

# Ecological investigation of learning in diverse communities with two- year-old girls

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# A Day in the Life

## Project Participants

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## Funders

Began under RDI: 'Interdisciplinary examination of the role of culture on human development: an international project for the development of new methodologies' based at the Center for Research on Culture and Human Development at St Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia (directed by T. Callaghan).

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# A Day in the Life



investigating aspects of culture in the lives of two-year-old girls in diverse communities across the globe.

core investigative aim: exploration of the notion of a 'strong child'

# A Day in the Life

Ecological investigation of thriving two year old girls

- Canada
- Peru
- Italy
- UK
- Thailand

'children as social actors'

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## Our objective

stimulating exchange with researchers and early childhood practitioners as to the goals, methodologies, initial findings, and implications of these understandings for perspectives on parenting, family learning, acculturation, and professional practice.

## Structure of discussion:

5 papers, discussant, open discussion

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## Aims

A: Exploring thriving, 'strong children' in a variety of cultural communities

B: Further our understanding of children as social actors, interacting with others in ways that shape culture and are shaped by culture

C: Develop interpretive research methods, through the application of a critical perspective.

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## Criticality and culture

Culture: "meaning-bearing activity in all its forms"  
(Raymond Williams)

"Culture is an evaluative conversation constructed by actors out of the raw materials afforded by tradition and ongoing experience. It is continually modified by them in processes of social interaction, and their behavior is guided by anticipation of such cultural evaluation." (Hammel, 1990: 457)



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Focus on 'strong child' (DfES/Sure Start 2003)  
- interpretive approach:

Openness in methodology

Working across settings, attempt to move away  
'parochialism in notions of quality'

Reflexivity

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"The process of development can be understood only by ... a dual research agenda. First, one must study children engaged in their daily activities to observe the unit of child-in-activity-in-context that represents the locus of the developmental process. Second, one must also study the cultural belief systems and institutions that are responsible for consistency in the everyday contexts of behavior experienced by children." (Gaskins, 1999: 27).

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## Outline of methods

- *Locating research participants*
- *Interviewing; Pre-filming; mapping the environment*
- *Day in the Life filming*
- *Selection & creation of compilation video*
- *Iterative stage*
- *Beginning analysis*

Project website: <http://dayinthelife.open.ac.uk/>

# A Day in the Life

Michael Cole (1997)

"There is no doubt that culture is patterned, but there is also no doubt that it is far from uniform and that its patterning is experienced in local, face-to-face interactions that are locally constrained..." p. 250



Swings and hammocks  
as secure bases  
during  
'A Day in the Life'  
in diverse cultures

Sombat Tapanya

Catherine Ann Cameron

# Goal

To explore:

- familial supports for the development of "strong children" -- open to local definition
- interactional synchrony between the child participants, their families, and their shared engagement with available cultural tools for soothing
- contextual soothing resources toddlers and their caregivers enlist that **appear to** support and promote confidence in exploration and in social maturity

# Attachment as an heuristic

- John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth, Herbert Kaye, Daniel Stern, & Mary Main
- Security for exploration -- “roots for wings”
- Primary care-giving as interactional synchrony
- Responsive and reliable

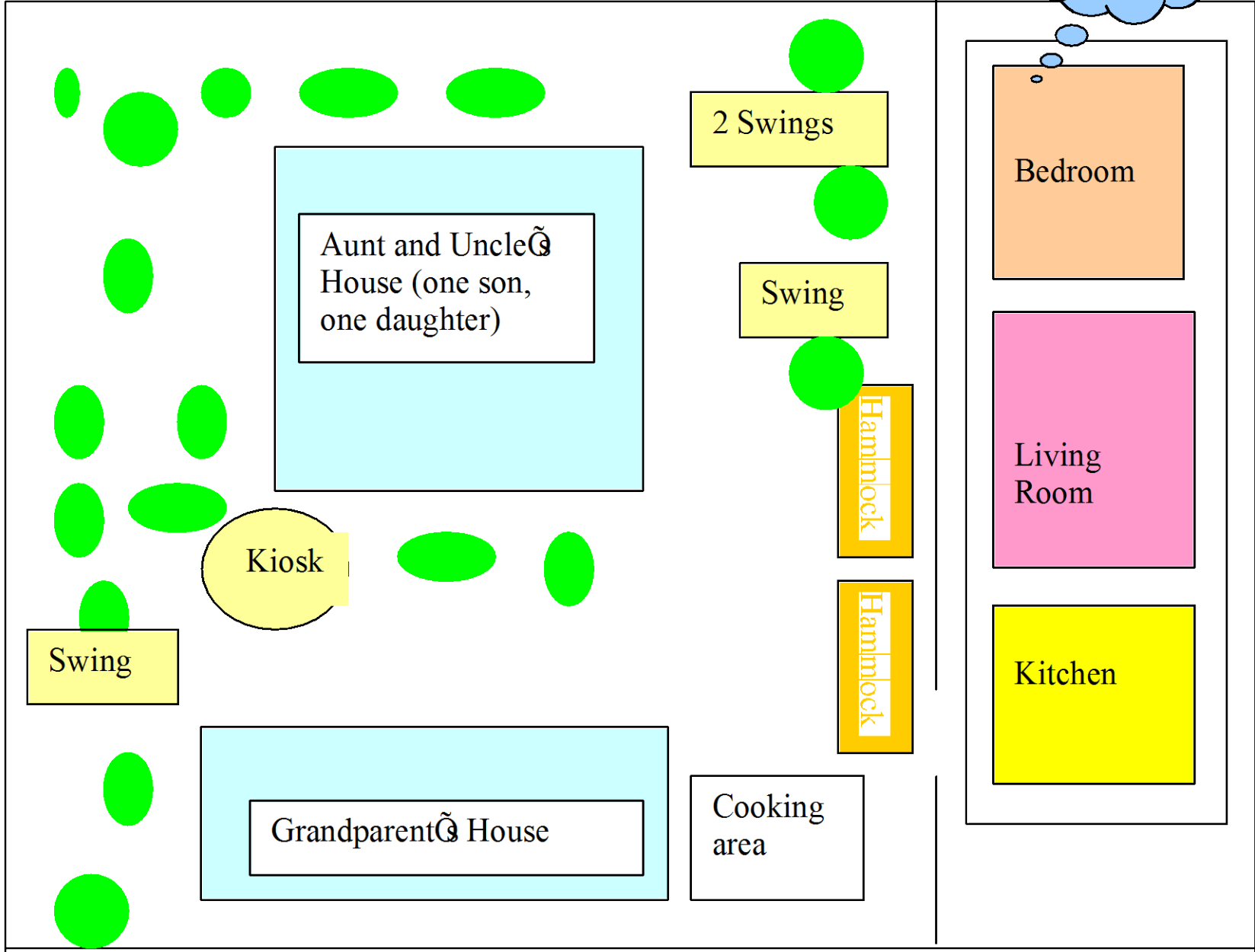
# Analytic methods

- Identified “secure base” respites from ongoing activity
- Identified the contexts for respites
- Identified the interlocutors, if any, associated
- Identified cultural artifacts associated
- Inferred goals of child and caregivers



# In Thailand

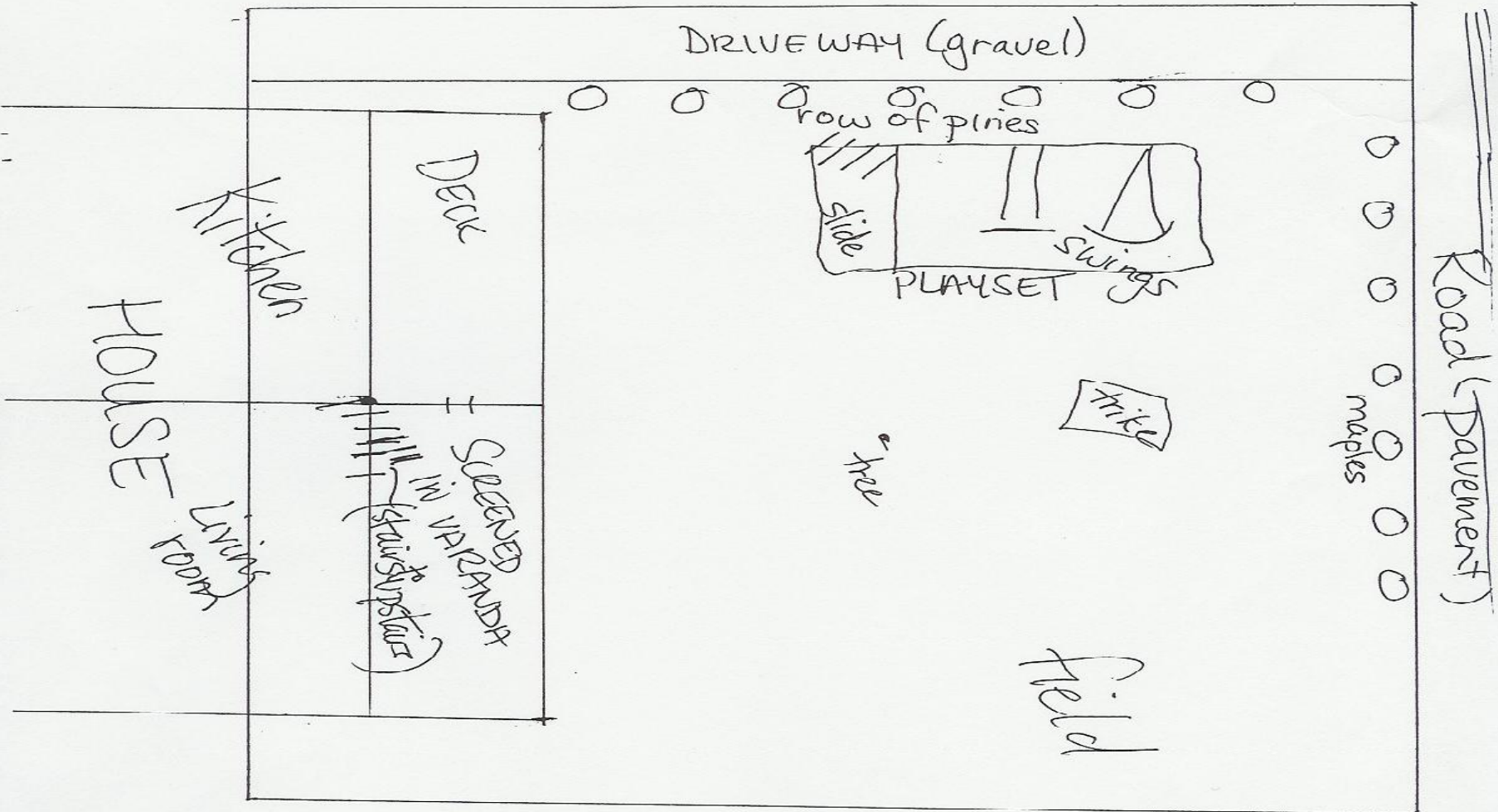
- Family compound near city with: Two parents, sibling; two grandparents; aunts and uncles; cousins
- Time to share interests (frog in grandpa's shoe; cooking themes)
- Swings and hammocks -- contact comfort -- time out for r, r, & r
- Three R's: rest, reflection, & rehearsal in children's places (Rasmussen, 2004)



# In Canada

- Nuclear family -- mother, father and two children in detached house in the country
- Mother and younger sibling (father, grandmother, aunt)
- Child-scaled and -directed artifacts -- furniture, play equipment, but most time spent with pots and pans
- Swings more successful than rocking chair

# YARD

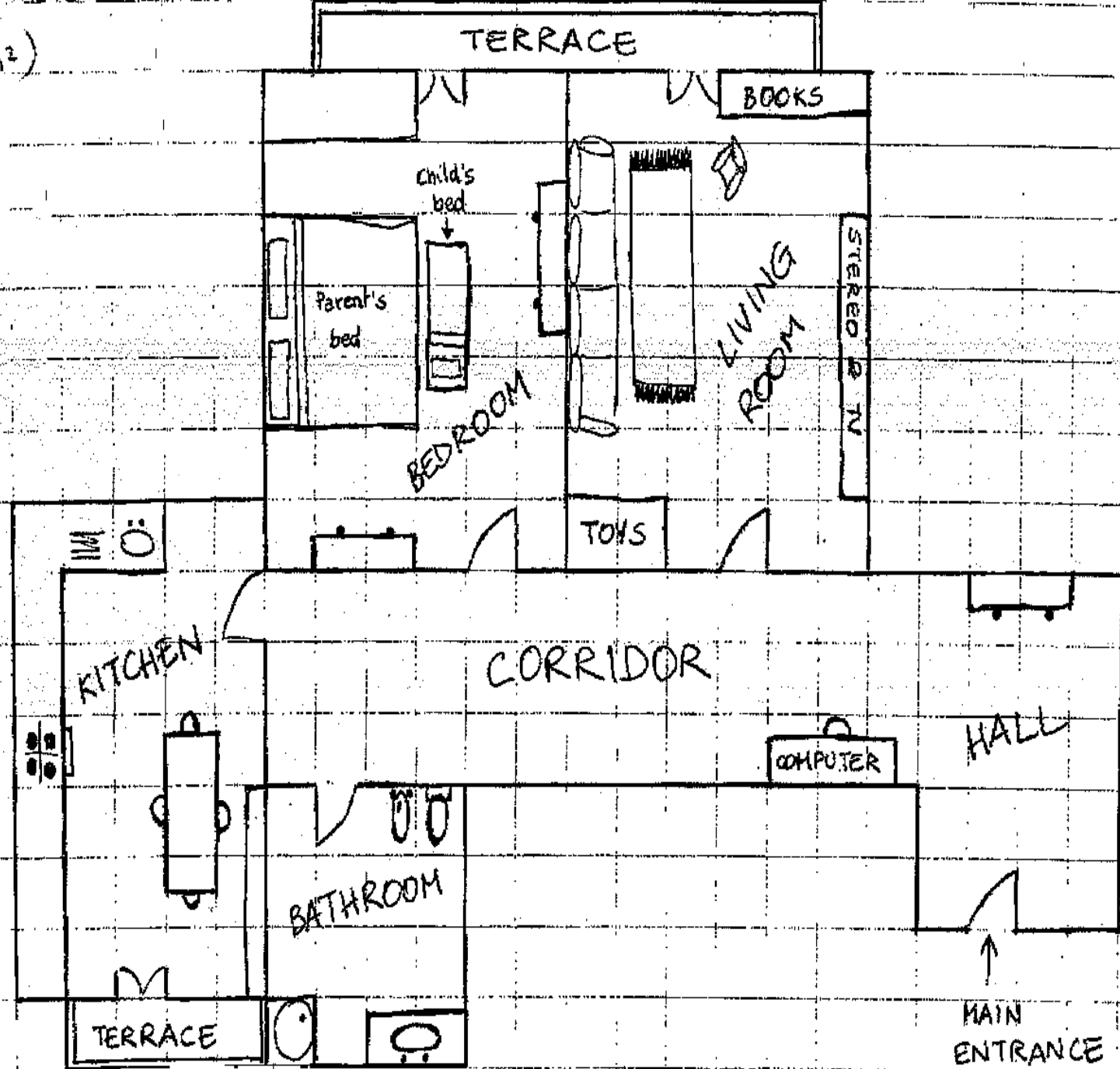


# In Italy

- Nuclear family in city apartment
- Father, mother and one child
- Father commenced and sustained many of the interactions
- Activities centred in apartment on hot summer's day
- Lap rocking time after nap

THE HOUSE

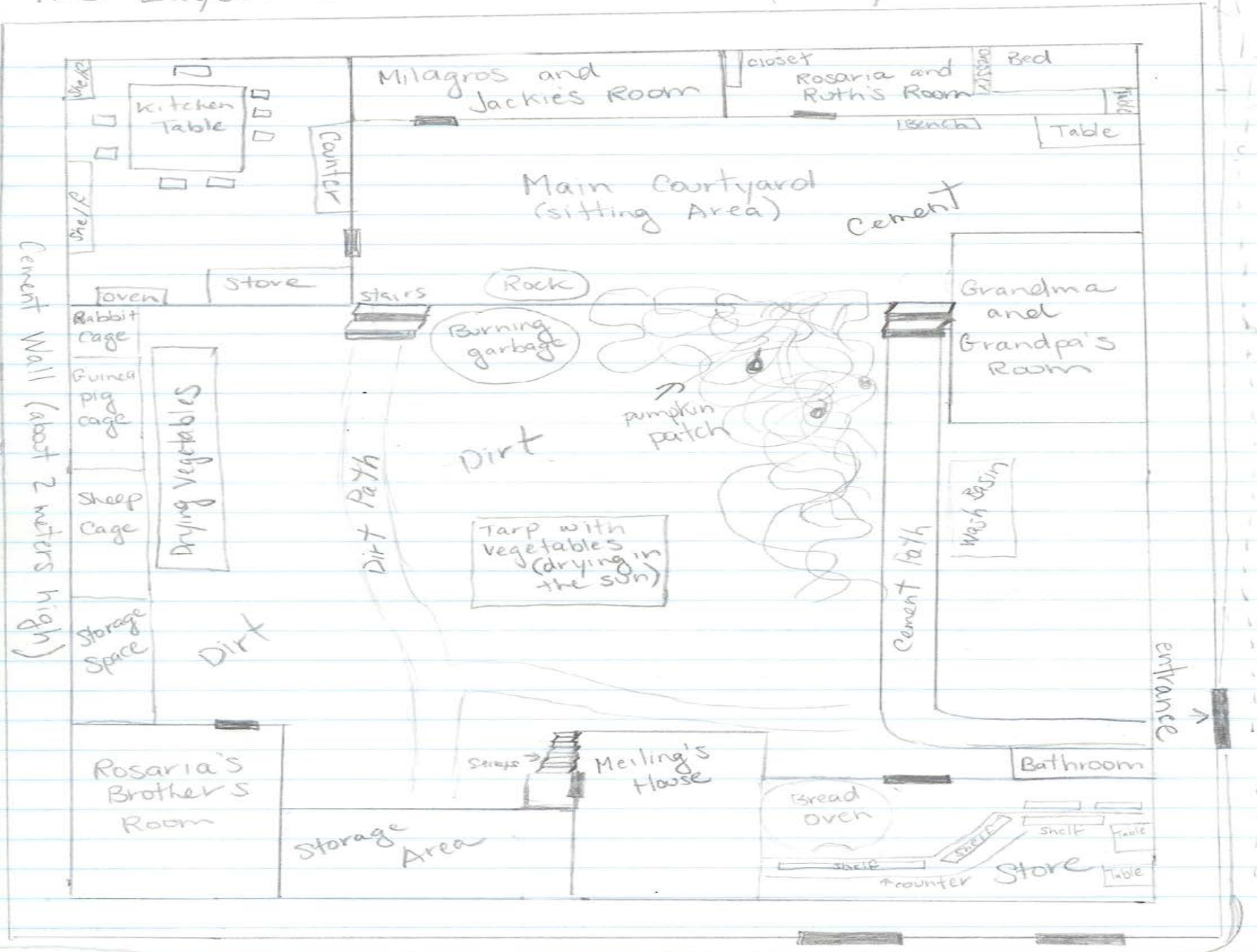
60 m<sup>2</sup>)



# In Peru

- Rural family compound: mother, father, sister, aunt, uncle, cousin, grandmother, grandfather
- Feeding by almost all
- Dancing spontaneously as well as on demand
- Book reading with grandmother, as aunt and cousin stand by

# The Layout of The Entire Property

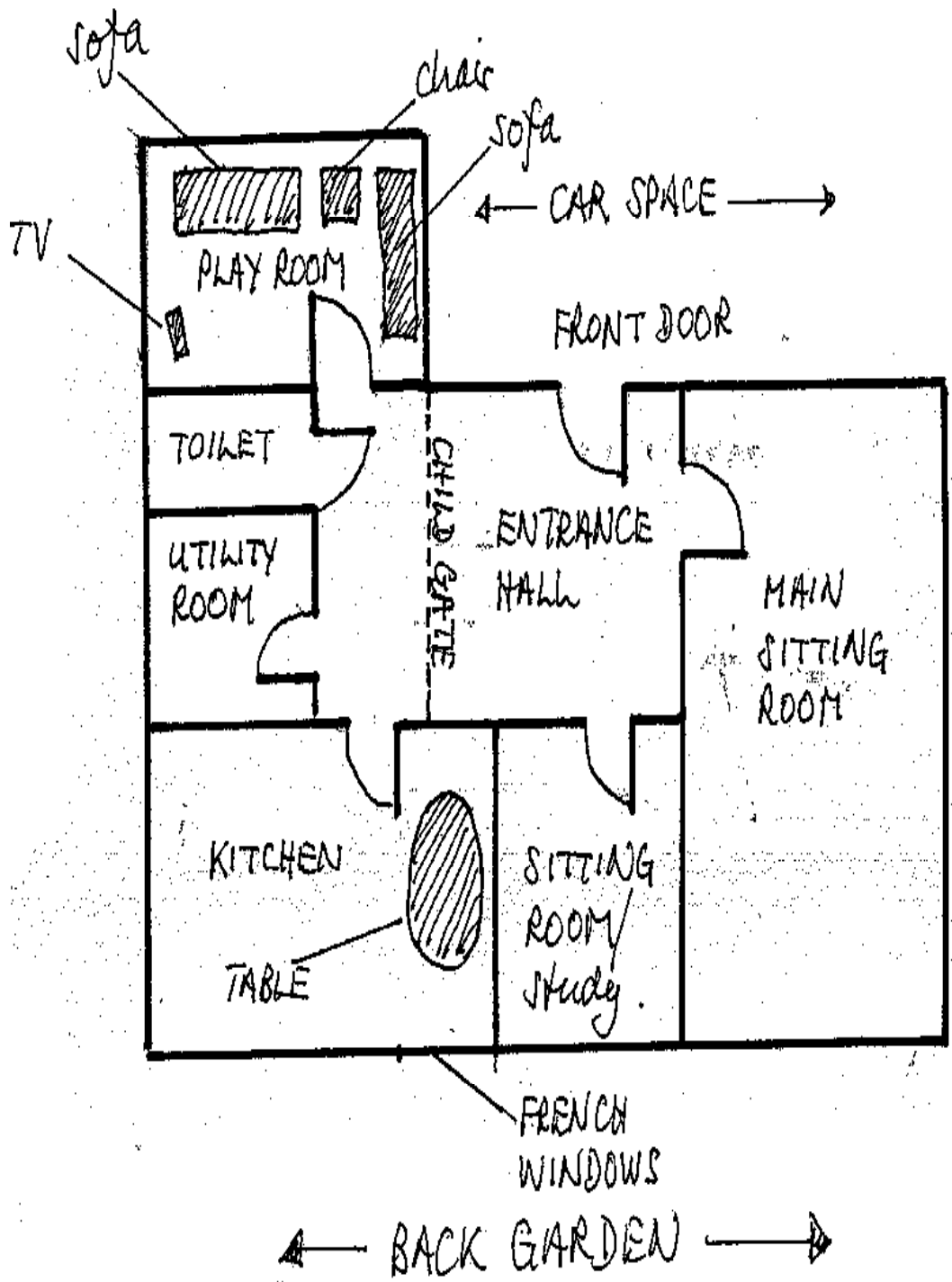


Main Road



# In the United Kingdom

- Mother, father, twin sibling (& two sets of grandparents)
- Lap time story telling
- Elaborate lunch and games at table
- Very active day taking children to mall, children's farm, indoor playground
- Car sing song



# Conclusions

- Swings and hammocks, rest, reflection, & rehearsal: The soothing respites provide in all contexts pauses that refresh
- Soothing motions connect the children to their caregivers both in support for emotional connectivity and as resources to proceed with engagement in a busy day
- Activity during the day is enhanced by breaks in pace that swings and hammocks can afford
- Interactional synchrony so evident in this shared soothing may enhance the carer's well being as it does the child's

Exploring 'eating events' in  
interactions between children and  
family members

Julia Gillen & Roger Hancock  
Open University, UK

# A Day in the Life

Eating event: 'any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the offering and/or consumption of food plays a role'

Heath (1983) defines literacy event:

"any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role."

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- 1 Narrow definitions miss aspects of meaningful engagements;
- 2 Cultural practice - part of family 'habitus'
- 3 Links with play

# A Day in the Life

# Peru



Situation - time, place

Eating event - people, nutrition

Other interests - hat, bird

Negotiations

Situation - time, place

Eating event - people,  
portability

Other interests - exploration,  
movement, music, etc.

Interactions



Situation - time, place

Eating event: eating v play

rivalry v support

Family eating practices - potential  
for complex affective exchanges

Situation - time, place - selection  
Eating event  
Play  
'mutual apprentices'

Situation - time, place  
Eating event  
Play  
Perspectives

# A Day in the Life

## Conclusions

Agendas, agency

Negotiations, trading

Play, explorations of interests

'eating events'

Bidirectional view of socialisation

# Musical Experiences During a Day in the Life

Susan Young: University of Exeter, UK

Julia Gillen: Open University, UK

Catherine Ann Cameron: University of British  
Columbia, Canada

# Analytical dimensions of family music practices

- 1 Identifying and mapping musical experiences
- 2 Identifying interrelations between musical activities and immediate environment
- 3 Identifying interrelations between musical activities and sociocultural/historical environment

- 4 Identifying forms of participation for parents and children
  
- 5 Inferring purpose for music within family practices and parenting - relating to project's overall focus on 'a strong child'

# 1 Mapping musical experiences

- Ambient music from radio & TV
- Theme & soundtrack music on TV & video
- Recorded music on CD/cassettes – commercial & ‘home-made’
- Tunes & pitched sounds made by toys
- Songs sung by adults for children & by children with adults
- Actions & dance movements performed by children & modelled/supported by adults



## 2 Interrelations between musical activities and immediate environment

- Relationship between confinement within constructed environment (flat, house, compound, car) & extent of structuring in musical activity
- Technologies extend & supplement childhood music

### 3 Interrelations between musical activities & sociocultural context

- Embodied postural & gestural primaries of family & community group
- Traditions of children's songs
- Traditions of adult music, in family/community
- Economic situation + technological developments
- Music as commodity – both adult and children's popular culture
- Influence of formal education practices

# 4 Forms of Participation

## Adults:

- Select
- Initiate
- Perform
- Model & cue
- Interject
- Encourage & praise

## Children:

- Move, dance, gesture
- Vocalise
- Respond verbally

## 4 Forms of Participation: musical activities as 'scripts'

- Concept of Scripts as events, routines children come to recognise (Nelson & Gruendel)
- Music as 'Scripts' (Cook) -  
music as a resource with potential to engender forms of engagement

# 5 Inferring purpose

Music contributing to:

- Physical contact between parent + child, enhanced by entrained rhythmicity
- Assistance with regulating physicality and emotions
- Provision of entertainment and education
- Enculturation into family's & community's values
  - acquiring sense of identity

# Humpty, Dumpty: UK

- Connects with British aural tradition of children's lap-games
- K. is described as 'wild' & needing to be active
- 'Live' singing game is flexible to moment
- A 'script' (she knows, enjoys, asks for repetitions)

# Daycare songs cassette: Italy

- Home musical repertoire extended by technology and selected cassette
- Tape is school-home link – a ‘script’ with wider connections
- Occupying her while remaining in cool indoor space during midday
- Father structures participation in operating equipment, whistles (and sings?), acts out
- Participation emphasises instructive content

# Dancing to CD: Peru

- Connects with traditions of adult music & dance in community
- Staying in warmth of bed during early morning?
- Father models dance movements, operates CD player, watches and praises
- Display of M.'s prowess as dancer - pride
- Mode of participation - child-engagement with adult cultural forms



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# The development of symbolic systems: a cultural perspective



**Giuliana Pinto**

**Beatrice Accorti Gamannossi**

**Catherine Ann Cameron**

*Interactive symposium 'A Day in the Life': Ecological investigation of learning in diverse communities with two-year-old girls*



# The acquisition of symbolic system

- Importance of the emergent knowledge of notational systems presumed to be developmental precursors to:
- Conventional forms of symbolic communication (Lee & Karmiloff-Smith, 1996).



# The acquisition of symbolic systems

- Development of an understanding of representation across domains
- Identification of experiences that influence children's acquisition of various symbol systems
- Focus on drawing activities and knowledge of print and numbers (Bialystok et al., 2000).



# The Day In The Life (DITL) data set

- Home activities by which parents expose child to opportunities for learning about different notational domains such as drawing and written language (Payne et al., 1994).
- Observed:
  - child's approach to written notational system;
  - home activities by which parents create opportunities for learning about written language thus enhancing development of symbolic representations.



# Aims

To observe direction of child's attention towards symbolic systems: Report on three different cultures for:

- development of symbolic activities useful for enhancing children's interest in written symbols (Lonigan, 1994);
- typical settings for emergent development of symbol systems: shared attention, child-adult, dyadic asymmetrical relationships, and reciprocal involvement (Ravid & Tolchinsky, 2002).



# Participants

Three dyads (2 1/2 year-old child and adult) in three different DITL cultures were examined;

- ***United Kingdom***: the child and her grandmother,
- ***Peru***: the child and her aunt,
- ***Italy***: the child and her father.



# The coding system

- The most important elements in the interactions between the girls and significant adults in symbolic activities,
- Used an original sequential coding system using the following categories:
  - spatial position of the two participants,
  - type of activities involved,
  - social behaviour of both partners,
  - language used in interactions,
  - level of participation in the activity.



# United Kingdom

- A very high level of participation from the girl, who is in grandmother's arms during the whole interaction.
- Reciprocity in social behaviour: grandmother turns pages and points out the characters of the story.
- Language is mostly simple, but some complex interchanges (more than two verbal exchanges).
- Grandmother's interaction style is *dialogical*: she speaks to her granddaughter; imitates cries, voices and gestures of animals characters; and gives her time to respond.





# Peru

- Despite their spatial position the girl and her aunt maintain eye contact during the whole interaction and show high engagement.
- Some solitary activities, but the interactions are largely reciprocal: the girl turns the pages pointing to and naming the animals, the aunt interacts with her asking names of animals and pointing at pictures.
- Simple language is used to communicate with the partner.
- The aunt has an *instructional* role: she is attentive to correct vocabulary use and pronunciation.



# Italy

- High level of participation from both father and child: close position and maintenance of shared focused attention.
- Reciprocal interaction: the father describes scenes, points out figures and objects in pictures, He answers the girl's questions about names of objects in pictures.
- Child is active in suggesting activities. Her language is simple and direct.
- Father's interactional style is *directive*: he mostly turns pages and gives the child instruction about correct word usage.

# Conclusion

- We report important variability which characterizes the different contexts, (e.g., different approaches to emergent literacy, different degrees of sharing of material). The nature of data does not test hypotheses about persistence of different patterns nor about their exclusiveness in each context.
- However, we suggest that the construction of competencies in notational systems is a commitment in all cultures examined.