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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Researcher's personal narrative

I am an international student whose first language is not English. While I consider my English to be satisfactory and I am capable of conducting research, I have to admit that my language abilities are not the same compared to my native language, Greek. It has been very difficult for me to conduct an ethnographic study in a linguistically different environment. However, at the same time it seemed to be of benefit as the fact that I had a background totally different to the one adopted here in England allowed me to bring a fresh perspective of thinking, understanding and interpreting reality. My previous experience of working as a teacher for children with special needs in my country, made me feel when I started conducting the research that I had a dual role: that of an outsider and of an insider. On the one hand, I was an outsider because I did not have an intimate knowledge of the group of children, teachers and overall context prior to the beginning of this study's field observations, thus enabling me to make observations that probably teachers were taking for granted. On the other hand I was an insider, as I had previously worked with children with autism in similar settings and my previous experience was tied with that knowledge. Duranti (1997) calls this kind of distinction the emic/etic distinction, which is vital in order to help a researcher better understand the culture and community under study, while Merton (1972, p.36) argues that 'we no longer ask whether it is the Insider or the Outsider who has the monopolistic or privileged access to social truth; instead we begin to consider their distinctive and interactive roles in the process of truth seeking'. I would see my role in the current study as that of a person who combines multicultural perspectives to understand the world.

I share my personal story so that the reader can understand my stance on the research and how that may affect the evolution and interpretation of the current study. My interest in children with autism was born when I was an undergraduate student in physical education. Due to cultural taboos surrounding children and individuals with

special needs, I was very rarely able to see children with autism walking along the street or playing outside with other children. This was the starting point for me that urged me to understand and learn more about the life of those children from the perspective of a physical education teacher. It was a challenge for me to understand how those children were being supported in the context of a physical education class. This led me to work for a year with a child with autism on a one-to-one basis in a special primary school in Greece.

My interest was further extended when I decided to apply for a Masters degree in Adapted Physical Education in a country other than my native. My main aim was to see the differences and/or similarities a physical education class, between two different countries, could provide to children with autism. I had the chance to work and interact with children with autism while I was conducting my clinical work as a physical educator in a psychiatric clinic for children with schizophrenia, autism and other related disorders and my practical work as a physical educator in an integrated primary school including one child with autism and two children with learning difficulties. It was a valuable experience that helped me realise the importance of play as this was introduced through group activities with the constant support of adults.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to explore, through case studies, the play of two children with autism in the inclusive environments of their preschool settings. Previous research on the play behaviour of children with autism has relied almost exclusively on experimental or quasi-experimental studies aiming to categorise play in distinct categories which would consequently help researchers 'judge' in an objective way whether children with autism were able to play or not. Since standardised experimental strategies are not able to provide the real picture of the abilities of children with autism during play, it is necessary to expand our knowledge of the play of children with autism through contextually based methods including naturalistic observations through which a researcher is able to collect evidence on children's real-life experiences documenting what actually happens (Greene & Hogan,

2005) in the play life of children with autism taking place in inclusive preschool settings.

In this study, therefore, I explored the play of children with autism as this was supported and evolved in the holistic environment of their inclusive preschool setting. In particular, I was interested to explore the strategies the teachers used in order to support play for all children including the child with autism and how this would be affected by the whole play ethos of each setting. It was my objective to contribute towards further understanding relevant to the play of children with autism by closely observing, recording, analysing and interpreting the play of the children with autism as this unravelled in the context of two different inclusive preschool settings.

### **1.3 Theoretical Approach**

This study adopted a social constructivistic approach in order to explore, from a naturalistic point of view, the play of children with autism in context. Social constructivism refers to the intersubjective nature of knowledge which can be characterised as social and not individual (Schwandt, 1990). In the same vein, Crotty (1998) argues that ‘the focus of social constructionism is the collective generation and transmission of meaning’. Vygotsky was a great supporter of social constructivism emphasising that development could be understood only if it is studied in its own socio-historical and cultural context (Bruner, 2006). Thus understanding of how children with autism develop their play skills while they are being supported by their teachers and interacting with their peers, in the social context of an inclusive environment, is of great importance since it can provide us with information that otherwise would be elusive.

### **1.4 The context of this study**

The study was conducted in England where early childhood has gained great attention during the past decade evident through the many changes that have taken place in English childcare provision and the establishment of various services like Sure Start

programmes and integrated provision that strive to create opportunities for high-quality early learning and a number of other services including family support and health services (Miller, Cable, & Devereux, 2005).

Children with special needs are able to attend a range of settings while those with major difficulties often receive additional medical, educational or social services (Devereux & Miller, 2003). Those rights were established for children with additional needs through the Children Act 2004 which suggested a wider framework aiming to improve those children's lives by employing a wide range of strategies like multidisciplinary and integrated planning that could be applied in early years settings (DfES, 2004). However, there are still concerns over the actual availability and quality of early childhood education. This is described vividly by Waller (2005) who states that 'there is still concern and debate about the availability, cost and quality of care and education for young children, provision for under children three, local involvement and control of childcare and achieving a balance between the needs of children and their parents' (p.xiii). The quality of the settings in this study was something that would be understood through the research as it was conducted.

The educational philosophy that was primarily established in England aimed to create environments where preschool children would be able to play freely, choose their own activities and of course be directed by adults (Maynard & Thomas, 2004) whose daily tasks did not include teaching of formal skills like reading and writing. Recently (September 2008), England put in place the Revised Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage that incorporated the Birth to Three Matters (first National Curriculum) appropriate for children from birth to 5 years old to be delivered by preschool staff. Despite the fact that the Early Years Foundation Stage was carefully designed to promote children's early learning from a holistic point of view, there are still concerns over the nature of the curriculum based on the fact that it over-emphasises subject knowledge (Anning, Cullen, & Flear, 2008). This study is mainly concerned with the play experiences of the children as they emerge across the curriculum.

## 1.5 Thesis overview

This chapter has provided a brief introduction to the researcher's background, the study's main aims, the approach adopted and the wider context relevant to this study. *Chapter 2* presents a review of the background literature relevant to professional and insider perspectives on autism. I go on to discuss play by presenting the work of major play theorists who suggested separately their own ideas about the importance of social context within the learning and play of each and every child. Furthermore, I provide the reader with an extensive literature relevant to the play of children with autism in a variety of settings. A detailed description of the methodology adopted in combination with the methods used and the analysis followed in this study can be found in *Chapter 3*. Additionally, *Chapter 3* includes a detailed description of the profile of the children with autism and a rich description of their play contexts. *Chapter 4* provides the reader with findings using detailed descriptive vignettes, illustrating in a vivid way the play of the children with autism as this was developing on an individual and group basis with peers and teachers in the social context of an inclusive setting. *Chapter 5* discusses the findings by presenting and exploring the four main themes that arose from the data analysis of this study. Following on, the discussion addresses the limitations as well as contributions of this study. Finally, *Chapter 6* concludes with the key points from this study considering recommendation for practice and research and suggesting that inclusion in preschool settings is and can be feasible for all children as long as the real value of play will be understood by early years practitioners and become embedded and enacted through their active involvement in all children's, including children with autism, learning through play.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. Autism**

##### **2.1.1 Professional perspectives**

Autism was first described by Leo Kanner in 1943 (Gillberg & Coleman, 2000). It is conceptualised as a lifelong (Fecteau, Mottron, Berthiaume, & Burack, 2003), neurodevelopmental disorder (Toth, Dawson, Meltzoff, Greenson, & Fein, 2007) with an early onset of the first symptoms in the first three years of life (Rutherford, Young, Hepburn, & Rogers, 2006). Wing (1988) identified the triad of impairments that characterise individuals with autism, focusing on the deficits: (a) severe abnormality of reciprocal social relatedness, (b) severe abnormality of communication development, (c) restricted, repetitive behaviour, interests, activities and imagination. Autism varies in degree of severity (Frith, 2001) and people with autism have been divided into two categories – low and the high functioning (Gillberg & Coleman, 2000). Low-functioning individuals are characterized by profound linguistic difficulties and a mixture of symptoms such as tantrums, repetitive behaviours, low attention span and visual impairments while high-functioning individuals show higher intelligence (IQ 70 or above) and linguistic competence affected only by a dysfunction in the social sphere (Joseph, Tager-Flusberg, & Lord, 2002). Furthermore, autism is frequently interrelated with other disorders (Evans, Castle, Barraclough, & Jones, 2001). Wing (1996) suggested that there is an autistic spectrum of disorders which includes subgroups of conditions which share the triad of impairments but differ from one another in severity of difficulties and way of manifestation when diagnosed (Frederickson & Cline, 2009), including classical or Kanner's autism, high functioning autism, Heller's syndrome, semantic pragmatic disorder and Asperger syndrome (Evans et al., 2001). This concept of a spectrum is dominant in current literature.

Historically, autism has been conceptualised differently. In 1944, Hans Asperger first described a condition he termed autistic psychopathy (Fitzgerald & Corvin, 2001),

which included a group of children who exhibited autism-related characteristics (Simpson et al., 2004) but had above average intelligence (Evans et al., 2001), better language and social skills than in Kanner's autism (Frith, 1991), fewer symptoms such as stereotypies or sensory abnormalities and more unusual or intense interests and preoccupations (Klin, 1994). Until 1981, Asperger syndrome was rather ignored. Wing (1981) renewed interest in the condition, renamed it Asperger syndrome and described the difficulties that individuals had due to the condition. Those included a) a lack of normal interest and pleasure in people around them, b) a reduction in shared interests and wish to communicate either verbally or non-verbally, c) a delay in speech acquisition, and d) lack of imaginative play.

There is great overlap between Asperger's and Kanner's descriptions and a longstanding controversy over whether Asperger's is separate from the autistic disorder, or a milder version and part of the general autistic spectrum (Macintosh & Dissanayake, 2006). In 1994 publication of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) listed 'Asperger's syndrome' as one of the five pervasive developmental disorder subtypes (Evans et al., 2001). Although social impairment and repetitive behaviours were identified as the core features of the syndrome there were still some misconceptions relevant to the unspecified degree of severity in social skills, communication impairment and speech delays compared to autism. However, this was not a barrier against the approval of an official definition for Asperger syndrome which has not yet been universally accepted (Aarons & Gittens, 1999; Prior, 2003).

Research studies (Eisenmajer et al., 1996; Ozonoff, South, & Miller, 2000; Szatmari, Archer, Fisman, Streiner, & Wilson, 1995) have shown that most individuals officially diagnosed with Asperger syndrome meet all the criteria provided by DSM-IV for autism and not Asperger syndrome, with Frith (1991) describing individuals with Asperger as 'having a dash of autism'. This lack of consensus remains since the publication of DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) and leads to confusions and incoherence in the diagnosis of autism and Asperger syndrome (Hill & Frith, 2003). Current literature (Ozonoff et al., 2000) suggests that autism is a spectrum and that Asperger's disorder is at the highest end of this spectrum (Tryon, Mayes, Rhodes, & Waldo, 2006). Schopler (1985) argued that what people were describing as Asperger syndrome was high-functioning autism and cautioned against



its premature use while Wing (1998, p.23) stated that ‘Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism are not distinct conditions’. At present the label ‘Asperger’s syndrome’ is still used by parents and social services (Tryon et al., 2006).

Despite the fact that in the past decades there have been great breakthroughs relevant to the origins of autism there is still no conclusive scientific evidence regarding the exact causes of autism (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). The cause of autism, when it was first described in the 1960 by Kanner, tended to be a lack of love from a mother to a child – the so-called *refrigerator mother* – which is no longer accepted since it has been established that the causes are other than faulty parenting (Attwood et al., 2008). Another discarded theory that has brought much debate over the causes of autism is related to the MMR vaccine which was accused of causing autism in young children after one study found that children that were vaccinated at the age of 12 months were showing signs of autism a few months later (Schreibman, 2005). This is in contrast with a number of studies which highlight the lack of relationship between the MMR vaccine and autism (Baird et al., 2008). Research has now focused on genetic studies which indicate that autism may be related to abnormalities in specific chromosomal regions responsible for making some people more susceptible to autism thus suggesting that autism can be inherited, while aspects of the disorder are claimed to affect autistic people’s families which have a high percentage of relatives with speech disorders and other relevant difficulties (Aarons & Gittens, 1999). Today there is growing evidence that autism is caused by multiple factors – genetic, environmental, metabolic and immunological- which come into play and result in autism (Frederickson & Cline, 2009).

### **2.1.2. Insider perspectives**

There are many written accounts from individuals within the autistic spectrum that give an insider’s perspective on autism. While professional perspectives focus on the deficits that individuals with autism exhibit, insider perspectives stress the notion of difference and provide an alternative view to the traditional notion of autism as a pervasive developmental disorder. The narratives presented below provide a valid alternative picture of autism based on lived rather than research experience, which

highlights from an 'inside-out' approach (Williams, 1996) how people with autism perceive their status.

Jim Sinclair, an individual with autism, describes autism as 'a way of being':

Autism isn't something a person has, or a 'shell' that a person is trapped inside. There's no normal child hidden behind the autism. Autism is a way of being. It is pervasive; it colours every experience, every sensation, perception, thought, emotion, and encounter, every aspect of existence. It is not possible to separate the autism from the person – and if it were possible, the person you'd have left would not be the same person you started with. This is important, so take a moment to consider it: autism is a way of being. It is not possible to separate the person from the autism (Sinclair, 1993).

The next insight belongs to Temple Grandin, a high-functioning autistic individual who describes her sensory experience:

Loud, sudden noises still startle me. My reaction to them is more intense than other people's. I still hate balloons, because I never know when one will pop and make me jump. Sustained high-pitched motor noises, such as hair dryers and bathroom vent fans, still bother me, lower frequency motor noises do not (Grandin, 1988, p.3).

Therese Jolliffe is another autistic individual who acknowledged her sensory difficulties:

The following are just some of the noises that still upset me enough to cover up my ears to avoid them; shouting, noisy crowded places, polystyrene being touched, balloons and aeroplanes, noisy vehicles on building sites, hammering and banging, electric tools being used, the sound of the sea, the sound of felt-tip or marker pens being used to colour in and fireworks. Despite this I can read music and play it and there are certain types of music I love. In fact when I am feeling angry and despairing of everything, music is the only way of

making me feel calmer inside (Jolliffe, Landsdown, & Robinson, 1992, p.15).

The next example vividly describes how the communicative difficulties of autism can feel:

Like most autistic people, I am constantly struggling to communicate. The frustrations of this struggle often make me feel tense and nervous. My language is quite good, but talking is stressful, because it takes a lot of effort for me. My voice often sounds ‘funny’. I have very few friends because of my communication problems ... I do hear and usually understand when people are talking to me, even if I don’t look at them. However, it takes longer than average for me to figure out what to reply and then to say it. When people talk to me, it helps a lot if they speak slowly and give me time to respond without pressuring me (Ward & Alar, 2000, p.234).

There are also very important insider reflections from individuals with autism on how they played during their childhood. Some of them are presented below. Jean Paul Bovee (cited, by Donnelly & Bovee, 2003, p.472) provides a personal account of imagining in a different way to his siblings:

‘I was not very good playing in typical ways or with other children and I rarely got enjoyment from it. I learned to play some because my brother and sisters made me, but I preferred reading and music. They still are important for me. I understand why there is a need to develop typical play skills, but I was developing my skills at my rate for being the person on the autism spectrum I am. Imagination is something that is different in each person. For me, it was making my lists, creating fictional genealogies of characters, planning imaginary ball games with players on baseball cards, creating different languages and the list goes on. Each person is different and imagination is different for each person’.

Donna Williams talks about her difficulties in understanding how she could play with other children:

I was pretty, I was cheerful but I did not know how to play *with* children. At most I knew how to create very simple games or adventures and sometimes allowed others to participate, as long as it was totally on my terms (Williams, 1992, p.27).

Based on Booth and Booth's (1993) statement that 'new opportunities for the future emerge by focusing on a person's capacity as revealed in the context of their life experience rather than on their deficiencies' (p.377), I decided to provide a range of personal accounts from individuals with autism. In my opinion, first hand accounts show how individuals with autism perceive aspects of social life, what they grapple with and how resilient they can be. The accounts give evidence from an inside-out perspective and enable the reader to understand better the nature of autism and the difficulties connected to it as those are narrated and seen through the eyes of people who live with autism and often find traditional ways of experiencing the world frustrating as they have different ways of confronting social events. These understandings have helped to prompt an alternative conceptualisation of autism adopted by professionals, which has taken place over the past decade focusing on the different way that individuals with autism understand information compared to a deficit account (Jordan & Jones, 1999).

Additionally, as one of this study's basic tenets was to investigate the play of children with autism, I believed that it was important to provide some insider perspectives relevant to the play experiences of individuals with autism during childhood. The descriptions provided highlight the ability of individuals with autism to engage in and enjoy play activities, and at the same the difficulty of others in their social environment to understand their different play needs compared to their typical peers. Overall, the examples provided above depict in an illustrative way how those people perceive themselves and try to find their rights to difference.

## 2.2 Play

### 2.2.1 Defining play and its importance for young children

Play has a very important part in a child's life and this is recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (General Assembly Resolution 44/25, 1989) which advocates that it is a right of every child to play. Play has a major role in the development of children (Jordan, 2003). Through play children acquire cognitive, social, linguistic and emotional skills (Kasari, Freeman, & Paparella, 2006). Play provides a safe environment (Desha, Zivianni, & Rodger, 2003) where children can learn and practise new skills (Boucher, 1999), explore their environment (Skaines, Rodger, & Bundy, 2006), interact with other children (Jordan, 2003) and express themselves (Dominguez, Ziviani, & Rodger, 2006).

Today there are numerous definitions of play which try to capture its complex nature although there is no single or common definition of it. Bundy (2001) states that, 'there is little agreement and much ambiguity about virtually every aspect of play, from its definition, to its purpose, to the ways in which it manifests itself' (p.89). Therefore, in order to understand a small part of the range of meanings attached to the definition of play and its subcategories I will provide a selected range of play definitions given by leading authors in the field of early childhood play. Huizinga (1998, p.3) suggested that play is a 'totality' and as such must be understood and evaluated while Issacs (1954) argued that 'play is the child's means of living and of understanding life' (p.23). Hughes (1999) stated that play is characterised by intrinsic motivation and has to be done only for its own sake as an end in itself. It has to be freely chosen by the participants and not directed by others. It is non literal; it gives freedom to the player to imagine and engage in situations not compatible with reality. It actively engages the player through physical, cognitive and psychological involvement and finally, it gives pleasure. Sylva, Bruner and Genova (1976) stated that 'the essence of play is in the dominance of means over ends. This is not to say that play is without goals ... but in play the process is more important than the product' (p.244). A wide range of characteristics of play is given by Fromberg (1987, p.36) who defines play as '*symbolic*, in that it represents reality with as if or what if attitude; *meaningful* in that it connects or relates experiences; pleasurable even when children engage seriously in

an activity; *voluntary and intrinsically motivated*, whether the motives are curiosity, mastery, affiliation or others; *rule-governed*, whether implicitly or explicitly expressed; *episodic*, characterised by emerging and shifting goals that children develop spontaneously’.

As is evident from the general direction of this thesis, I understand play as a means of expression for each and every child including children with autism. I agree with Huizinga (1998) who prefers to understand play as a totality and I further argue that play can be ‘suitable’ for all children no matter how it is expressed. As a teacher working for a couple of years in early years settings I realised the importance of context to the understanding of play which can take a variety of forms as it is constructed by different people within different contexts. Like Vygotsky (1978) who argued that only an in-depth analysis of play can highlight its role in young children’s development, I argue that play is used by all children for its own sake and should have an important role in their daily life both at school and at home; thus I support the understanding of play through a naturalistic lens which is opposed to ‘artificial’ categorisations and labels which I believe undermine its holistic nature, cannot capture all the aspects it is constructed with and cannot give the real picture of children’s needs.

### **2.2.2 Types of play**

The developmental importance of play has led many researchers to investigate it through a wide variety of methods and experimental designs (Wood & Attfield, 1996) and define it in many different ways (Pramling Samuelsson & Fleer, 2008); this section will provide key terms of different types of play which have been affected by the use of objective terminology to provide neat definitions of distinct categories (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000). It must be noted though, that there is still no consensus over the definitions, attributions and views of developmental progression in play (Pronin & Bergen, 2006).

Sensorimotor or practice play refers to the play of a child through kinaesthesia (Hughes, 1999) while functional play can be defined when using an object as its

function denotes, even if it is a miniaturised object (Ungerer & Sigman, 1981). Leslie (1987) described three categories of symbolic play: a) object substitution – using an object as if it was something else (e.g. using a soap as a telephone), b) attribution of false properties – attributing properties as if they exist (e.g. a cat is talking), and c) reference to an absent object – refer to something as if it was present (e.g. drinking tea from an imaginary cup). Pretend play is occasionally used as a term that includes both functional and symbolic play (Libby, Powell, Messer, & Jordan, 1998) or synonymous with symbolic play (Blanc, Adrien, Roux, & Barthelemy, 2005; Kasari et al., 2006; Lewis, Boucher, Lupton, & Watson, 2000; Rutherford & Rogers, 2003; Rutherford et al., 2006).

Socio-dramatic and fantasy play are two terms that are usually used interchangeably. Smilansky and Shefataya (1990) provide specific characteristics though, which separate the two different forms of play. Fantasy play includes the engagement of a child into an imitative role play where s/he undertakes a make believe role and imitates an action, the child is actively involved in make believe play with regard to toys including object substitution, the child engages in verbal make believe play with regard to actions and situations, and finally the child persists in role play for approximately ten minutes. Socio-dramatic play takes place when it includes all the above characteristics including interaction and verbal communication with another child.

Parten (1932) was amongst the first researchers to study young children's play without adult intervention. He identified four distinct categories of social play; these included a) solitary independent play where a child plays alone with its own toys and without any interaction with others, b) parallel activity with a child playing along her/his peers but not with them, c) associative play during which children play together and share toys fulfilling their own play wishes, d) cooperative play where children play together, share the same activities and participate in organised activities (Curtis & O'Hagan, 2003).

Taking into account the wide range of defined play categories, there is a need to understand the real use of such categorisations. The categorisation of play into broad categories brings different play characteristics to the fore; however, this may not

consider the different contexts in which play takes place, or account for children's needs, interests and preferences (Wood & Attfield, 2005). If a range of play activities is absorbed under a basic heading (Lindon, 2001) the result may be partial snapshots and 'thin' descriptions, unable to capture the dynamic nature of play (Wood & Attfield, 2005). This is in accordance with Wood and Attfield (1996) who state:

In the urge to explain and categorise play, we may be in danger of overlooking the fact that children define play themselves. They often establish mutual awareness of play and non play situations. They create roles, use symbols, redefine objects and determine the action through negotiation and shared meanings. Often their enactments of play themes and stories or their creation of play scripts reveal far more subtleties than academic definitions can capture. (p.4)

### **2.3 Play in early years settings**

Play has a major developmental importance for children and is an integral part of childhood (Wood & Attfield, 1996), but there are two contrasting views about its status and educational importance within the early years settings. The contextualised nature of play is confusing and misleading (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000) as depending on the context in which it occurs, play takes different forms; it can be indulged, serious, encouraged, tolerated or banned (Wood & Attfield, 1996). Due to the complexity inherent in the nature of play its educational value is not always identified in the early childhood curriculum (Aarons & Gittens, 1999) making it difficult for practitioners to assess its outcomes and undermining its status. Thus, although play is vital during early childhood and its place in the curriculum has been taken for granted, perspectives from practice reveal tensions between the rhetoric and the reality of play (Wood & Attfield, 2005).

The gap between rhetoric and reality in play is seen as the main weakness of play in schools (Bennett, Wood, & Rogers, 1996). Although teachers seem to understand its importance in children's development, Wood and Attfield (1996) argue that play is not integrated into their educational 'duties' with their role remaining pathetic and



rather supervisory concerning play. An early years preschool setting requires the teacher to be actively involved in children's activities but at the same time to be responsible for all children, a fact that may force teachers to pay more attention to other things than the children. On the other hand, teachers often seem to be afraid to intervene in children's play as they think they could spoil it (Pramling Samuelsson & Johansson, 2009) or, as Moyles and Adams (2000) argue, they just do not understand the real importance of play in young children's development.

Promoting learning through play is even more problematic (Bennett et al., 1996) with Tizard, Blatchford, Burke, Farquhar and Plewis (1988) maintaining that learning through play in an early childhood setting was more a myth than a reality. Pramling Samuelsson and Johansson (2004) argue that the simultaneous praise and distrust towards play may come from the discrepancy and devaluing of play over learning when it comes to preschool education. This is despite Lindon's (2001) observation that support for learning through play in early years settings has been well established throughout the years. Play behaviour is shaped by different contexts while it can take place anywhere (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000). One such context is the environment of an early years preschool setting where children and their teachers have the opportunity to interact, play and learn together. However, the need of parents and other professionals to see progress at school and the fact that play may not result in any tangible outcomes makes play susceptible to criticism as teachers have to provide outcomes of learning and attainment (Bennett et al., 1996).

Play and learning are complementary to each other while the most valuable learning comes from play. This must be however realised in practice by teachers who often undermine its role and status in early childhood education and give a secondary role to play.

## **2.4 Pioneers of play**

### **2.4.1 Play**

Different researchers and theorists have explored the educational value and importance of play during childhood (Moyles, 1996). The vast literature on children's play reveals that its role in the children's development is no longer considered as a break from learning (Bruce, 1996), but instead as a valuable medium that helps children learn (Moyles, 1996) and develop their social, cognitive and emotional abilities (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

Play has been explored and understood from different theoretical perspectives (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky were among the researchers that played a major role in the enhancement of our understanding concerning children's development through play (Lindon, 2001). Each of them adopted and suggested a different theoretical perspective to explain the processes through which play emerges and develops in children, its relation to learning and its overall importance in the way children think and act (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

### **2.4.2 Jean Piaget**

Piagetian theory states that learning and development are two separate entities. Development preceded the evolution of learning while the child was engaged in activities that had already emerged and were just refined through the process of learning (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Piaget was more interested in understanding the development of cognitive processes, rather than those of social or emotional development, through which children understand and learn to think (Lindon, 2001). According to Piaget, play was the result of cognitive development (Herron & Sutton-Smith, 1971) and the biological maturation of a child (Berk & Winsler, 1995) suggesting that children play in certain ways which are appropriate to their current level of cognitive development (Drifte, 2002). To explain the evolution of cognitive development, Piaget suggested four stages that explicated the developmental phases that every child goes through including the sensorimotor stage, preoperational stage,

concrete and formal operations (Ellis, 1936). Piaget saw these stages as the same for every child who passes through each of them as soon as s/he has experienced the content of the preceding stage; thus play patterns would be the same for every child since their play behaviour was following a standard pattern of each one of the developmental phases (Ellis, 1936).

Piaget perceived play as a means for a child to combine existing knowledge, experience and skills that would result in learning outcomes (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000). He argued that through play children could make sense of their experiences as they explored the environment around them independently as scientists develop their own understandings (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, & Bell, 2002). Children engage in a self discovery of their social environment while they are actively involved in the construction of their own learning which is accompanied by their simultaneous experimentation with objects and play materials (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Lindon, 2001). Two key characteristics of Piaget's theory were accommodation and assimilation. Accommodation was the procedure through which a child starts understanding the meaning of an action (Piaget, 1976) while assimilation was supposed to help the child adjust an activity according to his/her specific needs at a particular time (Wood & Attfield, 1996). According to Piaget play occurs when assimilation, already existing knowledge, overcomes the accommodation phase which is relevant to the incoming information that a child acquires while playing; in other words a child must acquire certain skills and abilities before s/he will be enabled to play (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000). Piaget tried to explain play through schemas arguing that children exhibit new ideas through play and assimilate them to their already existing knowledge (schemas). If the information is new and the child cannot combine them with already existing knowledge, then s/he has to accommodate an existing schema to 'fit' with the new information (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000).

Piaget identified three stages in the development of a child's play which were appropriate to children's age, type of play and the kind of cognitive abilities children should have developed in order to engage in each type of play activity (Lindon, 2001): a) practice-sensory motor play (6 months – 2 years), b) symbolic play (2 -6 years), and c) games with rules (over 6 years), suggesting that children would participate in more advanced forms of play as their cognitive development would permit them to be

involved in more sophisticated play activities (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000). Additionally, the social environment could not influence the learning of the children and this was extended to the fact that knowledge transmitted by adults – in the form of instruction – could not influence a child’s learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). Piaget saw the relationship between teachers and children as a conflict rather than as complementary to each other (Lindon, 2001). According to Piagetian theory the teacher’s role was not that of an active participant but that of a provider, enabler and facilitator who responds to children’s initiatives, values their experiences (Wood & Attfield, 1996) and provides a variety of different activities enabling the children to learn independently (Moyles, 1996) and construct their own knowledge (Wood & Attfield, 1996).

Fundamental aspects of Piagetian theories have still an important impact in early childhood education. Robson (2006) states that High/Scope curriculum ‘explicitly acknowledges the influence of Piaget on its development’ (p.16) while Sutherland (1992) argues that ‘nursery teachers have to a large extent been the best customers for the Piagetian message’ (p.137). My own response to the interpretation of Piaget’s theory for educational praxis includes a rejection of the view that the social environment lacks impact in children’s learning and development. My role as a teacher in different schools for children with autism has helped to show me the important role of the social environment can have and I have been interested in gathering evidence on the impact of the social environment and the teacher as part of this. I dispute the Piagetian notion of ‘lone scientist’ as my professional experiences have led me to understand that children gain rich experiences, express their feelings and become involved in diverse play forms when they interact with their peers and not only with their toys.

### **2.4.3 Lev Vygotsky**

Vygotsky was primarily interested in studying the development of cognitive processes taking place in a child’s life (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). He supported the notion that children are actively involved in the construction of their own learning while they interact and collaborate with other people (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). The zone of

proximal development (ZPD), one of his most well known concepts, refers to his theory concerning children's way of learning and development. Vygotsky used the term *zone* because he was suggesting that development could not be seen as measurable but instead as a developmental maturation (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). This was in accordance with his position against the notion that standard intelligence tests were able to show children's real cognitive abilities (Berk & Winsler, 1995). By the word *proximal* (close to, next to) he wanted to focus on the children's abilities that were very close to being developed at any given time (Bodrova & Leong, 2007); according to Vygotsky (1978, p.86) the zone of proximal development was defined as 'the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers'.

Vygotsky saw education as preceding development (Berk & Winsler, 1995) and as context dependent (Moll, 1990). Education should become the medium through which children will be provided with experiences involved in their zone of proximal development and will help them acquire abilities that are higher than their current cognitive level (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Vygotsky was interested in the context and social environment in which development could take place (Moll, 1990) and which could hence influence a child's learning, type of instruction and of course development (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). One such social environment that could make use of the zone of proximal development and could influence children's cognitive learning effectively is school, where children are instructed by their teachers and interact with their peers (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

In Vygotskian terms, the aim of instruction should be the elicitation of learning coming from the joint activity between the teacher and the child while the child will be actively involved in the construction of his/her cognitive abilities (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Development will occur in a child's zone of proximal development when a child will have partially acquired a skill – through his/her active exploration of the environment – and will be ready to apply it as soon as s/he is instructed by his/her teacher. Teachers should offer children problems that are at the children's level of potential development and to which children would not be able to provide a solution unless they had been scaffolded by their teachers (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

‘Scaffolding’ was another term that grew out of Vygotsky’s work and further developed by Bruner; it refers to the support that more knowledgeable others such as teachers or peers offer the children to help them acquire higher mental abilities through interacting in the zone of their proximal development (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Scaffolding (linked with the idea of zone of proximal development) is an extremely popular concept in the field of education (Krause, Bochner, & Duchesne, 2003). Wells (1999, p.127) argued that scaffolding is ‘a way of operationalizing Vygotsky’s (1987) concept of working in the zone of proximal development’, while Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976, p.89) described scaffolding as ‘controlling those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner’s capability, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within the range of competence’.

Vygotsky (1962) stressed the importance of the social environment in relation to a child’s development, suggesting that higher mental functions necessarily go through external social stages which ultimately become internal mental functions. Central to this process, alternatively known as ‘social mediation’ (Engestrom, 1996), is intersubjectivity (Roehler & Cantlon, 1997).

*Intersubjectivity* refers to the shared understanding between a teacher/adult and a child, on the presumption that the participants are working towards the same goal and that gradually the responsibility transfers to the child (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Teachers are responsible for collaborating and communicating with the child in order to translate their own understandings according to the children’s level of cognitive ability and provide children with a connection between the tasks they already know and those that they are ready to learn (Berk & Winsler, 1995); thus teachers enable children to develop their own conception of a task and at the same time increase their level of cognitive ability (Roehler & Cantlon, 1997). For Siraj-Blatchford and her colleagues (2002) intersubjectivity is distinct from ‘sustained shared thinking’ which involves *instructive* teaching strategies but still shares common principles with intersubjectivity, including mutual engagement and learning ‘co-construction’ between the child and the teacher.

Vygotsky emphasised the role of play as a social activity suggesting that it can be seen as early as the interaction between a caregiver and an infant begins and ultimately plays a major role in the emergence of early communicative, social and emotional skills that the child will practise later in life with others (Berk & Winsler, 1995). This is in accordance with an important educational tenet in the early years which assumes that play is the predominant feature of early childhood (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000) through which preschool children can enhance their cognitive, emotional and social ability. Although Vygotsky did not develop a play theory, he put a great emphasis on its developmental importance for preschool children (Bodrova & Leong, 2007) but at the same time argued that it was not the dominant form of activity (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000). According to Vygotsky (1978, pp.102-103) play was 'the highest level of preschool development. The child moves forward essentially through play activity'.

Against the basic tenet that play is an activity that provides fun and pleasure to the children, Vygotsky formed his own theory about its nature and challenged the definition of play only as a means of pleasure. Instead he argued that play can be both pleasurable and unpleasurable for a child and suggested that its main characteristics are imaginary situations, subordination to rules, liberation from situational constraints and definition of roles (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000).

Vygotsky stressed the importance of imaginary compared to other types of play; through imaginary play children can develop their abstract thinking while they dissociate the meanings of objects from the real ones (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000), deal with unrealisable desires (Berk & Winsler, 1995), create and suspend rules through imagination and fulfil their needs and incentives leading them to think in a more complex and advanced way during childhood. He believed that all forms of play include imaginary elements which are bounded with rules; thus he associated play and imagination with rules in terms of a gradual evolution leading from an imaginary situation to the use and dominance of rules (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000).

A paradox coming from Vygotsky's tenet about play was that although rules were important and were liberating children during imaginary play, at the same time they could pose other constraints on their play (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000). He argued that

children must know how to act and control their spontaneity to keep their assigned roles during imaginary play in respect of maintaining the shared fantasy among them. However, he stressed the fact that this is not always very easy for them as they constantly renegotiate rules while playing and suggested that subordination to rules and moderation of spontaneity can lead to success in play (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000). According to commentators, although Vygotsky did not eulogise play, he stressed its importance in children's development and learning (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000), put a great emphasis on its social side (Bruce, 2004) and perceived children as active participants who interact with their teachers and peers, construct their own independent reality (Lindon, 2001) and satisfy their personal needs.

Vygotsky stressed the importance of the play context and suggested that play alone creates a zone of proximal development through which a child is able to realise thoughts that will become his/her future abilities (Bodrova & Leong, 2007) by making the child behave beyond his/her average age. Vygotsky acknowledged the importance of the presence of an adult who would act as a mediator to a child's learning. The adult's role was to intervene whenever a child was not playing in its potential and at the same time he pointed at the possible constraints that could come from within the environment of a preschool setting due to overly adult-directed activities focusing on its final influence on a child's play (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000).

Vygotsky was even more concerned about the quality of instruction teachers provided to children with special needs and the extent this had an impact on the children's learning opportunities (Berk & Winsler, 1995); in fact it could work towards the development of secondary problems (Bruce, 1996). He supported the notion that children with special needs had exactly the same educational needs as their healthy peers (Bodrova & Leong, 2007) and that the most important issue in their education should be the improvement of their social interactions with their peers and teachers. For this reason, one implication of this thinking is that schools and the experiences fostered within them should be carefully designed so that they will scaffold those children's learning and maximise their potential learning abilities (Berk & Winsler, 1995).



More specifically, Vygotsky referred to the developmental needs of children with learning and behavioural problems. He suggested that teachers should use the same discourse techniques and levels of interaction with such children that will mainly focus on the teaching of tasks that are within the children's zone of proximal development. This occasionally seems to be difficult due to children's impulsivity problems. That is the reason that the context and the environment where these children must be involved should offer them a balanced contribution between them and their teachers (Berk and Winsler, 1995).

Vygotsky's theory has been influential in my thinking about this study. The importance of context as this is framed in the wider social environment is a notion that I find resonance with as a teacher, since I my professional practice has led me to believe that the context, where a child plays and interacts, has a major role in the provision of meaningful play activities, and thus in the learning through play. My reflections on theory and practice intensified my interest in the active role of the teacher and the social environment in the play of all children. Vygotsky's assertion that play can take many forms for all children, and crucially his tenet that all children including children with special needs must have the same rights in education have been important for my development as a researcher.

#### **2.4.4 Jerome Bruner**

Bruner's ideas became known during the 1960s. He was greatly influenced by the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky (Slee, 2002). Bruner introduced the 'spiral' effect according to which 'learning is both recursive, that is, repeated in different contexts, and incremental, embodying developing expertise' (Robson, 2006, p.32). This iterative process of learning can be supported by adults who must intervene at an appropriate level and help the child achieve mastery (Lindon, 2001). Adults should observe children in order to be able to identify their play needs and according to those be actively involved in their play activities to scaffold them and make them feel successful (Moyles, 1994).

Bruner (1983) explored play in order to start understanding its relationship to the primary use of language in children and supported the notion that children play during childhood with the same objects but they tend to play and manipulate them differently as they are getting older (Lindon, 2001). For Bruner 'play provides an excellent opportunity to try combinations of behaviour that would, under functional pressure, never be tried' (Bruner cited in MacNaughton, 2003, p.43). Peekaboo was the form of play that according to Bruner (1983) could be ranked as 'one of the most universal forms of play between adults and infants' (p.277). It is a form of play governed by four rules, initial contact, disappearance, reappearance and re-established contact that requires the child to integrate a wide range of different skills such as mastery of objects and the ability to understand that an object is out of sight. According to Bruner (1983), the peekaboo game could enable a child to combine the pleasure that a game can offer with helping him/her develop spatio-temporal abilities.

Bruner (2006) has given much attention to the play of children *in pairs* while he argues that the longest and the most complicated play sequences take place when a pair of children (or a child with an adult) play together and construct their own microcosm. This is in accordance with Bruner and Haste (1987) who saw children as social beings and stated that 'we are now able to focus on the child as a social being whose competencies are interwoven with the competencies of others' (p.11). Bruner recognised the asymmetrical state between a teacher and a child and emphasised the role of an adult in children's play (David, 1990). The role of the teacher according to Bruner had to be discrete and non obtrusive while his/her presence must have 'a buffering effect' (Bruner, 2006, p.63).

Concerning Brunerian theory, there are aspects I disagree with regard to the teacher's role, which, according to Bruner had to be discreet and non obtrusive. Based on my personal working and observations with children with autism, I believe that the role of a teacher can helpfully be that of an active player who shares the same play interests with the children and tries to extend their learning. At the same time, I support the notion that teachers should observe children and then be actively involved in children's play. The question becomes one of what it means to be obtrusive and to what extent this enables teachers to be involved or not in the play of children. Personally, as a teacher my stance has been that involvement in children's play does

not have to be obtrusive as long as a teacher does not try to lead children's play and lets them set their own play agenda, giving the teacher the role of an active player and/or supporter who accepts children's play wishes and interests and further facilitates them in developing and learning through play.

Each of the theories discussed above provide particular frameworks adopted in the field of education and psychology. Over the last few decades there has been a theoretical shift away from experimental studies originating in developmental psychology and adhering to Piagetian and constructivist theories towards socio-cultural frameworks which try to research and understand play by focusing on different aspects and play behaviours (Anning, Cullen & Flear, 2004). The research reported here fits better within a Vygotskian theoretical framework which identifies the importance of play in naturalistic settings; the socio-constructivist lens which emphasises the great importance of culture and social context in children's development, prepared me as a researcher to want to understand better the culture and ethos of children's play settings which were in turn embedded in philosophical and political contexts. As a result, I was led to provide a thorough description of the play of two children with autism through an empirical understanding of what counts as play and how this can be supported by teachers in early childhood inclusive settings.

Summing up, the argument I develop in this study is in keeping with Vygotsky's theory for two main reasons. The first relates to the fact that Vygotsky was supporting the notion that learning and development is a social and collaborative activity. The second reflects Vygotsky's emphasis on the importance of context in children's learning and development. My aim in this study was to investigate play in its social and cultural context.

## **2.5 Play and autism**

Play is strongly interrelated with development (Libby, Powell, Messer, & Jordan, 1997), is an integral part of childhood and a child's most comprehensive form of expression (Desha et al., 2003). Children with autism are rarely perceived as playing children (Beyer & Gammeltoft, 2000) while they show a limited repertoire of behaviours and interests (Mash, Barkley, & Wells, 2006) with great difficulties in

play (Wolfberg, 1999) which tends to be repetitive (Stanley & Konstantareas, 2006), mechanical (Van Berckelaer-Onnes, 2003), passive (Jordan, 2003) and isolated (Anderson, Moore, Godfrey, & Fletcher-Flinn, 2004). I present a number of studies which illustrate from the literature the range of problems children with autism exhibit during play without being an exhaustive overview of all studies.

### **2.5.1 Sensorimotor play**

The first form to emerge, during the first year of life is sensorimotor play which consists of object manipulation (e.g. mouthing, holding, dropping objects) (Bremner & Fogel, 2006). There is a controversy over the nature and quality of sensorimotor play in children with autism. Some studies have failed to find domination of sensorimotor play in the play behaviour of children with autism compared to control groups (Lewis & Boucher, 1988; Stone, Lemanek, Fishel, Fernandez, & Altemeier, 1990) while some others have shown that children with autism engage in greater levels of sensorimotor play compared to other types of play (DeMyer, Mann, Tilton, & Loew, 1967; Dominguez et al., 2006; Tilton & Ottinger, 1964). This is in accordance to Libby and colleagues (1998), who also found a preponderance of sensorimotor play in the play behaviour of children with autism suggesting that this was happening either because of the fact that more advanced forms of play were not able to supersede less complex play behaviours, or because sensorimotor play could be seen more often while more advanced forms of play did not exist.

### **2.5.2 Relational play**

Relational play is when a child relates and combines two objects/toys (Trevarthen, Aitken, Papoudi, & Robarts, 1998). It is not clear yet whether children with autism have difficulties in relational play. The majority of studies show that children with autism have no problems in relational play (Baron-Cohen, 1987; Dominguez et al., 2006; Libby et al., 1998; Stone et al., 1990). These findings are in contrast with the study of Van Berckelaer-Onnes (2003) who argued that children with autism show deficits in relational play which is restricted to stereotyped and repetitive activities,

and in contrast with Dodd (2005) who states that children with autism have limited experience in relational play.

### **2.5.3 Functional play**

There is a debate concerning the ability of children with autism to engage in functional play (Williams, 2001) – intentional object manipulation (Hughes, 1999) including miniature replicas (Rutherford & Rogers, 2003) – with its earliest forms emerging around six to twelve months (Hughes, 1999). The majority of studies claim that they have found no differences in the functional play of children with autism compared with typically developing children (Charman, Swettenham, Baron-Cohen, Cox, Baird, & Drew, 1998; Desha et al., 2003; Dominguez et al., 2006; Libby et al., 1998; Van Berckelaer-Onnes, 2003), although the amount of play they demonstrated was less than that of typically developing children (Libby et al., 1998; Van Berckelaer-Onnes, 2003). These findings are in contrast with those presented in the studies of Desha et al., 2003 Jarrold, Boucher, & Smith, 1996 Williams, Reddy, & Costall, 2001 who reported that the functional play of children with autism was qualitatively different and lacks variation, diversity and integration. More specifically, it is shown that children with autism play in a repetitive way (Desha et al., 2003), spend less time engaging in functional play (Jarrold, Boucher, & Smith, 1996) and produce fewer play and novel functional acts compared both with typically developing children and children with Down syndrome (Williams et al., 2001). The reason for this discrepancy of results among different studies seems to be the different definitions accomplished in functional play including possible subcategories employed from various studies (Williams et al., 2001).

### **2.5.4 Pretend play**

Pretend play refers to any kind of imaginative play (Lewis & Boucher, 1988), emerges by the age of twelve to thirteen months (Honey, Leekam, Turner, & McConachie, 2006) and reflects the ability of children to know that one thing can stand for another (Hughes, 1999). Pretend play has been identified as the most problematic or impaired developmental area in children with autism while a large

number of studies investigating the nature of pretend play in children with autism have been published the last few decades (Rutherford et al., 2006). Today, there is still a debate surrounding the ability of children with autism to understand and engage in this type of play activity (Honey et al., 2006).

Many studies have investigated the ability of autistic children to engage in pretend play (Rutherford et al., 2006) and come to an agreement that children with autism have profound deficits in the production of spontaneous pretend play during free play (Blanc et al., 2005; Brown & Whiten, 2000; Jordan, 2003; Rutherford & Rogers, 2003) although they seem to have the ability to understand and make sense of pretence (Jarrold et al., 1996). More specifically, children with autism show less frequency (Jarrold, 1996), novelty and complexity in their pretend play actions, compared both with children with other kinds of delays and typically developing children (Rutherford et al., 2006).

This is not the case, however, under elicited conditions where the environment – with external distractions minimised (McDonough, Stahmer, Schreibman, & Thompson, 1997) – is established to meet the needs of children with autism (Beyer & Gammeltoft, 2000) who seem to have some capacity to pretend (Jarrold, 1996). The study of Sheratt (2002), which aimed to develop pretend play in five children with autism, suggested that the children were not only able to exhibit pretend play schemata under elicited conditions but also in unstructured or new situations. These findings are in line with other studies which state that under prompted situations children with autism show less apparent deficits in pretend play (Libby et al., 1998; Rutherford & Rogers, 2003), can understand pretend play acts (Jarrold, 1996), are slightly more playful (Skaines et al., 2006) and show greater or intact ability to engage in it (Lewis & Boucher, 1988; Jarrold et al., 1996; Brown and Whiten, 2000; Sherratt, 2002; Jordan, 2003).

### **2.5.5 Social play**

Social play reflects the ability of a person to share and mutually enjoy activities with another person. Children with autism spectrum disorders present distinct problems in

developing social play with both adults and other children (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) and this is established through a wide range of research studies focusing on the delayed and deviant development of social play in children with autism (Jordan, 2003). This is in accordance with a review by Charman and Baird (2002) which characterised ‘the lack of varied and imaginative or imitative play’ and ‘a failure to develop peer relationships’ as a key characteristic of children with autism (p.289). Children with autism show lack of emergence in joint attention (following another’s gaze to share the experience of observing an object or event), spontaneous imitation, and emotional responsiveness, features that are very important and characterise early social play interactions of typically developing children (Charman & Stone, 2006) but not children with autism.

Children with autism have an inability to develop and practice social skills with their peers. This inability leads them to social isolation and consequently to a lack of appropriate play skills development (Jordan, 2003); this is in accordance with Black, Freeman and Montgomery (1975) who stated that ‘unless a child develops appropriate play skills through his interaction with his environment and the objects in it, his social development is severely impaired and inappropriate patterns of behaviour are reinforced’ (p.363).

Children with autism lack interest to interact with their peers (Skaines et al., 2006), accept fewer invitations from their peers to play (Sigman & Ruskin, 1999) and favour solitary activities (Gena, Couloura, & Kymissis, 2005). All these deficits have an impact on the children’s overall ability to engage in social interactions (Kroeger, Schultz, & Newsom, 2007) and consequently to engage in play activities with other children (Stanley & Konstantareas, 2006).

Toy play difficulties are associated with the deficit in symbolic play of children with autism (Burack, Hodapp, & Zingler Burack, 1998). Dominguez and colleagues (2006) argued that there were clear toy preferences between children with autism and their typically developing peers. Toys like the Thomas the tank engine, gross motor and infant toys were used mostly by the children with autism (Desha et al., 2003) compared to dressing up accessories, action figures and plastic animals (Dominguez et al., 2006). The preference for reactive play objects from children with autism seems

to be due to the sensory stimulation they provide thus capturing children's attention (Holmes & Willoughby, 2005).

The plethora of studies presented above investigated the in/abilities of children with autism examined through 'objective' play tests and quantitative measures mostly in clinical settings. It has to be noted here though, that all those studies focus on a 'black and white' notion of what children can or can't do without taking into consideration the flux and unpredictable nature of play as this is contextualised according to the environment in which it takes place. Furthermore, all those studies adopt an approach prioritising categorisation of play behaviours rather than the dynamic and holistic nature of play as this develops among children. In opposition to those studies which decontextualise play, I argue that the real nature of play cannot be reduced to strictly defined categories and I suggest that what is needed is a deep understanding of play through a holistic point of view. This is in keeping with Vygotsky's theory emphasising the wider context and the role it plays in a child's learning and development. For that reason, this study takes an ethnographic stance supporting strongly the notion that the real nature of play cannot be fully understood unless more naturalistic ways of understanding including the culture and context of play are considered. To provide a summary overview of the relevant studies concerning children with autism and play (mostly in clinical settings), the Table 2.1 below gives a direct and detailed picture of important studies in the literature.



**Table 2.1 Studies of children with autism: a positivist view of play**

	Diagnosis	Number of children	Age of children	Type of groups	Methodology	Duration	Context	Play checklists
Anderson et al., 2004	Children with autism	10 children	3-7 years	N/A	No comparison group	5 half days in two points with 120 days apart	Mainstream educational setting	Parten Scale
Baron-Cohen, 1987	Children with autism, Down syndrome and typical children	30 children	2-12 years	10 children from each group	Correlations between groups	15 minutes	Clinical setting	Play categories borrowed from Ungerer and Sigman, 1981
Black et al., 1975	Children with autism	5 children	51-79 months	5 boys	No comparison group	3 min observation	Clinical setting	
Blanc et al., 2005	Children with autism, globally cognitively impaired and typically developed	50 children	28-140 months	N/A	Comparisons between groups	Several videotaped 10-20min sessions	Clinical setting	N/A
Brown & Whiten, 2000	Children with autism and Asperger	14 children	3-6 years	N/A	Comparisons between groups	90 minutes	Playgroup, school or training centre	N/A
Charman et al., 1998	Children with autism, Asperger's or Pervasive	29 children	42 months	18 boys and 3 girls	Comparisons within groups	1 single session of approx.1:30min	Not clear probably	N/A

	developmental delay and developmental delays							
Desha et al., 2003	Children with autism	25 children	41-86 months	17 boys and 7 girls	Correlations between the groups	1 single session	Clinical setting	Play categories borrowed from Libby et.al., 1998
Dominguez et al., 2006	Children with autism	59 children	3-7 years	17 boys and 7 girls	Control and experimental group between typical and children with autism	N/A	Clinical setting	Play categories borrowed from Libby et.al., 1998
Gena et al., 2005	Children with autism	3 children	3-5 years	2 boys and 1 girl	Multiple baseline design	2-4 times/week for 15-20 min	Home setting	N/A
Holmes & Willoughby, 2005	Children with autism	17 children	4-8 years	13 boys and 4 girls	MANOVA	10min/day for 1 week	Mainstream classrooms	Preschool Play Behaviour Scale
Honey et al., 2006	Children with autism and typically developed children	196 children	2-8 years	N/A	Correlations between the groups	N/A	N/A	Activities and Play Questionnaire-Revised
Jarrold, 1996	Children with	28 children	73-147 months	Autism: 3	Comparisons	5 min	Clinical setting	N/A

	autism and moderate learning difficulties			girls and 11 boys MLD: 5 girls and 9 boys	between groups			
Kroeger et al., 2006	Children with autism	25 children	4-6 years	N/A	Correlations among groups	3days/week for 5 weeks	Clinical setting	N/A
Lewis & Boucher, 1988	Children with autism, moderate learning difficulties and typical children	30 children	3-16 years	Autism and MLD: 11 boys and 4 girls Typical children: 12boys and 3 girls	Correlations between groups	2 sessions for 30 min	School setting	N/A
Libby et al., 1998	Children with autism, Down syndrome and typical children	27 children: 9 from each group	N/A	N/A	Comparisons within the groups	6 months	Either in a school or home setting	Coded play scheme
McDonough et al., 1997	Children with autism and typically developing	18 children	3-7 years	N/A	Control and experimental groups	45 minutes	Clinical setting	N/A

	children							
Rutherford et al., 2006	Children with autism, with other developmental disorders and typically developing children	73 children	2.8-4.9 years	N/A	Correlations between the groups	Repeated measures	Not clear, probably clinical setting	Fewell Play Scale
Rutherford & Rogers, 2003	Children with autism, other developmental disorders and typically developing children	78 children	24-47 months	N/A	Comparisons within the groups	N/A	Not clear, probably clinical setting	Fewell Play Scale
Sheratt, 2002	Children with autism	5 children	5-6years	5boys	Comparisons between the groups	3sessions/week, 40 minutes for 4 months	School setting	Test of Pretend Play and Symbolic Play Test
Sigman & Ruskin, 1999	Children with autism, Down Syndrome, developmental delays and typical	70 children with autism. 93 with Down syndrome, 59 with	2-6 years	N/A	Comparisons between the groups	Not clear	Not clear	N/A

	children	developmental delays and 108 typical children						
Skaines et al., 2006	Children with autistic disorders and typically developing children	58 children	3-7 years	34 boys and 24 girls	Comparisons between groups	30 minutes	Clinical setting	Test of Playfulness
Stanley & Konstantareas, 2006	Children with ASD	101 children	24-416 months	Mixed	File inspection	One day	Clinical setting	Lowe and Costello Symbolic Play Test
Stone et al., 1990	Children with autism, with mental retardation, hearing and language impairments and typical children	91 children	3-6 years	57 boys and 34 girls	Comparisons between groups	10sec partial interval recording procedure	Clinical setting	Four categories of play from Sigman and Ungerer
Van Berckelaer Onnes, 2003	Children with autism	24 children	N/A	N/A	Pre and post tests; no comparison group	11 weeks	Research setting	Toy play programme intervention
Williams, Reddy	Children with	45 children:	11m-5.5 years	N/A	Comparisons	2/3 times: 2 weeks	Home setting	Play categories

& Costal, 2001	autism, Down syndrome and typically developing children	15 from each group			within the groups	apart		determined from video observations
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## **2.6 Play Interventions**

A number of early intervention approaches have been developed over the years (Farrell, Trigonaki, & Webster, 2005) promising a significant impact in the lives of individuals with special needs and children with autism (Panerai et al., 2009). The approaches I present below consist of three distinct categories: a) Interactive Approaches, b) Visually Oriented Approaches and c) Child-centred Approaches. Those approaches are not exhaustive but chosen among others as they seemed to entail, to a larger or lesser degree, playful and supportive methods adults could use to enhance the play and other skills of children with autism. They are approaches that could be interpreted as offering some kind of social mediation or scaffolding for children's play. Though they are not always holistic they have some connection with the Vygotskian theory I have argued to be convincing. The third category of child-centred approaches are particularly worthy of attention because of their close connection to Vygotskian theoretical principles with play here as the main medium of learning and development for children with autism, intervention based on the children's play interests, adults taking an active role as players and not instructors during play, and major importance given to the context where play is fostered rather than to distinct skills that must be taught to the children by the adults. Furthermore, I argue that those kind of child-centred, play-based interventions must be welcomed as they take into account the real nature of play, which is turn is of major importance in the learning and development of children with autism.

### **2.6.1 Interactive Approaches**

#### **2.6.1.1 Intensive Interaction**

Intensive interaction was developed in the 1980s by Nind & Hewett (1988) to teach individuals with severe learning difficulties and/or autism how to learn and relate to others. It is based on the infant-caregiver interactional model and uses the playfulness of the adult to enhance the communication between the caregiver and the learner (Nind, 1999). Intensive interaction aims to establish a mutual relationship between the caregiver and the individual through a natural, holistic process led by instinct and

reflection. In intensive interaction the emphasis is on the rich, playful quality of the interactions between a practitioner and a learner (Nind, 1999, 2000) which will ultimately build a mutual relationship and encourage learning (Jordan, Jones, & Murray, 1998).

Intensive interaction does not require practitioners to use specific skills (Nind, 2000) or behavioural tasks (Evans et al., 2001) to communicate with the individuals; instead it is based on interactive ‘games’ that create a mutual pleasure between the caregiver and the learner, letting the learner take the lead of the interaction (Evans et al., 2001) while the practitioner respond sensitively and contingently (Nind & Powell, 2000). The practitioner’s interactive style, though, will be always based on a set of specific principles; these include a) interactions and various playful activities that will be mutually enjoyable, b) the continuous modification of body language (and e.g. eye gaze) based on feedback that the practitioner receives from the learner, c) tempo adjustments according to the learner’s rhythms with careful watching, waiting and timing, d) activities that the learner leads followed by the teacher’s responsiveness to his/her needs, and e) teacher’s attributions of social and communicative significance to the learner’s activities (Nind, 2001).

In 1998, Jordan, Jones and Murray reviewed the studies relevant to the efficacy of interactive interventions for individuals with autism suggesting that there was lack of studies, except from one case study (Nind & Hewett, 1994), establishing the efficacy of intensive interaction’s approach and noting the parallels between some of its principles with other relevant approaches. Since then, there have been a number of recent studies showing the importance of intensive interaction in educational settings (Kellett, 2000, 2003, 2004, 2005) and non-educational settings (Cameron & Bell, 2001; Firth, Elford, Crabbe, & Leeming, 2007; Leaning & Watson, 2006) with reported benefits for individuals with learning disabilities and/or autism in social skills (Kellett, 2000, 2003, 2004), joint attention and eye contact (Kellett, 2000, 2003, 2004; Leaning & Watson, 2006), physical contact (Firth et al., 2007; Kellett, 2000, 2003, 2004) and use of vocalisation (Elgie & Maguire, 2001; Kellett, 2000). Finally, it is worth noting that although intensive interaction used a playful approach to enhance the social and communicative skills of individuals with autism, its original aim was



not intended to measure play outcomes but rather was focusing on the social play of individuals with severe learning difficulties at the very earliest stages of development.

### **2.6.1.2 Option Approach**

The option approach, also known as Son-rise programme in the UK, was developed in USA in 1970s for children and individuals with special educational needs and/or autism (Williams & Wishart, 2003). It is a home-based approach which puts great emphasis on a playful one-to-one interaction between a parent and a child in order to change the child's undesirable behaviours (Breakey, 2006). The Option approach is implemented by parents in a play room based in their home, specifically modified to take away possible distractions of toys and objects (Williams & Wishart, 2003). It is a child-led approach which requires the parent to join in and imitate the behaviour of the child with autism (Trevvarthen et al., 1998). The adult's role is to use energy and enthusiasm and wait until the child becomes responsive (Jordan et al., 1998); it will then be time for the adult to try to extend the child's activities ultimately to enhance communication and social interaction skills (Trevvarthen et al., 1998).

The option approach is an interactive approach that uses playful exchanges between a mother and a child to reduce particular behaviours, and enhance skills acquisition and social development through the involvement of others in the play activities of a child with autism. However, it is not an approach that uses play as the primary medium to enhance learning and development of a child with autism.

## **2.6.2 Visually Oriented Approaches**

### **2.6.2.1 TEACCH Approach**

The TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children) program was the first program originally developed for children with autism (Simpson et al., 2004) by Schopler in the 1970s. The programme is based on structured teaching (Evans et al., 2001) and 'hosts' an appropriate modified environment to accommodate the needs of children with autism and 'enable

them to function semi-independently as long as there is a structure' (Jordan et al., 1998, p.80). According to Schopler and colleagues (1995) the four major principles of the approach are physical structure (layout of the classroom), schedules (visual information relevant to the place, time and type of activity following), work systems (information relevant to the kind of activity a student must complete in a work or play area), and task organisation (information on what the learning task is about).

Mesibov, Shea and Schopler (2004) suggest that TEACCH is an approach that respects the culture of autism, arguing that there is no need to try to change the behaviour of children with autism so that it can accommodate to normal standards. Therefore it identifies the children's interests and preferred activities (Jennett, Harris, & Mesibov, 2003) and determines the skills that have to be taught in an individual basis (Hersen & Thomas, 2005) with the ultimate aim of improving children's communicative skills so they are able to work and play independently (Jordan et al., 1998). On the other hand, it must be noted that TEACCH approach is used to teach a child with autism specific skills through a particular routine following specific act sequences. The aim is to provide a routine similar to the autistic way of thinking from the 'cradle to grave' (Jordan & Powell, 1995). The danger however lies in the fact that it is unclear whether the child with autism will be able to transfer the same routine and skills outside the particular structured environment; this is an inherent problem of TEACCH (Jordan & Powell, 1995).

TEACCH is one of the most used interventions in the world; several studies have shown its appropriateness for individuals with autism in various areas of their development (Panerai et al., 2009). Increase in the children's independent performance (Panerai, Ferrante, Caputo, & Impellizzeri, 1998), reduction of self injurious behaviour (Norgate, 1998) and other behavioural symptoms (Probst & Leppert, 2008), pivotal skills (imitation, perception, fine motor, eye-hand coordination and gross motor skills) (Tsang, Shek, Lam, Tang, & Cheung, 2007), play skills (Francke & Geist, 2003) and personal independence, social abilities and functional communication (Siaperas & Beadle-Brown, 2006) are among the areas in which TEACCH has been effective with individuals with autism. However, it must be noted that TEACCH is not a genuinely playful approach; it is rather an adult-led

activity which uses specific routines to enhance a variety of skills including play skills in children and individuals with autism in a pleasurable environment.

### **2.6.2.2 Social Stories**

Social stories were originally developed by Gray in the 1990s to help children with special needs understand social situations. Social stories belong to the so called visually oriented approaches that promote learning through observation and seem to be effective for children with autism (Dettmer, Simpson, Smith, & Ganz, 2000). The main characteristic of social stories is the provision of rules (Beyer & Gammeltoft, 2000) in combination with a focus on sequential events (Tager-Flusberg, 1999) within a friendly and supportive environment such as school or home (Parsons & Mitchell, 2002). A social story is a short personalised story that aims to improve social, play and language skills (Valle, McEachern, & Chambers, 2001), places a child as the main story's character, uses toys to help children learn new skills (Beyer & Gammeltoft, 2000) and does not involve interpersonal interactions which seem to be so frustrating for autistic children (Crozier & Tincani, 2005). Every social story has to contain four basic types of sentences: a) descriptive which describes a fact, b) perspective which gives information about other's feelings, c) affirmative which reassure the child for a given situation, and d) directive that say to children what to do. Recently, two more types of sentences were added: the control sentence which explains a situation and the cooperative that informs the child about the person that will assist it in a given situation.

Several studies have demonstrated the appropriateness of social stories for children with autism in the areas of social skills (Delano & Snell, 2006; Dodd, Stephen, Hupp, Jewell, & Krohn, 2007), prosocial behaviour (Crozier & Tincani, 2007), choice and play skills (Barry & Burlew, 2004), decrease in tantrums and interrupting verbalisations (Lorimer, Simpson, Smith, & Ganz, 2002). Social stories although they entail playful characteristics that enhance the learning of children with autism, their main focus is other than the use of play in its genuine sense.

## **2.6.3 Child-centred Approaches**

### **2.6.3.1 Integrated Play Group Model**

The integrated play group model was designed to support the play of children with autism in mutually playful experiences with their typical peers. It can be used either in educational or therapeutic settings for children aged from 3 to 11 years and its whole duration lasts from 6 to 12 months on a weekly basis. It adopts a socio-cultural framework based on the Vygotskian (1966; 1978) theory which places play at the centre of a child's development. In the integrated play group model, the children are encouraged to play in small groups which are guided by adults trained to use a specific system of support through guided participation to maximise the playful experiences of children with autism by intriguing them an intrinsic desire to play and socialise with their peers (Yang, Wolfberg, Wu, & Hwu, 2003).

The size of each play group is usually three to five children with three expert and two novice players; expert players are typically developing children while novice players are children with autism. The adults who support the play of all the children base their play guidance upon the observations of the children's play interests. Initially the adult guides the play activity; this guidance though fades when the children are ready to play and interact independently within the groups (Simpson et al., 2004). Special play arrangements are part of the approach which provides a wide variety of different toys able to elicit playful interactive and imaginative episodes. Schedules, routines, rituals and additional visual supports are among the main approaches' structures which can accommodate the varied interests of children with autism (Lantz, 2001). The integrated play group model seems to be a promising approach which entails the notion of play and tries to foster it in the everyday lives of children with autism.

### **2.6.3.2 Developmental Individual-Difference, Relationship-Based Model/Floor time model**

Developmental Individual-Difference (DIR) model is a developmental framework which is commonly referred to as 'floor time' model. The DIR model is an American

intervention to help clinicians, parents and teachers to develop individualised programmes to meet the unique needs of children with autism and other developmental needs. The main aim is to help children with autism improve their social, emotional and cognitive abilities. The D (Developmental) part of the model sets the necessary developmental foundations children with autism need to engage with others, play creatively and communicate with their peers. The I (Individual) part of the model describes the unique ways each child uses his/her sensations as touch and sound. The R (Relationship-based) part of the model refers to the type of relationships built between children and parents, educators and others, which are tailored to children's needs and uniqueness (ICDL, undated).

Floor time is a specific technique which is integrated into the DIR play-based interactive intervention for children with autism (ICDL, undated). DIR/Floor time model is based on the philosophy that affective relationships created during child-centred play between a child with autism and caring individuals can help children with autism acquire missing cognitive and emotional development (Lantz, 2001). DIR/Floor time model is child-directed and adult supported; it focuses on the interrelationship created between a child and an adult who tries to follow a child's emotions and play interests and extend the already cognitive, emotional and social abilities of a child with autism (Greenspan & Wieder, 2006). The floor time model includes five different stages: a) an adult approaches a child after an evaluation of the child's emotional state, b) the adult joins in the child's play following the child's lead, c) adult and child engage in mutual child-directed play activities, d) the adult extends and expands on the child's play activity, and e) as long as the child builds on the adult's comments a new circle of playful interaction begins (Lantz, 2001).

There is a plethora of interventions claiming to be appropriate for children with autism; however, as stated above there are only two play-based interactive approaches which are genuinely child-led, respect the play needs of children with autism and truly support and promote learning through play. The lack of playful approaches that can meet the real play needs of children with autism makes more urgent the need for more holistic and inclusive interventions that can bring real changes in the play life of children with autism.

## 2.7 Methods of Researching Play

Play has been linked to many areas of development including intellectual, social and emotional growth (Hughes, 1999). Play provides the most appropriate context where children can begin to direct their own activities, experiment and enjoy themselves while setting their own play agendas. Environments such as schools or home can be the best settings where the children feel free and express themselves better (Holmes & Willoughby, 2005). Observations taking place in naturalistic environments seem to be appropriate to reveal a child's play potential (Restall & Magill-Evans, 1994), although the bulk of research has been conducted in clinical (Brown & Whiten, 2000) rather than naturalistic settings (Holmes & Willoughby, 2005) with the majority using positivistic approaches to understand and investigate the play behaviour of children with autism.

Children with autism have been participants in many studies that have been conducted in clinical settings which were targeting play in a variety of ways. They examined self regulation through play acts (Bieberich & Morgan, 2004), regulations of actions involved in symbolic play (Blanc et al., 2005), spontaneous play behaviour and play object preferences (Desha et al., 2003; Dominguez et al., 2006), toys' sensory effects on children's imitative skills (Ingersoll, Schreibman, & Tran, 2003), playfulness (Skaines et al., 2006), symbolic play (Stanley & Konstantareas, 2006), exploration and understanding of toys (Van Berckelaer-Onnes, 2003) and play and imitations skills of children with autism (Rutherford et al., 2006). However, there are quite a few studies that tried to investigate the play behaviour of children with autism in the environments of their preschool settings (Morrison, Sainato, Benchaaban, & Endo, 2002; Sherratt, 2002; Anderson, Moore, Godfrey, & Fletcher-Flinn, 2004; Kalyva & Avramidis, 2005; Macintosh & Dissanayake, 2006; McDonald, Clark, Garrigan, & Vangala, 2005) and two were conducted in residential settings (Brown & Whiten, 2000; Jahr, Eldevik, & Eikeseth, 2000).

Studies investigating the play behaviour of children with autism usually employ quasi-experimental (Brown & Whiten, 2000; Kok, Kong, & Bernard-Opitz, 2002) and non experimental methodologies (Anderson et al., 2004; Thomas & Smith, 2004) such

as multiple baseline designs across subjects, multivariate analysis and descriptive statistics to analyse and explain play behaviours of children with autism compared to other groups with developmental disabilities and typically developing peers. The use of standardised play tests (e.g. Test of Playfulness; Test of Pretend Play; Lowe & Costello Symbolic Play Test) has a prominent place within those studies that aim to explain the possible deficits that children with autism exhibit in different play areas. However, it has to be noted here that I have identified only one ethnographic study conducted by Wolfberg and Schuler (1993) who investigated the impact of a peer play intervention on the play of children with autism. The focus has been on deficit areas of play in children with autism, such as joint attention and comprehending pretence.

As is evident, and despite the growing number of studies examining play, there remains very little research evidence on the context of play developing in natural settings (New, 1994). Taking that into consideration, in this study I sought to explore and understand the play of two children with autism as this transpired and developed in the context of their inclusive preschool settings. An ethnographical framework was selected to provide valuable insights towards a deep understanding of the play activities of children with autism as they were supported by their teachers, and to enable me as a researcher to capture their authentic play interactions formed in their natural contexts.

## **2.8 Teaching Strategies**

Over recent decades research in the field of education has progressed and provided teachers with evidence informing new teaching strategies and approaches for children with special needs (Fukunaga, Simonelli & Sperry, undated). As more and more children with autism are being included in inclusive settings, the process of promoting their participation and learning remains complex and is further supplemented by a debate of whether there is a need for teachers to change their current practices or not to meet the needs of those children (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008).

One view is that teachers are not able to support the learning and inclusion of children with autism unless they are specifically trained to meet those children's learning

needs (Leach & Duffy, 2009). A plethora of studies relevant to autism and inclusion claim that although children with autism can benefit from their participation in inclusive settings, their inclusion will be more efficient and successful when strategies specific to autism are used by the teachers and tailored to meet the learning needs of each child with autism (Harrower & Dunlap, 2001). Therefore Harris and Handelman (1994), Siegel, (1996) and National Research Council (2001) are among those arguing that providing teachers with 'effective interventions' specifically designed to meet the needs of children with autism still has an important place in educational settings.

Currently, there are numerous teaching strategies and/or effective interventions referred to in the literature as autism related (Schwartz et al., 2004) or claiming to promote the successful inclusion of children with autism (Hart & Whalon, 2008). Among them are behavioural teaching approaches (Schreibman, 2000; Lovaas, 1981), self-management teaching strategies (Strain, Kohler, Storey & Danko, 1994), antecedent procedures (priming, prompt delivery and picture schedules) (Zanolli, Dagest & Adams, 1996; Taylor & Levin, 1998; Hall, McClannahan & Krantz, 1995), peer mediated interventions (Kalyva & Avramidis, 2005; Locke & Fuchs, 1995) and pivotal response training (Thorp, Stahmer & Schreibman, 1995).

However, despite research focused on such teaching interventions designed specifically to enhance the social and communication skills of children with autism and promote their inclusion, Guttierrez, Hale, Gossens-Archuleta & Sobrino-Sanchez (2007) argue that many questions remain regarding the efficacy of those interventions in real-world inclusive settings. The concerns mainly come from the fact that those interventions are specifically designed to serve the needs of children with autism and not all children within a setting, they are applied by professionals who are not closely related to ordinary schools thus raising methodological issues over their suitability and finally they are applied by people with no expertise in special childhood education, thus probably lacking the necessary knowledge in early childhood matters (Schwartz et al., 2004).

These findings are in contrast with those presented in the studies of Sandall, Schwartz & Joseph (2001) and Schwartz et al. (1998) who suggest that there is no need for teachers to use any autism-specific strategies, materials or activities as children with



autism can be effectively supported through the use of common teaching strategies (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2003) and thus feel part of the whole setting's learning community within an inclusive early years preschool setting. Instead, it is suggested that the alterations needed to host the learning needs of children with autism should be focused on the modification of the classroom activities and routines (Sandall, 2001).

Corbett and Norwich (2005) argue the pedagogic implications are that all children - including children with learning difficulties - have the same pedagogic needs, highlighting at the same time that there is a possibility that some children might require some *additional* strategies in combination with the common ones or even teaching styles created exceptionally only for their unique needs. Corbett (2001) stresses that it is not that there are no differences among learners rather that the practitioners must identify – instead of denying - them and adapt their teaching strategies according to the learners need.

Currently, there are a great number of recommended strategies suggested as successful, not only in the inclusion of children with autism but in support of the learning and participation of each and every child. Those include the promotion of communicative and social competence skills through the use of explicit instruction; instructional activities that do not interrupt the natural flow of the setting's activities; provision of multiple opportunities which enable all children to develop their independence; promotion of generalisation and maintenance skills by providing common materials used by everyone and finally the development of an inclusive classroom community which will include all children and provide the same amount of opportunities to participate, share and learn (Schwartz et al., 2004, 1998).

With reference to teaching strategies for the development of play, which is recognised as important in early childhood as a medium to support learning for each and every child, Nutbrown and Clough (2006) argue early childhood teachers who know its importance still struggle to integrate it into their pedagogic repertoire and daily teaching approaches. Despite the fact that the role of teachers is evidently important in support of children during play, reluctance on the part of the teachers to play with the children is often reported (Devereux & Miller, 2003). Early childhood practitioners have difficulties in becoming actively engaged in children's play as they fear

interference in the children's activities (Moyles & Adams, 2000). According to Pollard and Broadfoot (1997) such difficulties mainly come from the pressures that early childhood practitioners continuously face in order to change their practices, as an emphasis is given to specialised strategies as opposed to the general processes of learning.

Walker and Berthelsen (2007) however, continue to stress the importance of the teacher's role and level of involvement in the development of an inclusive environment which will meet the play needs of all children including children with special needs. In a recent study, Vakil (2009) who examined the role of early childhood educators in the inclusion of children with autism identified the role of an early year practitioner as a person who will use effective strategies to include all children and ensure a quality program and as someone who will collaborate with other professionals and parents and plan the activities for all the children including the children with autism.

As it is evident from the studies discussed above, the focus on the teacher's role as this is related to broader curriculum and inclusion processes has been the object of study, but often distinct from studies of interventions in autism. None of the studies discussed has examined specifically how practices that support children with autism can be transferred or already fit into practice by early years practitioners in order to sufficiently support the play of children with autism in inclusive settings. This is one of the issues the current thesis aims to tackle.

## **2.9 Early Years Education Contexts**

The early years are an important part of children's lives as they play a major role in their emotional, cognitive and social development (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004), but this has not always been recognised in provision. In the UK, the Hadow report of 1931 was the first to suggest that 3-7 year old children should be taught separately from 7-11 year olds and urged a liaison between infant and junior schools. However, it was criticised as a report for not saying much about the continuum of a provision in the early years settings while supporting a deficit

model of young children suggesting that young children were showing a lack of mental organisation (Broadhead, 1996).

Moving on, the Plowden Report (CACE, 1967) contributed significantly towards the establishment of a 'child centred' curriculum in early years settings. The emphasis was placed on the active participation of young children in an activity, the self-directed activities that children should initiate and sustain and the adult's role towards the provision of an appropriate environment. The Plowden Report was based on the work of educational theorists and pioneers of early childhood and managed to convince governmental sectors about the important role of early years settings in the development of young children. This movement was recognised and approved by a political will, which resulted in financial commitment that ultimately increased significantly the amount of pre-five provision (Broadhead, 1996). The decade of the 1970s was the starting point for a wide expansion of nursery provision which took the form of nursery classes integrated into primary and infant schools (Broadhead, 1996). This led on to preschool provision becoming established for all children under five including children with special needs.

The Warnock committee (DES, 1978) and the Education Act (1981) provided the backdrop to the current situation in pre-schools relevant to special educational needs (SEN). The Warnock Committee (1978), which led to and informed the 1981 Education Act, was the first to claim that pre-school early provision and early educational interventions should be provided for each and every child, regarding mainstream nurseries as the best potential settings appropriate for the majority of the children with special needs. The term *learning difficulties* was also recommended by the Warnock Committee (1978) in order to replace the term *sub-normal* referring to all children with special needs. Aspects of the Committee's recommendations were adopted by the Education Act (1981) which emphasised the notion of integration suggesting that children with special educational needs should be integrated in mainstream schools and be educated under existing curriculum structures (Nicholls, 2004).

It was not until 1996 that the Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning on Entering Compulsory Education curriculum (SCAA, 1996) was introduced into every early

year setting providing a 'half day' session of education for children from 4 to 5 years old. The Desirable Outcomes suggested six main areas of learning which remain similar for the current framework and included personal, social and emotional development; language and literacy; mathematics; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical and creative development (Anning, Cullen, & Flear, 2004). However, there were tensions concerning the fact that the suggested curriculum was introducing too formal subjects to be learnt by children under five years old too soon and reflected the adult's expectations for the children's attainments rather than children's interests, although initially it was tending to provide a curriculum that would 'follow the interests of children' (Anning, 1995). In response to the problems in relation to the formality of the suggested curriculum for children under five another curriculum was introduced in 2000 (Anning et al., 2004). The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in liaison with the Department of Education and Employment introduced the Early Learning Goals curriculum to all pre school settings – a curriculum guide for the foundation stage concerning the education of children from 3 to 5 years old (DfEE/QCA, 2000). This curriculum guidance, aimed 'to help practitioners plan to meet the diverse needs of all children so that most will achieve and some, where appropriate, will go beyond the early learning goals by the end of the foundation stage' (p.5).

The curriculum guide for the foundation stage introduced six areas of learning: a) personal, social and emotional development, b) communication, language and literacy, c) mathematical development, d) knowledge and understanding of the world, e) physical development, and f) creative development (DfEE/QCA, 2000). Those areas were suggested as a rough guideline that teachers should use to prepare children and provide the basis for future learning. However, it is being stressed that these learning areas do not constitute a curriculum alone; instead they provide a framework for the teachers and the pre-school settings to use and enhance the development of children under five (DfEE/QCA, 2000). The 'stepping stones' are part of the framework provided, divided into three differently coloured bands which progress according to the child's age and aim to help practitioners identify skills, knowledge and abilities that children should have by the end of the foundation stage. This recognises that children will have acquired different levels of skills and abilities by the end of the foundation stage, suggesting that there will not be probably a linear progression, as

stressed in the curriculum's guide, in children's knowledge and skills (DfEE/QCA, 2000).

Concerns have arisen with respect to the developmental appropriateness of the Foundation Stage Curriculum for children from 3 to 5 years old (Kwon, 2002). There is no consensus between early childhood educators and policy makers with the former arguing that the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum is too prescriptive and formal (David & Nurse, 1999) and thus unable to meet young children's actual needs, and the latter arguing that direct and formal teaching can be used in pre school settings as well as later education (Woodhead, 1999). Their disagreement about the appropriateness of the National Curriculum in early years settings is discussed by Blenkin and Kelly (1993, p.58) who argue that 'a curriculum divided into subjects is, potentially, the most alienating form of curriculum for young children because it formalizes experience too soon and, in doing so, makes it distant from the everyday, commonsense knowledge and learning that the young child is familiar with and responsive to'. The results of the Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander, 2009) concluded in similar vein. The extension of early years provision and the starting of primary school at the age of six instead of five were among the basic recommendations from this study, which argued that 'too formal too soon' characterised current educational provision in England. The review argues that good quality play-based learning should be extended up to the age of six for all children, supporting the notion that the holistic nature of curriculum in the early years is often distorted by the fact that teachers prioritise learning goals from the Key Stages 1 and 2.

The debate about the early years curriculum further relates to debates about play. In western countries, the value of play in children's development and learning is widely known (Mittler, 2000) and the child's right to play has been identified by the United Nations Convention (General Assembly Resolution 44/25, 1989). Play has been seen as the recognised way for young children to learn more effectively in early childhood education while it offers opportunities for children to develop in cognitive, social and emotional domains (Sayeed & Guerin, 2000). Sayeed and Guerin (2000) however, stress the fact that UK governments have failed to use play as a medium for children to learn despite its great importance for young children, and that play is almost absent from the UK early years curriculum. The Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander,

2009) highlighted the importance of play in the education and overall learning of all children arguing that, ‘there is no evidence that a child who spends more time learning through lessons -as opposed to learning through play - will ‘do better’ in the long run’ (p.16). Thus, as suggested by Miller, Drury and Campbell (2002) ‘there is a danger of play being squeezed out of the early childhood curriculum’ (p.13).

## **2.10 Curriculum models in early childhood education**

In the following section, I present curriculum frameworks adopted in the USA, New Zealand and Italy. Those curriculum frameworks have been selected for discussion for a number of reasons. Firstly, because of their play-based holistic philosophies which focus on the rights of the children to learn through play and the role of the teachers as active play partners who follow children’s play agendas and are actively involved in children’s learning construction. A second reason is that all of the frameworks stress the importance of reciprocity and joint reflection in group and other activities which enable children to construct their own learning and share their understandings with their peers and teachers. Thirdly, is the variety of activities and learning styles provided by each, and which give room to each and every child to find appropriate activities within each program. Fourthly, is the importance placed on context in these frameworks for promoting different styles of learning and interaction between groups. Lastly, I chose to focus on these three curriculum frameworks because all of them address providing children with equal opportunities for learning no matter their ethnicity, disability and gender, thus trying to promote the learning and play of all children through the provision of cultural experiences. Therefore, I discuss the major aspects of those frameworks and their potential use worldwide.

### **2.10.1 High/Scope Curriculum**

The High/Scope curriculum was the framework adopted in one of the studied settings. It was originally developed by Weikart in the USA after a project designed to serve at-risk children from poor neighbourhoods in Michigan in 1962 (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002). It was an evidence based program which aimed to explore whether an early preschool programme, like High/Scope approach, could longitudinally help poor

children make a better start from the home to the wider community and ultimately become socially responsible adults (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993).

The High/Scope approach was conceptualised as a social experience involving interactions among children and adults. *Active learning* is the basic tenet of the approach which suggests that children act on their desire to explore and discover new ideas without being predetermined or guided by others and that they transform this action into play (Bennett et al., 1996). High/Scope's curriculum content is based on eight thematic areas which represent the 'key experiences' in children's learning: active learning, language, representation, classification, seriation, number, spatial relations and time (Wood & Attfield, 1996). Furthermore, it has four curriculum principles: adult-child interaction, learning environment, daily routine and assessment, all of which strive to educate young children in action (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002).

The High/Scope curriculum model is based on Piaget's constructivist theory (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). Adult-child interaction is based on the guiding responsibilities of the adult who has to be discreet, non intrusive (Moyles, 1994) and enthusiastic about a child's activities (Anning et al., 2004) while the child is experimenting as a lone scientist (Moyles, 1994). The adult's role is that of a supporter who shares control with the children (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002), supports their decisions and focuses on their strengths, monitors their activities (Wood & Attfield, 1996), adopts a problem-solving approach towards social conflicts (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002) and provides ongoing support through dialogue and conversation (Wood & Attfield, 1996).

The High/Scope pre-school approach puts high importance in the preschool learning environment. It stresses the role of the adult towards the setting of a learning environment which will provide the children with opportunities to take initiatives (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002), play with a selected variety of materials during free play time, make choices and set their own play agendas (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002). The setting is organised in thematic areas which include sand and water play, drawing and painting, 'reading and writing', counting, sorting, climbing, singing and dancing. All the materials are stored in accessible places accompanied by picture labels

children can read and thus all of them are able to use them independently and without an adult's support (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002).

The daily routine followed in High/Scope approach is a plan-do-review process (Moyle, 1994). During planning time the children are encouraged by their teachers to plan their own activities according to their interests (Wood & Attfield, 1996), set their own play agendas and learn how to take decisions (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997), an important aspect in a child's school achievement (Cohen, Bronson, & Casey, 1995). Free play time that lasts about an hour is the 'do' time, during which children are allowed to choose and engage in free play activities according to their interests among the thematic areas provided by the setting (Bennett et al., 1996). Review time is of major importance in the curriculum model (Wood & Attfield, 1996) when children come together in small groups to remember the activities they were engaged with throughout the day, describe them and express themselves, either through talking or writing and painting. The adult's role during review time is that of the supporter and facilitator (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002) who aims to encourage the children to talk, by asking questions like 'what would you like to do?' which extend upon children's remembering and support children's decisions. Structured play can take place during review time where teachers direct children's activities and guide them with specific intentions for learning outcomes (Bennett et al., 1996).

Assessment includes a range of tasks required of staff. Teamwork is of major importance and runs through the cooperation of the staff to observe the children and gather important information through daily anecdotal notes based on what they see and hear concerning children's activities and interests. Occasionally, staff members use the High/Scope Child Observation Record, an assessment instrument that focuses on children's experiences in the nursery. Staff members also engage in discussions about planning sessions while they share their concerns, reflect on current practices and make plans for the next days (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002).

The High/Scope approach has been widely used by pre-school practitioners all over the world including United Kingdom and it is the only curriculum approach which has been evaluated and followed-up in a long term perspective (Pramling Samuelsson, Sheridan, & Williams, 2006). Stephen (2006) argues that there are many studies



focusing on High/Scope's appropriateness for children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds but at the same time warns regarding the nature of the outcomes, which still seem to be unclear.

### **2.10.2 New Zealand/Te Whariki Curriculum**

Te Whariki is the curriculum for early childhood care and education in NZ which caters for children from infancy to school entry at age five (Anning et al., 2004). It is a relatively new framework that the Ministry of Education in New Zealand decided to approve in 1996 (Ministry of Education, 1996). Governments had not previously been concerned to apply a curriculum in the early childhood sector and it was the first time that this initiative had a governmental stamp. This was not wholly accepted by the early childhood organisations who expressed concerns that a catholic curriculum framework would constrain their independence and diversity (May, 2002). The development of Te Whariki was the result of an ongoing process which involved different early childhood services, organisations (May, 2002), in-service early childhood practitioners (Anning et al., 2004) and parents (Miller et al., 2002) who would contribute towards the development of a bicultural and situated curriculum (Anning et al., 2004).

The curriculum framework is not organised according to subject-linked areas; instead it states four basic principles (Miller et al., 2002) which stress a holistic philosophy (Anning et al., 2004) and can be used by the teachers to plan and set up the children's learning experiences (Miller et al., 2002). The four principles are a) empowerment for the child to learn and grow: whakamana, b) adopting an holistic way of development for the children to learn and grow: kotahitanga, c) the wider world of the family and community as an integral part of the early childhood curriculum: whanau tangata, and d) children learn through responsive relationships among people and things: nga hononga (Podmore & Carr, 1999). A set of parallel Aims for Children (later named strands) in Maori and English were developed, not as translations but as equivalent domains of empowerment in both cultures (May, 2002); their names are a) well-being: mana atua, b) belonging: mana whenua, c) contribution: mana tangata, d) communication: mana reo, and e) exploration: mana ao turoa (May, 2002) and each of them include goals, learning outcomes and adults' responsibilities (Miller et al., 2002).

The goals do not include specific guidelines for educators to use with young children but rather general ways through which educators can support children's learning (Anning et al., 2004).

The title Te Whāriki was based on a central metaphor (May, 2002) although its primary name was Te Whāriki. He Whāriki Mātauranga mö ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996). Its name is translated as a woven mat where all strands, goals and principles of the curriculum are included for standing on (Anning et al., 2004); in Maori language it translates as 'a mat for all to stand on' (Podmore & Carr, 1999). It encompasses the diversity existing in each person's philosophy, language and culture taking part in early education (May, 2002) embracing a vision of the bicultural child in New Zealand (Miller et al., 2002).

Although New Zealand had a tradition of play-based curricula the practical application of the curriculum in early childhood settings was not easy (Podmore & Carr, 1999). By 2000, Te Whāriki was apparent in most centres (May, 2002) but it seemed that early childhood practitioners were not ready to implement it into their daily routines (Anning et al., 2004) partly because, on purpose, there were no further guidelines given to the practitioners to 'force' them to 'weave' in their own curriculum pattern and their own context (May, 2002). The Te Whāriki curriculum suggests that an appropriate curriculum can only be determined by taking into account specific groups, communities and children, thus emphasising the individuality and contextuality of a curriculum. Therefore, the differences existing among different early childhood centres are due to the fact that each of them is based on a different theoretical understanding which is according to the children's interests (Tyler, 2002).

Social constructivism, Te Whāriki's basic tenet, states that children can learn better when supported by other adults or peers (Anning et al., 2004). Play, an important learning medium during childhood, is deeply integrated into Te Whāriki curriculum (Pramling Samuelsson & Fler, 2008). Play is highly valued and can be either purposeful or not as a way for children to explore and learn. The role of an adult is that of a supporter who selects appropriate teaching strategies to support learning through play. The selection of the strategies is based on the observational knowledge of the child and its family; Te Whāriki positions the child as a life-long learner, and

stresses the major role of the child's family and community in the learning process (Pramling Samuelsson & Fler, 2008). While Te Whāriki defines three different age groups, infants, toddlers and young children, it does not focus on separate experiences; it rather suggests that children will develop in unpredictable ways, emphasising the individuality in the development of each child, rejecting the use of developmental measures for intellectual, cognitive, emotional and social growth and approving a more holistic point of view (Tyler, 2002). According to New Zealand's Ministry of Education (1996) the curriculum is founded on the fact that children should 'grow up as confident and capable learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution in the society' (p.9).

The Te Whariki programme has received considerable interest among early childhood educators worldwide (Curtis & O'Hagan, 2003) while Cox (1996) states that the framework can offer important insights in pre-school teachers' practices. However, its implementation in early childhood settings is being seen with some scepticism by some researchers who argue that this curriculum model can not be adopted as it stands by other countries (Devereux & Miller, 2003) due to inherent cultural characteristics dominating the whole curriculum and specific to New Zealand (Pramling Samuelsson & Fler, 2008).

### **2.10.3 Reggio Emilia Approach**

The Reggio Emilia approach was established shortly after World War II by Loris Malaguzzi and this influenced Italian preschools in the 1960s and 1970s. The whole approach seeks to enhance a child's 'own powers of thinking through the synthesis of all the expressive, communicative and cognitive languages' (Edwards, Forman, & Gandini, 1993) while it integrates theoretical values from important pioneers in early childhood like Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner (Brunton & Thornton, 2007).

The key features inherent in the Reggio approach include a) the image of the child, b) the expressive arts in the pre-school establishment, c) long term projects (or *progettazione*), d) community and parent-school relationships, and e) the environment

and teachers as learners. Malaguzzi believed that creativity is a way of thinking and responding to the world and that central in terms of learning and teaching, building relationships and professional development is 'the image of the child' which 'is rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and children' (Learning Teaching Scotland, 2006). Reggio educators believe that children have rights in learning and understanding and that their learning abilities should be valued (Mercillott Hewett, 2001); they strongly believe that a child has great potential to interact with the world, take responsibility for her/his own learning and be listened to. All those principles are extended to children with special needs who, in the Reggio approach, are characterised as having special rights and are all included in mainstream education (Learning Teaching Scotland, 2006).

The role of the expressive arts as a vehicle for learning is an important element in Reggio approach. Children are seen as protagonists and encouraged to participate in a variety of expressive activities such as sculpture, dramatic play, shadow play, puppetry, painting, dancing, music, ceramics, construction and writing (Edwards & Springate, 1993). Teachers strongly support the engagement of the children with the expressive arts believing that through them the children are able to share feelings and emotions, revisit subjects of interest, understand better their inner world through non verbal languages (i.e. gestures, glances, emotions) and experience and understand the same things from different angles (Learning Teaching Scotland, 2006).

In the Reggio approach, teachers are first of all learners while they are trying continuously to understand better the children they are taking care of. They work in pairs and each pair is responsible for a group of children (Abbott & Nutbrown, 2001). Teachers are partners, guides and facilitators in the co-construction of knowledge with the children. They engage in the same activities with the children, explore, discover and provoke children's thought to enhance their mental development; this is consistent with Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development within which adults support children and scaffold their developmental learning (Mercillott Hewett, 2001). Teachers are also researchers with the responsibility to observe, take notes and record conversations between the children (Rosen, 1992). These observations are then discussed and translated with other teachers, *atelierista* (a

trained art teacher), and *pedagogisti* to discover altogether and reflect on children's symbolic languages (Perry, 2004).

The Reggio approach has given emphasis to the collaboration between the parents and teachers. Parents participate in meetings with teachers to build an image of the child as an individual, including the construction of photo albums or favourite rhythms that could be the base for conversations between the child and the teacher. Parents are asked to provide information about their children's daily routines at home which are then discussed with the teachers and other parents in group settings. Furthermore, parents are expected to take part in discussions relevant to school policy issues, curriculum planning and evaluation with reciprocal relationships built between the school, the family and the children valued in the approach (Learning Teaching Scotland, 2006).

The organisation of the layout and the physical environment is of great importance in the Reggio Emilia early childhood programme and is often referred to as the 'third teacher' (Learning Teaching Scotland, 2006). The nurseries are places interconnected with each other and considerable attention is given to the design of furniture and organisation of the space to maximise access. In each classroom there are spaces in the form of mini-ateliers which are designed to host both large and small group activities. Rooms all open into a central piazza, where children from all around the schools play and meet altogether as they move freely from one space to another (Abbott & Nutbrown, 2001). Colourful pictures, photographs and other children's work are depicted on the walls, floors and ceilings (Perry, 2004) with the aim of making the children understand themselves in relation to the nursery's physical environment (Learning Teaching Scotland, 2006).

Today the Reggio approach has been recognised world wide for its holistic philosophy and many countries borrow or learn from it (Learning Teaching Scotland, 2006), visiting Reggio Emilia preschools to understand their philosophy, and adopt and integrate some of its principles in their own preschools (Perry, 2004). However, there is still a debate about whether the Reggio Emilia approach can be successfully implemented into other countries as it is not just a curriculum approach but rather a philosophy that entails cultural influences tightly bound with Italian culture and way

of living (Learning Teaching Scotland, 2006). The USA is mostly interested in the implementation of the Reggio approach in American preschools (New, 2000) while Australia's system is under change and while partly influenced by the socio-cultural philosophy of the Reggio approach its principles in practice have yet to be determined (Pramling Samuelsson & Fler, 2008). The Scottish Teaching Centre (2006) advocates that 'while there is much we may wish to take on board, we need to be cautious in attempting to replicate the Reggio Approach in our own early years settings. There is a sense in which the Reggio Approach is not directly transferable' (p. 23).

Summing up, the curriculum frameworks discussed above share one common feature; concern with the holistic nature of children's learning and how this can be enhanced through activities which are different from traditional academic schooling and instead focus on the social side of learning through shared understandings, mutual participation and communication between the children and their teachers. Thus, the next section focuses on inclusive education for two main reasons. First, inclusive education can 'host' the above curriculum programmes, further enhancing inclusion for social and educational inclusion children with autism. Second, inclusive education and how this is applied in preschool settings, is central to this thesis. Thus, I outline how inclusive education as evolved through out the years as this is of great importance towards the understanding of the wider context of inclusion.

## **2.11 Inclusive Education**

Policy history in the move towards inclusive education in England is complex and I have focused just on important landmarks to provide a context for the study. The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) was the first of its kind in England to support integration and the placement of children with special needs in mainstream schools where possible and the first to recognize the importance of early childhood education as an ideal placement to identify possible children's special needs through five different stages of assessment procedures. The Warnock Report proposed the elimination of the existing categories (blind, partially sighted, deaf, partially deaf, physically handicapped, delicate, educationally subnormal (moderate), educationally subnormal (severe), epileptic, maladjusted, speech defects and autistic) and replacing

these with a continuum of 'special educational needs', classifying children into three different categories of learning difficulties: mild, moderate and severe (Jones, 2004). However, the maintenance of special schools to meet the needs of pupils with more severe special educational needs was one of the Report's basic tenets suggesting that integration was beneficial for some children and not for others; this dual model of integrated and special provision raised for many years debates among the educational community and has largely remained.

There have been challenges to this position from the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE, 1989) and its *Inclusive Charter*, which was the first UK document to support inclusive education and reject the notion of segregation. Evans et al. (1999) argue though, that the breakthrough in the change of thinking and practices in inclusive education originated from the Salamanca Statement from the World Conference of Special Education (UNESCO, 1994) which had a 'powerful influence' on inclusion worldwide. The conference, held in Spain in 1994 and involving representatives of 92 governments and 25 international organizations proposed and established the right of education for everyone (Thomas, 2001). The Salamanca Statement, which was launched by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 1994, p.11), strongly supported inclusion for all children and urged governments to adopt inclusive principles by stating that 'inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights. Within the field of education this is reflected in the development of strategies that seek to bring about a genuine equalization of opportunity'.

The Green Paper, *Excellence for all children: Meeting Special Educational Needs* (DfEE 1997) which was launched by the UK government again supported inclusion and placement of children with special needs in mainstream settings but at the same time retained special schools for those children who still needed them and remained committed to the continuum of special educational needs:

We want to develop an education system in which special provision is seen as an integral part of overall provision, aiming wherever possible to return children to the mainstream and to increase the skills and resources available in mainstream schools. We want therefore to strengthen links between special

and mainstream schools, and to ensure that LEA support services are used to support mainstream placements (DfEE 1997, p.44).

There has been a shift in attitude from focusing only on children's individual needs towards more inclusive approaches trying to meet all children's needs by modifying the setting's available resources brought a different perspective into the notion of 'integration' and 'inclusion'. The Index for Inclusion (Booth et al., 2000) was a milestone for the UK and worked towards the inclusion of all the children in mainstream schools by supporting the removal of barriers which would create a sense of community and develop an inclusive ethos. The Index for Inclusion was distributed by the English Government to every school with the aim of enabling teachers, parents and other staff to develop inclusive cultures, practices and policies in their schools (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). It was not only used in schools in England and Europe but in schools all over the world (Vaughan, 2002).

The Special Education Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001 came into force in September in 2002 and extended the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and further supported the civil rights of the children and individuals with special needs in education. The second section included the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) (amended from the original 1994 version). The Code provided guidance to Local Education Authorities (LEAs), early years providers and other related social and health services, on identification, assessment and early provision recognising that one important aspect in the inclusion of children with learning difficulties is the adoption of whole school policies and the placement of those children in early education settings or mainstream schools (Jones, 2004). The Code stressed the responsibility of special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) for further assessments on specific children's progress following concerns reported by teachers or others coping with a child with learning difficulties and for coordinating SEN provision. Jones (2004) argues that the Code of Practice created debates and has not been generally welcomed, moreover, the early identification procedures and assessments do not focus on how the needs of the children with learning difficulties are to be met through alterations that will take place within a school's context itself. Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson (1994, p.155) concur that the assessment procedures continue to redirect the focus away from the school's considerations to



‘what is wrong with the child and the family rather than on ways in which children can be taught effectively within the ordinary classroom’.

An important cross-government policy that radically influenced early years services in England was the Children Act 2004 which promoted overall reform of children’s services under the slogan *Every Child Matters*. Five main outcomes were prioritized through the act: being healthy; being safe; enjoyment and achievement; making positive contributions; and achieving economic well-being (DfES, 2004). The Act further stressed the need for integrated services which would integrate additional services for children with special/additional needs ‘such as those with disabilities, those whose parents have mental health problems or those who need to be protected from harm’ (DfES, 2004, p.15).

Finally *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES, 2004) again aimed to address issues of inclusion and support the rights of children with special needs to education and success. This builds on the proposals from *Every Child Matters* and aimed to reform children’s services by personalising learning for all children and reforming education in a way that each and every setting is able to serve better the diverse needs of individual children, reduce the reliance on SEN structures and promote success and achievement for all children. However, this is not without criticism; Loyd (2008) stresses the failure of the government to understand the controversial nature of inclusion arguing that ‘far from removing barriers to participation and achievement, then, the current Government policy, with its continuing preoccupation with national targets and standards can be seen maintaining them or indeed even contributing to erecting them’ (p.229).

### **2.11.1 Integration versus inclusion**

In the last decade the word ‘inclusion’ has appeared regularly in literature and governmental documents. Mittler (2000) argues that integration, which has largely been replaced in policy documents by the term ‘inclusion’, was mainly referring to the placement of children with special needs in mainstream schools whereby students with special needs were required to adapt to the school’s arrangements on the assumption that the school system would not alter its own existing practices. The

concept and practice of integration has been questioned by many proponents of a wider notion of inclusion, though, who have expressed their dissatisfaction with the appropriateness and motives of segregated special education (Florian, Rouse & Black-Hawkins, 2007) and integration. Barton (1984) suggested that integration was serving motives other than real concern about children's education and argued that integration was 'a product of complex social, economic, and political considerations which may relate more to the needs of the wider society, the whole education system and professionals working within the system, rather than simply to the needs of individual children' (p.65).

Integration was related to the medical model of disability in which the difficulties are understood to lie within each individual, to be examined and provide a possible 'diagnosis' about the nature of the difficulties and guide to an intervention programme that will work towards the remediation of those difficulties. Mason (1992, p.223) explains, 'a medical model, belonging to the individual concerned, which needs treating, curing or at least ameliorating. It is fundamental to the philosophy of segregation which separates young children from each other on the basis of their medical diagnoses, and then designs a curriculum which is aimed at 'normalising' the child as far as possible'. Thus, the aim of the education within a medical model is to make children fit the strategies adopted by schools (Mittler, 2000). This is without taking into account the social and other factors that may relate to the disability itself (Norwich & Kelly, 2004) and without needing to change the systems and structures around the individual.

Gradually the concept of 'integration' has been replaced by that of 'inclusion' (Thomas, 2001) after concerns that the 'medical model' was preventing progress in the field of education, since it could not answer questions relevant to the reasons why many schools were unable to teach all children successfully (Ainscow, Farrell & Tweddle, 2000). Inclusion concerns the reform and restructuring of a school's philosophy as a whole to provide the same educational and social opportunities and meet all children's needs as valued members of the school community (Mittler, 2000). For many writers, such as Shernavaz, Welton, O'Connor & Kline (2009), Mittler (2000) and Ainscow (2000), inclusion is not just related to the physical placement of children with special needs in mainstream schools; instead it is relevant to the

provision of an enriched environment where all children, including children with special needs have equal access and rights and will participate within it as valued members and active participants supported by adequate support. In other words inclusion celebrates diversity as ordinary (Jones, 2004). Corbett (2001) characterises inclusion as a ‘connective process’ which focuses on the interrelationship between the overall context of an institution and the dynamics in the human interactions as those are evolved through a multi-dimensional process like inclusion. In the *Index for Inclusion*, Booth, Ainscow and Kingston (2006), characterise inclusion as follows:

Inclusion involves change. It is an unending process of increasing learning and participation for all, an ideal or aspiration that is never fully reached. There is no fully inclusive setting ... an inclusive setting then may be best described as one that is on the move (p.5).

Thus, for many the shift from ‘integration’ to ‘inclusion’ does not imply only a shift in terminology but a shift in fundamental principles and perspectives about disability. ‘Integration’ was a good fit for the ‘medical model’ of disability which was focusing on within-child differences and on physical access and the provision of resources (Corbett, 2001). This resulted in pedagogical notions of specialised teaching approaches: that specific groups of children – children with varying degrees of learning difficulties – were in need of receiving special teaching strategies and distinct pedagogies in settings, often separate from their typically developing peers in mainstream classes and schools (Corbett & Norwich, 2005). Inclusion on the other hand is a good fit with the social model of disability which emphasises the social, contextual nature of the disabling condition, which is situation centred rather than person centred (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). Inclusion stresses the shared responsibility and joint concern of everyone included in a school setting (Corbett, 2001). Jones (2005) sees ‘differentiation’ as important to the promotion of inclusive practices which aim to meet individual learning needs by adjusting the curriculum accordingly. Barton (1999, p.58) suggests that ‘inclusive education is not integration and is not concerned with the accommodation and assimilation of discriminated groups’ highlighting the fact that inclusion is a principle which celebrates diversity and regards it as ordinary.

## **2.12 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on a wide range of different issues related to autism, play, curriculum and inclusion in early years education. Multiple perspectives through which autism was defined, understood and experienced were presented and discussed, as was the provision of different play definitions and the work suggested by important play theorists in the field of early childhood education. Furthermore, this chapter focused on the play of children with autism as this is understood currently through explicit categorizations, positivistic approaches, autism specific play interventions and other related teaching strategies. An extended description of three important curriculum play frameworks in early childhood education and a detailed description of inclusive education and how it is currently perceived were also provided and discussed in the current chapter. Next in *Chapter 3* I present in detail all the methods used and the methodological issues raised throughout the conduct of the current study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

This study aims to explore the play of children with autism contextualised in their inclusive preschool setting and particular play ethos. For this reason, an epistemological framework that would allow an in-depth and holistic understanding was needed. The interpretative paradigm enables researchers to understand the social world from a holistic point of view and explore events that are context-bounded and socially situated (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Taking these issues into account this study adopted a naturalistic approach and more specifically an ethnographic case study in order to unravel the complexities and understand in detail how two children with autism construct their experiences while supported by their teachers in the naturalistic environment of an inclusive preschool setting. In this chapter I will present the main purpose of this study, the philosophical assumption it was based on, the implications coming from the methodological framework adopted and the methods used during data collection. I will go on to describe the participants and their preschool settings.

#### **3.1 Purpose of the study**

The overall aim of this study was to find out how different teaching approaches and school philosophies have an impact upon the play behaviour and learning of children with autism. Previous research on children with autism and play has been conducted either in clinical or intervention settings and employed experimental designs to understand and investigate play. There is a lack of studies concerning the understanding and exploration of the play of children with autism in contexts where children act naturally. For this reason, this study adopts a more naturalistic stance and employs an ethnographic case study approach.

The research questions were:

- In what ways can early years settings have an impact on young children with autism?

- How can different types of adult support influence the play behaviour and learning of young children with autism?
- What kind of implicit and explicit strategies do teachers use during free play and during structured teaching time?
- How do those strategies influence children's play and learning?
- How are these strategies linked to the school's play ethos?
- What are the implications for teachers and schools?

### **3.2 Philosophical assumptions**

Positivistic views of the world are based on normative science (Keeves & Lakomski, 1999) and concerned with the nomothetic explanation of knowledge, based on a system of laws that describe causes and effects (Neuman, 2007). Positivists support a value-free science (Neuman, 1997) that is distinct from personal, political or religious values (Mertens, 1998), use either inductive or deductive way of thinking to explain a situation (Keeves & Lakomski, 1999), assume that social reality is made up from objective and rational facts (Neuman, 2007) and put an emphasis only on those facts that can be tested empirically in a quantitative and analytical way and thus can be confirmed (Eichelberger, 1989) or at least falsified with certainty (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2006).

In this research I have used an interpretative approach which rejects positivistic principles and process the notion that reality is complex, holistic and content-related while 'the phenomenon of interest unfold naturally' (Patton, 2002, p.39).

Interpretative approaches have been characterised by critics as lacking scientific rigour, being subjective and establishing loose criteria for truth (Keeves & Lakomski, 1999). However, an interpretative paradigm helps a researcher understand the dynamic and constantly changing reality of a social context; likewise I wanted it to help me understand and describe what was happening in the play context of an inclusive preschool setting and how children with autism constructed their own play experiences as they were supported by their teachers. Thus, the epistemological assumption of this study takes an interpretative stance established through naturalistic principles which are context based and give priority to the meanings and personal experiences of individuals (Patton, 2002).

### 3.3 Ethnography

Interpretative or qualitative research comprises many different forms of research inquiry. One such is ethnography which is rooted in cultural anthropology and, according to Lichtman (2009) began being used in the field of education by the middle of the 1980s. Ethnography was first adopted by social scientists who were interested in the interpretation of a setting's culture but found that the traditional ways of research inquiry were insufficient for the discovery and understanding of people's shared experiences (Streubert Speziale & Rinaldi Carpenter, 2007). According to Spradley (1980, p.3), 'ethnography is the work of describing culture'; it focuses on the understanding of other individuals' lives as those are framed in a wider socioeconomic and political context (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). Ethnographers, therefore, should become part of people's lives (Streubert Speziale & Rinaldi Carpenter, 2007) and try, according to Geertz (1983, p.58) learn 'the native's point of view'. Ethnography is closely interrelated with methods and methodologies which are grounded in some form of in-depth field work, involving working with people for long periods of time in natural settings (Schuler & Namioka, 1993). From this perspective, ethnography requires the building of strong connections between the people under study and the ethnographer, since this is the only way for the latter to develop a cultural understanding from a holistic point of view (Morse & Field, 1996).

Ethnography is widely used in childhood studies since in this field childhood is perceived as culturally constructed and young children as social actors who play an active role in the shaping of their own childhood. Ethnography is being used to provide insights into the social aspects of young children's development in different cultural contexts (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland & Lofland, 2001) since particular behaviours can be best described and interpreted only in the context of the settings or environments in which they are collected (Wiersma, 1995). Greene and Hogan (2005, p.136) argue that naturalistic ethnographic studies in childhood allow a researcher to 'gain insight into *what factors are significant* to those children under study rather than assuming *what we as researchers see as significant* in childhood'.

Participant observations and interviews are the key data collection methods used in ethnographic studies (Mertler, 2008). However, in recent years, new approaches

which support new ways of working with children and people in research and representation have been added in ethnographic studies (Pink, Kurti & Afonso, 2004); these visual research methods include video, film and photography. In the past visual ethnographic methods have been accused of lacking systematisation and representativeness, but now it has been recognised that ‘film or video is not simply useful for representing ethnographic research but it is a research method in itself’ (Pink, Kurti & Afonso, 2004, p.5).

Taking into account the factors discussed above, the current study adopted visual ethnography to understand in detail the culture of each setting and this was reflected in each nursery’s ethos. Additionally, visual ethnographic methods added to this study the possibility of examining and interpreting in detail how and whether the play ethos of each inclusive preschool nursery facilitated the inclusion of the child with autism through play. Finally, visual ethnographic methods enabled this study to capture the dynamic nature of the playful interactions of two children with autism and bring new thinking about the richness and further appropriateness of visual methods into childhood.

### **3.4 Case study**

Case study has long been adopted by disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and history. Case study is the study of the singular and it is expected to capture the complexity of a single case (Stake, 1995). In this section I address various definitions, of ‘case study’ itself and position this study within them.

Stake (1995) refers to the notion of ‘case’ as ‘a specific, a complex, functioning thing’ (p.2) and argues that,

a case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case ... we study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look for the detail of interaction within its contexts. Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances. (p.xi)



Stake offers an interpretative way of understanding and defining ‘case study’ and suggests two main types: the intrinsic and the instrumental. The *intrinsic* case study focuses on the intrinsic interest a researcher has in a particular case, wanting to acquire more information about it for its own sake and not because s/he is interested in it for other purposes; here ‘the case is of the highest importance’ (Stake, 1995, p.16). In contrast, *instrumental* case study is used when a researcher studies a specific case to get insights into something else closely related to the case but still important to the study; for this type of case study Stake (1995, p.16) argues, ‘we start and end with issues dominant’.

A more positivist stance on case study is offered by Yin (1993) who defines case study as ‘an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident’ (p.14). He tries to emulate aspects of the scientific approach in case study research and suggests that ‘case studies that follow procedures from ‘normal’ science are likely to be of higher quality than case studies that do not’ (p.xvi). In his explanation of case study Yin provides three main types:

1. The *exploratory* case study which defines questions and hypothesis of a following study or determines the appropriateness of the desired procedures
2. The *descriptive* case study which supports the contextualised and complete description of a phenomenon and
3. The *explanatory* case study which focuses on the cause-effect relationships of the case under study.

The framework adopted in the current case study integrates aspects from the approaches of case study of both Stake and Yin. Thus, following Stake, I place importance on the complexity that a case study can offer to a phenomenon under study, and Yin in terms of more specific guidance about the study’s purpose. Under these terms, this study is an exploratory, descriptive case study which investigated the play of two children with autism focusing on the intrinsic interest of the cases. The exploration of the children’s play as this evolved in the inclusive settings and the description of their activities in great detail was central to this visual ethnographic case study, which aimed to understand and explore in depth the play of two young children with autism in the holistic environments of two inclusive early years settings.

### 3.5 Case study - Theoretical assumptions

Next, I discuss theoretical assumptions in research as they relate to a case study approach.

#### 3.5.1 Generalisation and case study

The issue of generalisation has been regarded differently among interpretive researchers mainly due to their different assumptions about the nature and purpose of case study taking into account the place theory has within it (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000). Yin (1993) foregrounds the development of theory and states that ‘theory development as part of the design phase is essential, whether the ensuing case study’s purpose is to develop or to test theory’ (p.27). The issue of generalisation is referred by Yin as either ‘statistical’ or ‘analytical’ and he argues that the latter is more suitable for generating theory from case studies. He advocates that ‘a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study. If two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication may be claimed (Yin, 1993, p.31). Yin’s tendency, however, to support generalisation from case study in a positivist form is not shared by other advocates of case study.

Stake (1995) argues that generalisation (in positivist terms) cannot be feasible in case study and makes clear that ‘we do not choose case study designs to optimise production of generalisations’ (p.8), arguing instead that case study focuses on the exploration and understanding of a single or a few cases; in other words ‘particularisation’. For Stake, the repetition of certain issues over and over again leads to a generalisation which, however, is ‘modified’ and not ‘new’. He terms this ‘naturalistic generalisation’ which is further divided into *petite and grand generalisations*. *Petite generalisations* refer to the description of a case or a few cases in a specific situation although they might not be perceived of as generalisations while they regularly occur within a case study. On the other hand, *grand generalisations* ‘can be modified by case study ... and may increase the confidence that readers have in their (or the researcher’s) generalisation’ (pp.7-8). According to Stake, naturalistic generalisations are important because of their embeddings in the reader’s experience and while they are drawn from people’s experiences and personal involvement in life issues so that ‘the person feels as if it happened to themselves’ (p.85).

Detailed descriptions of the complex reality of everyday life are of great importance in case studies which according to Geertz (1973) who called this 'thick description'. Thick description is used by case study researchers to stimulate their reader's reflections while they provide them with events as they were perceived by their actors (Stake, 1994). This is closely interrelated with emic and etic issues drawn in case studies and used traditionally by ethnographers who describe cultures 'departing in the field from the conventional views as to what is important, but ultimately relating the emic to the etic issues of their discipline' (Stake, 1994, p.20). The result of those inquiries that shift into assertions throughout the field work take firstly the form of petite generalisations by focusing on the similarities of cases and finally end up as grand generalisations referring to larger populations (Stake, 1994).

This study supports the notion of a 'naturalistic generalisation' which was established in the research by providing detailed accounts, in form of descriptive vignettes, to communicate and give rich and illustrative accounts about the play experiences of the two children with autism, aiming to enable the reader to recognise personal similar experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The process towards the selection of the most descriptive accounts was not linear since it entailed choice among a large amount of collected data of those that could provide in the most vivid way to connect to a reader and enable them to interpret the events through richly given vignettes.

### **3.5.2 Reliability and case study**

Reliability deals with the ability of a researcher to replicate his/her findings many times and arrive at the same results. Although this principle is being adopted from a wide range of positivistic researchers (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) it cannot be feasible in naturalistic case studies (Merriam, 1988) simply because the complex and multifaceted nature of social phenomena (Bassegy, 1999) are in flux and never static (Merriam, 1988). In this study I prefer Miles and Huberman's (1994) argument that reliability in interpretative/naturalistic studies 'refers to the integrity of the processes of the study, the breadth of the data collection and its appropriacy with regard to the research aims, the degree of consistency of data collection and categorisation of data on different occasions and the extent to which the categorisations and findings have been validated' (p.278).

### **3.6 Data collection methods**

The use of multiple methods is an inherent part of interpretative/qualitative research (Flick, 1998); they clarify the meaning of a phenomenon under study (Stake, 2005) and strengthen the rigour, richness, complexity and depth of a study (Flick, 1998). To gain rich data that describe the case of this project and reduce the possibilities for misinterpretation, I employed a wide variety of data collection methods and procedures. First I present an overview of the chronological order and the procedures of this study and then I provide a detailed description of the methods used.

#### **3.6.1 Study overview**

The identification of nurseries and children for the case studies was among the first stages of the conducted procedures. The main criteria that the nurseries had to fulfil were two: a) children with special needs and particularly autism were attending the setting b) the teachers were using play to promote the development and learning of the children. Among the seven nurseries contacted two offered their help and accepted my request to visit them. My visits there were multi-purpose since I wanted both to explain the aim of my research study to the gatekeepers at the nurseries and at the same time to be assured that both of the nurseries met my criteria. In the first nursery the teacher in charge of the nursery welcomed my proposal to conduct a study within their setting. I explained the aims of my research and provided them with a detailed account concerning the procedure of the study, the aims, and clarifying their rights to choose not to participate at any stage. Furthermore, I provided them with participant information sheets explaining the ethical protocol and consent forms. While the parents of the child with autism and all the staff were required to sign to give informed consent, for the parents of the other children who might also be observed there was a sharing of information and an opt out consent form. The same procedures were followed with the second nursery but this time I contacted the headteacher of the nursery who was actively involved in its daily routine and who accepted the invitation to take part in my study. After two weeks I gained permission from each nursery to inaugurate field work. All the parents and the teachers of both nurseries gave informed consent that I could conduct field observations, video observations and semi-structured interviews with the parents and teachers of the children with autism.

The mother of one of the children with autism (Vicky) did not initially give consent for me to conduct video observations because as she said characteristically, 'I do not know you'.

The field work in both nurseries lasted six months. My visits in each nursery took place in one week blocks every third week. The procedure followed included one week field work in the first nursery, one week field work in the second nursery and one week away to analyse my findings and make sense of the collected data. Field work was not an easy procedure, since it required many decisions on the spot, challenges in dealing with children's requests to play altogether and at the same time keeping up my role as an observer. Two months after the beginning of the study, with the field work in progress and good rapport established with the teachers, the parents of the children with autism, I decided to conduct the interviews on days convenient to the parents and the teachers' schedules. Two weeks later, I returned the transcribed interviews to the teachers and the parents, asking them to read them through and inviting them to alter any parts that they felt did not represent well their thoughts and beliefs at that point of time should they wish to.

I conducted the video observations four months after the beginning of the study. This followed a decision to renegotiate the issue of video observations with the mother who had not given consent at the beginning of the study. I had to take care not be coercive while keeping the right for a second chance. I had discussed these concerns with the teacher who offered assurance that since time had passed and the child's mother now knew me well it would be appropriate to broach the subject again. I was open to the possibility of a negative answer, but I met with the child's mother in one of the nursery's quiet rooms with the presence of the teacher to re-open the topic. Her response was positive and she gave consent to start video recording. The video recordings lasted one week for each school although due to the heavy winter, the children were absent some of the days of the video recordings. Video recording involved the challenges of managing the curiosity of the children to touch the camera and asking questions like 'what is that?' or 'what are you doing there?' My response to their requests included bending to the children's eye level, allowing them to touch and see through the camera and explaining to them the reasons I was using the camera in the nursery.

One month later and after five months in the field, I decided to complete the collection of the data since I was observing the same patterns of behaviour and had reached a 'saturation' point, which according to Strauss and Corbin (1998) 'is more a matter of reaching the point in the research where collecting additional data seems counterproductive; the 'new' that is uncovered does not add that much more to the explanation at this time' (p.136).

### **3.6.2 Data collection through participant observation**

Observation has a basic role in the field of educational research (Croll, 1986); it can serve as the main data source (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996) and can be a fruitful approach towards the understanding of everyday life situations (Robson, 2002) either in a laboratory or in a school setting (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1992). Ethnography is closely interrelated with participant observation while it combines participation in the lives of people under study but at the same time helps the researcher retain the professional distance required to observe and record data (Fetterman, 1998). According to Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) participant observation is divided into a fourfold typology which includes the complete observer, the observer as participant, the participant as observer and the complete participant.

During fieldwork, I mostly took the role of the observer as participant. It was a challenging and sometimes frustrating role since I had to restrict my own duties to the description of events and play activities of children with autism taking place in the nursery and to put aside my and the children's willingness to play and interact altogether. My role though was occasionally switched into a 'participant as observer' role depending on the children's play requests towards me and my active role and participation in their play activities as a co-player. Thus, I was struggling to be 'simultaneously in two worlds' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.113), that of research and that of participation although my active involvement was definitely of secondary importance. In this sense, I was able to observe and interact closely with the various adults and children establishing an insider's identity within the setting but at the same time remaining detached enough taking an outsider's perspective in order to make visible the invisible (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006) and collect data relevant to the problem under investigation (Baker, 2006).

### **3.6.3 Ethics in observation**

Observation often raises ethical issues; although it is generally seen as the least intrusive method in educational research there are dangers associated with the invasion of privacy. The fact that key participants in this study were two children with autism and many other typical children raised ethical problems about their ability to provide informed consent and understand why and what they were involved with (Busher, 2002), since children belong to a vulnerable group of people (British Educational Research Association, 2004). This did not mean that personally as a researcher I did not try to protect those children in any possible way from harm. I obtained an informed consent from the parents of each child (Krathwohl, 1997) and had informal discussions with the teachers so that I was informed about possible signs that could reveal children's discomfort (Alderson & Morrow, 2004) which would trigger me to stop video recording them that day (Cohen et al., 2007) thus making real the notion that I truly respected their right to self-determination and privacy (Beauchamp, Faden, Wallace, & Walters, 1982).

### **3.6.4 Field notes**

Field notes was one of the methods I used to collect my data during participant observation. As a non-native speaker, I thought that it would be very difficult to take field notes in any other language other than my native; however, I was wrong and my ability to write them in English was an unexpected need. Field notes consisted of multiple messy pages in the form of brief jottings where I was describing in great detail all the activities taking place within the pre-school setting among children and adults. At the beginning, I was trying to capture and describe the larger context in which the children's play activities and their teacher's support was taking place. Eventually, however, there was a need to narrow down the focus of my descriptions which had to be matched with my predetermined research questions (Green et al., 2006). The field notes included direct quotations or small bits of dialogue, questions and issues to follow up and possible comments from my role as an observer.

### 3.6.5 Journal

In addition to the field notes, I kept my self-reflective journal. A reflexive approach integrated within the research process is now widely accepted in qualitative research where researchers are invited to talk about 'their presuppositions, choices, experiences and actions during the research process' (Mruck & Breuer, 2003, p.3). A reflective journal was a place where I could often reflect on my own observations including a description of my anxieties, fears, reflections, doubts and thoughts relevant to the fieldwork and my decisions about the research methodology itself. The extract below describes my concerns about the renegotiation of video observations after Christmas when Vicky's mother had initially denied access:

I asked Mrs Sale's (keyworker) permission to renegotiate with Vicky's mother the use of video camera. I was full of uncertainty about the result of this discussion but Mrs Sale offered her help and assured me that we did not have to lose anything except from the fact that Vicky's mother could deny again. Vicky's mother allowed me to video observe Vicky without wanting to discuss further details. I was feeling happy, overwhelmed and did not know how to thank her. The first thought in my mind was the fact that my decision to renegotiate the whole issue after Christmas was correct.

The next extract comes from the week I conducted video observations:

I feel that I am intruding in their lives and touch sensitive issues. I do not feel comfortable mainly because I have a sense that the camera changes movements and situations. I am concerned about its effect on their behaviour and I am sure that nothing is the same as before. I feel that the teachers do not talk very much while some of them seem to hide. It is only the first day though; I hope that the things will change tomorrow.

Furthermore, the journal was a place to write my own personal interpretations relevant to specific events taking place within the settings every time I was revisiting it. Additionally, it was a convenient place to describe and integrate theoretical material



coming from the reading of the literature which ultimately helped me unravel issues and implications coming from the chosen methodological framework.

### **3.6.6 Artefacts**

Artefacts were used to further enrich evidence collected during observation. Green and colleagues (2006, p.228) define artefacts as ‘material objects used in the process of teaching and learning with ‘cultural meaning’ of a study’s context. The artefacts that were taken into consideration in this study included classroom displays which provided valuable information about the teaching habits of the teachers in context, weekly newsletter of the classroom, children’s statements, teachers’ observation notes and children’s art work which provided interesting views and completed the ‘picture’ relevant to the values and ethos of each pre-school setting (Anderson & Arsenaault, 1998).

### **3.6.7 Video recording**

Video recording was also used in this ethnographic study as one way of documenting the field observations. Ethnographers are interested in studying everyday people in real situations in their physical contexts thus video recordings can be used to record the insiders’ activities providing contextualised data (Iino, 1999) and giving, according to Collier and Collier (1986, p.7), ‘an instrumental extension of our senses’.

I myself conducted the video recordings using one camera. I supplemented my video recordings with field notes and was responsible for the camera’s correct operation. Video recordings lasted one week, took place within each preschool inclusive setting and focused on the play episodes of each child with autism with their peers, their teachers or just themselves. I used a portable digital hand-camera because it was easier for me to follow the children and record their play activities. I used a wide-angle view to be able to acquire a better sense of the whole picture (Erickson, 1992) including both the child with autism and the rest of the people interacting with her/him (Goodwin, 1993) capturing in a dense and clear way their verbal and non verbal ways of communication including body gestures and dialogue with other children. The use of a close up view was not possible due to the camera’s limited

zoom abilities although I did gain a close up view by moving in very close to the child's physical place and capturing in a better way details that could be lost in the whole (DuFon, 2002).

Video observations were very useful in the understanding of the play behaviour of the children with autism taking into account their body language and gestures important to understand in detail their behaviour and level of comfort in context (DuFon, 2002). Video recordings provided permanent audio-visual records (Prosser, 2000) while I played and replayed them many times (Cavendish, 1990). Each repeated viewing helped me see and focus on scenes I had not seen during the first viewing (Fetterman, 1998) and ultimately made me acquire a more thorough and detailed aspect of each child's abilities (Greene & Hogan, 2005).

The presence of a video camera within the preschool setting was not unnoticeable to the children and the teachers. Children saw the camera as a toy which they wanted either to touch or play with, while teachers tried to avoid being video recorded. Although those behaviours lasted only for one day it is clear that it produced other than normal behaviours as predicted by Adler and Adler (1994) who state that video recording can be intrusive enough to influence children's and teachers' behaviour making them act in unnatural ways.

Video recording was a rather challenging and new procedure for me which occasionally made me feel uncomfortable given the conditions of the situation within each setting. I was worried about the feelings of the people being video observed and did not want to be too intrusive but the most challenging times were when I had to stay focused in order to choose the best times to observe (Baker, 2006) and at the same time to respond to children's requests and questions; often children were asking my permission to play with the video camera and record for a while, while some others were expressing their curiosity about the camera asking me to let them just touch it. My response to their requests was always positive, even lending them the camera for a while. Technical problems related to the physical light were also part of my concerns for the quality of video recordings.

### 3.6.8 Ethical issues

Visual ethics and more specifically ethics concerning the use of video based classroom observations seem to raise a number of complex and differently situated ethical issues (Prosser, 2000). Children belong to a category of individuals who are perceived to be vulnerable (Flewitt, 2006). This vulnerability refers to their reduced ability to understand what they are required to do (Busher, 2002), sometimes just because of their age (Oliver, 2004) or because they have an intellectual, psychological or other kind of deficiency (Creig & Taylor, 1999). Concerning the children whose intellectual capability is limited (British Educational Research Association, 2004), their vulnerability is higher and researchers must be even more concerned about the ways they will employ to protect these children against possible harm (Alderson & Morrow, 2004). For this reason, the informed consent has to be gained from the parents of each child (Krathwohl, 1997) or anyone else who is responsible for them and acts in *loco parentis*; such as the teachers or the head teachers of the schools (Denscombe, 2002). Parents/guardians consent is needed in addition to each child's "assent" (Sieber, 1998); an issue which has been recently highlighted (Wiles et al., 2008) in research studies that involve children as participants (Cohen et al., 2007). Their consent can take a verbal or written form through the use of drawings or mark-making (Flewitt, 2005). Furthermore, and in addition to those suggestions in order to protect children from harm, Wiles et al. (2008) stress the need for a check from the Criminal Records Bureau, necessary for researchers conducting research with children.

To address issues of consent and anonymity in this study I have used pseudonyms for all references to the children, the people interacting with them, and their settings. I developed a multi-staged strategy and gained informed consent from the gatekeeper of the nurseries, the teachers, the speech therapists and the parents of the would-be participants and a check for myself as a researcher from the Criminal Records Bureau. Moreover, due to the fact that the participants of the current study were children with autism and seeking of informed consent from them would be inappropriate (Beauchamp et al., 1982), I contacted the teachers of the children and had informal discussions with them in order to be informed about possible signs that could reveal children's embarrassment or discomfort during the study (Alderson & Morrow, 2004). This would help me know if I need to automatically terminate my activity (Cohen et

al., 2007) or exclude the child from the study, thus making real the notion that I truly respect their right to self-determination and privacy (Beauchamp et al., 1982). However, the gaining of the permission to video record one of this study's children was not an easy process while access was denied by the parents of one child. Renegotiation of the same issue after a term in which trust had been built seemed to provide an ultimate solution to this problem. Written permission was further required and obtained and the video observations took place during the next term when there had been enough time for the parents of the children to feel more comfortable, trust me and allow me to video record their child.

### **3.6.9 Semi-structured interviews**

In ethnographic research, interviews are among the methods most commonly used (Bernard, 2000) although they may have a secondary role after observation (Nespor, 1997). Interview is suggested to be a type of social interaction (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) with a specific purpose and structure between an interviewer and an interviewee (Kvale, 1996). Through an interview a researcher is able to capture the experiences, attitudes, interests, concerns, feelings and values of the people interviewed (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006) thus aiming to understand the world from the practitioner's perspective (Holloway, 2005). There are three different types of interviews which are distinguished by their level of formality and structure: structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Patton, 2002).

One of the primary purposes of this study was to explore the nature of the support provided by various adults and children. A semi-structured interview was the most appropriate option to address those requirements since the flexibility and openness provided by this type of interview allowed the teachers of the children to express themselves with more latitude and freedom and me as a researcher to understand their perceptions and gain 'important insights' about their teaching methods as they were integrated in the play context of an inclusive pre-school setting (Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg, 1992). The semi-structured interviews conducted with the parents of the children provided valuable insights from the children's play life at home either with their parents or their siblings enabling me to acquire a more holistic picture of their play activities in different contexts.

The interviews took place in available, often quiet, rooms within each pre-school setting (see interview guide – Appendix 8 -11). The questions asked to the teachers of the children were generated from my own reflections and a literature review within a period of two months. During those months I had established good levels of rapport with the teachers in both pre-school settings and especially in one of the pre-schools where I had volunteered for almost two years; this was evident in the nature of the relationship with the teachers and the children.

There are two different ways to record an interview; these include written notes and the use of a recording device (Gay et al., 2006). In this study I used both of them. Audio recording was the easiest and quickest way among all the others (Gay et al., 2006) to record the whole interview and get a permanent record of everything that was said between me and the interviewees (Bernard, 2000), thus allowing me to replay many times the audio recording and analyse my data in a more concrete and simple way (Gay et al., 2006). Furthermore, audio recording helped me focus more on the teacher's responses and the communication with them avoiding at the same time the task of writing down all the interview details that would consequently distract me and slow down the pace of the whole interview (Gay et al., 2006). In ethnographic interviews though, the feelings, body posture and/or facial expressions of interviewees are important contributors towards the acquaintance of a more holistic picture of the data (Kvale, 1996). For that reason, I was taking notes throughout the interview which I ultimately combined with the audio recordings. This helped me keep up and describe the human characteristics and stance of the teachers and the parents of the children but at the same time retain a kind of backup in case the tape recorder was lost or destroyed (Bernard, 2000).

Due to the fact that the participants of this study were two pre-school children with autism who are perceived to be vulnerable (Flewitt, 2006) due to their limited intellectual capability (British Educational Research Association, 2004), I was not able to interview them. For that reason I decided to employ a number of strategies that would help me counteract the fact that I was not able to interview the children. Thus, I decided to interview both the teachers and the parents of the children in addition to the informal discussions I had with them throughout the period of field work.

Teachers' interviews covered a wide range of topics relevant to the teaching techniques they use within the settings, the way they support all the children and particularly children with autism and the ways they may integrate play in their teaching methods as a medium of learning. Parents' interviews were focused on the children's play at home alone, with their siblings or their parents, their play or toy preferences within the home and the possible change in the behaviour of each individual child due to their participation in an inclusive pre-school setting. Furthermore, I was taking in teacher's perspectives through informal discussions we had during field work. These discussions included issues emerging from field observations after my own reflections at the end of each day. Additionally, I was recording their responses and comparing them with our past discussions, finding occasionally no consensus among them.

### **3.7 Reliability, validity and trustworthiness issues**

Validity, reliability and trustworthiness issues are of major importance in every study, and thus the discussion of their definitions in combination with the presentation of the transformations they have undergone during recent years gives a picture of their role and legitimacy in research in general and this study in particular.

Reliability in quantitative research is essentially a synonym for consistency and replicability standards according to which a research instrument can be tested and replicated in a standardised manner by any researcher to reproduce the results of others, proving that there is honesty, universality and production of true knowledge (Neuman, 1997). There are many different types of reliability in quantitative research and all of them presuppose the minimisation of external factors which may reduce the controllability and standardisation of testing procedures necessary to guarantee the similarity in findings (Cohen et al., 2007). However, quantitative research methods cannot always address successfully the full range of problems in educational research; moreover, it is not possible to obtain complete control of the subjects under study and the settings in which the study is taking place. Furthermore, tools used to gather data cannot always provide an answer to the educational researcher who investigates human behaviour (Taylor, 2005).

Healy and Perry (2000) state that the quality of each paradigm should be judged on its own terms. Likewise, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.300) prefer the concept of 'dependability' to 'reliability', as they see the former as more appropriate in interpretative/qualitative research; they suggest that terms like credibility, confirmability, and transferability should be used in qualitative research and be the essential criteria to judge research quality. Dependability shows to what extent a study can be transferred and conducted in a context other than its initial one; this according to Cuba (1981) can be succeeded from the depth of the data provided which will enable the reader to transfer the same case to another similar situation. In this study I support the argument of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and adopt the notion of 'dependability' as most appropriate for interpretative/naturalistic studies. Dependability in this study will be evident in the description provided in the play sequences of the children with autism with their teachers; the depth of the data presented through vignettes and the thorough description of two inclusive settings provided in earlier chapters will enable the reader to transfer the findings of the current research in a similar to this study's settings.

A strategy for addressing 'dependability' issues in qualitative studies is triangulation which has four distinct types: a) data triangulation, b) investigator triangulation, c) methodological triangulation and d) theory triangulation. The basic tenet of triangulation is that a study must entail information from multiple angles and perspectives to elaborate a study's research problem and reduce bias and enhance trustworthiness (Cohen et al., 2007). In this study a combination of data and methodological triangulation was established. Data triangulation enables a researcher to collect data on the same phenomenon at different points in time; there are three different types of data triangulation and those include a) time triangulation, b) space triangulation and c) person triangulation (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2003). In this project I used time triangulation in order to observe children with autism throughout the year at different points of time and 'determine the congruence of the phenomenon under study' (Polit & Tatano Beck, 2003, p.431). The methodological triangulation of the data was established through the use of multiple methods of data collection which enabled me to check data from more than one standpoint; the methods I used included field observation, video observations and semi-structured interviews. The use of three different methods helped me understand and explain better the richness and

complexity of the play of children with autism as this was conducted in the context of an inclusive preschool setting and at the same time enabled me to avoid probable bias coming from partial capture of reality based on only one method of data collection (Cohen et al., 2007).

The concept of validity is also viewed differently by qualitative researchers who strongly consider that it belongs to the positivistic paradigm (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In quantitative research, validity refers to the extent that a research instrument captures the real meaning of a concept it is intended to measure (Babbie, 2009) while the dominant terminology includes universal laws, evidence, objectivity, truth, actuality, deduction, reason and fact (Winter, 2000). A credible research design in quantitative research can maximise validity while it can provide a clear explanation of a studied phenomenon and control all possible biases that can possibly distort findings. Quantitative researchers try to dissociate themselves from the research process as their own involvement could significantly reduce and have an impact on the validity of the measurement (Cohen et al., 2007).

Qualitative researchers instead adopt more qualitative terms like ‘trustworthiness’, ‘relevant’, ‘confirmable’, ‘worthy’, ‘credible’, ‘plausible’, or ‘representative’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Hammersley, 1987; Mishler, 1990; Wolcott, 1990). Waitling (1995, p.5) notes:

Reliability and validity are tools of an essentially positivist epistemology. While they may have undoubtedly proved useful in providing checks and balances for quantitative methods, they sit uncomfortably in research of this kind, which is better concerned by questions about power and influence, adequacy and efficiency, suitability and accountability.

In qualitative inquiry ‘the researcher is the instrument’ (Patton, 2001, p.14) and the quality of the research depends to a great extent on the skill, competence, rigor and effort of the person doing fieldwork and the honesty with which inferences drawn from the collected data are reported (Cohen et al., 2007), thus earning the reader’s confidence (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008). A researcher who uses qualitative research methods attempts to capture, through observation, the perspectives and the voices of



people being studied and tries to explain the social world and validate interpretations by checking them against participants' own interpretations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998); it is only then that a qualitative researcher will be able to make her/his own generalisations/theoretical inferences of the social world that will represent the reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and secure a sufficient level of validity (Agar, 1996). In qualitative terms this is called respondent validation.

In this study I validated my personal interpretations taken during field work by frequently discussing with adult participants to check whether my understanding about emerging themes was similar to their own. Those interpretations were recorded in my research diary where there is a detailed gradual recording and expansion of themes and patterns emerging from personal reflections during field work; this procedure was evolved continuously throughout the data collection stage and helped me figure out emergent themes relevant to data analysis. I tried further to enhance the respondent validation of this study by providing a transcription of interviews in each of the adult participants, asking them to confirm that the data they provided represented their current beliefs and that the interpretations conducted by myself had not distorted the data. Through this procedure I aimed to increase the accuracy of the collected data and clarify possible misinterpretations.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

The interpretation of data in qualitative research begins while field work is still ongoing (Walsh, Tobin, & Graue, 1993). Field notes coming from the participant observations I undertook in the preschool settings were re-read and expanded at the end of each day. Use of emerging field notes, my personal journal reflections and the expertise of my supervisor guided me to take decisions regarding further inquiry about data analysis and interpretation simultaneously. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed supplemented by field notes I took during the interviews relevant to the body language of the teachers, information that was not audio recorded and my own reflections.

Data collected during video observations were viewed multiple times and partly transcribed. The decision to view the videos with and without voice came up naturally

due to my inability to follow everything that was taking place at the same time within the nursery while I was observing and trying to transcribe different play episodes. The viewing of videos from two different 'angles' was very useful for me since each viewing provided complementary and more rich information about the same play episode.

Data analysis is a multi task procedure which includes several interrelated activities (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The data analysis in this study began with the inauguration of data collection; it guided subsequent data collection and was completed by the time data were gathered (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The first step of this study included the transformation of raw data from field notes, interviews and video observations into the Atlas ti software, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) package. Atlas ti enables a researcher to code multimedia and use hypertext (Dicks, Mason, & Coffey, 2005) while it is the only qualitative software programme able to integrate directly both textual and non-textual data files (Lewins & Silver, 2007). Atlas ti provides complex ways of looking at relationships within the data which enables a researcher to think more of the conceptual and theoretical nature of the data and is founded upon a theory generation approach (Breakwell, Smith, Fife-Schaw, & Hammond, 2006).

The second step of the analysis included data reduction through content analysis, a systematic research technique for making replicable and valid inferences (Krippendorff, 1980) through the description of a text's contents (Miller & Brewer, 2003). Content analysis was the method I used to compress large amounts of written data and reduce their complexity by extracting key themes/codes to understand better the values and opinions of each teacher and parent (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004) throughout this qualitative study. The codes I identified in this study as points of departure were roughly pre-set and were closely interrelated to my research questions (Bauer, 2000); the initial codes I applied in my data included types of play, teacher's approach, communication between teachers and play ethos. However, throughout the study and while I was continually 'interacting', revisiting and analysing the collected data, I felt the need to modify the initial codes, add new codes, delete some codes and group together those that shared the same theme. My personal reflections concerning the meaning of the data collected during field work and the update of my knowledge

through literature review were two main factors that contributed to the modification of multiple codes (as one might anticipate from Dey, 1993). Below I present a summary of the way I analysed the codes presented in the appendices.

For Forest nursery data, I began with the code, 'types of play' as this was important in the literature; there were not many differences in the categorisation of different types of play from the beginning to the end of the analysis. However, another initial, broad code, 'children with autism and play', became redundant when I decided that I needed a more personal profile of Vicky's characteristics and her other abilities so after some review this code was deleted. Further, after multiple revisits in the data I integrated in the same category (types of play) the code 'Vicky' with its subcodes as I realised that they were all referring to Vicky's play and interaction with other children; the subcodes included: Vicky's personal characteristics, Vicky's abilities, and Vicky's preferences.

The second code was 'teacher's approach' and this was integrated, after many revisits to the data, within the other main code, 'teaching strategies'. From the very beginning there were many codes which were relevant to the ways the teachers were trying to interact, communicate and play with the children (teacher and interaction, teacher and play, teacher's communication). Those that remained are presented in Appendix 18. As the analysis was going on I felt the need for this code (teaching strategies) to be integrated within a wider category which became one of the core themes, that is, 'pedagogical orientation'. I decided to create this main core theme as there were emerging codes which were relevant to the general pedagogical ways of teaching and playing that teachers were employing in the nursery. One more code which was further categorised into more subcodes was that of 'team's reflection'. At the beginning the codes 'teacher's communication and teacher's communication-reflection' were integrated under the one called 'team's reflection'. However, after revisiting the data I realised that the vignettes talking about teacher's communication and teacher's reflection were more general and were only focusing on the teacher's discussions relevant to the issues related to the nursery in general. Therefore I separated those two codes, which finally became main codes and the code 'team's reflection' included only two subcodes which were relevant to the speech therapist's

contribution depicting the team spirit in the nursery; those codes included: speech therapist and speech therapist's comments.

The codes 'IEP targets include play' and 'teacher's opinion about their role and academic qualifications' were produced from the beginning of the analysis and remained unchanged throughout. One more code, which finally ended up as one of the main codes quite late in the analysis, was that of 'teacher's involvement in child's play'; this happened because I was coding the chunks of information with the role the teacher had in children's play, which in this case was supporter, active player, mediator, coordinator. Ultimately, I decided to sum all these up into one main code. Another related code was 'teaching strategies during play' and while the subcodes included within this code were introduced gradually during the analysis they remained without deletion or renaming.

The third code, 'communication between teachers' was subsumed, after some revisits to the data, under the main core theme 'pedagogical orientation'. Meanwhile, there were emerging many codes which were relevant to the nursery's routine so I decided to create another core theme which I called 'nursery's curriculum' where I included all the codes and subcodes relevant to the nursery's daily schedule, timetable and curriculum. The subcodes integrated in the 'nursery's routine' code, initially included the following four codes: solo learning, groups and play, all children learning, teacher's approach. Those subcodes were created gradually and finally were all placed under the two main subcodes, 'learning through group activities' and 'learning individually' presented in Appendix 18.

Play ethos was the fourth pre-set code which was finally integrated within the main core theme 'school's ethos'. The subcodes that were renamed included: 'solve problems', which was changed to 'problem solution' and 'actively valued children's work', which was renamed from the initial code 'value children's work'. The latter change was made after I realised that the teachers were not only taking into account children's work (by praising them and storing their creations) but they were presenting them in the nursery's different corners and renewing them whenever the children were creating something new as well. Further, at the beginning of the analysis I had included the code 'theoretical framework' under the main core theme

‘nursery’s routine’; however, after revisiting the data again I realised that this code had to be integrated under that of ‘school’s ethos’ as long as it was referring to the general ethos of the nursery; therefore I moved it into this category. The rest of the codes in this category were subsumed under the main core theme of school ethos as they denoted values and principles indicative of the way the Forest nursery tried to foster learning and play in their children.

The coding journey for Butterfly nursery had some starting points in common, beginning with ‘types of play’. This category was easily applied to the data as the types of play the children were engaging were clear and discrete from the outset. Changes in subcode from one type of play to another tended to happen after some revisits to the data, particularly between the subcodes of functional and manipulative play. I coded for ‘adult child play interaction’ and ‘could end up in play interaction if’ and these were put initially under the ‘teaching strategies’ but later moved to the ‘types of play’ category. Initially I had not separated out coding for repetitive and sensorimotor play, mostly because repetitive play was expressed through sensorimotor play, however, I later realised that this separate category ‘repetitive play’ had to be created to make finer distinctions.

The category ‘teacher’s approach’ was removed as a subcode into another main core theme, with a new emerging category being the ‘nursery’s curriculum’. The code ‘nursery’s routine’ was created at the very beginning and remained unchanged throughout the analysis.

As with Forest nursery data the initial category ‘communication between teachers’ was later located within the main core theme of ‘pedagogical orientation’, which finally included the ‘teacher’s approach’ as a subcode. ‘Teaching strategies’ was the first main code of this category. The codes ‘academic qualifications’ and ‘play in the IEP’ remained unchanged, but the codes included in ‘teacher’s support in play’, which at the beginning were all categorised as ‘teacher’s approach’, underwent multiple changes being categorised according to the teacher’s role or the teacher’s act relevant to the child’s play. There were many occasions whereby the same chunk of data took two different codes (as presented in Appendix 24). The codes ‘teacher’s communication’ and ‘teacher’s communication-reflection’ were separated out after

initially all being coded as 'teacher's communication'. Other changes paralleled those made with the Forest nursery data, but a code particular to Butterfly nursery, 'lost opportunity to interact' I placed under this main core theme of pedagogical orientation because all the vignettes coded were depicting the fact that the teachers were not interacting with the children because they could not find any obvious usefulness in playing with the children; thus this was depicted in the whole nursery's teaching and pedagogical orientation.

The journey of the code for 'play ethos' to 'school ethos' has been outlined above. Under the label of 'symbols' I had first put a number of artefacts I was able to observe inside and outside the nursery and I decided to categorise them all under a this subcode. The process of coding and recoding data had some features in common with grounded theory and next I discuss this and how it affected the analysis of my data set.

### **3.9 Grounded theory**

Grounded theory is an empirical approach focusing on social phenomena. Grounded theory refers to a type of theory that is generated from detailed inspection and analysis of complex qualitative data; it describes a set of techniques that aim to enhance the credibility of a qualitative study through theory-building (Breakwell et al., 2006). Although the data analysis began with largely established pre-set categories, I gradually derived further categories coming originally from the data. I analysed the data without adopting any particular theory in advance; this would avoid possible bias in terms of integrating preconceived rather than evidence-based ideas on the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The method that describes better the procedures I undertook in this study is best described as constant comparison method. According to Glaser and Strauss (1999, p.102) 'the purpose of the constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis is to generate theory ... by using explicit coding and analytic procedures'. The constant comparative method enables a researcher to compare new data with the categories already developed so that s/he constantly redesigns and reintegrates theoretical positions in the already existing data (Cohen et al., 2007).

The coding of the data was conducted according to the principles of the constant comparative method and undertaken simultaneously with data collection. I have presented above a detailed description of how I renamed, deleted and created the codes of the analysis which has obviously taken multiple stages. The first stage included the application of the roughly pre-set codes in the collected data by analysing bits of data that seemed to be important and could provide an answer to the research questions. Gradually, there was a need to establish more codes; their evolution was not linear though since it was continuously interrelated with concerns, ideas, prior knowledge and knowledge I was constantly gaining from literature review and critical questions arising from data collection which helped me identify significant processes and direct further inquiry (Charmaz, 2006). The second stage of analysis included the identification of similar codes and their integration into broader categories. Those categories included common themes and patterns which ultimately helped me conceptualise and further develop my analytic framework. An important element throughout this process has been memo writing which helped me provide analytic definitions of each code, capture raising issues, pinpoint possible connections between the codes and clarify already existing ones.

### **3.10 Settings**

#### **3.10.1 Forest Nursery – Daily programme**

##### 3.10.1.1 General information

The Forest Nursery is located in the centre of a small city in the South of England. It is a mixed community nursery with 40 children aged from 3 to 7 years; there are only two places per session accommodating children with special needs. All the children attend 5 sessions per week and almost all of them come from countries other than England including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Somalia, Poland, Afghanistan, China, Turkey, Iran and Portugal. The nursery is attached to a bigger primary school also attended by children from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

### 3.10.1.2 Nursery staff: qualifications and training

There are four members of staff, who are teachers, all of them taught Reception children (age four to five years) – which is the first year of maintained schooling in England – and who have worked in the nursery between 3 and 21 years; they have English nationality and varying qualifications. There are six other members of staff who do not have teaching qualifications and do not come originally from England. However, their contribution is of great importance since they play with the children throughout the day and they contribute towards the facilitation of the English language by translating the teacher’s phrases. This is in accordance with the nursery’s most recent Ofsted Inspection which rated the quality of provision as ‘good’ and ‘very good’.

The staff structure is hierarchical with Mrs Sale as the playgroup leader and coordinator of the whole nursery. She is officially ‘in charge’ but most decisions are taken democratically. Each member of staff acts as a key worker for group teams, responsible for monitoring children’s progress and taking care of children’s needs. Occasionally new key workers cover absences. There are around ten other assistant members who have a complementary role in the nursery playing and interacting with the children. Part of the team is the speech therapist too who visits the nursery nearly every two months to evaluate the children’s progress and have extended discussions with the responsible key workers and the group leaders.

### **3.10.2 A nursery day**

The High/Scope curriculum is used in the Forest nursery where each nursery session lasts three hours and according to the curriculum consists of six distinct periods: The registration and message time includes the children’s obligation to find their names and fix them on coloured boards and their welcoming from the teachers in the main nursery area. The teachers announce the daily events to the children and inform them about the area they have to go that day with their team and do their planning through playful ways including songs and other activities. During planning time children and teachers discuss their daily play plans in small group activities that are initially adult led but still provide enough time for the children to express verbally



themselves, share their interests with the group and announce the play areas they would like to play in that day.

Work time is interchangeably used with play time where children play freely indoors and/or outdoors and are able to explore, experiment, create and learn through their active involvement in small, large or individual activities across the different areas of the nursery. The teacher's role during planning time is multifaceted swapping between different roles of supporter, mediator and actively involved adult. Following this comes the put away time signalled by particular phrases verbally expressed by a teacher; everyone tidies up the nursery and prepares for carpet time. Carpet time finds children and teachers gathered together on the carpet in a circle. It is an adult initiated time including activities like singing, reading stories aiming to enable learning through playful activities. Carpet time comes to an end when the teachers inform the children about the area they should go to with their team and key workers for team time. The final session of team time is divided further into three periods: remembering time where the children remember what they have played with that day and discuss this with their peers and teachers, snack time, and activity time during which the children do a special activity for that day with the teacher. Further details about the High/Scope Curriculum in section 2.10.1.

### **3.10.3 Forest Nursery – Layout**

In the paragraph below I provide a detailed description of the nursery's indoor and outdoor space so as to enable the reader to understand better the setting as the context.

#### 3.10.3.1 Outdoor space

Forest Nursery is surrounded by bushes and foliage high enough to make it difficult for a visitor to recognise the school's location. A small sign somewhere behind the bushes catches my eye as I approach the entrance with a slight slope leading to two different doors. The first door leads to the primary school surrounded by big windows and the ability to see through them the word 'Reception' whilst the second door leads to the nursery's garden which is divided into uncovered and covered areas.

A green plastic carpet covers the uncovered part of the garden which has different materials all around the playground including a slide in the middle of the garden, children's bicycles in different colours depicting different child heroes, a wooden bench where some books are lying, a wooden windmill, a wooden chalkboard. This side of the garden has a small path covered by trees and bushes where the children can walk and pass through. Around the small tree-covered path there is a wooden pavement with brightly coloured numbers for the children to park their bicycles while a few metres away there are small colourful trampolines, wooden swings in shapes of horses and trains, black tyres dispersed in different corners and a wooden child's table with toys and books already used and left in an anarchic way by the children.

The second, covered part of the garden has a big sand square area surrounded by a wooden bench, setting the area's boundaries, together with a big tree trunk going through the roof, one of the places children hide when playing hide and seek outdoors. Easily accessible plastic shelves and buckets full of toys and animals in varying shapes and colours, a wooden small table with two child sized chairs accompanied by colourful pens not yet used by the children make up the other half of the garden.

Access inside and outside the garden is possible through a red, glass sliding door enabling movement in and out of the nursery during free play time. The presence of a notice next to the door makes me realise its possible importance for the nursery. I am going through it and remember that I have seen an identical one in the jumping area which focuses on the way teachers should suggest solutions to possible disagreements between the children – the last reference to an adult role as a mediator gives me a sense of equality and fairness. *'Solving problems and resolving conflicts: approach calmly, acknowledge feelings, gather information, restate the problem, ask for solutions and choose one together, be prepared to give follow up support'* is in word processed text, with a hand-written addition: *'remember, do not solve children's problems for them. Adult role is mediator not solver'*.

### 3.10.3.2 Indoor space

#### *Welcoming hall*

The main nursery entrance for the children and the parents is at the back of the nursery; it seems to be hidden, surrounded by a basketball court and a pedestrian zone. The welcoming hall, a rather small place in the nursery, welcomes the children and their parents while it gives the visitor a sense of brightness coming from the windows decorated with children's and teachers' smiley faces. Flyers sparingly placed all over the hall provide varying information and focus on family events inside and outside the nursery. An invitation to parents to play with their children through vividly coloured pictures depicting children and parents hugging captured my attention and made me smile while another one gave details of support: *'Need information and advice on childcare, early education, activities for children or working in childcare? Contact these numbers... We all find life difficult at times! Sure Start family support is here to help you'*.

#### *Main nursery space*

The nursery's indoor space has a large carpeted area for whole group activities (registration, group story reading, music and movement) and is spacious enough to include many different corners and at the same time to be able to host in each corner five to eight children with their teacher. The main thematic corners are easily identifiable through labels indicating the name of each area. Each and every area is overlooked by windows leading to the nursery's garden and shedding much light when sunny.

Each thematic corner has a circular child-sized table and six to eight child-sized chairs. Most of the furnishings are made from light wood while the walls are decorated with children's paintings that are either at, or a bit below, children's eye level. Two specific corners, the puzzle area and the home area, are covered by colourful photos portraying children at their home, sitting with a member of the family, usually their mothers, while the nursery's multicultural quality is evident in some of the play areas decorated with different cultural objects that have been introduced to the children during the welcoming and message time.

The play areas have a wide range of different materials that can be easily reached by the children without an adult's support, in open, easy to handle cupboards with contents identified through picture labels. Finally, an interactive blackboard decorates one of the main nursery walls displaying pictures taken from children's indoor and outdoor play activities. It is placed in a very central place which can be seen by everyone and is used by the teachers for morning greetings and group activities taking place in the nursery.

### 3.10.3.3 Play corners

The nursery has eight different areas for the children to choose and play during free play time.

#### *Building end*

The building end is a rather spacious carpeted area with a 'jungle' theme; it is decorated with yellow shiny paper and a green veil lying on the table and displaying animals of different sizes and colours. Its name, which is not easily identifiable, is written in many languages including English. The building area includes easy access cupboards and a wide variety of differently coloured and textured materials to build with, put together and take apart: large hollow blocks, unit blocks, trucks and cars, train tracks, pickup trucks, boxes, cartons, small vehicles and animals, construction and farm vehicles, planes, helicopters and more.

#### *Music corner*

A two level wooden bench sets the boundary between the building end and the music corner. 'Come and play' in blue letters stuck on the music corner's wall is the phrase that caught my eye in my first visit there and made me approach to see how 'we' could play. The wall is dressed with gold paper and pictures of children playing with some of the musical instruments. Nearby, I can see pictures of black men wearing traditional suits and hats, sitting on the floor and playing tambourines. An illustrated picture, obviously taken from a book, covers a big part of the wall and presents a playful and rather happy scene of children dancing and smiling while keeping different musical instruments. Silhouettes of musical instruments cut by hand in black paper are stuck on the wall.

The music corner floor hosts a wide variety of musical instruments, many of them novel and intriguing. A tambourine, a piano, clacquets, xylophones, drums, maracas, bells, triangles, drums, whistles and harmonicas are among the instruments. Under each of those musical instruments there is an illustrated picture and outline label making it easier for the foreigner to start identifying some and learning others. Song rhymes that the children and their teachers sing during carpet time and illustrated pictures cover the lowest part of the transparent wall, depicting in vivid colours different musical instruments accompanied by their name: ‘veena, khol, tanpura, gopi chand, been, sitar, table, dholak’ illustrating the value of multicultural diversity within the preschool context.

#### *Home end*

Outdoor light from the windows leading to the garden brings a bit of nature inside in the home end. Stirring, cooking and pouring are among the activities children are engaged with while using the cooking equipment consisting of a wooden kitchen, an oven, boxes with playdoh, a plastic vacuum cleaner and more household equipment. Accessible cupboards store plastic vegetables of varying colours and sizes while the front part of the window is full of kitchen equipment that the children can use in the home end accompanied by illustrated pictures. The area is divided in two by a wooden oven and a gap leads to a corner where children can find a small bed and lie down. The wall is wholly covered by red paper that includes photos with children’s names and printed pictures with vivid colours and stones, feathers, shells and leaves stuck on paper. Dressing up clothes and accessories are hanging on hooks and a full height wooden mirror completes the area.

#### *Puzzle area*

The puzzle area with its yellow child-sized round table and six chairs has natural light. Two wooden tables with labelled shelves storing, outlined by an illustrated picture, materials and animals of varied nature, shape and colour including wooden puzzles bring different themes and levels of difficulty to the area. The walls are covered in pictures drawn by the children and children’s family pictures from different parts of their houses, focusing mainly on those children that have just started attending the nursery – in the middle there is the big label ‘Welcome to our new families’.

### *Jumping area*

The jumping area sets its boundaries with a square, blue mat and many other smaller colourful mats in different shapes and sizes. It is half surrounded by two wooden frameworks and covered by posters and pictures. The first poster has the phrase ‘all children play’ depicting four children sitting on mats, playing with small balls and laughing, creating a happy ambience and making it easier for a visitor to imagine how the children play in the jumping area. I see the word ‘jumping’ in English and four other languages and children’s pictures of animals; each picture has the name of its creator.

In visible places there are reminders to the children and the teachers of some of the rules that should be followed in the jumping area ‘Only 4 can jump. Do not climb on the sides’. In black typed letters seeming rather strict it says, ‘Rules: only 4 children are allowed, their shoes should be off, shapes are for building, rolling, sitting or climbing (not throwing), no contact fighting, stay on jumping when no shoes are on. Children may need to be reminded from time to time. Give them warning if behaving inappropriately’, and again, ‘Solving problems and resolving conflicts: approach calmly, acknowledge feelings, gather information, restate the problem, ask for solutions and choose one together, be prepared to give follow up support’.

### *Painting end*

The painting area is rather big with child-sized round tables and chairs and a smooth tile floor. One of the tables is covered with pieces of newspaper for the children to paint during free play time and team time and another one, by a summery display, stores different art materials like stones, shells and beads the children can use. The water table is also part of the painting area including water play materials like ducks, small boats and water windmills.

Two big posters on one of the walls captured my attention immediately: the first depicts a smiling child riding a bicycle and giving a hand to another child with physical disabilities sitting in a wheelchair with the phrase ‘the world is full of friends just waiting to be found’; the second is more literal depicting a child with clay in his hands and the title ‘High/Scope key experiences – creating presentation – drawing and painting’.

### *Writing end*

The writing table has ten chairs and a sign 'our pictures and writing' written in English and other languages. The wall is mainly covered with children's creations made from coloured papers while a discreet notice reminds the teachers of the materials the area must include at the beginning of each session and are likely to be used by the children.

### *Computer end*

The computer area has two computers opposite each other. The first computer is integrated into a plastic purple toy set with a couch for two and a plastic keyboard while the second is placed on a computer desk with a screen at children's eye level and space big enough to 'host' one or two children. The wall has a number of messages written on different small posters saying '*Learning through play. Play helps personal, social and emotional development, communication and language, mathematical development, knowledge and understanding, physical development and creative development*'. Descriptive illustrated pictures of smiling children playing in twos or threes in different places in the nursery give a playful and happy note in the end.

### *Book corner*

The book corner has one main couch and six child-sized chairs, a big window shedding light into the room and a floor covered with a white cosy handmade blanket. It is bordered with a colourful curtain. A table houses a CD radio and some of the corner's books with some others being stored on a wooden easy access shelf. The book corner is full of illustrative drawings and paintings, stories including people of different races, ages and even physical disabilities and books in the languages spoken by the children in the nursery. Each wall is covered both with drawings created by the children and an alphabet poster. A blackboard used by the teachers to place the books while they are reading them to the children is part of the book corner too.

### *You and Me room*

The 'You and Me' room is used by the teachers only when they want to play individually with a child with learning difficulties and occasionally with typically developing children. It is separated from the rest of the nursery and its door has a

black-and-white picture depicting a shorter and a taller figure holding hands. The room contains two tables and chairs and a big window leading to the garden. One table is used by the teachers as a place to put the different toys while the other one is used by the teacher and the child during the play time.

### **3.10.4 Butterfly Nursery – Daily Programme**

#### 3.10.4.1 General information

The Butterfly nursery is located in the suburbs of a city in South of England. It is located on top of a small hill, close to the sea and surrounded by trees. It is an urban preschool and is part of a block with two other schools. There are 52 children on roll who attend either morning or afternoon sessions and their age ranges from two to five years. The setting supports a minority of children with learning difficulties and children whose native language is other than English. The preschool operates for five days a week during school term times.

#### 3.10.4.2 Nursery's staff: qualifications and training

There are nine staff members working with the children either on a full time or a part time basis. All hold, or are working towards, a childcare qualification. Of the full time staff, the level of qualifications range from five to two. The structure is hierarchical with Mrs Baker as the headteacher and coordinator of the nursery officially 'in charge'. Specific members of staff act as key workers only for the children with special needs while the rest are responsible for monitoring children's progress and taking care of each and every child's needs. The setting receives support from local early years authorities and is a member of the Pre-School Learning Alliance. The quality of provision was rated in the most recent Ofsted Inspection as 'good'.

### **3.10.5 A nursery day**

Each nursery session lasts three hours and has a rather flexible schedule. The welcoming and registration time includes the children's obligation to find their names and 'post' them in a box. They are always welcomed by the head teacher while the



rest of the teachers wait for them in the welcoming room to register them. Lining up, being counted and playing outdoors for approximately half an hour is also part of the children's daily nursery routine which includes play indoors for thirty more minutes before lunch time. After lunch time, children have the opportunity to play for approximately twenty minutes outdoors and the rest of the time listen to a book being read by one of their teachers before the end of the shift.

### **3.10.6 Butterfly Nursery - Layout**

#### 3.10.6.1 Outdoor area

The nursery is attached to a block of primary schools on top of a small hill, making it difficult for a visitor to find it and even access it. A big door in the entrance of the whole complex, leads to each one of the schools located in the same area. A label in the entrance guides the visitor towards the different areas of the complex while colourful child footprints lead towards the nursery's colourful door. The word 'welcome' is on the door in many different languages though it is not obvious at first sight; there is also a small label naming the nursery.

A big garden surrounded by grey, steel fencing is opposite to the entrance. The garden is a rather big area, divided into two parts by wooden equipment. The first part is covered by blue carpet and 'hosts' a big wooden boat, a plastic, multi-coloured millipede and a wooden beam. The rest of the garden is partly covered by grass and asphalted surface. Five wooden steps leading to the top of a small hill and a wooden bench are the places where children can sit, climb, run or play during free play time. A squared place full of flowers and small buses is part of this area and very close to a wooden star on the floor.

#### 3.10.6.2 Indoor space

##### *Welcoming area*

The welcoming area is part of the wider open plan area and its boundaries are not clearly set. It is an area used by the children to hang their coats and later play during free play time. The area contains mainly shelves with documents including Ofsted

reports and other flyers sparingly placed on the wall providing information for parents and focusing on children's development while the overall impression is of a place used for storage purposes. A small blackboard used for registration hangs next to the door, noting the number of the children attending the nursery, the number of staff, volunteers and guests.

#### *Main nursery space*

The main nursery area is open plan. The first impression for a visitor entering the nursery's indoor space is a lively, colourful space. Pictures of children playing in the nursery welcome the visitor and give a strong sense of the children's existence. The nursery is covered with blue carpet while the walls are light yellow, though different colour and decoration are used to indicate each thematic area. The furnishing varies according to the activities taking place in each area, though the identity is not easily readable. Some areas include matching circular child-sized tables and chairs while others consist only of toys and other equipment.

#### 3.10.6.3 Play corners

The Butterfly nursery has seven different thematic areas where the children can play and interact during free play time.

#### *Writing end*

The writing end is part of the wider open plan area located very close to the main entrance. A round child-sized table is the place where the children can find pencils, papers and other drawing materials during free play time. A big window sheds light on this part of the nursery, with paper balloons stuck on the upper part depicting the pictures and names of the teachers. A veil hooked from the ceiling gives a sense of privacy to some children who want to be covered with it during free play time. The 'writing area' label written in three other languages is placed on the bottom end of this wall surrounded by children's photos.

#### *Home end*

The door of the home end has numbers sparingly stuck all over it with a mirror depicting faces and describing emotions. The room includes a child sized wooden

bench for the children to sit and play, while the combination of blue all over the room and the light coming from the big window gives a sense of familiarity. Cooking equipment, wooden oven, kitchen, ironing board and other household equipment is part of the home end. Accessible cupboards store plastic vegetables and other types of foods for the children to play. A big shelf full of toys like tills, dolls etc. is accessible only with the teacher's permission. The ceiling is covered by squared papers depicting numbers on one side and geometrical shapes of the same number on the other side.

### *Music corner*

Music corner is part of the main nursery area where 'The Early Years Foundation Stage Principles' are stuck on the wall and catch an adult's eye. The wall is dressed with blue paper and pictures of children playing with some of the musical instruments with their teachers. The small table hosts a variety of musical instruments; some are readily available and others are introduced by the teachers during free play time. A shelf not accessible to the children stores many CDs and cassettes below which at the children's eye level the phrase 'music corner' is written in three languages; a musical note hangs from the wall. An illustrated picture named 'Goldilocks', including musical notes and a child's figure using sign language are part of this corner.

### *Quiet area*

Quiet and computer areas are located in a shared place with unclear boundaries. The quiet area gives the sense of an overcrowded place which contains a wide variety of toys, including pianos, puzzles, books, with some of them laying on the table, some being stored in accessible cupboards and others lying on the floor. The wall is divided into two distinct parts, the first covered by pictures of labelled shapes is far above children's eye level, the second includes a big black cloud inviting children to look carefully and find a number from those accessible to the children, depicting objects and animals.

### *Computer area*

The computer area includes two computers and four child sized chairs. The wall of the computer area is dressed with a blue shiny paper and covered with a clock, the shape of number 1 and the label 'computer' which is almost hidden below the computer screens. A white cupboard in a non-accessible place for children stores a wide range

of documents used solely by the teachers and adds to a sense of messiness in the crowded area.

### *Sensory room*

The sensory room is the second room of the nursery separated by a door partly covered in silver paper. Entrance to the room is accompanied by darkness and a sense of mystery in the ambience. The most striking object in the room is a water tube which continuously alternates the water colours and gives a playful note. A bunch of colourful fibre-optic lights complement the water tube. A projector, which works only after children's request, presents vivid animated themes from the sea world. The ceiling is decorated with a big plastic boat and many differently coloured and textiled gift wraps while the floor includes toys ready to enrich the sensory experiences of the children including big plastic balls, mirrors, bears and other equipment.

### *Common area*

The common area involves three different parts including the kitchen, the painting area, the messy area, the sand area and the water area. The areas are distinguishable not through labels but from the equipment each of them involves. The painting area includes a painting table, a dry rack and some water colours; one of the walls has a blue net with some shells and children's drawings. The messy area is not always open but when used the children have the opportunity to play with cooking materials like water and flour. The water area is used occasionally. It includes a bucket with water where only four children are able to play with many different plastic toys coming mainly from the sea world and including sharks, ducks, fishes.

## **3.11 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the methodological issues relevant to this study. I presented and discussed the philosophical stance adopted in the current project, the validity issues related to accuracy and trustworthiness of the study and the theoretical framework adopted to gain important insights explore and understand the play of a child with autism from a holistic point of view. I further presented the methods used in order to collect the data and triangulate them. An extended description of the child's personal profile combined with the play context in which she was observed

was also included; a detailed description of the preschool setting was also provided. Next, in *Chapter 4* I present descriptive vignettes and discuss in detail the play of two children with autism and how this evolved in the naturalistic environment of two inclusive preschool settings.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CASE STUDY FINDINGS**

The findings initially take the form of the two case studies. I now provide a detailed description of this study's participants introducing the children with autism by presenting narrative vignettes which focus on the children and their families. Vicky's ability to play and interact both with her teachers and peers will be the first part to be presented and discussed. Tom's experimentation within his setting will be the second part. The chapter includes illustrative examples and a discussion of the children's play activities as they were unravelled and evolved within their inclusive preschool settings, with or without the support of their teachers and the active involvement of their peers.

#### **4.1 Children and their play contexts**

##### **Case study 1: A child at play – Vicky at Forest Nursery**

#### **4.1.1 Vicky's family**

Vicky came to England with her family when she was almost two years old. Her parents come from Gambia and their native language is Akku and Punjabi. Her father works in the private sector and her mother does not work. They came to England for 'a better life' as Vicky's mother told me. Vicky does not have any siblings at the moment but she will have in a few months. At home, Vicky's parents used to talk to her in Punjabi, but they explained that since Vicky was diagnosed with autism and after the doctor's recommendation to use a single language for medical and developmental reasons, they opted to start talking to her only in English.

#### **4.1.2 Diagnosis**

It was not until Vicky was three years old that her mother became concerned about her development as it was then that Vicky suddenly stopped talking having already started verbalising some words. This was the main reason she visited a paediatrician.

The paediatricians and speech therapists officially described Vicky, on her Statement of Special Educational Needs, as a child ‘who fulfils the diagnosis of autism’ suggesting that Vicky showed difficulties in communicating with her parents and other adults and exhibited stereotyped behaviours. Specifically, she showed particular preferences for specific toys, did not make any eye contact with her parents and showed reduced social relatedness with people surrounding her, including her parents. The Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) (Lord, Rutter, DiLavore, & Risi, 1999) was used by the paediatricians to assess Vicky’s play skills (ADOS is a validated observation tool used to diagnose children with autism through the application of many different activities that the children are required to go through and be assessed). Visits at home, a structured play assessment and the administration of a detailed interview using the Autism Diagnosed Interview-Revised (ADI-R), were the tools used to further assess Vicky’s play, taking into account both the information provided by her parents and the outcomes coming from the formal assessments of her play and communicative skills administered at home.

#### **4.1.3 Vicky’s personal traits**

Vicky was described in her Statement and by her teachers in interview as ‘a happy little girl’, ‘very smiley’. Staff perceptions were based on Vicky’s easy settling into the nursery and the interest she was showing in the activities on offer. This view of Vicky was not wholly shared by Vicky’s mother who said in interview that Vicky ‘is happy when she is in the mood’, referring to the fact that Vicky occasionally talked to her mother and was eager to join her in mutual activities like reading a book while at home.

There was a common description of Vicky as a very intelligent autistic child who could do many things alone: her teachers said characteristically ‘Vicky is not going to have problems in her life; she can do many things alone although she is autistic’; ‘she is very bright ... she is very advanced’; ‘she can do quite a lot of things, she can run with a ball, she can roll a ball, she can ride a bike, she can ride a tricycle confidently, she has got very good balance, she is computer wise ... she has taken the computer programs that we’ve got here above and beyond any level I’ve ever seen a child taking here’ (teacher’s interview). Summing her up, the nursery’s staff described

Vicky as ‘a really high functioning autistic child’ (teacher’s comment recorded in field notes).

Shyness was one basic characteristic of Vicky seen by her teachers and her mother: ‘Vicky is an active but shy girl’ (teachers), ‘she is shy and some times she feels shy’ (mother). When Vicky first started attending the nursery she did not seem to feel comfortable with the teachers and this was described by them: ‘Vicky had difficulties to trust us ... she was turning her back and was not looking at us’ (field notes). Vicky gradually became more confident as her teacher stated, ‘when she first started, if somebody came over to us when she was playing, you could see her physically cringe; she doesn’t do that anymore, she can tolerate them being near her, she can tolerate them joining in with the game with her’ (teacher’s interview).

Difficulties in the area of reciprocal social interaction skills were evident in that ‘she (Vicky) smiles during physical play activities – chase/tickle – but does not return a purely social smile’ (Statement). Her Statement focused on her strengths too – the fact that Vicky was enjoying activities taking place next to an adult, ‘she showed clear enjoyment of interaction with an adult when playing with the jack in the box together’, and the nursery report noted that ‘she was able to turn take with an adult and wait for ‘go’ in ‘ready, steady, go’ games.

Vicky’s level of independence was identified by her teachers and her mother. Vicky wanted to do many things alone, without an adult’s support, and this was more obvious every time she was offered help and she did not want to accept it – turning her back or pushing away the person’s hand. I recorded one of those days when Vicky did not want to accept her teacher’s help but found she had to:

*Vicky was in the office and was holding in her hands the cardigan of ‘Thomas the tank engine’. Mrs Roms offered her help to Vicky by saying to her ‘do you need help Vicky?’ but Vicky turned her back to her teacher, started saying ‘zip out’ and tried to close her zip without her teacher’s help; however, she was not able to close it alone and for that reason she turned her body again towards her teacher, touched the cardigan’s bottom and extended it towards*



*her teacher's side, showing to her that she wanted help. Her teacher closed Vicky's zip and Vicky left the room.*

Another similar event showing that Vicky did not want to accept other people's help and wanted to experiment alone at first was when she did not want to accept Mrs Baker's help:

*One day they were all playing in the middle of the nursery and Vicky was trying to join together two plastic pieces and make a figure with hands and feet without success. Mrs Baker, who was sitting on the floor next to Vicky, put her hands on top of Vicky's hands and tried to help her put the pieces in the right place; however Vicky softly pushed Mrs Baker's hand away and Mrs Baker told her then 'you want to do it alone, go on' and smiled at Vicky while she turned to me and told me 'I like this independence'.*

There was no consensus among her Statement, her teachers' comments, her mother's interview and the field notes concerning the way Vicky expressed her needs to ask for something. Vicky was described in her Statement as a child that was able 'to use another person's finger or hand as a tool to request an action', while her teacher suggested that 'when she needs help, she's got a look that she gives me and I know when she needs help ... so I am always at hand and always somewhere close by so that just a look can mean 'can you help me' and then again it's getting hard to say 'I need your help' (teacher's interview). For that reason the teachers were asking Vicky to say the phrase 'help me' each time she had a request. However, this was too difficult for Vicky who instead was pointing at the objects she was interested in. Her mother said that at home when Vicky wants something she will talk to her and ask for help: 'sometimes if she doesn't know she asks 'help'' (mother's interview).

Concerning Vicky's play, her Statement referred to the fact that her play actions did not vary from day to day and were focused on copying other people's actions, e.g. 'Vicky copies her mother while she is dressing up and putting her shoes on' (Statement). This view was echoed by Vicky's teachers who expressed the opinion that Vicky was mimicking other children's actions when they were initiating interactions with her: 'she is mimicking their actions and then it becomes a game

because that's what they did, she does it back, they like it, she does like it too' (teacher's interview); 'she (another girl) was saying something loudly and Vicky was copying her and obviously it wasn't really that she was interacting with her but it was like she was practising' (teacher's interview).

#### **4.1.4 Vicky's play preferences**

Trains and more specifically 'Thomas the tank engine' were Vicky's favourite toys in the nursery. She liked playing with this during free play time and sometimes she would bring it with her to the 'you and me' room too. Apart from the toy 'Thomas the tank engine' the nursery had a woollen cardigan depicting on its back with vivid blue, red and black colours Thomas's smiley face; Vicky mostly wore it when the weather was cold although the cardigan was not her size.

Vicky's preference and ability in computer skills had been noticed by everyone. Her Statement noted that during the home visit Vicky was playing with her toys particularly with her computer. This ability in computer skills was emphasised by her mother who told me, 'she likes playing with the computer a lot ... she can watch and type now', and by her teacher who expressed the opinion that Vicky has a natural ability on computers:

*She just seems to have a really natural ability on the computer, she can swap from one program to another, she can watch you do something and then imitate what I've done so when I show her that I want to come out of it I pressed alt-control-alt-delete twice and then flashed up on the screen and it's got 'end the task', 'new task' and then there is another option and I talked her through and I only did that twice. She can do that now ... her big strength is the computer skills, I think she can go really far with those ... she is computer wise (teacher's interview).*

Vicky liked playing with different musical instruments with a special preference for a saxophone. Vicky could find this in the nursery and could take it with her into the 'you and me' room. One day and after Mrs Hogg had given Vicky her PECS choices and asked her where she would like to play next, Vicky formed the phrase 'I want

saxophone' using the PECS strip and gave it back to her teacher. Mrs Hogg gave the saxophone, which was in an inaccessible place, to Vicky and Vicky started blowing it. Mrs Hogg explained 'Vicky loves the saxophone and wants to play with it all the time'.

#### **4.1.5 Vicky's involvement in shared play activities**

Vicky was also defined by all parties as a child that was not bothered by being among other children. Her statement noted that, 'Vicky plays alongside the other children', and her teachers recognised that Vicky felt comfortable being alongside other children:

*Vicky preferred to go and play in the garden that day, she was standing in the middle of the garden, among 3 other children, making bubbles and smiling while the other children were laughing, jumping and trying to catch and pop the bubbles. Mrs Lake (one of Vicky's teachers) who was standing very close to Vicky looking at her said to Vicky's one-to-one teacher and me, 'she is not bothered by being among them', smiled and left the garden while both Mrs Hogg and I looked at each other and agreed with her' (extract from field notes).*

This understanding of Vicky was shared by her mother too who said that Vicky did not have any problem, compared to before when she was not going at the nursery, being among other children, playing and talking with them.

Vicky seemed to be willing to participate and join in shared activities when invited by her peers at the nursery; as her teacher explained, 'she is not choosing to be separate and alone from everybody else, she actually appears to want and like it when they initiate interactions with her, so if another child touches her arm and then runs away, she will giggle and chase after them and touch their arm' (interview). The nursery report noted that, 'Vicky shows interest in the activities on offer' and 'she joins in with actions'. Although Vicky was willing to participate in joint activities when invited, she was not able to initiate actions as explained in one of her teacher's

interviews: 'I wouldn't say she initiates interactions with the other children although she is starting to look like she wants to'.

Vicky's statement noted that things that Vicky has seen on the TV are copied and repeated faithfully rather than integrated into her play. One of the stories that Vicky liked watching at home that period was 'Kipper' and according to her mother, she was first watched it on DVD and then she was repeating it, 'now she likes Kipper ... she watches DVD and then she will repeat it' (mother's interview). This repetition was more obvious in a video extract where Vicky was in the main nursery area among two other girls who were pretending to talk on the phone. In the same area, Vicky's one-to-one teacher and Mrs Lake joined the children in their play and started pretending to talk to them on the phone. Although the other two girls started talking and exchanging ideas with their teacher, Vicky held the phone to her ear and started talking to Kipper. Even when Mrs Hogg moved closer to her and asked her if she was talking to Kipper, Vicky did not respond and kept talking to him:

*'I can't sleep, I can't sleep' said Vicky while talking to the phone. 'Who are you talking to on the phone? Are you talking to your mummy?' Mrs Hogg asked Vicky, but Vicky was looking at the plastic phone she was playing with. Vicky held the phone to her ear again and with a thunderous voice said 'hello, hello, it's me Kipper.' 'Vicky who are you speaking to on the telephone?' asked Mrs Hogg and did not get any answer again while Vicky had started looking at Katia and Ann who were standing very close to her and talking on the phone with Mrs Lake who was sitting opposite to them. After a while Vicky held the telephone to her ear again and with a more silent voice and a mouth very close to it said 'hello tiger I can't sleep' and Mrs Hogg who was looking at what Vicky was saying carefully, asked her 'Vicky are you telling a Kipper story? Are you Kipper talking to tiger about not being able to sleep? ... 'Vicky ... should I call you Kipper?' but Vicky was not giving Mrs Hogg eye contact. 'You've been reading Kipper at home?' asked Mrs Hogg but Vicky did not respond again and although she stood still, looked at Mrs Hogg and seemed like she was listening to what Mrs Hogg was saying she turned her back and left' (extract from video observations).*

#### 4.1.6 Vicky's difficulties and development

One characteristic noted in her statement and identified during the home visits by the professionals assessing Vicky's skills was that at the same time that Vicky was playing on the computer she would 'run commentaries on her actions, use a lot of jargon and phrases she had heard on previous occasions – "who are you talking about?" – repeating them many times but not directing them to any of the adults in the room'. This was in accordance with field observations where Vicky was talking to herself preferring most of the time to repeat the phrase 'oh no it's broken' in a loud and strict voice while nothing was broken.

*Vicky was sitting in front of the pc and had just started playing a game where she had to categorise different objects by sending them into smiley blue bins. I was standing behind her when she started talking to herself saying 'oh, dear' 'oh no it's broken' in a really loud voice. Mrs Roms was sitting in the same area observing another child playing while Mrs Mell was sitting in the second computer next to Ian who was playing a game; they both started looking at Vicky who repeated the same phrase twice until Mrs Roms asked Vicky 'oh dear Vicky, what happened? Is there a problem?', but Vicky did not respond and kept looking at the screen. Mrs Mell then who was sitting next to Ian looked at Vicky and told her 'it's not broken Vicky, come here to sit next to Ian sweetheart'. Vicky first looked at Mrs Mell, then left her pc and sat next to Mrs Mell and Ian (extract from field notes).*

Every time that Vicky was asked to talk in front of a group of people she would physically cringe. Each time she was asked to express herself during planning or remembering time and it was her turn to talk in front of the other children, she shut her eyes and covered her ears with her hands, her body shook and her facial expressions indicated dislike. This was noted by the speech therapist visiting the school occasionally to assess Vicky's progress and by her teachers who highlighted this difficulty by saying, 'once she becomes familiar with you she can be quite confident and quite assertive but when she is in a group situation, that's when you see her struggling a little bit really' (one-to-one teacher).

Below there is a typical extract of when Vicky was asked to talk in front of other children:

*During team time, every child had to join a team and sit in one of the nursery's areas. The children were sitting at children's size round tables waiting for their teachers to come bringing with them their snack too. Vicky sat in one of the children's chairs, waiting patiently and quietly while she was looking around while all the other children were talking to each other. Mrs Hogg sat next to Vicky and after a few seconds Mrs Hogg arrived with a 'little man'. Mrs Sale got a miniaturised boy in her hand and started pretending she was having a dialogue with him: 'where are you gonna go little man?' while she was putting the little man very close to her ear pretending to listen to what he had to say to her. All the children were looking at Mrs Sale really carefully with their eyes being 'stuck' on her face and so did Vicky who was occasionally smiling too. 'Oh he is going to Vicky' said Mrs Sale to the children, looked at Vicky and asked her 'can you tell us where were you playing today Vicky?' but Vicky went suddenly rigid, closed her eyes, started shaking, screwing up her face and moving her lips. Mrs Hogg, who was sitting next to Vicky, bent her body very close to her and when a few seconds had passed, she started encouraging Vicky to talk by asking her to say to Mrs Hogg the things she had played that day 'Vicky would you like to tell us where you played today' said Mrs Hogg in a soft voice to Vicky who had started shaking again and had still her eyes closed; Vicky did not respond again. Mrs Hogg talked for her finally and told Mrs Sale 'we read a book about snow today' and Mrs Sale asked Vicky 'was that the same book we read yesterday Vicky? Was it the book with the tiger or with the lion?' but Vicky did not answer again while she was still shaking and had a facial expression like she was trying to say that she did not want to talk. Mrs Sale asked Vicky finally 'did you finish Vicky, telling us?' Vicky nodded positively, stopped shaking and Mrs Sale went on with the other children (extract from field notes).*

This was an example of a typical day that Vicky did not feel comfortable talking in front of the other children. According to the speech therapist this behaviour seemed to happen 'due to lack of confidence' (field notes – speech therapist). Reluctance to talk was not happening, however, in the 'you and me' room where Vicky was behaving in

a totally different way. This difference was highlighted in her teacher's interviews when talking about trying to find out ways to make her 'voice heard': 'Our role is to encourage her language and encourage her eye contact and the communication with people' (Mrs Sale's interview); 'I am trying to encourage her to speak, initially to me and then with everybody else when she has the confidence to use her voice' (Vicky's one-to-one teacher). To help Vicky express herself through the use of pictures and to talk more, the teachers used a PECS book (Picture Exchange Communication System). In the 'you and me' room Vicky was responding to her teacher's prompts, talking more and making eye contact with her. Her teacher explained, 'if we were in the little room she (Vicky) tells you but when she was out she is saying no', referring to the fact that Vicky was refusing to talk in a similar situation outside the little room. For that reason the teachers were using PECS to encourage Vicky to talk more through play and things she was interested in; 'we are trying to help her with PECS – you know obviously we are trying to find things she wants to play with and get her to ... sort of communicate with the pictures' (teacher's interview). This was recommended in Vicky's statement and by the speech therapist who supported the use of PECS to encourage Vicky's language and let her know what would happen next. The speech therapist suggested to Vicky's teachers, in one of her visits in the nursery, that they could 'choose among different objects that would act as a visual support for her', to develop her confidence so that she would not cringe in front of the other children (field notes – speech therapist).

Vicky's Statement described her as a child who 'was able to show some pretend play by putting teddies to bed, covering them, telling them to go to sleep, then laying next to them and pretending to sleep'. Referring to this type of play Vicky's mother said 'now she plays with more dollies'. This view was not shared by her one-to-one teacher who said that 'there are certain types of play that you never see like pushing a baby doll in a buggy and giving the baby some food ... you never really see her doing that'. Similarly, her teacher explained, '... we thought for example that Vicky would like dolls. Vicky did not feel comfortable with them so we stopped using them' (field notes). However, after the Christmas vacation the staff reported that Vicky had started playing with some dolls in the little room – she was feeding them, changing their panties and putting them to sleep – and this was, according to her one-to-one teacher, due to the fact that Vicky's mother was pregnant.

The detailed account presented above describes Vicky's personal characteristics as they were recorded during field work and reported by Vicky's teachers, speech-therapist and parents. The next section will focus on the description of the nursery's setting and timetable providing general information about the context of this study.

## **4.2 Structured time: Adult led activities**

### **4.2.1 Planning time**

An adult led activity, which illustrates the playful side of a structured activity during planning time, is presented in the first vignette.

*After the welcoming time, Vicky's team goes to the home area where every child can find on the table her/his own small colourful picture depicting an animal. Two of the key workers including Vicky's teacher are among them in case someone needs their help. Vicky stands in front of the table and looks at the pictures trying obviously to find her own among the others and with her finger points to some of them in a playful way. She does not choose until Mrs Hogg stands by her prompting 'which one is yours Vicky?'; Vicky finds her picture then, smiles, stamps her feet on the ground and gazes at her key worker. Mrs Bromley is waiting a few metres away for the children to come, while holding the face of 'Thomas the tank engine'. Mrs Bromley asks them to find a place in the queue, 'get on the train', be ready to choose the place they want to play that day and 'get off the train', by sticking their picture in one of the area's windows. Vicky is looking at Mrs Bromley tentatively while she is talking but she doesn't join the queue like all the other children. Instead she steps back looking at them, waiting until everyone is in the queue. 'Ready?' asks the teacher and starts singing with the children 'puff a train' occasionally making sounds 'tout, tout, tout, tout' while going around the nursery. Vicky's key worker leans her body towards Vicky and asks her in a firm voice accompanied by sign language 'where do you want to go and play? To the painting area?', Vicky shakes her head negatively and looks to the floor while the teacher prompts again giving multiple suggestions 'Water? Scissors' to take negative answers. Finally she asks Vicky 'Do you want to play in the*



*garden?’ Vicky looks at her, nods ‘yes’ and smiles. Mrs Hogg invites Vicky to ‘get off the train’ takes her hand and they both go to the garden’s door to stick Vicky’s picture while Mrs Bromley leads the children towards other nursery areas.*

In this vignette Vicky is required to be part of the group although she does not seem to feel so comfortable and willing to join the group. Within the playful context of this activity, Vicky’s teacher puts a high level of demand on Vicky to play and decide and Vicky has difficulties with both. The key worker takes a rather firm and encouraging stance towards Vicky who is further encouraged to choose among a wide range of activities and express herself through play. The key worker wants obviously to support her language but not to overtake her right to decide; therefore Vicky is continuously prompted by her teacher who gives her alternative suggestions in line with High/Scope recommendations.

On another occasion Vicky’s team goes to the book corner during planning time followed by two key workers.

*All the children sit on the floor in a circle while one of the teachers invites the children to sing with her as they ‘pass the hoop around until it is time to stop’, plan and then leave to go and play in the area they have chosen for that day. Mrs Baker asks each child to talk about his/her plans every time their song finishes and the hoop - with a red spot - stops in a child’s hand. It is Vicky’s turn to plan and talk in front of the other children and the key worker looks at her smiling and asks, ‘What are you going to do today Vicky?’ Vicky shuts her eyes and starts smiling. The key worker prompts her by asking ‘Have you any idea? Can you show me?’ but Vicky is not answering; ‘In the building end? On the carpet’ prompts the key worker again by looking at Vicky, waiting patiently for a response and finally says to Vicky who still smiles and has her eyes shut ‘you can tell me later’ and goes on with two more children. ‘Do you want Vicky to tell me?’ asks the key worker again but Vicky is smiling and looking downwards; the key worker goes on with one more child and then asks Vicky while only two of them have left in the book corner ‘have you thought what do you want to do Vicky?’ Vicky looks at her and says in a*

*cheery voice 'painting'; the key worker smiles - 'off you go Vicky' and Vicky leaves the book corner.*

In this adult led activity, which again has a playful structure, Vicky has many difficulties expressing herself even while her developmental age would suggest better capacity to do so and while she had been attending the nursery for the last four months the demands for a decision are still high. Even though the teacher respects Vicky's need to take her time in order to feel more comfortable and talk, Vicky opts out of talking by shutting her eyes. However, as she is not expected to give an answer on the spot, she gathers herself to express her choice once the group is very small. Limited skills in the English language is unlikely to explain Vicky's difficulties in expressing herself in front of other children as she had been listening to her parents talking in English since she was 18 months old. Shyness in itself is similarly implausible as an explanation for why Vicky reacted in such a way as she was frequently involved in this kind of activity and she had talked in front of other children.

In contrast to the previous vignette where Vicky has difficulty talking in front of the other children is the next vignette where Vicky responds to her teacher's question and takes an active role in the game during planning time in which a small robotic toy is involved.

*Mary having discussed her play plans sends the 'bee-bot' to Vicky and goes playing. Mrs Baker looks at Vicky and describes in a loud voice the bee-bot's action 'it is going forward towards Vicky' and smiles at her 'Where is Vicky going to play today?' Vicky points at some books in the book corner. Mrs Baker explains to the children that Vicky's favourite book is 'nightgarden' while Vicky is looking at her really carefully. 'Anything else?' asks the teacher and Vicky says in a soft voice 'painting' while looking downwards. Both teachers sitting among the children look at me surprised and seem to be happy that Vicky is talking in front of the other children. Her key worker leans towards her and asks her 'what colour painting?'; Vicky looks at her and replies 'painting' again in a soft voice. After that the main key worker asks Vicky again 'where do you want to send your bee-bot'? and unexpectedly for*

*everyone Vicky replies 'Mary' and starts pushing the buttons of the bee-bot that goes to Mary while the teacher thanks her, informs her that she can go and play and goes on with the other children. Vicky's one-to-one teacher sitting next to me tells me in a proud face 'she has got the main idea of these machines' and smiles at me.*

The teacher used the same type of questions she always uses during structured play time. Vicky had a known preference for machines and computers and this may explain the fact that she talked about her play plans in front of the other children instead of shutting her eyes and not talking. In response to Vicky's reply, the teacher tried to further extend Vicky's thinking by asking an open question based on Vicky's already existing knowledge of colours, though without success. Overall this type of play activity helped Vicky to participate and share a playful experience both with her teachers and her peers.

#### **4.2.2 Carpet time**

Carpet time gathers both teachers and children in the middle of the nursery in a cyclical shape. It is an adult led activity that gives the children opportunities to participate in whole group playful activities. The activity presented below takes place after free play time where both teachers and children, including Vicky, have already made snowmen in the nursery's garden and played all together. Vicky seemed to enjoy being among other children talking about snow.

*Teachers and children are all singing and jumping in the main nursery's area during carpet time; so does Vicky who smiles and obviously enjoys the activity. All of them sit on the floor and the teacher asks the children 'who made a snowman at home?' some of the children volunteer answers by shouting while Vicky is just looking at the teacher who goes on 'shall we pretend to make a snowman? What do we need to do? A boy volunteers an answer and suggests the steps they have to follow to make a snowman. The teacher repeats and asks from the children to do the same 'we need to get some snow, put it in the middle, everybody put it in the middle, pat it down and give the right shape, we need to make a head, and put it on the top'. She uses her hands and*

*pretends to put snow in the middle of the circle followed by most of the children but not Vicky who is just looking. 'What does a snowman need?' prompts the teacher in a loud voice and looks at the children to take the answer from a girl 'a carrot for his nose' and all start searching for a nose while the teacher says 'can we find a carrot? Oh I found a carrot put the carrot on his nose' pretending to find the nose on the carpet and using her hands to show she was putting the carrot in his nose. 'What do we need for his eyes? What can we use?' asks the teacher and a girl shouts 'buttons' - 'buttons right, wait I've got buttons in my pocket' the teacher responds pretending to find them in her pocket and putting them on the snowman while counting with her fingers 'one, two buttons, so I've got a carrot nose, two eyes what else does he need?' The children shout 'a mouth' pointing to their mouths; all this time Vicky is just looking either at her teacher or the children talking. 'How should we make his mouth?' the teacher asks and waits for answers while another teacher talks in her own language and explains to some of the children what the teacher just said. The children show with their fingers a curvy movement while the teacher says 'you are gonna draw it with your fingers' and does the same movement with her fingers too saying 'he smiles, he is a happy snow man'; Vicky does the same movement with her fingers too while looking at her teacher and the other children. 'Where could we use our hands?' prompts the teacher and the children shout by using their fingers at the same time 'a hat, and a scarf and gloves' while the teacher repeats the same words and uses her fingers to show that she is wearing them on different parts of her body. She waves her hands and asks the children 'but what do we need for his hands?' raising her hands above her head and the children volunteer answers agreeing finally to put some gloves and make them seem like hands. During all this, Vicky looks downwards or at her teacher while she moves her body like she is dancing being in a happy mood. 'Wow a beautiful snowman you made' says the teacher showing with her hands the middle of the circle and starts singing 'and now we could say funny little snowman round and fat, your button eyes and your very black hat' showing with her fingers the snowman's characteristics while most of the children are singing along with her 'funny little snowman smiles all day when the wind is cold and the sky is grey, funny little snowman sees the sun, quick the snowman run, run,*

*run' otherwise you'll melt' says the teacher while some of the children, including Vicky, copy her hand movements. The teacher brings scarves, gloves and hats and suggests the children pretend that they are snowmen, 'would Mike like to be a snowman?; a girl walks towards her and says 'new children today teacher' and the teacher agrees with her. The teacher closes her eyes and her finger points playfully at two different children who accept to become snowmen. 'Who else wants to be a snowman? Vicky do you want to be a snowman or a snowgirl? Yeh?' Vicky is looking at her 'you can if you want' continues the teacher and Vicky stands still but does not go next to the teacher to get a scarf, gloves and hat. Her one-to-one teacher stands up, goes next to her, extends her hand towards her, 'Vicky come and choose poppet' while Vicky accepts the invitation and goes with her teacher to find the clothes. However, Vicky is not choosing, she is just looking at the teacher talking, she accepts her teacher's suggestion for a hat and chooses a scarf when her teacher gives her two to choose between. 'Go back a little bit altogether' says the teacher and the children stand in the middle of the nursery 'snow people, snowmen, snow girls' and Vicky goes only when prompted by her teacher who is still sitting next to her. 'How many snow people, let's have them altogether, stand up in a line, come on' prompts the teacher talking mainly to Vicky who had chosen to stand behind the rest of the children 'you can join in Vicky, we've got 1,2,3,4,5,6 snow men today' says the teacher in a loud voice, shows with her fingers number 6 and starts singing 'there were 6 little snow men with a scarf and woolly hat, out came the sun and melted one' while one child sits on the floor and pretends to melt by the sun followed by the teacher's voice of melting 'blblblblbl, you gone and that was that'- the child takes off the scarf and the hat and sits back in the circle. 'And now we've got ... ' leaving the children to count although one of the other teachers has already started counting with the children; before they finish Vicky shouts '5', smiles and jumps slightly. Vicky has been left alone in the middle of the nursery and it is her turn to melt when both the teacher and the children sing 'there was one little snowman with a scarf and woolly hat out came the sun and melted down, you are gonna melt away Vicky' Vicky takes off the scarf and hat quickly and sits back in the circle while looking at her teacher smiley. Finally the teacher*

*says 'fantastic snow people, give yourself a pat' and they all start clapping their hands including Vicky who is smiling.*

At the beginning of this play sequence Vicky had difficulties engaging in imaginative play; instead she was looking carefully and occasionally seemed to copy her teacher's and peers' actions. She did not volunteer or talk unless prompted by her teachers, seemingly dependent on their special support. On the one hand, the teacher showed a readiness to 'decode' Vicky's difficulties and immediately offered her help to support and enable her to become actively involved in the group activity. On the other hand, Vicky anticipated her participation in the group by moving her body like she was dancing and this may have been her own way to be a member of the group. However, her difficulty in engaging in imaginative play in this particular play sequence may have been a temporary inability as she had probably not been engaged in this type of play except in the nursery. By the end of the activity she was participating more readily.

#### **4.2.3 Remembering time**

Another adult led activity requires the children to remember and talk about their play that day. Again the format is playful. The children sit at a circle table with two of the key workers among them. Mrs Baker has in front of her children's drawings created during planning time earlier that day; she uses them as car stops and takes a small car that stops on each drawing.

*'Are you ready here it comes brmm, brmm' says Mrs Baker and moves the car on one of the drawings while Kris extends his hand and touches the car to hear both teachers requests to sit down and wait for his turn. It is Vicky's turn to say where she has played that day. Mrs Baker stops on Vicky's drawing and says '... and it says Vicky, Vicky what you were being doing?' and looks at Vicky who hides her face inside her arms while all the other children are looking at her waiting for her to talk. Vicky does not talk and Mrs Baker does not insist; she starts describing what Vicky was doing that day 'she did some lovely jumping' using sign language. Vicky was still hiding her face even when her key worker who is sitting a few chairs away from her, touches her arm and*

*tickles her. Mrs Baker goes on with the snack time and only then Vicky raises her head and starts looking again around.*

Although she was in a happy mood, the teacher did not manage to make Vicky feel comfortable to participate and talk. The fact that Vicky started looking around as soon as this group activity finished may suggest that this was Vicky's own way to show her dislike of it. Video of another remembering time activity showed a similar response from Vicky.

### **4.3 Free play time: Child led activities**

#### **4.3.1 Role of mediator**

During free play time the children are allowed to play freely either indoors or outdoors. The teacher's role is mediator, active player or both.

The following vignette depicts a teacher outdoors in the role of mediator who does not engage actively in children's play but supports them with verbal prompts and facilitates the flow of their play.

*'Vicky is playing in the garden with a ball. She sees Katia getting on a plastic horse, follows her, sits behind her and hugs her, full of joy. Katia swings the horse and suddenly Vicky starts screwing her face up while Katia shouts 'Vicky you need to look the other way'. Vicky does not respond and keeps doing facial expressions of dislike. Mrs Roms who is in the garden, goes towards the two girls, crouches, touches Vicky's back and says 'Katia thinks you need to look the other way'; Vicky looks at her, smiles and with a loud happy voice says 'yesss'. The key worker then helps Vicky get off and get on again looking the other way while Vicky starts smiling again looking happy even before the key worker asks her 'is that better now?' and then when she sees Vicky's face says 'oh ok you are smiling now' and leaves the two girls to ride the 'horse'.*

Vicky joins other children in their play but has difficulties interpreting the meaning of their communications and this puts barriers on her communication and possible play interactions. This can result in misconceptions about Vicky's play intentions without adult mediation. The fact that the teacher did not use an authoritative approach, but instead a 'gentle' way of talking to Vicky, further facilitated Vicky's response and enabled her again to be part of the play sequence and further extend her play with her peer.

The next vignette again shows Vicky's dependence on an adult's presence in order to communicate efficiently with other children. The discrete intervention facilitates Vicky's understanding and gives a solution to her discomfort.

*During free play time Vicky is in the jumping area with three other girls. They engage in physical play and sit on mats or jump either in dyads or individually. Initially Vicky prefers to sit on the front seat of a mat while different children join the seat behind her. She enjoys being among them and shows her happiness when she starts laughing, jumping on the mat and looking at the other children who jump too although she does not talk to them and occasionally stays alone while looking around or playing with her finger. Another girl joins Vicky while she is still sitting on one of the mats and starts moving the mat sideways while Vicky starts moving too; one more dyad with two more children has been formed just behind Vicky and Katia. The children start singing and Vicky's keyworker joins them in the jumping area and adopts the role of a commentator on children's movements. She gives a cheerful running commentary on the girl's actions: 'Vicky you took over the bus' while the rest of the girls laugh and shout. Katia sits back on her seat again, Vicky follows her but stands still, makes the mat fall over again and looks at Mrs Hogg while she smiles. At that moment Mrs Hogg was talking to the other two girls and did not look at Vicky who started jumping, looking at her and falling on the mat while smiling and opening her mouth like she was shouting without her voice been heard though. Two of the other girls form another dyad, sit on a mat and start rocking on it; Vicky walks towards their side, looks at them but doesn't talk to them, she stands there until they fall off the mat. Vicky keeps looking at them and starts moving her mouth like she is trying to say*



*something without a voice. The girls get on the mat again while Vicky seems to expect them to stand still, she seems like she wants to sit. The girls try to find their balance on the mat and Vicky helps them by holding the mat firm. As soon as the girls settle on the mat, Vicky turns the mat downwards, making both of the girls fall off again, steps backwards and they all start, including the teacher, laughing loudly while Vicky is looking at the girls lying on the mats. The girls are ready to stand up and Vicky touches the mat and rearranges it like she seems to wait for them sit again on it. At the same time, Irene, the third girl in the jumping area, sits on the mat that Vicky was sitting on previously, turns towards the key worker and asks, 'who wants to ride my bus?' Mrs Hogg repeats 'who wants to ride on your bus? Who wants to sit on your bus?' in a loud voice. Vicky who is standing next to Irene, stops playing with the other two girls as soon as she hears Mrs Hogg's question, looks at Irene and sits behind her on the mat; this was commented on by her teacher who said 'Vicky wants to sit on your bus with you' while Vicky joins her, sits behind her expressionless and they both start rocking the mat sideways.*

Vicky was enjoying playing on the mats. She was actively involved in physical play with three other children. Although she was not talking, her reactions showed that she enjoyed playing and interacting with the other girls. Occasionally, it seemed that Vicky had the need to follow her peers' directions and be involved with them while at other times she was setting her own play agenda. The teacher's role was supportive in this situation too, and helped Vicky to see an alternative area to play while she joined Irene and they both started playing.

#### **4.3.2 Actively involved teachers**

During free play time teachers are also actively involved in children's play. The next vignette portrays in a vivid way the role of a teacher in the pretend play of 3 children while they are trying to transfer a patient in an ambulance.

*'Three children are sitting and playing in the middle of the nursery when one of the key workers joins them and sits next to them on the floor. The children*

*are playing with some ambulances and miniaturised toys when the key worker starts pretending that the boy in her hands is calling for help 'help, help me where is the ambulance?' A girl from the group brings a small bed with another 'patient' and two other boys are rolling two cars and make siren noises; they are the ambulances, going to get the patients, which are going faster while the key worker says in a high tone voice 'he broke his leg and his hand, oh dear ... 'while the children are looking at her sadly and park their cars next to the patient's ...'.*

This vignette shows the able adult monitoring the children's ideas but at the same time actively engaging in the play sequence. The teacher's contribution did not act as a hurdle to the children's play but instead enabled them to remain consistent to their role and continue developing their play story. In addition, this vignette shows the play ethos of Forest nursery which is evidently depicted in the imaginative mutual play of the teachers with the children in play areas during free play.

The next vignette shows Vicky's ability to engage in pretend play with Mrs Hogg during free play time and while many children were playing around. Mrs Hogg has an active but coordinating role in children's play; Mrs Lake who sits close to them in the main nursery area joins them and participates in their play too.

*Irene offers a plate with some food and says to Mrs Hogg 'this is your dinner'. Mrs Hogg says in a surprised voice 'is that my dinner?', takes the plate and invites Vicky who sits next to her to share it with them 'Vicky would you like to share some of this dinner?'. Vicky looks at Mrs Hogg, shuts her eyes and doesn't respond while Mrs Hogg says 'I'm gonna have a mouthful do you want some?' and pretends eating while Vicky and Irene are looking at her. Mrs Hogg moves the plate towards Vicky's side who takes the spoon puts it to her mouth and pretends eating. The key worker then says 'I think food is nice when you share it with your friends', she turns to Irene, 'would you like some?'. Irene says 'I want tea' and Mrs Hogg responds 'I will have tea too, do you want some?' showing the spoon to Irene who pretends eating while Mrs Hogg says 'I will have some tea' and pretends drinking from a cup. Meanwhile, Vicky is almost behind Mrs Hogg looking towards the main*

nursery area, talking to herself and repeating the phrase in a strict voice 'I don't believe that'. Mrs Hogg looks at her and invites her to drink some tea too 'Vicky do you want some tea poppet?' and extends her hand towards Vicky. Vicky looks at her, nods positively, gets the cup and pretends drinking. At the same time, Aisha joins them and Mrs Hogg asks her if she wants some tea too. Aisha agrees to drink it but instead she gets the plate from Mrs Hogg and put it in a buggy while helped by Irene and the two girls are laughing; Vicky who is standing next to Mrs Hogg looks at the other two girls and tries to understand what is happening. Mrs Hogg leans slightly towards Vicky, sits on the floor and tells her 'they put it in a buggy, it's not a baby it's a plate of food'. Vicky does not respond and turns towards the other direction when Mrs Hogg prompts her again 'can I have some more tea Vicky?' and before Vicky can answer Mrs Lake offers her dinner and joins their play by saying 'would you like some of my dinner Mrs Hogg?' to which Mrs Hogg responds smiling, 'that's lots of dinner Mrs Lake'. Vicky is passing by Mrs Hogg at that moment and Mrs Lake asks 'Vicky would you take some dinner to Mrs Hogg?' Vicky is on her way to Mrs Lake when Aisha runs faster than her and offers her help to transfer the dinner to Mrs Hogg; Mrs Lake does not allow her take the plate though and tells her 'Vicky, Vicky I asked Vicky' while trying to avoid Aisha taking the plate. Aisha leaves the area and Vicky gets the plate and goes in front of Mrs Hogg who says 'oh that's too much dinner for me if we get another plate we can put some on it for Mrs Lake' and turns towards Aisha who joins their play again by walking towards Vicky and Mrs Hogg and gets the plate out of Vicky's hands who is just looking at them. Mrs Hogg says then to Aisha 'Vicky was giving it to me wasn't she?' gives the plate back to Vicky and allows Aisha to take some of the dough and tells her 'you get that for Mrs Lake' and continues talking to Vicky who is looking at the dough and stirs it with the spoon 'is that for me?' asks Mrs Hogg. Mrs Hogg crawls closer to Vicky repeating in a louder voice 'is that for me?' Vicky looks at her hastily and keeps stirring her dough while Mrs Hogg smiles at her. Vicky tries to catch some of the dough with the spoon and feeds Mrs Hogg with the spoon who thanks her, pretends eating from the spoon with Vicky's help and finally says while touching her tummy 'oh it's lovely it's very nice, do you want to eat some?' Vicky looks at her, smiles at her, nods positively and pretends eating

*the dough from the spoon while she is encouraged from her teacher to do so. Mrs Hogg asks Vicky 'is it tasty?' but does not get any answer from Vicky who puts the spoon with the plate on the floor and Mrs Hogg says again 'I am gonna eat some more because I am still hungry' while she tries to cut some of the dough and is not looking at Vicky who leaves the area frowning and talking to herself saying 'I don't believe that' .*

Vicky engaged in pretend play with her teacher and two other children only when her teacher used body gestures to invite her to join them. Throughout the play sequence Vicky did not initiate any play actions with other children but remained passive. The key worker had a dual role: that of coordinator-commentator and of active player; she encouraged Vicky to become involved in play with other children prohibited another child taking over, redirected her attention to the play activity and commented when necessary on occasions where possible misunderstandings could have happened.

The next vignette depicts Vicky playing in the jumping area with three children and a teacher. It is a child led activity with the participation of an adult who supports them to build up houses and at the same time acts like a genuine player. Vicky joins three children playing in the jumping end accompanied by a key worker. The atmosphere is positive and the place full of children's happy voices. They all build a house with mats existing in the area and Vicky participates by giving mats to the teacher.

*'Vicky joins three children and a key worker who are constructing a house with colourful mats in the jumping end. As soon as they finish, Vicky jumps slightly on the mat and smiles while the house falls down. The children say 'oh no' with a sad voice while the key worker prompts them 'what are we going to do?' with Vicky repeating the whole phrase in a soft voice and looking at the teacher while the rest of the children are volunteering suggestions. 'Shall we do another house then?' suggests the key worker and the children start giving her pieces of mats to build another one while Vicky climbs on a triangle and says 'it is too slippery'; her teacher looks at me and smiles surprised that Vicky is talking. The children and the teacher build the house jointly when the key worker asks Vicky, who is just looking at the other children, 'Could you*

*please bring the square?’ Vicky looks at her and without hesitation brings the square to the key worker who puts it on the house’s top and the house falls down again. Before all the other children react Vicky says in a firm voice ‘not again’ while the key worker prompts the children to do it once more.*

In this episode Vicky approached and stood by other children during play although she did not know how to interact with them. The keyworker was a coordinator and active player supporting the children to cooperate and engage in physical play. This was the case for Vicky who was actively involved only after she was kindly asked by her teacher to do so. Vicky’s dependence on adult’s requests and support in order to communicate verbally and participate successfully in play sequences is evident.

Compared to the previous vignette that celebrated the cooperative spirit between a key worker and four children, the next vignette makes explicit that an adult can be more intrusive than a child would like them to be. Vicky is in the puzzle area and Mrs Frame who sits next to her suggests possible toys by opening some of the drawers and describing their contents. Vicky seems to be interested in a specific toy and rejects all of Mrs Frame’s suggestions until she finds the cupboard with the elephants. During this play sequence, Vicky is mostly talking after being prompted by Mrs Frame and repeats the same phrases. Mrs Frame is talking to Vicky about the elephants’ sizes and colours while she tries to be actively involved in Vicky’s play despite Vicky’s unwillingness to play with her (Video 2).

*Teacher: oh look I’ve got some numbers (opens a drawer and shows a number to Vicky)*

*Vicky: (looks at her hand, puts the number inside the drawer, closes it and smiles) No*

*Teacher: no, no ok (folds her arms and waits)*

*Vicky: (keeps opening different drawers)*

*Teacher: (opens another drawer) what about the teddy bears?*

*Vicky: no (in a low voice while looking at the drawers)*

*Teacher: this one?*

*Vicky: (finds the drawer she wants) ahh (in a happy voice)*

*Teacher: ahh you found the elephants (extends her hand to help Vicky put the drawer on the table)*

*Vicky: (carries the whole drawer alone)*

*Teacher: do you want to put it on this table? (taps her hand on it)*

*Vicky: (looks outside the window, then leaves the drawer on the table and sits on the chair)*

*Teacher: this is a big elephant (by taking one off the cupboard)*

*Vicky: (looks at the teacher's elephant, gets another one) Daddy (in a soft voice)*

*Teacher: another daddy elephant*

*Vicky: (tries to join the two elephants together) a daddy elephant*

*Teacher: two daddy elephants (showing with her fingers)*

*Vicky: (joins them and celebrates smiley) yehhh*

*Teacher: yesss you joined them together, they are going for a walk (pretends their finger to walk)*

*Vicky: (smiles and explores the elephants in the box, she finds one blue elephant and joins him with the other two)*

*Teacher: is that a daddy or a mummy elephant?*

*Vicky: a mummy elephant*

*Teacher: a mummy, smaller isn't it?*

*Vicky: (takes one more elephant out of the box)*

*Teacher: I can't find a baby. Vicky finds a ...*

*Vicky: (interrupts her teacher in a happy voice) a blue, I got some blue*

*Teacher: you are right, is it a mummy or a baby?*

*Vicky: a baby (slightly smiling and joins it with the other)*

*Teacher: you think it is a baby, do you? (gets a smaller one) whose this then?*

*Vicky: (touches the elephant) baby blue (joins it with the others)*

*Teacher: a baby blue elephant right that's mummy all moving now (pulls slightly the elephants)*

*Vicky: (pulls them back, takes one off)*

*Teacher: let's take one off*

*Vicky: (finds another one in the box and instead of joining him with the others she pretends that he is flying)*

*Teacher: is he going to walk and join the others?*

*Vicky: (does not respond and gets one more elephant)*

*Teacher: I am going to make a family, here is my daddy ... (taking two elephants out of the box and joining them together)*

*Vicky: (takes the elephants out of her hands, pretends that one of them is flying) ouiiii (capturing her teacher's gaze while looking at her)*

*Teacher: is he a flying elephant?*

*Vicky: (does not respond and moves the elephant like he is jumping on the table)*

*Teacher: dumbo he flies (pretending the elephant to fly) he flaps his ears (using hand gestures)*

*Vicky: (does not respond, instead she joins the elephants together and occasionally talks to herself and smiles) there*

*Teacher: (looks at her patiently) he is holding his tail (pointing at the elephants)*

*Vicky: (does not respond, finds one more elephant and smiles) blue*

*Teacher: another blue one*

*Vicky: (joins one more elephant)*

*Teacher: holding on*

*Vicky: (does not respond, finds two joined elephants in the box and places them next to the others) ahaha*

*Teacher: lots of blue elephants*

*Vicky: (rearranges the elephants in the box without looking at her teacher, she finds a red) red (in a loud voice and joins him with the other red elephants)*

*Teacher: (looks at Vicky without talking)*

*Vicky: (moves the elephants in a circle)*

*Teacher: which colour do we need now?*

*Vicky: (joins two more elephants and makes a semi circle)*

*Teacher: ahhh (capturing Vicky's gaze)*

*Vicky: (looks at her, finds another elephant, joins it with the red elephants)*

*Teacher: they hold on over here (pulls all the elephants together to join them)*

*Vicky: (finds one more elephant and tries to join him with the others)*

*Teacher: you've got a new colour. What colour is this one? (pointing with her finger)*

*Vicky: (does not respond, finds one more elephant, joins him with the others) a purple.*

*Teacher: purple*

*Vicky: a piece, a piece going in, finish (in a happy loud voice)*

*Teacher: a piece going in, heyyy (in a happy voice too)*

*Vicky: finish (in a happy voice)*

At the beginning of this vignette, the teacher is focused on the size of the elephants and redirects Vicky's attention each time she does not answer to her question. She does not always wait for Vicky to initiate a play sequence but instead suggests her ideas and concepts. Occasionally, the key worker tries to give voice to Vicky's play by describing her actions; a strategy suggested by the High/Scope Curriculum. Throughout the vignette, it is evident that Vicky wanted to set her own play agenda and be followed by her teacher who, after some delay, ultimately takes Vicky's lead in her absorbed play with the elephants.

During free play time Vicky and her teacher often go to the 'you and me' room; an activity that takes place during free play time where they spend around 25 minutes playing together. This room was often used by Vicky's key worker especially at the beginning of the year. According to the teacher Vicky talks more in this room, interacts with her teacher and engages in more complex forms of play compared to the main nursery area. In the example below, Vicky and Mrs Hogg are in the 'you and me' room at Vicky's request. They are sitting opposite to each other while Vicky is discovering different toys from a bag given from her teacher (Video 4).

*Teacher: did upsy daisy fall over and bump her head?*

*Vicky: (makes the figure stand still again on the track and fall over)*

*Teacher: oh no upsy daisy (in a sad voice)*

*Vicky: (looks at her, smiles and hides the figure under the table)*

*Teacher: where is she, is she under that table? (using her hand gestures)*

*Vicky: looks at her, smiles and brings upsy daisy onto the table*

*Teacher: (in a funny voice) upsy daisy*

*Vicky: (finds a spoon, looks at her teacher) mmm*



*Teacher: mmm what are you gonna do with your spoon?*

*Vicky: (no reply, searches the bag, finds playdoh and in a happy voice) a playdoh (looking at her teacher)*

*Teacher: a playdoh, what can you make with the playdoh?*

*Vicky: look at the playdoh (turns it inside her hand)*

*Teacher: can I have some playdoh? (extending her hand)*

*Vicky: (gives her some)*

*Teacher: share couldn't we?*

*Vicky: yeh (puts some playdoh in her teacher's plate instead of her hand)*

*Teacher: thank you Vicky*

*Vicky: I like to taste it (putting some dough in her lips)*

*Teacher: you like to taste your playdoh, are you? (rolling some of the dough)*

*Vicky: (pretends eating)*

*Teacher: I make my sausages and beans, more beans I'm gonna break it up and make some small balls.*

*Vicky: (stops eating and rolls some dough)*

*Teacher: are you making some food for me Vicky?*

*Vicky: what's this? (looking at the bag nearby her)*

*Teacher: this is your bracelet (rolling dough)*

*Vicky: (smiles and with a loud voice) weee sausages*

*Teacher: you are making sausages too*

*Vicky: roly polly, roly polly, roly polly (in a playful voice)*

*Teacher: oh I am making some beans, how many sausages will you have for your dinner?*

*Vicky: is got one*

*Teacher: you got one sausage, I am gonna have one, I can't eat too many sausages (rolling dough)*

*Vicky: (extends her hand, takes some of her teacher's dough) 'that's this one'*

*Teacher: you can have that one, if you want that one*

*Vicky: that one (taking some more)*

*Teacher: you can have all of them. 1,2,3,4 beans and a big sausage for your dinner (pointing to the pieces). I've got 1,2,3 beans and a sausage for my dinner.*

*Vicky: (takes a spoon and is ready to eat)*

*Teacher: is there another spoon in the bag? (looking in the bag) there is a brown spoon in the bag*

*Vicky: (is absorbed with a figure next to her) he is tired (in a wry face)*

*Teacher: (pretends eating)*

*Vicky: (looks at her, puts a small piece on her spoon and pretends eating) yum, yum.*

*Teacher: oh, oh my sausage is hot (blowing it)*

*Vicky: (blows her spoon too) aouts (smiles and keeps blowing)*

*Teacher: is yours hot?*

*Vicky: (blows stronger and pretends eating)*

*Teacher: (pretends eating) I might have something to drink (gets a cup)*

*Vicky: (looks at her teacher)*

*Teacher: do you want something to drink?*

*Vicky: (takes another cup, pretends to pour tea both in her own and her teacher's cup)*

*Teacher: thank you Vicky, nice of you to pour*

*Vicky: (pretends drinking)*

*Teacher: (pretends drinking)*

*Vicky: lavy (puts the cup on the table)*

*Teacher: lovely I am gonna eat some more now (pretends eating making noises with her mouth) is yours yummy?*

*Vicky: (does not respond)*

*Teacher: I think there is a little boy in the bag called Johnny (takes the figure out of the bag). He wanted to have some too 'if you like to have some Johnny' (feeds the figure)*

*Vicky: (looks at the camera, at her teacher's hands and mumbles)*

*Teacher: do you like to share your food with upsy daisy Vicky? is she hungry?*

*Vicky: (looks at her teacher, touches her tummy and pretends eating)*

*Teacher: you are pretending to eat your playdoh, pretend, not really in my mouth cause it doesn't taste very nice, look (shows Vicky how to use it) pretend*

*Vicky: (looks at her and puts the spoon a bit away from her mouth).*

In this relaxed play atmosphere Vicky and her teacher both had the role of an active player as they engaged in pretend and role play in the little room. Vicky initiated some verbal interactions with her teacher and seemed more comfortable in a one-to-one basis to express herself through talking, making requests and showing her preferences. Her teacher tried occasionally to direct Vicky's play by introducing play themes. This was not always accepted by Vicky, who was willing to set her own play agenda. The teacher used a wide variety of ways to extend Vicky's play, including direct question, description of Vicky's abilities and finally occasional repetition of Vicky's sentences.

In another episode of free play Vicky, who was keen on doing puzzles and able to finish most of them quickly and correctly with little or no help from an adult, finds a difficult puzzle and tries for a while to put some pieces together. Mrs Hogg joins her and offers some help and Vicky accepts it by nodding. Mrs Hogg starts rearranging the puzzle's pieces while suggesting to Vicky possible places for each piece and putting some others in by herself. They are interrupted by other children seeking Mrs Hogg's help and Vicky waits for her patiently. While it takes a long time to finish the pair collaborate together with Mrs Hogg commentating verbally adding to the convivial atmosphere. Vicky follows suggestions and attends carefully, and towards the end they share the feeling of accomplishment.

*Vicky: (tries to put the piece trying different angles)*

*Mrs Hogg: turn it around, you are working really hard on this are you?*

*Vicky: (turns the piece around)*

*Mrs Hogg: (takes the piece in her hands) what about ... does this side ... can you put it in that side (showing with her fingers)?*

*Vicky: (tries to put the piece according to the teacher's suggestion)*

*Mrs Hogg: just that side, Vicky just that side put it in that side, try that way*

*Vicky: (takes one piece out again and tries to put the last piece again in the puzzle, this time successfully)*

*Mrs Hogg: yes (keeping with her fingers the fitted pieces of the puzzle)*

*Vicky: a piece going in (puts the last piece) finish (in a happy and loud voice)*

*Mrs Hogg: yesss (in a happy and loud voice, celebrating with Vicky the fact that they finish it)*

*Vicky: yesss*

*Mrs Hogg: (smiles and starts singing using body gestures)*

*Vicky: (copies her and does the same movements while occasionally looking in another direction)*

*Mrs Hogg: well done you worked really really hard.*

In this activity Vicky and Mrs Hogg constructed the puzzle and discovered its difficulties jointly. Mrs Hogg was using different strategies of supporting Vicky: letting Vicky first experiment alone and then extending her help, describing Vicky's actions, and finally providing the possible answer to Vicky's problem through suggestions relevant to the piece's correct angle. Vicky seemed to feel sometimes more confident and others not. She tried many times to fit pieces unsuccessfully but was determined enough to keep trying. This was obviously recognised by her teacher who towards the end of the puzzle was supporting Vicky by keeping firm the pieces that fitted together, thus helping her feel successful.

#### **4.3.3 Lone play**

Vicky liked playing alone engaging in different activities. In the following vignette, Vicky plays alone in the book corner with a carpenter's tool kit. She engages in pretend play type and she seems to enjoy the activity while experimenting and exploring the use of different types of equipment (Video 3).

*Vicky is in the book corner alone with a carpenter's tool kit that has many different plastic tools inside. She gets one screwdriver, talks to herself for a while, extends her hand and says 'I got dhis, I turn it out' and starts manipulating the object she is keeping in her hands. After she wanders in the book corner for a while, she finds the binoculars she was playing with earlier that day, puts the screwdriver on top of them and starts turning it around like she is trying to screw it. Later, she finds two different types of screwdrivers. She gets the first one, shouts loudly 'yehh' and hits the binoculars while she finds another one a few minutes later. She talks loudly as soon as she gets it in her hands, runs towards the binoculars and starts hitting them. She finds another tool that she obviously does not know how to use; she looks at it,*

*moving it up and down and finally puts it back, gets another plastic hammer and says 'we fitted' in a happy and loud voice although she has not 'fitted' anything. Instead she gets a plastic saw and pretends first sawing the top of a chair and then the binoculars while mumbling a few words. Finally, she finishes playing with the tool kit, tidies it up and replaces it in its original place.*

Throughout the vignette, Vicky experimented with the different functions of the tools she was playing with and engaged in manipulative and pretend play. She seemed to be engaged in an esoteric dialogue relevant to her body movements and feelings during play but at the same time she was obviously more confident and able to express herself verbally.

Vicky likes playing with miniaturised figures at the nursery and at home.

*Vicky sits on the floor and finds two boxes; one of them has different types of helicopters while the other one has trains. Vicky chooses a helicopter and waves it like it is flying. By the time Mrs Hogg joins her and talks to her, Vicky seems to be enjoying her play alone; she smiles and with passion waves her hand above her head while gazing at it. Mrs Hogg stands by her, looks at her and observes 'oh, your helicopter is flying Vicky' but Vicky is concentrating on her flying helicopter which makes manoeuvres and goes up and down all the time. After a while, Vicky finds a miniature boy in one of the boxes, puts it in the helicopter and starts waving it again. Her teacher who still stands next to her comments by showing with her hand the helicopter's movement 'the aeroplane flying over your head Vicky' getting no response.*

In this vignette, Vicky showed clearly that did not want to interact with her teacher but instead to play alone. The teacher, instead of become actively involved in Vicky's play, preferred to take the role of the commentator describing and commenting on Vicky's actions. This was a lost opportunity for play between the teacher and Vicky.

Among Vicky's favourite toys were railways. In the following vignette Vicky plays with a wooden railway and does not respond either to the presence of Kris or her keyworkers who join her.

*Vicky is sitting on the main nursery floor where she finds a wooden colourful 'engine house' and joins it with some wooden pieces to make a railway. The engine house has the shape of a tunnel, being able to host two to three miniaturised cars. Vicky has already finished a big part of the railway when Kris joins her, gets a train and starts rolling it on the railway. Vicky looks at him hurriedly and then continues joining together the pieces. She does not seem to bother about his presence and Kris leaves after a few minutes. Mrs Hogg sits next to Vicky who has already finished a big part of her railway. Vicky gazes at her and continues joining the pieces together. Mrs Hogg finds a train and gives it to Vicky 'to see what will Vicky do with that' as she says to me. Vicky gets the train in her hands places it behind her back and keeps joining pieces on her railway. When finished, Vicky gets another train from a box very close to her and starts rolling it on the railway while producing train sounds. Finally she parks it inside the 'engine house' garage. She does the same for two more cars and then she breaks the railway into pieces and puts them back in their box.*

Further lost opportunities for joint play are depicted in this vignette. The first was between Vicky and Kris; the fact that neither of them talk was may be the reason the play between the two children does not evolve. Furthermore, the fact that the key worker did not try to extend upon Vicky's play but instead maintains a more passive role contributes to their play not developing.

#### **4.3.4 Child-child activities**

In the following vignette, Vicky is in the jumping area, plays with two other girls and engages in small group physical play indoors (Video 1).

*Vicky, Irene and Katia are in different parts of the jumping area. Vicky is almost hidden behind a mat while she is lying on it when Irene goes close to*

*her and nearly climbs on her. Vicky stands still opens her mouth without a voice and pushes the feet of Irene who looks at the camera and gives a shout of pain. Vicky's eye gaze sticks for a few seconds somewhere in the mats while Irene starts counting with her fingers. At that moment, Katia moves towards them and sits behind Vicky. Nearly simultaneously both Vicky and Irene turn towards Katia, start tickling her and laughing loudly altogether while Vicky looks at Katia, exclaiming in delight 'that's tickle, that's tickle'.*

Vicky is an active part of the group, enjoys being among the other two girls. Both Vicky and Irene seemed to have found a common code to communicate when they both started tickling simultaneously. This is a playful situation where Vicky is not afraid of expressing herself verbally while she interacts with the other girls without an adult's support.

Later, in the following vignette, the play is less easily negotiated by Vicky (Video 1).

*Vicky is lining up some bricks in the main nursery area when she sees Katia running towards the main nursery area. Vicky seems to believe that Katia is moving towards her and with a slight jump gets one of the bricks in her hands, puts it on the ground and looks at Katia who does not realise that Vicky is inviting her in a voiceless way to play with her and keeps running towards the home area. Vicky then stops playing with the bricks, goes to the home area and pushes some of the phone's buttons and then talks on the phone saying 'hello' in a loud voice. While Vicky is talking on the phone, Katia and Irene stand next to her with Katia taking the phone out of Vicky's hands and looking at her while Vicky steps backwards looking at Katia too. However, after a few seconds Irene and Katia leave while Vicky remains at the home area and starts playing alone again with the phone saying repeatedly 'hello, hello' in a louder voice. Katia listens to her talking to the phone, runs and takes again the phone out of the hands of Vicky who again steps backwards and looks at Katia's hands as she pushes some of the phone's buttons. This lasts for a few seconds while Vicky moves towards Katia, mumbles a few words and keeps looking at Katia's hands. Katia dials a number and gives the phone to Vicky who extends her hand to take it before Katia takes it back again for a while*

*and pushes some more buttons. Vicky pushes some buttons with her fingers too and tries unsuccessfully to get the phone out of Katia's hands. Katia tells Vicky 'you have to push that' showing a specific button with her finger. Vicky still looks at the phone and tries to get it out of Katia's hands saying 'no' in a loud voice looking at the opposite side of the nursery. Katia places the phone in Vicky's ear while she is holding it and does not allow her to touch it while Vicky says 'no, no' again and leans her body slightly backwards this time and does not talk to the phone. Katia walks for a while with the phone in her hands when she starts playing with some pans in the home area and leaves the phone. Vicky who follows her tries to take the phone again without a success as Katia grabs it and then Vicky says in an angry and rough voice 'no' and crosses her hands while looking downwards. However, she follows again Katia, who moves to another table, and tries for one more time to take the phone over her hands without success. This time Katia starts talking into the phone without inviting Vicky talk into it; Vicky pushes the phone's buttons and Katia pushes her hands away. A few seconds later and while Vicky is standing next to Katia looking at her, Irene joins the two girls in the home area. Katia gives the phone to Vicky and tells her 'it's your dad' while Vicky gets the phone and puts it back. Katia tries to take it out of her hands and then Vicky starts saying 'its mine, no no' in a loud voice. Finally Katia manages to get it back and says to Vicky 'I had it, I had it' and Vicky starts pushing the phone's buttons again.*

Vicky's lack of verbal communicative skills make her seem less able to initiate interactions with other children; she has her own way of inviting other children to play with her; by extending objects or her hands towards them. In this vignette, she engages in functional play alone but at the same time does not invite Katia to play with her. Both girls want to play by their own rules and neither compromises. Vicky seems to be persistent in her desire to acquire the object she wants and rejects Katia's invitation to engage in pretend play.

Vicky likes reading or listening to books. She is often in the book corner where alone or with other children she reads books she likes. In the following vignette she reads a book with Kris who sits next to her and listens to her talking while Vicky repeats book's phrases by heart (Video 3).



*Vicky: gets Goldilocks book, smiles at Kris who's coming in the book corner and puts the book in the reading blackboard*

*Kris: (looks at the camera) he me my friend, he me my friend (pointing to Vicky)*

*Vicky: (takes a chair and sits in front of the reading blackboard)*

*Kris: (sits next to her)*

*Vicky: 1,2,3 (counting and pointing at the bears in the book)*

*Kris: 3(points at the book) teddy bear (in a loud voice)*

*Vicky: (turns the page) once upon a time (reads only the first page and goes on by pointing the rest of the text)*

*Kris: dhat's a bear, dhat's a mummy bear, dhat's a daddy bear*

*Vicky: (turns the pages while mumbling some words)*

*Kris: a big bear*

*Vicky: (mumbles a few words while pointing at the book's figures) a tiny bear*

*Kris: teddy bear, teddy bear*

*Vicky: (looks at the camera and turns the page)*

*Kris: big bear*

*Vicky: three bowls 1,2,3 (counting and pointing at the book)*

*Kris: 2,3 (pointing at the baby bear)*

*Vicky: (turns the book's page and points at the text) I know to, I know (without reading it)*

*Kris: the house (looking at a house's picture in the book)*

*Vicky: who is eating my porridge?*

*Kris: that (referring to Goldilocks in the book)*

*Vicky: stretches her body (copying the figure in the book)*

*Kris: Goldilocks, Goldilocks (pointing in one of the pages)*

*Vicky: (looks at the camera, mumbles a few words and turns the page) oh no who is eating my porridge? (in a thick voice pointing at the daddy bear), who is eating my porridge (in a softer voice, pointing at the mum), who is eating my porridge (in a very soft thin voice, pointing at the baby bear)*

*Kris: (looking at the book and mumbles some words)*

*Vicky: who is she sitting in my ... ? (in a soft voice while pointing at the daddy bear)*

*Oh dear who is she sleeping in my bed, who is she sleeping in my bed (thick voice pointing at the daddy bear), who is she sleeping in my bed (pointing at the mummy bear with a softer voice), who is she sleeping in my bed (pointing at the baby bear with an almost crying voice)*

*Kris: (looks at the camera) Goldilocks*

*Vicky: puts the book back*

*Kris: goes to play in the main nursery's area.*

Similar to the previous vignette, Vicky invites Kris to play with her in a non verbal way. Throughout the story, Vicky repeats by heart phrases taken from the book and heard from her teachers. She does not respond to Kris's questions and largely engages in imaginary play without involving Kris.

The final vignette depicts Vicky's willingness to participate in a group activity and celebrates children's unique way of making another child part of their group.

*Four girls are jumping in the main nursery area keeping their hands. Vicky looks at them tentatively and seems willing to join them by moving closer and closer to them. Irene tries also to join them but is not able to do so because they do not allow her to be part of the circle; at the same time Vicky is jumping, smiling and following them when Irene gets her hand and they both jump together while Irene is singing or talking occasionally with Vicky copying some of her phrases. Irene approaches the circle and joins the other girls and so does Vicky. She tries to get the hands of two girls but they do not allow her to be part of the circle. Vicky looks at them and moves her lips voiceless. However, Mary says to her 'come on Vicky' inviting her to join the circle; Vicky joins them and they all start jumping, turning around and laughing in the middle of the nursery. Mary hold hands with Vicky for a while and the other girls follow. They sit on the floor and they are all laughing while Vicky shouts 'yesss' in a happy voice (Video 2).*

This last vignette shows clearly Vicky's choice and willingness to play with the other children. She approached the girls by using her common strategy: going closer and closer to them without talking. She was reliant on one child to invite her into the game,

thus beginning a playful group activity where all the girls including Vicky had fun and enjoyed play together.

## **Case study 2: The experimentation of a child: Tom at Butterfly Nursery**

### **4.3.5 Tom's family**

Tom comes from England. His father owns his own business and his mother works in the private sector. Tom has one younger brother and they all live on the outskirts of a small city in South of England. Tom's uncle has bipolar disorder and Tom's close relative is an individual with learning difficulties.

### **4.3.6 Diagnosis**

Tom was diagnosed as a child with autism at the age of two years. His mother became concerned that he was not making eye contact with her, was not acting like other children of his age and was not interested in toys. The paediatricians and speech therapists officially described Tom, on his Statement of Special Educational Needs, as a child who 'fulfils the diagnosis of autism'. The Autistic Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) was used to evaluate Tom's play skills. Home based visits and the administration of a detailed interview using the Autism Diagnosed Interview-Revised (ADI-R) were the tools used by the professionals to assess Tom's play skills, taking into account information provided by his parents and the outcomes of the formal assessments of his play skills at home.

### **4.3.7 Tom's personal traits**

Tom was described in his Statement as a child who 'looks angry and possibly happy' while his teacher referred to him as a 'lovely, very sensible and likable' child who liked the physical contact he had with her: 'he is very touchy with me ... he likes the tickles and the actual touch' (teacher's interview). These perceptions of Tom were partly shared by his mother who said during the interview that Tom 'is a happy little

boy as long as he can do what he wants to do', referring to the fact that Tom wanted always to follow his own routine no matter what his mother's suggestions.

There was a common description of Tom as a child not keen on interacting with other children. According to his Statement Tom was a child that did not have any interaction with peers while his teacher said characteristically 'he prefers to be with the adults'; 'if any of the boys come near here he will push them out of the way'. His mother explained that although Tom was not able to stand his brother's presence, he showed more tolerance to his cousins: 'up to six-seven months ago, when George [Tom's younger brother] went anywhere near Tom, Tom would push him, he is still does that now ... he doesn't do that with his cousins' (mother's interview).

#### **4.3.8 Tom's difficulties and development**

Tom was characterised in his Statement as a child with eating disorders. Those difficulties were highlighted both by his mother and his teachers. Tom's mother, in one of our informal conversations, talked about her difficulties teaching Tom how to eat. She further commented on her visits to professional centres that could help Tom cope with his eating problems although he was finally discharged due to the clinical diagnosis which was referring to behaviourally and not psychologically routed problems. Tom's mother in her interview narrated that Tom was often opening the fridge door at home to take vegetables and put them in his mouth although he would never eat them. Eating difficulties were also highlighted by Tom's one-to-one teacher who said that Tom was drinking milk or water but not eating anything; instead he was repetitively lining up pieces of bread, moving them in and out of his dish, looking at his teacher, smiling at her and clapping his hands.

Tom's level of dependency on adult help was identified in his statement by his teachers and his parents. He showed profound difficulties expressing his needs verbally and therefore he was using other ways of communicating with people such as pulling an adult's hand. In his statement Tom was identified as a child that 'can drag his mother's hand'; this was wholly shared by his teacher who said characteristically 'he will grab my arm ... or my clothing, or my face, or my chin' (teacher's interview). Those perceptions were shared by Tom's mother who explained, 'if he is trying to tell

me something while he is playing and I don't understand he will grab my face and pull my face to him trying to get me and listen to what he is trying to say ... to tell us something then he will make eye contact and grab our faces to look at him, to interact with him or just say the right things' (mother's interview).

Tom was characterised as a child with profound speech disorders, described in his Statement as a child who exhibits very little verbal communication who could occasionally say 'hi bus' or 'hi plane'. His mostly pre-verbal forms of communication though were accompanied by other forms of non verbal communication such as gaze, facial expressions, pointing and giving with adults but never with his peers. At home Tom was vocalising occasionally, particularly when he was engaged in favourite activities like naming vegetables. Similarly, at the nursery Tom seemed to occasionally communicate verbally with his teacher as in the vignette below:

*Lunch time and Helen (Tom's one-to-one teacher) asks each of the children if they want to drink milk. Suddenly, Tom looks at his teacher and starts repeating 'me, me, me' to which he is answered, 'Tom wait a minute'. Tom stops talking and stares at his empty cup. 'Tom would you like some milk?' continues Helen a few minutes later; Tom does not answer. 'Tom would you like some water?' asks Helen with no answer again as she pours some milk in Tom's cup. Tom has drunk all his milk to hear Helen asking him 'Tom would you like some cheese'? Tom does not answer and Helen continues 'Tom would you like some cracker?' but then Tom looks at her, gives his cup and says in a strong voice 'miiik' (milk). Helen looks at him and says smiling 'good boy'. Tom finishes up his cup of milk within a few seconds, looks at Helen and tells her 'me, me, me' 'what?' says Helen as Tom repeats the same words. Helen offers a biscuit to Tom, 'Tom biscuit? Nice ...' to prompt him to eat but instead Tom says in a loud voice 'tata' 'water?' asks Helen in a clear and loud voice and pours some water in Tom's cup. Tom makes noises with his lips while he is drinking his cup of water as he is asked by Helen to drink nicely 'no you have to drink it nicely'. Tom stops immediately and Helen praises him 'good boy' (extract from field notes).*

Tom demonstrated high rates of stereotypic behaviour such as shouting and crying which was often followed by temper tantrums, particularly when his routine changed for any reason. This was discussed by his mother in her interview: ‘Christmas we bought a big train track and him and George were putting it together on the play room floor and we put it together on the Christmas eve and the way they come down just Christmas morning the room had changed and he had a five hour temper tantrum on Christmas day, banging, throwing himself on the floor and in the end I had actually to give him sedation drugs’ (mother’s interview). Tom’s temper tantrums at home, led his mother provide the nursery with a chair where Tom could be fastened by his teachers every time he had to sit among other children. Tom’s teacher however, mentioned that Tom never shouted at the nursery and characteristically said ‘I think his behaviour is slightly different from at home’ (field notes).

Tom’s sleeping disorders were identified by everyone. His statement highlighted his difficulties in sleeping while his teacher often talked about the fact that Tom seemed tired probably due to the fact that he was not sleeping enough at home. His mother explained, ‘he doesn’t sleep he just likes to curl up cause he likes being with an adult when he goes to bed instead of sleeping on his own so he has to sleep with me or my husband or at the moment with both of us and see if we can actually get him sleep’ (mother’s interview).

#### **4.3.9 Tom’s play preferences**

Watching or listening to the TV was amongst Tom’s favourite activities. His teacher expressed the notion that Tom likes using the computer and watching TV. His preference for animation and sound coming from the computer at the nursery were two activities that Tom’s teacher insisted on and suggested them as Tom’s preferences in the nursery (teacher’s interview). Tom’s keenness on the TV was also referred by his mother who said that Tom liked watching particular movies on the TV and always preferred to listen to sounds coming from it while playing at home Similarly, in his Statement Tom was characterised as a child who ‘likes watching DVD Big Cook little cook’.

Tom liked kicking balls and running around and this was noted both by his statement 'he is occupied with football and runs around kicking a ball for hours' and from his mother who argued that Tom loved playing with balls for many hours while in the garden (mother's interview). Similarly, his father in an informal conversation characterised Tom as 'adrenaline junky' referring to the fact that he liked running for many hours. Tom's likeness for kicking balls was endorsed by his teacher who said that 'he will run around outside all session if he could just kicking the ball' (teacher's interview).

Tom's lack of social skills and preference for solitary play had been noticed by everyone. His Statement noted that he liked playing by himself and avoided social play with other children. This was wholly shared by his mother when referring to the play activities between Tom and his brother George 'he (Tom) is ok in the same room as him (George) as long as George isn't too close to Tom and so as long as George isn't trying to play with whatever Tom is playing with and he (George) is in another part of the room then Tom is fine with that but at the same time it's hard because there is no interaction at play' (mother's interview). Tom's teacher explained 'he likes just go off and sole play continually on his own'; 'with one of the girls that's here she, she is allowed to be near him and speak to him and touch him but ... the boys he is not so interactive, he will push' (teacher's interview). One characteristic example depicting Tom's difficulties in allowing other children to stand by him is given in the next vignette:

*Tom is sitting in front of the computer, watching a movie while Helen sits next to him speechless. John (another boy) stands next to Helen and by pointing tells her 'Tom'. Helen replies by encouraging him to greet Tom 'say hello to Tom' and John repeats 'Hello Tom' while looking at Tom. Tom starts shouting, gazes at John for a few seconds and pushes him away (extract from field notes).*

Another favourite was lining up pegs and putting things in and out of containers. His Statement highlighted his preference for playing with pegs while his mother said characteristically 'he loves playing with his pegs, he lays a line in his playroom and as long as it is repetitive he quite enjoys it' (mother's interview). Similarly, his teacher

wanted to use pegs as praise for Tom each time he would drink his milk in a proper way.

#### **4.4 Free play time**

##### **4.4.1 Play indoors**

The first vignette describes Tom being engaged in sensorimotor play:

*Tom sits on the sensory room mat and stares at the lights in front of him. Helen looks at him smiley through a wooden square filled with blue water and tells him 'Tom that's a blue one' but Tom does not reply and keeps staring. Helen finds some more wooden shapes filled with different colours of water puts them in front of Tom's hands and places each one on top of the other. Tom looks at her, takes each wooden piece and places it in an order in front of the window in the sensory room; as soon as he finishes he shakes each wooden piece and listens to the sounds they produce. Helen takes another one and shakes it in front of Tom's face, who ignores her and stares at the piece he is keeping in his own hands. After a few minutes however and while Helen is still producing noises with another piece, Tom takes the piece out of her hands and puts it next to the others on the window. At the same time, Craig opens the door and looks at Helen who says to him 'In a minute Craig, not now, good boy' while Craig closes the door. After a while, Tom sits on the mat and says to Helen 'take avai' 'finished? Take away?' repeats Helen and both of them put their shoes on and leave the room.*

The teacher tried to instigate Tom's interest in a different activity. Her role was that of a role model and not of an active player as she was trying to teach Tom the way he could order the toys in front of him; thus she preferred to set the play agenda instead of extending Tom's play. The present vignette describes the unsuccessful strategy used by Helen to encourage two children to play with each other since she was strictly focused on improving Tom's knowledge on colours. Tom engaged in sensorimotor play in a way different than the one suggested by Helen. He showed clearly his play



preference when he did not follow Helen's actions but instead he tried to set his own play agenda.

On another occasion in the next vignette Tom copied and accepted Helen's play suggestions:

*Tom and Helen sit on the mat in the sensory room with Tom staring at the fibre-optic lights, rolling his tongue continuously and saying 'tights' each time the colour of the fibre-optic lights changes; Helen who sits opposite Tom corrects 'lights' and looks at him. Helen finds a wooden shape filled with yellow water and puts it on the fibre-optic lights Tom stares at. Tom gets it in his hand, shakes it and listens to the sound it produces while Helen praises him 'good boy'. Next Helen takes three more wooden shapes, shakes each of them and puts each one on top of the other. In the end, she puts them back in a row, waiting for Tom, who still stares at the lights, to react. Tom takes each one of the pieces, shakes them and puts one on top of each other as he gazes at Helen. Finally, he builds with three pieces as Helen did previously. Helen looks at Tom really excited and smiley and tells him 'good boy Tom, good boy'. Helen then turns to me and tells me 'this is brilliant, I do not want to move. It is the first time he is doing something like that since he came here. It is the first time we had an interaction for so long time and it is the first time he follows what I am suggesting to him' (extract from field notes).*

Tom follows the teacher's play agenda and copies her actions even though he was previously absorbed looking at the lights. The teacher initially takes the role of a commentator who observes Tom playing and comments only to correct Tom's verbalisations. Her role however, gradually shifts to that of a role model who tries to instigate Tom's interest by suggesting activities he had been engaged in the past and found enjoyable; at the same time she is not playfully involved in his play but rather adopts a strategy of 'do-wait-and-see' without adopting any specific strategies that could create a truly playful atmosphere.

Similar to the previous vignette, Helen suggests to Tom a new toy to play with:

*Tom wanders in the quiet area, looking at and touching toys. Helen goes next to him invites him to sit next to her and gives him a piano-toy Tom had touched a few minutes ago. She puts the toy in front of Tom's hands, gets one of Tom's fingers and they both start touching the buttons as Helen says 'blue ... square'. Tom looks at her and smiles while Helen goes on with the letters 'A, B, C, D' which produce different funny sounds. Craig enters the area, stands next to Tom and looks at him; Tom gazes at him and pushes him away. Helen does not comment on Tom's behaviour but instead says 'Craig have a go'. Craig starts playing with the piano and Tom leaves.*

Helen's strategy was again to introduce something Tom had played with earlier to draw his interest. She was trying to guide Tom and make him experience different sounds while at the same time aiming to teach Tom colours, shapes and letters. Tom seemed to enjoy the activity as long as Helen was next to him and before Craig joined him in his play. Helen kept the role of an observer who in this case invited another child to be involved in Tom's play. She opted against a more active role which could possibly have enhanced the possibilities for Tom to feel more comfortable and thus play both with her and with Craig. Furthermore, we can see that in Tom's case the environment and consequently his teacher's strategy was not playful enough to further motivate him to stay focused on the activity.

Tom's impatience was known to his teacher; the next vignette depicts Helen intervening to make Tom stop shouting:

*Tom goes in front of the pc where three other children are sitting. He shakes one of the children's chair and Helen responds, 'Tom needs to wait'. Tom starts shouting loudly while looking at the ceiling, making all the other children around him look at him puzzled. Helen, who stands behind Tom's back, says to Lisa (another child) who is already playing with the computer for long time 'it's Tom's turn' and asks her to stand up. Johan exclaims 'but it was my turn'. Helen replies, 'it's Tom's turn' and places Tom in the chair while Johan leaves the area.*

Tom had not learnt to wait for his turn and used shouting as a means to make Helen fulfil his will. Helen did not follow through in her requirement for him to wait. Her role as mediator was fragmented as she did not seem to be able to cope with Tom's shouting.

The next vignette shows Helen's unsuccessful strategy for encouraging play between Tom and another child:

*Helen, Tom and Kris are in the sensory room. Kris plays with a big bear and Helen makes bubbles for Tom to play with. Kris stands next to Helen and asks her 'does Tom wants to play with me?'; she replies, 'you can ask him, ask him 'Tom do you want to play with me'? Kris looks at Tom and asks him 'Tom do you want to play with me?' but Kris does not get any reply from Tom who stares and occasionally pops bubbles. Helen prompts Kris to talk louder and have 'a big voice'; Kris repeats the same phrase in a louder voice very close to Tom's face. Again he gets no answer and starts playing alone with his bear. After a few minutes Kris goes to Helen and asks her 'is Tom still playing?'. Helen asks Kris to ask the same question to Tom, 'what are you doing Tom?' asks Kris but Tom starts shouting, looks at Helen and loudly says 'take avai' (take away). Helen who is sitting next to him, tells him 'finished? Take away?' as Tom grabs and pulls her hand towards the exit. They all put their shoes on and leave the room.*

This vignette highlights a lost opportunity for the children and their teacher to interact and play all together. The teacher tried to make the two children engage in a shared activity by involving actively one of the children. Although Tom seemed to have the need to be supported by his teacher, Helen preferred to take one step back by becoming an observer-director. Instead of interacting playfully with the children and trying to enhance the interaction between them through her own active involvement, she took a more distant or passive role in the whole play scene.

The next vignette shows Tom and Helen taking turns:

*Helen and Tom are sitting on the mat in the sensory room. Tom stares at the fibre-optic lights while Helen finds a blackboard and starts writing on it as she looks at Tom. Helen finishes writing by leaving the chalk on the blackboard; Tom gets it and starts drawing circles for a while. His turn is taken from Helen when she rolls a chalk on the blackboard without talking to Tom who stares at the changing colours of the fibre-optic lights rolling his tongue. As soon as Helen puts the chalk down, Tom repeats his previous activity until Helen asks, 'now I have a go please' gets another chalk and draws on the blackboard, prompting Tom to take his turn by leaving the chalk in front of him, telling him 'Tom's turn' and looking at him. Tom does not respond and it is then that Helen extends her hand to give him the chalk. Shortly after Tom gets it, Helen asks for her turn again by extending her hand to Tom who does not give it to her but leaves it on the blackboard. Helen then turns to me and tells me 'I wanted to make him give it to me but he didn't. It was like he was telling me 'get it alone'.*

Tom was absorbed in his own activity when Helen introduced this alternative activity to him. Tom responded to Helen's requests even though his attention was often shifting between the two activities. At the beginning Helen preferred not to talk and rather acted as a role model for Tom who copied her actions. She was not engaged playfully in Tom's play although she gradually increased the levels of her support through long pauses which acted as invitations for play and further support for him to be actively involved in the play act.

The next vignette shows Tom sorting out cards:

*Helen and Tom enter the sensory room. Tom sits on the mat and starts looking at the fibre-optic lights; Helen sits next to Tom finds a box accompanied by some pictures Helen and asks him 'which one is the monkey? The monkey in please'. Tom looks at them, identifies the correct picture and puts it in a box in front of him. Helen shows him the next two pictures 'which one is the donkey? the donkey please' while Tom looks at the fibre-optic lights and occasionally*

*rolls his tongue. Tom gives the correct answer and Helen happily praises him 'good boy Tom, good boy'. Helen gets one more pair of pictures and before she asks Tom, he grabs and pulls the pictures out of Helen's hands who tells him 'wait', turns to me and tells me 'Tom doesn't know how to wait'. Helen looks at me and tells me 'let's be tricky now', shows Tom three pictures instead of two asking him to identify the cow among three other animals 'which one is the cow?'; Tom ignores her and keeps looking at the fibre-optic lights. Helen asks him two more times but Tom is not able to find the correct picture.*

The current vignette highlights once more how little child-centredness existed in the play activities between Helen and Tom. Her role took characteristics of a teaching activity which aims to improve specific abilities rather than encouraging and supporting Tom to enjoy and become involved in a playful environment. Helen's aim seemed to be her wish to demonstrate Tom's skills to the researcher rather than to support him successfully and help him learn through genuine play. After all, it seemed that the purpose of the present activity introduced by Helen to Tom was a rather complying and not a play activity, which set play boundaries and requirements for Tom.

In the next vignette, Tom chooses to play in the painting end but ends up playing with the water:

*Kein and Kate are already playing in the painting end when Tom decides to join them. However, due to the nursery's rules, no more than two children are allowed to play in this area at the same time. Tom goes next to Kein and pulls out of his hands the brush he is painting with, to be told by Ann, 'no room to play Tom, Kein and Kate are playing, no room'. She takes Tom away from the area and makes him stand in front of the bucket with water in the same area. Tom finds a plastic bucket, pours water in it and vice versa continuously and repetitively. Tessa joins Tom and they both engage in the same activity until Tom decides to start pulling Tessa's bucket out of her hands. Ann who stands next to Tom, wiping the floor due to the small pond Tom has created, says to him 'no, no Tom, Tessa had it, you got this one' and shows him the bucket he*

*was playing with until that moment. Tom takes his bucket and pours water in his bucket while occasionally looking at Helen who sits on the opposite side of the nursery.*

Tom was moved to another play area since his behaviour and play acquaintances were not complying with the nursery's play rules. In the present vignette, we can see Tom engaging in parallel play with Tessa who played along him for a while. The two children could have further interacted with each other, if one of their teachers had tried to be playfully engaged with them so that Tom could have had the chance to play with and not just beside his peers and teachers. His teacher was mainly occupied in managerial and other activities, while she took an active role only when she wanted either to prohibit children from acting in a non desired way or she wanted to intervene in behaviour management; these two main roles kept her away from truly enriching and further extending Tom's and his peers' play experiences.

The next vignette shows Tom playing in the welcoming room:

*Tom is in the welcoming room playing with a till. Helen is sitting behind him and watches him playing when Tom grabs her hand and goes towards the exit. Helen tells him 'what happened? Come and see these are money' drawing his attention again to the toy he was playing a few minutes ago. Helen puts the money in the till and Tom does the same a few minutes later. He tries to close the drawer of the till unsuccessfully until the time Helen pushes it slightly and helps Tom close it; Tom looks at her, smiles and claps his hands. Helen shares his joy, claps her hands and says 'well done'. Tom gets back to the till and seems to find out how to open the drawer; Helen understands that and tells him by pointing at the right button on the till 'this one, this one'. Tom opens the drawer and tries to take some money out while Helen tells him 'there's some money'. Tom is not able to take the money out of the till, turns to Helen and tells her 'amay'; Helen repeats 'money' and helps him take the money out of the till. Tom takes the money in his hand and hears Helen saying 'thank you'; he smiles, starts jumping and verbalises before he goes back to Helen who says 'oh there's some money'.*

In the present vignette, Helen follows Tom's play agenda as he is engaged in functional play alone. Her role is that of a facilitator who often helps Tom fulfil his play wishes, feel successful and redirect his attention to play activities although her own role in Tom's play activity is restricted and rather pathetic since she does not actively follow his play preferences.

Subsequently, Neil decides to join Tom in his play and Helen takes a more active role in Tom's play:

*Neil plays for a while with Kate (another teacher sitting next to him) and then moves closer to Tom who at that moment looks again at Helen, keeps the money in his hand, says 'dai' and jumps smiley. Helen responds in a cheerful voice 'money'. Meanwhile, Neil touches the till Tom plays with and Helen repeats, 'hello Neil, hello Neil'. Tom is absorbed in his activity and Helen says 'money in, close the drawer'. Neil starts pushing some buttons in Tom's till as Tom ignores him. Neil keeps playing with them and Tom pushes Neil's hand away. Neil looks at Helen who does not say anything but instead names the numbers Tom is using in the till. Tom pushes Neil's hand away for a second time and Neil starts playing with a train he has in his hand. Tom keeps pushing them and Helen says repetitively 'three, three'. Neil goes again next to Tom and touches the till; Helen says repetitively the number three until Tom again pushes away Neil's hand. Helen commentates, 'Neil playing with the money' and looks at Tom who ignores her. 'Neil playing with the money?' asks Helen again and looks at Tom who gazes at Neil and shouts. Helen reminds him 'Sharing Tom. Can Neil play with the money?' Tom stops shouting and allows Neil touch his till. The other teacher sitting in the room says to Neil 'there must be some more money in the room' and takes Neil's hand to find some more money for the till while Tom is still playing with it. Neil leaves the place he was sitting while the teacher leaves the room.*

Neil joined Tom in his play without being invited by Helen who was focused on Tom's activities. Helen tried to make Neil's presence obvious to Tom who at that moment was absorbed in his own activity. Helen leaves the play sequence to evolve between the two children but does not further insist on Neil's involvement and

interaction with Tom when Neil is pushed away from the latter. At the beginning Helen's role is obviously more active but still restricted in taught skills like numbers although it later shifts into that of a mediator who tries to be fair between the children but at the same time does not actively encourage Tom to play with Neil; this was endorsed by the other teacher who literally removed Neil from sitting next to Tom as a way of reducing undesirable behaviours.

The next vignette shows Tom playing in the sand alongside his peers and his teacher:

*Tom wanders indoors followed by Helen. He stops in front of the water tube which is not open to children and Helen explains him that he cannot play there. Tom pulls Helen's hand towards the sand area where Deil and Lora are already playing. Helen rearranges the toys on the sand area so that it is spacious for Tom to play. Tom tries to get some buckets from the cupboard although Helen is already playing with a car as she rolls it on the sand. Tom does not look at her but instead first tries to get the spade out of Deil's hand and then looks at Helen, says 'aiaiai, aiaiaiai' and pulls her chin towards his face. Helen chooses one of the buckets for Tom to play with and they all start playing with the sand. Tom tries to get Deil's spade out of his hands but Helen gives back the spade and tells Tom 'you have to ask Deil. Which do you want?' and gives another spade to Tom who slightly bungs his bucket on the sand. Deil gives his bucket to Helen who offers her help and jointly with Deil fills a bucket with sand 'one, two, three, four, five, six'. Meanwhile, Tom and Lora play at the same area with their own toys. Helen asks Deil to pat the bucket before they make the castle and says 'ready, ready' while Tom is looking at his own spade. 'You do one now' says Helen to Deil who takes the bucket and gives it again to Helen who encourages him to do it by himself. Tom fills his bucket while Helen looks on until the time Tom looks at her and says loudly 'a, a, a'; Helen responds, 'ready?' She puts in some more sand and with Tom and Deil's help, turns the bucket upside down, asks Tom to pat it a bit and makes a castle for Tom. Deil destroys the sandcastle and Helen takes away Deil's hand and looks at Tom who is absorbed in sand digging (video extract).*



At the beginning Helen acts as a role model for Tom and tries to direct his attention to an activity chosen by her. Tom does not comply with her play suggestions and shows his play preference by pulling her chin towards him. Later, Tom is engaged in parallel play with his peers while his teacher takes the role of an active player with Deil leaving aside Tom playing alone and remaining engaged in his own play activity. Later, she shifts her attention to Tom and they jointly build a castle.

The next vignette describes Tom's teacher's actions to teach him how to take turns:

*Tom plays in the house end with some vegetables. Helen who sits opposite to him and correctly repeats his words invites him to play with something other than Tom is playing with at the moment. 'Drink please' says Helen who first pretends pouring water in a cup from a kettle and then drinks it. 'Have a drink please Tom' continues Helen while Tom turns his back and plays with the vegetables in the room. 'Tom you have a drink please' says Helen again by extending the cup towards Tom and touching his hand. Tom looks at her, pushes her hand away, shouts and grabs the kettle while Helen looks at him, extends her hand with the cup towards him and tells him 'can I have a cup please Tom?' Tom pushes and hits her hand with one hand and with the other he keeps the kettle as Helen tells him 'thank you Tom. Can I have a drink?' Tom does not respond; instead he gets the cup out of Helen's hands, turns his back to her and throws the cup somewhere in the room. He then turns back to Helen who asks him 'where is my cup? where is my cup?' looking at Tom who waves the kettle with his hand. Helen goes on 'where is my cup? Tom?' and takes the kettle out of his hands; Tom starts shouting, jumping and saying 'me, me, me'. 'What would you like to drink please? Have some milk?' asks Helen and points to the cup; Tom takes the cup, gives it to Helen who tells him 'thank you Tom' and pretends pouring some water in the cup. Tom takes the cup and 'drinks' the water as he stares at Helen. 'More please' says Helen to listen to Tom saying 'makmak' and give her back the cup. Tom turns his back and is occupied with other toys when Helen tells him 'Tom can I have some?', pretends pouring milk in the cup and then drinking it. Tom looks at Helen for a few seconds and starts playing again with his vegetables.*

Helen suggested an alternative activity to Tom and set her own play agenda which at the beginning was not acceptable to Tom who showed his dislike by turning his back

and pushing Helen's hand away. Helen insisted on making Tom engage in pretend play, role-modelled possible actions Tom could take on board and kept redirecting Tom's attention whenever he was unwilling to play with her. Helen became an active player and took turns with Tom who at the beginning had difficulties waiting for his turn and pretended to drink although later he was actively engaged in the play sequence and took turns with Helen.

In the next vignette Tom takes turns with Leo in the house end:

*Tom plays with a till in the house end, sitting on the floor next to a teacher. Leo enters the area sits next to them and asks Kate (teacher) 'can I have a go'? 'Sure have a go. Do you want the till?' answers Kate as Leo stands up and goes towards the till. Kate turns to Tom and asks him 'Tom can Leo have a turn with the till?' Tom does not respond and keeps pushing the buttons; Kate tries to take Tom's hands off the till and asks him again 'Tom, Leo, Leo play too' and pushes slightly the till in between the two children. Tom starts verbalising some syllables in a complaining tone of voice and partly gives the till to Leo. Helen who is sitting behind the children and observes them, interrupts and says 'Tom says hello, Leo' but both children are absorbed in their own play activity. Leo tries to move the till in front of him while Tom looks at the ceiling rolling his tongue continuously. Kate who sees Leo taking the till in front of him asks him to put it in the middle so that Tom will be able to play too. Leo plays for a few seconds and Tom decides to take the till again in front of him. 'Leo plays Tom' says Kate and points with her finger at Leo. Tom does not look at her but he keeps pushing the buttons of the till. Leo is looking at Tom while he is playing and finally his teacher who is sitting next to them asks Tom 'can Leo have a turn?' Tom gazes at her as she repeats her question 'can Leo have a turn?' by pointing at Leo and looking at him. Tom looks at Kate and gives Leo a small part of the toy he is playing with at the time. Leo looks at his teacher again and asks her twice 'can I have a turn?' Kate does not respond while Leo decides to take it by himself. Tom then looks at Kate smiling and says 'ok' clapping his hands 'good boy' says Kate and continues 'can Leo have a go? Tom?' Tom in a loud and happy voice verbalises 'a hag e koou' and looks at Leo. Kate repeats 'Leo have a go, Leo*

*have a turn'. Tom does not touch the till but only looks at Leo who is playing with the till for a few seconds until Tom starts playing with it again and they both keep pushing its buttons.*

The role of the teacher is that of a facilitator. She is not actively engaged in the children's play but rather observes them and sits next to them to facilitate possible misunderstandings between them. Tom engaged in multiple types of play involving functional and parallel play. He made eye contact with his teacher and took turns with Leo whenever he wanted to cooperate and give his turn to his peer. He expressed his joy with a smile and some syllables which were used by his teacher to encourage Leo (the other child) to play with Tom.

#### **4.4.2 Play outdoors**

The next vignette describes Tom playing in the garden:

*Many children run and play with prams in the garden, so does Tom who smiles and seems to be happy while pushing his pram. He decides to go towards Helen who at that moment is talking with Laura (another teacher) and bumps into her feet; 'where's your ball'? asks Helen, takes Tom's hand and they both run to find a ball while Tom leaves his pram in the middle of the garden. Tom finds a ball and starts kicking it until it bumps into Kelly's feet. Kelly gets the ball into her hands and Helen reminds her that 'Tom plays with the ball'; Tom does not react and just stares at Kelly who gives him the ball and hears Helen saying 'thank you Kelly'. Helen turns to me and tells me 'he had an eye contact at least today' (with Kelly) and smiles at me.*

The teacher missed the opportunity to extend Tom's play through any form of interaction as she was occupied in other activities. Moreover, she redirected his attention to an activity in which Tom was anyway involved by himself every day in the nursery instead of trying to extend his play experiences by following his play at that specific moment (pushing the pram). She prohibited the other child (Kelly) from possibly playing with Tom and reduced the possibilities for them to interact by focusing on the ownership of the ball rather than providing enough support and

further enabling Tom to play with his peer. In the end, it is obvious that the teacher is surprised by the fact that Tom made eye contact with his peer and obviously she did not expect him to play or further interact with Kelly.

In the next vignette Tom seems to have made a friend at the nursery who really cares about him:

*Tom is in the garden, holding Helen's hand when he decides to go up the small hill in the middle of the garden. Frace joins him and starts going up the wooden stairs with Tom while he is looking at but not talking to him. She shows a special interest in him since she puts her hand on his back like she is trying to protect him. Tom does not respond but does not seem to be bothered as he gazes at her and smiles. The two children go down the hill and Tom hugs Helen; Frace follows him and asks him 'are you ok Tom'? as she smiles at him. Tom looks at her and goes up the hill again. He can hear an aeroplane, stares at the sky and by pointing says in a loud voice 'pane, pane'. Frace who is standing by him looks also in the sky and says 'aeroplane'. Tom runs away towards Helen as he is followed by Frace; 'Hello Frace' says Helen and looks at Tom who looks her too, smiles at her and accepts Frace's hug. Helen smiles at them, takes their hands and suggests to them 'let's go running' and they all run along the garden.*

Tom had obviously a good friend at the nursery that cared about him and wanted to join him in his activities. Tom seemed to feel a bit insecure since he was hugging Helen each time he was followed by Frace and they were spending some time together. However, this did not prevent Frace from showing him her sympathy and even hugging him. Tom showed that he probably wanted to share his joy with other people when he verbalised half of the word aeroplane which was correctly pronounced by Frace. Helen's role was that of an observer who was involved in Tom's interaction only because Tom asked for her support and restricted her duties to teaching him how to greet other people.

The final vignette depicts Tom engaging in multiple activities outdoors:

*Tom is in the garden kicking a ball around the nursery for a long time. He bumps into Deil, who at the moment is riding one of the bikes, stares at him for a while and then goes on until he stops, takes a ball in his hands and gazes at Joanna (teacher) who talks to another child and then leaves again. Tom then finds a pram and starts pushing it along the garden when Chloe stops him and sits on the pram. Tom moves the pram forwards and backwards, leaves and finds another pram. He is stopped by Beatrice who tells him 'what's that?' takes a leaf out of Tom's pram and tells him 'it's a leaf'. Tom looks at her and leaves, to continue his play in the garden. He passes many teachers who at the time are discussing in the middle of the garden while the children are playing. Tom finally finds a bicycle; he starts riding it until Mike bumps into him with his bicycle. Tom stops for a while, gazes at him and starts riding his bicycle again. Mike follows him and bumps again into Tom's bike, who looks at him, smiles and starts riding again. Mike does not follow him immediately but when he decides to do so and goes next to Tom, who has stopped riding and seems to wait for Mike to come towards him; when Mike goes next to him, Tom looks at him again, smiles, stands up and pushes him away.*

Tom liked engaging in multiple activities while he was outdoors although he was playing beside and in parallel with other children and was mainly engaged in sensory motor play. Tom had difficulties interacting with other children and initiating interactions with them as he preferred to pass by them or ignore them. On the other hand, the active involvement of the teachers in the children's play was almost absent. However, Tom seemed to be playful and engaged in an interaction initiated by Mike and involved not physical but distant interaction between the two children.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This study explored and described the play of two children with autism in the naturalistic environments of two early years settings. The implications of the data relative to the research questions of this study are discussed in the current chapter. The main themes raised in this study highlighted a number of factors which contributed towards the inclusion and participation of two children with autism in play activities with or without their teacher's support. I begin with these before discussing the limitations of the study.

#### **1. Children with autism were engaged in all forms of play when they were sufficiently supported by their teachers and sometimes if they weren't.**

In this study I tried to understand in depth the play of two children with autism as this unfolded in the naturalistic environments of two inclusive settings. Below, I provide nine statements and build an argument which is based on thorough understanding of the play of two children with autism (in contrast to other experimental studies). Through 'naturalistic generalisation' (Stake, 1995) using the thick description of two children with autism I enable the reader to recognise similar experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and/or to 'pick up' information appropriate and useful to his/her own situation (Simons, 1980). Thus, it is through demonstrating what the data from these cases show about play for these children that we are able to understand better the play of all children.

#### **Statement 1**

As I have shown in the literature review, many researchers argue that children with autism cannot engage in complex forms of play, or that this can happen only under highly structured conditions. In this study I argue that two **children with autism can be engaged in all forms of play as long as they are enabled to play in their own way and to accept some kind of support from their teachers.** The current study evidenced the multiple forms of play the children with autism were involved with. It has to be noted here though that the children with autism showed a preference for

specific forms of play over some others, and that it was more difficult for them to extend their play to interact with their peers when they were not supported by their teachers.

### **Statement 2**

Exploratory play was included in the play repertoire of the two children with autism although it was not the dominant form of their engagement with toys and other objects within the nurseries. Whenever they were exploring, the children preferred to be alone as they used their senses to understand the function of the object or toy they were manipulating and playing with. This is evident in the findings presented in Chapter 4 (see pages 139-141). Nonetheless, this study shows that the children with autism were engaged in many different play activities, showing occasional interest in stereotyped activities that included solitary and repetitive play. In this study solitary play was one form of play among others in which the children with autism preferred to be engaged as they focused on sensations including touching, smelling, shaking, pushing, banging, rotating and kicking in a rather repetitive way. I therefore reject Gena et al.'s (2005) argument that children with autism favour solitary activities. This study instead endorses the argument of Boucher (1999) who noted that children with autism may show a preference for isolated and less social play just because they do not feel comfortable with, and are not yet ready to interact with, other peers or adults in a conventional way.

The current study identified sensorimotor play as one of the main forms of play for the two children with autism; thus in addition to the other forms of play, sensorimotor was included in their play agenda. This counters Libby et al. (1998) who suggest that children with autism engage in sensorimotor play as they are not able to be engaged in more complex forms of play. These children engaged in this safe, basic play (producing sounds by waving, shaking, banging, smelling and passing toys around) as well as in more advanced play.

### **Statement 3**

Relational play was not observed very often in the play of the current study children. Whenever it was evident in the children's play repertoire, however, it was rather varied and included many different types of toys and objects. This is interesting in

comparison to both studies that suggest that children with autism do not have difficulties in relational play (Dominguez et al., 2006) and to other studies suggesting that children with autism have limited experience in relational play (Dodd, 2005). In this study the relational play of the children with autism was mainly expressed in the form of matching shapes, colours, and pictures, ordering shapes and other toys, and combining and matching different wooden and other pieces together.

#### **Statement 4**

Functional play was the type of play the two children in this study most preferred to be involved with. This is in contrast to Stone et al. (1990) who suggested that children with autism spend less time in functional play. The range of themes was varied and extended to different thematic areas; although those themes are not exhaustive, they represent the activities that children with autism preferred mostly to be engaged with. Those themes were taken either from the children's daily lives or related to the toys available in the nursery, among them transport means of all sizes including miniatures (i.e. buses, aeroplanes, cars, trains), animals (i.e. crocodiles, ducks), musical instruments (i.e. trumpets, saxophones, drums, xylophones), sports equipment (i.e. tennis racquets), daily activities (i.e. brushing teeth with big toothbrushes), kitchen equipment and other activities (i.e. cook in a pan, turn the water tubs). Although the themes of the functional play were varied, it was difficult for the children to experience and engage in functional play with new toys and other themes unless their teachers tried to introduce them. Lewis and Boucher (1988) argued that the functional play of children with autism lacks diversity, but this study showed that the diversity depended on the opportunities that were presented to them. The children with autism were involved in different functional play activities either by themselves or in group forms and in cooperation with their peers and teachers. The data support, in part, the studies suggesting that children with autism do engage in functional play but their play is qualitatively different compared to their typical peers (Desha et al., 2003) mainly because the children with autism were almost always occupied within the same play activities with the same toys.

A further qualitative difference in the children's play concerned the difficulty the children experienced in communicating verbally and sufficiently their thoughts either to their teachers or their peers during functional and advanced forms of play. This



resulted in them occasionally seeming to be refraining from interacting and becoming mutually engaged in shared play with their peers and teachers. The peers of the children with autism were not always able to understand that the children with autism were responding to their play cues and that they were playing in their own way; this occasionally resulted in the peers' withdrawal from the play interaction which in turn resulted in lost play opportunities that could have been developed between the children with autism and their peers. Lost opportunities meant the 'stabilisation' of play – in this case at the functional level – instead of the potential for developing into more complex forms (i.e. symbolic play) being realised. This was not the case though in play between the children with autism and their teachers who were mostly able to understand that the children with autism had difficulties effectively communicating their feelings in their play and thus tried to support them and help them communicate their preferences more effectively.

#### **Statement 5**

This study suggests that although children with autism were not able to 'find the words' instantly and respond to their peers and teachers in a conventional way, they were replying in non-verbal ways depending on the play situation they were involved during play time. Those ways included a great variety of body gestures, looking at people, pointing, extending the hands to the recipient, standing very close or leaning towards peers and teachers. The ways the two children used to communicate with their peers and teachers varied in that Vicky used more advanced ways of showing her interest in play compared to Tom who exhibited a much limited repertoire. Whenever Vicky wanted to communicate her needs to her peers and/or teachers she extended her hands towards a child, moved closer to the children playing, looked at them, pointed at people and/or objects and cooperated with her peers' suggestions (e.g. a child gave her a train, she looked at him, put it on the railway set in front of her and rolled it on the track). Whenever she wanted to express her dislike and show that she did not want someone to be involved within her play activity she ignored her peer's/teacher's suggestion and kept playing with her own toys, she rarely pushed the child's hands away, but she would physically cringe and/or refuse to be involved in a play activity by repeating the word 'no'. Tom's ways of communicating with other people during play were more stereotyped and less varied. Tom would look at and copy his teacher's play suggestions, he would pull or grab his teacher's, but never a peer's, chin to draw

attention towards the activity he wanted to be involved with, he would extend his hands towards the toys he wished to play with and he would pull toys out of other children's hands. He expressed his dislike during play mainly by screaming, crying and banging objects to redirect his teacher's attention towards the activity he wanted to be involved with and pushing his peers' hands away from the activity he wanted to be involved with.

### **Statement 6**

Parallel play was often observed in the play of the children with autism either with their peers or their teachers. The three main foci for parallel play were play in the sand, play with musical instruments and play with Lego. Parallel play was governed by opportunities for the children with autism to interact either with their teachers or their peers, and often opportunities for parallel play with peers were missed (especially for Tom). Although the children with autism were able to join other children in their play, occasionally they had difficulties becoming actively involved into their peer's play often ending up playing aside and not together; it has to be noted here though that the children of the setting with the stronger play ethos seemed to be more **willing** to invite the children with autism play together.

The feasibility and occasional difficulty of eliminating missed play opportunities were also affected by the teacher's role and were different in the two settings. The teachers of the nursery with the stronger play ethos were 'employing' parallel play as the initial stage to introduce themselves into the play activity of the children with autism and to gradually become active play partners by themselves. This was not the case for Butterfly nursery where the teachers were almost always taking the role of the commentator, trying to steer the child with autism into play with his/her peers without any of their own playful contribution to the children's play sequence.

### **Statement 7**

The physical play of the children with autism included a great variety of different play forms, among them kicking balls and chasing each other, riding bicycles and/or wooden horses, jumping on musical mats and trampolines, playing with drums, bouncing on balls and playing hide and seek. This type of play was almost always a good way for the children with autism to interact – mainly in non-verbal ways – and

to share playful experiences with their peers; their teachers were also more able to take turns and be actively involved in the physical play of all children including those with autism. Thus the data of this study contradict the findings of Williams et al. (2001) and Jordan (2003) who suggest that children with autism are less likely to engage the interest of others during play since their way of playing is more routinised, more passive and less playful. The observations from this case study reveal that the two children with autism succeeded in engaging playfully in physical play which often required only non-verbal communication among the children. Physical play enabled the children with autism both to initiate and to follow playful interactions between them, their peers and/or their teachers.

### **Statement 8**

Pretend play was another form of play that the children with autism were engaged in with their teachers, peers and by themselves. The children were involved in a great variety of different activities including play with cars/trains and railway stations, pretend sleeping, cooking, and talking into the phone. These findings are counter to studies suggesting that children with autism cannot pretend or can only pretend under highly elicited conditions (ADD). Thus, this study instead suggests three main key issues about the pretend play of children with autism. Firstly, the children with autism were genuinely involved in pretend play as this was developed between them, their teachers and their peers in the naturalistic environments of their inclusive settings; secondly, the teachers' role and their contribution to the children's pretend play was significant, often further enriching these children's play experiences by encouraging them to talk and occasionally extend their play. Thirdly, the children with autism were keen on following their partner's play agenda during pretend play acts.

### **Statement 9**

Furthermore, it has to be noted here that amongst the variety of toys used by the children with autism during pretend play, there were toy preferences which occupied the children in the same favourite play activities. This lends some support to Dominguez et al.'s (2006) suggestion that children with autism have specific toy preferences and thus a limited play repertoire. The different idea that this study brings in, however, is that although the children with autism showed preferences for specific toys, at the same time they were genuinely playful and were taking pleasure from the

activities they were engaging with. This is in keeping with some of the main characteristics of play, which are that it involves pleasure, spontaneity and intrinsic motivation (Garvey, 1977, cited by Jordan, 2003).

## **2. Collaboration among the teachers could act as a catalyst in the development of an inclusive playful environment.**

After exploring the way children with autism interact and play with their peers, their teachers and/or in an individual basis, the next part of this chapter concerns the role of collaboration among the teachers and how this acted as a catalyst in the development of an inclusive, playful environment. Collaboration is closely interrelated with inclusion and is certainly not a new concept in inclusive education. This study highlighted once again the important place of collaboration in the construction of an inclusive environment, and also a *playful* environment. In the section below I present the contrasting practices of collaboration between the two case study settings – Butterfly Nursery and Forest Nursery – and discuss to what extent different levels of collaboration among early childhood educators can influence the inclusiveness and playfulness of two different inclusive settings.

In Butterfly nursery it was difficult to identify examples of real collaboration; instead I witnessed plain communication limited to daily issues among the teachers. The communication among teachers was rarely focused on issues relevant to the child's progress and attempts to collaborate, critique and eventually change their own practices almost never took place. The importance for good levels of collaboration and shared experiences among staff is highlighted by Hiebert, Gallimore and Stigler (2002 cited by Ainscow, 2007) who argue that when those kinds of attitudes are included in the repertoire of staff they can help them to change their current practices and probably develop new ones. The teachers in Forest nursery cooperated, shared their experiences, exchanged ideas and tried to find new ways of modifying their existing practices to enhance Vicky's progress. Potentially most importantly, this study highlights that the teachers in Forest nursery were not only reflective, but as Kerry and Wilding (2004) suggest, *reflexive* as well, trying to translate the outcomes of their discussions into new forms of teaching action that would ultimately enable all

the children, including Vicky, to play and learn. This was expressed by a teacher during field observation as ‘we are learning together’.

In Butterfly nursery there was no team work and reflection regarding the play activities. The teachers in Butterfly nursery had difficulties collaborating effectively and reflecting on their own practices as they were relevant to the play of all children including Tom. Moreover, it seems that the lack of collaboration among the teachers created some barriers not only in the promotion of inclusion but also in the enhancement of playfulness within the setting. In contrast, the teachers in Forest nursery were often reflecting, at the end of each shift, on the success and relevant appropriateness of activities chosen from the High/Scope list of play activities as they were adapted to the Forest nursery children’s needs.

Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2007) suggest that ‘effective settings’ have a number of characteristics which include the building of shared understandings, meanings and goals among the staff, effective communicative and reflection levels which ultimately lead to change in practices, building a learning and team culture, and finally supporting staff’s professional development to become critically reflective in their practices. This is partly supported by Duncan and Lockwood (2008) who focus on how the set of principles, ideas and common goals among staff work towards the promotion of high quality play. Thus, it is understandable that the current study found that good communicative and reflective skills among the teachers were associated with more playful behaviours between the teachers and the children.

In Butterfly nursery there seemed to be a lack of joint working and collaboration between the speech therapist and Tom’s one-to-one teacher, although this impression was not shared by the head teacher who expressed her satisfaction with the speech therapy work. ‘I am not able to find a place to talk’, Tom’s one-to-one teacher characteristically said in one of our informal discussions when I was interested to know the reason she did not try to talk to the leader of the setting or cooperate more with the speech therapist. It seems therefore that spaces for collaboration need to be created. At Forest nursery, where there were good levels of team work, spaces for collaboration among the teachers and the speech therapist were made. They were all interested in Vicky’s progress and shared together her progress on an ongoing basis.

The spirit of team work in Forest nursery was enhanced by the trust developed between the teachers and the speech therapist and the willingness on both sides to reflect, suggest and share new ways to enable Vicky's inclusion and play during group time activities. Episodes from the data in Chapter 4, pp.117-118 highlight their willingness to share their problems and improve their practices.

Vakil et al. (2009), in a qualitative study about the effectiveness of the teaching strategies used by early childhood practitioners to meet the needs of children with autism in inclusive settings, highlight the importance of interdisciplinary collaborative team work and characterise it as 'of paramount importance to the success of the child in an inclusive setting' (p.322). Taking that into consideration, the current study further suggests that collaboration and reflection among the teachers work not only for the inclusion of children with autism but also in the provision of meaningful play activities and in the development of a playful environment.

New ideas about possible activities that could be used within the nursery with Tom were not really welcomed by some teachers. This resulted in Tom's teacher refraining from taking initiatives relevant to practices that could be used within the nursery. Consequently she adjusted her own practices regarding Tom's daily routines in lone practice. The important role that the principals/leaders have in the development of collaboration and inclusive practices is highlighted by Ainscow (2007) and extended by Robins and Callan (2009) who argue that the creation of an inspirational ethos within an early years setting will be maintained as long as there is an 'interconnectedness' among the staff; where everyone is included in the decision-making process relationships of mutual trust thrive. This was not the case in Butterfly nursery where Tom's teacher felt her opinion on the set-up of inclusive practices was not taken into consideration. The practices in Forest nursery on the other hand, highlighted the teachers' strategies in using a common language and thinking to welcome new practices and sustain inclusive child-centred play approaches. This kind of common language, which enables teachers to exchange ideas, talk about their own practices and experiment with new possibilities is discussed by Little and McLaughlin (1993, cited by Ainscow, 2005). The value of exchanging ideas and welcoming new suggestions was evident in Forest nursery and further extended to me as a researcher as well, since I was often asked to express my opinion about Vicky's progress and/or

possible ideas as someone who was not directly involved and would have probably have another valuable perspective. After all, it is evident that in Forest nursery, the teachers were genuinely concerned to interact, include and enrich Vicky's play experiences within the nursery. These interactions reflected not only the teachers' ethos but the playfulness as this was constructed within the inclusive environment of Forest nursery.

At Butterfly nursery the head teacher appeared to be occasionally authoritative, taking a transactional top-down approach where the power of the decisions remains solely with the leader. As a result, it seemed that the decisions were mainly taken by the head teacher and almost never discussed with the responsible teachers, although in interview the head teacher described the staff working collaboratively and as a team: 'we also have meetings every half term where we all get together and everybody gets a say in what we are going to do in the next term'. This was not supported in her overall attitude towards the teachers and within the nursery; thus the lack of mutual collaboration between all members of staff including the head teacher presented difficulties for them working together for the best of the children. Fullan (2004, p.162) discusses the nurturing role that leaders in early childhood settings should adopt as 'the context setter, the designer of a learning experience, not an authority figure with solutions'. Forest nursery had such a leader who was more interested in interacting with the members of staff, valuing their opinions and taking decisions in collaboration with all of them. Robins and Callan (2009) call this style of leadership a 'letting go of leadership' where the power is shared among the staff aiming to empower and enhance the possibilities for change and development. The teachers at Forest nursery really cared about making a difference in all children's play including Vicky's and this was achieved through the ways they chose to communicate and take the decisions.

The practices at Butterfly nursery reflected the way in which the teachers were unofficially categorised into novice and experienced. For example, a teacher seeing herself as experienced intervened with a novice teacher by instructing her to finish Tom's time on the computer, which she complied with. This caused upset to Tom and to his one-to-one teacher, whose programme of using a timer on such occasions was being spoiled. The actions of the novice were excused by the one-to-one teacher as

not her fault as she was new when she learned she was merely doing what she was told. The lack of collaboration in such instances directly impacted on the children's play.

A sense of community was evident instead in Forest nursery where teachers with different levels of skill and experience were all collaborating and equally valuing each other's perceptions about Vicky's and all children's play. Their common goal was concentrated on their ability to share ideas and achieve the best outcomes for Vicky. For example, Mrs Hogg, Vicky's key worker, and the more experienced Mrs Lake, were observed discussing what approach to take with Vicky. Vicky had been distracted from where she was meant to be going by some drums which she had started to play. Mrs Hogg asked 'What can I do now?' and Mrs Lake supported rather than directed by replying, 'what do you want her to do?' The answer, 'I just want her play' affirmed the play ethos in the nursery. This episode showed the willingness and positive attitude of the teachers with differing levels of experience to reflect together about best practice as this fostered the basis for dilemmas, concerns and worries about mistakes or unexpected events to be shared and trust to evolve among the teachers. Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2006) argue that effective leaders in early years settings should develop a team culture and learning community that will enable the teachers collaborate effectively no matter their levels of expertise. Cooperation plays an important role towards inclusion. Good cooperative levels among teachers and other disciplines can further facilitate the creation of an inclusive playful environment.

### **3. Teachers' roles and communication styles in facilitating inclusion in play**

The differences in the roles adopted by the teachers within the two nurseries emerged from the data as significant in the play of the children with autism. In Forest nursery, the teachers perceived their role towards the children, and especially regarding Vicky, as being **supportive** – someone who will enable her express herself, interact with people and encourage her language and eye contact. Concerning play and their contribution towards children's and Vicky's play, teachers in Forest nursery held the notion that one of the roles they undertook was that of a supporter who leaves or enables the children to lead the play activities. This was reflected in both teachers' interview with comments like, 'it's about what she wants to do and I will support her



choice of play, it's not about what I want her to be doing at that given time', and 'you don't want to go in and change what they do, you don't want to sort of take over their play, but you could sort of extend it ... so you are trying to get them to lead the play [and] maybe to go further by thinking a little bit more than they might have done if you weren't there, so you are really trying there to extend it'. The teachers of the Forest nursery do not doubt the fact that Vicky is able to play. Furthermore, they express their own role in Vicky's play in terms of the 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978) as enabling the child to learn by providing information that will be just beyond the child's current level. They tried to build upon Vicky's play interests but at the same time to extend her knowledge by providing a great variety of play experiences and careful support for her learning through play.

The teachers at Butterfly Nursery often held a different point of view concerning the ability of children with autism (in this case Tom) to play and their role in enriching his play experiences. This was evident in both teachers' interviews where the teacher's agenda was foremost. For example:

I am trying to get him interested in different things like musical toys or things that make noise, like the balls with the beads in ... and he will look at them and sometimes he will just touch it or throw it and look at me and will have good eye contact and then just fly off and do his own thing again ... children that are autistic, they find it difficult I think to play, because they don't actually like the social side of being [and of] interacting with any child ... I think it is quite a challenge to actually teach a child like Tom to actually play.

A similar way of thinking was reflected in the second teacher's interview when she was asked about her support in Tom's play:

A lot of children with autism just play in their own space....and we [are] sort of trying to encourage children to interact with other children when they are playing, so that is quite difficult for children with autism because even though we offer our activities and our ideas for all children's needs quite often children with autism won't get the same experiences as other children, but in their own way they will, but they might just go to an activity for a little while

and then come away and then go back and then come away, where a lot of the other children might stay in that activity a bit longer so it's really for us to try and encourage and have out things that will catch their eye and make them think 'ok let's have a look over there'.

It is evident from the interview quotes above that there is a big difference between how the teachers at the two nurseries perceive their role and perceive the play abilities of children with autism and define disability in general. This stance, affects, as I have discussed in earlier chapters, both nurseries' practices and play ethos. At Forest Nursery the teachers perceive themselves as **enablers/supporters** who aim to build upon Vicky's play interests and let her set her own play agenda. Forest Nursery used practices reflecting more of a social model of disability, rejecting the notion that Vicky was not able to play, and creating inclusion by modifying – when necessary – their practices to match her needs. In contrast, the teachers at Butterfly Nursery did not have this working belief that Tom was able to play even when supported and encouraged by them, which held them back from offering such support. This stance towards disability, attuned more to a medical model of disability in which the difficulties are seen to lie within the child (as discussed in Chapter 1), was present even within an ostensibly inclusive setting. Wood and Bennett (2000), in a qualitative study which examined the theoretical perceptions of preschool teachers and their possible implications in practice, similarly found that teachers sometimes underestimated children's abilities to play in an independent, cooperative and successful way.

Part of the teachers' role at Forest Nursery was clearly to act as supporters in all children's play. As more experienced practitioners, the teachers at Forest Nursery supported, facilitated and extended Vicky's play, both in adult-child and child-child interactions, so that she was able to accomplish more complex tasks than she would be able to do alone. This is consistent with the findings of Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) who suggested that the most effective early years settings (for enhancing child development) were those which provided the children with a balance of opportunities for adult-initiated and child-initiated play interactions and in which the teachers were extending children's activities. In contrast, the teachers at Butterfly Nursery were almost always directing Tom to the activities he was supposed to be engaged with,

promoting mostly their own play agenda and learning opportunities but not trying to extend Tom's play. Duncan and Lockwood (2008) call this strategy 're-direction' as it allows the teacher to redirect the child's activities to their own but not to the child's play interests. One example that illustrates this concept vividly was when Tom found a buggy and happily pushed it along the garden and Helen stopped him after a few metres, took the buggy out of his hands and told him 'Tom sitting'. Tom looked at her and awkwardly sat in the buggy; as Helen started moving the buggy Tom started shouting and managed to get out, taking it from Helen running with it. I argue from data like this that children with autism can play better when teachers guide them and remember to build upon their interests, ideas and thoughts. This is according to Bruner (1983) who suggested that the teacher can direct a child's play as long as he/she does not focus on what to direct or how to direct it but rather tries to enable the child to apply the learning coming from the directed play to a new situation. Apparently this was not the case for the teacher at Butterfly Nursery.

The difference in the approaches used between the teachers of the two nurseries was obvious in the playfulness involved when the teachers were interested in enabling children to learn but at the same time engaging themselves as active play partners. The playfulness that evolved between the teachers at Forest Nursery and the children was reflected through the mutual pleasure observed during play activities with all children, including Vicky, and the fact that the teachers were engaging in play activities with children for the sake of playing and not for behavioural goals. The following example is one among the rest of extended vignettes I provided in Chapter 4, which depicts vividly the nature of the teacher's role as an active player, in Vicky's play experiences: Vicky sat on the floor, next to Ilane who was already shaking a couple of bells, and started playing drums. Mrs Hogg got closer to the two girls, sat on the floor and asked Ilane 'can I shake a bell with you Ilane'? Ilane nodded positively and Mrs Hogg started singing and shaking the bells with Ilane. Vicky listened, looked at them and started singing as well. The teacher in the vignette above did not use any specific pedagogical strategy related only to Vicky; this suggests that there is no single strategy but instead only the willingness of the teacher to be actively engaged and support children's learning and play. Thus, my argument from my data is in common with that of Hochmann and Weikart (2002, p.60) who suggest that playful adults are those who 'participate in the intensity of children's play' by building blocks,

making up and singing songs, playing tag and hide and seek and other activities which are particularly integrated in the children's play repertoire.

In contrast the teachers at Butterfly Nursery often undertook a quite different role as an observer-director – someone aiming to encourage Tom to interact only with his peers but almost never with his teachers; an illustrative example is provided in Chapter 4, p.152. This teaching strategy is in line with Schwartz et al. (2004) who suggest that children with autism should interact on a daily basis with their typically developing peers, but at the same time highlights Mortimore's (1999) argument which prioritises the establishment of a stable one-to-one relationship with the teacher who will later enable the child to communicate with their surroundings. Furthermore, Tom's one-to-one teacher did not usually adopt playful ways of engaging Tom actively in the play activity; she rather preferred to take a firm and strict way of talking, interacting and directing Tom which ultimately de-motivated him from going on with play. My argument echoes that of Duncan and Lockwood (2008) that when children spend time in a context which is not challenging enough for them to engage their interest they are unlikely to stay concentrating and become actively involved. In the same vein the fact that the teachers at Butterfly Nursery believed that their role should be restricted to a passive or rather reserved role in play terms (although not in teaching terms) is reflected in one of the teacher's interviews: when asked about her role in Tom's play she said characteristically, 'I needed to take a step back ... I didn't want to interfere'. The teachers at Butterfly Nursery appeared to be reluctant to do more than keep an eye on children's play, highlighting once again the prevailing orthodoxy that teachers should refrain from participating in children's play (Devereux and Miller, 2003).

Furthermore, and in addition to the fact that the teachers at Forest Nursery were continually taking different roles in children's play, their active engagement was most often in the form of open-ended questions such as, 'What can you see?' or 'What do you want to do with these colours?' They often tried to engage children, including Vicky, in pretend play with questions like, 'What are you going to do with the red car?' or 'What are these people doing there?' They would describe to the children what they could see and often they would even try to engage the imagination of the children by responding as if what they saw was something else: 'that looks like a

house, it has two holes that seem like windows’, or ‘are you playing with the aeroplane Vicky? The girl in it has yellow hair and a green shirt’. Those kinds of questions aimed to challenge children’s thinking, provoke speculation, challenge imagination and enable them to reflect upon their play and ideas. As Alexander (2000) suggests, open-ended questions stimulate ‘high-order’ thinking and require more than one possible answer from a child, and so this was interactive and not directive.

In comparison, the questions used by the teachers at Butterfly Nursery were always rather focused and could be characterised as closed-ended, such as ‘where’s the banana?’ or ‘where’s the giraffe gone?’ In addition, they were almost always focusing on description: ‘look Tom it is moving his tail’, or ‘oh that’s a big ball Tom’. Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2008) argue that closed questions aim to elicit short answers from the children; indeed the type of questions used from the teachers at Butterfly Nursery did not seem to facilitate and enable Tom to extend his play activities either with his peers or with his teachers.

The teachers within the two nurseries often undertook the role of **mediator to support in a greater or lesser degree the flow of the children’s play**. However, the way they approached the problems was completely different. At Forest Nursery the teachers were trying to help children solve a problem by explaining first what went wrong and the reason why they had to stop acting in a specific way, and finally making suggestions to the children so that they could mutually find a solution. The next example describes Kris who was standing in front of the interactive blackboard writing when Vicky went next to him and started writing as well. Mrs Hogg, who was sitting a few metres away from the children, went next to them, bent on her knees and explained to Vicky that she had to wait until Kris finished as only one child was allowed to write on the blackboard each time. Vicky looked at her teacher without replying and Mrs Hogg turned to Kris and asked him ‘have you finished with the blue Kris?’ Kris answered positively and Mrs Hogg gave a turn to Vicky. On the contrary, the teachers at Butterfly Nursery used less ‘negotiable’ ways to help the children solve their problems. The next example depicts one of those moments: Tessa was playing with a hoop in the garden; Tom went close to her and pulled the hoop out of her hands. The teachers were standing a few metres away and talking when Tessa went next to

one of them and drew their attention to Tom's activities. Meira [the teacher] went close to Tom, pulled the hoop out of his hands and told him 'That's Tessa's hoop Tom'. Tessa thanked her teacher while Tom found another hoop and started playing alone. **It is evident, though, that teachers who used discussion as a means to explain to the children how to wait for their turn, thus holding the role of a mediator, supported to a greater or lesser degree the flow of the children's play, coordinated effectively the play sequence, and worked towards the inclusion of both children in play.**

The role of commentator adopted by the teachers was common to the two nurseries although the aims of their actions differed. The teachers at Forest Nursery preferred occasionally during free and structured play time to hold the role of commentator-facilitator in Vicky's play. A vivid example occurred when Vicky was sitting on one of the mats and moved sideways when Katia joined her. They started singing when Mrs Hogg, Vicky's keyworker, joined them, commenting on their game. Vicky smiled and fell off the mat and Katia did the same; both girls started laughing ... a few minutes later, Irene sat on the mat Vicky was sitting on previously, turned towards Mrs Hogg and asked if someone wanted to ride her bus. Mrs Hogg echoed loudly 'who wants to ride on your bus?' and Vicky stopped immediately, looked at Irene and sat behind her on the mat. Mrs Hogg commented 'Vicky wants to sit on your bus with you' as the girls started rocking the mat sideways. It is evident in this example that the teacher maintained the least possible amount of intervention as she was interested in letting Vicky express herself and at the same time letting the play flow with the rest of the children evolve. Likewise, Tom's teacher at Butterfly Nursery was holding the role of commentator during free play time in Tom's play activities; illustrative vignettes relevant to this role are provided in earlier chapters. The difference compared to Forest Nursery though was that whenever Tom's teacher was commenting on Tom's play actions, she was not trying to extend and facilitate his play but rather interested in enabling him to copy her suggested play actions in a more directive way.

Thus, from the case study data, I argue that the optimum facilitation of play occurs when the teacher acts as a commentator in parallel with her duties in facilitating a child's play actions; the key issue is that the teacher's ultimate purpose should be the

extension and support of the child's play and learning rather than following the teacher's actions and lead. This is in line with Anderson (2004, p.382) who suggested that 'facilitative interactions' between the teacher and the child can better enable the child to learn and become independent compared to 'compensatory interactions', which have greater likelihood of making the child become dependent on the adult's assistance.

**4. A strong play ethos is created by a supportive curriculum framework which in turn supports teachers having fewer difficulties being actively engaged in children's play as it enables them to translate theory into practice.**

The importance of context has been highlighted by many authors; Porter (1995) discusses the importance of context in enabling students to learn and focuses on the context of classroom, the curriculum design and the instructional strategies employed by teachers to effectively serve all students including those with special needs. In this study, the data support the notion that the context, when it includes a supportive curriculum framework, is of major importance in the development of a strong play ethos which in turn affects teaching strategies.

The curriculum framework used at Forest Nursery by the teachers and serving a number of different purposes was the High/Scope curriculum (see Chapter 2, p.51). This curriculum framework provided structure to the nursery's activities, created a balance between the child-adult and adult-child activities, promoted inclusive practices, and finally became a guide to the adoption of playful approaches. In contrast, the lack of a supportive framework at Butterfly Nursery discouraged teachers from being actively involved in children's play, facing difficulties in using inclusive playful practices with all the children including Tom, and adopting play as the medium to interact and communicate with the children. Porter (1995) supports the notion that a curriculum which supports inclusion should be adopted by preschool settings, particularly one that supports all students' (including those with special needs) active involvement in the school's activities as 'this supports the development of an activity-based curriculum' (p.307) which allows students to learn through their own active involvement. Extending Porter's (1995) argument, my study suggests that

not only an inclusive curriculum but a curriculum framework based on play is necessary to develop a strong play ethos and inclusive practices.

The curriculum framework used by the teachers of the Forest nursery worked not only towards the active engagement of all the children in shared activities (singing, talking, painting) but also enabled them to actively value and celebrate diversity through activities done in the children's native languages (songs in Punjabi, Chinese). On the other hand, the lack of a framework in Butterfly nursery was a limiting factor both towards the adoption of inclusive playful activities between the teachers and the children but also towards activities that could celebrate and respect each and every child's cultural background. This study's argument about the interconnected relationship of a curriculum which respects the cultural diversity of children and works towards inclusive practices is in line with Nind (2005) who argues that a curriculum that integrates children's socio-cultural experiences and perspectives is important in the adoption of inclusive practices. Similarly, from an ethnographic study conducted in the UK related to the overall practices used in early years settings, Moyles, Adams & Musgrove (2002, p.51) suggest that the ability of the teachers to provide 'non-discriminatory and non-stereotypical resources and experiences which reflect differing linguistic, social, cultural, religious, ethnic aspects of the community' show the setting's level of pedagogical effectiveness as this is reflected in the teacher's approaches.

The High/Scope curriculum focuses on the important role of the context and the way it can be organised by adults so that children are provided with opportunities to experience a wide range of activities. Within this framework and adopting the principles suggested by the curriculum, the teachers of the Forest nursery provided the children with different activities - events which were used based on playful ways and were strongly connected to the overall play ethos of the nursery; 'High/Scope provides a list with many different activities' reported one of the teachers in one of our informal discussions during field work. Furthermore, and in addition to the activities suggested by High/Scope curriculum, Forest nursery was frequently organising various events which were either related to health, safety and hygiene issues supported by NHS workers or fire stations and other educational activities (library van, children borrowing books or toys from Sure Start). This is in accordance



with Moyles et al.'s (2002) argument that an early years setting's positive ethos will be established when the resources and equipment provided are stimulating, attractive, easily accessible by the children and based on different learning aims. Unfortunately, and in opposition to the practices used in Forest nursery, Butterfly nursery did not provide such a wide range of diverse learning experiences to the children. Probably the existence of a supportive curriculum framework would enable the teachers to organise more and varied events and provide a wider variety of activities and toys for all the children to play with. Moyles et al. (2002) argues that an early years setting's positive ethos will be established when the resources and equipment provided are stimulating, attractive, easily accessible by the children and based on different learning aims. The existing contrast between the play experiences provided by the two nurseries to Vicky and Tom, make evident the fact that a positive ethos will be established when the pedagogical orientation of each nursery will aim to provide both the necessary resources but to support the active participation of children in playful learning experiences as well.

The High/Scope curriculum framework gave a structure to the nursery's daily routine. At Forest Nursery, the routine was made explicit from the beginning of the day. The introduction of the activities was always accompanied by the use of a blackboard which was filled in with pictures from the areas where children could play; playful ways and certain phrases were also used by the teachers either during work or team time i.e. 'who is planning in the book corner?' 'What would you like to play with?' 'Where did you play today?' This type of structure gave the children the chance to contribute actively to their learning and freely express themselves, and gave the teachers the opportunity to use practices that were common for all the children. Compared to Forest Nursery, the routine observed at Butterfly Nursery did not include elements of mutual adult-child and child-adult participation; it was rather focused on procedures that matched older children and were irrelevant to playful ways of interaction and communication. Thus, the two contrasting practices adopted at each of this study's nurseries suggest that the strategies used by the teachers and the aim to promote learning through play can be dependent on the routine established by the curriculum framework adopted each time. This is something advocated by Moyles et al. (2002) who argue that an effective teaching and learning context can be achieved

through an established routine that supports both the children's and the teacher's daily schedule.

The curriculum framework was also a guide towards the adoption of playful approaches within Forest Nursery and the provision of multiple experiences to all the children including Vicky. This was enacted through different team activities in a different thematic area each day. The activities were mostly attempts to involve children in different forms of play, including pretend and socio-dramatic play, with the teacher introducing activities in a rather playful way and the children to take an active role in the construction of their learning through play. Notes taken during field work provide an illustrative picture of how playful approaches, which were used by the teachers and supported by the curriculum, enabled the children to learn through play.

'Ring, ring, ring, ring' says the teacher as the children are sitting around her and looking at her astonished 'oh hello mum, I would like the recipe for the pancakes ... mmm three eggs, one cup of sugar, one butter ...' and goes on '... it would be better to write down the recipe so that I will remember it, do you agree?' and the children nod as the teacher goes on 'who remembers how we make the pancakes' to receive the children's volunteering answers. In this case the teacher tried to retain the children's interest about the activity through pretend/dramatic play and asked them to meet a challenge and solve a problem by remembering.

The inputs chosen by the teachers are what Neelands (1984) refers to as the teacher's 'subtle tongue' since they help them structure play, not in a strict way which puts barriers into playful pedagogical approaches, but rather in a way that enriches the children's play and enhances the teacher's creativity to produce a structured but still interactive playful ambience.

In contrast to the playful approaches used at Forest Nursery, the lack of inclusive practices at Butterfly Nursery was evident in the teacher's practices for all the children but especially for Tom and his ability to learn, understand and play. Tom was always sitting literally fastened to his own chair, with his one-to-one teacher sitting

next to him and occasionally cuddling him. During field work, it was evident that Tom's teachers took for granted that Tom was neither able to understand nor to make sense of the activities provided to the rest of the children and taking place within the nursery. This was reflected in one of the teacher's expressions about him in response to my asking why Tom was not sitting on the floor along with the rest of the children: 'it doesn't matter' replied the teacher, as she unfastened Tom's belt and they went to another room where Tom could play alone. Tom was prevented from being actively involved in a context where he would probably have been able to experiment alone or with his peers, test out possibilities and reflect on his own actions with or without his peers' mutual participation. The lack of such opportunities prevents children 'from becoming successful learners' (Wood & Attfield, 1996, p.92). The teacher did not encourage Tom to interact with other children and supported the notion that it was Tom's own difficulties that prevented him from interacting with other children. The phrases that best depict the teacher's opinion and pedagogical stance towards Tom's abilities are: 'Tom likes playing alone and running around. Children have given up with him because he is not trying to interact with them', and 'autistic [children] do not know how to use equipment'. Thus, if a supportive curriculum framework had been adopted, it would unavoidably have enabled the teachers to use playful strategies and value all children's active participation, including Tom's.

Furthermore, the teacher's stance towards Tom's abilities brings to the fore two main issues related to inclusion and early years. The first relates to the fact that there is still too much work in autism specifically and in disability generally that reflects the medical model which emphasises that the problem resides within the child and continues the use of negative labelling (Jones, 2004). The second, interconnected issue underlines the fact that play is contextual in origin and as such is influenced by a number of environmental factors including teaching strategies. Hughes (1999, p.144) suggests that 'the lack of appropriate surroundings to play in, the failure of adult supervisors to help them plan and carry out their play routines, and the unavailability of suitable playmates all conspire to foster an impression that handicapped children suffer from basic play deficits. In fact, this impression may be completely false: the observed play differences may be environmental in origin'. Comparison between the two case study sites endorses this argument.

The supportive curriculum framework created a balance between child-adult and adult-child activities. Moyles et al. (2002) argue that effective practitioners must provide a wide range of smaller or larger group activities which in turn will make use of the children's already existing knowledge and build upon their abilities. The provision of a wide range of activities and an interconnectedness between the children and the teachers was evident at Forest Nursery which, through the use of the High/Scope curriculum, managed to provide different group activities to the children and at the same time remain open to all the children's – including Vicky's – active contribution. Schwartz, Billingsley & McBride (1998) assimilate early years classrooms with learning communities where the teachers should alternate the activities between small and larger groups as these can enable children with autism to actively participate in and contribute to the group's activities. Contrary to the inclusive practices being adopted at Forest Nursery, the lack of a curriculum framework at Butterfly Nursery developed space for less inclusive practices within it. This in practice was translated into a rather small number of group activities where most of the time the children were passive recipients and not active contributors to the teacher's activities. Phrases like 'don't bang on that one please' or 'you should be quieter indoors and louder outdoors' and the teacher's lack of ability to discover and introduce new activities to the children was further impoverished by the lack of a supportive curriculum framework as it would probably have enabled the teachers to refrain from the role of the observer-supervisor during free play time. These kinds of attitudes seem still to be common in a number of nurseries, reception and key stage 1 classes where children are left to engage alone in play and learning activities without receiving adequate levels of support from their teachers (Moyles, 2000). At the same time, it was evident that the teachers at Butterfly Nursery were not interested in becoming involved in children's play but rather preferred to be otherwise occupied; this was evident in the nursery's daily routine with teachers observed filling in forms and turning children away when they ask 'do you want to play with us?' This finding unfortunately does not challenge Michalopoulou's (2008) argument that nursery teachers may prefer to be involved in domestic and other related activities instead of being actively engaged with the children.

The two contrasting views that these two case studies have brought to the surface highlight on the one hand, as Corbett (2001) describes, a connective pedagogy which

focuses on the simple need for some settings to realise the importance of making children part of their learning through interactive procedures which aim to make learning fun; this was the case at Butterfly Nursery where the teachers were not able to facilitate all children's play probably due to the fact that there was no supportive framework that would act as a guide for their daily play, teaching and inclusive practices. On the other hand the teachers at Forest Nursery used inclusive playful practices which were embraced within the context of a playful curriculum and aimed to meet the needs of all the children including Vicky. The stance of these teachers can be understood in terms of the 'connective pedagogy' of Corbett and Norwich (2005, p.27), and they would identify the central role of the teacher as being to connect Vicky's learning needs to the rest of the children and adopt common pedagogies for everyone. Through the use of a connective pedagogy that was supported by the curriculum framework adopted at Forest Nursery, the teachers managed to build trust and mutual participation between themselves and the children and facilitated all children's, including Vicky's, participation in play and other learning experiences. Thus, this suggests that these teachers did not use any autism-specific pedagogies but inclusive pedagogies that enabled all the children, including Vicky, to be actively involved in the construction of their own learning through play. The need to use specific pedagogies for children with learning difficulties has been challenged by Corbett and Norwich (2005, p.16) who argue that 'pedagogic needs might be common to all pupils irrespective of social, ethnic, gender and disability, reflecting that they all have *common* educational needs'. Through that, they argue that children with special educational needs need the same pedagogies as others. Occasionally they may need and respond better to specific learning pedagogies but this does not mean that those pedagogies will replace the common ones; instead it suggests that a combination of common and specific pedagogies will be the key to enabling children with special needs to participate successfully with their peers in inclusive settings (Corbett & Norwich, 2005).

The level of involvement of the teachers at Forest Nursery was closely interrelated with the curriculum framework adopted, the inclusive pedagogies used by the teachers and the way they perceived their own role within the children's play activities. The activities provided to the children included big group activities where all the children and the teachers were gathered in a circle and participated in reading stories, pretend

play acts, singing and so on, and team activities, during which only the children from the same team were required to gather with their teachers in the same place and participate in different activities. The teacher's perceived their role as that of a coordinator/commentator interested in encouraging children to share their experiences and enabling them to express themselves freely by talking about their play throughout the day. In addition to big and small group activities, individual interactions between teachers and children took place during free play time in which both the teachers and the children equally participated in sharing playful activities. Similarly, Moyles et al. (2002) argue that effective teachers should be playful and provide a wide range of individual, large and/or small group activities which will establish a positive and inclusive ethos. However, these kinds of attitudes were not observed at Butterfly Nursery where it seemed that the teachers' level of involvement was influenced by the lack of curriculum framework. The teachers at Butterfly Nursery played with the children almost only when the children were trying to interact and play with them. This was explained once by one of the teachers who expressed the opinion that they did not play with the children because they did not want to interrupt them. Although the teachers at Butterfly Nursery showed a deep understanding of the importance of play in children's development and learning and gave attention to providing the children with play experiences 'based on their [the children's] interests', it was difficult for them to transform their theories into practice and be actively engaged in children's play. This, I argue, is due to the lack of a curriculum framework which would ultimately help them integrate children's play interests into their everyday practices. Furthermore, this stance within the overall nursery's ethos raises two main issues. The first is relevant to Castro Sylva's (2004) argument that teacher's beliefs regarding disability and inclusion issues can determine the pedagogical methods undertaken to teach children with special needs. The teachers at Butterfly Nursery showed an apparent difficulty with enacting the true notion of play, thus being unable to integrate it as a main part of their inclusive practices and pedagogies within the nursery. The second issue focuses on the way teachers perceive their own role in children's learning through play, which according to Wood and Attfield (1996) is critical. Teachers' support for children's play is insufficient when they are reluctant to be actively involved with it (Devereux & Miller, 2003). In the current case study, without a curriculum framework to guide them otherwise, the teachers took the role of observer and/or provider without focusing much on the interactive nature of adult-

child interactions which can be developed and further enriched through the use of play as a medium to enhance children's learning.

Finally, I present a summary discussing the findings in relation to the research questions. The first research question was, *'In what ways can early years settings have an impact on young children with autism?'* Throughout this thesis I have presented and discussed multiple vignettes relevant to Vicky's and Tom's play behaviour as this was supported within two nurseries by their teachers. The analysis of the two settings highlighted their different priorities and also stressed the interrelationship within each setting between the teaching strategies used by the teachers, the contexts in which the activities took place, and the general ambience of the play ethos of each preschool setting. The play ethos has been shown to be highly relevant to the strategies the teachers used to support children's play and learning through group and individual activities. This resulted in each child being included to a greater or lesser degree in the overall activities taking place in the nursery. The level of playfulness and shared participation in the settings was influenced by the strength of the play ethos.

*'How can different types of adult support influence the play behaviour and learning of young children with autism?'* was the second research question of this study. This study has highlighted the importance of the adult's support in the enhancement and provision of play opportunities for Vicky and Tom and the different roles they adopt during their engagement in the children's play. The types of support used by adults were different across the two settings: the adults in Forest Nursery took the roles of mediator, genuine player and/or commentator in Vicky's play. This is in contrast to the traditional notion that preschool teachers are either occupied in managerial or other activities and do not intervene in children's play based on the belief that their presence and involvement will interrupt the child's play flow and creativity. In Vicky's setting the teachers were always actively involved in the play of all the children, including Vicky as they were trying either to extend the children's own play agenda or occasionally suggest new themes that could be adopted by the children and help them extend their play interests. The teachers at Butterfly nursery, however, usually adopted a rather passive role towards the support of all children's play, or otherwise became directive. This occasionally created barriers for Tom in learning

how to interact, participate and share play and other activities with his peers. Thus, one important issue raised in this case study is that the active role of teachers in the play of all children with autism and their peers can have a direct influence on the quality and nature of that play.

The third research question was, '*What kind of implicit and explicit strategies do the teachers use during free play and during structured teaching time?*' The difference in the play ethos and philosophy of the two settings had an impact on the kind of strategies the teachers used in both free play and structured teaching time. At Forest Nursery, the teachers used a great variety of teaching strategies to support the play and learning of all children including Vicky. During free play the implicit strategies used by the teachers included modelling of an action that could be followed by the child, open questions which helped children in an indirect way to express themselves freely, repetition of children's phrases in the form of prompts which gave more time to the child think and talk, description of children's activities throughout the play event and finally turn taking which helped children learn how to respect their peers' and their own part during play time. Structured play time mostly included explicit adult directed activities which were directing all children's attention towards specific learning outcomes as the children were provided with guidance and structured frameworks but at the same time they were still providing time to the children to express themselves and share their ideas with their peers and their teachers through large and small group play activities. The strategies used included open questions, description of children's activities and repetition of children's phrases. At Butterfly Nursery, the strategies used by the teachers during free play time were largely restricted to explicit strategies which were focused on verbally forbidding certain activities and repeating certain phrases. There was a lack of interactive group activities in which all children including Tom would be able to share mutual play experiences and actively participate in playful activities and a limited number of creative activities introduced by the teachers. Thus, a limited range and scope of strategies contributed towards Tom's limited play inclusive experiences with his peers and teachers.

The fourth research question was, '*How do those strategies influence children's play and learning?*' As I have discussed earlier, the strategies used by the teachers had a



major influence on the play and learning of all the children, and I have clear data on this for Vicky and Tom in particular. At Forest Nursery, the inclusive strategies that the teachers used enabled Vicky to be actively engaged in both group and individual play activities, to learn how to share, and to develop a wide range of skills including play skills. At Butterfly Nursery, Tom seemed to have gained fewer opportunities to interact and play both with both his peers and his teachers since the teachers were not using any particular or comparable inclusive or play strategies that would enhance his learning and playfulness. Thus, it is evident that the strategies used by early years practitioners not only influence children's learning but also are important in the development of an inclusive environment which will meet the needs of all the children.

*'How are these strategies linked to the school's play ethos?'* was the fifth research question. Vicky's preschool's play ethos appeared to have been influenced by, and was closely interrelated with, a wide variety of different perspectives embedded in the teachers' approaches including the quality of play provided by the teachers to the children, the teaching strategies used by the teachers to support play within the pre-school, the time and space provided for the children to play during free play time and structured play time, the communication between the teachers, the continuous update of playful activities based either on children's requests or teachers' decisions, and finally the whole playful environment established within the nursery, which created a playful atmosphere. The High/Scope curriculum provided a framework in which the staff members were secure in adopting a playful approach and specific roles in supporting the children's play. The case for Butterfly Nursery was different as there was no supportive framework which could possibly have acted as a guide towards the strategies and activities the teachers could use to enable all children including Tom to actively participate either in individual or group play activities. However, it has to be noted here that the teachers did know and appreciate the value of play in the learning of children in general but they still had difficulty embedding it within the nursery's learning repertoire. Thus, if there was a play ethos it was not enacted or visible.

Finally, the sixth research question was, *'What are the implications for teachers and schools?'* The last research question highlights four main strands that have emerged from the case study data as very important in early childhood inclusive education and its relevance to learning through play. The first strand suggests that inclusive

preschool settings can and should support the play of all children including children with autism, who can benefit from the support given to all children. The second strand is that the play ethos is of great importance in the adoption and use of more inclusive and playful teaching strategies: the ethos and strategies need to be closely interrelated. The third strand refers to the teacher's type of involvement within the preschools and I argue that teachers' active involvement in children's play has been shown here to play an important role in developing their play and learning. The teacher's active involvement needs to be reflected in her role and type of support within the preschool setting and should be included within her daily 'duties' since play offers a medium to promote learning for all children, including children with autism, within the preschool age. A supportive curriculum framework, like that provided by High/Scope is helpful in guiding teachers towards collaborating, being secure in their play roles and enacting their play ethos.

Summing up, the contribution of this thesis to new knowledge comes from the description of the play of two children with autism from a visual ethnographic point of view. Emerging from this is the new understanding of how children with autism can play in their own way, in contrast with the bulk of the current literature which suggests exactly the opposite. We know now, in ways we did not before this research was conducted, how inclusion can be indirectly promoted within preschool settings through play when this takes the form of learning and participation within group activities where all children can participate. Moreover, we know the kinds of school ethos and support that enable this. Importantly, the research has shown how, when teachers in early years settings actively play with all children, including children with autism, and undertake different roles in this, they can contribute significantly to children's learning, participation and play.

### **5.1. Limitations of this study**

The limitations and strengths of the current study are focused on methodological issues. The current study was a qualitative ethnographic case study which aimed to understand, explore and describe in-depth the play of two children with autism in the context of their inclusive settings early years settings with their distinctive play ethos. Three issues which can be seen as limitations of this study include: the small number

of children observed, the differences in the play ethos and philosophies of the two preschool settings, and the fact that the research did not generate new theory so much as a thorough description of the play activities of two children with autism.

Quantitative studies rooted in a positivistic paradigm assume that a study's validity and reliability cannot be proven unless it includes a large number of participants. From this perspective, the first limitation is that the findings of this study cannot be replicated and validated by other studies which aim to explore the same issues, and that the number of participants is insufficient to lead to wider generalisations. Achieving generalisable findings on the play of children with autism in quantitative terms through the use of 'objective' measures and tests was not, however, among the aims of this study for three main reasons, which I discuss below.

First, children with autism belong to a heterogeneous group and context matters to how they feel and behave; taking this fact into account, I argued that 'objective' play tests would not be able to capture the real play abilities of these children. As long as each and every child with autism has different strengths and weaknesses statistical generalisation of the results would not be able to represent the play abilities of the whole population within the autistic spectrum. Therefore, I decided to observe only two children and try to understand their play in depth as this was supported in their early years settings by their teachers. As such, the generalisations that can be drawn from this study can come from the reader's application of the findings to other similar situations. The quality and richness of the data pertaining to the children's experiences are of higher priority than making large claims as to their generalisability, and the subjectivity of the research is due to the naturalistic aims of the study.

The second reason is that from the beginning of this study I held the view that the nature of play alters depending on the context in which it takes place; its true quality can only be captured within real-life situations. This is in accordance with Marjanovic Umek et al. (1999) who suggests that play is a highly contextualised activity; the results of studying play cannot be generalised since the play situation and the context in which the play takes place can alter and determine the mode of play; in other words, different contexts enable children to participate in different play modes. Additionally, I strongly maintain that the real notion of play as this is expressed through children's

spontaneous play cannot be captured through experimental, 'objective' procedures. The same position is held by Huizinga (1998, p.2) who argues that:

most of them [studies] only deal incidentally with the question of what play is *in itself* and what it means for the player. They attack play direct with the quantitative methods of experimental science without first paying attention to its profound aesthetic quality. As a rule they leave the primary quality of play as such, virtually untouched.

Thus, it would be a mistake to talk about the generalisation of the play abilities of two children with autism when it is already known that a different play situation and context could make those two children play and interact with their peers and teachers in different ways.

The third reason why achieving objective, generalisable findings was not an aim of this study was that in adopting an ethnographic approach the priority was to capture in detail everyday interactions which would be closely interrelated with each culture's meanings (Christensen & James, 2000) and to record 'in painstaking detail' the participants' interactions (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p.5). Accordingly, the current study's main aim was not to use 'standardised' methods and objective tests to understand the play of children with autism but rather to try through holistic and naturalistic ways to understand in detail the play of two children with autism. Nonetheless, one could argue that the aims might have been better fulfilled with three children, or even four or five.

The different philosophies adopted by the nurseries observed as reflected in their overall ethos could be perceived as the second limitation of this study. I did not have a good idea of the how different the nurseries would transpire to be at the start. Conducting pilot studies in each before the initiation of the main data collection may have highlighted this. However, the pilot study is argued to be a less important element in qualitative studies where a researcher learns throughout the process of conducting the fieldwork (Robson, 2002). Therefore, the criteria I used before the initiation of the field work included two informal visits to the nurseries that gave me a rough idea of each setting's ethos and the curriculum used, accompanied by

discussions with the headteachers and my evaluation of their response to my presence as a visitor for a whole day. The fact that the play ethos of each nursery was so completely different from the other transpired to be interesting, but it was not planned and in some ways it became a central feature in the study affecting the detailed examination of the teaching strategies used by the teachers. The difference between the two nurseries was probably both a limitation and a strength of the study, but it did further enhance understanding about the play of the children with autism in context.

Finally, a limitation of this study relates to the fact that the data collected did not lead to a new theory but instead described and explored the play of children with autism and enabled theoretical assertions to be made. However, while Creswell (2009) argues that theory can be generated from the study of a phenomenon in a particular cultural context, Flick (1998, p.41) argues that ‘the aim is not to reduce complexity by breaking it down into variables but rather to increase complexity by including context’. Although analysis in this study was based on the data collected during field work in two inclusive settings and did not generate a single theory to plausibly explain and predict regarding the play of children with autism, this was not the aim. In setting out to describe rather than explain the play of children with autism I have retained the complexity of the context and brought a new dimension to the field.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Play is really important in a child's life and acts as a medium for young children to learn. Early years settings are the most appropriate places where all children including children with autism can play and interact both with their teachers and peers. Prior literature has examined the play of children with autism by using positivistic approaches to define, categorise and measure play in settings other than the children's natural settings and only one study employed naturalistic methods to explore the play interactions of children with autism with their peers. However, no previous research studies have addressed and examined the play of children with autism in naturalistic contexts without specific interventions. This ethnographic study was designed to explore and describe the play of two children with autism and it is unique in that it is the first which addresses and explores the play of children with autism as this is supported by their teachers in the holistic environments of their inclusive early years settings.

The methodology and methods used were selected to fit with the research questions and main aim which was to provide a thorough and in-depth picture of the play abilities of Vicky and Tom. An ethnographic case study was employed to describe the culture and ethos of their inclusive preschool settings, but most importantly to investigate from a holistic perspective their play experiences. The methods used included field and video observations which were further supplemented by semi-structured interviews both with the parents and the teachers of the children to further contextualise their play within their daily interactions with their peers and teachers. Presentation and analysis of the data were aided by extended detailed vignettes which focused on the description of the play of the two children with autism in combination with the exploration of the teaching strategies adopted to supporting the children.

The analysis of the data followed the *constant comparative method* as the initial theoretical assertions were emerging and consequently codes were constantly compared and tested against the emerging data that were systematically collected.

Four different codes were used at the beginning of the analysis and those were later renewed and/or submerged into other codes as the analysis was going on. In the final analysis there were four main core themes grounded in the data and coming from their analysis. Use of Atlas ti software helped me to analyse the great amount of data including videos.

The claims to truth coming from this study included four main themes. The first theme emerging from this ethnographic case study was that children with autism can be engaged in all forms of play. This contrasts with many research studies which were focusing on what children with autism could not do. The second core theme highlighted by this study was that collaboration between the teachers is an important element in the development of an inclusive play ethos; thus confirming the findings of other studies which stress collaboration as an issue of major importance in moving towards inclusion. The third main finding of this case study, partly contrasting with the findings of other research studies in which the role of teachers in children's play was passive, was that teachers undertake many different roles in relation to children's play. In one of the nurseries the teachers were also active players as they actively supported the play of the child with autism and consequently her inclusion among her peers. The last but not least theme coming from the analysis of this ethnographic case study highlighted the role of a supportive curriculum framework for developing a strong play ethos in turn facilitating play.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

#### Informed Consent for head teachers

Dear Mr/Mrs

My name is Fani Theodorou. I am a teacher and a doctoral student in the University of Southampton. I am intending to conduct a study that will help me to understand and describe the play behaviour of the children attending early year's settings on play behaviour of children with autism. I am interested in describing the overall philosophical assumptions of the early years setting and their relationships to children's learning and play. I intend to explore the type of support the staff chooses to provide to each child in order to meet his/her playing and learning needs.

For this reason, I would like your permission to conduct a study in this early years setting. If you give your permission and would like your early years setting to be involved in this study, you will find all the necessary details in the information below:

1. I will visit the school two to three times before the study start in order to get familiarised with the children, the teachers and the whole setting.
2. I will observe the play behaviour of specific children for approximately six months through taking field notes and using video observations.
3. I will interview significant others that have direct or indirect relationships with the children. These will include teachers, teaching assistants, parents, psychologists and/or language therapists.
4. I would like to take into account official documents that will include each child's Statement and will help me further to understand in more depth each child's behaviour.
5. I will take into account official documents concerning Ofsted inspections and other documents relevant to your school's daily curriculum plan.
6. While the study will be in progress I will analyse the data, thus you will have the opportunity to have access to some preliminary, and later

of course final findings, of this study.

By providing permission to conduct this study in your school, you will help me to understand and describe in depth the play experiences of specific children attending the setting in combination with the support they receive by their teachers. Through this study I want to further describe the type of support your school provides to the children and its role into each child's learning and development.

The staff involved in this study will have the right to withdraw at any time even if they have already signed the informed consent. In such a case I will not use their information. I will keep confidential any personal details. Furthermore, I will arrange any interviews according to your availability and I will be open to hearing any possible concerns.

Any kind of information you will provide will remain confidential, will be used only by the research team and just for research purposes. I will change the names and all other relevant details concerning the school, the children and the teachers. All the relevant information will be stored in a safe and secure place. Data collected in a written form will be stored in a file cabinet, while data in an electronic format will be password secured in the university's server.

You will be able to access part of the data while the study will be in progress and at the end of the study you will be provided with a brief report of the study's overall findings and an edited part of the children's video clips.

Please read the participant information sheet attached to this letter. You will be able to be provided with further details concerning the study's overall procedure.

Your signature and your initials in each box indicate that you have read and understood the information provided above. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or leave a message with a telephone number and I will contact you as soon as possible (Fani Theodorou, 07967798223).



Thank you in advance,

Fani Theodorou.

## Appendix 2

### Informed Consent: Parents of the child with autism

Dear parent/guardian

My name is Fani Theodorou. I am a teacher and a doctoral student in the University of Southampton. I am intending to conduct a study that will help me understand and describe the play behaviour of your children while they are at the early years setting. I am interested in describing the overall philosophy of your child's school and the type of support the teachers choose to provide to your child in order to meet his/her learning needs.

For that reason, I need the help of your child and I am hoping you will allow him/her participate in my study. If you decide to permit your child be involved in the study, you will find all the necessary details in the information below:

1. I will visit your child's school two to three times before the study starts in order to meet you and get familiarised with you and your child.
2. I will observe and take notes of your child's play behaviour and interaction with other children and their teachers while at school.
3. I will need to videotape aspects of your child's behaviour in order to understand and describe in greater detail their play behaviour.
4. You will be contacted and asked about the play patterns that your child has been engaged in while at school and their experience at home.
5. While the study will be in progress I will analyse the data, thus you will have the opportunity to have access to some preliminary, and later of course final findings of this study.

By allowing your child to participate in this study you will help me to understand and describe in depth the play experiences of your child in combination with the support it receives by his/her teacher. Through this study, I want to further describe the type of support the school provides to your child and its role into your child's learning and development.

The participation of your child in this study is free and voluntary. You have the right to refuse and not allow your child to participate. You have also the right to withdraw without any penalty, whenever you or your child feel uncomfortable or because you have just changed your mind or for any other reason, even if you have already signed the informed consent. Furthermore, if I will notice signs relating to your child's discomfort, I will automatically terminate the procedure and the ongoing observations at that specific time.

The data collected in the study will be confidential. The name of your child will be unidentifiable in any published report and will be disclosed only with your permission. Access to the data will be limited to the university research team that is directly involved with the study. All the relevant information will be stored in a safe and secure place. Data collected in a written form will be stored in a file cabinet, while data in an electronic format will be password secured in the university's server.

You will be able to access part of the data while the study will be in progress and at the end of the study you will be provided with a brief report of the study's overall findings and an edited part of your child's video clips.

You have the right not to allow your child to participate; you have the right to withdraw at any time even if you have signed the informed consent. In such a case the information provided and all your's and your child's personal details will not be used in any stage of the study.

All the meetings will be held and arranged according to your availability and during times convenient to you. Expression of personal concerns will be welcomed and taken into account while all information gathered relevant to the study will be used with great confidentiality.

Please read the participant information sheet attached to this letter. You will be able to be provided with further details concerning the study's overall procedure.

Your signature and your initials in each box indicate that you have read and

understood the information provided above. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or leave a message with a telephone number and I will contact you as soon as possible (Fani Theodorou, 07967798223).

Thank you in advance

Fani Theodorou.

Signature

Date

Return this form to Fani Theodorou by using the attached self addressed stamped envelope. Thank you.

**Consent form: Parents**

**Children with autism: Towards an understanding and description of their play in the naturalistic environments of two inclusive preschool settings.**

- I have read and understood both the informed consent and the participant information sheet related to the above study and had the opportunity to ask further questions.
- I understand that the participation of my child is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any time for any reason without a penalty.
- I understand that the information gathered will remain confidential and will be used only for research purposes and by the research team.
- I understand that all the data provided will be safely stored and secured.
- I agree for my child to be observed, while playing at school.
- I agree for my child to be videotaped while playing at school.

- I agree to be interviewed about my child's play.
- I understand that the information gathered will be used without names in reporting research findings.

If you agree with the information provided above please fill in each box with your initials.

**Thank you for your time**

**Fani Theodorou**

### Appendix 3

#### Informed Consent: Parents of typical children

Dear parent/guardian

My name is Fani Theodorou. I am a teacher and a doctoral student in the University of Southampton. I am intending to conduct a study that will help me understand and describe the play behaviour of autistic children while they are at school and interact with your child.

Due to the fact that the children with autism will be part of the groups that your child may play with, I would like to acknowledge you the processes that will take place in the school. You will find all the necessary details in the information below:

1. I will visit your child's school two to three times before the study start in order to meet the staff working there and the autistic children attending the school.
2. I will observe and take notes of the autistic children's play behaviour and interaction with other children and their teachers while at school. Your child may interact with one of the autistic children's, however this will not be involved in our study's data.
3. I may need to videotape aspects of your child's behaviour when interacting with an autistic child. Your child's behaviour will not be included in the study's data.

By providing your consent you will help me to understand and describe in depth the play experiences of autistic children in combination with the support they receive by their teachers and the play interactions that may have with your child. Through this study, I want to further describe the type of support the school provides to the children and more specifically to the autistic children and its role into the autistic children's' learning and development.

The participation of your child in this study is free and voluntary. You have the right to refuse and not allow your child to participate. You have also the right to withdraw without any penalty, whenever you or your child feel uncomfortable or because you have just changed your mind or for any other reason, even if you have already signed the informed consent. Furthermore, if I will notice signs relating to your child's discomfort, I will automatically

terminate the procedure and the ongoing observations at that specific time.

The data collected in the study will be confidential. The participation of your child in any of the observations will be of minor importance and will not be taken into account in the final analysis of the data. Access to the data will be limited to the university research team that is directly involved with the study. The written data will be stored and locked in a file cabinet while the data included in a computer will be password protected. At the end of this study, I will provide you a report that will summarise our understandings and inferences coming from this study. Furthermore, a DVD with your child playing at school will be provided to you as well.

You have the right not to allow your child to participate; you have the right to withdraw at any time even if you have signed the informed consent. In any case the information that includes your child's participation will not be used in any stage of the study. Expression of personal concerns will be welcomed and taken into account while all information gathered relevant to the study will be used with great confidentiality.

Please read the participant information sheet attached to this letter. You will be able to be provided with further details concerning the study's overall procedure.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or leave a message with a telephone number and I will contact you as soon as possible (Fani Theodorou, 07967798223).

Thank you in advance

Fani Theodorou.

Signature

Date

Return this form to Fani Theodorou by using the attached self addressed stamped envelope.

Thank you.

**Consent form: Parents**

**Children with autism: Towards an understanding and description of their play in the naturalistic environments of two inclusive preschool settings.**

- I have read and understood both the informed consent and the participant information sheet related to the above study and had the opportunity to ask further questions.
- I understand that the participation of my child is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any time for any reason without a penalty.
- I understand that the information gathered will remain confidential and will not be used for research purposes.
- I understand that all the data provided will be safely stored and secured.
- I agree for my child to be observed, while playing at school with an autistic child.
- I agree for my child to be videotaped, while playing at school with an autistic child.
- I understand that the information gathered will be used without names in reporting research findings.

If you agree with the information provided above please fill in each box with your initials.

**Thank you for your time**

**Fani Theodorou**



## Appendix 4

### Participant Information Sheet: Parents and child

#### **Children with autism: Towards an understanding and description of their play in the naturalistic environments of two inclusive preschool settings.**

You and your child are invited to take part in a research project conducted by a doctoral research student Fani Theodorou; supervised by Prof. Melanie Nind in the School of Education, University of Southampton.

#### **Who is responsible for this research?**

Fani Theodorou, Research Student  
School of Education  
University of Southampton  
Highfield, SO17 1BJ

Prof. Melanie Nind, Supervisor  
Deputy Head of School  
School of Education  
University of Southampton  
Highfield, SO17 1BJ

#### **What is the research about?**

Children with autism face many difficulties in social contexts. One such context is school where the children are being supported by their teachers and provided with specific curriculum activities in order to develop their learning and play behaviour. I would like to find out to what extent an early year setting can promote and sufficiently support the enhancement of the autistic children's play. The different philosophies adopted by the schools will play a major role towards the further understanding of the type of support children receive from their teachers.

#### **Why is it important?**

We know that children with autism show difficulties in social activities. One social activity that is very important for every child's overall development is play, which is not fully researched in naturalistic contexts for children with autism. It is important to know the type of support provided by teachers and promoted by different naturalistic early years settings. This will be useful for researchers, teachers, parents and policy makers.

**What will I be asked to do?**

I will ask your permission before the study begins.

I would like to visit the school prior to the beginning of the study, in order to meet and get familiarised with some of the autistic children and the staff.

Consequent visits during the year will aim to observe the play behaviour of autistic children while they play alone, with their teachers and/or their classmates. The observations will be recorded through field notes and video recordings. I will try to be as unobtrusive as possible during the study, I will not interrupt your child's play activities during observations either through taking notes or video recordings and I will not include your child's play interactions in the study's data analysis.

**Why my child and I have been chosen?**

Your child may be included in some parts of video observations, because he/she has interacted with some of the children with autism while playing.

**What will happen to the information?**

Any kind of information we will gather concerning your child's play and interaction with the autistic children will remain confidential. The school's name and your child's name will not be identified under any circumstances. All the relevant information will be stored in a safe and secure place. Data collected in a written form will be stored in a file cabinet, while data in an electronic format will be password secured in the university's server. I will work hard to protect and keep confidential information relevant to the school, staff and children's identities.

The information gathered will be used only for research purposes. The collected data and the relevant information may be used to publish articles in educational journals. At the end of the study, I will provide you with a brief report concerning your child's play behaviour while at school and an edited DVD which will include your child's play interactions at school. Parts of those video recordings may be presented in conferences as well and permission to do that will be asked from you as well.

**What are the risks of this study?**

Your child will not be at risk. All activities and observations will take place in a familiar setting, with familiar people around. I will intrude as little as possible on your child's usual timetable. If your child shows any signs of discomfort I will stop the observations at that specific time.

**What are the benefits of the study?**

1. The primary benefit of this study is to raise awareness among the scientific community concerning the deep understanding of the play behaviour of the children with autism in naturalistic environments, the type of support they get from their teachers and possible interactions they have with their classmates.
2. Further benefits include providing you with your child's video recorded clips which can finally be kept as a permanent record of your child's play interactions while in the early year setting.
3. I will benefit from gaining knowledge and become more able to inform people who are responsible for the provision of services related to the inclusion of autistic children in naturalistic settings.

**What happens if I change my mind?**

You have the right to withdraw at any time-for any reason-you or your child feel uncomfortable even if you have already signed the informed consent. In such a case I will not observe your child while interacting and playing with an autistic child.

In case that I will notice signs of your child's discomfort at a particular time, I will automatically terminate the procedure and the ongoing observations at that specific time.

Any personal details will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes.

Expression of personal concerns will be welcomed and taken into account while all information gathered relevant to the study will be treated respectfully.

**Any questions?**

If you have any further questions about the research, please contact:

Fani Theodorou at 07967798223

Please leave a message and a telephone number in case I will not be able to speak to you at that specific moment and I will contact you as soon as possible.

**Any problems?**

If you have any problems with the research you cannot resolve with the researcher, you should better contact the research student's supervisor Prof. Melanie Nind at 023 8059 5813.

## Appendix 5

### Participant Information Sheet: Staff

#### **Children with autism: Towards an understanding and description of their play in the naturalistic environments of two inclusive preschool settings.**

The school and you are invited to take part in a research project conducted by a doctoral research student Fani Theodorou; supervised by Prof. Melanie Nind in the School of Education, University of Southampton.

#### **What is the research about?**

Children with autism face many difficulties in social contexts. One such context is an early years setting where the children are being supported by their teachers and others, provided with specific curriculum activities in order to develop their learning and play behaviour. I would like to find out to what extent an early year setting can promote and sufficiently support the enhancement of the autistic children's play behaviour. The different philosophies adopted by the early years settings will play a major role towards the further understanding of the type of support children receive from their teachers.

#### **Why is this important?**

We know that autistic children show difficulties in social activities. One social activity that is very important for every child's overall development is play which is not fully researched in naturalistic contexts for children with autism. It is important to know the type of support provided by teachers and promoted by different naturalistic early years settings. This will be useful for researchers, teachers, parents and policy makers.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

You will be asked to provide your permission before the research begins.

I would like to visit the early years setting prior to the beginning of the study, meet you there and become familiarised with you. All the visits will be arranged according to your convenience.

Consequent visits during the year will aim to observe the play behaviour of the children and the type of support you as a staff member choose to provide to each child and meet his/her needs. The observations will be recorded through field notes and video recordings. Issues relevant to each child's needs and the type of support you provide in order to boost autistic children's play behaviour will be raised and discussed with you. Those discussions will be tape recorded if you agree.

**Why has this setting being chosen?**

Your school has been chosen because it is an early years setting which includes 3-5 years old children with autism.

**What will happen to this information?**

Any kind of information you will provide will remain confidential, will be used only for research purposes by the research team. I will change the names and all other relevant details concerning the school, the children and the teachers. All the relevant information will be stored in a safe and secure place. Data collected in a written form will be stored in a file cabinet, while data in an electronic format will be password secured in the university's server. I will work hard to protect and keep confidential information relevant to the school, staff and children's identities.

The information gathered will be used only for research purposes. The collected data and the relevant information may be used to publish articles in educational journals. At the end of the study, the research team will provide you with a brief report concerning the autistic children's play behaviour in your early years' setting and an edited DVD with the children's video recordings. Parts of those video recordings may be used for conferences presentations and permission to do that will be asked separately.

**What happens if I change my mind?**

The staff involved in the study will have the right to withdraw at any time even if they have already signed the informed consent. In such a case I will not use their information in any stage of the study.

Any personal details will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes.

All the meetings will be held and arranged according to your availability and during times convenient to you. Expression of personal concerns will be welcomed and taken into account while all information gathered relevant to the study will be treated respectfully.

**Any questions?**

If you have any further questions about the research, please contact:

Fani Theodorou at 07967798223

Please leave a message and telephone number in case I will not be able to speak to you at that time and I will contact you as soon as possible.

**Any problems?**

If you have any problems with the research you cannot resolve with the researcher you should contact the research student's supervisor Prof. Melanie Nind at 023 8059 5813.

## Appendix 6

### Participant Information Sheet: Early Years Setting

#### **Children with autism: Towards an understanding and description of their play in the naturalistic environments of two inclusive preschool settings.**

The school is invited to take part in a research project conducted by a doctoral research student Fani Theodorou; supervised by Prof. Melanie Nind in the School of Education, University of Southampton.

#### **What is the research about?**

Children with autism face many difficulties in social contexts. One such context is an early years setting where the children are being supported by their teachers and others, provided with specific curriculum activities in order to develop their learning and play behaviour. I would like to find out to what extent an early year setting can promote and sufficiently support the enhancement of the children's play behaviour. The different philosophies adopted by the early years settings will play a major role towards the further understanding of the type of support children receive from their teachers.

#### **Why is this important?**

We know that children with autism show difficulties in social activities. One social activity that is very important for every child's overall development is play which is not fully researched in naturalistic contexts for children with autism. It is important to know the type of support provided by teachers and promoted by different naturalistic early years settings. This will be useful for researchers, teachers, parents and policy makers.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

You will be asked to provide your permission before the research begins. Permission will be also asked to be provided from the staff and the parents of the children.

I will visit the early years setting prior to the beginning of the study, in order to meet and get familiarised with the staff working with each child. All the visits will be



arranged according to your convenience.

Consequent visits during the year will aim to observe the play behaviour of the autistic children and their interactions with their teachers and their classmates. The observations will be recorded through field notes and video recordings. Issues relevant to each child's needs and the type of support provided by the teachers in order to boost children's play behaviour will be raised and discussed with the staff. Those discussions will be tape recorded if you agree.

**Why has this setting being chosen?**

Your school has been chosen because it is an early years setting which includes 3-5 years old children with autism.

**What will happen to this information?**

Any kind of information you provide us will remain confidential. All the names relevant to the school, teachers, children and their parents will not be able to be identified by name. All the relevant information will be stored in a safe and secure place. Data collected in a written form will be stored in a file cabinet, while data in an electronic format will be password secured in the university's server. I will work hard to protect and keep confidential information relevant to the school, staff and children's identities. I will work hard to protect and keep confidential the setting's, staff's and children's identities.

The information gathered will be used only for research purposes. The collected data and the relevant information may be used to publish articles in educational journals. At the end of the study, the research team will provide you with a brief report concerning the autistic children's play behaviour in your early year setting and an edited DVD with the children's video recordings. Parts of those video recordings may be used for conferences presentations and permission to do that will be asked separately.

**What happens if I change my mind?**

The staff involved in the study will have the right to withdraw at any time even if they

have already signed the informed consent. In such a case I will not use their information in any stage of the study.

Any personal details will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes.

All the meetings will be held and arranged according to your availability and during times convenient to you. Expression of personal concerns will be welcomed and taken into account while all information gathered relevant to the study will be treated respectfully.

**Any questions?**

If you have any further questions about the research, please contact:

Fani Theodorou at 07967798223

Please leave a message and telephone number in case I will not be able to speak to you at that time and I will contact you as soon as possible.

**Any problems?**

If you have any problems with the research you cannot resolve with the researcher you should contact the research student's supervisor Prof. Melanie Nind at 023 8059 5813.

## Appendix 7

### Participant Information Sheet: Parents and child with autism

#### **Children with autism: Towards an understanding and description of their play in the naturalistic environments of two inclusive preschool settings.**

You and your child are invited to take part in a research project conducted by a doctoral research student Fani Theodorou; supervised by Prof. Melanie Nind in the School of Education, University of Southampton.

#### **Who is responsible for this research?**

Fani Theodorou, Research Student  
School of Education  
University of Southampton  
Highfield, SO17 1BJ

Prof. Melanie Nind, Supervisor  
Deputy Head of School  
School of Education  
University of Southampton  
Highfield, SO17 1BJ

#### **What is the research about?**

Children with autism face many difficulties in social contexts. One such context is an early years setting where the children are being supported by their teachers and other adults and provided with specific curriculum activities in order to develop their learning and play behaviour. I would like to find out to what extent an early year setting can promote and sufficiently support the enhancement of the play behaviour of children with autism. The different philosophies adopted by the early years settings will play a major role towards the further understanding of the type of support children receive from their teachers.

#### **Why is it important?**

We know that children with autism show difficulties in social activities. One social activity that is very important for every child's overall development is play, which is not fully researched in naturalistic contexts for children with autism. It is important to know the type of support provided by teachers and promoted by different naturalistic early years settings. This will be useful for researchers, teachers, parents and policy makers.

**What will I be asked to do?**

I will ask your permission before the study begins.

I would like to visit the early years setting prior to the beginning of the study, and meet you there to become familiarised with you and your child. All the visits will be arranged according to your convenience. During those visits, I will discuss with you issues concerning the play behaviour of your child at home. This will be tape recorded if you agree.

I will make consequent visits during the year to the early years setting in order to observe the play behaviour of your child. The observations will be recorded through field notes and video recordings. I will try to be as unobtrusive as possible during the study and I will not interrupt your child's play activities during observations either through taking notes or video recordings. Furthermore, I may occasionally contact you and ask you about the play patterns your child has been engaged at the early years setting and which may or may not be experienced at home.

**Why my child and I have been chosen?**

Your family has been chosen because your child with autism attends an early year specially resourced setting and is 3 to 5 years old.

**What will happen to the information?**

Any kind of information you provide us will remain confidential. The school's name, your family's and your child's name will not be identified under any circumstances. All the relevant information will be stored in a safe and secure place. Data collected in a written form will be stored in a file cabinet, while data in an electronic format will be password secured in the university's server. I will work hard to protect and keep confidential information relevant to the school, staff and children's identities.

The information gathered will be used only for research purposes. The collected data and the relevant information may be used to publish articles in educational journals. At the end of the study, I will provide you with a brief report concerning your child's play behaviour while at the early years setting and an edited DVD which will include

your child's play interactions there. Parts of those video recordings may be presented in conferences and permission to do that will be asked separately.

**What are the risks of this study?**

Your child will not be at risk. All activities and observations will take place in a familiar setting, with familiar people around. I will intrude as little as possible on your child's usual timetable. If your child shows any signs of discomfort I will stop the observations at that specific time.

**What are the benefits of the study?**

1. The primary benefit of this study is to raise awareness among the scientific community concerning the deep understanding of the play behaviour of the children with autism in naturalistic environments and the type of support they get.
2. Further benefits include providing you with your child's video recorded clips which can finally be kept as a permanent record of your child's play interactions while in the early years setting.
3. I will benefit from gaining knowledge and become more able to inform people who are responsible for the provision of services related to children with autism.

**What happens if I change my mind?**

You have the right to withdraw at any time-for any reason-you or your child feel uncomfortable even if you have already signed the informed consent. In such a case I will not use your's and your child's information.

In case that I will notice signs of your child's discomfort at a particular time, I will automatically terminate the procedure and the ongoing observations at that specific time.

Any personal details will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes.

All the meetings will be held and arranged according to your availability and during

times convenient to you. Expression of personal concerns will be welcomed and taken into account while all information gathered relevant to the study will be treated respectfully.

**Any questions?**

If you have any further questions about the research, please contact:

Fani Theodorou at 07967798223

Please leave a message and a telephone number in case I will not be able to speak to you at that specific moment and I will contact you as soon as possible.

**Any problems?**

If you have any problems with the research you cannot resolve with the researcher, you should contact the research student's supervisor Prof. Melanie Nind at 023 8059 5813.

## Appendix 8

### Interview guide for teachers

Introduction: Purpose of the interview, assurance for confidentiality, permission to audio record the interview.

1. Tell me about your experience as an early years practitioner
  - a. How many years have you been involved in early years practice?
  - b. What training have you had?
  - c. What about special needs?
2. How many children attend here in the nursery?
3. What proportion of the children has special educational needs?
4. How long has Vicky been coming here?
5. How would you describe Vicky?
  - a. Does she have any strengths or weaknesses?
6. On which aspects of her learning do you mainly focus?
  - a. Why?
7. What do you see as the importance of play?
  - a. How does this apply with children with autism?
8. How do you encourage each and every child's participation in play?
  - a. What is your role in Vicky's learning and where does play fit in?
9. Is play feasible between Vicky and you?
  - a. If yes, how do you try to be involved in Vicky's play activities?
10. Is play feasible between Vicky and the other children in the nursery?
  - a. What does she enjoy most in the setting?
11. Do you think that play can affect an autistic child's learning?
  - a. What kind of strategies do you use to enhance Vicky's learning through play?
  - b. Does play appear on Vicky's IEP?

Cool off: Possible questions or additions from the teacher

Closure: provision of information relevant to the transcription of the interview

## Appendix 9

### Interview guide for head teachers

Introduction: Purpose of the interview, assurance for confidentiality, permission to audio record the interview.

1. Tell me about your experience as an early years practitioner
  - a. How many years have you been involved in early years practice?
  - b. What training have you had?
  - c. What about special needs?
2. What do you see as the importance of play in general?
  - a. How does this apply with children with autism?
3. How do you encourage each and every child's participation in play?
  - a. What is your role in Vicky's play and where does play fit in?
4. Do you think that play can affect Vicky's learning?
5. Tell me about the play ethos of the nursery
6. How do you encourage the staff to be involved in children's learning?
7. Are there any particular strategies the nursery use to support children's learning through play?

Cool off: Possible questions or additions from the teacher

Closure: provision of information relevant to the transcription of the interview



## Appendix 10

### Interview guide for Vicky's parents

Introduction: Purpose of the interview, assurance for confidentiality, permission to audio record the interview.

1. Does Vicky have a brother or a sister?
2. Does she have any cousins or neighbouring children she spends some time with?
3. How would you describe Vicky?
4. Would you like to tell me about your best times while playing with Vicky?
  - a. When did you most enjoy being together?
5. What does she play with?
6. Does she have any special preferences?
7. Does Vicky play with you or with her father?
8. Would you like to tell me about your play at home?
9. Do you interact with her while she is playing?
10. Does Vicky interact with you while you are playing together?
  - a. If yes, how do you interact with her?
  - b. How does Vicky responds to that?
11. Have you seen any differences in Vicky's play since she started attending the nursery?
  - a. If yes, in which areas?
12. Do you feel that Vicky has progressed generally since she has started attending the nursery?
  - a. In what way?
13. Have you seen any difference in the way Vicky plays at home and in the nursery?
  - a. If no, have you heard anything from the nursery about how she plays there?
  - b. How does this compare to home?

Cool off: Possible questions or additions from the teacher

Closure: provision of information relevant to the transcription of the interview

**Appendix 11**  
**Forest Nursery**  
**An interview with a teacher**

F: Yeh, does she (Vicky) have any strengths or weaknesses?

C: I'd say physically ammm physically she is very, she is very advanced, she can do quite a lots of things, she can run with a ball, she can roll a ball, she can ride a bike, wouldn't you know, she can ride a trice scale, it wouldn't surprise me if you got her on the bike , it wouldn't take her very long before she could ride it herself ammm, she has got very good balance ammm computer wise, she's....you know she's got, I mean she is taken the computer programs that we've got here above and beyond any level I've ever seen a child taking here, ammm she can do lots and lots of the computer, so she sorts of for every stage we do in the computer

F: yeh..

C: she reaches the next level and she sorts of working through them, so the computer showing her how to do all different things, like the game she plays when you riming

F: yeh..

C: like tub and sub and you know, that one that she is taken that above and beyond that level , I've never really seen any other child playing with it, morning or afternoon,

F: hmm

C: yeh, she is kind of ammm, she just seems of having a really natural ability on the computer, she can swap from one program to another, ammm she can watch you do something and then imitate what you've done so when I show her that I want to come out of it I pressed alt-control-alt-delete twice and then flashed up on the screen and it's got 'end' the task, 'new task' and then there is another option and I talked her through and I only did that twice. She can do that now

F: oh

C: so she can do that bit, it's just the ammmm clicking on the box get rid of the boxes to get back to the star button so

F: yeh

C: she doesn't know what to do then but she can do that bit up until she gets to that point and then she needs your help.

F: yeh

C: so I mean her big strength is the computers skills, I think she can go really far with those beyond....

F: yeh (smiles) what do you see as the importance of play in general?

C: I think we learn everything through play, I think everything we do and everything we are we've learnt it through play

F: hmmm

C: and through learning to interact with other people on a basic level and then taking a bit further

F: hmmm

**Appendix 12**  
**Butterfly Nursery**  
**An interview with a teacher**

F: Yeh, what do you see as the importance of play in general?

T: I actually think that might from babies children need to play, is more difficult I think, with some children that are autistic, they find it difficult I think to play,

F: yeh

T: because they don't actually like the social side of being interacting with any child, I think they find it really really difficult, and ammm to try and encourage an autistic child to play is quite challenge,

F: is it?

T: if they, if they don't actually like being around other people

F: yeh

T: and for Tom he doesn't mind being around other people, his, he likes just go off and sole play continually on his own

F: yeh

T: and I think, I think it is quite challenge to actually teach a child like Tom to actually play....

F: yeh

T: with somebody

F: mmm

T: it is, it is very important because through out the life you can be taught maths and English

F: hmm

T: and science, every thing else

F: yeh

T: but without social side

F: yeh

T: everybody needs to feel that and I think some times with autistic children specially well Tom

F: yeh

T: for example ammm

F: (coughs)

T: I don't think he actually .....understands that

F: hmm

T: to be accepted you have to go through play don't you? right at the beginning at the early years, because as you go on into an adulthood you, you still do play

F: that's true

T: don't' you?

F: yeh

T: and if you can't learn that right at the beginning then to be in the world around you how can you actually cope with..

## Appendix 13

### Forest Nursery

#### An interview with the head teacher

F: Do you think that play can affect Vicky's learning?

S: ammm I think (pause) I think probably yes because if you....when you say play you mean sort of like imaginative play or....

F: you will tell me what you..

S: ok, ok

F: understand when I making this...

S: I mean some of the things.... When she first came she do certain things and that was all she do

F: yeh

S: and I think we've tried to introduce her to some other things

F: ok

S: sometimes it might not be what, what she....what necessarily choose to do but we sort of say here....try this and then if she's tried it a few times, she might actually take on, take it on and, and want to do it herself

F: ok

S: so we've tried sort of increase the sorts of things that she will do also the things we know she likes to do, we try to sort of extend it a bit wider

F: hmm

S: we know she is interested in something and therefore, you know may be if we add this she might be interested and go in a different direction so you have to take what she is interested in and try to sort of extended sideways really

F: yes, what is your role in Vicky's learning and where does play fit in?

S: (pause) well I think everything

F: yeh

S: we do

F: hmm

S: everything we do we try to make playful, we try to make it sort of amm it...she....it's fun

F: yeh

S: she wants to do it

F: hmm

S: and I think that we have to ....we have to be there to support .....to support her, and to try and help her

F: hmmm

S: to, to do lots more things

F: yeh

S: but obviously you can't fo...you are not gonna force the child to do something that really don't want to do but you can try to show them more possibilities or....ammm and I think basically we are there to support her.

## Appendix 14

### Butterfly Nursery

#### An interview with the head teacher

F: What do you see as the importance of play in general?

B: in generally?

F: yeh

B: in generally the importance of play is to allow all children to be able ammm to experience all areas of the setting and to be able to use all their senses and ammmm just to able to explore and investigate really through their play and ammm just for us to encourage them to extend that play, ammm to give them some ideas on how they can do that, but a lot of them would be them initiating their play and us following their lead and taking one step further.

F: hmmm how does this apply with children with autism?

B: ammm that's quite difficult really cause a lot of children with autism just play in their own space

F: yeh

B: and we sort of trying to encourage children to interact with other children when they are playing, ammm so that is quite difficult for children with autism because even though we offer our activities and our ideas for all children's needs

F: hmm

B: try to meet all their needs, quite often children with autism won't get the same experiences as other children but in their own way they will ammm but they might just go to an activity for a little while and then come away and then go back and then come away where a lot of the other children might stay in that activity a bit longer so its really for us to try and encourage and have out things that will catch their eye and make them think 'ok let's have a look over there'

F: hmm

B: and then hopefully they might stay a little bit longer and then if there are other children around

F: hmmm

B: so trying and get them stay a little bit longer and see if other children will interact with them and then maybe they will be able to interact with the other children, but is it is quite difficult for us to ammm (pause) to encourage them to stay in an activity



longer

F: hmmm ammm how do you encourage each and every child's participation in play in the nursery?

B: just through conversation really and ammmm just to make out activities ammm to suit their interests

## Appendix 15

### Forest Nursery

#### An interview with Vicky's mother

F: How does Vicky interact with you while you are playing together?

M: she normally talks about the things she is doing

F: hmmm

M: like if she is watching kipper, she will tell me 'I am watching kipper' or says like 'kipper do that, kipper said do, do.....' sometimes (pause)

F: ok how does Vicky respond to the fact that you are talking to her?

M: like, ahh sometimes if she is watching kipper...

F: hmmm

M: if you are talking to her, give her food, she will eat because she is watching and now I notice, I normally put the TV off

F: ok

M: whenever she is eating

F: hmm

M: she will concentrate on the food

F: yeh

M: she likes playing with the computer a lot

F: on the computer a lot?

M: yeh she can watch and type and when you told her something once

F: ok

M: yeh because she was playing

F: hmmm

M: she can type ICK now

F: really?

M: yeh now she can type that

M: put junior and enter, she start playing

F: mmm

M: that's for one hour

F: yeh have you seen any differences in Vicky's play since she started attending the nursery?

M: yeh she plays differently, she plays with everything now, when she was not in the

nursery she don't play, if I will take her out with children she will just play with the toys but now they will be running, they will be exchanging and now everything she is...and she is talking a lot

**Appendix 16**  
**Butterfly Nursery**  
**An interview with Tom's mother**

F: But what does he play with?

M: he has always his marbles..he's got marbles..

F: hmm

M: and he likes putting them amm in his marble box. It's very, it's always usually the same toys

F: hmm

M: and very repetitive toys that he likes playing with..things like this (she touches a toy with beads existing in the room and moves one of the beads) so that he can just..

F: hmm

M: pass beads around but it's always repetitive stuff passing beads around

F: hmm

M: park games with the amm steering wheels and load of different bits and bobs but he is just not interested he rather just want to do something what he can do with his hands and loves playing with his pegs.

F: hm

M: he likes playing with his pegs he lays a line in his playroom

F: hm

M: and as long as it is repetitive he quite enjoys it still doing it but when if it's not he is not really that interested

F: hmm does he have any special preferences concerning his toys?

M:I mean really the marbles and the other day I bought a pack of plastic dinosaurs

F: yeh

M: and he spent just 7 hours just taking them out and putting them back in the pot

F: hm

M: that they come of (smiles)

F: (smiles)

M: it is just another routine that he likes taking them out and popping them in the bowl

F: hmm

M: but no not really but he has to have the TV on the background while he is playing

he doesn't like not having a TV on at home he is really it has to be underground just a trained program

F: ok

M: and Charlie the train which is another train program

F: hmm

M: or in the nightgarden..

F: yeh

M: which I hate (laughs)

F: (laughs)

M: for this stage a little book the cookery play program for children which he wouldn't, he had had that on all the time...

F: hmm

## Appendix 17

### Main themes: Forest Nursery

Play	Nursery's curriculum	Pedagogical Orientation	School's ethos
<b>Cooperative</b>	<p><b>Nursery's routine</b></p> <p>1. Learning through group activities</p> <p>2. Learning individually</p>	<p><b>Academic qualifications</b></p> <p>1. Teacher's training</p> <p>2. Teacher's training in special needs</p> <p><b>Teaching strategies</b></p> <p>1. Decisions</p> <p>2. Types of questions</p> <p>3. Approaches/techniques</p> <p>a) relationship between child/teacher</p> <p>b) could end up in play if</p> <p>c) lost opportunity to communicate</p> <p>d) other teacher's approach</p> <p>e) other teacher's questions</p> <p><b>Teacher's communication</b></p> <p><b>Teacher's communication-reflection</b></p> <p><b>Team's reflection</b></p> <p>f) Speechtherapist</p> <p>g) Speechtherapist's comments</p> <p><b>IEP targets include play</b></p>	<p><b>Theoretical framework</b></p> <p><b>Resources</b></p> <p><b>Symbols</b></p> <p><b>Culture</b></p> <p><b>Events</b></p> <p><b>Play ethos</b></p> <p>1. Learn through play</p> <p>2. Problem solution</p> <p>3. Actively valued children's work</p> <p>4. Playfulness</p>
<b>Exploratory</b>	<b>Learning through</b>	<b>Teacher's opinion about</b>	

	<b>group activities</b>	<b>their role</b>	
<b>Functional</b>		<b>Teacher's involvement in child's play</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Supporter</li> <li>2. Active player</li> <li>3. Mediator</li> <li>4. Coordinator</li> </ol>	
<b>Parallel</b>		<b>Teaching strategies during play</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describe actions</li> <li>2. Let the child lead play</li> <li>3. Join in play</li> <li>4. The child in control of own actions</li> <li>5. Repetition</li> <li>6. Mutual pleasure from play</li> <li>7. Teaching Vicky routines</li> <li>8. How to imitate adult's play</li> <li>9. Teacher's involvement in child's play</li> <li>10. Turn taking</li> <li>11. Modelling</li> <li>12. Structure</li> <li>13. Suggest alternative ways of acting</li> <li>14. Talking</li> <li>15. Introduce Vicky to new ideas</li> <li>16. Extension of favourite</li> </ol>	

		activities 17. Show more possibilities 18. Find activities Vicky enjoys 19. Communication 20. Types of questions 21. Open dialogue between teacher-child	
<b>Physical</b>			
<b>Pretend</b>			
<b>Relational</b>			
<b>Sensorimotor</b>			
<b>Copy</b>			
<b>Vicky's personal characteristics</b>			
<b>Gross motor skills</b>			
<b>Vicky's abilities</b>			
<b>Solo play activities</b>			
<b>Vicky's preferences</b>			



## Appendix 18

### Forest Nursery

#### Core theme: Nursery's routine

Vignette	1 <sup>st</sup> Code	2 <sup>nd</sup> Code-Recode	Core Theme
<p>Mrs Baker give to each child a small picture to hold. Each child's picture is different. Vicky has a zebra. Mrs Baker informs the children that they will start travelling with Thomas the tank engine and explains to them that as soon as they will find the area they want to play, they have to 'get off' the train, stick their picture within this area and start playing. They all travel around as the teachers sing and make funny sounds 'tout, tout'.</p>	<p>Teacher's approach</p>	<p>Learning through group activities</p>	<p>Nursery's routine</p>

## Appendix 19

### Forest Nursery

#### Core theme: Teacher's involvement in child's play

Vignette	1 <sup>st</sup> Code	2 <sup>nd</sup> Code-Recode	Core Theme
<p>Mrs Hogg gets a pair of spectacles Vicky was wearing until a few minutes ago, wears them and says to Vicky 'hello Vicky how are you?' Vicky smiles and extends her hands to get them and wears them again. She looks at her teacher and tells her in a singing voice 'it's for Fani' as Mrs Hogg is whispering 'jingle bells ... '. I get the spectacles wear them and say to Vicky 'hello Vicky, how are you?' She smiles at me, extends her hands to take back the spectacles and gives them to her teacher.</p>	<p>Talking between child-adult</p>	<p>Teacher as active player</p>	<p>Teacher's involvement in child's play</p>

## Appendix 20

### Forest Nursery

#### Core theme: Teacher's involvement in child's play

Vignette	1 <sup>st</sup> Code	2 <sup>nd</sup> Code-Recode	Core theme
<p>Vicky is standing in front of the computer with Mrs Hogg sitting next to her. Ben stands next to them and the teacher asks him 'do you want to play with Vicky?' Ben nods positively and then turns to Vicky to ask 'Vicky do you want Ben to come and sit next to you?' Vicky nods positively as well and the two children sit next to each other and use the computer alternatively and take turns with the teacher's help.</p>	Teaching strategy	Teacher as facilitator	Teacher's involvement in child's play

## Appendix 21

### Main themes for Butterfly Nursery

Play	Nursery's curriculum	Pedagogical orientation	School's ethos
<b>Exploratory</b>	<b>Nursery's routine</b>	<b>Teacher's communication</b>	<b>Play ethos</b>
<b>Functional</b>		<b>Teaching strategies</b> 1. Description of actions 2. Encourage play among children 3. Experience different areas 4. Extension of play 5. Learn children's interests 6. Teach how to play 7. Let the children take the lead 8. Modelling 9. Suggest new ideas 10. Suitable environment 11. Use of children's favourite activities	<b>Playfulness</b>
<b>Gross motor skills</b>		<b>Could end up in play if</b>	<b>School's ethos</b>
<b>Manipulational play</b>		<b>Academic qualifications</b>	<b>Symbols</b>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teacher's training</li> <li>2. Teacher's training in special needs</li> </ul>	
<b>Parallel play</b>		<b>Could end up in child – child interaction if</b>	
<b>Pretend play</b>		<b>Teacher's support in play</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Forbidding an action</li> <li>2. Give directions</li> <li>3. Observer's role</li> <li>4. Solve problems</li> <li>5. Taking turns</li> <li>6. Teacher's requests</li> <li>7. Teacher drawing attention</li> <li>8. Types of Questions</li> </ul>	
<b>Relational play</b>		<b>Level of adult involvement in child's play</b>	
<b>Solitary play</b>		<b>Lost opportunity to interact</b>	
<b>Sensorimotor play</b>		<b>Play and children with autism</b>	
<b>Repetitive play</b>		<b>Play in the IEP</b>	

<b>Adult child play interaction</b>		<b>Teacher's approach</b>	
<b>Child - child interaction</b>		<b>Teacher's communication – reflection</b>	
<b>Children's interests at home</b>			
<b>Copy</b>			
<b>Could end up in play interaction if</b>			
<b>Exploratory play</b>			
<b>Gross motor skills</b>			
<b>Physical play</b>			
<b>Tom's interaction with other children</b>			
<b>Tom's personal characteristics</b>			
<b>Tom's preferences</b>			

## Appendix 22

### Butterfly Nursery

#### Core theme: Teacher's support in play

Vignette	1 <sup>st</sup> Code	2 <sup>nd</sup> Code-Recode	Core theme
Tom finds a plastic long tube full of small beads in the room and turns it upside down as he produces different sounds with it. Helen looks at him smiley and tells him 'waou' as Tom leaves the room and goes to another play area.	Teacher's approach	Observer's- commentators role	Teacher's support in play

## Appendix 23

### Butterfly Nursery

#### Core theme: Teacher's support in play

Vignette	1 <sup>st</sup> Code	2 <sup>nd</sup> Code-Recode	Main theme
Helen talks with Laura when Tom stands in front of them with his pushchair and looks patiently Helen. A few seconds later Tom leaves as Helen and Laura are still talking to each other.	Teacher's approach	Observer's role & Lost opportunity to interact with a child	Teacher's support in play



## Appendix 24

### Butterfly Nursery

#### Core theme: Teacher's support in play

Vignette	1 <sup>st</sup> Code	2 <sup>nd</sup> Code-Recode	Main theme
<p>Tom keeps in his hand a plastic banana as Ros repeats continuously to Tom 'Tom where's the banana?'. Tom does not look at her but instead stares around. Dale who sits close to them points with his finger and says 'here's the banana'. Ros then looks at him and tells him 'Dale thanks for helping but I am talking to Tom now'.</p>	<p>Adult-child interaction</p>	<p>Teacher's question &amp; Lost opportunity to interact with a child</p>	<p>Teacher's support in play</p>