

Postscript: Suggestions for those who work and play with children, youth and adults.

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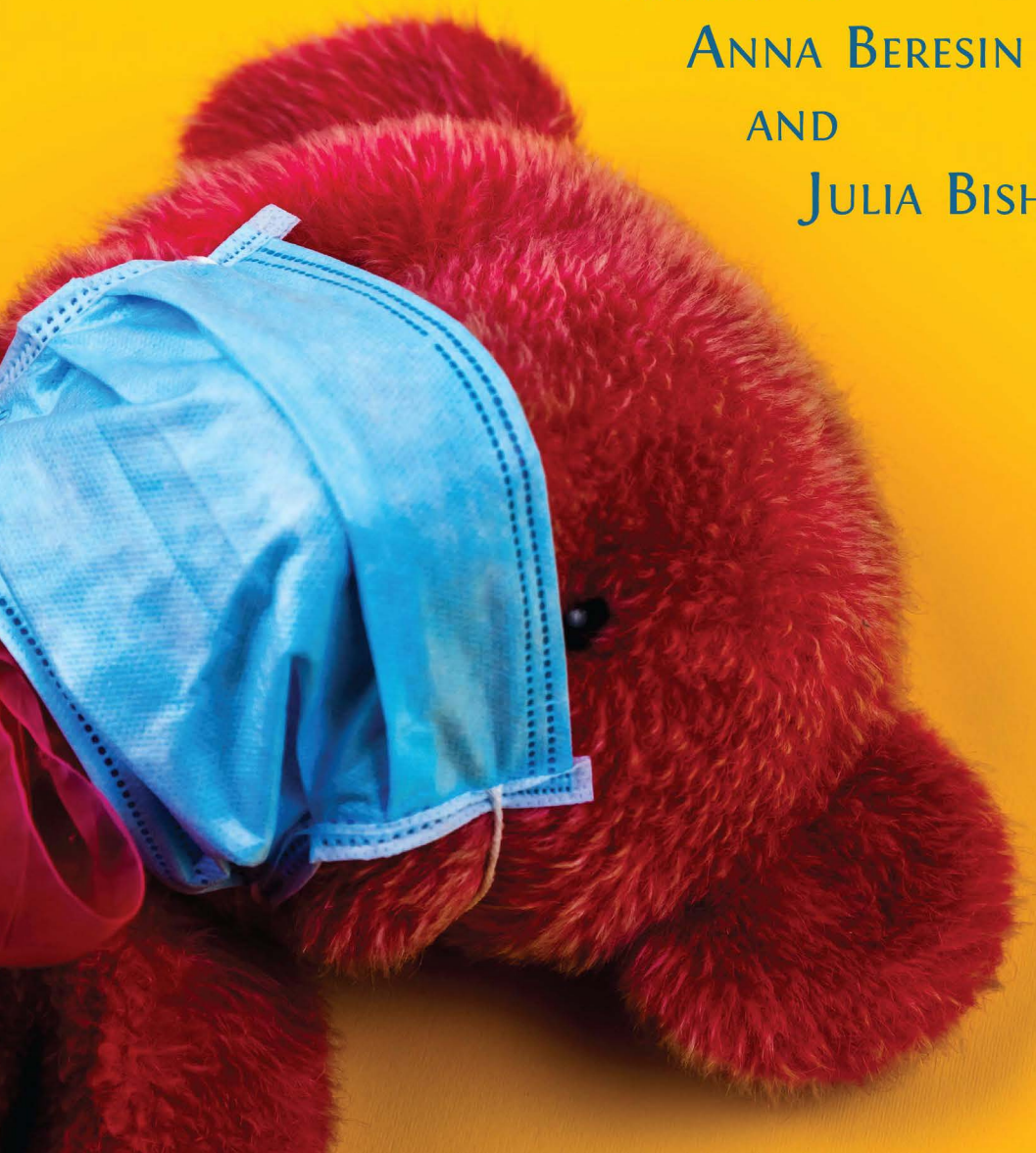
EVERYDAY PANDEMIC CREATIVITY
IN A TIME OF ISOLATION

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Postscript:

Suggestions for Those Who Work and Play with Children, Youth and Adults

Anna Beresin and Julia Bishop, with Chloé Beatty, Caron Carter, Suzanne Egan, Beatriz LeBron, Ruth Hazleton, Katriina Heljakka, Nicolas Le Bigre, Shanielia Lewis, Judy McKinty, Nevena Mitranić, Emma Morrison, Patricia Neville, John Potter, Martha Radice, Holly Sienkiewicz, and Danni von der Borch

We arranged to continue our cross-cultural dialogue and move it from print to Zoom and back to print again. Given play's profound connection to vitality, what have we discovered about play and Covid and about what might come next? The challenging paradox here is that play can and cannot be planned, but it certainly can be unnecessarily diminished.

The following contains suggestions for discussion and recommendations for training and practice. Eighteen researchers participated—the transcript here greatly reduced with the content chosen for relevance and edited or rearranged for clarity. The text here does not do the discussions justice given the warmth and enthusiasm of these virtual meetings. All of us were working in isolation, or in small teams, and had not met prior to these conversations. The first meeting included the editors and Chloé Beatty, Suzanne Egan, Beatriz LeBron, Shanielia Lewis, Emma Morrison, Patricia Neville, Martha Radice and Holly Sienkiewicz. The second involved the editors, Caron Carter, Katriina Heljakka, Nicolas Le Bigre, Nevena Mitranić and John Potter.

Much of the significance here extends well beyond the Covid pandemic, relating both to the field of play advocacy in general, and also to what might be anticipated during future pandemics. We present it as a single piece representing the two online meetings, with a written introduction by three esteemed Australian researchers for whom the meetings took place in the wee hours of the morning—Judy McKinty, Ruth Hazleton and Danni von der Borch.

What We Learned: The Australian Pandemic Play Project

Free play is fundamentally important to children of all ages and something that must be understood at a sophisticated level by government policymakers and education departments alike. In play, children can reclaim a sense of self, feel more whole and more in control. Through free play, children control the narrative themselves and learn how to explore, express and come to terms with situations they don't understand, giving them a strong sense of agency in a crisis. Opportunities for play are, and should be, a core feature of therapeutic treatment and recovery from trauma.

Research conducted throughout the pandemic has highlighted the need for all children to have easy access to safe outdoor spaces to play. This is particularly relevant to children living in high-density situations (such as multistorey apartments and high-rise public housing), and children from lower socioeconomic and disadvantaged backgrounds. The provision of secure public spaces for children to play in allows them to experience a sense of ownership and agency through play. These spaces must be made available for the exclusive use of children and young people, where they can feel safe, welcomed, and enjoy the freedom to create, make, tear down and start again.

Relevant to both school and public play contexts, these spaces should also allow children to play safely away from the constant scrutiny and intervention of adults.

Our research also highlighted the enormous inequities in the availability and provision of resources for play, particularly during lockdown, including technological equipment and access to the internet. Due to various factors (such as geographic location, socioeconomic

situation and ability of schools to provide children with devices and tech resources), this requires more careful consideration with significant implications for both play and educational equality.

Based on The Pandemic Play Project (Australia), we would recommend the following:

- That access to the internet and technological equipment is reviewed at policy level and prioritized for children in educational and home settings.
- That government and non-government aid agencies incorporate the distribution of open-ended play materials and equipment as part of emergency relief packages: for example, craft supplies, paint and other construction materials, simple toys, modeling clay, skateboards or bikes
- That at a policy level, children must play a consultative role in the planning and design of play spaces, especially for children of school age. Children are, after all, the experts in play.
- That local jurisdictions be encouraged to fund play spaces designed to allow children to play more freely within a safe space.
- That qualified play workers be engaged within schools and school jurisdictions on a regular basis.
- That parents have better access to educational material about the value and importance of allowing children to play more freely, including the importance of digital and online play as well as in physical spaces.
- That coursework on the characteristics and importance of play be developed and delivered as a core subject for undergraduate students studying education, childhood, and teen development.

Voices from Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland, Finland, Serbia and the United States

Anna: Welcome. So glad you are all here.

Study Play Across the Lifespan

Martha: Am I the only one who did not study children's play? Children are involved in the kind of carnival that I studied to a certain degree, and certainly they love 'tit Rax shoe box parade because it's tiny, but my research highlights the importance of play for adults, especially making as play, a kind of playing with materials, because that's what people did during the pandemic carnival. I mean this is what they do anyway in carnival, but they just took it to a new, different direction in 2021. The house floats that my chapter discusses were created on a domestic scale but were also an experience shared across the city. I think it's important to think about play beyond the family unit—play in a neighbourhood and on a larger community level.

Anna: Including your work was intentional, Martha, not just because it was really fun and beautiful to see, but I think Julia and I shared a commitment to the idea that that paradoxically play is essential for children but it's also essential across the lifespan. Some of the greatest theorists of play have talked about the continuum of play rather than the uniqueness of it during childhood, even though it may be critical during childhood.

Martha: The development stuff is great but it also makes it still very instrumental, and the fun thing about looking at adult players is that one assumes that adults are more or less fully developed, although we can always learn more and develop more, but the frivolous elements of play are no bad thing, right?

Shanielia: I'm really happy Martha said this because I have a teenager and I see as she gets older—there's less intention around including play in her activities, and that concerns me because there is no less need for play outside of organized sports. I am always looking for ways to engage her and her creativity. She's really creative, and I'm

finding less opportunity for that in our communities. Martha, I got really excited to hear you speak, because even as adults, like we forget how to play, and I think we train our teenagers to do that. Now you have to get serious. Now you've got to think about college, and none of that. And we wonder, like, why are they less engaged in school? They don't want to go to school any more. They don't want to learn any more, because it's no longer fun. They're not playing. And we learn more when things are fun, instead of having to, like, memorize things, which is unfortunately what our education system has become. But even for myself. I'm wondering now, I think I need more fun. How do I play either by myself or with my friends? I think I've lost track of this over time.

Anna: Can I jump in and ask you a question? You said that your teenager has opportunities for creativity, but less so for play. How do you distinguish the two?

Shanielia: She goes to a school of the arts, and I see her less excited about doing art now, because it involves a grade, and it involves being defined and monitored. And you know it has to be a certain way. And the more that happens, the less excited she is about it. She just wants to do her thing how she wants to do it. Provide her with materials and leave her alone, and it's starting to become more of like being told what art should look like and how she needs to be, and she's like 'Yeah, I don't want to do this anymore'. And it's, you know, I'm literally watching this in real time. So that's the difference to me, like play comes from you. It's like a creative spark from you that excites you, whereas you know the other stuff, it's like, 'Okay, I'm creating this container for you, and you have to operate within it'.

Holly: I'm really glad you shared that Shanielia and we haven't met in person, but I'm Holly, and we emailed and communicated while writing this chapter, but we have yet to meet in person. That's a lot of what our Healthi Kids team is trying to do is focus on unstructured play. And how do we provide more opportunities for kids to have unstructured play? Because Shanielia you're exactly right, once you put the parameters and the structure around it, it becomes innately less fun, and I feel like there's too much structure already in our children's lives.

Value Unstructured Play

Chloé: That's something that also shone through in the work we did during Covid as well during lockdowns, the level of unstructured play rose and that was commented on positively from the parents as well.

Patricia: Therein lies the rub of it, the paradox because we here are advocates for unstructured play, for that which can't be limited, that comes from within and is spontaneous, organic. And yet the conversations that we're automatically drawn into at a policy level, you know, even within educational discourse, is, we need to sort of pin it down.

Anna: Let's unpack this a bit more. Holly wrote this interesting thing in the chat, she's said, 'I would like to add that some educators remove play as a punishment for behaviour issues within school, not realizing that that is really detrimental to children's education, and has the potential to affect them negatively academically as well'. I would add, it is so negative, it can be seen as a public health issue. I know the American Academy of Pediatrics came out with a statement saying what a terrible idea it is to remove recess as a punishment, but many elementary schools in America still do. So, to link these two, I'm curious, how do we advocate for the unstructured?

Julia: Does anyone have the silver bullet?

Shanielia: I want to say just like education, a lot of things affect that space without having to be directly linked. Okay, I think I definitely had more free play growing up than my daughter does, and part of that is the expectation and the emphasis on grades and the emphasis on a certain path.

Holly: Part of working with Beatriz and working with Shanielia and our Healthi Kids team, part of it is advocating for safe place spaces, too. So many of the families in our area there's not outdoor spaces that parents are always comfortable having their kids walk to, like the neighbourhood park. They're not necessarily comfortable with that, so it's, you know, it's advocating for play, but it's also for healthy communities and advocating for these spaces to be safe for people to be out and about and accessing the resources that may already exist that may need improvement. But accessing what's there as well.

Anna: One of the things I think we can do is for us all to return copies of this book to the people that we studied, if we were affiliated with a programme or a school or a parent group, to close the loop in terms of communication.

Broaden the Vision of Play Advocacy

Martha: This question of how we advocate or how we structurally make play more important for everybody is a really good one because, for me, one of the interesting things about studying New Orleans is what we can learn from the practices of carnival that are very much embedded in the city. They are complex and have multiple purposes. So, they're put to instrumental uses as well with the place marketing and tourism promotion, and so on. But there are also these practices that give everybody the liberty of playing for a period every single year, and part of my argument is that the reason they were able to adapt carnival so well to the pandemic is that carnival is always improvisational, and it's always responding to current events.

But it's very much embedded in everyday life, so one of the questions that's always trotting round in my head is, how can you foster that structure elsewhere? How can you have license to play on an ongoing regular basis? I think it really helps that it's this one season every year. Make it regular. And then there are some quite peculiar things, like there's actually a bylaw forbidding commercialization of carnival sponsorship, so it's never the Kellogg's Carnival. It's never the ScotiaBank Carnival. It helps people feel like it belongs to them rather than to a corporate sponsor. So yeah, these are always the questions I think about in relation to the relevance of my research.

Anna: One of the things that seems so unique about New Orleans carnival is that it's not just a one-day thing, that people spend 364 days prepping for that one day. I think sometimes that special time thing for children gets translated into a commercial carnival; it comes in and sets up in the school yard. They do a play day and then it's over. What I've seen here in industrial northeast America, it becomes a one-and-done thing and kids hold their breath all year waiting for that one fun day because they're not involved in the prep. They're not involved in the tradition and the ritual. But I think you're onto

something about this paradox of tradition. How do you establish new and flexible traditions around play?

Shanielia: I wanted to speak about normalizing play, those are my words. We have a museum, a play museum here in Rochester. The kids hit the door, they already know, 'I'll see you at a certain time' and they just want to tear it up for whatever period of time, and I think that's a very valued way of, like, creating intentional play spaces where we can take our families. But then comes the conversation around accessibility, right? Because there's a charge to do so. How do we create accessible safe spaces for all of us? Because some of these things do exist but there's a price tag attached. If it exists and we can't access it, then what's the point? How do we identify, then resource, the things that are already in our communities, instead of trying to reinvent the wheel?

Notice the Blending of Play in Physical and Digital Spaces

Martha: The contagion of creative ideas was interesting. The Pass the Brush videos; did you see those? Or Don't Rush challenge videos where people would make videos collectively but apart to kind of show their solidarity, and so on, very beautiful videos that were often rather fun. And then the house floats. What happened in New Orleans was that because parades were cancelled, people decided to decorate their houses as carnival floats. It all started with a Twitter joke. And then all of a sudden, there were thousands of homes in the city that got on board and decided to make this version of carnival happen. Somebody said, 'Okay, it's decided. Let's do this'. Let's decorate our houses as floats and throw beads from our attic to passersby. So, it's very unevenly distributed, right?

There are people who were working far too hard to be able to engage in these things. But then there were a lot of people who were furloughed or working from home, or who needed something to do with kids at home. Another phenomenon like this was the re-creation of artworks that people did with domestic objects that spread around the internet. I mean, you can tell that I have time to look all these things up and was not trying to corral small children into doing online school! So, yes, it was unevenly distributed, and it depended on resources and so on.

But I found it surprising that people found the time, that people took those ideas and ran with them.

Chloé: I find that actually extremely heartening to hear how something like that can happen from such a simple act like a tweet or a social media post. Because if we think back to the question that you posed earlier on, how do we get these messages out? To policymakers, to advocates, sometimes it's as simple as 'Let's just make a post on social media. Let's just have a voice'. Everyone has the power to have a voice with globalization, with social media these days.

Suzanne: One of the things that actually struck me with some of the data that I gathered and actually used, and Martha's use of the word 'contagion' put it into my mind, following on from her point, was children bringing the pandemic into their play. I think one of the things that was, oh, surprising and not surprising was just the range of ages of children, the variety of backgrounds, and the variety of locations globally, where we see a broad influence of the environment shaping children's play. But it's still slightly surprising to see that children in Ireland and England and Australia and America, they're all putting masks on their dolls. They all have their teddy bears washing their hands.

We know children often use play in response to trauma, to ill health or to war. But I don't think there's ever been such a large-scale, mass, unwanted experiment where we've seen such a large negative effect happen to pretty much every child all across the world, how many of them brought Covid into their play. So, I suppose that was one of the surprising and not surprising things for me in terms of some of the findings that we saw on our research, in Ireland and internationally as well.

Julia: I just wanted to follow on a little bit from Suzanne's point. Really, I'm not sure whether it's a coping strategy. But what really surprised me just going back to that question was the corona chasing games, the Corona Tag, using evidence that I gathered from Twitter, because it's very difficult to be in all the playgrounds of the world simultaneously. It was just amazing how much just through tweets you are able to gather just how widespread that game was and that, it just apparently sprung up pretty much overnight amongst children

who could not have possibly transmitted it to each other during that time. But you know also, I was very struck by how very varied it was, and creative, and how incredibly responsive it was to what was happening in the media.

An example I have in my chapter concerns Marcus Rashford, the footballer, and how he had successfully campaigned for a voucher scheme, set up during lockdown for children in poverty who were entitled to free school meals, to be continued in the summer holidays too. And someone had reported a variation in the [Coronavirus] Tag game, and it was that if they were tagged with 'Tory', the Conservative party, they weren't allowed to eat until someone tags them with 'Rashford'. So, they had to be touched with those terms, and it was just incredible.

Another one was a Stuck in the Mud game and one of the release mechanisms after you'd been caught was you had to put out your arms like a soap dispenser or hand sanitizer and, if your arm was pressed, then you were released because you'd been 'disinfected' and you hadn't got corona anymore. Another release mechanism was the children had to sing 'Happy Birthday' twice. I just was astonished—we're talking middle childhood here, you know, the seven-to-eleven age group—just how sensitive they were, responding immediately to discourses they were hearing in adult worlds. Now whether that's a coping mechanism, I'm not sure, but I think it's a really interesting thing that perhaps we haven't really clocked sufficiently.

Provide Material Access for Play

Emma: One good thing came out of this, because I have my great grandchildren over the summer months, we were able to go to the Recreation Center because they serve lunch there. So that was a treat for them to walk down and be able to see other people. One thing I used to do there was, to keep myself separated from a lot of people, was take them down to the park and walk them around the pond, and they were able to learn about you know, fish, about the ducks about the geese that were there, and you know, just to get near the water and stuff; it's things like that I was able to do with them. Just

being able to be around other people was important. And they gave us bags, you know, with free items in them, and we used them, because there's a lot of different things, different activities in there that they could learn by. And it just made me feel better about this situation.

Holly: I was just going to say for those who didn't read our chapter, part of what we talked about, and what Emma's referring to is this Play Kit distribution, so really assembling thousands of play kits. There were things like footballs, beach balls, jump ropes, chalk, colouring books, you know, just things that could be given out in a bag to families, to the children, just to help encourage play whether it was indoors or out. That was kind of one of the elements of how the Healthi Kids team tried to keep play going during the pandemic.

Anna: Thank you both for sharing that. There's some great stuff going on in the chat.

Beatriz wrote: 'Kinetic toys, balls, slime, chalk, bubbles, colouring items, too. We also did some where we partnered with our local PBS station to do some nature exploration. Many kids' card games etc., FYI on the Play Kits'.

Martha added: 'there's a community art organization in Halifax-Wonder'neath- that distributed thousands of art kits to kids in a similar way'.

Julia wrote: 'the opportunities afforded by the pandemic for play in communication are something one hopes young ones will recall in later years'.

Chloé noted: 'Emma's experience really ties in with the idea of "learning lost during lockdown," and how there were plenty of opportunities for learning, just not in the conventional sense'.

Suzanne: One of the things that really came through in the data that we gathered in May and June 2020, so it was kind of early on, it was the first lockdown. It was quite severe in Ireland, with a two-kilometre restriction on our movement, and everything was closed. All businesses, all schools. So, you know it was very much each family unit was in their own home. People weren't traveling to see families, playgrounds were closed. Everything was closed. One of the things

that we spoke about, and you mentioned the subtitle of creativity, is kind of some of the ways people got creative in their play and in their adaptations to this unprecedented situation. But one of the things that really came through in our survey was how much the children were missing all of their friends, and all of the parents missing the social supports and their networks, this came through really strongly as well. So. Yes, there were some positives for play, but there were lots of negatives to both for play and for mental health.

Caron: I really had a sense from the data that the parents had got this sort of renewed value and appreciation of play and friendship. That really came across quite strongly. It may have been there before, but I think all of the parents kind of emphasized that. You know, in that absence that noticed how important friendship and play were. Also, I was just thinking about also Katriina's sort of play with objects. I wrote something a couple of years ago around how children often see these objects a bit like imaginary friends, as their friends. And I collected some data with children who had LEGO figures and actually referred to them as their friends, you know, and have them in their pockets, and had them at school with them. And it kind of afforded them perhaps some security, but also made them feel much more confident in the presence of these object friends.

Honour a Sense of Loss

Suzanne: Lots of parents talked about, you know, maybe a safe place in a daycare centre, or in the school that was no longer available. There was too much traffic in the neighbourhood, or, they couldn't let them out. Just missing out on friends, but how difficult it might be for the youngest children to keep in touch with friends online. So those young children don't have smartphones. They're not great on Zoom with maintaining conversations. So, I think that besides the isolation, missing out on those connections and those interactions, different types of playful opportunities and different types of play, it's something that kind of negatively affected the experiences at the time. I think people of all ages felt that again kind of globally, it's very much a universal experience.

Holly: I would add in and echo those thoughts. There's something like this sense of ambiguous loss where you don't really know what you've lost. But you lost something.

I'm a parent of two young kids, two and five, and the baby was born right before Covid started. So, a young family, we didn't have any support, and his aunt he met eighteen months later. I know my five-year-old now, he's starting to attend birthday parties for friends and he's like 'Well, why, haven't I ever had one?' We did it as a family, but when his birthday was, there were exposures. Families have handled Covid restrictions differently. I have seen in my own children, them not understanding it, and that's something that they're still grappling with.

Suzanne: I think it is also because children obviously develop so quickly. You know you kind of have a new child every six months. My own children were six and eight when we entered the pandemic; now they're eight and eleven. I'm kind of looking at my children exiting their childhood, you know, in the not-too-distant future. I'm kind of thinking, I thought we had another couple of years to do that thing. Sometimes it feels like forever, and other times it's gone in a blink of an eye. For a two-year-old, or a four-year-old, or a six-year-old, it is a huge chunk of their life that they have been living with these really weird circumstances. I think we won't know, for a few years to come, actually, the full effect of this, both on their play behaviours, and on all aspects of their development when the whole world shut down.

Anna: In the chat, Beatriz wrote that '[her] experience with [her] grandson who is just now getting to explore more, now that he's turning three, he has lost some social development'.

Shanielia: I want to contribute as a parent of an older child. The isolation did affect her developmentally in terms of, like, where she was. We know that right now as teens your friends are everything. And so it was really heartbreaking, like for me as a parent.

When she saw her friends out in public, I had to say, 'Remember, it's Covid', because the instinct is to run and hug your friend. And that it felt like she was being robbed, and I'm the person robbing

her because I'm having to say to her, 'You know you can't do that' and it was so heartbreaking. But one thing I also do see—was how she and her friends adapted. They leaned heavily into social media and creating things that they shared so they could have, like, still a collective experience. They did lots of group calls, like I felt dragged into the virtual world, where I think the transition for them was just building, because it's a natural playground for them, right? So they used those tools to create collective experiences for themselves, until they were able to go back to school and be together physically.

Anna: Just like us right now.

Shanielia: For me, it was more work, but for them it was more play. It was another tool, and so they just transitioned into it like that. It was something they had command of, they had control of, like. They checked in with each other continuously, and where, as before, I think there would be more one-on-one interactions, it was more like a group. So there was like a group call going all the time, or something was happening, and I'm like, 'Hey? What's going on?' and just like, 'Oh, I'm here with so-and-so, and so-and-so talking', even though physically they were isolated. I don't know how it affected anybody else's family. So, in your home you're with your family and being in school you're with your friends—that separation kind of just diminished even more.

Recentre Culture and Social Life in Recommendations for Play

Nevena: What we tried to do is to connect many different actors, like students, kindergarten teachers, parents, and children as well, in something that they do together.

Anna: How would you expand that on a policy level? How would you take the idea of the importance of social life and community life, and implement it in a concrete way?

Nevena: We had this sort of agreement at the policy level as well, because our ministry puts those sorts of suggestions for kindergarten professionals as what they should do in the time of the pandemic,

and we were consulted, so we told them what to do. Like not to put pressure on the content the children should go through, but just put the focus on the opportunities together, opportunities to communicate together with parents, with children. To just let them play. And the policy levels stood behind this idea and published this. It's something that's official. So, I think that meant a lot, because it was the official recommendation for the entire country.

Caron: In my chapter I talk a lot about time and space to build and just nurture friendships, particularly now post-Covid, to reconnect. There are times where children, particularly young children, haven't been able to socialize and we know that play is so integral to friendship. This has, you know, affected those relationships with some children, the idea that children hadn't been able to physically interact. You see, this sort of rough and tumble play, and this sort of hugging and wrestling, and you know that kind of thing, that there hadn't been those sorts of play, it had been missing.

I would add time to reconnect. It kind of links in with that idea of well-being, because I think for some children, they had found ways to connect, that might have been online ways to connect. It might have been through a video call. Or, some children were able to engage with imaginative play online through Zoom with friends. So, for some children it had worked quite well. But then for other children it just hadn't worked at all you know, and they felt uncomfortable in those contexts.

Nicolas: I can think of lots of examples from fieldwork and from other things where people expressed ill ease with societal pressures, especially during the pandemic, of having to gather with people like 'Oh God, it's another Zoom night with my eighteen relatives. How am I going to deal with this?'

Caron: The bubble systems that we had in schools in England meant that some children couldn't play with their friends that they usually play with. So, for some it was quite a profound loss really for them, and they kind of almost had gone through that kind of grieving process of not being able to be with and play with the children that they wanted to. So, there was a real impact on well-being for some children.

Anna: May I ask, the bubbles, we call them ‘pods’ here in the States, were they naturally occurring? Or were they assigned by the schools?

Caron: I mean I don’t know for all schools, but it seemed to be from the parents that I interviewed that they were sort of assigned by the schools. So, schools decided locally how they were going to do that. So, for some it was classes were split up, or for some children they could only play with the children in their class. For some of the schools, it could be that they could play with the whole year group. But the children talked a lot about it. The parents in that scenario talked a lot about if they were in a particular year group, and they couldn’t play with somebody who was in the other class or year group that they had previously played with and that that was a big thing. And I know for some children, they found it difficult to reconnect afterwards and to go back to those friendships, because what happened was when children were put into those bubbles, then there were lots of issues when they came back together, because some children had managed to forge new friendships, and some hadn’t, you know; so it’s quite complex really. Some children might have had well-established, quality relationships that were able to reconnect again, and for others, it just, it just didn’t work for them and they lost friends.

Katriina: The first really artefact-based evidence that we have collected during this pandemic about the importance of physical objects and the kinds of meanings they channel, is that they are communal objects, and very important for our building of this resilience. So that’s the first lesson and the second one is that, yes, the resilience aspect I already mentioned, but I’d like to think of a playful take on that term and title it “playful resilience” because I have understood that it’s very much about survival by doing and doing by playing. This represents sort of a type of toy activism. It has a lot to do with human gestures, and what we saw humans doing during the pandemic through screens. And they were these very tender and affectionate gestures, like the two toys hugging each other. Third, the Teddy Challenge proved, as a hybrid form of play, that screens can be extremely important for our well-being. Teddy bears and other plush toys were displayed behind window screens captured by the

camera functions, and thus screens of mobile devices and ultimately shared through social media, mainly observed and consumed through various screens on smartphones, tablets, and computers, and without the inclusion of smart devices and social media. The phenomenon could not have become viral and global, highlighting an instance of what I then have termed ludounity, playing for the common good.

Question ‘Resilience’

Anna: One of the topics that came up in our parallel discussion yesterday is the love and discomfort we have with the word ‘resilience’. On the one hand, the whole study of play during this time is really about this sense of survival and resilience, exactly what you were talking about, and on the other hand there’s some anthropological discussion around the word which suggests that the term puts the onus on the individual to be plucky to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and just carry on individually. To tie back to Nevena’s opening comment and also Caron’s idea of the communal response to the pandemic, does this in a way put the burden on the child, or on the family?

Katriina: It’s a very good question, and a very good point. And this is not an individual matter in the sense that a transitional object is in the traditional sense, and our understandings of the plush toy or soft animal, mainly the representing of the mother for the child. This is that maybe that discussion should be unpacked somewhere, a little more in detail. But you’re absolutely right not to put the pressure on the young individual that a child is. In Finnish we have *sisu*, which is translated often to ‘guts’ and guts is sort of an inner power that makes you go the extra mile. And this is a very cultural thing for Finnish people who have survived the wars before, and it has a lot of historical baggage in a sense. But I happen to know a *sisu* researcher who works in the area of positive psychology, and we have talked with her about play and its relation to this *sisu*. There’s a word in English called grit? Grit, yes? Does that describe what I just said?

Nicolas: Actually, I was quite interested in your discussion of resilience, and I think one way that we might consider resilience is on a scale of privilege, I guess, because I think some people are perhaps more

privileged to be resilient than others are. It certainly is in the UK context.

Being a folklorist, we always talk about childlore, which is really interesting, but I think lots of people can tend to see play only through the prism of childhood. But what I saw through my article, I guess from my book chapter, is that play exists through the ethnographers who are doing the work; they are willing participants in play as well. You know, the ethnography itself can be seen through the prism of play.

But in terms of the privileges of resilience, I mean in the UK, one thing that seemed striking to me was that in lockdown, all the public parks were made inaccessible for a period of time. I had a big project called the Lockdown Collection Project, and people were sending me their creative responses to the pandemic and that's sort of the basis of my chapter. And one person was talking about all these fantastic challenges she was setting for her children in her garden and she sent fifty videos of her kids doing an obstacle course and other things like that, absolutely wonderful stuff. But I couldn't help but think of all the kids for whom traditionally their only place to do that would have been the playground where all of the swing sets were chained up and closed off. Or you know, other kids were telling me about how they were using the internet. They were, you know, using Snapchat, or whatever other exciting apps that existed to sort of converse with their friends. But then there's, you know, a larger cohort than I think most people realize, people who have no access to the internet or very unstable internet connections, particularly in rural areas in Scotland. So that was completely unavailable to those children.

In terms of public policy, it's understanding the effects of targeting and criminalizing things like using public parks because it's really easy for somebody who is making this policy who has their own garden. We had lots of situations in Scotland, and in the UK where neighbours would be calling out people in the public park. And they would say, 'Oh, there's somebody using the swings or somebody using the park right now. They're breaking lockdown rules'. And they would, you know, get a fine or whatever it is. So, if somebody is using the park in that context it's probably because they don't

have access to their own garden, and most likely the person making that phone call has their own garden. So, I think that idea of being privileged enough to be resilient is something that's probably worth bearing in mind.

John: I think that resilience has a political dimension in our country as well in the sense that there was for a longtime kind of directive to schools to take up resilience guidelines and educate children for resilience at the same time as the government is imposing really draconian austerity on already very poor people. So, although I'm drawn to it in the sense of, we know of children who've been in really drastic situations—you can see examples of children's resilience sadly every night on the TV screen and coming in from Ukraine—and there is something in that. But the political use of the word resilience is to be resisted, I think.

When Julia and I and the other team members were talking, Yinka Olusoga came up with 'resourcefulness' as a kind of a word to capture more than resilience, because resourcefulness suggests the use of available resources, be they linguistic or material or spatial to play in some way. So, we've begun to use resourcefulness as well, haven't quite let go of resilience, but I have so many caveats to do with giving in to austerity as being a good idea.

Document Changing Culture

John continues: So, our concept for the chapter was to present a series of images as a photo essay. But when I was thinking about it, it drove me into the literature about what a photo essay does, and how it can be used in terms of representing a psychological state, a personal state, a creative state. So perhaps the most famous example would be the dust bowl photographs by Walker Evans that accompanied James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Beyond the gendered language from that time, it was, you know, landless farmers, and some of those images are so striking. It was an enormous kind of photo essay. I wanted to choose twelve images that represented, broadly speaking, the different kinds of things that came into the wonderful survey environment that was designed by the Sheffield team to welcome

families and children in, and so the images that I selected were of that nature. They showed public art. They showed private spaces. They showed children interacting with screens. They showed things that children made on screen.

So, the light bulb moment really is to see the variety, to look at the ways in which screens were used, to remember that in the early days of the various lockdowns UNICEF said, 'Children, play with screens!' after years of saying, 'Children, don't play with screens!' Suddenly, it was okay. It was like permission had been given. So now, of course, screens are bad again. It's come back round the other way, unless it's educational software.

I was thinking about the differences between categorization and thematic analysis. So, when you're a qualitative researcher and when you're an archivist with an eye on the future and heritage, how do those two things work together? That's been in the DNA of the Play Observatory which has led to some really interesting conversations about what we do. And a complicating factor for us was that there was also an exhibition in which there's like a third layer of interpretation, which is by a kind of public-facing youth museum, called the Young V&A, formerly the Museum of Childhood, appending their own kind of categorizations to what we were looking at and how the interpretation process works. What is the audience, and how do you go through it, and how do you preserve the child's voice?

Katriina: I guess it's a matter of personal survival, to deal with this through researching it. I'm making sense out of being a playing human amidst this kind of crisis.

Nicolas: One thing that I'm curious about and have looked at a fair bit is the idea of rules, and there were various kinds of rules during the pandemic. There was, you know, the sort of physical rules imposed, given the fact that there is this virus that could kill any one of us. And then there's also governmental rules, and then there's also the embedded rules of various games that we play. One of the most interesting things for me was probably one of the funnest to read, examples of play from some of our contributors where people

described when they were breaking rules, and when they were breaking lockdown rules. And the sort of glee with which they were saying it, such as this one person's talking about a ninety-three-year-old woman who holds cocktail parties in her flat. I wonder to what extent that made its way across all the other examples here, if rules came up at all, and rule breaking?

Anna: It certainly came up in my chapter on techno-mischief, the microanalysis of a Zoom play date. There was a deliciousness in subtle and selected rule breaking.

Julia: Some of the early reports of Coronavirus Tag, the chase game that seems to have been very widely disseminated during this time and seems to have just cropped up in the minds of so many children simultaneously, virtually overnight, I was able to find evidence via Twitter, which is not the most neutral source of evidence, that it was weaponized by some who didn't want kids to go back to school again, and in all sorts of tweets. There were accounts of children who actually, despite the fact that they were actually being told the rules, and the rules were literally that that they mustn't touch, they mustn't get within two metres of each other, and so on, teachers are saying they went straight out. They had the assembly. They were told the rules. They went straight out into the playground, and they began tagging each other by coughing on each other.

They absolutely seemed to be subversive, oppositional and challenging. They were playing with those rules in their own games with rules. And it really struck me that this wasn't just tabloidism. It was actually something that was happening, to some extent. Tag is just so widespread. It is iconic of children's sociability and interaction in those school settings, and this seemed to threaten the game. It has this whole metaphor of contagion and yet it paradoxically was threatening their whole sociability at the time.

Anna: Do you think it was because they felt it was so extreme? The limitations? They used this aggressive coughing as they had nothing left to interact with?

Play's Purpose Is Not to Have a Single Purpose

Suzanne: One of the things that I've learned through my own research, and lots of other people have found this as well, is that play supports multiple aspects of development, cognitive development, socio-emotional development, and physical development, and it's not just school where learning and development takes place, even academic development. So many aspects of play support academic development and I think getting that importance of play, getting that knowledge to policymakers and to a lot of educators, I think would be really valuable.

I think it ties in with Covid because there's a lot of pushing around [the idea of] learning loss, and it is important, you know—a lot of children, a lot of families have suffered to a certain extent. But I think the amount of learning loss may depend on the individual child, the family, the stage that they're at in school. In Ireland, the lockdowns went on for quite a period of time, but what we found was that actually there was a lot of play going on, and that this was supporting multiple aspects of development. So, while there might have been learning loss in school, there was a lot of learning taking place through play.

Nevena: What was most important for us was that play functions as an opportunity together. Together. So, I think that a lot of people today look at play as some sort of benefit, of course, but for individual children, that they will learn something, and children will gain some sort of cognitive skills or something else. But that's just like marginal stuff. The most important thing is the opportunity together, and to really work together on something that is different, something that is beyond the context into which we are put.

Julia: I think it surprised me how productive these discussions have been in actual fact, and how they helped us. I also like the fact that they are multivocal, you know this is collaborative with so many voices, co-produced. So, it's not actually one person's or two people's points of view. It's interesting to have this kind of thing. There's probably a word for this but I don't know what it is, but you know some sort of metaphor for all these different points, intersecting and diverging and so on. And I think that's a good way to finish.