Playing in the Zone.

A Vygotskian Interpretation of Young Children's Television-inspired Play and

Talk.

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Abstract

Children's 'representational play' has been extensively acknowledged as contributing to early learning and development. This qualitative case study examined a specialised form of representational play prompted by children's television watching. Participants involved children over the age of 3 years attending a community based childcare centre in a city in New Zealand. The study was carried out over a period of 2 weeks and employed 'naturalistic, observational' and 'stimulated recall' techniques during data collection. Children's 'television play' and talk became both the focus of the investigation and the unit of analysis. The original focus of Superhero play was extended to include other forms of television play that emerged as dominant themes within the studied centre. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning was used as a theoretical tool for analysis with special attention given to Vygotsky's concepts of 'intersubjectivity' and 'cultural tools.' Intersubjectivity was defined and discussed in relation to children's appropriation of 'cultural tools' during representational play. A Vygotskian focus necessitated embedding these concepts within Vygotsky's wider theory of learning and development. Vygotsky's concept of the 'zone-of-proximal development' therefore was also considered in regard to 'television related play and talk'. Nelson's (1986) concept of 'scripts' was examined as Vygotsky viewed language as a primary 'mediating tool' that significantly contributed to children's intersubjective understandings. This study concluded that 'Superhero play' and other forms of television play are the outcome of children's appropriation of sociocultural influences. The study's conclusion supported Vygotsky's theory of development that sees learning as occurring as the result of children's 'internalization' and 'appropriation of cultural tools'.

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Introduction

Past research and literature on play's contribution to children's development is both diverse and vast. Beginning with Parten (1962) and Piaget (1962) the play activities of children have been rigorously detailed. The free play philosophy and practices based on Piaget's and other researchers concepts of the individual have dominated early childhood education and theory over the last thirty years or so. Yet research based upon Piagetian assumptions and using a developmental perspective has limited the research paradigm in shaping the implementation of studies into play. Recent research is taking the position that children's play is both socially and culturally situated (Nicolopoulou, 1993; Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993).

This study sees previous developmental frameworks as neglecting to examine play as a sociocultural event. In the Piagetian tradition play is seen predominantly as an individual event that has tended to consider the child in isolation to his/her broader context. From the Vygotskian perspective however all play, even solitary play, is viewed as a social activity. Children during play actively appropriate available cultural offerings. While past research and theories such as Piaget's (1962), Parten's (1962) and Smilansky's (1968) have contributed significantly to our understandings of the place of play in children's development these theories now need to be considered within the social and cultural context in which they were formed. Socio-historical events and experiences influence children's play activities and forms of play requiring us to understand and value the many different forms of play that take place across time, culture and societies in accordance with the varying cultural meanings that arise from such play (Goncu, 1993; Fleer, 1996; Rogoff, 1998).

This study focuses on pretend play activities including children's discussions and talk that have been inspired by children's television viewing. Research and

literature based upon behaviourist and developmental assumptions are examined yet a specific focus is given to research examining Vygotskian concepts in relation to young children's learning and development. Vygotsky (1978) viewed play episodes as opportunities for children to enact and express their understanding through the appropriation of the sociocultural materials of their culture. Television-inspired play and talk are examined in the light of this claim.

Vygotsky's concepts of intersubjectivity and cultural tools are awarded a primary focus in this study, with special attention being given to his theory of play. Intersubjectivity is defined and discussed in relation to children's use of cultural tools during representational play. An analysis of the concepts of intersubjectivity and children's appropriation of cultural tools during play necessitates embedding these concepts within Vygotsky's wider theory of learning and development in order to appreciate the significance of these concepts in relation to young children's learning. Research and literature based on Vygotsky's concept of the zone-of-proximal development therefore is also considered in regard to television-related play and talk. Vygotsky's (1978) saw all pretend play as providing a zone for the extension of children's cognitive development and learning.

Nelson's (1986) concept of scripts is examined because of the pivotal place of language in Vygotsky's theory of learning and development. Language is a mediating tool that significantly contributes to intersubjectivity (Vygotsky, 1978). Intersubjectivity is achieved through the use of children's collective dialogic understandings. Vygotsky claimed that speech is a primary mediational tool appropriated by children during social activity (Vygotsky, 1978).

Research and literature on representational play, specifically television-inspired play, have tended to use developmental frameworks to analyse the concerns and

benefits of this form of play. This study asks if Superhero play and other forms of television play are in fact the outcome of sociocultural influences. This perspective works in well with Vygotsky's theory of development that sees all learning as occurring as a result of children's internalization and appropriation of cultural tools. A developmental focus that views the child in isolation to sociocultural influences potentially limits our understandings of some forms of representational play and its subsequent contribution to children's development and learning. Vygotsky's sociocultural focus seeks to understand the relationship between children's learning processes and the cultural and historical context in which they arise. According to Vygotsky the task of every new generation is to internalize and extend the understandings of past generations. Children today are learning and developing in an age characterised by rapid technological change. This research is timely as it investigates not only the ways in which sociohistorical change has impacted upon children's learning and development, but also the ways in which diverse forms of knowledge and understandings are appropriated by children during their play and discussions.

1.0 Teletubbies - Extending the Focus of this Study.

The recent New Zealand screening of the British television programme Teletubbies has extended the initial Superhero focus of this study. Adult concerns about this television programme echo some of the concerns of Superhero programmes however there appears to be a specific concern about the influence of the Teletubbies on young children's language and cognitive development. This focus differs from the Superhero concerns that seem to predominantly centre around the influence of Superhero programmes on young children's social development and attitudes.

Literature Review

<u>Introduction</u>

The following chapter reviews recent research and literature examining several aspects of Superhero play. Reviewed research and literature includes an investigation of the unique qualities of this form of play from both adult and children's perspectives. Research investigating two major theoretical perspectives (reactive and active theory) regarding the effects of television viewing on children's development and learning is briefly reviewed. Vygotskian inspired research analysing the concepts of 'intersubjectivity,' 'cultural tools,' 'rule-governed play' and the 'zone of proximal development' are reviewed in addition to studies using Nelson's (1986) concept of scripts as a theoretical focus.

2.0 Superhero Play

<u>Definition</u>

Cupit (1989) defines Superhero play as play instigated by Superhero television programmes. The play is intrinsically vigorous and perceived by many adults as bordering on disruptive and aggressive. Superhero is shorthand for diverse cartoon characters with shared features that often metamorphose into a superior form with superior, superhuman abilities. Superhero adventures follow highly predictable formulas and victory is almost always attained through the exercise of superior violence (Cupit, 1989). If children are to participate in this form of play they are often required to stay within rigid boundaries during play episodes.

2.1 Unique Qualities of Superhero Play

Cupit (1989); Dyson (1996); Kostelink & Stein's (1986); Levin & Carlsson-Paige (1995) and Paley's (1984, 1988) studies have all found Superhero play to involve vigorous, physical acting out play conducted mainly outdoors. Boys are predominantly involved and are usually divided into leaders and followers. Children become Superheroes when their play is free from adult direction. During play children engage in identification displays, unspecific activity and sometimes aggressive acts (Cupit, 1989). Children tend to run, jump and shout out assumed names. Teachers have reported this type of play can significantly disrupt other children's play (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1995; Cupit, 1989; Dawkins, 1991; Gronlund, 1992 and Kostelink, Whiren & Stein, 1986).

Television programmes inspire Superhero play and this differentiates it from most other forms of representational play although Kostelink et al (1986) maintain that Superhero play is a specialised form of dramatic play, that in many ways does not differ from other styles of representational play.

Teachers and parents reported characteristics unique to this form of play as including loud, vigorous character identification displays, usually conducted outDoors and involving groups of children.

2.2 Adult Perspectives on Superhero Play

2.2.1 Teacher concerns.

Much of the research on Superhero play has been prompted by teacher's concerns about the influence of this form of play on children's learning and development (NAEYC, 1990). Gronlund's (1992) action research study arose out of her concern about her five and six year old student's fascination with Superhero play.

Gronlund interviewed individual children to gain access to and increase her understanding of the participant's television-inspired fantasy play. Her research sought to replicate Paley's (1984) narrative method of investigating children's understandings through giving them the opportunity to act out written stories. Children were used as informants to increase Gronlund's knowledge. In addition she familiarised herself with the television programme by sharing her interest in the programme's culture with her students.

The results of this study saw a decrease in aggressive playground play, an increase in children's conversations with each other, an increase in the participant's interest in written expression and in the children's willingness to have their interests extended beyond the specific scripting of the programme.

The positive results of this study are difficult to dispute. Replicating these results however may create difficulties (Swadener & Marsh, 1995). It is feasible that qualitative personal features of the action-researcher contributed significantly to the study's success. The action-research methodology also raises desirability bias concerns regarding the findings. The teacher, as researcher, may have been seeking and therefore finding a causal relationship between her intervention and the change in children's behaviour. Another explanation however for the positive outcome of the study may have been increased adult attention rather than the specific intervention itself. This factor may have served as a confounding variable.

Dyson's (1996) research used observational ethnographic techniques to examine the social and ideological processes undergirding the children's use of media symbols. The Superhero was given a primary focus as stimulation for social affiliation seen in play episodes. The sample involved children from one junior class in an East San Fransico Bay school. Data collection used observational methods, information from

two key informant children and teacher-researcher collaboration. In addition children's written work was analysed and field notes were kept during play times. Dyson's research focused on children's participation in composing official (teacher-governed) and unofficial (peer-governed play activities). Findings of the study revealed the need for children to playfully appropriate self-chosen cultural symbols to negotiate the play with text and with each other. Dyson concluded it was both healing and empowering for children to play out fears and confusions from the position of power that is offered during Superhero play.

Data generated through the use of Dyson's ethnographic methodologies were interpreted using a psychoanalytical, narrative framework. A narrative interpretation of data however allows for a single interpretation of events, open to researcher-influenced assumptions or bias. The researcher's use of triangulation and the accessibility to thick descriptive notes helped to decrease the likelihood of highly subjective researcher claims (Tobin & Davidson, 1990).

Research by Kostelink, Wiren & Stein (1986) promotes the benefits of Superhero play with regard to children's social development yet acknowledges that teachers often object to the rowdy nature of the play. According to Dawkins (1991), Superhero play during the preschool years attracts criticism because it occurs at a time when social skills are still developing. During this stage of social development children are testing the boundaries of aggressive behaviour.

Carlsson-Paige & Levin (1995) cite the deregulation of children's television programming in the United States in 1984, as signalling the beginning of television inspired play in classrooms. They claim teachers have noticed a decline in creativity during play since this time. Play has become more repetitious and imitative of television scripts with children being less able to use play as a means of actively

transforming life experiences. Teachers have also observed increased violence during play sessions (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1995). Cupit (1989), Dawkins (1991) and Kostelink et al (1986) argue however that Superhero play does not vastly differ from other forms of representational play seen in the playground.

Carlsson-Paige and Levin's (1995) survey of teacher attitudes to Superhero Power Ranger play found significant concern among teachers. A questionnaire was distributed to interested teachers, working with children aged two to seven years. The survey used open-ended questions and required descriptive answers. Findings included responses from 204 completed questionnaires from 17 American states. Results of the survey revealed concern among teachers regarding the prevalence of Superhero play. Concerns focused primarily around the aggressive nature of play and the extent to which television characters derived from the programme Power Rangers were serving as negative role models for young children. The results of this study may have been influenced by the sample of respondents. Interested teachers were invited to participate creating a volunteer-bias. The self-selected sample would have reduced the validity of data. In addition whether respondents who completed questionnaires would have given the same distribution of answers, as the respondents who failed to return the questionnaires, remains unknown.

Dawkin's (1991) discussion outlines the concerns associated with Superhero play prompted by Cupit's (1989) teacher survey on television-inspired play. Common play observations by targeted teacher groups revealed Superhero play to be usually spontaneous, short- lived, to involve excessive bursts of energy, hero-identification displays and to exclude girls from participation. Dawkins maintains it has yet to be proven that there is a simple causal link between violence viewing and aggression in children's play and joins with Gronlund (1992), Kostelink et al (1986) and Paley

(1984) in advocating adult participation in children's Superhero play. Dawkins advocates adults watching children's programmes in order to gain access to, and understanding of, the material that inspires children's play episodes.

Cain and Bohrer's (1997) action research study sought to reduce a multi-age group of preschool children's violent dinosaur play that appeared to have been stimulated by their viewing the film 'Jurassic Park'. Teachers introduced props and materials to extend and build upon children's existing knowledge of dinosaurs in order to foster creativity and extend make-believe play. The researchers found children's aggressive play decreased as their attention turned toward constructing factual understandings within pretend play scenarios. A limitation of the study concerns a researcher desirability bias. The teachers may have interpreted events and data within a framework that supported their intended findings.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education's (1998) guidelines for early childhood education services and teachers states that although Superhero play or play with toys designed or used as weapons is often associated with stereotyped, violent behaviour, this type of play need not be interpreted as negative. The New Zealand Ministry of Education suggests a range of strategies for early childhood teachers. These strategies include accentuating the positive aspects of this play, introducing and applying rules, providing a supervised and safe place for Superhero and weapons play, substituting more acceptable actions and providing dramatic play props to extend play.

Teacher's concerns about young children's Superhero play have centred on the loud, aggressive behaviour associated with this form of play. Play was also seen as less creative and imaginative because of its repetitious and imitative nature. Teachers made causal links between the perceived violent content of programmes and aggressive, acting-out behaviours of young children during play episodes. The

obsessiveness of play was also viewed as detrimental to children's development and learning. Action research studies prompted by teacher's concerns sought to extend and build upon children's existing knowledge. Teacher-researchers based interventions upon constructivist frameworks. Results of these studies tended to yield positive outcomes although increased adult attention may have served as a confounding variable.

2.2.2 Parent concerns.

Parenti (1992), Postman (1985) and Winn (1977) have presented television as a plug-in drug that is potentially harmful to young children's development and learning. Parents have also voiced increasing concern about the influence of television on their children's development and behaviour. Dawkins (1991) notes it is usually middle-class parents who encourage early childhood teachers to ban Superhero play. Parental fears are centred on the perceived violent content of such programmes however research shows that there is not a simple causal link between viewing violence and children's aggressive behaviour. A direct, bi-directional link between aggression and viewing suggests that children are passive, vulnerable receivers of television content Winn (1977). Yet recent research sees children as active constructors of meaning who exercise control and discernment over what they view (Buckingham, 1993; Hodge & Tripp, 1986; Singer & Singer, 1978).

Greenberg's (1995) discussion provides a parental perspective on Superhero play. She joins other researchers (Dyson, 1996; Gronlund, 1992; Howarth, 1989 and Paley 1981; 1984; 1986; 1988, 1992) in promoting the psychoanalytical benefits of play and asks our acceptance of children's need to playfully appropriate cultural offerings in order to work out developmental tasks. Greenberg urges adult interest in

children's programmes in order to allow teacher access and input into children's play, values and attitudes.

Yet not all parents advocate acceptance of Superhero play. The obsessive nature of this play and the participating children's consequent lack of consideration for non-participating children have caused significant parental concern (Kostelink, Whiren & Stein, 1986). The roughness of the physical play is an additional concern of parents because of its potential to escalate and overwhelm young children (Pellegrini & Perlmutter, 1988).

Parents' concerns about Superhero play echoed the concerns of teachers regarding the perceived loud, aggressive nature of this behaviour associated with play episodes. Although many parents shared teacher's concerns, Greenberg (1995) encouraged parents' acceptance of Superhero play, with the aim of adults gaining access and opportunities to guide children's play in more positive directions. The New Zealand Ministry of Education's (1998) guidelines for early childhood services supported this perspective and suggested that adults extend and provide alternatives to this form of play.

2.3 Children's Perspectives

Research on Superhero play has neglected to consider children's perspectives in terms of directly asking them about why and how they played, and how much they understood about what they were viewing. A review of studies focusing on adult concerns sees children's enjoyment and enthusiasm for this type of play as a recurring theme (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1995; Cupit, 1989; Gronlund, 1992).

Talking with children about their ideas and attitudes to the Superheroes allowed Warren's (1995) qualitative study to focus on aspects of programmes of interest to

children. Two hundred and three preschool children aged 3 to 5 years of age (125 boys, 78 girls) attending early childhood centres in the suburban and country areas of New South Wales participated in the study. The researcher used stimulus material to elicit responses from children regarding their understandings and knowledge of Superheroes. Interactions between children and researcher were tape recorded and transcribed. Warren claims that the use of naturalistic methodologies lessened the possibility of researcher-led responses. The researcher's use of these methodologies suggests her awareness of the difficulties that adults face on entering children's worlds, in attempting to collect valid data (Corsaro, 1985). The study concluded that children have the ability to identify with some accuracy, the motivations of pro and antisocial behaviour. Children seemed to clearly understand that images on the screen were not real yet they still found it difficult to interpret the complexities of the emotional states portrayed by cartoon figures.

A major strength of Warren's study is her acknowledgment of children's perspectives in the research process. In this she supports Pramling's (1990) phenomenographic approach that sees all learning as beginning with children's conceptions of the world. Warren's sole reliance on interview data however could have weakened the validity of her study. An interview bias may have resulted through the researcher unwittingly extending responses that supported her expectations and overlooking those that failed to (Delamont, 1995). Using the interview method in conjunction with other data collection methods would have helped to redress this methodological limitation (Bell, Osborne & Tasker, 1985; McGee-Brown, 1995).

Howard's (1994) pilot study also took into account the child's perspective. Howard used qualitative methodologies to investigate the modality judgements of young children regarding television programmes. The sample included 31 children

aged 5 to 7 years drawn from an Adelaide inner-suburban State primary school with a heterogeneous population in terms of class and ethnic background. Children worked in small collaborative peer groups to sort television programmes into realistic and less realistic categories. The study focused on examining children's processes in regard to their modality judgements. Results indicated developmental differences between children's ability to make reality judgements. Howard concluded the extent to which children's behaviour, attitudes and beliefs will be influenced by television depends to a large extent on how real they perceive that image or depiction to be.

An issue this study failed to consider was the influence of the wider context on children's responses. Peers also may have influenced individual children's responses during collaborative work. In addition unaccounted for familial influences could have determined children's understandings. For example parents who have encouraged early critical evaluation of television content may have altered the generalised developmental predictions made by Howard.

Howard's (1994) findings however uphold Warren's (1995) and McKenna and Ossoff's (1998) study in proposing that many young children are able to distinguish between the fantasy and reality aspects of Superhero programmes during play sessions. Yet these studies' findings conflict with Carlsson-Paige's and Levin's (1995) research that reports children's frequent confusion with reality and fantasy due to cognitive limitations in the early years.

McKenna and Ossoff's (1998) study involved 68 European American children from three age groups (4 - 5 years, 6 - 7 years and 8 -10 years). Participant children were assessed on their ability to make reality-fantasy distinctions after viewing an episode of the television programme Mighty Morphin Power Rangers. Children were interviewed immediately after watching an episode. Subsequent to a MANOVA,

separate analyses of variance for several categories were recorded. The categories included frequency of watching, reality fantasy discrimination ability, memory for central versus incidental content, understanding of main theme and memory for story schema. Findings indicated only the eldest group of children were able to make clear reality fantasy distinctions. Older children also showed mastery of other study variables. Results suggested that although older children are most able to comprehend the programme they are not the most frequent viewers of the programme. McKenna and Ossoff's conclusion supports Gunteer and McAleer's (1990) and Signorielli's (1992) assertion that watching television is a skill that improves with developmental maturation.

Howard's (1996) study explores five Australian 4 year old's modality judgements about selected television characters. She concludes that children are not passive absorbers of television content, rather in their efforts to create meaning, they are stimulated into active thinking. Howard's analysis of data uses a Piagetian model that sees essential accommodation and disequilibrium as the motivators of learning. Howard's Piagetian framework interprets children's efforts to solve dilemmas through peer collaboration, as essential accommodation. A Vygotskian perspective however would see such interactions as examples of children scaffolding each other within their zone-of-proximal-developmental.

Szarkowicz's (1998) experimental study investigated young children's understanding of beliefs that are inconsistent with reality. Forty-seven Australian children aged 3 to 6 years participated in the research. Children were randomly assigned to two groups and watched a video or were read a book. Children who watched the video were reported to demonstrate a greater understanding of false belief than children who had the book read to them. Szarkowicz concludes the video may

have provided children with numerous cues not all of which were experienced when the book was read.

A limitation of the study was the lack of relevant social information about participant children. The reader was unable to discern whether children's increased ability to make accurate reality judgements was a result of the medium used to tell the story or other factors such as children's familiarity with videos rather than books. Increased understanding may have been the result of rehearsal rather than increased auditory and visual cues as Szarkowicz claims. The story also needed to be read to participant children by more than one adult in order to eliminate differences between the mediums due to the adult's personal traits. These studies have added to the growing evidence (Bianculli, 1992; Buckingham, 1993; Gunter & McAleer, Hodge & Tripp, 1986; Howard, 1992, 1994, 1996; Signorielli, 1992 and Van Evra, 1990) that children do not sit passively in front of television but rather actively interpret what they are watching.

Studies of Superhero play have often failed to consider children's perspective of this play. Research has concluded the more real children perceive content to be, the more likely it is to influence their behaviour, attitudes and beliefs. The majority of children participating in these studies were able to differentiate between real and pretend fighting yet there tended to be a developmental component to children's increasing ability to make these distinctions. In addition studies using adults' observations of Superhero play to examine children's perspectives, showed this form of play to provide young children with a significant source of enjoyment and fun.

2.4 Superhero Programmes and Children's Behaviour

Boyatzis, Matillo and Nesbitt's (1995) experimental study investigated the effects of the programme the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers on children's aggressive behaviour. Participants involved 52 children mean age of 7 years 9 months, enrolled in an after school programme in Southern California. Children were randomly assigned to the Power Rangers condition or a control group. The control group was observed while playing in their classroom and the number of aggressive acts in a 2 minute interval per child was recorded. The following day an episode of the Power Rangers was shown to the Power Ranger's group. Data revealed children in this group committed more aggressive acts per interval than the control group. In addition boys committed significantly more aggressive acts than girls.

A limitation of this study was that the observers were aware of the experimental condition raising concerns about observer bias. A positive feature of the study was that the children were observed in a naturalistic setting however children's viewing of the tape (an out of routine event in the programme) may have created an expectation of the children to behave in a particular way. The researchers noted that as the children did not frequently view tapes at school the participant's behaviour might have also been the result of general arousal.

Bassett's (1991) discussion outlining the television debate in relation to children's development and learning supports a Vygotskian perspective regarding the importance of interpreting meanings within social and cultural frameworks. Basset maintains research on television and children reveals as much as about the tensions and contradictions within the society as it does about either television or children. He cites the controversy over the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles as resurfacing the debate over the effect of television on children. Bassett concludes television in itself cannot

provide a direct causal explanation for violence in society as factors that may give rise to violent behaviour are complex and multifarious. Research has indicated that the violent content of television cartoons has to be understood within the social context that children are developing and learning because the cultural context and the set of understandings that accompany societal messages will condition children's interpretations. Bassett illustrates this point with an analogy between the crucifixion (a violent act) and children's exposure to televised violence. He argues that our interpretations of events are always embedded within complex sets of understandings that are surrounded by the social, historical and cultural concepts that will influence the individual's perceptions. This argument highlights the limitations of studies that are based upon behavioural and social-learning theories. These perspectives tend to assume a simple, bi-directional link between events and behaviour while ignoring wider contributing influences.

French and Pena's (1991) historical review of literature examined children's play patterns from 1900 to 1980 to ascertain if the Superheroes of today qualitatively differed from the heroes of past childhoods. A survey questionnaire was given to 100 adults (ages 17-79) representing two time periods, pre and post television. Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine differences between the two age groups. The study found that there were no significant changes in heroes or play themes in the middle childhood years since the advent of television yet there were significant differences during the early childhood years between pre and post television groups. Differences included significantly more heroic adventure play among post television children. Young children today were more likely to select a television character as their favourite fantasy hero to emulate in their play behaviours. In addition the range of qualities attributed to the hero was narrower than those models used in past

childhoods. French and Pena concluded that the media appeared to have replaced friends, siblings and parents as the young children's primary source of information about heroes and play themes.

Limitations regarding the interpretative conclusions drawn by these researchers include the lack of consideration given to the many other factors that may have influenced changes in children's play patterns and themes. The researchers conclude that young children are no longer exploring and rehearsing the subtleties of daily life through playing out commonplace events however this study was restricted to observations of children's use of Superheroes as play themes. Children may have represented other valid social themes and roles during play that the researcher failed to note in this study.

A methodological limitation of the study concerns the use of self-report methods. The study's reliance on the participant's memory to recall play activities during childhood questions their ability to objectively evaluate remembered play patterns and behaviours. A final concern is the lack of attention paid by the researchers to differences in play behaviours that may have occurred as a result of the changing social and cultural demands of each era and of the individual child's response to these.

Connolly, Doyle & Reznick's (1988) study conflict with Levin and Carlsson-Paige's (1995) conclusion that representational play based upon Superhero programmes stimulated aggressive and violent behaviour among children. They found that compared to social non-pretend activities most social pretend activities as seen in representational play revealed increased length of young children's interactions, a greater depth of involvement in play and larger numbers of children co-operating and participating in the activity.

2.5 Why Children Engage in Superhero Play

The number of children who engage in Superhero play should tell us that it contains elements of value to them (Cupit, 1989). The complete absorption of some children during play suggests the extent of that value (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1995; Cupit, 1989; Gronlund, 1992; Kostelink, Whiren & Stein, 1986).   The physical elements of the play provide enjoyment for children (Cupit, 1989; Dawkins, 1991; Gronlund, 1992; Pelligrini, 1987; Pellegrini & Perlmutter, 1988). Cupit (1989) observes that children regularly involved in Superhero play often have language or social difficulties. This form of play allows for easy participation, achievable success, potential ego enhancement and accepted ways to try out leadership. Superhero play scripts are based on shared knowledge and therefore are accessible to most children (Cupit, 1989).

Representational play however according to Black (1989) and Bruner, Jolly & Sylva (1976) presents preschoolers with potentially more complex interaction than the majority of adult-child social interactions. Black (1989) found representational and social pretend play behaviours may vary as a function of the age and gender of the players. In this claim Black's study supports Cupit's (1989) findings as she concludes boys struggling with cognitive and social skills are more likely to adopt Superhero and high action roles.

Superhero play allows children to share focus and purpose. Paley's work offers numerous examples of children's efforts to link the way the world is, to the way it might be, through peer collaboration during Superhero play. Paley views play as encompassing children's narrative understanding, for through play children reveal feelings and thoughts (Wiltz & Fein, 1996). She asserts that social play provides a

natural medium for children to develop thinking and cognitive processes. Play such as Superhero play carries its own value; tells its own story and is intrinsically rewarding in itself. Children may use this form of play to discover role adoption, self-confidence and self-regulation (Paley, 1984).

Howarth (1989) and others agree with Paley's psychoanalytical approach and maintain children receive and interpret cultural tales (such as fairy tales or Superhero themes) through enactment using them as frameworks for working out developmental tasks. Children work out their social worlds through the use of cultural symbols and tools. (Berk, 1994); Dyson (1996); Greenberg (1995) and Paley (1992) conclude that it is both healing and empowering for children to play out fears and confusions from the position of power that is offered to them during Superhero play.

Children engage in Superhero play because they enjoy it. It also offers them a relatively defined and undemanding context that allows for easy participation in group social play. This has led some researchers to speculate that children with language and social difficulties are more likely to be attracted to this form of play. Superhero play offers many of the benefits of sociodramatic play including the opportunity to experiment with social roles and rules. In social play children are able to work out developmental tasks through their appropriation of available cultural materials.

2.6 Benefits of Superhero Play

As is indicated by the above studies (Greenberg, 1995 & Dyson, 1996), not all research on Superhero play views it as a negative event in children's lives. Dyson's (1996) findings suggest that meaning is found, not in the cultural materials themselves, but in the social events through which these materials are appropriated. Child-led play allows children agency to appropriate cultural material to participate in

and explore their worlds. From this perspective Superhero play can be seen as just another exploratory cultural tool (Vygotsky, 1978) children have at their disposal. Dyson concludes that children will use the available cultural tools of their time to construct meaning and understand their worlds.

Howarth (1989) suggests representational play, imitating cultural stories, assists children in confronting and solving problems both cognitively and socially. Superhero tales can be viewed as cultural stories that have emerged in our time and share common themes with past eras (French & Pena, 1991). Superhero play therefore allows children freedom to experiment with today's social roles and rules (Paley, 1981, 1984, 1986, 1992).

Conclusion

Benefits and limitations of Superhero play.

Researchers disputed the benefits of Superhero play in regard to young children's learning and development. There is some debate for example about the benefits of the physical aspects of Superhero play. Pellegrini (1987) maintains that the rough and tumble physical aspect of Superhero play suggests positive developmental value, providing it does not escalate to aggressive behaviour. Children learn to use and practise skills that are valuable to them in terms of both social and physical competence and mastery. Yet Carlsson-Paige & Levin (1995) dispute Pellegrini's claim and argue that children do not possess the physical motor skills to engage in kicking, mock fighting and similar physical actions without potentially injuring themselves or other children. Pellegrini & Perlmutter (1988) claim that rough and tumble play allows children the opportunity to engage in reciprocal role playing

episodes (leader and follower). This reciprocal role taking may also be valuable for children's social perspective taking ability

Slobin (1976) maintains that children have little power or control in a world dominated by adults and play provides a valuable release from this. Superhero play gives children access to power and prestige unavailable to them during daily experiences (Paley, 1984; 1986). Superhero play contributes to social development and offers clear cues and precise models for imitation. This play allows some children easy entry into social play they may have otherwise been excluded from. (Slobin, 1976; Cupit, 1989).

Kostelink, Whiren & Stein (1986) conclude that as with all other types of dramatic play children during Superhero play are able to practise language skills, problem solve and participate in co-operative activities with peers. Each Superhero episode offers shared social relationships with peers and opportunities to follow, negotiate and reconstruct rules and roles. Sensorimotor skills, divergent thinking and creativity are enhanced when children pretend with one another (Bretherton, 1984; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). Levin and Carlsson-Paige's (1995) study disputed this claim and concluded that children's play stimulated by Superhero programmes lacked creativity, imagination or divergent thinking. They found this type of play interfered with creative play and argued that teachers perceived it to be related to increased violent and aggressive behaviour among children.

Researchers debated the value of Superhero play in regard to the benefits for young children's learning and development. It was argued by some that this play encourages children's physical development through allowing them to develop mastery and control of physical actions yet others claimed that children lack the necessary motor skills to participate in this play without injury to themselves or

others. In terms of cognitive benefits researchers found Superhero play required participants to comply with rules and scripts which implied opportunities for cognitive extension for young children. This form of play offered children opportunities to share social responsibilities with peers and increased opportunities to follow, lead and reconstruct rules and roles. However other studies viewed Superhero play as limiting children's creativity and contributing to their aggressive and antisocial behaviour.

Adults' and children's perspectives.

Superhero play was considered from both adults' and children's perspectives. A review of adult concerns and the perceived benefits of play revealed some central themes. Superhero play is a specialised form of representation play inspired by television content. The physical, loud, repetitious and highly imitative nature of this play has caused parents and teachers to be concerned about its educational value and positive influence on development. Children's involvement seems to be centred on their interest and enjoyment of Superhero play. This form of play also allows for easy participation in group and social play. The benefits of Superhero play are similar to other forms of sociodramatic play yet this form of play uniquely offers pre-scripted episodes and clear cues and rules of behaviour in a relatively undemanding context.

Reviewed theoretical perspectives.

The reviewed studies examined and analysed this form of play using developmental, social learning, behavioural and sociocultural frameworks. Studies based upon developmental or behaviourist assumption tended to focus on the negative aspects of play in terms of children's development and learning. Television-inspired play was seen to inhibit creativity, at times foster anti-social behaviour and attitudes and to induce children to attempt physical activities beyond their capabilities. While

research positioned within a sociocultural framework viewed Superhero play as a social rather than individual event that was situated in a specific sociocultural and historical context. Children's television play had occurred as response to the cultural tools of their time and children's attempts to appropriate available materials in order to make sense of their world.

3.0 The Effects of Television on Children's Cognitive-Processing Abilities

The next section of the literature review examines two major theoretical perspectives regarding the general effects of television viewing on children's development and learning. The first theoretical perspective 'reactive theory' considers the child to be a passive receiver of information in contrast to a more recent view 'active theory' that sees children as active constructors of meaning regarding information received via the electronic media.

3.1 Reactive Theory

The reactive theory views the child as a passive receptor of information delivered by the television. This view has its origins in behavioural, social learning and information processing theories that see the child as merely reacting to perceived stimuli (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968). The key to this orientation is a perception of the child as a passive, involuntary viewer of information absorbed from the screen. The reactive theory is supported by little direct research with most of the foundation for the theory being based on early information-processing theories carried out by Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968), Broadbent (1959) and Neisser (1967).

3.2 Active Theory

The alternative theory to this perspective is active theory. Active theory defines the child as an active processor who is guided by previous knowledge, experience, expectations and schemata (Anderson & Lorch, 1983). In this way children do not merely react to changing stimuli but actively apply strategies based on their previous experience with the content and formal features of the television programme including personal knowledge structures and available cognitive skills (Anderson & Lorch, 1983).

3.3 Television and Children's Creativity

The following studies tend to support the active theory and demonstrate that children's television viewing is not merely a response to stimuli but is a complex, purposeful cognitive activity that becomes progressively more sophisticated as children develop and learn.

There has been much debate about whether television stimulates or inhibits creativity. Gardner's (1982) research supports the idea that television stimulates imaginative activity and the sensory imagination of young children. James and McCain's (1982) study concluded that television enhances imaginative play. They recorded children's play at childcare centres and observed that a variety of games created by children were inspired by television characters and plots. The researchers noted that the themes emerging in television-stimulated play were in fact similar to play themes that had not been stimulated by television.

Singer and Singer's (1981, 1986) research also concludes that television can offer information, models, themes, stories and real or pretend characters who are incorporated into creative play however this process was not found to be inevitable or

consistently positive. The type of programme viewed by children may determine the type of play enacted by children after viewing episodes (Singer & Singer, 1983; Zuckerman, Singer & Singer, 1980).

Research showed that the amount of time children spent viewing television influenced children's creative play behaviours. Children who spent large amounts of time engaged in television watching were found to be less imaginative than children who spent moderate amounts of time viewing (Singer & Singer, 1986). Singer, Singer and Rapaczynski (1984) found in addition to the type of programmes watched by children, and the amount of time spent viewing, the mediation of children's viewing by family to be a significant indicator of child imaginativeness. Their findings concluded that parental attitudes and values about imagination influenced children's creative play patterns.

Summary

Early research investigating the effect of television on children's cognitive development and learning supported reactive theory. This perspective saw young children as passive receivers of information. An alternative and more recent perspective is known as active theory. This theory sees children as active constructors of knowledge. Reviewed studies showed mediating variables regarding the influence of television on children's cognitive processes, specifically imagination. Variables included the type of programmes children watched, the amount of time children spent viewing and the mediation of children's viewing by family members.

Research and Literature Using a Vygotskian Framework

This section of the review examines research and literature that are based upon Vygotskian concepts of learning and development. The concepts of intersubjectivity, cultural tools, zone of proximal development and scripts are discussed.

4.0 Intersubjectivity

What is intersubjectivity?

The starting point of learning in the Vygotskian model of learning is intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is achieved through shared meanings of signs and symbols that progress in the context of an interaction during a joint activity (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky maintained that children's communication with others using a shared frame of reference enabled them to internalize and construct their own meanings. Vygotsky saw understanding therefore as the product of shared communication and actions. This section discusses intersubjectivity in relation to cultural tools, examines literature purporting the need for intersubjective cognitive and affective states, considers the presence of intersubjectivity within pretend play episodes and critiques existing research about this concept.

4.1 Intersubjectivity and Cultural Tools

Shore's (1991) discussion proposes that past research of mental processes has not only overlooked affective contributions to children's thinking but also the sociological contributions to their construction of meaning. Shore supports Vygotskian theory in maintaining that cultural cognition is the product of the individual's semiotic organisation of cultural tools. In addition during the subjective processes of meaning construction, individuals use available cultural symbols to

internalize experiences and to transform them into higher mental processes. Intersubjectivity as a cognitive process, links the objectively available schemata found in cultural practices and the processes of meaning construction by which individuals appropriate symbols, to consciousness. Shore argues that research to date has failed to explain how the differences and relations between subjective meaning and intersubjective meanings contribute to the child's meaning construction.

Jamieson's (1994) experimental study in Montreal examined the processes by which mothers communicate with their hearing children and deaf preschool children during a problem-solving task. Jamieson analysed the conversations and interactional strategies of mother-child dyads from 3 matched groups. The study used an embedded multiple-case replication design. Conversational transcripts and non-verbal strategies used by mothers were videotaped, transcribed and analysed. Conversational transcripts between mother-child dyads and the data obtained during pre-testing and post-testing interviews were analysed. Analysis showed that the hearing mothers of deaf children were less likely to adapt interactional strategies to achieve intersubjective understandings than were the hearing mothers of hearing children or the deaf mothers of deaf children.

If a Vygotskian perspective is adopted and the interactional strategies used during this study are seen as psychological tools (Vygotsky, 1978) this study's findings further illustrates the place of cultural tools in achieving intersubjective understandings. The hearing mothers of deaf children did not share the same symbol system as their children and were therefore less able to communicate in a way that was understood by their deaf children. A further implication of these findings is that intersubjectivity of cultural tools and symbols is necessary for effective communication and information sharing.

The limitations of Jamieson's study are seen in the experimental design of the study. Mothers were being asked to interact with their child within a test situation. It is highly probable this would have influenced the interactions of some of the participants weakening the validity of the findings. The small number of mother-child dyads also meant that analysis of data involved description rather than manipulation of independent variables and causality therefore, cannot be inferred.

Forman and McPhail's (1993) study supports Shore's (1991) claim that cultural cognition is the product of the individual's semiotic organisation of cultural tools. In this study the unexplained differences between two participant's understandings of a task, are explained by the authors, as the result of one participant's inability to share in understandings with the researcher. Forman and McPhail used a case study approach to examine two 13 year old girls collaborative skills to acquire mathematical knowledge. The researchers found that despite initial differences in orientation to a mathematical task the two participants worked closely together during three collaborative sessions. Neither girl abandoned her initial task definition but sometimes adopted the definition of the other. The girl's pre-test and post-test session were coded in order to evaluate changes in each girl's ability to predict and then justify their conclusions.

Results showed that both girl's performance on pre-test and post-test sessions indicated gains in their ability to predict however they failed to demonstrate the same gains in their ability to provide justifications for their decisions. The researchers attributed the lack of pre-test and post-test gain by one of the participants to the degree in which her definition and goals concerning the maths task (the lack of intersubjective understandings regarding goals and intentions) conflicted with those of the researcher's. The other participant in contrast appeared to gain in her ability to

justify her decisions during these sessions because her definitions and goals matched those of the experimenter's.

The educational implications of this study suggest that the research design itself may be a cultural tool that can be appropriated by some participants and not by others. This finding is pertinent to early childhood research. When young children misinterpret or fail to recognise the intentions of an adult researcher this may lead to invalid data and distorted conclusions. Young children encounter many situations where they are either unable to understand what is being asked of them or they do not share the adult's goals and intentions due to significant qualitative differences in the adult's and children's cognition. Ratner and Stettner (1991) warn that for these reasons, we must remain aware of the importance of intersubjective affective and cognitive understandings between children and adults during research studies.

4.2 Intersubjectivity, Cognition and Emotion

Ratner and Stettner's (1991) literature review argued that cognition and emotion have been researched in isolation to one another. According to these researchers this occurrence has been to the detriment of our understandings of children's intersubjectivity being reliant on both the cognitive and emotional aspects of development. The authors found contradictory empirical support for the effectiveness of scaffolding or guided assistance between adult and child. They proposed contradictions to be the result of either the absence or presence of intersubjective cognitive and affective understandings between adult and child. Intersubjective understanding therefore provides the key to successful learning for children and needs to become a focus of research, with an emphasis on mutual affective as well as cognitive states. Ratner and Stettner ask whether a broader interpretation of

Vygotskian theory is required in order to include broader aspects of interactions (such as the child's affective state and the partner's or group's attention to it) that have been neglected in previous studies.

Tudge's (1992) study challenges Vygotsky's claim that intersubjective understandings reached in the course of collaborative interaction are always in a progressive direction in terms of the child's learning and development. Tudge investigated the processes of peer collaboration with a group of 162 children aged from 5 to 9 years of age. Each child was pre-tested to ascertain the processes used to apply a mathematical prediction. Children then worked alone, with a partner who shared the same understandings and with a partner who was more competent or less competent. If partners' predictions differed dyads were asked to collaborate in order to reach an agreement. All participants were subsequently given 2 post-tests. Data revealed that regression in thinking was as likely an outcome as improvement. According to Tudge any benefits gained were primarily due to working with a partner with increased competence, gain occurred as a by-product of the intersubjective understandings attained during the paired session. Tudge cautioned however that working with a partner with whom intersubjectivity was already present was much less likely to be associated with change. The finding of Tudge's study fails to fit within either a Piagetian or Vygotskian perspective of learning or development. Piaget would see disequilibrium as a prerequisite to increased understanding for the child, while Vygotsky would see intersubjectivity gained in collaboration with a more competent partner as always being in developmentally advanced direction.

Mundy, Kasari and Sigman's (1992) study used quantitative measures to examine the role of affect in verbal communication skills on the emergence of affective sharing, intersubjectivity and related phenomena in infancy. The confluence

of affect with a variety of joint attention and requesting behaviours of 32 infants ranging from 20 to 23 months in age were investigated. Each child was assessed with Early Social-Communication Scales. The assessment was videotaped with the experimenter and infant facing each other. Infants were presented with a structured sequence of events and toys that were designed to elicit joint attention, requesting and other forms of non-verbal communication.

Results showed that more positive affect was displayed in association with joint attention, than requesting acts. Educational implications of the study concern the implied link between joint attention skills and social-cognitive development. Joint attention behaviours seemed to provide indices of the infant's developing tendency to share affective components of subjective experience. Data indicated measures of these behaviours provided an operationalization of one aspect of intersubjectivity. The researcher's use of toys (props or tools) to prompt intersubjectivity is also relevant to this study. Joint attention behaviours not only involve the co-ordination of attention to objects and events but also the capacity to share affective experience through objects and events.

The study's use of pre-test assessments of infants and systematic coding analysis of data questions the validity of the findings. It is debatable whether an investigation of complex social phenomena such as affective sharing can be measured by coding procedures that quantify behaviour. Quantifying data is sometimes necessary to interpret findings and draw conclusions however quantifying units of behaviour in human interactions is particularly troublesome. Social behaviour reduced to units of analysis may result in the loss of valuable causal, interdependent linkages through the use of artificially constructed researcher operational definitions (Jacob, 1987; Johnson, 1984).

Moore's (1996) theoretical discussion of the emergence of social understanding supports Mundy, Kasari and Sigman's (1992) findings. Moore claims that social understanding and affective sharing involves the child's understandings of interactions between self and other. Interactions that occur in relation to shared objects and events (as was seen in Mundy's et al, 1992 research) are those that are most likely to elucidate our understandings of children's social understandings and cognitive processes.

Researchers have argued that the presence or absence of intersubjective cognitive and affective understandings between individuals may provide the key to effective learning (Moore, 1996; Mundy, Kasari & Sigman, 1992). Claims by researchers that studies have failed to acknowledge the interdependence of cognition and emotion have resulted in an incomplete understanding of children's learning processes (Ratner & Stettner, 1991). Shared objects events or tools between participants appeared to increase intersubjective understandings (Moore, 1996; Mundy, Kasari & Sigman, 1992; Tudge, 1992).

4.3 Intersubjectivity and Pretend/Symbolic Play

Feitelson (1977) defines representational play as characterised by a specific imaginative play theme being the focus of the activity. The theme itself however may change in time as play continues. This type of play is also termed sociodramatic play (Smilansky, 1968) and thematic play (Feitleson, 1977). Gaskin and Goncu (1988) referred to this type of play activity as free-flow play, free play, pretend play or Bruce's (1991) ludic play. Vygotsky (1967, 1978) states play themes always have their origins in the child's culture. The interactions between children are based on a shared or common knowledge about the context, story line and interactional patterns.

For Vygotsky (1967) play is always a social symbolic activity and the play themes, stories or roles that children enact are an expression of children's understanding and appropriation of the sociocultural materials of their society.

The importance of intersubjectivity for pretend play is outlined in the work of several major theorists. Piaget (1962) states children's sociodramatic play is dependent upon their collective construction of play symbols. While Vygotsky (1978) notes that pretend play requires children to jointly develop rules that guide social activity. Parten (1962) termed the most advanced form of peer social participation co-operative play, in which children are required to orient toward a common goal by negotiating plans, roles and division of labour.

4.4 Prerequisites for Intersubjectivity During Play

Bateson's (1955) research outlines a three-tier hierarchy demonstrating the place of intersubjectivity in young children's pretend play. The first level, according to Bateson, involves participant children sharing an understanding of the distinction between play and not play, the second level is deciding whether to join with the shared play. Children who decide to join the play shift into the pretend frame together. The final level is when children are able to add to agreements already reached.

Fein and Glaubman's (1993) review of literature and research of symbolic play concludes that past research has failed to understand how children adapt their own perspective to accommodate that of their play partners. Reviewed literature identified three components essential to children's engagement in sociodramatic play. First, your partner needs to know that you intend to pretend. Second, your intentions and those of your partners about what to play must be shared, and finally the 'fit' is

dependent upon mutual recognition and acceptance of the affective issues arising from the interaction (Fein, 1989).

Mallan's (1998) theoretical discussion considers the narrative function of children's play by focusing on the interrelatedness of story, imagination and visual expression. Mallan compares the features of storytelling with play and argues children's engagement in storytelling requires them to participate in a form of play that draws on their knowledge of narrative conventions or rules. In addition the play-like nature of storytelling is evident when storyteller and audience display a strong desire to engage in shared meaning and understandings. This perspective supports Vygotskian theory that posits for children to engage in symbolic play they need to attend to the rules of play and the intersubjective understandings and intentions of play partners.

4.5 The Place of Intersubjectivity in Vygotsky's and Piaget's Theories of Pretend Play

Piaget's (1962) theory of cognitive development sees symbolic play as appearing during the second year of life with the onset of representational skills. According to Piaget (1962) symbolic play is initially solitary involving the use of idiosyncratic symbols. Sociodramatic play using collective symbols does not appear until the end of the third year. Symbolic play evolves from the child's mental structure and can only be explained by that structure (Piaget, 1962). Piaget's theory with its emphasis on the individual's maturation and development is in contrast to Vygotsky's (1978) theory that focuses on play as a social activity.

Vygotsky (1978) sees play as contributing significantly to cognitive development rather than just reflecting it. Children during pretend play participate in their cultural context through sharing symbolic meanings (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986).

The establishment of a context of shared meanings is an important prerequisite to pretend play. Vygotsky (1978) stresses two interrelated and essential components in children's play. These are an imaginary situation and rules implicit within the imaginary situation. The rules may be implicit or explicit, still both require the participant's shared understandings and agreement to abide by them.

4.6 Intersubjectivity and Developmental Perspectives

Play theory has offered a developmental hypothesis about the joint adoption of a pretend focus (Erikson, 1972, Piaget, 1962 and Vygotsky, 1978). The claim has been that pretend play representations become social only after three years of age and that social pretend play increases between three and six years of age (Fein, 1981; Rubin et al, 1976). This developmental focus reveals a Piagetian stance that sees collective symbolism as being achieved as a result of personal and idiosyncratic symbols with peers. Players negotiate the meanings of play symbols until all participants share similar meanings (Parten, 1962).

Goncu's (1993) research examining the development of intersubjectivity during social pretend play challenges the developmental focus of previous researchers. Goncu disputes that children's play becomes intersubjective only after the age of three and argues that pretend play emerges earlier. Children in fact express metacommunicative and communicative messages in social, shared pretend play as early as 18 months of age (Goncu, 1993). Dunn's (1988) extensive ethnographic studies of children under the age of two also investigated infants' and toddlers' ability to empathise with and share the perspectives of their siblings within naturalistic family settings. Her findings support Goncu's research and showed toddlers have the ability to share in the understandings and affective states of their siblings and parents.

Goncu's work indicates intersubjectivity among peer partners increases with age throughout the preschool years and suggests this is due in large part, to the increased amount of time children spend engaged in sociodramatic play. Between the ages of 3 and 4 years, children engage in more extensions of their partner's messages and fewer disagreements, assertions of their own opinions and irrelevant statements during play were observed (Goncu, 1993). Tudge and Rogoff (1987) found that preschoolers have increased difficulty in establishing intersubjective understandings and co-operative, shared frameworks in 'closed-ended' problem solving. The authors speculate this is predominantly due to the requirements of the task. Children in these situations are being asked to orient toward a single correct solution to a pre-determined task.

4.7 Critique of Existing Research Examining Intersubjectivity

Goncu's (1993) critique of social pretend play theories concludes that there is an absence of a systematic analysis of intersubjectivity during this form of play. Current studies of intersubjective peer interactions during pretend play have failed to adequately address how children develop these understandings (Goncu, 1993). Fein and Glaubman (1993) maintain that a complete theory of pretence needs to explain how intersubjectivity is constructed. The authors argue that existing studies of intersubjectivity have failed to address its development during the course of peer interactions in pretend play.

Fleer's (1996) review of children's play activities proposes that more needs to be understood about the differences between the play-based activities of children and their implications for children's learning. She states that past research has been conducted within Western frameworks with the most significant pieces of work being carried out during the 1930s through to the 1960s (Fleer, 1996). As a result many of

the play activities witnessed in the last decade or so have been failed to be understood within existing frameworks. Research is now needed to understand the play activities of today's children in relation to current cultural practices and the cultural meanings they embody.

Summary

Piaget emphasised symbolic or pretend play as an individual activity derived from children's cognitive structures. Vygotsky viewed play as a social activity that required intersubjective understandings between play partners. Vygotskian based research has concluded rules and shared understandings are essential pre-requisites for pretend play (Fein & Glaubman 1993; Fleer, 1996 and Goncu, 1993) while researchers adopting a developmental focus cite cognitive and social maturity as primary requisites for symbolic play (Parten, 1962; Piaget, 1962; Smilansky, 1968).

Limitations of past research into pretend play include a lack of systematic analysis of intersubjectivity during play and data that shows how intersubjectivity is constructed by children during play episodes. Past conceptualizations of play have neglected the influence of the wider sociocultural elements that shape and define the play context (Fein & Glaubman, 1993; Goncu, 1993).

5.0 Cultural Tools

<u>What are cultural tools?</u>

Vygotsky (1978) defined cultural tools (whether technical or psychological) as mediators of human action that are appropriated by groups or individuals as they carry out mental functioning. He was adamant that the only way to guard against reductionism of the individual to the social or the social to the individual was to use a unit of analysis that encapsulated both (Tudge, 1992). His concept of cultural tools was unique in that it allowed for the integration of the micro-social contexts of interaction with the broader social, cultural and historical context through the individual's appropriation of cultural tools.

5.1 Appropriation of Cultural Tools

Higher mental functions, according to Vygotsky (1978), are culturally mediated through an indirect action. This action takes material matter used previously and shaped by prior human practice then extends the tool through current action by the individual (Cole & Wertsch, 1996). In this way past and present understandings are combined, shared and extended. A major implication of Vygotsky's theory is that all psychological functions begin and to a large extent remain culturally, historically and socially situated (Cole & Wertsch, 1996). Vygotsky claimed that all mental functioning occurs through the individual's use of cultural artifacts. This perspective suggests that knowledge is socially distributed and transformed through the individual's appropriation of tools. Vygotsky's concept of cultural tools challenges the boundaries placed between the social and individual that have dominated past thinking in Western psychology. For Vygotsky, cultural tools link the individual to their historical cultural context and play a central role in cognition and learning.

Research and literature employing the concept of cultural tools are now discussed in relation to symbol use, the television as a 'contemporary' cultural tool, the place of cultural tools in children's socialisation processes and temporal aspects of cultural tools.

5.2 Cultural Tools and Symbol Use

Neuman and Roskos' (1992) observational study examined children's literacy objects as cultural tools and their effects on children's literacy behaviours in play. Ninety-one preschoolers aged 3 to 5 years from two day care centres were randomly selected then placed into non-intervention and intervention classrooms. Initial pre-testing of participant children indicated there were no statistically significant differences regarding reading behaviours between intervention and non-intervention participants. Results of this study found that the infusion of literacy objects along with physical design changes in play settings significantly influenced the nature of children's literacy behaviours. Data revealed a marked change in the complexity of play frames and frequency of contingent sequences of literacy behaviour. Children in the intervention group engaged in greater object transformation with literacy props, than those in the non-intervention groups.

A limitation of the study is its relatively narrow interpretation of the participant's appropriation of cultural tools. Neuman and Roskos' study documents the physical dimension of an educational setting, yet this aspect represents only one factor in the learning environment. Sociocultural and social cognitive theories see the child's wider macro context as having critical influence in providing learning opportunities for children. Their study failed to consider the influence of social interaction as a psychological tool along with the broader macro influences.

5.3 The Television Symbol System as a Cultural Tool

McLuhan (1964) suggested that the formal attributes of a medium such as television influences how individuals think and process information. McLuhan maintained that different media present information in unique ways that are idiosyncratic to the individual medium. Gardner, Howard & Perkins (1974) and Goodman (1968) elaborated on the function of symbol systems and implied that similarities between the symbol system and mental representation of the content will aid comprehension. Salomon (1972) extended their theory and posited that individual symbol systems may be idiosyncratic to the particular medium and need to be learned by the individual. This notion fits in with Vygotsky's concept of children appropriating the cultural tools of their time. Children of each generation learn to decode or read the symbol systems offered to them by their own historical context.

5.4 Cultural Tools and Children's Socialisation

MacNaughton's (1996) study examines current concerns of early childhood practitioners concerning the use of popular culture toys as cultural tools, in regard to children's gender development. MacNaughton maintains that the theoretical base permeating much of the literature on the role of toys in children's gender development is based upon social reproduction theory that sees children as passively internalising societal messages and expectations. According to MacNaughton this theory fails to acknowledge the child's active role in his/her own socialisation processes and identity formation. MacNaughton argues that the role of agency is ignored in reproduction theory. She supports Vygotsky's claim that children actively appropriate cultural tools according to their own understandings and experiences. Children use cultural material

to construct dominant, current gender roles specific to their individual and macro contexts.

Collin-Stanley, Gan, Yu and Zillman's (1996) study used fairy tales to examine young children's preference of story book tales. Thirty-six preschool boys and 36 preschool girls aged 2 to 4 years of age were presented with fairy-tale books then asked to nominate their preference. Analyses of variance and chi-square analyses revealed gender differences that became more pronounced with the participant's increased chronological age. Girls exhibited a growing preference related to their increasing age for romantic tales, and boys a growing preference related to their age, for violent tales. The researchers concluded that the emergence of gender-specific genre preferences is the result of the confounded operation of both constitutional and environmental factors. Cultural tales as cultural tools provides a potentially insightful look into young children's socialisation processes and has implications for this study.

Shore's (1991) theoretical discussion viewed cultural tools as windows to intersubjective understandings between children, peers and adults. Primary intersubjectivity can be transformed into secondary intersubjectivity through objects (or tools) of mutual interest. These objects serve to co-ordinate joint attention as well as provide a mechanism for intersubjectivity. Shore claims that research is now needed to determine how degrees of intersubjective co-ordination in meaning construction are appropriated through socially transmitted cultural schemata. Shore's discussion supports this study's hypothesis that cultural tools are prerequisites for intersubjectivity during play episodes and interactions.

5.5 Cultural Tools and Temporal Aspects

Joseph's (1998) narrative study draws an analogy between children's play and the grief experiences of adults. Using grief as theme Joseph connects play as a discourse in metaphorical and symbolic transformations. Individual's conversations with deceased loved ones at the grave-site are compared to theories of play. Eighteen German adults varying in age from 20-80 years of age were interviewed. Based on the interview data Joseph explores the individual's process of self-reorganisation after the loss of a loved one. Joseph borrows Vygotskian concepts and compares characteristics of symbolic play with this internalization process. He says in pretend play children transcend the concrete immediate world by way of semiotic reconstruction and this enables them to extend abilities to explore their needs and interests. Conversations with loved ones at the grave also involve an act of symbolic representation that connects individuals to the temporal aspects of life-events. Play and the grieving processes of individuals require the interplay of past, future and the transformation of these aspects in the present.

Joseph's research takes into account the concept of time in attempting to understand human development and behaviour. The participants appropriate time to assist them in their understanding and integration of a significant life-event. According to Joseph this closely resembles the way that children use symbolic play to assist their integration of personal and private understandings with social and cultural expectations. In this aspect Joseph uses a Vygotskian perspective to justify temporal influences as significant contributors to development and learning. The limitations of Joseph's study include the use of highly-situated interview data. Individual participant accounts were elicited in a specific setting about a specific event. Subsequent analysis of this data failed to consider possible confounding, contextual information. This

factor results in data collection and interpretation being a highly subjective event (Ball, 1990; Lather, 1986).

Summary

Vygotsky saw cultural tools as connecting the individual with culture and culture with the individual. The studies reviewed tended to interpret the individual's appropriation of cultural tools in a limited sense by focusing on mainly dyadic and small group interactions. Joseph's (1998) work introduced the aspect of time into human development and learning through discussing a unit of analysis that acknowledged the participant's transformation of temporal boundaries. Post-Vygotskian research has highlighted the need to include the influence of past knowledge within present interactions and behaviours (Rogoff, 1998). Cultural tools were seen as symbol systems and socialising agents (Collin-Stanley et al, 1996; MacNaughton, 1996; Saloman, 1979). According to Shore (1991), cultural tools are transformation objects that aid intersubjective understanding between children, peers and adults.

6.0 Zone of Proximal Development

What is the zone of proximal development?

Vygotsky (1978) defines the zone of proximal development as the distance between the level of actual development and the more advanced level of potential development that comes into play during interaction between more and less capable participants. A primary aspect of this interaction is that less capable participants can participate in forms of interaction that are beyond the level of competence they could achieve when acting alone. Cole and Wertsch (1996) outline the role of cultural tools

within the zone of proximal development and emphasise that the zone is an artifact-saturated medium interdependently linked to cultural tools. They give language, as a primary example, of the zone's dependence upon the individual's use of cultural tools.

This section considers dyadic interactions within the zone, the difficulties of researching the zone of proximal development and how children's pretend play activities and experiences provide a zone of proximal developmental.

6.1 Dyadic Interactions Within the Zone

Diaz, Neal & Vachio's (1991) comparative study examined differences between high-risk and low-risk dyads regarding maternal teaching in the zone of proximal of development. Fifty-one 3 year old children and their mothers participated. Twenty-seven dyads were identified as low-risk and 24 identified as high-risk for child abuse and neglect. The study was specifically designed by the researchers to examine the dynamic nature of maternal teaching within the zone. Transcription and coding of maternal speech during the maternal teaching session identified and measured researcher nominated dimensions of maternal teaching. Data revealed that low and high risk mothers differed significantly in their use of teaching strategies. High risk mothers used more controlling verbal teaching strategies, maternal withdrawal and distancing behaviours and fewer attributions of child competence.

Methodological problems of the study concerned the researcher's operationalization and measurement of scaffolding variables. Withdrawal and distancing were given as predictors or inhibitors of maternal scaffolding yet these may not adequately represent assistance behaviours. In addition it is questionable whether researcher designed specific task-relevant skills are able to adequately reflect the complex effects of social interactions between mother and child (Valsiner,1984).

Henderson's (1991) observational study used a coding scheme based on Wertsch's (1983 cited in Henderson, 1991) extension of Vygotsky's hypotheses about adult-child interaction in the zone of proximal development. The study sought to analyse adult-child interactions. Sixty children aged 3 to 6 years of age were videotaped while exploring objects with their parents. Clusters of verbal and non-verbal behaviour were used to code how participants defined the situation in 15-s interval of each session. When parent-child mismatches were apparent the participant's negotiations of an intersubjective definition were recorded and coded. Child and parent questions were coded for complexity and appropriateness of response and function. Results indicated that parent and child definitions matched almost 80% of the time and that they predominantly centred on exploration by the child, with attention to, or collaboration with the adult.

This study shares the limitations discussed in relation to Diaz et al's (1991) study. Researcher nominated tasks and operational definitions that attempt to measure subtle interactional nuances may yield ambiguous results. Also the sample contained only two-parent, middle-class families. A sample representing a wider variety of family forms and cultures may have found the intersubjective understandings of parent-child dyads differed significantly from the families represented in this study (Walford, 1991).

6.2 Difficulties of Researching the Zone of Proximal Development

Moll and Greenberg (1990) dispute researcher claims of objectivity regarding data collection in zone-based research and argue that all means of data collection embody a culturally biased sense of development that is reflected in both collection procedures and the subsequent interpretations of data. Moll and Greenberg's study

challenged the judgements of teachers and researchers who found South-Western Mexican students to be cognitively deficient in school activities. Using the zone of proximal development as the foundation for their analysis, they argued that the students did not have a fixed level of ability that could be measured by the neutral instruments of school assessment. Moll and Greenberg claimed that in school students were evaluated according to isolated performance by mediational means that were, in fact, culturally alien to them. Subsequent interpretations of results used a culture-laden means of evaluative assessment that was of no relevance to these Mexican American participants.

This study highlights the researcher's need for caution when making claims about the participant's processes of cognitive development based upon the zone of proximal developmental. It urges for a broader, wider interpretation of the sociocultural nature of the zone perhaps as Vygotsky had originally intended! Smagorinsky's (1995) theoretical review claims that the zone of proximal development's developmental nature means that the instruments of data elicitation will always be mediational rather than neutral. The zone implies that higher mental functioning is culturally shaped rather than universal in structure. Assessment vehicles used in research will therefore give an advantage to participants whose cognitive processes have developed in a way that allows intersubjective understanding with those who have created these assessment vehicles. Studies investigating the zone of proximal development frequently promote the perception that data collection reflects the research's findings. However these studies have often just measured how effectively an individual has understood and employed the researcher's tools (Forman & McPhail, 1993). For these reasons studies investigating the zone of proximal

development, are likely to continue to misinterpret developmental processes, and the participant's relationship with the tools of mediation (Smagorinsky, 1995).

6.3 Pretend Play Providing a Zone of Proximal Development

Lillard's (1993) paper examines the concept of pretend play as a zone of proximal development. Lillard supports Vygotsky's (1978) claim that pretend play allows children to operate at a higher cognitive level than they operate at in non-pretence situations. Pretend play therefore serves as an environment for early competence. Research studies have yet to determine whether pretend play creates social cognitive skills or whether social cognitive skills lead to the child's involvement in pretend play. Sociodramatic play requires both the participant's intersubjective understandings and negotiation skills. According to researchers this prerequisite for play suggests that children participating in pretend episodes will be extended in their social and cognitive development throughout the event (Bretherton, 1989; Conolly & Doyle, 1984; Gottman, 1986).

Summary

Past research has highlighted the difficulty of researching children's learning interactions within the zone of proximal development (Forman & McPhail, 1993; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Smagorinsky, 1995). Yet studies have shown that children's thinking processes can be extended during zone interactions (Henderson, 1991; Tudge, 1992). Improvement however appears dependent upon the presence of certain factors. Research found that when participant pairs reached intersubjective understandings children's learning was more likely to occur (Diaz, Neal & Vachio, 1991; Henderson, 1991; Lillard, 1993 and Tudge, 1993).

Researchers have raised concern about the objectivity or neutrality of data collection tools and methods used to investigate the zone of proximal development. Diaz, Neal & Amaya-Williams (1993); Fleer (1996); Moll & Greenberg (1990); Rogoff (1990, 1998); Smagorinsky (1995) and Tudge (1992) have all questioned the validity of restricting studies that examine the zone of proximal development to dyadic and small group interactions. Limitations of past research are predominantly due to researcher's failure to take into account the participant's sociocultural and historical context or the ways in which the wider context may contribute to cognitive processes during social interactions (Fleer, 1996; Litowitz, 1993; Moll, 1993; Moll & Greenberg, 1990 and Smagorinsky, 1995). Rogoff, (1998) and Tudge & Winterhoff (1993) also question the appropriateness of the unit of analysis used in these studies. They argue while the unit of analysis continues to focus on the individual as isolated from the broader context Vygotsky's concepts will never be fully understood in relation to human development and learning.

Recent debate about children's development and learning argues that development occurs as new generations collaborate with older generations during both interpersonal and institutional interactions. This view proposes that thinking and learning are the product of human sociocultural activity rather than the property of lone individuals (Rogoff, 1998). Interactions in the zone of proximal development therefore are the product of development and culture, and require us to take into account the historical influences of accumulated cultural knowledge and its contribution to children's learning processes (Cole, 1991; Rogoff, 1998).

7.0 Scripts

<u>What are scripts?</u>

A script is defined as a cognitive structure that represents a person's understanding of events in a familiar context (Nelson & Gruendel, 1986). Scripts become predictable sequence of behaviours, or actions embedded within the course of routine events (Nelson & Gruendel, 1986). They are acquired through social interaction and represent culturally defined events. Scripts include expectations about sequences of actions or roles and allow children to participate in a collaborative activity because of shared intersubjective understandings.

Scripts in this section are discussed as cultural tools. Development models and sociocultural perspectives of scripts are examined.

<u>7.1 Scripts as Cultural Tools</u>

Cole's (1991) theoretical discussion states in the past psychology has viewed scripts as describing asocial, individual mental representation rather than as mediators of activity in the social world. Cole interprets a script to be part of a social process that extends beyond an intra-personal event. Dilemmas arise however, when attempting to choose a unit of behavioural analysis that adequately reflects the interaction between cognitive, affective and social processes during events. Cole's dilemma echoes Vygotskian concerns regarding the understanding of psychological and cognitive processes and their links to the inter-psychological and intra-psychological planes. Vygotsky maintains that an essential key to understanding these processes is the role of cultural tools that mediate inter and intra activities. In this sense scripts can be viewed as cultural tools that allow us to examine the links between the broader context and the micro interactions that may influence children's

play. If Superhero or television-inspired play is seen as a product of cultural events then scripts used during television play provide a unit of analysis that allow for investigation of the interdependent influences of the micro and macro context on children's play.

7.2 A Developmental Model of Scripts

Hudson, Shapiro and Soss' (1995) empirical study interviewed 24 three year olds and 24 five year olds to investigate children's use of scripts when planning preparations for social outings. Planning was defined as involving more than one mental representation of an intended sequence of actions. Results indicated that children aged from 3 to 5 years are able to use general event knowledge in constructing several types of verbal plans. Developmental differences appeared regarding the amount of planning information children provided, suggesting that the ability to use event knowledge in planning, develops significantly during the preschool years.

Results of this study however may have been influenced by the data collection method. Data relied solely on children's verbal self-reporting of plans (children were asked to plan out aloud in the presence of the researcher). In addition individual children's developmental variations may have influenced results. For example qualitative differences in the participant's vocabulary may have resulted in an inaccurate representation of these children's cognitive understanding or even ability to appropriate researcher tools. Children's prior experiences regarding planning events or the place of rehearsal could have also acted as a confounding variable.

Farrar and Goodman (1990) propose a developmental stage model of schema that can be attributed to both age differences and stages of schema development when

children form scripts and general event knowledge. Age differences in children's episodic memory is attributed to the fact that children at different ages are in different stages of schema development. Younger children are less able to establish a script after limited exposure than older children due to qualitative cognitive differences.

Further investigations of children's ability to use scripts need to ask if their ability to appropriate cultural knowledge also has a developmental component. Ratner et al (1990 cited in Hudson, Fivush & Kuebli, 1992) suggest that young children may initially encode events at a different level than older children yet research to date has failed to conclude that developmental variation at different levels affects how children represent episodes of recurring events (Hudson, Fivush & Kuebli, 1992).

Hudson, Fivush and Kuebli (1992) review recent research on how young children organise general script knowledge. Studies investigating children's scripts and episodic memories revealed a complex and dynamic memory system functioning as early as 20 months of age. Children have the ability to continually organise and update memory structures once a standard script is established.

7.3 Cultural Scripting

Katz's (1991) theoretical review introduces the importance of cultural scripts in children making home and school connections. Groups of people share worldviews, behaviour and cognitive styles culminating in ethnic and national scripts (Katz, 1991). Children develop scripts from birth in collaboration with their caregivers (Cazden, 1988; Katz, 1991). Educational implications of cultural scripting alert teachers of the need to be more aware of children's prior cultural scripts to ensure that appropriate links are being made by both adults and children between home and centre

understandings. Appropriate educational experiences should incorporate and reflect each child's cultural script (Katz, 1991).

Weis and Worobey's (1991) qualitative study sought to examine the scripting process for marriage, the family, and sex-role development of children. Forty-two children aged between 3 and 5 years of age were interviewed at a New Jersey day care centre. In addition parents were asked to complete a questionnaire that assessed family structure, parental sex roles, incomes and housing. Semi-structured interviews with children sought to determine whether participant children had formed appropriate gender identification had androgynous or traditional sex-role scripts, and if they had formed a family script that recognised familial roles and relationships. Results suggested that young children are building scripts around marriage, family and parenthood. The study revealed that children's social scripts are complex organisations of beliefs, values and behaviours that assist them in making sense of the society around them. Educational implications of this study included the finding that adult discussions with children about various family structures and lifestyles was an effective way to extend children's scripts and acceptance of varying family forms and lifestyles.

A strength of Weis and Worobey's study is seen in its research design. Both children's and parents' perceptions were considered during the investigation. A limitation of the study was its reliance on children's and parents' self-reporting thereby introducing the possibility of an interviewer effect and perhaps in the case of the adults, a social desirability bias (Burns, 1994). It is also not clear from the study whether the research sample represented a cross-section of ethnic groups, cultures and social groups, raising generalization concerns.

Levy and Boston's (1994) study examined preschooler's recall of own-sex and other sex-gender scripts (two own-sex, two other-sex were assessed). The children participated in a single interview session at their preschool. Children were read the 8 event components of each of the 5 gender scripts and were asked to recall as many parts of the script that they could. Results showed that boys and girls demonstrated different patterns of recall and sequencing in recall for own-sex and other-sex scripts. Children tended to recall the scripts of own-sex over other-sex scripts. A limitation of these findings concerns the study's reliance on a single interview session of each participant. In the absence of supporting data collection methods the reliability of data generated from a single episode is questionable.

Summary

Reviewed empirical studies and theoretical discussions examined script theory and its role in young children's development of intersubjective understandings and use of cultural tools. Children come to educational settings with their own cultural and social scripts (Katz, 1991; Weis & Worobey, 1991) and it is important that adults take time to discover and extend children's prior scripting.   Studies revealed scripts to be influenced by children's developmental age and stages (Farrar & Goodman, 1990 and Ratner et al, 1990) yet Hudson et al (1992) disputed these findings. Hudson et al's (1992) study revealed children using scripts as memory structures, as early as 20 months of age. Studies also demonstrated gender differences in gender-script understanding (Levy & Boston, 1994) with children tending to favour own-sex scripts. Scripts as cultural tools emerged as a useful and relevant concept to be used in this study as they allow for a focused examination of children's attempts to mediate and appropriate cultural offerings during play.

Conclusion

Vygotskian-inspired research has asked us to look again at the appropriateness of applying past models and theories of play to today's play activities. Vygotsky's theories have shown play to be socially and culturally bound, contemporary play activities for example are situated within a technological context and this needs consideration. We need to understand the play activities of children today in relation to culture, time and place. Past research has analysed play activities using models and frameworks that examine activities as devoid of contextual influences and contributions. As a result a deficit rather than a difference model was often assumed by the research reviewed, in relation to children's learning processes. Recent Vygotskian-inspired research is deconstructing the free play philosophies justified by Piaget's developmental theory that have historically dominated early childhood education. Vygotsky's theory is being utilized in guiding our understandings of the wider contextual influences and its contribution to play outcomes for children. While research grounded in developmental assumptions has failed to provide an adequate understanding of play as a sociocultural event, Vygotsky's emphasis on context has prompted studies that are acknowledging culturally-embedded social interactions as central to children's learning processes.

This review has revealed a limited interpretation of Vygotsky's theory because of the past tendency of Vygotskian-based research to focus on dyadic or small group interactions. A reductionist emphasis however minimises the macro context's contribution to these interactions. Throughout his work Vygotsky continually stresses the importance of ensuring that children are not studied as separate units, in isolation to their social context. Carlsson-Paige & Levin (1995); Diaz and Neal (1991); Fleer (1996); Henderson (1990); Hudson et al (1995); Mundy et al (1992), Neuman and

Roskos (1992) and Tudge (1992) have all highlighted the difficulties of selecting a unit of analysis that adequately represents the influence of the wider sociocultural elements that define and shape human activity such as play. A related weakness is the tendency for data collection methods and subsequent interpretations to adopt a reductionist conception of play. This interpretation occurs when researchers attempt to translate play activities into separate psychological functions. Goodman & Goodman (1993); Goodnow (1993) and Nicolopoulou (1993) state that research framed within this perspective has overlooked the event of play as a social, interactive and cultural activity.

Recent restricted interpretations of Vygotsky's theory and play theories become even more obvious when a form of play arrives in our homes and centres that appears to be the direct product of contemporary sociocultural influences (television-inspired play). As developmentally based, behaviourist or restricted Vygotskian-based research struggles to understand the influences that affect the outcomes of this play we become aware of the need to consider the broader, sociocultural elements that define and shape children's play contexts.

This review found that studies located within the behaviourist/social learning or developmental perspectives neglected to examine children's play as an appropriation of cultural material. Studies that did acknowledge children's sociocultural contexts as an influence on play interpreted Superhero and television-inspired play to be children's responses to developmental challenges through their appropriation and mediation of cultural material (Cupit, 1989; Dyson, 1996; Gronlund, 1992 and Paley, 1992).

Vygotsky's (1978) concept of cultural tools provides us with a key to overcoming the limitations and difficulties found in the majority of studies reviewed

here. Children's tool use offers a unit of analysis that reflects the truly social nature of play (Vygotsky, 1978). Superhero play is uniquely different from other forms of representational play because it is inspired by television content. Immediately we see a link between children's micro interactions and macro sociocultural system. The link is the television as a cultural tool that both influences children's social play and is influenced by it. Television-inspired play becomes one and at the same time part of the life of the individual and the social system.

Scripts as cultural tools occurring during television-inspired play emerged as a useful concept to be used in this study. Neo-Vygotskian theory interprets scripts to be part of a social process that extend beyond an intra-personal event (Cole, 1991). A sociocultural view of scripts sees them as a complex interaction of cognitive, affective and social processes that occur on both the inter-psychological and intra psychological planes. Reviewed studies (Farrar & Goodman, 1990; Hudson et al, 1995 and Ratner et al, 1990) found developmental differences regarding children's ability to use scripts during social events. This suggests there may also be a developmental component regarding children's ability to appropriate cultural material. Research found that children use cultural scripting (Katz, 1991) and social scripts during learning (Weis & Worobey, 1991).

Vygotsky's theory has seen make-believe play as providing a zone of proximal development for children's learning. Reviewed literature and studies highlighted the difficulties of researching children's learning and interactions within the zone of proximal development. Past research, through focusing on dyadic and small group zone interactions, has failed to consider children's wider sociocultural and historical contexts or the ways in which these contexts contribute to cognitive processes during zone-type interactions (Fleer, 1996; Moll & Greenberg, 1990 and Smagorinsky,

1995). Studies showed that intersubjectivity occurs during play when children use their knowledge of television as stimulation for play. Vygotsky (1978) states that a significant feature of representational play is that it always contains rules for behaviour. Children are required to follow these rules in order to participate successfully in the play context. Television as a cultural tool provides a shared system of symbols and experience. Children during play appropriate intersubjective symbols through adherence to rules dictated by their shared play experience (Vygotsky, 1978).

Past research has already established that play is an important pedagogical tool in early childhood education. Reviewed research and literature suggests our challenge now is to understand the different forms of representational play and their implications for children's learning and development. Limitations of past research centred predominantly on studies using a unit of analysis that isolated children from their broader context. Television-inspired play, as an event, provides a unit of analysis that offers an understanding of the enmeshed links between children and their contexts. This form of play is inspired by a cultural tool of our time. Furthermore how children achieve intersubjective understandings through their appropriation of this tool may be understood when the unit of analysis becomes the child functioning together with mediational means (Wertsch, Tulviste & Hagstrom, 1993). Play is a sociocultural event and Vygotskian concepts allow for an investigation that supports this perspective.

Past research has highlighted the difficulty of capturing the 'embeddedness' of children's development and learning in social activity. Vygotsky argued that finding new methods of investigation and analysis that are able to adequately address the new ways in which problems are posed, requires more than a simple modification of previously used and accepted methods. In many of the reviewed studies the unit of

analysis became the individual child with social influences added to the original unit. This study investigates asks:

> "If the unit of analysis becomes the social activity or event will this enable us to develop a more comprehensive understanding of cognition as belonging to sociocultural activity as opposed to cognition continuing to being seen as the sole property or product of individuals?"

8.0 How This Research Relates to Existing Knowledge and Literature Within the Field

Nicolopoulou (1993) observes that two waves of research have been evident in the play literature this century. The first wave of research centred on the individualistic nature of play generated by Piaget's work (Parten, 1962; Piaget, 1962 & Smilansky, 1986). Many theorists have argued that Piagetian based research has failed to acknowledge the place of culture and social influences in children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dunn, 1988; Fleer, 1992, 1996; Goodnow, 1993; Hatch, 1995; Rogoff, 1990, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991and Wood, 1988). Research generated from Piaget's theory and work has failed to provide adequate understanding of play from a sociocultural rather than developmental perspective.

Recent sociocultural based research has asked us to look again at the free play philosophy and practices that have dominated early childhood education. Over the last decade or so Vygotsky's theory and work has provided an alternative to this philosophy, and has been utilised in guiding our understanding of the wider influences that contribute to play and the outcomes for children. Vygotskian-based sociocultural research has generated studies that acknowledge social interaction as central to

learning. Yet research has tended to focus mainly on dyadic interactions (Cazden, 1988; Diaz et al, 1993; Dunn, 1988; Goodman & Goodman, 1993; Litowitz, 1993; Moll, 1993; Rogoff, 1990; Tudge, 1992) between either adult and child or child and child. The limitations of this restricted interpretation of Vygotsky's theory become obvious when we seek to understand a form of play (television-inspired play) that appears to be a direct product of contemporary sociocultural influences. As developmentally based or restricted Vygotskian based research struggles to understand the influences of this play on young children's learning and development, we are reminded of the social and cultural 'boundedness' of human activity.

This study has attempted to avoid the limitations of previous research on play through using Vygotsky's theory of play and learning as a theoretical tool for analysis. However it will differ from the majority of previously Vygotskian inspired research in that it has used a wider lense. Television-inspired play is defined and considered as a sociocultural event. One of the most fundamental principles of the Vygotskian perspective is that the formation of the mind is inescapably a sociocultural process (Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993). Television play, as the product of sociohistorical influences, provides us with a clear example of the sociocultural dimension of Vygotsky's theory of learning and development.

This research retains an interactional focus yet significantly acknowledges the larger cultural context in which these interactions occur. Television is viewed as the cultural tool and play as the mediated activity. A consideration of the broader context and its influences on how children play in relation to children's interactional contexts was examined. Vygotsky's concept of intersubjectivity (or shared experience and knowledge) and how it is achieved during television inspired play formed the basis for analysis. Vygotsky saw intersubjectivity as being achieved through individuals'

shared meanings of signs and symbols. Yet an examination of tool and symbol use in relation to young children's learning is required at both the micro and macro level. This study asked if intersubjectivity occurs during play as a result of children's shared knowledge of television content (macro) and as a result of their appropriation of cultural tools. Cultural tools are seen as being present at both the micro (interpersonal play interactions) and macro level (representing television content during play).

Past research has already established that play is an important pedagogical tool in early childhood education. Our challenge now is to understand different forms of representational play and their implications for children's learning and development. This study saw the emergence of television-inspired and Superhero playas a unique opportunity to examine the links between children and their sociocultural contexts. Using Vygotsky's concepts as a theoretical framework this research examined a form of play that has failed to be adequately understood within developmental play frameworks and restricted interpretations of Vygotskian concepts.

The following areas of Vygotsky's theory were examined in relation to children's 'play and talk.'

"How or is intersubjectivity achieved during play?"

"Children's use of cultural tools (specifically television)."

9.0 Focus of Investigation

Research Question

> *"How or is intersubjectivity achieved through children's appropriation of*
>
> *cultural tools during symbolic/pretend play?"*

through shared rules?

through shared scripts or dialogues?

through shared cultural experiences? (specifically televiewing)

through play providing a zone of proximal development?

Play has been extensively acknowledged as contributing to learning and development. Children's symbolic, representational or pretend play has been linked to increased cognitive ability and social competence. This form of play requires us to study interactional processes between children, as well as their appropriation and mediation of tools/events, offered to them via their participation in cultural and social experiences. Play such as television-inspired play exposes the links between the micro and macro context. When the event or activity (play) becomes the focus of the investigation as opposed to individual behaviour this potentially allows for an examination of learning processes that reach far beyond the individual child.

Methodology

10.0 Research Design

Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that the purpose of a qualitative study is to gather enough knowledge to ensure understanding. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), the case study is an effective approach to qualitative research that seeks understanding of behaviour as its primary focus. The case study as a research design, allows for children and settings to be explored in depth (Hatch, 1995). The sociocultural focus of this study required the investigation to take into account children's learning within a specific social and historical context. An emergent research design that enabled reflexive and ongoing inquiry allowed for this requirement. In this study planned data collection methods were modified in response to participants' needs within the studied setting. As a result the original focus of the study was broadened to allow for significant and relevant understandings to be included.

The original focus of Superhero play was extended to include other forms of television inspired play present in the centre. These forms of play included play based upon the British television programme The Teletubbies, Spice Girl's play and McDonald's play (that appeared to be a direct result of children viewing television advertisements). The reflexivity of this study's approach led to additional considerations and influences being taken into account during data analysis and interpretation. However this study did not see complicating effects as hindering understanding and in fact valued the complexity of social actions within the early childhood research setting. These complexities were regarded as merely mirroring the participant's unique embeddedness in their historical, social and cultural contexts.

10.1 Validity

Several steps were taken to ensure the validity of this study. A common threat to validity in qualitative research is the reactive problem that sees the researcher' s presence or actions as influencing the behaviour of the participants (Burns, 1994; Cohen & Manion, 1992). Providing a detailed description of the researcher's role and actions during observations and conversations with the participants helped to address this limitation. Data collection is described in phases. Each phase clearly outlines the researcher's changing role and involvement in the research setting.

Data collection methods are triangulated to allow for converging lines of inquiry and the reader is encouraged to trace the chain of evidence that led to the researcher's interpretation and conclusions. Varied methods of data generation were employed to allow for a multi-method approach of data collection. These combined methods yielded a database that increased the validity of the study and allowed for consideration of the wider contextual influences on children's development and learning.

10.2 Generalization

A second concern of the qualitative case study is that the research design provides limited evidence for generalization due to the difficulty of generalising findings on the basis of one case. Critics of the case-study method also argue that it lacks reliability, due to its lack of statistical evidence. This lack of statistical evidence they argue, may result in subsequent studies examining the same phenomena but reaching a differing conclusion (Anderson, 1993). Burns (1994) however states that the case study's goal is to expand theories rather than to undertake generalizations.

This study's goal was to expand the current applications and understandings of Vygotsky's theory through investigating a specific form of play in one early childhood setting. While it is recognised that the centre in this study is embedded in its own unique context, it is likely that findings related to these children play behaviours will add to others' understandings of sociocultural theory, and its applicability to children's learning through play activities.

10.3 Reflexivity

Qualitative research requires a methodological commitment to reflexivity. One example of this study's commitment to reflexivity is seen in the expansion of the research's original focus (Superhero play) to include other forms of television-inspired play. According to Weirsma (1995) the researcher using naturalistic techniques aligned with qualitative research, is willing to abandon or extend original hypotheses if data collection supports this decision. The changing data collection methods in response to the participant's behaviour and interests (active participant observation, stimulus recall and direct observation) throughout the study provides further evidence of a reflexive approach.

11.0 Data Collection

There is a growing interest in peer interaction and play among preschool children (Bruner, Jolly & Silva, 1976; Garvey, 1977; Hatch, 1995; Rogoff, 1990; Tudge, 1992; Wertsch, 1991 and Wood, 1988). Pretend play activities are often child-initiated and child-centred making them part of the child's world rather than the adult's. Corsaro (1981) outlines the methodological difficulties of adults entering children's play activities or worlds and collecting valid data. A major shortcoming of

adults recording children's activities involves the tendency of adult researchers to remove themselves from the social contexts of peer activities. As a result data are interpreted from the adult's perspective creating a failure to capture the children's perspectives on their own activities. An outcome of this limitation is that researchers often find it difficult to make the relevant links between children's play activities and children's social-ecological environments (Corsaro, 1981; Hatch, 1995). With these limitations in mind, this study searched for methodologies that would allow for a contextualised, holistic examination of the children's perspectives. Such an aim led logically and exclusively to the use of qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. Data was not measured, correlated and predicted but described and interpreted. Qualitative research uses collection tools such as observation and interviewing, with the researcher often acting as the data collection instrument (Delamont, 1995). Using the researcher as the instrument in this study however required constant vigilance and reflection on the researcher's role.

11.1 Procedure for Data Collection

11.1.1 Instruments.

The primary research instrument used in qualitative research is the researcher's own capacity to observe, question and record (Delamont, 1995). As researcher, I developed and refined these capacities during the course of this study. The reflexive nature of this study resulted in a deviation from the planned research instruments. Originally I had intended to use a tape recorder and possibly video recorder to aid data collection. However on entering the field I immediately made the decision that these instruments would be too intrusive for the purposes of this study and subsequently recorded all the documented events, dialogues and behaviours in written

form. During the data collection phase I employed naturalistic observational techniques borrowed from ethnographic methodologies. The inclusion of naturalistic, ethnographic techniques allowed for the observation of and participation in valuable informal interactions with children.

11.1.2 Researcher-as-instrument.

As I was functioning as the sole data collection instrument it is necessary to include a profile of my own training and experience. My prior knowledge and experiences will have influenced the judgements that I have made during data collection in terms of recording and interpretation of events, conversations, behaviour and activities.

11.1.3 Researcher profile.

I have trained and worked as an early childhood teacher in addition to raising my own four children. At the time of this study I am lecturing in the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning at the Christchurch College of Education and working at Canterbury University in the Education Department. I see my prior experience with young children, coupled with my theoretical knowledge, as influencing the design and direction of this study. The reflexive nature of the study evolved in direct response to my ongoing assessment of the needs of the participant children, along with my increasing awareness of the need to respect the centre's existing culture and a desire not to alter it.

11.2 Methods of Data Collection

A summary of the methods and procedures used during data collection include:

Participant observation

Direct observation

Time sample observations

Language samples

Running record observations

 Semi-structured interviews with children

Informal interviews with children and adults

Individual interviews with children

Group interviews with children

Field notes

Data in the form of documentation was collected away from the research site and included magazine and newspaper articles. The data collection methods are presented under the headings of the three phases of data collection that evolved during the study.

   11.2.1 Rationale for using 'stimulated recall' as a method of data collection in qualitative research.

   My primary impetus for using stimulus material (a locket and cards containing pictures of television characters) was to allow children not directly involved in television-related discussions or play, to be able to continue with their activities free from undue disruption. The use of the locket, and later in the study prompt cards depicting television characters, resulted in this study employing stimulated recall as a method of data collection. The stimulated recall method was originally developed by Bloom (1954) to identify the participant's thought processes and levels of attention without unduly interrupting their thought processes. This study used the method to similar effect. Participant children initiated when, and where, they wished to see the stimulus material. This condition allowed me to naturally observe and examine children's thought processes and behaviour in relation to the stimulus material. Rose

(1984) writes that stimulated recall studies attempt to identify cognitive processes during a studied event. This study however used the method to examine children's appropriation of television as a cultural tool, through observing children's responses to television-related material as well as noting children's recall of television-related experiences.

The use of stimulated recall as a method of data collection finds support in the theoretical underpinnings of this study. Vygotsky (1978) stated all thought and knowledge is inherently social in origin and maintained that all thinking and action is carried out with the assistance of cultural tools. The locket and cards in this study can be viewed as cultural tools that provided a scaffold for children's recall of prior experiences and knowledge. The stimulus material therefore mediated children's thinking, conversations and actions.

This method of data collection undoubtedly resulted in an account that would differ from one that would have been obtained without the use of these prompts. Using the prompts for example may have sustained more elaborate responses than would have otherwise been reported. The use of this methodology also complicated the data analysis in terms of the study's qualitative focus. Yet Smagorinsky (1994) argues that neutral researcher behaviour is always, at best, an illusion. The cards and locket did provoke children's discussions and perhaps even interest, in television, yet the use of the prompts remained child-initiated throughout the study.

The employment of stimulus material in this study was not considered to be a confounding variable that may have contaminated data, but was instead seen as supporting the sociocultural underpinnings of the investigation. Using this method in fact served to elucidate the role of cultural tools in children's thinking processes.

Children's appropriation of this material became evident in their both their play and discussions.

The locket and 'prompt cards' was not planned but occurred in direct response to events that occurred in the social setting under study. The study was designed to be as unobtrusive and respectful as possible of both the participant children's activities and of the centre's curriculum. The 'stimulated recall' method of data collection therefore allowed me to meet the purposes of my study while remaining committed to both the ethical and theoretical principles of this research.

12.0 Selecting a Research Site

Eight weeks prior to the commencement of this study I visited 14 Canterbury childcare centres and kindergartens to assess their suitability for this study. The centres covered a cross-section of socio-economic areas, urban and country locations and included a range of early childhood services and philosophies. The final selection of one research site was based upon the following three factors. The centre programme's philosophy, (children were allowed extended periods of time for unstructured, self-directed play), the centre's attending children represented a range of ethnic, social and cultural groups, and the centre's availability and willingness to be part of this study.

12.1 Gaining Access and the Procedures Followed by the Researcher

On selection, the researcher approached the centre. The first contact was made by phone to explain the functions and requirements of the study to the supervisor and to seek permission for the centre's participation. The supervisor gave permission for participation. A time was made by the researcher to meet and to discuss the

requirements of the study. Requirements included explaining the study's aims and purposes, negotiating the role of the researcher within the centre during the time of the study, and settling on a date when data collection could begin. The researcher followed up this meeting with a letter (see appendix 1) confirming aspects of the discussion, along with a copy of the information sheet for parents/caregivers (see appendix 2), a letter for parents/caregivers outlining the study's aims and requirements (see appendix 2a) and consent forms for parents/caregivers (see appendix 4). The written information and consent forms for centre management (see appendix 3) and consent form for staff (see appendix 3a) was left with the supervisor. An invitation was also extended by the researcher, for the supervisor to note any queries or concerns regarding the centre's participation in the study.

12.1.1 Ethical considerations.

Information sheets and letters for parents/caregivers of participant children were given to the supervisor (see appendices 2 & 2a). However at the supervisor's request a notice was placed on the parent information board (written by the researcher) that briefly outlined the aims of the study (see appendix 5). This information stayed on the notice board for the duration of the data collection period. No families asked for their child to be excluded from the study.

Prior to commencing the study I had discussed with the supervisor the requirements of informed consent. The supervisor signed a form on behalf of the participant children and staff. She indicated that all parents, and families, had signed a form when they enrolled their child in the centre that agreed to their child's participation in educational studies.

13.0 Entering the Field

I went to the centre for one full day, one week prior to data collection taking place. This initial visit allowed me to meet with staff and children, observe routines, note the layout of the centre and tentatively plan for the study (see appendix 7).

13.1 Participant Observations

Phase one (active participation researcher-initiated).

Participant children were observed for 8 hours a day over a period of 2 consecutive weeks then for a further period of 3 weeks (one half day for each week). The observations began as participant observations. Initially I asked children engaged in free play activities and play about the television programmes they liked to watch (see appendix 6). These conversations took the form of 'friendly chats' and were often initiated by children during the course of their activities. This phase lasted for about 3 days, then as I became more familiar with children, the staff and centre routines I made a decision to modify the data collection method.

Phase two (child-initiated participation).

As my understanding and knowledge of the children's preferences for television programmes and play activities evolved, so did my awareness of the need to be sensitive to the existing culture and dynamics of the centre. The study (television play) involved a controversial topic because of its frequent association with aggressive and disruptive play. In addition this form of play has been perceived by many as inhibiting children's development and learning (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1995). Prior discussions with the supervisor had indicated that these were also the views held by the staff at this centre. As researcher, I felt I had a responsibility to

respect both the centre's and individual teacher's philosophies, while remaining sensitive to children's established play patterns and routines.

I had noted that over the first few days of data collection one of my conversations with children about television had prompted behaviour that resulted in disruption to other children's play. Faced with the ethical dilemma of wishing to meet the purposes of my study while remaining sensitive to the needs of the children and the centre, I attempted to find a way that I could carry out my research without unnecessarily disrupting or changing centre dynamics. This ethical dilemma, in fact, led to the second phase of my data collection.

One day I arrived at the centre wearing a large locket. Throughout the day I was beseeched with requests from children to: *"open it so I can see inside"*. The children's interest in the locket gave me an idea. That night I placed a picture of the Teletubbies inside one half of the locket and a picture of Batman on the other. The locket served two purposes. The separately positioned pictures allowed me to cover one half of the locket to ensure children did not have to see the pictures, unless they chose to.

This decision arose from my concern about children's former reactions to their peers' conversations about television characters.

Rosie to Nicky: *"Tonight we're gonna scare people...we're gonna be Batman..."*

On another occasion I arrived at the centre to be greeted by Nicky, Bruce and Tim who requested my help with their Batman cloaks (pieces of fabric). Kate and Harriet were standing nearby, watching me tie on the capes.

Kate to Nicky, Bruce and Tim: *"You are not Supermans...we don't like Supermans in here."*

Kate and Harriet subsequently ran away from their peers and hid in the home corner.

After reflecting on these events I learnt not to assume children's 'readiness' or willingness to always talk about these characters. The majority of children however frequently initiated conversations about the Superheroes yet the locket remained closed unless a child specifically asked to see it.

<u>What happened.</u>

Each day I was at the centre I wore the locket containing the television characters. Children often arrived in groups to see, then discuss the characters inside the locket (I would change the characters). Sometimes I joined in the children's conversations about television by answering their questions, or clarifying comments, but most of the time I just listened. When the children left I would withdraw from the field to record the conversations, actions and behaviour that followed the 'locket viewing.'

The locket became a point of considerable interest for children and this once again led me to reflect on my role as researcher and on the research design itself. Permission from the supervisor for me to actively provoke television conversations and play, along with children's constant requests to,

*"...see more..."*or *"show me what else have you got..."*

after locket showings, resulted in another modification of the data collection design.

I made 12 small flip cards. Each card featured two different television characters, one pasted on the front of the card and the other on the back. These cards were kept close at hand but were stored in an envelope away from sight. At the child's or children's requests I would show the cards and record the children's subsequent responses, comments, behaviour and actions.

13.2 Direct Observation

Phase three (minimal researcher participation).

After about a week or so of observation I became fascinated with the way that children's pretend play stimulated by the locket and television prompt cards, extended to play that incorporated other cultural activities (nursery rhymes, social roles, occupational theme based play, centre happenings). This play occurred in addition to, and often inter-linked with, television play. At this point in the study I decided once again to rethink and subsequently modify my role as researcher. I withdrew from interacting directly with children (but always responded to children's requests and questions, including requests for 'locket showings') and began to unobtrusively 'listen in to' and 'observe' children's pretend play activities.

Data collection during this phase consisted of predominantly 'direct, non-participant observations' with minimal interaction between the children and myself. During this period I used 'language samples', 'running records' and 'time sampling methods.' The final phase of the data collection allowed me to record, in depth, details of actions, behaviour, activities and dialogues. It also allowed for the opportunity to observe and record rich, complex play episodes and events that did not appear to be prompted or stimulated by my presence. Effects of 'researcher presence' during this phase of the data collection were minimised as children had become accustomed to my presence in the centre.

13.3 Interviews

13.3.1 Individual interviews (children).

Phase one (researcher initiated interviews with children).

In addition to observations, participant children were interviewed both individually and in groups. During phase one the interviews took the form of

'informal chats' directed by the researcher. Interviews focused on pre-set areas of television-related inquiry investigating children's interests and preferences in terms of television programmes and characters (see appendix 6). McGee-Brown (1995) states that the attention span of young children is short and rarely are adults able to engage a child in an interview long enough to elicit all the information that they require. Interviewing young children can also be problematic because of children's limited verbal conceptual and response capabilities. Researchers in addition need to be aware of the unequal power dynamics between adults and children (Corsaro, 1985). All of these issues were taken into account when planning and conducting the children's interviews. Although the interviews were semi-structured they remained informal and took the form of conversations and 'chats.'

Phase two (children sharing information with researcher).

Semi-focused, researcher-initiated interviews were supplemented with brief, naturalistic interviewing of children carried out during play activities. These interviews took the form of unobtrusive and relevant play-related questions that were asked in order to clarify or enhance the researcher's understanding. Questions took into account the naturalistic context and were asked sensitively in order to minimise the effects of researcher presence.

13.3.2 Group interviews (children).

One way to overcome the mentioned limitations of adult-child interviews is to include group peer interviews during data collection. During 'phase one' children participated in collaborative peer interviews. These interviews would often begin with one or two children, then increase in number as passing children became interested in the content of the discussions. Cullen discusses this occurrence and terms it the 'de facto' group interview. Interviews with children may commence with one child giving

his or her perspective yet as the conversation proceeds others join in resulting in shared meanings and perspectives (Cullen, 1997). The 'de facto' group interview provided valuable data for the purposes of this study as it allowed for an additional examination of how children collectively contribute to each others' intersubjective understandings.

Phase one (researcher initiated group interviews with children).

Researcher props (locket and cards) at times stimulated the interviews, at other times the researcher initiated conversations and dialogues. For example after observing Teletubby play for the first time I approached the children as a group and spoke with them about their actions. The group interview allowed me to address the unequal power relations between the children and myself (especially initially when I was not known to the children). This form of interview also increased my opportunities to talk with children in a more natural setting (group interviews are less demanding, intense and threatening for young children). Group interviews offer participant children the opportunity to share and negotiate information with each other in a more relaxed and natural setting (Cullen, 1997).

What happened.

The 'de facto' group interview became a regular event occurring regularly and spontaneously throughout the entire data collection period. I had originally planned to hold focus group interviews with both children and adults however informal group discussions with children evolved naturally out of play situations. Informal discussions with adults also occurred during centre routines negating the need to put into place a more structured group interview with either children or staff.

The 'de facto' group interview with children was used frequently during the early stages of data collection as this approach allowed children to negotiate and share

information with each other and me in a relaxed and informal setting. For these reasons I considered that the data gathered using this method to be as valid, if not more valid, than data collected using a more structured approach. Information offered by children during these discussions provided relevant examples of the ways in which children negotiate and share meanings with each other. The use of naturalistic group interviews as a data collection tool also supported the theoretical underpinnings of this study in that it allowed for an examination of the socially constructed nature of knowledge and its sociocultural foundations (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; 1986).

13.3.3 Adult Interviews

Phase one (researcher initiated interviews with staff).

This study's intention to examine the sociocultural aspects of play required an acknowledgment of the larger, broader context within which children's interactions and actions occur. Interviewing the supervisor allowed for the inclusion of her perspective and understandings of the children's play activities. These interviews once again took the form of informal chats that were often carried out 'on the hoof' during centre routines. The content of the interviews was recorded anecdotally by the researcher after each conversation. As other studies have indicated (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1995; Cupit, 1991; Dawkins, 1991) adults' perceptions and beliefs have the ability to alter, direct or contribute to children's forms of play. Adults' understandings and attitudes of children's television play therefore were included in the research.

Phase two (staff initiated interviews with researcher).

Adult interviews during this phase were initiated by the adult participants and took the form of spontaneous offerings and insights rather than researcher-led questioning.

<u>13.4 Field Notes</u>

In addition to the use of the stated data collection methods, daily field notes were recorded during the data collection period. Field notes included the recording of observations, conversations and researcher notes. Tentative theoretical interpretations of collected data were also included in these notes. Field notes were used to both confirm and extend data. The notes also provided relevant contextual data that were not readily obtainable through the use of other research instruments.

<u>13.5 Off Site Contextual Data</u>

Material not gathered at the research site, but used in this study to gain a broader perspective of the influence of the Teletubby television programme on young children and their families, was collected from the following sources:

Letters to the editor in the New Zealand Listener (11 July, 1998)

The TV Guide (26 June, 1998).

Articles in the Christchurch Star (15 July, 1998).

The Press, Christchurch (30 July, 1998).

14.0 Data Analysis

<u>14.1 Approach taken to Data Analysis</u>

Hatch (1995) states that in qualitative studies data collection and analysis is closely related. This study used a 'recursive' (rather than linear) model of analysis. The data were collected, then analysed and additional data collection was based on this analysis.

Initial data collection phases involved identification of consistent patterns in the data notes and transcripts. I began data analysis by recording these patterns as

tentative categories. At first I recorded many categories that related to 'television play/talk' as well as 'non-television-related' sociodramatic episodes. Using my data as a basis for analysis involved an interpretative process that allowed for an interdependent relationship to develop between the study's theoretical base and the collected data (Altricher & Posch, 1989; Delamont, 1995).

14.2 Limitations of this Approach

I was aware that the identification of patterns and the emergence of subsequent categories involved the use of subjective and inferential judgements regarding the meanings that I had attributed to children's actions and dialogue. Hatch (1995) argues however that whenever studies seek to examine children's social construction of meaning data analysis needs to be inductive, inferential and interpretative in nature.

14.3 Rationale for Using a Sociocultural Framework of Analysis

Vygotsky (1978) proposed that the most basic unit of analysis of human development and learning should not be the individual but one that takes into account the influences of larger sociocultural events (Rogoff, 1998). Leont'ev (1981) in support of Vygotskian thinking used human activity as a unit of analysis. Like Vygotsky he saw human activity as being unable to be removed from systems of social relationships and social life. 'Activity' as a unit of analysis, allows for an insight into the meanings, the motives and the intentions of behaviour as well as the influence of environmental factors on behaviour, development and learning.

An examination of how children achieve intersubjectivity through their appropriation of cultural tools requires a descriptive, interpretative approach to data collection and analysis. The study's focus on meaning necessitates a discovery of

patterns through detailed documentation of data that is followed by reflective analysis and interpretation. The analytic process therefore emerges from the data itself.

The researcher's involvement in the field allowed for multiple opportunities to observe children's activities, discuss these activities with them and for an understanding to emerge of the meanings that participants themselves, attributed to their actions. Constant reflection during analysis resulted in the modification of data collection methods and led to new ways of viewing the data. Data analysis was thus not constrained by the methods used to obtain it. Initial exploratory data analysis enabled the relative significance of patterns in the data to emerge and be explored.

14.4 Addressing Validity Issues

Validity concerns were addressed through comparing data generated from the observations with other methods of data collection such as interviews, field notes and journals. As a result of across methods' comparisons, relationships and patterns emerged between the categories. The differing sources of data collection worked to increase the validity of the findings and the researcher's interpretations of data. Categories of data were analysed and reanalysed as units of meaning were identified, refined and categorised. Although the research questions provided the initial framework for data analysis, analysis continued throughout the entire research process and well into the writing up period of the final report.

15.0 The Process of Data Analysis

15.1 Step One: In the Field

The first step of analysis began in the field with the researcher pre- numbering each page and line of observations, field notes and journal notes in preparation for the subsequent identification and coding of data (see appendix a). After every 3 days or so during the data collection phase, the notes were analysed in order to identify tentative themes, commonalties or incongruencies. These categories or insights were recorded in a journal and coded under headings. The 'category headings' tended to describe recurring events recorded in the data (see appendix b). In a separate journal under each of these original headings, I included some examples from the raw data that could then be referenced back to the page and line number recorded in the original field, journal or diary notes (see appendix c).

15.2 Step Two: Withdrawing from the Field

At the completion of the data collection phase, each page of data was transcribed to ensure full and legible notes and photocopied. Coding ensured that any data separated from its original context for the purposes of categorising could be, if needed, traced back to its fuller context. This step ensured an understanding of the influence of context on events, actions and dialogue could be achieved (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Analysis using this method supported the sociocultural theoretical stance of this study. Sociocultural theory seeks to understand activity and behaviour in relation to contextual influences.

15.3 Step Three: Identifying Units of Meaning

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994) the process of qualitative analysis is one of identifying the meaning derived from words and actions of the participants in the study. Step three of analysis began with an initial identification of small units of meaning in the data (see appendix d). After further analysis, similar units of meaning were placed into categories. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) definition of a 'unit of meaning' was adopted during this process of analysis. A unit of meaning is 'autonomously comprehensible', that is, able to be understood without any further information being added (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As analysis progressed there was further refining and changing of categories in response to consistencies and incongruencies appearing in the units. Finally, larger categories began to emerge in the form of collections of like/similar units of meaning.

15.4 Step Four: Placing the Units into Larger Categories

Recurring concepts and themes found in the units pre-empted the next stage of analysis. Provisional categories were formed under self-explanatory headings and common units were placed under one of these categories (see appendix e). Negative examples, or examples that failed to fit a category, were put to one side under the category of 'Review Again.' When several examples of data failed to fit a category, a new category was created. The 'Review Again' data were read and re-read throughout the analysis process to determine whether miscellaneous data could be included in existing categories. Units of data that did not appear to belong to any category were noted.

15.5 Step Five: Refinement and Finalisation of Categories

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest writing a 'propositional statement' in order to justify and clarify categorisation of data. A propositional statement conveys the meaning that is contained in the data and justifies its inclusion in a specific category (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study employed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of 'propositional statements' to determine significant findings that arose from this study's data.

I began the process of writing propositional statements with grouping together similar data under a provisional category. I then attempted to develop a 'propositional statement' for that particular category. Analysis during this phase progressed from merely stating or describing a category's name, or from just restating the kinds of data contained in that category, to writing a statement that reflected the collective meaning of all data collectively grouped together in that category. This was a complex but significant step in the data analysis and a phase that began the discovery of the research outcomes.

Propositional statements were in essence derived from an accumulation of positive examples of a particular phenomenon that appeared in the data and became the accumulative and end product of each of the former steps in the analysis process (see appendix f). Propositional statements represented the total outcome of former coded data (see appendix a), categories (see appendices b, c & e) and units of meaning (see appendices d & e). These final outcomes, or statements, also served to rationalise inclusion of selected data within categories, as well as validate the formation of the categories themselves. Appendix (g) provides an example of the process, and steps taken, in developing a propositional statement.

Refinement and the subsequent finalisation of propositional statements were the last stage of the phase. This process involved a complete review of all the propositional statements to determine any overlap or ambiguity between statements. Similarities and ambiguities were noted, resulting in final refinement.

15.6 Step Six: Identifying Relationships Across Categories

Propositional statements justified and defined categories of data and in doing so helped to determine links or relationships across categorised data. This step of the analysis process involved a search for the relevance and significance of outcomes in relation to the research questions. Propositional statements or outcomes were duly categorised in preparation for the final reporting of outcomes, under corresponding or relevant components of the research question (see appendix h).

16.0 Final Validity Checks

Careful description of data collection methods and the analysis process provides the reader with a basis for judging the credibility of the study (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). In addition to the provision of detailed information about methods and data analysis, this study increased the validity of findings through the use of multiple methods of data collection. A last step involved matching up units and categories of meaning that appeared across differing methods of data collection and then relating these themes back to the research questions.

17.0 Unit of Analysis

Wertsch, Tulviste & Hagstrom (1993) argue that within a Vygotskian perspective the irreducible unit for analysis is the individual-functioning-together-with-mediational-means. 'Children's appropriation of tools' became the unit of analysis. Appropriation was seen in both a micro and macro sense. The child's macro mediation involved children's appropriation of the television as a cultural tool while micro mediation occurred during play interactions.

17.1 Unit of Analysis used in this Study

This study analysed the social activities of 'television play and talk.' Television play is an activity that occurs at the level of immediate interactions yet takes into account children's wider social, cultural and historical context. Furthermore using children's participation in 'television play and talk' as a unit of analysis allowed for potential disclosure of the ways in which children individually and collectively appropriate cultural materials and tools to achieve intersubjective understandings.

18.0 Research Questions as a Guideline for Data Analysis

The research question guided the interpretation and analysis of data.

"How or is intersubjectivity achieved through children's appropriation of cultural tools during pretend play?"

18.1 Intersubjectivity was Considered by Examining these Categories:

1) Children's use of cultural tools in play

2) Play providing a zone of proximal development

3) Children sharing an understanding of rules imposed on the situation through the requirements of the shared pretend play situation

4) Children sharing in scripts and dialogues (dialogue and speech being a cultural tool)

5) Children's appropriation of accumulated cultural knowledge through play (cultural/historical aspects)

These categories become the primary focus and foundation for data analysis and guided interpretation of findings.

19.0 Participants

The centre in this study is a full time non-profit Daycare Centre. It is community-based and is managed by a Board of Trustees. The children range in age from birth to 5 years of age. There are 60 children on the roll, with the centre being licensed for 12 infants and 28 children aged over 2 years of age. The two age groups have separate areas. Children in the over 2 area were participants in this study. There are 8 permanent teachers and 1 centre-based student. The centre opens from 7.45am until 5.30 pm from Monday to Friday. It is situated in the grounds of the local high school, in an eastern surburban low socio-economic area of Christchurch. The centre's programme is based on a 'free play philosophy' where children are encouraged to self-select experiences from a range of resources, settings and activities. Structured activities and events in the 'over 2 programme' predominantly involved caregiving routines such as meal times and rest times.

Findings and Discussion

<u>Introduction</u>

Cultural tools are discussed under the headings of the zone of proximal developmental, rules, and scripts/dialogues. Findings are interpreted within a Vygotskian framework. 'Television play or talk' is defined by this study: "As play or talk that involves either verbal, social or physical reference by a child or children to a television or movie character and or programme." The original focus of this study was Superhero play yet as the investigation evolved other forms of television play emerged as dominant themes within the centre. A decision was made to broaden the scope of the study to include Teletubby play, Spice Girl's play and consumerist aspects of play such as McDonald's play that appeared to be directly related to television advertising.

20.0 Propositional Statements

This section sets out the study's findings in the form of 'propositional statements.' Propositional statements were in essence derived from an accumulation of positive examples of a particular phenomenon that appeared in the data and became the accumulative, end product of each of the former steps in the data analysis process. These final outcomes or statements also served to rationalise inclusion of selected data within nominated categories as well as validate the formation of the categories themselves.

The format of this section is as follows: Propositional statements are represented by a code number along with the propositional statement or finding itself. Examples from data are given to support statements, accompanied by discussion. The code number indicates both the category under which the finding has been placed and the

number of the finding itself. The three category headings and corresponding
numbered codes are outlined in the following section.

Category Headings and the Corresponding Codes:

20.1 = The Zone of Proximal of Development as a Cultural Tool

20.2 = Rules as Cultural Tools

20.3 = Scripts as Cultural Tools.

Each finding is placed under one of these 3 categories. Category headings
emerged from the data and were guided by the research question.

Findings Code Example:

20.0: Indicates that this finding is reported under the generic category of:
'propositional statement.'

20.1: (.1) Indicates that this finding relates specifically to the category heading: *'zone
of proximal development as a cultural tool.'*

20.1.1: (1.1) Indicates that this finding is the *'first or number (1)'* finding/statement
under the category heading 'zone of proximal development as a cultural tool.'

Note: For a summary of the findings see Table 1.

TABLE 1. Propositional Statements/Findings

Category / Code	Propositional Statement/Finding
Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)	
20.1.1	Children need to share points of definition and understandings within a play episode/centre activity before they are able to operate in the ZPD.
20.1.2	Television play scaffolds children into social roles and at times extends their vocabulary and conceptual understanding of language.
20.1.3	Television scaffolds children's social understandings through allowing them to construct and develop their own rules about roles.
20.1.4	Children read cultural signs and symbols to make direct connections between the television character as a product and purchasing.
20.1.5	Books about television characters show children negotiating two symbols systems, the written word and the electronic media.
20.1.6	Television related objects (children's clothing, pictures and props) scaffold , and provide links, between the children's home and centre experiences.
20.1.7	Knowledge of television characters and programmes created an intersubjectivity between children and adults.
20.1.8	Children while linking television-related pictures and objects to their 'individual home' experiences remained aware that they shared the 'collective' experience of televiewing with other children.

Category/Code	Propositional Statement/Finding
Rules	
20.2.1	Children actively enforce the rules guiding television play and at times scaffold their play partner's knowledge of rules through discussion and demonstration.
20.2.2	Children scaffolded knowledge for the uninitiated (or the interested) unsure of scripts, symbols and behaviours.
20.2.3	Children assume other children's / adult's knowledge of the rules and roles within television programmes and characters.
20.2.4	Rules about roles within the television play and talk are constructed during interactions.
20.2.5	Pretend play is a collective activity that requires ongoing maintenance.
20.2.6	Children share rules about decoding Superhero symbols.
20.2.7	Television play and talk reflects societal rules regarding children's future roles especially in relation to gender.
Scripts	
20.3.1	Children's use of television scripts / language demonstrates their appropriation of a primary cultural tool.
20.3.2	Children's television play contains gender-sterotyped scripts and behaviour.
20.3.3	Gendered scripts as cultural tools, embody not only the child's cultural past but also presuppositions concerning their future.
20.3.4	McDonald's scripts reveal children's understanding and use of consumerist terms and principles in both play and talk.
20.3.5	Teletubby play allows children to legitimately return to past behaviours and may also evoke parental or adult feelings within observing children.
20.3.6	Children's obvious enjoyment of interactions during Teletubby play indicates that the scripts hold meaning and value for them.
20.3.7	During play children use scripts to stay in character and to let other children know the character they are enacting.

20.1 The Zone of Proximal Development as a Cultural Tool

Play allows children to free themselves from the situational constraints of time and space and the everyday meanings assigned to objects and events (Rogoff, 1998). The zone of proximal development includes children's immediate interactional contexts yet it also transcends the constraints of the here and now. Children during play are offered the opportunity to creatively appropriate meanings, rules and goals and recast them within their own understandings (Sylva, Bruner & Genova, 1976; Packer, 1994). This study found that both past and present knowledge provided a zone of proximal development by extending play opportunities however this occurrence was dependent on children sharing points of definition during their play and discussions.

20.1.1 Proposition 1.1: "Children need to share points of definition and understandings within a play episode/centre activity before they are able to operate in the zone of proximal development."

Observations showed that children needed to share points of knowledge or understanding with peers before they were able to operate within a zone of proximal development. The following account illustrates this finding.

It is early in the morning and children are arriving at the centre. Two staff members and a small group of children are participating in a music and movement session. The group is singing and dancing to the theme song of a children's television programme (You and Me). Two children stand nearby observing the activity. One child moves to the group and attempts to join in but does not know the words of the song or the actions. This child makes three

attempts to join in the session. After the third attempt he leaves the group and begins wandering around the centre.

The staff has assumed that these children have prior knowledge of the television programme. A well known theme song from a children's television programme provides a potentially effective settling device to ease children's transitions between home and centre. However children unfamiliar with this programme are prevented from appropriating the material for this purpose. This episode demonstrates that collectively shared knowledge is able to provide intersubjectivity between children and adults, home and centre, with the prerequisite that children are able to appropriate the knowledge in order to begin this process (Nicolopoulou & Weintraub, 1998).

An example of children needing to share information with peers as a prerequisite to operating in the zone is also seen when a child refuses a peer access to a pretend play episode. The reason for this refusal seems to be based upon the peer's lack of knowledge about the play's requirements.

> Harriet is singing a Spice Girl's song. Nicky attempts to join in but confuses the words. Harriet stops singing, places her hands on her hips and orders Nicky to *"Stop playing."* Harriet continues, *"seeing   you don't know the song you're not allowed to sing it."*

Nicky is denied the opportunity to participate, because according to Harriet, she has failed to demonstrate sufficient evidence that she shares 'her' knowledge of the play script and format.

In contrast during this episode a child is allowed not only entry but full participation, in an established play episode because of the knowledge she shares with the play participants.

> Nicky is seated in the book corner looking at the Teletubby book.

Rosie, Rebecca and Laura arrive to tell Nicky: *"Quick...quick...Teletubby's tea party...we are having a tea party."*

Nicky: *"Yay...yay..."*

She runs from the book area and follows the girls to a group of children who seated at a small table playing with plastic cups and saucers. The children call out in unison, *"Teletubbies...custard...toast...Teletubbies."*

Nicky replies in script, *"Teletubbies uh oh tustard..."*

Two children seated at the table move over to create a space for her. She sits down and immediately becomes fully engaged in the group's play.

Although Nicky was a late comer to an established play episode, she was able to join in and contribute because she shared understandings about the play script and format with her peers.

Findings suggested that television play, like other forms of representational play, provided a zone of proximal development for children. Television play encouraged children to share in others' understandings and to express their own understandings to others. Sometimes children however mistakenly assumed that all peers shared their knowledge and understanding of television programmes or characters. In this example a child is genuinely surprised to discover that a peer does not share his knowledge of the Teletubby programme and characters.

Ben and Susan are looking at the picture of the Teletubbies in my locket. Ben asks Susan to name them. Susan pauses then incorrectly identifies two of the Teletubby characters.

Ben to Susan: *"Don't you know who the Teletubbies are? Why don't you know who the names are? Why don't you know who they are...just watch your TV...when you get home..."*

Yet children still perceived other children (and not adults) to be the most reliable and knowledgeable informants of television programmes and characters. On only one occasion have I recorded a child asking a staff member for information about television, in contrast to many recorded examples of children seeking television-related information from peers. This may have been due to the children's awareness that all staff did not support their interest in television. As a result of prior conversations with the supervisor I discovered that she considered television to be of dubious educational value and was concerned about its influence on children's development and learning.

20.1.2 Proposition 1.2: "Television play scaffolds children into social roles and rules and at times extends their vocabulary and conceptual understanding of language."

Observations showed children during television-related play and conversations appropriating information received through this medium to explore social roles and extend their conceptual understanding of language. However this finding conflicted with several other studies that found children engaging in Superhero play to use restricted and limited vocabulary (Cain and Bohrer 1997; Carlsson-Paige & Levin 1991; Cupit 1989).

Tim is discussing Batman's super human abilities with me.

"... and did you know he leaps buildings in a single bound... like... (demonstrates leaping)...*see just one big jump..."*

Tim is able to qualify what he has said. Through his actions and language he shows me that 'leaping' means 'jumping' and that 'single' means 'one'. Television in this sense is providing a zone of proximal development in giving him alternative words to express familiar concepts.

In another example Lance uses actions to explain words.

Laura: *"...we like Teletubbies."*

Lance: *"We like Teletubbies."*

Lance: *"When things... Teletubbies... go round... they go like this...round...round."*

(He spins around demonstrating the action with his body).

Laura: *"...and have Teletubby toast...and everything..."*

Lance: *"...and Tubby sponges wash their feet with...sponges...see..."*

(Lance bends down and pretends to wash his feet).

Lance illustrates his understanding of words *"go round"* with motor actions and this extends to a discussion, also accompanied by actions of how sponges can be used to wash feet. Throughout Lance's demonstration and discussion, Laura laughed and nodded as if in agreement suggesting that she agreed with her peer's definitions.

Television play also appeared to offer children the opportunity to experiment with social roles and rules. Children's play explorations of gender themes provided a scaffold into gender roles and the accompanying societal expectations. In the following episode Nicky demonstrates gendered behaviour and actions.

Nicky is standing beside me and says; *"I can be a Spice Girl...stop right now...love me very much..."* She wiggles her hips and pouts her mouth. Nicky flicks her hair over her shoulder as she speaks. Her voice has an adult-like quaver and she pronounces the words using an exaggerated American accent. Her actions represent overtly stereotypical female movements.

Nicky is mimicking gender stereotyped actions and words long before she has had the life experience, or even opportunity, to develop a cognitive or social understanding of the messages underpinning her play. Her actions and words are

indicative of gendered behaviour and this may signal the beginning of her socialisation into future gender roles.

In a separate incident Nicky role-plays a 'mother.'

Nicky is in the home corner. She covers a doll with blankets and places it in a buggy.

Nicky to an observing peer: *"She can watch TV when we get home."*

(is referring to the doll) *"Simpsons."*

This comment illustrates the influence of television on play in terms of social roles. Nicky, during play includes monitoring 'television watching' as part of the 'mother-baby' theme. Her dialogue suggests that her role as a mother involves deciding 'when' and 'what' her child can watch on television. Nicky through play has defined her parental role to include making decisions and perhaps placing restrictions on her 'child's' televiewing routines.

During this episode children use television-related props, as tools, to investigate roles and issues relating to our social justice system.

Four boys (Sam, Ben, Tim and Tom) have constructed a large enclosure with wooden blocks. The structure takes up about half of the floor space available in the block corner. Sam, Ben, Tim and Tom are using McDonald's give-away toys as play props. Ben makes loud, siren-like noises as he places two of the McDonald's toys inside the enclosure.

Sam: *"...get to jail...get to jail...master...get away get away we don't need you."*

Tim: *"He bites people."*

Tom: *"That pig eats people so he has to go to jail."*

(He places the Miss Piggy Muppet toy inside the block enclosure). I observe that one of the main play props (or toys) the children are using is 'Hamburglar'

(a McDonald's character depicting a burglar who steals hamburgers). This toy has a jail-striped top and a black scarf tied over his eyes.

Provoked by props that represent McDonald's characters, these children explore through play, the workings of our social justice system. One child plays the role of 'jailor' and his role is to put the toys into jail. His play partners clarified this role during their discussion of the alleged crime and consequences (the crime is biting and eating people and the punishment is being jailed). This episode illustrates children use of both verbal terms ('jail' and 'master'), and actions (placing the toys inside the enclosure after having built the enclosure for this express purpose), to try out the roles and processes of our social rule making and keeping systems.

In addition these children appropriated the information in a way that was relevant to their own lives and this was demonstrated by their mastery of cognitive and symbolic systems to represent collectively acquired social information during play activities (Durkheim, 1973). The crime was 'biting' (a typical offence for children of their age). The punishment was exclusion *"get away we don't need you"* and this also seemed very relevant to these young children's lives and their perception/experience of punishment.

20.1.3 Proposition 1.3: "Television scaffolds children's social understandings through allowing them to construct and develop their own rules about roles."

In addition to television providing a scaffold for children in terms of social roles, it also appeared to provide children with the opportunity to construct and develop their own rules about roles adopted during play.

Tim, Ben, James, Nicky and Helen are playing Beetleborgs (animated television programme).

Tim: *"Where shall I sit…where shall I sit…I don't want any arguments."*

The four children are negotiating roles and talking animatedly.

I am finding it difficult to decipher whom is saying what but can hear snippets

of: *"…you could be… I will be… he's… she wants to be… then we could…*

let's… you have to…."

Children negotiating rules about roles during television play episodes created

significant interaction between them. This particular discussion for example lasted

over fifteen minutes. The children began the discussion with some common ideas

generated from the television programme, then from these shared points of knowledge

they developed and negotiated their ideas and plans. During this episode I observed

their negotiations about the play roles (who would do what or what character they

would be) lasted almost twice as long as the actual play itself.

Although it was not common for children to change the roles of the

Superheroes, in this episode Sam changes the rules to recreate the role (and

personality) of Batman. Sam's reconstruction of the Superhero's role appeared to be

in response to his need to express feelings of frustration created by the unsatisfactory

outcome of an earlier incident (he was reprimanded by a staff member for swearing

after Tania and Harriet told on him).

Harriet, Tania, Sam and James are playing in the home corner. Harriet knocks

on the door (doorframe prop in the home corner).

Harriet: *"…knock…knock…"*

Sam is on the other side of the Door.

Sam*: "I'm the alligator to eat up your babies."*

Excited squeals from the other children. Harriet and James try to hide behind a

rack of dress up clothes in the home corner.

James (excitedly): *"Hide the babies...hide the babies."*

The children come out from behind the clothes rack and run to look for another hiding place. Sam growls and approaches them.

Tania to Sam: *"Sam come and get this."* She waves a doll (baby) at him and appears to be deliberately taunting him. *"What are you waiting for?"* (to Sam)

Sam: *"I'm waiting for Batman and the dogs."*

Tania: *"This is our dog and you can't have him."* (she grabs James)

Sam: *"Batman is going to eat your babies then."*

The episode ends abruptly when Tania suddenly says: *"I know that it is hiding time but we are not playing this game any more and [I know how you feel]"* (it is unclear whom this last comment is directed to).

Sam apparently angry and frustrated with his peers for telling on him then teasing him changes the rules and reconstructs Batman's role. Batman, usually the 'saviour' and upholder of safety and justice, suddenly becomes the aggressor and the one to be 'saved from'. Tania does not support Sam's unconventional reconstruction of the Batman role and indicates her disapproval by withdrawing from the play episode.

During a separate incident I observe Sam once again changing the rules of Superhero play. In this example however Sam reconstructs the format of the play rather than the role of the Superhero. He engages in the play in a secretive and solitary manner uncharacteristic of most Superhero episodes.

Sam is in the block corner playing with three small, plastic toy horses. He appears deeply engaged in the play and is softly making Superhero type sounds. Sam covers the toys with his body and whispers soft, barely audible noises. A

child approaches and he quickly re-positions his body in a way that prevents this child from hearing or seeing his play.

Sam: *"Daddy is in trouble...you need saving."* (softly to himself).

He picks up the horses and moves them in galloping type action while still whispering quietly:

"I'll save you...I'll save you...neigh...neigh...come quickly. (Superhero noise)...*quick... Superman...now...now."*

Sam is requesting Superman's presence so he can save his "Daddy." He uses the horses as a prop for the Superhero play, with Superman arriving on horseback rather than flying, his usual mode of transport. Aspects of this episode demonstrated actions uncharacteristic of typical Superhero play. For example Sam carried out this play alone and in fact actively prevented a peer from participating by shielding his activity. His speech was secretive, hushed and almost inaudible. Previously observed Superhero episodes involved loud volumes of noise, frantic and active gross motor activity, with groups rather than individual children, participating in the play. Sam had again adapted this form of play and appropriated the material to suit his own purposes. This child's active appropriation, as opposed to a passive absorption of media related themes, was a relatively common occurrence in the centre reminding me of the complementary roles of individual agency and culture during children's play and discussions.

Laura, Susan and Rachel are discussing whether Luke can be a Spice Girl and continue to participate in their play (the play has evolved from mother and father play into Spice Girl play after Susan entered the group).

Susan: *"Luke you can't be a Spice boy you know."*

Rachel: *"Yes he can, my Daddy was a Spice boy at a party."*

Laura: *"Your Dad can't be a Spice Girl...he's a Dad."*

Rachel: *"He wasn't a Spice girl...he was a Spice boy...so Luke can be one...you just be one Luke...and we will play...ok?"*

Luke: *"But I don't want to be a Spice boy...I'll just be Batman...look here is my Batman cape...*(he picks up piece of fabric from the dress-ups).

Susan: *"See I told you he couldn't be a Spice boy."*

Rachel: *"He can so...but he's just going to be Batman...eh Luke?"*

Laura to Rachel: *"Did your Mum help your Dad be a Spice boy...?"*

The children's discussion shows they are attempting to modify their own understandings to accommodate Rachel's. The dominant group belief is that if you want to play Spice Girls then you must be female. However Rachel's personal experience (her father's party antics) sees her challenging the others' rule about this play and gives evidence of the influence of life/home experiences in children's emerging thinking processes. Rachel attempts to extend her peers' beliefs by developing and introducing a new rule, males can be Spice Girls. At first the other children appear to reject Rachel's contribution yet Laura's final comment to Rachel suggests that she may be revisiting her original thinking and giving this new idea some further thought.

French and Pena (1991) maintain that television is replacing parents, family and peer's place in informing children about their future societal roles. I found that television play tended to reflect rather than inform children of societal dilemmas, discourses and tensions regarding societal roles. Television play seemed to allow or even encourage children to experiment with social roles, power struggles and conflicting ways of seeing the world. On one hand it could be argued that the influence of television-related themes in children's play were enabling children try

out a far greater range of thinking, roles or experiences than their own life experiences could offer. Although of course it is debatable whether this is beneficial for children in all circumstances and remains dependent on the theme or issue itself. Television-related play however in this sense, is providing a zone for societal tensions to be 'played out', 'tried out' and then mediated by children in terms of their emerging social understanding and development.

20.1.4 Proposition 1.4: "Children read cultural signs and symbols to make direct connections between the television character as a product and purchasing."

As the study progressed I became increasingly aware of these children's ability to 'read' cultural signs and symbols. This ability was especially evident when children asked to see my cards or locket showing the various television characters. Children repeatedly linked these pictures to personally acquiring and purchasing television-related products.

Charlie approaches me and asks to see Barney. Bianca and Lance see me getting the prompt cards out and gather around. Bianca and Charlie start competing for the pictures. The children hold on to specific cards refusing to pass them around to peers as asked. Bianca grabs at Charlie's pile.

Charlie: *"I've got that one. I've got that one at home."* (he is pointing to a picture of Barney)

Bianca: *"I have...you haven't..."*

Charlie: *"I'm going to buy one so there...Daddy will buy me one...."*

I show Bianca the other cards and try to distract her but she continues trying to outdo Charlie in terms of who owns what and who is going to buy what next.

Their conversation focuses solely on personal 'possession' and 'purchase' of the television characters.

These children are seeing pictures of the television characters and associating them with purchasing. This episode illustrates one of many times I observed children connecting television and consumerism. The connection was socially constructed in that children's play and talk about television demonstrated their collective participation in the ideals and values of a consumerist society. Children were learning to 'desire' and learning to 'acquire.'

In another interaction Charlie asks to see the 'Barney videos' (this term has become his euphemism for the prompt cards).

I get the cards out and he quickly sorts through them until he finds the picture of Barney.

Charlie: *"Barney!* (excited recognition) *I'll but that one…and that one…"* He turns to me.

"Could you buy that one for me?"

Charlie and I had many other discussions about the possibility of his parents, grandparents, or me, being able to purchase these products for him.

During an art activity two children (Katie and Bianca) recognise an advertising catalogue lying in a pile of magazines. The catalogue is immediately identified by these children as belonging to 'The Warehouse.'

They begin cutting out pictures of television-related products from the catalogue.

Katie: *"This is the Simpsons. Bart…Lisa…Maggie…"*

Bianca: *"And here is…. Teletubbies… let's buy them…let's get this stuff."*

Katie: *"At the Warehouse... the Warehouse... where everyone gets a bargain."* (sings the advertising jingle).

These children accurately identified the catalogue as belonging to a well known national corporate chain store by 'reading' and decoding symbolism in the form of environmental print. This particular symbolism was so evocative in fact that children needed only to look at the colour of the catalogue (red) in order to determine its source and internalize the authorial intent of the catalogue writers,

"At The Warehouse you buy things...good stuff."

The children shared in the thinking of the authors of the advertising text by imbuing socially constructed symbols with meanings that were in turn shared collectively with other members of their society. Troseth and DeLoache (1998) maintain that the specific challenge for young children is the need to take information from a symbol as information about the real world. Children are continually asked to infer a message, knowledge or a particular state of affairs based on knowledge acquired from societal symbols. These children demonstrated competence in this area through their ability to decode and associate symbol with information.

Other examples in the data further illustrated children's ability to internalize cultural symbols, and to appropriate them during dialogue and play. This particular example involves a conversation about *"buying things"*.

Luke and Tim have asked to see my 'pictures' (prompt cards). I show them the cards. Luke is holding the 'Barney' card (it also features Baby Bop).

Luke: *"Margaret can you buy me that one?"* (he is pointing to Barney)

Me: *"No Luke I can't."*

Tim points to Baby Bop picture.

Tim: *"Margaret can you buy me that one?"*

Me: *"No Tim I can't buy you that one."*

Luke: *"Mummy can or Pops can."*

Tim: *"I have that one at home anyway."*

Luke: *"I have that one too."*

Tim points to another picture, *"I want that one."*

Luke replies: *"I want it too…but you need lots more money."*

A significant example of children's ability to decode consumerist symbolism occurs during an interaction when three children not only ask me to buy the product for them, but also tell me exactly where I can purchase it. Once again the picture they are discussing has been cut out from a Warehouse advertising catalogue and is edged in red.

Sam: *"Look it is at the Warehouse so that is where you can get it for me…"*

Me: "How do you know that Sam?"

Sam: (points to the red border on the card) *"…that red means Warehouse."*

This particular picture had no visible advertising logos, symbols or wording. It had certainly not been my intention for children to make links between the television characters and purchasing. Children spontaneously making these links was an unexpected, but enlightening event. Vygotsky believed that children's internalization of culturally produced sign systems brings about developmental transformations and forms the bridge between early and later forms of cognitive development (Cole & Scribner, 1978). I became aware that young children skilfully appropriate whatever cultural material is available to them within their environments. In doing so they gain access to and understanding about the values and systems operating within their own society, culture and time.

20.1.5 Proposition 1.5: "Books about television characters show children negotiating two symbol systems, the written word and the electronic media."

Findings showed that children learn to 'read' television symbols and appropriate them during play. Books about television characters provided an example of how children were also able to negotiate two symbol systems in order to access information. The Teletubby book and the Teletubby programme shared content and children appropriated both symbol systems to access this information.

Helen is sitting in the book corner looking at a Teletubby book and singing:

"Reach out and touch somebody."

She repeats this line of the song several times while studying the pages of the book. Helen   points to the Teletubby picture and identifies each character out loud by name using one to one correspondence to correctly place name

   with character.

I observe that by naming the characters Helen is transferring the knowledge she has gained through watching the television programme to her book reading activity. Young children are often able to respond meaningfully to symbols before they are able to use or decode that symbol system (Troseth & DeLoache, 1998).

An event recording carried out in the book corner confirmed an initial hunch about the popularity of television-related books. The two most sought after and 'read' books by children were about television characters the Teletubbies and 'Barney.' It was unclear whether the popularity of these books was because of children preferring familiar previously encountered material, or if they were choosing the topics that were of most interest to them.

Children's preference of these books has educational implications for early childhood development and learning. Children choose to read books that represent

previously acquired information encoded in symbol systems that link their home and centre experiences and that relate to their interests. Another possible but unrelated reason for the children's significant interest in these books may be explained by my presence in the centre. I was a daily reminder to the children 'about things related to television' and children had come to associate me with this topic. My presence therefore was stimulating their interest. Evidence of children making links between my presence and television was seen when I returned to the centre after a week's break. A large group of children left their activities and gathered around me with immediate demands to see my television pictures, while others waited impatiently for an opportunity to share their 'latest' stories about television characters and programmes.

Children tended to use the book corner as a quiet place to escape the stimulation of centre happenings. Children would read the Teletubby book alone and sometimes elect to do so even after an offer of story reading. During these times children looked at the pictures and constructed their own stories out loud in Teletubby script. The Teletubby story was always 'read' out loud by children using an infant-like tone imitative of the characters' voices. Reading in 'Teletubby speak' suggested that children were using auditory cues that the book alone, as a visual medium, was unable to offer. This behaviour further suggested that they were transferring and combining skills gained through two separate mediums (book and television) in order to elicit information. When children did request I read the Teletubby story to them, these sessions would often result in groups of children engaging in either Teletubby script or play.

The book providing a stimulus for Teletubby play again highlights children's appropriation of two different symbol systems. The book's static pictures are unable

to demonstrate to the children the Teletubby actions however the pictures do symbolise or represent television images already seen. These previously encountered images become a stimulus for play. Mallan's (1998) study that found young children are more adept at interpreting visual and audio video/television cues, than those offered through story book readings. My own findings failed to find one symbol system (words or electronic media) as being more accessible to children than the other, but rather demonstrated the way in which children are able to effectively utilise both systems in order to access desired information.

20.1.6 Proposition 1.6: "Television-related objects (children's clothing, pictures and props) scaffold, and provide links, between the children's home and centre experiences."

Data suggested that television characters and programmes help children to make links between their homes and the centre. This incident for example illustrates the locket and cards being used by children as a stimulus for further discussion about home events, along with the opportunity to share home happenings with others. A group of six children follow the typical format of the 'card viewing sessions' by initially identifying the characters by name.

> Rachel: "*Let me see those cards again Margaret...* (she points to the Teletubbies)...*I've got Po at home on my bed... at home...Nana got him for me. And Mummy was there too...and we went shopping and got other stuff.*"
>
> Luke: "*My Grandad flew in on an aeroplane.*"
>
> Rachel: "*Did he get Po for you?*"
>
> Luke: "*One day he might.*"

Rebecca: *"My Mum's having a baby you know… it's in her tummy…and I've got Teletubbies on my TV too…and they have TVs in their tummies."*

Charlie and Nicky run up to me as I enter the centre and ask to see my locket. I open it to reveal Kermit and Spiderman.

Charlie: *"Frog!"*

Nicky: *"Spiderman!"*

Charlie: *"Where's the Teletubbies?"*

I show them the cards and find a picture of the Teletubbies.

Charlie: *"At the Warehouse my Dad is going to buy me a video of the Teletubbies…*(points to one of the pictures) *…he's going to buy me that one…"*

Nicky leaves and tells me she is going to make a Teletubby book at the art table. She returns with a drawing and says:

"This is for my new baby in Mummy's tummy (she points to her picture) *and this is the Teletubby's tummy it has a square in it not a baby."*

Me: *"Is that the square?"* (I point to the square).

Nicky: *"Yes that's the TV inside his tummy please write on it and say it is for the baby and I love Mummy and love Daddy and the baby and the family."*

I write down Nicky's words verbatim and read it back to her. She laughs out loud and puts the picture in her backpack to take home.

Nicky's mother is having a baby, a significant event in her family's life. Nicky links this event in her life to the television characters when she makes comparisons between her mother's and the Teletubby's 'tummies.' After this interaction I would often inquire about Nicky's mother's welfare, and she in turn would seek me out to talk about her family's preparations for the baby. What had originally begun as a

discussion about Teletubbies, created a point of shared and mutual interest between us that lasted the duration of my time at the centre.

In addition to using the cards to share home events, children would use my locket and cards as a source of comfort when they were 'wandering,' unsettled or upset. Children's clothing depicting television characters provided home and centre links. The following excerpt is an example of a staff member using a television-related clothing, to create a connection between home and centre, and of the child being comforted by this association.

A staff member is at the Door greeting Rebecca and her mother. The parent leaves the centre but Rebecca is reluctant to go outside and join the other children. The teacher holds up one of Rebecca's gumboots and says:

"Are you going to wear your Barbie boots outside today...(pauses and waits for response) *Look where's Barbie?* (the teacher points to the Barbie logo on the boots) *Are you going to show everyone your new birthday Barbie boots?"* Finally Rebecca smiles, points to the Barbie transfer on her gumboots then walks outside to join her peers.

In this interaction the teacher is not only using the Barbie boots to make a centre-home connection, but also to encourage Rebecca to use the boots to create a point of intersubjectivity between herself and her peers.

During a similar incident I use television-related material to comfort an upset child.

James has been shadowing me since his mother left and appears very unsettled. He begins to sob quietly and repeats over and over again that he wishes he were at home because he wants to see his mother. I invite him to look at the cards. As James flips through the cards he visibly calms down (stops sobbing, begins to

breathe normally) and seems to seek comfort in naming the television characters. After spending a brief time looking at the television characters, James informs me that he always watches television on Saturday mornings, and then mentions (in the same sentence) that his mother will be back, to take him home at three o'clock.

In this situation the cards assist a child in making the link between his home and the centre. The television material gives James an opportunity to reconnect with something familiar from home and plays the role of an attachment object that appears to provide a catalyst for his subsequent self-regulatory behaviour (when he informs me and reassures himself that his mother is coming back later).

At other times it was the children themselves, who used television programmes and characters as a way of initiating or sustaining their interactions with peers and adults.

Richard is alone in the book corner reading the Teletubby book. He has been watching me write and is interested in what I am doing (frequently stretching his body to look at my notes or to look at me) but seems unsure how to initiate a conversation.

Richard: *"Teletubbies everywhere. Teletubby everywhere."*

He turns to the last page of the book and looks up at me and says:

"Margaret look Teletubby on scooter like mine one."

In addition to using television material to seek comfort or to scaffold adult-child interactions, children used this material to establish or maintain their own social networks and interactions.

James has been observing a group of four boys playing in the block corner and seems interested but unsure how to join in the activity. Suddenly he discovers that he

has something in common with one of the group and it this discovery that gains him access into the play.

James notices Sam's socks.

"Sam! I have those Batman socks at home."

Sam replies: *"...so do I at home."*(the socks are on his feet).

Children linked television-related pictures and objects to their personal home experiences yet at the same time remained aware that other children also shared the experience of watching television. Although for some children seeing images of the television characters in the centre proved to be a decontextualised and slightly unusual event.

I have just shown Rebecca the prompt cards and she says with excitement:

"The Teletubbies...Teletubbies. I see them at home...I watch them...I watch them all the time...why are they here...why do you have them here?"

In other situations I would use children's television-related clothing as an opportunity to either initiate or sustain children's conversations. I tended to use this strategy as a way of breaking the ice and getting to know the children during my first few days at the centre.

Harriet approaches me and is wearing a Teenage Ninja Mutant Turtle T-shirt. She stands beside me without speaking. I point out each character on her T-shirt and ask her who they are. Initially she doesn't reply but then draws my attention to one of the characters.

Harriet: *"Look."* (she points to the mask over one of the Turtle's eyes)

Me: *"Is that a mask over his eyes?"*

Harriet: *"Scary, scary..."*

Me: *"Why is it scary Harriet?"*

Harriet: *"Because he won't show me his eyes…like this."* (she covers her eyes with her T-shirt).

I am not convinced that Harriet knows who the Ninja Turtles are yet these characters have nevertheless provided a point of intersubjectivity between us.

20.1.7 Proposition 1.7: "Knowledge of television characters and programmes created an intersubjectivity between children and adults (including the researcher)."

Children associating me with television characters and programmes provided many opportunities for interactions. I quickly formed relationships with the participant children, and feel this was because they associated me with something of interest and familiarity to them.

I repeatedly noticed that the most common reaction of children seeing pictures (especially the Teletubbies) of the television characters at the centre was delight. When children gathered in groups, to collectively play or talk about television characters and programmes, their enjoyment increased. Children's group interest stemmed from their 'mutual recognition' of television symbols, characters or signs. The following episode provides an example of this phenomenon.

Sam is wearing his Batman socks (socks covered in the Batman logo). A group of five children are looking at them. The children look at the socks, then look at each other and laugh. The group begins to chant in unison.

"Batman forever… Batman socks…Batman forever…Batman socks."

These children's recognition and understanding of the symbol's significance was borne out of their collective experience of televiewing and had created an intersubjectivity between them.

During a separate incident Laura and Katie discuss the Teletubbies.

Laura: *"Teletubbies go outside every morning... then they go home."*

Katie: *"Yes they go home... it's way down there."*

Laura: *"Do you know that?"* (This question is directed to me).

Me: *"No I don't know about them."*

Laura and Katie begin talking over the top of each other with occasional pauses to let the other contribute or to finish each other's sentences.

(Parts of this conversation were very difficult to record because of the rapid flow of speech and ideas.)

Laura and Katie: *"They go home."* (in answer to my question)

"Their tummies go round and round."

"People are inside their tummies."

Throughout the interaction the girls remained actively involved in each other's thinking. This may have been the result of this pair sharing the mutual task of educating me about Teletubbies, in addition to sharing information. Moll (1993) states that when children are engaged in tasks that share mutual goals, the task itself, creates an intersubjectivity between partners. My ignorance had provided these play partners with a mutual goal and task that encouraged intersubjective and collaborative understandings between the play partners.

20.1.8 Proposition 1.8 : "Children while linking television-related pictures and objects to their 'individual home' experiences, remained aware that they shared the 'collective' experience of televiewing with other children."

During television-related discussions and play children would often assume others knowledge of the characters and programmes. This assumption seemed to stem from a belief that 'all' children watched television and that the programmes/characters

on 'all' televisions were the same. I considered the possibility that young children may have assumed rather than understood that television was a collective social experience because of age related cognitive limitations such as egocentrism. However when discussing their home events, children clearly understood that not all children shared their home events and were able to differentiate between their own and others' experiences. For example Nicky was aware that not all children's mothers were pregnant. Also children would often talk about their pets or extracurricular activities in a way that suggested they understood that these things were peculiar to their family and could not be generalised to their peers' experiences.

This play episode demonstrates children assuming their peers' knowledge of the Teletubbies.

Helen, Casey and Bruce are at the art table collectively looking at the Teletubby book. The children are making Teletubby sounds, naming the characters, and discussing past episodes of the Teletubby programmes with each other.

"Remember the one where the custard machine…(inaudible) *yeah …and then he…Dipsy…Lala…"* (these comments are directed to all the group)

Throughout this and similar discussions, children take for granted that everyone knows the programme and has knowledge of the characters.

In a related incident Laura, Rosie and Sam are discussing the books, tapes and videos they have at home.

Rosie says that she has *"…those toys at home on my bed…and I play with them sometimes."* (Barney, Baby Bop and BJ)

Rosie asks her peers to tell her what *"Barney toys"* they have on their beds. I note that she automatically assumes the other children know of and own these toys.

Children frequently discussed, decided upon, and sometimes even claimed their favourite Teletubby characters. In this example two children accept that this practice of claiming and choosing will create inevitable conflict between them.

Mike, Sam and Lance are discussing their favourite Teletubby character.

Mike: *"Mine's Po."*

Lance: *"Tinky Winky… and we had a fight over Tinky Winky…we both wanted it."* (this comment is directed to me)

Mike: *"Yeah we always fight over him."*

Summary

Vygotsky (1978) awarded representational play a prominent place in his theory, granting it the status of the "leading factor in development" (p.101). Berk (1994) states that representational play serves as a unique and influential zone of proximal development within which children advance themselves to ever higher levels of psychological functioning. This study found that television inspired play, a specialised form of representational play, scaffolded children's cognitive and socio-emotional development. Children appropriated this form of play to explore social roles, to extend, practise and experiment with language skills and as a device to ease transitions between home and centre.

20.2. Rules as Cultural Tools

Vygotsky's notion of 'rules' emerged from the findings as a relevant concept that demonstrated children using 'rules' as cultural tools during play, to allow for exploration of societal expectations. Rules were defined by this study to include children's understandings of social conventions, expectations and messages, as well as to include the structures that are inherent within the play situation itself. Findings showed that rules appeared twice within pretend play episodes. Societal 'rules' and messages are first represented by children during their play and then manifested again in the 'rules' demanded by the play context itself.

20.2.1 Proposition 2.1: "Children actively enforce the rules guiding television play and at times scaffold their play partner's knowledge of the rules through discussion and demonstration."

Children could be tenacious and determined in getting their interpretations of the rules heard and ensuring that peers complied with these interpretations. The following two episodes observed on separate days, show one child's determination in getting her interpretation of a rule regarding the play actions of the Teletubbies heard and accepted by peers.

Harriet: " I watch Teletubbies."

Nicky: *"So do I. Watch me...* (she jumps up in a starfish fashion) *this is what they do. They go like this* (she jumps again) *Teletubbies jump in puddles in and out."*

Harriet: *"No they don't. They all go into this house and Dipsy forgot to say goodbye so he had to come back again."*

Nicky: *"No Teletubbies go like this…* (jumps again)*…and they jump in puddles."*

(says this forcefully and with some exasperation).

The play episode did not end here, but I left to attend to a crying child.

Four days later I observe Nicky re-enforcing this same rule about Teletubby behaviour, this time with another play partner.

Nicky to Katie: *"Teletubbies jump in puddles. And Spiderman catches Batman in the night… and saves him."*

Katie is upset about a prior, unrelated incident and does not reply. She sobs softly. Nicky attempts to comfort her and offers to get the Teletubby book. She locates the book, returns and opens it on the first page then 'reads' to Katie, *"Teletubbies always jump in puddles."*

(I have to hide my smile).

On another occasion James is playing with Charlie. At the beginning of the episode he takes some time to carefully explain the 'rules' of the play to his friend. His initial emphasis suggests that these 'rules' are to be an integral part of the play episode.

Charlie: *" Spiderman…yeah I'll show what he does….* (makes clawing actions with his hands)*…he has a web…to climb in. And catch baddies in. And that's what he does…this is how you do* it (demonstrates a climbing type action)*…ok?"* Charlie begins to mimick the Spiderman actions in the exact manner that James has demonstrated.

The most frequently enforced rule by children during play involved ensuring that the 'right players' had access to the play.

A group of five children Tony, James, Sarah, Rose and Tim are making scary noises. I can not hear exactly what they are saying but have heard the words *"Beetleborgs"* and *"Batman"* repeated several times. The group is outside behind the climbing frame. They are huddled together in a circle facing inwards with their backs to nearby children not involved in the play. Jane tries to enter the group. The group of five are calling out to each other and begin kicking their legs and waving their arms.

"Keep her out…keep her out…"

Sarah notices me watching and calls out

"Margaret…we don't want her…tell her she doesn't know how to play…and she's wearing those pants again."

As Sarah says this she turns to the group and says:

"Do we…do we?"

Sarah is clearly stating the rule 'that if you don't know how to play then you can't play.' Her active enforcement of the rule is seen in her response to Jane's alleged transgression of this rule. Sarah seeks the other children's and my support for her stance and in doing so assumes our collective agreement of this rule. Previous studies have also indicated that rules belong to the play situation itself rather than to the individual child (Berk, 1994; Rogoff, 1990, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978). Sarah's actions indicate that she sees this rule as belonging to the group rather than to the individual, and perhaps this explains why she enforces it with such authority. Nicolopoulou and Cole (1993) argue that the authority of rules in pretend play is not dependent on certain individuals, but is always embedded within the structure of the collectively shared activity.

20.2.2 Proposition 2.2: "Children scaffolded knowledge for the uninitiated (or the interested) unsure of scripts, symbols and behaviours."

Children spontaneously scaffolded for peers the requirements or rules of television play in terms of the characters' roles, actions or scripts during play episodes and centre activities. Scaffolding was sometimes requested by peers, but peers also scaffolded play partners without prior invitation.

Mike has drawn a picture of Po (a Teletubby character) and shows it to me. Andrew asks to see it too. I comment on the antennae protruding from the character's head and the television in his tummy.

Andrew: *"It is not a TV it's a square."*

Mike: *"Yes it is. Because you watch things in it."*

Andrew: *"It is not."*

Mike: *"You do watch things in it like the Teletubbies. It's on TV."*

Mike is teaching Andrew about Teletubby symbolism. Mike intended his square to symbolise a television yet Andrew disputed this interpretation of the symbol. Mike responded to Andrew's challenge by giving him specific information about the programme and about the unique characteristics of the Teletubby characters (they have television sets in their stomachs). I observed that Mike interpreted Andrew's challenge to mean that he was unknowledgeable about these television characters. However at no time throughout this interaction did it occur to Mike that Andrew may have in fact been challenging his ability to graphically represent the Teletubbies on paper, rather than revealing his own limited knowledge of Teletubby symbolism.

The following situation illustrates another example of peers providing 'unsolicited' scaffolding for a child engaged in Superhero play.

Rose is holding onto a green shawl wrapped around her shoulders. She turns to Jane and Sarah and says, *"I'm Batman."*

Sarah to Jane: *"She can't be Batman...with that on..."* (touches the shawl).

Sarah to Rose: *"You can be Batwoman...if you want to be Batman...wear this..."* (she hands Rose a dark piece of fabric)...*and you put your arms out...*(she demonstrates by holding her arms out at right angles) *...then run."*

Sarah informs Rose that she can not be Batman wearing a green shawl. The rule, according to Sarah, is that Batman wears a dark cape and he positions his arms at right angles to his body. Also 'green' obviously was not Batman's colour and this was non-negotiable. Others' studies are in concordance with the finding that children enforce specific rules about the play roles related to characters in television programmes (Cupit, 1989; Dawkins, 1991).

In this situation however a child offers her play partner advice about a television identity and he seeks further guidance.

Rachel and Tom are cutting out pictures from catalogues and magazines at the art table.

Tom: *"Do you want that Barbie one?"*

Rachel: *"That's not Barbie."*

Tom: *"Yes it is look."* (points to a pink border).

Rachel: *"No that's just a doll...it's not Barbie...she* (the doll) *you have to have all the Barbie stuff..."*

Tom: *"Oh...ok. Is this one Barbie?"* (points to a picture)

Rachel informs Tom about who is, and more importantly who is not, Barbie. In addition she offers him a guide for detecting pseudo Barbies in the future (if Barbie doesn't come with accessories then it's not Barbie). Tom appears to accept Rachel's

guidance and authority on the subject and this is indicated when he seeks further advice (Is this one Barbie?). One explanation for Tom's acceptance of Rachel's rules about Barbie, may be the overtly gendered nature of the toy. Barbie is predominantly portrayed in advertisements as a toy for 'girls,' rather than 'boys.' For this reason Tom may have felt secure in exposing his lack of knowledge about the toy because boys aren't expected to know about such things. According to Gender Schema theory, for young children with limited life experience, gender stereotypes and schemas are often heavily depended upon to assist with assumptions and predictions of other children's interests and areas of knowledge (Albers, 1998).

Other children also sought peer scaffolding in order to gain more information surrounding the roles and scripts about television characters and related play.

Nicky is with a group of children singing *"Stop Right Now"* (a Spice Girl's song). As she sings she wiggles her hips. This action causes her skirt to swing out from her legs. She appears to be enjoying the sensation, indicated by her laughter and multiple repetition of the action. She turns to the group and announces:

"I'm wearing my Spice Girl's dress today. Stop right now thank you very much." Mike along with the rest of the group is carefully observing Nicky's actions. He asks her to do it again. Nicky obliges willingly.

Nicky: *"And you go like this…* (Wiggles her hips)…*and like this…* (Repeats the action)… *Thank you very much* (sings this phrase)... *And then you go like this…* (puts her arms out in front of her body in a dancing type movement).

Nicky demonstrates step by step, the actions and words of the Spice Girl's song to Mike and a group of on-looking children. Her explicit demonstration and explanation of the actions provides the children with a scaffold for future Spice Girl

play in terms of format and script. It was interesting to note however that Mike even after specifically requesting that Nicky repeat her actions, continued to 'observe' rather than 'participate' in the play (although two other girls joined in). Yet research shows that children consistently display a same-sex preference when asked to choose play activities or their favourite toys (Alexander & Hines, 1994; Martin et al., 1995) and perhaps this explains Mike's reluctance to 'try out' the Spice Girl's actions and script.

20.2.3 Proposition 2.3: "Children assume other children's/adult's knowledge of the rules and roles within television programmes and characters."

Observations showed that children assume that both children and adults share their understanding of the rules guiding television play episodes or television characters' roles. Assumptions tend to be based on children's perception that play partner's shared their knowledge of television programmes and characters. Yet my findings suggest that not all children engaging in Superhero play are aware of the 'rules' of this play. In the following episode for example Tony discovers that James doesn't know the rules guiding this Superhero's role.

James and Tony are on the climbing frame outside.

Tony to James: *"Watch me jump…I am the Incredible Hulk…look at my shirt…I'm getting bigger…*(he tears at his shirt as though ripping it in half)*…I'm too big for this shirt…*(he turns toward to James)*…let's be Hulks."*

James: *"Why are you too big?"*

Tony: (in a surprised tone) *"Don't you know the Incredible Hulk…he explodes his clothes."*

Tony was required to make the rules guiding this Superhero character explicit, when James failed to follow his lead in the play. He had mistakenly assumed that James already had this knowledge. This finding conflicts with Cupit's (1989); Dawkin's, (1991); Haas Dyson's, (1996), Kostelnik's et al (1986) and Paley's (1994) studies. Their research concludes that Superhero play provides children with a shared and 'prescripted' understanding of the rules and requirements of this form of play. The discrepancy between findings may be explained by the focus of this study. My investigation examined the ways that young children reach or come to share intersubjective understandings during play. Data therefore was analysed and interpreted within this framework. Children who did not seem to share play motives or meanings subsequently became a focus of my observations and it is possible that this factor created a researcher bias.

In addition to children presuming 'others' knowledge of television, children would also assume 'my' knowledge of television characters. On discovering my ignorance they would attempt to educate me about the programmes and characters. In this interaction however Tania deems me 'beyond education.'

Tania asks to see my pictures and pauses when she sees a picture of the Spice Girls.

Tania: *"Spice Girls."* (Laughs).

Me: *"Who?"*

Tania*: "They sing*...(pauses and looks at me for a moment as though expecting me to suddenly remember who she is talking about) *you know"* (impatiently).

Me: *"What else do they do?"*

Tania: *"They just sing...(pauses again waiting for me to respond)... you know because they are friends and cousins...you know... (pauses)... so they just sing...together...all the time...and do things like that...you know!"*

(She walks away seemingly frustrated by my lack of knowledge).

Yet at other times children made accurate assumptions about their peer's knowledge of television inspired activities or play. Two children engaged in an art activity collectively associate a prop with Superhero play. During this activity each child accurately predicts the other's intentions and actions without any apparent negotiation or communication about the play.

James and Andrew have sighted thin strips of red cellophane on the art table.

James turns to Andrew: *"Ninja Turtles."*

Andrew: *" Ninja Turtles."*

James leaves the table momentarily. While he is away, Andrew places a cellophane strip across his eyes. James returns, looks at Andrew's mask and exclaims, *"Ninja power."*

James too makes a mask and on completion places it across his eyes. The boys run outside and engage in Ninja play (mock karate fighting).

Throughout this interaction, including the time James and Andrew first noticed the cellophane strips, the children shared a common understanding about both the activity (making Ninja masks) and the ensuing play (Superhero play). At no time during the episode did the children confer, or explain to their play partner the meaning or significance of the cellophane. Nor did the boys discuss what they were going to do in order to make the masks, or the direction that the play would take once the masks were completed. The interaction remained grounded in assumption, with each child taking for granted that the other shared both his intention and understanding about the

Ninja Turtle activity. The red strips of cellophane as a prop or tool, collectively symbolised for the partners, this form of play.

20.2.4 Proposition 2.4: "Rules about roles within television play and talk are constructed during interactions."

Rules associated with roles are implicit and there is an expectation that others will also understand the rules, as they are derived from a shared social context (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). This study's findings suggested that rules are also stated explicitly and may be negotiated and constructed by players during play. I discovered that as children developed a mutual or intersubjective understanding of the rules, they were then able to move from this base to negotiate, experiment and extend their own perspectives to include other children's contributions. This episode provides an example of children's creative reconstruction of the 'rules'.

James and Jon have just spent some time clarifying whether you need a Batman cape to fly. Throughout the discussion James is adamant that to be a *"flying Batman"* you need a cape.

Jon challenges this rule by proposing that Batman,

"Can fly any way he wants to…"   .

Five minutes later the two boys are sitting outside inside a large wooden box.

Jon to James: *"Hey this is our aeroplane…our Batman aeroplane…"*

James: *"Yeah…yeah…super sonic Batman aeroplane…Batmans fly in this sometimes to get to Beetleborgs."*

Jon and James co-ordinated their perspectives by initially clarifying the rules, then extending their own understandings by building upon each other's contribution. Children's collaborative play often requires play partners' efforts to take the

perspective of others and to clarify communication through negotiating scripts and rules of play (Bretherton, 1984; Corsaro & Rizz, 1988; Goncu, 1987).

Even in discordant interactions children who shared some rules about the proceedings or structure of the play were able to continue with the episode. Disagreements in fact, could result in an extension of an original idea and sometimes led to more complex play. At one point during James' and Jon's Batman play, it appeared the episode may end because of the play partners' inability to reach intersubjective agreement about the rules. Yet when James modified his initial beliefs about 'Batman and flying' to include Jon's perspective he enabled the play to continue. However not all children were able to reach intersubjective understandings during negotiations. In the following interaction the children's inability to share the other's perspective in terms of the rules, stops the play altogether.

Kim and Harriet are in conflict about how you play Teletubbies.

Harriet: *"Come on Kim let's play Teletubbies...come on Dipsy ...come on Dipsy."*

Kim: *"That's not how you play Teletubbies* (the word *play* is stressed and said with some exasperation)...*go round and round..."*

(Harriet is riding a scooter backwards and forwards in a line on the hard area outside). Harriet climbs off the scooter, dumps it on the ground and shouts back to Kim as she is walking towards the Door to go inside:

"I'm not going round and round...I'm not playing Dipsy...I'm not playing...I'm going inside."

Pretend play asks children to integrate roles, rules and shared knowledge (Meckley, 1995). There is an ongoing expectation that play partners will know and follow the rules. These children were learning that pretend play is a collective activity

that requires ongoing maintenance. Throughout each play episode participating children were asked to maintain points of intersubjectivity regarding their own and their partners' expectations and intentions. Children were able to deviate from the rules however when one partner rejected the rules all together, the play was unable to continue.

In this play episode children reconstruct and rewrite the rules about the Superheroes. Although this was not a common occurrence the ensuing example demonstrates one child's creative interpretation of the rules guiding the Superhero role.

> Tim is wearing a wig made out of pantyhose and is shaking his head making the 'hair' swing out.
>
> Tim: *"I've got big hair."*
>
> Sam puts the wig on his head and begins to use it like a Kung-fu instrument.
>
> Sam: *"Cha...cha... Cha...Superman...cha. Chas. Take that...cha."*
>
> As Sam talks he is swinging his arms and legs out in 'King-fu' like movements and is turning his head very quickly. This action causes the 'hair' to spin out and hit another child in the face.
>
> Sam: *"You are all my servants...Superman will chop you up with my hair."*
>
> He continues rotating his head, swinging out his arms and legs, his play partners are quickly getting out of his way. A staff member intervenes and reminds Sam to be careful of others.

Sam is certainly using creative licence in reconstructing Superman's role within this social interaction. He has added karate skills to Superman's repertoire of abilities and turned his peers into villains. However another interpretation of Sam's actions in terms of his reconstruction of the rules, is that Superman has become the villain

preying on innocent children. In both situations Sam has changed the rules guiding the role of Batman and his behaviour. Unfortunately I did not get the opportunity to explore the motive or intent underlying this play performance. Sam's actions became increasingly aggressive requiring staff intervention and I made a decision not to inadvertently re-enforce his behaviour by discussing it with him.

Children participating in this discussion clarify and construct a television character's role with one

child taking the lead in explaining the role to the others.

A group of three children are deciding what to play.

Lance, Ben and Tom are sitting outside on the bench discussing what they will play.

Lance: *"The Incredible Hulk?"*

The others agree.

Tom and Ben: *"Yeah."*

Tom: *"Is he a man?"*

Lance: *"Yes."*

Tom: *"Is he real?"*

Lance: *"Yes."*

Ben: *"Is he like this?"* (pulls an aggressive face and pumps up his arms)

Lance: *"...and he goes funny colours. And...he's real... real...real ugly."* (pulls an aggressive face)

Tom: *"Let's play Teletubbies."*

Lance's play partners are initially unclear about the role of the Incredible Hulk although they have all agreed to play. Lance responds by giving his peers information about the character and the play's requirements. A twist at the end is that once Ben

becomes aware of these requirements, he changes his mind about participating in the play and offers Teletubby play as an alternative.

At other times children mutually negotiated the requirements of a play role. This interaction demonstrates two children's equal commitment to the maintenance of the play. The strategy they used allowed for the play theme to be extended so roles could be created for both participants.

Tania and Nicky are cutting out pictures from a magazine at the art table and using the pictures as wrapping paper.

Nicky hands the pictures to me saying, *"Birthday presents for Margaret."'*

I thank her each time I receive one (about six times in total).

Nicky to Tania: *"I'm giving lots of presents to Margaret."*

Tania: *"I don't care…I can give her some too…"*

Nicky to Tania: *"I know we can go to McDonald's too."*

Tania: *"Yum… yum…McDonald's."*

Tania: *"Yes, yeah…McDonald's* (sings the jingle) *…good times…great taste…at McDonald's."*

During this episode Nicky wraps presents for my birthday then extends the play to include a trip to McDonald's. The inclusion of McDonald's in the birthday play is relevant. Throughout my data I observed children associating 'going to McDonald's' with birthday celebrations. Nicky as the 'present giver' changes her role mid play to avoid a role conflict with Tania (who also wants to be present giver). Tania's agreement *(yeah yes)* with Nicky's decision to include McDonald's in the play suggests that she is willing to accept her peer's reconstruction of the original roles in order to maintain the play. The episode concludes with Nicky and Tania mutually

agreeing to extend the play to include 'gift giving' and 'partying at McDonald's' as part of the birthday play theme.

20.2.5 Proposition 2.5: "Pretend play is a collective activity that requires ongoing maintenance."

My observations showed that pretend play is an activity that places demands on its participants in terms of their willingness and motivation to maintain each episode and also on their ability to reach intersubjective understandings about the play. When intersubjectivity was unable to be reached among play partners pretend play could not continue.

> I am discussing Teletubbies with a group of children and I hear a child calling out. James and Laura are engaging in Superhero play when James' behaviour escalates to exclude rather than include Laura in the play. He is using cardboard roll props as 'weapons' and is intimidating his play partner.
>
> James pushes them into Laura's face saying *"Ra...ra...ra...ra."*
>
> Laura starts to cry. I intervene and ask James to stop putting the rolls in Laura's face. He ignores my request and I take the cardboard rolls from him.

In this situation James' and Laura's Superhero play resulted in adult intervention. I was aware that the play was escalating but was initially monitoring it to allow the children time and opportunity to independently negotiate or re-establish the rules. Laura's call for help indicated that neither child was able to do so. My intervention in this episode shut the play down rather than maintaining it yet it provides a clear example of pretend play as a collective and mutual activity that requires ongoing maintenance. When James failed to include Laura in the play and sought to express his own behaviour rather than 'reading' and responding to Laura's

cues to redirect his actions, the play was unable to continue. At the point of my intervention neither child was capable of putting into place strategies to maintain the play (nor for that matter was I, judging by the outcome of my intervention).

During play activities children would subtly monitor their own and other children's actions and behaviour. At times what initially appeared to be an individual and solitary activity on closer investigation revealed covert but astute interactions taking place between play partners.

Nicky, Tom and Harriet are playing with small, plastic dinosaur toys in a trough filled with sawdust. Harriet is making a Superhero type noise as she moves the models around in the trough. The children seem to be engaged in solitary or parallel play and appear relatively unaware of the other children's actions. Although there is talk, this is not directed at any particular child and takes the form of egocentric speech rather than interactive dialogue. The children who do speak do not look at each other, nor do they reply to the others' comments.

Nicky: *"Mine is doing that."* (She moves the dinosaur using a circular motion)

Harriet: *"Stomp. Stomp. Mine is brown enough…that's the shadow down there."* (Says this as she fingers the dinosaur model).

Harriet: "Put some down there."

Tom: *"…and on his tail…"* (As he says this he piles up sawdust on the dinosaur's tail).

Harriet: *" Nearly open."* (She is moving her dinosaur through the sawdust).

Throughout the episode the three children who spoke did not direct their comments to peers. Occasionally a child would look up but on noticing a peer watching would look away, or down, avoiding eye contact. It seemed that the children were privately 'checking out' each others' actions. At first glance I saw three children

at the trough engaged in non-interactive, parallel play. However after further observation I noted that each child was actually carefully monitoring their own, as well as their peer's play actions and in doing so were maintaining perhaps even prolonging this pretend play activity.

After becoming aware of this 'private monitoring strategy' I observed it occurring in many other situations throughout my time in the centre. These situations did not always concern television-related activities, yet provided examples of young children apparently unsure of social requirements or expectations in a range of situations from play with peers, to participation in centre routines, using 'private monitoring' strategies. The strategy involved vigilant but unobtrusive monitoring of peers' and to a lesser extent adults' actions and behaviour. A sociocultural interpretation of this behaviour may be that children are observing and internalising social and cultural values and expectations. Western culture for example predominantly values independence and encourages children to pursue individual achievements and success. These children were appropriating a strategy that allowed them to gain knowledge, while maintaining independence. Quietly observing others means that no one need know that you do not know. Covert observation affords individuals the opportunity to find out about social expectations and required group behaviour prior to personal participation.

Rogoff (1998) states that observation is an important collaborative process in children's development and one that is often mistakenly regarded as passive. Children's monitoring of events happening around them provides them with vital information in terms of social and cultural knowledge (Bandura, 1986; Verba, 1984; Zimmerman & Rosenthal, 1974). Lave and Wegner (1991) appropriately term this form of observation 'legitimate peripheral participation.'

20.2.6 Proposition 2.6: "Children share rules about decoding Superhero symbols."

Children's discussions about television characters suggested there are rules in the form of collective beliefs that guide children in decoding and interpreting Superhero symbols. On the occasions that children were unable to identify television characters they resorted to looking for cues and clues in the forms of symbols, that could offer this information.

Robert and Tim are looking at the prompt cards but are unable to identify one of the television characters.

Robert: *"He has a cape...so he is a good guy."*

Tim: *"...good guys?"*

Robert: *"...he's a good guy."*

Me: *"Why does a cape make him a good guy?"*

Robert: *"Because Batman and Superman have capes."*

Tim: *"...yeah...yeah...capes."*

The rule is 'capes symbolise good guys' and this provides a 'shared clue' for the children in the absence of other knowledge. Rules about Superhero play were also evident in children's discussions about the roles and abilities of the Superheroes.

Tracey: *"Spiderman catches people."*

Kim: *"...yeah he saves them."*

Tracey: *"No, no Batman does that...he saves people....Spiderman chases them back to Batman so then he saves them."*

Kim: *"...he does not...Spiderman's job is to save them."*

Tracey: *"...but he can't because Batman does that."*

Children repeatedly identified 'saving people' and 'flying' as the primary occupation of the Superheroes yet had difficulty in expanding upon this concept in order to introduce other aspects into these characters' profiles.

Charlie sits down beside me and asks to see my cards. He looks through the cards and points to the Batman symbol on one of the cards.

Charlie: *"That's Batman. And I like him...do you like him?"*

Me: *"I don't know much about him."*

Charlie: *"He's a man who flies and things and saves baddies."* (I think that Charlie is meaning 'goodies' not baddies)

Me: *"How does he fly?"*

Charlie: *"Puts this on."* (points to the cape)

This conversation once again illustrates a child identifying the abilities and attributes of a Superhero via an external symbol (the cape). Yet in the following discussion Sam actively resists my attempts to personalise and expand upon the characteristics of Superheroes beyond his formerly stated boundaries.

Sam is looking at a picture of Superman and begins to make growling, swooshing type noises.

Sam: "(noises)...*he saves...saves goodies...catches baddies."*

Me: *"What do you think he has for breakfast?"*

Sam: *"He doesn't do stuff like that."* (impatiently)

In this situation my question strays from the accepted framework of typical Superhero behaviour. Sam immediately pulls me back into line then lets me know that he is not prepared to continue with the direction that this discussion is taking.

At other times children appropriated the accepted Superhero symbols and actions to create their own versions of these characters.

Harriet has overheard a group of children talking with me about their television preferences. She turns to me and says, *"My Mum doesn't let me watch TV."* Harriet runs away from the group, her arms out stretched stiffly behind her body calling out:

"Tractor man...tractor man...saving you. Tractor man."

A large school field is over the fence from the centre clearly visible to all the children. A man is cutting the lawns using a ride-on lawn mower. Harriet races towards the direction of the lawn mower performing Superhero actions (arms outstretched mimicking flying).

Harriet specifically informs me that she does not watch television at home although her play behaviour denotes a Superhero influence and imitates other children's Superhero actions. In addition Harriet's Superhero script includes talk about 'saving' (presumably people). Her play creatively combines events occurring in her immediate context (lawn mowing) and the typical Superhero actions to create *"Tractorman."* Perhaps she is subtly reinforcing her comment about *"not watching TV"* with the recreation of *"Tractorman."* Harriet's Tractorman is an original and creative hybrid that merely borrows aspects of the Superhero symbolism and behaviour rather than opting for a total adoption of the code requirements.

Children also saw masks as symbolising Superheroes however the 'mask' unlike the 'cape' did not always assist children in terms of determining whether the characters were 'good' or 'bad.' If a character wore a cape it was commonly accepted that the character was good, but the mask proved to be an ambiguous symbol. In this interaction for example Sarah interprets the 'mask' to mean something fearful.

Sarah is wearing a Ninja Turtle sweatshirt and draws my attention to the characters. She points to the mask covering one of the character's eyes.

Sarah: *"Scary...scary."* (she covers her eyes with her hands and walks away).

20.2.7 Proposition 2.7: "Television play and talk reflects societal rules regarding children's future roles especially in relation to gender."

My observations indicate that children's television play contain gender stereotyped scripts and behaviour. Girls banned boys from Spice Girl play and girls were told by both boys and girls (*"...you can't..,"*) when they engaged in Superhero play. Bassett (1991) claims that television only reflects the existing tensions and contradictions already present in society regarding gender expectations and power divisions. My data identified this trend as also being present in children's television-related play and discussions. Some children for example adopted a 'gate keeping' role during play or discussions to ensure that their peers complied with societal rules about gender roles. The following two incidents illustrate this point.

Sarah tells Harriet, Kim and Rebecca that she is Batman.

Harriet to the group: *"She can't be Batman with hair like that."*

Sarah has long hair and is wearing a hair-band.

On another occasion a group of girls and boys are engaged in play that evolves into Spice Girl's play. Jon is immediately told by two of the girls in the group that he can not be a Spice Girl and he will have to *"...go and play something else."*

In addition children engaged in play activities were often unwilling to transgress the stereotypical gender roles.

Lance runs inside and calls out to a group of nearby children, *"Let's go to Batman's house."*

Bianca: *"I'm not Batman. I'm a Barbie girl in a Barbie world."*

(She sings the last two words).

Bianca responds to Lance's invitation to go to Batman's house by dissociating

herself from Batman

and identifying herself instead as 'a Barbie girl.'

In another incident Rose and James are discussing their favourite television

characters.

James: *"I like Captain Planet and Barney."*

Rose: *"But they lost him. I like Simpsons. Teletubbies and Scooby Doo and the*

Teletubbies and the Teletubbies say uh oh hello and sometimes their custard

machine doesn't work. Who likes the Spice Girls? I'm Posh Spice."

Me: *"Who are you James?"*

James: (incredulously) *"I'm not a Spice Boy!"*

Rose: *"No he's Batman of course."*

Children identified with 'same sex' television characters. The data repeatedly

showed boys identifying with Superhero roles, and girls identifying with Spice Girl

roles. Martin, Eisenbud and Rose's (1995) study also found that children under eight

years of age tend to display 'gender-centric' behaviour and preferences.

In contrast children would state a 'preference for' rather than 'identify with' the

Teletubby characters. Teletubby characters are fantasy, fictional and non-human and

this may explain why children did not personally identify with them during play.

Children at this age and stage of development (3-5 year olds) are becoming

increasingly aware of and interested in societal roles and begin to seek role models of

appropriate gender behaviour (Berk, 1997). These children during play and

discussions appropriated television material in order to gain access to rules and

expectations regarding their future gender roles within society. It makes sense then

that children primarily identified with characters that provided information about their own sex roles. This may also explain why children stayed strictly within the stereotypical television roles of their 'own sex' during play rather than enacting or exploring the gender roles of the 'other sex.'

MacNaughton's (1997) study however found that children of this age are not constrained by social rules or expectations about gender roles during their play. She claims that children exercise agency in play to resist popular culture's stereotypical gender messages. Yet Davies' (1990) findings are in concordance with the findings of this study and conclude that in spite of the freedom or release from social rules that pretend play allows, when children attempt to change the rules guiding discursive practices in play they are quickly pulled back into line by other children. My findings predominantly showed that children stayed within the stereotypical frameworks of television roles. Girls pretended to be Spice Girls and boys pretended to be Superheroes. Children's discussions also reflected a preference for 'same-sex' characters.

Rules emerged as cultural tools that children appropriate during television play to scaffold their own and their partner's knowledge of scripts and play behaviours. Rules about social roles were constructed during play and used as a scaffold into future societal roles, especially gender roles. A final finding was that pretend play required ongoing maintenance work in the form of children's mutual compliance to the rules inherent within the play situation.

20.3. Scripts as Cultural Tools

Children used the following television scripts during their pretend play activities and discussions: Teletubby scripts, Superhero scripts, Spice Girl scripts and McDonald's scripts. Script talk originated from children's collective experience of viewing television and emerged as a linguistic tool that was grounded in a highly specific but shared social symbol system. However exposure to and some understanding of the symbol's communicative significance was a necessary prerequisite to children accessing or using these symbol systems.

20.3.1 Proposition 3.1: "Children's use of television scripts/language demonstrates their appropriation of a primary cultural tool."

Signorielli (1992) argues that television has its own specific symbols and conventions that need to be 'read' by the viewer. I found that children revealed their substantial understanding of the television script's communicative significance through their use and appropriation of this tool in both their play and talk. Children's ability was especially evident when they discriminated between the differing script genres. There was significant variation in the television scripts regarding vocabulary, grammatical arrangements, discourses and meaning. Superhero scripts for example used a variation of vocabulary, specific grammatical forms and tended to focus on the themes of 'power' and or physical attributes.

Jacob and James are outside by the climbing frames. Jacob climbs up on the frame and calls out to James: *"I am the Incredible Hulk...sometimes a man....sometimes a hulk....I save those who need it most. I can do anything...see how I climb...see how I leap...*(he leaps down off the climbing frame and lands on the ground besides James)*...now I am man."*

Jacob is using the Superhero script and accurately applying these words to his actions. His arrangement of the words 'see how I' however is not typical of everyday usage and is even less typical of a young child's speech pattern (Berk, 1997; Santrock, 1997) yet Jacob appears to understand the grammatical requirements peculiar to this script and is able to appropriately apply them to his play.

Teletubby script on the other hand, required children to restrict their vocabularies to a few simple phrases and words. Children using this genre during play respected these conventions and did not extend vocabulary outside of the script's imposed parameters. Children even accurately mimicked the mispronunciation of words in line with this script's speech idiosyncrasies.

Lance and Lucy are playing Teletubbies.

Lucy: *"Tubby toast...tustard."*

Lance: *"Uh oh... uh oh...Lala...Lala...Dipsy...Po."*

Lucy: *" Wabbits...wabbits...windmill...Po."*

Lucy mispronounces the words 'custard' and 'rabbits' in compliance with the requirements of the Teletubby script.

Children's use of jargon and technical terms provided evidence of their ability to also appropriate specialised language terms. In this example Charlie demonstrates his knowledge of modern technology by using the appropriate technical terms to explain the concept of video machines and how they work.

Charlie is sitting beside me looking at a 'Barney' advertisement in the newspaper that has been used to protect the art table during a pasting activity.

Charlie: *"Can you buy me that one?"*

Me: *"No I can't Charlie."*

Charlie: *"Mummy can?"*

Bruce sits down beside Charlie and looks at the advertisement.

Bruce: *"I have that one."* (Points to the picture of a Barney video)

Charlie: *"I want that one. I watch Barney at home."*

Me: *"What is that one?"* (I point to a picture of an audiotape)

Charlie: *"It's a dinosaur. A purple dinosaur. Don't you know Barney?"*

Me: *"Is that a CD?"* (Pointing to a picture of a video)

Charlie: *"No that's called a video."*

Bruce: *" A video?"*

Charlie: *"At home I jump on it and break it."*

Me: *" What is a video?"*

Charlie: *"It makes Barney come on the TV."*

Me: *"How?"*

Charlie: *"You put it like that...*(demonstrates putting a videotape inside a video machine and models pushing buttons)... *like your video at home."*

(This last comment is directed to me).

Me: *"Do you know that my video machine at home is broken?"*

Charlie: *"You can't watch Barney then?"*

Me: *"No, because my video machine doesn't work and because I don't have a videotape of Barney."*

Bruce: *"Our video breaks sometimes and goes..."* (incomprehensible noise - he wrings his hands and gestures confusion).

Charlie to me: *"You will have to buy that new video then...*(points to the videotape in the advertisement)...*and get it fixed."*

This dialogue demonstrates Charlie's, and to a lesser extent Bruces' understanding of the workings of videotapes and video players. Charlie used technical

terms/jargon such as 'video' appropriately and accurately differentiated between pictures of CDs, audiotapes and videotapes. In addition he verbally explained 'how' to use a video machine, accompanied by a demonstration of placing tapes into the machine and pushing buttons to make them work. In Vygotskian terms, Charlie appropriated language as a 'psychological tool' to represent and share accumulated knowledge of the 'technical/material tools' of his own historical and cultural context.

In a similar example Nicky informs me that she knows all the words to a Spice Girl's song because she has listened to them at home:

"...on a tape and on TV."

She explains that she can play the tape *"...lots and lots of times..."* so that she can hear the words *"...again and again..."*

Children also used scripts to practise and extend their language skills. Although Carlsson-Paige & Levin's (1995); Cupit's (1989); Kostelnik's et al (1986) studies found Superhero scripts to be highly repetitive and limited in terms of content and vocabulary, the following example suggests that Superhero scripts are able to advance children's vocabularies.

Tim is holding a piece of paper rolled up in a scroll shape and hands it to me.

Me: *"Do you want me to read this to you?"*

Tim: *"You can't. It is a cryptic message for Superman and the Beetleborgs."*

Me: *"A cryptic message?"*

Tim: *"...yeah it means it's secret...and you won't know what it says."*

In addition to children's ability to differentiate between and use a variation of script genres, children also demonstrated through their use of language, an awareness of the properties and relevance of technology in their lives, and of the ways that it is able contribute to their own skills and knowledge.

20.3.2 Proposition 3.2: "Children's television play contains gender-stereotyped scripts and behaviour."

My data supported others' studies (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1995; Cupit, 1989; NAEYC, 1990) in finding that children's Superhero scripts and talk predominantly, and at times exclusively, focused on the physical attributes, actions and abilities of the Superheroes. Children's discussions about these characters would always begin by referring to their physical abilities and attributes. In contrast, when the Spice Girls featured in children's play or talk, discussions focused solely on the women's physical appearance.

> Sarah, Jacob, Tom and Tim are looking at the picture of Spiderman in my locket.
>
> Sarah: *"...yeah that's Spiderman and he flies around...and chases and climbs and saves people."*
>
> Tom contributes: *"...and so do Superman and Batman. They can fly and do stuff...and they are so strong to carry people."*
>
> Jacob replies: *"...and Robin can too...but he's smaller than Batman."*

The Spice Girl's conversations focused on the women's 'physical appearance' with children giving the most attention to their hair length and colour, and skin colouring. Children (girls) were told by peers that they 'could' or 'could not be' a chosen Spice Girl character on the basis of how closely their physical appearance mirrored that of the character they had chosen to play. Tania for example was informed by a peer during a Spice Girl play episode that she had to be Posh Spice (the woman portraying Posh Spice has dark hair and an olive complexion). When I asked why Tania had to play this particular Spice Girl character, both Tania and her partner answered in an incredulous tone, *"Because she's got black hair!"* Tania is Samoan.

MacNaughton (1997) would explain the girls' reply as being the product of societal messages that are delivered to children in a complexity of ways. She maintains that the majority of children's play worlds are about perceived gender roles and the related role expectations. This phenomena results in play that mirrors the inequities within our society. Dyson (1996) however sees scripts (including gendered scripts) as 'enabling tools' that allow children access to future masculine and feminine roles.

Boys did not participate or express any interest in participating in Spice Girl's play. In fact in this interaction Charlie displays some discomfort in even having to admit, let alone demonstrate, his knowledge of the Spice Girls.

Charlie asks to see my locket and I open it.

Charlie: *" I want to see your other pictures. "* I hand him the cards. He looks at each card briefly but pauses when he comes to a very small, computer-generated picture of the Spice Girls. I am surprised that he is able to identify the characters.

Charlie: *"Spice Girls!"*

Me: *"How did you know that?"*

Charlie: *"Oh you know...*(looks down*)... girls... they dance... you know* (looks away). *Yeah and they go like this. "* (wiggles his hips and blushes - he giggles and blushes again apparently embarrassed at modelling the action).

Charlie's comment *"oh you know... girls...they dance"* shows that he associates the Spice Girls with dancing, except that in this case the 'girls' he is referring to are actually 'women.' Charlie demonstrated the dancing action by wiggling his hips in an effeminate manner, but appeared extremely uncomfortable at portraying this 'stereotypical' feminine action.

In addition to children's television play representing gender-stereotyped scripts and behaviour, children were either unable or unwilling to expand television characters' roles to include a more holistic and realistic portrayal of their identities.

Tania is discussing Batman and talks about this character exclusively in terms of his physical attributes.

Tania: *"He flies...saves people...he's big... flies about."*

The data showed this tendency to be present in all children's descriptions of the Superheroes. These characters were referred to solely in terms of their physicality, while other aspects of their development such as personalities, interests or intellect remained unknown and undeveloped.

Tania: *"That's Spiderman...* (points to the picture)... *he catches baddies and saves people. He's strong."*

Me: *"What else does he do?"*

Tania: *"Oh nothing. Just saves people."*

I found it very difficult to engage children in any form of conversation that extended their perception of the Superheroes, or the Spice Girls, beyond the stereotypical packages presented to children in television programmes or advertisements. So Superheroes, according to these children at the beginning and conclusion of my study, were strong, superior mostly male beings, that could fly and save people, while Spice Girls remained 'girls' who danced, sang and who were always referred to by children, in terms of their physical appearances.

20.3.3 Proposition 3.3: "Gendered scripts as cultural tools, embody not only the child's cultural past but also presuppositions concerning their future."

I found that scripts, as tools, embodied the child's cultural past in relation to gender roles yet also contained expectations concerning the child's future. Television scripts collapse the time boundaries that separate children's past, present and future within the play situation. Television as a cultural tool accelerates this circumstance, as children re-enact through play past cultural and societal beliefs about gender roles, present day societal and cultural assumptions in relation to gender behaviour and future societal expectations of children in reference to socially constructed adult roles. However children in this study used agency when appropriating past beliefs or present day messages by actively using scripts to meet their own play purposes and agendas. Nevertheless children's transcripts of Superhero and Spice Girl dialogues revealed many examples of stereotypical gender talk.

Spice Girl scripts for example were limited to the words of Spice Girl songs and these songs included strong messages about femininity that were communicated to children through a series of non-verbal gestures and movements that served to reinforce stereotypical behaviour and attitudes. The song most frequently sung by girls during play episodes was 'Stop Right Now,' a song all about 'needing love and wanting to be loved.'

Boys, on the other hand, received messages via Superhero scripts about 'masculinity' involving physical proweress, superior abilities and an attitude of being the 'saviour' rather than the 'saved' and the 'needed rather than the needy.' As many others before have noted children are socialised into these roles of 'independence' and 'dependence' from a very young age via multiple, complex and intersecting societal messages. My data showed television to contribute in large part to this socialisation

process, through its reinforcement of stereotypical, gendered messages to young children about future gender roles. Children's representation of the messages during their play and talk suggested that they were listening and internalising these beliefs. Television scripts presented children with clear unambiguous messages in the form of past accumulated societal beliefs about gender roles, and also by implication, assumptions their children's future roles within society.

20.3.4 Proposition 3.4: "McDonald's scripts reveal children's understanding and use of consumerist terms and principles in both their play and talk."

Children's understanding and participation in consumerist culture was evident in their use of McDonald's scripts. Children prompted by recent visits to McDonald's engaged in detailed discussions and play about 'going to McDonald's' with discussions often following into play episodes. McDonald's play and talk consisted of sharing knowledge about the latest specials offered (especially Happy Meals), comparing menus (what did you get), inquiring about the latest give-away toys and discussing Ronald McDonald. In this McDonald's play episode two children role play vendor and consumer.

> Philip and Peter are in the block corner. They have built a counter like structure
> with the blocks. Philip is on one side of the counter and Peter on the other.
> McDonald's toys are scattered over the total floor space in this playing area.
> Philip is handing Peter small pieces of ripped paper as Peter hands over various
> McDonald's toys.
> Philip: *"$2.95 with fries."*
> Peter: *"...and one Happy Meal and a Big Mac and a Coke."*

Discussions and play were often extended when children brought from home the give-away toys they had received with their meals.

James, Luke, Rebecca and Tim are looking at James' McDonald's toy and are discussing the 'Happy Meals' they have eaten at McDonald's.

James: *"I had Coke with lots of ice."*

Luke: *"...yeah...yeah...yeah...and...and...cheese burgers."*

Rebecca: *"I hate those cheese burgers."*

James: *"Just get some thing else or pull it out."*

Rebecca: *"It's too hot and gooey and sticky...and..."* (she pulls a face indicating her disgust).

Tim: *"Margaret where's that bucket with all those Mac toys in it?"*

Me: *"With the McDonald's toys in it?"*

Rebecca: *"Look Margaret it's over there up high...you can get it down...ok?"*

I get down the bucket containing 'Happy Meal' give-aways (small plastic toys many of them representing television characters). The four children gather around and begin sorting out the toys and negotiating their roles.

Tim: *"I'll be the guy who says do you want fries."*

Rebecca: *"We'll be the mother and the father and you be the baby."*

(she points to Luke and James respectively)

It was a common occurrence for children to associate McDonald's meals with give away toys. This play incident also showed children engaging in occupational play. Tim nominated himself to play the McDonald's employee. The phrase he used to declare his role is particularly revealing in terms of its consumerist associations. Tim says, "I'll be the guy who says do you want fries with that?" and uses a phrase

McDonald's employees use as a ploy to urge consumers ordering food to increase their meal order.

Another example of McDonald's being representative of occupational play is seen in this episode.

James is playing with the McDonald's give-away toys. He flips open a small toy resembling a hamburger and reveals a character inside.

James: *"Look monsters inside eating hamburgers."*

Me: *"Monsters live inside hamburgers?"*

James: *"No silly…they are just toys…transformers* (He laughs at my mistake and pretends to put the toy hamburger into his mouth). *Big meat patties how many meat patties would you like? My favourite."*

Children playing with McDonald's toys or role playing 'going to McDonald's', tended to focus on the reality aspects of the play rather than the fantasy. In this example my question about monsters offers James the opportunity to move the play into a fantasy realm, yet he clearly chooses to define the play in relation to 'factual' rather than 'fictional' events. I talk about monsters being inside hamburgers, and he responds with the message that these are only toys. After redefining the play, he goes on to discuss his favourite burger and repeats parts of a conversation he is likely to have heard in relation to buying food at McDonald's. His final question,

"How many patties would you like?" firmly places the play back within a reality framework.

Children made clear associations between 'McDonald's and money' during their play and discussions. This first incident involves two children playing families, a theme that evolved into a discussion about meal time routines.

Katie and Charlie are outside underneath the climbing frame engaged in a sociodramatic episode involving eating, food, and meal preparation.

Katie: *"Can we go to McDonald's?"*

Charlie: *"We need to get some money first."*

In the second example Sarah informs me that her mother is going to buy her food from McDonald's.

Sarah approaches me and says, *"I'm going to McDonald's in the morning. My Daddy's in bed."*

Me: *"What will you eat?"*

Sarah: *"McDonald's hamburger had a cake…Mummy buys a drink in the morning and the burger."*

I use and emphasise the word 'eat' and Sarah answers by telling me what her mother will 'buy' at McDonald's. In a similar situation Bianca makes the same connection between money and McDonald's food.

Bianca is telling Jane about her birthday party at McDonald's. She says that they *"buyed"* a milkshake and because they had *"some more money"* they could *"buy"* a cake too.

It is of course very likely that children throughout time have made similar connections between procuring food and needing the money to do so however it appeared that this link was exaggerated in relation to McDonald's food, perhaps as the result of television advertising. I came to this conclusion as children frequently discussed McDonald's in terms of the latest meal 'specials', information they had no doubt gained as being part of a targeted audience. This finding echoed children's continuing desire to purchase Teletubbies products, a phenomena I also saw as also being attributed to the influence of television advertising. Young children were indeed

'reading' and internalizing the messages promoted by marketing techniques via the electronic media.

In this interaction Jane does not specifically refer to McDonald's but investigates the concept of money and food, by checking out how things work in my family.

Jane: *"Does your kids say give me 50... 50 cents?"*

Me: *"What do you mean?"*

Jane: *"Please Mum can I have some money? Do you give it to them?"*

Me: *"Sometimes I do for their lunches."*

Jane: *"For their lunches. What happens if you don't have any? Do you say then you are grounded?"*

20.3.5 Proposition 3.5: "Teletubby play allows children to legitimately return to past behaviours and may also evoke parental or adult feelings within observing children."

Teletubby play appeared to be a very enjoyable event for the participant children. The script and actions were often accompanied by much laughter and smiles yet I noticed that unlike other television-related group play, this play did not escalate or get out of control, nor did it require adult intervention.

Mike has sought me out to discuss Teletubbies.

Mike: *"There you are Margaret. What are you doing there?"*

Me: *"Just writing my story about what all the children are doing today."*

Mike: *"So you are a teacher."*

Me: *"Yes I am bit like a teacher except that I am doing research."*

Mike: *"What's research?"*

Me: *"It's finding out about things and then telling other people about it."*

Mike: *"I need to tell you about something. Teletubbies. I watch TV you know."*

Me: *"Do you like Teletubbies?"*

Mike: *"Because I like Po and I like being Po."*

Me: *"I don't know who Po is."*

Mike starts to talk in an incomprehensible garble using a high-pitched infant-like tone. Most of the vocalisations are single syllable sounds with pauses between each one. He jumps in a starfish fashion with arms and legs spread out from his body. Mike repeats this 'star fish' jump several times. Other children begin to gather around, giggling and joining in the vocalisations with some of them modelling Mike's actions.

The most significant feature of this episode involved the children's and Mike's obvious enjoyment of this play. In a separate incident I am at the book corner and have been asked by a child to read the Teletubby's book.

A group of children gather around me. As I begin the story the children pre-empt some of the phrases and sounds, particularly the sound *"uh oh."* One child asks to see Lala (one of the characters). I attempt to extend the very limited words of the story by discussing Lala in relation to the pictures and encourage the children to predict the events before I turn the page. Lance is listening but appears agitated at my story reading techniques and asks me to,*"Just read the story."* He starts to engage in 'Teletubby speak' making repeated *"uh oh"* sounds in an infant like tone, the other children continue listening to the story. Lance then turns to me and says,

"I just get all silly sometimes."

I reply, *"Were you being a Teletubby?"*

He answers, *"I just like, like, like being them."*

The following interaction provides another example of a child's enjoyment of these characters and of things associated with them.

I have been observing children in the art corner and leave to begin my write up when Ben notices me leaving. He hugs and me says,

"Don't go we love your Teletubby locket."

Lance and Laura hear Ben's comment and say,

"We like Teletubbies. The best of all."

The noted episodes are representative of numerous other times I observed children verbally expressing their enjoyment of Teletubbies during their play or talk.

At other times Teletubby play appeared to evoke nurturing and parental feelings in these young children.

Harriet is playing in the home corner, holding a doll on her knee. She is using a plastic spoon and small container to 'feed' the doll saying,

"Here you are baby. Here is your Teletubby custard...she likes Teletubby custard...don't you?"

Her voice has a 'mother-like' tone and she is holding the doll rocking it gently in her arms.

Harriet is role playing a mother with her child and in contrast to the previously recorded Teletubby play episodes she is being the adult and not the infant. Her play combines mother play and Teletubby play by incorporating aspects of the Teletubby script into her dialogue. Harriet's tone mimicks the cooing, infant like tone of the Teletubbies. This tone may have been representative of 'motherese' rather than Teletubby script, yet the way that her pitch lapsed between an adult and child like tone throughout the episode was highly imitative of these characters' speech patterns.

Although children expressed delight at hearing Teletubby talk and play, the staff at this centre did not always share this feeling.

A parent has brought two Teletubby soft toys to the centre. I am unsure of what has been discussed but I hear the parent offering to take the Teletubbies back to work rather than leave them with her child at the centre (as I assume was her original plan). In the meantime a small group of children have gathered around the parent holding the toys. The children excitedly talk over each other and jump up and down, straining to get a glimpse of the toys.

This incident reinforced my previous observations that the staff were not supportive of Teletubby play or talk in the centre. Leaving the toys may not have been encouraged because of the difficulties staff could have encountered in supervising the children's overwhelming demands to play with them. However it is also possible that it was what the toys represented, that prompted the staff member's request to have the toys removed from the centre. The one or two informal conversations I had with staff about the Teletubby programme revealed their concerns about the perceived regressive behaviour, especially in regard to language, that this programme modelled to children.

20.3.6 Proposition 3.6: "Children's obvious enjoyment of interactions during Teletubby play indicates that the scripts hold meaning and value for them."

Children began each Teletubby play episode by identifying the Teletubby character they intended to play. This identification could also include advice to peers about their possible character choices. Claiming and choosing characters' roles was negotiated 'in character' using 'Teletubby-speak.' 'Teletubby-speak' was spoken in a high-pitched, infant-like tone and consisted of constant repetition of phrases such as

'uh oh' and 'again, again.' The vocalisations and words seemed to have little or no meaning outside of the play.

> Tim and Luke are outside spinning around in circles calling out in high pitched tones: *"Teletubbies…Teletubbies…Dipsy, Winky, La La , Po."*
>
> They run toward each other and hit their stomachs together and say in unison: *"Uh… oh…uh…oh…again…again."*
>
> Sarah approaches them and says:
>
> *"Teletubbies, Teletubbies… time… for your tustard…Teletubby tustard."*

Teletubby scripts did not advance past these phrases with the exception of children repeatedly naming the Teletubby characters and occasionally mentioning single words that were mispronounced for example *"wabbit."*

Although the scripts and vocalisations held little meaning for me I noted that children using Teletubby scripts shared a common understanding of the 'talk' with other children. I drew this conclusion after frequently observing children's reciprocal participation in Teletubby dialogues.

> Sam is seated in the block corner and has overheard a conversation Harriet and Nicky are having about Teletubbies. He looks up and begins calling out across the room to the girls,
>
> *"Teletubbies, Teletubbies… Dipsy… Lala… Po… Teletubbies…*
>
> *Teletubbies…*(he is smiling and laughing as he says this)…*I know too…uh oh uh oh…ha ha ha ha."*

Tomasello (1995) states that the nature and processes of an interaction between children cannot be fully understood without also attempting to understand the meaning that is imparted by the tools they use. Teletubby scripts as a tool, allowed these children to engage in infant like behaviour. I speculated that the Teletubby

characters with their babyish looks and infantile vocalisations may have afforded young children struggling with newly acquired skills, a sense of power and competency (not unlike the Superhero roles). Teletubby play allows children to legitimately return to past behaviours or perhaps watching peers playing out these roles promotes parental or adult feelings within the observant child. Leont'ev (1981) argues it is in the course of activities such as play that children learn to engender purpose and meaning to their lived experiences. Were these children using Teletubby play as a tool to legitimately return to previously lived experiences or past developmental stages and explore parental roles?

Jane asks to see my locket and I open it to reveal the Teletubby picture. Tania is standing nearby and comes closer for a look. Jane begins to use the Teletubby infant-like talk and says,

"Uh oh. Splash splash... (incomprehensible noises)... *uh oh."*

I have no idea what she has said or means by her vocalisations, however her peer responds and continues the dialogue using the same Teletubby script.

Tania: *"Blah blah...* (same incomprehensible noise that Jane has made)... *blah. Uh oh."*

Jane begins to laugh obviously enjoying Tania's contribution to the dialogue and replies.

Jane: *"Uh oh blah blah* (noises)."

Tania: *"Fall down go round."* (she models these actions to Jane who mimicks the behaviour).

The two girls laugh uncontrollably and fall down on the ground.

I drew a final sociocultural conclusion about the Teletubby phenomena and the tool (television) that had created it. I observed that children's Teletubby script was

often accompanied by children gently hugging and stroking each other while making high-pitched cooing, soothing-type noises. After watching several episodes of the Teletubby programme I realised that children's play dialogue and actions closely resembled those of the television characters. After repeatedly observing children imitate these play behaviours I began to speculate about the pro-social messages the programme was communicating to these children. The messages appeared to be in direct contrast with the 'power' and 'gendered' themes of other television play. I considered that the Teletubbies may have been created in response to teacher's and parents' concerns (NAEYC, 1990) about the gendered, inequitable and anti-social messages conveyed to children through television. If this was the case then the Teletubby programme itself, was a direct product of social, cultural and historical influences and a tool of its time.

I consider a related issue to be the increasing concern expressed by adults (mostly parents) about the influence of the Teletubby's scripts on young children's language development. Parents and caregivers view the television characters' repeated use of simple phrases and infant-like pronunciations, as inhibiting children's speech and vocabulary development (International Express, 1998; Listener, 1998; Telegraph, 1998; Television Guide, 1998). This adult concern was also evident in this study's findings. During my experiences working as an early childhood teacher then training early childhood teachers, I have noticed an increasing pressure on the early childhood community to justify to society at large, that young children are 'being taught something.' If community concerns about young children's 'education' have arisen in response to today's sociopolitical climate, then there may be links between adult concerns about children's perceived regressive behaviour prompted by this

programme, and today's societal pressure for children to begin achieving at a very young age.

20.3.7 Proposition 3.7: "During play children use scripts to stay in character and to let other children know the character that they are enacting."

Bateson's (1955) study found that in pretend play the majority of verbal behaviour has a metacommunicative function. Metacommunicative strategies are used to emphasise the nature of the play and to give guidance to the direction of the play. Within the play frame communication is used to develop, interpret and enact scripts and to create play that suspends reality. Metacommunication therefore is used to describe the signals used outside of the play frame that guide or regulate play (Bateson, 1955).

Teletubby scripts involved minimal (out of frame) negotiations between children regarding clarification of roles or intent during the play, yet Superhero scripts were often discussed and debated among participating children. However the most frequent use of metacommunicative strategies was seen in McDonald's scripts. Children would often 'come out of character' to clarify or negotiate meanings within the play episode. The following episode provides an example.

Tim and Rose are playing McDonald's in the home corner. They have an overturned box they are using as a *"fries machine."*

Rose: *"Here's your coke...*(hands Tim a cup) *and here's your fries."*

(in frame)

At this point she turns to Tim and says:

"Hey let's use this thing for the coke machine ok we'll just put it like that." (out of frame)

Tim: *"No stick it up this way."* (out of frame)

Rose: *"Here are your Happy Meals."* (returns to play frame)

McDonald's play was the only observed television theme that included children's 'real life' experiences as material for play. Unlike the Spice Girl, Superhero and Teletubby characters, McDonald's characters represented everyday people carrying out real life roles. The reality aspect of the play may explain why children entered and exited the play frame more often during McDonald's play than in other television-related episodes.

Scripts were used by children to alert others to the character they were playing and some children communicated to their play partners solely through script. Sometimes even peers' direct 'out of frame' questioning about the play, failed to entice children engaged in the play, to abandon the script or exit the frame.

Harriet is singing a Spice Girl's song and dancing.

Nicky: *"What are you playing Harriet?"*

Harriet does not reply but continues to sing the song and dance. Nicky listens, observes for a moment, then joins in the play. Harriet doesn't verbally interact with Nicky at all during this interaction even though Nicky asks her a direct question about what she is doing.

Harriet in a separate incident invites Nicky to play Teletubbies. She does not directly ask Nicky to join in, but uses the character's script, as means of invitation.

Harriet: *"Come on Dipsy...* (this comment is to Nicky).... *Let's play."*

When Nicky ignores her peer's invitation to play Harriet repeats,

"Come on Dipsy."

Children would also use scripts to let other children know they wished to participate in group happenings or as a means of gaining entry into established play episodes.

Shane, Tom and Tim are playing with the McDonald's toys in the block corner. Bruce is observing, attentively watching the group but is in not involved in the play. After a few minutes of observation he begins to make a roaring Superhero type noise, one of his peers (Tom) looks up from the play and moves over to make a space for Bruce on the floor. Tom then hands him two of the toys. Bruce begins to model the actions of the other group members and becomes fully engaged in the play.

Bruce assessed the situation before attempting to participate in the play with his peers. He did not directly ask his peers if he could join them, but instead indicated his interest and intention to join their play, using Superhero script. Without any form of verbal interaction between Bruce and his peer, an invitation was offered, and then accepted by Bruce, to participate in the play action.

Carlsson-Paige & Levin (1995), Cain & Bohrer (1997) and Cupit (1989) have argued that television scripts used by children during play are highly repetitive and restrictive in terms of language development. Yet my findings suggest that scripts as tools, are able to contribute to children's learning and development. Children in this study used scripts to gain information about future gender roles and to investigate associated societal expectations. Scripts were appropriated to examine and participate in consumerist society and also to maintain and sustain play episodes with peers. From these findings I concluded that development can not always be assessed by immediate, measurable outcomes, such as children's 'use of' or 'complexity of' vocabulary. Learning occurs as children appropriate cultural tools such as language,

to fit their own needs, interests and abilities. Social and cultural technologies produce

tools such as television scripts and children mediate these tools through active

appropriation during talk and play.

Conclusion

Vygotsky emphasised the transformational nature of tool use for the individual and considered this to be a key to understanding the social foundations of cognitive processes. He wrote that human psychological processes are acquired in the process of mediating one's action with others, through tool use. Using or appropriating the tool transforms rather than transmits knowledge and in social activities such as play, children use tools to both receive from and to contribute to their physical world, their culture and to others' thinking processes (Rogoff, 1998). Cultural tools are created by societies over the course of history and time yet change with each society. Vygotsky believed that children's internalization and appropriation of culturally produced tools (such as television) would bring about transformations in individuals' thinking processes.

Television, as a cultural tool, offered these children opportunities to appropriate information and societal messages through the transformational activity of play with play itself, in Vygotskian terms, being a 'psychological tool' of the mind. The television as a material artifact revealed itself to be a social and historical object that transformed the ideas of both the designers and its later users. Television play showed children's thinking forming and being formed through their use of this tool during play and discussions. However this study speculated that children were also contributing to this tools use by influencing the content of children's television programmes. One example of this was seen with the appearance of the Teletubby play in the centre a programme I suggested was created in direct response to adults' prior voiced concerns about the anti-social and inequitable messages portrayed in Superhero type programmes.

Zone of Proximal Development

For a zone of proximal development to be created, there must be a joint activity that creates a context for interacting children (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Television play as a joint activity required children to share perspectives, knowledge and tools. The zone therefore was highly dependent on these children's shared 'tool' use. Use of tools whether psychological or material, is jointly constructed by the developing child and the culture in which the child is developing (Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993). Television play provided a zone of proximal development through the social interaction of play where children learnt how to use both material and psychological tools.

What role does intersubjectivity play in the zone of proximal development? Intersubjectivity was created through children's shared knowledge of television programmes and characters. These children's collective use of this artifact during their play and talk created a zone that allowed them to extend upon each other's thinking and actions. Television play created an intersubjectivity beyond the immediate context as children shared in the thinking of the tools creators making the zone a very large space with the efforts of past minds being included in the equation. Vygotsky (1962) suggests that the larger the zone the more children will learn. An educational implication of the findings of this study, is restricted interpretations of the zone or children's tool use within the zone, may limit the adult's potential to create important and necessary links between children's thinking processes and learning opportunities.

Cole and Wertsch (1996) maintain that an essential aspect of the zone is children's use of language and artifacts (tools) in ways that extend their thinking processes. A special quality of the human environment is that is suffused with the achievements of

prior generations in reified form (Cole & Wertsch, 1996). Individuals mediate their actions through artifacts and arrange for the rediscovery and appropriation of these forms of mediation by subsequent generations (Vygotsky, 1978). Children appropriate artifacts and tools and in doing so participate in both their cultural past and the present. Cole (1985) describes interactions within a child's zone of proximal development as being the place 'where culture and cognition create each other.' This study found the zone to be an artifact saturated medium and highly dependent upon children's shared tool use.

Rules

Thinking and cognitive development involve children participating in forms of social activity constituted by systems of shared rules that must be grasped and voluntarily accepted (Nicolopoulou & Cole, 1993). Television play although intrinsically voluntary, at the same time was a rule-governed activity. This study found television play required children to abide by the rules imposed by the television characters and programmes as well as attending to the requirements of the pretend play situation. Rules served to constitute television play, and in turn, these rules derived their authority from the child's voluntary commitment to the shared activity of the play (Vygotsky, 1978).

Rules created intersubjectivity as children's shared understanding and acceptance of the 'rules' within play episodes determined whether the play activity was extended or extinguished. Although children were required to share some understanding of the rules of television play, at times play partners mistakenly assumed others' understandings. Children in this study actively enforced the rules guiding television play yet were also willing to scaffold their play partner's knowledge of the rules through discussion and demonstration. In addition television

play and talk reflected 'societal rules' regarding children's future roles (especially in relation to gender). This form of play also gave children an opportunity to explore societal rules and expectations.

Children engaged in joint pretend play episodes constructed and abided by the rules that guided these activities. Intersubjectivity was achieved by children co-ordinating rules with others and by their inclusion of, and response to, other children's contributions. Children who were unaware of the rules guiding television play, or those were aware of rules but chose to deviate from them, were still able to maintain and develop play episodes, as long as their play partners were willing to work towards points of intersubjective agreement and understanding.

Scripts

A significant finding of this study was that although scripts contained differing genres and conflicting discourses, television scripts as a 'play tool' unified children in their knowledge and experience of television characters and programmes. Scripts therefore as a shared symbol system allowed children involvement in others' thinking processes through a mutual and collective understanding of words and meanings. Television programmes and characters created an intersubjectivity between the children and their play partners as they came to share in the joint understanding and the significance of words or jargon. For example 'Teletubby' or 'Spice Girl's' scripts would have held no meaning for these children (or myself) two or three years ago and may in fact hold very little meaning for future readers of this thesis in later years. Yet children will continue to elaborate the possibilities made available to them through a tool of their time even when their application of cultural messages and tools do not always move in the directions that are considered by experts, or other segments of the community, as being the most desirable (Rogoff, 1998).

Through participation in cultural and social activities such as televiewing and play children transformed activities to meet their own purposes, interests and agendas. Rogoff (1998) maintains that children engage with each other by building upon cultural genres, through their appropriation of past and present symbol systems. This study found social and cultural processes constituting each other as children transformed television scripts and rules through their participation in play and discussions. Each generation will alter the practices of past generations to fit their own circumstances (Rogoff, 1998).

A main aim of this study was to understand how intersubjectivity is achieved through children's appropriation of cultural tools during play. Vygotsky saw tools as the constituents of culture and as simultaneously material (or technical) and psychological. Psychological tools in this study included a range of symbol and sign systems that as cultural tools were able to restructure and re-configure children's cognitive processes. Language as a cultural tool linked these children to their sociocultural context and enabled them to participate in it. Vygotsky (1978) has claimed that the linguistic symbols of language are a pre-existing cultural artifact that are able to direct children's cognition into ways of thinking previously created by members of their communities. For these children television scripts served as a tool that embodied the cognition of others by providing them with the symbols and tools of their community. From the Vygotskian perspective, interpersonal interactions can only be understood in reference to language as a historical and cultural tool. Meanings of interactions and tools of interaction such as scripts cannot be fully understood without also considering the impact of social and cultural technologies that produce the tool and channel the nature and focus of children's communicative interactions

Children received and interpreted cultural roles and expectations through enactment, using the tools of their culture as frameworks for play. The meaning was found not in the cultural tools themselves (such as scripts) but in the social events (play and talk) through which tools were appropriated. Television scripts, as cultural tools, presented children with pre-scripted guidelines regarding expectations of the play. Television scripts became a 'user friendly tool' that were easily accessible to most children because of the intersubjective understandings that were created between children who accessed this tool.

How is intersubjectivity achieved through children's appropriation of scripts during television play? Children mediate their interactions with each other through language. Scripts reflect children's shared experience and knowledge of both television characters and language itself. Scripts also show the historical transformational nature of language and the way that it is appropriated in children's play. As a genre scripts link children to their cultural-historical context through embodying the cultural norms and societal messages of the day, yet at the same time they connect children to the accumulated knowledge and beliefs of prior generations. Historical cultural themes such as gender role expectations and good versus evil have been communicated to yet another generation of children through a cultural tool of their time. Here we see the influence of both the micro and macro setting on language as a symbol system. Language is mediated by the participation of prior generations and appropriated by children to reflect today's culture, time and place. Children using scripts shared understandings with others within the immediate context of the play setting, but at the same time were simultaneously sharing in the understandings of past minds.

Limitations of the Study

This study did not explore the socially constructed positionings that indicated children's relationships with their contexts for example, racial and ethnic identities, gender (this was briefly mentioned), socioeconomic status, family arrangements and so on. As a consequence an in depth exploration of social and historical influences that would have significantly contributed to observed interactions was beyond the scope of this study. Although originally designed to be so, the study was not collaborative in nature. Valuable teacher and caregiver insights regarding children's play and talk therefore were left untapped and unexplored leading to a related methodological limitation. The researcher as the sole research instrument resulted in data collection and interpretation involving a single and subjective interpretation of data. In addition data was interpreted using one theoretical position, sociocultural theory. The limitations of using a single theoretical framework included the loss of others' stories and interpretations in terms of the findings. Piagetian theory for example may have reached different and perhaps conflicting conclusions to those that were drawn by this study.

Time was a limiting factor. The data collection period was over a relatively short period and this may have served as a confounding variable in terms of children's 'television-related' behaviour and talk. Participant children throughout the data collection period came to associate me with television characters and programmes, creating both a researcher bias and observer presence effect. These variables were especially present at the beginning of the data collection period. In addition the use of 'stimulated recall' as a data collection complicated interpretation of data. Conducting

the study over a longer period of time would have helped to address the mentioned limitations.

Educational Implications

Vygotskian based studies have revealed children as socially constructed individuals highly dependent upon their social, historical and cultural contexts for learning. This study focused on the cultural tools within children's contexts and children's unique appropriation of these tools. The focus allowed for edification of children's experiences and events according to individual understandings and perceptions. With this focus the place of individual agency within collective sociocultural understanding is revisited. The potentially dichotomous relationship between the individual and the context was addressed in this research by using 'children's activity of play and verbal interaction' as the unit of analysis. Activity as a unit of analysis sought to amplify the relationship between context and learning processes rather than focusing on individual children or individual events.

A focus on children's appropriation of cultural tools has educational implications for early childhood education. Children in this study are revealed as skilful and competent appropriators of the tools that are offered to them within their sociohistorical context. Yet the dual focus on intersubjectivity and tools also revealed the need for intersubjective understandings between individuals regarding tool use. Herein lies the educational implication for early learning. If there is a mismatch or lack of fit between 'tool and user' or 'user and user' learning opportunities for young children are restricted or at worst negated. Those involved in early education therefore need to be aware of the 'tools' that our children are using. Each generation will modify the tools of past generations and our challenge is to accept and value the many

diverse ways of representing knowledge through cultural material. This of course will require us at times to rethink education and care practices with children, along with our attitudes to the forms of knowledge that arrive in our centre and homes via children's appropriation of cultural material. An awareness of children's ongoing appropriation of tools asks us to suspend hasty judgements about activities or behaviours that do not fit in within the existing frameworks of knowledge.

Perhaps the most significant educational implication of this study takes the form of a reminder to look beyond the activity, behaviour or words, to the 'processes' involved in children's appropriation of cultural tools. Children showed themselves to be competent internalizers of societal messages via their use of cultural tools. If we celebrate and value children's skill of 'appropriation' during play then a related outcome is to find ways of encouraging children to apply these skills in other situations and contexts. These young children demonstrated significant ability to absorb collective cultural material and make it their own. Findings pointed to culture as the basis of every child's learning and development.

This study has reminded us of the place of cultural tools in development and learning. We need to share in children's understandings of these tools and the ways in which they use them. If educators are not aware of the impact of cultural tools (such as television) they may neglect to utilise a powerful and influential medium or fail to understand the considerable influence that such mediums exert on young children's development and learning.

<u>Future Directions</u>

Future directions include the need for research that continues to consider not only the actions of children but also the culturally and historically defined context that will always serve as the origin of these behaviours. Learning and development is both enabled and constrained by the tools and resources within each sociohistorical context. The place of tools in young children's learning and development therefore and their appropriation of them needs further exploration. The process of appropriation itself or how children internalize cultural knowledge, is still relatively unknown in terms of being able to practically apply this knowledge to teaching and learning situations. I suspect one place to begin is with an exploration of motivation and intent in children's learning. This point was briefly touched upon in this study. Children's enjoyment of one television programme revealed a collective motivation for learning and participating in related play behaviour and discussions. The place of motivation in children's learning requires further investigation in relation to context specific activities such as play and children's appropriation of sociocultural content. Examining motivation and intent also asks us to consider the child's perspective in relation to these concepts suggesting the need for a phenomenological focus within sociocultural research. Narrative methodologies may allow for this dual focus. Narrative research within sociocultural frameworks is a challenging but enlightening venture yet it could provide potential understanding in terms of children's perspectives in tandem with an understanding of the social, cultural and historical influences in which these perspectives have originated. Yet the promotion of theoretical foci within educational research must be supported by ways in which this

theory is then able to be translated into useful information in terms of our practices with children.

This study's sociocultural focus has raised more issues than provided answers in regard to educational practices. However if we continue to work towards increasing our awareness of the influence and centrality of context in children's lives this provides a first step to finding ways that allow for useful application of this information. An appreciation of the place of cultural tools in young children's learning will also hopefully increase the effectiveness and 'fit' of education and care practices in accordance with each child's specific and context driven needs. As teachers, educators, parents and caregivers let us demonstrate the same level of competence and skill as children do, in appropriating our 'teaching tools' to fit with the ever changing sociohistorical contexts in which our young children are developing and learning.

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Appendices

Appendix (1): Letter to Supervisor and Early Childhood Staff

2 April 1998

Dear ...

This letter is confirming my verbal invitation and your consent to participate in this research.

I am an early childhood lecturer at the Christchurch College of Education completing post graduate studies with the Department of Learning and Teaching at Massey University. I am currently undertaking research for the Masters of Education Degree. My research is under the supervision of Dr Joy Cullen and Assoc Prof Roy Shuker. In addition to my work as a lecturer involved in the delivery of the pre-service Diploma of Teaching ECE, I have trained and worked as an early childhood teacher.

My research interest concerns the ways in which television has influenced children's learning, development and play. I am particularly interested in the ways that children interact during play in order to reach an understanding of their social and cultural environments in relation to television's influence.

A part of my investigation of this topic, I plan to carry out fieldwork over a period of about five weeks during July and August 1998. The nature of the work involved may include audio-tape recordings of children discussing television and discussions of television-related play and talk with teachers.

All audio-tapes will be transcribed by me. I would hope to be in your centre daily for an initial period of two full weeks (during July), then supplement this time with three or four subsequent visits (for one half day a week end of July and early August).

During my time at your centre I will be observing children's play and am able to negotiate a time to discuss this with you further if required.

At the completion of this study participants will be given the choice of retaining data or consenting to its destruction. Throughout the time of the study all data (tapes etc) will be used exclusively by me for the purposes of this study. My two supervisors are the only other persons that will have access to this material, either of whom you are encouraged to contact if you have any concerns or queries. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants. A summary of the research findings will be made available for interested participants.

Any information given by participants throughout the research will be used for the purposes of this study only. In the event of any publications resulting from this research, participants will be informed and their consent sought. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality of participants, data will be number coded in order to prevent individuals from being identified during any stage of the research process.

The research is intended to be collaborative in nature and it is therefore hoped that I will be able to bring skills and understandings to your centre, as well as value and document your insights and understandings, in working with young children.

As participants you have specific rights:

To decline to participate

To refuse to answer specific questions

To withdraw from the study at any time

To ask any questions about the study at any time during the time of your participation

To provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher to do so

To be given access to a summary of the findings of this study on its completion

This study will be written up as my MEd thesis. I will be happy to answer any further questions regarding this study or issues that may arise from this letter. Thank you for your time and your interest in this research. I am looking forward to working with all those involved at your centre.

Yours faithfully

Margaret Brennan   348-2059 x 8232 (work)

Supervisors: Dr Joy Cullen and Assoc Prof Roy Shuker (06) 356-9099

Appendix (2): Information Sheet for Parents/Caregivers/Guardians

29 June 1998

P.O. Box 31-065

Christchurch 8030

(Ph: 348-2059 x 8232)

Dear Parents, Caregivers and Families

Information Sheet

Re: Early childhood study

I am an early childhood lecturer at the Christchurch College of Education completing post graduate studies with the Department of Learning and Teaching at Massey University. I am currently undertaking research for the Masters of Education Degree. My research is under the supervision of Dr Joy Cullen and Assoc Prof Roy Shuker. In addition to my work as a lecturer involved in the delivery of the pre-service Diploma of Teaching ECE, I have trained and worked as an early childhood teacher.

My research interest concerns the ways in which television has influenced children's learning, development and play. I am particularly interested in the ways that children interact during play in order to reach an understanding of their social and cultural environments in relation to television's influence.

A part of my investigation of this topic, I plan to carry out fieldwork over a period of about five weeks during July and August 1998. The nature of the work involved may include audio-tape recordings of children discussing television and discussions of television-related play and talk with teachers.

All audio-tapes will be transcribed by me. I would hope to be in your centre daily for an initial period of two full weeks (during July), then supplement this time with three or four subsequent visits (for one half day a week end of July and early August). During my time at your centre I will be observing children's play and am able to negotiate a time to discuss this with you further if required.

At the completion of this study participants will be given the choice of retaining data or consenting to its destruction. Throughout the time of the study all data (tapes etc) will be used exclusively by me for the purposes of this study. My two supervisors are the only other persons that will have access to this material, either of whom you are encouraged to contact if you have any concerns or queries. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants. A summary of the research findings will be made available for interested participants.

Any information given by participants throughout the research will be used for the purposes of this study only. In the event of any publications resulting from this research, participants will be informed and their consent sought. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality of participants, data will be number coded in order to prevent individuals from being identified during any stage of the research process.

The research is intended to be collaborative in nature and it is therefore hoped that I will be able to bring skills and understandings to your centre, as well as value and document the insights and understandings of those who work with young children.

As guardians of participants you have specific rights:

To decline your child/ren's participation

To refuse to answer specific questions

To withdraw your child/ren from the study at any time

To ask any questions about the study at any time during the time of your child/ren's participation

To provide information on the understanding that your name or your child/ren's name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher to do so

To be given access to a summary of the findings of this study on its completion

This study will be written up as my MEd thesis. I will be happy to answer any further questions regarding this study or issues that may arise from this information sheet. Thank you for your time and your interest in this research. I am looking forward to working with your children and with all those involved at your centre.

Yours faithfully

Appendix (2a): Letter to Parents/Families Outlining Study's Aims and Requirements

29 June 1998

P.O. Box 36-228

Christchurch 5.

Dear Parents, Caregivers and Families,

I will be in your centre over the next two weeks or so carrying out research for my Masters of Education Degree with the Department of Learning and Teaching at Massey University.

I am an early childhood lecturer at the Christchurch College of Education and have also trained and worked as an early childhood teacher. My research interest concerns the ways in which television has influenced children's learning, development and play. I will be observing children during play and talking with them about their play and their understanding of television. At times I may speak with parents and caregivers about their understandings and observations of children's play.

Please feel free to approach me at any time if you have any questions at all about my work with your child/ren or if you are interested in what I am doing and would like to know more.

I look forward to working with your children.

Margaret Brennan

Appendix (3): Consent Form for Centre Management

Consent Form for EC Management

The Management Committee/Association of (centre name) *agree* to the staff at our early childhood centre being involved in this early childhood research project.

The Management Committee/Association of (centre name) *do not agree* to the staff at our early childhood centre being involved in this early childhood research project.

Signed: Date:

I agree to participate or allow a child/ren in my care to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed

Date

Appendix (3a): Consent Form for Teachers/Staff

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time regarding (my participation/the participation of children in my care).

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any questions on my own behalf or the behalf of a child/ren in my care.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission. The information and material gathered during the study will be used only for this research. In the event of any further

publications arising from this research I understand that my permission will be sought prior to publication.

I *agree/do not agree* to discussion being audiotaped. I also understand that I have the right to ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Appendix (4): Consent Form for Parents/Caregivers

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time regarding (my participation or the participation of my child/ren).

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any questions on my own behalf or the on behalf of my child/ren.

I agree to provide information to the researcher on the understanding that my name will not be used without my permission. The information and material gathered during the study will be used only for this research. In the event of any further publications arising from this research I understand that my permission will be sought prior to publication.

I *agree/do not agree* to discussion being audiotaped. I also understand that I have the right to ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

I *agree* to participate or allow my child/ren to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed

Date

Appendix (5): Notice Placed on Family Notice Board at Centre

Dear Parents, Caregivers and Families,

I will be in your centre over the next few weeks carrying out research for my Masterate thesis at Massey University. I have trained and worked as an early childhood teacher and am currently working at Christchurch College of Education as a lecturer.

As part of my research I will be observing and talking with children at this centre about television.

If anyone does not wish their child to be involved in this study, or if they wish to know more about what I am doing, please see (supervisor's name) or myself.

Many Thanks

Margaret Brennan

Appendix (6): Researcher Questions Regarding Children's TV Preferences/Interests

If you watch TV what programmes do you like to watch?

Do you have a favourite programme or one that you like best?

Can you tell me about it?

NOTE: (This question often led onto a discussion about specific TV characters. When this happened I would ask children to tell me about them and/or the programme in which they featured).

These questions provided a guideline only and were used during the first few days of the study. Questions were intended to initially provoke children's discussions about television programmes and characters.

Appendix (a): Example of Coded Transcript

6 July Monday 9:30am

From Field Notes Book 1. Page 3.

Anecdotal Account and Language Running Record

Purpose of Observations: *To Ascertain Television-related Play and Talk*

Context: *(9:40am) Seated at the home corner in full view of the play dough table, the art table, the Door (children entering with parents/caregivers) and in view of floor space used for music and group activities. Cold morning, Doors closed. Between 10-15 children present. 2 staff in view (2 other staff in centre, 1 greeting parents, 1 preparing resources in under 2 area).*

Method: Anecdotal account, Language Running Record

(source: Field notes, Diary)

1. Group activity (music) playing Suzy Cato's 'see you later' theme (from TV

2. prog). (A8) Group of 5 chn and 1 staff singing. All children singing.

(intersubjectivity?) (A8) (A11) (A26)

3. Chn jumping up and down in time to taped song.

4. Nicky leaves the group and approaches me. Stands beside me.

5. Nicky: "I'm wearing Bananas in Pyjamas today. B1 is called Kathy and

6. B2 is Banana." (A20) (A37)

7. Me: "Are they on TV?" (A41) N: "No they are not any more." (A20)

8. Nicky leaves.

Context 10:00am: *Block corner. 3 chn crouched underneath shelf appear to be engaged in sociodramatic play episode. (Lucy, Lance, Bridget, Tom)*

Method: Language Running Record/Direct observation, participant observation, anecdotal

Source: Field notes

9. Lucy: "Fire's coming, fire's coming...(inaudible)....fire.. do you see fire

10. poo bums?"

10. Lance, Bridget and Tom ignoring her pretending to be asleep. Lying on 11. floor in a row, head to toe eyes shut.

13. Lucy turns to me. "I've got a Spice Girl's sweat shirt...yes we are...are

13. the Spice Girls." (A21) (A37) (A60)

14. Lance and Tom open their eyes, get up off the floor. Turn to face me.

15. Lance: "We like the Teletubbies."(Said to Lucy and me. Turns to Lucy) (A22)

(A23)

17. Lance: "When things go round...(spins around with this body - full body turn)

18. (inaudible) (A15)

19. Lucy: "Have some Teletubby toast" (A15)

20. Lance: "No custard, tubby sponges wash their feet with (A15) I like to....

20. play Teletubbies sometimes (A23) uh-oh uh-oh." Runs around in small 20.

decreasing circles - starts to climb up on the art table. "Oh no I'm...

23. going..."(A15) "Teletubby Po Lala Dipsy....Pinky...Winky and Barney

24. says hello..." (A15)

25. Tom runs around in small circles mimicking Lance"s T/T gestures (says

26. nothing). (A24)

10:30 Context: Collage Table

Method: Anecdotal, Language Running Record

Source: Diary

27. Kate is wearing Barbie gumboots and a Teletubby sweatshirt.

28. Turns to me and names all the T/T characters on her sweatshirt. (A7)

29. Lucy: "I've got a Teletubby hat." (A7)

30. Brigette: "I got a teddy bear hat."

10:40 Context: *Outside in the sandpit (cold morning) Two children seated on the edge of sandpit.*

Method: Language Running Record/Observation (running record)

Source: Field notes, Journal

31. Harriet to Nicky: "Do you know the Spice Girls?" (starts singing SG

32. song Stop Right Now). (A9) Nicky joins in (gets words wrong).

33. Harriet: "No I'm singing it (A43) stop right now thank you very much…I

34. need someone for a human touch…hey now you got me on the

35. run….fun" (A60) Turns to me, "My mother doesn't let me watch

36. TV" (A46) (Continues singing the song. Voice has an adult quaver.

37. Appears to be singing it with an American accent. (note: incongruency SG are

British -superimposition of other cultures. Nicky is Maori).

38. Still singing (Spice Girl song) Nicky picks up a bucket and spade.

39. Shovels sand into bucket. (A13)

40. Nicky to Harriet: "Do you know my song? (A9) I'll just get all my dirt

41. off. (A13) I am human body touch. I love you in the money yes I

42. do…yes I do…buddy money…buddy money…I love you." (A60)

43. Harriett to Nicky: "Let's play Teletubbies Nicky…come on

44. Dipsy…come on Dipsy…" (A14) (A15)

45. Nicky: "That's not how you play Teletubbies…Dipsy…Dipsy…." (A16) (A15)

46. Harriett: "Ok ok...we'll do it like that... (A18) (is bending over trying to

47. take off gumboots to follow Nicky who has run inside) (A17).I'm

48. coming... take off your gumboots and we're allowed inside.." (A17)

(Observation ends: 11:15am).

Appendix (b): Naming and Identifying Tentative Categories

(related to step 1 in data analysis)

Category A = Television-related Talk and Play

A7. Child/ren's knowledge of TV character on their clothing

A8. Intersubjectivity created by children's shared knowledge of TV

A9. Children checking out knowledge of television characters/programmes with each other.

A10. TV creating links between home and centre.

A10. Child/ren/adults using TV knowledge to create shared play, talk, singing, actions.

A11. Child/ren using TV knowledge in conjunction with other activities unrelated to TV.

A13. Carrying out non-TV play alongside TV talk

A13. Child/ren inviting other child/ren to join in TV play

A14. Playing in Teletubby character

A15. Child/ren making rules about TV play (that's not how you play.)

A17. Child/ren transitioning out of TV play into other activities/routines/play

A18. Child/ren's acceptance of another child/ren's rules about TV play

A19. Child/ren negotiating rules about TV play

A20. Child/ren demonstrating knowledge of TV character/content

A20. Children's clothes with TV characters providing a point of intersubjectivity between children/adults

A20. Child/ren sharing knowledge of TV characters with other child/ren/adults

A23. Child/ren indicating their preference for a specific TV character

A24. Child/ren mimicking or modelling peer's Teletubby actions/talk

A25. Using unrelated props for TV play

A26. Teachers/staff using TV knowledge as a point of intersubjectivity between adult and child/ren

A27. Child/ren sharing knowledge with researcher or other child/ren about researcher prompts (cards and locket)

A28. Child/ren's knowledge of Superheroes confined to Superheroe's physical actions/abilities

A29. Child/ren recognizing TV character on peer's clothing or objects

A30. Child/ren demonstrating knowledge of Superhero re: actions or role

A31. Child/ren responding with agency to Superhero talk/play

A32. Child/ren using home knowledge to counteract fear or uncertainty about Superheroes

A33. McDonalds as a point of shared knowledge between children and children and adults

A34. Child/ren using unrelated props for Superhero play

A35. Child/ren seeking adult assistance to carry out Superhero play

A36. Child/ren sharing the Superhero role with other child/ren during play

A37. Children using TV as a point of intersubjectivity between children/adults.

A38. Adult (researcher/staff) incorrectly assuming child/ren's knowledge of TV characters/programmes

A39. Child/ren accessing TV character/programme as part of unrelated pretend play episode

A40. Cultural events provoking TV play/talk

A41. Researcher initiated contact with child/ren. Asking child/ren's knowledge of TV characters and programmes

A42. Child/ren using McDonald's props as a stimulus for play (give away toys with meals)

A43. Child/ren exluding other child/ren from TV play/talk

A44. Child/ren requesting researcher to read stories based on TV characters/programmes

A45. Child/ren reading TV related books (child-initiated and no adult involvement)

A46. Child/ren making links between TV characters at centre and home experiences

A47. Child/ren requesting to see researcher props

A48. Child/ren extending TV character's typical roles during play/talk

A49. Child/ren requesting researcher to purchase TV related products for them

A50. Child/ren sharing knowledge of Superhero role and characteristics with other children/adults

A51. Child/ren specifically asking to see Teletubby prompts or pictures

A52. Child/ren engaging in aggressive Superhero play requiring adult intervention

A53. Child/ren imitating peer's Superhero play/script

A54. Children gathering around in groups to see researcher prompts (de facto)

A55. Child/ren demonstrating or engaging in stereotypical gendered play/talk based on TV characters' roles or programmes

A56. Child/ren competing for TV related books or researcher prompt cards with other children

A57. Child/ren demonstrating knowledge/understanding of consumer based messages and symbols (advertising included)

A58. Consumerist TV related knowledge creating intersubjectivity between children

A59. Child/ren using McDonald's props used for aggressive play

A60. Child/ren engaging in Spice Girl's play/talk or child/ren showing interest in

peer's Spice Girl play/talk

Appendix: (c) Examples of Data Forming Initial Categories

(relating to step 1 in Data Analysis)

ABBREVIATIONS:

FN: field notes (1 & 2 = Book 1 and Book 2)

JN: journal

LRR: language running record

OB: observation

POB: participant observation

RR: running record

AN: anecdotal account

RQ: response to my question

a) Children Demonstrating Knowledge of TV Characters/Content/Programme

Examples:

1) Nicky approaches me and says: "I know the Spice Girls. Stop right now." (FN 1,

AN, LRR: pg 5 line 16)

2) Charlie: "Barney is at home on TV."

Me: "Is he still on TV?"

Charlie: "Barney is gone but he is on video...purple (inaudible)Teletubbies and

Wiggles are on TV."

Charlie begins to sing the Wiggles theme song. (FN 1, LRR, POB, AN:

pg 21 lines 16-20).

Jane asks me to open my locket. I open it to reveal the Teletubbies.

Tania is standing nearby and comes over to look.

Tania: "oh that's so cool... so cool."

Jane: "....they go splash, splash, splash and hold the big ball...(is using a T/T type accent) and fall down...blah...blah...(inaudible noise)

(FN 1, LRR: pg 24 lines 16-21).

b) Child/ren Demonstrating Knowledge of Superhero Rules regarding SH Actions or

Role

Examples:

Nicky to me: "Spiderman catches people."

Me: "Saves people?"

Nicky: "Batman saves people...he saves people...Spiderman chases them back to Batman so then he saves them." (FN 1, LRR, POB: pg 90 lines 18-2)

2) James is looking at the pictures of Batman and Superman.

James: "They are good guys."

Me: "What makes them good guys?"

James: "They all have capes."

 Me: "Why do capes make them good guys?"

James: "Because Batman and Superman have capes and they save and people flying with capes." (FN 1, LRR, POB: pg 52 lines 24-30).

3) James and Ross are playing Superheroes in the home corner. James has a policeman's hat on and is throwing cardboard boxes at Ross.

James: "Take that...take that..." Ross is karate kicking into the air and gesturing with his arms.

Ross: " Superman....does this and this (continues gesturing) and that..." (FN 1 & DD, AN, OB, LRR: pg 83 lines 25-29).

Appendix (d): Data Analysis

Identifying Units of Meaning

(illustrating step 3 of data analysis)

ABBREVIATIONS

FN: field notes (1 & 2 = Book 1 and Book 2)

JN: journal

LRR: language running record

OB: observation

POB: participant observation

RR: running record

AN: anecdotal account

RQ: response to my question

Example One

1) James: "I like Batman, Robin and Superman because they fly."

Tim: "They can't fly really."   (FN, OB, LRR: p65 20-21)

Note: Tim's response challenges James' belief about Superheroes (JN).

(unit of meaning: children differ in beliefs about Superheroes)

2) Tom has left the book corner where I am sitting and returns with a handbag. He

selects the Teletubby book, purposefully searches for it in a pile of books. He places

the book in his handbag and goes to leave. Tom looks at me and says: "…handbag

and Teletubbies…"

Me: "Have you put the Teletubbies in the handbag?"

Tom smiles (looks very pleased that I have noticed) and leaves the book corner with bag and book.

(FN & DD, AN: p52 14-17)

Note: Tom is extending Teletubby play by combining these TV characters with unrelated sociodramatic props (JN).

(unit of meaning: television-related props may provoke TV play)

3) Charlie points to a picture of Jack Frost on the wall and asks me:

"Who's that?"

Me: "Jack Frost"

Charlie places a policeman's hat on his head.

Charlie: "I'm Batman and I'm going to get that damn Jack FrostÖI'll get that Jack FrostÖ" (FN, POB, LRR p27 6-9)

Note: Charlie is combining unrelated props [hat], a cultural figure [Jack Frost] and a Superhero [Batman] in his play). The policeman's hat may represent authority, Tom's earlier reaction to Jack Frost suggested that he had identified him as a 'bad guy'. His response to Jack Frost involves his appropriation of the combined powers of Batman and a Policeman (JN).

(unit of meaning: unrelated props are used for Superhero play - props and Superhero symbolising authority?)

4) Katie and Kate are in the home corner. Ben and Tim are approaching them. They boys appear to be playing Superheroes and this is indicated by the sounds that they are making and by their physical actions (arms outstretched, running).

Katie: "No Supermans in here..." (FN, AN, LRR p21 7-10)

Note: Katie is disapproving of Superhero play and clearly lets her wishes and feelings known to her peers (JN).

(unit of meaning: child disapproves of peer's Superhero play)

5) Lance, Tim and Harriet are looking at a picture of the TV character 'Tazmanian Devil' on Lance's cap.

Harriet: "Öhe (Batman) saves people. He saves people when they are scared. I'm a brave girl and I am not scared of anything."

James: "There are no monsters in New Zealand." (FN, AN, LRR p6 24-28)

Note: Harriet and James reassure themselves about potentially fearful events. Harriet declares that she has no need of Batman and is capable of 'saving herself'. James claims that he is safe because he lives in NZ. (JN).

(unit of meaning: child responds with agency to Superhero talk)

Appendix: (e) Categories Derived from Common Units of Meaning

Throughout this phase of analysis I continued to follow the process of identifying small units of meaning in the data that were 'autonomous.' The next step involved placing these units into larger categories as commonalties emerged within the units of meaning. A recurring theme, for example, that emerged from identified units of meaning was:

' Children create/change, enforce, accept and share specific, scripted information (rules?) in relation to television play and talk.'

Categories involving this theme were created from the following units of meaning:

1) Category A19: Children negotiating rules about TV play

a) Jon to James: "..hey this is our aeroplane…our Batman aeroplane."

James: "...yeah….yeah…..super sonic Batman aeroplane….Batmans fly in this sometimes to get to Beetleborgs."

unit of meaning: extending rules around TV play

b) Tom: "Do you want that Barbie one?"

Rachel: "That's not Barbie."

Tom: "Yes it is look" (points to a pink border).

Rachel: "No that's just a doll…it's not Barbie…she (the doll) you have to have all the Barbie stuff."

Tom: "Oh…ok."

unit of meaning: qualifying rules re: identifying Barbie

c) Lance: "The Incredible Hulk?"

Tom: "Is he a man?"

Lance: "Yes."

Tom: "Is he real?"

Lance: "Yes."

Ben: "Is he like this?" (Pulls an aggressive face and pumps up his arms).

Lance: "…and he goes funny colours. And he's real...real... ugly…"

unit of meaning: negotiating rules around Superhero characters

d) Harriet: "…come on Kim let's play Teletubbies….come on Dipsy …come on Dipsy."

Kim: "...that's not how you play Teletubbies (the word play is stressed and said with some exasperation)...go round and round."

unit of meaning: children model rules re: TV play and characters

2) Category A30: Children demonstrating knowledge of Superhero re: actions or role

a) Tracey: "Spiderman catches people…"

Kim: "…yeah he saves them…"

Tracey: "No, no Batman does that…he saves people….Spiderman chases them back to Batman so then he saves them."

Kim: "…he does not….Spiderman's job is to save them…"

Tracey: "…but he can't because Batman does that…"

unit of meaning: identifying Superhero's role

b) Charlie: "Spiderman…yeah I'll show what he does... (makes clawing actions with his hands)…he has a web…to climb in…. And catch baddies in…. And that's what he does…this is how you do it."

unit of meaning: sharing and modelling knowledge of Superhero

c) Nicky: "Teletubbies jump in puddles. And Spiderman catches Batman in the night... and saves him."

unit of meaning: sharing knowledge of Superhero role

d) Tony: (surprised tone) "…don't you know the Incredible Hulk...he explodes his clothes..."

unit of meaning: sharing knowledge of Superhero's abilities

3) Category A48: Child/ren extending TV character's typical roles during play/talk

a) Jon: "(Batman)...can fly any way he wants to…"

unit of meaning: extending Superhero's ability/role

b) Sam: "You are all my servants…Superman will chop you up with my hair…"

unit of meaning: changing Superhero role (from good to bad)

c) Sam: "Batman is going to eat your babies then."

(note: separate incident and entry from example 3b)

unit of meaning: changing Superhero role (from good to bad)

The recurring theme of *'children create/change, enforce, accept and share specific, information in relation to television play and talk'* produced the common units of meaning outlined in the examples.

These units of meaning subsequently formed the categories:

A19: Children negotiating rules about TV play

A30: Children demonstrating knowledge of Superhero re: actions or role

A48: Child/ren extending TV character's typical roles during play/talk

From these categories emerged the propositional statement:

<u>*"Rules about roles are constructed during television play and talk."*</u>

Appendix (f): Sample of Propositional Statements

'Children need to share points of definition and understandings within a play/episode or centre activity before they are able to operate in the zone of proximal development.'

'Television play scaffolds children into social roles and rules and at times extends their vocabulary and conceptual understanding of language.'

'Television scaffolds children's social understandings through allowing them to construct and develop their own rules abut roles.'

Appendix (g): Process used in Forming a Propositional Statement

a) Final Propositional Statement: *"Television-related objects (children's clothing,*

pictures and props) scaffold and provide links between the children's home and centre

experiences."

This propositional statement evolved out of the following category headings:

A20. Children's clothes with TV characters providing a point of intersubjectivity

between children/adults

A29. Child/ren recognizing TV character/s on other child/ren's clothing or objects

A46. Child/ren making links between TV characters at centre and home

A47. Child/ren requesting to see researcher props

These categories were formed after identifying the following common units of

meaning in the data.

Examples from Data that had formed the Category Headings

A20. Children's clothes with TV characters providing a point of intersubjectivity

between children/adults

1) A staff member is greeting Rebecca and her mother. Her mother leaves the centre

and Rebecca is reluctant to go outside to join the other children. The teacher holds up

one of Rebecca's gumboots and says:

"Are you going to wear Your Barbie boots outside today. Look where's Barbie? Are

you going to show everyone your new Barbie boots?" (the staff points to the Barbie

logo on the boots).

(FN 1 & DD, AN, OB, LRR: pg 2 lines 2-8)

unit of meaning: staff using TV related clothing to aid transition (make link) between home and centre

2) Harriet approaches me and is wearing a Teenage Ninja Mutant Turtle T-shirt. I point out each character and ask her who they are. At first she does not reply but then draws my attention to a feature of one of the characters.

Harriet: "Look." (she points to the mask over one of the Turtle's eyes)

Me: "Is that a mask over his eyes?"

Harriet: "...scary, scary..."

Me: "Why is it scary Harriet?"

Harriet: "Because he won't show me his eyes...like this." (she covers her eyes with her sweatshirt).

(FN 2, POB, LRR: pg 21 lines 21-25)

unit of meaning: researcher using TV clothing to initiate interaction

3) "Sam! I have those Batman socks at home."

Sam replies: "...so do I at home..." (the socks are on his feet).

(FN 1, LRR: pg 46 lines 31-32)

unit of meaning: TV clothing providing peers with common home links

4) Laura: "Look at my hat."

Bianca: "Teletubbies hat!"

(FN 1, LRR: pg 2 lines 6-8)

unit of meaning: child recognising and responding to TV character on peer's clothing

A29. Child/ren recognizing TV character/s on other child/ren's clothing or objects

1) Kate and Tim are both wearing clothes with Barney pictures on them. Charlie looks at the clothing then says, "Margaret can I see your Barney pictures?"

(FN 1, AN, LRR: pg 79 lines 26-28).

unit of meaning: TV clothing prompting child's further interest in TV material

2) Laura is wearing a Spice Girl's sweatshirt.

Nicky: "Are they the Spice Girls?" (points to the picture on the sweatshirt)

Laura: "Yes they are."

(FN 1, LRR: pg 1 lines 16-17)

unit of meaning: child/ren recognising and responding to TV character on clothing

3) Lance is wearing a Tazmanian Devil cap (television character).

Bruce: "I have a cap with Taz on at home."

(FN 1, LRR: pg 6 lines 21-22)

unit of meaning: TV clothing providing common home links between peers

4) James: "Sam I have those Batman socks at home." (points to Sam's socks)

Sam: "So do I."

(FN 1, LRR: pg 46 lines 30-32)

unit of meaning: TV clothing providing common home links for peers

A46. Child/ren Making Links between TV Characters at Centre and Home

1) I have just shown Rebecca the prompt cards and she says with excitement:

"The Teletubbies…Teletubbies….I see them at home…I watch them…I watch them

all the time…why are they here….why do you have them here?" (FN 1, LRR: p12

lines 1-6)

unit of meaning: child linking TV character at centre with home

2) Charlie and Bianca ask to see my locket. I open it and they see the picture of the

Teletubbies. They laugh delightedly (it seems to be prompted by their recognition of

the T/T).

Charlie: "We have the Teletubbies at home."

Bianca: "So do we!" (FN 1, AN, LRR p21 23-26)

(Charlie and Bianca make a centre-home connection).

3) Charlie asks to see my locket. I show him.

Charlie: "I have that Teletubby on video and on TV but I lost the video at home…"

(FN 1, LRR p 23 6-7)

 (Charlie refers to the video at his home).

unit of meaning: child linking TV character at centre with home experience

4) James is using a hammer as a gun and points it at me as he is talking.

James: "I saw him (Superman) on TV at my place....when he was on...but he gave up....he's not on TV any more." (FN 1, LRR p29 24-26)

(James refers to Superman at his home).

unit of meaning: child linking TV character at centre with home knowledge

5) Tim and Tom spot the Teletubby book. Both children try to grab it. Tim takes it and turns to the back of the book where there are advertisements for Teletubby videotapes. He points to a picture of a video and smiles:

"I have that one at home!" (FN 1, AN, LRR p44 1-5)

 (Tim notes he has the videotape at home).

unit of meaning: child looking for TV character in centre that he has at home

6) James is very upset about his mother leaving. He asks for and finds the McDonald's toys, then sits with me and talks about going to McDonalds with his mother. He becomes calmer and more settled as he talks about the event.

(JN, AN)

(James talking with me about his visit to McDonalds with his mother is prompted by the McDonald's toys).

unit of meaning: child seeking comfort in TV toys at centre through making home links

A47. Children Request to see Researcher Prompts

Tania: "Margaret - see your pictures?" (FN 1, LRR: pg 24 line 3)

Tim: "Where is your locket....pictures?" I open the locket.

Tim: "Where have the Teletubbies gone?" In the locket is Spiderman and Kermit.

Tim: "Where are the Teletubbies?" (FN 1, POB, LRR: pg 48 lines 30-32)

3) Charlie to me: "Where's Barnie?" Brigette and Lance gather round. Brigette: "We want to see your cards." (FN 1, POB, LRR: pg 68 lines 28-31)

units of meaning: children requesting TV material at centre and naming TV characters (knowledge that has been gained at home?)

After further reading and re-reading of these categories:

A20. Children's clothes with TV characters providing a point of intersubjectivity between children/adults

A29. Child/ren recognizing TV character/s on other child/ren's clothing or objects

A46. Child/ren making links between TV characters at centre and home

A47. Child/ren requesting to see researcher props

I noted similarities and subsequently grouped them together under the common theme of:

TV objects at the centre help children to make home and centre links.

From this possible discovery I asked the question:

"Are children appropriating TV related objects and materials to create links between their home and centre experiences?"

Information suggested in the category headings provided this answer. Children's clothes with TV characters provide a point of intersubjectivity between children/adults as children often recognized and commented on TV character/s they saw on their peer's clothing or objects. The television-related objects appeared to assist children in making links between characters at the centre and their home experiences and finally, children frequently request to see the research props then

comment on their home and centre experiences. In addition, at times, children appeared to seek and find comfort in seeing this material at the centre.

<u>Summary: Television-related objects in the centre provide a form of intersubjectivity between children's home and centre experiences.</u>

Based on this discovery, an inclusive and conclusive propositional statement was written. This propositional statement sought to summarise all of the data that related to this finding:

Proposition: "Television-related objects (children's clothing, pictures and props) scaffold and provide links between the children's home and centre experiences."

Appendix (h): Propositional Statements Categorised in Relation to the Research Question

(relating to step 6)

Question: 'How' or 'is' intersubjectivity achieved through children's 'appropriation' of cultural tools during pretend play?

Intersubjectivity was Considered through Examining the Category:

Television play/talk providing a zone of proximal development

Related propositional statements:

Children need to share points of definition and understandings within a play episode/centre activity before they are able to operate in the zone of proximal development.

TV play scaffolds children into social roles and rules and at times extends their vocabulary and conceptual understanding of language.

TV scaffolds children's social understandings through allowing them to construct and develop their own rules about roles.

Children 'read' cultural signs and symbols to make direct connections between TV characters as a product and purchasing.

Books about TV characters show children negotiating two symbol systems, the written word and the electronic media.

Television-related objects (children's clothing, pictures and props) scaffold and provide links between the children's home and centre experiences.

Knowledge of television characters and programmes created and intersubjectivity between children, and children and adults (including the researcher).

Children while linking television-related pictures and objects to their 'individual home experiences' remained aware that they shared this 'collective television experience' with other children.

Appendix i: Sketch Plan of Centre

SWINGS

CLIMBING FRAME

BARK

HARD OUTSIDE AREA

SAND PIT

FAMILY CORNER

BLOCK CORNER

RAMP

SLEEP ROOM

ART/DINING AREA
(HARD FLOOR AREA)

UNDER TWO Y/O AREA

BOOK CORNER

KITCHEN

OFFICE

STAFF ROOM

GRASS AREA

HIGH SCHOOL PLAYING FIELD