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Developing 'Negotiation capital': influence and imagination in three and four-year-old triadic collaborative play in nursery

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ABSTRACT

This project seeks to understand the 'possible worlds, possible selves' (Carr, M., A. B. Smith, J. Duncan, C. Jones, W. Lee, and K. Marshall. 2010. *Learning in the Making*. Rotterdam: Sense) afforded to children by collaborative imaginative play involving negotiation. We investigate how 3 and 4-year-olds achieve their ends through negotiation and collaboration in imaginary play. Preliminary findings suggest that the ability to influence the play appears to depend on the amount of 'negotiation capital' held by each child. Children engage in a process of 'brinkmanship' assessing how much 'negotiation capital' they hold at any time. The capacity to influence is, therefore, both individually and socially determined and time specific. The study raises questions about how adults can move from being 'solution fixers' with an emphasis on adult determined 'rules' as a way of settling differences of opinion in the nursery to engaging in a more reflective pedagogy where the adult 'tunes' to the child's collaborative play in action.

KEYWORDS

Negotiation; collaborative play; video reflection; reflective practice; early childhood education

Introduction

Children grow in many directions together, but a child is always in search of relationships (Malaguzzi 1994, 3).

Babies are born meaning makers and seek to communicate with others as they develop even before birth (Siegel 2012). Colwyn Trevarthen's work on companionship suggests that this drive to communicate and share playful experiences is innate (Trevarthen 2001, 2002). We are born to be sociable in groups, as demonstrated by children's rich and witty interactions with their peers (Bradley and Selby 2004).

Children construct their understanding of the world through these interactions or communications. Bruner (1983) describes how they are made meaningful through a shared understanding of a co-constructed socially and culturally formed world of which the child is co-author. Vygotsky (1978) explores the construction of self in relation with others and he describes the huge influence play has on the development of a child. In this study, we drew on Vygotsky's concept of play as an imaginary situation in which the child is liberated from the constraints of the physical situation. 'The child sees one thing but acts differently in relation to what he sees. Thus a condition is reached in which the child begins to act independently of what he sees' (Vygotsky 1978, 97).

Vygotsky highlights the motivational drive to play experienced by children as

‘play is connected with pleasure’. He observes that there are certain paradoxes relating to play, one being that although the child is liberated through play to do what she feels like doing at the same time ‘she learns to follow the line of greatest resistance by subordinating herself to rules and thereby renouncing what she wants, since subjection to rules and renunciation of impulsive action constitute the route to maximum pleasure in play’ (99).

Vygotsky argues that this subordination to rules

creates a zone of proximal development of the child. In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play it is as though he is a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all the developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development (102).

Observations in the nursery of three and four years old children devising and responding to their own rules in imaginative play became a focus for this enquiry as we sought to explore the zone of proximal development for the child. The struggles within negotiations were particularly evident in triads where allegiances were formed and re-formed as the ability to influence the play moved between players.

Background and context

This study was the focus of discussions over a two-year period with family workers, researchers and parents at the Pen Green Centre for Children and their Families. We use the term ‘family worker’ rather than ‘educator’ in order to emphasize the central importance of working with the whole family. The ‘Image of the child’ (Malaguzzi 1994) at Pen Green is deeply considered and draws from a belief that children learn by constructing their own understanding through their own experiences (Whalley 2007). Constructivist theory has influenced the development of a ‘mastery oriented’ pedagogy where children are encouraged to be strong, to choose, to challenge and to question (Dweck and Leggett 1988; Athey 2007; Whalley 2017). Recent discussions have also focused on learning through interactions and how children can be supported to be aware of the feelings and sensitivities of others.

Family workers and parents use video reflection to analyse children’s learning through the use of child development frameworks including Schemas (Arnold 1999, 2003, 2010; Athey 2007), Involvement and Well-being (Laevers 1997) and a framework for analysing adult – child interactions (Lawrence and Gallagher 2017). The depth of engagement between adults (family workers and parents) and children and the finely tuned nature of the pedagogical support offered to children is well documented (Whalley 2007, 2017). The use of video and the shared knowledge and analysis of observations of children at home and in the setting, through what is called the ‘Pen Green Loop’ enable family workers and parents to support children’s deep concerns and current interests. The documentation of each child’s learning is rich and illuminating (Whalley 2017).

Research question

As an ethnographic study of learning ‘in the wild’ (Claxton, Lucas, and Webster 2010) of the nursery environment this study looked at how 3 and 4-year-olds interact in

spontaneous imaginary play. The focus was on how children use strategies to negotiate, influence and collaborate in their play. Research questions were:

- How do children negotiate with each other in imaginary play?
- What strategies do they use?
- How do they work within the group to gain influence while maintaining the collaboration of others?

Methodology

The methodology draws from an interpretivist approach using the qualitative methods of video observations and narrative observations of children both at home and in the nursery. The ethical issues of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and benefits for participants were considered in accordance with the EECERA ethical code (2015) and the ethical contracts with all participants were revisited as the project developed. Considering the potential for a power imbalance between children and adults and between parents and educators, the right to withdraw from the study at any time was highlighted. Video reflection is part of everyday practice in the nursery, however, particular attention was given to the ethical considerations of the use of video within the project. The ethics of intruding into the child's world was also carefully considered. By focusing the filming on specific events and recognizing the sensitivity with which it was achieved and shared, we hoped to mitigate against the intrusion into the children's play whilst maximizing the opportunity to increase our understanding. In order to understand the dynamics of children's interactions with each other, we needed to observe them for ourselves. The filming allowed us to do this collectively and repeatedly, enabling discussion and reflection by stopping the video at any point on the replaying of the tape. As Hedges and Cooper (2017, 402) point out 'Video footage of children's play interactions may be a particularly powerful catalyst for reflection as it enables unlimited repeated viewings to deepen understandings'.

A purposive sample of three sets of three children were videoed when engaged in imaginative play. Play scenes rich in interactions and negotiation were selected. The videos were transcribed and the children's dialogue was coded with particular attention to the dynamic of the exchanges between the children. Parents and family workers met and watched the videos together and discussed emerging themes. All names in the study have been changed (Table 1).

Family context of children in the study

Analysis

Excerpts of the children's dialogue from each of the three triads are presented here to illustrate the point at which the dynamic of the group changed and the ability to influence the game moved between players. We have described this process as 'brinkmanship' where each child is testing their approach to influencing the play at each moment.

Table 1. Birth order and siblings.

Child	Birth order	Number of children In family
<i>Triad one</i>		
Roy	2nd	2 (older brother)
Mark	1st	2 (younger sister)
Barbara	1st	1
<i>Triad two</i>		
Daisy	1st	4 (two younger brothers and a younger sister)
Anyia	2nd	3 (older brother, younger sister)
Izzie	3rd	4 (two older brothers and a younger sister)
<i>Triad three</i>		
Lily	2nd	2 (older brother)
Ruby	2nd	3 (older brother younger brother)
Chantel	2nd	2 (older brother)

Triad one

Roy, a four years old boy in the nursery was observed playing in the sand with Mark (4 years) and Barbara (4 years). The three children habitually played together.

Barbara poured sand and it went across Mark's hand. Mark seemed indignant.

Mark: *Don't throw sand in my eyes!*

Mark repeated the phrase several times. Roy watched at first and then intervened.

Roy: *She didn't ... (pause) ... it was only an accident ... (pause) ... it doesn't matter ... (pause) ... you are the ice-cream man ... that's the choice*

It seemed that Roy was using many strategies to keep Mark in the game, including denial, rationalization, assessment of importance, attempting to direct the game through creating another role for Mark and when none of these strategies seemed to be working, eventually giving him an ultimatum, *that's the choice*. Roy seemed to be developing mastery as he tried different strategies to negotiate with his peers. He seemed to act as a facilitator for the game to continue.

Later in the same sequence, an adult came through the nursery inviting the children to go with her into the gym (large hall). Roy said to the other two that he did not want to go at first but when Mark and Barbara said they wanted to go, Roy became enthusiastic about going, singing *Let's all go to the gym!*. He seemed to be able to judge the limit of his influence and the point at which he was losing influence in the group. By quickly joining in with the shared desire to go to the gym he seemed to go with the change in dynamic without any apparent 'loss of face' or loss of respect by his peers.

In the research discussions, Roy's mother said that they always negotiate with Roy at home over choices that are made such as what to do on a weekend. He also spends a lot of time with his older brother and his many cousins so he has lots of scope for practicing negotiation strategies.

In different observations, Roy was observed to use quite sophisticated logic as a form of persuasion. For example, intervening when a younger child could not put his own trousers back on after he had dressed in nursery play clothes.

Roy: *Did you put them on this morning?* [child said yes]

Roy: *Well you can put them on now then.*

This confidence and enthusiasm for being solution focused seemed to enable Roy to take on the role of the ‘ideas man’ and afford him something akin to what is described in the UK as ‘street credibility’ or peer respect within the nursery.

Triad two

Anya (4 years), Daisy (4 years) and Izzie (3 years) were playing in an area they had set up with blocks to represent a house. Anya had a notepad and pen on her lap which she held close throughout the play. Initially, there was a lot of discussion about who was to play each role.

Anya:	<i>Who I'm going to be?</i>
Daisy:	<i>The dad</i>
Anya:	<i>I'm a girl ... I'm a girl (shaking head)</i>
Daisy:	<i>You can be a dad if you want!</i>
Anya shakes her head	
Daisy:	<i>Yes!</i>
Anya:	<i>I don't want to be ...</i>
Izzie:	<i>I've got a boy dad at home</i>
Daisy:	<i>Two sisters then!</i>
Anya:	<i>And who will Izzie will be?</i>

In this sequence, Daisy appeared to be taking the initiative in defining the characters in the play and seemed to try to persuade Anya that she could be the dad if she used her imagination, while Anya used reason (I'm a girl) to negotiate her role.

Daisy begins to pretend to make the dinner.

Daisy:	<i>Do you want to eat our dinner at the table or in the home?</i>
Izzie:	<i>Eat it in our home</i>
Daisy:	<i>(coming into the 'home area' holding a pink plate, highly prized in previous games, and a pan behind her back) It doesn't matter what plate you get right? It doesn't matter</i>

Daisy gives the pan to Izzie and gives the pink plate to Anya.

Daisy seemed to be using her knowledge about the highly prized pink plate of previous games to influence the game. She seemed to use a deescalating strategy of stating clearly that it doesn't matter which plate you get and then gave the pink plate to Anya who smiled, perhaps in acknowledgement of the significance of this 'gift'.

Izzie finds a brush

Izzie: *Brush*

Daisy puts her hand on the brush in Izzie's lap

Daisy: *Mine!*

Roy (detailed above) who witnesses the interaction shouts over to them

Roy: *Look in the box there's another one in the box*

Daisy looks in the box and finds another brush. Anya claps her hands.

Anya: *Good!*

Daisy checks on another child who has joined the group and is sitting in a different section of the pretend house.

Daisy: *Baby alright?*

Daisy finds bracelets in the box and puts them on.

Daisy: *Now don't you have them because they're mine. I'm baby*

Anya: *But I'm somebody ... but it's nursery's*

Daisy: *Well it's mine now. Baby just has one* (gives a bracelet to the child who is sitting in a different section of the house)

Anya: *But how about us?*

Daisy: *No because I haven't got much ... I've only got* (begins to use names to count the people) *I've only got one, two, three, four, five, six ..and there's only three of these ... isn't there Izzie?* (nodding at Izzie who nods in return)

Anya pulls her dress ties forward

Anya: *I've got a tie here look ... a pink tie* (She finds an adult and asks for her dress ties to be tied around her).

Roy was again able to intervene in other children's play as a 'solution fixer'. Anya seemed to employ strategies of encouragement when a solution was found by clapping her hands. The discussion about who owns what and who has the right to different pieces of equipment in the nursery at any one time is much debated among the children and is a rich area for learning negotiation skills. Anya seemed to try to reason that although Daisy was a character in the game, as she was, it still meant that all nursery equipment belonged to the nursery. This is a strategy that Daisy seemed to use for her own advantage later in the game (see below). Daisy appeared to attempt to strengthen her argument by using reason to count the people and the bracelets and by nodding her head and asking Izzie to agree with her. Anya appeared to back out of the argument by focusing attention on a piece of her clothing.

As Anya moves away from the group to ask an adult to help her tie her dress ties she says,

Anya: *But don't touch my pad*

Daisy takes the pad out of the hollow block where it has been stored and begins to write in it.

Izzie: *Look! Her drawing on it* (pointing to Daisy)

Daisy: *No but it's everybody's! It's nursery's*

Anya: *It's mine!* [Name of family worker] *left it on my peg! No Daisy!* (Daisy begins to write on the pad) *Nooo!*

Daisy: *You left it there!*

Adult intervenes and suggests another pad could be found in the nursery. Both Daisy and Anya agree.

Anya: *I can ... I will give you a yellow pen, you can have a yellow pen can't you* (Daisy gives the pad and pen to Anya)

There is a break in the play while they go off to find another pad. Daisy comes back with a book and they settle down in the pretend house again.

- Daisy: (as if taking a register) *Now who's here today?*
 Anya: (recognising her writing in the book Daisy has found) *Oh that's mine.* (offering the pad she was using previously) *you can have this one if you like*
 Daisy: *No..*(quickly focusing on the 'register') ... *right Anya's here ... Anya's number ... eight ...*

Anya and Daisy both write letters on the paper in their respective pad/book.

The negotiation about who has the right to use nursery equipment continued. Daisy used the argument that when you leave a nursery pad it is no longer yours to use exclusively. Anya countered by saying that her family worker had selected the pad specially for her that day. When the suggestion of another book to write on was made, Anya seemed to try to sweeten the outcome by offering a yellow (seemingly special) pen. When Anya discovered that the book that Daisy found had been a book she had been previously using she attempted to swap the pad for the book. However, as her dad during the analysis stated, she seemed to realise 'she was on a loser' and in the end accepted that she would have to keep the pad she had previously had in the game and allow Daisy to write in the book.

Triad three

Lily (3 years), Ruby (3 years) and Chantel (3 years) were playing in the nursery pretend car. Chantel was holding on to her 'Nemo' soft toy which she had earlier brought from home. She carried the toy with her during the play sequence.

After disagreements over who should be whom and who should sit where, the three girls go outside. Lily reaches for the hands of the other two saying, *come on you two* and they walk hand in hand over the bridge to another section of the nursery garden. Lily lets go of the hands and runs to the climbing frame (called 'monkey bars' in the UK). Ruby climbs up behind her and Lily turns to Ruby,

Lily: *Ok you go after me.*

There were plastic crates beside the climbing frame and when Lily has difficulty swinging along underneath the overhead bars, Chantel moves the crates into position so that Lily can support her feet.

After moving one crate along, Lily turns again,

Lily: *You go on that one Ruby.*

Ruby: (to Lily) *You go on the next one.*

Lily seemed to take the lead by running to the climbing frame first and directed Ruby as to how she could follow her along the crates. Ruby, in turn, directed Lily in order to keep her moving on. Chantel supported the play by placing the crates to enable them to climb along the frame. This supporting role seemed to contribute to the cohesion of the group.

Chantel follows them along the climbing route. Lily picks up Chantel's soft toy 'Nemo' from where Chantel placed it.

Lily: *Nemo wants a turn ...* (holding up the toy) *'I want a turn I want a turn'*

Ruby squeezes past Lily gaining access to the climbing frame.

Ruby: *My turn*

Lily: *Nemo wants a turn*

Chantel: (taking Nemo in her arms) *Be careful, no he can't have a turn*

Lily attempted to use Chantel's toy 'Nemo' to influence the game, taking on the character of the toy. This is an example of what the sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) calls 'plying the frame'. Lily attempted to stretch the expected pattern of interaction or collectively understood frame of the game through animating the toy, to give her some potential power to direct proceedings. Chantel, as the owner of the toy, however, took the toy back from Lily and did not accept the intervention. Lily seemed to accept that this strategy hadn't worked out at this moment in time.

Lily goes to look at the rope swings a little way away, attached to a tree. Ruby and Chantel continue to climb. Chantel goes first.

Ruby: *It's my go after Chantel*

Lily returns to the climbing frame.

Lily: *Girls! We can do something else in a minute can't we?*

Ruby: *We're not going to play that are we Chantel? We're going to play all day aren't we?*

Ruby and Chantel then run to the two rope swings and swing on them. Lily watches for a while then she holds her hand up.

Lily: *Five more shots* (local phrase meaning five more goes). She holds both hands up standing in between the rope swings. *Okay? Five more shots* (nodding her head). *One, two, three, four, five* (The two girls continue to swing) *Okay four* (holding up her hand again) *Six* (holding her hand up to Ruby) *and five* (holding her hand up to Chantel). Chantel swings one more time. Lily pulls a twig on the tree.

Lily: *Ding ding, off you get.* Chantel gets off.

After the failed strategy with 'Nemo', Lily seemed to seek a different approach by suggesting that they could do something else in a minute. Ruby seemed to challenge her attempt at influencing the game by seeking agreement with Chantel that they would remain on the climbing frame. However soon afterwards they ran to the rope swings where again Lily seemed to attempt to direct them, using a strategy that her mother said is often used by herself at home, limiting the time or number of goes before a change occurs. Finally, Lily seemed to find a successful strategy by using a bell-like sound to signify a change which Chantel responded to by getting off the rope swing.

Lily: *Pretend this is a fair* (a playground where families pay to go on rides) *okay? And I'll be the mum. Come on sisters. Pretend you're the baby okay* (to Chantel) *and you'll be the sister* (to Ruby). Lily then attends to a nursery child who shows her that she has hurt her leg and Lily directs her to her mother who works as a family worker in the nursery.

Lily: *Babies, babies this way* (leading them down a path. Ruby follows at first but Chantel runs back to the climbing frame making baby noises and Ruby then follows her)

Lily: *Okay babies, two ... two shots okay? ... two shots okay? ... two shots* (holding up two fingers and patting Ruby on the tummy and back as she swings).

Chantel: *Again again!* (runs back to start climbing again).

Lily: *Okay more shots and then that's it*

Ruby: *Lets go again baby* (climbs on the frame behind Chantel)

Lily: *Pretend we are all the babies! Ga ga* (runs to climb on the frame behind Ruby).
 Chantel: *I'm the mummy. Four shots* (holding up her hand then climbs along) *ga ga*
 Ruby: *I'm the mum. You can have this many shots* (holds up both hands)

Lily again took the initiative and suggested an imaginary scene and roles which the other two girls seemed to accept. The freedom of a 'baby' role, however, seemed to suggest to Chantel that she could disregard Lily's direction in the game and she ran back to the climbing frame. Lily again tried the 'numbering of goes' strategy and when that didn't appear to work she turned herself into a baby to join the climbing game. Each child then had a go at being the 'mum', quickly returning to the baby role.

Findings and discussion

The three scenarios illustrated above demonstrate the freedom the children experience in the nursery environment to experiment and explore through interactions within a social group. This involves a certain amount of risk-taking and relates to Ferre Laever's concept of Well being (Laevers 1997). A child who is feeling emotionally self-confident and has high self-esteem is able to extend themselves from the security of what they know to try out different ways of being which in itself leads to learning. Learning is emotional. As Siegel (2001, 90) explains 'By linking mental processes to each other within the single mind and across two or more minds, emotion serves as the fundamental aspect of mental life that serves to "join" or "integrate" minds.' Siegel (2012) also argues that the distinction between emotion and cognition is potentially harmful to our understanding of learning.

The pedagogy in the nursery at Pen Green is highly developed to support children's emotional development and high levels of Well being. This is one of the factors that enables children to feel comfortable and 'in their element' as 'fish in water' in the nursery (Laevers 1997). At the time of the research and in the scenarios analysed by the adults in this project who knew the children well, the children were displaying high levels of Well being.

Imaginative play: the opening of possibilities

Corsaro (2003) argues that by stretching a well-rehearsed role play, the children make the play risky and therefore more attractive to other children. They are also able to explore and experiment within a relatively safe pattern of interactions as 'the children explore their own emotional reactions in their roles as parents and children' (Corsaro 2003, 124). He argues that they can test their limits of bodily and social aggression. We would add they are also able to test the limit to which each player can secure cohesion and 'togetherness' (Singer and De Haan 2007) within a group and the relationship between how they interact with each other and how the play is developed and sustained. Open-ended imaginative play also offers the potential for developing negotiation strategies when playing with others. As Dweck asserts, 'mastery orientated children tend to focus on strategies when they encounter difficulty' (Dweck 2000, 109).

Process orientated learning in social groups: learning in the moment

This focus on 'learning in the moment' or a process-orientated approach to learning helps us to recognise the 'zone of proximal development' described by Vygotsky (1978). It also

explains how a child's deep level of Involvement (Laevers 1997) can occur when children are immersed in peer to peer interactions.

In his seminal work on the developing mind, Siegel (2012, 53) explains that the 'brain can be called an anticipation machine, constantly scanning the environment and trying to determine what comes next'. Each of us filters our interactions with others through the lenses of mental models created from patterns of experiences in the past. The mental models, schemata or what we have termed 'social schemas' are created through what Siegel calls 'summations' or 'generalized representations' developed from repeated experiences from infancy and encoded in certain areas of the brain. Siegel states, 'this is a fundamental aspect of learning' (Siegel 2012, 52).

It is important to note here that mental models or 'social schema' are derived through experience and interactions with others, they are not innate. 'The direction of flow is clear: from culture to individual; from outside to inside' (Donald 2001, 250).

Social schemas guide imaginative role play. The children in this study were using their senses, their life experience and experience of each other to gauge the moment, to anticipate the actions of others and to decide what to do next. At any one time, each child appeared to have a certain amount of cohesive 'glue' or attraction that enabled them to influence the play. We have called this 'negotiation capital', drawing on Bordieu's notion of 'capital' as 'accumulated labour' which enables the appropriation of 'social energy' (Bourdieu 1986, 46). The children in this study appeared to engage in a process of 'brinkmanship' where they tested out different negotiation strategies and assessed how much negotiation capital they had at any time. The observations appeared to demonstrate that the more negotiation capital a child held at a given moment, the more they were able to influence the play.

Home social learning

In the research discussions, parents expressed surprise at the complexity of the play they saw on the film and the role their children played in negotiating their part in the game. However, some families clearly took time to negotiate and debate at home with children about different issues and the extent to which children had access to play freely with other children was thought to be a contributing factor to the development of negotiation strategies displayed by the children in the study.

Six of the children in the study had one or more older sibling(s), and five children had one or more younger sibling(s). Judy Dunn (1993) notes that in studies on the effect of sibling relationships, there is as much variation in relationship qualities among individuals who have siblings as among those who do not. She explores rivalry and conflict, shared humour, connectedness and attachment security between siblings and while these elements are present in many sibling relationships 'no single dimension of prosocial behaviour in the relationship of young siblings seems to exist' (Dunn 1993, 50). Her studies did indicate, however, that children who could better understand emotions and 'other minds' were associated with the experience of frequent co-operative play with older siblings. While differences in temperament seemed to affect how siblings got along, links between gender, birth position and age gap and sibling hostility or friendliness were less clear. Dunn's work does show that sibling relationships are clearly connected to differences in parent – child, parent – sibling and parent – parent relationships, emphasizing the importance of the family dynamic in child development.

The parents in this study commented on the contrasting negotiation strategies the children engaged in with siblings at home which often included shouting and stomping. Shouting and stomping strategies were also regularly observed in the nursery but the children in these scenarios did not seem to rely on these in the context of imaginative play. The parents were struck by the children's patience and ability to compromise. The dynamic of negotiating one's own place in the play while also contributing to sustaining the play is indeed complex. While Vygotsky (1978, 99) describes the child learning through subordination to rules or what we would call the expected pattern of interaction or 'social schemas' in order to maximize the pleasure in play, this study suggests that at key moments children risk influencing the play based on the amount of negotiation capital they hold at any one time. Through a process of brinkmanship, they are prepared to assess the success of a bid to influence the game. If successful, they take the game forward. If the group is not with them they are prepared to compromise in order to sustain the play. Presumably, sustaining the game is of greater interest and more pleasurable than disrupting the game through a less compromising approach.

Conclusion and pedagogical implications

Exploring children's learning through interactions in imaginative play in this study has given parents and pedagogues insights into how socially competent and skilled children are in engaging in negotiation and collaboration in the nursery. We can clearly see that given a supportive environment, the children can learn very effectively from and with their peers. Indeed, the complex processes of meaning-making between peers are easily overlooked by adult pedagogues (Hedges and Cooper 2017). In contrast, too much adult intervention can be detrimental as Malaguzzi (1994) asserts, 'Over activity on the part of the adult is a risk factor. The adult does too much because he cares about the child; but this creates a passive role for the child in her own learning'. He goes on to explain that far from reducing the adult role, this approach demands more thought and consideration. 'All of this changes the role of the teacher, a role that becomes much more difficult and complex. It also makes the world of the teacher more beautiful, something to become involved in' ... 'We need to be open to what takes place and able to change our plans and go with what might grow at that very moment both inside the child and inside ourselves' (Malaguzzi 1994, pi).

In this study, adults have been able to reflect pedagogically on how to provide opportunities for collaboration and the development of negotiation skills in nursery and at home. Reflections on when, when not and how to intervene in negotiations in imaginary play need to be considered alongside the learning opportunities afforded to children through negotiation in conflict resolution. Rather than resorting to adult enforced rules to guide children's behaviour, organization of the learning environment through negotiation could be supported (Carr 2001; Corsaro 2003). Relinquishing adult devised rules in a learning environment is challenging and requires adults to be open to learning themselves.

Children are continually seeking relationships and are motivated to collaborate and engage with each other. Malaguzzi (1994) explains,

We have to let children be with children. Children learn a lot from other children, and adults learn from children being with children. Children love to learn among themselves, and they

learn things that it would never be possible to learn from interactions with an adult. The interaction between children is a very fertile and a very rich relationship.

In developing our understanding of peer learning, particularly in imaginative play, our challenge is to recognize, discuss and document social schemas being played out in nursery and at home. As parents and pedagogues, we need to keep challenging ourselves on the way we support children's learning and to be open to children showing us the way.

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