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PLAY BIRTH TO THREE
Treasure Baskets and Heuristic Play, the legacy of Elinor Goldschmied (1910–2009)

Anita M. Hughes and Jacqui Cousins

Introduction

Anita M. Hughes

I had the good fortune to work with Elinor Goldschmied in the early 1980s, when she was actively disseminating her ideas about the Treasure Basket in the UK. This collaborative work led to our research into the exploratory play of toddlers (10–20 months) which we named Heuristic Play. The Treasure Basket and Heuristic Play became widely known following the film we made, *Heuristic Play with Objects*, in 1992 and the publication of the book, *People Under Three* (Goldschmied and Jackson 1994). Elinor and I collaborated in film-making, training and research until she ‘retired’ at age 90 in the year 2000, but we were friends till her death in 2009.

Jacqui Cousins

Professional courses with the National Children’s Bureau (NCB) in 1987 provided training with Elinor Goldschmied whom I had known since my own challenging childhood. Elinor used the films referred to by Anita Hughes but, later, I watched her Italian films of 1952. This enabled me to discuss my diagnostic and therapeutic work and Elinor’s way of working with traumatised infants in a variety of settings. I had just started research on empowerment and autonomy from babyhood for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Thus began a rich professional relationship with Elinor as a ‘critical friend’.

Elinor Goldschmied

Elinor Goldschmied (1910–2009) was undoubtedly one of the greatest pioneers of the twentieth century in infant childcare, play and development. She introduced the Treasure Basket, Heuristic Play and the Key Person approach. Quick-witted, irreverent,
politically motivated from a left-wing position, she was ahead of her time regarding the philosophy and practice of childcare. Psychologically astute and disinterested in public acclaim, Elinor revelled in intellectual debate yet had no time for intellectual snobbery. She confounded all establishments, health, educational, social and political with her candid observations, outspoken views and down-to-earth practical approach. She became passionate about babies’ play and emotional well-being following her work in orphanages in Italy immediately after the Second World War (in the late 1940s) and was politically active all her life, seeking to inspire and influence good practice in childcare in Italy, Spain and the UK.

**The value of play: in search of a definition (Anita and Jacqui)**

Play is at the heart of being alive and it begins the moment a baby is born, during those first intimate moments of eye-to-eye contact between mother and baby, and play has a place in our lives till the day we die. Without play, using our bodies and minds in harmony, life lacks creativity, meaning and joy. The study of play as a focus of serious research took off in the second half of the twentieth century. In common with Elinor Goldschmied, the authors of this chapter each studied erudite explanations and examples of play in action and its great importance for the holistic and healthy development of all children.

Winnicott (1988: 55) wrote of play: ‘Play is immensely exciting. The thing about playing is always the precariousness of the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects.’ Play is precarious because it is about taking oneself out of one’s comfort zone and to the edge of what is familiar. It involves taking a leap into the unknown and requires feelings of trust and security in one’s environment and relationships. It is that leap which triggers those feelings of excitement and being fully alive.

Bettelheim (1987: 171) wrote of play: ‘Play is crucially important, because while it stimulates the child’s intellectual development, it also teaches him without his being aware of it the habits needed for such growth, such as stick-to-itiveness, which is so important in all learning. Perseverance is easily acquired around enjoyable activities such as self-chosen play. No skill is ever learnt and no artistic impulse is ever given expression without the ability to concentrate and persevere and we learn to concentrate best through self-chosen play.

Early childhood pioneers like Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel (1782–1852), Maria Montessori (1869–1952) and Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) exerted an international influence on early education while many others followed. Margaret Macmillan and Susan Isaacs each worked in the Froebelian tradition. When she was 18 years old, they guided Elinor in her training as a Froebelian teacher. They knew and understood her respectful view of childhood itself and the rights of all children to play and learn at their own pace.

Of course there were others who held that view. There still are. Deeply moving was a speech about this at a UN conference in 1978 when the 12-year gestation period for the UNCRC began. The Polish delegation celebrated the centenary of the birth of their hero, a brave Jewish doctor and writer Janusz Korczac. He chose to die with
his orphans at Treblinka but left compassionate words embedded in the UNCRC which still inspire us,

Children are not the people of tomorrow, but are people of today.
They have the right to be taken seriously,
And to be treated with tenderness and respect.
They should be allowed to grow into whoever they were meant to be –
‘The unknown person’ inside each of them is our hope for the future.

(Josephs 1999: 4)

In 1989, Elinor told that story again at an NCB meeting. She had made an immediate connection between those powerful words and a fundamental principle that underpins the daily practice of teachers in the Froebelian tradition. In 1987, Professor Tina Bruce, a leading Froebelian scholar, clarified that same ‘child-centred’ perspective. In her book, Early Childhood Education, she provided us with ten common principles worthy of further study as the bedrock of the early childhood tradition today. Despite so much political opposition in Britain where ‘play’ is so often misinterpreted and misunderstood, this first principle still underpins our professional work in the training and professional development of our teachers: ‘Childhood is seen as valid in itself, as part of life and not simply as preparation for adulthood. Thus education is seen similarly as something of the present and not just preparation and training for later’ (Bruce 1987: 10; 2015: 20).

In 1989, Dr Gillian Pugh, chief executive at the NCB, stressed that all agencies responsible for the play of young people needed to work together to agree a clear definition of ‘play’. That consultation process, guided by her, took months for such a large and disparate group to begin to share a common language and negotiate shared understandings.

The different age phases resulted in many differing perspectives and interpretations. It was inevitable that those with a responsibility for the play of children from babyhood to the age of eight focused much attention on their holistic development and the free-flow, imaginative or fantasy play at the heart of early childhood education in nurseries and schools. Those with more experience of the older children focused on sports activities and more structured games for time out of school.

A collaborative definition of ‘play’

Despite differences, a definition was achieved. Sadly in 2017 it is still ignored by many who have political power and responsibility for the emotional well-being, holistic development and learning of children in their early years and onwards.

Play is an essential part of every child’s life and vital to their development. It is the way children explore the world around them and develop and practise skills. It is essential for physical, emotional and spiritual growth, for intellectual and educational development, and for acquiring social and behavioural skills.

Play is a generic term applied to a wide range of activities and behaviours that are satisfying to the child, creative for the child and freely chosen by the child. Children’s play may or may not involve equipment or have an end
product. Children play on their own and with others. Their play may be boisterous and energetic or quiet and contemplative, light-hearted or very serious. Every child needs to play and has a right to play, but opportunities to play are often limited by external factors – discrimination, the effects of disability and special needs, insufficient space and environmental factors, poverty and other social conditions. Play services are the means by which new opportunities for play are created.

(National Children’s Bureau 1989)

Elinor shared with such colleagues attempting to define play many concerns about excessive political interference in our professional work. She described how Susan Isaacs in the 1930s put into action her ‘child-centred’ philosophy in her beautiful Cambridge school and garden which often challenged the status quo. Elinor spoke about the tangible trust and respect shown to the children by all the adults there. Children are born as young people not pressurised to grow up too soon.

The children Elinor said she had observed were totally free to choose and engage in all kinds of play. Some spent hours (like Elinor did as a child) with proper magnifying glasses to investigate every plant and living creature; others fantasised as they dressed up and invented their own imaginative worlds; one small boy climbed to the top of a shed roof and found a safe way to the ground – so much better than being lifted down.

Play and learning in the first three years of life (Anita)

In my book, *Developing Play for the Under 3s* (Hughes, 2016), I describe five aspects of learning, all of which relate to play. They are:

* Secure and loving relationships (Key Persons in group day care)
* A healthy balance between anxiety and curiosity
* Risk-taking effort and creative tension
* Feeling comfortable with making mistakes
* An appropriately stimulating environment

However, I feel it is worth examining a couple of these aspects in a little more detail. While curiosity is the driving force that underpins all learning, the ‘other face’ of curiosity is anxiety, which provides a natural caution that is a safety net when trying something new. As curiosity propels us outward, so anxiety holds us back and when the two are in healthy balance then action is bold, sensible and pleasurable. This push/pull emotional see-saw is something that is going on every day of our lives. In order to achieve and monitor a healthy balance for the youngest of babies and children they need secure and loving relationships with caregivers who are understanding, patient and non-intrusive but who can share in a child’s delight. (This is part of the Key Person’s role, which Elinor felt was so important in relation to the development of play.)

If a child has become ‘paralysed’ with anxiety and associated distress, he will not be able to play and be active. This means he will be unable to learn. If this
anxiety becomes prolonged, then memories will be stored in the amygdala (the part of the brain that controls emotional response) that will trigger the ‘flight’ or ‘freeze’ response whenever faced with those kinds of situations again.

(Hughes 2016:18)

Another aspect – vital for learning and play – is about the making of mistakes, which, for older children and adults, can become negatively associated with feelings of failure. However, it is only through the failure to achieve what you originally intend that you enjoy playing and can learn. This is because ‘making a mistake’ offers the opportunity to modify how an activity is carried out to achieve a desired intention. In this way new ideas and ways of doing things are discovered. Indeed, the most significant scientific discoveries (such as the discovery of penicillin) have been made through experiments ‘going wrong’ in the laboratory.

What I love about watching babies and young children playing is that they have no sense of failure, feeling perfectly competent and happy when (to the adult eye) their handling of objects or manipulating their bodies is clumsy or lacking in skill. Sadly it is through the socialisation from older children and adults that very young children learn that failure is something to be avoided and to feel ashamed about.

Thinking, learning and noticing

Thinking begins at the point of noticing; making a note in our minds about the presence of something and then deciding whether or not it is familiar. As thinking becomes more sophisticated, with the advent of language, then the object of what is noticed begins to be categorised. What is more, the affect (our emotional response) plays more and more of a part, where preference and avoidance also influence thinking and behaviour.

Noticing also arouses curiosity, stimulating an increased level of attention and interest. You cannot make someone curious about something, but you can draw their attention to it and help them to notice it. Recently I was walking in the woods and a friend drew my attention to an early solitary bluebell in bloom. I then found myself noticing green clumps of sprouting leaves and individual bluebells everywhere. The more I looked, the more bluebells I saw! I then became curious about the details of the flowers’ exquisite appearance. I had walked in those woods many times but had never really paid such close attention to the bluebells before.

A key contributor to the development and understanding of children’s play and learning was Jean Piaget (1896–1980). Influenced by Darwin’s theories of evolution, Piaget became fascinated with the notion that children’s play is a developmental process and suggested that children naturally go through four distinct stages of development, which has dominated developmental theories ever since and even influences educational policymaking today. Piaget also believed that children were not passive, waiting to have knowledge given to them; rather, they were more like little scientists who, through self-directed experimenting (doing and thinking), were constructing their own meaning, understanding and reality in the world.

Piaget named the first stage of development as the Sensorimotor Stage (from birth to two years), where infants learn through exploration of the world using their five
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senses. The Treasure Basket is a resource for the seated baby (5–10 months) and the open-ended materials for facilitating Heuristic Play provide the best opportunity for learning at this stage.

Elinor Goldschmied and the Treasure Basket

Elinor also held the belief that children could and should learn for themselves and was keen that even before a baby could move about, they should be given the opportunity to reach and choose items to explore and experiment with. It was with this in mind that Elinor came up with the idea of the Treasure Basket when she was working in orphanages in Italy in the late 1940s. These babies had no toys and were being offered no sensory stimulation whatsoever. However, the value of a Treasure Basket transcends culture and era and its principle is relevant to all babies anywhere.

You will probably find a Treasure Basket in most early childhood settings in the UK as it has become widely known about. The concept of the Treasure Basket is brilliantly simple, yet to this day it is regularly misunderstood. I hope to explain it in clear and practical terms that Elinor would have appreciated. Ideally the basket itself should be a round, low and rigid-sided wicker basket (with no handles) of about 30 cms in diameter and 12 cms in height, filled with between 80 and 100 different items, safe and small enough for a seated baby to handle, but varied in substance, texture, appearance and smell. Items can be made from leather, wood, fabric, rubber, metal and glass alongside the wondrous objects that can be found in the natural environment such as shells, pebbles and pine cones. It is best to avoid any objects made from plastic: they are not only dull in taste, smell and texture, but a baby’s world has enough plastic in it as it is.

Remember too how babies learn initially through all their senses so they will need simple objects which appeal to each of the five. Watch how many of these simple, natural materials go straight into their tiny mouths. Observe too the different personality traits in evidence. There will be babies who simply sit and watch while others throw everything out of the basket or cling on to only one thing of great interest. The babies are in charge but we the adults have the responsibility to keep them safe and provide things to encourage their innate curiosity, appeal to their interest and curiosity, and enable them to develop and enjoy learning as they play.

It is a basic human urge to make sense of our world, find meaning in it and to feel some control over it. When babies, at around 4 months, begin to reach out in order to grasp and hold objects, they are taking their first step towards physical control and recognition of their surroundings. Their play is all about examining and getting to know the characteristics of any objects that come within their reach. They do this by looking, holding, shaking, banging or mouthing them. If a baby had language they would be asking, ‘What is this object like?’ The Treasure Basket provides scores and scores of possible sensory experiences that are exciting, interesting and immensely satisfying for a curious baby at the mouthing stage (around 5–10 months). What is more, this exploratory activity is constantly creating new and vital neuronal connections in a baby’s developing brain, facilitating accelerated learning and intelligent thinking.

We need to recognise the importance of offering the Treasure Basket in an atmosphere of love, safety and unrushed peacefulness and that the baby is with someone
with whom they have a securely attached relationship. The caregiver needs to be sitting, in comfort, close to the baby and to be responsive and attentive without unnecessary chatter or the intrusive offering of materials. Our society has become obsessed with the notion that there should be a continuous verbal commentary to ensure babies develop satisfactory language skills. While babies do need to hear language and be offered plenty of social interaction, they also need peace and quiet in order to be able to think and concentrate. Playing with objects in the Treasure Basket is largely non-social and a baby’s pleasure and satisfaction is derived directly through sensory contact with those objects. Concentration and learning is disrupted when caregivers either initiate comment or select and hand items to the baby. If more than one baby is playing beside the same basket, some early social exchanges and copying (like shaking an object) between babies is often observed, but this is done at the babies’ instigation. It is also important that the caregiver feels comfortable with all the objects in the basket to avoid communicating any unnecessary anxiety. If not, then it is better that the object of concern (for the adult) is removed.

The Treasure Basket also offers choice of which, whether and when to pick up objects, giving a baby his first experience of selecting and decision making. Contrary to popular belief, 100 objects are not overwhelming and we have regularly observed babies urgently rummage to select a new item from a familiar basket! One of the striking features of a baby’s play with a Treasure Basket is focused concentration and a baby can easily concentrate for forty minutes or more, laying the foundation of a much needed skill. Concentration is enhanced by the shared pleasure between caregiver and baby through mutual glances, smiles and gestures.

It should be made clear here that the Treasure Basket is not suitable for a toddler. The items will simply get scattered. (In a group day-care context babies and toddlers need to be separated for Treasure Basket play.) However the Treasure Basket can have great value for older children (from age three onwards) and Sue Gascoyne (2012) has written an excellent book about this.

**Heuristic Play (Anita)**

When a baby begins to move about, their curiosity about the world of objects (and indeed their own body) begins to change. If they had language they would ask, ‘What can I do with this object?’

The word ‘heuristic’ derives from the Greek word ‘eurisko’ meaning to discover, find or gain an understanding. Heuristic also refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience. This is exactly what toddlers of 10–20 months are doing in their play. A toddler wants to make things happen. They develop an interest in causality, the cause-and-effect relationships between objects. They want to explore the effect of their actions upon objects. To begin with, things seem random and in chaos but soon patterns and order emerge. Different outcomes stimulate thinking and a greater understanding about the nature of different materials. Greater understanding is immensely satisfying and motivating. So failing to get a brick to bounce, for example, or a large ball to slide down a small tube generates curiosity and it certainly does not imply failure! Heuristic Play is more
than a set of typical actions with objects: it is a natural and creative way of living and is the basis of all future problem-solving, scientific and mathematical learning.

Young children will be experimenting in a whole range of different ways: filling and emptying, slotting, selecting and discarding. Posting, piling and balancing, rolling, pushing, throwing and shaking. Recognising differences and similarities and pairing like with like. There is also banging and the beginning of tool use, screwing and unscrewing, sequencing and repeating cause and effect. Through all this activity and experimentation they are mastering the learning tools for life.

They learn about concepts such as rollability, flexibility, rigidity, one and many, size differences, creating patterns, movement, the resistant quality of materials and many more fundamental concepts. The magic is that these concepts are being understood before the use of expressive language. There is also a place for providing Heuristic Play sessions for older children (2–4-year-olds), provided only open-ended materials are on offer and the principles of setting up the play session are the same as for toddlers, which include the adults staying quiet but responsive.

**Materials to promote Heuristic Play**

Containers are an extremely important starting point, as filling and emptying, together with moving objects from one place to another are activities of primary interest. Some suggestions for containers could include tins (of various shapes and sizes), yoghurt pots, cardboard or wooden boxes, slide boxes, egg boxes, flower pots, purses, handbags, baskets and even wide-topped plastic bottles. Objects can be natural, household or recycled and the list from the Treasure Basket is a good starting point (Hughes 2016: 47–50). The difference between the Treasure Basket and materials for Heuristic Play is that there is only one of each object in the basket, but one needs plenty of the same objects for Heuristic Play.

When a good collection of tins, containers and materials has been put together you are ready to start a Heuristic Play session. Storing materials in ‘shoe bag’ type drawstring bags is ideal. For a nursery setting it is suggested one should aim to provide the group with ten to fifteen bags each with each containing fifty or so items of the same type. In this way, there is plenty of material for a small group. Collections of items might include large corks, keys, shells, chains, balls, curtain rings and so on. It is best if the material is brought out for a specific play session, otherwise it will become muddled up with other play things. Ideally it would be wonderful to offer a daily Heuristic Play session, but in practice this may not be possible. The important thing is for practitioners to plan with colleagues scheduled sessions when they and their children can be uninterrupted for about an hour.

**Setting up a Heuristic Play session**

1. A clear space (preferably carpeted) is necessary, emptied of other play material and undisturbed by other activities.
2. Provide a comfortable adult chair for the Key Person.
3. When setting out materials, use the whole space to avoid crowding of the children.
To maintain interest, vary the collections of materials you put out at any one time.

For each child in the group three containers (preferably large tins) are adequate. Always provide containers at each session.

The adult facilitates play by sitting quietly and attentively, only responding if a child offers something or is in some kind of difficulty.

It can be helpful to provide a large cardboard box nearby, if a child begins to kick or throw any of the materials. The adult can then encourage the child to place (rather than throw) items into the box, directing their energies to more purposeful ‘filling’.

It has been calculated that if one child is given four bags, each containing fifty items, they could (theoretically) create 1,387,142 combinations!

It is helpful for the adult to do unobtrusive re-ordering of the material when necessary, maintaining an inviting appearance in the space.

Allow about an hour for a Heuristic Play session with twenty minutes of that time set aside for joint ‘clearing up’ with the children. (They love this as it is a great ‘sorting’ and ‘filling’ activity in its own right.)

**Treasure Baskets and Heuristic Play: Vision into Action (Jacqui)**

In 1989, I was able to stay with Elinor and watch her early Italian films of 1952. This was (for many, many reasons) one of the most moving experiences in my life. Elinor was aware that I was going to work in a paediatric clinic in Göttingen, Germany to help with small groups of Romanian orphans and their young inexperienced carers. Elinor and I spent long hours together while she shared her way of working with the traumatised infants shown in her films. She knew that I would have very limited materials but would be able to use (as she always did) imagination, creativity, insatiable curiosity and love for humanity, to bridge gaps in my resources. We discussed how Treasure Baskets and Heuristic Play might be used in a diagnostic way and for playful therapeutic work in a variety of settings.

I shared with Elinor how I had already put some of my vision into action with very disadvantaged and depressed inner-city communities. Of particular interest was how beneficial Treasure Baskets had been to those very young mothers who had little space at home and very limited resources, such as the Traveller and Gypsy mothers with whom I had previously worked in Plymouth. They had very lively babies and other young children who had a natural curiosity but very limited space for them to play. They all lived in beautiful, pristine caravans but were surrounded by mud, dangerous lorries, unmade roads and toxic waste. At that time, there was no designated Traveller or Gypsy site except on a disgusting council rubbish dump. My gifts of small Treasure Baskets provided the individual babies with many long explorations of sensory materials of various fruits and small objects already in their vans. They gave us many hours of relaxed talk and great fun in watching while we sat nearby to drink our tea.

It was more complex to provide play facilities for the older mobile infants who were naturally becoming very frustrated by their confinement. However, liaison with the local head teacher of a nursery and infant school enabled the mothers to be given their own special room in her school. They decorated it themselves in a traditional style
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and we went to local recycling ‘scrap stores’ to gather and set up Heuristic Play with their older infants. They preferred to keep everything in the plastic ‘stacker-boxes’ boxes they were more used to and interpreted all Elinor’s work with the kind of freedom they cherished. We did not then have Anita’s film or books to give us guidance. However, they did have their own ‘Treasure Chest’ for some curious objects and to keep ‘Granny’s Memories’! There was a small garden where play with the nursery children and friendships with their mothers happened naturally. Play countered many prejudices which some local Plymouth families had about Travellers and Gypsies and the prejudices they had about them.

In 1992, I began research on empowerment and autonomy from babyhood with the UNCRC. While familiar as an early years’ advisor and lecturer with the traditional abiding concerns in Britain about the ‘protection and provision’ for children, the UNCRC now stressed the need for their ‘participation’ in all consultation processes such as those necessary to implement Articles 12 and 13. In brief, Article 12 made clear that all children have the right to express their opinion and have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting them; whilst Article 13 outlined children’s right to express their views, obtain information and access information regardless of frontiers.

As a member of the UN Association for Threatened People (Gypsy division) and UN Peace Child it was my responsibility to find creative ways in which the youngest children, their families and carers could become involved in that consultation process. A team of developmental psychologists conducted diagnostic work in collaboration with UN colleagues in France, Germany, Austria and Scandinavia. We were all engaged with the assessment and design of therapeutic play and educational programmes to address the major difficulties of the young orphans of Romania and other refugees being supported by my charity, WARchild. Treasure Baskets and Heuristic Play became our diagnostic tools.

**Shared meanings need definitions**

Elinor was very particular that people understood the deeper political reasons for working in the way she always had. It is therefore necessary to define all the terms used:

Empowerment . . . is the process whereby people as individuals or in groups or communities, acquire skills, knowledge and confidence which enable them to make choices to effect changes in their lives.

(Thomas 1990: 17)

Autonomy (1) the concept of autonomy means acting in accordance with oneself. Autonomous actions are those that have been freely chosen, that are willingly self-regulated, and those for which one accepts full responsibility . . . regulation through choice is characterised by flexibility and the absence of Pressure.

Autonomy (2) [referring to that definition] . . . sometimes, unfortunately this is interpreted to mean that children should be allowed to do whatever
they want to do. On the contrary, autonomy means that children determine the ‘right’ thing to do based on their beliefs and understandings of themselves and their families and act accordingly.

*Deci and Deci 1987: 1024–37*

**Observations**

In 1995 Elinor and I wondered how Treasure Baskets and Heuristic Play could be managed in settings that had more babies, lively toddlers, fewer staff, less designated space and different routines. Before introducing Treasure Baskets and Heuristic Play at a ‘drop-in’ centre in my home town of Totnes, we had the benefit of discussions with an experienced head teacher, her staff and families. We watched Elinor’s films made by Anita Hughes with parents and carers who attended regularly with their infants. They had already noticed how quickly their babies became bored with their plastic toys and how soon tussles between toddlers could turn to frustrated tears or real anger.

We sat comfortably to watch the film *Infants at Work* and built reciprocal relationships with our families as their babies made choices in their play, demonstrating individual differences. While one tasted and tested as many objects as she could reach, a baby boy explored a metal whisk in great detail for more than ten minutes before handling and tasting a lemon. He pulled a face, shuddered and returned again to the whisk. Having such a range of interesting things to stimulate their curiosity and being offered uninterrupted concentration, the infants worked for an hour while Key Persons watched nearby.

**A Key Person approach**

Elinor developed this approach in the 1990s and it is fundamental for the well-being, learning and play of babies and children in group care or early education settings. This is an approach or way of being and working with babies and young children which focuses on coming to know and understand them as individuals (Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck 2012).

It encourages practitioners in their settings to support specific children as they become more involved in the group or social situations by having a deeper and more meaningful relationship with them and their families. This approach is underpinned by the belief that, for all children, but in particular for those living in poverty, or who are otherwise disadvantaged, it is their needs and rights that are paramount in their holistic development, rather than political or other social or institutional systems which have inevitable organisational constraints. Key persons are in the best position to be alongside the children, to watch and listen to them and use Vygotsky’s *scaffolding* approach to guide their language and learning (for a full definition and explanation of the cultural implications of scaffolding in action see Rogoff 1990).

For both Jacqui and Anita, it was such a pleasure to report back to Elinor after our work with Treasure Baskets and Heuristic Play. In all our evaluations, irrespective of the settings, the adults who had struggled hard not to intervene in the play spoke
of not only the length of time their infants concentrated, but they too enjoyed a more peaceful, calm and spiritual time. It is our hope that the reader will also find opportunity to have such experience.

References and further reading


Play birth to three


**Further DVD resource material**