

International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development

Volume 18

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Early childhood education in many countries has been built upon a strong tradition of a materially rich and active play-based pedagogy and environment. Yet what has become visible within the profession, is, essentially a Western view of childhood, preschool education and school education.

It is timely that a series of books be published which present a broader view of early childhood education. This series seeks to provide an international perspective on early childhood education. In particular, the books published in this series will:

- Examine how learning is organized across a range of cultures, particularly indigenous communities
- Make visible a range of ways in which early childhood pedagogy is framed and enacted across countries, including the majority poor countries
- Critique how particular forms of knowledge are constructed in curriculum within and across countries
- Explore policy imperatives which shape and have shaped how early childhood education is enacted across countries
- Examine how early childhood education is researched locally and globally
- Examine the theoretical informants driving pedagogy and practice, and seek to find alternative perspectives from those that dominate many Western heritage countries
- Critique assessment practices and consider a broader set of ways of measuring children's learning
- Examine concept formation from within the context of country-specific pedagogy and learning outcomes

The series covers theoretical works, evidence-based pedagogical research, and international research studies. The series also covers a broad range of countries, including majority poor countries. Classical areas of interest, such as play, the images of childhood, and family studies, will also be examined. However, the focus is critical and international (not Western-centric).

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Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Play from Birth and Beyond

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This book is dedicated to all in our lives who gave us a passion for play. This includes our playful families, friends, colleagues, children and students who helped to make all aspects of play such a life force – we thank you all.

Preface

**Ethel Spowers (Australia,
b.1890, d.1947)**
Swings 1932
**Colour linocut, printed
on thin ivory laid tissue,
24.2 × 26.3 cm**
**Art Gallery of New South
Wales**
**Purchased 1976. Photo:
Jenni Carter/ AGNSW
144.1976**



I know of no other way of coping with great tasks, than play. (Nietzsche, Ecce Homo)

The academic literature on learning indicates that the process of coming to understand or make sense of the world begins in infancy and that the period of childhood is crucial in processes of learning and human development (Australian Government DEEWR, 2009). Play-based learning has a foundational role in these processes, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) recognises children’s right to play as a mechanism for active involvement in learning and development. This book celebrates the role of spontaneous play alongside play-based learning in early childhood development, while also advocating for the value of an ongoing commitment to playfulness in subsequent educational contexts, into adulthood and beyond. While this book is diverse in terms of theme, methodol-

ogy and the perspectives that contributors bring to their consideration of play, a central thesis of the book is that play, in particular contexts, offers a way of creating and becoming oneself. It makes this possible by releasing us from the more mundane and day-to-day aspects of life. As Gregory Bateson (1973) might put it, it liberates us from seriousness and allows for a nimbleness of mind in which experimentation can occur. In particular, the unprescribed nature of free play allows for the experience of unhurried engagement, and the expression of curiosity and wonder that we argue facilitates the process of creating and becoming oneself.

The psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott provides a theoretical explanation of the thesis that in play we create ourselves, suggesting that play is characterised by 'unintegration', which Abram (2007) explains as a state characteristic of infancy in which life is experienced as a stream of 'unintegrated' or comfortably unconnected moments. Winnicott uses unintegration to describe the quiet states of the infant, during which she/he is dependent on the mother being in a state of primary maternal preoccupation that provides the holding environment necessary for healthy development. When the mother is in this state, the child experiences a sense of continuity of being in relation with a 'good-enough' mother in a comfortable holding environment at the start of life (Winnicott, 1990, p. 144). Winnicott links this sense of comfort with unintegration, the precursor of the ability to relax and enjoy oneself and also the capacity that gives us the opportunity to become more ourselves. The infant and adult who are able to relax in an unintegrated state are in genuine relation with one another; the infant knows existentially the experience of trust and the sense of feeling safe, and these develop the capacity to 'live creatively', to play (Abram, 2007, p. 67; Winnicott, 2005) and to enjoy cultural pursuits in a way that expands possibilities for individual selves. Both infant and adult experience a comfortable 'everything is up for grabs/everything is included' feeling, which involves the mind, body and spirit. The ability to become unintegrated constitutes a developmental achievement for the infant, and while the adult may only maintain the ability to revisit this capacity fleetingly and intermittently, it is nonetheless a significant achievement for the adult.

The association Winnicott (2005) advocates between unintegration and the enlivening aspects of play helps to draw attention to the social-psychological, ethical, therapeutic and aesthetic implications of play and hence to the contention that play is a way of making life worthwhile. As human beings mature, the value of play and of playful attitudes is less likely to be recognised within the reality of the everyday lifeworld in which we are often preoccupied with specific purposes or responsibilities that demand our attention. Contemporary everyday life is often highly fragmented, given the extent of our mobility, our capacity and our obligations to be engaged in many and varied contexts, both physically and via social media, and our potential for electronic communication. These features of everyday life, perhaps better described as afflictions, exacerbate the tendency towards preoccupation with instrumental pursuits or distraction by multifarious possibilities; as such, they can mitigate against the possibility of the genuine engagement with others that playfulness requires.

At the same time, the intrinsic value of play for children is undermined in contemporary life, if not hijacked, by the toy and childhood learning industries, which

promise extrinsic and desirable instrumental outcomes but are necessarily motivated to greater or lesser extents by commercial interests. These preoccupations and instrumental concerns can undermine our ability to be ‘ourselves’ in the sense of being a self without a particular purpose, without a particular focus, desire or responsibility to be fulfilled in the present moment – a self that can put aside the reality of the everyday world to playfully explore possibilities. Equally, such preoccupations and concerns can undermine the capacity for genuine human relationship inherent in play and to which Winnicott drew much attention. As Abram argues, Winnicott possessed ‘a sensibility to the human need for reliable relationships’ and saw the capacity for unintegration and play as integral to the development of such relationships:

It is sometimes assumed that in health the individual is always integrated, as well as living in his own body, and able to feel that the world is real. There is, however, much sanity that has a symptomatic quality, being charged with fear or denial of madness, fear or denial of the innate capacity of every human being to become unintegrated, depersonalized, and to feel that the world is unreal....Through artistic expression we can hope to keep in touch with our primitive selves whence the most intense feelings and even fearfully acute sensations derive, and we are poor indeed if we are only sane. (Winnicott, [1945] 1992, p. 150)

Here, Winnicott is recognising both the poverty of constant sanity, understood as relentless rational, purposeful, instrumental activity, and the concomitant value of the capacity of adults to become unintegrated. Fink, Saine and Saine similarly recognise the value of play for adults, arguing that it ‘is a strange oasis, an enchanted rest-spot in his [the adult’s] agitated journey and never-ending flight. Play affords a type of temporal present’ (1968, p. 22). This recognition and Winnicott’s emphasis on the worth of achieving unintegrated states are noteworthy for this book, since it resonates with our argument that playfulness is an attitude of mind that has as much to offer those adults who are alive to its possibilities, as it offers children. While early life is a teaching ground through the pedagogy of play and the memories of early times of play may be sketchy for adults, the enlivening possibilities of play can be facilitated for adults in various ways. Stories from those who can remember, family photos or videos, all of these prompt us to recall the power of playful times. Reflectively watching infants and young children at play either from our perspectives as parents, grandparents, friends or teachers also reminds us of our own early play life. While these memories may be fleeting, they allow us to revisit early play in a half-remembered way and to appreciate and share in its wonder in our interactions with the young.

The aesthetic dimensions of life provide another means of bringing play alive for adults. Take, for example, the reputed power of the giant mechanical marionettes of the French street theatre company, Royal de Luxe, which was formed in 1979. Jean-Luc Courcoult, the founder of the company, describes the theatrical capacity of the giant puppets, which stand up to 50 ft or 15.2 m high, to ‘create a new mythology inside cities where people can recover their innocence’. Courcoult goes on to argue that the giant puppets help to retrieve the extraordinary or ‘dream vision’ of the world that children have. He argues that ‘the Giants evoke in everybody, be they children, their parents or older people,...the same poetry...this form of... dream

and joy, tranquil but powerful' (Courcoult, 2016). This kind of first-hand engagement in play, this 'enchanted rest-spot' in our usual agitated journey (Fink, Saine & Saine, 1968, p. 22), creates a familiar sense that 'we all know what this is', but this assumption can make it difficult to fully appreciate the value of play, and it also undercuts our attempts to interrogate relevant explanatory theories.

Play is a multidisciplinary enterprise, and like other cultural practices, its significance for human experience and fulfilment cannot be interrogated or explained through one or two theoretical perspectives. Consequently, as the work of theorists such as the late Brian Sutton-Smith (2001) attests, theorisation about play is informed by different disciplines. The prominent disciplines and the theorists representing those disciplines within this book include cultural history as examined through the work of Johan Huizinga; philosophy and sociology through the lens provided by Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard and Roger Caillois; psychology as explained through the work of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Esther Thelen, Linda Smith and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi; and, as evident above, psychoanalysis as explored through the work of the paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott. Friedrich Fröbel's approach to pedagogy is also significant for this book since it emphasises the nurturing of creativity in the young child through playful activity.

While the relationship of play to education is central to the book, the claim that play is 'an essential element of man's ontological makeup' is equally important. Play is clearly defined differently in different contexts within contemporary society, but its status as what Fink, Saine and Saine (1968, p. 22) describe as 'a basic existential phenomenon, just as primordial and autonomous as death, love, work and struggle for power', determines that we struggle to draw overarching conclusions about its significance for us within different contexts. We ought not be surprised by this, given the breadth of our engagement in play and playful activity. As Fink, Saine and Saine go on to argue, play is not bound to other basic existential phenomena they identify 'in a common ultimate purpose'; rather, play confronts them all; 'it absorbs them by representing them'. Hence, 'we play at being serious, we play truth, we play reality, we play work and struggle, we play love and death – and we even play play itself' (1968, p. 22).

Why Focus on Play?

Akin to Fink and his colleagues, Mead (1896) included play, along with work and art as one of the three general types of human activity, and so we might choose to answer the question, Why focus on play?, by noting its significance in this regard and recalling Winnicott's grand contention that play offers a way of truly becoming oneself (Winnicott, 1992, p. 212). But the literature on play is also unequivocal about the utilitarian value of play-based learning for enabling the expression of individuality, the enhancement of dispositions such as creativity and curiosity, the exploration of connections between prior experiences and the development of new

connections, the development of relationships and concepts and the stimulation of a sense of well-being (DEEWR, 2009). Indeed, this potential for play-based learning appears to come naturally to young children (Chudacoff, 2011). A number of contributors to the book draw attention to the utilitarian value of play, taking various perspectives on that utility. As editors, we have chosen to focus on Donald Winnicott's contention that play is a way of becoming oneself through genuine engagement with others so as to draw attention to the tension between utilitarian and non-utilitarian understandings of play – a tension that is evident in the various chapters of the book.

Huizinga is also called upon for the value of his argument that play is not to be seen as simply a matter of instinct or of utilitarian advantage:

[P]lay is more than a mere physiological phenomenon or psychological reflex. It goes beyond the confines of purely physical or purely biological activity. It is a *significant* function – that is to say – there is some sense to it. In play, there is something 'at play' which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to action. All play means something. If we call the active principle that makes up the essence of play, 'instinct', we explain nothing. If we call it 'mind' or 'will' we say too much. (Huizinga, 1949, p.1)

The book acknowledges the utility of play, but at the same time, it recognises the force of Huizinga's claim that the fun we experience in play resists analysis. Fink, Saine and Saine also appreciate this aspect of play, noting that it possesses its own internal space and time, that the play world is the sphere of illusion and hence that thinking about it 'leads ever deeper into the unthinkable' (1968, p. 26). The way in which play resists analysis helps us appreciate the tension implicit in coming to understand play, even with particular contexts. The utility of play in educational contexts is clear and conventionally accepted, but at the same time, the capacity to take a playful attitude to work or study lifts us from merely instrumental concerns and connects us to our humanity, to archetypal forms of human activity.

Huizinga's work guides our engagement with play in the book precisely for the breadth of his treatment of the topic and his attempt to provide an analysis despite the difficulty of doing so. As a historian and cultural theorist, Huizinga in his major publication on play, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1949), models the multidisciplinary approach to the topic of play that we have adopted in the book. Thus, the book interrogates the broader value of play, along with the ways in which playful engagement might be facilitated in educational contexts, from early childhood to tertiary education and beyond. It devotes considerable reflection to the different sociocultural contexts of play, as well as the ever-evolving relationship between play and technology, play and consumerism, play and spirituality and play and the spatial environment.

One of the volume's distinguishing features is that several chapters include the voices of children and adults as subjects experiencing play. These voices have been important to the way in which play is articulated in the book. They provide empirical indicators and evidence of play's richness, which resonate with our own experiences of this phenomenon and its enlivening role in our lives. In their work on spirituality and play (Chap. 4), Cathie Harrison and Christine Robinson take into consideration two 4-year-olds' experiences of self, other and connectedness during

outdoor play. In her study of play and the primary school, Dee O'Connor shares with readers the views of Dominic, recalling how important risk-taking was during his play time as a young child and how his experiences allowed him to develop into a well-focused and confident young man.

In the introductory chapter to the book, 'Playing with Theory', the editors discuss theorists of play whose ideas are most relevant to a discussion of play in education generally, and which also reappear in some of the chapters throughout the volume. As suggested above, Huizinga provides a rich starting point for an exploration of play as a cultural phenomenon, since his work can be applied to many discipline areas and offers rich inspiration to potential educators. The ideas of developmental psychologists Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky are then considered, as well as the contrasting approach of psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, who helps to remind those interested in the study of play of the inevitable tension we must face between a commitment to both the intrinsic and the extrinsic value of play. The editors also briefly consider Thelen and Smith's dynamic systems theory as well as poststructuralist analyses of play. Thelen and Smith in particular are used to illustrate a comprehensive approach to human development that attempts to integrate play into everyday life, hence, recognising both its intrinsic and extrinsic value.

The structure of the book is guided by its treatment of three key dimensions of research. These are divided into three sections: (1) The Value of Play, (2) Play Beyond Early Childhood and (3) Sociocultural Contexts, Technology and Consumerism.

The first section, 'The Value of Play', considers play from five different perspectives. In her chapter, 'Considerations of Play Enlivened Through The Work of Donald Winnicott', Cynthia à Beckett extends a focus on the psychoanalytic theories of Donald Winnicott as a key to enhancing our understandings and applications of play, in particular in relation to early childhood education. Winnicott combines psychoanalytic ideas with the psychological notion of flexible toleration to show how play is the mechanism through which creative living can be achieved. Winnicott is distinctive for the way in which his ideas connect with artistic expression but are also relevant to approaches towards implementing curriculum. Concepts such as unintegration and the holding environment, mentioned above, as well as 'transitional object', 'the third zone' and 'formlessness' offer illuminating ways to understand play and enhance relationships among babies, children and adults. Understanding the intrinsic value of play in this way offers us relaxed, trusting opportunities for enrichment, which contribute to the flourishing of the whole personality and hence indirectly create opportunities for development that have utilitarian dimensions.

The second chapter, Kathleen Tait's study of play and babies, 'The First Two Years of Life: A Developmental Psychology Orientation to Child Development and Play', investigates the phenomenon of play during infancy, through the generally utilitarian lens of developmental psychology. Tait provides a review of the forms of play that emerge within the first 24 months of life. Distinguishing between the object focus of play, which comes about through play experiences, and the social focus of play, which emerges through communication experiences, Tait uses empiri-

cal evidence to account for the perceptual, motor and language development skills that evolve through play. Practices of adult-infant play, face-to-face play, game-play and object-directed and person-directed play are defined and explored, as babies shift from social to object and to more integrated experiences of play.

In Chap. 3, Cathie Harrison and Christine Robinson's 'Looking Deeper: Play and the Spiritual Dimension', discusses the connections between play and spirituality in the context of early childhood education and care in Australia. The authors begin by considering historical and philosophical perspectives that support the idea of play as a mode of developing spirituality in children. They then examine children's capacity for spirituality, drawing on the recognition of this capacity in Australia's 2009 Early Years Learning Framework. The authors argue that increased emphasis on both the economic value of the individual and on education for workplace productivity in government policy and rhetoric poses a challenge to cultivating play and spirituality enhanced through play for children. Their use of vignettes explains the link between spiritual capacity and holistic approaches to education and helps to straddle the divide between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for play in the context of early childhood education.

In Chap. 4, 'Muckabout: Aboriginal Conceptions of Play', by Denise Proud, Sandra Lynch, Deborah Pike and Cynthia à Beckett, the recollections of Proud, a Murri woman from Queensland, are a catalyst to an exploration of Aboriginal approaches to play, with reference to existing scholarship on Aboriginal play and leisure. Proud recounts some of her childhood experiences of play in light of some of the values and philosophies of her people, using the culturally significant concept of *Darn Nudgen Burri*, which has connotations of empathy for others, compassion, grace, gratitude and self-sacrifice. This concept underpins Proud's life experience and also interacts with the playfulness she takes to be an essential and defining characteristic of Aboriginal attitudes to life, a playfulness that fully recognises the intrinsic worth of play in the life of human beings. The authors argue that *Darn Nudgen Burri's* moral imperatives along with the Aboriginal focus on mucking about, having fun, teasing and not taking life too seriously can usefully inform educational practice in the wider community in early childhood settings and beyond.

This final chapter in the first section is Dee O'Connor's 'Loving Learning: The Value of Play within Contemporary Primary School Pedagogy', which makes an impassioned case for more play time and playful interaction in primary school. O'Connor observes that while the social, physical, emotional and intellectual benefits of play are well supported by evidence, children inhabit increasingly controlled environments in which there is an overall reduction in risk-taking, outdoor and child-directed play. Using empirical research from the 2012 Irish Neighbourhood Play Research Project, O'Connor shows how and why primary schools could become more playful and act to balance the social changes that are restricting play time and experiences in modern childhood. Taking risks during play becomes a key element of her argument, which uses the experience of Dominic, who attributes his status as young entrepreneur to his encounters with risk-taking during the play experiences of his childhood. O'Connor is drawing attention to Bateson's view of play as occurring within a particular context or frame, one that differs from the

instrumental logic of the everyday lifeworld. Within this play frame, things are both real and unreal at the same time, and the exploration of possibility and risk-taking is inherent (Bateson, 1973).

In the volume's second section 'Play Beyond Early Childhood', contributors show how facilitators, educators and teachers in various contexts and at different levels might use playful engagement to improve their pedagogical practices. Hence, the focus here is generally on extrinsic purported benefits that include boosting student activity and involvement in learning, as well as enhancing flexibility, openness to possibility and reflective consideration of the learning process, so as ultimately to produce graduates who possess the skills to make them fit and flexible for the twenty-first-century world.

The first chapter of this section is Marilyn Fler and Anna Kamaralli's 'Cultural Development of the Child in Role-Play Drama Pedagogy and Its Potential Contribution to Early Childhood Education'. The chapter argues that there is a place for adult involvement in general imaginative role-play, contrary to the commonly held position that children's play is best left undirected. Fler and Kamaralli use the work of Vygotsky and Lindqvist, to show how the active support of teachers in devising scenarios jointly created by children and teachers is of enormous benefit to children's development. The case studies they use introduce Shakespeare to primary-aged children, calling on Vygotsky's view that play and drama are closely related, and they also make use of Lindqvist's idea of play worlds for preschool children in relation to the narrative of Enid Blyton. The authors argue that teacher intervention in this process of narrative role-play not only enhances children's play but also offers them a significant opportunity for cultural enrichment.

In Chap. 8, 'The Playground of the Mind: Teaching Literature at University', Deborah Pike explores a problem that arises in the context of the tertiary classroom, that is, that conventional and strictly syllabus and goal-oriented teaching does not inspire students with confidence in their own capacity to engage critically and creatively with interpretations of literature. Pike examines the theoretical background of the concepts of play and playful pedagogy, drawing on early learning and, where available, adult learning contexts and on literary and philosophical perspectives on creativity and play; in doing so, she draws attention to the need to straddle both extrinsic and utilitarian motivations for employing playful pedagogies with recognition of the intrinsic value of such a pedagogy. Building on these theories and from her own teaching experience of literary studies for university undergraduates, she presents a set of activities that employ play in the adult learning context of literature studies.

In Chap. 9, play pedagogy becomes a critical way through which educators can help students develop the competencies requisite to a future in the digital age, which will no doubt create challenges that have not yet been predicted or imagined. In 'Gamestorming the Academy: On Creative Play and Unconventional Learning for the Twenty-First Century', Bem Le Hunte argues that playfulness in tertiary education is key to enhancing creativity in university students and preparing them for a world of supercomplexity. Once the domain of children and early childhood educators, Le Hunte makes a strong case for bringing play back into the academy. She explains how the use of playful pedagogical strategies, such as constructing 'more

beautiful’ questions, taking ideas ‘for a walk’ as well as using games that deprioritise closed questions and answers and narrowly utilitarian approaches to learning, may assist students in becoming more innovative in their thinking. The curriculum is problem based in its approach to learning and includes classes in the disciplines of science, engineering, business, law, health, design, arts and social sciences so as to encourage students to embrace a truly multidisciplinary method for addressing these problems. This facilitates in students the development of philosophical reflection, as well as skills in risk assessment, design and construction, which equip them well to address the multifaceted problems facing our world.

Acknowledging the ways in which playful environments are now considered crucial for facilitating thriving workplaces, leading businesses and post-compulsory education contexts, in [Chap. 10](#), Fiona Young and Genevieve Murray explore the perceptions of playful learning environments created in two secondary education environments in Australia. In ‘Designing for Serious Play’, Young and Murray continue with the idea that creative innovation is crucial to the social and economic development of contemporary society. They investigate the principles requisite to the design of successful playful learning environments for adolescents, while also identifying some hurdles to its achievement. For Young and Murray, a play-based environment for adolescents is one where students and teachers are not narrowly or solely driven by predetermined outcomes. With reference to aspects of Huizinga’s analysis of play, they identify factors, both spatial and attitudinal, facilitative of playful learning and teaching. While noting that there are few examples of playful learning environments in Australian secondary schools, Young and Murray provide a study of two exceptions, describing the use of spaces designed for self-directed and collaborative learning. These spaces include a workshop, café, cinema, boardroom, i-space and retreat and offer students a diversity of spaces in which to work; unlike the schools’ traditional classrooms, the deliberate lack of specificity as to their use facilitates collaborative as well as self-directed learning, which the authors argue ultimately impacts positively on playful approaches to pedagogy.

Chapter 11, ‘The Power of Play-Based Learning: Pedagogy of Hope for Potentially At-Risk Children’, presents the work of Marguerite Maher and Stephanie Smith who claim that while play affords students the opportunity to develop competencies for the future, its value and impact is broader than this: it has the potential to effect social change. Maher and Smith demonstrate and argue for the use of play-based pedagogy with ‘at risk’ primary school students – such as those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds and refugees. The authors demonstrate that introducing play-based pedagogy increases students’ drive towards learning, improves literacy and numeracy, enhances confidence and deepens engagement with learning. Maher and Smith trialled a play-based learning programme in mathematics and science in a year two classroom (the third year of compulsory education) in a school with a high population of at-risk children, and the results were positive in terms of student experience and educational outcomes. Framing their study within the context of Freire’s pedagogy of hope, Maher and Smith show evidence of the intellectual and social advantages of this programme.

The programme adopts and endorses a child-centred approach to teaching, and as such, the authors argue that it should be well supported through initiatives in the professional development of teachers.

The final section of the volume, 'Sociocultural Contexts, Technology and Consumerism', is devoted to considerations of the sociocultural contexts of play, with a special focus on much-vexed issues of consumerism, technology and play, and the utilitarian and commercial aspects of play.

Bronwyn Davies begins the conversation in Chap. 12 by drawing our attention to the ways in which play among children becomes an enactment of gender roles and gendered games, by both 'assembling and dismantling' gender. 'Gendering the Subject in Playful Encounters' engages with Gilles Deleuze's concepts of 'deterritorialisation' and 'lines of flight' to assist us in appreciating the ways gender and play 'intra-act' with each other. Gender and play are viewed as forced into an encounter with each other in which both are consequently changed. Davies uses examples from Australia and Sweden to examine the ways in which the play of children, on the one hand, maintains the status quo through the performance of traditional gendered behaviours but, on the other hand and more importantly, children's play is presented as 'deterritorialising' these behaviours and challenging them through 'cuts' and 'molecular shifts'. In such instances, 'creative lines' of escape come about by ultimately disrupting traditional binary concepts of gender. Such deterritorialising acts involve risk-taking, and for the female child, it is this tension between the desire for risk-taking (traditionally unfeminine) behaviour and the imperative to enact normative femininity that becomes a battleground. Allowing these creative moments and shifts to take place is key to encouraging students to inhabit emergent identities, which are also likely to be more authentic.

Anne Kultti and Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson present the results of their study of the objects and tools of play in Chap. 13, 'Toys and the Creation of Cultural Play Scripts: Play Practices in Early Childhood Education Through a Study of Objects as Mediational Tools in Children's Play'. Using Vygotsky's ideas, they show how the objects used in play co-constitute the meaning of the play via the framing of an imaginative narrative that children create around the objects. Their empirical study examines the use of play objects with four children to show how teachers can learn from observing the toys, objects and other props used so as to support children's involvement in play as they move in and out of imaginary framings. The authors argue that object-play activities enhance cognitive and linguistic capacities of children, as they move towards and away from reality during play. Such a programme supports the development of children's imaginative thought and allows teachers to participate with children in creating imaginative activities.

Chapter 14 draws from work undertaken in an Australian Research Council-funded project, which explored how children engage in online and digital activities in the home. 'Playing With Technology: Young Children Making Sense of Technology as Part of Their Everyday Social Worlds' by Susan Danby, Christina Davidson, Maryanne Theobald, Sandra Houen and Karen Thorpe is an empirical study of children's play with an indubitably contemporary focus. Using an ethnomethodological approach, the researchers investigated the way technologies and children's involvement in pretend play intersect. The chapter records the ways in

which young children use technologies in everyday life by recruiting both real and imaginary props to support their play activities. Via detailed conversation analysis and by observing the children's gestures, their gazes and their speech during these play activities with technology, the authors are able to reveal the nature of the children's relational encounters, their spontaneous interactions and their embodied action fantasies in these forms of play. In doing so, they recognise the place of technology in enhancing the more intrinsic dimensions of play and help draw attention to the nuanced view of play that this book recommends.

In some contemporary literature, the question of how children play becomes a question of whether or not certain kinds of play are actually any good for them. In Chap. 15, 'Play, Virtue and Well-Being: Is Consumerist Play a Bad Habit?', philosopher Angus Brook poses this very question. From a virtue ethics perspective, Brook explores the possibility that what he refers to as consumerist play may be opposed to the intrinsic purposes of play and may well lead to bad habits of playing insofar as consumerist play appeals to and manipulates human appetite and desire. Brook examines the relationship between virtue ethics and play and considers a number of theoretical approaches to play, including those of Huizinga, Gadamer and Caillois, in order to determine play's purpose. Ultimately, it is Aristotle's concept of happiness as 'eudemonia' that he argues is most useful in helping to determine the value of play in terms of what it might ideally enable us to achieve. Brook turns to St. Thomas Aquinas' view of play as an intrinsic and basic human good and a contributor to human well-being to draw attention to the moral dimensions of play and particularly to emphasise the potential of the habitual practice of playing consumerist games to undermine, rather than to foster, well-being.

Consumerism and play are the focus of the volume's final chapter by Camilla Nelson and Ari Mattes, 'Lego, Creative Accumulation and the Future of Play'. Nelson and Mattes uncover the phenomenon of Lego – the largest toy manufacturer in the world – by examining the continual reinvention of their core message of 'play' and the way in which it is likely to shape the future of play: work becoming play and play becoming consumption. Their analysis extends into *The Lego Movie*, in which play becomes entirely instrumental and utilitarian as a mode of advertising. While the movie may appear to be a critique of capitalism, it simultaneously subverts and reinforces capitalistic principles, playing a game with an audience whose parents are well acquainted with the purported evils of capitalism but who still like to play and acquire. Nelson and Mattes explore the way in which playing with Lego reveals the consumerist impulses driving media entertainment and the immersion of our children in play that occurs in a branded world.

Conclusion

This volume contends that play, particularly spontaneous play, offers pathways to creating and becoming oneself. However, this contention is juxtaposed to a parallel and contemporaneous commitment to the value of play-based learning in early childhood development and to the productive use of play-based pedagogies within

schools and tertiary education institutions. Certainly, play is not a mere childish or trivial pursuit, and hence, it is not insignificant – either in terms of broad conceptions of what play has to tell us about the nature of human being and its capacity to help us understand the meaning of our existence; or in the contributions it can make to social, moral and intellectual development.

Play in some of its forms can put us in contact with metaphysical or spiritual dimensions of our being. Equally, it can free us to explore the world around us, our relationships, our understanding of self and our place in the communities of which we are part. It can provide us with space for creative activity and reflective thought and space to test our presentation of self, and most importantly, it can give us pleasure and respite in the process. These valuable aspects of play are intrinsic to it, or as Alasdair MacIntyre (1996) might put it, they are goods internal to the practice of play.

Given that most of the contributors to this volume are involved in different spheres of education or in activity associated with education, the value of playful learning from a broadly instrumental perspective has been emphasised. However, while we wish to challenge narrowly instrumental attitudes to play, to encourage playful attitudes in education and in social life more broadly, we cannot fail to notice the way in which the intrinsic worth of play can be undermined in contemporary contexts. Like artistic endeavour and the human capacity for aesthetic expression generally, the very pervasiveness of play as a human activity determines that as with art, it becomes the focus of commercial activity. But play's pervasiveness as an element of human life and as a particular orientation to any situation also ensures that it will not disappear. Rather, play is likely to take different forms in the future. The threat for the future, as noted above, is that the play of children who are responding to their own natural curiosity and sense of wonder might be hijacked by commercial interests or by instrumentally focused approaches to play in educational contexts. Protecting play from such threats requires a preparedness to tolerate the tension implicit in play as a phenomenon – in that it is a natural human phenomenon, inevitable, ubiquitous and valuable for its own sake, while also being instrumentally useful. We do learn about the expectations or flexibility of the social world through play; we enjoy coming to understand an idea in the context of play-based learning, and we come to appreciate the limitations of play via the tensions we perceive between play and the serious world of work and external accomplishment. While from the perspective of its worth play is for the most part autotelic, it can also be purposive, although without any narrow or particular purpose.

It is our view that confronting the tension related to play as a purposive activity, although one without any particular or specific purpose, demands that we engage in continual and reflective negotiation with ourselves; this negotiation requires that we interrogate our own attitudes to and uses of play in the many contexts in which playful engagement can occur. Part of our negotiation will require recognising that the instrumental advantages or outcomes of play are only likely to be fully achieved if we are prepared and able to recognise that the instrumental advantages or outcomes of play are by-products of genuine engagement in play.

Thus, the goods external to playful engagement, such as the development of particular skills and competencies, are only possible via a commitment to the goods internal to the practice of play, which demand a genuine and free engagement in play for its own sake. This requires a particular kind of intentionality or motivation, sometimes referred to as indirection (Lynch, 2005); play, artistic endeavour and the development of friendships share this form of intentionality. In each of these cases, attempts to directly achieve the goods extrinsic to these practices will frustrate their achievement. Rather, we must engage in play, artistic endeavour or activity with potential friends for its own sake. We must be free of any specific expectation and aware of the fragility of the enterprise since it is possible that play can be disrupted or even become dangerous and dark, so as to undermine rather than contribute to human flourishing. The point here is that just as we cannot guarantee that a friendship will develop with an acquaintance, or that an impressive work of art will be the outcome of an artist's activity, nor can we guarantee that play will achieve a particular outcome.

Nonetheless, play is a phenomenon that encapsulates possibilities for becoming, for well-being and for flourishing that we bypass at the peril of failing to reach our potential as human beings. Thus, the recognition of the value of play's creative potential and the challenges with which playful engagement presents us can easily be interpreted as moral imperatives; as Fink, Saine and Saine put it: 'precisely, in the power and glory of our magical creativity we mortal men are "at stake" in an inscrutably threatening way' (1968, p. 29).

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