**[Karen]:** So, while the VEYLDF references the word play a total of 45 times in the document, it is this statement, "Guided play and learning occurs when adults are involved in children's play and learning, following children's interests, and responding to spontaneous learning opportunities as they arise." It's that statement that perhaps, I think, holds the clues to how an educator might be a co-contributor to the creative process. So, the question, Sarah, is, how do you ensure that the play opportunities we create for children every day, build collaborative and reciprocal relationships between adult and child?

**[Sarah]:** Yeah. That's... Yeah.

**[Karen]:** There's a lot in that, I think.

**[Sarah]:** That's a lot in there, so I'll break it down. I want to start with the framework and the fantastic diagram, the triple helix, because that holds great clues of a.. early childhood is so strong with this adult-led, child-directed play and learning, guided play and learning. It's that idea that we don't have a fixed pedagogy. We have pedagogies in play-based learning that are more suited to certain things, so that idea of intentional teaching, is that balance between planned and spontaneous. It doesn't give a hierarchy. It really talks about that both are valuable and valid in our pedagogy.

**[Sarah]:** And I just want to pay, because you talked about the spontaneous nature that the guided play and learning... And I think this one's really important because the guided play and learning gives us that way of reciprocal relationships. And of course, they all do, of course, if you think of the pedagogical play framework that people use, it’s a two-way, it's never one-way. But the guided play and learning really, if we think of it as children also guiding adults, it's not just adults guiding children, it's that two-way, and that great diagram supports that. And that idea of this dialogue, not just oral dialogue, but a dialogue in play spaces, which we know with children is often through physical exploring together. And I'm going to bring up the idea of playful learning that Kathy Hirsh-Pasek talks about. And it opens us up to the openness, and experiences that each person brings to the table. I really love that, what she says. So that idea of the educator and the child brings something to the table.

**[Sarah]:** So, I think that when we co-contribute in this creative space, and I want to talk about that idea of children's interests. Well, I'm going to adapt that slightly, because I want to talk about the child's learning. Interests, when we follow an interest, to me, it seems very transient and surface level, where when we follow the learning, it's much more open and process orientated, within what children are doing at that time. And you talked about working theories, and Peters and Davies talk about that, in the moment to moment in these interactions. These playful interactions that demands teachers to truly listen to what children are saying to avoid disrupting, what they're thinking or feeling and expressing to us. So, I think that space, that space that's spontaneous, while it seems, on the surface, as if it's just this place that we can dip into, to be spontaneous is actually quite tricky.

**[Karen]:** I imagine it would be. And I imagine it's also perhaps a disposition that doesn't come to all.

**[Sarah]:** Well, it was interesting because to prepare for this, I watched that wonderful Twilight seminar of Sandra Cheeseman, and she was talking about infant and toddlers, as you know. And she talked about, for creativity, she got to set the tone to enable creativity with infants and toddlers, which is so lovely. And she talked about interesting and rich environments, but also that are stable and predictable, and the two exist together. So, they feed off each other, so there is form, but there is improvisation. Now creativity and the arts really understand this notion that there is form and creativity, form operating with improvisation. Because creativity doesn't follow a straight line, no matter what you're working in. And really, this two-way between adults and children, in this creative space, mean they can explore together. Because the arts don't shy away from the adult as an active player, but in that space of structure and spontaneity.

**[Sarah]:** And I think that idea of drama pedagogy is helpful. Cecilia O'Neill talks about this, that the drama pedagogue has both, because you are teacher and you are part of the drama, and the same with play. You are teacher and play. You're operating in this liminal space. So, of course, you've got all your teacher understandings of what you have to do. It's not like you become a child, but it's this improvised spontaneity, to pick up what children are saying. And I love what Maxine Greene talks about. She's a very well-known academic with creativity, writer of creativity in the arts. And she says that adults and children can occupy this space in partnership. So, they foster, and I'm quoting from her, "Active exploring rather than passive, to allow for the unpredictable and the unforeseen." And this is what children are doing in their play. It's process driven, meaning that it's highly spontaneous, highly improvised, but it's not anything goes, because if we are dragons and we've got Elsa here, we might have a superhero, there is some kind of order and form that children are using.

**[Sarah]:** And as adults, if we want to enter their play in these spontaneous moments, to be in this creative space, with this dual subjectivity. To enter that improvisation with children, means that we have to enter as a co-player. And, of course, I want to make it really clear, not all the time. We're not entering children's play, we know the importance of children with play, with their peers or on their own. But to enter when we do want to enter in this space, and explore the creative aspect of this play, and this dual subjectivity, rather than observing what's happening from the outside, to actually go on the inside as a player with children.

**[Karen]:** Can you unpack that a little bit? What do you mean, having dialogue with the spaces and their relationships with people?

**[Sarah]:** In play?

**[Karen]:** In play, yeah.

**[Sarah]:** Well, if you think of children in play, they're in place with objects around them, inside or outside, whatever the objects are. So, children in play transfer object for meaning. So, they take an object, and they decide what they need for their play, and Vygotsky talked about this famously, a stick became a horse. The children needed a horse, they didn't have a horse, so they got a stick, the stick became the horse. Children do this all the time, so that they replace an object's meaning with another meaning in their play. So, they manipulate the environment to create their play needs. They don't just see the environment as is. They go, "What if? What if we turn this table up and we get in there, and that's a train and that will take us to the island?" Underground, of course!

**[Sarah]:** So, they have this, "What if?" in play, and that relates to objects, place. This is no longer the sandpit; this is a space station, and we are going to go over to another thing. So, they're really good at improvising. “This is what we want to play. We don’t have it? Hang on, we are going to create it, as they are. We need a dragon; you're going to become a dragon. You go over there, and you hide, you are going to become the dragon.” They do this with place, objects, and each other. And it's a nice way of playing with that. An example from my research was a teacher's... the children in her play were using superheros in their play, great that they were exploring that superhero. So, she entered the play in a role, and she became a spider woman. And the children had decided that her powers didn't work.

**[Sarah]:** So, they were the heads of the superheroes, and they had to fix them. So, she just went with that. She went with the idea that her spider hand, she couldn't make the webs, so she was really improvising on the spot, going with what the children were saying. And then the children were the ones that gave her... solved her problem of, showing her how her fingers were to work. And they helped her do this. They talked about the fingers, they showed it, because play is embodied. She was embodying this with them in the outside space, and they gave her that. So, what they were doing there, is they were using their expertise. The teacher was supporting their agency, as their decisions influence the current events, which were, they needed to do this thing as superheroes and the teacher's superhero power wasn't working. So, it became a playful interaction between the teacher and the children. It was fluid, unpredictable creating what Sinclair calls a dialogic improvisation.

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