

Teacher as player: co-creating with children in play

submitted by

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Declaration

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

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

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committees.



Sarah Rachel Young

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Abstract

A foundational aspect of early childhood education is children's play. Traditionally early childhood education has privileged the child's free play and teacher roles are predominantly as observers and supporters. Socio-dramatic play is a central play mode with preschool children, though the teacher entering this play can be a contentious issue. This has meant the role of *player*, which includes entry into the imaginary field, has been the child's domain. My own interest is to understand a shared imagined space when the teacher and children meet in play's imaginary field.

Theoretically this thesis is grounded in a cultural-historical paradigm theorising play, imagination and aesthetic education. In play children makes use of dual roles as they move fluidly between being themselves and being a character in an imagined world, and this is where creativity first emerges. Therefore, the research for this thesis wanted to understand how the teacher performs these dual roles with the children.

Methodologically this work was underpinned by a qualitative research design to engage with an in-depth inquiry. The participants of this research consisted of four teachers, in four different preschools and the children in their program. A central methodological and conceptual component was drama-based fieldwork in the form of *playworlds-as-method* that created an experience for the teacher, children and researcher to collaborate with the aim of understanding the teacher's performed roles. Data were generated over five-months in written, audio and video formats and this formed the basis of the deductive and inductive analysis.

The main findings indicate that the teacher performed roles influence the shared creative process in various ways. The focal theory of this thesis has established that these performed roles have implications for teaching practice in early childhood play-based settings. Firstly, the ability to value and use children's contributions to build a collaborative environment. Secondly, the teacher's interplay with form and improvisation allows an experience to flourish. Finally, attention to the environment as a place that supports teacher's experimentation in the creative process. The research implications suggest this contemporary theorising of the teacher as player can open up understandings and possibilities for early childhood teaching practice when co-creating with children in play.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The research reported in this thesis focused on the teacher in relation to children's play. Play is a foundational part of early childhood education where children manoeuvre between real and imaginary worlds engaging with objects, people and place. The teacher entering play can be a contentious issue and there is a lack of consensus around their role. To research the teacher in children's play requires opportunities for joint engagement in play's imaginary world (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010). Therefore, this thesis aims to gain understandings on what happens when children and their teacher meet in the creative act of play and perform roles in a collaborative environment.

Imagine a play scenario at a preschool with a group of four-year-old children where they have morphed into superhero character roles. In these roles they act out an unfurling narrative in a fantasy world. The roles, narrative and fantasy world have been developed by the children from what they have seen and heard in their everyday experiences. They do not act these out verbatim, instead they use elements from different experiences they have encountered in their lives and meld these together with their co-players. The children use physical and verbal language to communicate as they exchange ideas, develop unfolding rules, and build narratives together. This is an example of how children engage in socio-dramatic play, an everyday occurrence in the preschool setting. This thesis inquires into what happens when the teacher enters children's play to understand how adults engage in the imaginative space. From a cultural-historical perspective play is enveloped by an imaginary situation that positions the players in dual roles of self and other (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1930/2004, 1976). To carry out this inquiry the teacher, children and researcher will engage in children's popular culture inspired playworlds as the platform for the research.

This research seeks insights into the teacher's role in children's play and this introductory chapter outlines key areas that foreground the study: the play context, problematic aspects of the teacher in play, the research questions, contextualising the research, personal orientation to the study, and finally, the thesis structure.

1.1: The play context

This section begins by clarifying the term play, as while it is commonly used and practised it "frustrates a fixed meaning" (Sutton-Smith, 2008, p. 82). There are many

interpretations of play and therefore it can be difficult to define (Japiassu, 2008; McInnes, Howard, Crowley, & Miles, 2013; Pellegrini & Smith, 2013). The activity of play is the context for learning in early childhood educational settings and as stipulated in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1989) is seen as essential to children's learning and development. Play is central in the Australian federal policy framework for early childhood learning (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009) and in the framework for the state of Victoria, which is the context where this study takes place (Department of Education and Training, 2016).

From birth, play manifests in humans as the new born child uses their senses to explore and discover their environment, interacting with external stimuli (Garner & Bergen, 2006; Vygotsky, 1934/1994, 1976). This type of early play is object focused, as children interact with the items and people in their environment using their body as the instrument for this exploration (Garner & Bergen, 2006; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009; Hutt, Tyler, Hutt, & Christopherson, 1989; Vygotsky, 1934/1994). Hutt et al. (1989) describe this as *epistemic play* and argue that it is exploratory in nature as the child investigates; *what objects do* (Hutt et al., 1989). Vygotsky (1976) argues that this play links to the child's innate development and is reproductive in nature.

Around the age of two, according to the cultural-historical perspective, a major change occurs in children's play as it becomes more deliberate and purposeful to include a fantasy element (Vygotsky, 1976). Hutt et al (1989) describe this as *ludic play* and, while the children still uses objects, now they investigate; *what can I do with the object?*. This switch is significant, as children shift into more active and deliberate interactions with their world. This *ludic* element includes a subtype of play called dramatic or pretend play that embraces an imagined world overlaid on the present reality (Lillard, 2011; Vygotsky, 1976). Children use this imagined world to embody different roles in their unfolding narratives (Vygotsky, 1976). This type of play can be an independent or social activity in the development of a make believe situation where children get to "(re-) create" themes from their social environment (Japiassu, 2008, p. 381). When two or more children engage in this play it is termed social pretend play (Lowe Vandell, Neneide, & Van Winkel, 2006) or socio-dramatic play (Monighan Nourot, 2006). Vygotsky (1930/2004, 1976) argues that this mature play links to the child's social development and is where the imagination is central and

creativity first emerges. This creative aspect occurs as children gather elements of what they have seen, heard and experienced in their life and use these as stimulus in various combinations to create something novel in their play (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). In the educational context preschool children engage in this type of play throughout their day, like in the example given earlier in this chapter. Although the teacher entering play becomes problematic because play is viewed as the child's domain and the teacher's role in play is both poorly understood and undervalued.

1.2: Problematic aspects of the teacher in play

The teacher in play is problematic because traditionally in early childhood their role has been “minimized and undervalued” (Grieshaber, 2010, p. 40). Grieshaber (2016) contends that historically European traditions dominate early childhood perspectives of play, viewing the activity as the child's domain. Terms such as *child initiated* and *child directed* govern the education arena (Grieshaber, 2016). While this child initiated and directed play is an important component of early childhood education, as it gives children agency over their own learning, it is not the only component. On its own, this approach privileges the child's free play and “may reduce opportunities for children to choose activities alongside adults” (Wood, 2013a, p. 5). This perspective perceives the teacher's role operating on the periphery providing spaces and resources, but ultimately someone who obstructs play (Trawick-Smith, 2012). Therefore, this historic view creates a nervousness around the teacher in children's play (Grieshaber, 2010; Leggett & Ford, 2013). Edwards (2017) argues that play and teaching contradict each other, because play is process oriented and teaching is outcome focused. In addition, Wood (2010b) argues that it is because the play process can be perceived as a space of “chaos, loss of adult control, and indeterminate outcomes” (p. 15). These problematic areas create an uneasiness around – and for – teachers in relation to play. The outcome of this means play can occur in a void, as generally educators do not intervene in the play process, or feel uncomfortable about doing so.

This complexity around teaching and play is not assisted by the policy context in Australia; as Leggett and Ford (2013) argue that the national policy framework, *Belonging, Being Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) that guides the preschool teacher's practice does not make this position clear for early childhood educators. Leggett and Ford (2013) attribute this to the way the EYLF brings “together different ways of operating under one curriculum model, thus creating debates and

possible tensions around the role of the early childhood educator in relation to the child as learner” (p. 43). This is compounded by conflicting stances regarding adult or child control over the learning context and “the philosophical idea of a child-centred curriculum” (Leggett & Ford, 2013, p. 43).

A child-centred curriculum, where children choose and develop their own play, ought to view teachers as supporting the child’s play choices and encouraging the inclusion of diverse play motifs. There is a body of literature arguing that not all play motifs are valued in practice, with a particular rejection of play informed by popular culture (Edwards, 2011; Holland, 2003; Marsh, 2010, 2013b, 2014; Wohlwend, 2016, 2018). Teachers often view popular culture motifs as uncreative, while traditional themes in play are deemed more creative (Marsh, 2010). This dismissal of popular culture in the educational setting is the subject of a long held conflict for educators, as “we can never fully resolve the tension between entertainment and education” (Jenkins, 2007, p. 156). This links to the early childhood field as children engage with entertainment outside the educational setting by watching television and films, and using Apps and toys, that are laced with stories and characters from popular culture. Children use these popular culture motifs to develop their play, as articulated in the superhero socio-dramatic play described in the opening of this chapter. Therefore rejecting popular culture play sits in opposition with the way culture, including popular culture, informs children’s play construction (Marsh, 2013b, 2014). This is because, as stated earlier, children meld together what they have seen and heard into their play (Vygotsky, 1930/2004), whether this is from home life, books, television programs, films, toys or Apps.

The areas identified above, the play process and popular culture play, hint at the problematic nature of the teacher’s role in children’s socio-dramatic play. Do socio-dramatic play and the children’s popular culture motifs require the teacher to accept new and unknown terrains with unpredictable pathways and therefore create an uneasiness about play? This question has informed the direction of this study and is the reason this research has deliberately positioned the research in the preschool setting with children and teachers (Fleer, 2013b, 2015; Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010).

To achieve the intentions of this research, a drama teaching method known as *playworlds* was used to create a jointly shared play environment (Lindqvist, 1996, 2001, 2003a). The act of adults and children engaging and contributing together cements a

playworld episode. The playworld method has been used to study the adult in play by various researchers (Brédikytė & Hakkarainen, 2011; Ferholt, 2015; Ferholt & Lecusay, 2009; Fleeer & Kamaralli, 2017; Hakkarainen, Brédikytė, Jakkula, & Munter, 2013, p. 213). Playworlds is a form of drama teaching that does not discuss whether adults should enter play; instead, it is centred on “deciding *upon the ways* that adults will join children in play” (Ferholt & Lecusay, 2009, p. 81). This is discussed in detail in the literature review chapter of the thesis. In this research, playworlds consisted of an imagined shared world that allowed the teacher, children and researcher to improvise roles in an embodied narrative (Lindqvist, 1996, 2001, 2003a). Playworlds as a method has been systematically developed as one of the research methods and is discussed in detail in the methodology chapter. These ideas have all contributed to the two research questions framing this study, which inquiries into the teacher’s role in children’s socio-dramatic play.

1.3: Research questions

The research questions have emerged from the problematic aspects that arise when the teacher and children co-inhabit socio-dramatic play, as highlighted previously. This research is qualitative and took place within the state of Victoria in Australia within four early childhood, four-year-old preschool settings with the aim of responding to the research aims and questions using appropriate research and data analysis methods (Bazeley, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2003). Two main research questions informed this study:

- 1) How do teachers perform roles in popular culture informed playworlds co-created with children?
- 2) How does an exploration of performed roles assist in understanding the teacher in children’s play?

The term *perform roles* originates from the work of drama teaching that asks teachers to take on a role in the education setting (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; O’Neill, 1995). Goffman’s (1956) work in sociology argues that as humans, in our interactions with others, we are always performing roles that consist of multiple personal and social identities. Goffman’s (1956) work is familiar to the world of drama teaching as it pays attention to how we perform roles and play at being other (Davis, 2018; Schechner, 2013). To expand on the preschool setting where these performed roles will be enacted I will now look at how this educational setting has been conceptualised.

1.4: Contextualising the research

This research took place in four preschools, that are also known as kindergartens, in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia (Tayler, 2011). This research's data was generated in 2015 in Victorian preschools, which were attended by children who are between four and five years old. In some cases preschool programs are available to three-year-old children (Department of Education and Training, 2017). The setting of the preschool can be within long-day care centres, in stand-alone centres, or attached to a school. Long-day care centres operate for approximately 48 weeks of the year, whereas the stand-alone centres, or centres attached school, typically operate 40 weeks a year aligned to the primary school year calendar. All settings typically offer the preschool program that usually operates for 40 weeks of the year. In these settings in Victoria, the government provides all children access to a kindergarten program for 15 hours a week the year before they begin school (Department of Education and Training, 2017).

The preschool or kindergarten is led by a teacher who holds an early childhood teacher qualification of four years full-time, or equivalent, higher education study (Victorian Institute of Teaching, 2017). For this study the term *teacher* refers to the early childhood teacher participants, and the term *preschool* denotes the educational setting where this research occurred. The preschool teacher's practice in Victorian preschools is guided by two mandated policy learning frameworks documents: first, the federal government's *Belonging, Being & Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009) and second, the state government's *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For All Children from Birth to Eight Years* (VEYLDF) (Department of Education and Training, 2016). The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) is the first framework of its kind in Australia and was developed when in 2008 the Labor government embarked on a reform of early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Sumsion & Grieshaber, 2012; Tayler, 2011). The EYLF curriculum framework was developed and agreed upon as "federal, state and local jurisdictions joined forces to 're-vision' ECEC" (Tayler, 2011, p. 213). The structure of the EYLF consists of five key areas:

- 1) Vision for children's learning
- 2) Early childhood pedagogy

- 3) Five Principles to reflect contemporary theories and research evidence concerning the EC context (Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships; Partnerships; High expectations and equity; Respect for diversity; Ongoing learning and reflective practice)
- 4) Eight Practices that underpin the EC pedagogy (Holistic approaches; Responsiveness to children; Learning through play; Intentional teaching; Learning environments; Cultural competence; Continuity of learning and transitions and assessment for learning)
- 5) Five Learning outcomes for children from birth to five years (Identity; Community; Wellbeing; Learning; and Communication) (DEEWR, 2009)

For this research two areas of the EYLF were significant as they link to the teacher in children's play. The EYLF Section 2), *early childhood pedagogy* asks teachers to “draw on their creativity, intuition and imagination to help them improvise and adjust their practice to suit the time, place and context of learning” (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p. 11). In addition, the EYLF Section 3), *intentional teaching*, highlights the use of child-guided learning and teacher-guided learning (Epstein, 2007). Intentional teaching is also prevalent in the VEYLDF (Department of Education and Training, 2016) as it stipulates that an integrated teaching and learning approach is recommended and seen as “an active process founded on learning relationships with children” (Department of Education and Training, 2016, p. 14). This learning framework recommends a combination of three types of approach:

- 1) *Adult-led learning* sees the teacher responding to the children's current learning by planning and deliberately setting the educational agenda.
- 2) *Child-directed play and learning* gives the children the reins as they lead their learning “through exploring, imagining, experimenting, investigating and being creative in ways that they control. The adult's role may be to observe what the child knows and understands based on what they make, write, draw, say and do” (Department of Education and Training, 2016, p. 15).
- 3) *Guided play and learning* is more spontaneous in nature as the teacher follows children's interests.

Intentional teaching (DEEWR, 2009; DET, 2016) operates with a balance of adult-guided and child-guided learning, and these do not occur in opposition. Children learn

through both positions and educators teach from both positions (Epstein, 2007; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Trawick-Smith, 2012; Wood, 2010a). The teacher plays a role in child-guided learning, and children have a role in teacher-guided learning, so there is not a hierarchy, but rather a combination of the two positions (Epstein, 2007; Trawick-Smith, 2012; Wood, 2013b). However, both the state and the federal policy frameworks have no specific guidelines on how to accomplish these teaching practices in children's play. The writers of the EYLF argue, in their supporting paper, that they wanted to encourage the teacher's "professional artistry—a blend of practical knowledge; skilful performance characterised by intuition, improvisation, imagination" (Sumsion et al., 2009, p. 7). At the end of the Victorian framework there is a glossary, which explains the creative aspect of learning and makes a point of including the teacher in the creative process. Creative skills are defined as, "children's capacities and competencies to use and develop their imagination in all areas of learning by exploring their ideas" (Department of Education and Training, 2016, p. 35). It then goes on to include the teacher's *creative skills* which are also regarded as central to learning in the arts "(music, dance, drama, media and visual art). Finally, it acknowledges that these creative skills are valuable to all parts of the curriculum and are "developed by the children and early childhood professionals' use of problem solving to guide teaching and learning" (Department of Education and Training, 2016, p. 35); this is the extent of the support offered for teachers in this area. This policy link to the teacher's imagination and artistry is the focus of this study as it seeks to gain a deeper understanding about what happens when the early childhood teacher and children collaborate in the creative act of play.

1.5: Personal orientation to the thesis

As the researcher I would like to acknowledge my own interest in the central topic of the teacher in the arts. I have a bias towards the arts as a medium to engage and express myself in the world. From a young age I found solace, interest and engagement in the arts as they offered multiple ways of being, doing and expressing. Throughout my life I have continued working and immersing myself in the arts including performance, educational programs for arts organisations, arts education and education in general. As a trained primary school teacher, majoring in drama, my teaching practice has mainly been focused in the early years in the educational arena with a particular interest and experience in the 3-5-year-old setting and this takes centre stage in all my pedagogy.

I have gained much experience and expertise from being a teacher in preschools using the dramatic teaching method of process drama where I engaged with large groups of children and their teachers in a shared imagined world. Process drama is a form of drama that incorporates the teacher with young children in an unfolding narrative that is developed using the children's and teachers' ideas in a collaborative environment (O'Neill, 1995). I was first introduced to drama with young children as a student at the University of Melbourne with Dr Kate Donelan and as she explained the way drama encompasses children's ways of embodying and expressing, just like their play, this made complete sense to me. Since then I have used this method of teaching with children, teachers, and student teachers, to collaborate in this art form. As a drama specialist the work of Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton (1995), Peter Slade (1995), Cecily O'Neill (1995) and others have guided and developed my practice. Over the years I have often wondered, because of the close associations between play and drama, why teachers in early childhood generally do not use this art form. This is not a criticism of teachers; rather, I am trying to understand why the early childhood field has not pursued drama teaching in a more systematic way as a teaching method in play. During my work as a teacher, lecturer, and adult educator in the arts, I have collaborated with many groups of teachers and witnessed a contradiction that occurs between the arts and education. In general teachers express that children learn and engage in various creative art forms, and that play itself is a creative act, and yet at the same time many do not see themselves as having creative capital (Harris, 2016b; Sinclair, 2017). I have often wondered why this occurs and what does this mean for our teaching in play-based settings. If teachers do not perceive themselves as creative, then what happens when they enter the child's imaginative worlds in play? Why is play not seen as a space where the teacher can contribute and collaborate with children?

Eisner (2002) argues that arts education is a place where the "imagination is given license to fly" (p. 75). The teacher is an important feature in the artistic development of young children because to not intervene is "a kind of pedagogy by neglect" (Eisner, 2002, p. 198). He disputes the notion of the adult stepping back and only letting the children work on their own, artistic development is not automatic and the teacher has a vital role to play "to bring out the children's creativity, wonder and imagination" (Eisner, 2002, p. 233). Greene (2000) argues that aesthetics education through the arts require teachers and children to occupy the creative space in a partnership. There is a particular aspect of teaching with and through drama that requires the embodiment of the teacher being open to the "possibility

of learning, or art making to shape, divert, nurture or remain silent” (Sinclair, 2012, p. 50). This method of teaching in drama means the teacher can never predict how the narrative will evolve or end as there are multiple discourses at play (O'Neill, 1989). The interactions between all the participants become a “dialogic improvisation” (Sinclair, 2012, p. 50). This improvisation is key as it means players operate in a space where the narrative is in a process of constant flux (Engel, 2013). Nevertheless, this does not mean anything goes, as drama has important structural elements that bind and focus this collective way of being with children in the process of learning through drama (O'Neill, 1995). Consequently, this research stems from my work and curiosity to further understand the processes of the teacher and how a dramatic teaching method can act as a tool to understand the shared imaginative play activity.

Therefore a qualitative research paradigm was used in this research, as it locates the researcher in the world to be studied, rather than positioning her or him as a separate entity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Saldaña, 2016; Yin, 2012). I have positioned myself in the research process in an active role as a collaborative participant, specifically in the playworlds method. I understand that this role does not distance me from the action, in fact it deliberately places me in the action, making the role a tentative one since it shifts in power structures as the researcher has different functions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). These structures use both emic (insider) and etic (outsider) stances (Patton, 2003). The emic stance comes from the perspective from within the group, as I am a teacher and will be fully engaged in one of the data methods process. In contrast, the etic stance is from an outsider’s perspective as I am the observer and researcher. These stances talk to and inform each other and operate together in the research process. To make clear my positioning in this study my professional history was made transparent to the participants (Eisner, 1997) making clear that this guided the foundational construction and understandings of the research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). I have also paid attention to my own reflexivity, discussed in detail in the methodology chapter to include understandings of how my decisions, perspectives and actions effect the participants (Punch, 2002).

To conclude this chapter, the following section outlines the thesis structure to make visible the organisation of this dissertation.

1.6: Thesis structure

The chapters in this thesis are sequenced as follows. Firstly, this current chapter has introduced the aim of the study which is to understand how teachers perform roles in play and argue that problematic aspects arise when the teacher enters (or chooses not to enter) children's play. The two research questions are laid out and have framed this research inquiry. The play and preschool policy context in Australia and my own personal orientation to the study, which is underpinned by imagination and creativity, have all been outlined.

In Chapter Two: Literature Review, the empirical research is presented providing evidence about the significance of the teacher in children's play. I argue that there is an important gap in the research literature about the teacher's roles in play and that therefore this area is an important one to study (Fleer, 2015; Fleer & Kamaralli, 2017). I further argue for the value of using the drama teaching method of playworlds to examine this shared space. This section also provides literature on the popular culture aspect of play and how this relates to children's play motifs.

In Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework, the theoretical underpinning of this study, which is focused on Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory, is presented with specific attention to his writings on and theorisation of play, imagination and the aesthetic space (Vygotsky, 1926/1992, 1930/2004, 1976). At the core of a Vygotskian perspective of play is how children simultaneously use dual roles in their play; this approach offers opportunities for the teacher to make use of being outside the play in the reality field, and, inside the play in the imaginative field (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976). Central to this research is cultural-historical theorising of the social situation that links to play in the preschool educational context. Children's play includes dual roles that operate *inside the play* and *outside the play's* imaginative field (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976). To understand the creative act of play this thesis is inquiring about the aesthetic experience that pays particular attention to imagination and creativity. Finally, this chapter examines how narrative is used as a form of organising and expressing verbal and physical stories in play and playworlds.

In Chapter Four: Methodology, the methodological design locates the study in a qualitative research paradigm. This research uses a case study approach a common methodology strategy in qualitative research (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2000;

Yin, 2009). In particular Yin's (2009) definition of case study is being used, as this supports an in-depth inquiry into a phenomenon, that takes place "within its real-life context, especially when, the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 18). In this research the teacher's performed role in play is the phenomenon, and the real-life context is the play-based learning in the preschool setting. These two elements cannot be separated as they operate simultaneously. Therefore, this study also used a drama-based method to investigate this "embodied inquiry" (Bresler, 2011, p. 322).

The next three chapters present the thesis findings and analysis to address the research questions. Chapter 5: Findings and analysis one – *Performing play invader* introduces two areas that disrupt or limit the teacher's role in the imaginative field; they are called *supervisor* and *pretender*. Chapter 6: Findings and analysis two – *Performing director* presents two key considerations outlined as: *Embedding children's popular culture play motifs* and *articulating the story goal towards through-going action*. Finally, in Chapter 7: Findings and analysis three – *Performing experiencer* consists of two key areas that are *embodying as if* and *improvising dialogue*.

In Chapter 8: Discussion the thesis moves from the analysis of the findings chapters to synthesise and express what I have learnt from the experience (Evans, Zobel, & Gruba, 2011) with links to the theoretical framework and literature. Included in this chapter are links to preschool teachers in the field and how this study can be helpful to understand their practice in the creative act of play. And finally, in Chapter 9: Conclusion, the thesis is concluded to finalising the story and presents the significance of the findings, the contribution to the field, and possible future research. To continue this thesis the next chapter will outline the literature pertinent to this study's inquiry onto the preschool teacher in children's socio-dramatic play.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The introduction chapter outlined the key argument of this thesis, which centres on understanding the role of the early childhood teacher in socio-dramatic play, as generally teachers do not interfere in this space (Edmiston, 2017; Grieshaber, 2016; Marjanovic-Shane, 2010; Wood, 2013a; Yelland, 2011). This non-interference has been historically situated in the teaching practice of limited adult involvement that privileges the child's *free play* (Grieshaber, 2016; Trawick-Smith, 2012; Wood, 2013a). The literature discussed in this review chapter has been sourced using various methods as part of my research process.

2.1: Literature review strategy

The initial database searches began with key terms of children's play and early childhood teachers in play using the Australian Catholic University (ACU) and the University of Melbourne's (UoM) library search engines, JSTOR, Eric and Pro-quest. The search was limited to peer-reviewed journals written in English. The UoM Library Guides were also used for early childhood education and care (ECEC) were also used. The reference lists of the sourced journal articles were used to widen the search. Lev Vygotsky's (1930/2004) text *Imagination and creativity in childhood* was a key reading at this stage and the online Marxist Internet Archive (<https://www.marxists.org>) was a constant source for the literature regarding Vygotsky's cultural historical theory.

The literature was also searched from the authors that were being frequently cited in the journals and books to target other work that related to the study from these writers. To locate these works by specific authors as well as the libraries, I used Academia, Research Gate and Google Scholar. Searches in the databases of Eric and Pro-quest using the terms popular culture play, early childhood teacher's imagination and creativity in play, process drama and playworlds. In addition, when considering the paucity of literature available, researchers like Ferholt (2009); Flear (2015); Hakkarainen et al. (2013) had stated that the area of the early childhood teacher in play's imaginative field was limited, so this validated my area of study.

In addition, consistent online companions have been Maria Popova's *Brain Pickings*, which engaged and challenged my thinking. In addition, Pat Thompson's *Patter* and Inger Mewburn's *The Thesis Whisperer* offered clear advice on the research process. Even though this literature review is positioned at the start of the thesis my engagement with the literature

was certainly not restricted to the beginning of the research process. Throughout the research process there was a constant melding of reading, doing, listening, writing, discussing and thinking in a fluid, and at times, chaotic motion. This process was active from the initial curiosity until the final full stop and was necessary to adequately address the research questions:

- 1) How do teachers perform roles in popular culture informed playworlds co-created with children?
- 2) How does an exploration of performed roles assist in understanding the teacher in children's play?

The review of the literature sourced in relation to this research begins with an account of research on *the preschool teacher's role in children's play*, then focuses on the use of *playworlds as a drama teaching method* and finally on *popular culture play*.

2.2: The preschool teacher's role in children's play

The teacher's role in children's play offers a breadth of research. Trawick-Smith (2012) from the United States of America sought to understand the interactions between teachers and children and find out whether they supported children's play. This research aim was to test out an *Integrated, Responsive Model of Play Intervention* that consisted of using observations of children in play to understand if the "teacher can determine whether or not to intervene and, if so, whether general play support or interactions to enhance specific thinking and learning goals are appropriate" (Trawick-Smith, 2012, p. 265). When the model found the teacher added to the child's play needs Trawick-Smith (2012) uses the term *good-fit interactions*, whereas, the term *poor-fit interactions* signifies when the teacher interrupted, distracted or interfered with the child's play needs. I outline below two of the settings, each of which focussed on teacher-child interactions in play.

In one setting Trawick-Smith (2012) aimed to address the model with a focus on children's autonomous play. The data collection consisted of eight adults (two teachers, four assistant teachers and two student teachers) and their interactions with 32 children aged between 3 and 4 years old in the preschool. These interactions were videoed during the children's free play episodes in early childhood settings. The video data analysed interactions where the teacher was within five feet of the children's play. These interactions consisted of many examples of teachers providing children with a level of support needed to

keep the play autonomous. This teacher support was seen as *good-fit* and consisted of stepping into the play, with the aim of stepping out, so children could continue with their play process supporting the autonomous aspect (Trawick-Smith, 2012). In another setting, the model had a focus on teacher's supporting oral language (Trawick-Smith, 2012). This study included 42 preschool children and their teachers, and the analysis added a narrower focus on oral language learning. The findings showed that when teachers asked open questions that prompted children's verbal expressions, this contributed "to language development, if they are administered in a manner that matches what children need and are currently doing in play" (Trawick-Smith, 2012, p. 270). This focus on teachers responding to the child's play context was prevalent and seen as *good-fit interactions*.

Overall the main findings in Trawick-Smith's (2012) paper, which covered the two settings, emphasised that teacher's interactions need to be congruent with the child's current thinking and play actions. Trawick-Smith's (2012) *integrated responsive model* of play intervention does not follow a linear sequence, as it needs to be responsive to the child's actions and ideas, and therefore, how and when, the teacher decides to interact is complex. Trawick-Smith (2012) found the teacher's decision to interact could be focused on a social element to draw a child into play, or ask questions to extend the play, and both were deemed enriching for the play experience and seen as a *good-fit interaction*. This became more difficult when academic content was used. For example, a *good-fit interaction* was when the teacher joined the play and/or supplied resources congruent to the child's play needs. In contrast, an example of children's play that centred on a make-believe dinner scenario included a teacher entering the play and pointing to the plates and asking what shapes they were, this was seen as a *poor-fit interaction* as it aligned with a teacher agenda rather than the play content (Trawick-Smith, 2012). An important part of the findings was the teacher's ability to articulate and reassess their actions to move from *poor-fit* to *good-fit interactions*. For this thesis the focus on the responsive teacher whose behaviour appropriately corresponds to the current situation is helpful, though in Trawick-Smith's (2012) research there was no mention of the imaginative and creative aspect of children's play.

An Australian study by Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie (2011, 2013b) also addresses the interactions between the teacher and child/ren in play. This research was based in 16 early childhood settings in Melbourne, Australia and included 114 children aged four to five years old and 16 early childhood teachers. The aim of the study was to address the

policy framework, as outlined in the Introduction of this thesis, *Belonging, Being Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) DEEWR (2009) with particular emphasis on intentional teaching. There were two foci: one centred on planning, and the second on the teacher's pedagogical interactions in play (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011, 2013b). The different ways teachers entered play became the focus of a Pedagogical Play-framework they developed, which outlined three teaching positions (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011, 2013b). These three positions were embedded in the subject discipline of environmental education; I will now outline them in detail.

The first position is *open-ended play* where the teacher provided materials that promoted children's exploration of a new concept and there was limited teacher engagement. The second position is *modelled play*, which required the teacher's input at the start, to demonstrate or examine a concept, then the children were given opportunities to experiment and there was limited teacher engagement. The third and final position was *purposefully framed play* where there was consistent collaboration, between children and teachers, to gain understandings of a concept, and a range of information and resources was used (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011, 2013b). All teacher participants planned and implemented the three play-types with small groups of children. The teachers in the study could select what play type/s they wanted to implement and in what order they would occur. The data generated came from the implementation of the three play-types as they were all video-recorded and there were individual teacher interviews (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011, 2013b). The findings in this and subsequent related research argue that the play-types are of equal pedagogical value and can be used in different combinations as the teacher makes choices when to step into the play-based learning, or when to allow children time to practise or experiment by themselves (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011, 2013b).

Edwards (2017) paper on these play types theorises each play-type drawing on the concept of imagination aligned with Vygotsky's cultural historical theory. Edwards (2017) uses Vygotsky's understanding the imagination and how humans generate ideas that are products of a reproductive or combinatorial activity. Vygotsky (1930/2004) argues that the reproductive activity links to our memory and it copies or reproduces patterns of what we have seen, heard or experienced, whereas the combinational activity does something different. Our creativity comes from the combinational activity as our imagination takes what we have experienced in reality and combines these elements into something novel.

Since adults have many more experiences they have the potential for more extensive combinational activity (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). Edwards (2017) argues that the Pedagogical Play-framework is a tool that locates teachers in children's play to include their rich life experiences. Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie (2011, 2013a, 2013b) pay attention to this combinatorial activity of the imagination with particular focus on the teacher being an asset to this area of play-based learning. The teachers in this research stepped in and out of the play to develop the concepts being explored paying attention to the creative combinatorial aspect (Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011, 2013a, 2013b). The Pedagogical Play-framework melds the children's play needs and teacher's curriculum content needs within a flexible play-based pedagogical framework (Edwards, 2017; Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011, 2013b; Edwards, Cutter-Mackenzie, Moore, & Boyd, 2017) however, the teacher's roles and their imagination were not part of the scope of this study.

Wood's (2013a) research in the United Kingdom has a focus in part on how play creates opportunities for children's imagination. Wood's (2013a) study took place in an early childhood educational setting in Britain. The study involved 10 children aged between 3.10 and 4.5 years old and their teachers. The aim of the research was to examine the choices children "during periods of free choice and free play, and to reveal how the social dynamics of power operate within different contexts" (Wood, 2013a, p. 7). The data consisted of 48 hours of written observations over a 12-week period. These observations recorded dialogue and the setting details and were supported by photographs. The findings highlighted that extended play episodes with minimal adult inclusion were common. Through the interpretive data analysis the findings indicated that when an adult intervened in a play episode it was usually for safety purposes and/or to enforce centre rules (Wood, 2013a). This type of adult intervention dismantled the play episodes, and Wood (2013a) notes that there was no questioning about, or seemingly interest, in the actual play content. In the discussion, Wood (2013a) argues for less teacher control in play, albeit advocating for "critical engagement" (p. 16). Wood (2013a) argues the teacher's engagement in play needs to adapt and respond to the children, rather than hanging about on the periphery.

Fleer's (2011, 2013a, 2017) research in the early childhood setting in Australia addresses the notion of shared imagination to including children and adults. One particular study by Fleer (2015) examined the role of the teacher with children in a shared imaginary with the aim of understanding the adult's role. The study took place in five Australian early

childhood centres in rooms where the children were aged between 3 and 5 years old. The five centres had the following make-up of teachers and children: Centre A: three teachers and 53 children, Centre B: one teacher and 20 children, Centre C: one teacher and 30 children, Centre D: two teachers and 24 children, and finally Centre E: two teachers and 24 children.

The three main parts of the data collection consisted of: 1) A professional learning session to outline cultural–historical aspects of play and learning; 2) Video data was gathered to capture the children and teachers in free play and whole group time; 3) Individually, teachers were interviewed to articulate their practice. To understand the teacher in play, Fleer’s (2015) research analysis included a version of Kravtsov & Kravtsova’s (2010) pair pedagogy and Vygotsky’s (1930/2004) concept of the imagination. The findings in Fleer’s (2015) study revealed the teachers used diverse forms of interactions with children, though few teachers were inside the imaginary field choosing to stay distant from this space. Predominantly the nine teachers, across all settings, engaged with children by supplying resources and setting up the play, and/or they would “monitor or supervise” the activity (Fleer, 2015, p. 1809). When teachers did enter children’s play it was mainly as a *visitor* and only in short bursts that limited their time in the imaginary field (Fleer, 2015).

As stated previously, Fleer’s (2015) research used the cultural historical theorists Kravtsov and Kravtsova’s (2010) concept of subject positioning, which places the teacher in the dual roles of being inside and outside the imaginative field. Part of the data collection consisted of videoing the teacher and children in play-based learning activities. To analyse the videos the dual roles were used as a frame to understand each teacher’s practice. Firstly, in the research analysis of one teacher’s practice they aligned it to *outside the play* as she took on a narrating role, serving as a way to “keep the storyline moving” (Fleer, 2015, p. 1810). Later, in the same play scenario, the children required a microwave oven, so the teacher became the microwave oven for the children within the play context. The analysis places this as an example of the teaching being *inside the play*, although they make it clear this was not an example of a teacher actively engaged in the play (Fleer, 2015). Fleer’s (2015) research findings stated that teachers in the study mostly operated outside the play’s imaginative field, highlighting the need of more research to understand this multifaceted space. This need demonstrates the complexity of the shared play space as the inside and outside stances are ambiguous for teachers in children’s play.

Another study by Fleer and Peers (2012) examined the collaborative play space with twenty-four preschool children aged between 4 and 5-years and their teachers (number of teachers was not provided). The data were collected in a preschool in urban Melbourne, Australia and included video-recordings of adult-child play interactions. In this study the teacher observed the play and demonstrated interest by asking the children about what they were doing (Fleer & Peers, 2012). Examples showed a teacher engaged in back and forth exchanges where their questions drew out the child's ideas allowing "a shared sustained imaginary conversation to be generated" (Fleer & Peers, 2012, p. 423). These conversations encouraged the children to share their ideas thereby illuminating their imagination to the teacher. The study used Vygotskian perspectives of play and the imagination and found when the teacher builds "a collective imaginary situation" it has the potential to encourage children to express their thoughts and ideas (Fleer & Peers, 2012, p. 427).

Another example from the same study included a detailed conversation on a popular culture inspired play episodes focusing on the television program Dr Who™. The teacher was able to ask questions to the children, which allowed the children to explain their thinking and then the teacher included them into the play narrative. The children explained to the teacher how the preschool wooden blocks became the walls of the TARDIS™ (Time and Relative Dimension in Space) – the time machine central in the Doctor Who™ television series. This object transformation acted as a pivot for play to develop, in accordance with Vygotsky's (1976) understanding of play. In addition the children used actions, in this case hands gestures, and this assisted them to navigate "the TARDIS through time and space" (Fleer & Peers, 2012, p. 424). This example demonstrates how the children embodied their roles in the imagined world and the teacher's presence was important as it contributed to the complexity of the play (Fleer & Peers, 2012). Fleer and Peers (2012) argue that the act of the children's embodied roles, and how they explained them to the teachers, constitutes an example of being simultaneously inside the imaginary field and outside it in the reality field. Fleer and Peers (2012) claim that teachers conversations based on children's explorations in play supported their imaginary situation. This study is significant for this thesis, as it deliberately engaged with the historical idea that early childhood teachers are not direct participants in play with children establishing the need for more research to highlight this particular issue (Fleer & Peers, 2012).

A final piece of research in this section comes from a Peters and Davis (2011) study that looked at children's *working theories* as they interacted with their teachers in five early childhood centres in South Island of New Zealand. The research focus was to understand ways to foster children's working theories and the pedagogy that supported their thinking. Working theories are defined as the way children draw on their existing understandings to make sense of their world. For example, when the *working theories* are stable, they linked this to Piaget's (1955) understanding of *equilibrium* and how we have gained an expertise about a concept. And when *working theories* are in the process of developing they linked to *disequilibrium* and how we are not yet certain about a concept (Piaget, 1955). The study argues that the adult's awareness of specifics of children's working theories were important regarding their interactions. The results of this research stated that understanding the nuances about children's interest was complex and it is not always clear "who controls the direction of thinking" (Peters & Davis, 2011, p. 12). When a *working theory* is developing it was easy for the teachers to 'hijack' the theories rather than spend time "to adapt and fit with the child's subjectivity" (Peters & Davis, 2011, p. 12). Peters and Davis (2011) argues that this process does not always follow a straight line and rather than teachers rushing to answer questions for children to reveal the 'facts', they recommend embracing uncertainty. In the "moment-to-moment interactions" this demands that teachers truly listen to what children are saying to avoid disrupting a working theory and achieve intersubjectivity (Peters & Davis, 2011, p. 5).

The empirical research thus far illustrates that in an educational context adult participation within children's play is far from being clear (Fleer, 2015; Grieshaber, 2010, 2016; Hakkarainen et al., 2013; Wood, 2013a). While I am not advocating that teachers to enter children's play all the time, I want to understand what happens when the teacher and children unite to create a reciprocity of the imagination. Davydov (1982) argues the teacher's work is not automated as it "always carries a profoundly creative character" (p. 17). Therefore, playworlds may be considered as affording the conditions that assist develop an understanding of the teacher's roles as part of the creative process in children's play. I will now discuss playworlds as a drama pedagogy.

2.3: Playworlds as a drama teaching method in preschool

As articulated in the introduction chapter of this thesis, drama teaching in the form of playworlds was developed as a method. This method creates a collaborative arena offering opportunities for teachers to engage their own imagination in a make-believe world with young children. This section outlines the drama teaching strategies recommended for use with young children and is followed by an account of the empirical research associated with playworlds.

The arts have the potential to provide a collaborative environment as they support “the development of inter-subjectivity, or in other words, shared purpose and meaning-making among participants” (Deans & Wright, 2018, p. 76). Drama teaching has a long tradition in arts education (Dunn & Stinson, 2012; O’Neill, 1995; O’Toole & Dunn, 2002; Stinson, 2015). Slade (1995) made connections in his early work between play and drama, combining the two as a teaching tool and arguing that knowing how to play is central to life. Drama as an educational construct enables children and teachers to act out stories from the past, and develop imagined stories in the present creating a shared cultural activity (Winston & Tandy, 2001). Verbal and non-verbal language are the expressive modes of drama (Toye & Prendville, 2000). The oral and physical aspects require children’s and teacher’s participation in the developing story (O’Neill, 1995). Drama asks the teacher to introduce new roles, story lines and themes while supporting and extending children’s learning (Dunn & Stinson, 2012; Ewing, 2015).

Process drama is a form of drama that is appropriate for young children as the teacher and children co-construct a story together and like play the process is the focus not a performance element (O’Neill, 1995). Process drama requires the teacher and children to be the writers, directors and actors in an imagined world (Dunn & Stinson, 2012; Ewing, 2015; Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; O’Neill, 1995). The practice of process drama includes the works of Gavin Bolton (1979), Dorothy Heathcote (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995) and includes the critical writings and practice of Cecily O’Neill (1995). As well as other drama education practitioners and researchers of this educational art form (Dunn, 2003, 2016, 2017; Edmiston, 2015, 2017; Ewing, 2015; O’Toole, 1993; Stinson, 2015; Warren, 1999; Winston & Tandy, 2001). Central to this practice is embodiment or somatic learning requiring the children and teacher to represent and express using their whole body to communicate and develop the drama (O’Toole, 1993, 2012; Slade, 1995). Drama requires the teacher to

improvise and be open to the “possibility of learning, or art making, to shape, divert, nurture or remain silent” (Sinclair, 2012, p. 50). Ewing (2015) argues that play and process drama have the potential for the teacher and children to create a collective activity.

O’Neill’s (1989, 1991, 1995) work in process drama engages with Heathcote’s ideas of this art form to present key characteristics that I will now outline as an overview and then in more detail. Firstly, there is a fictional world where the teacher and children collaborate in a dramatic form. This imagined world is developed from a pre-text with no prewritten text or scripts as it is improvised from the group’s input. The final characteristic is how drama is a group activity with no outside observers in the form of an audience (O’Neill, 1995). Drama, like all art forms in education, offer different ways of “knowing and responding to the world” (O’Neill, 1991, p. 24). It specifically encourages teachers to give children a voice “to locate their own experience in relationship to the art form and its heritage, and to give validity to the kinds of knowledge and experience the students bring with them to the classroom” (O’Neill, 1991, p. 24).

The roles of the teacher and children in process drama are termed teacher-in-role and children-in-role, and act as a device to differentiate between the actual person and their role in the drama (O’Neill, 1995). I discuss them separately as they involve different expertise and purposes. The children-in-role guide, make decisions, and elevate the drama in what Heathcote and Bolton (1995) term the *mantle of the expert*. The children’s expertise gives them a higher status in the drama as their role is needed to develop the unfolding narrative, and is positioned so the narrative cannot proceed without their contributions (Toye & Prendville, 2000). This then recasts the teacher to become someone who needs the children’s expertise to proceed in their teacher-in-role (Bolton, 1985; Daniels & Downes, 2015). Therefore, the teacher’s role become the one who needs the children’s ideas and suggestions to develop the unfolding narrative.

The teacher generally opens a process drama with what O’Neill (1995) terms as a pre-text. This pre-text or hook aim is to ignite the children’s curiosity to enter the imaginary world (O’Neill, 1995). This pre-text includes a problem to be solved or a dilemma to be addressed and is a pedagogical device that acts to engage the group where all the participants learn through inquiry and discovery (O’Neill, 1995; O’Toole & Dunn, 2002). This way of working also includes “dramatic tension and structure” that guide and develop the experience (O’Neill, 1991, p. 25). There always needs to be a major tension or dilemma that

the drama aims to resolve as well as smaller tensions along the way (Dunn & Stinson, 2012). In this way tension draws us into the narrative, providing purpose (DeCoursey, 2018; Dunn & Stinson, 2012). The teacher acts as a guide in the drama “leading the way while walking backwards” including the children in all aspects of the story (O’Neill, 1995, p. 67). Part of the teacher’s role is to balance the tension because, if there is insufficient tension the children become bored or disengaged, and if there is too much tension they may become over boisterous (Dunn & Stinson, 2012).

In process drama there are multiple dialogues at play that include the teacher-child, child-child, and child to self, and the unfolding drama becomes a “dialogic improvisation” (Sinclair, 2012, p. 50). These verbal and physical improvisations require a flexible and inventive teacher (Dunn & Stinson, 2012) “to bring out the children’s creativity, wonder and imagination” (Sinclair, 2012, p. 51). The teacher’s expertise in including children’s voices in the narrative supports the collaborative element of a drama process (O’Neill, 1989, 1995). Finally, the climax comes at the closing of the drama when the main dilemma has been resolved. These dramatic elements play out in playworlds that I will now discuss.

Playworlds was developed by Swedish scholar Gunilla Lindqvist (1995, 2003b) and her thesis pays attention to Vygotsky’s writings that makes connections between play and art. The research from her thesis took place in a day-care centre in Sweden with six rooms and involved 84 children and 35 adults. In Lindqvist (1995) research playworlds’ data were generated in three rooms of the day-care centre and were videoed. Lindqvist (1995) used video as she was part of the playworld process, and this provided an overview of the experience. Lindqvist’s (1995) research focus was on “What *roles* do the *adults* play in the pedagogic process?” (p. 70). To begin a playworlds session, Lindqvist’s (1995) noted that the teacher took an idea to the children with content that was of interest to them and she used literature like a folktale or another kind of narrative text. This text ignited involvement in the playworlds and the process was reliant on the teacher’s and children’s dialogue that occurred. This dialogue was central in the analysis process. The findings highlighted that the adults role was important to guide and dramatise the action in the playworlds (Lindqvist, 1995). The research stressed that playworlds allowed the teachers “to step outside the ‘teacher roles’ and leave behind the institutional language which is part of the teacher role in preschools and schools” (Lindqvist, 1995, p. 210).

Lindqvist (1995, 1996, 2001, 2003a) positions playworlds as an arts pedagogical approach for teaching with young children in a play-like situation. Lindqvist (2003a) melded together children's play environment with the art form of drama to develop playworlds. Playworlds' teaching and learning space allows children and teachers to participate in a group shared fictional world where the teacher and children improvise an embodied narrative; the act of doing and contributing together is what cements a playworld episode (Lindqvist, 1995, 1996, 2001, 2003a). Like drama, playworlds consists of three core elements: a narrative with a plot arc, a teacher in role to drive the process, and a group of children (Nilsson, 2010). Once in this imagined world, all participants play with the ideas and the dynamics of the time and space. Consequently, no two playworlds events can be the same. Like play, playworlds episodes are process driven, and children and teacher move the narrative and action forward together (Lindqvist, 1996).

Playworlds narratives are unfixed and fluid as the participants work in the process towards the solution (Lindqvist, 1996). Teachers and children work together to govern these playworlds using role, narrative, setting and tension that all link to drama pedagogies (Nilsson, 2010). However, playworld pedagogy is a contentious issue as play or play-like practices that include the teacher and children in a collective space are a contested concept (Grieshaber, 2016; Lindqvist, 2003a; Wood, 2007, 2013a). Rather than the teachers being only onlookers, props buyers, site location managers and relationship counsellors, they are vital in "dramatising the action" as a meaningful medium for the participants (Lindqvist, 1996, p. 10). Playworlds has been taken up by different researchers in: Finland, USA, Australia, Serbia, and Japan, and these scholars continually evolve the pedagogy (Fleer, 2015; Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2011; Nilsson, 2010). Playworlds are core in this current research as I am using them as a tool to embed teachers in a play-like environment with the aim of understanding the teacher's performed roles. I now discuss in the empirical research on playworlds in detail.

Playworlds in Finland have a long history due to the work of Hakkarainen and colleagues (Hakkarainen, 2010; Hakkarainen & Bredikyte, 2015; Hakkarainen & Brèdikytè, 2014; Hakkarainen et al., 2013; Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2011). The research in Finland that took place between 2002 and 2008 at Oulu University created an experimental play laboratory (Play Lab) researching play with children, their families and student teachers (Brèdikytè & Hakkarainen, 2011; Hakkarainen, 2010; Hakkarainen et al., 2013). Key to

using playworlds is an understanding of its structure, which consists of principles that Hakkarainen (2010) articulates as, firstly the understanding that children enter an imagined world with teacher in a joint venture. Themes to develop the imagined world should be engaging for children and include topics about the human condition. The theme is actively embodied with children and adults by taking on roles. Dramatic tension is central as teacher use dialogical interactions to elicit children's ideas to develop the playworld process. Finally, a reflective stage is where the teacher notices children's engagement in the playworlds themes after the event to plan further joint ventures (Hakkarainen, 2010).

In one particular study Hakkarainen et al. (2013) used playworlds with 110 children aged between birth and 5 years over a seven-year period. The children, their families and student teachers were the research participants. The aim was threefold: "(1) to act as a creative play club for children and families; (2) to present a learning research site for students; and (3) to act as an experimental research site for university researchers" (Hakkarainen et al., 2013, p. 213). The study examined how student teachers support children in their play using puppets and visual art activities. The research questions were: "How does narrative intervention support the construction of joint play?" and, "Which characteristics of adult play guidance explain the success or failure of joint play?" (Hakkarainen et al., 2013, p. 213). The focus on the adult in the play revealed a contrast between what the researchers named, "successful or less successful joint play in the narrative play-world intervention" (Hakkarainen et al., 2013, p. 217). The successful interactions advanced the play to a "higher level", where the unsuccessful interactions meant the play was maintained at the same level (Hakkarainen et al., 2013, p. 223).

The research findings revealed that successful student teachers interactions had qualities of spontaneity and creativity (Hakkarainen et al., 2013). These student teachers were able to be involved emotionally as they used the children's ideas to build the playworld to keep the narrative interesting and engaging for the children (Hakkarainen et al., 2013). The playworlds were framed by a comprehensive storyline with dialogic interactions between teachers and children (Hakkarainen et al., 2013). In unsuccessful interactions, however, the students took an outsider observer stance and they seemed unable to coordinate their emotional and physical connection or understand the children's play. This resulted in children losing interest and the story dispersed (Hakkarainen et al., 2013). The teacher's emotional engagement is core to the success of the joint play between teacher and children

(Hakkarainen & Brèdikytè, 2014). Hakkarainen and Bredikyte (2015) argue that teachers in play present problems:

Supporting higher forms of play is a very challenging task for the teacher. We might say that this situation creates the ZPD [zone of proximal development] for the adult. Adults can prepare and support the development, but not ‘produce’ it. They meet the challenge of their own ZPD in interventions because each child is a new unique individual person demanding specific interaction (p. 41).

The findings of this study by Hakkarainen et al. (2013) included several points to consider when thinking about adults in play. First, the playworld theme needed to motivate the children and teachers. All participants took an active role in the process. There was authentic emotional involvement from the adults through dialogical interactions between the children and adults character roles. And finally, dramatic tension fed into an engaging narrative. These principles are an important part of this thesis, as they will inform the playworlds being used as a method.

I now continue to look at playworlds with research from the United States of America where Ferholt’s (2009) research took place in a multiage school setting. In this study, playworlds centred on the children’s book *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1950) with the classroom teacher, four researchers, and 20 children from 5.2 years to 7.2 years. The research aim was to examine playworlds as a place that “fosters development in both the adult and the child” (Ferholt & Lecusay, 2009, p. 59). Over a period of a year, 14 two-hour sessions with playworlds were documented as the participants’ enacted sections of *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Lewis, 1950) along with other play and art activities. Ferholt and Lecusay (2009) argue playworlds are a powerful tool as the teacher becomes a “fellow actor” in the play and their learning is part of the aim (p. 61). Ferholt’s (2009) study made links to Russian theatre practitioner Stanislavski’s (1948) writing related to acting and theatre. One link relates to the actor’s engagement with *perezhivanie* – an idea roughly translated as an *emotional lived experience* (Ferholt, 2009, 2015) derived from Vygotsky (1934/1994) and Stanislavski (1949) work. This playworlds study by Ferholt (2009) wanted to see how *perezhivanie* occurred with adults and children.

As Ferholt’s (2015) playworlds kept revisiting *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* text and associated roles to engage the children examples of *perezhivanie* were evident. An

example of *perezhivanie* came from a teacher called Michael and his interaction with Milo, a child in the study whom the teacher had described as having had a “very difficult year” (Ferholt, 2015, p. 63). At one-point Milo was sitting with two other children and displayed behaviours associated with boredom and a “wariness to joy and pride” (Ferholt, 2015, p. 61). Michael asked who would take the role of the *White Witch* and Milo with an excited look on his face and corresponding gestures to signify he would like the role (Ferholt, 2015). Milo, with the help of the teacher, gradually transforms into the role of the *White Witch* and this character role acted as a *pivot* to draw the child into the narrative (Ferholt, 2015). The term *pivot* is from Vygotsky (1976) and it signifies when meaning has been severed from something and the “child’s relationship to reality is radically altered” (Vygotsky, p. 546). A well-known Vygotskian (1976) example is when a child uses a stick to stand in for a horse in their play and the child no longer sees the reality, the stick, but the abstraction, the horse. In Ferholt’s (2015) study Milo is inserted into the playworld through the *White Witch* character pivot that “resonates with both Michael and Milo and they each become more themselves as they develop this role” (Ferholt, 2015, p. 67). Ferholt (2015) argues when Milo enacted the dual roles of himself and a character it created the unity of personal and situational. Overall this research found *perezhivanie* was evident from the teacher who was able to adapt in the process and be “fully and actively engaged” (Ferholt & Lecusay, 2009, p. 81). This study found that if the teachers did not simultaneously work in the real and imagined worlds the children would not engage with them. The playworld is a joint activity and includes adult and child forms of creative imagination (Ferholt & Nilsson, 2017, pp. 63-64). I would like to now move to Australia where playworlds are new to the research and practice arena (Fleer, 2015).

A pilot study from Fleer, Veresov, and Walker (2017) in Australia focused on children’s executive function (EF) and whether teacher’s create environments for this to flourish. This research by Fleer et al. (2017) took place in one preschool setting with five teachers, five assistant teachers and the 4-5-year-old children they teach. In their study, the teachers planned and implemented a ten-week playworlds program using mainly books and fairy tales as the playworld stimulus. The data consisted of teacher’s reporting on their own practice and a group interview, there was no ethics clearance to use the children in the data (Fleer et al., 2017). The analysis focused on data from the teacher participants regarding their self-reported successful practices. The overall findings found that playworlds offer a place for teachers to support children’s executive function development and that the children had

a strong interest that was sustained (Fleer et al., 2017). In the focus group the teachers articulated how the choice of the stimulus was important because when the teacher and the children related to the text it meant they were all emotionally engaged and connected to the playworlds content. Fleer et al. (2017) suggests that in the playworlds children are supporting each other's "EF activities because it is collectively understood and actioned by the whole group" (p. 10).

Another study in Australia by Fleer and Kamaralli (2017) used two case studies and drama based teaching. One looked at drama in the primary school and the second in a preschool with the aim of defining and understanding the role of the teacher in role-play and drama activities. While their study does not directly use playworlds the teaching elements of Lindqvist's (1996) playworlds act as the foundation to link play and drama learning. The authors acknowledge that drama is a common occurrence in the primary context as arts teaching interventions are seen as a way to support and expand creativity (Fleer & Kamaralli, 2017). In contrast in early childhood settings, teachers "do not traditionally take part in children's play" (Fleer & Kamaralli, 2017, p. 112). I will first look at the study in the primary context and then the preschool setting.

The case study in the primary school took place in Sydney, Australia, consisting of three groups of children aged between 5- to 11-year-olds (Fleer & Kamaralli, 2017). The *specialist* drama teacher used extracts from Shakespeare's *Richard III*, *The Tempest* and *Macbeth* to begin the exploration and the text had been chosen "with the aim of creating a mood the children were likely to relate to" (Fleer & Kamaralli, 2017, p. 117). The children may have been hearing the Shakespeare text for the first time. After the teacher read the text the children were asked to express their ideas relating to how it made them think and feel. The children's responses aligned to the adventure content and included terms of *spooky*, *scary* and *exciting* (Fleer & Kamaralli, 2017). The initial discussions led to group improvisations attuning to the mood and emotions in the text that the children connected with. The study makes it clear that this was not a performance but a forum for the children to express their emotions using the Shakespeare text as a springboard. Fleer and Kamaralli (2017) argue the text offered the language of the character, rather than the embodiment, and this allowed the primary students to take on some of the emotional landscape of the characters.

The second case study in this research is more significant for this thesis as it takes place in the preschool setting and includes the teacher. Fler and Kamaralli's (2017) preschool case study included 16 children aged between 3.6 and 4.2 years, and ten children aged between 4.7 and 5.9. Three examples of dramatising learning are highlighted during the interplay between teacher and children. Example one highlights the use of Enid Blyton's (1937) book *The Wishing Chair* as the stimulus and took place in the centre group time (generally in Australia this is the only time of day when the teacher and all the children gather together). In the study, the teacher introduced *The Wishing Chair* book, and this acted as an entry point into the imagined world with a focus on how the children characters in the book went on adventures. The use of a prop in the form of a wishing chair was used and two children sat on the chair to share their ideas. All the children were invited to go on a journey with the teacher (Fler & Kamaralli, 2017). Example two in the preschool reports activities focused on scientific learning and a huge inflated "giant plastic bubble (5 × 2 × 1 m dimensions) which was kept inflated by a constantly propelling fan" (Fler & Kamaralli, 2017, p. 122). This giant bubble allowed the children and teachers to literally enter into another world. The third and final example in the preschool included interactions with the teacher and a small group of children in the outside area focused on a spider (Fler & Kamaralli, 2017). While this did not lead to a group drama on the spider, after the event two children, one who was scared of the spider, went on to embody the spiders in their play.

Overall, Fler and Kamaralli (2017) argue that the preschool teachers were vital in the process of dramatisation and their role was different in each scenario: in the first episode they created the context for learning to occur, in the second episode the teacher and children were using role-play together, and finally in the third episode the teacher's interactions were used as stimulus for the children's role-play. In the study the researchers asked the early childhood teachers to challenge their thinking about the adult in children's play and encouraged them to engage in this imaginative arena (Fler & Kamaralli, 2017). These researchers go as far as arguing that in early childhood:

We can no longer stand back; we must become involved in children's role-play. Together with children, we can create the imaginary conditions for expanding children's playworld, and through this support the development of their play. Through being collaborative, experiential and stretching outside the familiar, these methods encourage the kind of cultural historically framed learning that

results in real conceptual and emotional engagement. This in turn means we culturally develop the child in both school and preschool settings through drama pedagogy. (Fleer & Kamaralli, 2017, p. 126)

Fleer and Kamaralli's (2017) findings from the school and preschool settings highlight that the teacher provides meaning to the play learning process. Fleer and Kamaralli (2017) acknowledge that their research was preliminary and further studies are required as there is limited study of the teacher in role.

Regarding the final playworlds research I will briefly discuss the work carried out in Serbia and Japan. In Serbia, from 1989 to 1991 researchers at the University of Belgrade worked with Škozorište Drama Studio for children in situations using playworlds. This research took place over two years and consisted of approximately 50 children aged between 7 and 14 years and seven adults. The study merged: stories from the children's lives, traditional games, and imaginative play with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to develop a performance piece (Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2011). The adults in the study listened to the children and encouraged them to choose the themes to develop and take the lead in the process (Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2011). The findings highlighted that it was not just the unique way *Hamlet* was used, but how children's emotions and own experiences were intersected with the play and informed the performance (Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2011). In Japan, over a one year period in 2008 to 2009 playworlds research took place in a private kindergarten with 5 to 6 year old children and their teacher (Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2011). The theme was 'Hakken to Boken', which translates as discovery and adventure. This study centred on play and visual art as this was central to the settings practice. This work used the playworld to engage the children in the theme of *Forest and Seas*, which acted as a stimulus for the children's art exploration to occur (Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2011).

Playworlds and drama pedagogy (Lindqvist, 1996) have a long tradition of being a "collective activity of creating" (Holzman, 2010, p. 27). Drama teachers are adept at taking roles and developing role play as a component of their teaching (Fleer & Kamaralli, 2017). This focus on the teacher links to this thesis as creating a collaborative space to play within is central to gaining an understanding of how teachers perform roles. Playworlds can be used over time to develop narratives and this is why this study choose this play-based drama method. The aim was to develop the playworlds with the teachers and children and this would offer opportunities for the teachers and/or children to use the themes in the preschool's

play-based context. Earlier in the thesis in the introduction chapter I discussed how play and teaching can be viewed as being in opposition. This contradiction is because traditionally play is seen as process driven and the child's domain, whereas teaching is outcome focused. I would argue that engaging in children's play using dramatic pedagogies creates a place in-between these two areas that claims the process for a group experience with children and teachers. Playworlds is space that deliberately places adults and children in a collaboration in a play like activity.

To develop the playworlds for this current research children's popular culture play motifs were used to form the pre-text. These play motifs aligned with Vygotsky's (1930/2004) understanding of how children's play stems from what they have, seen, or heard and of how they adapt this into their play, creating a new realities. The next and final section of this chapter presents the literature regarding young children's popular culture play in the preschool.

2.4: Popular culture play

There are a few reasons popular culture play motifs were used to frame the playworlds in this thesis. Firstly, as stated in the introduction chapter, there is a history of tension, and even rejection, regarding popular culture in early childhood educational settings (Edwards, 2011; Holland, 2003; Marsh, 2010, 2014). Creating a contradiction to the common discourse of teachers using children's interests to inform teaching and planning (Grieshaber, 2010, 2016; Wood, 2013a; Yelland, 2011). This could be because in the educational setting popular culture toys and play are deemed to have less value for curriculum development and some teachers find them unsuitable (Corsaro & Eder, 1990; Edwards, 2011; Marsh, 2010; Wohlwend, 2016, 2018). Therefore, including children's popular culture motifs can look at how their use can be a helpful part of the preschool play context. Secondly, using children's popular culture play motifs made it possible to utilise their knowledge of popular culture narratives that included roles and setting. This aligned with drama pedagogy, which places children in the role of experts to develop the unfolding narrative "privileging learner-led media-rich play" (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 2). This provided a fluid space requiring teachers to improvise and consequently use their imagination to create new pathways for the narrative with children. This discussion of the topic begins by defining culture and subsequently popular culture as there are multiple definitions (Corsaro, 2015;

Marsh, 2010; Williams, 1983), and then presents the empirical research associated with popular culture play.

Children's play is built by melding together things they have seen and heard in their life (Vygotsky, 1930/2004) and this can include forms of popular culture such as films, television shows, Apps or computer games (Marsh, 2013b). Play is fluid as it uses multiple areas of the child's life in its construction (Marsh, 2013b, 2014). Let us revisit the play scenario from the Introduction chapter of this thesis where the children embody superhero characters in their unfolding play construction. These characters have been developed from what the children have seen and heard in their life, which could be from a television program they have seen or an Apps they have played with. Multiple parts of the child's life are offered and churned around in play and they directly link to the child's culture (Kalliala, 2002, 2006; Marsh, 2010, 2014). Therefore play and culture are inseparable (Kalliala, 2006; Rogoff, 2003) just as the child's biology and culture are intertwined (Pellegrini, 2009; van Oers, 2012). This is why Sutton-Smith (1997) argues that children's play needs to be understood in the culture in which it takes place. The young child's play landscapes are influenced by their culture. Culture is defined as the ordinary, the day-to-day interactions with people and places; it goes beyond our biological make-up; it is what we develop through our daily lives (Williams, 1983). Williams (1983) argues that culture is the way we live our lives through connections to people and place. This is relevant for this research as the focus is the interaction between teachers and children in play, and this is an everyday cultural activity in the educational setting.

Culture has been, and is still, divided into low and high definitions that create a hierarchy of value (Danesi, 2012). High culture links to the "aesthetic canons, social class, education and other variables within the community" (Danesi, 2012, p. 2). Williams (1977) argues that this is expressed as the intellectual and artistic pursuits of individuals and groups who excel in particular fields. High culture has traditionally been accorded "superior value, socially, aesthetically, and historically" (Danesi, 2012, p. 5). Whereas *low culture* has been rendered as inferior and includes the sub-category of popular culture (Danesi, 2012). Popular culture can be traced back to the early 20th century and is often trivialised, even though it validates everyday activities in people's lives (Danesi, 2012). Fiske (1989) characterises popular culture in relation to people's lives as an "active process" (p. 23). An example of this in practice occurs in Fleer and Kamaralli (2017) as they acknowledge young children

actively use “narrative and emotive material developed by others, often in forms of movies, television shows and computer games” and that drama teachers in primary schools generally “deflect children away from pre-packaged characters and plots of popular culture” (p. 117). Instead of using the popular culture to develop curricula the study used extracts from Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, *The Tempest* and *Macbeth* in the exploration of drama learning. This example links to Danesi’s (2012) articulation of popular culture’s validation in society as the research seems to place a superior value on the Shakespearean text and inferior value on the popular culture motifs. I would argue that both stimuli are of equal value for drama exploration, rather than linking to a broader social hierarchy of culture (Danesi, 2012).

Popular culture deliberately subverts the tradition that high culture espouses. The unpredictable and ever-changing nature of popular culture is dynamic that is made “by the people for the people” (Danesi, 2012, p. 4). This links to children as their use of popular culture is seen in their play. Opie and Opie’s (1959, 1969) extensive research in the United Kingdom in the mid-20th century found evidence of children using popular culture elements from films in their games, songs and chants. Opie and Opie’s (1969) work shows the history of how children express their culture in their play and like “other social activity, it is subject to continual change”(p. 8). They explain how each generation believes that ‘traditional games’ are being replaced by a lesser way to engage in play (Opie & Opie, 1969). This research documents how children’s play is ever adaptable and responds to the environment in which it is enacted and in some way can be invisible to the adults around them (Opie & Opie, 1969).

In the early childhood Edwards (2011) argues that in the preschool setting, corporate toy or digitised character play still sits on the periphery even though the use of popular culture toys and play themes present opportunities to develop early childhood curriculum content. This could be because teachers still see traditional and open-ended toys as more creative and the corporate toys or play related to popular culture themes are viewed as uncreative (Marsh, 2010). This tension is not new. Vygotsky (1926/1992) argued early in the 20th Century that the aesthetic aspect of education was seen as amusement, rather than learning. Early childhood has taken on this divide as popular culture play has a history of tension (Edwards et al., 2015; Marsh, 2014). So why in the 21st Century are we still wary of popular culture in education? Jenkins (2007) argues, that there is a belief that children get excited and stimulated and therefore “vulnerable to the seductions” (p. 155). From this

perspective, children are seen as needing to be protected from elements of their culture creating a dichotomy between entertainment and learning (Jenkins, 2007). The idea that adults shield children from popular culture creates a nervousness when aspects of popular culture, in the form of television programs, films and Apps – and the myriad forms of merchandise accompanying them –are aimed at children (Jenkins, 2007).

These tensions shape popular culture that is constructed for the child consumer. We never seem to be able to decide whether children’s culture is culture that children enjoy consuming or culture that adults want their children to consume; we can never fully resolve the tension between entertainment and education. (Jenkins, 2007, p. 156)

The entertainment and education divide is inevitable in early childhood as children use all aspects of their culture, including popular culture, to frame and build their play landscapes at home and in the educational setting (Kalliala, 2002; Marsh, 2010; McPake & Plowman, 2010). Children’s play popular culture motifs come from television programs, films, console games, Internet games, websites, Apps, toys and other artefacts that inhabit the modern world and these inform children’s play milieu in the educational setting (Goldstein, 2011; Levin, 2006; Marsh, 2010). Marsh (2010) defines popular culture for children as “texts, artefacts and practices that are popular with large numbers of children and are either commercially produced or produced and circulated amongst children themselves” (p. 13). Children have active membership of their culture through what Corsaro (2015) terms as *interpretive reproduction*. The *interpretive* aspect refers to the innovative ways a child harnesses elements of their life and adds their own unique contribution as they actively engage in the world (Corsaro, 2015). The child’s culture is *reproductive* as their participation in life is influenced by and influences the broader context (Corsaro, 2015). Corsaro (2012) argues that the child is located in both their own culture and that of the adults’ and they are constantly entwined.

Popular culture in society grows from the people who inhabit the culture (Williams, 1974) where they have a say and influence over its use and development (Fiske, 1992; Haas Dyson, 2006). This is because popular culture is mass produced and easily accessible to many people (Danesi, 2012; Marsh, 2013a; Storey, 2001, p. 14), not necessarily in the production of the commodities, but rather in the use of these commodities in their lives (Fiske, 1989, 1992) and this includes children. A prevalent area in popular culture play is

how children embody superheroes and this seems to create a particular tension in the educational context (Cupit, 2013; Holland, 2003; Popper, 2013). Danesi (2012) argues that Superman is linked to a “a pop culture pastiche of mythic heroes, such as Prometheus and Achilles. Like the ancient heroes, he is indestructible, morally upright, and devoted to saving humanity from itself” (p. 56). Marsh (2000) supports this notion and argues that children’s fascination in superheroes nourishes our inherent need to have “some control over chaotic forces of nature and evil” (p. 211). In socio-dramatic play children use superhero characters “as a cathartic force in the exploration of control in their environment” (Marsh, 2000, p. 211). I now discuss the empirical research into popular culture play.

To begin this discussion, the notion of *funds of knowledge* is relevant, as it has a history in education and relates to children’s popular culture play. The term *funds of knowledge* was developed by Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (1992) to develop partnerships between the United States of America (USA) and Mexican populations in schools in the south-western states of the USA. The study argues that teachers can gain valuable information if they understand the cultural capital that exists in children’s lives and “these funds are the currency of exchange not only between generations but also between households, and so form part of the ‘cultural glue’ that maintains exchange relations between kin” (Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992, p. 318). Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg’s (1992) study aimed to move away from a “deficiency model to structure instruction for minority children that underestimates the funds of knowledge that U.S.-Mexican households contain” (p. 313). Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) used the concepts of *funds of knowledge* in their study that also took place in the USA and found that when teachers understood the cultural context of the child it created a bridge between the classroom and home life. In the home visits the teacher took the role of *learner* and the new *funds of knowledge* had the potential to develop rich academic content for the curriculum (Moll et al., 1992).

Hedges’ (2010) research used *funds of knowledge* in early childhood education in New Zealand where she argues that children’s play interests are a valuable entry point into teaching. Hedges’ (2010) study took place in a kindergarten with children 3 to 5 years old, and a day-care setting with children aged between 6 months and 5 years, and included ten teachers. Hedges (2010) argues that in early childhood the child’s funds of knowledge are visible in their play as they “feed forward and feed back” into the child’s specific interests (p. 30). Children’s play offers something unique to the teacher, because it is a magnified

view of children's funds of knowledge ready to use for appropriate curriculum context. Overall Hedges' (2010) study found that teachers generally have surface understanding of children's play interest and even the teachers who had a strong practice of using children's interest tended to trivialise the actual play content. In addition, popular culture toys were frequently under acknowledged and artefacts were often asked to be kept in the children's bags and not used in the educational setting (Hedges, 2011). Hedges (2012) found that if the early childhood teacher took on the role of *learner* to "seek knowledge outside their current understandings to support children in their learning" (p. 14), this could encourage a responsiveness to children's interests. Hedges (2010) argues that using children's interests to build curriculum is a common practice in early childhood although the content chosen is based on what the teacher views as appropriate for the educational context.

Popular culture in the form of superheroes is associated with a long history of conflict between children's interests and teachers' choice for educational content. Cupit's (2013) research in Australia found that teachers have concerns about superhero play, believing it does not allow children to be flexible in their play as stories and characters are already prescribed, and so limit the imagination (Cupit, 2013). To structure the findings Cupit (2013) developed a framework that identified five ways teachers interacted with superhero play in the educational context. Four of the methods sit outside the child's play: *laissez faire*, replacement, prevention and curriculum application, and one enters the imaginative sphere: engagement (Cupit, 2013). The *laissez faire* method of teaching meant the children used the superhero themes though there was little intervention from the teacher. In opposition the teacher who engaged with *prevention* either banned or limited the play due to the perceived negative aspects. The *replacement* method saw the teacher superseding challenging storylines with less disruptive alternatives. The *curriculum application* method was when the teacher used the ideas of the children's superhero play to develop curriculum outside the play episode but did not enter the play. The final approach is when teachers used *engagement* and this was the only method where they entered the imaginative play space to enhance the play episode with the children (Cupit, 2013). This *engagement* approach is relevant for this thesis as I am going to use the children's popular culture play motifs as a platform for the playworlds.

Popper's (2013) research in the United Kingdom (UK) paid attention to how children took on superheroes roles' and their physical embodiment included pretend weapons in the

dramatisation. Popper (2013) found that the use of weapons signifies the child's expression of the narrative rather than a deliberate violent act. This research made evident that the key aspect of superheroes stories is not violence, but stories where good and evil are apparent and used to contradict each other (Popper, 2013). Stories children respond to can include notions of an evil other that is imposing "impeding physical doom" on the world (Dyson, 1997, p. 2). Then the child imagines and embodies a superhero that has "powers rooted in accidents of nature or science" to have power over the contradiction at hand (Dyson, 1997, p. 1). Schousboe (2013) makes the point that society can reflect to children the notions of good and evil, right and wrong, power and powerlessness and "play can be an arena for learning to distinguish between good and evil" (p. 22). Schousboe (2013) argues that play themes of good and evil are not necessarily dichotomies; rather, they can give the child opportunities to experiment with multifaceted areas of life.

In the U.S.A. Wohlwend's (2016) research addresses popular culture in the early childhood setting in preschool and first grade classrooms. This study looked at versatile ways of experimenting through *participatory literacies* that provide teachers and children ways for "interpreting, making, sharing and belonging" to support "modern childhoods immersed in media cultures" (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 62). Wohlwend's (2016) research came from a five-year ethnographic study that aimed to provide teachers and researchers a place "to develop and try out critical and productive approaches to media-rich literacy play curricula" (Wohlwend, 2013, p. 4). The study took place with six early childhood teachers from two preschools and one first year of school setting (Wohlwend, 2013). The research sought to answer three questions:

- 1) Who gets to play? How do children get access to play groups?
- 2) Which practices seem routine (natural, expected) and necessary for participation in this playgroup?
- 3) How are artifacts used for making and remakings of imagined and immediate identities for toys and players (e.g., characters, player roles, cooperating friends)? (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 2)

In relation to this research, I will report on the use of *literacy playshops*, which used, teacher planned media literacy curricula with a focus on designing spaces for children to create their own videos using "new technologies and popular media repertoires as cultural capital" (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 2). *Playshops* were deliberately used to invert the teacher-led

top down approach and moved to privileging the child's media-rich play using "sources of child expertise and culture resources" (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 2). The data method incorporated a *filmmaking centre table* to engage the children, teachers and the researcher in this learner-led activity. Teachers of in this study were invited to suggest children's popular culture interests to frame the research context.

Wohlwend (2016) reports that in one early childhood setting the teachers' practice had a strong equity focus and so for various reasons they did not encourage children to bring in popular culture toys. The teachers were also responsive to the families that wanted to limit their child's contact with popular culture and mass media (Wohlwend, 2016). The researchers gave the teachers an article to read by UK academic and researcher, Jackie Marsh, on popular culture and play. From this the teachers could see that there was merit in the children's popular culture interests and decided to audit the children's popular culture festooned clothing, lunchboxes and bags. The audit revealed that children were interested in three particular motifs: Transformers™, Star Wars™ and Disney Princess™ (Wohlwend, 2016). However, the teachers decided that parents would not support these themes as they are too gendered or too violent (Wohlwend, 2016). The teachers decided to choose the film of Toy Story 3™ as a compromise. However, this choice did not crystallise with the children, demonstrating that the children's popular culture interests are not necessarily aligned with adult concerns.

In the end the teachers in the early childhood setting of Wohlwend's (2016) study settled on using the Disney Princess dolls for the filmmaking activity, and for one child, Grace, this became an entry point to more social play. Grace did not usually play with others and this was a concern for the teachers in the research. After time with the Disney Princess dolls activity, Grace talked about the Sleeping Beauty doll she had at home. Another day Grace brought in her Sleeping Beauty doll to the show *and tell* session the teacher had planned. Grace showed enthusiasm and expressive language regarding her doll that opened up a social entry into playing with other girls (Wohlwend, 2016). The teachers' change of stance on children being able to use, and bring in, popular culture toys gave Grace a portal to share her home life in the educational setting. The doll characters went on to be a connecting factor where Grace and the children moved in and out of the play frame as they contemplated "storylines but also players' desires, friendship bonds and play goals" (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 11). For Grace, the researcher argues, this experience with the girls

“was transformative, mediating both the emergent story in the play narrative and the friendship norms in peer culture that allowed her to participate more actively” (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 11). Grace’s transformation moved from her from sitting on the side-line in a passive mode to becoming an active story teller and leader in the play (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 11).

In the second setting the teachers had already allowed popular culture to be brought into the centre. Although there was limited digital technology in the room, iPads were used as a digital device to make movies as requested by the teachers. The play often included small groups of children and was cemented by shared play genres as well as gendered patterns that “created insiders and outsiders in patterns of inclusion and exclusion that became routine” (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 12). In the centre there were two groups of boys who played with superhero capes in physical play scenarios that consisted of DC Comic’s Batman™ or Marvel’s The Avengers™ (Wohlwend, 2016). These boys had interest in the same popular culture context and “developed a set of shared expectations and pretend meanings” (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 12). A small group of girls played with props and costumes their play centring on princesses or fairies. A pair of girls played using Disney’s Frozen™ as a focus and this popular culture motif created a “unifying element with widespread interest that crossed gender and spanned playgroups” (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 12). This play was also physical and included children singing from the film’s soundtrack.

In the same room, Jonah was a child who mainly played by himself. When the digital film making was introduced to the room, Jonah immediately engaged in this play activity. Jonah created films with one or two other children; because of the limited digital resources this sharing of the use of an iPad with the App PuppetPals was a requirement. Jonah developed expertise creating interest from other children as his films included “fast-moving animation with sound effects and expressive voices” (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 13). Jonah developed a collage of sounds, images from Frozen and Avengers, and photos of the room toys, that were cut together distorting the images. The teachers could not understand why other children enjoyed and engaged in the films. Wohlwend (2016) argues that this is an example of “insider humor”, that is, an aspect “shared among children in peer culture that mystifies adults” (p. 14). This is an example of how digital technologies became an entry point and a collaborative play activity for the children as they “learned to cooperate on the small touchscreens, simultaneously advising one another, moving and animating puppet avatars, and voicing characters” (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 13).

Both of these examples allowed individual children to become part of the broader group with the use of digital technologies and children's popular culture play themes. Wohlwend (2016) argues that there were multiple examples of the children's social and academic transformation and this had the most effect on children who sat outside play's social network.

Edwards' (2010, 2011, 2013a, 2013b) research in Australia addresses digital technologies and the popular culture aspect of children's play. S. Edwards' (2013b) pilot study took place in Melbourne, Australia, with ten families with children aged between 20-months and 5 years. The aim was to examine the relationship between traditional types of play and contemporary types of play (Edwards, 2013b, p. 10). Traditional play activities included "bike riding, climbing, drawing, cutting, puzzles, and using play-dough" and converged play activities included digital technologies and the popular culture aspect of children's play (Edwards, 2013b, p. 17). Edwards (2013b) argues that the way children's play converges with popular culture and/or digital technologies is misunderstood in early childhood education, as these more recent media are seen as being of lesser value than more traditional play activities.

The main data comprised 40 to 50 minute audio recorded semi-structured interviews with the adults and children to identify the children's choice of play activity (Edwards, 2013b, p. 14). In the interviews the children were encouraged to show and talk about their favourite toys, activities and use of digital technologies. The analysis of this study centred on two categories of play types, traditional types of play and converged types of play. The findings showed that children blend traditional and converged play and, rather than limiting their play, it was part of the meaning making process (Edwards, 2013b). For example, the use of popular culture television shows enhanced the play as children incorporated the characters and themes into their narrative. This study makes clear that play is informed by popular culture and available for teachers to tap into for curricular content.

Another study reports Nuttall, Edwards, Mantilla, Grieshaber, and Wood's (2015) research, which aimed "to bridge the gap between children's contemporary life-worlds and the provision of play-based curriculum in early childhood education" (p. 222). This paper came from a broader study on teacher's professional development with a focus on digital play that included popular culture. The research videoed children's traditional play as well as consumer and digital play content (Nuttall et al., 2015, p. 227). These play episodes took

place with seven children and three teachers from suburban preschools in Melbourne, Australia. Individually the children were videoed as they engaged in play with researchers. One at a time the researcher introduced three types of play artefacts aligning to traditional, consumer and digital forms of play. Firstly, artefacts were introduced in the form of traditional toys of either a farm set or a wooden train set. When the child grew tired of the play the researcher then introduced consumer popular culture toy additions. These consisted of Peppa Pig™ artefacts for the farm set or Thomas the Tank™ for the train set. The researchers interacted with the children and when the children's engagement diminished the final – digital – artefact was introduced, which consisted of an iPad™ with a Peppa Pig™ app for the farm set or a Thomas the Tank™ app for the train set. All the examples included the researchers and children engaged in back and forth interactions. In their use of the final digital artefact, when the children became disengaged they were “invited to explore other apps on the iPad™ to sustain their engagement with digital artefacts for at least 15 minutes, in order to ensure sufficient data for video analysis” (Nuttall et al., 2015, p. 227). Then teachers were involved in semi-structured interviews and focus groups to obtain their views and understandings of the play episodes. The teachers were shown the videos of the children they teach and asked to identify what they thought constituted play. First the data were inductively coded looking for patterns and motifs in the teacher's language and then deductively coded under the concepts of: “‘curriculum’, ‘teacher knowledge’ and ‘contemporary play’” (Nuttall et al., 2015, p. 228).

The researchers argue that the teachers experienced frustration in their practice, as a result of their perception that there was a dichotomy between their desire to support the home learning environment of the children they teach and the fact that children are fully immersed in digital technologies informed by popular culture (Nuttall et al., 2015). The findings highlight an example of a teacher's view that if children's play is underpinned by television program themes or superheroes, it lacks imagination, while, in contrast and in opposition natural materials support imaginative play. Teachers felt that digital technologies and teaching in early childhood were ambiguous and made teachers feel “adrift when trying to understand and mobilise children's home digital participation through play-based learning” (Nuttall et al., 2015, p. 228). The researchers argue that traditional ways of viewing play are important and yet research on new technologies that inform play and imagination needs further development to expand our understandings on children's play and teaching in play (Nuttall et al., 2015). Nuttall et al.'s (2015) research relates to this current study as the

relationship between children's cultural worlds, imagination and their play are still not fully understood.

Research from Edwards et al. (2015) is a study in Australia that focused on the connections between digital media, popular-culture, well-being and environmental education in early childhood education. This study consisted of 12 teachers split into two groups. One group was given an intensive professional development program on the research themes. The second group was told about the research and their practice was observed with minimal intervention. In relation to popular culture, the research found that generally teachers supported children's use of popular play motifs though there was a reluctance for teachers to use these in planning. The teachers did not know how to respond to the children's popular culture informed toys or play interests and they were "not always recognised as viable informants for content generation" (Edwards et al., 2015, p. 46). Edwards et al. (2015) argue that teachers embed learning in more traditional forms of play as there is confusion about how to approach popular culture play, for example, children's attraction to Spiderman™ or Frozen™. Edwards et al. (2015) argue that popular culture is seen in many digital technologies, in the form of Apps and games, and this means children's play interests are diverse and can leave the teacher feeling ill-informed. The study found that when the teachers had been given professional development on the research themes, they used children's popular culture play motifs in their planning and "capitalised on children's existing funds of knowledge" (Edwards et al., 2015, p. 45).

I now move to the final part of this chapter where the themes are summarised, and I point to the gap in the literature that this current research addresses.

2.5: Conclusion

This chapter has considered studies that focus on three main areas that have guided this current research. First, I addressed how the preschool teacher's role in play is complex; indeed, Hakkarainen and Bredikyte (2015) argue play is always unfamiliar and for adults this is even more apparent. This is echoed by Fleer (2015), who argues that more research is needed to understand the teacher in play regarding the imaginative shared space. Second, this chapter discusses *playworlds as a dramatic teaching method* that has the potential to be a space for teachers and children to be together in the imaginative field to act as a platform to research this area of the teacher's role in play. The final section of this chapter addresses

how children's popular culture motifs have personal significance for their play (Edwards, 2011). What children bring into the preschool in the form of their play genres always relates to their cultural context encompassing characters (Cupit, 2013; Holland, 2003; Popper, 2013; Wohlwend, 2016) from media in the form of, film, television, and Apps (Edwards, 2013a; Hedges, 2011; Marsh, 2014). The existing body of research suggests that popular culture play is still under-used and including children's popular culture interests in playworlds would provide a potentially productive stimulus (Wohlwend, 2016) and medium for this research.

This chapter has considered that further investigation is needed into the early childhood teacher's role in play with children. This collaboration would use the children's input revealing their cultural expertise is used as a way to develop a shared narrative. Such an investigation would contribute new insights into the teacher's role in socio-dramatic play and reveal how teachers' performed roles support creative acts of play. The literature focusing on how the teacher performs roles inside the imaginative field in play is limited, and thus this current research is relevant. As stated earlier this study aims to use a dramatic pedagogy in the form of popular culture informed playworlds where the teachers and children will have opportunities to collaborate, permitting an investigation into the teacher's performed roles in play. The next chapter will outline the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis to further support this method of inquiry.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

Continuing on from the Literature Review, which has revealed important contributions to understanding children's play and the role of the teacher, this chapter outlines the cultural-historical theoretical underpinnings of the thesis. This research inquiries about the teacher's performed roles in children play and uses cultural historical theory as the theoretical framework to address the research questions:

- 1) How do teachers perform roles in popular culture informed playworlds co-created with children?
- 2) How does an exploration of performed roles assist in understanding the teacher in children's play?

I will begin this chapter with an overview of cultural-historical theory and then discuss the theoretical concepts used to underpin this thesis, namely, the social situation, children's play, imagination and aesthetic education, and finally, narrative and story.

3.1: Overview of cultural-historical theory

Cultural-historical theory emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century in Russia at a time of great upheaval. The decline of the Tsarist autocracy propelled the Great Socialist October Revolution (1917) and brought with it a period of transformation (Leont'ev, 1979). The effects of the Russian Civil War (1917–23) and World War One (1914–18) left Russia with many social problems (van der Veer, 2007). The work of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels became relevant as their thinking and writing shifted the focus from the growth of the individual to the growth of the collective (Blunden, 1998). This Marxist influence created transformation that was dynamic and revolutionary in nature and Blunden (1998) argues that, "Marxists aim to enhance the freedom of working class people chiefly by expanding the scope of collective action and the possibilities for individual growth and creativity within that" (p. 1). This political ideal stemmed from the premise of co-constructing a society with the individuals that inhabit it to develop consciousness (Blunden, 2009). This dynamic environment led to changes in all areas of life, including psychology (Blunden, 2009; Leont'ev, 1979). The reform took time as a new psychological approach explored consciousness with links between the social and cognitive and these ideas conflicted with the "spirit of idealism" that had been at the core of the field (Leont'ev, 1979, p. 11). As this

reform progressed, dynamic change in practice and theory began, and this coincided with Lev Vygotsky's entrance onto the stage.

Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) came from a town in Russia called Gomel, which is about 650 kilometres from Moscow (Luria, 1935). Vygotsky worked in both Gomel and Moscow with expertise in various fields that included psychology, the arts and education (Leont'ev, 1979). Psychology, literature and drama, and teaching wove together and acted as a great influence on his thinking and writing (Davydov, 1982; van der Veer, 2007). Vygotsky (1931a) recognised the external environment's connections to the internal development of the individual and his awareness of this intersection is how cultural-historical theory came to be (Davydov, 1982). Vygotsky's work in psychology acted against the laboratory style of investigation that was common at the time, as he wanted to look at the real life of people (Blunden, 2009). In psychology Vygotsky realised that as a field it “did not really offer a satisfactory scientific explanation of human personality and of those complex activities of the brain which are specifically human” (Luria, 1935, p. 1). Central to cultural-historical theory is an understanding that as humans we are active and dynamic contributors to our own development and the development of society (Vygotsky, 1978). To understand the individual, first we need to understand the social and historical context, because they weave together and influence each other (van der Veer, 2007). This intersection is what Vygotsky brought to his work in this time of “chaos and improvisation” (van der Veer, 2007, p. 23), which constituted a “cauldron of creativity” (Blunden, 2009, p. 3).

Early in his career, before he became a psychologist, Vygotsky wrote theatre reviews and this “theatrical background had a life-long influence on his ideas and many of the concepts he introduced into psychology ... are rooted in the theatrical tradition” (Rubtsova & Daniels, 2016, p. 189). One connection in the arts was aligned to the performing arts through the work of Russian theatre practitioner Constantin Stanislavski (Mitchell, 2015; Stanislavski, 1948). In Russia's pre-revolution era in the theatre the actor on the stage presented caricatures of roles to the audience (Mitchell, 2015; Rubtsova & Daniels, 2016; Stanislavski, 1948). In contrast, in the post-revolution era, Stanislavski's (1948) acting system introduced and encompassed a more natural way to perform that was grounded in the actor experiencing a role on the stage, resulting in the presentation of a more realist interplay between the actor and the audience (Gillett, 2012; Mitchell, 2015). Vygotsky (1925/1971a) was interested in this interplay as a way of expression that pays attention to the unity of

internal and external processes. This shift in understanding was also reflected in Vygotsky's work in education as he argued that "the culture of education as it had existed was itself in need of profound transformation and that this was possible in the new social circumstances that obtained in Russia" (Daniels, 2008, p. 3).

To put this shift in perspective when Vygotsky (1931a) practised psychology the dominant lens viewed the young child as a "completely finished and formed organism, but only smaller in size" (p. 98). This perspective sees the child as a mini adult whose trajectory is already predetermined. In education at this time the young child was viewed as an entity who could not yet do things, in relation to an adult or another child, projecting a deficit model of learning. In stark contrast, Vygotsky's (1931a) focus was on what the child can do that differentiates it from the adult or other children. This was transformative and revolutionary because it demanded that psychologists see "the true uniqueness of child behavior in all the fullness and richness of its actual expression" (Vygotsky, 1931a, p. 98). This challenged the child psychology evolutionary view of development that focused on gradual growth along a straight path more like botanical development (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930). Not only did Vygotsky (1931a) present this view on development supporting the concept of learning as maturation that naturally and slowly occurs, but he also argued for revolutionary development that is sharp and abrupt. In his career Vygotsky advanced theory that focused on "tools for the development of new pedagogies for all learners" (Daniels, 2008, p. 3).

Vygotsky's work in cultural-historical theory was collaborative and he formed a circle of young scholars that included: Aleksei N. Leonti'ev, Daniil Elkonin and Alexander Luria (Blunden, 2009; Yasnitsky, 2011). Sadly, Vygotsky died at the age of thirty-eight on June 11, 1934 (Luria, 1935). Since then scholars have continued, and continue, to develop the work and expand on his ideas (Blunden, 2009; van der Veer, 2007). Cultural-historical theory was, and still is, interested in the process, whether in the arts discussing actors on the stage, or in education looking at the young child's play activity. I will now go into detail about the theoretical concepts that I have identified within cultural-historical theory which frame the theoretical underpinning of this thesis. These are discussed in the following sequence: the social situation, children's play, an aesthetic experience, and finally, narrative and story.

3.2: The social situation

Inherently the concept of the social situation is core to early childhood education, as it includes children and adults in a collaborative learning environment. Education does not stand alone as it reflects the culture that it inhabits and play is informed, and informs, the culture of the preschool educational setting (Bruner, 1996; Roopnarine, 2011). Vygotsky (1931a) argues:

We can formulate the general genetic law of cultural development as follows: every function in the cultural development of the child appears on the stage twice, in two planes, first, the social, then the psychological, first between people as an intermental category, then within the child as an intramental category. (p. 14)

Consequently the young child enters the world with inherited links to their genetic or developmental make-up with innate mental processes that Vygotsky (1931a) describes as lower mental functions (LMF). The young child engages with the world in a reflexive manner, responds using impulses and reacts in the moment to their physical and social environment (Vygotsky, 1931a). These mental processes act as single units and do not necessarily link to other mental functions. Lower mental functions are unmediated by the social environment and they occur in isolation and link to the biological progress of a child (Vygotsky, 1931a). From birth, the child interacts with people, and Vygotsky (1931a) argues that it is “through others we become ourselves” (p. 105). Through social interactions we develop what Vygotsky (1931a) describes as higher mental functions (HMF).

The person’s interactions with others lead to the development of higher mental functions as it is the social mediation that moves development forward, not the development that moves the social forward (Vygotsky, 1931a). For example a simple interaction between a child and adult can create a collision as the humble gesture of pointing towards an object, becomes a communication gesture (Vygotsky, 1931a). Vygotsky (1931a) argues that the meeting of lower mental functions and higher mental functions influence a person’s learning and development (Vygotsky, 1931b). This collision is what Vygotsky (1931a) wanted to explore as “revolution and evolution” are “two mutually connected and closely interrelated forms of development” (p. 99). It is the clash between, the child’s basic forms of behaviour, and the cultural forms of behaviour that constitutes the “very essence of cultural development” (Vygotsky, 1931a, p. 99). Daniels (2012) acknowledges that Vygotsky had a

“dialectical worldview” that was central to his thinking, work and writings. Davydov (1982) argues that to understand a dialectic from a Vygotskian view of psychological development we need to look “through the prism of the relationship between content and form” and its connection (p. 18). In cultural-historical theory dialectical ascensions occur when a concrete problem arises for the learner as a contradiction (Daniels, 2012; Davydov, 1982). This is a dialectic that can be viewed as a struggle that requires the learner to resolve and therefore is in the process of change (Vygotsky, 1978). A well-known example given by Vygotsky (1976) is explained by how this occurs in play for the child. The example refers to a play episode where the child requires a horse in the imagined world, creating a contradiction as they do not have a real horse. To resolve this the child ascends to abstraction by using a stick as a horse, therefore this has changed the conditions of development for the child by being able to participate in the play (Vygotsky, 1976). The transforming of the stick into a horse is an example of the child using the objects available to them and changing their meaning to fit into the play landscape (Bodrova, Germeroth, & Leong, 2013; Vygotsky, 1976). This is not easy for the child as to “sever thought from object” requires thinking in relation to ideas rather than objects (Vygotsky, 1976, p. 546).

From a cultural-historical perspective, learning mediation in the form of a social situation is essential (Vygotsky, 1934/2012). As the adult and child interact in activities signs that include language are central to this mediation (Vygotsky, 1934/2012; Vygotsky & Luria, 1930). Language creates meaning for the child and the adult acts as a converter of words in their social interactions (Vygotsky, 1931a). Language is an example of interlacing of the psychological and social worlds of the child (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky & Luria, 1930). The adult’s role in language composition is active and collaborative as the communication processes allow the voices of the participants to become central to the development of higher mental functions (Wertsch, 1991). Language mediates the psychological world of a person and how a person thinks and feels is reliant on these mechanisms (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930).

In the social situation the adult and child’s behaviour have the chance to unite. The adult in the environment acts as a model or support for the child until the child can coordinate the self and the social independently (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930). The preschool child engages in play with their whole body and uses speech as they experiment regulating their own behaviour (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930). With the young child this begins in a “chaotic form” and then later the planning function strengthens and they mentally proclaim their intent

(Vygotsky & Luria, 1930, p. 120). Vygotsky (1978) believed that “once children learn how to use the planning function of their language effectively, their psychological field changes radically” (p. 28). Central to cultural-historical theory is the idea that the inter-psychological world is the prime influence on the intra-psychological world and this interlacement creates a cycle that is always in motion. Movement and change take centre stage in cultural-historical theory.

It is the mediated social situation that can support change in the child’s development (Vygotsky, 1934/2012). Vygotsky and Luria (1930) argue that the child’s development operates on two planes, firstly on a social plane that is interpersonal, and then on a personal plane that is intrapersonal. On the social plane the adult or other children act as a structure until the child no longer needs this support and they can regulate her or himself. The two planes are not hierarchical but interlaced together. The social situation relates to zones of development where the child works independently or with support from more knowledgeable adults or peers (Vygotsky, 1934/2012). These zones are not concerned with specific skills related to a particular task; rather, they focus on the child’s learning and development (Chaiklin, 2003). The first is the child’s zone of actual development (ZAD), which refers to what a child can do by them self independently (Vygotsky, 1978). This zone encourages independent play as the child engages in various activities in their day. In contrast the zone of proximal development (ZPD) refers to what the child can do but with the assistance from peers or adults. The ZPD has the potential to be a learning space where the teacher and child, or the child and child, work in collaboration. For example, in education at the start of the ZPD the teacher sees what the child brings into the zone and these are the child’s “functions that have not matured yet but are in a process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state.” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The adult and child collaborate together and this partnership acts to support the child’s learning of new concepts or difficult tasks (Vygotsky, 1934/2012b). Vygotsky (1978) argues that the mediation with more knowledgeable peers or adults supports the child’s zone of potential development that signifies where the child could be heading, although it is too far out of their reach at present.

Finally, I wish to pay attention to the cultural link of learning in the social environment. What the child experiences in the environment propels them to move towards this activity “which is concluded in the process of actual interaction of ideal and present

forms” (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 203). For example, adults, or other children, that demonstrate higher forms of regulation are modelling this to the child before they can actually achieve this them self. The child has had many examples of the *ideal* demonstrated to them in the social situation through mediation (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930). This *ideal* occurs throughout the day as the child interacts with a parent who asks their child to wait as they cook dinner, or uses a pointing gesture to focus the child’s attention, both form of communication demonstrating the ideal of how to regulate, or, focus attention (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky & Luria, 1930).

In socio-dramatic play the interactions among children, and between children and adults, offer opportunities to work in the zone of proximal development in the form of “joint culture creating” (Bruner, 1986, p. 127). What we do, how we engage, and with whom we engage, all mediate our learning (John-Steiner & Souberman, 1978; Vygotsky, 1998). Play is a meditated activity and how cultural-historical theory views children’s play as a platform for learning is discussed below.

3.3: Children’s play

The concept of play from a cultural-historical perspective views the imagination as central to the process (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, 1976). In the broader context play has many interpretations with multiple definitions and has been studied by diverse theorists (Japiassu, 2008; McInnes et al., 2013). While the term is commonly used it is difficult to define and this “frustrates a fixed meaning” (Sutton-Smith, 2008, p. 82). The aim here is to define a type of play called *dramatic or pretend* play – these terms are interchangeable – and the *socio* prefix is used to define the social aspect. Vygotsky (1930/2004, 1976) argues that dramatic and socio-dramatic play is a form of mature or creative play. This maturity comes from the child’s use of assigned roles and implicit rules that allow the zone of proximal development (ZPD) to be present (1976). In this mature play, Vygotsky (1976) argues the child can be their own support in their ZPD, as the roles and rules they adopt require them to act as if they were “a head taller” than themselves (p. 552). In this form of play, the child “is always above his [*sic*] average age, above his daily behaviour” (Vygotsky, 1976, p. 522). This is because the imaginary situation acts as a form of self-regulation as the child is confronted with the rules of the play and their own immediate desires (Vygotsky, 1976). Play provides this conflict requiring the child to balance these two positions as they become a co-player (Vygotsky, 1976). Vygotsky’s (1976) understanding of this mature or creative

play includes three elements that I now discuss, beginning with: the imaginary situation, followed by embodied roles, and finally the use of implicit rules.

An imaginary situation in mature play frames the activity. Vygotsky (1930/2004) argues that the imaginary situation, in children's play, stems from what they have experienced in their culture. The children's play motifs are directly intertwined with their cultural experiences (Davydov, 1982). Children take elements from their day-to-day cultural experiences and combine these fragments into new invented realities in the form of dramatic play (van Oers, 2013; Vygotsky, 1930/2004). This imagined world does not have limitations as the children use elements from their world to create new play landscapes. Taylor (2013) argues that imagination is where we "transcend time, place and/or circumstances to think about what might have been, plan and anticipate the future, create fictional worlds, and consider alternatives to the actual experiences of our lives" (p. 3). Therefore the imaginary situation is not a literal copy of the original; rather, it is an embodiment of the memory (Vygotsky, 1976). The child reveals their internal processes of imagination as they become externally embodied in their play scenario (Vygotsky, 1976, p. 550). In play the child lets go of current links to reality as time and space diminish, and "a day can take half-an-hour and a hundred miles are covered in five steps" (Vygotsky, 1976, p. 550).

Vygotsky (1976) argues play requires the child to transform objects from the literal meaning – these objects stand in for something else that fit into the imaginary situation as described previously in this chapter. When this occurs in the imaginary situations of the child's play it "can be regarded as a means of developing abstract thought" (Vygotsky, 1976, p. 553) as the child uses this space to experiment with symbolic transformation. This transformation requires the child to be flexible as the imagined world calls for various tools depending on the play needs. Children's play foci link to situations they have seen, heard and experienced, in their actual life (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, 1976). For example in play we see various forms and configurations of family, shopping, restaurants, and medical scenarios or situations from: books, television, film, computer games and Apps (Marsh, 2014). Children take their experiences from their lives and weave them together to create a new imagined landscape to play within (Dowling, 2012; Elkonin, 2005; Vygotsky, 1930/2004). These play landscapes are not an precise replica of the child's life, rather a creative adaptation of their experiences (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). The child's social experiences and endeavours act as a repertoire for them to draw on and therefore the possibilities and

combinations are endless (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). This part of children's dramatic or socio-dramatic play is linked to the human capacity and predisposition to storytelling by creating "private story-like structures in our thoughts" (Singer & Singer, 2006, p. 98). This story structure in the child's play takes the form of a physically and verbally embodied narrative. This notion brings me to the next section to explaining how *embodied roles* are present in children's socio-dramatic play.

As the child embodies roles in socio-dramatic play this forms a foundational part of their learning and development (Holzman, 2010). When children take on roles, they are creating what Vygotsky (1976) terms as a *dual effect plan*. Children simultaneously operate both *inside* the play in a role, and *outside* the play as themselves (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976). This way of navigating roles in play is seamless, and not a dichotomy, as the child simultaneously pulls together "playing I" and the "real I" (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010, p. 35). *Inside the play* the child uses the *playing I* to take on a role as other in the form of the character and *outside the play* the child uses the *real I* when they are themselves. The role as someone else in the imagined world is not separate from self (Bateson, 1976; Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976). The dual effect plan means that roles are occurring "situational and supra-(above) situational" (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010, p. 29). Players do not step *inside* and *outside*, like they are stepping on and off a stage; they are always on the stage, so it is more like an overlapping, or interplay. To articulate this, Bateson (1972) discusses play as having two frames: *inside the frame* and *outside the frame* and the players use them concurrently. This creates a frame within a frame, within the play discourse rather than two separate frames (Bateson, 1972). Kravtsov and Kravtsova (2010) articulate that this dual positioning,

allows the player to comprehend the imaginary situation, which is determined by "real" and "sense" fields. Accordingly, play includes play relations that are associated with the logic of a play's plot and the real relations, which have been formed in the process of a person's real life activity. (p. 29)

The real and sense positions create a double subjectivity (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010) and the child is deft at moving effortlessly amongst the two, becoming both the director and the player (Sutton-Smith, 1979). This can be heard in their language in the form of meta-communication (Bateson, 1972) as children voice their ideas, actions, and thoughts in the context of the play. The child's "meta-level talk" is evident as they speak as a character

in the play, and as themselves *about* the play (Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2014, p. 176). Bateson (1976) argues that animals, including humans, converse on more than one level and this is meta-communication. Meta-communication turns in on itself and creates a “paradoxical frame” as what occurs in the frame is not the same as what occurs outside the frame (Bateson, 1976, p. 124). This meta-communication is highlighted in play when the child becomes a character in the play and then talks to their peers about the play episode at the same time (Nachmanovitch, 2009). The child in play, as their character role can present a different view or behaviour from themselves. This means children try out ideas and actions in their play experimentation and these might not align to “the meaning of that behaviour when displayed outside the play frame” (Bergen, 2014, p. 12). Children act out various versions of what they see, do and hear and embody these in new combinations in their play (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). The roles that children embody in their play are bound by rules and so to conclude this section on socio-dramatic play I now discuss how rules are peppered throughout this type of play.

Play is bound by rules that are implicit as the participants work within the constraints of the imaginary situation (Vygotsky, 1976). These rules are not obvious and laid out before the play begins, but evolve as the imagined situation requires and the child co-ordinates their behaviour accordingly (Holzman, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976). The rules are developed during the play process and are guided by the imagined situation. Children then correlate their roles as they act *as if* they were someone else, in the imagined world and this is where they exhibit “higher levels of self regulation” (Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p. 132). The rules assist children to practise self-regulation and this comes under the broader term of executive function seen as higher order thinking processes (Carlson, White, & Davis-Unger, 2014; Slot, Mulder, Verhagen, & Leseman, 2017; Thibodeau, Gilpin, Brown, & Meyer, 2016). These processes are separated into three areas: working memory, inhibitory control and cognitive flexibility, and the imagined situation in play provides a space for practising these behaviours (Bodrova et al., 2013; Slot et al., 2017). *Working memory* is how the child holds information and then includes these ideas in the play; *inhibitory control* is how the child focuses their attention on the play and resists impulses that do not adhere to the play context; and finally, *cognitive flexibility* relates to how a child can switch from their own priorities or perspective and incorporate ideas from peers or adults into the play (Carlson et al., 2014; Slot et al., 2017; Thibodeau et al., 2016). These cognitive processes are supported in play as the rules give children opportunities to behave above their level of development (Bodrova et al., 2013;

Vygotsky, 1976). Children's play is the platform that allows these self-regulation behaviours to develop because the "imaginary situation already contains rule of behaviour" (Vygotsky, 1976, p. 541).

Through a cultural-historical lens play is not driven by rules that lead to a predetermined outcome; the rules are more fluid and made up by children in the moment (Vygotsky, 1976). Dewey (1910/1997) argues that predetermined outcomes have traditionally divided play and work, and they create an unnecessary "separation between process and product" (p. 164). For example, being present in an activity can also lead towards a conclusion – they are not necessarily ununified (Dewey, 1910/1997, p. 164). Dewey (1910/1997) argues that the play and work divide presumes that play is purposeless and work is only forward focused. Thinking of these as two extremes aligns work to *drudgery* and play to *foolery* (Dewey, 1910/1997). Instead Dewey (1910/1997) asks us to think about how it is the balance of serious and playful that creates the ideal mental state. This ideal mental state has the potential to occur in play as the child fuses their ideas and actions in an imaginary situation (Dewey, 1934/2005).

In this section I have presented Vygotsky's (1976) understanding of mature or creative play including the three elements of the imaginary situation, embodied roles and rules. To gain a greater understanding of this type of play I include in this theoretical framework the role of imagination and aesthetic education.

3.4: Imagination and aesthetic education

In play children fully engage their imagination, weaving in and out of the transformative process between reality and pretend (Runco & Pina, 2013; Vygotsky, 1930/2004). Robinson (2011) argues imagination releases us from the current situation by transforming the present into something else. Vygotsky (1930/2004) emphasises that the imagination is not a frivolous pursuit, rather it is essential to our daily lives. To understand the imagination, we must make visible the links to reality, as our experiences are the ingredients of our imagination (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). Cultural-historical theorisation of the imagination indicates that it is a dynamic process with four interweaving phases that are inherently connected (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). The first phase is *reality* as everything in our imagination is anchored in the here and now. Consequently, the richer and more diverse our experiences, the more we have to draw on in our imagination. A person uses their

experiences, what they have seen, felt, heard, smelt, tasted and touched to create “a new active force” (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 20). Our imagination is fed and expanded by all that we experience. The second is a *combinational* phase where our memories of the past fuse with new phenomena and this combination creates something new. Consequently, our imagination is limitless as the possibilities and amalgamations are endless. The third phase is *affect* as these memories connect to our emotions that have images and feelings attached, acting as a reference for our new experiences. These are layered affective memories because even if the feelings do not at that moment link to what is happening now the feelings appear real (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). The fourth and final phase is *embodiment* as the combination of reality, memory and emotions become crystallised or embodied creating something completely novel and Vygotsky (1930/2004) theorisation of the imagination argues that this acts as a new force in reality that in turn will impact on our new experiences.

These four phases of the imagination from a Vygotskian perspective are different from each other, but not used as separate entities as it is the interlacement that creates the cycle. To explain how these phases interact Vygotsky (1930/2004) argues the brain provides us with reproductive and combinational functions that work together. The reproductive aspect recalls past experiences that limits humans to the known and orients us only to the past, whereas the combinational function orients us to the future and the two are interlaced (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). The imagination uses both planes like a tapestry as it weaves past experiences and current realities and reworks them (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). If imagination is based in reality then potentially adults have more experiences, as they have lived longer, and have a more examples to draw on (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). Nonetheless, it is perceived that the child’s imagination is greater because the child has more trust in these products and so they are more readily accessible (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). Theorising imagination this way begins with the exploration of our senses, including what we see, hear, touch and feel. Then we use these stimuli to sort, discard and meld; offering the potential to become embodied in reality (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). The imaginations connection between past and present is witnessed in young children as their life experiences build new play episodes (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). My interpretation of the four interweaving phases is presented in the following illustration.

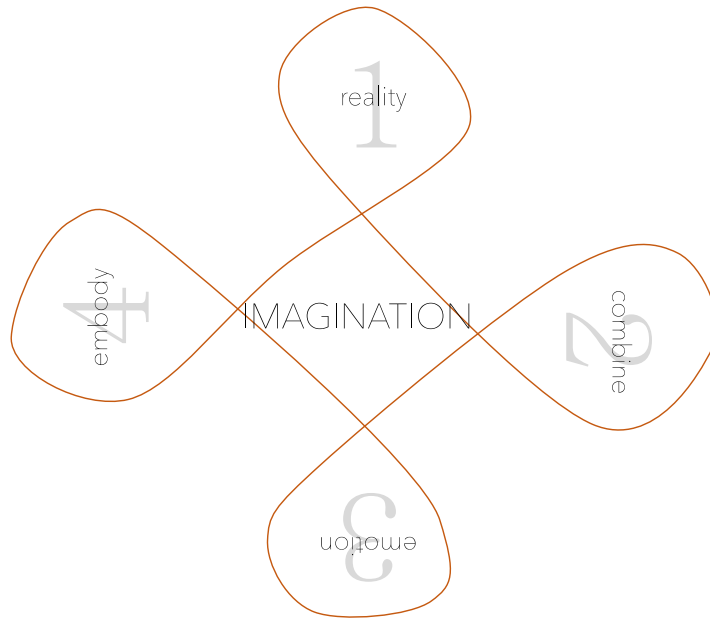


Figure 1: Vygotsky's (1930/2004) cycle of the imagination

In play children communicate through physical and verbal interactions that are expressions of their imagination (Lindqvist, 1995). In education encounters between adults and children “who are trying to learn how to learn requires imagination on the part of teachers— and on the part of those they teach” (Greene, 1995, p. 14). Craft (2003) argues that when discussing young children’s imagination and creativity in education an inclusive approach is needed as all children should have opportunities to express and develop their creativity. Using Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) understanding of creativity is helpful for play and education. He outlines two constructs of big-C and little-c creativity and these link to the creative aspects of people’s lives. First, big-C creativity is seen as high refinement in a particular field, producing a product that is novel (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). This big-C construct is affiliated with the belief that someone, or something, is creative when it is judged to be so by outsiders in the field (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Kozbelt, Beghetto, & Runco, 2010; Runco & Pina, 2013). This links to many adult views of creativity as being a mystery and seen as solely belonging to the world of the artist, scientist or a select few people (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Robinson, 2011; Vygotsky, 1930/2004). In contrast, and relevant for this research, is the use of Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) more prosaic little-c creativity to describe the everyday creative occurrences in people’s lives. This is also associated to the novel and expressive aspect but only needs to be original to the individual (Csikszentmihalyi,

1996; Sawyer, 2011a). Csikszentmihalyi (1996) argues that the imagination needs to be embedded in reality and both are “needed to break away from the present without losing touch with the past” (p. 63).

Big-C and little-c creativity have embedded in them the potential for the state of being in what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) has termed *flow*. This *flow* state is when a person pays attention to a task and they are completely absorbed in the activity at hand, this is regardless of the activity type (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). For example flow is pertinent for the arts, sciences and play as when we are focused in an activity we can achieve this “peak mental state” (Sawyer, 2011a, p. 365). The state of flow is not concerned about failure, it is where self-consciousness disappears and the notion of time is distorted (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). However, it does require a level of challenge that expands on our current abilities that leads us into action (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). This challenge or a problem propels us to find new ways to perform (Vygotsky, 1930/2004).

Aesthetic education is a mode of inquiry that Greene (1999) stipulates requires adults with children “plunging leaps they never could have conjured up themselves” (p. 5). This means new terrains are uncovered and developed as the group engages in creative partnerships to explore new possibilities. Aesthetic education is fuelled by dialogue that is focused on change, where ideas and actions are dynamic (Greene, 1995). Vygotsky (1926/1992) argues that aesthetics in education can operate in a space between two oppositions. At one end, the aesthetic experience is viewed as an elixir for everyone and everything, and at the opposite end it is dismissed and viewed as an insignificant “form of amusement and a way for children to have fun” (Vygotsky, 1926/1992, p. 1). Whereas Vygotsky (1926/1992) argues from a cultural-historical perspective aesthetic education occurs as an active force as we engage in the world with physical action as well as visual imagination. Our engagement transforms our reality onto fantasy as “a genuine recreation of things, objects, and situations” (Vygotsky, 1926/1992, p. 16). Dewey (1934/2005) argues, that aesthetics is not only aligned to the fine arts but is a part of the human experience. An aesthetic experience, Dewey (1934/2005) argues, is an exchange between a person and their environment and “art is a quality that permeates an experience; it is not, save by a figure of speech, the experience itself” (p. 326). An experience is an “interaction between “subject” and “object” between a self and its world, it is not itself either merely physical nor merely

mental” (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 256), it is the interaction between the two that make it an experience.

Greene (2000) argues that aesthetic education does not occur in a private domain, rather a public sphere that allow for social imagination and transformation. The art form of drama in an educational contexts is most effective “both educationally and aesthetically when its construction is shared and its meaning negotiated” (O'Neill, 1985, p. 160). This meaning pays attention to the individual and social aspects of artistic development in relation to a “broader range of social and cultural learning” (Neelands, 2004, p. 50). Drama in an educational context creates this space as “an activity or performance that, by means of aesthetic experience” it performed through the body, emotions and the mind (DeCoursey, 2018, p. 3). Lindqvist (1995) argues that play too is an example of an “aesthetic form, and it is largely the aesthetic emotions which influence its course” (Lindqvist, 1995, p. 53). In play children engage with objects, ideas, language and movement in an improvised manner and “from an aesthetic point of view, these forms should be regarded as part of a lyrical and musical pattern” (Lindqvist, 1995, p. 136). Lindqvist (1995) argues when teachers and children collaborate in play, they “can share aesthetic experiences” (p. 38).

Abbs (2003) tells us that arts education is valuable for children because it involves both the mental activity of the imagination and the physical aspect of the senses. We interact and react both physically and mentally to our environment (Dewey, 1934/2005). Dewey (1925) uses the term body-mind to describe how are bodies engage in discourses to communicate and participate. To continue to develop the mind-body link I discuss this in relation to phenomenological theorist Merleau-Ponty (1962). Merleau-Ponty (1962), argues that bodily movements exist alongside our cognitive explorations and this understanding of the body’s role in imagination is useful when discussing play. Merleau-Ponty (2012) explains the body is made up of enveloping parts that are grounded in the lived experience and human perception is related to this lived experience. We become aware of our environment through our senses and perception is a meaning making tool to understand our experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Perception from a cultural-historical understanding is articulated by Kravtsov and Kravtsova (2010) as they argue that the,

imagination appears in mental development when a child becomes independent of his/her own perception. When a child is asked to state that a doll is sitting, for example, when the doll is obviously standing, the child can only complete this

task if she/ he understands her/himself as the subject of his/her own speech, when a new mental function has been created, which is known as imagination. It is imagination that allows a child to control the space between his/her own perception. (p. 30)

This demonstrates the link between the outward actions and the inward cognitive processes. Dance theorist Sheets-Johnstone (2016) argues that our movements occur in space and time and are intrinsically interconnected to our expressing, sensing, emotional and cognitive fields. A person's body movements are not those of machines, argues Sheets-Johnstone (2016) because we have a unique dynamic way to express ourselves as animate beings. From birth our body takes in information through our senses as we engage with objects, space and the people in our environment. Sheets-Johnstone (2016) argues, that our initial forms of thinking occurs in movement that is interwoven with perception; "there is no 'mind-doing' that is separate from 'body-doing'" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2011, p. 422). Similarly, play is the epitome of mind and body doing, which is present from birth because movement is our first language (Sheets-Johnstone, 2016). I think it is important here to link to the art discipline of drama in education as it engages children "not as disembodied thinking machines but as emotional and bodily creatures" (DeCoursey, 2018, p. 3). Drama is an expressive art form that is a blend of physical and verbal expression, whether with young children in play or actors on the stage.

In this thesis drama was used as a platform for the teacher participants to engage in the imaginary field using roles and narratives co-created with the children and the researcher. This supports cultural-historical theory's understanding that "drama, more than any other form of creation, is closely and directly linked to play, which is the root of all creativity in children" (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 71). To explain this link Vygotsky's (1932) early writing about the actor on stage is useful as he acknowledges the actors ability to engage "infinite sensations, feelings, or emotions that become the emotions of the whole theatrical audience" (p. 6). The actor, argues Vygotsky (1932), deliberately taps into their emotions, not in a raw and exposed manner, rather to offer an illumination "from the point of view of the actor's self-awareness" (p. 7). The emotional aspect is fundamental to the art form and can be felt when the actor's interaction with the audience presents a form of "emotional dialogue" (Vygotsky, 1932, p. 8). The emotions that the observers connect with are reliant on the actor's ability to transmit their truth in their character role (Vygotsky, 1932).

This emotional response in an aesthetic experience is what Vygotsky (1925/1971b) calls *catharsis*. Catharsis comes from the Greek word *catharsis*, which means to purify or cleanse. Aristotle (1997), writing on aesthetics in *Poetics*, argues that catharsis is the release of emotions that occur in theatre through tragedies or comedies. It makes sense that Vygotsky uses this term in his writings on the arts, with a particular link to theatre and how it produces a cathartic response (Connery, 2010; Smagorinsky, 2011; Vygotsky, 1925/1971c). Catharsis creates a meeting point of, emotion and imagination and this fusion generates dynamic movement and an emotional response (Vygotsky, 1925/1971d). In relation to performance catharsis occurs “when something happens to the performer/s characters, but not to the performance itself” (Schechner, 1985, p. 113). This is a dramatic mediation meaning that the person on or off stage has changed in some way (Moran, 2010; Smagorinsky, 2011; Vygotsky, 1925/1971b).

The term catharsis relates to the Russian term *perezhivanie*, that denotes an intense experience that unifies intellect and affect (Vygotsky, 1934/1994). *Perezhivanie* includes catharsis and is a lived and processed experience derived from a situation (Vygotsky, 1934/1994). Vygotsky (1934/1994) argues that the child’s emotional landscape includes many *perezhivaniya* that incorporate “a unity of environmental and personal features” (p. 342). The environmental features are consistently changing and dynamic and these influence a person’s development (Vygotsky, 1934/1994). The environmental factors include other adults and/or peers and this mediation with others is pivotal for the child’s development. As a person witnesses and interacts with others this in itself changes their development in some way (Fakhrutdinova, 2010). Vygotsky (1934/1994) states that,

Perezhivanie is a unit where, on the one hand, in an indivisible state, the environment is represented, i.e. that which is being experienced, - *perezhivanie* is always related to something which is found outside the person - and on the other hand what is represented is how I, myself, am experiencing this, i.e. all the personal characteristics and all the environmental characteristics are represented in *perezhivanie*. (p. 341)

This notion of experiencing is present in the child’s play and Vygotsky’s awareness of *perezhivanie*, Smagorinsky (2011) argues, possibly came from his interest in Stanislavski’s work in the theatre. Vygotsky and Stanislavski both referred to this concept, Vygotsky (1934/1994) in relation to education and Stanislavski (1949) in relation to theatre.

Jean Benedetti (2017b) who translated many texts from Stanislavski's Russian into English, defines *perezhivanie* as "the process by which an actor engages actively" (p. xxiii). Stanislavski's *plan of experiencing* is a dual plan for actors and is represented as a fine line drawing of two lung like shapes that are positioned next to each other. These two lungs connect at the top to feed and unite in one super-objective. The left-hand-side of the lung represents the internal psychological experiencing aspect of acting, whereas the right-hand-side represents embodiment or outer character (Stanislavski, 2017a; Whyman, 2013). This dual plan includes both an inner theatrical sense of self as experiencing, and an outer theatrical sense of self as embodiment that are inherently entwined (Whyman, 2013, p. 113). Although *perezhivanie* is not limited to the stage, it is a central component "of human development in offstage life as well, serving as the foundation for cathartic response to dramatic mediation" (Smagorinsky, 2011, pp. 337-338).

I am referring to Stanislavski's writing again as his work in theatre can add to understanding how an adult uses dual roles and therefore helpful in this thesis to understand the teacher in play. Firstly, Stanislavski (1948) argues that there are two acting methods that act in opposition. One style sees the actor on stage *playing the role* in a forced acting style (Carnicke, 2009; Mitchell, 2015; Stanislavski, 1948). This is seen as pretending in a representational style where the actor goes "through certain disjointed exercises" (Stanislavski, 1948, p. 275). This stance relates to an actor using mimicry and means the role becomes fragmented from the group experience and therefore does not support the through line of action (Stanislavski, 2008). This type of acting is like *wearing a mask* (Mitchell, 2015) and operates outside of one's self, it does not make use of the dual roles that connect the character-role to the self-role. In contrast, Stanislavski's (1948) second state has the actor *living the part* on the stage to present a more natural way of acting (Carnicke, 2009; Gillett, 2012; Mitchell, 2015). This where the actor is *experiencing the role* on the stage (Gillett, 2012). Like a child in play, the actor on the stage in this role behaves *as if* they are someone else (Stanislavski, 1948). In acting, the concept of experiencing requires "synchronicity as the flow of the ordinary time and the flow of performance time meet and eclipse each other" (Schechner, 1985, pp. 112-113). This way of experiencing a role connects the actors and audience that moves from the "feeling, of "I" as a feeling of "we"" (Vygotsky, 1932, p. 6). In this *we* state Stanislavski (1948) required actors to connect to their *emotion memory* and in his method the actor does not "act" outside themselves, they connect to a similar emotion in themselves, and the broader their emotional memory, the more emotion they have to draw

on. This means the actor transforms in some way, which indicates that they carry something of themselves across to the role they are playing and the self and role nourish each other (Carnicke, 2009). The actor is self, and a role, simultaneously, and there is an “unbroken concentration on the events of the play during performance” (Carnicke, 2009, p. 133). Schechner (1985) argues that our behaviours are like strips of film that we can edit and re-edit into different formations. He calls this *restored behaviour* as we are never doing something for the first time (Schechner, 1985). We manipulate and transform our stored ‘films strips’ into something else and therefore they become “twice-behaved” (p. 36). Restored behaviour means life is open to endless possibility whether in theatre or play (Schechner, 1985).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Vygotsky’s (1976) theorisation of the child in play and Stanislavski’s (1948, 2017a) theorisation of the actor on the stage, both acknowledge the use of dual roles and the relationship between these roles is important for this thesis. The use of dual roles can elevate us out of our everyday life and make an emotional connection to imagination (Stanislavski, 1948). The final part of this section on imagination and drama also link to theatre and the dual nature of the performer as examined by Augusto Boal who expanded on Stanislavski’s understandings in his *Theatre of the Oppressed* work in Brazil (DeCoursey, 2018; Gillett, 2012). The concept of *theatre* in Boal’s work is not associated to a building or stage but is concerned with the relationship between the participants, “which allows man [*sic*] to observe himself in action, in activity” (Boal, 1995, p. 13). His work in Brazil was political and educational, deliberately including actors and non-actors in the physical games, acting techniques and improvisations. Boal (1995) used theatre as a “tool for the comprehension of social and personal problems and the search for their solutions. (pp. 14-15). The non-actors were an important part as he argues that everyone was an actor, and everyone was theatre (Boal, 1995). This created a space where boundaries were diminished, as actor and non-actor roles were overlapped rather than separate. Both actor and non-actor become players in a shared space. His term *spect-actor* implies that the audience are able to guide or change the experience as “the spect-actor is the actor, he can guide him, change him. A spect-actor is acting on the actor who acts” (Boal, 1995, p. 13). The actor and non-actor roles are bio-directional and they inform and perform on each other. Boal (1995) argues when this happens the drama is developed into a space that creates a *metaxis* where participants engage in a “state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds” (Boal, 1995, p. 43). The separation is

lessened as both actor and non-actor perform in this in-between space (Linds, 2006). This in-between space is an ever-changing landscape where opportunities “emerge for action and knowing” (Linds, 2006, p. 115).

In arts education there are strong links to this in-between space and O'Toole (1993) argues that in drama,

we are operating in both of these contexts, and it will be shown that they are operating on each other. That is part of what is romantically called the ‘magic’ of theatre; however, I shall unromantically term it ‘metaxis’ because it is a very substantial and definable component of the experience itself, which needs to be understood if we are to comprehend the dramatic aesthetic and the dramatic meaning. (p. 13)

Drama participants engage in dual roles that create the metaxis in a “boundary crossing experience” (Davis, 2015, p. 71). This metaxis, like play’s dual effect plan, is where reality and fiction merge in the present activity (Bolton, 1985). This space offers an aesthetics mode where all participants, adults and children, encounter new worlds (Greene, 1980a). This means the teacher needs to find ways to bracket out the ‘mundane’ world of the educational environment to “enter the aesthetic space” (Greene, 1977, p. 122). To do this teachers develop spaces in which particular atmospheres “foster active exploring rather than passivity, that allow for the unpredictable and the unforeseen” (Greene, 1980b, p. 57).

The synergy between imagination and how it manifests in play and drama are why the research for this thesis used a drama-based method in the form of playworlds to assist in understanding the teacher’s performed roles in this aesthetic space. Like play, drama adopts a narrative form that I will discuss in this final section of the theory chapter.

3.5: Narrative and story

In our day to day interactions we communicate our experiences to each other in the form of a story (Bruner, 2002). This begins at a very young age and play is an example of how the young child brings to existence and organises their thoughts and ideas in the form of a narrative (Bruner, 1996, 2002). Bruner (1986) asks us to think about two modes of human thought that we use to interpret and understand our experiences in the world. The two modes are: the *paradigmatic mode*, which aligns with the logical categorisation of the world,

and the *narrative mode*, which is concerned with the meaning given to experiences through stories (Bruner, 1986). These two modes have a relationship as the paradigmatic mode can be seen as the structure of reality and the narrative mode allows the complexity and ambiguity to emerge. Bruner (1996) argues that we use both modes to express our ideas, using chronicle modalities as a “vehicle of meaning making” (p. 39).

Literary theorist Barbara Hardy (1968) argues that humans use narrative in multiple ways as we, “dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative” (p. 5). As humans our lives are framed by narrative construction as we make up stories about our lives and the lives of others that reflect the past, present and future “In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future” (Hardy, 1968, p. 5). The need to communicate our stories is paramount as, “the agentive mind is not only active in nature, but it seeks out dialogue and discourse with other active minds. And it is through this dialogic, discursive process that we come to know the Other and his points of view, his stories” (Bruner, 1996, p. 93). Bruner’s (1996) describes the distinction between a narrative and a story, to emphasise the different functions. “A narrative is a discourse, and the prime rule of discourse is that there be a reason for it that distinguishes it from silence” (Bruner, 1996, p. 121). Narrative therefore consists of events that hold meaning, and they occur in a sequence. Whereas, a story includes the narrative form and has an additional aspect in the form of a coda that is “an implied evaluation of the events recounted” (Bruner, 1996, p. 121). This coda is more reflective and “returns the hearer or reader from the there and then of the narrative to the here and now” (Bruner, 2002, p. 20). The rhythm of a story involves travelling between the parts to build the whole and this requires the creator/s to navigate *fabula*, *sjuzet* and *forma* (Bruner, 1996).

The terms: *fabula*, *sjuzet* and *forma* originate from the Russian formalism school (1910s-1930s) of literary criticism. Vladimir Propp (1968) was a key writer on narratology, which had a particular focus on deconstruction of the narrative form. Propp’s (1968) examination came at a time when, “the art of narration and dramatic presentation, together with a keen sense of the oral epic style, became a characteristic quality of the Russian people” (p. xviii). Propp (1968) used *morphology* the “study of the component parts” (p. xxiii) to break down the story. *Fabula*, *sjuzet* and *forma* apply to all narrative media, including: film, theatre, writing, and animation (Bruner, 1986, 2004). *Fabula* is translated as

the sequence of events that holds the overall meaning and plight of the story (Bruner, 1986). Propp (1968) makes it clear that the overarching meaning is reflected in the structure and stories with the same plight do not necessarily resemble each other. That is because a story relies on the *sjuzet* or discourse to integrate the time, place, and people in the mode of the telling and this discourse is shaped differently, depending on the way it unfolds in the composition (Propp, 1968). If we think of these parts of a story as having two different roles, the plight gives the overarching meaning, and the discourse is the detail that make sense of this overall plight. The final unit of the story is the *forma or genre* that relates to the type of story in the form of tragedy, comedy, romance, etc. and generates the story plight and discourse (Bruner, 2004). All the forms of story we see, hear and experience in our lives may appear different because of specific content, yet they have a known order or scheme that unites them and that is the mix of *fabula*, *sjuzet* and *forma*.

Dramatistic pentad is a tool that derives from Burke (1945) explaining how a story has a structure of motives. There are five terms presented in a five-pointed star and each have a set of questions to mould a narrative. The questions are, “What was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he [sic] did it (agency), and why (purpose)” (Burke, 1945, p. xv). These terms can occur in any sequence as they sit in relation to each other and assemble our story telling. Bruner (2002) informs us that within these motives something askew happens as an original plan goes adrift. When we share our stories and hear other’s stories we become “deft in imagining what might happen if...” (Bruner, 2002, p. 30). Bruner (2002) argues that a narrative is a conflict between what we expect to happen and what actually happens. Therefore stories are tools for solving problems as well as creating new ones and are viewed as “a culture’s coin and currency (Bruner, 2002, p. 15). Like adults, children are captivated by the unknown and peculiar and you can see this in their play at an early age (Bruner, 2002).

The construction of story is apparent in Vygotsky’s (1932) writing on theatre. Vygotsky (1932) pays attention to Stanislavski’s (1948) acting method which uses a similar structure to understand the narrative in a theatrical performance. Stanislavski (1948) argues that actors on the stage who use the acting method of *experience the role* also use the *given circumstances* and the *super-objective* to guide their *through-going action* (Stanislavski, 1948). The *given circumstances* refer to the story framework that are the specifics of the time and space the action occurs. This relates to the particular setting and period of the drama

(Stanislavski, 2008). Nested within the given circumstances is the plot's super-objective that guides the story to make sure everyone is "headed toward the same goal" (Stanislavski, 1948, p. 276). The *super-objective* guides the motives and action in the same direction. There are also *minor-objectives*, that act as feeder lines "towards the same goal and fuse into one main current" (Stanislavski, 1948). Stanislavski (1948) used the following image to present the super-objective that highlights the flow of movement in a particular direction.



Figure 2: Stanislavski's (1948) super-objective

Stanislavski's (1948) uses this line to demonstrate the super-objective flowing in a forward direction; the smaller arrows are the minor-objectives that connect to the main line, all moving in the same course. This form serves not to restrict the narrative flow, rather to make sure everyone involved is in the same story; otherwise, if the minor-objectives were to split off in different directions the story could become uncoordinated as individual objectives break away from the main current.

Vygotsky (1925/1971c) was also interested in the components of story and argues in his text on fables that there are two sides to narrative: material and form. *Material* is concerned with the events and characters, and all that existed before the story which sets up the context to inform the plot. *Form* relates to how the story is being delivered think of a play, novel or poem and how these forms act "in accordance with the laws of artistic construction"(Vygotsky, 1925/1971c, p. 146). Like Stanislavski, Vygotsky (1925/1971c) argues that a story consists of a series of events that follow along a straight line. There is a chronological aspect that determines the form and like notes that form a melody, or words that form a poem, or scenes that form a play, this *melodic curve* becomes an "artistic form to which the material has been moulded" (Vygotsky, 1925/1971c, p. 150). Therefore, the movements follow a line, but the shape of the line would be dependent on the moulding of the notes in the melody, or the words in the poem, or events in the play (Vygotsky, 1925/1971c). Rather than being straight, the line as I imagine it is curved, as it curves to mould the form. My interpretation of this appears in the following illustration.

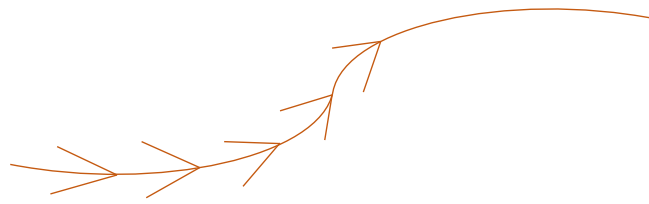


Figure 3: Vygotsky's (1925/1971c) melodic curve

Propp (1968) argues that a story's structure is underpinned by *uniformity* and *repetition*. Stories come in many different forms of "picturesqueness, and colour" (Propp, 1968, p. 21) and it is the colour that provides the emotional connection. The work of a story whether in literature, theatre or oral-telling comes down to two basic parts that Gornick (2001) explains as the situation, that are the circumstances, and a story that provides our emotional involvement. This link between the story situation and the emotional connection is vital as it connects us to the content. This is achieved by the imposed structure or order, and in literature Gornick (2001) argues this unfurls as if "order made the sentences more shapely. Shapeliness increased the expressiveness of the language. Expressiveness deepened association" (p. 4). This creates tension that supplies texture to a story where the emotional connection occurs for the individual reader, teller, viewer or listener (Gornick, 2001). Dundes (1968) adds to this discussion, in his introduction to Propp's book *Morphology of the Folktale*, noting that the final part of every story "must ultimately be related to the culture or cultures in which it is found" (p. xiii). This is demonstrated in a child's play as it is directly related to what they have seen, heard and experienced within their cultural context (Bruner, 1996; Roopnarine, 2011). Children's culture informs their play as they express and translate their experiences by "embodying those ideas into a story or narrative form" (Bruner, 1996, p. 121).

Stories enacted by children within their play require a dialogue of back and forth exchanges for collaboration to take place (Bruner, 1996). In play, children are playful and this requires flexibility in the imagined world that is not confined real life (Dewey, 1910/1997). As they are not restrained by reality; instead, they continually adapt and transform their reality to mould their imagined play landscapes (Bateson, 1976; Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976).

3.6: Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the theoretical concepts from cultural-historical theory that underpin this study: the social situation, children's play, imagination and aesthetic education, and finally, narrative and story. As discussed in this chapter a Vygotskian understanding of play's dual roles and the function of the imagination are highly relevant for this thesis because they highlight their significance to children's play and cognitive development and therefore the teacher. The next chapter presents the methodological design in this thesis that supported the use of these theoretical concepts in the research process.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The previous literature and theory chapters have outlined the empirical and theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. This methodology chapter draws on this foundational work and explains the overall research design (Yin, 2011) to address the research questions:

- 1) How do teachers perform roles in popular culture informed playworlds co-created with children?
- 2) How does an exploration of performed roles assist in understanding the teacher in children's play?

These questions require a methodological approach that encompasses both traditional methods and more active approaches to allow opportunities for the teacher, children and researcher to perform roles in playworlds. Therefore this thesis is using participatory research that has a “social contract, that honours and values the multiple voices and perspectives of those who take part” in the study (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, & Bottrell, 2015, p. 21). The following sections outlining the specifics of this research design are presented in the following sequence: qualitative research, methodological approach, drama-based research, researcher's reflectivity, ethical engagement, recruitment and participants, procedure, methods, data generation, and lastly, the data analysis.

4.1: Qualitative research

This research was qualitative and situated in an interpretive paradigm that views the world as complex and so unable to be explained or reduced to a clear set of observable truths (Gray, 2014). This was a small-scale study to allow for an in-depth investigation into the teacher's performed roles, which constitute a complex and process driven phenomenon (Yin, 2009, 2015). Qualitative studies attempt to make sense of a phenomenon in real life context with participants in the field (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2003; Yin, 2012). The preschool teachers' performed roles were the phenomena and the early childhood classroom in which the playworlds were enacted was the real-life context. In addition, this research deliberately located the researcher in the world to be studied (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2003; Yin, 2012). This required involvement with the participants in the playworlds “to interact with them in meaningful ways” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 29). This research was first shaped by the

researcher's personal interest in arts education (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). And then developed through the interactions with the participants through various methods, selected to assist in understanding the phenomena in question (Creswell, 2013; Eisner, 1997; Schwandt, 2000).

A qualitative research paradigm sits alongside my own ontology, which views reality as being socially constructed, understanding that there are multiple ways of being in, contributing to and viewing the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000a; Eisner, 1997). Therefore, this thesis included understanding of the participants multiple realities and perspective in relation to the research themes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The study's epistemological lens understands knowledge as being socially formed aligning to the theoretical understandings of cultural-historical theory presented in the theory chapter (Vygotsky, 1925/1971d, 1926/1992, 1930/2004, 1976). This epistemological lens included the imaginary field as a site where a "creative individual, one who strives for the future, is enabled by creative imagination embodied in the present" (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 88). Therefore the design of this research included a drama-based research method to create an aesthetic experience (Bresler, 2011). The aim was to use more than just oral communication for the participants to express themselves. As play is an embodied form and this study wanted to understand the teacher role in play, their oral and physical expressions were important and expressed "meanings that otherwise would be ineffable" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 2). This extensiveness allowed the participants and researcher to explore together "the potentialities of an approach to representation that is rooted in aesthetic considerations" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 2). To explain these points further I begin by outlining the research methodological approach.

4.2: Methodological approach

This research used a case study approach that is a common methodology strategy in qualitative research and multiple key methodologists contribute to this arena (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2009). Case study asks questions of *what* has happened or *why* and *how* it happened and uses multiple sources of evidence to understand the phenomenon being investigated (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2000; Yin, 2009, 2012). In this research Yin's (2009) definition was used, which states a case study is suitable if the research "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not

clearly evident” (p. 18). As already stated, the real-life context was the early childhood preschool, and the phenomenon which had unclear boundaries was the teacher’s performed roles, so a case study approach supported this study. Yin (2012) argues that *how* and *why* questions (which frame this research) are aligned with an *explanatory type* as they attempt to explore and describe a phenomena to “enrich the understanding of a cause-and-effect relationship” (p. 89).

To inquire about the phenomenon of the teacher’s performed roles a single case study was used with a holistic design as Yin (2009) argues this “is advantageous when no logical subunits can be identified and when the relevant theory underlying the case study is itself of a holistic nature” (p. 42). This alignment can be seen in Vygotsky’s (1934) work when he argues that “analysis relies on the partitioning of the complex whole into units...the term “unit” designates a product of analysis that possesses all the basic characteristics of the whole. The unit is a vital and irreducible part of the whole” (pp. 46-47). In this thesis the unit of analysis is the teacher’s performed roles to gain understandings of the complex whole, which has been previously outlined in the literature chapter, regarding the position the early childhood teacher takes in young children’s socio-dramatic play. Single case studies do not attempt to generalise instead requiring an in-depth interstition (Yin, 2009). A single case study’s approach supports the theorisation of this thesis creating an alignment between the questions and the theoretical and methodological frameworks for a cohesive piece of research (Yin, 2015). To expand on the theoretical link to the study’s design this next section will outline drama-based research.

4.3: Drama-based research

The central methodological and conceptual component of this thesis’ fieldwork was a drama-based research method in the form of playworlds, which created a platform to gain an understanding of the teacher’s performed roles. This drama method was aligned to the theoretical underpinnings of this research that provided an imagined shared world in which the teachers, children and researcher could improvise an embodied narrative (Lindqvist, 1996, 2001, 2003a). Lindqvist’s (1996) playworlds generate an aesthetic play pedagogy that have clear links to Vygotsky’s *Imagination and creativity in childhood* (1930/2004), advocating for the teacher as a co-player. (Lindqvist, 1996). This drama-based research method “conceptualized as a way of knowing, highlighting embodied inquiry and communication” was central (Bresler, 2011, p. 322).

The art form of drama as a method has the potential to entice the participants, “reader or viewer into taking another look at dimensions of the social world that had come to be taken for granted” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 2). This study’s drama-based method provided a space for dialogical interactions to “support improvisation and creativity in the data” (Bresler, 2011, p. 322). Bresler (2011) makes the point that central to an arts experience and qualitative research are the processes and environment that the activity occurs. These elements have the potential to “illuminate significant aspects of qualitative research, including data collection, data analysis, and writing” (Bresler, 2011, p. 322). Drama in the form of playworlds was used for the teachers, children and researcher to develop and engage in “a unique shared aesthetic experience” (O’Toole, 2006, p. 47). O’Toole (2006) argues, that drama is an artform that is negotiated by the participants of the group and therefore cannot be reproduced. These relationships are unique that “become single units of experience capable of analysis and study (O’Toole, 2006, p. 46). The adoption of the drama-based playworlds method provided a number of sensitising concepts, which Blumer (1954) defines as opportunities to create an interplay with the empirical world and the theoretical world. These were used in the data analysis and are discussed in detail later in this chapter. Using an embodied drama-based research method meant it was difficult to engage in the process and also take observations on the process (O’Toole, 2006). Therefore, videoing the drama-based method became part of the research design that allowed me to be in playworlds and also generate data (Heath, Hindmarsh, & Luff, 2010). Details of the playworld structure is presented in the methods section and the use of video will now be discussed in the following section.

4.3.1: The use of video

Video use in social science has developed as a relatively inexpensive and reliable way to capture social interactions in the research context, and is an effective research tool for generating and analysing data (Harris, 2016a). In this thesis, as the playworld included the teacher, children and me in the activity it meant that as the researcher it was unmanageable for me to collect data on the whole experience. Video was the approach used as it reveals elements that are unable to be seen when one is in the actual process (O’Toole & Beckett, 2013). Therefore the use of video meant I could capture the playworlds experience including the oral and physical interactions and be engaged in the process (Harris, 2016a; Plowman & Stephen, 2008). This was pertinent for the analysis as this allowed me

to see and hear the physical and verbal exchanges in 12 playworlds across four different settings. The video footage was accessible during the deductive and inductive analysis as “evidence in action” (Robson, 2011, p. 180). I was able to watch and re-watch the data generated in the analysis process with the aim of revealing phenomena that occurred (Heath et al., 2010) which in this case was the teachers’ performed roles and other components that influenced their enactment. In addition, the literature chapter identified examples of research that used video to capture teachers and children engaged in play that supported my decision to use video in the data generation (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011, 2013b; Fleer, 2015; Fleer & Peers, 2012; Lindqvist, 1995; Trawick-Smith, 2012).

Heath, Hindmarsh and Luff (2010) argue that the viewpoint the researcher adopts in the filming process depends on: “(i) the type of data needed, and (ii) the practical constraints of the setting” (p. 41). The practical constraint in this study was that part of my researcher role was to actually be in the playworlds with the teachers and children. Operating video equipment requires a concentration on the lens angle, lens focus and sound quality, and it can take many attempts to capture high quality footage (Heath et al., 2010). Therefore to obtain a visual and audio overview of the experience, when I was part of the playworld process (O’Toole & Beckett, 2013) I needed someone else to take the lead in the video recording. I applied for, and obtained, a grant from the Australian Catholic University Research Grant to fund a videographer to supported me in this methodological decision. I chose the videographer because she had worked in preschool settings previously so was familiar with this education environment.

As the use of video can be distracting for children (Plowman & Stephen, 2008) at the start of each playworld session I introduced the videographer and she described the video process and showed the device to the children (Heath et al., 2010; Robson, 2011). During each playworld episode the videographer sat with the video camera on a tripod set-up in the corner of the preschool rooms in a fixed position, and if required, she followed the playworld action to the outside area to continue filming and used a roving position. The 12 hours of video footage were stored, transcribed and coded in NVivo™ (Harris, 2016a; Heath et al., 2010).

The video data in NVivo™ enabled coding where the footage could be watched several times. It was during this process that it became clear that I was the only viewer. I realised I should have included into the schedule, after each videoed playworld session, a

viewing with the teacher participants. This would have benefited the thesis by assisting me to gain an understanding of each of the teachers' perspectives. If this had occurred, we could have paused the video footage to obtain their thoughts on specifics of their role performance. While their written reflections were used, this would have advanced the analysis process to make visible some of the nuanced themes coming through the video content. This would have the potential to support the teacher's ideas, suggestions, concerns and/or uncertainty during the next *playworld* session. If the teachers had the opportunity to watch and express their views of what was happening for them at the time, this would have delivered a more nuanced reflective cycle. Finally, as the video mostly captured the teacher, the children and me, I noticed that there was a limited view of the out-of-frame details (Heath et al., 2010). However, the teachers wrote about these in their reflections, as did I in my *researcher's journal* after the event.

Drama-based research requires continuous critical reflection "to understand possibilities and contributions to knowledge and understanding" (Bresler, 2011, p. 325). As the researcher I have expertise and experience in drama and teaching drama; Bresler (2011) argues this is "essential in order to apply artists' sensibility to the research project" (p. 325). and this is addressed in the next section on researcher's reflexivity.

4.4: Researcher's reflexivity

Reflexivity is a foundation for thinking more critically about the impact of the researcher's assumptions, values, and actions on others in the research process. Qualitative research deliberately locates researchers in the world to be studied, rather than considering them as a separate entities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2012). However, this is a tentative role with shifts in power structures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2012) and ethical practices need to be conducted (Lichtman, 2013). The researcher's axiological links to their values, beliefs and background needs to be acknowledged, as they all contribute to research and purposely shape the study, including the interactions within it (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Cousin, 2010). A qualitative researcher is not separate, either literally or figuratively, from the research (Cousin, 2010). In this thesis my own history, including my practice as a drama teacher, was the starting place for my thinking and research development (Cohen et al., 2007). This history and personal interest have been central to this study and were made transparent to the participants (Creswell, 2013; Eisner, 1997). The emotional aspect of the imagination has already been discussed in the theory chapter and drama-based

research does not shy away from the participants and researcher's emotions as they are central to the aesthetic experience (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Bresler, 2011).

Ongoing reflexivity took into account ethical considerations (Baptiste, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 2000) as during data generation power imbalances can transpire (Gray, 2004). This is because the need to obtain the participants' ideas and view their practices can distract the researcher from their ethical responsibility. Lichtman (2013) argues that to address this, it is necessary to plan and provide a trustworthy research space where the researcher is aware of and sensitive to the possible effects of having a position of power. In this thesis the researcher asked the participants to share their understandings of play and their own teaching, and also to take an active role in a drama-based method to make visible their thinking and enacting (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The drama-based method is inherently linked to affect, as "anything well crafted, anything made with sensibility and imagination, anything that requires skill and the use of technique in order to create something that has an emotional effect is an artistic affair" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 45). Therefore, when the participants expressed their thoughts and feelings in the data generation, my aim was to represent them accurately, and not "dishonour the original intention" (O'Toole, 2006, p. 17). Bresler (2011) argues that throughout drama-based research subjectivity needs to be part of the reflexivity stance and "the role and situated perspective of the researcher should be made clear (p. 322).

This researcher reflexivity was documented in a *researcher journal* where I wrote about my own experiences. This data was used in the triangulation to minimize my own perspectives becoming entangled with the other participants (Yin, 2011). As the researcher I was part of the drama-based method working with the teachers and children as part of the playworlds and this linked to my insider stance of being a research participant and teacher (Patton, 2003). However, I was also the researcher, which linked me to an outsider stance (Patton, 2003). These two perspectives created a tension and so throughout the data generation my documentation included an account of my thoughts, ideas, and challenges to make sure there was consistent and systematic attention to my own reflexivity (Cohen et al., 2007). This form of expression was written down to keep a record of my "own meta-thinking about the research" (O'Toole, 2006, p. 102). This supported an on ongoing ethical research environment in my interactions and decision making throughout (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2015). To continue with this chapter's attention to ethical practices the next section introduces the ways ethical engagement occurred, and then moves onto the procedures for

recruitment and an introduction of the participants. Finally, the five methods used in this study (including playworlds) are described and justified.

4.5: Ethical engagement

For research in an educational context in Victoria, Australia, ethics approval is a procedure and has two formal processes that are university- and government-driven. First, ethics approval from the Australian Catholic University (HERC Register No. 2014 330V) was applied for and received. Second, ethics approval from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2015_002591) was applied for and received (Appendix A). (Ethics approval was amended to include four teachers and approved by Australian Catholic University and the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development). These two institutional ethics procedures are the starting point of the guidelines for ethical conduct with adults and children in an educational context. They ensure the researcher is qualified and has thought through the implications for the participants to guard their wellbeing.

The appendices in this thesis include the: two Ethics approvals, Introduction Letters, Information Letters, Consent Forms and Data Method Templates. These show an inconsistency with the final thesis title because the initial title for this project that appears on these documents is, *Imagination and the Teacher's Play Pedagogy*, but this was changed later in the research process to the current thesis title of: *Teacher as player: co-creating with children in play*. The initial title is retained on these documents as these were the forms presented to the participants and have been signed.

Christensen and Proust's (2002) *ethical symmetry* model views all participants as active contributors of research and this study adhered to this model. This research took place in preschools with teachers and children and my ethical responsibility for their wellbeing was essential (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). First, it was my responsibility to provide clear and straightforward information to highlight the potential risk aligned with being involved in research (Yin, 2009). Part of creating a research environment where the participants felt comfortable to speak openly included protecting their identity. This meant all data generated (written, audio and video recordings) from this research used teacher, children and centre pseudonym to de-identify the participants and their workplace in the documentation. Written, audio and video data are stored in a secure computer password protected file.

Video was valuable for the analysis process because the drama-based method could be watched and re-watched many times. However video comes with complexity as it can identify participants and therefore the pseudonym de-identification process to protect their wellbeing can be jeopardised (Heath et al., 2010). Therefore, the video generated data in this research have only been used in the analysis and will not be shown in public. I understand that extracts from the video could be useful for presentations, however, to ensure the teacher's and children's anonymity my initial informed consent highlighted that the video would not be shown to outside audiences. During the research process participants' right to withdraw any data, or themselves, at any time was articulated in the informed consent (Robson, 2011), that I will discuss in this next section.

4.5.1: Researching with children

As this research took place in preschools, understanding the value and ethics of working with children was considered and practised throughout this research. My own ontological view sees children as capable individual members of society (Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2011). Children are “active citizens” contributing and shaping the culture they live in (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 481). However, I also acknowledge there is a contradiction, as potentially children have “unequal power relationships” (Punch, 2002, p. 323). Therefore, in this research there was sensitivity and awareness regardless how these power imbalances occur and ethical practices to protect children were used (Phelan & Kinsella, 2012). To begin, an overarching understanding of *ethical symmetry*, that takes into account the differences between children and adults meant that I created “a dialogue with children throughout the research process” (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 178). Using this stance required constant checking and awareness of the children as individuals within the group context throughout the study (Christensen & Prout, 2002). The next section exemplifies how the ethical engagement was formalised in this research process.

4.5.2: Informed consent from adults and children

Informed consent is an ethical necessity in research and prior consent is required for the study to proceed (Christians, 2000; Heath et al., 2010). For all participants consent is always voluntary and without any coercion from the researcher (Christians, 2000; Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) argues that protecting participants from any harm and/or deception is part of this consent. Suppling participants with detailed information before the data generation is

essential so they can make an informed decision regarding their involvement (Christians, 2000). This was achieved by developing the Teacher *Information Letter* and *Consent Form* (Appendix B) and Centre/Preschool Director *Information Letter* and *Consent Form* (Appendix C), which clearly outlined the research themes and aims, data collection methods and process, and time commitment. The forms articulated the participants' rights to confidentiality throughout the study, and how pseudonyms were used to protect their identity. In addition, they were informed that they were able to request the filming to be discontinued at any time during the process, and/or any data to be withdrawn, this included video footage. Finally, it was stressed that if the participant wanted to completely withdraw from the study at any time during the research process this would be supported

The wellbeing of all participants in research is of high importance to the researcher and as this research included children this required an additional layer of ethical consideration (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Dockett et al., 2011; Smith, 2011). To obtain the children's consent begins with their parent/s as they are the "gate-keepers" of this permission for the research process (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998, p. 187). First the *Parent Information Letter* and *Consent Forms* (Appendix D) were sent out to inform the parents about the research topic and process for their child. This parent consent was formalised by the parent agreeing and signing the form and it was made clear that they could refuse or withdraw their children before or during the process at any time (Alderson & Morrow, 2004).

Assent from the children was also used and this occurred in two phases. First, the teachers sat with each child and completed the *Assent Form* (Appendix E) before data generation commenced. These forms included the child ticking a smiley face with *YES* if they wanted to participate, or a sad face with *NO* if they preferred not to. As these Assent Forms were completed early in the research process and before the playworlds data generation, the children could not necessarily predict how they would feel on the day. Therefore, included was a clear and ongoing informed consent strategy (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011) with the children each time we began a playworlds episode. At the start of each playworlds session the teacher and/or I informed the children that if they did not want to join in, they could choose something else to play. Also if during the process the children "showed signs of not wanting to be involved" (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011, p. 54) the teacher and/or I reminded them that they could do something else or watch if they would prefer. The children's right to decide on the day whether they partook in the playworld

was taken up in all the four different settings. In the 12 playworlds sessions a total of nine children either decided they did not want to join in at the start or chose to step out during a session. Provisions were made and the children had the choice to watch and/or choose something else to participate in with another educator in the room/centre. Adopting this method made me sensitive to and aware of the children's ongoing interest and engagement (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011).

In this study after the ethics was approved, *Information Letters*, *Consent Forms* and *Assent Forms* were sent out to the participants and were signed and returned. One centre had 10 children, and then one child in each of the other three sites whose parents chose not to let their children participate in the research. Other play-based learning opportunities were made available for these children within the centre during the times the playworlds method was being used. I briefly discuss how these documents and the data generated have protected the participants privacy and confidentiality and then move on to recruitment and introduce the participants.

4.5.3: Privacy and confidentiality

As discussed previously this research adheres to ethical considerations that made sure the participants' wellbeing was considered at all stages of the study (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Privacy and confidentiality has safeguard each participant's identity at all times (Christians, 2000) and the names and teaching locations of all participants have been changed on all data generated. The teachers selected their own pseudonyms, and these have been used throughout data collection and this thesis. Even though I used video to record the playworlds episodes, in my Ethics application it was stated that this was only to enable the analysis and therefore no still screenshots are included in this thesis. In addition, no still shots or video will be used in future presentations on the research. To adhere to the ethical decision-making regarding the 92 children's privacy I have used pseudonyms for individual children in any of the dialogue and used the term *children* when there is a group response. All data are stored and secured according to the National Statement of Ethical Conduct.

Having articulated the foundational aspects of this thesis' research now I introduce the participants and begin by outlining the recruitment process used to engage preschool teachers in the field.

4.6: Recruitment and participants

This research took place in four Victorian preschools with 92 children and four teachers. There was a structured process to initially engage and enlist the participants. The number of participants in research depends on the phenomena being explored, and as the intention of this qualitative research was to engage in an in-depth study, a small sample size of teachers was appropriate (Cohen et al., 2000; Yin, 2009). Purposive sampling was used because it allows the researcher to select based specific requirements (Cohen et al., 2007) and in this thesis this was focused on qualified preschool teachers who had knowledge and experience of play-based learning in a preschool setting. I sent out an *Introduction Letter* (Appendix F) to preschool teachers using my professional network.

The following criteria were used for selecting participants:

- 1) A degree qualified (3 or 4 year) preschool teacher in an early childhood long day care setting or a stand-alone preschool and the children in their room (min number 15 children).
- 2) Teachers who were willing to give time to participate in the study, approximately 12-15 hours, over six meetings, between March and September 2015.

The response rate was rapid and within a few days there was interest from eight teachers. After initial discussions with the interested parties, either by email or the telephone, the *Information Letter* (Appendix B) was sent out to the eight specific preschool teachers. Following this process, one interested teacher declined due to work commitments, and three teachers were from non-preschool rooms. The remaining four preschool teachers, who were all women, consisted of two teaching in long day care settings, and two teaching in stand-alone preschools. As these four teachers all met the selection criteria, I decided to increase the number of participants for the study from three to four (this decision meant the Ethics for ACU and Victorian Governments were amended and approved).

The four teacher participants were invited into the study; they had various years of experience and taught in different preschool contexts. The following table displays their specific characteristics, consisting of their chosen pseudonym, age, qualification, teaching experience, setting location in relation to the CDB in Melbourne, centre pseudonym and number of children in the preschool room.

Table 1: *Teacher participants and centre characteristics*

Teacher pseudonym	Henrietta	Rosie	Peggy	Louise
Age	42	26	59	28
Qualifications	3-year Degree in Early Childhood Education	4-year Bachelor of Education (EC)	4-year Bachelor of Education (EC)	4-Year Bachelor of Education (EC & Primary)
Teaching experience	10 years teacher & 11 years assistant	5 years teacher	10 years teacher & 20 years assistant	6 years teacher
Setting	Stand-alone preschool	Long day care centre	Stand-alone preschool	Long day care centre
Location to Melbourne CBD	Outer south eastern suburbs	Inner city	Western suburbs	Northern suburbs
Centre Pseudonym	Green	Pink	Blue	Purple
Children in room per day/session	26	25	27	26

The four centres were located in different areas of Melbourne and what follows is a brief snapshot of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2016) characteristics of each suburb from the 2016 census, which was the year following year of the data generation:

- 1) An outer south-eastern suburb of Melbourne, Victoria, 62 km from the CBD. The population is approximately 46,000 with 12,000 families.
- 2) An inner-city suburb of Melbourne, Victoria, 3km from the CBD. Population nearly 11, 000 with approximately 2,500 families.

- 3) A western suburb of Melbourne, Victoria, 19 km from the CBD. Population nearly 12, 500 with approximately 3,500 families.
- 4) Northern suburb of Melbourne, Victoria, 13 km from the CBD. Population nearly 68, 000 with approximately 17,000 families.

This next section provides details about procedures and the timeline for the teachers and children participants.

4.7: Procedure

The research methods took place over a five-month period between April and September 2015. Each teacher had a contact time of approximately 13.5 hours over this period, although this did vary depending on the amount of time they engaged in the written reflections outside the playworlds method enactment. The timeline for participants was made clear to them in the initial meeting and the schedule was tailored to their availability. The contact time for the children consisted of approximately 4.5 hours, and all of this time took place in their preschool centre on a day that they were present so there was no time requirement outside their preschool day. Data generation with teachers and children participants was flexible enough to allow time for unexpected occurrences, such as teachers being unwell, on leave, and other unforeseen incidents. Collaboration with the teachers occurred early in the data collection planning and I created a timetable considering: each teacher's specific requirements, the school term dates and public holidays. While I had made time in the schedule for interruptions to the sequencing the initial timetable did not need to be altered. To follow is Table 2, which displays the timeline, participants, method, location and timeframe for the four teachers and children participating in this study.

Table 2: *Timeline, participants, method, location and timeframe*

Timeline	Participants	Method	Location	Timeframe
April 2015 (Weekday)	Teachers & children	Observations	Individual preschools	2 hours
	Teachers	Semi-structured interviews		
April 2015 (Saturday)	Teachers	Professional learning session	Inner-city venue	3 hours
May & June 2015 (Weekday)	Teachers & children	1st Playworld	Individual preschools	1.5 hours
		2nd Playworld		1.5 hours
		3rd Playworld		1.5 hours
September 2015 (Saturday)	Teachers	Group interview	Inner-city venue	2 hours
Approximate total hours for children				4.5 hours
Approximate total hours for teachers				13.5 hours

Before research data are generated the use of a pilot study is often recommend to hone the data collection methods (Yin, 2010). As this research was using an arts-based method that was being videoed (details to follow) this prior study enabled some experimentation to occur between the researcher and videographer before the participants were involved. This will now be discussed, followed by the use of video and the five methods.

4.7.1: Pilot study

After the ethics approval a pilot study was undertaken in a Melbourne inner city preschool with which I had a professional relationship through my teaching work. As the data generation was going to take place in preschool settings it was helpful to practise the drama-based playworlds method in this pilot study to develop further expertise in the playworld process and the video equipment (Heath et al., 2010). In the pilot study preschool, in collaboration with the preschool teacher, we enacted a playworld in the form of a drama class with the four-year-old preschool children. This pilot study meant that I practised the

playworlds method with a group of 20 children in collaboration with the preschool teacher and used the *researcher journal* to make notes of any significant areas. Together the teacher, children and I used a playworld pre-text that linked to the children's play motif and used teacher-in-role and children-in-role in a joint narrative. In addition, this pilot study gave the videographer an opportunity to use the video camera and amend any concerns in a setting similar to the actual data generation sites. The videographer had an opportunity to refine the camera technique as she experimented with the positioning of the camera. A fixed camera position was chosen in the room, and a roving position was used if I needed to move into the preschools outdoor setting. This fixed camera captured all the participants and gave a clear overview. Finally we made sure this position allowed the quality of the sound to be clear and audible (Heath et al., 2010).

To explain how the participants engaged in the research the following section outlines the methods that generated the research data.

4.8: Methods

Qualitative studies include collection of “of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible.” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). This study used five research methods to address the research questions on the teacher's performed roles in popular culture informed playworlds co-created with children; the methods attempted “to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). This qualitative research deliberately designed multiple methods for a triangulation of the data (Yin, 2011). This triangulation enabled opportunities to “shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). The various methods consisted both traditional qualitative methods and a drama-based method (Bresler, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; O'Toole, 2006; Yin, 2015). These will be discussed in the following section, first the playworlds-as-method structure is outlined, as this was a key part of the research data generation, then the remaining four methods are described in the sequence they occurred.

4.8.1: Playworlds-as-method

The playworlds-as-method occurred in each of the four preschools, every week for three weeks. I followed the dates and times I had prearranged with the four teachers in the *professional learning session* (details later in this section) that were scheduled at a convenient and pre-set date and time for the teachers and children to take part in the





playworlds. The videographer and I arrived 15 minutes early to set up the camera and settle into the field. Each playworld length was approximately 45-60 minutes and with the prior set-up and post-session pack-up time we were in the centre for about 1.5 hours. While these were weekly explorations the teachers were encouraged to keep the playworlds motifs explorations in their preschool if there was a continued interest.

Drama teaching and learning spaces are bound by structure and within this operates an improvised activity (DeCoursey, 2018; Taylor & Warner, 2006). To do this the playworlds were structured using Hakkarainen's (2010) playworlds principles as well as process drama methods (O'Neill, 1995), these have also been discussed in the literature chapter. The playworlds were a platform to use Kravtsov and Kravtsova's (2010) dual pedagogy as the teachers and I shared the positions of being in both the reality field outside the play and the imaginary field inside the play. *Inside the play* focused on the teacher and me as we utilised the *playing I* when we took on character roles (Bateson, 1976; Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976) that linked to the popular culture motifs. *Outside the play* focused on the teacher and me as we used the *real I* when we took on duties that linked to being a *teacher* (Bateson, 1976; Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976). The playworlds structure occurred in the following sequence.

Popular culture motifs

The four teachers in each of the four preschools were asked to observe the children's play in their preschool. From these observations they selected a popular culture play motif that coincided "with educational needs of the classroom and individual children" (Hakkarainen, 2010, p. 79). The aim was to use these popular culture play motifs as the playworld pre-text creating the narrative hook that was of interest to the children (O'Neill, 1995). The children's popular culture play motifs we used to develop the playworld pre-texts were all different and stemmed from the: Television program: Octonauts™, Film: Frozen™, Superheroes: Spiderman™, and lastly, Film and amusement ride: Pirates of the Caribbean™. To follow is Table 3, which maps the popular culture motifs to specifics of the children's play as reported by the four teacher participants.

Table 3: *Teacher’s observation of children’s popular culture play motifs*

Teacher (Centre)	Teacher’s description of children’s popular culture play	Popular culture motif
Henrietta (Green)	Children pretend they are Elsa and other characters. Elsa has the psychic ability to control and create ice and cold temperatures (Cryokinetic, cryokinesis). Her sister Anna does not have this power.	Frozen™ 
Rosie (Pink)	Children pretend they are animal characters from the television show that live in an underwater world and their motto is: <i>Explore, rescue, protect.</i>	The Octonauts™ 
Peggy (Blue)	Children pretend they are being a common house spider and they then become a superhero who can shoot webs out of their hands to assist in climbing and/or catching others.	Spiderman™ 
Louise (Purple)	Children bring clothes from home and pretend they are pirates. These pirates live on boats and catch people.	Pirates of the Caribbean™ 

These popular culture motifs informed the planning of the teacher-in-role, children-in-role, and the playworld pre-text. This is alignment to process drama meant the roles and pre-texts were “aesthetically charged” (Dunn, 2017, p. 127). To plan the subsequent playworlds we asked the children what should be included, and their ideas were picked up to further develop the popular culture motifs.

Outlined in the table below are all the popular culture play motifs we used for the pre-text of the all the 12 playworlds. As outlined in the previous table the first popular culture motif in each setting came from the teacher’s semi-structured interviews (to come below) as they discussed the popular culture play that they had observed children engaged with in the preschool. Each subsequent playworld was planned after the enactment of the previous one using the children’s ideas to extend the playworlds narrative (three in each setting, 12 in total) as aligned with the planning cycle in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (Department of Education and Training, 2016).

Table 4: *Popular culture motifs used for the 12 playworld*

Teacher (Centre)	1st playworld popular culture motif	2nd playworld popular culture motif	3rd playworld popular culture motif
Henrietta (Green)	Frozen™ & How to Train Your Dragon™	Frozen™	Frozen™ & Sonic the Hedgehog™
Rosie (Pink)	The Octonauts™	The Octonauts™	The Octonauts™
Peggy (Blue)	Spiderman™	Spiderman™	Spiderman™
Louise (Purple)	Pirates of the Caribbean™	Pirates & Frozen™	Superheroes & Frozen™

Entry into the setting

Each entry into the setting followed a similar sequence as the videographer and I arrived at the preschool, signed in, and took our equipment to the preschool room. We were welcomed by the teacher, other adults, and some of the children. The teachers were usually busy with the morning routines and the children were moving freely from inside to outside

in various play activities. The videographer began to set up her camera and some children would come over to talk and assist her. She offered the camera to the children so they could investigate, and they took turns looking through the lens. I began to unpack my trolley of props that accompanied me to all playworld sessions, in case we needed them during the process. The trolley consisted of a large piece of stretchy fabric, a long length of thick rope, 25 smaller pieces of rope, and 25 small felt mats. Some of the children would come over and begin to chat and help me with the trolley. When the teacher was ready, she gathered the children on the mat and introduced us to the children. It was at this time that the teacher discussed with the children the rhythm of the playworlds. To follow is an example of how a teacher and the children recapped the ways that helped us work together in a big group.

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Louise (teacher): | When we work with Sarah today in our drama what do we need to remember? |
| Sam (child): | If we don't want to keep doing it we can do something else. |
| Clancy (child): | Listening to each other. |
| Darcy (child): | Make sure we all have time to talk. |
| Teddy (child): | When we are moving make sure our bodies are safe. |

Generally, the children continued to contribute and asked lots of questions about what we were doing today, and we talked about how the playworlds were make-believe and that we would be pretending and developing the story together based on themes that had been observed in their play. This beginning acted as “an agreement to pretend” (O'Toole & Dunn, 2002, p. 4). In the play context this signals to children that *this is play* (Bateson, 1976) making clear that we are collaborating together in an imaginary world.

Beginnings: pre-texts and roles

The popular culture pre-text came with ready-made characters and the imagined (Dunn & Stinson, 2012; O'Neill, 1995). We explained the teacher-in-role and children-in-role characters and how in these roles we would pretend to be someone else. The teacher-in-role is crucial and needs to be distinguished from the everyday teacher role. In this study the teacher-in roles were planned so we, the teacher and I, had lower status in the drama and needed the assistance of the children-in-role and their expertise. Each playworld lasted approximately 50-60 minutes, although the narrative motifs could be extended in each centre if this suited the individual setting. To follow is Table 5 outlining the 12 playworlds, popular

culture motif, children-in-role character, teacher-in-role character (teachers and researcher), as explained in the literature review.

Table 5: *Playworld sequence, popular culture motifs and character roles for players*

Playworld Sequence	Popular culture motifs	Children-in-role	Teacher-in-role (participants)	Teacher-in-role (researcher)
1st	Frozen™ & How to Train Your Dragon™	Detectives	Elsa (Henrietta)	Anna
2nd	Frozen™	Detectives	Elsa (Henrietta)	Anna
3rd	Frozen™ & Sonic™	Detectives	Elsa (Henrietta)	Anna
1st	Octonauts™	Various Octonauts	Information Technology Officer, Dashi the Dog (Rosie)	Engineer, Tweak the Rabbit
2nd	Octonauts™	Various Octonauts	Information Technology Officer, Dashi the Dog (Rosie)	Engineer, Tweak the Rabbit
3rd	Octonauts™	Various Octonauts	Information Technology Officer, Dashi the Dog (Rosie)	Engineer, Tweak the Rabbit
1st	Spiderman™	Detectives	Spiderwoman (Peggy)	Detective
2nd	Spiderman™	Captains of Superhero Ministry	Spiderwoman (Peggy)	Captain of Superhero Ministry
3rd	Spiderman™	Captains of Superhero Ministry	Spiderwoman (Peggy)	Captain of Superhero Ministry
1st	Pirates	Pirates	Trainee Pirate (Louise)	Narrator
2nd	Pirates & Frozen™	Pirates	Trainee Pirate (Louise)	Narrator
3rd	Superheroes & Frozen™	Detectives & Superheroes	Elsa (Louise)	Narrator & Anna

In the table above the first playworld in each centre was based on a popular culture motif that came from the teacher's observations of the children's play. The subsequent playworlds changed depending on what the children had suggested they wanted to keep

exploring. For example, Rosie's playworlds were always aligned to the Octonauts™, and Peggy's with superheroes as these topics remained of interest to the group of children and sustained the narrative. In the other two settings the initial popular culture motif was used and then others were added as the children introduced them to the narrative. In line with drama-based teaching methods the teacher acts as a guide to bring forward the children ideas and wonderings attempting to create a balance of children and adult input to guide the unfurling events and relationships between characters (Hakkarainen, 2010). The pre-text was also presented to the group as a problem to be solved and our collective job was to solve this dilemma. To follow is Table 6, which outlines the 12 different super-objectives that provided the story purpose for each playworld (three in each setting).

Table 6: 12 playworld pre-texts

Playworld Sequence	Popular culture motif	Playworld pre-texts
Henrietta 1 st	Frozen™ & How to Train your Dragon™	Anna’s (Frozen™) pet dragon (How to Train your Dragon™) is lost and she needs help to find her companion.
2 nd	Frozen™	Olaf the snowman is melting and needs help to re-freeze.
3 rd	Frozen™ & Sonic the Hedgehog™	Sonic the hedgehog is lost in the forest and Elsa has asked for help to find him.
Rosie 1 st	Octonauts™	A letter from Captain Barnacle stated that the Octopod (submarine) main system is down as the computer is missing. Dashi who fixes these issues, is missing too. We need to find Dashi so he can fix the Octopod.
2 nd	Octonauts™	Our friends who are humans are stuck in a forest and have asked for help from the Octonauts™.
3 rd	Octonauts™	Our friends who are humans are trapped in an underwater cave and need rescuing.
Peggy 1 st	Spiderman™	Spiderwoman has lost her superpower and has asked for help to retrieve them.
2 nd	Spiderman™	Spiderwoman is using her powers to do things that are upsetting for the people of the city and they have asked for help.
3 rd	Spiderman™	The superheroes are frozen and the people of the city have asked for help to unfreeze them as they are needed.
Louise 1 st	Pirates of the Caribbean™	A trainee pirate needs to learn how to become a qualified pirate.
2 nd	Pirates of the Caribbean™ & Frozen™	A pirate is using her powers for bad not good.
3 rd	Superheroes & Frozen™	Anna has frozen the superheroes and they need help to become unfrozen.

Middlings: tension and action

Once the problem or dilemma was set the children brought the theme to life “with adults' participation and emotional involvement” (Hakkarainen, 2010, p. 79). This meant we were all heading towards the same overall story goal and the roles all worked to achieve this group objective. Then when smaller problems came up in the process they were collaboratively solved before we could continue with the story (Hakkarainen, 2010). The props that I brought each week supported the playworld process in many different ways depending on what the narrative needed. For example, we transformed:

- The large piece of fabric into a boat, and the floor became an ocean to sail across.
- The long piece of rope into a bridge to walk across to get to the other side.
- The small pieces of fabric into rocks to step over a river.
- The small pieces of rope into snakes that we needed to weave through to get to where we were going.

The specific details of boats, bridges, rocks and snakes were suggested by the children and they added further explanations that grew the narrative body. For example, *the ocean is wild, under bridge are monsters, between the rocks are crocodiles, the snakes are sleeping*, and these created moments of tensions that held story and participants together. These moments were embodied dialogues between adults and children (O'Neill, 1995; O'Toole & Dunn, 2002; Sinclair, 2017). Throughout this process the children, teachers and I were all part of the problem finding and problem-solving as we worked towards the story's super-objective and included moments of tension to keep the narrative engaging.

Endings: resolving the problem

The playworld episode came to an end when the problem or dilemma had been jointly solved and the narrative climax had been reached to conclude the drama (Nilsson, 2009; O'Toole & Dunn, 2002; Toye & Prendville, 2000). This completed the playworlds in the form of a story coda with a reflective element that brought us from the “there and then of the narrative to the here and now” (Bruner, 2002, p. 20). Then a more personal reflection took place for the teachers and children. This acted as a time for the teachers to write down their thoughts and feeling straight away after the experience. As we were all in the preschool

together the teacher and I gathered the children to draw their reflections on their experience, which gave the teachers an opportunity to write their own responses to their involvement.

I sat with the children, gave them a piece of paper and fine-liner pen and asked the children to draw something remembered from the story (Dean, Brown, & Young, 2007; Deans & Wright, 2018). When the children had finished drawing, and if they wanted, I wrote down their verbatim companion narratives to complement their drawing as a form of *drawing-telling* (Deans, 2014; Deans & Wright, 2018; Wright, 2007). These drawings were copied, and the originals returned to the children. I made a decision to not include these in the analysis as the unit of analysis is the teacher's performed roles, although I have incorporated some drawings (children's names have been removed) to illustrate the playworlds in the finding's chapters and appendices.

Reflections

The *teacher's reflections* were in a written format and first took place straight away after the playworlds. Reflective writing directly after an experience is a valuable form of data for qualitative research as it captures immediate thoughts and feelings about the participant's experience (O'Toole, 2006; O'Toole & Beckett, 2013). Reflection in this research method links back to the theory chapter and Dewey (1910/1997) who argues there are "subprocesses which are involved in every reflective operation" (p. 9). These subprocesses can include doubt or confusion to bring to the surface understanding (Dewey, 1910/1997). In the Professional Learning Session we discussed how their (the teachers') thoughts or feelings did not need to be fully developed and the reflection were in a written format (Dewey, 1910/1997). These reflections aligned to the research questions, as the teachers offered their perspectives on both their own performed roles teaching in play in their preschools and being in the playworlds as a player. Writing was chosen as the reflective format to offer a private space and the teachers could choose to share or not. The nature of reflection is that it requires time to *pause* on something that has created uneasiness or disturbance (Dewey, 1910/1997). Therefore the teachers were also encouraged to write at any time after the playworld, since even though the memory fades, reflective writing "permits distance and the introduction of other perspectives; distance permits action to resonate with other experiences" (O'Toole, 2006, p. 132). The teachers could give me their reflections in person, or by email, and only the writings they were happy to share have contributed to the data generation.

Now to explain the other four methods I begin with observations, then the semi-structured interviews, the professional learning session, and finally the group interview.

4.8.2: Observations

Observations are a key method for collecting data in a qualitative study, particularly a case study (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2003; Yin, 2012). This form of field data collection asks researchers to use their senses to document what they are seeing and hearing in the real life setting (Patton, 2003; Yin, 2012). In this study *observations* took place in the individual preschools over approximately 30-minutes just before the teacher's semi-structured interviews. These captured descriptive details of the setting (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2003) with a particular attention to the popular culture play motifs being explored by the children on that day. These play motifs were discussed with the teachers in the semi-structured interviews. During these observations I became familiar with the four different settings in an informal way. I viewed both inside and outside areas where the playworlds were going to take place and informally talked to children and other staff. However, while these observations were helpful to familiarise myself with the setting, they were not used in analysis as they did not offer information on the teacher's performed roles, which constituted the unit of analysis.

4.8.3: Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a common method in qualitative research (Yin, 2012). The aim of the interview is to develop a conversation that allows for a two-way discussion between the researcher and participant. The semi-structured interview questions acted as a guide and allowed the participants "to use their own words, not those predefined by the researcher, to discuss topics" (Yin, 2011, p. 72). The interview structure was broken down into a sequence recommended by Patton (2003). It began with factual questions, to make participants feel comfortable as they could answer them with confidence, and then moved on to questions focused on their beliefs on the research themes. In this study the topics were focused in the teacher's beliefs regarding: their role in play, imagination and play, and popular culture aspects of play. These interview questions sought information about the teacher in play to tap into the four participants' perspectives on their practice and beliefs about their daily role of being a teacher in play.

Yin (2009) describes the researcher's role in the interview as operating on two levels; the first is aligning with the requirements of the inquiry and the second is being friendly and nonthreatening to make the experience fluid and flexible rather than rigid (Yin, 2009). These *semi-structured interviews* (Appendix G) were planned and worded to ensure consistency when interviewing the four different participants, while allowing for movement and flexibility (Patton, 2003). The interviews were audio recorded to capture the entire conversation and create a fluid interaction focused on the participants rather than on writing. These were then transcribed to use as textual data in the analysis process (Yin, 2012).

4.8.4: Professional learning session

For this study the aim of the *professional learning session*, which took place before the playworlds episodes, was to develop a “dialectical relationship between theory and practice” (Edwards & Nuttall, 2009, p. 2). This session was oriented towards the themes in the research and allowed time for the participants to interact and share their views with each other (Cohen et al., 2007). This session began by introducing the teacher participants to each other, outlining the aims of the project, and going over the procedure so we were all clear about the expectations and timelines. I then presented an overview of concepts in the research that were centred on children's play and the teacher's role, including imagination, playworlds as a drama method, and finally, popular culture play motifs. In the final part of this session we discussed the popular culture play motifs they had observed in their preschools and the teachers decided on a popular culture motif that would frame the first playworlds data generation episode in their individual preschools. The final method (discussed below) also had a reflective aspect as the *group interview* involved the four teachers and I coming together in a central location with the aim of concluding the data generation and discussing any further reflections on their experience or teaching practice.

4.8.5: Group interview

Linking to teachers' reflections in the last section this final method of a *group interview* allowed time away from the playworld experiences to add perspectives that may have resonated for the teachers in their practice (O'Toole, 2006). I deliberately made this six weeks after the final playworld, so teachers had time to reflect and think about the concepts we had discussed in relation to their teaching practice in children's play. Once again this links back to Dewey (1910/1997) who argues,

Reflection involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a consequence — a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while each in turn leans back on its predecessors. The successive portions of the reflective thought grow out of one another and support one another; they do not come and go in a medley. Each phase is a step from something to something — technically speaking, it is a term of thought. Each term leaves a deposit which is utilized in the next term. The stream or flow becomes a train, chain, or thread. (pp. 2-3)

The *group interview* (Appendix H) in this research simulated discussion and highlighted insights that the teachers had on the themes we had explored (Punch, 2005; Yin, 2011). There were three parts, outlined below, to the session that adopted an informal format, which guided us with a focus on creating an environment in which the teachers could comfortably express their thoughts.

- 1) We revisited the research themes of play that included popular culture motifs, imagination, and the teacher's role.
- 2) Teachers voiced thoughts on their teaching in play.
- 3) We discussed emerging insights about their experience of being in the playworlds with children.

As there was a focus on the teachers' views and their experiences in the playworlds as well as their teaching this *group interview* had the potential to bring “to the surface aspects of a situation which might not otherwise be exposed” (Punch, 2005, p. 171). Patton (2003) argues that the social aspect of the group gives participants a chance to express their views and consider other's perspectives by interacting and responding to each other's experiences. This *group interview* was also a way to conclude the data generation and thank the participants for their significant contribution.

Having outlined the research methods this final section of the chapter pays attention to the specifics of this data generation and the analysis process that took place to make sense of the textual, audio, and videoed data.

4.9: Data generation

Yin (2009) argues that from the start of the data generation there needs to be an analysis plan otherwise the “study analysis is likely to be in jeopardy” (p. 129). The aim is to develop a systematic process to reveal an element of the reality of the phenomenon being researched (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000) and in this study the phenomenon is the teacher’s performed roles. Using multiple methods requires a place to store and analyse the data generated. Yin (2015) argues that the researcher needs to create a database that is systematic and functional and which serves as an “able assistant and reliable tool” (Yin, 2009, p. 128). This thesis used a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) package NVivo™ that assisted in keeping the multiple data forms, text and video, stored and organised together to allow for a systematic and consistent analysis. In NVivo™ the textual and video data were organised and stored, and then coded and recoded in the analysis phase. The NVivo™ system allowed for a clear and systematic portal that supported a safe place to play with the data in many configurations (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013).

As each of the five data methods were implemented the data generated was stored and prepared for data analysis in NVivo™ to create a systematic and cohesive platform. The five methods generated data that comprised of textual and video formats. The audio recordings from the methods of the semi-structured interviews, professional learning session, and group interview were all transcribed to create a textual format. These transcripts, along with the teachers’ reflections and the researcher’s journal, became the textual data generated. The videoed playworlds consisted of 12 one-hour playworlds episodes that were filmed, enabling a visual and audio representation (Heath et al., 2010). As discussed in the section regarding the playworlds method the children were asked to draw after the experience and these pictures were not used in the analysis, as this thesis inquires into the teacher’s performed roles. Nonetheless, some have been included in the findings and analysis chapters and appendices to illustrate elements of the playworlds process for the reader.

Qualitative research by nature views data generation as a process that is not “separate from analyzing data” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 1). This is because when one is generating the data you are intuitively thinking and making decisions in the data generation and analysis process (Richards & Morse, 2013). Therefore the analysis is not an endpoint activity to the data generation process; rather it simultaneously occurs as you are collecting data (Creswell,

2014). In this thesis the audio, textual and video-generated data were analysed alongside each other and this process is discussed in the following section.

4.10: Data analysis

The data analysis for this qualitative research was both deductive and inductive (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Gray, 2004; Pope et al., 2000; Silverman, 2005) and will be explained later in this section. First, referring back to cultural-historical theory's *unit of analysis* reinforced the relationship to the theory of the thesis. Vygotsky (1934) stresses that the unit of analysis "is a vital and irreducible part of the whole" (p. 46). Vygotsky (1934) describes this concept through the relationship between thought and word; as the two exist because of each other, they are inherently unified. He goes on to argue the "meaning is an inseparable part of the word; it belongs not only to the domain of thought but to the domain of speech. A word without meaning is not a word, but an empty sound. A word without meaning no longer belongs to the domain of speech" (Vygotsky, 1934, p. 47). Therefore, the unit of analysis does not exist without the whole. In this thesis the unit of analysis is the teacher's performed roles as addressed in the research question: *how do teachers perform roles in popular culture informed playworlds co-created with children?* And the object of the analysis is apparent in the second question, which links to the teacher's practice: *how does an exploration of performed roles assist in understanding the teacher in children's play?*

To address these questions the study design deliberately included multiple data methods to triangulate the data from different perspectives (Bazeley, 2013; Yin, 2009). Triangulation, Yin (2011) argues, comes from a navigation principle that uses three reference points to gauge a specific location. In research the aim is to take at least three viewpoints to validate the events being described in the study (Yin, 2011). Triangulation in this thesis came from the multiple forms of generated data that allowed the unit of analysis of teacher's performed roles to be viewed from multiple perspectives (Yin, 2011). The perspectives came from the *semi-structured interviews*, *professional learning session*, *group interview* and *reflections* as they were designed to allow the four teacher participants a place where they could express their views about their teaching practice and the research themes. Whereas, the *playworlds* were designed so that teachers, children and I could perform roles in an imagined world; and the video data captured this enacted research method.

The *researcher journal* was also used in the triangulation to include my own interpretations (Yin, 2011). Saldaña (2016) argues that researchers in a qualitative paradigm are highly tuned to the data and not “algorithmic automatons” (p. 13). Barone and Eisner (2012) and Bresler (2011) argue that arts based research can deliberately generate data where the researcher is part of the experience and this adds complexity. Part of the complexity allows the researcher’s writing of their own thoughts to include moments of critical reflection on their involvement (Barone & Eisner, 2012; O’Toole & Beckett, 2013). For example, during the data collection and analysis process, that involved watching videos that I was in, I included in the *researcher’s journal* analytical memos as an informal analysis strategy that allowed for “assessing the adequacy” of the data (Yin, 2015, p. 186). These *analytical* memos were a place to express and explore my thinking about areas of the research analysis (Saldaña, 2016). It is recommended that these memos are written down as soon as the researcher thinks of them “to reflect and expound on them” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 45). These memos were part of my reflexivity to include frustrations, insights, and questions that arose during this process (Saldaña, 2016). The aim of a qualitative inquiry is not to a verbatim reproduction what happened rather to “to add insight and understanding and to create theory that provides explanation and even prediction” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 81).

Before I delve into the inductive and deductive analyses, I want to outline how I used coding within the textual, audio and videoed data in NVivo™. The aim of coding is to label the text, audio or video to “form descriptions and broad themes in the data” (Creswell, 2014, p. 242). Coding in qualitative research is a process that begins with many codes that are reduced to “collapse codes into themes” (Creswell, 2014, p. 243). In this thesis all data in the form of transcribed interviews, professional learning session, written reflections and videoed playworlds were uploaded in NVivo™. Here codes were assigned when there were either, expected areas of the phenomenon present, or when topics were frequently discussed or enacted by the participants, and also when areas of uniqueness or surprise surfaced (Creswell, 2014). Words or phrases were allocated to describe the meaning of the chosen section that became the ascribed code used when this was apparent in other areas (Creswell, 2014). This was not a linear process as codes were assigned, and then reassigned, as I worked my way through the data, and back to the data and readings to “make sense out of” what I was seeing, hearing and reading (Creswell, 2014, p. 242). Saldaña (2016) recommends

cycles of coding, as the first attempt is rarely enough to develop salient features required to build focal theory.

I used a blend of coding recommended by Saldaña (2016) to identify and then name a code. For example, in vivo coding was used as it paid attention to the participants' verbatim words or statements from the data (Saldaña, 2016). I also used pattern coding to "identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 236). Saldaña (2016) calls pattern coding a way to develop "the category label that identifies similarly coded data" to "not only organise the corpus but attempt to attribute meaning to that organisation" (p. 235). These two types of coding were able to capture the patterns in the data and also the unique areas that were significant for the research topic, as they were "essence-capturing" to develop the research story (Saldaña, 2016, p. 9). The codes were characterised in various stable forms making sure the focus was not too narrow as this can "oversimplify the analytical prose and hamper rich theory development" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 7). This meant the coding enabled a way to group the constructs presented in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The analysis process began using a deductive approach framed by the initial thinking and planning of this thesis with links to the theoretical framework (Bazeley, 2013; Patton, 2003). This aligns to Yin's (2009) theoretical positioning strategy, which acknowledges that the pre-reading and writing stage shape the data collection and therefore analysis. This prior work developed the methods (Pope et al., 2000; Yin, 2009) including the use of the teachers in dual roles in the imaginary field (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010). All data from the transcribed interviews, professional learning session, written reflections and videoed playworlds were used in this stage of the analysis. To explain the process, I return to NVivo™, as this system was helpful to organise the data in many configurations (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). To do this NVivo™ offers *parent nodes* to represent a broader theme, and then *child nodes* for the subthemes. These nodes were named to represent the specific codes, for example the initial organisation of the data was coded into *outside the play* or *inside the play*. Then within these two positions as I looked for patterns, I created sub-codes. For example, the teachers *not entering play* became something that was repeated in the data and these themes coincide with the literature on being *outside the play*. Then I aligned the codes to broader themes that linked to the research topic (Creswell, 2014). The following table presents extracts of the deductive analysis, including the codes that were either *outside the play* or *inside the play* and themes that were developed from these.

Table 7: *Extract of deductive analysis, including codes*

Codes representing the teacher outside the play	Themes	Codes representing the teacher inside the play	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Knowing children’s popular culture play genre – Naming children’s actions, characters, setting – Settling disruptions in play – Giving safety reminders in play 	Popular culture play motifs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – In role as animal or character – Using actions in role 	Entering as player
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Observing play from the sidelines – Children don’t want you in the play – Disrupting the play – I don’t want to invade too much – I don’t want to influence them in any way – I don’t want to impose – Unsure about my role in play 	On the periphery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Asking questions to children – Acknowledging children’s ideas and suggestions – Moving the narrative forward with children’s ideas and suggestions 	Building the narrative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Providing resources – Resolving conflict – Assisting child/ren to enter – Setting rules/limits 	Entering as teacher		

Once I had established this first analysis phase I began the inductive analysis that identified other significant areas that presented themselves within and across the first two deductive positions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Gray, 2004; Pope et al., 2000; Silverman, 2005). This consisted of coding the data to label the text or video “to describe a segment” (Creswell, 2014, p. 243). These codes aligned to *sensitising concepts* (Blumer, 1954) and themes (Creswell, 2014) in the data that I now explain.

A *sensitising concept* is defined by Blumer (1954) as opportunities the researcher takes to create an interplay with the empirical world and the theoretical world and this was apparent from the beginning of data generation. These sensitizing concepts that were identified in the data are “grounded on sense instead of on explicit objective traits, can be formulated and communicated” (Blumer, 1954, p. 9). Blumer (1954) explains, that definitive concepts in data analysis are prescriptive and predetermined whereas sensitizing concepts “merely suggest directions along which to look. (p. 7). This openness and fluidness of looking in different directions meant that sensitising concepts “enable one to grasp the reference in terms of one's own experience. This is how we come to see meaning and sense in our concept” (Blumer, 1954, p. 9). In the analysis process I created an interplay between the data the theoretical concepts from the literature and theory chapters. This meant that when I was reading the textual data or watching videoed data I could see or hear the theoretical concepts in practice, or when I was reading about specific concepts the practice came into the theoretical realm.

Themes were developed in the analysis as the codes were “aggregated together to form a major idea” (Creswell, 2014, p. 247). Therefore subsequently the inductive approach continued to look for other areas embedded in the previous levels of analysis (Gray, 2014; Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013; Yin, 2009, 2011). To achieve this Yin (2011) recommends that researchers consistently query themselves as well as the data. According to Yin (2011) in the data analysis process “you are proactively sifting and sorting your ideas, searching for patterns” (p. 191). The data were examined and re-examined, many times, to illuminate connections and or disconnections in a recursive movement (Yin, 2009, 2015). I continually paid attention to unexpected themes or one-off incidents that were significant in the process and became of value to address the research questions (Creswell, 2014).

While this analysis used coding, on its own this does not weave together the research story that is required in qualitative research (Saldaña, 2016). The aim of the analysis is to bring the coding “onto a higher conceptual plane” (Yin, 2015, p. 202). Therefore the analysis process works towards smaller more detailed concepts to capture further themes that were materialising (Gray, 2014; Guest et al., 2013). This meant the analysis of this thesis continued all the way through the writing process and became an in-depth learning process. (Yin, 2015). Moving between the data generated, and the literature, took time to develop my theoretical sensitivity in this “cyclical act” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 9).

During this final phase the deductive and inductive analysis moved systematically to a “conceptual level” (Yin, 2015, p. 196). This phase continued to further reduce the data to develop an in-depth research story (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Pope et al., 2000). This moved from describing what happened to developing a map to condense the data into a coherent understanding of why this was significant (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The following table is an extract that gives an example of the inductive analysis, including sensitised concepts and themes identified.

Table 8: *Extract of inductive analysis, including sensitised concepts and themes*

Sensitised concepts	Themes	Unexpected themes
Contaminating play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Interfering/invading/intruding – Lack of belonging in play – Guilty of leading the play – I feel like I’m not wanted in the play – Staying on the fringe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – My version of a superhero is not the same as the child’s version
Foolery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Becoming a caricature in play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Unable to verbally respond to child/ren
Playing the role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Long sections of teacher talk – Losing the narrative thread – Silence – don’t know what to do next – Enclosure of the body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Over emoting with sounds and gestures – Adults creating an audience – Aware of being watched by other adults – Feeling judgement from other adults – Other adults who contribute from the periphery
Pre-text Teacher-in-role / children-in-role Super-objective Through-going action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Using popular culture motifs to set the scene – Using tension to develop the narrative – Picking up on children’s ideas to use within the narrative – Feeding the story goal, using action to get from A to B in the narrative and the physical space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Holding the space – Interruptions to the space – Teacher anxiety – Vulnerability of the creative space
Experiencing the role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Using <i>as if</i> to perform a role – Improvising the role – Using gesture, actions and voice aligned to narrative – Asking questions to children about the scenario – Listening to children’s popular culture expertise 	

This deductive and inductive analysis concluded in a reduction of the data into three key findings. These findings undertook many reconfigurations and link back to the research questions regarding the teacher's performed roles as well as the literature and theory chapters. These performed roles revealed understandings about the teacher as player and also uncovered how the preschool environment can limit the teacher's involvement in play.

4.11: Conclusion

This chapter has given a detailed account of the methodological decisions made for the research of the thesis. The links to theoretical underpinnings of cultural-historical theory have been made visible by the work of Vygotsky (1930/2004, 1934, 1976). The use of Yin's (2012) single case study approach, with an explanatory type, and a holistic design has been justified. Matters of transparency regarding the ethical engagement with the participants, including children, were discussed along with the strategies used to achieve this. An account has also been provided of the methods that enabled data generation and analysis to support this in-depth investigation (Yin, 2011, 2015).

To follow are the three findings and analysis chapters of this thesis are titled: *Chapter 5: Finding and analysis one – Performing play invader*, *Chapter 6: Finding and analysis two – Performing director*, and finally, *Chapter 7: Finding and analysis three – Performing experiencer*.

Chapter 5: Finding and analysis one – Performing play invader

These findings and analysis chapters address the teacher's performed roles. In the following three findings and analysis chapters and the ensuing discussion chapter, the teacher's pseudonyms are: Henrietta, Rosie, Peggy and Louise, and I am named Sarah. The children have various pseudonyms when their response was individual, and the term *children* is used when they responded as a collective. As discussed earlier this thesis methodology chapter used a qualitative paradigm and the previous chapter concluded with a description of the methods of analysis that has established the data patterns providing responses to the research questions:

- 1) How do teachers perform roles in popular culture informed playworlds co-created with children?
- 2) How does an exploration of performed roles assist in understanding the teacher in children's play?

A key element of the playworlds was the use of the model of a dual subject positioning (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010). This included the teachers and I working together in the imaginary field in a "pair pedagogy context" (Fleer, 2015, p. 1806). Therefore the term 'teachers' refers to the four preschool teacher participants and the researcher as, together we operated using the pair pedagogy approach (Fleer, 2015; Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010). The researcher's role in the *playworlds* was to free up the teachers and give them support and space to enter the *imaginary field*, so I took on more of the teacher responsibilities (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010). However, in accordance with the theoretical framework these two positions always operate concurrently and therefore, they are inseparable, so both needed to be present. The teacher always has an educational itinerary as well as a player itinerary (Fleer, 2015; Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010).

In this findings and analysis chapter there are two teacher performed roles that make up the *play invader*. At the start of this thesis I argued that a lack of clarity surrounds teachers entering children's socio-dramatic play, and during the data generation and analysis reoccurring themes aligned with this uncertainty about teachers in children's play. To begin, in extract below from one of the semi-structured interviews, which took place at the beginning of data generation, Henrietta articulates her awareness of the complexity of her role in children's play and the many ways she interacts with the children.

Data extract 1: Semi-structured interview

Henrietta (teacher): Sometimes I'll be invited, like the children will come and invite me to play, "Henrietta, come and play with us." Or sometimes, I might see the situation where a child is standing back and they don't know how to join in the play, so I'll go and join in, and then invite them to come into the play. Sometimes I might see a situation arising that I'm not comfortable with. It could be rough play, it could be language that's being used, so I'll go and join in the play and kind of join in that conversation and calm it down, and then if I choose not, sometimes I can be in the play and then withdraw myself for the same sorts of reasons – if the play's settling, or they don't need me there, the child that needed to be encouraged to play is there on their own now, they're doing okay, so I'll back away. Sometimes, just observing the play and they're doing an amazing, having a great moment, and an adult could just disrupt that whole situation.

Henrietta's example demonstrates the different ways a teacher thinks about play and enters play. I begin with this verbatim text to demonstrate how teaching in play is not only about location of being in the play or not, because when we enter play there are multiple ways to perform our roles and this thesis is attempting to understand this complexity.

The term *invader* for this finding has been directly taken from the teachers' clarity regarding what they did not want to do in children's play. This came through in their statements that consistently focused on the teacher's awareness of supporting children's autonomy in their own play. Some examples are: *I don't want to invade too much, I don't want to influence them in any way, I don't want to impose*. The four teachers in this thesis respectfully viewed play as the child's domain and their practice supported this view. This aligned with empirical research discussed in the literature chapter where teachers are reported as gravitating towards the periphery of play. Indeed, the term *play invader* aligns with the participating teachers' performed role, as at times this role did not synchronise with the phases of the imagination as theorised by Vygotsky (1930/2004). I have identified two

areas that assisted me to understand the teachers' performed role/s and discuss in this chapter. These roles are named the *supervisor* and the *pretender*.

5.1: Supervisor

This first aspect of this finding links to the teachers' reluctance to deliberately enter play, and instead choosing to position themselves on the fringe. The role of the *supervisor* in this finding comes from the individual teacher *semi-structured interviews* and the *group interview* in which the four participants discussed their beliefs and practice regarding children's socio-dramatic play. The teacher as a *supervisor* of play is a valued and valid area as part of their role is to support children's play (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). The teachers in this study gave clear descriptions of what they do to support children's play and yet there was ambiguity about actually being in play, other than in this supervisory role. In Rosie's semi-structured interview example below, she stated her reasons for keeping her distance from entering children's play.

Data extract 2: Semi-structured interview

Rosie (teacher): Well, I feel you don't want to invade too much, you don't want to direct it too much, you want it to be organic, natural experience for the children, and sometimes it appears the children don't want you in the play, and you'll say, oh, can I join in? And they'll say, no, especially this kindergarten age group. I'm not sure so much with toddlers, but in the four-to-fives they really are off doing their own thing, and frequently not have much teacher involvement, we're just there overseeing, to supervise, if they have any problems they'll come up and ask questions.

Rosie articulates how she values the children's ideas in their play and is flexible and supportive, depending on the children's needs. In Peggy's interview below she also makes it clear that play should stem from the children and she encourages them to discover independently although she is always available to provide resources, manage conflict, and/or observe the learning (Fleer, 2017; Jones & Reynolds, 2011).

Data extract 3: Semi-structured interview

- Peggy (teacher): I believe that the play should come from them [children], their ideas, and that if I put specific things out, or go over there with them, that the play then doesn't become what they want to do, it becomes what I want to do. I don't want to influence them in any way, I just like the play to be their ideas, most of the time, unless it becomes out of control, then I might go in for ... but, yeah, that's part of my philosophy, that's why, in my room, I have a lot of things out, so they've got lots to choose from.
- Sarah (researcher): Yeah, they have lots to choose from.
- Peggy (teacher): Outside, no, but they can always come and ask. You see, that for me is their play, rather than (pause)
- Sarah (researcher): Tell me.
- Peggy (teacher): Well, probably because that's how I played when I was young, and I remember having wonderful times climbing trees, hiding, making cubby houses, then, that's what I want for them, but I don't want to do it for them, I want them to just discover that that's what they can do, and also, I've noticed, and it happened last week, there's magnificent things going on up on the hill, and it was all set up over there, and one of them told me it was a snail house, so I thought, oh, I might just wander over, not to ... but just to sit closer and observe them, I got over and sat down, and they all disappeared. So, it's like that secret play that they were happy to do that, but as soon as the adult came!
- Sarah (researcher): And you think because it was secret play, like you said?
- Peggy (teacher): Yeah, they just, no. Whether they saw me as a threat or, I don't quite know what it was, and probably because here, the children are used to us not interfering, we just, basically sit back and watch.

Peggy's example above aligns with the supervisory role teachers employ, as discussed in the literature chapter, and she acknowledges the children's right to play and supplies resources aligned with their play needs. These supervisory roles act as support for

children's independent play and are a common occurrence in the preschool. Peggy further explained how part of her practice is to deliberately distance herself from the action and this responds to the children's needs in her room. The children, Peggy clarifies, may see her, "*as a threat or, I don't quite know what it was, and probably because here, the children are used to us not interfering*". This demonstrates Peggy's respect for the child's autonomy in play and aligns with the dominant view of play as the child's domain (Grieshaber, 2016). As argued in the introduction chapter this view has meant the teacher has limited and even undervalued their role in play (Grieshaber, 2010) and is part of the reason I am interested in inquiring about this topic. For example, Peggy stated,

Data extract 4: Semi-structured interview

Peggy (teacher): I believe that the play should come from them, their ideas, and that if I put specific things out, or go over there with them, that the play then doesn't become what they want to do, it becomes what I want to do. I don't want to influence them in any way, I just like the play to be their ideas, most of the time, unless it becomes out of control, then I might go in for...but, yeah, that's part of my philosophy.

This teacher, echoes the other teachers in this study as they paid attention to the children's agency and valued the child's right to play and choose their play landscapes (Corsaro, 2015; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Smith, 2011; Trawick-Smith, 2012). The four teachers clearly explained their beliefs on why children's play is often deliberately devoid of any teacher involvement. I begin with Rosie's extract since it explicitly makes a point I wish to tease out.

Data extract 5: Semi-structured interview

Rosie (teacher): But the actual involvement in terms of participant in play, I have to say is quite minimal. I feel in terms of managing the entire group, supervision, I manage three other staff members so a lot of the time it almost feels administrative, which is unfortunate. I feel like I would be more involved in the play if I had myself and just three or four other children.

Rosie understands that her actual time in play is limited due to other teaching demands. When I refer back to the research questions this finding does not offer clues to how teachers perform roles in play. This is because the supervisor does not actually enter the children's socio-dramatic play and the imaginary field is a space that cannot be entered from a distance. To perform roles in play that align with children's play activity as explained previously in this thesis means that action and dialogue in an embodied manner is needed (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976). Peggy explains in the final group interview that took place after the playworlds why she does not see play as a place for her and gives us insights into her role of being on the fringe.

Data extract 6: Group interview

- Peggy (teacher): I don't think I have changed a lot in what I see play is, but it has made me think about that it is okay to step in, and I think we, as teachers need to have those skills to know when to step in and how to step in, and understand that it's okay to step in, but I still, to a certain degree, feel that when you do step in you are still guiding their play, it still becomes more of your idea than their ideas, and that's not what I want. I prefer to sit back, still the same as what I did before, sit back, observe, and then think, oh, okay, they're doing this, they're saying this, I can go and get this and this and this and this, and just put that there for them to choose if they want to use it. That's where my comfort zone is. It's not a problem that I don't feel I can't, but I don't want to guide their play in any way, and I don't think that's changed.
- Sarah (researcher): And let's go back to when you talked about that originally, why is that? Talk to me about that, what is that guiding, what is it you don't like guiding in play?
- Peggy (teacher): Their ideas, and maybe that's because I am an adult, and because my ideas of a Superman are different to their ideas of Superman.

This example suggests that when adults do enter the imaginative field they are what Fleer (2015) terms *visitors* in the play. Therefore, children get used to teachers being

suppliers of resources, or being there for emotional support, but they do not seek out teachers for imaginative support as this has not been modelled. As I am interested in ways teachers can enter the imaginative field it is helpful to think about the dual roles that children take in their play as they are self and simultaneously become and play with being other, is helpful here. If the teacher is in a supervisory role and does engage in a joint adult-child play experience this may create an uneasiness around being in play from the child's and adult's perspective. Peggy's statement above when she said "my ideas of a Superman are different to their ideas of Superman" highlights the uncertainty of how teachers view the children's input in relation to their own.

This notion of *different ideas* is something that occurs in our daily conversations with other people. Conversation between people are often subject to improvisation as the individuals exchange viewpoints (Sawyer, 1997). These improvised conversations go in different directions as we feed off the ideas of others to build the conversation, the pathway is not set before we begin. However, in this study the supervisor operated outside the imaginary field minimalizing the improvisational element in a dialogic interaction (Brédikyté, 2011, p. 153). Dewey (1934/2005) argues that a conversation is a form of an aesthetic experience, contending that, as just like a work of art that has "different acts, episodes, occurrences melt and fuse into unity, and yet do not disappear and lose their own character" (p. 38). Choosing to improvise is to commit to working with no predetermined outcomes and this is not easy for some. Stepping forward into the unknown requires teachers to be comfortable in a collaborative process that can end up going in a "radically different direction" (Hakkarainen, 2010, p. 78).

This is part of a known dichotomy between teaching and play (Edwards, 2017; Epstein, 2007; Grieshaber, 2010; Trawick-Smith, 2012) that has created a vagueness and uncertainty about what to actually do in the imaginative field. In the research for this thesis, the teachers could clearly talk about their supervising role; conversely, entering the portal of play brought with it a set of constraints. In the final *group interview* the teachers expressed their confusion and commented how certain areas impact on their relationship to children's play.

Data extract 7: Group interview

Peggy (teacher): Because we're being told, over and over and over, and over and over again, children's interest, children's interest.

Rosie (teacher): Children's rights. The children's voice, so that whole philosophy. So that's why we worry, because if we step in, then we're, are we impeding on the child's rights, are we impeding on the child's voice?

Above Peggy and Rosie give insights about constraints that they feel hinder how they engage in play. The children's interest is a dominant discourse in early childhood education and is supported in the Australian and Victorian governments' policy documents (DEEWR, 2009; DET, 2016). This practice of using children's interest to engage with children is well established in Australian early childhood education, although entering the imaginative field is somewhat vague. Rosie in her initial interview expressed views that assist to understand how the more administrative roles of being a 'teacher' take time away from her being engaged in the imaginary field.

Data extract 8: Semi-structured interview

Rosie (teacher): The role of being teacher, and the role of being a mentor to the staff that I have, it can be difficult too.

Sarah (researcher): Because you're the leader of the room.

Rosie (teacher): Because I'm the leader, yes. I think that my co-educators probably do more of that participative than I do, just because purely being in the leader role, being called out of the room to do this or do this meeting or here, there, everywhere, so sometimes.

Sarah (researcher): I just want to pick up on what you said, you know you said you wish you could be more involved, if you could think of an ideal what would it look like?

Rosie (teacher): Even if it was just, oh, maybe, yeah, I think I have to, once a week, go and do a set dramatic play, so that would be a nice goal for me, after all of this, just once a week, go and have a set plan. We do group time every day and things like that,

but it's with the entire group, but to actually take a small group and do a drama experience, even just once a week would be nice.

Rosie's idea of wanting time to enter the children's play is clearly expressed, although how can the teacher be part of this when they are focused on other areas? Vygotsky (1930/2004) argues that we need time to express and exercise our creativity and the process is the focus rather than the product. The teachers gave clues about this in the group interview when a discussion developed around being in play and having to attend to other roles of being a 'teacher' in the early childhood setting.

Data extract 9: Group interview

- Rosie (teacher): I really enjoyed the play, too, I felt like it was like you were, in the moment, you forget, it's like that hour [playworlds] with Sarah, it did feel like I was in another world, in terms of not worrying about counting the numbers of children or whatever it is you normally have to worry about in your program, so it was just a really nice experience.
- Sarah (researcher): So, that links again to that managerial role you have as teachers.
- Rosie (teacher): Yeah, it's always a conflict in here [she points to her head], it's like a mental conflict, I think.
- Henrietta (teacher): Yeah, that's a really good point.
- Louise (teacher): And that probably describes that awareness of the filter, you just turn off, you're just so engrossed in what you're doing with them [in the playworlds], and that play and getting involved, it's that filter, you just switch off.

In this group interview discussion, the early childhood teachers articulated the constant focus they had on the various roles they need to do in their daily job. While the *playworlds* gave them an experience of 'letting go' how does this work in daily practice? Dewey (1934/2005) argues that characteristics of an aesthetic experience consist of spontaneity and an "absorption in an orderly development" (p. 291) and absorption is in opposition to having one's attention elsewhere. The supervisor, as argued in this thesis,

means teachers' attention is flitting, which creates what Rosie argues as a 'mental conflict'. This means that notion of the ideal mental state of being playful and serious at the same time is not available (Dewey, 1910/1997). In Rosie's reflection below, which she wrote after a playworld, she expresses the challenge of entering the imaginary field when she had to think about multiple other areas, while alongside this she felt excitement in the process.

Data extract 10: Teacher reflection

Rosie (teacher): I felt reassured that the children wanted to rescue me (as I was another character). Although sometimes I felt that I was a bit too worried about behaviour management at times of a couple of the children. I guess that's hard to shake off when you are the teacher, sense of responsibility. It was a bit daunting on the spot but exciting.

Linking back to Vygotsky (1930/2004) who argues that the imagination is not fleeting or trivial it is "a result of a very long internal process of gestation and fetal [*sic*] development" (p. 25). Therefore, the supervisor in this thesis does not have the capacity to enter the full cycle of the imagination, not because these teachers did not want to, but the work environment of the preschool means they are continually disrupted and limited time is available for this type of engagement.

This next and final part of this finding and analysis chapter, introduces the performed role of the *pretender* who did emerge as a player. Although this role did not enter the imaginative space, highlighting that taking on a role in children's play is not as simple as becoming a character.

5.2: Pretender

The pretender in this thesis is focused on the teacher's performed role that was illuminated in the *semi-structured interviews*, as the teachers gave examples of their practice generally and during the *playworlds*. The pretender is aligned with a Stanislavskian acting method of taking on a role in a way that was more like "pretending" (Gillett, 2012, p. 3). I want to include a reminder that I am not saying teachers are actors, rather I am using the notion of the actor on stage as a metaphor for understanding the teacher in play and the way they perform roles.

The pretender used teacher-in-role to become a character in the popular culture *playworlds* method, although I would argue that this was not akin to the dual role quality that children use in their play (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976). This highlights the complexity of the adult in play, as it is not as simple as taking on a role; rather what the teacher does with the role is what is significant for the imaginative field. Before I explain this further it is important to note that there is a substantial distinction between the teacher as pretender and when children pretend to be someone else in their play (Toye & Prendville, 2000; Vygotsky, 1930/2004, 1976). When children pretend in play they are not operating outside themselves, they manoeuvre a dual position in play, that allows them to be themselves and be a character simultaneously (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976). Children in their play are not false they act “in a very concrete and realistic way” (Brédikyté & Hakkarainen, 2011, p. 62). In contrast the pretender worked in a way that aligned to a representational acting mode (Stanislavski, 1948). In this mode Stanislavski (1948) argues that the actor is disconnected from the through line of action and is “going through certain disjointed exercises of parts of the system” (p. 275). In this study, instead of using the character role in a *realistic way*, the pretender was more aligned with stereotypes that became teacher directed and fragmented from the group experience (Taylor & Warner, 2006). This is in opposition to children’s play that is fuelled by “coherence and unification” (Dewey, 1910/1997, p. 162). This pretender role aligned with Dewey’s (1910/1997) understanding of foolery as it does not align with the core rhythm of the experience. A foolery position is disconnected from the activity at hand and appears like a “series of disconnected temporary overflows of energy dependent upon whim and accident” (p. 218). This performed role does not work in partnership with the children even through the teacher is physically in the play. In the following example, Henrietta assists us to understand how this plays out in everyday play interactions that could be seen in preschools.

Data extract 11: Semi-structured interview

Henrietta (teacher): Last term, when we had a home corner sort of area that turned into a hospital on the children’s request, I was a patient, and the children were using all the different medical tools and they were listening to my heart, someone declared that I was dead, so I asked them what they wanted me to do, and they said, “Well, play dead.” I went, “Okay,” so I just

kind of lay there with my tongue hanging out, and their conversation around me was, “No, that’s not how you play dead, that’s not what you do.” So they were saying, “No, you need to put your face like this, and your tongue needs to be in your mouth,” because I had my tongue hanging out, and so I followed their direction.

Sarah (researcher): And they taught you how to play dead?

Henrietta (teacher): They taught me how to play dead... Yeah, it was great. So, things like that, and they will often say to me, “Oh, Henrietta, you’re being silly,” and so, oh, okay, they want me to be serious, so okay.

Here Henrietta is sensitive to the children’s play and enters the play in the role of a patient. While in the role she is supporting the children’s expertise as the *mantle of the expert* (Bolton, 1985; Daniels & Downes, 2015; Heathcote & Bolton, 1995) because the child tells the teacher how to behave. Yet, I would argue that it distracts from the play narrative and displays “separation between process and product” (Dewey, 1910/1997, p. 164). In this example, the children corrected the teacher, and this distracted the children from their play narrative as the teacher became the focus rather than their play content. While this demonstrates the children’s ability to use dual roles as they move from the play’s *imaginary field* to the *reality field* (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976) to aid the teacher, it also reveals something else. If we look at this example in relation to the cycle of the imagination (Vygotsky, 1930/2004), discussed in the theory chapter, the children are being bought back to reality (first phase) to correct the teacher’s actions rather than being supported in the play process to engage in the full cycle of the imagination.

I argue that the pretender inverts children’s play by using *foolery* rather than taking it seriously to support the play narrative. Taking play seriously means the teacher does not get lost in their own role performing in a way that is separated from the children’s focus. In the following playworld, centred on the Octonauts™, I could not understand why the children began to be fragmented from the narrative. During the analysis and understanding the concept of *foolery* as a *sensitised concept* I could see that different forms of foolery occur, and at the core there is an absence of commitment to the role and how it feeds the

group narrative. The *researcher journal* entry below discloses the playworlds from the researcher's perspective.

Data extract 12: Researcher journal

Sarah (researcher): Today I felt quite confused during the playworld. Trying to unpack what happened is complex. In this playworld on the Octonauts I can see how using exaggerated gestures and sounds can cause a disconnect with children – it's like the children know we are over acting. The teacher played the character of Dashi and the playworld narrative required her to be physically trapped in a dark cave. This teacher was so engaged, and I always admire her enthusiastic manner. To be in the dark cave, in reality the teacher was in the middle of a circle of rope that the children and I decided could represent the cave. This was a pivotal part of the action and narrative as we needed her input to continue with the narrative. The children and I were standing outside of the rope, in roles of other Octonaut characters and we needed to find out how we could rescue her. The children and I asked her "How can we help you Dashi?" and in role the teacher pretend cried, and said, "I'm really scared, I don't know what's going on" while she rocked back-and-forth with her body. The crying and gesturing continued, when I realised our question was not answered. I encouraged the children to ask the question again, and she did not answer. The children gradually started to lose interest, got distracted, or laughed – it felt like they wanted to move on, but this story was stuck. I was stuck too. I wanted to wait and see what happened, but I was also responsible for engaging the children in this playworld session.

The above *researcher journal* entry describes how I could see that the teacher did embody the role with her actions, nevertheless, she did not contribute ideas to develop the collaborative narrative through her language. My reflexivity as a researcher was important

here as I wanted to see what would unfold, but we had all the children there and I needed to be the *teacher* to support their needs. In the analysis I could see that this was an example of the teacher's actions and language being disconnected with the narrative and this then halted the process. I argue that a type of *foolery* took over to create this lack of unity between the process and the product (Dewey, 1934/2005). The pretender's use of sound and gesture in their character role became unsynchronised with the narrative. The aim of being teacher-in-role is to create opportunities for dialogue with children and to use the role to move the drama forward (Taylor & Warner, 2006). In Dunn, Bundy and Stinson's (2015) research their analysis used *high commitment* and *weak connection* to articulate that a teacher is committed to the role, though their role does not have a strong connection with the children. This assisted me to understand what happened in the example above, as the teacher was so committed to the character role with great enthusiasm, as seen by the use of gesture and sound to emote the role, however this created an over use of *playing the role* (Stanislavski, 1948).

This is an example of how teachers can be in role and exaggerate the emotion in their performed roles (Dunn et al., 2015). This 'performed' version of emotions when taking a role did not allow for the narrative development with children. To explain the 'performed' emotional connection I want to go back to the concept of *perezhivanie*, discussed as *lived through* (Grainger Clemson, 2015). The term *through* implies that you are *in* something and *moving* forward at the same time. In the example above, the *lived* element of being *in* is present, as the teacher is in role using voice and gesture, yet in contrast, the *through* element of moving *forward* was absent as the use of voice (pretend crying) and gesture (rocking backwards and forwards) was used to communicate and this did not convey a clear message to the children. I argue that to deliver a clear message to the children in the collaborative process requires teachers to respond to the children in alignment with current point in the narrative, so the group is heading in the same direction.

I refer back to Stanislavski's (1948) acting method where the actors' *through-going action* and language always support the super-objective. This is in opposition to the previous Octonauts™ example, as the children reacted to the teacher's voice and gestures with mixed responses: a few children laughed, some copied the crying, while others became distracted and talked about something else. All these reactions meant that the common thread of the narrative was disrupted as the teacher's individual objective – of playing a role – was

overridden by the sounds and gestures. This links to Dewey (1934/2005) who argues that an enemy of spontaneity lie in our relationship with “staleness of matter” (p. 73). In the above example of the teacher not replying to the children meant the staleness of matter occurs for the children. Our voice and gestures are dialogically connected and they convey meaning in our communication (Smagorinsky, 2011). In the art form of acting from a Stanislavskian perspective the actor’s aim is to use appropriate expression and gesture to achieve a sense of truth (Grainger Clemson, 2015) and I argue to that to understand role in this way is related to the teacher and children in this research.

Grainger Clemson (2015) explains that Stanislavski required actors to use the logic of the character they are playing to transform the *throughaction*. To be cognisant of the *throughaction* means that there needs to be a focus on the “inner truth of a role, rather than merely imagining and reconstructing the external world” (Grainger Clemson, 2015, p. 43). While teachers are not actors, understanding how a role requires commitment highlights the complexity of being in the play process. In the example above the teacher became so engrossed in the character role that it forced the narrative process to stagnate; the teacher was separated from the experience and the role was therefore an individual pursuit.

This separation also appeared with the pretender in the use of monologue. This use of monologue limited the inclusion of the children’s ideas, which favoured the teacher’s ideas, which in turn goes against the collaborative aspect (Sawyer, 1997). Indeed, in the *playworlds* data generated in this research if the teacher’s used an improvised monologue it created an individual narrative rather than a collaborative one. The collaborative process relies on the teachers’ questioning to prompt the children’s ideas and allow time for the children to answer the questions. In the *playworld* example below the teacher was in role as Elsa from Frozen™ and the children were in role as Detectives. The pre-text was to help Elsa investigate why Olaf, the snowman from Frozen™ was melting. In this example we had travelled up to the top of a mountain and the teacher started asking the children some questions to elicit their ideas.

Data extract 13: Playworld (videoed)

Henrietta (teacher): Detectives we need some help, we've got to the top of the mountain, are you puffed, I'm very puffed. Big deep breaths, are you ready? (Teacher and Children breath in and out).

Wow that's much better, okay now we need to find Olaf, how are we going to find Olaf. Isa how do you think we are going to find him? How will we recognise him? If he's all melted though? What are we going to do to recognise him if he's melted?

Paris (child): I know.

Henrietta (teacher): What can we do?

Quinn (child): We could just use our noses because our noses know what Olaf look likes.

Henrietta (teacher): Our noses know what Olaf looks like, okay, how do noses know that? (Children calling out ideas) What can we do when we get there? Are we going to hug him? Will that help him stop melting? I don't know, I don't know, I think we, oh what can we do to stop him from melting, what can we do? (Children yelling and shouting).

This is an example of the teacher's asking questions that became an improvised monologue. The teacher was so engaged in the role, her questions became like a speech and the children's ideas did not become a significant part of the dialogue. Therefore the movement forward in the narrative was blocked because dialogical skills include listening to the children to advance the conversational turn taking (O'Toole & Stinson, 2013; Peters & Davis, 2011). Referring back to the literature chapter and how teachers can disrupt children's *working theories* is relevant here as the children's *working theories* were not being acknowledged (Peters & Davis, 2011). This teacher was completely engaged in the playworld narrative using her character role. However if children's ideas do not enter the narrative flow it limits the collaborative opportunities. Sawyer (2011b) argues that the notion of working with groups in a creative manner "is potentially a multi-levelled process that involves creative mental processes (at the level of the individual) and creative collaborative processes (at the level of the group)" (p. 62). In the above example the teacher, who is responsible for the *creative collaborative processes* could take the ideas from the children to build the broader group narrative. Therefore, opportunities to take the children's ideas and weave them into the narrative create a dialogue of the teacher's and children's ideas, rather than a teacher monologue. A prime function of dialogical interactions is to encourage responses to advance the narrative conversation (O'Toole & Stinson, 2013). Taylor and

Warner (2006) argue that when the teacher does not elaborate on what children are contributing it can create a message that the children's role is passive. In the previous example the common objective was split and ideas were going in different directions, so it was very difficult to form a group narrative. In this way the action and narrative becomes separate and "unrelated to the whole" (Stanislavski, 1948, p. 261). This fragmented behaviour takes the teacher away from the in-betweenness of the dual roles as the character role does not support the teacher role to develop the story structure. Interactions between the teacher and children require the teacher's use of the dual roles to provide "exciting experiences, or 'perezhivanie'" (Brèdikytè, 2011, p. 82). Taking on a role in the imaginary field asks teachers to "step out of their 'teacher roles'" to enter into dialogue with children (Lindqvist, 2003a, p. 74) and this improvisation is not easy.

I started to look in different directions to see why the teacher may not enter the imaginative field and a common thread that kept emerging was the presence of *other adults* in the environment. These other adults, who could be educators or parents, created a sense of an audience, which was a clue to the teacher's unsynchronised roles. The notion of an audience created a sense of being watched by others when the teachers were in play and/or in the playworlds. Brèdikytè and Hakkarainen (2011) research argues that it is challenging for teachers "to be spontaneous; to improvise, to have the courage to make mistakes" (p. 64). Being comfortable with uncertainty and making mistakes in front of others demands a supportive workplace. In this research when the pretender 'performed' a role the awareness of others judgment limited their engagement in the process. In the *semi-structured interviews* and *group interview* the sense of an audience and their perceived judgment was prevalent for the teachers. In the following dialogue from the *group interview* the teachers discussed this concept.

Data extract 14: Group interview

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Peggy (teacher): | People will look at me and say, "Oh, look at that dill over there", basically. I think you just feel uncomfortable. Whereas with the children, they're non-judgmental, you can just get in there and be yourself. |
| Henrietta (teacher): | Oh, yeah, thousands of people do. I don't care if parents are looking through the window going, "Is she teaching my children, or is she a lunatic?" Whatever, I don't ... that's |

just part of my role, I think, to be able to get down on my hands and knees or walk on my tippy-toes, be a giant if that's what they want of me, whatever part of, whatever it is they want me to be, I will.

Louise (teacher): I have a great time with them, and I get so engrossed in what I do with them that a lot of the time, as I said, people must walk in and just watch what I'm doing and go, she's on another planet.

Peggy, Henrietta and Louise's dialogue about being in children's play and also having a sense that others were watching highlights the performative aspect of teaching. The teacher's focus on how others see them influences the emotional aspect of *perezhivanie* that is "an indivisible unity of personal characteristics and situational characteristics" (Vygotsky, 1934/1994, p. 6). The situational characteristics, others watching the teachers, influenced the personal characteristics of teachers who felt judgement from the others. In the above example, the teachers could articulate how their attention is on the periphery and I argue that this distraction means that the notion of the audience influenced their emotional commitment. Stanislavski's (1948) argues that when an actor is focused on the audience and their attention is not on the stage they cease to be engaged in what is in front of them. I argue that the same relates to teachers in play as when their attention is elsewhere, and they are conscious of others watching them their part in the narrative becomes superficial. Consequently, the four phases of the imaginative cycle as articulated by Vygotsky (1930/2004) are fragmented. Further evidence of the audience effect came from the teacher's comments about other adults who work with them.

Data extract 15: Group interview

Peggy (teacher): Adults in the room who... snigger or look... because you're right into it, and you're happy to be right into it, but you look across and hear or perceive what they're thinking.

Rosie (teacher): Educators or parents?

Peggy (teacher): Educators.

Sarah (researcher): Peggy, you've used the word snigger, what do you mean?

Peggy (teacher): Just their body language.

Rosie (teacher): Is this co-educators?

- Peggy (teacher): Yeah, it's not overt, it's ...
- Rosie (teacher): So, it's subtle?
- Peggy (teacher): Yes, but then, is that my perception of what I think that they're thinking?

Peggy articulated that it may only be her perception of what others think, however, this focus on the audience, watching and judging, meant that their lived experience was disrupted. The influence of adults in the room was highlighted in Lindqvist's (1995) research as she argues the playworld success was reliant on all the adults attitude towards the content and "if one of the adults was not interested, this fact would influence the course of events" (p. 132). Working in creative collaborative processes "places enormous demands on a teacher" (Taylor & Warner, 2006, p. 141). This includes the teacher's commitment and ability to work with the ambiguity of the unfolding process (Taylor & Warner, 2006). Making sure the space is safeguarded, as it can be easily be interrupted by others in the environment, is complex in a play-based environment where the room may have multiple educators engaged in other activities. This concept of an audience effect occurred in the playworlds and is captured in my *researcher journal* below.

Data extract 16: Researcher journal

- Sarah (researcher): At the start of this playworld the teacher seemed nervous and uncomfortable. It took her a while to come and join the children and I on the mat which was the place where we began each week. I was unsure how the session would go as we needed to focus the group of children for the start of the playworld. Maybe it was because another educator in the room had joined us and sat by the side and watched. I remember in the interview she talked about people looking at her joining in children's play so this could be something that concerns her.

After the session I could see why because the other educator was sitting on a chair watching and yet separate from the action. Multiple times when the teacher or I asked the children a question and if the children were not quick to

respond the other educator would answer for them. Also, she would use behavioral management strategies to control the children and this was distracting and kept pulling the children's focus out of the narrative. I did not know what to do as the playworld became stilted. Then I decided to ask the teacher and other educator to be the reindeers pulling the sled (a rug on the floor) containing the children-in-role. This began to change the dynamic and the narrative and players became more unified.

I felt like we were being watched. Someone being outside the playworld activity and yet physically close created an uncomfortable atmosphere. Does this mean that my attention, the teacher's attention and the children's attention were somehow fragmented? This imaginary space is fragile and seemingly small disruptions can puncture this state.

During the playworlds example above I was grappling to understand what had happened. To be honest, during this playworld I felt frustrated and unsure how to proceed. This was an uneasy situation and called on my reflexivity as a researcher during the data generation. It was during my writing, and then later in the analysis, where I gained insight into the experience and identified what had contributed to the *uncomfortable atmosphere*. This was partly due to the teacher's insight in the final *group interview* where she expressed her ideas on other adults watching us and she actually bought up our experience together in the playworld.

Data extract 17: Group interview

Henrietta (teacher): I suppose if people were laughing at me, I didn't care, I don't care about that. The way I found that people were blocking [in the playworlds] it was when we were encouraging the children to provide their ideas, the other educators were answering the questions, so Sarah and I would be trying to encourage the kids to come up with an idea, I think one of them was we were trying to suggest to

them what animal could pull a sleigh? And they were all saying Rudolf, they were saying things like that, and we were saying, oh, what's one of those animals, the ones with the big things on their heads? And one of the other co-educators went, oh, a reindeer, and I went, yep, that'll be the one. So, that's how I was finding a lot of them blocking the play.

In the data analysis the teacher's term *blocking the play* helped me see how the concept of an *audience* plays out in real time. The idea of people watching, rather than doing, can take on a judgment role. When the teacher and I had our focus elsewhere, for example, on the other adult in the room, this pulled our focus away from the imaginative field. Lindqvist (1995) argues in her research on playworlds, that when other adult's interest waned "this fact would influence the course of events" (p. 132). Lindqvist (1995) goes on to explain how an adults lack of interest is "projected onto the children" (p. 132). This is demonstrated in the example just given as another adult's comments or interjections can easily disrupt the imaginative field.

In this group interview the discussion was expanded on as the teachers talked about their experiences with this conflict. Here I have included a section of dialogue to demonstrate the four teacher's shared frustrations about other adults in their workplace.

Data extract 18: Group interview

Henrietta (teacher): Different educators will be outside, and often, it's a bit frustrating when you go outside and see amazing play situations happening, which you can become involved in, and you look over and see other educators just standing there talking to one another and not about anything related to their work, I think that's a block as well. What are they missing out on, for starters? And they could be either listening to the play, not necessarily being involved, but listening to it and is there an opportunity for them to extend that, is there an opportunity for them to suggest props for the

- kids to be able to extend that language or something, so I know that happens at the service I work at all the time.
- Peggy (teacher): And they don't see the value.
- Henrietta (teacher): That's the other thing, too, they don't know.
- Peggy (teacher): In what this wonderful thing that's going on in front of you that you're stepping back, observing, listening to, and they don't see the value in that, they more see the value in what they might be doing elsewhere, and they need to come, I must have that child to do this, and that person might be the main character in that game, that is taken, and that's the end of that.
- Sarah (researcher): And what's this, taken that child to do this? What would this be?
- Peggy (teacher): Oh, it might be, I don't know, something, put your lunch box in your bag, pick up your shoes, interrupting.
- Rosie (teacher): So, now that blocks the children from their play, I guess too.
- Peggy (teacher): But this person here, doesn't see that, they see it's more valuable that we need to put our things away, that's just what we do.
- Sarah (researcher): Yeah which is important, but ...
- Peggy (teacher): Not there and then. See yesterday, the whole group, the play was just, oh, it was stunning, and there was little groups, all out there dotted, doing wonderful things, and I knew what time it was, in here, group time, this is just wonderful, but then one word was said and that was it, and the whole yard then changed.
- Sarah (researcher): What do you mean, one word?
- Peggy (teacher): I don't know, pack away or, I don't know what it was, but that moment had gone, seeing all these children engaged, so perfectly.

This alerts to the idea that a shared imaginative space can be a fragile environment. When a work environment is overridden by ancillary routines without consideration of the atmosphere established this adds to the complexity of working with child in play. This

fragility means the space can easily be disrupted or dominated by others leaving limited opportunities to engage the imagination to establish a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This flow state as introduced in the *imagination and aesthetic education* section in the theory chapter is not something that can be quickly restored as the creative space requires attention and focus in the activity at hand. This is a problematic issue in early childhood education as there can be many distractions or interruptions to an activity in the setting. The following example is an extract from my journal after a playworld.

Data extract 19: Researcher journal

Sarah (researcher): During today's playworld the teacher was called away to take a phone call. This was not an important call, she later told me, and I could see she felt uncomfortable. She came back and we continued, after she spoke about the frustrations of daily interruptions, that unless important, can wait. This teacher was pulled away and it was hard to get back the group imaginary field, as it disrupted the teacher and children. This must be frustrating for teachers in their daily work practice. Does the sub-text mean that early childhood settings do not value or understand the construction of play and therefore trivialize the process and this creates an open-door policy?

This teacher brought this up in the final *group interview* and expressed her frustrations with the practice. She made it clear that it was no one's fault, but I would argue that this is part of the culture of play-based learning in some early childhood educational settings.

Data extract 20: Group interview

Rosie (teacher): When you get a phone call, that blocks play. That frustrated me, it happened a couple of times when we were in play, and that was really frustrating and there's nothing I could do, I had to answer it, because I was by myself with Sarah, so, I guess that's how I felt, frustrated by interference in

play by another adult. Even though they did it unintentionally.

This ‘block’ that Rosie talks about highlights how in early childhood settings outside factors can easily interrupt the environment. This was supported by the four teachers who consistently talked about being pulled out of play, due to other teaching demands or environmental factors. In the following conversation the teachers discussed some of the distractions they experienced.

Data extract 21: Group interview

- Peggy (teacher): Because you’re always reflecting, am I saying the right thing, am I doing the right thing? Is that child joining in? Should that child be joining in? And I found, while I enjoyed it and I loved doing it, but I still struggled with just completely letting that go, and it wasn't about thinking about counting numbers, it was more about is this child joining in, how can I help that child to join, oh, that one's being left out, how can I ...?
- Louise (teacher): It depends on the scenario and how the children are going.
- Rosie (teacher): You’re in and out, yeah. Oh, yeah, I’m here, but really it’s like, okay, I’ve got a meeting at 2 o’clock, I’ve got to meet with a parent, I’ve got to chat to that staff member in the room next door, yeah, so there’s two ...
- Henrietta (teacher): I’m here but I’m listening to this conversation over here.
- Rosie (teacher): And I’ll just drop this down while I’m listening to that. I wish I was an octopus, sometimes.
- Peggy (teacher): And even when you’re reading a story, you’re reading the story, and then you’re thinking, oh, there’s that father looking through the door, what time is it? And all that’s going on, as you’re trying to project yourself in that story.

The conversation above expresses the teacher’s frustration with the distractions and I argue that these act to distance teachers from play. The mental distraction of wanting to be ‘doing the right thing’ and guessing what this looks like in practice was a challenge for these

teachers. Also, the physical distraction of needing to be doing ‘other things’ constantly pulled these teachers out of the play. Once again these distractions, whether mental or physical, take the teacher away from the imaginary field of play and have the potential to disrupt their *flow* in the experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In contrast, however, Louise presents an example where there is a shared respect for the play and the teaching environment in her workplace. While this was not a common experience in this research it gives clues to what creates a teaching environment that supports the teacher in play.

Data extract 22: Group interview

Louise (teacher): I was going to say, going back to the values, what I’m hearing as well, it’s really about environment and your co-workers, like the relationship. I guess I come from a centre and a lot of staff, most of them have been employed for at least five years. I think one of our staff has been with us five years, everyone else has been for 14 years, 15 years, so there’s been that real foundation of staff really knowing each other, and I guess management as well, management encourage the educators in our centre, they put out adult chairs in the rooms, we want to see adult chairs in the rooms, we want to see you sitting, and that really comes from our coordinator, she’ll come in and she’ll sit down on the chairs and talk to the children, so it’s that real.

Louise states that in her early childhood centre, time has invested in building pedagogical relationships between the teaching staff and management and these are contributing factors to a supportive workplace. However, I argue that if the dominant culture in the education setting undervalues the early childhood teacher’s role in children’s play, as highlighted in the introduction and literature review chapters, and this encouragement to fully engage with children that Louise expresses may not flourish. If we undervalue the role of the teacher in play, we also undermine the imaginary field; this is because it takes time, attention and commitment from all players to build the imaginary world and has the potential to be easily disturbed.

5.3: Conclusion

This first findings and analysis chapter highlights the teacher's performed roles that either do not enter the imaginary field (supervisor) or are not supported by the early childhood setting (pretender). This means these two performed roles are disassociated from the collaborative process. The next chapter is *Finding and analysis two – Performing director* that addresses details of the structure that supports co-creating with children.

Chapter 6: Finding and analysis two – Performing director

This second finding addresses the teacher *performing director* and refers to the teacher's decision making at the planning stage before and during the playworld. In education a process drama is reliant on the teacher to navigate the experience (O'Neill, 1989). O'Neill (1995) argues that while drama is highly focused on the children's discovery in the unfolding narrative is still needs a "leader, director or teacher" (p. 60). Davis (2015) argues that drama teachers should be seen as a *curators* responsible for designing the environment including the learning process and this aligns well with this thesis. O'Toole (1993) uses the term *teacher/playwright* as their attention to the narrative dramatic form is key to their role. I have chosen to use O'Neill (1989, 1995) term of *director* as it encompasses these concepts and explains the pre-work as well as the continued support this role entails. Playworlds call for a teacher's attention to the planning before, and continued support during, for this group process to thrive. The teacher is a negotiator and re-negotiator that builds the narrative within the context using the materials supplied by the children's ideas and wonderings (O'Toole, 1993).

As outlined at the introduction of the first findings dual subject positioning meant the teachers and I worked together in the playworlds with the children in each preschool (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010). To understand these dual roles these next two chapters address some of the nuanced sub-themes that came through in the analysis of this research. The director in this finding is characterised by two sub-themes that I now discuss in the following sequence as *embedding children's popular culture play motifs* and *articulating the story goal towards through-going action*.

6.1: Embedding children's popular culture play motifs

The director begins by paying attention to the children's play motifs as a tool to develop the playworlds to enter the imaginative field (Hakkarainen & Brèdikytè, 2014). Throughout this thesis the term *motif* refers to the particular popular culture play that was used to create the pre-text for the playworlds. In drama education a pre-text is used to stimulate children's interest in a topic (O'Neill, 1995; O'Toole & Dunn, 2002; Stinson & Ewing, 2018). This pre-text is what Stanislavski (1948) refers to in theatre as the *given circumstances* that hold the "facts, events and epoch, time and place of action" (p. 51). This pre-text acts as the background information for the imagined world to exist and means the

group is all focused on a joint foundation. Lindqvist (1995) argued in her research on playworlds, which focused on Tove Janson's (1960, 1963, 1978) *Momin* books, that if the teachers had a different starting point to the children the group focus diminished and so they needed to begin again.

To develop a pre-text for use in the first playworlds session, I asked the teachers what popular culture play motifs the children were using in their preschools as this meant the children were already connected to the characters and setting (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2014). The four teachers in this study could all articulate the children's popular play motifs in each of their preschool settings. Each teacher gave a detailed account of the popular culture play, and in their teaching, they were responsive to the children's play choices (DET, 2016; DEEWR, 2009). This responsiveness encouraged the children to discover "possibilities of self through their adoption of different personas and roles" in their play (Popper, 2013, p. 77) as Peggy and Henrietta stated in the following excerpts from their individual interviews.

Data extract 23: Semi-structured interviews

Peggy (teacher): Yeah, [the children do] a lot of negotiating and swapping characters, and using things, like today with the Star Wars, they had pipes and all sorts of things. Spiderman, who else have we had? I'm not up with them all. A lot of the ones from characters on the television.

Henrietta (teacher): Dragons have been a big one, and that has come from movie franchises like the, How to Train your Dragon, and also just from an interest in dragons, and that has been shown through their conversations. One little boy has brought in things from the movies, figurines and things like that, whereas other children have just had conversations about the mystical creatures and their powers and things like that, which is nice. Lots of Frozen™, still. Frozen™ is a big one.

Like Peggy and Henrietta, the other two teachers supported the children's right to choose their own play motifs and often these came from popular culture. Examples of children's play choices included superhero play that was discussed in relation to behaviour management strategies (Holland, 2003; Popper, 2013). Teachers were proactive to establish

guidelines around safety of self, and others, by setting ground rules, especially in relation to the physical aspect of superhero play (Popper, 2013). This practice was evidenced by Rosie and Louise in these excerpts from their individual interviews.

Data extract 24: Semi-structured interviews

Louise (teacher): I don't discourage superhero play, we just set limits with them, so we say, I'm happy for you to continue your game, however, how are we going to make sure that everyone's safe?

Rosie (teacher): They frequently pick up spades and shovels and sort of a fighting-style game, but I allow them a lot of freedom with it, provided they're not hitting each other with the shovels. So, they use their imagination to pretend that the shovels are weapons.

Later in her interview Louise discusses her teaching practices that support the children's popular culture play in the preschool setting. She is aware that her role is focused on understanding and she uses questioning to allow the children to express their ideas.

Louise (teacher): It's how you step in and how you question them, rather than telling them, with superhero play with the swords, how else can you use them so that everyone's safe, rather than saying don't use them, or you need to point them down. How else are you going to use them? What else are you going to do? And that, automatically, I find, then you don't have to tell them, because it'll change their, well, okay, let's do this, so you say, so that they would keep playing this and that everyone is happy.

Louise's example suggests that teaching practice focused on how to give children agency over their play and model safety for all children. Peggy's initial interview extract below shows how children in her group use superheroes in their play.

Data extract 25: Semi-structured interview

- Peggy (teacher): Spiderman, who else have we had? I'm not up with them all. A lot of the ones from characters on the television.
- Sarah (researcher): Television, oh, okay, yeah. And you said they negotiate and swap roles, what else do they do? Is it physical, or more talking?
- Peggy (teacher): With the superheroes stuff it's probably a lot of running, it's very physical. They swap roles.
- Sarah (researcher): So, one time, one will be ...
- Peggy (teacher): Yeah, and they might run past and he's Spiderman, and then the next, they'll go around the yard and come back, and there's been a bit of argy-bargy going on, and now, another one's Spiderman.

Here Peggy could explain details of how the children moved in and out of role in their play, including the physical aspect of superhero play. In the playworlds, popular culture acted as a pivot for the teachers as it lifted them out of reality and into another unknown world of the child's domain. Peggy expressed this in her reflection below.

Data extract 26: Teacher reflection

- Peggy (teacher): It's not about what we played as children and reproducing that as "the only right way to play" but remembering these children live in a vastly different world. We cannot change their lives and what they do outside Kinder so go with them and embrace their play. Made me feel more comfortable with superhero play – can see where if channelled can develop children's negotiation and cooperative play skills. All [teacher's emphasis] children had knowledge of superheroes.

Peggy could see that her own play experience was different to that of the children she works with in the preschool. Children's play links to what they experience outside the educational area and all children had information regarding superheroes. This is an example of the children's popular culture *funds of knowledge* (Hedges, 2012; Wohlwend, 2018) being used to position the children in the role as experts (Bolton, 1985; Daniels & Downes, 2015;

Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). In Lindqvist's (1995) early research in playworlds she argues that the adults attitude towards the chosen literature and children's culture in general influenced their engagement in the drama art form. Children's culture is expressed in their play that includes popular culture motifs and the preschool teacher's attitude can determine how they respond to certain play. In the group interview Peggy mentioned this aspect of how teachers choose, or discard children play motifs. In the statement below Peggy names the common discourse that proposes early childhood teachers follow children's interests and yet this *following* has a filter attached that is never clear.

Data extract 27: Group interview

Peggy (teacher): And we're saying, we're going with the children's interests, but are we really, because it's sometimes, we're going with the children's interests that we, because of who we are, that we agree with, not actually what is the children's interests, because the children's interests might be Octonauts but I don't really like them, don't know anything about them, I think it's rubbish, therefore, I'm not really going with the child's interest, am I?

I want you [children]to be able to use your imagination without having to fall back on what you've seen on the television. Now, whether that's right or wrong, I don't know, but I'd much rather have them in the sandpit cooking, or building cubby houses over on the hill, than being Superman and Spiderman, and all that.

This example speaks of tensions, as while the teachers in this study did not dismiss popular culture play, Peggy implies that teachers can be cultural gatekeepers of which particular play motifs are valued and supported. This links back to the literature chapter where the high and low culture divide is applied to education (Jenkins, 2007) and as popular culture is deemed as low culture and its inclusion can be contentious. A common practice in early childhood education is to plan for learning using children's play interests and it is stated in policy frameworks. For example, in the EYLF (DEEWR, 2009) under the practice of *Responsiveness to children* states that "Educators are responsive to all children's strengths,

abilities and interests” and use this information to extend children’s learning (pp. 14-15). In the VEYLDF (DET, 2016) in the *Integrated Teaching and Learning Approaches* section it states that teachers “build on children’s skills and interests, using real life situations that may introduce something totally new to make learning engaging and relevant” (p. 14). However, as Peggy stated, there can be a hierarchy of value, and as when the teacher picks up on areas children connect to, these may contradict what the teacher deems appropriate or productive for imaginative play. For example, why is cooking in the sandpit and building cubbies seen as more imaginative than popular culture play? In both examples the children would use what they have seen and heard in their culture and combine them, like ingredients, to build their imagination in play.

As discussed in the theory chapter, the imagination connects to our reality and emotions as our memories link back to images, sounds and experiences we have gathered in life (Vygotsky, 1930/2004) and we use different modes of expression to translate our ideas (Bruner, 1996). If a child watches a television program and follows the narrative, which includes tension and conflict, they could experience an emotional connection of excitement or being scared, which in turn may be why the child chooses to include this in their play. This is why the popular culture play motifs became the entry point to plan the playworlds which created a “link between play and culture” (Lindqvist, 1996). These became the *openings* that Greene (1995) argues as entry points to breakthrough and work with the imagination. Children in these playworlds immediately new the context of the openings presented to them, as the characters and setting were known and current to their own imaginings and they shared their funds of knowledge with us (Hedges, 2012; Wohlwend, 2018). For example, in the initial interview with Rosie it was expressed a some of the characters from the animated television program the *Octonauts*TM had regularly appeared in the children’s play, so this became a starting point to plan the playworlds with this group of children.

Data extract 28: Semi-structured interview

Sarah (researcher):	So, do you know who’s in the Octonauts?
Rosie (teacher):	Oh, Captain Barnacles, and I can’t remember the name of the other character, but Dashi or something, but Captain Barnacle’s mentioned quite often.

This popular culture knowledge sharing supported the playworld narrative and connected the content to the children's *funds of knowledge*. In Rosie's first playworld, we introduced the Octonauts™ motif by starting with; "*We are going to do a story about the Octonauts. What do you know about the Octonauts?*" This opening provided the children an entry point into the story (Bundy, Piazzoli, & Dunn, 2015; Dunn & Stinson, 2012; O'Toole & Dunn, 2002). The children willingly shared information on what they knew about the *Octonauts*. The children called out ideas and the teacher and I learnt more nuanced details to include in the narrative. This knowledge meant there was instant dialogue between the children, and teachers because the children knew the content of the story pretext from the start, their contributions were heard and used which set a precedent for their involvement.

The director also made use of the children-in-role and teacher-in-role, as discussed in the literature review chapter, to support the playworld. As the researcher I planned these roles with the teacher who had identified the children's play interest before the playworld to make sure these positions supported the story (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). This is an *outside the play* curatorial role (Davis, 2015) that developed and supported the co-creating element of the playworld experience. The purpose of children-in-role was to illuminate their expertise in the narrative content (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; Wagner, 1976). This meant when the teachers asked questions it elicited the children's ideas, using these to weave into the playworld narrative. The children's status was paramount as the narrative needed their ideas to proceed and their ideas formed the minor units that built the narrative (Ewing, Simons, Hertzberg, & Campbell, 2016). In contrast, unlike the children, the teacher-in-role did not offer expertise in the popular culture motif; their role was developed to need assistance in the plight which was the focus of the story. On its own the teacher-in-role could not move the narrative forward – it needed the children-in-role to contribute their ideas, in the role as experts, to proceed. The teacher needed to make sure the children were "enticed into the dialogue by the characters the adults dramatised" (Lindqvist, 1996, p. 10). Using the popular culture motifs from children's play meant that from the beginning the children contributed as they knew the names and characteristics of the characters and details of the setting.

In the playworld example below the children and teachers were in roles as various characters from the television show the Octonauts™. The show takes place in an undersea world in a submarine base named the Octopod. The Octonauts are a team of various animals-based characters that explore and take on adventures. Although the technology in this cartoon

is fictional, the animals and their encounters are based on real marine creatures in their natural habitats. In this specific playworld a letter from a known captain characters stated that the Octopod's main system was down as the computer was missing. *Information Technology Officer Dashi the Dog* who fixes these issues, was missing too. We needed to find Dashi so he could fix the Octopod. This was our story goal and now we had a joint activity to embark on. The children and teachers chose their individual Octonaut character, and the children assisted the teachers in this process sharing their expertise. We all added to the narrative as we prepared to leave the underwater home in the *Octopod* submarine to solve the dilemma in the playworld and this is an extract.

Data extract 29: Playworld (videoed)

- Sarah (researcher): First we must put our hats on - why do we need hats on?
- Sam (child): So we can think.
- Billie (child): So we don't get lost.
- Sarah (researcher): This is our thinking and don't get lost hat.
- Harper (child): Don't sink.
- Sarah (researcher): Don't sink because... are we on land or under the ocean?
- Children: The ocean.
- Sarah (researcher): Because we live under the water, because we are Octonauts?
- Ash (child): And you need a helmet 'cos it don't get water in there.
(Child gestures to their head)
- Wren (child): And a jetpack.
- Sarah (researcher): I've forgotten about the jetpack, so we put our helmets on first to make us think and breath under water, and then we need our jetpacks, so put your jetpacks on. (Adults and children all gesture putting on jetpacks). Tighten it up.
- Marley (child): You know if we're inside the Octopods that means we don't need our helmets on. And to get the helmet on we go like this (Child gestures a finger to press button near the throat to open it).

In the example above the children used their knowledge of the terms from the Octonauts™ television show to build the details of the uniforms we all needed to be equipped with. Marley explained how we, as the *Octonaut*™ characters, needed to use helmets before

we left the Octopod on our adventure. These helmets were imagined, and everyone pretended to use them using the specific directions from Marley. The child's input was heard and then used to develop the narrative and this demonstrated how the children's expertise, whether it accurately matched the popular-culture television show or not, gave them a higher status (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; Wagner, 1976). For example, when Marley added the detail about how to use the Octonaut helmet, this information was taken by the teacher and incorporated as part of the imagined world. Whenever the helmet was required in the narrative the group was reminded of this gesture and included the action and sound into the roles. This is an illustration of the teacher being cognisant of the need to include the children's expertise in the popular-culture motif to co-construct the narrative. (Examples of the children's drawing representing the playworlds popular-culture motifs are presented in Appendix I).

These inclusions can be small or large instances, as this is how dialogue is developed; the people contribute to build a conversation that did not exist before as the collection of ideas had not been collated in this way before. This created knowledge sharing that was reliant on the adult-child verbal and physical interactions where we could reflect and act together as a group (Hakkarainen, 2010). The teachers keep in mind the aims, of the children-in-role as experts and teacher-in-role as someone who needs help, before and during the playworld. I will now discuss how the teachers articulated the story goal as another tool to co-create the playworlds with children.

6.2: Articulating the story goal towards through-going action

An effective pre-text presents a clear purpose for the narrative to proceed (O'Neill, 1995). This was verbally expressed to the children as a problem that needed action to attend to the dilemma. This process encouraged the children and teacher to activate their imagination by providing "the arc from which it is possible to begin to infer the full circle of the action" (O'Neill, 1995, p. 22). In theatre, as discussed in the *imagination and aesthetic education* section in the theory chapter, Stanislavski (1948) argues, the super-objective makes sure everyone is working towards the same direction and the through-going action is always supporting this goal. These concepts were seen in the playworlds as the teachers made sure that individuals did not dominate the narrative flow as the story would have become fragmented and the common goal lost (Hakkarainen, 2010). The pre-text gave a focus for the through-going action in the process relying on the children and teacher's input

to co-create the narrative. The popular culture motifs that we developed into a pre-text acted as a stimulus for the plot (O'Neill, 1995). In the following example, five children contributed their ideas to co-create the pre-text that stimulated this Octonauts™ playworld beginning (Bundy et al., 2015; Dunn & Stinson, 2012; O'Neill, 1995; O'Toole & Dunn, 2002).

Data extract 30: Playworld (videoed)

- Sarah (researcher): I have a message, Captain Barnacle has gone off on a mission and we are here in the Octopod, and someone has taken the computer, so the Octopod is not running. We can't go forward, we can't go backward, we can't go sideways. Someone has taken our computer. Octonauts the only clue I have found is. (*I place a key in the middle of the circle*).
- Finn (child): A key.
- Sarah (researcher): What do we think the key opens?
- Finn (child): Open a door.
- Sarah (researcher): It could open a door.
- Andie (child): A secret door.
- River (child): A saw door.
- Sarah (researcher): A saw door - what sort of door is that?
- River (child): A treasure door.
- Sidney (child): And then you can open a brick.
- Sarah (researcher): A brick, a brick in a wall?
- Memphis (child): A brick, maybe a, maybe a big museum door.

The above example sees the children-in-role contributing to the way forward in the narrative to solve the problem. The children's engagement with the initial problem was a vital part of the collaboration and the teachers built the narrative in partnership with the children (Bredikyte, 2010). When this beginning was articulated we all knew the purpose of the playworld and it activated a collaborative method of working (Holzman, 2010). As the playworlds progressed the teachers and children dramatised the action in multiple ways. This created a dynamic environment where the teachers and children enacted the story together. This action was dominated by two of Lindqvist's (2003a) concepts expressed as *travelling* and *adventures* that will now be discussed.

Travelling aligned to the movement that occurred in the playworld. This movement had two useful components: the physical action as we shifted from one space to another in the preschool, and the narrative action as we moved the story forward. These physical and narrative movements forward were not automatic as the teacher needed to factor them into the playworld narrative. For example, in Louise's 3rd playworld centred on the film Frozen™, the per-text had the children-in-role as detectives to find the superheroes who had been frozen by Queen Elsa. The children-in-role as detectives were asked by their teacher where the frozen superheroes could be. In the example below the teacher built the next stage of what to do both physically and narratively, using the children's ideas to build the travelling component into the playworld narrative.

Data extract 31: Playworld (videoed)

- Sarah (researcher): We've to go to where the frozen superheroes are. Where would they be? (to children)
- Darcey (child): On the ice.
- Louise (teacher): On the ice, we're got to go to the Iceland, yes?
- Scout (child): I think they will be on...an ice city.
- Louise (teacher): Yes, they will be on an ice city.

Louise listened to the children's suggestions and then modified the narrative to include the detectives' (children's) idea of the *Ice City* as the impetus to our group travelling to this landscape. As this discussion developed further Scout then suggested that we needed to get onboard a *Superhero Rescue Train* to travel to the *Ice City*. This idea was taken up by the teacher and used as a vehicle to physically and narratively move. The teachers used the prop of the long piece of rope to be the *Superhero Rescue Train*. This prop meant we could all be together on a train, with a train-like activity that moved us from inside the preschool to the *Ice City* in the outside area (where the children had stated the ice city would be). When the teachers listened it gave them opportunities to respond imaginatively to the children's ideas (Greene, 1995). To guide the children onto the imagined *Superhero Rescue Train* Louise held one end of the long piece of rope that stretched out to one end of the room and then I held the other end. Louise then called the children's names, one by one, they climbed on board attaching themselves to the rope by holding on with one hand. As the children gathered on the long rope with us all attached, this signified the superhero train's carriages. There was a lot of talking between the teacher and children, and children and children about

the train and Ice City as the train prepared to leave the imaginary station. Louise encouraged the children to add train sounds as we moved the train to the outside setting. The train was energetic and yet contained, children were laughing and talking as the moved towards the outside area and the next part of this narrative.

The moments of travelling seemed like a small part of the playworld at the time and yet they became an important juncture that bought us all together both physically and narratively. Various forms of traveling were used in all 12 playworlds at some stage of the narrative. These forms of transport incorporated a blend of movement and voice and created a joint emotional charge in the story. Group traveling was more than getting somewhere, it was a crystallising tool where the whole group of children and teachers came together, and collaboration arose. The travelling vehicles were not planned in advance, rather the narrative supplied a need and the children were quick to suggest transport that moulded to the story.

The following illustrations begin with a child's drawing of the *Superhero Rescue Train* from the aforementioned playworld and include other drawings of travelling from all settings. From two other settings the examples link to how a large piece of fabric was transformed into a vessel we all sat on. In these images the cloth is represented as either a boat the pirates used to cross the water, or an octopod the Octonauts used to travel through the water. In the fourth example a solo travelling device is given and was included to ride individual horses (in this case no prop was used) to travel from A to B. Individual travelling devises allow the children to travel together, but in their own way, and props can be used or can just be imagined. In the travelling the teacher makes clear the procedure and route to ensure safety. All forms of transport were developed from the children's ideas to cultivate action in the narrative and organise the group to work together. These points in the collaboration were a physical coming together, travelling somewhere that had a purpose and yet the destination was unknown. For example, how we got on or in the transport, and the travelling process included constant narration and discussion between the teachers and children. The illustrations to follow include the children's verbatim descriptions of their drawings. These drawings were not used in the analysis, as already discussed in the methodology chapter, but I have included them in this findings chapters as I believe they offer a visual representation of the playworlds process.

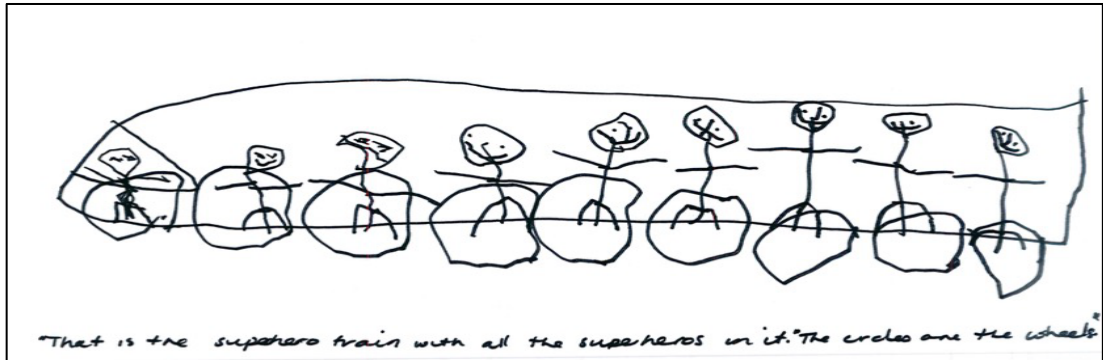


Figure 4: Travelling example, "That is the superhero train with all the superheroes in it. The circles are the wheels."



Figure 5: Travelling example, "All the people in the boat and the animals in the water."

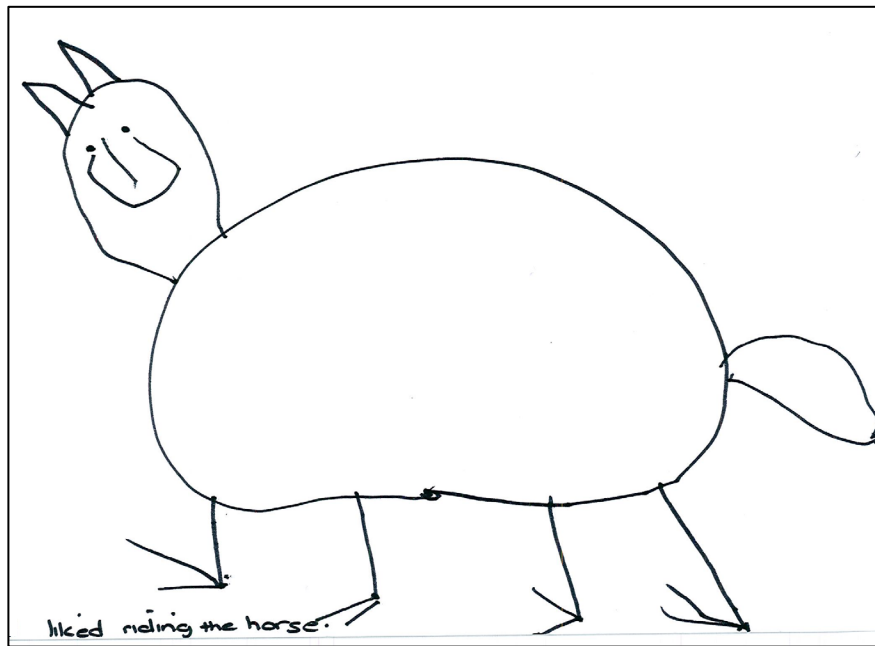


Figure 6: Travelling example, "I liked riding the horse."

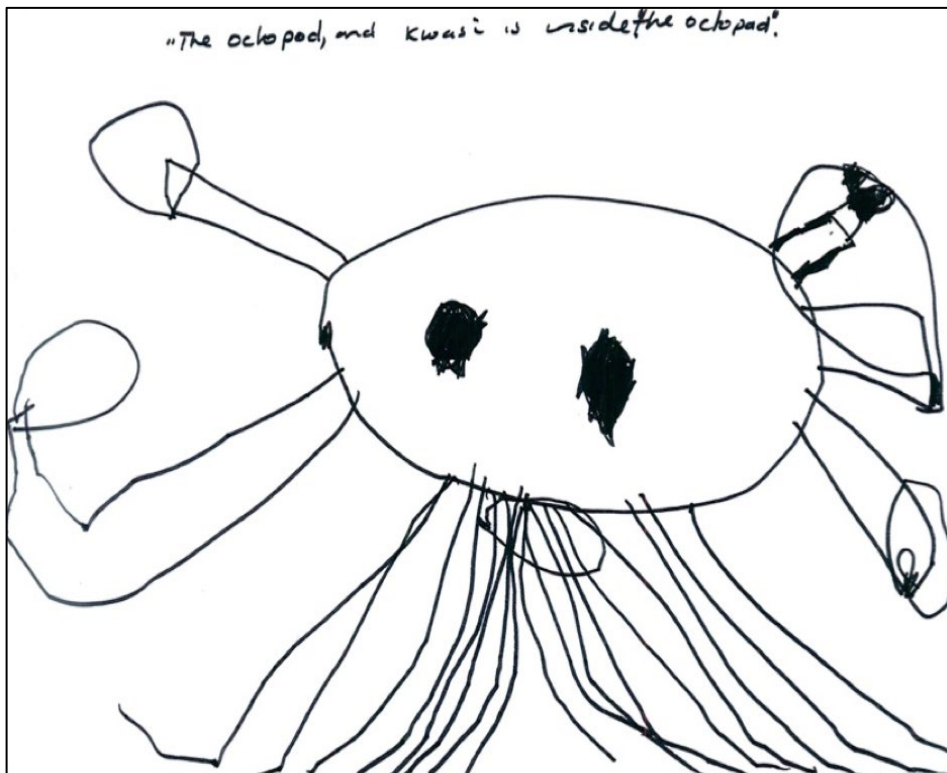


Figure 7: Travelling example, "The Octopod and Kwasi is inside the Octopod."

As the teachers structured the action, they were modelling collaborative skills as they listened and responded to the cacophony of ideas coming from the children. On all the imagined travelling examples of the *Superhero Rescue Train* or *Pirate Boat* or *Octopod* or *Horse* the teachers encouraged the children to make sounds and talk to each other and this became a physically and verbally active component. The children and teachers' sound and physical expressions built the dramatic context as they co-created the doing together (Lindqvist, 1996, 2001, 2003). This act of doing together occurred throughout to embody the imagined narrative and the teacher's role supported this expression in the playworld (Bundy et al., 2015).

Lindqvist's (2003a) concepts expressed as *adventures* were also threaded through the narrative. These became the *minor-objectives* which occurred throughout the playworlds and they feed the narratives *super objective* (Stanislavski, 1948). In the playworlds the *adventure* elements were acts of tension initiated by the teacher and/or children and then shaped by the whole group (Lindqvist, 1996). Tension is core to drama as it gives us connection and a reason to stay with a story and find out how the problem at hand can be reconciled. O'Neill (1995) argues that a key strategy of teacher-in-role is to build the tension in the drama. The tension guides the narrative forward by creating "collisions or dangers" in the story (Hakkarainen & Brèdikytè, 2014, p. 248). In the example below Peggy used her role as *Spiderwoman* and the children's role as *detectives* to co-create the tension using speech and gesture to add to the adventure.

Data extract 32: Playworld (videoed)

- Sarah (researcher): Peggy's the Spiderwoman and we're going to help her because something is wrong and she's going to tell us what's wrong. Spiderwoman, Spiderwoman tells us what's wrong.
- Peggy (teacher): Oh, I'm in big trouble, big, big, trouble. I've got no powers. Something's happened to me. My fingers, they just (The teacher is wriggling her fingers) I don't know they're just all flat and wonky and they don't do anything, they don't do anything.
- Sarah (researcher): (To children) What usually happens to Spiderwoman's fingers, show me. (Two children demonstrate the Spiderman hand gestures by putting their index and little fingers out to

make the web-making gesture. They stand up and show Spiderwoman and physically put her finger in the right place to shoot webs, but the fingers keep wobbling).

Peggy (teacher): I can't (She starts to pretend cry).

Jamie (child): Spiderwoman, look see (A different child gets up and demonstrates with his hands) You put two ones with the fingers, and then you go put two things out like this. (He puts out his index and little fingers to make the gesture. Still the teacher could not find her web making finger).

In this example, the teacher made sure the children's expertise in the action was used and this detail created tension in the narrative. The teacher and children discussed how Spiderwoman had lost her powers and we needed to make a potion to help her, leading to a new point in the narrative. Here we collaborated and developed the potion ingredients, and accompanying spell, that relied on the slow unfolding of ideas from the children and teachers. The following child's drawing includes the teacher Peggy in her performed role as a superhero. The overlaid closely drawn back-and-forth frenetic quality in the drawing represents Spiderwoman's powers that the child restored. Other examples of the children's drawing representing the playworld adventures are presented in Appendix I.



Figure 8: Adventures example, "Peggy pushing all her power into all the people."

The mysteriousness aspect of the adventures kept the narrative interesting, as no one knew what was ahead (Greene, 1995; Hakkarainen, 2010). The teachers kept the pre-text the focus and made sure the improvised *minor-objectives* fed the main plot with moments of tension. To highlight this process I refer back to the theory chapter showing Stanislavski's (1948) image of the super-objective and Vygotsky's (1925/1971c) melodic curve which are moulded to the dramatic form. The travelling and adventures created the *melodic curve* in the action, which is developed with the children's ideas as the teacher moulds the dramatic form. For example, the children's expertise of transport, some associated to the popular culture motif, created the various types of vessels that we travelled in. These were added to the *melodic curve* as the director incorporated them into the narrative to head towards the super-objective. In this way teaching with drama methods intentionally include all the children in the same experience, this is a group experience (O'Neill, 1995). Part of the teacher's role was to develop the dramatic form that was meaningful for the participants (Lindqvist, 1996). This meaning linked to the popular culture pre-text and enabling spontaneous acts of tension, that despite the term, do not just happen. The teacher deliberately made time to develop tension, and/or picked up on the children's contributions and these became the plot threads that were woven into the narrative O'Neill (1995).

The playworld narratives had something unforeseen happen as an instrument for problem finding and these acts of tension give rise to the unexpected (Bruner, 2002; Hakkarainen, 2010). I want to make it clear that the tension was age- and group-appropriate and talked through with the children rather than imposed. The tension contributed to an interesting and engaging narrative as it was "the force which drives the drama" (Bundy et al., 2015, p. 163). Whether reading a book or watching a film our engagement comes from not knowing what is ahead, but wanting to find out. This urge to find out what will happen next was an important part of pulling us all into the narrative formation (Bruner, 2002). As the children, teacher and I had solved the central dilemma it was time to conclude the playworld. Here the teachers were *outside the play* using a retrospective feature to bring the children from imaginary world of the playworld to the current world of the preschool and gave a voice to all participants to contribute to the story coda.

6.3: Conclusion

The second findings chapter of this thesis has identified the teacher as *performing director* and included two sub-themes: *Embedding children's popular culture play motifs*

and *articulating the story goal* towards *through-going action*, which demonstrate the complexity of this performed role. The following final findings chapter presents the inversed teacher role that is *Finding and analysis three – Performing experienter*.

Chapter 7: Finding and analysis three – Performing experiencer

This final findings and analysis chapter is focused on the teacher in a character role with the children. This positions the teacher as a player with the children in the imaginary field (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010). This last finding continues to address the research questions, with particular emphasis on the first question:

- 1) How do teachers perform roles in popular culture informed playworlds co-created with children?
- 2) How does an exploration of performed roles assist in understanding the teacher in children's play?

The experiencer in this chapter used evidence from the teachers' examples of their practice expressed in the semi-structured interviews, group interview, reflections and also their enactment during the playworlds method. As outlined in the *methods* section of methodology, in the playworlds the teacher participants became a "fellow actor" with the children (Ferholt & Lecusay, 2009, p. 61). Play shares many aspects with drama and becoming another character in the form of a role is a dramatic device that works across both fields. In this thesis, I argue that the *director* sets the environment for the *experiencer* to embody a role playing *as if* they are someone else (O'Toole & Dunn, 2002; Sawyer, 1997; Stanislavski, 1948; Toye & Prendville, 2000). As I have stated earlier, teachers in this study were not actors, nonetheless this link between play, drama and acting has been helpful to understand the process of being inside the imaginative field with children. Stanislavski (1948, 2008) argues when actors are on the stage, they do not act a role that is separate from themselves, they are self and other at the same time as they experience the role from within and then embody their inner experience in a physical form. This is the same for children in play as they simultaneously pull together "playing I" and 'real I" (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010, p. 35). In play, children become both the director and the player (Sutton-Smith, 1979) and for this study, the teachers were asked to mirror this way of engaging that required them to be flexible in the role and narrative development (Hakkarainen, 2010).

Relating to the teacher's performed role as Experiencer, Stanislavski's (1948) acting method was used in the analysis. The experiencer aligned with the state that relates to how "organic acting is experiencing" the role on the stage (Gillett, 2012, p. 3). Experiencing a role became the *sensitising concept* that became apparent in the analysis (Stanislavski, 1948)

and this was deliberated and performed in different ways in relation to the imagined world (Kravtsova, 2010). I would like to emphasise that playworlds, like process drama, are not performances and therefore they are not concerned with how they appear from the outside (O'Neill, 1995). All the players, both adults and children stepped in and out of the dual roles of being self and being other. They are in a *situational* position in the imaginary situation (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010) in the playworld, responding to the unfolding narrative as a character. In this role they do not only imagine themselves as someone else, but they imagine objects as something else. In the following example, the teacher Louise gave an account of taking an object and transforming the literal meaning into an imagined one with the children in their socio-dramatic play (Vygotsky, 1976).

Data extract 33: Semi-structured interview

Louise (teacher): I got a stick and pretended the stick was suddenly my fishing rod, and so then we were pretending to go fishing with that, so I just went along with that. “Who’s coming fishing, today?” They’ve extended it to pretending to have boats and pretending to create campfires, cook the fish on it, and all sorts of things.

Louise’s example of how she changed the stick into a fishing rod is parallel to how the children exercise this object transformation in their play. Children are not restricted by their environment as they are apt at object and place transformation to develop the play landscape as needed (Vygotsky, 1976). Louise also explained how she transformed herself into another species, or object, to pretend with the children so she was able to flexibly follow the children’s ideas in play.

Data extract 34: Semi-structured interview

Louise (teacher): I’d go along with it, is I’d pretend to be an animal, or I’d pretend to go on a rocket trip with them, whatever’s happening.

The four teachers talked about how they often used props and characters as a common part of their practice. They were able to mimic the children’s ability “to fluidly improvise dialogue and story action in ways that enriched and sustained play themes” (Wohlwend,

2016, p. 62). I now look at how teachers brought this capacity to the playworlds, and to do this I have divided the experiencer into two sub-themes, *embodying as if* and *improvising dialogue*.

7.1: Embodying as if

In this study the teacher as the experiencer embodied a role in the form of a popular culture character that enabled the concept of *as if* to come into fruition as she became someone else (Stanislavski, 1948) to dramatise the action (Lindqvist, 1996). As already stated, the experiencer role aligned to *living the part* on the stage where this acting encompasses a more natural way of interacting with others and connecting to the dramatic content at hand, Stanislavski (1948) used this in relation to the actor's character role and theatre audience. This was slightly different in the playworlds, because as I highlighted earlier these are not performances for an audience. The experiencer embodied a role in the form of a character from the popular-culture motif (as outlined earlier in Table 5) using *as if* to embody the action (Davis, 2015) that developed the unfolding narrative. In the narrative the *as if* role was "not so much a feeling, of "I" as a feeling of "we"" (Vygotsky, 1932, p. 6). Vygotsky refers to 'we' as the actor and the audience, while in this research the 'we' became the teacher, children and I within the dramatised narrative. O'Neill (1991) argues that teachers using drama at any age level must operate within the process. The teachers use of role from within the dramatic context is drawing on the essential content from the art form. Therefore, using a dramatic pedagogy demands teaching that is engaged in an artistic process (O'Neill, 1991).

An example of the embodied *as if* can be seen in Henrietta's first playworld described below, which centred on the Disney film Frozen™. The teacher's role was the Queen Elsa, I was her sister Anna, and the children were Detectives. The pre-text of the playworld was centred on how Queen Elsa needed help as she had lost her pet dragon, and the children and I decided to travel to the castle to help her. Before the teacher took on the role of Elsa, she began the playworld as a detective with the children and I, and we all travelled in-role to the castle together. This role hopping is a constant feature of children's play and the teacher was asked to do this as well, if it was needed for the narrative. In the playworld *traveling* was used as we needed to cross a bridge, and then cut through the long grass to make our way to Elsa's castle. In the following example, Henrietta with the children as detectives embodied actions to dramatise the imagined world. Henrietta and I laid out the prop of the long piece

of rope to represent the bridge. While the children were sitting to one side watching, they were not passive. As Henrietta and I extended the long rope across the room the children guided us by calling out where it should go and what it should look like. As this was happening, we asked the children what would be under the bridge and their imaginings co-created the physical environment adding to our shared imaginations. This is what children do in play as the “children’s creative processes are particularly clearly manifest in the fact that auxiliary operations” are as important and interesting as the play itself (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 73). The example below is from the bridge crossing with the children.

Data extract 35: Playworld (videoed)

Henrietta (teacher): Oh, this bridge is a bit small for my big feet, wow, wow, wow.

Henrietta laughed with children as she wobbled her body over the bridge (the prop rope) pretending that the bridge was too small for her and she was having difficulty crossing. Together the children and teacher conversed on the bridge to assist each other’s crossing. When everyone had crossed the bridge, we needed to travel through long grass to the castle. Henrietta used gesture to embody using a knife to cut through the long grass and we all followed her actions.

Henrietta (teacher): Oh you guys work hard.

In the example above Henrietta in her embodied role guided and encouraged the children to move over the bridge and through the narrative. This example demonstrates how the teacher-in-role unites the group in the collaborative experience (Taylor & Warner, 2006). Following this dramatisation, the narrative required Henrietta to become Queen Elsa and to assist with the role transition, I asked the children what they thought Elsa would be doing in her castle. In this discussion, the children reminded me that Elsa lived in an “ice castle”, one child suggested that she would be “reading a book”, and another child added that she would “sit on [her] throne” to read it. Here the children responded to the loose structure of the narrative and their ideas padded the narrative structure. With this information Henrietta embodied the children’s suggestions as they told her to sit up high on a table to signify the

throne and she pretended to read a book. The children's expressed ideas are used which allows them to see themselves "as people able to teach as well to learn" (O'Neill, 1989, p. 529). This teacher was flexible as she operated in the imagined world and used gestures and actions to embody her role. This teacher, just like an actor, created the "infinite sensations, feelings, or emotions" (Vygotsky, 1932, p. 7) with children in the playworlds. O'Neill (1985) argue that "like the actors in a play, participants in drama constitute the dramatic world and reveal it through their actions and statements" (p. 161). In this way the teacher supported the collaboration within the imagined story that provided "opportunities for emotional engagement" (Davis, 2015, p. 65). This is an example of being *inside the imaginary field* as the teacher-in-role supported the collaboratively generated narrative.

Below the teachers written reflection revealed their thoughts about their own imagination during the playworlds. In the first reflection Peggy is writing about a playworld conclusion where we all celebrated in the narrative as the children-in-role character had helped Peggy in her teacher-in-role character as Spiderwoman. Peggy as Spiderwoman suggested that we all have tea and scones to mark the triumph. In her reflection she disclosed what was occurring for her internally.

Data extract 36: Teacher reflection

Peggy (teacher): Great to let the imagination go and let self-go. Does not matter what it looks like.
Today involved memories of my late mother as we "ate our scones" for tea.

As Peggy talks about her late mother, it shows how emotions are connected to our past experiences and these visit us in present imaginary processes. These memories are not planned but spontaneously revisit us at times that can seem unconnected. This demonstrates how our imagination in current experiences are influenced and assembled by the past. Therefore a group activity has the potential to bring to the surface multiple past experiences to inform the present reality (Vygotsky, 1930/2004) (Vygotsky, 1930).

Another example is shown below as Louise's written account of how she became engaged in the teacher-in-role during the playworlds sessions.

Data extract 37: Teacher reflection

Louise (teacher): I felt engrossed/free as there were points where I just became so engaged with taking on the role of the pirate that I became really engaged in the play and begun to forget all that was going on around us. I felt a real sense of belonging and purpose in the children's play. A sense of being connected. I felt a sense of achievement as towards the end as children all gathered and celebrated our contributions as a group. Also I felt fun and fulfillment throughout the experience as a whole.

As Louise wrote about her teacher-in-role she highlights how she felt connected and this demonstrates her experience of *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Louise blocked out what was happening on the periphery while engaged in the imaginary process with the children, her focus and attention was on the current activity. These examples of emotional engagement in the playworlds from Peggy and Louise examples once again link to the concept of *perezhivanie*. *Perezhivanie*, is discussed in the theory chapter and translates as “lived through” (Grainger Clemson, 2015, p. 40); it relates to being in, and moving through, at the same time. Brèdikytė (2011) argues that the emotional state of *perezhivanie*, is dependent on “the evolving situation, which should result in emotional sensitivity to the situation and the people involved” (pp. 152-153). An example of the teacher being sensitive in the playworld was apparent in Louise's written reflection.

Data extract 38: Teacher reflection

Louise (teacher) I have become more confident in being able to pre-empt things and redirect children's ideas placing strategies in place before they occur to ensure it doesn't interfere with the structure of the story. For example, today there were a few children who were afraid of participating as we had to enter the ice land, therefore rather than giving them an option to sit and watch I was quick to think on my feet and decided that we would all make the leap together, distracting them to participate with support.

In the previous example, Louise was in the playworld as the experiencer and was able to focus on the needs of the children. The *as if* involved *perezhivanie* because to take on a role there needed to be a link to the person's emotions (Carnicke, 2009). These examples of teachers in the playworlds demonstrate the teacher concurrently situated in the character role and operating as themselves (Grainger Clemson, 2015). The experiencer, like the actor who *lives the part on the stage*, is connected to their emotions and merged this with their character role (Mitchell, 2015). Stanislavski (1948) required actors to connect to their *emotion memory* and the actor does not "act" outside themselves; they connect to a similar emotion in themselves, and therefore the broader their emotional memory the more they have to draw on. This way of engaging was what Schechner (1985) refers to as *restored behaviour* as when a person is behaving as someone else, they are "as if I am 'beside myself,' or 'not myself,'" (p. 36). The experiencer drew upon this in the playworlds and was connected to the emotional lived experience occurring (Vygotsky, 1934/1994). The experiencer makes constant links between the imagined world and the real world to build the joint dramatic activity (O'Neill, 1985). This unity was how the teachers as experiencer incorporated self and *as if* to embody their role in the collaborative playworlds.

Drama and playworlds require collaboration as they are social pursuits. An example of the experiencer developing the collaborative process is in Peggy's first playworld session. The playworld was centred on the popular culture motif of Spiderman™ and Spiderwoman. Peggy took on the role of Spiderwoman and the children were the Ministers of Superheros as previously outlined in the methodology chapter. The pre-text of the playworld meant the Ministers were called to help Spiderwoman retain her lost powers. Towards the end of the playworld the Ministers had made a potion for Spiderwoman and if she drank this it would return her powers. Spiderwoman sat on the floor and the children and I surrounded her, sitting in a circle. One child, in role as a Minister of Superheroes, was asked to dispense the potion, and slowly they dabbed the imagined liquid on each of Spiderwoman's fingertips. There was a pause – we were all quiet. This was not a pause where the narrative was sinking, as outlined in finding and analysis one, instead this type of pause was tension; we were all hanging off this moment waiting to see what happened next. I refer to O'Neill (1985) from the theory chapter as this is an example of the shared meaning negotiated by the participants of drama. Anyone could have interrupted this moment, but we waited. Then Spiderwoman rolled over to one side, and slowly and silently uncurled her body up to a standing position. She stood upright and quickly shot her hands up in the air. She flicked out her fingers into

the trademark Spiderman/woman hand gesture that the children had previously shown her. This consists of curling the middle and ring fingers into the hand palm and the thumb presses on them to hold them down. This leaves the remaining small and index fingers free to point out to cast the web, as shown in the illustration on the right.

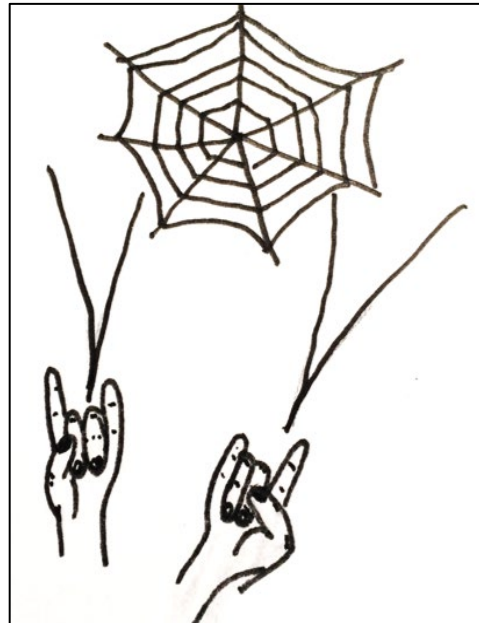


Figure 9: Spiderwoman's hand gesture, Illustrator Sunny Youngsmith

At this point in the playworlds Peggy in-role as Spiderwoman, standing still in her superhero pose then made a loud “swoosh” sound. She smiled at the children and took a bow and stated, “Thank you, you have filled my bucket. All you people of the ministry thank you, and now I'm going to promote you all. You can all be Captains”. The silence was broken, and all children started to cheer and talked to each other, and the teachers, about what their captain names would be (e.g., *I'm a Spider Captain*). This is an example of the teacher using the *embodying as if* role to develop the collaborative element of the playworld. This way of working is focused on dialogical interactions and “demands active human presence and participation” (O'Neill, 1991, p. 24). The experiencer was able to tune in to the whole group to support the children and the narrative which resulted in using role to develop “new and deeper understanding of phenomena” (Brèdikytè, 2011, p. 82). In this example the teacher as the experiencer was able to use the playworld in the educational setting “to cultivate such ‘lived, emotional experiences’, through explicit activity and so can be seen to generate *perezhivanie*” (Davis, 2015, p. 64). This development in the narrative meant that in the following two playworlds Peggy, the children and I decided to include the children-in-role as Captains of the Superhero Ministry. In her written reflection Peggy offered insight into her thoughts on the group experience.

Data extract 39: Teacher reflection

Peggy (teacher):	The more chances we give them to use this imagination the more their imaginations will grow. Rather like a tree, we plant the seed by listening to the fertilizer (ideas) they are
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giving us and assist it to grow but not with too many of our ideas.

Peggy as experiencer was flexible in her use of language which required an improvisational element to the role that I will now discuss in detail. I am calling this part of the experiencer ‘improvising dialogue’ which links to O’Neill’s (1989, 1995) work around dialogue and how it is a central part of dramatic encounters.

7.2: Improvising dialogue

The notion of improving dialogue came from the patterns within the data. O’Neill (1989) argues that “authentic dialogue” in a drama classroom is when adults and children are both listeners and speakers as they invent new scripts (p. 530). This links to children’s play that Sawyer (1997) argues is a process of improvised speech and action. Improvising dialogue links directly to play episodes with more than one child. Sawyer (1997) explains that one child begins as *the speaker* and other children are *the participants* and improvisational creativity begins when the child as speaker, either in the play frame or out of the play frame, instigates the interactional exchange. *The speaker* and *the participants* are equal players as they are both needed, because “no single child can unilaterally determine which direction the play will take” (Sawyer, 1997, p. 47). *The speaker* and *the participants* unconsciously swap roles in the play as individuals “introduce novelty to the play situation by proposing a change to the play frame” (Sawyer, 1997, p. 47), which changes the play direction. Schousboe and Winther-Lindqvist (2013) stress that,

The playing child creates a sphere of imagination where it as an active agent may explore and transform very impressive aspects of its own life. In play, the child can express itself in a relatively uncensored connection, enabling it to indulge in a variety of spontaneous ideas. (p. 2)

Indulging in the activity of spontaneous ideas is a hallmark of play and Dewey (1934/2005) argues spontaneity is an important part of an art form. Spontaneity is linked to how a person has “complete absorption in subject matter that is fresh” and this “holds and sustains emotion” (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 73). In this thesis I trace how the experiencer became part of the spontaneous dialogical exchange and was able to be both *speaker* and *participant* depending on the playworld requirement. The spontaneous nature of these invented scripts requires a teacher to be open to an unpredictable pathway of conversation

(O'Neill, 1989). In the playworlds the experiencer used both the spoken word and gesture to support a dialogic teaching method (O'Neill, 1989; O'Toole & Stinson, 2013). The act of listening and then responding was at the forefront (O'Neill, 1989; O'Toole & Stinson, 2013; Stinson, 2015) as the experiencer and children collectively shared ideas and viewpoints and these were used to build an understanding or a concept. For example, it was the spontaneous dialogue between the teachers and children that “opened the door to the fictitious world” (Lindqvist, 1996, p. 10). At the start of the playworlds episode discussed above, the teacher as experiencer posed questions to the children and used their responses to develop the imagined world they were all were about to enter. During this time the experiencer organised the children so that multiple ideas and suggestions were heard and contributed to the narrative. These ideas and suggestions were oral and/or physical, and the teacher picked them up and then wove the children’s voices into the narrative, which “scaffolds the children’s learning in and through drama” (Dunn & Stinson, 2012, p. 117). However, it was the improvisational aspect of the teacher that allowed the experiencer to enter the sense field.

The following example of Louise’s third playworld episode combined the popular culture motifs of superheros and the film Frozen™. Louise was in-role as Queen Elsa and I was in-role as her sister, Anna, both being roles from Frozen™. The children had the higher status role of detectives and their input was needed to solve the dilemma at hand. In the playworld, the pre-text centred on Queen Elsa who had literally frozen all superheroes in the land and at this stage the detectives were going to convince her to stop using her powers to freeze people. The children, Louise and I were at this time in-role as detectives and had worked out that we needed to travel to talk to Queen Elsa at her castle. The children’s suggestions stated that we should use the outdoor area of the preschool as the castle land. We travelled outside and I let the children know that Louise was going to become Elsa. The next dialogue example demonstrates how the children moulded and developed the teacher’s positioning in her castle.

Data extract 40: Playworld (videoed)

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Sarah (researcher): | Okay Louise you're going to be Elsa. (To the children)
Where does Elsa live? |
| Indigo (child): | In a castle. |
| Sunday (child): | In a frozen tower. |

Sarah (researcher): So Louise to be in a tower you've got to stand up high, we need a tower. (Louise stands up on the wooden deck)

Louise (teacher): Is that high enough?

Georgie (child): No higher up on that wood. (Georgie refers to a wooden banister on the outside decking)

Sarah (researcher): Do you think she can balance up there?

Children: No!

Georgie (child): She can sit there?

Louise (teacher): I can sit there, hold on (Louise sits up high on the banister)
There we go.

This was an example of improvising dialogue as the teacher valued and used what the children brought to the imagined world (O'Neill, 1989). O'Neill (1989) argues that the drama teacher juggles multiple ways of working in “*inside the work*” (p. 534). Here the children were directing the adults as we all developed the setting in the playworld. This created an open dialogue that linked to the narrative. In the following extract the children and I were sitting on the floor under the teacher as Elsa. They were in-role as detectives and I was now in-role as Anna and this is how the improvised dialogue developed.

Data extract 41: Playworld (videoed)

Sarah (researcher): Elsa, there's some people who want to talk to you [To Louise as Elsa].

Louise (teacher): Which people Anna?

Sarah (researcher): Elsa I told you, if you keep freezing people, people are going to get cross.

Louise (teacher): What brings them here?

Sarah (researcher): I think you have frozen some people who are very important. I think you need to talk to them.

Louise (teacher): Okay, let them in. (Sarah opens the imagined door and all the children enter as detectives and come in) What brings you detectives here today? What are you doing at my palace? What has brought you here to my palace Frankie, what has brought you here today?

Frankie (child): I have a movie of you and see you on TV.

Louise (teacher): You usually see me on TV. Oh, that's nice. But what brought you here today? Why have you come to see me?

Darcey (child): Because we need to talk to you to stop freezing people.

Louise (teacher): To stop freezing people?

Children: Yes.

Louise (teacher): Do you mean the superheroes that I froze?

Children: Yes.

Louise (teacher): But why? Why do I need to stop freezing them?

Harley (child): Because that's not good.

Louise (teacher): I think it's brilliant.

Harley (child): They help people, it's 'cos we need them to save people.

Louise (teacher): But I have a problem, I have a problem that I can't stop freezing people. How am I going to stop freezing them?

Remy (child): Because you've got powers and you can't help the powers. You can't control your powers.

This example is an improvised dialogue where the teacher posed questions to elicit the children's ideas, and then used these ideas to build the narrative (Sawyer, 1997). Drama is an art form "of the spoken word and of gestures and the body" (O'Toole & Stinson, 2013, p. 161) where listening requires the participants to be responsive to each other and act on each other's ideas in an improvisational manner. The interactions, between the teacher and children were fluid and unpredictable and as they evolved there were multiple dialogues at play (O'Neill, 1995). The dialogues with the teacher and child/ren developed the unfolding narrative into a "dialogic improvisation" (Sinclair, 2012, p. 50).

Further on in this playworld the children as Detectives and the researcher as Anna needed to help Elsa unlock her superpower of freezing people. In the narrative Elsa had also frozen the people and animals who lived in the land and this created a problem that needed to be resolved. The Detectives and Anna helped Elsa make a potion that she would drink to unlock her power. Part of the improvised dialogue is presented in the following example.

Data extract 42: Playworld (videoed)

Louise (teacher): Okay let me think, well, something that's not going to make things freeze. I need some heat. So maybe some fire.

- Jamie (child): The sun.
- Louise (teacher): Some sun, maybe some sort of heat, something that creates heat.
- Harper (child): Fire.
- Louise (teacher): Fire, I think there needs to be fire, fire has to go into it.
What else, yes (responding to a child).
- Dash (child): Some hot rocks.
- Louise (teacher): And what about you? (gesturing to Chris)
- Chris (child): Fire rocks.
- Louise (teacher): Fire rocks. What else Chris?
- Chris (child): Meteors.
- Louise (teacher): It will be a bit hard for me to swallow, so I might have to put something in there so that I can swallow it (She uses a gesture of her hands to mouth and head up to pretend she is swallowing). What about you Ripley?
- Ripley (child): Honey drinks.
- Louise (teacher): Some special honey drinks, honey water, how about that?

Here Louise elicited the ideas from specific children to create a recipe for the potion. After the recipe ingredients were established the teacher asked the children to collect the items. The children ran off to different places in the outdoor area and gathered their ingredients (that were all imagined) and as they ran and/or walked around the space they chatted to each other. Meanwhile I fetched the large piece of fabric prop and I put in on the ground to signify the cauldron. Louise called the children to the cauldron and we stood around the fabric, then one at a time each child named their item and placed it into the smouldering cauldron. The loose structure of the playworld supported an improvised dialogue as there were limited predetermined outcomes and the players, both the teachers and the children, responded to what was happening (O'Neill, 1995). The teacher's written reflection below highlights Louise's thoughts about being in this process and how she balanced her role with the children's role.

Data extract 43: Teacher reflection

- Louise (teacher): Today I felt more comfortable about my role in contributing and facilitating children's play without being worried about

whether I was taking over too much control in their play and how the role of the educator can still lead whilst also incorporating their ideas and interests in the story being flexible.

The above example of practice can be linked back to the theory chapter on imagination and drama as Dewey (1934/2005) argues that an experience needs to move “from something to something” (p. 38) and it has an element of flow like a river. The metaphor of the river means an experience is dynamic as it moves, and it collects things on the way. The experiencer used the *as if* to collect children’s ideas to feed the narrative by asking questions that stimulated the dialogue while they were in role. This way of working means the teacher gives “subtle attention to detail, nuance, and implication; the ability to exploit the unpredictable in the course of the work” (O’Neill, 1989, p. 24). Improvising means that the people involved do not set out in advance how they are to interact or react, instead they hear what someone is saying or see what someone is doing and then respond “spontaneously to each new impulse” (Gillett, 2012, p. 6). Louise’s understanding of her role in the imaginary field demonstrated how she used her character role to connect to the children by listening and responding to their suggestions.

Data extract 44: Teacher reflection

Louise (teacher): I felt really connected to the group with all the children participating and responding to my character making suggestions and demonstrating high levels of enthusiasm as they responded to the suggestions.

The experiencer is an example of what Dewey (1934/2005) discusses when contending that an experience is created “by interaction between “subject” and “object” between a self and its world, it is not itself either merely physical nor merely mental” (p. 256). The teacher working in this way is able to construct “emotional responses to both actual and dramatic worlds” (Dunn et al., 2015, p. 1). Play is like an improvised drama performance as both require that there is no set script; it is developed in the moment with only a loose structure to guide, and the collective decides what will occur rather than one person (Sawyer, 1997). Improvisation used in an educational context guides and scaffolds children in a collaborative learning process (Sawyer, 2015). In the research for this thesis,

the improvisation element required the teachers to be flexible in the *problem setting* and *problem solving* process (Grainger Clemson, 2015) as all the participants unraveled and dramatised the narrative together (Lindqvist, 1996). The teachers pre-planning provides the foundation for the “spontaneous improvisation” (Brédikytè, 2011, p. 153). Therefore, it was the Experiencer’s ability to use the children’s ideas and suggestions in the playworld episodes that made the learning process collaborative.

7.3: Conclusion

In this final finding chapter, I have illuminated the teacher performing in the imaginative field as experiencer. The experiencer needed to be a catcher and a weaver of ideas to co-create the narrative with children. This is an improvised method that required a flexible, sensitive and inventive teacher who was able entice the children into the group process through oral and physical forms of expression. Teaching in and through drama means children and adults “can experience the exhilaration of the search for discovery of new ideas, capacities, forms, and interpretations” (O'Neill, 1989, pp. 24-25). There is a focus on back and forth exchanges between adults and children and *embodying as if*, and *improvising dialogue* were the core elements of this method.

The next chapter of the thesis is where the three research findings derived from the multiple methods of data generated are discussed in relation to the research questions. These questions have underpinned the research design, data generation and analysis. This final part of the thesis is what Yin (2015) calls the synthesis of the data to address the research phenomena, moving from the empirical research to conceptualisation and attempting to cultivate theory (Patton, 2003).

Chapter 8: Discussion

This discussion chapter moves from the analysis of the findings and what they suggest to address the research questions (Evans et al., 2011). Educational research of this kind aims to present a picture of what was happening in the environment (Eisner, 2002) and therefore this chapter engages in what it means to be a teacher with children in play. In the introduction chapter I expressed my curiosity around the early childhood field and drama teaching as a method for adults to participate in children's play and this has continued to engage my thoughts in this research process. The similarities between play and drama (Lindqvist, 1995; Vygotsky, 1930/2004) have been expressed in the theory and methodology chapters and I return to my inquisitiveness to express new understandings of this alignment. Here I offer a contemporary theorising of the teacher as player to open up possibilities for a practice of co-creating with children. I start by reiterating the research questions that have framed this thesis.

- 1) How do teachers perform roles in popular culture informed playworlds co-created with children?
- 2) How does an exploration of performed roles assist in understanding the teacher in children's play?

These two questions were deliberately focused on the teacher's roles and the findings chapters expressed how they were performed in different ways throughout the research. Two performed roles of *supervisor* and *pretender* were consistently evident throughout the data in all settings and with all teachers, and these highlighted the barriers that inhibit teachers entering the imaginative field of play. In contrast, the two performed roles of *director* and *experiencer* were rare; nonetheless, when they operated in unison, they enabled the teacher to be a player in the imaginative field with children. While I constructed the four different performed roles from the analysis, the individual teachers in this study were not categorised as either *supervisor*, *pretender*, *director* or *experiencer*; rather they each highlighted elements of these four roles in ways that have increased my understandings of the complexity of the teacher's role with children in play.

To develop this inquiry about the teacher's performed roles, I have used the concepts and practices of playworlds as a space to experiment with the drama teaching techniques of a pre-text, children-in-role and teacher-in-role (Bolton, 1985; Daniels & Downes, 2015;

Dunn, 2017; O'Neill, 1995). As outlined in the literature and methodology chapters, playworlds as a dramatic pedagogy has been central to this inquiry. This is because this drama teaching method 'flips' the traditional model of the teacher in a way that "radically changes the approach to play guidance" because it "eliminates adults' authority position" (Hakkarainen, 2010, p. 78). This notion of *eliminating the adult authority* does not suggest teachers avoid play; instead it recasts the teacher as a player. The teacher-in-role device casts the teacher's character as someone who needs and values the children's contributions to proceed with the narrative (Bolton, 1985; Daniels & Downes, 2015; Dunn, 2017). However, as identified in the literature review, teachers are often on the periphery of play (Fleer, 2015; Fleer & Peers, 2012; Hakkarainen et al., 2013), therefore being a player is not practised or always valued. The findings of this thesis identify the continuing deliberation from the four teachers about not wanting to dominate play, at times viewing play as a child-only zone. In contrast, I argue that it is *how* the teacher engages in play that determines whether they dominate or co-create. Using teaching methods from drama has given preference to ways the teachers and children both contribute to co-create something new in a dramatic form (O'Neill, 1991, 1995). This creates a dynamic relationship where listening and responding occurs like a dance as the players choreograph the shape and form. Boal's (1995) describes this in his theatre where "different powers take the floor at different times— potential can become act, occupy the spotlight and then glide back to the sidelines, powers grow and diminish, move in to the foreground and then shrink into the back-ground again—everything is mutable" (p. 39).

Kravtsov and Kravtsova (2010) explain that in play children use a dual roles and both are present allowing "the player to orient him/herself to the role of another, the character or hero being "represented"" (p. 33). These two positions in play (as the player and nonplayer) enable the participant to be the subject and "to control the play at will" (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010, p. 33). The focus of this thesis is on the teacher's performed roles that not only echo what children do in their play (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010; Vygotsky, 1976) but also link to what actors do on the stage (Stanislavski, 1948). These roles of player and non-player employ different dramatic devices, although they always sit in each other's shadow because a person engages in restored behaviour as a "key process of every kind of performing, in everyday life, in healing, in ritual, in play, and in the arts" (Schechner, 2013, p. 28). This thesis employed this understanding of double subjectivity to inquire about *how*, or indeed *if*, the teacher mirrors this way of being both a player and non-player.

In this chapter I explain the three claims that come from the findings to articulate the teacher as player with children, drawing together the chapters of this thesis to build a focal theory of new understandings of the teacher in children's play. The three claims concern the *children's ideas as narrative contributions*, *interplay of form and improvisation* and finally, *teacher's vulnerability*. I argue these are key components in this thesis in understanding teachers' role performance. I begin by introducing the first claim to highlight how the teacher builds the ensemble through the *children's ideas as narrative contributions*.

8.1: Children's ideas as narrative contributions

This first claim expresses what I have learnt about the teacher as player in relation to the way teachers' value and include contributions from the children. Play has the potential for teachers' and children's ideas to build a collaborative creative environment which makes use of and "combines all these drops of individual creativity that frequently are insignificant in themselves" (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 11). The significance of the children's ideas as narrative contributions relies on a teacher who can elicit and harness these offerings. I argue that the teacher in the creative space adds something that cannot be achieved if the teacher is absent. Teachers use a dialogical practice where they engage children in decision making to nurture and prioritise a learning environment built by the group's imaginings. Drama activities make use of the children's expertise in the children-in-role position and this device places children in roles where their ideas are heard and then used to progress the narrative forward (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; O'Neill, 1991). Craft (2015) argues that when teachers engage in "reciprocity between questioning imaginative engagement and narrative" this "foregrounds the children's perspectives, which have far more potency than those of adults" (p. 425). To achieve intersubjectivity between players the teacher needs to allow time to hear children's *working theories* expressed (Peters & Davis, 2011). This type of dramatic reciprocity of ideas to co-create narratives asks teachers to be part of the creative process, rather than be on the periphery of play. I refer to Linds' (2006) writings on theatre, which makes the point that actors and non-actors collaborate as they express verbally and physically as they "dramatize collective stories activating the whole body" (p. 115). I argue that when teachers are engaged in this way with children, their influence is one of value, expanding, rather than diminishing, the play experience.

Playworlds offer opportunities to integrate the children's "individual diversities, interests and needs" (Cecchin, 2013, p. 58) by physically enacting together in narrative form.

This links back to the *through-going action* that acts as an organisational method to pull together the improvised individual thoughts, ideas, and wonderings into a sequence of events that hold meaning for the group of children (Bruner, 1996). The teacher's ability to harness the children's ideas to progress the story forward is part of the joint activity (Hakkarainen, 2010). Greene (1995) argues that our imagination takes us into the world of empathy as it acts as a way of "decentering ourselves" where teachers attend to children's ideas and respond imaginatively to them (p. 31). Samuelson and Wohlwend (2015) state that "play actions are made meaningful through interactions when other players recognize them, prompting response from tacit scripts that are sensible to co-players" (p. 569). In this thesis, when the group collaboration was focused on the same goal it was strengthened when the teacher became the problem finder, and the children as problem solvers. Cecchin's (2013) term *traces* identifies how a teacher values the diverse offerings children bring, which includes their "feelings and thoughts" (p. 62). When children express themselves, their narrative modalities act as a "vehicle of meaning making" (Bruner, 1996, p. 39) as they share their experiences, both real and imagined (O'Neill, 1985).

When the teacher gathers individual elements from children's ideas, words, and actions, and weaves them to develop the narrative, they are developing a collective dialogue. This dialogue flows and develops into what Fler and Peers (2012) name a "shared sustained imaginary conversation" (p. 423). These physical and verbal interactions become a dynamic mix of the emotion and imagination to create "dramatic mediation" (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 338). Here the personal and the social planes merge as the teacher weaves together her/his own ideas (the personal) with the children's ideas (the social) (Daniels & Downes, 2015). The teacher does not disappear into the character role, instead she/he uses the role to develop the narrative with the children. The *memory combinations* from past events are used with the current situation, and this creates collective creativity (Vygotsky, 1930/2004) in a dialogic teaching method with young children in the preschool (Daniels & Downes, 2015; O'Neill, 1989).

In contrast, when the teacher uses language and gesture with little connection to the children's expressions there is a lack of unity between the teacher's "spoken word and of gesture and the body" (O'Toole & Stinson, 2013, p. 161). The aim of the teacher-in-role is to create opportunities for dialogue with children and use the role to move the drama forward (O'Neill, 1989, 1995); monologue or silence means the teacher becomes separate from the

narrative and therefore the group process. As outlined in the finding chapters, when a teacher monologue takes hold it means dialogue, which is a central part of communicating, is minimal. This lack of attention to what the children are contributing means their verbal expressions recede as the teacher engages in a mono-narrative. Another way the findings articulated how the children's verbal and physical contributions were unheard is when the teacher was silent, unable to attend to the ideas and suggestions expressed, which felt like the narrative was literally collapsing. Either monologue or silence means the flow of the group activity, which requires movement, is immobilised and the narrative cannot stay buoyant. Engel (2013) argues that in play children use a *flux and flow* approach in their narratives as they seamlessly move between *what is* and *what if*. The *what is* links to their everyday life and the *what if* is the imagined world using more "far-fetched possibilities" (Engel, 2013, p. 216). The real and the fantasy offer a place to "use hypothetical thinking to solve problems, and go beyond their immediate lived world" (Engel, 2013, pp. 221-222). The role of the teacher in these positions is significant as Engel (2013) argues children take cues from the cultural milieu in which they are playing. In the arts the teacher is an active part of the process and Abbs (2003) argues they are "animating the procession of works, genres, techniques, biographies, movements which make up the symbolic continuum I call the aesthetic field" (p. 57). The teacher in drama uses the dramatic form to engage in acts that are unfolding and are on the cusp of emerging as all participants mould the as yet unwritten narrative (O'Neill & Lambert, 1982).

To understand how teachers can go beyond the immediate here and now I want to return to the term pivot (discussed in the play section of the theory chapter), which is drawn from Vygotsky (1976) and used in relation to children in play. Vygotsky's (1976) well known example is the child who takes a stick and transforms it into a horse as this is what is needed for the play context and the pivot is "severing the meaning" from the object (p. 548). In this thesis the child's *funds of knowledge* (Hedges, 2012; Wohlwend, 2018) in the form of popular culture motifs were immense and acted as a *pivot* for the teacher to lift them out of the known and into the unknown world. In the findings, when a teacher stated, "what if my ideas of a superman are different to the children's ideas of superman", there is a possibility to enter into shared understandings of superheroes. Teachers cannot possibly know all of children's popular culture play motifs, let alone specific details. But children do, and this research found they were happy to share their knowledge and this expertise can pivot teachers into unknown territories. The combinational aspect of the imagination

(Vygotsky, 1930/2004) means the children's *ideas of superman/woman* can be shared with the teacher's *ideas of superman/woman*, thereby melding child and adult imaginations into new formations. The children's popular culture motifs can invert teacher-led, top-down approaches to privilege "learner-led media-rich play" revealing "sources of child expertise and cultural resources" (Wohlwend, 2016, p. 2).

In practice at times this collective sharing of ideas is chaotic, as "in the aesthetic field nothing stays still; all is perpetual oscillation and the child's essential creative work should be placed effectively within it" (Abbs, 2003, p. 57). Children have multiple ways of thinking and expressing and this requires flexible teachers, "not geometers working with only compasses and straightedges" (Baer & Kaufman, 2012, p. 150). In an aesthetic space there is exploration with "harmony and dissonance" that "keeps the brain both committed to stable, harmonious relationships necessary for continuity in life and the interest and pleasure in dissonance necessary for adaptability" (DeCoursey, 2018, p. 48). This adaptive quality is required in the imagination as we adapt and mould items from our experiences to create something that did not exist before (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). This demonstrates the complexity of the teacher's role in children's socio-dramatic play, which brings me to the next claim in this discussion chapter, that teaching in play requires an interplay of form and improvisation.

8.2: Interplay of form and improvisation

This second claim expresses the need of an interplay of form and improvisation as central to the creative realm (O'Neill, 1995). O'Neill and Lambert (1982) argue that when the teacher is part of the creative process their presence can develop deeper insights and collaboration. If the teacher understands how to structure a drama, "it will be possible to achieve in improvisation the same dynamic organization that gives form to theatre experience" (O'Neill, 1991, p. 25). The creative space includes form as the "active principle" (Vygotsky, 1925/1971c, p. 146) and this combines with improvisation, which is the unpredictable element (Sawyer, 2015). As discussed throughout this thesis, children's play is an improvised activity and yet, Sawyer (1997) tells us, adults' "everyday life is relatively stable" and the opportunities to improvise are "confined to informal social interactions" (p. 181). This implies that adults and children have very different daily practice and expertise in improvisation. The findings of this thesis have helped in understanding the creative space of play and how form enables an improvisational aspect to flourish.

Taylor and Warner's (2006) book on the life work of Cecily O'Neill reflects on how she highlights this relationship between structure and spontaneity in drama education as being central to the process. To explain the interplay between form and improvisation in detail I return to how a narrative structure consists of travelling between "its parts and the whole" (Bruner, 1996, p. 122). In theatre this guides the ideas and actions into what Stanislavski (1948) argues is one main current. In this thesis the *main current* creates a form to hold the drama space. I have described these form components of the narrative as *pretext*, *super-objective*, *tension* and *through-going action* and argued that these allowed the participants to travel in a similar direction. Of course, there were individual pathways, but as a collective the shared goal was to solve the problem in the drama. The pre-text developed in the planning stage asks the teacher to envisage what may happen; "like an actor rehearsing alone in an empty theatre: in front of future audience, absent at the moment, but present in the imagination" (Boal, 1995, p. 19). O'Toole and Stinson (2013) make a point of highlighting that all drama begins "with a fictional model of human situation that is then complicated in order to explore the causes and consequences of action and relationships and these are expressed nearly always in combinations of spoken words and/or gestures" (p. 161). In education this is developed by teachers, who are what Davis (2015) names *dramatic pedagogues* and their role in developing the learning environment is significant. This accords with the ideas of Lindqvist (1995), who argues that teachers with children enact characters and actions together for the narrative to unfold.

Like the work of theatre practitioners, *dramatic pedagogues* use narrative to experiment with time and space, which is "condensed or stretched at will, and the same flexibility operates with people and objects, which can coalesce or dissolve, divide or multiply" (Boal, 1995, p. 20). The teacher's focus on the *through-going action* keeps the pace in line with the children's engagement by developing tension and "creating significance" (DeCoursey, 2018, p. 174). In this research when the narrative pace was too slow the children lost interest, but if it was too fast the children did not have time to contribute and connect to the content. The narrative structure of the playworlds in this research was like a roller-coaster, positioned for moments of excitement in the action, and moments of reflection on the story. The teacher's use of form is a core part of their "artistic pedagogy" (Taylor & Warner, 2006, p. 29). Drama like play uses content that involves action in the present imagined world by using ideas from past experiences (Dewey, 1934/2005). This back and forth through time is a factor relating to the concept of imagination, as memory

does not access material in a straight line; it combines images and feelings from the past as the process evolves (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). The form of the *pre-text*, *super-objective*, *tension* and *through-going action* created parameters to support and ease teachers' entry into the unknown. Dewey (1934/2005, p. 291) argues that "the spontaneity of art is not one of opposition to anything, but marks complete absorption in an orderly development. This absorption is characteristic of esthetic [*sic*] experience" (p. 291).

Part of the form included the teacher's use of simple props and the transformation of the props' actual meaning. These were acts of travelling to physically move in the environment, and narrativity move in the playworld. These moments were not prescribed, as the decisions needed to be developed from the current ideas of the children. This mirrors what children do in play, as Samuelson and Wohlwend (2015) argue children continually develop and modify various symbolic meanings for objects in the imagination world. It is this adaptative characteristic of play where children improvise and "test the limits of an object's typical meanings to see how it might be repurposed to represent another idea (p. 569). The use of props and their transformation is part of the supporting the notion that in children's play the auxiliary tasks are part of the creative process (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). This places value on co-creating in the process as teachers and children are heading towards an endpoint, but it is not set like a previously compiled narrative in a book or script; it is in construction.

This brings me to the improvisational aspect of this claim which stems from findings. The teacher-in-role is an example of this improvised quality as they express their ideas in relation to the narrative. Things are not static or fixed and the teacher's ability to improvise is key in their response to children's ideas (O'Neill, 1991, 1995). Bruner (1997) argues that a creative act yields *effective surprise* in some part of the process. *Effective surprise* takes place within the structure as it extends the experience into "metaphoric effectiveness" where we see things from new and different perspectives (Bruner, 1997, pp. 19-20). This allows something to be made that did not exist before, bringing forth our imagination. Aesthetic education aims to arouse all participants, both adult and children, "to become more than passive onlookers, to be willing to engage" (Greene, 1999, p. 9). This engagement can be linked to a person's awe or wonder in the unexpected as *effective surprise*, whether in sculpture, mathematics, story or drama, requires a "willingness to divorce oneself from the obvious" (Bruner, 1997, p. 23). The improvisational quality that children utilise in their play

can be harnessed by the teacher, as “novelty and reconfiguration are central to the enterprise, not peripheral” (Samuelson & Wohlwend, 2015, p. 570). This novelty and reconfiguration become part of the children’s expressions of their imaginings and take the teacher and the narrative into unknown territories where multiple voices contribute to the reciprocal story. The teacher’s ability to pick up on the memory inputs from the children to develop the dialogue requires fluidity in these interactions as the narrative path evolves with the physical and verbal contributions (O’Neill, 1989).

The teacher-in-role is an easy stance for some, but for others, improvisation skills need to be honed because *acting on your feet* requires practice (Dunn & Stinson, 2012). For example, as discussed in the first findings chapter, if the teacher’s individual objective of playing a role is overridden by overemoting, this signifies the player’s lack of unity between the personal and social planes needed for emotional connection (Vygotsky, 1934/1994). In this research, when the teacher was using a role and it was disconnected from the children and/or the narrative it meant there was limited dialogue to “model and embody the very attitudes and values being fostered” (O’Neill, 1991, p. 24). As stated in the first findings chapter, when there is a lack of teacher commitment to the collaboration, it is picked up by the children and their own attention becomes fractured. The teacher plays an importance role in creating conditions that support executive function that include children’s focus and attention (Fleer et al., 2017).

Teachers who work with dramatic pedagogies are writing the narrative in real time as they include the ideas coming at them from the young children (O’Neill, 1991). The act of co-creating requires teachers to be apt at collaboration, adaptability and uncertainty (Harris, 2014). Lindqvist (1996) argues that “ambiguity is an important characteristic of art and play” (p. 10) although it can be disconcerting for adults. Throughout this thesis it has been articulated that in practice there is minimal entry into children’s play or, when teachers are involved in play they are often in an auxiliary mode. Therefore, I argue that, when teachers do enter, this unpredictability can be difficult and even motivate them to stay on the periphery of play. Teachers believe creativity supports problem-solving skills and curiosity and yet it can disrupt the ordered aspect of the teaching environment (Smith & Smith, 2010). Drama pedagogues engage a balancing act of a “zone of complete predictability and being out of control” (Sawyer, 2011a, p. 365) and is not easy if teachers have minimal experience in this way of working.

Here I want to argue for a play pedagogy that has a balance of form and improvisation. To do this I return to play as *an experience* that has movement and progresses forward with a dynamic and unpredictable quality (Dewey, 1934/2005). Samuelson and Wohlwend (2015) describe this in play as being “fuelled by cycles of collaboration, negotiation, and improvisation, enabling children to contest and problem-solve as they make decisions on how to enact” (p. 569). So to enter this space with children there is a non-negotiable involvement in the process that is “committed to stable, harmonious relationships necessary for continuity in life and the interest and pleasure in dissonance necessary for adaptability” (DeCoursey, 2018, p. 48). Vygotsky (1930/2004) links this adaptive quality to the creative process that propels us towards the future as we create something new. When the teacher uses *embodying as if*, as articulated in finding and analysis three chapter, she becomes someone else with the aim of supporting children’s narrative landscapes (Dunn & Stinson, 2012; Edmiston, 2017). The teacher-in-role is always in line with the teaching environment, as they are not solo players.

As I have previously stated, teachers are not actors, although I argue that using an actor-like stance has assisted in my understanding of the teacher’s role in the imaginary field of children’s play. Key to this has been Stanislavski’s (1948) work, which positions the actor as experiencing a role on stage that is not separate from themselves. Stanislavski’s (2008) acting method states that “stage action must be inwardly well-founded, in proper, logical sequence and possible in the real world” (p. 50) to make sense in the fantasy world. Zaporozhets (2002) connection to Stanislavski’s work argues that an actor with little experience has difficulty performing a simple task in an imaginary world. This understanding shows that working in this way requires practice to develop this expertise demonstrating the complexity of the creative work of play as improvising demands that the teacher becomes a novice. While this does not mean anything goes, as they are bound to the logical order of the narrative, without experience this can be a challenging space. Professional improvisors adhere to what they are doing, as well as the order of the situation and other actors (Sawyer, 2011a). Like the improviser, the expressions of the teacher, both orally and physically, are not random, but connected to the narrative order and children’s roles. This is not an individual pursuit, as, like an actor who feeds from the script, other actors, and the audience, the teacher is working in connection with children and the parameters of teaching. The teacher’s role is informed by their life so the *as if* is never first-

time behaviour, it is adapted and changed and exists in the relationship between the space of self, and the space of character (Schechner, 1985, 2013).

To expand on this idea of form and improvisation I refer back to Vygotsky's (1925/1971a) essay on *Art and Life* that provides links between children's literature and play. Both activities play with words, sounds and rhythms and yet they both have order acknowledging that "there is a system in this folly" (Vygotsky, 1925/1971a, p. 258). This system can bring comfort for the teacher, supporting her or him to accompany the child in the imaginary world knowing that the order sets boundaries to the experience (Vygotsky, 1925/1971a). For the teacher, the order and topsy-turvy make use of form and improvisation in creative collaborations with children. Here I refer back to Vygotsky's (1925/1971c) *melodic curve* to explain this collaboration as the dialogue and actions that are created with, and between, the children and woven into the unfolding narrative that becomes the "artistic form to which the material has been moulded" (p. 150). Teaching with a dramatic method pays attention to the collaborative process to enrich the play narrative with the children (Hakkarainen, 2010). This notion of a flexible form offers some structure for the teacher to support their improvisations with children. The teacher's flexibility with children is necessary as "extreme plasticity allows and encourages total creativity" (Boal, 1995, p. 20). This is explained by Schechner (2004) in relation to choreographers of modern dance this art form "is invented through improvisations and perfected through repetition: the emotional core of a work is not known in advance and then "expressed," it is uncovered through action" (Schechner, 2004, p. 238). In relation to teachers, Lobman (2010) explains that a group of children and their teacher form an "improvisational ensemble" (p. 207). The teacher in the ensemble is the equivalent of a director, choreographer, or conductor as they build an environment for the collective to create within (Lobman, 2010). To highlight how the environment influences a creative ensemble with adults and children's this discussion chapter will consider the final claim of the teacher's vulnerability.

8.3: Teacher's vulnerability

This thesis theorises play from a Vygotskian perspective where creativity is present. The creative process is never set and always includes some form of improvisation (Sawyer, 2011a). When considering the two previous claims, *children's ideas as narrative contributions* and *interplay of form and improvisation* it is evident that being a teacher in play is not only complex, but it takes a great deal of courage to enter the unknown. This is

because work in the creative realm makes demands on a person's feelings and emotions, as they are significant to the aesthetic experience (Greene, 1980a; Vygotsky, 1926/1992). As stated in the theory chapter, the unity of emotion and imagination ignite catharsis (Vygotsky, 1925/1971b) creating the "dramatic mediation" (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 338) that is available in play. Hakkarainen, Brèdikytè, Jakkula, and Munter (2013) argue that, working with a dramatic pedagogy by using teacher-in-role with children "wakes up the adult's own imagination, helps emotional involvement, and perezhivanie" (p. 223). Perezhivanie centres on emotional experiences that include the internal and environmental aspects (Vygotsky, 1934/1994) and these emotional explorations in the preschool require teachers to be open to the unknown.

Improvising demands that the teacher becomes a novice, that requires experimentation and a focus on the process (Sawyer, 2011a; Zaporozhets, 2002). Csikszentmihalyi (1996) argues that creativity is assisted by attention on a task that includes the refinement of "curiosity and interest" (p. 346). Young children's curiosity appears in a "diffuse and generic" manner as they are attracted to new and interesting elements in their day (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 346). However, an adult's curiosity is more focused on specific areas as they expand their understanding on a topic (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Adult curiosity has the potential to funnel into unknown areas, as "without awe life becomes routine", and adults benefit from being curious enough to engage in a "more creative life" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 346). The creative process relies on curiosity into the unknown and this can be in opposition to a teacher's daily practice. Greene (1995) asks teachers to reclaim their spontaneity that can enhance their dialogical relationships with children into the unknown. Although as the findings in this thesis discuss this is not a straightforward pursuit as the imagination links to our emotional life. Brown (2009) explains that a person can only be spontaneous if they feel supported in offering novel ideas as part of their expression. In a shared learning environment expressing yourself is key to participation and this includes the teacher as well as children. Learning and creativity are "inherently vulnerable" environments as they both operate in a state of flux (Brown, 2012, p. 186). Brown's (2012) defines vulnerability as our ability to be present even when there is "uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure" (p. 34). Brown (2012) argues that vulnerability is the "cradle of the emotions" and when we put ourselves out into the world "with no assurance of acceptance" this is a vulnerable act (p. 34). Vulnerability defined in this way is not seen as something that should be avoided; rather it develops connection between people.

To be vulnerable with others means we are “taking risks” and “braving uncertainty” that has the potential to build relationships in the collaborative environment (Brown, 2012, p. 37). An early childhood teacher able to work in this way is able to traverse the unknown, although as this research suggests a supportive environment is desirable.

In this thesis the teachers expressed that the children in the playworlds were *non-judgmental* and this encouraged them within the creative process. However, this final claim of the thesis also explores the notion of the presence of an *audience*, as articulated in first finding and analysis chapter, and how this failed to support teachers to be vulnerable in the creative process. The *audience* is defined in this thesis, as how other adults in the environment have an impact on, and can influence, the teacher as player. Hakkarainen, Brédikytė, Jakkula, and Munter’s (2013) playworlds study found that when the adult took an observer stance they lacked coordination of their emotional and physical contributions which led to the story line being broken. This idea of *breaking* is relevant here, as even though the audience in this thesis are not in a teaching role, I argue that their observer stance *breaks* the creative space. Sawyer’s (2015) work assists here as he informs us that actors who are skilled improvisors feel an emotional high from a successful experience. In contrast when things are not going well the same actor experiences a terror like state. An unpredictable environment means “group creativity can be frightening because failure is public” (Sawyer, 2015, p. 253). Here I argue the *audience* in the preschool inscribes a *public* persona, even though it is composed of work colleagues, as their role as observers means they are not part of the ensemble and they sit on the boundary of the play. Like the improv actor, the teacher as player is exposing themselves to this terror state if they do not have supportive colleagues. Why would teachers take a risk and leap into the unknown path of play, when their experimentations are viewed by other adults who may not be supportive?

When the teachers in this thesis implied they felt *watched* or *judged* by others, they were expressing this as an *uncomfortable* feeling. Sawyer (2015) makes it clear that a certain amount of fear can support “a flow experience. But once it crosses a certain threshold, the actor moves from the flow zone into an anxiety zone” (p. 253). I would argue that teachers in this thesis were able to express this *anxiety zone* and how the preschool environment contributed to this uneasy state. This *anxiety zone* disconnects us from what we are doing, and who we are attempting to engage with, diminishing our capacity to be vulnerable as we encounter the unknown in the process of discovery (Brown, 2018). Engaging in novelty or

curiosity for teachers is not always an easy entry point as it can be plagued with anxiety (Hughes & Cousins, 2017). Hughes and Cousins (2017) argues that curiosity propels us forward to explore, while anxiety pulls us back to retreat. When these two are in balance our “action is bold, sensible and pleasurable. This push/pull emotional see-saw is something that is going on every day of our lives” (Hughes & Cousins, 2017, p. 36). This push/pull was evident for teachers in this thesis and at times, I argue, the balance leant towards anxiety.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) argues that a certain amount of anxiety can be useful as it offers a challenge that can bring engagement and enjoyment to a task. Likewise Brown (2009) pays attention to this link to anxiety and uses the term *anticipation* to explain how speculating what is to come is important in regards to our curiosity, although the uncertainty “cannot be so great that it overwhelms” (p. 19). Vygotsky (1930/2004) states that actual discomfort is important as it adds the concept of challenge for an individual and this is what drives us to “exercise creativity” (pp. 28-29). A key part of the imagination is its link to our affective memories, even if the feelings do not at that moment link to what we are doing they are felt as if they are real (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). As described in the findings chapters, when teachers felt colleagues were watching them it made them feel *uncomfortable*; I argue, therefore, that this external consideration impacted on the teacher’s internal development of their imagination (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). This happens because this environmental conflict means the teachers project their attention to the *audience*, pulling their focus away from the creative space and impacting on their current ability to be in *flow* with children (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This outward environmental issue means teachers cannot use “the inescapable presence of the real world” to act as an anchor to engage in the imagined world “free to act without threat or danger, without necessary consequences for the real world of ordinary life” (DeCoursey, 2018, p. 49). DeCoursey (2018) argues that, drama learning in education links to aesthetics which is concerned with two areas: “mode of attention and emotional response” (p. 37). I argue that when teachers’ focus is on the *audience* their emotional response is set firmly in the real world and this has ramifications for the creative space.

The work in the theory chapter on the imagination space is helpful here as Vygotsky (1930/2004) argues that adults have more experiences than children and therefore greater “quality and variety” of combinations to draw on in their imagination (p. 34). However, he goes on to express that the child has “greater faith in the products of his [*sic*] imagination

and controls them less”, whereas the reverse can be said of adults (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 34). In this thesis, the notion of adults having *less faith* in their imagination can link back to the education environment. How can teachers have *faith* in their own curiosities and expressions of imagination when they feel judged by others? Moreover, this can be a reason why teachers do not enter this environment, and the repercussions mean they do not get practise to develop skills of being in a group creative space? Csikszentmihalyi (1996) argues that we are not able to be creative in something in which we are not exposed to, therefore if a teacher has not had experience being in play, this assists in understanding why she or he may not feel comfortable engaging, especially if this is performed in front of an *audience*. Distractions, whether mental or physical, have the potential to take the teacher away from the shared creative space. This is because outside influences that divert, rather than engage, the teacher’s focus do not support the double subjectivity of being in the imaginative field. Hakkarainen et al.’s (2013) research found that when a conducive environment is developed, the adult is able to be focused on the narrative with children. However, this thesis found that when other adults hover outside the creative realm the teacher who is attempting to be a *player* is interrupted. This points to how creative acts are fragile spaces and when the teacher does not have a supportive environment it is difficult to ‘hold’ the creative space. This means supporting a group artistic experience is a “demanding activity” for the teacher (O’Neill, 1991, p. 24). Teachers juggle between the imagined world of a player, and the real world of a teacher, and both are needed to work creatively, and this is complex and emotionally charged work.

8.4: Conclusion

Throughout this thesis play has been theorised as a creative act where the imagination is central (Saracho, 2012; Vygotsky, 1930/2004) and I have argued that understanding creativity requires a focus on making the process visible (Sawyer, 2015). As teachers being in a space with children where we belong simultaneously to what is here now and what we are yet to create links to the metaxis (Boal, 1995). Play as a form of metaxis does not separate the teachers and children as it can only exist “as an encounter between participants” (Linds, 2006, p. 114). This *encounter* not only requires the teacher to enter play but asks for their full participation. This way of seeing play requires a group process with active encounters between the teacher and children, in opposition to the dominant discourse that undervalues the teacher’s role in play. I would go as far as saying that it underestimates the potential of

the teacher as an active force in the child's creative landscape of play. This thesis thus advocates understanding and valuing the teacher as player in the play process, I want to stipulate that I am not advocating for this to occur all the time, but when teachers do enter, they are supported to be actively part of the process with children. To co-create with children in this way is not predictable; there are parts that can be unexpected as improvisation is always surprising (Sawyer, 2015). This thesis views play as a space that offers a group practice where adults and children collaborate through "imaginative transformation, negotiation speculation and interpretation" (Taylor & Warner, 2006, p. 112).

This thesis provides three key components in teachers' role performance that attempts to understand how adults and children engage in play. These components express what I have learnt about the teacher with children in a play space, articulated in this chapter as the importance of *children's ideas as narrative contributions*, *interplay of form and improvisation*, and *teacher's vulnerability*. I argue that understanding these areas from this research can inform creating states where we belong simultaneously to what is here now and what we are yet to create. This chapter has illuminated entry points and obstacles to co-creating the imaginative field with children in play. I now move to the conclusion chapter where I bring together the elements of this thesis.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The aim of this research was to understand how teachers engage with children in a shared imagined world of play. The teachers performed roles, as discussed in the findings and discussion chapters, have given insight into how this occurs through the use of a dramatic pedagogy. This research is not advocating to work with children in drama type activities, although as stated in the introduction chapter this practice is of great interest to me and the work I do. To conclude this thesis, I will adjust my viewpoint, which has been focused inside the research process, to now deliberate on the outward significance of my research for the early childhood teaching field and research into teachers with children in play. This thesis has delved into what it is to be a teacher as player with children in play and, when I think about early childhood teachers in preschools, I reflect on how this research can be helpful to their day-to-day practice. I would like to share how this thesis, with particular attention to the claims made in the discussion chapter, sheds light on contemporary and collaborative play ventures. While this thesis is not advocating that teachers enter children's play all the time, it does put forward considerations about their role when they do enter.

In the previous chapter I have presented three main claims on the teacher's performed roles in the shared creative space of play. The claims have stemmed from the two research questions that deliberately focused on the teacher to inquire about their practice in play. The first question *how do teachers perform roles in popular culture informed playworlds co-created with children?* has been examined in the three findings and analysis chapters as well as the discussion chapter where various performed roles were identified. The second question *how does an exploration of performed roles assist in understanding the teacher in children's play?* has been explored in the discussion chapter addressing three claims. These of *children's ideas as narrative contributions, interplay of form and improvisation, and the teacher's vulnerability* are offered to develop this thesis' focal theory.

Throughout the thesis, a cultural-historical theoretical paradigm has supported this inquiry both theoretically and methodologically, with particular attention to the dynamic aspect this theory offers by giving prominence to the social situation (Vygotsky, 1931a). This thesis was centred on the writings of Vygotsky (1930/2004), which theorises play and the imagination, where he argues that “we find both factors – the intellectual and the emotional” as they “are equally necessary for an act of creation. Feeling as well as thought drives human creativity” (p. 21). This theory also underpinned the methodology chapter to

include the “dual or two-sided positioning” (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010, p. 33) and playworlds as method (Lindqvist, 1995) to develop a space where the teachers, children and the researcher were participants in co-creating narrative explorations appropriate for a preschool setting where play is the focus. To explain what this means for teaching practice and future research I share the thesis’ *contribution to the field* and acknowledge my *reflections on the research process* and, finally, discuss *future research directions*.

9.1: Contribution to the field

The synthesis of cultural-historical theory and acting theory has been helpful to rethink and reimagine the role of the teacher in children’s play, as outlined in the three claims of the focal theory. There are two main contributions I believe are significant to the applied field of teaching and research in play. The first contribution is in the area of teaching practice in children’s play; the second is a methodological contribution, based on how the playworld-as-method was used to understand the teacher’s performed roles. I want to stress that I am not being prescriptive about the findings of this research, as the aim of this thesis was understanding, rather than absolutes. Therefore, I do not offer a list of *how to*; rather I seek to highlight understandings of teacher as player.

The first implication of this thesis is that it values the *teacher as player* with children in their play to develop current understandings on this topic. This is pertinent for the teacher in early childhood as it pays attention to how collaborating with children in play is intricate, signifying that to be a player is far more complex than teachers just taking on a character role. While the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) policy document, as stipulated in the introduction chapter, asks teachers to “draw on their creativity, intuition and imagination to help them improvise and adjust their practice to suit the time, place and context of learning” (p. 11) it does not outline how this occurs. This thesis gives new insights into the specifics of the teacher as player, including how environmental factors can influence how this is enacted in the preschool. To work in a creative space not only requires a teacher who is comfortable with working in pathways where the collaborative endpoint is not set, but also demands a workplace that supports this exploration. This thesis gives preference to a drama teaching method that includes children-in-role as experts and the teacher-in-role as one who needs this expertise in a joint creative venture. I refer to Boal’s (1995) term *spect-actor*, which deliberately unifies actors and non-actors to blur the boundaries of any expertise as “we are all actors: we are theatre!” and both parties create dramatic meaning and action

(p. 19). This thesis supports using drama teaching characterises (Lindqvist, 1995; O'Neill, 1991, 1995) as outlined earlier in the thesis where children guide the teacher into the imagined world, the teacher guides the children into the collaborative process, and both build a collective creative environment (Bolton, 1985; Daniels & Downes, 2015; Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; O'Neill, 1991, 1995).

For these reasons this thesis also contributes to initial teacher education and considerations on how play and drama are positioned. Are teachers directly trained in the creative realm, if so, how does this prepare them to enter into an applied field of being a teacher in play that is improvised and developed collaboratively? Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) writing on creativity argues that practice develops our expertise in in a field and this prepares us for explorations, therefore a teacher who is unprepared for the creative aspect of play enters with little understanding to support the experience. In initial teacher education including experimentations that encourage improvisation and adaptation (DeCoursey, 2018; Sawyer, 1997, 2015) would offer some experience in this space to give pre-service teachers' practice in play like landscapes.

Another contribution of the thesis opens up the possibilities of playworlds-as-method in researching the dynamic environment of play with teachers and children. This drama-based method (Bresler, 2011) creates an aesthetic experience enabling an inquiry into a shared creative process. This thesis contributes to the playworlds literature by extending the work initially developed by Lindqvist (1995, 2001, 2003a, 2003b) and used in research by Brédikytė (2011), Hakkarainen (2010), Ferholt (2010) and others. The playworlds-as-method uses drama education techniques and processes to research play that creates an environment for the teachers, children, and researchers as participants to perform roles together. This creates what DeCoursey (2018) terms as a *dramatic artwork* in the form of an improvised activity to embed the participants in a process, as understanding a creative space does not happen from observation alone. I argue that to inquire about a creative process there need to be some parts of the study that enable the researcher and participants to be in the 'eye of the storm'. Davis (2018) argues that when we engage in "dramatic thinking" it encompasses both "relational and collaborative" processes (p. 86) and this aspect has been the major component to develop my understanding of the teacher in play.

Researching play using playworlds enabled engagement and thinking about the process that included the interactions between adults and children. Playworlds focus on the

participants' embodied roles meant that we could work in the realm of imagination giving the participants "the opportunity to create and step inside and inhabit the stories, to test out the possibilities beyond ourselves" (Davis, 2018, p. 86). I believe that this method allowed my role as a researcher with the teachers and children to enter into the process where we could physically, mentally, and emotionally engage in the inquiry. I would like to stress that this type of inquiry is intricate, as discussed and detailed in the methodology chapter, and to make use of this method requires a depth in thinking and practice of dramatic mediation techniques, as well as the reflective stance of the researcher. This thesis has argued that play as metaxis is complex as it requires teachers and children to explore new possibilities in the imagined world. This venture into the unknown is a brave pursuit for teachers and, if the environment does not support their improvisations and experimentations, entrances into unfamiliar territories are less likely to occur.

9.2: Reflection on the research process

Reflecting on the research process of this thesis I have identified some limitations of the study. If I was to go back and refine this process, I would make some methodological changes. In research the methods are developed early in the process, informed by extensive reading and experience as a researcher. In this research it was not until after the data generation that I realised some of the shortcomings of how the methods were used in the process.

I now conclude that an adaptation to the *professional learning session* would be to include a simple informal drama-based task. This would give an opportunity to engage the teachers in a drama-based activity and discuss the process of the experience before we worked with children. I believe this would have further prepared the teachers for the subsequent playworlds and would have further developed their understanding of the techniques we were going to use in the drama-based method.

The playworld-as-method, a drama-based method, was highly significant and central to the teachers' and children's engagement as well as my own, and there were areas that I would develop further in future inquiries. While I used the popular culture motifs that the teachers had identified from the children's play, it would have been advantageous to do this with the children in the four individual preschools for the initial planning. We did this at the end of the first and second playworld to further develop the popular culture motifs used and

this meant the children ideas were included in this planning. Incorporating this adult and children group planning from the beginning would have opened up the adults' understandings of the children's *funds of knowledge* and *working theories* to develop the first playworlds. In addition asking the teachers to keep track of how the playworlds popular culture play motifs and practices were used during the following week would have given information of how this teaching practice informs early childhood programs.

As discussed in the methodology chapter the children's drawings at the end of the playworlds allowed the teachers time to write their reflections and I did not use them in the analysis. This was because the research in this thesis was focused on the teacher's performed roles and I could not presume the children's drawings offered any insight into this focus. In future research I would rethink the use of children's drawings in the data generation. This would include asking the children to draw what they liked about the popular culture motifs and this could give insights into their connections to the playworld narrative. This would also add to the analysis to include the children's views of being in popular culture playworlds with their teachers.

Discussed in the methodology chapter, I now believe including some form of video playback viewing for the teacher participants would have enriched their experiences of being in the playworld method. This would have added further teacher commentary (beyond their reflections already included in this thesis) on their role performance and perhaps would enhance the specificity of their comments on their experience. A viewing of the videoed playworlds for teachers to comment on their verbal and physical involvement would potentially add insight into their perspectives on this shared creative act. This could enrich the analysis, providing another lens to add to this detailed work.

Finally, as highlighted in the *contributions to the field* I have articulated how the findings of this thesis may contribute to initial teacher education and how play and drama are positioned. Therefore, finding out more about the teacher's initial and subsequent teacher education, and the inclusion of drama and creativity in their learning in general, would have added to my understandings of how their experiences of the theorising of drama and creativity linked to their practice. These reflections will be used to develop future research, which I now discuss in the final section of this thesis.

9.3: Future research

If the claims of this thesis are beneficial, what does this mean for the field of research into teachers with children in play? Thinking more deeply about the role of adults in children's play can extend this current research, with the potential to untangle the teacher as a collaborator in the creative space. When I think of where I began at the start of this thesis and my understandings now, this thesis' clarity about teacher's performed roles opens up more areas to investigate. This study has created a pathway for future research in the area of the teacher in play to understand the group creative process. Further insights into teacher's curiosity and vulnerability, which have been considered in the discussion chapter, would also benefit from further in-depth inquiries into educational environments as supportive spaces to work creativity with children.

I also argue the playworlds-as-method can be used to further study play to include more nuanced details of the collaborative processes of teachers and children. As play does not happen in a vacuum, additional work could include other educators to understand centre or classroom perspectives on the daily work of being a teacher in play-based learning environments. This kind of approach in the preschool environment could also include children's perspectives of their teacher in their play to advance this work in understanding the collaborative creative space.

I began this research wanting to understand the teacher's role in children's play. At the end of this long process I believe my understandings have developed due to the research process and the engagement of the four teachers' contributions with the children in their preschool. The engagement and sincerity of Peggy, Henrietta, Louise and Rosie have been central to my learning that has emerged from this experience. In education, children's play takes place in many configurations, places, and groupings, and this thesis has offered considerations of the complex work of the teacher, who enters into reciprocal relationships with young children in the creative realm within the preschool educational context.

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Appendices

Appendix A: ACU Ethics and State Government Ethics approvals

Dear Applicant,

Principal Investigator: A/Prof Susan Edwards
Student Researcher: Sarah Young (HDR Student)
Ethics Register Number: 2014 330V
Project Title: Imagination and the Teacher's Play Pedagogy
Risk Level: Low Risk
Date Approved: 22/01/2015
Ethics Clearance End Date: 31/12/2015

This email is to advise that your application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee and confirmed as meeting the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

This project has been awarded ethical clearance until 31/12/2015. In order to comply with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, progress reports are to be submitted on an annual basis. If an extension of time is required researchers must submit a progress report.

Whilst the data collection of your project has received ethical clearance, the decision and authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that appropriate permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to ACU HREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. Failure to provide permission letters to ACU HREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. Further, this approval is only valid as long as approved procedures are followed.

If you require a formal approval certificate, please respond via reply email and one will be issued.

Decisions related to low risk ethical review are subject to ratification at the next available Committee meeting. You will be contacted should the Committee raises any additional questions or concerns.

Researchers who fail to submit a progress report may have their ethical clearance revoked and/or the ethical clearances of other projects suspended. When your project has been completed please complete and submit a progress/final report form and advise us by email at your earliest convenience. The information researchers provide on the security of records, compliance with approval consent procedures and documentation and responses to special conditions is reported to the NHMRC on an annual basis. In accordance with NHMRC the ACU HREC may undertake annual audits of any projects considered to be of more than low risk.

It is the Principal Investigators / Supervisors responsibility to ensure that:

1. All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC with 72 hours.
2. Any changes to the protocol must be approved by the HREC by submitting a Modification Form prior to the research commencing or continuing.
3. All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Letter and consent form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee.

For progress and/or final reports, please complete and submit a Progress/Final Report form:
http://www.acu.edu.au/research/support_for_researchers/human_ethics/forms

For modifications to your project, please complete and submit a Modification form:
http://www.acu.edu.au/research/support_for_researchers/human_ethics/forms

Researchers must immediately report to HREC any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol eg: changes to protocols or unforeseen circumstances or adverse effects on participants.

Please do not hesitate to contact the office if you have any queries.

Kind regards,
Kylie Pashley
on behalf of ACU HREC Chair, Dr Nadia Crittenden

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



Department of
Education & Training

Strategy & Review Group

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Telephone: +61 3 9637 2000
DX 210083
GPO Box 4367
Melbourne, Victoria 3001

2015_002591

Ms Sarah Young
Faculty of Education and Arts
Australian Catholic University
Level 1, 34-36 Brunswick Street
FITZROY 3065

Dear Ms Young

Thank you for your application of 6 January 2015 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools and/or early childhood settings titled *Imagination and the Teacher's Play Pedagogy*.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. The research is conducted in accordance with the final documentation you provided to the Department of Education and Training.
2. Separate approval for the research needs to be sought from school principals and/or centre directors. This is to be supported by the Department of Education and Training approved documentation and, if applicable, the letter of approval from a relevant and formally constituted Human Research Ethics Committee.
3. The project is commenced within 12 months of this approval letter and any extensions or variations to your study, including those requested by an ethics committee must be submitted to the Department of Education and Training for its consideration before you proceed.
4. As a matter of courtesy, you advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools or governing body of the early childhood settings that you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director or governing body.
5. You acknowledge the support of the Department of Education Training in any publications arising from the research.
6. The Research Agreement conditions, which include the reporting requirements at the conclusion of your study, are upheld. A reminder will be sent for reports not submitted by the study's indicative completion date.



7. If the Department of Education Training has commissioned you to undertake this research, the responsible Branch/Division will need to approve any material you provide for publication on the Department's Research and Evaluation Register.

I wish you well with your research study. Should you have further enquiries on this matter, please contact Youla Michaels, Project Support Officer, Research, Evaluation and Analytics Branch, by telephone on (03) 9637 2707 or by email at michaels.youla.y@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Susan Thomas
Director
Research, Evaluation and Analytics Branch

05/02/2015



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER: Preschool Teacher

PROJECT TITLE: Imagination and the Teacher's Play Pedagogy

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Associate Professor Susan Edwards

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Sarah Young

STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD)

Dear Preschool Teacher,

Sarah Young is a qualified teacher and has worked in a range of early childhood settings and participated in research projects with children and adults. She is conducting research for the completion of a Doctorate of Philosophy and you are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

The aim of this project is to understand preschool teacher's beliefs and experiences of their imagination in play with the goal of developing their own teaching in play. Play and is a common occurrence in the preschool setting and Australian preschool teachers are required to support play-based learning. Play is an imaginative and creative process that children engage and learn in and most children feel at ease in play, however, it often happens without the teacher's involvement as generally teachers do not interfere, or they feel uncomfortable in the play process. The study will develop an understanding of:

- How the teacher experiences their imagination in play;
- How the teacher's knowledge of their imagination influences their teaching in play; and
- How the inclusion of children's play themes inform the teaching in play.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by student Sarah Young, and will form the basis for the degree of PhD at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Associate Professor Susan Edwards.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no foreseeable risks, however every project contains some risk. This research will use ethical practices that understand the participant's wellbeing is paramount. Privacy and confidentiality protocols will safeguard all the participant's identity at all times. The names and teaching locations of all participants will be changed on all data collected, with pseudonyms used in their place. All participants will be reminded of their rights to leave the research if they do not wish to proceed at any time.

What will I be asked to do?

The activities that you, the children in your preschool room, and the researcher will do together are as follows:

1. April 2015: An audiotaped individual *Semi-structured Interview* (one hour) to find out your beliefs of children's play, the teacher's role in play, and imagination. At a convenient time and location for you. These will be informal and you do not need to prepare anything. The discussion is your views and beliefs of play and imagination.
2. April 2015: A researcher written *Play Observation* (three hours) in your preschool settings to observe the children's play themes. In your setting at a convenient time for you. You and the children in your room do not need to prepare anything; the researcher will observe the play

activities in the room or outdoor setting.

3. May 2015: An audiotaped *Professional Learning Session* (three hours) with you and the other two teacher participants to talk about children's play, the teacher's role in play, and imagination. Also to co-plan with the researcher a creative play experience, using our children's play themes, for the researcher to implement. At a convenient time and location for all three teachers.
4. June/July/August 2015: Three videoed *Creative play experiences* (90 minutes – 60 minutes with the children and 30 minutes to set-up and pack up). One per-week over a three-week period with you, the researcher and the children in your preschool room. At the end of each session you will be asked to write/ or audio record a reflection and the children will be asked to draw a reflection. In your setting at a convenient time for you. You will be required to take part in the Creative play experience with the researcher and children. The researcher will lead to sessions but the ideas and suggestions from you and children are needed to develop the experience.
5. July & September 2015: Two audiotaped *Group Interviews* (two hours each) with you and the other two teacher participants to share your experiences and ideas of children's play, the teacher's role in play, and imagination. At a convenient time and location for all three teachers.
6. April – December 2015: Any ongoing written/ or audio-recorded reflections are welcome too. These can be done anytime if you would like to record or write any thoughts.

How much time will the project take?

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to commit to approximately 16 hours over a nine-month period.

What are the benefits of the research project?

This study will contribute to your professional development as an educator by working with other teachers to share ideas and beliefs on play and teaching in the preschool. In addition through this experience you may develop your own play practice by further understanding your role in play. Play is complex and so is the teacher's role so further understanding will assist other preschool teachers to engage in this vital learning area of play. The children will benefit through engagement in a number of creative play experiences.

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.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

- The information that is collected will be used to develop a deeper understanding of teacher's experiences in play.
- The results of the research will be published and shared through the PhD thesis, journal articles, practitioner publication and presented at conferences and other educational arenas.
- Only the researcher will have access to this data and digital data will be stored on a password-protected computer and hard copy data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a room at ACU (Associate Professor Susan Edward, office at the Faculty of Education and Arts, Australian Catholic University, Room: 1.04, Level 1, 34-36 Brunswick, Fitzroy, VIC 3065) during the study.
- Privacy and confidentiality will safeguard the participant's identity at all times. The names and teaching locations of all participants will be changed on all data collected, with pseudonyms used in their place.
- The data will be held for a minimum of five years following completion of the study. After this time the data will be destroyed.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

Results are not focussed on individual participants but on overall experiences of imagination and play. All participants will be provided with copies of the results in the form of the thesis upon request.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

You can contact Sarah Young on 0412 771 684 or by email at sryoun001@myacu.edu.au if you would like to chat about the study or have any questions.

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: 18856). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Manager of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.: 02 9739 2519
Fax: 02 9739 2870
Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?

If you wish to sign up to the study please email Sarah on sryoun001@myacu.edu.au or call 0412 771 684. The forms can be returned to me at:

Sarah Young
Faculty of Education and Arts
Australian Catholic University
Room: 1.04,
Level 1, 34-36 Brunswick Street
Fitzroy, VIC 3065

Yours sincerely

(



Sarah Young!
STUDENT RESEARCHER!

)



Associate Professor Susan Edwards!
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR!!

PRESCHOOL TEACHER CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: Imagination and the Teacher’s Play Pedagogy
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Associate Professor Susan Edwards
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Sarah Young

I have read and understood the information provided in the Participant Information Letter. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research data collection from April 2015 until December 2015.

I consent to:	Yes	No
April 2015: An audiotaped individual <i>Semi-structured Interview</i> with the researcher (one hour) to find out my beliefs of children’s play, the teacher’s role in play, and imagination. At a convenient time and location for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
April 2015: A researcher written <i>Play Observation</i> (three hours) in my preschool setting to observe the children’s play themes. In my setting at a convenient time for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
May 2015: An audiotaped <i>Professional Learning Session</i> (three hours) the researcher, and the other two teacher participants to talk about children’s play, the teacher’s role in play, and imagination. Also to co-plan with the researcher a creative play experience, using the children’s play themes from my room. At a convenient time and location for all three teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
June/July /August 2015: Three videoed <i>Creative play experiences</i> (90 minutes – 60 minutes with the children and 30 minutes to set-up and pack up). One per-week over a three-week period with the researcher and the children in my preschool room. At the end of each session I will be asked to write/ or audio record a reflection and the children will be asked to draw a reflection. In my setting at a convenient time for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
July & September 2015: Two audiotaped <i>Group Interviews</i> (two hours each) with the researcher and the other two teacher participants to share our experiences and ideas of children’s play, the teacher’s role in play, and imagination. At a convenient time and location for all three teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
April – December 2015: Any ongoing written/ or audio-recorded reflections are welcome too, these can be done if and when I would like.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The researchers in future research projects may use the data that I provide during this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way and will not, under any circumstances, contain names or information linked to identifiable participants or locations.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:.....

SIGNATURE:DATE

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:DATE.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:DATE



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER: Centre Director

PROJECT TITLE: Imagination and the Teacher's Play Pedagogy
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Associate Professor Susan Edwards
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Sarah Young
STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD)

Dear Centre Director,
Sarah Young is a qualified teacher and has worked in a range of early childhood settings and participated in research projects with children and adults. She is conducting research for the completion of a Doctorate of Philosophy and your centre preschool teachers are invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

This research study will help preschool teachers develop their role in children's play. Play is an imaginative and creative process that children engage and learn in and most children feel at ease in play, however, it often happens without the teacher's involvement as generally teachers do not interfere, or they feel uncomfortable in the play process.

The purpose of this project is to understand preschool teacher's beliefs and experiences of their imagination in play with the aim of developing their own teaching in play. The study will develop an understanding of:

- How the teacher experiences their imagination in play;
- How the teacher's knowledge of their imagination influences their teaching in play; and
- How the inclusion of children's play themes inform the teaching in play.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by student Sarah Young, and will form the basis for the degree of PhD at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Associate Professor Susan Edwards.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no foreseeable risks, however every project contains some risk. This research will use ethical practices that understand the participant's wellbeing is paramount. Privacy and confidentiality protocols will safeguard all the participant's identity at all times. The names and teaching locations of all participants will be changed on all data collected, with pseudonyms used in their place. All participants will be reminded of their rights to leave the research if they do not wish to proceed at any time.

What will I be asked to do?

The activities that the researcher, the teacher and the children will do together are as follows:

1. April 2015: An audiotaped individual *Semi-structured Interview* (one hour) to find out the teacher's beliefs of children's play, the teacher's role in play, and imagination. At a convenient time and location for the teacher. These will be informal and the teacher does not need to prepare anything. The discussion is on their views and beliefs of play and imagination.
2. April 2015: A researcher written *Play Observation* (three hours) in the preschool settings to observe the children's play themes. In the preschool setting at a convenient time for the teacher. The teacher and children do not need to prepare anything; the researcher will observe

the play activities in the room or outdoor setting.

3. **May 2015: An audiotaped *Professional Learning Session* (three hours) with the three teacher participants to talk about children's play, the teacher's role in play, and imagination. Also to co-plan with the researcher the first creative play experience, using the children's play themes in their preschool setting, for the researcher to implement. At a convenient time and location for all three teachers.**
4. **June/July/August 2015: Three videoed *Creative play experiences* (90 minutes – 60 minutes with the children and 30 minutes to set-up and pack up). One per-week over a three-week period with the teacher, the children in their preschool room with the researcher. At the end of each session the teacher will be asked to write/ or audio record a reflection and the children will be asked to draw a reflection. In the preschool setting at a convenient time for the teacher. The teacher will be required to take part in the Creative play experience with the researcher and children. The researcher will lead to sessions but the ideas and suggestions from the teachers and children are needed to develop the experience.**
5. **September 2015: One audiotaped Group Interview (two hours) with the three teacher participants to share their experiences and ideas of children's play, the teacher's role in play, and imagination. At a convenient time and location for all three teachers. These sessions are informal and require to teacher to share their experiences of their teaching in play.**
6. **April – December 2015: Any ongoing written/ or audio-recorded reflections are welcome too. These are can be done anytime if the teacher would like to record or write their thoughts.**

How much time will the project take?

If the teacher takes part in this study, they will be asked to commit to approximately 16 hours over a nine-month period.

What are the benefits of the research project?

This study will contribute to the teacher's professional development as an educator by working with other teachers to share ideas and beliefs on play and teaching in the preschool. In addition through this experience they will develop their own play practice by further understanding their role in play. Play is complex and so is the teacher's role so further understanding will assist other preschool teachers to engage in this vital learning area of play. The children will benefit through engagement in a number of creative play experiences.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. No one is under any obligation to participate. If a teacher at your centre agrees to participate, they can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

- The information that is collected will be used to develop a deeper understanding of teacher's experiences in play.
- The results of the research will be published and shared through the PhD thesis, journal articles, practitioner publication and presented at conferences and other educational arenas.
- Only the researcher will have access to this data and digital data will be stored on a password-protected computer and hard copy data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a room at ACU (Associate Professor Susan Edward, office at the Faculty of Education and Arts, Australian Catholic University, Room: 1.04, Level 1, 34-36 Brunswick, Fitzroy, VIC 3065) during the study.
- Privacy and confidentiality will safeguard the participant's identity at all times. The names and teaching locations of all participants will be changed on all data collected, with pseudonyms used in their place.
- The data will be held for a minimum of five years following completion of the study. After this time the data will be destroyed.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

Results are not focussed on individual participants but on overall experiences of imagination and play. All participants will be provided with copies of the results in the form of the thesis upon request.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

You can contact Sarah Young on 0412 771 684 or by email at sryoun001@myacu.edu.au if you would like to chat about the study or have any questions.

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: 18856). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Manager of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Manager, Ethics
c/o Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
NORTH SYDNEY, NSW 2059
Ph.: 02 9739 2519
Fax: 02 9739 2870
Email: resethics.manager@acu.edu.au

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?

If you wish to sign up to the study please email Sarah on sryoun001@myacu.edu.au or call 0412 771 684. The forms can be returned to me at:

Sarah Young
Faculty of Education and Arts
Australian Catholic University
Room: 1.04,
Level 1, 34-36 Brunswick Street
Fitzroy, VIC 3065

Yours sincerely



Sarah Young!
STUDENT RESEARCHER!



Associate Professor Susan Edwards!
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR!!

CENTRE DIRECTOR CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: Imagination and the Teacher’s Play Pedagogy
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Associate Professor Susan Edwards
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Sarah Young

I have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree for my centre to participate in this research data collection from April 2015 until December 2015.

The activities that the preschool teacher, the children in the preschool room, and the researcher will do together are as follows:

- April 2015: An audiotaped individual *Semi-structured Interview* (one hour) to find out your beliefs of children’s play, the teacher’s role in play, and imagination. At a convenient time and location for you.
- April 2015: A researcher written *Play Observation* (three hours) in your preschool settings to observe the children’s play themes. In your setting at a convenient time for you.
- May 2015: An audiotaped *Professional Learning Session* (three hours) with you and the other two teacher participants to talk about children’s play, the teacher’s role in play, and imagination. Also to co-plan with the researcher a creative play experience, using our children’s play themes, for the researcher to implement. At a convenient time and location for all three teachers.
- June/July/August 2015: Three videoed *Creative play experiences* (90 minutes – 60 minutes with the children and 30 minutes to set-up and pack up). One per-week over a three-week period with you, the researcher and the children in your preschool room. At the end of each session you will be asked to write/ or audio record a reflection and the children will be asked to draw a reflection. In your setting at a convenient time for you.
- September 2015: one audiotaped *Group Interviews* (two hours) with you and the other two teacher participants to share your experiences and ideas of children’s play, the teacher’s role in play, and imagination. At a convenient time and location for all three teachers.
- April – December 2015: Any ongoing written/ or audio-recorded reflections are welcome too.

I understand that there will be digitally recordings and realise that the participants can withdraw consent at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify the centre in any way.

NAME OF CENTRE DIRECTOR:

SIGNATURE DATE

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:DATE

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:DATE

Appendix D: Information Letter and Consent Form – Parents



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER: Parents

PROJECT TITLE: Imagination and the Teacher's Play Pedagogy
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Associate Professor Susan Edwards
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Sarah Young
STUDENT'S DEGREE: Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD)

Dear Parents,

Sarah Young is a qualified teacher and has worked in a range of early childhood settings and participated in research projects with children and adults. She is conducting research for the completion of a Doctorate of Philosophy and your child is invited to participate in the research project described below.

What is the project about?

This research study will help preschool teachers develop their role in children's play. Play is an imaginative and creative process that children engage and learn in and most children feel at ease in play, however, it often happens without the teacher's involvement as generally teachers do not interfere, or they feel uncomfortable in the play process.

The purpose of this project is to understand preschool teacher's beliefs and experiences of their imagination in play with the aim of developing their own teaching in play. The study will develop an understanding of:

- How the teacher experiences their imagination in play;
- How the teacher's knowledge of their imagination influences their teaching in play; and
- How the inclusion of children's play themes inform the teaching in play.

Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by student Sarah Young, and will form the basis for the degree of PhD at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Associate Professor Susan Edwards.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no foreseeable risks, however every project contains some risk. This research will use ethical practices that understand the participant's wellbeing is paramount. Privacy and confidentiality protocols will safeguard all the participant's identity at all times. The names and teaching locations of all participants will be changed on all data collected, with pseudonyms used in their place. All participants will be reminded of their rights to leave the research if they do not wish to proceed at any time.

What will your child be asked to do?

The activities that the researcher, the teacher, your child and the children in your preschool centre will do together are as follows:

1. April 2015: A researcher written *Play Observation* (three hours) in your preschool settings to observe the children's play themes.
2. June/July/ August 2015: Three videoed *Creative play experiences* (90 minutes – 60 minutes with the children and 30 minutes to set-up and pack up). One per-week over a three-week period with the teacher, your child, and all the children in your preschool room with the researcher. At the end of each session the teacher will be asked to write/ or audio record a



PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: Imagination and the Teacher's Play Pedagogy
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Associate Professor Susan Edwards
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Sarah Young

I (*the parent/guardian*) have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this research data collection from April 2015 until August 2015.

I consent to:	Yes	No
April 2015: A researcher written <i>Play Observation</i> (three hours) in my child's preschool setting to observe the children's play themes. In the setting at a convenient time for the teacher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
June/July /August 2015: Three videoed <i>Creative play experiences</i> (90 minutes – 60 minutes with the children and 30 minutes to set-up and pack up). One per-week over a three-week period with my child's teacher, the researcher and the children in the preschool room. At the end of each session my child will be asked to draw something they remember from the experiences. These will be copied and the originals returned to your child.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The researchers in future research projects may use the data that my child provides during this research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I understand that my child's participation is voluntary, that my child or I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way and will not, under any circumstances, contain names or information linked to identifiable participants or locations.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

SIGNATURE: DATE

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: DATE

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: DATE

Appendix E: Assent Form – Children



ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: Imagination and the Teacher’s Play Pedagogy
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Associate Professor Susan Edwards
STUDENT RESEARCHER: Sarah Young

Hello (child’s name)

My name is Sarah Young and this is a picture of me.



I am interested in how you play with your teachers. I would like to come to your preschool and video you playing with your teachers and me. After this I would like you to draw a picture of your play.

Can you let me know if this is okay – please colour in a SMILEY face for **YES** and the SAD face for **NO**.

YES

Thank you - Sarah Young

NO



NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18: DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: DATE

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: DATE



Appendix F: Introduction Letter – Teachers



Faculty of Education and Arts
Australian Catholic University
Room: 1.04,
Level 1, 34-36 Brunswick Street
Fitzroy, VIC 3065

23rd February 2015

Dear Participant/Teacher

I am conducting research in 2015 for the completion of a Doctor of Philosophy and I was wondering if you were interested in being a participant.

I am a qualified teacher and have worked in a range of early childhood settings and participated in research projects with children and adults. I would like to work with degree qualified (3 or 4 year) preschool teachers, in their four-year-old room, in a long day care setting or a stand-alone preschool, and the children in their room. You do not need any other expertise - just an interest in the creative act of play.

This research study aims to help preschool teachers develop their role in children's play and I am really interested in your input.

Play is an imaginative and creative process that children engage and learn in and most children feel at ease in play, however, it often happens without the teacher's involvement as generally teachers do not interfere, or they feel uncomfortable in the play process. The purpose of this project is to understand preschool teacher's beliefs and experiences of their imagination in play with the aim of developing their own teaching in play.

If you would like to find out more about the study or have any questions, please give me a call on 0412 771 684 or by email at sryoun001@myacu.edu.au.

Kind regards

Sarah Young (PhD student)

Appendix G: Method – Semi-structured interview questions

PROJECT TITLE	Imagination and the Teacher’s Play Pedagogy
RESEARCHER	Sarah Young
Semi-structure interviews	
Teacher’s Name (Pseudonym)	
Date	
Interview Duration	
<p style="text-align: center;">Interview question and sequence guide</p> <p>1. Factual questions Firstly, I am interested to know about the children’s play in your room.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What themes do they like to use in their play? – How do they use their imagination in their play? <p>2. Opinions and values questions I am interested to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – About your beliefs on play? – What do you think the role of the teacher is in play? <p>3. Sensory questions If and when you do enter the play:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What kind of things do you say or do? – How else do you respond in the play? <p>4. Feelings questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What do you think about the motifs children use in their play? – What do you think about your own imagination in play? – How do you feel when you are in the play? <p>5. Background Questions I would like some background information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How long have you been teaching? – Where and when did you do your studies to become a teacher <p>6. Final questions Just before we finish, I like to know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What do you hope to get out of being a participant of this study? – Is there anything else you would like to talk about regarding the study? 	

Appendix H: Method – Group interview questions

PROJECT TITLE	Imagination and the Teacher's Play Pedagogy
RESEARCHER	Sarah Young
Group interview	
Teacher's Names (Pseudonyms)	
Date	
Interview Duration	
<p>1. What are your thoughts on children's play?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The children's play and popular culture themes? – What's happening in their play? <p>2. What are your thoughts on you in the play?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What do you think about your role in play? – What do you contribute to the play? – How do you use your imagination in the play? – What do you feel when you are in the play? – Why are you in the play? <p>3. Emerging insights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Why do we think that we should/n't be involved in play? – Why are we worried that we will take over? – Why are we worried to add ideas? – How do you feel when other adults watch you play? – How do others assist you to play? – What do you need to do to be able to play? – When you are in play what do to do to keep children engaged? – Are their any tensions of being a player? – Did you ever feel like you were engaging your imagination in play? – What did that feel like? – What do you need to be able to do this? <p>4. Any more thoughts/ideas?</p>	

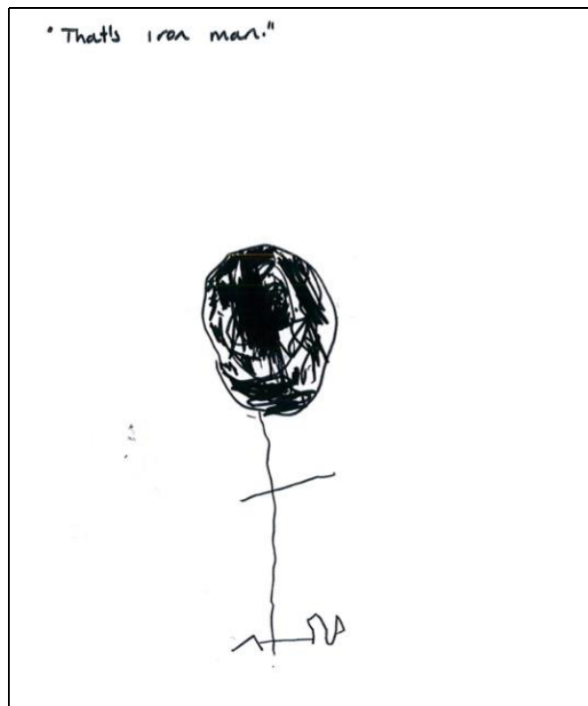
Appendix I: Examples of the children's drawings representing the popular culture motifs



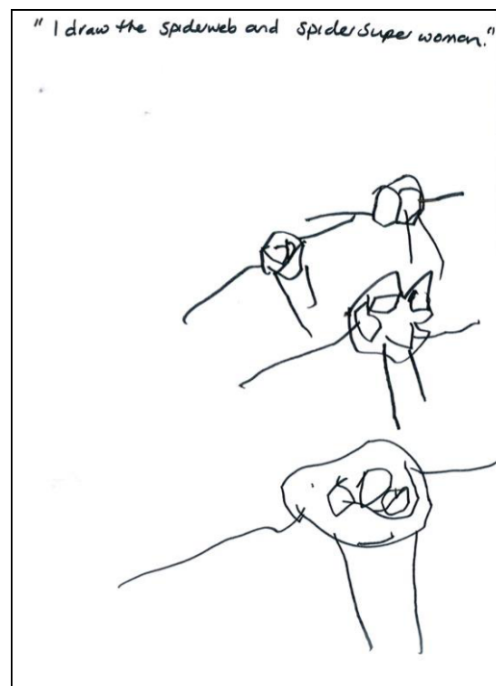
Popular-culture genre – Octonauts™, character Kwasi



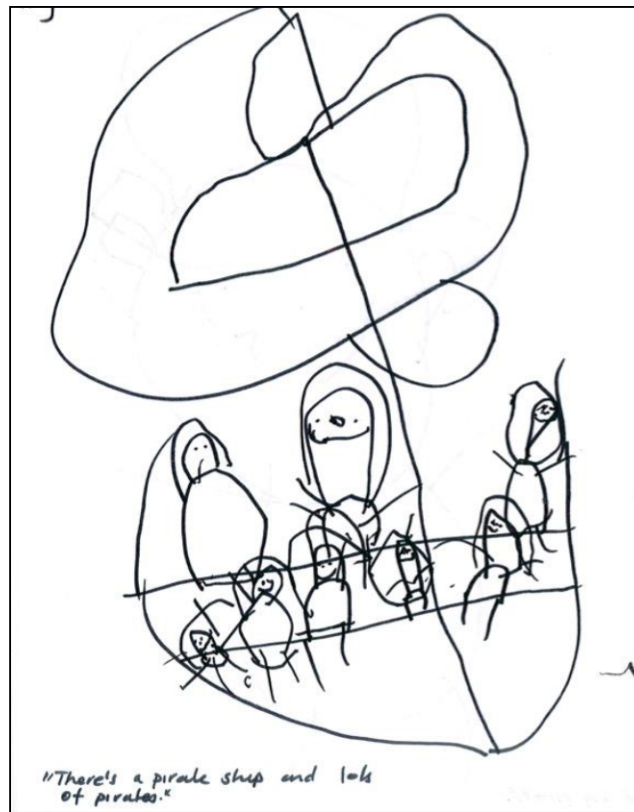
Popular-culture genre – Frozen™, character Elsa



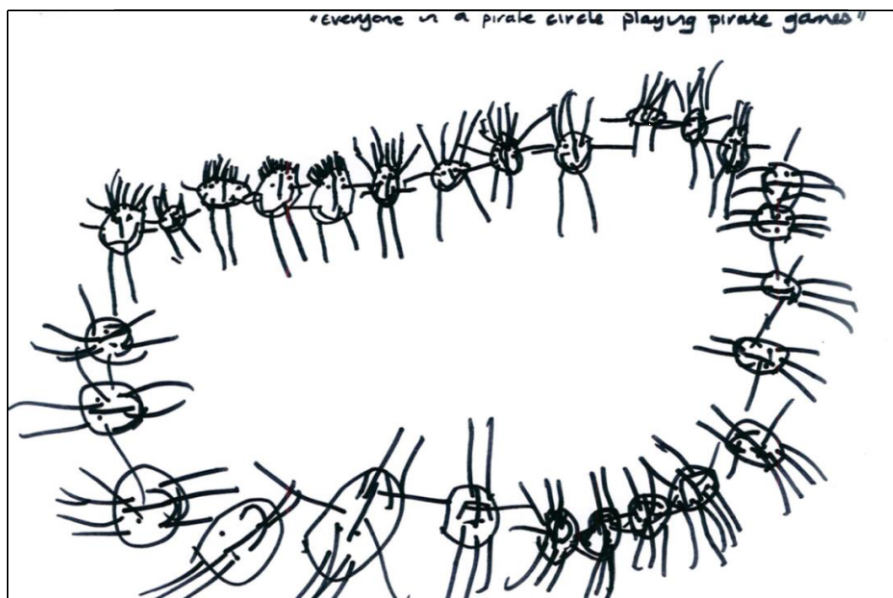
Popular-culture genre – Superheroes, character Ironman



Popular-culture genre – Superheroes, character Spiderwoman

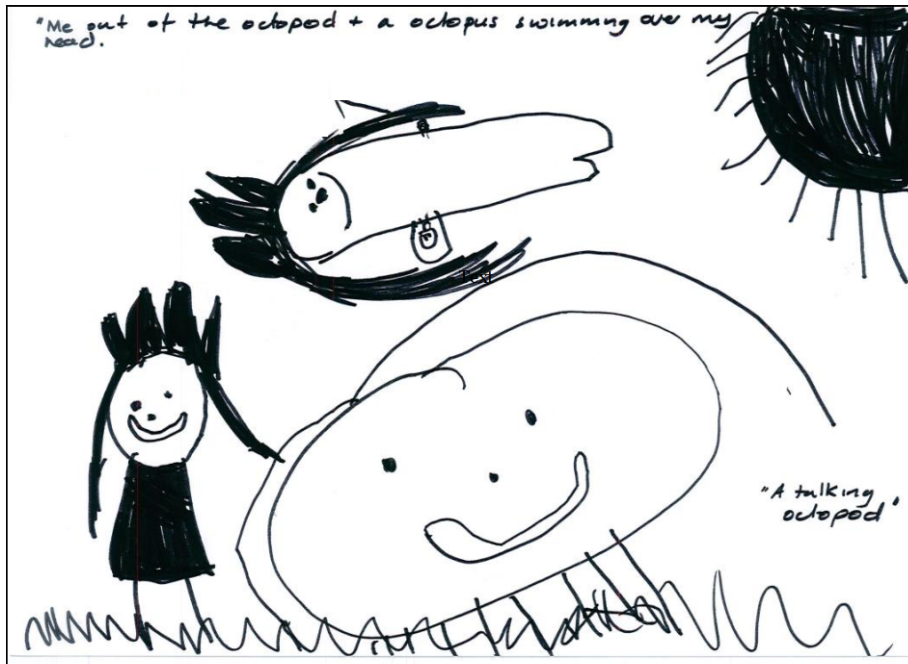


Popular-culture genre – *Pirates of the Caribbean*TM, character pirates



Popular-culture genre – *Pirates of the Caribbean*TM, character pirates

Appendix J: Examples of the children's drawings representing adventures



Adventures – “Me out of the Octopod and an octopus swimming over my head.”



Adventures – “That’s holding the snakes in there.”



Adventures – "It's you, touching Elsa's hand."



"It's all, these are the icicles and these are all the superheroes frozen."

Adventures – "It's all, these are the icicles, and these are all the superheroes frozen."