A SOCIO-CULTURAL INTERPRETATION OF YOUNG CHILDREN'S PLAYFUL AND HUMOROUS COMMUNICATION

"The play's the thing" - Hamlet

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative and interpretive study explores how young children experience humour and playfulness in their communication. Data were gathered in three early childhood education centres. The ethnographic method used was primarily participant observation, with the aid of a video camera and tape-recorder. Socio-cultural historical activity theory informs both the methodological paradigm of the research and the framework for data analysis. The research focuses on systems of interactions rather than individuals. The diversity and complexity in children's playful and humorous communication is illuminated by presenting 24 narrative-like "events" involving such communication. This presentation makes clear the dynamic qualities and artifact-mediated dialectical nature of playful and humorous communication activity. "Artifacts" include material and non-material tools, symbols, and semiotic signs (Wartofsky, 1979). Relationships between the roles, rules, and the community of children and teachers engaged in each event are discussed. Tensions and contradictions in these relationships (including children's playful subversion of adult rules) are explored.

This thesis argues that humour, playfulness, and imagination are shared and distributed across groups of children. Thus children's imaginations, including their individual experiences, are dynamically shared with and connect the group. Playful and humorous communication involves words, sounds, gestures, posture, rhythm, and movement. At times the synchronous movements and speech of children having fun together are like a spontaneously improvised dance. Boundaries between children are blurred by the activity. The children become united by shared and distributed imagination in playful and humorous diversity.

This study suggests that individual children in early childhood centres should be viewed as fundamentally connected to each other. Individuals exist in relation to others. Children's relationships with others, their environment, and

artifacts are central to understanding children's experience of playful and humorous communication.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A feature of groups of young children playing is their exuberant energy - the mirth, glee, and exhilaration in their play. Their bodies express their feelings and they seem to move, laugh (and cry) a lot. Observing these facets in children's everyday playfulness in early childhood centres contributed to the researcher's decision to explore this phenomenon. The researcher also had a personal interest in playfulness and humour. As an early childhood teacher and a parent she valued, enjoyed and was fascinated by young children's playfulness and humour. From a lifespan perspective, playfulness and humour may encompass important communicative and coping skills for adults living in a complex world, increasingly faced with making complex choices, as argued by Goncu and Perone (2005). It follows that playfulness may also be an important disposition for learning (Carr, 2001), both for children being playful and humorous in the present world and for children developing and learning to be citizens in an unpredictable future world.

Though children's play has been extensively researched (El'konin, 1971/1972, 1989/2000; Garvey, 1977; Huizinger, 1949; Piaget, 1962; Sutton-Smith, 1971; Vygotsky, 1978), this study differs from most play research because the focus is neither play nor individual children, but the communicative nature of humour and playfulness which characterises groups of young children having fun together.

The original proposed research question was:

- What role does humour play in the interactions of young children?

Sub-questions probed humour in communication, and humour in relation to understanding others. During the exploratory phase of the research the wording of the main question was changed to reflect the researcher's

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observations in the field. The main question became:

- How do young children *experience humour* and *playfulness* in their *communication*?

Thus "humour" was expanded to include "playfulness," which better captured young children's experience of laughing, having fun, and being funny, rather than adult joke humour. Humour, as a subset of playfulness (Bergen, 2003; Lieberman, 1977), is discussed in Chapter 2. "Experience" was added to the research question in order to make explicit that this study is about children being funny and having fun. The replacement of "interactions" with "communication" seemed a more apt and purposeful description of children being playful "together".

1.1 DEFINING THE NOUNS "PLAYFULNESS" AND "HUMOUR"

Most people recognise young children's humour and playfulness. Yet both terms are difficult, if not impossible, to define neatly. This is exemplified in the unanimous vote by delegates at the first International Conference on Humour and Laughter, held in Bedford in1976, not to hold a concluding session devoted to defining humour, or to compile a taxonomy of humour, because both tasks were perceived as impossible (Chapman & Foot, 1977). Definitions of play and playfulness also elude tidy descriptions, though Collins English Dictionary (1998) does make the links between the two terms explicit in defining "playful *adj.*" as "1. full of high spirits and fun: 2. good natured and humorous". Use of the word "humour" has changed over time. In Renaissance times it referred to the four humours of the body: choler, melancholy, blood, and phlegm (McGhee, 1979). Aspects of this usage occur today when a person is described as being either "good humoured" or "out of humour"; the implication is that bodily humours are either in or out of balance.

Historically, theories of humour have been categorised into three types: "superiority", "incongruity" and "relief" theories (Morreall, 1983). Aristotle described humour in terms of a superiority theory where the function of

humour was ultimately derisive (Morreall, 1983). Wit was regarded as educated insolence and the best that could come from humour was the ability to laugh at oneself. Young children often appreciate slapstick comedy humour where they triumph over another. The incongruity theory views humour as primarily cognitive, involving unexpected, illogical, or inappropriate matches. In contrast, the relief theory offers a psycho-analytic and physiological explanation of humour as primarily linked to sexual and aggressive ideas, or instincts (Freud, 1916). That is, humour (like dreams) serves a regulatory function allowing the venting of nervous energy.

None of these theories cover all humour. The same humorous event can be interpreted differently, from each theoretical perspective. Most importantly for this research, none of the theories emphasise the *context* of humour. Instead they all view humour as located in individual minds.

1.2 INCLUDING CONTEXT

Communication is central to this study. Rather than focusing on children as separate individuals the "communication" focus used here is on the interactions and transactions that connect young children being playful and humorous together. Communication is about connecting with others and expressing understandings. Children communicate in order to both feel at home in the world and, to make sense of the world. As social beings children learn to represent their understandings of the world by interacting and communicating with people, places and things (Ministry of Education, 1996). The interactive focus on communication emphasises the artifacts (Wartofsky, 1979) that mediate children's interactions and thereby connect children. This interactive focus also includes invisible historical influences by acknowledging that the activity of communicating occurs in social, historical, and cultural settings.

This study is situated within a broadly socio-cultural paradigm (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1987, 1999; Vygotsky, 1934/1986, 1978; Wertsch, 1991, 1998).

Social - cultural - historical - activity theory (henceforth referred to as CHAT, Chaiklin, 2001) is used as a framework for analysing children's playful and humorous communication. CHAT prioritises the contextual elements in communication. CHAT also prioritises the dynamic, dialectical and dialogical nature of children's activity that is at the heart of their playful and humorous communication.

Humour and playfulness are situated social activities. They involve relationships. The CHAT framework model makes this obvious, by highlighting the complexities and the diversity in young children's playful and humorous relationships. The methodology of this study focuses on young children's situated playful and humorous communicative activity as the unit of analysis. This is congruent with the communicative and activity-based nature of playfulness and humour. These social and communicative qualities of humour and playfulness are a focus of this research.

A research focus on activity systems requires a complex paradigm shift from focusing on separate individuals to focusing on the unifying aims of communication. CHAT is not a closed system reductionist model. The dialectical and dynamic nature of activity implies openness, change, and transformation. Thus, activity systems encompass both diversity and unity, which as Engeström (1999) has pointed out, seems like a contradiction. But the activity of communicating unites the diversity of individual actions and goals as shared aims that motivate ongoing group activity. This monist unity in activity extends to developing complex open systems that are interconnected and always changing, rather than being self contained unities (Engeström, 1987). The focus on children's activity and communication raises awareness of the multiple layers of activity and of the early childhood centre community as a "public family" as well as being an activity system. The CHAT framework fits with the qualitative interpretive methodological procedures used in this study.

Chapter 2 of this thesis explores the academic discourse in the literature

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covering children's playfulness and humour. That literature is generally restricted to psychological references and focuses on children as individuals. Paradoxically there are gaps in the literature on both adult playfulness and on children's humour. This is not the case for literature on adult's humour and on children's play. Chapter 2 begins by overviewing interpretations of humour and playfulness and identifying gaps in the literature. The research focus of this study is wider than the general psychological focus of the literature. The socio-cultural approach taken in this study encompasses broader sociological and anthropological interpretations of children's playful and humorous behaviour.

Socio-cultural theory and CHAT are discussed further in Chapter 3 in relation to the theoretical foundations of this study and the CHAT paradigm that frames the research's focus on the activity of children communicating. Ethical issues are discussed in both Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 4 more pragmatically outlines the research methods and the process that was followed in this study. The research is situated in natural settings, being three early childhood education centres, and uses ethnographic methods. The successive phases of the research are explained together with the sub-questions that developed during each phase and which were addressed in the following phase.

Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 present the "findings" of the research in relation to 24 "events" that illuminate the diversity of children experiencing humour and playfulness in their communication. Each of these chapters addresses, in order, the sub-questions that arose during the four successive phases of the research.

For purposes of in-depth analysis each chapter also uses a different but complementary lens of the activity theory model to frame the events that are then analysed and discussed. The lenses of the activity theory model include: the *artifacts* that mediate and the *rules*, *roles*, and *community* factors that are also components of children's playful and humorous activity

(presented in Figure 3.2). This dual focus, on sub-questions plus an activity theory lens enables further exploration of children's collective experiences of playful and humorous activity from various perspectives. Thus Chapter 5 explores artifacts that mediate children's playful and humorous communication. Chapter 6 looks at the rules, and Chapter 7 looks at the roles around children being playful and humorous. The early childhood centre community lens is a focus for Chapter 8. Chapter 9 brings together all these lenses on the activity theory model to analyse and discuss one activity from these different, yet complementary, perspectives.

Reflecting the diversity inherent in playfulness and humour, a wide range of themes emerged as this study progressed. They include: agency and power, children being imaginative, children using a range of communicative languages (from music to words to bodies), narrative ways of being playful, intersubjectivity, intercorporeity, theory of mind, artifacts that mediate playful and humorous communication, and the emergent nature of the communication process.

Chapter 10 brings together the main findings of this thesis. These include the conclusion that young children being playful and humorous together act collectively. The resulting implications for how we view individual children and early childhood centre communities are discussed in Chapter 10.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Rather than being a discrete review of research literature this chapter is a review of ideas and approaches to studying children's humour and playfulness, with reference to a few key research studies. Two paradoxes stand out in the literature on children's experience of humour and playfulness.

First, humour and playfulness tend to have been researched as separate topics within subject disciplines despite, as Apte, (1985) points out, being closely related overlapping topics that cross several subject disciplines. Most of the research on children's humour and playfulness has been carried out within the discipline of psychology where playfulness, humour, and related behaviours like laughter, teasing and joking, have generally been treated as unrelated, separate categories, defined and researched differently. Examples include the much cited research of Chapman, 1983; Chapman & Foot 1976; Goldstein & McGhee, 1972; McGhee 1971, 1976, 1977, 1979; McGhee & Goldstein, 1983. The second and related paradox concerns the individualistic nature of this humour research: it has tended to focus on individuals and to ignore context.

In contrast to humour research, play research (and playfulness) has generally been viewed as more socially contextualised though frequently lacking awareness of cultural and historical contexts. Notable examples are the Russian researchers: El'konin, B. D. (1996/2001), El'konin, D.B. (1971, 1972), Leont'ev, (1978) and Vygotsky, (1978, 1934/1986). Yet as this study shows, both humour and playfulness, especially when viewed from the child's perspective, are related social activities. Earlier playfulness researchers, such as Lieberman (1966, 1977), did acknowledge the social nature of

children's playfulness, yet they retained an individualistic research focus.

These paradoxes in the research literature provide a rationale for using an approach that attempts to redress the splintered balance and make explicit the links between individuals, social groups, and cultural-historical context. The overlapping links in children's experience of playfulness and humour are also acknowledged by focusing this research on both playfulness and humour. Hence this study argues for both socio-cultural research methods, (Chaiklin, 2001; Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1987, 1999; Wertsch, 1991, 1998) and socio-cultural psychological understandings of people (Davydov & Radzikhovsky, 1985). From this perspective individual psychological development is a socio-cultural process.

This review of the discourse begins with an overview of research literature on children's humour and playfulness. Some of the definitional and methodological issues and resultant tensions identified earlier are highlighted and gaps in the literature are also identified. It is argued that dominant theories of child development have blinkered psychological understandings of children's humour and play, and have consequently governed the nature of research in these areas.

Play research is a vast domain. Only aspects of it that seem particularly relevant to this study of children being playful together will be addressed. Concepts that are important for understanding child development from a socio-cultural play research perspective are addressed. These include: the place of rules, roles, imagination, imitation, and repetition for children being playful and humorous. Other play-related concepts that are addressed include: mastery and power play, and the related concepts of both group and individual agency, as well as choice. All these concepts can contribute towards understanding children's experience of playfulness and humour in their communication. Literature on the nature of improvisation and spontaneity in children's playful and humorous communication is discussed. The roles of narrative and myth in meaning-making are also addressed.

Socio-cultural psychological interpretations of intersubjectivity are discussed and contrasted with other psychological research on children's developing theory of mind. In this study both concepts (intersubjectivity and theory of mind) concern children developing self and other awareness while being playful and/or humorous. This discussion will also lead into the mediating functions of words and other artifacts (Wartofsky, 1979) in children's playful and humorous communication.

Any understanding of young children's communication obviously has to include their non-verbal and pre-verbal communication. Fogel (1993) overcomes the dualism inherent in pre-verbal, non-verbal distinctions by referring to "verbal actions", which include sounds as well as words and word approximations. His view sees continuous communication as a process including body movements, gestures, sounds and speech. Gordon Wells makes the point that all first language-learning communication is pre-verbal rather than non-verbal, (personal communication, January 19, 2003). Though words may be the ultimate tool for complex thinking and communication (Halliday, 1993; Vygotsky, 1934/1986), a lot of playful and humorous communication is wordless. Consequently the philosophical and neuro-psychological theme of intercorporeity (Merleau Ponty, 1962), or body language, will be addressed.

The historical approach of this literature review, beginning with past humour research, is consistent with the prioritising of historical (as well as social and cultural) perspectives that is integral to the socio-cultural approach of this study. This review will elaborate on some broad aspects of the socio-cultural paradigm, without being repetitive, as substantial sections of Chapter 3 will also explore socio-cultural theory and CHAT methods in detail in relation to this study.

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2.2 CATEGORISING AND DEFINING HUMOUR

2.2.1 Piagetian dominance in psychological humour studies

Within psychology a developmental perspective on children's humour has prevailed since the 1970s, when Piagetian theories of children's cognitive development also reigned supreme (Chapman, 1983; Chapman & Foot 1976; Goldstein & McGhee, 1972; McGhee 1971, 1976, 1977, 1979; McGhee & Goldstein, 1983). These researchers, still dominant today, seemed caught between competing paradigms associated with the unsystematic and social nature of humour and the positivist, individualistic nature of empirical research (Foot, 1986; McGhee, 1977, 1979).

Earlier observational studies of humour that had been carried out in the nineteen twenties and thirties were dismissed by this new breed of scientific humour researchers for not being sufficiently empirical (Brackett 1933; Enders, 1927; Ding & Jersild, 1932; Kenerdine, 1931; Wilson, 1931, all cited by Chapman, 1983). Chapman (1983) argued for the incorporation of more systematic "behavioural measures" and less "subjective" researcher participation in humour research, also cautioning against possible "experimenter effects". During the 1970s and 1980s the measurement of humour comprehension and appreciation, experimenter effects and awareness of being observed were regarded as "methodological problems" with which humour researchers must grapple (McGhee, 1977, p.205).

During the seventies McGhee (1971, 1976, 1977, 1979, 1982, 1983) captured the field by proposing that children develop their understandings of humour through four age-related stages of increasing cognitive sophistication. McGhee is still the most widely and authoritatively referenced researcher on humour and children as exemplified in more recent research that refers to McGhee by, for example: Barnett (1990, 1991) Klein (2003) Lampert (1996) Sobstad (1995) Socha & Kelly (1994) Trevlas, Grammatikopoulos, Tsigilis & Zachopoulou (2003) and Zeece (1995). McGhee's stages of humour

development correlate roughly with Piagetian stages of cognitive development.

McGhee (1971) defined humour narrowly, in terms of incongruity theory where humour is understood as the cognitive mismatch between what is and what should be; the resolution of that incongruity is often conveyed in jokes and riddles. Accordingly, children's playfulness, laughter, mirth, glee and other experiences such as tickling, and silliness in the context of play, are not regarded as humorous because they do not necessarily fit with incongruity theory. McGhee (1977) does acknowledge that his developmental theory is "a restricted model" (p. 27). However, he sees this as a desirable quality in the interests of empirical science.

Categorisation makes humour easier to study and quantify for research purposes, and McGhee apparently did not perceive the restricted model as possibly misrepresenting humour simply because using circular logic, he defined humour in terms of incongruity. Though incongruity is an important factor in humour, it is argued here that young children's humour extends beyond incongruity. The boundaries between play, playfulness, joy, glee, mirth etc. are fuzzy and emotions are integral to children's experience of humour and playfulness in their communication. Thus, the experience of humour and playfulness is not purely cognitive, but integrates cognition with feelings (Bergen, 2003; Klein, 2003).

Definitions such as McGhee's can be problematic if they create boundaries that restrict understandings. Humour, like play, defies definitive categorisation because there are always exceptions to the rule. However the tradition of narrowing humour by defining humour has been common to most theorists and researchers on humour (Chapman & Foot 1976; Goldstein & McGhee 1972). Even when they do acknowledge that humour defies definition, researchers and theorists have continued to define humour narrowly so as to study it more easily (Chapman & Foot, 1976; Goldstein & McGhee, 1972). Freud (1916) for example, preferred to narrow his humour

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studies to "wit", which he described as "a sub-species of the comic"(p. 288), and somewhat removed from the broader realm of humour. He did however acknowledge the breadth of "humour".

McGhee's (1971) stage theory of humour development is based on his understanding of humour as incongruity, and fits Piaget's (1962) stage theory of psychological development. Accordingly, incongruity-based humour develops alongside Piagetian understandings of representational thinking and pretend-play. The initial first stage in the development of incongruity humour involves incongruous actions towards objects. Stage two incorporates language as a tool, making possible the incongruous labelling of objects and events as in play with words and mislabelling (e.g. calling a cow a dog). Words take over from actions.

Children begin to appreciate conceptual incongruity at about age three when the activity of pretending predominates so children can create conceptual incongruities (e.g. "My dad called me a silly sausage so I called my dad a silly potato"). This stage continues until about age seven when, with operational thinking (Piaget, 1962) children are able to recognise errors in logic, reverse ideas, and consider two or more ideas simultaneously. Finally, in stage four, children show the beginnings of understanding the multiple meanings and word play of jokes and puns that are typical of adult humour.

Among the humour researchers of the seventies there was some disagreement over the ages of these stages. This was compounded with some disagreement also over the nature of humour. Thus Schutz (1976) shortened McGhee's two-year age limit for representational thinking to about eighteen months, which fits with the beginnings of representational thinking. Schutz also suggested that infant games like "peek-a-boo" and tickling might show the very early beginnings of humour use. However McGhee (1971, 1979) did not regard this sensori-motor-like behaviour as humour. He argued that the ability to experience humour requires representational thinking. Moreover, the ability to appreciate jokes and riddles requires even more

sophisticated operational thinking so, according to McGhee (1979), is beyond the thinking capabilities of children younger than about seven years.

This dominant developmental stage theory of humour excluded both different definitions of humour and understandings of cognition. Humour was defined narrowly and cognitively. Cognition was also viewed narrowly, as located inside individual minds. Most significantly, the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which children interactively construct and experience humour were ignored. Thinkers such as Bateson (1972), Rogoff (1998) and Salomon, (1993) have criticised this separatist view of individuals. In contrast they view cognition as distributed, shared thinking that connects people.

Being funny and playful are social activities that encompass more than isolated individuals using incongruity theory. Therefore a separatist view of cognition and individuals seems to be illogical as well as ironic. Instead of emphasising individuals this study focuses on the interactions and connections between children being humorous and playful. Thus this research paradigm differs from that of traditional psychological research on humour by incorporating methods and theory from other disciplines, including anthropology and philosophy.

2.2.2   Cross-disciplinary approaches to humour study

As has been pointed out, a lack of disciplinary and subject overlap has been a feature of the research literature on children's humour. *The Psychology of Humour* (1972), edited by Goldstein and McGhee represented only the research of psychologists, referred to as: "…behavioural scientists, whose training lays emphasis on quantitative research and empirically verifiable theory, and all have agreed that progress towards understanding humour will sooner come about by these means than by any other" (p. xx). This was despite the editors pointing out in their introduction that, "Any attempt to understand the many facets of humour requires the student to go beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries" (p. xix). A decade later, McGhee and

Goldstein also edited the *Handbook of Humour Research* (1983), and this time they included papers by humour researchers from a range of social science disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and linguistics, as well as (and still predominantly) psychology.

Despite the espoused cross-disciplinary benefits, the different disciplinary perspectives still did not seem to influence each other. The psychological research, for example, retained a narrow "scientific" reliance on quantitative methods. In the case of psychology the research perpetuated behaviorist traditions by, for example, assessing individuals' observable reactions to humour stimuli in artificial, experimental contexts. Fine (1983), a sociologist, refers to the ease of carrying out this type of psychological research as a reason for the psychological dominance in humour research. He also suggests that the difficulty of researching humour in its social context is a reason for the relative scarcity of humour studies within sociology. With the addition of cultural context to social context, Fine's rationale could also explain the scarcity of anthropological humour research.

From an anthropological perspective, Apte (1985) has described the difficulty he had in categorising children's humour according to themes that he had identified, using ethnographic methods. He found that the themes overlapped, and that definitions were problematic. The themes he identified were: linguistic, humour in play, scatological, and sexual categories. "Humour in play" included both "humour" and "play". As Apte (1985), reinforcing their overlapping nature, pointed out: "Both are considered pleasurable activities, however, and both can generate the responses of smiling and laughter. Thus the dividing line between humour and play is very thin indeed" (p.89).

2.2.3 Defining playfulness

This blurring of categories is a recurrent theme in research on both humour and playfulness. Both terms defy neat definitions (Bergen, 2003). Following

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Lieberman's (1966) earlier research on playfulness, Barnett (1990, 1991) also categorized "sense of humour" as a component of playfulness on the Children's Playfulness Scale (CPS). The original "playfulness instrument" scale devised by Lieberman (1966) was a questionnaire in which adults answered questions about child subjects' playfulness. The questions covered five categories as qualities of children's playfulness: manifest joy, physical spontaneity, social spontaneity, cognitive spontaneity and sense of humour. Whereas Lieberman asked open questions about children in relation to these categories of playfulness, Barnett used more specific closed indicators about the same categories. For example, Lieberman asked openly about the frequency and consistency of the child's sense of humour, while Barnett's CPS stipulates evidence of joke telling, teasing, telling and laughing at funny stories, and being a clown.

Categories, definitions, and words can both constrain and assist understandings of children being humorous and playful by what they do and do not include. In this context the playfulness scales of both Lieberman and Barnett focused on individual children and ignored the physical and social context of children's playfulness. This was however Barnett's (1991) intention, as she points out: "The measurement of play is viewed as an internal personality construct, as the child's predisposition to engage in playful activities and interactions" (p. 70). Such an approach clearly ignores the view of playfulness as a social phenomenon by interpreting playfulness as a personality trait. Similarly Lieberman (1977) also linked playfulness to individual creativity. Evaluations of the CPS have confirmed the existence of playfulness with the underlying categories as constructed in the CPS (Trevlas, Grammatikopoulos, Tsigilis, & Zachopoulou, 2003). However, both the CPS and Lieberman's (1966) instrument rely on the views of adults, plus the premise that playfulness is an internal personality construct.

In contrast to the individualistic focus of Barnett's (1991) CPS the socio-cultural paradigm of this study prioritises interaction over individualism. A focus on interactions is consistent with the research focus on children

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experiencing playful and humorous *communication*. This approach necessitates a focus on children being playful and humorous together, socially, in groups. From a socio-cultural perspective individual personality development involves cultural, historical, and evolutionary processes that are ultimately social. Children develop socially before becoming individuals (Vygotsky, 1978).

2.2.4   From cognitive incongruity to social-emotional playfulness

Because the boundaries between humour and playfulness overlap it is necessary to review some aspects in the vast arena of play research. Despite this overlap, humour researchers within psychology seem to have spoken different languages from play researchers; this reflects different methodologies as well as epistemologies. Unlike the predominantly narrowly focused and defined research about humour, research into children's play and playfulness has generally reflected broader understandings of play. The playfulness research of Barnett (1990, 1991) and Lieberman (1966, 1977) are exceptions, using research methods that seem more familiar to humour, than to play research.

The breadth in play research is summarized in the title of Huizinga's (1944) classic: *Homo Ludens: A study of the play-element in culture*. Garvey's (1977) later seventies classic, *Play: The developing child*, was described by her as an exception of the times, because it focused, broadly, on the development of social, rather than exclusively cognitive, aspects of play. In contrast, McGhee (1971), studying children's humour in the same era, had emphasised the cognitive aspects of humour. Another classic of that time, *Play: Its role in development and evolution,* edited by Bruner, Jolly and Sylva (1976), also promoted broad, context dependent understandings of play and playfulness from a range of cross disciplinary international perspectives. Similarly, *Child's play* (Herron & Sutton-Smith, 1971) represented an eclectic cross-disciplinary selection spanning seventy years of play research and including articles critiquing the Piagetian "copy theory of play" (Sutton-Smith,

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1971, p 326), as well as Piaget's response to this criticism.

All of these publications on play are still relevant today, 30 years later, and all contain sections on playfulness and humour. For example, Bruner, Jolly and Sylva (1976) contains chapters on word-play by Cazden, Chukovsky and Weir, on laughter and smiling in humans and monkeys by Van Hooff, and on humour, playfulness, and creativity by Koestler and Bruner. None of these writers mention the specifically psychological humour research and analyses of McGhee, Foot or Chapman, who were the dominant humour researchers at that time and since. Instead they emphasise cross-disciplinary understandings of play, and make broad links between play, culture, and evolution.

There are however some tenuous links between play and humour in the play research. For example, Garvey (1977), in a chapter titled "The natural history of the smile", refers in some detail to Sherman's (1975) research on "group glee, ... the spontaneous eruption of mirth among children" (p. 21). However McGhee, writing in the same era, makes no reference to Sherman's work, probably because group glee does not fit the incongruity model of humour that he promoted. Chapman (1983), in the *Handbook* of *humour research*, edited by McGhee and Goldstein (1983), does refer disparagingly to Sherman's research under a sub heading ironically titled "non humorous laughter" (p. 151).

As well as reflecting a fixation with incongruity theory, this dismissive attitude also reflects the dominance of quantitative methodologies in psychological humour research. Sherman's (1977) paper on group glee, presented at the first international conference on humour and laughter was dismissed in the session summary for containing "statistical inadequacies ... multiple correlations based on small n's of less than forty have to be treated with great caution" (Kline, 1977, p. 375).

Sherman's study is fascinating. It showed the prevalence of group glee as a

common phenomenon in nursery settings. Like the present study he videoed children being playful and gleeful in naturalistic nursery settings. But unlike this study he presented all data quantitatively, probably reflecting the ethos of the times. Interestingly, Sherman had acknowledged McGhee's dominance by describing group glee in relation to McGhee's theory: "McGhee (1971b) makes a distinction between laughter which may be attributed to humour, and laughter which may only be ... a mere expression of heightened pleasure (p. 341). It is McGhee's latter description which is felt to be related to the group glee phenomenon" (Sherman, 1977, p. 357).

Group glee combines playfulness with humour, expressed in laughter and zaniness. Garvey (1977), while researching children's play, has referred to group glee as "a fascinating phenomenon, long familiar to nursery school teachers" (p. 21). Group glee broadens understandings of humour, from incongruity towards understandings that include children being playful and having fun together. Sherman (1977) described group glee as a "socially interdependent phenomenon" encompassing " ... three behavioural manifestations: joyful screaming, intense physical behaviour and laughter, all of which may be going on simultaneously in a group of children" (p. 357).

Sociability and spontaneity, aspects of glee, are also aspects of humour that do not fit individualistic laboratory-style humour research. Spontaneity cannot be controlled, so it cannot be researched using traditional methods. This rationale partly explains the avoidance of group glee in the humour research. Playful and humorous spontaneity may however be researched using the naturalistic observational ethnographic methods that are used in this study.

Another reason for the dearth of research on group glee may be that, like rough and tumble play, glee challenges utilitarian theories about the purpose of playfulness, especially in relation to the serious business of learning. Thus, how are phenomena like group glee explained: as experiences of being and having fun in the present, or as experiences of doing, with future payoffs? Rather than explaining why children experience humour and playfulness in

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their communication, this study emphasises *how*. But the "why" and the "how" may overlap in the analyses.

2.3 SOCIAL INDIVIDUALS

2.3.1 Spontaneity in playfulness

Spontaneity is a recurrent quality in the literature on playfulness that informs this research study. Spontaneity is variously attributed either to children as individuals and/or to the activity of play; different slants reflect different researcher /writer perspectives.

Lieberman (1966, 1977) was one of the first researchers to emphasise playfulness as an individual disposition. Spontaneity is an explicit and dominant quality in three of the five domains suggested by Lieberman (and later by Barnett (1991)), for measuring playfulness in individual children. It is implicit in the remaining two domains of playfulness. The domains are: physical spontaneity, social spontaneity, cognitive spontaneity, a sense of humour, and manifest joy.

As mentioned earlier, both Lieberman's (1966) and Barnett's (1991) tools for measuring playfulness treat playfulness as an individual disposition. Despite the social nature of playfulness these tools measure individuals' behaviour; they avoid environmental and other contextual factors.

2.3.2 Spontaneity in improvisation

While the playfulness instruments of Lieberman (1966) and Barnett (1990, 1991) have emphasised spontaneity as an individual quality, other researchers have emphasised group spontaneity in peer group culture (Corsaro, 1985, 1997), in play (Garvey, 1977), in improvisation (Sawyer, 1997) and in group glee (Sherman, 1975). Corsaro (1997) has elaborated on the complex themes that sometimes underlie and motivate the "spontaneous

fantasy" play of groups of children.

Ethnographic research methods were used by Corsaro (1985, 1997) to identify chasing, hiding, power, and control as common themes in children's "spontaneous fantasy" play. Ethnographic research methods were also used by Sawyer (1997) to research the "improvisational" nature of pretend play. This study also uses ethnographic research methods, combined with "events", as a way of authentically representing the complexity in children's spontaneous playfulness. Spontaneous fantasy play, like improvisational pretend play and group glee, lies outside traditional psychological interpretations of children's play. Spontaneity is also an important quality in pretend play. The spontaneous, improvisational, and potentially chaotic qualities of such play make this challenging to research, represent, and understand in all its complexity (Corsaro, 1997). Ethnographic approaches can provide authentic ecologically valid ways of researching children's everyday playfulness and humour.

Spontaneity in play contradicts the "structuralist" rule-based emphasis of both Piagetian and Vygotskian play theory. Though frequently juxtaposed, both theorists emphasise, in different ways, the structures (particularly the rules) that are both created and inherent in play. The Vygotskian view emphasises children's creation of rules as ways of making sense of the world. The Piagetian view emphasises play as assimilation; rules are an important aspect of older children's more mature game play. El'konin (1996/2001) presents another perspective on rules by emphasising the separate sets of rules, as patterns of behaviour, that develop both inside and outside the frame of children's play. According to Sawyer (1997) improvisational play emerges outside any rule-bound scheme. In taking this view Sawyer seems to interpret rules narrowly, as inherited and rigid codes of conduct, rather than as more flexible social-cultural norms of behaviour that may be learnt and reproduced innovatively and spontaneously.

From a socio-cultural perspective nothing is totally new. Therefore children

improvising are re-creating experiences. Through improvisation children re-create rules for understanding roles and relationships. Children being spontaneously playful and improvising together are representing aspects of prior experiences and developing their understandings in zany ways, by communicating, and re-creating the rules in their play.

Sawyer (1997) infers that spontaneous improvisation may be developmentally important for children learning to be social and conversational beings. Goncu and Perone (2005) go further, and postulate that the improvisational spontaneity observed in children's playfulness may also be a desirable quality for adults. From this perspective they view pretend play as a lifespan activity for western adults. They suggest that adults who are playful are likely to also be flexible thinkers, adaptable, and open to change. These views have implications for teachers valuing young children's spontaneous play, as well as for teachers also being spontaneously playful.

This slightly provocative view of play as lifespan learning paradoxically mirrors the split in the histories of humour and play research. As mentioned, most psychological research on play has involved children and research on humour has largely focused on adults (Bergen, 2003). This study combines a focus both on playfulness (as a subset of play) and on humour, as a subset of playfulness. For all ages, both humour and playfulness involve degrees of openness, flexibility, and adaptability.

2.3.3 Context in playfulness and humour

Context can be a challenge for research (Lave, 1993). This study uses CHAT to explicitly include context by exploring how the environment and context contribute to children's experience of playfulness and humour in their communication (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1999; Leont'ev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1991, 1998). This theory is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. The research methods are largely observational. The focus and the unit of analysis are the activities, practices, and processes. These

include the artifacts (Wartofsky, 1979) that mediate children together experiencing fun while communicating, rather than individual children's playful and humorous dispositions.

The term "artifact" is used to refer to tools, symbols and semiotic signs (Wartofsky, 1979) that mediate playful and humorous communication. In this study the mediating and representational function of artifacts is prioritised. This emphasis precludes philosophical dilemmas around the ideal, material, and non-material status of mediating artifacts; instead the focus is on their mediating function. Thus the questions become how, why, and what artifacts mediate children's experience of playful and humorous communication?

Contradictory views of playfulness, (as an individual internal disposition or as social practice) with their contrasting views of what counts as rigorous research (context either contaminates or authenticates), serve to illuminate the contrasting ontologies and research paradigms that pervade the fields of play and humour in psychological research. In some ways the contrasting theoretical positions on playfulness are non-issues because groups consist of individuals, and playfulness in communication involves the dynamic activity of groups of individuals.

From a socio-cultural perspective individuals appropriate aspects of group playfulness as they internalise aspects of the external practice (activity) of group playfulness. Appropriation is an active, dialectical, learning process that occurs through involvement in artifact-mediated activity (Rogoff, 1998). Playful "activity" unites individuals, so is integral to the content of group activity. Research that confines itself to individuals, or to groups alone, misrepresents the dynamic and dialectical activity of playfulness, by reductively avoiding it. Activity, used in this study as the unit of analysis, retains a cohesive wholeness by including the individuals, the group and the artifacts that mediate playfulness (Leont'ev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1991, 1998; Wertsch & Penuel, 1996).

CHAT emphasises how artifacts embody and mediate culture and history (Wartofsky, 1979), and how contexts create conditions that directly affect (in this study) how children experience humour and playfulness in their communication (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1987, 1999). Playful and humorous communication is a social process. As Fogel (1993) points out, all communication is social.

2.4 AGENCY, POWER AND SUBVERSION

Feelings of agency, power and subversion are also social. In his discussions of peer culture in pre-schools Corsaro (1997) uses the label "interpretive reproduction" to describe the process whereby " … children create and participate in their own unique peer cultures by creatively taking or appropriating information from the adult world to address their own peer concerns" (p. 18). As Corsaro (1997) points out, these peer concerns can also involve children participating in and creating their peer culture by resisting adult rules and authority. The potentially subversive nature of both humour and playfulness invites their use as strategies for resistance, while also enabling children to gain some control over their lives.

The subversive use of humour and play by young children has attracted little research interest within the discipline of psychology, perhaps again reflecting the individualistic focus of much research. Related concepts of group power, control, and agency are also rarely mentioned in research on children's humour and playfulness.

There are several exceptions in the more sociological research literature (Corsaro, 1985, 1997; Hannikainen, 2001). Hannikainen (2001) for example, has described children playfully engaged in "serious activities", such as adult-initiated, structured activities and daily routines" (p. 125). She has explained this playfulness as both making serious routine type activities meaningful, and contributing to children's shared feelings of group "togetherness". Group glee and playful rebelliousness around rules have some similarities with the

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subversive use of humour by groups of adults that has been described by Fine (1983) and Morreall (1983). Sherman (1975) observed that group glee in children was much more frequent during structured lessons that utilised physical behaviours than during children's relatively unstructured free play time, suggesting that group glee may sometimes be a form of rebellion in reaction to controlling situations. This finding also suggests that physical activity may predispose children towards more physical (and gleeful) ways of behaving.

Corsaro explains this rebellious group agency thus: "In attempting to make sense of the adult world, children come to *collectively produce* their own peer worlds and cultures" (Corsaro, 1997, p. 24, italics in original). Awareness of children's collective agency, power, or control in early childhood institutions became important aspects of this study's focus on playful and humorous interactions. Agency has been associated with individualistic understandings of individuals being empowered and having choices. But since the exercise of power involves relationships, and is always situated historically, culturally, and socially, agency does extend beyond individuals. Wertsch (1998) uses the concept of the "agent-acting-with-mediational-means" (p. 24) to emphasise the artifacts that mediate and connect individuals with each other and the physical environment. Artifacts can include other people, who may also act as proxy agents (Bandura, 2001), empowering children's sense of agency by assuming roles that mediate children's powerful and playful pretend play. The phenomenon of group glee is also an example of collective agency as described by Bandura, (2001).

Despite the limited research on power in young children's playfulness, play has long been acknowledged as a state of being where children do exercise control over their behaviour (Bruner, 1976). In this sense children being playful and having fun are active agents, creating and breaking rules, making choices, and learning self control or self regulation (Vygotsky, 1978).

Challenging rules and transforming roles (and rules) is also an inherent

aspect of expansive activity systems as described by Engeström (1987) and discussed later in this chapter in relation to the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Accordingly the tension in transformation motivates activity, and in this way cultural practices are re-created anew. By transforming serious activities (such as some routines) into playful occasions, the activities can also become more meaningful as well as enjoyable (Hannikainen, 2001). The activities may also become a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978, see section 2.5.2).

2.4.1 Gender differences in playfulness and humour

Individual differences, including gender and power differences, are a phenomenon of children being playful and humorous together; the ways in which this diversity is interpreted sometimes lead to contradictory conclusions (Davies, 2003). For example Sherman (1975) used Darwinian theory to interpret and explain why spontaneous outbreaks of glee were more prevalent in mixed gender than in homogenous groups in his research. He argued that in heterogenous groups both sexes compete vocally. An alternative ethological explanation could suggest that the normally quieter girls in mixed groups may have become noisier as a way of adapting to the noisier and more physical behaviour of the boys. Other studies have noted that groups of boys are more likely to engage in physical forms of humour (McGhee, 1976). Boys do engage in more rough and tumble play than girls, as does the young male in other mammalian species (Pellegrini & Bjorklund, 2002). Rough and tumble play is sometimes humorous. The early childhood centres in this study were all mixed gender and full of vocal children. In this study the researcher was aware of research suggesting that girls may adapt to boys' physical playfulness and boys to girls' playful verbosity (Danby, 1998; Lampert, 1996). She was also alert to the power sub-texts and the gendered nature of children's playful and humorous narratives (Davies, 2003).

2.5 PLAYFULNESS AND HUMOUR IN IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY

Tenuous links have long been made between humour, playfulness, imaginative thinking, and creativity (Koestler, 1967; Lieberman, 1977; Vygotsky, 1966). Creativity is rarely mentioned in current play research. Imagination, regarded as an aspect of creativity, also receives little attention. Humour has been regarded as a sub-set of playfulness (Barnett, 1990; Lieberman, 1977), which is also related to being creative and imaginative. The inference is that being humorous and playful uses the same sort of facilities as being imaginative and creative.

Csikzentmihalyi (1990) has identified the state of "flow" as an essential aspect of the creative process for adults, and Bruce (1991), drawing on the intense involvement qualities of "flow", labelled the state of children being fully intensely engaged in play as "free flow play". The implication is that children playing intensely are also being creative and possibly imaginative. Though Csikszentmihalyi (1990) does acknowledge the important influence of social contexts for creative adults, both Lieberman (1977) and Bruce (1991) confine their understandings of play, imagination and creativity to individuals. The distributed and social aspects of play, creativity, and imagination challenge this individualism, with implications for the communication focus in this study.

The concept of "distributed cognition" (Salomon, 1993), or joint cognition, may assist in understanding the synchronous communication of children in tune with each other playfully and humorously, imaginatively, and possibly creatively. In this sense cognition is stretched over (or distributed across) the group, and the sum is greater than the parts. The concept of distribution seems to be related to concepts such as distributed flow. In this study it is applied to related concepts such as distributed creativity, and distributed imagination, to usefully describe children's playful and humorous communication.

Emotion and cognition are united in the imagination. Children using humour, playfully recreating words and narratives, pretending and transforming objects, are using their imaginations (Egan & Nadaner, 1988). The balance of considered thinking and improvised spontaneity varies, but imagination is constant because all thinking and feeling that is not constrained by the concrete sensual reality of the present requires imagination (Egan, 1988; Egan & Nadaner, 1988). In using their imaginations children suspend reality and begin to think analytically rather than empirically (Harris 2000). Weininger (1988) has described this use of imagination as the thinking part of pretend play, the "what if" part that sets the stage for the "as if" play. Children transform reality according to the rules that develop and emerge while playing. They play with the rules, sometimes unrealistically, playfully, and humorously.

Referring to Vygotsky's thinking around imagination, presented in his book appropriately titled *Imagination and creativity in childhood* (1930) Lindqvist (1995) writes poetically: "Imagination describes a circle. It takes fragments of reality and transforms them, the new fragments take shape and re-enter reality. Imagination is both emotional and intellectual, and that is why it develops creativity" (p. 46).

This link to reality is where understandings of imagination differ. There has been a tendency to confuse logic with reality and to over-exaggerate the fantasy aspects of imagination and the power of young children's imaginations generally. This latter point may be because the imaginative pretend-play of young children is so fascinating to observers. As imagination depends on experiences for inspiration, it follows that the imaginations of older, more experienced people, are better developed than children's imaginations as Vygotsky (1978) has pointed out. In contrast, younger children's playful and humorous imaginative pretending seems to be characterised by improvisational spontaneity and to be more concerned with the "what if" rather than the more thoughtful, reflective and "scientific" use of "as if" imagination as described by Vygotsky (1934/1986).

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This developmental relationship between spontaneous play and imagination in children's development is described by Vygotsky (1978): "Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions, and the formation of real life plans and volitional motives - all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development. The child moves forward essentially through play activity" (p. 102). In this way the imagination is also fundamental to the development of personality and consciousness (Hakkarainen & Veresov, 1999). The relationship between play and imagination extends logically to also include playfulness and humour.

Links between imagination, humour, and playfulness are apparent in social activities that integrate emotional and cognitive learning. Referring to the artificiality of psychological research that separates thought, emotion, and action, Bruner (1986) has creatively written:

> ...all three terms are abstractions, abstractions that have a high theoretical cost. The price we pay for such abstractions is to lose sight of their structural interdependence. At whatever level we look. However detailed the analysis, the three are constituents of a unified whole. To isolate each is like studying the planes of a crystal separately, losing sight of the crystal that gives them being (p. 118).

Play, playfulness, and humour, like imagination, must be interpreted within their cultural contexts. In this study cultural context has several layers of meaning. It refers to the micro culture of the centre communities, as well as children's peer cultures and the wider societal culture. Cultures are characterised by shared values, beliefs and norms. Different cultures may understand and value playfulness, humour, analytic thinking, and imagination differently, reflecting that culture's values, beliefs and norms (Cole, 1996; Goldman, 1998).

From about two years of age children actively use their imaginations to playfully adapt and create scenarios that, in some logical way, also reflect elements of their cultures. This logic reflects children's developing understandings of the social rules and roles of their cultures (El'konin, 1971, 1971/1972, 1989/2000). Children adopt diverse roles. The objects and words that children play with acquire other meanings as children use them playfully and symbolically, moving between reality and fantasy. This relationship between imagination and reality is dialectical rather than oppositional, and reflects broader societal and cultural norms.

Dyson (2001) emphasises the educational importance of children being imaginative and playing with the "cultural resources" of everyday lives, particularly popular culture as portrayed in the media through superheroes, rappers, film and pop stars, for example. Thus Dyson (2001) argues that "Children's illustrated potential to adapt cultural resources in response to changing conditions – to be playful – seems key, not only to furthering literacy development, but also to furthering socio-cultural lives on a fragile, ever-changing planet" (p. 9).

The point is that the themes children play with imaginatively are culturally meaningful and relevant in their everyday lives, and reflect the culture of adults and therefore of the wider society. From this socio-cultural perspective children play to make sense of the adult world. They use their imaginations and learn by playfully re-creating the rules and roles of society. The culture of the early childhood centre community is positioned integrally within this wider macro-society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Consistent with the research focus on communication and experience, the focus in this study is on the early childhood centre community, rather than on a wider macro perspective of culture. However a CHAT perspective implicitly acknowledges the importance of context on all levels. Thus the early childhood centre community reflects and influences the wider community in various ways.

2.5.1 Perezhivanie

Shortly before his death, Vygotsky (1998, referred to by Van De Veer, 2001) attempted to unite the affective and cognitive dimensions of learning and development by suggesting *perezhivanie* (translated as "emotional experience") as a holistic unit of analysis for understanding children's development. Following on from Vygotsky, Vasilyuk (1984/1988) has also used perezhivanie, as a unit of analysis for researching links between perception, experience, and personality changes. Perezhivanie is a holisitic unit because it unites emotion, cognition, and development, and focuses on the relationships between these elements over time. These relationships are situated in ever-changing physical environments (Kirschner & Whitson, 1997). The focus is on the relationship between the child and the physical environment. This explicit focus on environment highlights the importance, from a socio-cultural perspective, of understanding emotion and cognition as originating in response to experiences in the environment and in the social world. "So the notion of situatedness leads to the primacy of practice – a whole new landscape for the study of cognition" (Engeström & Cole, 1997, p. 301).

This emphasis on practice, situated cognition, and perezhivanie contrasts sharply with the view of children developing from within, initially internally and cognitively, then socially and emotionally. Consequently it follows that playful and humorous experiences, like all experiences that engage children meaningfully, will influence children's psychological development. Detailed explorations of personality development are beyond the scope of this study, which focuses on patterns in group interactions, rather than individual children's psychological development.

2.5.2 Pretend play and the zone of proximal development

Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) has been interpreted in many ways (Chaiklin, 2003). All the interpretations reflect ideas of

progress and development in children's learning and some are didactic. Vygotsky (1978) regarded play as a leading activity for preschool children and therefore a source of development with the potential to create ZPD. He wrote: "In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development" (p. 102).

Just as pretend play has been described as the leading activity in the development of young children, exploration with objects has been described as the leading activity for infants and toddlers (El'konin, 1971; Leont'ev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978). Because young children do continue to play with objects while pretending, Zaporozhets and Markova (1980/1983) regard activity with objects as the leading activity throughout the early years. Objects include words, and the development of language is one of the outstanding features of the early childhood years. It follows that children engaged in these leading activities are likely to be working within their zones of proximal development.

Seeing children's playful and humorous play with objects and their playful and humorous pretend play as potentially creating spaces that enable children to act within their ZPDs may help our understandings of children's motivation. Children transform roles in different ways in the same play, and the intrinsically motivating qualities of play are preserved. This intrinsic motivation in play may also be important for later, more formal, school-based learning. The ZPD focus is on flexibility and future learning.

Within activity theory Engeström's (1987) concept of expansive zones for learning and change is similar. He shifts the zone slightly, from being the child's zone, to becoming the activity system zone. The expansive activity zone becomes the space for learning and change, and the group activity goal sustains the play activity while contributing to individual's motivation. Contradictions and tensions between the various components of the activity system create the movement and motivation within the play activity. Activity

theory is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

2.5.3   Distributed imagination

The focus of this study is not individuals but interactions, and this focus can be problematic when considering concepts such as cognition and imagination in children's communicated playfulness and humour. Cognition, intelligence, and imagination have traditionally been treated as belonging to individuals. However from a socio-cultural perspective the individual is an integral part of culture and society. In the words of John Donne, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent". The individual's cognition, including imagination, also extends beyond the skin, as explained by Bateson (1972), describing how the blind man uses his walking stick, as an extension of his thinking feeling body, and his skin. A research focus on communication enhances awareness of the distributed nature of cognition, imagination, and feelings in children's playful and humorous communication.

Salomon (1993) explains how thinking is distributed because:

> …what characterizes such daily events of thinking is that the social and artificial surrounds, alleged to be "outside" the individual's heads, not only are the sources of stimulation and guidance but are actually *vehicles of thought*. Moreover, the arrangements, functions, and structures of these surrounds change in the process to become genuine *parts of the learning* that results from the cognitive partnership with them. In other words, it is not just the "person-solo" who learns, but the "person-plus", the whole system of inter-related factors. (p. xiii)

Imagination is integral to abstract thinking. Thus one can substitute "imagination" for "thinking", "learning", and "cognition" in the above quote.

The concept of distributed imagination as put forward in this thesis involves a consideration of the place of imagination in cognition. It also requires an examination of the context of playful and humorous activity, including other

people and the artifacts that are part of the distributed activity. It follows that an aim of this study is to explore the ways in which the activity of being playful together is distributed and connects children. The concept of distributed imagination shares some similarities with the concept of "situated learning" (Kirshner & Whitson, 1997), which emphasises the importance of the immediate physical and social context of learning and is therefore also applicable for this study.

In this study individual children being playful and humorous are viewed as integral parts of the whole activity. Mediating artifacts, which are integral to cognition, learning and imagination connect the parts. The artifacts, which include words and other semiotic signs, may mediate playful and humorous communication imaginatively, for imagination is distributed via artifacts. They are the *vehicles of thought* in Salomon's (1993) terms.

2.5.4 Repetition and imitation

Repetition and imitation are basic strategies by which children internalise meanings and concepts and learn about the world. Accordingly several researchers (Corsaro, 1985, 1997; Elkoninova 1999/2001) have commented on the repetitiveness of pretend play themes, as well as the imitative structure of role-play, and the complexity of negotiating roles and frames for play (Sawyer, 1997; Trawick-Smith, 1998). Following the theories of El'konin (1989/2000) and Vygotsky (1978), Elkoninova (1999/2001) suggests that the internalisation of external concepts requires this repetition. Children playing roles are also imitating aspects of the roles they have observed around them. Imitation in this sense is not simple copying or passive assimilation, but implies that children are actively (and sometimes playfully) developing understandings of aspects of the roles being imitated (Sutton-Smith, 1971), while simultaneously negotiating the context and contents of the play (Trawick-Smith, 1998). They negotiate, imitate, repeat, and re-create from both inside and outside the play frame (Goffman, 1974). Via this playful and sometimes humorous activity external concepts associated with roles played

gradually acquire internalised sense and meaning. Concepts include feelings, ways of thinking, and words with their generalised and attached meanings. Thus the repetitive and imitative activity of play mediates children's developing understandings of the adult world as they play what they have seen, heard, and felt.

Given that pretend role play has this rule-role learning function, El'konin (1989/2000), Vygotsky (1978) and other researchers have emphasised the importance of adults being involved and extending children's play without killing it (Broström, 1996; Van Oers, 1996, 2003). Extension may involve adults simply accepting the play, adding props and providing space, or more actively assuming roles in the play. Several researchers have commented on the hesitancy of teachers about entering children's pretend play (Broström, 1996). Summarising cross cultural research on play, Cole (1998) points out that direct adult involvement in child peer play is more of a rarity than a norm in most cultures, and that peer play is even more the norm in non-western than middle class western culture. There seems to be a gap in research about teacher involvement in children's spontaneously humorous improvised playfulness.

Children begin to develop "scientific concepts" from "spontaneous concepts" (Vygotsky 1934/1986). In other words more focused learning develops out of playfulness where children spontaneously play with objects and concepts. Repetition and imitation are integral to this developmental process, as children playfully (and sometimes humorously) negotiate rules and roles, and the sense, boundaries, and meaning-making of play. They develop meta-awareness of communication, play, cognition, and language (Bateson, 1972; Trawick-Smith, 1998). Within functional linguistics imitation is also a convergent metacommunicative strategy used by young children to sustain play (Fogel, 1993). Theory and research suggest that spontaneity, imitation, and repetition may be themes for children being playful and humorous together.

2.5.5 Mythic thinking and cultural re-production

Myths seem to be fundamental explanatory constructs in all cultures, including children's peer cultures. Corsaro (1985) identified mythic themes to do with dualisms, like being lost and found, danger and rescue, death and re-birth, as common underlying features of children's spontaneous fantasy, pretend play. Egan (1988) points out that young children playing out these mythic themes around life, the universe, and everything, are using their imaginations to charge the world with meaning. He explains mythic thinking as the basis for all rational thinking. Accordingly the narrative structures of myth can provide intellectual and emotional security. Myth combines emotion and intellect, rational and irrational thought, sometimes with humour and playfulness.

Mythic thinking can also be understood as an evolutionary stage in representational thinking (Donald, 1991). Donald's evolutionary theory has implications for understanding how children re-create culture. According to Donald (1991) over time (about 4 million years) humans have evolved increasingly sophisticated systems for representing meaning and knowledge, ie for cognition. He called the first level *episodic culture*. This involves being entirely in the present, with no semantic memory and thus no ability for reflection, but living episodically. Chimpanzees operate at this level. *Mimetic culture* follows. This is associated with the non-verbal culture of *homo erectus*. It involves imitation of physical actions like gestures, smiles, frowns, and possibly pointing, thus enabling shared interactions. *Mythic culture* developed about half a million years ago. It is associated with the development of language, which led to the creation of myths and narratives as ways of making connections and sense of the world. Thus myths represent sense. Donald's last stage emphasises *theoretic culture* associated with visual mark-making, primarily writing, as representation.

All of these historic evolutionary stages can be seen in the play of children. They do not follow a prescriptive pattern as suggested by stages of

development, or recapitulationist theory. As Trevarthen (2002) points out, an understanding of the nature of mimetic culture has implications for appreciating the communicative importance of young children's non-verbal, embodied, and temporally-expressed narratives.

Representational culture, as described by Donald (1991) shares functional similarities with representational artifacts as described by Wartofsky (1979). Wells (1999) points out how both emphasise "…that it is the activity of representing that plays the defining role in characterising human cognition" (p. 124). In this sense the artifacts of representational culture mediate the sense making, knowledge constructing, thinking, and being activity of people acting in touch with each other in the world.

Children playing with mythic and other narrative themes are also learning (through imitation and repetition) event scripts – i.e. knowledge patterns that are culturally, socially, and historically prescribed. Nelson (1996) uses the label "mental event representation" (MER) to describe young children using language to construct mental representations of familiar events. According to Nelson (1996) these event representations become generalised models in the developing minds of children, for abstractly organising and understanding the social world. Language development correlates with MER development. Mental event representations, including scripts and schema, may function as mediating artifacts (Cole, 1996) in children's playfulness and humour.

2.6 NARRATIVE

This study uses the narrative structure of "events" to support the research focus on communication and experience. Bruner (1986) views narrative as meaning-making, as the experiential means by which we develop knowledge and understanding of the world and our place in it. He contrasts narrative ways of understanding with "paradigmatic" ways of knowing. Narrative is basically social. Stories are created socially. Good stories, such as mythic themes, extend the imagination and work on several levels, including the

emotional and aesthetic (Coles, 1989). Through narrative children also develop a theory of mind; they come to understand how other people might be thinking and feeling, and that others do have beliefs and desires that may differ from theirs (Astington, 1996; Siegel 1999). Paradigmatic thinking is the logical, rational realist, empirical, factual detail of science. Bruner points out that both ways of thinking are valid and even complementary, but the paradigmatic mode has dominated western scientific thinking outside the arts. When it comes to understanding social experiences (such as humour and playfulness) it is the narrative mode that counts because humour and playfulness are not necessarily linear, logical, rational or scientific. Hence this study uses narrative structures to represent naturalistic events of children being playful and humorous in early childhood centre contexts. The playful patterns and themes in these events are then made explicit.

Narratives are not always conversational. This is especially the case with pre-verbal children as noted by Trevarthen (2002) and Dissanayake (2001) and musicologists such as Brown, Merker and Wallin, (2001). Consequently in this study attention was also directed at playfulness and humour expressed as narratives using sounds (other than words), and movement.

2.6.1 Word and sounds

Play with words is common among young children. Words are objects, or semiotic tools (Vygotsky, 1934/1986), ideal for play. As Lucy Sprague Mitchell (1948, cited by Cazden, 1973) wrote: "There is no better play material in the world than words. They surround us, go with us through our work-a-day tasks, their sound is always in our ears, their rhythms on our tongue" (p. 607). Children seem to play with words in the same musical ways, and for the same multiplicity of reasons, that they play with sound, rhythm, and rhyme generally. They play with words for pleasure, for fun, to communicate, and to make sense of the world.

Words, sounds, narrative and mythic themes all serve a mediating role for

children making sense of the world while also being playful and having fun communicating. Imagination allows children to think and feel beyond the concrete present reality and to use humour and be playful, particularly with sounds and words. Just as narrative structures create meaning, words too create generalized thinking structures in the mind (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). Words without meanings are empty sounds. As the King says in Act 3, scene 3 of Shakespeare's Hamlet, "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: Words without thoughts never to heaven go." Words, like narratives, can create images that are full of meanings. The generalised shared meanings that people attach to words mediate individual understandings and thus structure verbal communication. But words can also convey multiple and different meanings, reflecting individual subjective and developmental interpretations of objective social words (Halliday, 1993; Vygotsky, 1934/1986; Wells, 1999; Wertsch, 1991, 1998). Different word meanings can form the basis for joking humour, as well as misunderstandings in communication.

Young children also develop an understanding that the symbolic meaning of a word is different from its object status (Cazden, 1973; Chukovsky, 1963). Children separate the word meaning from the concrete object when, for example, they jokingly pretend one thing is another. Cook (2000) points out that:

> The capacity for such reversal and distortion of reality is important to the development of interpersonal relationships in two opposite ways: as humour allowing bonding, and as practice in prevarification - for each individual needs to lie and deceive as surely as they need to co-operate. (p. 46)

Children also invent sounds in a phonetic form of word play that can become poetic or simply silly, but again requires the same ability to separate meaning from the word object. Children play with sounds, rhythm, rhyme, and meaning of words. Halliday (1973, 1993) and Trevarthen (2002) have described, with different emphases, how pre-verbal children also play with

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sounds and rhythm in primal narrative ways. Thus Halliday emphasizes the verbal proto linguistic nature of pre-verbal communication while Trevarthen emphasises rhythm and early musicality. Both emphases involve communication and narrative. Fogel, Lyra and Valsiner's (1997) description of verbal actions captures clearly the flow over from sounds to words in the communication styles of young children being playful together. They write:

> Verbal exchanges in humans are embedded in an ongoing process of nonverbal coaction in which posture, gaze direction, facial expression, and body movements are mutually coordinated to create emergent social patterns ... Indeed if one examines verbal action at a more microscopic level of analysis, words are themselves produced as a continuous stream of sound in which a person is free to alter the intensity, pitch, and timing of the utterance to create social meanings that are both context-dependent and context-renewing. (pp. 67-68)

Children's playful and humorous experiences with sounds and words connect them socially to each other and to the wider world.

2.6.2 Musike

Rhythm is a fundamental quality of the sounds and movement children make while communicating playfully. In fact it has been argued that rhythms underlie all motor and vocal behaviour (Dissanayake, 2001). One reason for presenting playful events in this study was to avoid the artificial structural categorisation of aspects of communication that could misrepresent the total nature of children's playful and humorous communication. The ancient Greek word for music, *musike*, includes all the temporal arts: poetry, dance, drama and music. The rhythmic nature of young children's playful and humorous communication endorses this very wide definition of music.

In discussing the origins of the temporal arts Dissanayake (2001) suggests that the rhythmic synergetic mirror-like movements observed in early infant-mother intersubjective relationships are basic to later music expression. Like

Trevarthen (2002) and the ancient Greeks, she defines music as including all the temporal arts. Both she and Trevarthen (2002) also refer to the narrative nature of rhythmic patterns, often expressed musically with emotional feelings (such as playfulness and humour) conveyed in tone, rhythm, and rhyme.

Rhythm, sound and movement are stand-out features of children being playful and humorous. Trevarthen (2002) has proposed the existence of an intrinsic motive pulse (IMP) in the human brain. Its function is similar to Chomsky's language acquisition device (Cook, 2000), but with a wider focus on rhythm and the communicative function of musical languages. The IMP "comprises: (1) a rhythmic time sense ... ; (2) sensitivity for the temporal variation in intensity, pitch and timbre ... ; and (3) a perception of the narrative in the emotional development of the melodic line, which supports anticipation of repeating harmonies, phrases and emotional forms ... (p. 25).

Music, language, playfulness and humour share several qualities. They are all more social than individual activities, including other people as both participants and audiences. Children being rhythmical and musical while being playful and humorous are also combining cognition and emotion in their behaviour.

2.7 BODY COMMUNICATION

Emotions and expressions are embodied. Thus a concern with the context of children being humorous and playful must emphasise the player's bodies - not as objects, but bodies as described by Ruthrof (2000), that are integral to their perceiving, feeling, thinking, and being activity. The communication of young children being humorous and having fun is very physical and not necessarily verbal, (though it may be vocal), especially when the children are pre-verbal infants and toddlers. Lokken (2000), for example, has referred to the physical style of toddlers walking, as toddling. Their actions speak.

Corporeal communication among body subjects is described as

intercorporeity (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This is a similar concept to intersubjectivity, with the emphasis on physical bodies. Other phrases such as the "incarnate cogito", "mind corporeal", and "bodily subjects", are commonly used with reference to the idea of pre-reflective, bodily experiences as the " … primal basis for everything we can mean, think, know and communicate" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. xi).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) metaphorically used the phrase "the flesh of the world" to describe the concept of bodies living, feeling, being in, and acting on the world in a reciprocally responsive way. This understanding of embodied minds as connected and part of the whole environment precludes any exclusively individualistic focus on child subjects as research objects in this study. It is also congruent with the dynamic and dialectical nature of activity theory.

Just as one can analyse layers of meanings in words, narrative, utterance and discourse, so too do subjects embody greater complexity and layers beyond the visible "body language". Words cannot easily capture and represent original experience, unless perhaps in poetry or metaphor. It follows that pre-reflective body actions may be beyond representation with words, which has implications for how children's experiences of humour and playfulness can be represented with words in this study.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) assert: "The mind is inherently embodied. Thought is mostly unconscious. Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical. These are three major findings of cognitive science … Because of these discoveries philosophy can never be the same again" (p. 3). These assertions are supported by neuroscience and investigations of how the neural structures of the brain produce conceptual systems and linguistic structures. Hence biological, physiological changes are embodied as mind changes too (Damasio, 1999). At an obvious level, infants' thinking minds develop and change as they move from crawling to toddling and as they learn physical cultural skills, such as sitting either on a chair or on the ground.

Bodies will develop differently in a blend of nature, nurture, and culture. So the embodiment focus in this study is primarily about interpreting movement. How do these bodies speak? Humour is social. But communication is more than words. A research focus on purposeful body movement offers further ways of representing and understanding young children actively having fun and being funny.

2.8 THEORY OF MIND, INTERSUBJECTIVITY, AND COMMUNICATION

Theory of mind and intersubjectivity both concern communication. Yet within the psychological research these two related concepts have different origins that reflect their different usage (Olson & Bruner, 1996). The concept of intersubjectivity has been more common in socio-cultural research than has theory of mind, which tends to sit within more mainstream developmental psychology. Theory of mind is more cognitivist, being specifically the understanding that other people have minds with beliefs and desires that may differ from one's own. Because both concepts concern communication (including playful and humorous communication) it was important to consider the relevance of both theory of mind and intersubjectivity to this research.

Within the research field the emphasis of intersubjectivity has been on shared understandings among participants engaged in an activity (Goncu, 1993; de Haan, 2000; Trevarthen, 2002). Intersubjectivity has its origins in the infant-mother relationship (Dissanayake, 2000; Reddy, 1991; Stern, 1985; Trevarthen, 1998), and in contrast to the more explicitly cognitivist theory of mind, intersubjectivity is regarded as primarily an affective state of being. As de Haan (2000) points out the concept of intersubjectivity has been used in different ways across disciplines, and even within socio-cultural psychology, reflecting different ideas about the balance of power, the adult role, numbers of subjects, and the role of mediating artifacts in intersubjective relationships.

Both concepts, theory of mind and intersubjectivity, involve people learning to

understand and relate to themselves and others (Olson & Bruner, 1996). These are essential qualities for effective communication, whether it be playful and humorous, or serious. Thus both concepts are relevant to this research focus on children experiencing humour and playfulness in their communication. While the attainment of intersubjectivity is acknowledged as " ... a central issue in psychosocial development" (Goncu, 1993, p. 185), so too is the attainment of a theory of mind. "Perhaps the single most basic ability underlying human social interaction is the understanding that other people have knowledge and desires that may be different from one's own" (Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2002, p.203). However, unlike the under-researched concept of intersubjectivity, theory of mind has been overwhelmingly researched over the past decade (Lillard & Curenton, 1999).

Why has theory of mind attracted so much interest? The reasons lie partly with its social, interactive, communicative importance. Intersubjectivity is important for similar reasons, yet it is a comparatively vague concept which is difficult to measure. Theory of mind, in contrast, has been described in terms of specific measurable cognitive abilities, despite the recent increasingly emphasised importance of affective qualities in communication (Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2002). Researchers have devised tests to verify when children have acquired concepts of belief, false belief, desire and perception, which demonstrate that they know that others also have minds (Astington, 1996; Astington & Gopnik, 1991; Carruthers & Smith, 1996; Gopnik, 1996; Harris, 1996, 2000; Wellman, 1990). Theories about theory of mind continue to proliferate across disciplines. Philosophy, cognitive science, primatology, and developmental psychology are all fields currently involved in the dialogue (Carruthers & Smith, 1996).

Theory of mind research emphasises the individual child developing, from within, a theory about other minds. Thus, psychological development is understood as initially an internal process of becoming an autonomous independent individual. In stark contrast socio-cultural psychology views development as occurring "from the outside in". Thus the individual

internalises beliefs, values, and norms from the cultural, historical, and social context in which s/he lives. Language and other cultural artifacts mediate this learning, and connect individuals with the world context.

The reasons for the concept of intersubjectivity being almost non-existent in theory of mind literature are related to the existence of these two contrasting psychological paradigms. Astington (1996) suggests that these "two sets of views are incommensurable theoretical perspectives, which are impossible to integrate" (p 199). She also suggests more optimistically that, because Vygotsky did emphasise both biological and cultural lines of development, " ... perhaps now is the time to make these assumptions more explicit. This will bring us closer to a view of theory of mind development that integrates cognition and culture, and gives an active role to individuals as well as societies" (Astington, 1996, p.199).

From an empirical scientific perspective, theory of mind, has been an easier concept to research than intersubjectivity. For example the well known false-belief task requires the child to contrast real life perception with knowledge and then to make a correct knowledge-based prediction. This ability requires the child to hold two representations in the mind simultaneously, a skill that is also required to appreciate incongruity in humour. Much theory of mind research around this task has been carried out in controlled, artificial situations such as laboratories for example, asking children questions about where objects are, or are not, hidden. Such research methods do not acknowledge the strange context of the setting, or address the whole child. Consequently the tasks cannot easily engage children emotionally. Yet emotional involvement may be a catalyst for children thinking at a higher level. Children who are emotionally engaged in play, and having fun, may operate ahead of themselves, within their ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Interestingly and unsurprisingly the more naturally sited theory of mind research has found that children as young as two years seem to understand that others can have different beliefs and desires from them (Youngblade and Dunn, 1995). In contrast, for children in artificial laboratory situations the age

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for having a theory of mind seems to be about four years (Bartsch & Wellman, 1995).

This research study is naturalistic, being situated in early childhood settings. It also involves children emotionally engaged and motivated in being playful and humorous. That is the nature of play and humour in communication. It follows that young children in this study may demonstrate that they have developed theories that others too have minds.

Intersubjectivity seems to be an obvious phenomenon to anyone observing children being playful, in tune with each other, and communicating while having fun. Yet, as Goncu (1993) explains, the systematic study of the development of intersubjectivity in social pretend-play is a neglected research area. This may reflect the lack of socio-cultural research generally (Chaiklin, 2001).

When children role-play they assume the thinking and feeling of another and they relate to others, also in (as well as out of) role. To do this children must hold several representations in mind simultaneously; this is a theory of mind requirement. Various theorists have explained pretend role play in different ways that reflect their philosophies. For example Piaget emphasised the assimilative function of such play for the individual child, whereas Vygotsky emphasised the adaptive function whereby the individual child internalises aspects of the external social pretend play. Both theorists acknowledge the importance of social pretend-play for children learning to share understandings with others and thus to develop intersubjectivity. Both also emphasise the importance of verbal language in this sharing, though for different reasons. These factors around intersubjectivity and theory of mind need to be explored in researching children's experience of playful and humorous communication.

In qualitative research the concept of intersubjectivity also has important implications for how researchers subjectively position themselves in relation

to the research participants.

Most theory of mind research relies on children being verbal, so they can answer questions and use words to explain thinking states. As Reddy (1991) explains, this creates a false dualism by separating physiological from psychological states, as well as avoiding questions about the mind states of pre-verbal infant toddlers. Yet all humans express psychological states physically: "The study of emotion suggests that nonverbal behaviour is a primary mode in which emotion is communicated" (Siegel, 1999, p. 121). In this sense the body is both a concrete structure and a form of lived experience.

What about the intersubjectivity, theory of mind and shared playfulness and humour of pre-verbal infants and toddlers? Reddy (1991), Dunn (1991), and Trevarthen (1998) have all described the playful, joking and teasing behaviour of infants with familiar people. The idea that pre-verbal infants do not have some conception of others also having minds and bodies is ridiculous (Reddy, 1991). Within theory of mind research the Cartesian separation of physical body and psychological mind poses problems. Reddy (1991) asks:

> Is this dualism – this complete separation of the physical from the psychological – really neccessary? Do we need to assume that infants learn about others through their physical behaviour alone and later get to the psychological meanings of these behaviours and to their "minds"? This picture of a behaviourist infant becoming a mentalist adult has its roots in a very influential but now troubled cognitivist theory (Butterworth, 1989). (p. 152)

Ideally, distinctions between traditional individualist psychological and socio-cultural psychological views of development do overlap, reflecting the interplay of biology and culture in the development of individuals in societies. The focus on communication in this study implies that theory of mind, intersubjectivity, and intercorporeity may all have relevance for understanding

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children's playful and humorous communication.

2.9 EMERGENT COMMUNICATION

Concepts of intersubjectivity, intercorporeity and theory of mind, when applied to playful communication, do not explain all of that communication. They cannot because, as Fogel (1993) stresses, communication is a continuously emergent, dynamic, and dialogic process. Individuals do not stand apart, watching while communicating; instead they are integral to the continuous communication process (Fogel, 1993).

The potentially dualist structures underlying both theory of mind and intersubjectivity conflict with the idea of communication as a situated (Kirschner & Whitson, 1997) and continuous process (Fogel, 1993). Theory of mind research can misrepresent the complexity of communication by oversimplifying it and reducing aspects of communication to a series of discrete systems or parts. These parts are assessed separately using the false-belief task, and other signaler-signaled, stimulus-response based systems. This structuralist position conflicts with more monist ideas of interconnectedness and communication as a continuous process (Fogel, 1993). Similarly the concept of intersubjectivity can also misrepresent communication by focussing too narrowly on the subjectively shared experiences of interacting individuals in a context-free present. Such a narrow focus misrepresents by ignoring the powerful pervasive influences of wider social, historical and cultural factors on all interactions. A narrow focus on intersubjectivity alone may also avoid addressing the important semiotic and mediating role of artifacts in all communication.

A socio-cultural approach to studying communication emphasises these contextual elements. As Fogel (1993) points out, any system of categorisation and analysis has its blind spots: "When we are focusing on the regularities of communication, packaging actions into discrete units, formulating the supposed rule of discourse, or ignoring variability and playful

creativity, we miss the core of the process and the excitement that keeps us involved" (p. 41). Hence the validity, in this study, of using CHAT with its analytic prioritising of the contradictions, irregularities, and transformations within children's playful and humorous activities. Communication and the ways in which people (including children being playful) understand each other are frequently divergent, illogical, chaotic, non-functional, and spontaneously unpredictable. It is this emergent slippage in playful and humorous communication that renews, motivates, and sustains the process of communication.

2.9.1 Emotional communication

Playful and humorous experiences involve feelings and emotion that are expressed in gesture, facial expressions, sounds, and words. Emotions function as regulators of the self, connecting the self internally and externally with others. "In its manifestations as neurophysiological events, subjective experiences and interpersonal expressions, emotion interconnects various systems in the mind and between minds" (Siegel, 1999, p. 240).

Children's emotional and cognitive selves are integrated in the activity of having fun. While affirming the scientific basis of this integration Siegel (1999) writes that: "Creating artificial or didactic boundaries between thought and emotion obscures the experiential and neurobiological reality of their inseparable nature" (p. 159).

The measure of consciousness and spontaneity in children's playful and humorous activity varies. Awareness of feelings seems to require conscious thinking. Damasio (1999) identifies feeling, emotion and consciousness as: "… three stages of processing on a continuum: *a state of emotion*, which can be triggered and executed unconsciously; *a state of feeling*, which can be represented non-consciously; and *a state of feeling made conscious*, i.e., known to the organism having both emotion and feeling" (p. 37, italics in original). So thinking and emotional feeling may occur, initially perhaps

unconsciously and bodily, even when playfulness is expressed in spontaneous group glee. The experience of being playful and humorous with others may awaken consciousness.

Speech and words help children become conscious of their own and others' feelings and thoughts. Words enable the understanding of other minds as in theory of mind. With words feelings can be shared and made conscious. In a similar way facial expressions and gestures may also signal feelings associated with having fun, thereby making awareness of the feelings a conscious social act. However as Halliday (1973, 1993) states, gestures, posture and facial expressions, described as "proto language", are less refined and more open to different interpretations, than words. Unlike words proto language "… cannot create information, and it cannot construct discourse" (Halliday, 1993, p. 96).

Connections between emotion and feeling, thinking and behaving, and context, are only beginning to be addressed in the psychological research literature. At an individual level they are beyond the scope of this study. However the group dynamics of children communicating emotionally and cognitively, while having fun together, are relevant for this study.

Describing communication, Fogel (1993) writes "My point is that in normal situations, one's emotions and expressions are not discrete entities encased in the individual, but they are socially constructed, dynamically created out of the fabric of the present" (p.28). This brings us back to the relevance of using a socio-cultural paradigm and methodology for researching playful and humorous communication.

2.10 SUMMARY

This chapter has ranged widely in reviewing some of the ideas and approaches in the discourse around young children's humour and playfulness. *Humour, playfulness, experience* and *communication* are the

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key words in the research question: How do young children experience playfulness and humour in their communication?

The review began by comparing and contrasting the different research histories and the different ways of defining the related topics of playfulness and humour. This included some discussion around the stage theory of humour development that has dominated theory around children's use and understandings of humour.

Several gaps and contradictions were identified in the literature; these are fundamental to the nature of this research. Humour and play research have been treated differently, though there is considerable overlap in children's experience of humour and playfulness. The psychological literature in particular has tended to focus on individuals and, for children, stages in humour development. Much of this research was carried out in scientifically controlled situations such as laboratories, yet humour and playfulness are commonly spontaneous and not easily controlled. There is an abundance of research on children and play, particularly from the 1970s, but far less research on children and humour. The research on both playfulness and humour tends to avoid the child's perspective, or children's experiences. There is also a general lack of research on children's shared experiences. This is a major gap, considering that children who attend full-day early childhood education centres share a great deal as members of a communal institution.

From an initial historical overview of humour and play research the review shifted to exploring relevant writings around children experiencing humour and playfulness in their communication. Spontaneity and improvisation are qualities of children experiencing being playful and having fun. Other observable qualities include children together playing roles, inventing rules, imitating, repeating, and using their imaginations. Children use words, sounds, and other expressive gestures to communicate feelings and thoughts.

A substantial latter part of the review addressed how children communicate while having fun. Intersubjectivity and theory of mind were discussed, because these different, yet related concepts both concern children communicating and acknowledging other people's realities and perspectives. It was acknowledged that theory of mind does not easily fit with the socio-cultural paradigm of this study. The potential relevance of musike, rhythm, sound, and gesture in children's playful and humorous communication was addressed. This area of communicative languages and musical awareness is not much researched and seems pertinent to this study.

The subject and discipline segregated nature of much of the relevant research has contributed to an artificial separation of emotional, cognitive and social learning. Yet children being playful and humorous together integrate all these dimensions of being.

The apparent haphazardness in children's playfulness and humour pervades aspects of this review. However, there is logic to the patterns and that logic reflects the diversity within playfulness and humour; it also acknowledges the contradictions, continuities, and disjunctions that are integral to how children experience playfulness and humour and that are integral to the CHAT framework which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

One way of addressing the shortcomings in the literature is to use socio-cultural methods, because they emphasise context. CHAT is used as a tool in this study partly because it provides a framework that includes the context of the activity. This enables the systematic analysis of situations, while also retaining an awareness of the whole activity. In this way a research focus on activity dynamically unites the diversity that is inherent in humour, playfulness and activity itself. Chapter 3 discusses activity theory as a methodological tool. That chapter explores in greater detail the CHAT framework that informs both the research methodology and the socio-cultural paradigm of this project exploring young children's experience of humour and playfulness in their communication.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: THEORETICAL TOOLS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an interpretivist study. This chapter describes the theoretical framework and interpretivist paradigm underpinning the research methods, which will be described in Chapter 4. As pointed out in Chapter 2, ideas about humour and playfulness are socially constructed, and interpreted within cultural and historical contexts. Thus in this study children's humour and playfulness are seen as reflecting the culture of the early childhood centre, as well as wider societal and cultural ideas and expectations about children, humour and playfulness. Humour and playfulness are interpreted and understood subjectively (and sometimes differently), by infants, young children, and adults, including this researcher. An interpretivist paradigm acknowledges the reality of these multiple interpretations of playful and humorous experiences.

The chapter begins with a macro perspective by discussing how and why qualitative research and interpretivism are the paradigms for this study. Following this context-setting introduction, theoretical concepts connected with socio-cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) will be addressed. Concepts to be discussed include:

- activity as a unit of analysis
- mediation by artifacts (including tools, signs, and symbols)
- various components (nodes) of the activity system "triangle model" (rules, roles and community: Engeström, 1987, 1999) and how they are dynamically interconnected through activity
- the object and motivating force for activity
- *perezhivanie* (emotional experience).

The use of narrative (Bruner, 1986) for structuring and organising playful experience is then discussed. This thesis presents interpretations of a total of 24 events. These events may also be understood as mini-narratives that represent children being playful and/or humorous in diverse ways. Throughout this Chapter theoretical ethical issues around how participants are represented and the role of the researcher are discussed. Chapter 4 focuses on methodological procedures.

3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND INTERPRETIVISM

"Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). In this study the natural settings are the early childhood centres and the phenomena under study are children's experience of humour and playfulness in their communication.

Interpretivism involves the researcher attempting to understand how the children she observes may be feeling and thinking while being playful and humorous (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Are they constructing understandings and creating meaning out of being playful? In this study the interpretive process raised ethical issues and questions around the powerful position of the researcher in relation to the children whose experience she was researching. How did the researcher relate to the children, not as objects to be studied objectively, but as participants with whom the researcher developed relationships? A related question was: How did the researcher guard against subjective bias?

Interpretation is the crux of researcher understanding, so it is necessary to discuss what is meant by "understanding". Just how much can people "understand" each other? The interpretivist position of the researcher raised a host of philosophical and ethical issues which will be discussed in relation to the overarching research question: "How do young children experience

humour and playfulness in their communication?" These include "understanding" (Schwandt, 2000), the nature of experience, and the nature of communication.

3.2.1 How did the researcher work towards understanding children's experience of fun?

Schwandt (2000) points out that "for all post empiricist philosophies of the human sciences, understanding is interpretation all the way down" (p. 209). In this study ethnographic methods formed a basis for the researcher's interpretation of children being playful and humorous. These interpretations were therefore based on detailed reflective observations that described, and represented children being playful and humorous (Graue & Walsh, 1998; Tedlock, 2000).

Ethnography has been described as "...those varieties of inquiry that aim to describe, or interpret the place of culture in human affairs" (Chambers, 2000, p. 852). The researcher in this study used ethnographic observational methods to try to understand the early childhood centre cultures. Observations were focussed on the mediating role of tools, signs and other cultural artifacts that, through playful activity, connect people (including the researcher) with each other and the world (Engeström, 1987, 1999; Wartofsky, 1979; Wertsch, 1991, 1998). Words and body language are obvious examples of culturally conditioned signs that mediate playfulness internally. In this study natural materials, such as water and sand, as well as manufactured books and dress-up clothes, were cultural tools that mediated playfulness externally.

Alluding to researcher reflection and active involvement in the research process, Tedlock (2000, p. 455) has referred to ethnography as "...both a process and a product". Understanding others' experiences always remains guesswork in the end. Thus although this study was not an ethnography, (time in the field being insufficient) reflexive ethnographic methods were used

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to observe how cultural artifacts mediated children's humorous and playful communication.

3.2.2   The nature of experience

Experience is more than words. From a phenomenological perspective experience is sensation before reflection and before representation can describe it (Jackson, 1996). However, from a socio-cultural perspective, experience does evolve in response to activity and experience is always mediated, either with material tools, or with non-material symbolic and semiotic signs and symbols (Wartofsky, 1979; Wells, 1999; Wertsch, 1991). The body language of young children, especially pre-verbal children, is interpreted as meaningful communication about and expression of playful and humorous experiences (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This emphasis on non-verbal, or pre-verbal, ways of communicating playful experiences does not detract from the importance of play with language and words that was also a strong feature in the data in this study. Rather than categorising communication as either verbal or non verbal, a research focus on the purpose of young children's playful communication may be a more useful way of understanding their communication. Verbal, non-verbal and pre-verbal ways of communicating are connected. They flow into one another. Pre-verbal children, young children and adults all communicate with bodies by using signs.

> A human infant engages in symbolic acts, which I have referred to as
> **acts of meaning**. Children are predisposed, from birth, (a) to address
> others, and be addressed by them (i.e., to interact communicatively);
> and (b) to construe their experience (i.e., to interpret experience by
> organizing is into meanings). **Signs** are created at the intersection of
> these two modes of activity. Signs evolve (a) in mediating – or, better,
> in enacting – interaction with others, and (b) in constructing experience
> into meaning; specifically in exploring the contradiction between inner
> and outer experience (Halliday, 1993, p. 94). (emphasis in original)

Young children experience being playful and humorous both emotionally and cognitively and, as Halliday (1993) explains, use signs to communicate these experiences. Acknowledging the primacy and unity of experience and activity, Vygotsky (1998, cited by Van de Veer, 2001) has described in his later writings "perezhivanie" (translated as "emotional experience") as a unit for analysing the interplay of child and environment. This is an interactionist perspective of child development. More recently Vasilyuk (1984/1988), (a student of A. N. Leonte'ev) has integrated perezhivanie into activity theory by emphasising the function as well as the process of experience. "The process of experiencing is involved in perception and in personality changes. These are two principal functions of experiencing" (Vasilyuk, 1984/1988, p.12). Perezhivanie unites consciousness, emotion, and cognition in activity.

A pragmatic focus on concrete experience, evolving in and from activity, is part of a tradition of early childhood research described by Tobin (1995): "Since its beginnings, scholarship in early childhood education has been characterised by a belief in the authenticity of firsthand experience and knowledge" (p. 225). This research focus on experience, rather than on language, seems especially logical when some of the participants are pre-verbal children. Children's experience is central to this study; it is the structures of their experience of humour and playfulness as they interact that comprise the study's themes (Van Mannen, 1997).

Development is based on accumulated experiences. This pattern of remembered experiences creates narrative ways of thinking about the world: making sense, solving problems, and developing a sense of mastery and control in relation to living in the world. "Experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). Therefore in this study children's experience of humour and playfulness are represented narratively, in events that represent individual children as connected both to each other and to social, historical, and cultural contexts (see 3.3.3).

3.2.3   The nature of communication

How did the researcher address communication?

A focus on communication, as in this study, assumes a focus on the relationships between individuals and their environment. A CHAT approach assumes researcher awareness of the importance of invisible cultural, social, historical and biological factors in communication. This awareness extended the research focus beyond the visible children, teachers, and environment, to also include the invisible influences of these cultural and historical factors. Observed communication is complex. It frequently seems chaotic, comprising a muddle of mediating signs and other artifacts, and whatever connects people with each other and the environment (Fogel, 1993). This semiotic muddle had implications for how the researcher interpreted and made sense of observations; it was necessary to have a heightened awareness that observed communication extends well beyond the visible aspects.

Artifact-mediated activity was a logical unit for analysis because it integrates the dynamic qualities of children communicating fun (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1999; Leont'ev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1991, 1998). Children being playful and humorous are active. They move a lot. Therefore a research focus on activity theory is congruent with the practical activity of children being playful and humorous (Cole, 1996). A focus on activity acknowledges the tensions and contradictions that motivate ongoing activity and the communicated experiences of children being playful and humorous.

The artifacts that mediated communication were interpreted as social, cultural, historical and biological constructions. In this study balls are an example of a material artifact that mediated playfulness and humour. The ball sometimes even seemed to have anthropomorphic qualities for very young children.

Speech is the most obvious mediating artifact used in communication, and word play is a dominant feature in young children's playful and humorous communication. Words acquire multiple related meanings that reflect both the users' developmental ages and their prior experience with, and personal understandings of, the words. For these reasons words are particularly powerful mediating artifacts for verbal children being playful.

Therefore words (including phrases and utterances) are a unit of analysis in this study (Vygotsky, 1934/1986; Wertsch, 1991). Words enable conscious, thoughtful, and complex playful and humorous communication. Vygotsky (1934/1986, p. 256) has eloquently described the relationship between thought, speech and shared consciousness: "Consciousness is reflected in a word as the sun in a drop of water. A word relates to consciousness as a living cell relates to a whole organism, as an atom relates to the universe. A word is a microcosm of human consciousness". Echoing Shakespeare, Vygotsky (1934/1986, p. 255) writes: "A word devoid of thought is a dead thing".

However, as the youngest participants in this study were pre-verbal, and all the children (both pre-verbal and verbal) used gesture and body movement to communicate humour and playfulness, mediating artifacts extended beyond words as a unit for analysis, to include whatever it was that mediated their communicative activity. Activity is prior to words. Vygotsky (1934/1986), despite his prioritising of words as a unit for analysis, wrote: "To the biblical 'In the beginning was the Word' Goethe makes Faust reply, 'In the beginning was the deed'…the word was not the beginning – action was there first; it is the end of development, crowning the deed" (p. 255).

The question of how children communicate and experience humour and playfulness, leads to complicated concepts about the semiotics of mediation; this is at the heart of communication. How do children learn the meanings of the signs with which they communicate playfulness and humour? Signs

include body language as well as speech. How do they learn to relate intersubjectively, in tune with each other?

According to socio-cultural theory all communication, including intersubjectivity, is mediated. Children learn the meanings of mediating signs from their social experiences in the world. Via engagement in activity this external social knowledge is internalised. Thus, what is initially social becomes personal as it acquires first personal sense and then social meaning. Obviously the process is not a simple case of transference from outside to inside. The dynamic and dialectical nature of activity precludes the existence of any external - internal boundaries (Miettinen, 2001; Zinchenko, 2001).

Individual children actively learn by internalising, appropriating, and creating different meanings from similar experiences. The developmental age of children, and their personalities, will affect how playfulness and humour are understood and expressed by individual children. However, the focus of this study is not individual children; it is the playful communication between them, although developmental age-related factors are taken into account. The attitudes of teachers and peers also affect the culture of the early childhood centre, which in turn affects how children communicate and experience humour and playfulness there.

To what extent can communicative signs express internal feelings of playfulness and humorous thoughts? Researchers, scientists, religious thinkers, and philosophers have long discussed and debated the intricacies and problems of dualism that are associated with this external-to-internal process. Zinchenko (2001), responding to the philosophical issue of how the external world somehow becomes the internal mind, has pragmatically pointed out that: "This difficulty does not arise, however, if internalisation is understood as a transition from intersubjective to intrasubjective, which is performed by mental functions ... Such an explanation eliminates the opposition between external and internal and, consequently, both visible and

invisible at the same time" (p 137). In this interpretation the dialectical dynamics inherent in activity unite subject (playful child participant) and object (environment, including artifacts). Subjective blends into objective and vice versa, inter- and intra- subjectively. As Miettinen (2001) has stressed, artifacts mediate the blending of subject and object. Artifacts embody cultural historical experiences (Wartofsky, 1979). That interpretation adds weight to this study's research focus on the mediating artifacts and the dialectical properties of activity in the relationships of children experiencing fun together.

3.3 SOCIO CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY: METHOD AND PARADIGM

As well as being interpretive and qualitative the methodology in this study is also based on the dialectical materialist philosophy associated with CHAT and grounded in the philosophy of Marx (1845), who had developed the thoughts of Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach. Dialectical materialism uses the concepts of thesis, antithesis and synthesis to explain historical changes. The term "dialectical" refers to the historical contradictions which stimulate tensions, that in turn motivate and propel change leading to transformation.

Socio-cultural historical activity theory goes under various names and is frequently also referred to as CHAT. The various labels associated with socio-cultural theory share a common emphasis on the importance of social, cultural and historical contexts on human development. Chaiklin (2001) has suggested a one-sentence definition of cultural-historical psychology as: "…the study of the development of psychological functioning through social participation in socially-organised practices" (p 21). CHAT emphasises people's activity, (referred to as "practices" by Chaiklin), because learning, development and change occur through activity. The CHAT methodology used in this study is congruent with the study's aim of exploring children's every-day playful and humorous activity. Thus this study explores relationships between children's socio-cultural-historical contexts and their playful and humorous communicative behaviour and experiences. How

children communicate playfully, the artifacts that mediate their playful and humorous relationships, the interactions between children, and the overall context are important research foci. In this study the research did not focus so much on individual children as on their relationships with the total environment, including other people. By focusing on activity as the unit of analysis this study prioritises interaction over individualism.

3.3.1 Mediated activity

Artifact-mediated activity is the unit of analysis (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1987, 1999; Wertsch, 1991, 1998) used to analyse events of children communicating while having fun (see 3.2.3). As a unit, mediated activity combines the diversity of children's experiences with emergentism (Sawyer, 2002). This means that activity, as a unit, is not reduced to an assemblage of separate elements that misrepresent the wholeness of the activity (Vygotsky, 1986). The relationships that connect the elements of activity are prioritised in the analyses. (Elements include the rules, roles, artifacts, and community and are elaborated on in section 3.4).

The use of separate events, as in this study, to illustrate the holistic interconnected aspects of activity could misrepresent activity as closed circular systems. However the events are not isolated. Rather, they are systems of activity that also interconnect and cross over with multiple other events. Change emerges out of the contradictions and diversity in this activity both inside events and between events. In this way emergentism (Sawyer, 2002) incorporates openness and change in activity systems. Activity theory prioritises the contradictory, never static, and ever-changing nature of activity (and of humour and playfulness), while enabling systematic and manageable analysis of events of children having fun together. Thus activity systems interconnect as open, rather than closed, systems of change.

In this study mediated activity is interpreted as children communicating playfully and humorously with culturally and historically constructed artifacts

in their natural socio-cultural historical contexts. A question arises over how much historical, cultural, and social contextualisation is desirable. Where and what are the boundaries of the activity system? The events presented in this thesis as units of analysis are loosely bounded by naturally-occurring play frames (Bateson, 1972; Goffman, 1974) and narrative structures (Ochs & Capps, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988; Trevarthen, 2002) that integrate the events. The events, in turn, are situated in early childhood centres, in communities, in New Zealand, and are thus contextualised. The boundaries around activity are always fuzzy as activity systems overlap and blend into expanding systems (Engeström, 1987).

It is not logically possible to study naturally-occurring playful communication by focusing on individuals in artificial environments, such as laboratories. Humour and playfulness are primarily socially, culturally, and historically constructed and mediated.

3.3.2 Artifacts

A critical sub-question in this study is: "what mediates this playful and humorous communication"? The various terms used in the literature to refer to the mediation of communication – i.e. tools, symbols, signs, and artifacts, sometimes cause confusion in relation to their material or ideal status. For example, words (despite being invisible) are referred to as tools because they serve this concrete mediating tool-like function (Vygotsky, 1934/1986), yet words are also symbols that with experience acquire internal, personal meanings which abstractly reflect concrete experiences. Words are also semiotic signs. In this study the term "artifact" as described by Wartofsky (1979) is used to refer to tools, symbols and signs.

Culture is mediated, transmitted, transformed, created, or re-created via artifacts. Wartofsky (1979) has proposed three levels or categories of artifacts that bypass the idealistic-material problems by emphasising how the representational role of artifacts mediates activity/praxis. Wartofsky (1979)

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has pragmatically described artifacts as "... anything which human beings create by the transformation of nature and of themselves: thus also language, forms of social organisation and interaction, techniques of production, skills ..." (p.xiii). The first level of primary artifacts describes material objects as they are used directly, in primary production. For example in this study words, balls, and books mediated playfulness at this primary level. Secondary artifacts include symbolic representations of primary artifacts with the addition of a historical dimension. In this study the norms and routines of early childhood centres, mediated by words and outlined in centre policies and rules, are examples of secondary artifacts. Wartofsky (1979) has referred to tertiary artifacts as "...a class of artifacts which can come to constitute a relatively autonomous 'world', in which the rules, conventions and outcomes no longer appear directly practical, or which, indeed, seem to constitute an arena of non-practical, or 'free' play or game activity" (p.208). Tertiary artifacts are symbolic and, with the addition of imagination, they mediate how we see or perceive the world.

This emphasis on the imagination, as in free play and games, implies that an awareness of tertiary artifacts may be particularly pertinent to this study of playfulness. Playfulness need not be interpreted in a limited sense, as being directly or concretely tied to material artifacts or their representations. It also derives from the activity of being imaginative with these primary and secondary artifacts. Repeated narrative play themes, such as scripts, as described by Cole (1996) and Nelson (1996) and humour are therefore examples of tertiary artifacts that mediate playfulness. Words being integral to communication, are particularly important because, as well as being primary artifacts, words are also mediating artifacts at the secondary and tertiary levels.

3.3.3 Narrative events

The activity units that are analysed in this study consist of a series of events that represent, in narrative form, the diversity in young children's playful and

humorous communication. These narrative-like events may be understood as tertiary artifacts (Wartofsky, 1979). Artifacts, in turn, may be understood as, "the linchpin of cultural mediation" (Cole, 1996, p.122). Wertsch (1998) has described narratives as cultural tools; that is the function of the 24 events presented in this study, where the use of events is both descriptive and explanatory (Polkinghorne, 1988). This reflects the research process, which shifted from description to interpretation as the thematic links across events, both within and between early childhood centres, became clearer.

Narrative structures, i.e. the sense of continual change that is integral to stories, are one way of retaining the dynamic and dialectical emergent unity of playful activity. Narrative is also a fundamental way of learning and making sense of the world (Bruner, 1986; Clandinin & Connolly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988), in this case for both the children and the researcher. This is because, as Bruner (1986) has explained narrative situates knowledge in contexts that make personal sense, though not necessarily logical or rational sense. The plot structure of the narrative provides a cohesive whole that endows individuals' experiences with meaning. The structure usually includes some sort of beginning, middle, and end, with the possibility of considerable deviation between these parts; narratives are not necessarily linear or straight-forward as Ochs & Capps point out (2001).

Time is integral to the narrative. Polkinghorne (1988) distinguishes between the complexity of narratives that integrate individual actions with events over time, and the simplicity of "... chronicles, which simply list events on a timeline. Narrative provides a symbolised account of actions that includes a temporal dimension" (p. 18). But, phenomenological time as experienced by children may not equate with chronological timetabled clock time (Van Mannen, 1997). As in Hall's (1976) classic dichotomy, the teacher's time-sense is likely to be much more monochronic, while that of the children is likely to be decidedly polychronic. Different understandings and interpretations of time are one way in which narratives (and events) may develop contradictions and complexity.

Spatial dimensions and the physical environment also contributed complexity to children's narrative constructions, and were an important consideration for understanding children's bodily experience of playfulness. In this study a narrative focus on the activity of children being playful and humorous was one way of representing the multi-dimensionality, complexity, and dynamics of the activity. Thus the 24 events presented in this study illustrate the diversity and complexity of children communicating playfully.

Validity, or truth, can be an issue in the use of narrative methods. How does the researcher know that constructed narratives truly reflected children's experiences? In this study narrative events illustrating children being playful and humorous guided the data-gathering process, sometimes at a purely intuitive level as the researcher looked for signs of children being playful and focused on those. Signs included obvious signals such as laughter, happy screeching, and sounds and movements associated with busy joyful or gleeful activity. In this sense data-gathering was selective, yet these events were also a natural feature in the observation data. They were everyday events, activities nested and framed within wider activities.

Obvious signals frequently marked the beginnings and endings of playful events. Bateson (1972) and Goffman (1974) have referred to these signals as "play frames". At one level, events were sometimes framed by another event, such as an eating routine, or a transition time, when children were moving from inside to outside, or from one activity to another. In the case of playfulness in pretend play, children's signals and messages operated on two levels: inside the play, in pretend roles, and outside the play, negotiating the roles and rules for play (El'konin, 2000). Thus the pretend play constituted one frame and the negotiating of that play, another frame.

The researcher time spent in centres added to the "truth" of the narratives as particular themes emerged and patterns were repeated over time. Thus the events presented in this study are, in one sense, not unique but

representative of children's everyday practices in these early childhood centres. In another sense they are, like all activity, entirely unique events never to be precisely repeated again.

Events, like activity systems, are also bounded and framed by bigger events and broader social, cultural and historical contexts. In this sense all events, narratives, activity theory triangles, patterns, themes (or whatever one calls these models as units of experience) are interconnected. In presenting this research and illustrating particular points it is necessary, for the purpose of analysis, to extract whole events, and to present aspects of events, separated from their total context. Immediate contexts are therefore described only briefly. In a similar way, for purposes of analysis this study separates out the various lenses that frame activity systems. Related challenges for this research include acknowledging this decontextualisation and retaining an image of the wider context of events, while representing the diversity in the events, and also retaining an overall cohesiveness to the theme of children having fun together. Section 3.4.2 elaborates on how this research project met these challenges.

3.4 ACTIVITY THEORY FRAMEWORK: A RESEARCH TOOL

This section explains in greater detail the activity theory framework used in this study. The framework used to interpret the playful events is developed from Engeström's (1987, 1999) expanded triangular model of an activity system, which describes the essential relationships within activity systems. In turn Engeström's (1987) model is developed from Vygotsky's (1978) earlier simple triangulated model of activity, which identified only the *stimulus* and the *response*, with an *auxiliary stimulus* at the third triangle point between the stimulus and the response (see Figure 3.1). The auxiliary stimulus is the feature that distinguishes the socio-cultural nature of this triangle model; it represents the idea that psychological relationships are mediated (Vygotsky, 1978). A variation of this simple triangle model, which fits this study, identifies *cultural artifacts* as the auxiliary stimulus mediating the interactions

between the *subject* and the *object* in the two bottom corners of the triangle (see Figure 3.1). The subject includes people, and the object includes the environment.

Figure 3.2 represents diagrammatically the framework for analysis used in this study. Figure 3.1 sits within the upper part of the model. Thus, *cultural artifacts* replace the auxiliary stimulus; object and subject are situated within a broader context that includes the *community*, the *rules*, and the *roles* of the participants in the activity. In this model as elaborated by the researcher, children are viewed as *participants*, and the object is understood as the motivating *aim* of the activity.

Zinchenko (2002, p 10) has criticised the triangle as being a "... rather scanty metaphor ..." for the "... emotional experiences, will, action, word and image..." that are the stuff of activity, and therefore of children experiencing humour and playfulness. As with any model, not every aspect of the complexity of communication, learning and relationships can be explicitly included in it. Activity is too complex for a complete diagrammatic description. Neither can words fully represent the activity or the complexity of experiences associated with it. Another problem with diagrammatic models is the static image they can convey, despite the activity label. These limitations of triangle models are acknowledged. Figure 3.2, though it may convey a reductionist and static image because it is a diagram, does however attempt to portray the dialectical dynamism of activity systems. This dynamism is integral and basic to the nature of activity, which is all about continual change. Sawyer (2002) has referred to the change process of activity systems as emergentism, thereby acknowledging the complexity of activity systems. Complexity and change emerge out of activity. W.-M. Roth (2004) has described how the contradictions that emerge in the changing relationships between the components of the CHAT model create tensions that motivate the ongoing activity and the continual change that are integral to activity .

The Marxist economic and historical perspective, which is integral to socio-cultural psychology (Elhammoumi, 2002) and activity theory (Leont'ev, 1978) is apparent in Engeström's (1987) model of activity systems, which was a forerunner of Figure 3.2, as developed in this study. While acknowledging the pervasiveness of economic and historical influences on all dimensions of activity systems, this study uses the term "role" less strictly than the original "division of labour", though still with an awareness of the power structures inherent in all relationships.

In Figure 3.2, representing "Children's playful communication in context", "roles" have replaced the "division of labour," and "artifacts" have replaced "tools". The concepts of production, consumption, distribution and exchange, though not labeled, are integral to Figure 3.2, but not of prime interest in this study. This triangle model still only represents an atom in a multi-layered complex of interconnecting activity systems that Engeström (1987) has referred to as "expanded activity systems".

Mediating artifacts
Auxiliary stimulus

Subject
Stimulus

Object
Response
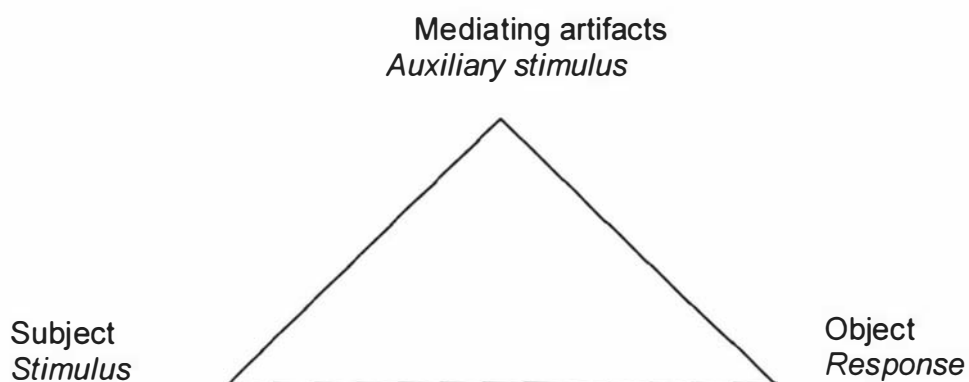
Figure 3.1 Simple model of psychological relationships

(adapted from Vygotsky (1978)

Cultural Artifacts:
environment, play
materials, words, scripts

Children:
thought
emotion
behaviour

Aim: play,
"togetherness"
perezhivanie

Roles

Community:
early childhood
centre

Rules
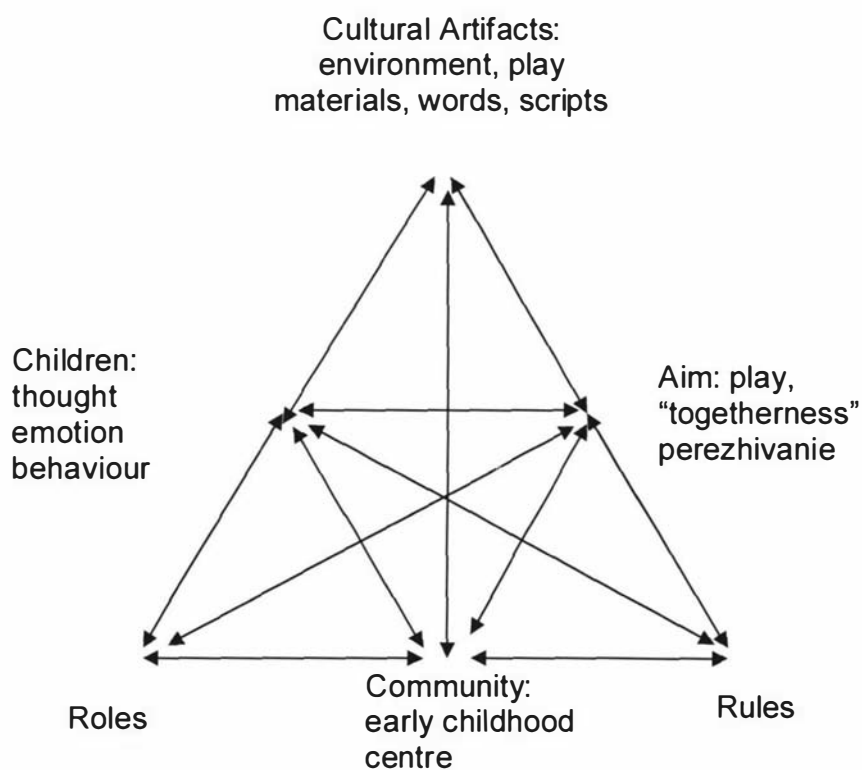
Figure 3.2 Children's playful communication in context

(adapted from Engeström, 1987, 1999).

3.4.1 Perezhivanie: Combining emotional experience with cognitive development

"Children" replace Engstrom's (1987, 1999) "subject" label in Figure 3.2, emphasising the active roles of children as thinking and feeling participants in activity. The concept of perezhivanie (translated as "emotional experience" and mentioned earlier in 3.2.2) emerges between children and the motivating aim of being playful and humorous. Perezhivanie is a very interesting and largely ignored analytic unit, which combines cognitive development with emotional experience in activity (Vasilyuk, 1984/1988). Thus emotional experience overlays activity being integral to the motivating aims of the activity.

As a unit for analysis, perezhivanie retains a holistic non-reductionist focus on the dialectics and history of the relationship between feeling and thinking. Perezhivanie mediates children's experience of the environment, and so connects the environment to experience. Consequently the environment is not perceived as a separate influence on children; instead interaction is the focus. This requires researcher awareness of how children may experience the environment, both cognitively and emotionally, over time. By combining cognition, feelings, and activity in the context of the physical environment, perezhivanie contributes balance and integrity to an understanding of individual-group-environment dynamics, as well as recognising the emotional bases to cognition and the mediated nature of experience.

3.4.2 Micro to macro activity systems

The CHAT framework model described in Figure 3.2 is the unit of analysis used. The words surrounding this framework are specific to this study of children experiencing playfulness and humour in early childhood settings. However the underlying theoretical concepts can be applied to analyses of social situations on many levels, from macro to micro analyses. Different

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theorists have used and continue to use aspects of activity theory for different levels of analyses. For example Vygotsky (1978, 1934/1986) originally prioritised a more micro-analytic focus on language and words, because words are an important mediating cultural artifact for thinking. Wertsch (1991, 1998) also prioritises words. Leont'ev (1978) in contrast was more focused on macro links between economic structures, the labour market, and children's social activity. Engeström (1987, 1999) has carried on that tradition by promoting the use of activity theory in work activities.

Other researchers and theorists use activity theory in a wide range of micro-, and macro-analytic ways. Some examples are Cole (1996), Edwards (2004), Goncu (1999), and Rogoff (1998). This study uses activity theory in more micro-analytic ways because the research focus is on children experiencing playful and humorous relationships and the experience is conveyed in narrative events. However, awareness of the broader macro context of the events is important for understanding children experiencing playfulness and humour.

As a framework model Figure 3.2 represents an open holistic understanding of activity situated in context (social, cultural and historical). Activity systems are also situated in relation to each other, interconnecting to create context on many social, cultural and historical levels. Thus, activity systems are dynamic systems of relationships. This research is about relationships. As Goncu (1999) points out children's relationships have been avoided by mainstream psychological research, particularly in relation to cognitive development research which has emphasised individuals.

The CHAT framework model (Figure 3.2) enables the researcher to explore essential invisible concepts, such as the historical construction of playfulness and humour within the activity. The activity system is holistic and early childhood education has long promoted holistic understandings of learning and children, at least theoretically. This is reflected in New Zealand in *Te*

Whaariki (Ministry of Education, 1996), the Early Childhood Curriculum, where "holistic development" is a core principle.

From a more macro-analytical perspective activity systems may also be interpreted as mediating artifacts of activity. Neither the macro, nor the micro level analyses and perspectives of activity systems can exist without each other. As Fine (1991, p. 171) points out,

> The division of the world between micros and macros serves
> specialization, but is not intellectually tenable ... The more we
> recognize that structure and interaction depend on each other, the more
> our theories can break the bars of the cages we have constructed for
> them.

Just as a too rigid adherence to the macro-micro dualism is unhelpful, so too does the dialectical nature of mediation subsume any dualism by blending subject and object, inner and outer, inter and intra-psychologically (Wertsch, 1998), inter and intra-subjectively (Zinchenko, 2001), via activity (Miettinen, 2001). Wertsch (1998), Zinchenko (2001), and Miettinen (2001) have described in detail how these dualisms are dissolved in the dialectical activity of CHAT. The psychological development of children is a socially mediated, dialectical and active process. Playfulness and humour are inherently social, dialectical and active too.

It is this dialectical activity, with its internal contradictions, tensions and transformations, which creates the motivating aim that sustains ongoing activity. In this sense the experience of play motivates the activity of play that provides the experience as explained by El'konin (2001) and Leont'ev (1978). As transformation is a feature of activity, related questions for this study concern how playfulness, humour, the participants' roles, rules, and the artifacts that mediate their playful communicative activity, are all transformed during that activity. In this context change and transformation are interpreted by El'konin (2001) as development.

A focus on the dynamics of activity also highlights the mediation involved in communication, and the connections between children, others, and the environment. What signs, symbols and tools mediate humorous and playful interactions, and how do they do that? These questions helped to retain a research focus on practical activity, thus avoiding the research trap of becoming overly idealistic or abstractly theoretical, and unconnected to the material data.

In this sense, Ilyenkov (1982) uses the phrase "ascent from the abstract to the concrete" (first used by Karl Marx) to describe the process whereby the understanding of ideals and theory develop and are understood as images, though tied to concrete material reality. Images mirror reality. It follows that non-material symbols, signs, and artifacts that mediate communication are not abstract ideal concepts; they are tied to concrete material reality. This may also be one way to understand playfulness as an individual disposition, yet tied to the context of the playfulness and thus distributed across players, as described by Carr (2001). In this sense context includes participants as well as their physical environment acknowledging the situated nature of change and learning described by Kirschner and Whitson (1997).

3.5 ETHICAL ISSUES

3.5.1 Advocacy and intersubjectivity

The research focus on children's everyday experience of playfulness and humour in early childhood centre communities was partly provoked by the researcher's appreciation of children's humour and playfulness, and a desire to advocate for children's right to leisure and play. This desire was partly motivated by her awareness that young children's right to be playful may be endangered in an environment where playfulness and humour, as expressions of leisure and recreation, may not be valued. Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children, to which New Zealand is a signatory, states:

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1. Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

2. Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life, and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

The researcher was also acutely aware of her powerful (bigger, stronger, and older) adult position in relation to children, and the ethical responsibilities implicit in that position. These responsibilities included the ethical principle that the research would not harm or disadvantage children in any way, either during the process, or in the outcomes of the research (Greig & Taylor, 1999; Hedges, 2002). A research focus on playfulness and humour did not seem to be potentially harmful. Rather it could support children's right to be playful.

However there were ethical issues around the potential objectification of the child participants during the research process. Thus in using video, the researcher was aware of how the creation of visual images could unhelpfully objectify participants. Written observations could do likewise. One way of addressing this potential subject-object dualism was to emphasise intersubjectivity.

As a researcher/participant observer, the researcher was working from subjectively objectifying children towards intersubjectively trying to understand children's experience of humour and playfulness. The CHAT paradigm promotes an understanding of the mediated nature of intersubjectivity. This paradigm shift in researcher focus, from individuals to interactions and the artifacts that connect individuals in interactions, dissipated any dualist objectifying issues by making explicit the central mediating role of artifacts in shared and intersubjective activity.

Though reference is made to shared subjectivities and intersubjectivity, child "subjects" are called participants in this study. This terminology avoids any traditional psychological interpretations of passively researched subjects (Woodhead, 2000). It also acknowledges the researcher's participating presence, as well as respecting children's rights as active participants in the research process.

The researcher role in the centres varied, fluctuating along a continuum of insider and outsider relationships with teachers, parents, and children; different points on the continuum reflected varying degrees of reflexivity, intersubjectivity and empathy. In relating to children the researcher was another adult, different from the children by reason of being physically bigger, having more words and subject to fewer centre rules. But, adults do retain a part of the child they once were, and being "in touch" with this past child probably assists the process of relating intersubjectively and playfully with children. In this study the researcher was reflexively aware of this phenomenon, both in observations of teacher-child interactions and in the researchers' personal teaching narratives. This reflexive awareness has been described as a turn from participant observation to "the observation of the participant observer" (Tedlock, 2000, p. 464).

3.6 SUMMARY

This chapter has described the eclectic mix of theoretical tools that structured both the paradigm and the research methods used to study young children being playful and humorous. The interpretive, qualitative paradigm of this study was described. The theoretical basis of socio-cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) was described, with the use of diagrams. The rationale for using CHAT as both the paradigm and the research method was explained.

The dynamics of activity systems as units for analysis were explained, along with the central CHAT concept of artifact mediation. Narrative structures, as mediating cultural artifacts, sit within this mediating framework. They are

nested in activity systems, and comprise a central unifying unit of analysis in this study. Thus narratives, in the form of playful and humorous events, represent the research data in formats that make pedagogical sense and reflect the diversity, the context and the reality of children's playful and humorous communication in early childhood centre settings.

Finally, ethical issues relating to the research focus, its usefulness, and the researcher's role, were discussed. Many of these points, addressed theoretically in this chapter, are examined in the next chapter, in relation to the pragmatics of the research process.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD: PROCESS AND PRACTICE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter described the theory underlying the methodology used in exploring the research question: "how do young children experience humour and playfulness in their communication?" This chapter describes the participating early childhood centres and the people involved in this study, and the methods followed by the researcher. The overall research context and design and phases of the research are described in section 4.2. The rationale for site selection is explained, and the research participants described in sections 4.3 and 4.4. Procedures followed during the research process, including ethical procedures, the generation of data, and its analysis are described in section 4.5. Issues of validity are addressed in section 4.6. Section 4.7 summarises the main points of this chapter.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The design of the research was inspired by the field work methods of ethnographic research (Chambers, 2000; Delamont, 2002; Tedlock, 2000). This study was however, not an ethnography because total time in the field was restricted to about 110 hours. The research was located in three early childhood centres that represented different types of centre contexts. Observations of children playfully experiencing and communicating humour were later interpreted within narrative structures as events (Bruner, 1986; Clandinin & Connolly, 2000; Ochs & Capps, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988).

4.2.1 Phases of the research

The research was sited in three different early childhood centres and there were four successive phases of data gathering. The first two phases

occurred in centre 1 (called "Northbridge"), the first phase there being an exploratory study. The centre that joined the project in phase three has been called "Eastbridge" and the third centre, joining in phase four, has been called "Southbridge" (see Table 1).

As is usual with exploratory qualitative studies the research process generated further questions; each successive phase addressed questions that had developed out of the previous phase, as well as relevant issues that arose within each phase. The resultant sub-research questions are listed in this Chapter and addressed in the results Chapters. The cumulative character of the research process is made explicit by the research phases.

After developing a research proposal and following university ethics review procedures (see section 4.5.1), the data-gathering phases of the research began. Data were gathered between November 1999 and March 2001, i.e. over a total time span of sixteen months. The study began with a one-month exploratory phase in Northbridge followed by three successive months each in Northbridge, Eastbridge and Southbridge, though data gathering in Northbridge continued alongside that in the other two centres for a year (see Table 1). The researcher time in the centres included a representative cross section of inside/outside, arrival/departure times, mornings/afternoons, wet/fine days as well as different week days, thus ensuring coverage of the whole normal day. Research time in Southbridge centre was confined to mornings only as a different group of children attended the afternoon sessions. The data gathered over the year in Northbridge centre also provided seasonal coverage.

Table 1   *Research phases: Time in centres*

	Northbridge	Eastbridge	Southbridge
Phase one: November-December 1999	Exploratory study; research information provided and informed consent obtained from parents and teachers; data generation: observation of children being "humorous".		
Phase two January 2000-March 2000	Data generation continues; refocused on how children *experience playfulness* and *humour* (observation, interview teachers).		
Phase three: July 2000-October 2000	Northbridge continues (interview parents of 5 children at Northbridge).	Information provided and informed consent obtained from parents and teachers at Eastbridge; data generation (observation, interview teachers).	
Phase four: October 2000-March 2001 (break from December-January)	Northbridge continues to December, (observation).		Information provided and informed consent obtained from parents and teachers at Southbridge; data generation (observation, interview teachers).

Time observing in centres was as follows:

Northbridge centre: 1-3 hour visits over thirteen months: 25 visits. (during phase 1: 10 hours; phase 2: 30 hours; phases 3 & 4: 10 hours overall).   **total 50 hours**.

Eastbridge centre: 2-3 hour visits over three months: 12 visits during phase 3.   **total 30 hours.**

Southbridge centre: 2-3 hour visits over three months: 12 visits during phase 4.   **total 30 hours**.

  fieldwork total hours: 110 hours

Plus casual pop-in visits to all 3 centres.

Phase one

This was the exploratory phase, carried out in Northbridge centre. In this phase the main objective was to check whether or not young children's humour was a viable research focus. The researcher was interested in both the prevalence and the interactive role of humour for groups of young children in early childhood centres. Thus the initial research question was:

- *What role does humour play in the interactions of young children?*

Children having fun was a feature from the beginning of this phase. Children simply laughed, and were boisterous and physically exuberant, much more than most groups of adults. It was concluded that the research focus was viable, but needed refining and elaborating. Laughter can be a sign of humour, but humour is more complex than physical laughter and visible movement. During this phase it became apparent that the interpretation of "humour" needed to be broadened, as discussed in Chapter 2. Adult interpretations of humour did not necessarily match children's perspectives or experiences of humour. Definitions of humour did not necessarily include the mirth, glee, and laughter that were dominant features in the researcher's

observations of children having fun in their play. The definition of "playful" in Collins English Dictionary (1998) aptly captured the researcher's observations of children being "full of high spirits and fun; good natured and humorous" (p. 1188). Consequently, as explained in Chapter 5, the word "humour" in the research question was expanded to include "playfulness".

As well as broader understandings of "humour", another fundamental issue which emerged during phase one concerned how children jointly constructed and experienced humour, and had fun together. As a result the research focus shifted to include an emphasis on children's joint intersubjective experiences of humour, fun and playfulness. Children's "experience" was added to the research question, thereby acknowledging their feelings, perspectives and attitudes. In this way the initial cognitive focus (developed from the existing research literature) on children's developing theory of mind - as expressed in their humour - was expanded to include the affective aspects that characterise children communicating playfully. Thus the "theory of mind" focus that had initially inspired the researcher was expanded to a more socio-cultural and holistic understanding of children developing inter-subjective shared awareness. The role of artifact mediation in the communication of these shared understandings became a related research focus.

The main research question became:

- *How do young children experience humour and playfulness in their communication?*

A sub-question that emerged during phase one and persisted through all phases of the research process was:

- *What mediates children's playful and humorous communication?*

A related consideration was how children manifested their psychological understandings of themselves and others, while having fun together. How (if

at all) were social-cognitive concepts such as theory of mind, intersubjectivity, and collaboration (Olson & Bruner, 1996) apparent in young children's social playfulness? Olson and Bruner (1996) suggest that consideration of such concepts is increasingly important in research involving young children.

Further sub-questions which developed during phase one and retained importance throughout the research included:

- *How do young children communicate intersubjectively, when having fun together? (Are concepts of theory of mind, intersubjectivity, and collaboration apparent?)*

Written informed consent to the research process was obtained from all parents and teachers at Northbridge centre during this first phase. This same format for research information and consent forms, with name and place details changed, was used in the other two centres in later phases of the research (Appendices A, B, C, D).

Phase two

Phase two comprised an investigation of children's interactive experience of humour in one early childhood centre, i.e. Northbridge. The overall research aims were to understand and identify how these children inter-subjectively experienced humour and playfulness, and how children being playful fitted into the centre's everyday routines and transition times. These included "circle" and meal times, around which much of the centre day was structured. The researcher was looking for the underlying artifacts and tools which children used to mediate playful communication. Thus, the sub-question that preoccupied phase two was:

- *How do centre routines and transitions between centre activities impact on children's playfulness and humour?*

As a way of focussing in-depth on children's playful relationships, five of the children in Northbridge became target children. The five children were purposely selected to represent a range of ages and both genders. They were two boys and three girls, aged from 14 to 49 months at the start of the research. This age range was selected to reflect developmental differences such as the 1 year old's pre-verbal playfulness, the imitative word and sound play of the 2-3 year olds, and the play with word meanings of the 3-4 year olds.

While observing children's playfulness and humour the researcher sporadically tracked these particular children, alternating between using the video-camera and the laptop, as they playfully interacted with others. Thus the researcher gathered additional information about how these individual children communicated playfully. During phase 3 the parents of these five children were interviewed as the researcher explored "playful" continuities between home and centre. The additional information gathered about these children, and the longer period of time spent in Northbridge centre (a year), contributed to researcher awareness of development as an obvious crucial sub-text in the data, which influenced how children experienced and expressed humour and playfulness in their communication.

Staff interest in the research topic at Northbridge centre became an explicit part of the research process; they volunteered to keep written records of children's humour in notebooks provided by their supervisor. So did some parents. Theoretically these data were a useful adjunct. However, the actual data production did not match the initial enthusiasm; perhaps it was overcome by the realities of busy lives. The researcher provided teachers and parents with notebooks in which to document their observations, and accompanying notes for guidance (Appendices E, F). Both teachers and parents preferred to talk with the researcher about humorous incidents they had observed. The researcher then made notes. However, three of the parents of focus children did provide the researcher with useful observational records of incidents they had interpreted as humorous during the year.

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Phase three

Phase three involved the addition of Eastbridge centre to the research. As well as addressing the questions that emerged from phase two, this phase also involved looking for similarities and differences in children's construction, understanding, and communicative use of humour in the two early childhood centres. The contrast between the centres was exemplified in the sorts of questions that developed during phase three.

The teachers at Eastbridge were younger than those at Northbridge, and most were quite playful with each other, as well as with the children. Consequently the research focus on children's playful and humorous interactions widened to include teacher-child interactions as well as child-child interactions. The sub-culture of the centre as a playful place became a focus for understanding the communicative playfulness of children.

Research questions that became foci for phase three included:

- *What role do teachers play in children's playfulness?*

- *What roles do children play in each other's playfulness?*

The awareness of centre culture as a variable in children's playfulness arose out of the Eastbridge data and became a comparative research focus for both Northbridge and Southbridge centres. The communicative styles of both verbal and pre-verbal children became another focus. Eastbridge had a predominance of toddlers (18 to 36 months), and only a few 4 year olds. Northbridge had more older children than Eastbridge, and at Northbridge the under and over 2's were separated for most of the day. There were not many older 4 year olds at Northbridge either. Teachers and language seemed to be important research issues. Thus the other question, which developed in phase two and became a focus of phase three asked:

- *How do pre-verbal children interact and communicate playful and humorous roles with each other, with talkers and with teachers?*

Towards the end of phase three it was decided that it would be useful also to observe playful teachers and older verbal 4 year olds, and this became the focus for phase four.

Phase four

Phase four involved the addition of the third centre. Southbridge was purposely selected because it had a predominance of verbal 4 year olds and teachers who described themselves as "playful extraverts" (Taped interview, 14.11.00). Play became an important theme in the data, reflecting the association between play and its disposition, playfulness. The addition of a third centre seemed to amplify the significance of centre culture as a variable in the data. Thus the research focus in the fourth phase included teacher behaviour in relation to the centre culture, though the overall focus was on the humour and playfulness of children. In Southbridge centre the researcher was also looking at how children used narrative structures and word play when being playful, and how teachers facilitated this. The sub-questions that were addressed in phase four included:

- *How do children use narrative structures and words when being playful and humorous?*

- *What role do the teachers play in children's playful and humorous narratives?*

- *How does teacher playfulness affect the centre culture?*

4.3 SITE SELECTION

The initial research sites were two full-day care early childhood education centres, catering for children from birth to school start at five years. A third centre was later added for reasons that developed out of the research process, relating to how older young children use words in communication. All the centres were purposely selected to reflect a range of early childhood centre types. They were also self-selected in that the staff were keen to participate in a project about humour and playfulness. Thus every centre approached consented to be part of the research.

4.3.1 Northbridge centre

Northbridge centre was selected as a site for several reasons, including the fact that it was an all-day, mixed-age child care centre, with the majority of the children attending full-time. This wide age range, from 6 months to almost 5 years, enabled some observation across traditional age-stage divides, thus adding to the depth and breadth of data gathered. However the "under 2's" were physically separated from the "over 2's" for most of the day, giving the impression of two age groups in the one centre. This arrangement restricted a wide mixed-age focus of the research in the first two phases. Membership of both the children's and the staff's groups was stable.

Northbridge centre was based at a tertiary institution, and served the children of staff employed in the institution. Consequently parents were an integral part of the centre at a local community level. In comparison with other centres in New Zealand, Northbridge was structurally a "good quality" centre, meaning that the staff were all qualified to the Diploma of Early Childhood Education (or its equivalent) benchmark level, and the centre had above average adult:child ratios, with a small group size of up to 23 children and between 5 and 6 staff on duty at any one time. The number of staff varied according to the actual numbers and the ages of children in attendance. For under 2's the ratio was 1:3 and for older children it was 1:8.

These qualities of ratios, group size, and staff qualifications were important reasons for selecting Northbridge. Combined with group stability they contributed to quite secure relationships between children, staff and parents, allowing the centre to function as another "home", or "public family" for the children. It was therefore likely that the children would behave fairly "normally", enhancing the ecological validity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) of the research observations.

Like many early childhood education centres in New Zealand, Northbridge was an old converted house, possibly adding to its family-like atmosphere. Another reason for this centre's selection was its convenient geographic location for the researcher, who could "pop in" at short notice. The researcher was also already a familiar face in the centre, having worked with the staff on professional development programmes, so her presence was less disruptive than that of a complete stranger. Importantly, the staff at Northbridge had also expressed prior interest in the topic of humour.

4.3.2 Eastbridge centre

Eastbridge, was a similar size all-day centre (20-25 children), also catering for 0-5 year olds. It was selected as a "typical" full day care centre because, in contrast to Northbridge (which served employees of a tertiary education institution), it was not work-based. Thus it lacked that particular type of community character. Unlike Northbridge, Eastbridge was a privately owned "for-profit" early childhood centre. It did not have the same high "quality" structural criteria of group size, ratios, physical space and teacher qualifications (Smith, 1996) as Northbridge. Three of the staff were also part-time students in a centre-based teacher training programme, though one of those three left early in the research and was replaced by a qualified teacher. Two staff were untrained and three were qualified to the Diploma of Early Childhood Education (or its equivalent) benchmark level. Eastbridge was not a "poor quality" centre. It was a new, purpose built, inner city centre, and thus

representative of many of the newer full-day child care centres in New Zealand. This variety in centre type was one way of expanding the range of the study.

4.3.3 Southbridge centre

Southbridge further expanded the range of centre types in this study. It differed from the other centres in being a sessional community-based centre, with mainly 4 year olds. The inclusion of older children enabled a greater research focus on speech and (through speech) children's thinking. Southbridge was a "free kindergarten", purpose-built almost a century ago as part of the development of the kindergarten movement in New Zealand. This meant that it was nominally free, but relied on parent donations and fund-raising to supplement the government funding shortfall. It was staffed by three diploma and degree-qualified registered teachers. "Parent helpers" were also an everyday phenomenon there, with between one and three parents staying for at least part of most sessions. This centre was selected on the recommendation of a visiting senior teacher who had been impressed by the playfulness of the teachers. Like the teachers in both the other centres, these teachers were also keen to participate in the research study.

The three centres complemented each other in their diversity. Northbridge served primarily tertiary institution staff families, whereas Eastbridge was a privately-owned inner-city centre serving mainly city workers. Southbridge was sessional and part of a less affluent multi-cultural geographical community.

4.4 PARTICIPANTS

Northbridge centre had seven permanent teachers, three regular relief teachers who were tertiary students, and occasional student teachers in training. All the permanent teachers were female, with a spread of ages from about twenty to mid fifties. One of the regular relief teachers was male. Two

teachers worked exclusively with the "under 2's". The "under 2's" occupied a separate end of the old house for most of the day, except at meal-times. The children too were a mixture of ages, with seven 2 year olds, seven 3 year olds, five 4 year olds, and a few under 2's, at the start of the research period. Girls predominated, with twelve of them and seven boys. The five target children about whom additional information was gathered (through parent interviews and observational tracking), were purposely selected to represent a range of ages (from 14 to 49 months) and gender. All the children at the centre had at least one parent in close geographical proximity, on the adjacent tertiary institute campus. At the start of the data gathering, three older children had younger siblings also at the centre. That number increased to five during the year, though one older child also left for school. English was the dominant language in all the children's families, apart from one, in which a mixture of French, Italian and English reflected the parents' backgrounds.

In contrast to Northbridge, Eastbridge really was a mixed-age centre, apart from at eating times when the "under 2's" ate in a separate, more manageable first sitting. The children at Eastbridge were generally younger than at Northbridge. So were the teachers. At the start of the data-gathering period there were seven 1 year olds, seven 2 year olds, six 3 year olds and three 4 year olds. Two children were sisters. Females again predominated, with fifteen girls and ten boys. English was the predominant language in children's home families, though three children also spoke Maori at home and in the centre. Parents worked in a variety of city jobs.

Eastbridge centre had five permanent teachers and several regular relief teachers, all female and predominantly young, most being in their early twenties. During the data-gathering period the supervisor-manager and two other staff resigned. They were replaced and for a few weeks the centre had a male relief teacher. Despite the high staff turnover (50%) the centre had a playful, youthful, atmosphere. The teachers frequently joked with each other and seemed to have fun at work.

In both Northbridge and Eastbridge centres relief teachers were a normal everyday occurrence, either filling in for unwell teachers, or for teachers on training days, or covering unfilled permanent positions. A nation-wide shortage of qualified teachers increased this propensity.

Both Northbridge and Eastbridge centres were open all day, fitting in with parents' working hours. Southbridge, however, inherited a sessional timetable that has been a feature of kindergartens for most of the past century. The twenty seven children were all 4 years old, with an even gender balance of thirteen girls and fourteen boys. The roll at this kindergarten was kept lower than is usual because the building and site were small compared to most kindergartens. The three teachers here were friends, socialising together during and outside work hours. They shared several factors in common: all were female, and all turned thirty during the data-gathering period, and celebrated a joint birthday party in the centre one Saturday night. They were also all upgrading their existing qualifications and studying university papers by correspondence. The three had been working together for nine months when the research started. Two of the teachers had been at Southbridge the previous year. The familiarity and friendliness among these teachers was a noticeable feature to anyone visiting this centre.

Southbridge operated with a minimum of rigid routines, and for most of the morning a small area was set up with water and food so that children could take responsibility for eating morning tea when they wanted. The children at Southbridge represented a diversity of ethnic and cultural family backgrounds. These included Somali and Iraqi refugees, and Samoan, Rarotongan, Indonesian, Chinese, and European families. Thus English was not the dominant language for all these families. Some children and parents understood and spoke very little English.

4.5 PROCEDURES

4.5.1 Ethics and access

Ethics approval for the research was initially obtained from the Victoria University School of Education Ethics Committee, through the researcher's teaching appointment there. This was subsequently approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, through the researcher's enrolment as a doctoral student. The approved procedures involved parents and staff receiving written information sheets (Appendices A & C), followed up with informal verbal information. Signed consent for all data-gathering was obtained from all staff, and from parents on behalf of their children (Appendices B & D). Where appropriate, children also gave verbal consent to being observed. For example, the researcher usually asked 4 year olds if it was okay to video them, while also ensuring that she did not interrupt their play, either by videoing or by talking with them.

Gaining access to the teachers in these early childhood centres was uncomplicated. This was partly because the researcher had been an early childhood teacher and understood centre systems, and also because the research focus on humour and playfulness was perceived by teachers as positive and non-threatening for both teachers and children.

The process for Northbridge and Eastbridge centres involved the researcher arranging meetings with the centre supervisors to explain the research proposal. In both cases the supervisors were positive about the research subject. The researcher then arranged for the distribution of written information sheets and consent forms to teachers and to parents. The teachers helped to ensure that all parents received the information forms, and collected the signed consent forms on behalf of the researcher.

Eastbridge was open long hours and the researcher was not usually there at 7.30 am, or at 6.00pm, to meet parents when they dropped off and collected

children. The researcher did discuss the research with those parents she met, as well as with the teachers. The access process at Southbridge was slightly different because Southbridge was part of an association of kindergartens. Access was obtained through the researcher asking a senior teacher in a local Kindergarten Association for suggestions of possible kindergartens. Southbridge was suggested and the researcher then arranged to meet the three teachers. As in the other centres, these teachers were also enthusiastic about the research subject.

Disseminating research information and obtaining informed consent from parents was more challenging at Southbridge because some parents did not read or speak much English. Some parents were also wary of signing anything official-looking, probably reflecting their past experiences with officialdom. The researcher, with the essential help of the teachers, spent a week meeting parents individually at the start and end of sessions, and explaining the research. Other parents acted as informal translators when needed. This personal approach worked. Parents were reassured that the use of video, and the research topic, was in the interests of their children. In this way parents and teachers were made aware orally, as well as in writing, that they had the opportunity of withdrawing from the research at any time. They were also all assured that all identities of participants and centres would be protected with the use of pseudonyms.

The informed consent of child participants was by proxy consent from parents, yet the child's interests were the foremost concern for the researcher. The researcher's passive, reactive role (Corsaro, 1985), of not interrupting children's play or other activities, yet responding to children's requests and queries, caused a minimum of disruption to the centre processes. Thus, when the occasional child did ask what the researcher was writing, or watching, or doing, the researcher responded honestly, and the children seemed pleased that they and their play were being acknowledged. Participant privacy and confidentiality were made explicit for both adult and child participants from the beginning of the research process.

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4.5.2 Data generation

Tools used for gathering and generating data consisted primarily of participant observation, with the essential aid of a hand-held mini video-recorder as well as a laptop computer and occasionally an audio cassette recorder. Note-taking alone was inadequate for capturing the complexity and spontaneity of playful interactions, hence the reliance on technological aids. The equipment was not overly obtrusive for several reasons. These included the small size of the video camera, which was frequently simply held at waist level. The video camera was used to record conversations as much as visual body language. Perfect focusing was not a priority, whereas ensuring that staff, parents and children remained relaxed was a priority. The children in all three centres were used to staff videoing them, so they were familiar with the equipment. The researcher tried to fit in as naturally as possible. This meant responding to children's questions and conversations while simultaneously videoing them. For example, children playing a game asked the researcher to count while they hid (and in event 3 she videoed while counting).

The older, more verbal, children at Southbridge did show initial interest in the technology. When some children there expressed interest in videoing, the researcher helped them to use the camera for one session. After that the occasional child would ask to look through the lens, then resume playing.

The research produced approximately 30 hours of video-taped data, a lot of which provided contextual information. Humour and playfulness are largely unpredictable and seemed to erupt spontaneously, hence videoing was a relatively random and intuitive process of tracking individuals and groups of children playing.

When not videoing the researcher sat at a child-sized table (or crouched, or stood using a bench top as a table), watched, and typed notes directly onto a laptop computer. As the children moved around the centre the researcher

unobtrusively followed them. The children did not express much interest in the laptop, perhaps because they had computers at home. Southbridge centre had one computer for the children's use. For those children who were interested in the laptop, the researcher simply demonstrated typing letters, words, and their names; they soon lost interest.

The original typed field notes are divided into four columns: one for date, time, place and such conditions; another for literal "objective" observations; the next for interpretation; and the fourth listed the material mediating artifacts (see Appendix G). This list of artifacts has been important in using a CHAT framework which prioritises the tools, symbols and signs that mediate activity. Individual children were tracked alternately by video and laptop as a way of contextualising experiences through the eyes of children, while retaining a focus on interactions. The researcher also kept a reflective journal and regularly wrote analytic memos (Appendix H). In this way the data generation, writing, and transcribing processes formed the first levels of data analysis.

Semi-structured interviews with the teachers and key parents in Northbridge centre were audio-recorded (Appendices I & J). The interviews provided the teachers with a chance to debrief, and to explain what humour meant for them as teachers. In all the centres teachers were initially keen to talk about humorous centre incidents. This was distracting for the researcher, who felt caught between communicating with teachers and observing children. The completion of the teacher interviews enabled the researcher to re-focus on observing children and teachers.

The parents of focus children at Northbridge offered to keep diary records of children's humour at home. But busy lives overtook well-meaning intentions, and only three of the five gave the researcher dated written records. Other parents offered verbal accounts of funny situations. The teachers at Northbridge responded similarly, with initial enthusiasm; this was expressed by some teachers in written observations of situations they regarded as

humorous, but more often was expressed orally to the researcher. The researcher usually noted these oral stories in analytic memos.

4.5.3 Data analysis

The development of theory from data requires systematic processes and caution. As Graue and Walsh (1998) point out, there is a double danger that in the exclusive search for theory in the observational data of individuals the wider context may be disregarded, and the research may become overly individualised. One way of not jumping to premature theoretical conclusions (by individualising observational analysis and avoiding context) is systematic descriptive analysis, which precedes theoretical interpretation (Pollard, 1996). As explained in 4.5.2 the researcher in this study used several systems for generating full detailed descriptive observations of children being playful and humorous during each phase of the research. The fullness of this data ensured that analysis was contextualised.

Inductive data analysis did occur as data were generated, so that initial data generation was also the first phase of data analysis. This initial analysis accompanied the construction of a data record (Graue & Walsh, 1998); the process included: dating, filing, and re-filing observation notes, transcripts and tapes, and making copies of everything (on computer discs, video and cassette tapes) for safe-keeping. Data analysis was ongoing during all four phases of the research.

Theoretical analysis (the next level of analysis, Pollard, 1996) followed the same sequential order, of describing and analysing, so that analyses from each phase of the research informed subsequent phases. These analyses developed out of repeated viewings of the video footage, multiple re-readings of interview, observation and video transcripts, reflecting and ruminating over memos (writing more) and looking for paradoxes, gaps, and contrasts in the data (Delamont, 2002).

This analytical process was simultaneously informed by ongoing and extensive reading of related literature. Literature on "play" became an important resource, as did writings on cultural historical psychology and activity theory. Together, the data and the literature provided substance for theoretical reflection. An understanding of phenomenological theory (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and other qualitative, interpretive research methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Gergen & Gergen, 2000; Schwandt, 1994, 2000; Van Mannen, 1997) was also essential for interpreting data reflectively and holistically, rather than simply categorically and technically. This approach enhanced the researcher's awareness of the difficulties associated with trying to be "objective" and unbiased by "bracketing out" pre-existing knowledge and beliefs when analysing and interpreting data.

Themes around playfulness and humour were identified from patterns and regularities, including contradictions, contrasts, and paradoxes in the data. These themes were compared across and within centres as a form of cross-checking the primary data.

Prominent themes in the data have been collated as a series of "playful events" that illuminate these themes and draw on narrative methodology to frame the events (Bruner 1986; Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Coles, 1989; Polkinghorne, 1988). Events are one way of illuminating the diversity in interpretations and experiences of humour and playfulness, while representing children's experiences authentically. As with frame play (described by Goffman, 1974, and Bateson, 1972), these events had observable beginnings and ends, though they were sometimes not apparent until the whole event was analysed. Events overlapped, and were not tidy structures (Ochs & Capps, 2001).

The criteria for deciding that events were "playful and humorous" also overlapped. The researcher's initial focus, in the exploratory study, was on humour only. Her interest in children's experience of humour in their communication expanded the research focus on humour to also include

playfulness, which seemed to better represent children's experience of humour. As pointed out in the literature review playfulness and humour overlap (Apte, 1985; Garvey, 1977; Kline, 2003; Sherman, 1975). They are intertwined in children's development (Bergen, 2003). Lieberman (1966) and Barnett (1991) have suggested broad dimensions as indicators of individual children's playfulness in the playfulness scales that they developed. In this study these dimensions were applied to children's interactions and communication styles, rather than to individual children. For this researcher such dimensions helped in categorising events as playful and humorous. The dimensions are: physical spontaneity, (e.g. body language and physical activity that speaks playfully) social spontaneity (e.g. ease in playful communication), cognitive spontaneity (e.g. imaginative and word play), manifest joy (enjoyment) and sense of humour (e.g. being funny, teasing, and appreciating humour).

The 24 events presented in this study were purposely selected to represent the breadth and diversity of ways in which children in this study experienced playfulness and humour in their communication.

Tedlock (2000) emphasises the importance of narrative ways of representing field-work data for creating unity and meaning out of data while avoiding simplistic and artificial categorising of wholes into parts. The use of narrative structures avoids reductionism, thus acknowledging the diversity and complexities inherent in humour and playfulness, while portraying unity in the activity of the event.

Narrative structures fit easily and naturally with activity theory. The use of CHAT for interpreting narrative-like events enabled further in-depth analysis and understanding of children experiencing playfulness and humour in their communication. It was at the level of theoretical analysis (Pollard, 1996), that the CHAT framework developed for interpreting events was most useful (Figure 3.2, "Children's playful communication in context"). This framework has been explained in detail in Chapter 3. It draws on socio-cultural historical

activity theory and uses mediated activity as the unit of analysis. The research process involves identifying the motivating aim or object of the playful event, and exploring how that aim changes during the play. In identifying how the object is transformed it is also necessary to explore what mediates the relationships in the play, and to identify contradictions.

In this study playful and humorous events are initially analysed and discussed using the separate lenses of each of the components of the CHAT framework model (Figure 3.2) to explore the tensions, contradictions and changing nature of the relationships. This approach acknowledges the complexity in the events. Analyses are later combined and in Chapter 9 one event is analysed using all the components of the model. To briefly summarise, the components that complicate and mediate the relationships in the activity system include: artifacts, rules, roles, and the community of the involved participants (Engeström, 1987, 1999; Figure 3.2). Mediating artifacts include tools, semiotic signs and symbols on all levels (Wartofsky, 1979), and can also include people. Artifacts can be simultaneously material and conceptual, the main point being that all communication is mediated (Cole, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978), and that relationships between the components are complex, changing and contradictory. The dynamics of the relationships are in continual flux, like the usual seemingly chaotic patterns in children's play. Activity, like play, is never static, and the activity unites the diversity that is inherent in play.

Data from interviews with teachers and the parents of the target children, as well as parents' and teachers' observations of children and the researcher's observations of children and teachers, reinforced the importance of the research interpretations going beyond empirical data to include invisible historical, social and cultural perspectives. For example, teachers' stated beliefs about the value of humour helped to clarify researcher understandings of the teachers' behaviour (*roles*) as well as the *rules* of the centre and the attitudes of the local centre *community*. Similarly, information supplied by

parents about rules and roles at home clarified patterns observed in target children's playful and humorous behaviour in the centre community.

4.6 VALIDITY

Gergen and Gergen (2000) have referred to "the crisis of validity" in qualitative research, exemplified "particularly in the relationship of language to the world it purports to describe" (p.1026). They suggest reconceptualising validity and embracing reflexivity, multiple voices, and different literary and performance styles, as desirable expressions of heterogeneity in social sciences research, thereby reflecting the diversity of the real world. This valuing of diversity does accord with the multiple perspectival nature of humour and playfulness; such perspectivity is also integral to this study. The observational and interview methods used to generate data in this study attempted to reflect the voices and actions of children and teachers, as well as the researcher's responses. Not everyone finds the same scene funny. This point is emphasised when the developmental age range of the involved players covers from one to fifty plus years.

In this research, congruence between the diversity of the research methods (narrative method and CHAT frameworks) and the diversity inherent in the research topic (multiple understandings of humour and playfulness) have contributed to overall research validity. Thus, narrative and CHAT frameworks have been combined as tools for analysing and interpreting the data generated in an attempt to understand the diversity of young children's experiences of humour and playfulness in their communication. The use of both CHAT and narrative methods provides triangulation that adds breadth and depth to the analyses. Both qualitative methods are congruent with the research topic: humour and playfulness are not statistical concepts but qualitative states.

Related validity issues concern the trustworthiness of the data, or its "textual/narrative validity" (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 247) (Lincoln & Guba,

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2000). How verifiable is the actual data? What criteria were used in the selection of events? This in turn leads onto questioning the authenticity, or "interpretive validity" (Altheide & Johnson, 1994, p.485) of the researcher's interpretations of the generated data (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

In this study several methods were used to achieve trustworthiness and authenticity in the data generation and interpretation. These included triangulation. Methodological triangulation provided different perspectives of the diversity of playful and humorous events (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Data were collected using multiple methods including video and audio-taping, observations and interviews, "...across time, space and persons..." (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p.102). Reviewing existing research literature further assisted the triangulation by providing other perspectives to prompt different interpretations of the data.

Where possible the observation data focused on children, teachers, material artifacts and the environment where and when children seemed to be having fun. The researcher looked for signs of fun; these included laughter, smiling, talk, and busy energetic bodies. The researcher usually began by just observing, tracking individual children, and watching for the playfulness, humour and fun that usually began unpredictably. The criteria for interpreting behaviour as humorous and playful developed in response to the researcher's initial findings. For example, the researcher developed a broader understanding of humour in relation to playfulness. Thus, as the researcher focussed on physical signs of laughter and joy in facial and bodily expressions, the research focus shifted from initially attempting to focus exclusively on humour, to also include playfulness, as an expression of the same joyful phenomenon.

The researcher moved between positions of objectivity, subjectivity, and intersubjectivity in a series of cycles that began with the researcher passively observing children being playful and humorous, while simultaneously retaining an awareness of the impossibility of total researcher objectivity. As

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the researcher developed rapport with the teachers and children, those relationships also developed degrees of intersubjectivity and shared understandings. At times the researcher was requested to participate in children's play, e.g. by counting. Generally however, the children treated the researcher as an adult, somewhere between a teacher and a parent, and the researcher tried to maintain a passive responsive role using "reactive strategies" (Corsaro, 1985). These included being responsive to child- and teacher-initiated communication, and relating to children and teachers authentically with feelings, intersubjectively rather than as an objective outsider. Conversely, the researcher's position as a visitor, and the process of simultaneously reflecting while observing, ensured that the researcher did not become subjectively immersed in centre playfulness.

The format for writing observations in centres clearly separated interpretation from empirical observation (see Appendix G). During the research period the researcher also wrote reflective memos (see Appendix H); this process contributed to ongoing data analysis, thus assisting the interpretive process while simultaneously contributing to ongoing reflection. Interpretation involved re-watching video footage and re-reading and expanding written observations, all the while reflecting on theory as well as the observations. This process allowed the researcher to notice patterns and themes that repeated, or which stood out. Techniques used to achieve accuracy in this interpretive process included peer debriefing as well as cross-checking observations and interpretations with teachers, children and some parents (These were the parents of the five focus children in Northbridge centre).

The length of time spent in the centres provided prolonged coverage of everyday centre life in a range of centres purposely selected to reflect a range of centre types, thus adding depth and breadth to the study.

The concept of validity may also be related to the purpose and usefulness of the research, referred to by Graue and Walsh (1998) as "praxis-oriented validity" (p. 248). Thus this research project is useful and worthwhile for two

main reasons. First, it concerns the everyday activities of young children in institutional care. Young children are typically playful in their everyday lives, yet both humour and playfulness (as an associated disposition) are under-researched topics in the literature. As more young children spend increasing amounts of time in early childhood centres it is important that teachers, parents and policy makers understand that living and learning are complex processes, involving both emotion and cognition (Damasio, 1999). This research legitimates the importance of studying everyday practices in order to understand children. Secondly, this research has ecological validity (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The naturalistic methods are congruent with the everydayness of the research focus on playfulness and humour in young children's communication, in early childhood centres rather than in laboratories.

To summarise, the process of data analysis in this study moved from descriptive to theoretical, though always grounded in the actual descriptive data. The researcher was working towards balance in description, analysis and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Ultimately, external validity depends on rich descriptions that illuminate and do not simply replicate observations, yet do portray the observed participants' experiences. In this study the use of narrative structures was initially descriptive. With interpretation and analysis, narratives also became explanatory (Ochs & Capps, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988). Narratives, combined with mediated activity as the unit for analysis, ensured a balance of theoretical interpretation with pragmatism in understanding and representing how young children experience humour and playfulness in their communication.

In using ethnographic methods (Chambers, 2000; Delamont, 2002; Tedlock, 2000), the research process focussed on providing in-depth understandings of the interactive processes of children being playful and humorous. This depth allows the results to be generalised in two ways (Delamont, 2002). The first is across the three early childhood centres. Secondly the results of this study may be generalised in the development of theory about young

children's experience of humour and playfulness in their communication. In the latter case theory development is based on CHAT.

4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter has described the methods that were used in this research project exploring how young children experience humour and playfulness in their communication. It explains, how the four sequential phases of the research were located in three early childhood education centres. Ethical issues around research involving children, data generation and analysis were described as part of the research processes, and issues of validity were also addressed.

For purposes of portraying the complexities in children's playful and humorous communication each of the findings chapters in this thesis will focus on one component of the triangle model of activity theory (Figure 3.2, "Children's playful communication in context"). Each component provides a different yet complementary lens for analysing events of children being playful and humorous. Chapter 5 highlights the *artifacts* component, Chapter 6 focuses on *rules*, Chapter 7 on *roles* and Chapter 8 on the *community* component. Chapter 9 integrates all these components in relation to one event. This progressive way of working with the components of the model is one way of clearly conveying, without reducing complexity, the multidimensional nature of the activity of children's playful and humorous communication. The use of this sort of structural analysis should not obscure the fluid and dynamic nature of activity. The triangle model (Figure 3.2) is an abstract and static illustration of a dynamic system with inherent dialectical contradictions. Activity must also be interpreted in context, as connected to multiple expanding activity systems (Engeström, 1987).

As well as providing a lens on mediating artifacts, Chapter 5 also presents the literature, theory and methods used in analysing the research findings for phase one of the research process. That phase was the exploratory study in

Northbridge centre, investigating the viability of young children's humour as a research focus.

CHAPTER 5

ARTIFACTS MEDIATING HUMOUR AND PLAYFULNESS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Each of chapters 5-8 in this thesis highlights one component of the complex triangle model of activity theory "Children's playful communication in context" (Figure 3.2). This chapter highlights the artifact (Wartofsky, 1979) mediated nature of children's playful and humorous communication. It also explores the humour-playfulness overlap that emerged during the initial exploratory phase of the research.

Research questions

The initial main research question, before any data gathering, was:

- *What role does humour play in the interactions of young children?*

As a result of data analysis during the initial, exploratory phase of data gathering, "experience" and "playfulness" were added to the main research question, which became:

- *How do young children experience humour and playfulness in their communication?*

Because the researcher was interested in what artifacts mediated young children's playful and humorous communication and how they mediated this communication, the sub-question for this exploratory phase of the research was:

- *What mediates children's playful and humorous communication?*

Mediation is, by definition, a fundamental concept in all branches of socio-cultural-historical psychology (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1987, 1999; Leont'ev, 1978; Miettinen, 2001; Rogoff, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wells, 1999; Wertsch, 1991, 1998). The model "Children's playful communication in context", that is used as the framework for data analysis in this study positions mediating artifacts as central to the activity system (see Figure 3.2).

All interactions are mediated by artifacts according to socio-cultural theory (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 1987, 1999; Leont'ev, 1978; Rogoff, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Wertsch, 1991, 1998). Therefore artifact mediation is critical to a socio-cultural perspective that prioritises activity and interaction over individualism. In this study the term "artifact" refers to semiotic signs and symbols as well as tools (Wartofsky, 1979). Activity systems are presented as "events". Various triangle models, including Vygotsky's triangle model of psychological relationships, illustrate the psychological importance of the relationship between the *individual* as subject and stimulus, the *environment* as object and response, and the *artifacts* that mediate and connect both, as the auxiliary stimulus (see Figure 3.1). Thus, the mediating artifacts link stimulus and response and any potential dualism between subject and object is absolved in the mediating activity of the auxiliary stimulus (Miettinen, 2001).

This chapter presents five events to illustrate both how playfulness and humour overlap, and how children's experiences of playfulness and humour are mediated by material and non-material artifacts. These events were randomly observed during the first three phases of the data gathering. They all represent the playfulness/humour overlap that became an issue in the first phase. As a way of retaining some cohesion and consistency, three of the selected events involve the activity of water-play, though the water is imaginary in the third event. In these events the water, as a material and primary artifact (Wartofsky, 1979), both mediates children having fun together, and unites them as a group. Water-play is an outdoor activity. Four of the five events occurred outdoors, perhaps reflecting links between

playfulness and the sense of freedom that can accompany being outdoors (as Stephenson, 1999, also noted in her research into children's outdoor play).

Analyses and discussion are presented after each event. Related themes introduced in this chapter include relationships and intersubjectivity in playful and humorous experiences.

The teasing out of concepts such as artifact mediation is an intellectual exercise for purposes of in-depth data analysis. Mediation is integrally, dialectically and dynamically connected to all components of the activity system represented in "Children's playful communication in context" (Figure 3.2). The triangular shaped model is an artificial construct for purposes of data analysis. In reality the components are in constant flux, overlapping and interconnecting across time and space with multiple other activity systems in an expanding and continually changing pattern of systems. To the researching observer there was often a synchronicity in how children having fun together moved together. Ruthrof, (2000) has also observed the expressive and representative qualities in the language of moving communicating bodies. Slow motion video playback accentuated these interconnected patterns in children's playful movements, so that hilarious fun sometimes looked like choreographed modern dance movements. Non-material artifacts such as sounds, gestures and words also mediated children's playful activity, semiotically, by communicating.

5.2 PLAYFULNESS INCLUDING HUMOUR

The exploratory phase of this research began at Northbridge centre in early summer when the children were spending increasing time playing outdoors. A sense of freedom seemed to pervade the children's outdoors experiences, perhaps exacerbated by the elements of warm equinoctial windy days, sunshine and a lot of sand and water play. As mentioned earlier, the main objective of this phase was to check the viability of young children's humour as a research focus. The researcher was interested in both the prevalence

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and the interactive role of humour for groups of young children in early childhood centres.

The following three water-play events have been included here as typical examples of how children's playfulness and humour need not rely on incongruity, jokes, or word play. Alternatively, as these events illustrate, children's experience of playfulness and humour can involve noisy busy sensual body-language, laughter and fun. Underlying themes of power and resistance may also be a feature (Corsaro, 1997). Water mediates children's playful experiences and interactions in various ways in events 1,2 and 3.

5.2.1 Event 1: Paddling pool play

Background:
Northbridge: Sunny, hot summer afternoon. A paddling pool has been set up in the shade of trees.

> Three older children (4 year olds) are in the pool, water half way to their knees, bending over, holding onto the pool side bars, jumping heavily, splashing huge splashes, giggling, squealing and laughing gleefully. Tom stops jumping momentarily. He lies down in the shallow water, wriggling his entire body as if to feel the water tickling, touching him all over. He continues laughing and smiling, then resumes jumping and splashing. Zizi and Peta do likewise, battling the water. Few words are spoken. The fluidity of the water with their bodies mediates playful, joyful communication. The experience is sensory and shared, the water connecting them. This episode lasts five minutes until the teacher tells the three to get out and let the younger children (2-3 years old) have a turn. The four younger children are, despite their sensori motor age/stage, far more subdued and unconnected with the water and each other. They simply stand still quietly feeling for a few minutes the water on their legs, before timidly getting out at the teacher's suggestion. She had tried, unsuccessfully, to relax them with words and gentle splashes. With the pool empty of children, Tom, Zizi and Peta hop back into it and resume jumping and wildly splashing with much laughter and group

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joy, or glee. The teacher pours buckets of water over them, adding to the
playfulness.

(Northbridge, 03.11.1999)

Analysis and discussion
Playfulness: humour

Observations such as this paddling pool example influenced a shift in the
initial research focus to include greater awareness of the ways in which
children together constructed, communicated and experienced both humour
and playfulness. It became apparent that the word "humour" was often
narrowly interpreted, as discussed in the literature review Chapter. Adult
interpretations of humour did not necessarily match children's perspectives,
or their experiences of humour. Ways of understanding humour did not
necessarily include the mirth, glee, laughter and general playfulness that
were dominant features in the researcher's observations of children being
humorous while having fun in their play. Defining and distinguishing
playfulness from humour is difficult (Klein, 2003). For young children this is
even more difficult because humour and play are so strongly connected.
Bergen (2003) points out that "…the differentiation of humour from play may
be a long process; indeed some connections between humour and
playfulness continue in later childhood and adolescence and really throughout
life" (p 21).

Lieberman (1977) was the first researcher to identify the quality of
playfulness, which she described as "the lightheartedness that we find as a
quality of play in the young children's activities … its component parts of
sense of humour, manifest joy, and spontaneity" (p. xi). However, unlike the
present study, Lieberman's main interest in playfulness seems to have been
as an aspect of play, "the play element in play" (p. xi). She was less
interested in how children actually experienced playfulness socially, which is
the focus of this study. An emphasis on children's experiences of playfulness
and humour implicitly includes social, emotional and cognitive aspects of that

experience. Humour and playfulness therefore cross traditional psychological boundaries between sociology, social and cognitive psychology and anthroplogy (Apte, 1985; Fine, 1983; Garvey, 1977; Goldman, 1998). The playful and humorous communication of the four year olds in this event engaged and united them as feeling and thinking individuals in situated (Kirshner & Whitson, 1997) and distributed (Salomon, 1993) activity together. The timid unplayful feelings of the toddlers were also distributed across them as a unified group (Salomon, 1993) and they remained seriously wary of being in the paddling pool.

5.3 MEDIATING ARTIFACTS

The paddling pool filled with water, in event 1, was a primary mediating artifact (Wartofsky, 1979). The water conduced the jumping, splashing, gleeful communication of the older children and the silent numb reactions of the younger ones. A noticeable feature of early childhood centres in New Zealand is the equipment, materials and activities that have historically dominated the programmes. Water-play, with hands in waist-high water troughs, is traditionally regarded as a staple activity, alongside sandpits and a range of other less "natural" materials and activities, such as finger paint, paint, wooden blocks, picture books, jigsaw puzzles and the ubiquitous family corner. Though the activity of filling waist high containers with water is questionably "natural" water itself is "natural". All these typical early childhood "activities" involve children using their hands as tools for manipulating other tools and materials (artifacts).

Water is a transformative and intriguing substance. It is a versatile and sensory material. As well as being an exploratory medium in itself, water, like heavy air, also mediated communication between children, connecting them with each other and the material world beyond their bodies. In this study, water often mediated playfulness, fun, loudness and excitement. Play with water was also observed to mediate soothing, calming, still feelings. The almost fearful reactions of the younger children in the paddling pool were

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unusual. Perhaps the younger children were intimidated by the boisterousness of the older children. They may also have been intimidated by the newness of the paddling pool set-up and the vulnerability of actually being inside a pool, as opposed to the familiar position of standing outside a water trough with only their hands in it. Their entire bodies, as well as hands, got wet. This event exemplifies the unity in activity for both groups, the timid toddlers and the playful four year olds.

5.3.1 Event 2: Water trough toddler play

Background:
Eastbridge: outside, early morning, (7.20am). The group of children are toddlers (18-36 months), their number varying from two initially, to five later, plus one older child and the teacher Vi.

> Lau and Tim, attracted by the sound and sight of Teacher Vi tipping up and hosing out the round water trough, run, toddling towards it. For a few seconds they stand, stock still, and watch the water spurting from the hose. Then Lau puts his foot on the wet ground where Teacher Vi has just sprayed.
>
> Teacher Vi: "Careful, you might get wet, ooh".
>
> Lau: "Ooh"! [imitating Teacher Vi]
>
>   "Aaahhh"! [looking at his feet, gently stamps where the water
>
> is]
>
> [Tim moves closer to the water, points and exclaims, in a sing song voice]
>
> Tim: "Uh oh". [his favourite repeat phrase]
>
> Teacher Vi: "Water". [to Tim slowly and clearly]
>
> Tim: "Or ar". [responds]:
>
> A pattern starts where Teacher Vi says "Ooh" as she squirts the hose towards the children's hands and they respond with squeals, pointing, jumping and laughter.
>
> Teacher Xia: "Tim come and change your nappy".

Two hours later (9.30 am):

Teacher Vi filling the water trough notices Tim wondering aimlessly.

Teacher Vi: "Tim, come over here darling, Tim haere mai". ["come here" in Maori]

Others also come, Lau, Viv, Max, Milli, all two to three year old "toddlers", attracted by the activity. As the water squirts from the hose they scream and laugh, running towards the spray, hands stretched out in front, ready to catch and feel the water. The water attracts and repels as they run to and from it, both wanting and not wanting to be caught by the hose spray. Teacher Vi plays with them, tricking and sometimes catching them with water spray. Lau opens his mouth seeming to want to swallow the water as he toddles jerkily towards the spray, taking excited steps forward and back, accompanied by screams of joy and some laughter. The hose is turned off and the five children space themselves around the round shaped water trough and begin swishing and splashing gently with their hands.

(Eastbridge, 10.10.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Communicating experiences: Mediating intersubjectivity

As in event 1, water mediated communication. However, in contrast to the toddlers in the paddling pool, these toddlers did relax and play with the water. Why? Reasons are multiple. Perhaps they felt some control over the water, helped by familiarity with this sort of water play. They were also in control in being partially involved in the process of setting up the water play. This included watching the water trough being hosed clean and later filled, before the play with hands in the water trough began. Rather than being bodily immersed in the water this group played with the water, which was contained by the waist high trough and the hose. It is possibly that these children felt safe as well as "in control", with the water contained separately.

Something, be it symbols and signs such as words and body language, or material objects and substances, such as water, always mediates

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communication. In this study the focus was narrowed to those artifacts that mediated playful and humorous communication (Wartofsky, 1979). Thus, water with containers was a joint, mediating, focus for playfulness in events 1, 2 and 3. However, the researcher wondered to what extent social-cognitive mediating concepts such as intersubjectivity, theory of mind, metacognition, and collaboration (Olson & Bruner, 1996) were apparent in young children's social playfulness.

How did these children relate to each other and the water? Lau and Tim appeared to be in tune with each other at times, perhaps because teacher Vi had earlier played with them together. Lau glanced towards Tim several times, checking him out. However, all the children showed most interest in the shared water focus. The water, with trough and hose, mediated and connected them materially. The signs they made also connected them (Bateson, 1955). Thus they listened to each other squeal and chaotically imitated and alternated squealing, laughing and giggling, echoing and signaling messages about fun to each other. The water, the equipment (trough and hose), the teacher Vi, and children's signs all mediated children's water play experiences, including the nature of their interactions, the intersubjectivity and the collaboration.

From these sorts of observations there emerged a related set of sub-questions concerning the nature of children's playful and humorous relationships with each other. These questions persisted through all the phases of the research:

- *How do young children communicate intersubjectively, when having fun together? Are concepts of theory of mind and collaboration apparent?*

The term intersubjectivity is used in multiple ways, some of which assume that subjects simply develop shared understandings. However, from a socio-cultural perspective, the important point, was the artifacts that mediated the

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development of intersubjectivity. Water connected the children with the world and with each other. It did this concretely under the shared hose spray and when they immersed their hands in the water trough together. In their unique and diverse playful ways all the children experienced the sensation of water on skin and responded with movement and sound (laughter and joyful screams). Questions around mediation and intersubjectivity persisted throughout all phases of the research, reflecting the socio-cultural bases of a research focus on the interconnectedness of individuals and objects and how this interconnectedness is experienced, perceived and expressed by the participants.

Though these toddlers shared the water it seemed to mediate communication with the teacher more than with each other, perhaps because the teacher held the hose, so was in control of the mediating artifact, the water. Tim and Lau did show some intersubjective awareness on a few occasions, in their glances towards each other and their shared laughter. However, most of the younger children, though responding together, seemed more aware of and interested in, the teacher and the water than each other. The older children in event 1 seemed more intersubjectively aware. They expressed this togetherness with their bodies as they jointly, collaboratively, and with shared bodily awareness and understanding, played with the mediating water. In the language of Merleau-Ponty (1962) their bodies expressed "intercorporeity". The four year olds appeared to understand that others also have beliefs and desires, expressed in the shared joy in splashing each other, possibly demonstrating a theory of mind (Whiten, 1991).

Event 2 continues:

A short while later teacher Vi allows Mai (4 years) to hold the hose, to add more water. Mai plays with the power of the hose water, shooting out jet streams, creating whirlpools. [She also has potential power to splash others.] The toddlers joyfully play with the whirlpools and spray, laughing, giggling, squealing and responding.

Teacher Vi: "Okay, I think that's enough now".

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[taking the hose, she turns it off and goes to put it away]

Meanwhile Mai drinks a mouthful of water and instead of swallowing spurts it out, like a fountain. Mai laughs. Younger children watch and begin to imitate, spitting out water, giggling, squealing, laughing.

Teacher Vi: "Mai, that's a bit gross. All your germs get spurted everywhere. If you're going to drink it, fine, but swallow and don't spit".

Mai knows she has broken a rule. Tim squeals, giggles, stamps quickly, excitedly, on alternate feet, and continues drinking and pouring water into different sized containers. Teacher Vi doesn't notice Viv quietly drinking and spitting out water.

(Eastbridge, 10.10.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Mediating power and agency

As well as mediating group connectedness, water also mediated subversion and feelings of power, agency and control (Corsaro, 1985, 1997), in several ways. Mai was definitely in control when she created whirlpools with the hose jet and somewhat defiantly spurted water from her mouth. The four year olds in the paddling pool (in event 1) had controlled the water directly by splashing and jumping in, on, and through it using their whole bodies including their laughing, screaming, voices. This group's control was more restricted. The hand-held hose in event 2 mediated some control over the water, as did the hands splashing in the trough and the water spitting.

In a sense the play with water metaphorically mediated aspects of children's social and psychological positions. Thus, their water play around oppositional concepts such as: wet-dry, catching-chasing, spitting out-swallowing in, may be interpreted within a power play framework. From this perspective playfulness, in these events, involved children asserting power or agency (Bandura, 2001); in relation to a mediating artifact (Wertsch, 1998), the water, as well as in relation to each other and the teacher. Agency and power are always situated processes; they are integral and attached to the event as

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much as to individuals and the group. The researcher wondered whether Viv, quietly imitating Mai's water spitting, was being subversive and/or enjoying the water spitting sensation.

Collaboration and intersubjectivity were features in the water play events when the water mediated children playing with rules and roles around the water, spitting, splashing and jumping together, for example. However, more metacognitive and reflective thinking was difficult to gauge in these water play events, as also was clear evidence of children showing a theory of mind. Both concepts rely on verbal language to gauge children's thinking (Lillard & Currenton, 1999) and are open to critique for this reason (Reddy, 1991). The water play events involved languages other than words.

5.3.2 Event 3: Waterspout play

Background:

Northbridge: windy, outside, summer. This event continues the water play theme, though with imaginary water. The age span of children is wide, from 2 years, 2 months to 4 years, 9 months. Over half an hour (the time of the event) the number of children involved in staying with the play grows from three to six.

A large blue plastic tarpaulin cloth and a dome-shaped climbing frame mediate the play as primary artifacts. The previous day the teachers had covered the dome with the tarpaulin and the younger children (2-3 year olds) had fun, playing hiding games, inside and outside the tent-like covered dome ("our house"). Zizi (4 years, 7 months), Dani (4 years, 9 months) and Sally (4 years, 8 months) are together pulling a large blue tarpaulin over the dome-shaped climbing frame; they make "oooooo" sounds in unison, imitating the wind, intersubjectively in tune with each other, and connected by the tarpaulin. They laugh together as it blows off. The activity involves them coordinating their moves while crawling, climbing and pulling the tarpaulin up and over the dome, against the wind. The wind blows it off again and they laugh.

They leave for a few minutes then return to the task. This time teacher Rae offers them pieces of string to fasten the tarpaulin. They cover the frame but don't use the string as they don't all want to make a fixed tent-house.

Teacher Rae: "Well you'll have to negotiate,…are you using your words Dani"?

Dani: "No, no, no Zizi no no…" [Zizi has pulled too much to her side].

Oscar: "Well I want to build a house". [(4 years, 9 months), joining in]

Another gust of wind takes the tarpaulin off the frame. Laughter, glee and a lot of movement; they battle the wind with the tarpaulin.

Younger children drift over towards the action, Eliza (2 years, 2 months), and Milly (3 years, 2 months) (six players now). Oscar picks up bark chips from the ground where he stands and drops them on his hat. Eliza, seeing this, also picks up bark chips; she drops them on the tarpaulin [imitating]. Dani climbs to highest point on top of frame and tarpaulin, while Eliza busily picks up more bark chips and smiling, throws them onto the tarpaulin [repeating]. At this point the play changes direction.

Analysis and discussion

Mediation: Houses, shelters and windy weather

This house re-creation is an example of how the broader socio-cultural context provides motivation for children's play. Houses and shelter are important aspects of the adult world; in trying to make a "house" the children intended to re-create a "pretend" version of the adult "real" world (El'konin, 1971, 2000). On several occasions children were observed creating shelters or nests. These were sometimes safe hiding places. As artifacts houses can also create and mediate feelings of belonging that are part of having a home. As material artifacts the tarpaulin and the dome-shaped climbing frame mediated the imaginative house construction. Children used their

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imaginations collectively to construct the tent-like house from the mediating materials. Thus the materials mediated communication on several levels simultaneously. Children's imaginations transformed the climbing frame and the tarpaulin from material artifacts to a house. Later the blue tarpaulin became water falling down the dome frame.

Artifact mediation is the central concept in CHAT. As Miettinen (2001) explains "... through the use of cultural artifacts and participation in collective activities, subjects assume the qualities of the environment. Ways of doing and properties of things are objectified in tools and cultural artifacts" (p. 301-302). The transformational qualities of the artifacts and the imaginations of the children steered this event. The windy weather was also a powerful natural mediating force influencing and transforming the course of the play.

Importantly for this research, these children had fun. They laughed, responded to and played with the materials, the environment and each other. This playful activity and group connectedness seemed to motivate the ongoing play.

Event 3 continues:

The play turns as Dani falls through the frame, with the tarpaulin beneath, carrying and holding her; she laughs and screeches with glee. The tarpaulin falls in folds through the gaps in the dome frame as she sits on it. Zizi, Sally, Dani laugh and scream, like fire engines, under the tarpaulin,

Zizi explains excitedly to the watching researcher:

"We jumped down the waterspout, we're going down the waterspout".

The blue plastic tarpaulin becomes a visual metaphor for the concept of water as the children purposefully fall through the gaps in the dome frame and slide down the tarpaulin waterspout [waterfall].

Oscar: "I came down again". [to Zizi, Sally, Danni]

Zizi: "We've got two waterspouts". [excitedly, to researcher]

Oscar: "Zizi, in here, in here".

Sally beside Oscar, laughs a lot and watches the others. Dani is all activity, totally absorbed. Elli follows the older ones and drops through the dome, hanging by her arms, teacher Rae rescues and lowers her. Zizi and Oscar lie next to each other in a hammock like structure.

Teacher Rae: "Sunhats on"!

Oscar: "Woweee, Here's the doorway".

Zizi: "Lets play hide and seek Rae". [teacher]

Teacher Rae: "Well I know where you all are, Okay, what shall I count to?"

Zizi: "10".

Teacher Rae: "1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10".

Zizi: "Shut the door, shut the door".

Teacher Rae: "Mmm I wonder where they could be"?

[Screeches of laughter from inside the tarpaulin water spout]

Teacher Rae: "Oh here you all are, hiding in the water spout, Woweee, Here's the doorway".

Oscar: "That's the water spout". [to teacher Rae]

Teacher Rae: "Are you wet"?

Oscar: "No".

Teacher Rae: "Why not"?

Oscar: "It's a dry waterspout".

Zizi: "Come into the waterspout".

Zizi: "Sophie you count". [to researcher]

Zizi: "Hide, everyone hide, Sophie count".

Oscar: "Zizi, in here, in here".

Researcher: "1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10.

I wonder where the children are"?

Screams of laughter as the waterspout "door" (the waterspout has some house-like attributes; the door is the overlapping edges of the tarpaulin) opens and six children emerge laughing wildly, almost falling over each other.

(Northbridge, 21.01.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Distributed imagination: Playful synergy

These children were particularly playful, rather than humorous. They laughed, screamed and giggled while their bodies moved excitedly, with enthusiasm, highly motivated to have fun together.

This is an example of creative "spontaneous fantasy play" (Corsaro, 1997), described by Sawyer (1997) as "improvisational play". It is also an example of distributed imagination, a phenomenon that became apparent in this study as the researcher observed children being playfully imaginative together and learning from each other. The imaginary concept of a waterspout became a central mediating artifact and focus in the collaborative play of these children, yet it was initially suggested and imagined by just one child, Zizi. The concept of a waterspout was probably unfamiliar to most of the children. The name is appealing. It conveys the image of the falling blue tarpaulin and captures images of waterfalls and whirlpools too. Distributed imagination is similar to distributed cognition as described by Salomon (1993). It is also based on the premise that all thinking that is not concerned with the immediate concretely empirical reality requires some imagination. Prior experiences contribute to the development of imagination (Vygotsky, 1978). In this event imagination became distributed via communication around artifact-mediated activity.

It follows that improvisation and spontaneity are not created from a vacuum. Children's prior experiences with words and the world provided motivation for this play (El'konin, 1971, 2000). Thus the words "waterspout" may also be interpreted as an exotic label or concept from the adult world that the children played with. Oscar, cleverly blending word meanings with his world experiences, referred to the construction as a "dry waterspout", a contradictory concept. The combination of words, sounds (ooooo), the climbing frame, the tarpaulin, wind, children's imaginations and physical bodies, all mediated the shared playfulness. The original house focus was transformed to the concept of a waterspout. Words, as artifacts, mediated in

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metaphorically naming the imaginary waterspout. The youngest children, Eliza and Milly, didn't speak. Neither did Sally who spoke very little English, having newly arrived from Sweden. However these three, like the others, understood the play; they used their bodies to communicate ideas and feelings and relate to each other intersubjectively, in tune with the play (Ruthrof, 2000).

The older children directed the play with words and bodies, while the younger ones immersed and enmeshed themselves in the tarpaulin, imitating others, repetitively throwing bark chips and re-creating the previous day's house play in new ways. Using their imaginations the children metaphorically re-created their earlier experiences creatively (Lindqvist, 1995).

This activity communicated physical fun and playfulness. Children used their bodies purposively and intelligently, (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) almost in unison, climbing up and falling down, getting caught in the tarpaulin, hiding and being found and repeating everything. Their body movements became centered on the image of a waterspout that they were either in, on, or some part of, though they had to imagine what a waterspout might be like. In repeating the actions, with slight variations, children were internalising the associated feelings. Thus, each child experienced the same waterspout play uniquely and personally. In this way the diversity in their individual experiences became distributed and shared in the unity of the play activity.

5.3.3 Event 4: Imitating Tellitubbies

Background: Eastbridge, mid morning, outside on the roof-top play space; a few other children and adults are also outside occupied in the sand pit and talking.

Mollie (2 years) runs (toddles quickly) around outside accidentally bumping into the slide, the big boxes, the trollies, the wall. Every time she bumps she stops, stands still and in a loud chanting tone exclaims "UH! OH!" She then looks

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around, at me and other adults and anyone in the area. She does not hurt herself.

She's having fun. Sometimes she laughs or giggles a little at her own actions.

(Eastbridge, 08.09.2000)

Analysis and discussion

Media influences: Solitary social playfulness

The motivation and meaning of Mollie's oddly playful behaviour puzzled the researcher who was unfamiliar with current television programmes for toddlers. However, a colleague immediately saw the imitative connection between Mollie's seemingly absurd solitary playfulness and the television programme "Tellitubbies", in which a character did exactly what Mollie was doing; it toddled and bumped into everyday objects, then exclaimed "oh! oh!". It is likely that Mollie was repetitively imitating and re-creating this particular character. From a socio-cultural perspective she was internalising aspects of that character's behaviour by imitating it repetitively. She was also showing her developing understanding of the character by externalising the character's behavior in her own imitative behaviour (El'koninova, 1999/2001). The dialectical and dynamic nature of Mollie's activity blended her internalising and externalizing behaviour. Thus, any potential dualism in Mollie's internalising and externalising process of understanding the character was dissolved in the activity process itself (Miettinen, 2001).

Mollie used her body purposively (Lokken, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 1962) and as an artifact, mediating her experience and understanding of the Tellitubbies, the character, and television as media. On another level television and the Tellitubbies programme mediated Mollie's developing understandings of the world. Mollie's playfulness was not solitary as she was imitating, re-creating and thereby developing some understanding of a character from the social world of television. Thus her playfulness was connected to and directly reflected the wider society and her developing understandings of the world (of television) (Dyson, 2001). As a performance her playfulness was also directly social. She seemed to be presenting a social performance for an audience that included herself (Lindqvist, 1995).

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With each bump, she laughed or giggled, seemingly at her behaviour, and looked around for teachers watching her. Was she imitating the performance-audience aspect of television, or possibly joking in a playful way with the teachers and/or herself? On this occasion the teachers made no explicit responses, however Mollie's performance did have the potential to initiate and develop relationships with teachers.

5.3.4   Event 5: Playing with foil wrap

Background:
Northbridge: 8.30am (arrival time), all children are indoors.
Teacher Sue is seated on a child sized bed in the family play area, reading (a book of traditional rhymes) to Frank (2 years, 8 months) who sits beside her; Eliza (1 year, 11 months) arrives with a large piece of shiny silver plastic wrapping foil wrapped around her. The researcher stands nearby, observing.

Eliza: "Bboooo"! [jumps while exclaiming to researcher]
Teacher Sue says something, [inaudible] to Eliza about loud noises
Eliza: "Grrrr, brrrr". [responding as she moves towards teacher Sue]
Teacher Sue pretends to be frightened and hugs Frank, who's holding the book.
Frank: "Grrrr, brrrr". [to Eliza]
Teacher Sue: "That was so funny". [to Eliza]
Eliza: "Lala lala lalaa". [jumps with glee, smiling all over]
Eliza wraps the foil around her shoulders like a scarf and moves to the nearby painting area.
Eliza: "Paint, me paint, paint". [pointing to the painting easels, which are occupied by other children].
A child finishes and teacher Rae puts an apron on Eliza, who becomes engaged in painting.

Pete, (3 years, 6 months) approaches teacher Sue and sits beside her on the bed. She teaches him an old action rhyme.

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Teacher Sue: "Knock on the door, and peep in, chin chopper, chin chopper, chin chin chin".

Pete repeats the actions on teacher Sue's face and vice versa, three times. Frank, still sitting on the bed on the other side of teacher Sue, watches.

Eliza finishes painting and returns to teacher Sue. Eliza laughs as teacher Sue recites the same rhyme and does the actions on Eliza's face.

Teacher Ali arrives and Eliza rushes up to her, with the wrapping foil. She hides her face behind it.

Eliza: "Grrrr…" [laughter]

Teacher Ali: [laughs crouching down to Eliza's height]

Teacher Ali gently throws the wrapping foil up in the air. Eliza copies this action and becomes interested in the floating quality of the foil. Eliza laughs at the floating foil. She smiles and laughs a lot.

Charlie (3 years, 6 months) catches the falling foil and runs off with it, Meg (2 years, 11 months) joins in and follows him. So does Albert (2 years). Eliza tries unsuccessfully to retrieve the foil.

Later in the morning Charlie leads Eliza in cutting the foil up and pasting it on paper, in the art area.

(Northbridge, 06.11.1999)

Analysis and discussion
Humour turning to playfulness

Like the previous event (4), this event also involved explicit joking humour initiated by a very young child, Eliza (1 year, 11 months) and directed towards adults/ teachers. On this accasion the teachers did respond. Eliza's initial joking peek-a-boo humour was an aspect of the overall playfulness that included and united both teachers and children.

The plastic wrapping foil was a central mediating artifact in this event. It had similar skin-like qualities to the plastic tarpaulin in the waterspout play, in

event 3. Enveloping materials of various fabrics were frequently observed as mediating artifacts in young children's playfulness. The tarpaulin in event 3 integrated the children as a unit when they clambered under, over and inside it. It seemed to hold them together in a chaotically noisy and playful way. The much smaller size of the plastic foil material in this event restricted Ella's enveloping hiding play to her alone. Like the tarpaulin, which changed from forming a house to being a waterspout, the foil too was transformed as it mediated the activity in several ways: by hiding Ella, by floating and being chased, before finally being cut up and pasted.

Two teachers also mediated the humour, by responding to Eliza's peek-a-boo joking and throwing the foil into the air, thereby encouraging and supporting playfulness. The traditional finger rhymes that teacher Sue enacted with Pete and Frank added to the generally playful atmosphere. Teachers Ali and Sue were observed to be generally relaxed and they also enjoyed children's company. In an interview on another occasion Sue emphasised the importance of teachers being relaxed and open to children. "… relaxed and happy and after all, isn't this what we want them all to be, relaxed and happy?… I think even if you bring humour into the centre, … it gives an easy relaxed feel that we are able to laugh at things and this isn't a deadly serious place …" (interview, Sue, 21.01.2000).

The usual teacher-child power positioning was reversed when Teacher Ali allowed Pete to do the finger rhyme on her face and teacher Sue crouched to the same height as Eliza while playing with her (Corsaro, 1997).

Eliza had started the event by jokingly hiding behind the foil wrap. The researcher, taking a passive reactive role (Corsaro, 1985), simply smiled. However, teacher Sue responded more positively by commenting on loud noises. This provoked a growling response from Eliza and Frank. This exchange of reactions was not as linear as it appears in the transcript; it was more chaotic and layered (Fogel, 1997) with a huge amount of communication via very flexibly, actively moving bodies. For example while

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growling, Eliza, almost lion-like, crawled towards Frank who simultaneously leaned his body towards her. A lot of the playfulness was expressed in energetic movement, in laughter, jumping, and happy body language (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Lokken, 2000).

Peek-a-boo joking humour is fairly common among very young children, yet it contradicts dominant theories about young children's cognitive abilities (Reddy, 1991) or inabilities. Eliza clearly showed a premeditated awareness that others also have minds and would find the contradictions in her behaviour amusing. Consequently, after an initial positively playful response from teacher Sue, Eliza repeated the hiding trick with teacher Ali, demonstrating that this was not a one-off instance of understanding. In this way she demonstrated that she was developing a theory of mind, at least in this situation. Like Mollie, imitating and performing Tellitubbies in event 4, Eliza was also playing to an adult teacher audience and that requires some degree of forethought (Astington, 1996; Olson & Bruner, 1996).

5.4 SUMMARY: ARTIFACT MEDIATION AND MOTIVATION

In focusing on the joint activity of children being playful and humorous together, the question arises as to what motivates these children to be like this and, in relation to the focus of this Chapter, what artifacts contribute to this motivation? According to activity theory the aim of activity is bound up with the motivation for the activity (Leont'ev, 1978). Play is complicated in that one ludic aim of play is the play itself (Hakkarainen, 1999). It follows that as playfulness is a sub-category of play and humour is an aspect of playfulness, the aims for children being playful and humorous are just that. On the basis of the events presented in this Chapter this explanation seems too simplistic.

In all five events the aims of the humour and playfulness did seem to also be about relationships and understanding. Playfulness and humour mediated

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children's developing understandings and relationships, including how they experienced communication, on several levels.

These levels of mediation may be understood in relation to how children used the material and non-material artifacts in these events. These included: water, foil, television characters, individual children's prior experiences, words, each other, teachers and even the windy weather (or perhaps it used them, in event 3). In these events words and water created concrete, fluid, abstract and imaginative concepts and feelings. Wartofsky's (1979) classification of artifacts as primary, secondary and tertiary artifacts, (discussed in Chapter 2) acknowledges the complexity involved in the mediating process of perceiving and representing artifacts.

This process of artifact mediation always occurs through the constant flux of activity. The dynamic and transformational process of artifact mediation through activity provides the ongoing motivation for the activity. It is the core of learning, development and change, because consciousness, understanding and knowledge are also transformed. This transformational phenomenon is common in children's play with material objects. For example, in these events the climbing frame house became a waterspout, Mollie became a Tellitubbie, the silver foil was used in various ways (hiding, chasing and cutting up), and the splashing water transformed people and things from dry to wet. Transformation is also common in children's word play; this topic is addressed in Chapter 6.

Motivation applies to the group activity, not the actions of individuals alone but individuals together in a system (Leont'ev, 1978). Therefore the motivations for playful and humorous activity are multiple, reflecting individual diversity. Motivation reflects the roles individuals play, expressed in the nature of their relationships and their status (including the power dynamics) in the activity. Thus artifact transformation and tensions and contradictions in the relationships between players (and hence within the activity), stimulate and motivate its continuity.

Referring to the use of artifacts on developing consciousness, Wartofsky (1979) writes:

> It is in the use of such representations that a characteristic mode of praxis is preserved, and comes to be transmitted; and in this lies the germ of cultural evolution, ... (Thus, I say in another paper, the artifact is to cultural evolution what the gene is to biological evolution) (p. 205).

It is in using artifacts that children develop understandings of the ways they may be used. For example, some fabrics can be used to cover, to create houses and waterspouts, to hide under, and to otherwise envelope in many amusing and playful ways. Children learn, create and adapt patterns of behaviour, scripts and schema as artifacts (Cole, 1996) and these artifacts affect children's developing consciousness reciprocally.

When artifact mediation involves fun and humour, boundaries around artifacts can become playfully fuzzy and flexible. In this way rules for artifact usage are not fixed and rigid. In event 5 Eliza used the wrapping paper in several ways that did not include wrapping up parcels, which was its manufactured use. The children at the water trough played with the water in various ways, including spitting and splashing. When children play with artifacts the mediating (internalising and externalising) process is likely to be meaningful for them. Young children do not learn by following rules rigidly. One way in which children can learn is through play, which, according to El'konin (1972), elaborating on Vygotsky (1978), is the leading activity for young children's learning. They were referring to pretend play. However, when children being playful and humorous use their imaginations they are likely to be using similar cognitive and conceptual processes to those used when pretending. Without speech it is more difficult to guess at children's cognitive and emotional experiences. As individuals the children in these events may have been learning a wide range of different things from their shared involvement in playful activities.

In a sense the artifacts in these events connected children with the wider world. Yet what motivated these children to carry on, to be playful and have fun? Both motivation and mediation are complex concepts. Just as artifacts are multi faceted, so too do individuals have multiple goals. These goals and relationships are continually changing. This dynamism with its inherent conflict is integral to activity and the transformations that occur within activity. For an observer the continual transformations are endlessly intriguing. A house becomes a waterspout. The splashing qualities of water became subversively imbued with power. The plastic foil is transformed from wrapping material to a sheet to hide behind. An imitation becomes a performance, and so on.

Incredibly complex play processes seem to generate ongoing motivation for young children's playful activity. Some goals can become dominant group goals, thereby providing ongoing motivation for the activity and becoming a force in themselves, not owned by any individuals, but distributed over the group (Salomon, 1993). Thus the waterspout play became a group goal, enabling the further development of playful relationships. Wertsch (1985) writes that:

> The motive that is involved in a particular activity setting specifies what is to be maximised in that setting. By maximising one goal, one set of behaviours, and the like over others, the motive also determines what will be given up if need be in order to accomplish something else (p. 212).

The house play in event 3 was given up, not as an individual's conscious decision, but in response to several factors, including the wind. The more important group goal of being playful together sustained and transformed the play.

The social, cultural and historical contexts of the early childhood centres with their traditional emphasis on "play" is reflected in activities such as "water play", "outside play", as well as ritualistic eating times and other historical

routines. These all impacted on how playfulness and humour were manifested and experienced by children in these centres.

The children in these events could have mundanely, unaffectedly, simplistically, touched the water, (the younger children in the paddling pool in event 1 did that), climbed the climbing frame and sensibly tied the tarpaulin to it, ignored the Tellitubbies or simply copied the behaviour and used the plastic foil constructively and sensibly in the collage area. However, these children generally did not behave like predictable automatons. Instead they frequently approached activities playfully and sometimes with humour. The children in these events manipulated the artifacts that mediated and transformed aspects of the activities, thereby making activities playful, interesting, fun and motivating.

The manipulation of artifacts, expressed in "playing with the rules", was particularly noticeable in children's approach to routines and potentially mundane rituals, a phenomenon that is further explored in the next chapter. Play with the rules was a prominent feature in the language play of three to five year old children in particular. Play with words is also addressed.

CHAPTER 6

RULES, ROUTINES AND RITUALS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Rules are another component of the CHAT triangle model, "Children's playful communication in context" (see Figure 3.2) that provides the analytical framework for this study exploring how children experience playfulness and humour in their communication. The events presented in this chapter are analysed and discussed with a particular focus on this rules component, bearing in mind that all the components in the model are dynamically interconnected; in reality they are inseparable.

During the first phase in the data gathering it became apparent that a lot of the really excited playfulness or glee (Sherman, 1975), and apparent chaos, occurred during rule-bound transition times, when an activity such as water-play was beginning or was new (event 1), when children were arriving, as when Eliza arrived with the foil wrap (event 5), or when a change was being made to the activity such as adding more water (event 2). A lot of playfulness was also observed during rule-governed routine times, such as at teacher organised music, circle and eating-together times. Thus a sub-question that developed during this first phase of data gathering, and became a focus of the second phase, was:

- *How do centre routines and transitions between activities impact on children's playfulness and humour?*

Routines and transition times accounted for a lot of children's time in these early childhood centres. For purposes of analysis this Chapter explores how children experienced rules associated with one common time-consuming,

every-day routine: the extremely interesting and important ritualistic routine of eating together.

Rules included far more than a legalistic narrow understanding of commands to be followed. The word "rules" also describes expected patterns and ways of behaving that reflect cultural norms and values. Thus the scripts (Nelson, 1996) and schema (Piaget, 1962) children learn, as they actively construct their understandings of the world, consist of rules. All behaviour is rule-bound in this sense and young children spend a lot of energy and time working out what the rules are (Vygotsky, 1978). From this broad definition of rules it follows that children's humorous play with rules was apparent on several levels within the centre routines, reflecting children's developing understandings of rules. In focusing on playful and humorous communication, play with rules around language and words was a prominent theme occuring in all the events presented in this chapter. A fascinating aspect of this language play was children's playfulness around the rhythm and sound of words. These playful and humorous ways with word sounds will be discussed in the context of musical awareness, intersubjectivity and musical ways of making meaning during these rule-bound routine times.

6.2 ROUTINES AS RITUALS

The link from routines to rules and their reification as rituals became apparent during the process of data analysis. The centres in this study were governed by rules surrounding routines such as: arrival times, circle times, morning tea times, tidy up times, lunch times, nappy changing times, afternoon tea times, home times and other times. Days and time were managed through time-consuming rule-bound routines that become ritualised practices. All these timetabled times involved children moving from one activity to another. Frequently these transitions were rules rather than choices. Thus teacher control was an underlying theme, with the children being managed and herded, almost like sheep. The researcher observing the children being playful (sometimes subversively) during routines wondered how children

experienced these events. How did teachers respond to children's playfulness and to what extent were teachers aware of their power over routines and transition times? How did teachers empower children during these times?

The routines and rituals that rule early childhood centres add to their unique qualities as educational institutions. New visitors are frequently surprised by the child-sized physical design that supports these routines. The furnishings in the three centres in this study were generally child sized. Equipment and teacher-planned activities reflected a mixture of early Froebelian and later Piagetian origins with associated images of the young scientist child surrounded by, yet disconnected from, stimulating materials and activities. This disconnection partly reflected the historical laissez faire free-play assumption that simply providing a wealth of materials, without emphasising interaction, would promote learning.

In this study "eating together times", when the children sat together, occurred three times per day in both Northbridge and Eastbridge centres. This was an accepted teacher and management-determined ritual, in which all children participated as a rule. Space for the eating activity was made by clearing other activities from the tables, which were then temporarily transformed from places for play to places for eating. Southbridge centre, in contrast, ran a "rolling" morning teatime, allowing children to decide if and when they would eat.

6.3 PLAYING WITH RULES SUBVERSIVELY

The researcher wondered how the rules around the eating together routine mediated children's playful, gleeful and humorous behaviour. The events presented in this chapter are typical examples of groups of children actively developing and using their own rules and imagination (essential attributes of play) to make the potentially tedious teacher-controlled eating-together rituals meaningful and enjoyable for them.

The use of words, including playing with words and their meanings, is a feature in all these events. The implicit rigidity in the very concept of rules around language and routines seemed to invite playfulness; this is a way of exploring and creating flexibility around rule boundaries, while simultaneously developing understandings and internalising the meanings of specific rules. In turn, rules became reified as rituals around practices such as hand washing, sitting at tables, waiting, chanting karakia (prayer), rhymes and songs together. These practices were supported by artifacts.

The artifacts that mediated eating together times included (a) primary artifacts such as the mugs, chairs, tables and symbolic words; (b) secondary artifacts, such as scripts and the order of the entire ritual, from hand washing and karakia (Maori grace, prayer, said before eating) through to tidy up time; and (c) tertiary level conceptual artifacts such as some word play rhymes that engaged participants and playfully represented aesthetic qualities associated with rhythm, tone and physical movement (Wartofsky, 1979). Via multiple levels, eating together times mediated the development of group synergy, peer culture (Corsaro, 1997) and feelings of togetherness. This included having fun while playing with the rules around routinised rituals and adapting and innovatively re-creating rules.

6.3.1   Event 6: Aesthetic word play.

Background:
Northbridge: Morning tea-time. Eight children (2 years to 4 years, 8 months old) and one teacher sit at a round table. A bowl of fruit is being passed slowly around the table (cut up orange and banana segments). Semi-seated next to each other and across the table from the teacher and the fruit, are the three older children. They move a lot with each other messily in time and in tune. Chairs, mugs and feet scrape surfaces and the atmosphere is busy and noisy. The younger ones wriggle in their chairs, watching both the older children and the teacher who talks to them while offering them fruit. Tom (4 years, 3 months) stands in front of his chair rolling his empty water mug on

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the table. His body moves with the mug, never still. Zizi (4 years, 8 months) and Peta (3 years, 10 months) rock their chairs precariously.

Looking at the teacher, Tom spontaneously begins to sing-chant:

Tom: "Please pass the wee-wees."

He gets no response, and repeats the chant. As he still gets no response, he changes the chant:

"Please pass the trai-ain."

Zizi rejoins: "Please pass the trai-ain."

The teacher had earlier made train noises while gently pushing the plate around the table.

Zizi: "Please pass the fru-uit."

Tom: "Please pass the fru-uit."

Zizi: "Please pass the lollypop."

Tom: "Please pass the banana pop." [sound unclear]

Zizi: "Please pass the orange pop."

Peta: "Please pass the ice-block"...

Tom and Peta: "Please pass the ice-block"...[in unison]

Tom: "Please pass the pop pop."

(Northbridge, 19.02.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Words as mediating artifacts; Musicality as intersubjectivity

The children played with rules of etiquette and created rules around the rhyme and form of the chanting. Like a narrative the rhyme, tells a collaborative story on several levels. The melodic chanted tone with its repetitive rhythm conveys feelings of chaotic repetition, representative of many ritualistic eating together times in early childhood centres. The children moved continuously, also often chaotically and repetitively. The meanings of the words chanted ranges from challenging the rules of social etiquette with "wee-wees", to acknowledging the "please" in "pass". There is a subversive

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tension in much of children's play with social rules. In using "toilet humour" Tom could be demanding teacher attention, and/or the fruit.

Tom was also asserting agency and all three children demonstrated social or performance awareness in the way they listened and looked at each other while moving and chanting almost over each other. Their social-performance awareness seemed to show that these children had some understanding that others also have thinking and feeling minds (Astington, 1996; Astington & Gopnik, 1991). These children performed playfully for themselves, for each other, and for an audience, all qualities identified by Lindqvist, (1995) in her analyses of children's dramatic play. Like a well-formed narrative, the event concluded happily and positively, with pleasurable party-like images of lollies and ice blocks. As Coles (1996) explains good stories are well structured narratives with plots, and happy endings.

The lack of teacher involvement may partly explain why this particular eating time became quite subversive. Half way through the teachers had a duty swap, disrupting teacher continuity. The children, confined in chairs, became restless. They scraped their chairs on the floor and shuffled their water mugs on the table. Tom rolled his empty mug around the table-top sideways, creating extra interest for himself. He repeatedly moved in and on his chair, despite a teacher telling him several times to sit down. Most children did not, they possibly could not, sit still. Water spilt from mugs. Eliza threw food on the floor deliberately and looked up smiling. Was she seeking control or attention, playfully and cheekily? Sammy flipped her dress up over her head, catching and spilling some water from her mug, which a teacher quickly caught. The spilt water mixed with food scraps on the table. Anna and Tom threatened to pour "*compost water*" over the floor and then over the teachers too. The teacher's response was to ignore and distract the children, saying "*It's sleep time now*".

The children had playfully created a peer togetherness, referred to as "peer culture" by Corsaro (1997), that excluded the teachers, whom some of the

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children threatened with "compost water". It did not help that the teachers at the end of the meal-time were different teachers from those at the start. They still epitomised power and control. For example teachers could choose to leave the room for their meal times. The children did not have this freedom to leave for lunch, but they could assert group agency, as described by Bandura (2001) in the face of feelings of powerlessness. They did this playfully, with words and actions.

Though physically constrained by chairs and tables, the children used their bodies, their imaginations, their voices and the only available objects (mugs, chairs and table) to communicate playfully and create this chanting rhyme. The to-and-fro playfulness in their chanting seemed to connect them with each other, mediated by sung word chants that were extensions of their feeling bodies. Ruthrof (2000) and Shotter (1993) have referred to this concept of bodies expressing feelings and ideas in body language as an extension of words.

The musical, rhythmic qualities in their chanting seemed to unite the participants intersubjectively as, collaboratively, they improvised playfully and in the process created a cognitively complex rhyming narrative.

The children's word play combined real fruit objects with pop, which also rhymes with ice-block and lollypop. The imagined and exaggerated word associations were all with playful party food; lollypops and more pops. Varga (2000) has also noted these over-the-top wild exaggerations as a feature in young children's play with words.

Playfulness enabled these children to interact within a joint zone of proximal development transforming words and meanings, while creating new rhymes and rhythms. Trevarthen (2002), emphasising the primal importance of rhythm, suggests that, "The foundations of all psychological co-operation or intersubjectivity are to be found in a sense of movement and in the detection of the generation of qualities of movement in other bodies" (p.26).

The repetitive rhyming nature of word-play, like pretend play, may be interpreted as part of the internalisation process whereby children develop understanding through imitation and repetition. As explained in chapter 2 and in section 6.4 this is not simply copy-cat imitation, being partly created anew (El'konin, 2000; El'koninova, 1999/2001). The children in this event were practicing, and hence learning about, the rhyme, rhythm, form, and functions of spoken language, creatively. It is likely that they were also developing their understandings of interpersonal relationships and how the sum (children acting together) may be greater than the parts (individuals alone). Together these children played with words and created a musical rhythmic chant within a group co-constructed zone of proximal development.

Trevarthen (2002) suggests that musicality, when understood in the classic Greek sense of also including rhythm, movement, poetry and all the temporal arts,

> ... may be at the source of the ability to be socialized in the human way ... New evidence on the place of affect in intelligence (Damasio, 1999; Freeman, 2000), and on how emotions regulate brain development, cognition and learning, makes the infant's sensitivity to musical form more comprehensible" (p. 22).

He has proposed that, "music communicates with the very young human being because it engages with an intrinsic movement pulse (IMP) in the human brain. According to Trevarthen (2000), the IMP detects "pulse, quality and narrative, ... in communicative musicality" (p 27).

In this study the rhythmic chanting of improvised rhyming narratives was an observed phenomenon in young children's communicated playfulness. It was a particular feature of eating together times when children were physically constrained by being seated. The complex word-play, as in this example, was usually initiated by the four year old children. Less specific verbal

sounds and rhythmic gestures, that fitted with the concept of an IMP, characterised the playful and humorous communication all age groups.

The following event presents a different example of children chanting, though here children and teachers chant together in unison and the script is largely predetermined and teacher initiated.

6.3.2   Event 7: Chanting rhyme together

Background:
Northbridge, Morning tea time: Fifteen three to four year old children sit (moving, jiggling while waiting), at two round tables. Two teachers sit at one table and one at the other, while seven younger children (under two) sit, further away, at an oblong table and in high chairs with their teacher. The researcher sits on a child-sized chair nearby, camcorder in hand, directed mainly at the table with two teachers. Four of the seven children are older, articulate, near-four year olds.

Teacher Ali is in charge:

Teacher Ali: "Okay." [she begins the familiar, teacher led, group chant that involves the children joining in and doing the body actions]

Teacher Ali: "I can hear my hands go x x x." [3 times, clapping sounds]

"I can hear my tongue go x x x." [3 times tongue-clicking sounds]

"But I can't hear my shoulders go x x x." [silent shoulder shrugging]

Olaf: "I can." (4 years, 9 months)

Tom: "I can hear my shoulders go." (4 years, 1 month)

[Teacher Ali ignores these comments and continues with more lines]:

"I can hear my lips go x x x." [lip smacking sound]

"I can hear my teeth go x x x." [teeth biting sound]

"But I can't hear my hair go x x x." [head nodding movement]

Olaf: "I can hear my head going."

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Tom: "I can, I can hear my brains going."

The two teachers laugh, and teacher Ali continues the chant:

            "I can hear my feet go x x x." [stamping sounds, they stamp

            feet]

            "I can hear my nose go x x x." [Snorting breathing in sounds]

            "But I can't hear my eyes go x x x." [blinking eyelids]

Three children (Tom, Olaf, Cheryl (3 years, 7 months)) in unison:

            "I can!", "I can!", "I can.!"

Sensible Anna (4 years, 11 months) disagrees: "I can't", almost siding with the

teacher. And young Sally (2 years, 3 months), seated between Tom and Olaf

smiles, seeming to agree with them that she too can hear her silent self. For a few

minutes Tom continues shaking his head, shrugging his shoulders and listening to

his own silent movements.

(Northbridge, 02.12.1999)

Analysis and discussion
Power, agency and togetherness

The rhythmic and repetitive chanted, sung rhyme united children and
teachers as a group. Not only the words, but also the physical actions,
expressed in body language united them socially (Trevarthen, 2002). The
children "spun off" each other, so that initially only Olaf and Tom "heard" their
shoulders, but in the next round Olaf, Tom and Cheryl all "heard" their eyes
blinking when they determinedly tried to hear their body sensations. They
expressed their shared consciousness with movement and sound.

Almost in a reversal of roles and power, the teachers laughed, playfully, at the
humorous way in which the children had interpreted the rules of words. The
younger children watched and imitated the older children as they listened
intently to their internal body movements and sounds. Concentration was
visible in their tight facial expressions that showed them thinking about the

meanings of the words they chanted and feeling the movement of their bodies as they listened.

This developmental process whereby children learn about word meanings from initially sensing the feelings of word sounds has been described by Vygotsky (1934/1986): "The relation between thought and word is a living process; thought is born through words. A word devoid of thought is a dead thing … the connection between thought and word … emerges in the course of development, and itself evolves" (p. 255). Olaf, Tom and Cheryl asserted considerable peer group agency in thinking about the meaning and feeling of the words (Corsaro, 1985, 1997). Together they disagreed with the intended meaning of the words of the rhyme. Almost metacognitively (certainly reflectively) these children felt that they could hear their heads, shoulders, brains and eyes move. They seemed to mix sense and meaning (Vygotsky, 1934/1986), confusing hearing and thinking with feeling. By disagreeing with the meaning of the song they challenged the accepted rules of the teacher-determined status quo, a brave initiative for relatively powerless children. Yet they did this without antagonism or divisiveness, so that the group togetherness was not threatened. The teachers laughed, showing appreciation and enjoyment of children's thinking/feeling questioning.

Layers of meanings and relationships all added to the web-like messy mosaic of group cohesiveness. Contradictions, expressed in the children's disagreements with word-song meaning and sense, illuminated both the power balance and developmental differences in word usage between teachers and children. Thus the children felt the sense in the words, while the teachers thought about the meaning. These contradictions also made explicit, with words, the ways in which the resultant tension motivated the continued enthusiastic and playful involvement of both children and teachers in the activity. However, the overall group communication and cohesiveness involved more than word sense and meanings. It included rhythmic chanting and movement as well as less visible historical and cultural conditions of the eating together activity.

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Minutes later, several children playfully re-created aspects of the rhyme's body focus, as the following memo illustrates.

> Tom, after putting a sandwich into his mouth, puts his hands under the table and exclaims, chanting playfully to all: "I have no ha-ands." He then pulls them out, waves arms in the air, smiling saying "twooo". John (4 years), seated beside Tom has been watching and smiling and he immediately does likewise, imitating Tom perfectly and looking at teacher A as he chants: "I have no ha-ands". He gets no response, so John repeats: "I have no ha-ands", using the same chanting tone as Tom. This time the teacher responds by asking him how he eats with no hands. John coyly pulls out one hand to show her, smiling as if this is a joke. Does the hand play have links with the body chanting 3-5 minutes earlier? No hands, no sounds, no hearing? Meanwhile, Olaf quietly covers and uncovers his eyes, seeing and not seeing. He repeats this three times. No one notices or comments. Has the rhyme's focus on body parts and senses enhanced and created a sort of zone of proximal development in relation to children's body awareness?
> (Memo, 2.12.99).

These children imitated words, actions, and the chanting tone used earlier in the group song-chant. As in the song-chant their awareness focused on the senses, in this case sight. These children were also innovative in creating new variations on the original song actions.

6.4 REPETITION AND IMITATION

Repetition and imitation, attributes of both the song-chant and children's behaviour as described in the memo and the song, are important processes for children internalising concepts according to CHAT (Vygotsky, 1978; Zinchenko, 2001). They are also common attributes of play, for it is in play that repetition and imitation assume fresh qualities, so they are not simply "copy-cat" reproductive processes (Elkoninova, 2001). It is suggested that

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the qualities of playfulness in the process of repetition and imitation may free up the internalisation learning process, thereby facilitating learning that is meaningful (Elkoninova, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978; Parker Rees, 1998). So what were these children doing apart from learning the words and actions of a song-chant? In this case the concepts to be internalised probably revolved around sensory and bodily awareness, and explicitly included incongruity, or nonsense humour. However, from a more interactive and developmental perspective, children also learnt about relationships; they were learning about collaborating and relating as members of a community, actively practising and challenging accepted meanings and rules, while developing their own subjective selves. As Michael Cole points out,

> Activities and processes are not just a background (context) within which a person, and individual develops - social processes and activities are internalised (Vygotsky's term) and make the person's self. And (!), this is not social reductionism, because the process of internalisation is the active process of recreation of a social world as an inner microcosm. In addition, I think that play-activities - and orientations in play - are key to understanding how this internalising/recreating works (M. Cole, personal communication, June 11th, 2003).

So, in playfully participating, repeating and imitating observed processes these children are proactively developing themselves as actively participating agents in a social world.

At times the playfulness may be interpreted as creating a shared zone of proximal development for those involved. For example, in events 6 and 7 several children reflected on and played with word meanings and sounds. Together they extended each other's thinking and understandings of words. Teachers were not observed either developing or extending children's play with words. The impetus came from the peer group.

The following event picks up on the concept of children learning and playfully re-creating the adult world. In this event they imitate and re-create the

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peculiar adult phenomenon of scripts and rules associated with joke telling. This teacher does try to assist the children's joke telling.

6.4.1 Event 8: Joking

Background:
Eastbridge: Indoors: Seven 3-4 year old children eat afternoon tea together, after the younger children have finished eating. They're seated at two oblong shaped tables, parallel to each other, so that four children (two per table side) are seated back to back. Much of the talk was too muffled to clearly hear everything.

> Teacher Nic tells Ben (3 years, 9 months) to turn around, he was facing Vanessa (3 years, 10 months) at the other table, so seated backwards.
>
> Ben: "Uh I was just telling her a joke."
>
> Teacher Nic: "Oh really, can you remember it? Can you tell me?"
>
> Ben: nods head [meaning yes, doesn't say anything, just stretches out on chair]
>
> Teacher Nic: "Do you want to tell me later?"
>
> Ben: nods [yes nod]
>
> Vanessa: "I'll tell you it. How did a elephant walk on a person's head?" [laughs]
>
> Teacher Nic: "I don't know."
>
> Lewis: "(unintelligible) caught fire...[laughs]" (3 years, 10 months)
>
> Ben and Vanessa squirm in their chairs
>
> Ben: "Yes that's it."
>
> Teacher Nic: "Where do you get your jokes from Ben?"
>
> Ben: "I make them up."
>
> Vanessa: "That's really good that you can do that Ben."
>
> Brie: "And I can make jokes up too." [(4 years) at other end of table]
>
> Vanessa: "Ben, Ben, Ben, how did the elephant cross the tree?"
>
> Ben: "I don't know."
>
> Vanessa: "Because a person stanned on his head." [laughs]

> Vanessa: "Ben, Ben, Ben, Ben I'm telling you a joke. How did a train cross the street?" [trying to get Ben's attention]
>
> Ben: "I don't know….."

(Eastbridge, 20.07.00)

Analysis and discussion
Imitating and re-creating joke scripts

This event presents four children discussing and practising a script (Nelson, 1996) for telling elephant nonsense jokes. As primary artifacts, words, their rules for usage, and the meanings children gave them mediated the actual joke telling. This cultural practice of joke telling, with its rules of turn-taking, questioning, responding, and ridiculously inverting word meanings, also mediated as a secondary artifact - as a recipe for a style of dialogue.

The researcher wondered why Ben didn't tell the teacher his joke when asked. He possibly expected ridicule. He may have forgotten the lines. The teacher, tactfully, didn't persist in asking and with few words, encouraged the exploratory joke telling. However, Vanessa responded in Ben's stead. Demonstrating sensitivity, Vanessa also assured Ben that his jokes were "really good". Then, possibly inspired by Ben and the sympathetic teacher Nic, she made up her own nonsense jokes for Ben to answer.

This joking humour required children to understand the script (Nelson, 1996) of a joke, to think about the meanings of words, to use their imaginations and juxtapose or exaggerate these meanings, and to provide nonsensical answers. It was cognitively challenging (Varga, 2000). It was also fun. The children laughed at the nonsense in their own jokes.

6.4.2 Event 9: Teacher initiated humour

Background:

Eastbridge: It is lunch time and about ten 3-4 year old children are seated in lines facing each other at two oblong tables that are joined end on. Before eating the teachers and some children have, in unison, said a Maori karakia (grace), that included the word "kai", meaning "food". Teacher Mu stands; he's in control, in charge of serving the seated children their lunch. The talk begins as he serves Anna (3 years, eleven months), who is seated between Bob, (four years, three months) and Cat (4 years).

Anna:	"I said kai I said kai." [kai is Maori for food]
Bob:	"I said kai."
Cat:	"I said porky kai."
Teacher Mu:	"Who would like some sour cream?"[he walks behind the children serving the food onto plates in front of them]
Several children:	"Me… Me Me Me Me Me." ..
Teacher Mu	"A bit there for you." [he spoons food onto each plate]
	"And a bit there for you"…..
Children:	"Laughter" [at the cream splashing slightly]
Teacher Mu:	"Whoops we've got no plates."
	"Well I can't put it on the table can I?" [He gets some more plates]
	"And you and you and you" [Spooning cream onto the plates]
Anna:	"He's a funny man."
Bob:	"You're a guy."
Teacher Mu:	"Am I a guy is that why I get laughed at?"
Anna:	"Silly."
Teacher Mu:	"Smelly I thought I smelt quite nice."
Anna	"You do, the smells coming out of your bottom."
Teacher Mu:	"I don't think we should be talking like that while we're eating our lunch now."
Bob:	"Because that's a toilet word."

(Eastbridge, 11.8.00)

Analysis and discussion
Teacher control: "manners"

The teacher in this event deliberately used humour, possibly to amuse both himself and the children. He was very much at the centre of the playfulness, standing above the seated children and mediating playfulness in a controlled way. The children laughed at the cream being spooned onto their plates and the suggestion that it might be spooned onto the table. One child pointed out that, unlike all the other teachers, this teacher was male, and funny, or silly. Teacher Mu deliberately misheard silly as smelly, to which a child responded with socially inappropriate joking. However, this unacceptable joking was quickly controlled and the rules explained by both teacher Mu and Bob, with different rationales. Thus, some joking humour and playfulness was acceptable within limits.

In this everyday event the boundaries for acceptability were set by the teacher in control. The limits of the humour and playfulness were expressed and embodied by this teacher and reflected social and cultural norms expressed in concepts such as "manners" and "silliness". Manners enforce rules, in this case around correct or polite word usage. In a sense this event shared similarities with live theatre performance. Teacher Mu performed for the seated audience of children and their audience participation contributed to the framed performance. The process did enliven a potentially mundane routine where actions were directed at children as objects, passively sitting and waiting to be served food. In this event some children did attempt to assert themselves actively, and Anna's comments were subversive. However, the performance hardly empowered them as the teacher, standing over and directing, seemed to be firmly in control of the activity. The teacher was a central mediating artifact. So too were the dishes and the food he served and, on another level, the words that were spoken. The artifacts all served to hold the group together in this shared meal time.

6.4.3   Event 10: Multiple overlapping dialogues

Background:

Northbridge: Morning tea time, seven children and one teacher Bo sit at one round table, while another seven children sit at another table positioned nearby and four "under twos" sit alongside three "under one year olds" who are seated in separate high chairs. It's noisy and feels crowded, with multiple overlapping interactions within each table group, rather than between tables. To an observer teatime sounds like chaos, with half heard conversations, part sentences, and the over-riding hum of voice noise. This event focuses on a few children at one round table and because intelligibility was an issue, only snippets of the fascinating and playful talk are included.

Jim (4 years, 9 months) sits beside Frank (3 years, 8 months) and Eliza (2 years, 10 months). He squirms on chair, while talking to Frank, all squirm, Teacher Bo and 4 other children sit at the round table

Frank: "Da da da da da da dar."

Frank and Jim, both put hands on heads, making "funny" movements, imitating each other, being silly.

Jim: "Is this butter? Is this butter? Is this butter?" [to Teacher Bo]

Teacher Bo: "Yes"

Eliza: "Is this butter? Is this butter?" [imitates Jim]

Georgina, (1 year) sitting in highchair overlooking the noisy activity, makes squeaky smiley faces at the researcher, who is seated nearby, videoing, watching and writing.

Jim: "The day gets longer" [He's having a conversation about day light saving, with teacher Bo]

Teacher Bo: "The day gets longer, the night gets shorter"…..

[Frank and Jim are laughing together]

Jim: "Jeliza, kiza, biza, liza." [to, or at Eliza]

Frank: "I want a monkey's head." [alluding to the banana's being cut up by teacher, who's also seated at the table]

Peta:	"It's monkey tails." [(4 years, 4 months) referring to the banana skin]
Jim:	"It can be a pirate ship."
Jack:	"You didn't even cut my finger off when I got the apple." [to teacher]
Peta:	"And you didn't even cut my finger off when I got the banana."
Eliza:	"It's a monkey tail." [quietly speaking to herself, about the banana skin]
Jim:	"The chair came off the ground, it flied, I said it wouldn't fly and it did fly....."
Teacher Bo:	"How? Did you lift it to make it fly?...Who lifted it?"
Jim:	"Me."
Teacher Bo:	"Why don't you fly up to the ceiling?" [to Jim]
Jim:	"I can't stay up there."
	"I flied ....one day in the bathroom.....and I jumped...flying gumboots...flying trees..."
	"Can I leave the table?"
	"My chair's flying."

[Jim carries ("flies") his chair away when leaving table; stacking chairs away is the normal routine after eating time]

(Northbridge, 03.10.2000)

Analysis and discussion

Group processes

The outstanding feature of this almost surreal and apparently chaotic scene is the bizarre talk that connects these children. The dialogue is not linear. As in much communication, conversations are mixed up with movements and interruptions (Fogel, 1993). Any intention of an orderly teatime was subverted as children imaginatively played with themes and concepts such as monkey tails, bananas, flight, names and more. These themes were not totally random, but connected to children's past and future experiences. Name playing was a regular occurrence. In this event Jim played with Eliza's

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name. The children improvised and played with concepts and words, not bound by rigid rules of language usage or overly constrained by having to be seated. Their bodies mirrored this flexibility around rules as they contagiously squirmed and wriggled on their chairs. Jim and Frank inspired each other in "silly" actions. Eliza experimentally and playfully explored words, feelings and other perspectives, imitating and repeating Jims question to the teacher, "is this butter?" Georgina caught the noisy activity and smiled happily from her highchair. The image of banana skins as monkey tails had been introduced by a teacher joking on an earlier occasion. Eliza listened and repeated the words to herself, while Peta picked up on, and repeated, Jack's joking caution about using knives. Thus, themes of imitation and repetition extended over time, including playful experiences from earlier morning tea times.

The teachers calmly responded to questions, and asked a few. The teacher tactfully used questions that encouraged Jim's imaginative exploration of flight. After tea Jim and Frank made wings out of cardboard, continuing to express an interest in flight. Thus the freedom to talk and imaginatively play with concepts and ideas around flight, during eating-together time, contributed to constructive play later.

Children imitated, repeated, and learnt from each other In a process similar to "distributed cognition" described by Salomon (1993). The laughter, playfulness and talk connected the individual children and the teacher as a group with multiple activities occurring simultaneously, reflecting participants' multiple diverse aims, yet united in the eating-together activity. The dialogue in this event overflowed with contradictions and tensions, expressed in body movements, gestures and words which all contributed to the playful intensity of, and motivation in, the activity.

6.5 SUMMARY: RULES, ROUTINES AND MOTIVATION

Routines and rules conjure images of work, which raises the traditional work versus play dichotomy described by Elkind (2003). The aims of this morning

tea routine included work for the adults who dictated and enforced the rules, while the children played. However dualistic work-play perspectives are not helpful. They do not reflect reality. In this event the teachers did relax and playfully enjoyed themselves and the children. For the children, playfully following the morning tea routine was also work. The boundaries of both work and play overlap in the experience of this routine. These children did eat their food, and by playing with the rules and exploring the flexibility in boundaries, new rhymes, words, and concepts were imaginatively re-created.

Activities contain multiple aims, as befits their complexity and the multiple agendas of the individual participants. For the children the overall motivating aim seemed to be to blend playfulness and have fun together, within the constraints and rules of the eating routine. For the teachers the overall motivating aim was for the children to eat and be nourished. Teachers had other aims too, such as that the children learn to follow rules of social etiquette. Physically constrained by rules around sitting in chairs and rules around eating, the children together were motivated to be playful in ways that were permissible. Together they re-created sets of playful and flexible rules around words. All play is rule-bound, as is much of living in society. But, in play the rules can be played with flexibly; that is a characteristic of play. Thus in playing with rules, players work towards some integrated balance between tightly structured co-ordination and anarchic disco-ordination; between chaos (or nonsense) and logical reality (or meaning). In working out this balance the children in these events used their imaginations to play with scripts, words, sounds, rhythm, the food, and other concrete objects like chairs and mugs, as well as their own bodies. In this physically constrained play the children bent existing rules and created new rules around word usage in particular. They created nonsense rhymes, which blended personal sense and shared meaning (Vygotsky, 1932/1986). Repetition, imitation and imagination were all qualities of this social playfulness, particularly in their word play. Repetition, imitation and imagination are also fundamental processes for any learning (Egan & Nadaner, 1988; Egan, 1988) and words are the tools for thinking (Vygotsky, 1978, 1932/1986).

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Feelings of group togetherness and belonging and the development of peer culture were also mediated by the children actually sitting together around a table, physically part of a group (Corsaro, 1985 ;Vasconcelos & Walsh, 2001). Sometimes the teacher was included positively in the group, as in event 10. Sometimes the teacher's presence, or words, mediated resistance by children, as in events 6, 7 and 9, when the authoritative teacher voice was challenged. In all these events peer group togetherness seemed to be dependent on peer involvement, rather than teacher participation.

The role of children and teachers in children's humour and playfulness, and how teachers influence the culture of the early childhood setting is a focus of chapter 7. This explores the "roles" component of the activity theory model, "Children's playful communication in context" (Figure 3.2). The non-verbal playful and humorous communication of toddlers in particular, including how teachers communicate with pre-verbal children, is also examined and discussed.

CHAPTER 7

ROLES FOR TEACHERS AND CHILDREN

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the roles of teachers and children when children are being humorous and playful together. Roles are another component of, and provide another lens on, the CHAT model that provides the framework for interpreting and analysing the data in this study (see Figure 3.2, "Children's playful communication in context"). A socio-cultural understanding of children's playfulness emphasises the context of the playful activity. It therefore includes an awareness of teachers' roles and how teachers, as well as children, interact. Related research questions center on how teacher style affects children's playful activity, particularly the non-verbal activity of pre-verbal children. Following on from teacher style is the question of how these teachers envisioned playfulness and humour fitting with their teacher roles.

This chapter also explores issues that had emerged during the initial phases of the data gathering concerning very young children's playful and humorous pre-verbal communication.

The research questions that focused the third phase of data-gathering were:

- *What role do teachers play in children's playfulness?*

- *What roles do children play in each other's playfulness?*

- *How do pre-verbal children interact and communicate playful and humorous roles with each other, with talkers and with teachers?*

Several of the eight events presented in this chapter are interpreted with this dual focus on both the pre-verbal playful and humorous communication, and the roles of children and teachers in children's playful and humorous communication. Three events are from Eastbridge centre and three from Northbridge centre. One event from Southbridge centre (event 14) is also included, because it represents non-verbal playful communication among four year olds for whom English is not their native language.

7.2 VERBAL TEACHER: PRE-VERBAL TODDLERS

All three of the above research questions are addressed in the following two events, 11 and 12.

Background:
Eastbridge; A series of playful events involving Em (14 months) and Kate (15 months), occurred in an afternoon over a one hour period. The centre is located on the first floor of an apartment building. The outside rooftop space is partitioned from the inside by a wall of bi-folding glass doors, which are open, allowing the children freedom to wander between inside and outside. The weather is fine, though slightly chilly, on an early spring day. The teacher Mo in this scenario is also Em's mother.

7.2.1 Event 11:Toddling and falling

Kate comes toddling inside from outside; she hesitates at the door boundary between in and outside before toddling, waddling, straight towards Em who's lying on carpeted floor surrounded by four pillows. Kate makes laughing, cackling sounds that match her eager toddling style. Teacher Mo stands between the two children, though to one side, openly watching them both, welcoming and encouraging Kate inside, by bending low and smiling at her. Several children are playing in the vicinity of Kate and Em.

Teacher Mo, to Em who's gently, purposefully, repetitively letting her body fall forward, hands in front, onto the carpet floor:

"Ohhh!, oh up up again, up again, here she comes again."

Em falls as though Kate has pushed her [Kate hasn't]. Em makes squealing sounds of fun while falling.

Teacher Mo: "Go get Kate Em."

Kate then imitates the falling actions, to one side of Em, falling without being pushed. Em simultaneously squeals happily.

Teacher Mo: "Oh, she's gone crash, Kate's gone crash, crash."

Kate lies on the floor, bottom up. Em's still laughing, squealing excitedly.

Max (3 years), comes over, says something to Kate, gently puts his head on the ground near Kate's head and takes a stick from Kate's hand. He then gets up and wanders off.

Em, watching, lies down imitating Kate, placing her head near Kate's head.

Teacher Mo: "Go, go, go, Kate, go." (Kate watches Em)

Kate rolls over onto her back, relaxing happily.

Em watches Kate and also tries to roll over, ending up lying on her side, on carpeted floor.

Teacher Mo: "Oh are you going to have a lie down?"

Teacher Mo comes over and kneels beside them.

Teacher Mo: "Okay night night."

                "You want a pillow?"

Teacher Mo places a pillow beside Em who puts her head on it, side on, for a few seconds. Em sits up and Kate puts her head and half her body on the same pillow.

Teacher Mo: "Kate's got your pillow."

Em puts her head on another pillow. Kate, watching, moves her head and body to another pillow (Four pillows lie on the carpet).

Teacher Mo: "Oh, Kate's got a red pillow.

Both children lie, cheeks on pillows, a metre apart from each other, bottoms in the air, half on sides, watching each other, having fun, pretend sleeping.

Em watches as Kate moves to yet another pillow.

Teacher Mo: "Now Kate's got the blue pillow."

Teacher Mo claps her hands together as she chants to Kate:

"Go, go, go ,go."

Kate half stands and lets her body fall forward purposefully, onto the carpet. She laughs, then rolls onto her back, (repeating actions from the start of this scenario).

Analysis and Discussion

Toddler movements: Imitating roles

These toddlers had fun role-playing falling and copying each other. They experienced bodies falling as fun, appreciating the whole-body sensory feelings of falling, lying down, and rolling over. Both toddlers repetitively fell and laughed each time, seemingly at the playful, gravitational sensation of letting the body go and falling. In this almost joke-like way they played with their own body's actions and enjoyed watching themselves and each other fall. They experimented with their bodies, expressing ideas and feelings in their gestures and, at times, awkward and immature toddler movements (Lokken, 2000), and they were inspired to repeat the actions by watching each other. They watched and imitated each other's body movements (heads on pillows). In the beginning Em let her body fall and, as a natural conclusion to the first sequence, Kate let her body fall. As if she had slipped into toddler role, the teacher also behaved repetitively and imitatively, though instead of letting her body fall she used active words (go, go, go...). In this way words can encompass actions.

The event continues:

Em, watching Kate, who's lying on her back on the carpet, gets up, toddles over to the nearby music area, picks up a string of bells, toddles back and gives them to Kate. Kate, now sitting, takes the bells and proceeds to first shake, then finger and explore them. Em toddles off towards the outside doors. She meets teacher on the way.

Teacher Mo: "What's happened to Kate Em, where's Kate?"

Em turns and looks towards Kate who's sitting on the floor absorbed in the bells.

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Teacher Mo: "There she is, She's got the bells."

Kate hears this and looks up, towards them.

Em turns and toddles back towards Kate.

Kate gets half up, crawls a few steps, then fully up and toddles towards Em. She puts her arms out towards Em who has stopped toddling and stands waiting, watching Kate approaching. When close enough, Kate puts her arms around Em hugging her. Both squeal happily, playfully.

Teacher Mo: "Ooh that's nice, are you going to have a kiss and a cuddle?"

[commenting rather than questioning]

Em reciprocates and both unsteady toddlers fall down softly, Em first.

Em makes a gently protesting cry.

Kate pats Em's head

Em gets up and toddles away and Kate lies on her back, on the floor (She seems to enjoy this relaxed position).

(Eastbridge, 22.09.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Teacher's mediating role and teacher words

Teacher Mo played a pivotal role, connecting Em and Kate intersubjectively with each other, with herself, and with the wider environment. She did this by using objects in the environment (pillows) and by using words to signify associated meanings (pillows and sleep) and actions ("go, go, go"). She also used her adult understandings of humour to mediate the activity. She later explained "... to jolly things along, we can use humour in lots of different situations, like to cheer children up and to jolly them along" (Interview, 14 November, 2000).

Em and Kate used their bodies to joke with each other and to purposively communicate ideas about sleeping (heads on pillows), gift giving, receiving (bells), showing affection (hugging, kissing and head patting), and the thrill of falling (forwards onto carpet). Teacher Mo continually reinforced their social awareness, by reminding them of each other. As well as mediating social

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awareness, intersubjectivity, and connectedness, teacher Mo also mediated the development of empathy; she supported the toddlers' cuddling, kissing and patting actions. They expressed kindness and caring. The teacher's words as actions united them as a unit, together with her and the physical environment.

7.2.2 Event 12: Toddling, sliding and hiding

Background:

Eastbridge, Outside. The same day, 20 minutes later.

The slide is teacher Mo's play focus for Em and Kate. It is next to a flexible canvas tunnel-tube. Both slide and tube mediate playful communication in this scenario.

Jo (4 years, 10 months) is hiding in one end of the canvas tunnel. He is dressed in a leopard suit. The tunnel moves with his movements and this attracts the attention of Em. Teacher Mo stands beside the slide, one arm outstretched, supporting Kate, who readies herself at the top of the slide. Em, standing a metre from the tunnel, points to it, looks at the teacher (her mother), and looks again at the tunnel, thereby initiating the teacher's talk.

Teacher Mo: "Who's in there Em? Is that Jo, is that Jo? Go and have a look, go and have a look Em."

Kate slides down the slide, she toddles towards the tunnel end. Em stands beside Kate, watching Kate.

Teacher Mo: "Em, I mean Kate, go and see who's in the tunnel. Who's in the tunnel? Who is it?"

Kate bends over, holding the tunnel edge, she kneels and positions herself half inside one end of the tunnel.

          "Oh Kate who is it? Who is it?

Say boo to whoever's in the tunnel, say boo."

Jo: "Brrrr..." (growling)

Teacher Mo: "that was a funny sound that came out"

Jo at other end of tunnel from Kate, makes more high pitched noises:

"Urrh urrh…"

Em watches Kate and the tunnel, Em toddles over and sees Jo at the other end of the tunnel. She makes no reaction but toddles over towards the teacher for a turn on the slide.

Jo runs out his end and away.

Kate looks out from the tunnel too late, too slow to see him disappear.

Teacher Mo: "Oh, who was it Kate? Who was it?

Kate: "Daar."

Teacher Mo: "Jo, was it" [then she rehears Kate, daar/dark]

"Is it dark in there is it? It is dark; are you going to go in?"

Analysis and discussion
Roles, contradictions and actions

Though the playful activity of sliding and the humorous activity of hiding united these children and teacher, the roles of the individual participants in this event were not directed to the same immediate group goal. It is the contradictions in people's actions within activity systems that provide the motivating ongoing force for the activity and the group goal (Engeström, 1987). The group goal revolved around relationships with the slide, the tunnel, and each other. Different aims motivated the three groups: the teacher, the toddlers and four-year-old Jo. Thus Jo and teacher Mo developed and extended the playful and humorous hiding theme in the play with the toddlers (Em and Kate) as a participating audience. Jo and the teacher understood the incongruity that made pretending not to know who was in the tunnel humorous for them. They both took playful roles in the performance. Teacher Mo held overall power in the play and controlled the direction of the play. She described how her use of humour, initiating the hiding and finding game in this case, fitted with her teacher role:

I rate humour really highly in the centre, knowing the appropriateness of humour for the children. You've got to know what humour's appropriate

really. It's a good balance between being independent and thinking of others in the group (Interview, 14 November, 2000).

She emphasised the developmental appropriateness of humour for both groups and individuals. Thus Jo, being almost five years old, could understand and play the joking "hide and seek" role, which the teacher suggested he play. The toddlers however seemed to be more focused on the separate physical elements in the play; they were preoccupied with the immediate aim of mastering physical skills such as sliding, climbing, walking, and bending (without falling over) to look in the tunnel. In accordance with her mediating role teacher Mo prioritised these mastery aims for the toddlers, assisting them in repetitively practising climbing up, turning around, and sliding down. She also introduced the more complex abstract concepts of hiding and finding, which amused her and Jo, but the humour seemed to be beyond the toddlers' comprehension. As in the previous event 11, this teacher sensitively prioritised these children's awareness of each other, thereby promoting the importance of relationships and "togetherness" as centre goals.

The toddlers and Jo used their bodies as the primary means of communication (Jo as a leopard did growl, as well as run). Teacher Mo used words that the toddlers understood. When she suggested that they look to see who was hiding, they did so, peeping into the tunnel. Kate made a half intelligible comment, possibly explaining why she could not see who was in the tunnel. She said "daar, which the teacher interpreted as "dark". The teacher also interpreted Em's bodily expression of her desire for a turn on the slide. The children's body movements were directed towards purposeful action (Merleau Ponty, 1962). Teacher Mo used words instead of actions to provide a running commentary about their actions. She was as repetitive with her words as they were in their actions.

Event 12 continues:

> Kate comes out of the tunnel edge and starts pushing a nearby toy pram to and fro.
>
> Em is still toddling towards teacher Mo, both arms outstretched effectively communicating the message to be helped onto the first box-step up the slide.
>
> Teacher Mo: "You'd like to have your turn on the slide now would you Em?"
>
> Em starts climbing up the graduated boxes towards the top of the slide. Kate, meanwhile, starts climbing up the slide itself.
>
> Teacher Mo: "Oh hullo, are you coming up the slide Kate? You're coming up the slide."
>
> She laughs at the incongruity of Kate going up, rather than down, the slide.
>
> Kate gets to the top of the slide before Em. Teacher Mo helps her turn around and slide down. As Em starts to slide down, Kate starts to climb up again. They meet at the bottom, gently.

(Eastbridge, 22.09.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Actions as gestures

Both Em and Kate used gestures and whole body movements to communicate very actively their wants as well as their playful feelings. The social, physical, and historical context contributed to the motivation for this sliding and hiding play. Thus the slide, the box steps, and the tunnel all mediated communication between the teacher and the children. Ideas of "hide and seek" traditionally pervade children's play and adult conceptions of children's play. Sliding, like hiding, is a common activity for young children in New Zealand. Public playgrounds often have slides. The physical presence of both slide and tunnel reinforced their acceptance as objects signifying adult conceptions of "playfulness".

The teacher's role, in using the joking humour of hide and seek, the jollying humour of catching ("go get her"), and seeing the incongruous humour in

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climbing up the slide, dominated these events. The toddlers' playfulness, in comparison, seemed more purposeful. It included: their alternating imitation of each other, repetition, turn-taking, squealing joy, and the shared significance of mediating objects, like cushions, that also signified lying down and sleep. The feature that really stood out for the researcher was the very physically non-verbal communication styles of these pre-verbal children being playful. Their active bodily communication stood in stark contrast to the teacher's use of words as well as actions, to mediate and to interpret the toddlers' pre-verbal gestures and body signals. In her teaching role teacher Mo used humour that she and Jo, who was four years old, understood. The toddlers were purposefully playful in their toddling way.

7.3 LAUGHTER AND SILLINESS

Play with nonsensical words was a common feature in many events including all five events presented in Chapter 6 where children played with rules around words. Because words are tools for thinking (Vygotsky, 1932/1986) word play requires some cognitive complexity. The following two events, 13 and 14, describe silly play where the children are between 3 and 5 years old and thus verbal, yet the physical body assumes primacy over words for communicating playfulness and humour.

7.3.1 Event 13: Teacher as clown

Background:
Eastbridge: Outside, early morning, teacher Kat enjoys being very physically active and playing with the children. The researcher sits nearby, watching and videoing.

> Olivia (4 years, 9 months) sitting on the climbing frame, looks towards teacher Kat who's come outside. Teacher Kat picks up a ball and begins doing skilful "hacky sack" movements, kicking it in the air, not letting the ball touch the ground.
>
> Olivia: "I'm going to cli-imb." [chanting]

Olivia hangs upside down, legs curled over a bar of the climbing frame.

Teacher Kat: "Your hair's like my hair Olivia, It's all standing up."

Teacher Kat holds the ball. She has short spiky, orange, clown-like hair.

Saul(2 years):   "Throw it up"…[to teacher Kat]

Teacher Kat: "Up there? Up there, where the sun is shining?"

She throws the ball really high, 3 stories up. It hits a window.

Researcher: "Jeepers Kat."

Four children leave their play (jumping from large boxes) to excitedly watch teacher Kat throwing the ball really high. They turn to me grinning, sharing their delight at my comment and the teacher's spunk.

Kat (seemingly oblivious), gets ready to throw again. She uses a lot of force in her whole body:

Teacher Kat: "Another big one, ready?"

Teacher Kat: "Whahoa."

Teacher Kat: "Do you wanna go?" [to Josh (3 years)]

Josh takes the ball from her and throws it straight up in the air, imitating Kat's style.

Teacher Kat: "Good one…"

Mai (3 years, 11 months) picks up the ball as it lands on the ground. She has a go, throwing the ball straight up.

Teacher Kat: "Whahoa, Whahoa."

Kat catches the ball as it comes down.

Mai: "Again. Again. Again."

Kat puts ball behind her back, hidden up her T shirt. She runs around the children (five children now). They see the lump on her back.

Teacher Kat: "Okay, okay, ready? I'll do a header."

She does, a high one!

Morning tea-time interrupts.

(Eastbridge, 31.08.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Teachers play too?

This teacher was particularly physically playful. Like the children, a lot of her playfulness was expressed in her body movements. She was skilled at mime and, with her short spiky orange hair and physical agility, she also looked like a clown. On another occasion she was observed skillfully juggling three and four tennis balls, performing for the children. She moved quickly and she did throw the ball in this event "Pokemon" style, with one arm outstretched, imitating the style of throw on a currently popular children's television programme. By using this style she signified acceptance of Pokemon to the children. (Pokemon play does surface later that day).

Teacher Kat had fun and enjoyed being playful in this way. The children seem to accept her in this playful, un-adult role. Several children tried repeating her ball-throwing skills thus imitating her actions. Teacher Kat made an explicit comparison between hers and Olivia's hair styles, thereby positioning herself close to the children and reducing the adult-child power imbalance.

However, unlike most children, she did dominate the play. She retained the power and authority of a teacher, yet behaved almost like a child. With her physical prowess she was, in some ways, closer to a super-hero role model than a child, or a teacher. She could throw the ball far higher than the children (and most teachers) can. Teacher Kat, with her performance and ball throwing skills, filled the roles of primary, secondary and tertiary mediating artifact in this playful activity (Wartofsky, 1979). Though she had the advantage in being a central mediating artifact in the play, Kat did however also sustain the play. The teachers' role in sustaining and not killing play is a challenge for many teachers, described by many researchers including Broström (1996) and Van Oers (1996).

Later, after morning-tea:

> Kat initiates play, by approaching the empty dinosaur table [very low table with
> an emptied box of plastic dinosaur figures beside it]. She asks the nearby
> children: "Right then which ones can I play with? [dinosaurs are on the ground]
> She gets no verbal response, but immediately four children come and join her.
> They role-play, using the dinosaurs as puppets. They play at eating, saving,
> escaping etc. with lots of sound effects and crawling on the floor led by Teacher
> Kat. She leads the play. They hunt for "baby rhino", a concept initiated by Kat.
> The children play with both Teacher Kat and the dinosaurs. They laugh while
> playing.
>
> Emily, sitting with Teacher Eli on the sofa, imitates Teacher Kat's voice and
> giggles.

Analysis and discussion
Laughter and motivation

The fun and laughter in this role-playing dinosaur story seemed to add
tension, and hence motivation, to the play. Teacher Kat both initiated and led
this "baby rhino" pretend play. Her attitude to being playful and humorous is
summed up thus: "Children can't express humour and have fun if the teachers
can't... When the teachers are feeling in a fun mood it affects the children.
Staff getting on really well together creates the whole atmosphere" (Interview,
14 November, 2000).

In some respects her role seemed to be that of an entertainer or performer.
However, she was also aware of the pedagogical responsibilities in her
teaching role: "Some days the teachers are really crazy and the children pick
up on it, but we know the boundaries, we can joke around but we still do what
we're meant to. We still teach." (Interview, 14 November, 2000).

In these events teacher Kat did use words to complicate the dinosaur play, by
describing the activities of the dinosaurs and developing a potentially complex
story around these plastic hunters. Thus concepts of being lost, found and

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hiding, were introduced to the story line. Kat also introduced concepts of height, velocity, and space, up there "where the sun's shining" to the ball throwing. However, her overall aim in her role as a teacher was for children and teachers to have fun together, rather than to be a didactic teacher.

7.3.2 Event 14: Contagious laughter

Background: Southbridge, outside, Beside the wood-work table, three four year old boys have built catapult contraptions which operate by jumping on one end of the plank of wood which is balanced on a fulcrum in the middle (like a see-saw). The other end then flicks up and sends the objects (bottle tops) balanced on it flying. None of the children has English as a first language and only Lau speaks some English, Ali and Mal being recent immigrants. Lau is from Iraq and Ali and Mal are from Somalia. Today was Ali's first morning session. He had been attending the afternoon sessions with younger children.

> Ali arranges 3 bottle tops on one end of the plank.
> Mal gives high pitched squeaks as he sees Ali do this. Mal then fetches two more bottle tops, which are lying nearby on the ground, (possibly they've fallen off the nearby carpentry table).
> Lau is also watching: "Uh ooh"
> Meanwhile Ali uses one leg to stamp firmly on the upright end of the plank, sending the 3 bottle tops flying, he laughs, Mal giggles and watches as Ali repeats the jump three times. All three boys laugh hysterically, glancing at each other and bending over helplessly, using no words.

(Southbridge, 2.11.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Laughter as communication

These children were totally involved in the activity of catapulting bottle tops to see how far they could fly. They were united intersubjectively by both the

joint activity and their gleeful laughter, which expressed huge enjoyment. They laughed after each catapult, their bodies almost doubling over with hysterical ("gleeful", Sherman, 1975) laughter as they looked at each other and the flying bottle tops. As with the dinosaur play in event 13, the laughter seemed to energise and increase the motivation for the play. The researcher found it difficult not to laugh also. She wondered if these children, without spoken English, were instead using laughter as a means of communicating with voices as well as bodies. She had observed this group of boys being very gleeful on several occasions. Therefore the researcher decided to ask the teachers how they interpreted this very playful, happy, amusing, and almost hysterical, gleeful (Sherman, 1975) behaviour.

Teacher Cath: "Yes, they laugh as a way of talking. That's where humour's great, because it breaks down the barriers... These children are all Muslim and all play together, yet they speak three different languages" (Interview, 2.11.2000).

The children used their bodies a lot, jumping on the catapult, almost falling over laughing, and stumbling around. The three of them seemed to become one unit of activity, connected in their dancing movements by roles that reflected their common historical and ethnic cultures, religion and gender. Laughter, with associated body expressions (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) united them despite, or instead of, a common spoken language. They moved synchronously and hysterically together. Engeström's (1999) analysis of how the motivation and tension in activity systems reflects "multi-voicedness coexisting with monism" (p. 20) seems to describe the unity that also included linguistic diversity in this self-sustaining group activity.

7.4 PLAYFUL/HUMOROUS ROLES IN PRETEND PLAY

The following two events, 15 and 16, pick up on the theme of playful and humorous roles in playful pretend play, this being an area where young children can experience a wide variety of roles and associated power

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structures as they re-create aspects of roles they've observed in the "real world", which includes the fantasy world of the media. Children pretending are playing with roles and their play is frequently serious. Playfulness is not obvious in this serious play, yet it is an implicit aspect of the flexibility that accompanies pretending and that enables children to assume other roles.

7.4.1 Event 15: Transformational roles and boxes

Background:

Events 15 and 16 involved the same children in Northbridge centre over a one-month period, using large cardboard boxes as versatile, transformational, props, to support their playful pretend play. On this first occasion Eliza and Frank had been using large cardboard boxes as important objects in their pretend play. In the past hour the boxes had undergone several transformations, all based on the children's experiences and understandings of the world, gleaned from the media, books, TV, adult talk, everywhere.

Frank: "This is going to be a fire truck and a police van." [to the researcher]

Eliza, playing alongside, is busy joining two boxes together with sellotape.

Frank: "You know what Sophie?"

Researcher: "What?"

Frank: "This is our pirate ship."

The morning tea routine interrupts the play flow and Eliza drags the pirate ship closer to the eating area and ties it up with some string.

After morning tea, Eliza is preoccupied with her new baby brother.

Milly, (4 years) picks up a pirate ship box and puts it on her head, like a giant hat, and walks off. Frank, seeing this, somehow entices her back to the original play space with the box. When I look again (a few minutes later) the boxes have become beds. Frank turns out the lights saying seriously:

Frank: "It's going to be night time. I'll just close the curtains".

Milly: "laughs."

Frank:	"No, that's not funny. If you laugh you won't be able to be in my game".
Milly	"Okay". [She shuts her eyes super-tightly, for a few seconds]
Frank:	"It's going to be morning. We're going to do everything special today". [said with pleasure] as he turns the lights on

and opens the curtains.

(Northbridge, 29.09.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Rules in role play

This event illustrates players considering each other's roles in relation to the play, and in deciding to either develop or not develop playfulness and humor in their roles. Children transform reality, according to the rules that are created and develop both inside and outside the pretend role-play. Both sides of the play were made visible when Milly slipped out of her pretend role, laughed inappropriately, and Frank reprimanded her with the ultimate rule about roles: "If you laugh you won't be able to be in my game." The play will end. Milly did seem to enjoy laughing and being playful in her role, but she had to adapt her role to match Frank's.

The excerpt also clarifies how exposure to experiences in the world assists the development of the imagination, by providing the child with imaginative resource material (Lindqvist, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). Experiences includes books and other media, as well as direct experience. In this case Frank brought his experiences of adventure and vehicles to the play. Thus he referred to police vans, fire trucks, and pirate ships, as well as beds and sleeping routines (lights out, curtains closed). Experience in the real world informed his abilities to think analytically. He understood that light day follows dark night and could think and plan ahead; "It's going to be morning. We're going to do everything special today." Combined imagination with the flexibility inherent in playfulness, enabled Frank to pleasurably plan for the day ahead and Milly to enjoy her supportive role in the play.

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Children do not usually create totally new roles in their pretend play. They tend to imitate aspects of roles around them. For Frank the roles revolved around sleeping routines. This sort of role imitation is much more complex than simply assimilating. Imitation in pretend play implies that children are actively and creatively developing understandings of aspects of the roles being imitated (Corsaro, 1985; El'konin, 2001; Sutton-Smith, 1971; Vygotsky, 1978).

The repetitive activity of pretend role play can mediate children's developing understandings of the adult world as they learn to separate meanings from words and symbols from objects, and develop their understandings of concepts. The cardboard boxes came to symbolise a variety of objects which had both generalised and personal meanings for the children in their play. From a socio-cultural perspective children repetitively playing with the boxes as symbolic objects were beginning to develop "scientific (academic) concepts" from "spontaneous concepts" (Vygotsky 1986). This process of developing concepts is integral to the repetition and imitation, the negotiating of rules around roles, the personal sense and meaning-making of pretend role play.

Frank was observed role-playing sleeping rituals on several occasions. In this re-creation, he may have been internalising the reality of the real ritual, emotionally and cognitively (El'konin, 2001; El'koninova, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). In his pretend role Frank used his imagination to exercise control over the sleeping activity. In this sense imaginative thinking is also activity. Cardboard boxes, words, and other children mediated his internalisation and developing understanding of what these external concepts meant for him personally. These artifacts also mediated developing relationships, communication and togetherness, as common goals for much of the children's play. In his repetitive play around a sleeping theme Frank was learning while also thinking, feeling, and gaining experience through the role-playing activity. In this event Frank's subtle playfulness, and Milly's sense of

humour, contributed flexibility to the role-playing and the internalisation process.

7.4.2 Event 16: From Jack-in-the-box to posting parcels

Background:

The previous day Pip had hidden in a box and Eliza and Tom had put boxes on their heads and walked around bumping into each other on purpose, having fun experiencing different visual fields. All four of the children involved in this event had been on an aeroplane, three overseas. Tom had returned the previous week from Canada, full of stories, and Pip was soon to go to France. Pip's mother is French.

> Frank and Milly were humorously playing a jack-in-the-box game where they shut themselves in a box, held the flaps down, then together jumped up laughing. After the jack-in-the-box play, Milly was hiding alone in the box and teacher Jim jokingly commented:
>
> Teacher Jim: "Oh, we'd better put this empty box away as no one's using it."
>
> On being told that Milly was inside, (which he knew), he suggested posting Milly, off to France.
>
> Teacher Jim: "Who's got a stamp?"
>
> Pip: "Put a stamp on me so I can go off to France too."...
> [excitedly]
>
> Tom (4 years, 9 months) also joins the activity. Children begin drawing stamps on boxes, all talking together discussing and imagining traveling - by plane - to France and Canada. They take turns sellotaping up the large cardboard boxes of those that want to be posted, with the children inside.

(Northbridge, 28.8.2000).

Analysis and Discussion
Repetitiveness: imitation

In playing Jack-in-the-box Frank and Milly were having fun, joking with the incongruity of obvious hiding and sudden surprising, while also being in control in unison and experiencing very physical feelings of together crouching to hide, and jumping up in surprise. Their crouching down and jumping up roles synchronistically expressed and embodied their shared intersubjectivity (Goncu, 1993).

Themes related to sleeping, travel and hiding, with their associated roles were recurrent in the play with boxes. Several researchers (Corsaro, 1985, 1997; El'koninova, 2001) have commented on the repetitiveness of pretend play themes, as well as the imitative structure of role play. Both of these aspects of play reflect children learning new concepts. Following the theories of El'konin and Vygotsky, Elkoninova (2001) suggests that the internalisation of external concepts requires repetitive play. Some concepts require a lot of repetition and this can look like imitation. For example, Frank seemed to be working on the meanings around concepts associated with sleep, day and night, and repeating these concepts in his play. Similarly, the theme of hiding and surprising was repeated by several children, using the large boxes as mediating artifacts, while experiencing and internalising associated feelings and thoughts.

Milly, hiding in the box, was imitating others that she had observed doing likewise. However, to play the activity provides a different experience from that of observing others. Frank and Milly together re-created the hiding game in their unique way, not copying, but appropriating, imitating, and adapting the activity of hiding and surprising. By playing with concepts in this experimental way, external concepts associated with roles played gradually acquire internalised sense and meaning for those children (Zinchenko, 2001). By using mediating artifacts to playfully develop these roles and associated concepts these children were creating zones of proximal development

(Vygotsky, 1976). They were furthering their understandings of abstract concepts in concretely playful ways.

The children in events 15 and 16 used the cardboard boxes in different ways that mediated them playing and relating together. Through sharing and complementing each other in the roles they played, the children's imagination, like cognition, was distributed across the players (Salomon, 1993). Shared, distributed imaginations contributed complexity to children's playfulness and loosely united the children in activity, creating shared zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, in these events the sum was greater than the parts.

7.5 NAMES: ROLES AND IDENTITY

Name play was a fairly frequent four-year old teasing, joking phenomenon. It was particularly interesting because names, as personal special words, may acquire subjective meanings, contributing to children's developing feelings of identity and role. Children played with sounds as well as the meanings of names. They sometimes teased and sometimes improvised experimentally with sounds, rhyme and rhythm.

7.5.1 Event 17: Name play

Background:
Northbridge centre: This name-play event was introduced by four year olds and mediated them creating their own peer-group "togetherness", while waiting to be served food one lunch-time. It did not involve teachers. Anna starts playing with name sounds and the others pick it up.

Olaf:	"Tom, you've moved".
Anna:	"You know what Tom's really called? He's called Lom, Olaf's really called Lollaf".
Olaf:	"Sammy's really called Spammy".

Sammy:	"No Wammy".
Peta:	"Eeta, no Weeta and Dolly's called Polly, no Wally. Byman [Simon] Pope. My name is called Geeta".
Sammy:	"My name is Wammy". [repeats 3x, to everyone]
Olaf:	"I'm Lollaf".
Anna:	"I'm Panna".
Tom:	"Tom's name is called crrrrrrr..."[moving chair a lot, while making sounds, rather than words]
Sammy:	"My name is called Andewope, I'm Andewope".
Tom:	"I'm Gwandelope".
Sammy:	"I'm Ropeerope".
Tom:	"I'm Hairyhair".
Sammy:	"I'm Photograph".
Tom:	"I'm Motograph".
Anna:	"And my name is Wupwupglee".

(Northbridge, 15.12.1999)

Analysis and discussion
Names and roles

The name play began with rhyming words, before moving onto sounds, when Tom became "crrrrrrrr". This led on to complicated word creations, both with and without meaning, rhyme and rhythm, before becoming quite playfully absurd. This play was not as linear as it reads. The children spoke quickly, intersubjectively, dialogically, and chaotically in tune with each other, using their imaginations to create sounds and meanings. The words they created as names conjured up images of absurd nonsense roles, perhaps freeing them from the mundane constraints and roles associated with their real names. The children played with the rules for words and the rules for play, clearly asserting themselves. For example, Sammy refused to be called Spammy, substituting Wammy, while Olaf accepted his name was Lolaf, and announced this to all. Interestingly, Anna was both first and last speaker, almost symmetrically and poetically rounding out the event.

This play with their names mediated children's individual and group awareness, agency, and developing consciousness. The use of words, as in this event, mediates consciousness becoming a social process.

Words, including names, offered great possibilities for creative play, for children constrained physically by chairs and tables. The play varied from subversive and humorous, to aesthetically appealing tone and sound combinations that also combined meaning (as in events 6 and 7). Play with names was a common playful occurrence in all three early childhood centres.

7.6 SUMMARY: ROLES, COMMUNICATION AND MOTIVATION

Roles are one component of the activity system model, "Children's playful communication in context" (Figure 3.2) used for purposes of data analysis in this study. Roles are always understood in relation to the other components of the model, and also in relation to the overlapping interactions of other, ever-expanding activity systems (Engeström, 1987, 1999). Thus participants in these events assumed a wide variety of roles, sometimes simultaneously and motivated by various goals.

All of these events were plays within plays; they occurred as part of the everyday centre programme, so were ideologically positioned within the pedagogical goals of teachers and other adults. For some of the players, the playfulness and humour in these events motivated and facilitated continued activity. Children's roles in the events reflected the dynamics of their various relationships and changed accordingly. Relationships and roles also reflected the goals of the activity. Thus teachers and children engaged in the same activity usually had different goals (and roles), so were differently motivated to engage in the activity. For example the pretend play events (15, 16) may be understood on several levels simultaneously, reflecting the different goals of the players as well as the goals of the interpreting researcher.

Developmental differences among children further exaggerated their different goals for being playful together. For example, playfulness for the one year olds in events 11 and 12 involved watching and imitating each other, yet was very linked to their individual body sensations of climbing, sliding, and falling, reflecting the sensori-motor developmental phase of this pre-verbal age group (Lokken, 2000). In contrast 4-year-old Jo playfully hid and anticipated his hiding role in relation to others. As well as having greater physical control over his body, Jo could use words for actions and for thinking. The development of language enables profound and fundamental cognitive and communicative changes as well as greater diversity and complexity in the roles that children play and the goals that motivate play (Halliday, 1993). Roles are always relative and changing, created in relationships, and through dialogue that is both verbal and non-verbal (Fogel, 1993).

The pretend role-play of young children is of particular interest, because in pretend play children do slip in and out of role, experiencing a range of different ways of being and relating. Events 15 and 16 illustrate how children's experiences outside the centre, with their families and in the wider community, provided rich nourishment for their role-play. Thus, the roles children played and pretended with were meaningful and relevant in their everyday lives, both outside and inside the early childhood centre. Children's pretend roles reflected the culture of adults and the wider world. From this perspective children play at roles to make sense of the world; they play in order to actively, playfully, create and re-create, rather than to copy or directly imitate roles (Sutton-Smith, 1971). They do not play to escape reality, but to experience and understand it. The flexibility that is an inherent part of being playful and funny seemed to add a creative edge to how children internalised and re-created roles, without rigidly following the rules of play.

Signs, symbols and tools mediate communication for all roles (Vygotsky, 1978; Wartofsky, 1979). The pre-verbal signs of young children were a feature in several of the events in this chapter. However non-verbal signs,

expressed in body language, were also an important means for talkers (adults and children) communicating playfulness. Mediated activity connected participants in their playful and humorous roles and relationships, with the dynamics of these playful relationships motivating and sustaining playful communication.

In this study the culture and history of the early childhood centre, and teachers' personalities, influenced how teachers understood their roles in relation to both children and teachers being playful and humorous. Within each early childhood centre the equipment, planned activities, physical space, and teachers' attitudes reflected and endorsed the accepted centre rules as norms for what sort of playful and humorous behaviour was condoned and acceptable (El'konin, 2001; Kalliala 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). A few teachers did initiate, support, and relate to children playfully. Others seemed to view their roles as teachers more seriously and less playfully. The roles teachers played seemed to be related to the ethos of the centre, a theme to be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 8

CHILDREN'S NARRATIVES IN CENTRE COMMUNITIES

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter explores the research question, "how do young children experience playfulness and humour in their communication?" through the community lens of the activity system "Children's playful communication in context" (Figure 3.2). From a CHAT perspective "community" importantly conveys the understanding that individual consciousness is created through relationships with others in the community. Thus individual consciousness is socially constructed through relationships in communities. Relationships are historically situated and reflect the communities within which they exist; relationships too are in continual flux. This perception that everything is continually changing can complicate understandings of community. It can also free up understandings, ensuring that notions of "community" do not become reified structures, but remain open systems.

Community encompasses layers, or systems, of influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), so may be understood from various perspectives and as Wells (2004) explains the word "community", is open to different interpretations (Wells, 2004). From a macro perspective, each early childhood centre in this study was part of the early childhood community of New Zealand, so shared similar aims as expressed in policies, regulations, and national curriculum. The early childhood centres were also part of the even wider macro communities of New Zealand and the world. For purposes of analysis, "community" in this study refers to a more micro perspective that includes the amalgam of playful and humorous relationships of participants engaged in activity systems within the three early childhood centres. Thus, community consists of individual

participants engaged in activity systems with shared motivating aims as described in Figure 3.2 and by Wells (2004).

Like community, activity systems also comprise multiple layers of meaning. The centre, or all early childhood centres as a group, may form a system. However, for the purposes of this study the activity system refers to the actual physical and psychological activity, presented as "events", of groups of children being playful and humorous together within these early childhood centres.

During the fourth and final phase of data gathering the researcher's prime interest was the playful use of words by four year olds. This was the main reason for the addition to the study of the third centre, Southbridge, where most children were four years old. The researcher wondered how the playful communication styles of these older children differed from those of the predominantly younger children in the other two centres.

In response to the earlier focus in Chapter 7, on the playful and humorous roles of teachers and children, the researcher's focus broadened to include greater contextual awareness of the playful cultures of all three centres and the differences between them. This researcher focus was intensified by the particularly playful styles of all three teachers in Southbridge centre. The researcher wondered about the links between playful and humorous teachers and playful and humorous children and playful early childhood centre communities. The interest in children's playful and humorous use of words also developed to include a broader awareness of cognition as a collaborative process (Rogoff, 1998) distributed (Salomon, 1993) across and situated (Kirshner & Whitson, 1997) within communities. Rogoff (1998) has explained cognition as a collaborative process, while Salomon (1993) has described the distributed nature of cognition, and Kirshner & Whitson (1997) have explored the situated nature of learning. These perspectives of learning and cognition all emphasise the social nature of learning, exemplified in this study in children's use of language including words, as well as sounds and rhythm, to

construct playful and humorous narratives together, as members of early childhood centre communities.

Initially the researcher envisaged the verbal narratives of four year olds as alternatives to (or extensions of) other communicative forms, such as the chanting, musical, movement-based narratives described in Chapter 6, and the bodily intersubjectivity described in Chapter 5. The awareness of words in narrative construction developed from researcher interest in the complexities around children's developing use of words for relating (Fogel, 1993) and communicating playfully, as well as for making sense and creating meaning from their experiences as discussed by Bruner (1983,1986) and Halliday (1973, 1993). Though much humour and playfulness were communicated without words, the narrative (verbal) nature of playful and humorous events increased in importance as this study progressed. Words added cognitive complexity to playfulness, at least for the researching observer. This was partly because words were more observable and interpretable than the subjective feelings and ideas they expressed. As Jackson (1996), Merleau-Ponty (1962), Shotter (1993) and others have explained, even words cannot fully express others' experiences.

The research questions generated during phase three, which became a focus for phase four, were:

- *How do children use narrative structures and words when being playful and humorous?*

- *What role do the teachers play in children's playful and humorous narratives?*

- *How does teacher playfulness affect the centre culture?*

This chapter addresses these questions in the above order. There is some overlap, because several of theevents address all of the questions, with

teachers playing roles in children's narrative constructions (event 18 for example). Section 8.1 explores conversational narrative systems of activity where words add plot and drama to the activity. Section 8.2 elaborates on the concept of narratives as cultural tools. In Section 8.3 teacher style is further explored in relation to children's playfulness.

8.2 COMMUNITY PRACTICES: PLAYFUL CONVERSATIONAL NARRATIVES

The events described in this section illustrate how the practices of teachers and children, combined with wider community and cultural factors, expressed the culture of these centres as localised communities. Activity systems, in the form of co-constructed narratives, overlapped in an infinite network of interconnecting "expansive" systems (Engeström, 1987, 1999). Chasing, catching, killing by various means (including poison), and magical powers are common themes in the following four playful events presented in this section (18, 19, 20, 21). Though this combination of activities implies tragedy, only the comedic aspects were observed in the children's play. Busy activity reigned overall.

For coherence, most of the events are presented here in naturally occurring sub-sections, each followed by discussion and analysis.

8.2.1 Event 18: Playful teacher chasing

Background:
Southbridge, 27th Oct. 2000. This event evolved after a special "morning tea time". Unusually, this "tea-time" included all twenty-four children.

The following memo describes the scene-setting atmosphere:

> "Three teachers, shared history, all born in the seventies, within two
> months of each other, all wearing seventies clothes today, will jointly

celebrate their birthdays, on Saturday night (tomorrow) in the centre, parents and friends are invited, me too. This is a "grown ups" party. However the preparations and party-like atmosphere are pervading the children's programme. The teachers have been trying out their hippy-like long seventies garb, as if they're also in dress-ups. Children's collage materials are being transformed into streamers and other decorative accessories. And now the teachers are testing a fondue set, with the children as consumers of fruit pieces pierced onto shish kebab sticks and then dipped, by adults, into the hot chocolate fondue pot which a teacher holds over the portable gas fondue stove, on a low table. The adults joke and laugh while children watch and wait, with interest." (memo, 27th Oct. 2000).

Teacher S had been most "in control" during the fondue making; moving among the twenty odd children, who crowded around a low table, she handed out chocolate buttons and fondue sticks, explaining, directing and instructing. As this "morning tea time" finished and the children began moving to other activities, the teacher-child power balance also changed, playfully. The "teacher chasing" scene erupted suddenly, as about 6 children burst out of the building, chasing teacher Sue.

Alan: "We can just get a machine and it can crack the world." (Alan: 4years, 10 months)

Ben: "And we'll eat you up." (Ben: 4years, 4months)

Jo: "And we are going to make you fall down. If you run your fastest we'll run after you." (Jo: 4years, 10months)

Teacher Sue: "Go on then catch me."

Teacher Sue: "You can't get me." [chanting]

[She stands facing her chasers and makes a teasing face at them, calmly twinkling her fingers in the air, beside her ears, in time to the chant].

[They run after teacher Sue] yelling:

          "Get her... get her get her get her..."

[The number of chasers increases to 8]

Teacher Sue: "Oh you've got me."

Analysis and discussion
Power - group agency – transition times

These spontaneous power-play games seemed more frequent during transitions between activities and routines. The time and freedom involved in moving from the morning tea-time indoors (quite controlled, for safety reasons) to the outdoors, provided "space" for playful, gleeful, chaotic teacher chasing. As also noted by Stephenson (1999) in her study of children's outside play, wild physical playfulness was more common outdoors where there were fewer physical barriers such as ceilings, walls and doors. Together these children asserted their group agency towards the powerful teacher, who reciprocated by playfully teasing and further encouraging the chasing. It was the teacher's provocative controlling and teasing behaviour that initiated this chasing event. Children's and teacher's normal roles were subversively, playfully, and humorously reversed, while the children appeared to experience powerful feelings of being physically and emotionally in control.

Event 18 continues:

They pull her down to the ground, their movements matching screams of joy as they connect with her physically touching, their exuberance expressed in sounds and actions. Her body flops voluntarily and she lies on the ground. Three children climb and lie over her, kicking and waving their legs in the air, laughing and screaming with glee, yet carefully avoiding any hurting. Others watch excitedly jumping. Gilda (4 years, 5 months, no English) initially watches then, seeing no danger, becomes the fourth to lie gently on the teacher, playfully kick her legs in the air and laugh.

Jackie (4 years, 9 months):"Cut her, cut her". [he waves two plastic knives].

Alongside: One child puts on the teacher's very large, black velvet, pointed sun hat that has fallen off her. The cone shaped hat covers his entire head. He jumps lots of excited little, hard bounces under a giant witch-like hat and giggles loudly.

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Despite all the physical excitement and words expressing violence, this rough and tumble play was non-violent. As Bjorklund and Pellegrini (2002) have pointed out, children playing rough and tumble do not physically hurt each other. The children understood the pretence in the drama, and the gentleness in rough and tumble. When the children were asked, on another occasion, how the teachers felt about being caught Rolf (4 years, 6 months) commented truthfully, "They like it, they laugh when they're caught" (interview, 19.02.2001). Themes of chasing, conquering and poisoning were observed in children's play in all three centres. However, these teachers allowed children to physically experience power and control in ways that were not observed in the other centres. This type of teacher chasing activity, where the teachers seemed to encourage children to express agency and power by reversing typical adult-child roles, was unique to this centre where it was a recurrent phenomenon. As products of the liberal seventies these teachers consciously and deliberately allowed the children to experiment and play with rules around power and position. As one teacher explained: "We don't have too many rules, or unnecessary rules". (Interview, Southbridge teachers 07.03.2001). They allowed the children to use them, as mediating artifacts, in the children's playful power plays around mythical themes.

Event 18 continues:

Teacher Sue: "Lift me up". [she offers up her hands]

Alan: "We can't lift you."

                 "Into the pond." [sandpit]

Screams from children...three of them pull her gently. She walks where they lead her, towards and into the sandpit, they begin putting sand on her

Teacher Sue runs out of the sandpit:

                 "I don't like it all over me."

Ben: "We'll put it on your feet so you'll die." [holding a shovel full of sand]

Teacher Sue: "Okay, if you just put it on my feet."

Teacher Sue   "I'll just roll these up" [she rolls up her pants,

They bury her feet in wet sand]

Teacher Sue: "Oh it's cold, oh oh it's freezing."

Jo: "You're dead now."

Teacher Sue: "Am I dead?"

Jo: "Yeah."

Teacher Sue: "What do I do now then? I suppose lie down"

Alan: "It's not funny." [to another child who's laughing]

She lies down in the sandpit, they bury her feet again

Jo: "Now you're going to grow into a tree."

Teacher Sue: "Am I growing into a tree?

Jo: "Yeap."

Ben: "Put her in the fire Put her in the fire Put her in the fire." [wood
to fire?]

Teacher Sue: "Help, Jackie save me."

[Jackie does so, while Teacher S tells the children that Jackie is saving her.]

Analysis and discussion
Power and myth

This complex scenario appeared to involve mythical concepts around death,
birth, growth and rebirth, and associated feelings of power, control, chaos,
and subversion. Incongruities abound and it is incongruities that define
humour according to McGhee (1979). In a sense the event reads like an
ironic joke. In summary, the powerless people (children) pulled the giant
(teacher, adult) to the ground, jumped on and physically conquered her,
before killing her, with plastic knives and (as the next segment of this event
indicates) poison. The giant was then buried in the sandpit (pond), from
where she was reborn as a tree. She grew and was then chopped down for
firewood and burnt, so conquered and killed again. Similar mythical chasing,
catching, rescuing, and killing themes (as also noted by Corsaro, 1985) were
observed in the play of children in all three centres, but the usual pattern

involved child-child chasing, rather than child-teacher chasing. Of interest was how children playfully transformed these potentially tragic mythic themes into humorous and playful dramas. Of interest also was Alan's anxious reaction to the potential reality in the drama. As a developmentally older child he seemed to understand the implications behind the play and that death was serious.

Different theoretical perspectives provide various interpretations of this sort of play. According to Egan (1988), myth users (including children) compose and tell narratives to provide intellectual security. Mythic concepts can evoke strong feelings around security, fear, and power. Bettleheim (1976) explains how, from a psycho-social perspective, this type of play may assist children in expressing and dealing with powerful emotional feelings. Corsaro (1985) has described this spontaneous play in terms of "approach-avoidance routines" (p.219). He identified recurrent themes of death-rebirth, lost-found and danger-rescue. This teacher-chasing event involved elements of all three themes. The latter two could possibly also be interpreted as evolutionary echoes of survival instincts of early humans as discussed by Donald (1991).

From a CHAT perspective, the mythical concepts that children dramatise may mediate their developing understandings and feelings of being in the world. Thus in play children try out different perspectives, play with these roles, and explore feelings of agency in altered power relationships. Whatever the theoretical perspective, children in all three centres were observed dramatically, playfully, and humorously re-creating stories with mythical themes. In this context Bruner (1962) has described drama as the expressive art form of myth.

Just as the narratives of myth are story-shaped, with beginnings, ends, and plots in between, so children playing out mythic themes may learn to represent their experiences of the world as story-shaped. This line of thought leads to theories about narrative ways of knowing which, as Bruner (1986) explains, view knowledge as embedded in the stories we create and re-

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create. In this way stories give meaning to life's patterns. As Ochs & Capps (2001) point out, these narratives are not necessarily linear, logical, or final. The multi-voiced nature of playful narrative events can create disjointed, overlapping events that do reflect real life.

From a socio-cultural perspective an issue concerns the social origin of myths. In event 19, three boys (Alan, Ben, Jo) who were the leaders and the talkers, spontaneously improvised and re-constructed the dramatic event from an amalgam of stories seen and heard. It is likely that the drama developed from previous stories read, told, seen on TV, and learned in similar play with peers and possibly with adults in the wider community. These boys developed the creation-myth theme together. They introduced concepts around birth, death, and rebirth and other children picked up on them in their play. In this way individual cognition, expressed in imagination and playful carnival-like fun, became distributed across the group of players (Salomon, 1993).

Event 18 continues:

Teacher Sue: "What about making some fondue on the fire, some chocolate fondue?"

Jo: "Okay, and then we're going to put poisonous chocolate fondue all over your face."

Teacher Sue: "Now what sort of fondue are we going to make?"

Jo: "Chocolate and then we'll put it all over your face."

Teacher Sue: "No no no no."

Ollie (4 years, 8 months): "No we're going to eat it."

Teacher Sue: "We'll need some spoons….Lets find some things to dip in it. What can we find?"

[All play with the spoons in the pots, all standing and moving, no sitting].

Ollie: "I need a knife to cut you up."

Teacher Sue: "Oh no you can't cut me up now, I'm dead…"

(10.05-10.10 am, 27.10.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Teacher as mediating artifact

In this final scene the teacher, at the center of the drama, used words to gently remind the children that the joking playfulness was complete: "Oh no you can't cut me up now, I'm dead." She redirected the children away from the potentially chaotic playful teacher-chasing and killing drama, towards quieter, more controlled and serious sand play that focused on the children re-creating (through pretence) the fondue-making morning tea time of fifteen minutes earlier.

The teacher played a central mediating role throughout this drama, epitomising power in her position and size. In the beginning she provoked and thereby initiated the chasing game. As the game progressed her calm, yet involved and questioning manner in the midst of the children's excitement, ensured that chaos did not take over. For example, in lieu of her whole body being physically buried, she suggested that the children cover only her toes in sand. This they did, understanding that buried toes symbolised a buried person. On several occasions she also checked out her role-playing with the children: "What do I do now then? I suppose I lie down... Am I growing into a tree?" In these ways she allowed the children to play with her, as a living artifact, paradoxically taking a calm and serious role in the children's playful, at times humorous and joking, occasionally hysterical, extremely active, dramatic narrative.

As a community Southbridge differed from the other two centres in several respects. One striking difference, which is epitomized in this event, was the active role that teachers played in children's playful dramas. All three teachers in Southbridge centre were observed participating and even initiating playful and humorous dramatic events with children, and these events frequently altered the power balance between children and teachers. In this way these teachers allowed the children to experience group and individual agency, to make choices and to feel in control, in their playful

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dramas. On one level the role reversals and power shifts also made the events humorous and joke-like. As mentioned earlier Southbridge also had fewer teachers than the other centres and these teachers were friends with similar interests, likes and dislikes. They all enjoyed being silly and playing. These factors contributed to the relaxed community expressed in the playful ethos of the centre.

8.2.2   Event 19:   Making "poisonous"

Background: (14.11.00). Southbridge centre, (10.36) outside.
Music plays loudly in the background and a teacher sings to it in a jazzy style, "ba baa ba ba be ba…" For the past ten minutes about six children have been using hula hoops to chase and catch each other. The teachers have ruled that the children must ask others if they want to be caught with hula hoops, before actually catching them. Despite this rule the children seem to enjoy the chasing and catching game, possibly because the catching is still physically expressed in the act of looping a hoop over the captured.

However, the play theme changes from chasing and catching to a more united group focus on "making poisonous". The chasers have gathered under a tent-like fabric construction in a far corner of the playground where they are invisible but audible to outsiders.
Rolf begins:

Rolf:	"Now we need to make poisonous, okay."
Jim:	"Yeah with water."
Rolf:	"Now we need to make poisonous, okay, and they'll get dead."
	"Yeah, yeah". [a lot of laughter, Rolf, Jim, Zed]
Rolf:	"Off we go. Jim, lead in, right."
Jim:	"Off we go."

Together three boys (Rolf, Jim, Zed) run out from the tent and towards the sandpit, collect buckets, funnels and spades, and arrange them on the edge of the deck that surrounds the sandpit. Rolf begins digging in the sandpit.

Rolf: "We're going to trap all the girls, and the teachers."

Researcher: "Why"?

Analysis and discussion
Power and gender roles

The four year old boys at Southbridge seemed to be a united force at times, initiating and managing the chasing games, as illustrated in these two events, 18 and 19. The idea for "making poisonous" had developed out of the hula hoop chasing, with its restrictions on "asking before catching". Poisoning was a qualitatively different, abstract, and imaginative variation on catching and killing. In all three centres both boys and girls were observed playing with "poisonous", using the adjective as a noun. Davies (2003) notes the same linguistic and teacher-chasing phenomenon when she became the target for young children's chasing, attacking and killing (with "poisonous") play.

The myths and fairy tale stories that children re-created in playful narrative form also frequently re-created gendered stereotypes around power. This "male - female binary" (Davies, 2003) relationship is integral to many traditional myths, legends and fairy tales. In studies of preschool children and gender Davies (2003) has described how "...the idea of powerful, dominant (hegemonic) masculinity informed the interpretation that children made of characters and of narratives, and of what they were capable of imagining in positioning themselves as male or female" (p. 92).

In researching children's narrative constructions, Nicopoloulou and Richner (2004) have described how compared to the smooth relationship themes of girls' narratives, the themes that boys played with tended to be wrought with conflict: "the plots focused on fighting, destruction, and disorder...as defining themes of the story" (p. 361). Certainly this was the case at Southbridge. Girls did become participants in the play, in event 18 for example, though here the teacher was the only really active female participant and as "the enemy" she epitomised "power", to be overthrown violently, mainly by boys.

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Events 18 and 19 were directed and led by a small group of fairly articulate boys.

As Davies (2003) points out, the lack of "gentle" male role models may partly explain the aggressive expression of male power by little boys. In most early childhood centres, including all the centres in this study, men are a rarity. It is possible that some boys resent the lack of male role models, and rebel against their perceived domination by women teachers. In event 19 Rolf included the female teachers in the category of girls to be chased and eaten.

Event 19 continues:

The 3 boys walk and run speedily between water trough and sandpit carrying back to sand-pit buckets filled with water, pouring it through funnels into buckets that they're simultaneously filling with sand, making the poisonous lava. They work together, as a unit, enthusiastically, joyfully, a hive of activity and noise. Rolf jumps excitedly at the mixing/making process. They comment as they run:

Rolf: "We need jam and sugar."

Jim: "Lets get sugar now."

Rolf: "Lets get more water. We're making nice gurgly googly poisonous. This is lava."

[All 3 laugh and screech with delight as the bucket overflows when more water is added to their sand concoction].

Rolf: "Now it's all done."

Jim: "Now water, lets make more larvoo eh."

Teacher Lu: "What are you making Rolf"?

Rolf: "Lava to cook all the teachers and girls."

Jim: "Lets make more larvoo.... More water, more water. A little bit more sugar. Hey are you digging here Rolf, are you making a, are you making a drain"? [Rolf has resumed digging in the sandpit]

Rolf: "I'm digging a deep hole, so that I can bury the teachers and the girls, okay."

Jim: "No we're not going to do that."

Rolf: "We can just bury one girl in here, just one, just one, okay. We're making a volcano for girls okay. Lava, sticky lava."

Jim: "More water....Lets make a waterfall."

Rolf: "We're building a new hole, okay."

Jim: "Lets put more water."

Rolf: "I'll go and get some more water, okay, to put into the hole, okay"?

Analysis and discussion
"Lava-poisonous" making activity

The overwhelming image in this game was the excited, playful, very busy activity of these three bodies acting in unison. Rolf and Jim directed the play with words. Contradictions surfaced, adding momentum and speed to the process. For example, Jim disagreed with Rolf's desire to bury all the girls and teachers. He then avoided responding to Rolf's suggestion to bury "just one girl". Perhaps as a compromise, Rolf used his knowledge and words to transform the jam poisonous to lava, which Jim learned as "larvoo". The hole they dug together, which Rolf had initially suggested was for burying the teachers and the girls in, became a volcano instead. Later on it became a mud puddle. Thus, Rolf's knowledge was distributed imaginatively among the three boys engaged in the one activity. Physical materials and shared imaginations mediated their playfulness.

Event 19 continues:

Jim puts one bare foot in the hole that is filled with water. He laughs, then takes it out, Zed stamps both feet in the hole chanting.

Zed: "Wash it down, squash it down."

He and Jim take turns stamping water into the sand pit, laughing and chanting. Others join them, attracted by the activity. Jim wanders off.

The play changes to wet sandy play with five children around a growing water-filled sand hole, making mud cakes, using a small plastic water wheel, trying to put sand and water through it. They all take turns standing in the puddle and squelching their feet. They dig sand, stamp, and pat it down, using hands and feet, adding water, laughing a lot while being very physically active. They bury their own feet under wet sand, and laugh hysterically at their vanished feet.

Rolf: "Put it in there okay

put it down there."

The newcomers understand and comply.

Olaf joins in: "Now we're making a water slide, OK. That's the water slide there."

Rolf: "No no. We're not making any more mud, OK. No, no more water OK."

[Squeals of delight as Zed jumps in the water- filled hole]

Zed: "We need more water, more water, we need more water."

The activity level rises again as they busily fetch water from trough 10 metres away [6 children]

Rolf: "We're breaking that we're going to build a new hole, OK, we better dig the drains." [2 holes now]

Musse and Jacoub throw water into the water-filled hole that Zed stands in, splashing him.

Zed yells: "Bad boy, you bad boy." [he makes raging monster noises]

[Zed starts to run after Musse and Jacoub and they run off laughing. Zed has a bucket of water to throw at them, they run inside where he can't follow; Rolf watches, also laughing].

Thus the chasing play resumes and within minutes it's hula hoop catching again. This play continued until 11.10, so lasted 34 minutes.

The busy activity continued with various transformations. In this scene the actual participants also changed. Jim left and Jacoub, Emil, Olaf, and Musse became part of the activity. There was not much talk, partly because three of the five spoke little, or no English, being recent immigrants from Somalia. However, the busy movements in the digging and water fetching activity, combined with playful laughter, seemed to unite them as a peer community, motivating them together. Rolf continued to direct the play. The hilarity at the end is an example of spontaneous glee (Sherman, 1975), combining fun and humour with silliness and laughter.

The qualities of the materials children used influenced how they experienced playfulness and humour. They splashed with water and squelched muddy sand. This sort of messy playfulness was permitted in Southbridge centre, a community with fewer rules than many early childhood centres with which the researcher was familiar. Both Eastbridge and Northbridge centres had small sand-pits and less water-sand play. Zed used water as a weapon in the concluding humorous laughter-filled chase. Hiding and catching was a recurrent theme in events 18, 19 and 20, expressed in chasing, burying feet, poisoning, and physically catching. As mentioned earlier, these themes appear to contain elements of the approach-avoidance play referred to by Corsaro (1985, 1997).

8.2.3 Event 20: Badjelly

Background:
Eastbridge, Two events, two months apart include the same children's hero, "Badjelly" (from Spike Milligan's book and cassette tape) and the power of "poison".

Ema (3 years, 6 months) and Gill (2 years) in the family play area. Researcher sits nearby.

Gill: "I've got my poisonous."
Gill, crouches, hiding behind a bed in family play area, she then stands up and wanders slowly off towards the outside area.
Gill: "Going outside after Badjelly."
Ema: "Gill's going to be Badjelly and I'm going to catch her." [to researcher] [she laughs]
[She gives Gill the big black boots]
Ema: "She died cause I gave her some poisonous."

Ema screeches with joy as she jumps on cushions in the family area. Outside, Gill enjoys exploring the tramping style and feel of wearing very large clumpy boots that reach past her knees.
(23.08.2000)

Two months later:

Inside, Ema and Isabel laugh a lot, while playing "Badjelly."
Ema (3 years, 8 months): "Who wants to come on my broomstick"?
Isabel (3 years, 9 months): "I have to come, cause my baby's just woken up."
Isabel goes over to Ema who's positioned herself, one leg either side of the broom, holding the brush end. Isabel holds a teddy bear [her baby]
Ema and Isabel both ride / walk / shuffle on the broom, giggling together.
Researcher: "Where are you going on a broomstick?"
Ema: "We're going outside, to catch Badjelly and we're going to cook him and we're going to eat him up." [squirming and laughing while talking]
Isabel continues walking towards the outside, without the broom, holding her teddy/baby, while Ema pauses to answer the researcher
Researcher: "Cook Badjelly?"
Ema: "Yeah." [laughing]

Ema runs off after Isabel, using the broom as a poking, killing weapon, poking the floor as she runs, making lots of joyful poking sounds

Ema: "Badjelly's into poisonous."

Isabel: "We put them in the oven."

Ema: "I put her in the oven." [giggles]

Ema: "Now lets go quick before Jelly comes."

Isabel: "Yeah."

(25.10.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Modern myths: witches, broomsticks and poison

Badjelly was a recurrent theme in the play of the older children in Eastbridge centre community, a mythical object-like person, a witch, to fear, conquer, chase and poison.... Badjelly seemed to affect some children, so that they replayed key concepts from the story; Ema was one of those thus affected. In both events she initiated and led the Badjelly play; in this way she shared her experience and imagination with her peers, who used their imaginations to participate in the play. Thus imagination, like cognition, was distributed (Salomon, 1993). Despite the dominance of one player, Ema, in these events, the other players (Isabel and Gill) were essential to both events, contributing to the performance and thereby the co-construction of mini-narratives building on the larger narrative myth of Badjelly, the wicked witch. Together these children formed a community of peers, situated within the larger centre community. The ethos of the centre community endorsed this imaginative play in the provision of material artifacts such as dress-up clothes, to support the drama. Unlike Southbridge centre, the researcher did not observe teachers initiating and actively participating in children's play. However she did observe the teachers on occasion being playful together and alongside children as in event 23 and performing playfully for the children, as in event 13.

The children's re-creations, like the original story, were humorous for the participants. Isabel and Ema laughed and giggled while "being wicked". Gill seemed happy to be included, and to wear big boots. Ema spoke excitedly, muddling sounds and grammar, so that the gender identity of Badjelly shifted from "him" to "them" to "her". Ema laughed when she tricked younger Gill, saying she was "going to catch her" and "She died cause I gave her some poisonous". Later she laughed as she poked "Badjelly into poisonous" and asserted her dominance over Isabel's "*we*" with "*I* put her in the oven", though the oven pushing was originally Isabel's idea. This giggling laughter seemed to diminish and twist the horrifying side of conquering and killing, transforming a potentially tragic situation into a comedy of sorts.

Pushing into the oven, or fire, like poisoning and magic potions, are powerful themes in myths and fairy tales (for example, Hansel and Gretel). The idea of the joker / trickster winning and triumphing over evil is another mythical archetype reflected in Badjelly. In these events the relatively powerless, trickster-like children triumphed. All these archetypes and themes feature in some form in the media, in television programmes of the superhero type, in movies, and in books. They are part of the surrounding culture and they can create powerful feelings of control in children's dramatic narrative play. In this sense myths pervade our present world as much as the past.

The following event also built on mythical media-inspired notions of tricks, magic and wands, with their associated powers.

8.2.4 Event 21: Tricks and magic

Background:
Southbridge, outside, sunny, morning: Researcher sits on steps near the sand pit. Sandy (4 years, 2 months) and Flo (4 years, 3 months) come over, sit down beside her, and initiate a conversation.

Sandy:	"We're doing tricky tricks."
Researcher:	"What sort of tricks?"

Sandy: "Lots, I've got a roly poly slide at my house."

Flo: "And I've got a xx (unclear) slide at my house…"

Sandy: "We were doing tricks at the tricky house, it's invisible. We go in there and shut the door and then it's invisible, It's a fold up one."

Researcher: "A fold up house?"

Flo: "No, a tent that's got wings."

Sandy: "If someone comes to my house I'll trick them by getting them to go into my tree-house and then they'll jump so high that they'll fall down and hurt their self. And then I'll tell them to jump in the house and they will and they'll jump down from the tree and hurt their self. Because I want to trick them."

Flo: "I got a magic wand at home; I got a slide at home."

Sandy: "And then when they fall they'll fall into a dungeon. There was a piece of string on top of the roof and then the string, the string will undo and they'll fall down."

Flo: "And I've got a fairy at home but she's not real, she did break once but we had to fix her."

Sandy: "The dungeon's going to be down at the bottom of the tree. I trick people by taking things away and putting them where people can't see, in a different place."

(26.10.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Incongruity in tricks and magic

This serious dual conversation about tricks, traps, wands, and magic had elements of the incongruity and double thinking that characterise joking humour. The conversation was dual, in the sense that both Flo and Sandy constructed stories and explanations; these sometimes overlapped, but were also independent. Ochs and Capps (2001) describe how conversational narratives can help narrators develop "frameworks for understanding events" (p. 2). The researcher, sitting alongside the children, mediated this talk by

being passively present, yet listening and responsively asking a few questions to clarify the thinking framework.

Young children's conversational narratives exhibit a variety of styles; simple, complex, short, long, finished and unfinished. All have in common the concept of meaning embedded in the situation, in the social, cultural, historical context of the individuals involved. We bring our unique and shared experiences to our interpretations of words as utterances, which express meaning and feeling. Ochs and Capps (2001) write:

> All narrative exhibits tension between the desire to construct an over-arching storyline that ties events together in a seamless explanatory framework and the desire to capture the complexities of the events experienced, including haphazard details, uncertainties and conflicting sensibilities among protagonists (p 4).

Event 21 continues:

Wands briefly become a joint focus for this dual dialogue:

Researcher: "What does your wand look like?"

Flo: "It's very beautiful."

Sandy: "I have 2 wands at home and I share a room with my brother."

Flo: "My wand is pinkish purple. I got it from Spotlight [a shop]. I made it, I brought all of the stuff that I had to make it from Spotlight."

Sandy: "We'll go and do some other tricks now."

Nearby teacher Jo sings along to music playing on the radio.

Flo [to teacher Jo]: "I know one about fairies."

Teacher Jo: "Can you sing it?"

Flo: "No, it's a magic song and it only works on magic days."

(26.10.2000)

Analysis and discussion

Talking, while thinking and anticipating

In this scenario the story explanations served to hold together relationships, between both concepts and all the participants. Sandy and Flo used words

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as tools to assist thinking. Thus, Sandy's explanation of the invisible tree house became increasingly complicated in the telling. The words she used seemed to mediate her thinking. Flo embellished her powerful "magic" wand with descriptive words. Asserting her autonomy and imbuing words with magic power she cleverly explained why she would not, or could not, sing the magic song because, "it only works on magic days". Overlapping themes of magic and tricks coordinated their monologues as dialogue, and towards the end of the conversation wands briefly became a shared interest. It was their experiences in the wider community beyond the early childhood centre that stimulated their conversational monologues. In this way children's individual prior experiences and current shared monologues facilitated their shared imaginative thinking; the process was similar to the distribution of cognition described by Salomon, (1993). As a mediating listener the researcher felt that she was simply fitting in with an adult listener role that the teachers in this community seemed to value. She had observed them doing likewise.

The important role of anticipation in adding meaning to conversation has been discussed by Shotter (1993). In all these narrative events the general scripts were largely anticipatory because the story themes were culturally familiar ones of chasing, catching, witches, killing, poisonous, wands, and magic power. Children improvised on the specific details in the making of material artifacts such as "poisonous", wands and traps. The dialogue and story line too were often anticipatory as children learnt to guess the general intention of what was spoken before it was said. For example Flo described her wand as beautiful; that's how wands are. In event 17 the dead teacher grew into a tree after being buried; that's the life cycle. In anticipating each other children and teachers read cues in, for example, gestures, voice tone and gaze, as well as in words already spoken (Shotter, 1993). Playful (as opposed to more serious) communication seemed to be associated with flexibility, spontaneity and improvisation. Thus what was anticipated was not predetermined.

8.3 COMMUNITY PRACTICES: CULTURAL TOOLS AND PLAYFULNESS

As explained earlier in Chapter 5, mediation by artifacts (Wartofsky, 1979), is the crux of CHAT. Cultural artifacts include tools signs, and symbols. Artifacts mediate all communication, including children's playful and humorous communication. In play, children use the tools of their culture to re-create meaningful aspects of their everyday world experiences. As Vygotsky (1934/1986, 1978) has repeatedly emphasised words are perhaps the most significant tools for thinking. Words are used almost unconsciously as primary artifacts as well as being conscious symbolic secondary artifacts. Words also mediate as tertiary artifacts, when communicating feelings associated with experiencing playfulness and humour.

Just as words are symbolic cultural tools for thinking (Vygotsky, 1934/1986), so too are numbers. Like words, numbers too can function as primary, secondary and/or tertiary artifacts, in mediating playful and humorous communication. In the following event children constructed narrative play with numbers, anticipating their meaning and order, in playful and sometimes humorous ways.

8.3.1 Event 22: Numbers in narratives

Background:

Northbridge. Two events (A, B), spaced one hour apart, involve the following children: Ema (3 years, 11 months), Tom (4 years, 8 months), Peta (4 years, 4 months), Shona (2 years, 10 months). Tom and Ema are two of the 5 children about whom the researcher had gathered more information by interviewing the parents during phase three of the research. Some relevant comments from these interviews with parents are included in the following analysis and discussion following event B. These comments provide further insight into how these parents supported and valued their children's playfulness and sense of humour.

In scenario A it is early morning (8.30 am). Children are still arriving. A mini-trampoline is set up in one room and three children gently jump on it together.

(A):

Ema:	"And September's my birthday."
Tom:	"And you know what, I'll be 5 when you're 4."
Peta:	"When you're...I'll be..."
Ema :	"6, I'm 5."
Tom:	"No when I'm 6 you'll be 5."
Peta:	"When Ema's 4 I'm going to still be older than you."
Tom:	"No Peta, cause there's a boy in Sydney and he's 7 so he's 3 years older than you..."

[All fall off trampoline and laugh].

(28.08.2000)

Analysis and Discussion
Numbers mediating intersubjectivity

This discussion, initiated by one child (Tom) continued. Numbers became a joint intersubjective focus of attention for all three (later four) children. Tom cleverly integrated his interest in numbers with Ema's remark about her birthday. Then, using the words and structure of numbers, the children co-constructed this dialogic event, based on a sharing of the individual experiences of Tom and Ema and the knowledge and interests of all three players. Tom revisited this counting-subtracting play several times that morning, as well as on other occasions.

(B):

The children lie on the floor near the trampoline (9.30 am).

Tom:	"when Sarah (mother) was born Dad was 1, when ...."
Peta:	"I caught your eye."

Ema: "I catched your teeth."

Tom: "One day we were cooking marshmallows in the fire and you know what I had 12 marshmallows."

Peta: "I had 21."

Ema: "I ate 20-60."

Shona   "I can't count."

Tom: "I can count to 100."

Tom starts counting and keeps going to 100 without stopping. For a short while Shona counts on her fingers beside him.

(28.08.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Distributing cognition playfully

Ema and Peta caught Tom's enthusiasm for numbers. While Tom played with numbers seriously, they playfully upped the ante in counting. Tom's "twelve" was recycled as "twenty-one", and as "twenty-sixty". Recycled repetition of earlier speaker's last lines, with slight twists, was frequently observed in children's play with words and numbers. The importance for learning of repetition (as opposed to straight copying) was discussed in Chapter 7. In this event, Ema and Peta also played with words, "catching" teeth, as well as eyes, in a literal variation of the "I caught your eye" idiom. In this randomly dialogic way interest and awareness of numbers became a shared group interest, leading to playful practice with numbers, and it is likely that this practice helped the children's proficiency.

The lack of teacher involvement in these number activities was noticeable. In contrast, the parents of Tom showed an awareness and interest in his words and number play, and encouraged it:

> "The words came through when we've been reading a book, he loves rhyming words…and he plays with numbers…we tend to do outdoors physical stuff at

> home, not painting and drawing so much…we lie on the floor at home…He's
> definitely a physical kid."

(Parent interview, 04.10.2000)

The researcher now realised why Tom spent so much time sprawled out on
the floor; at home it was his natural way of being.

Ema and Peta focused on size in their play with numbers. For example, "20-
60" and "21" are bigger numbers than Tom's "12" marshmallows. Ema's
father described how he interpreted this upping the ante as Ema's purposeful
use of humour.

> "She does a lot of negotiations and I think one of the ways she negotiates is
> with humour, like one of the guards always gets her to clip the ticket and he was
> saying "Now how many clips would you like today, three?" and she says "No,
> four" and she's always negotiating up that way".

(Parent interview, 05.10.2000)

8.4 COMMUNITY PRACTICES: TEACHER STYLE IN THREE CENTRES

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, during phases three and four
of the research the initial focus on children's humour and playfulness became
broader to include a greater contextual awareness of teachers' humour and
playfulness too. The teachers in the centres in this study expressed
playfulness and humour in different ways, both individually and in the cultures
of their three centre communities. These differences partly reflected
differences in age and qualifications, as well as working conditions and all the
many factors that contributed to teacher style and centre culture. The ages of
the teachers at Northbridge covered a wide span, from mid twenties to mid
fifties. These teachers were mainly "mature women" and qualified to the
benchmark diploma level, whereas most of the teachers at Eastbridge were in
their early twenties, and half of them were currently involved in field-based
training. These differences in age and qualifications extended to

appearances too. The Eastbridge teachers dressed in a variety of styles that went beyond clothing to include skin, with several proudly sporting tattoos and piercings of their tongue and other body parts whereas the Northbridge teachers were more conservative in dress and appearance.

In group interviews teachers at Eastbridge explained their understandings of humour in their work:

> "I guess I use humour constantly, I don't know in what ways though... It's hard to put into words what you actually do on the floor, it's hard to put humour into words, I mean if you're doing it it's funny, it's not funny ten minutes later."

On the benefits of humour:

> "I think humour relaxes children... There's not much aggression here, children don't get yelled at."

On humour as foundational for teachers and children:

> "Everything else will be built on humour, fun, if there's a good sense of humour and if the teachers want to have fun with the children then the other stuff comes, but if the teachers are really serious it's dead boring. Children can't express humour and have fun if the teachers can't."

On humour affecting centre culture:

> "Humour's definitely important; if the centre doesn't have humour then what does it have? If the staff can't come to work and have fun, then what's the point? When the teachers are feeling in a fun mood it affects the children. Staff getting on really well together creates the whole atmosphere."

(Eastbridge teacher interviews, 14.11.2000)

The teachers at Eastbridge found reflection on the benefits of humour challenging. They valued humour because having fun and a good time was important to them.

In contrast, the Northbridge teachers seemed more serious. They explained humour in relation to the teacher's professional role:

> "As a teacher I think that we're role models for the children so if they see us laughing it's part of how we work, it's an accepted part of life... Humour is very important".

On the use of humour:

> "I use humour consciously if I'm reading a story that has humour, I don't think I do use humour consciously. My humour is quite ironic so I don't use it consciously. It's more in response to children".

These teachers also explained humour in relation to specific children and child development theory:

> "How children use humour depends on their age. Alex today had her hair out and got it wet in a puddle and thought that was funny, younger children have more solo humour. Eliza and Alex were touching each other's hand at the tea time today, and laughing, they thought that was funny. Olive expresses humour a lot with jumping, she says "I'm happy" and jumps".

(Northbridge teacher interviews, 14.11.2000)

The contrasts in teachers' use and understandings of humour in these two centres also seemed to be reflected in their differing geographical locations of the centres. Northbridge was in an affluent green middle class suburb, and served a tertiary institution, while Eastbridge was located in the concrete heart of the city, adjoining trendy new apartments.

Southbridge was different again, being a community-based centre, serving the local multi-cultural lower income community. The three teachers at Southbridge were very aware of their similarities, as they explained when interviewed:

"In one job I was in I did courses but couldn't implement the ideas. I was just an individual. I wasn't supported there. Here we learn together. We support each other. We're all studying...

We're all extraverted...We're all the same age...We are all friends, we meet outside work...It's like a close relationship, you know that you can always discuss things without upsetting each other...If we just start picking at each other's food that's normal. If I'm feeling flat I can realise I haven't had enough laughter, so I go and look at Jenny's teaching."

Sandy continued this comparison of their centre with others:

"I visited this centre the other day, and even though those teachers got on well they were all separate. We work together, we value each other, the children can feel that too and they'll link in with us too, there are all these links. At this other centre they didn't seem to all relate to each other like we do."

On teacher role:

"I think that good ECE teachers can easily be the child in themselves."
(Southbridge teacher interviews, 07.03.2001)

These teachers were intersubjectively in tune with each other, perhaps partly helped by numbering only three; the other teams consisted of between seven and ten staff.

In an earlier group interview the Southbridge teachers described this intersubjectivity in relation to their shared philosophy and playful and humorous teaching styles:

"We laugh every day and we share a lot. We're on the same wavelength. Some people don't take humour seriously, even some teachers. We're all extroverts. We couldn't work in an office. I did once and they said I was "too boisterous". We are all the same age, but I think it's more to do with having the same sort of philosophy on life."

They also described how they did sometimes deliberately use humour, despite stating that they did not consciously use humour:

> "We really believe very strongly in having fun. This is not just a job, it's what I do, it's a lifestyle and having fun is very important. It's not just a way of coping and we can be quite serious. We get energy from each other. We're not all mad and crazy at the same time, well sometimes we are. We bounce off each other's energy.
>
> You use different humour with different children, and parents; we use humour to bring children out. We don't consciously use humour, but we do sometimes try to be funny for some children to make them feel more at ease, we might put funny hats on, or joke, and the humour changes with the same children, over time. Like Jan (child) got upset when we were going to tie Alex (teacher) up with sellotape the other day, and we had to change the play. Yet a few months ago she'd loved it, when Andrew tied up the whole kindergarten and people. This time she was very unsure, so we changed to kids tying up each others wrists and things and she got involved and found it very funny, but when Alex was being tied up she really was unsure. So you have to watch, to see what reaction the humour has and you have to change and be flexible."

In describing Jan's changed ideas of fun, the teachers implicitly acknowledged developmental changes in children's understandings of humour. They also explained how, for them, using humour assisted cross-cultural communication:

> "And you can use humour with different cultures. It's universal, like especially with some of our PI [Pacific Island] mothers, they love a laugh, and the Somali women, I found out the other day that they call me "the smiley one".

(Southbridge teacher interviews, 14.11.2000).

Teacher-child dynamics varied in relation to children's developmental ages as well as the nature of the early childhood programme, the centre as a community, and teachers' perceptions of their roles in that community. Older children in a sessional programme (Southbridge) created different dynamics

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from those in the all-day mixed-age child care centres (Northbridge and Eastbridge). Two to three year old toddlers dominated the composition at Eastbridge centre. Consequently, the pre-verbal playful communication of toddlers was a feature in the Eastbridge data. The following event illustrates how these teachers also communicated bodily, rhythmically, musically and playfully.

8.4.1   Event 23: Playful music session

Background:
Eastbridge. Inside, on the carpeted mat-time area; this was a regular teacher-led morning musical mat-time session with a mixed-aged group of about fifteen 1-5 year olds, (all the children present, except those sleeping), plus four teachers.

> Teacher Kat, seated on a low stool, uses her guitar to call children to music mat time. The other teachers sit on the floor in a circle with the children.

> Cleo (4 years):   "Now can we do um um Puff Puff the Magic Dragon with no words and just the actions?" [to teacher Kat who's sitting on a chair, in the circle, strumming her guitar]
> Teacher Kat: "Puff the Magic Dragon [she bends down and faces Cleo] doesn't have any actions."
> Soft laughter from teachers
> Cleo: "No but, can we do Puff the Magic Dragon?"
> Teacher Kat: "Yeah, we'll do Kentucky first."

Analysis and Discussion
Actions and words

The teachers laughed at Cleo's request for the actions only in a song that, unlike other songs, had no contrived actions. In all three centres teachers were observed laughing both with and at children, in similar ways. The

researcher wondered whether the teachers had understood that this may have been Cleo's intention. Cleo did move to the music when the teachers later sang Puff.

Event 23 continues:

All stand in a rough circle and the song starts, Teacher Kat playing the tune, other teachers singing the words

Teachers: "We're going to Kentucky, we're going to a fair to see a senorita with flowers in her hair."

All children and teachers bump each other, wriggling hips and bumping bottoms, purposely, doing the actions for the words.

"Well shake it baby shake it, shake it all you can"...

Cleo and Bob (3 years, 9 months) next to each other bump each others' bodies; a lot of physical contact, soft rough and tumble with laughter, a "bodies joking" language. They latch onto teacher Ann's legs and won't let go, hugging her knees. Teacher Ann has difficulty "controlling" their physical clinging.

"Shake it like a milkshake, until we all go Bang!!!"

All suddenly sit down on the floor.

Analysis and discussion
Teachers having fun, rhythmically

Cleo, dancing, laughing, and hugging teacher Ann's legs, had earlier expressed this desire to listen, move and not sing. She wanted to experience the music and communicate her experience, both subjectively and bodily.

The teachers showed their enjoyment of this teacher-initiated and directed music session. They too laughed. The teachers sang loudest and moved most (though if allowance is made for size, the children proportionately moved more). The physical-touching communication between the dancing moving bodies of teachers and children was exaggerated by the dancing, bumping, actions described in the words of the song. Words added complexity to the danced narrative.

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Feelings of humour and a joking playfulness dominated the expressive bodily communication of this music session. Teachers' and children's bodies communicated feelings and thoughts as they enacted the song and danced together, physically exemplifying the "corporeal turn" (Ruthrof, 2000, p.9), that has followed the linguistic turn, acknowledging that communication involves much more than words alone (Merleau Ponty, 1962). Thus, "...meaning is not restricted to linguistic expressions but is a part of every perceptual performance by which we constitute our world" (Ruthrof, 2000, p.11).

Event 23 continues:

They remain seated on the floor in a large loose circle.

Cleo and Bob let go of teacher Ann, and sway gently when the song changes to:

"Puff the Magic Dragon..."

Teacher Mary sits on floor with 3 children half lying over her lap. Bree (4 years) has a teddy bear, which she dances with, holding it as a "partner" for the Wibbly Wobbly song. The teachers lead and go around the circle including every child's name in the song.

"Wibbly wobbly woo an elephant sat on you.

And wibbly wobbly Cleo, an elephant sat on below.

Wibbly wobbly wob, an elephant sat on Bob.

And wibbly wobbly wee, an elephant sat on Bree..."

The children move in wobbly ways.

One child starts shaking her head from side to side, hair swinging, others follow, catching the idea and imitating her.

The session ends with morning tea-time, hand washing rituals.

(20.07.2000)

Analysis and discussion
Name play

The inclusion of every child's name in the Wibbly Wobbly song in event 23 re-emphasised the power of words, especially names. Each child's name was

matched with a nonsense rhyming word, sung mainly by the teachers, but valued by the whole group. Individual children smiled and laughed as their names and matching rhymes were sung. Unconstrained by sitting on the floor, the children and teachers still moved, swaying, lying on and over each other, connected very physically and relaxingly. The inclusion of all individual's names in a group song seemed to reinforce the existence of the group as a sharing community to which all the named individual's belonged.

The researcher observed teachers having fun, dancing and moving with children, in all three centres, though not all teachers were as physically relaxed as these.

Analysis and discussion
Bodily intersubjectivity

Communication that did not require words, or that prioritised other language forms, such as dance and movement, was a focus theme for the researcher observing, analysing, and interpreting children's experience of playful and humorous communication. Words enable the expression of complex thinking and feeling. But children and teachers also communicated with music and rhythm (Trevarthen, 2002), for example in events 6 and 7. They made sounds that were not words, such as laughter, giggles and exclamations, and they gestured and used their whole bodies, including facial expressions, particularly in events 1, 2, 4, 11, 12 and 14. The researcher's initial theoretical separation of verbal from non-verbal categories of communication did not help the understanding that spoken words are always used with the addition of movement expressively and responsively as gesture, tone and feelin, in varying degrees (Ruthrof, 2000). Gestures, like rhythm, music and words, are learnt socially from others, in communities. In this way subjective individualistic expression is socially acquired and experienced.

The immediate centre context was always integral to the communication, influencing the style and tone of relationships, as well as the nature of the playful narratives that children constructed. Context included other people, as well as the physical environment and lay-out of the centre and everything that contributed to the atmosphere up to and at that time. The past continuously impacts on the present. Thus context included culture and everything apparently external to the individual. Even this distinction is problematic, however, because clear boundaries between the external and internal (like subject and object) are non-existent in activity (Il'Yenkov, 1960/1982; Miettinen, 2001; Zinchenko, 2001). For example in activity, such as this music session, the rhythm, gestures, words and touch seemed to blur boundaries between the dancers. They moved chaotically as a group of individuals expressing externally their internal feelings and thoughts, yet united and mediated by sounds and rhythm.

Sometimes teachers were obviously integral in the context of children being playful, as they led, mediated, or directed the activity (e.g. event 18). At other times they were more present in mind than body, setting a certain tone in the rules around children's playfulness (e.g. event 19). In this respect the teachers and children in all three centres showed distinctively different ways of relating and communicating with each other and with children.

In their different ways, the teachers in all three centres valued the importance of both children and teachers feeling comfortable and having a sense of belonging to the centre. All equated children's humour and playfulness with children feeling that the centre belonged to them and consequently, with children developing and having a sense of community.

8.5 SUMMARY: COMMUNITIES AND MOTIVATION

This chapter has explored tentative links between the playful narrative scripts that children enacted and the idea of communities of players engaged in activity systems (Figure 3.2). Narratives and communities overlap on several levels. Children's playful narrative events were the constructions of communities of players united in activity systems by shared goals (Wells, 2004). These narrative-like activity systems also reflected aspects of larger activity systems, thereby linking with expanded understandings of community that extend beyond peer groups in the early childhood centre, to also include family and society. These wider links and understandings of community and culture are explored more fully in Chapter 9.

In their different ways the teachers and children in these early childhood centres demonstrated their understandings of the centre as a community in relation to humour and playfulness. They all said they valued humour and playfulness as part of the centre ethos. However, this attitude was expressed in subtly different ways that seemed to be reflected in the collegiality of their teaching relationships, their relationships with the children, and their understandings of humour and playfulness. Teacher friendships and collegiality were dominant features in Southbridge centre and, to a slightly lesser extent, Eastbridge centre where the teachers played together as well as with the children (events 18, 23).

For the children links with the wider community, and between their families and the centre, were expressed in how and what they played at (including the motivation to play). Being community based centres both Northbridge and Southbridge did have strong links with the local community as well as the families using their centres. These links provided the content and motivation, for children's playful events. The themes and concepts that created the plot and drama in children's co-constructed narrative events were a frequent aspect in the (generally more complex) playfulness of the four year old children in Southbridge. These themes, presumably the result of media

influences from the wider world community, reflected and connected children's peer play with both local and wider understandings of the communities out of which they had developed. Thus, in narrative play aspects of community and society were re-created. From El'konin's (1971, 2000) perspective, this re-creation of aspects of the social world is the main function of play. This study suggests that togetherness and enjoyment may also be important reasons for children being playful and humorous together.

Children's intersubjectivity and the idea of "distributed imagination", analogous to distributed cognition (Salomon, 1993) were also important phenomena in the playful narrative events that these children constructed together. The ways in which children used cultural artifacts (for example books, story scripts, numbers, words) mediated how they communicated playfulness and humour. The four-year-olds' narratives tended to be longer and more complex than those of younger children, sometimes elaborating on myth-like scripts as symbolic secondary and tertiary artifacts (Wartofsky, 1979). For example, event 19, "making poisonous", lasted 34 minutes. It involved a lot of physical activity and mythical archetypal elements, yet few words.

However words, even a few, did add cognitive complexity to children's narratives, and for the four-year-old children words opened their imaginations, creating potential shared zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus for example, in event 19 children could playfully imagine the consequences of creating and using the concepts: "lava", "larvoo" and "poisonous" (all words used to label the "powerful" mixtures children were making with sand and water). In events 18 and 19 they had fun imagining the "what-if" possibilities around digging, catching, killing, burying, growing, chopping down, and burning. Children used their imaginations to experience feeling powerful and in control and shared these feelings as a group, expressing playfulness and group synergy in their bodies and their word play. In this way playful feelings and ideas were expressed in words as well as in physical behaviour. Words added cognitive complexity to narratives thereby

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enhancing the emotional and social as well as the cognitive aspects of children's playful and humorous communication.

Words as the ultimate mediating tool for thinking, (Vygotsky, 1934/1986) also "simplified" the task for the researcher trying to fathom how these children experienced humour and playfulness in their communication. Chapter 9 attempts to blend the researcher's written words with children's spoken words and to integrate the components of children's activity by analysing the activity of one event.

CHAPTER 9

SOCIO-CULTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY
EXPANDED

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapters 5 to 8 have each emphasised one component of the CHAT model
that frames the unit of analysis in this research (see Figure 3.2, "Children's
playful communication in context"). Each component has provided a different
lens on the activity system. The aim of Chapter 9 is to integrate these
components while addressing some of the main findings of the research as a
whole. An overall discussion of the research findings will be the focus of
Chapter 10. The first part of this chapter will focus on integration using Figure
3.2. It will reiterate the importance for research validity of compatibility
between this framework as the unit of analysis and the research focus on how
young children experience humour and playfulness in their communication.
Mediation, at the heart of CHAT, will be revisited with an emphasis on the
cultural nature of mediation. Re-creation of culture, "the medium within which
we exist" (Cole, 1996, p. 8) is an ongoing, evolving, interactive process that
as Ratner (2000) explains, weaves together individual and context.

As in previous chapters, theory will be concretised in the presentation of
events, though here only one event is presented. However analyses of this
one event will reflect from multiple perspectives the different, yet related,
components of the CHAT framework model (Figure 3.2). Each component
will be addressed in relation to the same activity system of, in this case,
children's game playing. This focus on viewing one activity from multiple
perspectives illuminates both the dialectical nature and the dynamism of
activity as represented in the relationships between the components. These
relationships are expressed in the tensions and contradictions that are
integral to humour, playfulness, and activity. The final "analysis and

discussion" (section 9.3.5) will address how the contradictions and tensions in children's playful activity motivate and sustain the activity.

9.2 ACTIVITY REVISITED

The aim in using CHAT as a framework has been to focus the research on relationships, interactions, and transactions in children's playful and humorous communication, and to consider how the activity is sustained and connected. This framework makes explicit the dynamic qualities in, and the social nature of, activity and transformation, and the participating children being and becoming.

9.2.1 Mediation revisited: Actions and activity

The unit of analysis in this research study of young children being playful and humorous together was their mediated activity: playfulness and humour, as pictured in Figure 3.2, "Children's playful communication in context". Mediation dynamically connects all the points of the triangle in activity. Roles are mediated by rules that are mediated by and help to define the community. All are mediated by artifacts, that are in turn mediated by children's goals, and by the motivating group interests. A triangle model on paper does not do justice to the inherent dynamism in activity. In reality the activity triangle also extends both inwards and outwards.

Thus, activity is situated across multiple dimensions of time and space and dynamically interconnects with many other expanding activity systems as described by Engeström (1987). William Blake's metaphor of seeing a world in a grain of sand is very applicable to an understanding of activity systems as interconnected grains, or units, of the world. Indra's Net, from the Buddhist Avatamsaka Sutra, is another vivid visual metaphor which clearly conveys this notion of the interdependence and interpenetration of all phenomena. Indra's Net extends infinitely in all directions. A vast network of precious jewels is attached to each of the intersecting knots of the net. Each

jewel contains and reflects the image of all the other jewels so that, if you look at one, you see all the others reflected in it. Similarly each object in the world is not merely itself but involves every other object in itself: "In every particle of dust, there are present Buddhas without number."

Systems of activity overlap, like multiple conversations. Children playfully involved in any one activity may also simultaneously be participating in many other activities, actions, and operations contributing to multiple goals. These goals may be either playful or serious, determined or openly undetermined (Fogel, Lyra & Valsiner, 1997).

For example, pretend play scenarios prioritise at least two conceptual goals. First these sustain the play by negotiating outside the play-frame meta-communicatively as described by Bateson (1972). Thus players step out of their roles to negotiate the rules. Secondly the play's roles and plot are created by negotiations from within the play frame, as described by El'konin, (1989/2000). The players negotiate rules while acting their roles. Other goals of play may concern details of the plot and personalities of players, as well as related feelings of empowerment, agency, and identity.

As the contradictions in goals are played out and resolved, children's goals change. "Goals become linked to emotions, without which no decision-making (e.g., Damasio, 1999) seems to be possible. Decisions are made to increase the control I have over my environment" (W.-M. Roth, personal communication, 24.09.2004). Children's goals reflect the social, cultural, and historical contexts of their play. The group motivation which propels and unites their play is also integral to the goals. It is the relationships, interactions, and group participation which distinguish a series of individual actions and goals from group systemic activity.

Leont'ev (1978) has suggested that the motivating force in play is the play process itself. While this may be so, many of the events presented in this study show that mediation is central to the play activity. For example, the

mediating languages of gesture and words affected the direction and motivation of play. The ways in which children played with words and gestures, creatively interpreting and altering their meanings, implied that the goals, motivation, and outcomes of children's playfulness were open, changeable and indeterminate. Fogel, Lyra & Valsiner (1997) have described these open qualities as essential and integral to the communication process.

Operations and actions, with their corresponding goals and instrumental conditions, comprise the building blocks that make systems of activity (Leont'ev, 1978). Thus, children involved in joint playful activity brought their diverse unique shared and individual experiences (as actions and operations) to the play. These contributed to shared group objectives that united the players in socially, culturally, and historically mediated activity. The overall aim of the activity united, transformed, and motivated the activity as a system, rather than as a series of separate actions. The tension in this blending created the contradictions that motivated the ongoing activity. In this way children's playful narratives blended fixed and determined paths with unpredictable emergent goals.

9.2.2 Cultural historical mediation

Through their culturally and historically mediated playfulness and humour, children contributed actively to the creation and re-creation of their peer cultures, the early childhood centre cultures, and the wider community cultures. Culture consists of socially constructed artifacts and includes most phenomena, concrete and conceptual, that are not directly biological or of the natural world. Thus, culture includes "…psychological phenomena such as emotions, perception, motivation, logical reasoning, intelligence, memory, mental illness, imagination, language, and personality (that) are collectively constructed and distributed," (Ratner, 2000, p. 8). It follows that humour and playfulness, as collectively constructed and distributed psychological phenomena, are also cultural constructions. Culture, like playful and humorous activity, is dynamic, unfixed and in constant flux.

The historical aspect of activity adds depth to the cultural dimensions of the activity system. Cultural artifacts that mediate children's play have acquired histories which change over time. Early childhood centres are designed and filled with special child-sized furniture, materials, and equipment (artifacts) that reflect historical ideas and theories about what sort of play and equipment is good (i.e. developmentally appropriate) for young children. Popular material artifacts such as sand, water, books, paints, and dress-ups, mediate particular styles of humour and playfulness.

For example, the sandpit at Southbridge was a prominent and attractive outside feature, dominating the space near the door exit, and with edges that invited sitting on. Consequently sand and water play featured prominently in children's playful and humorous group communication (events 18 and 19). Southbridge centre is about one hundred years old, but sand and water have only become important curriculum materials since the 1950s' "learning through play" trend. The sandpit today is bigger and better than ever before.

The physical design and spatial layout of early childhood centres have histories that also directly affect how children play. Rules and architecture governed behaviour about where and when to eat, sleep, run and walk In all three centres in this study. Running inside was not permitted. Playful chasing games occurred outside. The songs, rhymes, and stories children tell and hear have their histories too. All these diverse artifacts contributed reciprocally to the ongoing process of children's playful and humorous culture re-creation.

The humorous and playful elements in children's play contributed reciprocally to the different cultures of the three centres in this study. So did the attitudes and values of teachers and other adults. The following event makes these overlapping links explicit. The event is one thirty-minute sequence, broken into four sections for purposes of analysis. Each section in turn is analysed

and discussed through the perspective of different lenses of the CHAT model "Children's playful communication in context" (Figure 3.2).

9.3 EVENT 24: PLAYFULNESS AND HUMOUR WITHIN A GAME

Background:

Northbridge, early afternoon. Initially, six children sit and stand around a new board game, called "shopping", that is on the round table. Teacher Lin has been sitting with them, talking a lot and facilitating the start of the game play by explaining turn-taking. The game involves collecting picture cards that match individual children's pictorial shopping lists. Only the five oldest children play: Tom (4.5), Zizi (4.11), Milly (3.3), Jack (4.5), Frank (4.3). Jilly (2.6) and Mini (2.6) watch. Teacher Amy replaces Teacher Lin. The children move continuously and only teacher Amy sits still. Children lie across the edge of the table, Tom rests his hands on the table and jumps, Milly crouches feet under knees on a chair, Zizi half lies across the table. The researcher sits nearby, writing and watching.

(12.07.2000)

Researcher: "Whose turn is it now?"

Zizi: "It's my turn [she pauses, thinking, stretches her body over the table, towards Tom]

                        It's Tom's turn".

[Tom is preoccupied, busy explaining how he'll share a turn with Milly]

Tom: "After I've got 6, um Milly, when I've got 5, when I've got, when I've got 6, um, when I've got 12, when I've got 10, I'll let you have a turn Milly, alright?" [he jumps in affirmative satisfaction]

Teacher Amy: "That sounds alright, Tom's had a turn, it's Jack's turn".

Zizi: "No, my turn".

Tom: "You pick that one up". [pointing to a card, speaking to Jack, while looking at Zizi]

Teacher Amy: "Which one is that Jack?"

Zizi: "It's Frank's turn, Frank's turn".

| Teacher Amy: | "Turn one over Frank, washing powder, do you have washing powder on yours?" |
| Zizi: | "Tom's turn". |

Analysis and Discussion

9.3.1 Artifacts mediate and motivate

The shopping game is a culturally mediating artifact on several levels. Words, gestures, and the game itself, mediated communication. The game was prominently positioned at the centre of the round table, surrounded by card-holding children. It connected the players physically. The educational intention of the game was to mediate children's developing understandings of sorting and matching concepts. However social relational ideas of turn-taking, fairness, and the learning of game rules seemed most important to these children. At this stage of the game these ideas were serious, rather than playful. The teacher mediated the turn-taking and so did the oldest, Zizi, as she began to take a "teacher-controlling" role. At another level the game was also a cultural-historical artifact conveying concepts of exchange value, transaction and consumption with an emphasis on acquisitive shopping. Most obviously and importantly the game mediated children using words that, in this event, developed thinking through talking and counting. For example, Tom used words, including numbers, to negotiate his shared turn-taking with Milly.

Event 24 continues:

Jack:	"I've got 3".
Tom:	"I've got 2 Jack".
Frank:	"I've got 2, I've got 1, 2".
Zizi:	"I've got 1, 2, 3".
Jack:	"I've got 1, 2, 3".
Zizi:	"You two've got 2 and we two've got 3". [chanting]
Researcher:	"Mmmm".

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Jack:	[laughs]
Zizi:	"So now it's Franky bankie's turn".
Teacher Amy:	"You've just had your turn Zizi, you've got lemons, who was after you?"
Zizi:	"Jack, no Frank it's not your, it went that way [pointing the direction]. Jack's turn. Okay, well it's Frank's turn".

[Frank looks confused as he had peeped at a card during this talk, so had taken a turn.]

Researcher:	"You can have another turn now".
Teacher Amy:	"Bananas, do you have bananas?"
Frank:	"No, look on my shopping list, no bananas. I've got no bananas on my shopping list".

[Teacher Amy leaves, the youngest three children follow her, Zizi takes over the teacher role]

Analysis and Discussion

9.3.2 Rules: Emergent and inherited

Within the game playing context these children created and repetitively practised rules that sustained their interactions and the game itself. Rules revolved around turn-taking, direction, number counting, plus the inherited rules of the game. These game rules included picking up cards, reading the pictorial symbols and matching them with their "shopping list" cards. The game rules were not rigidly transmitted and learnt, but juggled and played with. Turn-taking changed, and children played with numbers, chanting them and playing with rules around number order and quantity (2 and 3). Zizi played with Frank's name sound. As the children relaxed into the game rules the tone of the play shifted from its serious beginnings to a more playful style. The children now laughed and moved a lot, jumping, sliding, pointing and talking loudly.

Event 24 continues:

| Zizi: | "Right then, its Tom's turn". |

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Tom: "Um, I'm going to pick up this one".

Zizi: "Okay Frank, you pick the one near you, tomatoes. Frank's got tomatoes, have a look on your list Frank, do you need tomatoes?"

Tom: "1, 2, 3, 4, I've got 4".

Frank: "And I've got 3".

Tom: "And I've got 4".

Zizi: "Well now it's Tom's turn, Tommie's turn, Tommie's turny, no, no ,no, no, no, no, no". [singing]

Tom: "No, it's Hewy, Dewy, Dewy". [jumping while chanting]

Zizi: "It's my turn.

                    Orange juice, juicy juice, orangey juicy juice.

                    Whose turn is it?

                    Well it's Tom's turn.

                    Have you goooot it?

                    Put it neeeear in froooont of meeeee".

[singing, dancing, clapping her hands over her head, rhythmically, as she chants, picks up a card and puts it down]

[While singing Zizi picks up her shoes from the floor and slips them on. Tom picks up his gumboots. He puts one on and smells the other]

Tom: "I'm going to smell my boot, Zizi, do you want to smell my boot?"

Zizi: "No".

Tom: "It smells like mud".

[Tom moves around the table, offering his boot to each person to smell, and giggling. Jack and Frank smell it and back off. Tom smells it again. Zizi watches]

Zizi: "Let's get ready, whose turn? Who's had a turn?"

Tom: "Not Jack. He hasn't had a sticky turn".

Zizi: "Would you like a turn now?"

Tom: "Smelly boot".

Zizi: "Okay, then it's Frank's turn, and then it's myyyyy turn,
                    Nooooooo, noooooo, nooooo,
                    No no no no no no no no you haven't".

Tom:	"My smelly boot's kicked off my foot". [while excitedly jumping his other boot came off]
Zizi:	"It's Ba a a a nky's turn, Bank Bank's turn, turn, Banky Franky.
	No, put it next to Frank.
	No put it next to Jack cause Jackie's got no one.
	Now it's Franky Banky.
	My turn, my turn.
	No no no no, Franky Banky."
Tom:	"No it's Jacks turn now, you pick that one". [he pushes a card towards Jack]

Analysis and Discussion

9.3.3 Roles and distractions

With the teacher Amy off the scene Zizi, the oldest, assumed a teacher-like role, controlling the turn-taking rules, though not too didactically. She did ask "whose turn? Who's had a turn"? Comfortable in her leading role Zizi began to dance while singing and chanting directions and commentating on the process of the game. She transformed mundane statements into sung rhymes; "Well now it's Tom's turn, Tommie's turn, Tommie's turny". Tom responded in a challenging role with "No, it's Hewy, Dewy, Dewy". Zizi's act of putting her shoes on prompted Tom to take his gumboots off. His focus on the smelly gumboots did not distract from Zizi's controlling leadership, even though he offered his boot to everyone to smell. The play continued with Zizi protesting a series of long loudly sung negatives: "Nooooooo, noooooo, nooooo, no no no no no no no no".

The roles that Zizi and Tom presented may be interpreted as an expression of socially gendered roles (Danby, 1998) with Tom as the stereotypical disruptive boy and Zizi the pleasingly good, teacher-like girl. Tom did sabotage Zizi's role by ignoring her teacher role and diverting the game focus to his smelly gumboot, which he removed while Zizi was paradoxically putting her shoes on. However, contradicting the stereotype Frank and Jack - both

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boys - accepted their game-playing roles. When Zizi sang that it was Frank's turn, Tom disagreed and simply said, "No it's Jack's turn now" before telling Jack which card to pick up.

Event 24 continues:

Tom: "You've got you, you've done it Jack, look".
[Tom notices that the card Jack picks up matches, Tom jumps up and down excitedly, hands pushing down on table]
Jack: "I've got 5".
Zizi: "I've got 5 too, 1 2 3 4 5...6 7 8 9 10 11 12, Tommie's turn, Tommie's turn, Tommie, Tommie".
Tom: "I haven't got sausage sizzles, whose got sausage sizzles?"
Frank: "Not me".
Zizi: "My turn and look, I've got 6".
Tom: "Jack's got 5".
Frank: "1 2 3 4 5".
Zizi: "Jack's got 5, Jack's got 5, Frank's turn, right you've got it.
[She claps her hands over her head, chanting a running commentary] Can anybody help find the honey? Now it's Jack's turn. Really it's Frank's turn".

Analysis and Discussion

9.3.4 Community and belonging

This scenario involved a game within a game, or community within a community. Children inherited rules and then created other rules to match their roles and to fit with both the peer and the wider communities to which they belonged. Community, in this and other events, operated on several cultural levels reflecting: the children's peer culture with its horizontal and vertical relationships of power and friendship, the teacher's culture, the overlapping adult culture and the general ethos of the centre as a community culture.

In this event teacher Amy's reappearance towards the end of the event (see following page) reinstates teacher control and order to the disintegrating social chaos. The teacher's role in this centre community was to be in control and ensure that order reigned. Compared to her colleagues, teacher Amy was relaxed in her approach. She had allowed the children to experience feelings of being in control (Zizi), challenging authority (Tom), and accepting the status quo (Frank, Jack). Such feelings contributed to the ethos, particularly around teacher Amy. Several other teachers, in contrast, seemed to have a more rigid approach to rules and roles, and were not often observed communicating playfully with, or (like teacher Amy here) alongside, children. Teacher Amy exuded acceptance, and when she left this scene the younger children who had started out being involved and watching the game playing, left too and followed her. Besides appreciating her company they perhaps realised that, given the age-size-speaking pecking order, they would not have much status in the game playing without a mediating adult. They were young and small with the language of two year olds.

Such small-group activities involving between two and six children, initiated by children or teachers, were the norm in all three centres, with children seemingly naturally gravitating towards these small cluster groups. Within groups of this size everyone's voice could be expressed and possibly heard. Imagination, cognition, ideas and feelings were easily distributed (Salomon, 1993) across small groups.

Event 24 continues:

Tom: "Really really Frank's turn. No icky bananas. Jack's turn, then Frank's turn, then my turn".

Zizi: "Well it's really really Frank's turn".

Tom: "Really really Frank's turn".

Jack: "I've got 2 more to go".

[Jack also jumps up and down to the chanting, Frank sits]

Zizi: "Can anybody help find the honey?"

Tom: "I know which one is the honey, that one". [points to a card]

Zizi:	"I'm way ahead of you".
Zizi:	"Open up your heart and look inside". [singing]
Tom:	"Open up your cards and look inside, look inside". [singing
response]	
Zizi:	"Frank's turn, Frank's turn, Frank's turn, Frank's turn".

[Tom joins in the last round, chanting, singing]

Tom and Zizi:	"Frank's turn, Frank's turn, Frank's turn, Frank's turn".
Zizi:	"Frank, pick one up".
Frank:	"I'm trying to remember,… which one, what?"
Zizi:	"Which one do you need?" [to Frank]
Tom:	"Sausage sizzle, sausage sizzle.
	Sausage wizzle in a wee".

[Tom climbs onto the table]

Zizi:	"Frank, I'm just going to have to help you".
Tom:	"I've got 5".
Zizi:	"My turn now"…
Tom:	"2 plus 3 equals 5, I need 3 more. de de de de de de now I've
got 3".	

Teacher Amy returns as the play has become quite happily, playfully, raucous:
Zizi chants, Jack jumps and Tom's on the table. The game concludes peacefully
with all the children completing their shopping cards, with teacher Amy's help.
(14.30-15.00)

Analysis and Discussion

9.3.5 Contradictions and motivation

Tensions and contradictions dominated the children's verbal and body-
language interactions, and motivated the ongoing activity. The dialogue itself
also involved turn-taking, frequently addressed in rhyme with rhythm. Words
were used to represent their names, numbers of cards, and the objects
pictured on the shopping cards. Thus "Frank" became "Frankie" and then
became "Banky", just as earlier "Tom" had become "Tommie". Actions and
words became exaggerated as noted by Varga (2000). "Turns" became

"really really turns" repetitively chanted by Zizi and Tom separately, before they upped the ante by together chanting "Frank's turn". Zizi clapped her hands over her head while dancing and chanting; Jack and Tom jumped up and down, and Tom eventually climbed onto the table, positioning himself powerfully above the others. When Zizi sang the words of a song "Open up your heart and look inside", Tom's sung response refocused the song words on the shared game focus, "Open up your cards and look inside, look inside". The reciprocity and contradictions in children's interactions provided the momentum, motivation and energy that sustained this particular game activity for thirty minutes.

According to Engeström (1987) there are four types of internal contradictions in activity. Primary contradictions exist within activity system components, such as the rules, or community. Secondary contradictions exist between these components. Tertiary and quarternary contradictions exist around the group aim of the activity and between the aims of neighbouring activity systems. All these contradictions result from participants' actions. "In this context the link between the individual and society is important for understanding individual experience" (W.-M. Roth, 2004, p. 6).

This game play seemed full of primary, secondary and tertiary contradictions as these children played with the rules, roles, and artifacts. Tom altered the words of the song and climbed on the table, while Zizi attempted to assert adult teacher control, despite being a child. Zizi's teacher-child role illuminated tensions between the children's peer community culture and the rules of the centre culture. Corsaro (1985, 1997) has also noted these peer group: centre cultural tensions. From a macro perspective there were contradictions between activity systems and between the goals of the activity and other cultural aims.

For example, Tom's behaviour in standing on the table contradicted teacher controlled cultural rules around acceptable behaviour. He was also subverting both the rules of the game and societal rules when chanting

"Sausage wizzle in a wee" and standing on the table. What were Tom's goals and the group goals for all the children? They seemed to be a blend of enjoyment, togetherness, communication, and group agency. At another level the group goals were about understanding. The children played with rules around words and numbers, as well as the matching rules of the game, including turn taking. They made sense of these rule-based concepts by playing with them in improvisational and spontaneous ways (Sawyer, 1997).

For the researcher applying activity theory, these contradictions in activity reflected the nature of group activity as socially, culturally, and historically constructed, yet with groups composed of diverse individuals. Consequently contradictions and tensions between the components of the activity system could arise at any level of activity, for individuals and groups, around societal and cultural norms and values. Tensions associated with children's playfulness and humour were a focus in this research. These tensions frequently revolved around children making sense of situations, while learning, adapting, re-creating and challenging the associated social and centre rules.

9.4   SUMMARY

The playful rambling narrative event presented in this chapter reflected aspects of the culture of the centre community, including the rules and associated roles of that community. The game involved peers using artifacts playfully, re-creating their peer culture and centre culture around rules, roles, and a board card game. The different yet connected components of Figure 3.2 have been used to analyse the same event (24) from different yet complementary perspectives.

Within activity systems "community" includes rules, roles, and mediating artifacts. These components of the CHAT triangle model (Figure 3.2) have each been analytic foci for Chapters 5 to 8 inclusive. All of the events presented in this thesis may be analysed using any of the components of this

model, as each provides a complementary lens on the activity system. The different components are inseparably, dynamically, and dialectically interconnected. This chapter has integrated the different perspectives of these components in discussion and analysis around a common activity and the motivating aims of the activity. The distributed (Salomon, 1993) and connected nature of children's playful and humorous activity together stands out as a feature of all the events in this study.

The events presented in Chapters 5 to 8 show how narrative forms and scripts can provide a basic structure for children making meaning (Bruner, 1986) even when the meaning involved nonsense songs (event 23), role reversal (event 18), or word play (events 6, 7, 8, 10 in Chapter 6). In these events the playfulness seemed to "free" children's thinking from the potentially rigid, predetermined constraints of inherited narrow narrative ways of knowing and learning referred to by Shotter (1993). All the narratives (presented here as "events") involved children playing with rules and roles while re-creating narratives playfully, rather than reproducing predetermined scripts of adults or previous generations of children.

This event illustrates aspects of peer and centre culture, expressed in a community that consisted of expanding and overlapping activity systems, which may also be understood as chaotically overlapping narrative-like events. The dynamic nature of all this activity was reinforced by the physical activity of the children. Their occasional "hyper-activity" seemed to mirror the contradictions and tensions that, in turn, motivated and unified the ongoing activity (see 9.2.5).

Two of the components not addressed directly in this chapter but a focus for discussion in Chapter 10, concern the subject-object relationship in the activity system. (In Figure 3.2 the subject is "children" and object is "aims") These two components (children and aims), like the other components of the activity system (rules, roles, community, artifacts), are integrally interconnected through complex dialectical activity. They impact directly on

the tensions and contradictions that motivate ongoing change in the system. The child participants, being part of the activity, are also changing, along with the aim of their activity. In this way everything is in continual flux.

From another perspective, change is also integral to learning and development for the children. Further discussion around change, learning, and development will be addressed in Chapter 10, along with the conclusions and implications of this study of children experiencing humour and playfulness in their communication.

CHAPTER 10

SUMMARY: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the main themes and concepts that emerged as findings during the process of researching how young children experience playfulness and humour in their communication. The implications of these themes, sub-themes, concepts and related findings will be discussed. All the guiding research questions that were addressed in the findings chapters are addressed and embedded within the following thematic discussion. Connectedness emerged as a general and pervasive theme in this study. Within connectedness, diversity was an ever present tension contributing to contradictions in the activity of children being playful and humorous.

From a CHAT systems perspective the diversity in these contradictions motivated the dynamism and change that characterised children's playful and humorous activity. The emergent and complex nature of change is a feature of activity systems. It adds to diversity both within and across the events presented in this study. Diversity was also reflected in the incongruities associated with humour and playfulness. There are challenges for researching these "loose" concepts. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, both playfulness and humour defy orderly categorising and clear definitions (Bergen, 2003). From another perspective the structure of this thesis illuminates the diversity of interpretations and perspectives of children experiencing playfulness and humour in their communication through the presentation of 24 diverse events.

The social, situated (Kirshner & Whitson, 1997), and distributed (Salomon, 1993) nature of humour and playfulness are integrated in the other main

theme of connectedness. In this study children being playful together developed connections with each other and with the environment. Small groups of individuals became connected via the activity of being playful and humorous together. This group unity combined with individual diversity was a fascinating phenomenon. Dynamic unity in activity seems to fit philosophically with emergent theory as described by Sawyer (2002). He distinguishes the dynamic openness of emergentism from the potentially closed, more static and circular systems of some interpretations of monism. Both emergentism and monism emphasise the interconnected nature of all phenomena. Whereas emergentism acknowledges that newness and change emerge out of the dynamic nature of activity, monism may be interpreted as a more closed, repetitive, yet still interconnected view of the world. The Buddhist metaphor of Indra's net captures the emergent, interconnected nature of change as reflected and refracted in the glimmering jewels of Indra's Net (see 9.2.1). In the emergent and connected state of being playful and humorous together child subjects seemed to meld together with each other and objects in the environment as artifact-connected wholes, transformed by activity (Engeström, 1999; Engeström & Cole, 1997; Leont'ev, 1978; Miettinen, 2001). The distributed and dynamic nature of this connectedness is exemplified in many of the events presented in this research.

Connectedness and diversity were also overarching concepts in the sub-themes that emerged, and will be addressed in this chapter. These sub-themes include ideas around community, consciousness and collaboration, discussed as:

- Young children's playful and humorous communication creates connections: Playful communities;
- Shared playfulness and humour as shared consciousness: Language connects;
- Positive subversion and collaboration in playfulness and humour: Peer culture.

- Activity theory as an analytic framework: Representing connectedness and diversity;

All of these themes are about relationships and communication. They emphasise sociability and the centre as a community. Humour and playfulness are social. This obvious point has implications for how teachers and others view children, either as socially connected members of an early childhood centre community, as a "public family", or as individuals visiting the centre on a regular basis, but located and living in another more "private family". This leads onto reflection on the limitations and strengths of the methodology used in this study. Finally, further implications and areas for future research are discussed.

10.2 KEY THEMES

10.2.1 Young children's playful and humorous communication creates connections: Playful communities

In this study, small groups of children being playful and humorous together contributed to the overall "feel" and culture of early childhood centres as communities (Wells, 2004; Wenger, 1998). Small groups of children having fun together frequently acted as one within the larger group. This group oneness was exhibited in children's synchronised movements, as well as in the language they used, and the shared foci that motivated their joint activity.

Community structures, such as timetabled routines and rituals, affected the ways in which children were playful. Children in the three different centres created and sometimes subverted activities, such as routines and rituals, by being playful and humorous together. This pattern was also noted by Corsaro (1985, 1997) in his early childhood centre-based studies. The ways in which children together played with the rules and roles around routines and rituals created connections that both reflected and contributed to the community playfulness.

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Spontaneous group glee (Sherman, 1975) was an everyday phenomenon in all three centres in this study. In her play study Garvey (1977) also noted the everyday spontaneity of group glee. Both Lieberman (1966) and Barnett (1991) identified spontaneity as an important category in their instruments for measuring playfulness. Spontaneity is also an important quality in the "improvisational" nature of pretend play as described by Sawyer (1997). Group spontaneity was a recurrent phenomenon in the observations of children being playful and humorous in this study.

Despite the connected nature of young children's play much of the theory and writing about curriculum, teaching, and learning in early childhood refers to children as individuals. Little mention is made of peer interactions. Thus the early childhood teachers in this study followed the regulatory requirements to observe individual children, as a basis for planning and implementing curriculum and for assessing children's learning. Observations of individual children can narrow the teacher's (or researcher's) focus by prioritising the individual child, making it too easy for the observers to ignore the wider context of children's interactions and transactions. Yet it is this wider context that motivates and gives meaning to children's and teachers' actions and behaviour. A CHAT perspective, as used by the researcher in this study, explicitly includes the wider context of individual's mediated interactions.

10.2.2 Shared playfulness and humour as shared consciousness: Language connects

The activity of sharing and communicating humour and playfulness connected children. Words, verbal actions, posture, gesture, gaze and other artifacts (tools, signs, and symbols) mediated communication while also making children's thoughts and feelings conscious both for themselves and for others. In this sense "making conscious" implies the distribution of cognition as described by Salomon (1993). Emotion is integral to cognition according to Damasio (1999) and Siegel (1999). Imagination is also central

to cognition according to Vygotsky (1978). The events in this study exemplify these connections as individual children's thinking and feeling imaginations became distributed across the groups' playful activities.

The original Latin meaning of *conscius* is "sharing knowledge", from *con* with + *scire* to know. Shared consciousness is basic to communication. However, this does not mean that all the children engaged in being playful and humorous were equally conscious and aware. A lot of their fun was communicated in spontaneously improvisational ways. Individual children had fun improvising and spontaneously creating words, sounds and gestures unthinkingly, and therefore not consciously. Individuals experience the same playful and humorous events in different ways. Prior experiences and individual attitudes and dispositions ensure different experiential outcomes. Thus the improvised spontaneous knowledge expressed by individuals being playful and humorous together may become consciously shared group knowledge.

Word play featured strongly in this study. Children experimented with words as tools for thinking (Halliday, 1973; Vygotsky, 1934/1986), as well as for communicating (Cole, 1996; Wells, 1999), thus making conscious and sharing feelings and ideas. The three to five year old children in this study played a lot with words in creative, imaginative, and humorous ways that reflected their developing thinking and their fluency with word patterns. Such behaviours were also observed by Chukovsky (1963).

An understanding of words as more than thoughts and an appreciation of children's play with words is not new. Writing over thirty years ago, Cazden cited Lucy Sprague Mitchell (1948) who wrote almost sixty years ago:

> There is no better play material in the world than words. They surround us, go with us through our work-a-day tasks, their sound is always in our ears, their rhythms on our tongue...But when we turn to the children, to hearing and seeing children, to whom all the world is as play material, who think and feel through play, can we not then drop our adult

utilitarian speech and listen and watch for the patterns of words and ideas? Can we not care for the *way* we say things to them and not merely *what* we say? Can we not speak in rhythm, in pleasing sounds, even in song for the mere sensuous delight it gives us and them, even though it adds nothing to the content of our remark?
(1973, p. 607-608)

These words are at least as pertinent today. Despite the enthusiasm they express for children's apparently non-functional, non-structured word play, such play is still not a priority for teachers of young children. None of the teachers interviewed and spoken with in this study referred to children's word play when discussing children's humour and playfulness. This is interesting because word play was a prominent feature in the observations of children's playful and humorous communication in all three early childhood centres. The everydayness of children's play with words has also been noted by other researchers and writers such as Cook (2000). As well as being enjoyable fun, word play may also be important for children developing phonemic awareness which is an important part of learning to read.

Children's narrative ways of communicating, by co-constructing stories, while being playful and humorous, were also apparent in the research data. Humour and playfulness were also expressed as non-verbal narratives using sounds (other than words) gestures and movement (Trevarthen, 2002). Both verbal and pre-verbal children communicated emotional feelings of fun, humour and social togetherness in non-verbal ways. Using rhythm, gesture and sounds children co-constructed musical movement narratives, using other signs than words, to mediate and express their ideas and feelings (Dissanayake, 2001).

Analyses and representation of these narrative-like events involved the researcher reflecting on the sense and meaning that children might be constructing while being playful and humorous (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). This process also involved the researcher constructing stories to illuminate

aspects of the stories that the children constructed. Thus narrative methods for creating knowledge and understanding (Bruner, 1989) pervaded this study on several levels that included teachers, children and the researcher.

While words and other signs go some way towards connecting children being playful together there is still always some gap in the mediating process: between what children feel, think and experience, and what they actually represent, communicate and perceive. This slippage between individual experience and communicated responses enables the emergence of difference. When children in this study were intersubjectively and playfully connected and in tune with each other, their shared understandings contained differences as well as similarities. Intersubjectivity is multivoiced (Wertsch,1998); it includes the negotiation of meaning towards shared understandings (Rogoff, 1998). Differences are exemplified in the incongruous bases of much humour (McGhee, 1977, 1983). Negotiated differences motivate and propel continued activity. It follows that the communication process is not smooth, linear, nor logical, but thrives on difference as discussed by Fogel, Lyra and Valsiner (1997).

The outcome of these playful events was never totally predetermined. Shotter (1993) has described how aspects of communication, such as turn-taking, laughing, and other reciprocal responses, are anticipated by the players. Similarly scripts, as described by Nelson (1996), rely on players learning semi-predictable story lines. In all these events children blended improvisation with anticipation, half-guessing where their playful and humorous communication might lead. In this sense playful and humorous communication was always an integral part of an ongoing communication process. Playful and humorous communication emerged spontaneously (Corsaro, 1997; Sawyer, 1997) as part of children's ongoing communication in which, as Fogel (1993) explains: "… individuals and relationships are never fully defined; they are always constituted as part of a process" (p. 3).

This ongoing process of unfinished communication is exemplified in the open, flexible and sometimes chaotic nature of playful and humorous communication. Fogel (1993) has labeled the process "co-regulation" and this concept clarifies some of the complexities and discontinuities in the to-and-fro nature of children's playful and humorous communication:

> Co-regulation occurs whenever individual's joint actions blend together to achieve a unique and mutually created set of social actions. Co-regulation arises as part of a continuous process of communication, not as a result of an exchange of messages borne by discrete communication signals. Co-regulation is recognized by its spontaneity and creativity and is thus the fundamental source of developmental change. Co-regulation, in social and mental life, allows the individual to participate in the discovery of the unknown and the invention of possibilities. If our genes provide us with any developmental guideline at all it is our ability to enter into co-regulated discourse. (Fogel, 1993, p. 6)

Thus the development of shared consciousness by children being playful and humorous together was not a smooth process of developing shared understandings and intersubjective awareness. Rather, shared consciousness implied acknowledgement and acceptance of the diverse other players who were also engaged in the shared playful and humorous activity. The goals of the activity (presented as "events" in this study), directed the development of group synergy as shared consciousness, or intersubjectivity. Playfulness and humour are characterised by surprise and discordance. Activity is, by its nature, "bumpy". All of the events presented in this thesis contain elements of both determinism and indeterminism, congruity and incongruity, in the activity of children being playful and humorous (Fogel, Lyra & Valsiner, 1997). This is expressed in the tension at times between individual players' ways of being and the goals of their shared activity. In Catch 22 reasoning, the activity was the actions of the children. However, the motivation for their actions was dispersed in the interplay of the components of activity described in the model (see Figure 3.2). The components: roles,

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rules, community and artifacts, are dynamically and dialectically situated in cultural, historical and social contexts.

10.2.3 Positive subversion and collaboration in playfulness and humour: Peer culture

Playful subversion was an element in much of young children's humour and playfulness in this study. Though it is an element in many of the 24 events presented, subversion is particularly prominent in Chapter 6, which focuses on the "rules" component of the activity theory model (see Figure 3.2, "Children's playful communication in context"). In this study rules have been interpreted flexibly and broadly. They are understood as culturally-determined values and norms, expressed in children's patterns of behaviour and ways of being. Rules do also include more rigidly prescriptive standards, such as the rules in children's games. As Garvey (1977) explains:

> *Playing with rules* is an ambiguous phrase. We have play with rules that are the subject matter of what we're playing with, and then there's play that is constrained by rules in Piaget's sense. I think I'm agreeing with you 100 percent if you're saying that when you fantasize you are playing with rule systems, that is, regularities in systems. You're either keeping them consonant or you're varying them in some way, but if that rule governed system didn't exist, then you couldn't play, *because you are playing within a system, a system of relevances and coherences.* (cited in Sutton-Smith, 1979, p.279)

Accordingly rules include the sort of rule systems represented in the repeated scripts, schemas, and narratives played by children learning their cultures. This flexible interpretation of rules as systems reflects the playful flexibility with which children in this study created and re-created rules in their early childhood centre communities. Rules also accompany the roles that people play and that children see, try to understand and act out. Thus rules regulate exchanges among participants within the community of activity (Figure 3.2). They govern the way things are done within communities and cultures.

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In this study, children also played with the constraints that are integral to rigid rules, such as the rules around etiquette when eating together. These rules may be interpreted as precursors to the "game" rules referred to by Garvey in the above quote. Rigid rules seemed to invite subversion from children actively participating in learning the rules of the centre culture.

Young children do not learn merely by passively internalising externally imposed rigid rules (such as the game rules that primary school age children learn). Young children actively appropriate, re-create, and learn rules for living through ongoing processes of internalisation and externalisation of the rules of their cultures. A research focus on playfulness and humour raised researcher awareness of children playing with rules and blurring the boundaries of "socially acceptable" behaviour. They did this by improvising and being innovative while testing, developing their understandings, and breaking rules. Playfulness seemed to be integral to this flexible and creatively adaptive sense-making process. What was learned and repeated was always slightly different from what preceded it. In this reciprocal and playfully flexible way children's peer cultures and the wider culture were re-created, rather than reproduced. This process, whereby children use resistance as a strategy while re-creating their culture, has been referred to by Corsaro (1997) as interpretive reproduction. Playful peer group cultures were a feature in all three centres in this study.

Culture is re-created through everyday practices that include children being playful and having fun. Mimesis, narrative, myth, and ludic episodic culture, described by Donald (1991) as evolutionary stages in representational thinking, were also features in many of the episodes of young children being playful and humorous in this study. This observation is consistent with Donald's (1991) assertion that, though evolutionary in development, all these stages pervade the way humans today think and represent their ideas. Donald prioritises the thematic organising qualities in mythic representation above the other evolutionary stages. As with narrative ways of making

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meaning, myth can also order experiences. But, as Donald points out, in myth experience is organised thematically and metaphorically, rather than literally.

Myths are fundamental explanatory constructs in all cultures, including children's peer cultures (Egan, 1988; Egan & Nadaner, 1988), and mythic themes pervaded the events of children being playful and humorous in this study. Corsaro (1985) has identified mythic themes that are common underlying features of children's spontaneous fantasy pretend play. These include being lost and found, danger and rescue, death and re-birth. Corsaro (1997) has also elaborated on the complex power and control sub-texts sometimes underlying the spontaneous fantasy play of groups of children. All these mythic themes and sub-texts featured in this study, where children adapted them in playful and sometimes humorous ways. Examples are chasing, catching, killing and burying the powerful teacher (who was also reborn), in event 18, and playing with "poisonous" in events 19 and 20.

From a researching adult perspective the children in these early childhood institutions were subject to a lot of control and surveillance. This is partly because the teachers were legally responsible and accountable for children's safety and well being. Children were subject to rules around many routines such as eating times with their associated rituals, tidying up times, circle times, sleep and rest times. These routines, rituals, and other rules constrained their freedom in various ways. The children in this study were extremely compliant in learning these rules. However they did not simply learn rules by reproducing them, but played with the rules, introducing flexibility and meaning to their learning. Children asserting peer group agency by collectively playing with rules around routines, and playing with power, thereby subverting the rules, emerged as a consistent theme in this study.

Young children do not themselves consider that being playful, humorous and subversive while learning norms of behaviour is learning "rules", or even

learning anything. They play, learn, and subvert rules while developing understandings, awareness, and feelings of control and mastery. The prevalence of themes around rules, power, and control, in children's experience of humour and playfulness is a researcher's (outsider's) perspective. It may be that, from a child's perspective, being humorous and playful together enables children to feel some sense of group agency (Bandura, 2001) and self control, rather than always feeling externally controlled by adults. As Corsaro (1997) points out, this desire "…to achieve autonomy from the rules and authority of adult caretakers and to gain some control over their lives…" is "a major theme of peer culture" (p. 131). As Garvey (1977) pointed out when referring to play with rules, "since societies and personalities are both shaped by rules, a better understanding of the beginnings of such play is essential to the study of human development" (p. 106).

The children in these early childhood centres were largely controlled by adults' rules. Being playful and humorous together allowed them to experience feelings of efficacy, agency, power, and control. As well as being enjoyable, such feelings may be particularly important for children developing feelings of competency and confidence which are aims of *Te Whaariki*, the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996, see section 10.6). In this sense children's playfulness and humour may be important indicators of effective curriculum implementation.

10.2.4 Activity theory: An analytic framework representing connectedness and diversity

CHAT, both as a research method and the paradigm for exploring and understanding children's playful communication, fitted the overall purposes of the research. This became increasingly clear as the research progressed. This is because CHAT prioritises interactions over individuals. The researcher wanted to know why, how, and what connected these young children in their playful and humorous communication. Therefore the

research focus included both the nature and the context of children's playful and humorous interactions, rather than children as individuals. As pointed out by Kirshner and Whitson (1997), Lave (1993) and others context is integral to situated activity. This research focus on activity as the unit of analysis also exemplified the centrality of relationships for young children experiencing humour and playfulness in their communication.

The 24 events presented in this study illuminate both the diversity and the associated complexity of young children's playful interactions. The events are bounded by meta-communicative signals (Bateson, 1972; Goffman, 1974), narrative structures (Bruner, 1986; Ochs and Capps, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988), artifacts, and centre routines. Signals and structures framing the start and finish of events were communicated with words, gestures, body language, and timetabled routines. The events extended beyond these boundary signals and the participating individuals to also include whatever artifacts mediated and connected the elements (including individuals) within the event. Beyond these observable elements, the cultural and historical antecedents, the physical space, and other environmental factors that reciprocally influence events were also important.

CHAT, being a relatively new area in academic research in the west (Chaiklin, 2001), has been open to a diversity of types of research applications. Referring to this eclecticism and transformation in how CHAT is used, Engeström (1999) writes, "I anticipate that the current expansive reconstruction of activity theory will actually lead to a new type of theory. Essential to this emerging theory is multi-voicedness co-exisiting with monism. This may sound like a contradiction, and that is exactly what it is" (p. 20). Unlike other theorists Engeström (1999) considers monism as an open, yet unified system, similar in its dialectical nature to emergentism as described by Sawyer (2002). Other interpretations of monist circular systems as closed do not fit with CHAT because they do not enable the emergence of complexity and newness, expressed as innovation and creativity. The monist multi-voicedness that Engeström refers to is exemplified in the multiple

perspectives represented by the components of activity systems. The tensions between the components, the aims of activity, and the consequent dialectical dynamism ensure that activity systems remain open, evolving and transforming yet interconnected, like the metaphor of Indra's Net. "Human activity is endlessly multifaceted, mobile, and rich in variations of content and form. It is perfectly understandable and probably necessary that activity theory should reflect that richness and mobility" (Engeström, 1999, p. 20).

This blend of multi-voicedness, open monism (oneness, or unity) and emergentism was expressed in the simultaneously connected and diverse ways in which children in this study created fun together within the same event. The diverse ways they did this reflected children's individuality. It also reflected the tension between sameness and difference, congruity and incongruity, that is integral to humour and playfulness.

Contradictions, tensions and discontinuities characterise communication generally as explained by Fogel (1993). According to CHAT tensions and contradictions motivate and sustain ongoing activity. Playful and humorous communication is not smooth and linear. In this study the actions of children engaged in playful and humorous activities created the tensions and contradictions that motivated the ongoing activity. In this way the activity united individuals as a whole.

The prioritising of tension in activity mirrors the tension and surprise that is also an essential element of humour and playfulness. Humour is full of tension. This is exemplified in the notion of incongruities as a common basis for humour (McGhee, 1971, 1972). Children's playfulness thrives on bending, and subverting rules, and this is an undercurrent in many of the diverse events presented in this study.

The overall approach to this study is socio-cultural. Within this paradigm CHAT emerged as a framework that reflected the socio-cultural theory underpinning the approach. The CHAT framework (see Figure 3.2) emerged

during the research process as a pragmatically useful tool for researching humour and playfulness in young children's communication for all the reasons outlined. The inclusion of activity as both content and context added ecological authenticity to the research (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

10.3 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The overarching research question of this study asked: "how do young children experience playfulness and humour in their communication?" The children in these early childhood centres did spend a lot of time (sometimes subversively) being playful and humorous together. The time spent having fun raises questions about the value of children's playful and humorous communication, in relation to both future outcomes and present enjoyment. In response to such questions of value Elkind (2003) believes "... that play is as fundamental a human disposition as loving and working ... children play because they are predisposed to play,..." (p. 46).

The discourse around the value of play is complicated and controversial and its analysis is not essential to this study. But, several of the sub-themes that emerged in response to the overarching research question do have implications for teachers exploring their beliefs and values about play, as well as developing their awareness of the pervasiveness of children's playfulness and humour. Those sub-themes to be addressed in this section are:

- Children's playful and humorous communication: Complexity and collaboration
- Children's playful and humorous communication: Spontaneity and improvisation
- Children's playful and humorous communication: Music and rhythm
- Children's playful and humorous communication: developing meta and social awareness
- Children's playful and humorous communication: Implications for teachers.

10.3.1 Children's playful and humorous communication: Complexity and collaboration

Just as the researcher's awareness of the pervasiveness, complexity, and collaborative nature of children's humour and playfulness developed during the research process, so also did the awareness of several of the teachers in each early childhood centre. Initial ethical research procedures such as obtaining informed consent of all participants, and the researcher presence in centres, ensured that all the teachers were aware of children's playfulness and humour. Teacher interest, enjoyment, appreciation, and awareness of children's humour and playfulness did vary both between centres and between teachers, reflecting different centre cultures, teacher values, and degrees of collegiality.

Playful teachers were an interesting phenomenon. Several teachers in each centre, including all three teachers in Southbridge, had spontaneously playful teaching styles. The Southbridge teachers were a playful team of friends, all aged thirty and all self-described extroverts. They consciously used humour in their teaching, and nick-named the researcher "the humour lady". In a reciprocal, almost modeling, way teacher playfulness mirrored children's playfulness, or vice versa, so that like the teachers the children at Southbridge were also collaboratively playful. Both teachers and children communicated playfully. They had fun together. For the researcher, visiting this centre felt like going to a party. It is likely that the sessional nature of the centre and the fact that these were all four year olds contributed to this party-like playful atmosphere.

Teachers engaging in children's playful pretend play was a noticeable feature in Southbridge centre, where the teachers' roles sometimes mediated children's humour and playfulness. For example in event 18 the teacher became an object for children to chase. She thus became a mediating artifact. She was also a proxy agent (Bandura, 2001), enabling the children

to experience group agency, power and control in chasing, catching and overpowering her. Teachers' role-playing alongside children in this way was, however, more of an exception than a norm. The teacher-child power differential seemed less of an issue in Southbridge centre where all the teachers were playful together and with the children. Also teacher power there was a playful mediating focus of activity, expressed for example in teacher chasing.

The routines and rhythms associated with all-day care, and the larger, more diverse, and less united staff teams in both Northbridge and Eastbridge centes may partly explain why playfulness and humour that involved all the teachers and children together was not so common in these centres; teacher chasing was observed only in Southbridge. Both Northbridge and Eastbridge centres did have playful party times, as is shown by events presented in this study. However these playful times were usually child-initiated. An exception was the "teacher as clown" episode at Eastbridge (event 13). That teacher's behaviour and attitudes were however, not typical of most teachers in this study.

Playfulness may be an important teacher quality. The ability to play and be playful is generally regarded as important for children learning and developing new and adaptive behaviours (Rogoff, 1999). In a recent paper Goncu and Perone (2005) have repositioned play as life-span learning, and playfulness as a desirable disposition for all ages. Both humour and playfulness involve degrees of openness, flexibility, and adaptability which they suggest are not only desirable but necessary qualities for people at any age. The differences in teacher collegiality, collaboration, and playfulness in this study suggest that these teacher-focused issues would be useful areas for future research.

The culture and history of the early childhood centre communities was also a dominant feature in the playfulness of children and teachers, reflecting the accepted rules and roles around children being playful (El'konin, 1971, 1989/2000; Kalliala, 2002). The teachers at Southbridge reported that they

did not have many fixed rules. Teachers and children there were generally a united yet diverse playful community. Children playfully adapted and created rules and boundaries as they re-created understandings of their peer, centre, and wider cultural communities. Teachers played too. Despite (or because of) the diverse and multicultural nature of Southbridge centre the children, some parents and families, and the teachers were a community. They shared common understandings and accepted differences. It is likely that playfulness enabled these teachers flexibly to adapt, respond, and relate to the diversity within their community.

10.3.2 Children's playful and humorous communication: Spontaneity and improvisation

In this study spontaneity and improvisation were features of how children communicated fun. These related characteristics were not predetermined. They emerged out of playful and humorous activities. As many of the events illustrate improvisational spontaneity was a feature in children's playful imaginative pretending. Events 3, 4, 5, 8, 15, 16, 18, 19, and 20 all involve children pretending while being humorous and playful. Sawyer (1997) suggests that these improvisational skills that young children commonly use in their pretend play are important skills for life. For example, all conversations are improvised in the sense that they are always created or re-created afresh.

Improvisation was also a feature of children's general playful and humorous communication. Thus children improvised and transformed everyday routines and rituals into playful events. Events 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 21, 22, 23, and 24 are all examples of children improvising playfully and humorously without emphasising pretending. Several of these events focus particularly on improvisational and imaginative play with words (events 6, 7, 8, 10, and 17). Children developing as communicators need opportunities to practise their improvisational abilities, and children learning to think with words need opportunities to play with words. It follows that teachers need to

be aware of, value, and possibly extend opportunities and possibilities for children to practice improvising.

10.3.3 Children's playful and humorous communication: Music and rhythm

As this research progressed so too did the researcher awareness of the interrelatedness of all the ways that young children experienced and expressed humour and playfulness in their communication. Children being playful and humorous created and played with the sense and meaning of situations in multi-faceted and complex ways. Rhyme, and rhythmic play with sounds and bodies were interpreted within flexible open-ended musical narrative frameworks that complemented the CHAT framework. Wordless playful and humorous musical narratives communicated shared fun in events 1, 2, and 14. Sung and chanted words added meaning to the musical narratives in events 6, 7, 17, and 24.

The Greek understanding of "musike", as including all the temporal arts (Trevarthen, 2002), captures some of the breadth in young children's verbal and physical languages. Musike includes drama, music, dance, movement, and sounds. In this study rhythm was observed to be a fundamental feature in children having fun together. Individuals in groups often spontaneously moved and communicated playfulness synchronistically, creating an impression of oneness and togetherness. The tension that accompanied playful and humorous activity was expressed rhythmically in movement and sound. Sounds included laughter, squeals, and screams of joy. Both the tension and the mediating artifacts united the participants and provided motivation to continue having fun.

10.3.4 Children's playful and humorous communication: developing meta and social awareness

Communication involves complex cognitive, emotional and social processes (Bateson, 1972). Having fun, joking and being playful are social activities.

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They are grounded in communication. All of the events presented in this study portray the social nature of humorous and playful communication.

It is social in two ways. First, from a socio-cultural perspective whatever mediates interactions is part of the wider culture and therefore social, in a very broad sense; this acknowledges that social practices both originate in and re-create culture. Secondly, communication is obviously naturally social simply because communication involves more than one person.

Playful and humorous communication also involves thinking and feeling. Several "meta" phrases have been used by researchers and writers referring to children's developing cognitive and communicative abilities (Olson and Bruner, 1996). Trawick-Smith (1998) uses the term "metaplay" to refer to the process whereby children alternate being in and out of role as they direct and negotiate their roles within pretend play. Others have also described the complex negotiating that can occur as children balance the line between real and imaginary worlds (El'konin, 1971, 1989/2000). In his study of improvisation as the content in pretend play, Sawyer (1997) used the term "metapragmatics" to refer to children's regulatory signaling about the event during the event. In this study metaplay, metapragmatics and "metacommunication" were all evident in children's playful and humorous communication.

Metacommunicative signals (communication about communication) contributed to the framing of the events (Bateson; 1972,Goffman, 1974) and continued throughout events. In various ways children announced to each other that playfulness and humour were beginning. They used non-material artifacts such as words, sounds, gaze and other bodily expressions, as well as material artifacts like water and sand. The timing and structure of the events were also influenced by the centre routines and rituals such as eating-times and outside-play times. This use of metacommunicative signals continued throughout playful events as an integral element in the ongoing negotiation that helped sustain the "togetherness" in children's playful activity.

Children playfully having fun together and alongside each other had to communicate with each other in various ways. Sometimes they simply showed awareness of each other in quiet intuitive ways, as in event 2, for example, where the toddlers were physically united by the water trough, yet each experienced the water play in their own ways and most seemed more interested in the water than in each other, yet they allowed each other the physical space to be playful together.

Awareness of others is a theme that runs through concepts of metaplay, metapragmatics and metacommunication. Social awareness is also a theme shared by theory of mind (Astington, 2000; Whiten, 1991) and intersubjectivity (De Haan, 2001; Stern, 1985; Trevarthen, 1998), research as discussed in the Chapter 2. The development of intersubjectivity is an aspect of successfully negotiated social pretend play (Goncu, 1993).

In this study the development of intersubjectivity was also an aspect of successfully communicated playfulness and humour. Intersubjectivity was expressed differently according to the numbers of children involved, their age, adult involvement, the particular playful and humorous context, and the artifacts that mediated their intersubjectivity (De Haan, 2001). It is likely that a lack of intersubjectivity contributed to the playful activities that collapsed almost before starting. Without the teacher's intersubjective involvement in events 11 and 12 the two one-year old children could not be playful together, or alongside each other.

Children having theories of mind was more difficult to gauge than intersubjectivity, unless children chose to spontaneously use words to explain their own and other's beliefs and desires. The four year olds in events 18, 19, 21, 22, and 24 were quite articulate and their speech did illuminate aspects of their thinking. But despite this articulation, these events do not conclusively demonstrate children understanding that others too have beliefs and desires. Being playful and humorous did not usually entail clearly articulated

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reflections on theory of mind. Rather, children were preoccupied with being playful and having fun together. For the researcher to interrupt events to question children on their beliefs about others' thoughts, would have been unethical, intrusive, and would very likely have halted the playfulness. However in being playful and humorous together children (even very young children) did show some awareness of others' thinking. For example Eliza (1 year, 11 months), in event 5, repeated a playful hiding trick for one teacher, after first doing it with another teacher. Eliza was able to anticipate the teacher's reactions thereby possibly demonstrating some theory of mind. She was emotionally, cognitively, and socially engaged in being humorous. The social communicative emphasis on playfulness and humour in this research and the socio-cultural framing of the research prevented any exclusively mentalist focus on children's theory of mind.

Emotional qualities were integral aspects of children experiencing humour and playfulness in their communication. Tom abstractly subtracted and calculated children's age differences in event 22. His fascination with numbers motivated this play with numbers. The motivation, in turn, developed out of his emotionally, cognitively, and socially-based fascination with numbers. Links between motivation, emotions, cognition, and being social, in theory of mind research and young children's awareness of others, do require further research (Damasio, 1999; Siegel, 1999).

Theory of mind proved to be a less useful concept than intersubjectivity for understanding children engaged in being playful and humorous together, because children communicated playfully with their bodies and emotions as well as with words and their minds. Artifacts mediated this playful communication and the development of intersubjectivity. Artifacts included language in its many forms. Referring to the function of verbal language in theory of mind Astington (2000, p.269) points out:

> Language and thought are interdependent, and Piaget's and Vygotsky's viewpoints should be seen as complementary rather than opposed, as indeed, they themselves saw them. Language simultaneously serves

two functions; it is a system that both represents and communicates (Olson, 1980b). ... It would be a mistake to try to argue that either one of these perspectives provides a more satisfactory explanation of cognitive growth than does the other. "Cognition rests as much on a cultural foundation as it does on a biological one" (Olson, 1980a, p. 3). Children communicating playfully did so with their bodies, speech and thinking, feeling minds connected in mediated activity situated in social, cultural, historical contexts.

Olson and Bruner (1996) point out that current research interests in meta (communication, play, pragmatics), intersubjectivity, theory of mind and collaboration all reflect a gradual shift in researcher thinking towards acknowledging and trying to understand children's perspectives. Thus: "...what children *do* is not enough; the new agenda is to determine what they *think* they are doing and what their reasons are for doing it..." (Olson & Bruner, 1996, p. 13).

The emphasis on children's perspectives is reflected in the focus on their experiences in this study. But this study goes further than trying to understand individual children's experiences and thinking. Instead it focuses on what children are doing (experiencing) *together*, in relation to each other, in their communication. This interactive and situated research focus is more authentic and natural than focusing on individual children's thinking. It includes emotional and motivational components. The focus on social connectedness is also congruent with the social nature of humour and playfulness, and it fits with the nature of the early childhood centre community settings that these children attended, and where the 24 events are situated.

10.3.5 Children's playful and humorous communication: Implications for teachers

As this study progressed the researcher became increasingly aware of the powerful role of teachers in children's playfulness. This researcher

awareness was reflected in the sub-questions that developed in phases three and four, which addressed the role of teachers in children's playfulness and how teacher playfulness affected the centre culture.

All the sub-themes addressed in section 10.3 have implications for teachers' roles in relation to children's playfulness. The teachers in these early childhood centres had a powerful influence on how, when, and why children were playful and humorous. The tensions and contradictions (and hence motivation) in children's playful (sometimes subversive) and humorous activity were affected by the rules, routines, and roles that teachers created and enforced. These in turn seemed to affect the culture of the early childhood centre as a community.

This study suggests that young children in institutionalised settings need opportunities to play with rules around roles and routines. They need the freedom to communicate playfully. By being spontaneously playful and humorous, children can internalise social norms in meaningful ways (Vygotsky, 1934/1986). Playfulness with peers develops meaningful peer relationships while, like other young mammals, children simultaneously learn social boundaries (Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2002).

In many of these events teachers had the power to extend, enrich, develop and complicate, to ignore, or to kill children's playful and humorous communication. Teachers frequently missed opportunities to extend children's playful and humorous communication. For example, they often missed opportunities to extend and to initiate play with words, yet children's word play was a pervasive theme in this study. Words as objects are marvelously portable play-things. Words as sounds can convey both feeling and meaning, and combine socially valued learning with being playful and having fun.

10.4 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGY

The most prominent strengths of the methodology used in this study are also its weaknesses. They involve tensions in the use of CHAT around dualisms such as macro versus micro analysis, and structural versus emergent ways of understanding, analysing and representing playfulness and humour in children's communication. Both tensions concern the nature and boundaries of context in the 24 events used to represent children experiencing playfulness and humour in their communication.

Another possible dualism is the inclusion of Piagetian developmental assumptions within the socio-cultural paradigm of this study. However, the researcher did not view this as a dualism. Biological developmental characteristics of age groups such as infants, toddlers and young children can co-exist with cultural historical interpretations of development. Russian socio-cultural theorists refer to developmental phases that broadly parallel some Piagetian stages of development. For example, play with objects is described as the leading form of activity in the infancy to early childhood period while pretend play dominates the preschool period up to the age of about seven years (El'Konin,1971/1972). A research focus on cultural historical development that ignores the biological and physical characteristics of young children would misrepresent the physicality that characterises young children experiencing playfulness and humour in their communication. However this study foregrounds the social cultural historical context of development by using the CHAT model (Figure 3.2) as the unit of analysis and prioritizing the social nature of children's humour and playfulness.

At a micro level the unit of analysis in this thesis is mediated activity within playful and humorous events in early childhood centre settings. However activity theory may also be usefully applied to exploring more macro level activities that prioritise the political, social, cultural, and historical contexts of activity. For example, this research could have explored links between national early childhood policies and regulations, teacher training, and

attitudes towards playfulness and humour in the communication of teachers, families and children. But an explicitly macro focus did not match this study's more micro focus on children's experiences in their communication. Macro and micro foci and analyses do not provide opposing perspectives. They are artificial constructs for categorising and understanding research data. Both, like subject and object, are intertwined. They co-exist and affect each other. Thus children's playful and humorous experiences are ultimately responsive to, and effect change in both macro and micro levels of context. As Fine (1991) points out: "The world is seamless, although analyses are not ... Ultimately we seek to recognize that macro and micro approaches are and must be informed by each other in developing seamless knowledge of the world" (p. 162).

A similar argument concerns how the 24 playful and humorous events in this thesis are presented and analysed as framed structures with beginnings and ends. Events were framed by the early childhood centre structures that included the rules and routines as well as the physical environment. The events, like the traditional focus on individual children, may appear artificially disconnected from their immediate context, particularly the precedents and antecedents of the event. But the emergent and improvisational nature of children's playful and humorous activity connects the activity to the framed structural context of the event. As Sawyer (1997) explains, "Viewing children's play as improvisational suggests how it may play a developmental role in teaching children how to manage the balance between social structure and individual creative action" (p. 182).

There is also a danger that the different activity theory "lenses" of roles, rules, community, and artifacts may misrepresent the dynamic, emergent and connected nature of the events and of activity generally. For the purposes of carrying out this research and analysing data some categorising was essential. The point is that the reader, like the researcher, must understand that he or she is only reading a part of a dynamic interconnected whole.

The CHAT framework used to analyse the events in this study did enable in-depth exploration of children's communication, while retaining a focus on the whole event as the unit of analysis. CHAT provided a pragmatically useful framework for researching children (and teachers) engaged in everyday communicative practices (Wenger, 1998). It provided a naturalistic, dynamic, and complex analytical framework for studying these practices.

The CHAT framework combined with ethnographic observation methods and narrative-like event structures illustrated the complexity of children's playful and humorous relationships. As a framework the CHAT model (Figure 3.2) illuminated the interconnectedness of the relationships between the components of CHAT. In this way both the framework and the methods reflected the complex diversity of individual children connected in the activity of playful and humorous communication.

The results of this study are not definitive. It is limited in representing the findings of one person carrying out observation-based research for a doctoral thesis, as well as out of personal and professional interest. The research was also constrained in being confined to time spent in only three early childhood centres in only one city in New Zealand at a specific historical time, the turn of the 20th Century. Any perceived quantitative loss may be compensated for by the richness of the qualitative data gained. This study does suggest several areas for future research around the dominant sub-themes of collaboration, communication, curriculum, and play.

10.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

The group collective ways in which children communicated their playful and humorous experiences is a major theme in this study. Being playful and communicating fun involved small groups of children feeling connected and relating to each other. This view of children as connected to each other (and to the environment) has implications for curriculum planning, curriculum implementation, and the assessment of children's social learning. The view

of children as social collectives that emerges from this study has implications for policy directions and teaching practices. This in turn implies the need for further research to explore connections between peer relations and peer learning in early childhood centres.

Understanding individual children as connected to each other and the environment also has flow on implications for how early childhood centres are viewed. These centres are both separate community collectives of children, teachers, and families and integral parts of their local geographical communities. Further research is needed to explore how early childhood centres function as communities, as public families, as communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and as communities of learning (Rogoff, 1998; Wells, 2004). Such research could use CHAT in a more macro-analytic way than this study has done.

This research reinforces the view of play as a dominant (Vygotsky, 1978) and pleasurable (Piaget, 1962) activity of young children, and also the view that play is an important means for "being", as well as for learning and "becoming" (Perry, 2005; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Despite the considerable amount of traditional research and writing about children's play it is still a "puzzling" phenomenon and therefore worthy of further research. The ways in which being playful and humorous integrated cognition and emotion with volition, particularly in relation to playing with words, have implications for developing socio-cultural understandings of motivation. Further research is needed to explore these links, particularly the links between semiotic mediation and language development. The rhythmic links between musicality, song, speech, gesture, and all the languages of communication, were a fascinating feature in this study of young children communicating playfully.

Further research is needed to extend that of Trevarthen (2002) on musical identity and intersubjectivity, and Dissanayake (2001) on the biological and evolutionary bases of musical (temporal and rhythmic) awareness in early relationships. However, this study does suggest that teacher awareness of

musicality and rhythm in children's communication could be enhanced. Some questions arising from this research include: "How does musical (temporal, rhythmic) playfulness fit with developing musical awareness"? and "How does musicality add to playful and humorous communication"?

10.6 CONCLUSION

This study used "events" as a way of staying close to children's experiences of being playful and humorous. The events represented everyday socio-cultural practices in three early childhood centre communities. They were analysed and interpreted within the framework of CHAT. Thus the ways in which children utilised the material artifacts that surrounded them and the ways in which they related to each other, physically, verbally, rhythmically, intersubjectively, watching, imitating, and repeating, all exemplified the centrality of relationships for young children being playful and humorous together. Material and non-material artifacts mediated these relationships. Among the most significant artifacts for children communicating playfully were words. Words included the pre-verbal rhythmic signs that young children used while "talking", such as gesture, music, and other sounds. Words also included more complex cultural scripts and stories that four-year-old children enacted playfully.

In this study children being playful and humorous together communicated about what they were doing while they were doing it, with words, bodies, and minds. Being playful helped to free children's thinking and feeling states from the controlling rigidity of adult-imposed routines and rules, thereby empowering children as active agents together.

During the communicative process imaginative, cognitive, and emotional experiences were "distributed" across children as they collaboratively created playful situations while re-creating their peer culture and the centre culture. The outstanding feature of children's playful and humorous communication was this relational aspect and, by implication, the social learning that also

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encompassed cognitive and emotional learning when children were having fun together.

This distributed, social, and situated nature of relationships and learning has the potential to elaborate our understandings of socio-cultural theory in relation to teaching and learning. In the New Zealand context peer interactions and relationships have been overlooked in curriculum planning and assessment. Instead the pedagogical focus has been on children as individuals. Thus, practices, regulations and policies in the areas of curriculum planning and the assessment of children's learning are largely individualistic. This is exemplified in the common centre practice of developing records and documenting individual children's learning in portfolios. Portfolios may enhance communication between early childhood centres and individual children's families. A challenge for teachers and policy makers is to develop systems that also enhance children's peer communication and value the learning in children's peer relationships, thereby creating learning communities that value communication and reflect children's peer cultures.

Te Whaariki, the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996) explicitly emphasises the importance of communication. Te Whaariki:

> ...is founded on the following aspiration for children:
> To grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society (p.9).

This study has illustrated the complex, improvisational, and collaborative nature of children's playful and humorous communication. In the complex world of the future (and the present) it is likely that the flexibility and collaboration that accompany being playful and humorous will be desirable learning dispositions (Carr, 2001), and learning outcomes, for everyone.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Information form for parents

(Dates vary reflecting the three phases/centres)

Dear Parents

The purpose of this letter is;
- to inform you of a proposed research study;
- to ask for your permission to observe your children in this centre.

I am a part time lecturer in the Institute for Early Childhood Studies, in the School of Education at Victoria University. I propose carrying out an exploratory research project investigating how young children use humour in their communication.

I will be looking for all the ways in which children might communicate humour, while simultaneously trying to define humour from the children's perspectives. Consequently I would like to use a variety of methods to gather data. These methods will be primarily observational. They will include note taking as well as some video and audio recording of children interacting normally and hopefully humorously. All data will be destroyed once the project is completed, or if you decide to withdraw consent earlier.

I anticipate spending half a day per week in the centre, from July until November, and possibly some time early next year. You retain the right to at any time, without prejudice, withdraw your consent and discontinue your child's participation in the research project.

A British researcher called Judy Dunn has carried out research looking at young childrens interactions in the home, with parents and older siblings. She found that young childrens (21/2 – 4 years) conversations with slightly older siblings were often humorous and the humour differed from that used in conversations with parents. It would be interesting to compare humour use at home with humour use in the child-care centre. If you would be interested in being part of this sort of comparative study I would be very keen to follow up this proposal with you. All identities; the centre, teachers, parents and children will be protected through the use of pseudonyms.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the project please contact me for clarification. My university extension phone number is x8646, email, sophie.alcock@vuw. ac.nz .

APPENDIX B

Consent form for parents

If you are happy for your child to be part of this research work please sign and return this form saying "yes" to question (a). If you do not want your child to participate please send back the form saying "no" to this question. If you are interested in participating in the research as a parent please indicate your interest by circling the "yes" to question (b).

Thanking you. Sophie Alcock

(a)   I   *agree/*   *do*   *not*   agree   to   my
child_____taking
   (please cross out one)   (child's name)

part   in   the   observation   based   exploratory   research   project
at_____
                                                        (centre name)
child care centre.

The focus of the observations is children's use of humour in their communication.

(b) I am also interested in the proposed follow up study comparing young children's developing use of humour at home and in the childcare centre.

Yes/ no.

Signed_____*Date*_____
_____

Name
*written*_____
___

APPENDIX C

Information form for staff

(Northbridge centre)

(Dates amended for Southbridge and Eastbridge centres).

(The focus on theory of mind shifted, during phase one, to a broader socio-cultural focus on children developing intersubjective awareness that included developing theories of mind. Similarly, humour shifted to include playfulness that better captured the researcher's observations of children being funny, or humorous. The reasons for this shift are further elaborated in Chapter 5).

Title: Humour: Communication and Young Children's Developing Theories of Mind

Introduction

The proposed project involves exploring young children's use of humour in their communication from the perspective of children's developing psychological understandings of other people. The project will consist of longitudinal case studies using both qualitative and quantitative approaches to interpret children's humour use over time and in different contexts. The time frame for data gathering will be from twelve to eighteen months, targeting children aged approximately thirty months when the research commences. The years from two to four have been found to be significant in previous naturalistic research studies of children's developing theory of mind (Dunn 1991, Astington 1995). It is anticipated that the research will integrate theory of mind and socio-cultural research perspectives through the combined focus on humour as a culturally and cognitively constructed communication genre developed through collaboration between individuals.

This preliminary exploratory study will refine the research by identifying the humour indicators of children in your centre. I will be looking for all the ways in which children might communicate humour, while simultaneously trying to define humour from the children's perspectives. Consequently I would like to use a variety of methods to gather data. These methods will be primarily observational. They will include note- taking as well as some video and audio recording of children interacting normally and hopefully humorously. I will also be observing how children use humour with you as staff.

I would also like to audio tape conversations where the recorder can be set up with minimal interruption, such as in the dress- up area. The recorder will be visible to the children, who will also have the option of stopping the recording if and when they choose. It may be useful to playback video (and

audio tape) recordings for children and informally check out my interpretations with the filmed children. This process can be enjoyable as well as educationally beneficial for young children as it allows them to revisit and clarify experiences.

As a qualified early childhood teacher I will use my professional judgement to ensure that any data gathering is minimally disruptive to the children's usual programme in the centre. It may even contribute positively to the programme.

It is anticipated that the project data collection will commence in August/ September 1999. As the researcher I would like to spend a minimum of one day per week in your centre, observing and participating. This process will continue until about November by which time I will have collected heaps of information and this initial exploratory phase of the research should be completed. After analysing the data I will refine the research focus and the data collecting process. I anticipate spending one day per week in your centre for several months during 2000, though with a break from April until July. We can jointly decide what days are most suitable for you.

As part of the feedback process the Centre will receive a copy of the preliminary report on the project. Assuming this exploratory phase is fruitful the research process will continue for most of 2000, and the centre will receive a further final report upon completion of the entire project.

If you are willing to participate please read and sign the consent from. I will also be seeking the consent of parents.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the project please contact me for clarification. My university extension phone number is x8646, email, sophie.alcock@vuw. ac.nz .

I'm looking forward to spending time in your centre.

Sophie Alcock

APPENDIX D

Consent form for staff

I have read the attached information sheet and herewith consent to participating in this research project.

I realise that in the course of her observations of children interacting with other children and adults, including teachers Sophie Alcock may at times observe me. I am also aware that Sophie may want to interview me, however I retain the right to decline to answer any question which I do not wish to; and I have the right to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the research at any time, without prejudice.

I understand that all information gathered will be treated confidentially and my identity, like that of the centre and all participants in this research will be protected with the use of pseudonyms.

*Signed*_____*Date*_____

*Name wri en*_____

APPENDIX E

Guidelines for staff observing children

(Northbridge centre)

Pointers:

Write up notes only when you're feeling unrushed. I do not want to create extra work for you.

Please include date and approximate time of day and context (place) of the observation.

This project is ultimately looking at children's use of humour in communication, so I'm trying to explore humour from the child's perspective. If you want to you can try to interpret the child's thinking in your notes, or you can make them purely descriptive.

Do include yourself if you are part of the observation, so if the child/ren is/are communicating with you.

Please include non verbal as well as verbal communications where relevant and possible.

Thankyou very much for taking the time to make some anecdotal observations of children's humour.

Sophie Alcock

APPENDIX F

Guidelines for parents observing children

(Northbridge centre)

Research Project: Young children's use of humour in communication

Thank you for consenting to be part of this research. The purpose of this book is for you to document any instances of humour that you observe where x   uses humour and / or shows an understanding of humour. Your observations can include what you, or another person said or did. They can also include your interpretations and understandings of x's   thinking. They should be dated and if you think that the context is important for the humour jot that down too.

You may keep the book, however I would like access to it (photocopying) as part of this research.

Thank you very much and please contact me if you have any queries.

Sophie Alcock
Phone ext. 8646
Email Sophie.Alcock@vuw.ac.nz

Example observation form

Time	observation	interpretation	artifacts
27.1 0.00 9.20		Seventies day, teachers all dressed in 70's evening gear in preparation for party on saturday	mirror is conveniently located beside the paint easels
	X and x have painted faces as cat and dog, changes to 2 dogs, they return to easels and play with the black paint, painting hands, (on video)	They've done this on previous occasions too, transforming selves into cats, kittens, dogs and mice, adding whiskers etc. using black paint; (19,10th?)	
9.40		In sandpit TS and 5 boys digging a tower, Lots of talk about resting, half joking Teacher also has a spade and digs too, joint castle mountain construction	sandpit spades etc
	Oh it's getting higher Who's going to help flatten it ? Chorus response by 5 children: meee.. another boy and another, joking about making "a big fat one" TS: "Just flatten it down, don't break it down, just flatten it down That's it, push it down, that's it TS: "Are you guys all resting? Well I'll have a little rest too then "too much hard work"

"I think we're going to have a mat time soon, fondue, remember what we talked about yesterday, we're going to make chocolate fondue | 10 kids at one time, does ts presence also attract them?, sandpit is covered from hot sun, conveniently located just outside doors, and large

Lots of negotiating re how to flatten the top of the sand pile / tower /castle

as teacher leaves, so too do children | |

APPENDIX H

Example memo

July 25th 2000

Reflections
My second centre is an interesting contrast.   The supervisor is in the process
of leaving. According to staff she's on leave, sometimes "sick". Without a
supervisor the teachers seem to all muck in and co-supervise. It is a special
sort of centre. Half the teachers have tongue studs. They're all young.
Some are gay, lesbians. There are a couple of male teachers in the next
door centre. The teachers seem to play, have fun and a shared sense of
humour. They also show a lot of physical love for the children, picking them
up, lying beside them at circle time and being sat upon by several young
children at once, playing swinging games, dancing to rock 'n roll with the
children and each other....

Today, P, the reliever for the past 3 weeks who's almost my age (old) made
some affirming comments about the centre "they really love the children
here.   They pick them up and play with them". She too commented on the
special centre culture, where it's run by young teachers having fun. Half the
teachers are still in training, centre based. E is a new graduate.

Goldstein, Lisa (1997). Teaching with love: A feminist approach to early
childhood education. New York: Peter Lang., a reconceptualist I guess.
This book is perfect for understanding this centre and the importance of a
loving curriculum. Goldstein, referring to Martin (1990) writes about "… "the
three C's"- care, concern and connection…The 3 C's are the intellectual
foundation upon which my vision of loving teaching is built. However, one
essential element needs to be added to them in order to bring them to life for
the field of early childhood education: passion. The ethic of care is a highly
complex and subtle web of words and emotions, but it lacks the fire, the
spark, the ebullient energy that is required to teach young children with love."
(p 16). She continues by referring to Mem Fox (1995, 5-6) who describes the
fun, humour passion in teaching a three year old child to read, laughter,
intensity….it sounds like humour to me.

"I define this marriage of passion to care, concern, and connection as "love".
(P 17).
She refers to Sternbergs (1998) triangular model of love as including passion,
commitment and intimacy.

26th
Look at centre culture and teachers use of humour, also look at pleasure, joy,
well being the existential feeling and bodily expression. How does the body
convey humour, joy?

The outside equipment here promotes opportunities for fun; big climbing boxes that children can also play inside. Em and Georgy use them as rooms to play variations of "house".

Interview schedule for teachers

Teacher questions:

Reassure teacher that the research focus is about children's understandings of humour /playfulness.
This incorporates understanding how teachers (you) appreciate and use humour

Do you use humour as a teacher here?
Do you consider yourself playful?
How?
With children?
With colleagues?   (anecdotal examples?)

Which children do you "joke/play" with most?
Which adults do you "joke/play" with most?

How do you think these children use humour?
What about those children that don't seem to have a "sense of humour"?
Which children do you think are the most popular?
Can you comment on gender differences and humour?
What about age differences and humour?

What do you think about connections between humour and learning and thinking???

Parent interview schedule and prompt notes

Interviewing parents of five children about whom additional information was gathered, Northbridge centre

Humour parent questions and prompt sheet

Aim: To clarify humour links between family home and early childhood centre, triangulation, other perspectives, humour as expressed in playfulness, fun, laughter...

Explain that it helps me to have taped words, but I'll check with them before using any verbatim lines in any report.

Revisit research focus and ethical issues

Explain:
The general aim of this research project is to make some sense of the role of humour and playfulness in young children's communication. In particular I am interested in relationships and connections between children's use of humour, the ways in which children communicate and develop shared understandings and how these relationships relate to cognitive development, in particular their developing intersubjective awareness of self and others. Humour, like play, and playfulness, defies any constraining definition. Playfulness and humour are more integral to relationships and experiential enjoyment in living, than planned individual learning objectives and outcomes. To summarize, children's humour, communication and connected concepts are the basis of this research project.
The overarching research question

How do young children experience humour and playfulness?

Sub questions

How do young children, understand and use humour/playfulness in their communication with peers, siblings and teachers?

How do playfulness/ humour facilitate and reflect young children's developing psychological understandings of self and others?

Within this interpretivist theoretical paradigm this project uses the usual qualitative eclectic mixture of strategies to investigate young children's humour experiences, in the context of relationships and communication. The

data will mainly consist of contextualised, detailed observations of children being humorous and having fun. It will form the basis for a series of case studies focussing on the phenomenon of humour from children's perspectives. This collective case study (Stake, 1994), "event" based approach may be a way of capturing and portraying, the randomness and multidimensional qualities of playfulness and humour. In representing and interpreting "events" I aim to draw out and illuminate these diverse aspects of children's humour while being true to the original contextualised event. I am however mindful of the importance of retaining an awareness of the broader context when "framing" (Goffman 1974, Bateson 1972) humorous events.

I am looking at humour in communication, from the child's perspective, the experience of humour

How do you see XXXX's personality(child's name)?

Explore playfulness in the home, humour, fun and associated values

Do you play with your children?

How? (what about laughter humour, fun together?)

Mind corporeal (note)

Describe incidents I have seen in centre as prompts eg:

Eliza makes constructions, funny hat

Tom plays with numbers and words and letters, (playfulness as lateral thinking)

Why are Elli, Tom so humorous, dispositions?

Tom singing and dancing, 26,10.00 tape, to cassette, watching self in roof corner mirror, practicing style, playfully

Tom can focus concentrate drawing, making spider, dancing with numerous distractions around him

Friendships? "not you Sophie, my friend Sophie" smiling and distinguishing the names of her friend sitting beside her and me, sitting opposite, explaining to me that the Halloween pumpkin is Sophie's

Humour is therefore defined as a social message intended to produce laughter or smiling (Apte, 88 p ix)

Consider also the *why* people use humour (functions), *how* (techniques) *what it communicates* (content), *where and when* (situation context)