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Meeting and Minding: early interactions and learning who we are

Parker-Rees, Roderick

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Meeting and Minding:
early interactions and learning who we are

by

Roderick Parker-Rees

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"through others we become ourselves" (Vygotsky, 1997/1931, p. 105)

Author's declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

The study and research on which this application is based was undertaken while the author was employed as Coordinator of Early Childhood Studies at the Plymouth Institute of Education, University of Plymouth.

Signed: *Rod Parker-Lee*   Date: 22nd February 2019

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2011 'Social Gambolling: early playful interactions and the social situation of development' ISCAR (International Society for Cultural and Activity Research) Rome, Sept 5-10 2011.

2011 'Communication and Play' invited keynote talk at 'Early Years 2011: How Children Learn' conference, London, Sep 22-3 2011.

2012 'The vase between the faces: learning to share attention in early dyadic play' at EECERA, Oporto, Portugal, Aug 29-Sep 1 2012.

2012 'Developing Sustainable Student Communities: Informal Learning and Becoming Peer' with Joanna Haynes, Jenna Illingworth and Will Sugg. SRHE conference Newport, Dec 2012

2014 'How do we get to know each other? Questions of pedagogical epistemology in work and play with very young children' EECERA, Hersonnissos, Crete, Sept 2014

2016 'The Minding of Two-Year-Olds', EECERA, Dublin, Ireland, 31 Aug – 3 Sept 2016

2017 'Minding: helping infants to join us in the sharing of attitudes and meanings', ISCAR, Quebec, Canada, Aug/Sep 2017

2018 'Writing for academic publication', keynote at Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network Research conference, Hamilton House, London, Jan 19 2018

Abstract

Meeting and Minding: early interactions and learning who we are

Roderick Parker-Rees

The works included here represent the last 10 years of a lifelong enquiry into the role of playfulness in communication, intersubjectivity and the co-construction of identity. From a focus on the attentive playfulness of very early interactions I have gone on to explore how relaxed, social communication facilitates the meeting of minds and how minding, the continuing sharing, negotiation and recalibration of attitudes and meanings, allows us to negotiate the dynamic tensions inherent in our similarities and differences. My work offers a perspective on belonging and performance that can inform our efforts to support infants' participation in the social process of minding.

I have shown how infants' sensitivity to being 'liked' fuels a 'virtuous spiral' of communication, as the pleasure of playful interaction builds familiarity which then allows nuances of attitudes to be read from differences in how routine behaviours are performed. I have extended this understanding of 'liking' to explore how communication between adults can also be enriched and deepened when we have opportunities to meet in ways that allow us to get to know each other beyond the superficial exchanging of words and ideas.

My work is informed by two very different epistemological frames: developmental psychology (specifically the growing interest in work that adopts a 'second person perspective') and cultural historical theory (specifically

Vygotsky's late writing on *perezhivanie*, the social situation of development, sense and meaning). Engaging with these different ways of seeing how infants are helped to fit in and to stand out has informed my understanding that the development of identity is not the 'walling off' of a private self so much as the internalisation of shared patterns of discourse. Increasing familiarity with the richly varied regularities of interactions enables us to feel 'at home' in a widening range of social situations. When we are able to recognise the significance of the nuances of individual performances, we are able to meet with other minds and also to notice our own attitudes.

Our understanding of early interactions is framed by cultural assumptions about a dialectical opposition between childhood and adulthood, between the disruptive, unconstrained creativity of difference and the reassuring regularity of familiar ways of thinking and behaving. A focus on the flow of minding allows us to see this tension not as a problem but as a potential source of energy. Minding depends both on sameness, or familiarity with what people can be expected to do, and on the constant refraction and recalibration of this common understanding (Vygotsky's *znachenie* or 'meaning') through the unique associations and filters of individual interpretations (*smysl* or 'sense') and performances.

These works represent a series of stages in the development of my contribution to the flow of minding about how we help very young children to join in; to become like us but also to change what we are like. The next stage will be an exploration of how Vygotsky's late works and González Rey's model of subjective sense and subjective configurations can inform our understanding of performance and (inter)subjectivity.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction and Critical Appraisal

The published works presented here are drawn from an extended exploration of the nature of communication, specifically the relationship between the ontogenetically earliest forms of interaction and the development of identity. Together, the works contribute to an understanding of communication, intersubjectivity and identity in terms of a dialectical tension between private and public; 'in here' and 'out there'. In order to communicate and to be members of communities we have to be prepared to acknowledge and abide by some conventions and rules of practice that make us similar enough to others to allow us to be understood and accepted. At the same time, however, if we are to have anything of interest to communicate and if we are to be of use to our communities we also need to be different or distinctive. Between the poles of being the same, similar or alike and being different, individual or distinctive there is a social voltage that powers the activity and development of communities of individuals, 'intersubjects' (Kennedy, 2006, p.105) or 'collectividuals' (Stetsenko, 2013, p.19).

The publications included in this thesis were written for different audiences and published in different forms and this introductory chapter will outline the thematic links that weave them into a coherent and systematic programme of enquiry. All of my work has focused on the dynamic interaction between the affective, relational, lived experience of individuals and the generalised, shared ways of being, thinking and knowing which enable us to communicate and

share our feelings, ideas and experiences. My distinctive contribution has been to focus attention on the role of ordinary, unremarkable experiences in shaping our understanding of other people and ourselves. The following sections show how interactions can be understood in terms of playfulness, perspectives, liking, joining in, co-constructing identities, meeting with differences and, finally, minding; the transitive, intentional communication of attitudes, values and habits that enables individuals and cultures to develop and adapt.

While each of these aspects of interaction is identified here and addressed in the following publications primarily with reference to what might be described as its 'positive' form, it is important to acknowledge that each represents part of a spectrum of behaviour which also includes potentially damaging and even abusive patterns of interaction. Instead of playfulness, for example, infants may encounter strict insistence on compliance. Instead of liking they may meet with indifference or even hostility. Instead of adaptations to enable them to join in they may experience exclusion and instead of sensitive, attuned minding they may experience isolation and neglect.

In the past, in other cultures and, here and now, in families where caregivers are overstressed, under-supported or suffering from emotional or psychological trauma, many children have experienced what we would consider neglectful or abusive treatment. Children and communities are astonishingly resilient and it might be argued that there is a 'ratcheting' of progress towards more sensitive childcare, as most parents try to avoid what they remember as the failings of their own parents and to reproduce what they think of as their positive qualities. It is, nevertheless, important to recognise that all children will sometimes experience less than ideal and often potentially harmful treatment.

Playfulness

The background to the papers submitted here is my earlier work on the role of playfulness in learning, both in early years settings (Parker-Rees 1997a,b,c, 1999) and in the life and work of primary school teachers (Parker-Rees, 2000, 2001). Dewey (1909, p.162) argued that '*playfulness* is a more important consideration than play. The former is an attitude of mind; the latter is a passing outward manifestation of this attitude'. Playfulness is important well beyond childhood as a strategy for managing the relationship between fitting in (by acknowledging a variety of sociocultural conventions and rules) and standing out (by actively exploring the 'wiggle room' in these public forms). Adam Phillips (1998, p.87) has noted the radical potential of this kind of playfulness:

> To treat an order, or any kind of rule or instruction, as merely suggestive – to turn it into something a little more to one's taste – is radically to revise the nature of authority (obedience would be merely fear of interpretation).

I argue that the professional duty to find appropriate, context- and person-specific interpretations of policies and cultural expectations requires a form of critical playfulness, an ability to 'transform constraint into opportunity' (Woods, 1996, p. 8) rather than passive compliance.

Perspectives

The works presented here were written in a decade (2007-2017) which saw a significant shift in approaches to the study of communication and identity in the fields that have most informed my work: cultural historical theory and the study of child development.

In cultural historical theory there has been a shift of focus from what Fernando González-Rey (2009, 2011, 2016) identified as the 'second moment' of Vygotsky's work (1928-31), with increasing attention to the incomplete and unfinished fields of enquiry developed in his 'third' or final moment (1932-34). In the West, the appropriation of Vygotsky's work - particularly from the translations introduced by Jerome Bruner (Vygotsky, 1962), Michael Cole (Vygotsky, 1978), and Jim Wertsch (Vygotsky, 1981) - resulted in an instrumental focus on improving pedagogical strategies by developing more efficient ways to hand over cultural knowledge to new generations. The focus in the West on scaffolding, concept formation and internalisation of Higher Mental Functions corresponded with the Russian reinterpretation of Vygotsky's work, particularly in its interpretation by Alexei Leontiev, as the foundation for the development of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (González Rey, 2009, 2016).

While western academics continue to mine the products of the 'second moment' of Vygotsky's short career for insights into ways of making education more effective and more humane, there has also been a growing interest in the ideas which he touched on in his first works (Vygotsky, 1971, 1993) and which he revisited in the last years of his life. The focus on *perezhivanie*, particularly in 'The Problem of the Environment' (Vygotsky, 1994), marks a radical shift from the idea that culture is *reflected* in the common psychology of a community to a recognition of the unique ways in which every individual *refracts* experiences. Vygotsky argued that children do not simply internalise or absorb information about how people do things but they actively *make* sense, drawing on their

unique personal history to process experiences into *perezhivaniya*; their *interpretations* of sociocultural information. In his last works Vygotsky also returned to his earlier focus on the relationship between the public, shareable 'meaning' (*znachenie*) of words, events and concepts and the private 'sense' (*smysl*) experienced by individuals as 'the aggregate of all the psychological facts that arise in our consciousness as the result of the word' (Vygotsky, 1987, p. 273),.

In the second moment of his work Vygotsky was focused on how we come to be *like* other people, by internalising common ways of understanding our environment. In his third, final moment he became more interested in the *differences* which ensure that we each interpret, and relate to, our environment in uniquely individual ways (González Rey, 2016; González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez, 2016; Fleer et al., 2017).

In the field of developmental psychology, specifically in the study of early childhood, there has been a similar shift of focus away from what Reddy (2008, 2011) and Schilbach et al. (2013) have characterised as a 'third person perspective', standing apart from children's interactions and behaviour to observe it from outside. There has been increasing recognition that if we hope to understand the interests and sense-making of other people this 'objective' perspective, which Martin Buber (2004) characterised as an 'I-it' relationship, must be complemented by a more subjective 'second person perspective', corresponding to Buber's 'I-thou' relationship.

The third person perspective, associated with a scientific understanding of rigorous enquiry, encourages a focus on what can be generalised and what is likely to be consistent across a wide range of different contexts – the *znachenie* of observable behaviours. Professional assumptions about the nature of rigorous observation can result in an odd discrepancy between how researchers make sense of observations of babies in the controlled conditions of the 'baby-lab' and what they know from their own experience of living with their own children. The epistemological challenge to this 'spectatorial' perspective, arguing that it may underestimate the part played by relational factors, especially in very early, preverbal forms of interaction, has come mainly from female researchers (e.g. Tizard and Hughes, 1984; Dunn, 1988; Engel, 2005; Zeedyk, 2006; Nelson, 2007; Reddy, 2008). Even in 2005, however, Sarah Engel was surprised by the extent to which researchers (male and female) could seriously underestimate the communicative abilities of infants 'even when they have some at home' (Engel, 2005, p.42). Second person perspective studies of early childhood interactions can enrich our understanding of how familiarity, intimacy and co-lived prior experiences contribute to the development of our ability to engage with, learn from and learn about other people.

Liking

The first paper included in this submission (Parker-Rees, 2007a) marks a shift of focus from playfulness in nursery and primary classrooms to much earlier kinds of interaction. This paper was written for a special issue of the journal

'*Early Years*', featuring papers from the Plymouth Early Childhood Studies team. Drawing on research into early, preverbal infant development (e.g. Trevarthen, 1995; Meltzoff, 1995, 2005; Tomasello, 1999; Reddy and Trevarthen, 2004; Dijksterhuis, 2005; Gallese, 2005; Hurley and Chater, 2005) it shows that early interactions can only really be understood in terms of the developing relationship between an infant and a caregiver. Andrew Meltzoff proposed, in his 'Like Me hypothesis' (Meltzoff, 2005), that babies are particularly responsive to interaction partners who reflect their movements and vocalisations with attuned, contingent 'replies' and I argue that the pleasure responses of babies provide powerful rewards for caregivers, helping to maintain and prolong attentive interactions. I also draw on interaction research (Zlatev, 2002; Garrels, 2004) to show how 'liking', adjusting one's behaviour to narrow the gap between communication partners, can contribute to a feeling of familiarity. As our interactions become more relaxed and enjoyable we lower the mask of social roles and reveal more of the differences which shape our unique understandings (our *smysl*), allowing us to get to know each other better (Parker-Rees, 2000). The familiarity that is gradually developed in relaxed social interaction also builds our ability to interpret more subtle cues in the behaviour of people we know well.

Unlike a mirror or a video recording, the reflection provided in the responses of an attentive, playful partner is enhanced by the affective relational information that it also offers. In social interactions we are not merely imitated or reflected, we are also (in varying degrees) *liked*. The simple evidence of how much another person is willing to join in a co-regulated, coordinated dance of

communication with us tells us about our relationship and about our partner as well as about how we are seen.

Unless people who work with babies and infants have opportunities to experience the affective charge of interactions between babies and familiar partners, they may not be aware of how much babies can do in the context of an enabling relationship. Practitioners working with babies in unfamiliar settings and relationships can have limited opportunities to observe the 'heroic glee' (Trevarthen, 2005, p. 97) shown by infants when they are surrounded and supported by familiar partners who know and like them. When carers are too busy or too stressed to be playful with the infants in their care they may come to assume that it is normal for infants to behave in rather flat, passive ways so they may not feel any need to create opportunities for more lively interactions.

This concern was developed further in a chapter written for Janet Moyles's 'Early Years Foundations: meeting the challenge' (Parker-Rees, 2007b). Here I argued that the greater value and status afforded to more public, formal and sharable kinds of knowing means that the more context specific, private, 'primary communication' associated with the warmth of familiar, playful interactions can easily be undervalued and drowned out. Increasing 'professionalisation' has put practitioners under greater pressure to focus their attention on how their practice may be interpreted outside the immediate context of their setting. Löfdahl and Prieto (2009) have shown how a requirement for Swedish early years settings to publish 'Quality Accounts' detailing good practice has resulted in an observable shift of focus among practitioners. Because they need to identify generalizable, indicators of quality

(*znachenie*) they have begun to pay less attention to more intimate, local factors (*smysl*) which cannot be made public in this way. For example, some aspects of work with children with additional needs cannot be included in the Quality Accounts because of concerns about confidentiality. Other features of close relationships with children may be unpublishable because they have to be *felt* in the context of second-person engagement.

In another chapter (Parker-Rees, 2010 revised as 2015d), I argued that play in educational contexts was increasingly understood as a convenient strategy for enabling and accelerating children's access to public, recordable and reportable kinds of knowing. I characterised this as a focus on 'hunting' or 'getting in' (the pursuit of generalizable knowledge which can be acquired and displayed beyond the immediate context) and contrasted this with 'gathering' or 'letting in' more tacit, often context-specific, kinds of information. This accumulation of more incidental knowledge, particularly social awareness, is especially well supported by playful interactions in relaxed settings and with familiar partners, as much among adults, in the form of social chat, as among children in play. The OECD study '*Starting Strong II*' (OECD, 2006: 60) noted the social pedagogy favoured in Scandinavian countries where 'greater emphasis is placed on learning to live together'. This was contrasted with the 'schoolification' found in other countries, including the UK and USA, where a 'pre-primary' approach to early education is reflected in a greater emphasis on specifying and documenting what children should be learning.

Meeting

My chapter on 'Hunting and Gathering' (Parker-Rees, 2010, 2015d) was influenced by my involvement in a long-term project which focused on opening

up practice in Steiner kindergartens through extended discussions between Steiner kindergarten teachers and teacher educators and early years teacher educators from outside the Steiner community. The study was particularly democratic, with the scope, focus, design and conduct of the research being discussed, negotiated and co-created during a series of day-long meetings. These opportunities for extended conversation allowed participants to get to know each other socially, echoing the focus, in Steiner kindergarten practice, on supporting a community in which people, children and adults, can learn to live together. I suggested that the book that emerged from the project should be entitled *'Meeting the Child in Steiner Kindergartens'.* As the book's editor, I aimed to present the findings of the project in a way that would enable readers to experience something of the rich and complex process of *meeting* with a different way of thinking about young children's learning.

In the introduction, '*Ways of Knowing Children'* (Parker-Rees, 2011b)*,* the chapters written by other members of the project team are set in the context of a wider overview of ways of getting to know children. The 'gathering' approach that we observed in the Steiner kindergartens is contrasted with the 'hunting' approach to assessment that is characteristic of 'pre-primary' forms of early years provision. Margaret Carr noted that hunting for 'observations' can encourage a focus on what children cannot yet do, echoing Vygotsky's criticism of planning 'guided not by tomorrow but by yesterday, by the child's weakness, not his strength' (Vygotsky, in Fleer, 2002, p.7). There is an important distinction between meeting or getting to know a child and standing apart to observe and document what she is doing. Being observed is not *experienced* in the same way as being 'liked'.

In another chapter (Parker-Rees and Rees, 2011) the focus is again on how Steiner kindergartens help adults and children to get to know each other. This chapter is grounded in extensive conversations in which Sarah Rees and I sought to understand some of the differences between our understandings of key concepts. This opportunity to explore our differences, to meet and engage with another way of seeing, struck us both as being interestingly similar to the open, receptive approach to getting to know each other which we had experienced in our observations in Steiner kindergartens. Observing and participating in Steiner kindergartens allowed me to discover parallels between what the Steiner kindergarten teachers described as 'inner work' and my own understanding of sympathetic accommodation or 'liking'. Inner work includes a contemplative, reflective 'stilling' that allows what has been gathered unconsciously, in the course of meeting with children through the day, to surface in the form of a 'picture' of each child and what they might need. Several of the Steiner kindergarten teachers talked about their practice of 'child study'. This is a procedure invoked when adults are concerned that a child is not at ease in the kindergarten environment and it involves the teacher (and sometimes all staff in the setting) focussing attention on this child over a period of a few days, noting their feelings and responses to the child. What I found particularly interesting was how teachers would often point out that this noticing could be enough, in itself, to resolve any issues. While the Steiner teachers had learned to understand this effect in terms of Rudolph Steiner's anthroposophical beliefs, I could relate it to my understanding of 'liking'. By paying closer attention to a child, and to the nature of their interactions, teachers were able to 'tune up' their relationship in ways that both child and teacher could feel and appreciate.

Participation in this project, and editing the book which resulted from it, provided me with direct experience of the value of making time to meet with other people's different ways of understanding the needs of young children. This meeting extends beyond what can be communicated by words on a page. The Steiner kindergarten teachers recognised the importance of what I have described as 'primary communication' (Parker-Rees, 2007b), the knowing which is gathered from full engagement in interactions not just with words or ideas but with whole, embodied and situated people. My conversations with other participants, informed and complicated by the familiarity gathered from our extended meetings, helped me to get a feel for their understanding of Steiner practice but also, in the course of exploring our differences, deepened my own understanding of what Lois Holzman (1997, p. 87) described as '*sharing life with children'.*

Joining in (becoming peer)

The CARITAS (Collaborative Application of Research into Tutoring for Autonomous Study) project, on which I was Principal Investigator, involved a team of six colleagues from what was then the Faculty of Education, representing library staff and leaders of Independent Study Modules on a range of programmes. We worked together to develop ways of helping tutors to access, share and discuss research into supporting student engagement in self-directed study. The project led to the development of a Sharepoint site for sharing and discussing research and to the introduction of a monthly faculty reading group. Joanna Haynes and I then decided to engage with students to

explore their experience of the small seminar groups intended to provide support for their autonomous work on final stage research projects (Parker-Rees and Haynes 2013).

Although this paper is not focused on early development, it illustrates how an interest in 'meeting' informed my research into aspects of teaching and learning in Higher Education. The structure of the CARITAS project, with day-long meetings for discussion of ideas which participants had encountered in their own independent exploration of relevant research, drew on what I had learnt from the Steiner project about the value of this kind of extended interaction. The faculty reading group was a further extension of this attempt to acknowledge the social and affective aspects of meeting with other people's understandings, allowing participants to explore differences in their interpretations of shared concepts, occasionally glimpsing the personal *smysl* behind the professional *znachenie*.

Joanna and I were particularly interested in how students experienced the support provided both by their supervisors and by seminar groups – small groups of students supervised by the same tutor. The paper explores some of the issues associated with the supervisory/tutorial role such as the challenge of ensuring consistency of provision. We noted the tension between strategies introduced to 'rule out' too much divergence (e.g. by provision of tutor handbooks, induction programmes and staff-development activities) and the inescapably variable social dynamics of relationships between different tutors and students. We were also interested in the range of responses from students about their experience of working with peers. While most were dismissive

about the value of 'that group-work malarkey', by the end of the year they were able to look back on their relationships with others in their supervisory group and to acknowledge that it had been 'kind of nice' to be able to share ideas and worries with peers who were going through similar experiences.

These meetings with students showed that Dewey's injunction that 'the school must represent real life' (1897, p. 3) was as relevant to work with young adults as to work with preschool children. Attempts to 'rule out' the messiness of students' affective experiences, to establish walls around 'what is to be learned', can be seen as a kind of 'schoolification' of the university, echoing the issues identified by Löfdahl and Prieto (2009) in Swedish preschools.

Shortly after writing 'Informal aspects of becoming peer' I was invited to contribute to a 'festschrift' celebrating the work of Vera John-Steiner. In her book, 'Creative Collaborations' (John-Steiner, 2000), John-Steiner presents detailed and sensitive accounts of the 'behind-the-scenes' activity which is often overlooked in narratives about the achievements of great scientists, scholars, artists and thinkers. In my letter (Parker-Rees, 2013) I wanted to acknowledge the importance of 'gossip and daily-ness' (*ibid.,* p.97), a term used by members of a feminist writing collective whose work is explored in chapter 4 of 'Creative Collaborations'. I related this 'daily-ness' to Vygotsky's distinction between meaning (*znachenie*), the public, sharable currency of verbal communication, and sense (*smysl*), the more intimate, relational and context-specific awareness of 'what we do' –which is more *felt* than known. The title for my letter, 'Collaborative Recreation', refers to the valuable roles played by 'meeting' and social interactions in the continuous process of re-creating shared, cultural

understandings. This collaborative recreation was evident in the discussions between participants in the Steiner and CARITAS research projects, in conversations between students and tutors in their seminar groups and in the day-to-day experience of learning to live together in early years settings.

Co-construction of identity

Being invited to contribute a chapter to the Sage Handbook of Play and Learning in Early Childhood (Parker-Rees, 2014a) provided an opportunity to develop research into the role of pre-verbal, primary communication in infant development. The original title for the chapter was 'Playfulness and learning who we are' and my intention was to review recent research into early development which suggests that playfulness, familiarity, intimacy and 'daily-ness' provide the context in which a sense of self can be co-constructed. This chapter represents a meeting of insights from research in a number of disciplines that can inform our understanding of 'who we are'. Vygotsky's late and unfinished work on 'The Problem of Age' (1998/1934) introduced the 'Social Situation of Development' to explain how opportunities and contexts for social interaction shape the development of a child's ability to participate and are in turn transformed by changes in what the child wants and is able to do. Vygotsky argued that before infants develop an awareness of a distinct self they live in a 'Great We' (*ibid.,* p. 232) that provides the nest where the ability to participate in social interactions is nurtured. I argue that it is not so much that a sense of self emerges out of this 'Great We', like Venus emerging from the sea, but more that the daily-ness of 'what we do' shapes the lens through which we refract and make sense of our experiences. I argue that our sense of self is, in Vygotsky's

terms, a Higher Mental Function, a 'habit of mind' acquired through our participation in social relationships and interactions.

Vasudevi Reddy (2008, 2011) has observed that the place of research into early childhood development, primarily in departments of psychology, has tended to privilege the more detached, 'scientific' third-person, spectatorial perspective over the more engaged, participant 'second person perspective'. Reddy argues that this has made it more difficult to research the more intimate, familiar forms of relationship which I characterise as 'meeting' and which constitute the social, relational situations in which we can co-construct our understanding of who we are.

I note that several key publications (Fogel et al., 2006; Seemann, 2011a; Schilbach et al., 2013) have brought together work by developmental and comparative psychologists, philosophers and neuroscientists. These collaborations represent another kind of 'meeting of minds' and a new Social Situation of Development which has the potential to enrich and extend our understanding of how we come to be who we are – not isolated individuals but co-participants in the Great We of a shared culture which is enriched by a variety of different lenses and perspectives.

After writing this chapter, I was invited to contribute to a special issue of the Brazilian journal *Perspectiva* (Parker-Rees, 2014b). I am not able to include the paper here because it was published in Portuguese (*De nós para você para mim: a co-construção da identidade nas interações na pequena infância* - From

us to you to me: the co-construction of identity in early interactions). I will, however, outline its main argument, as this relates to the development of my thinking about the social processes within which identities are co-constructed. In this paper I referred to Karen Barad's (2007) term, 'agential cuts', to highlight how our ways of thinking about the 'boundaries' between self and other are socially constructed, flexible and different in different cultures. In the traditional example of a person using a stick to probe the environment, it is not obvious where a cut could be made which would mark a clear boundary between person and environment. It is equally problematic to determine where an agential cut might be made between an infant and the nurturing social situation by means of which she is able to engage with and explore her environment. I referred to a study (Kärtner et al., 2013) which compared mother/infant interactions in German and Nso (Cameroon) families:

> By focusing their study on face to face interaction and social smiles Kärtner et al. may overlook the more continuous, tactile forms of intersubjectivity which characterise the experience of babies who are almost constantly in their mother's arms. For these babies 'interaction lacks the peaks of emotional excitement seen in Euro-American dyads' (Kärtner et al., 2013, 86) but it also lacks the troughs – being put down in a baby chair, cot or cradle. Being repeatedly picked up and put down may accelerate a child's ability to separate out a sense of self (German mothers expect to see social smiles at about 2 months while Nso mothers expect this at 7 months, on average) but not all cultures would recognise this as something to be desired or actively encouraged. (Parker-Rees, 2014b, p. 904[1])

I went on to suggest that Western cultural practices may privilege a 'peaks and troughs' pattern of understanding which extends into the way we think about attention and communication:

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[1]
     I have provided quotations from Parker-Rees 20014b in English, as submitted, with page references to the corresponding Portuguese text in the published article.

> Picking up and putting down objects (including babies themselves) can be seen as fundamental manifestations of the way people take up interest in things, sequentially or collectively, and how they switch their attention to something else. (Parker-Rees, 2014b, p. 907)

In the context of understanding how children are helped to join in with the social practices of their family, I argued that attention to the 'flow' of interaction may be more accessible to the infant than differentiated attention to distinct elements, such as sounds, words, turns or even persons. By noticing differences in how interactions *feel* babies can begin to identify the otherness of others, which in turn allows them to notice the otherness of themselves - how they are different from the people with whom they interact.

One of the reasons why I am so fascinated by the study of very early development is that the process of examining the ways in which babies begin, with others, to make sense of their environment can take adults out of habitual ways of thinking. In this paper, I argued that there is an important distinction between looking in on other ways of thinking, from a third-person perspective, and *meeting* with them, through second-person perspective direct engagement:

> This sort of knowing cannot be achieved 'from outside', by reading or being told, it can only be acquired *within* particular forms of social interaction. (Parker-Rees, 2014b, p. 910)

Difference

The 4th edition of the Early Childhood Studies text-book which I first co-edited, with Jenny Willan and Jan Savage in 2004 was published in 2015. This book

was originally intended to serve three purposes: to provide a resource for students, tailored to the structure of our undergraduate programme; to encourage new members of the Early Childhood Studies team to write about their own areas of interest; and to highlight some of the ways in which the study of early childhood can help students to learn about themselves, as well as about the lives and worlds of young children.

For the 4th edition I contributed the introduction (as I have for all editions) (Parker-Rees, 2015a) and two chapters. 'Developing Communication: getting to know each other' (Parker-Rees, 2015b) was updated to further emphasise the importance, well beyond early childhood, of the full spectrum of modes of communication; the whole cake of which speech is just the icing. I also contributed a new chapter, 'Concepts of Childhood: meeting with difference' (Parker-Rees, 2015c).

This chapter provides an overview of the history of ways of understanding childhood, emphasising the two-way relationship between ideas about childhood and ideas about adulthood. I explore the dynamic tension between competing concepts of childhood, drawing on David Kennedy's observations about the tension between the 'same-ness' which allows us to live together in large social groups and the 'different-ness' which sets each of us apart as a unique individual (Kennedy and Kohan, 2012; Kennedy, 2013a). On the one hand, the romantic concept of childhood celebrates the innocence, creativity and different-ness of childhood as qualities to be protected, preserved and extended into adulthood. On the other hand, more classical or empirical concepts of childhood focus on helping children to progress, as quickly as

possible, from this wild or savage condition into the civilised, well-mannered same-ness of adulthood.

The history of childhood has tended to be characterised by 'grand-narratives' which highlight shifts, swings and transformations from one period to another but I argue that this tension between what William Blake might have called the 'contraries' of childhood and adulthood, difference and sameness, *smysl* and *znachenie* is an inescapable and beneficial feature of what it is to be human. It is not only across time periods, between cultures or within sub-sections of a society that disagreements can be found between romantic and classical, pro-child and pro-adult concepts of childhood. Similar tensions can be found within families (between mothers and fathers and between parents and grandparents) and within individuals whose feelings about childhood may vary in different contexts (e.g. in private and public environments) and at different times (e.g. when exhausted or when full of energy). Kennedy (2013b, p.38) has suggested that instead of attempting to rule out these tensions we should welcome and encourage a dialogue between the 'emergent structure' of the child and the 'relatively fixed structure' of the adult. Individuals, families and societies benefit from the 'meeting with difference' which children can offer, in their role as 'valuable strangers' (Harding, in Kennedy, 2006, p. 142). Modern communities are impoverished by the age-segregation that separates both the young and the elderly from the daily-ness of adult life. Inverting a familiar proverb, I have argued that 'it takes children to raise a village' (Parker-Rees, 2015c, p. 200).

Minding

From 2013 to 2017 I worked with Sandra Mathers, Jan Georgeson and Verity Campbell-Barr on a funded project, 'Two-year-olds in England: an exploratory

study' (Georgeson et al., 2014). I have contributed a chapter (Parker-Rees, 2017) to the book, 'Places for two-year-olds', edited by Georgeson and Campbell-Barr, in which I further develop my focus on the role of pre-verbal 'meeting' in early development. I suggest that, as well as feeding and clothing our infants, human parents are also responsible for *minding* them, not in the potentially derogatory sense of (merely) meeting their basic needs but in the much more important sense of helping them to 'mind'. I argue that it is more appropriate to examine minding as a social process than to attempt to understand minds as independent entities. I return to the arguments I made in 'Liking to be Liked' (Parker-Rees, 2007a) and in 'Playfulness and the co-construction of identity' (Parker-Rees, 2014a) but with a new understanding of the relationships between the different-ness of personal identity and the same-ness of cultural 'rules'.

Karen Nelson (2007) notes the distinction made by young children between the sameness or routine-ness implied by certain 'present tense' phrases (I have cereal for breakfast, I go to school, I put my pyjamas on before I go to bed) and the different-ness or specificity of 'past-tense' phrases (I had cereal for breakfast [this morning], I went to school [today], I put my pyjamas on before I went to bed [last night]). Awareness (albeit largely unconscious) of this distinction shows that even by the age of about 3 years, children are able to differentiate between 'scripts' or 'formats' which describe what we do (as a rule) and what might be described as individual instances or performances of a particular behaviour. Initially young children rely on the information available in and from contexts to 'remind' them about 'what we do' and about what they *can* do with things, so it makes very little sense to try to study or make claims about

what children can do when they are taken out of this familiar 'minding' environment. In time, however, 'what we can do' can be internalised, not in the form of pieces of information (hunted, caught and kept) but in the form of the habits, habitudes (Dewey, 1916), rituals (Gadamer, in Grondin, 2000) or habitus (Bourdieu, 1990, 2000) which shape the 'lens' through which we make sense of experience, refracting sensory information into *perezhivanie*. Thinking about learning in terms of the abstraction of rules or theories about regularities and patterns in our experience has fuelled interest in 'Theory of Mind' (Premack and Woodruff, 1978; Mitchell, 2011) as an explanation of how children are able to understand other people. Lawrence Hirschfeld (2013) has argued that a 'Theory of Society' may better represent the way we come to know what we can expect others to do, say and think:

> In negotiating social interactions, mentalizing is less important than attention to the contingencies of context, normative constraints on action, epistemic affordances of the cultural environment, and the group dynamics of the social milieu. (Hirschfeld, 2013, p. 101)

To describe this kind of knowing as a theory may be misleading. This is not knowledge owned by individuals or contained in brains but the more distributed, social knowledge which Shotter (after Wittgenstein) describes as 'knowing how to go on' (Shotter, 2012). In Karen Barad's words, this kind of knowing 'does not come from standing at a distance and representing but rather from *a direct material engagement with the world'* (Barad, 2007, p. 49 original emphasis).

It is in relaxed, playful, *convivial* interactions, such as children's pretend play or adults' social chat, that we are most able to 'learn to live together' because these are the times when minding flows and we are less cautious about how we present ourselves. When people are open to communication and immersed in

'second-person' relationships, their responses, attention, anecdotes and accounts are 'telling' because their choices allow others to meet their minding and to notice their different-ness.

The process of tracing the development of my thinking about meeting and minding has made me increasingly conscious of the challenge of using an essentially 'third-person' medium to communicate a developing understanding of the social, relational and continuous nature of the undercurrents which shape our meaning making. While language provides a degree of 'sameness' which can allow meanings to be (more or less) shared, the tidiness of printed words, as presented here, can only represent the surface of the flow of our minding. In conversation, even the cumbersome conversation of written exchanges in emails, letters or postings on online forums, we can slowly begin to discover the person behind the concepts, recognising telling differences in the ways words and concepts are used. It is too easy to forget, that beneath the 'public' surface of language, stilled on the page, lie powerful affective currents of distinctive and intriguing attitudes. Engaging, joining in and *meeting* with children whose communication is not yet framed by language can remind us of the simple pleasure afforded by sharing our attention, attitudes and minding with others.

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Liking to be liked: imitation, familiarity and pedagogy in the first years of life

Rod Parker-Rees

Liking to be liked: imitation, familiarity and pedagogy in the first years of life

Rod Parker-Rees[*]
University of Plymouth, Exeter, UK

This paper offers a review of the literature on the role of imitation in the earliest stages of social interaction between babies and familiar partners. The review focuses on the ways in which reciprocal imitation marks familiar relationships that provide special contexts for babies to engage actively and exuberantly in the construction of a shared culture. Because adults' perception of a baby's actions and intentions are filtered by the adult's experience of living within a particular culture, babies can obtain valuable information about this culture from the differences between what they do and how familiar adults respond to them. As they become increasingly interested in the social meaning of people's behaviour, infants also become more sensitive about how their own actions may be interpreted, showing pride and delight when their intentions are realised and embarrassed withdrawal when their efforts fail. When very young children are observed in unfamiliar contexts and when they are cared for and educated in professional settings, they may have relatively few opportunities for lively, joyful exchanges with reassuringly familiar partners and this can distort adults' perceptions of 'normal' infant behaviour. It is argued that adults' attentive interest in mutually enjoyable exchanges with young children is an important difference between humans and other apes and provides an essential foundation for pedagogy and for children's active participation in a shared culture.

Keywords: *Imitation; Familiarity; Pedagogy; 'Like me'; Emotions of companionship*

Introduction

The study of very young children's abilities to imitate the facial expressions, gestures and actions of others has recently become a focus for cross-disciplinary studies which draw on psychology, sociology, neuroscience, anthropology, philosophy and other disciplines to try to make sense of this facility (Hurley & Chater, 2005). In this paper, I will argue that the imitative abilities of infants cannot be understood in isolation from the cultural contexts in which they develop. What makes humans so different from the other great apes is not just what individual infants are able to do, but also what adults and infants like to do together. The same evolutionary processes which led to the development of social groups, intentional communication, dance, music and gossip also led us to enjoy conversational exchanges with our children,

*Faculty of Education, University of Plymouth, Douglas Avenue, Exmouth EX8 2AT, UK.
Email: rod.parker-rees@Plymouth.ac

exchanges in which we imitate them as much as they imitate us. The evidence from research on imitation may help early years practitioners, and those who prepare people for this crucial work, to understand the mechanisms at work in our interactions with babies and young children but we should also acknowledge the pedagogical importance of adults' enjoyment of these conversations.

Shifting perspectives on infant imitation

When Meltzoff and Moore (1977) first presented evidence of newborn babies' ability to imitate facial expressions, notably tongue protrusion, their findings met with an unenthusiastic, even cynical response from a field which was still firmly grounded in a Piagetian model of early infancy. As Meltzoff and his colleagues, Gopnik and Kuhl, later observed (Gopnik *et al.*, 1999), reluctance to acknowledge the active role of babies in communication exchanges may have reflected the fact that, in the 1970s, developmental psychology was very much on the outer fringes of what was still a predominantly male discipline. One can understand how men might continue to believe that the first months of life were dominated by reflexes and an essentially passive accumulation of knowledge about the world, but for those who have spent time caring for and engaging with a young baby, this view could feel incompatible with their own experiences. Reddy and Trevarthen (2004) offer the example of Professor Elizabeth Bates who, at a meeting of the British Psychological Society in 1993, admitted that she had been sceptical about the possibility of neonatal imitation until she experienced it first hand with one of her grandchildren. Bates acknowledged that the phenomenological evidence of feeling that her grandchild was indeed engaging her in a form of conversation proved more convincing than any number of published research findings.

While some have been persuaded by the evidence of their own interactions with children, others have been won round by evidence from research in neuroscience—especially since the discovery, by Rizzolatti *et al.* (1996), of 'mirror neurons' in macaque monkeys. Rizzolatti and his colleagues accidentally discovered that specific neurons which fired when the monkeys grasped an object were also activated when the monkeys saw the experimenters grasping ice-cream cones (Trevarthen, 2005). The researchers went on to identify other mirror neurons which fired both when the monkeys performed a specific action and when they observed the same action performed by another monkey, or indeed by a human. Other researchers have gone on to replicate and extend these findings—in humans as well as in monkeys (Fadiga *et al.*, 1995; Decety *et al.*, 1997; Iacoboni *et al.*, 1999). Although there is still much to learn about *how* the mirror neuron system works, it is now generally accepted that it *does* work and research on the physiology of imitation is challenging old assumptions about the distinction between perception and action (Prinz, 2005a) and indeed between self and others (Gallese, 2005).

Ironically, the discovery of the mirror neuron system in monkeys has been accompanied by a growing realisation that imitation can be seen as an almost exclusively human phenomenon (Tomasello, 1999; Donald, 2001; Zlatev, 2002;

Garrels, 2004). As long as we assumed that imitation was a primitive, 'monkey-see, monkey-do' response, we could dismiss it as being too trivial to merit further research. It became much more interesting once we began to understand that adults' and children's imitation of each other's behaviour was almost never seen even in our closest relatives, the other great apes. Mutual imitation might have a key role in the rapid evolution of human culture:

> imitation actually leads babies to behave in new ways that are <u>not</u> genetically determined and, in fact, to behave like the adults around them. Imitation is the motor for culture. (Gopnik *et al.*, 1999, p. 167)

Research on other animals has confirmed that several forms of behaviour associated with imitation, have not been recorded in other species, except, sometimes, in individuals which have been reared and intensively trained by humans. Wild animals do not use pointing to show interest (though some apes can be taught to do this) (Corballis, 2002); they do not practise skills (though human-reared bonobos have on rare occasions and Alex, a human reared African grey parrot does practise new words—if these were first taught in the context of social interaction with humans) (Pepperberg, 1999); they do not learn by imitation and neither do they teach (though human-reared bonobos have been seen unsuccessfully attempting to show wild-reared bonobos how to complete tasks) (Donald, 2001). Perhaps most significantly for this paper, no other animals, even those who have successfully been taught to use sign language or tokens to communicate with humans, have ever been observed using these symbol systems to chat with each other (Donald, 2001). The fact that human-reared animals frequently display skills which have never been observed in the wild suggests that pedagogy, the sometimes deliberate and sometimes unwitting efforts of adults to shape the behaviour of their children, may explain why the emergence and persistence of culture has (so far) been unique to human societies. Perhaps as a result of our heightened ability to infer what other people know, think and believe, we have evolved a powerful predisposition to enjoy communing with babies, especially our own, in ways which go beyond the protective care shown by other species: most of us like babies and most babies like to be liked by familiar adults.

If it acts like me, it likes me

Andrew Meltzoff has continued to research infant imitation for nearly 30 years and has recently summarised the findings that have led him to develop his 'Like me' hypothesis (Meltzoff, 2005). He argues that babies are predisposed to focus their attention on information that matches their own movements, information which is 'like me'. A mobile suspended over a baby's cot can become much more interesting, for example, if it is attached to the baby's leg, so that its movement is contingent on the baby's kicking. Not only will the baby explore and test this contingency with vigorous bouts of kicking and rapt attention, but it may also begin to smile at the mobile (Watson, 1979).

While mechanical devices such as a contingent cot mobile can provide some measure of 'like me' information, the great majority will come not from objects but from people, and not from just any people but specifically from people who are actively and deliberately engaging with the baby (Meltzoff & Moore, 1999). Much as the exaggerated intonation of infant-directed speech can help to make utterances targeted at a baby stand out from the relatively flat contours of ordinary speech between adults, the communicative behaviour of an engaged adult, one who is responding to the rhythm, intensity and style of the baby's own movements is highlighted and marked as particularly interesting by this 'like me' quality. Research by Cohn and Tronick (1983) showed that babies quickly become anxious when this 'like me' information is interrupted, as when a mother withholds engagement cues by adopting a 'still face'. Murray and Trevarthen (1985) also showed that babies' responses to 'live' CCTV images of their mother engaging with them were very different from their responses to delayed or recorded images which still showed their mother engaging with them but now 'out of synch'.

Meltzoff conducted a similar experiment but using real engagement between 14-month-olds and two adults, one of whom actively imitated the child while the other responded contingently (in time with the child's actions) but not performing the same actions as the child (Meltzoff, 1990). The children looked and smiled significantly less at the merely contingent adult than at the more 'like me' one. They also engaged actively with their imitator, deliberately varying their own movements while closely monitoring the adult's response. In another study, after noticing that 6-month-old infants would often look at their mothers and smile after they had successfully imitated an action (making a light come on by touching it with their heads), Meltzoff observed that 'there is a social-game quality to human interaction' (Meltzoff, 2005, p. 59). This has obvious benefits for learning, as it helps to bind adult and child into a mutually rewarding emotional engagement, suffusing learning with an affective component which makes it much more effective as a cultural tool.

Toddlers are not simply learning machines, as some behaviourists (and even some Piagetians) would seem to believe. Their activity, even with inanimate objects but particularly with interested other people, is typically, though not universally and not always to the same extent, emotional as well as 'cognitive' or 'intellectual'. Several studies have shown that babies do not tend to imitate the actions of mechanical devices in the same way that they imitate human models (Meltzoff, 2005). Simon Baron-Cohen (2003) has argued that we are all at different points on a systemising-empathising spectrum, with men being more likely to be predominantly systemisers and women tending to favour empathising.

This suggestion clearly has implications for differences between the parenting styles of fathers and mothers (and for the research interests of male and female developmental psychologists) but it also highlights the fact that even babies may display a wide range of different responses to social stimuli. For a social group as a whole, however, a tendency for most babies to prefer interactions with people who are interested in them, and who display this interest through contingent responses, may confer an evolutionary advantage. As Kinsbourne (2005) points out, it may be

unwise or even dangerous to imitate any and all available models. Infants' choices about how fully they will engage in imitative exchanges seem to be influenced by their awareness of the extent to which a communication partner is 'tuned in' to their own movements, rhythms and vocalisations. There is clearly a systemising component to this ability to detect contingent behaviour but, for most children, this is accompanied by an empathising connection which lifts the experience of reciprocal communication to a different affective level: 'By 14 months, infants undoubtedly know that adults are not under their total control and part of the joy of this exchange is the realisation that although the infant does not actually control the other, nevertheless, the other is choosing to do just what I do' (Meltzoff & Decety, 2003, in Garrels, 2004, p. 20).

The ability of most infants to express their own joy, interest and fascination makes them particularly rewarding conversation partners. More experienced and enculturated adults and older children are captivated by babies' social skills and willingly serve them as tutors, not in mechanical, systemised training, but in delightful conversations fuelled by mutual enjoyment of generously shared interest: 'we would all prefer to be cared for by someone who enjoys our company rather than by someone who acts out of grim duty' (Noddings, 2002, pp.178–9).

Adults act as social mirrors or cultural editors of infants' actions

In choosing to do just what the infant does, adults, and especially doting parents, hold up a 'social mirror' (Rochat, 2004) to the children with whom they interact. Prinz (2005b) has suggested that this imitative mirroring allows infants to perceive aspects of their own actions that are normally 'filtered out' in the early stages of perceptual processing:

> organisms are made for understanding the world surrounding them, rather than for understanding themselves; that is, how their own bodies and their own minds work. For instance, it has long been known that veridical perception relies on mechanisms that subtract, from the total information available, any contributions that are due to the perceiver/actor. (Prinz, 2005b, p. 181)

Our ability to subtract out our own actions allows us to maintain a stable perception of our environment as we move around within it. We can differentiate between perceptual changes resulting from our own movement, such as the saccadic movements made by our eyes as we read, and those which are independent of our actions, such as when an insect flies past us; however:

> As a consequence of being mirrored by somebody else, the infant comes to perceive her own actions through the other. It may be such attending to one's own actions through the mirror of somebody else that may counteract and eventually help to overcome the inbuilt mechanism for cancelling the perceiver/actor and her contributions to the world she is perceiving and acting upon. (Prinz, 2005b, p.182)

Recognising our own actions without simultaneously experiencing the familiar flow of proprioceptive feedback about what our bodies are doing may result in a feeling of

unease similar to the embarrassment many people experience when they see themselves on video or hear themselves on audio recordings. We can recognise ourselves but what we see or hear *feels* oddly unfamiliar. Toddlers may also show signs of embarrassment when they see themselves in a mirror (Reddy, 2000), but in comfortable, scaffolded interactions with familiar partners, this unease is dispelled by the pleasure that comes from being 'liked'. Because people tend to become entrained by the movements and rhythms of people they like (Dijksterhuis, 2005), being imitated in this way shows us not only that the other person is like me, but also that they like me or, at least, that they are empathising with me. A mirror image or a video recording may copy my actions exactly but it cannot like me.

For most people, being 'liked' or imperfectly imitated by a communication partner is emotionally rewarding (we like being liked), but when babies converse with adults or older children, who are already well versed in the ways of their culture, they also benefit from a powerful mechanism which supports their induction into culturally valued ways of behaving. Affiliation to a particular culture entails a progressive adjustment of one's action and perception processes as a result of differential levels of exposure to 'normal' (relatively frequent) and 'unusual' events. Language learning provides a particularly clear example of this tuning process: 'as children acquire a vocabulary and see the world through the language they acquire, they learn not to see it as well, for *a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing*' (Eisner, 1990; emphasis added).

When adults engage in conversations or chats with babies, their interpretation of the baby's contributions is inescapably filtered by perception systems which have been tuned by prior exposure to the kinds of experiences associated with a particular culture. A fleeting twitch of the corners of the lips may be perceived as a social smile, prompting the adult to respond with a full, even exaggerated, display of a 'proper' smile. Virtually any vocalisation which begins with a /m/ sound will be inescapably pulled in by a perceptual attractor which will shape the mother's response into 'mum' or 'mama', accompanied by plenty of encouraging, celebratory cues to mark the pleasure and value attached to these sounds. Regardless of their intentions, the cultural tuning of adults' perception processes will tidy and smooth the baby's actions and sounds, assimilating them to a pre-existing cultural template. The adult therefore serves as an 'enhancing mirror' (Trevarthen, 1995, p. 16) in which the infant sees not an exact reflection, but a culturally edited, 'retouched' version of its own actions. It is the combination of reassuring familiarity, resulting from the adult's efforts to affiliate with the baby, and stimulating novelty, resulting from the differences between what the baby does and how the adult responds, which enables babies to pick out valuable information about what matters in this particular cultural context (Parker-Rees, 2004).

The benefits of repetition with variation: seeing the intention behind the act

Because infants enjoy the companionship and familiarity associated with seeing their own behaviour returned to them with interest, they reward attentive adults with

smiles, laughter and infectious joy, shaping the adults' behaviour even as their own behaviour is shaped by the adults' editing. When adults find a form of interaction that works, they will therefore be more likely to repeat it, giving babies the added benefit of opportunities to find a pattern in a series of familiar, but not identical, repetitions of a successful 'play format' (Bruner, 1983). Adults do not have to start from scratch when it comes to finding what will appeal to babies because they are likely to have been exposed to interactions between other adults and babies—both in the flesh and in books, on TV and in other media. Every culture provides parents with a 'starter kit' of games, such as 'peekaboo', giving and taking, boisterous jiggling and swinging, funny noises and expressions, nursery songs and rhymes, which have survived the rigorous processes of memetic selection as they have passed from generation to generation. Each culture's favoured styles of adult–child interaction, for example, the extent to which the infant's arousal is encouraged or damped down, the degree of animation in voice and gestures and the nature and frequency of physical contact, both emerge from and contribute to the more general behavioural styles characteristic of the culture. Babies adopt, but also adapt, the patterns of behaviour which adults share with them.

Every family has its own microculture of rituals and routines, around mealtimes, bathtimes, bedtimes and playtimes, which offer infants frequent opportunities to repeat familiar, culturally mediated patterns of interaction with a familiar partner. This frequent repetition allows infants to construct mental models or 'general event representations' (Nelson, 1986) that enable them to differentiate between predictable (and therefore uninteresting) events and unexpected, novel or surprising events, which merit more attention: 'We are highly adaptive creatures. The predictable becomes, by definition, background, leaving the attention uncluttered, the better to deal with the random or unexpected' (Ian McEwan, *Enduring love*, cited in Wilson *et al.*, 2005, p. 5).

One consequence of an increasing ability to predict how other people will behave in a familiar context is that older infants begin to be able to pay more attention to other people's intentions. Gergely *et al.* (1995, in Gergely, 2002) have shown that by the age of 9 months, infants will even appear to ascribe intentions to animated shapes on a computer monitor. After seeing a small circle moving along and 'jumping' over a rectangle to 'meet' a large circle, they were shown two animations in which the same circles featured, but without the rectangle 'obstacle'. They looked more intently at the animation in which the small circle followed the same path as before (jumping over the place where the rectangle had been) than at the more different animation, in which the small circle moved straight to the large circle. This suggests that the infants were able to make allowances for the ways in which 'reality constraints', such as obstacles, can change the form of action appropriate for achieving a particular goal.

Just as adults perceive infants' actions through the filter of perceptual systems which have been tuned by exposure to a particular culture, so infants repeatedly exposed to daily routines can begin to discriminate between incidental or accidental 'noise' in people's behaviour and 'information' which is worthy of their attention.

Gergely *et al*. (2002) repeated Meltzoff's experiment in which infants watch an adult who makes a box light up by touching it with her head, except that one group of 14-month-olds saw a slightly modified demonstration. Half of the children saw the unusual action performed by a model who was holding a blanket around her shoulders, so that her hands were not free. Many more children in this group used their hands to press on the box, rather than their heads, suggesting that they were imitating what they understood to be the model's intention, rather than just mimicking the action they had seen. Meltzoff (1995) has also shown that 18-month-olds will imitate an action that a model 'failed' to achieve (e.g. pulling a toy dumbbell apart), rather than simply copying the model's unsuccessful actions.

Other studies have examined the extent to which infants are influenced by a model's explicit verbal cues to differentiate between intended and unintended actions. Carpenter *et al*. (1998) showed 14- and 18-month-olds an adult who performed two actions on an object, saying 'There!' while performing one and 'Whoops!' while performing the other (the order being varied). After the second action coloured lights, would suddenly turn on. All of the infants imitated the 'intended' ('There!') action significantly more than the unintended ('Whoops!') one, suggesting that their attention was focused on making sense of what the model was 'trying' to do rather than simply repeating what the model did. Want and Harris (2001) also used a verbal cue, 'Oops!', when showing older (2.5 and 3.5 years) children how a toy figure could be removed from a tube by means of a stick. Pushing the stick down one end of the tube would push the figure into a trap, pushing from the other end would successfully push the figure out. Showing the wrong method, saying 'Oops!', and then showing the right method proved to be significantly more effective (for the older children) than just showing the correct method or a control condition in which the stick was moved outside the tube. A later, similar study allowed Harris and Want to show that a single exposure to the incorrect method ('Oops!') followed by the correct method was significantly more effective than repeated independent trial and error (Harris & Want, 2005).

While these studies do show how infants might derive pedagogical benefits from social cues that help them to filter irrelevant actions out of their imitations, they still suffer from the shortcomings identified by Donaldson (1978), in her criticism of Piaget's clinical experiments. When children are taken to laboratories and exposed to carefully controlled and systemised peculiar events, they may reveal something about how their minds work in this sort of isolated context, but we should be wary about assuming that this is how their minds will work in the more normal context of lively interaction with familiar confederates.

Emotions of companionship: conditions for playful exchanges

In real-world contexts, interactions with other people are suffused with emotional significance as we carefully monitor not just what other people do but also how they react to what we do and to what other people do. As Reddy and Trevarthen (2004) have observed, from the age of about 6 months infants become considerably more

self-conscious than neonates about their participation with others in imitative engagements. As they turn from self-absorbed fascination with the development of control over their bodies to a new interest in whatever interests their communication partners (evidenced in social referencing and joint attention), they also become acutely aware of how their own actions are appraised by others:

> Cultural learning and everything to do with education and shared artificial knowledge and skills involves communication in relation to a joint and mutual experience of the world of objects, and that is where you get these very powerful emotions of pride, which reflect the appraisal of other persons—pride in knowledge and pride in skill, and shame in not being thought master of such things, to be thought unskilled or ignorant. These emotions of companionship are crucial in the development of happy self-confidence at any age. (Trevarthen, 2005, p. 97)

There are interesting parallels between these emotions of companionship and the cues used by Carpenter *et al.* (1998) and Want and Harris (2001); 'There!' can be seen as marking pride in successful action and 'Whoops!' signals a degree of embarrassment or shame when an intended outcome is not achieved. But these exclamations are no more than vestiges of much more powerful emotional forces that are particularly associated with infants' confident interactions with familiar and fully engaged partners: 'There is a kind of heroic glee in the navigating 6-month-old's spirit—an infectious pride signalled by presentation of previously imitated acts in clever, exaggerated and surprising ways for the appreciation of others' (Trevarthen, 2005, p. 97).

Such joyful inventiveness may play an important part in what makes human culture so adaptable and so responsive to new ideas. Vygotsky (1988, p. 64) argued that: 'The very essence of cultural development is in the collision of mature cultural forms of behaviour with the primitive forms that characterise the child's behaviour; and Donald (2001, p. 153) echoed this idea in his claim that; 'the creative collision between the conscious mind and distributed cultural systems has altered the very form of human cognition.' When fresh new minds collide (and collude) with the cultural systems that shape the behaviour of people around them, they do not simply mimic what they observe. Instead, they find or construct form and structure in the patterning of their experience and, given propitious social contexts, they delight in trying out their personal perspective on other people:

> Babies come already 'designed', or 'programmed', to be deeply interested in the people and world in which they find themselves. They are incredibly observant and selective, as well as being extremely clever at interpreting what they witness. They learn best by playing with things they find in their world, and above all by playing with the familiar people who love them. (David *et al.*, 2003, p. 150)

Children do not simply conform to the culture that surrounds them, they perform it (Parker-Rees, 1999), communicating their own interpretation like a musician performing a piece of music. Instead of passively copying what other people do, taking up cultural habits as if they were a uniform, they adapt them, play with them and dress up in them, and, in the process, encourage others to see new possibilities in them. The creative process by which children make sense, rather than simply find it,

appears, however, to be particularly vulnerable to the kinds of social pressures associated with unfamiliar environments or interactions with unfamiliar people.

Challenges and implications for researchers and professional early years settings

Because child development researchers seldom have time to develop a comfortable familiarity with their subjects, 'heroic glee' is very seldom found in controlled 'laboratory' studies of infant behaviour. With a few notable exceptions from the 1980s (e.g. Tizard & Hughes, 1984; Stern, 1985; Dunn, 1988), and despite a general trend towards the use of sociocultural models for understanding children's development, it is still difficult to find substantial studies which document very young children's participation in their natural habitat. As Engel (2005, p. 36) has observed, 'It is more respectable to study primates in their natural habitat than human children in their homes'.

Even in the best-managed early years settings, it may also be difficult to achieve the depth of shared experience and easy companionship which allows young children to engage in bold, confident social participation. Allocating a key worker to each child can certainly help both parents and babies to build trusting relationships with professional carers (Goldschmied & Jackson, 2004) but this is not sufficient to ensure that staff can regularly 'find time to play, have fun, sing and laugh with young babies' (DfES, 2004, p. 5).

The issues for researchers and for practitioners are linked because lack of experience of babies in their natural environment can lead to cultural assumptions that filter adults' perceptions of what counts as normal infant behaviour. Young professionals whose only contact with children is in settings where staff are too busy to nurture familiar relationships may have little experience of babies' 'full-on' engagement in joyful interactions. When these practitioners come across reports of laboratory studies which have been conducted with emotionally uncomfortable children, they may therefore have little reason to challenge the limited view of children's potential which such studies can promote; and:

> If we assume that the infant is unaware of our expectations or intentions we act accordingly: we do not encourage the baby to cooperate with or play with our intentions and expectations, and we do not engage with infants' actions that may be attempts to engage our expectations and intentions. For a playful parent, who enjoys the shared emotions, this does not seem the right way to go. (Reddy & Trevarthen, 2004, p. 14)

One implication for the training and development of early years professionals is that placement experience for the birth-to-3 stage should include opportunities to spend time with parents and babies in home environments, or at least in environments where parents and children can be seen engaging in confident, playful interactions, as well as in professional settings. The English Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) consultation document (DfES, 2006) encourages practitioners to 'find out as much as you can from parents and carers about young babies before they join the setting, so that the routines you follow are familiar and

comforting' (p. 40), and to 'find out from parents how they like to communicate with their baby' (p. 44), but valuable though such information may be, I am not convinced that this will be sufficient to 'recalibrate' the perceptual tuning of early years practitioners. Simply spending time with parents and children in a home setting also may not be enough to change the way prospective early years professionals think about the capabilities of babies. Susan Engel (2005, p. 42) quotes a colleague who professed amazement at how little developmental psychologists know about children, 'even when they have some at home', and remember that Professor Elizabeth Bates was only able to recognize babies' ability to imitate when she observed imitation at first hand not with her own children, but with her grandchildren.

It may be, however, that focused observation of babies' interactions with familiar adults in the home environment might help developing early years practitioners to see and feel what babies can achieve, given optimum support. Direct, personal experience of the close, familiar relationship which allows parents to understand and support their young children may also contribute to a greater respect for parents. There is always a danger that the professional development of early years practitioners can result in somewhat critical attitudes to the parenting skills and practices of 'untrained' parents and much work with very young children is in situations where professionals can be seen as 'taking over' from parents. A phenomenologically grounded, experiential understanding of the importance of babies' interactions with familiar adults might help practitioners to see that a very important part of their role is valuing and supporting relationships between parents and children (Barnes *et al.*, 2006). Promoting parents' understanding of the pedagogical value of enjoying their children's company should be an important part of the early years professional's role.

While commercial constraints and pressure of other tasks may make it difficult for early years professionals to re-create the 'attentive love' (Noddings, 2002) which can flourish in the depth of shared experience between parent and child, there is still much that can be done to support the development of empathising as well as systemising skills in early years settings. What such settings lack in opportunities for intimate interactions between a child and a familiar adult can, to some extent, be compensated by greater opportunities for children to practise getting to know each other.

Vivien Gussin Paley (Paley, 2001) has written a short but powerful account of how one teacher, Mrs Tully, used 'doing stories' to help a group of 2-year-olds' to develop their own, shared culture and, in the process, to discover, assert and share their own identities. The children would dictate stories to Mrs Tully throughout the day and then, in the afternoon, they would all gather together to 'do' the stories, in the manner Mrs Tully had learned from Paley's book, *Wally's stories* (Paley, 1981). This involved Mrs Tully reading the story while the 'author' performed it in front of the other children, sometimes recruiting some or all of them as co-players or props. This was not, however, the end of the story. Once the author had performed, any of the other children could perform their own version of the story and sometimes every child would offer his or her own interpretation, as when the story was just the one

word, 'Mama'. As each child performed, they revealed aspects of themselves, as we all do whenever we tell a story in our own way, but they also contributed to the evolution of a shared understanding of the story and of their individual relationships with it, an understanding which became part of the culture of this community of two-year-olds. As Mrs Tully said: 'When my babies do their stories, that's when they really see each other … that's what we need to go after in school, the seeing and the listening to each other' (Paley, 2001, pp.11–12).

Babies can imitate movements and recognise when their own movements are being imitated but these older children are already imitating stories and observing what is revealed when different people each imitate a story in their own, unique way. Adults engage in social conversation, sharing and responding to anecdotes both as a way of getting to know each other and as a way of maintaining social relationships. Kinsbourne (2005, p. 170) observes that this sort of 'conversing' has a 'powerful affiliative effect that binds people together socially and gratifies them emotionally'. Like Mithen (2005), Kinsbourne suggests that this emotional function of 'entrained' or coordinated interaction developed before the emergence of language; we danced together and sang together well before we started to talk to each other. Indeed, as Rochat (2004) has argued, babies are social creatures well before they are able to construct an individual identity of their own. It is perhaps odd, then, that our understanding of pedagogy is still dominated by a rather narrow, systemising approach to the assembly and profiling of individual intellectual abilities. We have tended to assume that learning by imitation is a one-way process in which the learner obtains information from a more competent model, and in which the relationship between learner and model is of little or no importance. Research on reciprocal imitation with familiar partners reminds us that our delight in the company of other people lies at the very heart of the uniquely human process of intentional pedagogy.

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Sole Author

Introduction

Ways of knowing children

Rod Parker-Rees

In this chapter I offer an account of how the contributors to this book became involved in exploring Steiner kindergarten teachers' approaches to getting to know children. I suggest some ways in which distinctive aspects of Steiner kindergarten teachers' ways of being with children can contribute to a wider examination of how we help young children to extend their social world beyond their families. I argue that the concept of *meeting* – an active, reciprocal adjustment to others which incorporates the sharing of ideas within a more extensive and inclusive communication of values and nuances – can inform our understanding of social processes and communities in ways which extend well beyond the kindergarten or nursery.

The 'Meeting the child' project had its origins in 2007 when Trevor Mepham, the principal designate of the newly approved Steiner Hereford Academy, approached the University of Plymouth to propose a study of approaches to observation and assessment in Steiner kindergartens. This was at a time when the UK government was introducing an Early Years Foundation Stage to coordinate the regulation of all forms of provision for children from birth to the age of 5. Janni Nicol, as the early childhood representative of the Steiner Waldorf schools and kindergartens, was involved in negotiations about the proposed universal requirements regarding 'Early Learning Goals' which all early years provision would have to address. To meet some of these goals, especially those concerned with the teaching of reading and writing and the introduction of information technology, would require fundamental changes in Steiner kindergarten practices. Members of the Steiner early years community were also concerned that the approach to assessing and recording children's development, in an extensive Early Years Foundation Stage Profile document for each child, might come to exert unhelpful pressures on kindergarten teachers. Although some exemptions from these requirements were agreed for Steiner kindergartens, this issue highlighted the need for further work to share awareness of different 'ways of seeing' as well as different ways of working.

It was in this context that a group was formed, comprising early years academics from the University of Plymouth (led by Professor David Reynolds), experts in the training and professional development of Steiner kindergarten teachers and

independent consultants, to undertake a small-scale study of the beliefs, values and practices which inform Steiner approaches to getting to know children. From the beginning of the project it was clear that the Steiner educators and academics in the group welcomed the opportunity to meet with people who could offer an 'outside perspective' on what goes on in Steiner kindergartens. They were keen for us to join them in the task of understanding what is distinctive about what Steiner kindergarten teachers do, think and believe. The funding available for the project was not sufficient to enable us to undertake a rigorous review or evaluation across all Steiner kindergartens in England but we were able to organize a series of observations in eight classes in five schools in different parts of the country and to conduct interviews with nine teachers. The notes from observations and the transcripts of the interviews were circulated among the project group and informed extensive discussions at a series of whole-day meetings. At these meetings members of the group were able to raise questions about aspects of what they had observed or what they had read in notes from other observations and interviews, and our conversations allowed us to share and address our different perspectives, impressions, concerns and understandings.

In the summer of 2009 Mary Jane Drummond, Sally Jenkinson and Janni Nicol worked together to use our data to address a series of questions raised by the project group. Mary Jane and Sally went on to produce a report *Meeting the Child: Approaches to Observation and Assessment in Steiner Kindergartens* (Drummond and Jenkinson 2009) which may be accessed at http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415603928/. We hoped that including extensive examples from our data would help to 'engage the reader in an imaginary internal dialogue with the teachers' (ibid.: 6), enabling others to join us in the process of meeting the teachers and engaging with their beliefs, values and practices.

In this book we continue and extend our exploration of what Steiner approaches can contribute to our wider understanding of how we engage with children, how we get to know them and how we help them to get to know each other. We have all interpreted what we have seen, read and discussed in relation to our own understanding of what matters for young children, and we hope that readers will be willing to meet us in the attempt to understand what we can learn from Steiner kindergarten teachers' ways of knowing the children with whom they work.

It is important to be clear that our intention is neither to sell Steiner ideas nor to provide a rigorous critical evaluation of Steiner practices. We believe that early years teachers in a wide range of settings will recognize the importance of 'being there', of engaging fully with children, showing them that we care about them and absorbing the countless, seemingly trivial signals which allow us to know them as individuals and as members of various groups. Early years teachers around the world are aware of the pressures of 'performativity' (Osgood 2006) which can sometimes seem to promote a remote, 'objective' approach to observation and assessment, driven as much by external demands for evidence of cost-effectiveness as by the internal needs of a particular nursery or kindergarten community. We cannot offer easy solutions which will allow educators to prevent these pressures

from compromising their relationships with children and families, but we hope that this book will prompt readers to think carefully about what really matters in their practice, and especially about the important distinction between knowing children and just collecting information about what they can do.

A variety of approaches

Our understanding of what is worth noticing in young children is rooted in our own sociocultural contexts, and social and cultural changes are reflected in changes in how and what we observe. Piaget's careful 'close-up' study of individual children's active engagement with their world was motivated by dissatisfaction with the prevailing behaviourist psychology which all but ignored the part played by children in their learning. Piaget helped teachers to pay more careful attention to children's responses but perhaps the price paid for this was a shift towards a more 'scientific' approach to observation. Chris Athey was inspired by Piaget's writing, and the Froebel Early Education Project which she led in the 1970s enabled her to work with teachers and parents to gather extensive and detailed observations of children's play over a period of several years. Careful analysis of this data led Athey (2007) to argue that we can only understand the significance of children's behaviour if we follow them from activity to activity and look for the patterns, or 'schemas' which can transform our perception of their activity from aimless 'flitting' to purposeful 'fitting' – actively transforming available resources to develop a sustained exploration of a thematic interest such as 'up and down' or 'round and round'. Athey's work led to much enthusiastic 'schema spotting', allowing early years practitioners to experience the satisfaction of working with parents to uncover important information about each child which might otherwise have been overlooked. Much has been made of Froebel's belief that early years teachers should ideally be like a 'mother made conscious' (Steedman 1985) and the drive to professionalize work with young children has tended to promote increasingly rigorous 'conscious' study of children in early years settings (Ailwood 2007), resulting in valuable discoveries about what children can achieve but also transforming relationships among adults and children by widening the gap between the observer and the observed.

One of the most distinctive features of Steiner kindergartens, and one which is likely to seem particularly 'weird' to other early years teachers, is the concern to allow young children to continue in their 'dreamy', 'unawakened' or unmediated engagement with their environment. Children are not encouraged to examine their experiences, to answer questions about them or to focus on abstract ideas; instead they are encouraged to 'wallow' in their actions and perceptions. This could easily be taken to imply a romantic suspicion of intellectual processes but I think it is better understood as an effort to maintain a balance between the 'cool' appeal of decontextualized ideas and the warmth of full engagement in experiences and relationships. The 'hunting' orientation, which we see in the focused, purposeful and professional pursuit of knowledge, can enable us to capture valuable information but there is also much to be gained from the more relaxed, responsive,

'gathering' orientation which is more characteristic of social interactions (Parker-Rees 2010). When we meet new people and want to get to know them, we seldom go about this by observing them and compiling lists of their abilities, likes and dislikes. Instead we try to put ourselves in situations which allow us to engage with them in informal social activities and chat, trusting that our largely intuitive social processes will allow us to pick up and retain a rather fuzzy sense of what they are like. When we realize that someone is observing or studying us, it just does not feel the same as when someone is interested in us, likes us or even loves us. For young children in particular, it can be difficult to move from a family environment, in which, hopefully, one is known and loved by people one knows and loves, to a nursery or kindergarten where one may be observed or studied by well-intentioned strangers. Meeting with Steiner kindergarten teachers and responding at different levels to their practices, beliefs and values can help us at least to reassess the balance of our priorities by reminding us that our efforts to accumulate information about children should not stand in the way of our getting to know them.

Margaret Carr (2001) has acknowledged that even after many years of researching approaches to observation and assessment in the early years, she still found herself slipping into what she described as a 'folk model' of assessment – judging children against a variety of formal and informal developmental scales to identify 'gaps' or 'shortfalls' which needed to be addressed if the child was to get 'back on track'. This 'child mending' (Parker-Rees 2007a) approach is informed by generalized, professional knowledge about where children 'need' to be. The dispensing of an appropriate curriculum (Broström *et al.* 2010) is informed by a diagnosis of what children cannot do, 'guided not by tomorrow but by yesterday, by the child's weakness, not his strength' (Vygotsky in Fleer 2002: 107). Carr developed her 'learning stories' approach to observation as an alternative to this folk model, one which would focus on what children *do* know and what they *can* do rather than on the gaps between where they are now and where they 'should' be. Learning stories are narrative accounts which set a child's activity within the wider contexts of relationships, interests and previous experiences.

Where approaches to assessment have tended to adopt the cooler, more systematic, scientific frameworks which Bruner (1985) describes as the 'paradigmatic' mode of thought, writing learning stories encourages observers to adopt the warmer, fuzzier 'narrative' mode which engages with our more intuitive, social knowledge and in which tiny, barely perceptible nuances of gesture, eye contact and facial expression can have a dramatic effect on how we interpret the significance of actions and events. The difference between the folk model of assessment and the use of learning stories may be understood in terms of the difference between going into a forest, cutting down trees, stripping away their branches and dragging out the logs for use elsewhere and going into a forest to study the trees where they stand, in order to understand how they form part of their eco-system. Pressure to 'log' assessment information often comes from external requirements to complete statutory profiling instruments which are of relatively little value in meeting the internal needs of a learning community. Unfortunately, these pressures have

pervasive effects which spread throughout the practices and priorities of early years settings. Annica Löfdahl and Héctor Prieto (2009) have shown, for example, how the requirement in Swedish preschools to publish 'Quality accounts' has tended to encourage teachers to see 'hard' information, whatever can be measured, evaluated and written about, as being more highly valued, and therefore in some ways more important, than the softer, more local and particular aspects of their caring interactions with individual children.

Writing learning stories still requires us to stand back as we observe and record, but it can also remind us about the wide range of kinds of information which contribute to our understanding of individual children. Trying to understand the narrative of a child's activity can make us more aware that our ability to 'read' children's behaviour is dependent on the extent to which we have spent time with them in informal social activities such as play, chat, mealtimes and outings.

Carr encourages observers to pay particular attention to children's social networks and relationships when writing learning stories but the process still encourages a 'one-by-one' approach to observation, focusing on each child as an individual problem-solver. In the celebrated preschools of Reggio Emilia, in northern Italy, the teachers focus more on observing and recording the development of projects than on compiling information about individual children. Attention to the emergence of shared understanding is also distributed beyond the adults, becoming an integral part of children's activities as they are encouraged and helped to *document* what they are learning from their projects (Forman and Fyfe 1998; Rinaldi 1998). Here, teachers do not collect the leaves of observation in order to preserve them in individual albums or profiles of children's achievements; instead adults and children feed their observations back into the ecosystem, heaping them around the trees by making them available to children, parents and staff. The documentation of projects, in photographs, models, paintings, drawings and transcripts of children's observations, comments and questions, nourishes and informs the continuing development and sharing of interests. The Reggio Emilia preschools are characterized by a particular emphasis on using creative and artistic activities to explore and develop understanding. Engaging together in using the 'hundred languages of children' to represent and share understandings provides rich opportunities for adults and children to get to know each other. The unique 'feel' of each child's way of representing what they have noticed about a particular topic, whether in the quality of their voice, the rhythm of their lines or the flow of their movements, can be gathered by adults and other children, allowing members of the preschool community to get to know each other as well as to get to know themselves in relationship to others. There are parallels here with the work of Vivian Gussin Paley, a kindergarten teacher in the USA who, over many years, developed an approach to 'doing stories'; supporting children not only in performing their own stories but also in reinterpreting each other's. Paley has shown how sensitive children can be to the different meanings which their peers reveal in their retellings of the 'same' story (Paley 1981, 2003, 2005).

Where the Reggio Emilia preschools appear to buzz with the energy of children busily engaged in studying all aspects of their world, Steiner kindergartens are more likely to impress visitors with a pervasive feeling of calm, unhurried 'just being' – more like a home than a studio or academy. Steiner kindergarten teachers do not 'do stories' with children as Paley did but the children have rich opportunities to explore meanings, their own and other children's, in extensive and unstructured play.

The shape of the book

All of the chapters contain examples from our observations and interviews or from the writers' experience to illustrate what goes on in Steiner kindergartens, and they all address aspects of the values and beliefs of the kindergarten teachers. They have been arranged in a way which we hope will help the reader to proceed from a focus on what happens in Steiner kindergartens (and why) to a focus on what Steiner kindergarten teachers aim to do (and why), ending with chapters which set this practice in the wider contexts of how teachers are supported by a tradition of discussion, reflection and 'inner work' and how their approach to knowing children may be challenged by pressures to focus on what can be recorded and reported outside the kindergarten.

In Chapter 2 Mary Jane Drummond presents a series of commentaries by different Steiner kindergarten teachers on one episode from our observations, when children gathered with their teacher to squeeze apple juice, using an old, mechanical apple press. By revisiting the episode several times Mary Jane illustrates the way in which events can yield their significance progressively as they become increasingly familiar. In Steiner kindergartens the same story will often be told many times over the course of one or two weeks, allowing children to listen their way into it, anticipating particularly powerful moments and responding to subtle variations between separate tellings. In this way stories come to be experienced as events, rather than as simple devices for delivering information, and the excitement of novelty is balanced with a growing connoisseurship of the rhythms and patterns of well-known tales. We hope that readers will themselves experience something of this slower savouring of experiences as they encounter and re-encounter some episodes from our data in a number of different chapters. Much as themes emerge and spread in children's play, particular moments from our data have stood out for several of us, albeit for different reasons, and some have become familiar reference points in our discussions. Mary Jane's chapter both describes and illustrates the gentle, unhurried pace of the Steiner kindergarten, where children are allowed to 'learn before being taught', to join the activity as and when they are ready and to make their own sense of shared events. When the younger children suggest that 'fairies and gnomes' are responsible for the working of the apple press some readers may see this as evidence of the weirdness of the Steiner environment, but Mary Jane shows that the fairies and gnomes are no more than a form of 'placeholder', a device which allows younger children to defer explanation of how

the apple press works, while the older ones are willing and able to explore the interaction of parts in the mechanism.

The benefits of interaction between older and younger children, both directly and indirectly, are explored by Sally Jenkinson in Chapter 3. In Steiner kindergartens children normally stay with the same teacher for several years, from when they start at age 3 to when they move on to class 1 at about the age of 6 or 7. This means that teachers are able to get to know each child very well, following progress and noting personal achievements and difficulties, but it also means that the children benefit from living in a mixed-age community. In the extended periods of free play younger children can watch older children's play from the sidelines, sidling in as peripheral participants as and when they are ready. Younger children can also learn from observation of older children as they carry out routine tasks such as setting a table for mealtimes, chopping vegetables for soup or putting things back where they belong. Older children will sometimes remind the younger ones about 'how we do things here' but more often than not this will not be necessary because the younger children are able to learn before being taught. The older children also benefit because they are able to enjoy the responsibility of helping the younger ones, as they were once helped, reinforcing their own understanding by sharing what they have learned.

In the 'Golden Key' schools set up in Russia by Vygotsky's grand-daughter, Elena Kravtsova and her colleagues, the mixed-age approach is sometimes taken even further, with older children spending some time in the full group and some time in their own special lessons (Holzman 1997) so that a group can include children ranging in age from 3 to 10. In these schools, as in the Steiner kinder-gartens, 'the role and position of the teacher is transformed from educating children to *sharing life with children*' (ibid.: 87, italics in original). The Russian word *obuchenie,* sometimes translated as learning, sometimes as teaching or instruction, has no real equivalent in English because in Russia learning is under-stood to include all aspects of the interaction between a 'teacher' and 'learner', and not just the ideas or concepts being taught. Ways of behaving, values and principles are all learned in the course of educational encounters and it is therefore important for teachers, including older children in a mixed age group, to offer a model worthy of imitation. Sally makes a similar point when she cites John Dewey's observation that 'the school must represent present life – life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground' (Dewey 1897: 3). For the teachers in the Golden Key schools, thinking and feeling are inextricably interwoven in *perezhivanie;* the fully engaged activity of 'living through' and making personal sense of experience. In Russia education has never separated off the development of the intellect from the development of affect in quite the way we have seen in Europe and America:

> affect and intellect are not two mutually exclusive poles, but two mental functions, closely connected with each other and inseparable, that appear at each age as an undifferentiated unity.
>
> (Vygotsky 1998: 239)

The mixed-age structure of the Steiner kindergarten is one of the features which help to make it feel real and vital and more like a 'home from home', creating opportunities for adults to notice how children engage in a wide range of inter-actions, sometimes turning to others for support or reassurance and sometimes offering encouragement where they notice that it is needed.

In Chapter 4 Sarah Rees and I present an account of our extended conversations about the distinctive features of the environment which Steiner kindergarten teachers aim to provide. We talked about the 'what' of the physical environment, the 'how' of teachers' day-to-day practice and the 'why' of values and traditions which support and inform what goes on in the kindergartens. As we talked we came up against several concepts which needed closer examination, often because the language one of us was using did not quite fit with the other's understanding. When, for example, I suggested that the framework provided by familiar routines might help to scaffold children's learning, Sarah was not comfortable with this analogy, feeling that scaffolding suggested a form of support which was rigid and predetermined, applied from the outside rather than from within and constraining as well as enabling development. I realized that my own concept of scaffolding had 'drifted' away from the concrete reference of the image and that I was not always sufficiently aware of the different connotations and associations which the term might bring to mind in others. The long discussions and informal chats at our project meetings offered a framework within which Sarah and I could come to a shared understanding, enabling us to make sense of each other's emails much more effectively than would have been possible if we had never met. Our experi-ence of negotiating a common understanding of what matters about the Steiner kindergarten environment reminded us that what we know is always rooted in our unique personal experience, and that meeting with another person's ways of seeing requires much more than a simple exchange of words and concepts. The meaning of the physical environment of a Steiner kindergarten is rooted in the ways in which materials are used and cared for. These practices are themselves rooted in the values and beliefs of the kindergarten teachers so that the *obuchenie* experienced by children weaves ideas, gestures, feelings, rhythms and routines into a richly contextualized web of impressions. The values and beliefs of the teachers frame the kindergarten environment but these are themselves framed by the history and traditions of Steiner education. Tradition is something of a political trigger word, signifying oppressive constraints to some while to others it speaks of reassuring, tried-and-tested ways of doing things. While the Steiner tradition clearly offers teachers a degree of confidence, enabling them to trust that they will come to know their children through the processes of sharing life with them, it cannot be allowed to 'set' into rigid dogma. Meeting with people whose work is grounded in other traditions can help us revisit our values and beliefs as we see them reflected in other eyes.

Another aspect of the meeting of traditions is illustrated in Chapter 5, in which Sarah joins Sue Waite in an exploration of the ways in which imagination is nurtured in Steiner kindergartens. This chapter exemplifies, in form and in content,

a meeting of Steiner's ideas with findings from the wider world of psychological and pedagogical research. Imagination is presented as a bridge which connects action to thought, a mediator between unconscious and conscious mental processes, and play is presented as the primary means by which young children can transform the external representation of their interests and concerns into internal thinking. If we think of play as imagination 'on the way in', an enactive precursor of internalized thinking and daydreaming, we can see how important it is to allow children time and space to play both on their own and with a variety of peers. The Steiner kindergarten teachers' concern to protect a 'dreamy' space may also be understood in terms of allowing children to wallow in their play, slowly absorbing the rich and complex information about social relationships, roles and feelings which will give colour and vitality to their understanding of their sociocultural world. Standing back and trusting children to take what they need from their active, playful transformation of simple, open play materials may not accelerate their progress towards learning goals quite as much as more 'hands-on' approaches but it may nurture a different, less easily measured form of knowing which is equally important. Sue and Sarah invite us to consider whether the unhurried, unstructured play which we observed in the Steiner kindergartens might prove more effective in developing children's understanding of relationships, feelings and emotions than later lessons in 'social and emotional aspects of learning'. In the context of the present study we should also acknowledge how effective children's play can be in enabling children to get to know each other, and themselves, and how much adults can 'pick up' about children without consciously setting out to study them.

If adults can come to know children by giving them space and time to play, they must also recognize that children will get to know them by picking up subtle cues from the ways they do the things they do. In Chapter 6 Janni Nicol explains how Steiner kindergarten teachers set out to present themselves to children as models worthy of imitation, not telling children how they are expected to behave but showing them. As teachers do the things that need to be done, preparing food, mending and caring for materials, cleaning and decorating the classroom, they are conscious not only of what they are doing but of how they are doing it and of what this tells the children. Teachers are expected to develop all aspects of their activity into an art of living, drawing children into careful, beautiful and joyful ways of practising the 'domestic arts' and 'artistic activities' by making these 'suitable for the child's imitation through play' (Steiner 1923/1988: 71). Teachers seldom ask children to join them in an activity, preferring to allow children to choose to join in. They use few words or instructions, preferring to model what needs to be done or to 'give the children a picture', using words to engage with a child's imagination. By themselves modelling a full engagement in what they are doing the teachers also invite children to 'lose themselves' in their tasks and, as children are caught up in the 'flow' of the activity (Csikszentmihalyi 1991) they reveal subtle details which help teacher, child and other children to get to know each other in largely intuitive ways. Simple activities which are repeated regularly

– tidying up, chopping vegetables, baking bread, painting and drawing, singing and sharing stories – can offer particularly rich opportunities for noticing changes in how a child is engaging, and the teachers' careful awareness of their own participation can sharpen their sensitivity to each child's unique style.

In Chapter 7, John Burnett focuses on an interview with Carolyn Bond, one of the Hereford teachers, in which she talks about the differences she has observed between her earlier work in 'mainstream' schools and her work as a teacher in a Steiner kindergarten. Carolyn talks of how, in the course of one of the regular activities described by Janni in Chapter 6, she might notice that a bright, capable, knowledgeable and well-adjusted child was experiencing difficulty in controlling the pouring out of paint into little pots. This might alert Carolyn to the possibility of some imbalance in the child's development: 'that the child has been a little bit awakened in their thinking . . . and that's obviously been at the cost of their physical development'. John explains how this concern to protect children from premature awakening of their intellectual faculties is grounded in Steiner's under-standing of the balance between the dreamy, unconscious realm, where action and will are dominant, and the awakened, conscious realm which is dominated by abstractions and ideas. Steiner studied the work of Schopenhauer, Spinoza, Kant, and other philosophers, and concluded that achieving a balance between will and representation, between action and thought, was one of the primary goals of education. John points out that Carolyn's concern is not that we should spend all of our lives in the dreamy realm but only that we should allow children time to enjoy their exploration and mastery of this realm before we 'push them forward' into more exclusively 'head-based' learning. John gives the example of a young girl whose re-enactment of a baby's cries and movements revealed an impressive degree of mimetic sensitivity, well beyond what she would be able to describe if asked what babies are like. Allowing children space to 'live in their limbs', to engage fully in noticing how they and others act and move, enables them to develop their 'participant consciousness' rather than to become prematurely 'heady', floating above their experiences like spectators or onlookers.

In Chapter 8 Mary Jane Drummond presents a vivid account of her own conclusions about what sets Steiner kindergartens apart from the many other early years settings in which she has observed. By focusing on 'absences', on what Steiner teachers do *not* do, she suggests that the calm, respectful, trusting relationships found in Steiner kindergartens may reflect the fact that the teachers do not float above their classes as spectators. Because these teachers are fully immersed in the process of sharing life with children, 'not playing at school, but living together, doing real-world things together', they do not need to justify their behaviour with reference to learning intentions, areas of learning or educational jargon. Because they work hard at ensuring that they offer children a model worthy of imitation they do not have to instruct and direct children; they can simply trust the children to join them in doing what needs doing or in enjoying a creative activity. Because they spend time with the children, quietly getting on with their own activities, they do not need to bombard them with constant questions to find out about them:

'we wait for them to tell us something, rather than questioning them'. Like John, Mary Jane points out that these teachers are not trying to prevent children from developing as meaning-makers; indeed, they understand very well that children are able to make sense in different ways – in their play, in their physical activity and in their spoken language, especially in story and discussion. The children in Steiner kindergartens are not deprived of opportunities to learn. As Karen, a teacher in one of the Hereford kindergartens, said, 'they are living being a four-year-old, a five-year-old, a six-year-old to the absolute brim'. Enabling children to engage fully in the experience of their lives requires a very high level of commitment from their teachers. It can take many years to develop the confidence and experience which will allow teachers to achieve the 'apparent inactivity' we observed in Steiner kindergartens. Mary Jane concludes her chapter with Jill Taplin's observation that being a Steiner kindergarten teacher has 'hardly been a job, it's been a way of life'.

In Chapter 9, Sally Jenkinson explains how Steiner kindergarten teachers work to develop the intuitive skills which will enable them to 'read the book of the child'. Exercises in learning to see help students avoid premature judgements about what is worth noticing; instead of 'hunting' for predetermined indicators of development, needs or abilities, they are encouraged to 'gather' tiny, apparently insignificant details about a child's appearance, movements, relationships, play preferences and more. In time, and with the appropriate relaxed, calm state of mind, these gleanings will allow a 'picture' of each child to emerge, 'hovering lightly in imaginative recreation'. What is particularly powerful about this way of allowing one's unconscious, intuitive mind to process information is that the 'picture' which emerges is dynamic and responsive. When teachers practise their regular 'inner work' of bringing each child to mind, often in the evenings, just before they go to sleep, they are able to 'place' each child in an imagined future by asking themselves questions such as 'what does this child need from me?' When they are able to still what Jonathan Schooler (in Claxton 1997: 90) describes as the 'ruckus' generated by the chatter of thoughts in the 'front' of the mind', new interpretations can emerge in the back of the mind and, in Carolyn Bond's words, 'sometimes something will step out', revealing a new significance in the information they have gathered about the child. Teachers will also work, sometimes alone, sometimes with colleagues, on an extended 'child study' which involves focusing attention on the child over a period of days or even weeks, gathering little details which will help to recalibrate their 'picture' of the child. Many of the teachers in our study commented on how this focusing of attention could often be enough to address some difficulty or concern in their relationship with a particular child; the more we notice about someone else, the more we are able to adjust appropriately in our interactions with them and the more they will notice our attentiveness (Parker-Rees 2007b). What is distinctive about the practice of Steiner kindergarten teachers is that they recognize the need to work on the development of their intuitive processes through regular exercises and training; in Carolyn's words, 'it is almost like developing muscles . . . the more you do, the more something develops and becomes refined'.

In the final chapter, Trevor Mepham considers some of the ways in which the omnipresence of assessment has tended to distort our understanding of what education is for. Like John Burnett in Chapter 7, he suggests that the habit of assessment and appraisal can tend to turn us all into spectators of life, reducing the tangle of messy experience to tidy but inert measures and standards. In stark contrast to the progressive gathering of seemingly meaningless details from which a clear picture of a child can emerge, this compulsive assessment can result in the accumulation of masses of seemingly meaningful measures or observations which cannot tell us anything useful about what children need from us. Recognition, rooted in the messy, lively tangles of human relationships, proves much more motivating than tangible rewards or inattentive praise. The *will* processes of noticing, recognizing, valuing and understanding are part and parcel of all human interactions and they enable us to get to know each other very effectively in social contexts. Unfortunately, however, external demands for records of children's progress can reduce assessment to a process which values only what may be recorded and measured.

The process of getting to know children which we experienced in Steiner kindergartens cannot be fully recorded in words on a page. We hope that we can give you a flavour of the environment enjoyed by children in the kindergartens by including illustrative examples from our observations and interviews, but we also hope that reading this book may encourage you to arrange to visit a Steiner kindergarten near you and to engage in your own meetings with Steiner teachers. We also aim to widen the scope of the 'Meeting the child' project, to include meetings with teachers and teacher educators from other traditions, and we hope that you will look out for opportunities to organize your own meetings with people whose approach may be very different from your own. Even if you do not find anything useful or interesting in their values, beliefs and practices, which is unlikely, you are sure to learn more about your own approach in the process of answering questions about it, explaining it and defending it.

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Informal aspects of 'becoming peer' in undergraduate research: 'still connected but going our separate ways'

Rod Parker-Rees [a] & Joanna Haynes [b]

[a] Plymouth University, School of Education, Rolle Building, 502, Drake Circus, Plymouth, PL4 8AA, UK

[b] Plymouth University, School of Education, Nancy Astor Building, Drake Circus, Plymouth, PL4 8AA, UK
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Informal aspects of 'becoming peer' in undergraduate research: 'still connected but going our separate ways'

Rod Parker-Rees[a]* and Joanna Haynes[b]

[a]*Plymouth University, School of Education, Rolle Building, 502, Drake Circus, Plymouth, PL4 8AA, UK; [b]Plymouth University, School of Education, Nancy Astor Building, Drake Circus, Plymouth, PL4 8AA, UK*

This study is grounded in a research project, the CARITAS project (Collaborative Application of Research Into Tutoring for Autonomous Study), which ran in our university from 2007 to 2009. Tutors from a variety of programmes collaborated to review literature and to investigate both formal and informal support for students involved in 'independent' studies. Our approach to the research was particularly informed by Boud and Lee's (2005) notion of 'becoming peer', the idea that students (and tutors) need to learn about, and get involved in the culture of academic practices as well as the topics of academic discourse. This paper presents ideas which emerged from discussions held in focus groups with students undertaking undergraduate research projects. Analysis of themes in these discussions highlighted the character and significance of informal peer relationships. These relations played an important part in helping students to give and take care and support, to manage their tasks and to enjoy the challenges of self-directed study. We suggest that universities need to pay careful attention to creating and sustaining supportive conditions and pedagogic spaces in which such informal social relations can flourish. In thinking about academic success at university, proper recognition should be given to the significance of such informal learning relations among students.

Keywords: *undergraduates; peer learning; social networks; autonomy; research supervision*

Introduction

This paper emerges from a collaborative project which explored ways of supporting students involved in various forms of autonomous academic work, in the course of their undergraduate study. The practical research associated with the

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*Corresponding author. Email: rod.parker-rees@plymouth.ac.uk

project, a series of relaxed, convivial conversations with students, made us increasingly conscious of ways in which the students benefited not only from **receiving** support from their peers but also from opportunities to **give** this kind of support to one another. The programmes on which we teach, Early Childhood Studies and Education Studies, both have an explicit focus on ethics in all areas of work. Education Studies aims for a highly inclusive ethos, in terms of both content and pedagogy, and Early Childhood Studies is structured around a 'core of care'; we are concerned that students should not merely know **about** caring, they should also have opportunities to experience caring relationships and to exercise the 'soft skills' which will enhance their ability to perform and to model the practice of care. As tutors, we were fully aware of the benefits of peer processes such as study support groups, discussion and debate but engaging with students in more extended and informal conversations allowed us to get more of a sense of what it **felt** like to belong to a supportive group.

As we searched for scholarly work to inform our understanding of ways of supporting our students in autonomous study we found David Boud's concept of 'becoming peer' (Boud & Lee, 2005) particularly helpful. Boud has shown how the demanding but potentially rewarding process of conducting a research project allows students to experience being part of an academic community. Boud and Lee (2005) argue that research *training* should be reconceptualised as research *education*, which takes place in a community of peers, including fellow students, tutors and experts. Becoming peer is the process by which students (and newly appointed tutors) feel their way in from peripheral to more central participation in the cultural processes which constitute the practice of the community:

> Learning with and from fellow students as peers, learning to participate in faculty-based seminars alongside academics and visiting scholars, learning to participate in the research, presentation and publication practices and learning to network internationally with fellow researchers, for example, all involve complex notions of 'becoming peer'.
>
> (Boud & Lee, 2005, p. 512)

We came to feel, however, that Boud's emphasis on participation in academic practice might not fully reflect the significance of the more informal, social and affective aspects of coming to feel as if one 'belongs' in an academic community (Cartney & Rouse, 2006). There was a need to expand the idea of 'becoming peer' to include the felt experience of being supported within a community. This broader interpretation was, in fact, acknowledged by Boud in an earlier paper co-authored with Geoff Anderson (Anderson & Boud, 1996) in which peer learning was described as 'a type of mutual, complementary or reciprocal learning', grounded in a particular socio-emotional context and offering:

> a means of dealing with educational issues difficult to handle in other ways and of restoring and enhancing some of the social dimensions of learning frequently lost in universities of today. (Anderson & Boud, 1996, p. 15)

Both our programmes include the study of ways in which people have sought to conceptualise and model the process of learning. This requires students to expand their concept of learning beyond a set of curricular goals or assessed learning outcomes:

> What constructivists call learning is only part of a larger process of human change and transformation, the process called learning by socioculturalists. Whether one attaches the label "learning" to the part or to the whole, acquiring knowledge and expertise always entails participation in relationship and community and transformation both of the person and of the social world. (Packer & Goicoechea, 2009, p. 239)

Navigating the brave new world of autonomous research

Undergraduates undertaking research and independent study projects at our university are expected to be able to make sense of research papers in specialised domains, to get to grips with ethical and methodological issues and to take responsibility for the planning and conduct of their research study. This shift in the locus of control of students' academic activities can create uncertainty. Tutors distinguish supervision of research projects from other forms of teaching, seeing undergraduate research projects as exciting opportunities for students to venture into new territory and explore areas of personal interest. However students often see the task as 'doing a project' or 'getting through' a project. In pedagogic terms, undertaking a research project can feel like entering a new and foreign world, where authority and relationships are mysteriously reconfigured (Todd *et al.*, 2004).

It is not only students who may be uncertain about the nature of the tutorial role. Boud and Costley (2007) argue that a supportive 'adviser' relationship may be more appropriate when supporting undergraduates than the 'supervisor' relationship which is common in work with postgraduate students. Holmberg (2006) has identified the wide variation in roles and relationship styles adopted by undergraduate research tutors even within one department of one institution and Jawitz (2007) highlights the challenges faced by novice tutors in working out what their role is supposed be when they have very little explicit advice on this. On the other hand, attempts to improve the effectiveness of tutorial support by providing practical frameworks, tutor handbooks or other forms of 'top-down' management have not always proved helpful or successful (Schweinsberg & McManus, 2006), with both tutors and students ambivalent about efforts to 'rule out' the uncertainties associated with personal relationships (Todd *et al.*, 2006). Smith (2007) contrasts 'technical solutions' to tutorial support, driven by concern to increase cost-effectiveness, with 'communicative responses', arguing that education 'contains constituent elements of nurturing. In other words, it belongs to the domain of human cultural interactions that should stand outside the world of commerce and commodification' (*ibid.*, pp. 687–8). Smith is concerned that commercialisation of higher education poses a threat to inclusive, 'disinterested communicative action',

pointing out that 'preferred' students are increasingly contrasted with 'iffy' students – the non-traditional students who may be more likely to choose 'new' universities because they feel they will 'belong' and feel more comfortable there than in a more traditional university. Because new universities are less well resourced, however, they are also more likely to face pressures to adopt managerialist ways of reducing the costs of 'processing' their students (e.g. by offering 'outsourced' student support packages rather than giving tutors the time and space to provide care as an essential component of their educational support).

There is an extensive body of research on informal aspects of learning and care in adult education but we have found that literature on care for students in higher education often separates teaching from caring roles or services. We sought out studies that highlight the integral nature of caring and social dimensions of teaching and learning relationships. Bruffee (1999), for example, describes universities as institutions of reacculturation, and accentuates the value of interdependence in university learning. Hockings' (2010) offers a valuable synthesis of the literature on inclusive learning cultures which concludes that more needs to be done to emphasise the creation of safe environments marked by mutual trust and respect, empathy and open-mindedness, as well as better provision for responsive academic support for individuals.

As we face significant challenges to the ways we are able to engage with our students we have become particularly interested in exploring students' perceptions of the support they receive, not only from their tutors but also from their peers, and not only in their 'private' times and spaces but also in the sorts of informal provision described in Matthews *et al.*'s (2011) account of 'social learning spaces'.

Methods and ethical considerations

This was a small scale qualitative study, exploratory in approach. A group of five third year students from three of the School of Education's BA programmes met three times with two tutors from the CARITAS project team (the authors): in January, when the students were moving on from the first term's focus on research methods training and conducting their literature review to develop more detailed planning; in March, when they had completed their data collecting and were analysing data and beginning to write up their studies, and in May, just after they had submitted their research reports. This phase of the project was focused on the specific context of the third year undergraduate research project and we hoped that relaxed conversations with the students, over a free lunch, would help us all to understand how students can develop their ability to engage in autonomous study.

In the first focus group, to get the conversation going, we invited students to make a drawing to represent their 'ideal' tutoring and support scenario for independent study. Visual methods of eliciting responses from participants are increasingly common (Thomson, 2008). We did not intend to make analyses of the drawings. The activity was proposed to provide an imaginative focus for the exploration of 'support' in both tutor/student and student/peer relations. It was a

way of enabling the students to take a lead in establishing the initial 'agenda' for these informal conversations. The conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed. The analysis was thematic: both researchers independently identified recurring issues in the transcripts, linked to the construct of 'becoming peer', and then compared their readings.

The process of seeking and gaining ethical approval for our project highlighted ambiguities and tensions in current constructs of tutoring roles. Our school's ethics committee pointed out that there might be a conflict between the intimacy and disclosure associated with tutors engaging students in focus group discussions about the process of supervision and the detachment required to assess students' work. We recognised that students' contributions in our focus groups might be influenced by their awareness that we would be marking their research projects and we were happy to do what we could to minimise this effect, for example by ensuring that students knew that we would not be first-marking any of their work. We were troubled, however, by the messages associated with the (implied) suggestion that our ability to assess students' academic performance might be compromised by our discussions with them about how they experienced their tutorial support. This concern is perhaps indicative of a wider mistrust of tutors' ability to combine professional authority with open, engaged relationships with students, a mistrust which results in increasingly narrow professionalising and cooling of tutor/student relationships (Smith, 2007) and which emphasises that students are a long way from being seen as 'peers' with their tutors.

Discussion

Analysis of the transcripts identified tensions and possibilities around the process of 'becoming peer' in the context of work on undergraduate research projects. We have chosen three of the themes identified in our analysis of the recordings and trancripts from the focus group to provide the focus for this paper because they are particularly relevant to our interest in affective aspects of 'becoming peer': peer feedback and 'that crazy group work malarkey'; 'being comfortable with one another' and 'the best of both worlds'.

Peer feedback and 'that crazy group work malarkey'

When we asked the students about their experience of offering each other feedback on work in progress we encountered a rather uncomfortable sense of awkwardness:

> you do kind of suss it out before you feel confident enough to say, to go up to that person to say do you mind having a look at this for me? (January, 13)[1].

Commenting on each other's work was not, as we might have hoped, a well-articulated, embedded practice, but more ad hoc and a matter of individual tutor and student preference.

Like some of the students in Todd *et al.*'s study (2004), students did not feel able to offer feedback or reassurance on the academic level of their peers' course-work:

> I can't say to them yes I think you are doing well or I don't think that is good enough because I feel really mean saying that and I just, I am not qualified to say (January, 11).

Students were also rather wary of tutor-directed group tasks and activities.

Echoing other studies in this field, such as Gibbs's (1995) identification of 'free riders' and 'social loafing', such activities not only led to resentment but were sometimes seen as unfair, particularly if group work formed part of the formal assessment process which would affect a student's degree classification:

> how you feel about the group process in a kind of ungraded, unmarked, learning for learning's sake situation may be very different from how you feel about group process when your life depends on you getting a good mark (March, 13).

However, students also resented group presentations that involved a lot of preparation but which were **not** assessed, particularly if these were organised close to coursework deadlines; 'that crazy group work malarkey that comes at the end of the year' (March, 9).

> We have got to do a presentation and it isn't marked so I don't give a stuff about it really and I will do it the night before, probably (March, 3).

There was, however, widespread endorsement of the value of peer feedback in the context of the research module seminar groups. These were small groups (about 8 students and their tutor) which met every week throughout the autumn term (and less frequently in the spring term) to discuss the content of the research methods lectures and to discuss students' plans for their own studies. These groups were clearly valued as opportunities for mutual encouragement, constructive criticism and sharing of wider perspectives and comments on whether something 'would actually work practically':

> because you have been with those people since their idea was a tiny little thing and you watch it every week move on so it is like part of your work as well because it has gone into influencing your projects (March, 13).

The students understood the effects of group dynamics, pointing out that 'you have already got people there who understand and can go through things at the same time'. They accepted different individual preferences in approaches to working with others, 'there are some people who want to be in a group situation and some who don't', but the students were all clear that they did not want to do group work just for the sake of it.

These responses reminded us that group work cannot simply be imposed in a 'cold', impersonal way but that we should aim to embed peer activities in social frameworks of familiarity and trust.

'Being comfortable with each other'

Several of the students involved in this study had joined the third year of a BA programme after completing a two-year Foundation Degree at one of the university's partner colleges. We were well aware of the challenges faced by these 'Direct Entry' students, who have to adjust to a new working and learning culture at the same time as they engage with the step change in expectations which comes with entry into the final year of undergraduate study, so we were not surprised to hear that this transition also presented social challenges:

> you have got this huge problem of actually not being able to just sit down with people and chat to them as if you've known them all your life because they are very cliquey (March, 15).

What did surprise us was the positive glow which surrounded the direct entry students' perceptions of relationships between progressing students. This image of easy, comfortable relationships seemed to be not so much an accurate impression of how the 'progressing' students got on with each other as a wistful projection of what the direct entry students felt they were missing:

> 'everyone seemed to know somebody … there was just this feeling that there is a huge constituency of people who all knew each other and were all comfortable with each other and then this little, few bubbles of people that were coming in and that didn't know each other and were very much like small fish in a big ocean' (March, 6-7).

This perspective from the direct entry students helped to make us more aware of the importance to the students of feeling 'comfortable' with both tutors and peers.

But students recognised that, as well as needing to know *about* tutors and fellow students, they also wanted to feel they were known *by* these people. One student in the pilot focus group had talked about the 'quite personal' and 'embarrassing' process of asking another student to comment on her work and this awkwardness was mentioned again in the January group:

> You have to have that relationship, yeah? Like for me, joining in the third year, I hardly know anyone really and the people I did know … I have formed friends here anyway but I still don't think that if I gave my work to them and said, 'Here, what do you reckon?', you know, they won't honestly say what they thought or, like you say, they would probably not feel comfortable because noone knows that I am a bit unsure myself (January, 11).

Some tutors might respond to students' desire for comfortable relationships with talk of the need for academic 'challenge', as if comfort were an undesirable kind of sedimentation or settling. For these students, however, being 'comfortable' did not contrast with being challenged, so much as with being overcome by panic:

> the tutor reactions are so widely different that it is throwing a lot of people off and it's like, they will get together with their normal dissertation group of friends and, 'Oh you

are doing that, oh mine hasn't asked us to do that' and they would start getting pan-icked and then someone says, 'Oh yeah I have got to do that' (March, 16).

While students suggested that these feelings of panic could be reduced by the availability of more consistent and clear information, later conversations suggested that sustained involvement with a smallish group of peers had helped to provide a comfortable, reassuring sense of familiarity, of knowing and being known. This was particularly noticeable in the May meeting, at which students could look back fondly on their now completed experience. The rather anodyne word 'nice', often expressed in a hesitant, searching way ('just kind of … nice'), seemed to gather together their perhaps not fully conscious intimations about the value of the emotional support provided by belonging to a group:

> I thought the group tutorials were good and it was kind of nice to know, nice to share, kind of what everyone was doing, even though you didn't really help them, kind of by saying, you know, 'You might have mentioned …' and 'Oh, I read something about that' or things might have been mentioned but not actually helping them complete their study, it was just nice to kind of, I guess, just share ideas and to, you do kind of need to know that you are kind of on the right lines (May, 7).

Holmberg (2006) has shown how tutors working in the same department can construct their understanding of their role in very different ways; as coach, consultant or mother, depending on what they felt was an appropriate balance between their academic repsonsibilities, towards their discipline, and their pastoral responsibilities, towards individual students. Some tutors may be uncomfortable with the idea that they should accept responsibility for the 'comfort' of their students, particularly in the light of critiques claiming that a growing 'therapeutic turn' threatens to undermine the socially progressive role of education (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009; Furedi, 2004).

While some tutors might have reservations about developing peer relationships with students, it was interesting that the students seemed to see a clear distinction between the different kinds of support they wanted from their tutors, some of which was 'work based' while some was what one student characterised as 'just a hug':

> as I said different places, different times, you know sometimes it is nice to have an informal chat just to catch up and regularly monitoring just because I myself need a lit-tle bit of checking just to make sure, you know, I am not forgetting about it or leaving it to the last minute … then sometimes it is good to have a formal kind of chat and be somewhere quiet that you can just talk, it comes as different things you need at differ-ent stages of your report throughout the year (January, 7).

Our experience suggests that the tutor-student relationship, whether coach, consultant, mother or something else, has to be understood within the wider social frame of the environment which, though it may be offered, supported and encouraged by tutors, is also co-produced by interactions between students. Getting to know one's peers and getting to be known by them, not just in terms of what they think and know about study topics but also much more broadly, helps to produce

the 'kind of nice', comfortable feeling of belonging which makes studying an enjoyable and positive experience (Leach, 2009; Matthews *et al.*, 2011). For many students this feeling of social belonging may be more important than the more elevated, academic membership which Boud and Lee (2005) seem to associate with 'becoming peer'.

Undergraduate study will lead into an academic world of research and publication for a small minority of students but for most it will lead to further professional training and employment outside the university. For these students, the experience of supporting and being supported by a group of peers may be among the most valuable learning opportunities which undergraduate study can offer.

'The best of both worlds'

Although some of the students were quite frank about the amount of effort they were prepared to put into ungraded presentations and 'the crazy group work malarkey that comes at the end of the year', they did recognise the benefits of a structured framework of support. Some of this structure came from the tutors, in the form of 'mini deadlines' which provided an external framework for students' autonomous study:

> We had to give our literature review in initially, as part of our plan, which really helped because it made you have to go and research the literature and look into it, so that was good, so that was a big part of reading around the subject area (May, 2).

It was clear that membership of a tutorial group came to influence individual students' engagement with their studies. For some this influence was experienced as a form of guilt:

> I handed something in but it was always like a very small percentage of what I should be and what everyone else was, and then I felt terrible because everybody had done all this work and I hadn't done it and then, you know, I tried to hide or run away (May, 3).

For others, however, this initial reluctance to engage gave way to recognition of the benefits of being **made** to share ideas with peers:

> once you had been to the first [seminar] you were kind of like 'Oh, that was good', you know. It was getting over that kind of initial 'Oh do I have to?' (May, 9)

While this progression could be understood in terms of the internalisation described in Vygotsky's general genetic law (1981), from inter-psychological action on the social plane to intra-psychological action on the psychological plane, such an interpretation of students' learning may not fully recognise the affective component which is internalised along with graduate skills and abilities. Vygotsky insisted that 'affect and intellect are not two mutually exclusive poles but two mental functions, closely connected with each other and inseparable' (in Levykh, 2008, 87-8) and his claim that 'functions initially are formed in the group in the form of relations of the children, and then they become mental functions of the individual'

(*ibid.*, 97) can apply to undergraduate students as much as to children. The 'higher mental functions' which students are expected to develop in the course of their research project work need to be securely grounded in positive feelings which students learn to associate with the sharing of understandings:

> It was set up really well, where we had group tutorials right at the beginning where we needed it, where I found them, working in a group, a lot easier than on my own because I might actually do something because other people are there, which is nice. (May, 8).

> starting off with a group everyone sort of came up with ideas and then went, 'oh that sounds good' and 'how about you do this' and it gets you thinking about more things and then I guess there comes a point where, you know, the trees start branching out and everyone starts going in different directions; still connected but going our separate ways. So I think we have probably got the best of both worlds in that respect, you know, having the group discussions and then being able to go off on our own gives you more confidence about it, but sometimes you need to sort of check in with someone and say 'Is that alright?' (March, 12-13).

Christie *et al.* (2008), writing about the experience of students transferring from a college to an élite university, emphasise the socially distributed and situated nature of learning competences; what students are able to do is not independent of the context in which they are expected to do it:

> Whilst it is important for universities to be concerned with the quality of their teaching programmes, the social and collaborative aspects of students' learning experiences, captured in the accounts of the social situatedness of learning, are also important determinants of graduate outcomes, and should be included in efforts to enhance the quality of student learning. (Christie *et al.*, 2008, 12)

Offering students 'the best of both' requires us to acknowledge both the formal aspects of 'becoming peer' in the sense explored by Boud and Lee (2005) and the more informal, affective aspects of feeling comfortable in a learning community (Cartney & Rouse, 2006; Matthews *et al.*, 2011). If we want to offer sustainable education and to support students in developing an enduring disposition for autonomous study, we cannot afford to undervalue the importance of their social wellbeing.

Conclusion – sharing responsibility for supporting autonomous learning

We began the project out of which this study emerged at a time of upheaval and transition, hoping to identify ways of adjusting the practices we had developed in one learning environment to the rather different demands of a new dispensation and a new setting. This context may well have predisposed both tutors and students to pay more attention to the affective aspects of our work than might otherwise have been the case. While the changes in our work environment helped to highlight the importance of social factors in shaping what students learn from the programmes and tasks which we provide for them, our findings are not limited to such situations. Wilcox *et al.* (2005) interviewed first year students, some of whom

withdrew before the end of the year, and found that their decision whether or not to continue with their studies was often influenced more by aspects of their social integration, or lack of it, than by academic challenges.

Similarly, Havnes (2008, 5) cites an observation from a student in Norway, 'The curriculum is not difficult. What is difficult is to be a student. It is a new way of life'. However, Havnes offers a rather different response to the challenge of helping students to find their way in this new environment. Instead of looking for ways for tutors to engage students in activities which will help to develop a sense of comfortable belonging, he argues that students need to establish their own autonomy in managing the social and affective aspects of university life. Where David Boud (Boud *et al.*, 2001; Boud & Lee, 2005) has argued that tutors should formalise peer learning, drawing it into the curriculum so that it can be available to all students, and Leigh O'Brien (2010) has made a compelling case for the value of tutors themselves modelling caring behaviour, Havnes (2008) argues that we should also recognise the importance of the contribution that can be made by peer-mediated learning initiated and conducted by students themselves. This echoes the student's comment cited earlier, that structure, provided by tutors, combined with opportunities for students to get to know, trust and support each other can offer 'the best of both'.

Havnes reminds us that we do not have to do everything for our students. We can offer frameworks and patterns of expectation which will nudge students towards experiencing the pleasure of learning alongside others but we should also trust and expect them to demonstrate autonomy in developing their own approaches to making learning an enjoyable and mutually supportive experience. While we are concerned to help students to develop their autonomy and independence we also hope that they will experience the rewards and pleasures of interdependence, of being part of a mutually supportive community.

As we explore ways to meet students and adapt to a new, more marked separation between teaching spaces and academic and administrative territories, we are also faced with the challenge of finding new ways to offer our students 'the best of both'. We hope to offer a rigorous and stimulating introduction to academic study in an environment which also recognises the importance of the 'comfortable' and 'nice' aspects of social interaction. We believe that students who are encouraged to develop and exercise their autonomy, both within the curriculum and beyond it, in their 'work' and in their 'play', are more likely to associate their own learning and personal development with the pleasures and rewards of social engagement and participation. Becoming peer requires acquisition of knowledge, skills and experience but to feel peer, to **feel** comfortable in a learning community, also requires a supportive social environment.

Note

1. Quotations from focus groups are referenced by the date of the meeting and the page number from the transcript.

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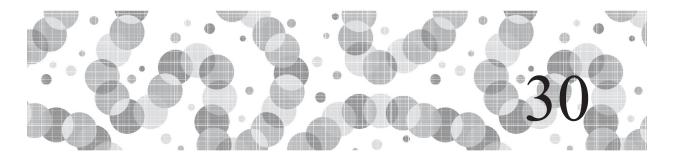
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Playfulness and the Co-construction of Identity in the First Years

Rod Parker-Rees

INTRODUCTION

> We see the self as originally an extension of experience of the other. (Fonagy et al. 2004: 8)

Attempts to understand learning in early childhood have tended to focus on the development of 'higher mental functions' (Vygotsky, 1981), which depend on information being tidied into generalised concepts. Because language has been the primary means of accessing what people know, remember and understand, the study of learning has focused on processes which result in consciously accessible, 'speakable' knowledge more than on the 'softer' processes by which we unconsciously adjust and tune our expectations, particularly about how the people around us are likely to behave. This chapter will focus on playful interactions which allow very young babies and their caregivers to gather soft knowledge about each other, enabling them to negotiate and co-construct roles and identities. Such interactions include the closely attuned contingencies of primary intersubjectivity (Trevarthen and

Hubley, 1978), individual and mediated attention to objects (Fogel et al., 2006), and 'triadic' exchanges which reveal differences in people's attention and perspectives.

Infants can perceive, shape and regulate their *interactions* with others well before their experience is organised into awareness of distinct 'selves'. Interactions with more knowledgeable others and in culturally shaped environments provide opportunities for immersive, complex, intuitive learning. Playful interactions are particularly valuable because playfulness helps to loosen the hold of structures, social rules and constraints, making it easier for participants to find a fit between public, shared concepts and their own unique tangle of experiences. The intricate process of fitting one's responses to another person's attention while acknowledging and enjoying their interest in one's own focus of attention constitutes a social situation of development which helps infants to begin to pick out distinctive patterns in their interactions with different partners. The undifferentiated 'Great We' of early

experiences (Vygotsky, 1998: 232) is gradually resolved into a great web of relationships. As they learn about the distinctiveness of others infants also come to learn who they are, co-constructing a personal social identity which will never be exclusively their own.

Recent work in developmental psychology has focused attention on the fundamental distinction between the detached, 'spectatorial' perspective favoured by experimental psychologists (Hutto, 2008) and a 'participant' perspective which acknowledges the importance of understanding how it *feels* to engage with another person (Engel 2005; Reddy 2008, 2011; Schilbach et al., 2013). We experience relaxed, playful interactions with people with whom we are especially familiar and our playfulness allows us to reveal more of ourselves to each other, thereby further deepening our feeling of familiarity. Intimate relationships *feel* markedly different from contacts with strangers, when we need to be more consciously watchful for the cues which allow us to predict how another person is likely to behave. Partners who are particularly familiar with each other can tune in to subtle cues which allow them to co-regulate their attention and their levels of arousal, making their interaction feel smooth and easy. As they explore what works in this particular context, their relaxed, open reciprocity can sometimes lift their interaction into exuberant playfulness, further reinforcing the intimacy of their relationship (Parker-Rees, 2007).

GATHERING SOFT KNOWLEDGE

Babies clearly learn a huge amount in their first year of life but the way they *gather* information about patterns and consistencies in what happens around them is very different from the conscious, purposeful *pursuit* of knowledge which is often associated with later forms of learning (Parker-Rees, 2010). Early experiences help babies to discover regularities and surprises in their actions, perceptions and responses, resulting in 'soft',

intuitive ways of knowing quite unlike the kinds of learning which we associate with conscious mental activity and accessible, declarative 'hard' knowledge. Accounts of development which focus on how children ascend into hard mental activity have tended to undervalue the role of this soft, embodied thinking but recent accounts of the earliest stages of social development (e.g. Hobson, 2002; Carpendale and Lewis, 2006; Seemann, 2011a) have acknowledged its importance. Being fully human appears to be inescapably dependent on this primary, *felt* knowing, and playful interactions provide particularly rich opportunities for acquiring and refining the soft knowledge which lets us know what to expect from other people (Youell, 2008).

Playful interactions enable us to develop flexible social skills which allow us to participate in different kinds of interaction with partners whose behaviour is also responsive to our own. The importance of play in the development of this social adaptability can be seen even in the development of rats. Over several decades, Pellis and Pellis (2009) have conducted a series of ingenious studies to research the effects of depriving juvenile rats of opportunities to engage in social play. They have gathered a strong body of evidence to support their argument that without early experience of playful interactions, rats consistently fail to develop the ability to adapt their own behaviour to that of a co-responsive partner. It would clearly not be acceptable to conduct similar studies with human infants, but these findings suggest that it is worth considering whether playful interactions might also provide rich opportunities for infants to learn about how different people can be expected to respond to objects and events. Infants have to learn about sociocultural meanings – what different people like, value, want, fear and shun. Play helps them to learn what it feels like to interact with different partners and how to adjust their own participation in different kinds of interactions.

Playfulness and soft, social learning are bound in a virtuous spiral of mutual support.

When we interact with other people we adjust our behaviour to achieve a better fit (Shockley et al., 2003). We may not be consciously aware of these adjustments but we experience them as physical responses which allow us to remember, anticipate and imagine how it feels to interact with a particular person. When we know someone well we can predict their responses more reliably and we therefore feel more relaxed and comfortable with them. When we interact with familiar people we can be more playful because we are less reliant on the predictability offered by social scripts and conventions. As we develop greater trust and familiarity we reveal and learn more about each other and about ourselves, co-constructing a socially situated awareness of who we are.

PRIMARY INTERSUBJECTIVITY

Human infants are actively supported by older and more enculturated others who generally enjoy the experience of getting to know a baby, albeit in a variety of culturally distinctive ways (Gaskin, 2006). While adults of other species tolerate interaction with infants, humans, to varying degrees in different cultures, may encourage babies to join in with social interactions. Research suggests that mothers are usually particularly committed to building an intimate relationship which serves as a comfortable emotional 'nest' in which babies can develop the confidence and skills which will allow them to fly in future social encounters (Fonagy et al., 2004).

Colwyn Trevarthen (1979) offers a powerful account of the early development of primary intersubjectivity in the first few months of life. He argues that the combination of babies' physical helplessness and their perceptual capability affords rich opportunities for a particularly intimate form of interaction which has no topic other than developing the relationship itself. Babies soon learn that they can steer the flow of interaction, conditioning their caregivers through skilful deployment of smiles, gurgles, quivering lips, frowns and

cries, and caregivers are usually more than willing to lose themselves in finding a connection with their baby.

Babies enjoy the feeling of being 'liked' (Parker-Rees, 2007) and specifically the feeling of being the focus of another person's attention (Reddy, 2011). They are finely attuned to detect contingency in the movements of objects and people, and are quick to pick up on the fit between their own actions and those of another person who is actively engaging them in co-regulated interaction (Fogel, 1993). The playfulness of primary intersubjectivity provides opportunities for caregiver and baby to develop specialist expertise in adapting to each other's shifting dynamics. The pleasure of 'having a chat' with a responsive baby increases the likelihood that caregivers will make time for this, and every chat consolidates and reinforces mutual feelings of intimacy and familiarity.

Intimacy is experienced as an intensely affective response, partly because of the release of dopamine when we experience a match between what we expect and what we perceive (Frith, 2007). This pleasure response drives us to seek opportunities to engage in social interactions because these help us to refine our models of how we can expect others to behave (Zeedyk, 2006). Within a communicative exchange, the spiral of shared enjoyment can result in moments of exuberance which are marked by increased levels of oxytocin, a hormone associated with pair bonding, trust and love (Feldman, 2007). Playful interaction can escalate into exuberance only when the participants are able to relax into a flow of mutual 'liking' adjustments and it is in this heightened form of intimate exchange that babies are able to borrow from their partner's abilities, allowing them to appear 'a head taller' (Vygotsky, 1978: 102). When playing a game like 'peep-o', for example, a baby who has delighted in being able to anticipate the excitement of his play partner's 'reveal' may feel confident enough to introduce his own playful variations on the game, lifting his participation from passive observation to active contribution by

snatching at the cloth behind which she is hiding. Intimacy is highly context-specific and the tuning of fit between one's own actions and another person's responses requires an investment of 'face-time' before the co-regulation of interactions becomes easy, smooth and relaxed. It is perhaps for this reason that mutual playfulness acts as a reliable marker of familiarity as well as a powerful context for its development. Infants, like adults, do not like it when an unfamiliar person presumes to engage with them in an overfamiliar way.

It is difficult for playful interactions to blossom if either infant or adult is not sufficiently relaxed; parents who are *too* concerned about tuning in to their babies may unwittingly communicate a degree of anxiety which makes interaction feel less playful. Beebe, Lachman and Jaffe (1997, in Fonagy et al., 2004) have shown that while high levels of coordinated interpersonal timing between mother and baby are predictive of high levels of cognitive performance in the baby's later childhood, slightly lower levels of contingency are predictive of secure attachment and 'easy' temperament. Daniel Stern (2001) noted that levels of coordinated interpersonal timing between four-month-old babies and their mothers in their home were actually lower than when the same babies interacted with a stranger in a laboratory. The higher level of contingency in the less familiar context may be due to 'interactive vigilance'; both baby and adult were highly alert, *working* to sustain and manage their relationship, whereas in the familiar home environment mother and baby were able to relax, lower their guard and 'just be' together – 'an active and necessary condition for play' (2001: 145). In these very early months, the experience of easy, intimate interactions with a familiar partner provides a particularly fertile example of what Vygotsky described as a 'social situation of development':

> The social situation of development ... determines wholly and completely the forms and the path along which the child will acquire ever newer personality characteristics, drawing them from the

social reality as from the basic source of development, the path along which the social becomes the individual. (1998: 198)

Vygotsky argued that successive social situations of development provide environments which both support opportunities for action and constrain them. Development therefore takes the form of a series of crises as individuals borrow from their social surroundings precisely the capabilities which will allow them to challenge the restrictions inherent in social participation. The close, familiar intimacy of primary intersubjectivity allows babies to develop the confidence and security which will allow them to 'fly the nest'; to extend their sphere of action beyond the mother–baby dyad.

INDIVIDUAL AND MEDIATED ATTENTION TO OBJECTS

Parents and caregivers enjoy the intimacy of primary intersubjectivity but they are also usually responsible for sowing the seeds of the crisis which will turn their child's attention away. Even in the earliest interactions with a baby, adults often introduce toys or everyday objects, placing things in the baby's hands or using them to attract the baby's attention. The extent to which adults' use of toys is responsive to the baby's reactions will vary. Some adult–child dyads develop a strong focus on supporting the infant's exploration of objects while others focus more on their social interactions, inviting and expecting less attention to the objects themselves (Fogel et al., 2006). Decisions about what is introduced to the baby, what is placed where the baby can reach it and what babies are encouraged to do with the objects they handle are all mediated, in different ways in different cultures, by adults' understandings about what babies need or are likely to want:

> Objects are not things in themselves for infants in the first half year. Objects are enlivened by their embeddedness in social activities and become part of the infant's world through their incorporation

into the historical process of the development of the parent-infant relationship. (Fogel et al., 2006: 40)

As babies become able to support themselves in a sitting position, freeing their arms and hands from their duties as body props, the golden time for primary intersubjectivity may be rather abruptly pushed aside in favour of exploration of physical objects. When an infant responds to the introduction of an object by actively refusing the caregiver's efforts to engage, this can be experienced by caregivers as an unwelcome loss of intimacy. It may, however, be particularly important for babies to be able to explore their environment immediately, without their experiences being mediated through another person's knowledge and interests. In order to develop sensitivity to other people's attention to other things, babies need to explore the nature of their own relationships with objects and events. Exploratory play with objects enables children to find out about the world and refine their movement schemes by poking, prodding, mouthing, banging and throwing things. This action-focused play also allows their own body and actions to become more perceptually transparent. Repeated handling of different objects enables babies to master motor control of arms, hands and fingers so that their use of these becomes automatic and effectively invisible. Their attention can then be focused on the *effects* of their actions rather than on the actions themselves (Pacherie, 2011).

At the age of four or five months, babies are not yet in a position to be able to separate out hard facts about the properties of objects from their complex experience of what it feels like to interact with them. What they 'know' about a teddy bear, for example, is a set of anticipations about how it will respond to their actions on it – how it will feel if they squeeze it, what it will smell like if they hold it against their face and how it has featured in their interactions with other people. By handling objects, babies develop 'action-guiding positions' (Seemann, 2011b: 194) which link past experiences of interaction to possible future actions – objects which they have

enjoyed eating will be linked with 'good to eat' connotations and an armchair may be associated with the experience of 'cuddling up with mummy'. Babies do not come to know about a separate, external environment; rather they come to know about their own, felt experience of acting in the environment. Objects are known in terms of their affordances (Costantini and Sinigaglia, 2012), not objective properties which are equally available to anyone but specific relationships between their features and the child's own personal abilities. The skills which infants develop through handling objects are situated and context-specific: 'a property not of the individual human body as a thing-in-itself, but of the total system of relations constituted by the presence of the organism-person in a richly structured environment' (Ingold, 1996: 178). When babies withdraw from the intensity of interactions with other people to focus on playing with inanimate objects, their situation remains inescapably grounded in the features and properties of their *interactions*. The objects available for them to play with, the opportunities to play and the ways in which others respond to their play all contribute to their developing ability to participate in particular kinds of socially structured interactions.

NOTICING THE ATTENTION AND PERSPECTIVES OF OTHERS

Even as babies are honing their ability to focus attention on their relationships with objects and events around them, they are also developing awareness of the focus of other people's attention. Vasu Reddy (2008) has charted a pattern of development in the progressive expansion of infants' awareness of the objects of other people's attention. From about four months (about when many infants are just beginning to switch their focus from their caregiver to exploring objects) they engage in triadic interactions with another person and an object in that person's hand, where the connection between person and

object is explicit and physical. After a few months when they are intently focused on their own exploration of objects, they are likely to become increasingly sensitive, from about seven months, to other people's attention to what they do – for example, to a parent who laughs when they bounce up and down in response to hearing music. At this age infants quickly learn that they can produce a predictable response by performing 'tricks', but they may also show signs of self-consciousness if too much attention is paid to their actions. They are able to regulate the level of attention they are receiving, either turning away to reduce their exposure or 'showing off' to increase it.

From about eight months infants can share attention to objects in their own hands, particularly by handing things to another person, and it is not clear whether their attention is focused more on the object or on the social processes of 'giving' and 'receiving'. Soon after their first birthday, infants demonstrate their ability to share attention to remote objects, both by following another person's gaze and by themselves pointing to guide another person's attention. Joint attention does not appear suddenly and fully formed towards the end of the first year. It emerges gradually, as infants develop their ability to focus attention on aspects of different kinds of interaction – particularly those, like exuberant play, which are associated with heightened emotions.

Reddy (2011) has argued that the affective charge of experiencing another person's attention underpins and motivates the later expansion of awareness of people's attention to objects which are beyond immediate reach. At each stage the infant's attention is focused not on *either* an object *or* another person; rather it is on the relationship *between* person and object. Having felt the charge of being the focus of attention and of focusing attention (in the exploration of objects), infants are encouraged and helped to close the sides of the relatedness triangle (Hobson, 2002), so that they are able to focus on another person's *attention* to an object or

event, to observe what things *mean* to other people. It has been assumed that the focus for infants' learning then turns outward, that they begin to engage with the world in the same sort of way in which scientists, historians and ethnographers approach it, driven by a desire to know what it means and to explain it. While we can learn about the world by observing how other people respond to it, we can also learn about other people by noting how they respond to the world.

A shared focus of attention, such as a play format, can act as a reference point which allows people to notice differences between what they expect and what they observe. While babies are unlikely to have any conscious awareness of what they have learned about their mother, their response to engaging in shared interactions with her will colour their expectations about how she is likely to behave in familiar situations. These anticipations of how their mother is likely to respond allow a baby to notice and interpret even slight variations in her responses. We do not need to be consciously aware of the adjustments we make as we get to know each other but this process of 'transactional calibration' (Bruner, 1986: 62) continuously updates and fine tunes our ability to anticipate other people's actions, making them feel increasingly familiar. This allows us to relax more and to be more playful in our interactions with them and as a result we are able to get to know them better:

> Infants do not learn about the social world mostly from third persons, from "he's" and "she's" whom they observe dispassionately from the outside. Instead, they learn, first and foremost from the "you's" with whom they interact and engage in collaborative activities with joint goals and shared attention. (Moll and Meltzoff, 2011: 398)

Sharing attention involves much more than simply observing another person's response and comparing it with one's own. Carpenter and Liebal (2011) offer an account of how triadic, person–object–person interactions are assembled, showing how they often culminate in the affective reward of a 'sharing

look'. First, one person notices something which strikes her as interesting and which, based on previous interactions, she expects the other person will also find interesting. She 'catches his eye' with an initiation look and then, when this look is acknowledged, and she has his attention, she guides his focus to the interesting object by turning her gaze onto it. She checks that he has followed her lead and that he has seen the noteworthy object and then both celebrate the recognition of their 'togetherness' with a 'sharing look'. Both receive an affective boost from the confirmation that they know each other well enough to be able to share in each other's interests; 'I saw that and I knew you would be interested in it'. The sharing looks and knowing smiles which mark successful triadic interactions are evidence of what Bruner (1995) referred to as 'meeting of minds' and remind us that our main reason for sharing attention to other objects and events is less to extend our knowledge than to strengthen our relationships with other people. Carpenter and Liebal note that although 'subjectively [sharing looks] feel utterly simple and directly perceived' (2011: 173), it is remarkably difficult to describe or define them in a way which does justice to the pleasure they both produce and display. This explanatory gap may be due to the fact that the soft knowledge on which social interactions are built is processed through fast, automatic channels which are largely inaccessible to direct, conscious observation. The sharing is felt more than observed.

The toddler's interest in the details and distinctness of other people's relationships with objects and events, what particular people like and dislike, what frightens them or disgusts them, what they prize and what they ignore, reminds us that meaning is initially an entirely relational property, an affordance or a relationship between an object and a person. It makes no sense, at this point, to talk about the meaning of an object or event; one can really only talk about what it means to a particular person. The sharing and exchange of attention, and specifically the shared attribution of meaning to objects and events, would appear to be a higher mental function (Vygotsky, 1981) which must first be experienced in interactions with and between other people (on the social plane) before it can be internalised as the ability to observe one's own attention and notice the personal meanings one has learned to associate with objects and events.

It has been widely recognised (Bruner, 1986; Rogoff, 2003; Tronick, 2005; Trevarthen, 2011) that as soon as infants develop the ability to notice how others respond to aspects of their environment, they gain access to a rich store of ready-made sociocultural information. 'Social learning trains bodies to use each other's brains' (Cowley, 2004: 574). Children become increasingly skilled in identifying what other people can be expected to find funny, frightening, disgusting, desirable or shocking, and they are particularly interested in monitoring the affective responses of *familiar* people.

LEARNING WHO WE ARE: FROM 'US' TO 'ME'

While most of an infant's interactions may at first be with a particularly familiar partner, most often with his/her mother or primary caregiver, there will also usually be plenty of opportunities to meet other people, each of whom will occupy a particular position on a scale of familiarity, from cosily intimate to disturbingly strange. For the infant, each person will be associated with a distinct *felt* response, ranging from easy, relaxed and open to tense, anxious and vigilant and with distinct expectations – comfort or excitement, high or low energy, cuddly or remote, etc. Without needing to be able to categorise features, distinguish between types or read minds, infants already have sufficient soft knowledge to begin to distinguish different patterns associated with their *interactions* with different people. Gradually, the 'great we' is resolved into increasingly distinct other identities, each of which is known not in terms of a set of properties of the person so

much as in terms of what it feels like to interact with that person. The ability to differentiate between the felt experiences associated with interactions with different others also enables infants to begin to notice patterns in their response to interactions, patterns which can become features of their own identity: 'I like it when daddy throws me up in the air', 'I don't like it when granny squeezes me too hard', 'that dog frightens me but mummy likes it'.

The emergence of a sense of self can be seen as the separation of a distinct identity *out of* the 'Great We', leaving behind a tangle of 'you's and 'they's who no longer interfere in our uniquely personal engagement with the world. From this perspective, participation in playful interactions enables us to differentiate ourselves by helping us to notice differences between other people's ways of being with us, other people and things. We can then use our awareness of these differences between other people to begin to notice differences between other people and ourselves. The emergence of self-awareness can also be seen, however, as a reorganisation of relationships *within* the 'Great We'. From this perspective it is not so much that playful interactions help us to set ourselves outside our knowledge about other people as that they allow us to make that knowledge part of our identity. Our soft knowledge about other people's ways of engaging with us, and with other people and things, is *internalised* in the form of knowledge of social conventions, expectations and patterns of behaviour. This soft knowledge continues to inform decisions and opinions which we think of as 'our own':

> We rarely recognize the extent in which our conscious estimates of what is worthwhile and what is not, are due to standards of which we are not conscious at all. But in general it may be said that the things which we take for granted without enquiry or reflection are just the things which determine our conscious thinking and decide our conclusions. And these habitudes which lie below the level of reflection are just those which have been formed in the constant give and take of relationship with others. (Dewey, 1916: 22)

SPECTATORS AND PARTICIPANTS, OUTSIDERS AND INSIDERS, THIRD-PERSON AND SECOND-PERSON PERSPECTIVES

Our decisions about how we should 'go on' in day-to-day life are informed by what Shotter (2012) describes as 'withness thinking', the soft, fuzzy knowledge which comes from our experience as participants in interactions with particular people in particular contexts. Until recently, however, the study of developmental psychology has been dominated by models of learning which have favoured the adoption of a 'third-person perspective' (Reddy, 2008; Schilbach et al., 2013), standing apart from interactions and observing them from the outside. The difference between the third-person, 'I–it' perspective and the second-person, 'I–you' perspective is illustrated by Reddy (2008) as the difference between what it feels like to see someone smiling at someone else and what it feels like when you notice that someone is smiling at you. The third-person perspective favoured by most psychologists has meant that concerns about managing and controlling variables have driven the study of early interactions into clinics and baby labs. As a result, we now know more about how infants and caregivers behave in unfamiliar situations than about how they behave in the privacy of their homes, where they are more likely to feel relaxed and comfortable enough to enter into playful interactions.

The problems associated with adopting an outside perspective when studying early interactions may be particularly evident in accounts of parenting practices in unfamiliar cultures. Accounts of mother–infant interactions in several African tribal cultures, for example, have emphasised the absence of evidence of playful interactions. Le Vine and Le Vine (1963, in Tudge and Odero-Wanga, 2009: 144) observed of the Gusii in Kenya that 'Mothers do not play with their children, fondle them, or display affection for them openly'. The need for some caution in interpreting these findings is highlighted, however,

in an observation by Price-Williams (1975), cited by Rogoff (2003) in a discussion about cultural patterns of playfulness:

> Among Hausa mothers, the custom is not to show affection for their infants in public. Now those psychologists who are concerned with nurturance and dependency will go astray on their frequency counts if they do not realize this. A casual [observer] is likely to witness only public interaction; only when much further inquiry is made is the absence of the event put into its proper perspective. (2003: 27)

It is not only casual observers who risk this sort of misapprehension; even the most rigorous of observers may fail to see events in their proper perspective if participants see them as outsiders. When it comes to the intimate, playful interactions which characterise early adult–child relationships it may be particularly difficult for anyone to observe the play without, to some extent, compromising how relaxed and open the participants feel. Grondin went so far as to say that 'one who observes the play with sovereignty from outside acts as a spoilsport, exactly because he does not play along' (2000: 52). Anyone who has tried to video-record mothers 'acting naturally' with their babies will know that this delicate, intimate relationship is often particularly private and easy to disrupt. A mother whose attention has been even partially taken outside her interaction by her awareness of a video camera is, to varying degrees, less fully present for her baby.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The earliest playful interactions are highly context-specific and it is becoming increasingly evident that they cannot be fully experienced or understood without acknowledging the support available from the intimacy of familiar relationships. Interest in the processes which allow babies to begin to connect with other people has grown as advances in technology have made it possible to document more and more of the intricacies of interpersonal exchanges. In recent years, researchers from different disciplines have shown increasing interest in exploring the borderlands between their fields. Easier access to research findings from all over the world and from different paradigms has meant that researchers are more and more able to 'play' with different ways of examining and understanding the topics they study.

Rapid advances in the range of technologies available for studying activity in the brain have made it possible to examine the neuronal processes which allow us to connect, both consciously and intuitively, with the interests, feelings and concerns of other people (Keysers and Gazzola, 2012). This new understanding of social aspects of mental processes has also led neuroscientists to explore the boundaries between their discipline and neighbouring territories. Seemann (2011), for example, brings together a range of perspectives on joint attention from developmental and comparative psychology, philosophy of mind and social neuroscience. Schilbach et al. (2013) review the boundaries between neuroscience, developmental and social psychology and phenomenology, where the 'spectatorial' approach previously associated with hard science is challenged by a softer 'second-person' perspective.

The shift of focus from intrapersonal processes to interpersonal spaces is also evident in work by Fogel et al. (2006). Fogel and his colleagues draw from Piagetian theory, sociocultural theory, ecological theory and dynamic systems perspectives to develop a relational–historical research approach which examines interactions between caregivers and infants in order to study the development not of the infant but of the relationship itself. This approach has yielded fascinating insights into how the inevitable variation in familiar routines generates changes, some of which are amplified, played with and eventually adopted as new frames for interaction.

Interest in the finer details of how interpersonal exchanges are co-constructed has also informed therapeutic approaches, such as

Suzy Tortora's (2006) 'Dancing Dialogue'. Tortora works with children for whom social interaction is either difficult or unmotivating, basing her approach on what she has learned from very sensitive observations of interaction between mothers and babies. She engages in a 'dance' with the child, echoing aspects of the child's movement patterns in her own actions. Her playful, responsive style of interaction helps to support development by loosening familiar structures, allowing for the wholesale reorganisation of existing abilities across the dyad and not just in one participant, the 'learner' or 'patient'.

CONCLUSION

Careful examination of early interactions, from a variety of different perspectives, highlights the intricate subtlety of the processes by which babies and caregivers come to know each other. This knowing is grounded in the gradual accumulation of soft knowledge, as much about the feel of particular forms of interaction as about the features of another person. We can help babies to find out who they are by paying close attention to them and by letting them notice how we respond to them. Playful interactions with a familiar partner offer particularly rich opportunities for noticing, testing out and shaping new ways of being together. Vygotsky (cited in Kravtsov and Kravtsova, 2009: 207) urged professional pedagogues to abandon the traditional 'outsider', didactic perspective in favour of a more engaged relationship with children: 'Do not teach and do not "bring up", but live an interesting life together with children'. Our life together with children is likely to be more interesting if we recognise the importance of making time to be playful.

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13 Concepts of childhood: meeting with difference

Rod Parker-Rees

Introduction

Childhood is a concept which seems simple and straightforward but the more we examine it the more we understand not only about what it means to be a child but also what it means to be an adult and a member of a community. Individuals may tell themselves that they have 'put aside childish things', preferring the civilised order of adult behaviour, but communities do not have this option. Children are a necessary feature of any group which intends to survive beyond one generation and childhood, specifically the relationship between children and adults, is a defining feature of human society. We are made human by opportunities to find out how other people behave and think but also by our interest in introducing newcomers to our ways. Teaching and learning (and assessing other people's behaviour) are central to the cultural lives of human communities and human individuals.

Working with other people's children obliges us to be critically aware of our own attitudes. We are bound to meet parents and colleagues whose perspectives on childhood will be different from ours and we have to recognise how our assumptions affect our judgements and our responses to other people. This chapter will examine the complexities involved in the development of concepts of childhood and will consider how a deeper awareness of the nature of concepts can influence how we feel about meeting with people who do not see things quite as we do. I will argue that we should not be looking for a single, universally applicable, 'best' concept of childhood because children are better served by a continuing, critical discussion fuelled by a diverse range of voices and personal experiences. Indeed, we cannot understand childhood unless we recognise it as part of a dynamic process of interactions which allow both individuals and communities to adapt and adjust to changing environments.

If you are interested in working with young children it is likely that you are more than usually comfortable with meeting people who do not see the world quite as you do. One of the characteristics of children is that they have not yet learned how to 'fit in' with the rules and conventions of their society and this means that they have a tendency to confront us with embarrassing questions and fresh insights which help us to notice assumptions we might otherwise take for granted. For some people, particularly those who like things to be clearly organised and predictable, this is distinctly uncomfortable. The history of the concept of childhood can be mapped out in terms of a centuries-long argument between adults who want to educate children out of childhood as quickly as possible and those who value the special contribution which children can make to a family or community.

David Kennedy (Kennedy and Kohan, 2012) has characterised this argument as evidence of a tension between the child's direct interest in what is *different* and the adult's reliance on being able to count on other people seeing things in the *same* way. A degree of sameness in how people think and behave is a fundamental requirement for survival in closely packed groups. If we could not predict how others could be expected to behave we would have to be in a constant state of hypervigilance, unable to relax and always watching out for any sign of possible risk or threat. The social contract, which allows us to function in large groups with relatively infrequent explosions of violence, relies on shared concepts which have to be learned through participation in the social activity of a group. This need to 'learn the ropes', to gradually work out what is and is not OK in different social contexts, constructs a divide between those who know (adults) and those who don't yet know (children). It also constructs a divide between the unique phenomenology and difference of individual experience and the partially shareable epistemology of uniquely human 'higher mental functions' (Vygotsky, 1997: 106).

When we explore concepts of childhood we have to acknowledge differences in children's and adults' ways of engaging with the ideas which inform their culture. Our interactions with children remind us that the social conventions and habits of thought which frame our day-to-day interactions are inventions rather than given features of a natural order (James and Prout, 1997). Engaging in pedagogy, an inescapable feature of all human societies, regularly confronts us with the challenge of explaining and justifying everyday behaviours and practices which familiarity would otherwise render invisible. Spending time with children reminds us of the individual differences beneath the superficial sameness on which our social interactions depend.

We can also remind ourselves of difference by studying the history of concepts of childhood. History provides valuable opportunities for trying to see how other people at other times, with other concerns, fears, hopes and priorities may have thought and felt about their relationships with children (Brockliss and Montgomery, 2013) and can help us to develop critical attitudes and dispositions which can inform our meetings with other people in the present (Cunningham, 2006). Even now, when we have so much more in common with most of the people we meet, there are still important differences between us. How we function as professionals will depend on how willing we are to engage with these differences, to learn from them, and sometimes to challenge them. It is easy to assume that if someone treats children in ways which make us uncomfortable they must be wrong and our professional duty is to educate and correct them. Our duty to safeguard children will sometimes require us to challenge abusive or neglectful behaviours but in many cases, if we are able to recognise that people may have compelling reasons for their choices and decisions, these can offer us windows into their life, allowing us to get to know them as complicated, different people rather than as interchangeable representatives of a category or type.

'My' childhood and 'my' concept of childhood?

It is widely recognised that young children do not have concepts of childhood in the way that adults do (Alderson, 2013) because concepts have to be distilled out of

experience. Whereas children live *in* their childhood, adults are able to think *about* childhood, to stand back from it and to consider it as an idea. To complicate matters further, we tend to imagine that our own concept of childhood is privileged because we have experienced it for ourselves, so we know what we are talking about (Kennedy, 2001). What we forget, when we remember our own childhood, is that remembering is a cognitive process which has to be learned. We do not have to learn how to *have* experiences but we do have to learn which aspects are noteworthy, which are worth keeping and which are too mundane and ordinary to bother with. This is why a three-year-old who is quite capable of talking about any aspect of her activities at nursery may be completely flummoxed when asked, at the end of a session, 'What have you been doing today?' It takes years to learn how to edit experiences down to retrievable memories because we have to learn how we can expect *other* people to feel about things that have happened to us. Life is too short to allow us to recall every detail of any experience. We can't spend a whole day remembering one day, so we have to edit our experiences down to the highlights and our decisions about what deserves to be kept are informed by our growing awareness of how other people will respond – what will be interesting, shocking, amusing or impressive. Our awareness of a shared, public concept of childhood is constructed even as this public concept informs the way we selectively edit the memories which will define our 'own' childhood.

Every year we ask our students to write a short account of 'What childhood means to me' and every year we are struck by the similarities between students' responses. While some students will write about difficult and dark memories, and we are careful to caution them that recalling their own childhood may be disturbing, the great majority of accounts feature the pleasure of freedom to explore outside, unsupervised by interfering adults, or special occasions, holidays, outings and time together with family. We then challenge our students to consider why they have these memories. Would they have any reason to remember them if they were ordinary events which happened every day?

We select and remember significant moments and moments which others remind us about and we forget the everyday experiences which barely required our attention. As a result our adult memories of our own childhood are inevitably more interest-filled (whether with happy or traumatic moments), rich and intense than our present-day experience of our own lives and the lives of today's children. Because we are usually comparing our 'edited highlights' experience of our remembered childhood with our 'live-streaming' experience of children's day-to-day lives it is not surprising that we should experience the feeling that something has been lost. Whereas we spent our time playing freely outdoors with friends, in the sunshine and on holiday, today's children sit indoors on their own, huddled over their computers, their phones or their homework, waiting for the rain to stop.

Although children do not think *about* their childhood in the same way that adults do, their childhoods are still shaped by adults' concepts of childhood. Particularly in affluent, minority world societies, every detail of a child's environment is considered, planned and managed, from her clothes, furniture and toys to the way people hold, feed, comfort and play with her. Even her attention to events in her

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environment is tutored by her shared interest in what other people find interesting. Before she is one year old she will be aware of what others find alarming, interesting, funny or disgusting and she will learn to use this growing social knowledge to inform her interactions (see Chapter 3). Although adult members of particular social groups are likely to share many aspects of their concepts of childhood, they will not agree on every detail and frequent, affectively charged disagreements, between mothers and fathers, between parents and grandparents and between parents and siblings, for example, help to ensure that we are often reminded about concepts of childhood.

We tend to claim ownership of our ideas in phrases such as 'my concept of childhood' or 'my views on parenting' but careful reflection will show us that these ideas are socially constructed and shared. Our feelings about how we 'ought' to behave or what we 'should' do are built out of our experiences of other people's behaviours, beliefs and arguments. We gradually become aware of what different kinds of people do, approve and expect and we internalise these intricate webs of mutual expectations and obligations in the form of our 'own' feelings about what we 'should' do. These social rules vary across different contexts and learning their subtle variations takes many years, establishing a widening distinction between adults, who know how they are expected to behave, and children, who are still learning.

Communities develop their own strategies for managing the inevitable disagreements about how adults should treat children and we may need to step back from our focus on individuals to recognise how roles and responsibilities can be distributed within and across social groups or figurations (Gabriel, 2010). In families, for example, traditional distinctions between gender roles have contributed to the construction of different role expectations for mothers and fathers (Hrdy, 2011; Gray and Anderson, 2012). Each family's ways of arriving at decisions about what children need, what they deserve and what can be expected from them will involve different dynamics of argument, coercion, subterfuge and appeals to members of a wider family or social group. Even within the same family, there are likely to be differences between what sons and daughters learn about the roles expected of fathers and mothers. In larger social groupings we can expect to find a different kind of dynamic in the arguments between members of social factions differentiated by variations including levels of economic, social or cultural capital. So when adults come together to form new families it is likely that they will bring with them different assumptions and expectations about childhood which may not become apparent until they have children of their own to argue about.

To say that our concepts of childhood are socially constructed is not to suggest that we are swept along by an irresistible force of social determinism. We are exposed to the richness and complexity of different attitudes and behaviours in our dealings with mothers, fathers, older brothers and sisters, grandparents, families of friends and media families in soap operas, sit-coms, films and 'reality' programmes. As we become more aware of the social appraisals associated with different patterns of relationships we are able, to varying degrees, to make choices about how we want to be seen by others. The names, clothes and hairstyles we choose for our children,

whether and for how long we breast-feed, whether we carry them or put them in a buggy, the way we talk to them and the way we discipline them are all signifiers which we can use to tell other people who we think we are and how we want our children to be seen. We have space to shape our 'own' concepts of childhood within the wider context of alternatives which we choose not to adopt but our choices about how we should treat our children are always informed by our sociocultural knowledge about how *other* people will judge the choices we make.

Childhood v. Adulthood – an evolving dynamic

Acknowledging the subtleties of interactions between the *different* self-identities of individuals and the communities of *sameness* in which these identities are framed should make us cautious about attributing the *same* concept of childhood to whole social groups over extended periods of time. While the structures of authority in different families and communities will allow and forbid different kinds of challenges and disagreements, we have no reason to believe that any society has ever settled on a fully agreed and universally accepted approach to raising children. It can still be useful, however, to step outside the familiar disagreements of our own age to try to understand why people living in circumstances *more* different from our own may have developed *more* different ways of thinking about the relationship between childhood and adulthood.

Concepts of childhood are always shaped and defined in relationship with concepts of adulthood and as our understanding of adulthood changes we can expect this to influence our understanding of childhood. What we think of as changes in concepts of childhood may therefore sometimes be better understood as changes in concepts of adulthood or as changes in the relationship *between* childhood and adulthood. As our ability to travel and our access to information have grown, so has the threshold for attaining an 'adult' level of competence in an expanding range of social contexts. This has required changes both in the extent of childhood (there is just so much more to be learned) and in adults' attitudes to childhood and children (Heywood, 2001).

Throughout most of our recorded history we have assumed that learning to control our natural impulses, to subordinate our individual interests for the greater good of a tribe or family group, is a positive achievement. We have compared ourselves with other animals and prided ourselves on our ability to transcend our brutish nature. From this point of view, an adult is someone who has learned how to behave in different circumstances, understanding what will offend others, what will be admired and what will be punished. In the days of the great Persian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman empires, when large numbers of people were living in tightly packed cities, being civilised was an essential part of maintaining the social order. It is no accident that the words we still use to describe behaviour which acknowledges the interests of other people are drawn from words for large social groups; from *civis* we have civil and civilised, from *polis* we have polite, from *urbs* we have urbane and from *court* we have courteous. Of course in the days of empire only a few men, and very few

women, would be in a position to manage their own behaviour. For most people, social order would be imposed on them by *others* and they would never experience the personal autonomy which we nowadays associate with adulthood. For example, in a Roman household, the *Pater Familias* had absolute authority over the behaviour of other men, women, slaves and children in the household, together with the responsibility to protect both the well-being and the reputation of the family.

Philippe Ariès (1962: 125) famously argued that 'in medieval society, the concept of childhood (*le sentiment de l'enfance*) did not exist'. Much has been made of the narrowness of the evidence on which this claim was based and other historians (Pollock, 1983; Hanawalt, 1986; Shahar, 1990; Hendrick, 1992; Crawford, 1999; Orme, 2001) have since shown that young children, certainly those under the age of about seven years, were clearly *not* treated like 'mini-adults' in the Middle Ages. Indeed the word 'adult' was 'not really naturalized' in English before the middle of the 17th century (OED, 1971: 129).

Norbert Elias (2000) focuses on the 'civilizing process' which resulted in the progressive internalisation of the mechanisms of social control, a process which might be described as the invention of adulthood (Kennedy, 2006). A growing belief in learning, reason and personal responsibility, rather than blind faith, can be traced back to the Renaissance but in England in the 17th century this focus on self-control was fuelled both by the puritan rejection of passive subservience to the authority of priests and by a radical political movement which rejected the authority of an overbearing and greedy nobility, resulting in civil war.

We tend to associate puritanism with the doctrine of 'original sin', the belief that children were born with the guilt of Adam and Eve which must be purged by thorough moral and religious instruction. Where Roman parents might have seen childish tantrums, wilfulness and stubbornness as evidence of children's uncivilised, 'natural' condition, puritans were more likely to construe this as evidence of children's inability to resist the temptations of evil. We should, however, remember that, just like today's news media and, indeed, our own memories, history has a tendency to focus attention on what is exceptional. The attitudes of 'mainstream' puritans, who would have condemned violent disciplining of children as a failure of adult self-control (Morgan, 1986 in Cox, 1996), are less likely to catch our attention than the 'fire and brimstone' sermons preached by more 'extremist' ministers. Careful examination of historical evidence shows that use of corporal punishment in the 17th century was broadly similar to practice in the 20th century (Pollock, 1983; Todd, 1987; Sommerville, 1992). Cox (1996) argued that the puritan emphasis on family life was driven by worries about the corruption of the 'civilised' world and a concern to protect children which is not so different from 21st-century withdrawal to the safety of the family home. Changes in how people lived with children led in turn to the development of a more personal, domestic approach to study and self-improvement.

John Locke (1690) argued that children's minds are shaped by the experiences imprinted on them and in his letters advising a friend on the private education of

his son (Locke, 1693) he focused on the responsibility of fathers to guide their sons into a virtuous and reasonable adulthood by carefully managing the kinds of experiences to which they would be exposed. He advised fathers to watch their sons as they played, looking out for signs of 'Byass in their Natural Temper' (1693: para 139) which could be gently corrected by exposure to positive models. The challenge of education, as he saw it, was to preserve the 'Child's Spirit easy, active and free' (para 46) while introducing the habits of self-control and respect for others which are the hallmarks of virtuous adulthood:

> *All their innocent Folly, Playing, and Childish Actions, are to be left perfectly free and unrestrained,* as far as they can consist with the Respect due to those that are present; *and that with the greatest Allowance.' (para. 63, my emphasis)*

In the mid 18th century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was deliberately controversial when he drew on popular accounts of the lives of native Americans to argue that the natural state of the 'noble savage' had been debased and corrupted by social affectations, leading to the absurd powdered wigs and elaborate costumes of the 18th-century gentleman and the dehumanising squalor of overcrowded cities. In 'Émile, or On Education', he issued a direct challenge to Locke's celebration of Reason:

> *To reason with children was Locke's great maxim. It is the one most in vogue today. Its success, however, does not appear to me such as to establish its reputation: and, as for me, I see nothing more stupid than these children who have been reasoned with so much. (Rousseau, 1762/1979: 89)*
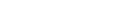
Rousseau's romantic celebration of the natural condition of childhood saw education not as an introduction to the rules and manners of civilised society but as arrogant interference with nature's plan:

> *Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man. He forces one soil to nourish the products of another, one tree to bear the fruit of another. He mixes and confuses the climates, the elements, the seasons. He mutilates his dog, his horse, his slave. He turns everything upside down; he disfigures everything: he loves deformity, monsters. He wants nothing as nature made it, not even man; for him, man must be trained like a school horse; man must be fashioned in keeping with his fancy like a tree in his garden. (Rousseau, 1762/1979: 37)*

Kennedy (2006) and Davis (2011) have shown that Rousseau's supposed invention of the romantic concept of childhood is actually grounded in a long tradition. In the 12th and 13th centuries St Francis and Bishop Anselm had argued that children are born in a state of pre-lapsarian innocence, like Adam and Eve before they were expelled from Eden, and the 17th-century poetry of Traherne, Vaughan and others celebrated the freshness and purity of children's immediate engagement with experience. Fogel (2001: 729) goes back even further, suggesting that pre-agricultural hunter-gatherer communities 'exemplify a primarily romantic culture'.

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It is also important to remember that history tends to record the ideas of those who hold power and we should not assume that everyone shared the ideas advanced by those who had the time to write. Rousseau reminds us, for example, that mothers and fathers do not always share the same concepts of childhood:

> *Mothers, it is said, spoil their children. In that they are doubtless wrong –but less wrong than you perhaps who deprave them. The mother wants her child to be happy, happy now. In that she is right … Fathers' ambition, avarice, tyranny and false foresight, their negligence, their harsh insensitivity are a hundred times more disastrous for children than is the blind tenderness of mothers. (Rousseau, 1762/1979: 38n)*

While throughout most of our history, writers and thinkers have focused on how children can be helped to acquire the knowledge and social understanding which will allow them to take their place among adults, they have also acknowledged what they would dismiss as 'blind tenderness' in the 'fondness' and 'coddling' demonstrated by the adults who spent more time with children.

Childhood *and* Adulthood: without contraries is no progression

Rousseau's *Émile* was particularly influential in England where it helped to inspire a radical Romantic movement at a time when revolutions in France and in America were challenging traditional assumptions about power and authority. At the heart of this Romanticism was the idea that difference and individuality were qualities to be nurtured and celebrated rather than flaws to be smoothed over by the uniform sameness of polite, obedient behaviour.

In his 'Songs of Innocence and Experience' William Blake (1794/1988) integrated words and images on his illuminated plates, weaving foliage through the text of his poems which contrast the phenomenological innocence of childhood and nature with the concept-bound experience of adulthood and the city. In 'London' he alludes to the strictures of the 'rational' social order:

> *In every Infant's cry of fear …*
>
> *The mind-forg'd manacles I hear (1794/1988: 27)*

In 'The Garden of Love', a chapel has been built, 'Where I used to play on the green'. 'Thou shalt not' is written over the door,

> *And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,*
>
> *And binding with briars my joys & desires (1794/1988: 26)*

Unlike Rousseau, however, Blake did not represent innocence as a *higher* condition than experience. His assertion that 'without contraries is no progression' (1790/1988: 34) recognises the energy which comes from the dynamic tension *between* Heaven and Hell,

Innocence and Experience, or childhood and adulthood. Blake argued that progression depended on interaction *between* contraries, illustrated in the community of 'old folk' and 'little ones' who enjoy each other's company in 'The Echoing Green' (1794/1988: 8).

Romantic poets at the turn of the 19th century interpreted Blake's celebration of the energy of a diverse community into a more internalised, personal balance between the lyrical, ineffable energy of direct, unmediated sensation and the clarity of rational thought, reimagining childhood as a continuing feature of a balanced individual identity. Wordsworth explored memories of his childhood in an effort to find ways of communicating a 'sense sublime' (Wordsworth, 1999), which could capture in words the sublime feelings inspired by nature. Coleridge (1840: 497) defined 'Genius' as 'the carrying on of the freshness and feelings of childhood into the powers of man-hood' and Jane Austen wrote, in 'Sense and Sensibility' about two sisters, Elinor and Marianne, learning to balance the impulsive energy of 'sensibility' with the rational self-control of 'sense'.

In the mid 19th century this romantic effort to integrate some of the qualities of child-hood into adult life was diluted into a more sentimental 'cult of the child' (Coveney, 1967; Davis, 2011) as many adults looked back to their edited memories of a simpler time, freed from the burdensome responsibilities of adulthood. It was also challenged directly by evangelical moralists like Hannah More who objected to a 'spirit of independence and disdain of control, which characterise the times' (More, 1830: 109) and who sought to force children into a starchy uniform of 'good habits'. It was this desire to bring children under control, as much as the philanthropic concern to protect them from exploitation in factories or to protect their innocence from the depravity and squalor of life on city streets, which led to the introduction of compulsory education. By the early 20th century, Freud had developed the romantic internalisation of child-hood in his model of the childish *id*, the adult *ego*, and the parental/social *super-ego* but children had already effectively been removed from most areas of adult life.

Segregation of communities, whether on the basis of gender, ethnicity, age, (dis)ability or social class, reduces opportunities for encounters with difference. Adults who have become familiar with the reassuring sameness of the company of other adults may increasingly come to feel uncomfortable when they are faced with the different-ness of children. Children may then pose a double threat to adult equanimity, both because they don't yet know how they are supposed to behave around other people, especially unfamiliar people, and because they may provoke uncivilised behaviour (e.g. sexual and violent responses) in adults who are not used to their company.

A romantic vision of an alternative world, where adults and children can safely play together, is offered in recent accounts of the social structures of hunter-gatherer communities. Like Fogel (2001), Gray (2009) and Konner (2010) draw on ethnographic data from a wide variety of (just) surviving and recently studied hunter-gatherer societies to highlight the sometimes surprising extent to which adults and children appear to enjoy and benefit from living alongside each other in small communities. Rousseau had compared the individual noble savage of the Americas with the sophisticated gentleman of 18th-century France but Gray and Konner focus on the social groups or bands which are a feature of hunter-gatherer life. They suggest that children benefit from

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opportunities to learn, at first hand and with no need for schools, about all the things that adults do but also that adults enjoy a relaxed, playful environment in which adults as well as children are largely free to choose how they will spend their time. In these communities the behaviour of adults can be directly influenced by the interests of children. When Mbuti children have had enough of the bad atmosphere caused by adults' arguments, they will perform the *molimo madé* ceremony, which involves them collaborating to imitate an angry elephant stamping through the camp, 'a playful means by which the young people, without blaming any individual adult, can influence the adults' behavior' (Gray, 2009: 512). It takes children to raise a village.

Conclusion: meeting with difference

We cannot simply turn back the clock to return to our hunter-gatherer roots any more than we can return to the imagined golden age of our own childhood. We can, however, learn something from stepping outside the social frameworks which have shaped our adulthood. Encounters with other ways of thinking can help us to develop a critical plurality which makes us more willing and able to see past the sameness of concepts and to meet with difference.

It is our shared concepts, learned from our participation in social interactions with other people, which allow us to communicate with people who do not share every detail of our own experience. But in order to meet with other people we must be prepared to look below the smooth surface which concepts offer and to notice differences in the ways in which sameness is performed. Instead of assuming that everyone does or should mean just what we mean, we can take the trouble to step outside our assumptions to *meet* and learn from the differences which other people have to offer.

David Kennedy (2006) argues that we can no longer understand the civilised adult as a discrete individual or *homo clausus* (Elias, 2000), instead we should acknowledge that we are *intersubjects*, who cannot be known, and indeed cannot exist, in isolation from the social figurations which shape us and are shaped by us. Kennedy argues that our existence and development as intersubjects depends on dialogue with others and that this dialogue can only take place when we are able to hold open space for difference. If the otherness of childhood is denied, repressed or absorbed by our adult self we cannot meet it in dialogue and benefit from the role that children can play as 'valuable strangers' (Harding in Kennedy, 2006: 142), helping us to trouble the surface of sameness.

ACTIVITY **1**

Think back to your own childhood and try to recall some of the childcare issues which were contested in your family. This may take you back to arguments between your parents, between your parents and grandparents or wider family about how you should eat, dress, behave, talk, etc. or between you and your siblings over differences in how you

(Continued)

ACTIVITY **1** *continued*

were treated. You might also ask other members of your family about disagreements they can remember. (What childhood issues do your parents remember their parents arguing about?) What can you learn from these memories about different concepts of childhood within your own family?

ACTIVITY **2**

With a small group of friends, consider the opportunities open to different sections of society for spending time with a variety of people of different ages, backgrounds, beliefs and values. What factors, including personal preferences, resources and time, might influence these opportunities? Can you think of any ways of helping or encouraging people to get to know a wider variety of different people?

FURTHER READING

Cunningham, H. (2006) *The Invention of Childhood.* London: BBC Books.

This is an excellent introduction to the history of childhood from the Middle Ages to the 20th century. A CD or audio download of the BBC Radio 4 series based on the book is also available so you can listen while doing something else!

Gray, P. (2009) Play as a Foundation for Hunter-Gatherer Social Existence. *American Journal of Play*, 1(4): 476–522.

This article presents fascinating accounts of the ways in which adults and children live together and learn from each other in hunter-gatherer societies.

Kennedy, D. (2006) *The Well of Being: Childhood, Subjectivity, and Education.* New York: State University of New York Press.

Kennedy presents an extraordinarily rich picture of the place of childhood in our culture, history, psychology and sociology. This is not a light read but it is well worth the effort!

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Sole author

2

THE MINDING OF TWO-YEAR-OLDS

Rod Parker-Rees

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to encourage people who will play a part in the minding of two-year-olds to reconsider our understanding of how young children notice and make sense of their world. By focusing on the *minding* of two-year-olds, rather than their minds, I hope to contribute to a shift in understanding, from thinking about children in terms of what they have *acquired* or *developed* to noticing how they are encouraged and enabled to *participate* in social communities.

This chapter will offer an exploration of the inextricably *social* nature of 'minding', particularly as this informs our thinking about how we can support two-year-olds as they move out from the familiar, private context of home and family into the more public world of early childhood education and care settings.

Minds and minding

I want to stretch the use of the word 'minding' beyond its conventional use. We have come to separate the idea of 'mind', as a noun, from the many ways in which we use 'mind' as a verb ('mind out!' 'Do you mind!' 'mind you …' 'mind your own business' …) but I want to play with three related ways in which 'minding' can be understood:

- **Minding is what minds do.** We have become used to thinking in terms of people *having* minds but this tends to hide the fact that minding is a process, and a shared process at that. It really makes no more sense to say that I have my 'own' mind than to say that I have my own conversations, interactions or even my own language. When we shift our attention from children's minds to children's minding, it becomes easier to recognise that this refers to the process

of directing and focusing attention, both in social contexts and in 'private' thought.

- **Minding is the intentional sharing of ways of minding.** This sense can be understood by comparison with verbs like 'feeding' and 'clothing'. To feed or clothe someone is to offer what they need in order to be fed or clothed and while these terms can refer to the process of putting food in someone's mouth or putting clothes on their body, they can also refer to the less intimate process of making food and clothes available so that recipients can feed or clothe themselves. In a similar way, minding can be understood as the *pedagogical* process of intentionally sharing interests and attention with others, deliberately helping them to participate in the minding practices of a particular culture.

- **Minding is looking after or caring for something or someone.** This is the more familiar sense associated with what a childminder does. While it is often related to the first sense of minding (we expect childminders to focus their attention on the children they are minding), it can also have a rather pejorative sense akin to 'babysitting' or looking after animals. When understood in this way, minding may have connotations of 'just' responding to needs; an outdated and inaccurate association which is vigorously challenged by childminder organisations.

The focus of this chapter will be mainly on the second of these – how interactions with carers such as parents, grandparents, siblings, friends and neighbours 'scaffold' and support the minding of two-year-olds. How do we enable children to find out about what matters to us (both as individuals *and* as representatives of a shared culture) and how can we show *our* interest in what matters to them? How can we equip children with the public, cultural resources (including language but also less explicit ways of expressing values and beliefs) which will enable them to share their private interests with others; to 'make up their minds' and also to learn what other people mind about? I will argue that minding children in this active, intentional way can best be understood in terms of sharing meaning – indeed, meaning and minding have much in common:

> Sharing the meaning of experience appears to be a unique motivation of human cognition incorporating the intertwined motivations of making sense and making relationships.
>
> (Nelson, 2007: 17)

I will begin by outlining the early stages of learning to share attention. Noticing what people notice, and how they respond, leads, usually by the end of the first year, to an interest in the relationships between people and things or events; what things *mean* to particular people. This early awareness of differences in other people's minding enables infants to begin to separate various 'you's from the "Great We"' (Vygotsky, 1998: 232) of their first interactions and this also leads to the discovery of a self, initially perceived through the attention of other people.

Sharing experience and meanings with others allows children to become increasingly aware of patterns in how other people can be expected to feel about things. Noticing, sharing and sometimes contesting the mindings of others (and particularly of others who have an active interest in supporting them) helps children to develop skilful and culturally attuned management of their own minding. Becoming a member of a community involves learning how we are expected to fillet our experience – separating what is worth keeping, what we think will be interesting to other people, from what needs to be cut away/edited out or ignored, either because it is uninteresting, bland or useless, or because it may be offensive, irritating or disgusting.

Our minding, how we direct our attention, is both our own and not our own. To be able to share experiences and relationships we need to acknowledge the interests and mindings of others as well as to allow others (and ourselves) to get to know what is distinctive about us. The social negotiation of attention requires a complex to-ing and fro-ing between a child's 'own' interests and concerns and those of the people with whom these meanings and mindings are shared. Children internalise knowledge about other people's relationships with their environment (what they like, care about, etc.) but they also externalise their own understanding of what they have observed, in their uniquely modulated responses, imitations, play, utterances and, in time, in their speech. Internalised values and judgements allow us to observe and evaluate our own externalisations, to see ourselves as others see us.

For both two-year-olds and their interaction partners, sharing understanding depends on a shared awareness of the child's particular context. Familiarity with a shared world and a shared past allows familiar adults to 'know where a child is coming from', making them more able to 'scaffold' the child's minding. John Shotter (2012) uses the term 'withness thinking' to describe this intensely 'present' way in which thinking and minding can be situated in, and supported by, the features of a context outside our heads. Shotter contrasts 'withness thinking' with 'aboutness thinking' – the ability (and habit) of lifting ourselves out of our immediate context so that we can think 'about' it rather than 'in' it. Perhaps one of the most important distinctions between the minding of two-year-olds and of most adults is that two-year-olds have not yet mastered the trick of thinking 'about' things, thinking in concepts rather than in a context. For this they will need a few more years of practice in using language and in noticing how it is used by others.

Language has a special function as a mediating tool which allows public meanings to be negotiated and shared while also allowing private meanings to be revealed in the 'telling' ways in which meanings are performed and expressed differently by different people. When children begin to 'use words' it is easy to imagine that they have already crossed the threshold of language but there is still a long way to go before they are able to join us in our use of public, dictionary-definable, conceptual and decontextualised meanings.

The chapter will conclude with a consideration of how we might understand the role of practitioners whose professional task is to furnish children with the opportunities and experiences which will enable them to enter into a minding

community. How can we help two-year-olds and even younger children to man-age the transition from context-dependent minding, with the support of familiar people, places, things and routines, to the much more demanding task of minding, making sense and forming relationships among strangers in a strange, new setting?

Intersubjectivity: attention to attention and learning how to mind

> jointness comes with being moved just enough to sense the psychological orientation of the other in oneself, but as the other's. This happens through intersubjective engagement that is emotional in source and emotional in quality.
>
> (Hobson, 2005: 201)

Babies are not born with an inbuilt ability to share attention but they are born into communities which actively support their development of this ability. To under-stand how children are helped into particular ways of minding, it may be helpful to clarify what is meant by attention and also how attention can be shared.

Peter Hobson (2005: 187) describes attention as 'psychological engagement' and I think it is helpful to move away from the idea of attention as an internal psychological property of an individual, to see it more as a relational concept, a connection between people or between people and things. The development of these connections has been extensively studied by Colwyn Trevarthen and his colleagues, resulting in a clear account of consistent patterns in how babies are helped to develop intersubjective relationships (Trevarthen and Aitken, 2001; Trevarthen, 2011). Beginning with the purely social interpersonal 'conversations' which frame primary intersubjectivity (Trevarthen, 1979) – whether in face-to-face 'chatting' or skin-to-skin connectedness – babies are brought into engage-ment with enculturated adults in a two-way process of mutual familiarisation. Babies appear to enjoy participating in interactions with a partner who pays close attention to them (Parker-Rees, 2007) and Ed Tronick and colleagues (Cohn and Tronick, 1983; see also Adamson and Frick, 2003) showed how sensitive they can be to interruptions in this flow of mutual engagement. If the caregiver switches to 'still face', not responding to the baby's cues, or even if an artificial delay is introduced between action and response, when baby and caregiver are linked remotely via cameras and monitors (Murray and Trevarthen, 1986), babies will quickly start to show signs of unease, first by actively trying to provoke a contin-gent response, e.g. by waving arms, vocalising and making eye-contact, and then writhing and crying to signal their distress. Even very young babies are clearly sensitive to differences between attuned, intersubjective minding and less atten-tive forms of interaction.

Trevarthen noted that babies who are able to sit up, making their hands avail-able for exploration of their environment, may switch the focus of their attention to objects they can pick up and manipulate. This 'epoch of games' (Trevarthen,

1977) can be seen not so much as an interruption in the development of inter-subjectivity as a shift of focus to relationships with things, allowing babies to tune up their understanding of the affordances of different objects without the direct mediation of another person's responses. Handling things allows the baby to explore her relationships with what different objects allow and enable her to do. Reddy (2008) has shown that this apparent shift from a highly social, 'second-person' perspective, to a more 'Piagetian', 'third-person' perspective on what can be done with things is preceded by heightened interest in other people's hands and in their manipulation of objects. So what looks like a very private form of exploration may well be motivated, at least in part, by an early awareness of other people's relationships with things. It is important to recognise that most of the objects encountered and handled by a baby will have been *selected* as 'safe' and 'appropriate' by adults or older children who are versed in a particular culture. So even when a baby is 'alone' with objects to play with, she is still wrapped in the mindings of her community.

Towards the end of the first year, the infant's experience of primary intersub-jectivity and of 'first-hand' exploration of objects enables her to notice another form of relationship in her social environment. Where primary intersubjectivity is focused on the experience of mutually responsive interaction with another per-son, secondary intersubjectivity (Trevarthen and Hubley, 1978) involves attention to the relationship between another person and a *topic* with which that person is engaging; for example, different adults may respond to a spider with interest, fear or disgust. Familiarity with persons and with objects allows the infant to focus on differences between people's responses to particular objects, events or other people. This is another important step in the continuing development of the infant's ability to communicate and opens up opportunities for participation in the negotiation of shared ways of minding. By focusing attention on what other people are interested in, how they respond to things and what they do with things, the infant can now discover what things *mean* to particular people.

At this point, meanings are not understood as properties of objects ('spiders are interesting/scary/disgusting') but as features of relationships between persons and things, events or other people ('Dad is scared of spiders'). This growing awareness of structure in the patterning of interactions already relies on an ability to generalise across different events, to notice consistencies and repetitions which inform expec-tations and allow the infant to predict how familiar people are likely to respond in familiar situations ('Dad *is* scared of spiders' vs. 'Dad *was* scared of the spider' – though of course this understanding is not yet held or expressed in this verbal form!).

Social referencing, the outsourcing of interpretation by paying attention to the way other people respond to things, is widely recognised as a powerful strategy for 'harvesting' cultural information which other people have already learned. There is, however, much more to this process than just the acquisition of knowledge. Sharing attention is, first and foremost, a way of connecting and communicating with the minding of other people and it is important to recognise the affective,

social qualities associated with this experience. Hobson (2005: 201) has argued that 'one can only have joint attention if one has the capacity to 'join' another person' but he has also pointed out that this 'joining' is more complicated than it might at first appear. When we talk about infants developing the ability to share in joint attention with others, it is easy to imagine a meeting of previously separate minds but this is an example of the common tendency to project our adult ways of minding into our interpretation of the experience of children. It is easy to forget that our earliest experiences are not clearly differentiated between 'mine' and 'yours'. We begin our lives in the flow of what Vygotsky described as the 'Great We', immersed in interactions, supported and swept along by them and alert to their felt qualities. We enjoy the 'fit' of attuned interaction with a familiar partner and we feel distress when the flow is disturbed but we do not yet understand our interactions in terms of exchanges between a clearly distinct 'you' and 'me': 'at times interacting caregiver–infant dyads are neither one individual nor two, but somewhere in between' (Spurrett and Cowley, 2010: 308).

I have argued (Parker-Rees, 2014) that recognising differences between other people's ways of responding to objects and events enables infants to construct assemblies of attitudes and behaviours which can be associated with particular persons who have distinct ways of minding. Infants do not need to construct a theory of mind before they can understand that different people demonstrate different kinds of attention to things, but once they are aware of other people's attention they can begin to recognise *themselves* as objects of this attention. Joint attention may not be so much about bringing 'our' attention into line with someone else's as about learning to separate ourself and others *out* of the flow of interaction between us.

There is an important distinction between undifferentiated attention and shared attention, which requires awareness of both joint experience and a distinct, experiencing self. Carpenter and Liebal (2011) offer a powerful account of the pleasure shown by two-year-olds when they register that they are sharing attention, as when a child notices that someone else is imitating her actions. The smile which often accompanies this 'sharing look', after a child has successfully 'locked on' to another person's attention, is evidence of the pleasure which we associate with the sharing of experience, and this pleasure is itself evidence of the value and importance of shared minding.

For most people, sharing attention is a powerful motivator, whether in 'gossip' about social matters or publication of academic arguments and findings. Developments in social media have highlighted our preoccupation both with sharing our experience and with getting feedback ('likes') from others, not least because this sharing allows individuals to function as parts of a sociocultural 'superorganism', both contributing to and fed by information and understanding which extends far beyond our own first-hand experience. Our first steps into a 'shared life' (Heal, 2005: 40) mark the beginnings of our participation in interactions which will both open up a world of other people's experiences and enable us to find ourselves reflected in the eyes and mindings of others.

Internalising and externalising

> Human agency is realised through participation in practices that are 'ours' before they can be 'mine'.
>
> (Rouse, 2007: 514)

Sharing in the minding of others involves both internalising, taking on board awareness of how others can be expected to act and react, and externalising, 'performing' one's own interests and intentions. Participation in the shared life of familiar others ensures that infants are exposed to the patterns in people's behaviour, not only what they do but also, to varying degrees, what they like and dislike, what they value and what they fear. As infants become increasingly adept at interpreting the intentions and feelings behind people's actions, they are able to use this awareness to find out more about how *they* are perceived and *who* they are.

It is easy to think of babies as passive receivers of information, overlooking the extent to which our minding is enabled and constrained by our motor capabilities. Our ability to notice other people's attention and intentions is, however, always informed by what we ourselves are able to *do*. We have seen how the motor skills required for manipulation of objects allow the four- to six-month-old infant to focus her attention on exploring the properties of things, motivated in part by her interest in what other people do with their hands. Esther Thelen, Linda Smith and colleagues (Smith et al., 1999) have shown that older infants who are already able to move autonomously (usually by crawling) are significantly more likely to 'understand' the significance of a change of place in the 'A not B' task. This task involves showing the infant an object at location A, covering it and encouraging the infant to 'find' it. When the child is adept at uncovering the object at location A it is then moved, in full sight, to a different location (location B) and again covered. While young infants will typically continue to search for the object at location A, those who are already independently mobile, and who therefore have personal experience of dealing with changes in their geographical relationships with their environment, are more likely to switch their attention to location B. Children who are not yet independently mobile can also be helped to 'succeed' in this task simply by changing their position (height) between the location A and location B trials.

Campos et al. (2000) have studied links between independent mobility towards the end of the first year and a range of social and cognitive changes including joint attention, fear of heights, distance and size perception and separation anxiety, as well as performance on the 'A not B' task. Of particular interest here is their conclusion that the ability to move away from a caregiver is associated with increased checking of the caregiver's position and focus of attention. As noted in the previous section, it is only when the infant is aware of a separation between her own attention and that of her caregiver that she can recognise and appreciate the *sharing* of attention.

As infants grapple with developing motor skills, they have frequent opportunities to notice differences between what they *want* to do and what they are

able to do, helping them to lay the foundations for an understanding of *intention*. Carpenter and Liebal (2011) describe studies by Liszkowski and colleagues, who examined attempts by 12-month-old infants to share attention by pointing at objects and vocalising. By observing infants' responses when an adult responded to a pointing gesture either by focusing only on the child or only on the object pointed at, the researchers found that infants were clearly not 'satisfied' by these unnatural responses. They would repeat their pointing gesture and became less likely to point in future trials. These infants were willing to work to repair their messages to achieve the result they wanted, which was shared attention to a specific target, and this experience of persevering to achieve a social goal may help infants to notice the intentions behind the actions of other people. When Andrew Meltzoff (1995) showed 18-month-old infants a demonstration of a person manipulating objects (e.g. 'trying' to pull the ends off a dumb-bell) he found that most infants, when given the object, would not simply imitate the adult's actions but would 'complete' them, suggesting that they had inferred an intention in the adult's actions.

Children are not left to find out about the social world of attention and intentions on their own. To varying degrees in different cultures, parents and caregivers actively participate in children's minding, responding with interest to bids for shared attention, providing a 'running commentary', helping children to achieve their goals and/or distracting them from undesirable intentions. Nelson (2007: 102) has described this shared minding as 'parental externalisation of intent' and this unusually explicit co-construction of meaning clearly supports children's entry into the particular values and priorities of the caregiver's culture.

Children are also increasingly able to externalise their own interests and attention, contributing to social interactions with others. As they begin to imitate actions, for example, their versions show exactly which aspects have caught their attention, providing subtle cues which can be picked up by attentive caregivers and which inform the familiarity which enables caregiver and child to understand each other. Bruner (1996: 23) noted the special function of externalisation in making aspects of our knowing 'accessible' to appraisal and interest, not only to others but also to ourselves:

> Externalisation produces a *record* of our mental efforts. One that is 'outside us' rather than vaguely 'in memory.' It is somewhat like producing a draft, a rough sketch, a 'mock-up.' … 'It' relieves us in some measure from the always difficult task of 'thinking about our own thoughts' while often accomplishing the same end. 'It' embodies our thoughts in a form more accessible to reflective efforts. The process of thought and its product become interwoven.
>
> (Bruner, 1996: 23)

Vygotsky (1978: 201) described early pretend play as 'memory in action' and we can understand this not only as physical re-enactment of features which have caught

a child's attention but also as the processing of these features, externalising them so that the child can make personal sense of them, allowing a personal understanding to be internalised. As a child plays with a particular way of acting, observing her own performance and noticing what she notices, she is also contributing to her developing awareness of herself.

For a two-year-old, living and minding in the small private world of personal experience, the boundary between 'in here' and 'out there' is far from clear-cut. Judy Dunn's study of the lives of two-year olds in their homes (Dunn, 1988) provided powerful evidence of the extent to which these very young children were enabled by their familiarity with the patterns of interaction in which they had grown up. Among members of their family, these children showed that they could participate in a wide range of social activities, including teasing, arguing, telling jokes and making excuses, which, at the time of the study, had not been observed in 'laboratory' studies of two-year-olds. It would perhaps be an over-simplification, therefore, to say that the children observed by Dunn had 'internalised' knowledge of their home environment. This knowledge depended on their ability to interact directly with people, places and things; it was not yet 'in' them, available to be used (with the same degree of confidence) elsewhere.

In familiar environments young children (and indeed all of us) are supported by 'withness thinking' (Shotter, 2012); our minding is extended across people, places and things which 'remind' us about what we might do. For adults this might include a bookshelf filled with books which remind us of ideas we have read about, but a two-year-old is more likely to draw from the affordances of toys and other objects which carry reminders of what can be *done* with them and, of course, from intersubjective relationships with other people. Two-year-olds live in, from and into the space around them. They will not be able to join us in standing apart from this space and thinking 'about' it until they have developed much more sophisticated language skills.

Language and access to shared meanings

> It is through the relationship with the other that the I emerges, is constructed and maintained; and likewise it is through the relationship with internal others that reflection itself emerges and is constructed and maintained.
>
> (Kennedy, 2006: 147)

It is particularly difficult for adults, who are deeply immersed in a mental world organised largely by language, to comprehend how different the minding of two-year-olds (and even three- and four-year-olds) really is.

Preverbal minding, as a form of 'withness thinking', is framed, supported and guided by the immediate context in which the child finds herself; whereas verbal, conceptual minding opens up the possibility of 'aboutness thinking', allowing us to stand back and apart from our physical environment and to venture into alternative worlds, remembering past events, planning or anticipating future ones and

exploring possible and imagined contexts. Language allows us to share access to concepts which carry generalised meanings – not the personal, particular meanings first noticed by children in the behaviours and responses of individuals but public, common meanings which are co-constructed in the continuing negotiation and exchange of verbal interactions. Concepts are abstractions, literally 'pulled out' from particular contexts and freed from the tangle of messy details which complicate each person's unique, individual experience. Concepts allow different people to share attention to *kinds* of things without requiring that everyone has previous experience of precisely the same contexts. Most importantly, concepts are constantly renegotiated and recalibrated as people share their interest in what others can be expected to know, feel and care about.

But this extensive web of conceptual knowledge is not acquired or internalised suddenly, as soon as children begin to produce and respond to words. Two-year-olds, who have usually just begun to use a few words, still rely on a concrete, present context to support and enable their minding. They are still some years away from developing the ability to 'lift off' or step out from their immediate context into the more public space of conceptual thinking, but their social environment is usually richly organised in ways which will help them to participate in conversations with other people.

Participating in a social environment enables children to develop familiarity with what can be expected to happen in particular places, at particular times and with particular people. Engagement in mealtimes, dressing and undressing, bathtimes, bedtimes, going to the shops, etc., exposes children to patterns in these daily routines, allowing them to develop expectations about what is likely to happen next. Although every mealtime will be slightly different, there are likely to be common elements which are repeated with enough consistency to allow them to become part of a familiar 'script'. Because parents and other caregivers are themselves participants in wider social and linguistic communities, these scripts, while slightly different in every family, are likely to resemble those of other families which share a similar culture. The shared mindings of cultural groups are built into the language and practices of individuals through their conversations with family members and other people, online forums, books, TV programmes and a wide variety of other media. This means that, within a particular cultural group, the unique, private contexts experienced by individual children are still likely to have much in common with the contexts experienced in other families.

Patterns and routines in everyday life, shaped by the wider framing of cultural norms, enable children to begin to differentiate between what *feels* familiar and what is interestingly (or alarmingly) novel, well before they are able to recall specific memories about previous occasions. Children may delight in playful variations in the details of particular scripts, variations which help to confirm a shared understanding of what is 'normal' and what is 'silly'. Katherine Nelson (2007) has noted that by the age of three, children appear to be able to differentiate between 'script' knowledge (about what *usually* happens) and accounts of a specific event. Nelson argues that, for young children, what we call the 'present' tense is actually

used to signify the normal features of script knowledge ('I get out of bed, I get dressed and I have my breakfast' or 'Dad is afraid of spiders') while the past tense is used when referring to specific events ('I fell out of my bed' or 'Dad was scared of the spider'). This suggests that distinctions between what usually happens and novel, interesting or remarkable events may be particularly salient for young children who are just beginning to 'work out' the regularities and patterns in what happens around them.

Because adults are embedded in linguistic, conceptual ways of minding, they tend to engage with children 'as if' they were already members of the language users club. This assumption is reinforced when they begin to produce sounds which can be taken for words. When adults chat with children or offer a 'running commentary' on the child's actions, attention and intentions, they help to develop associations between particular contexts and particular sounds but they also provide cultural information about what *they* think is *worth* saying. When familiar adults condense aspects of a child's experience into a verbal narrative, the sifting out of what is 'remarkable' from what 'goes without saying' provides valuable information, not only about shared, common understandings of what can be expected but also about the unique features of different people's 'ways of seeing'. When older children struggle to respond to the familiar question, 'what did you do at nursery/school today?' their difficulty may be more to do with deciding *what* will be interesting than with knowing *how* to express themselves.

Nelson (2007) notes that advances in language, like earlier advances in mobility, may result in a need for new strategies to monitor relationships with other people. Two-year-olds are usually still firmly rooted in contextual minding and largely unable to engage in conversations about other times and places, so they do not *need* to notice differences between 'what happened to me' and 'what someone told me about'. As they develop more sophisticated language skills, however, allowing them to stray further away from the here-and-now, it will become increasingly necessary for them to keep track of this distinction between their 'own' experience and 'hearsay' – information about other people's experience. The development of an 'autobiographical self' is driven by this need to differentiate between what is privately 'mine' or 'yours' and what is publicly 'ours'.

Implications for the minding of two-year-olds

> Children's intellect develops through their encounters with the socially mediated world of people doing things in places.
>
> (Engel, 2005: 71)

Other chapters in this volume will elaborate on the details of what two-year-olds need from their caregivers, whether at home or in an early years setting. Here I can only touch on the possible implications of a shift towards seeing children's minding as a shared, social process.

The growing focus on naturalistic observation of very young children in social situations, particularly by female researchers (Dunn, 1988; Rogoff, 2003; Engel, 2005; Nelson, 2007; Reddy, 2008), has helped to highlight the context-dependent, situated nature of early forms of thinking, focusing, noticing and remembering. Instead of trying to devise artificial ways of identifying patterns of development in what individual children are able to do without the support of a familiar context, these researchers have examined the ways in which the ordinary, day-to-day life of communities performs the important pedagogical function of helping children to join in and enjoy the experience of sharing meanings.

Political pressure to get mothers 'back to work' has perhaps contributed to concerns that children are being hurried into care settings which struggle to provide the familiar, intimate kinds of support which children need. The emphasis, in out-of-home settings, on ensuring that every child has a consistent key worker, can be seen as a way of trying to smooth the transition from the familiar context of home to the new, strange and bustling environment of an early years setting but it is important to recognise that these settings can offer rich and exciting opportunities for children to 'move on' from the security and familiarity of 'home' to the novelty and stimulation of 'away'.

While it is certainly possible for children to move on from context-dependent 'withness thinking' to more conceptual, linguistic 'aboutness thinking' within the small world of their immediate family, encounters with a wider variety of different perspectives can contribute to development of broader, more flexible concepts. Like the nurseries of Reggio Emilia, we perhaps need to focus more on supporting communities of children and adults which allow minding to be shared. Instead of worrying about how an early years practitioner can provide fully attuned attention to each child, we should perhaps consider how practitioners can work to maintain and develop a community in which attention is more distributed. Ideally, perhaps, this community would include parents, grandparents, caregivers and other family members so that children have opportunities to participate in a wide range of different kinds of interactions, not only with other two-year-olds, and so that parents and others can also experience the pleasure of joining in with a community beyond the home.

In the past it would have been easy to argue that two-year-olds are not 'ready' to participate in communities outside their family and the assumption that they are developmentally unable to form worthwhile peer relationships could find support in group situations where children were encouraged to explore their own interests. However, when children are expected and helped to take an interest in each other's interests, as well as in those of familiar adults, they can surprise us with their ability to share their minding.

In her deceptively simple account of the relationships between Mrs Tully and the two-year-olds in her classroom, Vivien Gussin Paley (2001) provides a powerful image of how a sensitive adult can support the minding of two-year-olds, helping them to broaden each other's horizons as they get to know each other. Mrs Tully uses Paley's approach to 'doing stories' (Paley, 1981), which involves writing down the children's stories and then, later in the morning, encouraging the children to

perform them for each other. Paley describes the children's engagement with Alex's one-word story, 'Mama'. After watching Alex's performance, all of the other children eagerly take turns at presenting their own interpretation of 'Mama':

> Each acts the role according to some inner logic: this one walks on his toes, another bends to touch the rug, someone else closes her eyes and sways. … Their ability to bring a character to life and reveal something about themselves at the same time is astonishing'.
>
> <div align="right">(Paley, 2001: 4–5)</div>

As each child externalises and shares a personal response, the whole group, including Mrs Tully and the performer, is able to share and internalise new meanings. Noticing how other children notice different aspects of the idea of 'Mama' does two important things: it expands what may previously have been a very private association between word and sense into something more like a shared concept and, at the same time, it allows each child (and Mrs Tully) to get to know more about the distinctiveness of each child's unique perspective.

Paley notes that the sign on Mrs Tully's door reads 'Lillian Tully, director and head teacher' but I think this account of her ability to draw children into a community of shared meanings shows that she was also a highly skilled childminder.

Questions

When you spend time with two-year-olds, what do you do that might help them to join you in your social world?

Is it possible to establish a clear boundary between 'your' minding and the children's?

Recommended reading

Nelson, K. (2007). *Young Minds in Social Worlds: experience, meaning and memory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Katherine Nelson offers an excellent review of research into the distinctive features of young children's thinking. In this book she traces the fascinating, shifting relationships between what children are able to do and what they learn from participating in the everyday interactions which make up their social worlds. Nelson shows how children are minded by interactions with older children and adults who actively help them to join in.

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Chapter 8 - General discussion and further works

Assembling this selection of my published works has been like putting together an issue of the journal 'Early Years', a process which often results in the unexpected discovery of common themes and issues from the juxtaposition of individual papers. This collection is different in that all of the works were published under the same name. However, spanning a period of 10 years, they have not been written by entirely the same person any more than the different authors represented in an issue of a journal can be seen as entirely distinct individuals – lists of references will often attest to elements of a shared heritage and common assumptions. Each work acquires a new set of meanings through its position among the others just as each individual person acquires a new identity through her relationships with other people: "through others we become ourselves" (Vygotsky, 1997/1931, p. 105).

I have always felt uncomfortable with the idea that a PhD thesis should represent an original contribution to a field of knowledge because this risks undervaluing the 'Creative Collaborations' (John-Steiner, 2000) behind every text. There is something odd, also, about the idea that successfully defending a PhD thesis grants one the right to 'become peer', to take one's place in an academic community. This idea seems to be related to the understanding of education as a process of furnishing learners with all the equipment they may need to be able to make their way among the perils of the next stage of life. We fill learners' backpacks and then, like the marshals who check that participants in the Ten Tors challenge have everything they need, we assess them to make sure they are ready to move on. In the process of looking back over my published works I have realised that I have been trying to make a case for a different perspective, one which sees learning as the product rather than the

pre-requisite of participation in social practices. If we want, in Vygotsky's words, to 'live an interesting life together with children' (in Kravtsov and Kravtsova, 2009, p.207) we will need to shift our focus. Instead of trying to determine how to equip children for our adult world, we will need to consider what we can do to make our world more inclusive so that children can live and learn in it with us. If I have fulfilled the requirements for achieving a PhD not in order to prepare me for an academic career but as a result of my participation in the life of academic communities, I am at least practising what I preach.

In chapter 6, 'Concepts of childhood: meeting with difference', I note that it is not only children who may be disadvantaged by their exclusion from many aspects of everyday living. The separation of childhood from adulthood has been associated with a hierarchical epistemology which values mind over body, thinking over feeling and 'masculine', 'adult' reason over 'feminine', 'childish' emotion. As Vygotsky noted in 'Thinking and Speech':

> Among the most basic defects of traditional approaches to the study of psychology has been the isolation of the intellectual from the volitional and affective aspects of consciousness. The inevitable consequence of the isolation of these functions has been the transformation of thinking into an autonomous stream. Thinking itself became the thinker of thoughts. Thinking was divorced from the full vitality of life, from the motives, interests, and inclinations of the thinking individual. (Vygotsky, 1987, p.50)

My focus on the very early interactions between preverbal children and their caregivers has enabled me to pay close attention to kinds of communication that allow minding to be shared within a particular context, without recourse to the 'public' meanings provided by language. Preverbal infants can learn a huge amount about other minds by observing other people's attention (e.g. what they look at and what they handle), their intentions (see Warneken and Tomasello, 2006, 2010) and their attitudes (the nature of their relationships with objects and events). Active participation in seemingly trivial everyday activities enables

infants to develop familiarity with the habitudes or habitus of the people with whom they share an interesting life. This familiarity is highly context specific and difficult to share with others but it allows us, particularly infants but also older children and adults, to read meaning into very subtle variations in the ways in which routine actions are performed. I have argued that we are more able to share in other people's minding when we have opportunities to meet them in relaxed social contexts that allow us to build a degree of familiarity with their ways of being, feeling and thinking. I hope that my writing about meeting and minding will make some contribution to a wider reappraisal of the role of 'soft' knowledge in shaping the lens through which each individual refracts shared experiences into a unique *perezhivanie* which can in turn influence the minding and sense-making of others. It is by engaging with the eddies and currents of the flow of minding that individuals may contribute, for good or ill, to the constant regeneration and adaptation of prevailing attitudes.

Future work

I gave a presentation on my work on the minding of two-year-olds at the ISCAR (International Society for Cultural-Historical Activity Research) conference in Quebec in September 2017. During the conference, I was able to participate in a series of extended round-table discussions around the subject of *perezhivanie*, particularly as this concept was developed by Vygotsky in the last years of his life. Following these conversations, another participant, Nikolai Veresov, invited me to spend some time as a visiting scholar at Monash University in Melbourne, where Veresov leads the Early Years Academic Community. I have also been asked to co-edit and contribute to a forthcoming

book on 'Drama, Perezhivanie and Development' to be published before the next ISCAR conference, in Brazil in 2020. Veresov's interest in the relationship between drama and *perezhivanie* focuses on the role of peak, 'dramatic' events or crises which shape the refractive 'lens' of individuals' *perezhivanie* or sense-making. My contribution will be to offer a rather different perspective, focusing on the 'daily-ness' of the micro-performances through which we gather information about other people's attitudes and reveal (to ourselves as well as to others) aspects of our own interpretation of events; our distinctive *perezhivanie* or *smysl.*

At the 2017 ISCAR conference, I was also able to meet Fernando González Rey whose 'post-Vygotskian' theory of distributed subjectivity has been very helpful in the development of my own thinking about minding as a process that cannot be adequately understood in terms of the discrete processes, contents and capabilities of isolated brains. González Rey argues that individual sparks of 'subjective sense' (similar but not identical to Vygotsky's felt sense or *smysl*) which inform our sense-making or *perezhivanie* are themselves influenced by wider, sociocultural 'subjective configurations'. These subjective configurations, like Dewey's 'habitudes' (1916) and Bourdieu's 'habitus' (2000) are gathered from participation in social interactions and provide the degree of 'sameness' or common sense which is essential if people are to be able to communicate. Our shared knowledge of these scripts or scores enables us to make sense of individual 'performances', to infer the subjective sense or *smysl* revealed by subtle variations. González Rey insists that there is an indivisible reciprocity between subjective configurations and the flashes of subjective sense which are framed by them but which also contribute to their development and evolution.

González Rey has worked extensively with the Cultural-Historical research team at Monash, contributing to a special issue of their journal, *International Research in Early Childhood Education* which focused on new interpretations of *perezhivanie* (González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez, 2016) and co-editing a book on 'Perezhivanie, Emotions and Subjectivity' with Marilyn Fleer and Nikolai Veresov (Fleer et al. 2017). His collaboration with the Monash team provides an example of his theory of subjectivity. Like all readers of Vygotsky's work, González Rey, Fleer and Veresov will each have responded with unique moments of subjective sense because each reader brings a distinctive personal history that shapes their *perezhivanie*—the way they make sense of their experiences. At the same time, every reader belongs to a variety of cultural groups, each of which offers webs of subjective configurations that encourage some interpretations and discourage others. In the case of Vygotsky there are also complex issues of translation and editing (Yasnitsky and van der Veer, 2016) so that the subjective configurations which may once have informed Vygotsky are overlaid by different sets of associations from different languages and different scholarly traditions. As Fleer, Veresov, González Rey and others meet and argue about their interpretation of what Vygotsky did and could mean, they also contribute to the subtle reconfiguration of their own and, through their publications and teaching, other people's ways of understanding Vygotsky's work. For each, their subjective sense is to some degree constrained by co-constructed subjective configurations but it also informs, challenges and shifts those configurations.

González Rey (2017a, 2017b, 2018) has drawn from the work of a wide variety of thinkers, including John Shotter and Karen Barad, to challenge a particular feature of the social configurations that have framed the way we understand subjectivity. He argues that we should question the deep-rooted assumption that subjectivity can be thought of as a property of discrete, individual 'subjects' and his insistence on the flowing 'transpersonal' nature of the reciprocal influences between shared social configurations and distinctive instances of subjective sense provides a useful configuration for my own thinking about meeting and minding.

The contribution which I am able to make to future work on *perezhivanie*, performance and subjectivity will be through drawing attention to what can be learned from careful and sensitive exploration of the very earliest interactions between infants and caregivers. In his final years Vygotsky revisited and re-examined his earlier insistence that 'the isolation of the intellectual from the volitional and affective aspect of consciousness' was 'among the most basic defects of traditional approaches to the study of psychology' (Vygotsky, 1987, p.5). The active, participatory engagement of preverbal infants with deeply enculturated caregivers provides particularly rich opportunities to study what Vygotsky recognised as 'the very essence of cultural development … the collision of mature cultural forms of behaviour with the primitive forms that characterise the child's behaviour' (Vygotsky, 1988, p. 64).

After being invited to visit UNESP, the State University of Sao Paolo, Brazil as a visiting scholar, in October 2017 I am currently working with staff and post-doctoral students to develop doctoral work on helping caregivers to read the

body-signs of one-year-olds, with a view to publishing this work to a wider audience, beyond Brazil. I am also working with another researcher at UNESP on a future special issue of the journal 'Early Years' which will feature papers from Latin American countries and which will also be published ahead of the next ISCAR conference in Brazil in 2020.

My interest in 'liking' (2007a), 'primary communication' (Parker-Rees, 2007b), 'gathering' (Parker-Rees 2010, 2015d), 'meeting' (Parker-Rees, 2011a), and 'minding' (Parker-Rees, 2017) has developed from my belief that interactions with very young children can help adults to recognise the profound importance of the 'trivial', day-to-day, ordinary events which shape the way we perceive and interpret our social environment. It is this soft knowledge that allows us to read and interpret the *smysl* or subjective sense behind the *znachenie* or subjective configurations of culturally shaped behaviour. This sensitivity to telling performances enables us to get to know both other people and ourselves.

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Chapter 2

Liking to be liked: imitation, familiarity and pedagogy in the first years of life

Chapter 3

Meeting the child in Steiner kindergartens: an exploration of beliefs, values and practices - Introduction: ways of knowing children

Chapter 4

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