

**Play and Learning: Experiences and  
perspectives of immigrant mothers and  
bicultural children in Canada**

By  
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## Abstract

This thesis examines play and learning experiences of immigrant mothers and bicultural children and delves into their perspectives on their experiences. It also explores their cultural capitals which are accumulated in different contexts. Through this investigation, the study uncovers the cultural variations of play and learning which may lead to conflict between home and school discourses.

Using interpretivist methodology and qualitative methods, data were collected from interviews with nineteen mothers and nineteen children. The semi-structured interviews used allow flexibility of probing whilst being framed by subsidiary questions. At the end of the interview, a drawing activity was carried out with each child to offer an alternate tool of expression for him or her.

Through a socio-cultural lens, the main findings are presented based on 'Play as third space' framework. The study reveals the cultural shift and intergenerational gap of play and learning in first space. The experiences of children in second space were viewed from their perspectives involving challenges faced at school and the navigational strategies they constructed. The third space, a conceptual space, acts as a bridge between the first and second spaces. This study argues that play as third space allows children to make sense of their experiences, exercise their agency, calibrate power imbalance in the two physical spaces, and construct their identities in order to bridge home and school discourses,.

This study argues that bicultural children's experiences are multifaceted and complex, especially if there is discord between home and school cultures. Thus, the study advocates the importance of educators' and practitioners' awareness of possible cultural dissonance and sensitivity in observation and interventions during play. This study also recommends two-way communication between home and school to bridge cultures as well as to understand and value the cultural capital that children bring to school.

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Abstract	ii
Contents	iii

## **PART 1: INTRODUCING THE THESIS**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction to the study**

1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Rationale for study	1
1.3 Aim of study and research questions	2
1.4 Theoretical framework	3
1.5 Researcher's positionality	5
1.6 Structure of thesis	8

### **Chapter 2: Literature review**

2.1 Introduction	10
2.2 Understanding play	11
2.3 Relationship between play and learning	14
2.4 Play and learning in different cultures	18
2.5 'Play as third space' framework	23
2.6 Identity, agency and power	29
2.7 Reflections and future prospects	32

## **PART TWO: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Chapter 3: Designing the study, collecting and analysing data**

3.1 Introduction	34
3.2 Framing the research	35
3.2.1 Main research question and subsidiary research questions	35
3.2.2 Boundaries of study	37
3.3 Methodology and methods	39
3.3.1 Selection of methodology for this research	39
3.3.2 Selection of data collection methods	40
3.3.2.1 Interviews	40
3.3.2.1.1 Types of interviews	41
3.3.2.1.2 Interviews with children	42
3.3.2.1.3 Subsidiary research questions and corresponding interview questions	44

3.3.2.2 Drawing	47
3.3.3 Ethical considerations	48
3.3.4 Validity and reliability	51
3.4 Data-collection process	52
3.4.1 Phase 1 participants recruitment	52
3.4.2 The pilot study	53
3.4.3 Phase 2 participants recruitment	54
3.4.4 The main study	55
3.4.4.1 Interviews with parents	58
3.4.4.2 Interviews with children	59
3.4.4.3 Drawing activity	59
3.5 Data analysis process	60
3.5.1 Transcribing process and approach to transcript analysis	60
3.5.2 Approach to drawing analysis	65
3.5.3 Third space theory: A tool to analyse emerging concept	66
3.6 Conclusion	66

## **PART THREE: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Chapter 4: Immigrant mothers' experiences and perspectives of play, learning, and relationship between play and learning**

4.1 Introduction	67
4.2 Comparing play in native country and Canada	68
4.2.1 Changes in play settings and experiences resulting in changes in affordances of play	68
4.2.1.1 More playmates in native country	68
4.2.1.2 Play is less structured by adults in native country	70
4.2.1.3 The perceived need to be accompanied by adults for outdoor play in Canada	70
4.2.1.4 Lack of toys in native country	73
4.2.1.4.1 More outdoor play	73
4.2.1.4.2 Creative use of other materials for play	74
4.2.1.5 More restrictions in terms of gender in native country	76
4.2.1.5.1 Girls play indoors, boys play outdoors	76
4.2.1.5.2 Same gender playmates	77
4.2.2 A new form of play: Digital Play	78
4.2.2.1 Digital play is reducing social interaction with family and	79

friends	
4.2.2.2 Digital play is a distraction from studying	80
4.2.2.3 Preoccupation of mind on digital play	80
4.2.2.4 Concern on digital play's effect on eyesight	81
4.2.2.5 Addiction to digital play	81
4.2.2.6 Behaviour-changing effect of digital play	82
4.2.2.7 Losing interest in toys	83
4.3 Comparing learning in native country and Canada	84
4.3.1 Preference for Rote-Learning Approach	84
4.3.2 Preference for Play-based Learning Approach	91
4.4 Relationship between play and learning	95
4.5 Communication between home and school	100
4.6 Conclusion	100

## **Chapter 5: Children's experiences and perspectives of play, learning, and learning through play**

5.1 Introduction	102
5.2 Children's drawing: What it reveals about play	102
5.2.1 Favourite play objects	103
5.2.2 Favourite play activity	105
5.2.3 Children's wants in relation to play	109
5.2.4 Important playmates	111
5.2.5 Drawing as a form of play	113
5.3 Play and its challenges for children	115
5.3.1 Playmates	115
5.3.2 Communication problem	119
5.3.3 Discrimination	120
5.3.4 Limited play opportunities	121
5.4 Two learning models: play-based learning and rote-learning	121
5.4.1 Preference for Weekend School	122
5.4.2 Preference for Regular School	123
5.5 Relationship between play and learning	125
5.5.1 Dichotomy between play and learning	125
5.5.2 Academic Play	125
5.5.3 Applying existing knowledge	126
5.5.4 Independent learning	126

5.5.5 Social skills	128
5.6 Conclusion	130

## **Chapter 6: Play as third space between home and school: bridging the two cultural discourses**

6.1 Introduction	131
6.2 Cultural dissonance	131
6.3 Children using play as third space between home and school discourses	133
6.3.1 Play as a bridge to understanding the different cultures at home and school	133
6.3.2 Choosing a playmate with similar identity to navigate the school culture	134
6.3.3 Similar play at home and school	135
6.3.4 Playing with cultural identity	135
6.4 Teachers' strategies to support children's navigation in school culture	136
6.4.1 Bringing a toy from home to school	137
6.4.2 School's provision of a familiar toy	137
6.4.3 Teacher's intervention in child's difficulty in play	138
6.4.4 Teacher's intervention in children who play exclusively with each Other	139
6.5 Conclusion	140

## **Chapter 7: Discussion**

7.1 Introduction	141
7.2 First space	142
7.3 Second space	145
7.4 Third space	147
7.5 'Play as third space' framework: Promoting play as third space	151
7.6 Conclusion	156

## **PART FOUR: CONCLUDING THE THESIS**

### **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

8.1 Introduction	158
8.2 Reflections and Limitations	158
8.3 Contribution, Implication and Future Research	159
8.4 Conclusion	161
<b>References</b>	<b>163</b>

## Appendices

Appendix A: Flyer to recruit participants	175
Appendix B: Information Sheet	176
Appendix C: Consent Forms for Adult Participant	178
Appendix D: Consent Forms for Child Participant	179
Appendix E: Informal Consent Form for Child	181
Appendix F: Information of Parent	182
Appendix G: Interview Questions for Parent	183
Appendix H: Interview Questions for Child	184
Appendix I: Research Ethics Application Form	185
Appendix J: Ethical Approval from University of Sheffield	195
Appendix K: Interview guidelines	197
Appendix L: Printed email to Ottawa Islamic Community Closet dated 20 March 2013	199
Appendix M: Printed email to Ottawa Chinese Community Service Centre dated 21 March 2013	200
Appendix N: Printed email to Ottawa Islamic Community Closet dated 23 April 2013	202
Appendix O: Excerpt of interview with Aisha	203
Appendix P: Example of Coding of Data	205

## List of Figures

Figure 2.1 'Zooming in' approach to literature review adapted from Wellington et al. (2005)	10
Figure 2.2 Bergen's continuum of behaviours	13
Figure 2.3 Bergen's schema of play and learning	17
Figure 2.4 Application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory' (Levy, 2008a)	24
Figure 2.5 Play as third space (Adapted from Levy's (2008) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory')	25
Figure 2.6 'Play as third space' Framework (Adapted from Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory', Wood's (2010) integrated pedagogical approaches model, and Brooker's (2010) bridging cultures through dialogue concept)	26
Figure 3.1 Flow of discussion	34
Figure 3.2 Formulation of subsidiary research questions	36
Figure 3.3 Collated responses according to interview questions	61
Figure 3.4 Organization of participants' responses according to subsidiary research questions	62



Figure 3.4	Coding and condensation of data into themes	63
Figure 3.5	Inter-category comparison between each pair of mother and child	64
Figure 3.6	Comparison of interview transcripts with thematic data	65
Figure 4.1	Baar's illustration of an imaginary car accident	97
Figure 5.1	Drawings by Chanda and Emran	104
Figure 5.2	Drawings by Madiha, Husna, Jasmin and Qadi	108
Figure 5.3	Drawings by Naqeeb and Rafee	110
Figure 5.4	Drawings by Daliya and Luna	112
Figure 5.5	Drawings by Omera and Saad	114
Figure 5.6	Ishaq's drawing of Mario, a character in his digital play	127
Figure 5.7	Parvina's drawing depicts sharing during play	129
Figure 6.1	Ghadah's drawing of herself at a water park	136
Figure 6.2	Aatif's drawing of Beyblade, his favourite play object	138
Figure 7.1	Play as third space (Adapted from Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory')	142
Figure 7.2	Play as third space (Adapted from Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory')	145
Figure 7.3	Play as third space (Adapted from Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory')	147
Figure 7.4	'Play as Third Space' Framework (Adapted from Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory', Wood's (2010) integrated pedagogical approaches model, and Brooker's (2010) bridging cultures through dialogue concept)	152

### List of Tables

Table 3.1	Information on participants	56
Table 3.2	Fonts used for mothers' interview transcripts	60
Table 3.3	Fonts used for children's interview transcripts	61

# Chapter 1

## Introduction to the study

Insights from theoretical and empirical studies illustrate powerfully that young children demonstrate an inherent capacity to play and that it appears central to their early learning. Few would dispute this. Yet how such insights are to be translated into pedagogical practices across diverse social and cultural contexts has presented the international early childhood field with some of its more enduring challenges (Rogers, 2011, p. 5).

### 1.1 Introduction

The quote which commences this study highlights universal acceptance of the importance of play and its intricate relationship to learning. Yet, given that play is socially and culturally constructed (Brooker, 2011a), studies have shown that there are cultural variations in play (Pramling Samuelsson and Fler, 2009). Some children experience a virtual gap between home and school cultures, resulting in difficulty in negotiating school culture (Levinson, 2005). According to Wood (2014), cultural dissonance created from misalignment of home and school cultures is a significant concern in play.

This chapter begins with an exploration of the basis for this study which arises from personal experiences and gap in literature. The next section discusses the theoretical framework for this study with justification of choice. This leads to a discussion on my positionality in this study. The final section provides an overview of the thesis structure.

### 1.2 Rationale for study

In this section, I explain the underpinnings of my study which are two-fold: 1) personal rationale; and 2) gap in literature.

In 2008, I migrated to Canada with my husband and two young children. Having spent my early upbringing and adult years in Singapore prior to the relocation, I noticed significant differences in play and learning between the two countries. Before we migrated, I had already noticed a generational gap between how I played as a child

and the way my children play. The relocation to Canada added a cultural dimension to the differences. The learning experiences I had as a child were rooted in rote-learning approach. Although there is a move towards play being integrated in learning, emphasis on academic achievement through rote learning profoundly shapes the early childhood education in Singapore. In Canada, I volunteered in a non-profit child care centre, where I observed that the children engage in free play for most part of the day with the teachers adopting a supervisory role. Subsequently I also learned from my children about the adaptations that they had to make due to cultural shifts.

While many studies have investigated differences in play and learning in different cultures (Pramling Samuelsson and Fler, 2009), there is a lack of representation of immigrant mothers' voices portraying their experiences and perspectives in play and learning. In a play-based approach to the early childhood curriculum, which is advocated in many countries, the child's funds of knowledge serve as a starting point for learning. Thus, it is important to examine the happenings and cultural capital accumulated at home. I place high priority on projecting the voices of children in this study because I believe that they are capable of expressing their perspectives on their everyday experiences. In addition, my literature review indicated that there is a deficit in voices of bicultural children in existing research. Although it would be beneficial to include the perspectives of teachers for my study, I decided not to include them as participants because it might make the scope of my study too wide. In addition, I believe that the voices of those who experience the two culturally different settings are the most salient: parents' and children's voices. Subsequently, I decided to focus on mothers instead of including both parents for reasons that I discuss in **Section 3.2.2 Boundaries of the study**.

In the next section, I explore my underlying assumptions and my objective in carrying out this research so that I have a clear focus which serves as a beacon for my study.

### **1.3 Aim of study and main research question**

The process of formulating the main research question is guided by two questions:

- 1) What is the aim of the study?
- 2) What is the underlying assumption?

This study serves as a platform for immigrant mothers and their children to share their experiences and perspectives. The objective of the study is to examine the cultural capital that mothers bring with them as they migrate to another country, as well as the cultural capital that children bring to school. It also aims to uncover the children's experiences as they navigate the school culture. In the process of understanding the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and bicultural children, the study aims to explore possible cultural differences and intergenerational gaps of play and learning experiences as well as cultural dissonance between home and school. Upon reflection, these objectives probably stemmed from my assumption as an immigrant mother that other immigrant mothers may also have had different play and learning experiences in their native countries. Also, based on personal experiences, there is an underlying assumption that bicultural children may have to adapt to different cultures at home and school.

The process of examining the objectives of the study led to the formulation of the main research question:

**What are the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and bicultural children in play and learning at home and school?**

Next, I discuss the theoretical framework of this study, which is the paradigm in which it is situated.

## **1.4 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is the interpretivist paradigm which provides the lens for the various stages of this study from the designing stage to the reporting stage. Prior to discussing the theoretical framework of this study, it is important that I share my journey of transition from a positivist paradigm to an interpretivist paradigm. My first degree is Bachelor of Science in Physics and Mathematics. My educational background naturally situated me in the positivist paradigm, where "all genuine knowledge is based on sense experience and can be advanced only by means of observation and experiment" (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007, p.9). This doctrine is congruent with the experiments and investigations that I conducted in my undergraduate studies, in which physical quantities are measured. The measurements are then repeated so as to achieve accuracy in results. The role of the researcher is to

distance him or herself from the investigation conducted, and in failing to do so, the results of the investigation are rendered invalid. The goal is to obtain generalization which is then stated as facts or 'truth'. Through Part 1 of my Doctorate of Education (EdD) journey, I was enlightened that the concept of pure objectivity cannot be achieved in social sciences because values are fundamental to the human condition and they are shaped by experiences, beliefs and expectations in life (May, 2001).

The objective of my research is to explore the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and bicultural children. This study does not intend to generate representation, or prove if a certain hypothesis can be accepted or rejected. Thus, the objective of this study is situated in interpretive inquiry in which the focus is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen et al., 2007). According to Duffy and Chenail (2008), each particular research design encapsulates a combination of ontology (view of reality), epistemology (theory of knowledge), methodology (procedures or strategies that should be used) and axiology (values or ethical principles to be adhered to).

The ontological stance of interpretivism is to see the world based on one's position in it (Hammersley, 2013). Realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions (Guba and Lincoln, 2005) based on the meanings people give to their own intentions, motives and actions and those of others (Smith, J., 2008). This study holds the belief that there are multiple realities which can be better understood through examining different perspectives and acknowledging the validity of each and every perspective. My ontological stance is that the experiences of the mothers and children are socially constructed (Greig, Taylor, and MacKay, 2007) and there are multiple realities because they depend on the interpretations and meanings given by different individuals (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006).

In the interpretivist epistemology, the inquirer and the subject of inquiry are fused together with the interactions between the two parties to create the findings (Duffy and Chenail, 2008). The epistemological stance that I have assumed is that knowledge formed is subjected to assumptions, values and beliefs (Guba and Lincoln, 2005) and that I am part of the research, intertwined with the whole research process (Hammersley, 2013). In the interpretivist paradigm, qualitative methods such as interviews and observation are used to collect data in order to achieve the objective of interpretivist approach which is to "understand social life and describe how people construct social meaning" (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson, 2002, p.719).

The researcher's values and experiences are an essential part of the research process (Ponterotto, 2005). Since values are central in the interpretivist paradigm, they should be acknowledged, described and accounted for (May, 2001). Previously, in **Section 1.2 Rationale of study**, I explained how my experiences as an immigrant mother influenced this study. I also made my underlying assumptions explicit. The decisions I made at various stages of the research process inevitably influenced the findings of this study. Thus, it is crucial that my choices, the reasons for them, and values influencing them are overtly presented in my report and discussion. My ontological and epistemological stances, as well as my beliefs and perspectives, inevitably situate myself and my study in the interpretivist paradigm.

The awareness that I began my doctorate journey from the positivist paradigm led me to reflect on possible remnants of positivist values which may be intertwined in my study. It is possible that the constant mental reminder during the interview of not asking leading questions and ensuring that my body language and responses are non-judgemental may have stemmed from positivism. However, this tenet is also embedded in interpretivism. This is not an argument that this tenet will result in no 'researcher effect' on participants' responses because my interaction with the participants inevitably influences their responses. Another possible trace of positivism detected is the discomfort in writing as the first person. Upon reflection, I realised that the initial draft of my thesis was done in third person based on positivist principles of detaching oneself from one's study to gain validity. I rectified this by reminding myself that I am situated in the midst of my study, therefore I need to make this overt in my writing.

In the next section, I discuss how the theoretical framework of this study influences my positionality. In addition, I examine my relationship with the participants to determine insider/outsider positionality as well as my view of children and childhood.

## **1.5 Researcher's positionality**

The theoretical framework or paradigm is the lens through which a researcher views his or her research and it influences the way the researcher situates him or herself in the study (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). In an interpretivist paradigm, the beliefs and values of the participants and the researcher, as well as the researcher-participant interactions are integral to the research process. Thus, in this interpretivist study, my

theoretical positionality as a researcher is situated at the heart of my study, embedded in every stage of the research process.

According to Irvine, Roberts, and Bradbury-Jones (2008), researchers are considered as 'insiders' when they share a common language and culture with research participants. Given that I do not share the same native language, nor do I originate from the same native country, I do not consider myself holding the full status of 'insider' in this research. However, I share some common characteristics with the research participants as an immigrant mother from Asia and a member of the Muslim community in Ottawa. This commonality was highlighted during one of the interviews with a comment, "You know how they dress differently from us". The terminology 'they' seems to infer 'othering' while the terminology 'us' may be interpreted as an inclusion of the researcher as part of the community. Furthermore, I was referred to as 'sister' by some of the research participants on numerous occasions.

Whilst by definition, my positionality is not as an 'insider' in this research, I argue that the common characteristics that I share with the participants allow me to claim the status of 'partial insider'. Although an insider researcher would usually have easy access to participants in his or her community, being a partial insider, I encountered a lot of difficulty in accessing the participants. However, once the trust was gained, I believe that there was acceptance by the participants. The shared identity as a Muslim immigrant mother allowed me to have a common ground with the participants, probably leading to comfort in interaction and openness in responses. According to Dwyer and Buckle (2009), participants are usually more open to an insider researcher which may result in greater depth of data. Participants may be willing to divulge details of their experiences because of an assumption of understanding and empathy based on common experiences. In her ethnographic study of Egyptians, Sherif (2001) who is Egyptian-American, observed that her American researcher friends often misinterpreted the behaviours of Egyptians and sometimes adopted a supercilious attitude in their interpretation of the local culture. I believe that the common experiences have allowed me to ask probing questions with insight and sensitivity. Another advantage is that better understanding of the participants due to our common experiences may reduce the possibility of misinterpretation.

One of the disadvantages of being an insider is that participants may not provide details based on assumptions of similarity and taken-for-granted common knowledge. However, given that my native country is different from the participants', this difference

is useful in establishing that we may not have common cultural capital brought over to our migrated country. Hence, this situates me as a partial outsider, reducing the possibility of participants assuming taken-for-granted common knowledge.

In summary, I believe that my positionality as a partial insider has allowed me to gain trust and acceptance from the participants leading to openness in responses. In addition, these common experiences have allowed me to better understand their experiences as immigrant mothers in Canada, thus reducing the possibility of misinterpretation. However, there are some differences between myself and the participants which render me a partial outsider. I argue that this is an advantage to me because the participants may feel that they have to furnish details in their responses due to our background differences. Hence, I believe that my in-between cultural positionality allows for better insight, understanding and empathy. At the same time, this “in-between” state creates awareness of significant background differences which highlights the importance of using probing questions to avoid making assumptions on the responses.

As my study involves research with children, it is imperative that I examine my view of children and childhood which affects my positionality in this study.

### **1.5.1 Researcher’s view of children and childhood**

There is an apparent shift in research from children as becoming beings to competent social actors in their own right (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008). It is important that I reflect on my concept of children and childhood before deciding on my method and methodology. This view influences my assumptions at the various stages of research and also the perspective adopted to build my analyses. Concurring with the view of Greig et al. (2007), I believe that children have their own specific characteristics and they are constantly in interaction with their environment. Hence, there is a balance between the children being shaped and actively shaping the environment.

According to Langsted (1994), children are experts in their own lives as they are the only ones who know how it is to experience being at that age. In contrast, Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) believe that humans cannot claim to be experts of their own lives as experts are interpreted as people who have complete knowledge of their own lives. I am in agreement with Lancaster and Kirby (2003) in defining children as experts in



their own lives, with the interpretation of expertise as having special knowledge of their lives, and that there are also other additional sources such as parents and teachers who provide other perspectives on the children's lives.

Children are the primary source of knowledge about their own childhood experiences (Alderson, 2000) and hence would provide an excellent source of data for research in early childhood. Accordingly, my view of children would be as subjects and not objects of research as children can give valuable and enlightening perspectives (Nutbrown and Hannon, 2003). This leads to my approach of involving children as participants in my research, respecting their rights and acknowledging the value of their perspectives (Greig et al., 2007).

## **1.6 Structure of thesis**

### Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides the impetus and objective of this study leading to the formulation of the research question. The theoretical framework and my positionality in this study are also discussed in this introductory chapter.

### Chapter Two: Literature Review

The discussion of literature chapter is presented using the zooming-in approach (Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCulloch, and Sikes, 2005), starting with a broad view of play, and eventually focussing on the key areas of identity, agency and power. The chapter closes with reflections on the gap in literature.

### Chapter Three: Designing the study, collecting and analysing data.

This chapter is devoted to the methodology and method of the study. It justifies the choice of research methodology and methods used. Also, it describes the data collection and analysis processes.

### Chapter Four: Immigrant mothers' experiences and perspectives of play, learning, and relationship between play and learning.

This chapter addresses the first three subsidiary research questions. It analyses and interprets significant findings from the interviews and drawings in relation to mothers' experiences and perspectives.

Chapter Five: Children's experiences and perspectives of play, learning, and relationship between play and learning.

This chapter addresses the last three subsidiary research questions. It analyses and interprets significant findings from the interviews and drawings in relation to children's experiences and perspectives.

Chapter Six: Play as third space between home and school: Bridging the two cultural discourses

In this chapter, I discuss evidence of cultural dissonance and the use of play as a bridge between home and school which has emerged from the findings.

Chapter Seven: Discussion

This chapter brings together main findings from the three previous chapters and considers their significance from socio-cultural perspective as well as in the light of relevant literature. The conceptual framework 'Play as third space theory' structures this discussion.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

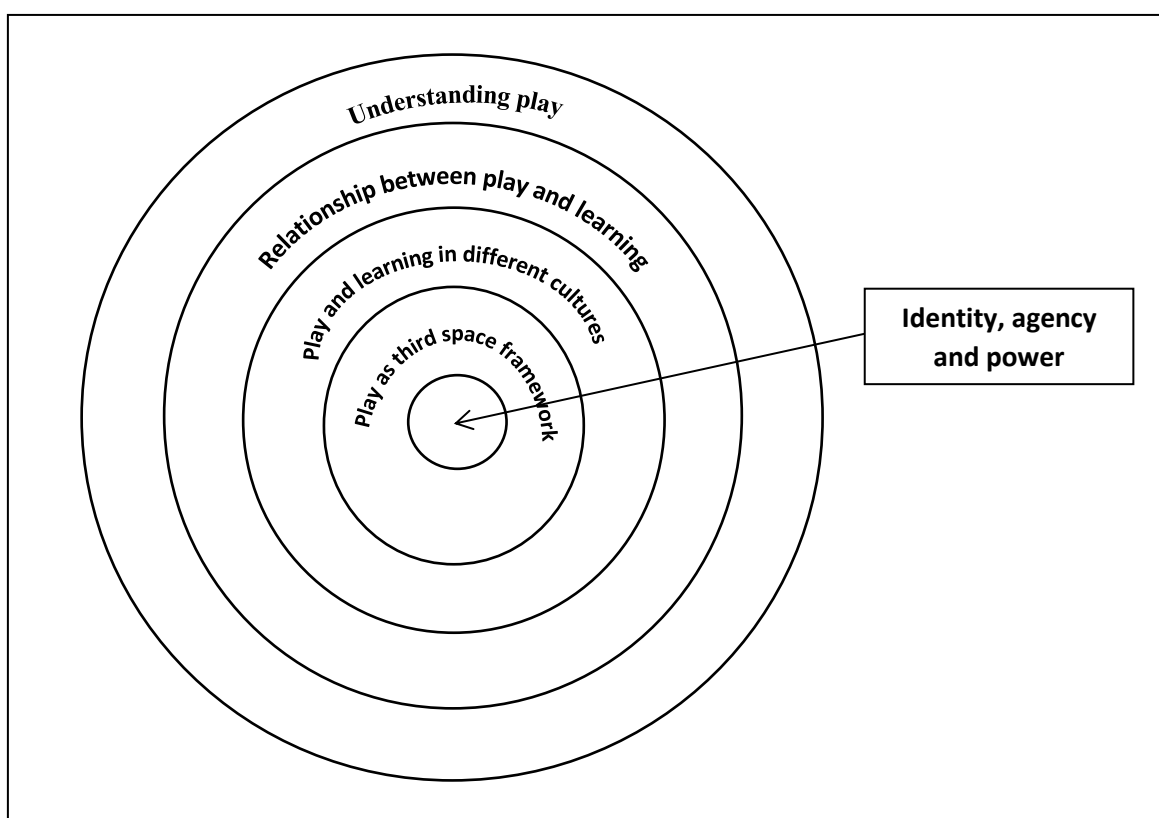
In the final chapter, I share my reflections of the research process and the limitations of the study. I also discuss this study's contribution to knowledge, theoretical and pedagogical implications, and suggestions for future research.

# Chapter 2

## Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

The objective of this study is to investigate the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and their children on play and learning. In light of this objective, this review commences with a macro view of play and its relationship to learning. Subsequently, it focuses on play and learning in different cultures. In the following subsection, a conceptual framework of this study is introduced and discussed. The next subsection explores the concepts of identity, agency, and power. Finally, this review concludes with a brief consolidation of the discussion in the previous sections. It also elucidates areas in which this study can contribute to the body of knowledge. This chapter adopts the 'zooming-in' approach (Wellington et. al., 2005, p. 82) as illustrated in *Figure 2.1*.



*Figure 2.1* 'Zooming in' approach to literature review adapted from Wellington et al. (2005)

## 2.2 Understanding Play

According to Katz (2008), play remains an elusive concept to define despite being a continuing topic of interest in the fields of child development and early education. At one end of the spectrum, only free-flow activities with no adult input are considered as play (Bruce, 1991). At the other end, highly structured adult-directed activities, which incorporate materials with specific instructions for use, are also considered as play (Elkind, 2009). Fler (2009) suggests that play encompasses a wide range of activities because “most of the behaviours and activities young children engage in can be termed as play by one theorist or another” (p.2). Similarly, Wood (2013) also paints a broad picture of play activities as a wide range of behaviours situated in different contexts which provide multiple meanings to the players and observers.

Rubin, Fein, and Vandenberg (1983) suggest that there are three general approaches to the definition of play: psychological disposition, observable categories of behaviour, and the context likely to evoke disposition or yield behaviour identified as play. They suggest that play as a disposition is characterized by six factors: intrinsic motivation, attention to means rather than ends, guided by the question ‘What I can do with this object?’, element of pretense, freedom from externally imposed rules, and active engagement. Play as observable behaviour focuses on the taxonomies of behaviour describing distinctive types of play. For example, Piaget’s three types of play are practice play, symbolic play, and games with rules (Garvey, 1990). Rubin et al. argue that categorizing play allows for emphasis on child development which may not be apparent when play is viewed as a general behavioural disposition. Play as context refers to producible context in which particular types of behaviour occur, including behaviour that is considered as play. Pellegrini and Smith (1998) agree with Rubin et al.’s multidimensional approach in defining play. They elaborate that it is useful to consider the antecedent and consequential dimensions of play during observation and classification of play behaviours. An example given is that a particular behaviour is considered play fighting if the children were on cordial terms after the fighting activity has ended. However, if negative disposition or behaviour towards each other is observed immediately after the fighting activity, it is then considered as aggression. They also caution that antecedents and consequences should not be considered as components of the play behaviour.

There are also attempts to define play in terms of its characteristics. Garvey (1990) lists five characteristics that should be present in a behaviour that is considered as play:

- (1) Play is pleasurable, enjoyable;
- (2) Play has no extrinsic goals. Its motivations are intrinsic and serve no other objectives;
- (3) Play is spontaneous and voluntary. It is not obligatory but is freely chosen by the player;
- (4) Play involves some active engagement on the part of the player; and
- (5) Play has certain systematic relations to what is not play.

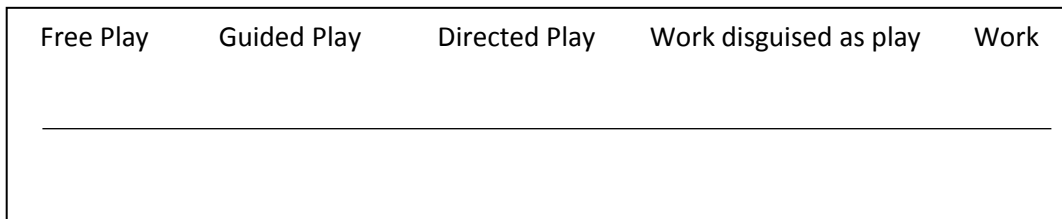
In their summary of a number of studies that focused on children's perceptions of play, Howard, Bellin, and Rees (2002) conclude that children's perceptions are related to experience. They observe that children are more likely to include absence of adult involvement as a characteristic of play when they are not used to adults being involved in their play. On the contrary, when children experience regular involvement of an adult in play, they are more likely to not include adult presence as a characteristic of non-play. This finding is similar to a study done by McInnes, Howard, Miles, and Crowley (2011) which compared two settings with variation in teachers' pedagogic interactions with children. They report that children are less likely to use adult presence as a cue to differentiate play and non-play activities when teachers participate in activities without hijacking children's choice and control.

The findings of some studies revealed that adults' and children's perspectives of play are not aligned. Wing (1995) shares that the teachers and children in her study were not in agreement as to what activities were considered as play. The teachers considered all activities that they had planned for the children as play. However, the children categorised some of the activities as work despite finding them enjoyable. According to Wing, it is more likely that the children will consider an activity as play if they have more control and ownership over the activity.

However, Cooney, Gupton, and O'Laughlin (2000) found alignment between child and adult perspectives on the fuzziness between the terms 'play' and 'work'. They attributed the blurred lines between play and work to blended learning activities that combined the elements of play and work which are shared control of classroom activities and spontaneity in the learning experiences. They argue that categorizing classroom activities to 'work' or 'play' may limit possibilities for teaching and learning. Wood

(2009) also cautions that when practitioners view play and work as a dichotomy, they tend to use mixed pedagogical approaches in which adult-directed activities are prioritised over child-initiated activities in the curriculum.

Bergen (1998) presents a continuum ranging from behaviours having the greatest internal component (Free Play) to those having the greatest external control component (Work). The continuum is illustrated in *Figure 2.2*.



*Figure 2.2* Bergen's continuum of behaviours

Bergen's explanation of the five points on the continuum is as follows:

1. **Free play** has the greatest degree of internal control, reality, and motivation.
2. **Guided play** occurs within a loosely defined framework of social rules, requiring children to give some attention to externally imposed control, reality and motivation.
3. **Directed play** has many externally imposed elements that are defined by adults and play is often led by adults.
4. Almost play or '**work disguised as play**' describes task-oriented activities that are not inherently playful but that can be transformed into directed or guided play activities if the potential for internal control, motivation, and reality can be tapped.
5. **Work** refers to activity that is engaged in to reach an externally defined goal and for which motivation is external.

Wood (2010) also proposes a more general continuum with work and free play on the opposite ends, and structured play at the middle point of the continuum. This is discussed in **Section 2.5 'Play as third space' Framework**.

There are many benefits of play to children, such as developing social skills, providing intellectual benefits such as fostering language and encouraging cognitive development, and enhancing creativity and imagination (Ashibi, 2007). Also, play allows for practice of fine motor skills, whole-body exercise and motor coordination. In addition to the benefits of play to children's development, Lindsey and Colwell (2003)

suggest that play provides opportunities for insight into child competence in various areas. In addition, play can be used as an instructional mode. The concept of play as a medium for learning is discussed in **Section 2.3 Relationship between play and learning**.

Although educators generally agree that play is valuable in the early childhood curriculum (Wood, 2013), the definition of play varies as different characteristics are attributed to it. Attempts to categorize play have resulted in confusion rather than clarity, and the lens through which one views play has contributed to the conundrum. The adult-centric lens sometimes provides a different view of play compared with the children's interpretation. However, if we acknowledge that children are capable of providing important and reliable perspectives on their experiences (Nutbrown and Hannon, 2003), their definition of play should also be taken into account when play is incorporated into classroom activities. Furthermore, psychological definitions have focused on a search for regularities (Kail and Zolner, 2012). In contrast, contemporary ways of understanding focus on cultural variations of play and players, and the ways in which play changes over time, context, ages and cultural contexts (Brooker, 2003).

While acknowledging the varied definitions and interpretations of play, this study examines play from socio-cultural perspectives in order to capture these variations. Furthermore, just as play is an elusive concept to define, its relationship to learning is also complex, as discussed in the next section.

## **2.3 Relationship between play and learning**

According to Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2008), play and learning are inextricably intertwined because play is a vital component in learning. Children are always learning when playing, but not necessarily learning what the adults want them to. (Katz, 2008). While it is generally accepted that play is central to children's early development and learning, play is in danger of being displaced in school curriculum due to the pressure of school readiness (Nicolopoulou, 2010) and a lack of understanding of the role of play in children's learning (Martlew, Stephen, and Ellis, 2011). In addition to the increasing focus on academic skills for young children, lack of common definition of play contributes to the challenges in advocating play in the school curriculum (Bodrova and Leong, 2010).

Rogers (2011) also agrees that there are problems in reconciling play and pedagogy. Play-based pedagogy means that play has become an instrument for learning. Yet, play and pedagogy seem to be divergent concepts in which reconciliation may result in conflict of interests. In her study exploring co-construction of pedagogy, Rogers reports a conflict of interests experienced by both the teacher and the child. The teacher is limited by the pressures to meet specific learning objectives although she would have preferred child-led play as a pedagogical approach. The child's desire to act a certain role is in conflict with what is deemed to be the acceptable and correct role as defined by his teacher. Wood (2010) also suggests that there are possible tensions between the policy involving play and learning and the actual practices. Cooney (2004) supports the presence of such tension with the findings of her study which reported a difference between children's actual classroom experience and teachers' perceptions of what children should experience.

Wood (2010) argues that the relationship between play and learning can be viewed from two perspectives: outside-in and inside-out. The outside-in perspective focuses on 'what play does for children'. It is linked to the process of enculturation which prioritises adults' interpretations of play and emphasises play as an educational medium with defined educational outcomes. The inside-out perspective is derived from emergent or responsive approach which focuses on 'what play means to children'. In this approach, children's funds of knowledge are made visible (Bodrova, 2008), and they emerge and develop with the support of educators. Wood proposes that the inside-out perspective provides a better approach to the relationship between play and learning.

The 'inside-out' perspective is agreed by Rogers (2011) as she suggests that children's perspectives on the meaning and value of play should inform pedagogy in a reciprocal and relational way. The relational pedagogy values children's knowledge and recommends learning experiences to be related to children's experiences (Brownlee, 2004). Rogers (2011) suggests that it is possible to resolve some conflicts of interest that arise between play and pedagogic practice by adopting a play pedagogy that is relational and co-constructed by both children and adults.

Pramling Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008) propose drawing on similarities between learning and play to address the tension between policy and practice. They suggest three similarities: (1) children's experience as a point of departure; (2) discernment, simultaneity and variation as key-factors; and (3) meta-cognition, meta-cognitive dialogues and meta-communication as crucial factors. Capitalizing on children's



experiences as a point of departure means that the starting-point as well as the result of a learning task should be pursued from the child's perspective. It is not necessarily child-initiated as the teacher may direct the children's attention to the learning objects. However, the child has to contribute by sharing his or her funds of knowledge and ideas, thus, participating in the meaning-making process. Next, they suggest that since play and learning allow for multiple reproductions and representations, teachers should value and encourage many different ways that a child thinks of a singular phenomenon, problem or concept. It is suggested that when a child thinks in various ways about a topic, simultaneously, the child is able to discern and recognise the variations and different meanings that may be derived from it. Drawing upon how children spontaneously use both communication and meta-communication in play, they suggest that teachers should encourage children to express their thoughts. Subsequently, teachers can then focus children's attention on how they think about something, which is the meta-cognitive aspect of learning. Pramling Samuelsson and Carlsson conclude that in order to integrate play and learning in a goal-oriented preschool, the teachers must view children as playing-learning individuals because the children themselves do not separate playing from learning.

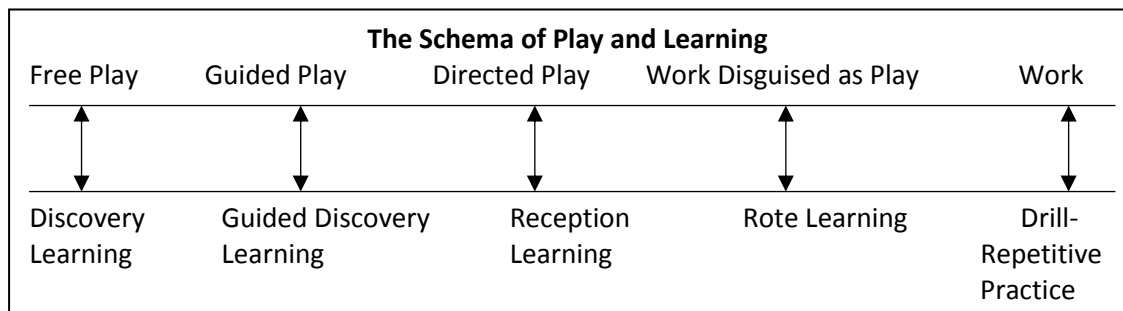
The emphasis on academic skills at a progressively younger age and the limited time that children spend in school may cause play to be viewed as a luxury rather than a necessity (Bodrova and Leong, 2003). Thus, Bodrova (2008) suggests a Vygotskian approach to address the tension between academic skills and play. She proposes that adopting the Vygotskian approach allows young children to engage in mature make-believe play which results in their mastery of necessary prerequisites of academic skills. Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2008) also demonstrated that children who engage in play and playful learning do better in academic subjects when compared to children who play less.

The Vygotskian approach emphasizes the importance of adult's role to scaffold play to enhance the quantity and quality of play while improving competencies such as language, cognitive, social and emotional (Bodrova, 2008). Johnson, Christie, and Yawkey (2005) place equal importance on adults' and children's roles in order to integrate play and learning in the curriculum. The roles of play from the Vygotskian perspective are to serve as a reflection of a child's current development and as an instrument to lead the child to the next stage of development. Thus, this approach focuses on the children's background knowledge as a starting point for play.

Drawing on the similarity in the suggestions made by Wood (2010), Rogers (2011), Pramling Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008), and Bodrova (2008), the child's funds of knowledge should serve as a starting point for play-based approach in the school curriculum. In the past, children have played and learned alongside older children and adults. However, Brooker (2011a) highlights that there is an increasing segregation of children from the intergenerational world as their daily experiences are confined in classrooms with same age peers. Thus, Bodrova (2008) suggests that there is a need to increase children's funds of knowledge through various ways such as field trips, guest speakers, books and videos.

Wallerstedt and Pramling (2012) propose that teacher-directed activity can allow children to appropriate cultural tools that they have utilised during their free play activity. They suggest that play and learning should not be regarded as two separate activities as children's learning comes into play in their activities. In fact, play and learning stimulate each other as the children create an understanding of themselves and the world around them (Pramling Samuelsson and Johansson, 2006).

Bergen (1998) suggests a schema that inter-relates play and learning (see *Figure 2.3*).



*Figure 2.3* Bergen's schema of play and learning

According to Bergen, the upper level continuum ranges from greatest internal control (Free Play) to greatest external control (Work), while the lower level continuum ranges from highest assimilative component (Discovery Learning) to highest accommodative control (Drill-Repetitive Practice). Each point of the upper level continuum corresponds to the point that is directly underneath it on the lower level continuum. For example, free play corresponds to discovery learning. The schema is open to the range of play that is encouraged by the educators, depending on their theoretical perspectives. However, it serves as reference for the educators to identify the kinds of learning they wish to encourage by focusing on the type of play that is linked to the learning.

Various ideas and suggestions have been made to address the relationship between play and learning in the school curriculum. The tension between play and pedagogy arises from various factors such as diverse definitions of play, various interpretations of its role in learning, and increasing pressure of school readiness. One of the recommendations made is to ensure that the play pedagogy is based on children's existing funds of knowledge. It is also suggested that children contribute to the meaning-making while being supported by the adult. While Bergen (1998) provides a useful schema that relates play and learning, there may be some disagreement to the categorization provided. For example, it is possible that some educators may consider both rote-learning and drill-repetitive practice as work.

This study adopts the stance that while play provides a valuable medium of learning for children, structured, teacher-initiated activities with play characteristics can also be incorporated into school curriculum to enhance children's learning. This standpoint also emphasizes the importance of optimizing children's funds of knowledge as the starting point for activities in school. Another factor that contributes to the complex relationship between play and learning is culture. In the next section, I explore the effect of culture on play and learning.

## **2.4 Play and learning in different cultures**

There has been a shift from searching for regularities and universal definitions of play to understanding cultural and contextual variations. "What is culturally appropriate for students in one culture is not necessarily so for students in another" (Gershon, 2005, p.66). Although the notion of respect for diverse cultural beliefs is generally acknowledged, the cultural dimension of play is sometimes ignored (Brooker, 2011 a). Göncü, Mistry, and Mosier (2000) caution that different communities may deem different activities as developmentally beneficial which may result in diverse play opportunities depending on the communities' beliefs, values and practices. They also suggest that the Western interpretation of play may misrepresent and misinterpret children's play in other cultures. For example, non-Western children's play may be misinterpreted as lacking because they do not have the pretend features of Western children's play. They examined the differences in social play of toddlers in four communities: Guatemala, Turkey, India, and United States. The findings conclude that while social play occurs in all the communities, there are variations in play frequency, partners of social play and activities in children's play. From their study, they conclude

that the children's play reflects adults' beliefs about children's development. Also, the cultural variations observed suggest that the absence of a certain type of play should not be an indicator of deprivation of the benefit of that type of play. This is because there may be other play or non-play activities that serve the same developmental function.

Brooker (2003) suggests that cultural variations in play reflect different goals of the family. These include compliance or assertiveness, independence or interdependence. For example, White, Ellis, O'Malley, Rockel, Stover, and Toso (2009) report that, amongst Maori in New Zealand, play is seen as a tool to transmit culture and language, and the purpose of play is to develop identity. This is evident in the way the environment is set up, in which there are cultural cues present. Similarly, in a study done in Wisconsin, United States, Wineberg and Chicquette (2009) suggest that a possible reason for the lack of adult involvement in children's play is rooted in the highly valued attribute of independence which is reflected in their local culture.

The notion of 'learning through play' has dominated the European, American and Australasian nations and infiltrated other nations which have different cultural traditions (Brooker, 2010). The different cultural beliefs, values and practices may have influenced the interpretation of the notion 'learning through play'. For example, the Chinese culture places a heavy emphasis on academic achievement (Fung and Cheng, 2012). Rao and Li (2009) share that the activities in the preschools in Mainland China are highly structured as a result of Chinese cultural belief that children's academic 'training' starts in their early years. Thus, it is possible that the emphasis on academic achievement brought about the perspective that free play activities are opportunities for teachers to reinforce pre-academic concepts whenever they encounter teachable moments.

In Hong Kong, Fung and Cheng (2012) report that the cultural belief on learning creates tension in supporting a play-based curriculum. For instance, the cultural concept 'diligence yields reward, while play gets nowhere' influences the perspective on the relationship between play and learning in Hong Kong (Cheng, 2011). The parents' demands for concrete evidence of academic achievement place pressure on the teachers to stop advocating play-based learning. The status of the kindergarten sector as private business adds to the pressure on the teachers to prioritise the parents' expectations and demands over implementing a play-based curriculum. In addition, according to Cheng (2011), the teachers interpret the notion 'learning through

play' based on their understanding that it involves presence of play objects during teacher-directed activities. She suggests that the teachers interpret 'learning through play' based on their rote-learning schooling experiences because of insufficient training in play-based pedagogy.

In India, other than the expectation of academic preparation for school, preschools face structural issues in implementing a play-based curriculum. Gupta (2011) reports that overcrowded classrooms, lack of play materials, poor facilities and untrained teachers contribute to the difficulty in engaging play as a medium for learning. Rote-learning is also viewed as a more feasible way of managing a large number of children, as it would be difficult for one teacher to implement play-based pedagogy to a class of perhaps 35 to 60 children. Despite heavy emphasis on formal teaching methods and rote-learning in schools, Gupta (2011) observed that preschool children seem to enjoy academic work. Perhaps, given that most of them come from low socio-economic backgrounds, the parents view academic achievement through formal learning as a vehicle for success and they pass this belief to their children.

Marfo and Biersteker (2011) report that there is a wide gap between the school culture and the local culture in Africa. They suggest that this is because the curriculum is imported from Western education and did not incorporate African life cultures. In addition, parents, teachers and some children perceive play as not real learning. They share that the play-based curriculum faces two main challenges - the disconnection of Western school culture with the local culture and the misconception of the role of play in learning.

Pramling Samuelsson and Fler (2009) present a comparison in beliefs about play and learning across seven different cultures in Chile, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Sweden, and United States. They note that there are some similarities in the children's experiences such as the usual activities of eating, sleeping and playing with remarkably similar kinds of toys. The children enjoy social interaction with their friends and teachers. There is also a general trend of seeking improvement in understanding and approaches in Early Childhood Education across the seven countries that they compared. They also highlight culturally specific experiences in each country such as walking with two sticks which is a popular outdoor activity in Sweden, and playing verbal and socio-dramatic games that are related to folkloric aspects of the Chilean culture.

In a study involving immigrant mothers and children in United States, Cote and Bornstein (2005) conclude that the immigrant children's play is of closer resemblance to that of the American children compared with the play of the children in their native country. Hence, it is possible to suggest that with immigration, children's play has undergone acculturation. Cote and Bornstein (2009) report that there are no significant cultural differences in exploratory or symbolic play across three cultural groups in United States. However, these findings are only based on interaction between mother and child, and it is a quantitative study which does not provide details of the observed play behaviour. In contrast, Levinson (2005) provides a different conclusion from his ethnographic study of Gypsy children in England. He observed that the Gypsy children play in a very different manner from the English children. The behaviour of the Gypsy children is generally perceived as uncontrolled and destructive. In an attempt to understand the behaviour from socio-cultural perspective, he suggests that the Gypsy children use play to express their "separate identity and reaffirm group boundaries" (2005, p. 527). The need to do so probably arises from being in a culturally different environment in school and an attempt to manage the threat of losing one's traditional identity. This study has contributed to understanding Gypsy children's orientations towards play and how they maintain their cultural identity in England. However, there is evidence in the study that the children seemed reluctant to allow the researcher, who is a non-Gypsy, to find out more about them. In one instance, a child said, "You might use it against us" (2005, p.509), demonstrating distrust in the researcher. Consequently, the limitation in this study is that the researcher does not have a common identity with the children; therefore the children appear reluctant to allow him into their cultural world.

In another study of immigrant children, it is also noted that the children seek ways to form their identity through play. Brooker (2006) reports that girls from ethnic minority prefer to spend their time in school playing together in the home corner and chatting in their native language. She observed that when the English children entered the home corner, the girls left for another activity area. They also did not show preference in playing with boys of similar ethnic group. The findings of the study conclude that differentiation of gender and ethnicity informed the children's choice of friends and activities. This study concludes that educators' intention of maximising children's opportunities through child-initiated activities with freely chosen playmates, may result in self-imposed or peer-group-imposed boundaries to children's opportunities. Brooker advocates proactive intervention through dialogue and questioning to mediate the possible negative effect of children's self-limiting choices in free play activities.

Parmar, Harkness, and Super (2004) investigated Asian and Euro-American parents' ethnographies of play and learning and the effects on preschool children's home routines and school behaviour in an American school setting. The authors report that while Euro-American parents value play as an important vehicle for early development, Asian parents do not share the same view. Asian parents place more importance on early start in academic training compared to Euro-American parents. There were also differences in the social interaction and patterns of play between the two groups of children. In their observation of Asian children's play in school, the authors conclude that, "when children come from cultural backgrounds in which their parents have different educational and socialization goals from those offered by Euro-American school settings, confusion and conflict will naturally sometimes result" (2004, p. 103).

The study conducted by Parmar et al. (2004) utilised questionnaires to determine the parents' beliefs and practices related to play and learning as well as a daily activities checklist. The parents were then interviewed and the researchers also took notes of how the living space was organised for children's play and learning. The children's teachers also completed a questionnaire and also provided information through a brief open-ended interview. While this study investigated cultural variation in children's play and learning, it would be beneficial to include children's voices on their experiences and perspectives.

There are attempts made by teachers to acknowledge the ethnic minority children's cultural capital in classroom activities. For example, Bodrova and Leong (2003) report that when a Chinese student gave out sweets to her classmates to share her celebration of Chinese New Year, the teacher suggested pretend play of Chinese restaurants. He shared a book on Chinese restaurants with the children, and brought them on a field trip to a local Chinese restaurant. The Chinese student's parents were also invited to share about the food that they eat at home. Thus, the teacher did not just acknowledge the student's cultural capital, but also supported the growth in the children's funds of knowledge and involved parents in the sharing session with the children.

Brooker (2011b) proposes that in order to respect the cultural dimension of play, practitioners need to inquire on how play and learning are perceived in the children's home environment as well as to reconcile their expertise and knowledge with that of the cultural capital of the children and the beliefs and expectations of the parents. It is crucial to not only understand play and its relation to children's learning, but also to

recognize that play is a cultural phenomenon and seek ways to support it from that perspective (Izumi-Taylor, Pramling Samuelsson, and Rogers, 2010).

## **2.5 'Play as third space' framework**

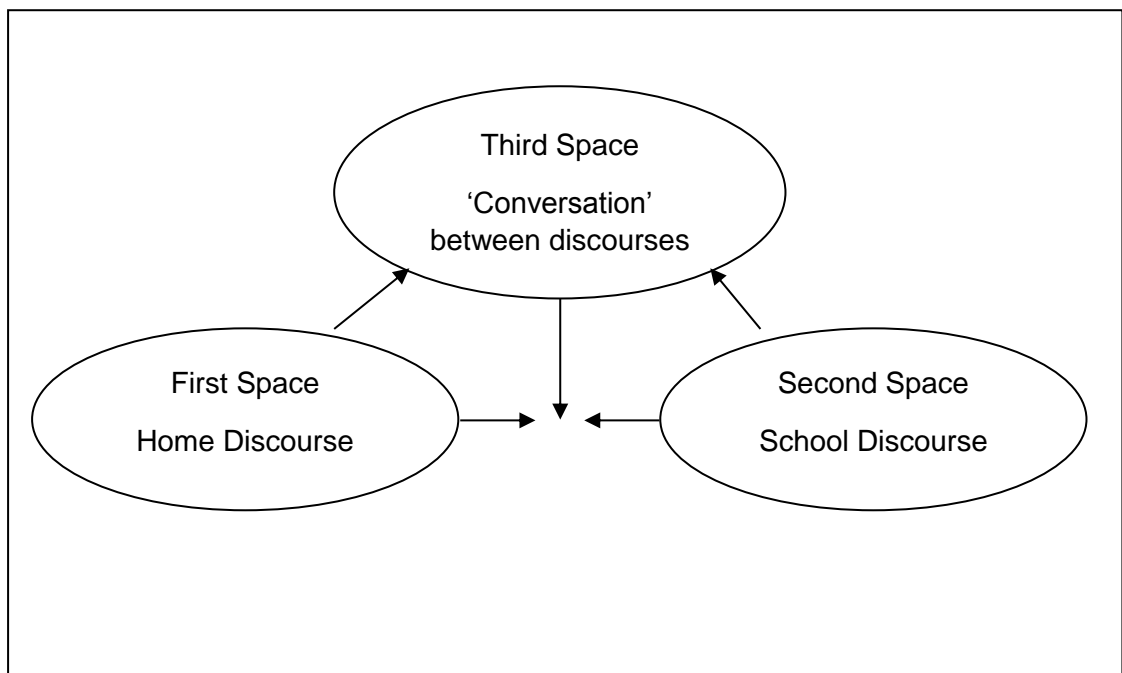
Gonzalez has argued that “increasingly, the boundedness of cultures gave way to an idea of interculturality and hybridity of cultural practices” (2005, p. 37), and these ideas are now explored in relation to play. Bhabha (1994) proposes the idea of cultural hybridity and suggested that ‘third space’ is an ‘in-between’ place which creative forms of cultural identity are produced. González, Moll, and Amanti (2005) situate the hybridity theory in theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms and suggest hybridity of funds of knowledge. According to them, funds of knowledge are cultural resources which are generated through experiences and social networks. In addition to third space being discussed in relevance to culture, third space concept has also been applied in other areas such as politics (Meredith, 1998), tourism (Hollinshead, 1998), human-computer studies (Muller, 2009) and literacy (Levy, 2008b).

According to Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, and Collazo (2004), third spaces are hybrid spaces that bring together the funds of knowledge that people accumulate from multiple resources to make sense of the world. They argue that there are at least three perspectives on third space theory in an educational context. The first view identified third space as “a way to build bridges from knowledges and discourses often marginalized in school settings” (Moje et al., 2004, p. 43). Third space is thus viewed as zones of proximal development to expand learning (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, and Tejada, 1999). Another view of third space is that it is “a navigational space, a way of crossing and succeeding in different discourse communities” (Moje et al., 2004, p. 44). An example used to illustrate this view is a study done by Moje, Collazo, Carrillo, and Marx (2001) in which students from non-mainstream backgrounds worked on an inquiry-based science project. The students brought together their funds of knowledge from their home experiences as well as knowledge from other subject areas within the school curriculum. The project-based approach served as third space for the students to navigate in school discourse using their funds of knowledge. The third view refers to “a space of cultural, social, and epistemological change in which competing knowledges and discourses of different spaces are brought into ‘conversation’” (Moje et al., 2004, p.44). The objective of the third space in this



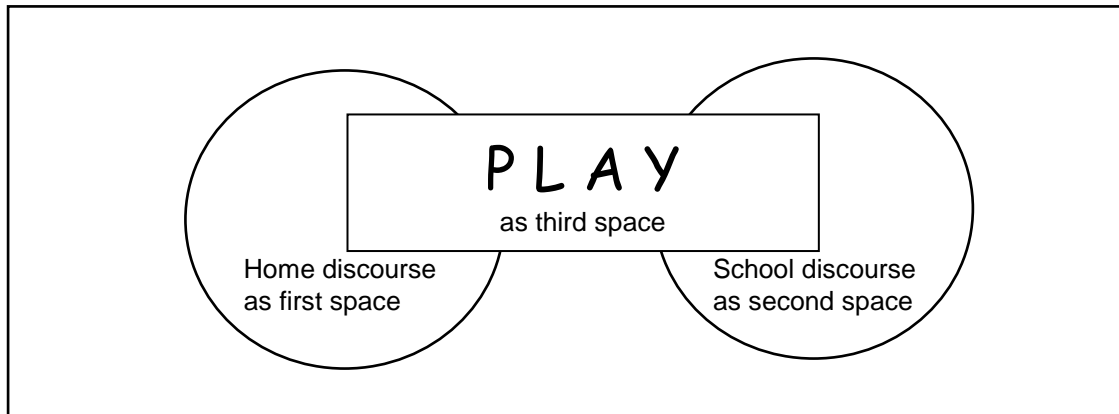
perspective is to generate new knowledge. Other studies have applied third space as a physical space such as family literacy classrooms where discourses from home are linked to school curricula (Pahl and Kelly, 2005).

In her work with young children, Levy (2008a) used third space theory to understand nursery-aged children's constructions of themselves as readers. She explains the application of Moje et al.'s (2004) third space theory in her work using a diagram presented in *Figure 2.4*.



*Figure 2.4* Application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory' (Levy, 2008a)

Building on Levy's visual illustration, this study applies play as third space between home discourse and school discourse as illustrated in *Figure 2.5*.



*Figure 2.5* Play as third space (Adapted from Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory')

The home discourse is identified as the first space and the school discourse is situated as the second space. In relation to Bronfenbrenner's theory of the ecology of human development, young children may face challenges as they move within and across different systems such as the microsystems (child's immediate environment such as family, school) and mesosystems (linkages and processes between two or more settings such as relation between home and school) (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In order to achieve a smooth transition, it is crucial that the child has the ability to transfer knowledge from one system into another (Levy, 2008b). Third space is viewed as an in-between space as well as a bridge between home and school discourses where children's funds of knowledge on play are brought together, generating play as a medium for transition between the first space and the second space.

To illustrate how play can be utilised as third space, a framework which combines Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory', Wood's (2010) integrated pedagogical approaches model, and Brooker's (2010) bridging cultures through dialogue concept is designed as shown in *Figure 2.6*.

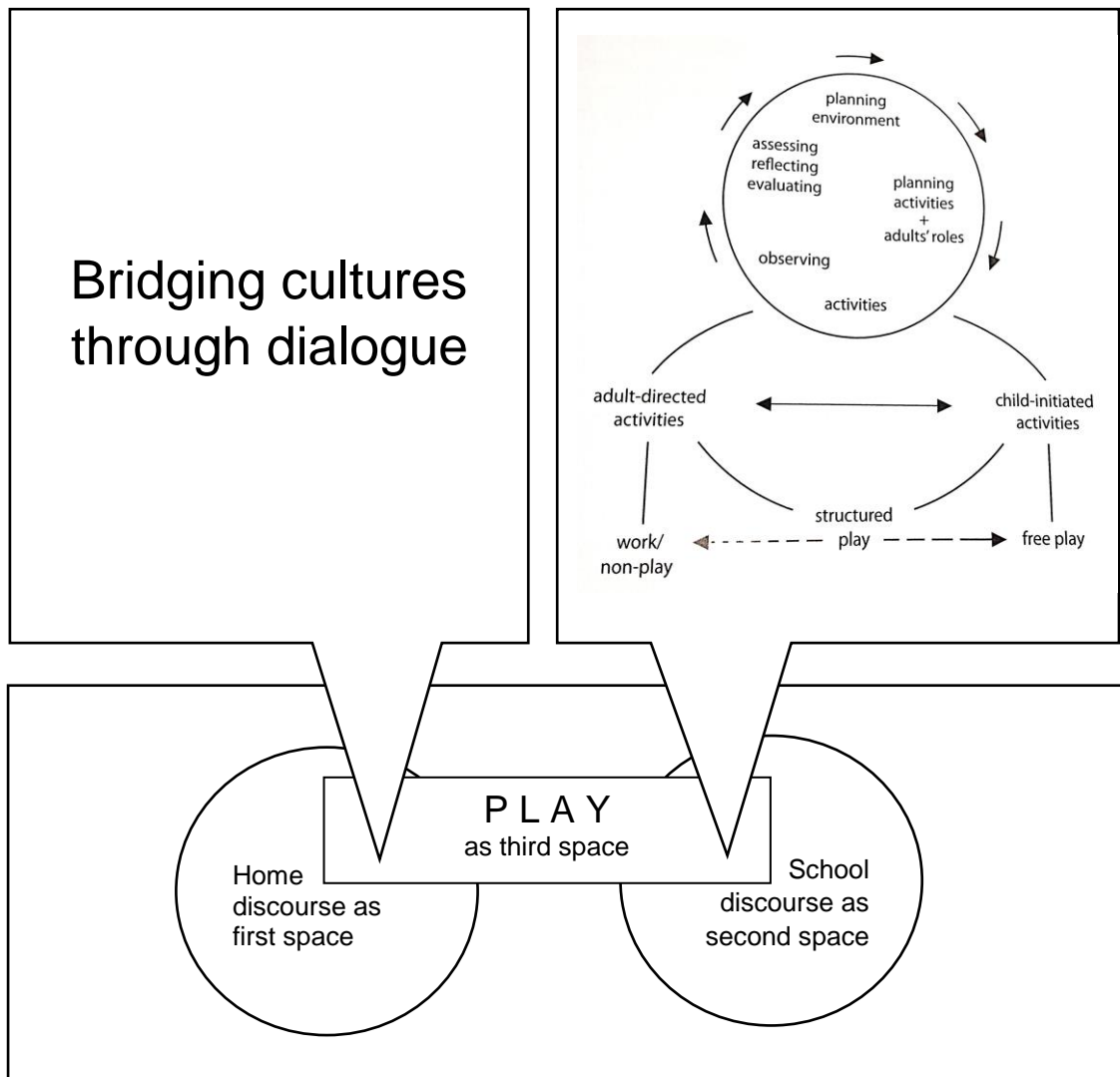


Figure 2.6 'Play as third space' Framework (Adapted from Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory', Wood's (2010) integrated pedagogical approaches model, and Brooker's (2010) bridging cultures through dialogue concept)

The 'play as third space' framework identifies the first space as the home discourse and the second space as the school discourse. Funds of knowledge are accumulated as children spend time at home and school. Through their everyday experiences, children make sense of the world around them and form their identities. The third space is a conceptual space where the funds of knowledge from home and school are brought together and fused to form new understanding and knowledge. In the third space, funds of knowledge from the first and second spaces can be supporting or conflicting to the children as they move between home and school discourses. Play acts a bridge or mediating tool in the third space to provide continuity between home and school. However, not all children experience continuity in the third space. Thus, Brooker's bridging culture through dialogue concept and Wood's integrated

pedagogical approaches model are embedded into third space, overlapping first space and second space respectively, to support the children in creating play as third space that allows them to negotiate between home and school spaces.

Brooker's bridging culture through dialogue concept considers cultural explanations of the relationship between play and learning and promotes effective communication between practitioners and parents. Brooker (2010) argues that as children move from home culture to school culture, they bring with them funds of knowledge acquired from the home culture. Sometimes, the knowledge and skills the children bring with them to school bear little resemblance to the school culture, hence resulting in the children experiencing some difficulties in acquiring knowledge and skills required in school. Acknowledging and recognizing cultural capital that children bring to school could enable children to bridge home and school cultures. Brooker also cautions that some parents may find it difficult to share practitioners' understandings of the value of play for children's development, but this challenge must be undertaken through prioritizing dialogues that support practitioners and parents working together. The bridging culture concept advocates the idea of partnership between practitioners and parents, the importance of play that reflects children's home interests and pedagogic practices that inform genuine dialogue between educators and families.

Grant (2011) explored the use of digital technologies in third space as a tool of communication between parents and teachers. Although Grant's study involved older children, the issues raised relate to the importance of communication and connection between home and school. Digital technology is proposed as a tool of communication because of the advantage of a more timely and direct communication. However, although not highlighted in the study, this advantage could result in a disadvantage to families who do not have the means to acquire digital technologies, parents who have low literacy, as well as those who are lacking in English Language skills. The findings of the research also suggest that parents and teachers view the main purpose of communication as avoiding or resolving problems instead of acknowledging that good communication is also beneficial in the absence of problems. Thus, prior to adopting good communication strategies between home and school, it seems crucial to convince educators and parents on the importance of regular two-way communication.

Wood's integrated pedagogical approaches model (2010, p. 21) is based on a pragmatic approach that play in early childhood settings is constrained by a number of factors such as indoor and outdoor environment, adult-child ratio, resources available

and curriculum. The idea of work/play dichotomy is rejected. Instead, a continuum of activities ranging from work or non-play activities to free play activities, with structured play in the middle of the continuum. Adult-directed activities or work/non-play activities are activities that are focused on defined outcomes with no choice or flexibility for children. The adult-directed activities can also act as a tool to build the children's funds of knowledge which the children can utilise in structured play and free play. The structured play activities are more broadly defined with elements of playfulness but with a limited degree of freedom. The activities can be adult or child-initiated. The free play activities are child-initiated with little adult intervention and undefined outcomes. The recursive cycle act as a general guideline on the role of the practitioners which involves planning environment and activities, interacting with the children, playing with the children, observing, evaluating, reflecting and assessing. The result of the evaluation, reflection and assessment stage informs the planning stage. The integrated pedagogical model is useful in recognizing the cultural capital that the children bring with them to the school setting. The planning stage can then utilise the children's funds of knowledge to better support the children in utilising play to bridge home and school. Through observation, the practitioners can identify children who experience difficulties in utilising play as a mediating tool to integrate into the school culture. In the next stage, they can reflect on strategies and ways to help the children who experience difficulties in creating the third space or bridge between home and school.

An example of a discontinuity in third space is illustrated by Hyun (1998). She shares the experience of an early childhood teacher in Las Vegas in supporting a Korean child in a Western school setting. She observed that the Korean child was crying at the housekeeping area during play. This is because the other children were laughing at her. One boy explained that they found it hilarious that the Korean child bowed each time they deliver a mail to her. The act of her bowing a few times is unusual to the other children. The teacher then decided to intervene by introducing Korean culture to the other children. This helped the other children understand their Korean friend better and the Korean child was able to build continuity in her third space by merging her funds of knowledge from home and school. It can be concluded that the teacher's observation of the situation in the classroom, reflection of the tension, and planning of follow-up activity are in alignment to the steps identified in the recursive cycle in Wood's integrated pedagogical model. This example illustrates how Wood's integrated pedagogical model can serve as a guide for practitioners to support children in utilising play to connect home and school cultures and discourses.

The 'play as third space' framework identifies play as the bridge that connects home as the first space, and school as the second space. Brooker's bridging culture through dialogue concept and Wood's integrated pedagogical model are embedded in the third space to provide suggestions on ways to support children in gaining continuity in the third space. This study utilises the 'play as third space' framework to explore intergenerational and cultural gap of funds of knowledge in the first space, tensions between cultural capital and school culture in the second space, as well as discontinuity in third space.

## **2.6 Identity, agency and power**

People's lives are fluid with interconnected experiences (Atkins, 2008). Grodin and Lindlof (1996) argue that the construction of self does not occur in isolation. Rather, it is mediated through interaction and communication with others. Thus, the process of transforming identity is influenced by one's cultural context and interactions with others (Mackenzie, 2008). According to Côté and Levine (2002), the role of culture serves as resources to construct a person's identity. Often, people are subjected to standards of acceptable behaviour in a society. When these standards change, pressure may arise for the person to change and fit into the available identity 'molds'. Côté and Levine suggest that although construction of identity is influenced by social factors, people can also exercise their agency in determining their self-definition.

Lewis, Enciso, and Moje (2007) define identity as a "fluid, socially and linguistically mediated construct" (p. 4) and agency as "strategic making and remaking of self within structures of power" (p. 4). Archer (2000) introduces the role of 'inner conversation' (p. 122) which allows a person to explore and create personal identities. The interplay between feelings and thoughts in 'inner conversation' are based on a person's primary concerns. Archer argues against the notion of people as cultural artefacts because it disregards human agency in which people are active subjects in their lives.

There are some studies that seek to understand people who experience different cultures in their everyday lives. Mok and Morris (2012) refer to these people as biculturals as they are "individuals who identify strongly with two cultures" (p. 234). For immigrants, these cultures refer to heritage and host country cultures (Berry, 1990). Mok and Morris (2012) report that the perception of biculturals on the integration of their identities has consequences for behaviour. They conclude that perception of

higher integration of identities leads to enhanced individual creativity to yield more authentic ideas based on information from both cultures, inclusive behaviour toward people from different cultures, and better alignment with members of the same social group. In contrast, biculturals who have divided cultural identities demonstrated more resistance to assimilation because of the apprehension of losing their inherited cultural identity.

Acculturation occurs when there is firsthand and continuous interaction between cultures which results in changes in cultural phenomena and long-term individual behaviour (Berry, 1990). The process of acculturation may also generate a new culture. Research has shown that there are many benefits if biculturals are able to integrate their cultural identities. One of the benefits is that better management of multiple social identities may lead to better accessibility of multiple knowledge domains which improves creativity (Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, and Lee, 2008). In addition, for immigrants, when the host-culture identity is more integrated into the primary ethnic identity, it leads to larger and more richly interconnected circles of friends who are not from their ethnic group (Mok, Morris, Benet-Martinez, and Karakitapoğlu-Aygün, 2007).

However, unsuccessful integration of cultural identities can lead to negative effects. For example, Berry (1990) identifies a negative effect which is acculturative stress such as feelings of marginality and identity confusion. Similarly, Mackenzie (2008) highlights that personal conflict can arise when a person is unable to reconcile the various values acquired from different cultural experiences. The integration of multiple identities is affected by a number of factors. For example, Cheng and Lee (2009) conclude in their study that positive multiracial experiences increase integration of multiple racial identities while negative multiracial experiences have the opposite effect. Another example is demonstrated in a research conducted by Szeib (2011) which investigated Canadian immigrants' construction of their bicultural identities within a multi-cultural context. Similar to Lustanski (2009), he concludes that language is an important factor in shaping bicultural identity and individual biculturalism is greatly influenced by context.

Promoting integration of cultural identities, Smith, K. (2008) suggests that hybrid identity is constructed through a synthesis of different identities. She postulates that hybrid identity is formed in third space where cultural boundaries meet and blur. The construction of a hybrid identity which is different from their parents' identity is reflected in a study done by Lustanski (2009) of two generations of Poles living in Canada. In her

study, participants who had their early childhood in Canada have a greater tendency to identify themselves as hyphenated identity (Polish-Canadians). In contrast, those who were born and raised in Poland tend to retain their identity as Polish.

In his study that examines children's identities, Edmiston (2007) suggests that children's identities are created through their participation and position in social interaction. However, the identities are not passively acquired, as children can exercise agency to co-author their identities with adults. He highlights two aspects of children's identities: cultural identity and positional identity. Children's main cultural identity is shaped by their family culture and school culture. Positional identity depends on how children are positioned in relation to others. For example, some adults perceive children in a position of needing strict management and control with very limited agency and power to negotiate.

In another study which examines children's identity, Hall (2010) identifies three definitions of power: 1) power as physical strength or force; 2) power as authority; and 3) power as ability and personal disposition. She highlights drawing as an 'authoring space' and explored how drawing is used by children to empower themselves beyond their position and ability in the real world. Likewise, Edmiston (2007) postulates that play creates authoring spaces for children to create a world where they feel more competent, confident and powerful as they are empowered by the emotional and physical safety of play.

According to Ryan (2005), "children's play is not a neutral space but rather it is a political and negotiated terrain" (p. 112). In highlighting agency in play, Wood (2014) suggests that children adopt strategies to sustain and manage their choices in play. Her findings reveal that the different forms of agency that children adopt in their play include pretence, managing task difficulty, negotiating social power dynamics and orchestrating individual and group activities. Wood cautions that freedom to make choices does not always empower children as some children do not have the skills or knowledge to manage social dynamics of power without the help of adults.

These studies demonstrate that children who experience different cultural contexts in their everyday lives may experience conflict and confusion if they are unable to integrate their cultural identities in different cultural contexts. However, as argued above, children are not passive recipients, but rather they are active agents in their lives. They are capable of exercising their agency in constructing their identity. While



the term bicultural identity is used by most of the studies discussed, hybrid identity as suggested by Smith, K. (2008) conveys the concept of children's agency in integrating their cultural capitals from their experiences in different cultural contexts to construct unique identities for themselves. The discussion in this section also suggests that children sometimes use play to empower themselves beyond their position and ability in their daily lives. However, free choices in play do not always empower children as it involves managing complex social dynamics.

## **2.7 Reflections and future prospects**

Although there is a general consensus on the vital role of play in early childhood, there is much disagreement on its definition and role in learning. Thus, instead of a specific interpretation to define play, suggestions have been made to produce a continuum of activities that can range from work (non-play) to play (free play). Although play pedagogy is advocated in most early childhood settings, there are diverse interpretations in practice. The challenges in implementing play pedagogy may stem from teachers' learning experiences and beliefs, academic pressure from policy and stakeholders, as well as other physical constraints.

As play is deeply rooted in culture, it is crucial to understand it from various cultural perspectives. The diversity of play in different cultures also lends to the complexity in interpretations of the relationship of play and learning. With globalization and immigration, different cultures are brought together. This further increases the complexity of interpretations of play and learning. Immigrant parents who grew up in a different culture may discover that play takes on a different meaning and role for their young children. Their perspectives of the role of play in learning may be in conflict with the practice in their children's school.

While many studies have investigated parents' perspectives on their children's learning in school, there appears to be a lack of literature that investigates immigrant parents' experiences in play and learning in their native country. These experiences form the cultural capital that may shape parents' perspectives on play and learning, and could possibly influence their children's home experiences. Children who come from ethnic minority groups may need to adapt themselves to the different cultures between home and school. There also seems to be a deficit in studies that project young children's

thoughts and feelings in their experiences of adapting to the different cultures at home and school.

The 'play as third space' framework is adapted from a combination of other diagrams and models, and serves as a conceptual framework for this study. The first space is the home discourse in which play and learning discourses within home are discussed. The second space is the school discourse in which children's experiences in school are investigated from the children's perspectives. Play is identified as the third space which serves as a bridge between home and school discourses. The integrated pedagogical approaches model and bridging cultures through dialogue concept serve as suggestions to support children's continuity in the third space.

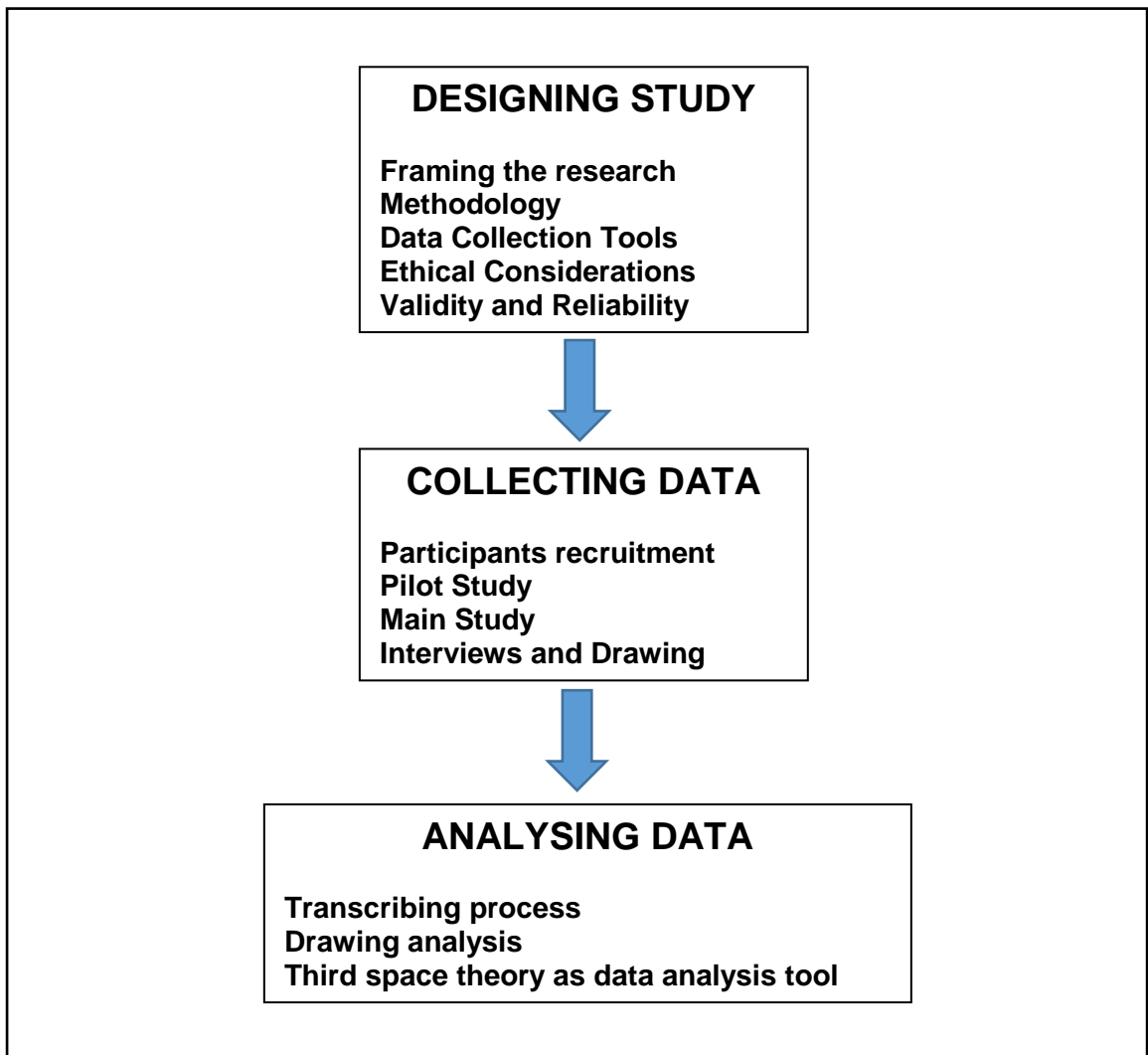
This review has discussed the problems in the concept of play and its relationship to learning. In addition, it has explored differences in play and learning in various cultures. Given the complex and diverse understanding and interpretations of play and learning, immigrant parents and their ethnic minority children may experience challenges in assimilation of different cultures. Thus, research exploring their experiences and perspectives may contribute to better understanding and better support for immigrant parents and ethnic minority children in play and learning.

# Chapter 3

## Designing the study, collecting and analysing data

### 3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to justify the research design, approach and processes in this study. The flow of discussion in this chapter is depicted in *Figure 3.1*.



*Figure 3.1* Flow of discussion

This chapter begins with a discussion on how the research is framed based on the research questions and boundaries of the study. Next, the methodology that underpins this study is discussed with justification of the methods chosen. Subsequently, ethical considerations are clarified. The discussion then moves to concerns with validity and

reliability. Thereafter, the next two sections explain the data collection and data analysis processes.

## **3.2 Framing the research**

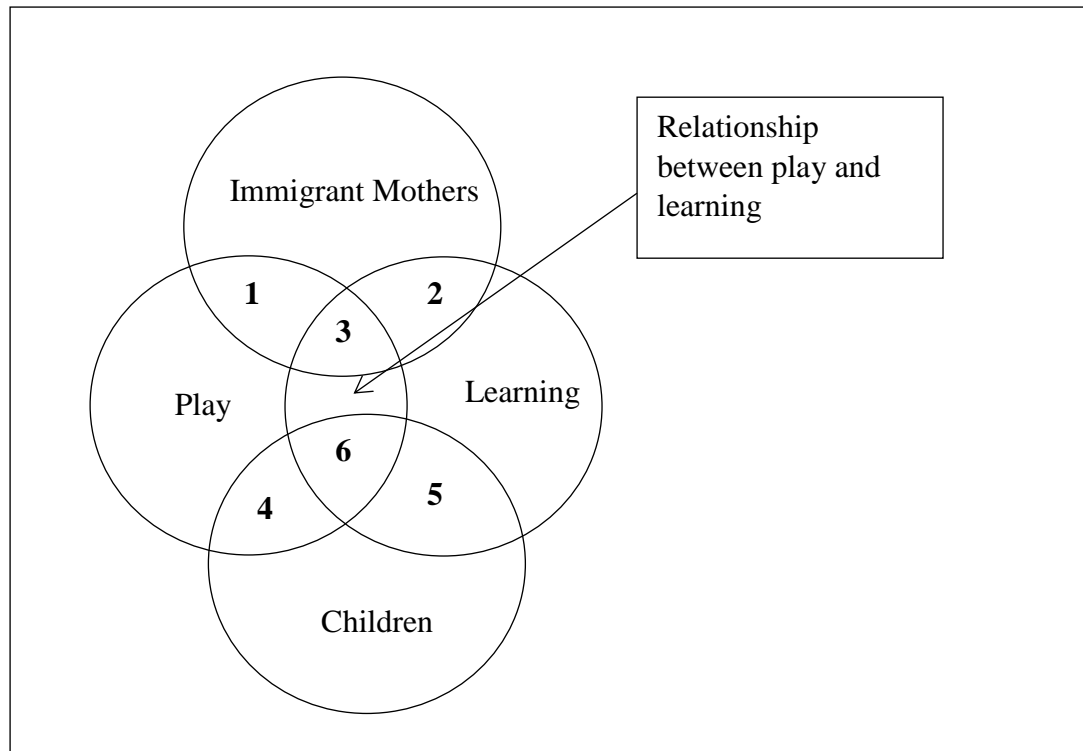
Although the main research question provides the specific area of inquiry, it is important to frame the research so as to clarify the focus of the study (Wellington et al., 2005). It sets boundaries to the significant issues to be explored and the physical and conceptual confinement of the study. Thus, to frame this inquiry, subsidiary research questions are formulated from the main research question. Subsequently, in the next subsection, the geographical boundary of this study is defined and selection criteria of the participants are explained.

### **3.2.1 Main research question and subsidiary research questions**

The main research question is:

**What are the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and bicultural children in play and learning at home and school?**

The keywords identified in the main research question are immigrant mothers, children, play, and learning. These four keywords were used to generate six subsidiary questions, as illustrated in *Figure 3.2*.



*Figure 3.2* Formulation of subsidiary research questions

The six subsidiary questions are:

- 1) What are the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers on play at home and school?
- 2) What are the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers on learning at home and school?
- 3) What are the perspectives of immigrant mothers on the relationship between play and learning?
- 4) What are the experiences and perspectives of children on play at home and school?
- 5) What are the experiences and perspectives of children on learning at home and school?
- 6) What are the perspectives of children on the relationship between play and learning?

The first question explores immigrant mothers' experiences of playing in their native countries in order to inquire into the comparison between the way they played as children and the way their children play. The second question explores immigrant mothers' experiences in learning in their native country and their perspectives on the way they and their children learn. The third question explores immigrant mothers'

perspectives on the relationship between play and learning to understand their views on how play is situated in learning.

The fourth question examines children's experiences and perspectives of play at home and school. The aim of this question is for children to share what activities they define as play and what kind of play is enjoyable to them. The fifth question delves into children's experiences and perspectives of learning at home and school. The sixth question seeks to understand children's perspectives on the relationship between play and learning.

The objective of the subsidiary questions is to provide focus and structure to the research inquiry, and to guide the formulation of research tools and data analysis.

Although the main research question and the six subsidiary research questions serve to achieve the objectives of the study, it is important to set a boundary to provide the physical and conceptual frame to the study. Hence in the next section, I discuss the geographical boundary and the sample size for my study.

### **3.2.2 Boundaries of study**

The geographical boundary of this study is Ottawa, the capital city of Canada. This choice is based on two reasons. Firstly, there are a large number of immigrants in Ottawa. According to Statistics Canada (2011), Ottawa has over 235,300 foreign-born residents, which is about 19.4% of the total population in Ottawa. The second is that Ottawa is my city of residence which provides logistical convenience and also, brings about cultural relevance to this study.

Given that the objective of this study is to capture depth in the inquiry, a small number of participants are preferable. This is to ensure that the data are sufficient yet manageable for analysis within the scope of this doctoral thesis. A target of 20 immigrant mothers and 20 children was set for the sample size of this study.

A range of selection criteria for participants was formulated with justification for the choices.

There are 5 criteria to the selection of immigrant mothers:

1. *The mother must be residing in Ottawa.*

The reason is to set the boundaries of the study in Ottawa.

2. *The mother must have a school-going child between 4 to 7 years old.*

The reason is to ensure that the mother has a child who is within the age criterion.

3. *The mother must be an immigrant who has spent her growing up years in her home country.*

The reason is so that she can share her experiences growing up in a country which is different from Canada, the country in which her child is growing up.

4. *The mother's native language is not English.*

The reason is so that the mother's native country is not a western country such as United Kingdom, Australia or United States, where the growing up experience may be similar to the growing up experience in Canada. It is also to explore the possible effect of having a different native language from English, in the child's playing and learning experiences in Canada.

5. *The mother must be able to communicate in English.*

The reason is to minimize language barriers in my communication with the mother.

The gender of the participants is narrowed down to mothers due to the assumption that mothers are usually better informed about their children than fathers. Studies have shown that generally, children spend more time with mothers than fathers (Craig, 2006; Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson, 2004; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, and Hofferth, 2001).

There are 3 criteria to the selection of the child:

1. *The child must be living with the mother.*

The reason is that the parents could be divorced or living separately. In such situations where the child is living mainly with the father, the mother may not be

able to provide a substantial perspective on the child's play and learning experiences.

*2. The child must be between 4 to 7 years old.*

The reason is that formal schooling for children in Canada starts at 4 years old. The upper age limit is set at 7 years old because the focus of this study is on children who are in the early childhood stage.

*3. The child must be going to a public school in Ottawa (not home-schooled).*

The reason is that the children may not be able to make comparison between home and school if they are home-schooled. Private-schooled children are also excluded from this study as they may have different, probably privileged experiences than children going to public school. Also, majority of the children in Ottawa attend public schools.

*Note: (The child can be a boy or a girl).*

The reason is that this inquiry does not require focus on specific gender for children.

### **3.3 Methodology and methods**

Methodology provides a framework for the research process and report of findings (Carter and Little, 2007). It determines the researcher's approach in understanding a phenomenon or question of interest, and serves as a basis for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. The selection of methodology influences the techniques and procedures used to gather data, which are referred to as methods of research. In the next section, I discuss the methodology and methods chosen for this study with justification for the choices.

#### **3.3.1 Selection of methodology for this research**

The objective of the research question is to explore how social experiences in play and learning are created and interpreted by the participants. This objective falls within the realm of interpretivist methodology, using qualitative methods. In qualitative methodology, the focus is on the "socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints



that shape inquiry” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.10). Wellington et al. (2005) describe three sets of assumptions that should be reflected before the choice of methodology and methods: 1) ontological assumptions concerning nature of social reality; 2) epistemological assumptions concerning bases of knowledge; and 3) assumptions concerning human nature and agency. These assumptions were discussed earlier in **Section 1.4 Theoretical Framework**. Therefore, based on the objective of the study, the theoretical framework of the study and researcher’s positionality, this study is situated in an interpretivist paradigm which allows for better understanding of how social reality is constructed, managed and sustained by the participants (Holstein and Gubrium, 2005).

### **3.3.2 Selection of data collection methods**

Methods are techniques, procedures or instruments to gather data to address the objective of the research (Wellington et al., 2005). The study aims to provide a space for immigrant mothers and their children to share their experiences and project their perspectives on matters concerning play and learning. Thus, the data collection tools should fulfill the objective of this research. Whilst observation of children is a useful tool to gather qualitative data, the use of observation as an isolated data-collection technique is deemed not to be the best choice to portray the perspectives of children (Burns, 2000). While participatory observation provides insight to children’s worlds, it is very time-consuming (Lewis and Lindsay, 2000). Thus, given the time constraint of this study, the selected methods are interviews and children’s drawings. These methods can provide depth to the level of inquiry in understanding participants’ views of their experiences (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). In the next two sections, I discuss the reasons for the choice of the two data-collection methods used in this study: 1) interviews; and 2) drawings.

#### **3.3.2.1 Interviews**

According to Burns (2000), an interview is “a verbal interchange, often face to face, in which the interviewer tried to elicit information, beliefs or opinions from another person” (p. 423). However, an interview is not a process dominated by only the interviewer as the interviewee co-constructs the interview process which determines the data collected. Although most interviews are done face-to-face, there are also interviews conducted over the telephone. Carr and Worth (2001) caution that while there are

studies reporting comparable data between telephone interview and face-to-face interview, the nature of the research question and sample population are important factors that influence the effectiveness of telephone interviews. While Carr and Worth discuss many benefits of telephone interviews, they also highlight the difficulty in achieving rapport and the lack of visual cues to aid interpretation of speech in telephone interviews. Given that this study involves very young children, it is crucial for the interviewer to build good rapport with the children (Scott, 2000). Based on the importance of good rapport and visual cues in the interview process, this study utilised face-to-face interviews.

There are three main types of interviews: structured interviews; semi-structured interviews; and unstructured interviews. In the following subsections, I discuss the advantages and disadvantages of these three types of interviews in relation to the research question. Next, I examine issues relating to interviews with children. The final subsection presents interview questions generated from the six subsidiary research questions.

#### *3.3.2.1.1 Types of interviews*

Structured interviews are sometimes referred to as verbal questionnaires in which specific information can be collected from a large number participants and the information can usually be quantified (Hodges, 1993). Although structured and specific questions are relatively quick to administer (Hill, 2006), there is no depth or details to the data gathered. Thus, structured interview is not an appropriate tool to explore the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and children.

Semi-structured and unstructured interviews are similar to conversations on a certain topic or theme. A major advantage of interview as a data-collection tool is that it allows for in-depth exploration of a subject. The flexibility of questions allows the interviewer to probe further into the participant's responses to the interviewer's questions. Westcott and Littleton (2005) suggest that the interviewer should explore creative or 'challenging' responses with follow-up questions so as to have a greater understanding of the interviewee's perspective. The flexibility of the questions also allows the interviewer to rephrase and clarify his or her question in the event that the participant misunderstands the question. Similarly, the participant could also clarify his or her understanding of the question put forward by the researcher before responding to the question.

Another advantage of using an interview as a research method is that it does not depend on the literacy level of the participants. This is especially important if the immigrant mothers have limited levels of literacy in English. Marshall and While (1994) suggest that flexibility of questions in their semi-structured interviews with the participants in their study, who have limited English conversational skills, is an advantage. The flexibility allows the interviewer to replace certain words with simple and more appropriate words and phrases, or rephrase in simple grammatical constructions. They also caution against repeating the question when the participant does not appear to understand the question because it can lead to the participant losing confidence or being embarrassed for not understanding.

The main limitation of using an interview as a research tool is that it is time-consuming. In addition to the planning of questions, it is preferable that the interviewer undergoes some training or pilot-testing in order to project proper body language and acquire good questioning techniques (Barriball and While, 1994). The neglect of social skills and positive body language can affect participation and responses in the interview (Westcott and Littleton, 2005). The interviewer must also learn not to question or probe in a leading manner as this could affect the reliability of the data.

According to Cohen et al. (2007), unstructured interviews are informal conversational interviews in which questions emerge from immediate context, and it is less systematic than semi-structured interviews. The data organization and data analysis can be quite difficult when certain questions pertaining to the objective of the research do not arise naturally in the conversation. Although this study is exploratory, the focus of the research is on playing and learning. Thus, semi-structured interviews provide focus in the responses of the participants while allowing flexibility in questioning in order to capture depth in the inquiry.

#### *3.3.2.1.2 Interviews with children*

Children have important perspectives on their lives which serve as a useful contribution to understanding their worlds (Lewis, Kellett, Robinson, Fraser, and Ding, 2004). Conducting an interview with children gives children a 'voice' which can be an act of empowerment (Lyold-Smith and Tarr, 2000) that acknowledges the ability of children to speak 'in their own right' and report valid perspectives and experiences (Alderson, 2000).

It is important for the researcher to be sensitive and adaptable to children and their needs (Aubrey, 2000). Kragh-Müller and Isbell (2011) suggest starting an interview with an open-ended question so that the researcher could formulate the subsequent questions following the child's lead. In contrast, Scott (2000) proposes starting the interview with a close-ended question that makes it easy for children to answer before moving on to probing questions. Regardless of the type of initial question asked, the researcher needs to be sensitive and aware of the best phrasing and way to ask a question and the kind of questions that should be avoided (Christensen and James, 2000). In view of the reasons advocated for choice of initial questions, my interview with children commenced with a close-ended question so that the child can gain confidence in responding before moving on to answer open-ended questions.

Clark (2010) suggests using objects such as puppets, photographs and drawings to enter children's world or to act as starting points for conversations. Although considerations have been made in using puppets to mediate the conversation (Levy, 2009) between myself and the child, I have decided that it is not necessary for this study. Firstly, the decision was based on my experience of working with children aged four to six at a child care centre in Ottawa. The children were able to engage in conversations with me on their everyday experiences without any mediating tools. Thus, given that the inquiry is based on children's everyday experiences, I decided that it would not be necessary to have a puppet or a doll to mediate the interview. Secondly, I took into consideration my supervisor's caution that using puppets or dolls to mediate conversations may be inappropriate in certain cultures or beliefs.

Other than puppets and dolls, there are other tools that can make the interview less formal to the child and assist the child in his or her responses (Greig et al., 2007). After obtaining informed consent from the child, the interview commenced with an invitation to the child to play together using play dough (colourful modeling compound for children). The child was also offered a choice of colouring activity if the child did not want to play with play dough. The main objective of conducting the interview during play activity is to create a less formal situation.

Mauthner (1997) reports in her study that five and six-year olds found individual interviews awkward and resorted to remaining silent, answering in monosyllables or saying 'I don't know'. Some children may give one line answers which require the interviewer to be skillful in using prompts and probing questions so as to keep the interview going. The rapport between the interviewer and the child plays a vital role in

ensuring that the child feels comfortable and at ease when providing responses (Scott, 2000). In addition, the nature of the child is also another factor that could affect the interview process. Some children are naturally shy or quiet and do not like to respond to questions. According to Westcott and Littleton (2005), it is a misconception that children will respond to us when we talk to them. This can be perceived as challenging the notion that research can give children a voice and be empowering. However, it is possible that the children's choice of not answering questions is their way of exercising their agency. Their silence could be their way of 'voicing' their reluctance to share their perspectives and their 'empowerment' may be expressed in their resistance to the context.

Another challenge in children's interviews is that the child may deviate from the topic or choose to terminate the interview prematurely. When the child deviates from the topic, the interviewer may attempt to bring the child back to the topic but it is important for the interviewer to recognize the children's right to their time and views (Hill, 2006). Hence, the child should never be coerced to answer the interviewer's questions. In their study, Nutbrown and Hannon (2003) report that not all interviews were completed in full as the interviewers did not persist to complete the interview against the children's wishes.

#### *3.3.2.1.3 Subsidiary research questions and corresponding interview questions*

Based on the six subsidiary research questions, interview questions were generated for the interview with mothers and children.

### **1) What are the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers on play at home and school?**

#### Interview questions:

- What kind of play do you engage in when you were a child?
- Do you find any similarities or differences between the ways you play as a young child as compared to your child? What do you think about it?
- What are the experiences of your child at school? Is he/she happy or does he/she face some problems or difficulties?

- Does he/she engage in lots of play at school? What kind of play?
- Does your child play at home? How does he/she play?

**2) What are the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers on learning at home and school?**

Interview questions:

- What were your learning experiences as a child (around your child's age)? (experiences)
- Do you find any similarities or differences between the ways you learn at school as a young child as compared to your child? What do you think about it? (perspective)
- What do you think of the way your child learns at school? (perspective)
- If you were given a choice between two public schools: one that adopt the rote-learning method and the other that adopt play-based learning, which one would you prefer?
- Does your child also learn at home? If so, how?

**3) What are the perspectives of immigrant mothers on the relationship between play and learning?**

Interview question:

- Do you think play helps your child to learn? If so, how?

**4) What are the experiences and perspectives of children on play at home and school?**

Interview questions:

- Do you like school? (If no, why?)
- What is the best thing about school?

- Is there anything you don't like about school?
- What do you do at school?
- Do you play at school?
- Who do you play with at school?
- What kind of play do you like at school?
- Who do you usually play with at school? Why do you like to play with him/her?  
What are your favourite games?
- When you're not at school, do you play at home?
- What kind of play do you like at home?
- Who do you usually play with at home? Why do you like to play with him/her?  
What are your favourite games?
- Which one do you prefer? Playing at school or home? Why?

**5) What are the experiences and perspectives of children on learning at home and school?**

Interview questions:

- What do you learn at school?
- Do you also learn at home? (Can you tell me more about it?)

**6) What are the perspectives of children on the relationship between play and learning?**

Interview question:

- Do you think play helps you learn like doing something you couldn't do before or doing new things?

In each subsidiary question, the two variables, experience and perspectives, and the two contexts, home and school, were taken into consideration in the process of generating the interview questions. The total number of main questions formulated for the interview with mothers is eleven (Appendix G, p. 183) while the interview with children has nine main questions (Appendix H, p. 184). Since the research method is semi-structured interviews, probing questions were asked according to participants' responses.

### **3.3.2.2 Drawing**

According to Einarsdottir (2010), most children are comfortable with drawing because it is usually part of preschool activity. It often represents children's understanding of the world (Cousins and Milner, 2007). Drawing also enables children to depersonalize and children sometimes use drawing as a buffer zone to perhaps avoid directly answering questions that they are not comfortable with (Hunleth, 2011). Drawing as a non-verbal tool for expression may provide an aid for children with language limitation (Scott, 2000). Wood and Hall (2011) argue that beyond acting as an exploratory tool, children's drawing can act as a bridge between different contexts such as home and school. Generally, drawing is an effective tool to provide an insight into children's views and perceptions (Einarsdottir, 2010).

In their study, Coates and Coates (2006) report the importance of interweaving data from observation, narratives during the process of drawing and the end product of drawing to provide a deeper understanding of children's thinking and meaning-making. They investigated the role of talking in the process of drawing and concluded from their findings that during drawing activity, children often engage in talking about what they are drawing. The narratives provide information about the drawing which may not be evident from the visual image of the completed picture. The narratives, as well as the elements of drawing, provide clues to practitioners on children's interests and their lives. In addition to communication which is focused on drawing, children also made social exchanges as they draw. Thus, they also use drawing as a platform for social interaction.



However, it is important to be sensitive to the various preferences of children as not all children like drawing (Greig et al., 2007). In addition, while some children may like drawing, they may prefer not to express themselves through drawing (Einarsdottir, 2010). Hence, although drawing as a tool can empower children by giving them greater participation in research (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2000), it is important that children are given a choice to refuse to draw and their choice is respected by adults.

### **3.3.3 Ethical considerations**

During the planning of this study, ethical principles outlined by University of Sheffield (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/education/research/ethics>) were closely adhered to. Upon completion of the research design, Research Ethics approval form was completed and sent to University of Sheffield (Appendix I, p. 185). This study commenced only after the ethical approval letter was received from the University of Sheffield's ethics review panel (Appendix J, p. 195). There are three main principles in ethical guidance outlined by University of Sheffield's Ethical Review Policy: 1) consent; 2) anonymity, confidentiality and data protection; and 3) safety and well-being. The next part of this section discusses how considerations based on these ethical principles were integrated into the study.

In my flyer, email, poster and blog, I provided brief information on my position as a doctorate student undertaking a research on experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and children on play and learning. I also included what will be expected of them such as the estimated duration of interviews with the mother and the child. I also indicated that I will give a small token of appreciation for their time and help in my research. I believe that the information provided during participant recruitment allows them to make informed decision in participating in my study. In addition, I included my contact details for them to call or email me for further clarification.

Prior to the commencement of the interview, I presented my University of Sheffield student identification card for the participants to verify my identity. This is to provide assurance to the participants. Next, I provided a detailed information sheet (Appendix B, p. 176) for them to read. I also briefly summarized it for them. The details of the information sheet include five factors recommended by Hill (2005): 1) aim of research; 2) time and commitment required; 3) who will know the results; 4) type of feedback given; and 5) details of confidentiality. Subsequently, they were given consent forms for

their participation (Appendix C, p. 178) as well as their children's participation (Appendix D, p. 179). These consent forms were signed by both the adult participant and myself. One set of the information sheet and consent forms was given to the adult participants. This is to ensure that the adult participants have a clear understanding of the research so that they can provide informed consent. They were also told that they can refuse to answer any question and terminate the interview at any time that they wished to do so. The same was also applicable to their children. The adult participant was requested to fill some information in the Information for Parent form (Appendix F, p. 182) and they were told that they could leave any part unanswered. The permission for the use of audio-recorder was also sought from all participants.

The decision to interview the mothers first before the children was based on the reason that perhaps the interaction between the researcher and their mothers may build some trust and comfort for the children to be interviewed later. Although parental consent was obtained prior to the interview with children, it is important for the researcher to ensure that children are given the opportunity to be the gatekeepers of their role as a research participant by obtaining consent directly from them (Dockett and Perry, 2007). Thus, an informal consent form was designed for children (Appendix E, p. 181). After explaining the research in simple terms "I want to find out more about play and learning, can you help me?" the child was then asked to colour one of the stars if he or she agreed to help.

Although consent has been given by both parents and children at the beginning, it should be considered as provisional (Flewitt, 2005). The researcher should be sensitive to the signs of discomfort of the children throughout the research process and decide to stop when necessary. The needs of the children should always precede the needs of the research project (Graue and Walsh, 1998) even though initial consent was obtained. The consent of the child is sought before utilising a research tool. In this study, the children were informed of the use of the audio-recorder to record the interview. They were shown how to start and stop the recording and the audio-recorder was pilot-tested with their participation. Subsequently, they were empowered to start the recording of the audio-tape prior to the commencement of the interview. They were also informed that they could choose not to answer any questions and terminate the interview whenever they wish to do so. Adequate explanation was given to each child before obtaining consent for the drawing activity so that the child was able to give an informed consent.

According to Davis (1998), research can be empowering to children depending on the researcher-child interaction and the choice given to children in the decision to be research participants and the extent of their involvement in the research. In allowing children to feel that they have some control over the research, the power inequality between adult researcher and young children is reduced. Therefore, children can be empowered to a certain degree during the research process. The researcher has to be sensitive and reflexive in the power issues during the interaction between the researcher as an adult and the children (Mauthner, 1997). Unequal power relations are inherent in research with adults (Cohen et al., 2007) and this is enhanced in research with children (Einarsdottir, 2010). The researcher should always be aware of the lower power status of the children in research (Cousins and Milner, 2007) and make attempts to improve the power relations by respecting the rights of the children to give consent to the adult entering their personal world and involving the children as active participants and collaborators in the research process (Danby and Farrell, 2004).

Issues of anonymity, confidentiality, and protection of data were addressed in the information sheet and consent form. Participants were also assured that their names and their children's names will not appear in any thesis, report or publications resulting from this study. They were also informed that the data collected will be securely stored and will only be accessible to myself and my supervisor. In addition, after the work has been completed, the audio data will then be destroyed. Although the initial transcripts were coded P1 to P19 (mother's interview transcripts), and C1 to C19 (children's interview transcripts), pseudonyms were later given to the participants. These pseudonyms were Muslim names obtained from Google search. Care was also taken to cover names written by children on their drawings.

The safety and well-being of both the researcher and participants were paramount in this study. The participants were given a choice of interview location: researcher's house, participant's house or a mutually-agreed public place. From the researcher's perspective as well as based on ethical approval, the nature of this inquiry does not involve harm to the participants or the researcher. However, as matter of caution, the participants were informed that the researcher has an obligation to report to the authority if the researcher was being informed of harmful situations such as abuse. Although the participants' contribution to the study cannot be compensated by gifts, a token of appreciation was given to each adult participant in the form of CAN\$20 (about £11) gift voucher and a toy costing less than CAN\$5 (about £3) was given to each

child. The monetary worth of the gifts is incommensurate to the participants' contribution to ensure that they represent tokens of appreciation and will not compromise the integrity of the research. It is also noted that some adult participants refused to accept the gift voucher. While the gain for this study is imbalanced and tipped more towards the researcher, it is noteworthy that Taibah<sup>1</sup>, the key person who helped in participant recruitment commented, "I am proud that you are representing us". Therefore, it can also be interpreted that this study benefits the participants because it provides a platform for their voices to be projected to a larger audience.

Another consideration to ensure protection for participants is that they were given the opportunity to view their interview transcripts and make amendments to their responses if they wished to do so. Consent was sought once again for the use of the interview transcripts through emails or phone calls. They were also invited to provide feedback on the study. The positive feedback given by the participants such as "the transcript is quite representative", "I found it great", and "it was a very positive experience for me" provide affirmations to the ethical considerations taken in this study. The feedback also included one comment, "maybe if I had time to consider the questions in advance, I could have come up with better answers". The participant was then assured that her spontaneous responses were very rich and insightful. The reason for the choice of not delivering the interview questions to all participants prior to the interview unless requested is so that the participants will not be unduly burdened with preparation for the interview. Another reason for the decision is that spontaneous responses are preferred over prepared answers to the interview questions.

### **3.3.4 Validity and reliability**

Validity and reliability are interpreted differently in quantitative and qualitative methodology. The validity of a study depends on the degree to which a study measures what it intends to study (Cohen et al., 2007). In the light of this definition of validity, there is no attempt to 'measure' anything in this study. Rather the methods and methodology used address the objectives, in order to gain better understanding of the concepts of play and learning from different cultural perspectives. However, as this interpretivist study uses qualitative methods, the term validity also refers to the authenticity of the study (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Guba and Lincoln (2005)

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym used

emphasize fairness as a factor to determine the authenticity of a qualitative study. They define fairness as:

deliberate attempts to prevent marginalization, to act affirmatively with respect to inclusion, and to act with energy to ensure that all voices in the inquiry effort had a chance to be represented in any texts and to have their stories treated fairly and with balance. (p. 207).

Miller (2008b) suggests that validity is maximised by ensuring that “the research procedures remain coherent and transparent, research results are evident, and research conclusions are convincing” (p. 911). Therefore, this thesis aims to provide detailed description and justification of all stages of the research process to provide transparency in the study. There is also a form of consistency in the data-collection process as each interview is conducted according to the ‘Interview guidelines’ document designed (Appendix K, p. 197) in order to ensure some degree of fairness during data-collection process. The data analysis process was done with rigour, as discussed in **Section 3.5**, as the data were analysed thoroughly to ensure fair representation of all participants.

Replicability, which is an indicator of reliability in a quantitative study, is not possible or desired in a qualitative study (Cohen et al, 2007). Rather, according to Miller (2008a), the reliability or credibility of a qualitative study depends on the notion of reflexivity in which the researcher is depicted as ‘the instrument’ in the study. He suggested projecting the unique identities of the researcher and participants in the study. Thus, in this study, the researcher’s theoretical framework and positionality were discussed. The justification of decisions made at various stages of the study was also explained. The effects of the interaction between the researcher and the participants such as language limitations were also discussed. In positioning the researcher at the centre of the study and explicitly acknowledging the role of the researcher as an integral player, this study provides transparency which heightens credibility and trustworthiness.

### **3.4 Data-collection process**

The data collection process commenced with the recruitment of participants. In this study, there are two phases of participants recruitment because of the difficulty encountered in recruiting volunteers for the study. Various strategies were devised to gain trust and confidence of the group of people who are the focus this study;

immigrant mothers, in order to gain access to their and their children's experiences and perspectives. This section describes the procedures undertaken, and highlights the positive experiences, challenges and reflections from the data-collection process. Thus, the subsections include: 1) phase 1 participants recruitment; 2) the pilot study; 3) phase 2 participants recruitment; and 4) the main study (which includes interviews with mothers, interviews with children and drawing activity).

### **3.4.1 Phase 1 participants recruitment**

Two strategies were devised at Phase 1 recruitment of the participants. One of the strategies was to send a mass email to a Yahoo email group 'Ottawa Islamic Community Closet' (Appendix L, p. 199). The other strategy was to distribute flyers (Appendix A, p. 175) at strategic places such as mosques and weekend language schools. 'Ottawa Islamic Community Closet' is a private Yahoo group email for Muslim women in Ottawa and Gatineau to trade personal belongings, request or render help to other members with no profit involved. An email was also sent to the Ottawa Chinese Community Service Centre (Appendix M, p. 200) to request for help to distribute the information for participant recruitment to their email database. However, no reply was received from the Ottawa Chinese Community Service Centre. Following the mass email to the 'Ottawa Islamic Community Closet', a response was received in the form of an email. When contacted, the respondent confirmed that she and her child met all the criteria for participants, and they were then recruited for the pilot study.

### **3.4.2 The pilot study**

The objective of the pilot study is to test the data-collection method which is the interview questions. It also provides an opportunity for me to practise conducting interviews and probing into participant's responses.

The pilot study was conducted at the participant's house. Zara<sup>2</sup> works from home and has two children. Her older child, Zahid<sup>3</sup> is 6 years and 6 months at the time of the interview. Based on the pilot study of the data collection instrument, it is concluded that no amendment is required to be made to the interview questions. However, there are two aspects noted from the pilot study. The first is the discovery during the interview

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonym used

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym used

that the child is not studying in a public school. Rather, he is studying in a private Islamic school. Although the 'public school' criterion was indicated in the email, it seemed that Zara had overlooked it. Thus, one of the learning points from this pilot study is not to assume but to clarify the mother's understanding of the criteria prior to setting up an appointment by asking detailed questions on the criteria. The second aspect is cultural or religious belief misunderstanding that occurred despite the participants and me sharing the same religious belief. When Zahid told me that he could make things disappear and reappear, I made a remark, "So, you're a magician!" His mother immediately intervened and said that they do not use the term 'magician' because they believe that it is linked to black magic. Instead the term 'trickster' is used. I immediately rectified the misunderstanding. This incident highlights the need for sensitivity to differences in cultural and religious belief during interviews.

### **3.4.3 Phase 2 participants recruitment**

Other than the first response for the pilot interview, no other responses were received for over a month despite ongoing, intensive efforts made to recruit participants. Posters on request for research participants were put up on public library notice boards and advertisements were uploaded on popular Canadian website 'www.kijiji.ca'. Hundreds of flyers were given out at various mosques and weekend language schools. However, the strategies were not effective because there were no responses to the requests. Using a known third person strategy, I called up a friend, Taibah, who is one of the key persons in the 'Ottawa Islamic Community Closet' group and requested for her help. She then sent a mass email to 'Ottawa Islamic Community Closet' group persuading others to help me. Taibah also reminded me to be culturally sensitive by bringing "a cake or something" when I visit a participant's house. Responding to Taibah's email, Zara, my pilot study participant sent an email to the group to reassure them that she had met me and that I am "a nice lady". Zara is also an active member of the group.

In response to the emails sent by Taibah and Zara, an email was received from Aisha<sup>4</sup>, a member of the Ottawa Islamic Community Closet group. Aisha thus became the first participant for the main study. After the interview, Aisha gave an insight into the poor responses in the email. She said that people may be hesitant to be interviewed or to let their children be interviewed by a stranger. Aisha suggested including my photo in the email to the group and to give assurance in the email that student identification card

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<sup>4</sup> Pseudonym used

will be shown to the participant before commencing the interview. Acting on Aisha's suggestion, another email is sent to the same group using a more informal tone with my photo attached to the email (Appendix N, p. 202). Subsequently, a response was received. Upon clarification, the respondent did not meet the criteria for participants because she grew up in Canada. However, she suggested setting up a website to recruit participants. Thus, a public blog was set up to provide relevant information on myself and my study. My photo was uploaded in my blog to provide identification to participants. The information that the blog has been set up was sent to the 'Ottawa Islamic Community Closet' group. Subsequently, another response was received from Badia<sup>5</sup> who then became the second interview participant. At the same time, Taibah contacted her friends requesting their help. A friend of hers who is a Principal of a weekend religious school gave permission for me to come during a staff meeting to talk to the teachers about the research. The target of recruiting 20 immigrant mothers and 20 children participants was met mainly from personal recommendations. Although it was not in the research plan to focus on a certain religious group, perhaps due to snowball sampling of participants, all the participants in this study are Muslims.

#### **3.4.4 The main study**

The main study involves interviews with 19 immigrant mothers and 19 children. One participant did not turn up for the interview because she was unwell. Pseudonyms have been used for reasons of confidentiality. For easier reference in the study, the first letter of the mother's pseudonym matches the first letter of her child's pseudonym. *Table 3.1* presents pseudonyms and details of the immigrant mothers, as well as the pseudonyms and details of their children.

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudonym used



No.	Mother's name <sup>6</sup>	Mother's number of years in Canada	Mother's native country <sup>7</sup>	Mother's educational level	Child's name <sup>8</sup>	Child's gender	Child's age at time of interview	Place in family
1	Aisha	3.5 years	Pakistan	n.a. <sup>9</sup>	Aatif	Male	7 years 3 months	1 <sup>st</sup> of 2
2	Badia	3 months	Pakistan	Master's Degree	Baar	Male	5 years 6 months	3 <sup>rd</sup> of 3
3	Cala	7 months	Pakistan	n.a.	Chanda	Female	5 years 5 months	3 <sup>rd</sup> of 3
4	Daania	20 years	Libya	Degree	Daliya	Female	5 years 7 months	2 <sup>nd</sup> of 2
5	Erina	12 years	Ghana	Master's Degree	Emran	Male	5 years 10 months	3 <sup>rd</sup> of 3
6	Faiza	14 years	Syria	Degree	Fahd	Male	5 years 9 months	5 <sup>th</sup> of 6
7	Ghaliyah	9 years	Saudi	Degree	Ghadah	Female	6 years 4 months	3 <sup>rd</sup> of 4
8	Haleema	11 years	Syria	Degree	Husna	Female	6 years 3 months	1 <sup>st</sup> of 2
9	Iffah	n.a. <sup>10</sup>	Ghana	n.a.	Ishaq	Male	5 years 8 months	1 <sup>st</sup> of 2
10	Jihan	14 years	Algeria	Degree	Jasmin	Female	5 years 7 months	3 <sup>rd</sup> of 3
11	Kamilah	4 years	Algeria	Master's Degree	Kanza	Female	6 years 1 month	2 <sup>nd</sup> of 2
12	Leen	9 years	Lebanon	Degree	Luna	Female	5 years 0 month	2 <sup>nd</sup> of 2
13	Maali	8 years	Sri Lanka	Degree	Madiha	Female	6 years 3 months	1 <sup>st</sup> of 2

<sup>6</sup> Pseudonym used

<sup>7</sup> Native country refers to the country in which the immigrant mothers had their growing up experiences. It is not necessarily the country that they were born in or where they originated from.

<sup>8</sup> First letter matching pseudonym for child

<sup>9</sup> Not available

14	Naba	3 years	Kuwait	High school	Naqeeb	Male	6 years 2 months	3 <sup>rd</sup> of 4
15	Ojala	17 years	Jordan	Degree	Omera	Female	5 years 4 months	5 <sup>th</sup> of 5
16	Parisa	18 years	Kuwait	High school	Parvina	Female	7 years 0 months	3 <sup>rd</sup> of 4
17	Qailah	9 years	Lebanon	Degree	Qadi	Male	5 years 6 months	2 <sup>nd</sup> of 4
18	Rabia	3 years	Lebanon	Degree	Rafee	Male	5 years 1 month	4 <sup>th</sup> of 5
19	Sofia	3 years	Egypt	Degree	Saad	Male	6 years 4 months	3 <sup>rd</sup> of 3

*Table 3.1.* Information on participants

Given the difficulty in recruitment of volunteers, the participants are made up of all who have volunteered to participate in the study. Although not intentionally selected due to constraints in participant recruitment, there is a good gender balance of 9 boys and 10 girls. The age group of the children ranges from 5 years 0 months to 7 years 3 months. The number of years that the mothers have been in Canada ranges from 3 months to 20 years. The immigrant mothers grew up in different countries and these countries are referred to as 'native country'. The total number of native countries involved in this study is eleven.

#### ***3.4.4.1 Interviews with parents***

Although the participants were given a choice of venue for the interviews which included my house, participant's house and a mutually agreed public place, most of the participants requested for the venue to be at their home while two of them requested to have the interview conducted at Tim Hortons, a popular fast casual restaurant in Canada. None of them requested for the interview to be conducted at my house while one of them had the interview at her friend's house who was also one of the participants.

During the interview, the participant's fluency in English language was informally assessed and the interaction was modified accordingly. For some participants, it was necessary for me to adopt a slower pace of talking in shorter sentences or simpler phrases. Sometimes some words in Arabic were used to explain the interview questions to some participants who are Arabic native-speakers. There were two situations in which the mothers requested a family member's help for interpretation. One mother requested help from her husband while another requested help from her child to interpret for them when they could not understand the question or were not able to express their thoughts in English.

In one of the interviews, the mother had chosen the interview to be conducted at her house on a weekday immediately after work. During the interview, it was clear that her youngest child was seeking her attention by refusing to play with his sisters and engaging in acts that annoyed the mother. The mother explained that she had just started work after three years as a stay-at-home-mom in Canada and her youngest child seemed to have difficulty adjusting to her absence. In empathy with her situation, the interview was shortened by focusing on more important questions.

All in all, despite some language difficulty, the immigrant mothers seemed eager to share their experiences and provide their views, especially on issues concerning their children.

#### ***3.4.4.2 Interviews with children***

Similar to some interviews with the mothers, there were some challenges in terms of language with children's interviews. One of the children, Chanda, was not able to understand some of the interview questions. Her father would sometimes interpret for her.

The strategy adopted was to interview the mothers first so as to give the children some time to adapt to my presence. However, in one of the interviews, the mother had asked the child to engage in digital play with his cousin while she was being interviewed. After the interview was completed, the mother called the child to be interviewed. Despite agreeing for the interview, the child seemed impatient to get back to his game and asked "Are we done yet?" halfway through the interview. Thus, the interview was terminated in respect of the child's request.

In general, most of the children interviewed were enthusiastic to share their experiences and perspectives of their lives.

#### ***3.4.4.3 Drawing activity***

At the end of the interviews with the children, they were asked if they could draw something for me. A few children voiced their apprehension of not being able to draw well. However, after reassurance from me that they can draw whatever they like, they began drawing and describing what they were drawing. Some of the children also brought out the toys that they were drawing. For example, Aatif brought out his Beyblade toy to show me and demonstrated how it was played. Similarly, Chanda took out her Barbie doll 'Dollie' from her room to show and play with me. Three children wrote their name on the drawing, perhaps as an indicator of ownership of the masterpiece. Upon my request, the children seemed very willing to contribute their drawing to my study. In addition, Luna eagerly volunteered an extra contribution by giving a play dough bug that she made in school.

### 3.5 Data analysis process

According to Cohen et al. (2007), “there is no one single or correct way to analyse and present qualitative data; how one does it should abide by the issue of *fitness for purpose*” (p. 461). Instead of the term ‘data reduction’ which may imply weakening or losing data, Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) suggested the term ‘data condensation’ which refers to “the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data” (p.12) in order to strengthen it. This section is categorized into three subsections: 1) transcribing process and approach to transcript analysis; 2) approach to drawing analysis; and 3) Third space theory: A tool to analyse emerging concepts.

#### 3.5.1 Transcribing process and approach to transcript analysis

The data analysis process began before all the data had been collected (Miles et al., 2014). During the interview, I was constantly interpreting and analysing the participants’ responses to decide on the probing questions. Subsequently, after all the interviews had been completed, the process of transcribing began. The initial choice was to use Nuance Dragon Naturally Speaking which is a speech recognition software package. As recommended, training was done for the software to recognize my pronunciation. Since the software is not designed for multiple speakers, I repeated the participants’ responses so that the software would transcribe it into text. However, perhaps due to incomplete sentence structures in the responses, the transcribed words often did not match the spoken word. After a few attempts, the decision was made to abandon the software and utilise the traditional way of transcribing, which is to manually type the responses (for an example of a transcript, see Appendix O, p. 203).

The next stage was to organize the responses according to the interview questions. The first step in this stage was the changing of fonts of interview transcripts. This is outlined in *Table 3.2* and *Table 3.3*.

Transcripts	Font
P <sub>1</sub> , P <sub>6</sub> , P <sub>11</sub> , P <sub>16</sub>	Times New Roman
P <sub>2</sub> , P <sub>7</sub> , P <sub>12</sub> , P <sub>17</sub>	Times New Roman Italics
P <sub>3</sub> , P <sub>8</sub> , P <sub>13</sub> , P <sub>18</sub>	Comic Sans MS
P <sub>4</sub> , P <sub>9</sub> , P <sub>14</sub> , P <sub>19</sub>	Cambria
P <sub>5</sub> , P <sub>10</sub> , P <sub>15</sub>	Arial Italics

*Table 3.2* Fonts used for mothers’ interview transcripts

Transcripts	Font
C <sub>1</sub> , C <sub>6</sub> , C <sub>11</sub> , C <sub>16</sub>	Times New Roman
C <sub>2</sub> , C <sub>7</sub> , C <sub>12</sub> , C <sub>17</sub>	Times New Roman Italics
C <sub>3</sub> , C <sub>8</sub> , C <sub>13</sub> , C <sub>18</sub>	Comic Sans MS
C <sub>4</sub> , C <sub>9</sub> , C <sub>14</sub> , C <sub>19</sub>	Arial Narrow
C <sub>5</sub> , C <sub>10</sub> , C <sub>15</sub>	Arial Italics

*Table 3.3* Fonts used for children’s interview transcripts

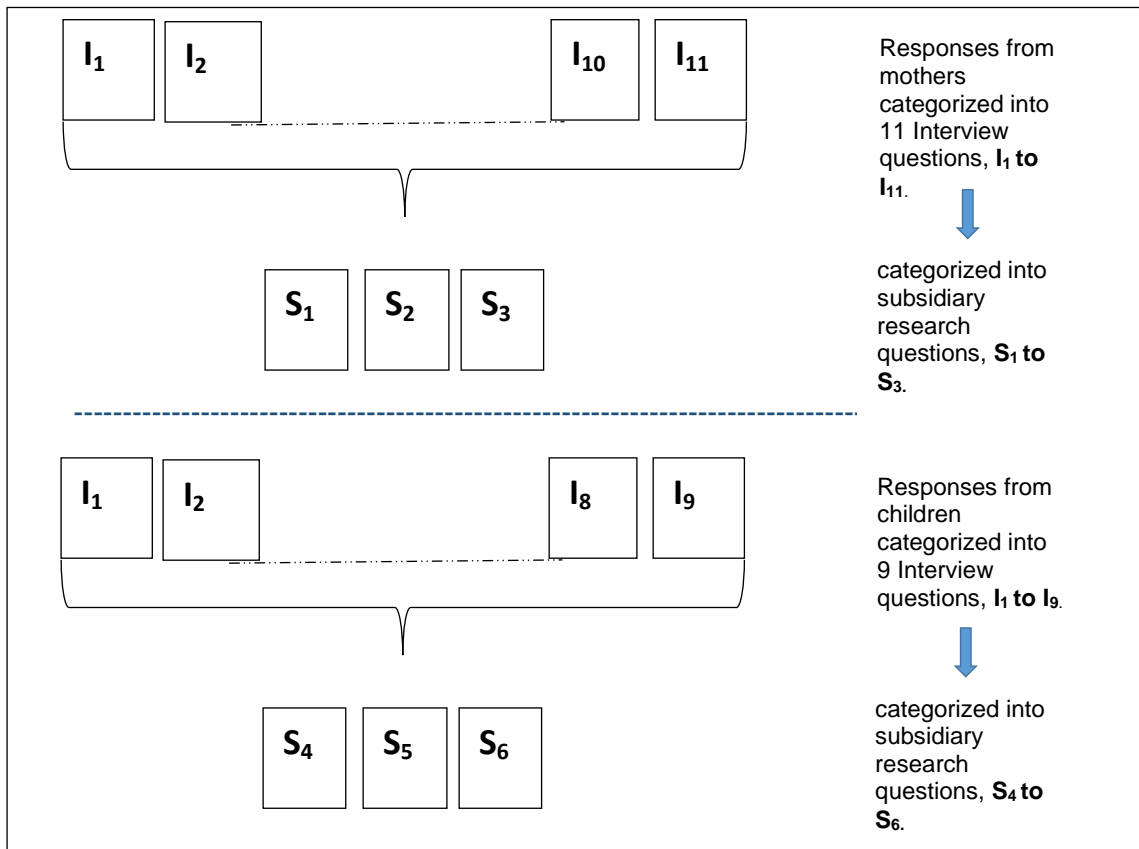
The objective of changing fonts is to enable the responses from different participants to be easily distinguished when collated according to interview questions. Subsequently, using Microsoft Word, the responses of all participants for each interview question were extracted from the transcripts and collated. An example of collated responses is illustrated in *Figure 3.3*.

Interview question 1:  
**What were your learning experiences as a child (around your child’s age)?**  
P1: Learning experiences were much different because here.....  
*P2: How did I learn? From mother, from school.....*  
..... (P3 to P18) .....

P19: There were desks and chairs, in rows. Each child has his own desk and chair.....

*Figure 3.3* Collated responses according to interview questions

The collated responses based on interview questions were then organized according to the six subsidiary questions. This process is illustrated in *Figure 3.4*.



*Figure 3.4* Organization of participants' responses according to subsidiary research questions

The next stage involved the first cycle of coding using 'across-case analysis'. In this cycle, codes or labels were assigned to data chunks based on the descriptive or inferential information. The codes were based on the concepts of play and learning, taking into account the methods of coding advocated by Miles et al. (2014) which are descriptive coding that summarizes the idea, process coding which extracts participant's action, interaction, and consequences of action, and affective coding such as emotion, values and evaluation (for an example, see Appendix P, p. 205). Subsequently, contradictions in participants' responses were also noted using 'within-case analysis'. In the second cycle of coding, pattern coding was done to group the summaries or results of first coding into smaller categories. This resulted in themes being generated in each subsidiary question. An example of themes generated is shown in *Figure 3.5*.

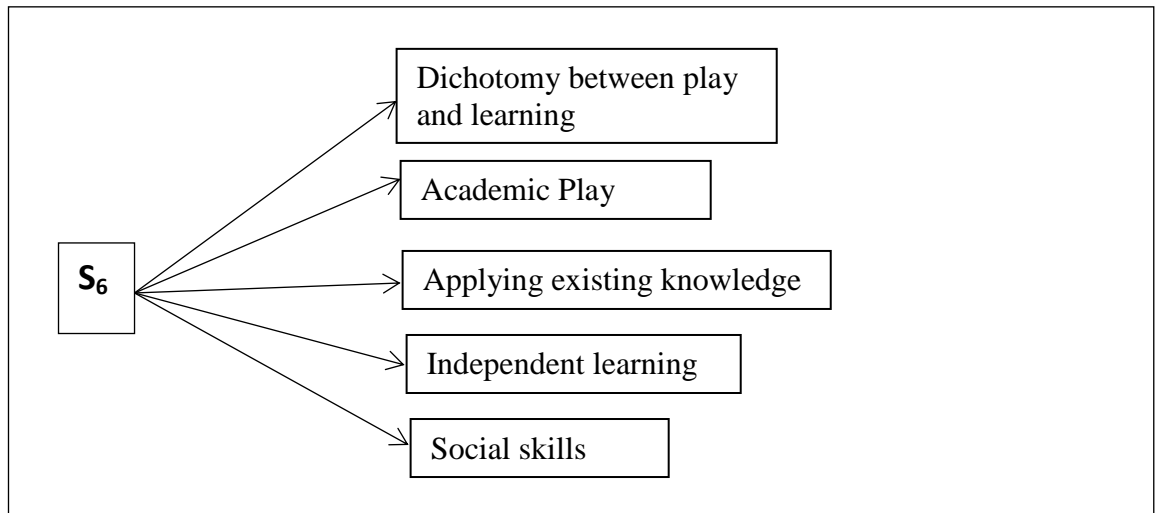


Figure 3.5 Coding and condensation of data into themes

Based on Glaser and Strauss's (1967) suggestion of constant comparative method, the next step after "comparing incidents applicable to each category" (p. 105) is to "integrate categories and their properties" (p. 105). Thus, comparison was made between the responses of each pair of mother and child. Based on relevance of data, comparison was made between **S<sub>1</sub>** and **S<sub>4</sub>**, **S<sub>2</sub>** and **S<sub>5</sub>**, and **S<sub>3</sub>** and **S<sub>6</sub>**. This is illustrated in *Figure 3.6*.



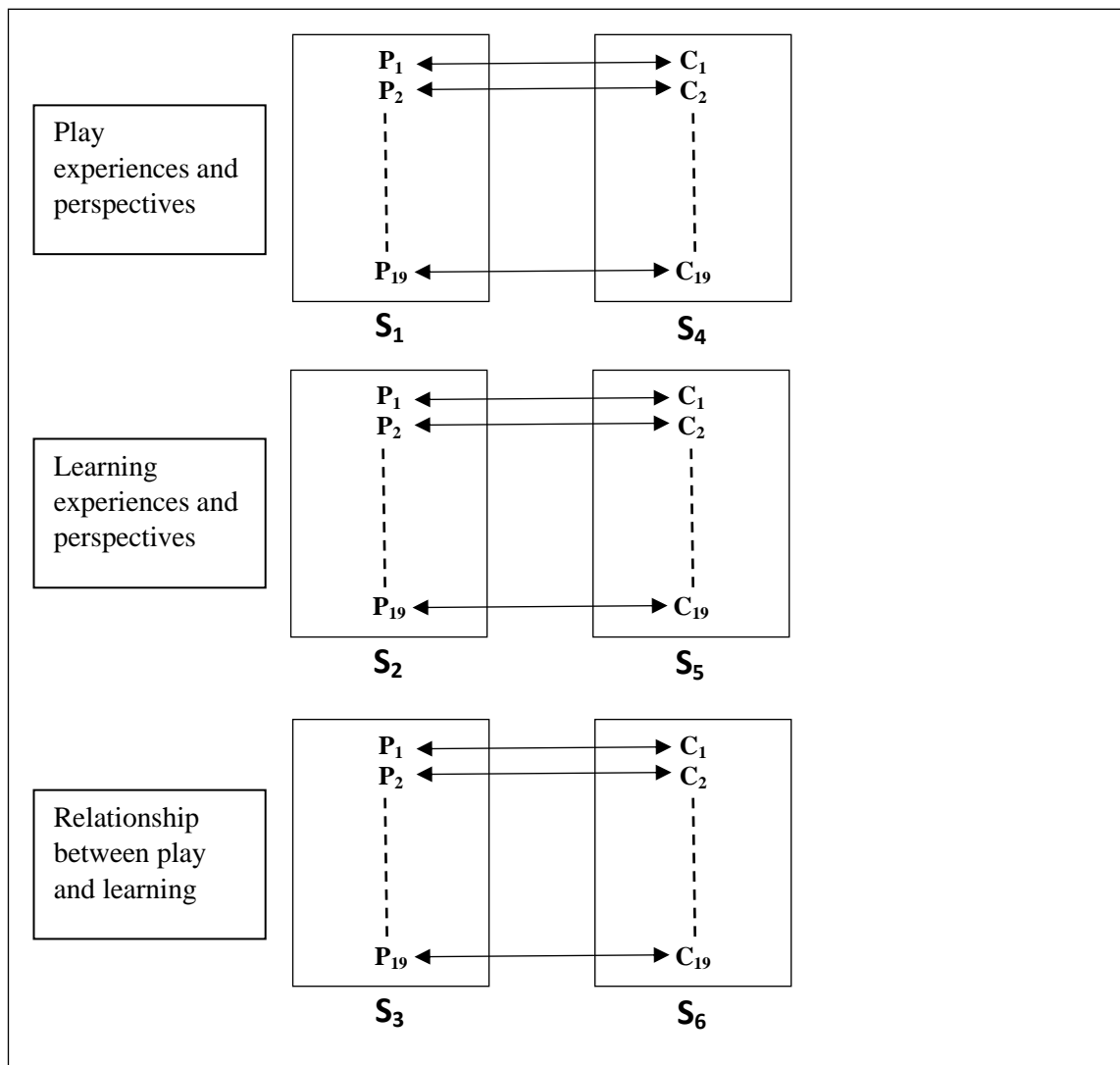
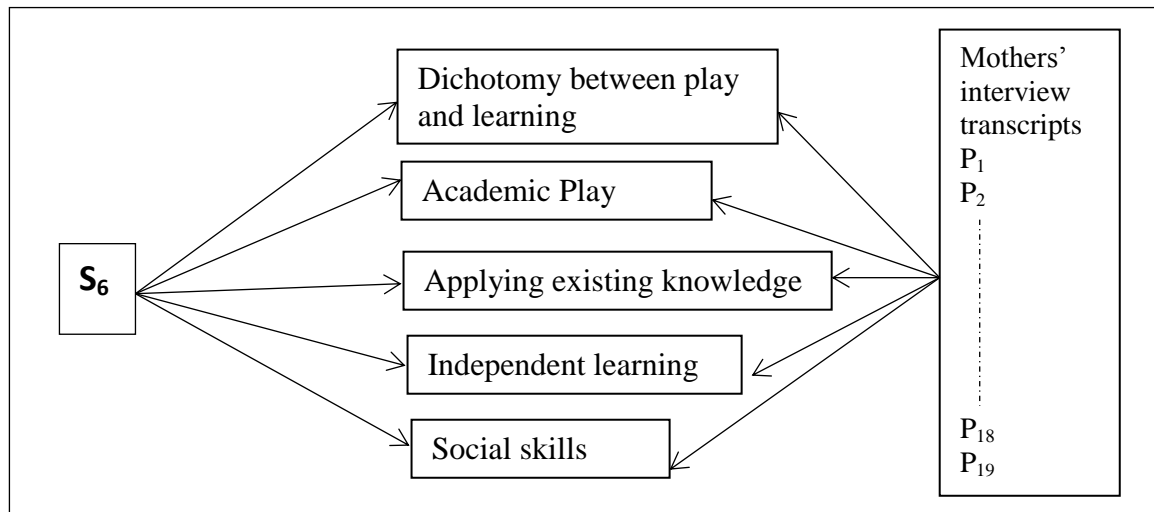


Figure 3.6 Inter-category comparison between each mother and child pair

The objective of the comparison of responses between each mother and child pair was to extract responses from one category that support or contradict responses in the other category. For example, in **S<sub>1</sub>**, a mother may have provided information that the child has some language difficulty at school. Subsequently, in **S<sub>4</sub>**, the child also shared experiences of language difficulty at school. Thus, these two pieces of information support each other to provide a more holistic picture of the child's experiences at school.

The process of categorizing the findings into themes involved my interpretations of participants' responses based on my understanding of the related experiences and perspectives provided by the participants.

In order to ensure rigour in the data analysis process, transcripts of the interview with mothers were analysed based on the themes generated in **S<sub>4</sub>**, **S<sub>5</sub>**, and **S<sub>6</sub>** to extract data that were relevant to the themes generated from the transcripts of the interview with children. The reverse was also done with children's interview transcripts with themes generated in **S<sub>1</sub>**, **S<sub>2</sub>**, and **S<sub>3</sub>**. This is illustrated in *Figure 3.7*.



*Figure 3.7* Comparison of interview transcripts with thematic data

The various combinations of response comparison, especially between each mother and child pair, were made to ensure that the data analysis process was done thoroughly to provide a more holistic understanding of the inquiry.

### 3.5.2 Approach to drawing analysis

Thomson (2008) argued that in analysing visual representations, analysis must be made of the interaction between words and images. Thus, the drawing analysis process commenced with detailed interpretations prior to categorization. The interpretation process involved comparing data from different sources: mother's interview transcript, her child's interview transcript, drawing process notes, drawing process conversation transcript and product of drawing activity. After interpretations were made of each drawing, the 19 drawings were then categorized on themes relating to play and learning. These themes serve to address the subsidiary research questions **S<sub>4</sub>**, **S<sub>5</sub>**, and **S<sub>6</sub>** which explore children's experiences and perspectives. Some of the drawings were used to support or clarify other themes generated from the interview transcript analysis. Thus, the transcript analysis and drawing analysis are not two separate processes but rather, they are interwoven in the data analysis process.

### 3.5.3 Third space theory: A tool to analyse emerging concept

The data from the study shed light on the 'happenings' at home and school. The term 'happenings' in this study is defined as events, interactions, transactions, processes, and all that takes place physically or conceptually in these spaces. Interestingly, what has emerged from the findings is that play has been used by children to bridge home and school. In addition, there was also evidence that teachers have utilised strategies to support children in using play to connect home and school. Thus, the concept of third space theory was used to analyse and interpret these emerging findings. The themes in **S<sub>1</sub>**, **S<sub>2</sub>** and **S<sub>3</sub>** illustrated the 'happenings' at home, which is the first space and the themes in **S<sub>4</sub>**, **S<sub>5</sub>** and **S<sub>6</sub>** described the 'happenings' at school, which is the second space. Relevant findings from all interview transcripts were extracted to form evidence of 'happenings' in third space, which is the bridge that connects home and school. These findings were then analysed and interpreted in light of third space theory.

## 3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the approach taken to the construction of the research plan and discussed the methods and methodology of the study. In particular, it drew attention to the positive aspects, challenges encountered and reflections from the research experience. The next three chapters report the findings of this inquiry. The first data analysis chapter (**Chapter 4**) addresses the first three subsidiary questions while the second data analysis chapter (**Chapter 5**) answers the last three subsidiary questions. The third data analysis chapter (**Chapter 6**) discusses the concepts that emerged from the findings.

## Chapter 4

# Immigrant mothers' experiences and perspectives of play, learning, and the relationship between play and learning

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to answer the first three subsidiary research questions which are:

- 1) What are the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers on play at home and school?
- 2) What are the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers on learning at home and school?
- 3) What are the perspectives of immigrant mothers on the relationship between play and learning?

The first section '**Comparing play in native country and Canada**' addresses the first subsidiary question. It explores immigrant mothers' experiences and perspectives on play. It comprises of two subsections. The first subsection discusses the comparison that immigrant mothers made on play between their native country and Canada while the second subsection explores immigrant mothers' concerns about digital play.

The second section '**Comparing learning experiences in native country and Canada**' addresses the second subsidiary question. It focuses on immigrant mothers' experiences and perspectives on learning. It delves into immigrant mothers' perspectives on the positive and negative aspects of learning in their native country and Canada.

The third section '**Relationship between play and learning**' addresses the third subsidiary question. It examines mothers' perspectives on the relationship between play and learning. The fourth section '**Communication with school**' uncovers sharing by immigrant mothers on their experiences and perspectives of communication between school and home. This chapter closes with an overview of the findings analysed and interpreted in the four sections.

## **4.2 Comparing play in native country and Canada**

In this section, I discuss two areas of findings from my interviews with the immigrant mothers. During the interview, I asked questions pertaining to their play experiences in their native country when they were around their children's age as well as their children's play experiences in Canada. I also probed into the similarities and differences between play experiences in the two different cultural settings. The two areas of findings are: 1) changes in play settings and experiences resulting in changes in affordances of play; and 2) a new form of play: digital play.

### **4.2.1 Changes in play settings and experiences resulting in changes in affordances of play**

The immigrant mothers grew up in a country where the culture is very different from that of Canada. Most of them grew up in the Middle East, with a few mothers who grew up in Africa and Asia. The differences in culture and play settings brought about different play experiences. During the interviews, the immigrant mothers shared certain aspects of their play experiences which are different from those of their children. I analyse how the changes in the cultural settings and play experiences result in changes in the affordances of play as experienced by their children. This subsection is categorised into five themes: 1) more playmates in native country; 2) play is less structured by adults in native country; 3) the perceived need to be accompanied by adults for outdoor play in Canada; 4) lack of toys in native country; and 5) more restrictions in terms of gender in native country.

#### ***4.2.1.1 More playmates in native country***

Some mothers reported having more playmates in their native country as compared to their children. For example, Badia shared that her son, Baar, sometimes had to play alone with his toys when his older sisters are busy. In contrast, she had not just her siblings as playmates, but also her cousins and neighbours.

Cala and Daania also shared the difference of having more playmates during their childhood days as compared to their children.

Raudhah: Do you have more people to play with than Chanda?

Cala: My kids, no more people, only brother and sister. I play more friends.  
We have 9 brothers and sisters. Neighbours.

Raudhah: How about your children? Do they play with neighbours too?

Cala: No, they play only brother and sister.

-----  
Daania: Sometimes she (her daughter, Daliya) says 'I don't have anyone to play with'.

Raudhah: How about you? Do you have people to play with at home?

Daania: At home, we had a big family. We were in the same age group. So, we had the same things to play with. Outside home, when we go for a visit, relatives, we play with the children.

Erina credited communal living as the reason for her having more playmates. She suggested that the close proximity of the houses contributed to the close-knit relationships in the community. Erina elaborated that everyone knows one another in the neighbourhood and they "consider everybody family". Thus, it was only natural that the children "play with everybody in the neighbourhood". She contrasted her growing-up experiences with her child, Emran's experiences and highlighted that she had never lacked playmates whereas "here (Canada), they do lack playmates".

Some of the reasons for immigrant mothers having more playmates during their growing up years are communal living in their native countries, growing up in a big family or having relatives living close by. Most of the immigrant families in Canada do not have relatives living within close proximity. The limited number of children to play with may result in the children not having a large pool of playmates to choose from or to learn from one another. Usually, in a larger pool of playmates, there is a greater range of personalities, maturity levels and interests. Thus, it may provide more opportunities for the children to learn to interact and accommodate the differences. Play, especially pretend play, is often enhanced when there are a larger number of playmates. According to Bodrova (2008), in multi-aged groups, there are opportunities for children to learn from older 'play experts', practise their play skills and then pass their knowledge to the 'play novices'. Thus, fewer playmates may result in fewer opportunities for children to learn to accommodate differences, learn from expert players and experience a richer and more enhanced play.

#### **4.2.1.2 Play is less structured by adults in native country**

Aisha shared that “there is no culture of going to playgroups like the commercial kind, like any child care settings here. There is no culture like that in my native country”. Organised playdates were not a common practice in most of the native countries of the immigrant mothers. Playdates are usually initiated by children without any intervention by adults. Aisha further described it, “there is a culture there, you don’t tell anybody before going to somebody’s place. You don’t call anybody, you just go and ring the bell. And the person will welcome you in and you can stay as long as you want. It’s that kind of thing, it is very easy and easy-going. There is no formalities”.

Erina also described the adult-free play contexts in which the children do not have to inform the adults when or where they are going to play. She expressed her experience as “you can just play outside without your parents knowing where you go”. On the other hand, Ojala lamented that the need to adapt to the culture of involving adults in organizing playdates resulted in her daughter, Omera not having many friends.

Raudhah:       What about friends?

Ojala:           Omera doesn’t have many friends. The problem is she can’t go outside and play. If she has friends, I have to take her to the house or her friend come to my house. Other than that, she can’t.

Organized playdate is a culture that is usually not practised during the immigrant mothers’ childhood days. It is also unlikely that the immigrant mothers attended commercial playgroups. Most of the immigrant mothers narrated their experiences of not requiring adult supervision when playing outdoors, which I elaborate in the next subsection.

#### **4.2.1.3 The perceived need to be accompanied by adults for outdoor play in Canada**

Some mothers shared that they were free to play outdoors as and when they wished, without the need to be accompanied by adults in their native country. However, they lamented that they could not let their children do the same in Canada. For example, Iffah contrasted the situation in her native country and Canada.

Iffah: The neighbourhood. A lot of friends. Because back home, it's safe. But here it's not safe. You can't allow your child to go out and play by himself. Back home, you can go out without asking anybody's permission. You can go out and come out, make sure by five, you're home. But there is no one watching you around because it's safe. But here, it's not safe. You cannot let your son standing at the roadside alone; it's not safe at all.

Iffah explained that she needs to accompany her child, Ishaq when he goes for outdoor play because she does not perceive it is safe for children to play on their own in Canada. She also lamented that, "going out, you have to take all the kids". This is probably because she also has a baby to attend to. Thus, when she brings Ishaq out for play, she will also need to bring her baby along, which may be inconvenient at certain times.

Omera, however, is less dependent on her parents to bring her for outdoor play because she has older brothers who could take her out for outdoor play. This is shared by Ojala, Omera's mother.

Raudhah: What about her? Does she play outdoors like you did?

Ojala: No, rarely. And she can't go by herself. To play outside, one of her brothers must be with her. Or taking her to the park. This is the only way she play outside.

Unfortunately, even with more people at home to take her out for outdoor play, Ojala reported that Omera 'rarely' plays outdoors, probably also due to the dependence on others to take her out.

Sofia also shared that her son, Saad can only play in the front or backyard if his older sister accompanies him. However, if Saad wishes to go to the park, he needs to be accompanied by his parent. Thus, while playing in the front and back yard is less restricted in terms of the need to be accompanied by adults, Saad will require the company of an adult to go to the park, probably because it is a distance away from his house.

Parisa recalled that she went out by herself whenever she wanted to play outdoors because "we know everybody, everybody know us. If you go on the street, everybody



know my family, know me". She contrasted the two situations of her native country and Canada, "big difference from here to our country" and elaborated, "here you can't do that. If we didn't take her outside, she's gonna be stuck home. We can't send her by herself outside".

Parisa highlighted the difference of independence in outdoor play between her childhood days and that of her child, Parvina. According to be Parisa, Parvina will be "stuck (at) home" if no one brings her out because Parvina can't go out by herself. She attributed the freedom of being able to go outside on her own when she was a child due to the communal living in her native country where everybody in the neighbourhood knows one another.

It is clear that there is a difference in terms of independence in outdoor play in the two contexts. In the native country, children do not need to seek permission from adults or depend on adult's free time to take them for outdoor play. However, in Canada, according to the immigrant mothers, children's outdoor play is dependent on adults' willingness to take them out.

Despite having a fenced backyard, some immigrant mothers feel that it is still not safe for children to be on their own there. Qailah shared this sentiment in the interview,

Qailah: Sometimes I send them to play at the backyard. I have to ask my husband to stay with them. Or every minute go and check on them. It's safe, but I can't.

Raudhah: In your backyard?

Qailah: Yeah.

Raudhah: Outside?

Qailah: No, no outside.

Raudhah: Is your backyard fenced?

Qailah: Yes. (But) I don't feel safe.

Similar to Iffah's sentiments, Qailah does not feel secure when her children play outdoors on their own in Canada, even in a fenced backyard.

When Erina highlighted the need for children to be accompanied for outdoor play, she concluded that this is probably the reason that children in Canada engage in more indoor play rather than outdoor play.

The need to be accompanied by adults for outdoor play may result in children losing their independence and freedom of choice in outdoor play. They may not be able to play outdoors as and when they would like to and they may have to depend on the willingness of an adult to accompany them for outdoor play. The main reason cited for this is that the immigrant mothers perceive that Canada is not as safe as their native country for children to play outdoors. The scope of this study does not investigate the validity of the mothers' claim on the comparison of safety between Canada and their native country. It is possible that accompanying children for outdoor play is perhaps a social norm in Canada and the immigrant mothers are conforming to it. However, it is also possible that this concern stems from the uncertainty of the safety of their children in a new environment, especially if they have just moved to Canada. What is clear though, the change in cultural setting and environment has brought about a change in the degree of independence and freedom of choice for children in relation to outdoor play.

#### ***4.2.1.4 Lack of toys in native country***

While some immigrant mothers commented that they do play with toys, quite a number of mothers shared that they did not have as many toys as their children. In addition, there are also a few others who recalled that they had no commercial toys but rather, they made their own toys using the materials available to them. The mothers' responses on lack of toys in their play experiences are categorised into two effects of this during their growing up days: 1) lack of toys leading to more outdoor play; and 2) lack of toys leading to creative uses of other materials for play.

##### *4.2.1.4.1 More outdoor play*

Daania grew up in a very small village in a desert and she and her siblings had very few toys available. Thus, she recalled "mostly playing with sand" with the "neighbourhood kids". Erina shared that she and her siblings had no toys to play with and so, they hardly play indoors because "there was nothing to play indoors". She said, "all the games are outside. You play outside. When it is raining, you play in the rain, sing rain songs. When there is moonlight, after supper, you go outside and do moonlight songs and play". Erina recalled a lot of singing while playing outdoors.

Likewise, Iffah also shared that she did not have any toys during her growing up years in her native country. Consequently, she would often “go out and play with friends”. She recalled that her play consists of a lot of active play such as “running around”.

The lack or absence of toys during their growing up years impelled them to engage in more outdoor play which usually involves a lot of active play.

#### *4.2.1.4.2 Creative use of other materials for play*

In addition to the lack of availability of toys during their growing up years as a motivating factor for more outdoor play, the immigrant mothers used whatever natural resources and household items that were available to them as play materials. This commonly involves imagination to transform these materials to represent a play object. For example, Erina recalled “pretend cooking” using recycled tins and cans as cooking pots and leaves as “make-believe food”.

The immigrant mothers also shared how they made toys out of the natural resources or used household items. Erina, Haleema, Jihan and Kamilah illustrated their creative experiences in their responses.

Erina: You go to muddy area. You make dolls out of those and then we use banana stems to make dolls. So, you cut the banana stem. You make strings to make hair. You use stones to make eyes, leaves to make draw something on the mouth, you braid the hair. You have your doll. And then guys would use socks to make balls. There used to be a lot of creativity. Anything you can find, you make something out of it.

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Raudhah: Do you play with toys?

Haleema: No toys. We used to make our own toys. Using sponge for cleaning the dishes. We make use make eyes; we used to play with them. We used to create our own toys. We had a big garden, so sometimes we play with the mud. We make castles.

-----  
Raudhah: How about at home? Any toys at home?

Jihan: No toys. I have only one doll. We have a lot of things to play. Apricot, (the seed). We have a game, we can play with this. Also, the bottle

(cap). It depends on how far. It's everything natural. Something else, we use the stone.

-----  
Kamilah: We borrow something from home and we try do houses with our dolls. We can make them (the dolls). They teach us how to do some dolls with someone. With some fabric. At my country, there were not lots of toys.

During their growing up years, the lack of availability of toys did not deter the immigrant mothers from having fun playing with the other children. In fact, this situation probably enhanced their creativity and imagination.

In contrast, Haleema shared that her daughter, Husna has plenty of toys. Yet, Husna sometimes complains to her that "she doesn't know what to play". It is also possible that Husna is complaining about not knowing what to play because she lacks playmates. This is because at other times, Haleema said that Husna complains that she has no one to play with as she has only her toddler brother at home. This suggests that despite having lots of toys, some children may not find playing alone fun. This is in contrast to their mothers' claim that despite not having many toys, the mothers had a lot of fun because they had a lot of playmates. The playmates also probably contributed ideas to the creative use of nature and household items for play to make up for the lack of toys.

Similarly, Parisa shared the same sentiments as Haleema. She said, "They (her children) didn't know how to play. Because I buy for her Barbie house and toys. Sometimes she bored. 'You have a lot of toys. Go play upstairs' (Parisa said to Parvina, her daughter). 'I don't know how to play' (Parvina's reply). She doesn't know how to play like we do. We happy with one toy". In the case of Parvina, she has a sister who is three years older than her, whom she plays with quite often. Thus, in this case, despite having a playmate at home, Parvina still complains of not knowing how to creatively play with her toys. Parisa shared that Parvina prefers watching television to playing.

While the immigrant mothers shared how their lack of toys was not a hindrance to them having fun playing, a few mothers such as Haleema and Parisa lamented their children's lack of creativity in playing. Therefore, the situation of lack of availability of toys could be seen as a motivating factor for children to engage in creativity and

imagination. It is possible that they enjoy the process of creating toys as much playing with them.

Most of the mothers shared that their children have a lot more toys than they did. This suggests that the privilege of having lots of toys may instead create a situation of complacency. Hence, there is no compelling need for children to create their own toys from raw materials. However, it is also noted that there are some commercial toys which are designed to hone creativity for children, such as Lego. Nevertheless, these commercial toys can be quite limiting in honing creativity as compared to the creative use of raw materials which may require imagination to uncover their potential to be converted into play items.

#### ***4.2.1.5 More restrictions in terms of gender in native country***

The mothers also shared some restrictions in terms of gender in their native countries as compared to Canada which are categorised into two parts. The first part is that in their native country, the culture is for the girls to play indoors while the boys play outdoors. The second part is that the children tend to play only with the same gender.

##### *4.2.1.5.1 Girls play indoors, boys play outdoors*

Leen: Boys will sometimes go outside the house, they play soccer. Girls stay inside.

Raudhah: So, mostly you stay inside?

Leen: Yes

Raudhah: Is it the culture for girls to play inside?

Leen: We play outside but with our parents. But we don't stay outside a lot like boys.

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Raudhah: Do you play outside also?

Naba: Little.

Raudhah: Is it because you are a girl or you don't like to play outside?

Naba: The girls usually don't play outside a lot.

Raudhah: Do you play running?

Naba: No, running only to the boys.

Raudhah: All the girls are like that?

Naba: Yes.

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Kamilah: She (Kamilah's daughter) is outside. Riding her bike. Even I don't know how to ride a bike because no opportunity to do that when I was young. Because I am a girl. I have brothers who ride.

Raudhah: Is that what is expected in the society, that girls must stay inside and not play outside?

Kamilah: It's tradition. There is no restrictions for her (her daughter).

In the three interviews, Leen, Naba and Kamilah shared that it is the culture in their native countries for girls to play indoors and boys to play outdoors. However, it doesn't mean that they did not have any opportunity to play outdoors. Perhaps, there is a greater tendency for girls to play indoors than outdoors in their culture. Leen shared that her parents usually accompany her when playing outdoors probably because the culture in her native country requires girls to have closer supervision when outdoors. Naba related that she did not engage in active play such as running because it is only for boys. Also, Kamilah said, unlike her daughter, she did not have the opportunity to learn to cycle because girls are not supposed to cycle in her native country. Thus, it seems that Leen, Naba and Kamilah came from a culture where there is an expectation that boys and girls have different types of play and girls do not enjoy the same opportunities to play outdoors as boys.

It is also interesting to note that this culture is in contrast to the culture of Iffah, Ojala, Qailah, Parisa, Sofia, and Erina who shared that they had more outdoor play than their children, as I had discussed in the earlier **Section 4.2.1.3 The perceived need to be accompanied by adults for outdoor play in Canada.**

#### *4.2.1.5.2 Same gender playmates*

Another difference highlighted by some mothers is that they had playmates only of the same gender whereas their children play with both genders. Naba shared that in her native country, "The girl play with the girl, the boy will play the boy only". She also shared that the girls usually don't play outdoors. Thus, it is possible that the restriction of indoor play to girls resulted in the children having only the same gender as playmates. However, in Jihan's situation, while she shared that she engaged in a lot of

outdoor play such as hopscotch, tag, hide-and-seek, and other active play, she also highlighted the culture of playing with only the same gender.

Jihan: But in general, the girls will play with the girls and the boys will play with the boys.

While it is possible that the culture of girls playing mostly indoors resulted in children playing with the only same gender, it is not necessarily related as illustrated in Jihan's sharing. The gender segregation in play could also be attributed to the culture in the native country.

The experiences of the immigrant mothers are different from those of their children because in Canada, their children are not bounded by culture to have restricted outdoor play due to gender or to have playmates only of the same gender. Thus, in this situation, the change in culture gives opportunities for girls to engage in more active and outdoor play. It also allows playing together, which may provide greater opportunities for children to learn and interact in a mixed-gender group setting.

#### **4.2.2 A new form of play: Digital Play**

When asked about the differences between their play and that of their children, some mothers mentioned that they did not have any digital play during their growing up years. Only Maali spoke of her experience with computers when she was younger, but she said that it was at an older age than her daughter, Madiha.

This new type of play, digital play, seems to evoke a lot of apprehension to immigrant mothers. Compared to playing with toys, the mothers are more likely to put a stricter time limit to digital play, or to not allow the child to engage in any digital play. However, they seem to be more accepting of educational digital play.

The findings uncover seven concerns that immigrant mothers have with regard to digital play: 1) digital play is reducing social interaction with family and friends; 2) digital play is a distraction from studying; 3) preoccupation of mind on digital play; 4) concern on digital's play's effect on eyesight; 5) addiction to digital play; 6) behaviour changing effect of digital play; and 7) losing interest in toys.

#### **4.2.2.1 Digital play is reducing social interaction with family and friends**

- Raudhah: How often does he play iPad?
- Naba: Everyday two hours.
- Naba: Only two hours.
- Raudhah: Why?
- Naba: Because after two hours, I take the iPad and give to my daughter plays two hours. After that, I take the iPad and hide it.
- Raudhah: Why do you limit it to two hours?
- Naba: Because he like to talk to his brothers and to me and to watch TV.
- Raudhah: You mean you want him to talk to others and not just play iPad?
- Naba: Yes.
- Naba: And the weather is sunny, he goes outside play with his friends football.
- Raudhah: So, the main reason you want to limit him playing iPad is to talk to you and his brothers and....
- Naba: To play with friends.

During the interview, Naba reiterated the limit of two hours per day, seemingly to put across that there is a time limit to digital play. She then shared that the reason is so that her son, Naqeeb will have time to communicate with his family, and engage in other activities such as watching television and playing with friends. It seems that Naba is concerned that too much digital play will reduce Naqeeb's social interaction with his family and friends. It is interesting to note that while she is concerned about the effect of digital play on social interaction, she also mentioned that less digital play would mean more time for watching television. This suggests that she may perceive watching television as a more desirable activity compared to digital play. While she mentioned the negative effect of digital play on social interaction, the same thing was not mentioned about watching television. Thus, it is possible that she may perceive watching television as a social activity for the family. Nevertheless, it is also possible that she mentioned watching television not because it is a better activity than digital play, but because she wanted Naqeeb to have a variety of activities other than digital play.

On the contrary, Jihan shared that digital play is a platform for interaction for her daughters. She narrated how social interaction between her three daughters takes places in the virtual world. She said that her three daughters would log in from their own computer into a similar website and they would play together in the virtual world.



Thus, despite concerns about the negative effect of digital play on social interaction, it is possible that some digital games allow for social interaction to take place in the virtual world (Marsh, 2010). However, it may be a different form of interaction compared to verbal conversations and physical interactions in the real world.

#### ***4.2.2.2 Digital play is a distraction from studying***

Raudhah: Does she play with the computer or iPad?

Ojala: No, I don't let her. Because I don't want her to get distracted. And the problem is that they will not love their studying because it (the studying) is not fun for them. And playing on the computer is fun. This is my plan for her. And I told her you will not be able to study and understand, so don't play the computer.

Ojala has very strong views about potential negative effects of digital play on studying. She is worried that her daughter, Omera will not like studying if digital play is introduced to her. In her opinion, digital play is more exciting than studying and hence it will make studying boring and not appealing to Omera. This suggests that Ojala does not perceive digital modes to be of any educational potential. Rather, she seems to view digital modes and education to be at opposing ends. It is also possible that this view stems from her perspective that studying is best done through rote-learning which I discuss in **Section 4.4.1**. Therefore, studying seems relatively not fun or exciting compared to digital play.

#### ***4.2.2.3 Preoccupation of mind on digital play***

Raudhah: Does he play the computer often?

Rabia: No. Their father said 'No'.... because he doesn't want it to manage their minds, just playing, playing all the time.

Rabia seems to answer my question on digital play with the reason given by her husband. However, it is also possible to assume that she brought up this reason because she agrees with her husband's view on digital play. Based on this assumption, it seems that Rabia is concerned that if her son, Rafee plays computer games often, he will be too preoccupied with digital play.

#### **4.2.2.4 Concern on digital play's effect on eyesight**

- Leen: And computer. I don't like them to stay (gesture at the computer indicating playing too long)
- Raudhah: You don't want them to play with the computer too much? Why is that?
- Leen: I don't want their eyes to...
- Raudhah: You don't want their eyesight to go bad?
- Leen: Yes

Leen expressed a concern that has been a topic of discussion in ophthalmology as there were concerns raised by physicians on the effect of computer use on ocular symptoms (Blehm, Vishnu, Khattak, Mitra, and Yee, 2005). However, it is still largely debatable as to what is the acceptable age and acceptable duration of exposure to the various age groups.

It is interesting that while being cautious about the effect of too much digital play on eyesight, Leen acknowledged the educational potential of digital play and shared her view on how learning takes place in digital play.

- Leen: And in the Wii, they know the techniques of some sports. For example, if he plays tennis, soccer, he's learning how to play. Now, she's playing on the computer. It teaches her how to spell words and sounds of letters.

She shared how playing sports virtually on the Wii (a home video game console) allows children to learn the techniques of different sports. She also shared that digital play helps her daughter, Luna, in reading and writing. Thus, it appears while she exercises caution in limiting Luna's exposure to computer screen, Leen does allow Luna to engage in some digital play.

#### **4.2.2.5 Addiction to digital play**

- Maali: I don't give a lot of computer games. Very rare. Very, very rare. In computer, they don't play. They know how to open it. They know watch something. I allow them to watch cartoons on YouTube. But playing, no. Just watching.
- Raudhah: Is there a reason for you not...?

Maali: I grew up, I don't know around which age. May be Grade 7 or 6. We had a lot of computers. I like them and I'm very addicted to them. And until I am in University, I like to play. So, I feel if I introduce it now, they are still young; it's something you can't control. You will be stuck there. So, I feel the more it's late, the more it's better. Coz once you introduce it, they will start, you can't control, especially if they start to like it. At this age, let them play, have fun real life.

Raudhah: So, you are afraid that they get addicted?

Maali: Yeah, if I don't control it, yeah. I had experience. My mum would cut the wire, because the whole family will sit. Even if I'm not playing, I will not move from watching my sister. Even if I am not playing, I have nothing, I won't move. So, my mum found that the best thing is to cut the wire. There's no wires, no playing. You have to go study.

Maali shared the experience that she had of addiction to digital play, although it was at an older age than Madiha's. She expressed her concern that her daughter, Madiha would also be addicted to it if she introduces digital play to Madiha at a young age. Instead, she prefers Madiha to engage in other types of play which does not involve the virtual world. Although Maali allows Madiha to engage in digital mode for watching YouTube videos, she is very firm about not allowing any digital play for Madiha. Perhaps, her reluctance to introduce digital play to Madiha is because she has experienced a loss of self-control in digital play when she was young. Maali's fear seems to stem from her negative childhood experiences with digital play.

#### ***4.2.2.6 Behaviour-changing effect of digital play***

Sofia related her observation that a certain type of video game seemed to have a grave negative effect on her son, Saad. She then did not allow Saad to play that video game anymore. Below is an interview excerpt where she described her observation of the behaviour-altering effect of the video game on Saad and how Saad reverted back to his normal behaviour after he stopped playing with it.

Sofia: He loves the computer too much. And he plays on the Wii lots of times. I got for him two games and we found that he becomes more nervous or his behaviour's completely different after he plays lots of times. Or lots of hour on that game. So, one of the games, I prevent it completely. He

doesn't play with it anymore. And for the other one, I can allow him every month for only one hour.

Raudhah: How was the game like?

Sofia: It was racing and there are lots of colours. It moves very, very fast. So, he got very nervous.

Raudhah: How long was it after he played that his behaviour changed?

Sofia: For the first week. His behaviour started to change gradually. But after a month, I found that his behaviour's completely, completely different.

Raudhah: How different is it?

Sofia: He was screaming, cry if he didn't achieve what he wants. And he cried for the teeny, tiny things. Outside, he doesn't respect, he doesn't listen. I feel that his concentration is somewhere else. And I need to repeat many times for him to do it.

Raudhah: How long was it that his behaviour came back to normal?

Sofia: About seven to ten days. It was improving gradually. I noticed that there is change.

Sofia seems to be more selective of the type of digital play which Saad engages in.

The negative behaviour-altering experience of a particular video game does not result in a total ban of digital play for Saad. He continues to enjoy playing computer games and video games which Sofia deems acceptable.

#### ***4.2.2.7 Losing interest in toys***

Erina: He used to play with toys but he doesn't anymore. For the past one year. These things (digital modes) are taking over toys.

Erina expressed her dismay at the replacement of digital play over playing with toys. She seems concerned that her son does not want to play with toys anymore. However, she also seems to be resigned about it when she said, "I don't like it. But sometimes you just give in". Nevertheless, she said that she tries to limit Emran's playing time with digital modes.

While there seem to be no mention of time limit to other types of play, most mothers are apprehensive of digital play which they see as a new type of play. However, they seem more in favour of their children engaging in digital play when it has educational objectives. In general, despite their apprehension, most mothers allow the children to

spend a limited time on digital play. They also ensure that the children engage in other types of play such as playing with toys, pretend play and active play.

### **4.3 Comparing learning experiences in native country and Canada**

During the interview, the immigrant mothers were asked about their experiences of learning in their native country when they were at their children's age. Most of the mothers stated that their learning experiences were very different from those of their children because they experienced rote-learning while their children experience play-based learning in Canada. They were also asked, "If you were given a choice between two public schools: one that adopts the rote-learning method and the other that adopts play-based learning, which one would you prefer?" This section analyses the mothers' preferences of learning approach based on their experiences and those of their children.

Although rote-learning and play-based learning approaches are presented in this chapter as dichotomous alternatives, these positions have been discussed in Chapter 2 as points on a continuum. Rote-learning approach utilises mainly passive or receptive learning activities (Kennedy, 2010). As illustrated in *Figure 2.6* (p. 26), play-based learning may also include activities which may be termed as 'work/non-play'. Kember (2000) suggests that learning approaches are better presented as a continuum rather than dichotomy based on overlapping characteristics. However, the objective of a dichotomous presentation of findings is to highlight the reasons that immigrant parents may have in their reluctance or struggle to embrace play-based learning approach which is implemented in their children's school curriculum.

#### **4.3.1 Preference for Rote-Learning Approach**

Out of the nineteen mothers interviewed, three of them firmly stated that they prefer the rote-learning approach. Badia, Iffah and Ojala supported their preference for rote-learning with reasons based on their experiences. Erina, however, prefers to have a mixture of both approaches, but with an inclination towards rote-learning.

Badia was certain with her preference. She said, "Definitely I will prefer that they will sit, memorize and do. They should do more in school". Her family moved to Canada less

than a year ago. Other than Baar, she has two older children aged ten and twelve. Badia shared that her children's Canadian teachers commented that her older children are 'very good' in mathematics. She elaborated, "I would say that this credit is going to our system (native country). Because there they were used to do more, more practice, and because of this, their maths is good compared to other Canadians or other students studying in that class". She had earlier on in the interview highlighted the positive aspects of learning in her native country which, according to her, resulted in the students being better at mathematics and memorization, as well as having better handwriting.

When asked if learning in her native country was stressful, Badia replied that it depends on the child. She said, "It depends. For example, if the child is brilliant, it is not stressful. If he is dull, or not paying attention, definitely stressful for the student". While Badia acknowledges that the learning approach in her country can be stressful for some students, she recalled that she enjoyed school. Her positive schooling experience could be a contributing factor to her preference for rote-learning, despite the acknowledgement that it could be a stressful approach for other students.

It is interesting to note that while Badia is firm in her preference for rote-learning, she also mentioned the positive aspects of the learning approach in Canada.

Badia:           The other thing is that here, students can answer better. In my native country, no. I think they are more respectful or they are scared, I don't know. But here, they are more free with the teachers compared to my native country. It is good for their confidence, for personality-grooming as well. If they are scared all the time, may be they have some questions in their mind, as they are scared, they will not ask the question. The question will remain in their mind. But (in Canada) they have a chance to talk to the teacher. That is good.

Badia applauded the open communication that children have with their teachers in Canada. She deduced that the open communication will prevent the children from being confounded with fear when they have questions to ask the teacher. Also, Badia acknowledged that better communication and child-teacher relationships result in children being more confident and articulate.

Raudhah:       What are the experiences of your child at school?

Badia: Very happy. He said 'Mama, there isn't anything to study. We are playing all the time'. When the child plays, definitely he will be happy.

Badia: He's learning, he's learning by playing. I think so. That's why he loves going to school.

Raudhah: What do you think of the way your child learns at school?

Badia: The thing that I am pointing here is that here, the students are not memorization. Whatever they are doing here, they are doing practice, and the next day they have test. This thing and feedback from teachers, doing something at home and showing the next day to teacher, so this exchange of information. So, from this way, I think they are learning more.

Badia also acknowledged that the play-based learning approach in Canada makes school fun and enjoyable for the children. It is interesting to note here that while Badia prefers the memorization method of learning in her native country, it seems contradictory when she stated children in Canada "are learning more" through play-based approach.

Another aspect of the Canadian system that Badia appreciates is that there is more than one teacher in a class.

Badia: One more difference. In my time, one teacher in one class. Here, more than two teachers at a time in the class. So, they are standing, one is there, the other one is there. That is good, very good, which I like. The children are listening to the teacher because they know that six eyes are watching.

However, Badia's reason for liking the lower teacher-child ratio is not because more attention can be given to each child, but rather that more teachers watching the children will make the children listen more attentively to the teacher. Hence, this suggests that Badia places a lot of importance in listening to the teacher in her child's learning.

As mentioned earlier, Badia acknowledged that Baar is 'learning by playing' at school. She also illustrated how Baar learns through play at home.

Badia: Supposed one thing. He has five, six cars. Supposed he park different cars at different places and one car was here. He asked me “Mama, how does this car go from here while there are so many cars?” “Ok, you should tell me” “Ok, move this one a bit behind, this one move, then, this car can pass from here.” He has collection of different types of cars. Different games. Sometimes accident. Sometimes wrong parking, big vehicle is coming and taking the wrong parking car. Imaginary he’s thinking what is going on. Whatever he is observing from his surrounding, he is used to do at home. He knows more than me in traffic rules. This is sign board. This sign board is saying this.

Through her narration of Baar creating a situational problem with his toys and then demonstrating problem-solving in his play, it appears that Badia acknowledges that learning takes place during play. Despite this, she insisted that she would have preferred her son to experience the rote-learning approach that she had experienced in her native country.

Similar to Badia, Iffah replied that she prefers rote-learning approach to play-based approach. She stated her reasons, “because I want my son to be smart. I want him to go to school very well because education is very, very important”. It appears that Iffah equates rote-learning to a more effective education approach which better supports children’s cognitive development.

Raudhah: How do you find learning there?

Iffah: It was stressful.

While Iffah acknowledges that learning was stressful in her native country, she still prefers the learning approach in her native country.

Iffah: In my native country, because it’s hard way, kids are smarter than here. Because here they find things easily. Back home, they don’t find things easily. So to my opinion, back home the kids are smarter than this country. This country, they are way, way behind. Back home, they are way ahead than this country (Canada) ..... But back home, they are very, very smart. The teachers (in Canada) say they are too little to learn. They have to take things easy. Back home, the education is better than here. In terms of financial, here is better. Here they have all the



accessories, in terms of education. But back home, there is no money and those kind of stuff. But in term of education, back home is better than Canada. Kids are very smart.

In the interview, Iffah repeatedly mentioned the word “smart” to describe the children in her native country. She also perceives the education in her native country as “better” than the education in Canada, perhaps inferring that the education in her country is better for the children’s cognitive development based on her repeated emphasis of “smarter” children.

Raudhah: What do you think of the way your child learns in school?

Iffah: It’s not enough. Here, they tell, because they are too little to be learning.

Iffah does not seem to agree with Canadian school’s approach to learning stating the reasons as the expectations on children’s learning are too low and children’s learning potentials are not maximised.

Likewise to Badia’s and Iffah’s preference to rote-learning, Ojala voiced the same preference when asked if she was given a choice between rote-learning and play-based learning for her child. She said, “The one with more studying. The problem with playing at the beginning of their age, they can’t accept studying later on when they are. They get used to, they don’t have homework. So, they will relax. And sometimes they can’t study more”. Ojala is concerned that play-based learning will not prepare her child, Omera for studying at a later stage of school.

Other than Omera, Ojala has four other children with the oldest aged 21 years old. Perhaps her apprehension of play-based learning stems from her observation of her older children’s peers:

Ojala: When you see student from other countries, for example, in Maths, they don’t take (learn) anything new, because they take in their countries. You can see the differences (between students who grew up from other countries and grew up in Canada). They can tell you that they are exceeded.

Ojala made a comparison between students who grew up in Canada and students who came to study in Canada at a much later age, and she concluded that the foreign-

educated students seemed to be ahead in their knowledge and skills compared to the students who went through the Canadian education system from a younger age. She explained that she is not against playing at school but she is unhappy that the playing time is at the expense of teaching time.

Ojala: They are not teaching the children, mainly playing. The time is not spending for teaching. I don't mind they play and make craft and do many things, but does not affect the teaching. In Ottawa, I feel that the curriculum, the system here is weak.

Ojala seems to perceive that there is insufficient learning in school. According to her, the time for teaching was spent mostly on playing, hence affecting children's learning. Thus, she seems to perceive that there is a dichotomy between playing and learning. Ojala contrasted this with her learning experience in her native country.

Raudhah: How was school like?

Ojala: Education in my native country is very strong. In everything. All the subjects.

Although Ojala has high regard for the education in her native country, she recalled that it was stressful. She also attributed the strict teachers and punishment as a cause of unhappiness at school.

Raudhah: How do you feel going to school?

Ojala: Sometimes happy, sometimes, no. There is a lot of stress. Because they are strict and they don't talk to us like friendly. They are teachers and we are students. I see my kids, they can talk to the teacher, express themselves. In our days, we can't do that.

Raudhah: Do the students get punishment?

Ojala: Yelling at us. Hitting. Some of the teachers, not all the teachers. Because of this, we are not happy.

When Ojala said that playing time is taking too much of teaching time at school, it seems that she views playing and learning as two separate activities. Yet, she also acknowledges that learning takes place when her child is playing in school.

Ojala: Definitely she (the teacher) put learning (in play). I didn't attend her class but I think she do that. May be I don't have example for that.

This seems to demonstrate a dissonance in her view on learning through play at school.

While Badia, Iffah and Ojala are very firm on their preference for rote-learning, Erina stated that she would prefer to have a mixture of rote-learning and play-based learning. However, she said that she is more inclined towards the rote-learning approach.

Erina recognizes the benefits of play-based approach but she perceives that there is too much playing at school.

Erina: I think play-based learning can be very effective but I think it should be a mixture of play and serious academic. I find it is more play. And the academics sort of builds in slowly, it is a slow pace. I think they should have a mixture of both.

Erina also voiced her unhappiness with her son's learning in school. She feels that the school's expectations of her child are too low, and her child is capable of learning so much more.

Erina: For me, I think it's slow. I think they're not tapping more into the potential.

Erina: The pace at which they go in the school is too slow for me. That's why I am teaching. If they were where they are supposed to be, and they are bringing home homework, I wouldn't be teaching him my own curriculum, just helping him go along.

Similar to Iffah, Erina views the school curriculum as not maximizing her son's potential in learning. Thus, she teaches him daily after school.

Erina: Every day after school, we do homework. He calls it homework. Home homework. He hardly bring homework (from school).

When asked about her learning experiences as a young child, Erina recalled that there was no playing during lessons in her native country. She lamented that with the rote-learning approach adopted at her school, it was just memorization without understanding. Therefore, she did not understand the concepts or underlying principles in her learning.

Erina: Let me start with the differences. Even with formal education (kindergarten) that I received. The difference is learning than playing. They did not inculcate playing in your learning. When you're in the classroom, it's like  $1 + 1$ ,  $2 \times 2$ . Like academics. At that very early age. You only get to play when you're in recess. Compared to them, they play in their classroom. They use play to teach them. That's the major difference. Here, with early learning, they emphasis more on playing to teach. But over there, early learning is more academics. Memorize. Rote-learning. By the time you finish kindergarten, you can recite the times table from two to twelve. The rote-learning, you don't understand the principles, you just learn. For a long time I didn't know how you get  $8 \times 8$ , I just know it by memorization.

It is interesting to note that while she acknowledges the shortcomings of the rote-learning approach she experienced, she teaches her son, Emran, at home using the rote-learning approach. She said "I teach him from how I learnt it. I remember how I learnt it".

#### **4.3.2 Preference for Play-based Learning Approach**

Other than Badia, Iffah, Ojala, and Erina, the remaining immigrant mothers stated that if they were given a choice between rote-learning and play-based learning for their children, they would have chosen play-based learning.

Naba shared her stressful learning experiences in her native country.

Raudhah: How do you feel going to school?

Naba: Scared.

Raudhah: Why were you scared?

Naba: Because sometimes the teacher, when any student don't know what this letter, the teacher said 'why you don't know? Clap with foot' (stamp with

your feet). Translated by daughter (If you know, clap with your hands, if you don't know, clap with your feet- Her daughter demonstrated with stamping of feet). When the student do this (stamp the feet), all the students became laughing. Because this is not a good student, this is lazy.

Raudhah: Any punishment?

Naba: When I was in school, yes. Every day, hitting. If you don't read good or don't make homework, the teacher hit you with a stick.

Raudhah: Is that why you were scared?

Naba: Yes.

Possibly due to their negative experiences such as the one shared by Naba, the immigrant mothers appreciate the different approach to learning that their children are experiencing in Canada. Ghaliyah and Haleema highlighted the importance of "loving school" in their children's learning experiences.

Ghaliyah: We were very tired of learning (rote-learning). We used to hate school. They love school (here).

Haleema: Because that way (play-based learning) they will love school, not hate it. That way they can be more creative.

In addition, the immigrant mothers also recognize other positive aspects of the learning approach that their children experience in Canada as illustrated by Leen.

Leen: I prefer their way (Play-based learning). I found their way of learning much, much better. We forgot everything coz we just learn by heart (through memorization). They touch everything, they see, they know why, why the spring, why the autumn, what's going on. They go to museums. For example, if their lesson is about a fish, the teacher bring a fish to the classroom. All their learning is experimental. It's very much better. And they use computers. So many things.

Other than comparing their own learning experiences to those of their children, their children's attitude towards the different approaches is also a possible factor in the mothers' preference for play-based learning. For example, Parisa noted her child's different attitude towards learning between the regular school which adopts the play-

based learning approach and the weekend language school which adopts the rote-learning approach.

Parisa: The Canadian, they do fun for the kids. Not sit them on the table and read, read, read. When the kids go to Weekend School, if you let them sit on the chair write, write, write, write, read, read, read, read, kids will be bored you know. We need to do something the same the Canadians do for them. The kids say 'No fun here'. Not doing activity, not doing anything for him, one doesn't like it'.

Although most immigrant mothers stated their preference for the play-based learning approach at school, some mothers consider it inadequate and try to compensate by teaching their children at home.

Raudhah: Does your child also learn at home?

Kamilah: Yes. I don't think she will learn anything if I don't teach her. I think she's able to read.

Raudhah: Why do you need to teach her?

Kamilah: I don't trust the school 100%. I can't rely just on the school.

While Kamilah stated in the interview, "I know they are learning by playing", she also expressed her doubts on the effectiveness of the learning that takes place in school. This concern is also echoed by Cala when she said that the learning at school "is not enough".

Cala: When she's small, I choose with playing.

Cala: In school, most of time, she playing. She learning. Spoken one she learnt by playing. Written one, vocabulary, the spelling, that was somehow, we asked her to sit and memorize those things. We give some extra work.

Cala recognizes that learning through play is more appropriate for her daughter's age, but she attributes only a specific learning aspect that takes place during play, which is 'the spoken one'. Probably she perceives play as an effective medium only for improving communication skills. Thus, she insists on rote-learning approach for other aspects of learning.

Similarly, Rabia acknowledges that her son, Rafee 'learns a lot' by playing. Nevertheless, she expressed her unhappiness that Rafee does not have any homework to do at home.

Raudhah: You were saying that you are not o.k. with him not having homework. Why is that?

Rabia: May be my old-fashioned learning, we have to write and I have to have a book. A special book for me, and on it my name. From the beginning to the end, the first letter and the end letter.

Raudhah: Do you feel there's something lacking in his learning if he doesn't have homework?

Rabia: By homework, it's like feedback. It's like a feedback with what you learn for the day. May be because I said in my field, I have educational field. Everything has to have a feedback. I learn today the letter A, so I have to practise to make sure that I understand this letter and I memorize it. But sometimes, not all children the same stage of mind, of accepting learning. They are different.

Raudhah: Is it like review or revision?

Rabia: Yes.

Rabia recalled that she used to bring home a book for homework for her to practise writing letters. To her, homework is a form of review or revision. Perhaps she wanted her child to have homework to reinforce his learning.

Nevertheless, it seems contradictory that despite acknowledging play as the best medium for learning, some mothers engage in rote-learning to teach their children at home.

Maali expressed her satisfaction with the play-based approach adopted as school as she described it as "wonderful". However, she gets her child, Madiha, to practise her writing skills by copying, perhaps without understanding.

Maali: I like to put them down (get her children to study) and give them write anything. Even if I take the bus flyer. Anything. Copy this. Try to copy.

Similarly, Qailah described her child's teacher who teaches through play as "amazing". However, Qailah also adopts rote-learning when she teaches her child at home.

Qailah: I ask him on the weekend to write his book. He doesn't want. He sits. 'You are not going to play outside until you finish'. I (come) back after half an hour or 45 minutes, he just wrote the title. He doesn't want to write. I told him 'Ok, you're not going to play outside now, stay in your room, and play in your room. You don't want to write, ok, it's up to you. You can play in your room'. He start crying and screaming 'You're a bad mommy, I don't like you'. After that, when he saw his uncle, his sister, his brothers outside and he heard their voices, he starts write, write, write until he's done.

It is possible that despite the mothers' preference for play-based learning at school, they may consider it insufficient and needs to be compensated with some rote-learning. Another possibility for adopting the rote-learning approach at home could be that rote-learning is the only approach they know and can employ to support their children's cognitive development. This lack of knowledge of play-based approach is expressed by Ghaliyah.

Ghaliyah: I wish I can teach the kids the way they teach the kids here. I like them to love the things they learn. They can take the things without hating. I like that they get the information and they are happy.

While these mothers stated their preference for play-based learning at school, there are still some unaddressed concerns such as apprehension that the play-based learning at school is inadequate and hence needs to be compensated with rote-learning at home.

#### **4.4 Relationship between play and learning**

One of the interview questions that I asked is "Do you think play helps your child learn? If so, how?" The objective of the question is to understand the mothers' perspectives on the relationship between play and learning.

Most of the immigrant mothers readily illustrated academic learning that takes place in educational play. They provided examples of educational games that help their children learn basic concepts in mathematics, language and science.



Ojala: With the LeapPad, yes. Because I bought for her one for science and one for language. Yes, so, she can play with it. It is educational. (LeapPad is a tablet computer designed for children)

Erina: We play the word card games that teaches him spelling. So, you show him the picture, based on the pronunciation, he will try to spell it. He loves it. He's getting better with that. Recognizing the words, it teaches you the spelling and phonetics.

Iffah: There is a activity something like learning websites, it's fun, you are learning at the same time having fun.

Leen: Like some games are educational games

Badia, on the other hand, highlighted the independent learning that takes place in digital play.

Badia: For example, many things he learn through laptop that I don't know. 'Mama, don't you know, you should do this, you should do that'. My husband said 'He knows better than you (Badia)'. That means he learns by himself.

Haleema, Naba, and Sofia provided examples of how building blocks hone their children's creativity.

Haleema: Yes. I think like blocks, she learns how to create shapes.

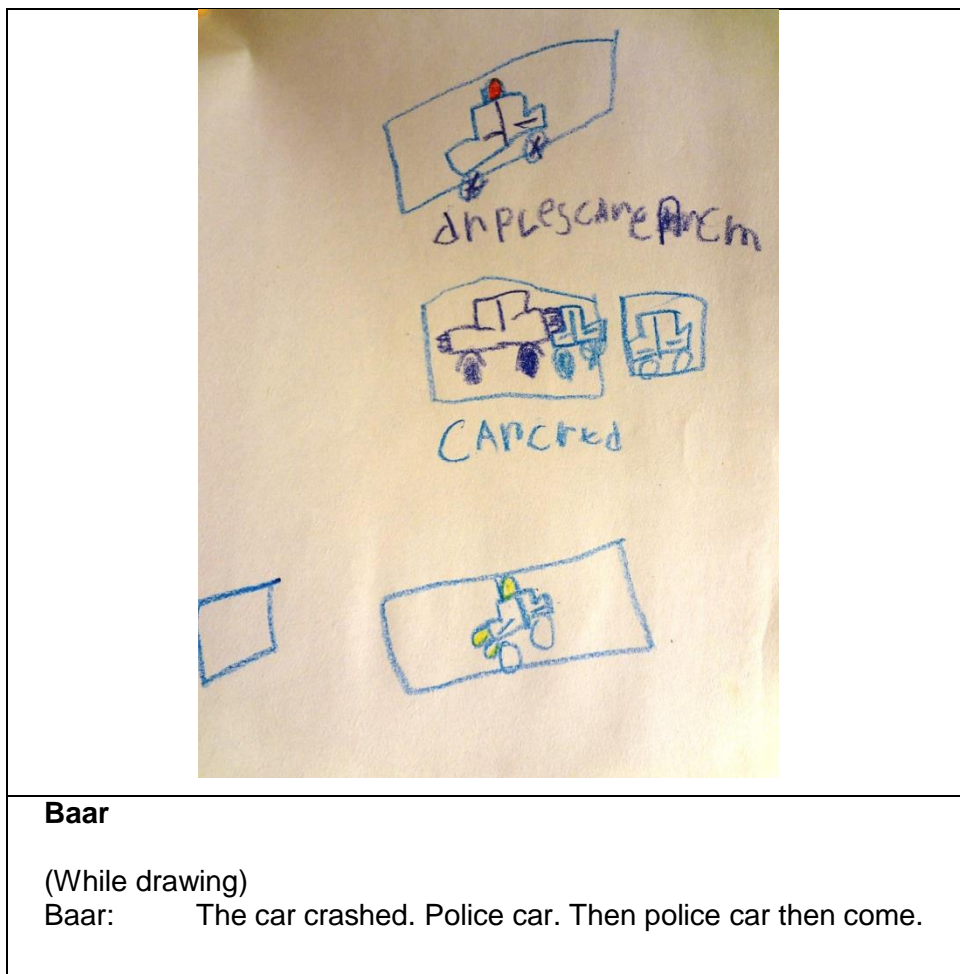
Naba: He takes the blocks that fit each other and colours that match.

In addition, Qailah and Badia shared how their children applied their existing knowledge to play such as re-enacting what they know or observe in real life situations.

Qailah: He plays with dinosaurs, he knows the names of the dinosaurs he plays with. He knows this dinosaurs can eat the other one because he is a meat-eater. When he plays with the one who has the longest neck, he knows that one, he can't eat meat, so he just go to the trees and try to eat the leaves. So, I think it's kind of learning.

Baida: Sometimes accident. Sometimes wrong parking, big vehicle is coming and taking the wrong parking car. Imaginary he's thinking what is going on. Whatever he is observing from his surrounding, he is used to do at home.

Baar also illustrated an accident scene in his drawing in *Figure 4.1*.



*Figure 4.1* Baar's illustration of an imaginary car accident

Qailah shared how her son gains new knowledge when he plays with digital play, such as knowing names of countries.

Qailah: Now he knows the countries because he tries to learn the car race (video game).

On the other hand, Cala and Faiza illustrated how their children learn game strategies and skills when playing.

Cala: She learns how to strategize and how to win, how to dominate.

Faiza: When he knows how to play, that is learning. When he knows how to play soccer, that is learning how to play.

Ghaliyah and Kamilah also shared how their children learn other people's culture and understand their own culture better through play.

Ghaliyah: This happens when they are playing with someone, they are discussing something with each other. Sometimes different culture.

Kamilah: She tries to play doing the same thing I am doing. To imitate me. By this way, I think she's learning.

Jihan, on the other hand, seems to regard play and learning as two separate activities in which one benefits the other. She views play as a relaxing time that can assist learning. She said, "The play is very important to them. Like to oxygen their brain".

According to the immigrant mothers, the relationship between play and learning includes learning academic concepts, acquiring independence in learning, enhancing creativity, applying existing knowledge to play, gaining new knowledge, learning game strategies, and learning about culture. Another perspective portrays a rather indirect relationship between play and learning in which play is a form of relaxation so that learning can take place better. This perspective, however, seems to position play and learning as two separate activities.

There are also some types of play that some mothers indicated as having no learning value. Usually, these include digital play that does not have specific educational objectives. Erina, Haleema, Naba, and Sofia mentioned the various digital modes such as video games, computer games, iPad (tablet computer) games, and non-educational websites are "just for fun". Similarly, Ojala regarded toys for pretend play such as Barbie dolls and Kitchen Set (household playset), are "just for fun" with no learning value.

Out of the nineteen immigrant mothers interviewed, only Parisa responded that her daughter is not learning when playing.

Raudhah: Do you think play helps your child learn? If so, how?

Parisa: She didn't ask 'What's that and what's that'. She just playing and that's it. Some kids ask. But my daughter, No. She doesn't care.

Raudhah: Do you think she's not learning?

Parisa: No. She just wants to play.

Raudhah: What about when she's watching TV, is she learning something?

Parisa: No, she learns. Sometimes she tells me the movie she watching.

It is interesting to note that while Parisa agreed that learning can take place during playing, she then stated that her daughter, Parvina is not learning when playing. She explained that this is because Parvina does not ask questions. Hence, she perceives Parvina as not gaining new knowledge when playing. I asked about watching television because in the earlier part of her responses, Parisa mentioned that Parvina prefers watching television to playing. Parisa seems more in favour of the relationship between watching television and learning rather than the relationship between play and learning. Perhaps it is because she sees Parvina's sharing of the movie watched as evidence of learning.

Thus, it is possible that Parisa does not think that learning takes place when Parvina is playing because she does not see any evidence of learning. This is apparent when she said that learning takes place when Parvina watches television because Parvina talks to her about it, whereas Parvina does not engage in conversation with her about what she is playing.

Parisa's view that Parvina is not learning when playing seems to contradict her earlier response of her preference for play-based learning. However, this contradiction could stem from her interpretation that only a certain type of play contributes to learning. Perhaps, her interpretation of play-based learning at school refers to the fun, playful activities or structured play that has specific learning objectives while the play that she refers to that is not related to learning is free and unstructured play which Parvina engages in at home.

## 4.5 Communication with school

Although communication between home and school was not part of the interview questions, it was discussed by some mothers. Most of the sharing implied a lack in effective communication between home and school. This is evident when Leen said, "...Sometimes in English school, I don't know what they are doing in English school". Similarly, Ghaliyah shared her frustration of not knowing how to support her child's learning at home. In another example, Sofia lamented that she disagreed with how the school handled Saad's limited social interaction by separating Saad and his good friend during play. However, despite making an attempt to talk to the teacher about it, she had to concede that the teacher has more authority in school.

However, there is evidence of communication from school to home. Qailah shared that Qadi's teacher sends weekly emails to parents informing them of the activities in class. Qailah then capitalized this information to initiate conversation with Qadi about school. It is noteworthy to highlight that while this communication is beneficial, it is a one-way communication.

## 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers on play and learning. The findings also surfaced mothers' experiences and perspectives on communication between home and school. In the section on mothers' perspectives on play, several comparisons were made between the play experiences of the mothers in their native country and the play experiences of their children in Canada. It can be concluded from these findings that when there is a change in cultural settings, it can result in changes in affordances of play. As a result, some of the affordances of play that are negatively affected include fewer opportunities to accommodate differences between playmates, loss of independence for outdoor play, and less motivation for creating toys for play. Another finding from this study is that there are various concerns with regard to digital play, which can be considered as a new type of play to most of the immigrant mothers. However, most mothers seem to be more receptive of digital play when it is perceived to be of educational value.

Some mothers prefer their children to experience rote-learning at school. One of the reasons given is that play-based learning is not maximising their children's potential in

cognitive development. Nevertheless, most mothers prefer the play-based learning approach and acknowledge its benefits. It should also be noted that despite the preference for play-based learning at school, some mothers view it as inadequate in preparing children for future education, therefore some mothers teach their children at home using the rote-learning approach. In summary, it can be concluded that while most immigrant mothers recognize the benefits of the play-based learning approach at school, there are still concerns about the effectiveness of this approach.

The next chapter addresses the remaining three subsidiary research questions in which children's experiences and perspectives on play, learning, and the relationship between play and learning are analysed.

## **Chapter 5**

# **Children's experiences and perspectives of play, learning, and relationship between play and learning**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to answer the last three subsidiary research questions which are:

- 1) What are the experiences and perspectives of children on play at home and school?
- 2) What are the experiences and perspectives of children on learning at home and school?
- 3) What are the perspectives of children on the relationship between play and learning?

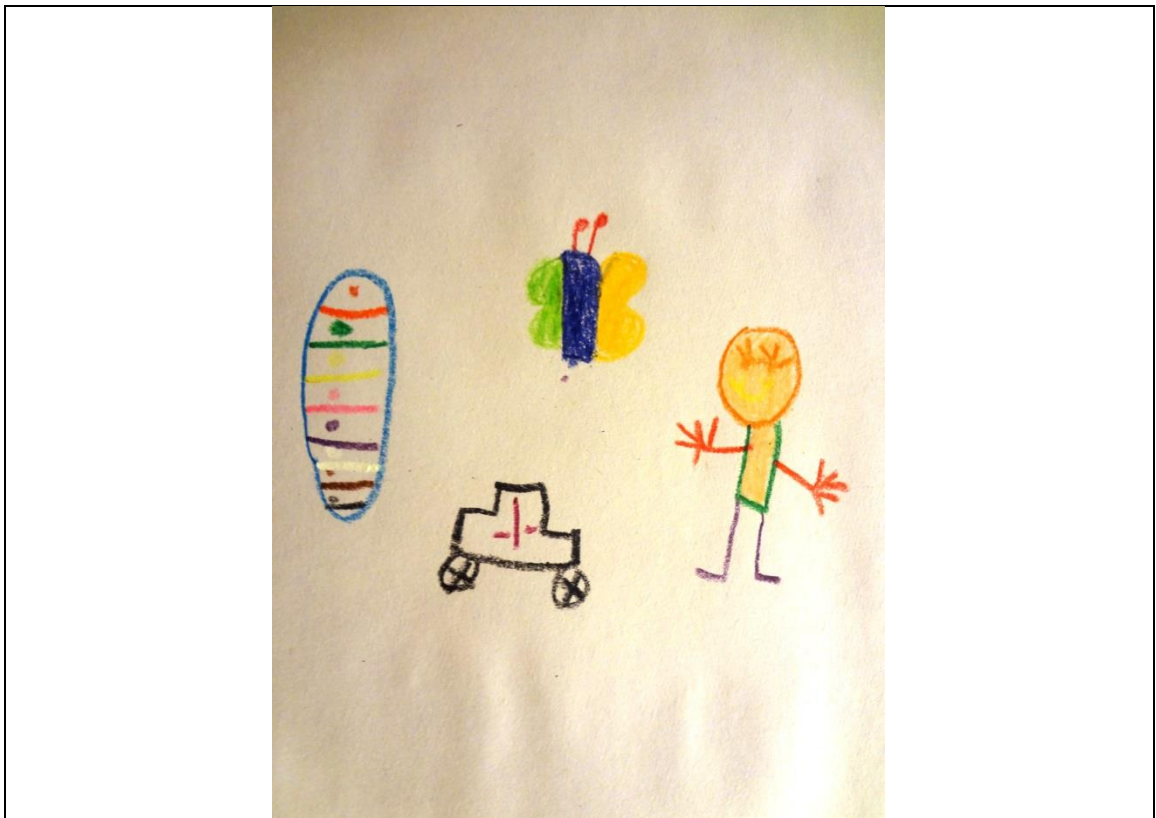
This chapter explores children's experiences and perspectives of play, learning, and the relationship between play and learning. It begins with a section on what children's drawing reveals in relation to play. This section is based on an analysis of children's drawing, conversations during drawing, children's interview transcripts and mothers' interview transcripts. The next section examines children's responses on challenges that they face in play. The subsequent section discusses children's preferences between two approaches to learning: play-based learning and rote-learning. The final section investigates children's perspectives on the relationship between play and learning. The chapter concludes with an overview of the findings.

### **5.2 Children's drawings: What they reveal about play**

At the end of the interview, the children were asked if they want to draw something for the interviewer. When the children were drawing, the interviewer asked the children questions about the drawing. The objective of the conversation about the children's drawing is to contribute to a better understanding of their meaning-making through drawing (Cox, 2005). The transcripts from the interviews with the mothers and children are also linked to the drawing to provide a more comprehensive interpretation and understanding of the drawings. Given that most children in the study stated play as their favourite activity, it is perhaps not surprising that most of the drawings are connected to play. From the interpretations through the conversation during the

drawing activity and the interview excerpts, the drawings were categorised into five themes: 1) favourite play objects; 2) favourite play activities; 3) children's wants in relation to play; 4) important playmates; and 5) drawing as a form of play.

### 5.2.1 Favourite play objects



#### **Chanda**

(Interview excerpts)

Raudhah: What kind of play do you like at home?

Chanda: Doll

Chanda: I only one doll.

Raudhah: Can you show me?

(Chanda brought Barbie doll)

Raudhah: What's her name?

Chanda: Dollie

(Conversation during drawing)

Chanda: I like butterfly. I like cars. I like eggs.

(Child also drew Dollie, her favourite doll)





**Emran**

(Interview excerpts)

Raudhah: Which one do you prefer? Playing at home or school?

Emran: At home.

Raudhah: Why?

Emran: Because I like playing my games

Raudhah: What games?

Emran: Like the DS and something

Raudhah: Is it your favourite game?

Emran: The Wii and PSP are my favourite games

Raudhah: What game is it called?

Emran: The Wii, I have two favourite games on the Wii. Naruto Revolution II, Naruto Revolution III.

(Conversation during drawing)

Raudhah: Is this a bird?

Emran: It's not actually real. It's like some video games.

Raudhah: What's this?

Emran: Naruto

*Figure 5.1* Drawings by Chanda and Emran

During the interview, the children were asked about their favourite play activities.

Chanda shared that she likes to play with her Barbie doll whilst Emran demonstrated strong interest in digital games. During the drawing activity, Chanda drew her favourite toy, Dollie, a Barbie doll, whilst Emran drew his favourite character, Naruto, a character in a Wii game (Wii is a digital medium for digital games). The conversation during the

drawing activity clarified what the children were drawing and the excerpts from the interviews identified and reinforced the status of the objects drawn as favourite play things.

### 5.2.2 Favourite play activity



#### **Madiha**

(Interview excerpts)

Raudhah: What's your favorite game?

Madiha: Play in the kitchen. Not a real kitchen. Two kitchens.

(Conversation during drawing)

Raudhah: Who is that?

Madiha: Me

Madiha: That's a puzzle

Raudhah: Do you like to play with puzzles?

Madiha: Yeah

Madiha: Me playing in the kitchen

Madiha: Draw me first

Raudhah: So, that's you

Madiha: Yeah



**Husna**

(Interview excerpts)

Raudhah: How does your child play at home?

Haleema (Husna's mother):

She likes to jump. She jumps all the time.

(Interview excerpts)

Raudhah: What is the best thing about school?

Husna: Going outside.

Raudhah: What do you do outside?

Husna: I play. I play with my friends.

(Conversation during drawing)

Raudhah: What are you drawing?

Husna: Me

Raudhah: In this picture, where are you?

Husna: I'm going to draw a park.

Raudhah: Who's that on the swing?

Husna: The other kids.

Raudhah: What do you like to play in the park?

Husna: I like to play on the swing.



**Jasmin**

(Conversation during drawing)

Raudhah: Who is that?

Jasmin: Me

Raudhah: Where's this place?

Jasmin: In the school

Raudhah: Is this in class or outdoors?

Jasmin: In class

Raudhah: Are you feeling happy or sad?

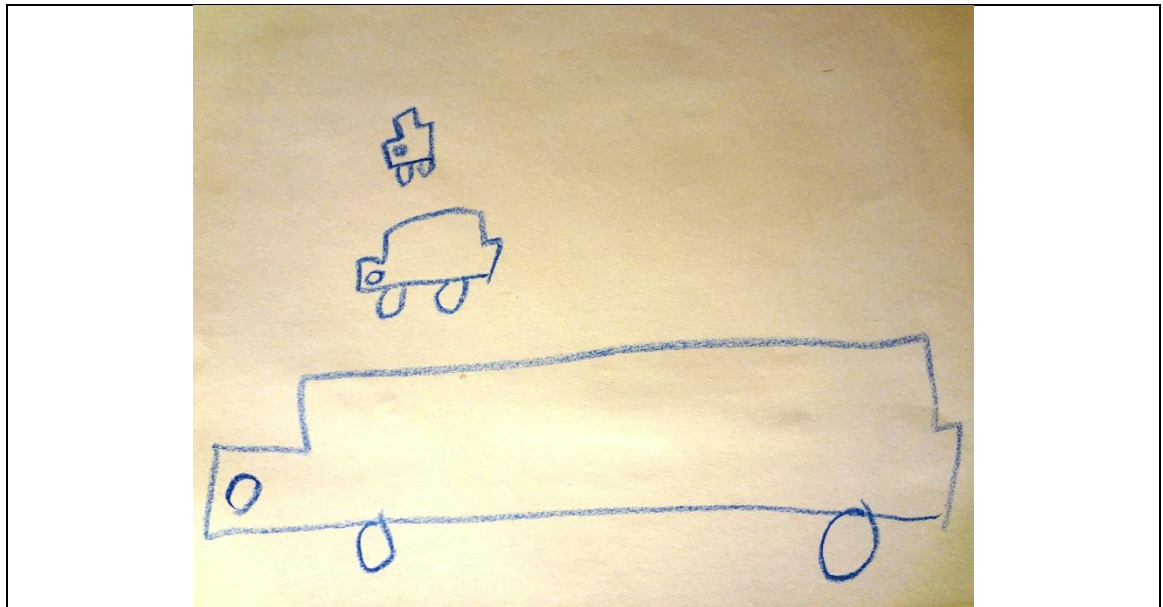
Jasmin: Happy

Raudhah: Why are you feeling happy?

Jasmin: I want to play with computer.

Raudhah: Can you play computer in school?

Jasmin: (Nodded)



**Qadi**

(Interview excerpts)

Raudhah: What is the best thing that you like to play?

Qadi: (paused) It's Xbox

Raudhah: You like X-box the best?

Qadi: Yeah

Raudhah: What do you play in Xbox?

Qadi: Cars, or Adventure

*Figure 5.2 Drawings by Madiha, Husna, Jasmin and Qadi*

When Madiha drew herself playing with puzzles, her mother remarked that she did not know Madiha likes to play with puzzles. She then asked Madiha and Madiha reaffirmed her liking for puzzles. Thus, through the drawing activity, Madiha's mother was able to discover Madiha's favourite type of play which she was not aware before. During the interview, Madiha mentioned that her favourite kind of play in school is playing at the kitchen area which she then drew during the drawing activity.

Husna's drawing is congruent with her mother's opinion during the interview. Husna's mother shared that Husna likes to engage in active play. This is further affirmed by Husna that she likes outdoor play at school. The sharing by both Husna's mother and herself seems to be illustrated in her drawing of herself at a park.

When Jasmin drew a picture of herself, the drawing itself does not seem to provide much detail about the idea that she was communicating. However, during the conversation about the drawing, Jasmin shared the hidden message behind the drawing which is that she was feeling happy because she was going to play with the computer at school. Hence, the conversation shed some light on her favourite play activity.

Likewise, it may initially appear that Qadi was just drawing a few cars. However, when his drawing is linked to his sharing during the interview, it is possible to imply that he was drawing his favourite play activity which is playing car games on the Xbox (a digital mode for games).

### 5.2.3 Children's wants in relation to play



#### Naqeeb

(Conversation during drawing)

Raudhah: Whose house is it?

Naqeeb: My house

Raudhah: Who's that?

Naqeeb: Me

Raudhah: And what are you playing?

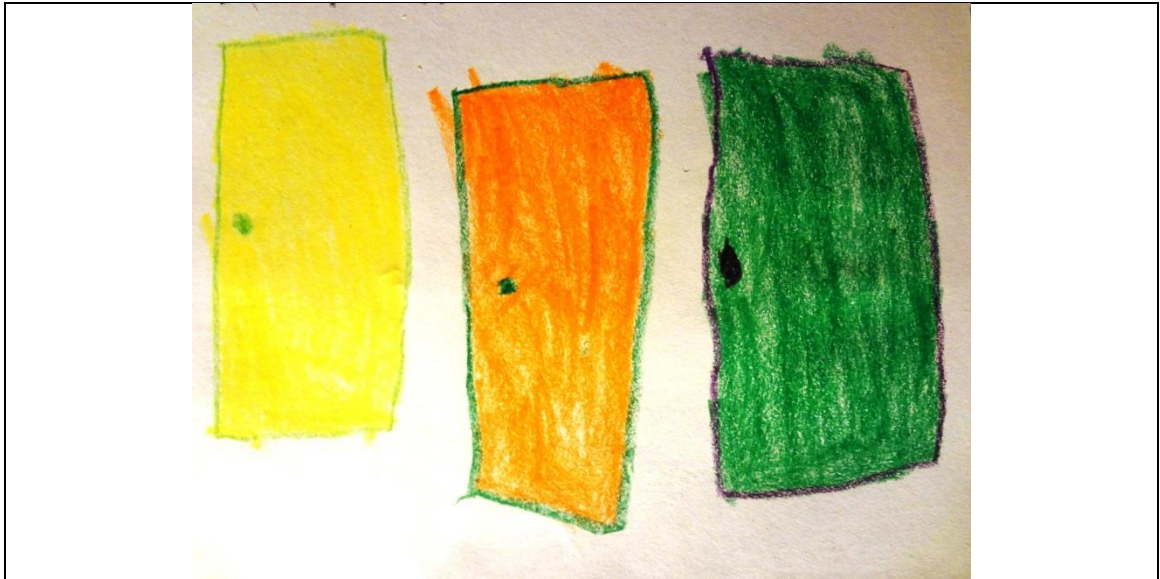
Naqeeb: Soccer

Raudhah: What's this?

Naqeeb: The net

Raudhah: Do you have a net outside?

Naqeeb: No, but I'm pretending.



**Rafee**

(Conversation during drawing)

Raudhah: What's that?

Rafee: A door

Raudhah: So, when you open the door, what is it?

Rafee: A room.

Raudhah: Whose room is it?

Rafee: Mine and my brother's room. We share it.

Raudhah: Is your favourite colour orange? (referring to the colour of the door)

Rafee: And green.

Raudhah: Do you play in your bedroom?

Rafee: No, I don't have toys in my bedroom. I want to put toys in my bedroom but my mom doesn't ....

Raudhah: So, you want to put toys in your bedroom, and did your mom say it's ok, or did she say 'No'?

Rafee: She said 'No'.

*Figure 5.3 Drawings by Naqeeb and Rafee*

Through his drawing, Naqeeb indicated his desire to have a net when he is playing soccer at his backyard. Thus, the drawing activity enabled him to virtually achieve what he wants in real life. On the other hand, it was only during the conversation that Rafee expressed his desire to have his toys in his bedroom, which seems to be represented by the bedroom door.

## 5.2.4 Important playmates



### Daliya

(Daliya drew her sister before herself)

(Conversation during drawing)

Raudhah: Who's that?

Daliya: That's my sister

Raudhah: And who's that? (referring to the second girl drawn)

Daliya: Me

Raudhah: Where is this place?

Daliya: (silence)

Raudhah: Is this a house or a school?

Daliya: A house

Raudhah: Whose house is it?

Daliya: My house





**Luna**

(Interview excerpts)

Raudhah: Who do you usually play with?

Luna: Mommy

(Conversation during drawing)

Luna: A house.

Raudhah: Whose house is this?

Luna: My house

Raudhah: Who's that?

Luna: Me

Raudhah: I see somebody outside.

Luna: Mommy

Raudhah: What is she doing outside the house?

Luna: Water the flowers

Raudhah: What's that?

Luna: It's raining

Raudhah: Where's your brother?

(Child drew the brother)

Raudhah: Where's daddy?

Luna: Still a baby

*Figure 5.4* Drawings by Daliya and Luna

It was rather surprising at first when Daliya stated that the girl whom she had drawn was her sister and not herself. Subsequently, she proceeded to draw herself. It seems to imply that her sister has an important role in her life. This is evident during the interview in which she shared that she plays with her sister, both at home and school. Thus, it appears that her sister is an important playmate to her. Similarly, Luna shared that she usually plays with her mother at home. Thus, in the drawing, she initially drew only herself and her mother. It was only after being asked where her brother and father were that she drew them.

### 5.2.5 Drawing as a form of play



#### Omera

(Interview excerpts)

Raudhah: Do you play in school?

Omera: Sometimes I colour. And sometimes we do some craft. Sometimes, not a lot of times.

Raudhah: When you're colouring, is that playing?

Omera: Yeah, sometimes we play with colour.

(Conversation during drawing)

Omera: I need yellow, and blue.

Raudhah: What are you going to do?

Omera: You're gonna see.  
 Raudhah: I see...  
 Omera: Green!  
 Omera: I'm going to put some blue and then some yellow  
 (Then, she reversed the order of the colours)

Omera: Not just with pink. Blue and yellow make green.  
 Let's try this (red) with this  
 Let's try the blue....  
 I'm going to try blue first and then red  
 Black with purple.

Omera: It's a beautiful rainbow! And the beautiful rocks. All different rocks.



**Saad**

(Conversation during drawing)

Saad: A sun  
 Saad: A house  
 Raudhah: Whose house is it?  
 Saad: Mine

Raudhah: Are you drawing something that you like to play?  
 Saad: No. Because I'm getting you to learn.  
 Saad: I will show you how to draw an egg.

*Figure 5.5* Drawings by Omera and Saad

When Omera was asked if she plays at school, she mentioned colouring. During the drawing activity, she illustrated how she played with colours when she added one colour to another. She then exclaimed that they were colourful and different (coloured) rocks. This seems to convey that Omera undertook the drawing activity as a form of creative play. Similarly, Saad utilised the drawing activity as pretend play in which he

seemed to be assuming the role of a teacher who was teaching me to draw. In these examples, the children seemed to have chosen to engage in the drawing activity as a form of play.

### **5.3 Play and its challenges for children**

When the children were asked “What is the best thing about school?” Fourteen of them immediately responded with the answer “play” or “playing”. Thus, it is clear that play is a dominant favourable activity in the children’s experiences at school. However, there are challenges that some children face in play at school. The three main challenges that surfaced from their responses are: 1) playmates; 2) language or communication problem; and 3) discrimination during play.

#### **5.3.1 Playmates**

When Chanda was asked about how she feels about going to school, she replied “happy and sad”. When probed on what made her sad in her school, she said that she did not like recess.

Raudhah: Is there anything you don’t like about school?

Chanda: Break (Recess)

Raudhah: You don’t like recess?

Chanda: No

Raudhah: What do you do during recess?

Chanda: Playing

Raudhah: You don’t like to play?

Chanda: No

Initially it seems odd that a child does not like school because she has to play during recess. However, subsequent responses revealed that she is unhappy about school because she has only one person to play with during recess. She said that she only plays with Baar because they speak the same language. Chanda and her family have just migrated to Canada less than a year ago, and hence it is possible that she is not very fluent in English. Her parents also mentioned during the interview that she has difficulty understanding the Canadian accent.

Raudhah: Why do you feel sad?  
 Chanda: .....  
 Raudhah: Because of friends?  
 Chanda: Yeah  
 Raudhah: Why? Are they not nice?  
 Chanda: I have one friend, Baar.  
 Raudhah: Why do you feel sad when you have Baar?  
 Chanda: .....  
 Raudhah: Or you want more friends?  
 Chanda: No more friends. Only Baar.  
 Raudhah: Is that why you feel sad? Because only one?  
 Chanda: Yeah

Although Chanda named Baar as the only one whom she plays with during recess, interestingly, during the interview with Baar, he did not name her as one of the friends he plays with. So, it is possible that Baar does not play with Chanda often and prefers to play with the friends whom he mentioned during the interview.

During recess, children usually engage in free play. They have the freedom to choose their own playmates and activities to engage in. For children who have difficulty in finding playmates, they may find this time particularly challenging and dreadful.

Raudhah: What is the best thing about school?  
 Chanda: Homework (clarified as classwork because she does not have any schoolwork to be brought home)

It is possible that she prefers classwork because it is usually structured and teacher-directed. In structured and teacher-directed activities, she would know exactly what to do. This is in contrast to not knowing how to find playmates during recess. Perhaps she feels lost when the children are left to their own initiatives during recess.

Another example of a child who seems to encounter some challenges in playmates issue is Daliya.

Raudhah: Do you like going to school?  
 Daliya: No  
 .....

Raudhah: What is it that you don't like about school?

Daliya: (Silence)

Raudhah: Do you like the friends?

Daliya: No

Raudhah: Do you have any friends in school?

Daliya: Yes

.....

Raudhah: Do you like the teachers?

Daliya: (Silence)

Raudhah: Are the teachers nice?

Daliya: Yes

Daliya seems very reserved and she often chose not to answer my questions. Prior to the interview, her mother has cautioned me that she usually does not like to communicate with people whom she hardly knows. I had attempted to play with her for a while before starting the interview. Although we had engaged in some communication during play, I did not get much response from her during the interview. From the brief responses I got from her, it seems that Daliya does not really like the friends she has in school. In contrast, she seems to find the teachers nice, though she did not answer my question when I asked her if she likes her teachers. It is possible that the playmate issue is a contributing factor to her not liking school.

Another child who responded on not liking school is Rafee. Initially, it seemed as though the cause of him not liking school is because he often gets time-out from his teacher, Mr. R.

Raudhah: Do you like school?

Rafee: No

Raudhah: Why?

Rafee: Because Mr. R. always.....he puts me in time-out.

However, his responses to probing questions revealed that he gets time-out due to issues concerning friends.

Raudhah: Why did he do that?

Rafee: Because I'm not good. Not good to people.

Raudhah: What did you do?

Rafee: Say mean stuff  
Raudhah: How do you feel when you're in time-out?  
Rafee: Bad  
Raudhah: Did you have stay for a long time?  
Rafee: No. Only 5 minutes.  
Raudhah: Did you get time-out only once or many times?  
Rafee: Many times.

When Rafee was asked about how he felt during the time-out, he said that he was angry. The initial assumption was that he was angry with his teacher for putting him on time-out. However, his answer was rather surprising that he was actually angry with another child.

Raudhah: Did you feel sad? Or angry?  
Rafee: Angry  
Raudhah: Angry with whom?  
Rafee: Because he doesn't understand what I say  
Raudhah: Who doesn't understand?  
Rafee: My friend.  
Raudhah: What did you say that he doesn't understand?  
Rafee: I said for him, be my friend, and he doesn't.

Thus, initially, it appeared as though the cause of Rafee not liking school was the time-outs that he gets in school. However, when he was probed with further questioning, he revealed that he has some issues with another child who doesn't want to be his friend. It is also possible that the child may not want to play with him despite his attempts at making friends with the child.

Chanda, Daliya and Rafee shared that they encounter challenges in making friends to play with. Some of the challenges that children face are having not many friends to play with, not liking friends in school, and being rejected by other children. This suggests that having playmate issues seem to cause unhappiness at school for some children. It is thus possible to deduce that playmates seem to be a significant contributing factor in determining if a child likes or enjoys his or her school experiences.

### 5.3.2 Communication problem

While Qadi did not mention having any communication problem with his friends, his mother, Qailah highlighted her worries about it.

Qailah: We meet a friend, he was in junior kindergarten. And he meet his friend in the park. He was so happy and excited because he met his friend. He just wanted to go and talk to him. His friend asked him a question; he started talking about something else. I told him in our native language 'Why did you do that?' (Qadi replied) 'I couldn't find the word to say, I couldn't find the word to answer'.

Qailah related that Qadi did not respond to his friend's question but instead, he deviated from the topic. He later explained to her that he did not know how to express himself in response to his friend's question. Qailah shared that they communicate in their native language at home. Thus, it is possible that Qadi may not have sufficient English vocabulary to express himself well such that he had to resort to deviating to another topic when questioned by his friend.

As mentioned in the subsection **5.2.1 Playmates**, Chanda shared that she has only one friend, Baar, to play with at school.

Raudhah: Why do you like to play with Baar?

Chanda: (Silence)

Raudhah: What language do you speak with Baar when you play?

Chanda: My native language

Raudhah: Is that why you like to play with Baar? That he can speak your native language?

Chanda: Yeah

Raudhah: But how about other friends? Can they speak your native language too?

Chanda: One friend. Baar.

When asked for the reason for her playing only with Baar, she did not respond. It is unclear if she did not respond because she did not understand the question or she was unable to express herself to answer the question. Given that she seems to have difficulty understanding some of the questions during the interview and expressing herself in her responses, further probing questions were on language. Her responses



seem to suggest that she has communication problems with her friends in school because she is unable to express herself well in English.

It appears that Qadi and Chanda have communication problem with their friends because of their lack of fluency in the English language. It is possible that communication problems may also lead to having problems making friends and finding playmates at school.

### **5.3.3 Discrimination**

During the interview, Erina related Emran's experience of being discriminated during play at school because of his ethnicity. Although he has shared such incident with her only once, it is possible that he may have experienced other instances of discrimination but did not share them with his mother.

Erina: He came home one day 'this person said I can't play with him because I'm brown and bald-headed'. It bothers me but I think he gets upset for the moment. I don't know if he is carrying it with him. He complained to me only once.

Erina shared that while Emran talks about his classmates, he consciously makes effort to choose friends who are of the same ethnicity or religious belief as him. She recalled that in the previous year of school, he befriended another child who is of the same ethnicity. However, in his current class, there are no other children of the same ethnicity. He then befriended another child who shares the same religious belief as him.

Raudhah: Does he have any friends?

Erina: He talks about his classmates. When he goes to school, he gravitates to friends of the same ethnicity or same religious belief. He's looking for someone to identify with.

During the interview with Emran, he mentioned Elyas as his favourite friend. When asked for the reason for Elyas being the person whom he likes to play with, he stated the reason as "because I can play with him". He then elaborated that Elyas shares the same religious belief as him. It is interesting to note that his first reason was that he 'can' play with Elyas. This suggests that he may perceive a higher possibility of

acceptance as a playmate from other children who have a similar identity to him. It is possible that this perception stems from his experience of being rejected and discriminated because of his ethnicity.

#### **5.3.4 Limited play opportunities**

When Omera was asked if there was anything that she does not like about school, she answered, “I don’t like to write my books because I need to take a long time. They play and I do my books”. Upon probing, it appears that her teacher planned free play activities after work-like activities, perhaps so that it will keep the children who complete their academic work early occupied. And perhaps it also gives more time for children who take a longer time to complete their required academic work. However, this situates play as a reward for completion of work. Children who take a longer time to complete their work may perceive it as a form of punishment to have their friends playing while they complete their work.

Despite play being the most favoured activity in school for most children, there are some problems that children face with regard to play. The findings of this study revealed four challenges faced by children. Some children face playmate issues which probably cause them not to like school or play time during recess. Other challenges are communication problems with friends and discrimination experiences. In addition, when play is situated as a reward for completion of work, some children may feel disadvantaged with limited play opportunities.

The next subsection discusses children’s perspectives on the two approaches that they experience – the play-based approach and the rote-learning approach.

### **5.4 Two learning models: rote-learning and rote-learning**

Most of the children in this study attend weekend language and religious school. According to some of the mothers interviewed, the weekend schools usually adopt the rote-learning approach. Hence, unlike the mothers who experienced only the rote-learning approach in their native country, most of the children experience both approaches: play-based learning at their regular school, and rote-learning at their weekend school. Some children prefer their weekend school while others prefer their regular school.

### 5.4.1 Preference for Weekend School

When Fahd was asked about what he learns in school, he was more eager to share about his learning at his weekend school than his regular school.

- Raudhah: What do you learn at school?  
Fahd: I learn... Can I talk about my weekend school?  
Raudhah: Sure.  
Fahd: I learn Quran and we play games, and for homework I get A+.  
Raudhah: Wow! Congratulations!  
Raudhah: What do you learn at your English school?  
Fahd: We play a lot of things and we learn, a big plusses, like a hundred plus one.  
Raudhah: Which one do you like more?  
Fahd: My weekend school.  
Raudhah: Why do you like your weekend school more?  
Fahd: Coz I love learning, and more of my friends are there, and I love the school.  
Raudhah: Do you learn more there?  
Fahd: Yeah.

Fahd's first response when asked for the reason for his preference for his weekend school is that he "loves learning". He also perceives that he learns more at his weekend school, compared to his regular school. Thus, it seems that Fahd relates learning more to his weekend school rather than his regular school, which probably explains his eagerness to talk about his weekend school when asked about learning. There was also a difference in his responses when asked about learning at the two schools. When he talked about his weekend school, he shared what he learns first and then mentioned about playing games and doing well for his homework. However, when asked about his regular school, he first mentioned playing with lots of things and subsequently shared one aspect of arithmetic that he learned. Therefore, it can be assumed that he seems to perceive learning as the main activity at his weekend language school and playing as the main activity at his regular school.

Fahd also seems to perceive playing and learning as two different unrelated activities.

Raudhah: Do you think play helps you learn like doing something you couldn't do before or doing new things?

Fahd: Yeah.

Raudhah: What do you think you're learning?

Fahd: We learn reading books and...

Raudhah: While playing?

Fahd: Yeah... and we play

Fahd may not have understood my first question and later on, he seems to be saying "we learn reading books and.... and we play", probably implying that learning and playing are two separate activities. It is possible that he may feel that less learning takes place in the regular school using the play-based approach because there is more play, hence, he may have preferred the rote-learning approach at the weekend school because it has less play and thus, in his opinion, more learning.

#### **5.4.2 Preference for Regular School**

Leen shared that the rote-learning approach adopted by Luna's weekend school is similar to her learning experiences in her native country:

Leen: On Saturday, they go the weekend school. That school they give homework. Because only one day per week. They have to follow complete curriculum. They follow the steps of back home way of teaching. So, there always is homework. It's not a lot of homework but compared to the English school that has no homework at all.

Leen: My kids doesn't like the weekend school. Because it's not much fun. It's a huge curriculum, they just want to fill in just one day but the English school is five days. And they rent a school that has toys, but they are not allowed to play with the toys. So, it's not fun. It is a little bit more like our school when I was a kid. It's serious, very serious, homework, no play. And they are not allowed to use the things in the school, like the computers, the toys, that belong to the English school or the French school. They rent the school for one day and they are not allowed. But they (the weekend teachers) do their best, they bring their own things.

Leen lamented that her children, including Luna, do not enjoy learning at the weekend school because they do not find the learning fun. She cited the rote-learning approach as one of the factors contributing to the children's aversion to the weekend school. Leen also commented that the weekend school's curriculum is too much to be covered for the short duration of weekly classes. Nevertheless, she empathised with the school's situation of renting the classrooms of the regular school, yet the children are not allowed to play with the toys available in the classrooms. Hence, it is possible that seeing the toys but not being able to play with them is a source of frustration to the children. Leen acknowledged that the teachers attempted to make learning fun by bringing their own resources. Thus, this suggests that lack of resources could also be a contributing factor to the weekend school not being able to adopt a play-based learning approach.

Similarly, Parisa also shared that her daughter, Parvina does not enjoy the weekend school because it is not fun. She cited the rote-learning approach "write, write, write, write, read, read, read, read" as the main contributing factor.

Parisa: But when she started to weekend school, she doesn't want to go to weekend school. Because she not like. I think from the teacher, sometimes she doesn't let the kids like it, but now, she doesn't want to go to weekend school. She goes but not happy. But in French school, in the morning sometimes she's tired to wake up, but she wakes up, she wants to go.

Parisa: May be she (the weekend school teacher) didn't do fun for them. The Canadian (teachers), they do fun for the kids. Not sit them on the table and read, read, read. When the kids go to weekend school, if you let them sit on the chair write, write, write, write, read, read, read, read, kids will be bored you know. We need to do something the same the Canadians do for them. The kids say 'No fun here'. Not doing activity, not doing anything for him, one doesn't like it.

Since the children experience both learning approaches, they are able to make a comparison between the approaches based on their experiences. Some of them indicate preference of one approach over the other. The main reason stated for the preference of play-based approach at the regular school is that it is more fun compared to the rote-learning approach at weekend school. However, the rote-learning approach

may also be favoured by some children because of the more visible learning that takes place during the weekend school.

## **5.5 Relationship between play and learning**

At the end of the interview, the children were asked, “Do you think play helps you learn like doing something you couldn’t do before or doing new things?” The responses of the children indicated that they have diverse views on the relationship between play and learning. There are five themes that emerged from their responses: 1) dichotomy between play and learning; 2) academic play; 3) applying existing knowledge in play; 4) independent learning through play; and 5) learning social skills through play.

### **5.5.1 Dichotomy between play and learning**

Qadi: No. Playing meaning you play, not learn

Qadi seems to view playing and learning as two separate activities. However, it is possible that this idea is conceived from the approach to learning that he experiences at home. During the interview, Qailah, Qadi’s mother was asked if Qadi learns at home. Qailah shared, “I ask him on the weekend to write his book. He doesn’t want. He sits. ‘You are not going to play outside until you finish’”. It seems to suggest that learning at home means writing in his book. Qadi was told that he could only play when he is done with his learning. Thus, it is possible that his conception of the dichotomy between play and learning stems from his experiences of play as a reward for learning.

### **5.5.2 Academic Play**

Aatif: If I play sometimes maths games, then I learn maths

Raudhah: What about your games like Lego?

Aatif: Those..Actually, you kinda can.... oh yeah, you can’t.

Aatif immediately identifies games with specific academic purposes such as Mathematics games as an example of learning through play. However, when asked about other types of play such as Lego, he perceives it as just playing with no learning value. It is also noteworthy that his mother’s response to learning through play is also more focused on academic achievement. During the interview, Aisha, Aatif’s mother was asked, “Do you think play helps your child learn? If so, how?” She answered,

“Definitely. In so many levels still learning from playing. Like basic concepts, like counting, like math, basic math from playing. Sometimes Science”. Perhaps the mother’s focus on academic learning shaped Aatif’s definition of learning which seems to be more confined to academics.

### **5.5.3 Applying existing knowledge**

Omera:            Yeah. When I’m playing, I just know how to count the stars like  
                         1,2,3,4,5. I count mine that means I know how to count.

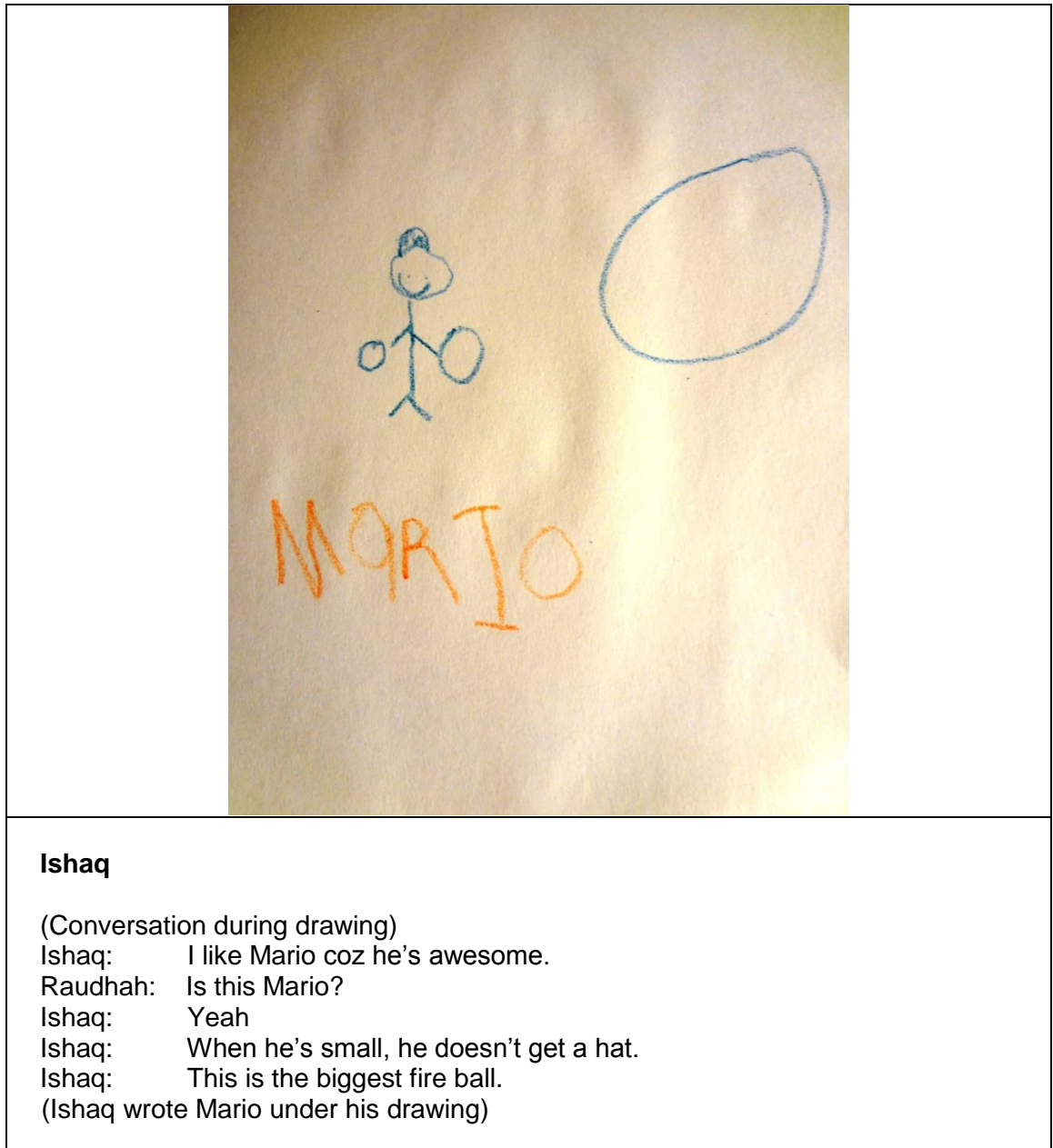
Omera illustrated how she learns through play by demonstrating her ability to apply her existing knowledge of counting as she plays. It is noteworthy that she is able to identify and explain how play and learning are integrated by stating that her counting during playing is an evidence of her arithmetic knowledge.

### **5.5.4 Independent learning**

Ishaq:            Yeah. I learn how to defeat Bowser. You know Bowser’s evil. That time I  
                         go to the castle, it was so awesome when I defeated him. He turned into  
                         giant Bowser and I just defeated him. It’s a DS.

Raudhah:        Who taught you how to play this game?

Ishaq:            I just do.



*Figure 5.6* Ishaq's drawing of Mario, a character in his digital play

Ishaq is confident that he is learning when he is playing with his DS (a digital mode). He stated that during the game, he learns how to defeat Bowser, who is an evil character in the game. He also demonstrated to me how he plays the game on his DS. When asked how he learnt how to play the game, he said, "I just do". Thus, it seems that he is driven by his interest to engage in independent learning so that he can become a successful player in the game. This is in contrast to his mother, Iffah's view on the DS. She said, "the DS doesn't help at all". Subsequently, Iffah acknowledges that, "the DS help them sometimes, help them improve their English. The characters, they talk. So, the children grab some words from it". While Ishaq inferred that he engages in independent learning when playing with his DS, his mother does not view



the DS as having any learning value other than improving his vocabulary. Thus, it seems to suggest that his mother's view of the insignificant learning value of the DS does not affect Ishaq's perception that he is learning through playing with the DS.

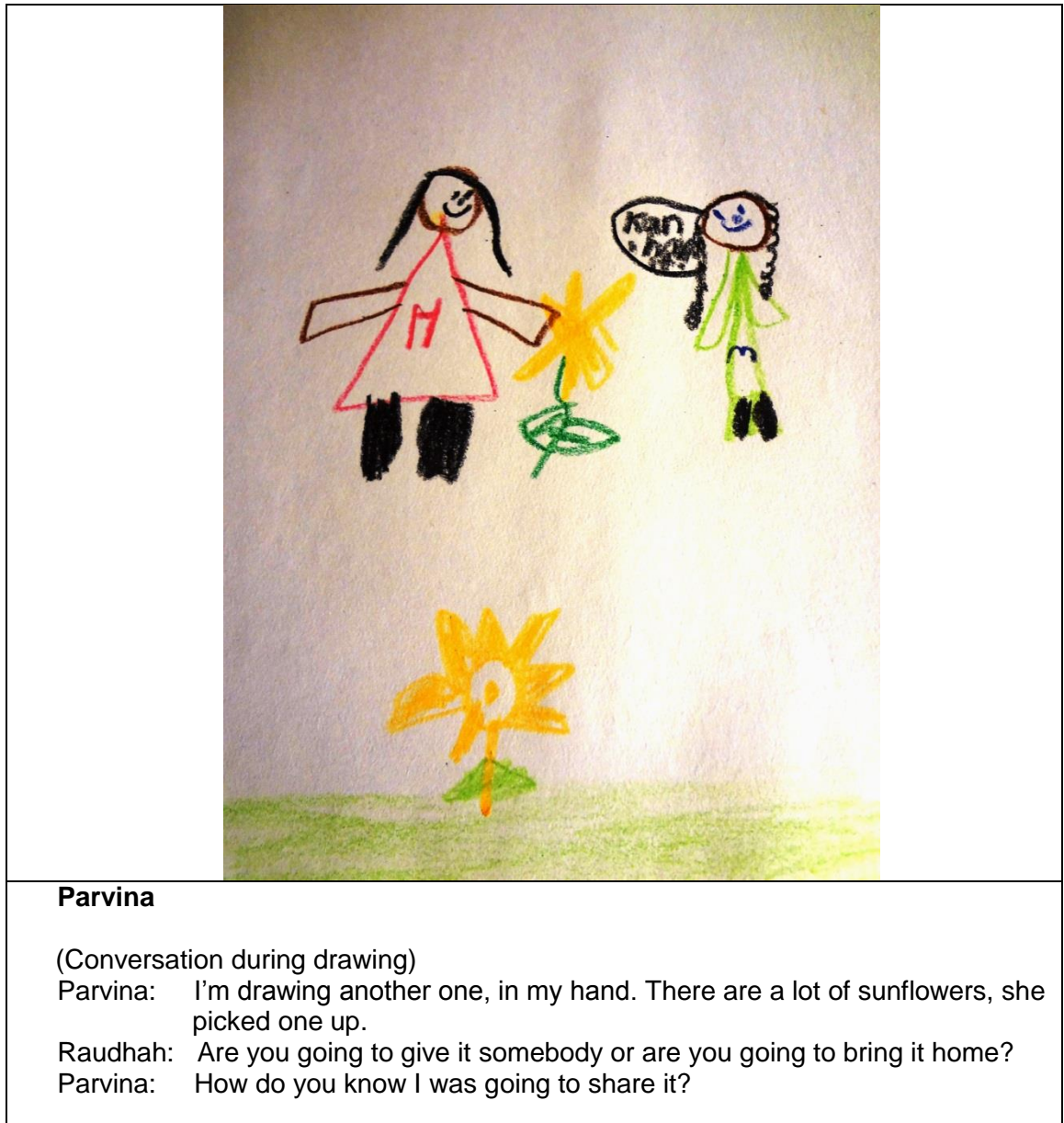
### **5.5.5 Social skills**

Parvina: Yeah, probably. I'm playing for fun. But when you're playing, you can learn....when you're sharing and when you're letting people play with you.

Raudhah: So, when you're playing, you are learning about sharing?

Parvina: And learning to let people play so that they won't be alone.

It is interesting that Parvina highlights the social aspect of learning in play. She explained that sharing and inclusive play is part of the learning that takes place during play. Perhaps this is an important issue to her because of a recent incident of a close friend who did not want to play with her anymore. Parvina confided, "She used to (be my best friend). (Now) She likes another girl more than me. When I say jokes to her, she just says 'stop'. And everyone, she doesn't do anything". Thus, being rejected by her close friend who prefers to play with someone else is perhaps a contributing factor that highlights the social aspect of play to Parvina. Although it is possible that Parvina's teacher may have talked about social skills during play, Parvina's sharing demonstrated her understanding of how learning is integrated in play. She also illustrated this in her drawing.



*Figure 5.7* Parvina's drawing depicts sharing during play

On the contrary, Parvina's mother, Parisa does not perceive Parvina to be learning when she is playing. When asked if Parvina is learning when playing, Parisa responded, "No. She just wants to play". Thus, clearly, Parvina and her mother do not view the relationship between play and learning from the same perspective. However, her mother's view of her not learning during playing does not seem to affect Parvina's perspective of the relationship between playing and learning.

## 5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has captured the main findings from interviews with the children, and the drawing activity. Excerpts from interviews with the mothers are also used to support, clarify and provide depth to the data analysis. The first section examines the revelation in the children's drawing in relation to play. The underlying meaning-making of the drawings is revealed through conversation on the drawing or interviews with the children prior to the drawing activity (Frisch, 2006). In addition, mothers' interview excerpts provide clarity to the interpretation. Most children drew their favourite play objects or play activities. The drawing activity was also sometimes undertaken as a form of play which involves a combination of everyday experiences and imagination (Hall, 2009).

One of the main findings from analysing the children's interview transcripts is that despite play being the most favourable activity for most children, some children face challenges in play at school. The three main challenges that emerged from the children's responses are difficulty in finding playmates, language or communication problems and discrimination during play. Another main finding is based on the children's perspectives on play-based learning and rote-learning that they experience in their regular school and weekend school respectively. Some children prefer the rote-learning because of the perceived higher learning value in it, while others prefer the play-based learning because they find it more fun. When questioned on the relationship between play and learning, the responses range from dichotomy between play and learning to intrinsic learning in play. The mothers' responses on learning through play are also compared to the children's responses to explore if there is a possibility that the mothers' perspectives may have influenced the way the children perceive the relationship between play and learning.

Children are expert informers of their own experiences and they provide reliable perspectives on their everyday lives (Wood, 2005). The drawing activity, when intertwined with interview and conversation about the drawing, offers insight into the children's thinking, experiences and perspectives (Einarsdottir, Dockett, and Perry, 2009). This chapter also reveals the challenges that the children face in play, their preferences for learning approaches and their views on the relationship between play and learning. The next chapter discusses the concepts that emerged from the findings in relation to the theoretical framing of the study.

## Chapter 6

### Play as third space between home and school: bridging the two cultural discourses

#### 6.1 Introduction

As illustrated in the literature review, there are many views on the definition of third space and how third space theory can be utilised in various disciplines. This study focuses on one of the perspectives described by Moje et al. (2004), which interprets third space as a way to build bridges between home-based and school-based discourses. In this perspective, third space is not a physical space but rather a conceptual 'in-between' space in which funds of knowledge from different sources meet, interact and fuse together to form new knowledge.

In this chapter, I analyse and interpret the findings which reveal that play is used by children and teachers as a bridge between home and school. It consists of three sections. The first section explores the possibility of cultural dissonance for ethnic minority children. The next section discusses how children utilise play as third space. The subsequent section illustrates strategies utilizing play that teachers use to support children's navigation of school culture. This chapter then concludes with an overview of the findings analysed.

#### 6.2 Cultural Dissonance

While most children start school at the age of four, Omera did not attend Junior Kindergarten. She started a year later and joined school at Senior Kindergarten. Thus, at the time of the interview, it was Omera's first year of school, attending Senior Kindergarten. Omera also attends weekend school which teaches her native language and religious studies. Unlike her regular school, Omera's teachers and classmates at her weekend school share the same native language and religious belief as her. Omera also speaks her native language at home. Ojala, Omera's mother shared Omera's experiences at school.

Ojala: At the beginning, she didn't go to Junior (kindergarten). It's the first year for her. At the beginning, it was weird. Because they are totally different

from us. She was with me all the time (before going to school). But she likes the weekend school a lot. Because they are the same culture.

After describing that attending regular school was initially a 'weird' experience for Omera due to the cultural differences, Ojala contrasted it with Omera liking weekend school because of the same culture. Thus, it is possible to deduce from the contrast that Ojala is suggesting that Omera does not really like her regular school. However, it is noted that during the interview with Omera, she made agreeing sounds and nodded her head when asked if she likes school. Nevertheless, Omera shared that she prefers playing at home than school. It is possible that she enjoys certain aspects of school but she does not enjoy playing at school as much as playing at home.

In addition, since it was Omera's first year in school, it is possible that she needs to put in more effort to adapt to the school culture which is different from her home culture. Thus, she may have preferred the weekend school because it requires less effort to adapt.

Ojala further elaborated.

Ojala:           And she's strong in her native language. Now she's strong in English. At the beginning of the year, she just say some words. Even though her brothers and sisters talk to her (in English), but the native language is stronger than English. So, she feels more comfortable in her weekend school than her English school.

Although Ojala suggested that Omera's ability to express herself better in her native language contributes to her preference of the weekend school, it was observed during the interview with Omera that she is able to express herself well in English. This contradiction suggests that although language could be a contributing factor to cultural dissonance, there are possibly other aspects of cultural adaptation that contribute to Omera experiencing difficulty in adapting to her regular school. There seems to be a cultural dissonance between home and school for Omera. The next section discusses how children utilise play as third space between home and school as a strategy to manage cultural dissonance.

## **6.3 Children using play as third space between home and school discourses**

As children's lives mainly revolve around home and school, they bring with them funds of knowledge from their experiences in these two cultural settings. The findings in the interview reveal that play is used by children as third space between home and school. The role of play as third space illustrated in the findings are: 1) play as a bridge to understand different cultures at home and school; 2) choosing a playmate with a similar identity to navigate school culture; 3) similar play at home and school; and 4) playing with cultural identity.

### **6.3.1 Play as a bridge to understanding the different cultures at home and school**

Ghaliyah shared that her daughter, Ghadah, plays with Anglo-Canadian children at school. During pretend play, Ghadah learns different aspects of western culture from her friends. When she comes home, she relates her experience to her mother, and then inquires how a certain action or behaviour is situated in her culture. According to Ghaliyah, Ghadah also learns about the school culture through pretend play at school which is usually based on Western culture.

Ghaliyah: She asks me something 'Mama, my friend said something. Is it right? It's good? It's not good?' The behaviour mostly. 'Is it true?' I give her the answer. This happens when they are playing with someone, they are discussing something with each other. Sometimes different culture. This happened when they are playing with someone else.

Raudhah: What do you mean when you said she learned from other culture?

Ghaliyah: Different questions. Like their lives, their food.

Raudhah: Does she get questioned about her culture when she's playing?

Ghaliyah: Yes. 'Why this your mum wearing this kind of thing (hijab)?' ....And I explain to her.

Other than learning about the school culture, Ghadah also gets asked about her own culture as she plays with her friends. Sometimes it is also through her friends' observation of her family members such as her mother's attire. When she relates her

friends' queries on her culture, Ghadah receives explanations from her mother. Through this, she gains better understanding of her culture.

For children who come from minority cultures, pretend play is an avenue through which they can learn about school culture. During pretend play, children are usually engaged in playing in a Western cultural setting. Thus, play serves as a bridge for children to learn about school culture which is different from their home culture. At the same time, questions received from their friends on their home culture ignite their interest to better understand their everyday practices.

### **6.3.2 Choosing a playmate with similar identity to navigate the school culture**

During the interview, Erina shared that her son, Emran, tends to deliberately look for a friend with similar identity. She said, "When he goes to school, he gravitates to friends of the same ethnicity or same religious belief (*words have been changed but they reflect the same context*). He's looking for someone to identify with". Erina suggested that the reason for her son's preference for friends of the same ethnicity or religious belief is that he wants to be with someone who has similar identity. She also shared that he had experienced some form of rejection when he wanted to play with children from different cultural backgrounds. This is also a possible reason for his preference for friends with whom he shares some commonality. Erina related that during the previous year which is also the first year of schooling, he was friends with another child who was of the same ethnicity but different religious belief. Now, in the current grade, there is no other child with similar ethnicity as him. However, there is a child who shares the same religious belief whom Emran has befriended.

This preference is also highlighted by Emran during my interview with him. He said that Elyas is his favourite friend whom he likes to play with.

Raudhah: Why do you like to play with him (Elyas)?

Emran: Because I can play with him. I know one thing about him. He told he's the same religion as me.

Emran seems to place importance on the fact that Elyas and himself are of the same religious belief and attributed this commonality as the reason for them playing together.

However, it is important to note that Elyas is not his only friend. Emran also mentioned that together with Elyas, he plays with other children who are of different culture and religious belief. Thus, this suggests that Emran and Elyas are not playing exclusively with each other. Rather, they play together with the other children at school. Hence, it is possible to conclude that having a friend who is of similar identity helps Emran manoeuvre and adapt to the school culture.

### **6.3.3 Similar play at home and school**

The same type of play can also serve as third space between home and school. It acts as a continuity medium for the children as they move from one cultural setting to another.

Raudhah: What kind of play do you like at school?

Qadi: I like to play with everyone soccer.

Raudhah: Is that your best game?

Qadi: (Made agreeing sound)

Raudhah: Are you a good soccer player?

Qadi: Yes. Because I kick it really high. And it moved and went into the goal.

Qailah shared that soccer is also a favourite game for Qadi at home. She said that Qadi is good at soccer. He plays soccer with his father every morning while waiting for the school bus to arrive. Similarly, Rafee also expressed his liking for soccer. He stated that he likes to play soccer at school, and that his favourite play at home is soccer. Thus, the findings identified soccer as a game that Qadi and Rafee enjoy playing both at home and school. This suggests that soccer, which is a familiar game to the two boys, acts as a bridge between home and school.

### **6.3.4 Playing with cultural identity**

At the end of the interview, Ghadah drew a girl at a water park. As she was colouring the hair yellow, Ghadah said, "I'm faking. I want to be blonde-haired. That's why I use yellow so that it can be like blonde". This suggests that Ghadah was playing with her identity using drawing as a medium. In this virtual world of drawing, Ghadah transformed herself into a blonde, Anglo-Canadian girl. This does not necessarily suggest that she is not comfortable with her cultural identity. Rather, it indicates a



process of exploring identities and authoring possible selves (Edmiston, 2007). This is depicted in *Figure 6.1*.



*Figure 6.1* Ghadah's drawing of herself at a water park

#### **6.4 Teachers' strategies of using play as a tool to support children's navigation in school culture**

There was evidence from the mothers' and children's sharings on the strategies teachers used to support children in utilizing play as a bridge between home and school. In addition, teachers have also used play as a tool to intervene in children's strategies in navigating school culture. The strategies are: 1) bringing a toy from home to school; 2) school's provision of a familiar toy; 3) teachers' intervention in children's difficulties in play; and 4) teachers' intervention in situations in which certain children play exclusively with each other.

#### **6.4.1 Bringing a toy from home to school**

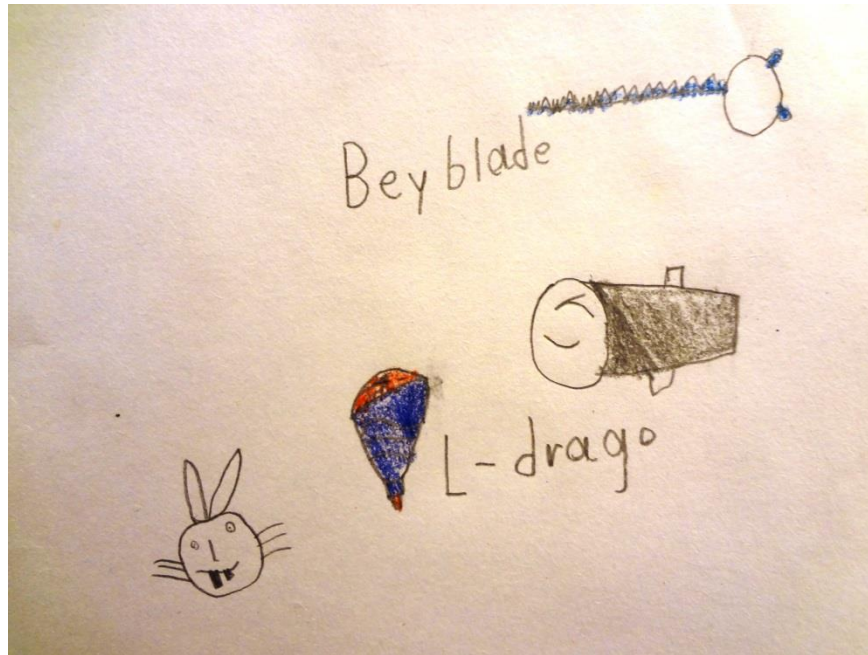
In this example, it seems that the teacher took the initiative to utilise play to connect home and school by asking all the children to bring a toy from home. This is revealed in the interview with Ishaq.

- Ishaq:           Actually I just brought my teddy bear to school. And I get to play with my teddy bear.
- Raudhah:        You can bring your teddy bear to school?
- Ishaq:           Yeah.
- Raudhah:        Every day?
- Ishaq:           Yeah.
- Raudhah:        So, do other children bring their teddy bears to school too?
- Ishaq:           Yeah. Just everyone in my class do.

#### **6.4.2 School's provision of a familiar toy**

Aatif mentioned that he likes to play with Beyblade at home. Beyblade is a spinning top which allows children to compete with one another. The game dictates that the last top that remains spinning wins the game. Aatif shared that he plays with Beyblade at school too.

- Aatif:            Or most of the time on Friday, we can play another game called Beyblade. It's fun too.
- Raudhah:        Do you bring your Beyblade to school?
- Aatif:            I always forgets. Today I forgot.
- Raudhah:        Then what did you do?
- Aatif:            Then I have to use the Principal's Beyblade. She gives it to some of the students.
- Raudhah:        Can you bring it home?
- Aatif:            (shook head) We got to leave it in then school.



*Figure 6.2 Aatif's drawing of Beyblade, his favourite play object*

This suggests that the teachers encourage the use of play as third space by allowing children to bring Beyblade toys from home and also by providing these toys for children to play with during recess.

#### **6.4.3 Teacher's intervention in child's difficulty in play**

Aisha shared that at the initial part of school, Aatif had some difficulties making friends.

Aisha:           Actually he is a shy kid by himself. He's not getting those as many opportunities because he feels more comfortable with our native language speaking people. Because we speak the same language (native language) inside the house. So, he is not getting that because there are not so many people around. I think he is lacking in that. But he has gotten much better now. Because when he first started going to school, he was very shy, he couldn't even answer anybody. But now he's much better.

Subsequently, Aisha shared how Aatif's teacher helped him adapt to school culture.

Aisha:           I think the credit goes to the teacher because she understood him and she pushed him when necessary to talk to other kids and to play with

other kids. They call it parallel play because he wasn't into parallel play at all. But she pushed him to where she needed to. She involved him in such activities in which ultimately he needed help. He had a very nice teacher.

In Aatif's case the teacher recognized his need for assistance and encouraged him to engage in parallel play as a first step before engaging in more socially-interactive play. Although initially Aatif had some difficulty in utilising play as a third space between home and school, his teacher's help has allowed him to create this bridge.

#### **6.4.4 Teachers' intervention in situations in which certain children play exclusively with each other**

Sofia: I have an experience with my child. I found it a little bit strange. He loves to play with one of his friends. They have many common interests. They love to play together and they don't like to play with anyone else. So when any other child come and ask 'Can I play with you?' They will say 'No'. And the teacher, for that, she prevent him from playing with his lovely friend for a month. And they can't play in the playground (together). They are not allowed to talk to each other. They are not allowed to play together. She was supervising them and she would tell any other teacher 'these children, they are not allowed to play together'. And I talked to the teacher. She said, 'You know what, your child, all his interest is to play with this child, it's not good for his personality, he will be like a follower'. And she went to the other mum, because she is my friend, she said the same thing. I find that hurt them a lot. More than the teacher can imagine. And especially my friend's son. He was asking my friend almost every day 'When can I come back and play with Saad (name has been changed)'. And he didn't understand why she's not allowing them to play together. She explained but he didn't accept the reason.

It appears that Saad was probably using the same strategy as Emran in having a familiar friend or a friend with similar identity to navigate the school culture. However, in Saad's case, it seems that they were creating a small boundary around themselves, and not allowing other children to enter this boundary. Saad's teacher was aware of

this and intervened by not allowing Saad and his friend to interact and play together for a period of time. This seems to have created emotional distress to Saad and his friend who could not comprehend her reason for intervention.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has argued that there is a possibility of cultural dissonance for ethnic minority children as they experience different cultures at home and school. The findings in this study suggest that children use play to manage cultural dissonance. Some of the strategies that children use, as illustrated in this chapter, include using play as a bridge to understand different cultures at home and school, choosing a playmate with similar identity to navigate school culture, engaging in similar play at home and school, and playing with cultural identity.

There is also some evidence which suggests that teachers also use play to support children in bridging home and school. The first two examples provided include the teacher asking children to bring a toy from home to be played in school, and school's provision of a familiar toy played at home. In the third example, the teacher recognized the child's difficulty in play and used intervention strategies to orientate the child to the school play culture. In the fourth example, the teacher was concerned that the children were not fully accessing the school culture and intervened by separating the two children to propel them to play with other children. Thus, in the third and fourth examples, it appears that the teachers were using play as a tool to encourage children to manage cultural dissonance and fully capitalize on the affordances of play at school. However, there seems to be a key difference in the last two examples between teachers responding to children's interests and choices, and teachers making their own decisions about what the children need. This reflects some of the issues raised in the literature review which indicate that teachers make different choices based on their pedagogical beliefs and practices (McInnes et al., 2011).

Based on the findings discussed in this chapter, this study suggests that play is used by children and teachers as third space in bridging home and school discourses.

# Chapter 7

## Discussion

### 7.1 Introduction

The literature review in this study has highlighted cultural variations of play and learning in different cultures. Yet despite acknowledging the cultural nuances of play (Pramling Samuelsson and Fler, 2009), there are not many studies that have explored the cultural capital that mothers bring with them as they relocate to another country, as well as the cultural capital that children acquire from home and school. What is also lacking is an understanding from children's perspectives of their navigation of the school culture and their construction of strategies to bridge home and school.

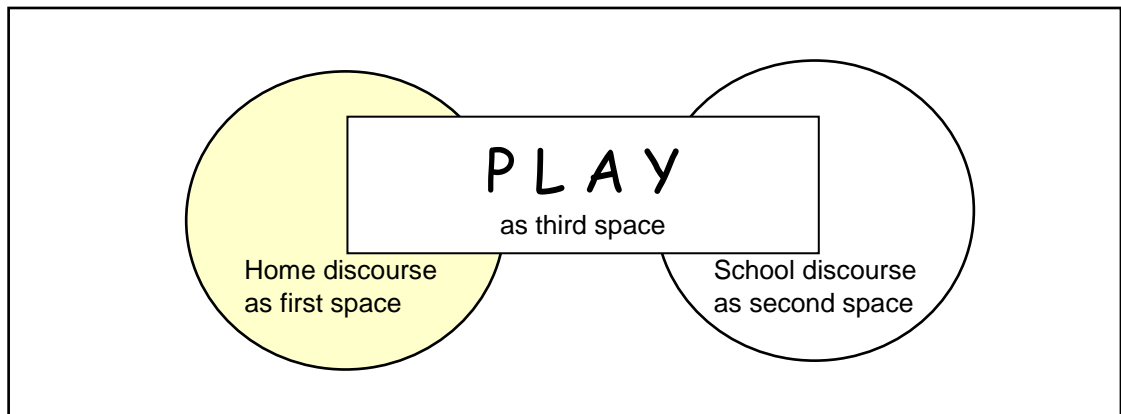
The objective of this chapter is to consolidate the findings and discuss the significance of the findings through a socio-cultural lens. In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, I have presented evidence that addresses the main research question:

**What are the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and bicultural children in play and learning at home and school?**

In this chapter, the findings are discussed in relation to 'play as third space' framework (see **Section 2.5**). The findings revealed the 'happenings' in the first space (home) and second space (school). In addition, what has emerged from the findings is evidence of the ways in which play is used to bridge home and school. While the 'happenings' in third space have been shared in Chapter 6, this chapter deepens the discussion of third space.

This chapter discusses the 'happenings' in these three spaces in relation to the research literature. The subsequent section proposes 'play as third space' framework as a guide to understand how play is used as third space as well as a structure to support children in constructing the bridge between home and school. Finally, I conclude with an overview of this discussion chapter.

## 7.2 First Space: Home discourse



*Figure 7.1* Play as third space (Adapted from Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory')

This study has shown that mothers' play and learning experiences differ from those of their children. Other than the generational gap between mothers and children, the cultural shift from one country to another plays a major role in contributing to these differences. As illustrated in the findings, changes in play settings have resulted in changes in play affordances. This has brought about changes in the cultural inheritance of play and learning for children, and illustrates that:

Culture mediates knowledge, values, and skills to the child. At the same time the child him or herself contributes to the interaction and by that influences the surroundings (Pramling Samuelsson & Fler, 2009, p.184).

When mothers migrate to another country, they bring with them cultural capital in terms of play and learning experiences, which may influence the way they view play and learning. Subsequently, this may affect children's home experiences. For example, the findings revealed that in their native country, the mothers experienced little or no adult involvement in play. This is similar to the findings in the study by Wineberg and Chicquette (2009) when they conclude that the lack of adult involvement in play reflects independence in some cultures. However, due to their play experiences with little or no adult involvement, the mothers may perceive that play does not require adult involvement and hence they may not play with their children at home. Studies have shown that children who do not experience adult involvement in play may perceive activities with adult-involvement as non-play activities or work (Howard, Jenvey, and Hill, 2006). It is possible that lacking experiences with adult participation in play could lead to difficulty with accepting adults in play (Howard, 2002). Thus, the absence of

adult involvement in children's play experiences at home may affect how the children respond to play pedagogy in school, especially in activities involving teachers' scaffolding of children's learning through play.

While the findings have affirmed my assumptions that there are generational and cultural differences between play experiences of immigrant mothers and those of their children, there is also evidence that the mothers have adapted to the differences. These adaptations demonstrated their understanding of how play is situated in their current context. For example, whilst Kamilah experienced restrictions based on gender such as not being able to cycle in her native country, she embraced the Canadian culture of allowing girls to play outdoors and engage in physical activities. The immigrant mothers are generally also more accepting of digital play, which they did not experience during their childhood (Marsh, 2005). In the case of Ojala, although she stated that she does not allow her daughter to play with the computer, she later shared that she allows her daughter to play educational games with an electronic tablet designed for children. While there is some apprehension to the perceived negative effects of digital play, the mothers recognize the learning potential of digital play (Brooker and Siraj-Blatchford, 2002). Most of them mediate this apprehension with restrictions of playing time and types of digital games. The findings support recommendation by Gutnick, Robb, Takeuchi, and Kotler (2010) that while there are benefits to digital play, there must a balance between digital play and other rich learning experiences.

Although the role of play in early education remains a contentious issue, generally, it seems that the immigrant mothers recognize that learning does take place in play. They also acknowledge the benefits of learning through play such as children having fun and being happy. In their responses, they shared some negative experiences that they had with rote-learning in their native country such as the stress that they experienced and the lack of understanding of concepts. In contradiction to the negative experiences of rote-learning, the findings indicated that some mothers support their children's learning by teaching them through rote-learning at home. This resonates with the work of Parmar et al. (2004) in which their study conclude that Asian parents "facilitated cognitive development by serving as teachers and academic coaches at home" (p.103).

The mothers' choice of teaching only through rote-learning at home is possibly due to their experiences of academic success through rote-learning, especially as most



mothers in this study are degree holders. Thus, given that they had done well in their studies and their perception that the rote-learning method has worked for them, their preference for rote-learning could be because they preferred to have a tested and proven method for their children. Their reluctance to embrace the play-based approach may stem from the uncertainty that this 'new' approach may not be as effective as the rote-learning approach (Myck-Wayne, 2010). Another possible cause of their apprehension is that the learning that takes place in play-based approaches may not fit well into their definition of learning which may encompass concrete evidence of achievement in reading, writing and mathematics (Fung & Cheng, 2012). In summary, it seems that despite acknowledging some of the negative effects of rote-learning, the mothers preferred this approach because they are not convinced that play-based learning will prepare their children for more formal learning at a later stage of school. Another reason for the use of the rote-learning approach as indicated in the findings is that the mothers do not have knowledge of play-based pedagogy. This concurs with findings from other studies which demonstrated that parents do not recognize the learning values and benefits of play in children's development and school-readiness (Parmar et al., 2004; Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, and Gryfe, 2008). Based on these findings, this study argues for better communication between home and school which is discussed in **Section 7.5 'Play as third space' framework**.

In addition, the children have also shared that they experienced the rote-learning approach in their weekend religious and language classes. Therefore, the children have to learn to adapt to the rote-learning approach and recognize what is expected from them in this learning model. They also have to interpret the role and status of play in relation to the rote-learning approach. At the same time, they have to be able to adapt to the role of play in play-based learning approaches in their regular school. Unfortunately, not all children can adapt easily to these two learning approaches. This is demonstrated in Fahd's responses as he stated that he prefers the weekend school which utilises rote-learning approach based on his perception of learning that takes place in these two models. It is possible that he does not recognize and could not appreciate the learning that takes place when play is integrated in learning. In contrast, Parvina and Luna could not adapt to the learning model in their weekend religious and language school that situates play at the periphery of learning.

From a socio-cultural perspective, these findings concur with Brooker's research regarding cultural variations across home and school settings:

One way of understanding the variation in the children’s experiences was through the ethnotheories, or cultural belief systems, of their home communities—such as their parents’ concepts of childhood, and their theories of intelligence and instruction (Brooker, 2003, p.117).

She also argued that differences in children’s school preparation affect their school experience. Thus, it is crucial to investigate the ‘happenings’ in first space in order to understand and value the cultural capital that children bring with them to school.

### 7.3 Second Space: School discourse

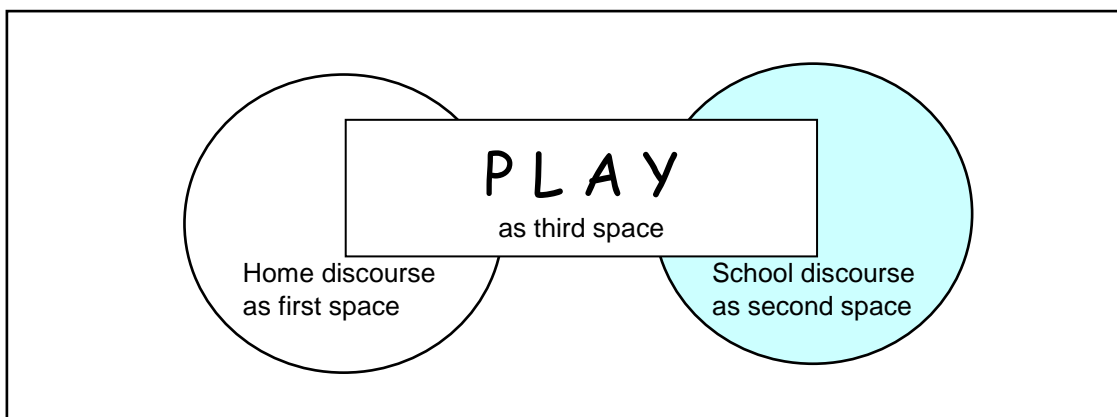


Figure 7.2 Play as third space (Adapted from Levy’s (2008a) application of Moje et al.’s (2004) construction of ‘third space theory’)

Since this study did not include the perspectives of teachers, the happenings in second space are informed by the perspectives of children, as well as those conveyed by their mothers during the interviews. There is evidence in this study which suggests that some children faced challenges in navigating the second space due to cultural dissonance. Cultural dissonance between home and school was also reported in the study by Marfo and Biersteker (2011). However, there are strategies that children have devised and used to manage the tension between their cultural capital and school culture. These reveal some of the tensions that children may experience in play-based approaches where they are expected to make choices about their activities:

Freedom to make choices does not always put children in control nor are they always empowered. The children’s activities were socially complex because they were solving contextual and relational problems which involved managing the social dynamics of power, often without the help of adults. However, they did not always have the skills and knowledge to do this successfully (Wood, 2014, p.15).

One of the challenges that children face is the difficulty in finding playmates during free play. The findings of this study revealed three causes, namely language barrier, discrimination and personality of child. One of the children's strategies to mediate this difficulty is to find a playmate of the same ethnicity or religious belief. This resonates with Brooker's (2006) study which reports that children from ethnic minorities tend to choose friends from the same ethnicity. However the difference is that Brooker reports that the ethnic minority children in her study deliberately stayed away from English children, while there is evidence in this study which demonstrated integration of ethnic minority children with others in play. This suggests that having friends of the same ethnicity does not necessarily isolate the ethnic minority children from others. Rather, it can assist in the navigation of second space and interaction with others who are of a different ethnicity.

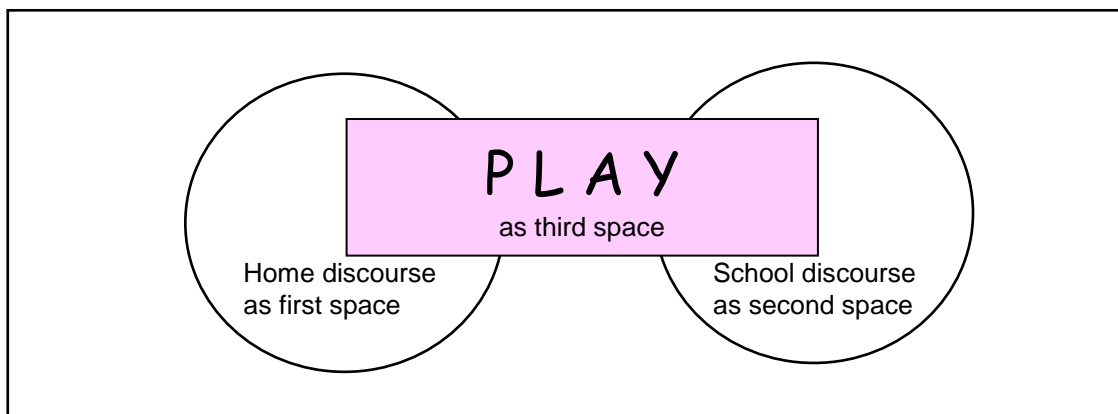
Nevertheless, some of the strategies that children use limit their opportunity to experience a fuller school culture. For example, due to limited language ability, Chanda chose to play only with a friend who can speak the same native language as her. The choice of limiting playmates to only those of the same ethnicity, whether out of personal preference or circumstantial factors, may also deprive children from accessing the full affordances of play. Thus, while there are many benefits of child-initiated play (Ashiabi, 2007), teachers must be sensitive to the problems that children may face during free play activities. It is important that teachers are aware of the possibility of cultural dissonance as well as some of the limiting strategies that children may adopt. This is discussed further in **Section 7.5 'Play as third space' framework.**

Children's learning experiences have an effect on their perception of play and learning (Howard et al., 2002) and they may experience misalignment in their rote-learning experiences at home or weekend school with play-based approach at school (Maddock, 2006). In addition to having to adapt to different learning approaches, the children have to understand others' expectations of them and interpret the role and status of play in relation to the learning models. Brooker (2003) acknowledges that while there is no easy solution to provide culturally relevant teaching and learning experiences, schools have a responsibility to make play-based pedagogy explicit through communication with parents and interacting with children. This study supports this view and further suggests that the cultural capital of learning that children bring to school can be acknowledged and integrated into school's play-based pedagogy. In her study, Gupta (2011) observed that preschool children in India seem to enjoy academic work. This is also expressed by Fahd that he enjoys learning at his weekend school

which probably involves writing and academic activities. Thus, it may be beneficial to include choices of work-like or academically-inclined activities such as writing and numeracy games that contain playful elements as suggested by Wood (2010). However, she cautions against situating teacher-directed activities and free play activities into work/play dichotomy.

There is also evidence of work/play dichotomy in second space, which reflects continued uncertainties that teachers experience in their theories and practice (Rogers, 2011). This is revealed in Omera's sharing of her teacher's use of play as a reward for completing academic work. Omera was unhappy that her friends were playing and having fun while she had to complete her work. This has negative effects on Omera and caused her to dislike academic work as it limits her play opportunities. This resonates with the research done by Martlew et al. (2011) in Scotland which revealed that some teachers interpret play-based learning as play being peripheral to the learning process. Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, and Milburn (1995) demonstrated that situating play on the boundary of learning results in negative effects on children.

## 7.4 Third space



*Figure 7.3 Play as third space (Adapted from Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory')*

According to Levy (2008b), application of third space theory provides a framework to “expose elements of ‘conversation’ taking place between the ‘funds of knowledge’ within ‘home’ and ‘school’ discourses” (p.62).

While third space can sometimes be a physical space, it serves more as a conceptual space in this study. It is a virtual space in which children's funds of knowledge from the

first and second spaces merge, fuse and form new knowledge. Children seek to make sense of their experiences and knowledge in these two physical spaces and the third space offers a safe place to explore and make meaning of their experiences (Smith, K., 2008). Third space can serve as an intellectual space where children become aware and seek to understand cultural differences in the two spaces.

This is illustrated in Ghadah's situation (see **Section 6.3.1**) as she tried to understand how experiences in second space are situated in first space. She observed how her friends at school play and she then questioned her mother if those practices are acceptable in her culture and religious beliefs. In addition, Ghadah also inquired how cultural capital from first space can be shared in second space. For example, when her friends asked about her mother's attire, she asked her mother for an explanation. This is probably so that she can gain a better understanding and explain to her friends at school. Thus, third space is also a space for cultural transaction as children ponder and evaluate the cultural capital accumulated from the first and second spaces. While children are constantly engaging in cultural transactions with others in first and second spaces, third space is where they make internal cultural transactions based on their selection of elements of their cultural capital that are important to them in particular contexts. Hence, internal cultural transactions in third space create new knowledge. The continuous building of new knowledge leads to the creation of hybrid culture which interweaves home and school cultures. According to Smith, K. (2008), a hybrid culture is created through the infusion and incorporation of elements of cultures.

Third space also creates a space for identity-construction for children (Bhabha, 1994). The children in this study are biculturals because they experience different cultures in their daily lives (Mok & Morris, 2012). However, not all biculturals are able to reconcile the various values and practices from the different cultural experiences (Mackenzie, 2008), resulting in identity confusion (Berry, 1990) as illustrated in the cultural dissonance experienced by Omera (see **Section 6.2**).

Nevertheless, studies have shown that biculturals may undergo acculturation (Cheng & Lee, 2009) in which their different cultural experiences merge to form a hybrid culture resulting in hybrid identity (Szeib, 2011). The process of exploring and making sense of different cultural experiences is illustrated in Ghadah playing with identity using drawing. In third space, children are usually free of judgment from others as they explore possibilities and construct their unique identities. In the case of Ghadah, taking on an identity as a blonde Anglo-Canadian is perhaps acceptable in imaginary world

but it may be frowned upon in the real world. As discussed earlier in **Section 6.3.4**, Ghadah's playing with identity is not necessarily an indicator of a rejection of her ethnicity and culture. Instead, it can be seen as a process of exploring possible selves (Edmiston, 2007) and construction of hybrid identity:

Changing cultural and social contexts, and new relationships allow individuals to develop new or modified identities. (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008, p.10)

The construction of a hybrid identity which is different from their parents' cultural identity is demonstrated in Lustanski's (2009) study on Polish-Canadians. She concludes that there is a greater tendency for participants who migrated to Canada as adults to retain their Polish identity while those who grew up in Canada identified themselves as Polish-Canadians. This suggests that in comparison to their immigrant parents, the children in this study may have a greater tendency to construct a hybrid identity for themselves through interaction and infusion of funds of knowledge accumulated from first and second spaces.

The third space is also an emotional and relational space in which children explore their emotions and relationship with others. Archer (2000) suggests that there are inner conversations that take place internally in a person. She explains that the inner conversation or self-dialogue is an internal experimentation between thoughts and feelings. Therefore, third space can serve as a space where children sort out their emotions and make decisions on strategies to allow them to navigate second space. For example, it is possible that having an emotionally negative experience of being rejected in play based on ethnicity resulted in Emran choosing a playmate with similar identity. This example illustrates that children can exercise agency in choosing playmates in school who can perhaps aid their navigation in second space.

Through the inner conversation that takes place in third space, children make sense of conflicting funds of knowledge accumulated in first and second spaces. For instance, in the rote-learning model at their weekend school, they may be expected to engage in passive learning where playfulness is frowned upon (Gershon, 2005). On the other hand, when they engage in play-based learning at their regular school, they are expected to be able to engage in creative and imaginative play with others. The children need to understand how play is situated in each learning model in order to successfully navigate in different contexts. This suggests that children are active

agents in their lives (Huber and Spyrou, 2012) as they adapt and perhaps contest different expectations of learning models in different contexts.

In third space, children have more power compared to within first and second spaces. In the two physical spaces, there is power imbalance as children are subjected to the rules and regulations determined by adults. However, in third space, children may perceive themselves as having power to make decisions on their choices and construction of strategies to enable them to use play as third space. In his explanation of how children are empowered in play, Edmiston (2007) states:

Playing allows children to transform their observations, experiences, and sense of possibilities within everyday life into fantasy worlds where the social rules are always understandable and the events are always under their control. (p.101)

As children are empowered in third space, they have higher agency (Hall, 2010) to utilise third space as a bridge between first space and second space. This study demonstrates that children can devise strategies to experience continuity in third space which allows them to navigate successfully in first and second spaces. For example, children who engage in similar play at home and school use their funds of knowledge of play to bridge home and school. This evidence supports the critical importance of play for children's development and learning.

I propose play as third space to bridge home and school because play is a leading activity in children's lives at home and school (Bodrova and Leong, 2003). The findings in this study have also illustrated how children utilise play to bridge home and school cultures and discourses. Through play, children can construct their identity and exercise power and agency. In contrast to Levinson's (2005) findings of "play as expression of a separate identity" (p. 519), this study demonstrates that play can be used as a bridge between different cultures leading to construction of hybrid identity. However, the findings also revealed that some children are unable to navigate third space successfully. This may lead to children experiencing a virtual gap between home and school cultures (Cheng and Lee, 2009). The virtual gap may, in turn, result in children having difficulty in negotiating second space (Parmar et al., 2004). The next section offers suggestions on how to support children to utilise play as third space so that they can bridge first and second spaces.

## 7.5 'Play as third space' framework

In Chapter 6, I discussed findings that illustrate how children use play as third space (see **Section 6.3**) and also, evidence of teachers' strategies to support children's use of play as a bridge between home and school (see **Section 6.4**). Subsequently, a beneficial question that can be explored is, "How can play be promoted as third space?" To answer this question, a framework which combines Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory', Wood's (2010) integrated pedagogical approaches model, and Brooker's (2010) bridging cultures concept is designed to promote play as third space. 'Play as third space' framework can serve as a guide to explore ways to support children's use of play as a bridge between home and school. *Figure 7.4* depicts 'play as third space' framework.



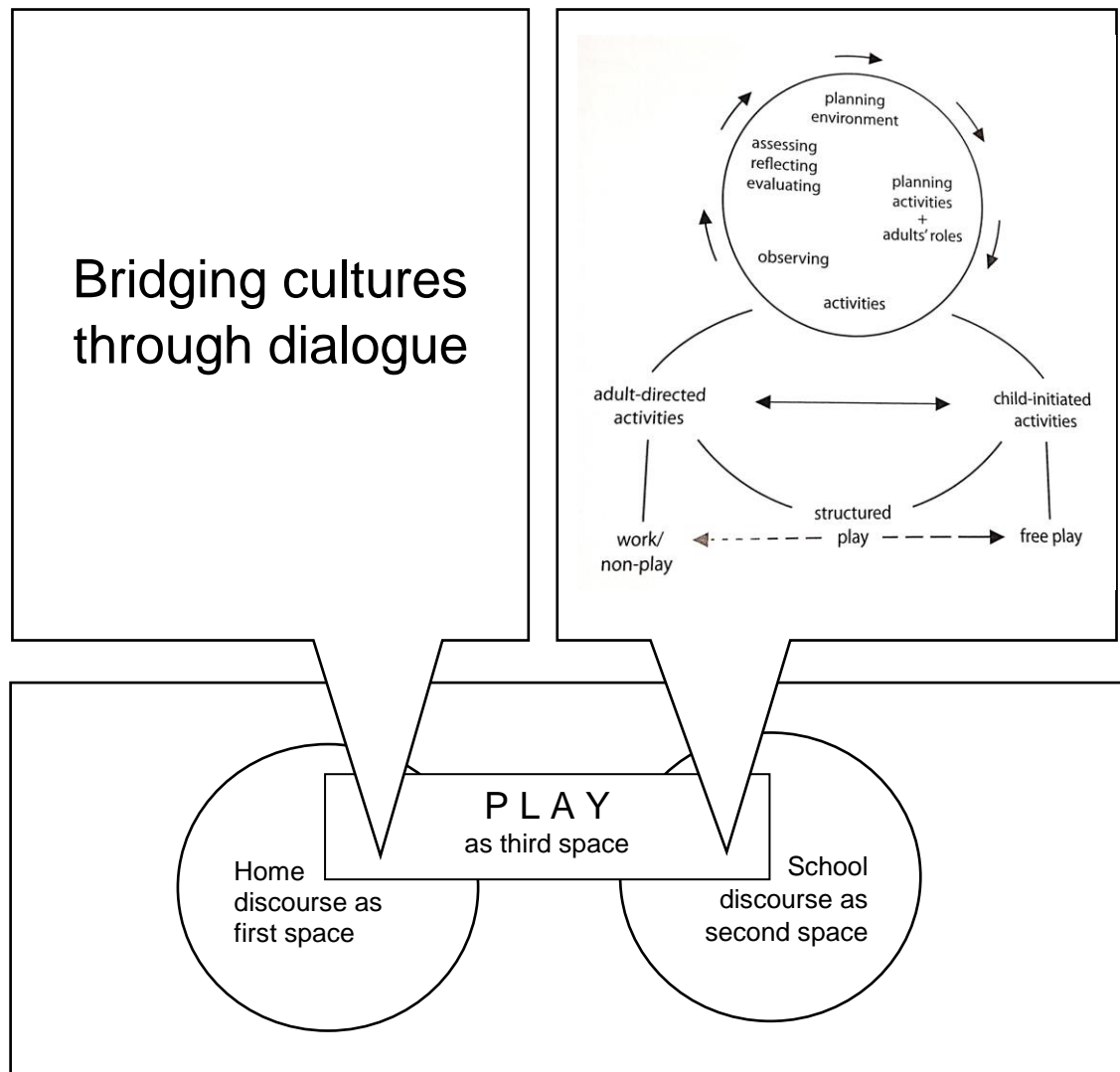


Figure 7.4 'Play as third space' framework (Adapted from Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory', Wood's (2010) integrated pedagogical approaches model, and Brooker's (2010) bridging cultures through dialogue concept)

Although this framework has been discussed in **Section 2.5**, the objective of this section is to explore ways in which this framework can serve as a guide to support children's use of play as a bridge between home and school. The discussion is based on the findings of the study and suggestions are made in relation to the framework and literature base.

The first part of the discussion is on Wood's (2010) model of integrated pedagogical approaches. According to Wood, the objective of the recursive cycle is to "ensure flow of information about children's play and learning from two pedagogical zones – adult- and-child-initiated activities" (p. 20). In this discussion, the focus is on how the

recursive cycle can inform the teachers on how they can support play as third space in order to illuminate ongoing concerns about play-based approaches:

Cultural distance and dissonance are significant concerns in problematising free play and free choice (Wood, 2014, p.6).

Firstly, teachers must be aware that there is a possibility that some children experience cultural dissonance due to the differences between home and school cultures. Based on this awareness, at the 'observing' stage of the recursive cycle, the teachers can identify children who seem to experience difficulties in play. For example, in Chanda's case, she does not enjoy free play because she has difficulty finding playmates in child-initiated activities. It is also important that teachers are aware that some of the strategies that children adopt to navigate school culture limits their play experiences. For example, Saad and his friend decided to play exclusively with each other. Their choice of exclusivity limited their opportunities in experiencing the full school culture and affordances of play. This highlights the importance of sensitivity in the role of teachers:

By being close to the children in daily activities (play and learning situations) and with an intimate knowledge of each child as a unique individual within a group, teachers can support, inspire, and challenge children's meaning making (something children deal with in play as well as in learning), at the same time they need to understand the child's perspective because it is only when they take the child's perspective they understand their meaning making (Pramling Samuelsson and Fler, 2009, p.188).

Based on their observations, teachers could then evaluate the situation and plan the environment or activities to provide intervention. In Chanda's case, she expressed her preference for teacher-directed activities during class work over free play. This suggests that she needs adult intervention in order for her to be able to engage with others. In the evaluating stage, the teacher may assess the cause of challenges children face in play. For example, if challenges in play stem from difficulty in communication due to lacking of fluency in English language or understanding Canadian accent, perhaps the teacher can suggest or initiate games that require less verbal communication such as tag and hopscotch to assist children in engaging in play as they learn to improve their English language. Thus, timely intervention during free play may benefit some children in integrating into the school culture.

In the case of Saad and his friend, the teacher recognized that they were limiting themselves from experiencing the broader school culture and greater affordances of

play. However, it seems that either the teacher was not aware of the importance of this strategy to the children in navigating the school culture with a familiar friend or the teacher did not value or approve of this strategy. The teacher's intervention method was to demolish the social relationship that Saad and his friend had created. They then had to make an effort to build a new social circle, under the constraint of not being able to include each other. Alternatively, the teacher could have widened the social circle by planning activities to allow other children to enter the existing social circle that Saad and his friend had created. The alternate intervention method of building onto children's strategies to utilise play as a bridge between home and school would probably have been better received by Saad and his friend.

In the integrated pedagogical approaches model, Wood (2010) suggests a continuum of activities ranging from work to free play activities with varying degree of adult-child initiatives and control. While adult-led activities may be rejected by some early childhood theorists (Bruce, 1991), the findings of this study revealed that some children may enjoy work-like activities. Thus, it is possible that offering a choice of playful work-like activities may allow children to utilise their funds of knowledge in school. This translates to providing activities for children that build on their funds of knowledge (Pramling Samuelsson and Carlsson, 2008) and allow children to demonstrate and develop their competencies. The continuum of activities may reduce play/work dichotomy (Bergen 1998) and therefore also reduce any negative effects of prioritizing work over play, which limit children's learning and development opportunities (Cooney et al., 2000).

The findings in this study also recommend that schools encourage toys or games that are played at home in order to support children's use of play as third space. Other than soccer, as mentioned in the findings, there are other types of play that children enjoy both at home and school which enable them to utilise funds of knowledge gained from each setting. The interaction and infusion of the funds of knowledge create play as third space and the commonly played games act as a bridge between the two cultural settings.

Other than planning activities, teachers can also plan the environment in such a way that the 'cultural capital' (Brooker, 2003) that children bring with them to school can be made visible in the classroom. For example, it may be beneficial if schools encourage parents and children to share some aspects of their home cultures at school. The children could bring their traditional costumes, musical instruments, and cultural

artefacts. These cultural items could be brought for show-and-tell sessions or set up in the classroom for children to play with. The sharing session or cultural play area allows children to gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures (Bodrova and Leong, 2003), and play-based interests. In addition, it may also help ethnic minority children feel proud to have their culture integrated into school curriculum and hence it may also promote a sense of belonging to the school community. The presence of cultural artefacts may also help ethnic minority children connect their home and school play experiences.

The second part of this section focuses on Brooker's (2010) 'bridging cultures through dialogue concept. In **Section 4.5**, I discussed findings that illustrated the lack of communication between home and school. Grönroos (2004) defines dialogue as a mutually motivated interactive process of reasoning together to achieve a common knowledge platform. It is a collaborative construction of understanding between two parties, which has particular resonances in the context of play. Brooker (2005) suggests that one of the tensions between home and school stems from pedagogy of play. The findings in this study suggested that some parents do not perceive pedagogy of play as an effective and trustworthy approach to prepare their children for the next stages of education, and therefore, they compensate by teaching their children by rote-learning at home. According to Myck-Wayne (2010), in order to align the different perspectives of play and its relationship to learning, there is a need for educators to reach out to educate the public on the benefits of play. Nevertheless, as discussed in **Section 7.2**, there is evidence that mothers have adapted to the cultural and intergenerational differences in play. This suggests that respectful dialogue between home and school may persuade mothers to reconstruct their understanding of the role of play in children's development and learning.

Similar to a study on Chinese immigrant families in United States (Heng, 2014), another tension highlighted in this study is one-way communication of school to home. The home and school dialogue must be a two-way interaction in which teachers seek to understand parents' cultural capital before communicating the school culture to parents (Grant, 2011). The findings also revealed that parents used rote-learning approach to support their children's development due to lack of knowledge and understanding of the relationship between play and learning. Therefore, in the dialogue between home and school, it may be beneficial if teachers provide suggestions on how parents can support the development of their children in a play-based pedagogy. In summary, this study suggests that a two-way dialogue can build teachers'

understanding of the 'happenings' in first space and the cultural capital that children bring with them to second space, as well as providing information and explanation of the 'happenings' of second space to the parents (Heng, 2014). The objective of the dialogue is to construct mutual understanding and "support practitioners and parents in working together on their common purpose of promoting children's well-being and their learning" (Brooker, 2010, p.40).

## **7.6 Conclusion**

Although play has been recognized as an integral agent in children's lives (Hyun, 1998), children do not always have equal access to affordances of play in learning and development (Ailwood, 2003). The cultural differences in play and learning investigated in many studies (Pramling Samuelsson and Fler, 2009) highlight the complexity of children's play and learning experiences. In addition, Munn (2010) suggests that there are tensions between the concepts of 'play' and 'learning' which results in various interpretations of the role and status of play in learning.

The objective of this study is to explore the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and their children in play and learning. The analysis of experiences and perspectives through socio-cultural lens revealed the happenings in first, second and third spaces. This study has revealed the cultural capital that mothers bring with them to the new cultural setting. The juxtaposition of mothers' and children's experiences illustrated the cultural nuances of play and learning. Through the comparison, the findings concluded that changes in cultural settings resulted in changes in affordances of play. This study also proposed that mothers have made some adaptations to the cultural and intergenerational differences in play and learning. In addition, the findings on happenings in the first space illuminated children's home cultural capital which should be acknowledged and valued at school.

The happenings in the second space through children's experiences and perspectives reveal some difficulties that children face in play and the strategies that children use to navigate the school culture. This study supports the view that there is a need to challenge the ideological assumption that children will naturally benefit from free choices because "freedom to choose may advantage some, but disadvantage others" (Wood, 2014, p.16). This study also illustrated that situating play as a reward for work

potentially creates unequal access to learning experiences and a form of social injustice for some children.

The findings shared in the discussion of third space concluded that children are not merely powerless recipients of experiences and knowledge who are completely shaped by their surroundings. Rather, they are thinking individuals who are able to process their acquired knowledge and exercise their agency in order to make sense of the world around them, construct their identity and adapt to different environments.

This study also challenges the belief that assumes children will automatically benefit from play pedagogy, as the findings showed that not all children are able to do that successfully. They require support from adults in order to bridge home and school and benefit from play-based approaches. This study proposes 'play as third space' framework to act as a structural reference to deepen understanding of children's complex experiences. It can also serve as a guide to provide better support for children to bridge home and school, navigate the school culture successfully, and benefit from play pedagogy at school.

In the concluding chapter, I discuss my reflections of the research process, limitations of this study and contribution of knowledge that this study has made. In addition, recommendations for schools and further research are also proposed.

# Chapter 8

## Conclusion

### 8.1 Introduction

The final chapter in this thesis discusses my reflections on the research process as well as limitations of this study. In addition, it presents this study's contribution to knowledge, implication for practice, and suggestions for future research. The closing section provides a brief overview of this chapter.

### 8.2 Reflections and Limitations

In hindsight, there are three things that I would have changed given the knowledge I now have. Firstly, as I have described in the methodology chapter, I encountered a lot of difficulty getting participants for my study. I spent over a month giving out flyers, sending mass emails and putting up posters at public places with hardly any response. However, what worked eventually was approaching key figures in the community whom people respect and trust. Thus, given the knowledge that I have gained on participant recruitment, I would have adopted a more effective strategy of approaching key people rather than spending futile effort on random sampling strategies. I would also not have wasted time and expense on Nuance Dragon Naturally Speaking, the voice recognition software I tried to use to transcribe the interviews. As reported in the methodological chapter, this software is probably not suitable for my study because of irregular phrases in the responses.

During the data analysis process I had spent quite a lot of time on coding and categorizing. Unfortunately, it was only after I had finished the data analysis process that I attended a hands-on NVivo workshop organised by University of Sheffield. I then realised that using NVivo would have made my data analysis process more efficient. I would definitely have used NVivo for data analysis had I known that it is a very useful and easy-to-use research software. I was also informed that it is useful for literature reviews. Although I have yet to learn more about all of the uses of Nvivo as a research tool, I would be interested to use NVivo for future research.

One of the limitations of my study is that it does not include teachers' perspectives. The reason for not including teachers' voices in my study was the stipulated word limitation of my thesis - if I had included teachers as participants in my research, I would have amassed a larger amount of data which would then have to be reduced and condensed. Given the word limit, I felt that I may not have done justice to the voices of the mothers and children if I were to include the perspectives of teachers as well. Another limitation is that I did not include any observation of children at school. I had decided not to do so during the research design stage because I anticipated that the children may be attending different schools. It would have been a huge undertaking considering that I would have to request for approval from gatekeepers of different school administrators to conduct observation of children. However, I acknowledge that observation as a research method would be easier if this was a case study in a specific school. The third limitation concerns minor language barriers during research. Two of the participants required some help from family members to translate their responses. During the interview, when some participants did not know certain English words, they sometimes used their native language. It was helpful that I know some basic Arabic. However, there were situations in which I had to consult another person for translation of some words. It is possible that some participants may have been able to express themselves better if I could speak their native language fluently. It is to be noted that it was not possible for me to engage an interpreter because the participants speak different native languages.

### **8.3 Contribution, Implication and Future Research**

I believe that this study makes a significant contribution to knowledge in a few ways. Firstly, it illuminates the cultural variations in play through the juxtaposition of immigrant mothers' and children's play experiences. In addition, it highlights the different learning approaches experienced by immigrant mothers and children as well as the diverse, and sometimes contradicting, perspectives on the approaches. Also, it reveals the accommodations that immigrant mothers make in their attempt to adapt to the culture of their migrated country. These findings provide insights into the richness of cultural capital that children bring to school.

The study also revealed that bicultural children may experience challenges in play which mainly stem from cultural dissonance. However, the findings have also demonstrated how play is used by children and teachers to bridge home and school



cultures. Thus, this study has contributed to understanding children's difficulties in navigating school culture and the strategies that they use in order to construct continuity between home and school.

This study proposes 'play as third space' framework as a guide and structural reference to support children in bridging home and school and navigating the two spaces. The framework is an integration of third space theory diagram (Levy, 2008a), integrated pedagogical approaches model (Wood, 2010), and bridging cultures through dialogues concept (Brooker, 2010). The flexibility of the 'play as third space' framework is that other relevant and appropriate models, framework or concepts could be added to the framework especially in the light of new findings. Thus, I would argue that the 'play as third space' framework holds considerable promise as a theoretical and pedagogical structure to understanding and supporting children's multifaceted experiences.

In the methodological chapter, I described the difficulties faced and the adaptations made in my participant recruitment process. This suggests that the study has reached out to people who are not easily accessible for representation in research. It has also demonstrated the need for cultural responsiveness to gain the trust of participants as well as the need for cultural sensitivity as illustrated in the pilot study. Hence, it is possible to argue that this study has made a small but useful contribution to research methodology, especially for research that involves participants from diverse cultural backgrounds. The findings also illustrated that when drawing is used as a data collection tool, conversation during drawing needs to be included in the analysis and interpretation process to provide clarity to understanding children's meaning making through drawing.

The implication for practice is the use of the 'play as third space' framework for teachers and practitioners. The findings also highlighted the importance of teachers' awareness of the possibility of cultural dissonance, challenges that some children face in play and invisible barriers in accessing the full benefit of play-based approach. Thus, this study proposes that teachers adopt "a critical, reflexive stance" (Wood, 2007, p.319), even during free play activities. Whilst the study did not seek to investigate home-school communication, the findings indicate a lack of two-way communication between home and school. The mothers expressed their desire to have better understanding of the play-based approach so that they can provide better support to their children at home. In addition, the findings suggest that there is area for

improvement in the school's effort to understand and value the home input in children's lives. In order for teachers and practitioners to build learning from children's funds of knowledge in child-centred approaches, they need to engage in dialogue with parents to understand the happenings at home. It is vital for teachers to recognize how play can sometimes create social injustice and inequality, which illuminates the importance of necessary knowledge and training in handling the cultural nuances of play. This remains a missing dimension in much play policy and research where assumptions persist about the universal benefits of play, often without the cultural nuances that are revealed in this study.

Further research can be done to explore teachers' perspectives on their experiences of children experiencing cultural dissonance and the intervention methods used by teachers to support children's adaptation to school culture. In addition, observation as one of the research methods can also be used to deepen inquiry into happenings in second space. Another area of research is to investigate the effectiveness of home-school communication from the perspectives of teachers and parents. The third suggestion for further research is to examine the use of 'play as third space' framework as a structural reference to support children. The 'play as third space' framework could also be used in studies which examine more specific issues such as how digital play acts as a bridge between home and school literacy discourses.

## **8.4 Conclusion**

The impetus for this study is two-layered: 1) personal experiences as an immigrant mother leading to underlying assumption of cultural differences in play and learning between the two contexts of home and school; and 2) the gap in literature on immigrant mothers' cultural capital, and bicultural children's perspectives on their complex experiences of navigating different cultural discourses. The findings have revealed multiple experiences of immigrant mothers and bicultural children, dilemmas faced by immigrant mothers and challenges encountered by bicultural children, as well as adaptations of immigrant mothers and navigational strategies used by children.

As this study is coming to completion, reflections are made on the research processes and the improvements that could have been done to this study. In addition, I have discussed the limitations of this study. Nevertheless, the limitations of lacking in representation of teachers' voices and observation as a research method are recommended to be addressed in further research.

This chapter has discussed this study's contribution to play and learning discourses as well as nuances in methodological and ethical protocol. The findings provide detailed accounts of the funds of knowledge that children bring as they move from one space to another as well as the formation of new knowledge in third space. Based on evidence of play used to bridge home and school discourses in the findings, this doctoral study suggests that 'play as third space' framework can be utilised as a structural reference for school and further research.

In conclusion, critical engagement in cultural nuances of play and learning provide better understanding of children's multilayered lives because "children's culture defines their world" (Brooker, 2011a, p.147).

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## Appendix A: Flyer to recruit participants

# Are you an immigrant mother with a school-going child who is between 5 to 7 years old?

If yes, I hope that you can help me with my research. I am a doctorate student who is doing a research on **'Play and Learning: Experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and children.**

For my research, I will be requesting two interviews: 1.5 hrs interview with you and 1hr interview with your child (in your presence). I would like to hear your experiences and perspectives on play and learning as well as your child's experiences and views. At the end of the two interviews, a \$20 Walmart gift card will be given to you as a token of appreciation for your kindness.

Please call me (Raudhah) at (613)882-4748  
or email me at [msdhah@hotmail.com](mailto:msdhah@hotmail.com).  
Thank you very much.



## Appendix B: Information Sheet

### Information Sheet

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Mdm \_\_\_\_\_, Parent of \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Raudhah Yahya. I am a student at University of Sheffield (UK) and I am currently undertaking Doctor of Education (EdD) in Early Childhood Education. As part of my course, I am conducting a research project on '**Play and learning: Experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and children**'. The objective of my research is to develop a better understanding of immigrant mothers' and children's experiences and perspectives of play and learning. I would like to invite you and your child to take part in my research. All participation in this research is completely voluntary.

I would like to provide more information on the interview process. I will be conducting two interviews: one with you and another with your child. The interviews will be conducted at your house (or another mutually agreed location) and at a mutually agreed date and time. The two interviews can be conducted consecutively on the same day or they can be carried out on separate days. I will begin each interview with both of us signing the consent forms. The first interview will be with you and it will not be more than 1.5 hours. Following that, I will interview your child and it will not be more than 1 hour. Both interviews will be audio-recorded with your permission.

As this research involves only sharing of experiences and perspectives, there are no right or wrong answers to the questions that will be asked. You and your child can decline to answer any of the questions or terminate the interview at any time, if you or your child wishes to do so. After the interviews have been completed, I will transcribe them for analysis. I will send you a transcript of my interview with you and you can make amendments to your responses to my questions, if you wish to do so.

Please be informed that if either you or your child shares with me sensitive issues that involve the well-being of either of you, such as spousal abuse or child abuse, I will have to inform the relevant authorities so that the relevant authorities can render aid to the matter.

All information that you and your child provide are strictly confidential. Your name and your child's name will not appear in any thesis, report or publications resulting from this study. The data collected will be securely stored and will only be accessible to me and my supervisor. After the work has been completed, the audio data will be then be destroyed.

I would like to reassure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics approval through School of Education, University of Sheffield (UK). I believe that there are no known or anticipated risks to your child as a participant in this research. The final decision on participation is yours. If you have any questions regarding this research, or would like additional

1

information to assist you in your decision on yours and your child's participation, please contact me at (613 8514748) or by email at [edp10rby@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp10rby@sheffield.ac.uk).

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this letter. I really hope that you will assist me in my research. The participation of both you and your child will be greatly appreciated and hopefully contribute to the body of knowledge in the research community. If you agree to the participation in this research project, please contact me through phone or email to set a date and time for the interviews.

Yours sincerely,

Raudhah Yahya  
Mobile: 613 8514748  
Email: [edp10rby@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:edp10rby@sheffield.ac.uk)

## Appendix C: Consent Form for Adult Participant

### Consent Form for Adult Participant

Title of Research Project:

**Play and learning: Experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and children.**

Name of Researcher: **Raudhah Yahya**

Participant Identification Number for this project: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please initial in the box after reading.**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated \_\_\_\_\_ explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time of the research process without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline. The contact number of the researcher for me to inform my withdrawal is 613 8514748 (Raudhah Yahya).
3. I understand that I will provide a final consent for the use of the data I provided for the research project after reading the transcripts and making any amendments I wish to make to the transcript.
4. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the reports that result from the research.
5. I agree to the use of audio-recorder for my interviews.
6. I agree for the anonymised text-based data collected from me to be used in research publications and presentations
7. I agree to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Raudhah Yahya  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## Appendix D: Consent Form for Child Participant

### Consent Form for Parent

Title of Research Project:

**Play and learning: Experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and children.**

Name of Researcher: **Raudhah Yahya**

Participant Identification Number for this project: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please initial in the box after reading.**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated \_\_\_\_\_ explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.
2. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw him/her at any time of the research process without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. The contact number of the researcher for me to inform my withdrawal is 613 8514748 (Raudhah Yahya).
3. I understand that my child's responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my child's anonymised responses. I understand that my child's name will not be linked with the research materials, and he/she will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.
4. I understand that I will provide a final consent for the use of the data my child provided for the research project after reading the transcripts.
5. I agree to the use of audio-recorder for my child's interview.
6. I agree for my child's drawings during the interview to be used in research publications and presentations.
7. I agree for the anonymised text-based data collected from my child to be used in research publications and presentations.
8. I agree to allow my child to take part in the above research project.

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender of Child: Male / Female

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant's parent  
(Mother / Father)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

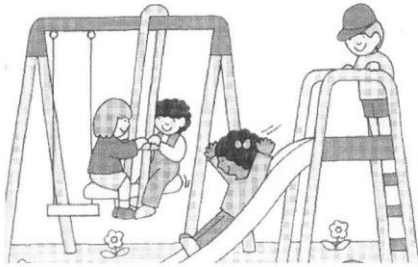
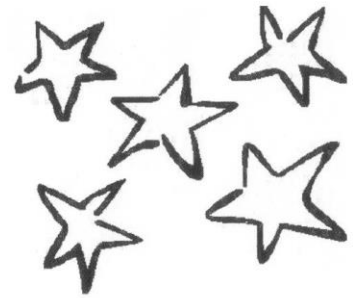
Raudhah Yahya  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**Appendix E: Informal Consent Form for Child**

*I agree to talk to Raudhah so that I can help her find out more about play and learning.*



*But I don't have to answer all her questions. And I can stop anytime I want to.*

## Appendix F: Information of Parent

### Details of Adult Participant

Name of Participant	
Age group of participant	(20-30, 31-40, 41-50)
Working outside, working from home or SAHM	
No of children	
Ages of children	
Did the other older children go through early schooling in Canada?	
Home Country	
No of years in Canada	
Educational Experience	

## Appendix G: Interview Questions for Parents

### Interview questions for parents

#### Parent's experiences

1. What were your learning experiences as a child (around your child's age)?
2. Do you find any similarities or differences between the way you learn in school as a young child as compared to your child? What do you think about it?
3. What kind of play do you engage in when you were a child?
4. Do you find any similarities or differences between the way you play as a young child as compared to your child? What do you think about it?

#### Child's experiences

5. What are the experiences of your child in school? Is he/she happy or does he/she face some problems or difficulties?
6. What do you think of the way your child learns in school? (perspective)
7. Does he/she engage in lots of play in school? What kind of play?
8. If you were given a choice between two public schools: one that adopt the rote-learning method and the other that adopt play-based learning, which one would you prefer?

#### Home environment from parents' perspective

9. Does your child play at home? How does he/she play?
10. Do you think play helps your child to learn? If so, how?
11. Does your child also learn at home? If so, how?



## Appendix H: Interview Questions for Child

### Interview questions with child

(Learning/school)

1. Do you like school? (If no, why?)
2. What is the best thing about school?
3. Is there anything you don't like about school?
4. What do you do in school?
5. What do you learn in school?
6. Do you also learn at home?

(Play)

1. Do you play in school?
2. Who do you play with?
3. What kind of play do you like in school?
4. Who do you usually play with? Why do you like play with him/her? What are your favourite games?
5. When you're not in school, do you play at home?
6. What kind of play do you like at home?
7. Who do you usually play with? Why do you like play with him/her? What are your favourite games?
8. Which one do you prefer? Playing in school or at home? Why?
9. Do you think play helps you learn like doing something you couldn't do before or doing new things?

If so, how?

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## Appendix I: Research Ethics Application Form

### University of Sheffield School of Education

#### RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM

Complete this form if you are planning to carry out research in the School of Education which will not involve the NHS but which will involve people participating in research either directly (e.g. interviews, questionnaires) and/or indirectly (e.g. people permitting access to data).

**Documents to enclose with this form, where appropriate:**

This form should be accompanied, where appropriate, by an Information Sheet/Covering Letter/Written Script which informs the prospective participants about the a proposed research, and/or by a Consent Form.

Guidance on how to complete this form is at:

<http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/11/43/27/Application%20Guide.pdf>

Once you have completed this research ethics application form in full, and other documents where appropriate email it to the:

Either

Ethics Administrator if you are a member of staff.

Or

Secretary for your programme/course if you are a student.

**NOTE**

- Staff and Post Graduate Research (EdD/PhD) requires 3 reviewers
- Undergraduate and Taught Post Graduate requires 1 reviewer – low risk
- Undergraduate and Taught Post Graduate requires 2 reviewers – high risk

I am a member of staff and consider this research to be (according to University definitions):  
:            low risk             high risk           

I am a student and consider this research to be (according to University definitions):  
                                         low risk             high risk           

\*Note: For the purposes of Ethical Review the University Research Ethics Committee considers all research with 'vulnerable people' to be 'high risk' (eg children under 18 years of age).

University of Sheffield School of Education  
RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM

COVER SHEET

I confirm that in my judgment, due to the project's nature, the use of a method to inform prospective participants about the project (eg 'Information Sheet'/'Covering Letter'/'Pre-Written Script'?):	
Is relevant	Is not relevant
1. Flyer to request for volunteers 2. Information sheet  (if relevant then this should be enclosed)	

I confirm that in my judgment, due to the project's nature, the use of a 'Consent Form':	
Is relevant	Is not relevant
1. Consent form for adult participant(mother) 2. Consent form for child participant (to be signed by parent)  (if relevant then this should be enclosed)	

Is this a 'generic "en bloc" application (ie does it cover more than one project that is sufficiently similar)	
Yes	No
	It is a single project for my EdD thesis.

I am a member of staff

I am a PhD/EdD student

I am a Master's student

I am an Undergraduate student

I am a PGCE student

The submission of this ethics application has been agreed by my supervisor

Supervisor's signature/name and date of agreement

*E.A. Wood*

.....13.13.....  
.....

I have enclosed a signed copy of Part B



University of Sheffield School of Education  
RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM

**PART A**

**A1. Title of Research Project**

Play and learning at home and school: the intergenerational experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and children.

**A2. Applicant (normally the Principal Investigator, in the case of staff-led research projects, or the student in the case of supervised research projects):**

Title: Ms                      First Name/Initials: Raudhah                      Last Name: Yahya  
Post: Student                      Department: Department of Education  
Email: edp10rby@sheffield.ac.uk                      Telephone: +16138514748

**A.2.1. Is this a student project?**

If yes, please provide the Supervisor's contact details:

Professor Elizabeth Ann Wood  
Professor of Education. Director of Research  
University of Sheffield  
**Tel:** (+44) (0)114 222 7048  
**Fax:** (+44) (0)114 222 8105  
**Email:** [e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk)

**A2.2. Other key investigators/co-applicants (within/outside University), where applicable:**  
Not Applicable

Please list all (add more rows if necessary)

Title	Full Name	Post	Responsibility in project	Organisation	Department

**A3. Proposed Project Duration:**

Start date: 01 Sept 2012

End date: 31 Aug 2014

**A4. Mark 'X' in one or more of the following boxes if your research:**

X	Involves children or young people aged under 18 years
	Involves only identifiable personal data with no direct contact with participants
	Involves only anonymised or aggregated data
	Involves prisoners or others in custodial care (eg young offenders)
	Involves adults with mental incapacity or mental illness
X	Has the primary aim of being educational (eg student research, a project necessary for a postgraduate degree or diploma, MA, PhD or EdD)

**A5. Briefly summarise the project's aims, objectives and methodology?**

The aim of this study is to develop a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and children in terms of play and learning.

There are four objectives to this study:

1. To explore the play and early learning experiences of the immigrant mothers.
2. To find out the perspectives of the immigrant mothers on the comparison between their play and learning experiences and their children's play and learning experiences.
3. To compare the play and learning experiences of the children at home and in school.
4. To seek the perspectives of the children on their play and learning experiences.

I will be using qualitative method for this study. It will be situated in the interpretivist paradigm. I am an immigrant mother who has relocated to Ottawa (Canada). I have the experience of growing up in my home country in Singapore and the experience of my children growing up in Canada, although they are no longer at the age of 5 to 7. In addition, I have volunteered in child care centres in both countries and observed the play and learning pedagogies adopted. Hence, I am aware that my research, commencing from the choice of topic to the various stages of the research, may be influenced by my experiences and perspectives as an immigrant mother from the Eastern world.

The methodology involves two interviews: One with the mother and another with the child. The interviews will be conducted at the house of the participant at a mutually agreed day and time. The participant will be given a choice of having both interviews on the same day, or to have two separate days for the interviews. The interview with the mother will not take more than 1.5 hours while the interview with the child will not take more than 1 hour. The interview with the child will be in the form of conversation while playing with the child.

**A6. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?**

There is no known potential physical or psychological harm or distress to all participants as this study involves only sharing of experiences and perspectives. However, there is a possibility that there will be inconvenience to the participants because I will be taking up their time for the interviews. In addition, they may not be comfortable allowing me to conduct the interview at their house. In this case, the participant and I can decide on a mutually-agreed location such as my house or a safe and quiet public place.

**A7. Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project and, if yes, explain how these issues will be managed?**

No. I believe that there will not be an issue of personal safety as the participant is a female. Also, the venue for research will be not be in a high risk location but in the house of the participant. However, for precaution, I will be informing my family member of the date, time and location of the interview. In addition, I will carry my mobile phone with me. If the participant declines her house to be a location for the interview, I will suggest my house or another mutually agreed quiet and safe public place.

**A8. How will the potential participants in the project be (i) identified, (ii) approached and (iii) recruited?**

The participants will be recruited from my town, Ottawa in Canada. I will distribute flyers requesting for volunteers at Asian Supermarkets, language school for immigrants and local mosques. I will also be sending a mass email to an internet group which consists of mostly female immigrants in my town. I hope to get 20 pairs of mother-child participants for my study.

I will request to be contacted through phone call or email if they are willing to volunteer for my research. When contacted, I will provide details of my study and request for their contact details (Name of mother, age of child, phone number, email address and home address). Then, I will send them the information sheet explaining my research. Subsequently, I will call them to set the date and time for the interviews.

There are 5 criteria to the selection of the adult participant.

1. The participant must be residing in Ottawa.
2. The participant must a mother, not a father.
3. The participant must have a school-going child between 5 to 7 years old. The child can be a boy or a girl.
4. The participant must be an immigrant who has spent her growing up years in her home country.
5. The participant must be able to communicate in English.

There are 4 criteria to the child participant.

1. The participant must be the child of the adult participant.
2. The participant must be living with the adult participant.
3. The participant must be between 5 to 7 year old.
4. The participant must be going to a school in Ottawa (not home-schooled). (The participant can be a boy or a girl).

**A9. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?**

Yes

No

X

If informed consent is not to be obtained please explain why. Further guidance is at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/policy-notes/consent>  
Only under exceptional circumstances are studies without informed consent permitted.  
Students should consult their tutors.

**A.9.1 How do you plan to obtain informed consent? (i.e. the proposed process?):**

An information sheet describing the details of the research will be posted or emailed to the participants prior to the interviews. The information sheet is attached to this form.

Before starting the interview, I will brief the adult participants on the objective of my research and the participants and I will be signing the consent form. I will then inform the participants of their right to not answer any of my questions and the right to terminate the interview at any time they wish. I will also inform them that the transcript of the interview will be sent to them and they can make modification to their responses to my questions.

For the children, their parents will be signing on their behalf. At the start of my interview with the children, I will brief each child individually, in simple terms, on the objective of the research. I will inform the children a simplified version of the objective, such as 'I would like to know what you think about play and learning and things you do at home and in school. There is no right or wrong answers to my questions.' In addition to the formal consent given by the parents, prior to the interview, I will inform the children that they can stop the interview at any time they wish to do so. They will also be informed that they can choose not to answer any of the interview questions if they wish. In addition, although not considered as a formal consent, I will give an informal consent-like poster for the child to sign or draw. The request for the children to sign on a consent-like poster may help the children feel more empowered in the interview. I will also be extra sensitive and vigilant to the nonverbal cues or body language of the children which may indicate that they do not want to answer the question asked or continue with the interview.

I will pilot test the interview questions with one mother and her child so that I will have a better understanding of how my interview questions will be perceived and understood by the participants, especially the children.

**A.10 How will you ensure appropriate protection and well-being of participants?**

At the beginning of the interview, I will inform the participants that they have a choice to end the interview at any time they wish. They may also choose not to answer any questions if they wish to do so. Their data will be anonymised and they will not be identifiable in the thesis, articles or publication resulting from the study. The participants will also be given a transcript of the interviews. I will seek their approval for the use of the transcripts.

In the event that a disclosure comes into light during the data collection period, I will discuss with my supervisor if it is necessary to bring up the issue to the relevant authorities. Prior to the interviews, I will inform both the child



and adult participants that if what they share with me is something about them being harmed, I will have to inform the authorities so that the authorities can help them. This is also indicated on my information sheet which will be given to the parents prior to the interviews.

**A.11 What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?**

After the interviews, I will transcribe the audio-recordings. The name of the participant will not be written on the transcripts, instead, the participants will only be identified using codes allocated to them. All audio-recordings and transcripts will be stored in my house. Also, the transcribing process and the data analysis process will also be conducted at my house. I will be the only person who will transcribe and analyse the data. My supervisor will also have access to the transcripts and analysis of data.

All data will be securely stored and all audio data will be destroyed after the work is completed. The participants' names will not appear in any part of the thesis, articles or publications resulting from the study.

**A.12 Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided.)**

Yes

X

No

On the flyer to recruit volunteers for my study, I will indicate that there will be a token of appreciation of a gift card valued at CAN\$20 upon completion of the two interviews (Interview with the mother and interview with the child). In addition, although not informed to participants prior to the interviews, I will also be giving a small gift of toy or book amounting to not more than CAN\$5 per child. These gifts are gestures of appreciation to their kindness in giving me their time.

**A.13 Will the research involve the production of recorded or photographic media such as audio and/or video recordings or photographs?**

Yes

X

No

**A.13.1 This question is only applicable if you are planning to produce recorded or visual media: How will you ensure that there is a clear agreement with participants as to how these recorded media or photographs may be stored, used and (if appropriate) destroyed?**

The research will involve audio-recording of the interviews. In addition to the written consent on the use of audio-recorder, I will seek a verbal consent from both participants (the adult participant and the child participant), before commencing the interview. I will ask the child to test the digital audio

recorder, so that he/she will be more informed of the audio-recording. In the information sheet, the participants are informed that all audio-recording will be securely stored and will only be accessible to me and my supervisor. They are also informed that upon completion of work, the audio data will be destroyed.

University of Sheffield School of Education  
RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM

**PART B - THE SIGNED DECLARATION**

I confirm my responsibility to deliver the research project in accordance with the University of Sheffield's policies and procedures, which include the University's *'Financial Regulations'*, *'Good research Practice Standards'* and the *'Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue'* (Ethics Policy) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the research funder.

In signing this research ethics application I am confirming that:

1. The above-named project will abide by the University's Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue': <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/index.html>
2. The above-named project will abide by the University's 'Good Research Practice Standards': <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/general-principles/homepage.html>
3. The research ethics application form for the above-named project is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.
4. There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.
5. Subject to the research being approved, I undertake to adhere to the project protocol without unagreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter from the University ethics reviewers notifying me of this.
6. I undertake to inform the ethics reviewers of significant changes to the protocol (by contacting my supervisor or the Ethics Administrator as appropriate
7. I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer (within the University the Data Protection Officer is based in CICS).
8. I understand that the project, including research records and data, may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future.
9. I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this form will be held by those involved in the ethics review procedure (eg the Ethics Administrator and/or ethics reviewers/supervisors) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.
10. If this is an application for a 'generic'/'en block' project all the individual projects that fit under the generic project are compatible with this application.

11. I will inform the Chair of Ethics Review Panel if prospective participants make a complaint about the above-named project.

**Signature of student (student application):**

*Raithel*

**Signature of staff (staff application):**

Not Applicable

**Date:**

28 FEB 2013

Email the completed application form to the course/programme secretary

For staff projects contact the Ethics Secretary, Colleen Woodward  
Email: [c.woodward@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:c.woodward@sheffield.ac.uk) for details of how to submit

## Appendix J: Ethical Approval from University of Sheffield



**The  
School  
Of  
Education.**

Raudhah Yahya

**Head of School**  
Professor Cathy Nutbrown

School of Education  
388 Glossop Road  
Sheffield  
S10 2JA

20 March 2013

**Telephone:** +44 (0)114 222 8096  
**Email:** edd@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Raudhah

### **ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER**

#### **Play and learning at home and school: the intergenerational experiences and perspectives of immigrant mother and children**

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved, and you can proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely



Professor Dan Goodley

**Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel**

cc Prof Liz Wood

## Appendix K: Interview Guidelines

### Steps to take when conducting interview

#### Introduce myself.

#### Information Sheet

1. Take out 2 copies of information sheet; fill in date, Mother's name and child's name.
2. Give her one information sheet, and ask her to read.
3. Go through some details with her.

#### Consent Form for Adult Participant

1. Take out Adult Participant consent form. Go through with Mother and ask her to initial after each point.
2. Ask her to sign on 2 copies and I sign on 2 copies.
3. Give one copy to her.

#### Consent Form for Parent

1. Take out 2 Child Participant consent forms. Go through with Mother and ask her to initial after each point.
2. Ask her to fill in the details on the child and sign on 2 copies and I sign on 2 copies.
3. Give one copy to her.

#### Interview with Parent

1. Ask to fill up participant details. Option to not answer any of the questions.
2. Ask for verbal consent on the use of audio-recorder.
3. Ask for verbal consent to start interview.
4. Start audio-recorder.
5. Start timer on iphone.
6. Begin interview

#### Interview with Child

1. Introduce myself.
2. Take out consent-like poster, read to the child, ask the child if he/she will help, take out the crayon to colour if he/she agrees.
3. Show the audio-recorder and demonstrate how it works. Is it ok if I use this?
4. Ask the child to start the audio-recorder.
5. Start the iphone timer.
6. Ask if he/she wants to play with playdough
7. Ask questions about learning and school.
8. Ask questions about play in school and at home

9. At the end of the interview, ask if the child can draw something for me (perhaps something you like?)
10. Ask if I can keep the drawing
11. Stop the audio-recorder. Inform the child, he/she can keep the crayons. And give the child a gift.  
-----
12. Ask parent if I can keep the drawing.

**Showing Appreciation**

1. Give the \$20 Walmart gift card to show appreciation.

**Appendix L: Printed email to Ottawa Islamic Community Closet dated 20 March  
2013**

Outlook.com Print Message

Page 1 of 2

[Print](#)

[Close](#)

**[TheOttawaIslamicCommunityCloset] Research participants  
needed (Immigrant Mothers)**

From: **R Y** (msdhah@hotmail.com)  
Sent: March-20-13 5:39:13 PM  
To: theottawaislamiccommunitycloset@yahooogroups.com  
(theottawaislamiccommunitycloset@yahooogroups.com)

Assalamualaikum warahmatullah,

**Are you an immigrant mother with a school-going child who is between 5 to 7 years old?**

If yes, I hope that you can help me with my research. I am a doctorate student who is doing a research on '*Play and Learning: Experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and children*'

For my research, I will be requesting two interviews: 1.5 hours interview with you and 1hr interview with your child (in your presence). I would like to hear your experiences and perspectives on play and learning as well as your child's experiences and views. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions as I am just asking for your opinions and sharing of experiences. At the end of the two interviews, a \$20 Walmart gift card will be given to you as a token of appreciation for your kindness.

There are 4 criteria to the selection of the mother:

1. The mother must be residing in Ottawa.
2. The mother must have a school-going child between 5 to 7 years old. The child can be a boy or a girl.
3. The mother must be an immigrant who has spent her growing up years in her home country.
4. The mother must be able to communicate in English.

There are 3 criteria to the selection of the child:

1. The child must be living with the mother.
2. The child must be between 5 to 7 years old.
3. The child must be going to a public school in Ottawa (not home-schooled). (The child can be a boy or a girl)

Please call me (Raudhah) at 613-882-4748 or email me at [msdhah@hotmail.com](mailto:msdhah@hotmail.com)

Thank you very much for taking the time to read my email. I hope that you can help me by contacting me as soon as possible. Jazakillah khair.

<https://blu180.mail.live.com/ol/mail.mvc/PrintMessages?mkt=en-ca>

2014-05-22



**Appendix M: Printed email to Ottawa Chinese Community Service Centre dated  
21 March 2013**

Outlook.com Print Message

Page 1 of 2

[Print](#)

[Close](#)

**Request for help in recruiting volunteers for research on  
Immigrant mothers and children**

From: R Y (msdhah@hotmail.com)  
Sent: March-21-13 7:34:55 PM  
To: occsc@occsc.org  
1 attachment  
flyer.docx (15.8 KB)

Dear Sir/Mdm

My name is Raudhah Yahya. I am a student at University of Sheffield (UK) and I am currently undertaking Doctor of Education (EdD) in Early Childhood Education. As part of my course, I am conducting a research project on **'Play and learning: Experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and children'**. The objective of my research is to develop a better understanding of immigrant mothers' and children's experiences and perspectives of play and learning. I would like to request help from Ottawa Chinese Community Service Centre in recruiting volunteers for my study by distributing this request through OCCSC's email database, if possible. I have attached my flyer on this email.

I would like to thank you for taking your time in reading my email and I hope that OCCSC committee will be able to help me in recruiting volunteers for my study.

Best regards,  
Raudhah Yahya

**" Do you know of an immigrant mother with a school-going child who is between 5 to 7 years old?"**

If yes, I hope that you can help me with my research by passing this information to her. I am a doctorate student who is doing a research on *'Play and Learning: Experiences and perspectives of immigrant mothers and children'*

For my research, I will be requesting two interviews: 1.5 hours interview with the mother and 1hr interview with her child (in her presence). I would like to hear her experiences and perspectives on play and learning as well as her child's experiences and views.

There are no right or wrong answers to my questions as I am just asking for opinions and sharing of experiences. At the end of the two interviews, a \$20 Walmart gift card will be given to the mother as a token of appreciation for her kindness.

<https://blu180.mail.live.com/ol/mail.mvc/PrintMessages?mkt=en-ca>

2014-05-22

There are 4 criteria to the selection of the mother:

1. The mother must be residing in Ottawa.
2. The mother must have a school-going child between 5 to 7 years old. The child can be a boy or a girl.
3. The mother must be an immigrant who has spent her growing up years in her home country.
4. The mother must be able to communicate in English.

There are 3 criteria to the selection of the child:

1. The child must be living with the mother.
2. The child must be between 5 to 7 years old.
3. The child must be going to a **public** school in Ottawa (not home-schooled).  
(The child can be a boy or a girl)

Please call me (Raudhah) at 613-882-4748 or email me at [msdhah@hotmail.com](mailto:msdhah@hotmail.com)

Thank you very much."

**Appendix N: Printed email to Ottawa Islamic Community Closet dated 23 April 2013**

Outlook.com Print Message

Page 1 of 2

[Print](#)

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**RE: [TheOttawaIslamicCommunityCloset] Please help me complete my studies**

From: **R Y (msdhah@hotmail.com)**  
Sent: April-23-13 9:49:32 PM  
To: **ryze2008@yahoo.ca (ryze2008@yahoo.ca)**  
2 attachments  
flyer.docx (16.4 KB) , munnyy.png (61.1 KB)

Assalamu'alaikum sisters.

I really need your help in my research so that I can write my thesis to complete my studies.

Please help me by replying to my email or calling me if you meet the criteria for my research participant or if you dont, please help me by passing this information to someone whom you know who meet the criteria. Or you can help me by forwarding this email to other email groups that you are a member of.

The information on my research and my contact details are in the attachment to this email.

For the interview, I can meet at a public place such as the park or if you'd like, we can also have the interview in your home or mine.

I will also show you my student ID as verification. I have also attached a photo of myself in this email, so that you will an idea of who will interview you, should you agree to volunteer to be interviewed.

Thank you very much. I really hope that you will contact me.

Raudhah  
813-882-4748

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**RECENT ACTIVITY:**  
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2014-05-22

## Appendix O: Excerpt of interview with Aisha

(Parent 1)

**R:** Researcher, **P:** Parent, **Native Country:** Refers to the country that the parent grew up in, it replaces the name of the country that the participant mentioned.

**“The transcript is based on only parts of the interview that are more relevant to the research topic. Some parts have also been moved to the more relevant part/question”**

### Parent’s experiences

**1. What were your learning experiences as a child (around your child’s age)?**

P1: Learning experiences were much different because here, children are usually alone and there is no extended family. And also the academic point of view, there is huge differences. In my native country, there is a lot of emphasis put on writing abilities and from the beginning even. And here, the stress is much more on playing than from pure reading and writing from beginning. That was one major difference that I noticed.

R: How was school like?

P1: I went to very good schools actually. And because of that I don’t have any language problems and I’m here in another country. All education is in English. And our native language, we speak at our home and even in schools and educational institutions too. But all the reading, books, and everything is in English.

**2. Do you find any similarities or differences between the ways you learn in school as a young child as compared to your child? What do you think about it?**

P1: The approach to teaching was definitely different. At his age, even his cousins in our native country, they have much more prettier writing. He can read well more than them even. There is a difference, I think, he is more knowledgeable. He knows about a lot of things but there, his counterparts of the same age, they can write better and they have other skills which he lacks because of the social differences. But he reads better than them at the same age.

R: So, are you saying that your learning experiences are similar to his cousins in your native country?

P1: Yes, Mine was but not his.

P1: I think there are more differences than similarities. Tests, there are lots of stress put on tests and doing homework. You have to memorize a lot actually compared to here.

R: Was there any teaching through play in your native country?

P1: Yes, but not as much as here.

R: Can you find any similarities?

P1: No, I think not. Very different actually. There is a huge difference, the way they handle it, approach it.

**3. Do you find any similarities or differences between the ways you play as a young child as compared to your child? What do you think about it?**

P1: At that age, they are lots of similarities. We tend to copy our older, elders, anybody who is around us. My mother used to sew on sewing machines for example. There was a toy sewing machine I had. I played with it a lot at that age. And there was a toy washing machine and I used to imitate my mother and all that. Because everybody used to repeat all those things to me so many times even till I got bigger. And it is the same thing for my son because he used to imitate me like when I'm cooking. I used to give him all my utensils and bowls and he used to pretend. He wanted the same, he didn't want the toy one.

R: What about the people whom you play with?

P1: I had cousins and neighbours.

There is no culture of going to playgroups like the commercial kind, like any child care settings here. There is no culture like that in my native country.

R: So, you play with your cousins?

P1: There are so many and they live not far from each other. They come and they play.

R: How about outdoor play?

P1: Outdoor play was very different from here. I think the ballgame is kind of similar and other games too. And I'm learning with my son that they play the same kind of games that we used to play, only the names are different. They are the same things actually. I don't know what he calls it, they sit in a circle on the ground. We used to play that kind of stuff. It's the same thing like playing tag and hide and seek. Different names in our language but the same thing.

R: So, how about in school? Do you play during recess or during lessons too?

P1: During recess, not during school. In my years, no.

R: Who does he play with?

P1: His friend who lives across the street. Neighbours. And classmates too. In winter, they come inside the house. Since the weather is better, they go to park. I take them actually and his mother also comes.

R: Do you find that he has find as many playmates as you had in your native country?

P1: No, actually he is a shy kid by himself. He's not getting those as many opportunities because he feels more comfortable with our native language speaking people. Because we speak the same language inside the house. So, he is not getting that because there are not so many people around. I think he is lacking in that. But he has gotten much better now. Because when he first started going to school JK, he was very shy, he couldn't even answer anybody. But now he's much better.

## Appendix P: Example of Coding of Data

**Do you think play helps your child learn? If so, how?**

P1: Definitely. In so many levels still learning from playing. Like basic concepts, like counting, like math, basic math from playing. Sometimes Science.

Educational Games

**Do you think play helps your child learn? If so, how?**

P2: Yes. For example, many things he learn through laptop that I don't know. 'Mama, don't you know, you should do this, you should do that'. My husband said 'He knows better than you (mother)'. That means he learns by himself. Spelling such as 'Spiderman'. Such type of spelling he learns because he loves to play those games. Supposed he loves to watch 'Mr. Bean'. Now he learns the spelling of Mr. Bean because he is curious, he loves to watch. If I press these buttons, Mr. Bean will come out on the screen. He knows YouTube, Google. I was also surprised how he learnt by himself. Because he is curious to know. If I tell him many, many things, he will learn because he is curious. I prefer to tell him what he wants to know.

Independent Learning

R: What about other toys?

P2: Supposed one thing. He has five, six cars. Supposed he park different cars at different places and one car was here. He asked me "Mama, how does this car go from here while there are so many cars?" "Ok, you should tell me" "Ok, move this one a bit behind, this one move, then, this car can pass from here." He has collection of different types of cars. Different games. Sometimes accident. Sometimes wrong parking, big vehicle is coming and taking the wrong parking car. Imaginary he's thinking what is going on. Whatever he is observing from his surrounding, he is used to do at home. He knows more than me in traffic rules. This is sign board. This sign board is saying this.

Reenacting real life situations

**Do you think play helps your child learn? If so, how?**

P3: Yes. Most I play Ludo, board game. I will help her with Ludo. She learns how to strategies and how to win, how to dominate.

Strategies / Skills

**Do you think play helps your child learn? If so, how?**

P4: Yes. I think it just makes her more interested. So, they are more eager. So, you have more attention and also whatever they learn, it sinks deeper. Because when it is play-based, it can be very visual. So, at home too, whenever I need to teach them something, I try to make it play-based.

Increase interaction learning

**Do you think play helps your child learn? If so, how?**

R: Like video games?

P5: Not really. I don't like it. But sometimes you just give in. So, we try to limit it. But I don't think they learn anything from it. It's just games. I know they have a lot of

vocabulary based on what they are playing on the games. But if you ask me, are they really learning something from it? I would just say play, just fun.

R: How about any other games?

P5: We play the word card games that teaches him spelling. So, you show him the picture, based on the pronunciation, he will try to spell it. He loves it. He's getting better with that. Recognizing the words, it teaches you the spelling and phonetics.

Educational games

P5: He used to play with toys but he doesn't anymore. For the past one year. These things (electronics) are taking over toys.

**Do you think play helps your child learn? If so, how?**

P6: When he play electronic play, he learn to play. When he knows how to play, that is learning. When he knows how to soccer, that is learning how to play.

Strategies / skills

**Do you think play helps your child learn? If so, how?**

P7: Sure. But playing with other, not by herself. She's creative when she draws. When she plays the playdoh. I like she's playing some games with others, she can get a word from here and there. Like allergy. 'What is allergy, Mama?' She asks me something 'Mama, my friend said something. Is it right?'. 'Is it good, us it not good'. The behaviour mostly. 'Is it true?' I give her the answer. This happens when they are playing with someone, they are discussing something with each other. Sometimes different culture. This happened when they are playing with someone else. They are concentrating when they are playing with themselves, but by themselves they got bored fast. With the others, 'let's see who's better', so, they can take a long time.

Learning about cultures

R: What do you mean when you said she learned from other culture?

P7: Different questions. Like their lives, their food.

R: Does she get questioned about her culture when she's playing?

P7: Yes. 'Why this your mum wearing this kind of thing?' 'Why is your mum doing this (action during praying)?'

P7: Yes, they learn from playing. The problem with us, we want to teach them the way we learn. That's why I would like to volunteer to see how they teach the kids. Because they got the information. They got it when they are happy. I don't know how to help them (my children) the same way. The way I study, read then answer.

**Do you think play helps your child learn? If so, how?**

P8: Yes. I think like blocks, she learns how to create shapes. It makes her brain better, analyze things. What fits and what doesn't fit. She discovers new things through play

Honing Creativity