Communicating Possibilities:  
A study of English nursery children's emergent creativity, exploring the three to four-year-old child as an artistic communicator and possibility thinker

TWO VOLUMES  
1 of 2

Submitted by Linda McConnon, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, November 2013.

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(Signature)

VOLUME ONE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This research builds on previous studies that have documented evidence of Professor Anna Craft’s concept of ‘Possibility Thinking’ (PT) as at the heart of creativity which involves children transitioning from ‘what is this?’ to ‘what can I or we do with this?’ as well as imagining ‘as if’ they were in a different role. My thesis titled “Communicating Possibilities” examines English nursery children's emergent creativity, exploring the three to four-year-old child as an artistic communicator and possibility thinker through a case study approach situated in one primary school in South West England. Three main research questions were posed concerning the ‘what, how, and why’ of creativity when children communicated through art; as well as exploring the nurturing role of others, and identity manifest through voice and learning experience.

This doctoral study is essentially interpretivist in nature seeking to explain how people make sense of their social worlds, and is an exploration framed by culturally negotiated, shared meanings, and complex social relations. Data was collected over one school year, in three nine-week research phases by the following ethnographic methods: naturalistic observations; researcher diary; children’s creative journals; and practitioner interviews. These methods were repeated for each phase. Inductive and deductive data analysis was conducted. Undertaken over time as the project unfolded, a grounded theory approach was applied in total to 27 episodes.

Micro event analysis of creative behaviours in action and narrative discourses of two kinds: peer-to-peer, and child-to-adult (teacher, early years practitioner, and my researcher dialogue) revealed four broad critical themes: Observing and documenting children’s creativity; What children can do together- recognising differences; Pedagogy of possibilities- developing a role; and The value of artistic communication in the nursery classroom. Each is discussed in terms of the key implications these themes hold for theory, policy, and early years practice.
CONTENTS

Contents

VOLUME ONE ................................................................. 1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................. 2
ABSTRACT ................................................................. 3
CONTENTS ........................................................................ 4
LIST OF TABLES ............................................................. 16
LIST OF FIGURES .............................................................. 19
CHAPTER ONE ................................................................. 21
Introduction ...................................................................... 21
  1.1 Overview of the Thesis ............................................... 21
  1.2 Personal Rationale ..................................................... 23
  1.3 Definitions of Creativity ............................................... 26
     1.3.1 Big creativity, little creativity, mini creativity .......... 26
     1.3.2 The creative person, process, product, and environment .... 28
     1.3.3 Creativity as Possibility Thinking (PT) ....................... 30
  1.4 Definitions of Art: ..................................................... 32
     Realism, Idealism, and Expressionism .............................. 32
     1.4.1 Young children’s free art ......................................... 33
     1.4.2 Identifying with cultural symbols ............................. 35
  1.5 Creativity and Art in the English Early Years Curriculum and Classroom .................................................... 38
  1.6 Introducing Reggio Emilia in Practice .............................. 40
     1.6.1 5x5x5=creativity .................................................. 41
     1.6.2 Contrasting values of being an artist communicator in school 42
  1.7 Collaboration and Identity ............................................ 44
  1.8 Overview of the Study and Research Questions .................. 46
  1.9 Summary .................................................................... 49
CHAPTER TWO ................................................................. 51
Literature Review ............................................................. 51
2.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 51
2.2 An Overview of PT Theory and Research .................................................................................................. 51
  2.2.1 2006 Characterising PT studies ............................................................................................................ 52
  2.2.2 2008 Question-posing and responding study ....................................................................................... 55
  2.2.3 2012 PT studies exploring the role of collaboration ............................................................................. 56
  2.2.4 2012 PT and child initiated play ........................................................................................................... 58
  2.2.5 2013 PT and the role of narrative .......................................................................................................... 61
  2.2.6 PT in the wider research field ................................................................................................................. 63
2.3 Studies Based on Pedagogy ....................................................................................................................... 66
  2.3.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................................ 66
  2.3.2 Questioning strategies to encourage young children to talk about art ................................................. 66
  2.3.3 Meddling in the middle .......................................................................................................................... 69
  2.3.4 Creativity and classroom talk ................................................................................................................ 72
  2.3.5 Communicating artistic actions and narratives .................................................................................... 73
  2.3.6 The value of drawing, narrative, and pedagogy ................................................................................... 75
2.4 Studies Based on Peer-to-Peer Collaborative Relationships ................................................................... 78
  2.4.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................................ 78
  2.4.2 Social creativity ..................................................................................................................................... 79
  2.4.3 Transitions into formal education .......................................................................................................... 80
  2.4.4 The developing self and social understanding .................................................................................... 81
  2.4.5 Collaboration ........................................................................................................................................ 82
  2.4.6 Emergence ............................................................................................................................................. 84
  2.4.7 Transitioning from individual-to-collaborative-to-communal creativity .............................................. 86
  2.4.8 Identity development ............................................................................................................................ 89
  2.4.9 Social identity ......................................................................................................................................... 89
  2.4.10 Identity in the context of the early years classroom ............................................................................ 90
2.5 Justification for the Research Approach .................................................................................................... 91
  2.5.1 Studies of PT .......................................................................................................................................... 92
  2.5.2 Studies based on pedagogy ................................................................................................................... 92
  2.5.3 Studies based on peer-to-peer collaborative relationships ............................................................... 92
  2.5.4 Voice .................................................................................................................................................... 92
  2.5.5 Richness of data ..................................................................................................................................... 93
2.6 Summary ...................................................................................................................................................... 93

CHAPTER THREE ............................................................................................................................................ 95
Methodology ....................................................................................................................................................... 95
3.8.4 Recording the data - diaries, journals, and interviews .......... 126
3.9 Grounded Theory ............................................................................. 128
   3.9.1 The emergence of grounded theory ............................................ 128
3.10 Data Analysis ............................................................................. 133
   3.10.1 Data analysis procedures ......................................................... 133
   3.10.2 Layer One: Framing the context .............................................. 133
   3.10.3 Layer Two: Inductive modes of inquiry .................................... 135
   3.10.4 Layer Three: Deductive modes of inquiry ............................... 138
   3.10.5 Layer Four: Constructing theory and modelling ....................... 140
   3.10.6 Constant comparative method ................................................. 141
   3.10.7 Theoretical sampling ............................................................... 141
   3.10.8 Theoretical memo writing ....................................................... 142
   3.10.9 Saturation ................................................................................ 142
   3.10.10 Final theory construction ....................................................... 143
   3.10.11 Internal validity: Member checking ........................................ 145
   3.10.12 External validity: Peer checking ............................................. 146
3.11 Summary of Research Process .................................................... 147
3.12 Additional Points for Consideration ............................................. 149
   3.12.1 Reliability, validity, and generalizability ................................... 149
   3.12.2 Statement of researcher’s experiences, assumptions, and biases ........................................................................................................ 151
3.13 Summary ....................................................................................... 152
VOLUME TWO ...................................................................................... 154
CHAPTER FOUR .................................................................................. 155
Findings RQ1: Emergent PT ................................................................. 155
4.1 Introduction .................................................................................... 155
4.2 Section 1: The Core of PT ............................................................. 156
   4.2.1 Visual model: The core of PT ..................................................... 157
   4.2.2 Playful acted out explorations ................................................... 158
   4.2.3 Fluxing drivers: Process as well as outcome .............................. 158
   4.2.4 Process: Unconscious, functional, therapeutic ......................... 159
   4.2.4.1 Unconscious ........................................................................... 159
   4.2.4.2 Functional .............................................................................. 160
   4.2.4.3 Therapeutic ........................................................................... 160
   4.2.5 Outcome: Conscious, goal-orientated, design ......................... 161
   4.2.5.1 Conscious ................................................................................ 161
   4.2.5.2 Goal-Orientated .................................................................... 162
4.2.5.3 Design ................................................................. 162
4.2.6 Self-determined sensorial infusion: Independence, looking for
own stimulus, and gathering information through the senses ...... 163
4.2.6.1 Independence, looking for own stimulus ....................... 163
4.2.6.2 Gathering information through the senses ..................... 164
4.2.6.2.1 Visual .............................................................. 164
4.2.6.2.2 Textural ............................................................ 164
4.2.6.2.3 Audial .............................................................. 164
4.2.6.2.4 Movement .......................................................... 164
4.2.7 Immersive action intention flow ...................................... 165
4.2.8 Summarising the Core of PT ......................................... 166

4.3 Section 2: PT Features in Action........................................ 166
4.3.1 Aesthetic acumen and acuity: Awareness and evaluation,
embodied performance, dramatic display .................................. 167
4.3.1.1 Awareness and evaluation ......................................... 167
4.3.1.2 Embodied performance and dramatic display ................. 168
4.3.2 Question-Responding: Verbal and non-verbal investigative
behaviour ................................................................. 169
4.3.2.1 Testing ................................................................... 171
4.3.2.1.1 Trialling ............................................................. 171
4.3.2.1.2 Piloting ............................................................... 171
4.3.2.1.3 Experimental exploration ..................................... 172
4.3.2.2 Predicting ................................................................. 172
4.3.2.2.1 Knowing what will happen ....................................... 172
4.3.2.2.2 Using knowledge to take action ................................. 173
4.3.2.2.3 Expectations ........................................................ 173
4.3.2.3 Evaluating ................................................................. 173
4.3.2.3.1 Have “I” got it right? ................................................ 174
4.3.2.3.2 Comparing ........................................................... 174
4.3.2.3.3 Observing reaction to action .................................... 174
4.3.2.4 Undoing ................................................................. 175
4.3.2.4.1 Erasing ................................................................. 175
4.3.2.4.2 De-constructing .................................................... 175
4.3.2.5 Compensating .......................................................... 176
4.3.2.5.1 Modifying for error ............................................... 176
4.3.2.5.2 Replacing instead of ................................................ 176
4.3.2.6 Repeating ................................................................. 177
4.3.2.6.1 Carrying out same actions ....................................... 177
4.3.2.6.2 Using same words .................................................. 178
4.3.2.7 Accepting ................................................................. 178
4.3.2.7.1 Agreement ........................................................... 178
4.3.2.7.2 Confirming ................................................................. 178
4.3.2.7.3 Happy with result ..................................................... 179
4.3.2.8 Rejecting ....................................................................... 179
4.3.2.8.1 Discarding ............................................................... 180
4.3.2.8.2 Filtering materials ...................................................... 180
4.3.2.8.3 Refusing others’ ideas ............................................... 180
4.3.2.9 Completing ................................................................. 181
4.3.2.9.1 Concluding an action in order to move forward .......... 181
4.3.2.9.2 Terminating on own terms ......................................... 181
4.3.2.9.3 Failure ..................................................................... 182
4.3.2.10 Summary of question-responding .............................. 182
4.3.3 Comparative question-posing study ............................... 183
4.3.4 Cross case analysis of question-responding .................. 184
4.3.4.1 Individual differences in question-responding .............. 185
4.3.5 Elucidation: Planning, Explaining, Rationalising ............ 186
4.3.5.1 Planning ..................................................................... 187
4.3.5.2 Explaining .................................................................. 187
4.3.5.3 Rationalising .............................................................. 188
4.3.6 Innovative imaginative declaration: Original and unique outcome/behaviour, artistic storytelling, experimental exploration, play props .................................................. 189
4.3.6.1 Artistic storytelling ....................................................... 190
4.3.6.2 .................................................................................. 191
4.3.6.3 Experimental exploration ............................................. 192
4.3.6.4 Play props .................................................................. 192
4.3.7 Risk taking: Novelty, naivety, non-conformist, and combating fears* (*Phase 3 only) ................................................... 192
4.3.7.1 Novelty examples ......................................................... 193
4.3.7.1.1 Using materials and tools in own way ....................... 193
4.3.7.1.2 Outcome not predicted by practitioner ..................... 194
4.3.7.1.3 Trying new ways of working .................................... 194
4.3.7.2 Naivety examples ......................................................... 195
4.3.7.2.1 Not respecting boundaries ....................................... 195
4.3.7.2.2 Copying .................................................................. 195
4.3.7.2.3 Pushing boundaries of activity ................................. 196
4.3.7.2.4 Unsure of actions ..................................................... 196
4.3.7.3 Non-Conformist examples .......................................... 197
4.3.7.3.1 Challenging rules .................................................... 197
4.3.7.3.2 Behaving in a non-permitted fashion ....................... 197

The day the spider went to the seaside ................................ 191

Told by Rosie Aged 4 ............................................................... 191
4.3.6.3 Experimental exploration ............................................. 192
4.3.6.4 Play props .................................................................. 192
4.3.7 Risk taking: Novelty, naivety, non-conformist, and combating fears* (*Phase 3 only) ................................................... 192
4.3.7.1 Novelty examples ......................................................... 193
4.3.7.1.1 Using materials and tools in own way ....................... 193
4.3.7.1.2 Outcome not predicted by practitioner ..................... 194
4.3.7.1.3 Trying new ways of working .................................... 194
4.3.7.2 Naivety examples ......................................................... 195
4.3.7.2.1 Not respecting boundaries ....................................... 195
4.3.7.2.2 Copying .................................................................. 195
4.3.7.2.3 Pushing boundaries of activity ................................. 196
4.3.7.2.4 Unsure of actions ..................................................... 196
4.3.7.3 Non-Conformist examples .......................................... 197
4.3.7.3.1 Challenging rules .................................................... 197
4.3.7.3.2 Behaving in a non-permitted fashion ....................... 197
4.3.7.3.3 Ignoring authority ................................................................. 198
4.3.7.3.4 Not adhering to cultural norms of practice ................................ 198
4.3.7.3.5 Remaining silent ............................................................... 198
4.3.7.3.6 Deflecting adult’s questions .................................................. 199
4.3.7.3.7 Terminating dialogue with adult ............................................. 199
4.3.7.4 Combating fears examples (Phase 3 Only) .................................. 200
4.3.7.4.1 Evaluating risk ................................................................. 200
4.3.7.4.2 Overriding self-preservation ................................................. 200
4.3.7.4.3 Deconstructing barriers ....................................................... 201
4.3.7.4.4 Having a go ........................................................................ 201
4.3.7.4.5 Provoking others ................................................................. 202
4.3.8 Cross case analysis of risk taking .................................................... 202
4.3.8.1 Individual differences in risk taking ............................................ 203
4.3.9 Augmented Accuracy: Modifying, Perfecting, Embellishing .......... 205
4.3.9.1 Modifying .............................................................................. 205
4.3.9.2 Perfecting .............................................................................. 206
4.3.9.3 Embellishing ........................................................................... 207
4.3.10 Critiquing: Outcome, behaviour, of self and others .................... 208
4.3.10.1 Outcome ................................................................................ 208
4.3.10.2 Critiquing outcome ............................................................... 209
4.3.10.3 Behaviour .............................................................................. 209
4.3.10.4 Critiquing behaviour ............................................................. 210
4.3.11 Problem Ownership: Patience, Persistence ............................ 210
4.3.11.1 Patience ................................................................................. 211
4.3.11.2 Persistence .............................................................................. 212
4.4 Summarising Chapter 4- Visual Model: The Core of PT and PT Features in Action ............................................................. 213

CHAPTER FIVE ............................................................. 216

Findings RQ: 2 ........................................................................ 216

The Nurturing Role of Others ................................................................. 216

5.1 Introduction ................................................................................ 216
5.2 Part 1: Adults as Meddlers ............................................................ 217
5.2.1 Range of meddling: Nursery staff and researcher ....................... 218
5.2.2 Agentic Advocator ..................................................................... 218
5.2.2.1 Allowing time and space ......................................................... 218
5.2.2.2 Respecting boundaries ........................................................... 220
5.2.2.3 Standing back and stepping forward ....................................... 221
5.2.3 Learner/Documenter .................................................................. 222
5.2.4 Equitable Participation Negotiator .............................................. 222
5.2.5 Supportive Facilitator .................................................. 223
  5.2.5.1 Guiding ................................................................. 223
  5.2.5.2 Reflecting ............................................................ 223
  5.2.5.3 Prompting ............................................................. 223
  5.2.5.4 Reassuring ............................................................ 224
5.2.6 Play Partner ............................................................... 224

5.3 Part 2: Meddling in the Middle of Young Children’s Art Making:
My Role .............................................................................. 225
  5.3.1 Role Reversal: Child as Artist/Owner, Adult as Learner/Documenter .................................................. 226
  5.3.2 Mirrored Behaviours: Repeating, confirming, sustaining, extending, evaluating ................................ 229
    5.3.2.1 Repeating ............................................................... 229
    5.3.2.2 Confirming ............................................................ 230
    5.3.2.3 Sustaining ............................................................. 231
    5.3.2.4 Extending ............................................................. 231
    5.3.2.5 Evaluating ............................................................. 232
  5.3.3 Child Narrative: Describing imaginative ideas in action, bringing art to life through storytelling, moving beyond what can be seen ................................................................. 234
    5.3.3.1 Describing imaginative ideas in action ...................... 234
    5.3.3.2 Bringing art to life through storytelling ...................... 235
    5.3.3.3 Moving beyond what can be seen ............................. 237
  5.3.4 Adult Narrative: Making visual and verbal connections, acknowledging, challenging and provoking, going beyond the realist vision ................................................................. 237
    5.3.4.1 Making visual and verbal connections ....................... 238
    5.3.4.2 Acknowledging, challenging and provoking .................. 238
    5.3.4.3 Going beyond the realist vision .................................. 239
    5.3.5 Visual model: Meddling in the middle of young children’s art ................................................................. 240

5.4 Part 3: Peer-to-Peer Roles and Relationships ...................... 242
  5.4.1 Classroom dynamics and creative relationships ............ 242
  5.4.2 Emotionally enabling context driven by provocation ....... 243
  5.4.3 Communal spectatorship ............................................. 243
  5.4.4 Collaborative creativity .............................................. 244
  5.4.5 Individual “as if” differences ........................................ 245
    5.4.5.1 Rosie: Teacher- and her Apprentice ......................... 246
    5.4.5.2 Box Boy: Director- and his Assistant ....................... 247
    5.4.5.3 Hot Wheels: Observer-Replicator- and his Artist-Demonstrator ................................................................. 248
6.6.1.2 Rosie’s Summary ................................................................. 281
6.6.1.3 Box Boy ................................................................. 281
6.6.1.4 Box Boy’s Summary .................................................. 287
6.6.1.5 Hot Wheels .............................................................. 287
6.6.1.6 Hot Wheel’s Summary .................................................. 290

6.7 Visual Model and Summary: .................................................. 290
The Child’s Identity as an Artist Communicator ....................... 290

CHAPTER SEVEN ................................................................. 293

Discussion ........................................................................... 293

7.1 Introduction ........................................................................... 293

7.2 Discussing RQ1: How is young children’s emergent PT manifest
and evidenced in the nursery-school context? ......................... 297
7.2.1 Core of PT ........................................................................ 297
7.2.1.1 Playful acted out explorations .................................. 297
7.2.1.2 Fluxing drivers .......................................................... 298
7.2.1.3 Self-determined sensorial infusion ......................... 300
7.2.1.4 Immersive action intention flow .................................. 303
7.2.2 PT Features in action ..................................................... 305
7.2.2.1 Aesthetic acumen and acuity ..................................... 306
7.2.2.2 Question-responding .............................................. 308
7.2.2.3 Elucidation and Innovative imaginative declaration ...... 310
7.2.2.4 Risk taking .............................................................. 313
7.2.2.5 Augmented accuracy ................................................. 318
7.2.2.6 Critiquing and Problem ownership .............................. 319
7.2.2.7 Summary of PT- key findings ................................. 322

7.3 Discussing RQ2: How is young children’s collaborative emergent
PT nurtured by the role of others in the nursery-school context?.. 322
7.3.1 Introduction ...................................................................... 322
7.3.2 Part One: Adults as meddlers ......................................... 323
7.3.2.1 Range of meddling: Nursery staff and researcher ......... 324
7.3.2.1.1 Agentic Advocate ............................................. 324
7.3.2.1.2 Learner/Documenter ......................................... 327
7.3.2.1.3 Equitable Participation Negotiator .................... 328
7.3.2.1.4 Supportive Facilitator ....................................... 330
7.3.2.1.5 Play Partner ............................................................ 331
7.3.2.1.6 Summarising meddling styles ........................... 332
7.3.2.2 Meddling in the middle of young children’s art making- my
role ................................................................. 333
7.3.2.2.1 Role reversal ...................................................... 334
7.3.2.2 Narratives .................................................................335
7.3.3 Part Two: Classroom dynamics and creative relationships ...339
7.3.3.1 Emotionally enabling context driven by provocation ....339
7.3.3.1.2 Communal spectatorship ..........................................341
7.3.3.2 Peer-to-peer roles and relationships in collaborative creativity .................................................................342
7.3.3.2.1 Parallel working ..........................................................346
7.3.3.2.2 Tactical engagement, tensions and blocks .................346

7.4 Discussing RQ3: How is the child’s identity as an artist communicator manifested through voice and learning experience in the nursery-school context? ..........................................................347
7.4.1 Introduction .........................................................................347
7.4.2 Case study summaries ........................................................347
7.4.2.1 Summarising personality ..................................................348
7.4.2.2 Summarising self-talk and talk to others .........................350
7.4.2.3 Summarising boundaries physical and personal ............352
7.4.2.4 Summarising artistic style, skill, and schema ...............355
7.4.2.5 Case study summaries- roles assumed ............................360
7.4.2.5.1 Rosie ........................................................................360
7.4.2.5.2 Box Boy ......................................................................361
7.4.2.5.3 Hot Wheels .................................................................363
7.4.2.5.4 Summarising roles assumed .......................................364
7.4.2.5.5 Summarising time spent in peer-to-peer creative relationships ......................................................................365
7.4.2.5.6 The implications of peer-to-peer roles assumed .........367
7.4.2.6 Social identity ....................................................................369

7.5 Summary of Discussion ................................................................370

CHAPTER EIGHT ...........................................................................373

Conclusion ......................................................................................373

8.1 Introduction ...............................................................................373
8.2 Conceptual Summary ...............................................................373
8.2.1 Thinking and doing in action ................................................373
8.2.2 The importance of being in an “as if “space for imagination and the complexity of collaboration ........................................375

8.3 What Children Can Do Together- ...........................................379
Recognising Differences .................................................................379
8.3.1 The temporary nature of peer-to-peer relationships ..........379
8.3.2 Linking identity to behaviours in action- “as if” ...............380
8.4 The Value of Artistic Communication in the Nursery Classroom ........................................... 382
  8.4.1 Elucidation and imagination ................................................................. 382
  8.4.2 Authentic voice in an authoring “as if” space ......................................... 384
8.5 Observing and Documenting Children’s Emergent Creativity ............................................. 388
  8.5.1 Characterising creativity ................................................................. 388
  8.5.2 PT Matrices ..................................................................................... 389
  8.5.3 The nature of “development” ............................................................... 392
  8.5.4 Summarising key PT differences in this doctoral study ............................ 394
8.6 Pedagogy of Possibilities- Developing a Role ................................................................. 397
  8.6.1. Enabling creativity through facilitation .............................................. 397
  8.6.1.1 Materials- possibility broad, moderate, narrow ................................. 397
  8.6.1.2 Provocation ................................................................................... 398
  8.6.2 Extending creativity- intervention ....................................................... 399
  8.6.2.1 Meddling- the implications for practice ........................................... 399
8.7 Final Summary of Communicating Possibilities ......................................................... 402
8.8 Critique of this Doctoral Study ......................................................................................... 403
  8.8.1 Evaluation ........................................................................................... 403
  8.8.1.1 Small scale research ....................................................................... 403
  8.8.1.2 Unequal gender representation ....................................................... 403
  8.8.1.3 Microphone data ............................................................................ 403
  8.8.1.4 Prioritising the close up mobile video data set .................................. 404
  8.8.1.5 Episode selection ............................................................................ 404
  8.8.1.6 Researcher positioning and perspective .......................................... 405
  8.8.2 Further areas of research ..................................................................... 405
  8.8.2.1 Developmental aspects of PT ......................................................... 405
  8.8.2.2 Challenges for future researchers ................................................... 406
8.9 Looking Back, Looking Forward ...................................................................................... 407

APPENDICES ............................................................................................................. 410

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................................................... 436
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Table Heading</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table: 2.1</td>
<td>PT behaviours in action (Craft, et al., 2012b)</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 2.2</td>
<td>Practitioner role in PT (Craft, et al., 2012b)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 3.1</td>
<td>Notes on potential focus participants</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 3.2</td>
<td>Contribution of data to analysis- this doctoral study</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 3.3</td>
<td>Utilised elements of a grounded theory approach</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 3.4</td>
<td>Code classification, flow of classroom movements- this doctoral study</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 3.5</td>
<td>Summary of research process</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 4.1</td>
<td>Question framing examples- this doctoral study</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 4.2</td>
<td>Question- responding categories and sub-categories- this doctoral study</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 4.3</td>
<td>Question-responding (QR) definitions by comparison- Chappell, et al. (2008) and this doctoral study</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 4.4</td>
<td>Summary of QR cross case deductive analysis across weeks 1-9</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 4.5</td>
<td>Summary of individual QR differences (deductive analysis)</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 4.6</td>
<td>Strength of PT features- this doctoral study</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 5.1</td>
<td>Range of meddling styles</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 5.2</td>
<td>Range of narratives</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 5.3</td>
<td>Summary of question-posing examples</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 6.1</td>
<td>Time spent in art areas engaged in activity alone (Rosie)</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 6.2</td>
<td>Time spent in art areas engaged in activity with peers (Rosie)</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 6.3</td>
<td>Time spent in art areas engaged in activity alone (Box Boy)</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 6.4</td>
<td>Time spent in art areas engaged in activity with peers (Box Boy)</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 6.5</td>
<td>Time spent in art areas engaged in activity alone (Hot Wheels)</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 6.6</td>
<td>Time spent in art areas engaged in activity with peers (Hot Wheels)</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 7.1</td>
<td>Comparison of PT characteristics found in early years settings</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 7.2</td>
<td>Question-responding definitions by comparison</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 7.3</td>
<td>Comparative table of artistic representations and communications- Hall (2008) and this doctoral study</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 7.4</td>
<td>Case study summary- roles assumed in order of strength</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 7.5</td>
<td>Case study summaries- time spent in art areas engaged with peers</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 7.6</td>
<td>Case study summary- time spent in art areas alone (red) and engaged with peers (blue)</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 8.1</td>
<td>The Core of PT Matrix- this doctoral study</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 8.2</td>
<td>PT Question-Responding Matrix- this doctoral study</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 8.3</td>
<td>PT Risk Taking Matrix- this doctoral study</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 8.4</td>
<td>PT Behaviours Matrix- this doctoral study</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table: 8.5</td>
<td>Defining continuous and discontinuous development Berk (2006)</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Figure Heading</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 2.1</td>
<td>An evidence-based model of PT, Burnard, et al. (2006)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 2.2</td>
<td>Pedagogy and PT, Cremin, et al. (2006)</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 2.3</td>
<td>Question-posing and question-responding, and original PT framework, Chappell, et al. (2008)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 2.4</td>
<td>Question-posing and question-responding Chappell, et al., (2008)</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 2.5</td>
<td>PT through provocation-stimulated play Craft, McConnon, and Matthews (2012)</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 2.6</td>
<td>Pedagogy nurturing possibility thinking Craft, McConnon, and Matthews (2012b)</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 2.7</td>
<td>Expressive arts and design: Being imaginative practitioner guidance, Early Education (2012)</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 2.8</td>
<td>Meddling in the middle, shifting behaviours and actions, McConnon (2013)</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 2.9</td>
<td>Creativity as individual, collaborative, and communal, Chappell (2008)</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 3.1</td>
<td>Focus of analysis Chappell, et al. (2008)</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 3.2</td>
<td>Focus of analysis Craft, et al. (2012b)</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 3.3</td>
<td>Focus of data collection timing and analytical layers- this doctoral study</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 4.1</td>
<td>Core of PT - this doctoral study</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 4.2</td>
<td>Visual model the core of PT and PT features in action- this doctoral study</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 5.1</td>
<td>Rosie’s spider picture (end of episode)</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 5.2</td>
<td>Visual model of meddling in the middle of young children’s art- this doctoral study</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 5.3</td>
<td>Visual model of classroom dynamics and creative relationships- this doctoral study</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 6.1</td>
<td>Identity manifest through individual creativity- this doctoral study</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 6.2</td>
<td>Artist communicator identities</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 7.1</td>
<td>Visual model the core of PT and PT features in action- this doctoral study</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 7.2</td>
<td>Critical themes- this doctoral study</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 8.1</td>
<td>Conceptualising a possibility path into the “as if” space</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure: 8.2</td>
<td>PT pervading through EYFS curriculum areas</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>