Play as third space between home and school: Bridging cultural discourses

Raudhah Yahya and Elizabeth Wood

University of Sheffield, School of Education

388, Glossop Road

Sheffield, S10 2JA

Abstract

This article examines play as a conceptual third space that serves as a bridge between home and school discourses. Using sociocultural theories and an interpretivist framework, nineteen immigrant mothers and their children in Canada were interviewed about their play experiences at home and in preschools. The findings reveal that children and teachers utilise play as third space in various ways. Although there is some cultural dissonance experienced by children, this study illustrates ways that children use play as a bridge between home and school, and explores strategies that teachers use in supporting children's use of play as third space. As children navigate these two cultural sites, they accumulate funds of knowledge and life experiences, which then meet, interact and perhaps fuse together in the conceptual third space. The conclusion proposes that 'play as third space' can be used as a conceptual framework for educators and practitioners to support children's transition from home to school and assist children who experience discontinuities.

1. Introduction

Although play is considered to have universal benefits for children's learning and development, recent studies support the notion that play in humans is socially and culturally constructed (Brooker, 2011a). There are cultural variations in play that are evident in children's home and preschool/school cultures (Rogers, 2011), and recent research contests dominant Euro-American assumptions about universal developmental benefits which emphasise sameness rather than difference (Adair and Doucet, 2014). Some children experience a virtual gap between home and school cultures, often resulting in difficulty with negotiating institutional rules and structures, including those that regulate play (Levinson, 2005). Cultural dissonance may be created from misalignment of home and school cultures, and is a significant concern in play (Wood, 2014a). The aim of this article is to extend the concept of play as a social and cultural construct and to examine play as third space that bridges home and school discourses, which are identified as first and second spaces respectively. Section 1 reviews the connection between play, culture and diversity, and discusses the concepts of identity, agency and power. Section 2 summarizes the research design and methodology of a small-scale study involving immigrant mothers and their

bicultural children as they negotiate home and school cultures. The conceptual framework for the study is illustrated and explained in Section 3. In Sections 4 and 5, the data are analysed and discussed. The conclusion proposes that the concept of play as third space offers scope for understanding how children negotiate and bridge cultural discourses.

1.1 Play and culture

There has been a shift from searching for regularities and universal definitions of play to understanding cultural and contextual variations, reflecting the perspective that "What is culturally appropriate for students in one culture is not necessarily so for students in another" (Gershon, 2005: 66). Although respect for diverse cultural beliefs is generally acknowledged, the cultural dimension of play is sometimes ignored (Brooker, 2011a). Göncü, Mistry, and Mosier (2000) caution that different communities may deem different activities as developmentally beneficial and thus play opportunities may vary depending on the communities' beliefs, values and practices. They also suggest that Euro-American interpretations of play may misrepresent and misinterpret children's play in different cultures. For example, non-Western children's play may be misinterpreted as lacking because it does not always involve pretence, a characteristic that is typically valued in Western play cultures.

   Brooker (2003) suggests that cultural variations in play reflect different goals of the family, such as compliance or assertiveness, independence or interdependence. For example, White, Ellis, O'Malley, Rockel, Stover, and Toso (2009) report that, amongst Māori in New Zealand, play is seen as a tool to transmit culture and language, and the purpose of play is to develop strong cultural identity: this was evident in the way the environment was set up, in which cultural cues are present. In a study involving immigrant mothers and children in the United States of America, Cote and Bornstein (2005) conclude that the immigrant children's play more closely resembles that of the American children as compared to the play of children in their native country. Hence, it is possible to suggest that with immigration, children's play has undergone acculturation. In an ethnographic study of Gypsy/Roma/Traveller (GRT) children in England, Levinson (2005) observed that their play differed from their English peers, and their behaviour was generally perceived by teachers as uncontrolled and destructive. Understanding their behaviour from a socio-cultural perspective, Levinson suggests that the GRT children used play to express their "separate identity and reaffirm group boundaries" (2005: 527), a need that arises

from being in a culturally different environment in school and attempting to manage the threat of losing one's traditional identity.

In an ethnographic study of ethnic minority children in England, Brooker (2006) also noted that they sought to form their identities through play. For example, the British-Asian girls preferred to spend their time in school playing together in the home corner and chatting in their native language. Brooker observed that when the White-British children entered the home corner, the girls left for another activity area. Also, the girls did not show preference for playing with boys of similar ethnic groups. The findings concluded that differentiation of gender and ethnicity informed the children's choice of friends and activities, and that educators' intentions of maximising children's opportunities through child-initiated activities with freely chosen playmates, may result in self-imposed or peer-group-imposed boundaries to children's opportunities. Brooker advocates proactive intervention through dialogue and questioning to mediate the possible negative effect of children's self-limiting choices in free play activities.

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

Brooker (2011b) proposes that in order to respect the cultural dimension of play, practitioners need to inquire how play and learning are perceived in the children's home environments, as well as to reconcile their expertise and knowledge with that of the cultural capital of the children and the beliefs and expectations of the parents. Whilst it is important to understand play and its relation to learning, recognizing the cultural dimensions of play, and seeking ways to support play from cultural perspectives remains a significant task (Izumi-Taylor, Pramling Samuelsson, and Rogers, 2010; Adair and Doucet, 2014). Deeper cultural understanding is also linked to issues of identity, agency and power within the social contexts of play.

1.2 Identity, agency and power

Lewis, Enciso, and Moje (2007) define identity as a "fluid, socially and linguistically mediated construct" (p. 4) and agency as "strategic making and remaking of self within structures of power" (p. 4). The process of transforming identity is influenced by one's cultural context and interactions with others (Mackenzie, 2008); culture serves as resources for constructing a society and changes in context may generate pressure to change and fit into the available identity 'molds'. Côté and Levine (2002) suggest that although construction of identity is influenced by social factors, people can also exercise their agency in determining their self-definition.

Some studies seek to understand people who experience different cultures in their everyday lives. Mok and Morris (2012: 234) refer to these people as biculturals as they are "individuals who identify strongly with two cultures" which, for immigrants, refers to heritage and host country cultures (Berry, 1990). Mok and Morris (2012) report that perception of biculturals on the integration of their identities has consequences for behaviour: perception of higher integration of identities leads to enhanced individual creativity to yield more authentic ideas based on information from both cultures, inclusive behaviour toward people from different cultures, and better alignment with members of the same social group. In contrast, biculturals who have divided cultural identities demonstrated more resistance to assimilation because of the apprehension of losing their inherited cultural identity.

Acculturation occurs when there is firsthand and continuous interaction between cultures which results in changes in cultural phenomena and long-term individual behaviour (Berry, 1990), and may also generate a new culture. However, unsuccessful integration of cultural identities can lead to negative effects, such as acculturative stress, which includes feelings of marginality and identity confusion (Berry, 1990). Similarly, Mackenzie (2008) highlights that personal conflict can arise when a person is unable to reconcile the various values acquired from different cultural experiences. Promoting integration of cultural identities, Smith (2008) suggests that hybrid identity is constructed through a synthesis of different identities, and is formed in third space where cultural boundaries meet and blur. The construction of a hybrid identity, which is different from their parents' identity, is reflected in a study by Lustanski (2009) of two generations of Poles living in Canada. Participants who had their early childhood in Canada have

a greater tendency to identify themselves as hyphened identity (Polish-Canadians), whilst those who were born and raised in Poland tend to retain their identity as Polish.

Play is also implicated in building and maintaining fluid identities. According to Ryan (2005:112), "children's play is not a neutral space but rather it is a political and negotiated terrain" which links play to wider issues of diversity such as race, ethnicity, class, culture, gender. Different forms of agency include pretence, managing task difficulty, negotiating social power dynamics and orchestrating individual and group activities. Wood (2014a:7) proposed that children's agency involves their motivation to learn, to become more competent and knowledgeable and to manage the dynamics of institutional and interpersonal power. However, these skills have to be learned in order to combine and extend their play repertoires.

In summary, research shows that children who experience different cultural contexts in their everyday lives may experience conflict and confusion if they are unable to integrate their cultural identities. However children are capable of exercising their agency in constructing their identities. While the term 'bicultural identity' is used by most of the studies discussed, hybrid identity, as suggested by Smith (2008), conveys the concept of children's agency in integrating different aspects of their cultural capital, including their play repertoires, to construct unique identities for themselves. The conceptual framework for this study therefore proposes third space as a means for understanding these dynamic processes.

2. Conceptual Framework

Third spaces have been proposed as hybrid spaces that bring together funds of knowledge that have been accumulated from various resources (Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, and Collazo, 2004). The third space concept has been applied in many areas such as politics (Meredith, 1998), tourism (Hollinshead, 1998), human-computer studies (Muller, 2009) and literacy (Levy, 2008b). Bhabha (1994) suggested that in relation to cultural hybridity, third space is an 'in-between' place in which creative forms of cultural identity are produced.

This study's conceptual framework builds on Levy (2008a)'s visual illustration, based on applying Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of third space theory, which she used to understand nursery-aged children's constructions of themselves as readers. Levy's (2008a) visual illustration was adapted to identify play as third space which is represented as a bridging space that overlaps and connects first and second spaces, shown in Figure 1.
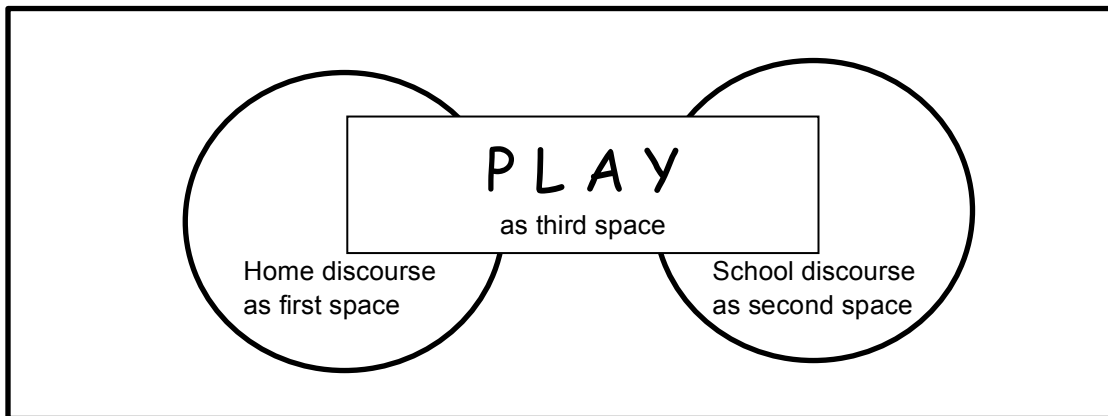
Figure 1. Play as third space **(**Adapted from Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory')

In Figure 1, the home discourse is identified as the first space and the school discourse is situated as the second space. In relation to Bronfenbrenner's theory of the ecology of human development, young children may face challenges as they move within and across different systems such as the microsystems (child's immediate environment such as family, school) and mesosystems (linkages and processes between two or more settings such as relation between home and school) (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In order to achieve a smooth transition, it is crucial that the child has the ability to transfer knowledge from one system into another (Levy, 2008b). Third space is an in-between conceptual space where children's funds of knowledge within and about play are brought together, thus enabling play to facilitate transition between the first and second spaces.

To illustrate how play can be utilised as third space, a framework has been developed (Figure 2) which combines Levy's (2008a) application of Moje et al.'s (2004) construction of 'third space theory', Wood's (2010) integrated pedagogical approaches model, and Brooker's (2010) 'bridging cultures through dialogue' concept.
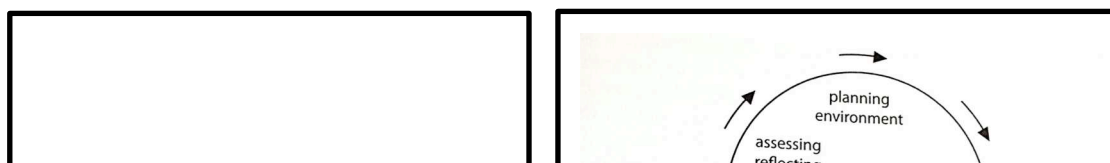
Figure 2. 'Play as third space' framework

The 'play as third space' framework identifies home discourse as first space, school discourse as second space and play as third space that acts a bridge between the first and second spaces, and allows other concepts, models and ideas to be added. Children accumulate funds of knowledge through their home, school and community experiences. The third space is identified as a conceptual space where these funds of knowledge are brought together and fused to form new understanding and knowledge. The funds of knowledge from the different discourses may support or conflict with children's understanding and adaptation in the two settings. It is argued here that play becomes a mediating tool or bridge to provide continuity for children as they move between contexts, especially if educators integrate free play and adult-led activities in ways that reflect children's interests (Wood, 2010). However, when children experience discontinuity in third space, they require help from adults and peers to bridge home and school discourses. Thus,

Brooker's 'bridging culture through dialogue', and Wood's model of integrated pedagogical approaches are embedded into third space, overlapping first space and second space respectively, to support children in creating play as third space that allows them to adapt and negotiate those discourses.

Brooker's (2010) 'bridging culture through dialogue' concept examines cultural aspects of play and learning and promotes effective communication between practitioners and parents. As children move from home to school settings, they bring funds of knowledge and skills acquired from the home culture, but which may be in conflict with, or bear little resemblance to the school culture. This may result in confusion or difficulties in acquiring the knowledge and skills required at school. Brooker proposes that recognizing the cultural capital that children bring to school could enable them to bridge those cultures. Brooker also cautions that some parents may find it difficult to understand practitioners' views of play in children's development and learning. However, she suggests that this challenge must be undertaken through a 'bridging culture' concept that prioritizes dialogues to support practitioners and parents working together, valuing play that reflects children's home interests, and developing pedagogic practices that inform genuine dialogue between educators and families.

Wood's model of integrated pedagogical approaches (2010: 21) is consistent with play as third space theory because it conceptualises a continuum of activities ranging from work or non-play activities to free play activities, with structured play in the middle of the continuum. The adult-directed activities are focused on defined outcomes, but can act as a tool to build children's funds of knowledge which they can utilise in structured or free play. The free play activities are child-initiated with undefined outcomes. The recursive cycle situated above the work/play continuum serves as a pedagogical guideline on the role of the practitioners. This model is useful in acknowledging the cultural capital that children bring with them to the school setting. In the planning stage, children's funds of knowledge can be incorporated into school activities to better support children in utilising play to bridge home and school. Through observation, practitioners can identify children who experience difficulties in developing play, and can develop strategies to help children who experience confusion or conflict in creating the third space, or continuity, between home and school.

3. Research methodology and design

The data are drawn from an interpretivist study (Yahya, 2014) of immigrant mothers and bicultural children in Ontario, Canada, which aimed to explore the participants' experiences and perspectives of play and learning at home and school. The findings reveal the happenings in all three spaces: the first space (home discourse); the second space (school discourse); and the third space. However, this article focuses on the findings that illustrate happenings in third space.

The study involved nineteen mothers who had immigrated to Canada, having had their childhood experiences in Pakistan, Libya, Ghana, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Kuwait, Jordan, and Eqypt (termed 'native country' in this study). The participants were recruited using flyers, emails to community centres and groups, and recommendations. The mothers had been in Canada from three months to twenty years. Most of the mothers were degree holders, with a few holding a postgraduate degree. The criteria for selecting the mothers included 'having a school-going child between four and seven years old' who would also be included as a research participant. The nineteen child participants were between the age of 5 years 0 months to 7 years 3 months: 9 boys and 10 girls.

Data were collected using interviews with mothers and children, drawings, and conversation during drawing activity. Each mother-child interview consists of 11 main questions for the mother (see Appendix 1) and 15 main questions for the child (see Appendix 2). The interviews and the conversations during the drawing activity were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. Ethical procedures (see Appendix 3 for interview protocol) include providing information about the research to the participants, and highlighting the options of not answering any of the questions, and premature termination of the interview session. In addition to the mothers' consent for their children participating in the research, informed consent was sought from the children. The options not to answer any questions, and premature termination of the interview if desired, were also communicated to the children and these options were exercised by some of the participants. Although the children were given the option not to participate in the drawing activity, all chose to participate and willingly contributed their drawing for the study.

3.1 Data Analysis Process

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and categorized according to the interview questions. Then the data were coded and condensed into themes. Subsequently, inter-category comparison was made between each mother and child pair to identify responses from one

category that support or contradict responses in another category. The next step involved identifying data from mothers' interviews which are relevant to themes generated from children's interviews and vice versa. The nineteen drawings were interpreted and categorized according to themes related to play and learning. The conversation during the drawing activity provided better understanding of the children's drawings, and the themes generated were then analysed for similarity and contrast to the themes arising from the interviews (see Appendix 4 for list of themes generated from study). The direct quotes from the interview transcripts derive from a naturalised transcribing approach so as to capture the sociocultural nuances of the interview.

4. Data Analysis

One of the initial questions asked in the interview with the children is "What is the best thing about school?" Although most identified play as the best thing, and a favourite activity, play is not without its complications and challenges, as discussed in the following thematic analysis.

4.1 Cultural Dissonance between home and school discourses

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

Ojala: At the beginning, she didn't go to Junior (kindergarten). It's the first year for her. At the beginning, it was weird. Because they are totally different from us. She was with me all the time (before going to school). But she likes the weekend school a lot. Because they are the same culture.

However, during the interview with Omera, she made agreeing sounds and nodded her head when asked if she likes school, but shared that she prefers playing at home than school. It is possible that she enjoys certain aspects of school but she does not enjoy playing at school as much as playing at home because of these cultural differences. In addition, since it was Omera's

first year in school, it is possible that she needs more time to adapt to the school culture. Thus, she may have preferred the weekend school because it requires less effort to adapt.

4.2 Children's use of play as third space between home and school

The findings from the interviews reveal that play is used by children as third space between home and school, specifically in three categories: 1) play as a bridge to understand different cultures at home and school; 2) choosing a playmate with a similar identity to navigate school culture; 3) similar play at home and school; and 4) playing with cultural identity.

4.2.1 Play as a bridge to understand the different cultures at home and school

Ghaliyah shared that her daughter, Ghadah plays with Anglo-Canadian children at school, and learns different aspects of western culture from her friends during pretend play. When she comes home, she relates her experience to her mother, and then inquires how a certain action or behaviour is situated in her culture:

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

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

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

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

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

Other than learning about the school culture, Ghadah also gets asked about her own culture as she plays with her friends. When she relates her friends' queries, Ghadah receives explanation from her mother, thus gaining better understanding of her culture and her identity.

For children who come from minority cultures, pretend play is a viable avenue through which they can learn about school culture in a Western cultural setting. Thus, play serves as a bridge for children to learn about the ways in which school and home cultures differ. At the same time,

questions received from their friends on their home culture may ignite their interest to have better understanding of their everyday practices.

4.2.2 Choosing a playmate with similar identity to navigate the school culture

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

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

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

Elyas is not his only friend as Emran also mentioned that together with Elyas, he plays with other children who are of different culture and religious belief which suggests that Emran and Elyas are not playing exclusively with each other but also with other children at school. Hence, it is possible to conclude that having a friend who is of similar identity helps Emran negotiate and adapt to the school culture.

4.2.3 Similar play at home and school

The same type of play can also serve as third space between home and school by acting as a dynamic medium for the children:

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

Qadi: I like to play with everyone soccer.

Interviewer: Is that your best game?

Qadi: (Made agreeing sound)

Interviewer: Are you a good soccer player?

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

Qailah shared that soccer is also a favourite game for Qadi at home, and that he is good at soccer. He plays soccer with his father every morning while waiting for the school bus to arrive. Similarly, Rafee also expressed his liking for playing soccer at home and at school. This suggests that soccer acts as a bridge between home and school for children's skills, knowledge and identities.

4.2.4 Playing with cultural identity

At the end of the interview, Ghadah drew a girl at a water park (Figure 3). As she was colouring the hair yellow, Ghadah said, "I'm faking. I want to be blonde-haired. That's why I use yellow so that it can be like blonde". This suggests that Ghadah was playing with her identity and, in this virtual world of drawing, Ghadah transformed herself into a blonde, Anglo-Canadian girl. This does not necessarily suggest that she is not comfortable with her cultural identity. Rather, it indicates a process of exploring identities and authoring possible selves (Edmiston, 2007).

Figure 3. Ghadah's drawing of herself at a water park

4.3 Teachers' strategies of using play to support children's navigation in school culture

Although teachers were not included as participants in this study, there was evidence from the mothers' and children's regarding teachers' strategies to support children in utilizing play as a bridge between home and school. In addition, teachers have also used play as a tool to intervene in children's strategies in navigating school culture. The strategies identified are: 1) bringing a toy from home to school; 2) school's provision of a familiar toy; 3) teacher's intervention in a child's difficulty in play; and 4) teacher's intervention with children who play exclusively with each other.

4.3.1 Bringing a toy from home to school

In this example, the teacher took initiatives to utilise play to connect home and school by asking all the children to bring a toy from home. Ishaq comments:

Ishaq: Actually I just brought my teddy bear to school. And I get to play with my teddy
               bear.

Interviewer: You can bring your teddy bear to school?

Ishaq: Yeah.

Interviewer: Every day?

Ishaq: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, do other children bring their teddy bears to school too?

Ishaq: Yeah. Just everyone in my class do.

4.3.2 School's provision of a familiar toy

Aatif mentioned that he likes to play with Beyblade at home and that he plays with it at school (Figure 4). Beyblade is a spinning top which allows children to compete with one another, whereby the last top that remains spinning wins the game.
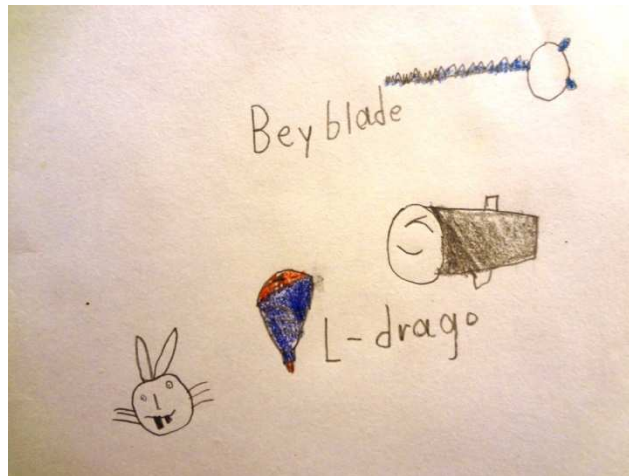
Figure 4. Aatif's drawing of Beyblade, his favourite play object

This evidence suggests that the teachers encourage the use of play as third space by allowing children to bring toys from home and to play with them during recess.

4.3.3 Teacher's intervention in child's difficulty in play

Aisha shared that during the transition to school, Aatif had some difficulties making friends.

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

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

Aisha: I think the credit goes to the teacher because she understood him and she pushed him when necessary to talk to other kids and to play with other kids. They call it parallel play because he wasn't into parallel play at all. But she pushed him to where she needed to. She involved him in such activities in which ultimately he needed help. He had a very nice teacher.

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

4.3.4 Teacher's intervention in children who play exclusively with each other

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

Saad was probably using the same strategy as Emran in having a friend who was familiar or with a similar identity to navigate the school culture. However, in Saad's case, it seems that they were creating a small boundary around themselves, and not allowing other children to enter. Saad's teacher was aware of this, but her intervention created emotional distress and the two friends could not comprehend the reason for her intervention.

5. Discussion

According to Levy (2008b), application of third space theory provides a framework to "expose elements of 'conversation' taking place between the 'funds of knowledge' within 'home' and

'school' discourses" (p.62). While third space can sometimes be a physical space, it serves as a conceptual and virtual space in this study, in which children's funds of knowledge from the first and second spaces merge, fuse and form new knowledge. Children seek to make sense of their experiences and knowledge in these two physical spaces and the third space offers a safe place to explore and make meaning of their experiences (Smith, 2008). Third space can also serve as an intellectual space where children become aware and seek to understand cultural differences in the two spaces.

This is illustrated in Ghadah's situation (see **Section 4.2.1**) as she tried to understand how experiences in second space are situated in first space, and how cultural capital from first space can be shared in second space. Thus, third space enables cultural transaction as children ponder and evaluate the cultural capital accumulated from the first and second spaces. Although children are constantly engaging in cultural transactions with others in first and second spaces, third space is where they make internal cultural transactions based on their selection of elements of their cultural capital that are important to them in particular contexts. Hence, internal cultural transactions in third space gradually create new knowledge which, in turn leads to the creation of hybrid culture which interweaves home and school cultures. According to Smith (2008), a hybrid culture is created through the infusion and incorporation of elements of cultures.

Third space also creates a space for children to construct their identities and appropriate available identities, which requires time and effort. The children in this study are biculturals because they experience different cultures in their daily lives (Mok and Morris, 2012). However, not all biculturals are able to reconcile the various values and practices from the different cultural experiences (Mackenzie, 2008), resulting in identity confusion (Berry, 1990) as illustrated in the cultural dissonance experienced by Omera (see **Section 4.1**).

Nevertheless, studies have shown that biculturals may undergo acculturation (Cheng and Lee, 2009) in which their different cultural experiences merge to form a hybrid culture resulting in hybrid identity (Szeib, 2011). The process of exploring and making sense of different cultural experiences is illustrated in Ghadah playing with identity using drawing. In third space, children are usually free of judgment from others as they explore possibilities and construct their unique identities. For Ghadah, taking on an identity as a blonde Anglo-Canadian is perhaps acceptable in imaginary world but it may be frowned upon in the real world. As discussed earlier in **Section 4.2.4**, Ghadah's playing with identity is not necessarily an indicator of a rejection of her ethnicity

and culture, but can be seen as a process of exploring possible selves (Edmiston, 2007) and construction of hybrid identity:

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

The construction of a hybrid identity, which is different from their parents' cultural identity, takes place over time and in the different spaces: in comparison to their immigrant parents, the children in this study may have more opportunities to construct a hybrid identity for themselves through interaction and infusion of funds of knowledge accumulated from first and second spaces.

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

In third space, children have more power as compared to first and second spaces. In the two physical spaces, there is power imbalance as children are subjected to the rules and regulations determined by adults. However, in third space, children may perceive themselves as having power to make decisions on their choices and construction of strategies to enable them to use play as third space, because

> Playing allows children to transform their observations, experiences, and sense of possibilities within everyday life into fantasy worlds where the social rules are always understandable and the events are always under their control. (Edmiston, 2007 p.101)

In these ways children have enhanced agency (Hall, 2010) and devise strategies to utilise third space as a bridge between first space and second space, and to experience continuity in third space which allows them to navigate successfully in first and second spaces. Although teachers can support them in building this continuity, the strategies need to be carefully tuned to the social, cultural and ethnic diversities of children and their families. Thus the evidence supports

the importance of play for children's development and learning, the use of play as a medium to connect cultural discourses, and children's agency in the transformational processes identified by Edmiston (2007).

6. Conclusion, limitations and implications for future research

This research illustrates that children are able to process their acquired funds of knowledge and exercise their agency in order to make sense of the world around them, construct their identities and adapt to different environments. However, the findings challenge universal assumptions that children will automatically benefit from play-based approaches implemented in the pre-school or school curriculum (Wood, 2014b). The children in this study required support from adults in order to bridge home and school discourses and benefit from play, which is consistent with similar research. This research proposes that 'play as third space' framework can act as a structural reference to deepen understanding of children's complex and diverse experiences. This framework can guide practitioners to provide better support for children to bridge home and school discourses, navigate the school culture successfully, and benefit from play-based pedagogy at school.

There are some limitations to this study which can be explored in further research. First, the study does not include teachers' perspectives, because of the chosen focus on mothers and their children. Second, observation of children at school is not included as one of the methods due to time constraints. Thus, further research can explore teachers' perspectives on children experiencing cultural dissonance and the pedagogical interventions they use to support children's adaptation to school cultures.

Brooker (2011a: 147) suggested that critical engagement with the cultural nuances of play provides better understanding of children's multilayered lives because "children's culture defines their world". This article extends her suggestion to recognizing and supporting children's use of play as third space which bridges home and school cultural discourses.

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Appendix 1 Interview questions for mother

Interview questions for parents

Parent's experiences

1. What were your learning experiences as a child (around your child's age)?

2. Do you find any similarities or differences between the way you learn in school as a young child as compared to your child? What do you think about it?

3. What kind of play do you engage in when you were a child?

4. Do you find any similarities or differences between the way you play as a young child as compared to your child? What do you think about it?

Child's experiences
5. What are the experiences of your child in school? Is he/she happy or does he/she face some problems or difficulties?

6. What do you think of the way your child learns in school? (perspective)

7. Does he/she engage in lots of play in school? What kind of play?

8. If you were given a choice between two public schools: one that adopt the rote-learning method and the other that adopt play-based learning, which one would you prefer?

Home environment from parents' perspective
9. Does your child play at home? How does he/she play?

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

11. Does your child also learn at home? If so, how?

Appendix 2 Interview questions for child

Interview questions with child

(Learning/school)
1. Do you like school? (If no, why?)

2. What is the best thing about school?

3. Is there anything you don't like about school?

4. What do you do in school?

5. What do you learn in school?

6. Do you also learn at home?

(Play)
1. Do you play in school?

2. Who do you play with?

3. What kind of play do you like in school?

4. Who do you usually play with? Why do you like play with him/her? What are your favourite games?

5. When you're not in school, do you play at home?

6. What kind of play do you like at home?

7. Who do you usually play with? Why do you like play with him/her? What are your favourite games?

8. Which one do you prefer? Playing in school or at home? Why?

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

    If so, how?

1

Steps to take when conducting interview

Introduce myself.

Information Sheet

1. Take out 2 copies of information sheet; fill in date, Mother's name and child's name.
2. Give her one information sheet, and ask her to read.
3. Go through some details with her.

Consent Form for Adult Participant

1. Take out Adult Participant consent form. Go through with Mother and ask her to initial after each point.
2. Ask her to sign on 2 copies and I sign on 2 copies.
3. Give one copy to her.

Consent Form for Parent

1. Take out 2 Child Participant consent forms. Go through with Mother and ask her to initial after each point.
2. Ask her to fill in the details on the child and sign on 2 copies and I sign on 2 copies.
3. Give one copy to her.

Interview with Parent

1. Ask to fill up participant details. Option to not answer any of the questions.
2. Ask for verbal consent on the use of audio-recorder.
3. Ask for verbal consent to start interview.
4. Start audio-recorder.
5. Start timer on iphone.
6. Begin interview

Interview with Child

1. Introduce myself.
2. Take out consent-like poster, read to the child, ask the child if he/she will help, take out the crayon to colour if he/she agrees.
3. Show the audio-recorder and demonstrate how it works. Is it ok if I use this?
4. Ask the child to start the audio-recorder.
5. Start the iphone timer.
6. Ask if he/she wants to play with playdough
7. Ask questions about learning and school.
8. Ask questions about play in school and at home

9. At the end of the interview, ask if the child can draw something for me (perhaps something you like?)
10. Ask if I can keep the drawing
11. Stop the audio-recorder. Inform the child, he/she can keep the crayons. And give the child a gift.
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12. Ask parent if I can keep the drawing.

Showing Appreciation

1. Give the $20 Walmart gift card to show appreciation.

Appendix 4 List of themes

Main theme 1: Immigrant mothers' experiences and perspectives of play, learning, and relationship between play and learning

1.1 Comparing play in native country and Canada
    1.1.1 Changes in play settings and experiences resulting in changes in affordances of play
    1.1.2 A new form of play: Digital Play
1.2 Comparing learning in native country and Canada
1.3 Relationship between play and learning
1.4 Communication between home and school

Main theme 2: Children's experiences and perspectives of play, learning, and learning through play

2.1 Children's drawing: What it reveals about play
2.2 Play and its challenges for children
2.3 Two learning models: play-based learning and rote-learning
2.4 Relationship between play and learning

Main theme 3: Play as third space between home and school: bridging the two cultural discourses

3.1 Cultural dissonance
3.2 Children using play as third space between home and school discourses
3.3 Teachers' strategies to support children's navigation in school culture