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Supporting Parents of Preschool Children to Develop Strategies for Schema-Based Play Activities to Enhance Attachment and Well-being: A Preliminary Study in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

This paper explores the meaning of childhood within the realms of play and attachment. Are parental attitudes and expectations, with the use of technology and prescriptive toys, limiting development in children today? Children's play in homes in the United Arab Emirates is examined to explore how children in this region play and whether the quality of this play supports the development of the necessary attachment with the parents and careers. The paper provides an overview of a pilot research study entitled 'Parents as Play Partners', in order to highlight how simple schema-based play with adult support can positively impact attachment and a child's learning and development. Although this study was a limited pilot, the insights obtained are powerful and could prove invaluable for governments and providers of early childhood education, as well as parents and practitioners in this field.

SUPPORTING PARENTS OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN TO DEVELOP STRATEGIES FOR SCHEMA-BASED PLAY ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE ATTACHMENT AND WELL-BEING: A PRELIMINARY STUDY IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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Introduction

We have both been involved in education for a number of years working on a range of projects involving both younger and older children. For the last fifteen the prime researcher has been based in the United Arab Emirates and the co-researcher has worked with her and other colleagues in the region. During this time we have both become increasingly aware of how modern life can impact children's relationships, play and personal development. For the parents, time is often frequently constrained with heavy workloads and busy social lives. Children within the contact of the UAE can be left for long periods with carers or technology. Could it be that the infiltration of technology into all aspects of life combined with the extended use of nannies and carers is changing childhood by negatively impacting children's natural play and development of secure attachments, particularly with their parents?

A child's play can be misunderstood and disregarded as something frivolous that is not an important part of a child's development. Without an understanding of the power of play it could be too easy to ignore it or limit it and in so-doing undermine childhood itself. Moyles (2013, p2) provides the following definition of play:

> 'Play is a highly creative process, using body and mind; it is flexible and often free from externally imposed goals…..It has positive, often pleasurable, effects on the players and frequently involves deep commitment and deep level learning. Play develops and changes over time…..from basic repetitive and pleasurable actions and vocalisations to highly intellectual and collaborative processes. Above all play offers children freedom, choice and control over some aspects of their lives, experiences they are rarely afforded in an

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inevitably adult-led world. Play is a context in which children's voices can be clearly heard.'

A wide body of international research highlights the positive impact of parents joining in play with their children. In particular the regular and naturally interaction and engagement with their children as play partners rather than as instructors or observers has developmental benefits. Professor Charles Deforges (2003) concluded that the more parents and children talk to each other about meaningful subjects on an equal platform, the better students achieve both in the short term and the long term. This play partnership is a good start in developing this level of relationship.

The study was devised to be a small pilot to elicit an understanding of play for children in different contexts within the United Arab Emirates. A key objective of this study is to look at this partnership and to offer insights into whether a specially designed 'Parents as Play Partners' research tool could assist families to engage and develop attachment with their children through schema-based play. The key aspect of this tool was to achieve this using low cost and natural resources commonly found in the home to enable a wide diversity of parents to access the activities suggested.

From the outset it was important for us to use video filming as part of our research design. This would enable us to observe and analyse the footage to analyse the differences between a child's 'normal play behaviour' using the resources parents had provided prior to the researchers input and of that following the intervention and the introduction of the activities from the 'Parents as Play Partners' module. Would the 'play partners' method support parents and children in forming stronger attachments?

The families selected for this introductory research study were from a wide range of cultural and demographic backgrounds living in the United Arab Emirates. Such research from this region is limited and the goal was to elicit whether the PPP module resonated with a variety of nationalities living here. This could indicate that the tool could be very powerful as it could transcend cultural barriers and possibly become a universal tool.

One cultural group not represented at this stage was Emirati. Should the initial findings indicate that the research could have positive impact, then a second wider study would include translated materials to be able to access a wider demographic of Emirati and other Arab nationals, thus improving the validity and impact of the study. The positive findings of this pilot would assist in securing subjects from these cultural groups.

The initial findings from this study, though limited, strongly indicate that 'play' has become distorted amongst a plethora of plastic and technological devices. It appears childhood could be being lost by misinformed parents who have forgotten or have never known how important shared imaginative play is to their children's learning, personal, social and emotional development.

This paper will begin with a literature review, which is divided into three sections, theories of parental engagement, attachment and play focusing on schema and the role of play. The methodology section will outline the small scale research project, 'Parents as Play Partners' and the research design section will focus on how the research process was conducted. The final analysis will be discussed in the results sections and a conclusion to summarise the limitations of the study and where this findings of this research can be used.

Literature Review

The literature review is divided into key areas to help guide the reader through the basic foundations and building blocks of this study and to highlight the previous studies on attachment, engagement and schema based play. There is an overview with regard to the perceived barriers to play, as observed by the researchers prior to this study followed by an outline of a selection of studies involving schema based play and the importance of play.

Attachment

John Bowlby's (1951) early research into the idea of the importance of attachment believed that the earliest bonds formed by children have a tremendous impact that continues throughout life. His research led him to believe:

> *"the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment."* (p13).

Mary Ainsworth joining Bowlby's research team in the 1950s further explored this theme whilst analysing James Robertson's film entitled 'A Two year old goes to hospital' (Bowlby and Robertson, 1952) regarding the separation of children from their parents when hospitalised. Observations of children traumatised by being separated from their parents often when they were profoundly sick, were used to strengthen an understanding of attachment. In the 1970's Ainsworth continued this research through her 'Strange Situation' study in which researchers observed children between the ages of 12 and 18 months as they responded to a situation in which they were briefly left alone and then reunited with their mothers. Through this research, Ainsworth identified three types of attachment, that of Secure, Ambivalent and Avoidant attachments.

In his introduction to his father's work, Richard Bowlby (2010), highlights the importance attachment has on human development: '*Our sense of self is closely dependent on the few intimate attachment relationships we have or have had in our lives, especially our relationship with the person who raised us*. 'Bowlby, (p viii).

However Harris (1998) challenges this assumption and attempts to show that it is the peers who have the greatest influence on the development of a child, rather than the parents. This notion is rather refuted through Harris' own identification of the behaviours of identical twins separated at birth and brought up in separate homes. She observed that they still exhibited identical traits, despite different peer groups and different carers. The key here is that certain characteristics of character appear to be buried within and will develop independent of social interaction.

What is of interest in the research of Bowlby and Ainsworth is their clear identification of the tension of separation and anxiety. Bonds have been created between the carer and the child and the intensity of these impacts on the behaviour choices made by the child in separation.

Field's (1996) research, critical of Bowlby's notion that the development of attachments ended in puberty, extended the view of attachment into the wider human development path and from observing teenagers, adults and the elderly considers that:

> *Attachment is viewed as a relationship that develops between two or more organisms as they become attuned to each other, each providing the other meaningful arousal modulation, which occurs in separation, invariably results in behavioural and physiological disorganization* (p545).

The important concept to note is the notion of being 'attuned'. The attachment is best when there is a balance in the relationship parameters between the two parties. A separation unbalances this relationship and physiological and psychological changes occur. What must be developed to optimise the growth and psychological well-being of an infant growing up appears to be this 'balanced' relationship or attachment with a significant other. Field (1996) adds further:

> *Attachment disturbances may appear even in the presence of an attachment object if the partners to the attachment relationship are not in tune with each other.* (p425)

It is for this reason that a key objective of the 'Parents as Play Partners' project is to provide opportunities for parents and children to deepen their relationships and to develop further their attachments and help improve this balance. This notion of the importance of a more meaningful attachment to the parent or carer which seem to have a vital role in shaping how a child and later an adult is able to navigate the world around them can been explored further though the lens of parental engagement.

The research of Desforges and Aboucher (2003) links parental engagement to a child's later success. Their key finding highlights that the more parents and children talked to each other about meaningful subjects, the better children achieved. Desforges' review led to the development of the 'Every Child Matters' policy Green Paper in Britain, (Chief Secretary to the Treasury, 2003). The importance of the parents engaging with their children has also been emphasised by Hattie (2008) in his in-depth meta-analysis of the influences on pupil learning. He conducted a 15-year analysis of 50,000 studies involving 83 million students to see what worked in education The results showed that a combination of parental encouragement and high parental expectations were critical elements in parenting support.

Where parental engagement was strong children experienced greater success in school with higher grades, better attendance, more positive behaviour and attitudes and increased enrolment in post-secondary education. Overall, the effect of parental engagement over a child's school career can be equivalent to adding an extra two or three years to his or her education. This has been highlighted over the years by many, including Professor Charles Deforges and Alberto Abouchaaar (2003) *"What parents do with their children at home through the age range, is much more significant than any other factor open to educational influence".* (p91). The challenge for this study was to consider how attachment and engagement can be brought into our project in a way that is manageable and understandable to parents.

The Importance of Play

Children around the world play and play is considered to be so important for children that it is included in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31 (2012) which states: *'Every child has the right to relax, play and join in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.'* Play is essential for the healthy cognitive, physical, social and emotional development of children.

Dr Stuart Brown, founder of The National Institute for Play has interviewed thousands of people to capture their play profiles. He has also observed animal play in the wild leading to the conclusion that play is a long evolved behaviour important for the well-being and survival of animals.

In controlled laboratory settings that limit play behaviour, animals were unable to deter aggression, or to socialise comfortably with fellow pack members. Although the linkages from these findings to humans has not been firmly established, the work of Brown is powerful in supporting the theory that children denied opportunities to play are at higher risk of presenting behaviour and social integration problems.

On the surface children's play may seem to be simple. However, Bob Hughes, a leading play theorist and practitioner in the UK, suggests that there are at least 16 different play types, displayed by children as they play including social, socio-dramatic, rough-and-tumble, exploratory, object, creative, communication, deep, recapitulative, symbolic, fantasy, dramatic, imaginative, locomotor, mastery and role play (Hughes, 2012). Erikson (1963), highlighted the importance of the 'make-believe' element of play which enables children to learn about their social world and their cultural role within it. He gave great emphasis to play based on the recognition that young children have limited ability to communicate their problems in the way adults may. Play situations are opportunities for the child to externalise

problems and to work through them and come to terms with them. Play also provides opportunities for observers to understand children's learning and development. *"Play and conversation are the main ways by which young children learn about themselves, other people and the world around them"* (Ball, 1994. P53)

At a time when children are spending more time isolated on tables or in front of digital devices. Of particular concern is the increase in time toddlers or younger are spending in front of screens. Anderson (2005) notes *'We are engaged in a vast and uncontrolled experiment with our children, plunging them into home environments that are saturated with electronic media.'*

Developing schema to assist parents in the engagement process to encourage personal conversation and interaction, to explore the world through imaginative play, seems to be more important now than at any other time.

Developing Schema through Play

During the 1970s, Chris Athey further developed the theory of schema. Athey, noted how children have interests and will repeat an action over and over again. For example, a baby may repeatedly throw a toy from his or her high chair. She highlighted that these behaviours are not 'flitting' or purposeless. The child is creating schema and the role of the adult should be to 'tune in' to the child's interest and support the child to develop his or her knowledge. For example, when a toddler carries things to the adult he or she may be exploring transporting items. The adult can provide bags and trucks in order that the child can carry items in different ways. The following table summarises schema identified by Athey (2007)

Table 1. Developing Schema based on the work of Chris Athey (2007).

Trajectory	Has a fascination with lines - vertical, horizontal and oblique. Repeated throwing and dropping of objects.
Rotational	Moving objects around and around. Drawing circles. Turning around.
Transporting	Moving objects or collections of objects from one place to another, perhaps using a buggy or a truck.
Enveloping and Containing	Covering things up and putting things inside. Likes posting objects and putting things in an enclosure e.g. farm animals in a field.
Transformation	Mixing paint, showing interest in melting jellies. Dressing-up.
Scattering	Emptying baskets, tipping out toys e.g. bricks, using arms and legs to scatter items, swiping objects or toys from tables.
Positioning	Placing objects in particular places e.g. lining-up cars, likes to stand in the front or back of the line.
Orientation	Explores things from different angles, Turns items over, looks behind pictures.
Connection and Separation	Interested in how things join together. Takes things apart.

The play opportunities that are provided for children depend upon our culture, values and our beliefs. There can be significant barriers preventing children from developing secure attachments and learning through play.

Barriers to Play –Non- Parental Support

Research in 2005 on housemaids and nannies in the Gulf published in the Journal of Childhood Research, indicated that 58 per cent of children under the age of three in the region spend 30 to 70 hours a week with domestic workers. Hala B. Roumani, Principal of the Gulf Montessori nurseries in Dubai and author of the 2005 study, said *"there was an economic benefit to parents using their domestic help as child care. "A maid is a very economical alternative and also provides a long list of additional services,"* (p8?) Using a maid may be economically beneficial but can be disastrous in terms of a child's intellectual, physical, social and emotional development if she is unaware of the importance of attachment, engagement and how the child needs to learn through imaginative and interactive play.

In addition, lower maternity leave and the lack of any paternity leave mean that a child' early development and parental attachment for both parents becomes limited. At present there is no paternity leave for men in the UAE and women are entitled to 45 days in Dubai and 60 days in the Emirates of Sharjah and Abu Dhabi, Al Tamimi & Company, (1986), UAE Labor Law, Dubai: Al Tamimi & Company. Retrieved from, http://uaelaborlaw.com/ These restrictive timeframes require those women returning to work to rely on another source for childcare and with the lack of family members to support many have no alternative but to use maids and nannies.

Barriers to Play - Technology

There have been numerous debates on the advantages and disadvantages of iPads and technology on children's development and learning. Studies conducted by Jordy Kaufman at the Babylab, Swinburne University, Melbourne have yet to be published. However, Kaufman argues that iPads and touch screen devices cannot be put together in the same group with TV's, but also advocates that he also limits his own child's screen time on these devices due to possible harmful effects (Cocozza, 2014). Also, the other interesting factor to note in this research conducted by Kaufman is the funding body is Google.

Common Sense Media (2011) reported approximately 72% of iPad applications in the Educational Category are marketed for pre-schoolers, which means that parents have to determine the choices they make on marketing and media, rather than research at present. This probably accounts for the following statistics taken from their site; Colby, Z. (2011), Retrieved from, www.commonsensemedia.org

- 60% of parents do not supervise their child's technology use.
- In a typical day, children consume just over three hours of media. This includes computer use, cell phone use, tablet use, music, and reading. Two thirds of this time is spent with "screen media" (TV, computers, the Internet, etc.) while reading is less than 20 minutes per day.
- 75% of children are allowed technology in their bedrooms.

These facts and figures show that it is not the iPad or tablet device in itself, but more importantly how it used and what it is used for. There has been equally positive studies conducted, although limited, such as or the development of literacy skills, for those children experiencing disability, (Flewitt, Kucirkova, & Messer, 2014). If iPad usage is to be promoted as a play time choice for very young children then the questions still need to be asked as to what type of play is taking place or should be? Is it development and providing learning to the child? Is it engaging and creating attachment with the parent? Or is it developing isolation and an inability to socially interact with peers? This study does not wish to look into this further at this stage. We raise this as a point to consider how children are left to 'play' and how we may need to seriously reconsider this action and become more engaged

with our children to ensure they develop a balance and a meaningful relationship and attachment to them.

This section has provided a brief overview with regard to the theories of engagement and attachment, the importance of play, highlighting potential barriers that may impact children's development.

Methodology

Combing the key elements of attachment, parental engagement and schematic play based upon a wide range of research has been central to the development of the '*Parents as Play Partners'* Project. This section provides an overview of the methodology in terms of its conception and development of this module as a research tool. The research process is also discussed from inception to completion.

Funding

A small research grant enabled this project to be undertaken. Funding was an essential requisite as a UK film crew had to be flown out to Dubai to enable filming of the research in the homes of the volunteer families. Filming was an important component, as the footage would be analysed later to determine outcomes and for use in future research. Once funding had been secured those families who had previously shown an interest were contacted as to their continued interest and a research team was formed.

Research Team

The research team comprised of two researchers, specialists in the field of early years, a film crew of two and a lecturing colleague in the field of early years with many years' experience in editing footage and producing programmes for 'Parent and Child TV' (UK) and others with an international and global reach. It was important to have this level of expertise, as this allowed parents and children to interact naturally rather than performing for the camera, which made for a stronger research outcome.

Ethics Approval and Consent Forms

As the study involved young children, consent forms had to be completed by parents not only for the home visits and research undertaken, but also for the filming and editing of footage gained. Although none of the research was undertaken in the UK, the UAE has limited guidance on research with children, so the guidelines set by British Education research Association (BERA, 2004) were adhered to and at all times to ensure that the best interest and rights of the child were of primary consideration. In addition, the ethics forms which had to be completed for the University's ethics Committee state that all researchers are also subject to the Data Protection Act which demands that data is kept securely and does not lead to any breach of agreed confidentiality and anonymity (BERA, 2004, p9).

These consent forms are mandatory for conducting research of any description with children, as ethical considerations must be taken into account by all, as outlined by Flewitt, (2005). Conducting any kind of research with children is challenging, especially with those in the early years. After careful consideration, it was agreed that the implementation of the research tool, 'Play module' and filming would be completed in the children's home environment. The research process was outlined and discussed in depth with the families and all questions answered before the consent forms were signed as the researchers wanted to enter these families' homes and leave without causing any distress or psychological harm (Alderson and Morrow, 2011). Permission was granted for home visits and filming by all four families taking part in the study.

Although informed consent was gained, we used the term provisional consent, as no one could predict how the children would react in front of the cameras and whether or not they would want to play at all when having so many extra, strange people in their domain. This provisional consent is on-going and dependent on the relationships of trust and collaboration built up between the participants and the researcher team, (Flewitt, 2005). Simons and Usher (2000) describe this provisional consent as "negotiated in situated contexts on a minute-by-minute basis" (p4).

Participant Description

This was a limited study to assess the potential impact of such an intervention with families to evaluate whether the challenge of setting up a wider study would be worthwhile. Four families participated in this research study. They were all residents within the UAE and had all been resident for a number of years. All of the children attended nursery school and two of the sample group had an older sibling. All parents involved in the study worked in professional roles or senior admin positions. All had assistance with childcare within the home from additional persons as carers during different times in the day.

Each of the families involved had volunteered independently of each other. As highlighted by Babbie (2001), purposive sampling was ideal in this situation and was very useful, as we needed to reach a targeted sample quickly and sampling for proportionality was not the main concern of the researchers. Volunteer sampling as outlined by Black (1999), can be an inexpensive way of ensuring sufficient numbers for a study, but can be highly unrepresentative. Therefore, families from different nationalities were purposefully selected to provide a varied cultural representation, but similar professional profile, ie. Educated beyond Secondary education with professional qualifications.

Table 2. Participant Details

Nationality of family	Childs Age	Parental involve-ment	Parent working	Siblings	Home Environment	Location
Greek	2 years 1 months	Both	Both	No	2 Bedroom Apartment	Dubai
Egyptian	2 years 6 months	Both	Both	Yes – older brother	3 Bedroom House	Dubai
British	2 years	Both	Both	Yes – older brother	4 Bedroom house	Ras Al Khaima
Nigerian	2 years 4 months	Both	Both	No	Bedsit/Studio Flat	Dubai

The families who volunteered to take part in the study identified various reasons for involving themselves and their children; including:

- To improve the communication skills of their child.
- To hopefully change some unruly behaviours and attitudes of their child.
- To develop play skills between themselves and their child.

Emirati families were not approached at this stage. Accessing this community can be very challenging. We wanted to be sure that there was a potential positive impact before translating all the play materials into Arabic and to persuade families to participate. We also had the opportunity to film the research as it happened. Emirati women and the inside of Emirati homes are very private. Obtaining permissions to film thee families would have been

even more challenging. The outcome of the research and the final film will hopefully become a lever to help access these families in future studies.

Research Design

An important aspect of the research was to share with parents the importance of the key underpinning theories – attachment, engagement and developing schematic play. The way of engaging with the child was to be as a 'play partner' rather than an observer or instructor. The information was to be presented as a module in both printed and electronic form during the home visit. The sections covered the importance of play; parents as play partners; using everyday activities as play opportunities; providing play opportunities at home and being active together. In order to ascertain the impact of the intervention parents would keep a diary for two weeks following the home visit.

The project took place in November 2014. Home visits were scheduled with each family and kept to a day each. We were not certain how each child would react and we wanted the families to feel relaxed and not rushed whilst in the flow of filming. Each family was asked to maintain a post intervention diary for two weeks, which were collected and a short interview recorded to glean further insights into how the 'Parents for Play Partners' research tool had been used and to what affect.

To enable things to run smoothly we arrived to each residence early in the morning and provided an overview to the parents of how the filming and intervention would proceed. Initial pre-questionnaires were given to the families to obtain general information about the family unit and to determine the interpretation of play by the parents. With cameras set up the research team positioned themselves out of sight, so as not to distract the child and parents in play. We adopted the same procedure with each family, so that the environment for filming would generate footage from a consistent arrangement.

The families were asked to play with their child as they would normally, using the toys and materials which the child usually playing with. This activity lasted for approximately fifteen minutes. This resulted in five minutes to settle into an activity and ten minutes for free play. No guidance was given to the child or to the parents in terms of the play, so communication, engagement and attachment were all under the control of the child and the parents.

Following this filming one of the parents was taken aside and the 'Parents as Play Partners' module was explained to them (20-30 minutes) and the activities outlined, as this would form the intervention. Whilst this was taking place, the other parent was asked to distract the child, so that all plastic and technological toys could be removed by a researcher from the play area being filmed. These toys and games were replaced with a selection of items suggested in the 'Play Partners Module'. These consisted of household objects and materials, for example; pans, spoons, socks, baskets, cushions, throws and dried food items such as pasta and beans. In addition, all mobile technology was removed from the play area and T.Vs turned off.

A second round of filming then took place which lasted for another ten minutes. The play on this occasion was to be led by the child, with the inducted parent communicating, joining-in the play and offering encouragement. At no time were they to take the lead as explained to them by the researcher.

Following this round of filming both parents were given further advice and guidance on how to record the play and the interaction they observed with their child in a diary or blog for a subsequent two weeks.

Upon collection of these recorded insights a short interview was held with the parents to discuss the two week period following the intervention and a post questionnaire was completed.

Results and Findings

Results – Pre Questionnaires

The pre-questionnaire was specifically focused on what was understood by play and how important the parents thought it was and what the children regularly played with and enjoyed.

Interestingly none of the respondents mentioned home-made learning materials or activities and materials centred round what is available at home or in the garden. This probably explains the findings from the first round of filming before the intervention. Parents were asked to play with their child as they would normally do, so the play area became crowded with plastic toys both big and small, TV, musical instruments, books and many more toys and games.

The following was observed:

- Analysis of the children's body language revealed high levels of frustration and anxiety, play was individual although parents were present.
- Concentration was limited and children drifted from toy to game to book to toy, no shared play took place.
- Anxiety showed on parents and children's faces, tantrums started and aggressive behaviour was displayed, hitting with cars and throwing toys.
- Parents tried to control situation and offer another toy to replace one thrown, the same action occurred again and again.
- All four children were in tears and showing aggression by the end of the 10 minutes and parents looked tired and frustrated.

Table 3. Summary of Initial Questionnaire

1. What do you understand by play?	All answers given could be summarised into the following key areas - learning, language and development
2. How important do you think it is for children to play?	All agreed it was very important.
3. What sort of play does your child engage in?	All responses involved toys, balls, cars and everything made available in the home. A key finding here was that items were parent directed.
4. Who is involved in your child's play?	This had a mixed response and included nursery staff, nanny, friends, teachers, family members – mother, father, sibling.
5. What does your child enjoy playing with?	Commercial toys/ digital media mentioned.

Intervention

Following the first 10 minutes of filming, the 'Parents as Play Partners' module was introduced to the parents and materials from around the home were positioned in the play area for the child to lead the play and for the parents to interact with and engage.

Key Observations – play based activities after intervention

Interestingly, children and parents appeared to quickly forget the presence of cameras and became immersed in the joint activity. Types of resultant play activity included dinners being made, dens being built, food being created, washing being emptied, hide and seek within boxes and reading in tents made from throws over table and chairs. The analysis of the footage after the intervention and research tool had been introduced was very different from the earlier filming. Kay observations can be summarised below:

- Analysis of the children's body language revealed high levels of engagement and involvement in the play with their parents post intervention.
- Noticeably, children turned their trunk towards parents and a close triangle was formed between parents, object (of play) and child.
- Typically, their body movements became more purposeful suggesting a greater depth of interest and involvement in the activity.
- Notably, in terms of 'flow and immersion in the moment' (Harding 2014) all children exhibited signs of deep play –wallowing in play (Bruce 1996, Athey 2003, Arnold 1999) in close proximity to their parents.
- Frequently, footage clearly revealed the compelling nature of schemas, for example, through the simplicity of resources such as a blanket to form a den (enclosure schema). Many other schemas were also in evidence: trajectory; enveloping; transforming; transporting etc.
- Increased frequency of moments of spontaneous laughter from parents and children.

Table 4: What has been the project's impact? (Question 5)

Components	*Family 1*	*Family 2*	*Family 3*	*Family 4*
Yourself	It has helped me to consciously create more time for play with my son and help him learn every day.	Very positively, new ideas, approaches. Happy to make something more creative, happy to see our son being more creatively and constructively entertained.	I want to change a bit of my day to be more involved in playing.	I feel less tired and stressed. I make time to play and read and life is better, I have my maid read also, things are better. I can now spend time with my younger son.
Your child	It has helped our son to play more and be confident to try new things and to play with other kids nicely and share.	Very positively. He can now engage with us more effectively and us with him. There is a better sense of continuity between home and pre-school.	He is so happy, he loves his new den and his sock puppets and bath times are so much fun with the kitchen utensils.	He is talking so much more and is not aggressive any more. The school is happy with him inshallah
Your spouse	It has helped him learn how to play more and create time for our son.	Very positive, quality time spent as a family instead of one on	Very happy, he has made dens in the bedroom and now they read	He now plays with our children as he has ideas. They make paper

	one.	every night together, it is wonderful!		aeroplanes and models together.
Your family	We all had fun playing together and it helped us to come up with new ideas and things to do everyday.	Very positively, quality time is spent together, more creativity, more enjoyable, more productive created some time for togetherness	We are happy and thank god that we found you. Our home is a full of paintings and we have less and less tantrums.	It was an amazing experience for our little family. Thank you for enlightening us through it. We definitely have a different perspective to playing now!

The change in the quality of engagement and the relationship between parents and children was striking after the intervention. Through the introduced child led play using non-specific artefacts rather than proprietary toys, parents and children were able to engage for a sustained period of time in a relaxed and more meaningful way. A key finding is the increase in language being heard from the children in all instances in the resultant film footage.

Key Findings –post intervention interviews

The post questionnaire focused on acquiring further insights on the effectiveness on the intervention. The first four questions related to the ease of use of the module by the parents and if it was understandable. All four families agreed that the module guide had been easy to use and understandable. A key question, which the researchers were most interested to review concerned the impact of the module and how it affected each participant, parent and child. The answers are outlined in Table 4.

Another two questions concerned the continued use of the 'Parents as Play Partners' module and the recommendation of it to others, as this was of interest in terms of future research. Responses can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Post Intervention Interview Table - Q6 and Q7

Question	Family 1	Family 2	Family 3	Family 4
Q6. Will you continue to use any aspects of the project? If yes why?	Yes, it brings us closer to our kids	Yes, it is a most constructive way of spending time together and he is so much happier.	Absolutely! It's a great project for parents. It will definitely help us to continue to create time and have fun together as we watch our son grow up.	Yes, because we now all play together for the first time, no one is left out and our son is getting more confident.
Q7. Would you recommend the 'Parents as Play	Yes.	Yes, same as for Q6.	Parents, sometimes run out of ideas of	Yes, because it is excellent!

Partners' module to friends with children, why?	what to do with their kids. I think this module will come in handy as it has useful tips for everyone.

The final question related to how the module could be improved and although there were no improvements suggested for this module, two of the four families suggested that another module should be created for older children, these were the two with older siblings and that it would be great if it was available as an app.

Key Findings – drawings and materials made by the children and diary entries
A variety of drawings and materials were made by the children, with parental support for the more complex items. They created, sock puppets, wooden spoon people, football games made from straws and corks and cotton wool, food has been chopped and washing emptied from machines, dens have been erected and sieves used in the bath.

The diary entries were equally impressive and a few key entries have been listed below:

- 19.11.2014 – He loves reading the book with the penguin travelling in an umbrella, so we thought it would be a great idea to make an umbrella today. We started off for an umbrella, but, along the way he decided to create a hat instead. We then played the game to keep the hat on our heads for as long as possible, this was really good fun!!!
- 14.11.2014 – Today daddy and me played lets cook dinner together. I learnt how to use the knife and I chopped up the vegetables. Our little chef in the making, amazing!
- 10.11.2014 – We made a den from an old curtain. My son didn't want me to go out of it! He loved spending time with me in there even if we are just sitting doing nothing! But as a change it is the only place he lets me hold a book to read it for him for more than two minutes!!
- 11.11.2014 – Dressing up, both my boys (6 and 2.6) wore my high heel shoes and baby blankets as capes to pretend to be Elsa with ice paws from Frozen! Yes boys like Frozen movie too. My little one came to say a lot of new words as he played pretending, examples; ice, here I am, anyway, let it go. It was so much fun, we laughed lots.
- 14.11.14 – We had a beautiful day today. The weather was perfect and we spend the whole day outdoors strolling around the city. The beautiful day was complete with my son and his dad playing puppet socks in the bath, he loves them and talks so much when using them!

The diary entries were plentiful and will be highlighted in the discussion section.

Discussion
Bowlby and Ainsworth demonstrated that nurturance and responsiveness are the primary determinants of attachment. Deforges and Aboucher (2003) and Hattie (2008) went on to link parental engagement to a child's later success. The challenge for busy parents is how to engage with their children in order to develop secure attachments within what is often a busy and challenging life. Research on the importance of scheme-based play by Athey

(2007) and Brown (2010) highlight that play is a natural method for engaging with children, for developing secure attachments and enhancing conceptual development – the roots of lifelong learning.

The '*Parents as Play Partners*' project gives parents a tool that enables them to engage with their children rather than being a supervisor or instructor.   Tuning-in to children's interests and extending them enables the parent to deepen the relationship as well as enhancing the child's cognitive development.

It is with this deep understanding of the complexity of children's play that the 'Parents as Play Partners' method provides opportunities for parents and children to play together. Film taken during the play sessions highlights how both children and parents naturally move between the different types of play, provided there are opportunities for them to be imaginative and creative with a range of natural and everyday materials.

The main points of interest from the pre and post intervention filming was how the children and parents became so relaxed and in a state of flow, as highlighted in the work of Mihaly Csikszentimihalyi (1991) on flow and immersion and Ferre Laevers (1994) regarding scales of involvement and engagement. One family was so immersed in playing in one setting that we were able to stop filming, pack up the equipment and just sit and observe until one of the parents realised we had finished. Tears did come then from the child, as we had stopped the playtime! When the children were leading the play they were fully engaged and a closer more naturally occurring attachment could be witnessed between parent and child.

Combing the key elements of attachment, parental engagement and schematic play based upon a wide range of research has been central to the development of the '*Parents as Play Partners*' Project and the footage certainly indicates that this is the main factor contributing to its success.

Conclusion

A key aim of the '*Parents as Play Partners*' project was to help parents and children acquire more secure, balanced attachments (Field 1996) to support the development of the child through a simple, supportive and easily understood intervention. It is felt by the researchers, from this pilot project, that this could be successfully achieved using the designed materials.

An initial small sample size was important in order to be able to establish if any observable development was possible between the play sessions to be able to refine the method and the module before a larger more encompassing study was undertaken. The initial findings are extremely encouraging.

Through the Play Partners materials it was possible to share with parents the wide-ranging and complex research with regard to attachment, engagement and schema-based play. The materials helped them quickly understand the 'P*lay Partners method*' and were confident enough to immediately build upon it after the research team had left.

This development was clearly detailed in the parent diaries, post interviews and questionnaires, so much so that the materials have now been translated into Arabic to enable the project to be extended into the local Emirati community and wider Arab society within the UAE and possible Gulf region.

Following further input from parents, the module will also be refined and made accessible through the development of an App. We appreciate how this may appear counter intuitive, however it will certainly allow the materials to be accessed by a wider audience and ensure it is available with parents at all times they have their smart phone to hand. It also allows for new materials to be added and content refined simultaneously to all users of the Play Project App in the future.

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