Chapter 2

Toddlers' Outdoor Play, Imagination and Cultural Formation

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Abstract Discussion on toddlers' outdoor play practices in various cultural spaces is rare in literature. In Australia, toddlers' physical development and well-being is promoted but less attention is given to cultural nuances of outdoor play. We ask the question: *How does outdoor play impact on toddlers' imagination and cultural formation?* Conducted in three Australian long day care (LDC) sites, an ethically approved project "*Studying babies and toddlers: Cultural worlds and transitory relationships*" examines the process of three Australian toddlers' outdoor enculturation. The concepts of imagination and play from Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory are drawn upon in relation to Hedegaard's institutional practices model, to link contextual relations between society, community and family. Cultural formation processes in toddlers' outdoor play, we argue, are more completely understood when daily life across home and local community is acknowledged. Data findings illustrate complexity of movement and experimentations in cultural conditions, where different spaces hold possibilities for imaginative transformations in toddler's play. Implications suggest toddlers' imaginative and culturally responsive outdoor play aligns with availability of interested adult/peers, shared family and community values, and varied local spaces. In this way, affective and dynamic outdoor interactions imbue cultural formation of toddler's play and imagination with local personal meaning.

Keywords Toddlers · Outdoor play · Imagination · Cultural formation

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2.1 Introduction

...no development – that of the child included – in the condition of modern civilized society can be reduced merely to the development of natural inborn processes and the morphological changes conditioned by the same: it includes, moreover, that social change of civilized forms and methods which help the child in adapting itself to the conditions of the surrounding civilized community. (Luria, 1994, pp. 46–56)

The aim of this chapter is to consider how the child changes socially and transforms according to the surrounding community; specifically the local outdoor environment, the home, and the local community. The social changes referred to by Luria (1994) include interactions and relationships occurring with family members. These socially interactive changes bring unique qualities to the morphological changes, embodied by toddlers in our study. These changes happen when toddlers use their bodies and relationships with others, to imaginatively transform themselves and the adults they relate to.

The focus of the chapter is on exploring and imagining the outdoor social environment that surrounds three Australian toddlers; two in Australia and one visiting China. A recent trend in research of outdoor spaces and outdoor environments suggests that these are dynamic places which afford many learning opportunities for children's (toddlers) exploration (Little, Elliot, & Wyver, 2017; Mackey, 2017). Such outdoor learning opportunities offer toddlers a chance for connecting with adults in relation to place, and for deep engagement with the beyond human-world (Robertson, Chan, & Fong, 2018). The outdoor environment and dimensions of place are also critical in relation to the quality of toddler's play explorations (Jeavons, 2017). Parents and teachers are most important for engaging in supportive and respectful conversations with toddlers and the decisions they make about the natural world, where a consideration of the cultural context is vital (Mackey, 2017). Therefore, we argue, that in studying outdoor play and the imaginative social environment in which toddlers engage, consideration of cultural formation in their natural worlds, is highly relevant (Mackey, 2017).

The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to understanding how cultural formation involves many perspectives and dimensions of toddlers' imagination in outdoor play activities. Outdoor play interactions have an affective and temporal reference point for new considerations of the processes of toddlers' cultural formation in outdoor play.

This chapter is situated in a multicultural societal context, and involves three families living in Australia, who draw on different cultural histories and practices. The term multicultural societal context in Australia refers to the notion that citizens have multiple cultural backgrounds. We find that the most recent Australian Census data (2017) shows nearly half Australians (49%) were born overseas or one or both parents had been born overseas. This highlights the rich cultural diversity of Australian Society, recognized as central to national identity. Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) (2019, p. 1–3) guides national quality standards with statements that support the positive experiences for very

young children being in the natural outdoor environment. Learning and development are promoted in statements like: “early opportunities to engage in natural outdoor play” (2019, p. 2) can support toddlers’ sense of belonging to the world, and be foundational to their exploratory interests and sensory experiences.

We argue in this chapter, that Australian and Chinese traditions of outdoor life may be used as a basis for exploring the question: *how does outdoor play impact on toddlers’ imagination and cultural formation?*

2.2 Theoretical Grounding

A number of cultural-historical researchers have studied and questioned children’s worlds and their everyday lives shared with others (Aronsson, Hedegaard, Hojholt, & Ulvik, 2018). In particular, Hedegaard (2018) suggests young children actively contribute to their learning through participation in different institutional practices across home and daycare settings. Young children not only contribute to their families’ everyday activities, but families also have traditions that relate to their particular society (Hedegaard, 2018). While Hedegaard’s (2018) argument suggests that traditions can also bring demands, tensions and conflicts, we notice that when toddlers explore their environment, this also leads to what is referred to as motive orientations that are directed towards an aspect of everyday life. Motives influence a person’s action (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2014) and in toddlers, the dynamic aspects of their active play are culturally embodied in their learning (Sikder, 2017). In very young children, Trevarthen (2011) emphasizes that family values and intuitive abilities are present from birth. Vadeboncoeur, Perone, and Panina-Beard (2016) locate the expression of active play practices and the values that support them, within a young child’s everyday social conditions. In this chapter, we examine how three toddlers actively express their bodily transformations through innate impulses, intuitions, imaginative choices and aesthetic inclinations, in outdoor play.

The social environment is a source of development for the young child’s learning (Veresov, 2017). The social environment, both indoors and out, is the toddler’s social world. The relations that occur in the social environment are a point for starting to think about the toddler’s social situation of development (Edwards, Fler, & Bottcher, 2019). The social situation of development was an important concept for Vygotsky’s theory as it foregrounded both the young child’s cultural and institutional context and lived experience in their social environment (Fler & Hedegaard, 2010; Hedegaard, 2019).

2.2.1 Socio-cultural Experience

The social environment has a unity of personal and environmental characteristics that give rise to awareness or consciousness (e.g. Veresov, 2017). Therefore, the social situation of development includes the sociocultural environment that brings qualitative changes in the toddler through their awareness and interpretation. We argue that this is represented in the toddlers' outdoor environment and forms part of family culture and community settings.

Parker-Rees (2017) proposes that researchers think more about how 2 year olds, (the age of the participating toddlers) are "encouraged and enabled to participate in social communities" (p. 1). He introduces the notion of 'minding' as being more than the conventional meaning of, for example, caring. He brings focus to the shared attention and intention in the toddler's daily interactions with others. In particular, the way toddlers negotiate meaning is considered to flow backwards and forwards. In this ebb and flow of the toddler's meanings and interests with others, there grows an understanding of the group. Similarly, the feeling of togetherness is achieved when the toddler is in concert with others as a "collective subject" (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2014, p. 46). Therefore, it is important to know more about how toddlers interact with others and negotiate their ideas in outdoor activity.

2.2.2 Imagined and Embodied Transformations

Much of the toddler's sociocultural environment is formed creatively and with imagination that is considered central to cultural continuity and change (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016). Imagination weaves past memories and experiences with what is imagined possible for the future, therefore enabling young children to act in their current environment (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016). Imagination is essential for human activity and gives rise to creative expressions, contributing to cultural transformation of the individual. Culture also involves experiences, artefacts and narratives that enable young children to collectively imagine with others (Vadeboncoeur et al., 2016).

Vygotsky (1966) explains that young children's play "is imagination in action" (p. 3) and there exists a dual affective plane that embodies the child's own ideas, feelings and actions. The imaginary actions of the play situation affect them, and through that, they make their meanings. Extending this idea, the toddlers' affective actions trigger imaginative responses as they find ways to embody, coordinate and respond to new and imagined social situations (Quiñones, Li, & Ridgway, 2017, p. 176).

In the situation of giving sensitive support to a toddler in a playful event, a parent for example, can bring together interpretation and personal imagining that reflects the special kind of responsive reciprocity that unifies external activity into internal thinking. This process becomes embodied in consequent responses for toddlers

(Ridgway, Quiñones, & Li, 2017). Parents or grandparents usually have specialized cultural knowledge present in their natural locations; therefore, toddlers and families can realize cultural learning through shared actions (Ridgway et al., 2017).

The next section provides an account using visual methodology to illuminate stories that capture toddlers' outdoor play in different sociocultural environments that show impact on their imagination.

2.3 Method: Visual Narrative Methodology

Research data from a project "*Studying babies and toddlers: Cultural worlds and transitory relationships*" (Li, Quiñones, & Ridgway, 2016) undertaken in an Australian setting, is used in this chapter to elaborate enculturation processes embodied in toddlers' outdoor play participation. The project studied babies and toddlers relating to their world in the first 3 years of life and explored how these first relations with the world are important for learning and for understanding their perspectives.

The three researchers were in a socially unique position methodologically to undertake this research. Each researcher came from a different cultural background, yet had shared time, visual methods and theoretical thinking together. Rich discussions on play, family life and pedagogical practices accompanied by frequent sharing of video clips, enabled multiple interpretations from differing perspectives. Trust and collegiality characterized the researchers' interactions and their shared intentions grew.

Visual narrative methodology uses images paired with home video transcripts and rich descriptions of play (Ridgway, Li, & Quiñones, 2016), to capture toddlers' outdoor play in a variety of local spaces. Data illustrate the complexity of movement and explorative experimentation in outdoor spaces within different cultural conditions. The outdoor spaces all hold possibilities for imaginative transformations through toddlers' play actions. Importantly, such spaces embrace available social interaction for toddlers.

In the case examples, toddlers' relations to their outdoor environments involve change and transformation, which in turn, motivate their new activity and new learning. Data of toddlers' interactions with their social environment, generated through use of video and still images were recorded by the research team and included 1.5 h of interview data with each family. When reviewed in collaboration by the research team, these data illuminated the toddlers' active explorations of local spaces and their orientation towards imaginative and expressive embodiment of what they noticed closely in new outdoor places.

The Australian toddlers aged 20-months to 2 years came from different cultural backgrounds. Their families were visited at home and interviewed there with one or more family members present. They were video observed at home and in routine outdoor play with family members present. Families shared their toddlers' experiences that included participation in neighborhood walks, community parkland play,

playground activity and exploration of a home garden. Outdoor cultural experiences in the toddlers' daily routines usually occurred within proximity of adult or peer support, in family, home and community contexts. Adult and/or peer presence extended the conversations initiated or prompted toddlers' explorative activity, re-activity and responses to outdoor experiences.

The following three vignettes from our research data, illustrate the different cultural contexts of the participating Australian toddlers. To contextualize these activities meaningfully, the research reported is based on spontaneous family and community activity data, collected by research team in daily life naturalistic settings. The research team observed that when the toddlers' daily activity was anchored in locally situated outdoor spaces, each toddler became embodied and wholly oriented to the immediate world being experienced. The three participating toddlers' stories are interwoven in this chapter.

2.4 Story One: Toddler Luci (2 Years Old)

Luci is an Australian born toddler whose parents and grandparents were also born in Australia. Her family home although close to the city, is located opposite community parkland and playgrounds familiar to her. This local parkland offers two enclosed playgrounds specially designed, with one for toddlers and the other for older children. The choice of where to play however is made spontaneously by toddler and adult and can depend on whether or not there are other children in the particular playground. All ages use both playgrounds. Grandparents also bring toddlers there.

Winding pathways and grassy plantings in both playground spaces invite exploration both off and on the gravel pathways and areas covered by tanbark (Fig. 2.1). Both playgrounds, internally defined with surrounding grassy tussocks and low-growing flowering plants, are used for hiding games and insect searches. The

Fig. 2.1 Hide and seek in grassy tussock with grandpa

playgrounds comply with council regulation fencing and there are contained areas (Fig. 2.2) surrounded by grassy treed areas for active running, dancing and ball play. The parkland located around the two playgrounds has a central barbeque area. This area encourages community and family gatherings and is frequently used for barbeques and picnics. These outdoor facilities adjoin a walking track that leads to a community garden. Luci's mother has a plot in the community garden where local families share collectively grown vegetables and herbs, and harvest from established fruit trees. This is a long-held community tradition of providing allocated food growing spaces for families who live in the area. The community garden is well fenced (Fig. 2.3).

Luci sees a ripe mulberry in the garden (Fig. 2.4). She stretches up to reach the ripe fruit. With the mulberry's purple colour already on her fingers and around her mouth, she expresses with her whole physical being, a look of joyful anticipation of further taste rewards that mulberry fruit can bring.

Curiosity is a driving force and evident in toddlers. One morning Luci noticed that something new had appeared in the park opposite her home. A familiar playground tree had been transformed with a little door and a sign that read Fairy Door. Luci's hands clasped together reflecting delight and excitement. A huge smile lit up her small face (Fig. 2.5). In order to explore further she climbed up to the seat that surrounded the tree for a closer look. The tiny construction attached to the tree now included a small door, entrance garden with flowers and a Fairy Door sign above it.

Luci's response is visible in her animated stance and gestures. The surprise, excitement and the sheer magic of this moment, was transformative for Luci and her family.

Fig. 2.2 Enclosed playground

Fig. 2.3 Community garden

Fig. 2.4 Luci picked a mulberry

Over the next days and weeks, further additions continued to transform the imagined yet real tiny fairyland community. It began a life of its own in the community park space. One day Luci brought a torch to shine on this growing Fairy Door world, to shed light on the tiny details (Fig. 2.6). Small blue rocks had appeared as pavers in the little fairy garden yard and a miniature mushroom was placed in there. Each day Luci's wonderment unfolded in the magical ongoing changes that created further curiosity and anticipation. The fairy world was real for her. The park tree and its platform now had a new purpose and new meaning for Luci. It transformed how

Fig. 2.5 Luci noticed a fairy door

Fig. 2.6 Torch to see fairy door transformation

she played and her imagination. From the process of physically climbing onto the platform and walking around the tree, she reworked the physicality of this, and with her new experiences, entered a conceptual, abstracted and culturally imaginative fairy world. The intriguing fairy door tree brought new surprises, as over time, community users of the park added little blue paving stones and a miniature toadstool to the fairy door garden. Luci shone her torch to look closely at the fairy door and its changing garden (Fig. 2.6).

The design of the fairy door space and its carefully constructed placement in an area known to local children, gives rise to the notion of magical and imaginative learning spaces that transform and nurture young children's imagination and who might provide them. The community *caring* and *minding* that Parker-Rees (2017) refers to is exemplified here. The impact of this community experience is culturally embodied in Luci's expressions and her whole personal demeanor.

2.5 Story Two: Silvia (2 Years Old)

Silvia was born in Australia into a Mexican immigrant family. Silvia's home is located in a semi-rural community in Australia. Local places for experimentation and exploration are the home environment with a growing garden. The outdoors is an environment that offers Silvia freedom of movement and experimentation with the land. Silvia participates with her family in the garden and visits the community park, cemetery and train station. The family garden is expansive, as her parents have undergone a recent renovation in their family home. On these days, they focus on taking out weeds, moving materials. Silvia explores the garden alongside her dad and mum, while singing, moving about and finding insects. Silvia is curious and imagines how insects move and in particular, she imagines the physical embodiment of snail movements.

The following case example shows the toddler's daily activities anchored in family life. In the case example, the daily activity shows toddler embodiment and imaginative expressions and experiences with garden snails. The outside garden offers many possibilities for exploration and over time, it became part of the family's values. Silvia spends considerable time outdoors, and is able to experience and observe first-hand the family home physical changes in the outdoor garden. Dad comments, *"I spend a lot of time outside with her... a lot of things we've been through with the renovation and all that... But Silvia I think, I don't know, she's learning with us how too... she knows the – daddy's materials... She understands... and she brings her own child tools"* (Father's interview).

The following example takes place in the afternoon. Silvia has already played in the park with her mum and now they join dad who is working outside in the garden. Silvia was playing outside while her dad was pulling weeds from the outdoor patio tiles.

Silvia said in excitement (Fig. 2.7): *a boing!*

Fig. 2.7 Silvia and dad on patio pulling weeds and placing swing in tree

Fig. 2.8 Silvia took a closer look at the snail

Dad: *a boing?*

Mum said to dad and then to Silvia: *Yes, a boing's that is how she calls the swing. Just like the one in the park Silvia!*

Dad continued placing the swing and said, *I think this branch is strong; we can place it here.*

Silvia explored the space and dad continued to place the swing. While this happens, Silvia continued singing and looked at the patio tiles as she picked weeds. She stopped for a moment, she looked at the floor, and she found a snail.

Silvia looked at the snail closely (Fig. 2.8) and asked her mum: *what is it, what is it?* There is much silence and contemplation, when her mother did not answer. She was trying to think what it was. They both looked at the snail.

Fig. 2.9 Silvia moves like a snail

Fig. 2.10 Silvia moves like a snail and says hello to the snail

Silvia narrated very slowly to her mum: *she moves, she moves, she moves her tail* and then physically and imaginatively, Silvia embodied the snail's movements (Fig. 2.9).

Silvia's embodied movements were as if she was being the snail (Fig. 2.9).

Silvia: *She moves her tail, she moves her tail.*

Mum looked surprised at the unexpected embodiment, laughed and smiled saying: *oh darling!* Silvia smiled back. Silvia looked at her mum with excitement and pointed to the snail.

Mum: *She moves the tail, the snail. How does the snail move?*

Silvia moved again shaking her bump. She extended her movements by showing how the snail walked.

Silvia extended her movements and paid attention to her feet, moving them closer together (Fig. 2.10).

Mum: *You move your tail like the snail!*

Silvia to mum: *yes!*

Silvia now related and talked to the snail: *hello!* Then she sang a song. She looked at what her dad was doing. Mum and dad's discussions related to the recycled windows that dad was moving. Silvia's mum and dad joined with Silvia in singing: *where is mum, where is dad, here he is, here she is? Where is dad? There he is? Where is the moon? Here is the moon?*

Outdoor play and exploration were present in Silvia's everyday life. Silvia imagined and related to the snail and related to her parent's everyday interest of being in the family's expansive garden. Silvia's cultural formation involved being with her family exploring outdoors, showing cultural interest in materials and being curious towards creatures that surrounded her family home. Contemplating and observing the snail were important moments for Silvia. Silvia's mother's silence and surprise about Silvia's snail embodiment was present when mother says, *Oh darling!* rather than providing a response to Silvia, she asserts that she moves like a snail.

2.6 Story Three: El (2.7 Years Old)

El was born in Australia from a Chinese immigrant family. El travels to China to visit his grandparents once a year during a family holiday. On his second visit to China, when El was 2 years and 7 months old, he visited his grandparents for 2 weeks. He became very interested and curious about grandpa's daily Tai Chi play. His grandparents live in a small community with four high apartment buildings, in a capital city in Northeast China.

The people living in the community have a regular exercise time every day after dinner. Grandpa routinely played Tai Chi. El went to the community playground with grandpa every day after dinner. Grandpa started playing Tai Chi when particular background music came through an MP3 device.

El asked with much curiosity, Grandpa: *What are you doing?* <外公, 你在做什么?>. Grandpa said, Tai Chi. It is very good for our body and health. <太极, 对我们的身体非常好>.

El observed closely and saw how grandpa moved his body.

Then El started to initiate his own movements by following the musical rhythms and responding to grandpa's movement (Fig. 2.11).

Figure 2.11 shows El's slow movement and his happiness in the shared moment. With a smile, he follows Grandpa's actions and said to his Mum: *Mum, Look at me!* <妈妈, 看我!> Then El kept moving with continued curiosity (Fig. 2.12) and amazement (Fig. 2.13) at the Tai Chi movements. Figure 2.14 showed El's aesthetic feelings of grace that guided him to explore his own movement with confidence. El's mum responded with a smile, *Very good movement!* <你做得好棒哦!> El enjoyed every movement with Chinese music and sounds in the environment. Many people from the community walked around after dinner.

Fig. 2.11 El embodies and imagines Tai Chi movements

Fig. 2.12 El's curiosity

Tai Chi is one representative of Chinese traditional culture, which “appears to have its roots in systems of exercise and self-defence designed over the centuries to prevent illness of body and mind...for a method of living in harmony with the various overwhelmingly powerful forces in the world” (Kauz, 1974, pp. 10–11). In recent years, playing Tai Chi is a very popular practice for older people in China, who participate in groups in the community park or playground. It is often observed early in the morning or later in the afternoon, as part of Chinese people’s everyday life. Young children experience and explore community play with the older generation in the park. For El, it was his first time to observe and perform Tai Chi. His

Fig. 2.13 El's amazement **Fig. 2.14** The aesthetic feeling of grace

grandpa explained to him that 'Tai Chi is very good exercise in Chinese culture to support our health and well-being'. El told the story of his feeling about exercising with Tai Chi; a story, which can be perceived by his grandpa through the responsive performance, embodied actions and shared expressions, creatively imagined by El.

The playground with traditional Chinese decoration harmonised with the exercise of Tai Chi, which represents the Chinese culture. This influences young toddler El's sense of belonging and understanding of his heritage cultural knowledge transformed in his imaginative embodied actions.

2.7 Discussion

Insightful stories of everyday experiences (Jornet & Steier, 2015) help the researchers emphasize and analyze practical examples of toddler relations with different outdoor environments. Toddler's cultural, aesthetic, ephemeral, imaginative and embodied transformations, are the focus of our discussion. In this chapter, the child's outdoor world making is first introduced from the toddlers' perspectives including activities that characterize their choices, and their embodiment in varied cultural routines and contexts. In the three stories, we discover the toddlers' access to diverse outdoor spaces: Australian (Luci; Figs. 2.4 and 2.5) and Chinese (El; Fig. 2.11) community playgrounds, city community garden (Luci; Figs. 2.3 and 2.11) and family garden (Silvia; Fig. 2.7). All these shared places and moments with family offer potential affordances and opportunities for cultural formation, embodied imagination and learning. Cultural formation is achieved through children's exploration with adults together in the family practices. As explorers, three toddlers make meanings of their surroundings under the support of the adults, while they also achieve their cultural identity and learning.

2.7.1 *Cultural Formation in Toddlers' Outdoor Environment*

Hedegaard (2018) suggests that early participation relates to the children's world making which is explicitly anchored in daily life. Hedegaard notes how traditions bring demands to children and lead to creation of motive orientations that are aspects of everyday life. Toddler's motives as interests, are created with the family interest of their particular familial outdoor culture. The three toddlers' daily lives are wholly embraced within the cultural characteristics of family, home and community life. As Trevarthen (2017) proposed, "they (toddlers) are motivated to explore life in a community that will cultivate artificial cultural habits." (p. 201).

Taking into account the toddler's perspectives, as explorers, each of the three toddlers made meaningful understanding of their family traditions which formed part of their cultural formation in outdoor environments. Luci explored and played in the community playground and garden (Figs. 2.1, 2.5 and 2.6). Silvia's everyday world consisted of being curious to learn about creatures and materials and exploring with her family the garden surrounded by recycled materials for the house. She explored the garden (Figs. 2.7 and 2.8) with family, making imaginative transformations e.g. her embodiment of the snail (Figs. 2.9 and 2.10). El's interest in his family culture and Tai Chi for body and mind, imaginatively and joyfully embodied the movements (Figs. 2.12, 2.13 and 2.14) that he learns are good for health and well-being in the Chinese community.

In cultural-historical accounts of learning, mediated activity, driven by a child's curiosity in spaces of interest, is what Bligh and Crook (2017) refer to as Learning Spaces. The toddlers' playful and companionable family activities, characterized by

choice and family relationships can take in the animate and non-animate, proceed over time and space, include human and non-human elements, and involve aesthetics and memory. Adding to cultural-historical theory with a dialectical contextualization of space, place, and temporality, a perspective that uses a 'critical ecological ontology for inquiry' (Payne, 2017, p. 122), may bring further understanding of how the cultural contexts of the three toddlers' embodied engagement in outdoor activity, can bring wholeness of meaning to their everyday lives. Luci's imagined fairy world in the local parkland, Silvia's home life curiosity where she notices the non-human life of a snail on the outdoor tiles, and El's engagement, in grandfather's embodied actions and cultural movements of Tai Chi, all illustrate how cultural knowledge is imaginatively transformed in outdoor play. Three toddlers' exploration of community life confirmed that, "the development of shared cultural knowledge gives objects and actions social or moral values as well as practical or aesthetic ones" (Trevarthen, 2017, p. 202). The three toddlers' cultural formation included family traditions where curiosity and embodied imagination were present.

2.7.2 Family Members' Encouragement of Toddler's Imaginative Transformations Through Active Exploration in Outdoor Environments

The outdoor environment is a sociocultural place where toddler's culture and lived experiences are explored and formed in the social world outdoors (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010; Veresov, 2017; Vygotsky, 1998). We argue that the outdoor environment provides an active space for toddlers to express their own imaginary individual transformations. In toddlers' imaginary choices, aesthetics and impulses are present. They are often created with family members who can encourage their toddler's active outdoor explorations.

Family members can collectively imagine with the toddlers. Movements, imaginary actions and embodiment are creative expressions that contribute to the toddlers' individual transformations in outdoor environments. For Luci, the enclosed playground provides space for active exploration of the outdoors where she imagines hiding herself from grandpa in the grassy tussocks. Luci is also curious about the Fairy Door in her playground where she imagines playing in a fairy world. Silvia learnt that her mum keenly observes and contemplates her imaginary choices of embodiment of a snail. Silvia's mum showed her surprise and acknowledgement of the snail movements, as embodied imagination that allowed Silvia to imagine what it feels like to be a snail. Similarly, El was curious noticing the musical rhythms, embodied actions and movements of Tai Chi with his grandfather with his mother commenting on his good movements. As Parker-Rees (2017) suggests in the context of toddlers' participation, enabling and encouragement are important in social communities.

We extend and show through case examples, that curious noticing by toddlers requires an attentive gaze in order to transform their everyday world and further conceptualize and embody imaginary transformation. For example, we noticed Luci's active imagination of fairies living in a local tree (Figs. 2.5 and 2.6) and Silvia's imaginary embodied movement of snails, greeting the snail in the family garden (Fig. 2.10) and El's embodiment of Tai Chi moves (Figs. 2.11, 2.12, 2.13 and 2.14) that bring health and well-being into the toddler's life. All examples are illustrative of the sociocultural nature of outdoor environments because each story involved family members' active encouragement in exploration of the outdoor environment with the curious and imaginative toddlers.

The sociocultural outdoor environment enables children to imagine and act in their local environment. It offers them a place to enjoy interactive moments. Toddlers not only live their everyday lives with interested family members but they also imagine what is essential for their own interest and activity. As Vadeboncoeur et al. (2016) suggest this gives rise to individual creative expression and cultural transformation. The three toddlers joyfully, enthusiastically and with appreciation of their outdoor environment, give us an opportunity to reflect on cultural formation. As adults, we notice their embodied imagination, evident in the example of Silvia's mother who stays in silence and contemplation, absorbed by the moment, yet still able to encourage Silvia to move like a snail. The responsive movements between El and his grandpa encouraged El to experience shared joy, and thereby transform how he experiences himself and how people might interact with others in different ways.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter sought to determine how outdoor environments impacted on toddlers' embodied multi-cultural imagination and cultural formation in play. It was found that each outdoor play environment afforded the toddlers' imaginative exploration, which plays a vital role in their cultural formation. The three toddlers engaged in imaginative interactions, initially with fairy door land (Luci), then snail movement (Silvia), and lastly Tai Chi practice (El). The three toddlers also explored their local communities and engaged in the local outdoor environment with nature when, for instance, Luci went on an imaginary adventure in parkland, Silvia explored the family garden and El engaged with a cultural inquiry in a community space when he visited China. This study concluded that outdoor play in the community offered a pedagogical tool to support toddlers' exploration of their culture and importantly, that their play was also supported by the presence of adults in culturally bound local environments.

Implications are that the development of toddlers' imaginative, culturally responsive outdoor play, aligns with availability of interested adult/peers, shared family interests and community values, that occur in varied local spaces. Affective and dynamic outdoor interactions imbued the cultural formation of toddler's play and

imagination with local personal meaning. Having access to diverse outdoor spaces, therefore offers potential opportunities for toddlers' personal expression, imagination and cultural learning.

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