Kindergarten Teachers’ Practices to Support Children’s Social and Emotional Development: Case Studies in Western Australian Catholic Schools

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Murdoch University
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**Kindergarten Teachers’ Practices to Support Children’s Social and Emotional Development: Case Studies in Western Australian Catholic Schools**

**Abstract**

This study investigated how teachers in Western Australian Catholic schools supported kindergarten children’s social and emotional development. By employing a sociocultural conceptual approach to analyse the data, this study highlighted the contribution of the local community’s educational values on the methods and patterns of programming and interactions within the classroom. The quantity and quality of teacher-child interactions, and where they occurred in the program were indicative of the support given to children’s social and emotional development.

An ethnographical approach was employed to investigate the complexity of classroom interactions and cultural influences on the program. Six teachers volunteered to participate in the study, providing a diverse range of not only pedagogical styles but also socio-economic areas and cultural backgrounds. A triangulation of research instruments were used to provide a more holistic view of how the teachers were supporting children’s social and emotional development. These included a teacher survey that investigated how the teacher interpreted their pedagogical approach; a survey that required teachers to rate the participating children’s social and emotional development; extensive participant-observations, and informal and formal teacher interviews. The data were presented as case studies with the emerging themes and patterns discussed in the cross case analysis.

This study found that children’s social and emotional development was best supported when (1) the classroom program provided a balance between teacher- and child-guided activities, (2) the teachers perceived both modes of activities as important vehicles for learning, and (3) the teachers recognised the importance of their role in supporting children’s social and emotional development in both teacher- and child-initiated activities. In addition, the teachers that were more effective in supporting children’s social and emotional development placed equal emphasis on relationships, play and physical and psychological environment. The data suggested that different suburbs in the Perth metropolitan area held different values on educational goals. These values influenced kindergarten teachers’ pedagogy and the emphasis they placed on supporting social and emotional development. This study has implications for early childhood educators and the way they organise their programs and classrooms. Specifically it emphasises the importance of the teachers’ role in supporting children’s social and emotional development in all aspects of the classroom context, not just during teacher-initiated activities.
I, Gillian Kirk, hereby declare that:

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person except where due reference is made.

Signature: Dated this day:
Acknowledgements

I have great admiration for the teachers who volunteered to be a part of this study. They are eight incredible women who desired nothing more than to create better education for young children. To each of you, I thank you for your professionalism, courage and selflessness.

I would like to thank my family for all their support and encouragement over what seems a lifetime. I am indebted to you, my wonderful husband Ian, my precious children Anjela, Mitchell and Eliza and my dearest friend Sheridan who have all showed me unwavering belief and strength. I share with them this finished document, it could not have been done without them.

I must thank Dr Libby Lee-Hammond and Dr Judy MacCallum for the supervision of this thesis, and say a special thank you to Judy for introducing me to the works of Barbara Rogoff. I would also like to make special mention of my critical friend Dr Jenny Jay who has been of great support to me, thank you Jenny.

During this lifetime of writing, two lives have come and two have gone. I dedicate this thesis to my grandchildren’s future, and with utmost respect to my parents’ memory. I don’t regret a second I spent with you.
**Glossary of Acronyms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACARA</td>
<td>Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACECQA</td>
<td>Australian Children’s Education and Care Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E4Kids</td>
<td>Effective Early Educational Experiences for Kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECEC</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education and Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EYLF</td>
<td>Early Years Learning Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQS</td>
<td>National Quality Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIPS</td>
<td>Performance Indicators in Primary Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZPD</td>
<td>Zone of Proximal Development</td>
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This study investigates how teachers are supporting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development in Western Australian schools. The research employs sociocultural theory as a vehicle for interpreting interactions, activities and events, and how each contributes to kindergarten children’s social and emotional development. The underlying concept is that social and emotional skills and strategies are learned and practiced through social interactions. Underpinning this theory is that even those interactions that are not intended as instruction are guiding children’s social and emotional development.

As this study takes place in Western Australia it has particular implications as the Western Australian kindergarten context has certain dissimilarities to the rest of Australia (these differences are outlined later in this section). Consequently, the findings from this research may be used to inform other states and territories who anticipate adopting a similar kindergarten and school model to Western Australia.

When the data for this study were collected in 2009, the policy and practice in kindergartens across Australia lacked focus and integration (Elliott, 2006) and were characterised by fragmentation and inequity (Walker, 2004). Table 1.1 outlines the similarities and differences in four year old programmes across Australia. Of particular note is that only Western Australian (and Tasmanian) kindergartens come solely under an Education Act. This implies that not only are these kindergartens integrated within the school system, they are also indirectly subject to mandated school assessments.
### Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>4 Year Old Programme</th>
<th>Regulatory Body</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Western Australia</strong></td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Department of education</td>
<td>School Education Act 1999&lt;br&gt;School Education Regulations 2000</td>
<td>School sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New South Wales</strong></td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Department of education and training Community Services</td>
<td>Children and Young Persons Act 1998&lt;br&gt;Children’s Services Regulation 2004&lt;br&gt;Education Act 1990</td>
<td>Day cares, or stand alones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tasmania</strong></td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Department of education</td>
<td>Education Act 1994</td>
<td>School sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victoria</strong></td>
<td>Preschool or kindergarten</td>
<td>Department of Human Services</td>
<td>Children’s Services Act 1996&lt;br&gt;Children’s Services Regulations 1998</td>
<td>Day cares, or stand alones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>South Australia</strong></td>
<td>Kindergartens (3/4) or CPCs (1/4)</td>
<td>Department of education and children’s services (DECS)&lt;br&gt;Stand-alone – Children’s services act&lt;br&gt;CPCs – Education act</td>
<td>Govt. - Children’s Services Act 1972&lt;br&gt;Non-govt. – Education Act 1972 or Children’s Services Legislation</td>
<td>Stand-alone (Kindergarten) or on school sites (CPCs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Queensland</strong></td>
<td>Preschool and community kindergartens</td>
<td>Department of education (preschool)&lt;br&gt;Crèche and Kindergarten association of Queensland (C &amp; K centres)</td>
<td>Child Care Act 2002&lt;br&gt;Child Care Regulation 2003</td>
<td>Preschools are stand-alone in the community, and C &amp; K in long day cares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Territory</strong></td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET)</td>
<td></td>
<td>School site (sometimes, along with day care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australian Capital Territory</strong></td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Department of Education, Youth and Family Services&lt;br&gt;Preschool – children’s youth and family services</td>
<td></td>
<td>Either close to or on school sites</td>
</tr>
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(Sources: Department of Education and Training, WA., 2003; Dowling & O’Malley, 2009; Walker, 2004)

#### 1.1 Background

This topic is of particular interest to me as an Early Childhood Consultant and was prompted by my observations of changes in the focus of teaching and learning in...
kindergartens. In writing this dissertation I often use first person. This is partly because of the personal interest that I have invested in this study, but also to acknowledge my role in constructing and interpreting the data. Part of my role includes providing support to schools in implementing the National Quality Standard\(^1\) (NQS: ACECQA, 2011, 2013) from pre-kindergarten to Year 2. The Standards are centred on improving quality in early childhood settings and the high-level outcome statements (Standards) are informed by extensive research. The document identifies seven quality areas, two of which are *Educational Program and Practice* (Quality Area 1) and *Relationships with Children* (Quality Area 5).

Generally, these two quality areas promote children’s active engagement in learning experiences through challenging, but individually and developmentally appropriate play-based activities, and through responsive and respectful teacher-child relationships. The core of the curriculum is to promote the development of the whole child through integrated, joyful learning processes that are enabled through caring, informed and supportive teacher–child interactions. The research underpinning the NQS has determined that this context provides a rich environment for life-long learning.

Therein lies the dilemma. Although the NQS is purporting this as ‘best practice’, the early childhood practice that appears to be taking traction is different from this best practice. Some of the practice that I am seeing, or have been told about by early childhood practitioners, is characterised by long periods of teacher instruction and few episodes of play. What appears to be driving these programmes is the mandated National Assessment Programme – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) that many

\[^1\] While the NQS is an Australia-wide document, only Western Australia and Queensland have extended it to include up to Year 2. In the other states and territories the NQS applies only to Kindergarten. The NQS “contains 18 standards with two or three standards in each quality area. These standards are high-level outcome statements. Under each standard sit elements that describe the outcomes that contribute to the standard being achieved. There are 58 elements in total” (ACECQA, 2013, p. 9)
kindergarten children will be sitting in four years’ time. Anecdotal evidence suggests that if this test is not the kindergarten programmes’ primary driver, then it is the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS)\(^2\) test.

The PIPS assessment was designed to assist with assessing progress of students entering primary school in literacy and numeracy (University of Western Australia, 2010). Catholic schools piloted this programme in 2004 and it became mandate in 2006. Similarly, NAPLAN was designed to indicate curriculum direction and strengthen educational outcomes. However, the publishing of schools’ NAPLAN results on the My School website\(^3\) through the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) quickly led to the perception of a league table. With this, the initial educative intent was overtaken with the notion that these scores are indicative of how good the school is.

Consequently, teacher directed kindergarten programmes have grown in popularity apparently due to the increasing conception that these programmes will guarantee children’s readiness for year one (Bredekamp, 1987; Katz, 1999). Many schools have begun “teaching to the test” – often resulting in a narrowing of the curriculum where the focus has shifted from ‘learning to learn’ to ‘learning to pass the test’ (Caldwell, 2010). This quest for higher scores has inevitably filtered down to kindergarten where evidence of teaching to this test is not only expected, but demanded.

\(^2\) In Catholic Western Australian schools these are the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) which takes place in first and fourth terms in the Pre-primary year (the year after kindergarten), and the National Assessment Programme – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) which is undertaken at a national level in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in the second full week in May.

\(^3\) My School is an online tool that provides users with information on school data such as a school’s profile, academic performance, funding sources and financials. The My School information service is provided by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). ACARA’s functions include national curriculum development, providing a national assessment programme and publication of nationally comparable data on all Australian schools (available: [http://www.myschool.edu.au/](http://www.myschool.edu.au/))
In many cases, this results in isolated skills learning predominating, where discovery and social learning had once been.

A climate that pursues academic success has the potential to overemphasise the cognitive domain at the expense of the other domains, often result in the exclusion of children’s social and emotional development (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Vecchiotti, 2003; Vespo, Capece & Behforooz, 2006). Thus, when the curriculum becomes teacher focused and directed, and the content and learning becomes more abstract children may become disempowered as they are forced to comply with a teaching style that may not meet their learning styles or needs.

1.1.1 Using nationwide studies to map children’s developmental progress.

Currently there are two studies being conducted in Australia that provide an indication of children’s developmental progress (Australian Early Development Index (AEDI), 2009, 2012) and highlights early childhood education and care (ECEC) pedagogical practices that are more likely to create a quality programme (Effective Early Educational Experiences E4kids, 2010 - 2015). Both these studies will provide invaluable insight into how kindergarten programmes can (and if they do) contribute to children’s social and emotional development.

The AEDI findings provide an indication of how kindergarten programmes are effecting children’s development. The AEDI is a national progress measure of early childhood development that will provide important markers of children’s welfare. Evidence for the AEDI is collected in children’s first year of formal full-time\(^4\) schooling.

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\(^4\) In 2013, Western Australian Pre-primaries became the first year of compulsory schooling. However, Year one remains the first year of formal schooling.
using a combination of teacher completed checklists and demographic information provided through enrolment forms.

The five AEDI domains of early childhood development that are measured include:

- Physical health and wellbeing
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive skills

There are a myriad of factors interacting with children’s development prior to the first year of formal schooling. Hence, not one experience can be conclusively identified as causal to the changes indicated by the AEDI results – at least not without further investigation. However, the experiences children have in kindergarten do play a substantial role in supporting children’s development in the AEDI domains.

Comparative data between 2009 and 2012 of the AEDI domains in Western Australia revealed that although there was a decrease in proportion of children developmentally vulnerable in language and cognitive skills, there was not a similar decrease in vulnerability in other areas, and possibly an increase in vulnerability in social competence and communication and general knowledge (Australian Government, 2013). These figures are depicted in the following graph.

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3 It has been argued that the AEDI is a deficit model that is rooted in universal theories of child development. Agbenyega (2009) proposed that the AEDI could offer data that are more indicative of community if it was framed using cultural historical theory.
Figure 1.1: Proportion of Western Australian children developmentally vulnerable by AEDI domain in 2009 and 2012.

With the introduction of NAPLAN in 2008, one could speculate that an increase in more formal programmes is associated with more children developmentally vulnerable in the AEDI domains of social competence and communication and general knowledge. Supporting this assumption are those studies (for example, Berk, Mann & Ogan, 2006; Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2009; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006) that confirm that social and communication skills are developed through play-based activities.

Through play-based activities children develop skills necessary for school-readiness, which include being able to cooperate, follow directions, demonstrate self-control, control negative emotions and pay attention (Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong & Gomby, 2005). These skills are integral to learning new skills, such as reading (Boyd et al., 2005). Ultimately, successful attainment of social and emotional skills enables children to “feel motivated to succeed, to believe in their success, to communicate well with teachers, to set academic goals, to organise themselves to achieve these goals, to overcome obstacles” (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg, 2007, p. 196). Which
ultimately makes available “a key to success in school and in life” (Zins & Elias, 2007, p. 237).

The E4Kids longitudinal study being conducted by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne provides an evidence base determining the best ways to support higher quality in childcare and kindergarten settings. Underpinning this inquiry is the belief that high quality settings are essential to providing important foundations to learning (E4kids Research Bulletin, 2012). Integral to the E4Kids study is identifying those factors that contribute to Australian children’s development, highlighting which environments and which children result in positive (or negative) learning experiences (E4kids Research Bulletin, 2012).

By using a sociocultural approach to explore kindergarten teachers’ practices, this current research will provide more Western Australian context specific information on both explicit and tacit features of the kindergarten environment that support or constrain children’s social and emotional development. In addition, it will provide an insight into how the participating schools’ community culture contributes to the educational goals that shape the kindergarten curriculum.

1.2 Research Design

The purpose of this research is to investigate ‘how kindergarten teachers are supporting children’s social and emotional development in their classrooms’. The aim was to investigate teachers’ practice in a sample of Western Australian kindergarten classrooms, not necessarily ones that had been trained in supporting children’s social and emotional development, and ascertain how ‘every day’ kindergarten teachers are approaching this aspect of children’s learning along with other curricula demands.
Eight teachers participated in this study. It was determined from the data collected that some teacher pedagogical styles and contexts were very similar. Consequently, only five of the case studies were selected to represent a varied range of pedagogical styles. The schools from which the five reported participants came were located in varying socioeconomic areas, and although the schools shared similar Catholic-based values and missions they each brought their own individual perspective in working toward educational goals.

There were multiple factors contributing to how the teachers approached the kindergarten curriculum, hence an ethnographic approach to inquiry was adopted to gain an insight into these processes. Classroom observations took place over a seven to eight month period. Other methods to gather data included an initial survey to ascertain how the teachers believed they approached the kindergarten curriculum, a survey that indicated teachers’ perceptions of some of the participating children’s social and emotional development, informal interviews throughout the data collection period in addition to a more formal interview at the end. The data were recorded in single case studies, providing rich descriptions of each kindergarten classroom programme. The case study analysis highlighted the range of opportunities each teacher was observed to provide for children’s social and emotional development.

This research has come at a critical time in Australian early childhood education. The sociocultural approach taken by this research has highlighted the multiplicity and variousness of factors that contribute to early childhood curriculum decision making across several Western Australian municipalities. The case studies present opportunities for supporting or constraining social and emotional development that are present in some Western Australian kindergartens. The findings from this research can be used to
bring awareness to schools of the contributing factors to kindergarten curricula and how these might contribute to children’s social and emotional development.

### 1.3 Thesis Outline

This thesis is presented in twelve chapters. This first chapter offers a background to the study, the second explains the concepts underpinning this study and details how these concepts shape the case studies and case study analysis. Chapter three examines the literature on social and emotional development and provides an insight into how using a sociocultural perspective will make a unique and valuable contribution to existing research. Chapter four explains the ethnographic inquiry adopted by this study to examine the research question and how the case studies and analysis are presented. Chapters five to ten present single case studies that present the data using the perspectives of the three foci of analysis (Rogoff, 2003) to provide an in-depth examination of the research question. Chapter eleven is a cross case analysis of the five case studies, and presents the opportunities provided in schools that either support or constrain children’s social and emotional development. Chapter twelve provides a summary of the research findings and presents the key messages that emerged from this study, limitations and recommendations for future research.
Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework

2.0 Introduction

The theoretical assumptions that underpin this study are derived from the concepts developed by Rogoff (1990, 1995, 2003), Vygotsky (1978) and Goldstein (1999). This chapter reviews these theories and examines how they can be used to conceptualise how teachers can support children’s social and emotional development.

Rogoff (1990, 1995, 2003), Vygotsky (1978) and Goldstein (1999) focus on the role of culture in development and each emphasise the importance of interactions that occur between partners in learning. The three ways these theorists approach development provide the framework for a robust investigation of the support systems used for social and emotional development in kindergarten classrooms.

A cultural perspective enables an examination of the proposition that children’s social and emotional abilities are developed through sociocultural activities and interactions that are inherent to a cultural community. In the lives of kindergarten children, this cultural community consists of those structures with which they have direct contact; for example, their homes, school and neighbourhoods. It includes the relationships and interactions they experience in their immediate surroundings (Berk, 2000).

However, in human development Rogoff (2003) recognized that:

People develop as they participate in and contribute to cultural activities that themselves develop with the involvement of people in successive generations. People of each generation, as they engage in sociocultural endeavors [sic] with other people, make use of and extend cultural tools and practices inherited from...
previous generations. As people develop through their shared use of cultural tools and practices, they simultaneously contribute to the transformation of cultural tools, practices, and institutions (p. 52).

The data generated in this study will be framed using Rogoff’s (2003) sociocultural “transformation of participation perspective” which explains that “personal, interpersonal and cultural aspects of human activity are conceived as different analytic views of ongoing, mutually constituted processes” (p. 52). These three foci of analysis present a research lens that enables the examination of the culture in which an activity takes place, the interactions between the social partners in the activity and the learner’s appropriation of knowledge through their personal involvement in the activity.

I argue that this conceptual framework encompasses the multifarious processes that occur in any one activity, while simultaneously capturing the changes that occur to both participants and culture. This was especially necessary for this study, as the sites of data collection were busy early childhood settings that were bustling with up to thirty energetic children moving eagerly from one activity to the next. Indeed, the three foci of analysis are useful in framing the data presented in the case studies, providing a more robust and holistic view of each of the kindergarten programmes.

While this framework is useful for examining the contributions made to a social activity as well as for interpreting children’s development and thinking, a Vygotskian perspective (1978) was adopted as a conceptual tool to provide deeper understandings into how the interactions within the classroom either supported or constrained children’s social and emotional development. Vygotsky’s development of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), his perspective on the use of tools and symbols in development and his emphasis on play as a leading factor in child development are useful in
analysing the nuances of the classroom culture and how they contribute to social and emotional development. What is particularly useful is that Vygotsky identified the contexts in which children develop, providing a platform for discussion of both how the observed contexts supported children’s social and emotional development, and those untapped opportunities and possibilities that had potential to strengthen children’s development.

Whereas Vygotsky was primarily focused on cognitive skills, Goldstein (1999) provides another layer of exploration by considering the role of affect in creating the ZPD. Relationships and the duality between learning partners feature strongly in Goldstein’s perspective, enabling an examination of an integral component of the teaching and learning process.

2.1 Development as Transformation of Participation in Sociocultural Activity

Generally, the sociocultural perspective allows an examination of the contributions that society makes to individual development. This theory stresses the interaction between developing people and the culture in which they live. In Rogoff’s (2003) work, she emphasises that:

[H]uman development is a process of people’s changing participation in sociocultural activities of their communities. People contribute to the processes involved in sociocultural activities at the same time that they inherit practices invented by others (p. 52).

In the collaboration for learning, Rogoff (2003) further proposed the “concept of guided participation in cultural activities” (p. 283). Although not a method of learning, it explains the varied ways in which children learn while participating in, and being
“guided by the values and practices of their cultural communities” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 284). Inherent to this view is that the guidance not only includes those interactions that are intended as instructional, but also those that are not intended as instructional.

This latter point highlights the possibility that not all guidance is desirable, and that in classrooms the guidance does not necessarily come from adults; rather, “learning is a process ... in which both adults and children contribute support and direction in shared endeavors [sic]” (Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996, p.389), creating a “community of learners” (p.388). Moreover, it may occur in both side-by-side and distal arrangements, in which children participate in sociocultural activity without intentional instruction or even being together at the same time (Rogoff, 2003).

Applying these concepts to this study would suggest that children’s actual social and emotional developmental level contributes to the processes involved in sociocultural activity at the same time that they are inheriting social and emotional skills and strategies that were created by others. Moreover, they suggest that the guidance inherent in sociocultural activities can either contribute positively or negatively to social and emotional development, within side-by-side and/or distal arrangements.

Inherent to the transformation-of-participation perspective is the understanding that development is an ongoing, mutually constituted practice where the cultural, social and individual processes are interconnected (Rogoff, 2003). In light of this, Rogoff (1995) proposed three foci of analysis: community/institutional, interpersonal and personal, which are useful in interpreting children’s development and thinking. The following provides a more detailed description of the three foci of analysis.
2.1.1 The three foci of analysis.

Underpinning the three foci of analysis is that when one level becomes the focus of analysis the others do not disappear, but rather remain in the background as “parts making up a whole activity or event” and “can be considered separately as foreground without losing track of their inherent interdependence in the whole” (Rogoff, 1990, p. 140). Within this framework, the researcher constructs the focus of analysis by choosing what to examine. This choice is necessary because “no one can study everything at once” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 58). Consequently, the diagrams that illustrate each focus of analysis in the following passages are framed by a lens held by the researcher’s hand.

2.1.2 The cultural-institutional focus.

The cultural-institutional focus of analysis is depicted in Figure 2.1. At this level, although the focus is centred on everything around the adult and child, it still acknowledges the contribution of the people involved (Rogoff, 2003). It considers factors such as those tools for learning that are being used, which are in this example the workbook, pens, coloured pens, writing, and mental tools, as well as the more distal factors such as seating arrangements. In addition, there are other less visual yet equally important factors, such as the forms of communication used within this context, the types of conversations, conventions of behaviour, the skills and ways of learning that are emphasised, the value placed by the community or institution on this kind of activity and so on (Robbins, 2002).

When examining situations using the cultural-institutional focus as a research lens in education, we consider how the school has shaped the practices that occur in the classroom: “how the school’s community revises its practices as new generations of
families join in and how the practices in this school connect with the culture and history of schooling in other innovative schools as well as in traditional schools and with national and educational policies” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 60).

Figure 2.1: The cultural-institutional focus of analysis.

The cultural-institutional foci of analysis offers a lens through which to view the mandated curriculum documents, the school community’s educational goals and values, the school’s educational vision, the classroom organisation and the teacher’s early childhood philosophy. Each of these provide the background knowledge needed to understand how the practices in each kindergarten programme are developed. When viewing the kindergarten curriculum from the interpersonal and personal perspectives, the knowledge explored in the cultural-institutional plane provides essential background information regarding the people and their relationships with each other (Rogoff, 2003).
2.1.3 The interpersonal focus.

The focus shifts from the cultural institutional lens to the interpersonal foci of analysis in Figure 2.2. This focus constitutes the interactions between the child and the adult (Robbins, 2002). This includes an examination of the mutual involvement, communication, and coordination of individuals and their partners, as well as the guidance and support of others either face-to-face, side-by-side joint participation, or in more distal arrangements that do not require co-presence while engaged in culturally valued activities (Rogoff, 1995). When using the interpersonal focus of analysis, a general understanding of individual and cultural information is useful as it positions the people involved, creating an understanding of what they are doing.

*Figure 2.2 The interpersonal focus of analysis.*
2.1.4 The personal focus.

The research lens is centred on the personal foci of analysis within the activity, highlighting the boy, and what he is doing in Figure 2.3. While the focus is on the child, the interpersonal relationship and the contextual planes fade into the background, but remain an integral part of the picture. In Rogoff’s sociocultural framework, the attention goes beyond simply what this child knows or can do to examine the process by which people appropriate their own understanding of and responsibility for activities through their personal involvement in those activities (Robbins, 2002; Rogoff, 1995).

![Figure 2.3: The personal focus of analysis.](image)

When using the personal foci of analysis, Rogoff (2003) warned of examining the individual in isolation without acknowledging the contextual background or the people constituting the cultural activity, saying that to do so may lead to mere speculation in regards to what the individual is doing.
2.1.5 The transformation of participation in sociocultural activity theory.

The three lenses enable the researcher to examine one situation from three different perspectives. Through the cultural-institutional focus of analysis the community educational values, school values, resources, children’s backgrounds and the teachers’ early childhood educational philosophies can be examined and analysed.

Through the interpersonal focus of analysis the researcher is able to investigate interactions, both proximal and distal, determining their effectiveness or analysing why they were ineffective in supporting children’s social and emotional development.

The personal focus of analysis enables observation of those features in the social and educational milieu that become a part of the children’s autonomous activity. Through this level the degree to which children’s independent actions reflect the teachers’ guidance can be examined and discussed.

Finally, through acknowledging the three foci of analysis, I will be able to situate each event as it occurs. That is, one aspect of a cultural activity could be viewed simultaneously through cultural, interpersonal and personal perspectives enabling a deeper insight into the contributions the different participants make to the activity.

2.2 Vygotsky’s Perspective

Despite Vygotsky’s short career he has contributed substantially to our understanding of the psychology of human development. To a great extent, his work marked the beginning of sociocultural theory and has since become the foundation of much research and theory in developmental and child psychology. His fundamental theory was that cognitive development was a process of acquiring culture, and as such,
he provided a perspective that integrated the social sciences of psychology and anthropology (Cole, 1985).

In this section, I discuss Vygotsky’s concepts of internalising higher order thinking; the ZPD, scientific (abstract) and everyday concept formation, play and the social and emotional skills and strategies that are developed within this context. Although these concepts interrelate, they are discussed separately.

In this study, these concepts highlight the importance of social interactions to learning, while explaining how higher psychological functions come to be understood and internalised by children. In particular, Vygotsky’s concepts emphasise the role of play in providing a context in which children contribute to sociocultural activity while inheriting the social and cultural norms relevant to that community. In engaging in play, children extend their social repertoires and learn how to effectively communicate their emotional needs. This in turn equips them with the necessary tools for developing their own well-being.

2.2.1 Internalising higher psychological functions.

This section highlights the importance of social activity and the ZPD in the course of intellectual, social and emotional development. First, it defines higher psychological functions and then describes how they are internalised. This is followed by an example of ‘inner speech’ that illustrates the importance of internalisation in children’s development.

Higher mental functions, for example, speech and self-regulation, are socially acquired and mediated by social and cultural meanings. They are evident when tools and signs are combined in psychological activity. Vygotsky (1978) differentiated tools
from signs by saying that the tool’s function is the conductor of human influence on an object and it is externally oriented – it leads to changes in objects. In contrast, signs change nothing in an object and are an “internal activity aimed at mastering oneself; the sign is internally oriented” (p. 55).

Vygotsky (1978) explained that the internal reconstruction of an external operation is called internalisation, and that internalisation takes place in a series of transformations:

(1) An operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed and begins to occur internally.

(2) An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one. Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory and to the formation of concepts. All higher functions originate as actual relationships between human individuals.

(3) The transformation of an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one is the result of a long series of developmental events. The process being transformed continues to exist and to change as an external form of activity for a long time before definitively turning inward. For many functions, the stage of external signs lasts forever; that is, it is their final stage of development. Other functions develop further and gradually become inner functions. However, they take on the character of inner processes only as a result of a prolonged development. Their transfer inward is linked with changes in the laws governing their activity; they are incorporated into a new system with its own laws (pp. 56–57).
Vygotsky proposed that any higher psychological function appears twice, or on two planes. First, it appears between people as an “interpsychological category and then within the individual child as an intrapsychological category” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). This process emphasises the interactional nature of development and the changing nature of activity over a period of time (Cole, 1985). Consequently, in this study, this places emphasis on the sociocultural activity and interactions that mediate the development of higher order social and emotional skills and strategies, such as self-regulation, empathy and negotiation.

The process of internalisation that Vygotsky described has important implications for this study, particularly when coupled with Goldstein’s (1999) theory that internalisation is made possible through the caring relationships shared by adults and children. The emphasis on higher functions first existing on the social level prescribes a context that needs to take place prior to higher functions being internalised by the individual. This is useful when examining classrooms and observing the opportunities made available for supporting and encouraging children’s social and emotional development.

Activities that occur within the ZPD provide opportunities for children to internalise higher psychological functions. The following provides an example of this using the higher psychological function of inner speech. It examines the moment in the course of intellectual development when children begin to use speech to overcome impulsive action, plan a solution to a problem prior to its execution and master their own behaviour (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) asserted that the “history of the process of the internalization of social speech is also the history of the socialization of children’s practical intellect” (p. 27).
2.2.1.1 Language as an intrapersonal function.

Language was chosen to illustrate the process of internalisation for two reasons. First, egocentric speech⁶ first emerges during the kindergarten period, hence it has direct relevance to the context of this study. Second, egocentric and inner speech are integral to regulatory and organisational behaviours, each being pertinent to the subject of this study of how teachers support kindergarten children’s social and emotional development.

Social and egocentric speech emerge at different times. At first, infants use social speech to adapt to the social environment and learning. As they grow older, the function of speech changes to help them master their own behaviour and acquire new knowledge and skills. Vygotsky (1978) wrote that “the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development occurs when speech and practical activity, two previously completely independent lines of development, converge” (p.24).

Egocentric speech rises between the ages of two and four, which Vygotsky (1986) suggested was indicative of an increase in cognitive development during this period. Research conducted by Berk (1994) proposed that egocentric speech peaked between the ages of four and six years.

By the age of seven, Vygotsky observed that private speech disappeared or went ‘underground’ to form inner speech (Wertsch, 1985, p. 111). He attributed this to children gaining mastery over their behaviour, and omitting words and phrases that refer to what they already know. Once their cognitive operations are well practiced, they

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⁶ The term ‘egocentric speech’ was introduced by Piaget (1926). Piaget believed it had no positive role in normal cognitive development and disappeared as children became capable of real social interactions. In contrast, Vygotsky (1978) asserted that egocentric speech played a pivotal role in cognitive development.
begin to internalise their speech with it becoming inner speech and then verbal thinking, or conscious internal dialogues conducted while thinking and acting (Berk, 1994).

The process of internalisation is evident when children begin to use language as a problem-solving tool. Children’s capacity to use language as a problem-solving tool takes place later in their development when socialised speech (previously used to appeal to an adult) is turned inward. “Instead of appealing to the adult, children appeal to themselves, language thus takes on an intrapersonal function in addition to its interpersonal use” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 27).

In classrooms this means that children need to experience problem solving and planning with more capable members on the social level (interpsychological level) over a period of time before they can begin to make that language their own (intrapsychological level). Vygotsky (1978) noted that private speech was more prevalent when children were engaged in tasks in the ZPD. This is supported by research conducted by Berk (1994) and Berk, Mann and Ogan (2006) who observed that children tend to talk to themselves more when working alone on challenging tasks and when their teachers were not available to help them. Using Vygotsky’s perspective, this use of speech assisted them in the execution of the tasks. The speech these children used is termed ‘private’ or ‘egocentric speech’. Inner speech first emerges in its external form (embedded in communicative speech) as egocentric speech (Vygotsky, 1978).

In contrast, an earlier study conducted by Frauenglass and Diaz (1985) found that those children who used more egocentric speech performed more poorly on the tasks they set. However, after examining Vygotsky’s definition of the ZPD, Diaz later deduced that the tasks used in the study were either too easy (eliciting no egocentric speech) or too hard for the children. He associated the increase in egocentric speech with children trying to grapple with tasks that were out of their realm of proximal
development. Hence, when Berk (1994) conducted her research, she asked the children’s teachers to set appropriately challenging tasks for the children to attempt. The results from this study supported Vygotsky’s supposition that egocentric speech helps in problem-solving and in directing task-related behaviour. In addition, Berk’s research found that children who progressed more rapidly from audible remarks to inner speech demonstrated more advanced ability to control motor activity and focus their attention.

The ability to turn speech inward is pivotal in children’s development as it becomes an auxiliary tool in solving difficult tasks, overcoming impulsive action, planning a solution to a problem prior to its execution and in controlling their own behaviour (Vygotsky, 1978). The use of inner speech signifies that children are taking over the support provided by others and using it to guide and control their own thinking and behaviour (Berk, Mann & Ogan, 2006), thus becoming a supportive tool in overcoming obstacles and acquiring new skills (Berk, 1994). In other words, developing higher mental functions.

In summary, inner speech first exists as social language used in shared activity (interpsychological level). Children then use this language to talk to themselves (egocentric speech) and eventually this speech becomes silent (inner speech – intrapsychological level). The use of egocentric speech flags the shift to during, or soon after, intrapsychological functioning commences (Wertsch, 1985).

Vygotsky observed that children use egocentric speech to guide their motor control and behaviour when attempting challenging tasks. This language is helpful when the task is set in the children’s ZPD. Tasks that are too easy do not require speech, and tasks that are too hard evoke a lot of egocentric speech, but to no avail. Children who have progressed to inner speech from egocentric speech demonstrate more advanced self-regulatory and planning skills.
2.2.1.2 Scientific and everyday concept formation.

While the concept of inter- and intrapsychological functions explains the internalisation of higher order functions, scientific (referred to in this study as ‘abstract’) and everyday concepts describe how deep and meaningful concept formation takes place. Fleer and Raban (2006) employed this empirical and theoretical concept to conceptualise how families, children and educators can support children’s literacy and numeracy learning. In a similar structure used by these authors, this section briefly describes the process of concept formation, relating this theory to classroom practices and teacher pedagogical styles.

In describing concept formation, Vygotsky (1987) drew upon two key components of the process, first are abstract concepts and the second are everyday concepts. He explained that abstract concepts are adopted from the domain of adult thinking, and everyday concepts are embedded in children’s life experiences and in natural conversational contexts.

Vygotsky (1987) found that everyday concepts arose or were used without conscious realisation of the concepts, arguing that this was the weakness of the concept.

Our data indicate that the weakness of the everyday concept lies in its incapacity for abstraction, in the child’s incapacity to operate on it in a voluntary manner. Where volition is required, the everyday concept is generally used incorrectly (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 169).
In contrast, while abstract [scientific] concepts provide a conscious realisation of the concept, they are fruitless if they cannot be attached to meaningful, authentic and concrete situations.

…the weakness of the scientific concept lies in its verbalism, it its insufficient saturation with the concrete. This is the basic danger in the development of the scientific concept (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 169).

It is when the two processes ‘merge’ (Fleer & Raban, 2006) that deep and meaningful concept formation takes place. In this process, everyday concepts lay the foundation for building abstract concepts and as they connect everyday concepts are transformed and consciousness or volitation takes place.

In order for concept formation to take place Vygotsky (1987) argued that the connection between everyday concept formation and abstract concept formation was essential. To illustrate this point he suggested that a conscious awareness of the study of another language could only be possible if the child possessed everyday language structures of their first language. He explained:

…pedagogical experience demonstrates that direct instruction in concepts is impossible. It is pedagogically fruitless. The teacher who attempts to use this approach achieves nothing but a mindless learning of words, an empty verbalism that simulates or imitates the presence of concepts in the child. Under these conditions, the child learns not the concept but the word, and this word is taken over by the child through memory rather than thought…It substitutes the learning of dead and empty verbal schemes for the master of living knowledge (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 170).

Vygotsky (1987) added that it is only within a system “which is based on specific relations of generality among concepts” (p. 197) that concepts can acquire
conscious awareness. In this way, the abstract “concept presupposes a system”. Further, “Science concepts are the gate through which conscious awareness enters the domain of the child’s concepts” (p. 193).

This implies that for concepts to be learned they cannot be segregated from the system. Hence, the practice of teaching isolated concepts in whole-group sessions in kindergarten are ineffective unless those concepts can be embedded within, or linked with, a system (Vygotsky, 1987). Applying the abstract and everyday concept formation to this study involves children being engaged in an activity that they would do every day; for example building something with blocks. When they coordinate their efforts, and the teacher makes them aware that their collaboration is teamwork, she or he has made the children’s unconscious actions conscious.

**2.2.2 The ZPD.**

Possibly the most noted of Vygotsky’s contributions to educational psychology is the concept of the ZPD. The ZPD is defined as:

…the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

The actual developmental level defines the functions that have already matured and that a child can perform independently (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD defines those “functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). The ZPD describes the zone in which children learn and practice new skills. It clarifies that in this zone higher psychological functions occur on the social level and then on the individual level. Moreover, it is through the guidance provided by
adults and more capable peers that internalisation can occur. This implies that adults do not always have to be present for learning to occur. When viewing this using Rogoff’s (2003) theory of guided participation, it needs to be considered that the learning that occurs in the ZPD is not necessarily intended by the educator or desirable. This is particularly true for when children are engaged in child-initiated play.

Vygotsky’s view on play as the leading activity in children’s development, recognises play as a complex and multifaceted activity. The following discussion is organised under the features Vygotsky identified to be inherent to play, beginning with how he perceived play to create a ZPD. The rules of play and how these affect development are also discussed.

### 2.2.3 Play as a ZPD.

Play was considered by Vygotsky (1978) to be a “leading factor in development” (p. 101) as he believed it contained “all developmental tendencies in a condensed form” (p. 102). He explained that in play, children subordinate their behaviours to the rules of the game or the character, something they cannot do in real life, creating a “zone of proximal development of the child” (p. 102). This perspective is useful in examining how teachers arrange the curriculum to support children’s social and emotional development in the kindergarten context.

Play is featured predominantly in Vygotsky’s writings as a major source of social interactions in young children’s lives. The interactions that occur in this context are bound by explicit and implicit rules that naturally create the ZPD. The social and emotional learning that occurs within the ZPD created by play have particular relevance to this study, as it is integral to developing skills and strategies inherent in self-awareness; social-awareness; responsible decision-making; self-regulation and

2.2.4 Play and rules.

Vygotsky (1978) wrote that during the preschool age, many unrealisable tendencies and desires emerge, and that these needs give rise to play. This is because in play children enter an imaginary, illusory world in which unrealizable tendencies and desires can be realised. It is imagination that distinguishes children’s play from other forms of activity.

The imaginary situation of any form of play contains rules of behaviour. Children imagine themselves being a character so they obey the rules of that character’s typical behaviour. Vygotsky (1978) illustrated this example by citing Sully’s (1904) study of two sisters. These sisters playing sisters became concerned with displaying their sisterhood and hence acquired certain rules of behaviour: “only actions that fit these rules are acceptable to the play situation” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 95). Sully noted that through playing sisters, the girls began to understand that sisters have a different relationship with each other than to other people, hence what goes unnoticed by children in real life becomes a rule of behaviour in play (Vygotsky, 1978).

Two factors emerge from Vygotsky’s study on the implicit rules governing children’s behaviour in imaginary play. First, children become studies of human behaviour and in doing so learn to take the perspective of others. In order for children to act as a sister/brother or mother/father, they must have a shared understanding of the behaviours that are implicit to that character. As a result, in addition to taking the perspective of others, children learn the social norms and expectations of their culture, which in turn heightens their “sensitivity to external pressures to act in socially desirable ways” (Singer, Michnick Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006, p. 79).
Second, as play develops, the more bound by rules it becomes. The more rigid the rules are, the greater the demands on children’s application, and concurrently, the greater the regulation of children’s activity (Vygotsky, 1978). This requires children to progressively develop more advanced levels of self-regulation. Hence, play is an essential factor in helping children learn to subordinate their desires to social rules while engaging in socially appropriate behaviour (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009).

2.2.5 The processes involved in developing self-regulation.

Social and emotional self-regulation strategies are essential for children to succeed in school (Boyd et al., 2005). If children cannot focus their attention, intentionally ignore distractions, plan and think deliberately, remember information they are not particularly interested in, delay gratification, or control their emotions and the expression of their emotions then they are less likely to succeed at learning to their fullest potential (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).

Self-regulation is critical to early development indicating the emergence of a uniquely human set of abilities or higher psychological functions (Vygotsky, 1978). When individuals exercise self-regulation by displaying deliberate, intentional or volitional behaviours they begin to become the “masters of their own behaviour” as opposed to being “slaves to the environment” (Vygotsky, 1978).

Consistent with all higher mental functions, the ability to self-regulate originates in social interactions (interpsychological category) later being internalised (intrapsychological category), where children can apply self-regulation independently. This implies that for children to be able to self-regulate, they need to be taught how through the provision of activities in which self-regulation develops and through practice.
Vygotsky’s work not only explains practice, it also provides knowledge of the relevance behind interactions and the educative trajectories resulting from these interactions. When early childhood programmes are viewed through the Vygotskian perspective it can be understood how they work, and how they can be made more effective in supporting social and emotional development. It is only through this understanding of how that education can be intentional and effective.

### 2.3 The Role of Affect, Volition and Relationship in Cognitive Development

Over an individual’s life-span, there is a transition from “direct, innate, natural forms and methods of behaviour [lower, elementary psychological processes] to mediated, artificial, mental functions [higher psychological processes] that develop in the process of cultural development” (Vygotsky, 1998, p. 168). Examples of lower, elementary processes include the sucking and rooting reflex, which are typically an immediate responses to stimuli and not mental or conscious processes. In contrast, higher psychological processes are both mental and conscious, and include affect (feeling), volition (will), motivation (goals and expectations), memory, thinking, language and perception. Volitional processes can be applied consciously, or they can be automatised as habits over time.

Through her examination of Vygotsky’s collective works, Goldstein (1999) highlighted Vygotsky’s acknowledgement of the role of affect, volition and relationships in cognitive development, referring to his statement: “The separation of the intellectual side of our consciousness from its affective, volitional side is one of the fundamental flaws of all of traditional psychology” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 189).
Goldstein (1999) argued that the emphasis on affect and its importance in ZPD was not fully developed in Vygotsky’s published works for two main reasons. First, Vygotsky’s theoretical development of affect and its relationship to cognitive processes was cut short due to his death at the age of 37. However, according to a former student, Bozhovich (1977), Vygotsky “devoted the last period of his life to a theoretical development of the problem of affect, its relationship to intellectual processes” but “... was never completed and expressed in print” due to his untimely death (p. 15).

Second, Goldstein noted that the translation of his theory has emphasised the intellect at the expense of affect. She writes in reference to *Mind and Society* (Vygotsky, 1978) that, by their own admission, the editors (Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner & Souberman, 1978) took significant liberties with Vygotsky’s extensive work, omitting material that appeared redundant, leaving Goldstein (1999) to question whether this material may have been helpful in further elaborating on the role of affect in the ZPD.

### 2.3.1 The interrelational dimension.

Using a similar principle to Vygotsky’s (1978) interpsychological dimension (the shared cognitive space created by the adult and child in the ZPD) Goldstein (1999) coined the term ‘interrelational’ to refer to the “shared affective space created by the adult and child in the ZPD” (p. 651), asserting that the interrelational dimension “allows the zone of proximal development to take place in any given situation” (p. 654).

In addition to being informed by Vygotsky (1978), Goldstein’s interrelational dimension was also influenced by the work of Noddings (1984) and her understanding of care, which was underpinned by a feminist approach to the role of adult and child in learning. Specifically, integral to the interrelational dimension are the roles of a person giving care (one-caring) and a person receiving care (cared-for). In this relationship the
one-caring offers the cared-for their full attention and is receptive to his perspective and situation. This situation is interpreted by Noddings (1984) as going beyond empathy to form a ‘duality’ with the learner, where the one-caring sees and feels as the cared for does (p. 30).

The concept of seeing and feeling as the cared-for does is, to some extent, measured through the Classroom Assessment Scoring System™ (CLASS) instrument in the dimensions ‘teacher sensitivity’ and ‘regard for student perspectives’ (Pianta, La Paro & Hamre, 2008). These dimensions are characterised by the teacher’s awareness of and responsivity to, students’ academic and emotional needs, taking into account students’ interests, motivations and points of view. In this view, the CLASS instrument shares tenets with Goldstein (1999) in that a reciprocal relationship is needed for learning to occur. Similarly, from Noddings’ (1984) perspective, teachers need to watch for ‘incipient interest in the child – the particular, concrete child’ and arrange “for the educational environment accordingly” (p. 24). When children’s interests and needs are taken into consideration, the children are, from Noddings’s standpoint ‘cared-for’, and from Pianta and colleagues’ (2008) perspective, are provided with what is considered quality education.

In Noddings’s (1984) view, caring and teaching are inseparable: “The teacher is necessarily one-caring if she [sic] is to be a teacher and not simply a textbook-like source from which the student may or may not learn” (p. 70). Noddings used the same analogical phrase – ‘the apprentice’ - to refer to the learner as Rogoff (1990). In addition, Goldstein (1999) drew similarities between learning situations as explained by

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7 The concept of the interrelational dimension also shares tenets with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System™ (CLASS) developed by Pianta, La Paro and Hamre (2008). The CLASS instrument is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
Noddings, where the apprentice affectively interacts with the teacher, and with Vygotsky’s description of the ZPD. Typical to both these positions is the apprentice gaining increased competence in the learning activity as time progresses.

Furthermore, Noddings (1984) addressed the issue of motivation and volition suggesting that although adults tend to enter learning situations because it is a moral imperative, children are more inclined to be encouraged to engage in these activities because of the “love for the adult and the desire to imitate her” (p. 64). Goldstein (1999) notes that the interaction in the ZPD is both intellectually and emotionally rewarding for both adult and child, suggesting that both are motivated to enter this zone for pleasure, growth and interpersonal connection provided by this interaction.

2.3.2 Using the interrelational dimension in this study.

Goldstein’s theory (1999) provides a useful tool for examining: (1) the ways in which teachers create caring relationships that are conducive to learning in the ZPD, and (2) the teacher-modelled behaviours used in forming the relational zone that are exemplar of emotional responses that meet social norms and pro-social skills needed for healthy and productive membership in society. In turn, this provides a platform from which to examine the ways that these modelled behaviours might be experienced in children’s behaviours in day-to-day interactions.

2.5 Conclusion

Generally speaking, this chapter has discussed how sociocultural theory will be used to conceptualise this study. Specifically, it has identified certain features of sociocultural theory that draw from the perspectives of three theorists, Rogoff (2003),
Vygotsky (1978), and Goldstein (1999). Just as Rogoff explained that personal, interpersonal and cultural-institutional aspects cannot exist or be studied in isolation from the others, so too, the concepts explained in this chapter cannot be isolated from each other.

These concepts work together in such a way that they contribute to each other. For example, when talking about guided participation, Rogoff (2003) suggested that one of the varied ways in that children learn is by taking the initiative to become involved in ongoing activities. These ongoing activities are typical of the everyday concepts referred to by Vygotsky (1987). This highlights the possibility that when children are participating in everyday concepts, they are there of their own volition. Therefore, in these situations when an adult or more capable peer uses more abstract concepts alongside everyday concepts, the understanding of what is being learned is facilitated. When children understand a concept, it becomes internalised and made their own (Vygotsky, 1978). Children are more likely to be able to retrieve the knowledge, skills and strategies that they understand and apply them to other situations, than those concepts that are merely verbalisms and have no meaning attached to them.

The following diagram (Figure 2.6) illustrates how these concepts contribute to each other in creating an environment for social and emotional development. Although pictured separately, in learning situations they occur simultaneously.
The concepts discussed in this chapter propound the connection between relationships, context, activity and learning. Learning occurs within the ZPD, however, the ZPD cannot exist without a shared, positive relationship between expert and novice. In interactions in the ZPD, children learn to use the cultural tools of their community to co-construct meaning and understanding. In these interactions participants contribute to the process involved in sociocultural activities at the same time that they inherit practices invented by others.
Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature that has demonstrated an inextricable link between social and emotional skills and strategies and academic outcomes. Integral to this discussion are the types of programme models that are more effective in supporting social and emotional development and improving academic outcomes. This first part of the review validates the relevance of examining social and emotional development, while demonstrating how this current study will add to the literature.

I will examine what the literature says with regard to early childhood environments that best support social and emotional and academic outcomes, including the findings from longitudinal studies that have demonstrated the long-term effects of high quality early childhood programmes. This part of the review plays an important role in bringing to the fore what research has identified as high quality, which has important implications for this study. The section is summarised with a table itemising pedagogical practices that prior research suggests supports young children’s social and emotional development.

It is important, however, to begin with a conceptualisation of social and emotional development. Establishing a definition that is consistent with the conceptual framework underpinning this study is important as a variety of definitions may lead to potential problems associated with not sharing a common understanding (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). The three foci of analysis discussed in the Conceptual Framework chapter, cultural-institutional, interpersonal and personal (Rogoff, 2003) have been used to frame the definition.
3.1 A Conceptualisation of Social and Emotional Development

The notion of social and emotional development infers that over time children develop increasingly adaptive ways of knowing and interacting. In this way, social and emotional development implicates a *process* that contributes to children’s repertoires of social knowledge and emotional understandings. The complexity and dynamicity of this process is realised when the contributions of personal, interpersonal and cultural-institutional planes are examined (Rogoff, 1995, 2003).

The personal, interpersonal and cultural-institutional planes are “inseparable, mutually contributing planes comprising activities that can become the focus of analysis at different times,” while the others remain in the background of the analysis (Rogoff, 1995, p. 139). When considering social and emotional development, the individual plane considers children’s capability and capacity for acquiring social and emotional skills, knowledge as well as their ability to regulate their behaviours and manage relationships. Most studies conceptualise social and emotional development from the personal plane perspective, that is, they define social and emotional development in reference to a set of skills. For example, research conducted on social and emotional learning are centred on social and emotional skills (Elias, 2006; Zins et al., 2007; Zins & Elias, 2007).

The interactional plane focuses on what children and their social partners are doing together. Hence, the interactional plane examines ways of interacting, expressing oneself and so on. Studies that consider guided participation and the scaffolding\(^8\) of children’s social and emotional processes are more inclined to define social and emotional development in view of the interpersonal plane. For example, Myers and

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\(^8\) Although the term ‘scaffolding’ was originally coined by Wood, Bruner nad Ross (1976), this phrase is used in this study to conceptualise the “problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” in the ZPD as described by Vygotsky (1978, p.86).
Sheffield Morris (2009) examine teacher-child relationships and how they contribute to low income preschoolers’ socioemotional adjustment.

The guidance that occurs in the interpersonal plane is directed by cultural and social values, as well as social partners (Rogoff, 1995). These are depictive of the cultural-institutional plane, that is, the social and emotional ways that are accepted and valued, how they are valued by the culture, school and so on. This plane is sometimes alluded to in some studies (Vespo et al., 2006) to conceptualise why social and emotional programs are not incorporated in classrooms, indicating these did not fit with school and/or community educational goals.

Most researchers focus on social emotional learning in reference to specific knowledge and skills, especially in their definitions. They do not consider all three planes, personal, interpersonal and cultural-institutional, of the social and emotional. This current study conceptualises social and emotional development using the three planes in order to examine the skills, processes, pedagogical practices and culture that supports development.

Although there are no existing definitions that reflect this approach, the five competency clusters of self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-regulation and relationship management are useful in providing an arrangement for examining social and emotional development (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, (CASEL), 2013; Zins et al., 2007).

The clusters that are presented here are adapted from CASEL discourse, however, in this study, I use the term ‘self-regulation’ (Vygotsky, 1978) instead of ‘self-management’, and ‘relationship management’ (Zins et al., 2007) instead of ‘relationship skills’. The terminology has been changed to better reflect the conceptual framework underpinning this study.
The five competency clusters drawn from CASEL (2013) and Zins et al., (2007) are defined as:

**Self-awareness:** The ability to identify and recognise one’s emotions and their influence on behaviour. In addition, having the ability to assess one’s strengths and limitations and having a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.

**Self-Regulation:** The ability to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviours effectively in different situations. Managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward personal and academic goals are indicators of self-regulation.

**Social awareness:** Includes the ability to take others’ perspectives, appreciate diversity and show respect for others.

**Relationship management:** Is the ability to communicate effectively and build relationships. Work collaboratively, engage in conflict management and negotiation. It also includes being able to seek and provide help when required.

**Responsible decision making:** The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behaviour and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, and being able to evaluate and reflect on behaviours (CASEL, 2013). Table 3.1 presents the five competency clusters through identifying skills that individuals need to address the competency.

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social and Emotional Skills and Strategies</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Awareness</strong></td>
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Proponents of social and emotional learning (SEL) strongly suggest that social and emotional skills need to be learned. SEL can be best described using the interpersonal foci of analysis where the interest turns to the relationships among the children and their social partners. Children learn those social and emotional skills valued by their community through their participation in sociocultural activities of their community (Rogoff, 2003) with adults or more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978) with whom they share an affective space created by the adult and the child in the ZPD (Goldstein, 1999). It is important that opportunities are provided to promote social and emotional development in the kindergarten programme for children to be motivated to

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9 “Agency: being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one’s world” (DEEWR & CAG, 2009, p. 450).
succeed, believe in their success, communicate well with teachers, set academic goals, organise themselves to achieve these goals and to overcome obstacles (Zins et al., 2007). Hence, early childhood learning centres have an important role to play in educating healthy children by fostering both cognitive development and social and emotional development (Durlak, Weissbert, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011; Frey, Hirschstein, Snell, Van Scholack Edstrom, MacKenzie & Broderick, 2005; Greenberg, 2006 and Zins et al., 2007). Whole school approaches that promote children’s social and emotional learning offer promising outcomes in regards to improving children’s positive school and life trajectories (Elias, Zins, Weissberg, Frey, Greenberg, Haynes, Kessler, Schwab-Stone & Shriver, 1997; Zins & Elias, 2006).

From a sociocultural perspective, social and emotional skills and strategies are developed as children participate in sociocultural activity. The changes children make due to their involvement in sociocultural activities is indicative of participatory appropriation that occurs in the personal foci of analysis (Rogoff, 1995). That is, children internalise a set of social and emotional skills and strategies that enable them to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain relationships, make responsible decisions and handle interpersonal situations constructively. This repertoire of social cognitive skills also fosters positive communication behaviours that promote relationship management (Boyd et al., 2005; Brophy-Herb, Lee, Nievar & Stollak, 2007; Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2012; Raver & Zigler, 1997). The development of these skills and strategies represents the internalization of culturally produced sign systems that bring about behavioural transformation and builds the bridge between early and later forms of individual development (Vygotsky, 1978).
There is a compelling link between social and emotional development and behaviour and school success (Boyd et al., 2005; Raver & Knitzer, 2002; Zins et al., 2004). Longitudinal studies by Moffitt, Arseneault, Dickson, Hancox, Harrington, Houts, Poulton, Roberts, Ross, Sears, Thomson and Caspi (2011) and Raver and Knitzer (2002) suggest this link is causal with academic achievement in the first years of school appearing to be built on a foundation of children’s emotional and social skills and strategies. Indeed, a growing body of evidence suggests that emotional development and academic learning are far more closely intertwined in the early years than has been previously understood (Raver & Knitzer, 2002).

The definition provided here differentiates this study from other research on social and emotional development in that it considers the cultural institutional (community values), interpersonal (relationship with others while participating in sociocultural activity) and personal (participatory appropriation of social and emotional skills and strategies) foci of analysis (Rogoff, 1995, 2003). This perspective highlights the importance of children’s participation in sociocultural activities for social and emotional skills and strategies to be internalised and behaviour change to be more conducive to learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

### 3.2 Social and Emotional Development and Academic Learning

Children must be able to pay attention, ignore distractions, regulate emotions, empathise with others, communicate effectively and participate effectively in social interactions in order to learn (Boyd et al., 2005; Elias, 2006; Zins et al., 2007; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). As such, those school programmes that integrate efforts to promote children’s academic and social and emotional learning are more successful in meeting educational goals (Elias et al., 1997). Kindergarten programmes
that emphasise academic skills, often do so at the expense of children’s social and emotional development, and with self-defeating consequences (Elicker & Mathur, 1997). This is because in order for children to learn academic skills they need social and emotional skills (Boyd et al., 2005).

The connection between social and emotional development and academic learning occurs on a number of levels. On the cultural-institutional level, the institution of the school is conceived as a social place of learning and learning is a social process (Rogoff, 2003; Zins et al., 2007). Vygotsky (1978) described this social process as knowledge first existing on the social level in activity before becoming internalised by the individual. On an interpersonal level, Goldstein (1999) emphasised the role of emotional connection between teacher and child in the learning process. Indeed, the positive relationship shared by child and teacher is reported to increase children’s motivation and pursuit of academic goals (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Stipek, Feiler, Daniels & Milburn, 1995; Wentzel, 1998, 2002).

The following section examines the research on how teachers support young children’s social and emotional development. It is organised under: instructional approaches that support social and emotional development; environments that support social and emotional development; the context of play to support social and emotional development; and the role of relationships in supporting social and emotional development. Figure 3.1 illustrates this organisational format.
3.2.1 Instructional styles and social and emotional development.

An American study conducted by Hamre & Pianta (2005) on instructional and emotional support in the first-grade found that naturally occurring variation in teachers’ emotional support can buffer the effects of being at-risk of school failure. The findings indicated that responsive child-teacher relationships can be important in enabling some children to make academic gains early in their schooling. Child outcomes and measures of classroom process were collected in the spring of child’s first grade from 910 children (across 827 classrooms) deemed at-risk at ages 5-6 by kindergarten teachers. The data used to inform the at-risk status in this study were extrapolated from the
NICHD Study of Early Childcare (NICHD ECCRN, 1993) that followed children from birth to first grade.

Although the global measures used in the study allowed a simplified characterisation of classroom quality, they tended not to elaborate on the specific interactional processes that are important in classrooms and integral to supporting children’s social and emotional development (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Further study to investigate the interactional processes that occur in kindergarten classrooms would build on Hamre and Pianta’s findings.

Whereas Hamre and Pianta investigated teachers’ instructional and emotional support and the influence it had on academic and motivational measures, other studies have classified the instructional styles into either didactic or child-centred approaches and examined the effect they have on academic achievement and motivation. For example, an American study conducted by Stipek et al. (1995) examined the effects of didactic and child-centred approaches on young children’s achievement and motivation. Although an older paper, it is reviewed in this chapter due to the depth of investigation made into the instructional approaches held by each school; the classroom and teacher characteristics and child assessments.

The child assessments (including achievement on number and letter/reading skills; perceptions of ability; expectations for success; enjoyment of school and school-like activities; preference for basic skills tasks; preference for challenge; dependence; pride in accomplishment, and anxiety) were collected from 227 poor, minority and middle-class children from 32 classrooms. Of the 122 girls participating, 63 were in didactic and 59 were in child-centred classrooms and of the 105 boys, 60 were in didactic and 45 were in child-centred classrooms.
The results demonstrated that children in the didactic classrooms performed better on the letters/reading achievement test than children in child-centred programmes, however, there were no differences found for knowledge of numbers. The authors noted that the advantages of didactic programmes for some reading related skills came with some costs. Children in child-centred programmes outscored their counterparts in most of the motivation-related measures, in addition, preschoolers in child-centred programmes indicated that they found learning about numbers and letters more interesting than their counterparts by selecting basic skills tasks over other kinds of activities.

As part of their conclusion, the researchers suggested that the goal needs to be considered in making instructional decisions because different approaches may be better suited for achieving different goals. The questions generated from this study included whether the negative effects of early direct instruction can be minimised through creating positive, nurturing social climates; and whether the negative effects of didactic early childhood programmes persisted or have long-term effects on achievement.

This latter question was addressed in a later study conducted by Marcon (2002). This American study found that by the end of their sixth year in school, children who participated in didactic preschool programmes earned significantly lower grades compared to children who had attended child-centred preschool (4-year old) programmes. Marcon’s study concluded that children’s long-term school success appears to be enhanced by more active, child-centred early learning experiences. She suggested that when children participate in overly academic preschool experiences that introduce formalized learning experiences too early, they are less equipped to think independently and take on greater responsibility for their own learning processes in later school years.
Both Stipek et al. (1995) and Marcon (1999, 2002) identified child-centred programmes as an instructional type that is more likely to enhance social and emotional skills, and in the long term, lead to more successful academic outcomes than more didactic styles of programme. Indeed, Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta and LaParo (2006) also assessed more didactic approaches as having the least effective strategies in supporting children’s acquisition of social skills and strategies. Both Stipek and colleagues and Marcon highlighted the relationship between social and emotional and academic development. However, neither study examined the social processes in child-centred programmes that contribute to children’s social and emotional outcomes. Nor did they investigate the variances between each school community that would highlight the educational goals inherent to each community. Further study in these areas will extend these researchers’ findings and deepen our understanding of how teachers can support children’s social and emotional development.

3.2.2 School based social and emotional interventions.

To date there has been a plethora of research examining the effects of school based social and emotional interventions on diverse student outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011), academic outcomes (Duncan, Dowsett, Claessens, Magnuson, Huston et al.; 2007), mental health (Durlak & Wells, 1997; Greenberg, Domitrovich & Bumbarger, 2001) and problem behaviours (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2010; Wilson, Gottfredsom, & Najaka, 2001).

Typically, these interventions are based on the premise that an individual’s skills, cognition and behaviours are malleable (Greenberg, 2006, p. 140), and that well placed interventions can contribute to resiliency and well-being. Programmes such as the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) curriculum (Greenberg, 2006;
Kam, Greenberg, & Walls, 2003; Kusché, & Greenberg, 1994) use well scripted programmes to guide children in developing skills such as the initial appraisal of the event and its emotional meaning, to adequately regulate their emotions, motivation to initiate problem solving and gather more information, decipher the more cognitive interpretation of the event and one’s behavioural response (Greenberg, 2006).

In a large scale meta-analysis of the literature on social and emotional intervention strategies, Durlak et al. (2011) concluded that “developing an evidence-based intervention is an essential but insufficient condition for success; the programme must be well executed” (p. 418). On average, students who have participated in a SEL programme have better social skills than 76 percent of comparison-group students and have an average 23 percent point gain in social-emotional skills relative to students who did not participate in SEL programmes. These findings may be attributable to teacher beliefs. Ninety three percent of the teachers surveyed in the CASEL report believed that SEL was important.

It seems apparent then, that teachers’ beliefs about SEL are likely to influence programme delivery, evaluation and outcome. Vespo, Capece and Behforooz (2006) found that a number of teachers tended not to persist with intervention strategies that were too sequential and prescriptive. Many of these teachers commented that they found it difficult to complete the more traditional academic subjects let alone any additional lessons. Some of the teachers who did persist chose to rearrange the sequence based on relevance to current events. In similar findings, Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson and Salovey (2012) found that teachers’ beliefs influence the type of learning environments they create and are predictive of the success of newly adopted pedagogical approaches such as SEL programmes.
The studies conducted on SEL intervention programmes use a personal analytical lens (Rogoff, 2003). That is, they centre on social knowledge and skills. In some cases where they measure the success of the intervention, they use an interpersonal lens, and examine what is happening between children and their peers. However, the emphasis still remains on social and emotional knowledge and skills. Studies that collect and analyse data using also a cultural-institutional and interpersonal lens will provide further insight into how children imply SEL strategies in naturalistic settings.

3.3 Quality Early Childhood Environments

Whereas the previous sections have examined instructional styles and programme approaches, this section examines quality environments and the implications they have on children’s social and emotional learning and development. The main difference between the two is that the first centred on instructional approaches to supporting social and emotional development and academic achievement while quality environments examines both structural (physical) and process (psychological) features of early childhood programmes (Perry & Dockett, 2007; Tayler, Ishimine, Cloney, Cleveland & Thorpe, 2013).

‘Quality’ can be a value laden term (Tayler & Thorpe, 2012). In this study, quality environments are those that promote children’s short- and long-term academic and social and emotional outcomes. Previous studies have investigated characteristics that are considered contributory to improving child outcomes. For example, effective pedagogy and programmes in the early years (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell, 2002), family characteristics, teacher behaviours and classroom climate (Brophy-Herb et al., 2007), teacher-child relationships (Howes, 2000; Howes,
Phillipsen, & Peisner-Feinberg, 2000; Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sammons, Melhuish, Elliot & Totsika, 2006) and more broadly, structural and process quality features (Sylva et al., 2006; Tayler et al., 2013).

This research has consistently found that higher quality early childhood programmes lead to greater benefits for children’s social and emotional development (Brophy-Herb et al., 2007; Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta & Mashburn, 2010; Melhuish, 2004; Sammons, 2010; Sylva et al., 2006). In particular, this research suggests that process quality features are essential in higher quality programmes (Burchinal et al., 2010; Galinsky, 2006).

Process quality features refer to the interactions between teachers and children in classrooms (Pianta et al., 2008). These tend not to be as readily investigated by researchers because they are not as easily “testable” as the more structural features of quality such as adult-child ratios and physical materials (Tayler, et al., 2013). However, the process dimension is widely considered an integral component of quality by many researchers and regulatory bodies (ACECQA, 2013; Galinsky, 2006; Pianta et al., 2008; Tayler, et al., 2013).

In Australia, there is currently a growing emphasis on improving quality in early childhood settings. In 2012, as a result of an agreement made by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), the National Quality Framework (NQF) was implemented in early childhood settings. The purpose of the NQF was to provide better educational and developmental outcomes for children using education and care services (Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, ACECQA, 2014).

Currently, there are a number of studies that have investigated features of quality early childhood environments. Longitudinal studies such as the Perry Scope Project (1962-1967) and the Abecedarian Project (1972-1977) have been able to demonstrate
long term benefits of quality early childhood programmes. These two studies are reviewed here to investigate the importance of quality and what defines quality.

3.3.1 Long term benefits of quality early childhood programmes.

Consistent with the definition of quality provided in this study, the children who participated in the HighScope and Abecedarian projects yielded significantly higher long-term positive social and academic outcomes than their counterparts from the respective control groups. These studies provide evidence in the value of investing in young children’s social and emotional development. This was demonstrated in the HighScope project through testing of children’s Intelligence Quotients (IQ). At the age of fourteen the IQ of these children remained on a par with their counterparts, however, their academic results were significantly higher. The difference between the two groups was that the HighScope project participants were more motivated, had belief in their self-efficacy and were more likely to make positive decisions that would invest in their wellbeing.

3.3.1.1 The HighScope project.

In 1962, the HighScope project commenced with 123 high-risk African American children aged between three and four. Fifty-eight of these children were randomly selected to attend the high-quality preschool programme based on HighScope’s participatory learning approach while 65 were placed into a comparison group that received no preschool programme. All these children were living in poverty and were perceived to have a high risk of failure (Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield & Nores, 2005).
The high-quality inherent to the HighScope project was depicted by an active learning model that emphasised participants’ intellectual and social development.

Children attended the preschool Monday through to Friday for 2.5 hours per day over two years. During that time, the staff to child ratio was 1:5 or 6 and the teachers made visits to each child’s home for 1.5 hours each week.

At age 40, 97% of the participants still living were interviewed. Additional data were gathered from the subjects' school, social services, and arrest records. The data revealed that those adults at age 40 who attended the HighScope preschool programme had higher earnings, were more likely to hold a job, had committed fewer crimes, and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who did not attend the HighScope project preschool (Schweinhart et al., 2005).

### 3.3.1.2 The Abecedarian project.

In 1972, the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Centre in Chapel Hill, North Carolina launched the Abecedarian project. The purpose of the project was to examine the potential benefits of early childhood education for poor children. The mean age at entry was 4.4 months. These toddlers were randomly assigned to either the early educational intervention group or the control group.

Those infants placed in the early educational interventions group attended an eight-hour-a-day, five-day-per-week, year-round educational day-care centre, with low teacher-child ratio (ranging from 1:3 for infants and 1:6 for 5-year-olds), the curriculum was characterised by educational games that emphasised language development and cognitive skills. The adult-child interactions were integral to the programme’s success, with conversational story reading and adult responsiveness being key features.
(Campbell, Pungello, Burchinal, Kainz, Pan, Wasik, Sparling, Barbarin & Ramey, 2012). They received free medical care, dietary supplements, and social service support for their families. From ages five through eight years, half of the children from both the intervention and the control groups were given extra help in school and at home by specially trained teachers.

The children’s progress was monitored over time with follow-up assessments conducted at ages 12, 15, 21 and 30 years (Campbell et al., 2012; Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002). The areas assessed included cognitive functioning, academics skills, educational attainment, employment, parenthood and social adjustment. The results revealed that those children who attended the child care/preschool at the age of 21 years scored significantly better in both reading and math achievement, and life outcomes.

At their core, both projects considered cognitive and social development as complementary and important. These programmes were characterised by intentional, play-based teaching methods that were fostered through respectful and responsive teacher-child relationships and partnerships with families. The benefits of these programmes, however, need to be considered in context. Both programmes had 1:6 teacher to child ratios in their 4-year old programmes, and the participants were predominantly African Americans from low-income families. Criticisms of these programmes suggest that these place certain limitations on the studies (Spitz, 1992), suggesting that caution should be taken in generalising these findings to the wider society.

Although the proposed current study is not longitudinal, the sociocultural approach that was taken enables an examination of the key factors featured in the HighScope project and Abecedarian projects through the cultural-institutional (school
engagement with families), interpersonal (quality and frequency of teacher-child interactions) and personal (children’s transformation in participation in sociocultural activities) lenses. Hence, this study will examine how features that contribute to quality are demonstrated in Western Australian Catholic school kindergarten contexts. One key component of this examination centres on teacher training. The teachers from the HighScope and Abecedarian projects were trained how to interact with children to improve social/emotional and academic outcomes – the interactions were the key. This current study investigates the interactions Western Australian teachers have with children and how they support children’s social and emotional development. The findings from this investigation will have implications for early childhood teacher training and ongoing professional development.

### 3.3.2 Examining the features of quality environments.

Quality early childhood environments are an amalgamation of multiple areas that contribute to children’s education. The NQS (ACECQA, 2013) identified 7 quality areas, reflecting both structural and process dimensions, which work synergistically to shape quality early childhood curricula. Equally, several studies have identified pedagogical features that are indicative of quality early childhood environments (OECD, 2012; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggard, 2004). However, despite this thorough investigation into features of quality early childhood environments, none of these studies have examined quality environments from a sociocultural perspective. Using this perspective, this current study provides an insight into how these pedagogical features appear in context and how they support social and emotional development. Underpinning this examination are the relative school community’s educational goals and how they translate to quality early childhood
environments in-situ. An investigation of this nature is important as it highlights the different guises quality may take in different contexts.

This section predominantly reviews two longitudinal studies that were centred on identifying the key features of quality early childhood environments. These are Starting Strong III (OECD, 2012) and the Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE, Sylva, et al, 2004). After providing some background on the purpose and methodology underpinning these studies, the findings are presented in table form together with research from other studies and how these relate to the theoretical concepts underpinning this study. The table (Table 3.2) is organised using the Policy levers identified in Starting Strong III as a starting point to frame evidence from other related findings from studies and related concepts. Table 3.2 is followed by a discussion of these studies and how using sociocultural theory to interpret them can contribute to our understanding of quality early childhood environments.

3.3.2.1 Starting Strong III.

Starting Strong I, II and III are international longitudinal comparative studies conducted by the OECD (2001, 2006, 2012) that are intended to expand access, ensure equity and enhance the quality of early interventions, which in turn will lead to better social and emotional and academic outcomes for children. An analytical framework was set up based on Starting Strong I and II coupled with the latest findings from international literature reviews. In Starting Strong III the OECD suggested the following five policy levers in encouraging quality in ECEC:

- Policy Lever 1: Setting out quality goals and regulations
- Policy Lever 2: Designing and implementing curriculum standards
- Policy Lever 3: Improving qualifications, training and working conditions
- Policy Lever 4: Engaging families and communities
- Policy Lever 5: Advancing data collection, research and monitoring (OECD, 2012, p. 9).

3.3.2.2 **EPPE project (United Kingdom).**

The Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) (1997 – 2004) project was a DfES funded longitudinal study compiled by Sylva et al. (2004). It was designed to explore five questions: What is the impact of preschool on children’s intellectual and social/behavioural development? Are some preschools more effective than others in promoting children’s development? What are the characteristics of an effective preschool setting? What is the impact of the home and childcare history on children’s development? Do the effects of preschool continue through Key Stage 1 (ages 6 and 7 years)? (Sylva et al., 2004, p. i).

The participants for this study were 3,000 children aged between three and four years old at the commencement of the study. Data were collected on children’s developmental profiles at ages 3, 4/5, 6 and 7 years. Familial background characteristics and the preschool setting the children attended were also considered (Sylva et al., 2004). Data were presented in twelve case studies that represented the middle and upper range of effectiveness. The case studies enabled an exploration of the practices that may have contributed to children doing so well in the programmes.
### Table 3.2

**Research identifying features of quality classroom environments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Starting Strong III&lt;sup&gt;10&lt;/sup&gt; (Policy Levers)</th>
<th>EPPE Project</th>
<th>Other research</th>
<th>Sociocultural perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. **Setting out quality goals and regulations:** In 2009, all states and territories signed up to the National Partnership Agreement. The NQS (ACECQA, 2011, 2013) was introduced. | - Children do better in settings that view educational and social development as complementary and of equal importance.  
- Kindergarten teachers’ knowledge of ECE curriculum is vital. | - Clearly defined and articulated goals enable kindergarten teachers to provide child-centred, holistic programmes (Brophy-Herb et al., 2007; Pianta et al., 2008; Stipek et al., 1995)  
- Early development and learning and care and education are inextricably linked (Elliott, 2006) | - Community educational goals contribute to school/classroom curriculum, emphasising the importance of clearly defined quality goals (Rogoff, 2003). |
| 2. **Designing and implementing curriculum standards:** In 2009, the EYLF (DEEWR & CAG, 2009) was introduced. Families informed of curriculum so they can support children at home. | - Effective settings provide a balanced curriculum where teacher and children equally initiate activities.  
- Quality preschool can be an effective intervention for the reduction of special needs, especially for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children.  
- Quality of home learning environment outweighs parental occupation, education or income. | - An effective early childhood programme combines both child-guided and teacher-guided experiences.  
- Teachers play an intentional role in child-guided experiences and children have active roles in teacher-guided experiences (Epstein, 2007).  
- A “consistent implementation of a well-articulated curriculum model has the potential to raise the standard of care and education experienced by young children” (Winter, 2003, p. 4)  
- Teacher-child ratios are an “effective barometer” of the frequency of meaningful contacts between teachers | - Rogoff (2003) notes that it is typical for some societies to prepare children for school by engaging them in school-like conversations.  
- Guided participation in the ZPD occurs when the more knowledgeable other (expert) interacts with the child (novice) and guides them toward problem solving, learning a new skill or concept and so on (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). |
| 3. **Improving qualifications, training and working conditions:** Additional ECE University and tertiary education places created. | - Higher qualified staff are more likely to engage in sustained shared thinking and maintain warm interactive interactions with children.  
- Higher qualified staff know how young children learn (child development). | - Teacher-child interactions are the primary mechanism through which children learn and develop (Pianta et al., 2008)  
- Teacher-child ratios are an “effective barometer” of the frequency of meaningful contacts between teachers | - Human development occurs in social, cultural and historical context (Vygotsky, 1978), and is a process of people’s changing participation in sociocultural activities of their communities (Rogoff, 2003). Warm interactive |

<sup>10</sup> After stating the Policy Lever (feature of quality) identified in Starting Strong III (written in italics), a brief statement in regards to how this has been implemented in Australia is offered.
Higher qualified staff were more likely to provide children with curriculum related activities and engage them in more challenging play.

Higher qualified staff were more likely to support children’s behaviour management through reasoning and talk.

Effective centres used ‘play’ environments to provide the basis of instructive learning.

Intentional teachers use their knowledge and expertise to organise learning experiences and take advantage of incidental learning opportunities as they arise (Epstein, 2007)

Intentional teaching requires an extensive repertoire of how young children typically develop and learn (Epstein, 2007)

Play=Learning (Michnick Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek & Singer, 2006)

Social and emotional skills need to be taught (Zins et al., 2007)

Children are more likely to engage in complex play in an environment that is warm, respectful, reciprocal and accepting (Perry & Dockett, 2007)

Positive school environments are the leading determining factor of the level of emotional competence and wellbeing in children and teachers (Weare & Gray, 2003)

Providing children with opportunities to talk and develop language skills is depictive of high-quality programmes (Wasik, Bond & Hindman, 2002)

Teacher presence in an activity is the chief factor encouraging children’s involvement in particular settings (Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1987; Kontos, 1999).

Explicit training in conflict resolution is effective for young children (Stevahn, Johnson, Johnson, Oberie & Wahl, 2002).
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as they demonstrate increased pro-social behaviour and emotional intelligences (Kolb & Weede, 2001)

- Teachers who are higher qualified tend to have more child-centred beliefs (Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant, Clifford, Diane Early, & Barbarin, 2005)
- Staff quality is closely linked to optimum learning experiences in early childhood centres and better and more equitable outcomes for children (Elliott, 2006)

4. Engaging families and communities: This aspect is assessed in the NQS. National project Engaging Families in Early Childhood Development (ECD) Story (MCEEDCYA, 2010) established.

- What parents do is more important than who they are. Quality of home learning environment outweighs parental occupation, education or income.
- Parental partnerships inform teachers about children. When curriculum reflects knowledge of children, they are more likely to feel connected and motivated to participate in the programme improving educational and developmental outcomes (Kagan & Kauerz, 2006; NIEER, 2007; Pianta et al., 2008)
- Community educational goals contribute to school/classroom curriculum (Rogoff, 2003).
- When children feel they belong, they are more likely to engage in interactions that have a shared affective space (Goldstein, 1999).

5. Advancing data collection, research and monitoring: Australia developed the AEDI

ACECQA, 2011, 2013; Brophy-Herb et al., 2007; DEEWR & CAG, 2009; Elliott, 2006; Epstein, 2007; Goldstein, 1999; Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1987; Kagan & Kauerz, 2006; Kontos, 1999; MCEEDCYA, 2010; Michnick Golinkoff et al., 2006; NIEER, 2007; OECD, 2012; Perry & Dockett, 2007; Pianta et al., 2005; Pianta et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 2002; Rogoff, 2003; Stipek et al., 1995; Sylva et al., 2004; Vygotsky, 1978; Wasik, Bond & Hindman, 2002; Weare & Gray, 2003; Zins et al., 2007
In this study, a kindergarten classroom environment encompasses all of the attributes identified in Table 3.2, each contributing to the other in creating an environment that either supports or constrains children’s social and emotional development. They do not exist in isolation and are only separated in this section for discussion purposes. The following examines these findings in relation to sociocultural theory.

When considering setting goals and regulations (OECD, 2012) from a sociocultural perspective, it becomes clear that it is not just the goals set by policy makers and educationalists that inform curriculum. Rather, the community educational values that are inherent to each school community will contribute to how curriculum takes shape in classrooms. Consequently, even if the curriculum views education and social development as complementary and of equal importance (Sylva et al., 2004), if the community’s educational goals differ, these will have implications for that kindergarten curriculum. However, when clearly defined and articulated goals (Brophy-Herb et al., 2007; Pianta et al., 2008; Stipek et al., 1995) are used to educate the school community about quality early childhood education, the community educational goals are more likely to shift to support a classroom curriculum that addresses both educational and social development.

Designing and implementing curriculum standards (OECD, 2012) that are guided by principles and practices underpinned by research and exemplary practice are more likely to lead to quality early childhood environments. The principles and practices underpinning the EYLF\(^{11}\) (DEEWR & CAG, 2009) recommend that

\(^{11}\) Principles underpin practice that is focused on assisting all children to make progress in relation to the Learning Outcomes. These are: secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships; partnership; high expectations and equity; respect for diversity and ongoing learning and reflective practice. Practices of early childhood pedagogy include: holistic approaches; being responsive to children; learning through play; intentional teaching; creating physical and social learning environments; valuing the cultural and social contexts of children and their families; continuity of learning and transitions; assessment for learning (DEEWR & CAG, 2009, p. 12-18).
curriculum is implemented through intentional, secure, respectful relationships that are typified by responsiveness. This suggests a balanced curriculum where teachers and children both play a respectful, reciprocal and active role in the learning (Epstein, 2007; Sylva et al., 2004) and there is a sense of duality that is integral to forming rich and meaningful interactions (Goldstein, 1999). Using concepts of sociocultural theory to interpret *developing and implementing curriculum standards* enables us to examine the teacher-child interactions as guided participation, where children can direct their own learning by initiating conversations with adults or other children, or by taking the initiative to observe or become involved in activities that help them learn (Rogoff, 2003). This concept extends Sylva et al.’s finding that more effective early childhood programmes were ones where teacher and children initiated activities equally to consider both tacit and explicit forms of initiating engagement in activities.

Partnerships with families is another principle underpinning the EYLF (DEEWR & CAG, 2009) and is integral to *implementing curriculum standards* (OECD, 2012). When parents are informed of the curriculum they are in a better position to offer them support children at home. Rogoff (2003) observed that it was typical for some societies to prepare children for school, and consequently, knowing what to prepare them for in their home environment will heighten and support the children’s preparation for learning at school.

Social interactions are fundamental to learning. *Improving qualifications* (OECD, 2012) is essential to these interactions because higher qualified staff are more likely to engage in sustained shared thinking and maintain warm, interactive interactions with children (Sylva et al., 2004). Through these interactions, teachers make children conscious of their everyday social and emotional responses by explaining to them what they are doing. The merging of abstract and everyday concepts enables
children to exercise these skills consciously and with volition (Vygotsky, 1987). This is exemplified by teachers who support children’s behaviour management through reasoning and talk (Sylva et al., 2004). Interpreting interactions using Vygotsky’s formation of concepts has implications for the effectiveness of social and emotional learning and intervention in kindergarten classrooms. It indicates that teachers need to interact with children while they are engaged in everyday activities, such as play, and attach social and emotional concepts to the child’s automatic (unconscious) activity to generate conscious realisation of their responses and behaviours (see Chapter 2, section 2.1.2).

Generally, teachers with higher qualifications are more likely to provide play environments to support social/emotional and academic learning, which can be attributed to their better understanding of how young children’s development (Sylva et al., 2004). Play has many benefits for learning and development. First, through play children are capable of regulating behaviours that are impossible to regulate in life, making play a leading factor in development (Vygotsky, 1978). Second, play provides a context in which children can safely learn local traditions and practices, equipping children with the social and cultural norms necessary for independent, successful interactions (Rogoff, 2003).

With knowledge of child development, higher qualified teachers know that social and emotional skills need to be taught and that incidental learning opportunities, as well as organised ones, offer opportune moments to support children’s social and emotional understandings (Epstein, 2007). Higher qualified teachers are more likely to encourage children to engage in challenging play in warm and accepting classroom environments that support and extend children’s social repertoires and competencies (Perry & Dockett, 2007; Sylva et al., 2004). In cyclical fashion, classroom environments
that are characterised by warmth and acceptance are the leading determining factor of emotional and social competence and wellbeing in children and teachers (Weare & Gray, 2003).

*Engaging families and communities* (OECD, 2012) contributes to the quality of early childhood environments because it is through this relationship that teacher learn more about the children. When curriculum reflects knowledge of children, they are more likely to feel connected and motivated to participate in the programme, improving opportunities to support children’s social and emotional learning. When children develop a sense of belonging (DEEWR & CAG, 2009), they are more likely to engage in interactions with teachers that are characterised by enjoyment and pleasure (Goldstein, 1999). It is only through teacher-child interactions that have a shared affective space that the ZPD is created, hence it is only through these interactions that children can develop their social and emotional skills.

In reference to engaging families and communities, an Australian study conducted by Farrell, Tayler and Tennent (2004) examined the social capital (i.e. social networks and relationships based on trust) of young children, their families and community members in urban and rural contexts of Queensland, Australia of integrated early childhood and family hubs. Social capital has been advocated by Australia's Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (2000) as one of five key determinants of social and family well-being.

One hundred and thirty-eight children (aged 4-8 years) from four schools, two each in rural and urban localities were engaged in informal conversations with a researcher in the naturalistic environment of their classrooms. The conversations were based on six dimensions of social capital (adapted from Onyx & Bullen, 1997): participation in community activities; neighbourhood connections; family and friend
connections; proactivity in a social context; feelings of trust and safety; and tolerance of diversity.

This study provided a unique insight into how children perceived their sense of social capital in both their community and school. The findings indicated that the majority of children in both the rural and the urban communities agreed that they felt safe, and understandably children in urban settings were more likely to engage with others and within teams outside of school hours. Children in the urban community were more likely to agree that they trusted most people and that they liked being with people who were different from them, and both urban and rural preschool children went to school because it was enjoyable. Farrell et al. (2004) proposed that the challenge for this research field is for practitioners and policy makers to promote the social dimensions of communities within and beyond ECEC that enhance social capital while contributing to the well-being of young children, their families and communities. Further research using personal, interpersonal and cultural-institutional foci of analysis will extend Farrell et al.’s findings to elucidate how the school and communities educational goals promote or constrain children’s social capital.

In sum, previous studies have identified certain structural and process features that are indicative of quality early childhood settings. Using a sociocultural lens to examine the findings from previous research shows that a deeper and more insightful understanding of how teachers can support kindergarten children’s social and emotional development in their individual contexts can be developed.

3.4 Play and Relationships in Supporting Social and Emotional Development

The following sections review the role of play and relationships. Although they have featured in the above discussion, a more intense examination is warranted due to
the central role these two features play in developing children’s social and emotional development. Maintaining the same organization as above, these are first presented in table format along with relevant research and theoretical concepts and a discussion follows.
### Table 3.3
*Features of play and relationships that support social and emotional development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Sociocultural perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Play</td>
<td>Activities that occur in the ZPD provide opportunities for children to internalise higher psychological functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Playing with peers is how children learn to make their own decisions, control their emotions and impulses, see from others’ perspectives, negotiate differences with others, and make friends. Play is how children learn to take control of their lives (Gray, 2013)</td>
<td>- When abstract and everyday concepts merge meaningful concept formation takes place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Through play children learn self-assertion, negotiation and compromise. They need to skillfully present their case to come as close as possible to getting what they want without upsetting the other players (Gray, 2013)</td>
<td>- Play is a leading factor in development containing all developmental tendencies in a condensed form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- When children engage in play they learn the social norms and expectations of their culture which heightens their “sensitivity to external pressures to act in socially desirable ways” (Singer et al., 2007, p. 79)</td>
<td>- Internal transformations in the child’s development is brought about by play (p. 101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Play cannot be laissez-faire and loosely structured, nor can it be didactic and highly structured (Miller &amp; Almon, 2009).</td>
<td>- Play is a major source of social interactions in young children’s lives and the explicit and implicit rules that bind it naturally create the ZPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children become frustrated with each other in laissez-faire play. In didactic situations the teacher controls the children’s behaviour and responses (Epstein, 2007)</td>
<td>- Play provides a context in which children can learn social and cultural norms (Vygotsky, 1978)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In didactic situations, children are compliant through fear of consequences, or because they are hoping to be rewarded. In these situations compliance is taught, not self-regulation (Shankar, 2010)</td>
<td>- Imagination distinguishes child’s play from other forms of activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Play needs to be a balanced blend of child-guided and adult-guided experiences (Epstein, 2007; Nicolopoulou, McDowell, &amp; Brockmeyer, 2006)</td>
<td>- Imaginary situations in play contain rules of behaviour that require children to take the perspective of others and learn the social norms and expectations of their culture (Vygotsky, 1978)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Play provides a context in which children develop coping strategies and contributes to children’s emotional understandings. The emotional health, social skills and cognitive-linguistic capabilities that emerge in the early years are all predictive of successful school outcomes (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007)</td>
<td>- Egocentric speech is integral to regulatory and organisational behaviours Imaginary situations in play contain rules of behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Play is a safe outlet in which children can express negative emotions in a context with no real-world consequences. Play therapists use play scenarios to aid in children’s recovery from stressful or traumatic events (Haight, Black, Ostler &amp; Sheridan, 2006; Miller &amp; Almon, 2009)</td>
<td>- The more complex the play, the more rules bound it becomes the greater the demands on children’s application and concurrently the greater the regulation of children’s activity (Vygotsky, 1978)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The decline of play since about 1955 has been accompanied by a continuous rise in anxiety, depression, and feelings of helplessness in young people. In relation to this, there has been a rise in narcissism and a decline in empathy (Gray, 2013)</td>
<td>- When children exercise self-regulation they become masters of their own behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Play offers a context in which children feel secure to explore and discover, building on both their strengths and interests (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett &amp; Farmer, 2005)</td>
<td>- With continued participation in make-believe play, kindergarten children engage in more complex negotiations when creating scenes; continually drawing on the cultural roles,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A wide variety of cultural communities spontaneously engage in pretend play with young children (Haight et al., 2006; Rogoff, 2003), this play is linked with secure parent- and/or teacher-child relationships (Sutton-Smith, 1994)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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**Research**

- Playing with peers is how children learn to make their own decisions, control their emotions and impulses, see from others’ perspectives, negotiate differences with others, and make friends. Play is how children learn to take control of their lives (Gray, 2013)
- Through play children learn self-assertion, negotiation and compromise. They need to skillfully present their case to come as close as possible to getting what they want without upsetting the other players (Gray, 2013)
- When children engage in play they learn the social norms and expectations of their culture which heightens their “sensitivity to external pressures to act in socially desirable ways” (Singer et al., 2007, p. 79)
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- Children become frustrated with each other in laissez-faire play. In didactic situations the teacher controls the children’s behaviour and responses (Epstein, 2007)
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### Supporting Social and Emotional Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adults role in play</th>
<th>Adults role in play</th>
<th>Adults role in play</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broderick (2001) found that 4- and 5-year olds who used more egocentric speech during activities were better at regulating their emotions that their age-mates.</td>
<td>Play is integral to developing social and emotional skills (Zins et al., 2007).</td>
<td>Kindergarten is the peak period for make-believe play predominating amongst children between 3- and 6-years old (Singer &amp; Singer, 1990).</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of relationships</th>
<th>Importance of relationships</th>
<th>Importance of relationships</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘The degree to which play is used to promote learning and development is dependent on teachers’ beliefs, practices and contexts (Hadley, 2002)’</td>
<td>A large majority of teachers indicated that play is important, while roughly half of the teachers perceived administrators not valuing it (Miller &amp; Almon, 2009).</td>
<td>“Appreciating children’s play requires time to become familiar with the players, their contexts and the nature of their play. Such an understanding is critical if educators are to build on such play and add complexity through introducing additional possibilities through props and supports” (Perry &amp; Dockett, 2007, p. 3).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher-child relationships</th>
<th>Teacher-child relationships</th>
<th>Teacher-child relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive teacher-child relationships are the primary mechanism of child development and learning (Elias, 2006; Pianta et al., 2008).</td>
<td>Consensus amongst the literature is that the interactions between adults and children are important to child outcomes (Tayler &amp; Thorpe, 2012).</td>
<td>Children often take the initiative to engage in activities so that they can learn. Both adults and children contribute support and direction in shared endeavours creating a community of learners (Rogoff et al., 1996).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| When abstract and everyday concepts merge meaningful concept formation takes place (Vygotsky, 1987). | When abstract and everyday concepts merge meaningful concept formation takes place (Vygotsky, 1987). | When abstract and everyday concepts merge meaningful concept formation takes place (Vygotsky, 1987). |

| Human development is a process of people’s changing participation in sociocultural activities of their communities. | Guided participation explicates the varied ways in which children learn. It includes those interactions that are intended as instructional, and also those that are not (Rogoff, 2003). | Interactions are both proximal and distal (Rogoff, 2003). |

| Social interactions develop the individual (Wertsch, 1985) as all higher functions are derived from social interactions with members of the same context (Vygotsky, 1978). | Any higher psychological function appears twice – first between people and then within the individual (Vygotsky, 1978). | The shared affective space created by the adult and child allows the ZPD to take place in any given situation (Goldstein, 1999). |

| The shared affective space created by the adult and child allows the ZPD to take place in any given situation (Goldstein, 1999). | The shared affective space created by the adult and child allows the ZPD to take place in any given situation (Goldstein, 1999). | The shared affective space created by the adult and child allows the ZPD to take place in any given situation (Goldstein, 1999). |
Forming a sense of duality is measured through the CLASS instrument in the dimensions teacher sensitivity and regard for student perspectives. Reciprocal relationships are needed for learning to occur (Pianta et al., 2008). Noddings (1984) states that caring and teaching are inseparable, asserting “the teacher is necessarily one-caring if she is to be a teacher and not simply a textbook like source from which the student may or may not learn” (p. 70). The emotional connection between adults and children characterises positive classroom environments (Pianta et al., 2008). Teacher-child relationships create a sense of security which enables to children to feel safe to explore their surroundings (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby et al., 1956; Brophy-Herb et al., 2007; Howes, 2000; Raver, 2004; Shonkoff, 2011; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Teachers who are responsive to children’s emotional cues are more likely to form supportive relationships that act as a buffer to stress (Nagel, 2012; Pianta et al., 2002; Pianta et al., 2008). Sensitive and responsive caregiving consistently predicts children’s self-regulatory competence despite economic disadvantage (Raver, 2004). Children’s healthy social and emotional development depends on the quality and reliability of their relationships with the most significant others in their lives (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004, 2007). Teacher-child relationships are formed through interactions where the adults and children’s minds meet on matters of interest to both of them and is characterised by rich problem setting and solving (Elias, 2006; Katz, 1998, p.36). The development of metacognitive skills is “contingent on the opportunities that adults provide to express existing skills and scaffold more complex ones” (Pianta et al., 2008, p. 5). The frequency of quality teacher-child interactions is a key determinant of positive teacher-child relationships (Pianta et al., 2005; Pianta et al., 2002). Outcomes from negative teacher-child relationships include the perpetuation of children’s negative social and emotional behaviour. This occurs when teachers continually ignore difficult behaviour or they react harshly to it. Children who are considered as ‘tough to teach’ are provided with less instruction and less positive feedback from teachers (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). Negative teacher-child relationships act as a stressor for children and may impair their adjustment to school (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Silver, Measelle, Armstrong & Essex, 2005). Peer relationships form a supportive base especially for children starting school for the first time in an unfamiliar place (Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1996). Peers are companions in play that help formulate values and beliefs and are integral to children’s compliance to behavioural norms of the peer culture and broader society. These relationships offer children important emotional and cognitive resources that Children learn while participating in practices of their cultural communities (Rogoff, 2003). Higher psychological functions occur in ZPD and are internalised through the guidance provided by adults and more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). The shared affective space created by the adult and child allows the ZPD to take place in any given situation. In the shared affective space the one-caring offers the cared for their full attention and is receptive to his perspective and situation, forming a duality with the learner. Children are motivated to engage in activities with the teacher through their love for the adult and the desire to imitate her. The ZPD is both intellectually and emotionally rewarding for both adult and child (Goldstein, 1999). Peer relationships are companions in play that help formulate values and beliefs and are integral to children’s compliance to behavioural norms of the peer culture and broader society. These relationships offer children important emotional and cognitive resources that are internalised through the guidance provided by adults and more capable peers.
-enable them to negotiate their new surroundings (Ladd et al., 1996; Rubin, Bukowski & Parker, 2006; Wentzel, 2005).
- Children who persistently misinterpret others’ emotional cues and act in anti-social ways are less likely to be accepted by classmates and teachers (Raver & Knitzer, 2002).
- Children who develop poor quality peer relationships are more likely to be aggressive, lonely, have low self-esteem and are less able to develop social skills (Schmidt, Demulder & Denham, 2002).
- These children are less likely to participate in group activities, participatory roles and collaborative learning experiences, cutting off an important avenue for learning and emotional support and limiting opportunities for social learning (Boyd et al., 2005; Ladd & Burgess, 1999).
- Pro-social co-operative conduct can protect children against the harmful effects of anti-social uncooperative conduct. Pro-social tendencies can protect children against peer rejection, discourage criminal behaviour and provide a buffer against persistent unemployment during adulthood (White, 2011).

Self-regulation originates in social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978).
3.4.1 Play as a context to support children’s social and emotional development.

The play that is referred to in this study is not laissez-faire or loosely structured, nor is it didactic or highly structured (Miller & Almon, 2009). Rather, it is a balanced blend of child-guided and teacher-guided experiences (Epstein, 2007; Nicolopoulou et al., 2006). Figure 3.2 illustrates how play is viewed in this study. The consequences of laissez-faire and didactic classrooms that are shown in this diagram are informed by Vygotsky’s (1987) abstract and everyday concept formation theory (see Chapter 2, section 2.1.2).

Figure 3.2: The kindergarten continuum (Sources: Epstein, 2007; Miller & Almon, 2009, Vygotsky, 1978, 1987)

As teachers tend not to get involved in laissez-faire classrooms, there are increased opportunities for children to learn societally undesired skills and practices.
(Epstein, 2007; Rogoff, 2003). For example, Rogoff warns that without appropriate guidance, children can learn to use violence to resolve interpersonal problems. Continued responses such as this can channel children’s internalizing of these particular values and practices. From another perspective, without appropriate guidance, children are more likely to act using everyday social and emotional concepts without consciousness or volition (Vygotsky, 1987). Consequently, they gain little mastery over their conscious ability to employ social and emotional skills that provide coping strategies and emotional understandings. This has implications for children as the emergence of emotional health, social skills and cognitive-linguistic capabilities in the early years are predictive of successful school outcomes (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007).

In didactic classrooms, children are given few opportunities to engage in play. In play, children learn the social norms and expectations of their culture which heightens their “sensitivity to external pressures to act in socially desirable ways” (Singer et al., 2006, p. 79). Vygotsky (1978) explains that in play children use their imagination. Imaginary situations in play contain rules of behaviour that require children to take the perspective of others and learn the social norms and expectations of their culture. With continued participation in make-believe play, kindergarten children engage in more complex negotiations when creating scenes; continually drawing on the cultural roles, conventions and models of cooperation of their society. The more complex the play, the more rules bound it becomes and the greater the demands on children’s application and the greater the regulation of children’s activity. When children exercise self-regulation they become masters of their own behaviour.

In didactic situations children are given few opportunities to practice rules of behaviour and to apply these rules to new situations. As such, they tend not to learn
self-regulation. Often these children are compliant through fear of consequences, or because they are hoping to be rewarded (Shanker, 2010). When children are constantly regulated by adults, they may appear to be self-regulated, but they are in fact “teacher regulated” (Bodrova & Leong, 2008, p. 2).

Play offers the most ideal environment in which to support children’s social and emotional development. Vygotsky (1978) confirmed that it is the leading factor in development as it contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form. Consequently, children’s play, learning and development cannot be separated, rather they occur simultaneously and synergistically (Barblett, 2010). In play children learn to make their own decisions, control their emotions and impulses, see from others’ perspectives, negotiate differences with others and make friends. Through play, children learn self-assertion, negotiation and compromise. They learn how to skilfully present their case to come as close as possible to getting what they want without upsetting their play partners (Gray, 2013). In addition, play facilitates children’s development of coping strategies and contributes to their emotional understandings. The emotional health, social skills and cognitive linguistic capabilities that emerge in the early years are predictive of successful school outcomes (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007).

Play-based early childhood programmes consistently yield higher quality learning experiences. This was earlier exemplified in the longitudinal studies the HighScope (Schweinhart et al., 2005) and Abecedarian (Campbell et al., 2012) projects. A more recent study conducted by Walsh, Sproule, McGuinness, Trew, Rafferty and Sheehy (2006) in Northern Ireland also demonstrated that 4-5 year old children who were given the opportunity to learn through play were given a higher-quality learning experience. In this study, 38 of the 70 children participating were in a traditional Year 1
class where the Northern Ireland Curriculum directed the programme, while 32 of the children participated in Enriched Curriculum classes, where a developmental appropriate, play-based and child-centred curriculum was being piloted. Results from the Walsh and Gardner’s Quality learning instrument (Walsh & Gardner, 2005) revealed that children who were given the opportunity to learn through play had more opportunity to act independently, engage in more challenging activities, had more positive dispositions toward learning, and showed higher levels of emotional, social and physical well-being.

It stands to reason that there are ramifications for social and emotional learning if children are given constrained opportunities to play. Gray (2013) noted that with the decline of play, from around 1955, there has been a continuous rise of reported incidences of anxiety, depression and feelings of helplessness in young people. Contemporaneously, there has been a rise in narcissism and a decline in empathy.

3.4.1.1 The teachers’ role in play.

Often teachers make many of the initial choices about play through curricula decisions, time, space and materials (Ashiabi, 2007; Kagan, 1990). As such, the degree to which play is used to promote learning and development is dependent on teachers’ beliefs, practices and contexts (Hadley, 2002). Research indicates that teachers with higher qualifications are more likely to encourage children to engage in challenging to promote the learning and development (Barblett, 2010; Sylva et al., 2004). Teachers are in a better position to create more challenging play scenarios when they become “familiar with the players, their contexts and the nature of their play. Such an understanding is critical if educators are to build on such play and add complexity
through introducing additional possibilities through props and supports” (Perry & Dockett, 2007, p. 3). This is not unlike determining the children’s actual level of development, that is, the level of development of children’s “mental functions that has been established as a result of certain already completed developmental cycles” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85). The props and supports the teacher introduces, alongside adult guidance, extends children into the level of potential development, which is the ZPD.

In addition to many other benefits, challenging play scenarios facilitate children’s development of competent persuasive language skills. This is because play in these scenarios children learn self-assertion, negotiation and compromise that are needed to skilfully present their case to come as close as possible to getting what they want without upsetting the other players (Gray, 2013).

In a survey reported by Miller and Almon (2009) a large majority of American teachers indicated that play is important, while roughly half of the teachers perceived school administrators not valuing it. Often this perception originates from the pressure to meet “inappropriate expectations” through developmentally inappropriate ways (p. 11). This concern was addressed in the introduction of this study (Chapter 1, section 1.0), where ripple effects of the PIPS and NAPLAN mandated assessments are evidenced in some Western Australian kindergartens.

Using an interpersonal, personal and cultural-institutional lens to examine play in kindergarten contexts provides an opportunity for insight into how these aspects contribute to kindergarten curriculum decisions about the use and inclusion of play (Rogoff, 2003). In addition, an investigation of this nature can highlight opportunities that teachers seize and those that they miss in supporting children’s social and emotional development. Specifically, the teachers’ role can be viewed in terms of Vygotsky’s (1987) abstract and everyday concepts concept formation theory where
teacher-child interactions in play (everyday activity) are necessary for social and emotional development to occur.

In summary of this section, there is consensus among researchers that play is essential to children’s academic and social and emotional development. Complex, challenging play extends children to develop more diverse and sophisticated social and emotional skills that increase social repertoires, improve wellbeing and contribute to successful school outcomes. Also this section has established that teachers have an important role in creating contexts that are conducive to complex play, and in guiding children’s social and emotional development while engaged in play.

Examining the use of play in kindergartens to support children’s social and emotional development using sociocultural theory as a lens has multiple benefits. First, it enables an examination of the inclusion of play in different cultural settings in the Perth metropolitan area and allows detailing of the cultural-institutional, interpersonal and/or personal aspects of the inclusion of play.

Second, by looking at how teachers guide children while they participate in play provides insight into the ways they employ concepts of learning deemed to be effective. For example, observing the use of implicit and explicit forms of guided participation; teachers’ ability to establish the ZPD and extend children through merging abstract and everyday concepts. In addition, an examination of these concepts in classroom situations provides insight into how embedded they are into kindergarten teachers’ pedagogical practice.
3.4.2 Relationships in supporting children’s social and emotional development.

Research and theory affirm that the interactions between adults and children are important to child outcomes (Goldstein, 1999; Rogoff, 2003; Tayler & Thorpe, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). Social interactions develop the individual (Wertsch, 1985) as all higher functions are derived from social interactions with members of the same context (Vygotsky, 1978). This section first examines the importance of teacher-child relationships, and then the role of peer relationships in supporting children’s social and emotional development.

3.4.2.1 Teacher-child relationships.

To date there have been a number of studies who have examined adult-child relationships and learning using a sociocultural framework, yet few who have examined the quality of teacher-child relationships in supporting social and emotional development using this perspective. For example, Fleer and Raban (2006) use a sociocultural framework to conceptualise how families, children and educators can support children’s learning in literacy and numeracy from birth to five years. The authors employ Vygotsky’s theoretical and empirical work on abstract and everyday concept formation to build their framework. Using a similar principle, this current study also uses this theory (along with others), but to conceptualise the building of social and emotional skills. Fundamental to my argument, however, is that all learning interactions are derived from an emotional connection (Goldstein, 1999).

Therefore, the emphasis of this section is on the nature of teacher interactions as the most important feature of teacher-child relationships. Therein, the focus is on how teacher-child relationships form to create a shared affective space, allowing the ZPD to
take place in any given situation (Goldstein, 1999). From this position it can be understood why teacher-child relationships features as the most commonly agreed upon feature of quality early childhood programmes amongst the literature (Tayler & Thorpe, 2012).

Teacher-child relationships are formed through interactions where the adults and children’s “minds meet on matters of interest to both of them and is characterised by rich problem setting and solving” (Elías, 2006; Katz, 1998, p.36; Sylva et al., 2004). Sylva et al., (2004) defined these as sustained shared thinking, and although they propounded them for their educative value, they also contribute to positive teacher-child relationships. Research suggests that emotional connections are formed when these types of interactions occur on a regular basis (Pianta et al., 2005; Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox & Bradley, 2002).

The emotional connection shared between teachers and children are characteristic of positive classroom environments (Pianta et al., 2008). The sense of duality that epitomises emotional connection reflects a caring about children and a desire to think as they do (Noddings, 1984). The CLASS instrument demonstrates the duality through dimensions such as “teacher sensitivity” and being responsive to children’s perspectives (Pianta et al., 2008). Teachers who are responsive to children’s emotional cues are more likely to form supportive relationships that act as a buffer to stress (Nagel, 2012; Pianta et al., 2002; Pianta et al., 2008). Examining this relationship from a sociocultural perspective discloses the learning potential in emotional connections as children are motivated to observe or initiate conversations with the teacher, or engage in activities because of the “love for the adult and the desire to imitate her” (Noddings, 1984, p. 64; Rogoff, 2003).
In a study of 178 student and 36 teachers in 7 American rural schools Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufman, Cameron and Peugh (2012) examined the contribution of teachers’ emotional support to children’s social behaviours and self-regulatory skills in children in first grade. The researchers employed the CLASS instrument (Pianta et al., 2008) to measure teacher-child interaction quality in the classroom and an adapted version of the Child Behaviour Scale (Ladd & Profilet, 1996) to gain teachers ratings of children’s social behaviours, and the Teacher’s Self-Control rating Scale (Humphrey, 1982) to measure children’s behaviour self-control. Parents completed a brief demographic questionnaire at the beginning of kindergarten (Western Australia’s Pre-primary). Research assistants collected observational data three to five times during the year for each teacher.

Overall, Merritt et al. (2012) found that emotionally supportive teacher-child interactions were associated with lower levels of child aggression even though it was not significantly predictive of exclusion by peers or pro-social behaviours. Children were more likely to show behavioural control in emotionally supportive classrooms than those in less supportive classroom and emotionally supportive classrooms were equally as important for children who were of “high and low levels of sociodemographic risk for students in our sample” (p. 153). These findings are consistent with an earlier American study of 140 Head Start children conducted by Myers and Sheffield Morris (2009) who found that teacher-child closeness and conflict were significantly associated with low-income preschoolers’ socioemotional adjustment in expected directions.

As the authors restricted their focus to examining teachers’ emotional support and how it contributes to social and emotional development they did not investigate other contributing factors such as community educational goals. A wider examination of the contributing factors, such as teacher-child interactions, peer interactions, programme and community values, to children’s social and emotional development would provide
more insight into how teacher-child interactions contribute to children’s social and emotional development.

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit substantially from positive teacher-child relationships. This was evidenced in a study conducted by Raver (2004) where she found that sensitive and responsive caregiving consistently predicted children’s self-regulatory competence despite economic disadvantage. In the same way, Brophy-Herb et al. (2007) found a correlation between positive teacher behaviours and higher social competence amongst children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Conversely, negative teacher-child relationships act as a stressor for children and may impair their adjustment to school (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Silver, Measelle, Armstrong & Essex, 2005). Outcomes from negative teacher-child relationships include the perpetuation of children’s negative social and emotional behaviour. This occurs when teachers continually ignore difficult behaviour or they react harshly to it. Children who are considered as ‘tough to teach’ are provided with less instruction and less positive feedback from teachers (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). Similarly, Brophy-Herb et al., (2007) found a correlation between negative teacher behaviours and lower social competence amongst children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

3.4.2.2 Peer relationships.

Other than those studies who have examined peer relations in a community of learners (Rogoff, 1994; Rogoff et al., 1996), there are few studies that have used a sociocultural theory to conceptualise how these interactions support social and emotional learning. There are a number of studies that have examined the learning potential and supportive nature of peer relationships, in particular those conducted by
Both Vygotsky (1978) and Rogoff (2003) acknowledged and emphasised the role peer relationships have in learning and development. In describing the ZPD, Vygotsky (1978) stated that learning occurred in “collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86) while Rogoff (2003) highlighted that children learn while participating in practices of their cultural communities. She identified learning as a process in which “both adults and children contribute support and direction in shared endeavors [sic]” (Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996, p.389), creating a “community of learners” (Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996, p.388). Integral to this perspective is that children participate in sociocultural activity without intentional instruction or even being together at the same time (Rogoff, 2003).

In the same way that positive teacher-child relationships contributes to social and emotional learning, peer friendships also form a supportive base, or secure attachment for children, especially for those starting school for the first time in an unfamiliar place (Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1996). These relationships offer children important emotional and cognitive resources that enable them to negotiate their new surroundings (Ladd et al., 1996; Rubin, Bukowski & Parker, 2006; Wentzel, 2005).

Peers constitute one of the most important contexts for child development and socialization. In addition to their function as companions in play they serve as sources of emotional support, help in children formulating values and beliefs, and are integral to children’s compliance to behavioural norms of the peer culture and broader society (Ladd et al., 1996; Rubin et al., 2006; Wentzel, 2005).

If children experience poor quality or quantity of peer relationships there is a greater likelihood that their psychological and social development will be negatively
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influenced (Ladd & Burgess, 1999). Those children, who develop poor peer relations are more likely to be aggressive, experience more loneliness, have low self-esteem and are less able to develop social skills (Schmidt, Demulder & Denham, 2002, p.451). Accompanying a poor sense of self, children who are not accepted by their peers are less likely to participate in group activities, participatory roles and collaborative learning experiences, thus cutting off an important avenue for learning and emotional support and limiting opportunities for social learning (Boyd et al. 2005; Ladd et al., 1999; Oden & Asher, 1977; Vygotsky, 1978).

Rejection, as a result of anti-social behaviours, in particular aggression, has shown to play a larger role in early school adjustment problems than the positive influences. Factors such as children’s aggressive behaviour, low socio-economic status and early academic difficulties are strong indicators of decreased success at school in later years. However, White (2011) suggests that pro-social cooperative conduct can protect children against the harmful effects of anti-social uncooperative conduct. That is, a pro-social tendency toward cooperation can protect children against peer rejection, discourage criminal behaviour (Pulkkinen & Tremblay, 1992) and provide a buffer against persistent unemployment during adulthood (Kokko & Pulkkinen, 2000; Pulkkinen & Tremblay, 1992).

The findings from these studies indicate that peer interactions are an important source of social knowledge, and that participation in peer social groups can increase social repertoires that will in turn improve emotional outcomes. Equally, these studies indicate that negative peer interactions can contribute negatively to children’s social and emotional development. These studies did not, however, investigate how the teachers supported peer interactions to improve children’s social and emotional outcomes.
Further research into this area will make a unique contribution to the literature in this important area.

3.5 Summary

In summary, this review highlighted the importance of high quality pedagogical practices in supporting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development. It identified three areas that equally contribute to high quality programmes, these are: environments, play and relationships. The pedagogical practices that were identified the studies reviewed in these three areas are represented in Table 3.4, categorised under the five competency clusters (CASEL, 2013) identified in the section 3.1 of this chapter.

Table 3.4

| Pedagogical practices known to promote social and emotional skills and strategies
|---|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Awareness</th>
<th>Social Awareness</th>
<th>Responsible Decision Making</th>
<th>Self-Regulation</th>
<th>Relationship Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instruction of social-emotional skills, knowledge and attitudes provided in developmentally and socioculturally appropriate ways</td>
<td>Provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for participation</td>
<td>Engage in sustained shared thinking to extend thinking and understandings</td>
<td>Promote a safe, caring, nurturing, cooperative and challenging learning environment that has clear, consistent expectations</td>
<td>Promote positive climate through emotional connections between teacher and child and amongst peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help develop positive, respectful ethical attitudes and values about self, others, work and citizenship</td>
<td>Help develop positive, respectful ethical attitudes and values about self, others, work and citizenship</td>
<td>Enable children to engage in meaningful play/activities</td>
<td>Strengthen relationships among children, teachers, other school personnel, families</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasise cultural sensitivity and respect for diversity</td>
<td>Emphasise cultural sensitivity and respect for diversity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It needs to be noted that the characteristics of pedagogical practices that are listed in Table 3.4 are underpinned by four assumptions. These are (1) they are based on sound theories of: child development that are consistent with the conceptual framework underpinning this study, prevention science, and empirically validated practices; (2) the teacher works within children’s ZPD to extend social and emotional knowledge, skills and dispositions (Barblett & Maloney, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978); (3) teachers own social and emotional wellbeing is healthy and (4) practices are continually evaluated (Elias, 2006). Teachers cannot support children’s social and emotional development if their own social and emotional needs are not being met (Barblett & Maloney, 2010; Weare & Gray, 2003).
Help develop positive, respectful ethical attitudes and values about self, others, work and citizenship.

Aware of and responsive to children’s emotional needs.

Provide comfort and assistance

Enable children to engage in meaningful play

Establish a consistent daily routine – a shared schedule creates a sense of togetherness.

Organise group activities so children who opt to play alone at choice time have an opportunity to interact with their peers.

Build children’s skills in perspective and turn-taking. Ask them to repeat back what they hear before adding their own ideas. Use role play to encourage adopting other viewpoints.

Promote community service to build empathy.

Use goal setting to focus instruction. Make all learning intentions explicit

and clarity of rules

Promote responsibility, cooperation, and commitment to learning

Self-regulation as integral aspect of formal and informal academic curriculum and daily routines (e.g., lunch, transitions, playground, extracurricular)

Provide mediated activity-based cooperative learning experiences

Build attachment to school through caring, engaging, interactive, cooperative classroom, and school-wide practices

Encourage and coordinate efforts and involvement of children, peers, parents, educators, and community members.

Encourage and provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for participation

Engage families as partners in educating and supporting children

Encourage social and emotional skills and attitudes to be modelled and applied at school and home.

Are aware and responsive to students’ emotional needs.

Arrange the room to include open areas where large groups can assemble and enclosed areas conducive to intimate interactions

Acknowledge (rather than praise) when children work together. Comment on how teamwork can help everyone reach their individual and collective goals

CASEL, 2013; COAG, 2012; Epstein, 2009; Pianta et al., 2008; Sylva et al., 2004; Weare & Gray, 2003; White, 2011; Zins et al., 2004, pp 198 – 199; Zins et al., 2007

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the literature on what research has found to constitute quality early childhood education. Most of the studies reviewed have been examined from a personal plane of analysis where the focus has remained on social and emotional knowledge and skills. Exceptions include those studies, such as Farrell et al. (2004) who also considered features of the cultural-institutional plane in their investigation.
As it can be shown from the review, there are very few studies that have examined how teachers are supporting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development using the three foci of analysis: personal, interpersonal and cultural-institutional (Rogoff, 1995, 2003). This type of research will make an invaluable and unique contribution to early childhood research by identifying community/school, as well as interactional factors that contribute to kindergarten programmes and how they support individual children’s social and emotional development.

At this point, I refer back to the figure (Figure 2.6) of conceptual framework illustrated in chapter two. The figure depicted the concepts that were to be used to conceptualise the interactions within the classroom from a theoretical point of view. The additional knowledge provided by the literature review, and the added emphasis on the three foci of analysis, extends the conceptualisation and are provided in the revised diagram (Figure 3.3).

This diagram indicates that children’s social and emotional development is central to this study. However, to examine how teachers are supporting children’s social and emotional development, the opportunities for children to engage in optimal learning environments; play and experience positive, caring relationships need also be examined. Integral to this are the interactions that contribute to promoting social and emotional development which are conceptualised using the ZPD, guided participation and the interrelational dimension. Finally, these need to be considered from three different lenses (personal, interpersonal and cultural-institutional) to ascertain how they contribute to the kindergarten programme. Research of this nature has the capacity to inform both school and community based policies on improved practice for kindergarten children’s social and emotional outcomes.
Figure 3.3: Factors involved in the conceptualisation of how teachers are supporting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development.
4.0 Introduction

This study adopts a qualitative method of inquiry to collect data. This chapter explains the research question and purpose of the study, describes qualitative methodology, in particular, the ethnological approach employed to investigate the research question. It then explains the instruments and procedure, and reports how the data will be analysed.

4.1 Research Questions

The main research question this study is designed to investigate is:

*How do teachers from different Western Australian metropolitan schools develop classroom cultures that are inclusive of supporting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development?*

My approach to answering this question is informed by the theoretical propositions posited by Rogoff (1990, 1995, 2003). Essentially, this theory recognises the mutual and dynamic relationship between the individual and his/her socioculture\(^\text{13}\) in development, as well as recognising that developmental goals held by each socioculture may not necessarily be the same. Subsequently, the subquestions this study is designed to explore are:

a) *What are those implicit and explicit exchanges and distal arrangements that teachers employ to promote kindergarten children’s social and emotional development?*

\(^{13}\) Socioculture emphasises the contribution of culture, social and individual processes to the co-construction of knowledge.
b) What other factors promote kindergarten children’s social and emotional development?

c) What developmental goals are valued by the school community?

d) How do these developmental goals contribute to the teachers’ choice of implicit and explicit exchanges and distal arrangements?

Interactions between the learner (child) and educator (teacher/adult, more capable peer) are the primary means of student development, and learning is integral to Rogoff’s approach (Hamre & Pianta, 2007; Pianta, 2006; Rogoff, 1990; Rutter & Maughan, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978).

4.2 Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methodology was chosen to investigate the research questions, as these questions compelled an exploration into personal and contextual meanings and hence the ‘subjective, experiential “lifeworld” of human beings’ (Burns, 2000, p. 11). By definition, qualitative methodology is ‘research aimed at explaining complex phenomena through verbal descriptions rather than testing hypotheses with numerical values’ (Suter, 2006, p. 41). The in-depth, descriptive account of the ‘status of places, people, situations, conditions and events’ (Charles, 1988, p. 81) captured by the verbal descriptions uncovers the more tacit, personal and subtle understandings that underlie attitudes and perceptions (Burns, 1997; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Rogoff, 1990).

In particular, as this study needed to understand the developmental goals valued by each of the school communities, I elected to use ethnography, a branch of qualitative methodology that is suitable for exploring culture to investigate the research questions. The data yielded and presented using this design will act to broaden our understanding of the topic so that it may inform future early childhood education policy at state-wide,
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jurisdictional and centre-specific levels. The following section explains ethnography in more detail.

4.2.1 Ethnography.

Ethnography is a branch of qualitative methodology that maintains a holistic approach to inquiry, describing the culture and nuances of a group of people (Ary, Cheser Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006; Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Ethnography is suited to my research as it recognises that ‘individual effort and sociocultural activity are mutually embedded’ (Rogoff, 1990, p. 25). Hence, in the ethnographic tradition, the researcher maintains a holistic view of the ‘social life within the general context of a culture, sub-culture or organisation’ (Burns, 1997, p. 302).

There are two perspectives of the definition of ethnographic research I have adopted for this study. The first perspective, provided by Johnson and Christensen (2008), is inclusive of the anthropological underpinnings inherent to ethnography:

Ethnography literally means ‘writing about people’. Educational ethnographers also focus on cultural description as is done in classical ethnography. The main difference is that anthropologists usually describe small cultures across the world...and educational ethnographers usually study the cultural characteristics of small groups of people or other cultural scenes as they relate to educational issues (p. 400).

The second perspective is centred more on the process of educational ethnographic research and explicitly states the holistic nature intrinsic to the ethnographic tradition:

The process of providing holistic and scientific descriptions of educational systems, processes, and phenomena within their specific contexts (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 273).
Ethnographic research provides a body of rich and robust data describing the cultural patterns and perspectives of participants in their natural settings (Ary et al., 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Creswell, 2005; Gay et al., 2006; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). It is the most appropriate way to explore attitudes and perspectives, which in this study are expressed through community-held developmental goals and are observed through the interactions occurring within the domains of classroom design, emotional support and instructional support (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008; Rogoff, 1990). Ethnographic research enables the researcher to capture the explicit and tacit interactions that occur in the classroom, as they are a product of how the participants interpret the complexity of their world, offering an insight into how they perceive situations and events (Burns, 1997; Rogoff, 1990).

Qualitative researchers believe that because of the many different perspectives and contexts in the world, there cannot be just one version of truth. What is more, each version of truth is not necessarily truer or more viable than the other (Gay et al., 2006). Therefore, the ethnographic qualitative researcher investigates group or individual constructions and perceptions of reality using a model that is inductive by nature, emphasising ‘process, values, context, and interpretation in the construction for meaning and concepts’ (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996, p. 19), reporting the data in narrative form in an endeavour to attain the holistic picture that is essential to ethnographic research (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

**4.2.2 Ethnographic case study.**

As the intention of this study was to describe cultural values and how teachers support social and emotional development within these cultural bounds, I chose to present my data using the ethnographic case study format. I have organised the following discussion on ethnographic case studies under four categories: a) the
4.2.2.1 Ethnographic case study defined.

An ethnographic case study is, as its name suggests, the case study approach combined with ethnography (Ary et al., 2006). A case study is an empirical inquiry that focuses on understanding a contemporary phenomenon present within its context (Yin, 2009). The ‘case’ is a self-contained and coherent unit of study with “well defined boundaries in terms of participants, location, organisation, time and context or a combination of these” (Sharp, 2009, p. 54). Its aim is to create a detailed description and understanding of that unit, yielding depth of information over breadth (Ary et al., 2006; Burton, Brundrett, & Jones, 2008).

When my research began, the ‘unit’, as described by Ary et al. (2008), was the classroom context in which teachers supported children’s social and emotional development. However, through the building of the description and understanding of the unit, I became increasingly aware of the importance of the relationship between a school community’s culture and the kindergarten classroom curriculum. Consequently, the unit of study progressed into a more deliberate examination of the school community’s culture, the classroom social interactions, including both tacit and explicit exchanges, and the relationship that occurred between them (Rogoff, 1990).

The case study design facilitated this intention, as the ‘primary purpose of a case study is to determine the factors, and the relationships among the factors, that have

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14 The Early Years framework (Australian Government, 2009) definition for curriculum has been adopted for this study.
resulted in the current behaviour or status of the subject of the study’ (Gay, 1987, p. 236). This design enabled me to conduct a thorough investigation into the phenomenon to be explored, enveloped within the complexity of the cultural context in which it was inextricably constructed and linked (Yin, 2009).

4.2.2.2 Rationale: Why ethnographic case studies?

The foundational question to ethnographic research is: ‘What are the cultural characteristics of this group of people or of this cultural scene?’ (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 400). Ethnographic case studies are designed to enable in-depth descriptions of a group of people enabling an insight into their culture. Consequently, this approach facilitates an examination of ‘people as they participate in and contribute to cultural activities that themselves develop with the involvement of people in successive generations’ (Rogoff, 2003, p. 52). For this reason, I selected the ethnographic case study design to present my research data, facilitating a rich, descriptive and holistic account of the field work (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

Case study research can potentially provide a level of detail unattainable by any other approach (Sharp, 2009). This degree of detail was essential in order to convey the subtleties inherent within each of the participating schools’ sociocultures (Rogoff, 1990; Sharp, 2009). Further, the conceptual framework guiding this study called for depth and attention to detail, as it needed to express both explicit and tacit exchanges as well as distal arrangements (Rogoff, 1990). The more detailed the account, the easier it would be for an outsider to understand the nature of the sociocultures through the eyes of the participants.

In addition, ethnographic case studies were chosen as they present a holistic account of the case and its context (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Sharp, 2009; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009), taking into consideration the whole range of participant
behaviours and the relationship of these behaviours to the participant’s socioculture.

Ethnographic case studies enable an investigation of not only the present actions of the participant, but also of ‘his or her past, environment, emotions and thoughts’ (Ary et al., 2006, p. 457).

This latter aspect of ethnographic case studies supports my study’s conceptual underpinnings, in particular, Rogoff’s (1990) argument that if human behaviour and the context are considered as separate elements, then a ‘mediating element’ needs to exist to connect them. Rogoff (1990) asserts that in reality there is no mediation, as the ‘child and the social world are mutually involved to the extent that precludes regarding them as independently definable’ (p. 28).

4.2.2.3 The case study process and format.

Initially, I found the process of data collection and development of the cases to be both a deductive and inductive mode of enquiry. It was only through this process that I was able to identify clear boundaries to this study, thereby establishing the bounded system that is required of case studies (Burns, 2000; Johnson & Christensen, 2006).

At first, the boundaries to my study were the classroom, the participating teacher and the children. However, through inductive analysis I became aware that the parameters needed to be broadened from my original hypotheses to include the school and school community, i.e., the school community’s culture. Once these parameters had clearly been defined I could begin a more detailed and focused investigation into the research questions.

The format for each case study begins with a discussion on the school community’s culture. This is followed with an introduction to the teacher and her early childhood teaching philosophy. I then discuss the classroom design and support this

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15 All teachers participating in the study were female.
description with a diagram of the classroom layout. Finally, I offer a snapshot of the interactions in the classroom, where I describe the ways in which the teacher provided an environment that promoted the children’s social and emotional development.

It is important to note that these factors are presented separately only for the sake of manageability and discussion. As previously mentioned, the view underpinning this study stresses that the child and their social world are mutually involved (Rogoff, 1990) and, in reality, cannot be separated.

The case study design encourages a multi-method approach to gather the necessary, and characteristic, depth of information (Burton et al., 2008). Typically, case studies are linked with methods such as observations and interviews, but there is also a strong association between surveys and case studies (Burton et al., 2008; Sharp, 2009).

The methods employed by this study are discussed in the following passages, after my argument for the use of collective case studies as both an appropriate and strengthening approach for presenting my research.

4.2.2.4 Collective case studies.

As this study intends to investigate alternative approaches to creating a classroom climate that promotes social and emotional development, multiple cases are used enabling this study to report the data using a collective (also referred to as multi-case) ethnographic case studies approach (Burns, 1997; Creswell, 2005; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Collective case studies are effective in providing evidence that tends to be more compelling than other forms of case studies (Burns, 1997; Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

A cross analysis of these multiple cases, which are set within varying contexts, will highlight the similarities and differences in the influences of school cultures on the kindergarten curriculum and the social and emotional climate of the different settings.
(Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In addition, the teachers’ pedagogical styles may also reveal similarities and differences as they respond, guided by their own experiences and philosophies, to their respective sociocultural influences.

Although a disadvantage of studying multiple cases is that depth of analysis can to some degree be compromised, I found the insight I gained through concurrently studying these cases outweighed any negatives (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In addition, the multi-method approach I employed, that is typical of case studies, offered a myriad of perspectives enabling a more robust and rounded examination of the case.

By examining multiple approaches, this study may lead to more generalisable findings. This is because the relevance behind case studies is based on the premise that a case can be described that is typical of some other cases. Once this case is explored and described, it can provide insights into events from which the case has been drawn (Burns, 1997). One is more likely to be able generalise the results from multiple cases than from a single case (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Moreover, within these cases the burden of transferability lies with the person seeking to transfer the results to other situations. This study does not specify transferability, it provides sufficient data from which the reader can determine the degree of similarity between the case study and the receiving context and whether it is applicable to their situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.3 Participants

Eight teachers and one hundred and thirty kindergarten children from eight different primary schools participated in the study. All the schools were Catholic private schools; one was located on the urban fringe of a major capital city, while the remainder were located in the metropolitan area. The number of children participating

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16 Catholic private schools were targeted because the system is values-based, and many parents send their children to these schools for these values. This has implications for my study, as social and emotional development is embedded in what we value as a society.
from each school varied considerably, with 30 children in one classroom participating compared with only four from another. The variation in rates of participation was attributable to the requirement to obtain parental consent for children to participate. The schools are located in a wide range of socio-economic areas; consequently, there were ‘low’, ‘middle’ and ‘high’ socio-economic areas examined in the study. Similarly, the participant schools represented a wide range of Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) values (range from 948 to 1,202).

All the teachers involved in the study were experienced early childhood teachers serving between nine and 30 years teaching early childhood groups, and between one and 14 years specifically teaching kindergarten. Further, all the teachers had some form of early childhood training (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Claire</th>
<th>Mia</th>
<th>Jess</th>
<th>Kyra</th>
<th>Heather</th>
<th>Rebecca</th>
<th>Emma</th>
<th>Monique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years teaching</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years teaching kindergarten</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17 These values are taken from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, 2009). The ICSEA is intended to be a measure of student populations, providing an educational value as opposed to just socio-economic status. It is indicative of the school population, and is derived through information from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and school data. Factors determining the ICSEA include socio-economic characteristics of the area where students live (provided by the ABS), whether the area is regional or remote and the proportion of Indigenous students enrolled in the school. The ICSEA is scaled to a mean of 1,000 and standard deviation of 100 for all Australian schools (ACARA, 2009). The ICSEA values for the participants in this study ranged from 948 to 1,202.
4.4 Research Instruments

In order to answer the research questions, the research instruments chosen needed to enable me to construct an understanding of each school community’s socioculture, provide an insight into the participating teachers’ beliefs and practices as well as to measure teachers’ perceptions of the target students’ social and emotional competency. Further, so that I could build a deep and rich understanding of each phenomenon, often more than one instrument was used to collect data. One of the strengths in qualitative data lies in its multi-instrument approach (referred to as triangulation), as it enables the researcher to validate data by cross-checking information from multiple sources (Drew, Hardman, & Hosp, 2008; Gay et al., 2006). The next section describes the instruments chosen to achieve this end.

The following table is an advanced organiser that summarises the type of research instrument/s used to examine the research questions. Next to the research questions I have summarised the steps for investigation. For example, in order to find out the tacit and explicit exchanges that teachers employ to promote kindergarten children’s social and emotional development, I needed to examine their practice.

This table links in with the study’s categories for analysis. This is discussed in more detail later in this chapter, under Data Analysis.
Table 4.2

**Advanced Organiser of Research Questions and Research Instruments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Focus of Research</th>
<th>Research Instrument/s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do teachers develop a classroom climate that is inclusive of supporting</td>
<td>Teachers’ beliefs and practices</td>
<td>Classroom Practices Inventory (CPI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kindergarten children’s social and emotional development?</td>
<td>Teachers’ perceptions of target children’s social and emotional competency</td>
<td>Social and emotional rating scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional support, classroom organisation and instructional support (see Table 4.3)</td>
<td>Observations and interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) What are those implicit and explicit exchanges and distal arrangements that</td>
<td>Teachers’ practices</td>
<td>Observations and interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teachers employ to promote kindergarten children’s social and emotional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) What other factors promote kindergarten children’s social and emotional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) What developmental goals are valued by the school community?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) for median weekly family income, parents’ occupations and percentage of English-speaking residents
- [www.rs.realestate.com.au](http://www.rs.realestate.com.au) for 2008 median house prices
- [Myschool website](http://myschoolwebsite.com) for ICSEA value and school statement
- School handbooks for statement of education vision
- Informal interviews for teachers’ perspectives on school socioculture and attitudes toward PIPS and NAPLAN testing
- Observations for behaviours that portray values
4.4.1 Surveys.

Two methods of surveys were adapted for this study. These were an adaption of the CPI (Hyson, Hirsh-Pasek, & Rescorla, 1990), which I referred to as the Teacher Styles and Preferences Survey (see Appendix B) and the Social and Emotional Rating Scale (adapted from the Australian Early Development Index; Denham et al., 2003; Reflect Profile Department of Education and Training, K/PP profiles; Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong & Gomby, 2005) (see Appendix B). In this section I describe both surveys, state their purpose and discuss how and why they were modified to become relevant to this study. In addition, I will report the methods of distribution and response rates.

4.4.1.1 Teacher Styles and Preferences Survey.

4.4.1.1.1 Purpose of Teacher Styles and Preferences Survey.

The Teacher Styles and Preferences Survey, which was adapted from the CPI (Hyson et al., 1990), was employed by this study as one of the research instruments to investigate how teachers develop a classroom climate that is inclusive of supporting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development, and how community-determined developmental goals influence the teacher’s choice of implicit and explicit exchanges and distal arrangements (see Table 4.2).

The questions in the Teacher Styles and Preferences Survey were designed to elicit data that are indicative of teachers’ beliefs of appropriate or inappropriate practice and how they perceived their classroom’s emotional climate. The survey was later
adapted for use by the observer. It was deemed that a second perspective, taken by me as the researcher, may assist in identifying inconsistencies between the teachers’ stated philosophies and their observed practice. It was decided that any inconsistencies of this type would be explored sensitively in the interviews.

4.4.1.1.2 Intention of the original survey.

As mentioned previously, the Teacher Styles and Preferences Survey was adapted from the CPI. The CPI was developed in response to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Guidelines for four- and five-year-olds (Bredekamp, 1987). Hyson and colleagues (1989) had noted that even though the guidelines provided a list of practices (items) that were either ‘appropriate’ or ‘inappropriate’, it was not developed as an instrument per se. Consequently, they designed the CPI as an observable measure that tapped into the ‘curricular emphasis and emotional climate of [early childhood] programs’ (Hyson et al., 1990, p. 476).

A measure for emotional climate was included in the instrument as Hyson, Hirsh-Pasek and Rescorla felt it was ‘unwise to assume that a formal academic emphasis would necessarily be accompanied by an equally formal or negative tone’ (p. 478). Emotional climate is integral to facilitating and supporting children’s positive social and emotional development (see, for example, Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Pianta et al., 2005).

Typically, a supportive emotional climate is characterised by a positive emotional connection between teacher and students, between the students themselves, and is exemplified by warm, respectful and enjoyable verbal and nonverbal interactions (Pianta et al., 2008). The teacher is aware of students’ academic and emotional needs and consistently provides comfort, reassurance and encouragement. Furthermore, the teachers’ interactions with the students and the programme content reflect the children’s
interests, motivations and points of view supporting children’s developing sense of autonomy (Pianta et al., 2008, p. 22). Based on this description, including a component for its measure was both relevant and necessary.

The original measure consisted of 26 questions, with each question containing items selected from the NAEYC Guidelines (1987). These were chosen because they were:

(a) able to be rated on the basis of several hours of direct observation; (b) specific and discrete (one and only one key point per item); and (c) closely related to the debate in early childhood education between a formally ‘academic’ focus (workbooks, drill, teacher instruction) and a ‘play’ emphasis (child choice, concrete materials) (Hyson et al., 1990, p. 477).

4.4.1.1.3 Modifications.

Two key modifications were made to the CPI for use in this study. First, the questions, which were originally designed for an observer to complete, were changed to a format that enabled a teacher to rate their own practice and to be self-reflective. For example, ‘The sound of the environment is marked by pleasant conversation, spontaneous laughter, and exclamations of excitement’ (Hyson et al., 1990, p. 494) was changed to: ‘The sound of my classroom is typified by pleasant conversation, spontaneous laughter and exclamations of excitement’ (see Appendix B). The purpose of this modification was so that I could gather data from two perspectives: the teacher’s and mine. Hence, throughout the observations, I used the CPI in its original form to rate the teachers on the same questions they answered themselves.

The second modification was made in response to the feedback provided by six teachers who piloted the Teacher Styles and Preferences Survey. These teachers, who were located in a nearby country centre, were similar in profile to the study’s target
population (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). The feedback from the pilot survey indicated it was too long and time-consuming. Consequently, five of the original questions that yielded similar answers were omitted (see Appendix B). The triangulation of data made possible through the multi-method approach adopted by this study offset any potential loss of integrity to the original survey’s findings. In addition, I used the CPI in its original form to observe the teachers; hence, the internal validity was not compromised.

The final modified survey consisted of 21 ‘play-centred’ and ‘academic-centred’ questions, distributed in quasi-random order. Each question could be rated on a five-point Likert-type scale, from ‘all the time’ to ‘never’. In addition, to enable further elaboration on the teachers’ perspectives, a provision for comments was made under each question. This latter addition to the survey added much needed clarity to the responses, further eliminating any chance of misinterpretation of meaning or intention.

4.4.1.1.4 Response rate.

Fifty-four Catholic primary schools in the metropolitan area of an Australian capital city, no more than one hour drive from where I was based, were sent the Teacher Styles and Preferences Survey and an invitation to be considered for participation in this study. Of the 14 schools who responded positively, eight (14.81 per cent) were selected, for reasons of logistics and to ensure sufficient and in-depth data collection could be made.

Logistically, I could not access more than eight schools, as they were located far apart and most of them shared the same attendance schedule of all day Tuesday and Thursday. Even then, some of these days were made inaccessible due to classroom

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18 In 2009 (the time of data collection) many Western Australian kindergartens still operated for 11 hours per week with a schedule of either two full days (usually non-consecutive) or four half days. All the kindergartens participating in this study opted for a two full day schedule. At this time, some Catholic schools offered an optional third day, which the parents paid for. The only proviso was that there had to
incursions/excursions and/or whole school events. In addition, each classroom timetable was structured similarly, which meant that the afternoon consisted of lunch, a rest time and free play. Consequently, all but one of the teachers requested I make my visits in the morning. With these physical limitations in place, it was sometimes challenging to access all eight classrooms.

Second, in order to build in-depth data that offered insight into community, school and classroom culture and educational goals, I needed to be able to access each classroom for substantial periods of time. With eight classrooms, I was able to observe for one to two hour blocks in each classroom once, and sometimes twice, a month from May through to November (see Appendix C for fieldwork schedule).

4.4.1.2 The Social and Emotional Rating Scale from the teacher’s perceptive.

4.4.1.2.1 Purpose of the Social and Emotional Rating Scale.

The Social and Emotional Rating Scale was developed for this study to provide insight into how teachers develop a classroom climate that is inclusive of supporting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development. This instrument acted as a record of how the participating teachers perceived the target children’s social and emotional skills and strategies at the beginning of the data collection period. The responses then acted as a benchmark from which I could observe, and later follow up, in interviews at the end of the data collection period. This procedure identified, as well as clarified, teachers’ intentional support responses to individual children’s social and emotional needs.

be enough parents taking up this offer. I did not visit the kindergartens on this third day as not all children attended.

19 Teachers were asked rate, using the Social and Emotional Rating Scale, only six of the children in their class available to participate in the study, so as not to add to their already heavy workloads.
4.3.1.2.2 Intention of the original scales.

The Social and Emotional Rating Scale was adapted from the following sources: the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI: Centre for Community Child Health and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, 2007; The Royal Children’s Hospital, 2006–2009), ‘Preschool emotional competence: Pathway to social competence?’ (Denham et al., 2003), ‘The reflect profile’ (Government of South Australia) and ‘Promoting children’s social and emotional development through preschool education’ (Boyd et al., 2005).

Each of these original scales were designed to measure social and emotional development and key clusters of dispositions that are known to influence children’s learning (Government of South Australia, The Royal Children’s Hospital, 2006–2009). In general, these instruments determine factors such as how well each child works, both independently and productively, with others; their perseverance and self-discipline when faced with challenging activities and their ability to get on well with others. Each of these traits have been identified as fundamental to school success (for example, Ladd, 1990; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996; La Paro & Pianta, 2000; McClelland, Morrison & Holmes, 2000).

4.4.1.2.3 Modifications.

Although the teachers were willing to participate in the study, all of them were hesitant to add to their already overburdened workloads. As a consequence, I presented them with an abridged survey that consisted of only 12 questions aimed at forming a general profile of the target children’s social and emotional skills and strategies.

These 12 questions addressed areas of enquiry common to all of the sources. For example, the eight questions: ‘Would you say that this child follows rules and
instructions; demonstrates self-control; listens attentively; completes work on time; is able to follow one-step instructions; is able to follow class routines without reminders; can’t sit still, is restless, and is distractible, has trouble sticking to any activity’ (AEDI, The Royal Children’s Hospital, 2006–2009) were modified to three questions: How would you rate this child’s ability to manage strong emotions and their expression in a constructive manner (e.g., anger, frustration and excitement); follow instructions, and remain attentive during mat sessions or other instructional situations while there are distractions? Like the questions posed by the AEDI, these questions were aimed at providing an indication of children’s self-regulatory behaviours.

The 12 questions used in the Social and Emotional Rating Scale were categorised into four groups. The first set had just two questions that offered a general overview of the child’s social and emotional skills and strategies. The second set consisted of three questions that indicated how well the child could self-regulate. The third set had four questions that explored the child’s ability to initiate and maintain positive relationships, and the fourth set, which had only two questions, examined the child’s ability to take risks. Each question yielded a behaviour that was observable, and hence I could also monitor the children using those questions as a framework throughout the data collecting period.

The survey was presented in a Likert-type format, where the responses to the questions were made by circling the responses: 1 = poor/very poor, 2 = average, 3 = very good/good or 4 = don’t know. Provision for comments under each question gave the teachers the option to explain or elaborate on their answers. Triangulation of data, provided by the other research tools used in this study, strengthened the internal validity of these responses (Burns, 2000).

In order to limit any additional work required of the teachers, the Social and Emotional Rating Scale was completed at the beginning of the observational period on a
total of six of the students per setting. Parental consent had been obtained for these children to participate in the study. Teachers were asked to select two children they perceived were from the low end of the social and emotional continuum, two from the middle and two at the higher end. As mentioned previously, the ‘continuum’ was classroom-specific, which meant that what was considered low, middle and high in one class did not necessarily equate to the same thing in another.

4.4.2 Participant observations, vignettes and interviews.

The following sections describe three related research instruments employed in this study. The relationship between these three research instruments provides an invaluable source of data integral to the investigation of the research questions. Together, they were used to gain insights and an in-depth understanding that each could not achieve if used in isolation. Figure 4.1 depicts the relationship between the instruments.

![Figure 4.1: Relationship between participant observations, vignettes and interviews.](image)

4.4.2.1 Participant observations.

4.4.2.1.1 Purpose of participant observations.

Participant observations were used in this study to provide insight into how teachers develop a classroom climate that is inclusive of supporting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development; the implicit and explicit exchanges and
distal arrangements used by teachers to promote kindergarten children’s social and emotional development; other factors present in the classroom promoting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development; developmental goals held by the school community and an insight into the developmental goals that influenced the teachers’ choice of implicit and explicit exchanges and distal arrangements.

In addition, the observations acted as a cross reference for data gained from other sources, strengthening the validity of the findings as well as highlighting those areas of synchronicity and contradiction. These areas enabled me to investigate further, yielding a more in-depth data analysis.

4.4.2.1.2 Why participant observations?

Time participating in the field enables the researcher to view the culture, i.e., the system of shared beliefs, values, practices, norms and rituals of the members of a group through the eyes of the participants. It is only through this way the researcher can understand the culture and report their findings from an ‘emic perspective’, or the insider’s perspective (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 404).

Consequently, observations are invaluable to ethnographic inquiry. Indeed, extended fieldwork and participant observations are the distinguishing features of ethnographic inquiry, as they enable the researcher to grow familiar with a group’s culture (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

There are two main types of observations, participant and non-participant. Non-participant observations require the researcher to refrain from interacting with the participants, allowing the behaviour and interactions to continue uninterrupted by the intrusion of a researcher (Alder & Alder, 1998). Participant observations are more widely used in qualitative research. Characteristically, this entails the researcher taking an active role in the field, observing from a member’s perspective, although influencing
what is observed due to his or her participation (Flick, 2002). Some critics of participant observations see this as a weakness; however, it is the establishing of relationships with the intention of gaining further insight into the participants’ perspectives that is deemed to be a strength of this study.

In this study I became a participant in the classroom. Realistically, it is hard not to participate when studying young children. However, I was not integral to the setting, and as such, I also had the freedom to unobtrusively observe. Gold (1958) differentiated participant roles in observation. He explained there are two extremes to observation. On one end is the ‘complete participant’ and on the other end is the ‘complete observer’ (Gold, 1958, p. 217). In between these two extremes were participant-as-observer and observer-as-participant roles. Gold’s typology is useful when describing the positions I adopted while making observations. For the most part, I assumed an observer-as-participant role, occasionally leaning more toward the participant-as-observer role when trying to gain more of an insight into the participant’s perspective. This stance was consistent with Burns’ (1997) observation that case study researchers are rarely total participants or total observers.

I felt this ‘in between’ stance to be advantageous as it enabled me to participate, getting to know the participants and their perspectives as well as allowing them to grow comfortable with my presence. During the times I acted more as an observer, I was able to document the participants’ interactions as they occurred in an environment that best resembled their everyday context.

Observations were selected as the chief research tool for this study because they enabled me to gain an insight into how the participants interacted in their natural, everyday context (Gay et al., 2006; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). This technique was particularly beneficial, as I had hoped to identify a relationship between the nature of peer interactions and the classroom socioculture. In particular, I wanted to gain an
understanding of the guided participation that occurred in the classroom, as well as
gaining an insight into the explicit and implicit exchanges and distal arrangements that
shaped the culture/climate of the classroom (Rogoff, 1990).

4.4.2.1.3 Guidelines for observations.

The observations were guided by the domains and dimensions developed by
Pianta and colleagues (2008) in the Classroom Assessment Scoring System™
(CLASS). The CLASS instrument was developed to measure classroom quality in
preschool through to third grade and was informed by theory and research (for example,
Blair, 2002; Denham & Weissberg, 2004; Hamre & Pianta, 2001, 2005; Ladd, Birch, &
Buhs, 1999; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004). The premise underlying
this instrument is that interactions between students and adults are determinant of
quality and, in turn, these quality classrooms support students’ social and emotional
functioning. Ishimine, Tayler and Bennett (2010) credit the CLASS as one of the few
instruments effective in capturing ‘process quality comprehensively’ (p. 75).

The CLASS instrument is categorised into three domains: emotional support,
classroom organisation and instructional support. Under each of these are dimensions
that focus on specific behaviours pertaining to the overall domain (see Table 4.3). In
reporting the average scores in the case study sections, the descriptors are provided
verbatim from the CLASS manual so as to accurately reflect the intent of the CLASS
tool. These descriptors are contextualised and supported with examples from the data.

Underpinning the behaviours to be observed was the conceptual framework
provided Rogoff (1990, 2003), in particular, explicit and tacit exchanges, distal
arrangements and behaviours that are indicative of the skills valued by the schools’

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20 See the Appendix D for further explanation of the domains and dimensions determined by Pianta et al. (2008).
respective communities. Further, these behaviours are integral to the mutual
involvement between students and their social context (Rogoff, 1990, 2003). The
following table (Table 4.3) provides a guideline for behaviours to observe.
### Table 4.3

**Guideline for Observations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual underpinnings</th>
<th>Emotional Support</th>
<th>Classroom Organisation</th>
<th>Instructional Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explicit and tacit forms of communication (Rogoff, 1990) constitute the quality of relationships. Student/teacher relationships result from the cultures’ sociohistorical background (Rogoff, 1990). Items below are emotional support behaviours identified by Pianta et al. (2008) that indicate quality of classroom climate</td>
<td>Explores guided participation where distal arrangements and explicit and tacit forms of communication have a subsequent effect on social and emotional development (Rogoff, 1990, 1995, 2003). Items below are classroom organisation behaviours identified by Pianta et al. (2008) that are indicative of the quality of classroom climate</td>
<td>Examines guided participation, where both face-to-face and side-by-side joint interactions are a part of instruction and fundamental to learning. In addition, apprenticeship underlies these items, as learners participate with others in culturally organised activities with the intention of developing mature participation by the learner (Rogoff, 1995). Items below are instructional support behaviours identified by Pianta et al. (2008) that indicate classroom climate quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive or negative climate</th>
<th>Teacher sensitivity</th>
<th>Regard for student perspectives</th>
<th>Behaviour management</th>
<th>Productivity</th>
<th>Instructional learning formats</th>
<th>Concept development</th>
<th>Quality of feedback</th>
<th>Language modelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive affect</td>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Flexibility and student focus</td>
<td>Clear behaviour expectations</td>
<td>Maximising learning time</td>
<td>Effective facilitation</td>
<td>Analysis and reasoning</td>
<td>Scaffold feedback loops</td>
<td>Frequent conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive communication</td>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>Support for autonomy and leadership</td>
<td>Proactive redirection of misbehaviour</td>
<td>Routines</td>
<td>Variety of modalities and materials</td>
<td>Creating integration</td>
<td>Feedback loops</td>
<td>Open-ended questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Addresses problems</td>
<td>Student expression</td>
<td>Student interest</td>
<td>Transitions</td>
<td>Student interest</td>
<td>Connections to the real world and the community’s socioculture</td>
<td>Prompting thought processes</td>
<td>Repetition and extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative affect</td>
<td>Student comfort</td>
<td>Restriction of movement</td>
<td>Clarity of learning objectives</td>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Clarity of learning objectives</td>
<td>Encouragement and affirmation</td>
<td>Providing information</td>
<td>Self- and parallel talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punitive control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarcasm or disrespect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe negativity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.2.1.4 Recording observations.

The consent form issued to teachers and parents prior to data collection requested their consent for photographs or videos being taken for research purposes. As some teachers and parents indicated they did not want photographs or videos taken in their classroom, all observations were scribed as they occurred. On occasion, notes were added post-observation, as recording them in session impacted on my ability to continue my observations.

The observations were taken at similar negotiated times each month, and sometimes twice a month (see Appendix C). Each observational period ran from one to two hours from May through to November, depending on the nature of the activities and convenience to staff. Arriving at a similar time for each observation enabled me to:

- Observe the children in a familiar context;
- Observe them interacting with familiar peers;
- Observe them interacting with their teacher/s;
- Observe them engaged in predictable and constant activities.

This consistency caused the children and their teachers to grow accustomed to me being in their classroom, and as such, over time I was less of a disruption to the routines and interactions. The data gathered offered a clear insight into the everyday peer-to-peer and child-to-adult interactions that took place in the context of the classroom, enabling me to ‘generate [the] data from the perspective of the individuals being studied’ (Wiersma, 1991, p. 229). Further, a constant retelling of the same events enabled me to gain insight from more than one perspective, and hence, enabled a holistic description of the data (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).
4.4.2.2 Vignettes.

4.4.2.2.1 Definition of vignettes as they are used by this study.

Although in research the term ‘vignette’ is typically used to describe constructed stories designed to simulate real life experiences (Renold, 2002; Schoenberg & Ravdal, 2000; Poulou, 2001), in this study, I use the word ‘vignette’ to refer to the real life experiences I captured in my fieldwork. Previous research in early childhood has successfully used vignettes in this way (for example, see Hesterman, 2008).

4.4.2.2.2 Purpose of vignettes.

Vignettes are used in this study to gain an insight into how teachers develop classroom climates that are inclusive of supporting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development. Further, they enable an investigation of implicit and explicit exchanges, distal arrangements and other factors in promoting social and emotional development and are instrumental in teasing out the developmental goals valued by the school community.

4.4.2.2.3 How do vignettes achieve this purpose?

Vignettes are a useful research tool, particularly in early childhood educational settings, as they efficiently capture a glimpse of the rich context in which multiple interactions, happenings and events unfold simultaneously in only a few short minutes (Barblett, Chadbourne, & Maloney, 2001). This ‘glimpse’ serves the dual purposes of first, making the reader privy to the individuality of each classroom context, enabling them to ‘see’ the classroom contexts as they were observed at one particular moment in time. For that moment, they are able to understand the participants’ attitudes,
perceptions and beliefs (Hughes & Huby, 2001, p. 382) that, in turn, offers an invaluable insight into the school communities’ cultural norms (Renold, 2002).

Second, vignettes allow the teacher to see their practice through the eyes of another. Often, the thought processes behind teachers’ choice of practice only become transparent when they are given the insight provided by records of what has been observed (Poulou, 2001). As noted by Poulou (2001), teachers enter the classroom with an idea of what, and how, to teach. These ideas are shaped by their own personal experiences, coupled with their preservice teacher education. However, it appears that without consciously exploring one’s own motives, they often go largely unrecognised (Poulou, 2001).

When it was time to organise the interview at the end of the year, I collated samples of events that I felt I needed further clarification and those that I felt would provide elucidation on cultural norms (Renold, 2002). Using these vignettes, I was able to examine with the teachers the rationale and circumstances behind them and build a holistic description of events as they occurred from the teachers’ perspectives. These perspectives then enabled me to investigate the research questions with more insight.

4.4.2.3 Interviews: A conversation with purpose.

4.4.2.3.1 Purpose of interviews.

Interviews were used in this study to provide insight into how teachers develop a classroom climate that is inclusive of supporting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development; the implicit and explicit exchanges and distal arrangements used by teachers to promote kindergarten children’s social and emotional development; other factors present in the classroom promoting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development; developmental goals held by the school community and an
insight into the developmental goals that influenced the teacher’s choice of implicit and explicit exchanges and distal arrangements.

In addition, the interviews acted as a cross reference for data gained from other sources, strengthening the validity of the findings as well as highlighting those areas of synchronicity and contradiction. These areas enabled me to investigate further, yielding more in-depth data.

4.4.2.3.2 Why interviews?

Interviews are one of the most popular and widely used methods for collecting qualitative data (Ary et al., 2006; Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Suter, 2006). They are often used in conjunction with participant observations to complement the data (Burns, 2000). In this study, they were used not only to supplement the participant observations, but also to gain deeper insights into the teachers’ perspectives by ascertaining their ‘thoughts, perceptions, feelings and retrospective accounts of events’ (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996, p. 134). Although much understanding can be gained through observations, interviews provide important insights that cannot otherwise be gleaned (Burns, 1997).

4.4.2.3.3 Types of interviews used in this study.

There were two forms of interviews used throughout the data collection process. The first were casual and informal interviews that were in fact conversations that were conducted when events arose that needed clarifying (Burns, 2000; Johnson & Christensen, 2008); for example, determining why the teacher had paired up particular children. The second was a semi-structured interview that was carried out at the end of the data collection period. Generally, although interviews in qualitative methodology
are less structured, they tend to be more probing and open-ended than those used in quantitative studies (Ary et al., 2006). Due to their flexibility, they can be adapted to each participant and their situation, yielding case-specific, rich and insightful responses (Gay et al., 2006).

On defining semi-structured interviews, Creswell (2005) states they are ‘interviews in which the researcher asks some questions that are closed ended and some that are open ended’ (p. 598). Although to some extent my interviewing technique fell within this definition, it tended to be more ‘a conversation with purpose’ (Ary et al., 2006, p. 480), as even though a few questions were planned ahead, I incorporated vignettes from the observations that were exemplar of emerging key themes to act as a guideline and stimulus for discussion. Furthermore, the use of vignettes enabled me to gain more of an insight into each teacher’s decision-making, understanding of their students and their perceptions of their school’s culture. The following section elaborates on this idea.

4.4.2.3.4 Using vignettes within interviews as an analytical tool.

These vignettes were instrumental during the interview process as they were a means of establishing a sense of collegiality with the teacher. This collegiality was created through a shared interest in those moments that demonstrated the children’s social and emotional skills and development. Johnson and Christensen (2008) stress that the researcher needs to establish trust and rapport with the interviewee in order for them to open up about his/her inner world. Equally, the teachers appreciated the recognition of their efforts and of the strategies they had implemented to foster children’s social and emotional skills, and as such, were keen to elaborate on them during the course of our discussions.
After I had read a vignette representing a germane idea to the respective teacher, some of them responded with reasons for their actions depicted in the scenario without having to be prompted further by me. However, in most cases, it was when I followed with a few directed questions that the teachers’ motives behind their practice were teased out (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Schoenberg & Ravdal, 2000). It was through the reactions and responses to the vignettes that I was able to examine the attitudes, beliefs and consequent motives that helped shape their practice (Schoenberg & Ravdal, 2000), and hence, gain more of an understanding of the cultural norms inherent in each school. On more than one occasion, this raw, unrehearsed reaction revealed an underlying motive the teacher had previously been unaware of.

4.4.3 Developing instruments that are able to construct an understanding of the school community’s cultural context.

4.4.3.1 Purpose of constructing an understanding of the school communities’ cultural context.

Integral to the conceptual underpinnings of this study, and fundamental to the research questions, is gaining an understanding of the educational goals promoted by each school community’s culture. Hence, it was necessary to develop measures that were both diverse and holistic, to construct an understanding of the culture.

4.4.3.2 Measures adopted to serve this purpose.

There is currently no measure available that can directly determine the cultural context of a school. However, as I hoped to construct an in-depth perception of the school community’s culture I collated information and statistics (for example, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), Bradley &
Corwyn, 2002; Brophy-Herb et al., 2007; Duncan, Ludwig, & Magnuson, 2007; Janus & Duku, 2007) that research had found useful in offering an indication of values and attitudes toward education and development.

Measures such as socio-economic background, which is correlated with health, cognitive, and socio-emotional outcomes in children (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002), house prices, parent occupations and ICSEA value were considered, including the percentage of the student population with English as second language. The school’s statement of education vision, taken from the respective school’s information booklet, as well as their statement posted on the My School website (ACARA, 2009) were used to gauge an understanding of the norms or values underpinning the schools’ cultural situations, and finally, each teachers’ perception of their school community’s norms and the nature of teacher and children’s interactions made available through informal conversations, interviews and observations were also recorded.

Through examining the variables that were known, which in this case are socio-economic status, ethnic population, median house prices, parent occupations and the ICSEA value, as well as those variables that are perceived, such as verbal exchanges and observed interactions, I constructed an in-depth perception of the school community’s socioculture. In addition, through contacting only Catholic schools, I narrowed the participants down to a shared set of values. Purporting to be a faith-based school, promulgating or fostering a set of values that are well defined and universal, means that the schools are tapping into something independent of the socio-economic indicators that guide and affect our perception of values. This enables them to be easier to measure against a theoretical constant. Moreover, there is an overarching body governing these schools—the Catholic Education Office (CEO)—who are charged with
articulating (a) the common Catholic values relevant to schools and (b) devising ways to teach those values.

Table 4.4 depicts the variables socio-economic status, ethnic population, median house prices, parent occupations and the ICSEA value, demonstrating how they were indicative of the school community’s developmental goals and how these goals were manifested within the classroom. Finally, Table 4.4 states the source of data I used to gain this information. It is important to note that each of these variables has limitations, and as such, taken separately, cannot be taken unequivocally as a complete indication of the school’s culture.
Table 4.4

Factors Indicative of Kindergarten Classroom Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Data Investigated</th>
<th>How Factor is Indicative of Developmental Goals (Rogoff, 1990)</th>
<th>Relation to Classroom Culture</th>
<th>Source of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic background</td>
<td>Family median weekly income</td>
<td>Socio-economic background is highly correlated with educational outcomes. Studies have shown that children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to be as ready for school as children from more advantaged areas (Bradley &amp; Corwyn, 2002; Brophy-Herb et al., 2007; Duncan et al., 2007; Janus &amp; Duku, 2007)</td>
<td>Socio-economic status can reflect an attitude toward education. A saturation of low socio-economic background students can impact on classroom relationships and quality (Brophy-Herb et al., 2007; Pianta et al., 2008)</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median house prices</td>
<td>Median house price</td>
<td>Recent Australian research has suggested that ‘estimating the school quality on house prices provides a possible measure of the extent in which Australian parents value better educational outcomes’ (Davidoff &amp; Leigh, 2008, p. 193). Based on this assumption, those parents who reside in areas with higher house prices also have higher expectations for the school their child/children attend</td>
<td>Parental attitudes toward education are constituent of the norms which define a school’s culture (Victorian DEECD). Consequently, the more expensive the area, the more academically oriented the kindergarten is likely to be</td>
<td><a href="http://www.rs.realestatede.com.au">http://www.rs.realestatede.com.au</a> (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent occupation</td>
<td>Percentage of professionals, skilled workers etc</td>
<td>As occupational status reflects educational attainment (Kerckhoff, Raudenbush, &amp; Glennie, 2001), occupation can be used to suggest the attitudes and values held by the parents of a particular community toward education (Davis-Kean, 2005)</td>
<td>Parental attitudes toward education are constituent of the norms which define a school’s culture (Victorian DEECD)</td>
<td>ABS (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICSEA</td>
<td>Value calculated in My School website</td>
<td>ICSEA was constructed from variables that are known to highly correlate with student performance. This value is indicative of the academic level that children from a particular school are expected to attain</td>
<td>Schools with a higher ICSEA value may be more likely to have an academically oriented focus in kindergarten</td>
<td><a href="http://www.myschool.edu.au">http://www.myschool.edu.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as Second Language (ESL)</td>
<td>Number of ESL students in kindergarten</td>
<td>Schools with a large number of children who are ESL may need to re-evaluate their developmental goals as they are presented with different educational needs</td>
<td>A saturation of ESL students affects the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), and hence, classroom culture</td>
<td>Teacher knowledge, ABS (2006) and My School website</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Teacher views of parental pressure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental attitudes toward PIPS and NAPLAN</th>
<th>Reflects parents’ perceived attitudes toward the PIPS and NAPLAN assessments. Parental pressure for performance in these tests contributes to the school educational goals.</th>
<th>Parental pressure may result in a more academically based and formal kindergarten curriculum</th>
<th>Formal and informal interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School vision statement</strong></td>
<td><strong>Developmental goals</strong></td>
<td><strong>School vision statements express the school’s values and developmental goals</strong></td>
<td><strong>Classroom culture is the concrete manifestation of the schools’ vision</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School booklet and My School website</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 Procedure

After this study was granted ethical approval by both Murdoch University (permit number 2009/024) and the Catholic Education office of Western Australia, schools were sent an invitation to participate in this study, along with the Teacher Styles and Preferences Survey. Those teachers who returned the survey were asked to complete a consent to participate form and distribute consent forms to the children’s families in their classroom (see Appendix A). They were then contacted to negotiate convenient times to for observations. It was agreed in the information letter to the teachers that I would come into the classroom once a month for an hour of observations. In the same letter it stated there would be a requirement for the teacher to complete two social and emotional rating scales, one at the beginning and one at the end of the year. Due to time constraints and workloads, the teachers completed the first rating scale, but a decision was made that an interview at the end of the year would be sufficient.

By the third observation session, observations on target children commenced. In these observations, I noted who these children played with, the nature of their interactions and whether they were positive or negative as defined by the CLASS instrument (Pianta et al., 2008), how they interacted with their teacher/s, their level of engagement in activities and during mat sessions in addition to other indictors of self-regulatory behaviours (see Appendix D). I noted the children’s facial expressions, the way they initiated contact with peers and adults, and I recorded some of the content of their conversations and/or private speech. In addition, I recorded the nature of the classroom curriculum, including routines, classroom design, activities and methods of instruction (Table 4.3 is a detailed account of what was observed). The documentation of the observations was made using a running record format, as some teachers and many parents did not consent to videorecording. There were some instances where I needed to elaborate on events that occurred during the session soon afterward.
Although informal discussions between the teacher and I occurred throughout the observation period, I scheduled an interview time with them at the end of the year. During this interview, I queried them about some of my observations to ensure I had perceived the situation/s correctly. For example, in one of the classrooms one of the very able girls had been paired up with one of the boys who sometimes acted out and experienced trouble concentrating. They would sit together at meal times and he would always seek her out during mat sessions. My assumption was they had been paired so the girl could provide a calming influence on the boy. However, when I queried the teacher I found out my assumption was incorrect. Apparently the girl had gone through some family problems and had notably lost confidence. The teacher paired them so that through caring for the boy she would regain her sense of self-worth.

Throughout the interview I tried to ascertain the teacher’s intentions behind their approaches. This proved to be an enlightening experience, as quite often their intentions were not apparent, even to themselves. In addition, I tried to establish how much their schools’ culture influenced their style. Finally, I queried the teachers on how they perceived the target children had developed socially and emotionally throughout the year. As promised in the initial invitation letter, I gave each teacher a copy of the observations I had taken in their setting.

4.6 Data Analysis

Generally, data analysis within ethnographic methodology is performed during fieldwork. Each session out in the field leads to either more questions, or a need to review existing questions, leading to analysis being a ‘process of question-discovery’ (Burns, 1997, p. 305). Many ethnographic studies change from the original hypotheses as a result of the data collected. This study was no different. Through this process of
question-discovery, it emerged that the different school cultures\(^{21}\) were a crucial factor to consider when examining the inclusion of social and emotional development in classroom programmes.

In analysing the data, two principles of pattern recognition were employed. The first, thematic analysis, was a preliminary to the second, semiotic analysis (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). The following elaborates on these two principles.

**4.6.1 Thematic analysis.**

Thematic analysis requires the analyst to look for trends or emerging themes while reviewing the narrative data. These themes then become the categories for analysis. The themes that emerged in this study were underpinned by the intent of this study, i.e., investigating how teachers from different Western Australian metropolitan sociocultures develop a classroom climate that is inclusive of supporting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development. Once the themes were established and organised they were discussed first within their individual cases and then in a cross-case analysis (Creswell, 2005).

**4.6.1.1 Themes identified throughout this research study.**

The themes identified in this study are framed within the theoretical concepts proposed in Rogoff’s (1990, 1995) sociocultural theory. They centre on the relationships that occur outside and inside the kindergarten classroom, and how they are continually forming and reinventing the classroom culture. Specifically, the planes for analysis are: 1) the cultural-institutional level, 2) the interpersonal level and 3) the personal level.

\(^{21}\) Even though the schools were all Catholic schools with the same set of espoused values, the different communities have different sociocultures. The differences in community cultures was reflected in their educational goals.
Each of these themes are interrelated, and comply with the planes identified by Rogoff (1995). Similar to these theoretical perspectives, it is important to remember that they are inseparable and mutually constituting, comprising activities that at times can become the focus of analysis but cannot be considered ‘as separate or as hierarchical’, rather, as ‘involving different grains of focus with the whole sociocultural activity’ (Rogoff, 1995, p. 141). Further, these themes are not conclusive. Other factors, such as Australian culture, laws, economic system, history and social conditions are not directly addressed yet are inseparable to the themes.

The following figure offers a pictorial representation of these themes, demonstrating the complexity of relationships that occur in the construction of the classroom culture.

*Figure 4.2:* Representation of the dynamic relationships that consistently interact with the concrete manifestation of the classroom climate.
In analysing these themes I further draw from concepts identified by Rogoff, Vygotsky (1978, 1987) and Goldstein (1999), which in turn are related to the research questions this study is designed to investigate. Moreover, I discuss the themes’ compatibility and describe how these transcribe to observations made of the kindergarten classrooms.

4.7 Validity: Defending Standards of Rigour

Authors Drew, Hardman and Hosp (2008) identified two broad categories of threats to validity in qualitative designs: 1) ‘threats to trustworthiness’ and 2) ‘researcher effects’ (p. 234). They suggest a variety of steps to protect against these threats, which are discussed in the following section.

4.7.1 Trustworthiness.

The trustworthiness of data can be compromised when the information collected is incomplete; the interpretation of findings is inadequate; there are inconsistencies in the data; misleading information caused by inadequate use of metaphors, diagrams or direct quotations; the researcher’s views outweigh the participants’ views and/or alternate explanations are not disqualified (Drew et al., 2008).

The three ways I ensured the trustworthiness of my data were: 1) I was thorough and meticulous with data collection, 2) I used triangulation of methods of data collection and 3) I used member checking. The following discusses these approaches. First, I was clear in what I wanted to observe and I knew the boundaries of the phenomena I wished to record. Guided by these foci, I recorded as much as I could on site and elaborated on these notes when I was alone while everything was still fresh in
my mind. In addition, I gathered information from multiple sources to supplement and enrich my findings.

Second, the multi-method approach adopted by this study not only enriched the data, but also triangulated information, corroborating the evidence. Where data from different sources conflicted, I would either re-examine my data and/or review the confliction using an alternate method.

Finally, at the end of the data collection period I gave the participating teachers a copy of my observations. The purpose of this was twofold; first, I undertook at the outset to provide each teacher with the observations of their respective classroom to supplement their assessments. Second, it enabled the teachers to look over my notes enabling them to judge the accuracy of the descriptions and interpretations in a process referred to as ‘member checking’ (Drew et al., 2008). Member checking further enhanced the trustworthiness of data as well as minimised the likelihood of observer bias.

4.7.2 Researcher effects: Observer bias and observer effects.

There are two forms of bias, or researcher effects, that can threaten the validity of data collected through observations in qualitative research. The first is ‘observer bias’, which occurs when the researcher observes subjectively and with judgement. The second is the ‘observer effect’, which refers to the effect the researcher’s presence has on the person/s being observed (Drew et al., 2008; Gay et al., 2006). The following reports on the measures taken to reduce the likelihood of bias.

4.7.2.1 Observer bias.

As at the time of the study, I had been a kindergarten teacher for nine years, and like the participants in this study, I considered myself to have a child-centred practice.
Similar to the participants in this study, my practice looked different to the others. I realised I had preconceived ideas about what I considered child-centred practice to look like and on what practices best support children’s social and emotional functioning. I also realised that these ideas could lead to judgement that would both narrow and sabotage the validity of my data. However, because this study was centred at understanding the socioculture of the participating school and kindergarten classroom, through time, conversations and observations, I began to understand the teachers’ intentions and goals, limiting any possible ethnocentric judgements I may have formed (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Observer bias could also arise from previous relationships with the participants. I had met three of the participants previous to the commencement of this study. These teachers were Kyra from St Katherine’s Primary school (Case Study 2), Jess from School 3 (the data collected from Jess’s school was not selected for the case studies) and Heather from St Hovea’s Primary school (Case Study 5), all of whom I had met previously in a professional capacity. During my research, I found these early associations to be advantageous, as we had an immediate rapport. With the teachers I had not met before, trust and comfort in our relationships were established more gradually.

In an effort to minimise any observer bias that may have occurred, I wrote down situations and events as they occurred as objectively as I could. In those situations where I felt I did not agree or understand why a teacher did what she did, I would note my reaction. Throughout my research, the teachers were my key informants. Wiersma and Jurs (2009) stated that key informants are often not used to their full benefit in educational ethnographic research. They attribute this in part to the researcher relying on their own familiarity with education. Consequently, if I needed clarification on an event, I ensured I asked the teacher as opposed to arriving at my own conclusions. In a
study of this kind, bias is possible. To reduce instances of bias in observations, each participant teacher was given a copy of my observations and asked to provide feedback. In addition, the teachers had opportunities in individual interviews to discuss and challenge observations”.

Another measure employed was that I gathered data through more formal interviews, questionnaires and surveys. These data were cross-examined for multiple interpretations by my supervisors, adding another process in minimising the potential for bias. This triangulation of data further clarified the participant’s perspective, hence reducing the risk of observer bias.

4.7.2.2 Observer effect.

I minimised the observer effect by following the same routine each time I entered the classroom, as well as visiting each classroom at a similar time each month. This predictable, constant behaviour made me less of an intrusion and/or point of interest. The children quickly accepted that I was in the classroom and went about their everyday routines with minimal to no disruption. Although the teachers appeared to act naturally at the beginning of data collection, I was certain of their comfort by the end of the data collection period because of comments like ‘I forgot you were in here!’ as I was saying thank you and goodbye for the day.

4.8 Conclusion

I argue that ethnography was the most appropriate and effective methodological approach to investigate the research questions proposed by this study. Ethnographical research, which began in the discipline of anthropology, enabled me to extensively examine different school cultures within the time span available for data collection.
The multi-method approach adopted by this study facilitated a thorough and rounded exploration of each school’s culture, as well as examining teachers’ attitudes to social and emotional development within early childhood. The 10–13 hours of observations made in each classroom offered an insight into how the schools’ culture and the teachers’ early childhood education philosophy manifested itself in the kindergarten curriculum, and the informal and formal interviews enabled me to view events through the eyes of the teacher.

Finally, data collection was conducted in a professional and ethical manner. The teachers were given the opportunity to read the notes taken in fieldwork and were invited to voice their concerns or interpretations on what was written. The lack of consent for photos and videotaping presented some limitations on the data collected; however, this was to a fair extent counteracted through the triangulation of data.
Chapter Five: Introduction to the Case Studies

5.0 Introduction

The case studies that are presented in the following chapters are organised under Rogoff’s (2003) three foci of analysis: the cultural-institutional, interpersonal and personal. The use of these three lenses to view and report the data enables a robust discussion of each classroom that highlights the similarities and differences between community, classroom interactions and child development, while recognising that the three perspectives are inseparable.

At the practical level, data are reported on how the kindergarten curriculum facilitates relationships, environment and play. These three factors operate synergistically to support strong foundations for children’s social and emotional skills (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004, 2007). The interplay between each of them is indicative of the intricate and diverse nature that is the fabric of healthy development in early childhood settings.

Of the eight teachers and kindergartens selected to participate in this study, only five were developed into case studies for this dissertation. The three that are not included were so similar to the five I report on that they did not add any further insights, and were therefore not developed into case studies. To elaborate, the five case studies that were included had different combinations of cultural-institutional, interpersonal and personal foci of analysis. That is for example, even though there were two case studies with similar cultural-institutional plane data (higher socioeconomic area and parental demand for more formal instruction) the teachers responded differently (interpersonal plane) and hence were included for examination. Conversely, those case studies with similar cultural-institutional and interpersonal foci of analysis were not replicated. The
case studies presented in this study provides a cross-section of schools located in socioeconomic areas.

The data for each case study were collected using the initial Teachers Beliefs and Practices survey, the Social and Emotional Rating scales ratings of six children’s social and emotional development, informal conversations, observations and interviews. Theoretical concepts developed by Rogoff (2003), Vygotsky (1978) and Goldstein (1999), the interaction between relationships, play and environment (Center on the Developing Child, 2004, 2007) and research reported in the literature review are used in the analysis and discussion of the data.
Chapter Six: Case Study 1—Mia’s Story  
St Matthew’s Primary School

6.0 Introduction

St Matthew’s, and another school presented later, St Orville’s (Chapter 9), were both situated in the most affluent areas participating in this study. According to conversations with the kindergarten teachers from both these schools, they were perceived to experience the most overt pressure to perform well in NAPLAN testing. This case study offers an insight into how Mia, the kindergarten teacher at St Matthew’s primary school, supported her students’ social and emotional development, while coping with the expectations set by the school and its community.

Two key themes emerged from the data collected on St Matthew’s kindergarten: (1) the inverse relationship observed between a teacher-centred programme and the opportunities made available for children to develop self-regulation, and (2) the ‘transformation of participation’ perspective that became evident through the data, where the participants contributed to the classroom culture while developing from their participation in classroom cultural activities.

The data collected from St Matthew’s kindergarten indicated that the development of social and emotional competencies was not as valued by the community as was scoring highly in assessments, such as the NAPLAN test. For St Matthew’s kindergarten, the strong focus on academic scores may have been instrumental in making the emphasis on cognitive skills outweigh other aspects of development.

Through the interpersonal focus of analysis, I examined some relationships that were evident in play scenarios towards the end of the year. When contrasted with the observations taken earlier in the data collection period, this observation provides a basis for discussion on teacher control and opportunities made available for the development of children’s self-regulation.
The personal focus of analysis was centred primarily on one boy, Michael. Michael’s journey highlighted one individual’s transformation of participation (Rogoff, 2003) in the classroom programme. The observations depicted changes in his behaviour, in particular his responses to the kindergarten programme. From Mia’s perspective, his responses reinforced the validity and direction of her programme.

This case study begins with an introduction to the kindergarten classroom dynamics and a brief background to the curriculum focus of St Matthew’s school. Together, these indicated some of the demands placed on Mia while she set about trying to meet expectations and achieve outcomes.

6.1 St Matthew’s Kindergarten Background

There were 30 children enrolled in St Matthew’s kindergarten. The kindergarten schedule ran all day Monday and Wednesday, and it offered a third optional day on Friday, which not all the children attended. The teacher, Mia, was supported by three teacher assistants, Andrea, Elizabeth and Jo. Andrea and Elizabeth were qualified teachers who chose to do assistant work for the enjoyment of the children and some extra money. The third assistant, Jo, worked with one of the students, Maddy, who had a global developmental delay. Maddy was not able to walk or toilet herself and she communicated mainly through physical gestures or vocalisations.

In this classroom, there were few social and emotional behaviours that were overtly problematic. One of the girls, Michelle, was partially deaf, and because of this she rarely engaged in interactions with the other children. However, by the end of the year she had been fitted with a hearing aid, and with Mia’s assistance, had begun

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22 Catholic school kindergartens in Western Australia can have a maximum of 30 children enrolled on the proviso a 1:10 adult to child ratio is maintained.
socialising with a few children. In addition, there was one boy who would occasionally become agitated and hit or push his peers, but this behaviour tended to be infrequent.

St Matthews’ primary school wrote on the My School website that it had a balanced curriculum, centred on building strong foundations in literacy and numeracy. It also promoted a specialised ability to cater for all levels of learning, stating that it offered both an extension programme as well as an intervention programme (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2009). The school’s vision statement promoted fostering a sense of empowerment through both knowledge and faith, and aimed to prepare students for becoming productive members of an ever-changing world.

From her experience with the school community, Mia found that the parents were very focused on their children achieving successful academic outcomes. She stated that the school’s NAPLAN results (which were already outperforming similar schools and Australia-wide average scores) were perceived as ‘not good enough’. Consistent with this remark, the parents insisted on seeing evidence of pursuit of academic excellence, even at the kindergarten level (Interview, 2/12/2009).

6.1.1 The kindergarten programme.

The programme adopted for this kindergarten was more characteristic of a Year 1 or 2 classroom, i.e., prescribed targets dominated the programme and the production of assessable products appeared to outweigh a diffusion of goals. Mia informed me that at the beginning of the year she began her programme using a play-based approach. However, after a while she observed that the children ‘appeared lost’ with this type of learning (Informal discussion, 21/10/2009). She concluded that this was because her students had been groomed by their parents for learning isolated skills, and this was what constituted their expectations for kindergarten. Consequently, Mia offered ‘more
organised learning centres so that all children have the opportunity to participate in activities that meet identified needs’ (Teacher Styles and Preferences Survey, 6/5/2009).

Preparing children for school learning is not an uncommon practice among families. Rogoff (2003) reported that middle class African American and European American families often engaged children in school-oriented practices, and in doing so prepared their children for literacy. However, parent academic expectations at the kindergarten level have increased over the years (Elkind, 2007), often resulting in an unbalanced curriculum23 that rejects play in favour of practices that facilitate learning isolated skills.

The data, which will be discussed later in this chapter, suggested that the school community considered those isolated skills that were centred on reading, writing and numeracy to be the key focus for education. In response to this, Mia constructed her programme on what she perceived was important to the school community. This ‘curriculum tailoring’ is consistent with Rogoff’s (1990, 1993) observation that classroom activities are developed based upon what is deemed culturally important.

In line with what Mia perceived as the school community’s educational values, her classroom was designed to draw the children’s attention and movement towards activity areas that had specific, predetermined educational outcomes. There was no home corner until the end of the year, and there were few other areas in the classroom that children could access freely without an adult directing their behaviour.

The following diagram (Figure 6.1) provides an outline of the classroom design. The mat area, represented by the blue section, was predominantly used for whole-group activities. During transitional times, it coupled as the area for block building and jigsaws. Just as environments can be prepared to encourage play (Doctoroff, 2001), they

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23 Epstein (2007) defines a balanced curriculum as a combination of both child-guided and adult-guided educational experiences. In child-guided experiences the adult plays an intentional role and in adult-guided experiences the child has an important and active role.
can equally be designed to discourage it. Generally, the design of St Matthew’s kindergarten classroom facilitated student movement towards teacher-centred activities (Pianta et al., 2008; see Appendix D).

Figure 6.1: The layout of St Matthew’s kindergarten classroom.

On the days that I observed this kindergarten, the morning routine was organised into two defined segments. First, the children participated in an extended mat session targeting literacy skills. This session was broken up with movement activities, which in turn enabled the children to participate longer in dedicated literacy time. The second segment occurred after morning tea, when the children were required to engage in
teacher-organised activities. Most of these activities were supervised by an adult and those activities that had no direct supervision were set with specific and explicit processes and outcomes; for example, at the play dough table they were given the instruction to use the play dough to ‘roll round and long’. They were provided with no extra equipment, limiting the possibility of deviating from the instructions (Observation, 11/11/09).

Typical of teacher-directed curricula, Mia designed her kindergarten programme so that the control of learning remained with her. This meant that the conversations and activities were all centred on what Mia wanted the children to do and learn. For example, for the most part, Mia conversed with the children while they were engaged in whole-group situations. The following vignette is typical of her talking through a shared book, an activity that I observed every time I collected data in this classroom:

**Vignette 6.0**

Mia brought out the big book. When she opened the first page one of the girls, Sheryl, yelled out, ‘I can see a question mark!’ Mia asked the children if she needed to change her voice here, pointing to the quotation marks. ‘Yes’, they replied. ‘Who do you think will be talking next?’ Mia asked the children. ‘The frog’, they replied. Where do I start? And so on.

‘Where do you think these animals live?’ Macy called out ‘zoo’. Another child yelled out ‘farm’, and another started singing ‘Old MacDonald had a farm’ quietly to himself (Observation, 29/6/2009).

In these learning situations, Mia maintained control of the conversation by asking closed questions, which are designed to provide quick and easy factual responses while keeping control of the conversation with the questioner.

While the classroom environment was safe and offered stability, the level of teacher control Mia exercised left little space for creativity and exploration. In this
environment the children were given few opportunities to practice being self-sufficient, autonomous, taking others’ perspective, setting their own rules, problem-solving in authentic experiences, setting goals, developing organisational skills, working cooperatively, and coming to understand their own strengths, needs and values (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg, 2007). These skills underpin the ability to independently engage in higher levels of affective (Bloom, Krathwohl, & Masia, 1964; Vygotsky, 1978) and cognitive skills (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956), and are essential to successful later learning.

6.2 The Interpersonal Focus of Analysis

Through the interpersonal lens I was able to view the relationships that took place in shared activities. In St Matthew’s kindergarten, this lens offered an important insight into: (1) the kindergarten programme and children’s interpersonal peer relationships, (2) Mia’s ability to make observations of all the children, and (3) the relationship Mia built with the children and how she used her relationship with the children’s parents to support social and emotional development in the classroom.

6.2.1 The classroom peer interactions.

In this classroom, I observed that the children interacted more freely with each other when they were playing outside during recess or lunch than when they were inside the classroom. The chief reason why this was the case was that when the children were outside they engaged in play and as a result they had control over what activities they would participate in, how they would participate and with whom. In contrast, in the classroom Mia controlled the activities, she told them what to participate in, how to participate and she exerted considerable control over who they participated with.
During indoor activity time, the children were encouraged to participate in activities that were guided by an adult. Even though they appeared happy to sit with Mia, the activities were given explicit and specific outcomes and consequently there was little scope for the children to take on active roles, or exert to ownership over the learning (Epstein, 2007). The activities organised for early finishers were also given specific outcomes. Using the example provided earlier, in the situation where the children were instructed to roll the play dough ‘round and long’ (Observation, 11/11/2009), the children tended not to engage with each other; rather they sat quietly rolling the play dough on the table. This particular activity constrained the children’s opportunity to engage in conversation that had the potential to increase their proficiency in social skills and understanding. In this classroom, conversation and peer interactions were further constrained through the lack of opportunities made available to participate in areas that encourage imaginative play, as for example, the home corner.

At the end of the year Mia reintroduced a home corner, which took the shape of a shopping centre. The authenticity of the resources invested in this area left nothing to the imagination; it looked just like a miniature shop. However, regardless of the realism presented by the centre, the children’s interactions did not coordinate to build on the shop theme, as the following elaborates:

**Vignette 6.1**

There was a shop set up close to the kitchen end of the room, where a work desk had been previously. There were two registers on a table, with chairs tucked neatly underneath. On the back wall was a basket of flowers and a variety of other items to buy. The registers were full of plastic coins and there was a supply of paper bags, which the children eagerly filled and put in their shopping trolley and baskets.
The home corner had a theme of shopping, which the children organised their play around for the first 15 minutes. Within this time frame, the children engaged in parallel play, as they played side by side with little communication between them. Roles had been assigned, with Mikayla being the shopper and Mary the shop keeper. When Marcus entered the scenario he threatened Mary’s role. Although Mary fought to secure her role, she quickly lost interest in it and began playing with the money and Marcus soon joined her in this unrelated activity. The theme quickly changed to ‘mum and baby’, yet even in this scenario the roles were not properly negotiated and the sequence of play was not delineated. The children soon lost interest, as the rules that define quality play were not properly established or monitored (Observation, 11/11/09).

There are a number of reasons why the play scenario went the way it did: (1) there were only three children allowed in the centre at any one time, (2) the materials and props were new to the children, (3) the children were given constrained opportunities to play in the classroom, and (4) the shop theme and resource ideas came from Mia and not the children.

The restriction of only three children in the centre reduced the likelihood that usual play partners were in the centre at the same time. Consequently, the children in the centre may not have wanted to play together because they were not friends. Also, with such few players in the game, it just took one of them to be off task for the whole scenario to appear haphazard. Incidentally, Epstein (2007) warned that arbitrary limitations placed on areas, such as the home corner, models exclusionary behaviour, doing little to promote children’s developing social skills.

It is possible that because the materials were new that the children were more interested in exploring these before engaging with them in play with their peers. It is interesting to note that Vygotsky (1978) suggested that authentic props to this extreme
do not necessarily add to development. He observed that it is difficult for young children to separate thought from an object, which results in them being dependent on the situation. According to Vygotsky (1978), kindergarten marks a time when children begin to separate ‘fields of meaning and vision’ enabling them to act independently of what they see (p. 97); this emergence occurs most naturally through play. If there is no need for the divergence of meaning and vision, i.e., a stick is no longer a stick, but is used as a horse, then this skill is less likely to be encouraged.

Another reason could have been attributed to the children’s history of playing together in the classroom. In this kindergarten the children were given very few opportunities to play together throughout the year, and as a result, they had not practiced the skills developed through play, potentially leading to some implications for the children’s social and emotional development. Vygotsky (1978) deemed play as a ‘leading factor in development’ (p. 101), asserting that ‘play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is in itself a major source of development’ (p. 102). Further, he noted that play was the primary activity for young children and it was in this context that the foundational skills for social and emotional development were laid.

In particular, the children had not practiced regulating their own behaviour through play in the classroom. Play requires strict subordination to rules, making it the most valuable context in which children develop self-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978). Consequently, regardless of the realism presented by the centre, the children found it difficult to regulate their behaviours to be conducive to collaborative play.

Play creates the ZPD for learning self-regulation (e.g., Elias & Berk, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). Play imposes the first constraints on children’s independent behaviours as they abide by rules that guide and direct action in the course of the imaginary play, creating an optimal environment for facilitating the development of self-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978). Without these child-imposed constraints, the children
in St Matthew’s kindergarten tended to be confined to rules set and enforced by Mia, and as such, their behaviours were more likely to be dependent on teacher regulation (Boyd et al., 2005).

The final possible reason as to why the children did not engage in the shop-related play was because it was not their idea. Mia had suggested the shop and organised the resources. In Vygotsky’s (1978) examination on why children play, he suggested that children are motivated to engage in play to create an imaginary situation that enables the realisation of unrealisable tendencies or desires. Hence, if they did not have the unrealisable tendency or desire, then they would be less inclined to engage with the theme.

### 6.2.2 Using observations to support social and emotional development.

Mia was aware of the teacher control that characterised her indoor programme, so she intentionally designed the outdoor programme for the children to play without any teacher direction. During this time, she did not direct or interact with the children, unless they came to her. When they did instigate interactions with her, she tended to follow their lead, for example:

**Vignette 6.2**

The children were playing outdoors. One of the girls, Makenzie, raced up to me, telling me about the big branch her friend was holding. She then raced over to Mia and told her the same thing while her friend dragged the branch over. Makenzie walked over to the sandpit and started filling a witch’s hat with sand. Once it was full she took it up to Mia for her to see. Makenzie stayed by Mia’s feet, gathering the sand that had seeped out the bottom of the hat. Makenzie stood by Mia for a while until she finally walked over to the rear of the playground and picked up a broken handle. She raced back to Mia with her
new find, prompting Mia to ask, ‘What do you think it could be?’ Makenzie suggested it was a bucket handle, and so together they went through the buckets in the trolley trying to find a bucket with a missing handle (Observation, 14/9/2009).

Mia informed me that she used the outdoor time to observe children interact with others, commenting that these observations informed her on what social skills needed developing and who played with whom. She would then use this information in the classroom to either explicitly teach a social and emotional skill, or to inform herself of which children to pair up for activities (Interview, 2/12/2009).

In contrast to some of the other teachers participating in this study, Mia made herself aware of the children’s actual social and emotional developmental level and how they interacted with their peers through regular, intentional observations as well as through the strong partnership she had forged with the parents. Her ability to make observations was facilitated through efficient classroom management (see Appendix D), and effective positioning. In reference to the former, Mia utilised her Duties Other Than Teaching time (DOTT) to complete managerial duties so that she could dedicate all her teaching time to the children. In some of the other kindergartens, the teachers were occasionally inaccessible to the children during teaching time while they attended to managerial tasks.

In addition to Mia’s observations of the children during outdoor play, she also positioned herself strategically in the classroom so that she could observe all the children. The intent behind her observations between outdoor and indoor activities appeared to differ in that during outdoor activities she observed peer interactions and social skills, while during indoor time she would be monitoring to ensure all the children remained on task and that set outcomes were achieved.
The partnership Mia formed with the children’s parents was unequalled by any of the other focus teachers. Every morning Mia would talk with the parents, once commenting it was her favourite part of the day. During this time she gained insight into the children’s likes and dislikes, as well as to how they fit in at home with family and their community.

However, in despite of Mia being aware of where children needed scaffolding in their social and emotional skills, the kindergarten programme tended not to offer the opportunities optimal for developing these skills. In this classroom there was little balance between teacher-guided and child-guided experiences. That is, the indoor experiences were teacher-guided, while the outdoor experiences were highly child-guided. This meant that in child-guided experiences the adults tended not to play intentional roles and in teacher-guided experiences children had no ownership or were unable to assume active roles (Epstein, 2007; DEEWR & CAG, 2009). Both scenarios tended not to be descriptive of joint participation (Rogoff, 1990), nor did they enable opportunities for scaffolding by a more capable peer (Vygotsky, 1978). In sum, these extremes of guidance were less likely to offer the balance required for optimal learning (Epstein, 2007).

As the programme did not offer opportunities for play in the classroom, Mia negated the most effective means of developing the children’s social and emotional skills in the ZPD, and in doing so, constrained their opportunity to act in the ‘imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation’ to create voluntary intentions and form real life plans and volitional motives enabling the ‘highest level of preschool development’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102).

6.2.3 The classroom relationships.
Although the indoor programme experiences were largely teacher-guided, Mia shared a warm relationship with her students. Her rapport with them was developed through sharing jokes, listening intently to their stories and/or giving them a hug if they needed one. For example, on my first observation of this classroom, I observed Mia calling out the attendance roll. She had the children sitting around in a circle and encouraged all the other children to look for the child whose name she had just called. Every now and again she would ask a child a question that was pertinent to him/her such as, ‘are you feeling better today?’ Alternatively, she would offer a comment such as ‘I love your beanie’. The children responded enthusiastically to this routine, and it appeared demonstrative of Mia’s concern for each child (Observation, 27/5/2009).

Indeed, affirming and respectful attentions such as these promotes children’s positive self-identity, as well as establishing a relationship that is more conducive to learning (Epstein, 2007; Goldstein, 1999). Children who develop a trusting relationship with their teacher are more likely to feel secure in discovering the academic milieu and participating in the different social groups offered in the classroom (Howes, 1997, 2000), engaging in activities that allow them to practice social and emotional skills and provide a model for effective and appropriate social and emotional behaviour (Center on the Developing Child, 2009).

The positive relationship Mia had built with her students contributed to them wanting to share their stories with her and participate in the activities that she supervised. The children’s willingness to attend activities Mia was involved in is explained by the interrelational theory as the children choosing to perform tasks so they can be like their teacher (Goldstein, 1999).

The whole-group session that opened each day also tended to offer the most structure. During this time, Mia would read a story to the children and the group’s attention would be directed towards developing awareness of the conventions of print.
Children participated eagerly, calling out the punctuation marks they recognised or responding to Mia’s questions; for example, ‘What is so special about this writing?’, referring to the speech bubbles (Observation, 21/10/2009). Mia would acknowledge the children’s observations, while maintaining control of the lesson through careful questioning.

As mentioned previously, Mia also learned more about the children in her class through the relationships she formed with their parents. Every morning before school began, Mia would go out and talk with the parents, and in the process, forged a strong partnership with them. Through this partnership she gained some understanding of the children’s cultural and community background, developing a more holistic and robust profile for each of them. In turn, this information was used to help shape the curriculum to support children’s individual social and emotional needs. This partnership was also shown to be helpful in determining appropriate social and emotional support for one of the focus children in this study, Mikayla. Mikayla had grown anxious towards the end of the year and did not want to come to school. Mia worked with Mikayla’s mother in trying to establish both the cause for her change in behaviour and in determining an effective approach that they could both use, and by doing so supported each other in supporting Mikayla (Interview, 3/12/2009).

Research suggests that parent involvement has the potential of fostering children’s positive self-image (Epstein, 2007) and enhancing their motivation to learn (Christenson, 2000). In this situation, however, the partnered approach adopted by Mia and Mikayla’s mother also had the added potential of extending Mikayla’s social and emotional skill development into the home, strengthening the likelihood of positive outcomes.

6.3 The Personal Focus of Analysis
The personal focus of analysis enabled me to examine the contribution the focus children made to the classroom cultural activities. In this discussion, I explore Michael’s transformation of participation in the sociocultural activities of St Matthew’s kindergarten (Rogoff, 2003).

At the beginning of the data collection period Mia rated Michael as having poor attention skills (Social and Emotional Rating Scale, 25/6/2012). In support of this rating, the early observations made of Michael indicated that he was more involved in playing with his friends or being distracted during mat sessions than attending to the lesson, as indicated by the following vignette:

*Vignette 6.3*

Michael and Marcus sat together clapping each other’s hands. Mia asked the children to look at her. Michael turned to her straight away but started making a low ‘aah’ sound. Mia informed the whole class that the only one making sounds was Maddy (Maddy was banging blocks in a container).

Michael stopped humming for a moment with his eyes fixed on Mia. Not long after, however, he started making the noises again—Mia did not look at him—and he stopped. Later during the interview, Mia commented that she does not sweat the small stuff. If she did, she would spend all her time picking up on children. In her mind, if the child was not annoying other children she would overlook the misconduct and usually their unnoticed behaviour would desist. (Interview, 3/12/09; Observation, 29/6/2009).

This example was typical of Michael’s behaviour up until nearer the end of the observation period. By this time, Michael’s participation in classroom activities appeared to have transformed. His earlier inattention was replaced with resolved attention, even when many of his friends’ behaviours appeared to remain the same. In one instance, two of his peers, one of whom was his good friend Marcus, began to do
their own thing with the beanbags Mia had given them. Even though they had walked over near Michael, he ignored them, instead choosing to follow the instructions Mia gave the class (Observation, 21/10/2009).

It seemed as though different values were beginning to influence his choices; for example, he chose the position on the mat that gave him the best view of the book Mia was reading as opposed to finding a position near his friends. This transformation was so noticeable I asked Mia what had occurred to make it happen. Mia offered two possible reasons for this change: first, she stated that ‘we have become interesting to him’, clarifying that Michael was an ‘intelligent boy’ and that the implementation of the formal curriculum was more engaging for him (Interview, 3/12/2009). The second reason was that one day she asked Michael to move away from Marcus as the two had grown disruptive. Mia emphasised that it was only once she asked him to move; however, Michael did not sit next to Marcus on the mat again even though they continued playing outside together (Interview, 3/12/2009).

Michael’s engagement during mat sessions began when she separated him from Marcus. This separation may have initiated two thought processes for Michael: (1) he discovered he liked paying attention to Mia, but just never had the opportunity to before due to peer distractions, and (2) Michael realised he had the choice of whether he sat next to Marcus or not. In addition, Michael could have become more attentive because, as Mia had previously suggested, the content had become interesting to him, and/or his listening skills developed over time.

With regard to the former, Michael’s autonomy of choice was enabled through Mia’s explicit instruction in guiding Michael to move away from his distraction, offering an example of how even social and emotional knowledge begins first on the social level (interpsychological) and then is it internalised inside the child (intrapsychological level) (Vygotsky, 1978).
Conversely, it is possible that Michael exerted no sense of autonomy; rather he remained abiding by the one-off instruction set by Mia without allowing himself an alternative course of action. Whatever the impetus for the change, Michael’s change, or transformation, highlighted not only that individual development is entwined with sociocultural activity, but also it elucidated the dynamicity of culture, i.e., that Michael contributed to the transformation of classroom activities just as the activities contributed to Michael’s transformation (Rogoff, 2003).

6.4 Discussion

The data indicated that the St Matthew’s kindergarten programme was shaped in response to the pressure from parents to pursue academic excellence, with measurable outcomes that are consistent with their beliefs regarding achievement. Consequently, this programme became less play-based (process-oriented) and more teacher-directed (process-driven). The following discusses these data.

6.4.1 The ZPD.

In this classroom the opportunities to encourage social and emotional development in the ZPD tended to be constrained for two reasons. First, the programme at St Matthews was designed to meet the academic objectives set by the community. Consequently, as teacher-directed activities characterised this classroom, the focus was on achieving academically-oriented outcomes and not necessarily social and emotional skill development.

Second, the curriculum arrangements in the classroom provided minimal opportunities for children to engage in child-guided activities and play. Play is a context where social and emotional skills are not only learned, but they are also practiced. Vygotsky (1978) believed that play situations create a ZPD and contain all
'developmental tendencies in a condensed form’ (p. 102). Hence, play would have provided a context in which social and emotional skills were learned and practiced, even if they were not the intended outcome.

The play context would also have given children the opportunity to practice social and emotional skills modelled by Mia, appropriating them to make them their own. For this learning to take place, the play needed to be characterised by a set of explicit and implicit rules, defined character roles and cooperative behaviours. These are elements that were not present in the play that occurred at the end of the year, and as such, this context tended to add little to the children’s social and emotional development.

### 6.4.2 The guided participation.

Mia arranged the indoor programme so that most interactions had the potential to be guided by an adult. Children were often instructed, informed, questioned and listened to when they were engaged in adult-guided activity. Whereas this arrangement tended to satisfy the more academic requirements of the classroom, it provided few opportunities for children to develop a sense of autonomy, agency, self-regulation or diverse problem-solving in authentic situations. Moreover, there were few opportunities for children to practice the social and emotional skills that Mia modelled during more structured experiences.

As Mia did not enter the children’s play situations when they did occur, there was little opportunity to demonstrate to children how they can scaffold their peers in solving problems in authentic situations. Hence, supporting children to engage in discourse, language and higher-order thinking skills tended to be more restricted to teacher moments rather than occurring independently throughout the classroom.
As the children were not shown how to support each other in independent situations, the peer guidance provided in play situations was less likely to be ‘desirable’ than if they had been given strategies on how to engage in more collaborative learning conversations (Rogoff, 2003). One possible consequence of this arrangement is that these children would end up being teacher-regulated rather than self-regulated (Shanker, 2013). As the children were constantly controlled by the teacher and were given little opportunity to control their own behaviours in play contexts, their behaviour was more likely to be teacher-controlled than self-regulated. This suggests that in subsequent years if they do not have a teacher controlling their behaviour it is possible they will experience difficulties in regulating their own behaviour to be conducive to learning.

However, when social and emotional issues arose, as they did for Mikayla, Mia responded with a repertoire of strategies that were drawn from her relationships with the parents and her extensive range of theoretical knowledge. As Mia always responded in consultation with the children’s individual parents, the guidance was more likely to be consistent.

6.4.3 The interrelational dimension.

The data suggest that although the relationships in this classroom demonstrated a ‘one-caring’ and ‘one-cared for’ dynamic, it was not experienced or developed in child-guided situations. This meant that Mia was not accessible to the children while they were engaged in situations where they were in control.

This meant that there were few opportunities for reciprocity based on the children’s ideas, thoughts and feelings (Pianta et al., 2008). Consequently, not only did Mia not engage in true reciprocal relationships with the children, she also did not take the opportunity to observe how they approached problem-solving or communicating in naturalistic situations. As such, she was less able to collate an
authentic assessment of the children’s actual abilities, and in turn was less likely to scaffold them in developing higher-order thinking skills, and in particular, executive functioning.

The vignette on the three children at play offers an example of how the children experienced difficulty in engaging executive functioning skills such as initiating, planning and carrying through operations. As the literature suggests, kindergarten is the most appropriate and effective time to lay the foundations for these bourgeoning skills, and it is through the expression of one-caring and one-cared for relationships in both teacher- and child-guided experiences that they are more likely to be developed.

6.4.4 The relationships, environment and play.

The interaction between relationships, environment and play that is needed for classrooms to effectively support children’s social and emotional development tended to be constrained in this classroom due to: (1) the relationship between teacher and children being constrained to teacher-guided experiences, (2) the academic orientation of the curriculum, and (3) the constrained opportunities for children to engage in play.

In this classroom, even though Mia shared positive relationships with the children while they were engaged in teacher-guided activities, the interactions and curriculum tended not to be responsive to all children’s academic needs, a feature integral to providing a differentiated curriculum (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000). Consequently, children like Mikayla found it more difficult to cope in the classroom, and this may have been why she was reluctant to go to school.

Even though Mia was concerned about Mikayla’s behaviour and responded by drawing on a wealth of strategies and by engaging her mother, she did not consider that the overly academic curriculum may have contributed to Mikayla’s reluctance to attend. However, in interview Mia did state that she believed Mikayla not to be as academically
ready as many of the other children in the classroom (Interview 3/12/2009). The data suggested that Mikayla demonstrated engagement, motivation and satisfaction while engaged in child-guided activity, and because of this it is likely that this situation would have provided a more appropriate situation in which to incorporate and develop other skills.

*Figure 6.2*: The interaction between relationships, play and environment.

The interaction between relationships, play and environment is fractured due to relationships constrained to teacher-guided experiences and very few play experiences provided. The few opportunities for play and extreme arbitrary limits placed on the number of participants is represented by the play triangle being further removed from the whole circle.
6.5 Conclusion

In summary, there were an number of elements supporting children’s social and emotional development in this classroom: Mia’s positive interactions with the children, her interactions with their parents, her knowledge of children’s social and emotional skills and her concern for the children. However, the effectiveness of these strategies tended to be diminished due to the few opportunities that were provided for children to learn and practice social and emotional skills in authentic experiences, in particular, play; a curriculum that provided little variance in differentiation and constrained opportunities for teachers to scaffold children’s learning as they were engaged in child-guided experiences.

One consequence observed was that children like Mikayla regressed socially, which further impacted on her ability to interact successfully with others in the classroom. This in turn, diminished her ability to thrive academically in the classroom, as she was no longer motivated or engaged, both of which are considered to be two of the most ‘conclusive indicators of how well an educational setting is meeting the learning and developmental priorities of children, (Government of South Australia, 2008, p. 14).
Chapter Seven: Case Study 2—Kyra’s Story

St Katherine’s Primary School

7.0 Introduction

This case study follows Kyra from St Katherine’s primary school, exploring how she organised the kindergarten curriculum to support her students’ social and emotional development. The St Katherine’s kindergarten programme reflected the school’s vision statement, which was centred on developing the whole child, not only by providing a holistic curriculum, but also by welcoming the involvement of parents and the community. St Katherine’s Primary aimed to encourage children to enjoy learning, stating: ‘a sense of joy for the learning adventure’, empowering them as valued, productive individuals (ACARA, 2009).

Two key themes emerged from the data collected from St Katherine’s kindergarten. First, Kyra overtly demonstrated respect towards kindergarten children. This was observed through the way she responded to the children’s ideas, their creations, their interactions and through the way she encouraged opportunities for them to be autonomous learners. It was possibly due to the respect that Kyra demonstrated towards children’s play that she was able to successfully enter their games and conversations without disrupting the flow of play; in this study her ability to do this was unparalleled.

The second theme to emerge was that Kyra decentralised the locus of control by empowering each child with being a teacher as well as a learner. As a result, the small activities that were set up around the classroom provided maximum learning opportunities as each area created a ZPD, and within each zone there were more knowledgeable others scaffolding the learning of their peers.
The data are organised under an interpersonal focus of analysis and a personal focus of analysis (Rogoff, 2003). The first perspective enabled an exploration of how the conversations that took place between peers in this classroom added to the children’s social and emotional development, in particular, their self-regulation. The second examines some conversations held by children as autonomous learners and thinkers, and investigates the context in which they took place.

This case study begins with an introduction to the kindergarten classroom dynamics and a brief background to the curriculum focus of St Katherine’s school. Together, these offered an insight into the educational environment in which Kyra worked towards developing the children’s social and emotional functioning.

7.1 St Katherine’s Kindergarten Background

There were 25 students enrolled in St Katherine’s kindergarten. The teacher, Kyra, was assisted by one education assistant, June. Both ladies shared a history of teaching kindergarten together, which may have contributed to the harmonious and respectful working relationship they had formed. There were no children with English as a Second Language (ESL) or students with disabilities in the classroom, and even though the children were constantly chatting, there were no behavioural issues.

St Katherine’s kindergarten ran for two full days, Tuesday and Thursday, with the whole group. There was also a third optional day where half the cohort attended. This day was offered to the parents at the beginning of the year at an additional cost, in anticipation of the universal access²⁴ initiative (15 hour week) that was to take place the following year.

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²⁴ Universal access ensures that all Australian children have access to quality early childhood education programmes. The programmes are to be delivered by a four-year university-trained early childhood teacher, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year, in the year before full time schooling. The commitment is to be fully implemented by mid-2013 (Australian Government website, available: http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/ECUA/Pages/home.aspx)
The parents demonstrated their support for the school by volunteering for parent roster in the kindergarten and helping in other school-organised events. This support enabled Kyra to develop the kindergarten curriculum in the way she felt best facilitated children’s learning. This, in turn, was further supported by the school’s ethos for learning, which was centred on enriching the journey of learning, not just focusing on the end learning product (ACARA, 2009).

7.1.1 The kindergarten programme.

St Katherine’s kindergarten programme was designed to promote children’s choice of activities, accessibility to equipment and interactions. In turn, these goals assisted in facilitating the children’s sense of autonomy, initiative, conversation and trust. In particular, children conversing with other children was very important to Kyra, and she encouraged conversation through the availability of certain activities, the accessibility of equipment, and through modelling respectful and thoughtful conversations.

There were some centres in the classroom that were consistently set up; in particular, the play dough and writing tables and the construction table. Near the writing table was a shelf that was kept stocked with both blank and stencilled paper and writing equipment. Similarly, the construction table was kept well equipped with boxes, sticky tape, glue, paper, string and other materials. The accessibility of the equipment was one factor in keeping the flow of conversation going, as the children did not need to interrupt what they were saying to go and ask a teacher for materials. In addition, the constructions that the children made provided impetus for discussion and learning, as the following relays:
Vignette 7.0

Kate made a dog out of a box and ribbon. I asked her if she had made a dog. She nodded proudly and added she was going to make two. She walked over to Kyra to show her. She returned to the table after Kyra made a fuss over her and quietly worked on her second dog. Kate pulled at the masking tape but could not get it off. While she struggled she spoke incoherently to herself. Finally, when the tape came free, she validated her efforts by saying, ‘There!’ One of the other girls at the table, Melissa, asked Kate what she was making. ‘Dog’, Kate quickly replied and walked away with her finished dog scowling at Melissa. Kate returned to the construction table. The girl across from her asked how many dogs she has. Kate said she has two at home. The girl said, ‘Now you will have five.’ Kate laughed (Observation, 13/8/2009).

Kyra admitted that sometimes she felt like a change from the construction table and that she did not like stencilled drawings, but she continued to set them up each morning to encourage the conversations that occurred around them. She said that for the most part she did not know what was being said, but she knew that rich conversations took place every time the children gathered at these tables (Interview, 15/12/09).

Another factor that contributed to the rich conversations in this classroom was the conversations that Kyra held with the children. Every time Kyra entered a conversation or began one, she demonstrated respect for the other’s opinion, ideas and thoughts, offering a warm and respectful model for the children to follow.

Many of the conversations Kyra conducted with the children demonstrated that she valued their ideas and suggestions. She achieved this by frequently engaging in back and forth exchanges with the children, which, in turn provided them with a forum in which to express and extend their ideas. Often Kyra repeated the children’s ideas to either some or all of the class, and in doing so, let the others know how valuable the
child’s suggestion was, or to create a forum in which the others could generate their own ideas.

More importantly, where possible, Kyra acted on the children’s suggestions by incorporating them into her programme. This flexibility demonstrated a high regard for the children’s perspectives and was indicative of a quality programme, as measured by the CLASS instrument (Pianta et al., 2008; see Appendix D).

In turn, the relationship Kyra formed with the children through respecting them as independent thinkers further enhanced the learning in the classroom by creating a shared affective space, which is essential for creating the ZPD. As a result, these conversations were more likely to create an optimal learning environment (Goldstein, 1999; Noddings, 1984).

The data verified that this was a classroom full of conversations. Sometimes Kyra would stop them and remind them to be quiet, but the noise would soon resume. Kyra responded to the statement in the initial survey, ‘The sound of my classroom is characterised by quiet’ with ‘What is quiet?’ (Teacher Styles and Preferences Survey, 14/5/09). In reality, Kyra did not mind the noise; however, like Claire from St Christopher’s Primary, she sometimes became concerned that visitors to the classroom would misconstrue the noise as bad behaviour.

The classroom was designed so that all the activities children could work on independently were at one end of the classroom while those activities that needed more supervision were at the other end. The classroom layout facilitated a free flow of movement between all activities. Although Kyra could easily monitor what the children were up to from where she positioned herself, the children were left to use their own initiative and decision-making when choosing activities and playmates. Research (e.g., Zins et al., 2007; Zins & Elias, 2007) state that classroom programmes that encourage children to make choices are more likely to facilitate the development of children’s
social and emotional skills. Further, Rogoff (1995) recognised the importance of children’s choices as being the distal arrangements of activity and as part of the guided participation process.

Figure 7.1: The layout of St Katherine’s kindergarten.

Kyra often got up from the activity she was supervising and talked to the children around the classroom, and in doing so, not only could she see what the children were doing, she could also extend their learning through showing an individual child’s work to the whole class, or by detecting prospective problems children were going to face and proposing a series of questions about how they were going to reach a solution. On occasion, Kyra would also skilfully include other children in the problem-solving process, and in doing so facilitated the development of collaboration, perspective-taking and negotiation. For example:
Vignette 7.1

Kyra approached Kieran and asked him how many pieces of paper he thought he needed to rest his wet construction on. He said ‘two’. Kyra nodded and Kieran went and got two sheets of paper and put them on the floor. Kyra asked him if he thought that was going to be big enough. Kieran looked unsure so Kyra suggested they measure. Kieran said he thought he needed one more sheet of paper, and placed that down on the ground next to the other two. He tried to pick up his construction but it was too large. Another boy walked over, and Kyra posed the question: ‘what should we do?’ The boys deliberated on how they were going to move the boxes (Observations, 2/6/2009).

This vignette highlighted two points that were typical to this classroom: (1) it demonstrated how Kyra utilised moments in the ZPD to scaffold children’s development by offering strategic support to them while they were engaged in activities arising from their interests and actions, and (2) it demonstrated how Kyra guided children while they were engaged in sociocultural activities, using both explicit and implicit directions to encourage them to use critical and divergent thinking and employ multiple tools as problem-solving strategies, such as in this case, engaging others in collaborative thought.

The tools that the children learned through these exchanges provided them with a number of strategies for problem-solving, both at the time and in future similar situations. Or in other words, through their participation in sociocultural activities their skills transformed, preparing them for independent participation in more mature forms of that activity. Even though the cognitive benefits to this scenario are obvious, there is also critical social and emotional development, as Kieran was enabled to become aware of himself as a self-efficacious learner while engaging in problem solving and
communicating with others to facilitate cooperative problem-solving strategies (see Table 4.1).

The type of interaction detailed by the vignette is exemplary of the intentional teaching which was identified as recommended practice in the EYLF (DEEWR & CAG, 2009) and suggested as excellent early childhood pedagogy by Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004). The aim of intentional teaching is to ‘foster high-level thinking skills’ while children and their social partners are engaged in culturally valued activities (DEEWR & CAG, 2009, p. 15).

Overall, Kyra designed centres throughout the classroom that on their own created the ZPD, and within the zones she modelled and guided children on how they could scaffold each other’s learning. As a result, the centres were a rich source for the development of higher functions such as logical memory and voluntary attention, as they made these readily available at the social level (interpsychological) through both teacher and peer interactions providing more opportunity for these functions to be internalised on an intrapsychological level (Vygotsky, 1978).

7.2 The Interpersonal Focus of Analysis

Kyra cultivated a rich learning environment by empowering every child as both a learner and a teacher. She achieved this by (1) creating an environment where the children knew their suggestions and their thoughts would be well received and acted upon, and (2) directing children to other children for assistance, or alternatively, she made children aware that they were in a position to assist others. Consequently, the mutual involvement, communication, and guidance and support of others that is indicative of the interpersonal level was not isolated to the child and the adult; rather, it was interspersed throughout the multiple interactions that occurred simultaneously around the classroom.
Normal everyday interpersonal interactions were a source of learning, as the following vignette indicates:

_Vignette 7.2_

Kyra walked past the home corner and noticed a doll lying alone on a chair. She looked over to where Karen and Kate were sitting. Upon seeing Kate with the mother’s scarf on called over to her and informed her, “Kate, your baby’s crying!” Kate immediately got up and fetched her baby.

Karen looked over to the doll on Kate’s knee and asked, ‘That’s a cute baby. What’s her name?’

Kate replied, ‘She doesn’t have one yet.’

‘Is she still little?’ Sarah asked.

Kate admired her doll and said, ‘She looks like a rainbow princess. ...She doesn’t really seem...she doesn’t have any hair yet.’

Karen asked, ‘Do you have any other children?’

‘This is a sister and I have two girls. See the girls in there (indicating to home corner). It’s their birthday.’

‘I see’, said Karen, ‘So that’s the family.’

There was silence for a short time while the girls coloured. Then Karen asked, ‘Connor or Jackson...which one would you like to marry?’

Kate thought briefly and then replied, ‘Well, I’m definitely not going to marry Jeremy. He’s not handsome.’

Karen redirected her, ‘Connor or Jackson?’

Kate clarified, ‘Are you asking who I’m going to marry in real life or in the game?’

‘In the game.’

Kate stated, ‘In the game I’ll marry Keith, because he’s handsome.’
After a while I asked Karen who she would marry. She stared at me, with a look of shock. After a while of awkward silence I asked who she would marry in the game. Once again Karen (who is usually very talkative) was quiet. Finally, with a residual look of disdain, she pointed to Kate. Kate, recognising her cue casually explained, ‘Only I get married because she’s the big sister.’

Kate started to sing as she coloured. Karen commented, ‘That’s a nice song.’

(Observation, 12/11/09)

Four points emerged from this vignette. The first refutes previously held convictions (Piaget, 1959) on children’s in/ability to engage in sustained social intercourse. The other three points centre on the development that was occurring while the girls were engaged in this culturally-embedded dialogue: first, the emergent literacy that was occurring as resultant of the sustained social intercourse shared by the children; second, the children’s use of rules of behaviour that were evident in the discourse (Vygotsky, 1978); and third, the creation of the ZPD with a more competent peer and the role of imitation in development.

With regard to the former, this vignette challenges the Piagetian idea that children under the age of seven or eight are unable to engage in sustained conversation. These beliefs originated from the works of Piaget (1959) and his reasoning why egocentrism dominated children’s talk before the age of seven. In his conclusions he deduced that children of this age used so much egocentric talk because ‘sustained social intercourse’ did not exist between them and that their play was typified by ‘gestures, movements and mimicry’ as well as words, indicating there is no real social life between young children (Piaget, 1959, p. 40).

However, this vignette clearly demonstrates two things: first, this scenario was of two four-year-old girls engaged in a play situation, and second, this play scenario was created purely through sustained conversation. Further, not only do I argue that this
play scenario was depictive of sustained social intercourse; I also postulate that in this conversation’s structure, content and reciprocity it created the foundation for literacy development (see Chapter 4). Specifically, these are ‘symbolic transformation’ (whoever wore the scarf was the mother), ‘metaplay’ (child clarifying whether it was in real life or in the game) and ‘narrative elements’ (the play was framed, i.e., their talk was interchangeable between the real world and their imagery; *decontextualised language was produced and understood*; i.e., props were not necessarily visible, and the *involvement of characters and plot elements*, i.e., both girls held firm to their roles of ‘mother’ and ‘big sister’ [DeZutter, 2007, p. 221]). Therefore, not only was the social intercourse sustained in the girls’ play, but its quality provided an important context for development.

Moreover, this social situation led to the development of social skills, in particular, self-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978). The social discourse was bound by implicit rules, and only those actions that fit the rules defining the girl’s roles were acceptable. Consequently, my deviation from the rules of the roles, i.e., asking the big sister who she would marry, was not received well. The girls themselves monitored their responses so that they remained true to their roles, even with Karen encouraging Kate—as the mother—to let me know of my mistake.

The girl’s knowledge of their respective roles was derived from their own experiences. Hence, the conversations were possibly imitations of what they had heard by these characters in real life. Imitation is perceived by Vygotsky (1978) as one of the paths towards learning and development, stating that through imitation children ‘develop an entire repository of skills’ (p. 84). In particular, when children engage in activity such as this they develop and practice skills in perspective-taking, accurate self-perception, respect for others, negotiation, impulse control and communication, which are all essential skills in learning.
Finally, yet fundamentally, the play context created the ZPD where Karen, being the more competent peer, led Kate through the adult-like discourse and through this guidance benefited both children’s literacy development and that of self-regulation.

Inadvertently, Kyra facilitated this interaction by creating an environment in which it could happen. In this classroom, the dress-ups were representative of roles, e.g., the mother always wore a particular scarf and the big sister always wore a particular dress, and whoever wore those costumes remained in character for as long as they had them on. Kyra allowed the children to remain in dress-up throughout the whole day, in contrast to many other classrooms where the children had to take the dress-up off as soon as they left the home corner. Hence, even though the girls in this vignette were at the writing table, they remained in character as they still wore their ‘mother’ and ‘big sister’ costumes.

More intentionally, Kyra encouraged collaborative or guiding peer interactions, as, for example, in the vignette given earlier of Kyra opening up the problem-solving discussion involving moving Kieran’s oversized construction to include another child. Similarly, I observed her telling one of the girls that another child was hoping to construct a bird and the bird picture on her cereal box may help him in his design. Then Kyra alerted the boy that the girl had a picture of a bird that may help him (Observation, 15/12/2009). Through actively encouraging those interpersonal interactions where collaboration or guidance could take place, Kyra increased the learning opportunities in her classroom (Rogoff, 1995).

7.3 The Personal Focus of Analysis

A theme of encouraging the children’s autonomous interactions surfaced throughout the data. It appeared as though Kyra was continually empowering the children with the knowledge that they were independent thinkers and self-efficacious
individuals. As a consequence, these qualities began to emerge through the children’s interactions and in the way they viewed problems. Although much of the following section reflects the interpersonal dimension, the focus is on the child’s engagement and responses. The point of the two examples that are provided is that the children independently engage in persuasive discussion, a skill that is developed through modelling and experience.

The first example is a vignette that demonstrates how one of the children, Kelsey, used problem-solving skills to convince Kyra that her idea would work even when Kyra thought it would not:

*Vignette 7.3*

When Kyra approached the table, Kelsey asked her if they could make a restaurant again. Kyra said they may not be able to because previously they could all fit in the home corner because there were only ten of them. Kyra told her there were too many children today and offered to count them with Kelsey. Once this was done, she counted the chairs in the home corner. Unperturbed, Kelsey stressed they could use the whole area (including the colouring table and other tables). Kyra thought for a moment and then agreed that it could be done. Kelsey stopped talking almost mid-sentence as she caught her reflection in the mirror. Kyra noticed, and commented how beautiful she looked (Observation, 2/7/2009).

Although the idea of a restaurant was not original to Kelsey, her ability to apply it to a different class dynamic was. She successfully countered Kyra’s argument as to why they could not have the restaurant by effectively communicating her reasoning and solution. Whether or not Kelsey was capable of this kind of persuasive conversation prior to her experience in St Katherine’s kindergarten is unknown; however, it was
reflective of the interactions that occurred in the classroom indicating that it was possible that this skill had been acquired or developed in the classroom.

The second example is similar to the first where a child uses persuasive language to suggest a change in routine or activity. In this case, one of the boys, Keith, suggested they changed the way they chose the leader\textsuperscript{25} for the week. Once again, Kyra discussed his idea, listening to his reasoning before agreeing to take it on (Observation, 2/7/2009).

Integral to many of these kinds of discussions was exactly that—they were discussions. Kyra did not end the conversation with an autocratic ‘no’; rather, she entered into a discussion explaining why she felt they could not repeat the restaurant scenario from the day before and listened to Kelsey’s reasoning why she believed they could, and equally, she listened to Keith’s logic on an alternative way to choose the leader.

Longitudinal research published by Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) associated discussions, or as they termed them, ‘sustained shared thinking’ (p. 720) with positive cognitive outcomes. Similarly, using this adopted terminology, the EYLF recommended ‘sustained shared conversation’ as best practice in extending children’s thinking, particularly in play situations (DEEWR & CAG, 2009, p. 15).

However, there is more to benefit here from just cognitive outcomes. The definition for social and emotional development provided by this study identified that the communication and social engagement that was occurring in this classroom were social and emotional competencies (see Table 4.1). As a result of the conversations in this classroom, children were inadvertently refining their social skills of relationship

\textsuperscript{25} The leader is one of the children chosen each week to perform special classroom duties, such as handing out equipment.
management, responsible decision-making, self-awareness, social awareness and self-regulation (Zins et al., 2007; Zins & Elias, 2007).

In addition to developing social competencies, the process of engaging in conversations also worked towards creating a shared affective space that in turn enabled the ZPD to take place. Reciprocally, the very essence of working within this zone contributed to the children developing conversational skills, as Kyra’s sensitivity towards their ideas and interests created an environment that promoted sustained shared thinking (Goldstein, 1999). Concisely, the form of shared communication demonstrated in this classroom provides the catalyst for synergic development, and is exemplary of ‘holistic’ pedagogy (EYLF: Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments, 2009, p. 14).

7.4 Discussion

The concepts used to guide this discussion include the ZPD, guided participation, the interrelational dimension and the concepts of relationships, environment and play as integral to learning social and emotional development. Like the complexity and interrelatedness of early childhood settings, these concepts also intertwine; however, to not discuss them with the integrity that each perspective takes would not accurately reflect the contexts from which the data were taken.

7.4.1 The ZPD.

Kyra intentionally organised multiple centres in the classroom that had the potential of creating a ZPD. This potential was maximised through Kyra demonstrating to children how they could engage in conversations that would scaffold their peers within this zone. Consequently, the children were empowered as teachers as well as
learners, and scaffolded their peers in situations that would have otherwise required an adult. Their conversations were observed to incorporate the tools that Kyra had modelled as she circulated around the classroom, i.e., they would share their discovery with peers, ask them questions about what they were doing, or talk over a problem with a friend. As a consequence, the children contributed to the knowledge in the social plane (interpsychological level), amplifying the learning potential presented by the kindergarten curriculum.

7.4.2 The guided participation.

The child-guided activities in this classroom were typified by dynamicity, where the roles in learning, whether it was Kyra and a child, or a child and a peer, were continually shifting, with the novice in each situation gradually gaining more responsibility for his or her own learning.

This was made possible because Kyra acknowledged that learning was happening all over the room and not just where she, or her assistant, were involved in teacher-guided activities. Hence, she regularly circulated around the room and seized those opportunities that presented themselves to model problem-solving strategies to children, offering help only where she observed the children could not work it out for themselves. In her discussions with children, she appeared to remain sensitive to children’s tacit cues that were indicative of their levels of understanding, and adjusted her instructions and assistance accordingly.

In addition, Kyra showed the children how to offer each other assistance, allowing children to guide their peers in the same situations in which they were once the novice. In doing so, she created a learning environment that not only developed cognitive skills, but because she encouraged peer mentoring, additional skills such as relationship management, self and social awareness, responsible decision-making and
self-regulation (see Table 3.1) were also practiced. Often, the centres were observed to run with only children mentoring peers, in a process that had been scaffolded through the initial teacher assistance.

Although in the other focus kindergartens dynamicity in guided participation was apparent during the observations, in that the children’s responses reflected that they had gained the skills the teachers were teaching (or at least could repeat them), the peer mentoring that was evident in Kyra’s classroom was more indicative of skills that had been mastered. Further, because the children were viewing the skill from the perspective of the expert, in addition to their previous perspective as novice, they were in a better position to further consolidate their understanding of the cognitive skills involved and were in more of a position to broaden their social repertoires.

7.4.3 The interrelational dimension.

Integral to the interrelational dimension is the one-caring and one cared-for relationship. In this case study, this relationship was demonstrated through the respectful conversations shared between Kyra and the children, as well as through peer interactions. This was because Kyra’s interactions with the children were indicative of her responsiveness to children’s needs and ideas.

More often than not, the conversations recorded were made while the children were engaged in child-guided experiences and Kyra had casually walked by and noticed what they were doing. Kyra often engaged the children in conversation by asking them how they were going to solve a problem. In the discussions she did not provide the children with solutions; rather, she would prompt them to arrive at their own. It appeared as though Kyra valued these discussions as much as she valued the learning in the teacher-guided activities, and as such, dedicated time to encouraging children to talk through their thinking processes. Consequently, these conversations embodied more
than just the solution; they also demonstrated the process of problem-solving, equipping children with skills that they could apply to future situations, as well as to share with their peers.

The respectful conversations appeared to be enjoyed by both social partners and possibly because of this, the conversations were often observed to be sustained. In this study, the length of time that Kyra remained engaged in sustained shared interactions with the children was unparalleled. This could have been because of two probable reasons: (1) in most of the other classrooms the teachers were observed to suggest solutions after only one or two (or no) prompts, possibly because the focus was on a quick solution (the product) as opposed to the process (the analytical thinking), and/or (2) the other teachers were rarely observed talking to children about what they were doing in child-guided activities (they invested their time and attention in teacher-guided activities).

7.4.4 The relationships, environment and play.

The respectful, reciprocal relationships, interesting and safe environments and complex socio-dramatic and cooperative play that characterised this classroom worked synergistically to create an environment that facilitated a strong foundation for developing children’s social and emotional skills.

Each element played an integral role in promoting the effectiveness of the other. The warm relationships, for example, created safe environments, which in turn encouraged children to play. Over the observation period, the play continuously grew more complex and sophisticated, which further strengthened relationships and created safe environments that were rich in creativity and encouraged exploration. Consequently, these elements worked cohesively together to reinforce Kyra’s support of children’s social and emotional development, and the degree to which this support was
provided also increased with the growing sophistication of the relationships, environment and play.

The following figure (Figure 7.2) depicts how when each of these three elements are promoted in the classroom, they strengthen and support social and emotional development. The closeness of each third of the circle indicates the holistic and continuous development of the child.

![Diagram showing the interaction between relationships, play, and environment]

Figure 7.2: How the interaction between relationships, play and environment work synergistically to create a classroom environment that supports children’s social and emotional development.

7.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the programme that Kyra offered was supported by St Katherine’s school and community. This enabled Kyra to offer a programme that she felt more appropriate for kindergarten-aged children, and not surrender to a pushdown curriculum. In this classroom climate, Kyra supported the children’s social and emotional development by demonstrating she was sensitive to their feelings, thoughts
and ideas; through encouraging autonomy by arranging the classroom so that materials and equipment were accessible to children; by providing a variety of activities for them to choose from and through encouraging conversation. As this latter point defined Kyra’s classroom, it is discussed further.

Conversation constantly filled St Katherine’s kindergarten. This was because Kyra demonstrated by example that language is a useful tool for learning and discovery. She often wondered aloud to herself or wondered with children, and in doing so would enter into sustained shared conversations that were integral to both conceptual and social and emotional development. Moreover, Kyra encouraged children to enter into sustained shared conversations with each other, maximising the potential for learning through interactions in the classroom.

Kyra was aware of the moments when to enter children’s play and extend their thinking, demonstrating an ability to intentionally teach—a trait that is linked to quality teaching. It is interesting to note that during the observation period these moments tended to outweigh the teacher-guided work, which is identified as being more directly linked to cognitive outcomes (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). These authors, and others (e.g., Epstein, 2007), recommend a balance between the opportunities for learning through freely chosen play activities and teacher-guided group work as quality early childhood pedagogy.
Chapter Eight: Case Study 3—Claire’s Story

St Christopher’s Primary School

8.0 Introduction

With the support of the school community, the kindergarten teacher, Claire, developed a curriculum using an integrated approach linking cognitive, emotional and social development to offer optimal learning opportunities. This approach was supported by St Christopher’s educational vision (My School website), and as such, was implemented throughout the school.

In line with current Australian educational policies, St Christopher’s Primary aimed to develop children’s literacy and numeracy skills, but did so from the perspective that children’s educational performance is enhanced when they possess a positive disposition towards learning. In this way, St Christopher’s Primary espoused a progressive curriculum, where the education philosophy embraced the idea that children should be taught how to think through exploration and discovery, as opposed to learning just for assessment scores.

The key theme to emerge from the data collected from St Christopher’s kindergarten was that children’s social interactions need to be closely observed in order to ensure: (1) that the relationships they are developing are mutually beneficial, and (2) that they are using classroom equipment in an educationally resourceful way.

The data are organised under the interpersonal focus of analysis and the personal focus of analysis (Rogoff, 2003). The first perspective enabled an exploration of some of the interactions that took place and how these interactions supported children’s social and emotional development. The second facilitated an investigation into how Caleb used his social and emotional skills to interact with others in the classroom.
This case study begins with an introduction to the kindergarten classroom dynamics and a brief background to the curriculum focus of St Christopher’s school. Together, these offer an insight into the educational environment in which Claire worked towards developing the children’s social and emotional functioning.

8.1 St Christopher’s Kindergarten Background

St Christopher’s primary school was located in a middle class area. There were 28 children enrolled in St Christopher’s kindergarten, and because of this, Claire was supported by two education assistants. One of the children, Caitlin, had cerebral palsy and some developmental delay. Even though she required some assistance with toileting she did not have a special needs assistant. As a result, one of the regular education assistants was sometimes absent from the group while assisting Caitlin.

The kindergarten programme ran every Tuesday and Thursday from 9am to 3pm. Although there was a parent roster, their help in the classroom was intermittent, and waned considerably by the end of the year. The principal, however, was a regular visitor (as he was to all the classrooms), who worked with Claire to create an interactive and educational classroom and outdoor area. In addition, he paid particular attention to school initiatives such as the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) programme, and possibly due to this interest, guaranteed their full implementation into classroom curricula.

26 The PATHS programme teaches primary school children how to choose alternative behaviours and attitudes to more aggressive responses, how to express and control their emotions and how to develop conflict-resolution strategies. The kindergarten PATHS component aims to improve children’s knowledge about emotions as well as their social and emotional competence (Kusché & Greenberg, 1994) (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1).
8.1.1 The kindergarten programme.

St Christopher’s kindergarten differed from the other focus kindergartens mainly due to the profusion of classroom educational resources that lined the perimeter of the room. For example, there was a SMART board\(^\text{27}\), a maths centre that offered magnetic and three dimensional puzzles, number cards and shapes; a science centre which had a light table, toy insects and related books, and a writing centre where children were encouraged to draw the insects—a lot of this equipment had been acquired by Claire on her appointment to kindergarten at the beginning of second term (she had formerly been the pre-primary teacher). In addition, there were those activities that were typical to all the kindergartens in this study, such as the home corner, block and jigsaw centre and a book corner (complete with sofa) (see Figure 8.1).

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\(^{27}\) Interactive whiteboard.
Much like the other kindergartens participating in this study, St Christopher’s kindergarten programme was organised using a thematic approach. However, differentiating this programme from the others was the implementation of the PATHS programme and how it featured prominently throughout the course of the day.

As mentioned previously, the school’s principal had introduced the PATHS programme to the school, and his continued interest in it may have contributed to it being fully implemented in the classrooms. The implementation of the PATHS programme was further enhanced through Claire’s belief in the programme’s outcomes, as she stated it was similar to what she would have done anyway (Interview, 15/12/2009).

Claire intended to make the PATHS programme significant to the children by rostering a PATHS child. This position required the PATHS child to perform tasks that the class perceived as significant, such as ringing the bell at transition times and sitting next to Claire on a child’s chair during mat sessions. It was during these mat sessions that Claire introduced those PATH strategies that would enable children to identify and appropriately respond to their emotions.

Throughout the observations, the effectiveness of the PATH strategies was not evident. Even though the children were at times confronted with conflict, in those circumstances they did not apply the strategies prescribed by the programme. In addition, I did not observe Claire coach PATH strategies during less formal situations, such as during small-group or individual play times, which may have been more causal than coincidental.

Research suggests that had Claire applied the PATH strategies at the times that were relevant to the children, then there would have been a greater probability that the children would have adopted the strategies as their own. Dewey (1938), for example,
believed that optimal learning occurred when it was embedded within situational learning characterised with social interactions.

Within this situational learning, Claire could have coached children in using private speech (Vygotsky, 1978), guided by the PATHS dialogue and ethos in regulating their social and emotional behaviours. With coaching in these situations, the children would have been more likely to independently recognise similar situations and apply the PATH strategies appropriately. As it was, in this classroom the theory appeared separate from the practice, and possibly for this reason, the coping mechanisms purported by the PATHS curriculum were rendered less accessible to the children at the times they most needed it.

With reference to the classroom timetable, this classroom was typical of most of those in this study; that is, it began with an initial whole-class mat session, followed by indoor activities. After activity time, the children would meet again for a whole-group session and then have morning tea inside the classroom. After morning tea, the children went outside to play. The afternoon followed a similar routine, beginning with a whole-group session, and so on.

In St Christopher’s kindergarten, during activity time, Claire often chose to work with only one or two students at a time while her assistants worked together supervising a group of six to eight students. Those children who were not involved in a teacher-guided activity played around the perimeter of the room with the equipment and resources Claire had set up. While Claire was preoccupied with her activity she would occasionally glance around the classroom to ensure all the children were working harmoniously. When she was not occupied by the activity, she would walk around and sit with the children while they were engaged in child-guided activities. While Claire sat with the children in child-guided activities, I did not observe her engage in sustained
shared thinking with them; rather, her attention appeared to be on monitoring the rest of
the class and not with the children she was with.

It transpired throughout the observation period that Claire was worried that I
would assume her class was not well-behaved. Not only would she constantly apologise
for the noise the children were making, she appeared to watch where I was looking and
if it was something she did not like, she would quickly ‘edit’ the situation to become
something that she wanted me to see. Consequently, I was never sure if her ‘editing’
was typical of her normal practice, or if it was just the hastiest way to make things
appear (in her mind) better to me.

Although in all the focus classrooms my identity as a researcher was never
neutral; that is, all the teachers recognised me as a researcher and asked me to make my
observations in the morning as they considered this time would show both them and the
children in the best light, my presence as an ‘outsider’ tended to be more exaggerated in
St Christopher’s kindergarten.

It is accepted that practices do change when an outsider is present, as Rogoff
(2003) explains:

There are only a few situations in which the presence of outside observers does
not transform ongoing events into public ones: if the event is already public, if
their presence is undetected, or if they are so familiar that their presence goes
without note (p. 27).

As I was constantly under Claire’s surveillance, my presence was consistently
detected, and as a result, it is possible that what I observed was not entirely typical of
ongoing events. The consequence of this was I did not get the opportunity to observe
Claire engage in sustained shared thinking with the children and her interactions with them appeared somewhat detached.

8.2 The Interpersonal Focus of Analysis

Using an interpersonal focus of analysis to view the data proved useful in identifying the need for teachers to observe children while they interact in child-guided activities in order to understand: (1) the dynamics occurring between friends, and (2) how children are interacting with equipment.

In this classroom, some of the children’s behaviours tended not to be reflective of the pro-social behaviours encouraged by Claire, her assistants or the principles outlined by the PATHS programme. It is possible that these less appropriate behaviours were perpetuated because first, Claire was unaware they occurred, and second, was not available in situ to guide the children in forming more appropriate behaviours.

During activity time, Claire positioned herself in the middle of the classroom, more or less anchored to an activity. Even though during this activity she was constantly scanning the room, the distance kept between her and the children meant that she could not hear the conversations that are necessary for discerning the nature of their interactions, nor was she available to guide children during the sociocultural activities that they had elected to participate in.

8.2.1 The dynamics between friends.

I will use the interactions I observed between two of the boys, Caleb and Callan, to illustrate this point. Caleb and Callan had been firm friends for the whole year (Informal interview). Initially when I observed them (at a distance), their relationship

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28 This case was the only situation where I was concerned that my presence might have altered interactions and events. This concern did not follow through to the other participating classrooms where I often hear the comment, “Oh, I forgot you were here!”
appeared typical of most young boys; that is, they fooled around playing with the equipment, and so on. However, when I observed their friendship more closely, I realised that not only did these boys intentionally avoid interactions with other children, but also that they rarely engaged each other in sustained social intercourse. The extent of their exclusivity is captured in the following observation:

_Vignette 8.0_

Claire put some music on—it had a catchy beat and attracted most of the class. Caleb and Callan, however, went over to the maths/puzzle centre. Every now and again, Callan’s head bopped in time with the music. Craig bounded up to the two boys and asked loudly, ‘What are you making?’ Neither Callan nor Caleb responded. The boy who followed Craig over tried to grab a block near Caleb. Caleb protested, saying, ‘They’re mine!’ Two other boys came over and sat next to Caleb, causing the once dyad to look like a circle of six boys. All the boys started playing with the blocks. Callan turned around so his back was to the group. He began playing with a maze puzzle that was lying behind him. Craig looked at Caleb and asked him what he was making. Caleb ignored him. When Craig received no response, he repeated his query. Caleb still did not respond, and instead shoved the last block into his construction, got up and walked around the group to sit in front of Callan, reforming their exclusive group of two (Observation, 10/9/09).

This vignette was typical of the data collected on these two boys’ interactions. Looking at the data collectively, two key features emerged, both of which potentially had negative implications for the boys’ social, emotional and cognitive development. First, the boys’ relationship was characterised by exclusivity. Both boys were observed on a number of occasions to actively avoid the company of other children. Second,
neither boy was observed engaging in sustained shared thinking (or conversation) with anybody in the classroom, including each other.

Studies concur that there is more likelihood that poor quality peer relationships will have greater negative implications for children’s psychological and social development (see Chapter 4, Section 4.10). Specifically, findings from research conducted by Ladd, Kochenderfer and Coleman (1996) assert that exclusive relationships have negative implications for children’s social and emotional development, in that they develop weaker support networks in the classroom, which in turn, adversely affects their academic performance.

How exclusivity can potentially affect children’s academic performance can be explained, in part, through Vygotsky’s (1978) process of internalisation. Integral to this process is that every function in children’s development appears twice—first at the social level; that is, between people (interpsychological), and later at the individual level (intrapsychological). Through limiting the social level to just the two, these children precluded the inclusion of a wider range of differential expertise in the sociocultural activities in which they participated.

Further exacerbating this situation was that the boys rarely used language, even between themselves. Consequently, the very nature of their relationship diminished the opportunities for them to engage in those social discourses that are likely to extend their social knowledge, increase their social repertoires and develop higher-order thinking skills (Vygotsky, 1978, 1985). Hence, the isolation and lack of communication defining this relationship constrained important opportunities for scaffolding the boys’ thinking and skill development.

The boys’ relationship, and the potential for development within it, can be more closely examined using Rogoff’s (1990, 2003) concept of guided participation. Guided participation involves ‘adults or children challenging, constraining, and supporting
children in the process of posing and solving problems—through material arrangements of children’s activities and responsibilities as well as through interpersonal communication, with children observing and participating at a comfortable but slightly challenging level’ (Rogoff, 1990, p. 18).

In view of this, even though the boys participated in activities together, their involvement was more characteristic of parallel play (Parten, 1932). Hence, the participation that I observed could not exactly be defined as ‘shared’ and the constrained communication that they did use tended not to entail positing problems or attempts to solve them; what is more, the boys’ exclusivity prevented any other child or adult from filling these roles. Therefore, their relationship was not exemplar of the guided participation in which children strive to learn from those around them; rather, it was more depictive of a secular and stagnant state, which appeared to do little in adding to the developmental goals sought by the school. Consequently, the capacity for optimal learning and development, or the potential to transform through participation, in this circumstance, was considerably diminished.

From an interrelational perspective, the exclusivity of the relationship also diminished the possibility of either child participating in interactions as the one-cared for with the one-caring (Goldstein, 1999). The implications for not experiencing this caring relationship, especially with an adult, are twofold. First, as a caring relationship is needed to create the ZPD, there were fewer opportunities for the boys to operate in this zone. Second, this relationship also had the potential of impairing the boys’ sense of security, which in turn would lessen the likelihood of them exploring the social and academic milieu presented by the classroom (Howes, 2000; Ladd et al., 1996).

When I informed Claire of what I had observed with regard to the exclusivity of the relationship, she confessed that she was unaware of the extent to which the boys kept to themselves. She would try to encourage them to interact with other children. On
my next visit, I observed that Caleb had diversified his friendships, and although Callan appeared reluctant, he also was with other children. Claire informed me that although she had tried to implement strategies to encourage the boys to play with other children, the breakthrough occurred when Callan was away sick for a week and Caleb was forced to interact with other children.

8.2.2 The interactions with the equipment.

This classroom offered a rich variety of educative resources that were set up around the perimeter of the classroom for the children to access freely. However, despite the educative value, the way in which some children were observed to utilise them tended to diminish their potential to support learning, for example:

Vignette 8.1

In the corner of the room sat Chloe, Christine, Cristal and Craig. Christine was pretending to be a baby and started throwing transparent plastic shapes around. Chloe chastised her, and in keeping in role, said, ‘Darling, don’t throw it near our faces.’ Christine threw another piece. Cristal said in a very calm, slightly disinterested tone, ‘Darling, don’t throw it on mama.’ Christine started throwing more and more pieces, pulling them out in handfuls from a plastic container. Cristal protested by saying ‘Darling!’ (Observation, 20/8/2009).

The children depicted in this example were playing in the maths centre; however, the thoughtless use of equipment tended to be typical of how many of the resources in the classroom were used. The children played like this for approximately 40 minutes without redirection or reproach from Claire or either of the education assistants. Consequently, any potential educational gains made through interacting with the resources were minimised.
The futility in which these resources were used by the children is realised when we view the resources as Vygotsky (1978) saw them—as culturally significant tools that have been intentionally included in the classroom curriculum to support learning. Cultural experience has demonstrated that these tools, when used in defined ways, are useful in solving certain problems or in scaffolding understandings. Basically, the usefulness of the tools is dependent upon how they are used, and it was because they were not used properly that they could not contribute to the children’s development.

Moreover, the haphazard way in which the children interacted with the equipment tended to mirror how they were interacting with each other. Consequently, in addition to not supporting the learning the equipment was intended for, the attributes of the children’s play also tended not to add to development as it was not bound by those rules that promote self-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978), nor was it structured in such a way as to support emergent literacy skills (DeZutter, 2007).

Collectively, the children’s interactions with the equipment and with each other while using this equipment was characterised by a lack of understanding and proficiency, which, in line with the CLASS instrument (see Appendix D), tended to diminish the quality of interactions in the classroom (Pianta et al., 2008).

The scene depicted in this vignette provided an ideal setting in which guided participation could take place. That is, the children were engaged in activity and with playmates of their own choosing; hence the children’s eagerness to participate, which is essential for learning, was already there. All they needed was guidance from a more competent peer or an adult in how to use the equipment in a more productive manner.

In this classroom, at the time of observations this guidance did not occur in these settings because the teachers were occupied by teacher-guided activities and were unaware (and unavailable) to identify and offer the support these children needed. Had this guidance occurred, it is likely that the more purposive use of equipment would have
led to more planned and cooperative play behaviours. This, in turn would have resulted in more positive social and emotional development, as well as cognitive gains.

In addition, the scene depicted in the vignette was also an ideal opportunity for Claire to build her relationship with the children. This setting, as it was not outcome-oriented, was suitable for allowing the children to engage in conversation and activity of their own choice creating, an affective space that, once established, may be transferred to more structured teacher-guided activities. This relationship must exist if the ZPD is to take place, and these are the situations in which these relationships are best built.

8.3 The Personal Focus of Analysis

When examining the children’s social and emotional development using the personal focus of analysis, I refer back to the boys introduced earlier, Caleb and Callan, to illustrate social changes that occurred seemingly on a personal level. As mentioned in this example, I had noted a shift in the dynamics of the boys’ relationship, which Claire attributed to Callan being away for a week.

It appeared that the one week Caleb experienced without the confines of Callan’s friendship enabled him to participate in ongoing activity with other peers. In turn, this participation awakened his sense of social awareness, allowing him to realise that the other children were enjoyable to be around. As a result of this realisation, a myriad of learning opportunities opened up to Caleb, enabling him to benefit from his peers’ expertise in the different activity centres. Further, as all classrooms are typically peer group contexts, it is a likely prediction that Caleb’s turnaround not only improved his chances of success at the kindergarten level, but also offered a more positive forecast for later years in schooling (Ladd, 1990).
When Callan returned from his week away, instead of reforming the exclusive group of two, Caleb tried to encourage Callan to engage with others just as he had. It was interesting to observe that the disregard Caleb once demonstrated towards others now appeared to frustrate him when he was confronted with it in Callan. The following vignettes demonstrate this:

**Vignette 8.2**

Callan sat opposite Caleb at the fruit table. Callan took some watermelon off the fruit container and began eating it. Caleb held up his watermelon and made a pushing action with it. Misunderstanding Caleb’s gestures, Callan smiled and showed him his watermelon. This time Caleb called Callan’s name and told him to pass the fruit. Straight away Callan pushed the fruit container across the table to Caleb. Caleb, sounding quite exasperated exclaimed, ‘Not to me, to him!’ pointing to the boy sitting next to Callan (Observation, 29/10/09).

**Vignette 8.3**

Caleb played with Riley on the block mat. Caleb looked over to where Callan was on the other side of the room. Callan had a block pointed menacingly at a girl’s head. Caleb yelled over to him and then told him to come over. Caleb informed me that he and his friends were building a tower (then a church). I asked him if they could make it higher (Observation, 17/11/09).

The changes observed in Caleb were made evident through his interactions with others, and through his responses to Callan. It appeared as though these changes were only made possible through Caleb being given the opportunity to participate in situations that stimulated his appropriation of more altruistic behaviours. This appropriation was so well adopted that when Callan returned from his week away, Caleb maintained them.
Had Callan not taken a week off, Claire would have had to orchestrate activities and/or events that made Caleb (and Callan) eager to participate in them and with other children in order for him to develop social awareness. As Rogoff (1990) states, children need to be eager to participate in ongoing activities and have a desire to understand for learning to take place.

8.4 Discussion

The data from the cultural-institutional dimension revealed that the social and emotional development was supported in this school by the parent body, the school-wide implementation of the PATHS programme and through Claire’s early childhood philosophy.

The kindergarten environment appeared safe, well-.resourced and interesting, and the children were encouraged to engage in play; however, the children’s relationships with Claire were constrained to when they were engaged in teacher-guided or whole-group activities. Because of this relationship, Claire did not gain an understanding of how children were interacting with each other and the classroom resources, and as such, this lack of understanding constrained the ability of both the environment and play in supporting children’s social and emotional development. The following discusses the data, using the theoretical concepts to frame the discussion.

8.4.1 The ZPD.

This kindergarten was richly resourced and the ample opportunities provided for play presented considerable potential for the ZPD to be created. However, because the children rarely used the equipment in the way it was intended and Claire tended not to be present while the children engaged in play, the potential to create the ZPD was to some degree diminished.
Nonetheless, there were a number of the children that engaged in socio-dramatic play, creating teacher-children scenarios that were organised, negotiated and bound by rules. The formation of the play emulated the real classroom situation of teacher and children, even to the point of one child being nominated as the PATHS child. These scenarios created the ZPD, providing opportunities for children to develop self-regulation, relationship management, self- and social awareness.

These situations were enabled because Claire allowed the children to use her teacher’s chair as a prop and she appeared to respect the play scenarios as a vital part of the classroom. However, as Claire was not observed entering the children’s play, there were possibly moments where children’s knowledge, understanding and skills that could have been extended went unnoticed.

8.4.2 The guided participation.

It was because Claire rarely engaged with the children while they participated in child-guided activities that the two boys, Caleb and Callan, continued in their exclusive relationship. This relationship constrained the boys’ access to the academic and social milieu present in the classroom, and the guidance they provided each other did little to extend their social repertoires.

Undesirable guidance in classrooms is obviously unintended; however, it is more likely to occur when the teachers have little knowledge of the social dynamics present within the classroom. It is only through occasionally entering or closely observing these interactions that teachers can be aware of the nature of the interactions and relationships and offer more positive guidance when necessary.
8.4.3 The interrelational dimension.

Claire shared caring relationships with the children; however, this tended not to be evident during children’s child-guided play. On the occasion that I observed Claire sit with some of the girls playing with play dough, her attention was preoccupied with watching the children around the classroom, and as such, even though she was physically near the girls she tended not to engage in those shared conversations that have been found to extend knowledge, understanding and skills (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004).

In addition, just sitting with the girls tended not scaffold the girls in the ZPD. For the ZPD to occur a duality between the one-caring and one-cared for must occur; there needs to be a connection. Instead, the girls appeared almost puzzled as to why Claire was at their table, resulting in their previously rich conversation to peter to a few comments here and there.

8.4.4 Relationships, environment and play.

In this classroom the children interacted with each other in a safe environment and often within the context of play. Claire placed particular emphasis on encouraging respectful relationships, with this intent being facilitated through the PATHS programme.

However, the effectiveness of this curriculum to support children’s social and emotional development tended to be diminished, because Claire did not appear to form relationships with children while they were engaged in play. Consequently, she tended to only understand their modified behaviour—the behaviour that takes place when abiding by someone else’s rules, ideas and conditions. This resulted in Claire being unaware of how the children interacted with their peers, which was indicative of their actual levels of social and development. Hence, as she did not know their actual level of
development, she was not in the position to offer relevant guidance that would support and extend their individual levels of social and emotional skills.

In this sense, the element of relationships reduced the effectiveness of the support given, and in a knock-on effect, also diminished the integrity of the environment and the play elements. In one noted instance, the ramifications for Claire not forming relationships with children as they engaged in child-guided activities was potentially detrimental to the social and emotional development of the children involved. The following diagram (Figure 8.2) represents the relationships, environment and play observed in this classroom.

Figure 8.2: How teacher-child relationships are integral to supporting children’s social and emotional skills and strategies in the environment and through play.
8.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, Claire supported children’s social and emotional development through implementing strategies prescribed by the PATHS programme; talking respectfully with the children and by providing consistent routines. However, the potential for practicing effective social and emotional skills tended to be constrained, as Claire distanced herself from child-guided experiences.

In these situations, Claire had the opportunity to scaffold children’s use of PATHS strategies using authentic experiences to consolidate understanding and heighten opportunities for independent application. In addition, these situations provided opportunity for extending problem-solving skills and levels of perseverance, as well as encouraging those social skills required for the effective interaction with peers.
Chapter Nine: Case Study 4—Olivia’s Story

St Orville’s Primary School

9.0 Introduction

St Orville’s primary school is located in an affluent suburb of the metropolitan area. Olivia, who was St Orville’s kindergarten teacher, expressed that the parents expected a competitive academic programme and that one or two had explicitly complained to her about her kindergarten programme. Even though the school’s principal tended to show Olivia support, she had asked her to introduce more specific labelling words to her children so that they would score more highly in the Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS)\(^{29}\) test given in the following year; for example, that the children refer to a sailing ship as a yacht.

The programme that Olivia delivered was centred on building the children’s social and emotional development. She informed me that she felt the children would do well academically regardless of the programme she developed, explaining that their parents were surgeons/doctor and lawyers and that she felt they were naturally predisposed to achieving good grades in their later schooling. From this assumption she concluded that what the children did need was a good grounding in social and emotional skills, and she developed her programme around this.

The data were collected using the Initial Beliefs and Practices survey, informal conversations, observations and interviews. The analysis of this data yielded two key observations: (1) using the curriculum to develop just one aspect of development appeared to be less supportive than adopting a holistic approach\(^{30}\) (EYLF, 2009), and

\(^{29}\) PIPS assessments are used in Australian Catholic schools to assess what students arrive at school knowing in terms of reading, maths and phonological awareness (www.education.uwa.edu.au/hips.future).

\(^{30}\) The holistic approach refers to education that recognises the connectedness of mind, body and spirit (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004).
(2) teacher involvement is often essential in maintaining educational direction and children’s motivation and interest, particularly in teacher-directed activities.

The data are organised under the interpersonal focus of analysis and the personal focus of analysis (Rogoff, 2003). The first perspective enabled an exploration into how Olivia encouraged peer discussions, collaborative play situations and social circles to support children’s social and emotional development. The second enabled an investigation into how children responded to the strategies that Olivia employed.

This case study commences with a brief background to St Orville’s approach to curriculum and the kindergarten classroom dynamics. Together, these help in developing an understanding of the cultural-institutional focus of analysis (Rogoff, 2003), which together with the interpersonal and personal foci of analysis are inseparable from the analysis of sociocultural activity.

9.1 St Orville’s Kindergarten Background

There were 31 children enrolled in St Orville’s kindergarten. Three of these children were from ESL backgrounds; however, by the time observations began in July, two of the three spoke fluent English. It is possible that Olivia made their language learning process more expedient by creating an inclusive curriculum that recognised the children’s backgrounds. Specifically, Olivia taught all the children songs in French, Spanish and Italian, and encouraged the children to share stories about where they came from.

St Orville’s School reported their school to approach education by teaching the whole child. Initiatives such as the Raising Achievement in Schools (RAISe31)

31 The Raising Achievement in Schools (RAISe) initiative is designed to address these concerns within Western Australia’s Catholic Education sector. The initiative facilitates professional development for teachers to help them meet the needs of all students, drawing heavily on current research on school improvement and student learning (Hayes & Benson, 2008) http://www.curriculum.edu.au/leader/raise,24326.html?issueID=11503
programme were implemented to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes; however, even though Olivia stated she had dedicated numeracy time (Teacher Styles and Preferences survey, 1/5/2009) specific RAiSe activities were not observed in the kindergarten.

Rather, the children in St Orville’s kindergarten were more commonly observed building Lego constructions. Olivia had pushed all the tables to the perimeter of the room, leaving the middle unobstructed. The children filled this space, sitting or lying on the floor building their designs. Those that had no, or minimal, interest in building with Lego occupied themselves with one of the centres surrounding the room. These included two large doll houses, where quite sophisticated narrations took place as the wooden characters were manoeuvred from one room to another; a well-equipped home corner that attracted both girls and boys, and a writing centre and a play dough table.

While the children played, Olivia occupied herself at her desk or walked around the room. On the odd occasion she would join a Lego construction group or sit with an activity she had organised. I did not observe her staying with any one group for the entirety of the activity; whereas this appeared to have no impact on the children engaged in Lego construction, it did seem to influence the children’s motivation in engaging in teacher-organised activities. This observation will be discussed later in this chapter.

Figure 9.1: The layout of St Orville’s kindergarten classroom
9.2 The Interpersonal Focus of Analysis

The interpersonal focus of analysis was useful in examining how Olivia arranged her programme to address the children’s social and emotional development. In particular, this examination centred on: (1) how the kindergarten programme encouraged peer conversations, (2) Olivia’s involvement in activities, and (3) the friendship circles Olivia developed to talk about social (friendship) issues that had occurred throughout the day.

9.2.1 The use of encouraging conversations.

Olivia intentionally tried to encourage conversations in her classroom chiefly for two reasons. First, she believed conversation was a social skill that needed to be taught, and second, she aimed to create a language-rich centre to assist the three children with ESL in learning English (Informal conversations, 21/7/2009, 20/10/2009). Incidentally, although social skills were Olivia’s main objective, the conversations that she engaged in and encouraged also worked towards ascertaining the oral language skills that are critical in laying the foundations for literacy skills (Massey, 2004; Wasik, Bond, & Hindman, 2006).

The data revealed that the moments Olivia most effectively encouraged conversations were mealtimes and those incidental moments that engaged both Olivia and the children. Olivia scaffolded children’s ability to hold conversations by intentionally modelling conversation techniques while they were engaged in conversation with her. Olivia rarely used closed or convergent questions; rather, she extended the children’s conversation by asking well-timed divergent questions (Epstein, 2007) that remained responsive to the children’s interests (Pianta et al., 2008; EYLF, 2009).
Mealtimes were used to encourage the children to converse with each other. This was usually done during morning tea and lunch while the children sat grouped together on the large tarpaulin. Olivia would start the conversation by doing such things as connecting one child with another whom she knew shared the same interest or experience; for example:

**Vignette 9.0**

The children are seated on a large tarpaulin for morning tea. Olivia asked them if they have exchanged holiday stories yet. She informed one child, Oliver, that the other, Oscar, had been to Augusta over the holidays and that he had caught a big fish. She encouraged Oscar to share his experience with Oliver, informing him that Oliver was going to Augusta later in the year (Observation, 21/7/2009). Alternatively, Olivia offered children starting suggestions such as:

**Vignette 9.1**

‘You can tell your friends what you did on the weekend or what you did last night.’ Some children attempt to tell Olivia their news but Olivia redirected them back to their friends—‘No, don’t tell me, tell your friends’ (Observation, 20/10/2009).

Olivia informed me that the children often tried to tell her their news, and not their peers. She reasoned this was because she asked the facilitating questions that made dialogue easy for them and in contrast, their peers often made comments such as ‘That’s nice’, which inevitably ended the conversation (Informal conversation, 20/10/2009).

Olivia deliberately chose mealtimes to encourage conversations as she viewed these as social times of the day, likening them to having dinner with their families at home. Providing children with opportunities such as these to talk and develop language skills is depictive of high-quality programmes (Wasik et al., 2002) that serve to prepare
children for emergent literacy skills and later, reading comprehension skills (Gest, Holland-Coviello, Welsh, Eicher-Catt, & Gill, 2006).

By intentionally encouraging conversations at mealtimes, Olivia differentiated her practice from the other focus pedagogical practices. In the other classrooms, the children tended to converse with peers, with little guidance from their teachers or were told not to talk at all for the first ten or so minutes of mealtimes.

Incidental moments also were noted as times that Olivia engaged in conversations with children. These times were characterised by a partnership in inquiry where both Olivia and the children were involved in the learning. One such instance was when Olivia had found a dead bat in the playground and brought it in to show the class:

*Vignette 9.2*

Olivia came into the classroom with a dead bat in a bowl and walked around the room showing the children. One of the boys, Orlando, was particularly fascinated by it. Olivia asked her assistants to go the library and find some books on bats and while they did she opened up a site on bats on the internet. She and the children talked about the different features of the bat and tried to match it with the bats they saw on the internet. After a while they all decided it was a fruit bat. When the assistants returned with several books, Olivia and the children starting searching through them, trying to find more details about their bat. After all the children returned to their former activity, Orlando remained scouring the books (Observation, 17/9/2009).

This process of inquiry led to rich and purposive conversations that had observably engaged both Olivia and the children. In addition to being demonstrative of the sustained shared thinking defined by Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) as exemplary of quality practice, the interactions were also depictive of the ‘duality’
Noddings (1984) suggested should occur between the teacher and the learner in learning situations. This is where the one-caring (teacher) sees and feels as the one-cared for (student) does (p. 30), providing a balanced learning environment of teachers playing an intentional role in child-guided experiences and children having an active role in teacher-guided experiences (Epstein, 2007).

### 9.2.2 Olivia’s involvement in the children’s activities.

Despite Olivia’s intention to encourage social interactions, at times opportunities were not made available to support the conversation in the classroom. This was noted particularly during teacher-guided activities. In these situations, Olivia would motivate the children to join her in an activity, but once they had commenced the activity she would leave them and engage herself in class management duties, as the following depicts:

**Vignette 9.3**

Olivia held some cards and asked one of the girls if she would help her sort them, stating that the farm cards had gotten mixed up with the rest of them. Olivia sat down and four other children joined them. Olivia held up a card talked about the picture that was on it, she then asked the group where she should put it. The girls imitated her doing the same with their cards. Olivia soon got up from the group and walked over to a table and began doing some cutting. Not long after, the four children who joined the activity left, leaving the original child on her own. Soon she began looking around, and then asked to no one in particular, ‘Where’s Opal?’ and left (Observation, 20/10/2009).

This situation had the potential of creating the ZPD, full of shared sustained thinking and thought provocation. Even though Olivia started the group thinking and
talking about the cards and possible categories, her early departure abruptly ended not only the conversation, but the activity.

At times, children are motivated to attend some activities only because their teacher is present. Noddings (1984) considered that this was because children are more inclined to engage in these activities because of the ‘love for the adult and the desire to imitate her’ (p. 64). Similarly, Goldstein (1999) suggested children are motivated to engage in some activities to enter into a zone that offers them pleasure, growth and interpersonal connection with their teacher. It is possibly for these reasons that teacher presence in an activity is the chief factor encouraging children’s involvement in particular settings (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1987; Kontos, 1999).

The data revealed that this tended not to be the case when children were engaged in child-guided activities. In these situations the children’s motivation to remain engaged in the activity was independent of Olivia being there or not. However, the majority of these activities tended not to provoke conversation, as they were more inclined to be solitary activities such as Lego construction, which are more closely aligned with parallel than cooperative play (Parten, 1932).

Activity time had the potential to support and extend Olivia’s efforts to develop children’s oral language skills (and other skills). However, this large portion of the day tended to remain untapped mainly because Olivia appeared inaccessible due to being distracted with managerial tasks. Ineffective managerial practices can potentially lead to less classroom productivity as learning opportunities are not maximised (Pianta et al., 2008).

9.2.3 The use of friendship circles.

Olivia had introduced the idea of friendship circles in the kindergarten. This was a whole-group social skills brainstorming session that took place when social conflict
arose between the children. For example, if two children had an altercation outside, even though Olivia would immediately help them resolve their conflict, later that day she arranged a friendship circle involving the whole class to discuss the nature of the conflict and possible resolutions (no names were mentioned).

In these sessions, Olivia took the opportunity to explicitly state the possible consequences for actions; for example, if you only play with one friend you will inevitably narrow your social support group, as well as talking through how everyone involved in the conflict must have felt (encouraging children to acknowledge others’ perspectives) and providing labels for emotions.

In the following example of a friendship circle, Olivia talked about feeling safe with friends and how important it was to have friends. The friendship circle I observed was centred on having more than one friend, as the following elaborates:

Vignette 9.4

Olivia loudly informed her assistants that she saw a lot of things happen in the playground that concerned her and so she thought they should form a friendship circle. She then whispered to the children: ‘If you can hear me can you sit in a circle.’ After settling children with a game of Simon Says, Olivia informed the children that they can have more than one friend, clarifying that if best friends wanted to play just with each other that that was ok; however, it was good to play with other friends too. To illustrate her point she got four of the boys up and asked the children if it was ok that all four of them played together. The children unanimously agreed it was ok. Olivia agreed and added that if she had a party she would like lots of friends there—the more the merrier. She concluded by saying, ‘I feel safe when there are a lot of people around me’ (Observation, 5/11/2009).
Olivia was the only teacher in this study who addressed conflict resolution both during and after an incident had passed. The other teachers tended to address conflict resolution only in situ, believing these moments to be more relevant to the children. Indeed, Epstein (2007) acknowledged that teaching conflict resolution skills should be taught at the time of conflict, but added that waiting until after an emotional dispute had passed to talk through feelings and introduce related terminology provides the child with time to calm down and be more receptive to learning new skills (Epstein, 2007).

This two-tiered approach to teaching conflict resolution skills not only benefited those children involved in the conflict, but also the rest of the class. In using the friendship circles Olivia encouraged all children to act with moral and ethical integrity (identified as a leading factor in being an active and informed citizen) (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008) through intentionally teaching critical reasoning (Bickmore, 2001), perspective-taking (Stevahn, Johnson, Johnson, Oberie, & Wahl, 2000), shared decision-making and problem-solving skills.

In addition, explicit training in conflict resolution has proven to be effective for young children (Stevahn et al., 2000), as they demonstrate increased pro-social behaviour and emotional intelligences (Kolb & Weede, 2001). These skills have been found to be transferable across the curriculum, enabling children to successfully negotiate peer interactions and facilitating their ability to access peer learning groups available in the classroom (Ladd, 1990).

9.3 The Personal Focus of Analysis

The personal focus of analysis was useful in examining the social strategies that some children in St Orville’s kindergarten employed in play. In this examination I provide two examples that offer two different perspectives of development in play. Each
study the child’s participation in the process, while describing the context in which the event took place:

Example 1:

The first example centres on the way one of the children scaffolded another’s social interactions through modelling more effective strategies, as the following depicts:

Vignette 9.5

Oswald watched Odette and Ophelia play in the home corner. When Odette commented that her baby needed a change he approached her, offering a plastic tomato for the baby to eat. Odette said she needed a spoon. Oswald eagerly went away and rummaged through the toy cupboard, but instead of bringing back a spoon he brought back some more food, which Odette promptly rejected. After trying with new foods for a while, Oswald looked to Ophelia for assistance. Ophelia took up his cause, asking Odette if her baby ate chicken. Odette pretended to feed it to her baby and said, ‘No.’ Ophelia appeared despondent and commented to no one in particular that ‘She doesn’t like any food.’ Odette, possibly sensing her losing control of the scenario quickly replied, ‘Hmm, she ate this chocolate.’ Seeing an opening, Oswald suggested the baby have a drink and after finding a plastic cup he handed it to Odette, telling her it was ‘power milk’. Odette leant away from Oswald’s extending arm with eyes wide open. Ophelia took the cup from Oswald and said, ‘Yeah, she’ll love milk’ and successfully handed it to Odette. After a while Ophelia found a doll and sat next to Odette. Oswald remained rummaging for food until another boy entered the home corner, then he went and sat quietly with the two girls (Observation, 21/7/2009).
This vignette highlighted two points for discussion: the first is the concept of scaffolding within the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978), which occurred when Ophelia was ‘requested’ to assist Oswald in interacting more successfully with Odette; and the second, which reflects on children’s incentives to engage in play and their drive to keep the momentum going even when it appeared no longer enjoyable (Vygotsky, 1978).

This play scenario clearly depicted the ZPD that Vygotsky (1978) explained occurred naturally in play. First, it had the full engagement of the players, and second, scaffolding needed to occur in order for Oswald to reach more effective social skills.

In this situation, Ophelia assumed the role of the more knowledgeable other and scaffolded Oswald’s ability to initiate interactions by providing him with alternate social models (Vygotsky, 1978). Her first response demonstrated respectful engagement, as she asked Odette what her baby liked. This question also gave an opening for Odette to suggest other possible food choices, which is a technique that Olivia was often observed using with the children. When Odette did not take up this invitation, Ophelia let both Odette and Oswald know that there was no other course to be taken in that regard.

Her second response modelled ‘affiliative’ speech, which is more commonly used by girls in negotiations (Leaper & Smith, 2004 p. 993). This approach provided Oswald with an alternative to the assertive gestures which is often associated with boys’ interactions (Leaper & Smith, 2004). Both responses modelled by Ophelia facilitated social discourse, as opposed to ending it.

9.3.1 The children’s motivation to play.

From an alternative perspective, the discourse was enabled through Odette hoping to keep the attention on her. As it was, Oswald gave her the ‘power’ to determine the direction of the interactions by offering her things for her baby to eat.
When Ophelia stated that the baby did not eat anything, she indicated that she was prepared to end the interaction. As Odette wanted it to continue, she became more receptive to the children’s offering of food and provided the opportunity for extending the interactions by suggesting that the baby does eat food.

From this perspective, Odette and Oswald were both motivated by their own individual needs to continue this play scenario. Possibly, Oswald’s incentive was to feel included in the girls’ game, while Odette was motivated to feel important. Regardless, this scenario was exemplar of children’s desire to fulfil a need as the motivation to engage in play (Vygotsky, 1978).

Example 2:

In the second example, the personal lens from which this vignette is viewed enabled an examination of the child’s role in consolidating concepts through play. Incidentally, this vignette also highlighted Olivia’s ability to enter play scenarios with the intent of reinforcing a concept through shared sustained thinking without distracting from the play itself (EYLF, 2009):

Vignette 9.6

Olivia asked one of the girls, Oriana, what her birthday month was. Denise told her it was March and added, ‘March again! (She rolled her eyes). When I turned four it was March and when I turn five it will be March! – It’s always March!’ Oriana then went away and came back with some stones. She told Olivia that she was inviting seven people to her birthday because she had seven stones. Olivia asked her if she was sure there were seven stones and asked Oriana to count them. Very methodically, Oriana pointed to each stone and counted. When she reached six it appeared as though she had counted all the stones—she was quiet for a moment and then repeated the process—there were seven. Olivia then invited Odele to count them. Odele hurriedly counted them, reaching an
incorrect number. Olivia explained to her that even adults make mistakes when they count too fast. Olivia then invited Odele to count again, slowly (Observation, 20/10/2009).

This vignette is a summation of multiple strategies that Oriana has developed over time. It highlighted her ability to recall information (counting), utilise taught strategies (touching stones with her finger as she counted) and use checking techniques when she knew an error had been made— which were made evident through the shared sustained conversation (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004) she held with Olivia.

It is more likely that Oriana was motivated by conversing with Olivia and Odele than she was by developing her number skills. Even when Olivia turned this conversation to one-to-one correspondence counting practice, Oriana happily obliged to continue the interaction with Olivia.

This situation is an example of the interrelational dimension, where the affective space shared between Olivia and Oriana enabled the ZPD to occur (Goldstein, 1999). In this space, Olivia intentionally encouraged Oriana to practice her numeracy skills without detracting from the enjoyment of the interaction, and Oriana was more inclined to remain in the interaction to remain in the enjoyable space she shared with Olivia.

In contrast, Odele did not share an affective space with Olivia as she had not involved herself in the interaction. This may have been why she counted the stones quickly, as she wanted to dismiss herself from what she may have viewed as a lesson as opposed to an enjoyable interaction.

From a similar perspective, this situation also highlighted the effectiveness of guided participation, as Olivia guided Oriana’s development while they both participated in that moment (Rogoff, 1990, 2003). This view also supports the assumption that Odele did not want to count the stones as she was not a participant in the initial conversation.
9.4 Discussion

St Orville’s kindergarten curriculum supported children’s social and emotional development primarily through the conversations that Olivia encouraged throughout the day. Often these conversations (usually stimulated by incidental occurrences) would evolve into sessions of sustained shared thinking that not only deepened relationships, but also extended thoughts and ideas. Olivia possibly would have enriched this environment further by creating more opportunities for social interactions centred on inquiry during teacher-guided activities.

Through utilising incidental opportunities to engage in shared sustained thinking, Olivia developed a learning environment that was characterised by children autonomously initiating interactions with peers, children recruiting peers as sources of guidance and children drawing from demonstrated social models when scaffolding their peers. Using the concepts underpinning this study, the following discusses these observations and how they appeared to contribute to children’s social and emotional development.

9.4.1 The ZPD.

In St Orville’s kindergarten, it appeared as though the child-guided experiences were the chief situations in which the ZPD was created. In these moments, Olivia not only scaffolded the children’s thoughts and understanding, but also encouraged the children to use language as a tool for learning. The way in which Olivia interacted with the children provided a model, or social tool, for other children to follow when either initiating interactions themselves or scaffolding other children’s attempts at engaging in interactions.

Language as a social tool was strongly encouraged in this classroom. This emphasis tended to differentiate Olivia’s pedagogical style from that of the other
teachers involved in this study. This approach appeared to be instrumental in encouraging the children’s ability to recognise themselves as self-efficacious conversationalists; communicate, especially in the capacity of inquiry and social engagement; work collaboratively, as they collaborated in supporting peer interactions; persevere when faced with challenges, especially when attempting to be included in other children’s play and negotiate and seek help as well as provide it (Zins et al., 2007; Zins & Elias, 2007).

**9.4.2 The guided participation and interrelational dimension.**

In contrast to the rich conversation and opportunities for scaffolding present in child-guided experiences, the teacher-guided experiences in St Orville’s kindergarten tended not to be as dynamic. The reason for this is best examined using the guided participation perspective and the interrelational dimension, where children are guided by the one-caring while they participate in sociocultural activity.

Although Olivia initially engaged children in the activity she had organised, once they began to demonstrate they knew what they were doing, she would leave to perform managerial tasks. The data revealed that while Olivia performed managerial tasks the children tended not approach her. This proposed two issues: (1) Olivia was not accessible to guide children in their learning while they participated in an activity, and (2) those children who are only motivated to be in an activity to share the affective space with their teacher no longer have an incentive to stay. The result was that the learning opportunities presented in the teacher-guided activity were not as maximised as they otherwise could have been.

Comparatively, other teachers in this study, especially Mia and Kyra, were not observed completing managerial tasks while the children were present. In these situations, even though they both did not necessarily stay for the entire duration of an
activity, they were always accessible when the children needed them. In turn, the children in these classes were observed to remain more on task in both child- and teacher-guided experiences, providing more opportunity for instances of guided participation and shared affective space.

9.4.3 The relationships, environment and play.

In this classroom, Olivia actively promoted peer relationships and often offered the children strategies for initiating and maintaining conversations. The structural environment provided physical props, space and time for play, and the psychological context further facilitated play by being respectful, tolerant of mistakes and enabling children to interact with their friends in meaningful ways. Olivia spent some time with the children while they were engaged in play extending their thinking by asking questions, relating stories and introducing additional possibilities through props and supports.

However, when Olivia became occupied with managerial duties she appeared to be inaccessible to the children, as they did not try to approach or engage with her during these times. Equally, in these situations Olivia no longer responded to the children, often appearing to take no notice of them as they went off task in the teacher-guided activities that she tried to engage them in.

Even though these activities were designed for developing cognitive skills, if implemented effectively they also would have supported the children’s ability to control their impulses, perseverance when faced with challenges, ability to follow instructions, maintain attention, problem solve, evaluate and reflect while interacting in meaningful activity with others, all of which are social and emotional skills that are fundamental and integral to learning. It appeared as though Olivia had little respect for the learning inherent in the activities she arranged. The following figure (Figure 9.2) demonstrates
the interaction between relationships, play and environment and social and emotional development in St Orville’s kindergarten.

![Diagram](image.png)

**Figure 9.2:** Relationship between relationships, environment and play at St Orville’s Primary School.

Even though the play and environment supported children’s social and emotional development, the possibilities to challenge and extend social and emotional skills while engaged in teacher-initiated activities were constrained due to Olivia’s inaccessibility.

### 9.5 Conclusion

The St Orville’s kindergarten programme highlighted the importance of the balance between teacher- and child-guided experiences and the need for the participation and engagement of both teacher and child in each. Even though Olivia invested in moments for social and emotional development, her inaccessibility,
especially during teacher-guided experiences, diminished the potential for development. In these cases, not only was the opportunity for extending understanding limited because the children soon left the activity after Olivia left, the opportunity for engagement with peers and the environment was also diminished.
Chapter Ten: Case Study 5—Heather’s Story

St Hovea’s Primary School

10.0 Introduction

This is a case study of Heather, the kindergarten teacher at St Hovea’s primary school, and explores how she supported her students’ social and emotional development. St Hovea’s school promotes a strong literacy focus, and accordingly, Heather arranged many of the activities to meet this demand. Most of Heather’s intentional teaching moments were occupied by these skill-specific literacy-based activities, and developing the children’s social and emotional skills was addressed when situations arose (Interview, 2/12/2009).

Observations made of this classroom highlighted four features of early childhood pedagogy that are considered integral to creating the ZPD that will more likely develop children’s optimal social and emotional development. These are: (1) teachers need to observe children while they are engaged in child-guided activities in order to identify a) children’s actual social and emotional developmental level, and b) what areas children need scaffolding in; (2) teachers need to take time to engage with children if they are to form those caring relationships that are necessary in creating the ZPD; (3) teachers (or a more knowledgeable other) need to be available to offer the appropriate guidance at relevant times; and (4) guidance, when left unchecked, is not always intentional or desirable.

The triangulation of data on the children’s social and emotional development over the eight-month period corroborated that these features of early childhood pedagogy are necessary for optimal social and emotional development to occur. This was particularly true in the case of two of the focus children, Holly and Harry. It transpired through the data that without observations and targeted scaffolding, there
SUPPORTING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT were negative implications not only for these children’s social and emotional
development, but also for their overall development.

As with the other case studies, the data were collected using the initial Teachers
Beliefs and Practices survey, informal conversations, observations and interviews.
However, Heather did not complete the Social and Emotional Rating scales, and thus
this information could not be used in this case study. Theoretical concepts developed by
Rogoff (2003), Vygotsky (1978) and Goldstein (1999) are used in the analysis and
discussion of the data.

Due to the pronounced social and emotional responses that the two focus
children were observed to experience, this case study has been organised differently to
the previous ones. That is, whereas previously the kindergarten programme prompted
discussion, in this case the children’s social and emotional development and responses
has organised and driven the analysis. This case study tells their stories, detailing the
children’s social interactions with their peers, while exploring ways Heather may have
been able to support these children while still coping with her other duties.

Similar to the other case studies, the data are organised under the interpersonal
focus of analysis and the personal focus of analysis (Rogoff, 2003). The first
perspective enabled an exploration of some of the interactions that took place and how
these were part of Holly’s social and emotional development. The second facilitated an
investigation into how Harry used his social and emotional skills to interact with others
in the classroom.

This case study begins with an introduction to the kindergarten classroom
dynamics and a brief background to the curriculum focus of St Hovea’s school.
Together, these highlighted some of the demands placed on Heather while she set about
trying to meet expectations and achieve outcomes.
10.1 St Hovea’s Kindergarten Background

There were 28 children enrolled in St Hovea’s kindergarten, and Heather was supported by two education assistants, Megan and Lynne. Both assistants helped Heather by setting up and supervising activities. Neither assistant was asked to make intentional observations of the children’s interactions.

There was a wide spectrum of social and emotional competencies in this classroom. That is, at one end there were some children who did not interact appropriately with others and demonstrated antisocial behaviours, such as withdrawal or hitting other children. At the other end of the spectrum, there were children who spoke freely and competently to both their peers and adults, demonstrating self-efficacious learning behaviours, such as instigating games and playing independently.

A few years prior to this study, in response to consistently low scoring literacy data, St Hovea’s school was identified as a school in need of literacy support. Consequently, they were provided with funding for that purpose (Informal conversation, 26/6/2009). The school maintained a strong literacy focus, and as such, literacy programmes and outcomes needed to be evident in all classrooms. Heather addressed this by creating writing, reading and computer centres as well as offering literacy-focused activities centred on the RAISE programme during indoor activity time. As these were skill-specific tasks, there could only be a few children at each activity and therefore a considerable number of the children were required to engage themselves in other child-directed activities around the classroom. Heather found it difficult to observe the children while they were engaged in these other activities, commenting at the beginning of the data collection period that she rarely had time to make the much-needed observations of the children, as there were always other duties demanding her time (Informal discussion, 26/6/2009).
In addition, like many of the other teachers participating in this study, Heather did not get involved in children’s self-initiated play because this time was viewed as their time to act independently. This, combined with few opportunities to observe children while engaged in play, resulted in Heather acknowledging that she had limited knowledge of how the children operated on an independent basis (Informal discussion, 19/9/2009).

10.2 The Interpersonal Focus of Analysis

In this section I focus on the interpersonal relationships surrounding one of the children, Holly. Holly was a child with ESL who, although she was fluent in her first language, experienced difficulty communicating effectively in English. Referring back to the table identifying social and emotional competencies in Chapter 4, effective communication was identified as a key component of relationship management. In accordance with this definition, Holly’s inability to communicate effectively with her peers directly affected her ability to build relationships, engage in social interactions, participate in ongoing activities, manage conflict, work cooperatively and seek help.

Throughout the data collection period, it became apparent to me that Holly’s difficulty in speaking English arose from her inability to access positive, collaborative peer interactions in the classroom. This observation was further informed by research in second language learning that suggests that those interactions that are centred on solving linguistic problems in collaboration with peers best facilitate second language learning, mainly because in these situations language is used as both a communicative and a cognitive tool (Escamilla & Grassi, 2000; Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-Beller, 2002). The relevance of this dual purpose of language may be understood more fully using Vygotsky’s (1987) ideology of second language learning, in which he explains that when learning a second language, the learner does not return to attaching labels to
concrete objects as he did when he learned his first language; rather, he uses his first language to mediate the second, enabling a more abstract approach to language learning.

The observations I made were conducted primarily while Holly was engaged in child-guided activities, which in this classroom were activities centred on peer interactions with little to no teacher constraints or intervention. By their very nature, these contexts necessitated the collaboration between peers that is considered to be integral to supporting language learning. Consequently, by observing at this time I was able to discover Holly’s ability to access these situations, as well as to gain an insight into how she interacted independently with her peers.

The observations revealed that Holly was often ostracised and/or belittled by her peers, as demonstrated in the following vignette:

_Vignette 10.0_

Renee, Anne, Elisa and Holly sat playing in the sandpit. Elisa and Anne were seated on some crates while Renee and Holly sat playing with the sand, each in isolation. Elisa, who was sitting on the first of the crates, ordered: ‘Sit in the car!’ Holly sat on the last crate behind her and Anne. Elisa turned around and yelled, ‘Not you, Holly!’ Holly got up and walked away talking (to herself) quickly in her native language (Observation, 13/11/09).

This example was typical of the interactions I observed Holly involved in, that is, children either did not talk to her, or, as in this case, they overtly shunned her. However, what appeared to intensify Holly’s social and emotional isolation was the covert way in which some children treated her, as shown in the following vignette:

_Vignette 10.1_

One of the girls, Renee, sat on the mat. When Holly walked by, Renee got up and pushed her in the back and sat down on the mat again. Holly turned around and poked her tongue out at Renee. Renee poked hers out at Holly. Holly went
to get her mother, who was on duty, and walked back with her to the mat. Renee kept her tongue out at Holly as she approached. Holly’s mother sat next to Renee and had Holly on the other side. Holly’s mother asked Renee where her shoes and socks were, informing her she had to get them before going out to play. Renee raced off to get them. When she was gone, Holly told her mother that Renee had pushed her. Her mother told her it must have been an accident and not to worry about it. Renee returned and sat back down next to Holly’s mother (Observation, 28/10/2009).

Magnifying this particular situation was that the one person who could offer Holly some degree of security in the classroom—her mother—did not comprehend the intentionality of Renee’s actions towards Holly, leaving her unsupported. From an attachment perspective, this lack of support had the potential of accelerating Holly’s diminishing sense of security in the classroom, further inhibiting her attempts at accessing positive, collaborative peer interactions.

It cannot be said in all certainty that Holly’s peers treated her like this because of the language barrier. However, what is certain is that the unintentional guidance the children were providing her with in these shared activities did little for her self-esteem, and collectively, these interactions worked to create a negative learning environment for her.

The finding that Holly was subjected to negative peer influence underpinned my position that her difficulty in communicating in English stemmed from socially- and emotionally-based issues rather than language-based difficulties. Indeed, numerous studies have found that negative environments such as this tend to impede children’s ability to acquire a new language (Barna, 1994; Escamilla & Grassi, 2000; Furukawa & Shibayama, 1995; Pederson, 1995), as well as intensify their difficulties in interpersonal interactions (Matsumoto, Le Roux, Ratzlaff, Tatani, Uchida, Kim & Araki, 2001).
In the interview (2/12/2009) at the end of the data collection period, Heather admitted that she was unaware of the types of interactions Holly encountered with her peers. This was because Heather gained her knowledge of Holly’s development from a different source than mine. Heather’s observations were made primarily during small-group teacher-guided activities and whole-group settings, and not while the children were engaged in child-guided activities. These were activities that tended not to be conducive to collaborative peer interactions, as typically the teacher maintained control of the activity.

In the situations that Heather observed Holly in, she appeared to cope reasonably well, in that she could complete the exercise and respond appropriately to the questions directed to her. Consequently, Heather perceived Holly’s language difficulties to be derived from a language-based source as opposed to a social and emotional one, and as such, she approached helping her from this perspective.

Heather informed me that about half way throughout the year, she suggested to Holly’s mother that they only speak English at home, with the intention of providing Holly with more exposure to it. However, Holly’s mother preferred to maintain their first language at home, believing Holly would adopt English in her own time (Interview, 1/12/2009).

Holly’s mother’s decision to maintain her first language at home is supported by the literature. Dropping the first language to accelerate second language acquisition is perceived as erroneous and potentially costly to the individual (Wong Fillmore, 1991). If Holly were to stop speaking her native language at home it is likely she would become isolated from everything she had previously known, making her situation worse (Savitizky, 1994). Moreover, the literature reports that the loss of one’s native language in place of the more culturally dominant one can potentially alienate children from their families, diminishing an important emotional support base (Wong Fillmore, 1991).
Rather, second language is best acquired in a calm, positive, interactive classroom environment that involves children in problem-solving and discovery through thematic experiences (Barna, 1994; Escamilla & Grassi, 2000; Dewey, 1938; Swain et al., 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). A warm environment is essential to second language learning, because no matter how competent the teacher is, if children feel socially isolated from the dominant culture, the probability that they will learn English is diminished (Escamilla & Grassi, 2000). Typically, environments that support caring relationships enabling collaborative adult and peer interactions (Swain et al., 2002) create an interrelational (Goldstein, 1999) and interpsychological space (Vygotsky, 1978) that is facilitative of language development.

However, as Heather believed that encouraging speaking only English at home to be the only recourse available to her, she did not explore any other approaches to scaffolding Holly’s interactions (Interview, 2/12/2009). As a result, Holly steadily grew more socially isolated from the dominant culture and her disconnectedness, coupled with a lack of observable secure attachments in the classroom, may have contributed to how she interpreted and responded to some situations. The following vignette provides an example of Holly’s response to one such event:

Vignette 10.2

Heather stood on the mat and shook a maraca. She told the children it was time to pack away. Two girls who had built block constructions told her they did not want to knock their work down. Heather suggested they write a sign asking the other children not to touch them. The girls ran off and wrote, in writing depictive of the ‘role play writing’ stage (Education Department of Western Australia, 1994, p. 24), signs requesting their buildings were left. They raced back and put the signs on top of their constructions.
The classroom grew more active, with children racing around putting things away. In the commotion and bustle, two boys swept up in the packing away frenzy bolted over to the girls’ constructions and knocked them down. One of the girls noticed and became distressed. When Heather saw her, she quickly reacted by yelling at the boys for ignoring the signs. Although the boys seemed nonplussed about her yelling, Holly appeared confused and frightened. She looked around the room frantically, saw me, raced over and grabbed hold of my arm.

By this time, Heather had started gathering the children, asking them to sit in a circle on the mat. Holly was still clinging to my arm talking quickly in her native tongue. I told her Heather wanted everyone to sit on the mat. She clung tighter to my arm. I then pointed to the circle and told her to find a spot to sit down. Holly surveyed the circle. Just then, the mother helper sat down with her son, Cameron. Holly released me and darted next to Cameron’s mother. She lifted Cameron’s mother’s arm and sought refuge underneath it. After a while she appeared to settle, but remained under the mother’s arm (Observation, 26/6/09).

It can be seen from this observation that Holly’s inability to interpret the situation caused her to seek secure, supportive relationships to buffet her stress (see Chapter 3, Section 1.3). Over the next six months of data collection it was revealed that while Holly was engaged in child-guided activities she continued to exhibit coping mechanism behaviours associated with trying to buffet stress; for example, she gradually withdrew from peer interactions and was often observed walking inside the classroom and around the playground with her head down incessantly muttering to herself in her first language. Early in my observations this latter behaviour was observed directly after she was made to feel uncomfortable, either by a peer or when she
could not understand the teachers. Later, however, I was unable to identify an observable trigger. The data indicated that these behaviours became more pronounced as the year progressed.

Holly’s actions can be explained in a number of ways. First, as Barna (1994) suggests, individuals with ESL tend to feel vulnerable, and their sense of self-esteem is eroded as they are confronted with messages they do not understand. As a coping mechanism, these individuals, such as Holly, often withdraw into themselves, blocking out the messages, such as by talking to themselves.

Another possible explanation for Holly reverting to her first language in times of stress is based on Vygotsky’s (1986) observation that when acquiring a second language, an individual uses the word meanings from the first language and simply translates them. Hence it is possible that the feelings were too complex for her to understand, and as such the meaning (understanding) was not available for translation.

In the long term, McCabe & Meller (2004) found that children with prolonged language difficulties tend to develop negative expectations for interactions. These researchers add that the combination of language difficulties and social rejection often leads to negative expectations for initiating and maintaining relationships, even after the children’s language skills have reached the skill levels of their peers.

Holly’s situation in the classroom appeared to be a casualty of the teacher not observing her; that is, Heather did not observe Holly while she was engaged in child-guided activities, as she was occupied by other duties, but was under the assumption that Holly was coping socially in the classroom because that is how it appeared when she sat with Heather for small- or whole-group sessions. However, with this assumption and the lack of opportunity to observe, Holly was put in social situations where the only way she could interact effectively was with support, or scaffolding, from an adult. As
this did not eventuate, Holly’s communication skills became less effective and she was confronted with more negative interactions from her peers.

As a result, the social and academic milieu present in the classroom became less accessible to Holly, reducing her opportunities for optimal development. This is because Holly learned (by social responses) not to be eager to participate in ongoing activities, and for the same reason was not motivated to increase her own understanding, both of which are essential to learning in a social context (Rogoff, 1990).

Figure 7.5 illustrates the cyclical nature of the occurrences that are impeding Holly’s optimal social and emotional development.

Figure 10.1: The cyclical relationship of interactions and their effect on Holly’s development in the classroom.
10.3 The Personal Focus of Analysis

The personal focus of analysis was useful in examining how Harry employed negotiation skills with his peers in the classroom. Even though Harry was also a child with ESL, in contrast to Holly, he had effective receptive and expressive language skills, to the point where he had been observed explaining the meaning of inferences made in children’s texts to his peers (Observation, 19/9/2009). In a briefing of all the children in this setting, Heather described Harry as a very clever child (Informal interview, 26/6/2009). It is possible that Harry used his intellect as a social tool by engaging others through helping them understand some of the books they were reading or capturing their interest through his discoveries.

Even though Harry appeared to have formed some friendships in the classroom, upon closer examination it was revealed that his relationships with peers tended not to be reciprocal. It transpired that Heather was unaware of the underlying features of Harry’s peer relationships, as she was unable to observe him in great detail while he interacted with his peers (Informal conversation, 26/6/2009). Nonetheless, even though Harry did not seem to have made any clear friendships in the classroom, he did talk to all the children and demonstrated an understanding of social situations that enabled him to initiate and sustain more positive peer interactions than Holly could.

When analysing from the personal foci of analysis, the attention is on the child’s efforts (Rogoff, 2003). Accordingly, even though the following example becomes possible through interpersonal relationships, the analysis is centred on the strategies Harry uses to maintain amicable relationships:

*Vignette 10.3*

Brett accidently knocked over a cup of water that was in the centre of the painting table. Harry informed him that his bag will rip now because it was wet. Although
there were a few splashes on Harry’s painting, it remained largely unaffected by
the water spillage.

Megan (the education assistant) returned to the table and Harry informed her that
Brett had spilled the cup of water. Megan looked into the cup and said they needed
some more water, and put some more in for them. She then left the table. There
was silence for a little while until Harry asked Brett if he was his friend. Keith,

who stood near the boys, stopped his work and said emphatically to Brett, ‘Say
no!’ Brett said ‘no’ to Harry. Harry was quiet and Brett defended his response by
saying that Harry should not have told on him.

Harry did not react; rather, he dipped his paintbrush into the white paint and then
carefully painted the top of the first stripe he had painted earlier. He laughed

triumphantly and painted some more. Once again he laughed and said in a very
assured way, ‘I’m making pink.’ Keith looked at him. Harry caught his eye and
asked him, ‘Do you know how to make pink?’ Keith looked curiously over to
what Harry had been doing, which prompted Harry to offer his method for pink
making, ‘You get the white and put it over the red.’ Harry then finished the rest
of the line. He then started on the next line which was green. ‘Aha!’ he declared,
‘Light green!’ He then looked at me and repeated, ‘Light green.’ He painted a
little more and without looking up began to chant, ‘Light green, light green’

(Observation, 26/6/2009).

In this example, Harry demonstrated his ability to anticipate his peers’ social
reactions and respond in such a way that would refocus their attention away from the
negative towards a more favourable social outcome for him. He achieved this by not
accelerating the boy’s negative responses by arguing with them; rather, he distracted them
with his colour mixing findings. Even then, however, he subtly monitored that he had
gained their interest before pursuing with his distracting tactic.
Through postponing time, i.e., by not responding immediately, Harry was able to solve the problem by replacing impulsive reactions with complex psychological processes, making his incentive to restore harmonious relations with his peers stimulate their ‘own development and realisation’ (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 26).

In doing so, Harry demonstrated social and emotional skills of self-awareness as he identified the emotions of his peers, responsible decision-making through problem-solving, employing self-regulation in controlling his own emotions and conflict resolution as he managed his relationships (Zins et al., 2007). Therefore, Harry demonstrated proficient social skills that Heather could have utilised in scaffolding other children experiencing social difficulties.

On another occasion, I had observed that Heather had put Harry in charge of turning the pages of the ‘Ugly Duckling’ book in time with the computer CD. In this role, Harry was observed bridging the other children’s understanding of the text, explaining to them why the ugly duckling was sad and why the other characters rejected him, and so on. Harry extended the duration of his role by organising another read-along CD with Heather (Observation, 19/8/2009).

In an informal conversation, Heather had acknowledged that Harry was ‘very responsible’ and ‘very keen to impress’ her. It is possibly because of this knowledge that she entrusted him with these roles. In turn, Heather’s delegation had the potential of supporting Harry’s developing sense of self and affirming his strengths, through recognising and valuing his sense of responsibility and abilities (Zins et al., 2007).

Many of the interactions I observed Harry participate in saw him in the role of either maintaining equilibrium, as in the former example, or supporting other children’s learning, as demonstrated in the latter example. However, I did not observe Harry engaging in those reciprocal peer interactions that are linked with developing a positive sense of self and positive perceptions of school (Ladd, 1990). From this perspective,
reciprocal peer relationships that offer important emotional and cognitive resources would have been more inclined to present Harry with a supportive or secure attachment base from which he could negotiate his surroundings. In turn, this learning environment would have provided him with those opportunities in the ZPD that were more likely to afford him mutually beneficial developmental outcomes while facilitating the development of higher psychological processes (Ladd et al., 1996; Vygotsky, 1978).

10.4 Discussion

In terms of scaffolding peer relationships in child-guided activities, the data highlighted that Holly and Harry received similar attention from Heather. However, Harry’s language use and social navigation enabled him to participate in child-guided activities and manage conflict; while Holly’s social skills were not as developed, leading to unsuccessful attempts at entering play groups and an inability to manage conflicts.

This raises two questions: (1) why did Harry demonstrate more effective social and emotional skills than Holly? and (2) what could Heather do to narrow the gap between them while maintaining quality classroom management with her current workload and demands?

10.4.1 Why was there a gap in social and emotional skills?

Theoretical concepts developed by Goldstein (1999), Rogoff (2003) and Vygotsky (1978) were useful in examining this question. Where the ZPD provided a context for potential development, the interrelational theory offered a possible insight into why the ZPD was not present, while the concept of guidance and participation elucidated the interactions that contributed to development.

10.4.2 The ZPD.
One reason why Harry demonstrated more effective social and emotional skills than Holly was that he began kindergarten with a different actual developmental level to her. As this developmental level was more socially successful, Harry needed less adult guidance, or scaffolding, in the ZPD to reach his optimal social and emotional competencies.

Many opportune moments that had the potential of creating the ZPD tended not to be utilised in this classroom. This was because: (a) Heather did not observe the children while they were engaged in child-guided activities, (b) as a consequence she was unaware of their actual developmental level, and (c) as she did not know their social and emotional needs she was not in a position to scaffold their development during child-guided activities. Furthermore, Heather needed to be free to access these moments in order to provide the relevant assistance.

The data revealed that the consequences of not observing children, in particular Holly, in potential ZPD moments were detrimental. The self-defeating coping mechanisms that Holly employed went unnoticed by the teaching staff, resulting in her behaviours escalating to the point where she had become isolated from her peers. This isolation further limited the likelihood of her engaging in those positive, nurturing peer interactions that would have improved not only her ability to acquire English, but also improve the possibility of positive social and academic trajectories.

In this classroom the ZPD could not be utilised to enable the scaffolding of Holly’s social and emotional skills because there was no evidence gathered from the data of a shared affective space between Heather and Holly. Hence, the one-caring and one-cared-for relationship did not form, and the security that this relationship may have afforded Holly did not enable her to access the learning opportunities available in the classroom.
Harry did not experience the same isolation as Holly did, but Heather was also unaware of how he negotiated with his peers. Hence, Harry did not receive the scaffolding that he needed to assist him in forming more reciprocal, positive friendships in the classroom. Rather, from the observations I made, it appeared as though Harry’s interactions remained stagnant, where he was regularly in the role of maintaining harmonious relationships, as opposed to sharing harmonious relationships. However, as Heather put Harry in charge of certain activities, it was more likely that he felt validated as a responsible and valued class member, affirming his sense of self.

In this kindergarten it appeared as though the children did not receive the appropriate assistance in child-guided activities (in the ZPD) primarily because Heather was occupied by other duties; for example, teacher-directed literacy activities or preparing for these activities. As Holly needed more assistance, her actual developmental level was not bridged and brought any closer to Harry’s. Rather, as the following section will clarify, the guidance that Holly did receive was more likely to have caused her social and emotional development to regress, increasing the developmental gap between the two children.

10.4.3 The guided participation.

In Holly’s situation, the guided participation that occurred was neither intentional nor desirable. Rogoff (2003) explained that instruction does not need to be intentional for learning to take place. Extending Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of scaffolding in the ZPD, she highlighted the role of other forms of engagement that are equally instrumental to development and warned that ‘guided participation is not limited to learning societally desired skills and practices’ (Rogoff, 2003, p. 284). This implies that the interactions Holly encountered during child-guided play with her peers were more likely to channel negative perceptions of herself, as well as to limit opportunities
for her to engage in positive, nurturing interactions that were more inclined to improve her social and emotional skills and extend her language and communication abilities.

Holly’s negative perception of herself created negative expectations for interactions, resulting in fewer opportunities for her to engage with her peers. It is children’s eagerness to participate in ongoing activities and to increase their understanding that drives learning; without this eagerness, learning in the social context does not occur (Rogoff, 1990). Moreover, fewer opportunities to interact effectively with her peers further reduced her ability to engage in positive and rewarding interactions with them, perpetuating a cyclical pattern of development (see Figure 7.1).

This cycle was able to perpetuate because the peer interactions that occurred during child-guided activities proceeded without direct guidance from Heather. Compounding this cycle was the possibility that Heather’s non-participation in these activities transmitted values and conceptions that unintentionally guided the children (Rogoff, 2003). For example, Heather’s nonattendance may have transmitted to the children that she did not value child-guided activities and only valued the teacher-guided activities that she supervised. More detrimentally, Holly may have perceived Heather’s constrained guidance during these times as endorsing the way the other children treated her. Either way, this arrangement did little to build Heather’s relationship with Holly.

As Harry did not need Heather as much as Holly did, his social and emotional development did not regress through the interactions he shared with his peers in child-guided activities. In addition, through Heather recognising Harry’s abilities and placing him in charge of activities, Harry’s sense of self was reaffirmed.
10.4.4 Narrowing the gap while maintaining quality programming.

The response given to this question is not aimed at providing an answer; rather, it is intended to explore possibilities. The possibilities discussed are drawn from the work of Vygotsky (1978), Rogoff (2003) and Goldstein (1999), as well as from the literature reviewed in Chapter 3.

To set the stage, I begin with a summarisation of the first question: Holly and Harry demonstrated different levels of social and emotional skills because they have different family backgrounds and preschool experiences. Their personality types, tolerances and temperaments are also different; hence they began kindergarten with different actual developmental levels. In addition, the two children experienced different peer interactions in the classroom, with one experiencing less successful interactions than the other. In turn, these interactions contributed to the children’s’ perception of themselves.

10.4.5 Using capable peers in guided participation.

In narrowing the gap between Harry and Holly, Heather had the option of putting Harry in the situation where he could act as the more capable peer and scaffold Holly’s learning. Vygotsky (1978) stated that problem-solving occurred under ‘adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers’ (p. 86). The emphasis to be made here is that a more capable peer is able to scaffold the learner, and that the person guiding does not necessarily have to be an adult.

Given this distinction, play groups organised with more capable peers paired with less capable peers would facilitate scaffolding of social and emotional skills in the ZPD without drawing too heavily on the limited adult resources. However, careful consideration to the pairing of social partners needs to be given because, as mentioned
previously, not all guided participation leads to the development of socially desirable social and emotional skills.

**10.4.6 Using teacher and child relationships in learning.**

In contrast to Vygotsky, Goldstein (1999) does not make the same distinction between adults and more capable peers in her interrelational theory. Goldstein (1999) only considers the child’s relationship with the teacher and the affective space that is shared between them. In support of this, research (e.g., Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Howes, 1997, 2000; Raver & Knitzen, 2002; for further information see Chapter 3) promotes adult (teacher) relationships with children as one of the leading factors in development, citing that this secure relationship base enables children to participate in the social and academic milieu offered in the classroom.

The observations I made indicated that Holly was in need of a secure support base in the classroom—even the presence of her mother while on duty did little to provide emotional support. It is likely that a more evident teacher-child relationship between Heather and Holly would have provided a support base from which Holly could begin to make sense of her interactions.

As mentioned previously, opportunities for Heather to build on her relationships with some of the children were diminished due to her preoccupation with teacher-guided literacy-focused activities. Looking at the situation from the cultural-institutional focus of analysis, it appeared as though Heather invested more time in these literacy-based activities because they yielded products that the school recognised as working towards literacy outcomes. In contrast, the literacy gains achieved through child-guided activities did not yield products that the school could measure as ‘educational’.

Intentional teaching is one approach in developing secure relationships between teachers and students while still running teacher-guided activities (DEEWR & CAG,
2009; Epstein, 2007). This is because intentional teaching is centred on a balance between child-guided activities and adult-guided activities, where adults play an intentional role in child-guided activities and children have important, active roles in adult-guided activities (Epstein, 2007). Hence, a partnership in learning is created where each participant works with, and is supported by, the other in achieving developmental goals.

Integral to intentional teaching are teachers acting with specific outcomes in mind for children’s development and learning. Moreover, intentional teachers know that certain skills are better developed through certain activities, i.e., social and emotional skills are best developed through play where children are in constant interaction with peers (Epstein, 2007). In line with this, intentional teachers will approach children in play and seize opportune moments to extend children’s social and emotional skills. In this instance, both Holly and Harry would benefit as they receive guidance at relevant times, which in turn develops their respective social and emotional skills.

On the other side of the working relationship, teacher-guided activities underpinned by intentional teaching become less unidirectional as perspectives and ideas are shared. As a consequence, there is more of an opportunity to observe children interacting with each other and adults. Hence, these situations are more likely to offer a clearer indication of children’s social and emotional skills, as well as creating a situation in which building secure, supportive teacher-child relationships is more able to occur.
There were two observed ramifications of the teacher being inaccessible to the children: 1) by not understanding their play she was less likely to know where the children needed social and emotional support, and 2) she was less likely to form a relationship with the children and create a safe and secure environment.

10.5 Conclusion

In summary, this case study highlighted that in order for the ZPD to be created, the four key features identified earlier as necessary for positive social and emotional development need to be present. The four features that this study has confirmed to be necessary for creating the ZPD for children’s positive social and emotional development are:

1. Teachers need to observe children while they are engaged in child-guided activities in order to identify:
a) The children’s actual social and emotional developmental level. Heather did not observe the children while they played, and thus she was unaware that Holly was rejected by her peers and that she was growing increasingly isolated. Similarly, with regard to Harry, Heather was unaware that his relationships lacked reciprocity, and because of this his potential to access opportunities to develop his social and emotional skills was constrained.

b) What skills the children need scaffolding in.

2. Teachers need to take time to engage with children if they are to form those caring relationships that are necessary for creating the ZPD. Due to the demands of the classroom, Heather was observed spending limited time forming a relationship with Holly. According to the theory underpinning this concept, as there was no shared affective space, the ZPD could not exist, even when Holly participated in teacher-guided activities.

3. Teachers (or more capable peers) need to be available to offer the appropriate guidance at relevant times. During the observations there was a stark distinction between teacher-guided and child-guided activities, where the former were guaranteed of Heather’s time and the latter were not. As she was not present during child-guided activities, she was unable to guide any of the children as they participated in play.

4. Guidance, when left unchecked, is not always intentional or desirable. Holly’s interactions with her peers were consistently characterised by negativity. Consequently, these children were guiding Holly’s social and emotional development on a downward, destructive path.

It can be concluded from this case study that if teachers spend little time with children during child-guided activities, then they will not develop the relationship they need to create the ZPD in more structured learning situations. Consequently, those
activities aimed at developing isolated skills will not be as effective without this shared affective space.

Using the theoretical concepts underpinning this study, I have identified some ways of addressing the issue of meeting school-prescribed outcomes while supporting children’s social and emotional development. These are:

- Using more capable peers in the ZPD to scaffold less capable children’s social and emotional skills.
- Being aware that guided participation is not always controlled by the teacher, and that peer guidance in social interactions is equally, if not more, influential on children’s social and emotional development.
- Making time to nurture teacher-child relationships, as these are essential to children’s sense of security in the classroom. This can, to some extent, be supported through teacher-guided activities as long as there is shared participation and both teacher and child have active roles in the activity (Epstein, 2007; EYLF, 2009).

However, fundamental to these approaches are observations of children engaged in peer interactions. Without these, teachers are unaware of children’s actual social and emotional developmental level, and consequently, they are unaware of where children need development. Inevitably, without this knowledge they are unable to appropriately scaffold their learning towards more competent skills.

Furthermore, this case study demonstrated that without appropriate social and emotional support, children can, as in the case of Holly, withdraw from the social and academic milieu provided in the classroom, resulting in adverse social and academic outcomes, defeating the educational objectives set by the school.
Chapter Eleven: Cross Case Analysis

11.0 Introduction

The single case studies presented in Chapters six to ten described the context of each classroom from a cultural-institutional, interpersonal and personal focus of analysis. In using the thematic analysis that was described in Chapter four (section 4.5.1), this chapter identifies and examines the patterns that emerged under each foci of analysis. The patterns identified provide insight into those classroom opportunities that either support or constrain children’s social and emotional development. These are then discussed in relation to the classroom relationships, environment and play. The patterns considered in this study should be understood in light of Australian culture, laws, economic system, history and social conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1977, 1994) which although alluded to, are not directly addressed in this study.

11.1 The Cultural-Institutional Focus of Analysis

There are several patterns that emerged in the cultural-institutional level. These are the: 1) contributions to curriculum made by parents; 2) mission statements for the schools, and 3) classroom routines and design. This section will discuss these subthemes and how they contribute to supporting children’s social and emotional development.
11.1.1 Parents’ contributions to curriculum.

There are two themes to emerge from parent contributions to curriculum. The first considers the contributions the parents’ make to the direction of schools educational goals. Included in this discussion is evidence of parents either promoting children’s holistic development or promoting academic goals such as higher test results in assessments such as PIPS and NAPLAN assessments discussed in Chapter one (section 1.1). This theme is indicative of the parents’ educational goals. The second theme concerns parent involvement in classroom activities. The following section examines these two themes in light of the support they each provide to children’s social and emotional development.

11.1.1.1 Parents’ educational goals.

The data indicated that all of the teachers involved in this study reported that the parents wanted higher scores indicated by future PIPS and NAPLAN assessments. However, it was in only two of the schools, St Matthew’s (Mia) and St Orville’s (Olivia), that the parents placed overt pressure on the leadership team to improve academic results. Both of these schools were located in high socioeconomic areas.

Informal interviews with Mia indicated that the majority of parents at Matthew’s were constantly demanding higher NAPLAN scores and that they wanted to see evidence that Mia was working toward this goal in her kindergarten programme. To support their educational aspirations, most of the parents groomed their children for more formal learning prior to starting kindergarten. Mia said this resulted in the children not being able to engage in play-based activities without appearing ‘lost’. With the combination of parental demands, and the children being groomed for formal learning, Mia developed a more formal, academically orientated programme. As a result, the
kindergarten programme was characterised by teacher-guided activities that had specific learning outcomes, where the children were carefully monitored in order to ensure the outcomes were achieved. Few opportunities were provided for children to engage in any experience that did not have a specified academic outcome. Consequently, there was no provision for child-guided experiences, in particular pretend play, until the end of the year.

The ramifications of having no play in the kindergarten curriculum for children’s social and emotional development are numerous. Play is where children learn social and cultural norms and regulate their behaviour to act in socially desirable ways. It is where they learn perspective taking, and in doing so develop empathy and respect for others (DEEWR & CAG, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, play creates a powerful vehicle for connecting with both others and learning, and in doing so establishes a foundation for learning numeracy and literacy skills (O’Connor, 2012). These will be discussed later in this chapter.

Even though the parents at St Orville’s Primary also demanded higher scores, the demand was not quite as robust as it was at St. Matthew’s, nor did the parents approach the school in large numbers. Rather, every now and again a parent would question the educational direction of the kindergarten curriculum, with some expressing their concern that it was not equipping the children with appropriate academic skills. This, combined with a lower than expected PIPS score from the previous years’ cohort, resulted in the principal suggesting that the children be trained in some of the language inherent to this assessment; for example, Olivia was asked by the principal to introduce the word ‘yacht’ (which appears in the PIPS assessment) to the children.

Olivia resisted any move to formalise the kindergarten curriculum. She believed that the children in her class would do well academically because they were naturally
predisposed to achieving good grades in later schooling (their parents were predominantly professional people). From this assumption she concluded that what the children did need was a good grounding in social and emotional skills. Consequently, this classroom was characterised by child-guided experiences and conversations. However, in what was possibly a radical effort not to formalise the curriculum, Olivia appeared to undervalue the teacher-guided experiences in this classroom. This was apparent for two reasons; one, teacher-guided activities were rarely observed to occur, and two, Olivia only momentarily stayed with the children while they were engaged in these activities. Typical to these situations, Olivia would launch the activity and then leave. Teacher-guided experiences provide children with the opportunity to engage in activities where the rules have been set by others, which is an integral process in internalising rules of certain behaviour (Bodrova & Leong, 2008). In other words, it is important for children to engage in these activities as they contribute to their ability to self-regulate.

The parents from the remaining schools, St Katherine, St Christopher and St Hovea’s kindergartens demonstrated more support for the teachers’ curriculum decision-making. Consequently, these teachers formulated programmes that were consistent with their beliefs about how young children learn. This transpired into classrooms that offered many opportunities for play and conversations coupled with times for children to engage with the teachers in teacher-guided activities. The degree to which each teacher involved themselves in children’s learning will be explored later in this chapter.
11.1.1.2 Parent involvement.

Each of the kindergartens participating in this study had a parent roster that was regularly filled by the parents of each community. Typical to all the classrooms, while on duty, the parents would follow an activity and encourage children to achieve the outcomes set by the teacher. In whole group experiences, the parents would sit on the mat with their children.

The data indicated that the children used their parents as a source of security, either by cuddling up to them during whole group sessions or by momentarily standing near them and then returning to their play. Studies have found the children of parents who have regular contact with schools demonstrate positive engagement with their peers, adults, and learning (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004).

11.1.2 The schools’ mission statement.

The mission statement of a school provides an overview of the steps planned to achieve the future direction of the school. In order to understand how the schools plan to reach their educational goals, each school’s mission statement was downloaded from the My School website (ACARA, 2010). These mission statements are discussed here in relation to what was observed in the kindergarten programmes. In this study it was found that those school mission statements that emphasised a learning journey were more likely to provide a balanced kindergarten programme that valued play as a medium for learning. In contrast, those school mission statements that purported a balanced or holistic programme to achieve literacy and numeracy outcomes were more likely to offer a kindergarten programme that was weighted toward one particular outcome, for example either academic outcomes or social and emotional outcomes. As a
result their programmes were characterised by either didactic, highly structured programmes or laissez-faire, loosely structured programmes.

Both St Katherine and St Christopher’s primary school mission statements placed emphasis on what they described as a ‘learning adventure’. St Katherine’s mission statement even propounded a sense of joy in the learning adventure. Consistent with this, the focus in this classroom was always on the process of learning rather than products. Typically at Katherine’s kindergarten, Kyra would skilfully enter child-guided activities enriching the process through asking thought provoking questions and empowering children with the skills to work through problems. The learning adventure was important and shared in both teacher- and child-guided experiences. Similarly at Christopher’s kindergarten, Claire offered a variety of teacher- and child-guided experiences. However, these experiences tended not to be as balanced as those offered at Katherine’s as Claire did not engage with the children while they engaged in child-guided experiences as often or as skilfully as Kyra did; nor did the children contribute their ideas to teacher-guided experiences.

The principals at St Katherine’s and St Christopher’s offered Kyra and Claire their support. Both principals believed that play-based learning was a valuable medium for teaching young children, and promoted this kind of learning in the school. The principal at St Christopher’s often visited all the classrooms and had a keen interest in the implementation of the PATHS programme. Consequently, the PATHS programme was adopted with integrity in each of the classrooms.

St Matthews’s, St Orville’s and St Hovea’s schools’ mission statements all suggested a holistic and balanced approach to improving literacy and numeracy outcomes. However, each of these schools offered a programme that was weighted
heavily toward developing only one type of skill using pedagogy that was either too teacher-guided or too child-guided (Epstein, 2007). St Matthew’s and St Hovea’s kindergarten curricula were weighted toward achieving academic outcomes with the focus being on teacher-guided experiences, while St Orville’s was weighted toward achieving social and emotional skills and the focus was on child-guided experiences. The literature suggests that kindergarten curricula that considers cognitive and social development as complementary and important (Campbell et al., 2012; Schweinhart et al., 2005), and provides programmes that combines both child-guided and teacher-guided educational opportunities offer more positive long-term educational and life outcomes (Epstein, 2007).

There are two possible reasons why one schools’ vision and leadership led to a more socially and emotionally supportive environment than the other. First, the vision that emphasised the learning journey placed importance on the learning that occurs in the process rather than on products. Social and emotional skills are developed through the interactions that occur along the journey, and when importance is placed on them, the more fruitful the social and emotional outcomes become. Second, the school leadership offered support to the teachers’ programmes and practices. Consequently, the teachers were able to integrate the education of the whole child, without pressure to target just one aspect of development. Essentially, the clearly articulated and agreed upon educational goals aligned resources and practice with prioritised areas and improved outcomes (OECD, 2012).
11.1.3 The classroom routines and design.

11.1.3.1 The classroom routines.

Consistent yet flexible classroom routines are important to young children’s social and emotional development as they provide emotional stability and security (Epstein, 2007). In this instance, routines are not just the schedules that guide the daily structure. Routines in this section also include the way the class behave and respond to situations of the day. It is demonstrative of the classroom culture. For instance, at St Orville’s kindergarten, if the children did not want their Lego constructions demolished at pack away time, they had to lift the piece onto a special table. In that way, the whole class knew to leave the construction alone. It was the classes agreed upon rule, and each child trusted that the other knew what to do. Therefore, the children who put their construction on the table felt secure in knowing it would be safe.

In contrast, St Hovea’s did not appear to have consistent routines that were understood by all the children. Using the example illustrated in Vignette 10.1, two girls were told to leave a sign on their block construction to let the other children know that it should not be knocked down. However, this was not usual practice, and as such the other children did not know what it meant. Perhaps the boys who knocked the construction down to pack it away might have felt confused as to why Heather began yelling at them. The routine that they knew was to put everything away when it was pack away time. Even though they did not appear upset because of Heather’s shouting, Holly did. It is possible that the raucous nature of the frenzied pack away, compounded by Heather shouting in a language that Holly was grappling to understand, made the situation appear to her as unpredictable and unsafe. It is highly probable that this heightened moment of insecurity and anxiety constrained the possibility of creating the
shared affective space necessary for learning in the ZPD to occur. Without this space, Holly’s engagement in activities, and her ability to develop to her fullest potential was compromised.

This highlights the importance of ensuring shared understandings in the classroom. The use of regular, understood routines, contributes to children feeling secure in knowing what is expected of them. If people develop as they participate and contribute to cultural activities, then routines should facilitate children’s engagement in positive experiences that support their social and emotional development.

11.1.3.2 The classroom design.

There are two themes to emerge pertaining to classroom design. The first considers how the physical design of the classroom directs children’s movements toward certain activities. The second explores how equipment is made available to children. The implications these have on supporting children’s social and emotional development is discussed.

11.1.3.2.1 Classroom layout.

All the classrooms in this study were designed to direct children toward certain activities. At St Katherine’s, St Christopher’s and St Hovea’s the design of the classroom facilitated children’s movement between teacher-guided and child-guided experiences. St Orville’s was designed to direct children to the centre of the classroom where they could engage in child-directed play, while St Matthew’s classroom design
directed children toward teacher-guided activities. These classroom arrangements invited children to participate in certain activities that were designed to promote certain types of skills (Doctoroff, 2001). Classroom designs that directed children to participate in only one form of activity, aimed at developing just social and emotional skills, or just academic skills were less likely to provide an environment that effectively supports children’s social and emotional development (Campbell et al., 2012; Schweinhart, 2005). Arnold, Brown, Meagher, Baker, Dobbs and Doctoroff (2006) suggest that programmes aimed at targeting multiple developmental domains are more likely to succeed.

The theory of transformation of participation (Rogoff, 2003) would suggest that transformation occurs based on the sociocultural activity children participate in. This means that in a classroom that only provides opportunity to extend social and emotional skills through child-guided experiences, the children’s opportunities to practice employing social and emotional skills in different contexts and for different reasons are constrained. Similarly, in classrooms that only provide teacher-guided experiences to extend academic skills will constrain children’s opportunities to learn and practice a range of social and emotional skills.

Furthermore, experiences that are unbalanced, i.e. child-guided experiences with no active involvement from the teacher, or teacher-guided experiences with no active involvement from the child are less likely to support social and emotional development. This can be conceptualised using Vygotsky’s (1987) theory of abstract concept and everyday concepts. In everyday activity, such as child-guided experiences children act without conscious thought and will be less likely to perform that skill again of their own volition. When an adult or more capable peer enters that experience and introduces more abstract concepts, then the activity becomes conscious and that child will be able
to perform that activity again of his or her own volition. In the case of teacher-guided experiences, if children cannot attach the abstract to everyday concepts, or authentic situations, it is less likely they will make a connection with the abstract concept and make it their own.

11.1.3.2.2 Availability of equipment and stationery.

In this study it appeared that those classrooms that provided equipment that facilitated pretend play and encouraged sustained conversations were more likely to support children’s positive social and emotional development. While all the classrooms had varying amounts of equipment available for children to access throughout the day, only two provided children with the opportunity to engage in sustained conversations. These were St Katherine’s (Kyra) and St Christopher’s (Claire).

Kyra intentionally set up her classroom to encourage conversations between children. Hence, the equipment she set up provided opportunities for sharing, collaboration and discussions. By keeping stationery well stocked for children to access independently, they were able to immerse themselves in their play without having to disrupt it to ask an adult for resources. Hence, in addition to encouraging children’s sense of belonging, responsibility and autonomy, this arrangement also increased the opportunity for children to engage in extended periods of complex play scenarios.

Although St Christopher’s also had plentiful resources and well stocked stationery, the children tended not to access them as readily or in such a coordinated or collaborative way. The only difference between the two kindergartens was the teacher interactions with the children while they were engaged in child-guided experiences.
Whereas Claire would scan the room to ensure all children were engaged, Kyra would occasionally enter into the children’s games and discussions, and engage with the children in what they were doing. Often these discussions were indicative of the sustained shared thinking described by Sylva et al. (2004), however, at other times they were just a well worded comment. These interactions will be discussed in the next section.

11.2 The Interpersonal Focus of Analysis

Three patterns emerged from the interpersonal focus. These were: teachers’ involvement in child-guided experiences, children’s involvement in teacher-guided experiences and the opportunities made available for children to interact with each other. The way in which these themes manifested in the kindergarten contributed to the development of children’s social and emotional skills, as the following elaborates.

11.2.1 Teachers’ involvement in child-guided experiences.

There were two key themes to emerge in this area. The first theme considers the opportunities each programme provided for child-guided experiences. This theme draws on the cultural-institutional focus of analysis, in particular the community and school’s educational values. The second theme examines how teachers used these opportunities to support children’s social and emotional development.
11.2.1.1 Opportunities for child-guided experiences.

Child-guided experiences offer opportune moments to guide the development of children’s social and emotional skills. Vygotsky (1978) explained that in play children can abide by a rigid set of rules that in real life would be impossible. Many child-guided experiences are bound within a framework of implicitly set rules. As a result, children need to coordinate and self-regulate their behaviours to stay within the parameters of the play situation. Due to the social and emotional demands involved in child-guided experiences, these situations present as crucial in promoting social and emotional development.

It was apparent from the data that some kindergarten classrooms offered more opportunities for child-guided experiences than others. Typically, St Katherine’s, St Christopher’s, St Orville’s and St Hovea’s programmes provided many opportunities for children to guide activities to meet their interests. In each of these classrooms the teachers provided time and equipment that encouraged children to guide their own involvement in activities.

St Matthew’s kindergarten tended not to offer as many opportunities for children to engage in activities of their choosing. Also differentiating St Matthew’s programme from the others was that the child-guided experiences tended to occur at different times from the teacher-guided experiences. The fewer opportunities for child-guided experiences could be explained by how Mia perceived the educational goals of the school and school community. However, it could also be indicative of the educational value Mia placed on these activities. It is possible that by separating the two that one form of activity was regarded as learning while the other was not.
11.2.1.2 Supporting social and emotional development in child-guided experiences.

In this study, teachers who were able to skilfully enter child-guided experiences and conversations provided more effective opportunities for the development of children’s social and emotional skills. When teachers skilfully entered child-guided experiences, they did not disrupt the direction of the children’s play or conversation, nor did they take over. Rather, they both guided and extended children by using what they had come to know of the rules inherent in the children’s play, and/or the object or creation that had captured the children’s interest, and/or using the children’s chosen topic of conversation.

Kyra was particularly effective at doing this. When she guided the children she would use the symbolism the children used in their play. For example, one day Kyra told one of the girls, Kate, who was the mum for the day that her baby was crying. Kate had left a doll lying around on one of the tables and Kyra wanted her to remove the doll from where it was. However, by using the language that was true to Kate’s role, Kyra maintained the integrity of the play and in doing so the imaginary situation that Kate and her social partner had formed was not disrupted (Vygotsky, 1978). Rather, the rich conversation between Kate and Karen transcribed in Vignette 7.2 directly followed this incidence.

This example highlighted two aspects to Kyra’s practice. First, it demonstrated that Kyra made observations of children while they played. Through observing the children’s’ play over a period of time, she had come to learn that certain dress-up items symbolised certain roles. For example, the mother wore the scarf, and the big sister wore the flared skirt. As such, Kyra knew that because Kate wore the scarf, she was the more likely out of the two girls to have the baby.
Second, it also evidenced that Kyra was respectful of the children’s play roles. Had she told Kate to go and put her doll away, she would have undermined Kate’s role as mother. In contrast, by saying ‘your baby is crying’ she affirmed Kate’s role. In this way, Kyra demonstrated regard for the children’s perspectives, which is a trait identified by Pianta et al. (2008) as indicative of quality interactions. Further, it did not interfere with the affective space that Kate and her social partner Karen had formed. In this situation, Karen was the more capable other who modelled adult conversation to Kate as they sat absorbed in their roles at the writing table (Goldstein, 1999).

In Vignette 7.1 Kyra approached one of the boys, Kieran, while he was engaged with creating box construction. She identified a problem that he was about to face and began guiding him toward planning how he would prepare for it. Throughout this interaction, Kyra did not once tell him what to do, rather she asked him a series of questions that later he could ask himself when faced with a similar problem. When Kyra noticed the other boy walking by, she modelled to Kieran how to engage others to work collaboratively in working through a problem.

Using Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of internalising higher psychological functions to examine this example, it can be noted that Kyra placed strategies for planning and seeking help from others on the social level (interpsychological). Planning and collaborating are higher mental functions. As all higher functions originate as actual relations between social partners, Kyra created opportunities so that these functions would likely be internalised by Kieran.

This vignette also provided an example of a teacher working within the ZPD. The affective space (Goldstein, 1999) shared between Kyra and Kieran the level of Kieran’s engagement in the activity and the skills for planning and seeking help that were just out of Kieran’s reach created the optimal environment for supporting and
extending Kieran’s social strategies. Kyra recognised this opportunity for learning and enhanced the learning potential by encouraging Kieran to become actively engaged in the learning process.

This following scenario provides an example of how Kyra used the topic of children’s conversations to enter their activity. Kyra walked up to a table where a group of girls were talking about one of the girl’s pet lamb and how it constantly defecated inside her house. Kyra quietly listened for a while and then, when an opening presented itself, she made the suggestion that the lamb wear a nappy (diaper). The girl responded to Kyra and the other girls joined in. Kyra sat with the girls while they spoke and the flow of conversation continued. This example demonstrates that through attentive listening, Kyra could build upon what the children were saying to naturally and respectfully enter the conversation. Using the children’s ideas, Kyra demonstrated that she had no intention of changing what the girls were talking about; hence the girls could remain engaged in what they were doing.

In contrast, even though Claire from St Christopher’s was very thoughtful toward the children, she did not demonstrate the same level of skill entering children’s play. For example, Claire sat with a group of girls who were playing with play dough. The girls had been making animal habitats and were telling each other their plans. When Claire sat with them they became quiet, as if waiting for her to give them an instruction. Claire smiled at them and started rolling some play dough. After a short while Claire began watching the boys on the other side of the room, finally, another child from another group coaxed Claire away. When Claire left, the conversation between the girls resumed.

The difference between the two examples can be explained using Goldstein’s theory of the interrelational dimension (1999). When Kyra entered the play she
participated in a way that was consistent with the children’s symbolism or conversation, following the children’s lead. In this way, she developed a sense of duality (Noddings, 1984) facilitating reciprocity between teacher and children (Pianta et al., 2008). Kyra participated, but did not take the moments over; rather she took her cue from the children enabling them to remain fully engaged in their activity. This supported children’s social and emotional development in two ways. First, by engaging in the children’s activity without taking it over, Kyra inadvertently reinforced to the children that their social interactions, thoughts and ideas were important and valued. Consequently, the children’s play and conversations progressively grew in sophistication as time went on. Second, Kyra created an optimal environment for the ZPD to occur. Within the boundaries of the rules the children had placed on their interactions, Kyra could effectively guide children’s participation toward more mature forms of social activity.

The programme offered by St Matthew’s presented some constraints for guiding children’s social and emotional skills and strategies in child-guided experiences. First, the opportunity for child-guided experiences did not occur throughout the day. Rather, they were isolated to certain times that were not dedicated to academic learning. When child-guided experiences occurred, they were usually centred on objects that tended not to foster collaboration or conversation with peers. This may have been due to a number of reasons including that it could have been particular to this cohort of children, or that the equipment did not encourage conversation, or that in this classroom the opportunities were too constrained for children to know how to engage in collaboration and conversations with adults and peers.

Second, when the opportunity to engage in child-guided experiences did occur at the end of the year (Vignette 6.1), the arbitrary limit placed on the number of children
allowed to enter the play reduced the potential for supporting and extending children’s social and emotional skills and strategies. One reason for this was that the fewer the children involved, the less chance that partnerships could form where there was a more capable peer. Intensifying the constrained potential for supporting and extending social and emotional skills and strategies was that the adults in the classroom were not observed entering the play.

In supporting children’s social and emotional development in child-guided experiences, three things need to happen. First, as with all higher psychological functions the social and emotional skills and strategies must exist first on the social level (Vygotsky, 1978). Children need to see how these skills and strategies appear in authentic situations. It is essential that in these situations that the abstract social and emotional skills and strategies merge with what the children are doing (Vygotsky, 1987). This leads to the second feature necessary for supporting children’s social and emotional development, there needs to be an adult or more capable peer present to connect the everyday and abstract concepts. Third, children need multiple opportunities to engage in activities that require them to practice these skills and strategies heightening the likelihood of the children making them their own.

The importance of teacher involvement in child-guided experiences was demonstrated at Hovea’s kindergarten (Case Study 10). At Hovea’s, Heather felt because of the huge emphasis on literacy in the school that she had to dedicate all her attention to literacy based teacher-guided activities. This meant that when children were engaged in play where intense social and emotional demands were continually being made, they went without adult guidance or support.

In this programme, as the teachers did not enter into or observe the child-guided experiences, the guided participation that did occur was not desirable for one of the
girls, Holly. Holly has a language background other than English (LBOTE) and she needed to engage with her peers in positive, language rich experiences in order to start communicating effectively in English. However, throughout the observation period, Holly was ostracised and bullied by her peers, which excluded her from the social milieu necessary for social and emotional development.

Holly would have benefited from the support of an adult, in particular her teacher Heather, in guiding her engagement in positive interactions with her peers. Equally, this adult engagement would have guided Holly’s peers toward more positive and inclusive social interactions. This situation highlighted that not all guidance is desirable, and placed emphasis on the importance of the structure of the program and the adults’ role within that structure (Rogoff, 2003).

11.2.2 Children’s involvement in teacher-guided experiences.

It was evident in the data that children’s involvement in teacher-guided experiences was encouraged by both teacher presence and teacher sensitivity to children’s ideas and abilities. In teacher-guided activities, most teachers remained with the children guiding them toward an outcome. However, at St Orville’s soon after Olivia demonstrated to children how to participate in an activity she would leave to finish preparing for another activity or perform other managerial tasks. Typically, once Olivia left an activity the children left soon after. As stated in the case studies this may be explained using Noddings (1984) theory that children are more inclined to engage in an activity because of the “love for the adult and the desire to imitate her (sic)” (p. 64) and to share in the enjoyable interpersonal connection with their teacher (Goldstein, 1999). It is also plausible that the children left the activity because if their teacher did not value it enough to stay, they could not see the value staying either.
In the other participating classrooms the teachers remained with the children, guiding their development through teacher-guided experiences. Kyra tended to occasionally leave to talk to all the children as they engaged in other activities, but would return to the children at the experience she was guiding. While Kyra was gone, the children were observed to remain on task. This could be explained by the way Kyra engaged them in the activity. In one instance, the children had researched a dinosaur, drew it and then used coloured play dough to build it into a more three-dimensional picture. As the children sat with Kyra one child sang, “Can I have blue-oo?” Kyra responded in song, and asked the next child what colour play dough they would like, also in the playful way the first child had. The enjoyment this created made all the children at the table want to participate, and soon they were all playing with words as they sung out their requests and what they were doing.

In this activity, Kyra responded to the children’s cues as they engaged in the experience. She demonstrated some flexibility in her interactions with the children allowing the word play initiated by one of the children to support them reaching the outcome of the activity. Incidentally, this was indicative of all the interactions in the classroom. Kyra was the only teacher who demonstrated flexibility in her programme to accommodate children’s ideas. In doing this, Kyra sent a strong message that the children had worthwhile and valuable ideas and that they were respected. As a result, they were more likely to express their ideas, and act freely during teacher-guided activities. It may have been this sense of ownership that encouraged the children to participate as attentively as they did.

Even though there is the possibility that children engaged so readily in the activity Kyra offered because it was playful, the other teachers also offered enjoyable activities. Mia for example, provided an array of interesting hands-on activities. The
children engaging with these activities, however, tended not to interact as freely with Mia or the other adults assisting in the activity possibly because their playful cues were not as readily adopted. Similarly, Claire prepared many topical and interesting activities, however, the inflexibility imposed by the teacher directed nature of the activities’ processes and outcomes minimised the opportunities for children’s active engagement and open-ended responses?

The level of children’s engagement in the activities Kyra offered can be explained using Goldstein’s theory of the interrelational dimension (1999). Teachers who are receptive to children’s perspectives develop a more caring relationship. Kyra, who consistently showed that she was open to and respectful of the children’s perspectives and ideas, demonstrated this. Consequently, they not only felt safe, but also motivated to contribute to all experiences and in doing so their participation was facilitated and increased.

11.2.3 Opportunities for children to engage with each other.

Play and peer social interactions place social and emotional demands on children. The implicit rules that bound children’s play require them to regulate their behaviour in ways that cannot be reproduced in other situations (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, opportunities for peer interactions and play are an essential component of kindergarten programmes for the effective support of children’s social and emotional development.

All the kindergarten programmes in this study offered some opportunity for children to engage with each other. However, the opportunities provided offered different support to children. For example, at St Matthew’s classroom the children engaged in peer interactions usually within teacher-guided experiences. In these
situations, the children tended not to engage in imaginary play, and hence they were given few opportunities to practice abiding by implicit rules in games. At St Christopher’s and St Hovea’s, the children engaged in peer interactions usually without the guidance of an adult. This presented many opportunities for children to abide by the implicit rules of a game, for example the ‘playing teacher’ game that the children at St Christopher’s often played. However, without teacher intervention, the children’s interactions were not always desirable.

At St Orville’s, Olivia intentionally guided children to communicate effectively with each other. As noted in the case studies, Olivia believed mealtimes to be social times of the day, and hence she encouraged children to converse with each other. However, while children were engaged in child-guided experiences where the activity was characterised by imagination and pretend, Olivia tended not to guide their interactions.

The implications for not entering children’s play to guide their interactions can be explained using Vygotsky’s (1987) theory of abstract and everyday concept formation. Vygotsky said that abstract concepts are adopted from adult thinking while everyday concepts are in children’s life experiences and in natural conversational contexts. It is only when the two merge that deep and meaningful concept formation takes place. This theory can be applied to social and emotional development where the adults’ abstract concepts guide children in everyday activity toward conscious enactment of pro-social, culturally embedded behaviours.

The data indicates that Kyra took providing opportunities for peer interactions one step further. Indeed, the interactions that Kyra engaged in with the children encouraged them to support and extend each other’s thinking. As such, in this classroom the ability to scaffold knowledge and understanding was not limited to just the teachers
or a few more capable peers. Kyra guided children into understanding that they could help other children, just as other children can help them. In this chapter it has been established that at St Katherine’s kindergarten Kyra often walked around the room entering in and out of children’s conversations and play. In these situations, Kyra would often guide the children toward supporting each other’s maturing forms of interacting, problem solving and collaborating. This was enabled via a number of means, with the first being the sense of duality that Kyra formed with the children. Using the example of Kieran again (Vignette 7.1), Kyra identified a problem that Kieran was about to encounter and began asking what they should do about it. Her ‘wonder’ questions made it appear that the problem was shared between them. Moreover, Kyra alerted Kieran to the knowledge that his peers can also be a source to turn to for collaboration in problem solving.

In another instance, Kyra informed one of the girls of an opportunity to support one of her peers who was trying to construct a bird. The girl had a picture of a bird on her cereal box that Kyra said would help the boy and his design. Then, Kyra alerted the boy that the girl had a picture of a bird that may help him. In creating this situation, Kyra situated a child, who may not normally be a ‘more capable other’ in the position of assisting another child. By doing this, Kyra demonstrated to the girl that she can be a more capable other who is able to scaffold another’s learning. She then placed her in a safe situation where she could practice supporting others.

11.3 The Personal Focus of Analysis

In this study the educational goals (discussed in the cultural-institutional focus of analysis) driving the kindergarten programme contributed to the children’s transformation-of-participation (Rogoff, 2003). However, it needs to be noted that the
personal focus of analysis is difficult to state with any certainty because one cannot be sure of what is happening in the children’s understanding and what they have appropriated as their own. What can be ascertained is a change in behaviour from the beginning of the observation period to the end.

The overriding theme to emerge from this focus of analysis is that children learn in different ways and at different rates. Consequently, a kindergarten programme that has little flexibility will be just as advantageous to some children’s social and emotional development as it is disadvantageous for others. In much the same way, a kindergarten programme that is centred on just one aspect of development will not necessarily support the other areas of development. For example, those children who need to gain a sense of independence and confidence, or develop the ability to ignore distractions while listening to the teacher will not do as well in a kindergarten programme that only addresses academic learning as they would in a programme that places equal emphasis on all areas of development.

The programme at St Katherine’s provided a balance between teacher- and child-guided experiences. The activities that were encouraged were designed to improve academic skills as well as develop children’s social and emotional skills and strategies. Kyra would engage with children while they were engaged in child-guided experiences and she enabled children to help shape the adult-guided experiences. In this way, Kyra was aware of how all the children interacted with each other in most situations in the classroom. Consequently, Kyra knew where children needed support and where they could be positioned to support others.

It is possible that it was because of this that throughout the year the children began to demonstrate increasingly sophisticated communication and problem solving skills. These skills were demonstrated to be beneficial to both their personal interactions
as well as to their critical thinking and persuasive arguments. For example, Vignette 7.0 demonstrates how one of the girls, Kathy maintained positive interactions with Kate who was initially unresponsive to her attentions. Kathy could have reacted negatively to Kate’s abruptness, but chose not to; rather, she skilfully used a topic that she knew was relevant to Kate to engage her in positive interactions.

In Vignette 7.3, Kelsey very competently persuaded Kyra to allow the children to create a restaurant at lunch time. This interaction demonstrated goal setting and organisational skills as well as the ability to solve a problem. It is possible that Kelsey already had these skills prior to her year in kindergarten, however, Kyra created a classroom curriculum that supported children’s thoughts, and gave them the opportunity to practice and build these skills. Consequently, on a number of occasions other children very capably expressed their idea to the class and Kyra.

It is possible that these children became more confident in the classroom because Kyra provided them with a safe, affective space in which they could practice communicative skills and problem solving within the ZPD. Moreover, as children confidently expressed their ideas and engaged in positive communications, they placed their social skills and strategies (higher mental functions) on the social level. Consequently, this classroom offered the long series of developmental events needed to transform an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978).

In contrast, St Matthew’s kindergarten programme was driven by an academic focus due to demands discussed in the cultural-institutional focus of analysis. Every day, Mia offered the same routines that promoted children’s understanding of the concepts she was trying to teach. Mia did this in an amiable way. She was always kind and gentle with the children, often making little jokes to make them feel comfortable.
Mia responded to all the children’s interactions when they were focussed on the outcome she was trying to promote. This meant that the children’s interactions that were not focused on the academic goal were often ignored, as for example the times when Michael tried to engage Mia in his practical jokes (Vignette 6.4). Although Michael’s jokes imitated the way Mia joked with the children, they came with the risk of deviating away from the academic purpose of the lesson. Therefore, Michael’s efforts were not reciprocated.

Mia rated Michael as having poor attention skills at the beginning of the observation period (Social and Emotional Rating Scale, 26/6/09). His peers often distracted him and he rarely paid attention to what Mia was saying. However, by the end of the observation period, Michael was attentive, quiet and responsive to Mia’s cues. The reasons for this change in behaviour could have been attributed to many reasons, some of which included that Michael may have matured; or he may have needed to be separated from his peers to realise that he enjoyed the content of the lesson, or alternatively he realised that his interactions in the programme were not encouraged. Regardless of the reason, Michael’s changing behaviour simultaneously contributed to the transformation of the classroom practice and institution. His change of behaviour, in Mia’s mind, verified that the programme had become interesting to him, and therefore inadvertently perpetuated the focus on academic outcomes.

In this same classroom, one of the girls, Mikayla, transformed to become anxious and reluctant to go to school. She appeared to regress socially, which began to impact on her ability to interact successfully with others in the classroom. This in turn, diminished her ability to thrive academically in the classroom as she no longer appeared motivated or engaged - both of which are reputed as two of the most “conclusive
indicators of how well an educational setting is meeting the learning and developmental priorities of children” (Government of South Australia, 2008, p. 14).

Mia did not perceive Mikayla to be as ‘intelligent’ as Michael acknowledging that she may have been struggling with the curriculum content (Interview, 3/12/09). Even though Mia began incorporating many coping strategies with the help of Mikayla’s mother, she did not consider adapting the curriculum to meet Mikayla’s needs. It is possible that a more play-based programme would have enabled Mikayla to perform tasks that she perceived too difficult in real life without inducing feelings of inadequacy and/or anxiety (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, play enables children to work within their ZPD. This means that Mikayla would have been given opportunities to reach skills and strategies just out of her reach, as opposed to striving for outcomes that were too difficult.

Throughout the observation period one of the girls at St Hovea, Holly, also gradually became more anxious and reclusive. In contrast to St Matthew’s kindergarten, this was more likely to be because Holly needed support interacting with her peers, rather than the curriculum content. As discussed in the cultural-institutional focus of analysis, the programme was designed with a strong focus on literacy dedicated activities which constrained Heather’s opportunities to make observations of children while they played. Consequently, Heather was unaware that Holly experienced difficulties interacting with her peers and was hence unable to help her develop more proficient social repertoires that would assist her in accessing positive social interactions. These were particularly important to Holly since positive, collaborative interactions that are characterised by problem solving and discovery are beneficial for children, like Holly, who are learning a second language (Barna, 1994; Escamilla & Grassi, 2000; Swain et al., 2002).
11.4 Summary

This cross case study analysis has demonstrated the connection between the cultural-institutional, interpersonal and personal foci of analysis, and in doing so has highlighted that each contributes to the kindergarten programme. It was also established that programmes that centre on developing the whole child provide a more effective environment in which to support children’s social and emotional development. Moreover, programmes that enable a balance between teacher- and child-guided experiences where children have input into the teacher-guided experiences and teachers have an active role in child-guided experiences offer more support for children’s social and emotional development. The reasons for this are threefold. The first is that children gain a sense of empowerment, satisfaction and general sense of wellbeing when they are able to contribute to the programme. Further, their contributions have the potential to make the programme more suitable to children’s interests and abilities.

Second, when teachers enter children’s play they learn about how children interact with each other. This is necessary to ascertain children’s actual level of development so that the teacher can provide them with experiences in the ZPD that extend their social knowledge, understanding, skills and strategies. Third, when teachers are engaged with children in child-guided experiences, they share an affective space from which they can guide children’s social and emotional development while engaged in authentic situations. Where abstract and everyday concepts meet, the learning and development are unparalleled.

Thus far this analysis has considered supporting social and emotional development from a conceptual perspective. The following explores this further using a more practical lens to view development. The concepts underpinning this study are still
used to conceptualise how teachers are supporting children’s social and emotional development.

11.5 The Relationships, Environment and Play

It was evident from each case study that there are three essential elements to a classroom that is supportive of children’s social and emotional development. These are relationships, environment and play. Much like the three planes of analysis described by Rogoff (1995, 2003) in the classroom these three elements are inseparable. They work synergistically, building (or constraining) the capacity of the other to provide a context that supports (or constrains) children’s social and emotional development. When each of these three elements work harmoniously, they create a whole. This is represented in Figure 11.1, where the three elements join together to create a complete circle. The arrows framing each segment indicate that one element will support and strengthen the other. Hence, when these segments become fragmented, the support is compromised.

Figure 11.1: Interaction between relationships, play and environment creating a whole.
It was observed throughout the case studies that if one of these elements was not evident or nurtured within the classroom, then the harmony was disrupted resulting in a context that could not sustain social and emotional support in a holistic and synergistic way. Figure 11.2 illustrates how one element cannot support the other when they are disjointed.

*Figure 11.2:* Interaction between relationships, play and environment when one or more elements are not evident.

This section analyses the relationships, environment and play presented by the case studies. Each section begins with how the kindergarten was enabled to provide that element in the classroom and then discusses the constraints experienced by others.
11.5.1 The relationships.

All the teachers in this study cared for the children in their class. They all expressed concern for children who were anxious or upset and they all wanted the children to develop to their optimum potential. However, only Kyra demonstrated flexibility in her programming to incorporate children’s interests and ideas. Receptiveness to children’s perspective and situation, or forming a ‘duality’ with the children is a key characteristic of quality early childhood education (Goldstein, 1999; Noddings, 1984; Pianta et al., 2008). Pianta et al. (2008) explain that this characteristic is essential to supporting children’s social and emotional development as it provides ‘comfort, assistance, reassurance, and acceptance’ (p. 36). When this is provided, the teacher becomes a secure base from which (a) children feel safe to explore their own thoughts and ideas, and (b) from which they can go and explore the social milieu of the classroom.

In regards to feeling safe to explore thoughts and ideas, most of the teachers in this study listened attentively to children. However, Kyra was the only teacher observed to act on the children’s ideas. Hence, Kyra encouraged children to talk through their ideas with her, just as Kelsey did in Vignette 7.3. As a consequence, these children were required to practice evaluation and reflection, organising their thoughts, as well as exercising skills of negotiation in order to convince Kyra that their idea was worth adopting (Zins et al, 2007).

Kyra’s programme had the flexibility to incorporate the children’s ideas for a number of reasons, many of which have been discussed in the cultural-institutional and interpersonal foci of analysis both in this chapter and the case studies. However, only one of these reasons will be discussed here. Kyra was able to incorporate the children’s ideas because the programme outcomes integrated developing academic as well as
social and emotional skills and strategies. Therefore, when the children presented well thought out reasons for changing her programme, she accommodated their thoughts and ideas because they worked to enhance her programme not deviate away from it.

In contrast, those classroom programmes that were fixed on achieving a specific outcome, did not have room for that flexibility. Consequently, children’s contributions were quickly redirected back to the outcome and were not acted upon, as demonstrated at St Matthew’s kindergarten. Therefore, in these classrooms the teachers and children did not engage in the sustained conversations that require children to develop strategies for effective problem solving and communication. In the case of St Orville’s kindergarten, where the programme was centred on promoting children’s social and emotional development, there tended to be no reason for the children to have to persuade Olivia to change anything in the programme. Hence, they too did not have the opportunity to engage in the same levels of negotiation as those children at Katherine’s kindergarten.

In regards to exploring the social milieu of the classroom it is essential that the children feel secure enough to do this exploring, since all knowledge exists first on the social level (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, all academic and social knowledge first appears between people before it can be internalised. Children who do not feel secure to access the social groups in the classroom are less likely to participate in group activities, participatory roles and collaborative learning experiences thus they do not experience an important source of social and cultural knowledge (Boyd et al., 2005; Ladd et al., 1999; Vygotsky, 1978).

Throughout the data collection period only Kyra was observed to interact socially with the children while they were engaged in child-initiated activity. By interacting in this way with them at this time, Kyra was able to promote and extend
children’s positive social repertoires in situations that were meaningful to the children. In addition, because Kyra often entered the children’s play and conversations the children did not find her presence disconcerting and carried on what they were doing uninterrupted. In contrast, as Claire rarely entered in the children’s play or conversations, their conversation faltered when she sat with them (Vignette 8.0). The implications of this were that Claire would not get the opportunity to listen to how the children conversed with each other. This would have provided an opportune time for her to scaffold the children’s social understandings and/or identify suitable moments for mentoring the children in using PATHS strategies in authentic situations. Vygotsky’s (1987) abstract and everyday concept formation can be used to conceptualise the merging of PATHS strategies with authentic situations, and in doing so heightens ones awareness of the potential for learning this moment may have had.

As it has been ascertained, teachers are in a better position to support children’s social and emotional development when they are aware of how children are interacting with their peers. Guided participation highlights how important this is as children are guided by interactions that are not necessarily intended as instructional. Hence, children develop social repertoires from the interactions they share with their peers. Indeed, “relational or dynamic features of friendships (e.g. companionship, support, conflict) create various psychological benefits or costs for children that, in turn, affect their development and adjustment” (Ladd, Kochenderfer & Coleman, 1996, p. 1103).

Caleb and Callan at St. Christopher’s and Holly at St. Hovea’s needed the support of an adult with their social interactions with peers. The guidance they experienced while with peers in their respective classrooms came at a psychological cost, with Caleb and Callan’s exclusive friendship and Holly’s inability to make connections weakening their support networks within the classroom. The teachers in
both these classrooms engaged in interactions only during teacher-guided experiences and as such were not observed to engage with children in play. Because of this, both teachers were unaware of the covert negative interactions that were shaping the children’s development.

11.5.2 The environment.

The structural and psychological contexts of the classroom contribute to supporting children’s social and emotional development. The structural context, for example, uses classroom layout and resource materials to encourage children’s engagement in certain activities. These activities can either encourage or dissuade social interactions. The case studies highlighted that the educational goals and focus of the classroom were reflected in the classroom layouts, as well as the choice and availability of resources. For example, at St. Matthew’s where the educational focus was centred on academic outcomes, the classroom layout highlighted areas dedicated for teacher-guided activities while providing limited room for children to engage in peer interactions. Similarly, the resources provided did not to encourage peer interactions as there were no provisions for explorative, imaginative, child-guided play. The resources that encouraged exploration and imagination were provided for in teacher-guided activities that had predetermined academic outcomes.

As peer interactions provide a rich source for social knowledge and understanding, this classroom layout constrained children’s opportunities to engage in experiences that support positive social and emotional development. Even though experiences were provided in teacher-guided activities, they did not provide the same social challenges that are inherent in peer interactions. Hence, as opportunities for guidance from peer interactions and behaviours was constrained, a valuable source of
social learning and opportunity to practice social strategies was minimised in this classroom (Katz & McClellan, 1997).

St Orville’s had the opposite arrangement where the layout of the classroom was dedicated to child-guided experiences and interactions. The areas dedicated to teacher-guided experiences were relegated to the perimeter of the classroom, and appeared not as important as the child-guided experiences. Accordingly, the children were rarely observed sitting in these areas. Even though child-guided experiences characterised this classroom, the interactions that occurred within them were at times constrained, due to the nature of the activities the children engaged in. For example, most of the boys busied themselves with Lego construction that did not require them to engage in conversation. Olivia rarely interacted with the children while they were engaged in these experiences. Rather, they would go to her at the end of a session and show her what they made. As Olivia did not interact with children as they engaged in child-guided activities, opportunities for extending children’s social repertoires were missed.

In both St Matthew’s and St Orville’s the classroom environment contributed to creating a distinct divide between child and teacher-guided activities. These constrained opportunities for an integration of approaches that allow for modelling, coaching and providing opportunities for practicing social and emotional skills and strategies (Epstein, 2007). In this way, these classroom layouts provided fewer opportunities for experiences that have been found to support children’s positive social and emotional development.

There appeared to be less distinction between child- and teacher-guided dedicated areas at St Katherine’s kindergarten. This was because of three reasons. First, even though the teacher-guided areas were together, they were also surrounded by areas that encouraged child-guided experiences. Hence, there was no clear physical divide
between the two (Figure 7.1). Second, the areas seemed less distinct because of Kyra’s fluid movement between them. This in itself offered support to children’s social and emotional development it made all learning that occurred in the classroom appear to be of equal value. Lastly, the flow of learning in all areas was maintained through the areas being well prepared with resources. In this way Kyra’s attention on the children was not disrupted by having to get materials for children, and children were able to access materials in a responsible and autonomous manner.

Kyra’s relationships and interactions with the children were likely to have contributed to the positive psychological classroom environment that characterised this classroom. As established in the literature review, the psychological environment creates the general atmosphere and tone of the learning environment (Perry & Dockett, 2007). It is shaped through warm respectful verbal and nonverbal interactions, teacher responsiveness to children’s academic and emotional needs and regard for student perspectives (Pianta et al., 2008). These types of interactions facilitate a sense of reciprocity or duality that enables the teacher to fully understand children’s actual level of social and emotional development. It is only through knowing where children are at that teachers can begin to scaffold children’s knowledge and understandings in the ZPD.

The opportunity for Heather from St Hovea’s kindergarten to create a positive psychological environment was constrained due to her concentrated focus on literacy dedicated activities. As Heather did not get the opportunity to engage with Holly in a range of activities, she did not form the duality that would have enabled her to understand how Holly was socially and emotional coping in the classroom. Furthermore, as Heather did not have the opportunity to observe or engage with children as they engaged in child-guided experiences she was unaware of the negativity that characterised Holly’s interactions with her peers. This exasperated Holly’s situation
further because while Heather believed that Holly’s peer interactions exposed her to the English language and promoted her social and emotional development, she enabled them to occur without intervention.

11.5.3 The play.

In this study it was found that without positive relationships in all areas of the curriculum and appropriate environments, the children did not engage in complex play. Moreover, complex play, which is characterised by sophisticated role play that demand increasingly challenging interactions, were more likely to occur when play was demonstrated to be equally valued as any other learning situations. This was demonstrated by the teacher’s responses to play and the environments they provided to facilitate it.

Play provides an ideal environment in which to support children’s social and emotional development (Berk, Mann & Ogan, 2006; Bodrova & Leong, 2008; Hirsh-Pasek, Michnick Golinkoff, Berk & Singer, 2009; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). As children develop roles and scenarios, they are challenged to take the perspective of others, engage in negotiation and conflict management, communicate effectively and regulate their behaviours and emotions. Hence, this space creates the ZPD, where children practice complex social strategies that they are unable, or unready to employ in real life situations (Vygotsky, 1978).

The children at St. Christopher’s were often given the opportunity to engage in play. These scenarios offered opportune moments for Claire to extend or scaffold the children’s social strategies, however, as she had not nurtured a relationship with children in play, many of these moments were not seized. Many of the play scenarios initiated by the children had great potential for supporting the children’s social and
emotional repertoires. For example, the children often played teachers. This scenario provided many benefits to the children’s social understandings. Through emulating the adult roles that the children observed, they experimented and practiced social roles in order to master the principles underlying them. In doing so, they prepared themselves for more mature forms of that activity or to complement their current role (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). The children’s reality of these roles were derived from what they observed in the classroom.

In addition, many of the children also engaged in playing ‘mother and father’. Similarly, they emulated the roles from what they observed at home and in the community. However, as Claire rarely engaged with children as they participated in child-guided activities, moments made available to extend children’s understandings, or resolve misunderstandings using the PATHS strategies that the school had adopted were overlooked. Consequently, often the structure of these scenarios would lose integrity, possibly because the children did not know how to develop it further, or one or more children will become off task and others did not know how to effectively preserve the rules binding the play in place.

Mia from St Matthew’s kindergarten did not provide the environment for children to engage in pretend play. Hence, the children were given no choice but to participate in teacher-guided activities. Bodrova and Leong (2008) state that children who are constantly regulated by adults appear to be self-regulated, however, they are in fact “teacher regulated” (p. 2). The assert that to internalise rules of behaviour children need to practice following the rules set by someone else; set the rules and monitor how these rules are followed and finally, apply the rules to themselves.

In contrast to these kindergartens, St Katherine’s provided both the environment and the teacher-child relationships within them for the rich development of play. Kyra
recognised and valued the learning that occurred in play. Hence, every now and again she would enter the children’s play and extend children’s understandings using the rules that the children themselves applied. Moreover, Kyra encouraged children to collaborate together and would explicitly tell them when their play no longer looked like ‘team work’. Equally, she would let them know when they were back on track with their team work. When children collaborated together, when moments presented themselves Kyra modelled ‘I wonder’ questions, or expressed how one could help the other.

11.6 Summary

In summary, positive relationships, environments and play have an integral role in supporting children’s social and emotional development. It became apparent throughout this discussion that when one of these elements was not present or nurtured in the classroom, the children’s social and emotional development reached a certain level of competency and then could go no further. However, when all three elements were present and nurtured, the children’s social and emotional development became increasingly more sophisticated.

For effective social and emotional development to occur, adults and children need to play active roles in each of the three areas. It is through this reciprocal engagement that teachers and children form a sense of duality that in turn informs the arrangement of the room, and the guidance provided by teachers in play. When one is passive, children cannot be supported to their fullest potential.

It is evident from the data analysis that some teachers do not recognise play as an essential feature in supporting children’s social and emotional development, and/or they do not understand how critical their role is in developing children’s positive social and emotional knowledge, understanding, skills and strategies. If teachers are to provide
quality early childhood settings, they need to be cognizant of the role of play and their role within play.
Chapter Twelve: Discussion and Conclusion

12.0 Introduction

This study was designed to investigate the question, ‘How do teachers from different Western Australian metropolitan schools develop classroom environments that support kindergarten children’s social and emotional development?’ An ethnographic approach to inquiry was adopted for data collection. This approach facilitated examining the data drawing on the sociocultural theories underpinning this study. A multi-instrument approach was employed. The strength of this approach is that the data were triangulated to gain a deeper insight into how the teacher supported the kindergarten children’s social and emotional development.

Unique to this study was the sociocultural theoretical framework that enabled an examination of data from a cultural-institutional, interpersonal and personal foci of analysis. Using these perspectives I was able to gain an insight into the educational goals of the school and school community; the interactions between teachers and children and children with each other, as well as an understanding of how the kindergarten programme contributed to the children’s social and emotional development.

12.1 Key Messages

The previous chapter identified the key themes to emerge under each of the three foci of analysis. Relationships, environment and play were also discussed in relation to these findings (see Figure 12.1). While these are pertinent findings arising from this research, in answering the research questions, they can be refined to two key messages.
These are (1) teaching the whole child is important, and (2) both teacher-guided and child-guided experiences are equally important in supporting social and emotional development. The following figure (Figure 12.1) illustrates how the key themes emanating from the cross-case analysis contribute to the two key messages. This chapter discusses these messages in relationship to the conceptual framework of this study.

**Figure 12.1:** The key messages.

Although these themes are strongly related there is an underlying difference that will be explained before the discussion. The first message, ‘all learning is important’ refers to the teachers’ beliefs that all the developmental domains are important to nurture. This implies that teachers deliver a holistic programme where the relationships, environment and play are all considered in nurturing the whole child. This contributes
to the intent of the programme, which in turn is reflected in the learning opportunities and classroom design.

In regards to the second message, teachers who believe that both child-guided and teacher-guided experiences are instructional are less likely to assume that they are the only source of instruction. Rather, these teachers believe that children can learn through their interactions with peers, and through their interactions with the environment. Hence, these teachers are more likely to interact with children in all experiences to ensure the social and emotional knowledge, skills and strategies that are being developed are not only extended but are also desirable.

12.1.1 All facets of development are important.

The first key message is that teachers who develop a programme that supports the whole child are more likely to support children’s social and emotional development. This study has found that this is further supported when positive relationships and environments, as well as opportunities for play are equally embedded in the curriculum (see previous chapter). Specifically, this study found that teachers who provided such a holistic program were more inclined to provide a variety of experiences that engaged children in meaningful play and teacher guided activities (see Chapter 3, Table 3.4). Social and emotional skills and strategies are not just developed in play, nor are they just developed in teacher-guided activities; rather multiple facets of the curriculum and the interactions that characterise them work synergistically to support children’s social and emotional development. This conclusion from the data complements the findings from both the HighScope (Schweinhart et al., 2005) and Abecedarian projects (Campbell et al. 2012), and is consistent with the assumptions about the importance of
teaching the whole child presented by studies such as Brophy Herb et al. (2007) and Stipek et al. (1995).

However, unique to this study was that through using a sociocultural framework I was able to investigate why some teachers offered programmes that were weighted more toward academic activities (typically teacher-guided experiences) or social and emotional activities (which were often child-guided experiences), and how other teachers were supported in providing a balanced and holistic curriculum. Specifically, the exploration of the data from a cultural-institutional lens indicated that the school community played an integral role in forming the curriculum direction of the kindergarten programme. This was particularly evident in Mia’s school St Matthew’s (Chapter 6), where the programme was designed to direct all children toward academic (teacher-guided) experiences.

The triangulation of research data employed in this study was useful in building a general profile of the school community’s educational goals and the relationship between these goals and the practices of kindergarten teachers. In particular, Mia’s responses to the Teachers Styles and Preferences Survey, the observations and informal interviews collectively offered invaluable insights into why the kindergarten curriculum was shaped the way it was. Moreover, the triangulation of instruments, combined with examining the data using the three foci of analysis (Rogoff, 2003) provided an understanding of the pressure Mia was under to offer an academically driven curriculum in kindergarten.

At the same time, the data collected from this case study verified the importance of offering child-guided experiences alongside teacher-guided activities for example, the children in St Matthew’s classroom could not independently demonstrate fundamental social and emotional skills and strategies such as working cooperatively,
help seeking and help providing, problem solving and so on (Table 3.1). Indeed, these children found it difficult to organise a play theme, negotiate roles and regulate their own behaviours to be conducive to complex play scenarios.

Similarly, the data collected in the cultural-institutional level indicated the constraints Heather from St Hovea’s (Chapter 10) was under in offering a more holistic programme. This situation differed to St Matthew’s in that Heather did offer child-initiated experiences but she did not interact with children while they played. Instead her attention was occupied by the literacy based activities that were promoted by the school. This had two implications, first, Heather was not aware of the nature of the interactions that were taking place in child-guided experiences and second, she was unaware of the children’s actual level of social and emotional development. Some children went without the necessary guidance that would have supported their social and emotional development and wellbeing.

In contrast, St Orville’s programme (Chapter 9) appeared laissez-faire with little emphasis placed on teacher-guided activities. The ramifications of this is that organised activities provide children who usually play alone at choice time an opportunity to interact with their peers. Hence an important avenue for learning cooperative skills, enhance communication and promoting classroom connections is constrained.

Claire from St Christopher’s (Chapter 8) and Kyra from St Katherine’s (Chapter 7) offered programmes that were more balanced. However, Claire tended not to interact with the children while they were engaged in child-guided experiences as often or as intentionally as Kyra and hence some of the peer interactions did not evolve in a societally desirable way. The importance of teacher guidance in regards to children’s social and emotional development is discussed in more detail in the next section.
St Katherine’s programme, however, offered both teacher and child-guided experiences and each of these experiences were enriched through regular teacher guidance. The conceptual framework underpinning this study helps conceptualise how this programme was supportive of kindergarten children’s social and emotional development. Specifically, as Kyra interacted with children during teacher- and child-guided experiences she was more inclined to create caring relationships that are conducive to learning in the ZPD (Goldstein, 1999). In turn, because Kyra had formed caring relationships, the children were more receptive to her joining their conversations and/or play and she was in a better position to scaffold children’s social and emotional development in authentic situations.

In summary, while this key message is consistent with previous research it contributes to the early childhood discourse through its framing of data collection and reporting using the three foci of analysis. This perspective provides a deeper insight into the factors that contribute to shaping social and emotional development in a kindergarten programme, and with this understanding teachers may be more aware of some of the social and emotional consequences of the way they develop their programmes. Specifically, this study demonstrates that teachers are more likely to support kindergarten children’s social and emotional development if children are given opportunities to practice social and emotional skills and strategies in a range of different activities that require them to use and practice a diverse set of skills and strategies.

12.1.2 Valuing the learning in both teacher-guided and child-guided experiences.

The second key message is that both teacher-guided and child-guided interactions and experiences are instructional, and that teacher interactions in both are
essential in supporting children’s social and emotional development. There are two reasons why teacher interactions are important to both child- and teacher-guided experiences and teacher guidance in both are essential to supporting children’s social and emotional development: (1) concepts are formed and become conscious when abstract concepts (which are adopted from the domain of adult thinking) are merged with everyday concepts (child-guided experiences), and (2) all interactions are instructional, which implies that not all instruction will be desirable.

Vygotsky (1987) explained that when abstract and everyday concepts merged conscious thought was formed. This is useful in conceptualising the importance of teachers guiding children’s learning in authentic situations. In both child-guided and teacher-guided experiences, if the teacher is not there to make connections between the abstract and everyday concepts then it is less likely that the children’s social and emotional repertoires will be extended.

The second reason why teacher guidance is important in both teacher- and child-guided experiences is that guided participation is not “limited to learning societally desired skills and practices” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 284). This means that while children such as Holly (Chapter 10) are engaged in negative child-guided experiences, these are the social and emotional skills and strategies that will contribute to her social and emotional development. The negative self-perception that is formed from these interactions contributes to negative expectations for future social interactions, and hence the negative consequences are perpetuated.

While this message that teacher guidance is important in both teacher- and child-guided experiences is consistent with findings from previous research (for example Epstein, 2007; Ladd et al., 1999; Miller & Almon, 2009; Perry and Dockett, 2007; Pianta et al., 2002; Pianta et al., 2002; Tayler and Thorpe, 2012; Wasik, Bond and
Hindman, 2002, and Winter, 2003) the sociocultural conceptual framework underpinning this current study enabled a unique insight into how teachers were, or were not, using teacher-guided and child-guided experiences to support kindergarten children’s social and emotional development. This study found that those teachers who understood that learning takes place in both teacher- and child-guided experiences were more likely to interact with children and scaffold their social and emotional development in all the experiences that were taking place in the classroom. Specifically, this meant that the teacher was rarely anchored to one activity, rather she would circulate the classroom and interact with children while they were engaged in both teacher-guided and child-guided experiences.

The idea that all experiences are instructional is embedded in Rogoff’s theory of guided participation (2003). As discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.1) Rogoff asserts that guidance does not only include those interactions that are intended as instructional, but also those that are not intended as instructional. This study found that when teachers acknowledged that learning happened everywhere, they were more likely to enter both child-guided and teacher-guided experiences and scaffold the children’s learning.

However, integral to this message is the understanding that entering child-guided experiences to enhance learning is a pedagogical skill. In this study, teachers who were able to extend children’s social and emotional knowledge, skills and strategies were those who could enter children’s play and conversations without disrupting the children’s line of concentration or distracting from the shared implied rules inherent in their interactions.

The multi-instrumental (triangulation) approach adopted by this study enabled an examination of how teachers successfully entered children’s activity. It was observed that the teachers who were more effective at entering into children’s play were those
who had become familiar with the players, their contexts, symbolisms and the nature of their play. This confirms the work of Perry and Dockett (2007) who argue that such an understanding is critical if educators are to build on play making it more challenging by introducing additional possibilities through prompts, suggestions, props and supports. In addition, it was noted during the interview process that although all the participating teachers stated that they believed play to be important for children’s social and emotional development, only those teachers who believed play was equally as important as teacher-guided experiences in children’s learning and development were the ones who successfully entered play. These teachers believed the play process to be a powerful learning experience and hence they carefully adjusted their language and actions so as not to disrupt the delicate blend of rules, symbolism, ownership and enjoyment and seized that sensitive moment in which to extend children’s social and emotional repertoires. In this way, this current study extended Hamre and Pianta’s (2005) more global findings by explaining kindergarten classroom interactional processes that support social and emotional development.

The interrelational dimension (Goldstein, 1999) provides a useful explanation as to how some of the teachers could successfully enter the children’s play. Specifically, this theory considers that teachers (one-caring) offering the children (cared-for) their full attention are more receptive to their perspectives and situations. Consequently, when teachers observe a learning opportunity arising they demonstrate sensitivity (Pianta et al., 2008) toward the children’s rules of play or conversation and used those rules to extend children’s social and emotional knowledge, skills and strategies. For example, when Kyra told the girl her baby was crying (Vignette 7.2), she acknowledged the symbolism of the scarf (the scarf wearer was the mother), and that of the doll (the doll was her baby, not an inanimate object) and she was sensitive toward the mother as
a matriarchal figure by telling her that “her baby was crying” as opposed to telling her to “put the doll away” (which was the objective).

In summary, this key message complements a number of previous researches, for example Ashiabi (2007); Campbell et al. (2012); Hadley (2002); Hamre and Pianta (2005); Nicolopoulou et al. (2006); Perry and Dockett (2007), Rogoff (2003); Schweinhart et al. (2005) and Vygotsky. This study has contributed further to this work through extending our understanding of how teachers can enter child-guided experiences without disrupting the depth of engagement in which social and emotional development is more likely to take place. This has great pragmatic implications for early childhood pedagogy, particularly in a political climate where testing and academic outcomes are being heavily emphasised. This insight was made possible through a triangulation of research instruments and examining the data through a sociocultural perspective, a unique approach in the field.

12.2 Limitations of the Research

Although many measures were taken to ensure a strong study, there were still a number of limitations. First, despite using only Catholic schools provided the benefit of examining schools with a relatively consistent value system, it also presented as a limitation in that the sample used did not include other schools systems, for example Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA) and the Department of Education (DoE). Hence, the findings from this study may not be as generalizable as they may have been if a more diverse range of kindergartens from all the schools systems was used.

Second, the observations were only made once or twice a month for seven to eight months. Consequently, the data reported provides only a snapshot of classroom
interactions and events. In addition, because of my presence the interactions in these classrooms may have been influenced and were possibly not entirely indicative of the more natural interactions that would have unfolded without me there - as it was noted with Claire (Chapter 8).

Third, due to time constraints and heavy workloads only one of the teachers filled in the Social and Emotional Rating Scale for the children. As such, as a data source, this insight into the children’s development was limited. In addition, this study was limited as the children’s actual social and emotional development was not measured using any standardised measure. Rather, the data depended on observable outward behaviours that were indicative of social and emotional responses and the teacher’s observations of children’s social and emotional development shared during informal and formal interviews.

12.3 Future Research

In making recommendations for future research, one must acknowledge the limitations of this study. Hence, it is recommended that a study using this conceptual design may be conducted incorporating a standardised measure of children’s social and emotional development. Such a study would provide a deeper insight into how teachers support kindergarten children’s social and emotional development and the actual levels of children’s development. Another recommendation for future research is that studies are conducted from a broad range of school sectors.

Further studies may also consider taking the child’s perspective on social and emotional development, investigating what children say about what makes them feel safe and supported at kindergarten would be a most interesting extension to the work reported here. In addition, a study that examines teachers’ perceptions across Western
Australia would offer a valuable insight into how teachers are supporting children’s social and emotional development in both urban, rural and remote areas.

12.4 Conclusion

The current study complements existing research on supporting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development. The overall findings suggest that classroom programme types indicate where teachers are more likely to interact with children in pro-social ways. In line with this, those teachers who offer a holistic programme are more likely to interact with children in all aspects of the classroom. As elements of social and emotional development are integrated in all areas of the curriculum, this approach is more effective in supporting kindergarten children’s social and emotional development. This study also highlighted that social and emotional instruction occurs whether it is intentional and desirable, or not. Consequently, those teachers who respect that learning is happening throughout the classroom and who understand that they can contribute to positive outcomes by playing an active part in all learning, not just what they had planned, will create a classroom context that is more supportive of kindergarten children’s positive social and emotional development.

A unique finding from this research was the connection found between play, environment and relationships in supporting children’s social and emotional development. Where each of these have been discussed individually, or with some degree of comparability in other research, to my knowledge they have not been presented as co-dependent before. By identifying these areas, this research offers a valuable contribution to ensuring quality early childhood education for all our children.


Bozhovich, L.I. (1977). The concept of the cultural-historical development of the mind and its prospects. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology, 16*(1), 5-


Hamre, B.K. & Pianta, R.C. (2005). Can instructional and emotional support in the first-


**Curriculum Decision-Making: Dimensions to Consider**. Policy Brief.

New Jersey: NIEER.


Appendix A: Information Letter and Consent Forms
Information Letter

**Project Title:** Effect of pedagogical styles on kindergarten children’s social and emotional development

**Investigator:** Gillian Kirk

You are invited to participate in this study.

**Background**

Research has established that social and emotional competencies are fundamental to children’s optimal overall development. A few studies have been conducted on pedagogical styles showing that different styles can effect children’s social and emotional development. We are interested to learn whether this is the case with kindergarten children in Western Australia, so we are inviting you to participate in this study.

**Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between pedagogical styles and kindergarten children’s social and emotional skills. The publication of these findings will help inform and further develop early childhood practices.

**What Does Your Participation Involve?**

There are two parts to this study that you are asked to participate in, these are:

**Part one: Determining your Pedagogical Style**

This involves completing the enclosed Beliefs and Practices survey and returning it using the postage paid envelope. Based on the completed surveys, some teachers will be asked to participate further in this study. Initially, this will involve the researcher observing your classroom once a week for two weeks for 1 to 1 ½ hours. These observations will supplement the survey. If you would like to know your pedagogical style, please inform the researcher.

**Part two: Assessing Children’s Social and Emotional Development**

In March/April, the participating teachers will be asked to assess their children’s social and emotional development using a social and emotional rating scale that will be supplied by the researcher. This scale will take approximately 20-25 minutes to administer. The results can be used to further supplement teachers’ assessment records as well as to inform this study. Following the completion of the scale, the researcher will undertake 5 sessions of 1 hour observations of the children’s social and emotional skills from May through to September (one/month). If all parents and teachers give
SUPPORTING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

consent, some of these observation sessions will be videotaped. These observations will be made available to the respective teachers. In October, teachers will be asked to complete the social and emotional rating scale again. This will mark the end of the data collection period.

If you wish to be involved in this study, please complete the survey and return it with the consent form using the postage paid envelope. It is important that you understand that your involvement in this study is voluntary. While we would be pleased to have you participate, we respect your right to decline. If you decide to discontinue participation at any time, you may do so without providing an explanation. All information will be treated in a confidential manner, and your name will not be used in any publication arising out of the research. All of the research will be kept in a locked cabinet in the office of Gillian Kirk.

Possible Benefits

If we are able to take the findings of this small study and link them with a wider study, the result may be valuable information for others. Furthermore, benefits for participating in the study include opportunities for the kindergarten teacher to reflect on current practices, the possible improvement of practice and ultimately, quality education for young children that will continue to benefit them throughout their school lives. In addition, the data collected can be used to further supplement teacher’s student assessments.

Questions

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study please feel free to contact Gillian on mobile: 0400 756 635 or on email: kirk.image@westnet.com.au; Dr Libby Lee on ph: 9360 2627 or on email: l.lee@murdoch.edu.au or Dr Judy MacCallum on ph: 9360. We would be happy to discuss any aspect of the research with you. Once I have analysed the information I will be mailing/emailing you a summary of my findings. You are welcome to contact me at that time to discuss any issue relating to the research study.

Contact

My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted. If you wish to talk to an independent person about your concerns you can contact Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677 or email ethics@murdoch.edu.au

You can expect to receive feedback from the survey by 13th March, 2009.

We would like to thank you in advance for your assistance with this research project. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Kirk
Consent Form

Effect of pedagogical styles on kindergarten children’s social and emotional development

1. I agree voluntarily to take part in this study.

2. I have read the Information Sheet provided and been given a full explanation of the purpose of this study, of the procedures involved and of what is expected of me. The researcher has answered all my questions and has explained the possible problems that may arise as a result of my participation in this study.

3. I understand I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to give any reason.

4. I understand I will not be identified in any publication arising out of this study.

5. I understand that my name and identity will be stored separately from the data, and these are accessible only to the investigators. All data provided by me will be analysed anonymously using code numbers.

6. I understand that all information provided by me is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.

Signature of Participant: ________________________ Date: ....../....../....... (Name)
Signature of Investigator: _______________________ Date: ....../....../....... (Name)
Supervisor’s Signature: _________________________ Date: ....../....../....... (Name)
Consent Form

The Effect of Pedagogical Styles on Kindergarten Children’s Social and Emotional Development

1. I agree voluntarily to allow my child to take part in this study.

2. I have read the Information Sheet provided and been given a full explanation of the purpose of this study, of the procedures involved and of what is expected. The researcher has answered all my questions and has explained the possible problems that may arise as a result of my child’s participation in this study.

3. I understand I am free to withdraw my consent for my child to participate in the study at any time without needing to give any reason.

4. I understand my child will not be identified in any publication arising out of this study.

5. I understand that my child’s name and identity will be stored separately from the data, and these are accessible only to the investigators. All data provided will be analysed anonymously using code numbers.

6. I understand that all information is treated as confidential and will not be released by the researcher to a third party unless required to do so by law.

Signature of Parent/Guardian: ________________________ Date: 
....../....../....
(Name)

Signature of Investigator: ________________________ Date: 
....../....../....
(Name)

Supervisor’s Signature: ________________________ Date: 
....../....../....
(Name)
Information Letter

We invite you to participate in a research study looking at the effects of teaching styles on children’s social and emotional development. This study is part of my course for gaining my PhD, supervised by Dr Libby Lee and Dr Judy MacCallum at Murdoch University.

Nature and Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of teaching styles on kindergarten children’s social and emotional development.

Effective social and emotional skills are necessary for children if they are to make friends, maintain a positive attitude and succeed at school. Studies have linked effective social and emotional skills in kindergarten with later school success. Studies have also found that the best time to address any social and emotional problems is in kindergarten. Consequently, we are investigating kindergarten practices that are effective in developing children’s social and emotional skills.

What the Study will Involve

If you decide to allow your child to participate in this study, the following will take place:

- Your child’s social and emotional skills will be assessed at the beginning and at the end of the school year by his/her teacher using an observational rating scale.
- I will make observations of the participating children’s social and emotional skills at school. It is estimated that the observational periods will take place for an hour once a month for five months. These observations will be nonintrusive and consequently will have minimal to no effect on your child. Some of these observations may be videorecorded.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study

Your child’s participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without discrimination or prejudice. All information is treated as confidential and no names or details that might identify your child will be used in any publication arising from the research. If you wish for your child to withdraw, all information collected in regards to your child will be destroyed.

If you consent for your child to take part in this research study, it is important that you understand the purpose of the study and the procedures that will occur. Please make sure that you ask any questions you may have, and that your questions have been answered to your satisfaction before you agree for your child to participate.
Benefits of the Study

While there is no guarantee that you will personally benefit, the knowledge gained from your child’s participation may help others in the future. The findings from this study will help inform teachers of practical and established strategies that best develop young children’s social and emotional development.

If you are willing to consent for your child to participate in this study, please complete the consent form and return to your classroom teacher by ___________. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact either myself, Gillian Kirk on mobile: 0400 756 635 or email: kirk.image@westnet.com.au or my supervisors, Dr Libby Lee on ph. 9360 2627 or email l.lee@murdoch.edu.au and Dr Judy MacCallum on ph. 9360 7847 or email J.MacCallum@murdoch.edu.au

My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted. If you wish to talk to an independent person about your concerns you can contact Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677 or email ethics@murdoch.edu.au
Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Gillian Kirk and I am a PhD research student at Murdoch University. My dissertation is on the effects of pedagogical styles on kindergarten children’s social and emotional development.

Recently there was been a surge of interest in the importance of social and emotional development. In particular, it has emerged through recent studies that children’s social and emotional skills are malleable, especially in the kindergarten year. However, most of these studies have been conducted in the United States and as such, may not be directly applicable to our Australian context. In addition, these studies tended not to include pre- and post-testing of children’s social emotional skills, hence, it was unclear if their social and emotional competencies were a result of the kindergarten programs.

Consequently, the aim of this current study is to investigate the relationship between pedagogical styles and kindergarten children’s social and emotional development in Australia. This study will monitor the kindergarten children’s social and emotional development throughout the year.

Benefits for being involved in the study include opportunities for the kindergarten teacher to reflect on current practices, the possible improvement of practice and ultimately, quality education for young children that will continue to benefit them throughout their school lives. In addition, the data collected can be used to further supplement teacher’s student assessments.

I have enclosed an information letter which explains the study in more detail. This letter also outlines what the participant’s involvement will be. This study has been subject to peer review and has Murdoch University ethics clearance as well as ethics clearance from the Catholic Education Office.

If you consent for this study to take place in your school, please forward the invitation to participate to the kindergarten teacher/s.

If you would like any more information, please contact me on mobile: 0400 756 635 or email: kirk.image@westnet.com.au, or my supervisors Dr Libby Lee on 9360 2627 or email: l.lee@murdoch.edu.au and Dr Judy MacCallum on 9360 7847 or email: J.MacCallum@murdoch.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Kirk
APPENDIX B: Survey and Rating Scale
Teacher Styles and Preferences Survey

Please provide your name and the name of the school you are currently working in:

Teacher’s name: __________________________

School name: ___________________________

N.B. The information provided will remain private and confidential.

Thank you for choosing to participate in this study. Your knowledge and expertise in nurturing kindergarten children will be used to inform early childhood practitioners on effective practice, particularly in reference to children’s social and emotional development. The following survey is designed to determine your teaching style. Previous research has demonstrated that at times teachers do not or cannot teach to their beliefs, considering this, the survey requests you answer the questions so that they are indicative of your current practice.

Please circle which answer best reflects your current practice. Where possible, please provide an example of your answer.

1. I allow the children in my classroom to select their own activities from a variety of learning areas that I prepared:

   a) all the time
   b) most of the time
   c) some of the time
   d) not often
   e) never

   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

2. I like to use large group, teacher directed instruction:

   a) all the time
3. The children in my classroom are involved in concrete, three-dimensional learning activities:

a) all the time
b) most of the time
c) some of the time
d) not often
e) never

4. I like to tell the children exactly what to do and when:

a) all the time
b) most of the time
c) some of the time
d) not often
e) never

5. I allow the children in my classroom to be active, choosing from the activities I have set up:

a) all the time
b) most of the time
c) some of the time
d) not often
e) never
6. I prefer the children to work individually or in small, child-chosen groups:
   a) all the time
   b) most of the time
   c) some of the time
   d) not often
   e) never

7. I incorporate workbooks, flash cards and other two dimensional learning materials into my programs:
   a) all the time
   b) most of the time
   c) some of the time
   d) not often
   e) never

8. I expect the children in my classroom to sit down, watch, be quiet and listen:
   a) all the time
   b) most of the time
   c) some of the time
   d) not often
   e) never
9. I like to directly teach letter recognition:
   a) all the time
   b) most of the time
   c) some of the time
   d) not often
   e) never

10. I instruct children on the correct formation of letters:
    a) all the time
    b) most of the time
    c) some of the time
    d) not often
    e) never

11. I teach math and science concepts using activities such as block building, measuring ingredients for cooking, woodworking and drawing:
    a) all the time
    b) most of the time
    c) some of the time
    d) not often
    e) never

12. I directly teach children how to write and trace with pencils:
    a) all the time
    b) most of the time
13. I directly teach children how to correctly use scissors:

a) all the time
b) most of the time
c) some of the time
d) not often
e) never

14. I encourage children to use a variety of art media, such as easel and finger painting, clay and play dough, in ways of their choosing:

a) all the time
b) most of the time
c) some of the time
d) not often
e) never

15. I use memorization and drill as teaching techniques:

a) all the time
b) most of the time
c) some of the time
d) not often
e) never
16. I encourage children to participate in activities by stimulating their natural curiosity and interest:

   a) all the time  
   b) most of the time  
   c) some of the time  
   d) not often  
   e) never

17. The art projects I plan require the children to copy an adult-made model:

   a) all the time  
   b) most of the time  
   c) some of the time  
   d) not often  
   e) never

18. The art projects I plan require the children to colour in pre-drawn forms:

   a) all the time  
   b) most of the time  
   c) some of the time  
   d) not often  
   e) never
19. I have certain times each day where I teach math or science:

a) all the time  
b) most of the time  
c) some of the time  
d) not often  
e) never

20. I provide opportunities for children to use puzzles, Legos (TM), textas, scissors or other similar materials in ways the children choose:

a) all the time  
b) most of the time  
c) some of the time  
d) not often  
e) never

21. I encourage children to participate in activities by offering rewards:

a) all the time  
b) most of the time  
c) some of the time  
d) not often  
e) never
22. The sound of my classroom is typified by pleasant conversation, spontaneous laughter and exclamations of excitement:

a) all the time  
b) most of the time  
c) some of the time  
d) not often  
e) never  

23. I like to use competition as a guidance or discipline technique:

a) all the time  
b) most of the time  
c) some of the time  
d) not often  
e) never  

24. I show my disapproval when children choose not to participate in activities:

a) all the time  
b) most of the time  
c) some of the time  
d) not often  
e) never  

25. I like to talk about feelings and encourage children to put their emotions (positive and negative) into words:

a) all the time  
b) most of the time
26. The sound of my classroom is characterised by quiet:

a) all the time
b) most of the time
c) some of the time
d) not often
e) never

27. I use redirection, positive reinforcement and encouragement as guidance or discipline techniques:

a) all the time
b) most of the time
c) some of the time
d) not often
e) never

This concludes the survey. If you wish to take part in this study, please mail the completed survey to Murdoch University using the addressed, pre-paid envelope by 8th May, 2009. Once the responses from the survey are analysed you may be invited to participate further in this study.

Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey.
## Social and Emotional Rating Scale

**Child’s Name:**

*Can the child adequately communicate in his/her first language?*

**Rating Scale:** 1 = Poor/very poor; 2 = Average; 3 = Very good/good; 4 = don’t know

### General

How would you rate this child’s:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall social/emotional development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to get along with peers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:** Adam has developed some sound relationships in kindergarten. He interacts effectively with others.

### Self-regulation

Child’s ability to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manage strong emotions and their expression in a constructive manner (e.g. anger; frustration; excitement)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow instructions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain attentive during mat sessions or other instructional situations while there are distractions (such as another child being silly)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Comments:** Considering Adam has experienced hearing impairment, he has coped exceptionally well in this area.

**Establish and Sustain Positive Relationships**

Child’s ability to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s ability to:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiate interactions and respond positively to peers and adults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolve disputes/conflicts amicably (such as using social problem solving skills such as negotiation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognise when someone is feeling sick or upset and try to comfort them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in complex play with peers (i.e. where children assigns own roles; negotiates props etc)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play with various children.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:** Adam plays very well with others, but may get upset when faced with conflict (which is normal at this age).

**Risk taking**

Child’s ability to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s ability to:</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persevere when faced with challenges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use his/her imagination and hypothesise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:** Adam has maintained and formed many peer friendships in the classroom.

He has demonstrated that he possesses those skills and behaviours that are fundamental to learning. Furthermore, he is always eager to participate in all types of activities and has proven to be an independent worker.

Date assessment completed: 19/11/2011
APPENDIX C: Fieldwork Schedule
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Description of fieldwork</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26/5/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 8</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/5/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 1</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/5/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 6</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/6/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 2</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/6/2009</td>
<td>12:00pm</td>
<td>Case Study 8</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/6/2009</td>
<td>2:30pm</td>
<td>Case Study 5</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/7/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 2</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6/7/2009</td>
<td>11:00am</td>
<td>Case Study 1</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/7/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 4</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/7/2009</td>
<td>9:45am</td>
<td>Case Study 7</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/7/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 6</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/8/2009</td>
<td>9:40am</td>
<td>Case Study 7</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/8/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 3</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/8/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 1</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/8/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 2</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/8/2009</td>
<td>11:00am</td>
<td>Case Study 8</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/8/2009</td>
<td>1:00pm</td>
<td>Case Study 4</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/8/2009</td>
<td>11:00am</td>
<td>Case Study 7</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/9/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 8</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/9/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 1</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/9/2009</td>
<td>1:00pm</td>
<td>Case Study 3</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/9/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 6</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/10/2009</td>
<td>10:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 4</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/10/2009</td>
<td>11:00am</td>
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<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/10/2009</td>
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<td>Case Study 7</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/10/2009</td>
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<td>Case Study 6</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/10/2009</td>
<td>9:30am</td>
<td>Case Study 2</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
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APPENDIX D: CLASS Domains and Dimensions (Pianta et al., 2008)
Overview of CLASS domains and dimensions (Pianta, La Paro & Hamre, 2008, p. 2)
Emotional Support

Positive Climate: The emotional connection, respect, and enjoyment demonstrated between teachers and students and among students.

Negative Climate: The level of expressed negativity such as anger, hostility, or aggression exhibited by teachers and/or students in the classroom.

Teacher Sensitivity: Teachers’ awareness of and responsivity to students’ academic and emotional concerns.

Regard for Student Perspectives: The degree to which teachers’ interactions with students and classroom activities place an emphasis on students’ interests, motivations and point of view.

Classroom Organisation

Behaviour Management: How effectively teachers monitor, prevent, and redirect behaviour.

Productivity: How well the classroom runs with respect to routines and the degree to which teachers organise activities and directions so that maximum time can be spent in learning activities.

Instructional Learning Formats: How teachers facilitate activities and provide interesting materials so that students are engaged and learning opportunities are maximised.
Instructional Support

*Concept Development:* How teachers use instructional discussions and activities to promote students’ higher-order thinking skills in contrast to a focus on rote instruction.

*Quality of Feedback:* How teachers extend students’ learning through their responses to students’ ideas, comments, and work.

*Language Modeling:* The extent to which teachers facilitate and encourage students’ language (Pianta, La Paro & Hamre, 2008, pp. 3-5).