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Dissertation Title

Relinquishing Control: Children learning and developing through adult co-play in Early Years Settings.

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A Thesis submitted to Maynooth University Department of Education in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Education

Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation, which I now submit to Maynooth University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education is entirely my own work; that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Abstract

The role of the adult in children's sociodramatic play within Early Years settings remains widely debated amongst writers and academics on play and the Early Years. However, it is a subject which remains under researched. Some writers have indicated that an active adult presence within sociodramatic play can support children's learning and development. However, many writers also express concern that the unequal power dynamic between adults and children within Early Years settings means that adults risk ruining play, by dominating and taking control. This qualitative study investigated the types of contributions an adult made whilst playing with children during sociodramatic play within an Early Years setting. The study also examined whether these contributions offered opportunities to support children's learning and development or impacted negatively on children's control over their play. The research involved a Case Study of a private Irish Early Years setting in which the researcher was the sole practitioner working with five children. The use of constructivist grounded theory during the analysis allowed for categories of contributions to emerge. These categories were then examined in detail and compared to existing research on the topic as well as recommendations from *Aistear*, the National Curriculum Framework. Nine Adult Contribution Categories were found to exist, and an analysis of these Categories showed that their use lead to either more child or more adult, control of the play. A Controlling-Playing Continuum and Score were devised based on the analysis of these Categories. It was concluded that the contributions the adult made did offer opportunities to support children's learning and development. However, some of the contributions made had the potential to impact negatively on children's control over their play. It was recommended that adults play with children in sociodramatic play within Early Years settings in order to support children's learning and development but that these contributions are exercised with caution, to ensure that children remained in control of their play.

Contents

List of Regularly Used Abbreviations

Aistear	Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework
C.E.C.D.E.	The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education
EY	Early Years
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
Síolta	Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"This point about play being self-chosen and self-directed is ignored by, or perhaps unknown to, adults who try to take control of children's play (and thereby ruin it). Adults can play with children, and in some cases can even be leaders in children's play, but to do so requires at least the same sensitivity that children themselves show to the needs and wishes of all the players. Because adults are commonly viewed as authority figures, children often feel less able to quit, or to disagree with the proposed rules, when an adult is leading than when a child is leading. And so the result often is something that, for many of the children, is not play at all. When a child feels coerced, the play spirit vanishes and all of the advantages of that spirit go with it."

(Gray, 2013: 179)

1.1 Play and its Benefits

Play is now accepted as being so important in the lives of young children that it has been recognised as a right by the United Nations within its Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). In addition, play is now widely acknowledged by many researchers for its contribution to children's learning and development. Hirsh-Pasek et al., for example, have claimed that play contributes to children's social-emotional and academic development and learning as well as their growing confidence and self-regulation (2008).

Meanwhile Wood (2004) claims that in play children demonstrate improved verbal communication, high levels of social and interaction skills, creative use of play materials, imaginative and divergent thinking skills and problem-solving capacities.

1.2 Theorists on play

Froebel (1826) was one of the first theorists who recognised the importance of play to children's development and learning, building a play and nature-based pedagogy of learning, known as the kindergarten, which built upon what he viewed as children's natural desire to play. Froebel believed that the experiences of the world which children gained through their play allowed them to construct their own understanding of it. He considered play to be "the highest expression of human development in childhood" (Froebel, 1826).

Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) defined play as the leading source of children's development, helping them to learn who they are and how to interact with others. He saw play as empowering for children, helping them develop skills such as abstract thought, will power and language and thus recognising play's central role in the child's cognitive, social-emotional and cultural development.

Later play theorists such as Fein (1985) and Sutton-Smith (2001) discussed the important role of imaginative play in allowing children deal with strong emotions such as fear, anger and sadness. Socio-cultural theorists such as Rogoff (1992) discuss play in terms of an "apprenticeship" in learning whilst Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss all learning as being "situated" within a "community of practice". From these perspectives, children go through a transformation from being novices on the periphery of "culturally valued activities", eventually becoming experts, in a process of "guided participation" with adults or more accomplished children (Brooker, 2010). In this way, play becomes a means for the child to learn about their community and culture and to journey towards expertise.

1.3 Defining play

As play develops many of the skills which we seek to nurture in Early Years (EY) education, adults tend to define play in terms of its usefulness to development (Lofdahl, 2005). Children, in contrast, have different motivations to play and usually "are playing because it is fun" (Gray, 2013: 278).

There are diverse views as to what exactly constitutes play but the following definition of play by Gray summarises its key features:

- Play is self-chosen and self-directed. Children can choose whether or not they wish to play, can make and change rules and are always free to leave the play.
- Play is motivated by means more than ends. Play is exercised for its own sake rather than for any extrinsic rewards or goals.
- Play involves rules which provide structure but are flexible enough to allow for creativity.
- Play is imaginative. It is different from the real world and this is understood by the players.
- Play happens in an "alert, active, but relatively unstressed frame of mind"

(2013: 178-180)

Meanwhile Bruce (2011), a play and early childhood theorist influenced by Froebel, described the following twelve features of play:

- Children use first-hand experiences from life.

- Children make up rules to keep control of the play.

- Children symbolically represent as they play.

- Children choose to play.

- Children rehearse their future in role play.

- Children sometimes play alone.

- Children pretend when they play.

- Children play with adults and children cooperatively in pairs or groups.

- Children have a personal play agenda which may or may not be shared.

- Children are deeply involved and difficult to distract from their deep learning as they wallow in their play and learning.

- Children try out their new skills and competences.

- Children coordinate ideas and feelings and make sense of relationships with their families, friends and cultures in play.

1.4 Sociodramatic play

Although there are many forms of play, the type of play which will be dealt with in this study is sociodramatic play, sometimes termed make-believe, pretend or role play. In this type of play, according to Vygotskians, the children create an imaginary situation, take on and act out roles and follow a set of rules, which are the behaviours determined by the roles or the scenario. The play is planned ahead and contains rules for participation which may be hidden at first but become more explicit over time and are negotiated by the participants. Sociodramatic play can be either solitary or parallel for younger or less experienced children but usually evolves into co-operative, social play as children get older and/or more experienced (Bodrova and Leong, 2007).

Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (*Aistear*), (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2009), describes young children's pretend play as play with objects, actions and situations which moves from simple to complex as children grow. It points out that in pretend play children make up stories and scenarios, act out real and fantasy events and try out roles, occupations and experiences. *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) defines sociodramatic play as pretend play which involves other children and/or adults and notes that this particular type of play offers unique opportunities for making friends and negotiating as well as developing communication and language skills.

1.5 Play in Irish EY Educational Policy

In Ireland, in recent years, there has been a pronounced shift away from Piagetian and developmental notions of individualistic, goal driven aims for children within EY policy. In it's place, there has emerged an increasing recognition of the importance of social-relational interactions and a change in the image of the child from one of deficit to one of competence, at least at a policy level (NCCA, 2009).

This shift has been reflected within both *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) and *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood (Síolta),* (The Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (C.E.C.D.E.), 2006). Both *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) and *Síolta* (C.E.C.D.E., 2006) recognise the central role of play within children's lives and its role in supporting development and learning. *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) is based on learning through play within an emergent and inquiry-based curriculum. Play is also one of the 12 Principles of Quality within *Síolta* (C.E.C.D.E., 2006), which underpin and inform quality practice within EY educational settings in Ireland.

This emphasis on play within the policy documents governing the Irish EY educational landscape places a particular onus on Irish EY practitioners to know and understand how they can best support and respond to children's emerging interests during play and thereby maximise children's learning opportunities.

1.6 Adult Involvement in Children's Play

Vygotsky (1967) speaks of children's development being dependent on the learning which arises from engaging with More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs), whilst Gray (2013) points to the benefits which free age mixing can provide to children's development. Whilst much educational research for young children emphasises the enormous benefits of learning through play, for some researchers these benefits are most likely to be achieved with adult involvement in play (Lindqvist, 1995; Bruce, 1997; Singer, 2006; Bodrova and Leong, 2007; Hakkarainen, 2013). However, others, such as Gray (2013) and Wragg (2013), question whether adults should be involved in children's play at all, believing that adults interrupt children's play and freedom.

1.6.1 Adult Involvement in Play in the Early Years

In contemporary EY settings there is a lack of free age mixing across the whole spectrum of educational settings. This means that the opportunities for learning which could be provided by engaging with older or more experienced peers, are often, instead, provided by the adults within the setting. However, EY researchers such as Singer (2013) have voiced concerns regarding the implications for play of the unequal power dynamic between adults and children in EY settings. For EY settings in which adults wish to maximise children's learning opportunities whilst simultaneously protecting their ownership and control of play, this

contradiction in the theories around play and learning becomes particularly pertinent. As many countries now espouse a play-based pedagogy in EY education, there is an urgent need for more clarity around this issue. However, it remains an area that is currently under-researched (Devi et al., 2018).

1.7 Questioning the adult's role

If, as EY practitioners and researchers, we value the role of children's play in contributing to their learning and development and wish to support it through play, we need to be mindful, whilst doing so, that we simultaneously protect children's ownership and control of their play (Theobald et al., 2015). Accordingly, an identification of the types of contributions by adults in play which damage play for children, may be worthwhile.

Many EY researchers, whilst agreeing with Gray (2013), that over involvement by adults in children's play risks depriving children of opportunities to grow, have also demonstrated that children in their earliest years can benefit from particular types of play with adults, which can support children's advancement towards more complex play with peers (Hakkarainen, 2013; Gaviria-Loaiza et al, 2017). Like Gray (2013) above, these authors suggest that play between adults and children, when practiced sensitively, can offer many of the benefits which are provided by play with older and/or more experienced peers.

1.8 Personal and Practical Implications

Over the last few years, as an EY practitioner, I have moved from a purely Montessori based pedagogy (which I trained for and practiced in the U.K.) towards one which has become play based, inspired by my move to *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) in Ireland. Montessori pedagogy (Montessori, 1909, 1949) is based on freedom of movement for children within a prepared

environment in which a specific set of didactic materials are available for independent or group use by the children. An adult trained in Montessori is available to assist the children and the philosophy is based on a principle of respect for the self, others and the environment. This move from a traditional Montessori setting towards a play-based setting was the beginning of my own curiosity around the role which an adult should play with children during sociodramatic play. In contrast to the role of the adult in a play-based setting, my role as a Montessori "directress" had been fixed and clearly defined.

1.8.1 The role of the adult in Montessori education

The role of the adult in a Montessori setting is to provide and maintain a well-prepared environment for the children which is rich in learning opportunities (Montessori, 1909, 1949). The adult supports the children in their knowledge and use of the materials through mostly one-to-one and occasionally group lessons. Although the children are free to move around and socialise, there is a strong emphasis placed on individual and independent work by the child with the materials provided. The increasing capability of children to concentrate, solve problems and work independently is encouraged by the adult.

Children are encouraged to follow their own interests and satisfy their individual curiosities. The adult encourages children's explorations and efforts but avoids interrupting children's work with instruction, only offering support when necessary. The adult relies on the self-correcting nature of the didactic materials to allow children to overcome challenges by themselves. However, such explorations are limited by the materials which are available, and the basic set of rules imposed by the setting, known as the "ground rules" (Montessori, 1909). The adult ensures adherence by children to the ground rules through reminders.

1.8.1.1 Sociodramatic Play within Montessori Settings

Traditionally within a Montessori setting there would be little allowance for specific sociodramatic play materials, although some children would use the Montessori materials in this way. The degree of adherence to this traditional pedagogical approach varies for each setting and sometimes for individual practitioners within settings. For children, this means that whether they are permitted to engage in such play with the Montessori materials depends on the setting. However, it has been my experience that many Montessori settings have moved away from a strict adherence to the traditional Montessori method and now provide additional materials for and encourage sociodramatic play, in recognition of the important role it plays in children's development (cf. Chapter 1.4)

1.8.2 Moving towards play

This move towards an allowance for more sociodramatic play within my own traditional Montessori setting was the beginning of a move towards what has now become a play based setting with a strong emphasis on sociodramatic play.

As my setting moved increasingly to a play-based setting which encouraged sociodramatic play, my role as a practitioner became more ambiguous. Although I had learned a huge amount about the benefits of a play-based curriculum, I remained somewhat in the dark regarding my role in its everyday implementation. In particular, I found that I lacked information on the knowledge and skills required to support children in their move towards engagement in complex sociodramatic play with peers. This echoes the work of Moyles, Adams and Musgrave (2002) which recognized that although adults recognized the educational benefits of play, they were unsure of their role in play and how to assess its outcomes.

In addition, the children often asked me to play a role or take part in their sociodramatic play and I was unsure whether it was better practice for me to accept their invitations to play or to encourage independent play with peers. I believe that this uncertainty stemmed from my adherence to elements of my original role as a Montessori educator, in which I encouraged children's independence in their activities and avoided interrupting children's work, as outlined above (cf. Chapter 1.8.1).

1.8.2.1 Immature Play

However, I had noticed that the independent play of the young children that I worked with contained many of the features which Bodrova and Leong (2007) attribute to immature play: repetitive; non-symbolic; lacking the role-playing and language which develops play scenarios; solitary or parallel rather than co-operative; lacking planning; much conflict; 5-10 minutes duration. This seemed to concur with the research by Bodrova and Leong (2007) and others, which suggests that young children in contemporary EY settings often lack experience in mature play and require support to engage in it effectively.

1.8.3 Reviewing the literature

The guidance provided by *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) suggested an active supporting role by adults in play, including taking part in the play without interfering. However, a review of the literature around the topic demonstrated disparate views amongst academics regarding the role of adults during children's sociodramatic play, as well as an acknowledgement that further research in this area was required. Furthermore, many researchers acknowledged the important role of adults in developing children's play and supporting learning within play, by taking on the role of an "insider" (Devi et al., 2018) or "co-player" and "play leader" (Gaviria-Loaiza, 2017).

These readings led to changes in the practice of sociodramatic play within my EY setting because I wanted to be able to support children towards more complex sociodramatic play. In

addition, in line with Article 12 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), I believe that children have a right to express their opinion on matters that affect them. As the children were asking me to play with them, I felt that their requests should be considered.

Today the sociodramatic play I practise with the children has been influenced by many of the authors contained in the Literature Review as well as others such as the EY teacher, researcher and author, Vivian Gussin Paley. Gussin Paley (1988, 1991, 2004) used a technique in which she accurately scribed the stories which children told her. The stories would later be acted out by the children in self-chosen roles. The children maintained much control over the stories and the play process.

1.9 Sociodramatic play within this setting

During sociodramatic play in my setting, the children usually begin by asking to play what they call "the game". We gather around the easel in the classroom and I ask each child who they would like to be in the game. The only rule with roles is that no child can tell another child what role they should take but each child should choose for themselves. I write down the details of the character each child is being which may include details such as the name, age, size, actions, location, relationship to other children, etc. Sometimes children will choose to write their own details or mark make alongside my writing or draw pictures of their characters, to which I attach the written form of their verbal descriptions (in a similar method to Gussin Paley's scribing described above-cf. Chapter 1.8.3.). The large easel was chosen because it allowed for many children to work at the same time. This process allows for listening and sharing and children are often influenced by each other's ideas at this point. Bodrova and Leong (2008) point out that planning play in this way helps children to: notice the specific attributes

of the roles and scenarios and the rules associated with them; regulate their own and others behaviour and learn about the instrumental and communicative purposes of written language.

Once everyone has had a turn to contribute who they are being in "the game", we discuss how we can make a story which will include all of the characters and we also discuss locations. My role is usually assigned at this stage by the children, although occasionally I will assign myself a role where I see a gap appearing for a character in the story. We then plan and gather costumes and props and set up our locations. This part of the process can often take a long period of time. At this point, everyone gets into their location and we start playing in roles. The play from this point evolves entirely organically and will often go in directions which we did not anticipate. Children will sometimes change roles, costumes or alliances in mid-play.

Sometimes the children are asked to draw or paint their characters or the play that took place after the play event and narratives by the children are attached to these pictures. This sociodramatic play practice takes place almost every day as the children usually ask to play "the game" every day. When we play outside after stopping "the game" for lunch, the children always play independently. This gives the children the opportunity to practice their skills without adult intervention or help unless necessary and also provides me with an opportunity to observe their sociodramatic play from outside of the play, in line with Vygotsky's recommendations (cf. Chapter 2.2.1). Any work by the children, narratives by the children, records of the roles played as well as records of the play stories are shared with parents and carers through displays and verbally daily and weekly in electronic communications, in line with *Aistear*'s recommendations regarding documentation and partnership with parents (NCCA, 2009).

1.10 The research questions

It is from within this setting and practice that the research took place. There is a recognition by the researcher that a delicate interplay exists between adults supporting children towards more complex sociodramatic play with peers and supporting other learning and children's growing independence in and autonomy over, such play. It is hoped, through the research, to shed some light on how adults can best position themselves and interact with young children in EY settings in order to allow this progress in sociodramatic play and learning to take place, without overly impacting on children's control of their play.

The terms "co-player" and "play leader" as outlined by Gaviria-Loaiza et al (2017) (cf. Chapter 2.4.1.) will be used to describe the role used by the adult playing with the children during this study. The term co-play will be used to describe an adult engaging in sociodramatic play with one or more children. The research questions are as follows:

- What sorts of contributions does an adult make whilst acting as a co-player or play leader during sociodramatic play in an Early Years setting?

- Do these contributions offer opportunities to support children's learning and development, in line with existing research on this topic and National Curriculum recommendations, or impact negatively on children's control over their play?

1.11 Theoretical Framework

1.11.1 Cultural-Historical Theory

1.11.1.1 Vygotsky

The research is framed within Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory around play (1967, 2004) and the zone of proximal development (1978). Vygotsky (2004) argued that play is a key contributor to children's learning and development into which children bring both their own life experiences and their imaginations in a process of creative reconstruction. He proposed that the richer the life experiences of the child, the richer the play would be (Vygotsky, 2004). Vygotskians believe that the quality of play is very much dependent on the amount and quality of adult mediation (Bodrova and Leong, 2008). In addition, Vygotsky contended that new learning takes place within the ZPD and that adults can play the role of a more knowledgeable other within this zone to bring the child on to new levels of learning (1978).

1.11.1.2 Later theorists

Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) developed this idea further, using the term "scaffolding" to describe the way in which adults support children's learning within the ZPD by offering appropriate levels of assistance until independent mastery of skills are achieved. Subsequent studies, which have also drawn on cultural-historical theory, have used these theories and concepts to demonstrate how adults, playing with children, can improve the quality of children's play (Lindqvist, 1995; Bodrova, 2008; Hakkarainen et al., 2013; Gaviria-Loaiza et al., 2017) and contribute to their learning and development (Bodrova and Leong, 2007; Fleer, 2013; Hakkarainen et al., 2013).

Wood (2004) has further suggested that the use of socio-cultural theory could contribute to a more solid grounding for play as a pedagogy, allowing play to be understood in terms of the relationships between players, their actions, interactions, co-constructed meanings and the play context itself.

2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

"Drawing upon cultural-historical theory, a number of studies have shown the importance of an adult's involvement in children's imaginative play for developing the quality of play...and children's development and learning" (Devi et al, 2018: 295-6).

The potential for sociodramatic play to contribute to the education and development of children in the Early Years has been recognised not just by educational theorists such as Vygotsky (1967, 2004) but also increasingly by National EY curriculum frameworks such as *Te Whariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) in New Zealand, *Belonging, Being and Becoming* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2009) in Australia and *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) in Ireland.

In addition, Devi (2018) describes how existing research has shown that adult involvement with children in sociodramatic play has the potential to develop children's abstract thinking, support the development of language and scientific concepts and support cognitive, social and emotional skills development as well as the co-construction of storylines.

However, whilst the amount of such play within EY settings has increased in many countries "more detailed research around the intricacies of play between children and adults is needed in the field of ECE" (Pursi and Lipponen, 2018: 23). Whilst play theorists such as Gray (2013) and Bodrova and Leong (2007) propose that adults should remain outside of children's play, others propose crucial roles for adults within the space of play in order to better understand children's stages of development and support children's learning through play (Hakkarainen et al., 2013; Gaviria-Loaiza et al., 2017).

My literature review will be arranged under the following themes: adults supporting learning through play, problematising power differentials between adults and children in play and adults' understanding and sharing of children's play. In this way, it is hoped that a clearer

picture of the optimal positioning and behaviour of the adult in sociodramatic play will begin to emerge, which will contribute to my overall research questions, as outlined above (cf. Chapter 1.10).

2.2 Adults supporting learning through play

2.2.1 Vygotsky

2.2.1.1 Play and the zone of proximal development

"In play the child is always behaving beyond his age, above his usual everyday behaviour; in play he is, as it were, a head above himself." (Vygotsky, 1978: 74)

Vygotsky proposed that in attempting to "jump above his usual level" in play, the child creates the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) which he defined as the "distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978: 211).

Knowledge of the individual child's ZPD provides the educator with the opportunity to support the child at a level which is appropriate to their stage of development. Vygotsky believed that, for young children, play was the source of development and that, as the child "tries to jump above his usual level", he/she "creates the zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978: 74).

2.2.1.2 The More Knowledgeable Other

Vygotsky (1978) spoke about the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) rather than the adult in his theories around learning. For Vygotsky, the MKO could be a more experienced peer or child, rather than an adult. The key point in defining the MKO was the fact that the MKO has

more experience or knowledge than the learner, so that comparative age or position to the learner did not matter.

2.2.1.3 Sociodramatic play

Vygotsky, in his cultural-historical approach, defined play only in terms of the socio-dramatic or make-believe play of preschool and primary aged children which he described as having three distinct features; creating an imaginary situation, taking and acting out a role and following the rules assigned to that role (Bodrova and Leong, 2015). In Vygotsky's view, these developments are mediated by social interactions and cultural artefacts. He believed that, for children, these developments mostly emerged from play and that play, therefore, had the potential to provide a fertile ground for learning and development, describing play as "the highest level of pre-school development" (Vygotsky, 1967:16).

2.2.1.4 Learning with assistance

Vygotsky advised that the most effective teaching should be aimed at the higher level of the child's ZPD so that the child can achieve new learning with assistance. For Vygotsky, "what a child can do with assistance today, she will be able to do by herself tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1978: 87)

Gradually, as the child manages to work independently, the assistance for that piece of learning is no longer necessary. However, Vygotsky also recognised that the child needed to continue practising the new skill independently beyond this point.

2.2.2 Scaffolding of play

Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) built on Vygotsky's ideas around supporting children's learning within the ZPD. They proposed that adults use "scaffolding", which are the activities which the adult uses to support the learner as they move through their individual ZPD. This

scaffolding is gradually removed by the adult as the learner becomes more capable of achieving the task independently.

2.2.3 Play as a leading activity and mature play.

Vygotsky (1967), as well as the Vygotskian scholars, Leontiev (1978) and Elkonin (1972), described sociodramatic play as the "leading activity" for children from age 3 to 6, having such a unique and central role in the child's development that it is irreplaceable by any other activities and produces major developmental accomplishments.

The exact type of play which is considered to be a "leading activity" for this age was described by Elkonin (2005) as "mature" or "fully developed" play. Mature play uses symbolic representation or actions, appropriate language to create scenarios and maintain roles, complex themes, rich, rule-adhered roles and an extended time frame (Bodrova and Leong, 2015: 381).

2.2.4 Elkonin's theory of play

Elkonin (1978) described the four ways in which socio-dramatic play helps to develop higher mental functions, as follows:

- Children become capable of intentional rather than reactive behaviours, delaying gratification of immediate desires.
- Children engage in "cognitive decentering" whereby they see other children's roles, play scenarios and play props from the point of view of other people, leading to the eventual ability to develop inner reflective thinking.
- Children develop the ability to work with mental representations of objects rather than the physical presence of objects themselves, leading to the development of abstract thinking and imagination.

- Children engage in planning and monitoring their intentional behaviours and that of others through the rules of the play, which eventually leads to "such metacognitive actions as the planning and monitoring of mental processes." (Bodrova and Leong, 2015: 380)

2.2.5 Adults supporting mature play

However, Elkonin (1978) also pointed out that children require the support of a child or adult MKO to move from immature to mature play and thereby benefit from its' contributions to the higher mental functions. Bodrova and Leong (2015), Bredikyte and Hakkarainen (2011) and others, similarly argue that play can only promote development where the child moves from elementary to more mature forms of joint play and that this can often best be achieved with specific types of adult support.

2.2.6 Changes to children's play

Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that "the make-believe play of today's children is not simply different from the play of the past but is less sophisticated and mature than in previous generations" (Bodrova and Leong 2015: 385). Kaprov (2006) claims that the main underlying reason for this reduction in play complexity is the decline of adult involvement in children's play.

Bodrova and Leong suggest that changes in "the culture of childhood" (2015: 385) are responsible for this lack of complexity in children's play. They propose that the reduction in free play time spent with MKOs in the form of older siblings and peers, the lack of prolonged free time to play and the segregation of classrooms into same-age play partners, has limited children's access to the kind of environmental conditions conducive to mature play. In this way, they conclude that it becomes necessary for EY settings to attempt to replicate these conditions through adults scaffolding children's play. In contrast to Bodrova and Leong,

however, Gray (2013) does not feel that adults should be the ones who support children to play, feeling that they risk taking control of the play and ruining it.

2.2.6.1 Knowledge gap

There can be no doubt, however, that with the current age segregation model of EY education, a kind of knowledge gap does exist, that is, the lack of older and/or more knowledgeable *peers* who can offer support towards further learning and development. For those working and learning in EY education, it remains a gap which needs to be filled and the most immediate solution would seem to come from the adults who are already present within the system, as suggested by Bodrova and Leong (2007), Gaviria-Loaiza et al. (2017) and Hakkarainen et al. (2013), who propose that adults can act as replacements for these peers,. For this reason, whilst children require the support of MKOs to move towards mature play and until the current model of education changes, contemporary EY settings may need this role to be performed by adults.

2.2.7 Pedagogical Approaches to adult support of play

From a Vygotskian perspective, therefore, the adult can potentially offer support to children in two ways during play. Firstly, the adult can support the child by observing the child's ZPD during play and then, with this knowledge of the child's potential development, scaffold their new learning accordingly. Secondly, the adult can help the child to move from simple to more mature forms of play.

Educational writers such as Lindqvist (1995), Bodrova and Leong (2007), Hakkarainen and Bredikyte (2010), Fisher et al., (2010) and Fleer (2013) have taken Vygotskian ideas and used them as the theoretical foundations for their pedagogical approaches, in order to justify increased adult involvement in play-based learning in the Early Years. These authors feel that such adult involvement improves the quality of both play and learning in EY settings.

"Tools of the Mind" by Bodrova and Leong (2007), is based on the work of Vygotskians and suggests the use of play, well supported by adults in EY settings, as a tool in the education of young children. They claim that in their observations of children's play in a variety of classroom types, children's play tended to be "immature". They describe immature play as repetitive, non-symbolic and lacking the role-playing and language which develop play scenarios. In addition, immature play tends to be solitary or parallel rather than co-operative, lacks planning, involves much conflict and cannot be sustained for longer than 5 to 10 minutes. They state that it is "imperative" that teachers intervene in children's play to improve its quality (2007: 145).

Drawing on Elkonin (2005), Bodrova and Leong point out that the development of mature pretend play takes time and often requires support from either more experienced peers or adults. They demonstrate strategies which adults can use to support children's play, such as modelling symbolic object use, supporting extended play scenarios, providing ideas for themes and roles, reinforcing the rule consistency of the characters within the play, modelling appropriate conflict resolution and coaching children who need help to play.

They suggest that this support should take the form of "scaffolding" as proposed by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), in order to help develop higher cognitive functions through play. However, they stress that teachers should not play with children or direct play as a member of the playing group, as it places the child in a subordinate role and prevents the child from pretending independently (Bodrova and Leong, 2007).

2.2.7.2 Guided Play

Guided play (Fisher et al., 2010; Weisberg et al., 2013) is another approach to learning which takes a Vygotskian approach to learning through play for young children. In guided play, the

aim is to harness those aspects of free play which are most attractive to children, such as being active, voluntary, fun and flexible (Burghardt, 2011) and combine it with adult guidance and support, with specific learning goals in mind. Both Fisher et al. (2010) and Weisberg et al. (2013) emphasise the fact that children remain in control of their play and learning in guided play but with the added benefit of adult scaffolding. However, whilst guided play may often be a better alternative to direct instruction, particularly for younger children, they acknowledge that it can be difficult to get the balance right between self-discovery through exploration and adult scaffolding of concepts. Weisberg et al. suggest that future research might "determine exactly how to balance child agency with adult constraint" (2015: 180). There are similarities here to the concerns raised by Gray (2013), Wragg (2013) and Bodrova and Leong (2007) regarding children, rather than adults, maintaining control of their play and these will be dealt with in more detail below (cf. Chapter 2.3).

2.2.8 National Frameworks

2.2.8.1 Australia

In Australia, *Belonging, Being and Becoming* (DEEWR, 2009) suggests the use of "intentional teaching" (Epstein, 2007) combined with play-based curricula to best support children's learning through play. This intentional involvement by adults in children's play would include strategies such as sustained, shared thinking (s), scaffolding, questioning, direct instruction, modelling and demonstrating (Kirkby et al., 2018). Whilst such an approach can be seen to solve the problem outlined above regarding the lack of MKOs in EY settings, there is the risk that, within a play-based curriculum, the teacher's intentions for prescribed learning outcomes becomes more dominant than the children's interests (Kirkby et al., 2018).

2.2.8.2 Aistear in Ireland

Internationally, many other EY curricula and curriculum frameworks recommend children's play as a tool in which to support children's learning. Many of these national curricula explicitly define the role of the adult in such play. For example, within *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009), it is recognised that the adult plays a key role in planning, supporting and reviewing children's play. The support the adult gives to children includes talking to children about their play, respecting their play choices and without interfering, taking part in the children's play. He/she helps develop skills, models play behaviours and is respectful of children's diversity. The adult also ensures inclusivity in play, protects children from harm and provides extra support to play where needed (2009: 56). For older children (21/2 to 6 years of age), who are more likely to be engaging in socio-dramatic play, the role of the adult is seen as necessarily more direct, involving support to join in, setting up scenarios, help to handle emotions and conflict and support with transitions in and out of roles (58).

2.2.8.3 Te Whariki in New Zealand

The role of the adult in play within *Te Whariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), the Early Childhood Curriculum in New Zealand, is much less explicitly defined, although in other EY government documents such as the "family and dramatic play" ideas document (Ministry of Education, 2015) suggested for use alongside *Te Whariki*, the role of the adult is more clearly outlined. It includes support to put children's ideas into practice without dominating, play-acting with appropriate language, help solving problems, provision of materials and idea stimulation (Ministry of Education, 2015: 2).

From this selection of pedagogical approaches and National curriculum documents, adults taking an active role in children's play in order to support learning, is widespread within the international EY landscape. However, it can also be seen that there are concerns around adults

either dominating or controlling children's play expressed in both the curriculum approaches and the National curriculum documents or frameworks.

2.3 Problematising power differentials between adults and children in play.

2.3.1 Sensitively Supporting Play

Accordingly, the type of support and scaffolding that adults, acting as MKOs, provide to children during play needs to be carefully considered and sensitively implemented. It is important that we consider how our pedagogy and curriculum should prioritise taking advantage of both of the opportunities which Vygotsky's theories on play seem to offer us. Firstly, we have the opportunity for the adult to take advantage of play to maximise children's learning potential by recognising and working within their individual ZPD. Secondly, mature play, as the leading source of development, provides children with the chance to develop those higher mental functions which are essential to later social and academic success.

2.3.2 Prioritising mature play

It is vital that we do not concentrate so much of our efforts on taking advantage of play to meet more traditional and academic, adult conceived learning goals (for example, number names or sequences) that we deprive children of the opportunity to develop mature play with all of the inherent benefits which it entails according to Elkonin (2005) (cf. Chapter 2.2.4.). The fact that there is a short window of opportunity during which certain higher mental functions are learned through play, should make this type of learning the priority within EY settings. The learning of the more traditional and academic subjects is not dependent on the age of the child and therefore, does not require the same timeframe for achievement.

2.3.3 Balancing adult involvement with child control

Furthermore, research into teacher involvement in children's play shows the following benefits; longer lasting and more complex play, increased social interaction between children, higher levels of cognitive activity, increased literacy activity and richer oral language (Johnson, Christie and Wardle, 2005). However, these authors acknowledge that it is the quality of the adult interactions rather than the quantity of them that impacts most.

This can be seen to have problems in two ways. Gaviria-Loaiza et al. (2017) consider that, where the appropriate setting and goals are identified, adult participation in children's play can be very beneficial but that inappropriate or overinvolved engagement by teachers can disrupt play. Sutton-Smith (1997), for example, points out that adults can sometimes attempt to define play for children and interrupt play which they feel falls outside of this limited definition, particularly where acting out violent themes is involved. Meanwhile recent research by Devi et al. (2018) has shown that although adults in EY settings believe that they practice under a pedagogy of play-based learning, in fact their physical positioning during children's play was too remote to fully understand the children's ZPD. In this way, it can be seen that there can be both too much and too little involvement by adults in children's play.

2.3.4 Adults dominating play

In addition, many writers have expressed concern regarding the potential for adults to take ownership of play from children in order to further their own educational agendas. Zaporozhets (1986), a student of Vygotsky's, in his concern over mature play remaining self-initiated by children, warned against teachers taking over play and turning it into a teacher-directed activity. Brostrom (1996) expresses concern that wherever the potential for turning play into "directive school work" exists, there could be a corresponding loss in "meaningfulness and flow" for children.

Gray suggests that as one of the defining characteristics of play is that it is "self-chosen and self-directed" (2013: 178), adult involvement in play risks compromising it to such an extent that the play can be ruined. He suggests that, for this reason, play should be left to children alone. Bodrova and Leong (2007) emphasise that for preschool and kindergarten aged children, the adults should not play with or direct the play of children as part of a group. It is their opinion that in doing so, the child is placed in a subordinate role and the play becomes a teacher-directed activity. Hakkarainen et al. (2013) express similar concerns that the power differential between adults and children in educational settings risks transferring control of sociodramatic play from the child to the adult, which has the potential to reduce the child's interest in and motivation to play.

2.3.5 How children play

Another key feature of play for young children is its' "dynamism and organic unfolding" which Wragg suggests adults are not always comfortable with, due to their own "mental rigidity and inadaptability" which can compromise children's freedom to play (2013: 286). Brostrom (1996) also warned that play which is more planned and often organised from the teacher's perspective, could exclude "the children's chaotic, non-logical, non-rectilinear and childlike way of playing" (1996: 100). Whilst adults can potentially offer educational support to children during play, there is the risk that in so doing, we could also remove the prime motivating force for children in play, which is fun (Huizinga, 1955; Pramling, Samuelsson and Carlsson, 2008, Gray, 2013).

Wragg (2013) has also suggested that regarding children in deficit terms rather than as experts at play with their own goals in mind, disrespects children and play and can interrupt children's development rather than supporting it.

In addition, and perhaps most importantly, if we aim, as educators, to start children on a lifelong enjoyment of education and learning, then surely it is through play that we should do so, for: "[o]ther avenues present themselves as paths toward education...but none is quite so much fun as play." (Eberle, 2014: 224)

2.3.6 Overcoming the power differential

Accordingly, whilst many researchers recognise the value of the model of adults supporting children's learning through play as proposed by Bodrova and Leong and others, they have also cautioned against adult aims for learning, control or safety coming to dominate children's play.

However, as outlined above, writers such as Gray (2013) and Bodrova and Leong (2007) have also acknowledged the reality that most children today have little or no opportunity to interact with children who can offer them more experience or knowledge of the world and therefore act as MKOs. This results in a type of "skills shortage" for young children, which nowadays is often being compensated for by adults in EY settings.

In discussing play with the support of older peers, Gray (2013) acknowledges the diverse benefits of children interacting with these kinds of MKOs. However, with the present climate of childhood having impacted children's play so dramatically, and with no change to such a climate on the horizon, children lack opportunities to benefit from such interactions with older peers in this way. It seems that currently, the only options for MKOs that remain open to young children within EY settings, are same age, but more experienced, peers or the adults who work

with them. The ideal solution would be that, by overcoming the obstacles outlined above by Bodrova and Leong (2007) above (cf. Chapter 2.2.6.), society would find more opportunities for children to interact with both older and younger children in order that they can learn from each other. In the meantime, within the existing EY sector, the solution may have to be found within adults' interactions with children during play.

2.4 Adults' understanding and sharing of children's play

The question then remains as to how adults should best interact with children during play. Gaviria-Loaiza et al. (2017) point out that whilst some teachers successfully facilitate children's play, others struggle with play and play based learning. They emphasise the importance of teacher's knowing what role they should adopt in attempting to support children's play.

2.4.1 Teacher Roles

Johnson et al. (2005) organised a variety of teacher's roles in play into two groups. The "precarious" group included uninvolved, director or redirector roles and were found to be either uninvolved or disruptive of children's play. Roles in the "facilitative" group included onlooker, stage manager, co-player and play leader and generated more positive responses from the children. Later, research by Vu, Han and Buell (2015) examined the effects of these varying roles on children's play and found that higher levels of teacher engagement as a co-player or play leader led to higher levels of cognitively complex and social play.

2.4.1.1 Children's responses to teacher roles

Gaviria-Loaiza et al., in their 2017 study, examined children's responses to these different teacher roles during sociodramatic and constructive play. They found that children engaged in more acceptance behaviours (such as responding to, incorporating or building on teacher's ideas or actions) when the teachers adopted a play leader or co-player role.

2.4.1.2 Co-player and Play leader teacher roles

According to Gaviria-Loaiza et al. (2017), the following teacher behaviours were associated with both the co-player and play leader roles; showing interest in children's play, taking an active role, providing input related to children's play, incorporating real-life experiences into

play, letting children take an active role, catching children's interest and attention. Their research showed that when teachers assumed these two roles and were therefore "inside" the children's play with the children, the children had "more social interactions with peers, shifting from solitary and parallel play to higher social levels of play, such as co-operative behaviours" (2017: 16).

Adults acting as "co-players" were described by Gaviria-Loaiza et al. (2017) as having the following characteristics: actively involved in play, play minor roles, speak in character, don't control the play plots, follow children's lead, adopt equal roles with children in manipulative pretend play (e.g. as dinosaurs, trucks, etc), sometimes step outside character to make suggestions for play. Adults acting as "play leaders" had the following characteristics: provide ideas and themes that help play, play minor or equal role, suggest novel and attractive ideas often related to real-life experiences, introduce specific vocabulary.

The findings of Gaviria-Loaiza et al. (2017) show that when teachers adopt these two types of roles, they are engaged in play-sensitive behaviours and are thereby able to advance the children's ZPD by guiding them towards more advanced play and learning. They conclude that involvement by adults in children's play "should be genuine and aligned with the dynamics of the play and with children's interests" (2017: 17). Their review of the literature around adults adopting a role within children's play indicates that adults become capable of; modelling play for children, adding complexity to the narrative, extending stories, helping resolve conflicts within the play plot and supporting specific learning goals from within the play.

2.4.2 Border play

Brostrom describes "border play" as play involving "a social interaction where the child is challenged and forced to create new meanings and understandings" (Brostrom, 2005: 7). Brostrom proposes that Vygotsky might argue for this type of challenging and supportive play

for children, in which a relational community and the child's ZPD can both be further developed. Engestrom (1987) describes this kind of learning as "learning by expanding" and suggests that it leads to the development of new knowledge, skills and actions.

According to Brostrom (2005), "Frame Play" (Brostrom, 1996) and "Aesthetic Theme Play" (Lindqvist, 1995) are two types of "border play" approaches in which the adult and children plan out their play and play together. The adult's role is both active and challenging and an "extended and common imaginary play situation" is developed (Brostrom, 2005: 9). There is considerable preparation and planning of the play which may include constructing storylines, costumes and props. "In this way, the frame-play is more organised and more purposeful than role-play" (Brostrom, 2005: 10). Brostrom suggests that this type of play allows children to have fun whilst also encouraging them to both plan and reflect on their play and thereby become an active learner through play.

2.4.3 Play Guidance

Hakkarainen et al. (2013) propose another form of adult intervention in children's play called "Play Guidance". This involves a story/narrative performed through drama, puppet show or storytelling in roles between student teachers and children up to the age of 5 years old, as joint play. They found that in successful joint play the students; were involved in developing the theme with the children, took roles and entered the play, were deeply emotionally involved in the play events, co-constructed play events through spontaneous and dialogic interactions, created dramatic tension through roles and play events, stayed motivated by creating a coherent and fascinating plot and anticipated boredom and then introduced novelty through new characters, plot twists or events. The authors found that in successful joint play episodes the play was productive, co-constructed and moved play to a higher, more advanced level and that "skilful adult participation helps to incorporate children's ideas and themes into one creative endeavour. The more experienced children become, the easier they can construct long-lasting

play activities on their own." (2013: 223) The authors recommend four specific steps for intervention in children's play, as follows:

- Observation of children to discover their play ideas.

- Stepping into the play and expanding upon the child's ideas.

- Getting involved in the play with the child or children.

- "Reach togetherness with a flow of mutual experience" (2013: 224)

  (This is described as the highest level of play involvement.)

2.5 Conclusion

There remains, according to the Vygotskian perspective, a need for young children to move from currently dominant forms of immature play towards more mature play and thereby, the achievement of higher mental functions. However, as many writers have pointed out, one of the key features in being able to achieve such mature play, is older or more experienced peers who can act as MKOs. These are often lacking in the everyday and school lives of contemporary young children. For this reason, many researchers, curriculum approaches and national curriculum frameworks have suggested that adults act as the MKO in their place. The ideal role of such adults in the play of young children remains unclear but there are indications that children are open to the contributions that sensitively attuned adults make from within play. This study will examine the types of contributions one adult makes whilst co-playing with children inside their sociodramatic play and whether these contributions offer opportunities to support children's development and learning. The study will also examine whether such contributions impact negatively on children's control of their play.

In this way it is hoped that the study can further expand the existing knowledge base regarding the optimal positioning of adults during children's play within EY settings.

3 Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the research aims and questions will be identified and the paradigm position of the researcher will be discussed. The research site and population of the study will be outlined in detail and the methodological approach chosen will be presented. Details regarding the procedures for guaranteeing anonymity, privacy and confidentiality will be discussed. The methods used for gathering data, gaining consent and analysing the data will be explained. Finally, the limitations of the study will be discussed.

3.2 Research aims and questions

The aim of the research was to investigate how an adult can best interact with young children during sociodramatic play within a play based EY setting, in order to allow for development and learning to take place, without overly impacting on children's control of their play.

The research was based on the following research questions:

- What sorts of contributions does an adult make whilst acting as a co-player or play leader during sociodramatic play in an Early Years setting?

- Do these contributions offer opportunities to support children's learning and development, in line with existing research on this topic and National Curriculum recommendations, or impact negatively on children's control over their play?

3.3 Paradigm Position

The researcher assumes a social constructivist paradigm position. Constructivism is described by Creswell as a belief in "pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended, and contextualized…perspectives towards reality" (2000: 125-6). Social constructivism sees social interactions as being central to experiences and sees all learning as being socially mediated. According to Vygotsky, "(e)very function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level…All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals" (1978: 57). This positioning aligns with both the research questions outlined above and the methodology chosen for this research. It allows for play and learning to be considered as both social and situated phenomena, which are not fully understood by adults and therefore require ongoing investigation. Play and learning have been described as "complex concepts that...are deeply intertwined" (Theobald et al., 2015: 348). Like many social phenomena, play and learning change according to the individuals engaged in them and the context in which they take place. Palinscar states that "[s]ocial constructivist perspectives focus on the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge." (1998: 345)

Adopting a social constructivist paradigm position allows the researcher to acknowledge and accept the complexity that naturally derives from this interdependent co-construction of knowledge, yet still seek to understand it and thereby, contribute to it more effectively in her everyday practice.

3.4 Research Site

The research site is an EY setting within a rural town in South East Ireland. The reason for choosing this site was that it is the author's own workplace and so, to some extent, was chosen for convenience. However, as the author works with these children and their families every day, she was already familiar with the children, their relationships with each other and their

wider sociocultural contexts. In addition, the children were already very familiar with the author as a practitioner. This provided the author with insider status within the research site, which has both advantages and disadvantages, which will be dealt with further below. (cf. Chapter 3.11.4.).

3.5 Population and Context

3.5.1 Population

The EY setting has one adult EY practitioner (with a degree in Social Science and a diploma in Montessori education) and 5 children between the ages of 3 and 51/2 years. The child places in the setting are fully funded by the Irish government through the ECCE scheme. In this setting, parents do not pay any additional fees. Children come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. The children attend the setting for 3 hours each morning, 5 mornings per week during term time, 38 weeks a year.

3.5.2 Pedagogical approach and materials

The setting, whilst having originally been based on a Montessori pedagogy, has recently moved towards a more play-based curriculum, in line with *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009), as has been outlined earlier (cf. Chapter 1.8.2.). The children normally have at least one and a half hours of freely chosen activities on arrival each morning until lunchtime, followed by a group activity and outside time.

The children's choice of activities includes the use of Montessori materials, puzzles, art/craft materials, books, puppets, dolls, plastic animals, construction toys, dressing up clothes, open ended natural materials, role play objects (such as phones, doctor bag, toolset, etc.), home corner (play kitchen, bed, couch) and a low-level sink/water play area.

3.6 Methodological Approach

3.6.1 Case Study

The methodological approach used was an ethnographically inspired, qualitative, single Case Study. A Case Study approach allowed for a rich, detailed and in-depth analysis of the topic, whilst locating the research in its own bounded and natural context (Tight, 2017). As stated earlier, play and learning have been described as complex and intertwined concepts (cf. Chapter 3.3). An in-depth examination of this complex subject within a natural EY setting in which daily incidences of play and learning take place, allowed for "thick" (Geertz, 1973) descriptions of these phenomena to be recorded. This resulted in a rich data source, from which understandings around co-play between adults and children during sociodramatic play could be gleaned.

In the case of this research piece, the fact that the site was chosen out of convenience (being the researcher's workplace) and because it contained all of the elements which the researcher wished to investigate, meant that a single Case Study of this particular site made sense. However, a Case Study was also a good fit in terms of answering these particular research questions and for the use of Grounded Theory in the analysis stage, both of which required a detailed record of the interactions between the adult and children during co-play.

3.6.2 Ethnography

The study was inspired by ethnographic research approaches, which allowed for a longer-term study of the participants and their interactions within this EY environment (Creswell, 2007). Although it was initially intended to record the children for a period of 4 weeks, some of the children contracted chicken pox and this led to the recording period being reduced to 3 weeks. In addition, fieldnotes, in the form of a writing log were used, which is common in ethnographic

research, details of which are given below (cf. Chapter 3.8.3.). As the author was both the researcher and the adult in the setting, ethnographic research, which is usually based on participant-observation, seemed particularly appropriate to this study.

3.6.3 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Clark, 2005; Charmaz, 2006) was used during the data analysis stage of the research in order to allow categories to emerge, which could help in answering the research questions as outlined above (cf. Chapter 1.10.). Creswell describes grounded theory as a process in which the researcher can "generate a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction" (2007: 63). This particular process of categorisation provided for a deeper understanding of the types of contributions an adult makes to children as they co-played together in sociodramatic play. According to Creswell, grounded theory is a good choice of design when, as in this case, no existing explanatory theory is available (2007).

In addition, Charmaz and Mitchell emphasise the benefits of using grounded theory alongside ethnographic methods:

"Using grounded theory methods can streamline fieldwork and move ethnographic research toward theoretical interpretation. Attending to ethnographic methods can prevent grounded theory studies from dissolving into quick and dirty qualitative research" (2001: 160).

3.6.4 Reflexivity

It is recognised by the researcher that when engaging in qualitative research and particularly in research which involves the researcher occupying insider status, remaining completely detached becomes difficult, if not impossible. For this reason, researchers must engage in a

practice of continuous reflection regarding their thought processes and ongoing research decisions, so that they do not negatively impact on the results of their research (Bryman, 2012).

3.6.4.1 Reflective Journal

For this reason, a reflective journal of my thought processes regarding the research subject, methodology and analysis was kept throughout, as recommended by Ortlipp (2008). This journal was kept as an online diary in a locked, password protected Notes file, on my password protected iPad. Ongoing reflections based on readings and direct experiences of co-play practice were recorded in it. This process of recording my reflections allowed me to refine my ideas and thoughts continuously and to reflect on my own behaviours as a practitioner, which was particularly relevant to this research. Appendix 1 contains an extract from the reflective journal. In addition, the "memo writing" (Charmaz, 2006) engaged in as part of the grounded theory methodology, (cf. Chapter 3.10.1.6), encouraged further reflexivity regarding the decisions being made during analysis. In this way, my beliefs, biases or behaviours could be "consciously acknowledge(d)" (Ortlipp, 2008: 695), which would provide an opportunity to prevent them impacting the research negatively.

3.7 Anonymity, Privacy and Confidentiality

The protection of participants' identities and their right to confidentiality and anonymity is accepted as the standard which is expected in research. (British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2018).

In this case the names of the child participants involved in the research were fictionalised by using pseudonyms, in order to protect their anonymity (Farrimond, 2016). Although the real names of the children were recorded on their parental consent forms and child assent documentation, a separate document was held in a secure location which links the participants' real names with their pseudonyms, as recommended by Farrimond (2016). All subsequent

documentation associated with the research referred to the participants only by their pseudonyms.

The researcher, supervisor and examiner are the only people who have access to un-anonymised data. All personally identifiable data collected will be irreversibly anonymised and retained by the researcher for a period of one month after conferring of the Master's degree results, after which, all personally identifiable data will be destroyed by the Principal Investigator (P.I.). Manual data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by the P.I. in Maynooth University.

Additionally, the researcher is the only Early Years Practitioner in the setting, which provides a named link to the setting. Although the name of the setting and its location were not used in documentation, it would be possible to identify the location of the setting through the name of the researcher. However, it would still be somewhat difficult to identify specific children within the setting from the data, as outlined above.

As the setting involves a small community, it may be difficult to guarantee the anonymity of the participants involved (BERA, 2018), where assumptions could be made regarding the identities of some of the children by other members of the community. The fictionalising of names, as well as the fact that there are at least two of each gender, should mitigate the risk of identification of individual children. However, in this case, the "potential harm" (BERA, 2018: 22) to participants caused by such identification should be minor, given the subject matter involved.

3.8 Data Gathering Methods

3.8.1 Video recording

It was intended that the methods used for gathering data would be as unobtrusive to the children's normal day as possible. Although video recording was initially considered by the researcher, it was felt that, given the specific circumstances of the setting, in which the researcher is the sole Early Years Practitioner, video recording tools could become quite intrusive to the children's everyday experiences within the setting. This was a problem faced by the practitioners in an EY setting who were attempting to record videos of young children in the absence of the researcher, in the study by Flewitt (2005). The researcher also had some ethical concerns around using visual images of these young children. These concerns centred around whether young children are fully aware of the long-term implications of their images being recorded. This apprehension has been partly informed by personal experience of parenting a teenager who requested removal of personal images of their younger self from a social media platform, reflecting a wider issue for young people which has been reported in many national newspapers. According to Flewitt:

"Although participants' names may be changed in written accounts and erased from audio recordings, visual images make them easily recognisable. This puts children at particular risk and renders parents and practitioners vulnerable to criticism, anxiety and self-doubt." (2005: 558)

Although Flewitt suggests ways of obscuring images of children within research, the more complex ethics approval required and the possibility of difficulties obtaining parental consent, contributed to the final decision not to use video recording in this case.

3.8.2 Audio recording

For this reason, it was decided that a discreet Sony ICD-UX560 audio recording device, and fieldnotes would be used. Bertrand et al. (1992), in discussing the recording of interviews, suggest that combining the use of field notes with audio recordings and transcripts, provides

completeness, keeps the data fresh for analysis and provides context. In this way, the data gathering (which was originally planned to last for four weeks, a considerable period of time for young children) would also have a minimal impact on the children's everyday experiences. Audio recording would, however, allow for an up-close and detailed recording of the interactions between the adult and the children and would allow for repeated listening to ensure accuracy. Using a digital audio recorder made searching for particular parts of the audio more straightforward, due to the simple functionality of the device.

3.8.3 Field Notes

In addition, field notes in the form of a daily writing log allowed for practitioner notes and/or reflections to emerge during the course of the data gathering period. It was possible to record relevant data such as influences on play themes, practitioner reflections on individual play episodes, feedback from parents and carers, etc. within this writing log, as can be seen below (cf. Chapter 5.2.3.1)

Using both data sources together also allowed for some limited triangulation of the data to take place to improve its' validity.

3.9 Consent and Assent

3.9.1 Proxy Consent

As the participants are children and therefore a vulnerable group, "proxy consent" (Farrimond, 2016: 86) (in which the child's consent to the research was sought from their parents, on behalf of the child) was sought from the parents of the child participants. This was done during individual meetings with the parents during which the research was explained verbally to the parents and they were also given an Information Sheet and a Consent Form to take away with them, copies of which are contained in Appendix 2. Parents were given ample opportunity to

ask questions about the research during the individual meetings. In addition, parents, in taking the Information Sheet and Consent Form away before completing it, were given extra time after the meeting to reflect on their child's participation before giving consent, as suggested by Vargas and Montoya (2009).

3.9.2 Assent

According to Article 12 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989) children have a right to express their opinion on matters that affect them and, for this reason, the children were asked to provide informed assent to their participation in the research.

Mayne et al. suggest that it is "only when potential participants understand their role and the purpose of the research project, and signify that consent, that the two aspects are combined to become "informed consent"." (2016: 674). However, in order to do this, children need to be given information about the research in a language which they can understand (Einarsdottir, 2007).

3.9.3 Interactive Narrative Approach

In this case, an "interactive narrative approach", as suggested by Mayne et al. (2016: 679) was used. This took the form of a book which was made by the researcher to be shared with the children. This book contained photographs, images and text regarding the researcher's university, the subject of the research and the Early Years setting, a copy of which is attached in Appendix 3. Mayne et al. (2016) have suggested that this approach improves understanding of participation for truly informed consent but is also enjoyed by children.

3.9.4 Dialogic approach

These authors also suggest that an "interactive narrative approach" can empower children further if a dialogic approach is taken during which children are provided with opportunities to ask questions and discuss the research process. This book was shared with the children in a group. According to Einarsdottir (2007), children are both more powerful and more relaxed when together with other children than when with an adult alone. This group exploration promoted a dialogue regarding the research between the researcher and the children, during which they asked questions regarding the researcher going to university and the recording device, in particular. The researcher also tried to convey to the children, through our shared dialogue, that their play has value to the researcher and to wider society. This helped the children to see themselves as contributors not just to this research, but to society as a whole, in line with Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989).

3.9.5 Audio recorder introduction

The audio recording device was also introduced to the children and they had an opportunity to try some recordings on it themselves, which they enjoyed. Flewitt suggests that handling technical equipment can help to "demystify the research process" (2005: 555). In this way, the children learned about this particular research, but also benefitted from it, by gaining some new knowledge about research, its tools and education as a lifelong experience.

3.9.6 Provisional Assent

Farrimond (2016) has suggested that due to the unequal power dynamic between adults and children in school settings, it can sometimes be difficult for children to refuse participation or later, withdraw consent. For this reason, the children were informed that they could say yes or no to participation and that they could withdraw their assent at any time. The children were asked verbally whether they would like to participate in the research and their answers (both

verbal and non-verbal, for example by nodding or head shaking) were recorded on paper by the researcher. However, the researcher considered this assent as "an ongoing process and open to review", as described by Einarsdottir (2007: 205) and remained aware of physical, as well as verbal, manifestations of non-consent, which are particularly pertinent in this age group.

All research was carried out in accordance with Maynooth University's Data Protection Policy (2018), Research Integrity Policy (2016) and Research Ethics Policy (2015).

3.10 Data Analysis

3.10.1 Grounded theory

As the area of adult involvement in children's sociodramatic play remains under researched (Devi et al., 2018), grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006) was used during the data analysis stage of the research, to answer the research questions. Through the process of grounded theory, it was anticipated that individual contributions being made by the adult could be grouped together as categories and that, by examining these categories, the researcher could answer the research questions. As the researcher had assumed a social constructivist paradigm position, it was felt that Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory (2006) would be a good match for the analysis stage of the research. In contrast to traditional grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in which the researcher acts as an objective observer, in constructivist grounded theory, mutual understanding and construction of meaning between the researcher and participant is assumed (Mills et al., 2001), which seemed appropriate to research on my own practice.

3.10.1.1 Event Sampling

The audio recordings were first analysed using an event sampling technique (Reis and Gable, 2000), during which all of the audio recordings were listened to, in order to identify instances

during which the adult engaged in sociodramatic play with the children (hereafter called co-play episodes). As some of the episodes lasted for a considerable period (up to 11/2 hours) and due to the time constraints of the Masters, it was decided that a maximum of 30 minutes of each co-play episode would be transcribed.

3.10.1.2 Initial Coding

In line with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) one of these co-play episodes was chosen as a sample to be transcribed verbatim in order to begin the process of coding. Once transcribed, each line of the adult talking was numbered. At this point line by line initial coding (Charmaz, 2006) of each of the numbered adult's talk took place. Initial coding involves sticking closely to the actions taking place within the data in order to ascertain exactly what is happening. As much as possible, gerunds (a noun formed from a verb and ending in -ing, for example, narrating in the phrase "narrating the storyline") (Collins, 2019) were used, as recommended by Glaser (1978) in order to keep as close as possible to what was happening in the data. Charmaz suggests that the use of gerunds in this way helps to "gain a strong sense of action and sequence" (2006: 49) which helps the researcher adhere closely to the participant's experiences. This practice allowed for a more authentic coding of the contents of the data, rather than engaging in speculative interpretation at this stage. This process was then repeated with a three more co-play episode in order to confirm the relevance of the existing open codes (through co-existence in other co-play episodes) and in order to continue searching for new codes.

3.10.1.3 Focused Coding

Following the Initial Coding of four of the transcripts, it was decided to begin the process of Focused Coding. In this phase, a colour coding scheme was used, as recommended by Charmaz (2006) to begin to examine whether there were Initial Codes which were either the same or

similar to each other within each transcript. This process of colour coding was then repeated for each transcript and gradually connections could be seen between the different initial codes so that they could be grouped together. In this way, these groups of initial codes began to point towards potential categories to be analysed.

3.10.1.4 Selective Coding

At this point in Grounded Theory a process called "Selective Coding" (Glaser and Holton, 2004) normally takes place, during which the researcher may re-enter the field to fill in potential gaps in the data, based on the existing potential categories.

Due to the limited time available, it was decided that, rather than re-entering the field, potential gaps in play types or participant types would be identified and the choice of the remaining audio recordings would be based on these gaps. Two more audio recordings were chosen through this process of selective coding which went through the same process of initial and focused coding.

The researcher continued to remain open minded about the possibility that new initial codes or adjustments to the existing codes might be necessary, until all of the transcription and coding had been completed. A total of six co-play episodes had now been transcribed and coded in this way.

3.10.1.5 Naming the Categories

At this point, the initial codes had been grouped together under nine colour-coded focused codes, which had the potential to become categories. These categories were now named and finalised (cf. Chapter. 4.1.4).

3.10.1.6 Memo writing

Continuous "memo writing" (Charmaz, 2006) was engaged in throughout this coding process, in order to remain reflective at all times throughout the period of analysis. Some extracts from the Memo are shown in Figures 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5. The memo-writing allowed the researcher to constantly reflect on, analyse and edit both the codes and the emerging categories during the data analysis stage. As Charmaz puts it:

"Memos catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue. Through conversing with yourself while memo-writing, new ideas and insights arise during the act of writing." (2006: 72)

3.10.1.7 Theoretical Coding

The next phase in the grounded theory process, known as theoretical coding, allows for the categories, developed through the process of focused coding, to be analysed and compared with each other (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser states that theoretical coding allows you to "weave the fractured story back together" (1978: 72). In this way, theory building begins to take place. This process can be seen below (cf. Chapter 4.2.1).

3.11 Limitations of the study

3.11.1 Population size

The limitations of the study included the small size of the population, which could lead to issues with transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of the results. In this study, the population was chosen for convenience and therefore, was based on convenience rather than purposive sampling. Whilst the results may be relevant for this study site, it does not necessarily follow that they can be transferred to all adults and children engaging in play together in all EY settings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have suggested that in providing a "thick" (Geertz, 1973) description of the setting and the population, the issues around transferability can be somewhat

mitigated. An assessment of whether the conclusions drawn in one study can be transferred to other situations or people, becomes possible through understanding population and contextual similarities and differences. A detailed description of the setting and the population has been provided with this in mind.

3.11.2 Multiple Sites

Whilst doing a multiple case study, by repeating the same research at another setting, could have further enriched the research (allowing for comparisons of interactions at different sites and by different participants), the time restraints involved in a Master's degree thesis did not allow for engagement at multiple sites.

3.11.3 Single Practitioner-Researcher

In addition, the fact that the researcher was the only adult in the setting during the research could raise issues of confirmability and credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These issues may be somewhat mitigated by the length of the research period and the high number of observations which took place within it. In addition, it is hoped that the use of audio and fieldnotes has allowed for some triangulation of the data to take place, ensuring increased accuracy during the transcription period. Finally, a process of peer debriefing by colleagues and the assigned University Thesis Supervisor helped establish further credibility. These techniques for establishing credibility and confirmability in qualitative research have been recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

3.11.4 Insider researcher

Adler and Adler (1987) have described "complete member researchers" as those who are already members of the group being studied during qualitative research. Although there are certain benefits to this status, such as acceptance and legitimacy, there are also risks. Asselin

(2003) claims that insider researchers can suffer from "role confusion", particularly when the researcher is already familiar with the setting or participants, though in a different role. Costley outlines additional risks associated with insider status, such as lacking impartiality, having vested interests in certain outcomes and being able to maintain "a fresh and objective view of data" (2010: 6).

3.11.4.1 Risk reduction

Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) have suggested that disciplined bracketing, in depth reflection and consciousness of personal biases and perspectives can reduce some of the concerns associated with insider status research. An awareness of these and other risks associated with insider researcher status and the adoption of a rigorously reflective stance throughout the research process, particularly during data analysis, was essential to the confirmability of the research results. The use of Grounded Theory during the data analysis stage of the research supports this stance. However, "(t)he intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders. We now occupy the space between, with the costs and benefits this status affords." (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 61)

3.12 Conclusion

This research piece seeks to expand our understandings of the optimal behaviour of adults around children during sociodramatic play. Whilst there is a recognition that this area of education is complex and generally under researched, there is also a need to tap into such complexities in order to progress our own learning as practitioners and researchers. The status of being an insider researcher raises the possibility of many risks within this research piece. However, it is hoped that these risks were somewhat mitigated through a disciplined and reflective approach to the research process. Finding a space where children's right to play can

comfortably coexist with adult aims to support children's play and learning, is an important conversation taking place within Early Years education. It is anticipated that this research will contribute to that ongoing conversation.

4 Chapter 4: Data Results and Findings

4.1 Developing the Categories

This qualitative study used Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory approach (2006) in which different coding phases were used to allow for categories to emerge from the data. The coding process, which went from Initial Coding to Focused Coding to Selective Coding to Naming Categories and finally Theoretical Coding, is described below.

4.1.1 Initial Codes

The Initial Codes were developed from the contents of each individual numbered line of the transcripts (highlighted in yellow), a sample of which can be seen below in Figure 4.1. Charmaz states that line by line coding in this way is particularly suited to "[d]etailed observations of people, actions, and settings that reveal visibly *telling* and *consequential* scenes and actions" (2006: 50) (italics in original). As can be seen, sometimes a line constituted a single initial code and at other times a single line could contain more than one sentence and/or constitute several initial codes. Although Charmaz (2006) recommends keeping initial codes short, it was felt that, as the individual contributions being made by the adult often contained groups of short sentences, it was necessary to allow for groups of these short initial codes to be recorded together in this way.

4.1.1.1 Contribution types

As can be seen from Figure 4.1, the adult was engaged in very active verbal contributions to the children's play such as narrating, asking and suggesting. However, the non-verbal contributions also became apparent during the Initial Coding phase such as controlling and playing.

Through the Initial Coding process, it was also possible to begin to ascertain the details of these active contributions, which could also be both diverse and later, telling, in terms of the analysis of the data. For example, within this short section, for the verb asking, there was: asking to wonder; asking to understand a child's meaning; asking for help in the game and asking about play actions. As can be seen, such detailed Initial Coding allowed for a more in-depth understanding of what was taking place within the co-play events.

4.1.1.2 Repetitions and Connections

As can also be seen in Figure 4.1, even within short sections of the data, certain words began to repeat themselves within the Initial Codes, such as narrating and playing. The regularity of some of these words, such as playing, were anticipated by the author whilst others, such as controlling, were not.

As the practice of Initial Coding continued, certain phrases began to emerge which were relevant to several lines of the transcripts and in this way, connections began to appear in the data which were later explored. However, it was recognised that prematurely interpreting processes and assumptions could be avoided by resisting seeking connections between the Initial Codes at this point in the analysis.

Figure 4.1 Initial Codes

Initial Codes   **Transcript**

25. Narrating the storyline/Controlling the timing of the play/Playing	<mark>25. But the dinosaur didn't come yet. We'll call you when the dinosaur comes.</mark>
	Sophie jumps up and peeps around the corner at Oscar.
	Sophie: He did. I found him!
26. Suggesting we do something/Controlling sequence of play/playing	<mark>26. We'll hop into bed. Maybe he'll come.</mark>
	She looks back into the room.
27. Affirming child's words/playing	Sophie: It's dinosaur land.
	<mark>27. That's dinosaur land isn't it?</mark>
28. Asking to wonder/adding new idea/playing	Rose: (Gasps). Dinosaur land?
	<mark>28. I wonder if the Spinosaurus will come to our palace to try and get his meat?</mark>
	Sophie: Well I will put some meat for him.
	Rose: Let me help you…here's the big one.
	Hannah: Save some meat for me cause I'm the leopard.
29. Playing/Instructing	Oscar comes in shouting "Spinosaurus"
	Hannah, Rose and I scream and say, "He's here!"
30. Playing/Narrating	<mark>29. (Into phone) Spiderman, come and save us, quickly.</mark>
	John: I'm Spiderman.
	<mark>30. Hi Spiderman. There's a Spinosaurus. He came into our Ice Palace.</mark>
31. Narrating the storyline. /playing	Sophie: Slippy, slippy.
32. Acknowledging child's idea/Complimenting/playing	<mark>31. Be careful. It's slippy on that floor.</mark>
	John: Well I have…well I have special ice rips, ice grips.
	<mark>32. You've special ice grips on your shoes? Perfect. That's a good idea isn't it?</mark>
33. Asking to understand child's meaning/Telling child about another child's play/playing	Sophie: But then you couldn't freeze it.
	<mark>33. Why? You can't freeze the floor? But Spiderman can still walk on it because he has special ice grip shoes.</mark>
34. Narrating the storyline/Asking for help in game	Rose: What's the matter in John?
35. Asking about play actions	<mark>34. Em Spiderman. Spinosaurus comes in here and he tries to take meat. Can you save us from Spinosaurus?</mark>

John: Yeah

<mark>35.How can you do that?</mark>

4.1.2 Focused Coding

Figure 4.2 below shows the process whereby the Initial Codes were colour coded in order to identify similarities between the Initial Codes in a process called Focused Coding (Charmaz, 2006). This Focused Coding allowed for similarities between the Initial Codes within each transcript to be noted and for these Initial Codes to be grouped together. This process was done for each transcript and also between the transcripts.

Figure 4.2 Focused Codes

Initial Codes	**Transcript**
25. Narrating the storyline. Controlling the timing of the play. /playing	25. But the dinosaur didn't come yet. We'll call you when the dinosaur comes.
	Sophie jumps up and peeps around the corner at Oscar.
	Sophie: He did. I found him!
26. Suggesting we do something/Controlling sequence of play. /playing	26. We'll hop into bed. Maybe he'll come.
	She looks back into the room.
27. Affirming child's words. /playing	Sophie: It's dinosaur land.
	27. That's dinosaur land isn't it?
	Rose: (Gasps). Dinosaur land?
28. Asking to wonder/adding new idea/playing	28. I wonder if the Spinosaurus will come to our palace to try and get his meat?
	Sophie: Well I will put some meat for him.
	Rose: Let me help you…here's the big one.

	Hannah: Save some meat for me cause I'm the leopard.
	Oscar comes in shouting "Spinosaurus"
29. Playing/Instructing	Hannah, Rose and I scream and say, "He's here!"
	29.(Into phone) Spiderman, come and save us, quickly.
30. Playing/Narrating	John: I'm Spiderman.
	30.Hi Spiderman. There's a Spinosaurus. He came into our Ice Palace.
31. Narrating the storyline. /playing	Sophie: Slippy, slippy.
	31.Be careful. It's slippy on that floor.
	John: Well I have...well I have special ice rips, ice grips.
32. Acknowledging child's idea/Complimenting/playing	32.You've special ice grips on your shoes? Perfect. That's a good idea isn't it?
	Sophie: But then you couldn't freeze it.
33. Asking to understand child's meaning/Telling child about another child's play/playing	33.Why? You can't freeze the floor? But Spiderman can still walk on it because he has special ice grip shoes.
	Rose: What's the matter in John?
34. Narrating the storyline/Asking for help in game	34.Em Spiderman. Spinosaurus comes in here and he tries to take meat. Can you save us from Spinosaurus?
	John: Yeah
35.Asking about play actions	35.How can you do that?

4.1.2.1 Memo-writing

From the beginning of the Coding process, notes regarding the coding and eventual categorising of the contributions were kept in a Memo which was kept within a separate Word document.

As this colour coding took place, notes were being made in the Memo about the potential Categories which these groups of colour-coded Initial Codes were pointing towards, as the extract from the Memo in Figure 4.3 demonstrates. This grouping of the Initial Codes using the colour coding system allowed for further in-depth analysis of the contributions to take place as the researcher reflected on what each Initial Code was indicating and therefore, where each Initial Code was best placed.

Figure 4.3 Memo Extract 1-Emerging Categories 1

Yellow- Playing or anything related to playing like props, characteristics, using role names, etc./Adding emotion(Modelling play?)

Teal-Adding or suggesting new idea/new language/Teaching/repeating language to teach/Explaining or reminding play rules/Helping to do something (modelling how) etc.

Turquoise-Thanking/Complimenting/Agreeing/Empowering a child/Acknowledging input/Accepting ideas/Responding to input

Pink-Asking a child questions/Asking to clarify/Asking about role, props, characteristics

Should this one be split into asking to clarify (so I understand) and asking for them to think? I think this needs to be split because one helps the adult and the other encourages the child's thinking.

Red-Telling child what to do or what not to do/Controlling play (sequence, timing, location, etc.)/Ignoring contributions **Sometimes to prevent or resolve conflict**

Light Grey

Narrating/Explaining/Connecting/Including/Sharing/Defending/Interpreting/Resolving or preventing conflict (Is this good or bad thing-resilience)/Negotiating/Being flexible/Supporting play position/Comforting/ How does this relate to turquoise?***Is narrating something different?***

As each transcript was colour coded, the emerging potential Categories were expanded to accommodate new Initial Codes. In addition, new potential Categories were added if necessary. This continuous changing of the potential Categories often led to an ongoing process of re-

examining and recoding of the earlier colour coded transcripts. By the end of colour coding the fourth transcript the potential Categories had evolved from Figure 4.3 to Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4 Memo Extract 2-Emerging Categories 2

Yellow-Playing or anything related to playing like props, characteristics, play language, using role names, etc./adding emotion/ (Modelling play?)

Teal-Adding or suggesting new idea/new language/teaching/repeating language to teach/explaining or reminding play rules/helping to do something (modelling how) etc./challenging the child to do something new/comparing to real world/asking for their defined help during play

Turquoise-Thanking/Complimenting/Agreeing/Empowering a child/Acknowledging input/Accepting ideas/Responding to input/Asking for permission/Affirming

Pink-Asking a child questions to clarify (about role, props, characteristics, actions, etc.) Or asking to confirm these things (i.e. Repeating it back to them to be sure about meaning)

Green-Asking for them to think /Dialoguing to make them think/Challenging their thinking/Suggesting new idea in an open wondering way/Asking to understand their existing knowledge/Asking for ideas or what to do

Red-Telling child what to do or what not to do/Controlling play (sequence, timing, location, etc.)/Ignoring contributions/Getting child's attention/Keeping game moving/Sometimes to prevent or resolve conflict/Getting child to wait/Instructing to do something together or individually

Brown-Stepping out of play to organise/resolve/remind rules

Grey-Narrating/Explaining (sometimes done to include)/Sharing prop/action meanings

Blue-Connecting/Including/Sharing/Defending/Interpreting/Resolving or preventing conflict (Is this good or bad thing-resilience)/Negotiating/Being flexible/Supporting play position/Comforting/Moderating my play behaviours/Reassuring/Explaining one child's play to another child

4.1.3 Selective Coding

The next step taken in the grounded theory process was Selective Coding, as was outlined earlier in the Methodology Chapter (cf. Chapter 3.10.1.4). The following notes were recorded in the Memo regarding the decision-making process around the Selective Coding of the remaining data set:

"Having looked over the potential categories above so far, there is nothing in particular that seems to be missing from them or confusing about them at this point. However, I want to see that the kind of play episodes I have transcribed so far are truly representative of all of the different types of sociodramatic co-play scenarios that I have audio recorded. So, having examined the types of audio recordings I have transcribed so far, for the next two I would like transcripts where I have a lesser role if possible and with more of Sophie/Hannah/Rose, possibly an outdoors one or one with object-based characters."

Two further audio recordings of co-play episodes were chosen with these parameters in mind, one in which I played a more submissive type role and in which Hannah played a central role and another which contained object-based sociodramatic play. These were transcribed, Initial Coded and colour-coded in the same way as the first four episodes. Again, the potential Categories were adjusted or expanded as necessary. The final Categories were as follows:

Figure 4.5 Memo Extract 3-Final Categories

Yellow-Playing or anything related to playing like props, characteristics, play language, using role names, etc./adding emotion /Modelling play

Teal-Adding or suggesting new idea/new language/teaching/repeating language to teach/explaining or reminding play rules/helping to do something (modelling how) etc./challenging the child to do something new/comparing to real world/asking for their defined help during play/asking to understand existing knowledge or establish what they already know

Turquoise-Thanking/Complimenting/Agreeing/Empowering a child/Acknowledging input/Accepting ideas /Asking for permission/Affirming/Doing what child says or indicates/Giving them control/Being flexible/ Moderating my play behaviours/ Taking submissive role/Negotiating

Pink-Asking a child questions to clarify (about role ,props, characteristics, actions, etc.)/asking to confirm these things(i.e. Repeating it back to them to be sure about meaning)

Green-Asking for them to think /Dialoguing to make them think/Challenging their thinking/Suggesting new idea in an open wondering way/Asking for ideas or what to do

Red-Telling child what to do or what not to do/Controlling play (sequence, timing, location, etc.)/Ignoring contributions/Getting child's attention/Keeping game moving/Sometimes to prevent or resolve conflict/Getting child to wait/Instructing to do something together or individually/not including

Stepping out of play to organise/resolve/remind rules

Grey-Narrating/Explaining (sometimes done to include)/Sharing prop/action meanings

Blue-Connecting/Including/Sharing/Defending/Interpreting/Resolving or preventing conflict (Is this good or bad thing-resilience)/Supporting play position/Comforting/Moderating my play behaviours/Reassuring/Explaining one child's play to another child/Sharing roles and names to include

4.1.4 Naming the Categories

Although I had been working with the potential Categories for some time, I had not yet named them. It was at this point that I began to consider naming each Category which had, until this point, been grouped only according to individual colours. Each colour coded Category was used to "sift" (Charmaz, 2006: 57) through all of the transcripts which allowed for the data to become much more manageable and accessible. This process allowed for more concise names for each of the Categories to emerge and be finalised as follows:

Figure 4.6 Named Categories

Playing

Playing or anything related to playing like props, characteristics, play language, using role names, etc./adding emotion/modelling play

Inspiring ideas and Teaching

Adding or suggesting new idea/new language/teaching/repeating language to teach/explaining or reminding play rules/helping to do something (modelling how) etc./challenging the child to do something new/comparing to real world/asking for their defined help during play/asking to understand existing knowledge or establish what they already know

Empowering

Turquoise-Thanking/Complimenting/Agreeing/Empowering a child/Acknowledging input/Accepting ideas /Asking for permission/Affirming/Doing what child says or

indicates/Giving them control/Being flexible/ Moderating my play behaviours/ Taking submissive role/Negotiating

Clarifying and Confirming

Pink-Asking a child questions to clarify (about role ,props, characteristics, actions, etc.)/asking to confirm these things(i.e. Repeating it back to them to be sure about meaning)

Encouraging Thinking

Asking for them to think /Dialoguing to make them think/Challenging their thinking/Suggesting new idea in an open wondering way/Asking for ideas or what to do

Controlling

Telling child what to do or what not to do/Controlling play (sequence, timing, location, etc.)/Ignoring contributions/Getting child's attention/Keeping game moving/Sometimes to prevent or resolve conflict/Getting child to wait/Instructing to do something together or individually/not including

Stepping Out

Stepping out of play to organise/resolve/remind rules

Creanating and Narrating

Creating whilst Narrating/Narrating/Explaining (sometimes done to include)/Sharing prop/action meanings

Connecting

Connecting/Including/Sharing/Defending/Interpreting/Resolving or preventing conflict (Is this good or bad thing-resilience)/Supporting play position/Comforting/Moderating my play behaviours/Reassuring/Explaining one child's play to another child/Sharing roles and names to include

As can be seen, some of the names for the final categories came from the Initial Codes whilst others, such as *Creanating and Narrating* emerged from the Focused Coding process, during which deeper understandings of each specific Category took place. (The term *Creanating*, which was devised by the researcher, will be explained further below (cf. Chapter 4.2.9.1).

4.2 The Final Categories

4.2.1 Theoretical Coding

As the final categories here were being analysed and discussed, Theoretical Coding, (cf. Chapter 3.10.1.7), began to take place. This process of comparing and analysing each of the codes involved a lot of reflection on the part of the researcher, as can be seen clearly in this extract from the Memo for *Empowering*:

> There is a real sense of needing to return control of the game to the children, like when one child found my character too scary at the start. Empowering the children in these ways allows me as a practitioner to be more flexible in the way I am playing with them in order to meet the needs of individual children in the moment. Obviously, there is a big connection between this category and the dark blue Connecting one. It's almost like, with this category, it's about me submitting *my* self to the child's self. For practitioners, that is really all about their willingness to relinquish control. That is so interesting because it is something I have been asking myself since the beginning of the Masters-what are we, as adults, so afraid of when dealing with children's education? Almost like coming full circle. I keep returning to power as a theme that fascinates me and of course it has so many resonances in the Early Years.

Each of the final nine Categories will now be discussed in more detail. The comparisons and analysis outlined here for each one is based on the reflections by the researcher which were recorded in the Memo.

4.2.2 Playing

Playing was recognised as a contribution type by the following types of indicators: referring to the children by their role names, referring to children's role characteristics or actions, referring

to props by their symbolic prop names, using language related to the play, adding emotions, the use of terminology or sounds appropriate to the play subject.

Playing by the adult was most often correlated with the *Creanating and Narrating* Category. Although these play episodes were chosen because the adult was seen to be engaging in co-play with the children, it was noticed that, for some of the events, there were low levels of *Playing* indicators within the co-play. This suggested that, for some of the events, although the adult assumed co-playing was taking place, the actual recorded contributions of the adult did not always indicate play by the adult.

Controlling type contributions were only occasionally used at the same time as *Playing* and were often used to either keep the game moving or to instruct children to do different things playfully within the context of the play.

The following is an example of *Playing* (Initial Codes highlighted in Yellow):

Figure 4.7 Playing Category

Initial Codes	Transcript
155. Restating their idea to share new storyline/playing	155. I won't eat any more cause I'm full up now…Hi cheetahs. I'm not going to eat you cause I'm full
156. Restating the whole storyline to share up to date storyline/playing	156.up. I ate all the dead other and all the Triceratops. So I'm not gonna eat you. I'm gonna be friends.
157. Sharing my new role characteristics. /playing	Sophie: Are you a friendly one? Oscar: We're both helpers. I'm a helper.
158. Sharing child's role action and my characteristic/playing	157 I'm friendly now. I'm full up. I'm only not friendly when I'm hungry but I'm not hungry. The 158.superhero fed me loads of meat and now I'm not hungry anymore and I'm friendly.

159.Including children/playing	Rose: Hee, hee! Do you want to…
160.Empowering child through his role/playing	Oscar: And I helped to...I am giant and I'm still the one...
	Rose: We come in your house?
	159. Sure. Well that's my prison. Do you want to see my prison? Superhero do you want to show the
	160.cheetahs? They want to see my prison. You've got the key.

4.2.3 Inspiring ideas and Teaching

In this contribution type there are two main types of contributions taking place. The first is *Inspiring Ideas* during which the adult adds new ideas into the play through verbal contributions. These are sometimes accepted by the children and sometimes rejected. The second type is *Teaching* which involves contributing new vocabulary; repeating new vocabulary; helping with tasks within play; asking for help; challenging the child to do something new; helping children with the rules of the play; teaching within the context of the play and assessing existing knowledge.

Inspiring Ideas and Teaching often took place alongside the *Playing* category and, in this way, can be seen to allow for new information and learning to be contributed within the context of the play. This means that it is both relevant to the play moment and has the potential to be relevant to the children, if, as in these cases, the play is based on their own choice of roles and interests.

In addition, there is a wide variety of new information and learning being offered to the children during each co-play episode. The following is a list (recorded in the Memo) of the types of *Inspiring Ideas and Teaching* contributions made by the adult during one 30-minute co-play event:

Adding new concept to enrich play; Adding a new concept to enrich play; Proposing a problem; Solving a real problem; Adding new language; adding word meaning; repeating new word; adding new concept to enrich play; adding new language; adding new language; categorising; adding new fun addition to play; adding new language and categorising; repeating new language; repeating new idea and linking to home life; teaching maths concept; explaining sequence; adding a fun new idea; adding maths concept; adding maths language; repeating new language; adding music/geography concepts; discussing geographic concepts; adding fun idea and geographic language; repeating new language; repeating maths language; helping with task; helping with task; adding new idea; linking with biology; discussing function of object; repeating function of object; explaining how function works; adding maths language; adding new concept to enrich play; repeating maths language; repeating a new phrase.

As can be seen, there are a considerable number of contributions covering a wide range of topics and allowing for much cross-curricular learning. As was noted in the Memo, however, caution is needed with the contributions being given within this category, that the teaching doesn't dominate the playing to such an extent that the role which the practitioner is playing within the co-play is not subsumed by their real life educator role, which risks damaging the flow of the play.

The following is an example of this contribution type (Initial Codes highlighted in Teal):

Figure 4.8 Inspiring Ideas and Teaching Category

Initial Codes	Transcript
	Rose: Yeah. And I love her kitty cat. He's our visitor.
141. Suggesting a new idea/Playing	141. Oh he could be one of the visitors in a little while, couldn't he?
	Rose: Yeah. Yeah.
142. Teaching/Playing	142. So he's tame and you're wild. He's a domestic tame cat. That means he lives in my zookeeper's house.
	Rose: Oh, I'm very glad you could come over.

143. Asking about child's meaning

143. Into, into the wild cat place?

John: I'm back. I'm back.

144. Repeating teaching language

144. He's a house cat. A domestic tame house cat.

4.2.4 Empowering

The *Empowering* category was indicated by the following contributions: thanking; complimenting; agreeing; empowering; acknowledging input; accepting ideas; asking for permission; affirming a child's words or actions; doing what a child asks or indicates; giving control; being flexible; moderating my behaviours; negotiating and adopting a submissive role.

These contributions most often took place at the same time as *Playing*. These contributions allowed for the children to control their roles, actions, characteristics, props, etc. In this way, the children were allowed more agency over the play which was taking place and were therefore seen to be empowered. Some of the contribution types within this Category such as thanking and complimenting indicated to the children that their contributions were valued and important.

It was noted in my memo-writing that where there was a higher incidence of this Category within the play, the children seemed to have more control over the play and the adult's role seemed to be more submissive.

The following is an example of the *Empowering* category (Initial Codes highlighted in Turquoise):

Figure 4.9 Empowering Category

Initial Codes	Transcript
209. Including/empowering	209. Cause you have powers, freeze powers.
	Hannah: And I won't forget to bring my luggage.
210. Complimenting	210. Good idea.
	John: If you want, I will help you by freezing Lipleurodon.
211. Complimenting	211. Brilliant! Great idea.
	Oscar: Right. Now.
212. Taking submissive role/ Playing	212. If you want, I'll go behind everyone cause I don't have powers, any books, any luggage with special books to tell you what to do.
	Oscar: But you can mind our book. Our book isn't magic. There's no real dinosaurs in it only pictures.
	Hannah: And don't worry...and don't worry.
213. Taking submissive role/Playing	213. Em, but I've got a broken arm and I don't want him to bang it.
	Hannah: But don't worry. I can, I can get a map if you want.
214. Teaching	214. Maps are good for showing the way, aren't they?
	Hannah: Let me get a map.
	Oscar: Well this, you can look in the dinosaur book. That is not magic. That only has pictures of dinosaurs in it.
	215. Oh yeah.
	Hannah: Here. Here's the map.
215. Agreeing	

216.Complimenting	216.Okay that's the map. That's good. That's like us going on a trip to find Lipleurodon behind the
217.Asking to include/ Playing	217.bush. Guys what about those cats? Will we ask them if they want to come with us?

4.2.5 Clarifying and Confirming

This category was indicated by the following contributions by the adult: asking the child questions to clarify the child's role or role characteristics/actions or to clarify props, locations, etc; repeating the child's language or paraphrasing the child's language back to the child in order to confirm and/or share the child's contribution.

Where the adult was *Clarifying*, there were often opportunities to repeat correct pronunciations or more accurate phrasings of words, back to the child and so this category was also linked to *Teaching*. It was also an opportunity to broadcast the play motivations of one child to other children which connected it to *Narrating*. In terms of both the Clarification and the Confirmation of the child's contributions, the adult was also given the opportunity to better understand the child's motivations in play which led to deeper understandings of each child's ZPD, offered opportunities for assessment and also connected this category to Empowerment.

The following is an example of *Clarifying and Confirming* (Initial Codes highlighted in Pink):

Figure 4.10 Clarifying and Connecting Category

Initial Codes	Transcript
	Sophie: What is up here? What is here?
	John: I think it's still dead. It's a dead Triceratops.
174. Asking to clarify	174. Dead Triceratops are in there?
175. Adding new idea/playing	John: Yeah. That's where we get it.

	175. Ooh. I might come in here again later when I'm hungry again.
	Oscar: It's all dead things in here.
176. Giving new name to prop/playing	176. This is the dead room.
	John: And there's a, there's a dead T-Rex in there.
177. Asking to clarify	177. A dead T-Rex?
	John: Yeah.
178. Adding new idea/playing	178. Ooh, will it come back to its life and eat me?
	Oscar: No.
	John: No, it won't.
179. Asking to clarify	179. It won't come back to life?
	John: Yeah, because it's whole dead.
180. Restating language to teach	180. It's completely dead is it?
	John: Yeah

4.2.6 Encouraging Thinking

This category is indicated by the following types of contributions by the adult: asking for the children to think; engaging in dialogue to make children think; challenging children's current thinking by questioning; suggesting new ideas in an "I wonder" way; asking for ideas about what to do.

During these types of contributions, the adult is encouraging the child to engage in independent thinking in order to come up with new ideas or solutions of their own which allows for creativity as well as consolidation of their thinking and previous learning. Like the *Inspired Ideas and Teaching* category it also allows for the learning to be relevant to the children's

current interests through their play and offers a broad range of cross curricular learning opportunities.

The following is an example of *Encouraging Thinking* (Initial Codes highlighted in Green):

Figure 4.11 Encouraging Thinking Category

Initial Codes	Transcript
36.Instructing/Asking to make think	36.You have to count to ten.
	Sophie: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10 (sound pumping)
	Rose: Here's your egg.
37.Asking to make think/ Playing	37.What number is it?
	Sophie: 10.
38.Adding emotion/Asking to make think/ Playing	38.10. I think that's good is it?
39. Asking to confirm	Sophie: Em, bad.
	39.Bad? I've bad blood pressure! Is it too high or too low?
40. Adding new vocabulary	Sophie: Too low.
	40.Too low?
	Hannah: Okay let me check your...keep your arm still so I can get some blood out to...no it won't hurt okay...I'm just going to send it to the shop so they can check it. It won't hurt don't worry.
41. Asking to make think. / Playing	41.They send it to the laboratory?
	Hannah: It's just a pinch for one minute and it's gone.
42. Adding new idea/Challenging her thinking/ Playing	42.Okay. Why are you taking my blood? Are you going to drink it?
	Hannah: No!
43. Affirming/Asking to make think/ Playing	43.But you are a carnivore. You like blood.
	Hannah: No, I don't. I'm just sending it to them to see if you have the right blood.

44. Adding new vocabulary/asking to make think	44. To see if I've the right blood. What will be in my blood if it's good?
	Hannah: If there's any bugs in you something kicks it out.
45. Adding new vocabulary/asking to make think/ Playing	45. The white blood cells kick it out?
	Hannah: Yeah. Okay.
	Sophie: Do you want this medicine?
	46. And the platelets, will they work?
	Hannah: It's only 2 okay? Just put it in here.

4.2.7 Controlling

The following were indicators that *Controlling* type contributions were taking place: telling a child what to do or what not to do; controlling the sequence, timing, location, etc of the play; ignoring a child's contributions; getting a child's attention; keeping a game moving along; getting a child to wait; instructing children to do something (either with the adult or by themselves); not including a child.

As can be seen from this list, sometimes *Controlling* can have negative connotations, whilst at other times it is used for practical reasons. *Controlling* always involved the adult getting involved in the play to bring it in a different direction than it might have gone were the children playing alone. In this way, the adult used their authority to take control of the play. It is recognised that although this could either benefit children (in terms of inclusion, encouraging self-regulation, keeping the flow of the play, etc.) or hinder children (interrupting children, dominating play), the adult's contributions were used to control the play in some way.. Although some of the other categories resulted in a change in the direction of the play, the actions within the *Controlling* category were being done purely to control the play.

Within *Controlling* there were many opportunities for scaffolding children's learning, particularly around self-regulation and social skills and in this way, it is connected to *Inspiring Ideas and Teaching*. As it often supported the inclusion and voice of some children, it is also connected with *Empowering*.

The following is an example of *Controlling* (Initial Codes highlighted in Red):

Figure 4.12 Controlling Category

Initial Codes	Transcript
119. Narrating/new idea/wondering/Playing	119. Let's see if he comes back or not. He read the sign. I didn't know dinosaurs could read signs.
120. Narrating/Playing	120. That's good isn't it?
	Hannah: He's coming! To give us back the sign!
121. Instructing/Playing	121. Maybe! Let's get into our building site!
	Hannah: Look what happened! He gave us back our sign!
122. Complimenting/Playing	122. Well done superhero and well done guard!
	Rose: I want to clean my (unclear).
123. Clarifying	123. To be what?
	Rose: My (unclear).
	124. Well hang on. We have to guard our site now. Rose! Other guard Rose! Come over here with
	125. me. We have to guard our site!
124. Controlling timing/actions/ Calling by play name/Playing	Rose: But I don't want to guard the site! I...
	126. Put our hands up like this...
125. Controlling play/Playing	Rose: I just want to get a wash!

126. Controlling actions/Instructing/Playing

127. Controlling play/Instructing/Playing/Narrating

127.But it's not washing time if a dinosaur is coming. Builders you get to work! We're guarding you!

John: Okay!

Rose: Come close. (talking to the dinosaur)

128.No dinosaur this wall is to stop you coming in the building site. It's a perimeter wall going all the

128. Controlling play/Repeating new word/Playing

129.way around so you can't get in the building site. No dinosaurs allowed!

129. Playing agreed role, props/Narrating/Controlling

Hannah: Then why did you give us back the sign? Hey! Can I tell you something? Tell him, tell him why did he give us back the sign, tell him that!

Rose: He's under the table!

130.Why did you give us back the sign dinosaur?

Oscar: Because I finished reading it! And I was being nice to you for one minute!

Sophie: He finished reading it!

130. Doing what child asked/Playing

131.He's only being nice to us for one minute! Maybe...Well shall we go have our cup of tea? I think

132.it's our break time guard.

131. Repeating to narrate/Adding new storyline/Playing

Rose: I need to get it back...Let me go get my bag.

132. Adding new storyline/Playing

133.I'm just going to ring the café and see if the lunches are ready. Hopefully the dinosaur won't come back.

(roaring in background from other room)

133. Adding new idea/Narrating/Changing direction storyline/Playing

4.2.8 Stepping Out

This category is indicated by the following types of contributions: stepping out of play to organise props, locations, etc; stepping out of play to resolve conflict; stepping out of play to remind children of rules within the setting.

Stepping Out type contributions are strongly correlated with the *Controlling* category as they often involve the adult temporarily removing herself from the play scenario in order to control children's behaviours. However, they differ from *Controlling* type contributions as they always take place outside of the play scenario. The *Stepping Out* category is also connected with the *Inspiring Ideas and Teaching* category as the adult teaches or reminds the child around the rules of the setting or the play. Figure 4.13 contains an example of the *Stepping Out* category (Initial Codes highlighted in Brown).

Figure 4.13 Stepping Out Category

Initial Codes	Transcript
	Sophie: Nicola, John hit me on the head with, with, with the telescope.
59. Stepping out of role/Controlling child's use props/Telling child what he's done	59 Okay John. Can I have that now. You've hit a couple of people with that now. That's not the way
60. Stepping out of role/Explaining rule	60 we use it. It's not for hitting people.
	John: I'll use a different, I'll use a di, a small one first though.
61. Stepping out of role/Explaining rule/Controlling prop use with rule	61 But John, you can have a small one but you're not to hit people. Do you understand?
62. Stepping out of role/reinforcing rule	John: I'm not going to hit them with a small one. 62 Okay. You're not allowed hit them even with the big one when you have it, okay?

4.2.9 Creanating and Narrating

Within this category there are two different but closely related contribution types which will be dealt with here separately.

4.2.9.1 Creanating

Creanating is a term which has been devised here to describe the combined process of creating and narrating in which an adult or a child creates a play role for themselves whilst also narrating the details of that role to those around them. The purpose of *Creanating* is to communicate the name and details of the role which the person has created (including any characteristics, props, actions or relationships associated with the role) to themselves and their co-players, in order that everyone understands the nature of the role they are playing. The process of *Creanating* becomes important where no costumes or other props are being used to ameliorate the representation of their character role. *Creanating* is a form of symbolic representation similar to the use of symbolic props in play (during which a child may tell co-players that, for example, a block now represents a phone). It was seen to be used in both sociodramatic play and object based sociodramatic play. This process of *Creanating* was the basis for all of the sociodramatic play that took place. *Creanating* was indicated by talking aloud about your role or the characteristics, props, actions or relationships associated with your role, during play.

An example of *Creanating* is given below (Initial Codes highlighted in Grey):

Figure 4.14 Creanating

Initial Codes	Transcript
	Sophie: Now you don't get the treasure!
14. Affirming what child said./ Playing/Creanating	14.(whispering) I can't get the treasure cause I'm dead now.

	John: I'm trying to, I'm trying to stop her get the treasure and I did. I made her die.
15. Affirming what child said. / Playing/ Creanating	15.(whispering) I'm dead now.
	John: She's dead now.
	Hannah: It says-to stop the man who you don't like who is stealing things just give him some sweets that is poisonous and leave it out, go home and some day he will eat it and be dead.
	Sophie: This is poison.
	Hannah: Okay. Leave it beside him, beside his arm, inside his arm, and he will wake up and eat it. Okay. I got the right.
	16.Oh I thought I was dead.
16. Responding to her input/ Playing/ Creanating	Hannah: (unclear) There is a little egg there for you.
	17.I thought I was dead but I'm not dead.
17. Responding to her input/ Playing/ Creanating	Hannah: There's a little egg there for you, a green egg.
	18.Oh good I got some food cause I was a bit hungry after being dead.
18. Narrating/adding new idea/ Playing/ Creanating	Hannah, Rose and Sophie: It's poisonous!
	19.Ooooh!! It's hurting my tummy. There was poison in the egg! Awww! Oh no! I got poison in my tummy!
19. Following their storyline with my actions/adding emotion/ Creanating	Sophie: (giggling)
	20.If I promise not to be a baddie will you get me medicine?
20. Adding new idea/being submissive/negotiating/ Playing/ Creanating	Hannah: Okay
21. Being submissive/negotiating/ Playing/ Creanating	21.I promise I won't be a baddie.
	Hannah: If you promise really good, we will not give you poison anymore.
22. Negotiating/being submissive/ Playing/ Creanating	22.If I don't steal any more treasure will you give me good medicine?
	Rose, Hannah, Sophie: Yes

Narrating is the process whereby the adult discusses, broadcasts or shares the roles of the children involved in the play (or their characteristics, props, actions or relationships) or the storyline, in order communicate it to others. *Narrating* is indicated by the adult talking aloud about any of these topics and can be seen in the following example (Initial Codes highlighted in Grey):

Figure 4.15 Narrating

Initial Codes	Transcript
	Hannah: Can I come in?
82. Narrating the game and roles	82.We just got to make sure that the dinosaur doesn't come again because there was a bad dinosaur
83.Narrating the game	83.trying to get down and knock everything.
	Oscar: And it was me wasn't it?
84.Narrating what happened already to share the storyline	84.Yeah. The Spinosaurus one was trying to get into our building site and we said no
85. Suggesting new action	85.Spinosaurus...oh! allowed...but I have to make the sign again.

Both *Creanating and Narrating* are strongly correlated with *Playing*. *Narrating* is also strongly correlated with *Clarifying and Confirming* as the adult engages in an active process of attempting to understand the child's role or the storyline and share it with others.

4.2.10 Connecting

Connecting is indicated by the following types of contributions by the adult: including children in play; sharing props with children; defending or supporting children's play positions; interpreting a child's intentions in play; resolving conflict; preventing conflict; comforting children; reassuring children; explaining one child's play to another child.

As can be seen from these contribution types, the *Connecting* category is about ensuring children's social-emotional wellbeing and scaffolding their ability to engage in socio-dramatic play. For the practitioner the *Connecting* category is also about ensuring inclusivity in play. *Connecting* is also concerned with the children being supported to connect both with each other and with the adult successfully. Consequently, the *Connecting* category is strongly associated with the *Controlling* and *Empowering* categories.

The following is an example of the *Connecting* category (Initial Codes highlighted in Blue):

Figure 4.16 Connecting Category

Initial Codes	**Transcript**
	John: Here's a icecream for you.
140.Thanking child/ Playing/Connecting	140.Oh King thank you! This is my friend.
	Hannah: After your story, I'm going to read my story to you after his story.
141.Connecting children/ Playing	141.But this is my friend the King. Can he come too? He's friends with me. We made friends.
	Hannah: I don't think there's enough room?
	Oscar: Eh. Okay. One step at a time.
142.Asking to include/ Playing	142.Do you want to come with us?
	Hannah: Well I don't think there's enough room.
143.Connecting/Including/ Playing	143.He's actually a superhero aswell so he's really great for helping. If anything goes wrong he can help us.

John: I think I'll squeeze in the back here.

144.Narrating re: props/ Playing   144.Oh great! He got me a drink. It's an ice cream drink. I'll put it up there.

Hannah: Hey can I try some?
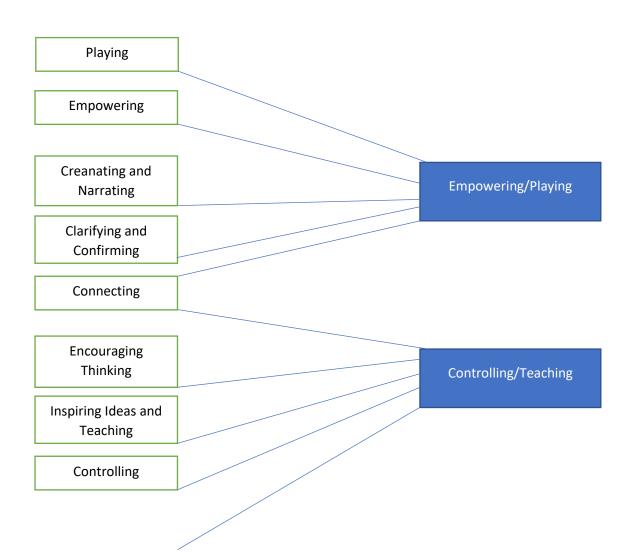
145.Responding   145.Yeah sure.

Oscar: One step at a time.

Hannah: Mmm nice.

4.3 Broader Categories

As can be seen above, the relationships between the different Contribution Categories became more apparent during the Theoretical Coding process. This can be illustrated as follows:

Figure 4.17 Broader Categories

As can be seen in Figure 4.17, the nine final Adult Contribution Categories can be subsumed into two broader categories – Controlling/Teaching and Empowering/Playing. The identification of these broader categories allowed for a wider perspective of the behaviour and processes within the co-play events to be taken. In this way further theory building around adults co-playing with children during sociodramatic play could take place, which will be outlined further below.

4.4 Numerical Analysis

Category	04-Apr	%	09-Apr	%	10-Apr	%	25-Mar	%	26-Mar	%	29-Mar	%	Total	Average %
STEPPING OUT	1	0.3	1	0.3	35	9.7	7	1.8	5	1.8	13	4.3	62	3.1
CONTROLLING	43	14.5	10	2.5	24	6.7	32	8.3	20	7.2	20	6.6	149	7.4
INSPIRING IDEAS AND TEACHING	49	16.5	46	11.6	44	12.3	31	8.1	55	19.9	40	13.2	265	13.1
ENCOURAGING THINKING	18	6.1	44	11.1	23	6.4	33	8.6	19	6.9	13	4.3	150	7.4
CONNECTING	9	3.0	29	7.3	23	6.4	20	5.2	23	8.3	18	6.0	122	6.1
CLARIFYING AND CONFIRMING	25	8.4	34	8.6	22	6.1	55	14.3	27	9.7	36	11.9	199	9.9
EMPOWERING	25	8.4	71	17.9	58	16.2	61	15.8	27	9.7	21	7.0	263	13.0
CREANATING AND NARRATING	35	11.8	31	7.8	21	5.8	30	7.8	36	13.0	45	14.9	198	9.8
PLAYING	92	31.0	130	32.8	109	30.4	116	30.1	65	23.5	96	31.8	608	30.2
TOTAL CONTRIBUTION TYPES	297		396		359		385		277		302		2016	

4.4.1 Contribution Numbers by Category

Figure 4.18 contains a table detailing the total numbers of contributions for each Category type on each of the Transcript dates. These have been further recorded as percentages of the total contribution types for each date. As can be seen from the table, the highest percentage of contribution types for each date was within the *Playing* category. *Playing* contributions represented 30.2% of all of the contributions by the adult during these co-play events.

Figure 4.18 Contribution Numbers by Category Table

4.4.2 Controlling-Playing Continuum

The various categories were conceived of as a Controlling-Playing Continuum (Figure 4.19) in which the adult offered different types of contributions which ranged between the two broader categories outlined above (Figure 4.17), i.e., more Controlling/Teaching type contributions or more Empowering/Playing type contributions. As outlined in its' own section above, *Connecting* is associated with both the *Controlling* and the *Empowering* categories. *Connecting* was found to naturally fall in the centre of the continuum.

As the contributions at the Controlling/Teaching end of the Continuum contained behaviours in which the adult had more control, this end of the continuum was associated with increased adult control. Meanwhile the contributions at the Empowering/Playing end of the Continuum contained behaviours in which the child had more control, so that this end of the continuum was associated with increased child control.

Figure 4.19 Controlling-Playing Continuum

Controlling-Playing Continuum

| Stepping Out | Controlling | Inspiring Ideas and Teaching | Encouraging Thinking | Connecting | Clarifying and Confirming | Creanating and narrating | Empowering | Playing |

←**Controlling/Teaching**   **Empowering/Playing**→

←**Adult Control**   **Child Control**→

4.4.3 Controlling-Playing Score

The various adult contribution Categories on the Controlling-Playing Continuum were weighted from 1(for the least amount of child control) to 9 (for the most amount of child control) and a score for each co-play event was devised as follows:

Figure 4.20 Controlling-Playing Score Table

	Weigh ting	04-Apr	Score	09-Apr	Score	10-Apr	Score	25-Mar	Score	26-Mar	Score	29-Mar	Score	Total	Total Score
STEPPING OUT	1	1	1	1	1	35	35	7	7	5	5	13	13	62	62
CONTROLLING	2	43	86	10	20	24	48	32	64	20	40	20	40	149	298
INSPIRING IDEAS AND TEACHING	3	49	147	46	138	44	132	31	93	55	165	40	120	265	795
ENCOURAGING THINKING	4	18	72	44	176	23	92	33	132	19	76	13	52	150	600
CONNECTING	5	9	45	29	145	23	115	20	100	23	115	18	90	122	610
CLARIFYING AND CONFIRMING	6	25	150	34	204	22	132	55	330	27	162	36	216	199	1194
CREANATING AND NARRATING	7	35	245	31	217	21	147	30	210	36	252	45	315	198	1386
EMPOWERING	8	25	200	71	568	58	464	61	488	27	216	21	168	263	2104
PLAYING	9	92	828	130	1170	109	981	116	1044	65	585	96	864	608	5472
TOTAL CONTRIBUTION TYPES		297	1774	396	2639	359	2146	385	2468	277	1616	302	1878	2016	12521
Weighted Score			6.0		6.7		6.0		6.4		5.8		6.2		6.2

As can be seen from the table in Figure 4.20, there was a wide range of scores between 5.8 and 6.7, indicating that the types of contributions given by the adult varied for each co-play event and overall, the events could be seen to be either more adult controlled or more child controlled. However, on average, they remained within the child-controlled end of the continuum.

Overall, an average of 31% of adult contributions were within the lower four points on the continuum whilst 62.9 % of adult contributions were within the higher four points on the continuum. This would also seem to point to the fact that for these co-play events, the play remained more child controlled than adult controlled. However, it also indicates that further possibilities exist, (through increased use of those contributions at the Empowering/Playing end of the continuum and less use of those at the Controlling/Teaching end of the continuum), for the co-play to become more child controlled.

5 Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this section, it will be shown how the contributions by the co-playing adult within the various Categories have the potential to support the development of mature sociodramatic play. The Adult Contribution Categories will be compared with Elkonin's theory of play (2005), as outlined in as well as *Aistear*'s recommendations on the role of the adult in play (NCCA, 2009). The Adult Contribution Categories will also be examined with regard to Gaviria-Loaiza et al.'s recommended actions for co-playing adults. Finally, some concerns around certain Adult Contribution Categories will be addressed.

5.2 Supporting the development of mature play

According to Leontiev (1978) and Elkonin (1972), mature play is the "leading activity" for children in the early years (cf. Chapter 2.2.3). From the examples given above it is possible to see that the sociodramatic play which the children were engaging in, when co-playing with the adult, can be described as mature play. The play contained all of the features which Bodrova and Leong (2015) describe as being present during mature play: symbolic representation or actions; appropriate language for creating storylines and maintaining roles; complex themes; rich roles which align with the rules for those roles and an extended time frame (the play episodes sometimes lasted for up to 11/2 hours or more). In contrast, the play episodes contained few of the features of immature play listed previously.

This would suggest that the adult's contributions are successfully supporting the children towards more mature forms of sociodramatic play, as recommended by writers such as Bodrova and Leong (2007), Hakkarainen et al. (2013) and Gaviria-Loaiza et al. (2017). As noted in the Introduction, the children had previously shown difficulty in achieving this level of mature

sociodramatic play when playing independently, without an adult present to support them, but rather their play had shown many of the features of immature play (cf. Chapter 1.8.2.1).

5.2.1 How the adult is supporting mature play

Within the Adult Contribution Categories we can see that the adult often offers the children support to engage in mature play: modelling symbolic representation or actions and referring to the children's role names and characteristics whilst *Playing;* supporting the maintenance and broadcasting of storylines, complex themes and rich roles with rules when *Creating and Narrating* and *Clarifying and Confirming;* encouraging extended time frames by keeping the play moving along when *Controlling*. In addition, when the adult is *Connecting* or *Empowering*, she is often including children, resolving conflict or supporting children to play together, all of which are necessary for mature sociodramatic play in which more than one child needs to be present. These types of contributions towards mature play by the adult can be seen in the following example:

Figure 5.1 Contributions supporting the development of Mature Play

Initial Codes	Transcript
	John: Freezing powers…dah, dah (singing)…I'm freezing you!
91.Acknowledging child's contribution by incorporating it/playing	91 (pretend voice) Oh no! Not that superhero with his freezing powers again!
	Sophie: I froze you. Now you're ice.
92. Acknowledging child's contribution by incorporating it/adding a new idea/playing	92 Now I'm made of ice and I can't escape to catch those cheetahs for my lunch.
	Sophie: Because you can't…because the ice, the floor is all slippy.
93. Adding a new idea/Keeping game moving? /playing	93 Oh good! Here comes the sun. It's melting all the ice. (melting sounds)
94. Including a child by narrating play/playing Creanating	John: And I'm gonna…

95. Signalling play with words

96. Signalling play with words

97. Acknowledging child's contribution by incorporating it/adding a new idea/trying to make them think/playing

98. Acknowledging child's contribution by incorporating it/Instructing child / playing

99. Trying to make them think.

100. Ensuring my understanding/instructing child

101. Stepping outside of play/Controlling location so all together/ Making them think

102. Drawing attention to the play/playing

103. Narrating to share the new storyline. /playing Creanating

104. Accepting his new idea/ Acknowledging child's contribution by incorporating it

94 I'm gonna catch this cheetah!

John: No, you aren't.

Sophie: No, you aren't.

95 Where is she? Ahah!

Hannah: (laughing)

96 Here I come (laughing). I'm going...

John: Dah, dah, dah (singing).

97 The ice froze me again. There's no sun in here to melt it. What can I do?

John: You are in prison!

Sophie: You're melting and you can't stop.

John: You're in prison!

98 They're gonna put me in prison? Oh no! (whispered: Grab my hand and put me in the prison.)

99 Where's the prison going to be?

John: There!

100 Outside? Okay, grab this hand.

John: On the other side of that gate.

101 Well we're going to do the game in the garden today John so think of somewhere outside where we can do it.

102 Oh no!

John: I know!

103 The superhero and the baby cheetah caught me!

Sophie: I'm the sister cheetah.

John: We can pretend, let's, let's, let's, pretend now, let's pretend this is the prison.

104 Oh yeah! This could be the prison.

5.2.2 Mature play support and the ZPD

Furthermore, this support of the children towards mature sociodramatic play is offering opportunities for the children to play at the higher levels of their ZPD, as recommended by Vygotsky (1967), that is, at a level of play which they may not be capable of achieving alone. This can be seen in the following example (Figure 5.2) when Oscar and John needed help with resolving a conflict within the play. In this case, despite Oscar's ongoing efforts, the children did not yet have the skills to resolve the conflict alone. If support from the adult had not been available to resolve the conflict, the play may have ended. Instead, the presence of the adult in the play allowed the conflict to be understood and resolved immediately and the play was able to continue.

Figure 5.2 Support to Resolve Conflict

Oscar: Well John I think you need to walk away from my home.

John: NO!

45 Yeah John I think you do.

John: No.

Oscar: You can sit with me John. You can sit with me. I like your superhero.

John: But Oscar I need to get out. You need to walk away from your, from your house.

46 No John cause that's Oscar's home where he's being the Kronosaurus.

John: You need to walk away.

47 John. That's Oscars home so I think you need to walk away from Oscar's home because that's his home when he's being Kronosaurus right? So, you can be there, but you can't break his home cause he doesn't, he doesn't want you to break his home. Okay? And I think it's okay if he doesn't want you to break it right? You don't want someone to break your home?

Oscar: And you can visit me.

48 Oh! That's kind Oscar. The superhero can visit you in your home?

Oscar: Yeah

49 That's a good idea.

Oscar: Is that a good idea?

John: Yeah.

Oscar: Okay... Don't chop my house okay?

Sophie: I'm still a, I'm still a cheetah sister.

(John and Oscar talking together and moving things in the background)

As the adult is supporting Oscar to resolve the conflict, the adult is modelling conflict resolution and by complimenting Oscar, positively reinforcing his kindness. Meanwhile, for John, the adult is supporting him to be more understanding of the play positions of other children. The adult, in reinforcing Oscar's kindness, helps John to see that Oscar is being kind, which helps John feel positive about their friendship. These contributions by the adult are scaffolding the children's social-emotional learning, moving them towards new learning with assistance.

5.2.3 Independent Sociodramatic Play

Vygotsky (1967) recommended that children be given opportunities to work independently at their new skills and that assistance, which over time would no longer be necessary, could eventually be withdrawn. The *Empowering* Category, as outlined above, offered many opportunities for the children to work independently at their developing play skills. When *Empowering*, the adult encouraged the children to take control of the play scenarios whilst the adult took a submissive role. In addition, within this setting, the children were encouraged to spend part of each day playing independently without the support of the adult, in order to allow the children time to practise their play skills without adult support.

5.2.3.1 Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes from this time, recorded in the writing log, showed that communication with parents and carers indicated that the children were practising these more mature play skills at home

with parents, carers, siblings and peers, allowing further learning to take place beyond the setting itself. They also recorded that the children were arriving at the setting, during the period of the research, with ideas for roles, as well as props from home, indicating that the children were developing the skills necessary to plan and organise their future play events, skills which Bodrova and Leong (2007) suggest children are supported to develop, in their pedagogical approach. This can be seen in the following extract from the fieldnotes:

Figure 5.3 Fieldnotes regarding Sociodramatic Play outside the setting

Fieldnotes from 05/04/19

Oscar and Hannah's mam came for a visit to "the zoo" today, as planned. They both said that the zoo play had been happening at home too. Hannah arrived into nursery all dressed up to be a water wild cat, in a special costume they had made together with leopard skin printed leggings and a furry hat and scarf. Oscar's mam said that he is being all kinds of dinosaurs all the time now in his play at home and doing lots of roaring noises, which his little brother is copying!

5.3 Adult Contribution Categories and Elkonin's theory on play

According to Elkonin (2005), sociodramatic play helps to develop higher mental functions in four different ways, as follows:

1. Children become capable of intentional rather than reactive behaviours.

2. Children engage in "cognitive decentering" whereby they see other children's roles, play scenarios and play props from the point of view of other people.

3. Children develop the ability to work with mental representations of objects rather than the physical presence of objects themselves.

4. Children engage in planning and monitoring their intentional behaviours and that of others through the rules of the play.

The adult supports the development of these higher mental functions through the Adult Contribution Categories in the following ways:

5.3.1 Intentional rather than reactive behaviours

When the adult engages in *Controlling* type behaviours within the play, she is often asking the children to wait or stop before acting out, which encourages intentional rather than reactive behaviours. When *Encouraging Thinking* or *Clarifying*, the adult asks the child to stop for a moment to either think or explain further, which also requires pausing in their play, thereby providing the child with opportunities to become more intentional in their behaviours.

5.3.2 Cognitive Decentering

When the adult engages in both *Creanating and Narrating*, she broadcasts both her own perspective and the perspective of other children which helps the child to see many aspects of the play from other people's point of view. *Connecting* allows for children to be included in the play, whose point of view might never be seen by the other children. It also involves explaining one child's play to others. All of these contributions encourage "cognitive decentering" by the children.

5.3.3 Mental representations of objects

When the adult engages in *Inspiring Ideas* or *Encouraging Thinking* she often either provides new ideas or asks children to come up with their own ideas for props. These props are either mental representations or alternative physical representations of real-life objects (e.g. In the play in Figure 4.2, there were no real ice grips on the shoes and the Ice Palace was actually just a desk).

When the adult is *Creanating and Narrating* or *Playing* she is either using or discussing the use of, these types of symbolic objects by herself or the children. This either acknowledges children's use of symbolic objects or models the use of symbolic objects for children.

5.3.4 Planning and monitoring their intentional behaviours and that of others

When the adult engages in *Controlling*, she is often helping the children to plan and monitor their own behaviour, as can be seen in Figure 4.12 above, through the use of reminders and sometimes instructions.

When *Teaching* or *Connecting* the adult also reminds the children about the rules of the play and explains children's positions, roles or other aspects of their play to each other. These contributions help to support the children with their self and other planning and monitoring.

When *Narrating* or *Confirming*, the adult helps the children to understand what is currently going on in the play from other children's perspectives or encourages children to stick to the same storyline. These contributions help the children to conform to the ongoing rules of the play themselves and to ensure conformity by other children.

In this way it can be seen that many of the Adult Contribution Categories support the development of mature sociodramatic play and thereby, support the development of higher mental functions for children within this age group, as outlined by Elkonin (2005).

5.4 Adult Contribution Categories and Aistear

This presence of the adult with the child, in order to support learning through play, has also been recommended by many National Curriculum documents as outlined earlier (cf. Chapter 2.2.8). It is interesting to note that many of the Adult Contribution Categories outlined here, closely correspond with the *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) recommendations regarding the types of supports which an adult should provide whilst playing with young children, as follows:

Figure 5.4 Aistear Recommendations-Adult Contribution Categories

Aistear Recommendations	Adult Contribution Categories
Talking about their play	• Playing (all aspects)
	• Inspiring Ideas and Teaching (new ideas for play)
	• Clarifying and Confirming (all aspects)
	• Encouraging Thinking (asking for new ideas about play)
	• Controlling (when based on play theme)
	• Creanating and Narrating (all aspects)
	• Connecting (supporting and explaining play positions)
Respecting play choices	• Empowering (complimenting, acknowledging and agreeing to their play)
	• Clarifying and Confirming (making sure of and broadcasting choices)
	• Connecting (supporting and explaining play positions)
Non-interfering taking part in play	• Playing (all aspects)

	• Empowering (agreeing, acknowledging, affirming, doing what child says, taking submissive role)
	• Creanating and Narrating (sharing own and children's roles, actions, props)
Help develop skills	• Playing (modelling play)
	• Inspiring Ideas and Teaching (all aspects)
	• Empowering (leadership skills)
	• Clarifying and Confirming (language skills)
	• Encouraging Thinking (all aspects)
	• Controlling (self-regulation skills)
	• Connecting (empathy and other social-emotional skills)
Models play behaviours	• Playing (all aspects)
	• Creanating and Narrating (modelling creanating and joint storyline formation)
Respects diversity	• Empowering (supporting quieter children and encouraging leadership in all children)

- Clarifying and Confirming (particularly for children learning English as a second language or with speech delays)

- Encouraging Thinking (Wondering aloud allows space for alternative worldviews)

- Controlling (can allow for diverse viewpoints to be voiced)

- Creanating and Narrating (narrating to include everyone's viewpoint)

- Connecting (sharing many perspectives, feelings, reactions)

Ensures inclusivity

- Empowering (encourages children to take part and lead)

- Clarifying and Confirming (particularly for children learning English as a second language or with speech delays)

- Encouraging Thinking (Wondering aloud allows space for everyone to be involved)

- Controlling (can prevent dominance by one child or group over others)

	• Creanating and Narrating (narrating to include)
	• Connecting (purposely including children and helping them to understand and empathise with each other and therefore stay connected)
Protects children from harm	• Empowering (when moderating adult play behaviours or taking submissive role to ensure not frightening or intimidating children)
	• Controlling (Resolving conflict, asking children to wait to speak so that other children are not excluded)
	• Stepping Out (to remind rules or resolve conflict or stop overly aggressive play)
	• Connecting (by including, resolving and preventing conflict, defending, supporting, comforting and reassuring)
Extra support to play where needed	• Empowering (Complimenting, empowering, acknowledging and affirming)

- Clarifying and Confirming (speech clarification and broadcasting quiet voices more loudly)

- Controlling (stopping dominance to allow space for other children to play and contribute)

- Creanating and Narrating (ensuring all children's contributions are communicated)

- Connecting

For Older Children:

Support to join in

- Playing (modelling play)

- Inspiring Ideas and Teaching (new ideas which might include the child's particular interests)

- Empowering (Complimenting, acknowledging their input, giving the child control, taking a submissive role, negotiating re: props, locations, etc. to encourage access)

- Clarifying and Confirming (translating or clarifying language to help with access to play)

	- Encouraging Thinking (gives pause for new contributions)
	- Controlling (location, props, etc. can encourage a child to engage afresh with the play)
	- Connecting (supporting their play position, reassuring, explaining or sharing play position, roles, etc.)
Setting up scenarios	- Playing
	- Inspiring Ideas or Teaching
	- Stepping out (to organise)
	- Creanating and Narrating (setting up play scenarios with words)
Help to handle emotions and conflict	- Empowering (moderating my play behaviours, taking submissive role)
	- Controlling (when done to prevent or resolve conflict)
	- Stepping Out (when resolving conflict)
	- Connecting (preventing or resolving conflict/reassuring/comforting)

Support with transitions in/out roles

- Inspiring Ideas and Teaching (suggesting, helping or modelling how to do something)

- Empowering (Accepting and acknowledging their ideas)

- Clarifying and Confirming

- Controlling (Instructing to do something connected with their role)

- Connecting (supporting and explaining play positions, roles, etc.)

5.4.1 Other Contributions

These Adult Contribution Categories reflect only the verbal contributions of the adult when already engaged in co-play with the children. Many other types of supports are provided by the adult during the setting up period before the co-playing in roles begins such as: setting up scenarios; planning for the play; writing out the various roles, actions and characteristics with the children and many other activities, as has been described earlier (cf. Chapter 1.9). These additional activities, which are essential features of the type of co-playing described here, also align with the recommendations of *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) as outlined above (cf. Chapter 5.4).

5.4.2 Valid Approach

This alignment between the Adult Contribution Categories during co-play and *Aistear's* recommendations regarding adult support types for play with young children (NCCA, 2009), indicates that the co-play between adults and young children practiced here, is a valid pedagogical approach within Irish EY settings.

5.5 Actions of Co-Players and Play Leaders

As has been outlined, Gaviria-Loaiza et al. (2017) described the particular actions which adults, acting as co-players and play leaders within their study, engaged in (cf. Chapter 2.4.1). Many of these actions correspond to the Adult Contribution Categories drawn from the co-play events in this study, as follows:

Figure 5.5 Actions of co-players and play leaders-Adult Contribution Categories

Actions of co-players and play leaders	Adult Contribution Categories
Showing interest in play	Playing
	Empowering
	Clarifying and Confirming
	Creanating and Narrating
Taking an active role	Playing
	Controlling
	Creanating
	Connecting
Providing input related to play	Playing
	Inspiring Ideas and Teaching
	Creanating and Narrating
Incorporating real-life experiences into play	Playing

	Inspiring Ideas and Teaching
	Creanating
Letting children take active role	Empowering
	Clarifying and Confirming
	Encouraging Thinking
	Narrating
	Connecting
Catching children's interest and attention	Playing
	Inspiring Ideas and Teaching
	Encouraging Thinking
	Controlling
	Creanating and Narrating
Play minor or equal roles	Playing
	Empowering
	Creanating
Speak in character	Playing
	Creanating
Don't control play plots	Empowering
Follow children's lead	Empowering

Equal roles in manipulative pretend play	Empowering
Sometimes step outside to make play suggestions	Stepping Out
	Inspiring Ideas and Teaching
Provide ideas and themes that helped play	Inspiring Ideas and Teaching
	Controlling
	Creanating
Suggest novel/attractive ideas	Inspiring Ideas and Teaching
Introduce specific vocabulary	Inspiring ideas and Teaching
	Clarifying and Confirming
	Creanating

5.5.1 Absence of Co-Player and Play Leader Actions

It is interesting to note that, although most of the actions outlined by Gaviria-Loaiza et al. (2017) can be seen in the co-play events in this study, some of these actions were clearly absent for some of the co-play events. For example, for the co-play event dated 26 March 2019, the adult did not play a minor or equal role, did not often speak in character, did control the play plot and did not always follow the children's lead. The more dominant role played in this event was noted in the researcher's Memo. However, the lack of those actions recommended in the research by Gaviria-Loaiza et al (2017) in this event, corresponded to a low score for both *Playing* (23.5% of contributions compared to an average of 30.2%) and *Empowering* (9.7% of contributions compared to an average of 13%). This co-play event held the lowest weighted Controlling-Playing score of all of the co-play events recorded in this study (5.8 compared to

an average of 6.2). This would seem to indicate that a correlation exists between the actions recommended by Gaviria-Loaiza et al. (2017), the Adult Contribution Categories and the Controlling-Playing Score outlined above.

5.5.2 Cognitively Complex and Social Play

Research by Vu, Han and Buell (2015) has shown that engagement by adults in co-player and play leader roles was associated with higher levels of cognitively complex and social play, whilst the research by Gaviria-Loaiza et al. (2017) showed that adults engaging in these roles could advance children's ZPD. This research has not examined the behaviour of the children in reaction to the various Adult Contribution Categories, which could indicate what effect the contributions had on the children's learning and development. However, the correlation that seems to be indicated above may suggest that a similar association with higher levels of cognitively complex and social play or advancing children's ZPD, could be expected to exist when the Controlling-Playing Score is high. In this study, the event of 9th April 2019, which held the highest Controlling-Playing Score (6.7 compared to an average of 6.2) contained most of those actions recommended by Gaviria-Loaiza et al. (2017) as outlined above.

5.5.3 Further Benefits of Co-Play

In addition, Gaviria-Loaiza et al. (2017) suggested that whilst engaged in these types of roles, adults were capable of: advancing children's ZPD by guiding them towards more advanced play and learning; modelling play for children; adding complexity to the narrative; extending stories; helping resolve conflicts within the play plot and supporting specific learning goals from within the play. These capabilities by adults can similarly be seen within the Adult Contribution Categories outlined above, which indicates that these specific types of adult contributions during co-play can also support children's learning and development.

5.6 Concerns around Adults Co-Playing

However, as Gaviria-Loaiza et al. have also said, this involvement by adults in children's play needs to be "genuine and aligned with the dynamics of the play and with children's interests" (2017: 17). This statement speaks directly to the *Controlling* end of the Controlling-Playing Continuum and reflects the concerns of many other writers around play. It was during the Theoretical Coding phase of the grounded theory process that the potential problems within *Controlling*, *Stepping Out* and *Inspiring Ideas and Teaching* became apparent. The issue of adult control over children's play was most noticeable within *Controlling* during which the adult is seen to try to control the play. Whilst this can be seen to benefit some of the children, it also has the potential to wrestle control of the direction of the play from the children towards the adult.

5.6.1 Concerns around Controlling

In the *Controlling* category, the contributions being provided by the adult always involved the adult using their authority to control the play, sometimes without any consultation with the children. It is exactly this use of authority that Gray (2013) alludes to in his concerns around adults "ruining" children's play. Whilst adults always need to exercise caution when using their authority excessively, the type of authority which the adult sometimes exercises within the *Controlling* category of this study, risks being particularly damaging to children's control of their play, as it happens within the play itself. Although the exercise of authority over the children within the *Controlling* category is more nuanced and purposive than in *Stepping Out*, if unexamined, it risks transferring control of the play from the children to the adult, as sometimes happened here. This directly contradicts the aims of other Categories such as *Empowering* and *Connecting* during which children are encouraged to take control of the play, in order to support the children's development of other skills such as creativity, independence,

responsibility and problem solving. These are some of the "positive learning dispositions" which adults are encouraged to help children to develop in the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* (NCCA, 2015: 2).

5.6.2 Concerns around Stepping Out

In addition, there needs to be some caution exercised that the overuse of the *Stepping Out* type contributions by the adult (to remind children of rules or resolve conflict) doesn't result in too many interruptions to the flow of the children's play. Children also need to be given some opportunities to resolve conflicts by themselves, in order to gain experience of independently exercising skills that have previously been scaffolded by the adult, as recommended by Vygotsky (1967, 1978).

5.6.3 Concerns around Inspiring Ideas and Teaching

In addition, within the *Inspiring Ideas and Teaching* Category there are echoes of Bruce's referral to the risks associated with "rampant teaching" (1997). As practitioners we need to exercise caution that our efforts to inspire and teach children do not impact negatively on the children's ownership of their play or its natural flow and dynamism. Additionally, behaving more like an educator in the midst of a co-play episode during which the adult has already adopted a role appropriate to the sociodramatic play taking place, may be confusing or frustrating for children.

5.7 Reflection and Restraint

For these reasons, it seems appropriate that, as educators, whilst we seek to support children's learning through play, we also keep in mind that there are many ways for young children to learn, not all of which are apparent to adults in the moment of play. In this way, we can give

greater respect to children's motivations in play, allowing them more agency over their decisions and actions, as recommended by Wragg (2013) and Hakkarainen et al. (2013) above.

It is for these reasons that the author has placed both *Controlling* and *Inspiring Ideas and Teaching* together at one end of the Continuum with *Stepping Out* and accordingly, given them lower scores in terms of their weighting towards an overall Controlling-Playing score. It is the author's belief, based on reflections during the course of this research and in agreement with the writers outlined above, that these contribution types, whilst often beneficial in other ways, should be exercised with both reflection and restraint by the co-playing practitioner, in order that children remain in control of their play.

It is important that, as educators, our own emphasis on the development of academic or self-regulation skills, does not overshadow the development of other, equally important skills for this particular age group. Dahlberg and Moss, when proposing a move from a discourse on quality to a discourse on meaning making within the EY landscape, refer to the fact that "societies need to put technical and managerial practice in its place, as subservient to democratic political and ethical practice, and to open (our)selves to diversity and experimentation" (2008: 25). This seems particularly pertinent to our current understandings around children's play. As adults seeking to join children's play and understand it, we must prioritise children's meaning making, whilst also practising both democratically and ethically. This requires the subservience of our own traditional technical and managerial practice. However, a willingness to do this opens our settings to the vast possibilities which diversity and experimentation provide and is certainly a more creative and meaningful place for both adults and children to play.

6 Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Answering the Research Questions

6.1.1 Adult Contributions

This research sought to analyse the kinds of contributions which an adult makes whilst acting as a co-player or play leader during sociodramatic play. The research identified nine different Adult Contribution Categories, as follows: Playing; Creanating and Narrating; Empowering; Clarifying and Confirming; Connecting; Encouraging Thinking; Inspiring Ideas and Teaching; Controlling and Stepping Out. For all of the Adult Contribution Categories, the adult was engaged in trying to support children's development and learning, using a wide variety of techniques, such as modelling, scaffolding and teaching.

6.1.2 Supporting Learning and Development

The research also wished to establish whether these contributions offered opportunities for the adult to support children's learning and development in line with existing research on this topic and National Curriculum recommendations.

6.1.3 Existing Research

The research found that the Adult Contribution Categories supported the development of mature play, which, according to Elkonin (2005), supports the development of higher mental functions.

The Adult Contribution Categories also provided the adult with many opportunities to both understand and provide learning opportunities within, the individual children's ZPD, as recommended by Vygotsky (1967, 1978), Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), Bodrova and Leong (2007) and Devi et al. (2018).

The Adult Contribution Categories were also found to correspond to the types of adult actions during co-play which advance children's ZPD (Gaviria-Loaiza et al., 2017) and lead to higher levels of cognitively complex and social play (Vu, Han and Buell, 2015).

6.1.4 National Curriculum Recommendations

In addition, the Adult Contribution Categories aligned with the types of supports which *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) recommends adults provide to young children during play. Accordingly, the type of co-play described here is a valid approach to use to support children's play within Irish EY settings.

It can therefore be concluded that the contributions which the adult made in co-playing with the children offered many opportunities to support children's learning and development, in line with existing research on this topic and National Curriculum recommendations.

6.1.5 Negative Impacts

The research also sought to establish whether any of the adult contributions during co-play risked impacting negatively on children's control of their play. The research found that, for three of the contribution types (*Stepping Out, Controlling* and *Inspiring Ideas and Teaching*), there were concerns over their overuse impacting negatively on children's control of their play (cf. Chapter 5.6.1). For this reason, it was recommended that these contributions be used with restraint and reflection on the part of the co-playing practitioner.

A Controlling-Playing Continuum was devised to demonstrate how each contribution type could lead to either more adult or more child, control of the play. A Controlling-Playing score was also developed, which allowed for each individual co-play event to be scored in line with the Continuum, which could prove useful for comparing future co-play events.

6.2 Assumptions and Anticipated Outcomes

This research initially emerged from a desire to understand the optimal role of the practitioner in a play based EY setting. It was hoped, by answering the research questions, to establish whether an adult co-playing with children during sociodramatic play could support children's learning and development, without impacting negatively on their control over the play. The researcher assumed, from her own experiences, that this type of co-play would yield positive outcomes.

However, using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) allowed for a careful and in-depth analysis of the different categories of adult contributions to take place, as they emerged from the data. This enabled the researcher to move from assumptions regarding co-play to the recording of real actions during co-play. The analysis of these real actions eventually allowed for theorisation around the adult's contributions during co-play to take place. In this way, the use of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) gave weight and meaning to what was only assumed before and allowed the following unexpected outcomes to emerge.

6.2.1 Diversity of Contributions

Observing how well the co-play aligned with existing theories and the Irish curriculum around play and learning validates its use as a tool to support children's learning and development. However, it was not anticipated that the contribution types within each co-play event would be so diverse and numerous which indicates an actively engaged presence by the adult to support learning.

6.2.2 Adult Control

In addition, it was not anticipated by the researcher that there would be so many adult controlling type behaviours within these co-play events. This control of children's play by the

adult is in line with concerns raised by Zaporozhets (1986), Gray (2013) and Hakkarainen et al. (2013). It led to reflection by the researcher on her role as a co-playing EY practitioner, which has subsequently impacted her own practice. The researcher now aims for her contributions to be at the child-controlled end of the Controlling-Playing Continuum. Having identified that three of the Adult Contribution Categories lead to more control of play by the adult, the researcher has limited their use whilst co-playing with the children, unless they are necessary. This reduced adult control within the co-play events means that the concerns held by these writers around adults controlling or dominating children's play, should be somewhat mitigated. Modification of practice in this way further validates co-play between adults and children during sociodramatic play, as a means of supporting children's learning and development within EY settings.

6.3 Relevance to the wider EY Community

Dissemination of this research to the wider EY community, through conferences, literature and social media, should encourage others to consider using adult co-play as a means of supporting children's learning and development. Where adult co-play is already being practised, hearing about this research may help other practitioners to realise that their adult contributions in co-play are supporting children's learning and development. The research could also make practitioners more aware of the need to be cautious in their co-play with children, to ensure that children remain in control of the play.

6.4 Methodological Appropriateness

For this research, grounded theory was chosen as a methodology, as there was little existing research on the behaviour of the adult whilst co-playing with children in play (Devi et al., 2018). The aim of the research was to allow new categories to emerge which might explain the type of contributions the adult was making whilst co-playing with the children. This

methodology was found to be very useful in establishing the Adult Contribution Categories as it forced the researcher to adhere closely to the actions of the adult within the events, thereby keeping closer to the aim of the research. This adherence prevented the researcher from making false assumptions about the adult's behaviour early in the research process, as outlined above, but also ensured that the researcher dealt only with the facts, which were established through analysing real actions.

As a researcher and as a practitioner who sought to improve their practice through the research process, this adherence to the reality of the adult's contributions, was crucial, in order to allow for eventual justification or limitation of these contributions to take place. Although the grounded theory process allowed for the establishment of the Adult Contribution Categories, it also gave rise to much reflection about the researcher's own practice, particularly around controlling children's play.

6.5 Limitations of the Research

It is acknowledged by the researcher that this is a small setting with a low ratio of children to adults. However, it has also been the experience of the researcher in other much larger and busier settings, that children enjoyed playing with adults and that the adults there played with children. It may be difficult to replicate the exact type of co-play that took place during this research in larger settings. However, it may be possible for the research to contribute to a wider discussion within the EY community, in order that co-play by adults with children during sociodramatic play is validated, as a means of supporting learning and development, in line with the research by Lindqvist (1995), Hakkarainen et al. (2013) and Gaviria-Loazia et al. (2017).

6.6 Future Research

In terms of future research it would be interesting to replicate this study in a larger and/or different type of setting to see whether the same or any further Adult Contribution Categories are found and whether similar improvements to practice can be made through use of the Controlling-Playing Continuum and Score. Future research might also examine how children react to each of the different Adult Contribution Categories and attempt to ascertain from these reactions, in what way children built upon the contributions. Child voice research could also be conducted within EY settings to ascertain from children themselves whether they enjoy adults co-playing with them.

6.7 Adult Presence in Play

In conclusion, we would not expect young children to develop cognitive skills without the scaffolding of such learning by either a teacher, a more experienced peer or autodidactic tools (such as the Montessori materials) to support their learning. Yet we often expect that children will learn the complex social, emotional and cognitive skills which it is believed sociodramatic play helps to develop, whilst playing with children of similar ages and stages of development and with very little adult support or even presence, as has been shown in the research by Devi et al. (2018).

Although this research has demonstrated that adults co-playing with children during sociodramatic play can offer supports towards children's learning and development, it has also justified the physical and emotional presence of adults during co-play with children. If, as practitioners, we wish to support children's learning, whether that learning is cognitive, emotional or social, our presence to support that learning is justified, required and often, requested by children.

However, with this active presence in play we also communicate to children that we value their play, that we think it is important and that we care about their interests. Through this co-play

presence, we are also better positioned to understand the children, their contributions and their ZPD. It is in this way that adults can move away from our historic, deficit-driven image of the child as a cup to be filled and move towards a more contemporary vision of children, as outlined by the principles of *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) and *Síolta* (C.E.C.D.E., 2006), which place children:

"at the centre of their own learning and development and view them as citizens with rights and responsibilities, free from any form of discrimination…confident, competent, curious and creative learners." (NCCA, 2015: 35)

This research supports and contributes to the effective practice of adults sensitively co-playing with children in sociodramatic play. Effective EY practice such as this, backed by research, can serve to further validate the presence of adults co-playing with children, whilst also respecting and supporting the strong and empowered vision of the child outlined within the principles of *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) and *Síolta* (C.E.C.D.E., 2006) above.

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Appendix 1: Extract from Reflective Journal

How to play in the ZPD without controlling and influencing children's play, whilst supporting their learning and sometimes acting as <u>one</u> of the MKOs. How when you step out of the child's ZPD it is because you are controlling the play too much or vice versa…whereas if you let them control the play, they remain within the ZPD? Oscar was, alone, beyond his ZPD and no matter how I tried convince him to do it alone, he couldn't (me trying to control him to do it alone...he beyond his ZPD)..when I offered support he stepped back into his ZPD (today I can do this big leap into leading play <u>with help</u>) and he was in control again (took my hand and moved towards fire play, smiling). If their own motivation in play drives them forward, we should not be removing this motivation by pushing them into zones they are uncomfortable acting in. They know their ZPDs better than we do…they feel their ZPDs and live them…listening to children and being child centred means knowing or getting to know their ZPDs...journeying together with them in their ZPD.

WHAT are the implications for this approach in a play-based model like Hakkarainens???

The key part of ZPD is the what I can do with help today, I can do alone tomorrow and the Montessori and Bruner thing of step by step......

Appendix 2: Information Sheet and Consent Form for Parents

Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study. I am Nicola O' Reilly, a Master's student in the Department of Education, Maynooth University. As part of the requirements for the Master's degree in Education, I am undertaking a research study`under the supervision of Dr. Máire Nic an Bhaird, Froebel Department, Maynooth University.

The study is concerned with the contributions which adults can make to children's learning whilst playing with children during sociodramatic play.

What will the study involve? The study will involve audio recording the normal everyday interactions between myself and the children during sociodramatic play in the nursery, using an audio recorder and fieldnotes.

Who has approved this study? This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics committee and the Education Department's Ethics Committee. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

Why have you been asked to take part? Your child has been asked to take part because they are a member of the nursery in which the research is due to take place

Do you have to take part?

No, your child is under no obligation to take part in this research. If you decide for them to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide for your child to take part, you are still free to withdraw your child at any time from the research without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your child's information up until such time as the research findings are analysed. A decision to withdraw your child at any time, or a decision for your child not to take part, will not affect your relationships with the nursery setting.

What information will be collected? Audio recordings and fieldnotes of the adult's interactions with the children in the nursery setting during sociodramatic play will be collected each day for a period of four weeks between 19th March and 15th April 2019.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Yes, all information that is collected about your child during the course of the research will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used throughout so that no children's names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' place of work, electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU PC or servers and will be accessed only by Nicola O' Reilly, Maire Nic an Bhaird (supervisor) or examiners (on request) until the end of November, 2019.

It is hoped to share the results of the study at conferences, publications or on research databases so that other Early Years researchers or practitioners may benefit from access to it, if you agree to this.

No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party. If you so wish, the data that you provide can also be made available to you at your own discretion.

Limits to Confidentiality

According to Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy;

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.' (2016: 9)

What will happen to the information which you give? All the information you provide will be kept at Maynooth University in such a way that it will not be possible to identify your child. On completion of the research, the data will be retained on the MU server. One month after conferring of the Masters results (by 30/11/2019), all data will be destroyed by the Principal Investigator (PI). Manual data will be shredded confidentially and electronic data will be reformatted or overwritten by the PI in Maynooth University.

What will happen to the results? The research will be written up and presented as a thesis. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part I do not envisage any negative consequences for your child in taking part in the research project as their will be no changes to their normal routine in the nursery setting.

What if there is a problem? You may contact my *supervisor Dr. Máire Nic an Bhaird on Maire.NicanBhaird@mu.ie* if you feel the research has not been carried out as described above.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me: Nicola O' Reilly, Phone 085-8437260, email: Nicola.oreilly@mumail.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this

Maynooth University
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

Consent Form

I……………………………………agree for my child …………………………………. to participate in Nicola O' Reilly's research study titled "Adults shared play with children in Early Years settings: a space to learn?"

Please tick each statement below:

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me verbally & in writing. I've been able to ask

questions, which were answered satisfactorily.   ☐

I am giving consent on behalf of my child voluntarily.   ☐

I give permission for my child to be audio-recorded   ☐

I understand that I can withdraw my child from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while he/she is participating.   ☐

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data right up to submission of the thesis (September 2019).   ☐

It has been explained to me how my child's data will be managed and that I may access it on request. ☐

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet   ☐

I understand that the study may be shared at conferences, in publications or on research databases for the purposes of sharing knowledge with other practitioners or researchers.   ☐

Signed……………………………………….   Date……………….

Participant Name in block capitals …………………………………………...

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this

study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed……………………………………. Date……………….

Researcher Name in block capitals …………………………………………...

If during your child's participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeon@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.

Appendix 3: Interactive Narrative Approach Book for Children

Nicola's Research Project

Sometimes adults go to school. Some adults go in the daytime. Some adults go in the night time. The schools that adults go to are often called colleges or universities. Just like children when they go to nursery or school, adults go to the college or university to learn new things.

I am going to a University. It is called Maynooth University and it is in a town called Maynooth in County Kildare. This is a picture of Maynooth University.

In the University there are classrooms, big libraries, sports halls, restaurants and cafes, apartments where people live and lots of other buildings. Some of the buildings are old and some are new.

When I go to Maynooth University I go there in the night time. I drive there in my car. There are lots of other adults in my class. I have teachers who teach me new things. I am learning about how to be a good

teacher for young children and about how to write well.

I am also learning about how to do research. Research is when we look at something carefully to try to figure out how things work or why things happen. Can you think of some times when we did this in nursery?

In Maynooth University, I am doing a research project. It is about playing with young children. I am wondering about what happens when we play together in our games. I want to

know what I do and what you do in the games we play together.

I want to use an audio recorder to record our voices and sounds when we play together in the mornings. You will have a chance to try out the voice recorder too. I will also write down some notes in a notebook sometimes.

I will do my best to make sure that this does not disturb our games. I will do this for 4 weeks altogether. Then I will be finished the project in the nursery. I will write down what happened and give it to my teachers to read. Some other nursery teachers might like to read about our games too.