International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development 8

Ivy Schousboe
Ditte Winther-Lindqvist *Editors*

Children's Play and Development

Cultural-Historical Perspectives

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International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development

Volume 8

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Children's Play and Development

Cultural-Historical Perspectives

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Preface

This book – like its object of study (play and genesis of play) – has changed and developed from its early beginnings in 2008 to its publication in 2013. At the onset, Ivy Schousboe found that some of her present and former students in their written theses contributed as interestingly to investigations in play as some of the articles published in well-established journals. She felt that it was a kind of waste that their work would probably be accessible only to herself and their external examiner and, therefore, requested them to turn their work into chapters. And, happily, so they did! Moreover, she also asked a senior college mate, Benny Karpatschof, to join in and, fortunately, he agreed! Last, but not least, Ditte Winther-Lindqvist accepted to contribute as the coeditor of this book.

Alongside the ambition of bringing this work to a wider readership, the editors shared a more ill-defined yet strong inclination to promote a culturally sensitive and contextual-developmental psychological approach to research in play.

With Schousboe's and Winther-Lindqvist's anchoring in the Department of Psychology at Copenhagen (along with coauthor Benny Karpatschof), it felt at first glance appropriate to locate the geography of the book and its particular dialogical cultural-historical approach to the Danish setting. Around this time (2010), we owe a special thank you to our colleague and friend Mariane Hedegaard for kindly and persistently reminding us of the importance of pursuing with this book and also for bringing us in contact with Marilyn Fleer. Meeting Marilyn Fleer and getting to know her inspiring work and interpretations of the cultural-historical approach in relation to children's play made it a pleasure for us to follow her suggestion to go truly international. So instead of restricting the chapters' empirical examples to stem from Denmark alone, we now followed Marilyn Fleer and her postgraduate students when they took us to the day care as well as the park in urban Australia and invited us to explore playing in a rural Mexican village. This has on all counts been an eye-opening experience for us!

What all chapters have in common is a preoccupation both with actual play activities and with academic theorizing of play, approached from a cultural-historical perspective. The primary aim of this book is to consolidate the intrinsic connectedness

of these subjects. This goal functions as the leading organizing principle in terms of content and direction. To attain this goal, Yoka Janssen and Astrid Noordermeer from Springer Press found that inviting central scholars from this field of study was a suitable consequence. The chapters by Ingrid and Niklas Samuelsson and Bert van Oers were written on that invitation and, in our view, solidify its position as a book on play, developmental processes, and theorizing within the cultural-historical approach.

Copenhagen, Denmark — Ivy Schousboe
21st December 2012 — Ditte Winther-Lindqvist

Contents

1 **Introduction: Children's Play and Development** 1
Ivy Schousboe and Ditte Winther-Lindqvist

2 **The Structure of Fantasy Play and Its Implications for Good and Evil Games** 13
Ivy Schousboe

3 **Playing with Social Identities: Play in the Everyday Life of a Peer Group in Day Care** 29
Ditte Winther-Lindqvist

4 **Pedagogical Perspectives on Play** 55
Daniela Cecchin

5 **Collective Imagining in Play** 73
Marilyn Fleer

6 **Play Performance and Affect in a Mexican Telenovela** 89
Gloria Quiñones

7 **Children's Collective Imagination in Play: A Preschooler's Bilingual Heritage Language Development** 107
Liang Li

8 **Language Play: The Development of Linguistic Consciousness and Creative Speech in Early Childhood Education** 127
Niklas Pramling and Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson

9 **Play to Learn, Learn to Play: Boundary Crossing Within Zones of Proximal Development** 141
Lars Hennig Rossen

10 **Online Adolescence: Real-Life Development in the Virtual World of Warcraft** 165
Halfdan Fryd Koot and Henrik Garde

11 Playing in Online Chat Communities 181
Morten Jack

12 The Persistence of Play and What If Thinking 197
Ivy Schousboe

13 Cultural and Historical Influences on Conceptions and Uses of Play 215
Ivy Schousboe

14 An Activity Theory View on the Development of Playing 231
Bert van Oers

15 Play, But Not Simply Play: The Anthropology of Play 251
Benny Karpatschof

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Chapter 1
Introduction: Children's Play and Development

Ivy Schousboe and Ditte Winther-Lindqvist

Many excellent books have been written about play – so when you write yet another, you are certain to be in good company! At the same time, it must be made clear why one wants to add yet another book about the subject. Our wish is to contribute to play research by giving equal weight to play and cultural-historical theory and hopefully gain further insight by combining the two topics. Metaphorically speaking, our hope is to go further by walking on two legs. Certainly, most publications address both topics, but they are often treated in very unequal proportions. We will attempt to combine them as we go along and in the book seek to balance their relative importance. First step in this introduction will address the question "What is play?" At first the views of central theories of development are mentioned and thereupon we look at play through the cultural-historical lens. In the next part we discuss the application of theories, at first on a general level and afterwards with a focus on cultural-historical theory. Finally follows a brief presentation of all the chapters in the book.

What Is Play? Theories on Play

Play has been defined in many ways and on the basis of different criteria (e.g. Schwartzmann 1978). For the present purpose, play is defined on the basis of characteristics that seem to be accepted across various classic theories of development.

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In other words, play will be characterized by what Wittgenstein names the “family likeness” which exists between the essential features identified in the definitions by scholars, who are otherwise of opposing orientations (Wittgenstein 1953/1992). Definitions across various theoretical persuasions describe play as an engaging and demanding activity, which is undertaken for its own sake, in the sense that it is not strictly goal oriented. The playing child creates a sphere of imagination where it as an active agent may explore and transform very impressive aspects of its own life. In play, the child can express itself in a relatively uncensored connection, enabling it to indulge in a variety of spontaneous ideas.

Theoreticians, who are classic in the sense that they have influenced and still are influencing broad research fields within developmental psychology, consider play to have positive functions for children.

Freud particularly stresses the conflict-processing function of play: “It will be seen that children repeat everything in their games which has made an impression on them in life, and that in doing so they abreact the strength of the experience and make themselves masters of the situation, as it were” (Freud 1955/1964, p. 29). Play is pleasurable for the child here and now, and through its tension-reducing and cathartic functions, it is also beneficial to the further development of the child.

Erikson (1950/1993) sees play as a manifestation of the child’s ability to control reality through experiments and planning. He conceives a theory about the chronology of various types of play and about their various beneficial functions. Through play, the child learns to participate in all kinds of real social and societal activities and, as with Freud, play also serves as a self-healing process.

Piaget too regards play as a positive activity, in fact so positive that he describes play not only within the normal scope of his theory but even includes some psychodynamically influenced perspectives. He emphasizes how necessary it is for the child’s emotional and intellectual equilibrium that it has at its disposal an activity in which it does not have to adapt to the surrounding world, but may on the contrary adapt reality to suit herself/himself. Play is significant, both for the cognitive development of the child, for its present well-being and for its ability to develop into a member of its society without suffering any harm (Piaget 1962; Piaget and Inhelder 1969).

Vygotsky considers play to be “a leading activity” for the preschool child as play propels development. This he explains with reference to the interconnection between the imagined situation and rules in play/the game. Vygotsky describes this process as the paradox of following the principle of both greatest and least resistance in play (Vygotsky 1933, p. 12). Following the principle of least resistance implies acting in accordance with one’s wishes and desires, and following the principle of greatest resistance simultaneously occurs because the child subordinates his/her actions to the meaning of objects and scenarios (rules) and thereby challenges or inhibits desired impulses (ibid, p. 17). On this basis he claims that “in play, the child is always ahead of its age, ahead of its own normal behaviour”, and that “through play, changes of a more general character occur in needs and consciousness” (Vygotsky 1978, pp. 68–69). Play is so to speak seen as a gateway into the “Zone of Proximal Development”. The concept of this zone is perhaps the most influential of Vygotsky’s

ideas. The collective of authors in this book will again and again return to this idea and try to consolidate and unfold it in many different ways.

To sum up: All of these classic scholars are united in regarding play as a beneficial activity, in one way or another.

Many authors have theorized play without doing this within a classical developmental frame of reference. Here we will only call attention to one author whom we regard as "the grand old man" within this field of research: Through decades, Sutton-Smith's publications have had great impact on research in play. He has not situated himself within one or another established theory. His focus is to contribute to valuable insights into the complexity of play from almost every conceivable perspective. Among other things, he emphasizes that play can be a delightful as well as a rude experience for the players, and that children in their play both establish and destroy social order. Moreover, he points out that play should be studied in a life-span perspective and he elaborates how not only children but equally adults participate in all kinds of games, including seemingly totally irrational and "silly" games (Sutton-Smith 1997, 1995). Also, this kind of ideas will be used and elaborated in this book.

In our opinion, all of the books presented above contribute with valuable and varied insight into the concept of play. This leaves us with an open question: Is there really still something missing in the research in play? Our answer is "Yes" – we think there is.

What Is Still Missing?

At a general level it seems problematic that research in play is often one-sided in the sense that it overexposes some phenomena and underexposes other phenomena. For example, the predominant focus on the beneficial aspects of play functions at the expense of engagement in research concerning the darker sides of play. One of the consequences is that many authors study the pro-social functions of play and refrain from even attempting to *discuss* whether play – like other kinds of activities – can in fact also have anti-social functions.

The same goes for the predominant focus on children. Most of the above-mentioned authors address children's play and do not even *discuss* whether the understanding of what play is and the associated understanding of which persons can be regarded as players is a matter of their own definition, their own *assignment* of roles and meaning of the concept of play.

Moreover, it seems clear that Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development is still a most influential concept. But most often it is only *used* in ways that suit each researcher's own project best. This key concept is surprisingly rarely *discussed*, and elementary questions like "Is the playing child *always* ahead of its age, ahead of its own normal behaviour?" are often not asked. This seems remarkable if one supposes that all researchers, who have for longer periods observed children at play, have seen children that enjoy to step into the role of a demanding, crying and extremely unruly baby.

Cultural-Historical Perspectives on Play as Presented in This Book

Cultural-historical theory emphasizes that the individual development of human beings occurs while and because they participate in social communities and that these communities are influenced by the particular cultural and historical contexts in which they are embedded. This makes it obvious to equally regard human play as an activity influenced by the communities in which it occurs and to try to understand these communities, both as they occur here and now and in their temporal and social anchoring. Thus, the theory does not contradict itself by entering into a dialogue with inputs from other viewpoints than its own but, on the contrary, invites an interest in the fact that there are many ways to play and many ways of thinking about play.

One of our important ambitions is to discuss play in the perspective of its occurrence at several interdependent levels. Thus, play will be illustrated on many levels: at the individual level, at the group level, in its embeddedness in the immediate context and at the societal and historical level. Another ambition is to respect the theory's sensitivity to reality. Reality changes and this must be reflected in the book as well as in the choice of subjects and methods used in the empirical studies, but equally so in the development of theoretical concepts.

This implies an obligation to address the above-mentioned omitted and still missing discussions of play. So, we will strive to balance the exposing of different aspects of the function of play and illustrate how play can be investigated and conceptualized in a life-course perspective. Last but not least important is the obligation to specify also at a concrete, substantial level the possible consequences of the Zone of Proximal Development and not leave more thorough investigation into them blowing in the wind.

We consider it fruitful to pay attention to the difference between play and playfulness. We use the term play to refer to a person's actual play (or playgroup's play activity), and we use the word playfulness to refer to the person's disposition or wish to participate in play, whether or not he or she does participate at the moment. Taking our point of departure in the above ways of understanding play, this difference in term is intended firstly to underline that although playing may be – and probably usually is – accompanied by pleasurable experiences, it may also be associated with unpleasant experiences in various ways. The wish to play can "lure" persons to participate in games that become unpleasant to them. Secondly, many activities which would not be termed play may be characterized by an attractive experience of playfulness, which is not least true of several activities in which adults indulge.

The fact that we take our point of departure in one theory does not imply that this theory simply is regarded as *superior* in relation to other theories about play and playfulness. Thus, following the technological development, new extensions are constantly made to theories which illuminate play from biological and ethological viewpoints, and since human beings are in every respect influenced by the potentialities

and limitations of being a biological creature and a particular kind of mammal, it would appear absurd to reject research in play on these levels as being less valuable. Cultural-historical theory clearly includes such levels in its general theoretical framework, but at the present time, it does not seem to contribute when it comes to unfold these levels in the research in play. Rather, the choice of applying one theory is determined by two manifest limitations, one being the ordinary condition of limiting one's material and the other being that the authors' knowledge of some of the other approaches to play research is not sufficiently extensive to allow us to supply anything original to them. To readers who wish a broader presentation of theories on research in play and a sharper focus upon the cross-cultural perspective, we recommend Göncü and Gaskins (2007) and Pellegrini (2011).

Now the ambition to contribute to consolidation of a classic theory calls for considerations of the far from obvious reasons for the application of theory.

The Application of Theory: General Statements About the Use of Well-Established Theories

Emphasizing the importance of developing a particular theoretical persuasion requires justification in an age where the well-known dictum that "the grand theory is dead" enjoys widespread support and for some seems a veritable liberation. One may speculate that some of the reasons for the sighs of relief which follow the declaration of the death of all the encompassing theories that say it may rely on a relief of having liberated oneself from the dogmatic and restrictive straitjacket of sanctioned theory. This feeling is not unknown to the present writers, who find that theoretical work is associated with both obvious risks and equally obvious potential.

By taking one's departure in a one-and-only particular theory and disregarding all other, one runs the risk of overexposing some aspects and leave other, in fact, equally important aspects in the dark. This is what we meant by unbalance in the beginning of this Introduction (e.g. social relations illuminated as being characterized almost only by power relations as it can be seen in the work of some of the social constructionists, life stories as determined almost only by childhood experiences as it can be seen in the works of some of the psychoanalytically informed authors).

As it will be made clear in the following, we are not arguing for an eclectic approach. A theoretical point of departure has considerable advantages, one of which is the obligation not to treat the research topic as a conglomerate in which everything may be embedded effortlessly and helter-skelter. What we are saying is that the sensible use of a theory requires that the researcher is aware of the relation between the theory and its object. Thus, when phenomena occur which are not in accordance with the internal logic of the theory or which lie beyond its scope, these should not be neglected nor should one write off serious investigation in their possible importance by pleading that "many interpretations of the same phenomenon

are possible". Both agreements and disagreements between on the one hand the theory and its object and on the other the phenomena which pop up, so to say, during the discussion and investigation of the topic and which lie outside the current domain of the theory are of *immense* importance to the judgement of the raison d'être of the theory. This is true, both when these phenomena are noticed on the background of input from other theories and/or when they are noticed due to empirical research or discussions of topics that address everyday life experiences. At all events, disagreements encourage further investigation of *why* they occur. In some cases, such investigations may lead to an expansion or revision of parts of the theory. The theory may be refined, corrected and updated so that it can grow and develop together with actual changes of reality.

One example which illustrates how something may at first occur contradictory is that play today is recognized as an activity which is so beneficial to the well-being and development of children that the United Nations declaration about children's rights advances it as a human right for children to have opportunities for play. At the same time, a quick search on Google will give countless hits which address the question whether and how it may be harmful for children to play war games and other games with an aggressive theme or manner of play. These hits stem both from parents, preschool teachers and researchers. Interest in and acknowledgement of such differences in approaches to play may prepare the soil for additional research-based knowledge of the *whole spectrum* of the possible implications of play.

Thus, a state of connection between the unruly wealth of all manners of input about play and the stricter research-based contributions can be fruitful. Metaphorically speaking, the view of a city on a New Year's Eve may be fascinating in its sparkling chaos of fireworks in all shapes and colours, just as the carefully controlled fireworks of Tivoli in Copenhagen may be enthralling and take the spectator through various styles and climaxes. There is an open possibility that the two kinds of fireworks may inspire each other. Equally open are the possibilities that free-ranging *and* strictly controlled approaches to play can be mutually inspiring.

Application of the Cultural-Historical Perspective on Theory as Presented in This Book

The overall message is that good theory must be sensitive to reality. This sensitivity can be furthered when a theory combines its own concepts and its own established knowledge with ideas and knowledge from other sources.

Among the well-established developmental theories, the cultural-historical theory has been chosen as the basic, because it focuses on elucidating the human being in his or her life, i.e. in its material being. However, it would be difficult to find any psychological theory that does not pay any attention at all to this topic. In our opinion, the particular advantages of the cultural-historical theory are partly that its concepts are designed with the specific intent of elucidating human development on *all* levels from the individual to the societal and partly that the basis of

the theoretical assumptions is transparent and explicitly unfolded. The overall theoretical construction is founded on the idea that the development of human beings is entangled with the developments in the surroundings they live in. As a consequence, cultural-historical theory at its best aims at generating knowledge in constant interaction with input from the recognizable material reality. Understood and applied in this way, it leaves the theory relatively open to discussion, so that even researchers whose theoretical background is not identical or near-identical to that of the founders may still have a say, which is worthwhile to listen to and learn from. You *can* win an argument, even if you are not a member of the fraternity! Similarly, the theory does not encourage those who have chosen it as their main approach and therefore treating it as a sacred museum artefact, but rather to explore the range of its basic assumptions.

The most important strength of the cultural-historical theory can be briefly characterized by the following three points:

1. Anti-reductionism

Anti-reductionism is evident in the cultural-historical view of human development in its holistic account of the person; rather than splitting up psychological domains into either cognitive/affective, personal/social realms of functioning, the theory encourages to understanding development as qualitative shifts in the person's ways of understanding, appreciation and participating in activities. The view of cultural-historical theory is that although higher psychological functions are based upon the lower ones, they cannot be reduced to these. An important implication of anti-reductionism is that, as mentioned, the theory is not blinded by self-sufficiency but keeps an alert eye also on the contributions of other theories. An equally important implication is that an alert eye is also kept on the risk of reductionism that can be seen in upcoming theories. To give an example:

Today neuroscience is, for many good reasons, *en vogue.* However, the contemporary relative dominance of neuroscience is not rarely seen to have some side effects that are opposed to cultural-historical theory: The human *brain*, and not the *human being*, is treated as the agent of human activity and development. To put it sharply, here is a case of emergency.

2. The Historical Approach

As introduced by the founder of the school, Vygotsky, the research programme is the investigation of the psyche by integrating the phylogenic, cultural-historical and ontogenetic developmental dimensions. As a consequence, the scholar should have a certain amount of knowledge about these dimensions, even though it is impossible for him or her to address all of them in their texts. What the programme

does demand is an obligation to address *how* the person's development is embedded in their material surroundings, not a specific way in which this needs to be described.

3. The Dialectics of Externalization and Internalization

Vygotsky perceived internalization as the counterpart to externalization. Where externalization consists in the creation of cultural products, internalization is the empowerment of the individual in taking these products into possession. These – in a way uncomplicated concepts – are clearly helpful tools when it comes to underline the entanglement of individuals and culture.

The main contribution of the book is that the collective of authors investigate their respective topics in line with considerations like the above understanding/of cultural-historical theory.

Moreover, the interest in Vygotsky's notion of the "Zone of Proximal Development" goes hand in hand with the scholars' wish to underpin a growing expansion of the field, in which the notion traditionally has been employed and also with *a widening of the concept itself*. This may be *the most important collective contribution of all the chapters in the book.* Our hope is that it will encourage the readers to use it as a platform, from which they *themselves* will continue the further development of theory and professional practice.

Values

Research about and with people will often – perhaps always – be based on values to some degree and today it is widely recognized that much research in psychology is not value-neutral. Therefore, it seems appropriate to comment on the basic values in this book. We dare suppose that the book has a potential to make its own contribution to underline the *equal worthiness of all persons*. This potential appears explicitly as well as between the lines, even though it is not expressed in exactly these terms.

In many articles it is emphasized that the very fact that people are both similar and different offers the possibility that a mutually benevolent or emphatic and caring attitude can facilitate a conduct of life that is beneficial for everybody. In particular, this is discussed with reference both to the relations between children and adults and to the relations among children. Evidently, the wish to influence practice is most clearly expressed in the articles that directly and with criticism and constructive suggestions address the planning of and interventions into children's everyday life. For example, in Scandinavian culture, and in many other places, play is regarded as a central and essential activity for preschoolers and the time and opportunities for playing with peers is supported in the way their lives are arranged in

preschools (Sommer and Samuelsson 2010). Today, globalization and standardized measurements of levels of competence between states on the educational level and in production inspire intense debates about how to ensure success in a global competition based on excellence in skills, education, innovation and know-how. We assume that this concern is a motivating source for disputing play in relation to learning. Many authors advocate for children's right to play, regardless of whether they immediately acquire specific "useful" skills or not. This observation seems especially relevant to point out at a time when preschool systems around the globe tend to restrict children's time to play and reserve more and more time for curriculum-based activities. It is well documented that formation of horizontal as well as vertical human relations is beneficial for children's development and quality of life. This goes for play too. Thus, day-care institutions should provide opportunity for two kinds of play, namely, games in which adults participate and games that children play among themselves. These kinds of games should be seen as mutually complementary and not as competing activities. One kind of play can inspire the other, exactly because of the differences between them. Adults can enrich children's play, for instance, by contributing extra knowledge, new ideas, nice play objects and protection in case of prolonged quarrels or boredom, and children's play among themselves can for instance have unorthodox and even "dangerous" themes and ways of negotiation and enactment, which are likely to disappear in play with adult participation, but are evenly important. As demonstrated by some of the authors, it is possible to obtain regular synergetic effects.

The disposition to establish equality also appears in the fact that throughout the book, people are treated in a so-called first person perspective, which means that the authors try to envisage how people experience and evaluate their own lives (Hedegaard and Fleer 2008; Sommer and Samuelsson 2010). In many chapters, the individuals involved will have a say themselves. In other contributions, people who are involved with them and their everyday life have contributed thoughts and observations, and in yet, other contributions emphasize how specific theories may be particularly suited to capture the personal experiences of the individuals.

To sum up, the basic values in this book are characterized by alertness, sensitivity, vigilance and respect for equal dignity in interpersonal relations.

Presentation of Chapters

All chapters also address empirical studies, theory and perspectives on age. Most of the chapters will be presented chronologically according to the age group they investigate most thoroughly. After that follows a presentation of the chapters that focus on the development of the basic theoretical concepts.

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Benny Karpatschof: Play, But Not Simply Play: The Anthropology of Play

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Chapter 2
The Structure of Fantasy Play and Its Implications for Good and Evil Games

Ivy Schousboe

Introduction

First, some rather prominent perspectives in the study of play will be briefly introduced. Next, the nature of play and with it the perspective which the playing child can adopt will be discussed in some detail.

On the basis of this discussion, a general model of the format of pretend play will be suggested. The model is intended to illustrate and explain the great variability of different forms of communication and interaction which children can operate with during play. It is argued that the psychological structure of fantasy play makes it possible for children to engage in and explore, in varied and relatively uncensored ways, all kinds of subjects and therefore even sensitive realities of social relationships. It is proposed that this variability is matched by a corresponding variability of the functions which play may serve for children's participation in social interaction, and it is suggested that in general it is circumstances outside play which influence or even determine what and how children play and the implications which play may have for them. In the same vein, it is suggested that even games with aggressive content may have positive as well as negative functions in relation to prevalent norms. It will be underlined that children's play can reflect their exploration of difficult moral issues in society. Finally, it will be proposed that children can create a ZPD among themselves that sometimes can improve or enhance their ability to deal with complicated issues and that this zone can differ from and potentially supplement or complete the one provided by adults.

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Play and Research in Play: Mainstream and Countertrends

Play is a widespread and varied activity for younger children, and, thus, it constitutes a rich and extraordinarily pliable object of research for scholars of widely different persuasions. Play has been defined in many ways and on the basis of different criteria (e.g. Schwartzmann 1978). For the present purpose, pretend play is defined on the basis of characteristics which seem to be accepted across the various theories, i.e. by the "family resemblances" which exist between the essential features found in the definitions of scholars who are otherwise of different orientations (Wittgenstein 1953/1992): Pretend play is an engaging activity which is undertaken for its own sake, in the sense that it is not goal oriented and does not serve an immediate rational purpose. The playing child creates an imaginative sphere where as a creative agent it may explore and transform the aspects of its own life which seem impressive. This is to say that the ticket of admission for something to enter into the child's play is that the child feels this *something* to be of importance in its own life. This *something* may be anything, and it may be dealt with in every manner of expression and manipulation which the child has at its disposal. It is the importance and intensity of the experience which causes the child to create a special imaginative sphere of reality in Werner's sense (1961).

The child who is playing is described as being in various special psychic states, and when it is intensively engaged in play, it can let itself be carried away by it. This does not mean that the child is to be understood as a victim of the game, divorced from reality. But in play the child can express its own interpretation of reality in a relatively unrestricted manner and this admits a multitude of spontaneous ideas. Compared to the grown-up person, the child has a special ability to let itself be carried away, to be open to emotional experiences where it is stirred and moved by, regardless of whatever it is momentarily engaged in. In so-called "great" or "deep" play, the child seems to be absorbed in the game and to let itself be carried away by the current of events (Buytendijk 1933; Gadamer 1975/2006). The child is oblivious of itself and can forget about those aspects of the surrounding world which do not enrich the game.

Among the classic and still influential figures within psychology are Freud, Piaget and Vygotsky. They are a group with many disagreements, but they do agree that play is beneficial for the child. Here and now, play facilitates the child's development within many different domains (e.g. the social and emotional domains), and in the longer perspective it furthers the harmony in the child's process of adaptation to the prevalent demands and moral values of society. Even though these theoreticians differ radically in their ideas of the scale and character of the promises and difficulties this adaptation implies for the child, they all see play as an activity that facilitates its steps towards being a full-grown member of society (Freud 1955/1964; Erikson 1950/1993; Piaget 1962; Piaget and Inhelder 1966/1969; Vygotsky 1978).

This view is shared by most contemporary scholars, while others are in vigorous opposition and take a more richly faceted view of play. Sutton-Smith (e.g. 1993,

1995) has emphasized that play can be a delightful as well as a scary experience for the playmates, and that children in their play both establish and destroy social order. Several other authors have drawn attention to the fact that there are both light and dark sides to play (e.g. Smith 1988, 1995; Gordon 1993; Pellegrini 1995). Nevertheless, this insight still seems to be underexposed in the mainstream conception of play, and in prominent textbooks of developmental psychology, it takes up little or no space (e.g. Lightfoot et al. 2009).

The idea that play may advantageously be regarded as an activity through which the child can develop and express its subjectivity and that it can be beneficial in many developmental processes will not be challenged. But the great faith in the inherent and positive strength of play may imply some limitations in the very understanding of play and of the child's subjectivity. It represents a tendency to make play an independent object of research so that the child with its regular and varied everyday life is thrown out with the bath water. There is widespread agreement that play is an activity through which the child may very well express and develop its subjectivity. However, when a large proportion of the games which children actually play are neglected, and when the possible beneficial functions of play are examined on a background of simple causal links, play is sometimes discussed in a too narrow frame and in isolation from children's reality. The aim of the following section is to illuminate play as a complex activity and the playing child as a many-faceted human being.

To sum up, it seems to me to be problematic that play is defined as an activity which can have many beneficial effects for the development of the child while, at the same time, the beneficial functions of play are investigated without asking the simple question: Can play also serve other functions?

I will take two steps to examine whether this question can add something to the way we think about the functions of play. First, I will attempt to demonstrate by means of two examples that a phenomenon which may be called "evil play" does in fact exist. Then, I will define some special characteristics of play which may cause it to produce even downright evil actions.

Evil Play

By an evil act I mean an antisocial act through which a person – for his or her own personal gain and without having been attacked – causes somebody else to suffer. Surely "evil" defines a quality in a *relation* between parties. And like other qualities in interpersonal relations, evil may be present whether or not there is agreement about that. This will be apparent from the following examples. The examples stem from my own observations which formed part of a research project about children in their everyday life contexts. The observations were made in 1986. More recent observations of play and mobbing indicate that they are not outdated (Sutton-Smith 1997; Winther-Lindqvist 2003; Chap. 4, this volume).

The first example is from a kindergarten. Three girls have agreed to play doctor. Anna is 4 years old and she is the doctor. Eve, likewise 4, is the mother. Little Maria, who is 2, is the sick child.

The game is well under way and all sorts of exciting incidents occur. A new climax is introduced: The little one is to take some medicine. The big ones provide it. They pee in a soda water bottle. This action – and its result – takes one of the girls out of the game. "Isn't that nasty?" she asks. The other one plays a trump: "But that is the *medicine.* Otherwise she would die!" The urine is forgotten as urine, and the girls are pleased with the impressive and lifelike medicine.

Now the little one is to take its medicine and she must be coaxed into taking it: "Here you are, Maria, here is your soda pop!" they say in very sweet voices. To their blank surprise, the little one refuses to even touch the bottle. However, that does not stop the game. The big ones recover from their surprise. It fits well into the game that the little one refuses to take her medicine – that also happens in the real world. It is not *supposed* to be easy. And the big ones appeal and threaten long within the framework of the game: "Yum! It's soda water. – I wish it was mine! You are only to take a sip, otherwise you'll get ill". The little one grows more and more restive and frightened but remains adamant. At last the big ones realize that the little one has dropped out of the game. They are scandalized: Maria is mean, for they had *agreed* to play doctor. Now they threaten and deride Maria in earnest. They will never let her play again, she destroys everything. Looking very pedagogical they explain to an adult: "We are not playing with her any more. She is too young".

Normally the three girls are very good friends, and there is no reason to think that the big girls bother the little one on purpose. They were concentrating on making the game exciting, and they seemed to be honestly indignant at having been "let down".

The next example stems from a day-care institution.

A group of 10-year-old boys are playing at war. They are heavily armed with crossbows, spears and long wooden knives. Anton is short and slender for his age, but he participates in his own slightly awkward way. Suddenly he becomes everybody's target: "Let's pretend to murder Anton!" somebody shouts. Then he is hunted. To begin with in a manner which is usual for that type of play, dramatic though it may be. He becomes genuinely frightened. And now he is chased in an increasingly excited way. The hostile shouts increase in number and "shrillness". The group seem to have lost their heads; they are now like a pack of hunting wolves.

Anton is caught in a corner. He is held tight and stuck hard in his stomach and threatened with a wooden knife to his throat. When an adult intervenes, he is white in the face and shaking all over. The children of the group defend themselves: "But nothing happened!" and "It was just a game". They appear hectic and bewildered. There was no happy ending for anybody. In a manner of speaking: The aggressive element of the game seems to have accelerated itself. And Anton's fear served as a trigger in this process rather than as a curb. First, the pack caused his fright, and then they lived up to his high level of fear.

Sometimes an evil element in a game is carefully planned, but in the two cases above, this does not seem to be the case. A frequent remark is: "They are playing so well that they have forgotten themselves and the world around them". But the very state of obliviousness – one of the hallmarks of play – is also a source of potential danger. The game can become so absorbing that the children perform acts from which they would normally refrain.

The Dynamic Structure of Social Fantasy Play

The examples have shown that play can be versatile and engaging, even to such an extent that it may be called absorbing. Naturally this is not only the case with "evil" play, but it may serve as a particularly illustrative example because it occurs despite resistance from existing norms. Below a model will be presented which is designed to capture the foundation of the versatility of play. A model of what play "is" would be desirable since it is common, but hardly very informative, to say that play is engaging because it is free from such and such ties. It would be preferable to say something about the ties it actually does have and why they can give the freedom to act, whether in a good or evil manner.

The model of the structure of play attempts to capture the versatility of play. It is intended to illustrate the aspect of play which enables the children to act in non-determined and sometimes surprising ways. It is assumed that this versatility explains why play can be an engaging and sometimes absorbing activity for the playing children.

The reasoning is straightforward: Play can have multifarious forms and functions, and this is because its psychological structure is complex. The psychological structure of play is matched by the rich variability in the development of specific games. In the following some important cornerstones of this structure will be defined.

A Model of the Structure and Components of Play

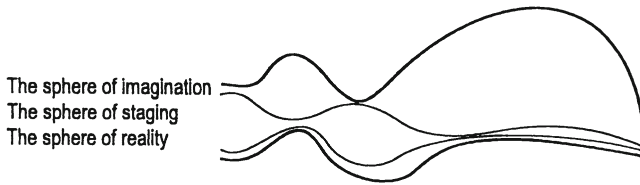
Scholars have long shown an interest in the fact that in fantasy play, the players operate within what, in Werner's terminology (1961), is termed several kinds of spheres of reality (e.g. Bretherton 1984; Giffin 1984; Fein and Glaubmann 1993). The model is intended to maintain and expand a concept of the interrelatedness of spheres and make clear how several spheres of reality with their distinct functions can be understood as interrelated. It will be presented in two steps. First, the overall structure of play and next a more detailed description of the components of the sphere of imagination.

The Structure of Structure: The Spheres of Reality of Play

The most important point is that children taking part in common fantasy play are operating *simultaneously* within several distinct spheres of reality: the sphere of imagination, in which the children are actors in make-believe events; the sphere of staging, in which they make proposals and negotiate themes and roles in the sphere of imagination; and the sphere of reality, in which they pay attention to those real-world properties of the players and of the physical surroundings which are relevant to the contents of the game. The surfaces of contact between these spheres are penetrable, so that they both separate and unite the spheres. In other words, it is not the case that the children have several spheres of reality at their disposal in such a manner that they may quickly and effortlessly walk into and out of the various spheres, though, as pointed out by Kane and Furth (1993), this is how the issue is usually presented. The children cannot "choose" to separate themselves completely from one of the spheres without destroying the game.

The simultaneous existence of mutually permeable spheres of reality is of great functional importance to play in two ways which supplement each other: For one thing, ideas may be supplied from the greatest possible field of reality, and for another, these ideas may be rendered realizable, since the spheres may "communicate with" and adjust to each other so that no sphere suffers intolerably. All the spheres are continuously necessary for the game. Even in the middle of the deepest fantasy game, the child takes some account of the immediate reality and the sphere of staging. The boy who is a pilot in a war game sees the possibilities of the high table and climbs up. He shouts "Here I come" and makes a daring dive in his imaginary jet fighter. While diving he is still sufficiently anchored in the immediate reality to ensure a soft landing in the pile of cushions. He may take some knocks, but not enough to force him out of the game. His quick-as-lightning staging has the purpose of enabling his playmates to follow his action and react adequately to it within the sphere of imagination. So, the game can continue. If he had only been conscious of the sphere of imagination, he would have risked serious harm and might have been regarded by the other children as a weird spoilsport rather than a playmate. In a similar manner, even the transparent negotiations about casting within the sphere of staging take place under some influence from the other spheres. It is taken into account which children are – due to real-world personal qualities like age and agility – able and willing to perform certain roles in the game, and similarly fantasies from the sphere of imagination about the thematic content of the game have some influence on the nature of such negotiations.

The degree to which the various spheres add to the game can and usually will vary in the course of the game, and in the same way the game as a whole can be more or less intense and, in consequence, may be very "deep" for the child. The various spheres relate to each other in a dynamic way. Occurrences in one sphere may be transformed so that they serve as a driving shaft for or an addition to another sphere and its possible expansion, or they may serve as a curb on developments in another sphere. The model below illustrates the simultaneously active spheres and their variable ways of interaction.



The model is intended to highlight the variable interrelatedness of the spheres as a general characteristic of common fantasy or pretend play, but it may also be interpreted as an illustration of the progress of a particular game. In that case, we see a development divided into four stages. In the beginning there is great stress on the initial exchange of ideas and negotiations (the sphere of staging). This paves the way for a period where the sphere of imagination dominates, supported by the other spheres. Then the sphere of imagination is diluted while the children negotiate again, being at the same time very well aware of the immediate reality and its demands and possibilities. At last the sphere of imagination expands enormously, while the other spheres shrink considerably. Now the children play oblivious of themselves.

Games vary, and the very shape of the figure will reflect this fact. A mapping of the example with Anton will bear close resemblance to this figure. The example describes the game when the children have already had their first negotiations and coordinate the plot in the sphere of imagination while taking into account events and states in the other spheres (stage two). In the next stage (stage three) – and in the sphere of staging – the sudden suggestion comes up: “Let’s pretend to murder Anton”. This causes immediate concern for everybody, and here the children go separate ways. Anton is frightened and immediately withdraws from the game, but he must remain physically. He is afraid, and it shows. However, the murder suggestion has the potential to enrich the game; this appeals to the other children and they begin to select and transform impressions from the sphere of reality in a special way (stage four): Those of Anton’s expressions of fear which can enhance the realism and excitement in the sphere of imagination are incorporated in that sphere. At the same time, the signs which indicate that Anton is no longer playing lose their potential braking power. So, the sphere of reality contributes to the progression of the game, but it no longer ensures that due account is taken of the actual well-being of Anton.

For Anton it was an unpleasant experience that events in one sphere may influence another, and that there was disagreement between his wishes and those of the others. It should be stressed that transformations in connexion with disagreements do not necessarily imply that someone becomes distressed. The true potential of the transformation of events may be most readily understood from the fact that not only harmony but also disharmony between the spheres may serve as a catalyst for the breeding of new ideas to the delight of all concerned. A discrepancy between the shared wish of the agents to play a certain theme and the wish of individual participants to either play or avoid certain parts or plots – a discrepancy which is voiced in the sphere of reality and the sphere of staging – may induce an increase of

imagination, which in turn implies the beneficial creation of innovative parts or roles and a corresponding thematic development within the sphere of imagination (Aufwärter and Kirsch 1981).

In the above, an attempt has been made to demonstrate that the interrelatedness between the spheres in play may help in making the sphere of imagination richer and sometimes dominant. But why can it become so absorbing? The following reflections on the nature of this sphere may contribute to an answer.

The Components of Absorption: The Components of the Sphere of Imagination

What are the characteristics of the content and manner of production of the sphere of imagination which make it such an attractive and effective theatre for the child? Three important and mutually connected components whose collaboration is a defining characteristic of the imaginative sphere of play should be pointed out. These components are:

1. *The thematic freedom of action.*
   The sphere of imagination offers the child the possibility of thematic experimentation of a *goal-seeking* and *goal-finding* nature. The thematic field is in principle undefined and unlimited. Free from goal-rational demands, the child plays on the basis of its own motives and interests. Being relatively undisturbed, it can explore and develop themes which are subjectively relevant. Thus, the concentration of meaning can grow strong and keep increasing. In other words, the imaginative space may be intensified by the combination of thematic expansion and increasing subjective relevance which it allows.

   In addition to this, *social* pretend play has a special potential of adding relevant themes: Several children introduce themes into the game, and the result is more than simple addition. In favourable circumstances, what goes on may be compared to improvization in ensemble playing. Exhilarated by the ongoing experience of fellowship and joint efforts, the children produce new variations. They expand and elaborate each other's themes and connect them in a way which can be surprising and attractive to the group and to the individual. Social pretend play admits the possibility of adding themes and de-conventionalizing them collectively. In this way, it may increase the potential of the sphere of imagination for expansion.
2. *The relational logic of imagination.*
   It is a characteristic feature of the sphere of imagination that the cognitive and emotional processes may follow and combine multiple sets of relational logic. The activities of imagination contain connotative, iconic and divergent modes of processing. These modes of processing supply individuals with a special spectre of methods with which they can perceive and evaluate their relations to the surrounding world and their subjective existence. In the

sphere of imagination, these modes of processing *meet with* the set of denotative, conceptual and convergent modes of processing. There is no jump *away from* the denotative mode of thinking and into the connotative mode. The very meeting of the modes of processing – and not the "artistic" mode alone – is a condition of the ability of the sphere of imagination to admit jumps of unlimited magnitude. As a result of this, unforeseen and captivating events may occur accordingly.

Every idea, no matter where it comes from, may be cut loose from its conventional context and become a constituent of a new one. The free relational logic of imagination makes it possible for everything to be connected with everything else in some way or other. Thus, it furthers the child's conceptual freedom and enhances the fullness and attractiveness of the imaginative space.

3. *Play-acting as a mode of activity.*
The last component to facilitate the potential expansion of the sphere of imagination is related to the way in which the game is performed or enacted. When children are playing, engrossed in the sphere of imagination, they are *play-acting*.

Play-acting is an effective way of creating disorder in the conventions of daily routines. A strong indication of this may be found if for a moment we leave children's play and look at Garfinkel's (1967) findings. In a series of experiments, he instructed students to perform simple physical acts and to assume certain attitudes to other people. For example, the students were asked to imagine that another person had hidden and doubtful motives and to show this to the person in question. Some students found it difficult to follow the instruction. The students who did follow it came to perceive the other as very hostile and monstrous and in return experienced very hostile feelings towards the other. Many students reported that it had been a pleasant experience to be so angry with an adversary.

The strength of involvement which is typical of play-acting is seen even when, in the course of their education, adult people are *made to* perform acts and adopt attitudes which are initially determined by others. This component of the sphere of imagination, too, can facilitate the generation of thoughts and feelings which are largely not predetermined and which for that reason make an accelerating involvement in this sphere possible.

The three components open the possibility of continuous addition of engaging themes, and the children's involvement may increase. This is the reason why the sphere of imagination can grow and become so dominant. The children concentrate more and more on the compressed sphere of imagination. Impressions from the other spheres constantly add ideas and these ideas are selected with increasing sharpness so that they fit into this sphere. They are now categorized increasingly on the basis of their function for the attractive sphere of imagination. It is precisely this which may happen even in the child's reaction to another child's signals of how it feels about the game. This, I believe, is why the other children may actually overlook the fact that Anton is genuinely scared. They select and transform his expression of fright on the basis of its meaning within the sphere of imagination.

Up to now some characteristics of common fantasy play have been presented and discussed from a point of view that exposes how this game can serve as a varied experimentarium for children at play. In order to expose the children's autonomy, the focus has been on "evil games". The focus on a kind of activity which conflicts with cultural moral norms invites a discussion of the meaning which this activity may have for other activities and, more precisely, the effect it may have on the children's general relation to these codes: *What can it mean for a child's life also outside the game that it has performed aggressive acts in play?*

Implications

We should certainly not accept all kinds of play. However, a considerable amount of research in play indicates that the significance for the child of the occurrence of evil acts in play seems to depend on factors beyond play (Rutter and Rutter 1993; Sutton-Smith 1997; Göncü and Gaskins 2007).

Thus, it seems plausible that the occasional occurrence of aggressive acts among children can have completely opposite kinds of effect. I shall try to develop this observation.

Generally speaking, children are born into a society where there is good as well as evil, power as well as powerlessness, and play can be an arena for learning to distinguish between good and evil. Personal experience has a special value, and when a child performs acts which are in conflict with moral norms, he or she obtains specific experience. It is reasonable to assume that such experiences are coloured by strong emotional associations so that they are not easily lost in the stream of the child's general experiences. The experiences with unpleasant acts may be useful in other contexts because they may promote the child's social competences and help to make him or her conscious of what is good and what is evil and in what circumstances. The point is: The contours of good and evil which such experiences outline have what I will call "empirical validity" for the child. They are rooted in the personal experience of events in precisely those social contexts which are relevant to the individual child. Therefore, they may contribute to an increase in the child's ability to distinguish realistically and in great detail between its own pro- and antisocial acts and thus also enable the child to choose more effectively to perform prosocial acts and refrain from antisocial ones – and vice versa.

It may be assumed that every child is to some extent capable of performing aggressively coloured acts (Harris 1989; Zahn-Waxler et al. 1991). Naturally, having the capability of something in no way implies that this capability is automatically put into effect when an occasion arises. Both individual features and the social context will influence the way in which the child plays, and the consequences for the child of having played games with an admixture of the antisocial cannot be deduced from the actions of play per se, but must be investigated with a view to the individual child in its various contexts. A considerable amount of research indicates that characteristics of the individual players will influence their willingness

to engage in play with antisocial elements and also the way in which they participate.

Some children are more cautious than others. It is well known that children sometimes stop at the very beginning of a game which they think may become frightening. Thus, Bretherton mentions how some children – particularly very young ones – may refrain from playing certain games because they are too dangerous ("it's too scary!") (Bretherton 1984).

Similarly, children vary with respect to how they perceive and react to other children's expression of unhappiness. It is well documented that children of all ages differ considerably when it comes to altruistic behaviour. They vary in their reaction to the unhappiness of others and in their expression of empathy, and they also vary with respect to becoming so overwhelmed with empathic distress that they abandon the field (Zann-Waxler et al. 1986/1991; Pepler and Rubin 1991). Such differences will presumably also influence the way in which the child perceives and relates to a playmate who becomes genuinely unhappy during play. In the same vein, it is likely that the fact that some children play in a more intense and abandoned manner than others will influence how likely they are to take notice of the state of the other players – Is she becoming genuinely scared? – and possibly stop playing.

Several empirical studies support the assumption that experience with play in which varying degrees of unpleasant occurrences appear regularly can affect a child's willingness to perform hostile acts in reality. Smith and Boulton (1990) point out that rough and tumble games can serve both as an activity through which children use and develop positive social skills and as an activity which they can use in socially manipulative ways. Gambols may offer a big, dominant boy an opportunity to increase his dominance or inflict physical harm on others. The game offers him a particularly effective way of controlling others: He can move back and forth between being aggressive in fun and in earnest in such a way that he sends conflicting signals as to what sphere of reality he is momentarily acting within. He becomes non-transparent and unpredictable for his victim, who becomes disoriented and helpless, unable to predict what will happen and what he can do. The child's general attitude to itself and to others is presumably one of the factors which have particular importance for its willingness to enter into socially positive and negative relations. It also determines what consequences he or she will have for the child if, in play, it performs acts which are really harmful to others. Thus, Rutter and Rutter (1993) argue that it is not the very performance of aggressive acts in conflicts, but the capability and willingness of the child to end conflicts in a friendly manner, i.e. the wish to make friends again, which indicates whether the aggressive actions will become part of a negative circle. For children who generally have good relations with other children, individual aggressive acts have little or no significance in their relation with other children.

This is in keeping with the common assumption that children who generally have negative experiences with interpersonal relations will tend to enter into negative relations even in new contexts and situations. They carry their internal working models and coping strategies within, and they attribute negative intentions to other people far more often than other, more fortunate, children. In accordance with these attributions, they act in a more hostile manner and receive a similarly hostile

reaction from others, and the vicious circle is complete. In connexion with play, Pellegrini emphasizes the fact that socially unpopular as well as socially popular children usually play with others who have the same sociometric status as themselves. He argues that this may be the reason why – unlike popular children – unpopular children do not use child groups who gambol to discover and create pro-social models, and do not see them as opportunities to perform and practise pro-social acts (Pellegrini 1988).

It seems as if the principle of St. Matthew (13, 12) is also valid when children play. It reads: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath". The strength of this principle is not reduced by two important caveats. One is that most of the studies referred to are theoretically based correlational studies, and this form of study does not show great interest in a detailed understanding that part of the population studied which lies outside the blueprint of the correlational calculation. For this reason, it should be mentioned that there are casuistic examples which indicate that children who are otherwise unpopular may be popular exactly as playmates – they may for example have a particularly wild imagination or great courage – and that this may help improve their social status (Åm 1992).

The other caveat is that, particularly when working with morally sensitive topics, it is important to state explicitly that the evaluation of a phenomenon may depend entirely on the position of the evaluator. Patterson et al. (1989) have described how children from what we call strained social backgrounds will often enter into what mainstream evaluations would clearly describe as vicious circles in their social relations, but they have also argued that from the perspective of the children involved, these circles may be seen as indications that the children master a functional set of coping strategies. When we move into areas which are regarded as particularly unpleasant in mainstream evaluations, we may find a particularly great diversity in the norms of evaluation. To give just one example: On the basis of extensive empirical studies of group harassment, Olweus has emphasized that the typical leader in harassment is not anxious and insecure "deep down", as he believes that a fair number of psychologists think. On the contrary, the typical leader either is much less frightened and insecure than the average child or corresponds to the average in this respect. Furthermore, his self-esteem is either average or fairly high, he has a generally more positive attitude to violence and a stronger need to dominate others than the average child and he has his own subgroup of fans who admire him and follow him as a hero (Olweus 1973, 1985). If such a bully increased his dominance by causing harm to others in using play as a manipulative medium, it may very well be imagined that he and his fans would see this as part of a positive circle, while, from a mainstream viewpoint, it would form part of a vicious circle. Once again it seems that it does not provide an adequate understanding to categorize aggressive actions in a in a simple manner or based on only one perspective.

It seems justified to assume that experience with playing in an aggressive manner can promote widely different sides of the social repertoire. At one end of the continuum, it may confirm or reinforce antisocial behaviour. A child can have the opportunity of experimenting with and fine-tuning antisocial competences so that it

can act more effectively. In addition, the child may have experienced some kind of satisfaction during the game which may sharpen its appetite for more experiences of the same kind. The display of power may have called forth shuddering admiration from the other children or the child agent may have experienced some relief by venting its frustrations on a scapegoat.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, aggressive play may strengthen the pro-social attitude and competences of the child. The distinction between good and evil may become clearer to the child. Here, the affective significance can play a great role: a child who has seen that it has made another child unhappy has gained a very real insight into what it can cause or bring about and how sad the consequences may be for both parties. This realization can serve as a check. It can turn up as a very vivid and specific counterbalance to an immediate impulse to act. "I do not want to play any more – she will only become unhappy".

To summarize: The aspects of children's participation in common fantasy play which have been discussed here are internally related to the general and diverse social positions and dispositions of the children. Play offers children a special free space in which they can explore interaction with both pro- and antisocial features, which *may* be advantageous to them. The children's games and their life outside of play influence each other; they may in fact be said to develop because of each other (Winther-Lindqvist 2013).

Conclusion: The Structure of Play and Some of Its Implications

This chapter has taken Vygotsky's statement "Taller by a head" as its point of departure and pursued the question of what the child can see from this position. This question has most often been answered from a use- or usefulness-oriented perspective that focuses on play's potential as an activity that furthers the child's interest in and smooth adaptation to society's acknowledged norms for desirable development within diverse domains. This chapter has tried to unpack central characteristics of children's fantasy play and on this background discuss more broadly what playing children can investigate and learn about.

In the process of playing fantasy games, the children continuously and in collaboration with each other combine input and ideas from three spheres of reality, and they can do so in new and sometimes even for themselves surprising ways. Thus, fantasy play has a format which invites the exploration of engaging topics in very varied ways. When we try to understand fantasy play in a way that matches the whole possible range of fantasy production, it strengthens the view of children as young cultural actors. They are seriously involved in cooperative explorations of and negotiations of how to deal with important realities of their societal circumstances of life. Modern western society shows a high degree of moral ambiguity and its recognized norms for good moral behaviour are not transparent. Sometimes the recognized norms differ from other practised and effectively functioning norms (see Schousboe, Chap. 13, this volume).

However, it is important to know the whole set of actually operating social codes and not just the explicit moral code in order to effectively shape one's role as a participant in society. Some of these realities can be difficult to find out about, to handle and to accept, but nevertheless, it happens that children go very far to get a grasp of these difficult aspects of reality.

The fact that children can play in ways that include non-negligible amounts even of unpleasant experiences goes hand in hand with an important point of Vygotsky's: In play children can overcome unpleasant hindrances and unpleasant emotional experiences when this gives them the opportunity to deal collectively with topics that are of serious emotional importance to them.

When we focus on this point of Vygotsky's and on the fact that children co-constitute each other's ZPD for better and worse, and when we see that they do this as cultural agents who relate to their specific conditions, it becomes clear how far the view is which children can gain access to when in their play they seem to be a head taller than themselves.

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Chapter 3
Playing with Social Identities: Play in the Everyday Life of a Peer Group in Day Care

Ditte Winther-Lindqvist

Introduction

This chapter explores the role played by symbolic group playing and gaming in the formation of children's social identities in day care by expanding on Ivy Schousboe's theoretical model of spheres of reality in play. Play activities among children in day care, takes place among peers who share a history, form relationships and develop social aspirations towards one another. In these relationships, social identifying processes are psychologically active and highly visible in actions, communications, negotiations and subjective experiences. The issue of social identities becomes relevant whenever people participate in groups of peers over time and raises questions as: Who am I in this group? How would I like to be recognized? (Tajfel 1978). Identities developed in play shape expectation patterns that guide behaviours and influence self- and other concepts in emotionally significant and personally relevant ways. This is consequential to how children participate in shared activities and how they form relationships – it contrasts highly the idea that playing is mostly fun, pleasurable, pretending and also a kind of sacred activity freed from immediate real-life consequences (Cohen 1987; Groos 1976/1901; Piaget 1976; Garvey 1977/1990).

In the Piagetian tradition of play studies, symbolic playing and playing with rules are taken to be two different kinds of activities, which also occur at different times in ontogenesis (Polgar 1976). Children's symbolic/pretend playing and its functions are overcome in middle childhood and taken over by playing with rules, the only kind of playing that persists into adulthood (Piaget 1962, pp. 166,168). In playing games with rules, the players are competing, by following explicit rules denoting what actions are legal and which ones are cheating – by performing the

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tasks of the game, within the prohibition of the rules, which apply to all players, in all games, the goal is to find a winner or a winning team (Jordan et al. 1995). Pretend playing, contrarily, has no winners or losers and goals are open ended; the players are free to enact and invent roles as they imagine a shared storyline (Singer and Singer 1990).

In contrast to this view, Vygotsky and the cultural-historical activity theory tradition regard every play world as guided by rules as well as imagined situations (Bodrova 2008). The question is not whether the activity is guided by rules or not, but the extent to which the rules dominate. In pretend play, the manifest imaginary situation predominates, and the rules by which role enactments are performed are latent and guide behaviours only implicitly – in playing games, we find an opposite situation; the rules are manifest, overt and dominate in discussions, negotiations and performances; and the imaginary situation recedes to a subordinate position (Duncan and Tarulli 2003, p. 276). Piaget and Vygotsky meet in agreement, when regarding symbolic/pretend play as a precursor to the development of games with rules, but they differ considerably when it comes to viewing symbolic playing and gaming as two different kinds of activities (Piaget) or as different versions of the same phenomenon (Vygotsky).

I would like to argue in favour of Vygotsky's viewpoint and at the same time exemplify and further develop Schousboe's model when analysing children's social realities and identities in examples of children engaged in symbolic group play (role play) as well as games with rules (soccer).

Claiming that symbolic group playing and games are all activities involving pretence and rules, I discuss these in turn arguing via empirical examples. The first part of the paper concerns symbolic group playing, its constituents and group composition with roles and positions; and the second part regards games with rules – which also involves negotiation of roles and positions – both presentations stress the implications of playing for the social reality and social identities among the players involved.

Symbolic Group Play

In order to frame the forthcoming analysis of symbolic group play based on empirical material from an observational study in a Danish day-care centre, a brief theoretical presentation of some constituting features of symbolic group play is outlined in the following section. An episode of symbolic group play is recognized when *a group of players are engaged in creating a shared make-believe scenario (either in verbal or in action), in which players take particular roles upon them (either in verbal or in action) in reciprocal ways.* A group is defined as minimum two persons who are concerned with a common project, e.g. playing together (Bauer and Gaskell 1999, p. 171). A group is furthermore characterized by the individuals involved thinking of themselves as members, and they collaborate and coordinate their behaviour by taking upon them different interrelated roles within their common project (Arrow et al. 2000; Zurcher 1983, p. 15). The make-believe scenario shows obvious symbolic "as-if" and "what-if".

Theoretical Preliminaries: Features of Symbolic Group Play

Pretence: Symbolic and Subjunctive Modalities of Thought

Psychologists have studied children's playing with the aim of identifying the developmentally acquired abilities and functions of play, especially the *ability for pretence*, investigating different levels and kinds of pretence, its origins in ontogeny and its organization (see Friedman and Leslie 2007, debating Lillard 1993, 2002). Symbolic play upholds a "space" between reality and unreality, believe and make-believe, related to both, but reliant on different modalities of thought (Baldwin 1908; Golomb and Kuersten 1996, p. 204; Sutton-Smith 1997, p. 1). Make-believe/pretence is framed by two correlated modes of thought: *symbolic thought* (manifested in "as-if" actions) and *subjunctive thought* (leading to "what-if" actions). The "as-if" component requires the child to detach the usual meaning of an object and ascribe it a new symbolic meaning (Vygotsky 1933; Goldman 1998, p. 2), for example, when a 4-year-old is pretending to be a sailor, the sofa cushion is his ship and the floor the open sea. Subjunctive thought is characterized by exploring potential possibilities: What if this room was a jungle? What if I was a tiger? (Bretherton 1984; see also Schousboe 2013b, this volume, Chap. 12). A crucial feature of the play situation is the players' awareness that what is going on is not to be taken as literally real. This requires the ability to distinguish between reality and pretence and, subsequently, on more complexly organized ways of communicating about this distinction and blurring the boundaries between the real and pretended.

Play Dominated by As-If and What-If Actions

The way children play reflects their knowledge and understanding which is evident in the differences between young and older children's thematic structure and object use in playing. There is general agreement around a developmental sequence in which younger children (toddlers) tend to *behave as if with what is* (Engel 2005a, b) and thus primarily imitate and pretend around experiences from their own everyday life (El'Konin 1988), for instance, making cakes with sand and serving tea in a plastic cup. Older preschool children (4–6-year-olds) who are more experienced with social representations, narrative structure, scripts, verbal skills and other symbolic resources are able to invent more fantastical *would be* realities of make-believe scenarios, for example, pretending to be pirates on a ship haunted by ghosts and casting magic spells, only to be rescued by "the good dragon-dinosaur"! These play themes are not rooted in the child's own everyday life experience but draws on all kinds of symbolic resources (books, films, TV shows, computer games, YouTube videos, toys, merchandise, commercials, etc.). The difference between these ways of pretend playing is also sometimes referred to as socio-dramatic playing (behaving as if with what is) and thematic-fantasy play (creating what-if imaginary worlds) (Hendy and Toon 2001, p. 12).

Material and Symbolic Tools of Play

Through free combination, connection and association in the realm of fantasy material reality offers endless possibilities for manipulation and use in pretence play – an open field, a wooden ship, a batman costume and a football. The availability of places, props, toys and objects with which to play affords particular themes, actions and scenarios. A soccer game is impossible without a ball and space to move around in – but these affordances don't necessarily lead to a game of soccer. The use of available objects and props can be incorporated in unconventional ways that sustain and/or expand the meaning of the make-believe scenario in creation (Almqvist 1994). The richness of the playing environment in day care depends not only on objects with which to play but also on access to varied spaces more or less carefully designed for playing (Spencer and Blades 2006; Bodrova and Leong 1996). Even though players are not forced to follow conventional social representations and common sense associations, these form the common ground from where to make sense of the world, through actions and communication (Moscovici 2000, pp. 22–23; Duveen 2001). Children from the same cultural backgrounds share knowledge of how the world works, how objects are used, how working life is organized, what the roles and relations are between the two sexes, etc. This knowledge also shows in more concrete scripts, on how holidays, injuries, birthdays, a house on fire, attending school or giving birth is carried through and taken care of in a play. The pool of everyday knowledge scaffolds the shared story which is enriched with the children's personal hopes, fears, ambivalences, preoccupations and curiosities during playing. Social representations provide the raw material, guidance and symbolic tools for playing rather than a recipe for faithful reconstruction (Bretherton 1984, p. 25). In the same vein objects, toys and props of play serve as promoting particular ideas, themes and enactments, rather than mechanically determining those – the toy/object enters the open dynamical person – environment systems, where it is ascribed meaning and relevance in accordance with the players preoccupation, desires, motives, knowledge, imagination and action potency.

Communicating About Reality and Pretence in the Play Group

When playing in groups, communication is necessary as a means of sharing the experience and coordinating one's actions accordingly. G. Bateson has pointed out that in order to manage pretence between actors, the players must meta-communicate, verbally or in action, that they are playing, so that their actions are interpreted accordingly (Bateson 1976, p. 120; Fine 1983, p. 183). Alongside, group playing also requires "stage management" devices or techniques for negotiating the content, theme and script, as well as where and how the theme is to be realized (Bretherton 1989, p. 384). Therefore, in symbolic group play, some communications aim to clarify and establish the *staging* of the play (who is who and what is happening and

how is it going to happen), and some communication acts to establish and maintain imaginary *performances* (Garvey 1977, p. 80; Fein 1981; Göncü 1993). The social representations, shaping children's expectations to the world around them, and their play themes, along with how these scripts are supposed to be enacted through roles, function in many ways as rules (El'Konin 1988). In the Vygotskian understanding of play rules, these are norms and implicit contracts for how to interact in this specific activity, norms that can be followed, violated, reworked and challenged in ways that affect the interaction.

Spheres of Reality

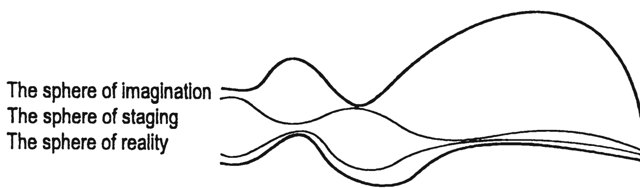
The concept of spheres of reality, borrowed from H. Werner (1961), has several advantages as a terminology for describing staging and performances as different kinds of realities in symbolic group play. Spheres of reality are used to describe how different ways of experiencing interacts dynamically with but is also distinct from other ways of relating to reality. Spheres of reality deal with inner, phenomenologically perceived "areas" of experience that are at the same time observable in the way the children talk, act, perform and communicate whilst playing. The advantage of this terminology in play theory, when dealing with the complex interplay of reality, pretence and communication, is that spheres are fuzzy "areas" that can overlap and change in their relative quantity as well as in their experienced qualities. Also, spheres of reality as a metaphor are easily visualized as layered one on top of the other illustrating how different experiences are active in conjunction, in the present moment, so that children in play move smoothly and effortlessly between those spheres.

According to Ivy Schousboe's (see Schousboe 2013a, this volume, Chap. 2) theoretical model, what is central to social symbolic play is that the players operate simultaneously within three interdependent spheres:

1. The sphere of imagination (realm of performance in symbolic/make-believe actions)
2. The sphere of staging (realm of organizing, planning and negotiation)
3. The sphere of reality (the material world of other people and physical spaces, laws of nature, available objects and props)

The way Schousboe uses the concept of spheres of reality allows one to look at playing as a multilayered activity, which is about pretence and at the same time about the literally real. Scholars employing Vygotsky's thinking do not consider real and not real as mutually exclusive. G. Lindqvist (2002) represents this position and states, "there is no opposition between aesthetics and rationality, imagination and reality" in playing (p. 440). In line with this thinking, Schousboe integrates the different aspects of children's playing by suggesting that each sphere is equally valid and equally important to the activity: This is so because the spheres of staging and reality are incorporated on equal terms with pretending in this model, as these

spheres are permeable, transparent and present throughout a given play incident, although one may be more predominant at different points during the play. The ways in which these spheres are interconnected are open and dynamical, so that what occurs in one sphere transforms another sphere, where it may facilitate or inhibit processes of expansion of that sphere, within the play as a whole (Schousboe 2013a, this volume, Chap. 2). Therefore, an enactment of a role in the sphere of imagination can bring about a need for renegotiation or clarification in the sphere of staging. Changes in the physical environment (the reality sphere) can inspire a change of content in the sphere of imagination functioning as an open dynamic system (Valsiner 1997, p. 91). None of the ways of relating to the different spheres can be neglected for the primary establishment of the play activity as well as its maintenance and unfolding in time.



As Schousboe's model shows, the sphere of imagination can become the absolute predominant reality in the minds of the players. The further analysis and argument of this chapter substantiates the ways in which the play group is deeply rooted in social reality, not least the social reality and identities among the players.

Aspects of the Institutional Tradition of Danish Day Care

In Denmark, children from age 2.8–6 years attend day care from approximately 8 in the morning till 4 in the afternoon. There is a long established institutional tradition of supporting the child's right to play freely and unsupervised by adult intervention, and the day cares are built to create a homey and playful atmosphere (Kragh-Mûller 2010). The professionals (called pedagogues in Danish) leave the children to decide what activities they would like to attend, where and with whom, rather than structuring the day with learning activities creating the groups for them. The children in most Danish day cares are therefore free to play on their own, as much as they want (only interrupted by lunch/afternoon fruit and occasional excursions or pedagogical projects). A day-care unit in Denmark usually consists of approximately 20 children aged between 3 and 6 years of age. Most children stay all 3 years of day care in the same unit and among the same peers of their age. In this environment, the children form consistent, yet dynamical, patterns of interpersonal relationships. In this environment, the children's friendships tend to be structured around an implicit hierarchical organization in which age plays a crucial role. In the social hierarchy, those who are eldest are most likely to have more

friends and be popular playmates (they are least rejected and most invited) among all the children. Also, friendships and play groups are often same-sex gendered. Boys and girls sometimes play together, but they usually prefer playing different themes and roles: The boys play male characters, often heroic ones, and the themes tend to be more fantastical, with a lot of drama between good and evil forces, rescuing and battling. Most girls typically prefer themes of everyday life, enacting family roles and doing domestic things like cooking, moving, going to school and shopping (Kalliala 2006). Clearly, boys and girls are oriented towards different social identities and identify with different social roles in their play, but the way identities are negotiated and communicated through playing is a general rather than gender-specific finding (see Winther-Lindqvist 2009a for an analysis of a group of girls' play). Some features of the peer-group culture seem to transgress different countries and cultures. W. Corsaro and D. Eder (1990) identify a number of concerns that the peer culture is organized around in Italian day cares of which the same concerns are relevant in the Danish context: gaining control with play spaces and props, protecting play groups when in them and obtaining access to them when outside them. Friendships and making social alliances are important when children place themselves and others in positions of control and likelihood of gaining access to ongoing play activities (Corsaro 1994).

Empirical Study

Method

The theoretical argument posed in this chapter is empirically informed by a motivated ethnographic study (Duveen and Lloyd 1993), obtained in two Danish day-care centres in 2003 and 2006. The first study took place in a day care located in Copenhagen/Denmark, and the second study was conducted in a rural village 30 km from Copenhagen. Both day-care centres are placed in an almost entirely homogenetic ethnic Danish lower-middle-class environment. The first study includes 100 h of reported observations, obtained during the course of 1 year. The second study includes 120 h of observations, and in both places these were carried out with paper and pen, on the spot, and supplemented with tape recordings of interviews with children "on the spot". Observations took place everywhere the children went – in units, hallways, bathrooms, the playground area, etc. – and the aim of the study was to understand the play activity from children's perspectives (Sommer and Samuelsson 2010).

In the chosen example illustrating symbolic group play and social identities, we are to meet Simon and Martin who are 5 years old. Simon appears in 22 out of 45 episodes of symbolic group play obtained in this material, and he and Martin attend the same unit as best friends at this point in time. The playground is rather small and full of playing devices, a wooden tower and a big ship in a big

sandpit, but there is no space for playing games like soccer. Simon and Martin always sit together at lunch and often play most of the day together – they also play at each other's houses. The example is chosen to illustrate how the spheres of reality and the composition of roles and positions are negotiated between the players in ways that involve their social identities and relationships. In this episode, Simon and Martin play with another boy, George, who is from the other day-care unit. They play in the rough and tumble play room full of heavy mattresses and pillows.

Example

Simon (to George): Can you help me with this one? You are not even helping. Hold this; we need this mattress (they crawl into the hideout).
Simon: I am a leopard cub and I am 3 years old.
George: Ok, I was a cheetah big brother and 9 years old.
Simon: How old were you?
Martin: 0. No 4 years. If you are 64, are you grown up?
Simon. Yes, I was in charge as the boss, and one could be bitten by crocodiles or a monkey, and you baby (to Martin)… you did it anyway because you were not afraid of it, so you shot big brother because you thought he was a monkey…
George: ?
Simon: Now you realized he was your big brother.
(an adult enters the room)
Simon: GO OUT!
Martin: Or I throw this at you (he threatens to throw the plastic cup)! (The adult quickly leaves again: easy, easy guys!)
Simon: Now you were to give me medicine. Hey baby…Now we went…We were tigers, sword tigers. You were the big brother (to Martin), and you were the father (to George). It was just a play gun shooting with smoke.
Martin: But you didn't die (worried)?
Simon: Bang, bang, you shot. It wasn't a real gun, but I was hurt, and now you were scared (the others listen carefully).
Simon: And this time you couldn't save me (lies down).
Martin: I put the medicine here.
Simon: But I died (talks whilst lying down). You had good medicine. I had to have it every day. It was really special, so I needed it every day, so I shouldn't die and never live again.
Martin: (carefully helps Simon drink medicine from the cup).
Simon: Only one drop (sighs).
Martin: Yes, here it is.
Simon: I was injured by a tiger, and I was bleeding, so I needed this medicine. It is morning, so I need medicine again.
Martin: Here you go (kneels again).
Simon: One, two, three, I have had it now, and you prepare for the next day's medicine.

George: You spat at me!
Simon: I only got a drop a day (Martin carefully pretends to give Simon the medicine).
Martin: Otherwise you get sick and then you die. It tasted good yeah? It didn't hurt much either did it?
Simon: And now it was in my brain, right. And now listen guys! It was all sorted now. You were 69 and now you developed, and I was 68 and slept in this warm shed and it was night. Let's say that you were old enough to make the medicine. I could spread smoke, so it hurts and YOU, you could make evil medicine, and it was you…! No it was me who made it because you always mixed good and bad.
Martin: No.
Simon: You were a sword tiger, and you developed, and a long time went, and then it was your birthday (he prepares presents by wrapping things in blankets). You opened all these presents (he comes with them and Martin opens them with excitement enacting the happy birthday brother). It isn't morning anymore. Here, have some juice (they drink and George watches).
Martin: Why don't we go and play something else in the unit?
Simon: If you do that, you can't come to my birthday! Now we play that you get all this medicine.
Martin: Ok.
Simon: And it is all for me.
Martin: NO.
Simon: Also for you. I only had three and you had more.
Martin: I could also taste it.
Simon: Yes. I have a good idea. Was this my birthday present?
Martin: (not approving)
Simon: This dummy was for you. You loved dummies, and now you needed a nap. I also need to sleep… You were afraid of spiders. Baby, you would rather watch TV. It is behind you. I would rather play a computer game. (They sit down and pretend to play in front of a screen. George keeps a place behind them.)
Simon: I can't be bothered with this clown's game. It is too stupid! But you would like to play it. But you don't have a computer!
Martin: NO (angrily).
Simon: Ok, but you wanted to play with the computer… (Martin gets up).
Soon after the play ends.

Analysis of Play Example

This symbolic group-play episode is dramatic and fantastical (resembles thematic-fantasy play, rather than socio-dramatic play), and presumably, there are no rules in it because the roles are invented as they go along. Looking closer at the negotiations, the eldest part of the role is taking the lead; Simon as big brother takes the director's position as he narrates the story and also stages his co-players' actions (Winther-Lindqvist 2009a). Martin seems fascinated by the vivid fictional sphere that Simon presents. George's participation is limited to be the 9-year-old cheetah big brother,

a role which is never acted out, and Martin's participation is also limited compared to Simon's. Despite this unevenness Simon announces "Listen guys", so both co-players feel that they belong. Simon's stream of ideas is presented almost as free associations, and they are hard to follow. The story clearly draws on cultural resources from the world of Pokemón where the figures can transform and develop into new figures. Simon thus becomes various different animals, and his talk is mostly about himself. Simon is too deeply absorbed in the fictional sphere to realize that he is losing the co-players' attention (overhearing the staging and reality sphere of the play). His co-players too often feel unemployed and uncertain about their own role and position. All medicine is just for Simon, which provokes a resistance from Martin. Simon quickly and smoothly picks up on this message through the reality sphere and tries to re-engage Martin again. He offers birthday presents and much more medicine, but he also nullifies this in ambivalent ways (you confused good and evil). Simon is narrating with eager and Martin must concentrate in order to keep pace with the identifications Simon makes of him, and he doesn't like most of them. Martin finally refuses to be the scared baby (with a dummy) who wants to play a stupid clown's game, but who hasn't got a computer! Simon is providing for his own significance to the play, but he is less generous in relation to identifying Martin equally positively.

Simon too often identifies Martin in ways he cannot accept, and it hinders his full participation and embracement with the play activity. Martin too often finds himself cross and self-defending. This holds true also when they don't play – it is Simon who does the most talking and presents ideas and thoughts. Martin is genuinely interested in these presented scenarios and Simon also makes him laugh, but he also often is overheard when with Simon. Precisely in this way the playing reflects and affects relationships of everyday life. Another little example illustrates their conflict.

Vignette

Simon: Martin let's play?
Martin: (no reply)
Simon: Why don't we… I was a dinosaur and you were…
Martin: I HEAR YOU, I HEAR YOU, I HEAR YOU, I HEAR YOU
Simon: And we could…
Martin: I HEAR YOU, I HEAR YOU, I HEAR YOU, I HEAR YOU…
Simon: Why do you keep saying that?
Martin: I HEAR YOU, I HEAR YOU, I HEAR YOU, I…
Simon: I get cross soon! (sounds sad)
Martin: I HEAR YOU, I HEAR YOU, I HEAR YOU (Simon walks away).

Comments: Martin "hears" too much of Simon, and it is difficult for him to get heard himself. This conflict is not readily solved. What happens in a play affects not only the particular play episode but also the general impression between persons and their relationship. Therefore, it is important how the children "play their part" and how they negotiate roles and positions in the group as players and persons sharing a project. Often in conflicting playing the players do not succeed in showing expected and needed recognition and influence.

Discussion

Identifying with Roles and Positions

Symbolic playing is related to identification processes in many ways, not least because playing is a practice that enables the player to be what she/he desires to become. But also, role enactment enables the child to explore feared, mean and morally dismissed and curious roles (like a thief, a nasty stepmom, a magic man). According to H. Furth and S. Kane, players enacting their roles, in a shared make-believe scenario, relate to the pretend situation "as if" it was real (1992, p. 160). This I have found to be an ideal rather than a necessary condition in symbolic group play. In order to identify fully with a role, it must represent a positive position in the eyes of the person who enacts it and also by the group in general. Sometimes reaching agreement on roles and positions involves threats, manipulation and sacrifices, and only "working acceptance" is attained, which refers to a kind of agreement involving a subjective sacrifice that people make in order to maintain a fragile interaction (Goffman 1969, p. 210). In other cases, roles are more readily "embraced" by the players, and the player easily identifies and "becomes" her/his role, as Furth and Kane suggest. In the example given, Martin was happily enacting the role of the healing brother, providing important medicine for his wounded little brother, but refused to be the baby brother with no computer. Identifications thus point back and forth between the factual and symbolic identity of both the role and its player – symbolic group play invites for a whole range of possible ways of being and acting, but the social reality of the peer group is part of it. The player not only identifies with the role but also with the central or peripheral position it indicates, and in the process of making the play group, these positions are made explicit. Making invitations and rejections of people whilst establishing the playing group is an overt and direct way of identifying someone as worth being with or not; Vandenberg (2005) comments, "An invitation into the playing group is more than just an opportunity to play; it is an issue of existence. To be outside the group is to be a nonentity, to join the play is to be officially sanctioned identity and status in the group" (p. 55). Creating and maintaining the play group offers subtle and sophisticated ways of marking social identities: The way roles are distributed and enacted are also ways of marking differences in hierarchical status, creating and maintaining special alliances and expressing emotional evaluations of one another. By designating someone a role or ascribing a role to oneself, one is making a sign of identity of the other, and also oneself is identified. These identification processes are most evident as concerns in the sphere of staging in the play because their roles and positions are formulated, negotiated and disagreed and agreed upon. These identifying acts are not performed as or interpreted as imaginary, but realized as real identifications performed in out-of-character voices. A particular identification is more or less welcomed, and if it is appreciated, the player and person as identified embrace her/his role with satisfaction, and the prospects of entering the sphere of imagination for an extended period of time are present. On the other

hand, if the identification is negatively perceived (regardless of whether this was intended or not), the identified person and player will *resist* this particular influence made by identifier (Duveen 2001, p. 269). In the sphere of imagination, the individual group member manifests herself/himself as player before person, and in the sphere of staging and in the reality sphere, the member manifests herself/himself as person before player.

Central and Peripheral Positions

All participants in a play group are principally full participants, but enacting the role of unemployed big-brother cheetah obviously offers less possibilities for influencing the activity than the injured sword tiger – and the one giving the medicine. The play position denotes different levels of control; the player takes or is allowed to take within a play, in relation to both the creation of a story (sphere of imagination) and how that story is to be realized (sphere of staging). Inspired by the Lave and Wenger's terminology (2003), the members of a playgroup uphold more or less central and peripheral positions in the play as a whole, as well as in different moments of the play. These play positions are closely connected to the play roles. The mummy, daddy, big-brother tiger or captain draw on cultural scripts for relevant actions and opt for more or less comprehensive action patterns and central positions within the play. Most children wish to uphold a central position in the play, and thus conflicts often arise in the negotiation of who is to take on which role.

The Director's Position

The director upholds a particular central position, as the one in charge of the play project, as main narrator and main organizer, exercising definitional power. The director is almost always performed by the player enacting the most authoritative role of the relatively eldest figure in the play (e.g. the mother). (Simon sometimes challenges this rule.) The director is more or less sensitive to the co-players' desires and contributions and is more or less expected to be dependent on those co-players. Simon enacted a solo storyteller in the example given, leaving a minimum of space for his co-players to influence the direction and content of the story. The functions of a director are to outline a storyline and make final decisions in cases of disagreements in the group, both in regard to fictional performances and staging features. Thus, the structure of group play – with its main director and members who perform reciprocal roles and positions negotiated and settled upon in the sphere of staging – carries identification processes among the children.

Building Relationships Through Playing

In symbolic group play, the children "play" with their interpersonal relationships and social identities. They exercise and explore them, expand them and change them. The way a person manages a role enactment and possibly mediates successfully among the players is recognized by the peers – in approving or disapproving ways. Playing together in this environment is not "sacred" area, in which one can act solely in accordance with one's own desires without real-life consequences. Group plays are therefore not that different from other social encounters regarding the ways in which people interact and form alliances and relationships. Experiences derived from specific and continuing play incidents lead to changes in general friendship-group constellations. Simon's inflexibility when insisting on "going solo" when playing with Martin eventually leads to their friendships ending. Luckily, Simon shows flexibility in other ways and is willing to play with much younger peers, in order to be able to stay in charge, but he does so after experiencing consistent rejection from his same-age peers, on grounds he is not able to understand or change.

Symbolic and Factual Identity in Playing

Children in play are actively presenting themselves in their factual/actual as well as in their symbolic variants (Schwartzman 1979). When a child enacts the role of the wicked witch or the nasty egg thief, all know that these identities are symbolic, as in *not real*, but to be interesting they must display qualities of the real; to participate successfully in the play as a magic man, the child must enact as if he was one – if he does it well, *he*, as he is perceived to be in reality, will be recognized for it. Likewise, if his enactments of a magic man are unacceptable to the co-players (which is likely to happen if his version of a magic man does not accord with the social representations of such a figure), he risks a rejection. Identifications always fall back on the actual rather than the fictional identity, and he (and the play role) might risk exclusion. There is thus a complex interplay of different identities with roots in different realities (fictional or factual, present or historical) in symbolic group play. This is one of the reasons why group play is of so great a concern to children in this environment.

In the last section of this chapter, we turn to children playing games with rules in order to illustrate how Ivy Schousboe's theoretical model also can account for children when playing games. Vygotsky argues that all playing involves rules, and I argue that the rules children construct refer to and reflect the social life and identities of the children involved. When children are positioning themselves (and are being positioned) in relation to core activities, like that of playing, they act as more or less influential, and they are more or less likely to gain access and obtain desired roles in these play groups depending on their friendship status, social alliances and

ways of participating. These processes, I recognize as social identities, and they are of great concern to the children – paramount in the games they play and the rules they play by.

Playing Games with Rules

Turning to the second part of this chapter, the investigation of children's playing within the model of spheres of reality as related to and involving social identities is further explored in relation to negotiation of rules in children's soccer playing.

Theoretical Preliminaries: Features of Games with Rules

From the field of developmental psychology, Piaget's (1966) classical studies of children's play with rules highlight the rational thought processes required to perform in a particular game (for instance, marbles). Whether or not the games' rules are followed correctly and how exactly they are articulated and practised is regarded as reflecting the child's cognitive reasoning and level of understanding. The direction of this developmental process is towards greater and more independent understanding of abstract, consensual rules that function in a proscriptive and prescriptive way. Rules in this sense are unnegotiable, a kind of dogmas that are supposed to be followed in the same way, from game to game, and applied to all the players participating.

Rules as Sociocultural Practice

Another (more sociological/anthropological) approach to children's gaming stress negotiation and ambiguity of rules and their implicit character as culturally and socially generative (Hughes 1991, p. 288, 1995). This particular take on rules is inspired by scholars regarding all social life and human interaction as governed by and shaped by more or less implicit social rules (Goffman 1969, 1974; Garfinkel 1967; Harré 1977). Rules as sociocultural practices are consistent with Vygotsky's descriptions of rules as they appear in children's playing, for instance, the sisters who are playing sisters act in sisterly ways, even more sisterly than normally, due to the performing of the roles. This behaviour is ordered and accords with rules, as there are rules for how to behave as a sister, for how to perform as a mother and a prince, etc. Vygotskian rules denote behaviours that are rendered legitimate and meaningful because they are practised within a particular frame of understanding, in accordance with a certain set of expectations – these could also be recognized as social representations (Moscovici 2000). This view reflects a co-constructivist perspective on children as both creators of and participants in cultural processes

(Valsiner 1997). The rules of different play roles and practices and their relevant interconnections function as appropriation of cultural practices and are guiding behaviours much more fluidly and unpredictable than from a rational calculus. Rules in this understanding are flexible and negotiable, and they are not suitable as markers of winners or losers directly – but indirectly the negotiation process opens up for a wide spectrum of argumentation, persuasion and disagreement among the players who can exercise more or less control and influence on the activity and thus explore and construct processes of social identities.

Rules for Rules

Hughes (1991) suggests a framework in which the entire playing episode (not the abstract game per se) is the unit of analysis, and she finds it necessary to supplement the *rules of the game* (explicit rules) with *rules of the social context* and higher-order gaming rules, *rules for rules*. Hughes argues that the "rules for rules" denote when and how what rules are to be followed and why in concrete situations the meanings upon which they rest need to be negotiated on the spot and they mediate between the rules of the game, as well as the social rules. For example, *a group of boys are planning their game of soccer (sphere of staging). There is to be an equal number of players on each team (explicit rule of the game), but as they start playing (sphere of imagination), a boy turns up and wants to join. He is allowed to play (rule of the social context) because that particular boy is a friend, and, therefore, the children operate in relation to a more fundamental rule in the children's peer culture that you don't exclude a friend from an ongoing play activity (rules for rules)*. There is thus a strong local and contextual feel to how children make use of and practise playing with rules, and Hughes argues that we need to take all these kinds of rules into consideration in order to gain a greater insight into the meaning and function of gaming among children in their relevant contexts and everyday lives. It is towards processes of negotiation of rules and identities we turn next, after a presentation of the second empirical study informing this chapter.

Background Information

I quickly learned that playing soccer was a core activity among most of the boys in the day-care centre in the countryside. Soccer is the activity around which the boys pursue a collective project and in some cases also pursue personal orientations and passions. Through playing soccer the boys exercise their friendships, explore and change their status hierarchy and express hopes and social realities. Soccer is the kernel around the construction of "we-ness" among them, in a highly gendered way.

As is often the case with day-care institutions in the countryside, the physical surroundings are spacious and rich, and this playground is big and green, with

different areas designed for different kinds of activities. Despite the many places to choose from, the boys prefer playing soccer in an area (not a recognizable soccer squat), but on a plateau, in the corner of the playground next to the fence into the local primary school. One goal is half the size of the other (marked by constructions in the fence), and the squat is approximately 10 m long and 5 m wide. In all kinds of weather, the boys chose to play football almost every day and often many times a day. Mostly, the boys are playing on their own, without adult supervision, and 15 soccer matches of this unsupervised kind, all lasting 15+ minutes, have been included for analysis.

There are 10 boys around 5 years of age in the day-care unit, and 7 of these play soccer. Some of them are also best friends and play at each other's houses, but they all belong to the group of boys who play soccer. In presenting the players, I have categorized them in accordance to their social status on the soccer squat and relations as mates and friends.

The Star Players

Jamie, Ollie, Andy and Fred are best friends who always want to play on the same team together, but usually can't because the teams get lopsided and unfair. Jamie and Andy lead in making the teams. Jamie is king of the soccer ground, and the boys agree that Jamie is the best player, followed by Fred and Andy. Ollie is the least good at playing among the best players, and he and Andy are the most likely to sometimes play on the other team or act in the role of judge.

The Ordinary Players

Jules, Phillip and Nicky never lead in the making of teams; they are active in participating in debating what rules count, when and how, but their words never count as the final saying. When they are placed alone on the same team, the game usually breaks down quickly, as it is too uneven, so Andy or Ollie always end up among the ordinary players somehow at some point.

The Other Players

Cecille and Camille. These twins are among the best ball players in adult opinion – but not identified as real players. They are only allowed in when they get a hold of the ball first or when an adult is joining the game. The girls on the soccer squat represent the inappropriate/d others – they disturb the narrative discursive expectations held by the boys about soccer players and are thus demonstrating the norm by being different from it (Staunæs 2006).

Example

In this example, we are to use Schousboe's model as an analytical framework in order to interpret the game of soccer, as a game of rules as well as pretence among the boys participating from different identity positions in the group.

Field Notes (1): The boys are discussing who is to take a seat on the bench in order to make fair teams. *Jules can change*, Jamie decides, and the others agree: *Jules you are out*. He accepts this and walks to stand up against the fence. *I am on your team* Ollie declares. *No, you're on their team Andy* says. Ollie wants to play among the star players, but he can't because Jules is judge, so he is needed among the ordinary players. He sits down and grumps. *Then I am out*! *You always say so*, Andy criticizes. *No I don't* he replies angrily. *He always says then I am out*, Andy explains to me, *also before you came. That is not true!* Ollie denies this and looks at me with big innocent eyes. He then gives in and plays on the other team, yet he constantly threatens to leave the game.

Comments/Analysis: The boys are setting the scene and discussing the teams *(the sphere of staging)*; Jamie and Andy take the lead in defining where the others are to be placed – Jamie decides that Jules is out and Andy rejects Ollie's wish to play among the star players *(a derogation of Ollie's social identity)*, and he tries to persuade and manipulate this decision by threatening to leave the game. This leads nowhere as Andy refers back to the game rule that there is supposed to be an equal amount of players on each team. Andy identifies Ollie as stubborn and inflexible (you always says so) which he is upset about and which he denies.

Field Notes (2): There is a fight over the ball, but otherwise there is a flow in the game and a few shots at each goal. Somehow without me noticing how the teams are changed. Fred now plays on Phil, Nicky and Jules team. He is down, and he cries out in pain. *Free kick* he cries. *Free kick,* he continues and Jamie nods. He gets up: *This is where it happened*, he points at the ground and is making himself ready for taking a shot at the goal. He hits it right on and screams: *Goal! No – it was on the border*, Jamie declares from the goal (now acting goalkeeper). Fred looks disappointed but is already kicking the ball again, but misses. The score is *4–6* Ollie declares, and they continue. Fred is down again, tackled by Nicky. He stops. *I am the judge,* Ollie says exhausted and sits down to watch the game next to me.

Comments/Analysis: The game unfolds *(in the sphere of imagination)* and the boys play the ball and effortlessly change roles and team members *(in the sphere of staging).* Fred demands a free kick due to a foul and gets it; he also scores a goal but the group pretends that the ball was on the border. It is Jamie who makes this statement, in which a game rule (that a score is a goal) is overruled, because it fits Jamie and his team better not to fall behind in the competition *(supports Jamie's social identity as the best player).* Contrarily to what one might expect, the role of judge has no authority at all in regard to settling disputes and enforcing the rules. Being judge is more like taking a break, or waiting to join, and commenting on the play.

Field Notes (3): Fred and James (now again on the same team) decide on a strategy, and they play each other in zigzag from each side of the squat – they play the ball all the way and score. *Yeahh*, they enjoy their beautiful goal, smile and clap each other's shoulders. Then they all put their arms around each other, from both teams and sing: *We are the*

> *champions*. Ollie joins them from the bench; they split up again and continue playing. Fred is tackled again, by Jules who then has a shot at the goal. *Goal* he screams! *NO,* Fred cries angrily. *No, he overran me.* Andy now interferes, taking Jules side: *I am out if it doesn't count*, he declares…*It was not a goal it was too direct and hard. We had no chance to save it*, Jamie argues and it seems settled then, and the game continues.

Comments/Analysis: The star players arrange a strategy *(sphere of staging),* which is at the same time lifting them up as star players, like those they know from TV *(anticipated and imagined identities)*. They (all) celebrate the goal and create a collective story of victory and championship *(in the sphere of imagination)*, and they sing the song to me and to themselves and look engrossed and happy about themselves. Jules has a fine shot at the goal, but it is too good, and ruled out because the others had no chance to save it *(sphere of staging).* Even though Jules is supported by Andy, they cannot persuade James and his team to accept the goal. So again, a rule of the game is overruled, by rules connecting to social identities and the social reality among the players *(sphere of reality).*

The Local Soccer Rules

M. Hedegaard (2007) identifies that one of the relevant competencies to acquire in the developmental stage of kindergarten is experimentation with rules in playing (p. 254) – it is obvious that these boys are exactly experimenting, and through this experimentation also creating and making their own rules, inspired by conventional soccer rules and terminology but spiced up with their own norms of good behaviour, friendship and principles of justice. These are sometimes in contrast to the conventional rules of soccer, sometimes not – but they are constantly negotiated among the players.

I have identified the following common rules this group play by (for further analysis of the rules and their negotiation see Winther-Lindqvist 2009b):

1. *The person who finds the ball is always allowed to play and take the lead in deciding who is to be on what team.*
2. *There are equal number of players on each team (mostly).*
3. *If someone is hurt, the player is (mostly) compensated.*
4. *Red cards are given if* an adult (me) kicks a ball in the head of a child. When a child kicks a ball in the head of another child, the sanction (red or yellow card) depends on kicker and victim.
5. *A score at the goal gives one point unless* someone has a persuasive argument against it (which is quite often) or if the kick of the ball is so direct/hard thus perfect, so that the goalkeeper does not have a chance to save it.

The rules for rules or the most important rule is "flexibility within stability": that not the same rules hold for everyone, in every situation, but that there are patterns of order, a hierarchical system, in which influence, privileges and sanctions follow concrete persons in relatively predictable ways. The relevant roles of judge, gatekeepers,

defender and the forward are negotiated among the boys but mostly follow a pattern in which James is always in the forwarding role and Andy often ends to counter this position on the other team. Central positions are those playing on James' team and the forward on the other team. The rules the boys play by were not all formulated like prescriptive rules, from the beginning, they occurred across time, and most of them became recognized only as common consensus in action rather than in verbal presentation. It is striking that fairness and score is a matter of dispute and negotiation, in which the situation at hand is taken into account (if the two teams are uneven in the level of competence and prospects of winning, a score can be accepted because a player starts crying). Therefore, a lot of time on the soccer ground is spent disputing and discussing opinions, rehearsing persuasion techniques and reaching agreement or simply quarrelling. When two parties do not agree, it is the person/player with the strongest alliances, most central position in the game who wins, rather than the person with the best argument or case. How one performs within the game is widely recognized by the others as personal ways of participation. Thus, the person who commits a foul in children's games is held accountable for its occurrence (Goodwin 2004, p. 8).

Discussion

Even though playing soccer is much about kicking the ball, tackling, playing together, playing solo and following rules, the boys are not following rules in any conventional way (Lancy 1984). Rather than following explicit, general and abstract rules, they seem more occupied with creating rules that fit their world view and local understandings of themselves and others. Their disputes around rules reflect and produce social identities, which is most evident when they negotiate the making of the teams – who is going to play on what team along with whom is often a long complicated and delicate debate – a dispute often leading to conflicts and quarrels. This I argue is similar to the negotiations of roles and positions in symbolic group playing.

Negotiating and Creating Social Identities Through Soccer Playing

At every new game, a new negotiation about what team to belong to represents a remaking and solidification or change in the boys' social identities in this particular friendship group. In every match their social status and scope of influence on the collective activity is exercised and explored – they show each other clearly how they perceive of each other and who they admire and like the most. The match is a social event, constituting the "soccer boys" as an entity, a group, and at the same time each boy is also constituted as a particular player and person participating from specific positions in the boys genetic social hierarchy – this is part of the ongoing social

identity work that children engage in every day among their peers in day care, consisting of more or less explicit processes and outcomes of identifications made and taken on by the boys. They show a different range of influence when it comes to being active in defining the social order and the rules governing their shared play. This difference in range of and quality of influence we recognize as a question of status position and of social identity. James is in charge and takes the director's position – he is the authority defining whether or not a goal counts, whether or not a foul results in a free kick or a yellow card, etc. He is challenged by Andy who often takes the lead in counterarguing. These arguments reflect the boys' social identities as well defined and accepted as the higher-order rules of the game by the players.

The Generic Social Hierarchy as Open System

The social landscape of a peer group, in which Jamie never sits on the bench and Jules very often does, is stable, but not static. All boys show energetic efforts to influence matters and take active part in making definitions of situations and themselves and others in them. Such efforts would be pointless in non-developmental systems – but a peer group like "the soccer boys" is a dynamical open system, in which Phillip is building up a reputation as the best goalkeeper, and Jules is recognized at last, for being good at other things than making everybody laugh due to dirty language. The boys are oriented towards personally and collectively motivated goals and desires, in which dreams of being a super-soccer player as well as being a recognized, well-liked integrated part of this friendship group and having fun together serve as driving forces. It is in this open and local system of the peer group that the rules are communicated and rendered legitimate.

Rules as Social Structures and Logics

The rules of the game among these players are so fluid and negotiable that they hardly manifest themselves as different from, or of a different category, than the social rules or the rules for rules as Hughes suggested and presented as terminology. What seems right and wrong, fair or cheat is completely interwoven with and connected to the social identities and relational stories, and in conjunction it functions as local consensual habits that guide and inform actions and understandings among the players.

Imagining Soccer

Schousboe's model becomes relevant to our soccer players, for several reasons. We need a layered model, rather than a hierarchical one, to account for the kind of rules

and pretence that are being articulated and followed in action among the soccer players. Among the players in my sample, we cannot easily separate game rules from social rules and rules for rules. Rather, the rules and their negotiation as well as how they are practised all bear a dimension of the social context and the relational history among the boys within them. It is mainly through and within the sphere of staging that the rules of the game is constituted and created, in accordance with the reality sphere. In the last section of this chapter, we are to substantiate the imagined situation (the sphere of imagination) in our case of playing soccer. This is entering the debate around whether or not games with rules are to be regarded as a different kind of activity from that of playing pretend, and we are to conclude that these are rather different versions of the same phenomenon, since playing the game of soccer involves imagined situations on many levels.

Subjunctive Thinking in Playing

Commonly, we recognize pretend playing when there are both as-if and what-if actions involved in the child's relating to its surroundings (Bretherton 1984; Engel 2005a, b). As-if performance relies on symbolic functioning; but in order to make-believe the mere ability and practice of performing and anticipating alternative realities, it relies on subjunctive thinking (thinking what if…?). This creative cognition is not only relevant when discussing playful acts: "Human beings constantly manufacture mental variants on the situations they face"… "We select from our fantasy a world which is close, in some internal mental sense, to the real world. We compare what is real with what we perceive as <u>almost</u> real" (Hofstadter 1984, p. 643). Subjunctive thinking is involved in all kinds of pretending situations where we engage with slightly different versions of the reality at hand or even just anticipate what is yet to come. In playful acts, anticipated possibilities both those that are likely and unlikely, thrilling, exciting and potentially scary fuel the situation with a range of ideas and suggestions for how the game is to be organized and carried through. In symbolic group playing, as-if as well as what-if acts are overt, tangible and easily identified (for instance, when children pretend to be tigers) – when playing soccer (children are playing on two teams, kicking the ball to score goals) there is not readily any what-if or as-if acts present. But, looking closer at the actual practice of soccer, the imagined situation proves to be quite explicit and tangible. I argue that soccer among these 5-year-old players is highly guided by imagined and pretended scenarios. Pretence most strikingly shows in the ways scores are counting as goals or not.

Vignette: It is fun playing soccer Andy says and smiles, as Cecille runs right past him and scores at the goal. *No that was not a goal!* Andy says, and Fred and Jamie support him. *It was a goal,* Cecille argues and gets support from me. *No, because Nicky* (goalkeeper) *was standing out here, then the goal doesn't count*, Fred argues. *How can it be our problem that your goalkeeper is not guarding the goal?* I say. *It is cheating*, Cecille complains. *That is the rule*, Jamie says.

Comment: This was clearly a goal, but somehow it is treated as *only almost* a goal, by some players, and as they argue most persistently and from most dominating positions, the goal is finally annulled as not a real goal. This serves as a nice example of subjunctive ways of reasoning. Often this “only almost” situation leads to extensive arguing, negotiation and persuasion attempts *(in the sphere of staging)* in order to reach agreement on which version of reality to follow.

Social Identification Process and Subjunctive Thinking in Playing

I argue, supporting Vygotsky’s point, that subjunctive thinking which is always involved when people make anticipations is also involved in all playing (both symbolic and game playing) – and this situation can be accounted for in the model by Schousboe, allowing space for experiencing all three spheres of reality within a present moment, yet the imagined situation may be more or less dominating in the total experience. The presence of subjunctive thinking as a string, or layer involved in all playing, is also, I argue, relevant when researching identification processes. Consider this example of an imagined identity:

Vignette: *It says Graversen on my t-shirt*, Phillip says happily and jumps up and down, as he guards the goal as goalkeeper. *Is Graversen your favourite player?* I ask him. *No. Schmeickel is my favourite, he is a goal-keeper like me,* Phillip says with satisfaction.

Comment: Through playing soccer, Phillip finds himself “as one of a kind” with Schmeickel his idol and hero. This wishful thinking answers back to a dream of his: *What if…I was like Schmeickel, the best goal-keeper in the world?*

This kind of dream work is present in participating in a game like soccer, when the players perform their roles on the squat. Experiences like these are reinforced collectively when the boys ritualize their game, through singing, congratulating and paying respect of each other in similar ways to the adult professional players. When they perform their roles as players and they talk (and shout) in deeper voices, using recognizable relevant terminology from soccer – they create a thickened story of themselves as real adult soccer players. They also invent their own local soccer terminology (chance kick). The boys are thus reworking the game, so that it fits their desires of imagined as well as factual identities.

Summing Up: Resemblances Between Symbolic Group Playing and Playing Soccer

The examples given illustrate that symbolic group play and games with rules among preschoolers in these Danish day-care environments share characteristics like roles, positions, negotiation, rules and pretence. The rules are implicit in the symbolic

group play example, with the only rule resembling a rule of the game is that the director of the play enacts the relatively eldest part in the story. Otherwise the relevant rules are recognized as rules for rules – show recognition of your friend and allow space for everyone to participate; rules Simon sometimes violate. But what about the narrated story or theme in soccer? Is this not reserved symbolic play? Looking at the different games of soccer, they resemble different storylines over the same theme (like the theme of birthday celebration) as we know it from symbolic group playing. Some games are high in spirit and engrossed with social support and encouragement, with a strong sense of positive togetherness (we-ness). Other games are frustrating and unresolved full of conflicts and accusations among the boys – some games are more neutral, but none is ever the same, in emotional density and qualia. The point here is that these games follow a well-known narrative pattern with beginning, middle and end, and most games elicit plots, or turning points, as when the boys all fall around each other's necks and burst out in singing "We are the champions" or when "Graversen" (a famous Danish soccer player) finally leaves the squat full of "injuries" too hurt to carry on. These performances and stories all carry pretence and subjunctive thinking in them. None of the boys is literally hurt in ways qualifying to roll around screaming in the dirt and hysterically cramping in pain; rather they are bringing their symbolic resources and knowledge to use enacting and pretending these scenes as they find them appropriate and exciting (Zittoun 2006). They are enacting their roles as soccer players, and at the same time they are identifying with and exploring tempting alternative identities, in ways similar to how children create and perform symbolic group playing.

Playing with Social Identities: Questing Recognition

When the players are performing their playing soccer, tackling each other, playing each other, communicating a strategy, having a shot at the goal, saving the ball right in time and recognizing each other (or damning each other), they are both themselves and more than themselves in the play situation. There is a constant underlying identification with and recognition of different kinds of players (possible identities) and persons through the game. Like Andy – who is Fred's and James' best friend, often at odds with Ollie – performing in the role of a particular kind of player (the quarterback, and one of good sportsmanship recognizing the others' great performances). These realities are not to be taken as real as opposed to pretended in an either or; they are real, as well as pretended, as well as negotiated (represented in the three spheres of reality); they all inform the actual performances and experiences of the play. In this sense, the model Schousboe is proposing to account for children's symbolic group playing is also fruitfully illustrating the game of soccer among preschoolers in the Danish day-care environment. Different forms of playing are not eliciting different kinds of worlds – rather different forms of experience co-exist, at the same time and across time, albeit imagined situations and rules are represented in different scales of relative strength in different kinds of

playing. This supports Vygotsky's stance on children's gaming and playing as versions of the same phenomenon and proves Schousboe's model useful also in relation to children's playing a game like that of soccer.

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Chapter 4
Pedagogical Perspectives on Play

Daniela Cecchin

Introduction

The article begins with pointing out some central issues concerning the functionality of play in a learning effectiveness perspective. I would then treat the logic of fantasy play, identifying characteristically core aspects of play activity, in order to bring the children's way of thinking and acting in play in to the pedagogical logic of the professionals. Successively, I would look at play as a source for pedagogical inspiration in day-care institutions, focussing on a complex integrating methodology and praxis that connects diversities and significant elements in children's lives. Finally, I would propose a developmental perspective on professionals inspired by the logic of play. This perspective is intended to promote an integrating cooperative pedagogy.

The Play-and-Learning Debate

In Western societies, there is an increasing focus on *how fast* and *how much* children learn or should learn and on how professionals can improve and make the learning of children more effective. Several books and other pedagogical materials concerning the relationship between play and learning emphasize the greatness of play as a learning facilitator. Play in the early years is, in the United States for example, considered as a "Key to School Success"[1] and programs based on play are part of policy-making with the educational purpose to increase children's learning and competences. The basic assumption is that children acquire better and faster reading and writing skills, if they for example, play with the letters of the alphabet.

[1] Bay Area Early Childhood Founders, California, 2007.

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Mathematics also seems to become more accessible and understandable to children if numbers are playfully presented or if they are a meaningful part of a play context (Van Oers 2003). The same ideas characterize the educational debate and the pedagogy in early childhood in European countries[2] where achievements and performances are in focus in the very small children's life in day-care institutions.

Scandinavian countries, unlike most southern European countries, have strong traditions in respecting the autonomy of children's play, (Kampmann 1996) and there are also changes going on to make day-care institutions more school related and school preparatory. Particularly in Denmark, the government has recently approved a law for a National Pedagogical Learning Program for children aged 1–3 and 3–6 years. This main program points out the importance of focussing on children's learning as part of the pedagogical praxis in nurseries and kindergartens in order to give all children appropriate learning possibilities. The program identifies six areas in which developmental and learning activities must be planned, actualized, documented, and evaluated in every single institution.

The new national program represents, in many ways, a departure from the traditional pedagogical praxis in Danish nurseries and kindergartens. Until recently, the tradition has been strongly based on care and spontaneous play activities. The recognition of the value of play, and in fact the ensuring of time and space for playing, is crucial to Danish pedagogy's inherent meaning.

So, play is then more and more institutionalized, not so much as spontaneous play activity, but as a learning medium, placed in schemas and schedules and used as a didactical modality or pedagogical style applied to achievement and skill performance. Of course, there are positive aspects in the play and learning debate. Children *can* learn and develop skills through pedagogically organized sessions and contexts while having fun learning. However, perhaps it is not necessary to camouflage learning processes and activities with play for the benefit of the child. We know from empirical research[3] that children have specific and often positive expectations both of playing and learning, without necessarily making any functional connections between the two.

I consider play to be one of the most significant sources of learning and inspiration for pedagogues involved with the child perspective in early childhood institutions. It is important to know about play structures and logic, not in order to *use* play to reach targets outside the playing itself, but instead to *qualify* the pedagogical–didactical frames and contents (Cecchin 2000). The challenge for pedagogue is then to re-think some of the conventional pedagogical approaches and methods mainly based on determined structures or curriculum through the insight coming from the play structure. Inspired by the logic of fantasy play, pedagogues have the opportunity to plan pedagogical processes and organize activities in more flexible and creative ways. That means in ways resembling fantasy play activities and narratives.

[2] Starting Strong II, Early Childhood Education and Care, OECD Publishing, 2006, (www.oecd.org/publishing)

[3] Hviid (1999).

The Logic of Social Fantasy Play

What I find particularly interesting in *social fantasy play* (Åm 1991) described earlier in this anthology, is the particular flow existing in the mutual construction and expression of the content in the play process, where individual ideas, suggestions and proposals are shared and evolve into common play stories. A fantasy story incorporates the children's interests and abilities in a context, defined and encompassed by the as-if dimension, where each idea can be connected with another in multiple ways, thereby making the story bigger, deeper, stronger and longer lasting. A fantasy story in play involves all the participants in different ways, placing value on their different contributions, ideas, suggestions and possibilities. I assume that dimensions such as diversity, variability and flexibility are fundamental in reaching the intrinsic goals of play itself, that is, deep emotional, motivational and cognitive involvement through bodily expressions.

Characteristics of Fantasy Play

In relation to social fantasy play, with its dynamics and logic, it is possible to highlight some characteristic aspects that can be useful in pedagogical thinking and praxis in accordance with child perspectives.

Creativity

Creativity is, according to the assumption of imagination and fantasy as core elements in play,[4] a very important and central dimension in playing. As assumed by Pellegrini,[5] play is characterized by a "what if" approach, where elements from the real world are transformed into alternative imagined worlds. In this respect, a "what if" dimension sows the seed of creativity because innovation is generated through alternatives. In relation to day care institutions, creativity is the dimension that can break conventional, stereotypical and repetitive pedagogical thinking with authenticity and innovation in pedagogical praxis. Creativity facilitates discovering alternative ways in organizing pedagogical processes and contexts and in solving problems and conflicts.

A characteristic of play is its occupation with and transformation of the environment in which modifiable scripts are created in accordance with the themes, which emerge as the activity progresses and develops. The same creative approach can inspire the conversion of the physical environment as well as accommodating the

[4] Vigotsky (1982), Bateson (1976), and Schousboe (1993).

[5] Pellegrini (1984).

pedagogical framework, which to a great degree allows a corresponding flexibility in the creation of relevant and meaningful pedagogical surroundings. Rather than narrowly arranging the pedagogical praxis to a given, often standardized physical space, the environment accommodates the progression occurring in the pedagogical narrative. The environment can be shaped, re-shaped and re-created in close connection to the current significant pedagogical content. Such a continuous "occupation with the environment" and specification of the narrative can be considered as significant pedagogical documentation.

Narrativity

Narrativity is considered to be a fundamental dimension in play in the sense that play activities express concrete and imaginative narratives, stories and events that are interconnected by a common theme or theme complex, for instance, playing fairy tales, or Star Wars and the space adventures. The narrative element constitutes a kind of script and connecting structure for playing. Narrativity facilitates the integration of individual diversities, interests and needs because they become integral components of the developing common and shared play story. In play, everything, in principle, can connect to each other. A pedagogical praxis can be viewed and developed with the narrative, as a basic element where creating stories together becomes the main pedagogical goal. This occurs through a process where the pedagogues continually explore the children's realm of meaning and along the way coordinate and interlace their relevant individual elements in a common narrative pattern.

Orientation and Flexibility

Orientation and flexibility are characteristic aspects in fantasy play. When children start playing, for instance, Star Wars play, they have a kind of individual and common idea of what they will do in the play, who is playing which role and how. In other words, children are oriented to certain goals within their play, but they do not know which specific directions the play content and actions will take them. Children cannot predict what will happen or when or where things will occur in the play. All depends on the interaction between the participating children and their interests expressed as concrete proposals and negotiations. It depends at the same time on the children's disposition to elasticity and their openness to let new proposals modify the play, to bring the play story further. Thereby they will insure the play's continuance and increase its emotional and bodily intensity and strengths.

In a pedagogical context, orientation and flexibility are also relevant when planning a pedagogical praxis. The planning processes can simultaneously incorporate intentionality and *orientation* towards pedagogical goals while maintaining *flexibility* in the sense of being open to what could contextually arise as relevant and

meaningful for the children. Parallel to children in fantasy play, pedagogues know in pedagogical planning how a story begins, but not how, when and where the content develops and ends. The participants create the story through dialogue based on negotiations and decisions of possible themes and concrete forms of expression.

Meaningfulness

As a play dimension, meaningfulness indicates the fact that play scripts concern themes and actions that are significant and relevant to the children, that is, themes and actions that are pertinent to their interests and needs in the actual moment and situation. The playing must make sense to the participants to be experienced as "good play", in other words, play, which is experienced as emotionally, cognitively, and socially developing, bringing the involved children's mind and feelings into other places than the ones known before playing. The same criterion of meaningfulness is important to connect to pedagogical activities that can be more or less relevant and pertinent to the children's experience. The degree of meaningfulness is crucial for whether pedagogical contexts are significant developmental and learning contexts for the participating children. Pedagogues can qualify and validate their pedagogical choices and proposals by observation, so that the activities become as emotionally meaningful and interesting as possible for the children.

Reciprocity and Cooperation

The fluency in play dynamics and the positive experience of the play depend on the children's ability for reciprocity and dialogue. Children in play contribute with their own suggestions and ideas, listening at the same time to—and in fact incorporate—the other participants' ideas and suggestions into the play script. In this way, there is a broad verbal, non-verbal, objective and physical dialogue, between all the participants in order to make the play story as good and emotionally strong as possible. Coordination and cooperation are related aspects of the social dimension in fantasy play activities. The mutual construction of fantasy stories requires a certain level of the capacity to coordinate ideas and suggestions, and to collaborate with each other. In order to create common stories involving children's perspectives, pedagogues establish a dialogical process were they suggest proposals, then listen to the response of the children, and then continue to apply different modalities to concretize the ongoing story content. The same reciprocity and cooperation is relevant within the professionals own process in planning and organizing the pedagogical praxis as well as in pedagogical leadership.[6]

[6]Cecchin (2010a, b).

Fig. 4.1 The spheres of realities in play (Cecchin 2008). My version of the play figure originally developed by Ivy Schousboe (1993)

Play as Source of Pedagogical Inspiration

All the dimensions and aspects characterizing the logic of social fantasy play can be re-formulated into a pedagogical perspective, indicating dimensions that professional pedagogues can implement in their thinking on praxis planning and organization of pedagogical contexts for and with children that are pertinent to their needs and interests. Social fantasy play lends itself to understanding the dynamics of pedagogical–dialogical processes in childcare institutions with the purpose of qualifying pedagogical praxis according to the child's perspective.

I find that the described aspects characterizing the logic and dynamic of social fantasy play have a consistent pedagogical value and relevance. They can be included in methodological thinking in order to develop pedagogical methods in a way that is responsive to the child-perspective (Cecchin 2008).

Inspired by the structural elements and the logic of social fantasy play, we can consider pedagogical processes in terms of extensive common stories and narratives that are developed over time in a day-care institution. The play structure with the three spheres (Fig. 4.1) gives the opportunity to make a pedagogical interface on the model, transforming play dimensions in pedagogical terms. The imagination sphere becomes a sphere of pedagogical narratives and creation; the negotiation sphere becomes a sphere for pedagogical observation, planning, organizing and evaluation; while the reality sphere becomes the concrete, material base and the spatial container for children's play activities and for the pedagogical narratives and ongoing visual documentation.

I find that there is a great similarity between the logic of social fantasy play and the methodology of the "*Integrating Background*". This makes the approach interesting as an exemplification of a pedagogy built upon the basis of a child perspective, inspired by play.

Integration and Complexity in Pedagogical Praxis

The "Integrating Background" (or *integrating significant context*) is a methodological approach developed at Bologna's University in Italy, by researchers referring to the work of Andrea Canevaro.[7] Originally, the "Integrating Background" intended

[7] Canevaro (1988) and Cecchin (1986).

to cope with the pedagogical difficulties connected to the integration of children with developmental difficulties or special needs in day care and schools. Gradually it developed in to a broadly relevant approach applicable to all children.

Inspired by Gregory Bateson's theory on connecting structures,[8] Canevaro was looking for ways to create meaningful social interactions between the special needs child and the other children.

Canevaro developed a pedagogical concept introducing the idea of "narrativity", relating it to the idea of "connecting structure", which he named "narrative connecting structure". In addition, he introduced an "institutional connecting structure" that is a more organizing and supportive structure, which includes most of the practical arrangements, meetings, observations, interviews, topic research, environmental changes and other supporting activities within the narrative structure.

The two structures are interrelated, reciprocal and flexible in their function. It means that changes in one structure allows changes in the other, so that the pedagogic planning reflects the content of the story, and the development in the story affects the further planning. Canevaro considers pedagogical processes in terms of *pedagogical stories*, so that the single activities connect to each other in coherent processes and praxis-narratives. According to Canevaro, integration is made possible by creating a pedagogical context allowing opportunities for making significant connections amongst the children based on their similarities as well as on their differences.

An "Integrating Background" is a context potentially integrating newness and diversities through continuous modifications, changes and reciprocal adjustments. In other words, the "Integrating Background" is a methodological perspective that provides suggestions and methods recognising children as well as pedagogues as participating subjects in their lives in day-care institutions.[9]

Being aware that there may not only be diversity but also a kind of discrepancy or conflict between children's and adult's perspectives, a crucial pedagogical issue is how to construct contexts that respect *and extend* both perspectives. Such a context must be able to create significant connections and interrelations between pedagogues and children as a prerequisite for significant connections among children. I consider the methodology of the "Integrating Background" to be such a context.

In most socialisation pedagogy, the cooperation between adult and child has the purpose of guiding the child to reach pre-defined cultural goals, abilities, or behaviour in accordance with a given social context. In the case of an approach as the "Integrating Background", the cooperation has a different purpose and a different content. The purpose is to make social interaction within children possible by searching for significant elements in the children's worlds and connecting those elements in common stories. The content of the cooperation is something new and authentic that pedagogues and children create and form together according to the interests and the involvements of the children participating and the pedagogues' suggestions and contributions in the story activities.

[8] Bateson (1979).

[9] Canevaro et al. (1988).

There occurs a kind of "contractual congruence"[10] between cooperating pedagogues and children, which means there is a reciprocal agreement with what the child and the adult agree upon and how they act upon it.

To include the perspective of the child requires careful observation and attentiveness to the children in order to recognize what the children show emotional and motivational engagement in, what they are concerned with, and what they are oriented toward. Pedagogues cannot predefine and plan the story process or its content, or shape it in detail just in accordance with an understanding of a generalized child. The adult must be a kind of investigator or researcher in praxis, like a "trace finder", in order to recognize the children around them.

The arrangement of integrating contexts in cooperation with children implies a pattern of dialogical–dialectic processes with clear pedagogical intentions and at the same time great concrete flexibility.

That allows adapting the pedagogical planning and the content of the activities to specific needs, motivation, and interests of the children. It requires an ongoing process of continuous observations, reflections, and negotiations between pedagogues and children on topics, possibilities, and concrete choices to be made.

From Children's "Traces" to Pedagogical Activities

Arranging an "Integrating Background", the pedagogues start to make several observations of children's so-called "traces".

The metaphor of "traces" comes from the Grimm's fairytale by of Hans and Gretel, siblings who are wandering around in the forest. The boy, Hans, leaves small white stones behind them on their way through the woods.[11] These stones are traces that make it possible for the children to find their way home again if they get lost. As a metaphor, the traces that children lay out can be strong markers for adults in "finding" lost children. To be able to see and follow traces is an important ability to develop for both children and pedagogues. Traces give the children a sense of security and assurance when it comes to recognition, recall and evocation of significant events and worlds. In addition, the traces give pedagogues the opportunity to recognize the children in their diversities, particularities, feelings and thoughts, in order to create a pedagogical context, which is in alliance with their needs and involvements.

As a pedagogical term, traces identify and recognize significant elements in the child's world.[12] Traces are expressions and markers of particularly strong interests and involvement in children's activities, such as in playing, drawing and communicating. They refer to significant thoughts, particular interests, preferences, and

[10]Hundeide (2003).

[11]Canevaro (1976).

[12]Cecchin (1986).

orientations towards the world. The pedagogues use those "traces" as cues and starting points for establishing a dialogue with children in order to find the main content, or a content umbrella, for story activities. The following example is an illustration of a pedagogical story based on the methodology of the "Integrating Background".

The Witch Flying in a Spaceship

At the Italian kindergarten Villamarina in Cesenatico, situated on the east cost of the Adriatic, pedagogues and children are continuously inventing and constructing stories that take concrete form in the environment and become common contexts for play activities and narratives. This context or "background" is not a static and finished project scenario, but a scenario in process, constantly in movement and under modification, corresponding to the actual activities of the children.

Once in Villamarina, I saw a witch wearing a pointed black hat flying under the ceiling and sitting inside a spaceship. Her house and cat hung between light blue clouds on a clothesline fastened across the room. On the floor, there was another house covered with painted paper and decorated with flowers, birds and animals in all colours. In the adjacent room, a sky with stars, astronauts and planets appeared. On the floor, a playhouse was formed as a spaceship made out of plastic bottles and properly equipped with a computer keyboard and other instruments.

These installations were the result of a storytelling that began with several observations in the playground of a group of 4-year-old girls. The girls repeatedly played a story about an invisible witch who could make magic with her voice. The play involved a larger number of children and went on for several days. The pedagogues

began to ask the children about the witch. What kind of witch was she? What was she like? Where did she come from? And so on. The children told several stories and drew pictures of their witch. They made a picture book based on what they said was a "good witch that could make all kind of magic". "The witch is very rich because she follows maps and finds treasures also with the help of her friends, the animals living in a castle full of colours", they said.

In relation to these stories, figures were made of the witch, the animals and her house by magnifying the drawings and making wall collages and play toys. The witch story developed in several ways and led to different activities, such as making magic with colours, food, and other materials mixed so they gave different results. At this point, there was another group of children, mostly boys, who demonstrated great excitement about the Star Wars movie. They played with, talked about and drew all the space heroes. The pedagogues made the same process of observation, investigation, storytelling and illustration about Star Wars, which took form as a spaceship made from plastic bottles.

It was interesting that the children made a concrete connection between the witch story and the Star Wars story by telling that one day, the witch, after all the broom flying, became very tired and therefore thought it was much better to fly in a spaceship. Supported by the pedagogues, the story went on with this unusual combination of themes for several weeks, constantly developing and concretizing new ideas and suggestions in different ways and with different modalities.

The narratives and the pedagogical documentation bind the stories together and concretize them as markers or a kind of *pedagogical traces*, including the most significant, which involved figures and events in the story process. A specific "background" cannot be copied to another kindergarten; it has to be developed in praxis in the single group of children and pedagogues. It has to be a new, authentic context coordinated dialogically between all the participants, children and pedagogues. Sometimes the parents contribute by bringing considerations and proposals from the children's interests and traces from their home experiences.

Integration as Narrative Connections

"… I'm hearing voices everywhere, and dialogical connections between them," wrote Bakhtin about speech and communication.[13] It seems to me to be a very appropriate sentence to illustrate the "Integrating Background" as a personal and interpersonal developmental space within which children make their encounters through similarities and diversities.

Inherent in an "Integrating Background", is a kind of resonance that reflected the story content in the environment through pedagogical documentation, that is, the single child's significant traces and engagement that the whole group of children can

[13] Bakhtin (1986).

sense and experience. In this context, children connect with each other meaningfully through their concrete expressions and projects that become visible, understandable and therefore potentially inspirational for other children. For instance, the witch of the girls' fantasy play who is able to fly faster in the spaceship created from the boys' Star Wars play allows for connections. To take account of children's perspectives in pedagogical contexts means to involve the children directly by dialogue and interviews, and indirectly by observing their "traces", including these in the construction of the environment and the pedagogical intervention. Such intervention is most likely to be in alliance with the children's interests, needs and involvements. We can conceive the essence of institutional integration as participation in the ideation and construction of a common story, that is, to be an integrated child in kindergarten means to be a constitutional part of a common story.

A good play is a play that develops a *big*, *deep and pertinent* common story where the content fits the emotionally and cognitive engagement of the children, a kind of play that can function as '*a socially integrating play*'. Parallel to children's play the assumption of *content pertinence* is also a very basic pedagogical concept in the methodology of the "Integrating Background".[14]

Connecting Diversities

Through narrative connections, the integrating context becomes a pedagogical arena that reflects children's interests and involvement as traces in the environment that are accessible and reachable for other children. In this context, children connect with each other in practical ways through their concrete play activities, and their drawings and paintings, which by pedagogical documentation in the room become visible, comparable and understandable. Therefore, the pedagogical documentation functions as a source of inspiration to other children.

We can see examples of interesting connections in the story background developed in Villamarina's kindergarten between the girls' fantasy play and the boys' Star Wars play, by the children's own proposal that the witch could fly better and faster in the spaceship thus imbuing the attribute of magic.

Another example of connections refers to the fact that some 3-year-old girls were a little afraid of the witch figure hanging from the ceiling made by the older ones. They said that it was ugly and looked scary. The pedagogue confronted the rest of the group with the problem, which ended up with the proposal to the little girls to make their own witch figure. The new figure portraying a kind and gentle witch reassured the children and made it comfortable to be in the playroom.

Such types of proposals are made possible by the narrative and institutional connecting structures that give pedagogues the opportunity to create meaningful environmental situations where children can move through and change each other's

[14]Cecchin (1986).

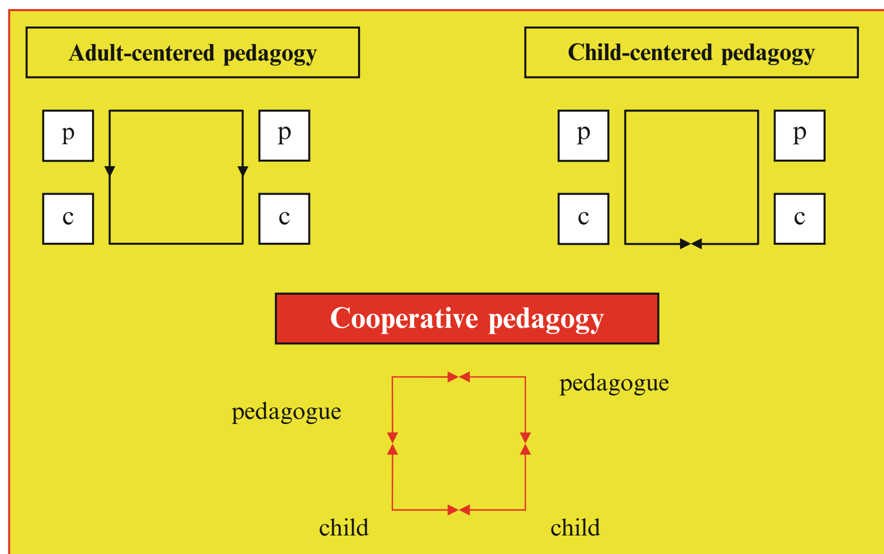

Fig. 4.2 Primary sources of influence (The model is developed by Ivy Schousboe and presented at the ECEERA Conference in Prague (2007))

worlds, physically, emotionally and cognitively and at least participate in common fields of mental and affective engagement.

Discussion

A Developmental Perspective on Professionals Inspired by the Play Logic

A cooperative pedagogical approach, consistent with the elements of cooperation, narrativity, meaningfulness, and creativity of the play logic, implies not only developmental perspectives and developmental possibilities for the children but also for the pedagogue (Cecchin 2007). In cultural–contextual developmental psychology, human development concerns phenomena in their changes, movements, and variability.[15] That concerns not only children, but certainly also pedagogues interrelating with children. It means that the pedagogical orientation moves from a predominantly adult-centred or child-centred pedagogy to a more cooperative pedagogy.

An *adult-centred pedagogy* is, as illustrated in Fig. 4.2, a pedagogy structured by the professionals on the basis of theoretical and practical knowledge about children

[15] Schousboe (2000) and Valsiner (1997).

and their development and learning. Often the adult-centred pedagogic uses *programming* as pedagogical modality, which implies predefined curricula, goals, and methods, and where the relationship between children is predominantly determined by the given programs and activities. It is common in this pedagogy to plan and work on certain themes or subjects that the pedagogues find relevant to children according to their age, their needs, or in relation to local traditions and cultural events. Most of the pedagogy in day-care institutions in European countries and parts of the United States, as seen in the OECD report,[16] can be defined as variations over what I will call adult-centred pedagogy.

The *child-centred pedagogy* on the other hand emphasizes that children in the group have a relatively broad autonomy to make decisions about—and to form—their everyday life in day-care institutions. The professional's pedagogical intervention is, in many ways, consequently determined by the children's own activities and play as they take place during the day in the institution. This approach emphasises that children must have many opportunities for self-administration of time and space and for free-play activities. Children are then encouraged to make decisions about individual and social activities and also to solve conflicts on their own.[17] According to this view, the pedagogue has a relatively peripheral and indirect role. Pedagogical initiative is filtered through and follows the children's own initiatives, and pedagogical intervention in praxis is mostly applied, as "fire weeding" in difficult conflict situations. Child-centred pedagogy is known throughout Scandinavian countries, particularly in Denmark.[18]

Cooperative pedagogy implies significant interactions and reciprocal influence between all the subjects in the pedagogical context. Children and pedagogues are subjects with different identities and personalities having different intentions and goals that need to be mediated in dialogical ways to make a consistent and pertinent pedagogical context.[19] The children and the pedagogues are continuously interrelated and interact with each other both as individuals and as groups. The pedagogical processes go through connections, negotiations, and mediations that occur in both practical and theoretical ways. Unlike programming in adult- centred pedagogy, this more flexible approach corresponds to a pedagogical modality that Italian researchers call *projecting*.[20] In a projecting praxis, the pedagogues make initial planning hypotheses based on the pedagogical institutional aims and intentions. However, those hypotheses are subject to modifications and changes in both content and direction so that the work can progress according to the actual motivation and engagements of the children.

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[16] Starting Strong II, Early Childhood Education and Care, OECD Publishing, 2006, (www.oecd.org/publishing).

[17] Kampmann (1996).

[18] Hviid (1998).

[19] Lippi (1999).

[20] Gandini and Edwards (2001).

In this perspective, professionals cannot just apply a general knowledge previously achieved, but they always have to re-view and re-think their theoretical and practical knowledge on pedagogy and about children in their own praxis contexts. Cooperation with children requires cooperating pedagogues that are able to focus on each other's potential and resources, to recognize and valorize each other's diversities and to handle problems, difficulties and conflicts constructively. It is practically evident that pedagogues, who have experienced process sharing of each other's professional abilities or particular interests, are able to understand the significance of a cooperative dialogical approach to children. Through processes on searching for the adult's *pedagogical traces* the praxis becomes more involving, motivating and transparent for the professionals.[21] This applies to their understanding of children's traces and the following sharing of observations and narratives in order to sharpen their knowledge of the children and qualify their commonly shared praxis. Thereby the cooperative approach creates an open and challenging institutional culture that leads to the development of new ways to communicate and collaborate in pedagogical praxis. Thus educational work involves not only learning and development challenges for the children but also, and maybe primarily, for the professional pedagogue.[22]

Conclusion

Arranging Common Zones for Proximal Development in the Traces of Play

It is interesting to relate the cooperative integrating perspective in pedagogical praxis to Vigotsky's theory on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Defined as the distance between the factual level and the potential level of a child's development that occurs under guidance of adults or in collaboration with other children, the efficiency of the ZPD can be extended from the interrelation between the single child and the adult and be applied to all contextual interrelations. It is, in other words, an understanding of potential proximal development in interrelations within an arranged cooperative pedagogical context. That means relations between pedagogues, between children, between pedagogues and children and between children, pedagogues and the environment.

The developmental potentiality in cooperative integrating pedagogy concerns children's sociality, their emotionality, thinking, and their physical and practical skills. Such developmental opportunities are present in the context and can activate in several ways. It can, for instance, be done through dialogue and proposals from

[21] Cecchin (2010a) and Sieling (2010).

[22] Cecchin (2010b).

pedagogues to the children, as it occurred in the story about the flying witch; through reciprocal inspiration between children, as in the case of making the witch fly in a spaceship; and through mediations as in the case of the figure of the gentle witch.

According to Newman and Holzman,[23] engagement in collective activities creates relational communities that function as Vigosky's ZPD. The cooperative pedagogical approach like the "Integrating Background" enlarges the zone of proximal development to the whole group of participants in the pedagogical context. Functioning as motivational field of significant references[24] I will characterize the "Integrating Background" as a pedagogical '*common zone for proximal development*'. That means a field that creates conditions for reciprocal development through common engagement and cooperation in common activities and play. Thereby a child in Villamarina's kindergarten can, for instance, experience emotional sensibility to other children's feelings in relation to a frightening play figure, while the affected children can experience understanding and develop coping and problem-solving strategies.

The Playfulness of Pedagogic

The aim of this article was to articulate core aspects in the logic and the structure of social fantasy play into a pedagogical and developmental frame including the child's perspective. Recognizing the authenticity and the significance of play activity as *children's own activity*, with strong emotional, motivational, and social implications, connections were made to pedagogical theory and praxis in day-care institutions. The logic of fantasy play has many common characteristics with the logic inherent in cooperative pedagogy. Several components characterizing play, acknowledge children as being of professional expertise in imparting information as well as being active participants in and co-creators of significant activities.

The proposal of a cooperative pedagogical approach exemplified with the "Integrating Background" approach, outlines the frame of a new pedagogical thinking and praxis with children where *playfulness* is a core element in pedagogy in early childhood. Thereby activities and projects are no longer simple, single and relatively separate events, but they are woven into a complex and significant pedagogical pattern of narratives, stories and connections that make all pedagogical processes very similar to the processes found in social fantasy play, a "*mega play*". Instead of being reduced to a pedagogical instrument, play can be recognized as a source of acknowledging that professionals can apply in their own professional development, and for inspiration aiming to make pedagogical processes and relations more relevant to the interest and the needs of the children.

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[23] Verga (2003).

[24] Canevaro et al. (1988).

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Chapter 5
Collective Imagining in Play

Marilyn Fleer

Introduction

As has been argued elsewhere in this volume (see Schousboe 2013), play holds a central place within the field of early childhood education. However, how play is defined varies according to the beliefs and assumptions of the researcher (Ailwood 2010; Grieshaber and McArdle 2010; Pellegrini 2011; Pramling Samuelsson and Carlsson 2008), and a close reading shows that most views of play draw from a biological or maturational theory of development (Wood and Attfield 2005). Many conceptualizations of the development of play are clustered into a framework of culturally specified stages or age-specific behaviours (Ebbeck and Waniganayake 2010; Parten 1933; Smilansky 1968), regardless of the cultural community from which the children come (Gaskins et al. 2007; Gaskins and Göncü 1992; Göncü and Gaskins 2007; Pellegrini 2011). Play is considered as natural for young children (see Garde and Koot, Chap. 10, this volume), seen as a positive experience for them, and is viewed as essential for their development (Kravtsov and Kravtsova 2010). Like others in this volume (see Schousboe 2013), these natural and altruistic views of play have been called into question (Grieshaber and McArdle 2010).

A growing body of theoretical and empirical studies suggest that play is culturally defined (Göncü and Gaskins 2007; Pellegrini 2011) and historically constructed (Elkonin 2005a), and traditional beliefs about play should be problematized (Grieshaber and McArdle 2010). Elkonin (2005a) has argued that play as a form of activity emerged because of societal needs rather than as something biologically determined. This view of play contrasts with the dominant theories found in much

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of the European heritage early childhood education literature which advocates for play as a natural part of what children do (Doherty et al. 2009). Like other chapters in this volume, we go beyond a biological individual reading of play and draw upon cultural-historical theory to argue for a collectively constructed view of play. The central question is whether a child comes into the world driven by a personal motive for play or acquires a collective motive for play. This chapter theorizes how play can be enacted across a whole community of children within a preschool setting rather than being positioned as something defined within the individual child or understood as occurring in dyads. Through this collective conception, a new model of play is put forward for theorizing play in kindergarten group settings. This model draws upon the same cultural-historical concepts described by Schousboe (2013) in Chap. 2 and reflects similar features found in subsequent chapters by Quiñones (Chap. 6) and Li (Chap. 7).

The Cultural-Historical Landscape of Play

In Vygotsky's (1966) seminal theory of play, he discussed the example of two children who in reality are sisters pretending to be sisters in play. By pretending to be sisters, Vygotsky argued that the children were following the rules and roles found within their communities about how to be a "sister". It is through pretending to be a sister that the concept of sisterhood is understood. In this reading, play creates the psychological conditions for young children's development.

Well-known European heritage researchers versed in the works of Vygotsky (1966) and his contemporary Elkonin (2005b, c),[1] such as Bretherton (1983), Giffin (1983), Miller and Garvey (1983) and Fein (1981), have all examined social pretend play and noted that the play themes that emerge take their content from everyday life. These researchers note that in play, younger players focus on everyday experiences, such as shopkeeping, eating and going to the hospital, with repetition, usually relying upon props to support their play activity. However, more experienced players rely less on realistic props for supporting their play scripts. Vygotsky (1966) suggested that object substitution takes into account both the object and the way the object can act as a pivot in play. For example, a pencil can represent a nurse's needle, whilst a blanket cannot. A cultural-historical definition of play foregrounds the child's creation of an imaginary situation where children give new meaning to the everyday objects and actions in their world.

Importantly, these European heritage researchers in drawing upon Bateson's (1955/1972) concept of metacommunication also found that children use language and action to signal when something is play and when something is not. Notably, they theorized that children indicate when play is "in frame" and when it is "out of frame", signalling to their play partners how the play should proceed. Their research looked

[1] Dates reflect English translation and not the years the works were published.

closely at how children signal in the act of playing how play begins, is maintained and moves in the direction that all players are happy with. This long-standing research by Bretherton (1983) suggests that “although the two levels (out-of-frame metacommunication and within-frame acting) are logically distinct, in actual play the levels are often intertwined. Play-acts and utterances therefore tend to carry multiple levels of meaning, which can only be disentangled conceptually” (p. 24). Garvey (1977), another long-standing play researcher, noted that children show a range of ways of signalling when something is within frame or out of frame. However, Giffin (1983) found in her research that children often signal a change in play directly within the play sequence, never stepping out of play, suggesting that it is difficult to create boundaries between the fantasy world and the real world of children. Giffin’s (1983) research also found that children would, within seconds, blend fantasy and reality in their play scripts. These early studies foreground the challenge of understanding the relations between reality and fantasy in children’s play noting that “The simulated territory of symbolic play is not necessarily a straight reproduction of real-world maps” (Giffin 1983, p. 32).

In Table 5.1, I bring together the categorizations that have emerged from Garvey’s (1977) research (columns 1 and 4 only), alongside of Giffin’s (1983) idea of how children create collective meaning in play where play themes are introduced, maintained and evolve amongst play partners *without* stepping out of the play frame. The subtle distinction of signalling play directions within and out of frame is illustrated with examples of utterances.

Although these long-standing researchers have presented important findings through their studies, they have generally not questioned the maturational dimensions of their findings. Overall, the researchers have predominantly framed their results in relation to babies, toddlers and preschoolers, suggesting different levels of play activity and subsequent development for players for each specific age period. That is, their findings have tended to be explained in relation to a developmental continuum, where play development is linked to the criterion of age rather than being viewed as socially and culturally constructed.

Kravtsova (2008) also draws upon Vygotsky’ theorization of play in her conceptualization of play complexity. Her theorization goes beyond developmentally prescribed stages. The focus of her work is related to a child’s positioning within the play. Play complexity builds when more experienced players move in and out of the play with deliberate or conscious actions. However, Kravtsov and Kravtova (2010) suggest that “being in the play” is related more to how the child positions himself or herself in the act of playing. For example, when young children direct a toy rabbit, they are outside of the play. When they act out being the rabbit by turning a box into a burrow and crawling inside of it, then they are in the play “being the rabbit”. The objects act as pivots for supporting the children with their play, but these objects also help them to negotiate with other children for creating shared play meaning. What is important here about Kravtsova’s work is that she draws attention, not to stages of play but rather the psychological dimensions of play that children experience, practice and develop. In line with Bretherton (1983), Kravtsov and Kravtsova (2010) also suggest that children take a dual role in play, “which allows the child to

Table 5.1 The dialectical relations between fantasy and reality

Category	Play (in frame)	Play (out of frame)	Perspective/approach
The child mentions or names the role	"She then went to the doctor" (child looks to the play partner)	"You be the doctor and I be the nurse"	*Other's role*
	"I am Doctor Helen"	"I will be the doctor"	*Own role*
	"She went to the doctors" (looking at play partner whilst picking up the stethoscope and begins to check heart)	"We can both be doctors"	*Joint role*
The child mentions the plan	"Yes. The ambulance must be called"	Child nods when the play partner says "We have to have an ambulance in our game"	*Other's plan*
	"There will be lots of patients today"	"Pretend you are the receptionist"	*Own plan*
	"We have to both make up the beds for the patients"	"We have to ask the teacher for some blankets for our hospital"	*Joint plan*
The child mentions the object	"And they had to give an injection to the sick babies" (uses pencil as an injection)	"This (pencil) can be the injection"	*The transformation of the object*
	"And the medicine is for the babies"	"We have to have some medicine for the babies"	*An object is invented*
The child mentions the setting	"All the babies are sick and need to go to hospital"	"All of these are the beds for the hospital"	*Setting is transformed*
	"Our hospital is called Bayside"	"This can be Bayside hospital" (pointing to an area)	*Setting is invented*

be the subject of play as well as to take up the objective position in which he/she can also control play at will" (p. 25). In referring to Vygotsky, they argue that there are two types of processes occurring in play, where a child can be happy in playing, but crying as a frightened patient in a game of doctors and nurses. They suggest that "when the child is 'crying as a patient' (inside the play activity) and 'enjoying the game as a player' (outside the play activity), we can speak about the characteristics of play and the differences from other types of activity to help us better understand the needed criteria" (p. 27). To achieve this dual thinking, the child must be simultaneously "inside" of the play and "outside of play". In these imaginary situations, children simultaneously take two positions in their play.

Having experience with being inside the play and outside of the play is important. In this theorization, it is argued that in play, children's natural everyday activity becomes cultural because children "master and self-regulate" behaviour. Through play activity and thinking about everyday practice, children not only think about

their dual emotional position in play (happy being a player, but pretending to be frightened as a patient), but they also consider the dual role of objects and actions in their play. This can be understood by examining how children see objects (visual field) and imbue these with new meaning (new sense) within the imaginary situations (when a pencil becomes a needle in a hospital game). Kravtsova (2008) argues that children need experiences with being in and out of an imaginary situation, and in their play they do this through the dual positioning of their emotions, objects and actions. Creating imaginary situations gives the possibility for dual positioning.

The Relations Between Collective Imagining and Individual Imagining

When we examine the play literature briefly reviewed in the previous section, it is possible to see that there are two central ideas for understanding play. First, we note from this literature that children, jointly or in negotiation with others, give new meanings to objects in their play. That is, they change the meaning of an object, and through this move away from reality. Metacommunicative language and action between children make the change of meaning visible and therefore possible. When children do this together, there is a sense of "collective imagining" within the same imaginary situation.

Second, the research shows that in play, children move closer to reality when they explore the rules of everyday life through role play – acting out the roles of, for example, mother, the bus driver or a complex set of roles and systems within a hospital. The roles and rules of society become conscious to the child, in the same way that the concept of sisterhood becomes understood when two sisters pretend to be sisters in their play. Meaning is both individually and collectively constructed.

This movement towards reality through role play, and away from reality through object substitution created in play, can be conceptualized as an interdependent movement between "individual imagining" and "collective imagining". This representation is shown in Fig. 5.1 and has been previously discussed by Fleer (2010) and Fleer (2011c). As a result of children taking their play themes from everyday life, children are in a state of continual self-movement as they move towards reality and away from reality when collectively imagining and individually imagining.

Here, the tension between the individual and the collective becomes evident (Ilyenkov 2009), and this marks the tension that exists between the "particular" and the "universal". The child in play is an individual person, but at the same time, the child is also playing the roles and rules of contemporary society. They are both individually being something whilst at the same time existing within a collective community of players where the roles and rules are understood and negotiated. The contradiction between individual and collective action creates the possibility for movement. Therefore, play must be thought of as a dialectical relation between collective imagining and individual imagining.

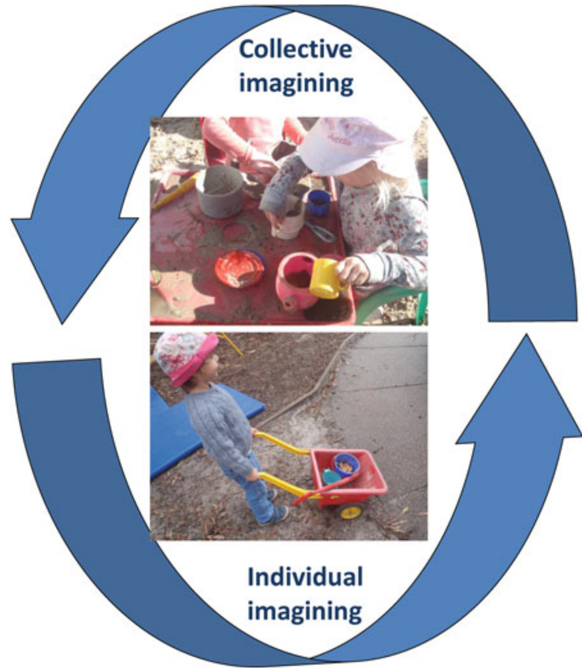

Fig. 5.1 Collective and individual imagining

Play when conceptualized as a dialectical relation between individual imagining and collective imagining *gives a new reading of play* to that which is found in the existing literature. In this conceptualization of play, it becomes possible to see play activity quite differently, and the perspective being put forward is in line with the alternative conceptualizations offered throughout this book. That is, we can theorize play in new ways to the range of approaches that have been offered under a more traditional maturational theory of development, where the essence of play is conceptualized as being "inside the child as their natural biological state". A dialectical relation between individual imagining and collective imagining allows us in research to examine relational activity between individuals across a whole preschool setting.

Constructing Imaginary Situations

Much of the research literature into play has featured the intensive study of dyads, often set up in laboratory settings, small groups of players in naturalistic settings or snapshots of players only (Baumer et al. 2005; Evaldsson and Corsaro 1998). We know little about how children play across a whole preschool context, where players and imaginary situations are in constant motion, intersecting, colonizing, appropriating and being extinguished or reborn. How is play to be understood when it is in constant and dynamic flux in group care and education settings?

Table 5.2 An overview of play activity across a centre (themes are interconnected)

Water and dye in bucket play	Painting the fence with dyed water play	Making mud paint in buckets	Painting objects with mud paint
Sinking mud play (links with dinosaur movie)	Mixing water, dye and soil play	Adding water, dye and mud to plastic crates	Horses visiting and drinking from muddy water
Adding dyed water to the digging patch	Digging for dinosaurs	Dinosaurs, mud and mud poo play	Looking for insects in sand pit
Looking for insects inside the centre	Bull ant moving – "biting your head off" play	Treasure hunt play	Dragon lizard and baby animal playful discussion with assistant teacher
Making and playing with play dough	Butterfly play with play dough	Interactive play space of the life cycle of the butterfly, books, poster, puzzle and plastic figures	Dinosaurs in play dough play
Washing the dolls	Drying the dolls	Horses visiting	Baby play with play dough
Doctor who play	Creating a house with large blocks outdoors	Horses visiting house and having a drink	Playing house indoors
Swing play – dizzy play	Going fishing play		Dinosaur bath play
Zoo animal enclosure interactive play set-up	Fishing play interactive play set-up	Sea creature play interactive play set-up (outdoors)	Mr. Crocodile game introduced by teacher

In research by Fleer and Peers (2012), it has been shown that children's play can encompass a whole preschool community. That is, children do not just enter into one imaginary situation, but rather engage in collective play, that involves or "infects" a preschool community. In Table 5.2 are examples of the dominant play themes experienced by 4 focus children within one preschool setting over a 4-week period.

The research that underpins the data presented in Table 5.2 found that children's play occurs concurrently over both time and across many areas within the preschool centre and outdoor area. An analysis of these data found that general engagement in the form of collective imagining and individual imagining regularly occurs. Illustrated below is an example taken from two children who were on hobbyhorses moving about the whole preschool:

Horseplay: Drinking in the House

Two groups of children have assembled inside and outside a block structure that has been erected in the outdoor area. In another part of the kindergarten, some of the children have been putting droplets of dye into small buckets of water and have carried their buckets with them to the block structure. The blocks create a boundary, enclosing a three by two metre

rectangular space. One group of children has placed their bucket of dyed water on the edge of one of the boundaries. A girl rides her horse into the structure, dismounts and leans the hobbyhorse on the side of the structure. She looks around. Another girl with a cape on her back zooms into the centre of the block structure. She stops in front of the bucket, picks up the hobbyhorse and says, "Oh your horse needs a little drink". She places the mouth of the horse into the yellow dye and makes "slurping sounds" as she moves the horse's head up and down. The other girl moves closer and looks on as the horse drinks and says, "Good". The second girl lays the horse to the side and says, "And then she goes to sleep again". This storyline is accepted and the first girl places her finger into the dye and moves the liquid around. As she does this, another child calls out, "Hey!" She looks to the child and continues to stir the liquid. Both children now have their hands in the liquid and they stir. One girl says, "Let's mix it up with our finger. It will taste yummer". A group of boys join the two girls. The second girl places the horse's mouth into the bucket of water again, as one of the boys adds a droplet of dye to the water. One of the boys says, "Let's get out of the house". Another boy stirs the water, and a third boy says, "I'm going for a walk now". The first girl leans over the bucket and says, "There is sand in there". All the children look into the bucket. (Video observation – Horse play 1)

The horse appears again on another day when the children are using water, dye and dirt to create muddy mixtures, which are used for a range of play themes, including painting, making quick sand, digging up dinosaurs in the mud patch, storing insects and making mud cakes (see Table 5.2):

Horseplay: Having a Muddy Drink

The first girl moves her horse to a large yellow crate that is filled with a muddy mixture. Two children have previously made this mixture, and a third child has added to it an insect he has found. A small group of children mix the substance together and then move to the side to gather more dirt for their mixture. At this moment the girl puts the horse's mouth into the yellow crate and says, "Yum yum. Yum yum". As she does this, one of the children who has helped place a bug into the muddy mixture calls out firmly, "No! No!" and then kicks at the girl to stop her horse from drinking from the yellow crate. The boy says, "I put a bug in there". The girl moves back and then moves forward again making "neigh sounds" gesturing with the horse for another drink. The boy says, "The bug is alive" and kicks the girl again in an attempt to keep the horse away from the crate. (Video observation – Horseplay 3)

These two snapshots of play is illustrative of the connectivity between play scripts and play props within a kindergarten setting over both time and across the preschool setting. What is evident is that the children as horse riders have free access to the space and to other play scripts. The horseplay connects the horse riders to other players, merging their play or causing tension when their horses are not welcome. The research demonstrated that horseplay continued to emerge over 4 weeks, with players moving between the range of play activity, always connecting, merging or changing the existing play each time they entered other children's play.

Horseplay could also be "put on hold" through the horses being dismounted and tied up, freeing the children to do something else. This was also a useful device for the horse riders to legitimately enter into other children's play. The horse riders and their horses were positioned as curious animals wishing to enter the play of others. Horseplay drew upon the props of other children's play, when, for example, the horses would drink from the range of containers being used by the children in their play. Horseplay also gave permission for the riders to observe and not enter play,

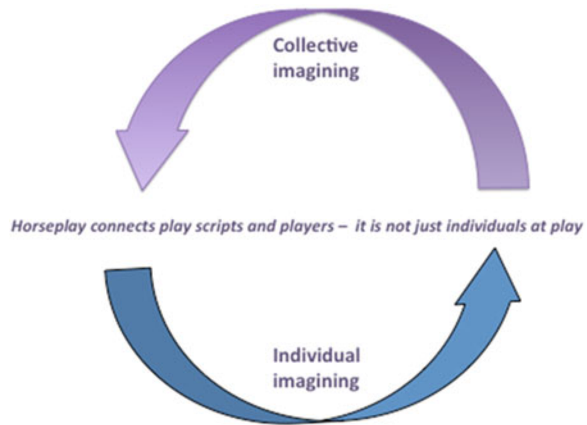

Fig. 5.2 Horseplay as an example of individual and collective imagining

through the children halting their horses and looking on. What was evident in this research was that horseplay allowed riders to interact with the differing play scripts operating within the centre. For example, horseplay introduced the idea of a visitor going into other children's play, adding new dimensions, giving an audience or signalling an interest in the play that was emerging. What was found was that horseplay acted as a technique for connecting different play scripts across a kindergarten community. Figure 5.2 illustrates this collective conception of play activity.

When collective play is conceptualized from the individual child's perspective, it is possible to see the limitations of *age as a criterion* for understanding play development. A dialectical reading of play, as is theorized in this chapter, moves the focus from only the individual to also including the collective and expansive group context, common to preschool settings.

Making Conscious Shared Sustained Imaginary Situations

In play the imaginary situations can only be shared if all the players are able to develop a common understanding or common practice that allows them to enter, exist, develop or reject the themes or objects that are offered between children. Through making conscious the distinction between imagination and reality in play as argued by Vygotsky (1966, 2004), it is possible for children to conceptually work with real objects and imagined (or abstract) ideas which represent reality. In the following shared and sustained conversation between the teacher assistant and a group of four children, we see a further example of how children play with ideas (Fleer 2011a, b, c):

Child A: *They have a tongue.*
Teacher: *They do have a tongue.*
Child B: *They will bite.*
Teacher: *Oh luckily Lucy (pointing) doesn't bite.*

Child A: *They bite and they will eat you.*
Child B: *Yes they are.*
Child C: *But a dragon lizard does.*
Teacher: *A dragon lizard does. Where do they live?*
Child C: *They live in Australia, and they live everywhere.*
Teacher: *How big are they?*
Child C: *Brrrrr….* (signals with both arms).
Teacher: *They must have sharp teeth to be able to eat* (pointing to mouth).
Child C: *They say "Snap!"* (moves arms around the teacher forcefully, emulating snapping action).
Teacher: *Oh gosh, do they live in the jungle?*
Child C: *They live everywhere.*
Teacher: *My goodness. Do they live in my house?*
Child C: *No, they live outside* (gesturing outdoors), *and if you are going to keep a pet one, it will say SNAP!* (emulating snapping action around teacher) *and eat you all up.*
Teacher: *Oh no… I don't want to get one if it is going to eat me up.* (Fleer and Peers 2012)

This extended conversation continues with more of the children contributing and discussing dragon lizards, eggs, chickens and other baby creatures. A mix of fantasy and factual information is entertained by the children as they explore the specific features of the creatures they are discussing. The assistant teacher reacts to all of their suggestions in role, generating surprise, fear and interest, as the children discuss the features of the creatures in relation to sharp teeth and eating humans. Shared sustained thinking (see Siraj-Blatchford 2007) between children and adults *creates the conditions needed for making conscious* to children important concepts for making sense of their everyday world. This shared *sustained imaginary conversation* (Fleer 2011a) between the teacher and the children about the dragon lizard and then later about other creatures allows the conversation to go deeper and become richer. This is an important technique that supports the relations between individual and collective imagining and the simultaneous movement between being in and out of reality and in and out of an imaginary situation. The central premise put forward by Vygotsky (1987) was that "Imagination is a necessary, integral aspect of realistic thinking" (Vygotsky 1987, p. 349). These ideas are represented in Fig. 5.3.

The contradiction between imagination and reality creates the movement which allows for a consciousness of concepts to be contemplated by young children. The simultaneous movement between collective and individual, as shown in play, is also noted between concrete and abstract, within learning programmes. That is, the *concrete-abstract relations* needed for concept formation are possible through imagination, where concept formation becomes a conscious act by the child. The child gives new meaning to the particular situation – the dragon lizards. When children imbue the idea of a dragon lizard with new meanings, and change their sense, we see that children move away from reality. Here, the

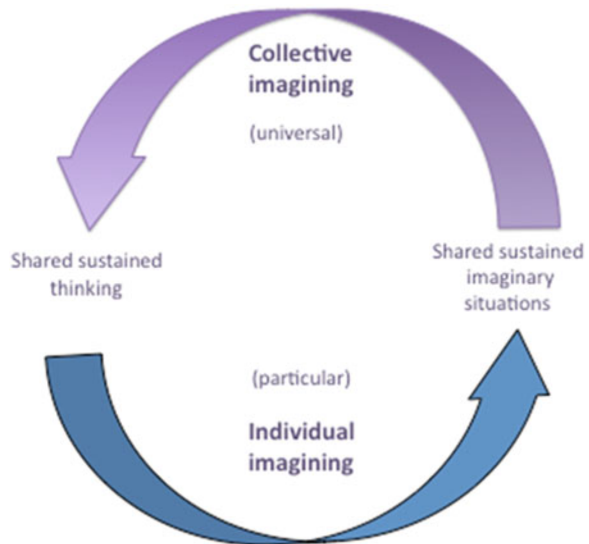

Fig. 5.3 Shared sustained thinking and shared sustained imaginary situations

dialectical nature of imagination is most evident because we see the dual role imagination plays in moving towards and away from reality. The teacher supported this backward and forward movement between imagined dragon lizards (and being dangerous) and the teacher asking about "Do they live in Australia?" (far away and can't harm you).

Further examples of children's play, where material consciousness was evident, are shown in Table 5.2 in the play of children across the whole preschool setting. Many of the children began their play with water and dye, which turned to painting with the buckets of coloured water, which in turn changed to creating mud paint (dirt was added to the coloured water in the buckers). The objects (bucket, water and dye) then became sinking sand as the buckets filled with dirt, which was then moved to the digging patch, where sinking sand was created in the digging patch. The buckets of water also became water troughs for the horses, as well as a place to put specific insect finds. The material objects were collectively transformed across players, contexts and play scripts. Groups of children continually gave new meaning to objects as they created mental representations. These collective transitions were important for building a collective consciousness about the objects and the new and evolving meanings that were given to the objects in the children's play world. In these examples of collective play within a preschool outdoor environment, it is possible to note the dual positioning discussed by Kravtsov and Kravtsova (2010). However, the theorization of *collective play* across a whole preschool setting allows one to see how the meaning of objects and actions also changes as play scripts connect, play scripts merge and play scripts evolve. The imaginary situation is continually being redefined.

The Essence of Play

Nilsson (2010) in analysing the extensive research of Lindqvist (1995) comes to the conclusion that through the creation of imaginary situations, play becomes the vehicle for developing abstract thinking. Lindqvist (1995) and those that have followed her playworld theorization have drawn attention to the conception that play is a significant source of development because it makes conscious to children the everyday world in which they live.

In the examples of children's play discussed previously, it is possible to see that in collective play across a whole preschool setting (see Table 5.2), that imagination when used consciously by children helps them to rise above reality (imagine dragon lizards), to descend to reality (contemplate if dragon lizards live in Australia) and to play with reality (Can dragon lizards really bite you if you are living in Australia?). Davydov (1984, 1990, 2008) refers to this form of conceptualizing as building theoretical knowledge through the process of *rising to the concrete.* Theoretical knowledge and dialectical thinking support children in building mental models, engaging in thought experiments and in ascertaining relational connections between many different elements within a system. Rising to the concrete encompasses the pedagogical principle of initially examining a holistic system and mentally ascending to this system in order to determine its specific nature. Through establishing the specific nature, it is possible to observe its universal character. Through this kind of contemplation, children discover a general law or gain some form of conceptual understanding. This model of play is shown in Fig. 5.4.

Davydov (2008) also stated that children need practice at concurrently thinking about the particular, and thinking about the general system of concepts. Davydov (2008) has argued that to establish the essence of a concept, children need to

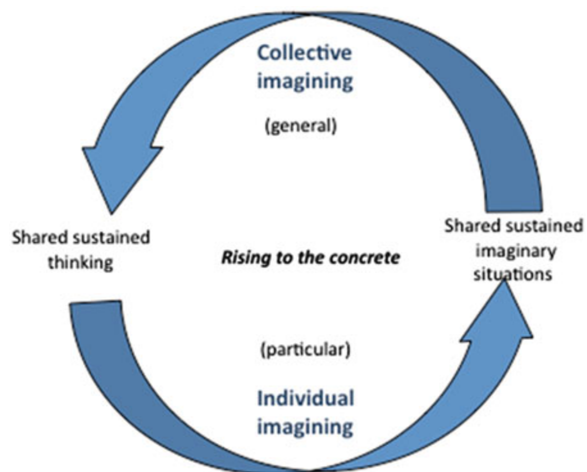

Fig. 5.4 A dialectical conception of play and learning

reproduce the concrete into some form of abstraction, such as a model (Aidarova 1982; Fleer 2011b, c). Children's play in many respects seeks to keep intact the wholeness of a situation, and through this it is possible to see how play simultaneously builds theoretical knowledge and dialectical thinking in young children. Although Davydov (2008) addressed his concept of theoretical knowledge to the problems of school-aged children's learning, his ideas are useful for considering the essence of what is play. Vygotsky (1987) argued that the unit of analysis in any sphere of research much shows the complexity of a system within its simplest building block. The essence of play is the imaginary situation where objects and actions can change their meaning and where shared and sustained imaginary conversations and actions are possible as a dialectical relation between individuals and collectives.

Conclusion

In this chapter, play has been conceptualized as the dialectical relation between collective imagining and individual imagining. Through their unity, it is possible to see how children can be both playing at being something whilst also being a part of a play community. Through this kind of dual reading of play, it becomes possible to see how play creates the conditions for movement between reality and imagination. Collectively moving in and out of an imaginary situation makes play themes conscious to players, and this provides the foundation for supporting children to also make concepts conscious, thereby helping them to make sense of their world.

In play children gain practice at collective and individual imagining across a play community. Collective and individual imagining also happens throughout society between adults. It can be argued that the essence of societal activity is in play as a form of collective imagining in group care and education settings.

Traditional approaches to play which draw upon maturational or biological theories of development foreground the play activities of children over time, categorizing them into stages. However, these theories have not been able to show concretely and theoretically what occurs across a whole community of players in care and education settings. Play, when conceptualized as a dialectical relation between collective imagining and individual imagining, makes visible how both collective and individual action in play support the development of theoretical knowledge in early childhood group settings. This reading of play gives a different conceptualization, building upon earlier empirical and theoretical works which seek to understand play within group settings.

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Chapter 6
Play Performance and Affect in a Mexican Telenovela

Gloria Quiñones

Introduction

The study in this chapter foregrounds a cultural-historical approach to the study of affect in a play performance. The cultural-historical concept of dynamic unity of intellect and affect is discussed (Vygotsky 1987a). The focus of the chapter is to investigate what kinds of play performance are found in a child's everyday life across different institutions (Hedegaard 2009). This chapter introduces to a new concept called *affective intentions*, which include intellectual and affective components in how the child is able to express *affective intentions* towards others through different non-verbal repertoires such as gestures, expressions and movement.

The case example visually presents Mayra's *affective intentions* and *interest* towards a Mexican telenovela (soap opera) which is a televised story that is popular in Mexican and Latin American societies (Gonzalez 2003). The play scenes and images show Mayra's creative transformation from individual to collective imagination (Fleer 2010) in a play performance.

Experiences (such as in play) are lived dramatically and intensively by children through what Vygotsky called *perezhivanie* (Vygotsky 1994). *Perezhivani*e (unity of thought and affect) translated into Spanish means *vivencia*, and this is used interchangeably in the chapter. The social environment will influence and affect the child, and the qualities of relationships, objects and surrounding experiences bring to the child awareness of his/her everyday world. The child is able to have an *affective attitude*, *inten*tion and *interest* to what he/she is emotionally experiencing. This concept is used to explain how the child intensively experiences everyday life with *affective intentions and interests* in relation to play experiences.

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Affect (Emotions) in Play

Affect and play in early childhood have traditionally been studied from developmental approaches that focus on the individual child (Ashabi 2000, 2007; Denham 2006; Denham et al. 2009, 2010, 2011; Denham and Brown 2010). Developmental theorists are just beginning to pay attention to the relationships between culture and emotions (Saarni 2001), and researchers have identified the importance of studying emotions including different cultural groups (Her et al. 2012; Trommsdorff et al. 2012). Important to mention is that in cultural-historical theory, the topic of emotions and motivation has been underresearched (Roth 2007). Affect and thought remain “largely unknown, although they are central to understanding his [Vygotsky’s] work as a whole” (Mahn and John-Steiner 2007, p. 46). This chapter aims to contribute to the study of this unity (intellect/thought and affect) in children’s play.

Sociocultural researchers have studied cultural variations between emotion and play in non-Western communities (Gaskins 2002; Gaskins and Miller 2009; Gaskins et al. 2007; Göncü et al. 2007). In their studies with Mayan children, they found how children’s emotional expressions were part of the cultural expectations of the community (Gaskins 2002; Gaskins and Miller 2009). Children’s cultural emotional expressions, for example, when being in a funeral, were silent and reserved. Their research has shown the importance of studying emotions in other everyday life activities. Other important cultural variations relate to the roles of adults in children’s play (Göncü et al. 2007). It is important to recognize how different communities have different forms and understandings of what makes play. However, a full and wholeness analysis is needed to understand what emotions mean from the child’s perspective – their *affective intentions and interest* in relation to what play is in different cultural communities. In this chapter, I discuss a play performance observed in a rural community in Mexico.

Affective Intentions in Play

This section aims to discuss the unity of intellect and affect in play. In his writings, Vygotsky argued for affect and intellect as a unified process. Vygotsky (1987a) searched for a psychology that was dynamic and whole. In his writing of thinking and speech, he discussed the affective relationship the individual has to reality, and both affect and intellect should be studied in a dynamic system:

> There exists a dynamic meaningful system that constitutes *a unity of affective and intellectual processes*. Every idea contains some remnant of the individual’s affective relationship to that aspect of reality which it represents. In this way, analysis into units makes it possible to see the relationship between individual’s needs or inclinations and his thinking. (1987a, p 50 emphasis original)

In this unity, Vygotsky (1987a) acknowledges the intellectual and affective processes of the individual through the affective relationship to its reality considering

needs or inclinations of one's thoughts. Vygotsky affirms that thinking includes one's motivations, desires, needs, interests and emotions (Vygotsky 1987a). In thinking, there are affective-volitive tendencies and influences and *hidden intentions*, which individuals communicate through intonations in voice and bodily.

Vygotsky used an example of Stanislavski piece of theatre "*intenciones ocultas* hidden intentions" (my translation, 1987b, p. 227) given to actors in their scripts. An actor performing a play scene reads a script that says: "how happy I am that you came", yet some of the *hidden intentions* written in the script are to hide the character's real intentions such as "I am confused you are here", where the actor tries to hide feelings of confusion.

Vygotsky discusses that when we act and speak, not only language and words (script) are important to understand but also – the *hidden intentions* of the individual – what is behind voice or words and what intonations are made. Here it is argued how important it is to consider the individual's affects and intentions communicated to others. Affect is connected to intentions (Roth 2011). Affective expressions developed by different repertories including gestures, movements and facial expressions. Affect can become passion when people orient their bodies, gestures and the attitudes towards others (Roth 2011).

In play, Vygotsky (1966) presents the same discussion. Vygotsky (1966) argued how a full examination of children's play considered intellect and volitional – affect processes "the child's need inclinations, incentives and motives to act" (p. 7). Volitional and affective aspirations of children's play included the child's needs, inclinations and interest to act, in this chapter referred to as the *affective intentions and interest* of play. The child's freedom to make choices of what to play (affective-volitive), what role to perform and what are those *affective inclinations (intentions and interests)* in play is important when understanding the child's perspective on play.

When the child creates imaginary situation, affective incentives (purpose) for playing in that specific situation need to be considered. While the child and other children set up play scenes, there are roles acted and performed, and the child's *affective intentions* are communicated through performing and acting out. Children redefine imaginary situations (Fleer 2013). The child's everyday experience is important when considering what the child is playing. Rules in play are created through imaginary situations; everyday experiences inform child's play. For example, when the child is playing the role of a mother, rules are communicated of how to "be" or "act" as a mother has to relate to the child's understanding of "mother figure" (Vygotsky 1966). The rules in play can be explicit or implicit according to what children need (van Oers 2010).

Experiences are important when playing and children do not imitate being a mother or reproduce events; in play there is a creative transformation, "creative reworking of the impressions acquired. He combines then to create a new reality, that conforms to his own needs and desires" (Vygotsky 1994, pp. 11–12). In this reworking of impressions and images acquired by the child's everyday experience, the child in play creates new realities where affects, emotions and feelings are relived in a new experience and reality. Experience becomes foundational to understanding what educators can imagine, project and plan what the child can learn in the future.

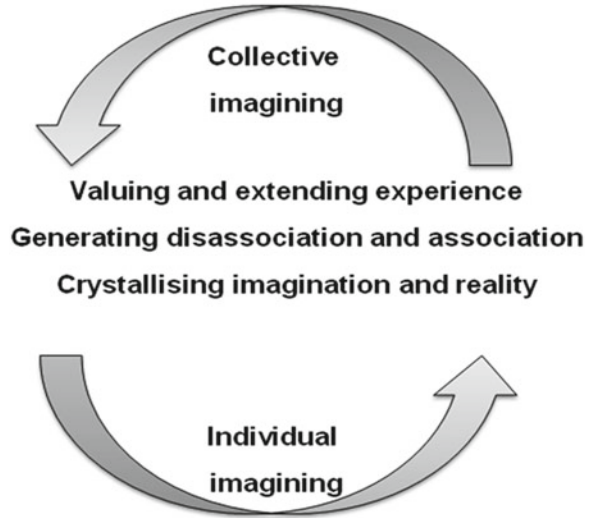


Fig. 6.1 Imagination and creativity (Fleer 2010, p. 143)

Imagination is a way of conceptualizing social experiences, narrations and description. Imagination is an abstract, mental and emotional activity. Experience and imagination are mutually related, and emotions are part of this process.

> On the other hand, every feeling, every emotion seeks specific images corresponding to it. Emotions thus posses a kind of capacity to select, impressions, thoughts, and images that resonate with the mood that possesses us at a particular moment in time. (Vygotsky 2004, pp. 17–18)

Through imagination, children recreate images from their experiences in a particular moment of time that are relived through play in a new imagined reality. A cultural-historical view of play accounts for the importance of tomorrow's possibilities "*la formacion de una personalidad creadora proyectada hacia el mañana es preparada por la imaginacion creadora encarnada en el presente*", the formation of a creative personality projected into the future is to prepare a creative imagination embodied in the present (Vygotsky 2001, p. 98 my translation).

Important to imagination and experience is how adults are able to extend play experiences in an individual and collective imagination (Fleer 2010). In Fig. 6.1, Fleer theorizes these ideas. Imagination is a new psychological formation in children (Fleer 2010). Through *valuing and extending experience*, adults can draw upon children's everyday experiences and extend children's abstract thinking through making associations and disassociations of everyday and scientific concepts. Imagination becomes reality, for example, through using a map as a conceptual tool where children are able to make representations of their interest and to disassociate other concept to new ones. *Generating dissociation and associations*, children associate what they know and disassociate through active support of adults in making new connections and reassociations. Children *imagine individually* and

in a *collective way*; creativity is a dynamic interrelationship between individual and collective imagination (Fleer 2010, 2011).

The next section aims to demonstrate how these ideas are possible to investigate through the use of video methodologies and through analytical tool of "Visual Vivencias" which captures visually *affective intentions* in a play performance across Mayra's everyday life.

Methodology

Video digital observations create a visual means to observe and study children in their everyday settings (Fleer 2008). Videotaping allows researchers to plan and organize play sequences to analysis and interpreting pedagogical play practices. From a cultural-historical perspective, using digital video technology offers several advantages as it aims at "capture the dynamics of a child's participation in institutional practice… seek to document different institutional practices and the children's activity within those institutions" (Fleer 2008, p. 106). Others like Lindqvist (1995) and Ferholt (2009, 2010) have used video recording as a method of documenting children's play worlds.

Visual Vivencia as Analytic Tool

This chapter contributes to the use of visual qualitative methodologies, through the concept of "Visual Vivencias" (Quiñones and Fleer 2011) to understand affect. Specific moments in play were selected. A child's *perezhivanie vivencia* – alive, intense and dramatic living experience – is visually seen through play (Vygotsky 1966, 1987a, 1994). The data is analysed through images taken from the video observations. The video clips were selected considering Mayra's persistent *affective interest* towards the telenovela. The images were manually taken from a programme called "Window Live Movie Maker". The images aimed to capture *momentitos in time (little moments)* of Mayra's play performance and her *affective intention* and motivations to the telenovela dance and singing. *Perezhivanie vivencias* aim to show not only the experiences but also the atmosphere where these experiences are created. Further, affect was captured visually so the reader can also make his or her own interpretations of play.

The researcher followed Mayra's everyday life across different institutions (Hedegaard 2009). According to a wholeness to investigating the everyday life of Mayra, the researcher investigates dominant practices and activities of Mayra across home, kindergarten and community researched. The telenovela activity was found to be a dominant practice across institutions in the everyday life of Mayra, the focus child in this research (see Fig. 6.2).

Original telenovela video clip – Antonella main character

Family institution play performance

Kindergarten institution play performance by Mayra and Anna

Community birthday party play performance

Fig. 6.2 Mayra's play performance across institutions

Figure 6.2 shows how the telenovela play performance was dominant across institutions such as family, kindergarten and community. This aims to shows how through a wholeness approach in investigating Mayra's everyday life. The next section presents the study design followed by the analysis of findings.

Design

The majority of the rural communities in Mexico live below the line of poverty (Schmelkes 2000). This Mexican rural community is considered rural because it had less than 25 families. There was only one kindergarten in the community and

one classroom consisting of four children. Every classroom had a teacher, which was usually young and involved in the CONAFE programme. This programme was the only public system accessible for rural communities in Mexico (Garza 2005, cited in Yoshikawa et al. 2007). Children walked to the kindergarten, as it was in close proximity to their homes. I followed up the four children in the kindergarten but focused on Mayra, a 5-year-old girl. I was able to follow children in the kindergarten for 11 school days (35 h) in a period of 2 months. My observations in the kindergarten were interrupted because the young teacher left the community due to health problems and because he was not well accepted as he was the first male teacher in the community. Because of this reason, only four children attended the kindergarten (two boys aged 4–5 and two girls aged 4–5).

Mayra's family lived in a walking distance to the kindergarten. Their home consisted of a small room owned by a family member and lent to Mayra's family. Mayra's stepfather worked cleaning close freeways from the community and her mother stayed at home. Mayra had an 8-year-old brother who attended the local primary school. I followed Mayra's everyday life, made five formal visits (10 h) and had informal interactions with Mayra and her family because I was living in the community. The next section presents two examples in the family and kindergarten. The first example shows Mayra's play performance at home, and the second example occurred in the kindergarten where Mayra and Anna collaboratively performed the telenovela performance.

Findings

Family Everyday Real Experience of the Telenovela

I made five visits to Mayra's family to observe Mayra's everyday life. Television was often turned on in all the visits I made. Television was at the centre of the one-room house. The one-room house included a queen bed, a fridge, a stove and storage for clothes. Mayra's family watch the telenovela every afternoon, and the telenovela was part of the family everyday life routines. For example, Gina, Mayra's mother, watched the television while cooking. Mayra and Gina often had conversations around the telenovela characters, and the telenovela songs were important to Mayra. For example, Mayra had the CD and a special DVD of "Las Divinas" telenovela, which Mayra followed every day. Children in this community, especially girls, learned the songs and dance moves from watching the telenovela. I lived in the community for 3 weeks and I could see it everywhere, e.g. to a community birthday party, for which I was invited; the music was part of the mood of the party. Further, in the kindergarten the teacher was aware that both Mayra and Anna liked the music so he had the special song of "Las Divinas" in his mobile phone.

Mayra observed in an active way and learned the dance choreography (Fig. 6.3). Mayra learned by observation (Rogoff 2003), and this is a form of learning often found in non-Western communities. Mayra related to the character of Antonella.

Fig. 6.3 Mayra observing the telenovela DVD

She "became" this character and identified herself with her. She was the popular character of a dance and singing group.

Everyday events and situations are lived intensively, harmoniously and passionately by children. In these images, *affective interes*t towards the telenovela is evident. In the first image, Mayra expresses what she is feeling as Antonella, the favourite telenovela character, appears in the television. In the second image, she sings the song and moves her hands sitting in the bed. The different emotions are communicated to the researcher non-verbally, and Mayra communicates with a smile revealing her affects.

This everyday experience allowed Mayra to learn about the songs of the telenovela and about the steps and choreography. Everyday experiences are important

for children's imagination (Vygotsky 2004). For Mayra, the telenovela and television were a *valued* practice in her family, and this play performance was *extended* in the kindergarten.

In this rural community, television became an *affective object* in this family. Other affective objects included the CD and DVD with special recordings of "The Divines". As children like Mayra in this community had few objects or toys that are of interest, objects such as television, CD and DVD became cultural affective objects that children treasured and loved.

The next section presents Mayra's performance at home, and her mother's affective engagement towards Mayra is reciprocal and collective. Mayra's mother supported Mayra's play; she played the role of audience supporting and engaging in Mayra's play.

Presenting Examples of Telenovela Play Performance

Performing and Playing Telenovela at Home

Mayra's mother welcomed the researcher inside the house. The first thing they showed me was a CD of the "Las Divinas". Eventually, the song of "Gasolina" was played. Mayra started singing the song on the bed and then Gina told her to stand up and dance. The camera focused on Mayra and the conversations around her. While she moved from the bed to standing up at the same time, the camera and the researcher moved.

In Fig. 6.4 Mayra's intellect and affect in this play performance can be seen. Mayra has an affective relationship to the song and the choreography. This is something she is affectively interested in, and she is able to communicate her affective-volitive tendencies towards her voice intonations through singing passionately the lyrics of the song. *Affective expressions* are connected to intentions. These expressions are developed through embodiment, which can be seen through gestures, movements and facial expression. This is lived intensively and affectively by Mayra. A close look (Fig. 6.5) shows affect in action through this embodiment.

This play performance becomes one because Mayra becomes the heroine and star performer in this *momentito*. She has an imaginary situation that is individual and collective; her collective imagination is shared with audience – Gina and the researcher. The rules in play are made by creative transformation of the dance moves. In order to have imagination as an abstract form, this dancing and singing are transformed by thinking of steps and by feeling empowered and happy. Gina encourages Mayra through saying "Stand up and dance!" *affectively engaging* her in the experience. The adult's role is to value the experience and extend it to affectively engaging the child to perform this scene. Affective intentions are created collectively; everybody is interested and engaged in the child's perspective of the telenovela performance.

Mayra sitting on the bed. Mayra smiles and laughs. She moves her hands while dancing. She sings.

Mayra: Nadie pasa de esta esquina **No one passes this corner!**

Mother: *Pero parate a bailar***But stand up and dance.**

The song continues. In orange her mother is standing up. Mayra laughs all the way and her dance focuses on her hands at this stage.

CD and Mayra singing:*Nadie pasa de esta esquina***No one passes this corner!**

CD and Mayra singing: *Aqui mandan las divinas* — **Here the divines are in charge**

CD and Mayra singing: *Porque somos gasolina gasolina de verdad* — **Because we are gasoline truly**

Mother laughs all the time and in one occasion says: Ay Mayra! Oh Mayra!

Fig. 6.4 Mayra's perezhivanie vivencia and affective repertoires

Fig. 6.5 Affect in action – embodiment

Performing and Playing Telenovela at Kindergarten

The telenovela play performance is extended and valued in the kindergarten. This play performance became part of Mayra and Anna's peer culture. Becoming the heroine in the telenovela, performance becomes complex for Mayra when being in the same room as Anna. Winther-Lindqvist (2012) explains how social identities are negotiated through play activities within the peer group. This is the case for Mayra; she still is able to *affectively engage* in the play performance and collectively imagine but in a different way when with peers.

The teacher is aware that Mayra and Anna are affectively interested and love the telenovela song. They creatively transform their roles to being the telenovela heroine. However, Mayra is not the centre of attention, and her mother is not present to support her enactment of the role. Mayra moves next to the teacher and is able to observe Anna's play performance (Fig. 6.6).

The teacher is able to *value* children's *affective interest*, and he *extends* this to playing the song in his mobile phone. This is a *collaborative imagination* as Anna and Mayra share the *same affective interest*. They are dancing together and individually imagine. Their individual imagination relates to how they play performed their roles. Mayra focuses on singing and moving her hands, and Anna embodies the song focusing on the dance rather than singing. While Mayra is accustomed to have the entire attention place to her performance by changing positions, she is able to see someone else transforming this play.

Mayra and Anna individually and collectively imagine the telenovela play performance. This imaginary situation translates to remembering the steps and choreography. The rules in this play become following and making your own steps, creatively transforming from the original ones. They are able to recreate a new reality. They have to remember and *think* about the steps, and they *affectively* and passionately expressed and communicated affective movements to the audience. The rules are implicitly communicated non-verbally by silently taking their own positions.

Teacher Leo in orange is playing the song in his mobile phone. Mayra is out of the frame, but her hand can be seen. As the song, starts Mayra moves quickly next to the teacher.

Divinas **Divinas (rule)**

somos gasolina **We are gasoline (fire)**

Fig. 6.6 Collaborative play performance

As Vygotsky (1987a) explained in thinking lays affective forces and motives, interests and intentions, this can be visible through speech and communication. Mayra knows most of the song lyric. The song has a negative component, "mira esa fea, look at that ugly", wherein Anna points to Mayra; see Fig. 6.7. This passes unnoticed by the teacher, but it is visible to Mayra. Winther-Lindqvist (2012) argues how teacher should identify the different social identities placed in peer groups. The teacher focused only on the dance and not in questioning Anna's negative non-verbal pointing. However, one asks: Why is Mayra next to the teacher? Why not included in Anna's dance? It might be that positioning herself next to the adult is for seeking emotional security.

In Fig. 6.8, when a close look is taken, the individual *hidden affective intentions* of Anna are shown. This is made implicitly; someone has to be in the ugly group. In the original video clip, the character, Antonella, does not point out to anyone. However, Anna points straight to Mayra both implicitly and explicitly, being these *hidden affective intentions*, "you are ugly because I am pointing you".

Gasolina de verdad **Real gasoline (or fire)**

Todos saben quien manda en esta school porque somos gente cool gente consciente con sangre caliente **Everybody knows who rules this school because we are cool people conscious with warm blood**

Nosotras bailamos bien **You know your heart. We dance well you know...**

Fig. 6.6 (continued)

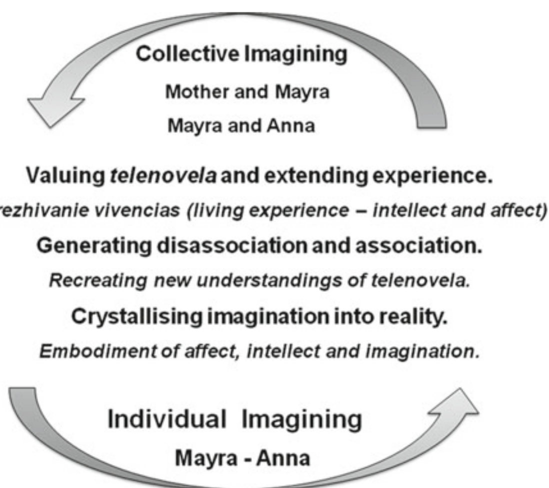
Mayra's identity changes as she transitions from home to kindergarten. At her home, it is seen how Mayra is encouraged to extend her play performance and experience. While in the kindergarten, the song played and the teacher plays specifically for Anna because all his attention is placed on her. However, for Mayra there is a change of social identity because the encouragement from the adults is different and

Mira esta fea
Look at this ugly one

Aqui hay otra fea aqui *no pueden* entrar
Here is another one they can't enter here

Fig. 6.7 Hidden affective intentions of Anna

Fig. 6.8 Telenovela play performance and embodiment of affect (Adapted from Fleer 2010)



her *affective intentions* remain important. However, her actions and freedom change because of Anna's presence. Mayra's identification with the different people at home and school changes her social identity, who she is and who she becomes. She is more emotionally vulnerable in the kindergarten (ibid.). In the kindergarten when children enter to a collective activity have to negotiate identities and identifications sometimes are explicit (Winther-Lindqvist 2009). Here it can be seen how Mayra positions next to the teacher to be closer to the adult and lets Anna take charge of the performance. Mayra takes a more peripheral position and Anna is the principal star performer.

This is a *perezhivanie vivencia* where the social environment, the music, the audience and all the components in play are lived intensely and with the drama that dancing and singing bring to Mayra's and Anna's everyday life. This is a cultural learning experience, which both children are affectively engaged, and their communities encourage music, dance and telenovela.

Discussion

The cultural variations in relation to emotional expressions are seen in this community through children play performing a telenovela that is valued in the community. Telenovelas are a cultural-historical practice in Mexican communities. There are many of these practices around many communities. Television and mobile devices mediate children's play. Fleer's (2010) model is discussed in relation to the telenovela. These cultural artefacts are illustrated in Fleer's model.

Collective and individual imagining (Mother and Mayra, Mayra and Anna). Affect is present in play as shown in Fig. 6.2 across different institutions. Children embodied a new reality through crystallizing imagination (Fleer 2010) and through *affective expressions* through multiple repertoires of embodiment of *affective intentions* that are visible through their body movements and facial expressions. According to Fleer (2010), imagination can be collective and individual. This is illustrated in two case examples where Mayra at home is able to create a new reality through embodiment of imagination and affect, and in the kindergarten, both children, Mayra and Anna, embodied their imagination and emotions as they have *affective intentions* towards the telenovela. For Mayra there is a new awareness of Anna's interest to the telenovela performance. The adults (mother and teacher) enter and support this collective imagination through acting as audience in the play performance.

Valuing telenovela and extending experience. This play performance is valued. However, the form of extending the experience is very limited. The adults' *affective engagement* is different. For Mayra's mother, Gina, she supports Mayra's play performance. In the kindergarten, the teacher values and extends Mayra's and Anna's *affective interest* through playing the song, but he is not as involved as Mayra's mother. The teacher does not encourage Mayra's interest; he just extends it to a moment of play performing. This interest has the potential to be extended in different pedagogical activities, for example, discussing the narratives and lyrics in the telenovela with children. It is important that the teacher is able to create new possibilities for learning.

Generating disassociation and reassociation (*recreating new understanding of telenovela*). Mayra brings new meanings to her role of Antonella. She is able to imagine an audience and a role that is valued in her community. In the kindergarten, Anna and Mayra reassociate roles as they transition to kindergarten. They are able to become their heroine but they play different roles – principal and secondary. The role of adults is important. Through reassociating new stories, adults can think about these new possibilities through analysing characters and making new songs from the telenovela. The adult's imagination is important in how they can create learning possibilities for children. Mayra is able to associate the song through transforming the dance choreography into her own individual imagination. Through disassociation, adults can focus on different learning goals for children.

Crystallizing imagination and reality (*embodiment of affect, intellect and imagination*). The child's imagination and creativity should be projected to what the child can learn tomorrow, but it is also important for the adult to see these possibilities.

The role of the adult is important in allowing the child's crystallization of imagination into a new reality – which goes beyond embodiment of play performance but through learning new concepts and new stories. The unity of intellect and affect in play is expressed in many ways: through repertoires of gestures, movement and dance which showed the *affective intentions and interest* in children play and through intellectually learning new songs and dance moves.

Why do children insist and persist in re-accounting and replaying the same event? In Mayra's case, it is because she *likes it* but further because at an early age, children are able to communicate their *affective interest* and *intentions* to adults and share these experiences, which are culturally valued in their communities.

Conclusion

Affective Intentions in a Perezhivanie Vivencia

This is a *perezhivanie vivencia* lived intensively and dramatically and as strong influence in the everyday life of Mayra.

As explained by Vygotsky (2004), imaginations are a creative reworking of the impressions acquired in everyday experiences. Children are able to create a new reality in relation to their affects, needs and desires. Mayra is able to imagine and transform the telenovela play performance through repertoires of embodiment of movement, expressions and dance. In play performance there is a creative transformation of dancing and singing.

In Turkish communities, play is defined culturally by children through sound and rhyme and nonsense singing (Göncü et al. 2007). In this Mexican community, the telenovela was a cultural form of play performance valued by the community.

The unity of intellect and affect can be strongly seen throughout the examples given. The way Mayra communicates interrelates to what she is thinking, the dance steps and song and what she affectively manifests through her affective language. This dynamic unity is seen through the affective relationship Mayra has to her new reality, crystallizing imagination in a new reality – where she becomes the heroine and where she belongs to the community. Mayra's affects are intense, passionate and emotional. Mayra enjoys, smiles and performs bringing her joy to her everyday life. Mayra's *affective intentions* and *interest* are communicated to the audience, adults, peers and researcher.

Vygotsky (1987a) reminds us it is not only thinking, language and words but knowing the motivations, interest and emotions of the individual. Adults need to understand play from the child's perspective, what it *affectively* means to children. Mayra's imagination crosses time and space. These *momentitos* of play performance are lived, alive and intense. Mayra's affect can be shown visually and this is an important methodological contribution. Through observing children's affect in play, analysing it visually allows for ongoing interpretation. Adults create new meanings and interpretations visually of children's *affective intentions, interest and engagements* in play.

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Chapter 7
Children's Collective Imagination in Play: A Preschooler's Bilingual Heritage Language Development

Liang Li

Introduction

From a cultural-historical view of the play-language relationship, derived from Vygotsky's cultural-historical development theory, children's role-play is influenced by cultural and social understandings, which is evident in language discourse. Children need to acquire skills from more expert members of their culture through adult-child teaching interactions (Vygotsky 1987b). Imitation in play provides the possibilities for children to create actions towards an adult model and internalize assistance from adults within the zone of proximal development (Li 2012a, b). Specifically, appropriate language use in play is imitated to improve the quality of play, such as how to express shared meaning and play planning, but also to support children's language development collectively with adults or more capable peers.

Hence, play gives rise to opportunities for exploring children's linguistic concepts and language skills. In play, the need for collaborative social interactions with others provides the chance to use language in thought processes and demonstrate linguistic knowledge and skills. Play promotes the elaboration of language processes through complex social interactions such as imitation, negotiation, conflicts and other kinds of communication. By reviewing contemporary literature, it is shown that adults have a key role in encouraging children to engage in play and thus support their children's language development. However, the research reviewed only focuses on teachers' interventions in children's play and development in school-based programmes (Duncan and Tarulli 2003; File 1994; Fleer 2010; Smilansky and Shefatya 1990; Trawick-Smith and Dziurgot 2010). Parents carry out the same functions at home that teachers do in the schooling environment to support young children's language development (Rasinski et al. 1990). The current

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study fills this gap and draws upon Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory to examine the ways immigrant parents support preschoolers' heritage language development, including parents' interactions with their children in play activities.

This study gives insight into the links between the development of imagination and language use within play in relation to family pedagogy. The larger study from which this chapter draws its data aims to explore the ways Chinese-Australian families are involved in their children's development of Mandarin as a bilingual heritage language (Li 2012a, b). The particular interest of this chapter is how immigrant parents and children's collective imagination and interactions in play contribute to their children's bilingual heritage language development in relation to family pedagogy. This chapter draws upon Vygotsky's (1966, 2004) concepts of play and imagination and Fleer's (2010) model of imagination and creativity development in order to understand how parents and children's collective imagination supports individual imagination development in joint play, thus supporting children's heritage language development.

This chapter begins with a presentation of cultural-historical theoretical play concepts, which orientates this study of a Chinese-Australian immigrant family's play activity. Through the analysis of a short data episode, the findings of the study will follow in order to show how parents and children's collective imagination supports the individual's imagination in play, thus aiding children's heritage language development. An earlier publication (Li 2012a) analysing the same data argues the importance of adults' supports within the child's zone of proximal development in play. This chapter will focus on the dialectical development of imagination in children's joint play.

Cultural-Historical Theoretical View on Play

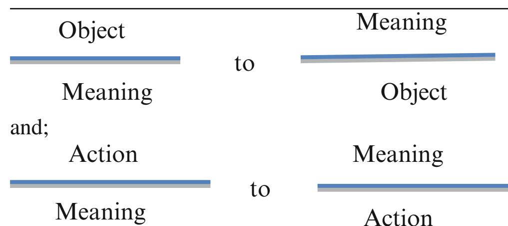
In cultural-historical theory, play is thought to show how "developed cognitive capacities serve important cognitive, emotional and motivational functions and by so doing, potentially influence the child's development" (Gaskins and Göncü 1992). Vygotsky (1966) considers that in play, children create an imaginary situation as "a means of developing abstract thought" (p. 17). Vygotsky's play focuses on three aspects: "children create an imaginary situation, take on and act out roles and follow a set of rules determined by specific roles" (Bodrova 2008, p. 359).

Preschoolers begin with creating "make-believe" situations. It is possible for preschoolers to separate the sense field from the visual field. In order to meet the need to act like an adult, the preschool child enters an imaginary world in which they can realize desires that are unrealizable in reality. In establishing criteria for distinguishing a child's play activity from other forms of activity, Vygotsky (1966) concludes that "in play a child creates an imaginary situation" in which they take on the role of adults and act them out (p. 8). The creation of an imaginary situation becomes the central and most characteristic activity in play (Elkonin 2005b) as it supports children's symbolic thinking. The "imaginary situation" children create in play

is converted into an internal process such as internal speech, logical memory and symbolic thought in external action (Vygotsky 1966). In play, a child acts out the role of an adult and follows the adult's social rules through the generation of objects and actions in representational thought, whereby they transfer meaning from one object to another, from one action to another.

Object, Meaning and Action in Play

At a very early developmental period, the child experiences confusion between words and objects and between meaning and what is seen. They are not able to differentiate between the situation in thought and real situations. At preschool age, in play, thought becomes separated from objects, and based on observations by Vygotsky (1966), "a piece of wood begins to be a doll and a stick becomes a horse" (p. 12). Vygotsky emphasizes that it is initially impossible for a preschool-aged child to sever the meaning of a word from an object directly. In play, they use a pivot for severing thoughts from objects. Substitute objects/actions act as symbols to represent other objects/actions and sever their real meaning. For example, in play the child sees a box as a car to drive or a wooden block as a boat to sail in the ocean. In this process, a box or a wooden block acts as a substitute object and functions as a "pivot" for severing the meaning of "car" or "boat" from the real objects. Or it can be said that the substitute action itself acts as a "pivot" that makes the child sever the meaning of "car" or "boat" from the real car or boat. At this point, the meaning in play becomes the determinant and dominates over the objects/actions. Inversely, objects/actions are moved from a dominant to a subordinate/secondary position and subordinated to meaning. It can be explained as such:



(Vygotsky 1966, p. 15)

The substitute objects/actions become mediators/cognitive tools, which shows "children's internal process in external way…and the internal transformations brought about by play in the child's development" (Vygotsky 1966, p. 15). Play is a vital transitional stage which can provide the impetus for a child to sever the originally intimate fusion between meaning (word) and reality perception, meaning and object, and meaning and action (Nicolopoulou 1993). In play, children rely on this kind of mediation by concrete objects or representational actions to develop their imagination and symbolic thought and reproduce real situations. Through this imagining process in role-play, children make meaning of social relations and interpret everyday concepts.

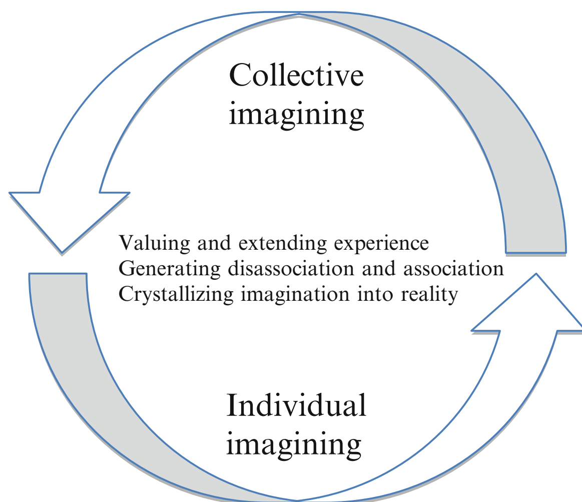


Fig. 7.1 Imagination and creativity (Fleer 2010, p. 143)

Vygotsky (1987b) points out that the development of speech is connected with children's development of imagination as a cultural function, where imagination is a kind of psychological process for the child that supports children's language development. Particularly, adults' engagement within their role-play helps them explore new concepts by using substitute objects and enhancing their play dialogue, thus improving their language in play.

However, how does children's imagination development occur in the joint play context? And, why is parents' involvement in children's play very important to children's heritage language development in the imagining process? This study addresses these issues to argue that parents' contribution to play and imagination makes a difference to children's language development in play.

The Dynamic Development of Children's Imagination in Play

Fleer (2010) has shown how imagination develops within play by drawing upon cultural-historical theory (see Fig. 7.1, Imagination and creativity model). Her work illustrates how early learning studies on play build upon the pedagogical model for developing theoretical knowledge in practice in play-based activities, which helps answer the main focus question in relation to pedagogy.

She argues that from a cultural-historical perspective, creativity and imagination are the result of a combination of collective and individual imagining. On the one hand, *collective imagining* shows that in imagined play, children explore the culturally and historically created collective knowledge that has been developed over time. On the other hand, children in play create imaginative situations to develop their knowledge and build upon these concepts under some form of adult support.

Individual imagining in children's play does not simply show what the child has happened to observe or experience but "the creative reworking of the impressions he [sic] has acquired. He [sic] combines them and uses them to construct a new reality, one that conforms to his own needs and desires" (Vygotsky 2004, pp. 11–12). Children use role-play to act out what they create with their imagination.

Fleer (2010) further argues that the nature of a cultural-historical perspective on imagination dictates that it must be considered as a dynamic interplay between individual and collective creativity.

In developing concept formation, it is important for teachers to actively consider the nature of the history of discipline knowledge as a collective imagining and to determine its relationship with children's individual imagining during play (Fleer 2010, p. 148).

Within the theoretical framework, imagination moves from the individual plane to form a dialectical connection between collective and individual imagining (Fleer 2010). Furthermore, Fleer thoroughly analyses the empirical research data to perceive imagination through a pedagogical representation, as seen below.

In terms of the above figure, it can be seen that Fleer (2010) develops a dialectical pedagogical model for supporting the development of imagination.

The development of imagination proceeds in a dialectical way, where the importance of a child's prior experience, the disassociation and reassociation process involved in the imaginative act and the crystallization process of imagination into a material form come into play during their development (Fleer 2010, p. 143).

In other words, a child's play situation is based on past experiences that have been documented and analysed, which enables them to both decide what to include or disregard in their imagined play and to connect separate actions into a whole distinct process or a new schema. In this chapter, a case example of play activity will be further discussed later in regards to Fleer's (2010) model.

Fleer's approach reflects Vygotsky's statements that "all higher mental functions are internalized by social relationships" (Vygotsky 1981, p. 146). The development of imagination as a higher mental function begins with the "interpsychological" (i.e. social) plane and then progresses to the "intrapsychological" (i.e. individual) plane via social interaction (Wertsch 2008). In addition, Vygotsky (1987b) points out that the development of speech is connected to children's imagination development as a cultural function in children's play. This connection is related to children's interactions with their surroundings, through which collective social activity informs the child's consciousness of basic psychological forms (Vygotsky 1987b). Smolucha (1989) reiterates Vygotsky's views on children's development of imagination in that "creative imagination develops from children's activity into a higher mental function that can be consciously regulated through inner speech" (1989, p. 2). Children's creative imagination as a higher mental function develops within their play activities through inner speech/verbal thinking, which assists connections between object and word meaning. Hence, children are able to use word meaning to regulate their thoughts verbally and making object substitutions in order to create imaginative situations in play. "Speech frees the child from the immediate impression of an object. It gives the child the power to represent and think about an object that he has

not seen" (Vygotsky 1987b, p. 246). Therefore, "both imagination and realistic thinking are social and verbal" (Gajdamaschko 2006, p. 37).

Furthermore, under the active support of adults, young children can master the competencies of language, cognition and social and emotional skills through engagement in play (Elkonin 2005a). Linking this to the current study, preschoolers' bilingual heritage language development is seen as a dialectically dynamic process in play. The collective imagining between parent and child supports children's individual imagination development in play (Li 2012a). Parents, as active participants in joint play activities, can apply strategies such as questioning and negotiating in order to encourage children's exploration of new concepts and word meaning. In the process of exploration, children are able to develop their abstract thinking, which can result in an improvement of their language and vocabulary. As a consequence, language is able to develop and be internalized, as the dynamic process of converging imagination and reality enhances children's higher mental functions.

Research Design

In order to answer the research question effectively, this qualitative cultural-historical case study was designed by building upon Hedegaard's (2008) dialectical-interactive approach. This research approach is used to study human activity and make common-sense interpretations of social reality (Bodrova 2008).

Sample

Three families with children aged between 4 and 5 years old participated in the overall study. All children were born in Melbourne and joined a weekend Chinese school programme. Their parents were from Taiwan or Mainland China and immigrated to Australia over 5 years ago. The data referred to this chapter relates to a 4-year-old girl, Lin, who attended English childcare from Monday to Friday (except for Thursday). She has a younger sister Meimei, who is 18 months old. Lin's parents generally spoke to them in Mandarin at home in everyday practice and used English occasionally, as they believed that the home environment was the main context in which their daughters could experience Chinese in Australia. Mandarin is considered as Lin's heritage language in the English-based Australian community.

Data Generation

Data for the study was generated over a period of 9 months from August 2009 to early April 2010 through photographs, video observations and video interviews. Video observations focused on the research families' typical everyday activities, including

Table 7.1 Interview-observation-interview data collection

Field work	Video interview At home 1 voice recorder 1 video camera	Video observation At home 2 cameras	Video observation At school 1 camera
Visit 1	Orientation Consent		Recruit participant Distribute research flyer
Visit 2	Using photos		Consent from other children's parents in the class
Visit 3		Morning activity	
Visit 4		Sunday afternoon activity	
Visit 5		After-school activity	
Visit 6		Dinner/after dinner activity	
Visit 7			Chinese classroom video observation
Visit 8			Chinese classroom video observation
Visit 9	Using video clips and photos		
Additional data	Parents also took photos of activities that they believed important to their children's language development Parents videotaped their bedtime stories, holiday play activities, dinner times, their Chinese festival activities, etc.		
Focus	Family practice Family perspectives Family feedback and comments Values and beliefs	Family activity Interaction Motives Conflicts Transitions	Children's behaviours Interaction Motives Conflicts Transitions

children's work, play, television viewing, bedtime stories, dinner and morning tea/afternoon tea. It includes over 70 h of video recordings in total. The video recorded the focus children at home playing and doing important everyday family activities at five different times, as well as observations at weekend Chinese school.

For each visit two cameras were organized. One focused on the researched child's interactions with others, and the other filmed the whole setting, capturing the family/school activities and the interactions between parents, teachers, children and siblings as much as possible. This approach was designed to capture children's interactions with others in family activities. Table 7.1 shows the whole process of interview-observation-interview data collection in the field.

As shown in the table, the videoed interviews taken by the two researchers for the larger study generated data for each research family, which was complemented by data provided by the parents, who took over 200 photos of their child's activities within the home. Also, additional data was generated by parents, who videotaped important family activities they believed were useful to their children's Mandarin development at home, totalling 40 video clips. All the interviews were conducted in Mandarin. This chapter is based on one video clip concerning Lin's play with her father at a park after dinner.

Data Analysis

The data analysis draws upon the work of Hedegaard (2008) and Fleer (2010). This study classifies categories such as children's motives, parents' demands, imagination in play and language use to structure the analysis of the research data. The family activities and practices are understood from different perspectives (the child, the family and the researcher). By using a dialectical-interactive approach (Hedegaard 2008), the data was interpreted step by step from *common-sense interpretation, situated practice interpretation and a thematic interpretation* to synthetic analysis in order to find out how relational aspects of interaction are intertwined and consequential for children's language development within the small data. This chapter is particularly interested in building upon the Vygotskian theory of imagination and play and Fleer's (2010) approach of building conceptual knowledge to explore the link between the development of imagination and language use within play, in relation to family pedagogy.

Findings: A Case Example of Play Practice at Home

The following example shows Lin's play with her father at the park after dinner. It was videotaped during the researcher's third observation period. Lin, her sister, her father and grandpa walked to the park near their house and played for a while, which was part of their everyday life in summer. Lin straightway ran to the climbing wall area when they arrived at the park. She initially put some tanbark on the bench and started her restaurant play. Her father joined the play by asking her questions. Only a part of their play is transcribed and interpreted below. Furthermore, the *common-sense interpretation* of this video clip has been discussed in detail (see Li 2012a). The *situated practice interpretation and thematic interpretation* have been developed in the following part. While they mainly engaged in Chinese language communication, bold-faced words indicate words spoken in English and red-lettered words indicate new Chinese words/concepts for Lin. Two questions need to be considered in the case example. How did Lin's father respond to Lin's imagined play? How did Lin engage in the collective imagining with her father in play?

Fig. 7.2 Lin's initiated play

Lin started to play under the slide area. She put some tanbark on the small bench. Her father squatted down by the bench to ask her ***"What are you doing?"*** *She said, "doing some* ***cooking****". Her father put his hands under his jaw, as if interested in her activity. Then Lin asked*:

Lin: ***What did you want?***
Father: ***What did you have?***
Lin: ***I have a lot of things.***
Father: ***Like…***
Lin: ***There is chocolate, ice cream and lily, and lollipop, and lots of yummy things like yummy chewy…like yummy yummy yummy chewy chewy ice creams.***
Father: ***Ice cream and chocolate are all sweet. And lollipop, I don't like this one.***
Lin: ***How about some fresh one?***
Father: ***What do you have?***
Lin: ***I have juice and fresh ones, and all different kinds of juice.***
Father: 我要喝果汁。*<Okay. I want some juice. >*
…
Lin: 你的果汁快要好,就放这个…插在里面。*<Your juice will be ready soon. I need to put this…inside. > [She pretended to put the straw into the cup.]*
Father: 果汁放的是吸管。*<That is a straw in the juice. >*
…

Lin initiated the restaurant play (Fig. 7.2). Her father responded to her performance through a series of questions. It can be seen that Lin was very comfortable with her English. Lin pretended tanbark was soup, "fresh ones", juice and bread. In other words, she used tanbark as a substitute object to interpret her understanding of real objects: soup, "fresh ones", juice and bread at the restaurant. Her father's questions generated their collective imagining situation and enabled her to continue

Fig. 7.3 "It is going to be a pretty shop"

exploring the restaurant play experience. Her father's engagement not only supported her to explore the play situation but also enhanced her Chinese vocabulary and language development.

It can be seen that she was still learning Chinese and needed more practice through communication. Moreover, this part of play shows Western cooking, including bread, juice and sandwich, which is part of their collective knowledge, reflecting that they live in a Western country. The content of the play was from Lin's everyday life. Her initiated play idea came from her observation of cooking at home and her restaurant experience.

In regard to her language development, Lin used English words to replace Chinese words she was not able to say, such as "straw". It can be seen that her English was better than her Chinese, which is consistent with her parents' comments on her language development. Her father did not ask her to copy his Chinese words but put these Chinese words into a context such as "That is a straw in the juice". Lin naturally imitated her father's words and tried to use it in the imagined play situation. This is the way she learnt Chinese words. Her father introduced her to new Chinese words contextually and intended to teach her Chinese through the play activity, which is further demonstrated in the next part of their play (Fig. 7.3).

[Lin found some tanbark to put it on the footholds of the climbing wall from both sides and tried to make the shop more beautiful.]

Father: 那我的三明治呢? 还有我的果汁呢? *<Where is my sandwich? Also, where is my juice? >*

…

Father: 那要多少钱呢? *<How much is it? >*

Lin: 嗯,嗯…你给我钱先。 *<You first give me money. >*

[This is the wrong grammatical use in Chinese. She translated it grammatically from English to Chinese. This is a syntactical structure problem.]

Father: 多少钱呢? *<How much? >*

[Lin picked some tanbark to show her father.]

Lin: 这个钱。*<This is money. >*

Father: 要多少钱? 我要跟你买三明治和果汁,要多少钱? *<How much is it? I will buy a sandwich and juice. >*

Lin: 要一块钱。*<One dollar.>*

Father: 噢,要一块钱啊。好,给你一块钱。*<One dollar. Here you are. >*

[Lin's father pretended to give her one dollar. Lin pretended to take it.]

Lin: 谢谢! *<Thank you. >*

Lin tried to make her shop beautiful. She pretended the climbing wall area was her shop, which shows her desires to act like a shop owner. Again, her father continued asking her questions in order to introduce new concepts in Chinese in relation to the restaurant context. Specifically, her father used situational explanations to explain the "how much" question to Lin in Chinese. Finally, Lin was able to answer her father's question in Chinese. Lin enhanced her Chinese vocabulary contextually. Also, Lin could expand upon her past experience through the collective imagining between herself and her father in the joint play. Under her father's support, Lin pretended the tanbark was money in addition to a sandwich, juice and bread. Their play became more complex and richer through their collective imagining, which is shown in the next section of their play.

> Their play still continued. Lin tried to cook some vegetables. She put some tanbarks on the bench and pretended to fry it. Then her father suggested her to put some oil and salt by doing the relevant actions. Lin also imitated her father's actions and pretended to add some oil and salt onto the vegetables.

In this segment of play, Lin still initiated their play by deciding what to cook. Also, Lin's father introduced other new Chinese cooking concepts in Chinese such as "oil" and "salt", which helped her to experience the Chinese cooking process and enhance her Chinese vocabulary. Their Chinese style of cooking reflected their Chinese cultural background, which is shown to be a part of their collective knowledge and imagination. Continually, their collective imagining became richer through their extended play dialogue and negotiation. This can be seen below when her father said, "Where is the meat?" and "This is the meat" (Fig. 7.4).

Father: 肉在哪里? *<Where is the meat? >*

Lin: 这里。*<It should be here. > (She looked for it.)*

Father: 肉在这里啊。*<Oh. This is the meat. >*

Her father picked up some tanbark from her cabinet.

Lin: 这是饭。*<It is rice. >*

Father: 哦,这是饭,拿错了,拿错了。*<Oh. It is rice. I chose wrongly. I chose wrongly. >*

(He put the rice back in the cabinet.)

Father: 那你的肉呢? *<Where is your meat? >*

Fig. 7.4 Negotiation in joint play

Lin: 饭也是在地上。饭在地上。都在地上。 *<The rice is on the ground. Everything is on the ground. >*

(Actually, the tanbark is on the ground everywhere.)

Father: 肉呢? 肉在哪边? *<Meat? Where is the meat? >*

Lin: 肉,肉。 *<Meat, meat. >*

(She found her meat and put it on the bench.)

Father: 炒肉,炒肉。 *<Cook the meat. Fry the meat.> [He pretended to fry the meat.]*

Father: 还是用烤的? *<Or barbecue? >*

Lin: 用烤的。*<Barbecue. >*

Father: 用烤的也可以。*<Barbecue should be okay. >*

…

Father: 那你还要煮什么? *<What else do we need to cook? >*

Lin: 饭。*<Rice. >*

Father: 饭。煮饭。*<Rice. Cook some rice>*

Father: 煮饭,那要先…洗一下米 *<When cooking rice, we need to wash the rice first>.*

[Lin put her rice on the bench.]

…

At this point in their play, her father used different strategies to encourage Lin to continue their cooking play, such as questioning and negotiating. In other words, the negotiation made their play experience become more complex. It shows that her father's involvement contributed to the play as he had much more past experience than Lin. Adult's engagement plays an important role in child's imagination development and, thus, child's language development. Here, we again see that under her father's support, Lin's role-play became richer and more complex as she used tanbark as meat and rice. This helped to develop her imagination and Chinese language

in relation to Chinese cooking ingredients and concepts, such as rice, meat and barbecue. In the following segment of their play, it continues to show their negotiation and how Lin understood the new Chinese words contextually and conceptually by achieving intersubjectivity.

In analysing the data, some important thoughts from a cultural-historical perspective come to the foreground right from the start. The theoretical framework has been discussed earlier, and associated concepts will be used to discuss the findings of the study.

Objects, Meaning and Action in Lin's Play

In this restaurant play with her father, Lin started to use tanbark as a substitute object instead of soup. Under her father's support, she explored her imagined situation. The tanbark was used as chocolate, ice cream, a lollipop, a sandwich, juice and later rice, vegetables, etc. Therefore, under her father's support, Lin separated the meanings of the different foods (soup, sandwich, juice, rice, etc.) from the real objects and transferred those meanings to substitute objects (tanbark/bench) in her imagined situation in play.

As Vygotsky (1987a) notes, preschoolers are not able to separate objects from the words that label the objects, and therefore, Lin borrowed substitute objects (tanbark/bench) as a pivot to sever her thoughts/meanings of the objects/actions from real objects/actions (soup, sandwich, juice, rice, etc.). The tanbark and the bench, as substitute objects, became mediating tools, which helped Lin to take part in a real buying and selling situation and imagine cooking in a restaurant (Li 2012b). This would support Lin to become conscious of the objects (soup, juice, rice, vegetables, straw, etc.) and even substitute objects (tanbark/bench) in this restaurant play. In other words, the play experience with her father enhanced her understanding of the meanings of the objects in a contextual and conceptual way, thus developing her Chinese vocabulary. Duncan and Tarulli (2003) highlighted Vygotsky's argument that "a child first acts with meanings as with objects and later realizes them consciously and begins to think, just as a child, before he [sic] has acquired grammatical and written speech, knows how to do things but does not know what he [sic] knows" (p. 275). Imitating the actions and words/voice of a restaurant owner in play, through collective imagining with her father in the play, Lin could learn how to recreate actions and move towards the behaviour of role models (restaurant owner), then internalize the intentional behaviour by using the Chinese language.

The Dialectical Developmental Process of Imagination in Lin's Play

Lin's role-play experience at the park shows her father's interactive support of Lin's play. Her father's support extended their play experience and encouraged her to continue playing and thinking. Their play shows the dynamic process of

imagination and reality. This is examined by Vygotsky (1987a), who states "The key transition point in the development of both thinking and imagination corresponds with the appearance of speech" (p. 349). Lin and her father's joint play shows that their extended play dialogue enhanced the imagined situation and broadened the play experience.

Extending the Play Dialogue Through Valuing and Broadening the Experience

Because of Lin's imagined play, her father was given the opportunity to respond to her actions consciously and collaboratively. In this case example, through her father's involvement, Lin was able to connect with the historical knowledge of cooking at restaurants. As Fleer (2010) states, through imagination young children's previous experiences and motives are visible to adults, who are then able to make a connection between context and concept in order to support children's development of imagination in play. In this case, Lin initially displayed her motive and desire for restaurant play by asking her father "What do you want?", which enabled her father to consciously respond to her actions with questions. This extended the play dialogue and broadened her experience within the imaginary play. For instance, when they started the imagined play, Lin's father asked what food she had. Moreover, Lin's father explained his need to have some fresh food. Again, when Lin asked for payment, her father introduced another new concept, which was the "how much" question in buying and selling situations. The shared understanding of the play situation enhanced their play dialogue. This also reflects that children learn social roles and rules through their play activities. The imaginary situation Lin and her father created in the play interaction represents how people conduct business in restaurants in Chinese culture. According to Vygotsky (1966), "Wherever there is an imaginary situation in play there are rules…rules stemming from the imaginary situation" (p. 10). In Lin's restaurant play with her father, the specific way to service the customer in the restaurant contains social rules, which their play enacted. That is, the rules behind the role-play offered an opportunity for her father to ask further questions to Lin, reflecting the selling and buying relations. Consequently, Lin could express her ideas and practise her Chinese.

Elkonin (2005b) claims "introduction to various aspects of real life may have greater or lesser significance in stimulating role play" (p. 42). In other words, the social environment around the child is the source and conditions for the development of children's play. Lin's father helped her to create a richer and more complex play experience by consciously introducing new concepts and words in Chinese such as "straw", "oil" and "salt" through a series of questions. When her father asked her "Where is the meat?", she replied in Chinese "Meat, meat". Lin was not simply copying the word but regulating her behaviour by searching for meat to cook (Li 2012a). Vygotsky's (1998) perception of imitation is not simply a mindless reproduction of actions but can be seen as all kinds of activity of a certain type that

are carried out by the child in cooperation with an adult or a more capable peer. Each time Lin's father mentioned new concepts such as "meat", "barbecue" and "cook some rice", Lin naturally imitated what her father said. What she imitated were not merely words; more important was the meaning behind the Chinese words. Overall, Lin's imitations enhanced her cooking experience, controlled her cooking actions, developed her abstract thinking and intuitively developed her Chinese vocabulary.

It is acknowledged that her father did not consciously teach her how to speak Chinese but contextually supported her to understand the Chinese conceptual words in the play. Again, when Lin could not understand "how much" question in Chinese, her father borrowed the buying and selling situation to support her understanding in a real situation. In this way Lin understood this new word and word meaning contextually. Within Lin and her father's collective imagination, Lin engaged in the process of constructing new knowledge of Chinese cooking by internalizing her father's words and actions in play (Li 2012a). This is congruent with Vygotsky's (1998) belief that "the child knows words only to the extent that they are given to him by the people around him" (p. 111).

The play experience helped Lin master her individual imagination and imitation (Li 2012a). Lin gave meaning to the tanbark as vegetables, oil and salt in Chinese cooking. Imitation in play provides the opportunity for children to recreate actions and move towards an adult model, enabling internalization. Specifically, appropriate language use in play is imitated to improve the quality of play, such as expressing shared meaning and play planning. This is related to Karpov's (2005) work, which stresses that adult intervention can also come in the form of explanations of social roles and relationships. As a result, Lin naturally understood the Chinese phrases and vocabulary (such as frying vegetables, straw and barbecue and how much questions) through her father's interaction, demonstrating how children acquire skills from more expert members of their community through adult-child pedagogical interactions (Vygotsky 1997).

Disassociation and Reassociation Within Conflicts

Using Fleer's (2010) model, Lin's play case example exhibits the dynamic psychological process of disassociation and reassociation of cultural concepts within play. Chinese cooking methods were introduced by Lin's father through questioning and responding and practised by Lin in her imitation, enabling her to reconnect the separate processes (the cooking steps) and components (the cooking ingredients). In this way, cultural concepts of general Chinese cooking knowledge and Chinese language contributed to new psychological functions (Lin's imagination), which contextually altered her behaviour (ability to cook) and enhanced her language use. The Chinese cooking steps and styles they imagined show the particular rules of Chinese cooking, which supports Vygotsky's (1966) argument that as the imaginary situation always contains rules in play, so does every play with rules have to contain the imaginary situation. Her father introduced the rules of Chinese cooking to extend

their imaginary situation, thus supporting her development of imagination. In this case's framework, the conflicts and negotiated acts between Lin and her father drive the progression of interactions and imagination. What does this mean when considering family pedagogy in relation to language development?

Intersubjectivity in play affirms that play partners continually exchange ideas and knowledge. When looking at the pedagogical approach to play, it is necessary to recognize that role-play requires intersubjectivity, and that children engage in mutually accepted play interactions (Göncü 1993). Imagination is considered fundamental to the dialectical interaction of an individual with their environment and the intersubjective understandings amongst play partners (selling and buying relations or different methods of cooking). Children achieve intersubjectivity in play by mostly negotiating their ideas with one another. In Lin's play, Lin and her father jointly shared their imaginings. When Lin asked her father to help her cook, her father countered, "But, I am your customer and am buying something from you". Lin then cuddled her father in order to persuade him to assist her, saying "Quickly. Come over to help me cook". Eventually, they began cooking together. Moreover, negotiations and discussions about what to cook and how to cook are illustrated in their play as well, based on their shared understanding of Chinese cooking, which shows their intersubjectivity (Mercer 1995). For example, when Lin's father asked her what she wanted to cook, Lin then asked her father whether he wanted to cook some vegetables.

The conversation between Lin and her father further illustrates that in their play, their shared understanding existed in the exchange of ideas and discussions on cooking, clearly demonstrating their intersubjectivity. This confirms Fleer's (2010) understanding that children and adults can "enact new practices together through play because they achieved conceptual and contextual intersubjectivtiy" (p. 15). Lin and her father's negotiated act, as a result of intersubjectivity, helped them to disassociate and reassociate their imaginary processing.

Furthermore, the intersubjectivity of Lin and her father led their interactions in terms of everything that was said and done before receiving a verbal or nonverbal response. In other words, their intersubjectivity resulted in their play communication. Lin's father intended to provide Lin opportunities to talk through questioning and negotiating so she could practise her language and expand her Chinese vocabulary. The guided support was a necessary pedagogical practice that extended Lin's imagination in order to support her Chinese language development. From Lin's perspective, she was able to develop their language by having the opportunity to use Chinese to reason, argue and explain, which can be categorized as subjective effective learning discourse (Mercer 1995).

Crystallizing Imagination into Reality

Imagination, as the basis of all creative activity, is an important component of absolutely all aspects of cultural life, enabling artistic, scientific and technical creation alike. In this sense, absolutely everything around us that was created by the hand of

man, the entire world of human culture, as distinct from the world of nature, all this is the product of human imagination and of creation based on this imagination (Vygotsky 2004, p. 10).

Here, Vygotsky (2004) argues that in the dialectic relationship between imagination and reality, imagination is directed by reality and "all the objects of common life appear…as crystallization of the imagination" (p. 7). In Lin's play case, the content of her imagination that was developed involved the cultural-historical knowledge of Chinese cooking. Lin's role in her imagined situation was a restaurant owner, which reflected her observations of cooking and her experience of restaurant environments from everyday life, as well as demonstrating her universal desire to "act like an adult" (Li 2012a). According to her parents' response in the first interview, she was very happy to observe or join in cooking at home and enjoyed restaurant experiences with the family, demonstrating that children's impressions and experiences in everyday life shape the base for their role-play (Ugaste 2005). In other words, their imagined restaurant play came from everyday reality.

With the help of her father, Lin was able to utilize her Chinese language (as a cultural tool) to engage her imagination. In turn, her imagined play experience guided her in making sense of social relations and rules at restaurants and cooking situations, internalizing appropriate practice and resolving language difficulties.

Lin's father applied strategies such as questioning and negotiating in order to encourage Lin's exploration of restaurant situations and develop her abstract thinking, which resulted in an improvement of Lin's language and vocabulary. Furthermore, as a consequence of Lin and her father's active participation in the play activity, the dynamic process of the convergence of imagination and reality enabled Lin's language development to be internalized, enhancing her higher mental functions in Lin's play case. This is represented in Fig. 7.5.

Lin's father used the imaginary play situation as a pedagogical tool to help Lin experience Chinese cooking and expand her vocabulary and language use within the learning discourse. Conversely, Lin initialized the joint play and attained intersubjectivity in terms of their imaginings. Consequently, she imitated her father's cooking and language use in play and built up her cooking knowledge in reality.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the role of imagination in play in bilingual heritage language development through a cultural-historical framework. It provides the foreground for approaching language development within imagined play situations and further confirms the connection established by Vygotsky between play and heritage language development. Furthermore, this study pays attention to preschoolers' bilingual heritage language development as a dialectically dynamic process in play, in order to provide parents with better pedagogical tools for thinking and supporting their children's development. Parents, as active participants in joint play activities, can apply strategies such as questioning and negotiating in order to encourage

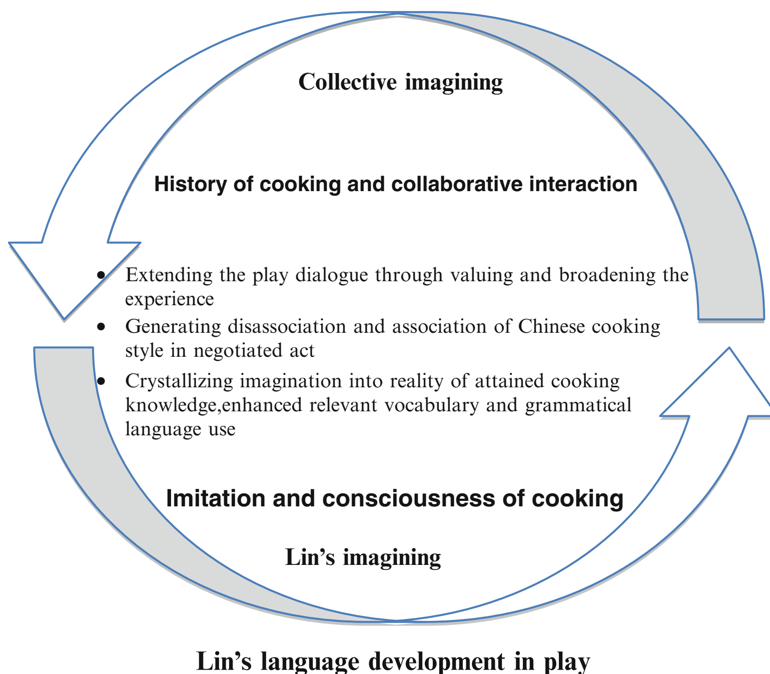


Fig. 7.5 Lin's language development through her imagination (Adapted from Fleer 2010)

children's exploration of new concepts and word meaning contextually. In the process of exploration, Lin was able to develop her abstract thinking, which resulted in an improvement of her language and vocabulary. As a consequence, Lin's Chinese language skills were able to develop and be internalized, as the dynamic process of converging imagination and reality enhanced her higher mental functions. In the case of Lin and her father's play situation in the park, the dynamic process of Lin's language development can be seen as the result of the development of her imagination through shared understandings in play. That is, the reason Lin could improve her language in use was because of the development of her imagination in shared play. However, the way in which Lin's imagination development occurred in play was due to Lin's imitation and her father's support (Li 2012a).

This chapter provides a new direction for researching young children's bilingual development. Unlike previous linguistic approaches to bilingual language development, it focuses on the role of imagination in play in bilingual heritage language development through a cultural-historical framework. Furthermore, the findings offer new insights into the communication between adults and children, contributing to understandings of children's development of imagination and heritage language in joint play practice.

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Chapter 8
Language Play: The Development of Linguistic Consciousness and Creative Speech in Early Childhood Education

Niklas Pramling and Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson

Introduction

Playing with language is an activity that children frequently engage in. This is evident if observing children doing jump-rope games and chants, making fun of adults, during play activities and conversations and many other situations. Many of the features of such language-play activities could be seen as poetic (and/or musical, on the latter, see Harwood 1998, on children's singing and clapping games). These include rhyming, alliteration, unconventional similes and metaphors, onomatopoeia, nonsense verse and the highly rhythmic nature of some of this speech. In a pioneering study of children's language play, Chukovsky (1925/1974) observed the common occurrence of these language activities in children. A perhaps equally well-known study of the language play of children is Iona and Peter Opie's book, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*. Originally published in 1959, Opie's study builds upon contributions of some 5,000 children attending school in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. In the study, a great variety of ways that children play with language are reported. These include nonsense verse, parodies, tongue twisters, macabre rhymes, and many others. One common form of language play is what Opie and Opie referred to as "punishable jokes" such as the following example given by a 13-year-old girl:

> There was an elephant called Nuts, and a man was going to take him out to show him to the people. When the man said to Nuts, "Sit Nuts", the elephant would sit. One day a man on

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> the other side of the fence started shouting, "Pea-nuts! Pea-nuts!" And Nuts did. (Opie and Opie 1959/2001, p. 30)

Another example given of a pun is this:

> There was a man in a house and he could not get out. The only furniture was a table. He rubbed his hands until they were sore. Then he sawed the table in half. Two halves make a whole. He shouted through the hole until he was hoarse, jumped on the horse and rode away. (ibid., p. 29)

This clever wordplay builds upon the principle of homophonies, that is, that there is more than one word (with distinct meaning) that is pronounced the same (or in a similar) way. The transcription covers this fact (i.e. the similarity in pronunciation between "sore" and "saw", "whole" and "hole" and "hoarse" and "horse"), but it becomes evident when read aloud. Interesting and impressive as these examples are, the ones we will refer to below are quite different. The children whose poems and language play are discussed in our chapter are also, and in most cases considerably, younger than the ones in the examples above.

While the occurrence of language play in older, school-age children has been of interest to researchers, this interest has revolved around issues such as the "carnivalesque" nature of such speech (Thomas 2004), that is, how it plays with and undermines authority and convention, practised by children on their breaks during the school day and, perhaps just, out of earshot from their teachers. Consequently, the nature of this speech has made it difficult to employ in classrooms as a resource in supporting the child's further language development. But, as we have already anticipated, the language play of the younger children that we will discuss is to a large extent of a different kind and can in fact be introduced into the activities of early childhood education.

Under "normal" communicative circumstances, people who communicate do not attend to the sounds and units of words, as Cazden (1974) points out. Rather, when communicating "[o]ur focal attention is on the meaning, the intention, of what we or someone else is trying to say. The language forms are themselves transparent; we hear through them to the meaning intended" (p. 12) and that "this process usually do function successfully, and out-of-awareness, for adult and child alike" (ibid.).

> Occasionally in the course of communication, some aspect of language itself does come to our focal attention. As long as communication is working smoothly, this is not apt to happen. But when something interferes with the normally smooth process, our attention shifts, and the language itself loses its transparency and becomes for some moment opaque; we attend directly to it, more conscious of ourselves or others. As a speaker, this often happens when we pause to search for a word. (p. 12f.)

The appropriated ability of going from spontaneous use to conscious use of the communicative tool of speech is referred to as developing metalinguistic awareness. This ability, that is, "to make language forms opaque and attend to them in and for themselves" (p. 13), is particularly important for appropriating the skills of reading and writing (Vygotsky 1987). Making children aware of language as a medium (Olson 1994) is thus one key task of educational institutions for children. In the present chapter, we will illustrate and discuss how metalinguistic awareness

can be supported in early childhood education, building on children's spontaneous language play as well as more structured poetry-making activities. It may be noted that Vygotsky himself alludes to poetic language as a means of arousing consciousness (Vygotsky 1930/2004, 1987).

In this chapter, we will base our discussion on the genre of poetry and (other) forms of language play. These are some of the forms children's language creativity can take and that their language development can include skills in. Being linguistically and communicatively skilled implies being skilled at several different genres and knowing when one or the other is relevant and interesting to use. One important cultural tool that has attracted much interest in psychological theory and empirical research is narrative genre (Bruner 1986, 1990, 2006; Ochs and Capps 2001; Pramling and Ødegaard 2011) in human sense making and communication. A narrative is a format that builds upon episodes that are weaved together into a coherent and evolving story (over time). The form of language play we in this text refer to as poetic in a sense builds upon principles contrary to narrative genre, through being characterized by concentration, shortening and images rather than stories (evolving events). Both forms of language use promote important communicative skills. Appropriating the tool of tools, that is, speech, implies developing many varied forms of language use. Two such forms are narrative and poetic. The third is interpreting (and producing) symbolic signs other than the letters of the alphabet (e.g. icons and various other cultural signs) (Magnusson and Pramling 2011), and the fourth important form is what Bruner (2006) refers to as paradigmatic mode of discourse, typically illustrated by scientific knowledge. The distinction between narrative and paradigmatic modes of discourse is in part parallel to Vygotsky's (1987) distinction between everyday and scientific concepts (cf. Luria 1976; Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson 2012).

The chapter is structured in the following way. First, we present some key notions of a cultural-historical (aka sociocultural) perspective on human learning. Here we focus on the appropriation of cultural (speech) tools. Second, we present briefly a research and development study on children's learning in the arts, from which the empirical data for this discussion come. Third, we present empirical examples, in the form of excerpts from conversations, analyse and discuss these in terms of the idea that children's development of creative ways of using language and linguistic awareness can be fostered on children's language play and poetry making. Fourth, and finally, we discuss some of the implications of our reasoning for early childhood education and the promotion of children's learning in this institutional milieu.

A Cultural-Historical Perspective on the Appropriation of Speech Tools

In this section we will present our understanding of the cultural-historical (aka sociocultural) perspective and concepts of Vygotsky and subsequent researchers that we will use in our reasoning. A basic premise of this perspective is that development

proceeds on two levels: first on the social plane and later on the individual plane. This is cogently phrased by Vygotsky in the following manner: "every function in the cultural development of the child appears on the stage twice, in two forms – at first as social, then as psychological; at first as a form of cooperation between people, as a group, an intermental category, then as a means of individual behaviour, as an intramental category. This is the general law for the construction of all higher mental functions" (Vygotsky 1998, p. 169). He further argues that this "law of transition from social to individual forms of behavior, which might also be called the law of sociogenesis of higher forms of behavior: speech, being initially the means of communication, the means of association, the means of organization of group behavior, later becomes the basic means of thinking and of all higher mental functions, the basic means of personality formation" (Vygotsky 1998, p. 169). In other places, Vygotsky writes about this process in terms of "internalization" (Vygotsky 1978). Later theorists in this tradition, such as Barbara Rogoff, have supplanted this concept with the concept of "appropriation" (Rogoff 1995; Wertsch 1998; Säljö 2000). The rationale behind this conceptual shift is to avoid the dichotomous implications of the term "internalization" as if something from the outside is entering into the child's mind, like a "liquid" from one container to another. Instead, "appropriation" is an attempt at conceptualizing learning as the individual gradually taking over a cultural tool or practice. That is, through participating in social practices, the individual becomes increasingly able to take active part in these practices. More specifically, what the learner appropriates through participation are cultural tools (Vygotsky 1997, 1998). The notion of cultural tools is central to a cultural-historical tradition, and it was one of the main contributions to psychological theory that Vygotsky introduced this notion to understand human agency, including learning (Daniels 2005; Kozulin 1998). Cultural tools refer to physical ones (sometimes labelled "artefacts") as well as intellectual or discursive ones (e.g. speech distinctions and categories). However, in the nature of these tools, the distinction is not always possible to make. An example of a tool that transcends physical as well as intellectual dimensions is written language (Säljö 2000), being both physical signs on paper and tools to think with. To appropriate a cultural tool often offers resistance, resulting in a prolonged familiarization process (Wertsch 1998). Such a gradual process of taking over tools (Wertsch 1998), that is, the appropriation of an important cultural tool such as speech, is a life-long process (Säljö 2005). We never fully master such (or perhaps any) cultural tool, but we can become increasingly able to use it in relevant and creative ways in various practices.

If taking a cultural-historical perspective on children's development, the mechanism though which people learn is communication, particularly speech (Säljö 2000). The nature of the communicative experiences the child is allowed to make and participate in will thus be considered decisive for the knowledge he or she develops. As a consequence of the importance ascribed to communication, other participants in the practices the child takes part in will be important to consider. In fact, if taking this perspective, the child's development cannot be understood in isolation (Vygotsky 1978). According to this perspective, the child does not so much discover the world through exploration as through conversations with others and becomes an informed participant in knowledge that fundamentally exists

before him or her and is deemed important by the community or society. Still, in the nature of the process of appropriation, taking over a cultural tool is never simply a copy of something pre-existing. Appropriation is an active meaning-making process contingent on the child's earlier experiences and the nature of the communicative participation of others.

While children come in contact with many important cultural tools through being socialized in a community or society, such communities also tend to institutionalize, in order to preserve in coming generations, many tools considered important. Institutions such as preschool and school are central to the preservation and dissemination of such tools as speech, writing, mathematics and science. In these institutions, learning is organized differently to what the child is introduced to and participates in outside such institutions (cf. Elkonin 2005; Fleer and Hedegaard 2010; Luria 1976). Vygotsky (1987) writes about this difference in terms of "everyday" and "scientific concepts", respectively. The former is appropriated though participating in everyday activities, while the latter is typically taught through instruction in an institutional setting such as school. It should here be noted that "scientific concepts" are not exclusive to the concepts of science (such as "atom" and "evolution") but refer to institutional forms of knowing regardless of field of knowledge. Another way of making this distinction is to say that the child appropriates everyday concepts through his or her primary socialization, while scientific concepts are typically appropriated though participation in an institution such as school. This distinction implies the central importance of preschool as an institution that is located "between" these two domains of knowing with a tradition that adheres much importance to the child's experiences while also aiming to promote new forms of knowledge and insight in the child. Hence, studying teacher-child (and child-child) interaction and communication in preschool is potentially of great interest to the understanding of children's development in so-called information societies where what Vygotsky (1987) refers to as "scientific concepts" are much valued. The latter kind of knowledge is, according to Vygotsky (1987), characterized by three features; they are (1) mediated by cultural tools, (2) voluntary and (3) therefore possible to develop through educational means. In the present text, we will discuss and illustrate this perspective in regard to children's language play and poetry making, as we have already mentioned.

A Study on Poetry Making in Early Childhood Education

In a 3-year trans-disciplinary research project, we as educational researchers took part in together with colleagues from the humanities (literature history) and the arts (music), art activities in early childhood were investigated (for a brief overview of the project, see Pramling Samuelsson et al. 2009). We focused on the art forms of music, dance and poetry. Nine work teams and their children were followed over a period of approximately 2 years when engaged in art activities. The teachers took part in in-service training at the university where they attended lectures and seminars with specialists in the arts (e.g. a composer and a dance teacher). The activities in

preschools and the first years of primary school (the age of the participating children was approximately 2–8 years) were documented by researchers with video cameras. These films were analysed by the research group. On some occasions, the researchers and the teachers watched parts of films from the latter's practice and discussed what each saw and what could be developed. The project generated a substantial amount of publications, particularly on music (e.g. Pramling 2009a; Pramling and Wallerstedt 2009; Wallerstedt 2011) and some on dance (e.g. Pramling and Wallerstedt 2011). At the end of the project, we introduced the teachers to poetry. The teachers were sceptical that this could be worked with in early childhood education. However, having tried it out in practice, they were pleasantly surprised. In fact, when the project ended, poetry was at the forefront of the teachers' concern. In at least one case, poetry making spread from the preschool to the adjacent school. As the teachers argued, this was the first time that influence had not gone the other way, from school to preschool (Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson 2010). While we have reported this poetry making, looking at the development of children's rhyming as an important feature of much poetry (Pramling and Asplund Carlsson 2008), the process of collaborative poetry making among a group of children and their teacher (Pramling 2010) and the nature of the children's poems (Pramling 2009b), in this chapter we will take a meta-view on this work, using cultural-historical theory to outline a notion of language play and poetry as means of developing linguistic awareness important to children's development of skills emphasized in schooling, such as literacy.

Language Play, Poetry Making and the Appropriation of Certain Speech Tools

In this section we will give some examples from our empirical data, to illustrate and analyse children's language play and poetry making. We will also discuss what experiences of this kind imply for children's linguistic development, particularly their linguistic awareness, and how early years teachers can support such development, building on children's language play and poetry making.

Attending to the Peculiar Turn of Phrase

The first example comes from a mundane activity in a preschool. Like in most preschools, they have circle time. A common practice during circle time is singing songs about various animals or the children that are present in the circle. The following plays out:

> [Together they sing about an elephant that makes different sounds. A child starts to talk about the elephant 'farting in there'. The children laugh, and some children start to wave their hands as if wanting to get the 'smell' away from the nose.]
>
> Child: It smells skunk.
>
> Teacher: How peculiar, an elephant smelling skunk! (Pramling and Pramling Samuelsson 2008, p. 145)

In this brief excerpt, the children and their teacher sing about animals and make accompanying sounds, that is, they enact different animals through characteristic sounds. This in itself constitutes a playful sound-making activity, where something about an animal's appearance (e.g. how they look) is transformed into another modality (in this case a sound). Making such transductions (to use Kress and Van Leeuwen's 2001, term) is a common practice of sense making and communication, perhaps particularly evident in children (Kress 1997). Transducing between modalities has been argued to constitute a fundamental form of creativity and as inherent to much aesthetics activities (Wallerstedt and Pramling 2012). The children in the above brief excerpt make use of a variety of semiotic means for carrying out the mutual activity; they sing, make onomatopoetic (mimicking) sounds and gesture and talk about odour. If looking more specifically at the second form of language play (considering the onomatopoetic sound making of various animals the first), that is, that a child remarks that "it smells skunk" and the teacher follows up by commenting, "how peculiar, an elephant smelling skunk!", this playful exchange points to the important difference between *how* we can speak about something (as if) and *what* we refer to in speech. In a subtle way, this implies the metaphorical nature of much of our speech, that there is a dynamic space between reference and referent. The language socialization implied in participating in this kind of language-play activities should not be underestimated in accounts of the child's appropriation of speech tools, the child's language development.

Mediating Meaning Through the Sounds of Different Readings

A different kind of example is the following, also from our own empirical data, but in this case with 6-year-old children in the preschool class (which is an intermediate form of schooling between preschool and school, for the 6-year-olds; for a presentation of this institutional form, see Pramling Samuelsson 2006). In the activity that stretched over three lessons, from which we will only look at one brief exchange, the teacher and the children worked on constructing a poem together. The starting point of this poetry-making activity was for the children to close their eyes and think about a teddy. Having done so for a moment, the children in turn told the teacher about their image of the teddy, how it feels, how it looks, what it makes them feel and so on. The teacher writes on the whiteboard what the children say, at first as a kind of list. Thereafter they start looking at and listening to what she has written, talk about their impressions and start relating and remaking these suggestions into a mutually constructed poem. During the lessons many interesting issues come up for negotiation. These include how to structure the poem (as a poem) with various parts, whether it should have one or several themes and the relationship between sound and sense (for a full account of this activity, see Pramling 2010). For this present discussion we will only briefly illustrate one interesting notion that the teacher introduces to the children during this activity:

1007 Teacher: Now when we've got this far, then we can think that we can read Amy. Amy and Jonte are dancing.

1008 Girl: Yes, but I know something that…

1009 Teacher: Do you hear the difference? Amy and Jonte are dancing. Amy and Jonte. Are dancing.

[---]

1013 Teacher: Do you hear the difference between those two?

1014 Children: Mmm.

1015 Teacher: Amy and Jonte are dancing. Amy and Jonte. Are dancing.

1016 Girl: Danced.

1017 Teacher: What's the difference? Jonas?

1018 Jonas: It sounds slower and much better.

1019 Teacher: Yes, it sounds slower because I'm reading it more slowly, but what is the difference in how they dance?

[---]

1031 Teacher: This is what I'm thinking then. Amy and Jonte. First we can think: Amy and Jonte are dancing. This is how they usually dance. Or we think, Amy and Jonte, they are dancing. Though they don't usually dance.

1032 Girl: What, wait.

1033 Teacher: Do you understand that we can say it in different ways?

1034 Children: Yes, of course.

1035 Teacher: Because if we say Amy and Jonte are dancing, it sounds as if they usually always dance.

1036 Boy: Right.

1037 Teacher: But if we say: Amy and Jonte. Are dancing. So maybe we can imagine that they're a bit in love.

1038 Girl No, they aren't.

1039 Boy: But you can think that.

1040 Teacher: You can think that. (Pramling 2010, p. 170)

This exchange that connects to several issues that the teacher and children have talked about during the activity thematizes not only how line breaking as an important feature of poetry makes the poem look differently on paper (or, in this case, on the whiteboard) but how it also affects the sense of the poem. As transcribed above, points (.) are used to signal a pause in talking (reading). For someone living in a literate society, such pauses are perceived in terms of the conventions of writing. Thus, semiotically mediated (Olson 1994; Wertsch 2007) by this literate practice, we perceive the sense conveyed by the sound in this way (even when reading silently). This subtle difference in how layout affects the sense conveyed is one of many important issues that the teacher introduces the children to and draws their attention to. Through the pause in reading, something surprising is implied (conveyed by the text). There are also instances in the data that the children start noticing the recurrence of certain letters on the whiteboard, that is, they start talking about and connecting speech and writing, a basic tenet of becoming literate (Wells 1986).

From Language Play to Consciousness

An interesting example of spontaneous language play among young children (3-years old) in preschool was documented by one of the teachers that participated in our study. She noticed and wrote down the children's speech (some of it) during their play. Two children were playing together with a bicycle tyre. They rolled the tyre, were "enrolled" by it and so forth. While playing with the tyre, they start singing. The following played out:

Jag har en rund ring	I have a round ring
Jag har en rund ring	I have a round ring
Jag har en	I have one
Jag har en	I have one
Jag vill bara ha en	I only want one (Pramling 2009b, p. 381)

After the child has sung the above, her friend steps into the tyre and starts singing – "poetry is", as Vygotsky (1987, p. 270) suggests, "inseparable from music" – the following:

Ta min hand	Take my hand
Ta min hand	Take my hand
Räck mig den	Give it to me
Sväng min vän	Turn my friend
Sväng min vän	Turn my friend
Sväng sväng sväng	Turn turn turn
Hem till mig	Home to me (ibid., p. 382)

A week after this incidence, another 3-year-old girl in the group says that she "wants to do poem with the tyres". Together with three of her friends and the teacher, they talk about the tyres while exploring them (e.g. rolling them). The following is written down by the teacher:

Hjulet runt	The wheel round
En nolla en nolla	A nought a nought
Snurrar hjulet	Spins the wheel
Rullar rullar	Rolls rolls
Hjulet ramlar	The wheel falls down
Jag kör bil	I drive car
Sitter i hjulet	Sit in the wheel (ibid.)

There are many noteworthy things with these two episodes. First, it illustrates the fact that children spontaneously play with language in creative ways (as already

Chukovsky 1925/1974, reported many instances of). It is not alien to children to do so. However, even if many children do so spontaneously, some children may not do so and others may become more inclined to do so if this is done and talked about in the everyday activities of the preschool. Second, the teacher has an important role in cultivating this spontaneous play form. Importantly in these cases, the teacher wrote down what the children said when playing with language in their activities. She later, during circle time, talked to the children about this and read back to them what she had heard. In this way, the children can become conscious about what they may simply do without much reflection. Hence, thematizing in talk children's spontaneous features of language play is important to make them aware of what and how they do when they play with language and how it could be further used in creative ways. In other words, doing so (e.g. through writing down what the children say during their language play and later speaking with them about this) adheres to the importance of turning the child's attention to the cultural tool as such (Olson 1994).

Conclusions

In this chapter we have illustrated, analysed and discussed some examples of children's language-play and poetry-making activities in early childhood education settings. Some of the "poetic" tools and practices spontaneously used by children, as well as intentionally introduced by a teacher, could be attended to in conversations between teachers and children, perhaps at a later occasion rather than in the stream of the activity. In this way, many important speech tools (scientific concepts) could be introduced to the children in a relationship that makes sense in terms of their own experiences and play. Knowing the importance of developing such metalinguistic awareness to the child's later literacy development (Wells 1986; Olson 1994), doing so appears critical to early childhood institutions in our text-based society.

According to the theoretical perspective of cultural-historical theory, use tends to come before meaning (Cazden 1974, 2001; Nelson 1996). A nice illustration of this from another important communication skill is found in Magnusson and Pramling's (2011) study of children's spontaneous sign making and the development of their conceptions of conventional signs. It was seen how children could make drawings, communicating, for example, that it was forbidden to do so and so. This was typically illustrated by the children crossing over an object (e.g. an ice cream). However, despite being prompted and supported in conversation to clarify what the symbol of the cross (X, i.e. not the letter "x" or the religion's cross) meant, the children initially were not able to communicate such an insight. In fact, coming to the understanding that the sign of the cross has a conventional meaning as such (rather than simply giving more examples of what is not allowed) proved to come later and following various scaffolding strategies by the adult, until it appeared as an aha moment by the child (ibid.). This, perhaps counterintuitive reasoning in fact, illustrates an important Vygotskian (1987, 1998) distinction between what he refers to as "pseudo concepts" and "concepts (proper)". It is in

fact quite easy to see that we, even as adults, often can give many examples of something without necessarily being able to formulate the abstract principle as such (cf. Pramling 1983; Werner 1973). Still, making children (learners) aware of these things, that is, to support them appropriating (Wertsch 1998) cultural tools (including what Vygotsky calls "scientific concepts", i.e. institutional categories, not limited to natural science domains), is an important task of institutional learning settings such as preschool and school. If looking more specifically at the practices that could be thematized in conversation between the teacher and child – and which was done so in this case – in following up the above instances of language play, we can see important tools that could be called poetic. These include alliteration, that is, that several words in succession begin with the same or similar sound (*r*ound *r*ing, *s*väng *s*väng *s*väng [English: turn turn turn]). These repeated sounds could easily be imaged as mimicking the rolling and spinning sounds of the tyre against the floor. "Read aloud", which in fact is very important with poetry, Stibbs (1981) suggests that "the poem enacts its meanings: performance becomes 'comprehension'" (p. 44). The repeated "r" and "s" sounds exemplify how sometimes "sound enacting sense" (p. 40; cf. Hughes 1967/2008). Finally, by reconnecting to and sharing children's spontaneous language play with the wider group of children, variation in experiences is made an asset in furthering the skills and understanding of the children. According to Vygotskian theory (1997), becoming conscious of cultural tools and how these can be used are important to the child's development in placing these tools under voluntary control, as a means of communicating with others as well as for communicating with oneself (i.e. thinking) and regulating one's own thought processes (cf. Rommetveit 1985). The point is not for the children to necessarily learn that what they do are called "metaphor", "alliteration", etc., if merely resulting in what Vygotsky (1987) calls verbalism (i.e. knowing what something is called without knowing what it means). Rather, it is important that they develop an understanding of the principles of these "scientific concepts", placing them under their voluntary control as functional (and fun) communicative tools for many occasions, for making sense of and playing with reality, that is, that they are supported in appropriating language as a dynamic and creative set of tools rather than merely a set of labels for objects. In addition to such tools being useful for making sense and playing, developing linguistic awareness is an important precursor to grasping the complex relationship between speech and writing.

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Chapter 9
Play to Learn, Learn to Play: Boundary Crossing Within Zones of Proximal Development

Lars Hennig Rossen

During recent years a handful of educational–pedagogical research programmes within the traditions of cultural–historical activity theory (CHAT) and cultural psychology have explored alternative paths to teaching, knowledge transfer and peer-to-peer learning by creating and exploring socially constituted contexts for learning which emphasizes cultural plurality, critical reflection and expansive, non-linear forms of learning (Cole 1996, 2007; Lindqvist 1995, 2001; Rossen 2005, 2006). Learning, in other words, that takes place within carefully constructed *zones of proximal development* instantiated in select institutions, offering the attendees a space for crucial knowledge acquisition and personal growth. Examples of these interventions are Michael Cole's 5th Dimension Project (Cole 1996; Cole and The Distributed Literacy Consortium 2006), the studies of Play Pedagogy (Lindqvist 1995, 1996), narrative learning (Hakkarainen 1999, 2004; Hakkarainen and Bredikyte 2004) and Hedegaard's cultural–historical classroom studies (2002). These combined research sites and spaces for learning have been providing the immersed researchers primarily with qualitative data which oftentimes point to the evaluated organizations as excelling in academic accomplishment as well as bettering the subjective experiences of the learning practice among the participating children (Brown and Campione 1994, 1996; Cole 1996, 2007; Hakkarainen 1999, 2004; Hedegaard 2002, 2005; Palinscar and Brown 1984). Within the cultural–historical tradition, scholars have worked with both children and adults by actively creating and participating in the functional systems they study, ultimately aiming towards inducing actual change. When constituting the system that is analyzed, the researchers place themselves in a privileged relationship to the object of analysis, making it possible to adopt an *ecologically situated view within the actual developing contexts* and accomplishing an institutional perspective that integrates traditions and practice

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in the institutions where children live their everyday life (Cole 1996; Hedegaard 2002; Rossen 2005, 2006). What separates the Play World project from other related interventions, however, is an initially non-complete and open-ended structure that allows for the participants to engage in designing the content of the intervention with guidance from and in collaboration with the researchers.

The intervention took place in a primary school situated in the *Camp Pendleton Military Base* north of San Diego and had a primary focus on integrating academically challenged pupils into the classroom while at the same time promoting basic literacies based on a narrative pedagogy which, like the traditional cultural–historical interventions, merges play and education to a meaningful whole. The Play World project was thus aimed at supporting 5- to 7-year-olds in their social and academic development mainly through engaging them in a radical reconstruction of their learning space, their existing social hierarchies as well as their personal narratives.

Culture, Ethnicity and Demography; School Numbers; and More

At this point an object-historical delineation of the activity system in question will be in place in order to formulate a basic understanding of the socio-economic conditions in the community in which the experiment took place. Select demographic data from the state of California as well as from the school population will serve the purpose. In 2005, the poverty threshold was set to an income of US$19.157 per annum for a family of two adults and two children under the age of 18 and US$15.219 for a single parent with two children under the age of 18.

The experimental class and the control class came from the same elementary public school in Southern California. The school is located on a large military base, and only 20 % of the student population comes from non-military families.

The majority of military parents are low-ranking marines, and 50 % of the students qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch – a rather high number when compared to the general poverty levels in the state, 20.4 % for people with Hispanic background vs. 8.7 % for people of European descent, comparable to the overall poverty numbers for the United States, 20.8 % of the Hispanic vs. 7.2 % of the European American population.

Although the military families whose children qualify for free lunch do *not per definition* live off incomes which are below the poverty line, it is a fact that the bottom feeder of the military personnel is characterized by low levels of education and a majority of the diploid soldiers are youth from families which are “financially strapped, with nearly half coming from lower-middle-class to poor households, according to new Pentagon data based on Zip codes and census estimates of mean household income” (npp.org). In effect, a family with two or more children living on a single military low-rank service income *does* live strikingly close to this economic baseline.

The fact that the school is situated within a military encampment has other implications for the intervention: The mobility rate of the pupils at the school is exceedingly high (46 % for the 2004–2005 school year) as the marines are often transferred to other military bases.

The ethnic make-up of the school is rather diverse with 42 % European American, 20 % African American, 31 % Latino, 2 % American or Alaska Native, 2 % Filipino, 1 % Pacific Islander and 1 % Asian students.

This constellation differs somewhat from that of the general population of the state of California, where the ethnic make-up is 44 % European American, 6 % African American, 37 % Latino, 0.3 % American or Alaska Native, 0.3 % Filipino, 0.5 % Pacific Islander and 12 % Asian.

The participants in the experimental group included the entire class, 20 children, 13 girls and 7 boys: 12 kindergarteners and 8 first graders (Mage = 5.7, age range 5.3–7.2 at the time of pretest). The ethnic make-up of this classroom was not representative of the overall make-up of the school, as there were no African American children and as the majority of the children were Latino: 12 Latino (60 %), 5 European American (25 %), 2 mixed ethnicity (10 %) and 1 Pacific Islander (5 %). The teacher, a 30-year-old male, had been teaching for 7 consecutive years.

The participants in the control group also included an entire class, 18 children, 9 girls and 9 boys: 8 kindergarteners and 10 first graders (Mage = 5.9, age range 5.1–7.3 at the time of pretest). The ethnic make-up of the classroom was more representative of the overall make-up of the school than the experimental group. 10 European American, 5 African American and 3 Latino children. The teacher, a 43-year-old female, had been teaching for over 10 years. Because of high mobility in the school, posttest measures for 3 of the 20 children in the experimental group (15 %) and 6 of the 18 children in the control group (33 %) were not obtained. Thus, these children were dropped from the analyses, resulting in 17 children for the experimental class and 12 children for the control class. The mean ages of the remaining children were comparable: $M = 5.5$ (age range 5.3–7.2 at the time of pretest) for the experimental group and $M = 5.6$ (age range 5.1–7.1) for the control group.

Concerning Research Design

As the CHAT approach represents a turn away from the traditional forms of experimental psychology, the researcher is faced with a problem; analysing intellectual tasks outside of a carefully constructed and constrained confine of a laboratory or formal psychometric test setting is nontrivial. There exists no set of rules or accepted procedures in the social sciences for evaluating the similarity of cognitive tasks unless the analyst has constructed the task in the first place, in which case the task as constructed provides the basis for claims about task similarity. It follows, then, that there is no accepted method of specifying whether an individual's behaviour is, except for topography, the same or different when it occurs in different contexts (Scribner and Cole 1981). This has far reaching consequences for work in the field

of social, cultural as well as cognitive psychology when attempting to characterize and understand the roots of human cognitive functioning. Experiments, the contexts constructed to make behaviour analysable, must thus be viewed as contexts that *discourage* the expression of active, adaptive behaviour (Vygotsky 1978), necessitating a more situated form of analysis.

When addressing the problem of integrating societal and institutional change with child development, one understands that cultural practice and meaning systems are not only acquired by the child, the child is also cocreator or co-producer of practice and systems of meaning (Hedegaard 2002: 19). The Play World project has thus served as an exemplary research environment; it seeks to address the interactional foundation of cognitive development in real-life settings, as well as it constructs and examines the learning context itself by applying a pragmatic, interventionist perspective to the social collective as well as the micro-genesis of the participants (Baumer et al. 2005; Cole and The Distributed Literacy Consortium 2006; Rossen 2006).

Research Design: Ethnographic Data Sampling

The study was designed as a pre- and post-quasi-experimental intervention in combination with weekly ethnographic observations – a method which was thought to circumvent the often forced construction of research questions around immediate demands for "hard data" while at the same time allowing for softer, longitudinal analysis of the cognitive changes and differentiated forms of participation which unfolded in the classroom as well as providing an opportunity for deep understanding of what brought (or failed to bring) about the quantitatively measurable changes.

Ethnographic observations were recorded on the basis of the principles of distributed cognition (Hutchins 1995) which sees cognition as the process of information that occurs from interaction with symbols in the world. The method prescribes the sampling cognitive ethnographies and considers and labels all phenomena responsible for this processing as ecological elements of a cognitive ecosystem, in the case the Play World. The ecosystem is the environment in which ecological elements assemble and interact in respect to a specific cognitive process. Cognition is then shaped by the transduction of information across extended and embodied modalities, the representations formed as a result of their interactions and the attentive distribution of those representations towards a cognitive goal. The overarching concept of distributed cognition enhances the understanding of interactions between humans, artefacts and environments, in order to document the implementation of each intervention. This allows the researchers to conduct a microanalysis of the cognitive process. In the case of the control intervention, only enough ethnographic data was collected to make sure that it was being implemented as designed. Three types of ethnographic data were collected.

First, detailed field notes from each of the four participating researchers and from the external observer were obtained. An external observer documented both

the experimental intervention and the control intervention; a graduate student's task was to provide an outsider's perspective on the activity in the classrooms through regular field notes.

Second, separate audio recordings and video/audio footage were obtained of all classroom activities and the children's artwork. All activities, including rehearsals and research team meetings, as well as sessions in both classrooms, were video- and audio-taped. Often one of the researchers videotaped using one camera and a second camera remained on a tripod, but frequently more than one video camera was passed between all of the researchers. At times the children also videotaped the proceedings.

Third, interviews with the children were conducted, both under systematized conditions where all children were briefly interviewed over a period of a week and unsystematically when children addressed an adult and proclaimed they had something to share. This included theories regarding the progression of the narrative, retelling dreams that took place in the Play World, etc. The following field note stems from a day of interviews, shedding light on the process:

> The interviews began with the question, *"What was your favorite part of the play?"* and *"What do you think is going to happen next?"* – From there we picked out anything of interest and had them go in depth. Many kids believed the witch would be coming the next day. Elizabeth said she liked the part when Mr. Tumnus and Lucas parted ways after the tea party. She believed the witch would be coming next and that they would have to run away from her in order to avoid being turned into stone. Then she said something along the lines of everyone would be turned into stone except her (Elizabeth), and that she would tell the witch to stop, and the witch would do just that, and the book would be back to normal.

Research Design: The Two Groups

For the present intervention, experimental and control classrooms were selected nonrandomly, as the teachers were selected because they were willing to commit to a year-long research study, and it was made sure that the teachers understood the procedure of the intervention and their roles in it. Teachers from both the experimental group and the control group agreed to the use of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* as the central text in the Play World. Neither of the two teachers was aware of the exact purpose of the study nor the nature of the assessments. The study was divided into three phases: pretreatment, treatment and posttesting.

In the pretreatment phase, assessments of the children's baseline narrative and literary competence were conducted as well as of the teaching approaches adopted by each teacher in their presentation of the narrative to the children. The treatment phase lasted for 14 weeks. During this time the experimental group engaged in the Play World practice, consisting of joint adult–child dramatization of the text, general discussion, drawing and free play. During this time the control group engaged solely in practices which the teachers in this school traditionally implement when reading a text with the whole class: the teacher reading a portion of the text aloud to the class, class discussion of the text which has been read aloud, the children reading

level-appropriate picture books to a partner and then to themselves, the children writing individually on a topic of their choice and drawing a picture to accompany this writing. In the posttesting phase, we conducted assessments of the children's narrative competence.

In November 2004, both the experimental and control groups were put in the same pretreatment condition, consisting of classroom observations and the pretest of narrative skills. In December, after the preliminary test measurements, both teachers started to read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* aloud to their entire class for a period of 10–20 min, three times a week; a segment of such a reading session is captured in the following field note excerpt:

> At the point in the story where the beaver whispers the coming of Aslan, John had the kids get close to him so that he could whisper the scene to them. This worked nicely – really drew them in. It was interesting the way he tried to explain the feeling of a pleasant dream or a terrible nightmare while awake (the reaction the children in the book had when they first heard to the sound of Aslan's name).

It was established that both teachers were handling the reading activity in a similar manner: First, they would read small portions of the text, reading dialogue using particular voices for each character and usually reading in an exaggerated emotional tone. After each reading, they engaged the children in a question-asking activity, either about the text or about the children's speculations regarding the next portion of the story: So, they were discussing the point in the book where the four siblings meet the beaver. The kids seemed to be into the story. I was sitting behind Lynn who was not shy about answering (usually accurately) all of the questions John posed about the story. He had to tell her to give others a chance to speak. During the moments when John had the students whisper to a friend what they thought was happening or going to happen in the story, Lynn would whisper really detailed answers. To the question of why the Beaver was speaking in a cautious tone to the siblings, she told me that she thought that one of the security guards that took the faun was coming to take the siblings, and she told me, "You weren't here when we heard that part of the story. John did a fantastic job at pulling everybody in and making sure all had their turn to speak."

In regard to the nature of everyday classroom participation, it is worth noting that two of the children, both boys, in the intervention group suffered from hearing problems which again led to poor verbal skills and pronunciation and were – in spite of the teacher's exemplary efforts – poorly integrated in many of the social aspects of everyday life in the classroom as well as displaying poor academic achievement. In addition, one of the two children, Danny, suffered from unspecified developmental disabilities:

> I remembered Danny from the first time I visited the school. He stood out because he seemed to have some difficulty producing speech. Turns out he has a fixable hearing problem ("his tubes need to be drained" – has yet to be done) that contributed to this. But I have a feeling that this isn't entirely the problem (I need to ask John and Rachel). He's a really affection kid. I waved him over and he sat with Joey, Kathryn and I for the next task, which involved drawing tri-angle-shaped objects. He was engaged and partook but seemed to lack a firm grasp on what exactly the task was.

One of the central questions, which arose during the pretreatment, was how well suited this specific form of intervention would be for ensuring social integration; the challenge was to shape interactions in a way that would facilitate participation based on actual developmental proficiencies as well as ensure continued development for both the children ahead of their chronological age as well as those lacking behind (Rogoff 2003; Vygotsky 1978).

The Zone of Proximal Development

As mentioned above, a prominent part of the research design behind the Play World intervention was the creation of *zones of proximal development*; when placing the discussion of the meaning of play within the CHAT framework, heeding to the separate role of the zone of proximal development in play and instruction is necessary. Like almost any other psychological or social phenomenon, the implications of play itself remain ethereal and difficult to define in relation to a broader context – the nomenclature of scientific research in the meaning of play is unfixed and often instantiated in a on-the-go manner by the individual researcher(s) undertaking the study due to the absence of paradigmatic language; problems of explaining the gap between play and learning in a theoretically thorough and appropriate manner remain to a large extent unanswered (El'konin 1971; Karpatschof 2002; Schousboe 2002).

Due to the educational philosophies of the times in which the theory was conceived, the role of play as an *integrated* and not seceded factor in the classroom has been overlooked as a possible alley to explore: In the classroom the zone of proximal development is first and foremost discussed in relation to acquisition of *scientific thought* and tied to activities which rely on a system of signs that generalize reality (Chaiklin 2003; Hedegaard 2002; Vygotsky 1978), formally expressed in the strive to teach the subjects general laws of physics, math, grammar, etc., and it can be seen to revolve around problem-solving and imitation skills – how well are the subjects able to replicate or utilize an example given by an adult in relation to the problem they are working with.

The zone of proximal development is thus most often defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky 1978: 86) as the dialectical operation between contradiction of internal possibilities and external needs that is thought to "constitute the driving force of development" (Daniels 2001: 57), and this original formulation can be said to focus substantially, in its own right, as a tool for assessment; Vygotsky gives the example of two children who are both 12 years chronologically, yet only eight years when their mental age is assessed through a standardized test. Now imagine, says Vygotsky, that one does not terminate the investigation here, but instead the test subjects are given adult assistance; we may now very well see that one child will be able to solve the task at hand to the level of a 9-year-old, while the other will be able to reach the level

appropriate for a 12-year-old. This goes to prove that they are not, as the initial test would claim, of the same mental age, and further, "the difference between 12 and eight, or between nine and eight, is what we call the zone of proximal development" (1978: 85f).

This kind of formally structured development is traditionally viewed as in opposition to the relatively unstructured development that takes place in children's free play, regarding which Vygotsky simply and without sophistry points out that "In play a child creates an imaginary situation" (1978: 93). This is by no means a trivial point; when placing the imaginary situation as a defining characteristic of play, we are able to pinpoint the place and time in the ontogeny where the child masters the art of removing herself from the immediacy of primary bodily functions and tentatively digress into the sphere of shared cultural symbols, and it further serves to make a clear distinction between the abstract and concrete modes of activity. Also, we have the criterion for play that "there is no such thing as play without rules. The imaginary situation of any form contains rules" (Ibid.: 94). This is a very important point – if we analyze play alone and remove the imaginary situation, we would be looking directly at the underlying rules. If the imagery is the flesh, then rules are the bones. The perfect example of this is two sisters who decide to play a game where they pretend to be *two sisters*, thus isolating and enacting what constitutes sisterhood. Finally Vygotsky puts up the criterion that "Play is […] a leading factor in development" (Ibid.: 96), a point that seems intuitively true and forms the main argument behind why it is worthwhile studying play in a school context. In play activity, as opposed to schooling activity, Vygotsky argues, there is relative freedom provided by the psychological support offered in the imaginary situation so that a child can be "a head taller than herself" (Vygotsky 1978).

However, this is a conceptualization that relies on a strong divide between the formal interactions between children and adults on the one hand and the informal play interactions children are apt to engage in when left alone on the other. This is a way of regarding development as separated and taking place in two unattached fields of practice: The ceremonious learning sphere where what occupies the child's attention is sought governed by adults and child behaviour placed under careful administration stands in stark opposition to the room of free play where the children are encouraged to engage in imaginative enactments. This other setting is understood more or less as directed by the children's own fantasies and characterized by the absence of *direct* adult influences, i.e. there is posed a minimum of demands and regulations. The Play World is a mediating entity interlocking these two oppositions.

Mediating Tangible Play with Abstracted Tools

The early Soviet psychologists emphasize the tool as being of a dual, i.e. technical *and* abstract, mediating nature, concrete in that it has physical properties and abstract in that it takes on a culture-given set of properties in its right context and

appears in cognitive relationships as an expression of ideality (Ilyenkov 1977). Indeed, Vygotsky heeds to language itself as the *tool of tools*, entertaining a fundamental difference between the technical tools and the psychological tools, and noted that, “by being included in the task, the psychological tool alters the entire flow and structure of mental functions. It does so by determining the structure of a new instrumental act, just as the technical tool alters the process of a natural adaptation by determining the form of labor operations” (1981: 137).

The technical artefact thus functions to serve as a conductor of human influence on the object of activity; it is externally oriented and aimed at producing concrete change in an immediate environment, a notion which would later take central stage in the activity theory, in the form of analysis focused on goal-oriented activity as the central concern for psychology (Engeström 1995; Keller and Dixon 1995; Leontiev 1977). The psychological tool, after its appropriation from the cultural environment, too is of a social nature but is distinguished by being internally oriented and aimed at mastering oneself; the modes of activity which characterize the two planes, internal and external, are so different from each other that the nature of the means they use cannot be the same across applications and contexts (Leontiev 1978: 55). Experiences from the Play World project have shown that the specific affordances of the concrete as well as abstract artefacts tied to the intervention, i.e. the narrative itself, the costumes, the props and sceneries in the reproduction and expansion of the intervention itself support a form of participation where the academically confident children support the less proficient in their learning processes, thus creating an *artefact-mediated zone of proximal development* void of adult supervision – giving reason for a critical discussion of the very nature of the concept of the zone of proximal development.

The Narrative: Retelling the Tale

The narrative background for the study was chosen in accord with Hakkarainen’s idea that the enacted narrative must resonate with the children’s personal narratives (1999); the story, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, takes places on the countryside in England during the time of blitz over London. A group of four siblings, Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy, are sent to stay with an old professor in his mansion, paralleling the children at Pendleton who for a large part had to endure long periods of time separated from their parents who were stationed in Iraq.

While staying with the professor, the youngest of the siblings, Lucy, enters a magical wardrobe and crosses over into a magical world, Narnia, which is being held under a spell of eternal winter by the White Witch. Therefore, during the pre-intervention, which begun after the children returned to school after their summer vacation, a large wardrobe with a removable backside, constructed to keep this feature concealed, was placed in the classroom with a large red ribbon around it and its front door secured with a padlock. The teacher did not begin reading the book aloud until late in first semester, and once he did, none of the children made a connection

between the wardrobe in the story and the one in their classroom; nor did the eight returning first grade children, who had been with the teacher in the same classroom as kindergarteners the previous year, offer the ribbon-wrapped wardrobe special interest.

When Lucy moves into the fantasy world of Narnia, she meets a faun, Mr. Tumnus, who invites her to tea and – under dramatic circumstances – confesses to being in alliance with the White Witch, having sworn to turn any of the, for him, mythological human children over to her, should he ever encounter any. Lucy comforts him and ensures him that she is sure he, after all is said and done, is a good faun; they can still be friends despite the fact he is a kidnapper *in spe*. She is instead returned to the real world through the wardrobe where she shares the experience with her siblings and is consequently accused of being a liar; only the professor seems to believe her.

Several days later, Lucy re-enters Narnia and Edmund follows. He fails to catch up with Lucy and instead comes across a great lady who introduces herself as the Queen of Narnia. She gives him his favourite food, Turkish delight, and promises to make him a prince, and later a king, if he brings the other children to her castle. After the Queen departs, Edmund meets Lucy, and they return together through the wardrobe. Lucy starts talking about Mr. Tumnus and then mentions the White Witch; when she describes the witch, Edmund realizes that she is the lady he has just made friends with, but he does not speak a word about meeting anyone in Narnia. Out of cruelty, Edmund will not admit to Peter and Susan that Narnia is real and Susan's health of mind is questioned again.

Finally, circumstances lead all four children to hide in the wardrobe, and they soon find themselves in Narnia. They discover that Tumnus has been captured for helping Lucy out of Narnia, and a pair of talking beavers named Mr. Beaver and Mrs. Beaver shelters the children.

They recount an ancient prophecy that "When Adam's flesh and Adam's bone sits in Cair Paravel in throne, the evil time will be over and done". The beavers tell of the true king of Narnia, a great lion called Aslan, who has been absent for many years but is now "on the move again". Edmund, still in the thrall of the witch, quietly leaves the house and goes to the witch's castle. His absence is not noticed until it is too late. Realizing after searching for Edmund that they have been betrayed, the others set off to meet with Aslan.

The narrative continues much further, but the recaptured part roughly formed the basis for the dramatization; the idea was to shorten the staged play and write a new, briefer ending, but, as we shall see, the children solved the problem by taking control over the project and writing their own.

The Flow of the Intervention: An Ethnographic Voyage

There were 14 sessions of the experimental intervention. These sessions also took place once a week and lasted approximately 2 h. Each session consisted of an

enactment of the text followed by discussion and then free play or art activities. In order to provide the transition from the written narrative and the read-aloud session into the actual enactment, where the researchers entered the classroom and transformed it to a holistic stage area, the book, which was used during the reading session, was replaced with one with blank pages:

> When John opened the book he acted surprised, then turned the book around and showed the pages to the kids. The pages started to fall out, which wasn't supposed to happen. This threw him off. He looked at me and then at Susan as if to ask, "*What now?*" but then he just went with the flow. The fact that the pages fell out of the book made a big impression on the kids who were very surprised. They all rushed to gather around John and inspect the book. One girl very clearly and slowly said "*Oh my god!*" and then a bunch of other kids echoed her. It was Oh My God's all around.

The next step was the actual dramatization, beginning from the start of the book with a section, which had been read to children a few weeks earlier. The old professor entered the classroom and – in spite of the sunny Californian weather outside – commented on the pouring showers of British rain, talking loud to himself about "those four kids from London who were supposed to arrive to stay here at the mansion". At this moment the classroom had not undergone any radical changes other than the placement of the wardrobe.

Meanwhile, the classroom was prepared for the staging; a transformation of the classroom into a stage, which would soon take over every available corner, begun:

> I turned on the sound effects. I slowly started closing the curtains, and then slowly walked outside to get into my costume. I only got a few glimpses of the kids while I was doing all this. They were looking around at what was going on but they didn't seem scared. Everything happened so quickly that I didn't even notice Rachel walking in to do her bit as the professor.

Rachel finished, walked outside, changed, and then we were on. The children were all very quiet and attentive – a few suppressed giggles here and there when the excitement got too much. The first session was us, the four kids, walking in and getting settled for the night, discussing all the adventures we were going to have in this big house and planning to play in the garden the following day if the weather was for it or hide and seek if it wasn't.

Following each session, the children were engaged in a group discussion regarding the play they had just witnessed; naturally the first session, which took the children by surprise, bred a plethora of radical hypothesis regarding books coming alive and the four children from the book visiting the school room.

Due to the rather untested nature of this form of intervention, very little – other than the few texts by Hakkarainen, Lindquist and Rainio already discussed – has been written regarding what to expect from this type of developmental studies. An interesting feature of the early field notes, which, other than recording the activity of the day, served as a communicative tool between the team members, is, that in spite of the efforts to focus the activity of the children, the anarchic nature of the research process shines through in the range of doubts and questions which are captured as well:

> This first session left me dazed and confused; were the kids confused by the play or did they get it? Some kids expressed recognition that the play was connected to the book and named

> the characters. I'm wondering if the performance was too short, or if it dealt with a portion of the book that was too far in the past for the kids to regroup their memories? Most children had a almost conspiracy like theory regarding the events and some even mentioned that possibility that the White Witch had snug in and hexed the book – others seemed to be a little frightened by this idea. The general feeling seemed to be that the book had some-how been transformed into real life events – how do we capture what they think and feel? Will too much of this end up as mere guesswork?

This basically unstructured nature of the investigatory process may be regarded as problematic and raise the question of whether it is possible, with any scientific weight, to disentangle the many threads of development which present themselves in the course of the study, when the people behind the initiative so obviously lack a clear view of the processes they have started. How can one make theoretically expansive claims when the empirical data lacks a clear focus and is conducted by people who most of all seem to be crawling on the floor with the children they claim to study?

The answers are both easy and unorthodox: The children will, based on their engagement with the adults, lead the way – by being in a position where no clear goal for the intervention has been set, other than test whether it in itself is a worthwhile practice or just a curios alternative to traditional classroom learning which will be welcomed by the subjects as an odd distraction from calculus and grammar exercises and leave little more than a confused teacher in a messy classroom behind, the research team has the benefit of applying a continuous pragmatic-methodological development as a direct function of the feedback which is offered by the participants and includes this in the data for later analysis. The chaos that ensues becomes a most treasured source of knowledge.

A key concern behind the inclusive discussions which followed the enactment of the text, which lasted approximately 30 min, was a strive for promotion of personal agency, allowing everybody to share what had caught their interest and encouraging the least vocal children to participate actively, which, as a rule, went on for as long as the children wanted. Next, the children were able to choose from either drawing with pencils and crayons, painting or engaging in pretend play with the props that the actors had left around the classroom, as they saw fit:

> Following the discussion John had the class split into two groups, each group receiving a large piece of paper and markers so that they could draw what they had experienced just then. John briefly demonstrated by producing a picture of Edwina. He emphasized to the kids that they were not to follow his example exactly – that they could draw whatever they wanted about the story. I think it was at this point, when the kids formed their two groups, that Joey said something along the lines of, *"Maybe we're in the story"*.

During the drawing sessions, the researchers joined the activity, drawing their own pictures and engaging with the children without instructing them on how and what to draw. During free play, the children, the teacher and the four researchers took the costumes and props from the performance and used them either for pretend play related to the book and the performance or other topics which seemed to concern the children.

An important feature of the Play World was the holistic manner in which it was integrated in the everyday practices; during the week, the children would, alongside their normal curriculum, construct new accessories for the coming drama session, based on their teacher's progression through the novel and the last enacted piece.

In the third week of enactments, one of the researchers playing the youngest sibling would open up the wardrobe and, for the first time, move into Narnia; however, it was decided that the children should have the opportunity to open and explore it before it was implemented in the play, and the teacher hid the key to the padlock, tied to a small red ribbon matching the one around the wardrobe, in a child's book box:

> John asked Danny to get [a book] from the bottom of the pile. He did and… he took out the key with the ribbon and looked at it. He showed it to Louis. He then took it to Michelle and Beverly who was reading behind the wardrobe. They sort of looked, paused, and then gasped. Then, with one voice they all were whispered *"it's the key"*, and then someone said it out loud, and then they ran to get John, and everyone ran to the wardrobe yelling *"The key! The Key! We have the key…"*

Inside the wardrobe, like in the narrative, they found four fur-lined coats; the children tried them on and took turns going into the wardrobe. That the efforts to make the mythology come alive for the children were effective became exceptionally clear when a girl on her way into the wardrobe was pulled back by a little boy, yelling "Nooo – don't go in without a coat; it's not safe! The Witch will see you!"

During the following sessions, the teacher joined the researchers in the enactment; during almost one third of the sessions, both the teacher and the children joined the researchers in the Play World, placing the children in a dual meaning system; the children were at the same time in a real situation and in a role, a cognitive state where they are enticed to function as both actors and directors. This way the children are drawn into dialogue by the characters which the adults dramatize, and as a result, both children and adults share a common Play World, which is gradually established as all participants interpret their experiences and portray a mutual system of meaningful symbolism (Lindqvist 1995; Rainio 2005).

The enactments involved not only props and costumes but also some combination of staging that appealed to the children's senses of touch, smell and sound. Examples included ice chips on the floor to represent the coldness of snow, pungent mothballs in the wardrobe when mothballs were mentioned in the text and a recording of a thunderstorm when it was raining in the scene being portrayed. In order to create a true sense of involvement, the first time the children crossed over from the real world and into the actual Play World was arranged as a large tea party in a cave together with Mr. Tumnus, the faun. This, however, took place *inside* the Play World but *outside* of the narrative:

> When I came back into the classroom after having acted my part they were already in the midst of the party, eating cake, and drinking tea. Everybody was moving around. A few kids here and there offered me eggs and tea and cake. It was great. I only remember Linda taking a minute or two to explain what had happened. Everyone else was busy eating or talking to Mr. Tumnus or waiting for Mr. Tumnus to finish peeling a hardboiled egg. There was a steady drone of "Mr. Tumnus!" in the background. I poured tea for some of the kids. Then

> I sat with Stacey and Elizabeth to drink some tea. Stacey told me that if I wanted an egg I could ask Mr. Tumnus. I yelled out his name but he was too busy with the other kids to hear me. Then Stacey gave me a few pieces from her egg. Then she asked me to get her a piece of cake. Stephanie poured tea for me. When I came back with the cake for Stacey she offered the hypothesis, that if she were to take Mr. Tumnus out into the real world, and if people doubted he existed, she would simply point to his tail and his fur as proof that he was real. This caught John's attention. He knelt down to have her explain her idea again.

During this first time entering into interaction with the staged play, they expressed a clear sense of interacting with a figure from the narrative, albeit not being in the narrative per se; the children stressed the fact that although they were in Narnia, it was not the Narnia in the book, as they had not moved through the wardrobe.

However, over the following weeks, the narrative progressed and the faun was kidnapped. The researchers, dressed as the four children, now broke with the written narrative and, as a part of an enactment, decided they would need help; going up against the White Witch would require the help from more children:

> We [the four researchers] all went into the wardrobe. I remember hearing some kids gasp when we opened the doors. Once inside Rachel and I stood by the doors and kept them closed while Susan and Larry walked on some of the ice. Someone tried opening the door from the outside and I heard someone else softly yelling no. Rachel was yelling her lines so that the kids could hear them through the closed doors. I was directly in front of her and had trouble holding in my laughter. Then suddenly the doors started trembling with the sound of all the kids' hands knocking. I had expected that only one of the kids would come up to the door and knock. Also, the knocking came too early (before the moment when Susan and Peter [characters from the play] apologized to me for not believing me); I hadn't heard John suggesting to the kids that they knock on the door. […] After the mad, loud knocking I peeked my head out through a crack in the door and the kids just burst out laughing. It was so loud and sustained and contagious. I don't know how I stayed in character. For some reason it felt to me that with the laughter the kids physically moved back a little. The laughter really seemed to last for a whole minute. Things went from me opening the door to Rachel taking the lead and guiding the kids into Narnia incredibly fast paced.

What cannot be captured in the field notes, but is overwhelmingly present on the video recordings which were captured from steady mounts during these sessions, is the incredible emotional investment and empathy the children express towards the characters as well as their insisting on keeping the researcher-as-adult separated from the researcher-as-character; if the faun wept, the children wept with him; if the beavers whispered the children whispered with them; and when the researcher left the classroom in costume only to return in the everyday dresses, the children would treat him as having been effectively absent through the whole session and go to great lengths to tell in detail what was missed during our absence.

Beginning with the aforementioned tea party, and the opening of the wardrobe, the intervention brought about a degree of investment which is arguably rare among children of this age; it was possible to serve the whole class meals of potatoes, tea, biscuits, eggs, cake and milk inside a cave made of construction paper without the least sign of trouble; the children, laughing and giggling without end, seemed aware that this was indeed what Hakkarainen refers to as a

special situation and the first sign of bad behaviour would break the spell and immediately reinstate everyday classroom rules. The journey from the classroom and into Narnia became a returning event, but without doubt it was the first time, which made the deepest impression:

> We put on our coats and then told the kids that there were coats for them in Narnia. (That week the kids had made their own individual coats (more like vests) out of paper grocery bags. They were multicolored and lined with cotton balls). We took their coats and handed them to the kids, reading their names, which were written on the inside. We introduced ourselves to the kids as we handed them their coats. I remember I gave coats to Logan, Elizabeth, Kathryn, and Alyssa. Once everyone had their coats we invited them in. We had placed one of the cardboard ice patches directly on the "inside" side of the wardrobe so that when the kids entered they stepped on the ice. The kids were ecstatic. Some of them weren't wearing shoes and so they really felt the cold. Their socks got soaked but they didn't seem to mind! I have a really strong memory of Sylvia saying "It's soooo cold!!" She had a huge smile and the widest eyes. And then there was the sound. It was just a mass of happy yelling and oooohhing and aahhing. It felt a little chaotic. I thought there wouldn't be enough space for us among the trees and Mr. Tumnus' cave but after a minute or so of trying to get the kids to settle down we were able to get them to gather round the general area of the lamppost.

In the end, the original written narrative and what was enacted bared little resemblance with each other apart from a shared cast of characters.

The following session consisted of various interactive tasks and the design of requisites. When the final day of the intervention came, the children had planned a grand finale; the faun was to be rescued, the White Witch' castle to be destroyed, and, most interestingly, the White Witch herself not to be killed but turned and made good; the children had discussed how to finish her reign of eternal winter and had come to the conclusion that she too had to be under a spell, a spell which could be broken:

> John and the kids did lots of preparing. They made colorful mountains out of cardboard; they converted the library next to the door to Ms. Anne's class into the witch's castle (also cardboard) – big and cozy; they constructed four huge (enough to fit 3–4 kids), but low thrones which they placed in the corner; they built the cage (colorful!) in which Mr. Tumnus would be jailed. Most impressive of all was their plan for defeating the witch and rescuing Tumnus. The important thing to mention about this plan is that it was the kids' own work start to end. They were the captains of the ship and John had his hands on the rudder.
>
> Also important was the fact that the kids developed a plan that incorporated the ideas of every child. The plan had stages, and each stage involved two or more kids collaborating in some activity that was directed at either defeating the witch or rescuing Mr. Tumnus. The kids knew what they needed to do (were supposed to do?) at least a few days before they did it. The idea of breaking the Narnia spell and setting the witch free is great - with John playing the part of the witch it seems they have great motivation to overcome the evil which his character represents. Truth to be told he did his part almost too well at the times.

The final session thus embodied the result of the strive to make the children active agents and involve them in critical participation; over time their personal engagement with the characters as well as their role as instructors became more and more pronounced, as the play activity took an increasingly central role in the everyday

school life. At the time of the final showdown in Narnia, when their plan was to be carried out, the classroom was at the same time buzzing with activity, all the while curiously controlled and focused:

> I thought there would be some moments of uncontrollable chaos. There were moments of chaos, but they didn't seem uncontrollable, or rather, getting things back under control didn't seem to be important in light of the joy that emerged from the chaos. I also felt more at ease that the kids had actually written out their plan and would be handing it to me before we entered Narnia. I figured I it would spell everything out for me. It didn't! But it didn't matter! The kids came back from their run. Susan, Peter and I were standing in front of the wardrobe. For some reason it felt a little awkward that we didn't greet the kids right away. They settled down in front of us and almost immediately Luis and (I think) Pedro got up to hand me the paper with the plan written on it. Tiger (and maybe Beth as well?) had to tell them to wait. After all, Susan had to set the stage for the kids (we can't find Edwina, we need to make a plan, oh you have a plan? Great! Etc.). I too had to remember to remind the kids to be quiet (there are spies in the forest!) and that it would be wiser to take care of the witch first before attempting to res-cue Mr. Tumnus. Once again, the kids were way ahead of us and before I could say anything one of the girls, I don't remember who told me (Lucas) that it would be wiser to take care of the witch first before attempting to rescue Mr. Tumnus. Next Susan tells the kids that we should all listen to Lucas because he knows his way around Narnia best. Luis and Pedro hand me the plans. I was expecting a notebook-sized piece of paper. Instead they hand me something the size of a poster! I was also expecting explicit details explaining how to go about executing the plan. Instead, there was a list of props with the names of kids written next to them. There was nothing to worry about. The kids knew the plan, lived the plan, and they helped be decipher what I couldn't figure out. Together we all read the plan out loud. The kids gathered the necessary props as we read them on the list. When we got the part of the plan for blowing up the castle, there was a little trouble. Joey, the kid who two weeks ago asked to leave and left the Play World as it was happening, started to plant the bombs in the castle. The other kids, who were supposed to help him, did help him.

When one compares the set-up of the classroom prior to the intervention with the layout at the termination of the project, it becomes obvious that even the simplest of common learning tasks becomes immersed in some reminiscence of, or reference to, the dramatic narrative.

Thus, a curious and wholly unanticipated side effect of staging the Play World in the classroom was tied to the volume, number and size of the designed and produced stage requisites and accessories. The scale by which the children, with the aid of the teacher, choose to construct the required artefacts remitted any possibility of stowing them away and bringing them forth when needed. Instead, they remained in the classroom throughout the entirety of the intervention, and, as mentioned, the children thus had accesses to the whole of the Play World frame in their free play, as well as they had to bear with its presence during everyday learning sessions, thus effectively erasing the boundaries of the fantasy world the children knew as Narnia, on the one hand, and the actual classroom, on the other. Monday-morning reading sessions would take place in an enchanted forest amidst blue and yellow trees, partner reading and solving math problem was undertaken inside the faun's cottage or beneath the beaver dam, and often the children could be seen to participate in group discussions wearing a fur-lined coat or holding a small cardboard shield.

Changing Settings: Changing Participation

Throughout the intervention, it was possible to observe how the classroom culture was remodelled in accord with demands raised by the increased awareness of the children as well as their interaction with the surroundings, or, in other words, the classroom became a personal space rather than an institutional setting, facilitating growth and invested participation in both play practices and actual academic tasks.

In the transgression from the form of enacted play, which took place in the shared world of pretence inhabited by children as well as adults who provided the rules of engagement, and into the children's self-motivated experimentation with the narrative revolving around re-enactment and exploration of alternative versions, the source of social development is recognized as a series of collective moves from one sphere of engagement to another where the boundaries of pretence, learning and teaching, play and seriousness are unravelled only to be woven together in new intricate patterns of sociality, and it takes little imagination to appreciate that radical restructuring of a learning space will lead to equally radical redistribution of agency, competence, power and social capital; classical classroom competencies are challenged and novel ways of thinking and behaving gain footing.

In effect, from an interactional and distributed developmental perspective, which regards the engagement with a culturally saturated environment where artefacts and significant others exercise constraints and opportunities and thus become key factors in the learning process, this means that when the settings are changed the mode of cognition will be changed as well; a point which has been discussed earlier in reference to the distribution of cognitive processes: Thought processes are not and cannot be isolated with a single individual and understood as completely internalized phenomenon but must be understood as mediated by and crystallized into the surroundings, often discussed in terms of their immediate affordances.

For many of the hoped for goals of education, we presuppose the success of the social constructability of affordances – that one can get a learner to attend to the pertinent properties of the environment or the designed object or the inscriptional notations such that the learner can join in to contribute to distributed intelligence in activity (Pea 1993: 52f). This points to a key problem in the traditional design of the tools we use for learning; the construction and implementation processes are often based on assumptions conceived in resituated research environments and then carried over to the learning spaces. An important lesson is that the principle of voluntary participation and engagement provides the best possible in vivo test situation for determining whether a designed artefact has, on the one hand, the learning affordances it was designed to have and, on the other hand, if its use may be sustained without having to be forced upon the learners (Cole 1996).

The Play World accordingly asked the children themselves to, within the given narrative frame, figure out what kind of equipment they would need in order to engage with the Narnia mythology in a way that seemed meaningful to them, thus to a large extent circumventing the problem of meeting a demand for artefact affordances by placing the responsibility for designing a working learning space on the learners themselves.

Expansive Developmental Zones: Introducing Synergic Systems

By exploring the dialectic nature of the connotations of *play* as both a form of creative expression and storytelling by means of dramatic statements (*a* play) and, on the other hand, the children's social free time activities (*to* play), the idea that participation in the Play World project placed the children in an *expanded zone of proximal development* which defers from any other kind of learning due to its *synergic nature* can be introduced; during evaluations of the activities that took place in the classroom outside the weekly intervention, it became clear that returning to the Play World became the preferred play activity among the participants.

When the children's free play takes the form of holistic social interactions, they re-enter the room of fantasy play and drama, inserting the participants into other spheres of the classroom than the traditional learning spaces, creating synergic propulsion by stretching the carefully managed confluence with the adults out into their everyday life.

Their play would thus maintain a momentum of literary engagement throughout the week until new inspirations and unsolved problems were added to their fantasy play. This spiral, instigated by the adult intervention, but kept alive by the children, is what may be referred to as the *synergic zones of proximal development* (Rossen 2006): Once their engagement with the fantasy world had been set in motion by the adults, the children continued to engage and seek in-depth understanding, exploring the possibilities of the narrative for the sake of the play itself and upholding the momentum of critical thinking that is sought in formal education, which may explain, in part, their academic as well as social development (King and Kitchener 1994).

However, it may be pointed out that an appropriate term that captures the idea of culturally mediated development would be the zone of *potential* development rather than *proximal*, stressing the fact that the next learning step is a *negotiation* between personal potential, immediate agencies, available mediators and a wide range of fluctuating influences, making the possible learning outcome a living and dynamic entity and not a predetermined *modus operandi* as implied by the notion of proximity, and the concept should therefore be referred to as a *synergic zone of potential development*.

Shifting Spheres: Play in Reality and Reality in Play

Putting things to their extreme, we can, based on the previous consideration regarding play activity and formal instruction in classroom settings, imagine a continuum from earthbound and concrete classroom teaching and the children's free play on opposite ends of a continuum. This is not suggesting that there is no imagery in the classroom – indeed most learning is abstract and requires a well-equipped imagination to comprehend.

We may at the same time split the power structure up in two opposites as a continuum that runs from the room where the adults decide how the children spend their time as opposed to the child-governed room where they may undertake any activity. This allows us to recognize four distinct zones of development; these are:

- A zone of concrete, adult-structured activity
- A zone of pretence, likewise structured by adults
- A zone of pretence, structured by children
- A zone of concrete activity, likewise structured by children

What is interesting in the present case of development through adult-structured play as a dialogical phenomenon, which mediates between classroom development and play development, is that although we may isolate four separate modes of cognition and also analyze the activity within these spheres separately, it is in the completion of a micro-genetic object-historical journey of learning, understanding and gaining knowledge that what can be referred to as a synergic zone of potential development occurs.

In this schema the traditional zone of proximal development may be recognized as situated in the top-left corner of the figure in a learning space where adults are in control and the education processes operate in a relatively concrete space, while the zone of proximal learning, which emerges as a result of children's pretend play, will be situated in the bottom-right corner.

Working with the Play World pedagogy, however, expands the area of structured learning from the learning zone of the traditional classroom and into other zones of activity. This begins with the move of the adult-structured activity away *from* the real world and *into* the imaginary spaces, illustrated by a move from the top-left to the top-right zones of activity; we do however see that the power structure remains more or less untouched, and adult influences are still pertinent and existing at this stage of the cycle.

However, as the project progresses and the learning space is increasingly colonized in the image of the Narnia mythology, we experience the children's agency increases markedly, and a slow process of redistributing the power structures of the classroom begins, based on the insights and ideas which the children import into the interaction with the adults from their free play explorations. It is important to realize that although this stage of the development has many traits in common with the traditional version of the zone of proximal development in pretend play, it is qualitatively different, first and foremost in that it is the sole result of the children's ability to communicate their wants and needs and persuade the adults to loose their grip over the classroom.

The power is now reversed 180 degrees and adults and children are working together as equals based on the children's instruction and imagination. Their suggestions and critique take the form of an investment in making the play their own; by exercising a growing critical reflection regarding everyday routines and becoming more vocalized in regard to the changes deemed beneficial for the basis of participation, as well as merging learning activities with their free play, the children became central actors in their own lives and level the traditional power relations to their favour.

Naturally, we are not entirely left in the hands of the children; a shadow of power falls from the traditional classroom and into the world of pretence, creating a state of intersubjective and distributed labour where the children operate according to traditional classroom rules of behaviour during the creative expression and relegation of play rules, which then draws the adults into their world. Thus, the intervention creates an equalized zone of proximal development in the third space in the model where the sphere of pretence becomes governed by children; here, the children were engaged in shaping the narrative and gained the sense of agency that would later empower their participation in the everyday activities outside the Play World frame, as well as it led to their investment in structuring the overall activity.

This represents the next step in the expansive principle, sending the children back into the classroom, where they remain in charge, yet engage in classroom activities. This was the case when the participants, after having finished the last Play World sessions with the adults, informed the teacher that they wanted to write a new play based on the book characters and stage it with their parents as audience.

The children then took initiative to a three-hour long discussion where the content of new play was negotiated: Could new characters be added or not? Could there be more than one White Witch? In the end, with the help of the teacher who had served more as an external mediator for thought processes and shared labour, the play was written and staged.

A final step in cycle of the synergic zone of potential development thus happens when the children make the move out of the Play World and back into the classroom, making the expansive zone of proximal come full circle.

My argument is, then, that the four fluctuating and ever overlapping possible states of activity depicted in the model each make possible a certain kind of development which *together* forms the synergic zone of potential development in an additive activity system which is the product of the total sum of the activity in the four modules, each representing a separate cognitive activity system that stands in direct contact with all of other complementary systems, forming a cycle of learning and engagement.

Thus, when the children's free play becomes a journey back into the Play World and is mediated by the artefacts that have their origin in an adult-structured learning activity that has become personally meaningful to them, they make literacy development a part of their play instead of a part of hard laborious school work, and, as the quantitative results have shown, it is not a form of learning that may be deemed *good enough* to be suitable to take up time and place in the classroom but is in fact a learning activity which produces results superior to traditional approaches but in a case where *it is supplemented* with these.

In conclusion the proposed synergic zone of potential development is characterized by the dialectic shift between *to play* and to *stage a play*, to learn and to teach, and to instruct and to be instructed, and thus, by allowing participation on all actual levels of development, it becomes a form of learning through participation which is grounded in critical, intellectual activity and personally meaningful contributions. The system in which this takes place becomes larger than any

classroom, and the individual will be developmentally challenged by means of the spiralling mediation of peers who may or may not be more capable as well as the culturally saturated artefacts.

The Play World can be summarized as a CHAT-based experimental intervention, which incorporates joint adult–child dramatization of a text from children's literature, alongside general discussions, art production and free play in the classroom.

Specific practices tied to participation in the experimental context were contrasted with a control intervention, which lacked pretend play and consisted of conventional school practices. It was predicted that participation in the Play World intervention would significantly improve children's narrative competence and the presented results appear to corroborate this prediction, and the analysis of narrative competence, pre- and posttest scores in the experimental and control groups, indicates significant increases in measures of narrative comprehension, narrative length and coherence for the experimental group. It is fair to conclude from these findings that the Play World practice promotes the development of narrative competence in at least these three areas.

Furthermore, the ethnographic data points to the teaching environment saturated with culture-specific artefacts as constructing a new form of meaning making and participation, which led to interactions between children with dissimilar learning proficiencies that called for the critical reflection of internalized knowledge and beliefs in the more proficient as well as an increased comprehension in the less capable as a result of shared externalization of information and culture-specific ways of interacting in the Play World as well as the classroom, leading to improved social interaction in the whole of the system. In overall these findings point to children's situated cognitive labour as a more "true" resource for knowledge about intellectual (and social) capacities then the test models which are used for measuring said skills.

In consequence, the current test philosophies and their implementation in the Danish Public School must be regarded as downright objectionable based on the catalogue of ethnographic, anthropological and distributed cognitive insights which have been accumulated over the span of years from the early pragmatist philosophers and Soviet psychologist up to contemporary CHAT practitioners.

The Play World and the Danish Public School

The findings from the Play World project may thus contribute to the design of a new and useful *complementary* method for teaching literacy in elementary schools. The typical presentation of children's literature consists of reading stories aloud and showing illustrations. However, based on experiences from Swedish, Finnish and American colleagues, we see that there is a radically different way to introduce literature to children. Following Lindquist's (1995, 1996) and Hakkarainen's (2004) pedagogy and theory of narrative learning, a classic piece of literature has been introduced into an activity that encompasses play, drama and art; those very

activities are currently marginalized in public schools in California and suffer a similar fate in Denmark, as they are currently viewed as nonessential for the development of academic skills. By enacting the text of a novel with children, we created a space into which children could freely enter to actively explore different aspects of the novel, including the characters and their goals, setting, plot and actions.

When one aims a research programme specifically towards generating qualitative data alone, one may, as was the case with the original Play World project, find an increase in general literacy skills and yet, due to the single track data gathering process, discover oneself stranded without resources for generating convincing, *popular* verification of points which are fully accepted and honoured in scholarly and academic settings. Following, the unfolding of the research programme and the expertise which has been accumulated in its course – which could be used for furthering these seemingly worthwhile combined research programmes and teaching contexts – seldom leave the universities and situated community institutions in which they were undertaken; if we as practitioners in the field of educational and pedagogical research are to make our work fathomable for a general public and "sell" the projects and the insight gained along the course of our work to the policymakers, there is a concrete and pressing need for narrowing on a similar discourse of efficiency and result-oriented implementation, and it includes the idea of public opinion as an in-built concern in the research design in the form of *supplemental* data gathering that satisfies the public and political realities *as well* as meets our academic standards, thus not compromising the initial programme but expanding it for the sake of sustainability.

To ensure this I propose a dual method praxis that satisfies the needs for providing tangible, hard data as well as generating ethnographies that will allow for later revision and in-depth interpretation and open up the door to a deeper understanding of what is actually under concern: the culturally mediated nature of human thought and development and the foundation of human learning as a cross contextual endeavour.

However, on the one hand, we lack a coherent theory of child development as unfolding across multiple contexts and, on the other hand, the divergences between the knowledge and praxis of the responsible practitioners who implement the learning agendas in the classroom, and the policymakers: I propose the Play World as an intermediary zone of learning and growth which may ultimately include the broader of society if the people working with pedagogical forms of intervention on all levels gather round a willingness to both develop and share their knowledge as well as adjust their methods and forms of argumentation to address the political reality in which they exist.

When regarding the social integration, I propose further investigation into the basis of mutuality as a modus operandi of inclusion and holistic participations which heeds to actual developmental levels which ensures the continued development of both the strong pupils and the less so. We experience development of the strong child as a result of him or her serving the weaker ones by taking on the role of the instructor and facilitating the learning processes, as well the children are exposing each other to good forms of behaviour, increasing the likelihood of the same behaviour to

occur in the other (Bateson 1972, 1979) while at the same time becoming forced to critically reflect on their own knowledge. In the process the interrelation between the literary narrative and the children's personal narratives has come to take central stage as they engage in continued renegotiations of the rules of engagement, facilitated by the available artefacts: primary, secondary and tertiary.

I propose the concept of the synergic zone of proximal development as the theoretical perspective which captures this shift between child- and adult-structured spheres of activity as well as wish to relate the introduction of novel and expansive concepts up to a previous claim; as it is an idea based on empirical observatory data and theoretical expansion, it must be carried back into the contexts of learning for re-implementation and re-evaluation before it can be claimed to have any use; there is thus immanent need for a new project which incorporates this hypothesis in the planned research questions in order to either support or reject its claims, again using the learning contexts as a design laboratory for both higher-order academically theory testing and school learning.

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Chapter 10
Online Adolescence: Real-Life Development in the Virtual World of Warcraft

Halfdan Fryd Koot and Henrik Garde

Introduction

Within the last decade, we have witnessed a remarkable development in the use of the Internet and associated technologies, as a place not only for gathering information or news. Just as often, the Internet is used for entertainment, creating new relations and maintaining relationships and communicating across the globe. The generation of children and adolescents in Denmark today uses these ways of relating and communicating as an integrated part of their everyday life. Previous generations had certain locations or places, like the street, at home or in school, to meet, socialize and therefore to develop. We perceive the Internet as an additional location or zone for children and young people of today, where a part of their development towards adulthood takes place. The Internet will, if the present technological advances continue, have a substantial and growing importance in the psychological development of children. Therefore, in our opinion, it is essential that scientists interested in understanding and explaining the development of children turn their attention towards this aspect of children's everyday life with the same scientific interest they display towards the family or school.

This chapter is structured as paragraphs. First, there is a short introduction to World of Warcraft (WoW), the virtual world that has been the focus of our study. Next, we present our theoretical conception of development, as well as the concepts of constraints and zones, briefly related to WoW. The theoretical part of the chapter

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is concluded with a paragraph on adolescents' social relationships and how we consider those in relation to WoW.

Following these theoretical paragraphs is the description of our empirical study of Danish adolescents' interactions and development in WoW, as well as our analysis of the empirical data, followed by a discussion of the implications of our findings and a conclusion of sorts.

World of Warcraft

World of Warcraft is a game that is not only played on the player's own computer but on many connected computers and servers in a huge shared virtual world, where the players can meet each other and interact. There are currently more than ten million active WoW players in the world, and WoW is the largest of its kind in terms of active users.

The game is based in the virtual world of Azeroth, inspired by fantasy literature like "Lord of the Rings" and role-playing games like "Dungeons & Dragons". You play classical fantasy characters and races like a wizard, a warrior, an elf, an orc or a troll and fight enemies like dragon and demons, collecting treasure and other rewards. The player creates a so-called avatar and enters Azeroth, either on the side of Good, The Alliance, or on the side of Evil, The Horde. In the vast and varied virtual world, you meet and fight other players or the monsters populating the world, created by the programmers and run by the computer, called NPCs (nonplayer characters). The NPCs offer quests, which the players can embark upon, getting treasures and experience points (XP) as rewards. The treasure and XP are in turn used to buy better equipment and developing your avatar, thus enabling you to fight stronger enemies. By doing that, you gain access to new areas, where the enemies are stronger, and thus you are driven forward in the game by the stories that are mediated by the game, in a pace controlled by the development of your avatar (Blizzard 2008).

In WoW, you play with a lot of other people, and you can help each other complete all kinds of quests. Some quests are so difficult that they are almost impossible to complete without cooperating with other players, and some, called raids, can only be completed by 40 or more players in unison. The players also have different abilities which complement each others, so that one may be good at fighting and another may be good at healing. In order to coordinate when and where to meet and play together, players join up in so-called guilds. During play, the players communicate by chatting, and on most servers, the common language is English. WoW can as such be used as an advanced chat room, where the context of the game and the visual aspect of the virtual world allow for a different kind of social life than other chat-based online communities.

Theoretical Assumptions

In order to utilize a scientific understanding of the development of the WoW players, we draw upon the theoretical use of zones and constraints of Jaan Valsiner (2000). His concept of development is to be understood in relation to culture, as

culture is a key mover in human development. Various cultures facilitate different possibilities and limitations/constraints for the individual's development. Therefore individuals develop in a culture which acts not as a deterministic principle, but by structuring possible paths of human development. As Valsiner writes,

> The actual course of personal development is constructed by the person in relation to that cultural guidance. In this sense, human psychological development is jointly by the persons and their social worlds, or co-constructed by the two. (Valsiner 2000; 1)

Thus, the individual is determined and indetermined at the same time, or *independent dependent* (Valsiner 1997; 173). Valsiner (1997) uses the term *relative autonomy* to stress that the individual is free to choose different options, but only on the backdrop of the different constraints determined by a given culture. In development there is always interdependency between the acting organism and environment/structure, and in the case of human development, the environment is structured in cultural meaningful ways, both in a physical sense and "in terms of" meaning or semiotics (Valsiner 1997).

In addition to the understanding of action employed by Valsiner (1997), we wish to expand this term and stress that action implies participation in diverse local practices. As put forward by Dreier (1999; 6), action, as a theoretical term, does not necessarily entail an idea of social practices, but can as a concept imply a free floating interchange between people or individual and environment. Therefore, we employ the critical psychological understanding, promoted by Dreier (1999), of the subject as a participant that can be located in different positions within different contexts or social practices, in pursuit of a certain life trajectory. We perceive development as occurring through action, but in our view this must entail participation in different (historical) practices.

Zones

Central to Valsiner's conceptualization of development are three different zones, which are seen as theoretical constructs that helps to pinpoint different aspects influencing the possible and actual development.

The three zones are:

1. *Zone of free movement or the zone of freedom of movement* (*ZFM*): It defines or constitutes possible physical movement as well as allowed thought and emotions.
2. *Zone of promoted action* (*ZPA*): It defines or constitutes social others wishes and goals for the child.
3. *Zone of proximal development* (*ZPD*): It conceptualizes the potential or possible development the child can achieve through participation with help from social others.

Two of the three zones are *not* new theoretical concepts, as Valsiner himself points out. ZFM as a theoretical concept was first employed by Kurt Lewin, but has undergone changes in Valsiner's re-employment of the concept, due to his different conception of borders or constraints.

ZPD is taken from Vygotsky's zone of the same name and is originally roughly conceptualized as the development the child can achieve, helped by adults or more capable peers.

Here, "potential" is a more prudent term than the more often used "proximal" (Valsiner 1997; 148), because ZPD tries to capture the potential development that can take place.

All of the three zones can be conceptualized as certain types of constraints, which structure the individuals' actions and, therefore, potential development.

Constraints

Constraints act as limitations or boundaries in a physical or semiotic sense (Valsiner 1997). In theory there are infinite possibilities for human development, but constraints limit infinite possibilities and "convert" them into finite possibilities; culture or, a more concrete example, school acts as a constraint by reducing the variability of developmental possibilities. The potential developmental pathways thus change into actual development, structured by the school or other contexts for learning and development and influential others who emphasize certain skills, proficiencies or conducts. According to Valsiner (1997) it is a necessity that this limitation takes place in order for development to occur. So, actions are structured by different types of constraints that, figuratively speaking, act as filter or funnel for development. However, they do not determine a certain outcome. One could say that constraints heighten probabilities for a certain outcome, but one cannot predict or determine a certain outcome in a dynamic open system (humans), and for changes and development to occur, it has to be open (Valsiner 1997).

Zone(s) of Free Movement (ZFM)

This zone defines which areas the individual can access, availability of different objects in a given area and the individual ways of acting with the given objects in a certain area (Valsiner 1997). The playpen can be seen as an example of ZFM, in the sense that it restricts the child's movement and access to different areas and limits the availability of objects. ZFM is easily thought of as only covering aspects of the physical environment, but it also functions through internalization, in the sense that the child sets boundaries for its own behaviour or movement in a cognitive and emotional manner, so that certain possible actions are excluded. As development takes place, the zone is changed in various ways, from playpen to living room to the whole house, or simply ceases to exist.

Furthermore, children, and adults for that matter, move between and into different ZFMs (home, work, school, etc.), which allow different possible actions and availability of objects.

Zone(s) of Promoted Action (ZPA)

ZPA should be understood as a zone that promotes certain types of development or learning, through the promotion of certain actions. The zone can consist of different activities and certain objects or areas which parents and others deem important for the child. The relevant others then promote certain types of actions, for example, the parents want to teach the child how to read and promote the use of books (to learn the alphabet and subsequently to read) by encouraging, placing the child with a book in his hands or reading with the child. The child can act differently than wanted or expected within ZPA, as the child can "choose" to comply or do something different with the book, i.e. tossing it about and playing with it. Parents and others can only promote; they cannot force the child to act. ZPA is in this way *nonbinding* in nature (Valsiner 1997; 192):

> (…) there is no way in which the child can be made to act within the ZPA (unless the ZPA is turned into ZFM). (Ibid; 192)

Imagine a simple incident; the parent asks the child whether or not it wants to put on its jacket. The child replies "no", and the parent pauses and then starts to promote the idea that it is rather chilly and the child ought to get a jacket on. When the parent decides to say "either take your jacket on or I'll put it on you", the action is promoted by a threat, but the child can still choose whether to comply or not. When the jacket is forced on the child, the zone of promoted action becomes a restrictive zone of free movement.

We understand the ZPA not only as comprising what actions parents or teachers want the adolescents to take but also actions that the state or other institutions promote, such as "don't start smoking", "get an education" and "take care of the environment". Last, but certainly not least, the child's peers also promote actions.

The ZFM and ZPA Complex

According to Valsiner (1987, 1997) the two zones must be seen as interacting or dialectically linked, and together they can be seen as different aspects of the same complex.

We conceive Valsiner's zones as potentially overlapping zones representing different interests defined by different actors in relation to contexts. In Valsiner's micro-genetic study (Valsiner 1997), he describes how eating situations with toddlers are structured on different levels, but in this case the balance of power and the involved actors are clear. In the case of adolescents, we presume that this issue is more complex and therefore not easily defined, because adolescents transverse a larger number of contexts, of their own choice or making.

In addition to Valsiner's understanding of ZPA and some cases ZFM, we wish to add another theoretical construct: developmental tasks. Different theorists propose different tasks in relation to adolescence, but most centre on the following: identity formation, the making of intimate relationships outside the family, participation in a certain "youth life" and the ability to engage in society as a responsible citizen

and therefore avoid different kinds of deviant behaviour or the development of psychopathologies (Hedegaard 1995; Poulsen 2002; Mørch and Laursen 1998). In our understanding of developmental tasks, one can subsume them as being ZPAs, and in some cases ZFMs, promoted (or demanded) by parents, institutions, peers and society in general. Therefore we argue that in most cases the developmental tasks are not defined by the adolescents themselves, but from "above". With adolescents, there can be conflicts between different ZPA's and ZFM's, in that there is not *one* ZFM or *one* ZPA. Hedegaard (2005) describes how Danish adolescents from immigrant families are having difficulties honouring demands from the school which are at cross with the norms of the parents, such as participation in school trips. In the light of Valsiner's theory (1997), different ZPA's are in play which the adolescent can select from. The ZPA, by promoting different actions, co-defines different conceptions of ZFMs: one at school and one at home.

Zone(s) of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Zone of proximal development is different from the two zones described above in that it tries to describe or conceptualize a movement or change from one state to another. The concept of ZPD helps to conceive the transition from possible development to actual development and point out the interdependency with social others and personal goal orientations. The ZPD is in Valsiner's conception subservient to the ZFM/ZPA complex and therefore describes *the set of possible next states* (Valsiner 1997; 200). In this sense, his concept is a narrowed-down version of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development.

The three zones interact and define what the child's potential development should or could become. ZFM/ZPA and ZPD are interacting in a dialectic relationship, and this interaction facilitates and defines what kind of development can take place. Changes in one zone cause the other zones to change as a result of mutually constituting dependence, for example, when a child learns to ride a bike in traffic and thus is allowed to ride to a friend's place, expanding the ZFM. ZFM and ZPA structure the probable development path which the child can follow or not follow. As the child develops, the ZFM and ZPA changes as well, as the actual development also changes which actions are promoted by parents and significant others. This again creates new potential paths (ZPD) for development and so on. Development should not be conceived as a process of reaching certain predefined final states. Rather, development is a continuous process.

Zones in World of Warcraft

Even though WoW is not created with that specific purpose, we propose that the game can potentially facilitate the development of children and adolescents, and we will apply Valsiner's zone theories to better understand the game. In WoW,

the player has the opportunity to use various aspects of the game in ways that, from our theoretical perspective, can be conceptualized in relation to ZFM, ZPA and ZPD.

- *ZFM*: Wow is in itself a whole new ZFM, in that the player, through the computer, can move out of the physical world that he or she is limited to and into the virtual world. The player can thus break down constraints that limit access to social interaction, due to imposed circumstances such as geographical distance to friends or lack of a commonplace to meet.
- *ZPA*: The player's access to different areas in Azeroth is limited by the development of the player's avatar, and because a highly developed avatar brings social status, the player is promoted to develop his or her avatar. The game also promotes cooperation, since some quests can only be completed with help from others, and the players promote each others to play often, and to commit to the game, since they are dependent on each other.
- *ZPD*: WoW can be perceived as a ZPD in relation to the game itself. First and foremost, players develop their mastering of the game, as well as typewriting abilities and language skills. Secondly, by promoting cooperation, WoW facilitates development of the social skills and social relations necessary for cooperative play.

These zones and possibilities are not unique for WoW, but are possible in many other online communities, both those that are related to gaming and those that are not. WoW, however, is unique in that no other online activity has promoted corporation and community making to the same extend as WoW. As a result, we predict that, by the time this is published, many other games will exist that copy and expand upon these aspects of WoW.

Social Relations of Adolescents

The part of adolescents' social life that takes place outside the family consists primarily of three primary types of peer relations: dyadic friendships, cliques and crowds (Cole et al. 2005).

Dyadic friendships are the intimate relationships between two individuals, which become increasingly intense in the teenage years (Savin-Williams and Berndt 1990). One of the most important developmental tasks to be solved in dyadic friendship is developing the capacities for intimacy and autonomy (Barr 1997; Selman et al. 1997). Adolescents who perceive their friends as supporting report fewer social, school-related and psychological problems and less loneliness (Eccles et al. 2003).

The clique is a group of several friends in regular interaction with one another, and it serves as the primary peer group for adolescents (Brown 1990). Though clique-like groups appear earlier in childhood, their purpose and structure changes in adolescence, because the clique now functions as a new centre of security for

adolescents as they spend less and less time with their family (Erling and Hwang 2002). Though the norms and values of home and school have already been taught by parents and teachers, it is in the clique that the adolescent learns how to behave outside these contexts. Therefore, this group is important for norm and identity formation in the adolescent years (ibid.)

Crowds are large groups of people gathered around activities such as parties, concerts and sports activities. Adolescents often participate in crowds along with their cliques, to provide a kind of safe base in situations where they can often feel insecure among strangers. With the exception of periods of transition, such as school change or commencing new leisure-time activities, the number of new peers that adolescents meet is limited. In crowds, though, adolescents have the opportunity to meet new – often like-minded – peers and develop new friendships or romantic relations, and that is one of the main functions of the crowd (Dunphy 1963; Cole et al. 2005).

Social Relations in World of Warcraft

With more than 10,000,000 users, WoW has the opportunity to function as a crowd for the players. In and through the game, you therefore have an opportunity to meet new people, without the need of a clique for participation and without the insecurity that one can often experience in other crowds. Thus, it is possible to make new relations in a way that otherwise is only possible for the adolescent in transitional periods. Furthermore, it is also possible for lonely people, who do not normally have access to crowds, to meet new friends.

Research shows that online communication can facilitate the development of very close relations, and that it is even possible to fall in love without meeting face to face (Schramm and Lønsted 2001). This is even more probable if you participate in lasting social relations, such as guilds in WoW. Guilds can also fill the role of the clique, as a peer group where adolescents can create their own norms and culture, reflect themselves in others and establish an alternate centre of security (Audon 2001).

An Empirical Study of WoW

Based on our theoretical assumptions and the empirical evidence presented, we expect that development can be facilitated through the game, and that close and lasting relationships can be developed and maintained in this virtual world. To consolidate this empirically, we interviewed a group of adolescents who spends, or has spent, considerable amounts of time playing WoW, and we regard them as experts on the field.

The study employs a qualitative method, and we have used three different interview forms to obtain the needed data. We started by making a pilot study, by conducting interviews of three adolescents (Victor, Anna and Max) via MSN Messenger. Based on our findings in the first interviews, we subsequently conducted the interviews in a more traditional face-to-face fashion, both single and focus group interviews, recorded in a digital format. The first theme in the interviews focused on the making of friendships and intimate relationships, the level of commitment in and to the game and the relationships in it. The second theme focused on the skills acquired in relation to the game and whether or not these skills could be used in other contexts.

All the informants participating in the study were between 15 and 17 years of age, and their names have been changed in the following to protect their identities. One girl and fifteen boys were interviewed, so one can rightly claim that this study's focus is on how young boys perceive WoW in relation to the themes in the interview.

Most of our informants were from a certain boarding school[1] that specialize in various kinds of games, so these youngsters take games seriously. We assume that they therefore participate on another level than what you would normally expect.

Online Friendships

It became evident from the interviews that the informants distinguish between friends with whom they only have relations on the Internet and friends in real life. They even use the abbreviation IRL[2]:

Interviewer: How many of your friends are playing?
Victor: Err....about 15 I believe, are we talking IRL friends here?

Furthermore, some of them have different categories in which these friends are categorized. In one category, they distinguish between close and good friends. "Good friends" is a denominator that can be used to describe the quality of the relationship, whether or not these are net-based or IRL. "Close friends", on the contrary, seem to be a denominator mostly used to describe relationships based in real-life settings. The common interest can still be WoW, but the interaction is based on face-to-face encounters.

[1] In Denmark, in the last 2 years of mandatory school, one can choose to attend a special private boarding school that in Danish is called "efterskole", roughly translated as "after-school". Most after-schools are characterized by specializing in some form of activity, i.e. sports, acting, dancing, music, etc.

[2] IRL: abbreviation of "In Real Life".

Other informants distinguish sharply between "real" friends and WoW friends/net friends. Here, the informants are not in any kind of unison agreement, but can roughly be ascribed two different set of opinions. In one opinion it is demanded that for a friendship to be "real", one has to have face-to-face encounters on a regular basis:

Jim: No…I don't think that you are able to become friends on WoW. I am of the opinion that I want to meet "friends" in person.

The other opinion is that one does not require face-to-face contact. For these informants, it is what the friendships entail, in relation to their everyday life, which is important:

I: Why do you think that so many people spend a lot of time on their WoW-friendships?
Adam: Because they feel that it is worth it, to hold on to them, because these *are* friendships.

Or as two of the boys we interviewed put it:

I: Some people claim that you can't become close friends through WoW?
Tom: But then they haven't really talked to them, then they're kind of shallow.
Peter: Then it's just a game.

For the ones who perceive their online friendships as "real" friendships, the relations are as meaningful as any other friendship. They can become as close as traditional offline dyadic friendships, and for these informants, it seems possible that developmental tasks can be solved through these relations. It also shows how WoW can function as a crowd for the players, as it provides the possibility to meet new people and make new friends. In our opinion, this is one of the most noteworthy and important features of WoW.

Intimate Relations and Commitment

Learning how to manage intimacy in relation to friends is one of the important skills that adolescents have to learn (Barr 1997; Selman et al. 1997). Many of our informants report that they are able to discuss intimate matters with their online friends:

I: So, you can discuss the same matters with your online-friends as with your IRL friends? Problems and such?
Dennis: Yes. Sometimes it can be an advantage that its online-friends… you can tell them all sorts of things, and they can't tell your IRL friends.
Anna: (about an online-friend) We talk about his girlfriend and his life and my life (…) It has become like a sibling relation.

A few informants even told us that they have met their girlfriends through WoW, and for one, the relationship became romantic long before they met in real life.

Most of the players show great commitment to WoW and the other players and often go to great lengths to live up to the expectation of online friends and guildmates:

I: Have you played WoW even though you didn't want to?
George: Yes… If you are part of a raid that takes 5 h, then perhaps you'd rather go visit the neighbour or watch a movie with your parents, but you feel obligated to keep on playing, because, otherwise the others would need you, and they might kick you from the guild.
Bill: Yes, I've felt that way as well, often.

In general, it seems that the social relations are the primary source of motivation for playing.

Developing Social Skills

Because WoW motivates you to cooperate with others, by incorporating constraints on how well you can manage on your own, the players are prompted to develop the skills necessary for cooperation. Several of our informants mention that they, by playing WoW, have developed a more profound understanding and accept of others and of the differences in people:

George: Personally, I think that you learn to accept other people's flaws. (…) I've become a lot more forgiving by playing WoW.
Bill: Because I've met so many people from different social classes, I've played with two players from South Africa, for example – It has been very educational. Also regarding to a mentally ill guy I've played with. (…) I've learnt a lot about other people.

Some of our informants claim that they have developed further social and interpersonal skills through interactions in WoW:

I: Have you learnt anything by playing WoW that you can use in other situations?
Adam: (…) I have become better at talking to other people.
Dennis: Cooperation. Communicating with other people (…) I think it has made me the person I am today.

Some of these informants tell that they used to be loners, who had a hard time relating to peers and making friends. For these, interactions in WoW have taught them social skills that can help them get on in real life, and successful experiences with online friends have given them new courage in regard to other social contexts:

Ben: I have improved a lot socially, in real life too, I'm better at talking to other people.

In that sense, WoW relations can display some of the functions that we have earlier attributed to the clique, as they can function as a new centre of security and as a place for adolescents to develop their own norms and values. For some it is easier to maintain these clique-like relations in real life, but for others it is easier to do online.

When asked what it takes to be able to learn social skills from WoW, some say that you have to *lack* some of the skills in order to *need* to learn them. In other words, people with imperfect social skills have the most to learn. Some of them also claim that you need to have the right motivation and attitude towards the game and the other players:

Tom: It also depends on whether or not they take their time talking to the other players – if they talk about how they feel and what they are doing – if they don't do that, they don't learn any social skills.

It seems that a higher level of commitment and motivation allows for a greater level of learning. According to Hedegaard (1995), more commitment results in a more experimenting and active approach, which again determines how easily one can achieve knowledge and skills and apply these to other contexts. Therefore, the players' motivation and commitment to the game and the other players are key factors in learning and developing through the game.

Given the necessary motivation, WoW can, via its constraints, promote the players to interact with one another and allow them to promote each other's development. WoW cannot in itself facilitate the development of its (adolescent) players, but it can function as a ZFM/ZPA complex, where the player as a copromoter makes it possible to use the game as a ZPD.

Development of Cooperation Skills and Other Skills

Regarding the development of other skills, the informants mention that they obviously develop their WoW gaming skills. In addition, the majority tell that they develop other computer skills, as well as language skills, due to the fact that most Danish players play on English servers:

I: Have you learnt anything from playing WoW?
Adam: English. And using my computer. Typing (…) using the Internet.
I: Have you learnt anything from WoW that you can use in other situations?
Peter: Typing without looking at the keyboard.
Tom: I think that I've become better equipped for school. Better at English, and if we're to make an assignment where we're allowed to use the computer, well, it's done a lot faster now.

Some of our informants describe how they customize WoW to match their personal preferences and play style:

Max: You have the opportunity to change your interface completely, with various add-ons, and I can't play at my best, without my own add-ons.

We believe the ability to customize computer programs is usable in many other situations, and even though the informants do not tell whether they have learnt these skills from WoW, we assume that they at least maintain them by playing the game.

Furthermore, some state that they develop organization skills and become better at teamwork by playing WoW:

I: Have you learnt anything from WoW that you can use in other situations?
Victor: Yes, maybe something about unity and teamwork
I: Have you learnt that from managing guilds and raids etc.?
Victor: Yes, you learn a lot about teamwork.
I: Can you learn anything from grinding[3] and questing?
Dennis: Cooperation and communicating with other people.

However, not all of the informants agree on how useful these skills are outside of WoW:

Max: Cooperation? He he. Well, you can cooperate on killing a great dragon in WoW, but I don't think that teaches you much about cooperation in the real world.

When asked what it takes to learn communication and cooperation skills from WoW, they believe, in agreement with social skill development, that you have to lack the skills and you have to have the right attitude towards learning:

I: What does it take to learn something from WoW?
Dennis: Hmm… You have to want it, you have to want to learn from it – and you have to acknowledge that this is actually something I can learn from.

It may seem like a banality to mention that the players develop these skills by using them, as this is the case with skills used in all kinds of contexts. The interesting aspect about this kind of skill development is the motivation that guides the learning. When adolescents learn skills at school, they are, at least partly, motivated by adults who promote certain skills considered necessary for a certain kind of participation in adult society and work life (Mørch and Laursen 1998). When the players learn skills through WoW, they are motivated only by their own desire to participate and succeed in the social life in WoW. As a (possible) result, they develop these skills to solve developmental tasks related to social relations and participation in youth life, as well as tasks that relates to skill development and the ability to participate in adult life. We believe that this comes with a high level of commitment, and that, as with social skill learning, WoW can function as a ZFM/ZPA complex, where the other players as copromoters make it possible to use WoW as a ZPD.

Most of the informants report that their parents, and some of their friends, think of their gaming as an antisocial activity, much like watching TV alone. For this group of adolescents, the need for, and application of, certain skills extends beyond what adults of today believe is important and understand the necessity of. For some, these skills are necessary for participation in a certain youth life and in development towards adulthood (Mørch and Laursen 1998; Mørch 1996).

[3] Grinding refers to slaying monsters for treasure and XP.

Discussion

Through the analysis of the interviews, we have shown that, based on commitment and different ways of participation, the adolescents can fulfill certain needs or developmental tasks.

Traditionally, developmental tasks, and the ways of solving them, are defined by scientists, parents and politicians. The problem, as we see it, is that the "right" way to do this is defined from an outside perspective of non-participation, i.e. outside the present context, while we regard the adolescents as first movers in participating in, and creating, new practices, which allow for new solutions and possibilities. We claim that these possibilities spring out from the fabric of new technologies in which the adolescents are enmeshed in a whole new way, where these new ways of being together are a commonplace fact of everyday life. We therefore wish to emphasize that the adolescents not only have to fulfill demands defined by different actors or institutions but also, in their way of participation, have to create new paths of development. They are therefore creating and reproducing new youth cultures and ways of using the available technologies, which presents new possibilities and new problems in relation to development and future life trajectories. One of the new possibilities that this chapter and study has focused on is the making of friendships mediated through a virtual reality.

It became clear during the interviews that the adolescents are very proficient users of the Internet and associated technologies, and that these skills are used, and indeed necessary, to make friends and maintain relationships. In addition, they use various abbreviations and slang that creates a "special" language which helps them communicate in WoW and other contexts. This language is a necessity in acquiring access to this (youth) culture, but at the same time, it is a construction in progress which reaches into the future. To participate in this culture, the adolescent not only has to acquire the language. He or she creates it through his/her participation, and in that sense they co-construct (Valsiner 1997, 2000).

Furthermore, to capture the adolescents independent co-construction, we would like to advocate that it is prudent to ask adolescents what *they* think they have to learn to participate in the right way in a given (youth) culture. This entails what is called a youth perspective, where the adolescents are not excluded from defining what they have to learn to, for instance, get new friends in a particular context.

Therefore, we see adolescents as cocreators of their own developmental tasks, as they, through participation, create, transform and reproduce the meaning of the contexts which their developmental tasks are situated in (Mørch 1996). Since development is never final, and the conditions for development are changing fast in our world, developmental tasks cannot be finally solved, as they evolve and continue throughout the individual's life trajectory (Poulsen 2002; Dreier 1999).

Another point we would like to stress, as an additional attraction besides the potential positive consequences mentioned above, is that when you participate in WoW, your age is of little or no consequence. In the everyday life of many adolescents, they occupy a somewhat peripheral position in (adult) society, where they attend institutions that isolate them with peers of their own age. By participating in WoW, this constraint subsides in the game, and the adolescents can therefore

participate, based on their gaming skills, language skills and avatar's status, as legitimate participants on equal footing with older players.

In the introduction we have argued that developmental psychology has to expand its focus to include the Internet, particularly online communities, to understand the development of children and adolescents, today and in the future.

When using Valsiner's cultural theory of development and the zones, one could ask how a game like WoW can play such a significant part in the development of some of the informants. Our answer has to be that WoW must be seen as a location which, through its design and structure, constrains and thereby promotes certain actions and therefore potentially facilitates certain developmental pathways.

Even though WoW was not created with the specific purpose of facilitating development, and the objectives and quests of the game were not created by the game's programmers to promote a certain developmental pathway, the game should not be seen as a ZPD that functions independently of human actors. As one of the informants put it, without the interaction with other human players, "*it's just a game*". It is the human participants who, by interacting with one another, and by being more or less capable, facilitate development. We believe that it is because of the other participants that these adolescents keep playing WoW, spending numerous hours in front of a computer. For them, these relationships are meaningful, also in relation to everyday life. Therefore, one can still apply the concept of zones as an analytic tool to understand how a "virtual location" entails these real-life possibilities and consequences and how, through interaction and relating to others, actual development occurs.

Conclusion

We have shown some of the possibilities for development in WoW. One point we would like to stress is that, in our interpretation, we have predominately looked at potential *positive* consequences in the use of – and participation in – WoW. Therefore, one can criticize this chapter for neglecting possible negative aspects. We acknowledge this, but still, this does not affect the conclusion that, for most of the informants interviewed, the consequences of participating are positive in scope. Some of the informants mention having improved their social skills, but we would like to point out that participating in WoW does not *save* adolescents; it only facilitates possibilities which have to be grasped through acting and participation. When you log on, different possibilities arise through participation, according to level of commitment and personal goal orientations, and by this, certain developmental scenarios can unfold.

Can the conclusions, proposed here, be applied to people living across the globe, or are they local truths, limited to adolescents in this location at this point in time? We think that the conclusions can, to some extend, be related to anyone, including adults, who are motivated for participating in lasting relations on the Internet. Certain socio-economic factors have to be in place to allow for leisure time and access to the Internet, but given that, and given a certain level of commitment,

we believe development on the net is possible for most people. At the very least, WoW allows for new kinds of activities, and not only for adolescent. We recommend that our readers "sneak in" to a MMORPG, and see for yourself what it is like. A lot of the players are your age, anyway.

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Chapter 11
Playing in Online Chat Communities

Morten Jack

Introduction

The Internet has become an important arena for social interaction during the last decade and hence an emerging field of research for social and developmental psychology. As with any emerging social arenas, the public conceptualization of sociality on the Internet has been dramatic and to a large extent dichotomic (Grünbaum 1999; Andersen and Jack 2002). Even today, 20 years after Howard Rheingold (1993) wrote one of the first ethnographic accounts of a virtual community, sociality mediated through electronic devices is still often described as outside of or in opposition to reality and in terms is being *good* or *bad* for the participants.

The purpose of this chapter is to give an account of how adults use an online chat room as a special place to build strong communities. The central argument in this chapter is that the concept of *playful activity* is a useful descriptor for a psychological understanding of the activities in this chat community, and possibly in other chat communities as well. Through analysis of the thematic genres of the co-constructed fictions unfolding in the room and of the results of these activities for the individuals as well as for the community, I argue that the activities in this room *resemble* social fantasy play as described within recent Scandinavian child psychology research. On the other hand, the special place – the chat room – transforms playing into forms and genres that might be distinct for their kinds of communities. This special role of the media is discussed throughout the paper.

This chapter is based on an explorative field study of one particular chat room (called *room 30–40*), conducted during the completion of my master thesis in 2002 (Andersen and Jack 2002). The chat room was at that time located on the Danish chat portal Opasia. Since then, Opasia, a service provided by the

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largest Danish communication cooperation, TDC, has discontinued their chat services. Characteristic for these kinds of communities, this has led to a new settlement of the community in another chat room made available by another service provider.

Online Chat Rooms

Online chat is a real-time text-based form of communication between multiple users over the Internet. "Real time" is in opposition to, e.g. e-mail, blogs and online message boards, which are all asynchronous forms of computer-mediated communication. On the chat, the text appears as it is typed on all electronic devices participating in the conversation.

People engaging in online chat are distributed in space and time in a different way than people engaging in face-to-face communication. They can be, and often are, apart in space, but close in time (Hougaard 2001). The receiver can be a single person (e.g. in a private chat room) or an unlimited number of people connected through the Internet from anywhere in the world.

The location of the chat room can be anywhere on the Internet. The room can be part of a dedicated chat portal (like the Danish portal Opasia, which is the case in this study), embedded in a Internet portal (e.g. dating sites, sites for special interests, community sites, message portals like Gmail), a part of a 3D virtual environment (e.g. Second Life), a part of an online multiplayer game (e.g. Counter Strike, Sims Online) or any combination of the above. The chat room can be mediated through any kind of an electronic device capable of connecting to the Internet, e.g. a PC, mobile device and PDAs.

When entering a chat room, the user must choose "a nick" (nickname). The "nick" identifies the user during the current chat session – or as long as he/she wishes to keep it – and may or may not be linked to the users' off-line identity. The nick can be the user's real name, it can be a description of the user's intentions on the chat (e.g. guy31_seeks_woman) or it can be any fictional word or sentence (e.g. Viking, HotGirl). The nick has an important role on the chat as the sole way of presenting yourself passively (without "talking") for the co-chatters. The list of "nicks" currently attending the chat is the first and often the only way of "taking a look around" in the chat room when entering and can give the visitor a first cue of whether he/she wants to stay. Although it is possible to take a new nick when entering a chat room – and even mid-session – nobody of the chatters in this study ever did so.

Chat: A Linguistic Party

When sociality is mediated through an online chat room, the users face the challenge of communicating successfully with very few means. Compared to face-to-face conversations, communicative channels as well as bandwidth are limited. As with most

online communication, all messages must be delivered through the exchange of text only. Sociality on the chat, then, has to be created, mediated and rehearsed exclusively through text. For that purpose, chatters around the world have invented a unique language, often described as a hybrid between text and speech (Crystal 2001; Hougaard 2001). This new language not only enables efficient delivery of messages through the media but also enables the chatters to play and perform.

As a visitor, one of the first remarkable experiences is the heavy use of acronyms. These can be used for a number of reasons, some of them identified by Hougaard (2001). Firstly, acronyms can be used to compensate for the missing paralinguistic information on chat. This group of acronyms directs the receiver in decoding the message. Examples include *S* (smile) and *G* (giggle or grin). Secondly, acronyms can be what Hougaard describes as *economizing use of language*. These enable the chatter to write long sentences quickly. Examples are BRB (be right back), WDYWTTA (what do you want to talk about) and OTTOMH (off the top of my head). The third and overlapping reason is what Hougaad terms *aesthetic use of language*, which covers neologisms like "sægs" instead of "sex" or "oxo" instead of "også" (Danish for "also"). The list of acronyms is long and per se incomplete,[1] and obviously, the acronyms function as signs marking subcultural borders, both within one chat room and within the online chat culture in general.

As a spectator, the linguistic creativity is both fascinating and indefinite, and playing on the chat necessarily equals *playing with the language*. The sociolinguist David Crystal describes the chat as a linguistic party, where the participants bring their language instead of bottles (Crystal 2001). This implies that the ability to master the unique language on the chat is a precondition for participating in the play, as is the ability to successfully decode it for a spectator wishing to understand what is going on. For a comprehensive sociolinguistic analysis of language on chat channels, see Crystal (2001) or Hougaard (2001).

The Chat Room as a Cultural System

Professor Michael Cole, co-founder of the 5th Dimension, a partly computer-mediated pedagogical and social form of intervention, argues that "culture comes into being whenever people engage in joint activity over a period of time" (Cole 1996, p. 301). Cole is referring to a research done by Rose and Felton in the 1950s on the minimal requirements for the emergence of culture. "They found that members quickly begin to invent new vocabulary and ways of doing things, primary and secondary artefacts" (Cole 1996, p. 301).

Applied to this study, chatting is in itself a culture that makes sets of artefacts available to its members. Primary artefacts include computers, screens and keyboards;

[1] For a list of the most common, see http://www.muller-godschalk.com/acronyms.html

higher level artefacts include the nonmaterial features of the chat room, e.g. predefined commands, private and public rooms and commands for changing nicknames. One of the products of the greater culture of chatting online seems to be the invention of new linguistic forms.

The process of acculturation involves changes in the ways subjects relate to the artefacts the culture makes available. When studying undergraduate students enculturation into the 5th Dimension, Cole found the first way of relating to artefacts to be orientational. In this relation, the artefacts are seen as things in themselves and resembles the way we as researchers and inexperienced chatters came to meet the culture of chatting: We observed the activity, which on a chat channel equals the text scrolling down the screen, but without the competences to master it. The next level is instrumental. Here, the artefacts serve as mediators for goal-directed action. As researchers, the chat room became instrumental to us, as it is for the regular members of the online chat communities. The third level of relation to artefacts is, according to Cole, reflective. On this level of enculturation, the subjects express a "particular form of mindfulness in working with the artefact" (Cole 1996, p. 302).

I argue that a characteristic of the culture in room 30–40 – and possibly in many chat rooms – is the reflective use of artefacts. Within the logics of play, anything can be anything (Schousboe 1993). This indeed seems to be the case when the chatters in this room perform, and this logic might be accelerated by the fact that higher level artefacts on the chat are nonmaterial and hence easily and rapidly changeable. Before digging into this discussion, I will present a perspective of playful activity that serves as the foundation for my analysis.

Playing in Chat Rooms

Why Play?

Seen from a first person perspective, playing is a self-explanatory activity: Children seek play because they want to be in the process of playing (Sørensen 2001; Mouritsen 1996). For the person engaged in playing, playing is motivated by the joy and fascination of the activity itself. The *activity of playing* is what Karpatchof, with reference to Huizinga's notion of *Homo Ludens*, calls an anthropological invariant: a fundamental form of human activity, not reducible to any other concept (Karpatchof 2002; Huizinga 1963; see also Asplund 1987). According to Karpatchof, playful activity is the self-transcendent aspect of human activity, the aspect of human activity that refuses to be controlled by a specific goal rationality set by the order of the society. This aspect of human activity is irrational and anarchistic and appears to serve no purpose. It is given many names; some of them are play, joy, fun, fantasy, humour and artistic display (Karpatchof 2002).

This kind human activity, motivated by the process of doing it, is coherent with what many of the adults in this study give as reasons for spending multiple hours every day on the chat. When asked why the chat, two of the informants replied:

> For me, chat is entertainment… you can relax after a day at work or relax and forget the thoughts on your mind….[2]
>
> Yes, I have good friends… but I mean I enter the chat to have fun or to tease a bit *ss* [sweet smile]… or just to watch…
>
> … the gimmick with chat/fantasy if you wish… it is fantastic ☺
>
> *SS* it is exactly the light mood *S* and some of them have the coolest sense of humour.

The terms “entertainment”, “have fun” and “light mood” used by the chatters above as motivations for entering the chat all describe the suspension of goal-orientation activity that characterizes play and *playful activity*. Based on interviews with the chatters and participant observations on the chat, I argue that for this group of chatters entering this chat room, no specific *need* behind (or in front of) the activity is motivating them to enter the room. They are not motivated by a need to expand their social network, to avoid face-to-face contact with people, to find a partner, to conduct experiments with sexuality or identity or to rehearse social competences. The motivation is emergent in the activity itself – they chat simply because they like doing it.

This, obviously, does not imply that these things cannot be an outcome of chatting. Chatting might actually expand the social network of the participants or help them to find a partner, and experiments with sexuality or identity might be a part of the playful activity taking place on the chat, which indeed might imply rehearsal of specific social and interpersonal competences. The “playfulness”, then, arises not as a result of the actions themselves, but of the *framing* of the actions (Bateson 1972). By framing the activities as play, the activities gain internal meaning. The chatters laminate personal experiences onto the play frame by a set of culturally shared meta-communicative cues indicating that participation in this context is to be understood differently than outside of this context (Bateson 1972; Armand and Husted-Andersen 2002). Besides using connotations like “fun” and “entertainment” as culturally shared descriptors of interactions in the room, the heavy use of acronyms function as meta-communicative cues that constructs the desired frame. In the example above, “smile” (*s*) and “sweet smile” (*ss*) is used in almost every sentence.

The Dynamics of Play

When framing the activities as “play”, “have fun” and “entertainment”, the chatters are co-constructing a reality in which their actions are attributed different meanings than in a sphere of everyday life. Understanding actions on the chat within this

[2] All quotations are based on screen dumps from either interviews with chatters or participant observations on the chat. All quotations are translated from Danish by the author.

context of play opens up certain attractive possibilities for participation. As will be shown below, *being someone else* is definitely a socially accepted and legal way of participating in this context, as long as it's *just kidding*. Doing it for real – internally understood as outside of the context of play – would be regarded as cheating, which is outside of the socially accepted ways of participating in this context and could eventually lead to *banning* of the unlucky chatter.

Applying Schousboe's (1993) conceptualization of social fantasy play carried out by children, the linguistic interaction on the chat can be seen as a recursive movement between spheres of reality and spheres of fiction. According to Schousboe, a child participating in play is simultaneously acting within three different spheres of reality (Schousboe 1993). The sphere of fiction represents the themes of the play, the sphere of reality represents the conditions for the play and the sphere of staging (regi) is representing exchange of ideas, negotiations and disposition of roles. The three spheres are penetrable and hence separated and interconnected at the same time. This implies that the three spheres of play are not three different *realities,* but all simultaneous and requisite conditions for the dynamics of the play. If a participant is placing himself outside of one of the spheres, the play will suffer and eventually not be able to continue (Schousboe 1993; Armand and Husted-Andersen 2002).

The sphere of staging takes of a crucial part at the onset of a play. This is where the exchange of ideas, negotiations and set up of roles is taking place. This is followed by a period where the sphere of fiction is pushed up leading up a period of renegotiations. Eventually, the sphere of fiction explodes, pushing the demands and opportunities of reality in the background. In this phase, children are engulfed into the play, pushing reality in the back of their minds, while realities outside of the sphere of fiction is still feeding the themes of the play (e.g. objects in the room are enabling or inhibiting specific themes in the play) (Schousboe 1993).

Summing up, playful activity is in this chapter seen upon as a noninstrumental, goal-suspending activity motivated solely by joy and pleasure. I argue that playful activity on the chat involves a highly reflective relationship to the artefacts made available by the culture, partly because these artefacts are used to construct the frame of playing. Below, I will identify three different fictional themes of play taking place in this specific chat room, all of which illustrates the reflective use of the mediating artefacts while at the same time resembles common dynamics of play. In all three examples, the sphere of reality – on the chat made up by the media and the mediating artefacts – recursively interacts with the sphere of fiction. Likewise, the sphere of staging is drawn into the play, especially when rules of conduct on the chat are under pressure.

I argue that the "fun" and "entertainment" on the chat seems to emerge in the gap and co-constructed movement between the different spheres. The first thematic genre might be the most obvious illustration of this. This thematic genre covers fictions explicitly constructed around the distinct features of online interaction.

Three Genres of Play on the Chat

Playing with the Media (Meta-play)

Sociality on a chat channel is in a number of ways different than sociality elsewhere. A special and very common genre of play is play that involves these differences. These forms of play are so common that they might be described as a distinctive characteristic of chat in general than a genre of play. One of the most common is actions that indicate physical proximity, e.g. when a chatter asks another if she needs anything from the grocer's:

* husmus is about to go shopping. Anyone need anything?[3]
<MissLili> husmus how much can you carry *GG*[4] [laughs loud]
<husmus> mislilli Got a truck, so
<MissLilli> husmus Ok, let's write lists then *G*
<husmus> mislilli jep, but you need to pick up the goods at my place *SGGG*
* SW recons it's quicker to do the shopping yourself *GG*

The two chatters might very well live in each end of the country, but are playing with the idea of physical proximity. Both of them are regulars on the chat and know each other very well. Other examples are fictional acts with each other on the chat, ranging from giving a virtual hug to long and complicated actions. A few examples:

<Frejas_Mor> snaps off a palm leaf and waves Viking.
* Bittern is bored to death
* SW throws a Lego box at Bittern so she isn't bored *Sg* [Big Laugh]
* mette_brb bungs Viking_away a beer.

Creativity is rewarded in these types of actions. The technology offers around 50 preprogrammed actions, which can be transmitted with only one click. Some of them are "says hello to everyone in the room", "bungs X a beer", etc. For old timers, a part of the play is to find new virtual actions.

The use of third person actions, in opposition to direct "speech", is an important toy on the chat. The shift from first person to third person is purely stylistic – it serves no other design purpose than enabling creativity. Third person actions can be used as above to simulate fictional actions and can be used to comment others' or own actions, e.g. MyLady after mistyping something:

*MyLady: ggrrrrr… damn somebody moved the keys…

[3] Husmus is using a third person action marked by the asterisk. Third person actions are often used by the chatters as *stage comments* on the chat (Hougaard 2001).

[4] Syntax is <sender> receiver message. Miss Lilli says to Husmus: How much can you carry?

In both cases, the actions involve something that is otherwise missing on the chat. Thoughts, feelings and the body as a physical entity can be drawn into the interaction on the chat, but only at the will and control of the chatter. This enables the chatter to maintain a certain control of how they are perceived by others and a certain freedom to perceive others according to *what they say* instead of *how they look* (Sørensen 2001). The enhanced possibility of *selective self-presentation* can be seen as a potential liberating aspect of online life in general.

The *playfulness*, thus, is partly made up by the absence of physical cues and partly shaped by the open-ended design of the room. The missing paralinguistic cues leave a wide open space for interpretations and imaginations among the chatters. This open space is filled with words by the speech actions of the chatters, resulting in the co-construction of an authentic and original narrative and hence resembling the social fantasy play carried out by children (Cecchin 1996; Schousboe 1993).

But the design of the room itself also plays a central role. Interaction in an online chat room forms intricate relations between the chatters and technology. Taking on a socio-technological approach, these relations can be addressed as a "collection of humans and things" (Latour 1999; Jensen et al. 2005). The design strategy of this and other chat rooms seems to be open-ended – the possibilities for forming and transforming the room through activity are almost unlimited. The room takes its form when inhibited – and vanishes if uninhibited. The interior of the room and even the language mediating the conversations are invented during the chat by the interplay between the technology, the intentions of the designers, the current users and by the tracks laid out by the activity of pervious users of the room. In that sense, an online chat room might indeed be the perfect playground for fantasy play.

Identity Games/Hide-and-Seek

This thematic genre of online play has attracted tremendous attention, not only in academic studies but also in the general public, often worried opinion about social life mediated through the Internet. What is described as play or experiments with identity on the Internet covers at least two different forms. Actual identity experiments are when a user logs on and pretends to be somebody else, e.g. by giving "false" information about age, gender or physical appearance. The intention can be the attempt to attract attention by a group of which the person does not belong outside of the chat. The notion of "false" in this sentence implies that there is a "right" version of these attributes, and that these are to be found in the off-line world and cannot conflict with these without being "false". If you are overweight off-line, any other self-presentation of your body online would be considered to be "false" in this notion.

Another form is by Sørensen et al. (2000) described as hide-and-seek and is when a user for the joy of self and others is pretending to be somebody else and eventually exposing her "real" identity. The first form can be seen as an individual play, whereas the second is often social and can involve all chatters in the attempt to disclose the person behind an unknown nick.

Both forms involve playing with the boundaries of fiction and reality. The user is acting within the sphere of fiction (pretending to be someone else) while expecting that the other users are acting within the sphere of reality (giving their "real" identity).

Chat sessions where the users are construction fictions about themselves as part of their self-presentation were very rare on the online chat community we investigated and might be rare in general among adults chatting. The questions of "Who am I, what can I be?" and "Who am I not, and what can I not be?" can be investigated during these practices and are closely related to the questions of "Where am I?" (Sørensen 2001). The chat session enables the user to perform a situated and reflexive construction of identity (ibid.). The anonymity and the distance created by the text enable the users to investigate different aspects of themselves that might be under development or socially unaccepted in other contexts.

Early accounts of online sociality have a strong focus on anonymity, which by Wallace (1999) and others are described as a fundamental feature of computer-mediated communications. This feature of online communications, in combination with what Suler (2001) labels *the online disinhibition effect*, is in early account forming the base of the expectations of widespread identity experiments, aggressions, flaming and casual, non-committal relationships on the Internet. This *media determinism* has lost ground during the last decade (Andersen and Jack 2002). Recent research shows that the media itself does not determine the social interactions mediated through it. Anonymity is a possibility offered by the technological design, but is only used if culturally accepted among the participants of the community. The adult chatters we investigated during this study never pretended to be anybody else except as part of a co-constructed fiction. As in many other contexts, giving wrong accounts of your gender, name or age outside of a common fiction would be considered bad behaviour.

Another constraint for these kinds of games is the nature of the community. As with many online communities, the relationships in this chat room tended to migrate from online to off-line, and most of the regulars in this room often met face-to-face, which obviously limits the possibilities for "playing" with identity. In that sense, the computer and the media forms one of many *realities* the chatters are participating in when building bonds with each other. The chat room is – like any other place – a special place with distinct possibilities for participation, but cannot meaningfully be placed outside of these realities. The construction of identity, seen as an ongoing discursive process, isn't separated from other contexts, but strongly entangled with other contexts the subject participates in. In this construction of identity, playing with central attributes of identity as gender and age might be a central part of the life of a teenager, but is not a part of these adult ways of interacting with each other, either off-line or online.

Hide-and-Seek or Dressing Up in Words

Hide-and-seek however is an often used genre of play on the chat. In the following sequence, I (called CyberTalker on the chat) tried to initiate a social fantasy play in the room. The fiction is a running contest for couples and has been going on for

about 5 min involving five chatters. Leaving the sphere of fiction, some of the regulars wondered with whom they had been playing:

<bmn> CyberTalker. Who are you really? What are you usually called in here *SS?
<Karsser> Cyber....you know, you are not allowed to lie, right?..*GG*
<CyberTalker> bmn I am new. Who do you think I am?
<bmn> Cyber. Have no idea. That's why we ask…

As described by Schousboe (1993), certain negotiations have to take place for the fiction to continue. Taking roles and identities is accepted within the sphere of fiction, but a need arises for the co-chatters to know who outside of the fiction is hiding behind the nick CyberTalker. The comment "You know, you are not allowed to lie, right?" refers to the sphere of reality and to the norms governing the social interactions in the room. After a while of negotiations, "Karsser" is typing a console command on the chat interface exposing my registered name "mjack":

<Karsser> Cyber… Who is mjack…*GG*
<CyberTalker> Karsser It's me *gg*
<CyberTalker> karsser Morten Jack
<Karsser> Cyber..Ok.. you are a man whose name is Jack…*G*
<CyberTalker> karsser My name is Morten
<mette> cyber oki now I know who you are *GGG* hey

The sequence shows how playing on the chat is playing with boundaries – in this case between fiction and reality as well as between playing and cheating.

Playing with Sexuality, Intimacy and Distance

Many of the chatters we interviewed during this study started the interview by assuring us that chat is not all about sex. This uninvited report is interesting and might hold many of the prejudices adult chatters face. Chat has, maybe especially in the early days, notoriously been linked to finding partners and dating. As with anything else going on in virtual places, descriptions must be situated in a specific social practice to obtain validity. Chat rooms on dating portals, for instance, have the specific purpose of connecting partners, whereas heavy and uninvited flirting would be considered rude in other chat rooms. Likewise, the degree and intensity of flirting varies during the day. At night, the mood is often much more "hot" than during the day.

Contact, flirt and possibly verbal sex obviously don't have to take form of play. Much of the more goal-oriented interaction is taking place in *red chat*, which means private chat rooms only visible for invited participants. Flirting out in the open often has a more playful character and always involves an audience that very well might comment the attempts. Flirting or sexualizing comments can cover from subtle comments, only understandable for the participants, to very direct comments like:

<HotGirl> Peter321: You wanna play fire truck? I scream, you spout *LOL* [laughs out loud]

The following example is taken from a long flirting play. Four chatters participate in this session:

* SuperWoman considers if a flirt with Peter321 will turn out less dramatic this night
* HotGirl looks gloomy at Peter321 and winks
<HotGirl> Peter321: Are you up to anything, or do you need a beer first? *BF* [winks naughty]
<SuperWoman> Peter321: I heard that sex is good against headache *BF*
<Peter321> HotGirl some dilemma… Beer… *GG*
* HotGirl is looking slobbering at Peter321 and laughs gloomy.
<SuperWoman> Peter321: Is that a banana in your pocket or are you just pleased to see me?
<HotGirl> Peter321: I love to dream, dream about you, cause In my dreams you are crazy about me.
<Peter321> SuperWoman hehe, HotGirl used that one earlier today *S*

The play in this example is operating at boundaries between spheres of fiction and spheres of reality. Irony, established by the heavy use of acronyms and exaggerations, is used to create the meta-frame of play and is giving the distance to the content that makes it safe for HotGirl to participate. At the same time, this obviously isn't just kidding. HotGirl wants to get in contact with Peter321 and is aggressively competed over by SuperWoman.

What is also evident in these examples is that the absence of the body makes intimacy more possible. On the chat, you are what you say and not what you look like. HotGirl is a *hot girl* in this example because she performs this role in the fiction. Most likely she knows both Peter and SuperWoman, but what is taking part here is the co-construction of a fiction, and in this fiction the bodies are subject to construction. Within the frame of the fiction, identity is not linked to the physical body, and the absence of the physical body on the chat makes the social construction of the body possible (Sørensen 2001). The physical appearance of HotGirl, Peter123 and SuperWoman loses importance as long as their names and self-presentation are coherent within the frames of the play.

These kinds of plays with sexuality and intimacy are quite safe for the participants and hence offer ways of experimenting with different actions while being physically secure. HotGirl is not just protected by the socially constructed frame of *as is*, but also by the physical distance to Peter321. As was the case above among teenagers experimenting with identity, the participation in online chat rooms can act as a *social sandbox* for adults, wanting to rehearse different ways of sexual approaches. Like with teenagers, zones of proximal development[5] can emerge within the chat room, forming springboards for actions outside of the chat. Following

[5] "The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky 1978, p. 86).

this line of thought, the roles taken by HotGirl, Peter321 and SuperWoman in the above examples might all represent interpersonal competences that are *about to emerge* in their discursive construction of sexuality, e.g. being aggressive, being much courted and being competitive.

Discussion

Taking this discussion back to activity theory, one might argue that play on the chat indeed is instrumental. Leontjev defines the object of an activity as its true motive:

> It is understood that the motive may be either material or ideal, either present or in perception or existing only in the imagination or in thought. The main thing is that behind activity there should always be a need, that it should always answer one need or another. (Leontjev 1978, p. 62. Quoted from Karpatchof 2002, p. 383)

So could the development of competences be the need behind playful activity that motivates it? What seems important here is that playful activity *might* result in the development of competences that are attractive to the subject or the group, but that the nature of the activity requires the participants to suspend any goal-directed activity. Karpatschof (2002) gives brainstorms as an example of this dialectics and apparent paradox of playful activity. A brainstorm is instrumental in the sense that it is used to solve a problem and thus subordinate to problem solving, but for the brainstorm to work, any goals must be put aside. This leads Karpatchof to argue that play must be taken seriously to work!

Playing with Intimacy and Distance: Transitional Fields

An important feature of interaction in chat rooms is the accessibility of accelerated *transitional fields* between intimacy and distance. Especially the shift from black (public) to red (private) chat enables rapid acceleration between being public and being very private – without exposing yourself to any physical danger. Stepping aside with somebody is not just easy – it is also perceived as relatively safe. The design of most chat systems even enables the user to participate in multiple private conversations simultaneously, without any of the involved partners knowing. What might be a consequence of the technically trouble-free access to non-physical intimacy is that access to private chat is followed by a set of norms that might be the most strictly enforced norms we fund during this study. Although it is technically possible to open a private chat room with anybody at any time, the code of conduct requires the user to always ask first. One chatter explains this norm to us:

> Well, you wouldn't walk up to a complete stranger and then barge in the door without knocking or ringing the bell or being invited, would you? ;o)
>
> That is to say… we decide ourselves who we want to be in our red rooms ;o)

Conclusion: The Role of the Media Revisited

Above, three different thematic genres of play have been identified in this specific chat room. Based on current research within the field, it is likely that some or all of these are common to many online chat communities. Likewise, two different attractive outcomes of playing have been identified. Firstly, the activity of play is in itself attractive. Secondly, playing on the chat forms social sandboxes in which competences that are about to emerge can be rehearsed.

The results of these two are individual; the subject gains something attractive by participating. A third result of the playful activity concerns the benefit of the community. I argue that playing has an important role in the constitution of a community that originates in the chat room. Playing and humour seems to work as a catalyst for the development and rehearsal of the community, bringing the participants closer together and indexing them within the social structure of the community. This is not unique to this study. Byam (2000) also found humour to be a constitutional feature of online communities and argues:

> Because humour simultaneously indexes so many important social domains, it has particular power to affirm the group's self-definition and to transform its social structure (p. 1).

A particular perspective of this study is adults engaging in playful activity online. Compared to older children and teenagers, the group of adults in this study not surprisingly played less with identity, but often engaged in fictional themes involving sexuality and intimacy. Other studies show how children chatting are moving from an orientation towards reality to an orientation towards fiction. Certain facts seem to be preconditions for children playing with each other on the chat – the most important being the age of the participants (Sørensen 2001). After this initial negotiation – which often involves wild bets and gambles – the fiction can begin, but for most young chatters, the fiction is in fact used as a vessel for intimacy. After a while, the conversations will tune in on realities again, covering subject of common interest to the participants. The result – and motivation – of this movement could in many cases be the establishment of friendships. We did not observe this craving for reality among the adults chatting. The fiction seems to be both the starting point and the ending point for the conversations.

What seems common to the thematic genres as well as to the outcomes of participation identified within this chapter is the fact that the media *does something* to the community and to the possibilities of participation. Sociality and playful activity online isn't just replicates of the same activities elsewhere. On the other hand, the relationship between the media and the culture is far from mechanistic. The diversity and local adaptability of online cultures easily match cultures elsewhere – if these at all are meaningfully detachable. So, even though different places on the Internet look the same, we may look in vain for similarities in the way they are used.

I have proposed different perspectives on understanding the role of the *things* mediating sociality on a chat channel. Building upon the cultural-historical tradition, the media makes artefacts available to the users and these artefacts forms and are formed by the participants of the emerging culture. The process of the creation and

modification of artefacts is the cornerstone of acculturation. Within this framework, the *devices* remain tools for the users, things that can be formed and modified. Tine Jensen proposes a radical different view of the computer. She argues that the computer can be seen as an enzyme. An enzyme has the capability to change the pace of processes that would happen anyway:

> Following this line of thought, like the enzyme, the computer becomes – in accordance with most media theory – and intermediary or catalyst. However, this intermediary does not simply connect points, but also changes the characters and relation between the points and, at times, even the structure of the points themselves. Thus, to explore the trope further, the computer as an enzyme connects to different substances, works on their boundaries and changes them into something else (Jensen et al. 2005, p. 125).

Playful activity is not the same on a chat channel as anywhere else. The spatial and temporal distribution of the participants, the lack of paralinguistic information, the special possibilities for anonymity, the distinct linguistic forms and the rapid transitional fields between intimacy and distance work on the boundaries of the activity and change playing into *something else*. Lacking words for these new forms of activity, the thematic genres and co-constructed fictions are described based on what they resemble in the culturally shared reality of psychologists and researchers of play. Moving further down the road of research into online communities, the language used to describe online communities might be the next victim. As researchers, we might need new concepts to describe and understand what is taking place when communities are moving online – concepts that grasp what is special without describing the activities online as "virtual", which implies that the activities online are somehow not *belonging to reality*.

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Chapter 12
The Persistence of Play and What If Thinking

Ivy Schousboe

Introduction

The presentation will be as follows: By way of introduction, some dominant developmental conceptions of progression will be presented. The aim is to define a specific conception of progression, the so-called layered model, which seems particularly suited to capture the fact that some aspects of development persist unchanged over time. Next, applying this model, it will be attempted to trace the persistence of an aspect of play which is traditionally described in connection with a certain period of childhood, namely, the "what if" aspect of fantasy play. The search for this aspect is extended in two ways: It will comprise several time periods which lie beyond the traditional focus area of play research, and it will comprise activity types which are usually not related to or defined as play. On the background of this search, it will be argued that the "what if" aspect is a persistent and widespread phenomenon.

Secondly, it will be attempted to contribute to an increased developmental understanding of the persistence of the phenomenon: What can be said about the genesis, stability and function of the "what if" phenomenon? The discussion of these questions is centred around a single radical version of the "what if" thinking, i.e. the experience of confluence between otherwise separate entities. This leads to a belief that the phenomenon has a basic function in people's daily lives and endeavours. A revision of the layered model is suggested, so that it will expose explicitly how the persistent "what if" phenomenon occurs in dynamic interplay with other kinds of experience, an interplay which varies in accordance with the immediate pursuits and motivation of the individual.

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It is concluded that the contribution to the developmental understanding of the "what if" experiences indicates that there is a fundamental similarity between children and adults with respect to the genesis, stability and functions of these experiences. On this background, it is argued that it is not at all a matter of course that much research describes play as a child-specific activity and that we regularly use play as a marker of childhood. Finally, it will be discussed how the child policies which the society adopts may affect the games which children play and the developmental possibilities of the children.

Developmental Conceptions of Progression

Developmental psychology is a rather large field of research within which different concepts of development occur. The figure below illustrates various dominant conceptions of changes over time (Fig. 12.1).

The first graph illustrates how the observed phenomenon arises, increases for a time and then diminishes or disappears. The second graph shows that one stage creates the condition for and is replaced by the second stage. This model is called the staircase model or the replacement model. The third graph illustrates that various phenomena appear in chronological order and that early phenomena may remain active by being raised into and changed in connection with the appearance of new phenomena. This model is referred to as the spiral model. The fourth graph illustrates that various phenomena may remain active both by being raised as in the previous model and – and this is the peculiarity of this model – by appearing in their *original* shape in the new whole. Stern (2000) labels this model the layered or stratified model.

As will be argued below, the purpose of sketching these graphs is not to claim that one graph is more true than the others. The aim is to illustrate that the graphs highlight different aspects of temporality. In relation to, e.g. the peekaboo game, graph I will highlight the view that peekaboo games belong to infancy, while common fantasy games belong to early childhood. Graph II will highlight (the fact) that through the peekaboo game, the child develops a capacity for interaction which is the prerequisite for and is supplanted by a new type of capacity which belongs to later social fantasy games. Graph III will illustrate that the peekaboo game develops a capacity for interaction which the more complex interaction of social fantasy play extends and changes. Graph IV focuses on the same point as III, but in addition underscores that in the peekaboo game the child also develops a capacity for

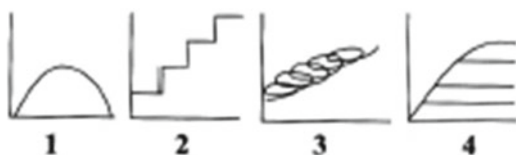

Fig. 12.1 Models of perspectives on progression

interaction whose early form coexists with later forms and which also remains part of and is continuously reconstructed in later fantasy play.

Stern has underlined in a particularly clear manner the fact that ways of experience and themes of life which occur early in life are not necessarily overtaken or replaced. His theory concerns the development of senses of self, but I believe that his way of thinking may be applied generally.

As noted above, research in play has underplayed the question if and how various phenomena of play may persist, and in the following, I will use the layered model as a search window in relation to play. I hope that an examination of the persistence and maintenance of an early aspect of play may act as an inspiration to open up some of the traditional fields of research and thereby also to supplement ways of understanding the relation between early and later periods of life.

A Supplement to the Dominant Developmental Perspective in the Study of Play

Several well-known types of play may be more fully understood when they are also examined with a view to their similarities. I will attempt this in the following, taking my point of departure in what may be called the favourite game of play research, namely, social fantasy play.

Focus will be on a characteristic which Bretherton (1984) emphasizes in her description of social fantasy play: The game contains an “as if” aspect as well as a “what if” aspect. The “as if” aspect refers to the activity where the child simulates some phenomena of everyday life which are familiar already. The “what if” aspect – and this is the aspect which Bretherton emphasizes – refers to the activity where the child makes assumptions about something which does not exist or at least which the child does not know to exist. It is the combination of “as if” and “what if” ideas which enable the child to create fantasies on a large scale, which is to say, explore both the possible and the maybe impossible.

Research in play usually describes social fantasy game as a type of play which reaches its peak in the third to sixth year in the lives of children. Below I will attempt to trace considerable “what if” elements in games which occur earlier and later and in other activities which are not called or conceived as fantasy games. Such elements may give occasion to widen our conception of where the “what if” aspect belongs.

Chronology and Continuity in Play Forms

As will be apparent from developmental textbooks, there is agreement within play research that various forms of play occur in a certain chronological order, and certain games are described almost everywhere. The game of peekaboo is described as

the game of the infant. It is a game which, within the secure framework of a well-known format, helps the child develop or consolidate a capacity which is essential in social interaction. The game becomes increasingly complex in the course of time, not least because of the child's increasingly active forming of it, but, it is stressed, its format, its structure, remains unchanged. In the present context it is worth noting that the content of the game does not enjoy visible interest with the researchers. Admittedly, it is pointed out that the format of the game builds up and releases a tension (e.g. Bruner 1976), but I believe that it may be further emphasized that the exiting point about the format is that it is a format *for something*. The child is engaged in the conception of "what if" aspects which are related to themes which are probably of great interest to him, in play as well as generally: When will mother reappear? (Sic, because it is mostly her). How will she look when she reappears – will she utter a friendly or a frightening peekaboo? The child's conception of "what if" is, I think, an important, but underexposed characteristic of this game.

Common fantasy play is presented as the most important game of the preschool child. As noted, it is mentioned that the game allows the exploration of both "as if" and "what if", and it is emphasized that children may here explore the impossible: They can be two quite different persons at the same time; they can be animals, a mixture of an animal and a human being and a fictitious character and a thing, as, for example, a lion superman with a built-in rocket. Here the "what if" aspect is embedded in the definition of the game, regardless of the fact that various researchers focus on different extents of the distance to reality and conventional thinking (cf. e.g. Leontjew 1973; Sutton-Smith 1997).

The rule game is described as the game of the "intermediate" child, that of mid-childhood. It is emphasized that the actors or agents are concerned with the establishment of, adherence to and possible renegotiation of rules for the game. Some scholars say that the rule game also contains roles, but stress that the role aspect is subordinate in relation to the rule aspect. As far as the "what if" aspect is concerned, one may say that it is perhaps more often defined away or relegated to the background than is necessary. The rules of rule games are always rules *for something*. This something is in many cases some form of competition between individuals or groups, a competition whose very feasibility depends on the existence of rules. In a competition, the outcome is not given in advance, and rules may ensure that the "what if" aspect – the possible outcome of the competition – may be explored. It is this field of imagined "what if" possibilities which makes the game exciting and necessitates rules. A game that merely consisted in the establishment of rules would not be likely to last long.

There are certain games and game-like activities which are not associated so strongly with special periods in life as the above, and some scholars emphasize that these games are practised by both children and adults (e.g. Pellegrini 1995). Games, sports and various kinds of involvement with fictitious universes may be mentioned. Games, sports and the reading or viewing of fiction are very widespread – and economically important – phenomena. Here, it should be underlined that all these activities may contain weighty, but not always recognized, elements

of "what if". In certain games, the agents rely on some combination of skill and luck – even professional chess players have good and bad days. In other games, the players rely on pure luck, however unlikely it may seem to the rational mind. Their lottery ticket may prove a windfall. They recognize the improbability, but what if…? Even in competitive sports, the "what if" aspect is central. Without this, the event would be a show, not a competition. To be on the safe side, some athletes perform exorcizing or conjuring rituals prior to a competition, and the greater the element of chance is within a sport, the more its performers use such rituals (Sutton-Smith 1997). Add to this that some devoted performers relate that their sport may give them attractive experiences of "flow". It is characteristic for such experiences that the ties of everyday rationality are loosened so that there is an opening for "what if" possibilities. The mountain climber has the freedom to experience the otherwise impossible feat of being one with the mountain or the universe (Csikszentmihalyi 1975). As for fiction, it is by definition rich on possibilities for the exploration of the totally or almost impossible, and a mere glance at the variety of television programmes, films, books and websites will testify to the extent to which people make use of these possibilities.

It goes without saying that there is nothing new in emphasizing that people can retain fantastic and irrational ways of perception throughout life (e.g. Werner 1961; Kris 1952). What has been argued above is only that the use of the layered model in connection with play can contribute to a further illumination of this fact. Compared to the other models, it has some advantages: It may inspire a fuller description of the individual forms of activity. In this case, it has drawn attention to the fact that certain forms of activity have an important, but sometimes neglected, element of "what if", and that this element may be the essential reason why a form of activity is precisely the form it is. The model draws attention to the fact that through various phases of their lives, people may to a considerable extent use even very radical and apparently particularly immature versions of "what if" thinking.

The Persistence of "What If" Conceptions

One may wonder at the persistence, even in our scientifically minded society, of such radical versions of "what if" thinking. What are they doing here? The question encourages one to proceed from merely noting the existence of the phenomenon over time to expanding the understanding of it as a developmental phenomenon and investigating its genesis, stability and functions. Without pretending to answer these questions in a satisfactory manner, I will begin to discuss them in the following.

In order to deepen our understanding of the developmental perspective, I will indicate a definite and precise characteristic of the hitherto broadly defined "what if" aspect. For this purpose, a single indicator of "what if" thinking will be discussed. A prototypical indicator has been selected which is unequivocally an

alternative to scientific or rational thinking, namely, the experience of confluence of otherwise separate entities, a manner of experience which occurs in a wide range of versions. Reference will primarily be made to research which does not directly deal with play, since such research seems to be fairly advanced in the way it applies a progressive perspective. I will point to research dealing with the human perception of the possible and the impossible, research, in other words, which is clearly concerned with the "what if" aspect and which I hope may shed light on its content, genesis and function.

Among scholars of different theoretical persuasions, it has been widely accepted that magical thinking, perception which is similar to the primary processes and the like, belonged to an early period of life. The immature child had not yet learned to distinguish between reality and fantasy and was in a high degree living in a fantasy world. With increasing experience in life, including upbringing and other cultural influences, the immature ways of perception/experience decreased or were replaced by the more reality-oriented ways (Cf. Rosengren and Hickling 2000).

Today there is widespread agreement that even quite young infants are worldly oriented. They seem to be disposed towards causal explanations, and they distinguish at an early age between what is possible and what is impossible (Stern 1985/2000). A massive body of downright revolutionary research has been published, demonstrating children's ability to acknowledge and control reality. However, this should not make us forget that children do not only control reality. Despite the research referred to above, children still move about eagerly in a fantastic and magical world, at least for a period.

For this reason, many scholars have studied the coexistence of conventional causal thinking and thinking which must be called an alternative to this. By conventional causality or understanding is meant that people operate with conventionally recognized logical relations and that different and well-established logical systems are used which are suited to the understanding of the physical, the biological and the psychological domains, respectively. These logical systems are sometimes called fundamental. The fact that some scholars propose further separate domains should be noted, but that does not affect the fundamental distinction between conventional and alternative causality (but see e.g. Hirschfeld 1995).

Magic or Clever Tricks?

Rosengren and Hickling (2000) have applied a progressive perspective in empirical studies of magical thinking in children. They report results which indicate that even very small children are reluctant to accept alternative causal relationships. On the background of a series of experiments in which 3- to 7-year-old children witnessed conjuring tricks, they conclude that the tendency to use alternative, magical causality to explain the magic begins at the age of 4, then reaches peak level for a year or two and then decreases rather abruptly to give way to a conventional causal explanation

that they are witnessing clever tricks.[1] They also find that children of all the ages studied only refer to magical causality when they are unable to figure out the conjurer's trick by using conventional causality. In addition, they find that the children use magic as an explanation first and foremost when they know of previous similar events which adults have described as being caused by magic or witchcraft.

Parents play an active part in introducing children to magic. When the children are about 3 years old, their parents take great pains to categorize various events as caused by magic, and they often promote various fictitious figures to real existence. Incidentally, they do so with considerable judgement and discrimination: Lovable figures like Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny really exist, while more doubtful characters like witches and sorcerers do not. When the children have been well introduced to magic, the parents begin to introduce them to scepticism about it. The parents of 5-year-old children will begin to give evasive or negative answers to questions whether something is owing to magic or whether a fictitious character really exists. As will appear, the children's use of alternative causality diminishes at the same time.

On this background, Rosengren and Hickling suggest a substantial revision of some basic theoretical assumptions about magical thinking. The magical thinking of children should not be understood as "errors" in their reasoning, errors which are due to immaturity and which culture will eventually correct. (Of course such errors exist, but they are solely errors of conventional reasoning.) To begin with, it is not the case that an original magical causality is replaced by conventional causality. On the contrary, magical causality is founded on conventional causality. It is a conceptual tool which the children make use of when conventional causality fails to explain a given phenomenon. In this manner, they are able to maintain causality in relation to the phenomenon in question. At the same time, the application of alternative logic may allow conventional logic to remain as an unchallenged tool of thought for the children, the tool which they will continue to use the most. In a manner of speaking, conventional logic does not risk being exposed as lacking or deficient, even though it appears inadequate with respect to making certain specific phenomena comprehensible. Secondly, the role of culture far exceeds the correction of errors. Culture actively and abundantly invites little children to think magically. For instance, it produces a wealth of products for children who play upon the existence of "impossible" creatures, objects and events, and in their daily intercourse with

[1]The fact that magical thinking as examined here, i.e. in relation to the transformation of physical entities, does not occur until the age of four does not preclude that it may exist earlier within other domains. In particular, some of the psychoanalytically oriented scholars have developed imaginative theories about the fantasies of infants. However, it has proved very difficult to make these theories accessible for such forms of validation, revision or refutation that colleagues of other theoretical persuasions might recognize. Therefore, it should be mentioned that, over the past two decades, a number of scholars of different theoretical leanings have opened up a dialogue which seems very promising, since it may generate knowledge about the fantasies of young children which a broader scientific society will recognize. Recommendable reading: publications, e.g. by Peter Fonagy, concerning "developmental psychopathology".

children, adults contribute to the furthering of children's ability to think about and explore the impossible. It goes without saying that culture also serves to tone down or eliminate magical thinking within certain areas.

Culture, then, dictates both where and how the introduction and possible elimination of magical thinking occurs, and it may be noted that the phasing out of magical thinking in one domain may very well go hand in hand with the retention of this manner of thinking in other domains and the introduction of it in yet other areas. Thus, it appears that the belief in the supernatural within the religious domain is introduced or substantially developed at the same time that the belief in conjuring tricks is driven back.

Let us look at some clear examples which illustrate that alternative thinking about how otherwise separate entities may be related to each may be a very tenacious phenomenon.

Conventional and Alternative Rationality: There and Back

Research in how children in our cultural sphere develop their understanding of the relation between the mental and the physical indicates that they have established a fairly well-consolidated and realistic "theory of mind" around the age of 4. At the same age, however, culture will begin to introduce them to alternative perceptions of what you might call the power of thought and belief. At first, they are encouraged to believe in the power of wishing and shortly after they will become acquainted with or possibly be systematically instructed in coherent religious notions. This introduction to alternative ways of conception occurs without damage to the established theory of mind. On the contrary, we may assume that in this connection, too, the alternative conceptions may in fact reinforce the understanding which is already established, since the established conception does not fall short just because it cannot help the child every time something needs to be explained. Added to this is the fact that children's conventional conception is not eliminated from the alternative notions. In fact, these may prove an extra ground within which conventional conception may be strengthened. For instance, in time children will begin to distinguish between acceptable or reasonable prayers and unacceptable or foolish ones. They do not expect that foolish prayers – like asking for money or a bicycle – will be heard. Only the reasonable prayers can work and the unreasonable prayers may even backfire (Wooley 2000).

As is well known, belief in the power of religious prayer may continue to exist peacefully side by side with rational thinking even in adults. But adults, too, can have a remarkable readiness to dissolve the distinction between otherwise separate entities. In daily life, one may observe from time to time how the feelings which one person has for another may rub off on his or her attitude to the possessions of the other person. Experiments have shown that college students object strongly to the thought of wearing completely clean clothes which have previously been worn by people who have been exposed to an accident or people whom they find to be

menacing or unsympathetic. The students themselves find that their reluctance is not rational in the ordinary sense of the word, but nevertheless they keep it. This shows that the reluctance can hardly be explained solely by rational considerations of hygiene. It becomes more understandable if we assume that it is based on a not always articulated experience of confluence between people and things. Of course, this in no way implies that in their daily lives, the students experience strange partial blending/confluence of people and clothes, but that such experiences may occur under certain conditions, in this case conditions which strike an emotional chord with them (Nemeroff and Rozin 2000).

Subbotsky pays special attention to the fact that the experience of confluence occurs under special circumstances. He has designed experimental settings in which subjects of various ages are given the opportunity to attribute various occurrences either to the influence of magical power or to human manipulation of objects. With regard to the tenaciousness of magical thinking, the experiments with adults are particularly interesting. As may be expected, adults who are asked whether attribution to magic power may be a possibility reply that they fully realize that magical force cannot, for instance, make a box cause damage "of itself" to a thing which is put inside it. But if they are asked whether they are willing to let the otherwise completely inactive experimenter put their driving licence into a box which has previously cut a stamp in two, a significant number of them abandon the unconditionally rational manner of thought. They do not wish to expose their own driving licence to such an experiment! When asked whether they are willing to put their hand into a box which has previously "on itself" done considerable damage to a piece of plastic, half of the subjects decline further participation, even though they have been guaranteed that they may stop the experiment whenever they want. This is to say that many of the subjects seem to be ready to abandon their otherwise well-established distinction between what they categorize as supernatural or impossible and what they find possible, and it appears that the readiness to take magical causal relations into consideration increases considerably as the risk involved in neglecting its possible existence grows more serious (Subbotsky 2000). The fact that this readiness or willingness appears in an experimental setting – a setting in which the subjects hardly expect to be exposed to real abuse – does not make it any less remarkable.

The Usefulness of Alternative Causality

We have seen, then, that many people show a readiness to use decidedly alternative kinds of rationality. But why is this readiness so persistent? I believe that it is because it is of general importance for the way in which we orient ourselves in our daily lives and thereby also for our subjective well-being. The capability to apply even those ways of experiencing and understanding may be significant for the individual in many ways, four of which will be discussed below.

First, many alternative ways of understanding may be said to constitute an always active "raw material" in our continuous interaction with the surroundings. They are

the direct descendants of a corporal and sensual "naive" perception which has not been transformed according to the rules of conventional rationality. For example, it is embedded in phenomenological perception that we trust things to be what they appear to be. This may be said to be a healthy and necessary point of departure to have in our interaction with the surrounding world. A person who did not in his daily life believe that what looked like a computer was in fact a computer, and what looked like a human being was in fact a human being and not, for example, a computer, would be in dire straits. At the same time, the phenomenological manner of experience constitutes the basis for an early-life belief in magic and the later estimation of a clever trick.

Secondly, alternative connotative ways of experience may enrich our perception of reality and make us aware of potential connections between events which conventional denotative rationality would have excluded in advance. When, in our daily lives, we examine something with special care and attention, it involves an orientation in the magnetic field between what is to be expected and what is possible. This may sometimes trigger good ideas and extraordinary experiences. In this connection, it may be mentioned that it has been found that people who excel particularly in their creative work – Nobel Prize winners and highly esteemed artists – are frequently so open to the experience of confluence that their Rorschach test answers are close to those of schizophrenics. In a similar vein, exceptionally gifted students were found to be particularly willing to suspend or alter their criteria for what they would classify as living and not living (Bruun 1965).

Thirdly, alternative ways of experience may in several ways have a decisive and often positive influence on the quality and intensity of feelings. In certain circumstances, they may instil a severely needed sense of control. Faith in the power of a wish or a prayer may be useful in situations of need and may help preserve the hope of happy future events. Actually, the attribution to another person of abilities which he or she does not have, but which one might wish she/he had, may sometimes work as a veritable self-fulfilling prophecy. This has been claimed to occur in connection with what is called – with a bizarre term – the anthropomorphic fallacy, a term which denotes the phenomenon of adults spontaneously attributing to little children characteristics which they do not yet have, but which they will acquire, among other reasons, because they are attributed to them. But the importance of alternative ways of experience for the subjective well-being may be far greater than that. They may function as an often not articulated basis for our understanding of and relation to others and to ourselves. Conventional logic is hardly able to give an adequate explanation of the wish to climb mountains, write scholarly dissertations or stay in an unsatisfying marriage to the end of one's life.

It may be particularly difficult to understand human emotional life solely on the background of conventional logical analysis, including the analyses that psychological notions and theories offer. Feelings like love and hatred and the inclination or disinclination to be together with certain other people are presumably based on experiences in the real world, and they are obviously important for the way in which we act. But the conception of who I am and who the other person is in this world is far from being generated through conventional analysis alone (Turner 1969). This

may appear particularly clearly from the fact that unconventional logic can have a strong and as it were contrary penetration. To give only one example, it may stabilize our perception of a person, even if rational analysis might supply specific factors which pointed in the opposite direction: But even so he is a wonderful man! (Cf. Rosengren and Hickling 2000). Similarly, openness towards the experience of confluence is a *sine qua non* for obtaining the much wanted and especially intensive emotional states which involve the experience of flow or communitas (Csikszentmihalyi 1975).

Fourth and last, alternative causality may enable people to relate to important aspects of society and of themselves, aspects which the prevailing discourse makes it difficult to talk about and perhaps even to recognize. Geertz has argued that rituals and other seemingly unreasonable or irrational phenomena have an interpretative function. They adduce some degree of understanding to hard realities about hierarchies of social positions in the society which are of great importance for members of the society, but cannot or must not be discussed (Geertz 1973). In continuation of this, one may assume that some of the "what if" experiences which have been discussed above can have a similar function. The fact that people in our knowledge-based society can continue to rely on magical forces and count on the most improbable luck may be tied to the realization that our lives are in fact affected by forces and accidental events on which we have little or no influence. We realize that we are not safe. The "what if" experience can provide an opportunity for telling ourselves that for better or worse, events occur which we cannot control.

Conventional rationality simply cannot capture a large field of the subjective experiences which directly influence people's lives and which are felt to be of vital importance. Alternative causality must be regarded as a common phenomenon. It is an alternative in relation to conventional rationality, but it is not alternative in the sense that it may be freely adopted or rejected as a factor in human experience and cognition.

That alternative rationality may enrich people's lives does obviously not imply that this is all it does. There is a reverse side of the coin. It can be dangerous to believe that something is as it appears to be. This may, for example, make it difficult to discover that there is a wolf inside the sheep's clothing. The experience of confluence may also encapsulate people in scary experiences, as may be seen in extreme form in psychotics, or make people do things they would otherwise have abstained from, as may be seen in the so-called mass phenomena. Finally, it may be mentioned that both falling in love and climbing mountains may be dangerous. One way of putting it is that it is precisely because of the nature of alternative rationality and the "what if" aspect that the possible space is expanded in uncertain and unpredictable ways.

The Layered Model: Cooperation and Competition

There seem to be many good reasons why alternative thinking is so persistent; it has many potentially beneficial functions. However, simply to conclude that people

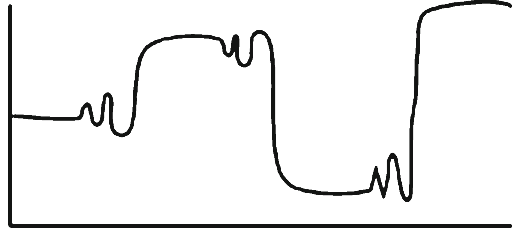

Fig. 12.2 A coexistence model (My graph Subbotsky (p. 66) uses a different graph)

have different form of rationality at their disposal and that they simply apply these in different contexts would carry a certain risk of "hypercontextual thinking". Context might appear to be the main agent in child development, an agent to whose conditions children effortlessly adapted (cf. Schousboe 2000). Therefore, it must be emphasized that the layered model should be read with awareness that there is a dynamic relation between the various forms of experience. One form may help generate another by functioning as a precursor for it, or it may help ensure the continued and unquestioned existence of another, or it may contribute to the weakening of another because it gradually becomes less adequate. Many shifts occur and these shifts cannot be understood as effortless adaptations to the contexts. Subbotsky (2000) presents this with particular clarity in what he calls a coexistence model of cognitive development. Like many others, he describes how different ways of cognition may function side by side, but in addition, he emphasizes that ways of experience can differ so radically in their basis of rationality that they enter into competition with each other (Fig. 12.2).

The individual person may very well make use of different forms of experience as long as she uses them in different contexts or for different purposes. But when a person experiences that several possible and mutually exclusive forms may be available in the same context, he/she will make a choice among them, and this causes a change in their internal relation.[2] The effect may be that there is a shift in the balance of power between the forms of experience, or that, on the basis of her new experience, the person leaves one way of cognition altogether in favour of others. This model, I think, may be regarded as a basic paradigmatic model, since it may incorporate the previously sketched models of development. It may be seen as an explication of Stern's layered model. It exposes how the different layers are *dynamically* related to each other – i.e. that the lines should be read as movable lines – which is also in accordance with the way Stern himself uses them.

In order to approach an understanding of when and how different kinds of shift occur, it is necessary to include a new notional level and investigate the motivation of the person (Subbotsky 2000). It goes without saying that people may be

[2]Subbotsky (p. 66) uses another graph to illustrate his model. That graph, however, I find less illustrative in the present context (Subbotsky 2010). This book appeared after the completion of the present article. It presents extensive research on alternative rationality and documents in a well-founded manner that and how magical thinking may benefit people's ability to cope with and potentially improve their conditions throughout life and within different domains.

motivated in an endless number of ways and that individuals differ with respect to what motivates them. In the present context, it has been emphasized that the individual seeks forms of experience and rationality which may serve their purposes and which seem safe. Specifically, and in accordance with theories of domain-specific cognition, it may easily be assumed that a shift in what one wants to experience something about – an animal or a rock or a human being – may give occasion for a shift in one's way of cognition. In addition, it is obvious that different contexts – universities, churches or shamanist sessions – may all invite their own form of rationality. Furthermore, out of curiosity or caused by an offer or a demand from the surroundings, the individual may strive to obtain new or possibly abandon old forms. Finally, it must be mentioned that changing dispositions and mental states may influence the spectre of possibilities which the individual is ready to explore. As noted, the experience that something is important and that "it's now or never" may give rise to intensified search and new choices also of alternative rationalities.

I have argued above that a radical version of alternative "what if" thinking may persist over time and suggested that among other things, this may be due to the fact that this thinking is generally important for people's manner of orientation and subjective sense of well-being. I have further argued that culture plays an active role in introducing, sustaining or sometimes toning down this kind of thinking, and that the individual is particularly motivated to employ it in certain circumstances. This is also true with respect to the previously mentioned "irrational" activities which the culture endorses and adults engage in. Thus, there are essential similarities between children and adults, both with regard to the forms of rationality they employ, to the significance for the individual of the forms of rationality and to the fact that culture plays a part in introducing and restraining it.

On this background, it is remarkable that in ordinary as well as scholarly contexts we mainly use the term "play" about children's activities and that we presume that culture will introduce children into the ranks of adults inter alia by assisting them in phasing out their childish irrational ways of thinking and imaginativeness. The fact that even a prominent textbook like Lightfoot et al. (2009), so eminently well informative about the sociocultural perspective, stops treating play already in the description of adolescence seems to confirm the impression that the tendency to regard play as a marker of childhood is strong.

Discussion

Policies

In my country, Denmark, there has been a tradition of ensuring that children could manage part of their time and also that they could play freely. Concurrently, with the process of globalization, there has been increasing attention to the fact that life conditions contain a great amount of variability and changeableness, which society as well as each of its members must take into account. It should be mentioned that

other countries, e.g. Finland, which is comparable to Denmark in important respects, respond to current demands and opportunities very differently from Denmark, but this point will not be elaborated here. Danish politicians point out that a country like Denmark can only prosper if its economy is based primarily on innovative thinking and the manufacture of new products. It is attempted to safeguard the future by setting up a developmental programme for children which will ensure that they achieve so-called versatile competence. This programme starts in nursery schools where children go from 6 months to 5 years. Today the Ministry of Social Affairs requires all nursery schools to set up a pedagogical learning plan which involves six themes, for instance, "social competence" and "language". The reason why precisely these six themes are to be emphasized is not made clear. However, there are clear and strict requirements to the effect that the pedagogues must identify specific goals and possible subsidiary goals within each theme; they are to arrange activities and relevant methods which may further these aims; they are to state why these activities and methods may further the aim; and they must document how the work of ensuring that the aims are achieved has been carried out and the extent to which it has been successful (the Ministry of Social Affairs 2004). The executive order is based on a specific view of learning: Learning must be effective in the sense that (1) it must be possible to locate it within six previously defined themes or domains, and (2) it must lead to results which can be strictly documented or measured within each of these areas. The motivation for designing pedagogy with a view to practising these very areas must be said to be quite clear. The risk that the focus on individual functions may at least sometimes come into conflict with the children's own plans and arrangements is also quite obvious. As demonstrated by so much educational research: Regardless of the kind words about versatile development and "soft" values, pedagogical practice becomes designed so that "we get what we can measure".

The requirements of the executive order may put pressure on some essential characteristics of children's development. As Leontiew (1973) emphasizes: Children develop and learn best when they are truly and genuinely motivated for the involvement with their surroundings rather than when they have just taken over and possibly understood the adults' arguments why it is good to do this, that or the other. The problem as I see it is that the Ministry has single-handedly established a hierarchy of motives which gives top priority to certain themes. The question if and when this hierarchy of motives might agree with that of the involved parties and what will happen in case of disagreement is not even raised. The insistence on precisely documented or measurable results implies that it can be precarious for the pedagogues to heed the children's own suggestions and enjoy their often lively production of unconventional ideas. They will risk a "waste of time" with regard to the goals.

But it is important, I think, not only to accept but also to appreciate a certain amount of "waste". As Valsiner (1997) has argued, redundancy with respect to possible ways of development has a positive effect on people's ability to develop as valid participants in their culture. The redundancy adds to their possibilities of meeting in a flexible and effective manner the demands of great or small changes which arise because both society and the individuals themselves are constantly

changing or developing. If there must be redundancy of potential development, this implies, by definition so to say, that there will also be waste in the sense of developmental potential which is not realized. In principle, a certain amount of waste is desirable, because it is a condition for the maintenance of a broad and flexible spectrum of possible ways to handle changes.

As noted above, it is advantageous for people to be able to think both rationally and seemingly irrationally, or, in other words, to be able to operate with conventional as well as unconventional causality. The strong focus on results by the Ministry may easily lead to a situation where alternative causality becomes the weaker part in the competition with conventional causality. Paradoxically, the consequence of this insistence on results may be that the development of innovative thinking, desired by everybody, is not promoted, but actually hindered.

The Ministry wants to appear friendly to children and asserts time and again that things can and should be learned "in a playful manner". Play is used as a medium to make learning exciting and funny. In the words of the minister, the aim is to make the children learn a lot without realizing that they are learning. Naturally, this may in fact happen. But when play is assigned a role of prime importance in the acquisition of predefined skills, there is a risk that free and creative play is pushed back into a very tight corner. Incidentally, one may wonder why it is presented as advantageous that the children are not aware that they "learn a lot". Like adults, children are often very keen to learn and they can enjoy the realization that they have in fact done so. It seems to me that there is a risk of rendering children as infantile by ignoring their wish to learn.

The demands of the Ministry are squarely formulated, and perhaps it is necessary for opponents to formulate equally square counterdemands in order to prevent that the ministerial demands will come to dominate all the activities of everyday life. Naturally, teachers must assume their role as active guides in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and precisely because it is important that adults function as guides, it can be of interest to investigate what this may involve. Valsiner has suggested that we should operate with several kinds of ZPD and has pointed to what he calls "The Zone of Free Movements" (ZFM). This zone specifies the *structure* of the environment which is functionally available to the child and forms the necessary background which makes it possible that something can happen as a result of the children's own arrangements and initiatives (Valsiner 1997). It should be made clear that the fact that adults ensure this "free" zone for the children does not imply that here they are *free from* adults and their possible contribution to the zone. Children may feel neglected and become sad when their professional adults interpret "freedom", "free play" and the like as equivalent to freedom from adult involvement. The defining characteristic of the ZPM is that it provides freedom for something to happen on the basis of the children's activities, and these activities may be enriched both by the children themselves and from inspiration from adults who may be present or who ensure that the physical surroundings are inspiring (Schousboe 2005). It is possible to improve this Zone of Free Movements by securing time and space for it. If politically necessary, I believe

that this may be done squarely by listing at least minimum requirements with regard to how much time and space must be ensured.

It seems to me that it ought to be an important task for teachers to ensure that children's "Zone of Free Movements" is of high quality. The zone is valuable for two reasons: One reason is that it must be recognized that it is impossible precisely to predict and plan the emergence of novelty and new ideas. Indeed, novelty in the sense of innovation presupposes a considerable measure of lack of order, breaking up, chaos and possible waste. What is possible is to establish conditions which ensure the time and space for that. Time for disorder and waste may be regarded as a sound investment, and on top of that it can be measured. The other and in my opinion equally important reason addresses the children's quality of life here and now. Children like to play and move around freely. They can also enjoy staring vacantly into the distance. They ought to be allowed the occasion to do so, whether they are engaged in interesting thoughts or not, simply because they like it.

Conclusion

The Changing Status of Play

It is evident that in various contexts, we use play to mark a dissimilarity between childhood and adulthood, but it cannot be said to be a matter of course that we do so. The notion that play is always and everywhere a marker of childhood is not new, but it receives attention again and again and it seems to be constantly consolidated (Aristotle 1998; Pellegrini 1995; Schwartzmann 1978; Sutton-Smith 1997; Karpatschof 2013; Subbotsky 2010). It is conceivable that in the western world of today, play is fairly often made a marker, among other things, because it can serve to meet the present requirements and norms of society. Conventional rationality may be regarded as safe capital in societies like ours, where science enjoys a high status and has precedence with respect to defining what are real and true ways of cognition. In the course of the latest decades, however, there has been some discussion of the asymmetrical relationship between children and adults as well as the status of science as the supreme source of cognition. This may indicate that conventional rationality is becoming a less prominent marker for adulthood, and that play with its "what if" aspect will change its status as a marker of childhood.

Actually, it seems that the status of play is already changing in our society. New "what if" arenas are created; new play activities appear, in which children, adolescents and adults participate. One example is "fantasy" for all ages, and the great commercial supply of fantasy products indicates that young people and adults with an interest in fantasy constitute more than a small exotic proportion of the population. Further, it happens that the "what if" aspect is incorporated as a legitimate and necessary element in what is ordinarily called rational behaviour. It no longer attracts attention when companies try to improve the innovative skills of their employees by sending them off on courses which contain various play-like

activities. The markers which we use to show what we consider to be the right manner in which to be a child, an adolescent or an adult seem to be undergoing a change. Using the layered model with the aim of tracing the persistence of the "what if" aspect of play may be regarded as one way of participating in this process of change. It keeps attention on the fact that both children and adults employ coexisting ways of experience. The widespread perspective of difference is supplemented with a perspective of similarity with respect to what it is to be a child and an adult. The message is that we are also similar.

It is important to bear in mind that it is advantageous to adopt a perspective of similarity as a *supplement* to the perspective of difference, i.e. not as a perspective which ought to outrank, let alone replace it. Among many other factors, the power relation between the adult and the child generations is marked by dissimilarity and asymmetry. In the present context, it is of particular relevance that adults have considerable influence on what opportunities for play the children are given.

As emphasized above, people have different forms of rationality at their disposal, and the usefulness of this has been discussed. It would, however, be an expression of wishful "hyperfunctional" thinking merely to conclude that people have different forms of rationality at their disposal, and that they apply them in the best possible manner in different contexts or vice versa: that different contexts simply promote the best possible repertoire of forms of reality. Thus, it is no simple or innocent matter for an educational institution to prioritize its repertoire.

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Chapter 13
Cultural and Historical Influences on Conceptions and Uses of Play

Ivy Schousboe

Introduction

In the following, some characteristics of the topics and uses of play research will be highlighted: After a few introductory considerations about research in play, it will be argued in connection with a brief view on history that there seems to be a certain relatedness between the perspectives in which play is regarded from a scholarly position in the western culture and the perspectives which are taken from other societal and political positions. The next step will address a few sometimes neglected insights from recent research which could deserve to gain status as broadly recognized contributors of significant understanding regarding the interrelatedness between culture, sociality, development and play. It will be emphasized specifically that, like adults, young as well as older children are concerned with important and complex relations in life. This will be illuminated in a discussion of how children and young people are engaged in finding out something about the diverse interrelatedness which exists between pro- and antisocial behaviour in human relations. In continuation of this, it will be demonstrated that the forms of play to which play research traditionally pays particular attention and which it often describes as dealing with other themes may be interpreted as having also this complexity as their theme. Next follows a discussion of why it may be so attractive for many children to play this kind of games. Based on the observation that these games are more widespread within western culture than in many others, certain characteristics of western culture will be highlighted, characteristics which may explain why such games are so widespread, and it will be suggested that one may see it as advantageous for children to obtain both pro- and antisocial competences. Finally, it will be argued that one may regard the coexistence of diverse and sometimes conflicting

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perceptions of play both as a potential benefit and as a potential hindrance for the various parties who study play from their different positions.

Considerations About Research in Play

A cultural-historical frame of interpretation draws attention to the fact that every theory must be understood as a product of its time, with the advantages and limitations which this causes for understanding. In this connection, it is natural to be aware that everybody, including the scholar as well as the politician as children of their time (Rieber and Carton 1987; Valsiner 1997), acts on the basis of his or her specific position within certain social and temporal frames and that this position will also influence the motivation which makes him or her take up the study of a given phenomenon. Thus, one should constantly examine whether previously established and recognized research has gained such a status that to a considerable extent it is transported into the present time without a concurrent inclusion of new ways of thinking and whether, for cultural and or ideological reasons, there is a certain cultural lag compared to other areas of contemporary research or praxis.

When you look up play in a textbook on developmental psychology, it is very likely that you will find a chronological presentation of forms of play which typically occur during childhood together with more or less elaborate reflections on the meaning which each of these forms of play may have for children's development. A closer study of literature about play will show that across cultures as well as within cultures, there are similarities as well as more or less marked differences in how important play is considered to be, in what games are considered particularly important and in the reasons given for this.

Play is a supple activity for children as well as adults, including scholars, in the sense that it is a variable activity which offers opportunities for a dedicated and selective investigation of a multitude of diverse circumstances which might be of interest to the individual. There is a continuous implicit or explicit discussion – sometimes bordering on "the right to define" – about play and its most important functions and in this connection frequently about the right to control children's actual possibilities of play. In the most widely accepted literature about play, it seems to me that certain aspects of the cultural embeddedness of play are relatively underexposed, even in the cultural-historical tradition, although they are important for the understanding of the diversity of definitions. Few contemporary students of play have concentrated on exposing the interrelatedness between psychological development and cultural life conditions, but the contributors to a book edited by Göncü in 2007 have made very clear what insights from this field of study may contribute to the understanding of play. However, further research is needed in the relationship between superordinate social conditions which influence the concrete living conditions for all members of a society and children's treatment of them in play. One may add that in today's literature there is a distinct shortage of reflections about the significance of the scholar's own culture for his or her treatment and

conceptions of play; the same goes for conceptions of play which are anchored within this culture. In the following I shall attempt to remedy this shortage a little, beginning with a historical sketch.

Political, Pedagogical and Scholarly Perspectives on Play and Social Development

The games of children and young people have been objects of adult interest for at least a couple of 1,000 years. Play has attracted attention for very diverse reasons. In print, this is shown by the broad variety of publications, stretching from descriptions in fiction which include play for its own sake as one of the important activities of the child to thoughtful advice from researchers and politically committed people which describes how the child's play may be influenced in a way that makes it likely that it may further social or developmental goals (e.g. Schousboe 1999).

The belief that play has a great and specific influence on the child's development, also in the long run, appears with particular clarity in the attempts which numerous political movements of widely different persuasions have made to further certain forms of play with the explicit aim of facilitating the development of desirable characteristics and competences in the young generation. In Europe play has been used as a medium of upbringing and development in all historical periods. In recent time fascists, Nazis, revolutionary socialists and anti-authoritarians have tried, with some success, to obtain influence on how children play. Movements which have wanted to further a militant spirit have put emphasis on outright martial and presumably combative common games with fights, competitions and heroes against enemies as their theme. This has been supposed to prepare the ground so that the young generation could perform the greatest possible antisocial acts in the face of the enemy without being too hampered by inhibitions. On the other hand, movements which have wanted to further peaceful coexistence have put emphasis on common fantasy games which were best played in a cooperative spirit (Claus et al. 1973).

While the supposedly beneficial effect of certain games was highlighted, other games were placed in a sombre background because they were either held in low esteem or regarded as downright taboo. Thus, Hitler opposed common fantasy play, and certain socialist movements, including the scholars who were part of them, opposed freewheeling fantasy, diagnosing it as unwanted escapism (Claus et al. 1973; Richter and Merkel 1987; Launer 1970). After World War II, several countries, including the United Kingdom, banned war toys, because leading politicians and researchers supposed that war toys would encourage a martial attitude in children (Sutton-Smith 1986). As it appears, many people have assumed that there is a simple and direct connection between the games that children play and the characteristics or qualities which they develop.

There are some problematic aspects of the political and the associated pedagogical view of play which can be found in play research. Firstly, even today's students

of play show great faith in the belief that play per se contains great strength and they regard it more or less widely in a utilitarian perspective. This perspective ranges from the assumption that play furthers children's confidence in life to the assumption that it is an efficient medium to achieve a number of specific competences which are relevant to schools and education (Sutton-Smith 1995; Saltz et al. 1977). Secondly, many people assume that there is a simple causal link between how children play and how they develop outside of play, and much research seems to confirm such a link. Thirdly, there is an obvious preference for certain games in the sense that these games are investigated at the cost of other games which children also play. There is thus a considerable amount of studies of peaceful common games and their potential positive functions for prosocial and cognitive development, while wild, chaotic, silly, monotonous and aggressively coloured games are relegated to the background or regarded as problematic (cf. Smith 1988, 1995; Hangaard Rasmussen 1992; Sutton-Smith 1997, 2003; Schousboe 2003). In short, most research concerns games which are supposed to have positive or useful functions, and the assumption that "as you play you will become" is still widespread.

In what follows I will try to pull in the opposite direction. The playing child does not simply take over norms and develop specific and predictable capacities by playing, in a chronological order, certain games, each of which furthers certain aspects of development. The child should be seen also as a socially directed individual who from an early age can explore independently and in a serious manner complex aspects of the culturally determined social relations with which he or she comes in contact. In the same vein, play should be seen also as a relatively free and open-ended (i.e. non-determined) activity which is characterized by having great potential variability with regard to the relation between play and reality and with regard to its functions for the playing children.

In order to consolidate these perspectives on children and play, it will be demonstrated that playing children can explore an important and complex aspect of social relations, namely, the relation between pro- and antisocial actions.

Playing Children as Cultural Agents

It is crucially important for the possibilities of a human being to act that it can perceive and act in accordance with the fact that mutual relations contain good as well as evil. Human beings develop in interaction with other people, and it is well documented that the magnitude and character of pro- and antisocial ways of behaviour in this interaction deeply influence human development in many psychological domains like social, cognitive and emotional development (Durkin 1995; Hetherington and Parke 2002; Lightfoot et al. 2009). There is also evidence that already from early childhood and throughout life, human beings are extremely socially responsive in relation to the pro- and antisocial polarity and that their positions in relation to it, whether it changes or not, will greatly influence their situation and spectrum of possible directions of development (Stern 2000; Dunn and Kendrick 1982; Harris 1989;

Rutter and Rutter 1993; Bretherton 1984). As suggested by Stern (2000), throughout their lives people are concerned with some "themes of life" which remain important for the quality of their social relatedness, though of course they engage in them in different ways in different periods of life.

In the following I will discuss children's navigation in the social field with the focus on such a theme, which I will sum up under the name "social complexity". The name is used here to designate the complexity which derives from the fact that good and evil may occur not only as separate but also mutually related aspects of social relations.

That the relation between good and evil is complex will be argued partly through the great cross-cultural differences which appear in the attitude towards good and evil and partly through a presentation of how western research operates with varied notions of the pair. Next it will be emphasized that a number of common games which occur widely among children in western culture may function as an "experimentarium" for social complexity. These games give the children considerable room for playing together about almost everything, and therefore also for exploring and shaping different versions of social complexity. It will be argued that western children may have very good reasons to concern themselves with social complexity and to develop a certain measure of both pro- and antisocial competences.

Cultural and Social Complexity

Children have much to learn about friendliness and hostility. There are many and often passionately presented opinions about how biology may play a role in regard to people's attitude towards other people (Zahn-Waxler et al. 1991/1986; Pepler and Rubin 1991). However, there is no reason to doubt that what is desirable and acceptable with respect to friendliness and hostility is to a large extent socially determined. This appears already from the fact that different cultures exhibit quite different evaluations and realizations of pro- and antisocial ways of action and it is underlined by the fact that it is a universal characteristic of cultures that they socialize children in accordance with the way they evaluate and balance these ways of action. In some places, many forms of aggression are evaluated more positively than in our culture. In Samoa, for example, a child who only crawls may be described with satisfaction as defiant, audacious and strong-willed and its first word is claimed to be "Shit!", a swearword which is used to express disapproval of somebody else's actions. The Kaluong people in Papua New Guinea encourage girls to behave in an offensive and aggressive manner towards boys, and the latter are not allowed to pay back in the same coin. In our culture, such an upbringing would seem remarkable, to say the least, but it fits nicely into a society where it is up to the woman to appoint her spouse and where with the aid of her relatives she can lock up the reluctant husband-to-be in a house together with himself or herself until he gives up and accepts his fate (Durkin 1995). In other places, aggression is regarded as more unambiguously negative than in western culture. A child growing up in, say, Thailand or Bali,

will be strongly encouraged to suppress aggressive conduct and perform prosocial behaviour (Durkin 1995; Geertz 1973). Cultural traditions are strong and do not automatically yield to the dominant norms of society. An example of this is that Korean-American children are brought up in a considerably more collective spirit than European-American children, and they also practise more prosocial behaviour (Hetherington and Parke 2002).

The fact that cultures vary so much and that some cultures seem to have considerably clearer attitudes with regard to pro- and antisocial behaviour than ours makes it important to emphasize that the following discussion deals exclusively with western culture (as mentioned in Ivy Schousboe 2013). This culture displays a fair amount of ambiguity with regard to good and evil and children must relate to the fact that the relation between good and evil is complex and must also frequently find their own way in this complexity. That this is a task of considerable magnitude may be illustrated by the fact that key concepts which refer to the character of social relations are "born" so complex that the occurrence of the phenomena which they describe or denote may have opposite effects for the individual and for the social unit or group, depending on the context about which they are used.

It is no wonder that superordinate concepts about pro- and antisocial behaviour, respectively, are notions which are defined in such a way that they can be "unpacked". They are complex notions which must match complex relations. In the following, some of these notions will be presented.

Conceptual Complexity in Social Complexity

Widely recognized ways of defining pro- and antisocial behaviour, respectively, draw attention to the fact that there may exist diverse mutual relations between these forms of behaviour, and that these forms may in themselves be differentiated. It is considered important to understand the behaviour in a way which goes beyond the description of it solely on the level of immediate action, and it is underlined that a distinction between the intentions which a person may have of performing a specific action and the motives which are the causes for wanting to perform it may give rise to other important distinctions.

Prosocial behaviour is defined as behaviour which is intended to be useful to others. The motives behind such behaviour may vary. In some cases, the behaviour is a natural extension of a positive attitude to the person in question, but in other cases prosocial acts are performed because they are expected to further one's own interests, whether it is to obtain a situation of mutual dependence which obliges the parties to do each other services or to gain social recognition on the basis of lip service. Altruistic behaviour is a form of prosocial behaviour whose defining characteristic is that the motive is not self-related. In this case, the motive is to benefit others. The altruistic agent may get to feel better, for example, because of the reduction of unpleasant empathetic feelings, but this is regarded as an accompanying feature and not as a motive for the action.

Aggressive behaviour is defined as behaviour which is intended to harm others. Here, too, the motives may vary. The motive may simply be an extension of a hostile attitude towards the person in question, but aggressive conduct may also be motivated by the wish to obtain something other than doing harm in itself. It may, for example, occur in self-defence, in the defence of one's group or in order to maintain norms for social behaviour within the group. The motives are often mixed, so that a wish to defend oneself may be closely interwoven with the wish to do harm. Some distinctions between different forms of aggression may further demonstrate the complexity of aggression. Distinctions are made between physical and verbal aggression; between "hot-blooded" and "cold-blooded" aggression; between aggression which is hostile in the sense that it is directed against people and instrumental aggression, which is aimed at obtaining an object or a right; and between reactive and proactive aggression. All these forms of aggression are seen already in little children, while relational aggression, which is a form of aggression whose aim is to spoil the antagonist's relation to others, is believed to be so cognitively demanding that it is not used until late school age and even then mostly by girls (Staub 1986/1991; Pepler and Rubin 1991; Hetherington and Parke 2002).

Empathy is a feeling which deserves to be included in the discussion because it is often associated with a prosocial nature and is supposed to counteract antisocial tendencies. But even empathy may be "unpacked" and show several faces. With the use of different terminology, an important distinction has been drawn between what I will here call parallel and complementary empathy, respectively. Parallel empathy expresses that one feels something similar or outright shares somebody else's feelings, while complementary empathy implies that, on the background of emotional resonance and cognitive processing, one partly distances oneself from the other and, as the word implies, acts in a complementary manner in relation to the feelings of the other (Staub 1986/1991). With regard to social complexity, it should be emphasized that both types of empathy may be related to both pro- and antisocial conduct. A person may very well be comforted by the fact that somebody else is crying along in unison, thereby showing parallel empathy with her when she is sad. However, for a child who cries because he or she has hurt himself or herself, it will hardly be a comfort if Mummy burst into tears. In such a case, parallel empathy would probably make the child sadder. Besides, a person may be so overwhelmed by parallel empathy that she experiences empathetic distress and flees from the field without trying to help (Feshbach and Feshbach 1986/1991). For the child who has hurt himself or herself, it may be comforting if her or his mother displays complementary empathy and says "Oh-oh, darling". But even complementary empathy may serve different purposes. Thus, it may serve as an excellent tool to do real harm, as happens when it is used as part of mobbing, humiliation and psychological torture.

There is a fair amount of research in the child's development of aggression and prosocial behaviour. Until the 1970s, and with heavy influence from psychoanalysis, research was mainly centred on aggression; since then prosocial development has been increasingly included in its focus. It has been characteristic of the research in question that it has had an agenda which stipulates that it is important that we get less aggression and more prosocial behaviour, and that much of it is concerned with

either prosocial or antisocial development and with the question of how adults can exert influence on either or both of the two domains (Durkin 1995; Hetherington and Parke 2002; Pepler and Rubin 1991, respectively). Recently, however, there seems to be a growing interest in investigating the interaction between pro- and antisocial conduct, something which we will return to later (Dunn and Kendrick 1982; Harris 1989). For the present purpose, the most important – though hardly very surprising – conclusions of the researchers are that there are age-related differences in a number of forms of pro- and antisocial behaviour and that – somewhat surprisingly – there is no indication that children in general become either more prosocial or more antisocial with age. Besides, longitudinal studies show that children in general exhibit a certain, though moderate, consistency over time with respect to their pro- and antisocial behaviour (Zahn-Waxler et al. 1991/1986; Durkin 1995).

The concepts above and the sketchy summary of research findings make it clear that children have much to learn with regard to social complexity. In the following we will take a closer look on how they do this in play.

Social Complexity in Various Kinds of Play

Social fantasy play is a kind of game which is traditionally and with good reason regarded as an excellent platform for experimentation with social relations, and it has been studied in some depth why this is so. However, social complexity is a relevant phenomenon for children both before and after the prime period of social fantasy play. For this reason it may be of interest to examine other kinds of play with a view to establishing whether they, too, are connected to social complexity.

Admittedly, some games have fairly fixed rules and scripts, but on the one hand a given group of children choose to play these games in preference to others and on the other hand, the children modify or adapt the scripts by themselves and negotiate what feelings will be appropriate for them.

Ever since the seminal article by Blurton Jones (1976), peekaboo has primarily been studied as a game in which children learn to master various communicative formats like turn-taking. But it may be added that the game also has a theme and that this theme concerns matters which are of vital interest to the child. In its earliest form the game is about the possible disappearance of Mother and whether she will reappear and whether she does so in a more or less frightening manner. In its later form the child increasingly takes the leading role, actively hiding and frightening the other, while Mother's role is to display first a certain worry that the little one is gone and then appropriate alarm when the child appears from her hiding place with a loud Peekaboo! The balance between fun and earnest is extremely delicate in this game and it happens quite often that the child becomes genuinely frightened and must be comforted. But the game is played again and again over a couple of years, even after the child has mastered the communicative formats, so it is reasonable to assume that it is its socially complex themes which are attractive.

Wild games, also known as rough-and-tumble games, are in fact ordinarily understood as games through which children try out friendly as well as aggressive actions in the shelter of the as-if character of the game. What may be added to this prevalent view of the game is that it is not restricted to little children, but is also played by older children and that the relation between fun and earnest varies greatly, depending on the children who play it and their reasons for playing it. The theme of the game must always be regarded as a "theme with variations", and it must be observed how the game is played. Wild tumble play has attracted the interest of many scholars, who have studied the bright as well as the dark sides of play. Several scholars have shown that characteristics of the individual child as well as characteristics of the group as a whole will affect the way the game is played (Neill 1976; Pellegrini 1988; Dodge et al. 1990; Göncü and Gaskins 2007; Goldstein 1995). Thus, based on his observations, Neill found that younger boys of five seemed predominantly to keep the rough-and-tumble game as pretend fight, while fight in earnest occurred only rarely. Older boys of 12 or 13 were far more likely to connect rough play with real aggression, which may be seen as a consequence of the general importance of the struggle for power and position in the hierarchy. The more robust boys would normally fight intensely when they played and frequently they did each other real harm, though this was usually not intended. In contrast, less daring boys would stick to a sparring kind of fight which nearly always remained playful (Neill 1976). Several other studies show similar results. Thus, in a study of 6- to 8-year-old school boys, Dodge et al. (1990) found that aggressive boys more frequently initiate ambiguous wild games, i.e. games in which there are at least hints of regular aggression, and based on observations of children in elementary school, Pellegrini (1988) has found that with popular children, wild games usually lead up to subsequent rule-governed games, while with children who are rejected by their comrades, such games lead to real aggression subsequently. It will be noticed that characteristics of the entire group, in this case the age of the players and the level of aggression within the group, give the individual child more or less obvious opportunities for playing either in a friendly or aggressive manner and that the way in which the individual child uses these opportunities is influenced by its individual characteristics.

Interestingly, this may be quite evident to the players themselves. Among others, Smith and Boulton have studied how children perceive fighting for fun and fighting in earnest, respectively, when they play wild games. Their interviews with 8- to 10-year-old children show that many of the children include both individual and contextual circumstances when they reflect on the relation between fighting for fun and fighting in earnest in play. Most children confirmed that fighting for fun may lead to fighting in earnest. The most frequent reason they gave for this was that either an accidental mishap had occurred or an accidental mishap had been misinterpreted. Most children also said that if they had been the victim of an accident, they would hit back if they did not like the person who had transgressed the as-if frame of the game – be it an accidental mishap or not! On the other hand, they would not hit back if the person in question was their best friend (Smith and Boulton 1990). This is to say that the children included the objective fact about play that accidents may happen, the fact that accidents will be interpreted and the

fact that the reaction to the transgression depends to a high degree on the child's individual relation to the transgressor.

It is often emphasized about rule-governed play that it more or less replaces role play. The rules become the most interesting aspect, while the thematic content is relegated to the background, though not eliminated. There is no doubt that rules become dominant in this kind of play, but it may be added that the rules are rules about something and that this something concerns important aspects of the mutual social conduct of the children. Rule-governed games are typically not about nice behaviour at the dinner table or about the proper behaviour when shopping in the supermarket with Mom and Dad. They are about fight and competition. They expose the fact that the individual participants in a social community will position themselves differently and the precarious point that one may win as well as lose with more or less grace. Rule-governed games also balance between fun and earnest. They may raise the spirit in a child who positions himself or herself well and hurt a child who is exposed as a pitiful loser in the bright searchlight of the community. It may be said that rather than pushing themes into the background, rules throw them into relief, because they focus on tender spots in the social interaction which it is important for the children to take part in.

It seems obvious that high-degree computer games, a form of play which is rapidly expanding both among children and adults, have the battle between good and evil as their theme. In this connection, it is noteworthy that the layer between fiction and reality is growing ever thinner. Technological development implies that the picture resolution becomes increasingly lifelike and players no longer play by themselves, but also have real teammates and opponents. In addition, the themes may be made so realistic that they ought rather to be classified as real. It is interesting that in connection with the recent war against Iraq, the US Ministry of Defence had computer games produced for the soldiers so that they could fight evil Saddam Hussein supporters in front of the screen. What influence these games may have had on the players' attitude towards the war is hard to say.

I do not know whether computer games in any appreciable degree thematically invite the exploration of social complexity, but it may be said that their sheer extension indicates an interest in the relation between good and evil and that it may be associated with friendliness and domestic comfort to wage war in virtual space.

It has been argued that games which have to do with social complexity are widespread and that it can be a positive as well as a somewhat problematic experience to take part in them. On this background it seems reasonable to ask more specifically what it is that makes these games so attractive.

Why Do Children Play Games About Social Complexity?

Like the adult, the child has many different important motives and intentions which appear with different weight in different contexts, and of course it is far from always that the child may act in accordance with its motives and intentions. Since play

imposes fairly few restrictions on the child's freedom to act and thereby on what motives and intentions it may want to bring into the foreground, it may serve as a free space where the child can explore even the more problematic sides of social life in a detailed manner without committing itself.

Vygotsky (1978) has pointed out that play may contain unpleasantness which the child accepts in order to be able to pursue a more strongly engaging motive than the avoidance of unpleasantness. Now let us consider more closely why a child can "choose" to take part in cruel or rough games in the first place and sometimes let himself/herself be carried away by them. In this connection, I would like to refer to Göncü (1993). He is interested in the factors which make common fantasy play attractive and he focuses on the fact that this kind of play is an intersubjective activity. Common fantasy play is an activity in which the child primarily engages in order to understand and respond to its own emotions. It is the children's perception that there is a certain similarity between their emotional needs which supplies the basis for a common focus in play. Play gives them very radical or fundamental possibilities of creating intersubjective experiences: When children are engaged in play they not only negotiate the script of the game – its theme and development; they also negotiate the emotions which are associated with the script.

In accordance with this I believe that children have valid reasons for playing games with aggressive or evil components. The theme of evil is of high affective significance and the relation between good and evil is of great importance in human life. At the same time, this relation is often complicated, even for adults. It can be difficult for adults to cope with it and to help children cope with it, so there are good reasons why many child games make a theme out of the conflict between good and evil. It is the children's attempt to gain intersubjectivity in relation to emotionally important topics that makes them intensely explore even dangerous themes. As a result of this, it happens sometimes that some children gain strong intersubjective experience at the expense of one or several other children. Interestingly, the prevalence of games which develop in this fashion varies considerably across cultures and their great popularity within western culture will be discussed below.

The Prevalence of Rough-and-Tumble Games in the West

Western children incorporate the theme of good and evil more frequently in their play than children in some other cultures (Hetherington and Parke 2002). This invites us to compare different cultures. Different cultures have radically divergent norms for pro- and antisocial behaviour, and in every culture it is attempted to socialize the young generation into adopting the culture's social repertoire and way of distinguishing between good and evil. As mentioned above, in some cultures, good and evil are defined a good deal more unambiguously than in others. The western conception of good and evil seems anything but clear.

Western culture displays great ambiguity with regard to the relation between good and evil, and people's mutual relations may be characterized as socially

complex in this respect. Religious westerners believe in a good God and an evil Satan, fully aware that the good God was involved when the cruel events which are so plentiful in the Old Testament occurred and that Satan is a fallen angel. Politicians may successfully engage in preventive war on a far weaker opponent, pleading that the war serves a good cause. As regards children, they should ideally learn to assert their individuality and own rights in competition with others while at the same time they should be kind and considerate and not harm anyone. In addition it is emphasized that they should be eminently capable of choosing, evaluating and solving problems by themselves. Finally, adults may also find the relation between pro- and antisocial behaviour difficult to handle. This may have as a result that they will sometimes be reluctant to suggest or demand a certain behaviour from the child. All this suggests that social relations may be difficult to see through and navigate in. An important way for children to explore them is by playing games about them.

The above presentation of features of western culture might suggest the adoption of yet another too stereotyped and in this case culturally deterministic way of understanding play. Therefore, it must be emphasized that the theme of the game – even when it concerns important aspects of the social conditions – is always to be regarded as a theme with variations. Thus, Göncü and Gaskins (2007) have amply demonstrated how important it is to examine both intercultural and intracultural variations in play, and as noted above there are also great individual differences in the ways children play. The fact that play occurs in different versions and is adapted to the actual life conditions may safely be said to support the assumption that children's modification and variation of their play can increase their room for manoeuvre so that they can explore and develop both social and antisocial ways of behaviour. On the background of the actual social complexity, the exploration of these modes of behaviour may be assumed to be potentially useful for them, and it will be briefly argued that in several connections it may be advantageous for children as well as other people to master also what I will call antisocial competences.

Discussion

Antisocial Competences: The Positive Sides of Antisocial Skills

It may be advantageous for children to possess a certain measure even of antisocial skills, when we see them as members of the whole culture, as members of peer groups and as individuals among other individuals.

Different cultures have different attitudes towards the polarity of the pro- and antisocial. If a child is to participate as a fully integrated member of its culture it is necessary that it "knows" its culture, even with regard to this polarity. In western society it will limit a child's range of accessible courses of development if it only has command of one or the other end of the social spectrum. It is well known that the all too "evil" or aggressive child in time gets locked up within an increasingly

narrow cast. The same fate may be suffered by the all too "good" altruistic child. An individual who has no skills in aggression is in a precarious position. Thus, research in mobbing shows that a typical victim of harassment is the girl who feels it necessary to be nice and good all the time. She has no effective response to harassment. Her response is unhappiness. She does not tell others about what has passed because she does not "squeal". She may even be moved by compassion for the evil-doer. Because she has heard that those who torment others are in a bad way themselves. This girl might very well improve her sad position if she was somewhat less good (Olweus 1973, 1985).

Antisocial skills can also be useful for the social life within a peer group (cf. Patterson et al. 1989). Obviously they can serve the prosocial purpose of securing the rights of one's own group. But they can also improve the internal well-being of the group. When a child is openly aggressive, it is easy for other children to see how it feels. This may help them realize that somebody is not happy and make a choice to do something about it. They can offer help – or pay back in the same coin. In both cases the overall level of aggression within the group is reduced because endless indirect struggles for social position lose their function.

When young children explain what a friend is, they often emphasize that a friend is someone you can disagree with or fight with and afterwards make friends with again. Maybe the sharing of even hostile feelings – so that one can recognize oneself even in this respect – can enhance the children's feeling of togetherness and intimacy. Such feelings are often more or less taboo in the adult world and this may make it important and reassuring for the child to be able to share them with other children.

To put it bluntly: It may be advantageous for children to acquire also a measure of antisocial skills. And sometimes they acquire them by a method which is generally considered very effective and which is recommended with all other kinds of skills, namely, "learning by doing". "Learning by doing" can help the child learn to distinguish between good and evil.

Up to now it has been underlined that play comes in many forms and functions and that the same goes for adult conceptions of play. What does this imply for ideas of play and research in play?

In Search of a Broader Research Perspective on Play

Both practitioners and researchers have specific reasons for dealing with play in certain ways and hardly anyone could or would concern himself or herself with play in its totality. That play can be used by practitioners as a tool to achieve certain intentions is seen particularly clearly when it is used with the aim of gaining specific clearly political objectives. Researchers need not necessarily relate to the implications which their work might have for the practice of play, but by the choice of the type(s) of play which they wish to study and their way of studying them, they nevertheless draw attention to certain selected aspects of play which they regard as

significant. Some forms of play, e.g. the repetitive motor games of little children, are studied primarily with a view to obtaining additional knowledge about a single or a few of its already recognized functions. Other types of play, e.g. pretend play, are more often studied with a view to gaining insight into its supposed "multifunctional" potential. I suggest that we expand the well-established research focus on the influence specific kinds of play can have for the development of already recognized specific psychological functions. With a widened research focus, it could be investigated whether each kind of play can function as a medium for children's development of a broader spectrum of capacities and personal dispositions and well-being than is most frequently mentioned. This might lead to a more comprehensive picture of how different kinds of play can function as flexible tools for children's exploration of all kinds of engaging phenomena in their everyday lives.

Conclusion: The Power of Play

The belief that "the way you play reflects what you will become" has been questioned. This belief has caused many restrictions on certain kinds of children's play as well as attempts to promote specific games which are supposed to be useful. For example, as mentioned above, the belief led many countries to ban military toys after WWII and to the production of computer games for soldiers. A search on Google will show that there are still vigorous discussions going on about the possible links between toys, war games and the generation of real aggression. However, there is nothing to indicate that play has an inherent and specific function. On the contrary, play is characterized by its pliable nature, so that children can bend it to suit their own purposes.

When we consider the dissimilarity of children, a remarkable disorder comes to light. It becomes difficult to maintain the view that the various forms of play each have their own evident function. It also becomes difficult to believe that certain games are inherently particularly beneficial for children, while others are less valuable or downright harmful. There are no fixed relations between play and its significance for the child. Does this give us reason to regard play as an epiphenomenon in relation to other social activities and abandon the idea that play is powerful? On the contrary, I think. Play is powerful precisely because it is *not* characterized by fixed relations. It is powerful because it is versatile so that children can have many and various motives for playing, for playing different games and for playing in various ways, and because play can have many different implications for them. It is because every child can play in various ways at various times and in various contexts that play is an important activity in the child's life.

This is to say that play can be significant because it can have many different meanings for those who play. It has great potential for connection: Children can base their games on anything, and they can play in many different ways, depending on what they are inspired by in their total existence. They can investigate and shape their relatedness with the surrounding world in accordance with what they are

preoccupied with. In this sense play is a supremely important activity in their lives. The strength of play lies in its supple adaptability in relation to the subjective commitment or involvement of the children.

In a similar vein it may be argued that research in play might benefit from an increased adaptability of the researcher's commitment to his or her subject through an active endeavour to create greater variability of methods in this subject. This might be achieved by including insights from other research traditions than one's own and toning down the not unknown academic tendency to underscore one's own research by a contrary-to-others kind of thinking and fight over the right to define. Play is a form of expression which is recognized by all cultures and attracts interest from many different research positions. This is to say that play may function as a common third, a *tertium comparationis*, around which people of widely different persuasions and motives may come together. The common field of interest can be a promising point of departure for researchers who are willing to take a playful attitude even to research by experimenting with a sometimes unorthodox combination of otherwise separate universes with the chance of gradually increasing our understanding of play.

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Chapter 14
An Activity Theory View on the Development of Playing

Bert van Oers

Problems of the Current Social Representation of Play

The relevance of play for individual and cultural development is widely acknowledged. In his famous study on the development of human culture, Huizinga (1938/1951) focused especially on the role of play and argued that culture emerges within playfully established human activities. He defines play as "voluntary activity accomplished within specific temporal and spatial boundaries, according to voluntarily accepted but stringent rules and characterized by an intrinsic goal, accompanied by feelings of suspense and pleasure, and by an awareness of being different from ordinary life" (Huizinga 1951, p. 47). Although Huizinga's cultural-historical analysis of the evolution of culture is widely read and discussed, his main point is not yet completely understood, let alone implemented in psychological theories on play or in practical play-based approaches.

Huizinga was very keen on the correct interpretation of his intentions with this study. In the foreword to the Dutch edition (1938/1951, p. *i*), he recounts his discussions with his publishers in the United Kingdom and Germany who both had changed self-opinionatedly the subtitle of his study "The play element *of* culture" into "The play element *in* culture" (Das Spielelement in der Kultur). He rejected this "correction" with the argument that he had not been interested in his study in the position of play among different cultural phenomena. Rather, he had wanted to study the play character *of* culture itself and discover how culture *as* play produces new culture. He stressed once again that in his view cultures emerge *as* play and develop in these playfully accomplished practices.

On the basis of his cultural-historical analyses of different cultural practices since the ancient Greek culture (e.g. religion, jurisdiction, language), Huizinga

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demonstrated how the dynamics of playfully organized cultural activities rouse needs to specify actions by more and more specific rules and routines. In his conclusions he worries on the basis of his detailed observations that such trends may wind up in highly regulated cultural practices that have lost all contact with play in its proper sense. He refers to examples like law, warfare, technique and religion (see Huizinga, p. 174–175) and warns for the evolution of science towards a highly proceduralized, non-ludic enterprise (p. 263).

Accepting play as a core element in the evolution of cultures raises the question of how play manifests itself concretely in cultures. Both in Huizinga's account of play and in modern developmental research, play is explicitly or implicitly related to immaturity or imperfection that can be overcome by further development and education. Play is supposed to be children's work or children's way of existence (see also, e.g. Dewey 1899, p. 339) that can and will be overcome by education. Indeed, most studies and theories of play are driven by conceptions of development and child development that conceive of play as a developmentally transient phenomenon (see, e.g. Lancy 2008). The concept of play is imbued with this *developmentalist assumption*, stating that play is characteristic of children's activity and is a stage in children's development that provides the conditions for further learning and advanced developmental stages in the domains of cognition and learning, necessary for school learning and formal operational thinking. Most studies on play have been carried out in the context of developmental psychology research. Almost all modern theories of play conceive of play as a basically developmental phenomenon, both phylogenetically (cf. comparative studies of play in animals and man) and ontogenetically (cf. studies that try to describe and explain young children's behaviour). Many great theorists of play (like Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky) seem to have adopted this developmentalist assumption, without further argument. The developmentalist assumption is characteristic for the way people use to talk about play (both lay people and academics) in everyday life and in the research on play. Developmentalism is a core element in the modern *social representation of play* (see also van Oers 2012a) and early education in general (see, e.g. Morse 2003).

Despite the wide occurrence of play in all cultures, researchers are still puzzled by the question of its operationalization. How to define play in such a way that it can be unambiguously recognized in research settings? Several of the aspects mentioned in Huizinga's definition of play have been around in the social representations of play for a long time (like voluntariness, rules, pleasure), and they are still often considered crucial in the acknowledgement of children's activities as play. The modern discourse on play is pervaded by the historically developed social representation of play that advocates pleasure, requires voluntariness in the players and assumes the absence of externally imposed goals. In the discourses on play from this social representation, play is essentially considered as pleasurable for the players and accomplished for its own sake.

A long-standing issue of debate in developmental psychology focuses on the recognition of child behaviour as play and its spin-off for child development. The quest

for criteria to identify play engages developmental psychologists already for several decades (see Smith and Vollstedt 1985). In an attempt at mapping the definitions of play, Smith (2010) mentioned a number of criteria for the recognition of play. Referring to the work of Loizos (1967), he points out that play can be defined as repetitive, fragmented, exaggerated and reordering the usual sequence of actions (Smith 2010, p. 6). Furthermore, according to Smith (2010, p. 6–7), play is generally recognized as human behaviour that shows flexibility, positive affect, non-literality, intrinsic motivation and preference of performance over outcomes. The criteria for the recognition and definition of play listed by Smith are widely acknowledged in modern research on play and part of the modern social representation of play. Especially, the experience of pleasure and the absence of extrinsic goals are frequently mentioned as defining characteristics. Burghardt (2011) critically reviewed the widely used criteria and redefined them into a set of criteria that is supposed to be applicable "to identify a behaviour as play in whatever context or species being studied" (Burghardt 2011, p. 9). He comes up with the following list:

- Play is incompletely functional in the context in which it appears; functional actions in play do not by themselves contradict play, but in play these actions are typically combined with actions that do not contribute to the achievement of a goal.
- Play is spontaneous, pleasurable, rewarding or voluntary.
- Play differs from more serious behaviours in form (e.g. exaggerated) or timing (appears before it is actually needed for survival).
- Play is often repeated, but not in stereotypic forms.
- Play is initiated in the absence of acute or chronic stress (Burghardt 2011, p. 17).

Burghardt's contribution to a criterion-based definition of play is highly valuable for the operationalization of play (especially in research settings) and can be considered as an important step forward in the discussions about play. However, useful as such criteria may be for the practical recognition of play and for the reinforcement and specification of the current social representation of play, a list of criteria is not yet a theory of play that explains the dynamics of the players' activity, relationships and developmental changes.

The lack of a clear and detailed theory of play causes a number of intricate problems that hamper the deep understanding of play as a kind of human behaviour and especially limit educators' abilities to benefit from play activities in the promotion of human cultural development. As I explained elsewhere (van Oers 2012a, b, c), at least the following puzzles can be identified in educational play research:

- *What is playful learning?* Criteria-based approaches to play don't explain how learning is possible in play and don't describe how it occurs; despite the fact that learning achievements in play have been reported, there is no detailed theory of learning in play (see, e.g. Hirsh-Pasek et al. 2009, p. 53–54).
- *What is the role of the adult?* The emphasis on spontaneity and free play makes the participation of adults in play highly problematic. However, the

widespread use of play in pedagogic settings is not clearly grounded in play theory. Although both practitioners and researchers have reported that children sometimes invite adults in their play (see Pramling Samuelson and Johansson 2009), it is not clear in which situations and for which reasons adults should stay out of play, participate just peripherally or take a role as an equal partner. A theory of play should be able to explain the meaning of varying roles of adults with regard to play.

- *How does play evolve during ontogeny?* The centrality of the developmentalism assumption raises the question of what happens with play after childhood, after the role-playing stage of children? Criterion-based definitions of play can show that human beings keep playing after childhood, but an explanation of this development still remains to be formulated. In general the developmentalism assumption implies that play is conceived mainly as a developmental issue, i.e. as a characteristic of some period in human development. Vygotsky, El'konin, Dewey and many others asserted that children's play is predominant in a certain period of life and evolves after childhood into a playful attitude towards reality (see Vygotsky 1978, p. 104; Dewey 1912/1979, p. 322). They didn't, however, develop a clear theoretical position on this issue. Moreover, many developmental psychology textbooks covering human ontogeny in detailed ways from prenatal through adolescent development don't even mention play before or after the preschool period (see, e.g. Feldman 2010).

This chapter will concentrate on the latter issue. I want to contribute to the study of play by formulating a theory of play in terms of the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory of Vygotsky/Leont'ev and their followers. More particularly, I want to address the problem of the development of playing while avoiding the developmentalist assumption. In fact I will argue for play as a cultural phenomenon, based on cultural decisions about how, when and why it can take place. The argument gives a theoretical framework for the understanding of play during human ontogeny. Additionally, I will just briefly claim here that an activity theory approach to play can also solve the problem of playful learning (at least at a conceptual level) and clarify the role of the adult in (or towards) play. I will not address these topics here but have addressed them elsewhere (see van Oers 2010a, 2012a).

Activity Approaches to Play

Over the past century (since the work of Karl Groos), several serious attempts have been made to capture play theoretically. In this section, I will refrain from giving a detailed account of the history of play theories but focus on the work of Piaget and the Activity Theory approach. Piaget is particularly interesting, because he also tried to interpret play in terms of activity and mechanisms in human behaviour. Although Piaget adheres to the developmentalist assumption, he formulates an activity-based account of play that is still significant in some ways.

A Neglected Part of Piaget's Approach

In his work *La formation du symbole* (Symbol formation; translated in English as *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*; see Piaget 1962), Piaget begins his search for the criteria of play with the important remark that "play is not a behaviour *per se*, but one particular type of activity among others" (Piaget 1962, p. 147). Piaget subscribes most of the criteria like the one's listed above with regard to children's play (like spontaneity, pleasure, freedom). He interprets them, however, as characteristics of the nature of children's activity. He refers to this as "the tonality of an activity" and contends that "the tonality of an activity is ludic in proportion as it has a certain orientation" (Piaget 1962, p. 150). Characteristics like spontaneity, freedom and pleasure qualify the child's activity in such a way that he feels able and permitted to interpret reality in a personal and unconstrained way, assimilating the situation predominantly in terms of existing cognitive structures, neglecting demands of reality itself. Finally, Piaget defines play in terms of his well-known mechanisms of development (assimilation and accommodation) and writes: "play begins as soon as there is predominance of assimilation" (p. 150).

Piaget's understanding of play in terms of how an activity is carried out is an important but neglected insight for the study of play. It precludes the idea that play is a special and separate kind of behaviour per se and promotes the idea that we have to look at the way activities are actually carried out. Piaget, however, unfortunately does not elaborate this view beyond his conception of rules which regulate children's behaviour in increasingly strict ways. In later developmental stages, he focuses only on the category of games (like rule-governed board games and sports). As a consequence, he overlooks that all human cultural activity is rule governed and can be carried out (under specific circumstances) in more or less playful ways. Similarly, he relates "imitation" to play but only interprets this in terms of assimilation and overlooks that participation in all sorts of cultural practices (even by adults) encompasses kinds of imitation. As a result, Piaget could only see children's imitations of everyday world endeavours as play, as they assimilate them in their own cognitive schemes and interests. He is not interested in adults' play. However, adult imitations of cultural practices may be often highly constrained by strict rules; they nevertheless maintain in principle the possibility of assimilation and unconventional interpretation.

Approach to Play from the Perspective of the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

Although Vygotsky himself has not developed an activity theory (like his colleague Leont'ev did), he frequently phrased his ideas in terms of concrete human activities and actions that can be developed into new forms by education. In

Vygotsky's conception of play, the child's personal sense (smysl') dominates his actions, which means that the child's affective and emotional relationship with the situated objects and actions determines how an activity is accomplished.[1] Vygotsky attributes a fundamental role to the imaginative situation for the accomplishment of play. He is, unfortunately, not very specific in explaining what this means. However, Vygotsky and his colleague Leont'ev are unequivocally clear about the relation of the imaginative situation to play. In their view, the imaginative situation should not be understood as an original imagination ("fantasy") from which play emerges. Rather, imagination emerges within play activity in their view. Within the context of the activity interpretation of play (and going a bit beyond the words of Vygotsky and Leont'ev), we can interpret the imaginative situation more specifically as the child's imagination of what can be done in the play activity or to put it differently to the child's personal view on the action affordances in the given situation (play activity). See also van Oers (in press).

In his article on the role of play in development (Vygotsky 1978), it is clear that Vygotsky's approach to development and learning is still holding to a developmentalism assumption, when he writes:

> "The child moves forward essentially through play activity. Only in this sense can play be considered a leading activity that determines the child's development". (Vygotsky 1978, p. 103)

This notion of *leading activity* is adopted by Leont'ev and El'konin who have specified it for the explanation of the course of human ontogenetic development. El'konin (1972) conceives of human ontogenetic development as a progression based on alternating orientations to reality. From birth children are first orientated to the social other (e.g. the mother) and their behaviour is motivated by this dominating orientation. After some time (about 12 months), this orientation changes into a focus on objects and a motivation to manipulate objects of the cultural surroundings (El'konin calls this the leading activity of manipulative play). Manipulative play changes into role play when the relationship to reality changes again into an orientation on social others. When this orientation (at the age of about 6/7) changes again into an orientation to cultural objects driven by the motivation to get to know these objects, to knowing about the world and to learning about how to understand the objects and their use, Vygotsky, Leont'ev and El'konin stop talking about play and characterize this new leading activity as "learning activity". In their view, play is the developmental stage that characterizes young children's stage of development and that may produce "new developmental formations" (see Chaiklin 2003) that prepare for this new stage of productive (academic) learning (see also Karpov 2005).

[1] In the Russian text the word "smysl'" (sense) is used (not "značenie", which refers to cultural meanings). Unfortunately the English translation of Vygotsky's famous article on play (see Vygotsky 1978) refers to meaning, rather than sense (smysl'), which might be confusing and miss out the emotional dimensions of the child's organization of play activities.

Coming to the question of how playing develops in the later course of development, Vygotsky's explanation is short, unspecific and unsatisfactory. At the end of his article on play, he writes:

> For the school child play becomes a limited form of activity predominantly of the athletic type, which fills a specific role in the school child's development, but lacks the significance of play for the preschooler. (Vygotsky 1978, p. 104)

Historical developments have caught up with Vygotsky when we see modern youth playing games in virtual realities that do not differ essentially from preschool children's role play, although (of course) the nature of these play activities and the complexity of the rules are different. It is clear from these cultural developments that play does not die away nor does it become less significant when children become older. But even when Vygotsky, Leont'ev and El'konin had been able to foresee these developments, they still wouldn't have been able to incorporate these developments in their theories without ridding of the inherent developmentalism and acknowledging the idea that the structural-morphological description of human activities is not enough for the understanding of play. It is the nature of the execution of activities (in a given constellation of actions, objects, goals, tools) that makes an activity playful.

No doubt, Leont'ev's activity theory is a huge step forward in the understanding of the formation and development of human cultural behaviour. This theory provides critical concepts (like action, operation, activity, object, goal, motive, tool) that are helpful in describing human activities and their changes in the process of the participants' interactions. Over the years, however, critical appraisals of the theory have pointed out some weaknesses of Leont'ev's theory in its original form. A number of scholars have argued that the nature of the execution of activities determines its outcomes, course, success and the meaning of the activity for the participants. Lompscher (1972, 1976) already argued for the importance of these "process qualities" ("Verlaufsqualitäten der Tätigkeit"). On the basis of his studies of problem solving, Lompscher and his colleagues distinguished "flexibility", "planning", "precision", "autonomy" and "intensity" as basic qualities of the execution of human activities (see Lompscher 1972, p. 36). The same activity can be carried out in varying ways by different people, in different situations and with varying levels of success. Lompscher and his team discovered, for example, that a goal in a problem-solving process can gradually change as a result of anticipatory actions of the problem solver, even in preschoolers (see, e.g. Wolters 1976). Anticipation is an important process feature in activities that underlies the flexibility in the execution of actions. Although Lompscher and his team did not study play, it is evident that this kind of flexibility, intermediate planning and continuingly changing the morphological constituents of activities are characteristic of play activities. Playing children don't bother (and even are culturally permitted) to change some of the rules or use idiosyncratic rules (like playing "*as-if*").

Along a similar tack, Brušlinskij (1982) has argued that the strongly morphological character of Leont'ev's theory tends to picture human activity as an unrealistically stable structure, whereas the living human activity also continuously develops

as a structure. That is to say, according to Brušlinskij, human activities are plastic and most of the time changing gradually while being accomplished. The motive might shift, goals become more detailed and slightly different, tools may become obsolete and replaced sometimes by others, the use of the tools becomes more automatic, the order of goals may change due to experience, and some of them may be lost without notice, skipped (on second thought) or be corrupted. This continuous changing of the activity structure over time is what Brušlinskij called the *process aspect of activities*. In his view, this aspect is particularly important for the understanding of thinking and communicating as activities (Brušlinskij 1982; Brušlinskij and Polikarpov 1990). In this chapter, this point of view is taken as a relevant additional argument in the interpretation of play in terms of activity theory.

The Leont'ev–Brušlinskij approach to human activity is a powerful instrument for the analysis and understanding of human actions. However, it does not give us any clue for establishing the developmental potential of human activities. My analysis of cultural activities over the past decade has led to the conclusion that the way an activity is carried out is highly important for its developmental potential (van Oers 2003, 2008, 2010a, 2012a). The way cultural activities are carried out (or rather are permitted by the cultural environment to be carried out) is precisely the basis for an activity theoretical interpretation of play. The way activities are carried out can be described on the basis of the *format of activity.*

Play as Particularly Formatted Activity

Over the past decade, I have developed a new look on play as a specifically formatted human activity. In a general way, human activities (including concrete cultural practices) can be characterized by three parameters that define the activity format: rules, level of involvement and degrees of freedom (see, e.g. van Oers 2012a).

The first parameter refers to the *rule-governed nature of human activities*. The nature and number of the rules that regulated human activities (more implicitly or explicitly) are an important determinant of how an activity proceeds. The rules can be simple (like repetition to achieve a kind of outcome, look, e.g. at a baby's repeatedly hitting a rattle and hearing the sounds it produces), but also more complex, which often require more deliberation and monitoring, are often slower and are prone to intermediate corrections when mistakes are discovered during the ongoing process. As to the rules, a distinction must be made between four important types:

- *Social rules*: Community-related agreements of how people should interact; these rules include, for example, prescribed ways of how others should be addressed to (see the pragmatic rules of language), but also rules that have to do with decorum or the cooperative principle (see Grice 1989). In general, such rules help people "to do and say the right things" in specific situations. According to Grice, they may include maxims (rules) like "be truthful", "be relevant for the audience" or "avoid ambiguity". From an early age young children learn the

pragmatic rules of language to get their communicative goals achieved (e.g. using a sweet phrase melody when asking something).
- *Technical rules*: This type of rules have to do with how to employ technical tools (like scissors, a pen, a lock, iPhone, written language). These rules can be simple (like using the handle to open the door) or quite complex like in controlling your balance when riding a bike or using a typewriter.
- *Conceptual rules*: These rules have to do with the knowledge (conceptual tools) needed for uttering systematically related propositions; such rules describe the ways conceptual tools should be used and are often based on the knowledge of systematic semantic relationships in a network of meaningful linguistic terms. Like the 6-year-old boy who could explain the difference between day and night on the basis of his knowledge that the earth revolves around the sun. Further examples are rules regarding the relationships between parent and grandparent; understanding and being able to differentiate between animal and cow and explain the difference in a narrative, or between flower and rose; relating positions of different numbers on a number line; or explaining the relationship between multiplication and division.
- *Strategic rules*: These are rules that regulate the course of activities (sequences of actions) from a meta-point of view. They have to do with planning ("first do this"), monitoring ("Where are we going?") and evaluation ("Is this what we wanted?"). The previously mentioned process qualities identified by Lompscher were mainly of this type. Children in role play can often be seen to use strategic rules, for example, when deciding on the roles and planning the play generally by deciding what to play: Are we going to rob the super market or just play customer and cashier?

Another parameter of the activity format is based on the *level of involvement* of the participants. Is participation based on a personal voluntary decision? Or is it imposed on the participants by a more powerful person while the participants can't attribute personal sense to it? The level of involvement is often related to the (institutionalized) conditions that are created in a practice. In schools pupils are often introduced to new topics that fall outside their actual interests and that they just attend to for satisfying the teacher and parents with good grades. More often than not, no conditions are created in the introduction of the new activity that should engage pupils and provide them with the means or opportunities to make personal sense of them. It is evident in ordinary classrooms that low levels of involvement restrict pupils' creativity, motivation and pleasure.

A last parameter of the activity format to be discussed refers to the *degrees of freedom* that are allowed to participants in a practice. Much freedom allows participants to make their own decisions on how to accomplish actions, to redefine goals, to invent new goals (within the confines of the practice), to pick up (or invent) new roles and to change the rules, tools and script of the activities.

The characteristic of freedom is mentioned by almost all play researchers and should be considered essential in all definitions of play. When the participants don't have any freedom of choice regarding what and how to play, activities will

never be experienced as play. Both the child that is forced to say a specific text for playing its role and the piano player who is only allowed to play exactly according to the score as interpreted by his teacher can't be said to play. They are just mechanically reproducing a predefined program. Play and freedom essentially go together, but as Vygotsky already pointed out, this freedom can never be absolute in play, due to the rule-governed nature of activities (see Vygotsky 1978). There is freedom to interpret the rules, to change some rules, postpone application of rules, etc., but complete denial of all rules renders the activity into chaos, which people generally don't like and definitely not playing children. It depends on the participants' engagement whether he or she will leave chaotic situations or negotiate with other participants on the interpretation or (re)installation of some rules that structure the activity to some level and give participants a basis for dealing with the freedom that is allowed.

Taking a look at human activities from the perspective of activity format, an activity can be generally called "play", when participants in the activity are aware of the regularities in the ongoing activity and expose rule-governed activity, are highly involved and are permitted to a certain extent to make free choices regarding the use and interpretations of the main constituents of this activity (its goals, object, rules, tools, roles, action sequence, etc.). One of the main reasons for applying rules (both for children and adults in an activity) is facilitating the ways of dealing with the freedom that is permitted. This faculty can be employed, however, in many different (and culture-bound) ways. A dominant educational way of dealing with this freedom and variety in activities is the imposition of strict rules that annihilate the participants' freedom. This is sometimes the case in risky labour situations, convict labour, training for high-level performances (like practising a complex movement) or in schools. In using the above described activity format to characterize different activities, it is evident that not everything in life (and school for that matter) is playful activity. Especially in school situations where children are forced through the curriculum without attempts to get them engaged and in which they are forced to apply technical or conceptual rules mechanically, there is no play-based curriculum, but mainly drill and practice learning for mastery. The way adults define play by putting up special constraints on children's engagement in activities is often a reflection of the needs to control children (see Sutton-Smith 1986). On the other hand, from a more emancipatory point of view, children can be allowed to take part in cultural activities (either with or without help or direct supervision of adults) in ways that allow them to explore cultural practices (including its roles, tools, rules, objectives, and limits) and develop new needs for learning to improve their participation in these practices. The whole range of play forms within and between cultures can be interpreted successfully from an activity point of view. From this point of view, it is evident how deeply play is a cultural construct (Gaskins et al. 2007; Göncü et al. 2007), based on cultural assumptions and decisions regarding the dignity of rules, the psychological value of involvement and the educational relevance of some freedom in the accomplishment of activities. Play is basically a cultural phenomenon, rather than a developmental expression of young children.

The Development of Playing

The activity theoretical approach to play provides a new look at play development as well. Most current theories of play development somehow reproduce (with certain adaptations) Piaget's classic description of the development of playing from sensorimotor play to symbolic play to rule play (games). The ability of symbolic representation and use objects in unusual, nonliteral ways is a core element in this approach (see Piaget 1962; Smilansky 1968). Limitations of these approaches with regard to covering all types of playing and obscurity of definitions have been well described (see, e.g. Pellegrini and Smith 2003). These theories concentrate exclusively on the evolution of play in a certain period of ontogeny and often neglect microgenetic developments within human's playing. In this last section of this chapter, I will focus on both dimensions from an activity theory approach.

The Development of Playing in Ontogeny

Conceiving of play as a specifically formatted practice (activity) introduces a new perspective on play development throughout ontogeny. This starting point directs the theory of play development to the improvement of the players' participation in cultural practices. Improvement of the participation in increasingly more sophisticated cultural practices calls for appropriating new ways of dealing with freedom in these practices.

Although there is still much reflection and research needed to specify precisely how players can and may exploit their freedom in playfully formatted cultural practices, it is obvious from research (see, e.g. Piaget's and Vygotsky's work on play) that the increasing relevance of *rules* in activities is an important dimension in ontogeny and particularly in playing. In fact, the proposal that I will offer here as an activity theory approach to play development concentrates on the evolution of playing during ontogeny as a process of increasing self-regulation with the help of more, varying and increasingly complex rules. This leads to a reconceptualization of play as an ongoing development of participation in playfully formatted activities and as such drops the assumption of play as a developmental stage in childhood in favour of play as a cultural phenomenon.

Consequently, we will have to reconceptualize El'konin's (1972) theory of periodization as well. El'konin's view on development as a sequence of leading activities is still following the developmentalist assumption by describing play as a special period in child development. It must be emphasized, however, that El'konin (1978) rejects the naturalistic explanation of play and development and points out that the stage of play is related to cultural conditions of the industrialized society that needs play as a stage to introduce children into cultural life. Nevertheless he sticks to the idea of play as a stage in children's development and does not explain how play evolves into new forms of activity. It seems that he still caught in some

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Leading activity	**Looking for social contacts** (building mutuality and shared attention)	**Manipulative play** (exploring the world of things)	**Role play** (exploring the world of social relations and roles)	**Learning activity** (appropriating conceptual knowledge of objects)	**Defining social position in a group** (building stable social relationships)	**Labor** (producing culturally valued commodities with exchange value)
Orientation to	WORLD OF PERSONS	WORLD OF OBJECTS	WORLD OF PERSONS	WORLD OF OBJECTS	WORLD OF PERSONS	WORLD OF OBJECTS

Fig. 14.1 Schematic representation of El'konin's theory of development

kind of cultural developmentalism that advocates play as a dialectical necessity for the transition to later and higher societal practices like study and work.

El'konin's theory of development, however, doesn't necessarily need a developmentalism assumption. The dynamic of the theory is based on an assumption of two different and alternating ways of orientation to reality during ontogeny. In his view, human development is characterized by switches from an orientation on the social other (like parents, peers, care takers) to an orientation to the world of cultural objects (like toys, images, concepts). Each of these orientations is manifest in specific motivations that dominate some periods in life (and that are characterized as "leading activities"). Schematically, this results in the following trajectory of development (see Fig. 14.1), with alternating foci on the world of persons and the world of cultural objects:

Each of the two orientations confronts the developing human being with demands to learn either social rules or conceptual (technical and strategic) rules.

The dialectical tensions between the demands from the world of objects and the world of persons are the basis for developmental progress, according to El'konin (see El'konin 1972). When the tensions between these two orientations become too high, according to El'konin, a crisis emerges which can only be solved by changing the focus from the dominating orientation to the other one and fostering its development

to a higher level. This shift from one orientation to another marks the transition from one leading activity to the next. A deeper analysis of this theory would be needed to do full justice to El'konin, but sticking to the topic of this chapter, I will briefly focus on two points:

1. In the transition from one leading activity to another, the developmental outcomes from the previous stage are not left behind, but they become less dominant as learning goals; they become integrated in the new type of activity that dominates the next leading activity.
2. It is clear from the above scheme that this approach locates play mainly in stages II and III (ages about 2 and 7). This is not to be interpreted as a disappearance of play from children's life; it just gets a less dominant position alongside serious school learning (as in sports or gaming, see again Vygotsky 1978, p. 104). Theoretically, however, there is not much attention paid to the explanation of the evolution of play during the leading activity of academic learning ("learning activity"; see also Davydov 1999; El'konin and Davydov 1966). Actually, Davydov resisted for a long time the idea of discursive learning in primary school pupils and advocated the teaching of theoretical knowledge that didn't give pupils much freedom for exploring their own ideas (see Davydov 1996; Carpay and van Oers 1993, 1999). Recently Davydov's initial point of view was also advocated by Karpov (2005), but this interpretation also lost the view on the playing child in the stage of learning activity (see van Oers 2011).

An activity theory approach to play doesn't need to change El'konin's periodization when we are ready to accept the idea that learning activity as a *cultural practice* (as an emulation of science by pupils in schools) can also be carried out in play form (as Huizinga suggests, see above). No doubt, learning activity is based on conceptual rules, employs social rules (see, e.g. Grice's conversational maxims) and can start out from engaging (personal) questions that are studied with rigorous methods and discussions (see van Oers and Dobber in press). Moreover, the emulation of scientific practices as a process of collaborative (discursive) knowledge production in primary and secondary school must allow pupils some degrees of freedom with regard to the formulation of possible explanations ("hypotheses"), with regard to their personal interpretations of other relevant sources, their ways of using the tools, etc. In that sense pupils re-enact the activity of a creative academic involved in knowledge production at the edge of science. There is no inherent reason whatsoever (except cultural and ideological limitations) that prohibits learning activity to be playful. In our own research (see van Schaik et al. 2010), we could demonstrate that allowing pupils some freedom in the construction of solutions to mathematical problems does not impair the learning outcomes and even may strengthen the transfer value of the learning outcomes (Terwel et al. 2009). Realistic mathematics education is based on the idea that mathematics learning should be based on problem-solving activities that encourage pupils to build their own mathematical conceptions and test them rigorously against solutions of others (peers, teacher). Playful mathematics learning in the early grades of primary school (see, e.g. van Oers 2010b) can be continued into the upper grades.

Similar analyses can be constructed for the other leading activities in El'konin's theory of development. As a format of activities, play can continue throughout the course of human development, since every cultural activity can be carried out in a playful format. The main limitations for organizing cultural activities in a playful way are rooted in cultural assumptions regarding safety, authority, expenses, etc. Hence, we can maintain that the leading activities as distinguished by El'konin can be maintained as descriptions of distinct developmental periods (with gradual transitions and much overlappings). The major differences lie in their orientations to reality and the rules that actors are supposed to use in the different leading activities. In our own classroom observations, we found, for example, that young children (3–4-year-olds) were mainly engaged in discovering the rules for efficient manipulation of objects (like a telephone, a pen, blocks, slopes), while for older children (4–6-year-olds) the focus changed towards social rules of how to behave in their re-enactments of cultural practices (like playing house or supermarket). It was remarkable that many of the social rules used by these children were of a moral nature ("you shouldn't…", "we have to share…", "it is not allowed…", "it is unfair to…"). Gradually more conceptual rules come into play, like "odd numbers are between two even numbers" (from a role play in a post office). In the course of development, more and more complex conceptual rules and technical and strategic rules become the focus of attention in the pupils' re-enactment of a researcher's work. But when children are engaged in activities of finding answers to their own or collectively endorsed questions or knowledge constructions and when they are permitted some degrees of freedom in finding shared answers, this learning practice still accords to the format of playful activity. Especially in simulations of collaborative knowledge production, pupils argue consistently and don't accept everything that is brought forward or what is against their shared pool of common knowledge. Hence this playful learning establishes its own constraints but does not destroy the freedom of creativity, divergent thinking, hypothesizing and reformulating goals or tools (like diagrams). The development of playing in ontogeny is mostly a process of appropriating new abilities to go on playing in increasingly complex and constrained cultural activities and dealing with the freedom that is permitted in these practices.

Microgenetic Developments in Playing

As could be expected from the process interpretation of human activities (see above, Brušlinskij), during play activities many changes occur, even changes that consolidate in new play themes and new narratives regarding the play children are involved in. This happened in one of our grade 3 classrooms (6- and 7-year-olds), where pupils were role playing in a shoe store they had built in their classroom. Some of the older pupils got focused on the stock of shoes and wanted to keep track of the numbers of shoes purchased and how many should be stored in order to keep the shop running. With the help of the teacher, they changed the play in a card game

where drawing a red card (with a number on it) meant buying in and a green card (also with a number on it) meant selling shoes to customers in the shop (the cards were top down, so the numbers couldn't be seen). This game required a lot of social rules (going turn by turn, not cheating with the numbers), conceptual rules for calculating the ever changing sums and strategic rules (shall I draw when I have only one pair of shoes left in stock?). The choice for this game was the pupils' own choice; they played it with high involvement and were free to make important decisions regarding how to play it. But the play was not as it started out, it transformed from playing actual customers to thinking about symbolic costumers and delivery factories. This process evidently contained elaborations of the players' narrative that guided their play. The development of the players' narratives in thematic role play is a fundamental dimension in the microgenetic evolution of a play activity (see Hakkarainen 2008; Hakkarainen and Bredikyte 2010).

In the following, a few salient changes in playful activity are described, taken from a play-based curriculum (Developmental Education) in the Netherlands (see van Oers 2012c). The described transformations within an ongoing play of children are purposefully introduced into children's play, without destroying the basic play format.

Stimulating the Transition from Manipulating Play to Role Play

Leont'ev (1983) pointed out that the understanding of the concept of role is important for deeper understanding and development of role playing. In Developmental Education classrooms in the Netherlands, special attention is paid to the children's adoption of specific roles in their play. In classrooms with mainly 3- and 4-year-old children, it can often be observed that children are playing with a toy in a repetitive way, without much evolution in the play activity itself. A small boy was riding with his toy fire engine the whole morning while imitating the noise of cars. The teacher observed him, and at some moment (when the boy seemed to take a break) she started talking with the boy about his car and asked if the firemen had been busy? If they had to extinguish many fires? Step by step the teachers lead the boy to the idea that he was the fireman going out for extinguishing burning houses. The connection of the boy's manipulative play with this car to a specific role expanded the boy's play (and vocabulary). In the follow-up of the play, the boy first built houses and then spurted the fire engine from the other side of the room to the burning house to extinguish the fire and rescue the people. A narrative was emerging too! Similar examples were found with girls putting puppets in a bath (they became the mother) or a boy walking around with a broom on the school yard (he was encouraged to play the gardener' role). These children's play was not destroyed by the "intervention" of the teacher but enriched by transforming the manipulative play into role-bound play. A role organizes activities, elicits narratives, suggests needs for new tools and builds a step for the transition into genuine role play, where role-role interactions on the basis of a shared theme become more dominant. Transitions to new leading activities are often facilitated by encouraging pupils to include new

dimensions in their ongoing play. A similar argument can be built for stimulating new developments within the leading activity called learning activity (a further description can be found in van Oers 2012b).

From Actual Role Play to Directing Role Playing

When young children have read a book (or had listed to a story read aloud by the teacher), sometimes the children want to express the story in a role play, in which each of them plays one of the characters in the story. These "dramatic story re-enactments" (Martinez et al. 1991) are generally supposed to support literacy development. Most of the time children like it, and a lot of negotiation on the story, its plot, slight changes, etc. are going on. The re-enactment is real play as it obeys the play format with regard to rules (mainly determined by the story theme), engagement and freedom with regard to decisions about how to dress up, what is articulated or not, etc. The transition of an imagined story in real role play is probably an important step in learning how to represent an imagined story in real-life role play.

Teachers in developmental education classrooms often make one step further and invite pupils to rebuild a scene from the story on a table: reconstructing the objects or houses from the story, making the landscape or the city and making the figures from the story. During this reconstruction play, children keep complying with the play format and start playing the part of the story again on the replica. In doing this kind of play, young children are making important steps in play development, as they are not actually playing out a role but projecting an imagined role script onto externalized agents. Actually the children are directors of the play from a meta-position.

Directing a play on the basis of an imagined situation or an idea is an important step in play development as this is one of the requirements for participating in intellectual discourse on a topic in which participants also try to find a script to come to an agreement (plot). A good player in such disputes is able to elaborate a plot and regulate the participants' utterances into a certain direction. Moreover, modern technology provides children with many electronic games (like the Sims, or cooperative play in 3D realities) wherein children can continue to develop their (strategic and conceptual rule-based) play. Serious gaming as an activity of playful learning in the context of virtually reconstructed real-life situations (see, e.g. Gee 2007) is an example of playful learning that emerges out of directing play in young children.

Developments in young children's play not only create conditions for meaningful transition to new stages of development (learning activity) but also lay a foundation for new abilities that may be relevant for future playful learning.

Conclusion

Although play as a cultural phenomenon has resisted definition for a long time, this chapter proposes an activity theory interpretation of play that defines play in terms of a specific activity format. This approach emphasizes the process character of

activities and advocates that playful activities are rule-governed, take care of the players' involvement and allow them some degrees of freedom in the accomplishment of the played activity. This activity approach is in line with Huizinga's cultural-historical theory of played practices that develop due to internal tensions and needs.

The activity theory interpretation of play analyses play as a cultural phenomenon and overcomes the long-lasting and theoretically unproductive developmentalism assumption. In the activity view on play, activities can be playful during all stages of ontogeny. The decision whether play is acceptable at all in particular situations depends on cultural (educational) presumptions, not on ontogenetic developmental needs or characteristics.

As to understanding the evolution of play in human development, Vygotsky called for a profound analysis of playing that can possibly "determine its course and its role in development" (Vygotsky 1978, p. 104). The activity theoretical analysis of play presented above demonstrates that Vygotsky was mistaken when he wrote that "Play bears little resemblance to the complex mediated form of thought and volition it leads to" (p. 104). It is not play itself that bears little resemblance to later forms of thought and volition but the contents of the rules that organize and promote later activities. Even though rules become more and more sophisticated and complex (as in conceptual learning and the appropriation of scientific theory), the nature of the activities can still be playful. In fact, we may expect that the cultural evolution of scientific thinking necessarily needs playful enactments of academic life, that is to say needs freedom and deep engagement within a strictly rule-based context, in order to open up for scientific fantasy and creativity. Education should look for ways to develop play into new forms rather than marginalizing it after early primary school and defining the aims of schooling merely in terms of transmission of knowledge and abilities.

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Chapter 15
Play, But Not Simply Play: The Anthropology of Play

Benny Karpatschof

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with two questions:

- How to *define* the concept of play
- How to *understand* the nature of play

These two questions, how to *define* and how to *understand* play, have throughout the history of philosophy been the object of disagreement and controversy.

Defining Play

In defining play, two tendencies have been opposing one another: a negative and a positive one. The negative definition conceives play as simply the negation of what is serious, worthwhile. The antique Greek philosophy had the antinomic pair of concepts:

Taking play
as simply play
and earnestness
in earnest
shows how thoroughly
thou none
of the two
discernest.
Freely after (Hein, *Collected Grooks I*, Borgen, Copenhagen, 2002)

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Seriousness (*spoude*) versus play (*paidia*)

Seriousness for the Greek antique was not the low ranking activity of work, suited for only women and unfree man, but rather *poleteia*, the important and respected participation in the public affairs of the *polis*.

Since the Reformation with its worship of work, this antinomy has, however, been supplemented by

Work versus play

In the negative definition of play, it is a mere residual to either seriousness or work, having no autonomous content. It is simply the meaningless, although possibly pleasant, pastime, outside of activities of importance.

An expression of this negative definition is found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*:

> The happy life is thought to be virtuous; now a virtuous life requires exertion, and does not consist in amusement. And we say that serious things are better than laughable things and those connected with amusement. (Aristotle 2008, Nicomachean Ethics, Ch. X, part 6)

We shall return to Aristotle in the next section.

In the positive definition, play is, however, seen as an independent type of activity, having its own content or meaning outside the sphere of "seriousness" or work. Such a positive definition is formulated by Dewey:

> In play the activity is its own end, instead of its having an ulterior result. (Dewey 1966, 202)

We are here on the verge to the next section, the understanding of play.

Understanding Play

Aristotle in the quotation above did not see anything of interest in play. In his stern conception of ethics and of education, the cornerstone was the concept of virtue (arete). And Aristotle saw play as a diversion from the road to virtue.

The teacher and predecessor of Aristotle, Plato, had, however, an understanding more positive and more illuminating on the phenomenon of play. In the section concerning education of his book *The Republic* he articulates the value of play through his mentor and speaking tube, Socrates. In Greek, there is a connection between education *paideia* and play *paidia*, both derived from children, "paidas":

> Well then, the study of calculation and geometry, and all the preparatory education (propaideuthenai) required for dialectic must be put before them as children, and the instruction must not be given the aspect of a compulsion to learn.
>
> Why not?
>
> Because the free man ought not to learn any study slavishly. Forced labors performed by the body don't make the body any worse, but no forced study abides in the soul.

"True," he said. "Therefore, you best of men," I said, "don't use force in training the children (paidas) in the subjects, but rather play (paidzontas). In that way you can better discern what each is naturally directed toward".

(Republic Ch. VII On Education, 7.536e–f,
http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.8.vii.html)
Here quoted from (Krentz 1998)

This not only rather positive but, in fact, dialectical understanding of play did not appear again until much later. During scholastic philosophy, the interest was rather oriented towards the preparation for the hereafter than for idle play. Below the official high culture of nobility of clergy, there was, however, as Baktin (1984) has shown, a vigorous but unofficial folk culture of carnival.

Play was further ostracized by the work ideology of Reformation as sternly expressed in the puritan education:

In [The Salem of] 1692, children were expected to behave under the same strict code as the adults – doing chores, attending church services, and repressing individual differences. Any show of emotion, such as excitement, fear, or anger, was discouraged, and disobedience was severely punished. Children rarely played, as toys and games were scarce. Puritans saw these activities as sinful distractions.

(http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schooladventures/salemwitchtrials/)

The modern era with its accelerating worship of play was announced by Rousseau who in Emile presented the following plea to all educators:

Love childhood, its pleasures, and its delightful instincts. Childhood has its own ways of seeing, of thinking, of feeling, which are suitable to it; nothing is less reasonable than to substitute our own . . . Work and play are alike to him. (Rousseau 2008, book II)

A plea that was half a century later transformed to a practical education by Fröbel:

The character and purpose of these plays may be described as follows: They are a coherent system, starting at each stage from the simplest activity and progressing to the most diverse and complex manifestations of it. The purpose of each one of them is to instruct human beings so that they may progress as individuals and members of humanity are all its various relationships. Collectively they form a complete whole, like a many branched tree, whose parts explain and advance each other. Each is a self-contained whole, a seed from which manifold new developments may spring to cohere in further unity. They cover the whole field of intuitive and sensory instruction and lay the basis for all further teaching. They begin to establish spatial relationships and proceed to sensory and language training so that eventually man comes to see himself as a sentient, intelligent and rational being and as such strives to live. (Fröbel, F. 1826. Die Menschenerziehung [On the education of man]. Keilhau; Leipzig, Wienbrack)

The romantic metaphor of childhood development as the growth of a plant was taken quite literally by Fröbel, who invented not only the *word* "kindergarten" but the *institution* itself.

Here the original link between childhood and play is still intact. In the philosophy of aesthetics of the same era, there is, however, a marked tendency to evaluate play as an adult phenomenon:

Thus, Schiller remarks:

Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word man, and he is only wholly man when he plays. (Schiller 2008, Letter XV)

And Hegel agrees in his somewhat more pompous style:

> Play [is], in its extreme insouciance, at the same time the most exalted and only true seriousness. (Hegel 2008, iii–xxiv)

Comparing this understanding to what we found in the Greek philosophy, it is apparent that Hegel has totally opposed the negative conception of Aristotle and raises the more dialectical view on play we saw in Plato to the level where true seriousness cannot be found outside play.

Quite in accordance to Hegel, Nietzsche asserts that seriousness fundamentally is to be found in the child:

> Man's maturity: to have regained the seriousness that he had as a child at play. (Nietzsche 2008a, Aphorism 94)

After this brief tour through the prehistory of play theory, we shall now turn the genuine history of the scholarly study of play.

It is, in fact, a rather limited number of scholars who have contributed in a significant way in this area.

With the eminent cultural historian Huizinga, the phenomenon of play was, however, elevated from casual remarks or romantic worship to a systematic analysis of play as an essential trait of any culture. He creates the first all-encompassing theory of play on the basis of this definition:

> Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is different from ordinary life. (Huizinga 1950, 28)

Huizinga understands play precisely because of its freedom from "serious" business to be a decisive precondition for cultural evolution. Thus, according to Huizinga, both religion and art are based on play, and one of his favourite examples of play as defining culture is the code of chivalry as it was expressed in the tournaments of the Middle Ages.

The paradoxical status of play in Huizinga's thinking, as, on the one hand, not-serious as lacking direct material results and, on the other hand, an activity having the highest importance for culture, means that it is a most delicate aspect of culture and easily exposed to corruption.

It can degenerate in the directions of both of the poles between which it is suspended. In the direction of seriousness, it can lose its playful and free status and be corrupted to normal business, such as often happens with professional sport. In the opposite direction, it can degenerate to silly pastime demanding no efforts and taking no pains. As a conservative cultural critic, Huizinga is thus quite pessimistic in respect to the future of play and consequently the future of culture.

We shall return later to the criticism of Huizinga and shall here emphasize two of his major theses:

1. Play is found in every culture and constitutes an essential part of it.

2. Although play is found in most vertebrate species, it is developed to sophistication in man that defines it as a specific anthropological quality.

A fellow scholar who has given a major contribution to the anthropology of play is the French sociologist and philosopher Caillois. He is, in fact, the founding father of the new discipline *ludology* that has developed rapidly with the ascent of the billion-size computer game business. Caillois had a less nostalgic and more a down-to-earth anthropological attitude towards the phenomenon of play, and while he admitted the eminent value of Huizinga's work, he criticized his predecessor for eliminating gambling from the concept of play and for ignoring the economical importance of play, especially in the form of money games and betting.

Caillois was as a trained social scientist not focused as Huizinga on the essential nature of play, but more interested in systematizing the many-spangled plethora of plays, and it is in particular this part of his work that has been of highly importance for ludology. His main work is *Man, Play and Games* (2001) (Original title *Les jeux et les hommes*).

Caillois made, in fact, not just one but two different conceptual systems, the mutual relation of which is not totally clear. The first system is a kind of classificatory system, and it does, however, not strictly observe the rules of a category system, as the inventor, or should we say discoverer, also operates with transitory forms. The second system is a kind of dimension, the end points of which are mutually exclusive.

The classificatory system consists of *four fundamental categories*, each representing an important aspect of the universe of play:

1. Agon
2. Alea
3. Mimicry
4. Ilinx

The Greek word *Agon* means conflict but was already used by Huizinga in the special meaning as competition. Agon is met in most games based on competence, such as in sport.

Alea is Latin for die. It is in a way the opposite form of Agon. Where Agon is based on skill and performance, Alea is based on chance. As already mentioned, Caillois does, however, acknowledge transitory forms. Even hazard games can incorporate a degree of skill, and even competence games, like sport, will always contain an aspect of chance.

Mimicry is the category where the play consists in imitation. This category is found in children's role play and in the carnival of adults. Mimicry is thus based on the passing *illusion* of the play functioning as the reality it is imitating. Caillois points here to the illuminating etymological fact that the word *illusion* is a combination of the Latin word *in* and *ludo*, the latter meaning precisely play. Thus, illusion is literally *in-play*. We shall later return to this observation that several scholars have seen as essential to the concept of play.

The last category, *Ilinx*, is, in a way, the most inventive of Caillois' classificatory system. *Ilinx* is a Greek word *meaning* whirlpool or maelstrom. Caillois defines it in the following way:

> Ilinx. The last kind of game includes those which are based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness.
>
> The disturbance that provokes vertigo is commonly sought for its own sake. (ibid. 23)

The second system of Caillois is just as important as the former. It is a kind of dimension spanned between the two poles:

1. Paidia
2. Ludus

We have already met both words: the Greek word *Paidia* in reference to the understanding of play in Plato and Aristotle, and the Latin word *Ludus* in the etymology of *illusion*. These poles show a peculiar side of the universe of play. A play can be characterized by an extensive or possibly total lack of rules, and it can, however, also be governed by rules, the rigidity of which sometimes borders to pedantry or even paranoid obsession, where the slightest break of rules is punished with zeal. And the curious thing with this duplicity is that it is exactly the freedom of any rules that seems to be the attraction of Paidia, whereas it is the following of rules that makes Ludus fascinating. There are some natural affinities between the two systems of Caillois. Thus, in the one end, Agon is intimately connected to Ludus, and in the other end, Ilinx is just as much attached to Paidia.

Caillois has not contributed very much to the question of defining the concept of play, although he criticizes Huizinga for being, at the same time, too narrow and too broad. Too narrow in elimination the element of economic engagement and interest, too broad in including parts of art and religious worship. He is, however, like Huizinga, still a protagonist for a dichotomous definition setting play apart from normal societal activity.

One of the most penetrating critics of this dichotomy is Bateson. In his celebrated Nietzscherian manifesto *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, he has a chapter *A Theory of Play and Fantasy*, where he in his peculiar opaque and paradoxophilic way undermines the logical precondition for defining play as a category besides non-play:

> [The] message "This is play" [...will] necessarily generate a paradox of the Russelian or Epimenides type – a negative statement containing implicit negative metastatement. "This is play" looks something like this: These actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions for which they stand would denote. [...] The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite.
>
> We face then two peculiarities of play:

(a) *that the message of signals exchanged in play are in a certain sense untrue or not meant;*
(b) *that that which* is denoted by these signals is nonexistent. (Bateson 1999, 183).

Bateson tells that he was inspired to this thought after having seen two monkeys in play.

Stevens criticizes in his article “Play and Work: A False Dichotomy” (1978) Huizinga’s definition of play for having this dichotomy as his Anker stone. In his letter in reply to Stevens’ article, Bateson (1979) agrees that the dichotomy mentioned is indeed false:

> It is not false but true that in many cultures much action is premised by the work-play dichotomy. The investigation of this truth will certainly reveal that belief in the dichotomy to be both partially self validating and teratogic (i.e. productive of monsters).

Bateson’s criticism of this dichotomy of Huizinga’s definition is, however, much more thoroughgoing as he scrutinizes several other of Huizinga’s dichotomies, such as “serious/not-serious, free/not-free, material-interest/no-material-interest” for their ethnocentric metaphysics.

The grand old man in the theory of play, the child psychologist Brian Sutton-Smith has made the chimerical feature of play the focus point of his book *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997).

In the very opening of this book, where he even refers to Bateson, Sutton-Smith explains this ambiguity:

> We all play occasionally, and we all know what playing feels like. But when it comes to making theoretical statements about what play is, we fall into silliness. There is little agreement among us, and much ambiguity. Some of the most outstanding scholars of children’s play have been concerned by this ambiguity. For example, classical scholar Mihail Spariosu (1989) calls play “amphibolous”, which means it goes in two directions at once and is not clear. Victor Turner (1969), the anthropologist, calls play “liminal” or “liminoid”, meaning that it occupies a threshold between reality and unreality, as if, for example, it were on the beach between the land and the sea. (ibid. 1)

One of the decisive attempts to find an alternative to the dichotomous thinking that blocks an understanding of the confusing nature of play has been made by the Russian philosopher and literary theorist Bakhtin. In his immensely erudite and original, but not especially humorous, book *Rabelais and His Word* (1984), he excavates the medieval carnival culture that sunk into the abyss of history in the seventeenth century as an Atlantis of frivolous joy but still was very much alive up to the Renaissance and, with Bakhtin’s cultural hero *Rabelais (1494–1553)*, as the best and most overwhelming exponent.

With thoroughgoing and sometimes nearly endless examples from the literally Gangantuan books of Rabelais, Bakhtin impressively defended his thesis that Bakhtin still lived in an antediluvian Eden before the dualistic separation of folk culture and high culture, between bad taste and good taste, between the lower, secrete stratum of the body and the acceptable part, between the grotesque and the refined in art and literature and even the cleavage between life and death.

In a way, the demise of the carnival culture that certainly accounted for a most important part of medieval life was also the beginning of the splitting of play itself.

Play was reduced to an undifferentiated expression of life for children and adults alike. It was limited to be the playground of children and an occasional oasis of pastime in the hard-working life of the adults.

The metaphor of *oasis* is also used in the book about play written by the German philosopher Eugen Fink. He was a pupil of Husserl, just as Fink's friend, Heidegger. Unlike the latter, however, he did not betray his mentor, but supported him until his death and prolonged his work in developing and using the phenomenological approach. Precisely because of the ambiguity of play, Fink could give a valuable contribution to this problem, attacking it in a phenomenological way.

The book *Oase des Glücks – Gedanken zu einer Ontologie des Spiels* (1957), partly translated to English (1960, 1968), is besides this phenomenological approach marked by Fink's background in classic German philosophy in his application of a dialectical instead of a dualistic thinking. Fink acknowledges the duplicity of play as a *transitory* or perhaps *luminal* phenomenon occupying, at the same time, a place in the world of reality of fantasy.

He thus writes about the relation between reality and fantasy when playing:

> In the design of the play world there is no place for the player in his distinct capacity as the creator of the world – he is nowhere and yet everywhere in the fabric of this world; he plays a role within this world and deals with play-world objects and people. The puzzling thing about this is the fact that in our imagination we comprehend these objects themselves as "real objects", and that within this world the dichotomy of reality and illusion can even occur on various levels.
>
> And yet it is not the case, that the truly real objects of our everyday world can be considered to be hidden by the beings of the play world and thus no longer recognizable. The play world does not form a curtain or a wall between us and all that is around us, it does not obscure or hide the real world.
>
> […]
>
> The play world is not suspended in a purely ideal world. It always has a real setting, and yet it is never a real thing among other real things, although it has an absolute need of real things as a point of departure. That is to say, the imaginary character of the play world cannot be elucidated a phenomenon of mere subjective illusion, it cannot be defined as a chimera, which were to exist only in the innermost soul without any relationship to reality. The more one begin to think about play, the more elusive and ambiguous it seems to become (1968, 24).

The colourful style of Fink could lead to the misunderstanding that we here find a romantic idealization of play. And he agrees, in fact, in the enthusiastic valuation of Hegel and Nietzsche quoted above. However, the strange duplicity of play is, in Fink's view, even met in its very power of fascination. And with a reference to precisely Nietzsche, he writes:

> In the course of play man can realize two extreme models of being. On the one hand, play can be experienced as a pinnacle of human sovereignty. Man enjoy here an almost limitless creativity, he is productive and uninhibited because he is not creating within the sphere of reality. The player experiences himself as the lord of the products of his imagination – because it is virtually unlimited, play is an eminent manifestation of human freedom. But it remains a difficult question, whether the nature of play is to be understood essentially and solely in terms of the existential force of freedom – or whether also completely existential factors reveal themselves in and through play. And in fact we do find occasionally in play the opposite pole of freedom, namely a withdrawal from the real world, which can go so far as enchantment and trance and reach a point of total enslavement through the demonic power of the mask. Play can contain within itself not only the clear apollonian moment of free self-determination, but also the dark Dionysian moment of panic self-abandon. (ibid. 24f)

Fink now says about the ambiguity of play:

> Man's relationship to the enigmatic illusion of the play world, to the dimension of the imaginary, ambiguous. Play is a phenomenon for which there are no adequate criteria at and. Its internal multiplicity of meaning can perhaps be most readily approached with the tool of a dialectic that does not smooth out the paradoxes. (ibid. 25)

Still with much caution and with due respect for the difficulty of the task, Fink now takes a decisive step to a characterization of play:

> The problem of analyzing exactly the way in which reality and irreality combine and interpenetrate in human play is of utmost relevance and yet extremely difficult. The ontological analysis of play leads back to the cardinal problems of philosophy: to speculations about Being and Nothingness, about Appearance and Becoming. We cannot follow this line of thought here, but one sees at any rate that the usual commonplace about the irreality of play must remain superficial, if one does not examine the enigmatic dimension of the imaginary. What is the human, what is the universal meaning of this imaginary dimension? Is it an isolated realm amidst the rest of creation? Is the exotic land of irreality the consecrated place for conjuring up and rendering present the essences of all things that exist? In the magical mirror image produced by the play world, a single object chosen at random (e.g. the plaything) becomes a *symbol*. It has representative character.

And now Fink presents a core definition of play:

> Even if it has long since been forgotten, human play is the symbolic act of representing the meaning of the world and of life. [The underlining set by BK]. (ibid. 28)

It is in this peculiar form of *reference* I think Fink is on the track to the basics of play. He says it is "*the symbolic act of representing the meaning of the world and of life*". Here, however, he is evidently not thinking of reference in a unilateral, picture-theoretical way. In unilateral reference, the picture points to this object it shall depict, without in any way modifying or influencing the object in question.

The connection between play as a symbol and the world it symbolizes must rather be understood as a relation of *interaction*. Maybe we could here make a semantic safeguard by making a differentiation between, on the one hand, a true *re-presentation*, that is, the just mentioned unilateral depicture of its object, and, on the other hand, a *presentation*, that is, a bilateral relation in which the presentation is a way of influencing, possibly changing, its object.

Finally, quoting Nietzsche's moral nihilistic praise of play:

Becoming and dissolution, building and destruction without moral implication, in eternal innocence, are to be found in the world only in the play of the artist and of the child – the world is the play of Zeus. (Nietzsche 2008b)

Fink dissociates from this grandiose aesthetication of play:

> The profundity of such a conception, but also its dangers and its seductive power, which impels toward an aesthetic interpretation of the universe, cannot be treated here. But the perplexing world-formula, according to which Being in its totality function like play, may perhaps make us aware of the fact that play is no harmless, peripheral or even "childish" thing – that precisely in the power and the glory of our magical creativity we mortal men are "at stake" in an inscrutable way. Once the essence of the world is conceived as play, the logical consequence for man is he is the only creature in the entire universe that can relate

> to and reproduce the working of the whole of Being. If this is the case, then man can find is true essence only in relating to that which transcends him. (Fink 1968, 29f)

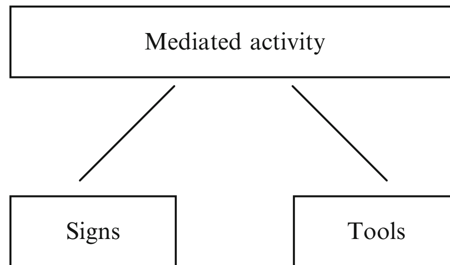
Where Fink attempted to outline an ontology of play, my title in this chapter has set the goal to sketch an *anthropology of play*.

Sketching an Anthropology of Play

Following Fink's statement of the entanglement of play and not-play and his final reference to transcendence, I shall now proceed in this direction. My theoretical platform being the *social cultural school* of Vygotsky and Leontiev rather than Husserlian phenomenology, my point of departure for the following outline of an anthropology of play will be the concept of activity.

When understanding play as not only a specific kind but even as an all-encompassing aspect of human activity, we shall base this outline on the social historical school's concept of *human activity*. Vygotsky has focused on the mediatedness as a primary characteristic of the activity of our species, and he emphasized the use of signs and tools as necessary preconditions for mediated activity:

> [T]he basic analogy between sign and tool rests on the mediating function that characterizes each of them. The may, therefore, from a psychological perspective, be subsumed under the same category. We can express the logical relationship between the use of signs and of tools using the schema in [the] figure, which shows each concept subsumed under the more general concept of indirect (mediated) activity. (Vygotsky 1978, p. 54)



In my own conception of human activity and the culture that is, at the same time, its precondition and its product, two additional categories besides signs and tools should be set up, namely, *cooperation* and *appropriation*:

1. Tools (material culture)
2. Signs (meaning, that is cognitive culture)
3. Cooperation (such as in the relations of production)
4. Appropriation (as the twin of production and as the intergenerational transmission of culture) (2000, 187ff)

We produce tools and signs through our cooperation, and after having externalized ourselves in the culture thus produced, we internalize this culture by appropriation.

Having now stated the constituents of human culture as I understand it (see Karpatschof 2000), it is now my intention to demonstrate that the aspect of play is not only a decisive attribute of human but, in fact, a necessity. That activity deprived of play cannot be maintained as human activity (see also Gombrich 1984).

The social historical *activity* concept is often criticized for being instrumental, reducing man to a mere worker, thus eliminating what Weber called value rationality in favour of end rationality (Weber 2008, Chap. II, Section iii and iv). This instrumentality is, in fact, clearly expressed in the categories mentioned.

There is, however, evidently something in human culture, and thus in human activity, that cannot be reduced to instrumental rationality. Let us here, in all discretion, ignore non-instrumental irrationality, a feature of mankind that is, by the way, also puzzling and hard to understand. We shall here focus on precisely the feature of play, taken in its broadest meaning, Dewey used in his definition above. Why are we seemingly wasting our time in activities seemingly void of any sense?

The first question from social cultural reference is now:

Is play an *activity* at all?

If we go to the founding father of the social historical school, Vygotsky, play is, at least for children, certainly an activity, and it is furthermore a leading activity, creating a:

> *[P]lay creates a Zone of Proximal Development* of the child. In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. […]
>
> The child moves forward essentially through play activity. Only in this sense can play be considered a leading activity that determines the child's development. (Vygotsky 1978, 103)

Children's play then is evidently an activity, and Vygotsky shows that it has a developmental functionality, that it is a developmental necessity. This is even the case in the young mammals and birds that engage in play as a stage of developing vital skills.

What then about adult?

We can here skip the animals and focus on the human adult. Vygotsky's successor in the cultural historical school gives a lead to answering this question. In his last book *Activity, Consciousness, and Personality* (1978), he makes an important distinction between activity and action: The concept is with necessity connected to the concept motive. No activity can occur without a motive […]:

> The main constituents of the individual human activities are the actions, performed in them. Action we call a process subordinate the conception of the result to be reached, i.e. a process subordinate to a conscious goal. Just as the concept motive is related to activity, the concept goal is related to the concept action. (ibid. 62)

Using the activity theory of Leontiev, we can now infer that play in the sense of Dewey is at least more than an action, as play, by definition, is not subordinate to anything else. Is it then an activity? This is evidently the case for children, where

Leontiev just as his predecessor conceives play as a leading activity. But what about adult play?

To be an activity, it shall have a motive. Now how does Leontiev define a motive? His concept of the motive of activity is closely connected to what he calls the object of activity:

> It is precisely the object of an activity that gives it a specific direction. In the terminology I suggest, the object of activity is its real motive. It is understood that the motive may be either material or ideal, either present or in perception or just existing only in imagination or in thought. The main thing is, that there is behind activity there should always answer on need or another, that it correspond to some need. (ibid.)

Well, there is evidently a motive for engaging in play, but the play motive is a rather circular entity, and the play is its own motive. Is this play motive corresponding to some need? In the case of young mammals and even children, this is evidently true. But what about the play motive in adults? To evade a return to a dualistic conception of adult play as something apart from "normal" regular activity, I shall now attempt an analysis of play that hopefully can clarify this question.

I shall, however, for a start argue for the proposition that play is not only an additional aspect of activity but, furthermore, a necessary, crucial aspect, to be defined as:

The self-transcendence of human activity

Where animal behaviour is confined to a system of instincts supplemented by learning processes, the history of the human species shows a remarkable ability to transcend not only such genetic matrices that are our biological heritage but even the chains of cultural traditions and of societal structures.

A transcendence that admitted can be most difficult, demanding and painful, but that nevertheless has appeared as a remarkable ability to sometimes radical change.

The aspect of play is thus the dialectical partner to the sociological feature of social control, the force that maintains the cultural system and the societal structure, often by harsh means. A delicate balance seems to exist between these two forces:

- The force of maintaining order, structure and control
- The force of change, suspension of control and restructuring

It is my thesis that the source of the latter force is the human beings ineradicable penchant for play. Just as Fink in the quotations above maintained that perceived and imaginative version of our world is intertwined in play, this is also the case in any form of activity. Human consciousness and culture are what distinguish us from animals, and the decisive feature is here meaning, i.e. that potential of a present sign to refer to and absent object. In this way, human activity has as its birthmark the ability to transcend the reality present in search an imagined reality.

Discussion

I now attempt to elaborate Leontiev's theory of motivation, according to which the motive of an activity is really its object, that again corresponding to some important need. This elaboration consists in advancing the evolutionary hypothesis:

> For any need, necessary for the survival of our species, there must be a psychological propensity by which this need presents itself as an experience of a motive representing the intention to reach the object in question.

This hypothesis can no doubt be extended to whole animal kingdom, but in this chapter, I have just our species in mind.

For instance, we now have evidence that bonding between the baby and the parents (or other caregivers) as well as between sexual partners is attached to *oxytocin*, the neurotransmitter of love (Kosfeld et al. 2005). In the same way, the need of exploration seems to be widespread, if not universal, among mammals, especially in childhood, and is evidently attached to a motive of investigation surroundings and also a feeling of joy during the process.

In fact, there are here two reinforcement mechanisms in play (so to say):

1. The joy of activity in itself
2. The joy of transcending a prosaic activity and transforming it to pure play

The evolution of mathematics is good example.

In my dissertation, *Human Activity* (Karpatschof 2000, 418–38), there is a description of how mathematics was born out of prosaic tasks as surveying and accounting in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. The crucial thing is that after having been created as most useful tools to perform such jobs, some of the guys practising these routines for the pharaohs and kings preceded their activity by setting up problems to solve without any prosaic use whatsoever, but exclusively for their own pleasure. This so-called *pure* mathematics that long ago separated itself from *applied* mathematics to which it is the successor, not the predecessor, has seldom kept its purity for a long time in our époque.

The great number theorist Hardy (1940) in his book *A Mathematician's Apology* made his own distinction in mathematics between what he called "real" mathematics, "which has permanent aesthetic value", and "the dull and elementary parts of mathematics" that have practical use. In the book, he also stated the reason for his choice of number theory in the peculiarity of this mathematical discipline that it was one of the few remaining of no practical use at all. Hardy was evidently blissfully ignorant of the rude fact that his colleague Alan Turing, a mathematician at Hardy's own university, Cambridge, was at the same time working to create computer science, for which number theory together with mathematical logic is the very foundation. In his innocent seclusion, Hardy demonstrated that the joy and playful fascination of a discipline in no way disappears, just because it becomes one's profession.

Conclusion

And now back to the specific object of my hypothesis of motivation, human beings, in a much larger extent than other animals, preserve a lifelong fascination for play, a *need* to play. Without this need, human activity would degenerate to mere repetition. Without the need to play not only the human individual would stagnate, so would even human culture. The key to cultural evolution is play. As playfulness thus

must have possessed a decisive selection value since the ascent of our species, it is no wonder that we have a need to play and the attached joy of playing, a fascination without which life itself would become just as dull as Hardy found "practical mathematics". What Hardy in his mathematical seclusion and dualistic conception of aesthetics, however, ignored, was that any dull practical activity is often, happily enough, transformed into play.

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