

A place within a place: Toward new understandings on the enactment of  
contemporary imaginative play practices and places

Submitted by

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**Photo of a nest cubby found in Tasmanian high country constructed by an unknown maker. Reproduced with kind permission of photographer and colleague, Dr Yeshe Colliver (2012)**

We shall not cease from exploration,  
And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

Eliot (1922) 'Little Gidding' from *The Waste Land*

## **Declaration of authorship and sources**

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No part of this thesis has been submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committee (where required) or a relevant safety committee if the matter were referred to such a committee.

This thesis was edited by Dr Gillian Fulcher, as a member of Editors Victoria, and her editorial intervention was restricted to Standards D and E of the *Australian Standards for Editing Practice*.

Deborah Moore

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## **Abstract**

This study was an intergenerational inquiry into imaginative play practices and places. Using narrative inquiry, it explored the childhood imaginative play practices and places of four families who resided in and around the suburbs of Melbourne, Australia. Each family had three generations who participated in the study; these included grandparents, parents, primary school children and pre-school children- a total of sixteen participants. Positioned within a qualitative, interpretative research paradigm, the narrative inquiry approach prompted participants' subjective stories as socially constructed knowledge about their childhood experiences of imaginative play.

Multiple contemporary discourses exacerbated by past assumptions and moral panic have asserted children's imaginative play today is 'less than' that in the past. Rather than respond to changes in imaginative play through moral panic, this study sought to examine to what extent children's imaginative play had, or had not, changed and what this meant to children using an empirical response to the changing nature of play. The use of cultural-historical theory established the persistence of cultural practices while it also showed the significance of contextual changes over time as influential determinants in how imaginative play was enacted. The Vygotskian conceptualisation of imagination was used to explain the psychological processes through which imaginative play could be understood. The cultural-historical theoretical framework was complemented through blending the concepts of *perezhivanie* and historicity to allow the examination of past and present imaginative play in a way that illuminated the key role of children's emotional and active responses to their imaginative play.

Through an analysis of the participants' narratives, the meanings of imaginative play practices and places across three generations were found to be fundamentally stable, with a limited number of changes having occurred. Children's impulse toward the construction of private, hidden and uninterrupted places in which to enact their imaginative play was described by participants as one of the predominant themes which illuminated continuity across generations. In contrast, children's agentic capacity to subvert and re-create various aspects of their cultural context highlighted the few elements of change over time. In building a focal theory of contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play, the interconnections between children's conscious awareness, material place and the construction of symbolic places, grounded in emotion, were considered essential elements of this new understanding. Visually,

this was represented as a nested diagram, with three porous dimensions, through which children cross into and out of to enable the enactment of their highly creative imaginative play in an emotionally safe place.

## **Publications and Presentations**

### **Published work: Sole authored articles**

Moore, D. (2015). 'The teacher doesn't know what it is, but she knows where we are': Young children's secret places in early childhood outdoor environments. *International Journal of Play*, 4 (1), 20-31.

Moore, D. (2014). Interrupting listening to children: Researching with children's secret places in early childhood settings. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 39 (2), 4-11.

Moore, D. (2014). 'My childhood was filled with secret places': The importance of secret places to children. *International Journal of Play*, 3(2), 103-106.

Moore, D. (2009). 'Only children can make secret places': Children's secret places in early childhood settings. *EveryChild*, 15(3), 6-7.

### **Published work: Co- authored articles and book chapters**

Edwards, S., Moore, D., & Cutter-Mackenzie, A. (2012). 'It will be a wasteland if we don't recycle': Sustainability and intentional teaching in early childhood, *EveryChild*, 18(3), 12-13.

Edwards, S., Moore, D., & Cutter-Mackenzie, A. (2012). Beyond 'killing, screaming and being scared of insects': Learning and teaching about biodiversity in early childhood education. *EC Folio*, 16(3), 12-19.

Cutter-Mackenzie, A., Edwards, S., Moore, D., & Boyd, W. (2014). *Young children's play and environmental education in early childhood education*. Heidelberg: Springer International Publishing.



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AARE Conference, Adelaide, December, 2013 – Historical and contemporary narratives of children’s imaginative play places.

Honoring the Child – Melbourne University Early Childhood Conference, November, 2013 – Listening to children’s narratives: ‘That’s enough telling!’

# Table of Contents

<b>Declaration of authorship and sources</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Publications and Presentations</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>x</b>
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	<b>xv</b>
<b>Abbreviations used with data</b> .....	<b>xvi</b>
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1. Background to the study .....	1
1.2. Aim of the study.....	4
1.3. A personal and a public narrative of imaginative play .....	5
1.4. Outline of the thesis .....	7
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review</b> .....	<b>10</b>
2.1. Introduction.....	10
2.2. Children’s knowledge of their lived experiences.....	10
2.3. Children’s knowledge of imaginative play practices and places: Meanings and uses of imaginative play.....	13
2.4. Children’s knowledge of imaginative play practices and places: Emotional connections with imaginative play.....	21
2.5. Adult knowledge of imaginative play practices and places: Moral panics about imaginative play.....	26
2.6. Adult knowledge of imaginative play practices and places: Generational change in imaginative play.....	31
2.7. Summary.....	40
<b>Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework</b> .....	<b>41</b>
3.1. Introduction.....	41
3.2. Theories and theorists of imagination, creativity and imaginative play .....	41
3.3. Vygotsky’s theory on the development of imagination and creativity in childhood .....	50

3.3.1. The ‘four ways’ in the development of imagination and creativity in children ....	56
3.3.2 Imaginative play, emotion and perezhivanie .....	63
3.4. Summary.....	70
<b>Chapter Four: Methodology.....</b>	<b>71</b>
4.1. Introduction .....	71
4.2. Qualitative research: An interpretative world view.....	71
4.2.1. Researcher reflexivity.....	73
4.3. Methodological approach: Narrative Inquiry .....	75
4.3.1. Narrative research foundations.....	75
4.3.2. Key principles and practices of a narrative inquiry .....	79
4.4. Methods: Sites and participants.....	84
4.4.1. Intensity sampling.....	84
4.4.2. Introduction to the research for the participants.....	86
4.4.3. Participating families and family members .....	87
4.4.4. City family – Inner-city location .....	88
4.4.5. Bush family – Suburban location .....	89
4.4.6. Beach family – Outer-fringe suburban location .....	89
4.4.7. Farm family – Semi-rural location .....	90
4.5. Methods: Data generation.....	90
4.5.1. Conversational interviews and meaningful storytelling .....	91
4.5.2. Conversational Interview One: Telling and drawing .....	93
4.5.3. Conversational Interview Two: Map making.....	94
4.5.4. Conversational Interview Three: Memory boxes .....	95
4.5.5. Conversational Interview Four: Re-story check.....	96
4.6. Data analysis.....	97
4.6.1. The unit and object of analysis .....	97
4.6.2. Intentionally looking for imaginative play stories in participant transcripts.....	98
4.6.3. Choosing exemplar stories of emotionally intense meanings of imaginative play	98
4.6.4. Creating a table to highlight temporal, social and place contextual dimensions...	99
4.6.5. Writing a re-story for each participant’s exemplar stories .....	100
4.6.6. Looking for narrative themes within generations and then across generations...	100
4.6.7. Creating mind maps of main recurrent themes to identify key findings .....	101

4.6.8. Custom-built form of data analysis .....	101
4.7. Ethical issues.....	103
4.7.1. Researching <i>with</i> children in a narrative inquiry .....	103
4.7.2. Sensitive topics and intrusive research .....	104
4.7.3. Informed consent/assent and the right to withdraw .....	105
4.7.4. Confidentiality and participant anonymity .....	106
4.8. Limitations of the study .....	107
4.9. Summary.....	108

**Chapter Five: Finding One: The continuity of imaginative play practices and places across generations..... 110**

5.1. Introduction.....	110
5.2. The impulse towards finding or constructing a quiet, uninterrupted and private ‘own place’ for imaginative play .....	111
5.3. The impulse toward the need for emotional safety for imaginative play.....	118
5.4. The close connection between bedrooms and trees with imaginative play .....	122
5.5. The inclusion of significant others in imaginative play.....	129
5.6. The impact of others on imaginative play.....	134
5.7. The influence of popular culture on imaginative play .....	139
5.8. The influence of found objects on imaginative play.....	144
5.9. Summary.....	149

**Chapter Six: Finding Two: The changes in imaginative play practices and places across generations..... 151**

6.1. Introduction.....	151
6.2. The availability and accessibility of places for imaginative play .....	151
6.3. The degree of privacy sought for imaginative play .....	160
6.4. The use of toys in the private and public performance of imaginative play.....	166
6.5. Summary.....	172

**Chapter Seven: Discussion ..... 173**

7.1. Introduction.....	173
7.2. Outer dimension: Children’s conscious awareness of imaginative play .....	174
7.3. In-between dimension: The construction of material places as portals into and out of imaginative play.....	184

7.4. Inner dimension: The construction of a symbolic place to enact imaginative play .....	198
7.5. Summary.....	211
<b>Chapter Eight: Conclusion .....</b>	<b>212</b>
8.1. Introduction .....	212
8.2. Contribution to knowledge: Substantive knowledge on new understandings of imaginative play .....	214
8.3. Contribution to knowledge: Methodological knowledge on the use of a narrative inquiry approach with young children .....	218
8.4. Limitations of the study.....	219
8.4.1. The disclosure of children’s private places for imaginative play.....	219
8.4.2. Adult interpretations of children’s imaginative play.....	219
8.4.3. No generalised claims about imaginative play .....	220
8.5. Further questions prompted by this study.....	220
8.6. A final narrative: My own re-thinking of places for imaginative play.....	222
<b>References.....</b>	<b>224</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>266</b>
Appendix One: Pingelly Kindergarten: Parents’ Day: Author, date and newspaper unknown. .....	267
Appendix Two: Power, L. (2013, April, 8th). Technology killing secret world of kids. <i>The Daily Telegraph</i> .....	268
Appendix Three: ACU and DEECD Ethics Approval letters to conduct research with children.....	269
Appendix Four: Explanatory letter to Early Childhood Centre Directors and Primary School Principals .....	273
Appendix Five: My own version of a memory box.....	276
Appendix Six: Explanatory letter for Parents, followed by Consent form for Parents and Grandparents.....	277
Appendix Seven: Preschool child drawing a significant place for imaginative play during her Telling and Drawing Conversational Interview. ....	281
Appendix Eight: Map making of places for imaginative play. A preschool child’s map making, followed by a parent map making. ....	282

Appendix Nine: Memory boxes. A grandparent’s memory box collection, followed by a preschool child’s box. ....	283
Appendix Ten: Ethics approval for a fourth conversational interview with each participant. ....	284
Appendix Eleven: Raw data transcript exemplifying a story of imaginative play embedded within the oral narrative. ....	285
Appendix Twelve: An exemplar story chosen for its intensely emotional response to imaginative play.....	287
Appendix Thirteen: Example of a Three dimensional narrative inquiry model process. ....	289
Appendix Fourteen: Example of a re-story.....	294
Appendix Fifteen: Extract from vertical table showing analysis within Preschool children’s re-stories.....	296
Appendix Sixteen: Extract from horizontal table showing analysis across generations from grandparents to preschool children.....	298
Appendix Seventeen: Example of mind mapping of narrative themes to identify key themes and findings.....	301
Appendix Eighteen: Children’s assent form discussed at the beginning of each conversational interview.....	303
Appendix Nineteen: Georgiana McCrae’s ‘sanctum’ in her home, McCrae Homestead, McCrae, Victoria, 1844. ....	304

## List of Figures

Figure 3.1: Visual representation of Vygotsky’s (1930/2004) four ways toward the development of imagination and creativity.....	62
Figure 4.1: Visual representation of the four participating families with three generations included in each family .....	88
Figure 4.2: Diagram representing the four conversational interview process conducted with the participants .....	93
Figure 7.1: Visual representation of the three dimensions of contemporary understanding of the enactment of imaginative play.....	210

## Abbreviations used with data

To denote the original location of the data used throughout this thesis, the following abbreviations were used.

Data generation conversational interviews were denoted as follows:

Telling and Drawing Conversational Interview:	T&D
Mapping Conversational Interview:	MP
Memory Box Conversational Interview:	MB
Re-storying Conversational Interview:	RS

Pseudonyms for participants are denoted as follows:

City Family:

Jill (referred to as J)

Judy

Sonya

Gabrielle

Farm Family:

Bob (referred to as B)

Daniel (referred to as D)

Ted (referred to as T)

Georgia

Bush Family:

Gloria (referred to as G)

Felicity (referred to as F)

Scott (referred to as S)

Frank



Beach Family:

Cathy (referred to as C)

Emily (referred to as E)

Laura (referred to as L)

Harry (referred to as H)

Based on the above, interviews are cited as follows:

(J, T&D, 6.5.13), (Judy, MB, 2.8.13), etc



## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This study is about childhood imaginative play. In particular, it is an intergenerational examination of imaginative play practices and places in an endeavour to suggest new understandings of contemporary imaginative play. Using narrative inquiry, it explores the imaginative play practices and places of four families. The use of cultural-historical theory establishes the persistence of cultural practices while also showing the significance of contextual changes over time as influential determinants in how imaginative play is enacted. Through an analysis of the participants' narratives the study examines the meanings of imaginative play practices and places across three generations. Chiefly, the topic was identified because of what appears to be confusion and misunderstandings around imaginative play practices in the twenty-first century.

### **1.1. Background to the study**

Multiple contemporary discourses concerning imaginative play suggest children today are no longer able to play in imaginative ways (Bishop & Curtis, 2001; Postman, 1985). This has given rise to confusion and misunderstanding around children's imaginative play in the twenty-first century, especially where there is an assumption that children's imaginative play today is 'less than' children's play in the past (Bodrova, 2008; Kim, 2011). This can be problematic for early childhood educators because imaginative play is considered important for children's development (Blake & Giannangelo, 2012; Bodrova, 2008; Saracho, 2012) and, as in the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009), is often viewed the cornerstone of early childhood education (p. 15). However, as Edwards (2014) contends, imaginative play may be manifested in a multitude of iterations in contemporary childhoods compared to past forms of imaginative play. As a consequence, early childhood educators may not recognise contemporary children's imaginative play practices or places for imaginative play. Therefore, this study can be seen as urgent for early childhood education because of the profound impact these misunderstandings, confusion and assumptions may have on children, their education and the early childhood field. Consequently, this study sought first to examine imaginative play practices and places across three generations, with the aim of illuminating any continuities or changes in imaginative play over time. By doing so, the study also sought to call attention to the

underlying assumptions which form multiple contemporary discourses on children's imaginative play and hence, second, to suggest new understandings of contemporary imaginative play.

Scholars and researchers have acknowledged the construct of childhood is different in each era (Aries, 1962; Cunningham, 2006). As a consequence, the view of childhood in any era is influenced by how children are perceived by adults who are informed by past, present and future assumptions and expectations (Qvortrup, 2009). Qvortrup (2008) had earlier defined this temporal notion as the 'historicity of childhood' (p. 72), and then reinforced this way of looking at change over time by stating, '[t]he parameters of childhood change their values constantly...but childhood nevertheless keeps forms that are comparable over time' (Qvortrup, 2009, p.26). Therefore, within the construct of childhood it can be argued there is both 'continuity and change' (Qvortrup, 2009, p.26). Furthermore, Edwards (2013) has emphasised it is also important to acknowledge the impact of context on children's development over time rather than 'simply comparing' past and present children's play experiences and skills (p. 204). However, contemporary discourses on imaginative play appear to have disregarded the inevitability of change and difference over time, and instead lament as Karsten (2005) found that 'it all used to be better then' (p. 276). I will develop these important issues in Chapter Two when I draw on the sociology of childhood paradigm to discuss generational change.

Children's imaginative play has been said to be changing over time (Cunningham, 2006). As an important cultural practice of childhood, and from a cultural-historical theoretical stance, imaginative play can be seen to change in accordance with larger contextual changes (Davydov, 1995; Rogoff, 2003). One of society's responses to these changes has traditionally been founded in moral panic. By definition, a moral panic relates to increasing anxiety and unsettled feelings about any perceived 'threat to societal values and interests' at any given time (Cohen, 2002, p. 1). Through their distribution by the media, research reports and word of mouth, these anxieties can become so 'entrench[ed] in the population's psyche' (Adams, 2013, p. 523) it can become difficult to know where the moral panic originated and what form it has taken (Facer, 2012; Krinsky, 2008). Researchers who have examined moral panic over time have found those relating to any aspect of childhood are especially hard to identify because intensified emotions incite a sense of a 'crisis in childhood' (Adams, 2013; Krinsky, 2008). This phenomenon was clearly seen in the literature towards the end of the last century when it was predicted the total loss of childhood due to the introduction of television:

[c]hildren's games, once so imaginatively rich and varied and so emphatically inappropriate for adults, are rapidly disappearing.

It is my contention that with the assistance of other media, such as radio, film and records, television has the power to lead us to childhood's end. (Postman, 1985, p. 292 & 290)

In his article, Postman (1985) linked the disappearance of children's ability to play imaginatively in 'rich and varied' games with his prediction of the demise of childhood, and hence deepened the rising moral panic about play, technology and childhood generally (p. 290). Other researchers reinforced Postman's (1985) view of contemporary children's inability to play imaginatively due to the impact of television. For example, academic papers and scientific reports such as Mendelson, Dietz, Karp, Patton, Shelov and Stern (1988) in the *American Academy of Pediatrics* stated 'toy-based television' was 'hazardous' and would 'inhibit imaginative play' (p. 900). Similarly, Levin & Rosenquest (2001) in their commentary on children's increasing use of technological toys, stated this trend would have a long-term detrimental impact on children's ability for problem solving, imaginative play and learning. More recently, researchers such as Bodrova (2008) argued contemporary children's imaginative play had declined, and stated:

[children today] play only with realistic props, their play scenarios are stereotypical and primitive and their repertoire of themes and roles is rather limited...Researchers from different countries agree that make-believe play of today's children is not simply different from the play of the past, but it has declined in both quality and quantity. (p. 364)

As a significant cultural-historical theorist, Bodrova's (2008) definitive statements would have been highly influential in informing early childhood educators, program directors and policy makers about the state of contemporary imaginative play. In a similar way, Kim (2011), in her quantitative study, also warned of a 'crisis in children's creativity' (p. 285), while Blake and Giannangelo (2012) warned there is 'growing concern that our children are losing their creative abilities' (p. 294). Other researchers investigating imaginative play have found parents and early childhood educators consider children today no longer imaginative, creative or capable of independent thought because of their dependency on television (Doliopoulou & Rizou, 2012; Fox, Diezmann & Grieshaber, 2010; King & Howard, 2010). In addition to this, media, research

reports and social commentary have collectively produced multiple contemporary discourses exacerbated by moral panic based on societal belief that childhood imaginative play is not only in ‘crisis’ (Adams, 2013; Coster, 2007; Kehily, 2008; Kim, 2011) but ‘lost’ altogether (Levin & Rosenquest, 2001; Postman, 1985; Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 2006).

Markedly similar to the cause of this contemporary moral panic, Bishop and Curtis (2001) claim the introduction of new technology has been ‘blamed’ for children’s decline in ‘play[ing] like they used to’ for many centuries (p. 2). Evident in the nineteenth century, for example, the introduction of the railway was seen as the cause for children’s declining play skills, while the ‘first cinema, radio and gramophone’ were considered the cause for twentieth century children no longer playing as they once did (Bishop & Curtis, 2001, p. 2). This draws attention to the cyclical nature of moral panics and now, in the twenty-first century, technological inventions of television and digital games have been seen as the prime cause for the assumed loss of children’s ability to engage in imaginative play (Adams, 2013; Bishop, 2014; Levin & Rosenquest, 2001). However, this is not a thesis about children’s engagement with digital technology nor how moral panic has described imaginative play in contemporary children’s use of digital technologies. Rather, the thesis offers an alternative response to the current moral panic around the loss of children’s imaginative play by making sense of the changing nature of children’s imaginative play. Therefore, I am providing a different response to contemporary discourses of change in children’s imaginative play through an empirical approach. This empirical approach aims to find out to what extent children’s imaginative play has changed or has not changed over time, and what this change may mean for children, early childhood educators and early childhood education.

## **1.2. Aim of the study**

Given the issue of understanding contemporary imaginative play amidst a background of contemporary discourses exacerbated by moral panic, the aim of the study was to examine contemporary and historical children’s imaginative play practices and places. As such, the research question for this thesis was:

What do the meanings of children’s imaginative play practices and places over the past three generations suggest for contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play?

To examine the meanings of children's imaginative play practices and places over three generations an intergenerational narrative inquiry into children's imaginative play practice and places was undertaken. Therefore, I sought individual narratives of childhood imaginative play practices and places of three generations in four families. Each family consisted of a grandparent, parent, early primary school child and a preschool child. The families were identified through the assistance of early childhood educators, and were located in inner city, suburban and semi-rural locations around Melbourne, Victoria from March to December 2013. As a narrative inquiry, it aimed to highlight the experiences of childhood imaginative play of each of these family members through conversational interviews recalled as stories at this time and place. Therefore, the study sought to identify the meanings of childhood imaginative play practices and places. I interpreted these meanings through processes of co-constructed storytelling and in-depth thematic, content and contextual analysis over the duration of the study. From this I developed a focal theory on contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play.

### **1.3. A personal and a public narrative of imaginative play**

Two newspaper articles have informed my thinking about this thesis. More than a hundred years separate the original publication of these two articles, however, both have strong connections to my family and the 'public narratives' of childhood that form the basis of this research (Somers, 1994). Contrasted against each other, these articles provide an insight into my personal understanding of play as well as the 'public narrative' of childhood imaginative play over time.

The first newspaper article I found was hidden in a tiny compartment in the back of an old wooden jewellery box passed down to me through my family. I found this newspaper clipping neatly folded, yellowed with age from a nondescript newspaper with no date apparent (see Appendix One). The article told the story of Parents' Day at the Pingelly Kindergarten in Western Australia where my great grandmother had worked as a Kindergarten Teacher at the turn of last century. Miss Funnell, my great grandmother, was heartily thanked for her 'work of love' she had bestowed upon the 'wee little ones...under her guidance'. On reading this article, I recognised how eerily similar the early 1900s children and the activities described in the article were to an event I could have organised as a kindergarten teacher in the 2000s - such were the similarities in the educational provisions (of dolls, plasticine and little 'wee tables') and attitudes (of 'little mites amusing themselves with their dolls') towards what is recognised as children's

imaginative play. This old piece of newspaper shocked me into realising how resistant to change my early childhood profession seems to be: more specifically, how our pedagogical decisions are so often based on past constructs of childhood rather than considering the authentic realities of contemporary children's lives. Hatch's (2010) statement on this resistance to change suggests early childhood educators would feel they were 'abandoning [their] concern for children' if they made any major changes in early childhood pedagogy with its strong links to the past (p. 267). In my own past experience as a kindergarten teacher, this apparent phenomenon of looking to the past still appeared to hold a formidable sway on the early childhood provisions, policies and understanding of childhood (Ailwood, 2007).

The second newspaper article was one that was written for the *Daily Telegraph* in April 2013 entitled Technology killing secret world of kids (Power, 2013). This article I found online and was written about the early stages of my PhD research (see Appendix Two). This story was based on an interview I had somewhat reluctantly given the previous week after a journalist had found a link to my forthcoming research and the study I had already completed for my Master of Education on children's secret places (Moore, 2010). Although I had clearly said I had only just started the data collection for my PhD, and therefore had no findings to anticipate or discuss with them, the article was written with a fait accompli expectation of what the results would be. This article was firmly located within a discourse of moral panic with an emotively written title to incite a threatened response from parents and educators alike. I was horrified that my research had been used in this way, and felt personally responsible for perpetuating contemporary discourses based on assumptions around children's imaginative play.

In juxtaposing these two pieces of text together as cultural artefacts from the past and the present, they demonstrate just how powerful stories can be in forming and disseminating 'public narratives' about childhood over time. Despite one being from the past and the other from the present, both articles displayed a similar attitude to children and childhood. Both positioned children through an image of the innocent child with very little agency in their choices of play and how they enacted it. Both used terminology and past constructs of childhood to describe a situation in which children were expected to behave in a particular way according to an adult interpretation of play. And both used the idealism of childhood to stake a claim that childhood should always look this way, regardless of the era or cultural context, and that changes to children's imaginative play were to be discouraged at all costs.



## **1.4. Outline of the thesis**

In this chapter I introduced the aim of this study which was to develop new understandings of children's imaginative play. I raised the core issue of misunderstanding and confusion around contemporary children's imaginative play, whilst I argued moral panic was one response to contemporary discourses on the assumed decline of imaginative play. I then introduced the research question, which has guided this study towards the examination of the meanings of historical and contemporary children's experiences of intergenerational imaginative play.

In Chapter Two, I outline the substantive and conceptual literature that provides compelling evidence on the significance of recognising children's knowledge of their lived experiences rather than relying on an adult interpretation of children's lives. However, a gap is identified in the literature with very few studies foregrounding children's knowledge of their imaginative play experiences. With this gap in mind, I examine the large body of literature on imaginative play from an adult perspective of generational change. Here I look at the cyclical nature of moral panic and how innovations in technology have historically been considered the cause of children's assumed decline in play skills. Further to this, I show how any perceived change to the construct of childhood can produce heightened emotional responses from adults.

In Chapter Three, I discuss the relevance of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory as the theoretical framework for the study compared with other imaginative play theorists. I state how the cultural-historical tenets of historicity, consciousness and internalisation combine well with the examination of the processes involved in the development of children's imagination and creativity. Further, I argue an understanding of a child's increasing consciousness of their emotional and cognitive reactions to imaginative play experiences can be seen through Vygotsky's conceptualisation of *perezhivanie*. I outline how the intense meanings of children's imaginative play practices and places can be understood through the refractive process involved in *perezhivanie*. I then examine the conceptual literature which explains the psychological processes in which children move between real and pretend realms in their imaginative play, and show how this is an integral part of the holistic development of a child's higher psychological functions.

In Chapter Four, I outline the methodological position I have undertaken in this study within a qualitative interpretative research paradigm. In doing this, I make clear my understanding that multiple interpretations of reality are possible, and that the subjective stories of participants can

be understood as socially constructed knowledge. I explain how a narrative inquiry approach with a focus on the context and content of stories can assist in understanding the meanings of experiences. This is because each participant's cultural context – that is, the temporal, societal and place dimensions of context– can inform the meanings of experiential stories. I discuss how the relational aspect of a narrative inquiry is an integral characteristic of this study where participants are invited to tell personal stories about their imaginative play experiences. I then introduce the four participating families with three generations in each family, ranging from grandparents to preschool children. Following these introductions, I explain the study's multimodal methods wherein an iterative series of four conversational style interviews were organised to invite and trigger historical and contemporary children's storytelling. I describe the analytical process through which two key findings were identified from the study.

In Chapters Five and Six, I provide the empirical experiences of what I found in response to the research question. In Chapter Five, I present the first of the two key findings from the study. In contrast to contemporary discourses around change and confusion, I argue this key finding suggests there are seven themes which indicate the fundamental stability of imaginative play across generations. In this chapter, I present and describe participants' re-story extracts from each generation to illustrate how each of these seven imaginative play themes was enacted in the past and the present. In Chapter Six, I present the second key finding. I explain how this finding identified three changes which have occurred in imaginative play across the past three generations. In these two chapters I outline the findings and themes which suggest new understandings around the continuities and changes in imaginative play practices and places across generations and thereby answer the research question. I show how these new understandings illustrate that very little change has occurred in the fundamental meanings of imaginative play across generations. Therefore, I argue that this study speaks back to contemporary discourses and moral panic on the decline in imaginative play, and instead demonstrates that contemporary children are highly capable of playing imaginatively.

In Chapter Seven, I shift from the empirical to the conceptual, in an analytical discussion of the key findings together with elements from the previous chapters, to build a focal theory on the enactment of imaginative play. I argue this theory is dependent on the interconnections between children's conscious awareness, material place and the construction of a symbolic place, and are grounded in emotion. In this theorization, I will argue children have always been consciously aware of the connection between imaginative play and emotion. Furthermore, I will illustrate

that this conscious awareness prompts children to use their knowledge of imaginative play practices and places to subvert or re-create the various aspects of their context toward the enactment of imaginative play. To illustrate the visual representation of this focal theory, I then present a diagram showing three dimensions in a nested format: the outer, the in-between and the inner dimension which represent new understandings of the enactment of imaginative play.

In the final chapter, I offer two areas in which this study has contributed to the early childhood field. I explain the first contribution to knowledge relates to new understandings of imaginative play. The second contribution is to methodological knowledge in connection with the use of narrative inquiry as a method to engage young children in research. The next chapter of this thesis will outline a review of the literature pertinent to this study of intergenerational imaginative play.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter examines the classical and current literature on imaginative play practices and places over the past three generations. The review of this literature will show how the underlying meanings of imaginative play across generations have contributed to the current understandings of imaginative play. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, children's knowledge of their lived experiences is recognised and acknowledged as valuable. The sociology of childhood paradigm is introduced and the significance of this paradigm as a basis to researching *with* children is emphasised. The second section highlights children's knowledge of imaginative play. Within the literature there are two main ways children's knowledge of imaginative play can be understood. First, the meanings and uses they have accorded to their imaginative play practices and places will be discussed; and secondly, children's knowledge of their emotional connection with imaginative play practices and places will be investigated. The third section of this chapter focuses on literature regarding moral panics adults frequently associate with assumed changes in children's imaginative play. This is followed by an examination of literature which analyses generational change in imaginative play from an adult position looking back on their childhood experiences of imaginative play.

### **2.2. Children's knowledge of their lived experiences**

Each epoch of history has its own understanding of the concept of childhood and how children are seen within it (Aries, 1962; Cunningham, 2006). Qvortrup (2009) explained this shifting concept of childhood through his contention that the 'parameters of childhood change their values constantly...[however] childhood nevertheless keeps forms that are comparable over time...' (p. 26). So while the construct of early childhood remains stable between the ages from birth to eight years of age, particular attitudes and issues concerning childhood change within each cultural-historical context (Qvortrup, 2009; Rogoff, 2003). Qvortrup (2009) furthered this argument by suggesting that, within each adult view of childhood, there was both 'continuity and change' (p. 26). Other researchers examining childhood however contend children have their own knowledge of their childhood experiences. Children's knowledge of experiences can be seen to be markedly different to an adult perspective or interpretation of childhood when analysed across generations (Mayall, 2008; Porter, Townsend, & Hampshire, 2012).

In earlier centuries, children were seen as ‘miniature adults’ who were involved in many aspects of adult working and family life (Pascoe, 2009, p. 216). However, many attributed the philosophies espoused by Rousseau (1712-1778) and later Froebel (1782-1852) to have shifted these views of childhood as ‘an immature form of adulthood’ (Wood & Attfield, 2005, p. 29) to an image of the innocent child (Elkind, 2002; Jenkins, 1998). This view of childhood increasingly meant children were considered to be vulnerable and in need of protection ‘from the dangers of the adult world’ (Pascoe, 2009, p. 216). With the advent of modernity, the concept of childhood was dominated by the principles of developmental psychology and the notion of the universal child (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Grieshaber & McArdle, 2014; Moran-Ellis, 2010; Pascoe, 2010; Qvortrup, 2008). As such, childhood was seen to be a time when children needed to be filled with knowledge by knowledgeable adults who could meet the ‘knowable’ needs of the universal child (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Davies, 2010). With this view of childhood, children’s vulnerability was reinforced by their perceived lack of knowledge, and therefore an inability to participate in society as a whole (Qvortrup, 2009).

Around the mid-twentieth century, dramatic cultural changes were developing an increasingly risk-averse society (Beck, 1986; Giddens, 1991; Gill, 2007; Wyness, 2012). Some of these changes included increasing globalisation, an emphasis on the individual rather than the community, and a shift away from the traditional models of childhood (Beck, 1986; Wyness, 2012). With the onset of these societal changes, a sense of uncertainty impacted on child rearing, discipline and community attitudes to children generally (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Lee, 2001; Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011). Consequently, parental expectations of children’s behaviour and play were changing to include increased supervision and monitoring due to unknown risks and dangers in an uncertain world (Beck, 1986; Giddens, 1991; Pascoe, 2009; Wyness, 2012). This notion of increased dangers in children’s lives has been explored in both Beck’s (1986) and Giddens’ (1991) classical work on risk aversion in postmodern times. Both scholars found the threat of unknown risks, a perception of danger and the constancy of uncertainty has produced a purposefully risk-averse society. Giddens (1991) suggested this was because we no longer have the ‘protective framework’ of traditions from the past to provide a sense of security in our lives (p. 33). In discussing the impact of these uncertain times, Wyness (2012) argued the insecurity the adults felt was ‘...projected onto their children through the tightening up of mechanisms for controlling them...’ (p. 59). As a result, children were

increasingly supervised from the 1960s onwards as images of their vulnerability, blended with images of innocence, became the most dominant view of childhood (Beck, 1986; Pascoe, 2010).

During the 1980s a further challenge to understandings of childhood appeared with the emergence of both the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the sociology of childhood paradigm (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999; Moran-Ellis, 2010; Shanahan, 2007). The starting position for researchers within the sociology of childhood paradigm was that children were 'social actors' actively engaged in the construction of their own lives (Buhler-Niederberger, 2010; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Madge, 2006; Shanahan, 2007). For example, Buhler-Niederberger (2010) considered children to be highly capable of creating their own culture, part of which was operating beneath the gaze of adults. Supporting this approach, Sutton-Smith (1997), Dahlberg (2009) and Corsaro (2011) collectively agreed that children could creatively subvert adult control over a child's life. Madge (2006) suggested children could now be seen as possessing their own voice as well as their own social group, and as such, childhood could now be understood through children's own 'eyes and words' (p. 2).

However, this is not to suggest this new approach to viewing childhood has been unproblematic and without challenges (Mayall, 2008; Shanahan, 2007; Yelland, 2011). Shanahan (2007) explained the difference between the rhetoric and the reality of contemporary children's lives by suggesting 'children may have agency, but adults still monopolise power...children may have voices, but adults control the conversation' (p. 415). Therefore, for children today the parameters of childhood seem to be characterized by a dichotomy oscillating between children's right to be heard (UNCRC, 1989) as 'experts in their own lives' (Moss & Petrie, 2002), and the notion that children are 'more hemmed in by surveillance and social regulation than ever before' (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998, p. 7), and in need of protection from unknown dangers in our risk-averse society (Gill, 2007). However, regardless of these debates on the realities of contemporary children's lives, some researchers still argue children's own knowledge of their lived experiences should be recognised to a greater extent in research (Mayall, 2008; Porter, Townsend, Hampshire, 2012). In particular, Mayall (2008) contends it is preferable to refer to the stronger term of 'children's knowledge' instead of using 'flimsy' terms such as children's 'perspectives', 'opinions' or 'views'. (p. 109). Similarly, Porter, Townsend and Hampshire (2012) contend the 'knowledge about children is best produced by them' (p. 132). With this in mind, children's knowledge of their own lived experiences can be actively sought by adult

researchers rather than assuming an adult voice is the only one respected and heard in research, in policy and in other contexts of children's lives (Mayall, 2008).

### **2.3. Children's knowledge of imaginative play practices and places: Meanings and uses of imaginative play**

Imaginative play can be seen as an integral part of childhood play and an important cultural practice in its own right (Rogoff, 2003; Taylor, 2013). Imaginative play practices involve children using re-constructed aspects from their reality to create 'virtual realities that become fantasies or concrete plans...[through] pretending, make-believe or symbolic activity' (Singer & Singer, 2013, p. 11). Similarly, places for imaginative play may be seen as the physical, symbolic or virtual places children create or find as part of their imaginative play (Marsh, 2010).

Some studies within the literature have proposed a strong link between imaginative play and particular places (Hart, 1979; Moore, 1986; Rasmussen, 2004). During the 1960s and 70s, philosophers and researchers such as Bachelard (1964), Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977), and later Hart (1979) were working on notions of place and attachment to place. Collectively, these researchers found 'spaces' with socially constructed meanings could be symbolically transformed into meaningful 'places'. Tuan (1977), for example, found a child's 'experience of place' was strongly connected with 'thought and emotion' (p. 8). Tuan (1977) suggested while other researchers considered 'feeling and thought as opposed' to each other, he argued instead that they 'lie near the two ends of an experiential continuum, and both are ways of knowing' (p. 10). Storli and Hagen (2010) explained Gibson's theory of affordances in the late 1970s as children's perception of the 'functionally significant properties' of materials available within their environment (p. 448). These were the materials within a child's 'culturally and socially specific' context that were available for practical use in their play (Linzmayr & Halpenny, 2014, p. 415). The four-year-old to eleven-year-old children in Hart's (1979) study spoke in-depth of their experiences of place and the affordances they perceived within these places. They spoke of the strong affiliation they had with particular trees and the importance of seclusion. The children in Hart's (1979) study also told of their search for affordances such as trees, sticks, leaves to assist in 'manipulating spaces to make places' to construct their hidden play places (p. 205). Hart's (1979) use of ethnographic mapping with the children assisted in his understanding of children's knowledge of their own places for play. He contrasted this methodology with

studies in which earlier researchers had not been privy to children's hidden 'child-built' places due to the adult-orientated methods they used, and states:

[t]he next most important category from both methods 'forts and houses' is most surprising in the light of previous studies of children's use of the environment. The importance of these child-built places...is made particularly clear by these data. One reason most studies have not noticed this phenomenon is that they have used the observational survey approach which would prevent them from discovering children's use of wooded and other hidden areas. (p. 165)

In contrast to these researchers, Hart (1979) was able to talk with children not only about their knowledge of their important places and how they protected this knowledge, but also their feelings associated with the construction of these places. Later, in the 1980s, Moore's (1986) work on children's play places indicated their 'hidden life' was still 'not well understood, acknowledged or taken seriously' by adults (p. xiv). He considered this was because researchers were primarily focused on adult organised environments for children. This gap in adult understanding may have been due to children's reticence to talk about their 'own made places' which Moore (1986) respected as children's 'private knowledge' (p. 46). However, despite this, Moore (1986) found there was a strong relationship between specific places and children's imaginative play practices in which they created 'their own personal world' (p. 46). Titman's (1994) study of children's use of space in school playgrounds reinforced Moore's (1986) early work, also suggesting that researchers seldom sought children's involvement in a study of places adults designed for children.

By the 2000s, an emphasis on researching children's relationship with their play places had become increasingly evident (Clark, 2007b; Rasmussen, 2004). For example, this was evident in Rasmussen's (2004) and Clark's (2007b) play place studies where children were asked to talk about the places they 'preferred' to play. Although these studies did not specifically focus on imaginative play, both researchers found particular places triggered particular imaginative play practices. For instance, an eight-year-old child in Rasmussen's (2004) study created his 'own town' with houses, roads and fields on a 'piece of land' with a 'special meaning and name' (p. 157). Similarly, in Clark's (2007b) study, she identified a number of different 'spaces' children chose to play in when they were outside. For example, one four-year-old child created his own



‘imaginary space’ as a ‘cave’ in which, he said, he listened to ‘magic music from [his] magic radio’ (p. 358), while other children found ‘private spaces’ to watch others from (p. 356). Whereas, some of the other children in Clark’s (2007b) study said they used the built ‘playhouse’ as a ‘social space’ in which they could ‘play and talk and cook’ (p. 356). In contrast, Rasmussen (2004) clearly differentiated between the meanings of the places children constructed for themselves (that is, children’s places) with those set-up by adults (that is, places for children). Therefore, for Rasmussen (2004), a built playhouse would be seen as an adult place set-up for children’s play, whereas a den<sup>1</sup> was a place children constructed for themselves. Rasmussen (2004) argued adults need to acknowledge children’s ability to ‘create places that are physical and symbolic’ for themselves and for their imaginative play (p. 171).

Following on from earlier studies of children’s attachment to particular places for play, more recently place-based researchers Lim and Barton (2010) claimed:

[c]hildren do not passively react or adapt to environmental elements but rather leverage various cognitive activities to mediate the influence of the place. The place is not an objective phenomenon rather it has to be interpreted and reconstructed by children. To develop a fuller understanding of children’s place experiences, we need to understand the place as it is experienced, interacted with, understood and constructed by children...[this] view also emphasizes the dialectical relationship between children and place. How children make sense of place-based information informs how they solve problems or challenges they confront in that place. At the same time, how children seek to solve problems within places informs the new place-based knowledge they acquire. (p. 329)

Lim and Barton’s (2010) argument around children’s dialectical relationship with place is an important point to which I return in Chapter Three from a theoretical stance, and again in Chapter Seven. Furthermore, Lim and Barton’s (2010) understanding of the deep relationship children develop with places they construct themselves for play strengthens Rasmussen’s (2004) contention about this phenomenon. Other researchers have also confirmed these ideas around

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<sup>1</sup> A den is a common term used in European countries referring to a child-constructed place. The term ‘cubby’ is commonly used in Australia for a similar place.

children's profound attachment to their play places (Elliott, 2010; Jack, 2010; Measham, 2006). Elliott (2010) discussed the work of evolutionary biologists who have found 'there appears to be an innate evolutionary drive for children to create hiding spaces or places – a vestigial survival strategy' (p. 61), whilst Jack's (2010) discussion around the primordial 'hefting urge' to seek places of belonging reinforces this childhood experience (p.756).

Researchers such as Hart (1979) and more recently Price (2000), Sobel (2002), Moser and Martinsen (2010) and Green (2014) have noted the importance of seclusion and the creation of secret places for children's play. In discussing the 'primary law of children's secret places', Price (2000) claimed 'it has less to do with a static and romantic state of being than with a dynamic search for constancy' (p. 262). While Moser and Martinsen (2010) focused on the hidden 'secret places' the majority of Norwegian early childhood educators purposefully provided for their young children's play in their early childhood settings, understanding these were important places for children's play. Sobel's (2002) claim that the 'secretive nature of the hiding place is significant' to children (p.70) was later reinforced in Roe's (2007) investigation into children's 'secret places' (p. 477) and Green's (2014) research into children's practice of hiding in special places at home. Also similar to Roe (2007) and Green (2014), Sobel's (2002) study included observations of children in their 'special places'. However, in contrast with Roe's (2007) and Green's (2014) conversations with children, it was notably adult memories of their special childhood places which Sobel (2002) used to identify the characteristics of these places. However, few researchers have focused specifically on the significance of this practice in relation to children's knowledge and feelings about their imaginative play practices and play places.

Singer and Singer's (1990) early investigation into the development of children's imaginative play included the identification of children's secret places as a 'reduced to size realm' where imaginative play was practised (p. 43). Titman's (1994) study of the 'hidden curriculum' in school playgrounds similarly highlighted children's desire to create play places where they could enact imaginative play through a 'private persona in a public place' (p. 72). Following on from these ideas, phenomenologists van Manen and Levering (1996) examined the notion of children's secret play places in-depth. They found children's construction of secret places was a valued, yet not well understood, childhood phenomenon. Notably, however, they claimed there was a difference between privacy and secrecy in children's play practices. From their work, privacy was seen as a deliberate withdrawal from others, while secrecy referred to the

maintenance of relationships ‘with those from whom the secrets are kept or with whom the secrets are shared’ (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 59). Furthermore, van Manen and Levering (1996) argued it was necessary for children to first experience privacy, that is, to separate from others, followed by feelings of secrecy in their play practices and play places. They suggested children sought secret places in quiet, secluded places not only to offer concealment away from adults and peers, but also to prompt feelings of safety and, to engender a ‘dreamy mood’ (p. 25). In particular, van Manen and Levering (1996) suggested the creation of secret places enabled border crossings into imaginative play worlds:

Children’s experiences of self-discovered play spaces are filled with borders, boundaries, gates, fences, crawling spaces, inside-outside. These boundary qualities are often associated with forbidden things, rules, and prohibitions. By crossing these borders, one may be able to step into other worlds. While playing in such secret places may require trespassing rules, it is also often requires new rules, new ways of acting and using the space. For example, sometimes the new spaces play a role in secret clubs...that may specify their own boundaries and rules...it appears that playing in these special places, away from adult view and away from the crowded space of one’s family living quarters, allows young people not only to create new play spaces but also to create new inner spaces with unimagined possibilities. (pp. 32-33)

By highlighting ‘new ways of acting and using the space’ together with the practice of ‘border crossing’ into ‘other worlds’, van Manen and Levering (1996) exemplified the imaginative play involved in the construction of children’s secret places (p. 32). Importantly, their study into children’s places suggested children were capable of constructing creative solutions when they are not able to find places for privacy:

Children who lack private space may have to go ‘underground’ and construct a double life, a secret inner world, that constitutes a place of refuge. The child leads an outer life and at the same time, there is the inner life that does not match the external norms and expectations. (van Manen & Levering, 1996, p. 158)

While van Manen and Levering's (1996) work provided valuable insights into children's private inner and sometimes 'underground' places, Aadlandsvik (1997) asked whether children's 'ordinary secrets in ordinary children's lives' should remain secret from adults (p. 363). Other researchers have more recently invited children to talk of their secret places if they chose to do so (Kylin, 2003; Moore, 2010; Roe, 2007; Sturm, 2008). For example, in both Roe's (2007) and Kylin's (2003) studies, children spoke openly of their secret places which were 'filled with meaning' (Kylin, 2003, p. 2). Similar to Hart (1979) and Rasmussen (2004), Kylin's (2003) findings from her study of den-making illustrated children's knowledge and capacity to manipulate a place and its affordances to 'mark a spatial boundary between the child and the rest of the world' (p. 2). At times, this 'boundary' could be as simple as 'a collection of sticks' while at other times it was constructed as a more formalised meeting place for a 'club house' (Kylin, 2003, p. 2), and in Roe's (2007) geographical study of primary school children's secret places the children spoke excitedly of their 'special knowledge' of 'secret places' away from an adult gaze (p. 477). Similarly, the preschool-aged children in Moore's (2010) study told of their knowledge of secret places explaining that only children know how to make secret places and that adults are not capable of constructing these places on a child's behalf. However, it was only when Moore's (2015) research trajectory shifted to appreciating the children's knowledge of their own practices rather than assuming the adult questions would 'discover' the truth, that the children's rich stories of their secret places were heard (p.10). Sturm's (2008) investigation into secret places 'inside books' provides another aspect of border crossing between imaginative play in actual and virtual places. He suggests that while others may enter a physical space without invitation, 'the added layer of private fantasy ensures the ultimate secrecy of space' inside the pages of a book (Sturm, 2008, p. 96).

Reinforcing these ideas around children's knowledge of secretive play places for imaginative play, Reunamo, Lee, Wu, Wang, Mau and Lin's (2013) recent study of young children's play also found children preferred to play in seclusion. The children in Reunamo et al.'s (2013) study were seen to use 'secluded places' for their imaginative play away from the 'interruptions of educators' (p. 301). However, the similarities were less evident in Reunamo et al's (2013) study where the child-constructed 'building of a house for imaginary bears' was not considered an imaginative play practice for children (p. 298). This view of children's imaginative play was in stark contrast to Canning's (2010, 2013), Green's (2012, 2014) and Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein's (2006, 2013) respective studies on children's play places for imaginative play.

These researchers have found children use the construction of place as an expression of their imaginative play rather than assuming place-making was irrelevant as Reunamo et al. (2013) seemed to have inferred. Canning's (2010, 2013) observational studies of children's den-making and Green's (2012, 2014) work investigating children's hiding places have shown the significance of place-making for sustaining imaginative play, while Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein's (2006; 2013) research highlighted the construction of place deeply embedded within imaginative play practices. Based on the classical studies by Silvey and MacKeith (1988), and later, Cohen and MacKeith (1991) into children's make-believe worlds called 'paracosms', Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein (2006) have more recently extended this earlier research (p. 405). They argued these make-believe worlds were 'one of the most remarkable forms of creative play in childhood', in which children created 'imaginary worlds' over an extended period (Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 2006, p. 405). These worlds may be manifested in real places or in symbolic forms and can include imaginative play with toys, particular places, imagined people, imagined languages, and 'unstructured, idyllic worlds' (Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 2006, p. 406). Although the Root-Bernstein's (2006) study illustrated the significant childhood practice of place-making for imaginative play, it is important to note these findings were based on surveys asking adults for retrospective responses to questions about their childhood imaginary play. It is also important to note the researchers' claim this play practice was more prevalent in the past than the present because technology had 'profoundly altered the landscape of imaginative play' (p. 418). Furthermore, they suggested contemporary children were more likely to be 'distracted' away from constructing their own worlds by television watching and 'attracted towards' simulated virtual worlds rather than inventing their own (p. 418).

Research into children's relationship with place has diversified as contemporary children's play practices have increasingly shifted into digital spaces as well as physical play places (Buckingham, 2007; Edwards, 2011; Hutchison, 2007; Marsh, 2013; Siibak & Ugur, 2010). Collectively, these researchers and scholars agreed children's increasing engagement with digital technologies meant contemporary childhood play places were likely to be markedly different to those in the past. Also emphasised were the many opportunities provided by digital technology for children to develop meaningful imaginative play (Buckingham, 2007; Edwards, 2011; Marsh, 2013). In line with past notions of place, however, Hutchison (2007) called for digital play spaces to be created as personally and 'culturally meaningful... places' (p. 37). For

example, in a comparative study of online and offline ‘playgrounds’, Siibak and Ugar (2010) found children ‘cherished’ the play opportunities afforded by digital play spaces (p. 148). From their analysis of children’s online play, Siibak and Ugar (2010) claimed children saw digital spaces as a form of ‘playground’ and so ‘playfully’ used these spaces as ‘play places’ (p. 148). It is noteworthy that within these more recent studies of children’s digital play places, the terms ‘space’ and ‘place’ were used interchangeably. This may be due in part to the adult-assumed difference between virtual spaces and physical places, however, Marsh (2013) strongly asserted children do not necessarily consider one ‘space’ as more meaningful than the other.

In contrast to a link between particular places and imaginative play, Marsh (2013) proposed children’s play spaces have become more ‘permeable’ than ever before (p. 76). She found the young children in her study of online Club Penguin players were aware of different play place options (Marsh, 2013). However, rather than preferring a single ‘modality’ as a play space (Marsh, 2013, p. 67), the children said they enjoyed moving ‘seamlessly’ between online-offline and inside-outside spaces (Marsh, 2013, p. 66). These children did not see different locations as problematic, instead seeing them as providing additional affordances for imaginative play. Similar to Sturm’s (2008) view of ‘virtual’ secret places inside a book, Marsh (2013) used an analogy of children reading and the visualisation needed to take ideas from a book into their physical play places. She suggested a similar though more flexible process was needed for virtual play. In these play spaces children could use ideas from their digital as well as their physical reality as imaginative play affordances, then switch back and forth between them. This idea of increasingly permeable play spaces in contemporary imaginative play is a notion I return to in Chapter Seven.

Engel (2005) also proposed children used imaginative play to move back and forth between their everyday reality and an ‘alternate pretend sphere’ (p. 514). Engel (2005) and other researchers examining imaginative play have maintained this was one way children differentiated between ‘what is’ real and the ‘what if’ of their imaginative play worlds (cf. Weisberg, 2013). Engel (2005) claimed this differentiation occurred when children ‘glide back and forth frequently between different kinds of pretend narratives’ (p. 520), while Weisberg (2013) wondered further whether children are able to create ‘more subtle’ distinctions within their imagination rather than focusing purely on real and pretend spheres (p. 87). Similarly, other researchers have found children moved between places for imaginative play without regard for inside-outside boundaries (cf. Glenn, Knight, Holt, & Spence, 2012), or virtual-

physical binaries commonly proposed by adults (cf. Hannaford, 2012; Loebenberg, 2013; Willett, 2014). Loebenberg (2013), for example, found in her study of children's play in virtual worlds the children tended to 'blur the boundaries' between online and offline imaginative play (p. 130). Similarly, the children in Willett's (2014) school playground play study told stories of how they creatively re-configured aspects from current media and popular culture into their traditional games, while the children in Hannaford's (2012) study of imaginative play informed by internet games said they commonly used 'their knowledge of the Polly Pocket game texts' in their school playground imaginative play (p. 27). This 'blurring' between online and offline imaginative play was also evident in Richards (2014) narrative inquiry with a young child. In Richards' (2014) study, a four-year-old child spoke of his knowledge of computer games and other external affordances combined with his own creative, adventurous thinking. In this way, the child used imaginative play to express a 'complex mix of private and public moments' which often culminated in drawing maps of his 'own world' (Richards, 2014, p. 149).

The literature on imaginative play has illustrated children's knowledge of physical, symbolic and virtual practices and places for imaginative play. This knowledge has been seen as being informed by children's use of available affordances for imaginative play. These practices and places have been shown to hold important meanings to children.

#### **2.4. Children's knowledge of imaginative play practices and places: Emotional connections with imaginative play**

Children's knowledge of imaginative play can be seen through the ways they were emotionally connected with their imaginative play practices and play places. This emotional connection can be manifested in children's sense of agency and in the inclusion or exclusion of others in imaginative play. It can also include children's knowledge of the use and meanings of imaginative play to subvert adult intentions.

While some researchers consider children capable of articulating their emotions in relation to their lived experiences of play (cf. Cheesa, Di Riso, Delvecchio, Mazzeschi, Russ, & Dillon, 2012; Hyvonen & Kangas, 2007 and, Mortari, 2011), others argue this is beyond children's capabilities (Sawyers & Carrick, 2008). For example, Sawyers and Carrick's (2008) study into children's pretend play found that, while young children felt strongly about creating the 'illusion of pretense' in their play, they were not able to articulate why they felt so intensely about this

play practice (p. 155). This may be due to the interrogative questioning technique Sawyers and Carrick (2008) used in their research, which Moore (2014) and Waller and Bitou (2011) found was not conducive to the children's disclosure of deeper feelings. In contrast, however, Mortari's (2011) study with young children illustrated the depth of feelings children can express in a research situation. In Mortari's study, the children acknowledged their appreciation for the 'thinking activity' in which they could examine their 'interior life' (p. 354).

Inextricably linked with the meanings and uses of imaginative play, children's knowledge of the emotion involved in imaginative play was evident in the previous section of this chapter. For example, emotional connections were evident when children spoke excitedly of the significance of their 'secret places' (Roe, 2007), and when children said they 'cherished' their online play opportunities (Siibak & Ugar, 2010). However, some studies have further highlighted the strong emotional connection children have with their imaginative play (Corsaro, 2011; Dunn, 2004). Corsaro (2011) and Dunn's (2004) work does not focus specifically on children's imaginative play however, emotional aspects of imaginative play were consistently referred to throughout their studies. Corsaro (2011), for example, claimed imaginative play was frequently 'emotion laden' (p. 179) because it dealt with anxiety inducing situations and children's 'persistent attempts to gain control over their lives' within the context of their peer culture (p. 189). Corsaro (2011) defined the concept of children's peer culture as a 'stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers' (p. 120). According to Corsaro's (2011) findings from his extensive ethnographic studies of children's play, children's knowledge was re-constructed through play practices amongst the peer group. Heightened emotions were common amongst children throughout this process involving their most personal 'values and concerns' (Corsaro, 2011, p. 120). Dunn's (2004) study also suggested intense feelings were involved in the blend of close friendships and imaginative play. From her study of children's friendships, Dunn (2004) argued:

[t]he close links between developing and sustaining a shared imaginary world and friendship are confirmed when the pretend play of pairs of friends is compared with that of 'acquaintances'. The pretend play that develops with friends is more sustained, more complex and more harmonious. (p. 29)



Even among five and six year olds, the fantasy play of friends is very vulnerable to the presence of adults...when a parent enters the room – the flourishing pretend play is suppressed and simply dies. (p. 46)

Both Corsaro's (2011) and Dunn's (2004) studies mentioned the significance of friendship and/or peers in imaginative play. Both of these researchers linked this significance with the notion of private, adult-free and agentive imaginative play. However, Dunn's (2004) study contrasts with Corsaro's (2011) work in that she found a difference in the heightened level of complexity in the imaginative play enacted with 'close' friends (Dunn, 2004, p. 29).

Strong emotional connections between imaginative play and chosen others (commonly close friend/s or siblings) have been identified in studies which have focused on imaginative play (Cross, 2009; Howe & Bruno, 2010; Rogers & Evans, 2006). Cross's (2009) and Rogers and Evans' (2006) studies have reinforced Dunn's (2004) findings on the significant relationship between imaginative play and friends. They also illustrated the 'high importance' children placed on imaginative play in their lives (Rogers & Evans, 2006). However, in contrast to Corsaro's (2011) focus on peer culture play practices, Cross's (2009) study was similar to Dunn's (2004) differentiation between imaginative play within a close friendship. In Cross's (2009) study of nine-year-old online game users, she found the imaginative play of a small group of boys was noticeably different to play amongst their peer group. This small group told stories of how they re-negotiated online games into 'complex story lines' (Cross, 2009, p. 130). As part of the re-negotiation, the boys played out their imaginative play amongst the 'hidden play spaces under the trees' rather than mimic the combat style games the larger group enacted in the school playground (Cross, 2009, p. 130). What was particularly interesting in Cross's (2009) study was the way the boys protected and hid their play from their larger peer group because they thought 'it would be considered babyish' if the others saw their different form of play (Cross, 2009, p. 133).

Similarly, Howe and Bruno's (2010) findings from their quantitative observational study of children and pretend play found children's imaginative play was likely to be 'more creative' when playing with one other significant friend or sibling. In particular, their play was more creative when in seclusion and away from the adult gaze (Howe & Bruno, 2010, p. 955). This 'more creative' play included play themes such as creating fantasy characters and 'imaginary worlds' (Howe & Bruno, 2010, p. 946). However, the children's creative play decreased or

ceased altogether when an adult ‘interrupted’ their play (Howe & Bruno, 2010, p. 954). Although this study did not include conversations with children, it is important to include in this chapter because it demonstrated the significance of context impacting on, and at times, inhibiting children’s imaginative play. Collectively, Cross’s (2009), Howe and Bruno’s (2010), and Rogers and Evans’ (2006) studies have all illustrated children’s knowledge of, and agentic capacity to, include significant others and exclude peers and adults in their imaginative play. The strength of the children’s emotions was also evident in their vigilant protection of imaginative play, the ongoing threat of ridicule, and their awareness of the approach of others.

Other researchers have also found children’s knowledge of imaginative play practices can be used as exclusion strategies to enable their control of play places (Cobb-Moore, 2008; Ghafouri & Wien, 2005; Johnson, 2013; Skanfors, Lofdahl, & Hagglund, 2009). Although the initial focus of these studies was not on imaginative play, as the research progressed the use of imaginative play strategies became increasingly evident. The heightened emotion connected with the children’s imaginative play was also evident in these studies. For example, in Cobb-Moore’s (2008) study of young children’s play places, the children were heard to use imaginative play and ‘pretend’ understandings of place to exclude others from their play. In this way, the children were able to manipulate the place, the play and those who were included in or excluded from it. Similarly, the young children in Skanfors, Lofdahl and Hagglund’s (2009) ethnographic study, together with the children in Ghafouri and Wien’s (2005) research, were seen and heard to carry out creative withdrawal and exclusion strategies in their preschool context. These strategies included ‘making oneself inaccessible’ to enable a ‘symbolic’ separation from the peer group even when they were in plain sight (Skanfors, Lofdahl & Hagglund, 2009, p. 100).

Johnson’s (2013) recent Australian study of school playgrounds also found children used imaginative play practices to exclude others. In Johnson’s (2013) study, small groups of children built and rebuilt their own cubbies in private corners of the school ground using found and natural materials. The membership of these cubbies shifted over time, with children being included or excluded according to ‘club rules’, which also regularly changed. Significant to this study was the noticeable link between the formation of close friendships and cubby building, wherein the children said they felt ‘very happy and safe’ if they were included in the cubby (Johnson, 2013, p. 86). What is especially interesting in all of these studies is the evidence of children’s exclusion of others in their play, despite the ‘everyone can join in’ discourse

commonly employed in educational settings (Skanfors, Lofdahl & Hagglund, 2009, p. 107). Corsaro (2011) also noted this tension, suggesting how ‘intensely difficult’ it can be for children to re-negotiate adult expectations of sharing places, especially when children were anxious to protect their ‘interactive spaces’ they had organised to play separately from others (p.157).

Children’s strong feelings of agency were also evident in children’s engagement with virtual imaginative play (Loebenberg, 2013; Marsh, 2013). In both Loebenberg’s (2013) and Marsh’s (2013) studies, the children said they were excited to be involved in digital play. Even with limited access to the internet, the children’s excitement was still present through their use of imaginative play with web-linked toys, such as, Webkinz and the Littlest Pet Shop (Loebenberg, 2013, p. 128), and Moshi Monsters and Lego (Marsh, 2013, p. 65). In Carrington’s (2005) study, children were seen to be developing skills in ‘outmanoeuvring or subverting the supervisory gaze and control of adults’ in their use of technology for play (p. 10) and, as a consequence, ‘dominant discourses’ around the innocence of children were said to be ‘fading’ (p. 17). Similarly, the older primary school aged children in Loebenberg’s (2013) study also said they enjoyed risky adventurous feelings in their imaginative play online by subverting adult restrictions. The children said they were aware of the safety reasons underlying adult instructions on the use of their images online. However, they spoke of the ‘thrill in toying with danger’ in their creation of YouTube videos using images of themselves and their friends (p. 124). In parallel with studies on children’s need for privacy (such as van Mannen and Levering’s (1996) work), Loebenberg (2013) found the meanings underlying children’s imaginative play online related to the ‘creative’ provision of a private play place (p. 129). The findings from both Marsh (2013) and Loebenberg’s (2013) studies showed children were not only reproducing imaginative play from the ‘real’ world into virtual worlds, but were able to ‘re-configure’ their reality into imaginative play with chosen others (Marsh, 2010, p. 35). Also similar to children’s emotional connection around who could ‘enter’ their play places, these feelings were seen in digital imaginative play where children commonly chose to play online with ‘close’ friends they already knew (Marsh, 2013).

Other studies have shown children’s knowledge of imaginative play practices have enabled children to subvert adult intentions, particularly those relating to safety and supervision (Chancellor, 2008; Corsaro, 2011; Fleet & Britt, 2011; Tam, 2013). Corsaro (2011) found as part of his investigation into children’s peer culture, children created ‘a set of behaviors or activities’ which they used to ‘contradict, challenge or violate’ adult rules which he identified as

children's 'underlife' (p. 177). Closely aligned with Corsaro's (2011) conceptualisation of children's 'underlife', these other studies have provided examples of creative strategies children have used to re-negotiate adult rules. For example, the children in Chancellor's (2008) study constantly risked being disciplined to play in the bushy out-of-bound places along the fence line they chose for their hidden imaginative play. The children had created a 'well developed warning system' to alert others if supervising teachers were close by (p. 101). However, they continued to find and construct hidden places in the bushes so that they could 'see without being seen' (p. 101). In a similarly subversive manner, the children in Fleet and Britt's (2011) study constructed 'secret, risky or private places' for imaginative play on top of walls, under bench seats and in the dirt amongst tree roots (p. 154). Through the re-negotiation of adult rules and places, these children held strong emotional connections with the 'high or hidden' places and practices they had manipulated for their own imaginative play purposes (p. 154). The preschool children in Tam's (2013) study also demonstrated complex creative strategies to subvert the teacher's intentions. The children's own imaginative play was highly evident in this study where children actively transformed roles, 'smuggled in' props and changed meanings of their dramatic play when the teacher was not supervising or not in hearing distance of their play (Tam, 2013, p. 256). In this way, the children's imaginative play was used creatively to disguise their own play agenda and so resist the teacher's intentions. What is especially of interest in each of these three studies was the agentic and creative way the children subverted adult rules and intentions through the use of imaginative play. Also of interest were the deep feelings associated with the children's own imaginative play practices and places in contrast to the adult-designed places and educational agendas. Risky, adventurous feelings were evident, thus engendering the children's emotional connection with these imaginative play places and practices.

## **2.5. Adult knowledge of imaginative play practices and places: Moral panics about imaginative play**

Multiple contemporary discourses around the assumed decline in imaginative play have frequently been exacerbated by 'moral panics which are cyclical' (Adams, 2013, p. 535). Similar to Adams' (2013) contention, Bishop and Curtis (2001) have argued the recurrence of moral panic around children's inability to play or use pretence in their play was not a new phenomenon (p. 2). Bishop and Curtis (2001) have found adults in previous centuries have

always asserted that ‘children do not play like they used to’, and commonly attributed blame to the most current technological change such as the introduction of ‘cinema, radio and the gramophone’ (p. 9). Researchers examining the formation of moral panics have claimed they can be incited by societal anxiety when the threat of generational change was thought to be occurring (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008; Bishop & Curtis, 2001; Cohen, 2002; Poynting & Morgan, 2007). This was especially the case if the threatened change related to any aspect of childhood (Adams, 2013; Bishop & Curtis, 2001; Cohen, 2002). A moral panic about childhood commonly involved the perceived threat of change, such as the disappearance or loss of childhood as it had been known in the past (Adams, 2013; Postman, 1985). Gillis (2009) explained the sense of loss in looking back on childhood, and stated:

childhood is a kind of performance, when children are expected to act like children. Even as the time spent with children erodes, and children cease to do childish things at ever-earlier ages, the ideal is thereby sustained and reinforced. On family occasions children act out the prevailing notions of childhood before an appreciative audience of adults, eager not only to confirm their idea of what childhood should be but also to revisit their own ‘lost’ childhoods vicariously. (p. 122)

Gillis’s (2009) emotive terminology used in this quote gives an indication of the strength of an adult response to any perceived ‘loss of childhood’. This was especially evident in Gillis’s (2009) reference to an adult ‘vicariously’ visiting and thereby reinforcing their notion of an ‘ideal’ childhood (p. 122). Other scholars have also noted this ‘fear of change and invocation of nostalgia’ (Kehily, 2008, p. 203) in relation to a perceived ‘loss of childhood’ (Buckingham, 2007; Coster, 2007; Kehily, 2008). As a consequence, ‘strong messages’ of loss and change become so embedded in the current era’s construct of childhood that they tend to perpetuate moral panic without any clear reason why it started (Adams, 2013, p. 523). Similarly, Krinsky (2008) argued it was difficult to isolate where moral panics originate in a ‘modern risk society’ due to its constant uncertainty (p. 6), while others suggest a moral panic about changes in contemporary childhood has intensified more recently due to the perception of increased dangers children currently face (Coster, 2007; Kehily, 2008; Morgan, 2007). Cahir and Noble (2007) contend the term ‘moral panic’ has become ‘overused’ and can ‘be misread as media hysteria over unfounded concerns’ (p. 137). They have argued further that a moral panic is often

part of a 'larger process of the construction of social problems' within any society, usually involving a blend of moral judgements, anxiety and change (Cahir & Noble, 2007, p. 137).

The cyclic pattern of moral panics can be seen in earlier studies around perceived changes to childhood which reflect the same concerns as those suggested in some current research. For example, a moral panic around technological change can be seen in Clark's (1940) study from the late 1930s on the radio listening habits of children. According to Clark's (1940) survey, parents were very concerned about the amount of time and the program content their children were listening to on the radio. In particular, parents were said to be worried about the 'unreal and impossible adventures' which were being broadcast as they encouraged an 'objectionable' influence on their children's play and morals (Clark, 1940, p. 147). More recently, similarly, Adams' (2013) study reflected this notion of moral panic about possible changes to childhood due to technological changes. Adams (2013) claimed parents initially expressed anxiety associated with the content and time their children spent watching television, and then later in relation to the influence of digital technology generally. Parents were said to be concerned these changes would contribute to a 'crisis in childhood' (Adams, 2013, p. 524).

Particularly interesting in Clark's (1940) and Adams' (2013) studies was the blame placed on each era's most current technological innovation as the cause for the assumed decline in children's imaginative play (Bishop & Curtis, 2001). Since the 'blame' placed on the gramophone in the early part of last century, researchers have consistently found parents have blamed the invention of television, the internet and technological games and toys for their children's perceived lack of imaginative play (Fox, Diezmann, & Grieshaber, 2010; King & Howard, 2010; Levin & Rosenquest, 2001; Marsh & Bishop, 2012). For example, the findings from Levin and Rosenquest's (2001) study found parents were worried their children would become so accustomed to 'technological toys' they would not be able to create their own imaginative play (p. 244). Levin and Rosenquest (2001) perpetuated this concern:

When children become used to toys that channel them into acting in a certain way, they begin to expect all toys to tell them what to do and toys that are open-ended can seem boring and uninteresting. This can have a long-term effect on how children play and the kind of learners they become. (p. 244)

Levin and Rosenquest's (2001) accusations about technological toys appeared to have been specifically targeted towards the moral panic parents and early childhood educators felt in relation to children's increasing technological use. Their use of emotive terms such as 'boring' and the 'long-term effect on learning' appeared to have been used intentionally (Levin & Rosenquest, 2001, p. 244). In a direct rebuttal of these concerns, Marsh (2002) continued the debate by arguing children should not be positioned as 'passive victims' in their use of digital toys as Levin and Rosenquest (2001) had implied (p. 136). Instead, Marsh (2002) claimed children 'should' be seen as agentic in their interactions with digital play. Furthermore, she suggested toys have always been 'social markers' throughout history for children, and so the provision of toys constantly changed as cultural practices also change (Marsh, 2002, p. 136). More recently, Marsh (2013) argued that toys 'reflect the zeitgeist of a given era' noting the significance of the cultural context of toys (p. 59), while other researchers who have investigated children's use of toys, such as Chudacoff (2007), Sutton-Smith (1992) and Turkle (2011), have found children do not always use toys in the way adults intend when they purchase them. In King and Howard's (2010) study, parents observed their children were 'happy' to be involved in 'static play such as watching television', however, the parents were concerned television greatly inhibited their children's creative play at home and at school (p. 39). Similarly, in Fox, Diezman and Grieshaber's (2010) research, parents also expressed feelings of fear and anxiety about technology, and felt it was lessening children's capacity to be engaged in 'worthwhile play' (p. 9). Contradicting this aspect of parental fears, the findings from Marsh and Bishop's (2012) study looking at the influence of television from the 1950s to the present day found children's creativity had not diminished. Marsh and Bishop (2012) have suggested instead that television has provided a positive influence on children's creativity since the 1950s, such as the 'creative and innovative' use of television characters and plot lines in children's play (p. 289).

With the expansion of children's digital play, researchers have shown an increased interest in examining parental attitudes in relation to digital technology and childhood (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Plowman, McPake, & Stephen, 2010; Valentine & McKendrick, 1997). Generally, these researchers found parental fears over the past two decades were triggered by concern about both their children's safety and their children's presumed decline in imaginative play. While some parents expressed concern about their children's decreasing outdoor play spaces and safety in public spaces (Valentine & McKendrick, 1997; Kernan & Devine, 2010),

others were just as concerned about their children's safety and increasing play in cyber space (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; King & Howard, 2010). It is interesting to note the similarities in the sense of panic evoked in the terminology used in reference to both public and cyber play spaces (Facer, 2012). In Facer's (2012) study of children's use of digital technology and moral panic, she highlighted parental confusion and fear concerning their children's 'wander[ing] in public spaces' while playing in cyber space (p. 397). Whilst other parents considered their children's use of the internet was a 'safer' option being 'under parental peripheral vision' rather than playing out of sight outside (Plowman, McPake, & Stephan, 2010, p. 72).

Debates around the negative influence of digital technology have fuelled moral panics around children's imaginative play (Marsh, 2002). The confusion around these debates was clearly seen in the contrasting conclusions of two recent studies on children's capacity for imaginative play (Kim, 2011; Russ & Dillon, 2011). For example, the findings from Kim's (2011) quantitative study showed children were no longer able to play imaginatively due to 'a reliance on digital technologies' (p.285). In Kim's (2011) study, creativity was measured in terms of a child's capacity to 'produce unique and unusual ideas', to be emotionally expressive, and 'to be able to see things from a different angle' (p. 292). Kim (2011) claimed her study showed a significant decrease in this range of imaginative play skills in young children over the past twenty years which supported her contention there was a 'crisis in children's creativity' (p. 285). As a consequence, Kim (2011) argued contemporary children were seen to be 'less imaginative' than children prior to 1990 (p. 292). Kim (2011) suggested this occurrence was due to children's 'dependency on current technologies to communicate...[as] some aspects of technologies hinder the development of a child's creative personality' (p. 292). However, in stark contrast to this research were the findings from Russ and Dillon's (2011) twenty-year longitudinal study on children's imaginative play. The results of their study illustrated children's imaginative play skills have not decreased over time as Kim (2011) had argued, instead they have 'remained stable or increased' (p.337). Russ and Dillon (2011) have suggested these findings may be due to the 'resilience of children living in complex times' whereby children need to be able to problem solve in complicated and 'newly imagined ways' (p. 337).



## **2.6. Adult knowledge of imaginative play practices and places: Generational change in imaginative play**

In seeking adult memories of childhood play for an intergenerational study, Karsten (2005) found adult participants tended to recollect only the ‘nice things’ from their past (p.279). The intentional choice of only the ‘nice things’ as memories has led Brannen (2004), Karsten (2005) and Coster (2007) to argue many adults have an ‘idealized’ or nostalgic view of their childhood. Further to this, Coster (2007) has suggested a Western view of childhood was commonly associated with an ‘image of the Edwardian childhood’ such as those represented in early twentieth century children’s books (p. 32). Overall, Coster (2007) argued this nostalgic reflection was based on ‘what many wish their own childhoods were or wish it could be for the next generation’ (p. 32). Similarly, Karsten (2005) found many older participants sadly lamented ‘[i]t all used to be better then’ even when on closer examination, this was not the case (p. 279). This paradox was particularly evident in Read’s (2011) study of past childhoods which illustrated the stark difference between the portrayal of the ‘innocent child in a garden’ view of childhood, in comparison to the reality of children literally playing in the gutter (p. 422). Further to this disparity, Read (2011) quoted an anecdote from Hardy, the Superintendent of the Free Kindergarten in Edinburgh in 1912, where she stated with dismay the ‘undesirable’ play she witnessed on the streets:

Their only nursery is the street, and what they have there, though it may develop their wits, too often does so at the expense of finer qualities. Their imagination may be stimulated, but it is in an undesirable direction, and not beautifully, as a child’s imagination should be stimulated. (Hardy, 1912, cited in Read, 2011, p. 423)

The reference to the ‘undesirable’ type of imaginative play fostered in gutter play appeared to contradict the ‘it was all better then’ statement the participants made in Karsten’s (2005) study (p. 279). However, on deeper analysis, this was possibly the ‘freedom’ adults often referred to in speaking of their childhood ‘outside’ play of the past. Likewise, the contrast between an adult view of optimum imaginative play in contrast to a child’s ideal was evident in this short snapshot of Hardy’s observations.

Similar to Coster (2007) and Karsten (2005), Brannen (2004) found that older participants in her study of families across generations frequently spoke of the difference between their play experiences and those of children today. In particular, these comments were about ‘the simple pleasures of past childhoods’ in which they made their ‘own amusements’ in comparison to the perceived passive consumption of today’s children (Brannen, 2004, p. 414). On reflection, the choice to project a romantic view of childhood can be considered to be each participant’s prerogative; however, as Coster (2007) contended, a problem arises when adults measure contemporary childhood against this ‘idealised view’ especially if in reality it never existed (p. 32). As a consequence of this phenomenon, researchers and scholars have found it valuable to take a historical view of childhood to examine the realities of childhood across generations (Brannen, 2004; Coster, 2007; Karsten, 2005). In this way, the changing ‘parameters of childhood’ (Qvortrup, 2009, p. 26) in each era can be seen from a cultural-historical contextual stance as well as through the selective memories of adults.

One way in which this contextual stance can be found is through historical studies of childhood. For example, studies of childhood play were conducted by Iona and Peter Opie in the United Kingdom and Dorothy Howard in Australia during the 1950s and 1960s. These studies have subsequently provided a foundation from which to compare contemporary imaginative play (Darian-Smith, 2012; Factor, 2004; Pascoe, 2011). Childhood studies during this time were informed by a moral panic in which radio, cinema and television were said to be negatively influencing children’s traditional games and imaginative play (Darian-Smith, 2012; Opie & Opie, 1969). An expression of this moral panic about technology can be seen in a quote from Dorothy Howard prior to the start of her research in Australia.

The generally held opinion, both inside and outside academic circles, was that children no longer cherished their traditional lore. We were told that the young had lost the power of entertaining themselves; that first the cinema, and now television had become the focus of their attention; and that we had started our investigation fifty years too late.  
(Howard, 1954, cited in Darian-Smith & Factor, 2005, p. 8)

Regardless of the societal fear raised about the influence of cinema and television here, the Opies (1969) and Howard (1954) both found traditional play practices were persistent in children’s imaginative play. However, children were seen to be creatively adapting popular

culture into their play. For example, in 1954 American researcher Dorothy Howard reported traditional games in Australian playgrounds were not ‘dying’ as she had been told, instead she found children were adapting their games to their local context (Darian-Smith, 2012; Darian-Smith & Factor, 2005). During her study, Howard recorded the inventive ways children adapted elements from the new technology of television, such as using features from the Micky Mouse show in their imaginative play (Darian-Smith & Factor, 2005; Pascoe, 2011). Factor (2004) also noted Howard was impressed with the agentive way children were actively making changes to their imaginative play practices.

Similar to Howard’s study, Iona and Peter Opie conducted an investigation into children’s play in school playgrounds throughout the United Kingdom during the 1950s and 60s. Also similar to Howard, Opie and Opie (1969) found traditional games were not only persisting, but were adapting to the cultural context of the time. For example, games and chants were created referring to the popular culture of the time, such as Shirley Temple and the Lone Ranger, as seen in their publication *The lore and language of school children* (Opie & Opie, 1959). Later, in their book *Children’s games in street and playground*, Opie and Opie (1969) included a chapter describing children’s ‘pretending games’. However, in contrast to Howard’s contentions, Opie and Opie (1969) considered children were not imaginative in their pretend play. Instead, they considered children to be ‘merely imitating’ experiences they had seen (Opie & Opie, 1969, p. 330). This view can be seen in the introduction of the ‘pretending games’ chapter.

Each day...they skip through a labyrinth of pretendings, and we suppose them to be imaginative, ignoring the evidence that the young do not commonly invent, merely imitate. We overlook, perhaps when they amuse us with their oddities, that what passes as original is due not to art but to artlessness, to mishearings, to imperfect understanding, to the three foot high viewpoint... Thus their pretending games turn out to be little more than reflections (often distorted reflections) of how they themselves live, and how their mothers and fathers live, and the books they have read, and the TV programs they watch. Whatever has caught their fancy is tested on their perpetual stage. (Opie & Opie, 1969, p. 330)

While children's play adaptations due to media influence were acknowledged in this statement, what is particularly noteworthy is the lack of agency Opie and Opie (1969) attributed to children in their pretend play. This is a surprising contradiction as much of their work, although clearly written at a time when children were seen as 'amusing' and 'odd', advocated for the 'adaptive' nature of children's play (Bishop, 2014). Apart from a reference in Hardman's (2001) critique of the Opies' research as a 'reductionist interpretation' of children's play (p. 502), it appeared many contemporary play researchers have overlooked these 'non-imaginative' statements from the Opies' work. Instead researchers and scholars tend to emphasise Opie and Opie's (1969) comments on children's innovative use of popular culture in play (Bishop, 2014; Marsh, 2011; Marsh & Bishop, 2012). It is also interesting to note the vast majority of play practices recorded in the Opie and Opie studies were more structured 'traditional games', rather than play which specifically involved imagination. By their own admission, Opie and Opie (1969) suggested they may have missed children's imaginative play in their observations. They surmised this may have been due to the contrast between the children's observable 'extroverted play' they saw in the playground compared with when the children were involved in 'introverted pretending' which would not have been 'admitted to under any circumstance' (p. 336).

Another study looking back on childhood play was conducted in the 1950s by American researchers Lukashok and Lynch (1956). In contrast to the Howard and Opie and Opie studies, this research was based purely on the recollections of young adults rather than observing children directly. Of particular note in this study, the researchers acknowledged the presence of 'different' memories and how they can impact on research intentions. To support this argument, Lukashok and Lynch (1956) stated:

[t]he basic assumption was that present adult memories reflect actual childhood preoccupations, ie: that items which persist over such a long time span are records of the real, salient, emotionally important experiences of youth. (p. 142)

These assumptions about the process of memory indicated the significance of emotion in the retention of childhood memories. However, Lukashok and Lynch (1956) also noted the possibility of participants choosing to select particular memories to 'impress the interviewer' (p. 142). This contention aligned closely with Karsten's (2005) and Coster's (2007) earlier statements on the difference between real memories and what participants wish were true of

their childhood experiences. In the memories of the participants' childhood play from the 1930s and 40s, trees and bushes were frequently mentioned as significant places linked with imaginative play.

‘We would rather play in the foliage. I think it represented a certain amount of mystery and imagination. You could invent things. Bushes sort of formed a clump surrounding an open space, and this can begin to mean something to you, such as a house.’ (Lukashok and Lynch, 1956, p. 145)

In this quote, particular places were chosen for particular forms of imaginative play. Lukashok and Lynch (1956) found the past children in this study demonstrated a ‘strong need to act upon the physical environment, to be stimulated by it, and to realise his imaginative fantasies through it’ (p. 152). This study provided memories of childhood imaginative play experiences from the 1930s, looking back from the context of the 1950s in America. The significance of imaginative play is evidenced in the participants' selected memories as the play experiences they most recalled when looking back on their childhoods.

Other significant historical studies have further illuminated an adult interpretation of imaginative play across generations (Armitage, 2011; Darian-Smith, 2012; Factor, 2004; Pascoe, 2011). These studies have included interviews with adults to garner their childhood memories (Pascoe, 2011), historical case studies (Darian-Smith, 2012), and analyses of historical documents (Armitage, 2011; Factor, 2004). Primarily, these studies have shown while changes have occurred, what has persisted was children's creative and imaginative approach to their play (Bishop, 2014). For example, Darian-Smith's (2012) Australian study compared contemporary children's play in school playgrounds with Dorothy Howard's school playground findings from the 1950s. What was noticeable in Darian-Smith's (2012) study was how ‘children's play today reflects, adapts and departs from earlier play practices’ (p. 265). Further, Darian-Smith (2012) noted the richness of children's play was especially evident in their imaginary play (p. 269). Just as Howard (1954) had found fifty years before watching children adapt Mickey Mouse to their play context, Darian-Smith (2012) was able to show children's inventiveness in their use of popular culture characters in their play. In one instance, a group of boys were seen to be using metal drain lids as ‘imagined portals’ in a ‘secret way to communicate’ in an innovative version of an Indiana Jones movie (p. 269). Similar to this use of

metal grates for imaginative play, Armitage (2011) also found grills, gates and drains were significant 'physical features' used for imaginative play in school playgrounds across generations (p. 11). In one instance, Armitage (2011) was told of a Principal at a school using a metal grill for his play during the 1960s as his father had before him in the 1930s. However, interestingly, when the current school children were asked about this particular 'pretend place' for play in the playground, they denied any knowledge of its meaning to the adult researchers even though they had been observed playing in creative ways around this site (p. 6).

Similarly, Factor's (2004) comparative study between Dorothy Howard's (1954) and Heather Russell's (1994) playground studies found 'links between play texts and play sites which were passed down from one generation to the next' (p. 144). As in Darian-Smith's (2012) and Armitage's (2011) studies, Factor's (2004) research also illustrated how children's imaginative play was as 'inventive' in using available affordances as it was in the past. For example, young boys in Russell's (1994) research were seen to '(illegally)...construct tunnels and dwellings in the clay for their GI Joes and so were engrossed in fantasy and drama' (p. 146), while in Howard's research, children used patches of dirt for intricate games of marbles (Darian-Smith & Factor, 2005). What is interesting in these samples of play from the past was the use of toys and popular culture artefacts from home which were used by children to prompt their play in school playgrounds. As against the impression given by earlier adult participants who insisted they made their 'own amusements' (Brannen, 2004, p. 414), children across generations have used 'toys' for their imaginative play in the past and in the present. However, in contrast to the past use of dirt as a playground affordance, Darian-Smith (2012) noted the increased use of artificial surfaces and the decline in the amount of space available for playgrounds in more recent times. She wondered if these changes would therefore change the way children use playgrounds for imaginative play and if the same affordances would continue to be available for children's play in the future. As a consequence, the influence of contextual changes on children's imaginative can be seen in these studies.

Another significant historical study of Australian childhoods was conducted recently by Pascoe (2011). The adults interviewed in Pascoe's (2011) retrospective study of the 1950s spoke of their memories of the surrounding streets as playgrounds because their homes were too small for play, but also the feelings of freedom and safety outside their homes as evident in this quote:

It was not only physical and social environments that defined growing up in the 1950s. The personal liberty granted children is remembered as crucial to their enjoyment of the play spaces available, and linked to the fact that adults felt that their families were in a safe environment. (p. 72)

This sense of adults feeling their children were in ‘a safe environment’ wherever they were playing appeared to be an intrinsic feature of past childhoods. Furthermore, parents seemed always to ‘know where their children were’ with unspoken rules about returning home when it started to get dark (Pascoe, 2011, p. 73). What was especially valuable in Pascoe’s (2011) study was the way the adult participants were able to explain the social norms of the 1950s and 60s, and then reflect on the actual childhood experiences they had had. For example, many of the participants commented their parents felt compelled by radio, magazines and parenting manuals to provide appropriate ‘outdoor play spaces’ and ‘their own private space’ for their children (Pascoe, 2011, p. 131). This pressure was confirmed in another historical study of the Australian family (Reiger, 1985). Reiger (1985) portrayed the increased pressure on Australian parents from around the 1930s onwards ‘to pay attention to the utility of toys and play’ despite the impact of the Great Depression and, later, World War Two (p. 170). For example, in a newspaper article it was stated ‘the backyard should provide excursion and adventure...the child needs to find adventure in his backyard’ (*The Argus*, 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1921, cited in Reiger, 1985, p. 170). However, in reality, as Pascoe (2011) found, the majority of children had shared bedrooms and very little space inside or outside their homes for ‘adventurous’ play as indicated in the following quote from one participant:

George explained that with no privacy or space in the home all play activities were carried on outside, but insinuates that energetic, outdoor recreation was preferred to the ‘indoor stuff’ favoured by children today. His narrative also implies that his working class family was resilient enough to accept their constrained domestic space without complaint and adjust their activities accordingly, rather than experiencing their small house as a deprivation. (p. 125)

In George’s story of growing up in the 1950s, his judgemental comparison between his predominantly ‘outdoor’ childhood and the ‘indoor’ focused experiences of today’s children

was clear. In George's childhood, in stark contrast to his view of children today, it appeared that play was only possible somewhere far away from home.

Other researchers have found similar instances where an adult view of past childhoods has been critically compared with contemporary childhoods (Clements, 2004; Kinoshita, 2009; Ramugondo, 2012; Sandberg & Vuorinen, 2010; Wilson, 2012). Overall, each of these researchers found older participants from a range of cultural backgrounds held a deficit view of contemporary children's imaginative play skills when compared with their own experiences of imaginative play. For example, in Australia, Tandy's (1999) comparative study between parents and their children found children's play in the past was 'generated within their imagination or within their own peer group on the street, park or secret places' (p. 155). In comparison, the participants believed society had changed so significantly that it was no longer safe for children to 'play and explore' without being 'constantly supervised for their own safety' (Tandy, 1999, p. 160). Therefore, their children were seen to have less freedom, more adult supervision, with television the main element in their lives rather than outside play; while in the USA, Clements' (2004) study showed a significant change in the amount of time children participated in their own outdoor 'made up games' compared with their mothers, reportedly due to a 'dependence on television and computers' (p. 74). Interestingly, in an earlier study conducted by Valentine and McKendrick (1997) on parental concerns about children's decreasing outdoor play, they found the issue was more to do with an adult desire for supervision of children's play than where the children played.

With rapid societal changes, McKendrick (2009) argued the neighbourhood was no longer the 'idyllic realm of childhood' (p. 241). Instead he found children were now choosing to spend less time outside because the home, and often children's bedrooms, were 'emerg[ing] as a play space comprising an array of electronic and other toys which [were] the personal possessions of children' (McKendrick, 2009, p. 245). In Japan, Kinoshita's (2009) study of generational differences in outdoor play also suggested the decline in 'secret bases' and hidden spaces for children over the past fifty years may have traversed cultures (p. 60); while in a Swedish study, Sandberg and Vuorinen (2010) claimed the participants in their study of childhood memories of play tended to 'idealize their childhood' in their outdoor play spaces (p. 57). Of particular relevance, the older participants perceived a 'lack of imagination in play' in today's child compared with the outdoor play they enjoyed as children (Sandberg & Vuorinen, 2010, p. 59). This attitude can be seen in the following quote:



When the participants were asked to compare children's play today with their own experiences of play both younger and older participants often viewed children's current play from a deficit perspective. The participants expressed deficiencies mostly in children's ability to use their imagination and creativity in play, as well as in children's ability to initiate and maintain play. Participants who grew up in the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s state that children no longer use their imagination in play. They often associate the lack of imagination with the increased range of toys, suggesting that toys that are ready-made and specifically made for a definite purpose seem to limit children's ability to see other uses for them. (Sandberg & Vuorinen, 2010, p. 59)

Couched beneath this 'deficit' view of contemporary children's imaginative play skills were the idealistic lens of childhood frequently referred to throughout this chapter (Sandberg & Vuorinen, 2010, p. 59). It appeared the participants' memories of their own experiences were overriding any new understanding of contemporary children's experiences. Interestingly, the older participants who held these views commonly spoke of overall changes in society which they linked directly to these negative changes in children's play capabilities: for example, the diminishing lack of outdoor places for play, increased technology, and social changes to the structure of the family. Similar to the participants in Sandberg and Vuorinen's (2010) study, Wilson (2012) also lamented the lack of unstructured outdoor play for children today. At first glance, Wilson (2012) appeared to be simply expressing a nostalgic view of her own childhood play in her criticism about children today playing in 'monitored and timetabled grids' (p. 32). However, on further analysis, Wilson's (2012) explanations of her imaginative play on the threshold of 'other places' demonstrated the depth of her understanding of play. Instead, it can be seen Wilson (2012) was commenting on the difficulty children may face today to play in the 'unidentified [and] liminal...in-between spaces...' which she identified as critical to her imaginative play (p.32).

Misunderstandings around what imaginative play looked like can be seen in a South African study of play evolving over generations conducted recently by Ramugondo (2012). The oldest participants in Ramugondo's (2012) study reported their grandchildren were seen as the 'lost generation' because they no longer knew how to enact 'real' play (p.333). Of particular relevance was Ramugondo's (2012) realisation the adults had misunderstood contemporary play

when they said there was a ‘dearth of play’ in their children’s lives (p. 334). On reflection, it appeared the adults had simply not recognised the ‘different’ play the children were engaged in within ‘undefined spaces’ because it was unlike their own experiences of play (Ramugondo, 2012, p. 334).

## **2.7. Summary**

This chapter has examined the literature pertaining to childhood imaginative play. Children’s and adult knowledge of imaginative play has been compared and analysed within classical and current literature. In so doing, it has become apparent that while there have been many studies which have examined play practices and places, only a limited number have foregrounded the role of imagination in children’s play. It has also become apparent that children’s knowledge of their lived experiences of imaginative play has not been consistently sought in past and present studies. Throughout this review of the literature, children’s meanings and uses of imaginative play appears to be substantially different from the functional use of imaginative play from an adult stance. Qualitative research studies which looked at children’s knowledge of imaginative play indicated a range of uses which do not necessarily conform to the adult preference for learning through play (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Adult-focused studies were frequently linked to learning and development often presented through quantitative scientific studies of cognitive-based imaginative play. In contrast to this, the literature on children’s meanings and uses of imaginative play show an agentive, emotion-filled child who uses imaginative play to construct real, symbolic or virtual places in private or with a few chosen friends.

Looking at the literature on generational change or continuity of imaginative play, it appears a more realistic view of imaginative play across generations is needed. The dominant discourse around childhood imaginative play has frequently been driven by cyclic patterns of moral panics commonly attributing blame to the most current technological change in society (Adams, 2013; Bishop & Curtis, 2001). It has been interesting to note the similarities in the fearful and emotive language used about the dangers of children playing in cyberspace and the language used around the dangers of unsupervised children in public outdoor spaces. In Chapter Three I will outline and explain the theoretical framework for the study.

## **Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework**

### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter examines the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis. The core abstract concepts investigated throughout this thesis relate to children's imagination, creativity and imaginative play. Therefore the two main sections in this chapter relate directly to theories of imagination and creativity and how they relate to children's play. The first section begins with positioning imagination and creativity in the early childhood field. This is followed by an overview of theories and theorists of imagination, creativity and imaginative play with relevance to this study. The multiple theorists discussed in this section include the classical early work of Ribot (1906) and Wallas (1926), followed by Huizinga (1949), and later theorists during the 1960s and 1970s, including Winnicott (1971), Jerome and Dorothy Singer (from the 1960s onwards), and, Bateson (1972). Further contributions to the field through the important work of Csikszentmihalyi (1996), Sutton-Smith (1997) and Corsaro (2011) have also been highlighted. The second section positions the major contribution of L. S. Vygotsky's (1896-1934) theory on the development of childhood imagination and creativity within cultural-historical theory. A focus on Vygotsky's (1930/2004) conceptualisation of children's imaginative play will provide the foundation for the theoretical framework of this thesis. Importantly, Vygotsky's use of the concept of *perezhivanie* in relation to the unity of emotion and intellect together in the development of imagination will be examined. This examination, together with Vygotsky's conceptualisation of imaginative play, rationalises the choice of cultural-historical theory as the theoretical framework for this study.

### **3.2. Theories and theorists of imagination, creativity and imaginative play**

Many researchers and scholars have debated the definition of imagination and its role in children's lives (Coates & Coates, 2011; Craft, 2003; Fein, 1975; Hargreaves, 2012; Taylor, 2013). These definitions have ranged from focusing on imaginative processes to creative products to the characteristics of creative children. For example, some scholars have argued imagination refers purely to a child's developing psychological skills in a cognitive process, such as divergent thinking and problem solving (Hoff, 2013; Lee, 2013); others considered it to be more about children's production of a creative 'product', such as drawing or musical

performance (Coates & Coates, 2011). There have also been ongoing theoretical debates on children's creative dispositions (Adams, 2010; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Glaveanu, 2011; Robson, 2012). For example, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) argued children cannot be considered creative because they were not able to 'chang[e] a way of doing things' (p. 155); while Glaveanu (2011) claimed 'the creative value of children's products' was 'exaggerated' when we idealised the notion of childhood, and so questioned the idea of a child's innate creativity (p. 123).

For the purpose of this thesis, Craft (2003) has provided a valuable way of understanding imagination and its intrinsic links with creativity:

Distinctions can be drawn between the creativity of the genius and that of the ordinary person (Craft, 2002) but equally there is frequently slippage between notions of creativity, imagination, enterprise, innovation and adaptability. The definitions which have had most influence in education in the last 50 years have been those which marry creativity and imagination and which take an inclusive approach, recognising that being creative is a fundamental aspect of human nature and that all children are capable of manifesting and developing their creativity. (p. 144)

Craft's (2003) support for combining the notions of imagination and creativity in an 'inclusive approach' is important to note in this definition (p. 144). Of particular relevance is Craft's (2003) contention these notions are part of a range of valuable characteristics of 'human nature' (p. 144). In a similarly inclusive approach, Eckhoff and Urbach (2008) considered the process of imagination to be 'a cognitive and affective endeavour that acts as the catalyst for all creative actions' (p. 180). Importantly, Eckhoff and Urbach's (2008) combination of cognitive and emotional elements was also included in this definition of imagination. Taylor's (2013) definition furthered this understanding of imagination by arguing imaginative thinking informed our 'emotional reactions' in our 'everyday lives' (p. 3). Additionally, she stated:

[w]ith our imaginations, we transcend time, place, and/or circumstance to think about what might have been, plan and anticipate the future, create fictional worlds, and consider alternatives to the actual experiences of our lives. (Taylor, 2013, p. 3)

What Taylor's (2013) definition demonstrated was how imagination and reality were inextricably linked through the ability to 'transcend' the experiences of our 'actual' lives, rather than thinking imagination has no relationship to real life. While there have been many debates on the definition, purpose and conceptualisation of imagination and creativity, children's ability to be creative and to demonstrate imaginative play skills can be seen to be highly valued in early childhood education (Hargreaves, 2012; Robson, 2012; Saracho, 2012). For example, both Hargreaves (2012) and Robson (2012) have argued children's capacity for creative thinking was of particular value and importance in young children's development. Robson's (2012) view that more result-focused testing of creativity skills may not 'give young children the best opportunities to display their competence or understanding' is particularly noteworthy (p. 28). Similarly, Saracho (2012) argued creativity was one of the 'most beneficial psychological characteristics' of children (p. 35). Furthermore, she suggested early childhood educators believe creativity impacted on a wide range of skills (such as, divergent thinking) and abilities (such as, mentally healthy personality) needed for children's overall development (Saracho, 2012).

Positioned more recently within cross disciplinary fields of science, psychology and the arts (Marsh, 2010), the theories of imagination and creativity in the early twentieth century were firmly held within the domain of developmental psychology (Ribot, 1906; Wallas, 1926). Of particular relevance, the work of psychologist Ribot (1906) and later, Wallas (1926), was instrumental in shifting the understanding of how imaginative processes in children can occur. For instance, the French psychologist Ribot (1906) created his theories on the development of imagination in his work entitled *Creative imagination*. These theories were highly influential in the subsequent work of Vygotsky (1930/2004) in his theory on the development of imagination in childhood. Ribot's (1906) ideas extended the current thinking of the time from the purely reproductive form of imagination and suggested instead there was a 'transition stage' between reproduction and production of imagination (p. 8). Also noteworthy was Ribot's (1906) conceptualisation of the relationship between imagination and emotion, as evident in the following statement:

The emotional factor yields in importance to no other: it is the ferment without which no creation is possible (p. 31)...all forms of the creative imagination imply elements of feeling. (p. 32)

In short, in order that a creative act occur, there is required first a need; then, that it arouse a combination of images; and lastly, that it objectify and realise itself in an appropriate form. (p. 43)

In this quote, Ribot (1906) foregrounded the importance of emotion in the creative act. Adding to this, Ribot (1906) noted children's use of 'illusion' in 'attribut[ing] life and even personality to everything' as another significant element involved in the development of children's imagination (p. 107). Similarly influential to later scholars' work on creativity, the American psychologist Wallas (1926) conceptualised a 'four stage model' in the process of creativity (Truman, 2011, p. 203). Wallas (1926) suggested individuals moved through these stages from 'preparation, incubation, illumination and verification' (Truman, 2011, p. 203). These stages were considered necessary firstly to accumulate 'existing facts and resources' which could then be used to inform and enable 'creative ideas and novel products' in the later part of the process (Truman, 2011, p. 204). Interestingly, Wallas's (1926) four stage model also holds similar characteristics to Vygotsky's (1930/2004) four 'ways' in his understanding of the development of imagination and creativity.

During the 1940s, the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1949) developed his theories on play as an intrinsic element of culture. In this work, Huizinga (1949) defined play with a clear link to children's use of their imagination. Huizinga (1949) stated:

[p]lay is distinct from 'ordinary' life both as to locality and duration...its secludedness, its limitedness. It is 'played out' within certain limits of time and place. It contains its own course and meaning...Once played, it endures as a new-found creation of the mind, a treasure to be retained by the memory. It is transmitted, it becomes tradition. (p. 28)

The exceptional and special position of play is most tellingly illustrated by the fact that it loves to surround itself with an air of secrecy. Even in early childhood the charm of play is enhanced by making a 'secret' out of it. This is for *us* not for the 'others'. What the 'others' do 'outside' is no concern of ours at the moment. Inside the circle of the game the laws and customs of ordinary life no longer count. We are different and do things differently. (p. 31)

Huizinga's (1949) definition of play has been valuable because it suggested a child's experience of imaginative play was 'different' to their 'ordinary' experiences. It was through a child's use of an imaginative 'creation of mind' that this distinction between ordinary (real) and different (imaginative play) was made possible (Huizinga, 1949, p. 28). Huizinga's (1949) reference to the 'circle of the game' where secrecy, exclusion of others and doing 'things differently' (p. 31) is also of relevance to this study and will be returned to in Chapter Seven. However, Moore (2011) in his recent study of digital games has questioned whether contemporary play can still be seen as 'bound' within a 'magic circle' as Huizinga (1949) had promoted (p. 373). Similar to Marsh's (2013) earlier comments on the permeability of digital play (see Chapter Two), Moore (2011) argued the mobility of digital games has made the distinction between the 'game world and the real world...practically indistinct' (p. 376). Interestingly, Moore (2011) agreed with Huizinga (1949) in his contention that the 'circle' can be in a wide variety of 'temporary locations' not necessarily designated for play (Moore, 2011, p. 378). Moore (2011) takes this notion further and stated:

[t]he mobility of play is therefore not always a series of border crossings to and from the magic circle, but a contingent process, a mode of play, seized in movements of experience, that involves a complex relationship between different changes in time, space, social attentiveness and cultural practices that are fundamentally creative. (p. 378)

Here, Moore's (2011) comments were more closely aligned with Huizinga's (1949) theory of play than it first appeared. By suggesting digital play is culturally constructed and dependent on context, Moore (2011) is in line with Huizinga's premise that play was a creative process which occurred within culturally situated 'certain limits of time and place' (Huizinga, 1949, p. 28).

Another important theory in the development of children's imagination and creativity was evident in Winnicott's (1971) psychoanalytical study during the late 1960s. In his book, *Play and Reality* Winnicott (1971) referred to the symbolism involved in the child's creation of 'transitional phenomena' commonly a soft toy or object which was said to represent firstly the child's mother (p. 5), and later a 'potential space' (p. 126). Children's use of dolls or soft toys was encouraged during this time as they were thought to indicate children's capacity for pretend play. In line with Ribot (1906), Winnicott's (1971) theories illustrated children's ability to

imaginatively endow these ‘transition objects’ with real life characteristics. More recently, researchers have extended Winnicott’s theories on ‘transitional or potential spaces’ (Winnicott, 1971, p. 126) suggesting these spaces can be seen as highly creative places (Ogden, 1992; Praglin, 2006; Sagan, 2008). For example, Ogden (1992) suggested these spaces can be seen as ‘a space in which creativity is possible’ (p. 213). Similarly, Praglin (2006) argued Winnicott’s (1971) notion of a ‘transitional space’ was important because it explained the imaginative practice of ‘constructing a framed, transitional area in which creativity finds expression’ (p. 5).

At a similar time during the 1960s and 1970s, further studies on the development of children’s imagination were being investigated by psychologists Jerome and Dorothy Singer. Taylor (2013) has recently suggested Singer and Singer should be considered as the ‘pioneers’ in the study of childhood imagination in such practices as day dreaming, imaginary companions and pretend play (p. 3). Early research by Jerome Singer (1961) on young children’s imagination found children who were continually ‘stimulated’ by peers, adults or ‘communication media’ were ‘much less likely to practice and perfect fantasy play’ (p. 399). Later, Jerome and his wife Dorothy Singer (1976) investigated the potential impact of television on children’s creativity. During this study by the Singers (1976), they reported the four-year-old children in their study were not able to ‘sit still throughout the half hour’ of experimental television watching (p. 79). As a consequence, it was assumed the television content would have little effect on children’s imagination. Still later, Singer and Singer (1990) examined the possible connection between early childhood experiences of imaginative play and the subsequent creativity of the adult. Throughout their book *The House of Make-Believe*, Singer and Singer (1990) quoted anecdotal evidence from adults who recalled childhood imaginative play ‘in places’ where they played alone and ‘secretly’ (p. 18). These adults said they played in secret as children because they believed their imaginative play would be thought of as ‘eccentric and liable to be misunderstood’ (Singer & Singer, 1990, p. 18). Importantly, these researchers’ acknowledged the relationship between imaginative play and the places it was enacted. However, in contrast to this evidence, Singer and Singer (1990) argued in other studies that highly imaginative children were ‘less likely to play alone’ (p. 74), and claimed:

[t]hose children who were highly and consistently imaginative also engaged in more social play, participated in ritual games and singing, and were less likely to play alone. The imaginative child tended to be those who initiated games, who were rarely solitary, withdrawn or



defensive. They could occasionally play alone, but they did not carve out delimited territory in the course of their activities nor did they play in more bounded spaces. (p. 74)

This description of an imaginative child also conflicted with the Singer and Singer's (1990) earlier findings. In their earlier study, Singer and Singer (1990) concluded an imaginative child sought out 'bounded' places to play alone, in secrecy and away from others criticism as noted previously (p. 74). Similarly contradictory, Singer and Singer's (2005) later work attributed their own 'childhood fantasies and pretending' to listening to stories on the radio every night (p. 2). In 2009, researchers Singer, Singer, D'Agostino and De Long (2009) argued children had 'given up active, outdoor activities for more sedentary, small-screen entertainment activities such as watching television, playing video games and using computers' (p. 289). Interestingly, Singer et al. (2009) had noted the majority of parents who were surveyed in this study believed 'childhood as they know it is over' due to the amount of television children were watching instead of playing imaginatively (p. 304). However, interestingly, this collective of researchers surmised the children 'may actually be doing more creative play than mothers recognise' (Singer et al., 2009, p. 307). In a study of play theorists, Hendricks (2009) suggested Singer and Singer's overall view of children's imaginative play was a very adult-orientated 'orderly' view (p. 12), which appeared to be based on a traditional, more passive attitude towards children's capacity for imaginative play. Hendricks' (2009) critique was reinforced in more recent comments Singer and Singer (2013) made suggesting games passed 'from generation to generation may well be fading as a result of the information explosion and children's reliance on television-viewing, video game play, and computer usage' (p. 24). Despite all of these comments, it appeared across Singer and Singers' work that they have not acknowledged the similarities between their own childhood radio listening and children today using television to inspire ideas for their play.

Another important body of work which highlighted the link between children's play and their imagination was seen in Bateson's (1972) work throughout the 1970s. Bateson's (1972) theory of play centred on the way children developed and maintained a 'play frame' initiated through 'let's pretend' style scenarios. Bateson (1972) referred to the necessary 'meta-communication processes' children develop to enable the recognition of 'this is play' signals or messages (p. 179). He further argued that within play, the child was aware of the difference between 'what is' and 'what is not' play through an awareness of what they are involved in playing (Bateson,

1972, p. 185). Other researchers have investigated Bateson's work on imaginative play (Engel, 2013; Knoop, 2007). Both Knoop (2007) and Engel (2013) have reinforced Bateson's (1972) play frame theory, arguing children stepping into and out of play frames assisted in their ability to differentiate between 'what is' real and the 'what if' of pretend play. Taylor (2013) suggested it was not well understood how children 'transfer information' from their imagination to reality (p. 564), whilst other researchers debated young children's capacity to understand the difference between reality and pretence (cf. Foley, 2013).

Towards the end of the twentieth century, American psychologist Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) research into the development of imagination focused on what he termed 'the creative flow' process. Markedly similar to Wallas's (1926) early model of creativity and Vygotsky's (1930/2004) theory on the development of imagination and creativity in children, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) conceptualised five steps in the creative process. These steps started with an individual's curiosity, followed by steps which showed an increasing consciousness of creative ideas, culminating in an explanation of the creative act. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) considered creativity to be the 'interaction between a person's thoughts and a sociocultural context. It is a systemic rather than an individual phenomenon' (p. 23). Similar to Singer and Singers' (1990) work on the characteristics of creative children, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) found there were particular attributes of those engaged in a creative 'flow'. These attributes included for example, the ability to exclude all other distractions, a distorted sense of time, and the ability to focus intently on the creative act (Csikszentmihalyi, 1966). In Hoff's (2013) recent examination of Csikszentmihalyi's theory of creative processes, she found 'intensive emotions' were experienced throughout the 'flow-like activity' of children's pretend play (p. 406).

Throughout the late 1980s and 90s, play theorist Sutton-Smith (1997) developed a notion of the messy 'ambiguities' of children's play, suggesting much of children's lives was played out in 'hidden transcripts of play' (p. 118). Sutton-Smith's (1997) ideas around children's 'hidden' play were based on the conceptualisation of a child's 'play culture' which was uniquely different to an adult culture, and he stated:

children can have their own autonomous play culture that attempts to be independent of adult cultural forms, in so far as the children are the ones who organize and maintain it through their own interactions,

meta-communications and framings, such as play and games. (p. 114-115)

Similar to Bateson's (1972) earlier ideas of meta-communication between children to organise their own play, Sutton-Smith (1997) suggested children's 'framing' of play was one way children can express their autonomy. Parallel to these ideas around the construction of children's own play culture was the work of sociologist, William Corsaro (2011). Corsaro (2011) focused on the significance of a peer culture in his research, suggesting children work hard to belong to the security of a group. He also suggested children have their own 'underlife' which operated subversively beneath the adult gaze (Corsaro, 2011, p. 177). In a similar fashion, Sutton-Smith (1997) argued children used many forms to construct their own culture in which they 'indulge in multiple expressions of their resistance through their manipulations of ritual and play' (p.118). Sutton-Smith's (1997) contention that imaginative play could be seen as an integral part within the whole 'play sphere', which included a wide range of 'play forms and experiences', was a valuable contribution to these theories of play (p.3). He classified this wide range of play into a continuum of play practices spanning from 'mind or subjective play' which included day-dreams, fantasies, reveries and imaginative play (p. 4) through to a more public 'performance play' (such as, music or playing house) (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 5). Sutton-Smith's (1997) declaration that the order of this classification is based on private-public forms of play is of particular interest because the connection between imaginative play as one of 'the most private' forms of childhood play is not commonly addressed in the literature on children's imaginative play (p. 4). This important point will be returned to in the theorization of this study in Chapter Seven.

Many others theorists and theories could have been included here such as Piaget (1962) and Torrance (1966). However, the theorists I have drawn on each have a specific relevance to this study. As indicated, these theorists and researchers have defined their own interpretation of imagination and imaginative play over time. Of particular relevance to this study was Ribot's (1906) work on the inclusion of emotion in the development of imagination. Also relevant, were those theorists who have worked on the idea of transitional spaces between reality and pretend worlds in a variety of forms (Bateson, 1972; Wallas, 1926; Winnicott, 1971). The theorists who differentiated between private and public imaginative thinking and play were also highly significant to this study (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Huizinga, 1949; Singer & Singer, 1990; Sutton-Smith, 1997). While these theorists and theories have been clearly influential in the

evolution of contemporary theories of imagination, the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1896-1934) is still considered the major contributor in this field on the development of imagination and creativity in children. For the intergenerational examination of children's imaginative play practices and places, Vygotsky's (1930/2004) conceptualisation of imagination, grounded within cultural-historical theory, can be seen as the most valuable overarching theoretical framework for this study.

### **3.3. Vygotsky's theory on the development of imagination and creativity in childhood**

Set against 'great social upheaval' during the early twentieth century, the Russian-Jewish psychologist Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1896-1934) developed cultural-historical theory as a framework to explain his theories on child development (Kozulin, 2003, p. 15). After Vygotsky's early death in 1934, his work was initially censored then blocked from publication due to political pressure in Eastern Europe. However, from the mid-1980s Vygotsky's work has become increasingly translated and circulated in Western psychological and educational fields (Gredler, 2009). Despite the time and place in which his theories were formulated, Vygotsky's influential work has far-reaching implications and relevance for current early childhood education and research (Bodrova, 2008). Cultural-historical theory has subsequently become one of many theories which have emerged recently to challenge the dominant discourse of developmental psychology informing the early childhood field over many years (Bloch, Swadener & Cannella, 2014; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Edwards, 2011; Grieshaber, 2001). As a consequence, the traditional view of the ideal child developing through a series of biological stages towards specified outcomes is no longer seen as the only way of understanding children and childhood (Cole & Scribner, 1978; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Hedegaard, 2009). Instead, there has been an increasing recognition that there are multiple ways to consider children and their development (Fleer, 2014; Hedges, 2014).

Gredler and Shields (2007) claimed the strength of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory can be seen in the way the psychological processes were explained as a mechanism rather than merely described. In explaining these processes, 'the essence of the whole' was examined rather than 'breaking down processes into elements' (Gredler & Shields, 2007, p. 26). Daniels (2008) explained this holistic process further by suggesting 'Vygotsky's intention was to consider the synthesis and qualitative transformation of oppositional or in some way contradictory elements

into new coherent wholes' (p. 32). In cultural-historical theory, this means the synthesis of opposite elements forms a dialectical relationship in which these opposites are seen as interdependent parts of a whole process (Daniels, 2008; Gredler & Shields, 2007). Daniels (2008) and John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) also referred to Vygotsky's extensive use of a dialectical methodology in his investigation into child development. John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) explained this method further:

Throughout his work Vygotsky used the dialectical method to analyse, explain and describe interrelationships fundamental to human development where others posited dichotomies – for example, mind and matter, language and thought, external and internal speech, nature and culture, social and individual processes in the construction of knowledge. (p. 195)

In highlighting Vygotsky's use of a method to explain dialectical interrelationships, John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) have identified pivotal elements enmeshed within cultural-historical theory, such as the dialectical relationship between the social and the individual. Through the establishment of a dialectical relationship between opposite elements, Vygotsky was said to have provided an explanation of the 'dynamic mechanism' for how 'interaction, tension, transformation and synthesis' work toward the development of higher psychological functions (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003, p. 62). The component elements of the development of higher psychological functions include the zone of proximal development, the social situation of development, mediation, and imagination (Daniels, 2005; Glick, 2004). For the purpose of this thesis, I will be focusing primarily on the examination of Vygotsky's conceptualisation of imagination, with only brief reference to other interconnected concepts within cultural-historical theory.

Within the field, many scholars and researchers consider Vygotsky's theory on the development of children's imagination and creativity to be the most significant contribution in understanding children's imagination to date (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Diachenko, 2011; Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008; Hakkarainen, 2004; Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). For example, Diachenko (2011) has referred to Vygotsky's highly influential work in explaining children's use of their imagination in expressing their 'world' in a 'symbolic form' (p.19). Moran and John-Steiner (2003) have asserted Vygotsky's theory on imagination introduced some of 'the most critical new notions'

through his representation of ‘creativity as a social as well as an individual process’ (p. 61). Similarly, Hakkarainen (2004) claimed Vygotsky’s (1930/2004) predominant work *Imagination and Creativity in Childhood* has formed the basis of ongoing inquiry into the development of children’s imagination and creativity since its first republication in 1967.

The fundamental key to Vygotsky’s theory on the development of imagination and creativity involved children’s play, often referred to in early childhood education as dramatic or pretend play (Bodrova, 2008; Duncan & Tarulli, 2003; Japiassu, 2008). For Vygotsky (1930/2004), play was seen as the ‘root of all creativity in children’ (p. 71). Further to this, Duncan and Tarulli (2003) claim that Vygotsky believed it was children’s use of ‘substitute objects and imaginary situations’ in their dramatic play which could be seen as the ‘central source of developmental change during the preschool period’ (p. 272). This idea of development occurring through imaginative play can be seen in the following quote by Vygotsky (1978) from *Mind in Society*. In this quote, Vygotsky (1978) provided an explanation of how play changes from reproduction of real situations to the start of a conscious shift in meanings. Vygotsky (1978) stated:

[i]t is remarkable that the child starts with an imaginary situation that initially is so very close to the real one. A reproduction of the real situation takes place. For example, a child playing with a doll repeats almost exactly what his mother does with him. This means that in the original situation rules operate in a condensed and compressed form...It is an imaginary situation, but it is only comprehensible in the light of a real situation that has occurred. Play is more nearly recollection of something that has actually happened than imagination. It is more memory in action than a novel imaginary situation. As play develops, we see a movement toward the conscious realisation of its purpose....It is the essence of play that a new relation is created between the field of meaning and the visual field - that is, between situations in thought and real situations. (pp. 103-104)

As such, the child’s development of imagination can be seen to occur through an increasing consciousness or ‘conscious realisation’ of what is imagined and what is real (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 103). Further to this, Kravtsova (2010) explained Vygotsky’s definition of imaginative play:

Vygotsky believed that what defines play is the presence of an imaginary situation. In Vygotsky's thinking, an imaginary situation is not a world of meanings, as many of his followers believe, and not a role, which is believed to be a criterion for play, in D. B. Elkonin's opinion. An imaginary situation in cultural-historical/nonclassical psychology is the space between the real world and the world of meanings. In other words, in order to create an imaginary situation or identify one in the activity of another person, it is again necessary to occupy two positions at the same time—to keep in mind the real world and the world of fantasy. Both worlds are actualized in play. Proof of this can be seen in Vygotsky's texts, which emphasize that in play a child cries like a patient but at the same time takes pleasure in playing. In other words, children are simultaneously inside and outside a game, and consequently engage in two positions simultaneously. (p.24)

Kravtsova's (2010) description of an imaginary situation has been especially valuable in reference to a child's increasing awareness of the real world while simultaneously playing in the imaginary world. Bruner (2004) described this process as 'imagination is play gone inward' (p. 24) wherein the child is capable of differentiating between the 'internal and the external life' (Mahn, 2003, p. 131).

According to Vygotsky, there were a number of aspects of pretend play in an imaginary situation which were contrary to earlier understandings of play (Zen'kovskii, 2013). Firstly, rather than play being 'totally spontaneous' as promoted previously by play theorists, Vygotsky argued pretend play needed to be 'rule-based' (Bodrova, 2008, p. 359). Vygotsky believed it was critical to understand the significance of rules within children's imaginative play, and the way children abided by these rules to enable the imaginary situation to persist (Bodrova, 2008; Duncan & Tarulli, 2003; Japiassu, 2008). Secondly, pretend play in an imaginary situation was based on reality instead of 'fantasy' which was commonly understood to be the case (Edwards, 2011; Flear, 2011; Vygotsky, 1930/2004). Vygotsky (1930/2004) argued children's imaginative play was based on their contextual and experienced reality. However, in his extensive work on the development of imagination he concluded children's imaginative play creatively re-configured their version of reality:

A child's play very often is just an echo of what he saw and heard adults do: nevertheless, these elements of his previous experience are never merely reproduced in play in exactly the way they occurred in reality. A child's play is not simply a reproduction of what he has experienced, but a creative reworking of the impressions he has acquired. He combines them and uses them to construct a new reality, one that conforms to his own needs and desires. (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 11)

What we see here is how Vygotsky showed the development which has occurred in children's imaginative play. In a continuation from Vygotsky's (1978) previous thinking seen in *Mind in Society* in which children initially reproduced only what they had experienced or seen, he now considered children to be 'creative[ly] re-working' an interpretation of their cultural reality into imaginative play (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 11). Fler (2011) argued these 'imaginative creations arise when the material and psychological conditions that are necessary for its formations are available' (p. 249). Another way of understanding these 'material and psychological conditions' which Fler (2011) referred to, is to examine the Vygotskian concept of a 'leading activity' which enables this change in children's imaginative play to occur (p. 249).

The concept of play as 'a leading activity' is another important aspect of understanding Vygotsky's work on play and its relationship to the development of imagination (Vygotsky, 1978). This is not in reference to play as the most 'dominant activity' in a child's life, rather an activity which leads to the development of a child's higher psychological functions at a particular time (Edwards, 2011, p.196). Edwards (2011) continued by explaining a 'leading activity operates as a bridge that supports a child's transition from one psychological function to another across the developmental lifespan' (p.196). Taking a 'leading activity approach' to development is significant in cultural-historical theory because it specified 'changes in the child's situation within society lead to changes in psychological processes' (Duncan & Tarulli, 2003, p. 273). Therefore, from a cultural-historical perspective, a child's imaginative activity (that is, imagination in action) has become a leading activity when it supports the rise of a new psychological function such as play (Kravtsov, 2008, p. 3). At this point, a leading activity was said to be mastered when a child was able to consciously recall and 'reflect on its processes' (Kravtsova, 2006, p. 14). Mahn (2003) and Gredler and Shields (2007) considered this development of consciousness to be a necessary function needed to move forward in the



development of higher psychological functions, particularly in the ‘role of *meaning* in the construction of consciousness’ (Mahn, 2003, p. 135). Mahn (2003) referred to the development of children’s conscious awareness of changes in their lives as ‘transformations in critical periods’ of their development (p. 123). Researchers have highlighted these periods in a child’s life, referring to Vygotsky’s work in the *Collected Works of Vygotsky* (Rieber, 1998) on the ‘crisis of three year old children’ and later ‘the crisis of seven year old children’ (Mahn, 2003; Kravtsova, 2006; Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2009). During the ‘three year old child’s crisis’, Vygotsky (1998) stated children were developing their personality, and at times behaved in ‘a kind of rebellion’ against the authority of adults seen in a notable change in relationship with their family (p. 286). Mahn (2003) argued it was through this process of internalisation when a child’s increasing consciousness of the difference between their internal (individual) and external (social) life occurs, changes in a child’s personality also occurred as a part of their ‘crisis period’ of development (p. 122). Mahn (2003) accorded this process of change to be brought about by an awareness of needs in the environment which then changes ‘the internal experience, which in turn changes the [child’s] relationship to the environment’ (p. 129).

Edwards (2011) explained this process of a child’s increasing consciousness of their environment further in linking play as a leading activity with the development of imagination, stating:

[u]nderstanding imagination as connected to reality is important for understanding how play works as a leading activity because imagination allows children to appropriate the cultural meanings of the objects and actions that comprise their social and cultural experiences.  
(p. 198)

Here Edwards (2011) argued children actively use their own constructed meanings of elements from their reality or cultural context in their imaginative play. This view was reinforced by Japiassu (2008) and Kudryavtsev (2011) who also considered children were capable of redefining the meanings of cultural objects and practices in the form of object substitution to include in their imaginative play. Vygotsky (1978) considered this notion of object substitution in imaginary situations to be highly significant in the development of children’s imagination (Duncan & Tarulli, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Duncan and Tarulli (2003) explained this significance by claiming it was children’s ability to ‘decontextualise’ the meaning of an object

that enabled them to move beyond simply playing with objects to using abstract ideas instead (p. 274). Edwards (2011) continued this line of thinking about the relationship between imagination and reality by referring to this notion in Vygotsky's theory on imagination, and stated:

[w]ithin cultural-historical theory there are four main ways of understanding the relationship between imagination and reality. Vygotsky suggests these 'ways' of understanding the relationship between imagination and reality are connected in a cyclical process in which imagination eventually feeds back into reality which then reconnects with imagination. (p. 198)

Edwards' (2011) reference to the 'cyclical process' involved in the 'four ways' toward the development of imagination is noteworthy here (p. 198). This cyclical process is the foundation of Vygotsky's (1930/2004) theory of the development of imagination and creativity in childhood, and will be discussed using direct quotes from this influential body of work.

### **3.3.1. The 'four ways' in the development of imagination and creativity in children**

Vygotsky (1930/2004) began his extensive explanation of the development of imagination and creativity in children by describing his conceptualisation of a creative act as:

Any human act that gives rise to something new is referred to as a creative act, regardless of whether what is created is a physical object or some mental or emotional construct that lives within the person and is known only to him. (p. 7)

This was an important statement to make at the beginning of this work, as it immediately dispelled the idea of creativity belonging only 'to geniuses, talented people who produce great works of art' (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 10). Instead, a child was seen to be capable of creating 'something new' in a creative act. Moran and John-Steiner (2003) have taken this point further and argued the underlying premise of Vygotsky's theory on the development of imagination can be understood by comparing a child and a 'famous creator' (p. 81). In line with Vygotsky's theory, they suggested a child telling a story is just as creative as a 'famous creator' (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003, p.81). They suggested this is the case because both the child and the creative genius go through a similar dynamic process in the enactment of their respective creative acts.

This early quote from Vygotsky was also significant because it referred to both the physical and symbolic manifestations of the creative act, as well as the notion of private or public performance of creativity in suggesting the creative act 'is known only to him' (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 7). 'Creativity', Vygotsky (1930/2004) had stated 'is one of the most important areas of child and educational psychology' (p.11). However, Vygotsky (1930/2004) argued creativity was only possible if something needed to be altered in a child's environment. He stated:

[a] creature that is perfectly adapted to its environment, would not want anything, would not have anything to strive for, and, of course, would not be able to create anything. Thus, creation is always based on lack of adaption, which gives rise to needs, motives, and desires. (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 29)

In this quote, Vygotsky's reference to a child's 'needs, motives and desires' as the prime motivation for creativity is of relevance to this study. Vygotsky suggested without these needs, a child would not be emotionally and cognitively provoked to change anything in his environment, and so would not engage in the imaginative process.

Furthermore, Vygotsky (1930/2004) believed creativity could be seen in young children's play experiences where a 'creative reworking' of their reality was combined to construct a new reality (p. 11). Vygotsky (1930/2004) clearly differentiated between 'reproductive activities' (p. 7) – that is, activities which merely reproduced what had been done before; and, 'combinatorial' or creative activities (p. 9). Vygotsky (1930/2004) argued it is 'the [child's] ability...to combine the old in new ways that is the basis of creativity' (p. 12). The complex processes involved in the development of these creative activities are what constitutes the 'four ways' in the development of imagination referred to by Edwards (2011) (see above).

Vygotsky (1930/2004) explained the 'four basic ways' in which imagination was associated with reality in order to illuminate the psychological dynamic mechanisms involved in the creative process (p. 13). For the first 'way', Vygotsky (1930/2004) stated:

imagination always builds using materials supplied by reality...The creative activity of the imagination depends directly on the richness and variety of a person's previous experience because this experience

provides the material from which the products of fantasy are constructed. The richer a person's experience, the richer is the material his imagination has access to. (pp. 14-15)

In other words, all aspects of a child's lived experiences were needed to inform the beginning of a creative activity (Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008). This aspect links back to the heightened significance of reality in relation to imagination rather than 'pure fantasy' as previously indicated (Edwards, 2011). It is also important to note Vygotsky (1930/2004) emphasised the importance of 'rich and varied' previous experiences to provide the affordances and resources in the construction of a creative act (p. 14). Interestingly, this document had originally been written by Vygotsky as a less formal version of his theory to be used by teachers and parents rather than for academic purposes (Hakkarainen, 2004). Consequently, there were many references throughout this work in which Vygotsky called for parents and teachers to take heed of his findings. For example, Vygotsky (1930/2004) requested parents and teachers provide 'broad experiences' for children to enable a 'strong foundation' for their creativity (p. 15).

The second 'way' in the creative process involved 'reworked' elements from reality (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 16). To explain this further, Vygotsky (1930/2004) stated:

[i]t does not reproduce what I perceived in my previous experience, but creates new combinations from that experience. These products of the imagination also consist of transformed and reworked elements of reality and a large store of experience is required to create these images out of these elements. (p. 16)

This referred to a child's capacity to imagine what others have seen or done, and use this information in a newly interpreted way (Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008). In this way, meanings become disassociated from their previous understanding and subsequently become combined in a new way. This process referred to the concepts of 'combinatorial' creative activities (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 16) and object substitution (Japiassu, 2008). Japiassu (2008) argued it is through a child's ability to substitute new meanings for objects that he or she can 'take any object produced by adults and invest it with ludic meanings' even if this was not the adult intention for the object (p. 384). He added, however, that the new meanings of the object still need to be 'culturally appropriate' in a way the child, others in the play, and their actions continue with the 'dramatic representation' of their pretend play (Japiassu, 2008, p. 385).

Furthermore, Japiassu (2008) emphasised that a child's pretend play is not for 'exhibition or public presentation' and is therefore not created for the observation of others (p. 385).

Further to the notion of 'combinatorial' creative activities, Vygotsky (1930/2004) referred to 'new combinations' of experiences formed through the transformation of past cultural practices (p. 16). In cultural-historical terms, each era produces different cultural practices according to changes in context (Davydov, 1995). Further to this, Rogoff (2003) explained this notion of transformation of past cultural practices as an indication of persistence and change by arguing it is important to understand 'generations of individuals make choices and invent solutions to changing circumstances' (p. 362). She continued further saying it is because of these newly invented solutions to accommodate contextual changes across generations that cultural practices can be seen to 'persist [but] also change over time' (Rogoff, 2003, p.355). Other researchers have referred to the influence of the past on present practices through the cultural-historical use of the term historicity (Sembera, 2007; Stetsenko, 2009; Vianna & Stetsenko, 2006). A term originally used by German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1927), historicity refers to the notion of 'making it possible for the past to form a continuous whole with the present and the future' (Sembera, 2007, p. 212). Stetsenko (2009) proposed the cultural-historical notion of transforming cultural practices requires an understanding that:

newly invented and discovered ways of doing things have to be crystallized in various forms of artifacts (including concepts, norms, rules, rituals and procedures) to make them available to others including future generations, while relying on and building upon experiences of others including those from the distant past. (p. 10)

This quote from Stetsenko (2009) emphasised both the processes involved in developing imagination as 'newly invented and discovered ways' and the way cultural practices change through a child's use of their own and others past experiences, as Rogoff (2003) had suggested, occurred over time.

The third 'way' focused on the emotional link between reality and imagination. It recognised the influence of emotion on a child's interpretation of reality. Vygotsky (1930/2004) stated there was a strong correlation between imagination, cognition and emotion, calling this the 'Law of the emotional reality of imagination' (p. 18). This idea explained how 'every construct of the imagination has an effect on our feelings' (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p.19) which, in turn,

highlights the notion that the ‘influence of the emotion we are experiencing colors our perception of external objects’ (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, pp. 17-18). Vygotsky suggested this was why ‘works of art created by their authors’ imagination can have such a strong emotional effect on us’ (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 20). Every feeling or emotion has an ‘image associated with it’ which can be manifested through physical or internal expressions of that emotion (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 18). To reinforce these statements, Vygotsky cited Ribot’s (1906) text from his book *Creative Imagination*, claiming ‘all forms of creative imagination...include affective elements’ (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 19). Vygotsky (1930/2004) went on to explain that:

[t]his means that every construct of the imagination has an effect on our feelings and if this construct does not in itself correspond to reality, nonetheless the feelings it evokes are real feelings, feelings a person truly experiences. (pp. 19-20)

The particular significance of this third way was in the unity of emotion and cognition as two opposite concepts which are more commonly examined separately. However, in the process of developing imagination, Vygotsky saw these two concepts as interdependent and therefore linked together within the whole concept of imagination (Daniels, 2008; Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2009). This unity can be seen as another example of a dialectical relationship between two opposing parts of the whole as referred to earlier in this chapter (Daniels, 2008; Gredler & Shields, 2007; Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). Subsequently, the unity of emotion and cognition is represented in the synthesis formed through a child’s developing consciousness of their emotional state and the way they react to this developing awareness (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). This sense of emotional awareness or consciousness is also referred to as a child’s *perezhivanie* (Gonzalez Rey, 2012). The translation of the Russian term *perezhivanie* can loosely be understood as ‘the process of emotional response to experience’ (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 336). An extended examination of this concept in relation to imaginative play will be continued in a separate sub-section towards the end of this chapter.

The fourth and final ‘way’ in the cyclic creative process toward the development of imagination can be seen in the creation of ‘something substantially new’ which then exists in reality (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 20). Vygotsky (1930/2004) stated:

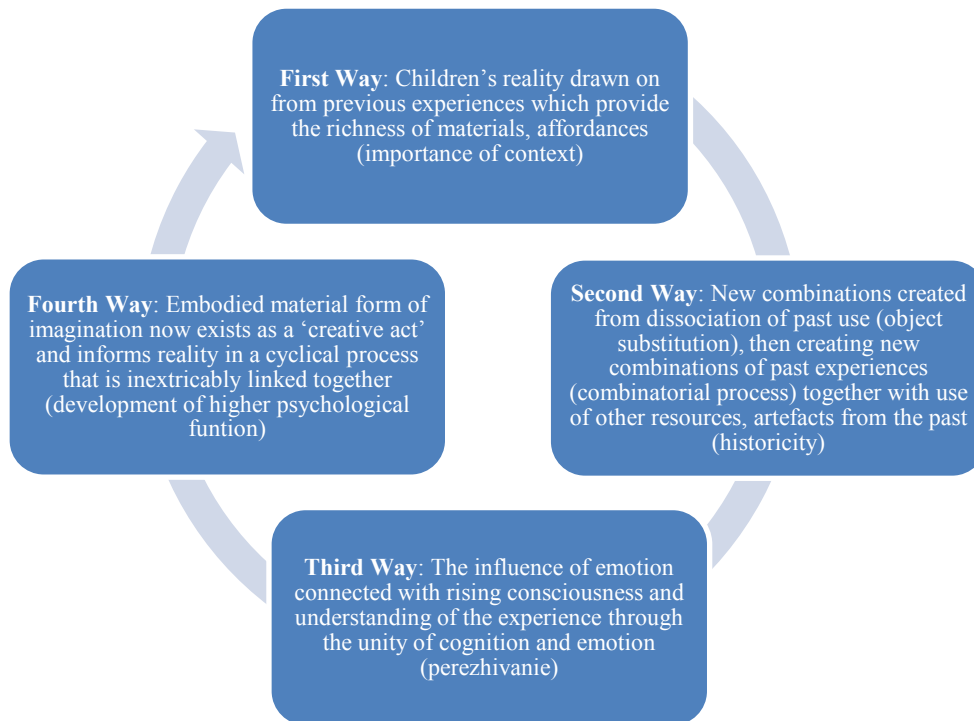
The essence of this association is that a construct of ‘fantasy’ may represent something substantially new, never encountered before in

human experience and without correspondence to any object that actually exists in reality; however, once it has been externally embodied and given material form, this crystallized imagination that has become an object begins to actually exist in the real world, to affect other things. (p. 20)

Vygotsky (1930/2004) argued this was the way ‘imagination becomes reality’ as a newly created ‘material form’ which has become part of the ‘new’ reality in which a child exists (p. 20). Of particular relevance to this study of imaginative play practices and places, Vygotsky (1930/2004) also stated:

[t]he last and most important feature of imagination, without which the picture we have drawn would be incomplete in its most essential aspect...is the imagination’s drive to be embodied, this is the real basis and motive force of creation. Every product of the imagination, stemming from reality, attempts to complete a full circle and to be embodied in reality. (p. 41)

Further to Vygotsky’s (1930/2004) declaration of the strong drive toward the ‘embodi[ment]’ of the imaginative act into reality, he also noted that this ‘drive’ does not always ‘coincide with the capacity to create’ (p. 39). In this way, Vygotsky has emphasised the influence of context on a child’s capacity to engage in a creative act. Eckhoff & Urbach (2008) suggested that, while it may appear the four ways are distinct and separate, they are however, closely linked and ‘inextricably intertwined in real life’ (p. 182). As such, these four ways should be seen as an entire dynamic process of the development of imagination, which occurs simultaneously as the creative act is enacted (see Figure 3.1).



**Figure 3.1 Visual representation of Vygotsky’s (1930/2004) four ways toward the development of imagination and creativity**

To summarize this holistic, cyclic and dynamic process of the development of imagination according to Vygotsky’s (1930/2004) theory together with the addition of other cultural-historical theorists, the ‘four ways’ can be described as follows:

- First, a child draws on resources, affordances and materials available from within his or her context or reality as the trigger for starting this creative process. The need to change something in his or her environment is a necessary precursor to this process (Vygotsky, 1930/2004);
- Second, a child needs to be able to develop the mastery of separating an object from its ‘adult-constructed’ meaning through object substitution by using imaginative play (Diachenko, 2011; Japiassu, 2008). The notion of a ‘combinatorial process’ is seen here in which the child combines old ways with new ways as ‘the basis of creativity’ (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 12). The capacity to use the experiences of others from the past as resources for use in this process is an important aspect of this ‘second way’. The notion of historicity is evident here because a child uses elements from cultural practices



and artefacts from the past, which are then seen to influence the present and future use of these creative products or evolving cultural practices (Rogoff, 2003; Stetsenko, 2009);

- In the third way, the combination of emotion and cognition unite in this dynamic process to enable the child's conscious thinking of this emotionally-charged experience (Gonzalez Rey, 2012). The child's reaction to this experience is created through his or her conscious awareness, impacted on by reality or context together with the child's personality (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003); and finally,
- In the fourth way, the ensuing creative act becomes part of newly reconstructed reality in the cyclical nature of this process (Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008; Edwards, 2011).

The above account has outlined the foundation of Vygotsky's theory on the development of imagination and creativity. This account has explained the interconnected processes which occur when a child consciously combines past experiences and resources from his or her reality into new ways to enable a creative act to occur. Throughout this process, imaginative play is used as the mechanism in which abstract and symbolic thinking lead toward the development of the higher psychological function of imagination (Bodrova, 2008; Japiassu, 2008; Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). Therefore, through a cultural-historical lens, an imaginative play practice can be seen as a creative act involving imaginative activity and thinking in young children. In examining Vygotsky's theory on the development of imagination and creativity in children, the role of emotion has emerged as especially important as an integral part in unity with conscious thought: it is particularly notable in the 'third way' involved in the development of imagination. This part of the process has been described by scholars and researchers through the use of the Russian term, *perezhivanie*.

### **3.3.2 Imaginative play, emotion and *perezhivanie***

Gonzalez Rey (2012) has maintained Vygotsky's valuable contribution to theories on the development of emotion 'have been overlooked' (p. 45). In earlier papers, Gonzalez Rey (2009) had suggested this was because Vygotsky has been more widely acknowledged for his cognitive theories of human development than in theories of emotion. He proposed this was due to past approaches of 'prevailing rationalism' within scientific research which ignored the importance of emotion in the development of higher psychological functions (Gonzalez Rey, 2012, p. 46). However, there has been increasing interest in Vygotsky's work on emotion in more recent

times (Bozhovich, 2009; Fleer, 2014; John-Steiner, Connery, & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010; Quinones & Fleer, 2011; Smagorinsky, 2011). For example, Bozhovich (2009) highlighted Vygotsky's view that the study of emotion and particularly emotional experiences, was important because it enabled an understanding of 'children's mental development' (p. 70), while Smagorinsky (2011) has concluded Vygotsky started and ended his brief career focusing on the 'emotional dimensions of human existence' (p. 322).

John-Steiner, Connery and Marjanovic-Shane's (2010) examination of Vygotsky's (1971/1925) *The Psychology of Art* was another example of more recent interest in Vygotsky's early work on emotion. *The Psychology of Art* was the basis for Vygotsky's original dissertation in 1925 and centred on the concepts of emotion, catharsis, creativity and the *perezhivanie* of actors. In Russia, *perezhivanie* was initially a term used to describe the dramatic actions of actors on stage however, Vygotsky was the first to reconceptualise *perezhivanie* in relation to higher psychological functions (Smagorinsky, 2011). John-Steiner, Connery and Marjanovic-Shane (2010) claim Vygotsky considered the emotional elements of lived experiences were 'crucial for imagination' (p. 8). As indicated in the *Vygotsky Reader*, Vygotsky (1994) expressed the significance of emotion in his writing of the *Psychology of Art* when he stated, 'Art is the social release of the unconscious, or liberation of emotions' (p. 247). Further to this, Vygotsky (1994) highlighted the critical importance of emotion in imagination, stating that:

people are liberated through an explosion of emotions, which makes the imagination flourish as it interprets emotions. The imagination is the central expression of an emotional reaction. (p. 247)

At the time of his death in 1934, Vygotsky had once again returned to work on the development of emotion, however, was unable to complete this work. Despite being unfinished, Vygotsky's theory on the development of emotion has since been published in an extended chapter in *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky*, Volume Six (Rieber, 1999).

Of particular relevance to this study, the significance of emotion in Vygotsky's work can clearly be seen in his theory on the development of imagination and creativity in children. Vygotsky (1930/2004) explained the only way the 'four ways' towards the development of imagination could occur was if 'both intellectual and emotional factors' were engaged (p. 9). Later, Vygotsky (1930/2004) declared, 'Nothing important is achieved in life without a great deal of

emotion' (p. 34). In another reference to the importance of emotion in *The Vygotsky Reader*, Vygotsky (1994) claimed a child's 'vivid fantasy' was 'rich' with emotions, stating:

[a] child's vivid fantasy is conditioned not so much by the richness of his ideas but by the fact that it is accompanied by a greater intensity and is more likely to arouse his emotions. (p. 280)

A child makes no attempt to hide his play, but an adolescent conceals his fantasies and safeguards them from other people's eyes...It is just this reticent aspect of fantasy which points to the fact that it is tightly bound up with inner desires, incentives, attractions and emotions within the adolescent's personality, and that it is beginning to serve this whole side of his life. In this respect, the association of fantasy with emotion is extremely significant. (p. 284)

This quote illustrated the blending of intense emotion with cognitive thought while foregrounding Vygotsky's conceptualisation of imagination. While Vygotsky apparently assumed young children were less likely than adolescents to 'hide' their imaginative play, it is of particular interest that he confirmed the significance of 'fantasy play' being associated with emotional elements as part of their psychological development in this work (Vygotsky, 1994, p.284). However, it was through an understanding of *perezhivanie* that Vygotsky was able to explain how children's internalised thoughts were affected by their environment, their personality and their emotional responses to experiences (Bozhovich, 2009).

Throughout his work, Vygotsky explained the influence of emotion on the development of children's imagination and their imaginative play through the concept of *perezhivanie*. According to Fakhrutdinova (2010), Vygotsky proposed *perezhivanie* to be a 'dynamic unit of consciousness' (p.32) which represented a 'dialectic unity' between thought and emotion (p.36). Vygotsky (1994) explained this complex concept in his lecture on the *Problem with the environment* using case study examples from children he had studied. In one example he discussed, three children in one family all experienced the same 'emotional experience' at the same time. However, each child reacted differently to the same experience because of their different attitudes, personalities and level of consciousness of the situation. In discussing the role of *perezhivanie*, Vygotsky considered it was an emotional awareness of a child's

relationship between the child himself, his environment and his emotional experience – that is, how the child interpreted and responded to the event (Vygotsky, 1994). Vygotsky (1994) extended this explanation by stating:

[t]he emotional experience [*perezhivanie*] arising from any situation or from any aspect of his environment, determines what kind of influence this situation or this environment will have on the child. Therefore, it is not any of the factors in themselves (if taken without reference to the child) which determines how they will influence the future course of his development, but the same factors refracted through the prism of the child's emotional experience [*perezhivanie*]. (p. 339)

An emotional experience [*perezhivanie*] is a unit where, on the one hand, in an indivisible state, the environment is represented ie: that which is being experienced – an emotional experience [*perezhivanie*] is always related to something which is found outside the person – and on the other hand, what is represented is how I, myself, am experiencing this ie: all the personal characteristics and all the environmental characteristics are represented in an emotional experience [*perezhivanie*]. (p. 340)

Vygotsky's description of the dialectical unity between the internal (the emotional experience) and external (environmental characteristics) elements was represented in these statements. This quote also represented Vygotsky's foundational cultural-historical view that the individual cannot be separated from his/her social context. However, what makes this relationship more complicated to understand is the process of consciously thinking about the experience (that is, the cognitive element), while comprehending the influence of affect on the experience (that is, the emotional element).

With an increasing attention to detail in Russian to English translations, researchers and scholars have recently re-examined Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie* (Gonzalez Rey, 2012; Murphy, 2014; Veresov, 2015). This concept is now considered to be more than a reflection of 'an emotional lived experience' as previously translated into English (Gonzalez Rey, 2009; Gonzalez Rey, 2012; Veresov, 2015). Instead, these scholars now understand Vygotsky's definition of this concept as a 'refraction' of the event or experience or phenomenon that is

happening or has happened to a person (Vygotsky, 1994). From a Vygotskian stance therefore, ‘refraction’ refers to a person’s active participation in how we react, respond to and ‘experience’ a particular experience or phenomenon rather than merely reflecting on it (Gonzalez Rey, 2012; Veresov, 2015). Gonzalez Rey (2012) explained this re-examined definition of *perezhivanie* as:

*[p]erezhivanie* was introduced by Vygotsky as a concept able to embody the integration of cognitive and affective processes central to the definition of the social situation of development...Vygotsky understood the unity of personality and environment in *perezhivanie*. The relevance of social influences on development would depend on *perezhivanie*, understood as a cognitive-emotional response based on the child’s personality...Functions under this prism also become sources of emotions which actively engage in a subject’s action. (pp. 51-52)

Gonzalez Rey’s (2012) definition of *perezhivanie* was valuable as a culmination of these more recent interpretations, particularly because of his inclusion of the influence of different processes on a child’s response to a social situation – both internal and external. Gonzalez Rey’s (2012) reference to a child’s personality playing a critical role in their *perezhivanie* was reinforced in Kravtsov and Kravtsova’s (2009) interpretation of *perezhivanie*. They contend the ‘dynamic connection’ between emotion and cognition was represented in ‘human consciousness’ through the development of a child’s will and personality (p. 205). However, regardless of the strength of Vygotsky’s statements about the importance of emotion in understanding imaginative play, a dominance of purely cognitive elements in children’s creativity is still commonly the focus of research attention (cf. Taylor’s (2013) 37 chapters in *The Oxford handbook of the development of imagination* are primarily based on the cognitive element of imagination). Researchers have noted the limited empirical studies on the use of *perezhivanie* as a lens for the combined examination of cognition and emotion (Brennan, 2014; Feiyan, 2014; Ferholt, 2009). This phenomenon has led Fler (2014) to argue recently the unity of emotion and cognition in imaginative play has not been ‘fully explored’ in early childhood research (p. 120).

However, despite these limitations, there have been some recent studies where this unity has been highlighted in children’s lived experiences (cf. Fernholt, 2009; Fler, 2014; Quinones,

2013; Russ & Schafer, 2006). For example, in Russ and Schafer's (2006) quantitative research on divergent thinking, memory and creativity in primary school children, they identified affect and cognition in the creative process. Their findings showed a 'blend' of emotion and intelligence in children's 'daydreams and play' (p. 349). Similarly, the young children in Quinones' (2013) recent study also expressed their feelings associated with emotionally intense cultural practices at home. Quinones (2013) noted she had not initially looked for these 'little moments of emotion' in the children's experiences, however, she became increasingly aware of the importance of *perezhivanie* throughout the analysis (p. 111). In contrast to these studies, Ferholt (2009) and Fler's (2014) research involved intentional adult provocation to investigate children's emotional responses to 'story book' fairy tale experiences. In Ferholt's (2009) study, the children and adults created 'playworlds' based on Narnia, while Fler (2014) used the Goldilocks fairy tale to trigger children's emotional reactions. Fler (2014) explained this concept further in relation to her work on *perezhivanie* and role play, and stated:

*[p]erezhivanie* as the child's emotional experience in role-play captures how the child becomes aware of, interprets and emotionally relates to their social and material environment....There is constant and simultaneous outward and inward projection of emotions and feelings, which are highlighted during children's role play...Role playing becomes the social prism through which children make conscious their emotions as particular feelings states. Here, emotions and cognition work together and cannot be separated from each other...*Perezhivanie* helps explain the doubleness of emotions, the flickering between real and imaginary situations, and emotional anticipation, filtering and reflection that were evident during children's play. (pp. 140-141)

Fler's (2014) combination of *perezhivanie* and role play provides a valuable description of how emotion and cognition work together through children's consciousness of their 'feeling states' (p. 141). This is especially evident in the way this consciousness enables children to 'flicker' between real and imaginary situations. While these studies have been valuable in understanding imaginative play and the role of *perezhivanie*, there were two earlier studies which were of particular value in relation to the present study's investigation into the meanings of imaginative play. These were Mahn and John-Steiner's (2002) research on *perezhivanie* and the creation of

safety zones, and El'Koninova's (2002) study into children 'flickering' between reality and make-believe spaces.

With an increasing interest in the cultural-historical concept of *perezhivanie*, what is especially relevant for this study is that *perezhivanie* can now be seen to portray the meanings of the experience or phenomenon rather than only highlighting the actual experience or phenomenon itself (Bozhovich, 2009; Veresov, 2015). In terms of children's imaginative play practices and places, therefore, *perezhivanie* can be seen to play an important role through the psychological process of uniting cognition and affect. This means, rather than merely 'feeling' an emotion about an imaginative place or practice, *perezhivanie* explained the child's developing conscious awareness of the deeper emotional meanings of imaginative play. This idea was confirmed in Moran and John-Steiner's (2003) claim that 'underpinning creativity, is the conscious awareness of the interaction of one's own and others' subjective emotional experiences' (p. 73).

Similar to Smargorinsky (2011), Gonzalez Rey (2012) and Fleer (2014), Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) had earlier considered Vygotsky's work on the relationship between affect and cognition to be 'largely unknown' (p. 47). Although Levykh (2008) argued emotion was already included in the zone of proximal development, Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) suggested the inclusion of an 'affective element' within the zone of proximal development would deepen an understanding of the unity between affect and cognition (p. 46). Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) suggested Vygotsky's important work on *perezhivanie* could be used within educational settings to enable children to establish 'emotional scaffolding' to learn more effectively together. Toward this end, Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) stated:

Vygotsky's concept of *perezhivanie*...describes the affective processes through which interactions in the ZPD are individually perceived, appropriated and represented by the participants. (p. 51)

In collaboration, partners create zones of proximal development for each other 'where intellect and affect are fused in a unified whole' (Vygotsky, 1934/1987, p. 373). Emotional scaffolding includes the gift of confidence, the sharing of risks in the presentation of new ideas, constructive criticism and the creation of a safety zone. Partners who have been successful in constructing such a joint system are sensitive to the sense as well as the meaning of each other's language. (pp. 51-52)

In these statements, Mahn & John-Steiner (2002) provided an example of how experiences can be transformed from ‘interpersonal to intrapersonal’ as the children became more ‘metacognitively aware’ of their social interaction (p. 53). Furthermore, they claimed an understanding of each child’s perezhivanie can create this notion of a ‘safety zone’ for children so that they can try out ‘risky’ new ideas safely and cope with making mistakes.

Mahn and John-Steiner’s (2002) concept of a ‘safety zone’ was markedly similar to El’Koninova’s (2002) understanding of the role of children’s make-believe spaces to enable a safe place for increasing self-awareness. El’Koninova (2002) originally introduced the notion of children ‘flickering’ between real and imaginary situations in relation to the construction of a ‘make-believe space’ (p. 49). Similar also to Bateson’s (1972) notion of moving in and out of a play frame, El’Koninova (2002) discussed the ‘territories’ children cross into and out of, especially if their ‘risky’ imaginative play becomes ‘too frightening’ to cope with (p. 41). Significantly, El’Koninova (2002) suggested these places were important for children because ‘building a make-believe space is the same as creating a place for safely testing sense’ (p. 49). In this way, children were seen to be more consciously aware of their imaginative play as Vygotsky had originally suggested in his understanding of children’s perezhivanie (Vygotsky, 1978).

### **3.4. Summary**

For this study, a Vygotskian view of the development of children through social, historical and psychological understandings, and specifically the development of their imagination examined in this way, is highly relevant. In particular, Vygotsky’s work on perezhivanie has emphasized how children experience their environment, events and emotional reactions differently according to their personality, the context and their conscious awareness of what is occurring. In combining Mahn and John-Steiner’s (2002) study of emotional safety zones with El’Koninova’s (2002) work on ‘flickering’ between reality and pretence, this combination has provided a basis for understanding the value of providing a place children perceive to be emotionally safe to enable creative risk taking in their imaginative play. The next chapter will explain and discuss the methodological underpinnings of this study.



## **Chapter Four: Methodology**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter examines the methodological design for this study. There are seven sections in this chapter. In the first two sections, I explain the methodological underpinnings of the study. This includes how an interpretative world view and a reflexive approach to research have informed the study. Following this, an overview of the methodological approach as a narrative inquiry shows how this approach aligned well with both my own interpretative world view and a cultural-historical theoretical framework. In this section, the historical foundations of narrative research are explained as the basis of the ‘narrative turn’ in the 1980s. This shift prompted the introduction of a tangent of narrative research into the field of narrative inquiry. The key principles and practices of a narrative inquiry will be discussed. The third and fourth sections focus on the methods used to invite participation in the research, and then to invite participant storytelling in multimodal ways. The fifth section provides an explanation of the unit and object of analysis, in conjunction with the iterative six phases of data analysis process and its application to the data generated in this study. The final two sections raise ethical issues regarding researching with children, in particular their involvement in a narrative inquiry and the notion of sensitive research topics. Finally, a discussion on the limitations of the study is undertaken.

### **4.2. Qualitative research: An interpretative world view**

Through an examination of the underlying principles of a number of different research paradigms, my understanding of reality, knowledge and ethics can be seen to be based on an interpretative world view (Delamont, 2012; Denzin, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Huberman & Miles, 2002; Patton, 2002). This means I have recognised my world view has been formed through an ‘interactive process shaped by [my] own personal history...and by those of the people in the setting’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 8). As such, my understanding of reality (that is, my ontological position) is that there is not one but ‘multiple realities’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 32). Similarly, my understanding of the construction of knowledge (that is, my epistemological position) is that ‘personally meaningful knowledge is...socially constructed through shared understandings’ (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, p. 149), while my

understanding of my ethical stance toward the research (that is, my axiological position) is that it is 'not possible to keep my values from influencing my research' (Baptiste, 2001, p.6). Therefore, in line with Baptiste (2001) and Grix (2002) who have asserted ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions form the basis of research, my research can be seen to have been guided towards an interpretative qualitative research paradigm.

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) have argued an interpretative researcher attempts to 'make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (p. 4). Furthermore, they contend '[t]he province of qualitative research...is the world of lived experience, for this is where individual belief and action intersect with culture' (p. 11). Sherwood and Reifel (2010) argued that within an interpretative paradigm, the researcher understands 'humans live in a "real" world, but how they understand that world varies' (p. 325). Therefore, as an interpretative qualitative researcher, my overarching research intention was to make sense of, and interpret, the varied meanings of the lived experiences of others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Hughes, 2011).

In addition, my interpretative world view has been fundamentally informed by a cultural-historical understanding of knowledge as a social construction and is in line with my theoretical positioning as outlined in Chapter Three. Similar to Vygotsky's (1978) conceptualisation of knowledge construction, other researchers such as Hollingsworth and Dybdahl (2007) and Hughes (2011) also consider knowledge to be socially constructed and based on an understanding of 'shared meanings' (Hughes, 2011, p. 41). Also similar to Vygotsky's view of dynamic processes of development, Hughes (2011) sees this socially constructed understanding as a 'dynamic meaning system – that is, one which changes over time' (p. 41). Hughes (2011) definition aligns well with the cultural-historical concept of meanings which are socially situated (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). This concept considers meanings of experiences to be created in collaboration with others, to be responsive to context, and to change over time (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Rogoff, 2003). In this study located within a cultural-historical theoretical framework, the multiple interpretations of the participants' imaginative play experiences were negotiated through co-constructed conversations. In this way, knowledge was produced through the co-construction of shared meanings in narratives between the participants and the researcher. As a consequence, multifaceted understandings of the meanings of childhood imaginative play across generations were socially constructed (Creswell, 2007; Lichtman, 2010; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

The interpretative qualitative paradigm this study is positioned within is in stark contrast to positivist research paradigms. Positivist research paradigms tend toward the idea of ‘one universal truth’ (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 23), with the presumption of ‘a stable, unchanging reality’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.11), which can be tested through strictly controlled ‘statistical analysis’ (Lichtman, 2006, p. 8). Furthermore, Lichtman (2006) argued the basis of traditional positivist research assumed ‘the role of the researcher was to be neutral; his purpose was to discover the objective reality’ (p. 5). Inevitably for a positivist researcher, this objective reality was waiting out there to be tapped into and revealed as ‘observable facts’ (Lichtman, 2006, p. 5). While Denzin and Lincoln (2013) now consider we are in our eighth and ninth moment of qualitative research, Denzin (2001) had earlier explained the shift away from a positivist world view in the ‘seventh moment’ of qualitative research by stating:

[i]n the social sciences today there is no longer a God’s-eye view that guarantees absolute methodological certainty. All inquiry reflects the standpoint of the inquirer. All observation is theory-laden. There is no possibility of theory-or-value-free knowledge. (p. 5)

Central to Denzin’s (2001) contention was an awareness of the subjectivity of the interpretative researcher. There was little doubt on Denzin’s (2001) stance to the axiological position of the researcher from this statement on the inevitability of the researcher’s own values and feelings impacting the research. Following on from Denzin’s (2001) claims, as an interpretative researcher I was keenly aware that my interpretations of the participants’ stories throughout this study were informed by my own cultural-historical experiences, feelings and assumptions (Creswell, 2007; Denzin, 2001; Hughes, 2011). In close association with my interpretative assumptions on what constitutes reality (a construction of reality through shared meanings), and the nature of knowledge (socially and experientially constructed knowledge), my axiological position focused on the high value I placed on the subjective stories as knowledge constructed by adult and child participants.

#### **4.2.1. Researcher reflexivity**

Characteristic of an interpretative qualitative research paradigm was the notion of researcher reflexivity (Cousin, 2010; Creswell, 2007; Denzin, 2001). This was because a reflexive researcher acknowledged their own values, assumptions and behaviour and how these aspects can impact on their interpretation of the phenomenon under study (Etherington, 2004). Watt

(2007) explained this further by suggesting the process of being reflexive was important for qualitative research as the researcher was the 'primary instrument' in data generation and analysis (p. 82). She suggested that by careful attention to issues and tensions which arise in the study, the researcher can become more aware of hidden influences (Watt, 2007). Etherington's (2004) definition of a reflexive researcher was valuable to this study as it showed how the notion of reflexivity aligned with cultural-historical concepts of consciousness and perezhivanie, as outlined in Chapter Three. Furthermore, Etherington (2004) suggested reflexivity was a skill in which we develop:

the ability to notice our responses to the world around us, other people and events, and to use that knowledge to inform our actions, communications and understandings. (p. 19)

This statement alluded to the level of deep consciousness needed to 'notice our responses' throughout the research process (p. 19). In this way, the idea of a researcher's perezhivanie as a conscious awareness of emotional and cognitive responses can be seen to be actively influential in the research process. These links between reflexivity, an interpretative research paradigm and a cultural-historical world view were also evident in Cousin's (2010) and Neumann's (2012) studies. Cousin (2010) argued that our world view was 'framed by our cultural resources' especially within the 'value-laden language' we use in research (p. 10). Further to this, Neumann (2012) argued for the inclusion of emotion in the research process. Neumann (2012) stated:

[r]esearch is a personal and emotion-laden pursuit inasmuch as it is scholarly and professional. It is hard to separate these qualities. Rather than assuming that emotion...always clouds, misdirects, or even distorts research-based thought, I propose that thought, honed to its brightest, and emotion, also in its most vivid forms, are twins born of insights gained in the midst of research that is personally meaningful to the researcher. (p. 8)

Neumann (2012) maintained it was important to consider the emotional side of research just as much as the cognitive aspects. She further claimed emotion should be seen as an integral part of the research process rather than trying to deny its existence as is common within positivist research paradigms. Similar to the dialectical relationship between emotion and cognition

explained in Chapter Three, Neumann's (2012) claim supported Vygotsky's (1930/2004) argument for emotion to be examined in conjunction with cognition in research. Neumann (2012) also suggested the researcher's 'emotion-laden' reflexive understanding provided heightened insights and 'attentiveness' to the researcher, the participants and the study (p. 9). In my view, it is this 'heightened insight' Neumann (2012) had suggested is gained through reflexivity which may be seen as a form of researcher perezhivanie (p. 9).

Vygotsky's (1930/2004) and Neumann's (2012) call for emotion to be elevated in research also resonated with my own search to accommodate emotionality and a reflexive stance in the methodological approach. Grix (2002) argued that once the ontological and then epistemological positions had been understood, the methodological position for the study 'logically follows' (p. 177). In looking for a methodology in which emotion and reflexivity were foregrounded, I was becoming increasingly aware of the field of narrative research. For example, Fontana and Frey (2008) suggested one 'powerful way in which to accentuate reflexivity' was through the use of narrative research where they contend we learn as much about ourselves as 'the other' during this approach to research (p. 141). On further examination of narrative research, this methodological approach to research aligned well with my qualitative interpretative world view. As a consequence, a narrative research methodological approach appeared to provide a 'clear fitness for purpose' to enable the research question to be answered (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 115). This decision was based on considerations of the best way to research, listen to and interpret the participants' multiple meanings of their imaginative play experiences across generations. A narrative inquiry was seen as the 'most authentic way to understand experiences', and therefore, the best way to interpret and understand the cultural context within which participants had these experiences (Golombek & Johnson, 2004, p. 306).

### **4.3. Methodological approach: Narrative Inquiry**

#### **4.3.1. Narrative research foundations**

Narrative research is based on the study of narratives or stories (Riessman, 2008). Scholars have attempted to define the term 'narrative', often interchanging the word with 'story' or the more experiential term 'storytelling' (Creswell, 2007; Kramp, 2004; Lichtman, 2010; Toy & Ok, 2012). A conclusive definition is difficult due to the diversity of multiple meanings between the process and the product of narratives (Riessman, 2008; Squire, Andrews, & Tamboukou, 2013).

In short, narrative researchers and scholars refer to narrative research as the study of a ‘storied life’ in which we dream, think and communicate in stories (Chase, 2008; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Frank, 2010). Kramp (2004) explained the significance of stories in our lives by stating:

[r]espect for stories and appreciation of their value have grown as we have come to understand more fully how they assist humans to make life experiences meaningful. Stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us with our past and present, and assist us to envision our future. (p.106)

Kramp’s (2004) explanation identified how experiences can be made meaningful through storytelling, while also illuminated the influence of memory and the temporal element of narrative research. Other researchers also considered these temporal aspects of narrative research important (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Meier & Stremmel, 2010; Reissman, 2008; Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou, 2013), whilst some considered the cultural patterns highlighted in individual stories to be the most significant aspect of narrative research (Patton, 2002; Squire, 2013). For example, Squire (2013) argued that experiential stories were influenced by both the individual’s thoughts, as well as the social and cultural context framing the story told. Somers (1994) referred to this narrative phenomenon as those stories which become accepted ‘public narratives’ of the era and are re-told in conjunction with a particular cultural context (p. 614). Golombek and Johnson (2004) acknowledged the emotional element of knowledge as critical to their work in narrative research. For example, they illustrated how narrative research into participants’ stories can ‘compel participants to question and re-interpret what they thought they knew’ while also understanding experiential stories to be ‘permeated with emotion’ (Golombek & Johnson, 2004, p. 306). Importantly these researchers argued the role of narrative research is not to objectively explain experiences, rather to ‘infuse [phenomena] with interpretation’ (Golombek & Johnson, 2004, p. 306).

All of these notions inherent in narrative research link well with the key cultural-historical tenets explained in Chapter Three: specifically, how cultural practices change over time (Rogoff, 2003), the influence of cultural context on cultural practices as ‘social, relational and culturally bound’ (Golombek & Johnson, 2004, p. 306), and the importance of uniting the concepts of emotion and thought (Vygotsky, 1930/2004). Collectively, this link between narrative research

and cultural-historical theory can be seen in the way people attempt to constantly construct knowledge through shared understandings of contextually situated experiences. Therefore, it can be argued that narratives cannot be separated from their cultural-historical context (Fleer, 2014; Golombek & Johnson, 2004). Overall, narrative researchers agree the focus of narrative research is seen through a 'series of stories' which provide 'an interactive interpretation' of experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 6). However, traditional narrative research had more formal foundations than this recent interpretation would suggest.

Historically, from myths to fairy tales, stories have always been a way for people to understand their lives (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Czarniawska, 2004; Elliott, 2012). In cultural-historical theory, storytelling has been seen as a way people have communicated important cultural practices between generations over time (Rogoff, 2003). Traditional narrative research such as the early twentieth century Russian formalists for example, Vladimir Propp's literary investigation into fairy tales was positioned within a more formal linguistic orientation understood as narratology (Bresler, 2006; Chase, 2008; Czarniawska, 2004; Grbich, 2007). However, notable shifts in historical and sociological research practices since the 1920s and 30s have moved the field towards less structured 'narrative forms' (Bresler, 2006, p. 22): for instance, the collection of life histories in the Chicago School (Chase, 2008). Following on from this shift, 'listening to previously silenced voices' was further encouraged through the 1960s and 70s civil rights movements (Chase, 2008, p. 61). Despite these changes in narrative research, it was not until the late 1960s that the model for 'analysis of personal experience narratives told in face to face interaction' was developed by Labov and Walenzky (Herman, 2007, p. 5). Chase (2008) argued it was this notion, initiated by Labov and Walenzky, that 'ordinary people's oral narratives of everyday experiences were worthy of study in themselves' which re-configured the field of narrative research (p. 63).

Gathering momentum from these changes and in conjunction with swings towards postmodern thinking, a 'narrative turn' within social science research was said to have occurred throughout the 1970s and 80s (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p.1). This 'turn' prompted a move away from purely scientific statistical data towards 'honor[ing] people's stories as data' (Patton, 2002, p. 115). Of particular relevance to this study where psychological theories have been linked with narrative research, psychologist Jerome Bruner's (1986) influential work on different forms of knowledge assisted in the philosophical turn in social sciences at this time. Bruner (1986) acknowledged there were two main modes of knowledge rather than one as previously thought

in scientific research - the paradigmatic and the narrative (p. 8). Of the narrative mode of knowledge, Bruner (1986) subsequently made claims about not needing to 'test' stories for their 'believability' (p. 14), and stated:

[t]he imaginative application of the narrative mode leads instead to good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily 'true') historical accounts...It strives to put its timeless miracles into the particulars of experience, and to locate the experience in time and place. (p. 13)

Bruner's (1986) comments were important for the narrative field because they engendered credibility in the use of narrative in research not previously recognised (Bresler, 2006; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Bruner (1986) claimed the value of a narrative approach centred on its ability to understand and represent the depth of human thinking because 'narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intentions' rather than the certainty of one static universal 'truth' (p. 16).

As narrative research branched out from its formal linguistic foundations, other forms of narrative studies have emerged in a vast array of formats with a variety of purposes (Elliott, 2012; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Riessman, 2011). For instance, some narrative researchers have focused primarily on the description of events in their stories (following the approach of Labov and Walenzky as Chase (2008) suggested), while some highlighted the analysis of the structural content of stories (cf. Riessman, 2008). Others were more interested in the performative element of the narrator of stories. For example, Langellier and Peterson's (2004) narrative research involved family storytelling and the significance of the stories passed on through generations, whilst Frank (2010) recalled the impact of stories on the storyteller and the listener. Research into the 'dialogical construction of narrative' has become increasingly widespread, following on from Bakhtin's view of the function of stories (Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou, 2013, p. 6), whilst other researchers examined the construction of identities through speech patterns and considered this to be a central purpose of narrative research (cf. Farquhar, 2012). More recently, the visual aspect of narratives has emerged as a significant way of interpreting stories through photography and other multimedia displays (cf. Reader, 2012).

Further to these notions of narrative research generally, a narrative inquiry can be defined as the 'study of experience as story' (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477). Our lived experiences are defined and redefined in the stories we tell. It is in the telling of these stories that the meanings



of our experiences become clear to ourselves and to others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Moen, 2006; Squire, 2013). This notion of story as a way to understand and inquire into experience is aptly explained by Xu and Connelly (2010) who stated:

story is not so much a structured answer to a question, or a way of accounting for actions and events, as it is a gateway, a portal, for narrative inquiry into meaning and significance. Story, in this sense, is complex and may be analyzed in inquiry. (p. 356)

Xu and Connelly's (2010) explanation was valuable as it emphasised the point of difference in a narrative inquiry beyond narrative research, and focused on the inquiry into the meanings of experience. For this study, the purpose in using a narrative research methodology was to find the best way to examine the participants' meanings of their imaginative play experiences. The significance of context is further highlighted in Clandinin and Roseik's (2007) explanation of a narrative inquiry, where they stated:

[t]he focus of narrative inquiry is not only on individuals' experiences but also on social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted. (p. 42)

In Clandinin and Roseik's (2007) explanation, a close link between narrative inquiry and the contextually based cultural-historical theoretical framework is reinforced and made clear.

As such, an investigation into narrative speech patterns, structural content or construction of identity was not deemed necessary. Instead, a research methodology which enabled the close examination of the meanings of experiences was needed. Knowing this, a narrative inquiry which highlighted the study of meanings of experience in both 'personal and social stories' was considered the most appropriate form of narrative research to adopt for this research project (Creswell, 2008, p. 514).

#### **4.3.2. Key principles and practices of a narrative inquiry**

Although similar in its foundation, a narrative inquiry is different from other forms of narrative research. The difference lies primarily in its ability to provide 'an analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates' (Bell, 2002, p. 208). Riessman

(2008) argued the researcher ‘does something’ with stories in a narrative inquiry, not just report them, as often is the case in narrative research. There are many diverse principles and practices which are distinctive to a narrative inquiry (cf. (Chase, 2011; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Squire, 2013); however, for the purpose of this study I have highlighted five key principles and practices which are pertinent to this narrative inquiry. They are:

- the acceptance of trustworthiness to ‘validate’ the stories in a time and place;
- the simultaneous examination of temporal, social and place dimensions of experience;
- the development of a researcher-participant relationship;
- the inclusion of the researcher’s voice; and,
- the re-storying of participant stories by the researcher.

Narrative inquiry researchers contend it is through these inherent principles and practices of a narrative inquiry that an inquiry is deepened and becomes more analytical (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2008; Squire, 2013). It is also through these principles and practices the ‘particular’ of each participant is still evident within the inquiry rather than potentially lost within ‘generalized categories’ as Polkinghorne (2007) had warned (p. 634). These key principles and practices form the point of difference from other forms of narrative research, and each will be discussed in turn.

First, in relation to trustworthiness, narrative inquiry researchers have been commonly asked if the stories they are told in interviews are ‘true’ (Frank, 2010). At other times, these stories were dismissed because ‘truth’ was not considered to be found in the subjective view of the storyteller (Riessman, 2001). However, the co-construction of narratives between the participant and researcher reinforces the interpretative world view that there is not one truth ‘out there’ to be discovered (Hunter, 2010; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Similarly, Riessman’s (2001) explanation about trustworthiness in a narrative inquiry indicated it is critical to understand how every story is different each time it is told and re-told. Furthermore, Riessman (2001) maintained a narrative inquiry does not claim the stories are ‘unquestionable’ rather, its purpose is to illustrate what the participants intended at that particular time and place (p. 705). Importantly, Golombek and Johnson (2004) argued the stories told in a narrative inquiry are ‘holistic and cannot be reduced to isolated facts without losing the truth that is being conveyed’ (p. 308). As a consequence, the stories told in a narrative inquiry need to be retained as a whole throughout the inquiry rather than reduced to single words or categories.

These queries of trustworthiness have been especially common in relation to children's stories (Engel, 1999, 2005), and those of elderly participants (Wenger, 2003). Regardless of the mandate to respect children's voices, Engel (1999) has suggested adults still ignore children's stories as 'simply cute and rather transparent, limited in meaning and complexity' (p. 3). Later, Engel (2005) claimed children do not always produce their stories 'on the demand of the researcher' and so adults do not always hear their more complex narratives (p. 524). In a similar vein, Wenger (2003) argued it was the memory of older participants which was consistently questioned in research situations. However, as both Grey (2002) and Riessman (2008) reinforced, it is more important to understand the meanings conveyed in stories than to 'verify facts' (Riessman, 2008, p. 187). Narrative inquiry researchers have argued the question of trustworthiness is answered through rigorous methodological processes and extensive data generation typically seen in a narrative inquiry (Mishler, 2006; Moen, 2006; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Riessman, 2008). As such, these researchers claimed standard procedures to check and triangulate validity were not 'well founded' in a narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008; Trawick-Smith, 2010).

Second, some narrative inquiry researchers consider it important to examine temporal, social and place-based dimensions of experiences 'simultaneously' (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr Murray, 2007, p. 23; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). Huber, Murphy and Clandinin (2011) defined these dimensions as 'temporality (past, present, future), sociality (the dialectic between inner and outer, the personal and social), and place (the concrete physicality of the place or places in which experiences are lived out and told) (p. 12). The examination of these commonplace dimensions was particularly significant for Clandinin and Connelly (2000) whose principles of narrative inquiry have been strongly influenced by the Deweyan concepts of experience and continuity. Therefore, they considered every experience to be on a 'temporal continuum' of past, present and future, in relation to both the individual and societal context in a particular place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007). Similar to the stance of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Riessman (2008), Hunter (2010) also considered stories to be co-constructed between the researcher and the participant at a particular time, place and historical context. As a consequence, the meanings associated with these stories could be seen to change according to context. It is important to note narrative inquiries are not presented as 'factual report[s] of events' rather as an understanding and analysis of the underlying meanings

participants want to convey through their storytelling at a particular time and place (Riessman, 2008, p. 187).

The third principle and practice involved the relationship between the participant and the researcher. This practice contrasts with researcher objectivity typically expected in positivist research paradigms (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Cousin, 2010; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). For example, Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) argued a positivist research paradigm considered the participants to be ‘completely knowable’ (p. 10) so that a ‘single kind of truth’ can be confirmed and measured (p. 30). However, in a narrative inquiry, the researcher understands there are many truths and multiple interpretations of experiences. Therefore a close reciprocal relationship was encouraged with the participants to enable multiple truths and interpretations to be told and heard (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ellis & Berger, 2001; Squire et al., 2013). Forming a reciprocal relationship with participants was considered a valuable practice in a narrative inquiry where the examination of people, their experiences and personal stories were central to the inquiry. These ideas closely align with my world view as an interpretative researcher. Rather than the researcher ‘standing back’, the deeper meanings of participant experiences were more likely to be discussed in an interactive, responsive interview with an empathetic researcher (Ellis & Berger, 2001; Josselson, 2007, 2011). Other narrative inquiry researchers have confirmed the importance of emotionally connecting with the participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Craig & Huber, 2007; Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2010; Kramp, 2004). For example, Kramp (2004) found the participants in her study ‘invited [her] into their lives’ so she was no longer the ‘objective bystander or observer’ (p. 112). Similar to Huber, Murphy and Clandinin’s (2010) research experience of their connection with participants, Kramp (2004) found a richer examination of the experiences of others was possible. Similarly, Craig and Huber (2007) suggested this depth of inquiry was only possible because of the relationship formed between the researcher and the participants, while others have suggested the relationship helped to ‘capture different...often otherwise hidden elements’ of stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 483).

The fourth principle and practice of a narrative inquiry is inextricably linked with the third principle and also relates to my world view of multiple interpretations of reality. In line with the relational nature of a narrative inquiry, this principle calls for the researcher’s own voice to be audible in interviews and visible in the written text (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Josselson

(2007) emphasised the importance of explaining to participants that the written text is the researcher's own understanding and interpretation of meanings. Therefore, Josselson (2007) continued, 'the report is not "about" the participants but "about" the researcher's meaning-making' (p. 549).

The fifth principle and practice involved the notion of re-storying participants' original stories. The re-storying of participant stories has become a common practice in narrative research, and in particular in a narrative inquiry (Beal, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002; Riessman, 2008). Re-storying is the 'process of gathering stories, analysing them for key elements of the story and then re-writing the story' (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 332). This can be useful in a narrative inquiry where large quantities of raw data were presented as 'decontextualised' stories, so that the meanings of the stories can be difficult to follow (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). In the creation of a re-story, the researcher interprets and reconstructs the participants' stories into a more contextually-situated version of the original story. The re-stories are then re-written using the researcher's voice as the narrator: importantly, however, re-stories include direct quotations so the participants' own words are 'an integral part of the re-storied narratives' (Beal, 2013, p. 700).

This notion of a re-story can be closely linked with the second principle and practice of simultaneously examining the three dimensions in the analysis of stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have created a three dimensional inquiry model to assist in the contextualisation of stories through temporal, social and place-based dimensions. With the intention of providing context to stories, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have claimed the three dimensional investigation of experience enables the 'rich detail about the context of the participant's experiences' to be clearly seen (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 332). The three dimensions of temporality, sociality and place act as 'checkpoints' so the researcher consistently pays attention to the inclusion of each of these contextual dimensions in the writing of the re-stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). Within this 'three dimensional inquiry space', a further four directions of inquiry are considered by 'looking inward, outward, backward and forward' and in so doing creating new 'meaning and significance' in relation to the participants, the researcher and the phenomena under study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42).

A narrative inquiry with its inherent principles and practices, such as forming a close relationship with participants and the practice of re-storying, can be seen to assist in the creation

of ‘new meanings from systematic inquiry and reflection’ (Golombek & Johnson, 2004, p. 308). In this way, interpretations and comparisons can be made between the interpreted ‘new’ meanings of past and present forms of imaginative play experiences. To generate the stories from which these meanings can be interpreted, multimodal methods were used in this study to invite and then prompt participant storytelling.

#### **4.4. Methods: Sites and participants**

##### **4.4.1. Intensity sampling**

The choice of sites and participants for this study was based on a form of ‘intensity sampling’ (Sherwood & Reifel, 2010, p. 325). As the aim of this narrative inquiry was to examine imaginative play experiences, random sampling was not seen as an appropriate way to locate participants (Riessman, 2008). Creswell (2008) explained the concept of intensity sampling in a narrative inquiry as the selection of ‘individuals who can provide an understanding of the phenomenon each with a different story that may conflict or be supportive of each other’ (pp. 523-524). For the purpose of this study, the underlying premise of intensity sampling suggested a particular place, educational philosophy and/or affordances within a particular location may encourage children’s imaginative play. Therefore, the possibility of finding participants with an established understanding of childhood imaginative play was considered to be more likely in particular locations (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Sherwood & Reifel, 2010). Due to the intergenerational aspect of this study, the initial invitation to potential participants in these locations was determined by the availability of families with at least three generations potentially available to participate. In this way, an intergenerational examination of historical and contemporary imaginative play experiences would be possible. The selection of families did not require a criterion of gender balance as the intergenerational aspect was the focus of the study.

After receiving Ethics approval from the Australian Catholic University (HERC Register No. 2013 20V) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2013\_001882) (see Appendix Three), I selected an early childhood setting in four geographical locations as potential sites for the recruitment of families. I then enquired whether each of the Early Childhood Directors and their Committees would allow the research to be conducted on their premises. Explanatory information letters were forwarded to the centres which expressed an

initial interest verbally (see Appendix Four). The explanatory letter explained that the only assistance needed from each Director was in the recruitment of one participating family plus providing some space for interviews to take place. The participant interviews were to be conducted onsite at the early childhood centres, not the participants' homes. Therefore, the early childhood setting was the central research site at each location. The Directors and Committees at four early childhood settings gave their permission for the study to be conducted at their centres. One family was identified by the Early Childhood Director at each of these sites. The four locations where these centres were situated ranged from inner city to semi-rural locations in and around Melbourne, Victoria as follows:

- inner city;
- suburban;
- outer suburban fringe; and,
- semi-rural locations.

The range of early childhood settings included long day care, sessional kindergarten, private school early learning centre, and a sessional preschool with an environmental program. They can be described as:

- A long day care centre privately owned in a city area which provides care and education from birth to five-year-old children over an extended period of time;
- A sessional kindergarten under the auspices of a local council in a suburban area which provides care and education over shorter periods of time for four-year-old to five-year-old children, usually around five hours per day;
- An early learning centre within a school setting in an outer suburban fringe area which provides care and education for three-year-old to five-year-old children, over an extended period of time; and,
- A sessional kindergarten under the auspices of a local council which operates a specific environmental program in a semi-rural area which provides care and education over shorter periods of time for four-year-old to five-year-old children. Two days of sessional kindergarten were in a preschool building with an additional three hour session in a local national park.

#### 4.4.2. Introduction to the research for the participants

As this study was looking at intergenerational imaginative play, I invited participation from four families with three generations in each family. Similar to Monk's (2014) experience in her intergenerational study, I found it can be difficult to locate more than two generations of a family for a research project. The Early Childhood Directors identified one family at a time who had expressed an interest in participating in the study. At this early stage in the research process, I organised a meeting with potential family participants at each centre. During these meetings we discussed the research methods, ethics and time frames. In discussing the research methods, I talked about inviting child and adult participants to draw, make maps and create their own memory boxes as methods to prompt storytelling during the research. To introduce the idea of a memory box, I read part of Mem Fox's (1984) picture story book *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* to explain the notion of using artefacts to trigger memories. I also showed each family my own version of a memory box as a concrete example of this method (see Appendix Five). Following these meetings, the families took their explanatory Information letters and potential Consent forms home to consider their decision, so they were under no pressure to participate (see Appendix Six). Each family was also encouraged to discuss the research process further with their children. After receiving eight consent forms from the adults and eight assent forms from the children, the total number was sixteen participants.

Each of the four families involved in the study included:

- one grandparent;
- one parent;
- one primary school-aged child; and,
- one preschool-aged child.

The final requirement to complete this stage was to contact the respective primary schools where the siblings of the preschool participants attended in order to ascertain their willingness for the research to be conducted on their premises (see Appendix Two). One family requested the research to be conducted during their primary school child's Out of School Hours program so as not to interfere with her school work. The other three families were happy for the interviews to be conducted during school hours in collaboration with the teacher. All four



primary school Principals and grade teachers gave their permission for the study to be conducted within their school grounds.

#### **4.4.3. Participating families and family members**

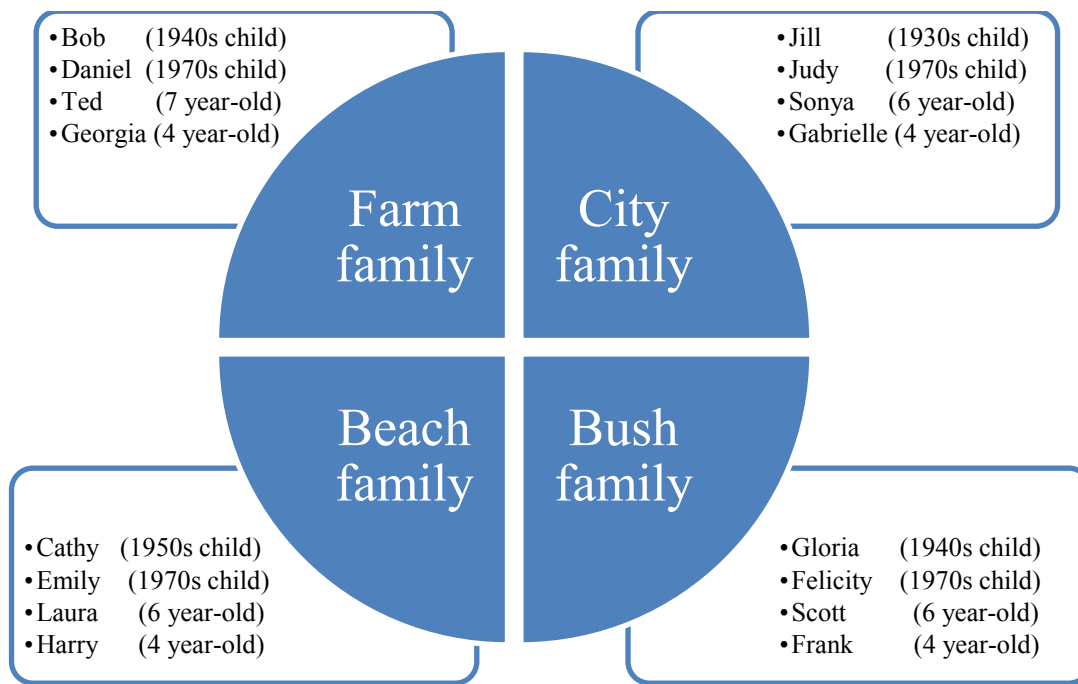
The names of the four participating families reflect their geographical locations around Melbourne:

- the City family;
- the Beach family;
- the Bush family; and,
- the Farm family.

The sixteen participants were made up of grandparents, parents, primary and preschool-aged children. The number of each of the family members was as follows:

- Grandparents: three grandmothers and one grandfather;
- Parents: three mothers and one father;
- Primary school aged children: two six-year-old girls, one six-year-old boy and one seven-year-old boy; and
- Preschool-aged children: two four-year-old girls, and two four-year-old boys.

The following diagram depicts the families and their members with each of their pseudonym names and era or year of their birthdate:



**Figure 4.1: Visual representation of the four participating families with three generations included in each family**

#### 4.4.4. City family – Inner-city location

Judy, the mother in the City family, was very keen to be involved in the study, and was born in the late 1970s. Judy quickly responded to the letter inviting her family’s participation claiming her Mum was writing their family history and would be excited to be included. Granny Jill, who was born in the early 1930s around the time of the Great Depression, lived some distance from the rest of the family and was, indeed, keen to be involved. Due to the distance from the early childhood setting, I arranged meetings with Jill in a local café throughout the study. Six-year-old Sonya, the eldest daughter in Grade One attended a small primary school in the city and was in After School Care for the three days her Mum worked. Sonya appeared enthusiastic to be part of the study on each of the occasions we met at her school. Gabrielle, the younger daughter was four years old and attended a childcare setting close to her mother’s workplace in the city. To fit in with Judy’s work schedule, I met with Judy at her favourite café close to her work for our research conversations. Judy was not sure whether Gabrielle would comprehend the concept of research or be able to carry out the research activities however, she imagined Sonya would be an ‘amazing storyteller’. Sonya’s school was predominantly asphalt with some tall peppercorn trees and raised garden beds. Gabrielle’s childcare centre playground was small with tanbark,

climbing equipment and a built cubby house dominating the playground, and was adjacent to a large grassy park. Judy told me their family home was situated on a small city block with a small-enclosed concrete backyard with a built cubby house for her two daughters.

#### **4.4.5. Bush family – Suburban location**

The Bush family was also keen to be involved in the study when invited by the Early Childhood Director. Grandma Gloria, who was born in the late 1940s during the post World War Two period, lived on the family's large bushy property in a small self-contained bungalow and was available to meet at the kindergarten when convenient. Their property was surrounded by large areas of bush on the other side of their fences. Felicity, the mother in the Bush Family who was born in the mid-1970s, worked in a local community house nearby, and was also available to meet at the kindergarten or the community house. Scott, the eldest son, was six-years-old and was in Grade One in the local primary school adjacent to the kindergarten where his younger brother, four-year-old Frank attended. The school and kindergarten were on the same road as the family home, with both educational settings providing large trees and large bushy spaces in the children's playgrounds.

#### **4.4.6. Beach family – Outer-fringe suburban location**

The Beach family was identified by the Early Childhood Director due to the youngest child's propensity towards cubby building. However, this tendency did not ensure four-year-old Harry was interested in speaking to an adult researcher about these places. Although Grandma Cathy, who was born in the early 1950s, lived interstate she often visited her family in Victoria, and was therefore available to be involved in the study. Emily, the mother in the Beach Family who was born in the late 1970s, worked part-time in the family business and was available to meet at the early learning centre. The two children attended a multi-campus school with an early learning centre. Six-year-old Laura was in Grade One and had access to the whole school playground, while Harry attended the early learning centre with a small enclosed playground within the school grounds. In addition, Harry also had access to a bush area adjacent to the school grounds which the Early Learning Centre used as a natural play space one day per week. On occasion, both children attended After School Care in the school setting. Their family home was close to the beach on a large block filled with tea-tree and fruit trees.

#### **4.4.7. Farm family – Semi-rural location**

The final family to be identified for this study lived in a semi-rural community where the Preschool was involved in an environmental program at a local National Park one day a week. Grandpa Bob, who was born in the early 1940s at the beginning of World War Two, lived some distance from the family though was happy to be involved in the study. I met with Bob at his local café and in his Church hall for different meetings throughout the study. Daniel, the father of the Farm Family, was a shift worker and was born in the mid-1970s, was able to co-ordinate working, sleeping and picking up the children with talking to me when convenient. Seven-year-old Ted was in Grade Two at the local primary school while his younger sister, four-year-old Georgia attended the local preschool. Ted's primary school playground was a large, bushy place with tall trees surrounding the oval. I met with Georgia at the Preschool and in the National Park during their weekly kindergarten experience in the Park. The family was in the process of moving to their farm acreage they had just purchased.

#### **4.5. Methods: Data generation**

The four main methods used in this study were:

1. telling and drawing;
2. map making;
3. memory boxes; and,
4. re-story checking.

Although all child and adult participants were invited to participate in each of these methods, it was entirely voluntary if they engaged with the method or not. Therefore, each participant was given the opportunity to engage in the research in a mode of communication which they preferred (Clark & Moss, 2011). This was in line with the research ethics I had explained to each of the participants at the beginning of the research process and the beginning of each research session. The methods chosen to engage children and adults in the research were considered to be 'interesting...while at the same time avoiding a gimmick approach', as Dockett and Perry (2007) had pre-empted in the use of some research methods with children (p. 50). It should also be noted that while visual narratives such as drawings and maps were created as prompts for the storytelling, only the oral narratives were used as data in the analytical process

for this study. During each of these four methods, I used a conversational interview style to invite and trigger storytelling with the participants.

#### **4.5.1. Conversational interviews and meaningful storytelling**

Embedded within a narrative inquiry approach is the use of conversational interviews rather than a more structured interview commonly used in qualitative interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011). Narrative inquiry researchers consider structured interviews an artificial way of collecting stories as data because extended storytelling is not encouraged in this format (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; de Fina & Perrino, 2011). A conversational interview frequently starts with an invitation to ‘tell a story’ which enables the participant to ‘express meaning’ (Mishler, 1986, p. 106). Stimulus questions or prompts by the researcher can further encourage a co-constructed narrative between the researcher and the participants. The participant can then extend the conversation to include meaningful stories around the phenomenon under study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Riessman (2008) has defined this form of narrative interviewing ‘storytelling occasions’ (p. 50), while Holstein and Gubrium (2003) have called it a ‘site for the production of meaning’ (p. 14). Polkinghorne (2007) discussed the need for ‘focused listening’ within a narrative interview to provoke ‘meaning into awareness’ (p. 481). The informality of this interview format may appear unproblematic; however, in reality it can be a complex situation laden with potential challenges (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011; Kramp, 2004; Riessman, 2008). These challenges can include the need for an awareness and heightened sensitivity to oneself and the participant (Josselson & Lieblich, 2009) as well as being open to tangential stories. It can also include the need for intense listening and responding non-judgementally whilst paying attention to power-imbalances within the researcher-participant relationship (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, p. 161).

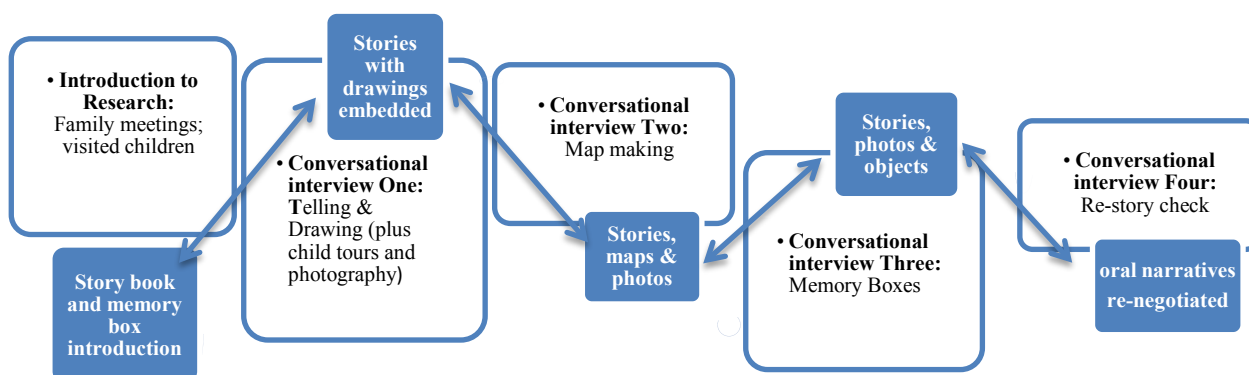
All the children and adult conversational interviews for this study were conducted in places other than family homes to minimise any sense of intrusion. However, I was also conscious of providing participants with a choice as to where they wanted to have our conversational interviews. The adults, particularly the grandparents, frequently chose to meet in a local café because of the convenience of not having to travel to the early childhood centre. Other factors, such as work-place location or work schedule determined meeting places with adults. Bound within the fence line of their educational setting, the primary school children tended to choose a place some distance from their peers in the school playground, for example on the oval; while

the preschool children oscillated between wanting to include others in the conversation and wanting to talk only when the others had left for the day. In Jones' (2008) narrative inquiry, the student participants chose to speak to the researcher inside a storeroom cupboard as a place where they said they felt safe telling their personal stories (p. 329). Jones (2008) drew on Bhabha's (1994) notion of a 'third space' as an impartial meeting place, and suggested the storeroom cupboard could be seen as a neutral place for conversations. Further, Jones (2008) claimed the cupboards were a 'liminal space or a space in-between other spaces... where alternative narratives can be heard' (p. 330). Similar to Jones (2008) research experience, a variety of cafés, community houses and libraries became a 'third space' for the adult conversational interviews in this study. This was because these spaces were not their home or the child's educational settings; instead this 'third space' became a neutral place where stories could be told and heard. Also similar to Jones (2008), it was evident where and with whom the conversational interviews took place impacted on the stories the participants chose to tell at that particular time.

Prior to the start of the research process I visited each respective educational setting a number of times over the first month. In this way, I became a familiar adult at the centre and started to develop a relationship with the participating children. In my role as a researcher with children, I considered it was important not to be seen in a supervisory role, nor did I adopt a 'least adult' position as some researchers have attempted in their research with children (Kirk, 2007). Rather my aim was to be seen as an interested visitor who wanted to listen to any stories the children chose to tell in their own time and place. I considered this to be a more respectful approach to researching with children, explaining I was available for conversations when convenient with them. Researchers have found young children have much to say about their lived experiences, especially if they have 'responsive listeners' (Estola, Farquhar, & Puroila, 2013, p. 10). Similar to Estola, Farquhar and Puroila (2013) and Waller and Bitou (2011), I have also found young children are more likely to talk about their experiences if they do not perceive the researcher to be a regulatory threat in anyway (Moore, 2014).

To encourage meaningful storytelling with the children and adult participants, I invited their participation in an iterative series of four conversational interviews which included a variety of oral and visual narratives embedded within them. I used this conversational interview format throughout the study because I wanted to encourage the participants to tell their stories without feeling inhibited by interrogatory questions. I asked the participants to choose where they

wanted to have our conversations because I wanted them to tell their stories in an environment where they felt relaxed, safe and comfortable. And, I respectfully waited for the children (and the adults) when and/or if they wanted to tell me stories about their imaginative play experiences. The multimodal methods used in this study included storytelling, drawing, tours of educational settings with the children, photography, map making, and the creation of a memory box of childhood artefacts to trigger memories and stories about imaginative play experiences. These multimodal methods were embedded within the conversational interviews as seen in Figure 4.2 below. Each conversational interview was conducted individually and confidentially with each respective child or adult participant.



**Figure 4.2 Diagram representing the four conversational interview process conducted with the participants**

#### 4.5.2. Conversational Interview One: Telling and drawing

Narrative research can be seen to be predominately verbal. However, researchers working with participants of different ages have found multimodal methods help participants generate more in-depth stories (cf. Esin & Squire, 2013). Other narrative researchers have suggested that using visual images when researching with children helps them share their experiences (Clark & Moss, 2011; Leitch, 2008; MacDonald, 2009). The first method I used in this study was to invite both children and adults to ‘tell a story’ about their childhood imaginative play experiences. I did this so as not to privilege one form of communication for adults and another for children.

During their storytelling, if the participant mentioned a particular place where imaginative play occurred I invited them to draw that place. In this way the visual images were used to extend the participant's storytelling rather than drawing a picture first and then telling a story as is commonly the case in research with children (see Appendix Seven).

However, not all researchers consider it necessary to provide 'participatory tools' to elicit participants' knowledge in a research situation (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Waller & Bitou, 2011). For example, Gallacher and Gallagher's (2008) investigation together with Waller and Bitou's (2011) research raises questions particularly around the use of 'child-participatory tools' in researching with children. These researchers have suggested children do not always need techniques devised by adults to enable them to say something worthwhile. Similar to my own research experience in my Master of Education study (Moore, 2010), these researchers also argued it should not be assumed that participatory tools will ensure a child's authentic engagement in the research process (Moore, 2014). With this experience in mind, I invited participants to draw their play places to assist in their storytelling only if they wanted to use this technique.

#### **4.5.3. Conversational Interview Two: Map making**

Map making is a method which has 'evoked chains of childhood memory and stimulated a fuller narrative' with adults in research situations (Simms, 2008, p. 76) and with children (Clark & Moss, 2011). In the second conversational interview I used map making because my aim was to trigger memories to extend the children's and adult stories of imaginative play practices associated with childhood experiences of place (Clark, 2005). This idea of identifying particular places where imaginative play occurred was based on Tuan's (1977), Hart's (1979), Rasmussen's (2004) and Lim and Barton's (2010) findings on children's strong connection between imaginative play and particular places. Therefore, for this second method I invited both child and adult participants to create maps to represent these places and their imaginative play experiences. For this map making method I provided large sheets of card, a variety of 3D materials, tape and drawing utensils. I then invited each participant to create their unique version of a map if they chose to do so while they continued to tell experiential stories of their imaginative play (see Appendix Eight).

For the children, this method also included tours and photography of their educational setting and homes prior to the start of the map making conversational interview. Researchers who have



used ‘talking while walking’ tours with children have found them to be highly effective in stimulating storytelling (Cele, 2006; Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). Each child was provided with a digital camera to take photos of their significant imaginative play places in their early childhood setting/school during our playground tour, and at home on their own. The photos the children took were subsequently used in their map making at a later date. Adult participants were invited to include ‘found photos’ or representative photos of childhood imaginative play places on their maps (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 144). Some narrative researchers have concurred photography is a significant way for both children and adults to remember and reflect on past experiences (Agbenyega, 2011; Lemon, 2006; White & Drew, 2011). For example, Lemon (2006) discussed the value of photography as visual narratives to ‘evoke memory in our lives, a memory that can be used to construct and reconstruct stories’ (p. 2). Further to this, Lemon (2006) noted young children were very aware of the benefit of taking and looking at photos to ‘reflect on the past’ (p. 5). Importantly, Agbenyega’s (2011) visual research with young children illustrated how children’s photography can capture the child’s experiential meanings where it may be ‘otherwise hidden from adults’ (p. 165). In this way, Agbenyega (2011) argued, children’s photography enabled ‘more robust and complex ways to both interpret and represent young children’s knowledge and experiences’ (p. 171) rather than adult interpretation alone.

#### **4.5.4. Conversational Interview Three: Memory boxes**

The creation of memory boxes is a method used in narrative research to trigger memories attached to artefacts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) suggested stories can be generated through a variety of mediums, ‘such as memory boxes (a collection of items that trigger memories); photos, other personal-family-social artefacts’ (p. 55). The use of significant objects to trigger memories and storytelling has become increasingly of interest to scholars working with narratives (Bell & Bell, 2012; Greene, 1995; Reser, 2008). Storytelling elicited through these memories has been found to be filled with emotion and sensory awareness. For example, Reser (2008) claimed ‘memory needs a scaffolding of places and spaces, the fixative of emotion, sensory triggers, smells and textures, interconnecting threads’ (p. 3), while both Greene (1995), and later, Bell and Bell (2012) found objects in the present resonated most strongly with the past when senses such as smell and touch are stimulated. The connection between emotion and thought has been a theme consistently present throughout this dissertation and will be a point I return to in Chapter Seven.

Knowing the importance of the connection between emotion and thought for this study, I used memory boxes as a method to stimulate deeper, more emotionally meaningful stories about the participants' imaginative play experiences. By choosing their own 'significant' artefacts to include in their memory boxes I had envisaged this would trigger personally meaningful stories attached to these objects. Each participant was given a white cardboard box with a lid at the start of the study to allow time to reflect on and collect artefacts for their individual memory box. Consequently, they each had at least two months before bringing it to our third conversational interview and telling me the stories triggered by the contents of their memory box (see Appendix Nine).

#### **4.5.5. Conversational Interview Four: Re-story check**

The final method used in this study was to return my re-storied version of their stories to each of the participants. I did this so that the participants could read or listen to the text I had reconstructed from their original stories. Originally I had considered there would only be three conversational interviews. However, upon completion of the previous three conversational interviews with each participant, I realised I needed to speak with each participant again as an integral element of the re-storying process in the early analysis phase. As a consequence, I organised a modification to my original Ethics Approval to allow for a fourth conversational interview to be included in the study (see Appendix Ten). Through the re-storying conversational interview, each participant could confirm or re-negotiate the written text so that it resonated as closely as possible with what they had intended in their oral stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred to this 'taking back' aspect of a narrative inquiry as necessary but difficult for the researcher and for the participant (p. 148). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also commented on how this process is not about asking if the re-story is 'correct', but rather, to ascertain whether the participant felt their voice and feelings had been well represented in the text (p. 148). It was interesting to note how many rich additions and amendments to the stories already told were included through this method.

The iterative process of building on each interview with subsequent interviews added to the overall richness and depth of the data generated. By allocating time for four conversational interviews, an initial form of this 'taking back' process started after the first interview and continued throughout the study. In this way, the participants were able to discuss stories they had already told, deepen these stories and enable a level of co-constructed interpretation not

otherwise possible. This process over subsequent interviews also assisted in establishing a more meaningful and ethically responsive research relationship with each participant as promoted in a narrative inquiry (Josselson, 2007).

## **4.6. Data analysis**

### **4.6.1. The unit and object of analysis**

A process of data analysis was necessary in order to answer the research question which was:

What do the meanings of children's imaginative play practices and places over the past three generations suggest for contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play?

As a narrative inquiry framed within cultural-historical theory, for this question to be answered the unit of analysis and the object of analysis needed to be closely examined as 'part' of the 'whole' contextual phenomenon under study (Riessman, 2008). Also, as this study was based within an interpretative paradigm, the data analysed within the analytical process needed to be interpreted through an understanding that multiple interpretations were possible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). For this research question, the unit of analysis was textually situated in each participant's transcripts of the stories they told prompted by drawing, mapping and memory box construction. I closely analysed these textual transcripts in order to meet the object of analysis of understanding the meanings the participants held in relation to their imaginative play practices and places across the past three generations. It is through the iterative phases of analysis which progressively built upon each other that suggestions toward the contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play were illuminated, thereby answering the research question.

To complete the process of data analysis I engaged in six phases of analysis. I will discuss each of these iterative phases in turn, which were:

1. Intentionally looking for imaginative play stories in participant transcripts;
2. Choosing exemplar stories of emotionally intense meanings of imaginative play;
3. Creating a table to highlight temporal, social and place contextual dimensions;
4. Writing a re-story for each participants' exemplar stories;
5. Looking for narrative themes within generations; and then across generations; and,

6. Creating mind maps of main recurrent themes to identify key findings.

#### **4.6.2. Intentionally looking for imaginative play stories in participant transcripts**

First, I listened carefully to the oral recordings of each of the participants. I then transcribed, read and re-read the written transcripts of each participant. While reading the raw data, I intentionally looked for and noted stories of imaginative play practices and places in each of the sixteen participants' collection of narratives. In a thematic analysis of narratives, Riessman (2008) argued the emphasis is on the content of what has been told rather than how it was spoken. Similarly, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) also focused on the content of the narratives. However, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) also highlighted the importance of 'reflexive monitoring of the act of reading' to be aware of the decision-making process while looking for particular stories in transcripts (p.10). Drawing on these two narrative analysis theories in conjunction with a Vygotskian conceptualisation of imaginative play, the stories I looked for in each transcript were rich in imaginative play content from both my own and the participants' knowledge of their imaginative play experiences. (See Appendix Eleven for a raw data transcript exemplifying a story of imaginative play embedded within the oral narrative).

#### **4.6.3. Choosing exemplar stories of emotionally intense meanings of imaginative play**

Next, I chose three exemplar stories from each participant's collection of narratives. At this stage in the analytical process, Riessman (2008) has claimed that the researcher is 'influenced by prior theory' (p. 54) and collects data which is identified as 'a set of stories that meet specific criteria' (p. 60). In this study, the prior theory was a Vygotskian conceptualisation of imaginative play seen through the lens of *perezhivanie* as an emotional response to imaginative play practices and places. The 'set of stories' which met the criteria were those in which emotionally intense experiences, reactions and responses to imaginative play practices and places were foregrounded. Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998) contend the stories which fit with the 'special focus' of the study can be 'distinguished by the space devoted to the theme in the text, the repetitive nature and the number of details the teller provides about it' (p. 63). I interpreted these emotionally intense experiences to be representative of the most important meanings of each participant's childhood imaginative play experiences because of the repetitive, detailed accounts given of these experiences. As a consequence, these were the

stories chosen to represent each participant's imaginative play experiences for continued analysis. (See Appendix Twelve for an exemplar story chosen for its intensely emotional response to imaginative play).

#### **4.6.4. Creating a table to highlight temporal, social and place contextual dimensions**

Following on from choosing the exemplar stories, I then created one table for each of the three exemplar stories from each of the sixteen participants to continue the analysis through Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) Three dimensional narrative inquiry model. The dimensions of temporality, sociality and place were used as foundational 'checkpoints' in three columns in each table to ensure they were 'simultaneously examined' in each story (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). In using this context-orientated inquiry model, rich detail about each participant's cultural context was emphasised in the analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Similar to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber (1998) also considered it was important to examine the 'whole' context of each participant's story rather than choosing 'single words' to create categories at the beginning of the analytical process (p. 12). In line with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) Three dimensional inquiry model, these checkpoints were:

1. Temporality – Past, present and future experiences and aspects of imaginative play practices and places;
2. Sociality – Descriptions of personal and societal meanings which have informed and influenced childhood experiences of imaginative play practices and places; and
3. Place – Particular places where imaginative play practices and experiences were enacted.

The significance of context in this phase of the analysis had strong links to cultural-historical theory in which the individual cannot be separated from his/her cultural context (Vygotsky, 1994). The use of this inquiry framework also connects with the cultural-historical understanding of historicity, particularly with Hirsch and Stewart's (2005) claim that '[h]istoricity... is the manner in which persons operating under the constraints of social ideologies make sense of the past, while anticipating the future' (p. 262). (See Appendix Thirteen for an example of the analytical process involved in the Three dimensional inquiry model).

#### **4.6.5. Writing a re-story for each participant's exemplar stories**

I then wrote a re-story for each of the three exemplar stories for each of the sixteen participants. In these re-storied versions of each participants' exemplar stories I ensured the dimensions of temporality, sociality and place were foregrounded according to contextual information included in the three dimensional inquiry tables (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Direct quotations from the participants were embedded within the re-storied narratives to ensure each participant's voice was visible alongside my voice as the narrator of the stories (Beal, 2013; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002; Riessman, 2008). By re-constructing each exemplar story into a re-story I was able to interpret and analyse the participant's whole story in a holistic, contextualised form (Beal, 2013; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). On close examination of each re-story, I was then able to identify meanings, themes and tensions in each participant's imaginative play practices and places. It was at this stage that I took the participants' re-stories back to each participant to ascertain whether I had captured the meanings of their stories of imaginative play experiences. Any alterations to the re-story the participants wanted to make were noted and changed accordingly, prior to continuing with analysis. (See Appendix Fourteen for an example of a re-story).

#### **4.6.6. Looking for narrative themes within generations and then across generations**

Following the analysis of each individual participant's re-stories, I then created tables for each generation which were populated with the individual participants' identified meanings, themes and tensions. In looking vertically, back and forth down these tables I was able to distinguish patterns, continuities and/or discontinuities amongst the themes, meanings and tensions within each generation: for example, looking within the grandparent column to compare and contrast each of the grandparent's re-story meanings, themes and tensions to ascertain whether there were any patterns, continuities and/or discontinuities between the grandparents' re-stories. I then looked horizontally for any patterns, continuities and/or discontinuities across the generations. That is, I looked for any patterns, continuities and/or discontinuities to compare and contrast across the generations back and forth between the grandparents to the parents to the primary and preschool children. This style of analysis is in line with Riessman's (2008) narrative thematic analysis in which the analysis and interpretation of themes within 'intact' stories is promoted. It is also in line with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) Three dimensional inquiry model which encourages looking back and forth along a 'temporal continuum' to view narratives from

different perspectives. Similar to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) suggestion to note discontinuities as well as emerging patterns and continuities, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber (1998) recommended it was important to pay particular attention to incidences which contrast with themes and patterns during analysis. (See Appendix Fifteen for an example of the vertical tables within generations; and Appendix Sixteen for an example of the horizontal tables across generations).

#### **4.6.7. Creating mind maps of main recurrent themes to identify key findings**

The final phase of analysis involved the creation of mind maps to visually represent all the narrative themes, patterns, continuities and discontinuities which had been identified in the previous phase. By plotting all the themes, patterns, continuities and discontinuities from within and across generations onto the mind map, recurrent themes could be clearly identified as the main themes of the study. In this way, themes involving continuities across generations together with themes involving discontinuities across generations became visible through this mind mapping phase of the analysis. As a consequence, two main themes were identified at this phase in the analysis. The first main theme included seven sub-themes, and the second main theme included three sub-themes. These two main themes and their sub-themes became the two key findings for this study. (See Appendix Seventeen for an example of the mind mapping process).

#### **4.6.8. Custom-built form of data analysis**

In considering what process to use for the narrative analysis of data, Creswell (2007) advised 'data analysis is not off the shelf; rather it is custom-built' (p. 150). In taking Creswell's (2007) advice, I have adapted three narrative analytical processes into a customised approach which fitted well with the literature, theoretical framework and methodology of this study in order to construct a 'custom-built' form of data analysis (p. 150). Consequently, the six phases of analysis for the study were informed by and adapted from Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensional inquiry model, Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber's (1998) holistic-content analysis, and Riessman's (2008) narrative inquiry thematic analysis method. Each of these three analytical processes had a similar approach, with some notable differences, to narrative analysis. The similarities included:

- the consistent use of re-storying original stories to assist interpretation;
- the focus on narrative content; and

- keeping the ‘whole’ story intact throughout the analytical process rather than ‘fracturing data’ by creating codes at the beginning of analysis (Riesman, 2008, p. 53).

The main differences between the three approaches lie in the inclusion of context and themes during analysis:

- In Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three dimensional model and Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber’s (1998) approach, context was seen as a critically important inclusion during narrative analysis, whereas Riessman’s (2008) thematic analysis pays little attention to the surrounding context of stories; and,
- The use of themes as a focus is another source of difference, where in Riessman (2008) and Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber’s (1998) approaches the interpretation of themes during analysis is highlighted far more than in Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three dimensional inquiry model.

However, in the combination of these three complementary forms of analysis, a much stronger analytical process has been created for this study. In this way, a narrative analysis of the ‘contextualised’ data as re-stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998) has provided a ‘rich portrayal of individual experiences’ (Beal, 2013, p. 697), while allowing for the interpretation and identification of common thematic elements across of a number of research participants (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 2008). The combined use of all three analytical processes in which context, content and thematic analysis were encompassed in the various phases of analysis enabled an interpretation of meanings that would not have been possible had only one approach to analysis been taken. Through this iterative analytical process, the textual transcripts were closely examined and interpreted as the unit of analysis. Following this, I identified two key findings in phase six of the analytical process. These two key findings, with their associated sub-themes, have illuminated the object of analysis which was the meanings of imaginative play practices and places across the past three generations. Therefore, the unit of analysis and object of analysis for the research question have been examined, interpreted and answered through this data analysis process. As a consequence, the research question for the study has been answered.



## 4.7. Ethical issues

### 4.7.1. Researching *with* children in a narrative inquiry

Research with young children has been gaining increasing interest since the 1989 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child (Baird, 2013; Clark, 2007a; Cocks, 2006; Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2009; Nolas, 2011; Raittila, 2012; Stephenson, 2012). Prior to this declaration, research concerning children tended to view children as objects to be studied, rather than seeing them as active participants involved in the study (Bath, 2013; Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005; Harcourt, 2011). Despite this shift, issues around researching *with* children have remained multifaceted, complex and contested (Kirk, 2007; Lomax, 2012; Sumsion, 2003). This is because research assumed to be inclusive of children is still frequently based on adult agendas (Sumsion, 2003) and ‘highly managed encounters’ (Lomax, 2012, p. 106). These issues are even more contested when an adult researcher’s view of children is based on an authority and power imbalance (Phelan & Kinsella, 2013).

Within the literature, assumptions around young children’s ‘incapacity’ to be involved in narrative research are still evident (cf. Skelton, 2008). In this example, Skelton (2008) suggested the young children in her study were not able to participate in interviews because they were considered not ‘fully competent’ to do so (p. 24). In comparison, the young children in Foloque’s (2010) study were interviewed both formally and informally to study their metacognitive learning experiences. However, the children’s narratives were still assessed in standard qualitative terms of ‘data triangulation’ for validity and reliability (Folque, 2010, p. 256). While some narrative researchers have included children’s spoken language during play in order to study their experiences (Ahn & Filipenko, 2007; Puroila, Estola, & Syrjala, 2012), others have focused more on linguistic patterns of speech (Tsai, 2007). The classical studies of (Engel, 1999, 2000; Fox, 1993) and later (Paley, 2004) have demonstrated the value researchers have placed on young children’s narrative contributions in research. For example, in Engel’s (2000) research, she explained the purpose of children’s use of narratives, and stated:

[n]arratives may form the psychological curtain between what is wild and private and what is orderly and public. Children often use narrative to create a boundary between the two. Young children construct stories as a way of wresting meaning from their daily experiences. Often their

narratives contain evidence of the emotional and cognitive conundrums they are trying to solve. (p. 196)

However, in this instance, Engel (2000) and with the other researchers mentioned, the focus was on children's spontaneous stories rather than eliciting storytelling through interviews. Even in a recent study, narrative researchers Salmon & Riessman (2008), argued adults need to assist young children's narratives to enable 'meanings to emerge' because of an apparent lack of children's storytelling skills (p. 79).

Therefore, it appeared narrative inquiry as a methodological approach to researching with children has been limited in its use in the past. In particular, there were very few examples of studies where young children less than eight years of age have been engaged in storytelling interviews as data generation in a narrative inquiry. It also appeared that there were very limited examples of a narrative inquiry where young children have been invited to tell stories about 'emotionally charged' imaginative play experiences (Gonzalez Rey, 2011). The present study has illustrated how young children's knowledge of the meanings of their imaginative play experiences can be valued in the stories they have told in a research situation.

#### **4.7.2. Sensitive topics and intrusive research**

Ethical issues around intrusive research are important to consider when examining stories of personal experiences embedded within 'the lives of others' (Lichtman, 2010, p.57). Hyden (2008) warned that any topic can be considered sensitive; however, it depended on the relationship formed between the researcher and participants how these topics were handled. For some, inviting children to discuss their imaginative play practices and places with an adult may have been considered overly intrusive. Some scholars and researchers have questioned whether adults have the right to inquire into all aspects of children's lives (Aadlandsvik, 1997; Clark & Moss, 2011; Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2009; Goodenough, 2003; Green, 2012). For example, Dockett, Einarsdottir and Perry (2009) mentioned an 'unsettling feeling' about the trust shown by children when they 'shared their secret places', which resulted in increased supervision of an out-of-bound area at a research site and an overwhelming feeling of betrayal of trust (p. 293). Clark and Moss (2011) also argued for the need to respect children's privacy in research. They suggested some adults can take advantage of the controllable 'visible child' when they now 'know' about children and childhood (Clark & Moss, 2011, p. 64). Green's

(2012) study of children's special places both in the home and in preschool highlighted how inadvertently intrusive research into children's places can be. For example, Green (2012) explained:

[a]t school, one boy talked about his place inside a large antique wooden chest. During his home visit, he demonstrated how he liked to crawl inside and close the top over him. Afterwards, his father worried that he might not be able to get out, and prohibited him from entering his place again. Thus research inquiry had caused a place that used to be secretive and special to be transparent and forbidden. (p. 280)

Green's (2012) research experience with this child's special place showed both how vulnerable research participants can be at times, and how easily researchers can slip into sensitive topics without realising (Hyden, 2008). Due in part to these research incidents and in an attempt to be as 'unobtrusive' as possible, the decision was made in the present study not to visit the children's (or adults') homes or video record children's imaginative play places. This was because video recording of children can be perceived as intrusive in some research instances (Hatch, 2002). Instead, with each participant's permission, I overtly tape recorded conversations and invited the children to photograph imaginative play places at home and in their educational setting using the digital camera I provided for their independent use.

#### **4.7.3. Informed consent/assent and the right to withdraw**

As part of the initial family meetings, I discussed the participants' rights to confidentiality and anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I also discussed the Assent form for each child to sign as well as their parents' permission form (see Appendix Eighteen). This assent form was used to safeguard the children's ongoing willingness to participate in the study on each 'storytelling occasion' (Riessman, 2008). However, I also needed to be sensitive to body language and other signs the child had 'physically' withdrawn consent during each of our conversations (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011; Hunleth, 2011). There were some occasions it became clear some children were no longer interested in telling any more stories at that time, and so I needed to stop the interview. This quickly became evident when one child at the very beginning of the research ticked the 'not happy' face and said he wanted to talk another day. I found out later from his father that this child was expecting to receive a basketball award at the assembly which he was missing because his teacher had said this was a 'good time' for us

to talk. Clearly, from this child's stance, this was 'not a good time' to talk. Another child simply declared 'That's enough telling!' during his mapping conversational interview and so expertly closed the conversation. Re-scheduling for another time became part of the conversations I had with these children, thereby suggesting they were still interested in participating, just not at that time. One child suggested 'could we meet again the day after the next day, on Saturday?' Researchers working *with* children have found it important to enable a child's comprehension of the whole research process using illustrations and detailed explanation (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011; Leitch, 2008). It is of utmost importance to be sensitive to the children's own time schedules and agendas which may conflict with an adult researcher's quest for data and other adult gatekeepers' interpretation of time (Sumsion, 2003).

#### **4.7.4. Confidentiality and participant anonymity**

Ethical issues connected with keeping research data confidential and the participants anonymous is more than a rhetorical requirement set out in an Ethics application. An ethical responsibility to the participants can be seen as a key concern for narrative inquiry researchers, particularly due to participant sensitivity around their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Although ethical issues are significant in any research, the depth of personal meanings invested into stories told in a narrative inquiry creates heightened vulnerability for the participant (Elliott, 2005; Josselson, 2007; Patton, 2002). Consequently, an ongoing awareness of participants' emotions and feelings are especially important for children and equally for adults throughout a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 2010). Giugni's (2006) research with children also draws attention to ethical responsibilities, such as her decision to withhold data when children declared their stories were 'not to be shared publicly' (p. 98). Josselson (2007) discussed a similar ethical dilemma to Giugni's (2006) about the public dissemination of stories, which can be highly problematic for a narrative inquiry researcher. She argued that because of the trusting relationship formed in a narrative inquiry, the participants were more likely to 'reveal more' in their stories (Josselson, 2007, p. 539). Also because of this trusting relationship, participants 'trust' the researcher will not 'expose their affect-laden material' in the written research text, and so the researcher has the ethical dilemma of deciding which data should not be disclosed (Josselson, 2007, p. 539).

In the present study, the adults confirmed their permission for me to write their stories at the re-story check. However, I felt a much heavier weight of obligation to the children to whom I had

promised confidentiality. This was not about ‘paternalistic protectionism’ towards the children (and their stories) as research ‘objects’ (Christensen & Prout, 2002, p. 486). Rather, it was a palpable sense of ethical responsibility to respect the participants and their personal stories to the best of my ability whilst meeting the requirements of a researcher to produce new knowledge. Therefore, I have decided to re-tell only the stories I have interpreted as ‘less private’ and have de-identified stories as much as possible without losing each participant’s ‘particular’ significance (Polkinghorne, 2010). It is my intention that this decision has facilitated an ethical and respectful attitude toward the participants and their stories.

#### **4.8. Limitations of the study**

For a narrative inquiry, sixteen participants can be seen as a large number of participants to thoroughly examine large quantities of complex textual transcripts in great detail. Due to this, I have found it difficult in the time and space I had available as a doctoral student to comprehensively represent their rich stories. I now understand a smaller number of participants would have been more appropriate for a narrative inquiry.

I am also intensely aware of the ethical issues around ‘who owns the story’ once it has been told to the researcher (Josselson, 2007; Pavlenko, 2002). In a narrative inquiry, particularly one informed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), taking research texts as re-stories back to participants is an important part of the methodological process. The notion of re-storying may have its own limitations for many, particularly as it seems as though the researcher is ‘changing’ the story. In the present study, it was interesting to note it was the children, more than the adults, who wanted to change parts of their re-stories with declarations such as ‘I didn’t say that!’ At times through this re-checking process, some children appeared concerned about the stories I had chosen to represent their imaginative play experiences, especially any seemingly ‘rebellious acts’ they had spoken about in past conversations. These children appeared to reconsider their told stories retrospectively when away from the original research conversation. In accordance with an ethical responsibility to the participants, I have altered these aspects of their stories. I have subsequently re-written their re-stories with an understanding that all stories are slippery, subjective and totally contextual, while remembering Riessman’s (2008) advice that no story is ever told the same way twice. With this developing understanding, the children’s response to this methodological process has critically informed the choice of stories, the way they were

represented and the strengthening of strategies to aid participant anonymity throughout this dissertation.

With the deepening realisation of an ethical responsibility in my relationship with each of the participants, I became increasingly aware that an 'ethical attitude' was dictating which stories would or would not be reported (Josselson, 2007). Many stories, told within this study of childhood imaginative play experiences, spoken in confidence by both past and present children I have realised are not mine to re-tell, and hence will remain private and not re-told. As an interpretative qualitative researcher engaged in a narrative inquiry, I also recognised the data generated was intricately connected to the relationship I had developed with the participants in the study. Therefore, the data and its subsequent findings cannot be reproduced but only act as a guide to others who may want to follow in a similar way through the use of a narrative inquiry.

Another limitation to the methodological approach for this study was in the decision not to visit the homes of participants. This decision had unpredictable repercussions which became a limitation of the study in the use of digital cameras in the children's homes. The decision not to visit the children's homes was made due to the potential for 'identifying' hidden and private imaginative play places. As a consequence of not visiting the children's homes, the children were invited to borrow the digital camera they had independently used in their early childhood centre or school for their continued use at home. In inviting each child to borrow the camera, I had assumed they would photograph the imaginative play places they would use in the map making at a later date. However, it appeared many of the adults took photos on the behalf of their children rather than 'allowing' the children to use the digital cameras. Some parents told me later they were concerned about the 'safety' of the digital equipment. Therefore the parents were the photographers instead of the children. As a result, the photos taken by adult photographers were an adult understanding of children's imaginative play places rather than the children's own choices about the photos to be taken. This became especially apparent when children appeared surprised at the photos to be used for their map making, clearly not knowing who or when the photos had been taken.

#### **4.9. Summary**

This chapter has examined the methodological approach taken for this study. The aim of this study was first to illuminate the meanings of childhood imaginative play experiences across generations, and second, to provide contemporary understandings of the enactment of

imaginative play. In establishing my world view as interpretative, multiple interpretations of participant meanings of their imaginative play experiences were sought through multimodal methods. A narrative inquiry was seen to be the best fit for the purpose of this study because it enabled a deep, contextual and temporal analysis of the meanings of storied experiences of imaginative play. The close relationship between the researcher and the participants assisted in the co-construction of stories and re-stories. The analysis of the data was conducted through an iterative process which enabled the participant stories to be kept intact for interpretation and analysis. Through this iterative analytical process, the meanings of children's imaginative play practices and places were reconstructed into contextualised re-stories by the researcher. In this storied form, the participants' meanings were contrasted and compared across the past three generations which answered the object of analysis aspect of the research question. I identified two key findings in phase six of the analysis process which have suggested contemporary understandings on the enactment of imaginative play.

The next two chapters, Chapter Five and Six, will provide details of the two key findings of this study through the presentation of extracts from each participant's re-stories. The re-stories were the main form of data which were drawn on for the final phases of analysis, and so the re-stories will be presented as data in the two findings chapters. The two key findings were:

1. There were seven imaginative play practices and places which have remained stable across the past three generations;
2. There were three imaginative play practices and places which have changed across the past three generations.

The first key finding will be presented in Chapter Five, and the second in Chapter Six.

## **Chapter Five: Finding One: The continuity of imaginative play practices and places across generations**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This chapter presents the first of the two key findings from this study. In this chapter I will turn from the abstract concepts introduced through the substantive and theoretical literature presented in Chapters Two and Three, and from the methodological intentions outlined in Chapter Four. In making this turn, I will move to the concrete experiences of what I have found in response to the research question. In presenting this finding I will begin to answer the research question, which was:

What do the meanings of children's imaginative play practices and places over the past three generations suggest for contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play?

An interpretative analysis of the re-storied data was undertaken to ascertain the participants' meanings of imaginative play practices and places across the past three generations. The first key finding to be identified through this analytical process was:

There were seven imaginative play practices and places which have remained stable across the past three generations.

This first key finding represents the continuity of imaginative play across generations and, as a consequence, is an important element in building the focal theory around continuity and change across Chapters Five and Six. Chapter Five and its sequel, Chapter Six, are of a descriptive nature, with the rich description of the participants' multiple experiences of imaginative play the main focus. They are important chapters as they serve to form the basis of the theorizing I will do in Chapter Seven when I bring together all of the preceding elements from previous chapters to build a focal theory on the enactment of imaginative play.

Many of the stories told by the children and the adults spoke of markedly similar experiences of imaginative play practices and places across generations. The meanings of these similar



experiences have been interpreted through data analysis as the first of the two key findings for the study. The seven themes related to stable imaginative play practices and places were:

1. The impulse towards finding or constructing a quiet, uninterrupted and private 'own place' for imaginative play;
2. The impulse toward the need for emotionally safety for imaginative play;
3. The close connection between bedrooms and trees with imaginative play;
4. The inclusion of significant others in imaginative play;
5. The impact of others on imaginative play;
6. The influence of popular culture on imaginative play; and,
7. The influence of found objects on imaginative play.

I will present each of these seven themes in turn using re-story extracts from participants to illustrate the stable imaginative play practices and places which have been identified within this first key finding.

## **5.2. The impulse towards finding or constructing a quiet, uninterrupted and private 'own place' for imaginative play**

All of the children and adult participants in the study told similar stories of how important it was for them to find or construct their 'own place' for their imaginative play. Frequently participants referred to these found or constructed places as their 'own world' or 'kingdom', commonly using terms such as 'quiet, uninterrupted and private' to describe these places. Of particular importance was their claim on this place as their 'own place'. This theme was highly significant because it showed a strong pattern of continuity in participant meanings of imaginative play experiences across the past three generations. To show the stability of this theme across generations, I will juxtapose an extract from Jill's (1930s child) re-story against extracts from the re-stories of Daniel (1970s child) and then Georgia (4 year-old-child).

As a young child in the 1930s, Jill (1930s child) found or constructed many places to enact her imaginative play. Early in our first conversation, Jill had started with a story about her 'lean-to' cubby in her father's woodshed close by the clothes line. Jill's mother provided discarded household goods and food for their play in this place close by the house. Following this, Jill told me a different story about one of her favourite places she called 'my spot' as she drew a picture of herself high up in an apricot tree. Later in the mapping conversational interview, Jill

disclosed the significant meanings of this place by whispering what else she was playing when she was up her tree, and other times when playing on her parent's window seat. In recalling these places and the imaginative play she enacted there over eighty years ago, Jill's re-story extract highlighted how powerful the meanings and the memories of these imaginative play places still were for her:

Amongst the flurry of relentless activity in their family home, Jill was able to find a place of quiet and peaceful solitude in the apricot tree. This was the apricot tree where she climbed alone with a sense of purpose and triumph in discovering that she could climb a tree at all. Jill said she 'felt like the Queen of the Castle up there' and continued saying, 'Yes that was my spot...It was like a lookout tower...No one noticed me, no one saw me there...' (J, T&D, 6.5.13). Interestingly, after many conversations together, Jill whispered to me that she wasn't only reading *What Katie Did Next* when sitting in her favourite tree as a little girl. She quietly disclosed 'I was spying too.' In this place, Jill became the watcher rather than the eternally watched as a 'good girl' in a 1930s childhood. This 'really good spot' was a place where Jill could confidently go where she knew no one else would follow (her sisters would never attempt to climb a tree) nor disturb her peaceful sitting, reading and spying. It was her place just to be herself, a place she valued for the opportunity for private reverie with a sense of timeless autonomy (J, MP, 8.8.13).

Jill's (1930s child) strong impulse toward creating her own quiet and private place for imaginative play was clearly evident in this extract. While a 'good girl' in a 1930s childhood context may not have traditionally included climbing trees and spying on others, Jill's choice of this private, uninterrupted place showed how she was able to circumvent societal expectations. It was interesting to note Jill's choice of place was influenced by her knowledge that no one else would follow her up the tree, fulfilling the uninterrupted criteria of this place and sensed it being her 'own place'. Jill's (1930s child) other choice of a private place she constructed was of a more abstract form, as illustrated in the continuation of the extract from Jill's re-story:

And secondly, and in some ways, incongruously, Jill's other favoured place for privacy was 'hidden' on her parent's bedroom window seat. Once again, Jill had a visual vantage point but what was especially significant about this place was that no one thought to look for her there. Jill said 'I liked it because it was right away and I was a bit of a book worm...There was so much going on in this area (the kitchen)...you can sneak up there with your book very quietly and pretend you're not there.' Jill was able to enter another world of dreamy imaginary thinking within the pages of her thickly paged, cotton bound book, safely uninterrupted, hidden in plain sight. Jill also mentioned she would happily find another place for this sort of imaginary play if necessary, that there were many places to choose from in and around her home. However, these were the places she loved the most, the ones she preferred to be in (J, MP, 8.8.13).

In Jill's (1930s child) re-story extract it was apparent she chose both inside and outside places for her private imaginative play practices, seemingly dependent on what else was happening in and around her home at particular times. It was also interesting to note Jill's capacity to be 'hidden in plain sight' on the window seat where she could 'pretend you're not there' and so was symbolically hidden from others. Jill's highly emotional feelings were palpable when she spoke of childhood places she had claimed as her own, constructing places where she knew she would not be interrupted by others. What I found especially interesting, however, was that Jill did not 'whisper' her deeper feelings about these places and practices until late into our second conversational interview when she was making her map and extending her stories. It seemed by this delay that Jill was initially hesitant to tell stories which were different to the societal expectations of a 1930s childhood. However, later, when Jill's hesitancy shifted, she told many in-depth stories of her personal experiences of imaginative play.

In a marked similarity to Jill's (1930s child) meanings of imaginative play experiences, Daniel's (1970s child) re-story extract illustrated a similar, strong impulse toward constructing his 'own' private, quiet and uninterrupted places for imaginative play. At the beginning of our conversation Daniel started his storytelling about his 'fun childhood' by talking about his adventurous play with his peer group in the old mines nearby his house. This conversation changed direction however, when I asked Daniel if there was a particular place he liked to play

alone or with his older brother. This question appeared to trigger an emotional story of Daniel's 'own place' he constructed with his older brother, as seen in Daniel's (1970s child) re-story extract:

From the sudden look on his face, it appeared I had asked a question that resonated with his own experience of place attachment out in the bush. 'Yes' he said, 'it sounds like a fairy tale' we did find a 'special spot' just next to the swampy wetlands to make 'our own little kingdom' (D, T&D, 6.6.13). From the thickly matted tea tree branches forming the roof and walls creating a dry, warm interior to the outside space around 'the hut' where the boys set up their camp, everything about this place was just how they wanted it to be. In this place, the boys could enact their imagination by catching and cooking their own food, making their own shelter and living for a short while completely on their own, until, of course, it was getting dark and they needed to head back home. The entrance into the camp site was difficult to find so that no one else knew where they were, but the boys knew how to navigate the special way in through the bush to find their spot 'way out in the middle of nowhere.' However, Daniel said, this place was so hidden away from the beaten track he would have no idea as an adult now how to find it again. Daniel was keen to add that although they did not want anyone else to know about their special and secret place, it was not that he was escaping from anything rather it was just a really fun 'cool' place to be and fulfilled a sense of independence they were both looking for (D, T&D, 6.6.13).

Daniel's (1970s child) re-story extract illustrated another example of a child's eagerness to construct their own private place for imaginative play. His use of the 'fairy tale' metaphor increased the sense of imaginative play the brothers enacted within their 'own little kingdom'. Daniel's realisation he would not be able to find this place as an adult seemed to heighten his awareness of the significance of the 'hidden' entrance to the swamp hut in the 'middle of nowhere'. Despite this awareness, Daniel was very keen to say he was seeking independence, not an escape in constructing this place. Daniel's emotional reaction to the memory of this important place was clearly demonstrated. I could see this in his facial expressions, the words he

chose to describe the place and their play in the past, and the value he still attributed to this imaginative play. Later, during his memory box conversational interview, I asked Daniel if there was a place which prompted imaginative play. I had expected Daniel to provide more stories of outdoor places following on from the stories he had already told, but he surprised me with his response:

When I specifically asked Daniel if there was a place which prompted his imaginative play, he paused and said he could be in a variety of places, wherever he was able to be in his ‘own little world.’ In this place Daniel felt he could ‘just create something out of nothing.’ In particular, he said after another long pause, it was probably when ‘my brothers and sisters all went off to school and I would play in my bedroom just with my cars and these sorts of things (mechanical toy) and make up your own world, sometimes outside and wherever else, but that would be when I was by myself.’ Daniel insightfully concluded in a quiet voice, ‘I don’t think you can draw a line about where it is and where it stops, there are times when you go into it and go out of it...a flow from one mood to the next’ (D, MB, 20.8.13).

It was interesting to note how mobile Daniel’s (1970s child) imaginative play was in this re-story extract. In this re-story, Daniel explained how he felt his imaginative play was facilitated when the environment enabled him to slip into and out of an imaginative, dreamy state of mind. In this instance, Daniel was able to construct his own place for imaginative play when he was less likely to be interrupted, in a quiet, private place.

Similar to Jill’s (1930s child) and Daniel’s (1970s child) desires to make their own places for imaginative play, Georgia’s (4 year-old-child) impulse to construct her own quiet, uninterrupted and private place for imaginative play was also clearly evident. Georgia’s preschool experience included a day involved in a local national park environment in conjunction with their conventional preschool site. I visited her in both the park and the preschool environments to listen to her stories about her imaginative play. It was interesting that even when we were talking together at the preschool, the stories Georgia chose to tell were primarily based on her imaginative play at the park, as seen in Georgia’s re-story extract:

One particular story Georgia told about her ‘pretend play’ was the one she based her detailed drawing on, showing how and where she and her friend Carly made their two separate ‘massive’ and ‘tiny’ bush cubbies at the [park]. Georgia explained how they decided to ‘take all the sticks away to make a doorway between the two cubbies’, although she said they didn’t want the other children to know where they were, nor did they want to be left behind when the group packed up to leave the site. It was also interesting that Georgia did not appear to play in nor mention the built cubby at preschool as an element included in her imaginative play places. She only referred to it as a ‘real cubby’ in terms of the proximity to where we sat that day. Later, in another story, Georgia talked about the built cubby, ‘the proper cubby’ she has at home, but said it is so messy they don’t go in there. Interestingly, Georgia’s Dad sent me photos for map making of this cubby he had built saying both of his children ‘love playing in there’ (Georgia, T&D, 20.6.13).

In contrast to playing in a built cubby constructing her ‘own place’ for imaginative play appeared to be very important for Georgia. Georgia’s confidence in, and capacity for, place-making was notable in her description of how she made the doorway between the two bush cubbies. Also notable was the tension between wanting privacy in their cubby play and the imaginative play the two girls enacted in there, while still wanting others to know where they were. The imaginative play the girls enacted in the bush cubby they constructed for themselves was rich and highly creative, as seen in the continuation of Georgia’s (4 year-old-child) re-story extract:

Other elements of the bush cubby stories included further imaginative play, such as singing songs the girls made up, painting the cubby ‘walls’ and turning on the ‘lights’ inside their cubbies. Georgia said they had to look out for snakes (one of the major constraints of this place) especially to keep the fairies safe. Georgia said she and Carly were the only ones who could see the fairies in this place, ‘no one else sees them here’ she said. On one occasion, Georgia took me around the [park] area saying ‘we always walk around and find different places.’

Georgia showed me the varied places they could choose to play in – this one here ‘looks like a house’; this one has lots of ‘food’ (pine needles, cones, sticks); and ‘this one is where our campfire is and the logs for sitting on are’ (Georgia, T, 18.6.13). It seems that their imaginative play places were very mobile, and that the criteria for choice was often based on pragmatic decisions – play affordances, weather, others too close by to allow privacy. Georgia mentioned one way to keep other children away from her cubby was to ‘play very quietly’, saying ‘I wanted to be quiet, to make them know...kind of not hear us, because we were too quiet...because we play our secret game and it’s very hard to get into it.’ The element I noticed most in Georgia’s stories was that the imaginative play that occurred there was not only rich and constant, but perhaps most importantly, uninterrupted (Georgia, T&D, 20.6.13).

Embedded in Georgia’s re-story extract about the construction of her bush cubbies were Georgia’s successful strategies to protect her private imaginative play from the broader peer group, and a developing awareness of the peer culture surrounding her play. In playing quietly, Georgia was passively excluding others from her cubby play with her friend by not allowing other children to know the ‘secret’ rituals to gain entry into their imaginative play. Later, in her map making, Georgia drew her bush cubby and made two puppets representing a little girl and her Daddy. In the subsequent story Georgia told about her map, the Daddy was clearly not able to get into the cubby because of his size, thereby showing another strategy of exclusion. Georgia’s considered use of available affordances was also evident as part of her creative appropriation of resources in the construction of her places for imaginative play, such as sticks and pine cones. As such, the use of these affordances was seen to have influenced the enactment of Georgia’s imaginative play by providing materials to trigger her creative thinking.

Similar to both Jill (1930s child) and Daniel (1970s child), Georgia (4 year-old-child) chose to construct her ‘own places’ where quiet, uninterrupted and private imaginative play was possible. Also similar to Jill’s (1930s child) hidden place up a tree and on the window seat, and Daniel’s (1970s child) hut in the swamp some distance from home, Georgia (4 year-old-child) was also able to find or construct different places for imaginative play based on available affordances within her cultural context. The third pattern of continuity between all three participants across

the past three generations was the strength in the emotional connection they all displayed to their 'own places' they each constructed for their imaginative play in the past and the present.

### **5.3. The impulse toward the need for emotional safety for imaginative play**

Most of the stories told by children and adults of their childhood imaginative play experiences included strong references to feeling emotionally safe within their found or constructed places. Participants frequently linked emotional words and feelings to their self-constructed places for imaginative play practices. To show the continuity of this theme around emotional safety for imaginative play across the past three generations, I will first present Laura's (6 year-old-child) re-story extract, then Emily's (1970s child), followed by Gloria's (1940s child) re-story extract.

In Laura's (6 year-old-child) re-story extract, her intensely emotional feelings attached to her multiple cubbies were clearly evident. Laura enjoyed constructing these places with her younger brother for their imaginative play, but she was also keenly aware of the significance of these places for their sense of emotional wellbeing. This awareness can be seen in Laura's re-story abstract:

Laura very expressively told me about the places where she and her little brother found or made cubbies, usually outside in their acre garden with an abundance of thick twisted tea-tree. In these places, Laura said they would find 'new ways' into the undergrowth by crawling in 'on our tummies' which she said was good because it meant adults could not follow them into these hidden places (L,T&D, 5.6.13). During our conversations, Laura spoke passionately about many important places at home and at school where she used her imagination for play. Laura also started to talk about 'hiding from other people' when others were 'trying to boss me around.' Laura said she would hide in the 'bushy cubby' in the far corner of the school fence line because it had many doorways in and out. In response to this comment, I asked her if there were any other places she liked to play on her own. Laura answered saying 'I go and sit down there [pointing to the fig tree at home she had made on the map]...sometimes I move the chair to there and sit up there when [I feel] a little angry and sad and a



little emotional'. Laura said she climbed up there so 'I get some more happy thoughts into my head and feel much better when I am up there...' (L, MP, 19.6.13). Other times, she said she would find a hiding place inside, even under her bed or blankets or the cupboard in her bedroom. Late into the mapping conversation, I asked Laura what would happen if she didn't have any of the places she talked about to play in. Laura's imagined reaction to what it would be like without her 'own place' showed a maturity well beyond her six years of age when she answered quickly, saying 'We wouldn't really have any place to be ourselves and play together in special places...I think we would have to like find really tricky places and it would be really hard to get in there and all that' (L, MP, 19.6.13).

Laura's (6 year-old-child) comments in this re-story extract highlighted her knowledge of a child's need for an emotionally safe and 'special' place to 'be ourselves.' This comment seemed to highlight the difference in some places where children could 'be ourselves' rather than the expected behaviour they were required to perform in public. More than this, Laura was also aware of the restorative effect of this place by saying she went there to 'get some more happy thoughts' when she was 'a little emotional'. It appeared Laura chose to find safe places at school, too, in a particular bushy place with multiple emergency exits when she was feeling 'emotional' and needed to be away from others. Significantly, Laura's comments suggested she would keep trying to find or make a place if she did not have one to fulfil this role, but these places she feared would be 'tricky' to find and 'hard' to 'get in there'. In making these comments, Laura was providing an example of how important emotional safety was for contemporary children for their imaginative play. Thinking deeply about what it would be like without a special and emotionally safe place for imaginative play, Laura showed she was not only highly capable of metacognitive thinking about an emotional experience, but she was able to imagine and articulate a future situation.

This theme on the impulse towards needing emotional safety for imaginative play can also be seen in Emily's (1970s child) childhood imaginative play experiences. As a young child living on an island in the Pacific Ocean, Emily's (1970s child) experiences illustrated a child's knowledge of the difference between being physically safe and feeling emotionally safe. The

value Emily (1970s child) placed on feeling emotionally safe in her 'own place' she had constructed can be seen in her re-story extract:

Emily's stories tell of long extended times, totally unsupervised in the bamboo jungle where she, her older brother and a small group of indigenous children constructed 'huts' for themselves. Regardless of quicksand and fast moving rivers surrounding them, Emily said she felt 'warm and safe and protected' within the thick bamboo 'walls' of the many 'enclosures' they made (E, T&D, 5.6.13). These children created their 'own world' of cubbies with a sense of achievement and adventure which Emily said was 'difficult to leave' at the end of each day. 'That was our place' Emily said, 'We never imagined anybody else ever being there. It was like finding something incredibly new...' (E, T&D, 5.6.13). In the mapping conversation, deeper feelings about her 'own place' were further triggered when Emily said, 'It was more about a feeling of being one with the space and creating wherever we were...We would make an enclosure pretty much wherever we were...Yeah, it was always about building houses, building places that we could play and create in...' (E, MB, 14.8.13). An extension to this feeling of emotional safety was another 'safe place' Emily referred to as her 'transition tree'. This place was in a large frangipani tree adjacent to their house, where Emily and her brother would climb and sit for some time 'in a sort of bubble' and where none of the adults were 'in control' prior to re-entering the 'adult world' after being totally immersed in their childhood world of 'bamboo huts' (E, T&D, 5.6.13). Later, in her map making conversation, Emily considered *Alice in Wonderland* was the only one who could truly understand her 'imaginary life' enclosed in the jungle (E, MP, 1.7.13).

When Emily (1970s child) talked about her childhood imaginative play, she commonly spoke about her feelings of emotional safety when 'enclosed' within a place she had constructed. In Emily's re-story extract this notion of feeling emotionally 'warm and safe' within the walls of the bamboo huts was contrasted against the physical dangers of the jungle. This contrast was evident again when Emily talked about feeling emotionally safe 'in a bubble' up her transition

tree compared to being under the control of adults. Also within Emily's re-story extract, the difference between a child's knowledge of safety compared with an adult view was accentuated. This difference included negotiating the dangers of quicksand, deep and fast rivers and thick jungles as seen through Emily's eyes as a matter of course, despite being less than five years old. However, when returning home at the end of the day, Emily said it was 'difficult' and required a gradual and gentle transition between the vastly different worlds. In looking back on her childhood experiences, both of these examples of place-making indicated Emily's conscious awareness of the need to create emotionally safe places in which imaginative play could be enacted compared to playing imaginatively under an adult gaze.

The continuity of this theme in needing emotional safety for imaginative play was also evident in Gloria's (1940s child) re-story extract. In looking back on her childhood from the present, Gloria's re-story extract highlighted how important she considered the construction of an enclosed place for imaginative play was for her sense of emotional wellbeing:

Gloria constantly said her childhood was 'idyllic' and filled with 'just so much freedom' and how much she 'just loved' the long grassy paddocks she played in as a child. Gloria told stories about the cubby in the old shed out the back of their yard, but her Dad would sometimes 'fill it up with wood or put chooks in there' (G, T&D, 31.5.13). In response to this, Gloria said they made a 'hidden' cubby in the 'prickly gorsebush infested vacant blocks' across the paddocks from their house. Even though her parents still knew where they were and sometimes visited their cubbies, Gloria said this was 'absolutely the most important place' for her, her younger brother and a few chosen others. However, Gloria noted 'you had to watch it, because all the rival kids wanted to get into your cubby' (G, T&D, 31.5.13). Gloria explained in emotive terms how she felt about her cubby in the gorsebush. She said, 'You just couldn't wait to get there because there was so much fun, and yet there wasn't anything in it that was valuable...It was just a fun place to play. You felt good. In my little bungalow as I call it now, I feel secure and enveloped and cocooned in there. And, this was the same too but fun' (G, T&D, 31.5.13). Despite the heightened significance of this place, it was interesting to note

Gloria had commented later in the memory box conversation that her ‘best place’ for imaginative play was when she was alone, wandering in the long grass in a ‘day-dreaming state’ of mind, away from the gaze of others (G, MB, 10.9.13).

In Gloria’s (1940s child) re-story extract, she referred to her feelings of ‘freedom’ associated with her ‘idyllic childhood’. A significant part of this feeling of freedom seemed to be linked to the construction of her ‘own place’ for imaginative play in the gorsebush in contrast to the cubby in the woodshed where her father interrupted their play with loads of wood. Similar to Emily’s (1970s child) difference between physical and emotional safety, Gloria also chose to construct her ‘own place’ for imaginative play in a place where she felt emotionally ‘secure, enveloped and cocooned’ and, therefore, safe. In looking back and forth between the past and the present, Gloria was able to compare her heightened feelings about her past constructions of place with her current ‘little bungalow’ and, as such, demonstrated the depth of the meaning of these places in her life. Of interest too, was Gloria’s increasing awareness of the intensity of her imaginative play when she was alone in the grassy paddocks in a ‘day dreaming state’ compared with when others could interrupt her play.

The continuity of this theme can be seen across the past three generations by examining and comparing the re-story extracts from Laura (6 year-old-child), Emily (1970s child) and Gloria (1940s child). Although each past and present child had contextually different affordances and constraints, their respective re-story extracts indicated how their impulse toward needing emotional safety for their imaginative play was just as strong as each other. It was also interesting to note the similar way each child used imaginative play practices to create an ‘enclosed’ place in which they each felt more emotionally safe and secure away from the gaze of others, compared with more public places.

#### **5.4. The close connection between bedrooms and trees with imaginative play**

Throughout the stories told during this narrative inquiry, the majority of the participants spoke of their imaginative play in association with both bedrooms and with trees in some way. This was the third theme involving imaginative play practices and places to have remained stable across generations. Apart from one of the participants who stated early in the study ‘I’m not a fan of a tree climb’ (Judy, 1970s child) and her youngest daughter who spoke of her fear of trees when she was outside (Gabrielle, 4 year-old-child), most of the participants told stories about

imaginative play in bedrooms and around trees. Rather than reinforcing the common binary of either inside or outside as opposing places for play, both historical and contemporary children's stories commonly included imaginative play both inside and outside. The stability across generations in the meanings of these experiences was as pronounced as the previous two themes. To demonstrate the similar meanings for this theme across the past three generations, I will present re-story extracts from Bob (1940s child), then Harry (4 year-old-child) followed by Felicity (1970s child).

In our conversations together Bob (1940s child) frequently told stories about his imaginative play in relation to trees, in particular an old oak tree in his backyard where he constructed a tree house high up in the branches. During our memory box conversational interview I asked Bob whether this place for imaginative play was still an important place for him, and he responded in an immediate and impassioned way stating 'yes, it is'. After a pause, he sadly added, 'It's gone now though' – the tree seemingly a symbol representing his long past childhood. The heightened meanings of his imaginative play experiences up and under trees were still important to Bob. This importance was further represented in Bob's mapping conversation when he brought an old photo of his father climbing a tree as a child, as evident in the following re-story extract:

Bob proudly showed me a sepia coloured photo of his Father and Uncle climbing a huge tree, with bits of wood nailed to the tree as a ladder, announcing 'This is what kids did in 1915!' This was a photo Bob remembered looking at many times as a child, especially when his Father told stories of his own childhood out in the country. Bob often compared childhood today with his own and his father's childhood in the past, suggesting where children play now was vastly different (B, MP, 21.6.13). As a young boy, Bob found he was able to climb onto the chook pen roof and then climb up into the branches of the giant oak tree above it. Later he found some planks of wood which he hauled up the tree to make his own tree house high up amongst the thick branches, and then used other bits of wood to make a ladder to get up there. This became 'one of the best spots' Bob said where he felt 'important' as the 'King of the Castle' with a sense of achievement being able to climb so high. And although he frequently referred to

what ‘we did back then’ in reality he often played alone, especially spending time by himself up his tree. No one else followed him up there as he quietly watched the driveway entrance from his hidden vantage point (B, T&D, 13.6.13).

Looking back on his childhood, Bob’s comment about feeling like the ‘King of the Castle’ high in his oak tree was an indication of the depth of feeling this place held for him. In many ways, it seemed the meaning of this place as an important place for play could have been passed down through his father’s attitude to playing in trees. In thinking about these places for his childhood imaginative play, it was interesting to note how strongly Bob felt in his perception that children today were no longer ‘allowed’ to play in trees. In doing so, it seemed Bob was expressing elements of moral panic about the decline in childhood compared with the public narrative of what ‘we did back then’. Bob’s (1940s child) re-story extract continued with imaginative play which involved more trees, this time including his younger sister and then their imaginative play inside a bedroom:

While collecting pine cones and sticks for the kitchen wood stove and lounge room open fire, Bob and his little sister often wandered into the back paddocks of their farm. This was where Bob and his little sister made their own multiple cubbies ‘down under’ the dark green border of Cypress pines. They played in amongst the tree roots and rabbit holes, using the collected pine cones, pine needles and sticks to form their house walls and furniture because they ‘needed them’ for their play. This was ‘our spot’ Bob had said, a private imaginative play place where they were not interrupted by others (B, MP, 21.6.13). Interestingly, Bob and his sister found other places for private imaginative play, such as inside in their shared bedroom where they privately practised their singing for the concerts they performed in. At times, Bob said, this ‘pretend’ play also included ‘skylarking on the wardrobes until they fell over’ (B, MP, 21.6.13).

Although Bob (1940s child) expressed strong feelings about an assumed decline in contemporary childhood imaginative play, many of his own play experiences challenged common assumptions of a 1940s childhood. For example, Bob’s re-story extract describing his

‘house making’ with his younger sister may be seen as contrary to popular belief about the gendered play of boys in the 1940s. Similarly, Bob and his sister’s choice to play inside also demonstrated a conflict with common assumptions that children in the past only played outside the home. For Bob, bedrooms and trees were both associated with his imaginative play in various times and places, regardless of societal expectations of a 1940s childhood. The continuity of this theme together with the impulse toward the construction of their own places for imaginative play was further demonstrated in the close similarities between the affordances Bob used in his cubby construction under the pine trees compared with his granddaughter Georgia’s (4 year-old-child) bush cubby construction under the pine trees in the park. In both instances, pine needles, pine cones and sticks were used to construct their own places for imaginative play, despite the seventy years between these childhood experiences.

Although contemporary children’s imaginative play can be commonly associated with indoor and often screen-based places, Harry’s (4 year-old-child) re-story extract illustrated a different narrative. Harry’s re-story extract showed a contemporary child’s strong connection between imaginative play and trees. While Harry had briefly spoken of play inside his bedroom playing an online game of Angry Bird on an iPad during his mapping conversational interview (H, MP, 19.6.13); for this theme I have focused on Harry’s relationship with trees. On another occasion, his sister Laura (6 year-old-child) had told me Harry had acted out Angry Bird up in their ‘little nest cubby’ up in the fig tree but ‘not with his iPad’ (L, T&D, 5.6.13). However, Harry had not mentioned this in his conversations about play. Harry’s relationship with trees can clearly be seen in his re-story extract where he linked his imaginative play with tree climbing, listening to trees and ‘pretending’ up trees:

As a small boy in the group, Harry was well known amongst his peers, teachers and family for his tree climbing skills and prowess. Climbing quickly and competently very high up the Kindergarten climbing tree he said he was ‘Jack’ up the tree. Calling down to me, Harry shouted, ‘You are very tiny...tinier than me, and if I get all the way up, you’ll be even more...tiny’ (H, T, 6.6.13). On another occasion, Harry’s Kindergarten Teacher casually asked him about the Story Tree when we visited the [bush] area. This idea appeared to ignite some interest with Harry, so he led me to the tree to check if there was a story available on this day. ‘I’ll show you which tree it is’ Harry called over

his shoulder, 'And, if you listen really carefully it tells you a story.' With his ear pressed to the trunk he exclaimed, 'Oohh, I hear a story...Once there was a snake and it didn't like meat so it went out to have...eat some grass instead. So, then when he feeled a bit sick, he ate all of the persons in the world and they were just snakes. And even foxes. That's the story' (H, T2, 7.6.13). Later, during our map making conversation, Harry became extremely excited when he came across a photo of his favourite tree cubby at home. A suddenly animated Harry shouted out, 'Ohhhh...I know, that's our fig tree... we do pretending there.' And then he abruptly stopped the conversation stating, 'That's enough telling' (H, MP, 19.6.13).

In this re-story extract, Harry's (4 year-old-child) strong relationship with trees and his associated imaginative play is demonstrated in his response to available resources and affordances. Harry's ability to 'look down' on others from the height of a tree was clearly important to him. Not every early childhood setting has a philosophy in which tree climbing and listening to talking trees is encouraged as it was in Harry's centre. However, in spite of this encouragement, it was interesting that Harry was hesitant at this stage in the research to continue talking about his play in the fig tree at home. Similar to Bob's (1940s child) intense reaction to the symbolism of his oak tree cubby, it was as if Harry had inadvertently displayed his deeper private feelings about his 'own place' in the fig tree in a way he had not meant to disclose to me as an adult and a stranger. As our relationship developed over time, Harry seemed more willing to explain how he felt in relation to trees and 'pretending'. The deeper meanings of trees to Harry's imaginative play were reflected in one of our last conversations when I invited him to tell me about the objects in his memory box:

For the first time, Harry seemed really engaged in the research process as he eagerly left his play with his friends to find his memory box of 'things.' Harry found a place for us to sit and talk about his memory box, but as we did so, other children started coming up the hill to listen too. In an amazing shift from his earlier attitude, Harry held up his hand and called to the other children, 'Stop, we're talking here, come back later.' With our privacy sorted, Harry then enthusiastically showed me what was inside his memory box - a half a brick, a leaf, a



twig and a matchbox car. I asked Harry about the brick, to which he triumphantly replied, ‘This is the stairs up...I made the stairs, but Laura made a lot...up to the tree cubby...it has a ladder and a balancing thing and a bed and a little chair...all those things... and do you know where the little chair is? It’s in the tree! It’s just for me and Laura and no one else goes in there... they don’t find out about it.’ Harry seemed especially excited when he showed me the half-brick in the box which represented the ‘stairs’ he had built to the ‘tree cubby’ he and his sister had made together (H, MB, 14.8.13).

This re-story extract illustrated Harry’s (4 year-old-child) heightened emotional connection to trees, in particular his fig tree at home, together with his creative act in making his ‘own place’ for imaginative play ‘in the tree’. Interestingly, it was the use of memory box objects which appeared to trigger Harry’s storytelling in a way that had not resonated with him until this point. It was also interesting how both Harry (4 year-old-child) and Bob (1940s child) both used tree climbing as part of their imaginative play in which they both felt ‘higher’ than everyone else, with a sense of achievement and adventure evident in their play and their stories. Despite Bob’s (1940s child) assumption to the contrary, it was equally clear from both Bob’s (1940s child) and Harry’s (4 year-old-child) re-story extracts that trees and bedrooms held important meanings as places connected with imaginative play in childhoods both past and present.

Bob (1940s child) and Harry’s (4 year-old-child) emotional connection with trees, bedrooms and imaginative play were replicated in Felicity’s (1970s child) re-story extracts. Here, Felicity oscillated between bedrooms and trees as places strongly connected with imaginative play, depending on the affordances or constraints within her context at different times and places. Felicity’s (1970s child) re-story extract described the creation of her two ‘secret club houses’ - one up a tree and the other in her bedroom:

Felicity reflected how relatively easy it was to find or create secret places for imaginative play in her childhood, such as going on an expedition down the street to a vacant bush block to a tree that was ‘great’ to climb. She told stories of imaginative play enacted on the branches of the tree - sometimes informed by television programs (such as, *Lost in Space*), sometimes from books (such as, *The Bridge to*

*Terebithia*), and sometimes just because of where they were. In conjunction with this place, Felicity and her cousins also created an inside version of their ‘secret club house.’ This place was subversively hidden beneath the mattress of her bunk bed. The only way this ‘secret club house’ was activated was through a special entry ritual Felicity and her two cousins invented through a ‘new language’. The play that occurred once through the special ‘magical doorway’ into the secret club house under the bunk bed mattress was full of rich imaginative play based on previous places, past play experiences and cultural informants so that ‘the ordinary turned into something extraordinary.’ I also found it interesting that Felicity talked about how she felt she had a ‘different persona’ in these places: ‘different play happened here.’ It was not just the ‘mud pies with assorted seed pods’ sort of make-believe play with the children next door, Felicity said, but a real connection to the construction of ‘your own world’ that shifted the play into a ‘different realm of meanings’ (F, T&D, 17.5.13). Also of noteworthy importance was Felicity’s comment that she wasn’t necessarily looking for solace or freedom when she constructed these places and said, ‘I think it was probably independence, or it was just that this was our place, and we were the bosses in that place and our secret meetings there weren’t for adults and grownups and older sisters...it was just that it was our rules when we were there’ (F, MP, 12.6.13).

The secret ‘new language’ Felicity (1970s child) and her cousins created, the complex entry ritual and the exclusive nature of this ‘secret club house’ were all creative features of their imaginative play practices connected with trees and bedrooms. In modifying and changing locations according to contextual constraints, Felicity and her cousins were showing a flexible attitude to their play and the places they enacted their imaginative play. However, they were also showing an example of children’s knowledge of how to use imaginative play to subvert an adult gaze away from their play. In this re-story extract, Felicity’s entrance through the ‘magical doorway’ into their secret places meant their play was transformed into ‘different play’, where the children themselves seemed different and adult rules no longer applied. This was particularly

noticeable when Felicity said the secret place play was different to the ordinary ‘mud pies with assorted seedpods’ sort of pretend play. Felicity was very clear that she did not want adults to know about or be involved in this play or place at all. The use of popular culture informants as affordances for their imaginative play in these places was also noticeable in Felicity’s descriptions, further enriching the depth of their play. Interestingly, Felicity said with conviction it was not about finding an escape from their real life, but more about a deep sense of agency, and the intensity of their creative play in these secret places up a tree and inside the bunk bed, which was the key to their attraction.

Each of these three participants’ re-story extracts have shown examples of how children’s knowledge of imaginative play and the places it was enacted such as trees and bedrooms were significant aspects of their childhoods. Each has shown an emotional connection to their imaginative play practices and places through their emotional responses to thinking, recalling and talking about these experiences: from Bob’s (1940s child) impassioned response, to Harry’s (4 year-old-child) guarded then excited reaction, to Felicity’s (1970s child) enthusiastic account of her lived experience of imaginative play up a tree and in a bedroom. Regardless of assumptions about where historical and contemporary children enacted their imaginative play, the comparison between these three participants’ re-story extracts has provided examples of imaginative play in close connection with trees and with bedrooms across the past three generations. The continuity of this theme can therefore be seen to have remained stable across generations.

### **5.5. The inclusion of significant others in imaginative play**

This fourth theme of including significant others in imaginative play was prominent throughout all the stories told by the children and adult participants in this study. For the purpose of this thesis, the term significant others referred to a sibling, cousin or a small group of close friends. If and/or when someone else was included in the children’s imaginative play, it was important this inclusion happened only when the children chose to include someone else. As this theme appeared consistently across all of the participants in this study, this was another example of an imaginative play practice which had remained stable across the past three generations. To show the continuity of this theme, I will present the re-story extracts from Scott (6 year-old-child), then Emily (1970s child) followed by Cathy (1950s child).

According to Scott (6 year-old-child), his imaginative play practices and places were dependent on where he was and who he was with. For example, Scott was adamant there were ‘no places’ at school where imaginative play was possible, saying instead he played ‘real’ games with his peer group at school such as Tiggly. However, at home, Scott said he played ‘pretend’ with his younger brother and a close friend or two. The following re-story extract shows Scott’s (6 year-old-child) understanding of the difference between ‘real play’ with peers and ‘pretend play’ with his brother:

I was fascinated by Scott’s ongoing comments that at home he ‘pretended’ to play games with his brother Frank, but at school he played ‘real’ games. It seems his understanding of imaginative, pretend or make-believe games were tied up with his definition of play. At school however his ‘play’ life appeared to be dominated by playing Tiggly and Pokémon cards (S, T&D, 17.5.13). When Scott spoke about his home, he told stories about pretending with Frank that there were sharks on his bed and in the garden, with his bed or the grass representing the ocean. He also spoke about his ‘secret club house’ in their garden under a bush. He differentiated between the bush cubby he made with his little brother and the ‘proper’ wooden adult-made cubby – but also noted that the proper cubby was so messy they rarely played in there. ‘We sometimes pretend that we’ve got a cubby in the bushes ... the bush one we only climb up and down and not really do anything there...and that cubby, the tree cubby is really far out across the grass... It’s a secret cubby. Only Frank and me and our friends are allowed, we’re only allowed to tell our friends...and there’s a clear way and then we can go in...and it’s comfy in there...but the tree cubby doesn’t have any toys but the wooden one does’ (S, T&D, 17.5.13).

Scott’s (6 year-old-child) re-story extract demonstrated his knowledge of the differentiation between ‘real’ play and pretend play, and where and with whom each could be enacted. For Scott, playing Tiggly or Pokémon at school was different to the pretend play he enacted at home with his younger brother. In this re-story extract, Scott and his brother’s construction of a bush ‘secret cubby’ in their backyard was significant to Scott as a place where pretend play happened. Although he commented they ‘did not really do anything there’, Scott identified this play with

his brother and two close friends as ‘pretending play’. It was interesting to note the absence of toys in this imaginative play place in contrast to the built cubby which was so full of toys it was not possible to play in there. It was also interesting to note Scott’s anxiety around playing ‘real play’ at school, enacting the expected behaviour of his peer group. The secrecy surrounding his bush cubby, where ‘only Frank and me and our friends are allowed...we’re only allowed to tell our friends’, appeared to be an important stipulation so that his peer group were not aware of this pretend play occurring at home. This secrecy from his broader peer group was accentuated on a later occasion when Scott confirmed this bush cubby was ‘very special’ because it was ‘a secret’ (S, MP, 12.6.13). Retrospectively, I later realised Scott had effectively closed down the map making conversation on the approach of others close to the area where we were talking together around his map and photos. These photos Scott had taken at home were too private to be exposed in a school environment. As a consequence, I was beginning to understand the inclusion of Scott’s significant others deepened his imaginative play at home in a way that was not possible in a public forum, such as at school with his broader peer group looking on.

Emily’s (1970s child) re-story extract also demonstrated the importance of including her older brother in collaboration with a small group of other children as significant other/s in their imaginative play. In the following story embedded within the body of Emily’s re-story extract, this small group of children can clearly be seen to be working together in their collective imaginative play:

‘I think this place, the bamboo really encouraged the play and you were all there like a little community. You had a job to do. So you were very much part of certain processes making that happen, so you naturally took turns. If it was food collection, there would be people sent out to get food and they would do their part, and nobody would argue...It was like a micro community...There was no bickering or competition or anything like that, no power plays, people just went about their jobs. You always felt like everybody had a job to do but they weren’t relying on anybody else for entertainment. It was very much ‘we’ve got something to do here’. We had a sense of purpose and each had a job to do. And that did feed out, I remember, after you’d spent that time in that space you’d come out and you’d feel a really great sense of achievement about what we did in a day. And we didn’t know what we

were going to do in that day until we got there. As soon as we were in there the planning happened, it was ‘Okay, we’ve got things to do...we’ve got to build steps in order to get up to the slide. We’ve got to make sure nobody else comes in this way. We’ve got to make our houses...’ (E, MB, 14.8.13).

Emily’s (1970s child) description of the small community of players in this story illustrated the powerful influence of significant others in the construction of imaginative play. While Emily’s brother was an intrinsic element in her imaginative play, the richness of this play was further stimulated by a small group of children all interested in playing imaginatively together in a similar way, with a similar ‘sense of purpose’. This was seen in the way they planned their play together, and played as a cohesive group without hierarchical ‘power plays’ impacting on their play. I was especially interested in Emily’s comment that she felt ‘a great sense of achievement’ in their hut making, their protection of place and their feelings of independence, indicating the strength of emotion attached to these imaginative play practices and places.

Cathy (1950s child) told many stories about the imaginative play she enacted with her older brother, and how significant he was in inspiring their creative play. In Cathy’s re-story extracts, a number of imaginative play practices and places were mentioned however, their play was notably different and more creative when Cathy and her brother constructed their own places for imaginative play:

Cathy considered there was ‘no space for a place’ inside her house for imaginary play. However, she also recalled using books as an imaginative play place when she was inside with her brother. Cathy said she could clearly remember feeling apprehensive when the family sat around the open fire in the lounge room at night – in enforced silence. The only way Cathy and her brother coped with this situation was by escaping into books, and so the books ‘became a place to be able to remove ourselves from that world to the other’ - as an imaginary place away from the authoritarian gaze of their parents (C, MB, 1.7.13). On an earlier occasion, Cathy had talked about the theatrical plays her brother had created in the backyard with the neighbourhood children using the clothes line as a theatre backdrop (C,

T&D, 29.5.13). However, in contrast to this form of pretend play, Cathy eventually remembered another story of imaginary play places in the back paddocks behind their house. This other place was over the back fence and into the ‘longish grassy places’ where Cathy and her brother made up ‘wild imaginary games in a world of their own that went on for days’ (C, T&D, 29.5.13). This play practice illustrated a different sort of imaginary play to when their mother monitored their play in the backyard. Cathy noted the difference in saying, ‘you knew Mum wasn’t going to climb the fence’ and so a ‘feeling of freedom’ surrounded this place and their play they enacted there together (C, MB, 1.7.13).

In Cathy’s (1950s child) re-story extract, the strong influence of her creative brother on her imaginative play is clearly evident. Their ‘wild imaginary’ play in the long grass was significantly different to the play enacted in the backyard with others. Cathy frequently mentioned her brother in our conversations, and planned to speak to him to discuss any other stories she may have forgotten. Interestingly, for the memory box conversational interview, Cathy recalled another important story of imaginative play initiated by her brother. In this story, her brother had frequently taken Cathy as a little girl to an old lady’s house down the road where the two children played ‘pretend games’ in her lounge room. This story of the old lady’s lounge room is embedded in Cathy’s re-story extract where she visualised being in the room as she spoke about the experience:

‘I’m actually in that room at the moment! It feels...very cluttered, old arm chairs and lace over the arms of the chairs, and the light, I remember the light vividly and it was really dull and it had a musty, funny smell to the house, but we felt safe and comfortable there because Miss Green was just delightful. And I think she enjoyed having us kids there, yeah, she was a very important part of Peter and my pretend play’ (C, MB, 1.7.13).

What was particularly powerful about this story was not only Cathy’s sensory visualisation, but the stark contrast between this ‘musty funny smell[ing]’ lounge room with the austere lounge room at home. At home, both children felt the need to escape into ‘another world’ inside their

books rather than endure the silence their parents demanded. However, Cathy felt they were able to express themselves creatively in the old lady's lounge room, and so this place became an emotionally safe place for the enactment of imaginative play.

For the children's re-story extracts presented in this theme, the choice of including significant others was shown to be an important criterion in the enactment of children's imaginative play across generations. Therefore, it is an example of a stable theme across the past three generations. In each of these instances, this inclusion shifted the children's play to a different, more in-depth level of 'pretend' than when playing with their broader peer group or in the company of adults.

### **5.6. The impact of others on imaginative play**

The impact of others on the participants' imaginative play was a common occurrence in the stories they told across generations and is the fifth theme around imaginative play practices and places to have remained stable. In contrast to the previous theme, the others referred to in this theme were usually adults (parents and teachers) and the broader peer group (that is, children other than close friends, siblings or cousins). There was a notable difference in the imaginative play which occurred in a private imaginative play place in comparison to play when peers and/or adults were present. Across each of the generations, this difference was made clear through their stories they told. Decisions on what, how and where imaginative play would be enacted were dependent on who was close by and potentially listening. Therefore, this theme illustrated another example of an imaginative play practice which had remained stable across the past three generations and was closely linked with the construction of emotionally safe places. To illustrate this theme's continuity, I will present re-story extracts from Judy (1970s child), followed by Sonya (6 year-old-child), and then from Jill (1930s child).

Judy (1970s child) started our conversation announcing she could not recall much of her childhood play, and then spoke about playing alone with her Barbie on the 'safe' concrete steps of her family's front garden (Judy, T&D, 8.5.13). Late into this conversation, Judy's stories deepened as she thought more about the imaginative play she enacted as a young child. Judy's stories gradually changed to talking about a private place where she and her best friend subversively constructed their 'own place' under a building site down the street from their homes:



A strong emotional attachment to this imaginative play place was evident through Judy's facial expression when I asked her if any parents knew where they were. 'Noooo...no way...NO WAY!!' she said defiantly, and continued by saying she assumed her parents thought they were still playing 'downstairs' in the garage. However, the girls' play changed dramatically when they secretly constructed their own imaginative play place under the building site. Judy recollected '...when that building site went up, whooshhh, we were straight across!...Yeah, that was a really cool place to hang out. I just loved it...it was great. We just felt so naughty there' (Judy, T&D, 8.5.13).

In looking back on this imaginative play place Judy (1970s child) and her best friend had constructed, Judy was very clear about their need for secrecy. At the time, Judy did not want any of the parents to know they were playing in this 'dangerous' place where they 'felt so naughty' under the building site. Judy suggested, 'Isn't that what kids do, not tell their parents what they are really doing?' (Judy, MB, 2.8.13). It was interesting to note the shift from Judy's initial 'safe' concrete steps as a place for imaginative play in her early stories to later stories of 'naughty', 'dangerous' and indeed risky places for imaginative play under the building site. However, what was especially relevant to this theme on the impact of others on imaginative play was Judy's realisation that she had kept this place a secret from her peer group too. Initially, Judy had talked about playing Hide and Seek at the building site with all the neighbourhood children. But then, halfway through this conversation Judy paused and it appeared she was suddenly aware that excluding this play from her peer group as well as her parents was 'another level of secrecy' (Judy, MP, 29.5.13). This was evident in the following conversation which was embedded in Judy's re-story extract:

'If you were a kid, that was okay, but it was very much withheld from any adult. So, that's all parents, older siblings you know those at the age who would think we were doing the wrong thing...But amongst our friends, our peers...that was open slather that house...(long pause)...But I wouldn't have told any of them that I would have played our 'Barbie world' with Cassie and we had our little fantasy [under there]. That would have been another level of secrecy. I wouldn't have

shared that with anyone. You know, you just wouldn't want to be teased. It was important to us' (Judy, MP, 29.5.13).

Even though Judy's (1970s child) peer group knew about playing at the building site, they did not know about the imaginative play based on Barbie that Judy and her friend enacted in this place. It appeared Judy was retrospectively aware of their need as children to protect their imaginative play from her peer group so they were not 'teased' by others about this 'important' play and place. In this way, Judy's play was significantly different in the company of others (such as playing Hide and Seek with the group under the building site) compared with the rich imaginative play enacted in their private 'place' she had secretly constructed with her close friend.

The impact of others on imaginative play was also evident in Sonya's (6 year-old-child) imaginative play experiences. Sonya spoke about her favourite 'very old' peppercorn tree locked behind a gate in her school playground and the impact of others on her imaginative play that occurred close by this tree (Sonya, T&D, 29.5.13). During a tour of the playground, Sonya showed me the tree and the corner close by where she and her small group of friends had created their symbolically hidden place for imaginative play. The important value of this place was clear when I asked Sonya how she felt about the tree being locked behind gates. Sonya's answer was embedded in her re-story extract:

'We pretend to talk to...that tree, because it's my favourite tree in the whole school...Ah, [I feel] a bit bad because the seats are...it's actually not supposed to be behind gates...Well, it's very old....I'm probably sure that was when a castle was here' (Sonya, MP, 13.6.13).

The four girls in Sonya's (6 year-old-child) 'club' would commonly come to this out of sight corner to act out their imaginative play such as 'pretend[ing] to talk to that tree'. Parallel with this experience of place making, Sonya appeared to be very aware of other children's view of her play, saying sometimes they did not think her play 'was fun' even though she thought it was:

In another conversation, I asked Sonya if it concerned her if others heard her play? I decided to ask this question because Sonya had mentioned she often played games other people didn't think were fun, even though she thought they were, such as playing 'pretend horse

riders' on the oval pathway next to the tree while 'looking for bug tracks.' Despite Sonya's confidence and creative thinking, it seems she was very aware of the accepted peer culture and adult regulations of school playground play and generally seemed anxious to comply with the rules that surrounded her use of place. Sonya started to answer 'No' she didn't care if anybody...heard them...but then stopped mid-sentence and changed direction, saying instead that '...because when I hear some people that are going around I sometimes start to stop because I think they are going to be laughing, because sometimes we do some games that are a bit private to me and my friends, that's why I wait for them to go first' (Sonya, MP, 13.6.13).

Of particular importance and relevance to this theme was Sonya's (6 year-old-child) realisation that she 'start[s] to stop' playing her 'private' games on the approach of potentially 'laughing' others (Sonya, MP, 13.6.13). It appeared that despite Sonya's highly imaginative play skills, her peers could severely impact the content and duration of her imaginative play and the places it was enacted in. Sonya's strategic 'wait[ing] for them to go first' before continuing the play had marked similarities with Judy's (1970s child) experience in keeping her imaginative play a secret from her extended peer group for fear of being 'teased' by others. It appeared that both Judy (1970s child) and Sonya (6 year-old-child) were becoming increasingly aware of the power of a peer group culture and the controlling impact the others had on their imaginative play.

Jill (1930s child) had told many stories of her childhood experiences of imaginative play during our conversations together. Previously they had included playing in the 'lean-to' cubby in her father's woodshed with her sisters, and playing alone up the apricot tree and on the window seat. However, this story of the river crossing in an old leaky boat the children had found was one of the most fascinating stories of the whole study. In this re-story extract, the impact of others on Jill's imaginative play was two-fold: first in a positive way with the inclusion of her two cousins to stimulate adventurous play; and second, the negative impact of the adults who 'blabbed' on them, and therefore stopped their adventurous play on the river:

Without discussing their forthcoming launch with any adult, the children collected a bevy of jam tins from the pantry and quietly headed towards the river for this momentous occasion. As the story

goes, the girls apparently baled water using the tins as fast as they could while the boys used their hands to paddle over to the other side and back again...enjoying the paradox between fear and control they had over their play choices, the boat and the river. As a collective at that time, they did not consider there was anything especially dangerous in their river play, however, Jill did reflect as an adult and a parent they did 'some pretty stupid things when we were little'. Remembering that time with a smile, Jill assumes it was the heady excitement of adventure and freedom, the risky behavior that was so addictive whenever they were with these two boy cousins who showed no concern for consequences. Eventually, Jill sadly reported, someone must have seen them having fun with their 'ship' and 'blabbed' on them. Subsequently, their parents 'hit the roof' and decreed they were not able to use the boat again or go down to the river for a long time afterwards as punishment for their unseemly and irresponsible behavior (J, T&D, 6.5.13).

In Jill's (1930s child) re-story extract, it was evident that the children's imaginative play was exciting and adventurous in digging out the old boat from the mud, getting it ready to launch and then sailing back and forth across the river. A number of contrasting tensions however were apparent in Jill's re-story extract. One concerned Jill's 'hidden' private imaginative play away from the gaze of her parents even though she had previously said her parents always knew where she was. In fact, Jill had specifically said 'it wasn't as if it was a secret or anything' when she was playing in her apricot tree, and that her mother simply 'called her down' from the tree if she was needed for chores or lunch (J, T&D, 6.5.13). In another tension, Jill constantly said she was eager to 'do the right thing' according to societal expectations of a 1930s child. However, this and other stories she told about the 'naughty' adventures she was involved in with her cousins who 'egged her on' would not have been deemed the 'right thing'. There was also a contrasting tension in an adult interpretation of safety to that of a child in Jill's re-story. Although as an adult Jill realised they did some 'pretty stupid things when they were little', she seemed genuinely perplexed that someone had 'blabbed' on their childhood play and told her parents. Jill's adventurous spirit seemed to be still present when she referred to her own childhood experiences as 'idyllic' and 'fun' however, in a later conversation Jill considered it

was 'less safe' for children now than in the past. Having noted these tensions, it was clear in Jill's re-story that the impact of others, particularly her parents and other adults, directed Jill's imaginative play, where and how it was enacted and the form the imaginative play took.

The re-stories from across all three generations included in this theme clearly demonstrated a reluctance to enact the children's 'private' imaginative play in front of their broader peer group and/or adults. As such, the stability of the impact of others on imaginative play across the past three generations can be seen in these examples. Also stable, was an impulse toward seeking emotional safety through the enactment of imaginative play even though the children's physical safety was sometimes in doubt. A variety of strategies to work subversively around the problem of the impact of others were used by different generations, including stopping play on the approach of others, finding private places where others were less likely to go, and/or being secretive about the places where deep, imaginative play occurred. For both the past and the present children it seemed their increasing awareness of the impact of others on their imaginative play was a surprising revelation. At times, it seemed as though it was this deeper reflection on their actions, responses and strategies they used as children allowed them to view their imaginative play experiences in a different way.

### **5.7. The influence of popular culture on imaginative play**

The influence of popular culture on imaginative play was the sixth theme across the generations in this study. Contrary to current thinking on the influence of popular culture as unique to contemporary childhoods, each era had its own particular popular culture informants. As such, imaginative play practices and places were often modified and adapted according to its respective era's popular culture. However, what had remained stable is the notion of popular culture intrinsically influencing imaginative play in each generation. Therefore, this theme was included as an imaginative play practice which had remained stable across the past three generations. To illustrate the continuity of this theme, I will first present re-story extracts from Bob (1940s child) and Cathy (1950s child), followed by Daniel (1970s child) and then Frank (4 year-old-child).

Although Bob (1940s child) spent much of his childhood taking on his father's role around the house and the farm while his father 'worked for the war effort', Bob was still able to find a time and place for play. Bob's imaginative play included making a tree house up an oak tree, making

cubbies under pine trees and ‘skylarking’ with his sister in their shared bedroom. Bob’s imaginative play also included playing alone, in private and acting out radio-inspired characters. Bob’s re-story extract shows the influence of popular radio programs of the era on the imaginative play he enacted:

There were a number of radio programs during the 1940s Bob and his family listened ‘for hours’ together such as ‘Dad and Dave and the Test Cricket games’. It was through these radio programs that Bob developed his passion for sport. These sporting programs appear to have triggered and informed one of Bob’s favourite pretend play scenarios where he ‘imagined [he] was the famous Australian cricketer Bill Ponsford bowling’ against the old brick outdoor toilet wall. Bob would run back and forth, shifting between playing in the role of bowler and batsman, scoring for both teams in the dirt, meanwhile commentating on the whole event. This was a very private game that Bob played, totally immersed within his own world of heroic sporting prowess where no one else was needed nor wanted. ‘This place’ Bob said, ‘leant itself to this play’ – a private space, a brick wall and a straight concrete pathway, the perfect recipe for this imaginative game. Similarly, Bob played a pretend football game alone out the front of their iron fenced garden along the straight dirt driveway with gum trees as goal posts. This is where Bob kicked and marked the ‘newspaper footy’ and then scored for each team with an ongoing monologue on the state of play. Bob said he ‘felt silly saying it’ but he was ‘pretending to be John Coleman playing for Essendon at the end of the war’ in these imagined moments on his own. It was important to him that this footy match was also a private game just for him to play, even though it would appear to be in a very public place (B, MB, 8.8.13).

Bob’s (1940s child) description of his imaginative play in this re-story extract was rich and detailed in where and how he enacted this play. Although he did not explicitly acknowledge the influence of the ‘hours’ listening to the commentary of sporting events, it appeared to have informed Bob’s imaginative play. Bob acted out these sporting heroes playing his own game of cricket and football in the snatches of time he had available for play. This play was clearly

important to him; however, Bob said he felt ‘silly’ talking in public about this pretend play. This may have been why it was not until our third conversational interview together before Bob talked about this particular form of his private imaginative play. Of particular relevance to this theme, Bob’s son Daniel (1970s child) had previously told me how he had covertly watched his son Ted (7 year-old-child) play a pretend game of football on his own in their backyard. During the ‘game’ Ted had drawn a square shape with his finger in the air to represent the need for a video recall of play (he told Daniel later) during his running commentary of his pretend football match. Adding to this story, Daniel (1970s child) also mentioned he had played a similar solitary game of ‘pretend footy’ during his childhood, saying ‘when you’re by yourself that’s when your imagination kicks in ‘cos there’s no one else there to interrupt it’ (D, MP, 20.6.13). Although Daniel had noted the similarity between his childhood ‘footy’ pretend play with his own son, Ted, it did not appear that any of the family members knew the full extent of how similar their imaginative play had been across each of the generations.

Similarly influenced by the popular culture of the time, Cathy’s (1950s child) imaginative play was informed by newly broadcast television programs with the advent of television in Australia. The following story embedded in Cathy’s re-story extract shows the influence of television on Cathy’s imaginative play during the late 1950s:

‘The shed that I’m talking about must have been a [play] place, because we actually started a thing with the street kids called The Helpers Club House...I can’t recall a lot of what we did...but I can vividly remember spending a lot of time with Kate who’s Dad was the first to have a television and we used to watch The Mickey Mouse Club and then we started our own club...and we used that shed as our little clubhouse...and Mum would make lemonade and we’d set up little things on the front fence and sell the lemonade and raise money for bush fires. I’ve even got the newspaper we were in. This was kid’s stuff in there, but my Mum used to monitor it though to make sure we were doing the right thing’ (C, T&D, 29.5.13).

Cathy’s (1950s child) story about the shed where the children played illustrated an example of an adult space which was re-constructed for use by children for imaginative play. By Cathy’s own admission, the name of their Club House in the shed was triggered by watching many hours

of The Mickey Mouse Club and the children wanting to re-create their own version of a 'Club.' Cathy spoke of this Club House as a child's place for imaginary play. However, it appeared this 'place' still seemed to be constrained by 'doing the right thing' according to 1950s societal expectations of children at the time through the constant monitoring by Cathy's mother. As such, the imaginative play which occurred in the shed tended to be a public performance of imaginative play, with the knowledge their play would be interrupted by Cathy's mother on a regular basis. As a response to this level of surveillance, Cathy and her brother found a place in the long grass over the back fence for their rich and private imaginative play where they knew their mother would not follow them.

Initially, Daniel (1970s child) did not consider his imaginative play was inspired by television watching, saying he was 'always' outside playing in the swamp and making huts with his brother. However, some time towards the end of our first conversation, Daniel mentioned his wife had suggested he was 'pretending to be Huckleberry Finn' as a child. On further reflection, by our next conversation together, Daniel thought perhaps other characters on television and in books during the 1970s had influenced the imaginative play he enacted in the bush. The following re-story extract from Daniel (1970s child) explains this reflection:

Much of Daniel's childhood was spent outside in the bush surrounding their house. Although Daniel said he had little time for watching television during his childhood, there were a few programs that attracted his attention. In particular, 1970s television programs such as Grizzly Adams and Daniel Boone with the common theme of solitary forest dwellers who lived 'off the land.' Similarly, this theme was continued through Daniel's favourite book *My Side of the Mountain* where the protagonist was a small boy who learnt to fend for himself in the wild by creating ways to catch and cook fish, making his own shelters such as hollowing out the interior of an old tree, and learning to be totally independent (D, MP, 20.6.13).

The notion of 'making shelters' similar to those constructed by these television and literary characters appeared to have been highly influential in Daniel's (1970s child) imaginative play. In looking back as an adult on his childhood, Daniel became increasingly aware that these characters were part of his imaginative play as a child. Unlike his father Bob (1940s child) who



did not acknowledge the link between listening to the radio and his own imaginative play in our conversations, Daniel was now able to identify the popular culture informants from television programs and books which influenced his imaginative play. As a consequence of this, Daniel's thinking about the construct of childhood imaginative play appeared to be shifting, as seen in the following re-story extract:

In an interesting shift in thinking even over the past few months we have been talking, Daniel now feels that although he would have said in the past that it is better to be outside to use your imagination and to be creative, he now believes that 'your imagination can be used wherever you are', the main characteristic was about being 'in my own little world.' Taking this notion a step further, Daniel said he can now see that his children are being imaginative when they play games on a computer because they effectively are in their 'own little worlds' and therefore it is a creative place. Daniel told a story about watching through the kitchen window as his son Ted was running around outside acting out a Minecraft game he had been playing on his iPod. In Daniel's altered opinion, his son was completely immersed in his own world, informed by earlier experiences from his computer game experiences, and was therefore using his imagination and being creative in this 'place' he had constructed himself (D, MB, 20.8.13).

In this re-story extract, it appeared that Daniel (1970s child) had moved beyond the contemporary discourse regarding children's use of digital technology negatively impacting their imagination which he had initially suggested was the case. Instead, Daniel suggested he could now see his children were creatively acting out their own version of digital games, actively using their imagination just as he had been inspired by Grizzly Adams.

Similar to Bob (1940s child), Cathy (1950s child) and Daniel (1970s child), four-year-old Frank was also a place maker for his imaginative play. Like the examples from earlier generations, Frank's imaginative play was also influenced by the popular culture of his era. During our first conversation, Frank very enthusiastically told me about, and then showed me, his secret places he had constructed in his kindergarten playground. He also told me about and then drew some of his secret places he had constructed in the bushes at home. However, as part of the re-story

check in our last conversation together, Frank changed the focus of his secret place locations from only outside places to include inside cupboards and digital places for play. As seen in this re-story extract, Frank explained why he needed to construct a new ‘secret place’ and how he gained entry to a digital ‘hiding’ place:

During the re-story checking conversation, Frank told me he had to make a new secret place at home because ‘Daddy had cut up all the wood because he thought it was just firewood...but it’s okay because I made a new one in the cupboard.’ (Frank, RC, 18.12.13). Also in Frank’s re-story checking visit, he told me how he was able to use his iPod to create different imaginative play places. Once again his capacity to make his own place was evident when he said he could ‘get inside it...by pressing a special button down the bottom and then I can get everywhere in there...I like to hide inside it behind a tree...I put a seed in there and it grew and then I went in there...so I could play the “Hide from the monsters” game’ (Frank, RC, 18.12.13).

Frank’s (4 year-old-child) re-story extract was notable because it illustrated an example of a contemporary child’s creative adaption to contextual affordances and constraints in the construction of places for imaginative play. In other words, this example showed the re-imagined use of popular culture inspired digital games to construct a place ‘to hide inside [his iPod]...behind a tree’ for imaginative play.

This is an important theme in this study because it challenged the assumptions made in the moral panic about the influence of popular culture on contemporary children’s imaginative play. The re-story extracts illustrated in this theme show historical childhoods were similarly influenced by popular culture in their imaginative play experiences just as contemporary children are today. Although the influence of popular culture can be considered as stable, each historical or contemporary child’s response to that influence was different according to the available affordances of the era, including found objects.

### **5.8. The influence of found objects on imaginative play**

This was the final theme relating to imaginative play practices and places which have remained stable across the past three generations. This theme was significant for this study because the

older participants commonly assumed contemporary children ‘always needed bought things to play with.’ However, despite this common belief, the contemporary children in this study all told stories about their use of ‘found things’ for their imaginative play in ways very similar to the historical children. Both contemporary and historical children told stories of how found objects enabled the enactment of their imaginative play. To illustrate the strong patterns of continuity on the theme of found objects enabling imaginative play across generations, I will first present a re-story extract from Judy (1970s child), followed by Gloria and Bob (1940s children), concluding with a re-story extract from Laura (6 year-old-child).

Judy’s (1970s child) childhood imaginative play has already been mentioned in relation to the secretive ‘Barbie world’ she created with her best friend under the building site. However, what has not been mentioned were the found materials Judy used to enact her imaginative play with Barbie. The following re-story extract described the importance of found materials for Judy’s imaginative play and the unexpected repercussions of this practice across generations:

Judy was ‘allowed’ to set up her imaginary world for her Barbie with a ‘pool, a double storey townhouse and all the extras’ on the concrete steps out the front of their house. The ‘extras’ Judy referred to were in reality a bulldog clip from her Dad’s office for an overnight attaché bag; beer bottle tops for dinner plates; and anything else she could ‘scrounge’ to create her intricate play world for Barbie. ‘On a good day’ Judy could spread all her ‘bits and pieces’ she had made for Barbie on the steps and play there uninterrupted for hours. On a bad day, however, when the weather stopped her from going outside, Judy used ‘half of the dining room table’ as the place to set up her Barbie world. There were many times however her Mother made her pack everything up and move her play to the bedroom (Judy, T&D, 8.5.13). Judy often compared her play with her older daughter Sonya who was frequently overwhelmed with wanting to buy things in front of the Toyworld shelves crammed full of Barbie accessories. However, Judy did not ask for or expect the latest Barbie accessory to be given to her because she preferred to make them herself (Judy, T&D, 8.5.13). Judy continued saying how annoying it was that her daughter ‘dragged all this stuff down’ from her bedroom and spread it out everywhere to play

with ‘all her dolls and stuff’ in the lounge room. A look of realisation spread across Judy’s face as soon as she said this, having just finished recalling how frustrating it was as a child to ‘pack up all her stuff’ whenever her Mum told her to regardless of her deep imaginative play. The silent irony of this was thick in the air as we both looked down at the map of Judy’s play places, ‘Ohh’ Judy said (Judy, MP, 20.5.13).

Judy (1970s child) was proud then and still was about her use of found materials rather than ‘pestering’ for bought play materials as a child. At the beginning of the study, Judy frequently complained about her children’s tendency toward playing with copious amounts of ‘stuff’ and their apparent need for bought toys. However, on further reflection, Judy appeared to become increasingly aware of the similarities between her past play practices and those of her daughter Sonya. This appeared as a turning point for Judy in realizing the continuity of this theme. Of particular interest, Sonya (6 year-old-child) had often commented during the stories she told about the Barbie accessories she made herself and the ‘fairy houses out of boxes’ were made from found materials just as her Mum had done as a child (Sonya, MB, 26.7.13).

Both Bob (1940s child) and Gloria (1940s child) had assumed children today ‘always need bought things to play with’ as Judy (1970s child) had also commented. In thinking about her past places for imaginative play, Gloria declared she had to ‘use [her] imagination because there was nothing there.’ (G, MP, 18.6.13). In this statement, Gloria was referring to the limited manufactured toys to play with during her childhood. This idea was continued in Gloria’s (1940s child) re-story extract when she was describing and drawing her gorsebush cubbies:

‘There were lots of gorsebushes...[in the vacant block]. You’d sort of dig it out and cut these pieces out here and there... all prickles here. And then, we’d put hessian in there so they wouldn’t hurt us. And any old carpet or lino to go on the floor, and we’d put in some rocks where you could sit. And use an old board as a table. It was quite decorated’ (G, T&D, 31.5.13).

Similar to Judy’s (1970s child) and Gloria’s (1940s child) experiences of finding things to use in their imaginative play, Bob (1940s child) was also proud to say he did not need bought toys for his play. One of Bob’s (1940s child) stories explained how he used ‘wads of newspaper’ as a

pretend football, as described in this re-story extract about his imaginative play experiences compared with children today:

Over the past few months Bob and I have had many conversations about his opinion on the difference between childhoods in the past and more current childhood experiences. Bob saw the difference to be particularly about today's children having copious amounts of manufactured toys in comparison to when he was a boy. Bob's childhood was embedded in a time of great social upheaval and adaptation in Australia due firstly to the Depression, followed quickly by the Second World War. His childhood in the 1940s was one of using whatever you could find to play with and 'making do' in comparison, he felt, with today's children who have everything 'given to them' without having to find or create their own play materials. One great example Bob gave was when he played footy in the front driveway as a young boy, he used 'scrunched up wads of newspaper' for his football. It was not until many years later before he was given a 'real' cricket bat, which Bob cuddled in bed he was so excited to receive such a present (B, MP, 21.6.13).

Bob's (1940s child) re-story extract shed some light on the underlying feelings adults (particularly grandparents) appeared to hold in relation to their childhood experiences with found materials. Bob's comments about having to 'make do' seemed to be linked to the valued childhood dispositions of persistence and creative problem solving. Indeed, these seemed to be common traits of a 'good childhood' as viewed through the historical lens of a 1940s child according to Bob's stories. When Bob and Gloria (1940s children) and Judy (1970s child) compared their childhood experiences with children today, they considered these important traits to have 'disappeared' in more recent times. In particular, they considered contemporary children's imaginative play to be 'less than' the imaginative play they experienced as children.

Although Gloria (1940s child) commonly compared her childhood imaginative play with children today, she did, however, add an exception saying her own grandchildren often 'picked up stones' on the way home to collect for their play. In fact, on reflection, she noted they often found things to play with in their backyard such as using the wood in the woodpile for their

cubbies. Similarly, Bob's grandson Ted (7 year- old-child) proudly told a story about making his own Minecraft sword from a painted paling fence board (T, MB, 27.8.13). Unfortunately for Ted, his Mum threw his sword away thinking it was 'just a piece of wood' and had not realised its significance to Ted. In another contemporary child's imaginative play experiences, Laura (6 year old child) also challenged common adult assumptions about contemporary imaginative play in her use of found materials.

Profoundly similar to Gloria's (1940s child) imaginative play experience of using found materials, Laura's (6 year-old-child) places for imaginative play were full of found materials. Laura's stories about her cubby building have already been mentioned previously in this chapter in illustrating the importance of constructing these places to Laura and her younger brother. However, in this theme, what was especially significant was how they worked hard together to construct this 'hidden' place by using discarded objects from home combined with other found materials in their garden (L, T&D, 5.6.13). Laura's description of her 'little nest cubby' demonstrated the continuity of this theme of using found materials in the enactment of imaginative play across generations. Laura's story was embedded in her re-story extract:

'Once I found like a little cubby, and it was near the driveway going up. And I found some bricks to make like stairs to go up a tree and step in there and I found a ladder and a chair...and it didn't have any legs on it. So I put it on a branch that I liked to sit on and then I put the ladder on there so I could climb up and sit on there...it was like a very old tree and it's near the gates where we shut the drive way and then we had to open it...there's like a little nest made up of all lots of sticks in it...Me and my brother play there and I found it first and there's like a little nest and my brother climbed up it and sat in there. And I asked him if it was comfortable and he said it was. Yeah, 'cos I really like to explore stuff and make new things' (L, T&D, 5.6.13).

This story from Laura's (6 year-old-child) re-story extract clearly illustrated a contemporary child's use of found materials in the enactment of their imaginative play. While Laura told many stories throughout the study, this one was particularly important because of the way she used found materials in a new combination to create her 'place' for imaginative play. Laura's comment about exploring and making 'new things' was also an indication of the creative acts

they were engaged in within this place for imaginative play. Interestingly, towards the end of our memory box conversation, Laura mentioned she planned to take an iPod up into her nest cubby so she could ‘play a secret game’ while she was up there. She was especially interested in the secrecy surrounding the ritual of gaining access to an iPod, saying she would not tell anyone her secret way ‘into’ the iPod (L, MB, 4.8.13). Laura’s story showed a contemporary child’s use of found materials blending with digital technology as an available affordance within her context. While Laura’s proposed use of digital technology may appear different to other generations, each generation blended the contextual affordances of their era into their imaginative play. For example, Judy’s (1970s child) use of Barbie as an element of 1970s popular culture was blended together with her found materials to enable her imaginative play. Similarly, Bob’s (1940s child) use of 1940s cricket and football heroes was blended with his use of found and adapted materials to enable the enactment of his imaginative play. However, the strongest indication of stability in this theme was most noticeable in comparing Laura’s (6 year-old-child) and Gloria’s (1940s child) choice and use of found materials in the construction of their imaginative play ‘cubby’ places. Both children used discarded things from home – Gloria found old carpet, lino and hessian, while Laura found an old ladder, broken chair and bricks. And both children used these found materials in combination with natural materials – Laura used the old fig tree and its stick nest in the branches as the base for her cubby building, while Gloria cut back the prickly branches in the gorsebushes for her cubby construction.

These re-story extracts relating to the theme of found objects illustrated another example of imaginative play practices and places which have remained stable across the past three generations. Historical children ‘proudly’ stated they did not need bought objects for their imaginative play. It seemed to these participants that this important characteristic of their childhood had disappeared in contemporary childhoods. However, despite cultural constraints of safety and regulation, contemporary children were also able to make creative use of found objects as affordances in very similar ways to historical children in their imaginative play.

## **5.9. Summary**

This chapter has illuminated the seven themes relating to imaginative play practices and places which have remained stable across generations. The participant re-story extracts which have been presented in this chapter have suggested an understanding of the enactment of imaginative play by both contemporary and historical children who were consistently attempting to construct

‘enclosures’ to enable a feeling of ‘my own place’ in some form to enact their imaginative play. Contemporary and historical children valued emotional safety rather than physical safety in the enactment of imaginative play, whilst their creativity was clearly evident in their adaption of affordances and manipulation of constraints wherever and however possible in their imaginative play. Both contemporary and historical children illustrated the importance of making choices around who was included and who was excluded in the places they constructed for imaginative play; and in both time periods, the children were seen to blend popular culture and found materials in new combinations to enable the enactment of their imaginative play.

In addressing the research question so far, the findings presented in this chapter could be viewed as simply illustrating the continuity of cultural practices: that children’s imaginative play has fundamentally not changed over time. However, in Chapter Six I describe the ways in which this stability persists simultaneously with changing aspects of children’s imaginative play over time. Contextual affordances and constraints are shown in Chapter Six to influence the parameters of children’s imaginative play, so that change is an integral element impacting the enactment of imaginative play over time while existing alongside continuity. In Chapter Seven, I bring together the findings presented in the present chapter and in Chapter Six in order to build a focal theory on contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play. In the following chapter, I will present further re-story extracts to illustrate examples of the three themes in which imaginative play practices and places can be seen to have changed across the past three generations.



## **Chapter Six: Finding Two: The changes in imaginative play practices and places across generations**

### **6.1. Introduction**

In the previous chapter, the first key finding illustrating the continuity of imaginative play practices and places was presented. In this chapter, I will present the second key finding which will describe how this continuity persists simultaneously with elements of children's imaginative play which have changed over time. Contextual affordances and constraints will be shown in this chapter to influence children's imaginative play, so that both change and continuity will be seen as integral elements in an understanding of the enactment of imaginative play. The second key finding was:

There were three imaginative play practices and places which have changed across the past three generations.

The analysis of the meanings of historical and contemporary children's experiences of imaginative play identified three themes around imaginative play practices and places which have changed across generations. These three themes were:

1. The availability and accessibility of places for imaginative play;
2. The degree of privacy sought for imaginative play;
3. The use of toys in the private and public performance of imaginative play.

I will now present each of these themes in turn with re-story extracts from participants in order to provide temporal, societal and place-based context to support the identification of this finding and continue to answer the research question.

### **6.2. The availability and accessibility of places for imaginative play**

This theme on the availability and accessibility of places for imaginative play demonstrated a distinct difference in the meanings of imaginative play experiences across generations. The comparison between the historical childhood narratives of freely roaming, independently mobile children and the relatively restricted contemporary imaginative play places of the children in this study has accentuated the dramatic shift in this theme. All the parents spoke of the

dichotomy they strongly felt in wanting their children to have the ‘freedom’ they had in their choice of play places. However, despite this strong pull they would not allow their children to go beyond their fences. Similarly, all of the grandparents spoke of their ‘idyllic childhood’ roaming ‘safely’ wherever they wanted in comparison to their view of the ‘confined’ and overly protected childhoods of their grandchildren. In relation to the children’s attitude to their play place range, one child mentioned wanting to ‘jump the fence’ while the youngest child considered you could get hurt if you were ‘too close’ to the fence. To illustrate the changes in availability and accessibility of places for imaginative play across the past three generations I will first present re-story extracts from Bob (1940s child), followed by Daniel and briefly Felicity (1970s children), and then Sonya (6 year-old-child) and her little sister, Gabrielle (4 year-old-child).

Over the course of the study, Bob (1940s child) spoke with heightened feelings about his imaginative play places in the back acres under the pine trees; high up the oak tree; and, some distance from home down ‘under’ the road. During our memory box conversation, another adventurous place for imaginative play emerged in Bob’s stories he had not previously mentioned:

Although Bob had told me many stories about spending so much time inside looking after his younger siblings that he was an expert in bathing babies, he also spoke of many places outside where he played in an antithesis of this responsible 1940s child. For example, he spoke about some risky places he played as a child, venturing down into the clay mines opposite their farm. ‘Of course, we were going to climb down into there!’ he said, suggesting such a place was inevitably inviting children’s exploration. I asked Bob if his parents were worried about him playing in a place like this. Bob said they probably would not have minded but then again he noted he was careful not to tell them ‘how often’ they went there. So, perhaps in reality the mines were a hidden place for adventurous play – maybe the boys were exploring the secret tunnels and caves in an imagined re-enactment of Rudyard Kipling’s *Kidnapped* Bob said he had read. Whatever the children were imagining as they scrambled to find the entrance into the network of

mines or crawling through the water pipes under the road, these were clearly dangerous places for children's play (B, MB, 8.8.13).

In this re-story extract, Bob's (1940s child) assumption that children will 'of course' want to go into risky, adventurous and dangerous places to play was an interesting point to note. Bob seemed more troubled about parents today over-protecting their children than about children playing in dangerous places. To emphasise this, Bob said he had not been concerned that his son Daniel (1970s child) was 'out there doing mad things' when he was a child. It is also interesting because Bob realised he did not tell his parents what he was 'really' doing in the mines and climbing through drains, and did not want them to know the full extent of this dangerous play. While historical children were considered 'safe' in their independent roaming in the past, it appeared in many situations they were not physically safe in the places they chose to play. Not surprisingly, Bob's son Daniel (1970s child) told very similar stories to his father Bob (1940s child) about the places he chose to explore for his imaginative play as a child.

Daniel's (1970s child) childhood imaginative play places constructed and hidden amongst the swampy wetlands in the middle of the bush have already been mentioned in the previous chapter. In addition to these places, Daniel's adventurous play in the derelict mines some distance from home were also important places within his range of accessible and available play places. Daniel's intense emotional attachment to these places was clear when he said he had the 'most fun childhood' playing in the swamp, the bush and the mines. However, what is of particular interest to this theme is Daniel's fluctuating attitude from his own adventures to his children's play place experiences. This comparison was especially stark in the following re-story extract when Daniel understood the irresistibility of adventurous places to children however, would not entertain his own children being able to play in any of these places:

'You weren't allowed to go in, but we found a way!' Daniel said with a look of triumph on his face as he told me about playing in the old derelict mines, tunnels and buildings. This was one of the 'dangerous' places Daniel played in as a child, saying 'Try telling kids they aren't allowed in there.' Daniel suggested these places were 'an absolute adventure' and held an 'irresistible attraction' to children for play. This was a place Daniel's parents apparently knew he was playing in but were not concerned for his safety - believing he was responsible

enough to play there. However, as a parent himself, Daniel said he would not be happy at all for his own children to play in or around the old mines or the swamps because he ‘knows so much more now.’ Is it that parenting styles have changed so much now, or is it that children are not considered as responsible as they were in the past? Why are places for adventurous imaginative play in the 1970s seen as so much more dangerous now? The notion of children’s changing level of responsibility was made even more obvious when Daniel talked about the gun license he held as a young child. Daniel was not happy at the prospect of his children handling or using guns at a similar age ‘Are you joking?’ he said (D, T&D, 6.6.13).

Daniel’s (1970s child) suggestion here that these adventurous places were ‘irresistible’ to children is reminiscent of Bob’s (1940s child) attitude that ‘of course’ children would want to play in these risky places. Remarkably, the similarities between Daniel and Bob extend to the inclusion of ‘old mines’ as imaginative play places in their respective childhoods. Also similar, both Bob and Daniel’s parents were reportedly ‘not concerned’ for their children’s safety in these play places. As a consequence, no changes in the availability and accessibility of play places for imaginative play were evident at this stage in the study between the 1940s and the 1970s historical childhoods. However, unlike Daniel’s father Bob, Daniel said he would not allow his children to play in these ‘dangerous’ places, thereby reinforcing the well documented decline in the physical range of childhood play places between the 1970s and 2010s. Daniel was noticeably reflective when he verbalised the marked difference between his children’s experiences of adventurous play compared with the ‘absolute adventure’ he and his father had as young children in an actual mine. Daniel talked about the times when his son Ted was playing digital games on his iPod such as Minecraft and Ninjago: seemingly aware of the similarities and the differences in Ted’s places for play. Interestingly, the online marketing for Ninjago states, ‘If you are an adventurer always looking for a new challenge then this is the place for you in the deep dark caves and tunnels underground.’ It is easy to see why this marketing slogan would attract Ted’s attention for adventurous, imaginative play.

Felicity (1970s child) also commented on the marked difference in the range of available and accessible places for her children today in comparison to her experiences, as seen in the brief story embedded in Felicity’s re-story extract:

‘I’m not sure if it was just from Mum or just the time, but it was just ‘get outside and play...come back when you’re hungry’ kind of thing, whereas, my kids are hungry every five minutes so they don’t go far enough to have to come back...it has changed you don’t want it to have changed but it has. They are very much at home, we’re on an acre and it’s a big block for the kids to play in. I say, I don’t want to know where you are in the block, don’t climb the fence though, go off and I’m happy not to be able to see you if I know that you are here and not gone anywhere...and you’re under the trees or climbing the branch or whatever...digging in the sandpit and the cubby [close to the house]. So long as they have not climbed the fence, I don’t want them to be “stay here for ten minutes and stay here and now we should organize this.” I’d much rather they come up with their own ideas to play with’ (F, MP, 12.6.13).

Felicity’s (1970s child) constant reminders to her children not to ‘climb the fence’, as seen in this brief story, is testament to the changes in accessible play places over the past generation. Although Felicity says she did not want to accept that changes had occurred since she was a child making a secret place up a tree in a vacant block some distance from home, she had to admit her children were confined to playing ‘very much at home.’ With this increasing awareness, sometime later Felicity again compared her experiences with her own children during our memory box conversation. This time, she offered an explanation for the changes that had occurred in contemporary children’s imaginative play, and then a different narrative when she was cognisant of her children’s private play:

Felicity lamented that although she didn’t want there to be change, however, in just one generation there seems to be so much change with parents tending to ‘tell their children where and what to play’ on a regular basis – not allowing them time to develop their own imaginative play. Felicity continued saying this was because ‘we have become so time poor things do need to be labelled for that time and that time and that time...and it’s as if children need direction for what to do in that small period of time...’ Having made these comments, Felicity concluded this conversation saying ‘But I still listen to my boys and I

hear them in the lounge room, and if you just butt out and stand back and they don't know that you can hear them or watch them, they come up with some absolute beauties, situations and environments and you know, scenarios in their imaginative play' (F, MB, 10.9.13).

Felicity's (1970s child) re-story extract provided an insight into the thinking processes of a parent who was watching the contemporary changes in children's imaginative play around her. Felicity concluded these changes had occurred because parents today not only want to know where their children were all the time, but they 'tell their children where and what to play' because of a lack of time to allow children to develop their own play themes. In contrast to this however, Felicity noted her own children were capable of highly imaginative play when firstly, they did not know you were listening, and secondly, when they were away from adult intervention. Felicity realised this was possible even if the children were restricted to staying within the fence line.

Dramatic changes in children's access and availability for places to enact their imaginative play were starting to become evident in the study through the stories told by grandparents and parents, and then comparing these stories with those told by contemporary children.

In the previous chapter, Sonya's (6 year-old-child) imaginative play places at school were discussed, especially those in the playground corner adjacent to the old peppercorn tree. An important part of Sonya's play experience at school were the school rules dictating where children were allowed to go in the playground, such as, not playing on the oval and not playing in designated areas for particular age groups. Sonya was very aware of these rules and often spoke of them as she guided me around the school during her afterschool care time. Similarly, Sonya told stories of her imaginative play places at home and where she could and could not play:

In our early conversations, Sonya often talked of playing with her younger sister Gabrielle at home, even though she could be annoying when she wanted to play with Sonya's Pet Shops at the same time. She talked about hiding under the table in the lounge room with Gabrielle; hiding behind the curtains with the spiders with skinny legs and Gabrielle; and, most of all, she talked about playing with Trash Packs

and Mushi Monsters on top of the dining room table or in their bedroom with Gabrielle. With a note of continuity, Sonya mentioned that she and Gabrielle had to play with their Trash Packs in their bedroom because she ‘couldn’t leave them on the table because my Mum uses the table.’ Outside in their small backyard was a built cubby, but as it was constantly filled with bikes and other household objects it didn’t provide any space for imaginative play. Sophie sighed and said ‘we don’t really play in it anymore’ (Sonya, T&D, 29.5.13).

In examining this re-story extract, it appeared Sonya (6 year-old-child) did not have many choices for available places for imaginative play within the fence line of her home. Similar to Scott’s (6 year-old-child) experience with his adult- built cubby house, Sonya’s built cubby did not allow any space for imaginative play. In the same way, inside her home, it also appeared Sonya’s choices were restricted to her bedroom with the occasional venture into the lounge room to find ‘hiding’ and play places for imaginative play. Ironically, Sonya and her sister were told to move their play materials from the table in a way very similar to Judy’s (1970s child) own experience when she set up her Barbie world on the dining table. These limitations on the availability and accessibility of imaginative play places were even more pronounced when Sonya suggested during our memory box conversation that she ‘did not have time’ to play at home:

During our conversations, Sonya had told many stories about her highly imaginative play at school. This was especially apparent in her stories about how she and her friends decide on new make-believe scenarios on a continually evolving basis for their pretend play. So I was surprised when Sonya said that although ‘Monster High dolls’ were probably what she loved to play with most at home and although she felt driven to read all the *BillieBBrown* chapter books she ‘loved them so much’, she admitted she rarely had time to do so. In fact, she said, she ‘didn’t have time’ to do anything much at home except watch television. Sonya had mentioned she was not allowed to use her mother’s computer to play any games, and so the television seemed to be her only access to popular culture apart from the dolls she had asked her mother to buy. Sonya admitted she ‘forgot all about all the other

stuff to do' when she was 'watching TV' and thought it was 'much better' than doing other things at home. I asked Sonya if she used her imagination when watching television, but she didn't think so except for the show about 'kids who are able to fly like a cat and a rabbit' (Sonya, MB, 26.7.13).

Sonya's statement in this re-story extract about her preference for television watching in contrast to playing pretend occurred late into our third conversational interview. Although Sonya's disclosure seemed incongruous to her highly developed imaginative play she had told me about at school, this occurrence may well be linked to Felicity's (1970s child) proposition around time poor parents needing to direct their children's play. In particular, Sonya's inability to find available places to spread out her dolls and 'fairy houses' she had made suggested watching television was a convenient way to 'escape' into another world from the adult-directed lounge room. Nonetheless, Sonya's range of accessible and available places for imaginative play can be seen to be limited to some inside places at home and in corners of the playground at school. Sonya's younger sister Gabrielle also had significant stories to tell which demonstrated the difference between the present and past generations' access to and availability of play places.

Gabrielle's (4 year-old-child) re-story extract further illustrated the limited physical range of available and accessible places for young children's imaginative play, and in particular their attitude to the places they can play:

Issues around safety appear to be well ingrained in Gabrielle's thinking about her play spaces, clearly articulated in her statement 'when you goes outside you need to be careful...' (Gabrielle, MP, 9.8.13). Not only was Gabrielle able to inform me about the safety concerns relating to the broken cubby with the sign that said 'STOP' whenever I visited her early childhood centre, but she often spoke about the small tree in the playground that needed to be 'roped' so that it did not 'fall down and bop you on the head' (Gabrielle, MP, 9.8.13). In another conversation when Gabrielle was taking multiple photos of her playground places, I asked her if she sometimes played along the fence line behind the bushy shrubs. This was a place I would imagine



children in this small exposed playground would hide in however Gabrielle's negative response surprised me. 'Nooo,' Gabrielle stated quickly 'some people going to get wire there and hurt them.' It seems Gabrielle transferred this risk-averse attitude to other places when she said she needed to 'tiptoe tiptoe' in case she 'tripped over the grass' in the park close by their house when her mother took her there, and that she could only climb the fallen down tree where it was 'a little bit down.' Trees, it would appear, have become a dangerous place in Gabrielle's life in contrast with her Granny's Jill's tree climbing adventures many years previously. I wonder where these strong views on danger, safety and fear of trees have come from. Were they embedded in the early childhood centre within their regulations and policies; or was it from her home environment where her Mum had admitted she was 'not a fan of the tree climb' (Gabrielle, MP, 9.8.13).

Despite Gabrielle (4 year-old-child) being the youngest participant in the study, her heightened sense of risk aversion was well established as evident in this re-story extract. It was also evident how these feelings of fear impacted on Gabrielle's imaginative play and the places it was enacted. As a consequence, the choices Gabrielle made as to where to enact her imaginative play were even more limited by the restrictions she imposed on herself, such as not too close to the wire fence, not too close to the broken cubby, and definitely not too close to the small tree in the playground in case it fell down and 'bopped' her on the head.

The historical children in this study appeared to have had unlimited opportunities for the creation of 'spaces' to become 'places' for imaginative play, ranging from far from home to close to their houses to inside their homes. While some historical children suggested 'there was no space for a place' inside their homes, they had many other available and accessible choices of imaginative play places. For most of these contemporary children, the availability and accessibility to a range of places for imaginative play appeared to be markedly different when compared to that of their parents and their grandparents. This may have been due to societal changes around the perceived need for adults to have increased, overt supervision and control of children and their play. As a consequence, contemporary children needed to be alert to opportunities in reconstructing any available space into a place for imaginative play. Therefore, these children needed to make places for imaginative play wherever they could find or construct

a place inside and outside their homes and educational settings, as long as it was ‘inside the fences’. The changes in children’s available and accessible places for imaginative play have occurred since the 1970s. Since then, contemporary children have needed to be flexible and adaptable in making choices about where their imaginative play could be enacted, compared to the historical children who had many available and accessible spaces from which to choose.

### **6.3. The degree of privacy sought for imaginative play**

The degree of privacy sought for imaginative play was the second theme involving imaginative practices and places which had changed across the past three generations. In this theme, privacy appeared to have become increasingly heightened toward secrecy from the 1970s to current times. In Chapter Two I highlighted van Manen and Levering’s (1997) work in which they had defined privacy and secrecy from a child’s use of the terms. Privacy was therefore defined as the child’s purposeful separation from others, while secrecy referred to the need to keep their play secret from someone else or with someone else. Van Manen and Levering (1997) also concluded that privacy was a precursor to secrecy, so therefore the need for privacy would always come first. During our conversations, the majority of the 1970s children and 2010s children mentioned some variation of secrecy needed for the enactment of their imaginative play. As a consequence of this, I had expected the 1930s to 1950s children to mention secrecy too, assuming it was a stable theme throughout the study. However, none of the grandparents mentioned the need for secrecy at all. While they did say they wanted to have private and hidden imaginative play places, secrecy was not deemed necessary for their imaginative play.

Therefore, the degree of privacy can be seen to be a theme in which change had occurred across generations. To illustrate the shift from privacy toward secrecy in imaginative play practices and places, I will present re-story extracts from Gloria (1940s child) followed by Felicity (1970s child) and then, Ted (7 year-old-child) and Frank (4 year-old-child).

Gloria’s (1940s child) construction of her gorsebush cubbies has been shown in Chapter Five to be linked to her feelings of emotional safety within her imaginative play places. Of particular interest to this theme, however, were Gloria’s comments about her parent’s knowledge of where her cubbies were and the imaginative play she enacted there. The place Gloria had chosen to construct her ‘hidden’ cubbies was just across the paddocks and not far from home, as Gloria explained:

This 'magic place' Gloria said was protected from invasion by other children with a network of 'shouted codes' to each other across the paddock, however despite this protection ritual they did not worry if their parents came to visit their cubbies (G, MP, 18.6.13). As Gloria drew her cubbies in the vacant blocks she explained 'our parents could virtually see you because there were so many paddocks and the houses were sort of spread out so they could see you. There were streets like that, we were here, and another street there...and the cubbies were here. There wasn't a lot of houses, still a lot of vacant blocks. Yeah, the adults always knew where we were, they often came down with things to eat and things like that' (G, T&D, 31.5.13). Gloria also mentioned one of the advantages of this childhood play place in the past was that they 'never had the worries of having to be home before dark' because they knew the neighbours would always 'look after you.' For Gloria, being watched by the neighbours was one of the things of the past she has lamented its loss. Gloria commented she felt it was a very different situation for her 'confined' grandchildren today who only had their own backyard to play in rather than wandering in paddocks (G, T&D, 31.5.13).

Similar to Jill (1930s child) and Bob (1940s child), Gloria said her parents 'always knew where we were' (G, T&D, 31.5.13). Although Gloria talked about the need to protect her cubbies from other children, she was not concerned when her parents 'often' visited their cubbies. Gloria said her parents sometimes came to watch them perform songs, look at the garden they had made around the cubby entrance and her mother frequently brought them 'things to eat'. Glenda adamantly declared she was hiding from other children in their 'hidden' constructions rather than her parents. Also similar to Jill (1930s child) and Bob (1940s child), Gloria (1940s child) often mentioned how safe she felt knowing the 'neighbours' were watching her as much as her parents. Of particular interest however, Gloria did note in her re-story checking conversational interview that although her parents 'knew where she was' in reality 'there was always somewhere to go to have a private place for play in the past'. Once again she compared this with her grandchildren whose lives she said were 'constantly being watched' (G, RC, 14.12.13).

However, this sense of being ‘watched’ was not something the following generation of children wanted, as seen in Felicity’s re-story extract:

Felicity introduced the idea of constructing her own imaginative play place very quickly into our first conversation when she told a story about the ‘secret club house’ she created with her two younger cousins up a tree. Felicity clearly recollected the place and the play as she drew the tree saying, ‘So this was bush and we played in there...there was a tree that was a great climbing tree that had quite a low branch that you could sit in and we pretended it was a house...We always knew it was there, but we felt like we discovered this place’ (F, T&D, 17.5.13). Felicity continued this story by talking about their ‘other’ secret club house hidden subversively under her mattress on top of her bunk bed. Although Felicity said it was ‘embarrassing now’ to talk about, her stories were full of descriptive and emotive words associated with their imaginative play. Although Felicity shared a bedroom and a bunk with her older sister she was able to use this space to make another ‘secret place’. Felicity explained the special and secret ritual to gain entry into the bunk bed secret club house, saying ‘We used to have to climb up from the bottom bunk...I had one plank was loose at one end, so for the secret meeting, you used to have to come in and stand on the bottom bunk and push the mattress up with one hand and move the plank across and climb up that way.’ This entry ritual had to be modified after Felicity became stuck in the bunk bed one night on her descent down via the ‘secret club house’ way. On calling her parents for help, she was told not to play on her bunk bed anymore, so the children decided to change their location to ‘under the bed’ and carry on regardless (F, T&D, 17.5.13).

Felicity’s (1970s child) impulse toward secrecy in her imaginative play was clearly seen in this re-story extract. Here, Felicity’s desire to be away from the gaze of her parents and older siblings was an important reason for the construction of her secret places. Unlike the previous generation, Felicity and her cousins explicitly enacted their imaginative play in hidden and secret locations with detailed secret rituals for entry wherein adults were not welcome. Although

‘embarrassing now’ as an adult looking back on her play experiences, Felicity’s childhood secret imaginative play was designed to subvert her parent’s concern for physical safety by ‘carry[ing] on regardless’ of adult rules and regulations about play practices and places.

Similar to Felicity (1970s child), Ted (7 year-old-child) did not want adults to know about his secretive imaginative play – at home or at school. Initially, Ted had spent much of our time together talking about Pokémon and playing football on the school oval (T, T&D, 17.6.13). After some time, Ted’s storytelling shifted to include a story about how he had originally used blankets around the edge of his bunk bed to create a hidden private place where he and his younger sister had played with their teddies and blankets. Later, Ted said he used the same technique with blankets but this time he took his iPod into this place he had constructed at night so he could continue playing in secret and uninterrupted by others:

When I asked Ted where he played with his iPod he told me he took it sometimes into his room and other times he played games on the couch. However, despite this being in plain view, Ted said that ‘no one watches me, just me’ so it was a private form of play. Further to this idea of privacy, was another conversation I had with Ted which was especially enlightening when he said that he made a ‘secret cubby’ with blankets around his bunk bed so he could sneak his iPod into his room ‘to play it in the night’. A different sort of secret place for a virtual secret place it would seem. Ted said his parents had seen him playing at night saying ‘Mum’s only seen me once but my Dad saw me once too’ so he decided to hide his iPod further under his blankets if his parents were close by (T, MB, 27.8.13). Later I asked Ted how he felt when he was playing the online games hiding behind the blanket and he said it felt ‘very warm and adventurous...and exciting.’ Ted said the reason why he put up the blanket was so ‘it is different’ and that it helps make the ‘space a bit more bigger and people can’t see’ what he was doing (T, RC, 12.12.13).

Ted’s (7 year-old-child) re-story extract illustrated his perceived need for secrecy to play his online game and the creative strategies he adopted to protect this play and this place. From Ted’s re-story extract it seemed it was important to him to find a place where he was able to

play secretly and imaginatively within these online spaces in his ‘own world’ without adult interruption. In this way, this play allowed Ted to be in charge of his imaginative play and the places he enacted this play. It was particularly noteworthy that Ted felt he was having a meaningful adventure when playing secretly within this digital space. When Ted said he was playing online on the couch in the lounge room, it seemed to be a version of being ‘hidden in plain sight’ for contemporary private and then secret imaginative play. It was interesting that Ted considered no one to be watching him even though he was playing his games in public. One other story Ted told about imaginative play, which was relevant to this study, concerned the ‘secret spot’ he showed me in his semi-rural, highly treed school playground. I had asked Ted if there were any places for imaginative play at school, and he replied he used to play pretend games when he was in Prep but not anymore because he was so much older now. However, towards the end of our tour around the bushy edge of the oval, Ted appeared to have changed his mind about revealing some information about his current pretend play as seen in the following brief story embedded in his re-story extract:

‘I don’t really know...but sometimes I do play over there...that’s the other place I hide. That’s our secret spot, secret stuff sometimes happens here and there...It’s not just mine...its mine and my friends, and it’s actually a tree...sometimes we play Assassin there...’ (T, T&D, 17.6.13).

Following on from this disclosure, Ted suggested the teachers thought the children were ‘just playing football’ on the oval up the back of the school, when in reality they were running back and forth across the oval between secret bases in an secret strategic game of Assassin (T, T&D, 17.6.13). In this way, Ted and his friends were able to successfully create another form of being ‘hidden in plain sight’ to enact imaginative play which was a secret with his few friends, but a secret from adults and other peers.

This theme of increasing secrecy was also seen in Frank’s (4 year-old-child) creation of secret places. Frank said he constructed his ‘secret places’ inside in his bedroom, outside in the garden at home as well as outside in his kindergarten playground. His heightened capacity to construct these places was evident in Frank’s re-story extract:

Frank’s stories about his multiple secret places at Kindergarten were quickly coming forth when he said ‘that’s my secret place...and that’s

my secret place too...I made it up...because I like to hide away' (Frank, T&D, 31.5.13). I was quite amazed that he even used the term 'secret place' as he did considering I had simply asked where he played pretend at Kinder. I was also amazed that he appeared to be happy to tell me about these private and secret places, even the one he had made at home. I'm not sure if other children at Kindergarten shared these secret places, but I have the impression that this was not the case because Frank did not tell me about them until the other children had left. At home however, Frank said there was a specific place that he 'made' together with a close friend because they decided that it was a 'good place to have a secret place.' Frank said they could 'go from down the bottom here and up to the top' as he drew a picture of the place he made and the entrance into this place. The concept of secrecy appears to be especially important for Frank, in that 'nobody comes in here' to his place where he likes to 'go everyday' (Frank, T&D, 31.5.13).

Frank's (4 year-old-child) re-story extract confirmed the strong impulse in childhoods both past and present toward constructing their 'own places' for imaginative play. This continuity was also evident in Frank's need for quiet, uninterrupted and private places for imaginative play, which he labelled as 'secret places.' When I asked Frank if anyone had shown him how or where to make secret places he replied he had 'made it' himself. Of further significance, both Frank's mother, Felicity (1970s child) and brother Scott (6 year-old-child) had also made 'secret places' and as such, it would appear this cultural practice had been passed down across generations. Frank's need for secrecy was reinforced when he only appeared comfortable to tell, and then show me his 'secret places' in his kindergarten playground when the other children had left for the day. Frank's need to construct his own secret imaginative play places were also confirmed in his story about making a 'secret place' with his friend, on his own in his bedroom, and as discussed in Chapter Five, where he talked about 'hiding behind a tree' online inside his iPod in a very similar way to the secret places he had shown me in his Kindergarten playground.

Privacy has been mentioned in Chapter Five as a critical attribute to the enactment of imaginative play practices and places which had remained stable across generations. Although the grandparents stated they were not concerned about being 'watched' as children, it was

becoming increasingly apparent through their stories that their multiple available choices assisted in the location of private places. It was interesting too, that all the grandparents noted how ‘watched’ their grandchildren were now, and that they saw this as a negative shift in the modern construct of childhood. However, an increasing need for secrecy for imaginative play beyond privacy appears to have changed and subsequently escalated since the 1970s onwards. Many reasons may have contributed to this apparent rise in children’s need for secrecy in their imaginative play practices and places. One reason may have been the increasingly overt supervision of children as the postmodern era of risk aversion became more apparent, to which children responded by becoming more secretive about their private imaginative play. For contemporary children, however, the choice of where to construct secret places for imaginative play had become increasingly restricted and so required more adaptations and creativity to maintain the secrecy of their imaginative play. As a consequence, contemporary children appeared to be looking for a different form of place to be construed as a secret place, and have become increasingly skilled at the construction of places which were ‘hidden in plain sight’.

#### **6.4. The use of toys in the private and public performance of imaginative play**

The final theme in this chapter on imaginative play practices and places which have changed across generations related to the use of purchased toys in children’s private and public performance of imaginative play. This was a complex theme because it was closely linked to the adult ‘gatekeepers’ who have purchased children’s toys together with the children’s agency in their knowledge of imaginative play. It is also closely related to the popular culture of each era and the influence of peer cultures as cultural affordances, and/or constraints for imaginative play. From the stories the historical and contemporary children told, it appeared the toys adults have bought for children had changed across generations. Subsequently, where and how these toys have been used for their imaginative play had also changed accordingly. Further to this, however, was the difference across generations between the use of toys in children’s private imaginative play to that of their public performance of imaginative play. To show this difference and change across generations I will present re-story extracts from Jill (1930s child), then Judy (1970s child), followed by Sonya (6 year-old-child) and Georgia (4 year-old-child).

When Jill (1930s child) was a small child, her parents bought her a china doll with curly blonde hair just like the 1930s movie star Shirley Temple. Jill still had this doll, though in pieces because her daughter had broken it while ‘secretly’ playing with it outside many years ago. For



Christmas one year, Jill's grandmother bought her a tea-set. Jill still had it and proudly showed me a photo of this tea-set. Throughout her childhood, the tea-set had been locked away in a cupboard until it was requested for use by Jill on special occasions. Jill said she was allowed to use the tea-set 'inside' when she was 'pretending to be a lady' practising having cups of tea with her friends in the 'best front room' just like her mother did. Both the broken doll and the intact tea-set featured highly in Jill's memory box conversational interview with me; however, Jill had initially told me stories around her 'domestic play' with her sisters as seen in the following re-story extract:

Their 'domestic' play was particularly evident in the lean-to 'make do' cubby the three sisters put together in their Father's woodshed in the backyard. In this public place, the girls creatively used left over objects and materials their mother had discarded from inside their house, making their own child-sized version of 'home' where cleaning the house with small child-sized brooms, tea parties and crying babies dominated. At other times, Jill and Eleanor re-arranged stumps of firewood to make their own restaurant under the clothes line, using their imagination in serving biscuits from the pantry and 'tea' from glass cordial bottles provided by their mother. Imaginative play also featured very highly in the 'grand dress-up parades' on the back of their Father's truck tray parked in the centre of the backyard – once again under the clothes line, much to their mother's dismay – where flocks of neighbourhood girls earnestly practiced their Queen of the Town competition curtsies. Jill said playing with dolls and dressing-up was 'very, very popular with all the girls in town' (J, T&D, 6.5.13).

For Jill (1930s child), this form of 'domestic' imaginative play was an extremely public affair – acted out in front of her parents and other children in their 'best front room', in an open 'lean-to' cubby, under the clothes line, and paraded on the back of the truck. Jill's re-story extract illustrated how adults in the 1930s encouraged (or manipulated) their daughters' pretend play to be publically performed, filled with elements of domestic play through the toys they bought and provided for their use. It was interesting that these were the stories Jill told me first when she spoke about her 'idyllic' childhood. The stories Jill told about her public performance of domestic-orientated imaginative play appear to be manifestations of an adult expectation of

what imaginative play ‘should’ look like from a 1930s perspective. Consequently, these stories contained the toys bought by adults to perpetuate this form of imaginative play in children. However, in contrast with this, Jill’s story of private imaginative play practices and places up her apricot tree and in a river boat demonstrated how she had pushed back against these strong messages of societal expectation and was able to create her own imaginative play. While Jill was able to engage in a different form of private imaginative play in comparison to her public play, the basis of Jill’s private play was still aligned with her public performance of imaginative play. For example, practicing dressing-up as ‘an elf’ in the apricot tree as part of her private imaginative play was closely connected with the public performance of the dressing-up with the neighbourhood girls in preparation for the town parades (J, MP, 20.5.13).

The cultural context surrounding Judy’s (1970s child) childhood was however vastly different to the expectations of Jill’s (1930s child) childhood during the 1930s. With the changes entrenched in the global civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s a different understanding of the role of women appeared to have facilitated a change in the toys bought for girls at this time. As a consequence, instead of domestic-orientated toys such as brooms and tea-sets, Judy’s parents bought her a Barbie doll, the most popular doll for girls in the 1970s, as seen in the following re-story extract:

It was clear from Judy’s conversations about her childhood imaginary play that much revolved around the world of Barbie Judy imagined in great detail acted out on the front steps of their house. It was here that Judy would spend the whole day acting out her ideal Barbie world. It was also clear that Judy’s play was heavily infused with the 1970s societal view that ‘girls can do anything’ and were no longer expected to stay at home in a housewife role. Judy wondered looking back how could Barbie represent the personification of feminist ideology with such a wardrobe and a stereotypical feminine figure. Perhaps Judy’s interest in other powerful women on the small and large screen at the time, such as, Wonder Woman, 99 from Get Smart and Julie in the Sound of Music explained this dichotomy? Judy apparently used to dress up as Wonder Woman as a small child on a regular basis, even going to the shops she said (Judy, MB, 2.8.13).

Judy's (1970s child) imaginative play with her Barbie on the front steps of their house could be construed as a public performance of socially expected 1970s imaginative play. This play was certainly in plain view from the house and the street, and Judy commented she was aware of her mother watching her through the front windows on a regular basis. However, of particular interest to this theme, Judy's 'secret Barbie world' imaginative play was different when she played with her friend under the building site. For this private and secret imaginative play, the actual Barbie doll was not taken to the building site or needed in their 'Barbie world' imaginative play. In fact, Judy stated, no toys were taken to this place which may have alerted others to their secret play in their secret location. This notion is discussed further in the continuation of Judy's re-story extract:

To protect her Barbie world play from adults and other peers, Judy and her friend did not take anything to their secret place under the building site which would have indicated someone had been playing there. As a consequence, Judy felt their imaginative play was notably different to when they were 'just playing with dolls' because they needed to create all of their play using their imagination without the aid of any toys 'normally associated with pretend play,' she said (Judy, MB, 2.8.13).

In this brief re-story extract, Judy's (1970s child) imaginative play showed the agentive capacity of children to use toys in creative ways, often in different ways to how adults may have expected. This was especially the case in Judy's play as she was able to extend her imaginative play about Barbie under the building site without using the actual doll as a prop for her play. Judy's re-story extract illustrated her increasing awareness as she looked back on her childhood play of the difference in the 'level' of imaginative play enacted in public compared with the deep, engaged imaginative play enacted in private. However, similar to Jill (1930s child), this play was still closely aligned to the public performance of imaginative play with Barbie as the main cultural informant in both of her private and public imaginative play places.

In contemporary childhoods, it appeared the difference between the toys used in private imaginative play compared with those used in the public performance of imaginative play was greater than in previous generations. These changes were evident in Sonya's (6 year-old-child) re-story extract in which this difference between the toys used in public and private imaginative play can be seen. Sonya asked for and was given a number of Monster High dolls for her

birthday recently by her parents, together with a 2010s version of Barbie with bendable legs unlike her 1950s predecessor. During our memory box conversational interview, Sonya proudly showed me the brochure of Monster High dolls as she took multiple photos of these dolls she had displayed on the table while explaining their every minute detail:

Of particular significance to Sonya, these Monster High dolls were part of the range of toys connected with digital games of a similar line. Sonya did not have any access to digital technology at home or at school, and was therefore was not included in the knowledge of these games with her school peers. However, by asking for her parents to buy her these toys she was able to ‘keep up’ with the other children in a way that was acceptable to her parents who did not want her to be immersed in digital play. What was especially significant however was Sonya’s admission during our memory box conversation about the toys she played with in private. This admission was made shortly after Sonya had ticked the ‘happy’ symbol to indicate it was okay to talk today, and then admitted she was feeling ‘a bit nervous’ about showing me her memory box contents. I immediately replied she did not have to show me anything at all. However, Sonya said she wanted to ‘carefully’ show me one by one with the lid ajar because she said, ‘I’ve got stuff in here I don’t usually let people see...it’s kind of babyish...I have teddies.’ Unlike the Monster High dolls of which she spent much time explaining every detail, Sonya was anxious to quickly show me, and then pack the teddies away back in the box with the lid firmly closed (Sonya, MB, 26.7.13).

Sonya’s (6 year-old-child) re-story extract illustrated the extreme importance Sonya placed on being able to ‘keep up’ with her peers in an almost frenetic way by having knowledge of the most current toys. In knowing these multiple toys and their idiosyncratic characteristics, Sonya was able to appear socially current in terms of popular culture despite not having any access to digital games. As a consequence, Sonya’s public performance of imaginative play with the broader peer group at school was firmly connected with the use and knowledge of her ‘favourite Monster High dolls’ (Sonya, MB, 26.7.13). However, in contrast to this, Sonya’s anxious and hesitant admission of her private imaginative play with ‘teddies’ further highlighted the pressure

she felt in not allowing others to see or know about her ‘babyish’ toys. In a similar way, as seen in the previous theme, Ted (7 year-old-child) had initially spoken at great length to me of the intricacies of popular and peer culture promoted Pokémon collections. However, much later, Ted very quietly disclosed he still played with teddies with his younger sister (T, T&D, 18.6.13).

In an ironic twist, Georgia’s (4 year-old-child) experience of ‘hiding’ her private imaginative play toys was connected with her Barbie play she said her older siblings did not like her playing:

Georgia’s said there was ‘only one place’ where she can play alone, in private at home – a ‘tiny’ space she has made in her bedroom with her Barbie dolls and their doll house. With the door firmly closed, Georgia enacts her private imaginative play despite her siblings’ negativity towards her choice. In this ‘one place’ Georgia has constructed an imaginative play place where she can be quiet and alone, and preferably uninterrupted by others in her pretend play. (Georgia, MP, 15.8.13)

In this example, Georgia (4 year-old-child) was seen to have created a private place for her imaginative play with Barbie, though she was very aware that both her older brother and sister did not like her playing with this doll. While she did not mention why this was the case, Georgia quickly shifted the conversation to a chanted list of available digital technology (‘iPod, iPad, iPhone’) and online games (‘I play Jetpack’) she played in collaboration with her older siblings (Georgia, MP, 15.8.13). This rehearsed list sounded like a collection of the essential elements of Georgia’s public performance of imaginative play.

In these contemporary examples of Sonya (6 year-old-child), Ted (7 year-old-child) and Georgia’s (4 year-old-child), the toys they used in private were significantly different to the toys they played with in their public performance of imaginative play. This theme appeared to have changed since historical childhoods by comparing Jill’s (1930s child) and Judy’s (1970s child) experiences in which their private imaginative play was more closely aligned in some way with their public performance of imaginative play. However in contrast with this, Sonya’s and Ted’s use of ‘teddies’ and Georgia’s use of Barbie in their private play was significantly different to their public performance of imaginative play with Monster High dolls, Pokémon and Jetpack.

Although historical childhoods were also influenced by popular culture and the impact of peer culture on their imaginative play was also clear, as presented in Chapter Five, this theme identified the difference in the use of toys across generations. In this theme, the use of toys in the private and public performance of imaginative play changed in more contemporary times. While the depth and creativity of imaginative play in contemporary private imaginative play places was not in question, this theme identified a greater difference between the toys used in private imaginative play to those used in their public performance of imaginative play in contemporary childhoods compared with historical childhoods.

## **6.5. Summary**

In this chapter, the themes depicting imaginative play practices and places which have changed across generations have been illuminated. In particular, it has highlighted three themes which show this change across the past three generations. The re-story extracts in this chapter have suggested the enactment of contemporary imaginative play included children becoming well practised in being ‘hidden in plain sight’ especially when access to other hidden places was unavailable, whilst the children from the 1970s onwards have increasingly created ways to enact imaginative play in secrecy. Contemporary children have become even more attuned to protecting their secret practices and places from others through an understanding of the difference between the private and public performance of imaginative play.

In the next chapter of this thesis I will present the discussion on the analysis of Finding One and Finding Two in conjunction with the relevant literature and the theoretical framework of the study.

## Chapter Seven: Discussion

### 7.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the major contribution of the thesis through discussion of the analysis of the study's key findings in conjunction with the work presented in the previous six chapters. In Chapters One and Two, I explained why it was important to the early childhood field to examine imaginative play and where this examination was situated within the scholarly debate seen through both the substantive and theoretical literature. In Chapter Three, I positioned the research question within a cultural-historical theoretical paradigm. Following this, in Chapter Four, I explained how I conducted the research, and in Chapters Five and Six, the key findings of the research were presented. The two key findings were:

1. There were seven meanings of childhood imaginative play practices and places which have remained stable across the past three generations;
2. There were three meanings of childhood imaginative play practices and places which have changed across the past three generations.

These two findings answer the research question, which was:

What do the meanings of children's imaginative play practices and places over the past three generations suggest for contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play?

I now shift from the empirical to the conceptual, and in so doing will draw together and blend elements from the previous chapters to theorize new understandings of contemporary imaginative play. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to build a focal theory on contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play. This focal theory is contingent on the interconnections between children's conscious awareness, material place and the construction of a symbolic place, which are grounded in emotion. These emotional aspects can be seen to be highly dependent on context, both historically (such as societal expectations informing behaviour) and in the present (such as risk aversion). In this theorization, I will argue children have always been consciously aware, at some level, of the interplay between imaginative play and emotion which I will show to be synthesised as *perezhivanie*. Furthermore, I will illustrate

that this conscious awareness prompts children to subvert or re-create the various aspects of their context (such as adult supervision, adult intentions of safety, lack of desired objects) so that they can achieve their leading activity in the enactment of imaginative play.

To visually represent this focal theory I have created a diagram that shows three elements which are essential to the enactment of imaginative play. These three elements are represented as three interconnected, porous dimensions: first, the outer dimension; second, the in-between dimension; and third, the inner dimension. I will present each dimension in turn as the three sections of this chapter. In the first section, I draw on Vygotsky's conceptualization of imaginative play and *perezhivanie* in order to demonstrate that children's conscious awareness of imaginative play is connected with emotion. The second section will explain the influence of context on children's construction of places for imaginative play. The material places children choose as portals into their imaginative play are contingent on contextual affordances and constraints; however, children's agency will be emphasized as a critical element of this dimension. The third section leads toward the notion of an emotionally safe place as the construction of a symbolic place for the enactment of creatively risky imaginative play. It is in the third section that I present the diagram depicting these three dimensions to represent visually contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play.

## **7.2. Outer dimension: Children's conscious awareness of imaginative play**

Children have always been consciously aware of the importance of imaginative play in their lives. Adding to this, strong emotional meanings have been attributed to imaginative play practices and places during historical and contemporary childhoods. As presented in Chapter Five, this was evident when Jill (1930s child) spoke excitedly about her 'favourite spots' for imaginative play in her 'own little kingdom' over eighty years ago; and again, when Scott (6 year-old-child) spoke in a hushed voice of his 'secret bush cubby' he had constructed for pretend play with his brother and a few close friends in his backyard. Similarly, when I asked Bob (1940s child) if his imaginative play place high up the old oak tree was still an important place for him, his affirmative reply was both immediate and intensely emotional as he raised his voice to emphasize his point. Also in response to my question about childhood imaginative play, Daniel (1970s child) paused and momentarily reflected. He then looked up at me and rapidly launched into a story he said 'sounded like a fairy tale' about 'our own little kingdom' he had made with his brother in a swamp. Laura (6 year-old-child) responded in a similar emotion-



filled way when I asked her how it would feel if she and her brother were not able to make their own ‘little nest cubby’ to which she quickly replied they would not have a ‘special place to be ourselves.’

What these responses demonstrate are the heightened emotional value imaginative play practices and places hold for both historical and contemporary children in the past and the present. My argument here is the integral interconnection between emotion and the enactment of imaginative play. This is interesting because in the theoretical literature on emotion and the development of imaginative play, they have been largely theorized as two separate elements. In his extensive work on the *Development of imagination and creativity in childhood*, Vygotsky (1930/2004) claimed ‘[f]eeling as well as thought drives human creativity’ (p. 21). However, despite Vygotsky’s claim, the theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Three showed the development of children’s imaginative play frequently foregrounded cognitive aspects while excluding emotion. As Robson (2012) noted, the weakness in this practice of privileging cognitive-based tests to ascertain young children’s level of creativity and imaginative play skills was that children were ‘unlikely to display their competence or understanding’ of imaginative play under such circumstances (p. 28). Aligned with Vygotsky (1930/2004) and Robson (2012), the narrative methods I have used to facilitate the participants’ storytelling have enabled both historical and contemporary children to display their emotional connection with their imaginative play practices and places.

This emotional interconnection was evident in Laura’s (6 year-old-child) concern when she envisaged the loss of their ‘little nest cubby’ would severely impact on her own and her brother’s capacity for imaginative play in the future. To understand what the loss of a cubby means to imaginative play is a strong example of children’s conscious awareness of the interconnectedness between emotion and imaginative play. In a similar manner, Daniel (1970s child) also spoke of loss and the interconnection between emotion and imaginative play when he oscillated between his own adventure-filled childhood experiences compared with his children’s more limited places for imaginative play. This was seen through our iterative conversational interviews in which his increasing awareness of how his past childhood experiences had previously coloured his interpretation of his children’s play. Daniel slipped back and forth between the past and the present in the stories he told as he questioned what he thought he knew about imaginative play (Golombek & Johnson, 2004). In Chapter Five, Daniel’s dramatic shift in thinking was evident during our third meeting, when he stated he now considered his

children's play inspired by and/or within digital worlds to be as imaginative as his own experiences in the swamp. Daniel's thinking had shifted from a discourse of loss and difference to one where he could see change as a creative adaptation to context. To punctuate his re-interpretation of his children's play, Daniel gave an example of his son Ted (7 year-old-child) acting out his own version of a Minecraft game in the backyard, totally immersed in his 'own little world' of imagination and markedly similar to Daniel's own immersion in his 'own little world' he had called a 'fairy tale'.

The manner in which Daniel at first assumed that his son Ted's imaginative play was something less than his own is a demonstration of contemporary discourses where contemporary children's imaginative play is considered 'less than' past children, as raised in Chapter One, and again, in Chapter Two. However, it also brings to light Vygotsky's (1930/2004) argument that creativity is only possible if something needs to be adapted in a child's environment. Central to his argument is that without a 'lack of adaptation' children would not engage in imaginative processes (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, p. 29). For as Daniel recalled, his son Ted needed to adapt or re-create his context as an active response to the constraints of the boundaries of his backyard. What this adaptation led to was an animated version of Minecraft enacted in the backyard, as recalled by Daniel, who had been watching his son's imaginative play covertly from the kitchen window. I will return to this critical point around the influence of context in more detail in the next section of this chapter. However, this is important to highlight here because Ted's example clearly speaks back to contemporary discourses on children's imaginative play which have been fuelled by scientific evidence claiming children are no longer able to play in imaginative ways (Bodrova, 2008; Kim, 2011). Although in the case of Ted, the evidence is vicariously through Daniel's re-telling of his son's play, all the contemporary children consistently illustrated their knowledge of, competency in, and emotional connection with, imaginative play in the stories they told.

In Chapters Two and Three, very few studies were seen to have foregrounded children's knowledge of imaginative play in their lived experiences. This dearth of research presupposes an adult interpretation to be the only acceptable understanding of children's imaginative play, rather than recognising the authenticity of a child's knowledge of their imaginative play. Of the studies highlighted, only a few have examined the relationship between the Vygotskian concept of *perezhivanie*, as the unity of emotion and cognition, with imaginative play in which emotion has been examined parallel with cognition, rather than ignored altogether (Ferholt, 2009; Flee,

2013, 2014). In Ferholt's (2009) comprehensive study on the combination of 'emotion, cognition, creativity and imagination', intentionally arranged 'playworlds' in which adults and children played together in a fantasy world were seen to 'evoke visible instances of perezhivanie' (xiv). Through this methodological process, Ferholt (2009) argued that the dynamic and 'elusive phenomenon of perezhivanie' was able to be observed and subsequently analysed (p. xiv).

Similarly, in Fler's (2014) work, she also combined the study of perezhivanie with an adult set-up of role play to illustrate examples of how children respond to emotional experiences triggered through an investigation of fairy tales. Fler (2014) explained the concept of perezhivanie wherein 'emotions and cognition work together, and cannot be separated from each other...the flickering between real and imaginary situations' (pp.140-141). Fler's (2014) contention suggested emotion and cognition 'work together' through children's consciousness of their 'feeling states' (p. 141). Particularly relevant to Ted's (7 year-old-child) re-creation of Minecraft, Fler (2014) argued this consciousness of 'feeling states' enabled children to 'flicker' back and forth between real and imaginary situations (p. 141). Although Ferholt (2009) and Fler's (2014) work have both been valuable in extending an understanding of the concept of perezhivanie in relation to imaginative play, these researchers have not used the lens of perezhivanie to focus specifically on children's meanings of their authentic, lived experiences of imaginative play. Nor have they examined imaginative play in this way from a historical stance. In contrast to these studies, this present study invited historical and contemporary children's recollections of the meanings of their authentic imaginative play experiences. As a consequence, this research has contributed to the literature on children's imaginative play by considering historical and contemporary children's knowledge and conscious awareness of their emotional connection and active responses (that is, their perezhivanie) to the enactment of imaginative play.

Children's conscious awareness of their emotional reactions to imaginative play experiences can be synthesized as perezhivanie. In Chapter Three, I discussed the significance of the increasing interest in Vygotsky's research into emotions, and particularly the concept of perezhivanie in more recent times. In particular, I noted the renewed translation of this concept to be interpreted as an active 'refraction' in how we react, respond and experience a particular experience rather than a 'mere' reflection of the experience (Gonzalez Rey, 2012; Veresov, 2015). For the historical and contemporary participants, therefore, the psychological process of 'refraction'

involving their imaginative play experiences can be seen as their unique reactions, responses and cognitive understandings of their own emotional experience of imaginative play. This process of refraction through *perezhivanie* was seen in an increased awareness and further understanding of imaginative play experiences in the past and the present across generations in the historical and contemporary children's stories. In the grandparents' stories, this process was seen when they were becoming increasingly conscious of their emotional responses and reactions to their imaginative play in the past. It seemed that the process of thinking deeply about their past experiences triggered an increasing awareness of their feelings at that time, the way they had responded to their circumstances, and the contrast between societal expectations with what actually happened. For example, this awareness appeared to trigger Jill's (1930s child) acknowledgement that she had purposefully kept the secret boat launch information from her parents, even though she claimed to always do the 'right thing' as a child and that her parents 'always knew' where she was. This was clear in the findings through both Bob's (1940s child) and Gloria's (1940s child) developing realization that their earlier comparison may have been ill-founded when they compared their play with found materials to those of children today always needing bought toys.

Similarly for the parents, this refractive process was seen in the findings in the later part of the study when their increasing awareness of their past experiences influenced their present understandings of imaginative play. The parents' stories showed an increasing consciousness of their contribution to their own children's circumstances and their emotional reactions to these contextual constraints. For example, this was evident in Felicity's (1970s child) discomfit with her 'contained' adventure rule to her children in saying 'you go anywhere but don't jump the fences.' This awareness was shown in the parents' re-interpreted stories on why their children chose particular ways to enact their imaginative play practices and places in contrast to their own experiences. This was seen, for example, in Daniel's (1970s child) re-interpreted understanding of his children's imaginative play online to be as meaningful as his own imaginative play. This was also clear in the findings when Felicity realized her children were capable of creating some 'absolute beauties' in their imaginative play when they were on their own, rather than being constantly directed by 'time-poor' parents. It was particularly evident when Judy (1970s child) acknowledged her daughter Sonya's (6 year-old-child) inclination towards 'bringing all her stuff down' to the lounge room was exactly the same as her own childhood impulse. In her earlier conversational interviews, Judy had complained about her

mother's demands to pack away all her Barbie 'bits and pieces' from the dining room table, even when she was deeply engaged in her imaginative play. During the course of the study, Judy had also complained about the amount of 'stuff' her daughter Sonya needed in her imaginative play, suggesting this was a symptom of contemporary childhood's demands. During the final conversational interview, however, Judy's visible realization of the similarities between her own and her daughter's imaginative play was another example of the process of *perezhivanie*, in which she was becoming increasingly conscious of her own and her daughter's emotional responses to play as she slipped back and forth between the past and the present.

In a similar way, the contemporary children also appeared to have an increased awareness of their emotional reactions to imaginative play and what it meant to them over the course of the study. This was particularly evident in the findings which illustrated their awareness of the strategies they used to protect their imaginative play. The shifts in their stories showed an increasing awareness which may not have been articulated earlier, but were becoming increasingly indicative of the deeper meanings connected with their imaginative play places and practices. This was seen in the findings, for example, when Georgia (4 year-old-child) explained she stopped her creative play inside her bush cubby when others 'peeked in', when Laura (6 year-old-child) understood she used her 'nest cubby' for emotional restoration, and when Scott (6 year-old-child) appeared anxious to keep his 'pretend' play enacted in his home-based 'secret bush cubby' a secret from his broader peer group at school by shielding his map and his conversation from others. This shift in conscious awareness was particularly evident when Sonya (6 year-old-child) changed her story about the significance of others approaching her 'private play' when she realized she would 'start to stop until they go past'. This was also evident in the findings which related to the re-story checking conversations with the children. The subsequent changes and additional stories the children offered during this method, such as Frank's (4 year-old-child) online hiding place behind a tree, provided further rich insights into their knowledge and increasing understanding of their imaginative play.

Listening to the pauses and shifts in the historical and contemporary children's stories – notably occurring in their later conversational interviews, it felt as though I was witnessing the participants' developing conscious awareness of their experience of imaginative play. Initially, many of the participants had a different 'public narrative' they chose to tell, which was frequently informed by the socially accepted narrative of each era (Somers, 1994, p. 619). These responses showed the power of societal expectations on the public narratives people re-tell, as

many of the participants told their version of the socially expected story in their early conversational interviews. However, later, the participants often slowed their words, paused and then continued on a different trajectory in their storytelling. Shifting from their initial ‘public narrative’, the participants moved toward more personal, emotionally-infused meanings as they thought deeply about their experiences of imaginative play. For example, it seemed Sonya (6 year-old-child) initially felt she needed to say it was acceptable for others to be included in her private imaginative play, influenced by a discourse around an expectation of inclusion (Skanfors et al., 2009). However, she changed her story to one where she said she stopped playing on the approach of others as an active response to the emotional experience of imaginative play. Similarly, Judy (1970s child) had shifted from repeating the discourses around the consumerism of contemporary childhood to one in which she realized her daughter’s emotional response to imaginative play experiences was exactly the same as her own childhood experience in the 1970s. Gloria and Bob (1940s children) also started to look more deeply at their grandchildren’s experiences, using found materials in creative ways as similar to their own childhood experiences in the 1940s, rather than perpetuating contemporary discourses around children today as not able to play without the use of bought toys.

From a cultural-historical theoretical understanding, these pauses, shifts and refractive responses to the emotional experiences of imaginative play are a discernible manifestation of *perezhivanie*. In his lecture on the *Problem of the Environment*, Vygotsky (1994) considered the definition of *perezhivanie* to be an awareness of the child’s relationship between himself, his environment and his emotional experience, and how the child interpreted and responded to an experience. Using Sonya’s (6 year-old-child) example again, *perezhivanie* was evident because her reaction was a conscious blend between her personality, the school context, the actual experience of imaginative play, how she interpreted the situation and then how she emotionally reacted to the impact of others. What this slipping back and forth along a ‘temporal continuum’ suggested was that the participants’ deep feelings and raised awareness about their imaginative play was a vital part of their understanding about their own and other childhoods. As such, the deep feelings and raised awareness were representative of each participant’s *perezhivanie* in relation to their emotional and cognitive responses to imaginative play. Although each participant had a unique response to their imaginative play experiences within their cultural-historical context, the intensity of their stories was replicated across generations, and showed the stability of this emotional response. In this way, the participants’ intense stories were able to be used as a

‘portal’ into the meanings of imaginative play (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 356), as each participant questioned and re-examined their own experiences (Golombek & Johnson, 2004) in contrast to the ‘public narrative’ of each era (Somers, 1994).

This notion of thinking of the past, present and future as a ‘continuous flow’ throughout the participants’ stories, where they slipped back and forth between the past and the present, aligned well with the cultural-historical conceptualization of historicity (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2006, p. 89). This process can be understood as the ‘dialectical notion of history and time’ informing each other rather than seen as separate entities (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2006, p. 89). By blending the cultural-historical concepts of historicity with *perezhivanie*, the historical and contemporary children’s heightened meanings of their imaginative play experiences could be seen as stable across generations. Although this narrative inquiry was primarily an intergenerational study and, therefore, interested in imaginative play across generations, each participant’s individual understanding and increasing awareness of their past informing their present provided valuable and insightful knowledge of childhood imaginative play

Further to the renewed interpretation and translation of *perezhivanie*, Veresov (2015) argued that this concept ‘encapsulates the meanings’ of the experience or phenomenon rather than just describe the experience itself. In this narrative inquiry, which focused on the meanings of imaginative play experiences, this new interpretation of *perezhivanie* has confirmed the relevance of this cultural-historical theoretical concept to the study. In terms of children’s imaginative play practices and places, therefore, *perezhivanie* can be seen to have provided an important role in enabling their metacognitive understanding through the development of consciousness and sense making (Gonzalez Rey, 2012). This means, rather than merely ‘feeling’ an emotion connected with an imaginative practice or place, viewing this process through the lens of *perezhivanie* helped explain the child’s developing cognitive awareness of the deeper emotional meanings of the imaginative play experience. Furthermore, the refractive process of *perezhivanie* explained the child’s conscious response to an imaginary play situation, particularly when a reactive change or shift in thinking was needed during the enactment of imaginative play, such as the example with Sonya actively responding to the impact of others on her play. This claim of a child’s capacity to actively respond to imaginative play situations was supported in Kravtsov and Kravtsova’s (2009) interpretation of *perezhivanie* in which they argued the ‘dynamic connection’ between emotion and cognition was represented in ‘human consciousness’ through the development of a child’s will and personality (p. 205).

Children can competently express their conscious awareness of their emotional connections and active responses to their imaginative play. Facial expressions, intentional silences and emotional words used during the conversational interviews demonstrated both the historical and contemporary children's strong emotional connections to their imaginative play experiences. Furthermore, the participants' descriptions of active responses to their imaginative play experiences demonstrated an authentic manifestation of *perezhivanie*. This was evident in Chapter Five, when Gloria (1940s child) exclaimed, 'I just loved it' in reference to the 'absolutely most important place' she had constructed with her brother and a few others as she drew a picture of the gorsebush cubby in a vacant paddock up the street. This was the place Gloria retrospectively compared with her granny flat she lived in now, saying both places gave her a sense of being 'secure and enveloped and cocooned.' Judy (1970s child) used the same phrase in talking about the 'cool place' she made with her best friend hidden under the building site. With a huge smile, Judy carefully drew a detailed map while saying 'I just loved it, it was great... We just felt so naughty.' Similar to Judy's feelings, both Jill (1930s child) and Bob (1940s child) spoke of the thrill of 'doing the wrong thing' in subverting societal expectations of their era when they evaded their chores to sneak into a bedroom to 'skylark in a wardrobe' (Bob) and 'disappear into a book' (Jill). Similar to the meanings these grandparents articulated, Ted (7 year-old-child) had also told a story about the excitement of 'sneaking' into his bedroom for imaginative play on his iPod behind the blanket. However, in contrast to these other participants, Harry (4 year-old-child) remained silent about his imaginative play and the places it was enacted during the early stages of the study. I was beginning to understand that Harry's hesitancy in speaking about his 'fig tree cubby' to an adult stranger was an indication of his intense feelings about this important place. These intense feelings were confirmed much later during our memory box conversational interview when Harry passionately exclaimed of this place, 'It's just for me and Laura and no one else goes in there... they don't find out about it.'

My main argument here is that these responses were an audible representation of the emotional connection the participants held for their imaginative play, not a romantic interpretation of childhood. It could be assumed that the older participants' stories were based purely on romantic or nostalgic memories of their past 'idyllic' childhoods (Brannen, 2004; Coster, 2007). However, I argue the marked similarities between the older participants' strong emotional connections with their imaginative play practices and places and those intense emotional connections of the younger participants contradict this assumption. The strength of Harry's (4



year-old-child) emotional connection to his imaginative play practices and places was aptly demonstrated by a powerful and intentional silence. In holding back from initially telling me about his ‘fig tree cubby’, Harry was placing clear boundaries on who could know about his important imaginative play places. By inviting him to tell stories about these important places, it appeared these boundaries were extended only when Harry was ready to extend them, reinforcing young children’s capacity to participate ethically in a narrative inquiry in which their knowledge of their lived experiences of imaginative play was sought.

This notion of examining emotional aspects with research participants can be fraught with difficulties (Feiyan, 2014; Quinones, 2013). It is difficult, for example, if not impossible for a researcher to know how each participant is experiencing their emotions at any given time (Brennan, 2014). This is especially difficult as scholars claim there is a difference between the internalized awareness of feelings with that of a visual display of emotion (Brennan, 2014; Gonzalez Rey, 2012). However, as Brennan (2014) argued, it is still ‘valuable and authentic data’ if the participants tell the researcher how they feel about a phenomenon or experience (p. 288). While some researchers have argued children are not able to articulate their feelings and show their emotions in a research situation (Sawyers & Carrick, 2008), both Mortari’s (2011) and Quinones’ (2013) studies clearly demonstrated young children’s capacity to express how they felt.

Similar to these researchers’ experiences, the contemporary children in this study were highly capable of expressing their feelings, displaying their emotion and discussing their responses to their imaginative play practices and places. This is an important point to make of this narrative inquiry, because it is often assumed young children are not able to contribute to research which focuses on interpretative interviews for data generation (cf. Skelton, 2008). However, the children were not only capable of contributing stories about their lived experiences of imaginative play, they were also able to articulate when they were happy to be involved in the research process and when they wanted to stop talking. This was particularly evident in Chapter Five, when Harry (4 year-old-child) as one of the youngest participants, decisively stated ‘that’s enough telling’. All the children demonstrated their knowledge of how to ‘shut down’ the research conversation through their spoken and unspoken language, and as Wood (2015) recently argued, children should not be underestimated in their ability to do so. Furthermore, the children’s knowledge and capacity to participate was a significant element of this narrative

inquiry because they were able to interpret their imaginative play experiences in similar ways to the adult participants.

Of particular relevance to children's conscious awareness of emotion and imaginative play, and their competence in expressing this relationship, was children's awareness of the need to feel emotionally safe prior to the enactment of imaginative play. This need was evident in the findings presented in Chapter Five, when Cathy (1950s child) spoke of her need to feel emotionally safe in a place away from her authoritarian parents before she could enact her play; and, again, when Emily (1970s child) explained how the feeling of constructing her jungle hut enclosures created a feeling of warmth and emotional safety that went beyond any concerns for physical safety. Emily contrasted these feelings of emotional safety in the jungle with her response to being under the control of adults, and realised she needed to create a 'transitional place' in-between these two places to cope with the difference. The need for emotional safety was also clear when Sonya (6 year-old-child) spoke about her need to protect her imaginative play from a critical peer group, and hence feel emotionally safe, before recommencing her imaginative play after they had passed by. I will return to this significant point briefly in the second section of this chapter when I discuss children's capacity to construct their own places for imaginative play; and then again in more detail in the third section of this chapter when I discuss the construction of a symbolic place for the enactment of emotionally safe imaginative play. However, it is important to note here that the historical and contemporary children's recognition of this need for emotional safety was an essential element of this outer dimension and a necessary precursor in this focal theory of the enactment of imaginative play.

### **7.3. In-between dimension: The construction of material places as portals into and out of imaginative play**

Children construct their own places for the enactment of imaginative play. This was seen in Chapter Five when Scott (6 year-old-child) and Georgia (4 year-old-child) chose to construct their own places for imaginative play rather than playing in the available built cubbies their parents had provided within their fence lines. Each child had specifically mentioned they had 'proper wooden cubbies' at home in their backyards however, both had also mentioned these built places were 'so messy' and 'full of toys' they did not play inside them. In labelling their built cubby houses as 'proper', it seemed both children were aware of the adult intention of the public performance of imaginative play to occur in these places. However, both Georgia and

Scott chose instead to construct their own imaginative play places in bushy places using found materials and included only close friends and siblings in their imaginative play. Interestingly, both children deemed these places to be secret places in which others were not welcome in their play or place. While Scott named his bushy tree cubby as a 'secret club house' which was 'far out across the grass,' Georgia talked about how she manipulated the play inside her bush cubby to be 'very quiet' so that it became 'very hard' for others to 'get into our secret game.' This phenomenon of constructing a place for imaginative play was identified in Chapter Five as one of the significant themes to remain stable across generations, as confirmed in the historical and contemporary children's stories. Similarly in Chapter Six, the findings revealed Sonya (6 year-old-child) also had a built cubby in her small city backyard in which she declared was 'too messy' to play in. However, the difference here was that Sonya chose to construct her own place for imaginative play as a symbolically 'hidden' place in the corner of her school playground as a refractive response to limited available places for play. In this way, Sonya was creatively adapting her context because of the need to construct a place for her imaginative play.

Also presented in Chapter Five, Jill (1930s child), Gloria (1940s child) and Cathy (1950s child) told stories of their own construction of places for imaginative play in contrast to the places their parents expected them to play in. All three participants had initially played in their respective backyard woodsheds, noting their parents knew where they were and what they were playing. It could be argued here that the woodsheds the historical children played in were historical prototypes for the highly supervised built cubby houses of contemporary children. This was particularly the case for Cathy in her signposted 'Helpers Club House' set-up in the woodshed on which her mother constantly checked to see they were 'doing the right thing.' This Club House idea was inspired by watching the Mickey Mouse Club on the first television set available in a friend's house down the street, though the constant checking by Cathy's mother may have suggested she was concerned about the influence of American-style popular culture on the children (Marsh & Bishop, 2012). Later in our conversational interviews, each of the historical children participants revealed alternative stories of hidden, subversive places as their own constructed places for imaginative play in contrast with the backyard woodsheds. These imaginative play practices and places included Jill's adventurous play in a re-launched leaky boat, Gloria's solitary day-dreaming in grassy paddocks, and Cathy's 'own world' she created with her older brother over the back fence in the long grass. What was especially interesting about this place in the long grass was that Cathy only remembered it much later as she drew a

map of her play places. It was then she excitedly recalled the long hours of uninterrupted play as a 'different' form of imaginative play to the public play in the 'Helpers Club House.' Further to these historical child-constructed places, in Chapter Six, Bob (1940s child) and his son Daniel (1970s child) told stories of 'easily' accessible and 'irresistible' adventurous places that were available to them for their construction of places for imaginative play. These places included deserted mine shafts down into old clay pits, dark water filled tunnels and collapsing coal mines. Bob exclaimed, 'Of course children are going to climb down there,' while Daniel declared it was an 'absolute adventure' but he would definitely not allow his children to play in the same places. Seemingly a consequence of this stipulation, Daniel's son Ted (7 year-old-child) told stories about how he constructed his places for imaginative play using resources and opportunities available within his context. One of these places Ted constructed was hidden within his bunk bed, behind the protection of a blanket and then inside his iPod where he could climb down into virtual mines in an online adventure of Minecraft. Ted did not mention the use of the built cubby house in his backyard as a place for imaginative play, but had said he felt 'warm and adventurous...and different' when he constructed his own place in his bunk bed for his imaginative play online.

As well as demonstrating children's capacity for place making, these findings have illustrated both contemporary and historical children's resistance to using adult-built constructions for imaginative play. It is this resistance, I argue, which has highlighted the extent of adult misunderstanding about childhood imaginative play and where children have chosen to enact it in the past and the present. For many of the historical children, thinking about the difference, between their play in the woodsheds and then later in their own place constructions, appeared a revelation as they re-interpreted their past imaginative play experiences. According to Georgia (4 year-old-child) and her brother Ted (7 year-old-child), however, the built cubbies were not an option for imaginative play even though their father Daniel (1970s child) had emailed photos he had taken of the cubby he had built, with a caption saying, 'both children love playing in here'. By building a cubby for their children, both Felicity (Scott's Mother, 1970s child) and Daniel (Georgia and Ted's Father, 1970s child) appeared to have forgotten the importance of making their own places for imaginative play as they had in their own childhoods. By taking the photos on behalf of his children, Daniel had provided an adult interpretation of his assumptions about his children's imaginative play rather than allowing his children to make their own photographic choices. Clearly, the children's photos for use in their mapping would have been significantly

different to the adult ones provided. Agbenyega's (2011) contention, raised in Chapter Four, that it is important for children to take their own photos in a research context as this enabled otherwise hidden information to be accessed is reinforced in this research example.

While the analysis of Chapter Five findings showed the stability of children constructing places for imaginative play in bedrooms and trees over generations, the analysis of the findings from Chapter Six illustrated the changes in play places that had occurred over time. The findings presented from Chapter Six illustrated how available affordances and inhibiting constraints within each child's respective context played an integral role in where imaginative play was enacted. As a consequence, the place chosen for the enactment of imaginative play was reliant on the affordances, resources and opportunities available within each context – for example, trees, iPods and/or bunk-beds for the contemporary children, and, for example, boats, grassy fields and mine shafts for the historical children. These material place-based choices were also influenced by contextual constraints, for example, having to remain within the fence line, under constant supervision, and having to abide by cultural expectations of childhood within a particular era.

In Chapter Two, I highlighted Tuan's (1977), Hart's (1979) and Moore's (1986) early research into children's experience of place. These place-based researchers found a difference in the meanings of places children constructed for themselves, particularly in their capacity to 'manipulate spaces to make places' (Hart, 1979, p. 205). More recently, researchers such as Rasmussen (2004), Clark (2007b) and Lim and Barton (2010) have also found children's attachment to their own places is different to that of an adult-constructed place. In illustrating this difference between adult and child knowledge of place, Rasmussen's (2004) comprehensive study clearly differentiated the places constructed by adults as 'places for children' in contrast with places children have constructed themselves as 'children's places'. In making this comparison, Rasmussen (2004) emphasized the difference in the meanings associated with these places, and suggested children associated 'special meaning and names' to their own meaningful places (p. 157). Built cubby houses may provide a site for the supervised, adult interpretation of public imaginative play, particularly in educational settings. However, the findings have suggested children were less likely to feel emotionally attached or confer their own meanings onto adult-built cubbies than the places they constructed themselves for the enactment of imaginative play. In this way, the findings supported the substantive literature from Chapter Two in which children's construction of place was foregrounded as a significant aspect of

childhood and their play. I have, however, taken this notion further by specifically highlighting the children's knowledge of the construction of place as significant in the enactment of their imaginative play.

Children use their knowledge of imaginative play in agentive ways to manipulate their context to enable the construction of their own places for imaginative play. This was evident in Chapter Five, when children, such as Jill (1930s child), Felicity (1970s child) and Laura (6 year-old-child) were able to use their knowledge of imaginative play practices to construct their own places in creative ways within the constraints of their cultural context. Both the historical and contemporary children constructed their own places for imaginative play up trees and in bedrooms. Each child moved beyond the common binary of either inside (commonly seen as the play place for contemporary children) or outside (commonly seen as the play place for historical children) and constructed a place inside and outside, despite these conflicting societal assumptions. I argue here that this imaginative play practice highlights how both the historical and contemporary children demonstrated the capacity to 'pretend you're not there,' as Jill had suggested, in their respective place as they entered into their own world of imaginative play. Felicity (1970s child) and Laura (6 year-old-child) constructed places for imaginative play inside their beds and bedrooms to secretly hide away from others; whilst Jill (1930s child) symbolically hid from the rest of the household by disappearing inside her book on the bedroom window seat. Each child created an imaginative play portal through which to gain entry into their places as a form of inclusion for some and/or as a barrier for the exclusion of others who were not welcome in this place. Felicity's entry ritual up through the bunk bed slats, which was just for herself and her two cousins, was a strong example of this capacity. So too was Laura's climb up the broken ladder into the 'little nest cubby' hidden up the fig tree which was only for herself and her younger brother, Harry (4 year-old-child), while Jill's quiet ascent up the stairs to the bedroom window seat was for her own purpose of escape.

The capacity to 'transcend time, place and/or circumstance' through imaginative play practices and places illustrated how historical and contemporary children were able to work around their contextual constraints in each era, including engaging in subversive acts (Taylor, 2013, p. 3). This was evident when Jill was able to subvert the societal expectation of being a 'good girl' in a 1930s childhood by inconspicuously climbing her apricot tree, knowing her sisters would not follow and interrupt her quiet reverie. This tendency toward subversion was also evident when Jill ascended the stairs alone to read privately in a world of her own rather than participating in

chores and family activities. Similarly, Laura's (6 year-old-child) tree-filled backyard provided ample choices and opportunities for tree climbing. However, in constructing a private place for imaginative play high up in a tree with precariously arranged found materials, Laura's actions subverted her parent's intentions of safety and supervision of their children. Similarly, while Felicity (1970s child) shared a bedroom with a much older sister, she was still able to construct a private place for imaginative play hidden under her top bunk bed as well as in a tree concealed deep within a bushy vacant block. To enable the ongoing construction of these places, Felicity needed to subvert both her siblings and her parent's supervision of their play in a way that allowed them to continue covertly. This was especially evident after Felicity's minor bunk bed accident, so the children changed the site to under the bed rather than stop their secret play inside altogether. What these examples demonstrated was the strong impulse for both the historical and contemporary children to construct their own imaginative play place, was creatively, and at times subversively, adapted to fit a variety of contexts, circumstances and places.

In Chapter Six, another example was evident in which historical imaginative play was seen to be persistent but with creative adaptations made in contemporary childhoods. Once again, the connection between trees and imaginative play was signified by participants as highly important. The findings revealed that most of the participants' re-story extracts from the 1930s through to the 2010s illustrated the important meanings associated with playing up, under or around trees. The imaginative play silently performed in the upper branches of Bob's (1940s child) oak tree, hidden in Jill's (1930s child) apricot tree, and enacted in Felicity's (1970s child) secret club house tree have already been discussed. However, access to trees was either not always possible or was restricted due to adult safety precautions for some of the contemporary children. Despite these constraints, the findings show trees were still considered important for imaginative play in some form by most of the contemporary children in the study. For example, Ted (7 year-old-child) proudly showed me his 'secret tree base' in the far reaches of the school playground where he disclosed he played pretend games after all. While Frank (4 year-old-child) enthusiastically showed me his multiple secret places intermingled amongst the trees in his kindergarten playground. Later, Frank told another story about the trees he virtually hid behind in an online game on his iPod. Beyond the constraints of his backyard fences, Frank created a different way to access trees for his imaginative play at home by using the resources he had available to him. The findings revealed Frank imagined a space inside his iPod where he

had planted a 'seed in there and it grewed and then I went in there...to hide inside it behind a tree.' This is an interesting adaption of imaginative play in connection with trees through the use of available affordances, particularly when considering Frank's tree-filled acre at home and his kindergarten environment that provided multiple trees for his imaginative play.

In contrast with Ted (7 year-old-child) and Frank's (4 year-old-child) experiences of multiple trees, the analysis of Sonya's (6 year-old-child) re-story extracts illustrated she had limited access to trees at home and at school. The photos of Sonya's backyard provided by her mother Judy (1970s child), revealed the padlocked adult-built cubby was a dominant feature in the small, paved courtyard at home. However, according to the findings, Sonya seldom chose to play outside at home at all. In fact, Sonya had disclosed she did not have 'time to play' when she was at home, preferring to watch television instead. In contrast to this however, the findings also illustrated Sonya's school playground was the prime location she chose to construct her imaginative play places as close as possible to a tree behind a locked gate. Even as a Grade One child, it appeared Sonya had quickly learnt how to re-negotiate her school playground to enable the construction of a symbolic place for imaginative play. It appeared Sonya had learnt how to navigate the concrete quadrangles of the playground, play between the school regulations of supervision, and avoid the powerful peer culture of her school playground so as to safely enact her imaginative play. In particular, Sonya learnt how to imagine being symbolically 'hidden in plain sight' when enacting her highly creative, imaginative play to protect herself and her few close friends from the potential ridicule of 'laughing' peers. Further findings revealed that despite the constraint of a concrete dominated playground and the tree locked behind gates, Sonya (6 year-old-child) was able to adapt her imaginative play to include her favourite tree. Sonya appeared bewildered as to why the tree was locked away, noting there were seats around its base suggesting it had been accessible in the past. This was made clear in the findings when Sonya spoke about the significance of her favourite old peppercorn tree, saying it was 'very old...from when it used to be a castle here', and that in their pretend games they used to 'talk to that tree.'

However, in contrast with Sonya's (6 year-old-child) and other contemporary children's experiences with trees in the study, the findings revealed Sonya's younger sister Gabrielle (4 year-old-child) was afraid of trees. From the findings it can be seen Gabrielle also had little contact with trees, especially since there were no trees in her small, paved garden at home and the only large tree in her early childhood setting had recently fallen. This event seemed to have



severely affected Gabrielle's opinion of trees and her insecure feelings when she was outside and her tendency to prefer to play inside. An apparent fear of being outside was expressed in Gabrielle's statement, 'When you goes outside you need to be careful [because the tree will] fall down and bop you on the head.' This fear was further expressed when Gabrielle shook her head at my suggestion that some children might hide behind the bushes along the fence line at her centre and said, 'you get hurt if you went too close to the fence.' Interestingly, Judy (1970s child) Gabrielle's mother, had mentioned that she was 'not a fan of the tree climb' during one of our conversations, and it seemed this attitude had infiltrated Gabrielle's perception of adventurous play on the 'other side' of the fence. In response to these feelings, Gabrielle's prime choice of place for her imaginative play was commonly in her bedroom, in her mother's bedroom and/or in the lounge room where she made 'houses' with her sister under the furniture. In looking at the connection between trees and imaginative play, the findings have demonstrated this imaginative play practice and important place had persisted across generations. However, the findings also confirmed most of the contemporary children had made creative adaptations to incorporate trees in some way into their imaginative play, using available affordances while working around contextual constraints. But in saying this, Gabrielle's adverse reaction to trees demonstrated the significance of context in the children's responses to affordances and constraints within their reality, and that multiple interpretations of similar situations are to be expected.

From these responses, it can be argued the increasing trend toward societal risk aversion in more recent times has contributed to the decline in the 'easy' places that had been available and accessible to historical children for imaginative play. As a reaction to this change, contemporary children were seen to be making inventive adaptations in the use of their available affordances to navigate around contextual constraints. Furthermore, the findings suggested contemporary children have needed to work out strategies to bypass the 'fenced in' constraints on their choice of places, while circumventing the increased supervision permeating their childhoods. As contemporary parents, Daniel's and Felicity's (1970s children) priority for the physical safety of their children aligned well with the postmodern emphasis on the protection of children at all costs – the main cost being the rapid decline of children's independent mobility into places beyond the fence line since the 1970s (Beck, 1986; Giddens, 1991; Gill, 2007). Within this protection discourse, the image of the child as vulnerable, innocent and in need of constant

protection was perpetuated in the ‘contained’ adventures parents offered to facilitate their children’s ‘physically safe’ imaginative play (Facer, 2012; Gill, 2007; Jenkins, 1998).

An integral element of the Vygotskian conceptualisation of the four ways in the development of imagination suggested children’s reality or context was of utmost importance in providing the affordances available for children’s use in their creative acts (Edwards, 2011; Vygotsky, 1930/2004). In this way, a child’s context was seen to encourage or inhibit their creative place-making constructions, through the ‘choices and inventions’ Rogoff (2003) suggested were indicative of the changes needed to adapt to changing situations over generations (p. 362). Similar to Hart’s (1979) earlier work, Lim and Barton (2010) also argued children were capable of constructing places for their own use rather than ‘passively reacting’ to context (p. 329). In making this statement, Lim and Barton’s (2010) notion of children’s agency in the construction of place aligned well with the findings in Chapters Five and Six, where children’s capacity, knowledge and understanding of place can be acknowledged as ‘a dialectical relationship between children and place’ (p. 329). This is an important inclusion to the literature in Chapter Two on children’s relationship with place as it referred to the way children ‘make sense’ of places through the affordances that were available, while ‘solving problems within places inform[ed] the new place-based knowledge they acquire[d]’ (p. 329). The historical and contemporary children were shown to solve problems relating to their contextually dependent places by creatively subverting these places into places for imaginative play. This suggestion is reinforced in Chancellor’s (2008), Fleet and Britt’s (2011) and Johnson’s (2013) studies of children’s places for subversive play in primary school playgrounds, where they found children were emotionally attached to those places they manipulated around adult intentions. In an alignment between substantive and theoretical literature, Tuan (1977) considered children’s feelings and thoughts to be vital elements contributing to their deeper experience of place, thereby blending the Vygotskian notion of *perezhivanie* as the unity of emotion and cognition with the construction of, and attachment to, place.

Contextual affordances and/or constraints influenced children’s choice of places for the construction of their emotionally safe places mentioned in the previous section. Further to children’s developing consciousness required to trigger the need to construct an emotionally safe place, the next part in this process involved the child’s construction or location of an actual place in which to construct an emotionally safe place for imaginative play. The choice of place where this could occur was dependent on the available resources within the child’s context, and

included outside places, inside places, symbolically hidden and/or virtual places. This place subsequently became the 'portal' or threshold through which each child was able to 'flicker' into and out of the imaginative play world they creatively constructed within it (El'kininov, 2002, p. 49).

Children have the capacity to transition from their contextual reality into and out of imaginative play through different material portals or thresholds. An example of this phenomenon was strongly evident in Emily's (1970s child) construction of her 'transition tree'. This tree was re-constructed as an 'in-between' place between her imaginative play world with her brother in the bamboo jungle and the world of adult rules the children reluctantly returned to at the end of each day. Emily referred to *Alice in Wonderland* as the only one who would truly understand her feelings of being in a 'different world' in the jungle and up her transition tree compared with the real world with adults. An important characteristic of Emily's transition tree was that it was a place where she felt emotionally safe, in a 'bubble' she had said, 'away from the control of adults.' In another version of transitioning between reality and imaginative play, Felicity's (1970s child) ritualised entry into her secret places signified the threshold through the 'magical doorway' she and her cousins had created into their secret places. As an adult, Daniel (1970s child) re-interpreted the complicated journey into his swamp hut as a purposefully hidden place that no adult could find 'way out in the middle of nowhere,' even though he was very keen to emphasise he was not 'escaping from anything in his childhood'.

Similar to these parental experiences of portals into imaginative play, the findings also illustrated the different portals and thresholds the grandparents and the contemporary children constructed as an entry into their places for imaginative play. For example, Gloria (1940s child) spoke of the garden she planted to 'mark' the doorway into her hessian filled, prickly gorsebush cubby, while Jill (1930s child) talked about crossing through the gap in the fence as an entrance into her places for imaginative play with her friend next door. Interestingly, even though Jill's mother called her for lunch from this gap in the fence, she did not go through the fence. Similarly, Cathy's (1950s child) mother did not 'jump over the fence' into the grassy fields behind their house, just as Cathy knew would be the case. For the contemporary children, different ways of transitioning into and out of places for imaginative play were constructed according to the resources and opportunities available within their context. For Harry (4 year-old-child), the 'half-brick steps' represented the threshold to cross over into imaginative play in the 'little nest cubby' he had created with his older sister, while Georgia's (4 year-old-child)

puppets she made in her map making conversational interview illustrated how difficult it was for an adult to 'fit' into her tree cubby, and so symbolised the exclusion of adults from this place. And in line with the different affordances available to contemporary children, the findings revealed Frank (4 year-old-child) had explained the special way to gain entry 'into' the imaginative play world inside his iPod which was by pressing a 'special button' where no one could find him 'hiding behind a tree' inside a digital game.

Each of the historical and contemporary participants demonstrated their creative adaptations of resources, affordances and opportunities within their context to construct a place to transition into and out of imaginative play. Core to these examples was a material place which acted as a portal into the imaginative play that was to eventuate once they had entered this place. Common to these examples was the use of these child-constructed transition places as a protective strategy to exclude others from their imaginative play and to feel emotionally safe within their 'own little world.' This idea of a transitional place in-between a real world and a pretend world has frequently been represented in literature, art and cinema where children cross over wardrobe doorways, through garden gates and down rabbit holes into imaginary worlds as Emily (1970s child) had alluded to (Mallan, 2003; Sturm, Bosman, & Leigh, 2009). Clearly, the concept of a threshold into an imaginary world has provided inspiration for artistic work across generations, though these are more often an adult representation of memories than a child's knowledge of this childhood practice (Goodenough, 2003; Price, 2000; Reser, 2008). As described in Chapter Three, by stepping into and out of Bateson's (1972) 'play frame' or Huzinga's (1949) 'secluded circle of the game' (p. 31), the historical and contemporary children were enclosed within the 'extremely complex process of imaginative play' as Vygotsky (1930/2004) had conceptualised it (p. 28). Similar to Rasmussen's (2004) differentiation between adult and child places, Wilson (2012) also identified the difference between places designated for children's play by adults (such as fixed playgrounds) with those 'in-between spaces' where she chose to play as a child, particularly, she said, on the 'threshold of unidentified play places' (p. 32). She was especially concerned for contemporary children's lack of access to these 'in-between spaces' and so anticipated children would no longer be able to play in the same imaginative ways she had as a child (Wilson, 2012, p. 32). However, in looking at the present findings, Wilson (2012) could rest assured that contemporary children are still competently enacting their imaginative play, in the same (such as up trees, under beds) and sometimes different (such as online) 'in-between' places to children in the past.

Other researchers and scholars have found the entrance or portal into places for imaginative play of significance in their research (Sturm, 2008; Wilson, 2012; Winnicott, 1971). Particularly relevant, Winnicott's (1971) early work on 'transitional spaces' between reality and imagination has prompted more recent researchers to consider the notion of a transitional space as 'a safe place' where creativity is fostered (Ogden, 1992; Sagan, 2008). Emily's (1970s child) construction of a 'transition tree' where she felt emotionally safe captured similar meanings to those of Winnicott (1971), Ogden (1992) and Sagan (2008) in their notions of creative and safe 'transitional spaces'. Similar to these researchers and scholars, the findings also suggested the historical and contemporary children crossed over, into and through 'inside-outside, borders, fences and crawling spaces' in their construction of private places for the enactment of imaginative play (van Manen & Levering, 1997, p. 32). Other researchers who have examined children's construction of child-constructed cubbies have suggested children create these places as physical 'boundaries' to symbolize the difference between the pretend and the real world in their play (Armitage, 2011; Canning, 2013; Johnson, 2013; Kylin, 2003). Kylin (2003), Armitage (2011) and Johnson's (2013) examples of the symbolic markers children used to signify their play places were also apparent in the findings where entrances had been 'marked' with various symbols, such as bricks, plants and secret pathways. Darian-Smith's (2012) example of a 'drain lid', used in a 'secret way' by the children in her study as an 'imagined portal', epitomised the symbolic entrances into material places constructed by the historical and contemporary children in the findings from this narrative inquiry (p. 269). In a similar way, the findings showed some of the contemporary children were able to symbolically 'mark' their digital places for imaginative play by first constructing a material place around the technological device in which their online imaginative play occurred. This was clearly seen in the example of Ted (7 year-old-child) where he first constructed his hidden place in the bunk bed prior to subversively playing Minecraft, and again, when Laura (6 year-old-child) used her 'little nest cubby' as a quiet, uninterrupted place in which to play imaginative games online away from others. These examples once again show the adaptive constructions contemporary children have used in the imaginative use of affordances within the constraints of their context.

Researchers investigating children's increasing engagement with digital technologies have argued contemporary places for imaginative play were 'more permeable' than in the past (Marsh, 2013, p. 76), with 'blurred boundaries' (Loebenberg, 2013, p. 130) between online and offline places for play. These and other researchers have argued children today are offered

increasing affordances, resources and virtual spaces as possible places for twenty-first century imaginative play which are said to be markedly different to play places in the past (Edwards, 2011; Marsh, 2010; Willett, 2014). Marsh (2013) asserted there were similarities between the imaginative visualization in reading a book compared to online imaginative play; however, she argued further that online places provided more flexibility for children to swap back and forth between real and pretend, using offline reality in their online play. While this online flexibility is not in question, I argue the findings showed the boundaries between imaginative play and reality have always been porous rather than a fixed, singular place without border crossings as some researchers assume. My main argument here is that the places chosen to become portals for the enactment of imaginative play can shift, merge and blend between each other rather than remain static and unchanged. To emphasize these blurred boundaries in the past and in the present, they can be seen in Jill's (1930s child) and Laura's (6 year-old-child) similar border crossings between varieties of places for imaginative play. In constructing these places, Jill fluctuated between being hidden while spying and reading up a tree to 'disappearing' on a window seat inside a book. These blurred boundaries can equally be seen in Laura's (6 year-old-child) imaginative play. Laura oscillated between playing games on her iPad up in her 'little nest cubby' to crawling through ti-tree tunnels to hiding in bedroom cupboards to hiding in secret places in the school playground. Jill (1930s child) and Laura's (6 year-old-child) imaginative play experiences in each of these places informed their creative play in each of the other places they constructed for imaginative play. Each child moved back and forth between inside and outside places, from being symbolically hidden in plain sight to playing inside a virtual space (book/iPad). In particular, each child's public performance of play informed their private imaginative play, in the same way as their public performance of imaginative play informed their private imaginative play. These examples of imaginative play moving back and forth in constant border crossings between public (social) to private (individual) imaginative play, is a visual manifestation of Vygotsky's concept of the dialectical process of internalization.

As explained in Chapter Three, the process of internalization occurred when a child's consciousness of their environment or reality, that is, their *perezhivanie*, can be seen in their unique cognitive and emotional response to an experience (Gonzalez Rey, 2012; Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2009; Mahn, 2003). Mahn (2003) claimed that according to Vygotsky, it was when a child's increasing consciousness of the difference between their internal (individual) and external (social) life occurred, that changes in a child's personality also occurred as a part of

their 'crisis period' of development (p. 122). Similar to Vygotsky's (1930/2004) explanation of need provoking imagination, Mahn (2003) accorded this process of change as brought about by an awareness of needs in the environment, which then changed 'the internal experience, which in turn changes the [child's] relationship to the environment' (p. 129). As a consequence of this process of internalization, a child's response to contextual affordances and constraints in the construction of places for imaginative play can be seen to be influenced by their perception of need, their developing personality, and their increasing consciousness of their context. Therefore, the subversive creative adaptations in imaginative play suggested by Sutton-Smith (1997) as the 'hidden transcripts of play' can be understood as cognitive and emotional responses to a child's context (p. 118).

For this phenomenon of moving into and out of imaginative play to occur, Vygotsky (1930/2004) and later Kravtsova (2010) had argued children were able to consciously move between the real world and an imaginary world. Engel (2005) also found children were capable of understanding the difference between the 'what is' and 'what if' in their imaginative play, while Huizinga (1949) in his classical study suggested, 'we are different and do things differently' when playing in imaginative worlds (p. 31). On considering children's knowledge about the difference between real and pretend, Weisberg (2013) speculated children may also be capable of creating 'more subtle differentiations' within their imagination rather than focusing only on the 'real' and the 'pretend' spheres (p. 87). I propose this theory of moving through multiple dimensions of imaginative play may be part of more 'subtle differentiations' within a child's imaginative play which Weisberg (2013) had speculated about (p. 87). Rather than a simple binary of either a real place or a pretend place, this notion of constructing an emotionally safe place for the enactment of imaginative play is made up of real, pretend, virtual and symbolic places for imaginative play, with multiple border crossings in-between. This notion was strongly reinforced in the findings when Daniel (1970s child) perceptively spoke in Chapter Six about his childhood experience of border crossings into imaginative play and said, 'I don't think you can draw a line about where it is and where it stops, there are times when you can go into it and go out of it...it's a flow from one mood to the next.' In this insightful commentary, Daniel appeared to be describing the conscious awareness of the development of imagination as Vygotsky (1930/2004) theorized in the 1930s, whilst simultaneously raising Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) more recent conceptualization of 'creative flow'.

#### **7.4. Inner dimension: The construction of a symbolic place to enact imaginative play**

‘...Rebekah occupies or imagines innumerable different private spaces. At a first remove, they are physical spaces where she can be alone. At a second remove, once she is in a private place she travels in her imagination to yet further places, occupied by companions of her own choice...’ (Schreiner, 1926, as cited in Jenkins, 2013, p. 44)

Children consciously construct symbolic places as emotionally safe places for the enactment of imaginative play. This was evident in Schreiner’s (1926) quote above, and was strongly evident in the findings in Chapters Five and Six. In these findings, Cathy (1950s child) looked back on her childhood through the lens of historicity in the form of re-emerged memories. Cathy was able to contrast her experience of the public performance of imaginative play in the ‘Helpers Club House’ compared with the different play in the emotionally safe places she and her brother constructed together. She spoke earnestly about the ‘multi-layered meanings of play’ which had become apparent with her increasing awareness of her feelings associated with her childhood imaginative play and places. Initially, Cathy had lamented that there was ‘no space to have a place’ for imaginative play inside their family home. In thinking more deeply about her own experiences of childhood imaginative play, Cathy firstly told a different story about escaping into imaginative play inside books while in their lounge room, and then later, about an old lady’s ‘dimly lit...musty smelling’ lounge room. In this alternative lounge room, Cathy and her older brother had symbolically constructed an emotionally safe place for their imaginative play. This imaginative play involved the old lady in a way that was not possible either in their subdued lounge room at home, nor in the supervised play in the ‘Helpers Club House’ woodshed. Similar to their feelings of emotional safety in the place they had constructed in the long grass, Cathy and her brother were able to enact a deeper, different form of imaginary play in which they could play ‘wild imaginary games’ with rich, complex themes ‘in a world of our own’ that continued over an extended period. Cathy’s descriptions of her extended ‘own world’ of imaginative play in the old lady’s lounge room and in the long grass were closely aligned with the characteristics described by Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein (2006, 2013) in their study of children’s imaginary worlds, and these descriptions demonstrated the strength of difference in the private play Cathy enacted.



In her re-story in Chapter Five, Cathy (1950s child) literally visualized the old lady's lounge room by giving a rich, sensory description of the place with her eyes closed, deeply entrenched in the memory. Such was the intensity of this story it was surprising that Cathy had taken so long to recall it in her storytelling. The findings suggested that it was only after thinking more deeply about their actual experiences that participants spoke about the reality of their imaginative play experiences that were often in contrast to the societal thinking of the time. This suggested the participants' stories were contextually linked to that era's conceptualization of childhood and the imaginative play expected to be enacted at that time. As a consequence, it appeared initially difficult for participants to move beyond these narratives in order to question 'what they thought they knew' about imaginative play and to be able to tell their own stories (Golombek & Johnson, 2004, p. 309). These findings also showed that Cathy was eventually able to question and then shift her thinking about her own experiences, which included both indoor and outdoor play experiences, in contrast to her original suggestion that children in the past 'only played outside'. In these alternative narratives, re-interpreted understandings of imaginative play and the places it was enacted had become a possibility for Cathy.

Similar to Cathy, the analysis of Emily's (1970s child) re-stories revealed they were not only thick with description but also increasingly showed a deeper awareness of her past experiences of imaginative play through her continual reflective thinking. In Emily's initial stories, the construction of 'warm and safe...bamboo hut enclosures' she had made with her brother and a small group of friends featured strongly. Later, it became increasingly evident that Emily as a young child was able to distinguish the difference between feeling physically safe and, more importantly to her, feeling emotionally safe. This has already been identified earlier in this chapter in the way that Emily and her brother symbolically constructed their 'transition tree' as a form of emotionally safe border crossing between the imagined world in the bamboo huts and the 'real world' of adults. Emily and her brother's strategy in using this place to adjust to leaving their 'own world' before re-entering an adult-controlled world, illustrated young children's knowledge in the use of imaginative play practices and places for the construction of emotionally safe places. However, a further example of Emily's increasing understanding of the importance of constructing emotionally safe places for imaginative play was evident in the findings when she compared imaginative play in the jungle juxtaposed against an Australian backyard. The findings suggested Emily felt unsure how to enact imaginative play in this new place, which she noted was a public event in an open backyard with nothing but a staircase,

some old pots and mud. In looking back on her childhood, Emily had concluded imaginative play in Australia during the 1970s was based on television characters rather than the environment, as it had been on the island. She felt she had to ‘activate the backyard’ using her imagination because there was nothing else there, which contrasted with a jungle ‘so full of stimulation.’ This contrast was interesting to note, and seemed to support many of the historical children’s evaluations of the increased need to use imagination when ‘there is nothing there’ to stimulate play and create places of emotional safety.

Similar to the analysis of the findings which showed Cathy’s (1950s child) and Emily’s (1970s child) increasing metacognitive awareness about their imaginative play, the findings in Chapter Five also illustrated Sonya (6 year-old-child) was increasingly aware of the need for emotional safety prior to enacting her imaginative play. These findings revealed Sonya’s initial hesitancy in acknowledging her concern about her peer group and their potentially judgemental attitude toward her imaginative play. Although the findings illustrated Sonya’s sense of self-esteem and confidence to be well-established, the impact of the powerful peer culture was highly influential in where, when and what she played. Initially, Sonya had said she did not mind others listening, but then shifted her response as she realized she did not want others to overhear the ‘games that are a bit private’ with her friends. As a further emotional response to this dilemma, Sonya had developed strategies to feel emotionally safe prior to the enactment of their imaginative play by being symbolically hidden in plain sight. Through the strategies of watching, stopping and waiting for others to pass by their private imaginative play place, the enactment of their deeply engaging imaginative play was protected from the impact of others. These findings suggested Sonya’s increasing consciousness of her need for emotional safety in her imaginative play. Further to this, the strategies Sonya created were a visible example of *perezhivanie* through the unity of emotion (Sonya did not want her peers to listen to her imaginative play and potentially laugh at her) and cognition (Sonya created purposeful strategies to prevent them listening) connected with the enactment of imaginative play.

The findings examining Judy’s (1970s child) imaginative play experiences in Chapter Five revealed further examples of a child’s knowledge and ability to construct symbolic emotionally safe places for imaginative play. Judy’s experiences were interesting because, as Sonya’s (6 year-old-child) mother, there were discernible family similarities across generations. This was seen, for example, in both Judy’s and Sonya’s strong impulse to construct their own emotionally safe places for imaginative play, and the protective strategies they created to avoid their peers

‘laughing’ at (Sonya) and ‘teasing’ (Judy) them. It is also interesting to note that, despite their confident personalities, they both had a similar emotional response to the potential threat of ridicule about their risky imaginative play which both identified as ‘different’ to the public performance of imaginative play. The findings show Judy was able to articulate this need to protect her play retrospectively, and was deeply thoughtful about her increasing recollection of childhood imaginative play experiences. On analysis of the findings, Judy’s stories were initially only about her imaginative play with Barbie that she had enacted on the front steps of her home. However, the later findings illustrated Judy’s stories became more intense with each conversational interview until she disclosed her strong emotional response to playing under a building site with her best friend. Although the neighbourhood children knew about the building site as a great place to hide, Judy realized later she had purposefully not told them about the ‘secret Barbie world fantasy’ she and her friend enacted there. Judy said she and her friend had kept this a secret because ‘they did not want to be teased’ by the other children, and that their play was ‘too important’ for others to know about. Judy saw this lack of disclosure to her peers as a ‘different level of secrecy’ compared with not revealing their play under the building site to her parents. The findings detailing Judy’s imaginative play under the building site indicated that her deeply engaged play in the emotionally safe place she had constructed with her friend was noticeably different to the ‘hide and seek’ play both girls performed with their peer group in the same physical space.

Children’s construction of emotionally safe places for imaginative play has involved privacy and, at times, secrecy. Judy’s (1970s child) reference to a ‘different level of secrecy’ in the construction of a symbolic emotionally safe place is of particular significance to the findings presented in Chapter Six. Although most of the participants had expressed a need to construct a private emotionally safe place in Chapter Five, the findings presented in Chapter Six illustrated the progressive change towards the need for more secrecy in the places they constructed for emotional safety from the 1970s onwards. Van Manen and Levering (1997) had differentiated between the concepts of privacy and secrecy in their work on childhood secrets, defining the need for privacy in childhood as a way of separating from others while secrecy was sought when children wanted their play to be a secret from, or with, someone else. The older participants had suggested their need for privacy had been met through many opportunities to play in private, hidden and uninterrupted places and so they did not feel the need to move beyond constructing private places for play. However, the impulse toward increased privacy manifested in the form

of secret places was evident on examination of the 1970s and contemporary children's re-story extracts. Similar to Judy (1970s child), this was seen in Felicity's (1970s child) construction of her 'secret club house' on her bunk-bed in her bedroom and up a large tree some distance from home. The findings demonstrated Felicity had wanted to keep her imaginative play places a secret 'from' her parents and siblings, and a secret 'with' her cousins (see also van Manen & Levering, 1997). As previously indicated, Felicity did this by constructing a secret entry ritual to gain access into these two secret places, and withholding information about their existence from everyone other than her cousins.

For the contemporary children, secrecy was also seen to be an important component in the construction of their emotionally safe places for imaginative play. The impulse toward constructing secret places was as intense for the contemporary children as it was for the 1970s children. This was especially evident in the findings which highlighted Frank's (4 year-old-child) enthusiastic construction of multiple secret places in a variety of places at home, at kindergarten and online. Interestingly, although Frank had claimed he had 'maked up' the idea of secret places himself, the notion of a secret place for imaginative play had clearly been passed through the generations of his family from his mother Felicity's (1970s child) 'secret club house' to his older brother Scott's (6 year-old-child) 'secret tree cubby' at home. Similarly, the impulse to construct secret places was also clear in the findings in Ted's (7 year-old-child) re-story extract which focused on his secret place hidden under the blanket hung around his bunk bed and where he had constructed a secret place around a tree at school as part of a 'secret game' Interestingly, this tendency toward secrecy had been passed down to Ted's younger sister, Georgia (4 year-old-child) who also referred to her 'secret games' at preschool, and who had established successful strategies to protect her secret play from the intrusion of others.

The increased need for secrecy by the 1970s children can be linked to postmodern societal changes and shifts occurring around this time (Beck, 1986; Giddens, 1991). A sense of social uncertainty had impacted on child rearing, discipline and community attitudes to children generally, with an increasing sense of urgency seen in the protection of children (Giddens, 1991). Consequently, parental expectations of children's behaviour and play had changed, with increased adult supervision to minimise unknown risks and dangers in an uncertain world (Beck, 1986). This was seen in the findings where Judy (1970s child) was aware of her mother constantly watching her play on the steps through the front windows, when Emily (1970s child) needed to create a transitional place between the adult supervised world and her imagined

world, and when Felicity's (1970s child) parents prohibited her play on the bunks after Felicity's accident in the bed slats. The findings suggested the children's response to this increasingly overt supervision and sense of uncertainty during the 1970s was to resist and push back against it, and become even more accomplished at 'hiding' than the previous generation had been. Privacy had stepped up to 'another level' towards secrecy for the 1970s children, as Judy (1970s child) had suggested. The findings presented show that secrecy had become paramount in the enactment of the 1970s children's imaginative play, as their secret places were ardently protected from others. 'Isn't that what kids do?' Judy had queried, 'Not tell their parents what they are really doing?'

Similar to the 1970s contextual changes, but with increasing intensity, societal risk aversion had framed the contemporary children's lives (Gill, 2007). As a consequence, their lives appeared to be organised around constant adult supervision based on the perceived need for heightened protection and safety precautions (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). The dichotomy between children considered as 'experts in their own lives' (Moss & Petrie, 2002) as against the reality of their being 'more hemmed in by surveillance and social regulation than ever before' (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998, p.7) was consistently illustrated in the findings. However, the findings have also shown how resilient the contemporary children were at working around these constraints towards the construction of their secret places in some form as an intrinsic element of their symbolic emotionally safe places. This view is reinforced in Russ and Dillon's (2011) twenty-year longitudinal research on children's creativity in which they found children's marked resilience in their ability to solve problems creatively due to the constancy of change in their lives. Price's (2000) definition of the 'primary law of childhood secret spaces', which she argued 'has less to do with a static and romantic state of being than with a dynamic search for constancy' (p. 262), links children's conscious need for the construction of an emotionally safe place with the creation of secret places. A child's secret place is not a romantic notion, but rather an emotional and creatively adaptive response to contextual constraints in an attempt to construct places for imaginative play.

Children have demonstrated the difference between their private imaginative play in emotionally safe places compared with their public performance of imaginative play. Although contemporary children's need for secrecy in their imaginative play was similar to that of the 1970s children, the findings revealed an additional layer of secrecy in the contemporary children's use of toys in their private imaginative play which was different to that of the

historical children. This contemporary change was seen in the findings when both Ted (7 year-old-child) and Sonya (6 year-old-child) played secretly with ‘teddies’ in contrast to the ‘popular’ toys they played with in public. In the findings, Ted (7 year-old-child) had initially talked in precise detail about playing Pokémon and basketball at school with his peers, saying he did not play pretend games at school. These comments were markedly similar to Scott’s (6 year-old-child) comments about the ‘real play’ he said he played with his peers when playing Pokémon at school in contrast to the ‘pretend play’ he played at home with his brother and close friends in the ‘secret bush cubby’. In later conversational interviews, the findings revealed Ted’s discussion shifted to include pretend play around the ‘secret base tree’ and secret strategic games he played at school with a small group of others up near the fence line of the oval. After this disclosure, Ted quietly talked about playing with teddies with his younger sister on his bunk bed using the blanket around the bed to create a secret place. In talking about his secret teddy play, Ted was extremely anxious that no one else at school knew about this play and had only disclosed this information when we were positioned far from the hearing range of any peers. Just as Jones (2008) had found, the places where interviews were conducted influenced the depth and type of stories told in a research situation. Further to this, in talking while on tour around the school as proposed by Clark and Moss (2011) and Kuntz and Presnell (2012), Ted appeared much more at ease in speaking about his deeper feelings of imaginative play than would have been possible in an interview inside his classroom.

The findings in Sonya’s (6 year-old-child) re-story extracts indicated she was also anxious about others knowing about her ‘secret’ teddy play. Similar to Ted, the stories embedded in Sonya’s re-story extracts shifted from peer group play to private (then secret) small group play to secret teddy play. This shift was particularly visible in the findings involving Sonya’s memory box stories, in which she had initially showed me her extensive collection of Monster High dolls and their corresponding marketing booklets. Also similar to Ted’s all-encompassing description of Pokémon, Sonya explained in precise detail every aspect of these dolls and appeared happy to openly display them as she spoke and photographed each one. However, following this conversation, the findings illustrated the extent of Sonya’s nervousness in showing me all the contents of her memory box, when she whispered, ‘I’ve got stuff in here I don’t usually let people see...it’s kind of babyish...I have teddies.’ Although Sonya’s mother, Judy (1970s child), had specifically said she did not want her children to have access to digital games for play, she appeared to be happy to buy Sonya the dolls she asked for which happened to be

merchandise linked with online games. In this way, Sonya was able to hold some form of social currency amongst her peers even though she was not able to speak the language of online games (Marsh, 2013). Further to these ideas, the findings demonstrated Georgia (4 year-old-child) was also aware of the difference between her private and public performance of imaginative play. This was seen through Georgia's 'iPod, iPhone, iPad' repetitive chant when I asked about possible online places for imaginative play. Georgia extended this technological recital by saying, 'I pretend Jetpack...Minecraft' and that her older siblings (not her parents) were only allowed to watch her play these online games. However, when Georgia spoke about her private places for imaginative play, she said there was 'only one place, and that's Barbie.' It appeared from these findings that Barbie had shifted from the popular culture toy of choice during Judy's 1970s childhood to one where Georgia felt she had to hide her Barbie play from her siblings for fear of criticism.

In terms of the change across generations, the findings in Chapter Six have shown that the toys the historical children played with in their private imaginative places and practices were often similar to those they played with in public. However, the toys the contemporary children played with in private were significantly different to the ones they played with in public. For example, Jill (1930s child) enacted similar aspects of imaginative play in private, such as dressing-up in elf brown clothes up the apricot tree in preparation for the public performance of neighbourhood 'dressing-up parades'. Similarly, Bob's (1940s child) private solitary game using 'a wad of newspaper for a footy' was an enactment of his public performance of imaginative play with the neighbourhood boys down the street. In a similar way, Judy's (1970s child) public performance of her 'Barbie world' she created on the front steps of the house was the main informant for her private imaginative play enacted in secrecy under the building site with her best friend. Cultural-historical researchers would explain Judy's use of an abstract version of Barbie as a manifestation of her ability to 'decontextualise' the concrete form into an abstract idea for play in a different context (Duncan & Tarulli, 2003; Japiassu, 2008). Vygotsky (1930/2004) referred to this process as 'dissociation' as part of the second way in the development of imagination which involved the reworking of past experiences into new creative ideas and meanings (p. 25). Bodrova (2008) has asserted that children were no longer able to 'decontextualise' objects to create new meanings in their imaginative play. She has further argued that contemporary children were not able to understand the concept of pretend because of their excessive use of 'extremely realistic toys' in stereotypical play themes (Bodrova, 2008, p. 366). However, the

present findings suggested children were not only capable of changing the meaning of toys and objects in their imaginative play, they were able to differentiate between different contexts and subsequently play in different ways accordingly. As a result, the findings presented in the contemporary children's re-story extracts illustrated the impulse toward secrecy had shifted to become even more complex than historical children's experiences of imaginative play.

While Marsh (2013) maintained 'toys reflect the zeitgeist of a given era' (p. 59), the analysis of the findings in Chapter Six provided a different narrative about contemporary children's use of toys. Instead of only playing with the toys which represented the societal trend or popular culture of the day, the findings revealed contemporary children's whispered stories of playing with alternative toys in their private imaginative play. This difference was evident in the findings where contemporary children were happy to talk about and display their toys 'linked to virtual worlds', such as Moshi Monsters, Pokémon and Monster High dolls, as part of their public performance of imaginative play (Marsh, 2013, p. 65). However, in contrast to this, these same children appeared anxious and 'nervous' about being exposed to their peers for playing with 'babyish' toys such as 'teddies' in private. Hence, this additional layer of secrecy was connected to the toys contemporary children played with in their private imaginative play in direct contrast to the toys they played with in public.

The findings which illustrated Sonya (6 year-old-child), Ted (7 year-old-child) and Georgia's (4 year-old-child) anxious protection of their private play aligned closely with Cross's (2009) study where a difference between public and private imaginative play was evident. In Cross's (2009) research, a small group of nine year old boys anxiously protected their secret, highly creative physical version of online games from their peer group for fear of being considered 'babyish' in playing imaginative games amongst trees (p. 133). As indicated in the present findings, each of the contemporary children's re-stories revealed the expected public performance of imaginative play for their era held a powerful influence on what form and where their private and secret imaginative play was enacted. These findings also demonstrated the significant emotional impulse to protect this secret play from others, thereby prompting a different use of toys for their public performance of imaginative play. While their private and secret imaginative play was as deeply engaging as the historical children's play, the significance of constructing an emotionally safe place for the enactment of this play had become even more important for contemporary children.



This notion of a child's knowledge of emotional safety as opposed to an adult's emphasis on physical safety continually reappeared in the participants' stories across generations. Drawing again on Vygotsky's (1930/2004) theory of imagination and creativity as mentioned earlier, that signified children's needs 'trigger[ed] the working of imagination' (p. 29), children's conscious awareness of a need to construct their own place for imaginative play was found to have triggered the practice of creative place making. Furthermore, the conscious awareness of the need to construct an emotionally safe place prior to the enactment of imaginative play triggered the process of imagination. This meant that once children became consciously aware of the need to feel emotionally safe, they were motivated to create a place where this feeling of emotional safety was possible. These findings have suggested that both the historical and contemporary children were aware of a difference between their private enactments of imaginative play, where they felt emotionally safe, in contrast to their public performance of play. Furthermore, the findings indicated that in each era, the children were conscious of the difference between their deeply engaging different form of private, uninterrupted and emotionally safe imaginative play compared with the public performance of play expected by society. The notion of a public performance of play is reinforced in Gillis's (2009) claim that 'childhood is a kind of performance' in which societal expectations of play is an adult interpretation of their own childhoods rather than a child's knowledge of their play (p. 122). In contrast to this however, what these findings suggested was the historical and contemporary children were enacting their private imaginative play beneath both an adult expectation of imaginative play as well as the play expected within the 'hidden transcripts' of their peer culture (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 118). While these findings may appear to merely reiterate Corsaro's (2011) notion of a peer culture 'underlife' (p. 171), I contend they reveal a deeper 'inner' dimension of imaginative play. Within this deeper dimension, the inner dimension of this focal theory, the children's subversive strategies were predominantly about protecting their creatively risky imaginative play, more so than simply 'contradict[ing]' adult intentions as Corsaro (2011) had speculated (p. 177). This idea is supported when considering the children's protective strategies were used to shield their private imaginative play from the critique of their broader peer group, not just to be 'somehow Other to adults' (Cloe & Jones, 2005, p. 320). Central to this argument is how a child's knowledge of imaginative play, the places it is enacted and their strategic use of imaginative play practices, enabled the construction of symbolic emotionally safe places for the enactment of deeply engaging, creatively risky imaginative play.

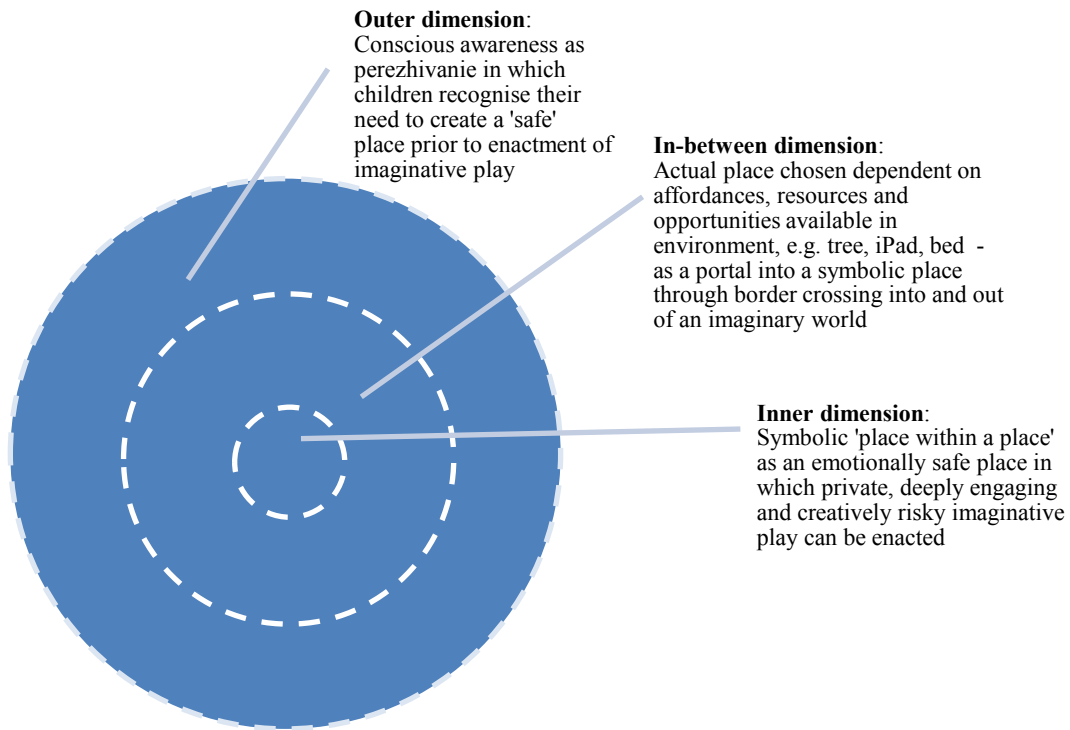
In Chapter Three, I highlighted the significance of Mahn and John-Steiner's (2002) notion of an 'affective safety zone' (p. 52). I also emphasized the value of El'Koninova's (2002) conceptualization of 'make-believe spaces' in which children 'flicker back and forth' from imaginary to real worlds (p. 49). El'Koninova (2002) maintained that children were able to create these 'make-believe spaces' to enable the 'safe testing of sense' (p. 49), while Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) discussed the importance in sharing risky, new ideas with important others (p. 52). Each of these scholars focused on the concepts of sense and metacognitive awareness, and as such, each was referring to the Vygotskian concept of *perezhivanie* as a child's increasing consciousness of their emotional experiences (Gonzalez Rey, 2009, 2012; Vygotsky, 1998). I have drawn on all of these conceptual ideas to inform the focal theory I am proposing on the enactment of imaginative play. In so doing, I have combined the idea of an 'affective safety zone' for creatively risky ideas (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002, p. 52) with the notion of constructing a 'make-believe space' to safely engage in 'flickering between an imaginary and real world' (El'kininov, 2002, p. 49). In addition to this, I have aligned these researchers' significant ideas with Vygotsky's theory on the development of imagination together with the findings outlined in Chapters Five and Six to frame this theorization on contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play. Therefore, the lynchpin of these contemporary understandings is a child's construction of a symbolic emotionally safe place prior to the enactment of creatively risky, deeply engaging imaginative play.

The findings revealed for historical and contemporary children to create an emotionally safe place frequently meant constructing a different 'place' symbolically embedded inside another 'place'. This notion was visually manifested in the findings which revealed Felicity's (1970s child) secret place 'inside' the bunk bed and the tree branches. It was also seen in Ted's (7 year-old-child) virtual place 'inside' the iPod which was within the enclosed bunk bed, and Jill's (1930s child) place for imaginative play 'inside' her book while 'hidden in plain sight' on the window seat. This notion of a 'place inside a place' is implied in Schreiner's (1926) quote at the beginning of this section. In this quote, the child first constructed a private hiding place, and then moved 'in her imagination' to another place where she played with imaginary friends (Schreiner, 1926, cited in Jenkins, 2013, p. 44). This quote not only reinforces a child's capacity for the construction of a private imaginative place, it also confirms the child's conscious movement back and forth between physical and symbolic places within imaginative play. This 'different' place was also evident throughout Chapters Five and Six when the participants

referred to their imaginative play and the places it was enacted as ‘different’ to ‘ordinary’ pretend play. In the findings, this difference was noticeable when Felicity (1970s child) understood her imaginative play inside her secret place to be ‘something extraordinary’ compared with the ordinary ‘mud pies in the backyard sort of pretend play’ with her peer group. Felicity commented further that the meanings of this play had ‘shifted into a different realm’ for her rather than simply playing make-believe with neighbourhood friends. The findings also illuminated this difference when Judy (1970s child) considered her fantasy Barbie play under the building site to be ‘so naughty’ and thereby different to her ‘ordinary play with dolls’ that she performed in public view, and when Laura (6 year-old-child) spoke of the difference between being able to be ‘themselves’ when they were playing in their ‘little nest cubby’ compared with other places where it would be ‘tricky’ to play. This difference was also visible in the comparison between Cathy’s (1950s child) deeply engaging imaginative play in the long grass compared with her closely monitored, ‘proper’ play in the ‘Helpers Club House’, and between Ted’s (7 year-old-child) Pokémon dominated play with his peers in the school playground in contrast to the creatively risky, imaginative play enacted with a few friends around the base of an old ‘secret tree’ up the back of the school oval. And it was particularly evident when the findings illustrated contemporary and historical children’s propensity toward deeply engaging play in the emotionally safe places they constructed themselves, rather than those designated by adults as physically safe play places intended for an adult interpretation of imaginative play, such as adult-built cubby houses in the present or woodsheds in the past.

Therefore, this focal theory of the contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play argues that a child’s deeply engaging, creatively risky imaginative play is more likely to be enacted within their construction of a symbolic emotionally safe place. This was the private imaginative play which was interpreted by participants as ‘different’ to the ‘mud pie’ form of imaginative play they performed openly in public. Furthermore, the public performance of imaginative play which adhered to the expected childhood norms of each era tended to be a less creatively risky form of imaginative play. Typically, this play was enacted in accordance with the ‘hidden transcripts’ of the peer culture (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 118) and was facilitated by adult gatekeepers who bought the toys which were representative of each era (Marsh, 2013). However, beneath these societal, adult and peer expectations, I contend the findings have illuminated a deeper, different form of imaginative play which was only enacted in private, hidden and uninterrupted constructions of emotionally safe places. That is, inside a place within

a place. The following diagram, Figure 7.1, is a visual representation of the three dimensions essential to this focal theory of contemporary understandings on the enactment of imaginative play.



**Figure 7.1 Visual representation of the three dimensions of contemporary understanding of the enactment of imaginative play**

In this visual representation, the outer dimension represents the child becoming increasingly conscious of their need to feel emotionally safe prior to enacting their imaginative play. This dimension highlights the role of emotion in this focal theory through the interconnection between emotion and the development of imagination. Following this, the second dimension represents the actual material place which becomes the 'portal' through which the child is able to move into and out of imaginative play, such as re-constructing the meanings of beds, trees and/or iPads as places for imaginative play. The choice of portal is dependent on the affordances or constraints within the child's cultural context in different times and places. The inner dimension represents the emotionally safe place as a symbolic 'place within a place' in which creatively risky, deeply engaging imaginative play can be enacted. Through this construction of an emotionally safe place, children have created a place in which to practise their creatively risky imaginative play in private before enacting their imaginative play in the public arena

where they could be exposed to criticism and ridicule from adults and peers. This focal theory further argues that children's substantive knowledge of their imaginative play practices and the places they construct can be seen as contextual affordances to counter cultural constraints to enable the construction of their private, emotionally safe places for imaginative play. These three dimensions have been intentionally illustrated with dotted lines to represent the porous border crossing which constantly occurs across each of these dimensions. They have also been purposefully positioned within a nested diagram to show the interplay between conscious awareness, material place and symbolism in the construction of emotionally safe places at the core of this focal theory.

## **7.5. Summary**

In this chapter, I have brought together the analysis of the two key findings from Chapters Five and Six with the substantive and theoretical literature in Chapters Two and Three. The theoretical lens of cultural- historical theory, in particular Vygotsky's (1930/2004) conceptualisation of the development of imagination and creativity in childhood, has been used to frame this work. Vygotsky's use of the term *perezhivanie*, together with Gonzalez Rey's (2012) more recent interpretation of this term, help in understanding the interconnected relationship between emotion and imaginative play. Furthermore, I have combined the cultural-historical concept of historicity with *perezhivanie* to further understand the complex process of how the past has informed the present in the way participants have re-interpreted their emotional responses to their own and other childhood imaginative play experiences over time. I have highlighted the relevance of a narrative inquiry that enables the participants to question their childhood imaginative play experiences, and shown how interactive research methods can, at times, assist participants in their recall of past experiences. This chapter was presented in three sections which represented the three interconnected dimensions which form the basis of this focal theory of contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play.

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

### **8.1. Introduction**

This chapter concludes the thesis which has sought to construct a focal theory of contemporary understandings on the enactment of children's imaginative play. Contemporary discourses asserting the decline in children's imaginative play were seen to impact adult recognition of children's imaginative play in homes and in educational settings. With this in mind, I examined two distinct bodies of literature in an attempt to understand imaginative play by firstly considering children's knowledge, then from an adult perspective. Compelling evidence on the significance of children's knowledge was presented through an examination of literature which highlighted children's agency in their use of imaginative play. I then examined studies which focused on children's emotional connection with imaginative play practices and places. However, very few examples of empirical research were found to foreground children's knowledge of the meanings associated with the lived experience of imaginative play. In contrast, an extensive body of literature was available which outlined adult knowledge of their retrospective experiences of imaginative play, adult assumptions around moral panic and generational change in imaginative play.

I have examined and acknowledged the work of theorists and researchers who have investigated the development of imagination and imaginative play over time. However, the use of cultural-historical theory was chosen as the theoretical framework, because of its emphasis on context, in conjunction with Vygotsky's comprehensive explanation of the development of imagination and creativity in children. I have provided an explanation on the Vygotskian concepts of *perezhivanie*, consciousness and internalisation. These concepts combined with the lens of historicity enabled a clear understanding of the past informing the present in 'emotionally charged' experiences of imaginative play (Gonzalez Rey, 2012). Increasing consciousness was seen to be of critical importance in each participant's ability to think deeply about their past experiences of imaginative play and the meanings of this play. Following this, I then explained and described the methodological underpinnings and decisions of the study. I explained in detail the use of a narrative inquiry approach to research, and found it the most authentic way to generate stories of meaningful experiences of imaginative play with children and adults. This method enabled participants to question and reconstruct what they thought they knew about

imaginative play and consider new possibilities in the enactment of imaginative play practices and places.

The analysis of the data generated identified two key findings which first highlighted the stability of imaginative play practices and places across the past three generations. There were seven themes in the first key finding which illustrated the stability of imaginative play practices and places, which were:

1. The impulse towards finding or constructing a quiet, uninterrupted and private 'own place' for imaginative play;
2. The impulse towards the need for emotional safety for imaginative play;
3. The close connection between bedrooms and trees with imaginative play;
4. The inclusion of significant others in imaginative play;
5. The impact of others on imaginative play;
6. The influence of popular culture on imaginative play; and,
7. The influence of found objects on imaginative play.

Although these themes have persisted over time, the second key finding illuminated three changes in imaginative play practices and places across the past three generations, which were:

1. The availability and accessibility of places for imaginative play;
2. The degree of privacy sought for imaginative play; and,
3. The use of toys in the private and public performance of imaginative play.

Finally, I combined the analysis of these two key findings with substantive, theoretical and methodological literature to discuss my interpretation of what these findings mean. The research question which has guided this study was:

What do the meanings of children's imaginative play practices and places over the past three generations suggest for contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play?

To answer this research question, the meanings of historical and contemporary childhood imaginative play across the past three generations were examined and analysed. Through this examination and analysis, I have identified new ways to think about imaginative play. In so

doing, I have proposed a focal theory of contemporary understandings of the enactment of imaginative play which argues the enactment of imaginative play occurs subject to the interplay between conscious awareness, material place and the construction of a symbolic place.

## **8.2. Contribution to knowledge: Substantive knowledge on new understandings of imaginative play**

This study has illuminated new ways of understanding imaginative play. The examination of imaginative play was initiated because contemporary discourses around children's imaginative play appeared to be based on societal assumptions rather than empirical evidence. Multiple contemporary discourses questioning twenty-first century imaginative play have been linked with moral panic on the assumed decline in contemporary children's capacity for imaginative play. Assumptions based on misunderstanding and confusion fed this moral panic, which in turn created fear and uncertainty about changes in childhood imaginative play. This included fear as to the impact of digital technology on children's ability to play imaginatively (Fox, Diezmann & Grieshaber, 2010; King & Howard, 2010; Levin & Rosenquest, 2001), to concern raised about a definitive 'decline in the quality and quantity' of children's imaginative play (Bodrova, 2008, p.364; Kim, 2011). While the debate about the origin and form of this particular moral panic was not within the scope of this thesis, what was of interest was the powerful influence of a cyclic moral panic on the construct of contemporary childhood (Bennett, Maton & Kervin, 2008). Specifically, how a moral panic based on the assumption of contemporary children's declining ability to play imaginatively in comparison with the past had profoundly informed current understandings of childhood, children's knowledge, dispositions and overall capabilities. Of particular importance to the early childhood field were the ramifications from these contemporary discourses about the assumed decline in imaginative play on children, early childhood educators and early childhood education.

Research has shown that early childhood education, regulation and policy commonly reflects societal values and assumptions about childhood, and consequently, can be seen as a gauge of contemporary discourses concerning childhood (Doliopoulou & Rizou, 2012; Sandberg & Vuorinen, 2010). This is problematic for early childhood educators who have expressed concern about how best to plan for imaginative play in a climate where children's imaginative play skills are said to be substantially less than the past. The educators' concern is further perpetuated when the implementation of early childhood pedagogy is conflicted between past theories of



play, restricted through regulations around supervision, and caught between past assumptions of childhood and what is currently happening in contemporary childhoods (Doliopoulou & Rizou, 2012; McInnes, Howard, Miles, & Crowley, 2011; Sandberg & Vvorinin, 2010). This situation was seen in recent early childhood studies in which the educators firmly believed contemporary children were no longer capable of playing in imaginative ways. As a result, these educators felt compelled to re-configure their curriculum accordingly to accommodate a deficit view of contemporary imaginative play (Bodrova, 2008; Doliopoulou & Rizou, 2012; McInnes et al, 2011; Sandberg & Vvorinin, 2010). Other recent studies investigating parental attitudes to perceived changes in play have also revealed misunderstandings about imaginative play. In these studies, many parents were concerned they did not understand or recognise what their children's imaginative play looked like (Fox, Diezmann & Grieshaber, 2010; Ramugondo, 2012; Singer, et al, 2009). On close examination of these studies, it can be argued that they reveal an adult tendency to impose their own interpretations of past imaginative play onto children's contemporary play. As a consequence, some adults were not able to recognise the imaginative re-constructions children have created in their play because it does not match their own imaginative play experiences and, therefore, their expectations of contemporary imaginative play.

The findings, however, suggest an alternative proposition to these contemporary discourses and pedagogical dilemmas. The two key findings from this study show the fundamental stability in childhood imaginative play with very few changes across the past three generations.

Accordingly, this study disputes contemporary discourses on the decline in imaginative play and provides empirical evidence which clearly illustrates contemporary children's capacity to enact highly creative imaginative play. In these new understandings of the enactment of imaginative play, the historical and the contemporary children were seen to be creative, resilient and agentive through their knowledge of imaginative play practices and the places they constructed to enact it. Children's imaginative play practices and places, as well as their strategies to protect it across generations, were creatively adapted to accommodate changing cultural contexts in each era. Of particular significance, historical and contemporary children were seen to enact imaginative play beneath the adult and the children's peer group gaze to enable the emotionally safe enactment of their creatively risky, deeply engaging imaginative play in private places. While the construction of an emotionally safe place for imaginative play was evident across

generations, its manifestation was also seen to be creatively adapted to allow for available affordances and/or constraints in each child's respective cultural context.

Other researchers have also found children were more likely to be creative in secluded places. In Reunamo et al.'s (2013) study, children were more creative when they played alone, whilst Dunn (2004) considered children's imaginative play to be richer in the company of one or two close friends. These researchers, together with Howe and Bruno (2010), have collectively found that children attempt to enact their imaginative play away from the gaze of adults, and in some cases, away from their peers (Cross, 2009). It is especially relevant that Howe and Bruno (2010) found children's play under the gaze of their parents tended to be limited to 'domestic play themes' in contrast with the creation of 'imaginary worlds' when they were alone or with close friends (p. 946). This idea was reinforced in Cross's (2009) study in which children re-configured online games into physical enactments of imaginative play in hidden places under trees, purposefully away from the gaze of other children. In this new way of understanding imaginative play, I take this argument further than these researchers and contend contemporary children's increased need for privacy in more recent times is a critical factor to be considered in the enactment of contemporary imaginative play. The findings provide definitive empirical evidence on children's need for privacy and emotional safety prior to the enactment of imaginative play. I also argue children's private imaginative play in any era was and/or is of a different, richer calibre than the public performance of play, where the expected imaginative play is enacted in front of an audience.

Therefore, I agree with Robson's (2012) contention that when children are 'tested' or overtly watched to assess their creativity and imaginative play skills, they are unlikely to exhibit their real capacity in such a public, staged arena. This notion would explain why researchers critically 'testing' children's creativity considered children today have 'limited...stereotypical play themes' (Bodrova, 2008, p. 364) such as the children in Howe and Bruno's (2010) study when watched by parents, and why Kim (2011) in her quantitative laboratory-based study pronounced children's creativity to be in crisis. It would also provide an explanation as to why the early childhood educators in Sandberg and Vuorinen's (2010) and Doliopoulou & Rizou's (2012) studies determined the heavily supervised, constantly watched children in their busy early childhood centres could not play in imaginative ways like children used to in the past. I maintain this was because the children attending these busy and overtly supervised places had difficulty in constructing emotionally safe places for the private enactment of their imaginative play in

these supervised and exposed environments. This would be especially so in places where a 'deficit' view of contemporary children's imaginative play was predicated through contemporary discourses. In contrast, the young children in Moser and Martinsen's (2010) Norwegian study, where hidden and secret places were purposefully provided in the early childhood settings because they were understood as important, were enabled to play in highly imaginative ways.

In this study I have argued children's deeply engaged, creatively risky imaginative play in emotionally safe places is unlikely to be witnessed by adults or their broader peer group. This is because their private imaginative play operates beneath the adult and peer culture in which the public performance of imaginative play is expected to be enacted. Yet, it is this contemporary public performance of imaginative play which adults are struggling to recognise as imaginative play, because it is seemingly so different to their understanding of what imaginative play should look like (such as imaginative play in digital spaces and using trade-marked dolls and objects). Paradoxically, adults would be more likely to recognise contemporary children's private imaginative play (such as playing with teddies and in trees), however, it remains predominantly hidden from view in a variety of ways and fiercely protected. Therefore, I argue that with an increased awareness of the creative adaptations contemporary children make in their imaginative play, adults would be able to question what they thought they knew about imaginative play and so re-interpret what they are witnessing. In this way, adults can be encouraged to re-examine what they perceive through moral panic and contemporary discourse as difference and recognise the continuities of imaginative play.

Through these new ways of understanding imaginative play, the stability of imaginative play practices and places can be seen to have persisted while simultaneously changing with creative adaptations in accordance with contextual affordances and constraints over time. Understanding this, new interpretations of contemporary imaginative play are possible. Through this contemporary understanding, an awareness of children's need to construct private places to enable emotional safety prior to the enactment of their deeply engaging, creatively risky imaginative play will assist in pedagogical decisions around imaginative play in early childhood environments.

### **8.3. Contribution to knowledge: Methodological knowledge on the use of a narrative inquiry approach with young children**

This study has contributed to methodological knowledge on the use of a narrative inquiry approach with young children. When searching for examples of a narrative inquiry with young children as participants, I found there were very few studies where this approach had been used in its entirety (notable exceptions were Farquhar, 2012; and Richards, 2014). Some researchers stated it was not possible to include young children in their research because they were considered not ‘fully competent’ to be able to participate in interviews (Skelton, 2008, p. 24). Other researchers indicated they had included children, however on closer investigation, the children were aged eight years or over (cf. Esin & Squire, 2013; Grey, 2002). While some narrative researchers appeared to use narrative research methods to collect examples of children’s speech patterns, they did not, however, include an inquiry into the deeper meanings of experiences as promoted in a narrative inquiry (cf. Ahn & Filipenko, 2007; Puroila, Estola & Syrjala, 2012; Tsai, 2007).

In the present narrative inquiry, however, young children aged four to seven-years-old demonstrated they were capable of, and competent in, telling stories of their lived experiences of imaginative play in a conversational interview situation. The rich and detailed stories these children told were acknowledged as their unique subjective knowledge of imaginative play practices and places, and therefore, as authentic data in the inquiry. Similar to the adult experience, the iterative nature of the four conversational interviews provided the children with the opportunity, time and place to consciously reflect on the meanings of their imaginative play experiences. In this way, the children were able to recall memories and tell stories of play experiences, reflect on what happened in the past and on the meanings of the play, and then re-tell their stories with renewed interpretations during our following conversations if they considered it necessary. In combination with the iterative conversational interviews, the participatory methods of drawing, photography, map making and memory box collation appeared in varying degrees to contribute to their awareness of their respective imaginative play experiences. However, just as significant in prompting awareness was the time lapse between conversational interviews and the children’s ongoing thought process in these periods, as revealed in their re-interpreting earlier stories in subsequent conversations. The children’s re-interpretations of their stories have confirmed the relevance of my decision to use a process of

iterative interviews rather than just one ‘storytelling occasion’ (Riessman, 2008, p. 50). This was a valuable method for all of the participants to be able to think about their stories, their experiences and their responses to imaginative play over a particular period. Furthermore, in contrast to other studies of generational change, this research experience using a narrative inquiry approach with young children has reinforced the methodological relevance of inviting young children to tell their stories of their lived experiences rather than relying solely on adult memories to inquire into contemporary childhood play (Brannen, 2004; Goodenough, 2003; Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 2006; Sobel, 2002).

By inviting children to tell stories about the emotional meanings of their lived experiences of imaginative play, they were given opportunities to talk about their personal knowledge of their own imaginative play practices and places. As a consequence, the young children in this narrative inquiry were valued and valuable contributors to the new understandings of imaginative play offered by this study.

#### **8.4. Limitations of the study**

##### **8.4.1. The disclosure of children’s private places for imaginative play**

Through the invitation to tell stories of personal experiences of imaginative play, the contemporary children’s current places for imaginative play were frequently disclosed, and therefore potentially exposed to the world. Due to this disclosure, the responsibility to keep these most private places confidential was a difficult, but necessary, ethical consideration in the re-telling of stories. As a consequence, some of the children’s data was not able to be included in the study. What this issue has raised, and why it is a limitation of the study, is that researching sensitive and private topics with children can necessitate the removal of some rich and informative data from public dissemination.

##### **8.4.2. Adult interpretations of children’s imaginative play**

Photography was one of the methods introduced to trigger storytelling with children and adult participants during the study. The children were offered digital cameras to use during our ‘walking and talking’ tours of their educational settings (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012), and again, to take photos independently at home. However, it was not until much later I realised that many of the photos were taken at home by adults on their children’s behalf. This was evident when the

children were surprised at the photos I had available for their map making use: clearly they had not taken these photos themselves. It was also evident in the way the children disregarded these adult photos as an interpretation of play, and chose instead to tell stories of the ‘hidden’ places beneath, around and behind the photographed places. The methods used to trigger storytelling were specifically created to foreground children’s knowledge of imaginative play places and practices. The adult decision to take the home-based photos rather than ‘trusting’ the children to use the camera and take the ‘right’ photos is indicative of an attitude regarding the competency of children in research. Disappointing as this experience was, and therefore a limitation of the study, it was interesting to see the children’s creative adaption to these adult-taken photos by cutting them up or covering them over and only using portions of the adult photos on their maps.

#### **8.4.3. No generalised claims about imaginative play**

The intention of this narrative inquiry was not to produce generalised, universal claims about imaginative play. This is not possible given the study was located within four particular families in particular places at a particular time. It is not within the ontological expectations of an interpretative research paradigm to produce such generalised claims. However, others would argue (such as researchers from positivist paradigms) that this study therefore has little relevance beyond its specific context. However, whilst it cannot produce generalisations of imaginative play, this study has produced a complex picture of contemporary play practices and places that can speak back to contemporary discourses and moral panics.

#### **8.5. Further questions prompted by this study**

In thinking more deeply about the children’s and their own experiences of imaginative play, the adult participants moved back and forth between the past and the present throughout our conversations. Frequently, the time between our conversational interviews was used for further contemplation about this research topic, as was evidenced in the re-interpretations participants brought back to the following conversations. As I write this, I am wondering, what this intense research experience of re-thinking past and present imaginative play experiences may hold for the participants now that we have finished researching together. Are the participants continuing to re-interpret their childhood and their own children’s childhood in the aftermath of our conversations? What does this mean to the participants now in their understanding of their children, their parents or their grandchildren? This is a field of research that could be examined

through further intergenerational research as an exploration of the dialectic between the past and the present.

It was interesting how genuinely grateful the older participants seemed for this opportunity to articulate their childhood experiences in a deeper, more insightful way than they had ever done before. More than this, they were also grateful to be able to think more deeply about contemporary imaginative play rather than follow the expected 'public narratives' of their era which they had initially told in their stories. Participants often told me about conversations they had had with parents and/or children which had been prompted by this research, and it appeared communication about the past had become a common occurrence within the families during the seven months of the study. I wonder if this communication has since continued, or was it just a moment in time when the research prompted imaginative play in the past and the present to be uppermost in their minds? Langellier and Peterson (2004) suggest someone in the family 'must do the work of remembering, composing and telling stories in such a way that they are memorable and told again' (p. 72). I was grateful and fortunate that each of the family members who volunteered to be part of this intergenerational narrative inquiry were willing to do the 'work of remembering, composing and telling' as storytellers on behalf of their families (Langellier & Peterson, 2004, p. 72). In thinking about the stories the families told during the course of this inquiry, what I am wondering now is why some particular stories were chosen to be told and re-told across generations, and were there some stories which remained untold? Why do people choose to tell the 'public narrative' of their era rather than the deeper personal stories of their lives? And, how has the past informed the stories I have been told in the present by the participants, and will these 'storytelling occasions' change the stories these families tell and re-tell in the future (Riessman, 2008, p. 52)? I was frequently surprised how often family traits in play practices and language were present in each generation of the families. I was even more surprised when I realised each generation did not seem aware that this was the case, and nor could I tell them I had noticed this pattern for ethical reasons. I would be interested to know more about this notion of family narratives and could see this as a valuable continuation and extension of this research in the future. Further research into these questions relating to the 'public narratives' passed down through families would be of interest as well as to how they merge with contextual changes of each era as counter narratives of families. The methodological model used in this study could be re-used again for further exploration of these intergenerational topics.

A worthwhile direction for post-doctoral study in the early childhood field would be to present the findings from this study to early childhood educators for their interpretation of this focal theory. In this potential future research, it would be interesting to know more about early childhood educators' current understandings of children's contemporary imaginative play. And, in particular, whether they consider this new focal theory and its visual model a valuable consideration in pedagogical decision making for children's imaginative play. It would also be interesting to know whether educators considered it possible to use this model to advocate for children's construction of their own places for imaginative play within an early childhood setting, rather than following regulations that require the constant supervision of children at all times. Following this, a trial of this new model in an early childhood setting as a pilot program could provide further understandings of contemporary imaginative play in shifting the theoretical to the practical for the pedagogical implementation by early childhood educators.

#### **8.6. A final narrative: My own re-thinking of places for imaginative play**

One Sunday afternoon recently I spent some time at the McCrae Homestead built in 1844, close to our old house on the Mornington Peninsula. Hidden behind the rough sawn weatherboards of Georgiana McCrae's bedroom was a tiny locked door leading to a small enclosed room. According to the stories told of Georgiana's life, this room was designed by Georgiana as a 'sanctum' to allow her quiet, uninterrupted time within her own private, creative place. Crossing over the threshold and within this place, Georgiana apparently drew architectural pictures, painted with watercolours and read great volumes of books, which was considered 'unusual' for a woman at that time (see Appendix Nineteen). With a jolt I realised I was witnessing a nineteenth century version of an emotionally safe place for creatively risky play. And with this realisation, I was becoming increasingly aware that children and adults alike potentially have their own version of an emotionally safe place for imaginative play in which they cross into and out of, in a variety of places and 'in-between spaces' (Wilson, 2012, p. 32).

Looking back on this research experience as I come to the final chapter, what has resonated as the most meaningful memory for me were the intensely emotional and deeply personal stories the children and adults told of their imaginative play and the places they constructed. I am beginning to understand the meaning of 'living a storied life' as I have struggled to respectfully re-tell the stories I was told (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Through their storytelling and my subsequent re-storying, my own experiences of play and place have blended inextricably with



their stories. As a consequence, this study has prompted my own re-thinking of imaginative play and the places it is enacted. Just as the participants' conscious awareness was made visible in this inquiry, so too has my own awareness been raised around contemporary children's imaginative play and places. More than this, this study has triggered my increased appreciation that we all live different storied lives, and indeed, with different interpretations of play and place. I now understand everyone seeks out their own 'in-between spaces' for imaginative play which are part of their own unique responses to the emotional needs and contextual milieu of their lives.

Contemporary children's emotionally safe places can be created in different ways and in different places, but this does not deem them of a lesser or greater value than any other imaginative play practice or place. They are just in a different 'place within a place' which we may come to know as Eliot (1922) suggested at the beginning of this thesis, 'for the first time' when we appreciate the intensity of children's imaginative play practices needed to create these places.

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## Appendices

Appendix One:

Pingelly Kindergarten: Parents' Day:

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PARENTS' DAY.

At the invitation of Miss Funnell, parents and friends of the Kindergarten spent last Friday morning with the little ones in the Parish Hall. The guests found the little scholars—the wee, wee ones as well—seated on wee chairs at little wee tables, busy with plasticine, crayons, pencils and paper under the guidance of their teachers, Misses Funnell and Swan. At a table by themselves were three little mites amusing themselves with their dolls. The sun shone brightly through the Hall windows and the happy little smiling faces put a finishing touch on the scene within the Hall. Physical exercises, games, action songs and a march brought to a close the very pleasant morning spent with the little ones at their Kindergarten.

During the very welcome cup of morning tea, the Rev. Canon Atwell, on behalf of Miss Funnell, thanked the friends of the kindergarten for their kindly interest. He made reference to Miss Funnell's work of love which began some twelve years ago with children too young for the State School, and complimented her on the great success achieved. He further said that the success achieved had made it necessary to shift the kindergarten from Miss Funnell's private residence to the Parish Hall. Miss Funnell was residing at the "Cottage" as she terms it at the rear of the State school when she first started the kindergarten in Pingelly. Canon Atwell spoke of the cost of equipment, saying that 25/- had recently been paid for a new little wee table. He thought that perhaps some handy men in the district might be able to do something towards necessary expenses in connection with the kindergarten.

Miss Funnell expressed thanks for kindly references made to the kindergarten school, and specially thanked those who had already taken a practical interest in the work being done. She considered that the school had not nearly accomplished that which it was possible to achieve. Miss Funnell looked forward to a better show of work accomplished by the time next Parents' Day approaches.

Mrs. R. Tanner spoke on behalf of parents and friends of the kindergarten. She expressed appreciation for all that was being done for the little ones in the kindergarten school, and wished the work a still greater success than that already realised.

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## Appendix Two:

Power, L. (2013, April, 8th). Technology killing secret world of kids. *The Daily Telegraph*.

THE AUSTRALIAN

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# Technology killing secret world of kids

LISA POWER | THE DAILY TELEGRAPH | APRIL 08, 2013 12:00AM



Sisters Prada and Chloe have fun with their dolls and books in their treehouse / Pic: Nathan Edwards

**IS** the siren song lure of technology changing the fascination children have with secret places? Hidden in bushes, up trees or inside bush cubbies, child-built secret dens have long drawn their owners outdoors to a world of imaginative play free from adult interference.

*PhD researcher Deb Moore, from the Australian Catholic University education faculty's Senior Proven Research Team, is investigating if generational change and iPads and other electronic devices are affecting the secret world of children.*

"Only children can make their secret places - adults cannot make those places for them," she said.

"The children decide where, when, how and who can go in there and everything about it. It is a hidden peer culture."

She said children busy with a natural secret place show amazing inventiveness, creativity and great imaginative play.

High up in a Port Jackson fig in the garden of their home on the north coast, sisters Chloe and Prada Hanlan love reading, having tea parties and drawing - though sometimes they take their iPads to listen to music

## **Appendix Three:**

### **ACU and DEECD Ethics Approval letters to conduct research with children**

11<sup>th</sup> February 2013

Dear Sue and Deborah,

Principal Investigator: A/Prof Susan Edwards

Student Researcher: Deborah Moore

Ethics Register Number: 2013 20V

Project Title: Young children's imaginative play places:  
historical and contemporary narratives of children's places for  
play

Risk Level: Low Risk

Date Approved: 11/02/2013

Ethics Clearance End Date: 31/12/2013

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

This project has been awarded ethical clearance until 31/12/2013. In order to comply with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, progress reports are to be submitted on an annual basis. If an extension of time is required researchers must submit a progress report.

Whilst the data collection of your project has received ethical clearance, the decision and authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. For example, your research may need ethics clearance or

permissions from other organisations to access staff. Therefore the proposed data collection should not commence until you have satisfied these requirements.

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

Decisions related to low risk ethical review are subject to ratification at the next available Committee meeting. You will only be contacted again in relation to this matter if the Committee raises any additional questions or concerns.

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

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

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



otherwise agreed by the Committee.

For progress and/or final reports, please complete and submit a Progress / Final Report form:

[www.acu.edu.au/465013](http://www.acu.edu.au/465013)

For modifications to your project, please complete and submit a Modification form:

[www.acu.edu.au/465013](http://www.acu.edu.au/465013)

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

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

Kind regards,  
Gabrielle Ryan

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



## Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Strategy and Review Group

2 Treasury Place  
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002  
Telephone: +61 3 9637 2000  
DX 210083  
GPO Box 4367  
Melbourne, Victoria 3001

2013\_001882

Mrs Deborah Moore  
Education Faculty  
Australian Catholic University  
174 Victoria Parade  
FITZROY 3065

Dear Mrs Moore

Thank you for your application of 1 February 2013 in which you request permission to conduct research in Victorian government schools and/or early childhood settings titled *Young children's imaginative play places*.

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

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



## **Appendix Four:**

### **Explanatory letter to Early Childhood Centre Directors and Primary School Principals**

#### **Information letter for Early Childhood Centre and Primary School**

<b>Project title:</b>	Young children's imaginative play places Ethics Register No: 2013 20V
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Assoc Prof Susan Edwards
<b>Co-Investigator:</b>	Dr. Linda Henderson
<b>Student Researcher:</b>	Deborah Moore
<b>Student's Degree:</b>	Doctor of Philosophy

Dear Early Childhood Educator, Primary School Teacher, School Principal and Committee Member,  
You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

#### ***What is the project about?***

Your early childhood centre or primary school is invited to participate in a project about young children's use of place for imaginative play. This project is looking at the imaginative play of young children now and in the past and the places where this play occurred. The aim of the project is to understand more about the meanings these experiences have for contemporary children compared with children over past generations. You have been invited to participate in this project because your physical setting and/or your educational philosophy is consistent with the purposeful sampling criteria required for this project. I am seeking one family only from your early childhood centre/school to participate in this study, preferably with a preschool-aged child, an early primary school child, a parent and a grandparent willing to participate in this research.

#### ***Who is undertaking the project?***

This project is being conducted by Deborah Moore and will form the basis for the degree of a Doctor of Philosophy at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Associate Professor Susan Edwards and Dr Linda Henderson.

#### ***Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?***

There are no foreseen possible risks or discomforts associated with participating in this project. The early childhood/school teacher may be slightly inconvenienced by the researcher asking to use some space to conduct research tasks with individual adults and children over three separate occasions, and having the child participants removed from the classroom for short periods of time.

#### ***What will I be asked to do?***

If you decide to have your educational organisation participate in this project, the teaching staff would not be involved in the actual research nor would they be asked to conduct any administrative tasks associated with the project. However, as only one family per centre is needed for this project, it would be appreciated if the Early Childhood Educator could identify

a family that may fit the project sampling criteria so an Initial Letter seeking participation could be sent directly to them. It would also be appreciated if the researcher could set-up a meeting at the Centre with the potential family to explain the project and hand out the Information Letter and Consent forms to take home. It would also be beneficial to the project if researcher was able to attend the preschool/school for a short time prior to starting to allow familiarization between researcher, children and family.

It would also be appreciated if the researcher can use some space inside and/or outside your building to conduct three separate research tasks with the children and adult participants. These research tasks would be scheduled at a time most convenient with the teaching staff, children and adult participants, and may take approximately 40 – 60 minutes each time to complete. The research with the children would be preferable within their normal preschool/school day if this was convenient with the teachers. These research tasks will entail both children and adults being invited to draw pictures, find or take photos, and tell stories about their imaginative play place experiences in the present and the past. Any materials required for these research tasks will be provided by the researcher and/or participant.

***What are the benefits of the research project?***

The findings from this research will extend the body of knowledge about children's health and well-being. It will be important to early childhood educators and primary school teachers who will have the opportunity to use this knowledge about children's use of place and their imaginative play when designing curriculum and learning experiences for young children. As a consequence, these findings will increase the quality of early childhood and school educational programs.

***Can I withdraw from the study?***

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. You are free to refuse to consent to participate in this project without having to justify your decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any time without giving a reason.

***Will anyone else know the results of the project?***

This research will be published in journals about young children's places, play and their developing imagination and presented at conferences about early childhood education. If you decide to participate in this project a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. This means that in any publications arising from the research that you or your early childhood centre/school will not be identifiable. Your privacy and confidentiality will also be protected by password protected computer files and locked cabinet storage of all copies of data.

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

If you are interested in finding out the results of this project you can email the researcher's address below for a copy of the findings and any subsequent publications. You can contact the researcher for these results in February 2015.

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

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Investigator Associate Professor Susan Edwards, or the Student Investigator/Researcher Deborah Moore.

Associate Professor Susan Edwards  
9953 3531 or [suzy.edwards@acu.edu.au](mailto:suzy.edwards@acu.edu.au)  
Australian Catholic University  
Faculty of Education  
Level 3, 174 Victoria Parade, FITZROY VIC 3065

Deborah Moore  
PhD Candidate  
0418 329 688 or [deb.moore@acu.edu.au](mailto:deb.moore@acu.edu.au)  
Faculty of Education  
Australian Catholic University, FITZROY, VIC 3065

***What if I have a complaint or any concerns?***

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number 2013 20V). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research). Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

Chair, HREC  
C/- Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)  
Australian Catholic University  
Melbourne Campus  
Locked Bag 4115  
FITZROY, VIC, 3065  
Ph: 03 9953 3150  
Fax: 03 9953 3315  
Email: [res.ethics@acu.edu.au](mailto:res.ethics@acu.edu.au)

***I want to participate: How do I sign up?***

If your educational institution agrees to participate in this project, please sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one participant copy for your records and return the other copy with the Expression of Interest form to the Student Investigator (Deborah Moore) via the self addressed stamped envelope provided.

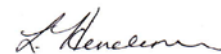
Yours sincerely,

**Researcher names/signatures**

Susan Edwards



Linda Henderson



Deborah Moore



Date: 29/1/2013

## Appendix Five:

### My own version of a memory box

My own version of a memory box of artefacts to trigger childhood memories of imaginative play. I used this memory box to demonstrate the concept to families during the Introduction to the research family meeting.



## **Appendix Six:**

# **Explanatory letter for Parents, followed by Consent form for Parents and Grandparents**

## **Information Letter for Parents**

<b>Project Title:</b>	Young children's imaginative play places Ethics Register Number: 2013 20V
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Assoc Prof Susan Edwards
<b>Co-Investigator:</b>	Dr. Linda Henderson
<b>Student Researcher:</b>	Deborah Moore
<b>Student's Degree:</b>	Doctor of Philosophy

Dear Parent,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

### ***What is the project about?***

You are invited to participate in a project about young children's use of place for imaginative play. This project is looking at the imaginative play of young children now and in the past and the places where this play occurred. The aim of the project is to understand more about the meanings these experiences have for contemporary children compared with children over past generations. You have been invited to participate in this project as a parent of a preschool child attending this early childhood centre. An important element of this project is to ascertain any changes in children's use of place for imaginative play over different generations. As such, it would be of significant benefit to this project if different generations of your family were willing to participate in this study – namely, your preschool child, your early primary school child, you and a grandparent were all interested in participating.

### ***Who is undertaking the project?***

This project is being conducted by Deborah Moore and will form the basis for the degree of a Doctor of Philosophy at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Assoc Prof Susan Edwards and Dr Linda Henderson.

### ***Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?***

There are no foreseen possible risks or discomforts associated with participating in this project. You may be slightly inconvenienced by the time involved in participating in three separate research tasks as part of the project.

### ***What will I be asked to do?***

If your family decides to participate in this project your children, you and a grandparent will each be invited to participate in three different research tasks which will be conducted at the early childhood centre (for the preschool child, parent and grandparent) or the primary school (for the primary school child). Each task will take approximately 40 – 60 minutes at a time most

convenient with each participant. The research with the children will take place within their normal preschool/school day at a time convenient with their teachers and the children, with the teachers in close proximity at all times. An initial meeting with your family and the researcher will be arranged at the early childhood centre to explain in detail the research aims and tasks prior to starting the project.

In the first research task both children and adults will be invited to draw pictures and/or create collages of imaginative play places, while recalling and telling stories of the imaginative play that occurred within these places. In the second task, adults and children will be invited to take photos and create maps of where their imaginative play places are or were, and continue to tell more stories about these play places. The final research task involves the creation of an individual 'memory box' of articles that remind each participant of their imaginative play places, such as, pine needles or a photo. (Please Note: the memory boxes will be provided for each participant prior to the start of the project.)

It is your decision if you decide to take or find photos to assist in creating your collage, mapping and story-telling. However, if you decide to use photos they need to be non-identifiable to ensure your confidentiality in the study. Storytelling will be invited with each of these tasks through the use of informal interview questions such as, 'can you tell me about where you played as a child?' and 'why did you choose to play in this location?' With each participant's permission these sessions will be audio recorded.

***What are the benefits of the research project?***

Your family will benefit from participating in this project by contributing to an increased understanding and knowledge about children's health and well being, which in turn will assist in your children's access to quality educational programs. The findings from this research will be important to early childhood educators who will be able to use this knowledge about children's use of place and their imaginative play when designing curriculum and learning experiences for young children.

***Can I withdraw from the study?***

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. You are free to refuse to consent to participate in this project without having to justify your decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any time without giving a reason.

***Will anyone else know the results of the project?***

This research will be published in journals about young children's places, play and their developing imagination and presented at conferences about early childhood education. If you decide to participate in this project a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. This means that in any publications arising from the research that you, your family members, early childhood centre or school will not be identifiable. Your privacy and confidentiality will also be protected by password protected computer files and locked cabinet storage of all copies of data.

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

Findings from the research will be presented to you and your family throughout this project to check you are happy with the resulting stories of your experiences. Any publications resulting from this work may also be offered to you if so desired.

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



Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Investigator Assoc Prof Susan Edwards or the Student Investigator Deborah Moore.

Associate Professor Susan Edwards  
9953 3531 or [suzy.edwards@acu.edu.au](mailto:suzy.edwards@acu.edu.au)  
Faculty of Education  
Level 3,  
174 Victoria Parade,  
FITZROY VIC 3065

Deborah Moore  
PhD Candidate  
0418 329 688 or [deb.moore@acu.edu.au](mailto:deb.moore@acu.edu.au)  
Faculty of Education  
Australian Catholic University, FITZROY, VIC 3065

***What if I have a complaint or any concerns?***

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number 2013 20V). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research). Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

Chair, HREC  
C/- Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)  
Australian Catholic University  
Melbourne Campus  
Locked Bag 4115  
FITZROY, VIC, 3065  
Ph: 03 9953 3150  
Fax: 03 9953 3315  
Email: [res.ethics@acu.edu.au](mailto:res.ethics@acu.edu.au)

***I want to participate: How do I sign up?***

If you and your family agree to participate in this project, please sign both copies of the Parent and Child Consent Forms, retain the participant copy and return the Researcher copy with the Expression of Interest form to the Student Investigator (Deborah Moore) via the self addressed stamped envelope provided.

Yours sincerely,

**Researcher names/signatures**

Susan Edwards



Linda Henderson



Deborah Moore



Date: 29/1/2013

# Consent form for Parents/Grandparents

*Copy for participant to keep*

**Title of project:** Young children's imaginative play places

Principal investigator: Assoc Prof Susan Edwards

Co-Investigator: Dr. Linda Henderson

Student Investigator: Deborah Moore

I \_\_\_\_\_ (*the participant*)  
have read and understood the information provided in the letter to participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in three separate research tasks, including telling stories about play in childhood imaginative play places; drawing and map making of imaginative play places; and, collecting articles for a memory box to prompt further stories of imaginative play places, all of which may take approximately 40-60 minutes duration each, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time (without adverse consequences). I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

Name of participant:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent or Grandparent)

Signature:

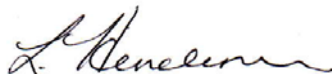
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

Signature of Principal Investigator:  
29/1/2013



Date:

Signature of Co-Investigator:  
29/1/2013



Date:

Signature of Student Investigator:  
29/1/2013



Date:

**Appendix Seven:**

**Preschool child drawing a significant place for imaginative play during her Telling and Drawing Conversational Interview.**



**Appendix Eight:**

**Map making of places for imaginative play. A preschool child's map making, followed by a parent map making.**



**Appendix Nine:**

**Memory boxes. A grandparent's memory box collection, followed by a preschool child's box.**



## **Appendix Ten:**

### **Ethics approval for a fourth conversational interview with each participant.**

**HREC Register Number:** 2013 20V

**Title:** Young children's imaginative play places: historical and contemporary narratives of children's places for play

**2.2.1 Research design modification:** The research design was altered slightly to include an extension of number of visits to 4 per participant (rather than 3) to enable the final check of transcripts in the form of re-stories to be implemented in person rather than via hard copies or email only as this would privilege adults over children's form of communication.

Modification approval email:

Ethics Register Number : 2013 20V

Project Title : Young children's imaginative play places

End Date : 31/12/2013

Thank you for submitting the request to modify form for the above project.

The Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved the following modification(s):

Inclusion of a final family meeting with each of the four participating families. To speak individually and confidentially with each member to confirm final text

We wish you well in this ongoing research project.

Kind regards,  
Kylie Pashley

## **Appendix Eleven:**

### **Raw data transcript exemplifying a story of imaginative play embedded within the oral narrative.**

Gloria: Ohhh... it was just the freedom of it.... You know, there was nothing, an old falling down draughty farm house. But as a kid it was full of excitement and fun. It was just really terrific. When we shifted in at Pxxx, well it's a main road now, Mxxx Road in Pxxx. It's like the main road here, but just a dirt road and not a lot of houses and as it built up there were a lot of families and a lot of paddocks with trees and bushes and

Deb: It's hard to imagine isn't it...

Gloria: we made cubby houses in the gorse bushes... very ....

Deb: What's a gorse bush?

Gloria: It's prickly and they have little yellow flowers and grow quite big.

Deb: Are they indigenous?

Gloria: No, they're a weed. We used to burrow into them and put hessian bags into them and make cubby houses.

Deb: oh, fantastic – and no one could get in if there were thorns in it

Gloria: Oh no, and you had to watch it, because you'd have rival kids who wanted to get into yours. So, there was so much freedom. We never had the worries of having to be home before dark. And the neighbours all looked after you. If you were naughty, you'd get a slap off them and the same as you would from your mum and dad. And if you went home and complained you'd get another one... (Laughing) There were a lot of kids and a lot of fun. We'd play cowboys and Indians and cops and robbers and ... I wasn't a girly girl... I had dolls but I wasn't ... because there were more boys in the neighbourhood I suppose. I had an older sister who was very studious, but she didn't like going to the farm at all so she didn't play... give her a book and she was happy.

Deb: How many were there in your family?

Gloria: There were three children. So I had a brother two years younger and we were really close, we were always in trouble (laughing) a lot of freedom. At Christmas time we'd do three weeks up on the farm and three weeks we had a tent and then a caravan on the foreshore at xxx and that was just magic because you were here from there to the water. And there was a lot of young kids and we went year after year after year... that was great. We had a rowing boat that was tethered to the broken down pier and we'd row around. It was all rather idyllic. So, I had a

really good fun childhood.

Deb: so this little cubby in the gorse bush – would you do like to do a quick sketch of that Gloria? It sounds incredibly significant.

Gloria: Sure... it was just ... there were lots of gorse bushes and around like that. You'd sort of dig out and cut these pieces out here and there... all prickles here.

Deb: Did you ever get hurt by them?

Gloria: Oh, probably covered in scratches and bruises. And then, we'd put hessian in there so that wouldn't hurt us. And any old carpet or lino to go on the floor, and we'd put in some rocks where you could sit. An old board as a table... It was quite decorated.



## Appendix Twelve:

### An exemplar story chosen for its intensely emotional response to imaginative play

**Daniel (1970s child):**

**Story: ‘Our own little kingdom’**

Deb: was there a place in the bush in particular that was yours alone or with one of your brothers...and would you like to draw...

Daniel: There was a spot... and it's funny that you say that, obviously there were lots of spots, but there were probably some special spots. But my brother and I built this hut and it was, and it may sound out of a fairy tale...

Deb: No no, that's exactly what I need... just the look on your face is enough...

Daniel: The mine went along, and we knew where the mine went... all coal mines from years ago. If you go now there are actually historical places where you can go mine tours... well we were doing our own tours. And there was this cave in around there... and you could see all the timber work where the wood was all shored up. And we used to get in there, and not far from there, and no one ever knew about it because it was way out in the middle of nowhere... there was this like a swamp, and it took a fair bit to get in there but we had our way how to get in there, not far from the mine and we actually built a hut in there

Deb: with Jeff?

Daniel: yes, Jeff, so we had our own little house out in the middle of nowhere... and overlooking a swamp and I don't know if that was part of another connection from the cave in as well from another mine, cos there was lots that were caved in so it just became part of a water course. So yeah,

Deb: so what did you make that out of?

Daniel: it was just all trees and stuff we found and it got to the point that we had so many trees over it that it was dry as a bone... To tell you the truth, I wouldn't even know how to get there now... and that would have been about three kilometers from home... I just remember that.

Deb: and did that have a special name or something you called it in particular?

Daniel: no I don't think so... it was just where we went.

Deb: can you describe how you felt out there?

Daniel: Um, trying to think back now, everyone has their own issues in life, but I can tell you honestly now that I've never had an issue that I was hard done by or anything or needed a place to go to seek relief or get away from my world because of discipline issues. It was our own little kingdom and we were Robyn Hood sort of thing... and we were pretty cool. It was just a fun place to go, not an out...to go to and set-up camp and cook something. We thought we were like Daniel Boone...

Deb: you sound like Huckleberry Finn actually

Daniel: Funny, if you speak to my wife and ask her about my childhood, I'm sure she would say that David would love to be Huckleberry Finn or something like that and its funny she might even tell you a story when a friend of mine, Tom,

who I grew up with, and you'll laugh at this... we went out and went camping, we camped out near the beach and we did that all the time... **I wouldn't let my kids do it now**. But our parents were confident that we knew to be responsible and do these things properly. And I remember that Ty and I took a tent and slept... and we were going to live off the land for the weekend and this will gross you out cos we shot a magpie and we plucked this magpie and we put it on a stick and we cooked it and ate the magpie... now that grosses my wife out... **as a kid it was the biggest adventure**...

## Appendix Thirteen:

### Example of a Three dimensional narrative inquiry model process.

This table shows the temporal, societal and place dimensions, followed by a re-storied version of a primary school child's story with commonplaces included, and then followed by an analysis of the meanings, tensions and any continuities from other narratives

<b>Laura's Story: Little nest cubby</b>	<b>Commonplace One:</b> <b>Temporality</b> <b>Past, present and future transitions</b>	<b>Commonplace Two:</b> <b>Sociality</b> <b>Personal feelings, hopes; societal context; researcher relationship</b>	<b>Commonplace Three:</b> <b>Place</b> <b>Actual physical place where events and experiences take place</b>
<p>Deb: can you tell me about some places – not at school- can you tell me about some at home?</p> <p>Laura: okay... Once I found like a little cubby, and it was near like the driveway going up. And I found some bricks to make like stairs to go up a tree and step in there and I found a ladder and a chair... and it didn't have any legs on it. So I put it on a branch that I liked to sit on and then I put</p>	<p><b>Past:</b> Number of cubbies made in the past in the trees at school and at home</p> <p><b>Present:</b> Series of cubbies made at school for different pretend play</p> <p><b>Future:</b> Plan to take new</p>	<p><b>Personal:</b> Like to sit on tree branch</p> <p>Both brother and sister like to explore and make new things, make things comfortable</p> <p>Use of cubby place for emotional restoration when feeling sad, angry and a 'little bit emotional'</p> <p>Didn't want parents to be able to come into twiggy cubby</p>	<p><b>Place:</b> Driveway cubby up a tree with ladder, bricks and chair</p> <p><b>Other places:</b> Nest cubby made of twigs</p> <p>Multiple places at school for pretend play – fairy tree and rocks; playground equipment for acting out play; tall</p>

<p>the ladder on there so I could climb up and sit on there...</p> <p>Deb: was it safe to sit up there?</p> <p>Laura: yes, it was like a very old tree and it's near the gates where we shut the drive way and then we had to open it... we also there's like a little nest made up of all lots of sticks in it</p> <p>Deb: who plays in there?</p> <p>Laura: Me and my brother... and I found it first and there's like a little nest and my brother climbed up it and sat in there. And I asked him if it was comfortable and he said it was...</p> <p>Deb: And why do you think he would want to climb up there?</p> <p>Laura: Because he likes exploring stuff... and making new things and making</p>	<p>iPad with secret password up to this tree for own secret play</p>	<p><b>Social:</b> School philosophy of natural environment valued</p> <p><b>Researcher:</b> Own cubby building experiences</p>	<p>trees for monkey play; bushy cubby for mothers, fathers and babies play – closest place we are next to, how to choose which one?</p>
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<p>things comfortable</p> <p>Deb: Is that why you make those places at your house too, is that why you do it?</p> <p>Laura: Yeah, cos I really like to explore stuff and make new things</p>			
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**Laura’s Re-story: Little nest cubby**

Laura is a storyteller. She very clearly told me about the places where she and often her little brother too would find or make cubbies, usually outside in their ample acre garden with an abundance of thick twisted seaside bushes. In these places, Laura said they would find ‘new ways’ into the undergrowth, sometimes crawling in ‘on our tummy’s’ which was good because it meant that adults could not follow them into these hidden places for play. Over the three sessions Laura and I spent together, Laura spoke often and passionately about these various important places where she used her imagination in play. During the mapping session when she was making a treasure map of places both at school and at home, I asked Laura what she thought people could do if they didn’t have important places like she does to play pretend games. Her answer was quick and straight to the point, saying ‘We wouldn’t really have any place to be ourselves and play together in special places...I think we would have to like find really tricky places and it would be really hard to get in there and all that...’

At six years old, Laura is highly capable of thinking metacognitively about her own play and that of others, she is emotionally intelligent and quite an amazing person. On another occasion, I asked her about places she liked to go to play on her own sometimes. Once again, Laura quickly answered in a mature manner saying that at home she hides up in the tree with the chair and the ladder when she is ‘a little angry, sad or a little emotional’ so that she can think ‘happy thoughts’. Other times, she may choose to find a hiding place inside, even under

her bed or blankets or cupboard in her bedroom. It was also interesting to note that Laura was clear about the different ‘pretend’ role of different places at school. There were specific places for fairy pretend play, where there were thick hiding shrubs and rocks to pretend to be toadstools; there were the tall trees for the monkey play; the playground for pretending acts in public; and, there was the ‘bushy cubby’ in the far corner with well-trodden pathways into and out of the three separate entrances/exits of a thick native bush where they traditionally played mums, dads and babies.

On our first session together, Laura had talked about playing with an iPad as a material ‘prop’ for pretending to ‘fly around’ in a rocket. She thought her brother was probably more interested in playing the actual games on the iPad than she was, such as when he played Angry Bird up in the cubby. However, by the time our last session occurred some three months later, Laura was extremely interested it seemed in buying her own iPad (just as her friends had done) and making up her own ‘secret password’ so she ‘could go in’ to play games. She didn’t mention which games specifically, but seemed to be very aware of the secrecy of the ritual involved in gaining access. I asked Laura where she might take her iPad to play it, and she replied, ‘up in the tree house or somewhere’ so that ‘I can just do one on my own and I can have a secret thing...’

## **Laura's re-story analysis-**

### **Main meanings/themes from re-story analysis:**

- Hidden and secret play
- Cubby building
- Away from and 'other' to adult gaze
- Entrance and exits important
- Different places have different roles for pretend play
- Awareness of the importance of place
- Place attachment
- Identity – 'a place to be ourselves'
- Emotional awareness and resilience
- Digital technology and popular culture influences
- Trees
- Bedrooms

### **Tensions and silences**

- Digital technology 'places for play' merging with natural play places
- Peer culture influence over own individual feelings

### **Continuities from other texts/other stories from others starting to emerge/narrative threads**

- Adventure
- Cubby building
- Secrecy
- Natural play places providing affordances for imaginative play
- Trees and bedrooms

## **Appendix Fourteen:**

### **Example of a re-story**

Looking back on the photographs of her sisters, Jill remembered her older sister Mary with her long ringlets of hair, as a particularly attractive girl who frequently won Queen of xxx popular girl competitions. Similarly, her little sister Ella, won the Shirley Temple look alike competition with her perfectly curled ringlets, which Jill claimed was the epitome of what all little girls should look in the 1930s. In stark contrast to her two sisters either side, Jill considered herself to be the ‘quaint’ middle sister of three, the infamous middle sister, the ‘horrible in-between’. As the in-between daughter of three girls myself, I sensed Jill’s underlying feeling about this position in the family dynamics. Regardless of Jill’s lack of ‘girly’ characteristics as she put it, ringletted hair was her aspiration even from a very young age and so endured her mother’s nightly curling techniques with this prized goal in mind.

It was not surprising therefore that play involving hair and the process of hairdressing featured strongly in Jill’s imaginative play life, especially with her curly blonde friend Penelope. Penelope lived in her Aunts’ house, one house away from Jill’s grand Edwardian home on the corner double block, but was easily accessible through a hole forming a gateway in the side fence. The two little four year old girls found a play space in the back garden shed at Penelope’s place to play. They made this small disregarded space into a meaningful place for imaginative play by claiming it as their own, interspersed with chairs, bikes and other stored household objects. Consequently, it provided a place where the girls could enact self-governance and control of their own space and actions, inconspicuously hidden from adult gaze. Back sheds have often dominated my childhood play experiences too, with their rich provision of private space and loose materials to accumulate as play props. My own back shed play experiences swirled as a background of memory as Jill continued to tell me her childhood stories between sips of coffee in the increasingly noisy café. With a dramatic crescendo to the story plot, Jill told me it was within this back shed play place, in the quiet unreal world of imaginative play, where Penelope cut all of Jill’s curls off. On completing this task, it was then Jill’s turn to ‘set upon’ Penelope to do the same with her curls. Was this play simply two little girls performing a daring and adventurous act they may have witnessed through the peripheral context of their social lives during the Depression years –a short bob ‘flapper’ hairstyle?



Some years later after this hairdressing incident, Penelope and Jill sat together in the hidden recesses of this garden shed place to read the risqué pages of the newly published Pooh Bear series that had been forbidden in Jill's household. Jill repeatedly said there were no secret places in her childhood and that the adults in her life knew where she was at any given time. What they probably did not know, however, was what she was doing in those places.

## Appendix Fifteen:

### Extract from vertical table showing analysis within Preschool children's re-stories

	Beach family	City family	Bush family	Farm family
Preschool child	<p><b>Harry's re-story main narrative threads:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hidden and private places found or constructed</li> <li>• Storytelling as part of play – different places represent different play ideas</li> <li>• Listening to children and awareness of children's agenda</li> <li>• Trees and tree climbing, names of trees, talking trees</li> <li>• Place affordances</li> <li>• Doorways, entrance – up brick steps, through 'doors'</li> <li>• Names of places, imbued with meaning, roles – trees; dog place; hiding place</li> <li>• Rules of peer culture</li> <li>• Bush cubby – construction of own place</li> <li>• Found materials for imaginative play – television wooden box;</li> </ul>	<p><b>Gabrielle's Main narrative threads</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hiding in plain view</li> <li>• Quiet, being alone important for imaginative play</li> <li>• Inside play places appear to provide emotionally safety</li> <li>• Construction of own place</li> <li>• Use of found materials plus popular culture infused imaginative play (teddy, monster dolls, pet shops)</li> <li>• Fear of outside play places, trees</li> <li>• Worried about trees falling</li> <li>• Importance of sibling in imaginative play</li> </ul>	<p><b>Frank's re-story main narrative threads:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hidden and secret play</li> <li>• Construction of own places</li> <li>• Multiple secret places at kinder and at home</li> <li>• Happy to talk about these – especially animated and happy to talk about these places</li> <li>• private places for play</li> <li>• Liked to 'hide away'</li> <li>• Other child and Finn made a secret place together, chose the 'right' place in bush</li> <li>• Inclusion of brother and other special friend</li> <li>• Secrecy important – nobody comes in here</li> <li>• Dreams in his bedroom, dreamy state – looking for treasure under bed</li> <li>• Spoke of computer games, enjoying different games on there – didn't talk about ipad or iphone games as such?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Georgia's re-story main narrative threads:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking places – walking around looking, multiple places to choose in some environments but not in others (eg bush kinder cf bedroom only place)</li> <li>• Construction of own place – in bedroom; in bush cubby</li> <li>• Private hidden creative play very important – eg in bush cubby, in bedroom, in charlies bunk bed</li> <li>• Secret play – hidden from peer group, underlife rules of play 'hard to get in'</li> <li>• Emotionally charged moment re secrecy of play in particular places eg at Bush kinder cubby</li> <li>• Popular culture infused play – Barbie; minecraft; digital technology recital ipod, ipad, iphone</li> <li>• Looking for quiet, uninterrupted play</li> </ul>

	<p>leaves, flowers, bricks; chair and table; corrugated iron roof for dog place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking for adventure – dangerous risk play up trees at kinder and at home</li> <li>• Places on iPad for pretend play?</li> <li>• Telling others to go away while we were talking – memory box</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check: computer places for play ‘inside’; able to gain access through special button to go ‘anywhere in there’ ; wanted to hide behind a tree in the computer</li> <li>• Re-Check: new secret place needed because Daddy cut up the last one outside; new one in cupboard in bedroom</li> </ul>	<p>places</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comparison btw built and bush cubbies</li> <li>• Importance of trees</li> <li>• Play affordances - Use of found, natural materials</li> <li>• Multiple places ‘discovered’ and appropriated for imaginative play – at home, at Preschool, at bush cubby</li> <li>• Entrance important in/out</li> </ul>
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## Appendix Sixteen:

### Extract from horizontal table showing analysis across generations from grandparents to preschool children

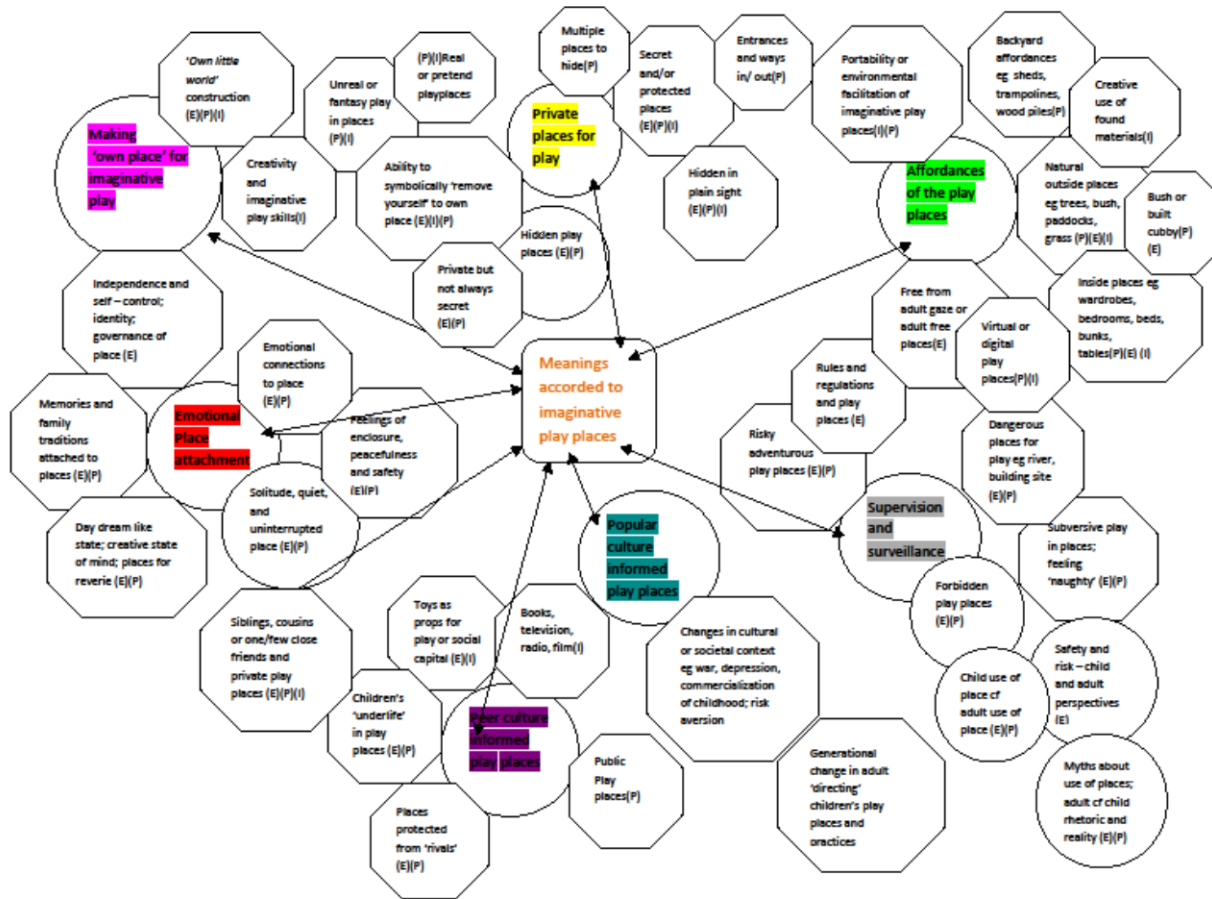
Grandparents	Parents	Primary school children	Preschool children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hidden imaginative play places – frequently in plain sight and NOT secret</li> <li>Private play places important for uninterrupted play</li> <li>Construction of own imaginative play places</li> <li>Marked own place with signifiers or identifiers such as garden beds, wooden platforms, signs over doorways</li> <li>Found materials used for and in imaginative play places</li> <li>Emotional connection with place – emotional safety, enclosure, security, quiet, reverie, escape, freedom, independence, sense of identity, importance, emotionally charged moments eg Cathy-Miss G’s lounge room</li> <li>Adventurous, risky play places – surveillance, chn safe places cf adult view of safety, over protection now and then; subversive play places</li> <li>Trees important as an</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hidden imaginative play places- very important</li> <li>SECRET places very important (Daniel did not say this, but his cubby entrance was hidden from adults, others)</li> <li>Private play places uninterrupted play</li> <li>Construction of own imaginative play places</li> <li>No props or objects needed to identify imaginative play place (secrecy)</li> <li>Found materials used for and in imaginative play places</li> <li>Emotional connection with place- transition tree emotional safety; fairy tale; smile; warm and safe; emotionally charged moments eg Felicity stuck in bunk bed in secret entrance; independence; achievement</li> <li>Away from adult gaze (secrecy)</li> <li>Adventurous, risky play places- subversive play places, jungles, under buildings, up trees, mines</li> <li>Affordance of place-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hidden imaginative play places important- Sophie in plain sight</li> <li>SECRET places important (S did not mention this, but other three did)</li> <li>Private imaginative play places for uninterrupted play important</li> <li>Away from adult gaze (S did not mention this)</li> <li>Construction of own imaginative play place</li> <li>Places constantly looked for use as imaginative play places (possibly need to be more mobile, changing more often?) Different places with different roles, different names, imbued with different meanings- in cupboards, under beds, bedrooms, online, in cars, in bunk beds, under bushes, up trees; proper cubby/built cubby cf bush cubby (Is this about place affordance too, some places are more applicable for imaginative play? Is it not so easy to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hidden imaginative play places important- at times hidden in plain sight (H, Gabrielle, Georgia, F)</li> <li>SECRET places mentioned by F and Georgia to me, H had told Teacher he had secret places but did not tell me; G did not use this word.</li> <li>Private play places for uninterrupted, quiet imaginative play important</li> <li>Away from adult gaze (F, Gab mentioned hiding from adults; Georgia mentioned hiding from family in bedroom, lack of supervision in lounge while online; H had hiding places from everyone apart from his sister)</li> <li>Construction of own imaginative play place</li> <li>Places constantly looked for use as imaginative play places (possibly need to be more mobile, changing more often?) Different places with different roles, different names, imbued with different meanings- in cupboards, under beds,</li> </ul>

<p>imaginative play place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriation of adult space for child use of place- back shed, toilet wall, driveway, mines</li> <li>• Affordance of place- some places irresistible to children for imaginative play</li> <li>• Popular culture infused imaginative play- Bob/radio; Jill/book, film; Cathy, TV; Gloria/film, book</li> <li>• Peer group play – different play to imaginative play places in own places (Concerts, dress ups under clothes lines different to back paddock dreaming of own world)</li> <li>• Sibling, friend, cousin inclusion in imaginative play place</li> <li>• Bedroom use as imaginative play place, inside for some (Bob, Jill) important, not others (no space for place, Cathy)</li> <li>• Tension around contemporary children’s need for commercial toys for imaginative play in comparison with no objects needed in the past</li> <li>• Chores vs play places (Bob, Jill)</li> <li>• Protection of place</li> </ul>	<p>some particular environments especially available, accessible</p> <p>possibilities for imaginative play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sibling, friend, cousin inclusion in imaginative play place</li> <li>• Entrances significant to imaginative play places (Is this about stepping into ‘own world’ separate to adult world, grandparents not so concerned about the difference?)</li> <li>• Own rules, own language as part of own world</li> <li>• Popular culture infused imaginative play- Judy/ Barbie; Felicity/book; Emily/book; Daniel/TV, Book (Daniel mentioned moral panic of online play, understands they can be informants for play just as much as any other experience)</li> <li>• Trees important as imaginative play places- not Judy, not a fan</li> <li>• Bedrooms or inside important as imaginative play places- F, D, J but not E</li> <li>• Tension around what they did as children and not wanting their own children to do</li> </ul>	<p>appropriate adult space for children’s use of place anymore?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional connection with place- attached to place, emotional regulation gained in places, awareness of place, favourite places, emotionally charged moments in places eg T hiding behind blanket playing online</li> <li>• Trees important as a place for imaginative play – secret base; favourite tree; nest building up a tree; bush cubby under tree and tiggly base</li> <li>• Adventurous, exploration play places sought- online, up trees</li> <li>• Siblings, friend/s inclusion in imaginative play place</li> <li>• Peer culture influence on play – different play with group than imaginative play alone, sibling, friend; Scott’s real cf pretend play at home; laughter of others; Pokémon cf secret base play; escape from others</li> <li>• Popular culture infused play – iPad; monster High dolls; iPhone, google; iPod games, digital games (including S’s comment she has no time to play due to</li> </ul>	<p>bedrooms, online, in cars, in bunk beds, under bushes, up trees; built cubby cf bush cubby (Is this about place affordance too, some places are more applicable for imaginative play? Is it not so easy to appropriate adult space for children’s use of place anymore?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trees – places for imaginative play, affordances of trees offered, fear of falling trees</li> <li>• Found materials used for imaginative play places</li> <li>• Emotional connection with place- dreamy state; secret hidden play; animated, excited conversation; feelings of emotional safety expressed about ‘warm’ lounge room; emotionally charged moments/stories told eg Gabrielle being chased by monsters at night in lounge room</li> <li>• Popular culture influence- digital toys/games Angry Bird, Pacman- H; Minecraft, Barbie- Georgia; Gabrielle- Petshops, F- Yoda, online games</li> <li>• Inclusion of siblings, friends in imaginative play places</li> <li>• Peer culture influence</li> </ul>
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	<p>the same- too dangerous, we were responsible, adult view of safety of chn view of safety; difference btw historical and contemporary view of safety for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer group play – different play to imaginative play places in own places (hide and seek/ mud pies pretend play different to imagining own world alone or with one other)</li> </ul>	<p>watching TV)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toys mentioned as prompts for imaginative play</li> <li>Use of found materials for imaginative play</li> <li>Entrance to imaginative play places mentioned as important</li> </ul>	<p>– choice of places where/what play enacted; different play with group than imaginative play alone or with sibling, friend eg Georgia with Charlie in bush cubby imaginative play different to pretend play with group, possibly more creative, more risks taken such as making up songs, painting ‘walls’; telling story of snake eyes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Looking for adventurous, risky play places – Georgia with snakes; H climbing trees; Gabrielle with Monsters</li> <li>Inclusion of siblings, friend in imaginative play place</li> <li>Entrances important – Georgia, H</li> <li>Lounge or playrooms – G, F, G</li> <li>Bedrooms used as imaginative play</li> </ul>
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Formatted mind mapping with main themes identified





## Appendix Eighteen:

### Children's assent form discussed at the beginning of each conversational interview

JOA

ACU  
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY



**ACU|education**

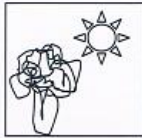
**Consent form for children**  
*Copy for participant to keep*

**Title of project:** Young children's imaginative play places  
**Ethics register number:** 2013 20V  
**Principal Investigator:** Associate Professor Susan Edwards  
**Co-Investigator:** Dr. Linda Henderson  
**Student Investigator:** Deborah Moore



I agree                      I do not agree

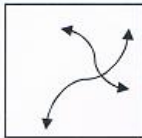
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**1. Drawing pictures**  
and telling stories  
about places where  
you play pretend or  
make believe games

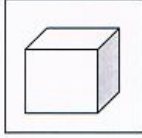
 




**2. Making maps**  
about where these  
places for pretend  
play are while telling  
more stories about  
how you play there

15/6  
verbal  
agreement on  
video



**3. Telling stories**  
about the things you  
have collected in  
your **memory box**  
about these pretend  
play places and what  
you remember about  
your make believe  
play

Name: 

Age: 7                      Date: 18<sup>th</sup> June 2013

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix Nineteen:  
Georgiana McCrae's 'sanctum' in her home, McCrae Homestead, McCrae,  
Victoria, 1844.**

