

Play Journal

This Play Journal records the 8 sessions undertaken in this case study. At the end of each session there are signposts to the sections in the paper which discuss & explore points, ideas and issues the session raised. All names and details of the children and their families have been changed.

Nasseem -Session 1 - July 13th 2007

Nasseem recognises Penny from the doorway and jumps up and down smiling. He runs into the living room, out of sight and then back as we walk in. He is clearly excited to see her and recognises her from the preliminary visit. We come into the living room and talk to his mum for a while. Nasseem is keen to start playing and Penny sits down on the floor and engages with him in a playful way, focusing on him. I start to film. Nasseem puts his forehead to the carpet and follows the pattern round the edge of the carpet, clockwise. He does this a few times, forehead kept pressed to the carpet and feet pushing him along. Penny tells him she's here to play.

A pot of coloured pencils come into the play. Penny offers eye contact, with animated facial expressions and a clear, animated voice. Nasseem accepts this and makes eye contact. He picks up the pencils and throws them in the air. Penny takes this as a play cue rather than any kind of challenging behaviour or block to contact. She picks up the pencils and offers Nasseem some words and adds an idea to the game. She tells him she likes his game. She says "1,2,3 GO" and throws them in the air. Nasseem smiles and laughs and repeats this cue from Penny. Penny puts words to his actions and he replies "GO". He grins and looks over to his mum and grins at her. He looks at me too and makes clear eye contact for a moment and smiles, as if he has understood my observer role. They play this game for about 10 -15 minutes, Penny offering Nasseem small variations to the game such as stretching arms out straight ahead before you throw the pencils and holding the pencils still before you throw them. This mirroring with subtle incremental changes shows the child that the worker respects his world, tries to understand it and playfully offers small variations. At some point in the game Nasseem also makes one or two circuits of the carpet with his forehead pressed to the pattern on the carpet, following the lines round the floor.

About half way through this game Nasseem gets up and goes to his mum, who is sitting watching him throughout the session. He hugs her and kisses her. Then he returns to his play. Penny lets Nasseem direct his play and tracks him, showing him with her actions that she has understood what he's doing and doesn't try to direct the play herself. Penny reads the playful cues Nasseem gives her and initiates some physical play, wiggling Nasseem's legs and gentle rough and tumble. Nasseem responds with laughter and smiles and clear eye contact.

The pencil game draws to a close and Nasseem heads off to his mum's bag where he takes out a prescription. He unfolds it and stares at it. Mum explains that he like the NHS logo and is indeed interested in any logo. Penny acknowledges this out loud to Nasseem "you like the words!" Mum asks for it back but he is reluctant to give it back. He cries a little, wails and complains and digs it out from where his mum tries to hide it. He tries to crumple the prescription up and at this point Penny introduces a cardboard box which she had asked mum to get at the preliminary visit. This was a Walker's crisp box with a yellow and red Walker's logo. Nasseem gets down on the floor and presses his face close to the logo, his eyes very, very close to the box. He stays like this for a few seconds.

There is a hole cut in the top of the box. Nasseem looks at his mum. Then he climbs in. Nasseem is repeating "bye-bye" but then smiling and grinning. Just before the box game starts Penny says to him "I'm not going yet, I'm staying". Nasseem climbs into the box and Penny zooms him across the floor. He laughs and smiles. He climbs out looking triumphant. He beams at mum and holds eye contact with her and then beams briefly at me, as if to share his lovely moment.

Penny and Nasseem repeat this several times. When he tumbles out of the box Penny wiggles his legs and ruffles his hair and tickles him. Nasseem laughs and squeals with delight. He gets back into the box and keeps saying "nice". The box starts to disintegrate. Penny asks Nasseem if he would like to go "again". They pause and sit face to face with the box between them. He looks at her. He bangs on the box with his feet, drumming out a little rhythm. Penny bangs the same rhythm back with her hands. Nasseem smiles and offers another rhythm. Penny responds, mirroring his sound and action. They share very strong eye contact and Nasseem starts to smile. He plays rhythm on the box and looks at Penny with expectation, that his actions and sounds will be reflected back to him. Watching them they seem to be very much engaged with each other, very closely connected, sharing a very important communication.

Penny asks if he would like to do the box riding again. Then she says to him “you dont want to”. Nasseem says “Dont want to” and Penny smiles and says she has understood that he doesn’t want to say again. I wonder how much of his speech is echolalic.

It is time to go. Penny is lying down on the floor and Nasseem puts his feet on her tummy and she tells him that he’s saying that he trusts her. She says she has to go and Nasseem says “Ooaaah” - a sound of disappointment. Penny says that she feels like that too.

Nasseem follows us out to the door and smiles at Penny and then runs back into the living room.

See Letting the child direct the play; Mirroring; Sensory Perceptual Difficulties in Autism; Play Cues; Loose parts & Play types

Nasseem - Session 2 17th July 2007

Nasseem immediately recognises Penny and smiles broadly. He giggles and laughs. He comes over to Penny straight away and seems ready to play. Nasseem makes strong eye contact, he looks almost expectantly at her face. Penny smiles broadly at Nasseem and widens her eyes. She returns the strong eye contact and says ‘hello’ to him. He picks up a leaflet and looks at it. His mum goes to take it away and put it behind her on the sofa, to hide it. Nasseem keeps trying to get it. He makes some frustrated sounds as he tries to get the leaflet but uses no words. The leaflet goes under the sofa and he stands and looks at it. Mum said it has gone, all gone. Nasseem looks at the bottom of the sofa. He lies down and tries to reach the leaflet - he can’t. His frustration grows and his frustrated sounds become louder and more desperate. He starts to jiggle up and down and pull at his mum. The tension and anxiety are palpable in the room

Penny introduces another cardboard box that mum has organised for this week’s session. Nasseem is calmed by this briefly and looks at it for a moment. There is no hole in the top of the box as with the first box. The two flaps of the base of the box box are taped together. Nasseem looks at the taped base and pushes at it. He keeps pushing at it and wailing and crying and pulling at his mum’s arm. His frustration resumes and mounts very quickly. He cries out and pushes at the box. He flings himself onto the sofa and flails his arms and legs. He is crying out

loudly now, real cries of frustration. It is distressing and stressful to watch. Penny asks him clearly and firmly to listen and to use his words. Her tone of voice seems to ground him and he quietens and looks at her. She repeats something about telling us what he wants. Then she uses the edge of a small plastic mirror to cut the tape and open the box. Nasseem immediately calms and tries to climb into the box. It is a little small but he manages to climb in.

Penny offers the game from last week where she whizzes Nasseem round the room in the box, again saying “1,2,3 . . .” and leaving Nasseem to finish the sentence with “Go!” The box breaks up with every ride round the rug. As before, Nasseem is smiling and laughing, eyes sparkling. When he tumbles out of the box he laughs and giggles and Penny does ‘spaghetti legs’ (holding the child’s ankles and wiggling their legs up and down) and tickles him. More laughter. Penny asks him “again?” “Again” Nasseem replies. After several goes the box completely disintegrates. Nasseem puts his forehead to the carpet and pushes himself round the edge of the carpet with his legs, as he did last week. Is it a way to manage the transition from one game which he was really enjoying to something else?

Nasseem then gets up and goes over to the dresser and comes back with the pot of pencils. He looks at Penny and wants to play the game from last week. He throws the pencils up and this time he throws them much further than last week into the corridor. They play this game for a while, then one of the pencils rolls under the sofa and Nasseem looks frustrated and starts to make a frustrated sound. Penny tries to get the pencil with a piece of the broken cardboard. At this point Nasseem goes over to the camera bag on the sofa. He stands in front of it, staring at the large white logo on the black bag. He gets right up close to it, eyes pressed up to the fabric. However, he doesn’t stay with the logo for long and turns and goes over to the garden patio doors.

He pulls at them and Penny puts words to his actions - “I want the door open”. Nasseem goes out into the garden and straight over to his plastic truck. He rides up and down in it for a while. He comes back to a large container and starts to play in it. Then he picks up an old saucepan on the patio floor and goes to put it on his head laughing. He hesitates and Penny says to him “is that your hat?”. He then begins a game where he gets his mum to put the saucepan on his head, then he runs around until it falls off at which he laughs long and hard and runs back to start all over again. He tries out a few words, laughing all the time. He is in control of this game. As he runs off and the saucepan falls off his head

Penny says to him “you made that happen. You did that!”

Nasseem seems to find the natural end to this game and trundles off to the shed, he goes behind it for a while, giving himself a little break from the contact. Penny just waits for him to come back. He does and he heads over to a window box full of soil on the patio floor. Penny joins him. He lifts up handfuls of soil and watches it run from his fingers. He repeats this and says ‘nice, nice’. Penny says ‘you like that, you’re letting me know that you like that.’

The ensuing game is a conversation with the soil, Nasseem showing Penny what he likes doing with it and Penny replying and putting his actions into words. Penny joins in with the soil play, running it through her fingers. Nasseem repeats throughout “nice, nice”. He puts soil on his head and throws soils at the fence. He looks very happy. When he drops soil on Penny he says “sorry”. He seems to guess that the hour of the session is nearly up - he starts to say “shesh” which his mum tells us means ‘finished’ in Bengali. Penny says it is finished and that she has enjoyed playing with him.

Nasseem sees Penny out, he smiles and then runs off - sometimes good bye is hard.

Feedback from mum - Nasseem has not watched any Thomas DVD’s this week. He has also been enjoying some rough and tumble play and playful times with his older brother.

See Sensory Perceptual Difficulties in Autism; Loose Parts & Play Types; Touch & Physicality; Managing feelings; Moods, feelings & atmospheres

Nasseem - Session 3 - 26th July 2007

Nasseem is so pleased to see Penny - he greets her with a big smile. He seems to have a sense of expectation now, like this is going to be fun. He climbs onto the sofa and has a look at me and the camera. He is interested in how it works and points at the digital screen, calling it ‘TV’. I show him how it films what’s in front of the camera. “TV” he says again. I show him how I film Penny and she looks over at us. He catches her eye and ducks behind me - a huge cue for a game of hide and seek! Penny asks out loud where he is. He scoots off the sofa and hides behind her back. She keeps looking for him with big gestures of “where

is Nasseem?!” He giggles and is of course delighted when he is finally ‘found’.

Nasseem comes back to the sofa and picks up the bag that has the camera in, he looks at the logo again closely - white writing on a black background. He puts the bag on his shoulder and runs off laughing. He runs into the corridor and stands there looking at Penny and then comes back into the room. There is a big strong cardboard box to play with this week and Nasseem climbs in and the box play begins. There follows the most wonderful piece of play - Nasseem is asking for the game to start, using words, enjoying himself, laughing and giggling. The atmosphere is full of fun and lightness. When Nasseem tumbles out of the box, Penny makes use of this to give him lots of tickles and do ‘spaghetti legs’. This is all so much fun that Nasseem’s brother Suleiman joins in - Nasseem resists this at first but the fun of the game seems irresistible and soon his brother is playing the game with him, pulling him along in the box and tipping him out, drumming on the box and tickling and giving him ‘spaghetti’ legs’. Penny then plays rough and tumble with both brothers and plays catching feet which both boys find squealingly hilarious. I think of Dr. Solomon’s brilliant evaluation criteria “you know when you’re playing at the right level when everybody’s having a good time.”

The box game is repeated but with variations. The idea of Suleiman’s turn is introduced. Nasseem is reluctant for this to happen at first. He jumps into the box with his brother too instead. Penny gives them a ride together, a shared go and then a solo turn for Suleiman. Nasseem is encouraged to join in. He doesn’t like it much but it seems like the idea has started.

There is much rough and tumble play and wild laughter. Penny is finally worn out. Nasseem pulls at mum’s dress and the patio doors to go out into the garden. Once out he gets his bike and cycles up and down. The garden is on a slight incline and he enjoys freewheeling down hill. He does this several times. His mum has prepared a bowl of water for him to play with. She offers it to him and he tips it out onto the patio floor. She is surprised and perhaps a little disappointed, that was not what she had in mind as to how the water should be played with. Nasseem watches the water spread and the rivulets trickle down the pale stone paving slabs. He gets his bike and cycles up the slope to his little ‘lake’, from right to left and then down again, turning around to watch the wheel tracks the water leaves behind him. He’s made a new game! He repeats this, weaving together the wheel tracks into a pattern. It looks rather beautiful as the paving slabs are so pale they are nearly white and the water makes them a dark

glistening grey colour. Penny says out loud that he's made a beautiful pattern. Mum notices it too.

Suleiman picks up on Nasseem's cue of going up hill and becomes a mountaineer scaling the heights. He too makes patterns once he reaches the lake, finger prints, a foot print. The brothers are playing together - Nasseem has had an idea that he has shared with his brother and that his brother is enjoying and adding to. After several goes Nasseem climbs off the bike and his brother takes over track-making. Nasseem goes down to the shed - he slips behind it for a while, perhaps to have a little break, then he comes out again. He picks up some of the rocks by the shed and starts to play with them. The session is finished and as we leave Nasseem comes to the door with his mum. He spots a pot of bubbles in the living room and after a quick look and smile good bye runs out into the garden to blow bubbles with his brother.

See Play Cues; Touch & Physicality; The crucial role of shared positive experiences; Increasing the play network & the inclusive play remit.

Nasseem Session 4 - 30th July 2007

We arrive before Nasseem today, he is out at the shops. He comes back after a few minutes. He is so pleased to see Penny. He smiles and laughs and jumps excitedly up and down, keeping strong eye contact with Penny while he does so. Nasseem turns round and watches me intently as I set up the camera - watching me watching him! He goes over to the window sill and picks up a plastic bottle of 'Dove' shampoo. He brings an already played with cardboard box down from a table at the side of the room. It looks like he's ready to play. He sits in the box and looks closely at the bottle, eyes close to the logo. He's really reluctant to give it up. His mum takes the 'Dove' away and Nasseem is frustrated and makes a loud frustrated sound. Penny mirrors this and adds words "I really want the bottle!" Nasseem makes a movement with his hand, tapping his fingers and thumb together, in a sort of movement that people use to show a bird. Penny mirrors this and adds the words "this is your way of saying you want it back." Nasseem takes the 'Dove' bottle back and sits again in the box. He holds it closely to him in that gesture of "it's mine!".

Penny picks up a green squeaky turtle toy that puffs air as you squeeze and

squeak it. She puffs it near him and he goes to take it. Penny holds it back in the same gesture that Nasseem is clutching the 'Dove'. Nasseem roars with laughter and obviously finds this hilarious. He reaches out to take it and she plays with this and holds it, like him holding his 'Dove' and says "mine!" He laughs again. They repeat this several times - it is a conversation about what is happening and about what has happened with the 'Dove' bottle. Then, as if he has done what he needed to do, he sits in the box and looks at Penny and says "again." So the box game begins. Nasseem really knows what to expect now and he says very clearly, "ready, steady go" and "again". Penny and his mum congratulate him on his words and he beams and joins in the clapping.

Nasseem does several rounds of the card board box game, whizzing round the carpet and tumbling out and lots of physical play, with tickling and 'spaghetti legs'. At one point, now the box has really disintegrated, Nasseem sits on a piece of cardboard and mum and Penny work together to lift him up into the air, like riding a flying carpet. He loves this. They take a break and Nasseem asks for the "sweet" he bought at the shop. He enjoys this and gobbles it up, saying "sweet", "nice". He then asks to go and play in the garden by pulling at his mum's dress. He is encouraged to put words to this and say that he wants the garden. He says "garden" very clearly and points outside.

Out in the garden Nasseem immediately gets the bowl of water and tips it in the same place as before. He plays with the water again walking carefully around the puddle as he goes up and down the garden. He walks really close to the edge of the puddle but not quite in it. He watches the rivulets of water running down the paving slabs. He seems pleased with what he has done. Now Suleiman has climbed on the bike and Nasseem is frustrated again. He really, really wants it. He walks round the patio, not quite crying but making loud frustrated and angry sounds and jiggling up and down. Penny encourages Nasseem to use his words and say that he wants the bike. She also mirrors his frustration saying that he really, really wants it. Nasseem drops to the floor - this is really hard for him to manage. At one point he starts to bang his forehead on the ground - Penny stops him. Nasseem stands up, still nearly crying and showing his frustration. He walks around, pointing at the bike. Nasseem looks at his brother and says "give" in Bengali. His brother finishes his go and then gives Nasseem the bike.

He rides up and down the patio several times and smiles as he freewheels down the gentle slope and crashes into the shed door. He looks around him to share his enjoyment and Penny and his mum acknowledge this, that he liked the

bike ride and was letting them know.

Nasseem spends the last part of the session in the vegetable patch. He walks carefully around the narrow paths before sitting down to play with the soil. He runs it through his hands and then his forehead and hair. Throughout the game he keeps up a conversation with Penny - the game *is* the conversation. He puts the soil in her hands, looks at her expectantly and she pours it into his.

It is time for us to go. This time Nasseem waves goodbye for a while as he watches us leave his house.

See Managing feelings; Increasing the play network & the inclusive play remit

Suheila Session 5 -15/12/07

We arrive at the house to find Suheila, her mum and her two siblings Majed (8) and Anika (3) at home. We do introductions as Pam is meeting the family for the first time. The children were keen to start playing straight away. Anika in particular is very demanding, really needing attention. Anika continued needing this level of attention throughout the session which made it difficult for Pam to concentrate on Suheila. Suheila, however, was giving some very clear play cues, many of which Pam was able to respond to and at points include the other two siblings, which I thought was a real achievement. Neither mum or dad, when he came shortly after, joined in the play much.

Suheila's play cues in this first instance were:

- using her eyes and eye contact to make initial eye contact and then moving towards the person, maintaining eye contact and putting her head to the side
- She also uses close physical contact i.e. once she has made eye contact she comes and puts her face close to yours, may touch your face and then hug or start to climb on you.
- Climbing on furniture, chairs and putting out her arms to jump and be caught.

Suheila has certain stereotypical behaviours which could be 'joined' with and be seen as play cues, which can evolve into shared attention. For example she uses her hands and fingers for visual stimulation, holding them up close to her eyes and then moving them away while flexing her fingers. Pam mirrored and joined with this and Suheila not only allowed her to do this, but they stayed in contact for a while, with their hands and faces in close contact. This meant they shared a great deal of proximity and Suheila stayed engaged in social contact.

Another of her stereotypical behaviours is spinning around. Pam also joins with this and the other siblings join in too and soon the children are laughing and smiling. Majed picks up Anika and spins her round. The children and Pam do this for a while and Suheila stays spinning with them and starts to smile.

At this point of group spinning the mood in the room is very positive, there is laughter and smiles all round, including mum. I think again of Dr Solomon. The 3

children and mum are definitely having fun at this point. It even seems that she might join in with the children's play, despite the fact that she seems to be quite poorly, coming down with a flu or cold. Before this could happen, however, dad comes home and the atmosphere immediately changes. Mum withdraws and the spinning play abruptly stops.

The interrupted play takes a while to resume. Suheila goes over to her dad and pulls on his hand and leads him to the kitchen. We have been told that she spends a great deal of time in the kitchen and eats a great deal. Once in the kitchen it is impossible to get her or the other children out. Suheila is insistent on having food, though actually she does not eat much, just a few fried onions. The other children are in the kitchen too, their needs for attention being so great that they were clamouring for Pam's attention and occasionally come to dad or over to me, (Jo) where I am filming the session from the corner of the room.

Mum does not come into the kitchen - it seems as if mum and dad do not find it easy to be in the same room together. Both seem very low today and the joy of the shared spinning play in the living room is not recovered in the rest of the session. In fact it takes a long time for any sense of equilibrium to be restored after dad comes back.

Pam, Majed and Anika come and sit with Suheila while she eats her food. The other children have a little snack too and chat together. Obviously Suheila did not join in their conversation but she watches them as they speak and seems to be perfectly at ease in the middle of things. Watching her I suddenly get a sense of just how social she is. She enjoys being around people, she does not retreat and withdraw from people or social contact and in fact has several strategies for getting to know people and maintaining contact. After she finishes eating she starts to play what Pam describes as physical trust games: she leans back on Pam; she holds Pam's face; smiling widely and making strong eye contact; she rocks on the balls of her feet and falls forward to be caught.

We comment on Suheila's physicality and how she uses physical contact socially. Her dad says that Suheila uses physical contact as a way of introducing herself to people, if people don't respond to her and she doesn't like them she does not continue - she shows discernment.

Majed opens the fridge to take out a drink and Suheila reaches in and takes out a bowl of chopped parsley. She moves very quickly and does not let it go. She takes it over to the counter and begins to play with the parsley (with dad's permission). Suheila seems to be very motivated by sensory experience: she enjoys the textures, the sensations and gently throwing the parsley up and down on her hand. Towards then end of the session Suheila tips out some Bombay Mix onto the kitchen floor. Dad asks her to pick it up - she does and puts it back into the bowl. We say thank you and smile, she smiles and smiles and then picks up the rest and puts it back. This makes me think that she is understanding some of what is going on around her verbally.

The time then comes for us to leave and Suheila gives us a big hug to say goodbye.

See Letting the child direct the play; Joining in the comfort zone; Sensory Perceptual Difficulties in Autism; Play deprivation

Suheila Session 6 - Saturday 22 December 2007

This second session is very different to the first, a completely different feel. Pamela and I had decided that, due to the level of play deprivation the other two siblings were showing, we would both get involved in the play and see what kind of play space could be had. I call on the way to the house, as dad had asked us to do and he answers the phone and says they would be expecting us. We arrive to find that he is not around. It turns out later that he was upstairs asleep, and he did not join us at all for the session or wake the whole time we were there. However, Suheila's respite carer, Aysha, is here today and Suheila's mum is smiling and looking bright and engaged. The children are ready to play and so the play starts immediately. Lots of wonderful play happens for the other two siblings and for the purpose of this report I will concentrate on Suheila's play and moments of shared play with her siblings.

Suheila makes eye contact immediately and it is very strong. It's like she uses her eyes to hook you in. She maintains eye contact with me (Jo) and I hold her gaze for as long as she wants. Maintaining eye contact she comes up close and rubs cheeks with me and then with Pam. She puts her head on one side and keeps eye contact as she does so, pauses and then moves closer, either to touch my face or rub cheeks again. We mirror these actions and this seems to lengthen the interaction.

Now there are two of us playing the needs of the other siblings can be met and Suheila can have the full attention and intensity of play that she needs. Pam and I are able to manage this very organically and move in and out of play frames with all 3 children. The difference is immediately obvious as Suheila stays in the living room, watches what is happening, and starts to engage with playing with me or Pam, and, at times, her play overlaps with that of her siblings.

Suheila climbs up onto the sofa and the furniture. At points she slides up and down the wall. She seems to play a lot with moving up and down against walls or furniture and drawing closer and further away from people. Coming up close to people, keeping strong eye contact, until she touches cheeks seems to be very important to her. Joining with this seems to facilitate movement into other kinds of play.

From standing on the sofa or the furniture, she looks at me and I return and hold her gaze. Then, I move closer, she smiles and holds out her arms to jump into mine. This time I can spin her round and start to lengthen the play. She smiles and laughs and has a few turns and then wriggles to be put down. Suheila spins round a few times and we do the same. The other children join in too and there is much laughing and giggling. Anika asks to be picked up and spun round too. This feels like a real shared moment. Mum and Aysha are watching and smiling. Aysha has been watching us play and is trying out some mirroring with Suheila as she comes up to her and plays. There is a strong sense of cohesion in the room, everyone seems to be really enjoying themselves and each other.

As we play with Suheila I think about what a very physical child she is - how she uses her physicality to express herself as well as needing to move and jump and engage with her body. I got a flash of how much I'd like to see her out on a playground or in a park or the woods. As she moves around the room she makes

lots of different sounds. We start to mirror those too. Soon Aysha is mirroring these sounds too and for a little while the other children join in as well. It is like a small orchestra of Suheila's sounds.

At one point Majed suggests playing hide and seek. He hides and we make a big deal of looking for him. He hides in the big cupboard. When we eventually find him Pam and I cheer and celebrate. He comes out of the cupboard and straight after Suheila goes into the cupboard to try out Majed's hiding place. She stays in there for a little while and then comes out smiling. We all cheer again. It seems like she is exploring and trying out her brother's idea.

She then continues her round of the room, she doesn't pause long but there are distinct signs of her staying with playful interactions for longer than last week. Suheila climbs up onto the windowsill. I stand next to her and pull the lace curtain across my face. Suheila reaches up and pulls it away, smiling. We repeat this a few times, holding it over my face and over hers. She seems delighted with finding and being found.

I swing her down from the windowsill and we are all down on the floor again. I take off the wide and long scarf I am wearing on top of a smaller one and hold it up to make a tent over Suheila's and my head. She smiles and laughs and puts her hands up to touch the material and hold it up. She comes out of the tent and then Anika comes under too. We carry on playing with the scarf for a while - Suheila hides her face behind it and then we take turns in pulling it away to see each other again. I then put it over my whole head and face and she pulls the scarf away to 'find' me. She is smiling as she does so. This game carries on for a while, one of the longest pieces of play with Suheila so far, full of mutuality and responses and initiating on her part.

We ask Aysha and the children's mum for a blanket and they bring out a big Spiderman one. Majed makes a tent and rolls himself up in it and there is much wild laughter as Pam, Majed and Anika do lots of rough and tumble play under, in and on top of the blanket.

As this is happening, Suheila and I play a long distance game, keeping eye contact, as I mirror her moving up and down or near and far. At one point we almost start a game of chase, but it is very brief and falters, something to build on though, I think. Around this time Pam goes out to the toilet and Suheila, very interestingly, goes out to the corridor and stands outside the door until Pam comes out and then follows her back into the living room. I find this fascinating as she was not playing directly with Pam in that moment but was so aware of the dynamics in the room.

I am really surprised and pleased that in fact, for the whole hour, Suheila stays in the living room except for this time and one other, very interesting and telling time. Majed had been doing plenty of acrobatics round the room. He had been showing Pam and was insistent then that we all watch. As I watch him Suheila runs out of the room and goes to open the kitchen door. I hold the door and ask her to come back into the living room. Pam comes out into the corridor and playfully calls her back in. Suheila does not object at all and is in fact quite smiley as she runs back into the living room.

We invite the children to try out being swung in the blanket. This is great as Majed and Anika take this in turns and their mum holds one end of the blanket, to swing them. She seems to be really enjoying this, and there are plenty of laughs and smiles all round. Suheila watches and at one point runs out and hides round

the door for a moment then runs back in. She does not lie down on the blanket or try and climb in, however, she stands right by the blanket swing as Majed is being swung and she watches him intently. She is very interested in what is happening and goes really close so that the swing knocks into her as it swings to and fro.

During the session Suheila hits both Anika and Majed once each; once to get Majed to move off the table and once to get Anika to move out of her way. She also pulled her hair. Apart from that they shared the space happily for the hour.

As Majed and Anika are swinging and playing, Suheila and I play another game of eye contact, standing up high and then bending down low, moving closer towards each other then further away and then closer together again. I offer to spin her round, which she accepts and then try and stretch this physical play by rocking her up and down on her feet and swinging her from side to side. She does not wriggle at all, just smiles and looks at me and stays with his game for a long time. I am surprised at how long she stays with this extended physical play. These feel like giant steps.

After an hour, by the end of the session Suheila takes herself out of the room and goes upstairs to the bedroom. This is when I realise that dad is asleep. She goes and stands near him and climbs up onto the bed. Dad doesn't stir. She is very quiet and relaxed and I just sit in the corridor and wait for her.

It is time to go. Pam, Majed and Anika have now spread the blanket out on the floor and are sitting on it doing colouring. I say goodbye to Suheila upstairs and she looks at me and then comes and sits on my lap for one last game. We play 'ride a cock horse', which I had offered her earlier on but she had not wanted. I am wondering about how she seems to pick things up once she has seen it a few times. We play this several times and I dip her down once she has ridden for a while. She loves this and we repeat it enough times for her to get a sense of expectation and anticipation - once we have done the riding part of the game she knows she will get dipped down; she seems to like playing with being upside down. We all go down the stairs and say goodbye. The children's mum gets down on the floor next to Majed and Anika and starts colouring with them. The atmosphere when we leave is much happier and lighter than last week.

See Letting the child direct the play; Mirroring; Joining in the comfort zone; Sensory Perceptual Difficulties in Autism; Play cues; Loose parts & play types; Play deprivation; Touch & Physicality

Suheila Session 7 - 29/12/07

Today when we arrive dad, mum and two siblings are in the living room. Suheila is upstairs. Dad is talkative and smiley. He is apologetic about last week and says he had been so tired. Mum is dozing in the arm chair, she seems to have a headache and apart from saying hello, today she does not engage with us or the children throughout the session.

Suheila's dad goes upstairs to get her and she comes down after a few minutes but she isn't immediately happy about this, as she comes in and hits Pam on the nose. She seems agitated but calms quickly as Pam mirrors her cross movements and says that perhaps she hadn't wanted to come down just yet. After a few minutes she is ready to play. She doesn't leave the room (except briefly to play on the other side

of the door frame) for the remainder of the hour. She also stays engaged in the play, taking a few little breaks when she needs them. She smiles a great deal throughout the session and has plenty of giggles and laughs too. This is not a child who does not want to be interacting and social.

Dad is really happy to do the videoing this week and seems to really enjoy it. Throughout the session he smiles at the scenes he's recording, immersed in watching his children playing.

Again Suheila makes her first point of contact with her eyes. She plays with keeping eye contact with me, then putting her head on one side and then bending down low, all the while keeping eye contact. She makes her way round the room, walking along the top of the sofa, on the window sill, over the large cushion on the floor. As she moves round she throws down any objects on the surfaces she's crossing - our bags, the TV remote, clothes - anything that's in her way. As she does so she makes eye contact with us and lets the game develop. Then she comes in close to each of us in turn, rubs cheeks and gives us a hug. There then follows a fairly long and complex sequence which I mirror: Suheila moves round the room, keeping close to the wall, keeping eye contact, then putting her head to the side, bending down low and making other shapes with her body, sometimes finishing with a twirl or a spin. She keeps eye contact with me (Jo) the whole time. Then she comes closer and closer till she is rubbing cheeks. Then she stands back a little and holds my face in her hands. She might then touch my cheeks or press my nose and squeeze my cheeks so my lips go into "fish lips". As this play progresses, so as she starts to move closer, she starts to smile, more and more broadly. By the time she is making modelling clay of my face she is giggling. She allows me to touch her cheeks and beep her nose in a return of her gestures. She finds it funny and then goes quickly back to her side of the room, standing on the sofa, where she starts the sequence again. This is fascinating face to face play with an incredible awareness on her part of spatial awareness and how you can play with that. She plays with the space between us as if it were an object. I find her play quite remarkable. An adult dancer could perform this on stage as a contemporary dance piece! It is really very sophisticated.

I have the same scarf on as last week and at some point it comes back into the play. Suheila laughs as she comes under and makes a tent with me, holding up the fabric with outstretched fingers. She again enjoys leaving me under the scarf and then lifting it off. She is less interested this week in hiding under the scarf by herself and then being found. This week she seems to prefer coming under and making a tent with me. I notice that this week she is also less interested in being swung or spun round, preferring very close face to face play.

Anika also becomes interested in the scarf and tries to pull it away from Suheila. She wants to play the game too. But Suheila is decidedly unhappy about this and they start to fight over the scarf. We offer either child another scarf but they both want this particular one, then one that is being played with. Suheila pulls Anika's hair, pulls at the scarf and pushes her. She tries to hit her too. Anika starts to hit back. Suheila comes over to me and hits me on the head, hard. She is very cross about this. This is starting to feel quite hard and I'm aware of feeling really anxious, a bit annoyed and worried that things will escalate. I pull back for a moment and focus on getting grounded again.

I try to mirror her feelings and I can see that Pam is doing the same thing with

Anika: two very cross sisters. Pam and I act out being cross, i.e. shaking our arms and looking cross. We hold out our hands and clap our hands together, to make a sound and an action that they might start to use to show and express anger rather than hitting. They both look at us and I hope that at some point they might start to use it.

They separate for a while and there is a bit of a pause in the play now. After this Suheila plays her spatial game again, this time however she takes us by the hand, one at a time and positions us around the room. From there she plays getting closer and turning and spinning as she does so. If we end up in the wrong space then she puts us back there. She takes my hand and guides me to on the low table the TV is on and climbs on my knee to play 'ride a cock horse'. We do this a few time and she beams as I turn her upside down. Whilst sitting close she plays 'face modelling' again. This is close face to face play which she is clearly enjoying and engaged with but I suddenly feel that I 'ought' to be doing something else - like helping her talk or adding something else to the play. I lose my attunement with her in this moment and at this point she slips off my lap and moves away. It really strikes me how our own agendas or that of others that we are worried about can really break the contact during the play. I think of the play principles, and how our first responsibility is to the play process and feel really encouraged and supported by that, which helps me regain my readiness to let Suheila direct the play and join in when she wants me to.

As Suheila positions us round the room Pam and I experiment with moving after we have been placed. At points Suheila smiles and comes and puts us back in the right place with a little smile on her face. She seems to be taking up this play cue from us. Her positioning of us seems more about organising her space and her world than it is about control. I play with not liking one particular spot she puts me in and trying to creep into the middle of the room and maybe back to my other spot, the one I do like. She also finds this funny and is willing to play with moving us around and have us add our playful contribution to the game.

Anika comes over to Suheila and hugs her and kisses her. Suheila stays with this until Anika starts leaning on her too heavily and then she pushes her off. They do share a good few moments of really lovely contact before his happens.

Majed is less involved this week than he was last week. At one point he and Anika go and dress up, Majed in a skeleton suit and Anika in a pumpkin suit. They look very pleased with themselves and Majed acts the skeleton with incredible stilted, slow movements. Towards the end of the session Majed suggests hide and seek. He hides in the cupboard, the same as last week. He loves being found and grins ear to ear.

Before we go I propose one more round of blanket games, to show dad the game and also to see if Suheila is interested in it. We get the blanket and Suheila looks delighted - she dives under it, as if to make a tent and the other two wrap themselves up in it for a while. However, she is very clear that she does not want to swing. She watches Majed and Anika and then very clearly shakes her head in a "no". We acknowledge this and say that it is so good to know what she does and doesn't like. The other two love the swinging and the blanket play as well. Suheila really seems to like going under it rather than in it - all three of them have found individual ways they can play with the same thing together.

See Mirroring; Loose parts & play types; touch & physicality; Managing feelings; Moods, feelings & atmospheres; Agendas

Suheila Session 8 - 5th January 2008

Suheila & Anika meet us in the hallway and are very excited and ready to play. Majed is upstairs with his cousins, who are visiting.

We go into the living room and Suheila comes up to Pam and I in turn: she looks at us and jumps up and down shaking her hands in excitement. We mirror this and say that she is so pleased to see us. She goes round the room and as usual throws any remote controls, papers or scarves off the sofa and onto the floor. Suheila gets very close to Pam and does more of the very close face to face play that I described last week. This seems to be her foundation stone, her first route to making a connection. Suheila gives us both a hit on the head though it is not as hard as when she was clearly angry the other week - we discourage this bopping and offer another route, such as greeting gently or hand slapping or clapping games for big bursts of energy.

Suheila positions me against the cupboard door, making sure that I am as far against the wall as I can be, no gaps. Pam sits over to my right, by the main wall. Suheila goes between us, making strong eye contact, smiling with us, rubbing cheeks and hugging us in turn. She is laughing and smiling and I think that she is greeting us and getting to know us. She does this for a while and the room is very peaceful as both Anika and Majed are out of the room with their cousins and guests. Their dad is starting to film and he again seems to be really enjoying this role.

Then Suheila comes and 'puts' me into the bottom section of the shelving unit, and then comes and sits in the corner and looks up at me. She seems to like small, confining/containing spaces at times. I try to introduce a few items into the play from a pile of toys in the corner. I pick up a small ball and throw it to Pam, who throws it back. Suheila is not at all interested in it. There is a blanket on the floor and she comes and sits on it. I pick up a couple of feathers from the feather boa and blow them in the air - she is also unimpressed with this. (Later when I try and introduce the feather boa she takes it from me and throws it behind her!) At this point, Anika comes back into the room and she and Suheila start to fight and squabble over attention and objects.

Suheila, with a big smile on her face, picks up the blanket and goes under it, holding the fabric up with her arms and holds it over my head. Anika and then Pam come and join in too. This blanket play doesn't last long and soon we are playing variations on the kinds of play I wrote about in last weeks sessions, spatial play, face to face play, more physical play and spinning. I notice that Suheila is very happy this week to develop more of the physical play i.e. playing 'ride a cock horse'. She climbs onto my lap with what seems like an expectation that we will play this and stays for several rounds of riding and then dipping, which is the longest that she has stayed engaged in this kind of play so far.

Majed and his cousins now come into the room and the dynamic once again changes and things become very interesting for Suheila. The other children want

to swing the blanket - which Pam and Suheila's mum hold and do the swinging together. Suheila moves close to the blanket swing once or twice but makes no attempt to get in. She keeps quite close to me, making eye contact and face to face interaction and also goes over to her mum and hugs her. She then runs out of the room, pauses in the corridor to see if she is being followed and then runs in to the kitchen. I do follow her into the kitchen and see her reaching into the fridge and taking out a can of fizzy drink. I take it from her and ask her to come back in to the living room. She does not protest and comes with me. Suheila goes over to the sofa and engages a little with me, playing with looking and close face to face play, but really she is more interested in watching the other children playing. I sit back and watch her watching them. She seems to be really taking in what they are doing.

Majed suggests lifting the blanket high and wafting it up and down and running under it. The others like this idea and it appeals to Suheila too, as she moves closer, watching intently. I go under too and Suheila comes with me and stays under the blanket for a while, playing with her mum and Pam as they lift it up and down and catch us and then just her, as I edge away to the wall, to let her play by herself. The blanket is big enough for the others to run under and out of while Suheila is under there too, so for a while there is much laughter and whooping as the other children run under the blanket, getting caught and then escaping. Suheila does not play directly with them but she is not *not* playing with them - she is sharing the space and the play.

When Suheila comes out from under the blanket she comes and sits on my lap and we play a kind of 'row your boat' game, sliding down and sitting up. She likes lying back and I put my legs flat and she lies down flat on my outstretched legs with her head resting against my feet. Her head and upper body are under the blanket now and her mum and Pam waft the blanket up and down gently over her face. Suheila laughs out loud - something Pam and I have not heard her doing before and it is truly delightful and infectious. She is crowing with delight, belly laughing. Her mum looks so happy and is looking at Suheila and laughing too, really sharing this joyful state. We are all laughing and it is a wonderful moment. I think how important it is that Suheila gets a chance to play with other children and how much positive play energy the cousins have brought with them, what a tremendous opportunity it gives Suheila to observe their play and find her own way in.

This is near the end of the hour and so the session comes to an end. We talk to the children about finishing this week, having mentioned it to them last week. When the time comes to leave Suheila does not want us to go and drags Pam upstairs to show her all the bedrooms. She tries to drag Pam back into the living room too. Suheila starts crying and her mum picks her up and cuddles her. It seems to me that she understands very clearly that this is our last session.

It has been a wonderful session. There has been much shared laughter and smiling. All three children have stretched and expanded their play experiences and hopefully found some ways to play together.

See Play cues; The crucial role of shared positive experiences; Increasing the play network & the inclusive play remit

