The SAGE Handbook of Play and Learning in Early Childhood

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Jennifer Sumsion is the Foundation Professor of Early Childhood Education at Charles Sturt University, Australia and Co-director of the Australian Government-funded Excellence in Research in Early Years Education Collaborative Research Network. In 2008–2009, she co-led a national consortium of academics, service providers and practitioners to develop Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, Australia's first national curriculum for children aged from birth to five years. She currently leads two Australian Research Council (ARC)-funded projects. One project is investigating early childhood educators' practices with respect to play-based learning. The second is exploring how a sense of belonging can be fostered in early childhood settings, especially for babies and their families in marginalised communities. Her recently completed ARC project with CSU colleagues focused on infants' lived experience of early childhood settings.

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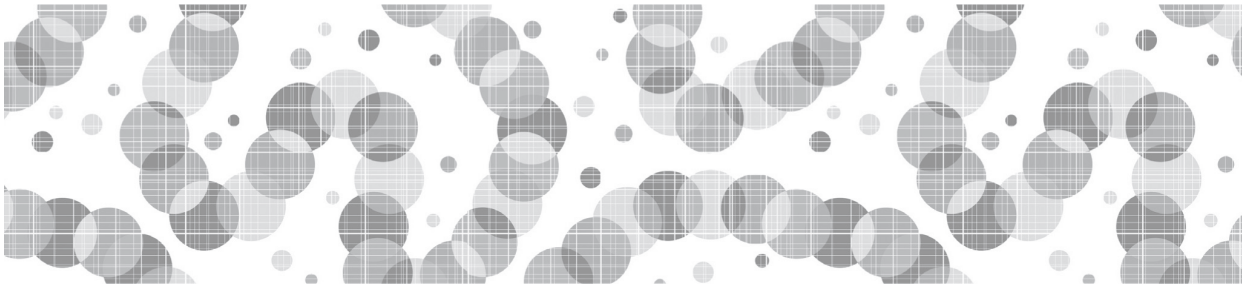
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Editors' Note on Terminology

In this handbook we acknowledge authors' preferred use of terminology and have not sought consistency of terms across all chapters. However, an author's choice of terms for certain categories can be construed as having political implications. We draw attention to the following categories here to clarify meanings.

1. In writing about young children and their caregivers and educators in a sex- and gender-neutral way, it is almost impossible to avoid the constant repetition of clumsy 'he/she', 'his or her', 's/he' constructions. Some authors, in reaction to psychology's traditional use of 'he', have preferred to adopt the convention of writing 'she' for 'the child'. Others, when writing about children's relationships with mothers and female educators, have preferred to use 'he' (the child) to avoid confusion with 'she' (the adult) where the caregiver is female. All authors have shown awareness of this difficulty and we have on the whole left their choices intact.
2. Some authors wished to make a specific statement about their use of 'race' as a socially constructed category to avoid the implication that it is a biological phenomenon. We have followed authors' preferences as to whether or not to 'quote' this term, but can confirm that in all cases (even when unquoted) it is understood by authors as a social and political construction.
3. Most authors have included some discussion of the different beliefs, practices and experiences found in different regions of the world. There are many ways to refer to these global divisions. Chosen terms include: Minority/Majority worlds; developing and developed worlds; Global North/Global South; Euro-American, Euro-Western, Western-heritage, industrialized, postindustrial and/or affluent. We have in almost every instance left these terms unchanged on the understanding that authors, whatever their preferred usage, are fully aware of global inequalities.



Introduction

Liz Brooker, Mindy Blaise and Susan Edwards

This is not the first handbook to be produced about play or about learning. Neither is this the first handbook to be written about young children. There are other handbooks that deal in considerable depth with topics including play (Pellegrini, 2011), young children's learning (Spodek & Saracho, 2006), and the sociological contexts of childhood (Qvortrup, Corsaro & Honig, 2009). What makes the present volume unique is that it is about play and learning in early childhood.

Play and learning are commonly described partners in the early years (Grindheim & Ødegaard, 2013), with the term 'early childhood' internationally defined as the ages between birth and eight (UNICEF, n.d). It is here that any ideas of simplicity regarding ease of definition about play and learning in early childhood might cease. This is because putting these concepts together opens for consideration a 'sprawling body' (Hännikainen, Singer & van Oers, 2013) of literature in which consensus about the definitions of 'play' and 'learning', and about conceptions of early childhood, is never achieved. In all probability the field of early childhood will never reach any consensus on these points, because it continues to be engaged in dialogue with diverse disciplines, theoretical explanations and philosophical positions, all of which have different implications for both research and practice. This means that in considering 'play' or 'learning' (or play and learning) a reader of early childhood research might well encounter ideas and arguments from philosophy, psychology, history, evolutionary biology, anthropology and sociology. Each of these disciplines follows its own traditions and lines of arguments. They hold varying epistemological and ontological positions, which in turn means they understand and value play and learning in early childhood in sometimes complementary and at other times entirely contrary ways. To grasp an understanding of play and learning in early childhood is to recognise that the breadth and depth of ideas on which the field draws, and to which it contributes, sometimes enables convergence and at other times highlights degrees of difference.

What is interesting about understanding play and learning in early childhood in this way is that over time these points of convergence and difference have evolved into concepts and debates that are recognisable as being about the distinctive field of play and learning in early childhood rather than being simply about play, or learning, or early childhood. For example, many an introductory textbook on early childhood would talk about play as the basis for children's learning (see for example, Morrison, 2011), and provide a historical overview of theories of play as a justification for its claim. Here, the idea that 'play is a basis for learning' is recognisable as a construct associated with the field of play and learning in early childhood, while the ideas associated with it are drawn from philosophy and psychology. Again, the debate concerning the relative benefits of free play, or of adult interventions in children's play, is recognisable as a discussion occurring in play and learning in early childhood. However, the terms of this debate draw on philosophical ideas about the natural goodness of free play and psychological theory regarding the social construction of knowledge. In a further example, traditional assumptions that consider play as a neutral and value-free vehicle for children's learning are now challenged by the critique that play is vested in socially powerful relationships which can sometimes be unequal. This debate too is recognisably about play and learning in early childhood, while the critiques are located within poststructural arguments regarding the interconnections of power, knowledge, subjectivity and discourse.

This handbook is an attempt to map the range of concepts, debates and contemporary concerns associated with this field, while seeking to provide some sense of how they have evolved from, and contributed to, the range of associated disciplines. Given these combined aims, the task assigned to the contributing authors was by no means easy (Qvortrup, Corsaro & Honig, 2009). Authors were asked to provide a historical account of their specific focus in the field, to illustrate where possible the alignment or divergence of ideas informing their areas, and to point to future issues and directions of relevance for the next 10 to 15 years. Readers will note that each author approached this task differently. In some cases, authors adopted a largely chronological perspective, stepping the reader through an historical account of key ideas, signalling important points of departure in thinking about play and learning and suggesting future avenues for investigation. Other authors employed a more narrative framework, using specific examples and stories to highlight universal questions of concern and how these have adapted ideas from different disciplines. Other strategies involved comprehensively surveying empirical literature and showing how this literature relates to theories and philosophies of play and learning.

We intended that the handbook would be inclusive of a wide range of cultural, geographic and thematic positions. Culturally and geographically we were keen to represent as many international contexts as possible. Whilst we have contributions from Australasia, Europe and North America, we did not succeed in sourcing chapters from a broader region of Asia, or from Africa or South America. It remains the case that the world's most affluent countries are those best able to support research into young children's play. The initial list of topics we hoped would be canvassed in the book was also not entirely achieved: we regret that the themes of inclusion, sustainability and second language learning are not represented in separate chapters, although they do appear in chapters across the handbook. We therefore encouraged authors to be as international as possible in their account of the field and, where they were able, to refer to aspects of play and learning specifically associated with inclusion, sustainability and second language learning.

The next significant task was to determine the placing of the chapters in a way that provided a conceptual framing for the entire handbook. This presented its own problems

because we recognised that the structural possibilities were as endless as the discussions informing the field, and that no 'natural' thematic divisions were evident. In addition, it was apparent that each of our authors was differently situated in relation to their nation or region, disciplinary history, teaching and research experience and intellectual affiliations, and that we needed to take account of this 'situatedness' in grouping the chapters. These differences opened up many possibilities for juxtaposing and arranging chapters: we could for instance have placed all the more traditionally developmental chapters together and all the more experimental or postdevelopmental chapters in another group. Instead we sought to place the chapters in ways that recognise the value of their differently situated perspectives.

In drawing on ideas of 'situated knowledge' we are indebted to the thinking of Donna Haraway (1988) who argues that all knowledge, including those 'knowledges' associated with play and learning in early childhood, comes from *somewhere* (1988: 590). In the case of the knowledge contributed to this collection, that *somewhere* includes not only the temporal and spatial circumstances of the knowledge production but also the complex lifetime experiences of authors, including their affiliations to diverse theories, discourses and practices. And just as their approach to play and early learning, and even to children and to childhood itself, has been shaped by these circumstances, so we know that our readers' reception of the ideas and evidence presented here will be shaped by *their* own contexts and history.

Haraway's ideas are productive for considering knowledge production because they enable us to think about how knowledge practices are enacted across the broad field of early childhood, without hierarchising one approach over others. Instead of thinking about the 33 chapters as evidence of 33 different and even contradictory perspectives, we follow Haraway in viewing all such positions as 'partial views and halting voices' (1988: 590) which can help towards developing a 'collective subject position' (1988: 590) through dialogue. This makes it possible to consider the field of early childhood play and learning scholarship not as a collection of isolated individuals but, rather, as a community composed of rich and diverse voices. One of Haraway's most important contributions to debates about knowledge production lies in her interest in making room for 'the more' – in being inclusive of new as well as old ideas, even when these may appear to conflict, and in welcoming contradictions and differences. From this perspective, we have tried to see our own role as creating 'the more' through the presentation and placing of these knowledges, in all their diversity – to present a community of scholars in dialogue across the field.

In drawing upon Haraway's ideas we also hoped to move beyond the hierarchical and binary thinking which has previously characterised the field, where so much debate has centred on oppositions (of play and work, adult and child, formal and informal, child-initiated and adult-directed). In respecting and valuing the 'partial' perspectives that all the authors bring to their chapters we invite readers to work with these partial perspectives. Instead of thinking about different and even conflicting perspectives as problematic, we encourage readers to view them as positive and productive. We hope that the different perspectives presented here can be understood as in dialogue with one another, collectively generating points of reference that do not simply rely on the old binary stances, but acknowledge and gain from a recognition of difference.

In this perspective, it follows that how play and learning is understood, enacted, and researched across the field of early childhood cannot be disconnected from how it is situated within the micro and macro politics of teaching, learning, curriculum, and childhoods, both locally and globally. The chapters which follow are conceptually situated within various social and cultural contexts, including the authors' values and beliefs about play, research, childhood, teaching, and learning;

our own values and beliefs as co-editors; the values and beliefs of the publishing world; and, not least, our readers' expectations of the purpose and composition of a handbook.

Our aims for the handbook were, we determined, best served by a three-part framing of the field. Each part contains a self-standing introduction detailing the contributions of the chapters to the broad section themes in which they are located. The three sections of the handbook focus in turn on: 1) Theoretical perspectives on play and learning; 2) Play and learning in pedagogy, curriculum and assessment; and 3) Contexts for play and learning. While individual chapters are grouped under these three themes, it will be clear to many readers that the chapters in Parts II and III are as much 'about theory' as they are about curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and contexts for play. Similarly the chapters in the first part of the handbook, while located in the 'theoretical' section clearly draw on research and practice in their discussions of play and learning in early childhood. The distinction between them is a matter of emphasis. Thus chapters in Part I draw out a theoretical framework from experience; Part II shows how theories of play and learning are implicated in classroom pedagogies and curricula; and Part III encompasses a much wider range of contexts and relationships in young children's play and learning.

The emphasis of the handbook overall is, as suggested, on promoting an understanding of play and learning in early childhood. It will, we hope, enable readers to enter the debate characterising the field, and join in making its 'collective subject position'.

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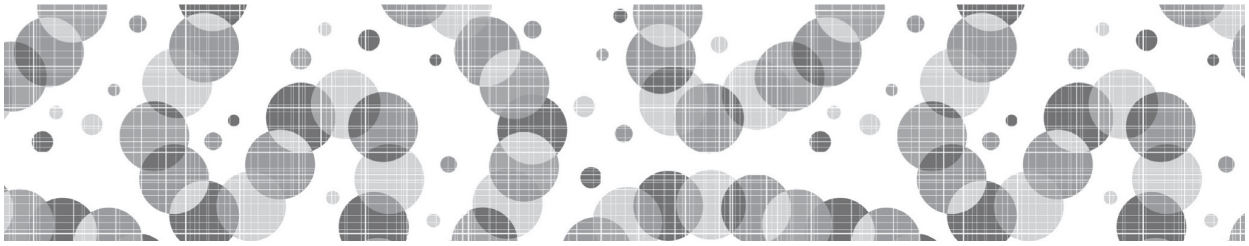
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PART I

Theoretical Perspectives on Play and Learning

Mindy Blaise, Susan Edwards and Liz Brooker



This section is focused on theoretical ideas about play and learning that are of both historical importance and contemporary interest to the field. Its chapters range from a broad account of foundational ideas to discussions of contemporary postdevelopmental theories, and include the consideration of socio-cultural, cultural–historical, psychological and anthropological perspectives.

The section commences with a chapter by Doris Bergen which introduces some of the foundations of play theory, including the work of psychologists such as Freud, Erikson, Piaget and Vygotsky and educators such as Hall and Dewey. The chapter explains how each of these theorists describes the relationship between play, development and learning in early childhood. Bergen introduces her historical survey with the declaration that play is 'a pervasive phenomenon seen in animal species, a common behaviour of human children, and an observable behaviour in the lives of human adults'. From this starting-point she refers to ancient, medieval and Renaissance writers to show how their ideas influenced understandings of play in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and identifies new directions for future research.

Chapter 4, by Adena Meyers and Laura Berk, demonstrates the strength and rigour of the experimental approach to research on pretend play, which is often viewed as the most characteristic, and the most significant, form of play in early childhood. Meyers and Berk take the reader through a series of key claims for the developmental impact of pretend play on young children, making a convincing case that – even if a causal relation cannot be established beyond doubt – evidence for the outcomes of pretend play, and especially of executive function, self-regulation and emotional control, has been described in numerous studies of children's development. The argument here draws on a number of important psychological constructs which have been the basis for extensive correlational studies.

The theoretical contribution of Vygotsky resonates through many chapters, but is the particular focus of Chapters 2 (Elena Kravtsova) and 5 (Bert van Oers). Both Kravtsova and van Oers argue the case for the relationship between play and learning from a cultural-historical perspective. Both engage closely not only with Vygotsky's own published works but also with those of his colleagues, collaborators and followers in the former Soviet Union. Drawing upon Vygotsky's non-classical psychological understanding of play, Kravtsova argues for the powerful enabling role of play in development and learning, framing play as a self-valuable activity which helps children to express what they know and see in their lives. Van Oers' work proposes a new cultural-historical activity theory that is capable of reformulating some of Vygotsky's original concepts, arguing that play is not a discrete activity but a mode of acting in the world which requires certain degrees of freedom for its existence.

Suzanne Gaskins, in Chapter 3, offers a very different description of the relationship between play and learning from an anthropological perspective. Gaskins also draws on foundational theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky to trace the history of ideas, but situates her own argument within cross-cultural research, which demonstrates the role of social, economic and cultural circumstances in shaping how children acquire the knowledge and skills valued in their communities. Her typology of societies shows that young children's play may be cultivated, accepted or curtailed, and that their learning may, in many societies, be mediated through non-play routes.

Gaskins reminds researchers in the field that 'Data from one very specialized cultural ecology, where play is highly cultivated, is not sufficient to answer questions about play's unique contribution to children's development and learning in all environments' (p. 40). She cautions researchers about the pitfalls of relying on a single form of cultural knowledge in their efforts to understand play – a timely reminder of the limited usefulness of play research from White, Western and middle-class contexts. Play research located in widely varied geo-political locations and with different groups of children and families may therefore be seen as offering the valuable 'partial views' adumbrated by Haraway (1988: 590).

Chapter 9, by Susan Grieshaber and Felicity McArdle, reviews literature about the ethics of young children's play and learning, including in classroom contexts. In addition to reviewing traditional theories of ethics, in which children acquire ethical ideas from the modelling and instructive work of adults, the chapter argues that play may be an effective site for fostering young children's own ethical understanding and behaviour. The chapter includes an examination of curriculum documents from various countries (Sweden, Norway, Hong Kong, Australia, and England), which allows readers to consider how ideologies about play, childhood and teaching are enacted across the globe.

A strong theme of equity, social justice and transformation runs through Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. These chapters highlight strong links between social justice and play, where play is understood as a political space where inequities may be constituted and perpetuated. They draw on theories that are of increasing contemporary significance to the field to show how postcolonial, post-structural, feminist, queer, posthuman, girlhood and masculinity studies, and new materialisms, may be used to challenge taken-for-granted understandings of gender, (hetero) sexuality, 'race' and social class. What these chapters have in common is the articulation of theoretical concepts that view children as active and creative agents who contribute to cultural production and change. Play is not positioned as 'innocent', but is seen rather as a potential site of equitable and transformative social engagement.

The 'situated knowledge' (Haraway, 1988) produced by these scholars, and the research they review, derives from a cross-disciplinary and cross-national discourse. The authors, far from being co-located,

received their own education and training in their home countries: Australia, Canada, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. New ideas, as this demonstrates, travel around the globe as international communication becomes available at the touch of a screen.

For example, Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, in Chapter 6, discusses postdevelopmental critiques with a particular emphasis on postcolonial theory, which shows how powerfully individuals and groups can be subjugated through classroom activities, including play. Her chapter shows how the intersections of racism and colonialism have been identified in research in early childhood settings around the world. Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, in Chapter 7, describes the 'material turn' which has recently emerged in the social sciences, and shows how this idea has been taken up in research into young children's play and learning. Her chapter uses a single incident of a child's play with sand to offer an alternative, posthumanist and materialist interpretation, in which non-human elements are credited with agency in their intra-actions with humans. This emerging line of research is presented through a review of recent studies employing these theoretical concepts, showing that they have quite specific epistemological, ontological, methodological and ethical consequences for understanding play and learning in early childhood. Readers will note too the requirement for a new 'language' which tries to express the meanings which are being 'thought' and 'said' for the first time.

Sue Saltmarsh, in Chapter 8, offers a cross-disciplinary theoretical approach to the study of play from a childhood studies/sociology of childhood perspective. Her representation of young children's play is grounded in historical accounts of childhood, as well as in contemporary understandings of the status of the child in society and the political nature of adult–child and child–child relationships. The many disciplinary perspectives employed in this chapter offer a range of insights into the ambiguities and complexities of children's socially constructed position in society and the material facts of their everyday lives and play experiences. Grieshaber and McArdle's discussion of the ethics of play in Chapter 9 reiterates many of the postdevelopmental themes raised in these chapters.

An array of different postdevelopmental theoretical perspectives is surveyed by Mindy Blaise in Chapter 10. Her chapter provides an account of the ways in which discourses of gender, sex and sexuality can be differently construed from the various theoretical standpoints to have emerged from feminist scholarship, including that of post-Confucianism. Each of the six theoretical positions discussed here makes visible, in different ways, how ideas about gender, sex and sexuality are constructed and enacted in early childhood classrooms. Discussion of recent play research employing these approaches prompts a rethinking of the roles of educators as well as researchers in challenging the inequalities which are produced when young children play together.

The final chapter in this section, written by Liz Jones and Rachel Holmes, clearly exemplifies Haraway's (1988) concept of situated knowledge, which is highlighted above. It considers the consequences of research and knowledge production where various theoretical paradigms are used as starting points to define and position play. This chapter, like Chapter 7, uses a single observation of classroom play to explore the meanings and interpretations which emerge when different theoretical and methodological lenses – modernism, postmodernism and posthumanism – are applied to the play. It concludes that non-traditional concepts, such as embodiment and affect, offer opportunities for new understandings of play's meaning for children. Readers, regardless of their own theoretical orientation, are likely to find this chapter challenging. Jones and Holmes argue that 'methodological multiplicity and complexity, taken in order to move ourselves as researchers towards conceptual, analytical and interpretive spaces that can meet the needs of ever-changing educational practices' (p. 134).

Part I of the handbook canvasses an array of theoretical and methodological insights and possibilities, encouraging an appreciation of the historical evolution of key ideas and a recognition of the force of postdevelopmental theories.

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1

Foundations of Play Theory

Doris Bergen

INTRODUCTION

Although play has existed as a part of human experience since early times, theories regarding its definition and cause, purpose, value, meaning, nature, effects and influence have been diverse and often controversial. Some theorists have focused on only one of the manifestations of play while others have focused on many different aspects. Playfulness, in its varied forms, is a pervasive phenomenon seen in animal species, a common behaviour of human children and an observable behaviour in the lives of human adults. According to Gordon (2009), the nature of play has been described differently by theorists in various disciplines, and they have 'come to different conclusions about the nature of play' (3). Göncü and Gaskins (2007) assert that because play is such a complex phenomenon, it has often been difficult to 'integrate its multiple perspectives' (4).

Play theory, therefore, is a wide-ranging topic, with some theorists giving definitions of the term 'play' and describing its purposes narrowly, others focusing on describing one manifestation of play, such as animal physical play or children's fantasy play, and others trying to probe the underlying meanings of all types of play with broad definitional theories. Four major strands of play theory have influenced present views of the theoretical meaning of play: 1) defining the characteristics of the behaviour called play; 2) examining aspects of animal play and its meaning; 3) examining the role of play as a sociocultural phenomenon and adaptive life quality throughout the lifespan; and 4) focusing on the role of various types of play in fostering children's development and education. This chapter provides an overview of the foundations of play theory, giving attention to all of these theoretical perspectives.

EARLY THEORIES OF PLAY

Plato, in his book of *Laws* (643 BCE), was one of the first to make the phenomenon of play a subject of theoretical interest. He suggested that children's play (*paidia*) had theoretical

significance as a venue for learning and for developing basic habits of character (*paideia*). According to Morris (1998), Plato believed that 'play is a medium of activity in which the player's natural underlying dispositions are revealed… and… (is)… the ideal medium of a child's *paideia*; that is, learning is most effective when play is its medium' (1998:114). Plato suggested that the correct way to educate children (both boys and girls) was to allow them to engage in play that promoted growth of their abilities, and that this would result in adults who were able to use their abilities effectively. Thus, the theoretical idea of play as an educational venue can be traced back to these early times.

RENAISSANCE/ENLIGHTENMENT THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PLAY

Specifically stated theoretical positions regarding the role of play and its value as a means for assisting children's development and learning began to be more evident during the Renaissance. For example, Comenius (1632, 1657) emphasized the view that children's playful activity had educational meaning. He wrote two books advising that children's learning would be fostered by interesting and playful activities. His books were so popular at that time that they were translated into 40 languages.

In the period of the Enlightenment, the influence of Rousseau's book *Emile* (published in 1762) emphasized the role of playful activity in children's lives. Rousseau believed that children were born innately good and thus, instead of having adults rigidly controlling their behaviour, should have the freedom to develop in their own natural ways. Since playing is a natural activity of children when they are allowed to control their own activities, Rousseau asserted that their development would be positive in this condition. Thus, his perspective is one that promoted an appreciation of the play of children at that time. Even Locke (1693), who saw children as *tabulae rasae* (blank slates) at birth, suggested that children should be taught through positive playful experiences to promote rational and individual needs, rather than by methods that made them fearful. He recommended indoor block play, however, rather than rowdy outdoor play. While play began to be viewed by these theorists as having a positive role in children's development and education, they did not really make explicit what might be the specific qualities of play that made it an important influence on children's development. However, their influence was a factor in later theoretical views of play as a facilitator of children's development and education.

LATE NINETEENTH-AND EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY THEORIES OF PLAY

Although these earlier theories continued to have influence during later centuries, theoretical ideas concerning play as a particularly meaningful factor that promoted children's development and education began to be made more explicit during this time period.

Theories Defining Characteristics and Purposes of Play

Theorists such as Spencer (1873), Schiller (1875), Lazarus (1883) and Seashore (1913) were interested in the meaning of play, and they provided some of the definitions of play that have continued to be influential. These theorists addressed play's origin and hypothesized about its purpose. For example, Seashore stated that play was free self-expression and its purpose was the pleasure gained by self-expression; Schiller theorized that children had excess energy and play was a means to expend this exuberant energy; Spencer viewed play as activity performed for immediate gratification without thought of long-term benefit; and Lazarus defined play as a free, aimless and diverting activity

without purpose. (See Mitchell and Mason, 1948, for more details on these early definitions of play.) The idea of defining play – that is, identifying its essential characteristics – has continued to be of theoretical interest.

Theories Derived from Observing Animal Play

Theorists during this period also speculated about the meanings of animal play and the implications for human play theory. For example, Groos (1898, 1901) discussed both animal and human play and thought that play was instinctive practice behaviour that assisted in preparing individuals for later use of the skills that were needed in adulthood (for both animals and humans), but also that for adult humans, play provided relief from the stresses of life. He proposed a 'recreation theory' of play that explained why adults often took refuge in play when they had lives that were consumed by work and anxieties. Mitchell (1912) and Kohler (1931) studied the play of animals and concluded that play served a purpose of socialization as well as assisting young animals to develop behaviours needed by adults of the species. Theoretical insights about the socialization meanings of animal play, gained from focused study of animal play, have enriched hypotheses about the meaning of play for humans (see Pellis and Iwaniuk, 2004).

Theories Focused on Play in Education and Child Development

European theorists Froebel (1887), Pestalozzi (1894) and Montessori (1914) all stressed the importance of playful activity as a means of educating children. Pestalozzi designed an educative system that drew on Rousseau's theoretical ideas. He suggested that children be free to explore aspects of their environment through their play and that the teacher's role was to observe and reflect on how to help them learn in that way. Froebel and Montessori both designed educational environments that built upon children's natural play abilities. Froebel, the designer of the kindergarten ('children's garden'), provided a set of toys (gifts) for children that were supposed to extend their learning as the children played through a set of activities that these toys promoted, and Montessori set up Children's Houses, which provided activities that were initially close to children's existing play behaviours but then provided ordered/sequenced materials (work!) to enhance those behaviours. Their views of structured play environments as ideal starting points for children's education continue to be supported by many present-day play theorists (see Elkind, 1983; Bryant and Clifford, 1992).

The American psychological theorists who influenced how play was viewed during this time period were Hall and Dewey, leaders in the child development movement. Hall (1920, 1924) is viewed as the founder of the field of child development. His theoretical perspective on play was influenced by Darwin and thus he believed children went through stages in their play that demonstrated the stages of human evolution. At an early age in play they manipulate objects; later they replicate simple adult activities in pretence, and their games reflect skills needed in more advanced civilization. Thus, to have a well-developed adult, there must first be a well-played child. While this theory is not accepted as accurate today, it did contribute to the idea that children's play was an essential part of their early development and that play experiences enabled them to be more effective in adulthood.

Although Dewey (1910, 1916) was influenced by Darwin and Hall, his theoretical orientation focused on applying theory to practice, and thus he drew on Rousseau, Froebel and other theorists who saw play as a venue for childhood education. He believed that the educative environment for children required their active involvement in self-chosen, playful experiences, because these would lead to child learning, and he demonstrated his ideas at the University of Chicago laboratory school. In play, children find

problems to solve, and since Dewey (1938) believed finding problems was the essential first step in problem-solving, he supported children's play as a means of helping them discover and solve problems. Research on children's play activities was common at university laboratory preschools during this time period. One early researcher was Parten (1932), who derived a schema of social play stages, including solitary, parallel, associative and cooperative, from her observational research. Adaptations of the schema have been used in many play studies conducted in more recent times (see Coplan, Rubin, and Findlay, 2006).

MID- TO LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY THEORIES OF PLAY

During the mid-twentieth century, play became a greater focus both of empirical and theoretical study by biologists, sociologists, ethologists and anthropologists, as well as educators and psychologists.

Theories Defining Characteristics and Purposes of Play

An influential piece of work by Huizinga (1950) emphasized the idea of play as a pervasive cultural experience that is tied to human survival. Huizinga believed that play was such an integral behaviour in the human species that he called humans *Homo Ludens* ('man, the player'). He outlined a number of the characteristics of play: it is voluntary; separated from real life; occurs within a frame or boundary; is ordered (has rules); and involves private spaces. Henricks (2002) states that although there have been many critiques and revisions of Huizinga's view, 'modern scholars stand on the shoulders of Johan Huizinga' (23). Huizinga's view of the evolutionary importance of play has been supported by Ellis (1998). For instance, Ellis (1998) believes that play has been a means for humans to survive the many uncertainties they have faced since ancient times, because the most playful humans were the ones who had the greatest range of adaptive behaviours that they could use when environmental or social conditions changed. Ellis stated that play was 'necessary for our evolution' (1998: 29) because it is 'a biological system for promoting rapid adaptation to threats to survival that cannot be predicted' (30).

Another influential definition of play was that of Bateson (1956), who explored the paradoxical nature of play, suggesting that it is a form of metacommunication. He stated that in play, animals and humans operate within a 'play frame', in which behavioural and verbal signals do not convey the same message as they would if used outside that play frame. Instead, players send the message 'this is play' and thus the message conveyed by their play behaviour is different from the meaning of that behaviour when displayed outside the play frame. He described the signals and understandings that occur among players so that they can communicate meaningfully within the play frame. Hutt (1971) theorized about the difference between ludic activity (play) and epistemic activity (exploration), which have some similar qualities. She stated that in exploration children find out objects' characteristics but in play they find out what they can do with objects. That is, in play the object may be used in elaborated ways.

Neumann (1971) theorized that since play is a voluntary activity, certain dimensions within the individual and external to the individual could be evaluated in determining if an activity could be called play. The dimensions she identified involved how much internal control the person had over the activity, what level of internal reality was present and if there was internal motivation to engage in the activity. She stated that most playful actions have children in control, making up their own reality and doing the activity because they want to do it. Rubin, Fein, and Vandenberg (1983) theorized that the definition of play must include active engagement, non-instrumental actions, focus on means not ends, internal motivation, internal rules and

internal locus of control. Bergen (1988) defined play as a 'medium' in which learning and development are fostered, and Barnett (1998) outlined the characteristics of 'playfulness'. There have been many expansions and critiques of these definitions in recent times (see Gordon, 2009).

There is evidence that children also have theories about play's characteristics. For example, King (1979, 1982) found that kindergarten children used criteria such as if an activity was imposed by the teacher and if it was enjoyable to define whether or not it was play, and at later ages, they had an 'in-between' category that identified some required activity as having playful characteristics but not really being play. Fein and Wiltz (1998) reported that when children talk about their pretence, they mention activities done at home or in the neighbourhood but not at school, because school activities are 'not the play children describe with relish and delight many years later' (47).

Theories Derived from Observing Animal Play

In studies of animals, biologists, ethologists and psychologists have noted that certain conditions elicited playful behaviour in animals that they were studying, both in laboratories and at field sites, and have speculated on the meanings of such behaviours. For example, Suomi and Harlow (1972) found that rhesus monkeys raised in social isolation in a laboratory appeared to have deficits in play behaviours, but if they were then allowed to play with younger monkeys, they recovered social behaviours. Harlow and colleagues (1950) also observed that when monkeys were given puzzles to manipulate, they did not need food reinforcements, and concluded that there was a 'manipulation drive' that is as primary as are more basic homeostatic drives. They did not identify this behaviour as play, however. Suomi and Harlow (1976) did speculate that play served two purposes in monkeys: enabling them to practise adult social functioning routines and to learn how to master aggressive impulses by using those behaviours in controlled, playful ways.

In studies of chimpanzees in the wild, Van Lawick-Goodall (1968) found all mother chimpanzees engaged in some play with their infants, although there were different levels of such play, and hypothesized that its purpose was social bonding. Lorenz (1971) indicated that, for many animal species, the curiosity exhibited in young animal play is an essential characteristic, enabling expression of new behaviours in varied settings. He commented that the curiosity evident in childhood play is exhibited in humans throughout life, and compared the play of children to the research of adult scientists. Recent research has studied how the 'playful brain' evolved in animal and human species (Iwaniuk et al, 2001; Pellis and Iwaniuk, 2004).

Theories of Play as a Socio-cultural Phenomenon

Sociologists and anthropologists have also theorized about the meanings of the play behaviours they observed in varied socio-cultural settings. For example, Leacock (1976) described the play of African village children and theorized that it was 'a rehearsal for adult roles' (467). Whiting and Pope Edwards (1988), after conducting a cross-cultural study of children's social activity and play, concluded that, while children played in all cultures, the types of play were malleable under social pressure, accounting for differences among boys' and girls' play and the types of play in various cultures. That is, play reflects the cultural meanings of the society in which it occurs (Gaskins, this volume). Documentation of the social–cultural meanings of play has continued to be of theoretical interest (see Roopnarine and Krishnakumar, 2006).

Opie and Opie (1969) gave an exhaustive account of English children's play in the streets and schoolyards and concluded that there was a culture of childhood that perpetuated

these games. They theorized that the function of the game was primarily a social one because it was not that important to win and in some ways these were 'ceremonial' activities, in that following the rituals of the game were important. Smith (1978, 1982) extensively examined the evolutionary and functional qualities of children's play as well as the longitudinal aspects of social play development, and Sutton-Smith and Rosenberg (1961) documented the changing nature of informal games over a 60-year period. Both Smith and Sutton-Smith have continued to elaborate on their theoretical perspectives in recent years.

Blurton-Jones (1972) charted categories of children's play in various world areas and compared rough-and-tumble play of preschool children to that of other young animals. He theorized that this behaviour served a social function and might occur in a critical period. Recent work on this play phenomenon by Pellegrini (2002, 2009) suggests that the purpose of this play in childhood differs from its purpose in adolescence. The rich database drawn from such studies has provided theoretical insights into the role of play as an enculturation medium.

Theories Focused on Play in Education and Child Development

Ideas of play as a phenomenon fostering development and education were furthered by the theoretical giants of the era, who focused on play's role in promoting socio-emotional or cognitive benefits.

Freudian theory

Freud (1917/1956, 1938, 1960), within his theory of psychosexual development, discussed aspects of children's play and adult playful thought. He saw the early childhood period as one in which the child at play creates a world in which he can feel in control, stating that the child 'behaves like an imaginative writer, in that he creates a world of his own or, more truly, he rearranges the things of his world and orders it in a new way' (1917/1956: 123). Freud believed that the child's playful activity was later transformed into adult playful thought. He suggested that adults create fantasy (much of it internal) rather than continuing to play as children do. Freud discussed how the joking behaviour of adults emerges from children's play by describing how children's playful activity is often the earliest form of humour expression, marked by exuberance and nonsensical qualities. He saw joking as a form of playful thought in later childhood and adulthood, and he asserted that 'the pleasure in a joke is derived from play with words or from the liberation of nonsense' (1960: 287).

Freud's youngest daughter, Anna, expanded understandings of the role of play in helping children face reality. In her work with children who had experienced the trauma of war and parental separation, she developed a 'therapeutic' play environment in which children could play out their emotions caused by traumatic stress. She stated that play therapy helps the child develop a secret world, using imagination and fantasy, and it is free from external demands (Freud, 1989). Other contemporary and later theorists expanded on these views regarding the emotional purposes that play serves (e.g. Klein, 1932; Isaacs, 1933; Lowenfeld, 1935).

This theoretical view has led to further work in the field of play therapy. Winnicott (1953) extended the psychoanalytic play therapy tradition and Axline (1969) and Moustakas (1974) laid foundations for 'non-directive' play therapy, which envisions play as being powerful enough to heal emotional trauma without active therapist intervention. Although methodologies and treatment models have continued to advance, the use of play in the treatment of childhood trauma is still based on the foundation provided by early theorists (see Wilson and Ryan, 2005).

Eriksonian theory

Erikson (1963, 1977) expanded on the theoretical meaning of play and its enormous

power in children's lives. He described how children use both pretence and construction play to gain control over their emotional lives and asserted that the feelings of power over their life events that children gain from pretence allows both expression of emotions and practice in controlling emotions responsibly. He theorized that this occurs during the 'Play Age' (three–six), which sets the direction of adult life. Erikson described children's creation of block construction 'worlds', which allowed them to deal with emotional and behavioural 'real-world' dilemmas. He asserted that, by taking on the role of a supercharacter (e.g. Spiderman) or an adult who is powerful in their lives (e.g. the doctor), children experience the leadership and power position of those individuals. He suggested that if they gain this ability to take initiative during this period of life, they will be able to assume roles of power and leadership and to imagine possibilities. Thus, they develop the strength of 'Purpose' and can allow 'the dreams of early childhood to be attached to the goals of an active adult life' (1963: 20).

Erikson believed that the play rituals of childhood continue to be expressed throughout life because these experiences provide 'the training ground for the experience of a leeway of imaginative choices within an existence governed and guided by roles and visions' (1977: 78). He stated (1966) that children's play is transformed into ritualizations (e.g. weddings, parades), which have a paradoxical quality because they are both playful and formal, familiar and surprising, and affirming and ambivalent.

Piagetian theory

Piaget's contribution to play theory (1945, 1965) was of great interest in the mid to late twentieth century. From his observations of his own children's play in infancy (1945) and his study of older boys' marble game play (1965), he both proposed stages of play development and theorized about their meaning as developmental constructs. Piaget differentiated play from imitation, indicating that play is primarily an assimilation process while imitation is primarily an accommodation process. He believed that children used play to construct their knowledge of the world by trying to relate their new experiences to their existing cognitive schema. Piaget stated that adults could gain great insight into children's thinking by watching children's play, and he explained how various stages of play corresponded with levels of the child's developing thought processes.

In the infant–toddler age period, the most prominent type of play is practice play, which involves repeating similar play actions on toys or other objects to master their use, with gradual elaboration of these actions. Piaget noted that one crucial aspect of practice play is that, rather than being a routine repetition of the same actions, as actions are mastered the child changes the play activity by making it more difficult or adding new elements. Practice play is seen in later childhood and adulthood when new routines of behaviour need to be mastered in the service of a larger goal.

Piaget noted that pretence becomes a major play mode during the age period of four–seven. Early pretence is often facilitated by adults but extends into elaborate social pretence activities with peers, such as socio-dramatic or fantasy play, during preschool and early years. Piaget's view that pretence is a means of furthering knowledge construction has led to much research on cognitive processes. Because, in pretence, children create worlds that make sense to them, Piaget believed that observers of play could learn much about children's understandings and misunderstandings. Pretence continues to be a major type of play during early and later years, although it may then involve small-scale replica figures or computer video sites (Bergen and Davis, 2011).

Piaget identified games with rules as the common play type for young children, although one-rule games such as peek-a-boo occur at earlier ages (Bruner and Sherwood, 1976). Piaget believed that in

games, children create rules that change as they negotiate to make the game enjoyable for a range of players with varied skill levels. Time is spent in discussion of rules, making them 'fair' and adapting them to make the game more 'fun'. Piaget asserted that peer play in games fosters children's moral development as children resolve cognitive disequilibrium related to issues of fairness and equity in peer play.

Piaget's theoretical ideas about children's play continue to be a catalyst for generating play theory. Numerous contemporary theorists have speculated about its influence on role and perspective-taking, social comparisons, language narration, social script knowledge and academic learning. For example, Bruner (1961) suggested that 'discovery learning' should be the mode for learning mathematics, Elkind (1976) adapted Piagetian perspectives to early childhood education, Fein (1981) and Bretherton (1984) discussed the role of pretence in cognitive development and the Singers (1990) examined its role in creativity and imaginative thinking.

Vygotskian theory

The influence of Vygotsky's theoretical ideas (1967, 1978) became prominent more recently. Vygotsky and his colleagues saw children's play as important but the adult's role also as important in helping children use objects symbolically (El'konin, 1966). Vygotsky described the age period from 2 to 8 as the time in which children learned the language of their culture and stated that this learning was evident in their play. At preschool age, children begin to use running monologues (i.e. 'private' speech) that accompany their play activities and this fosters the development of 'spontaneous' concepts. Vygotsky observed that in block play children's initial categorizations were unorganized but by late preschool age, their concept development is evident in their problem-solving with blocks.

However, he thought that pretence, especially pretend role-taking, in which the child must follow cultural scripts, was an especially important aspect of play because it enabled children to learn self-regulation and to develop a range of spontaneous concepts (1967). Vygotsky stated: 'there is no such thing as play without rules. The imaginary situation of any form of play already contains rules of behavior' (1978: 74). He asserted that play enabled thought to be separated from objects and actions, thus promoting ideas to control the play. As children grow older and their language becomes internalized private speech, these abilities continue to develop until individuals achieve mastery of their own behaviour by using symbolic means (Vygotsky and Luria, 1994). Although much of this imaginative play occurs in the company of other people, Vygotsky also discussed 'director's play' that occurs when a child is alone (Kravstova, in this volume). Then the child develops the scripts, builds the settings, and gives all characters voice. Older children often do this with small-scale objects and create their own 'worlds', which also have cultural meaning (Bodrova and Leong, 2011).

Vygotsky stressed the role of pretend play as a means of organizing thought through verbal mediation, enabling self-regulation to develop. This latter strand of his theory has continued to be fruitful regarding the role of fantasy and the relationship of play to cognitive skills such as literacy. His former student El'konin (2005) has continued to make his theoretical views on play explicit. Other theorists have promoted the use of playful techniques to support the growth of self-regulation (see Bodrova and Leong, 2011; Meyers and Berk, this volume) and to advance literacy development (see Christie and Roskos, 2000).

INFLUENCE OF FOUNDATIONAL THEORIES ON PRESENT-DAY PLAY THEORY

In contemporary scholarship the four strands of play theory discussed above are still in

evidence, although they have been refined and challenged as researchers have continued to test their premises.

A number of recent books have focused on defining socio-cultural aspects of play (Sutton-Smith, 2001), explaining animal play (Bekoff and Byers, 1998) and examining developmental, educational and therapeutic aspects of play (O'Connor and Braveman, 2009; Pelligrini, 2009). These works all build on the theoretical foundation provided by earlier theorists, which continues to influence research and theoretical ideas. One newer theoretical approach, however, has arisen from dynamic systems theory, and this may provide a new foundational component that will guide research and practice.

Play as a Dynamic System

The most recent theoretical perspective on play draws on dynamic systems theory and posits the view that one reason why theories of play have been so diverse is that play is a complex dynamic system that has characteristics of all such systems (see Thelen and Smith, 1994; Van Geert, 2000). For example, play is a self-organizing system that may appear chaotic but in which complex patterns of behaviour move towards order. The play state also shows disequilibrium, because it is always capable of change; its attractor states may be long or short, and it involves sensitive dependence on initial conditions because small inputs into play situations may cause disparate results. There are control parameters, which include differences in play patterns due to the age and skill of players; limitations on experience and types of settings available for play; interdependence, because all levels of play are interrelated; and soft assembly, with both stable and dynamic alternating periods. Vanderven has described play from this theoretical perspective (Vanderven, 1998), which will probably influence both play theory and research in the future.

CONCLUSION

Many theories of play have served as foundations for present play theory. They have added to the richness of definitions of play, its evidence in many species, its role in expressing cultural meanings and its importance as a venue for children's development and learning. Theorists will continue to build on these foundations to expand both the meanings and the mysteries of play.

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Play in the Non-classical Psychology of L.S. Vygotsky

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INTRODUCTION

L.S. Vygotsky did not write a great deal about play. However, we believe that his approach to the activity of play allows us not only to understand the essential characteristics of the cultural–historical approach but also to single out specific traits and features of non-classical psychology.

The approach to understanding play from the perspective of classical science has helped us to identify important data about the developmental patterns of play and its role in the development of preschool-aged children. At the same time, the classical approach has left four global questions about play that require further attention. First of all, a clear differentiation in classical science between the adult experimenter and the child respondent has led us to note that one of the most difficult problems in classical science is the problem of teaching how to play. Not only do children play less and with potentially lower quality now than in the past (Smirnova, 2006; Tullis, 2011; Tandon, Zhou and Cristakis, 2012) but also, many adults also do not have a grasp of the activity of play (Maximov, 2009).

Another question that was not covered by classical science is the question of using play as an auxiliary tool, in other words as a means to an end. This question is most important in education. There is even a special play type that relates to education, known as didactic play. Didactic play is an educational game. However, when researching the features of didactic play, V.V. Davydov (1986) has shown that play can lose its essential play characteristics, and in yet another case, can also lose the auxiliary function of working as a means to an end.

The third problem, which has not attracted much attention in classical science, is that play replaces object-manipulative activity in children's development, and later play itself is also replaced in turn by learning activity. In other words, classical psychology has not been able to explain the mechanisms and patterns of transition from one age period to another, including the transition from play as a leading activity to learning activity as a

leading activity. This question is not entirely theoretical. However, without even a hypothetical answer, it is impossible either to create a system for teaching children how to play, or to use play to create psychological readiness for school education.

The last and most important question not covered by the classical psychology of play is a question of the criteria of play. That is, the basis of play or the difference between play and non-play. By the basis of play we mean a certain unit of play activity that, according to L.S. Vygotsky, should have all the characteristics and features of a whole. In understanding the basis of play it is important, firstly, to settle the problem of the interconnection between play and the imagination. This is because many authors, such as Elkonin (1978), Davydov (1986), Kudriavtsev (1997), denote the close interconnection between play and imagination, but it is still unclear if imagination is formed by play or if it acts as a basis for play activity. It is also important to identify criteria which can be found not only in all types of children's play but also in the variety of adult games, as a way to understand the connection between imagination and play.

If we define the features of play in non-classical psychology we can see that play must be described from the perspective that types of communication are realized in play. For example, modern psychology has twice attempted to define play from the point of view of communication between players. A.P. Usova (1981) spoke of two types of relationships between players: play relationships and real relationships. In addition, according to L.S. Vygotsky's ideas, a child who is playing at being ill and in hospital 'is crying as a patient and at the same time is rejoicing as a player' (1978: 290). A child has two types of communication in play, that concerning the play and that as a player.

Play relationships and real relationships, despite their outward similarity, actually differ greatly from each other. The main difference is related to the fact that in Usova's (1981) definition, play is considered in terms of classical psychology and as an activity approach. Without denying the presence of real relations and play relations in play, we need also to notice that this feature is not exactly specific to play. These two types of relationships also take place in terms, for example, of education or in the process of professional activity. While studying play according to the idea that in play a child is at the same time inside it (i.e. crying like a patient) and outside it (i.e. rejoicing as a player) allows us to speak of the features of play and its difference from other types of activity, it also helps us to mark out its criteria and signs.

THE IMAGINARY SITUATION: A CRITERION OF PLAY

According to L.S. Vygotsky (1993), the basic criterion of play is the imaginary situation. The imaginary situation is the space between two 'fields', known as the real (or optical) field and the sense (or imaginary) field. To create the imaginary situation (i.e. the space between the optical and sense fields), a player must be at the same time inside and outside of the play. This explains why understanding and researching play is possible only through the simultaneous realization of these two positions. At the same time this also makes the study of play difficult for classical psychology, because the researcher may study play from the position of 'patient' or from the position of 'player'.

In non-classical psychology a person is at the same time 'in the situation' and 'above the situation'. Being in-situation and above-situation allows a person to realize the imaginary situation (i.e. the space determined by the real and sense fields). Accordingly, play includes play relations that are related to the logic of the play plot *and* real relations that are formed in the process of the player's real-life activity. In some cases, 'logic plot' relations and real relations do not coincide. For example, a small child might be playing the role of an adult who is helping and taking care of a youngster. The 'youngster' in

reality is an adult playing with the child. The logic plot and the real relations are different. In other cases the relationship between the 'logic plot' and the real relations not only coincides but also forms the content of the play. James Sully (2000) provides an example of two siblings who were playing (logic plot relations) at being sisters and who were in fact sisters (real relations). However, it does not matter whether or not the logic plot and the real relations coincide. What matters is that if a person who is playing is at the same time inside and outside the activity, then he or she is realizing play activity.

For example, during play, a child might represent a kitten. She says, 'Mother, I want to drink' or 'Mother, I'm scared'. But later she changes her voice timbre, her gait and her attitude towards the adult. She says, 'Mother, I will go to get a drink and after that we will play again'. So we can see that the child is at the same time inside the play (when she is the kitten) and outside the play (when she tells her mother she will drink and return to the play).

Being inside and outside the play simultaneously is a form of double-subjectivity for the player. Double-subjectivity as a criterion for play helps us to understand the problem of the basis of play in a new way. This is because according to L.S. Vygotsky (1991), imagination appears in the arena of psychic development when a child becomes independent from his or her own perception (436–54). For example, when a child who saw that a doll was sitting was asked to say that the doll was standing, it turned out that the child could only state that the doll was standing if he or she realized him or herself as the subject of his or her own speech. Recognizing oneself as the subject of one's own speech realizes 'imagination' as a new psychic function. It is imagination that allows a child to control the space of his or her own perception. In other words, as a result of the crisis at three years children begin to treat themselves as a subject of speech, and with the help of speech they change the space of their optical field. They are easily able to repeat after an adult that a doll is standing or a doll is sitting, no matter what the doll is doing in reality. According to Vygotsky, personal development occurs through the change of lytic [stable] and critical periods. There are several critical periods in the child's ontogenesis – often referred to as the crisis of one year, crisis of three years, crisis of seven years, etc. A child who has successfully passed the crisis of three years begins to be conscious of him or herself as a subject of his or her own activity. The central new formations of this crisis are the so-called 'I am' consciousness and the child's relation to his or her actions as personal actions (for more about 'I am' consciousness and personal actions, see Kravtsova, 2006).

These first displays of imagination seem like the appearance and realization of play actions but they do not lead to real play. For example, a baby might be sitting and hitting a chair with a spoon. The mother says: 'What a good child. You are hammering in a nail just like your father does'. If the child has a basic level of imagination and understands the meaning of 'father hammering in a nail', then psychologically the character of his or her actions will change. Now he or she will not simply be hitting a chair with a spoon, but will be like the father and hammering in a nail. During these displays the child realizes one position, and that is why we could say that many actions that look like play are not play at all.

THE ORIGINS OF PLAY

L.S. Vygotsky (1993), in his description of play development, uses the following formulae, which represent experience in the form of fractions: action/sense becomes sense/action and thing/sense becomes sense/thing. This representation describes the origin of play from object activity or play actions. Describing action/sense and thing/sense as fractions does not as a matter of fact create a model of play. It is only a model of the *psychological succession of play and object*

activity. Also, the sense in the first and second fraction as a rule belongs to the perspective of the adult. In play, according to L.S. Vygotsky (1966), a child from the very beginning acts from a sense, from intent. This means that the appearance of imagination may be considered as a psychological basis, which later gives rise to play. The appearance of play is related to the fact that a child from the very beginning is able to act from intent and, with the help of intent, the child's perception space changes. The meanings of things and actions with them begins to depend not on real perception, but from the intent that is initially suggested by an adult and after that is constructed by the child independently.

The psychological succession of play and object activity means that a child is able to perceive a certain object differently and act with it according to the sense that is given to this object and its actions by an adult (Elkonin, 1978). From this moment, the psychological succession of play and object activity differs qualitatively from what is called psychological readiness for play activity. According to Razina (2002) and Gurova (2006), psychological readiness for children's play is connected with special situational forms of communication between the child and the adult, and also with the origin of key actions with objects. Key actions refer to the main function of the object. For example, a chair is for sitting and a bed is for sleeping. Key actions allow the adult, and consequently the child, to change the item's meaning. For instance, 'if I'm sleeping on something, then this something has become a bed', or 'if I'm sitting on something, then this something is a chair, no matter that it may be a step or a block of wood'.

On the one hand, the child knows perfectly well that an item becomes a bed or a chair. But, on the other, he or she can change the meaning of the object. Initially a child can only change the meaning of the object with an adult's help. This is where situational forms of communication are needed. Later a child will be able to change the sense of an item on his or her own.

The same process occurs with play when play as a leading activity is replaced by learning activity. Research shows that play provides a special context for the volitional forms of a child's communication with others (Razina, 2002; Gurova, 2006) and that these forms of communication in total provide the psychological readiness for a child's school education. At the same time, inside play different situations appear where a child is not as conditional in his or her play as he or she was previously. For example, in football play the child actually scores a goal and so wins over a rival, and in building or construction play, the child takes real measurements. However, although this play loses its imagined character, the play still remains play. For example, in the case of winning or losing, a child easily goes along with the result, thinking that the result is not his personal achievement but only a transient problem. Moreover, in some cases children are able to take action to do better in the next game. It is important that during these exercises children encounter a model for future learning activity. This activity is directed towards what D.B. El'konin (1994) described as the transformation of one's own self from unknowing to knowledgeable and from unskilled to skilled.

Approaching play from the position of double-subjectivity has allowed us to create a certain periodization of play activity in the child's ontogenesis, and also to define the role of each type of play in the development of play and in psychic development. These types of play include: 1) director's play; 2) image play; 3) plot role play; 4) games with rules; 5) literature play; 6) theatre play; and 7) I-image play.

1. Director's play: provides both the ability for plot creation and the opportunity to control the play situation (that is, to take the above-situational position).
2. Image play: ensures the ability for identification and transformation.
3. Plot role play: originates from director's play and image play and helps to realize the imagined plot through the roles used in the play, as well as

providing different types of communication and collective activity during the play.
4. Games with rules: are genetically connected to plot role play; ensure the willing submission of players to the rules and provide the psychological foundation of volition.
5. Literature play: allows the reflection of relationships with others across different contexts. Provides the opportunity for conscious empathy and the analysis of one's own problems from various positions.
6. Theatre play: helps to create the stable 'I-image' and becomes the basis of the formation of professional self-consciousness.
7. 'I-image' play: is the basis of a fully fledged 'I-concept' and provides the stable personal position.

Double-subjectivity in play allows players to orient both towards their own selves and towards the character they are playing. In addition, double-subjectivity allows the player to reveal the features of the character and so to change his or her own behaviour, activity and facial expressions so that they resemble the represented character. At the same time, players should be conscious of their own characteristics and how they are distinguished from the features of their roles. Accordingly, play from the perspective of double-subjectivity allows from one perspective the realization of self-cognition, and from another perspective cognition of the surrounding world.

The presence of double-subjectivity during play helps players to control themselves in the process of realizing a certain role inside the play situation, but also to change their own real characteristics. In total these two sides of play – the player's consciousness of himself as a player and at the same time as a non-player – represent the subject of play. It means that a person is able to control his or her play volitionally.

These two sides of play form the basis of play and actually differ greatly from each other at the beginning of the development of play itself. As a rule, children begin to accept the role or to act with objects when they have no such opportunity in reality. That is why in the child's first or earliest games, the playing subject differs qualitatively from the one which is determined by his or her personal position. At the same time, according to the analysis of children's early games (Fradkina, 1946; El'konin, 1994), the two sides of the play coexist and develop fairly independently from each other. An example from practice is that of a young boy playing 'families' with his mother. The boy says that he will be the mother and the mother will be the son. He is not at all confused by the clear discrepancy between his age and his mother's real age and the discrepancy between their roles and genders as players. In the process of play the situation is transformed, and it turns out that the mother is to remain a mother, but the boy has become a fox cub. When his mother suggests to him that maybe she is not a mother any more, but also a fox, the child insists: 'you are just mother and that's all'. Here the child can accept the role of being a fox cub although he has no opportunity to take this role in reality.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PLAY

During the process of role-play development (and the introduction of a greater number of participants in play), the correlation between playing and the real sides of the subject of play activity changes. Here it emerges that the child's playing of 'I' has a significant influence on the development of his or her personality. For example, it may be that playing as a strong and courageous hero can help shy and bashful children to become less shy and fearful (Zaharov, 2004). However, they constantly need reminding, or even exposure to the continued impersonation of that hero, to overcome their fears in reality. These features of the play can be called the *first developmental stage* of the subject of play.

It is known that at the end of the preschool period there are substantial changes in the development of play (Vygotsky, 1966). During this time the rules of play come to the forefront and the imaginative situation moves

towards the sidelines. This movement reveals itself in the origin of games with rules. After the appearance of games with rules, all the previous play types begin to change. Now, when children are playing plot role play or director's play, they qualitatively change the form and content of the play. From one perspective children's play becomes more compressed verbally, and from the other the content of the play often becomes related to real life and real events. This shift represents the *second developmental stage* of play. For example, in the play of children within the second stage of play development, it is very hard to find a situation where one child is playing at being an adult and another child is playing at being a child. If in the course of the play they need this differentiation, second-stage players will most likely ask another smaller child to play with them, or will just use a doll to represent the 'child' in the play.

With the end of primary school, children do not stop playing. However, their games begin to differ qualitatively from previous stages. The content of primary school-age games once again begins to differ from reality, but reality also contributes greatly to the plot. This can be seen in teenagers' games, which are often informed by media and literature. The teenagers are fighting with each other as usual, but not as themselves; more like the heroes they read about or saw in television or in a movie. This means that the 'real I' influences the 'playing I', which is the *third stage* of the development of play

The conditioned influence of the subject's 'real I' on his or her 'playing I' is related to the fact that only from this time may children take part in performances, and so transform themselves consciously. In other words, he or she should really feel him or herself as the character. At the same time, he or she is not fully becoming a particular character; rather he or she learns to adjust the features (i.e. bravery or modesty) of the characters to his or her own self. This capacity is very important for the child's personal development as well as for the child's performance. Here the two sides of the subject of play activity do not merge together but coexist in the space of the child's personality.

We can illustrate this thought using the heroine Julia Lambert from W.S. Maugham's (2001) novel *Theatre*, who once found herself in a situation where her playing (acting on stage) and real position (in her off-stage life) coincided in terms of content. In real life, Julia was jilted by her lover and the same situation took place in her performances on stage. As a result, she transferred her real suffering to the stage. She thought that she had never acted with such brilliance; however it turned out that her performance was no good at all.

In this example, we have on the one side the influence of the 'non-playing' (the 'real I') on the playing or the 'imagined I'. However, from the other side it turns out that both these sides of Julia's playing activity subject were merged into one. This is proved first by the transfer of the 'imagined I' into her real life. For example, at the beginning of the novel Julia appeals to her son with a passionate speech, but in the next moment she remembers that she is speaking just like one of the heroines from a play.

If in the theatre the coincidence between the 'playing I' and the 'real I' leads to poor acting in a play, in the field of personal development such coincidence can have a destructive influence. A person who does not distinguish for him or herself between the 'playing I' and the 'real I' is likely to become immoral and emotionally emasculated. If we analyse these changes we could say that in older teenagers and younger adolescents, the playing and non-playing aspects of play activity again coexist in parallel and influence each other equally. We could also say that they once again become of equal value, and that when this occurs the development of play has reached the *fourth stage*. At the end of this stage, the subject's 'real I' includes all the play activity of the previous stages.

The fundamental difference in adult play is that there is a clear distinction between the playing and the non-playing I. In adult play there is only one real subject with an interiorized subject of play activity based on the

previous stages. This helps adults to voluntarily and consciously use play in different situations.

PLAY AS A LEADING ACTIVITY

The next important idea of L.S. Vygotsky (1933) concerning play is the idea that in the preschool years, play is a leading but not predominant activity. The concept of play as a leading activity helps us to make several important practical conclusions about play. One is that play as a leading activity determines development. However, to influence development, play itself must also develop. Only at the end of the preschool period, when a child has mastered the main types of play, may play become the predominant activity – in other words, an activity that takes a greater part in a child's life. This theoretical position allows an understanding of a whole number of problems that are related to play realization in practice.

First of all, a great number of children at the end of the preschool period have not fully developed play activity. This is expressed in low levels of psychological readiness for formal school education. Second, many children of preschool age get 'stuck' in their play. In this situation their play does not develop, so instead of helping with their education and development, the play they have begins to prevent development and education. Third, a lack of appropriate conditions for the realization of play in later ages leads to their continuing to play in school instead of studying (Kravtsova, 1991).

PLAY AS AN AUXILIARY TOOL

The study of play according to the ideas of L.S. Vygotsky (1933, 1991, 1966) helps us reach three important conclusions about using play as an auxiliary tool. The first conclusion is that in the area of psychic development, play acts in two ways. At the beginning, play is a self-valuable and independent activity. During this period a child or an adult is mastering a certain type of play. This becomes apparent, first, in the fact that he or she needs to create special conditions for the realization of play, or even have some help from outside his or her play. Second, at the same time, at this stage of play there is a lot of object activity, which we have shown to be the basis for play.

After play starts as a self-valuable activity, it becomes a form of life-activity. Play is expressed in the verbalization of its objective part. For example, a child will not knock at the door and walk away in reality, but he or she will say that they are knocking in pretence, or even say 'after I knocked'. The same process occurs with literature play. When play has become a form such as in literature play, the outward equivalence between a person and his or her image in play is not so important. Besides, the player will not imitate 'fighting' or their wish to 'hide', but they will talk about it and include it in their communication with their play partners.

The second conclusion refers to the inclusion of play in other types of life-activity. The most popular of these life-activities are education and therapy. The results of research show that play cannot be used in any activity as far as it acts as a self-valuable activity (Kravtsov, 2001; Novikova, 2006). This also touches on the genetic development of play. To the extent that a child (or adult) has not mastered play, he or she can only play in a certain type of play. At this time play is a leading activity for him or her, and so is not a predominant activity that can be used in support of life-activity. When play acts as a form of life-activity, on the one hand, it stops being a leading activity, while on the other it may be used in any other type of activity. At the same time, that growth which will appear by using play as an auxiliary tool may also be rightly called play education or play therapy.

The two stages in play development, including 1) self-valuable activity and 2) form of life-activity, are connected to all play types. In other words, so far as role play or play with the 'I-image' has not passed the stage of self-valuable activity, it cannot be

used as an auxiliary tool for education or therapy. This is why in every age period, as a rule, one type of play acts as a self-valuable independent activity, while the other types of play may be used in other types of activity. As a person becomes older he or she uses different play types in his or her life-activity.

Finally, a third conclusion about play as a leading and predominant activity is related to the features of play inclusion in other activity types, or to using play in a person's life-activity.

The study of play's genesis allows us to mark out the essential characteristics of certain types of play. For example, director's play may be created in conditions where a child is offered opportunities to unite different objects (such as words or characteristics) by sense. If a child takes different toys, pictures, words and so on and is able not to unite them in classes, but is able to create a certain plot, then this will be both an imagined situation and at the same time play, according to Vygotsky (1978). Take the following example. We offer a child a typical set of items for classification, such as a plate, a spoon, a fork and a doll, and the child is able to use these objects (or pictures of these objects) to make a story about a doll who first ate soup and then was offered a rissole, which she did not like. Then, in the story, instead of eating the rissole, she secretly drank compote, and so on. This would be the child's imagined situation, in which the child is realizing at the same time both the real position (by looking at pictures or objects, by touching them and so on) and the imagined position (what lies on the plates, what the doll liked, what the doll did not like, the doll's name, etc.). What is in the imagined situation is the result of the child's imagination. At the same time, these aspects of the imagination constitute a feature of director's play.

If such an act of play functions as a self-valuable activity in a child's life, then he or she will be just playing in it, but if it has become a form of life-activity we could use it for teaching subjects such as mathematics or first and second languages. We could ask a child to count the number of flowers painted on a plate and on a cup and to tell us which has more flowers. Besides, we could, together with a child, make a menu which features not simply soup but also the full name of a particular soup; we could teach children what kinds of food we should put in this soup, and so on.

In image play, the conditions for the creation of the imagined situation change. Now the image is essential for the play. The image should be thoroughly familiar to a child who will play or who will use play. At the same time, the person should have strong emotions attached to the image. Research by Russian scientists shows that modern children have stopped playing at 'hospitals' or 'doctors' in spite of their wide experiences of communication and interaction with others (Abramenkova, 2000; Dresvyanskaya, 2012). This could be because they do not have strong emotions attached to the image of these professionals.

Plot role play and its imagined situation are determined by two roles with differing content, for example a doctor and a patient, a teacher and a student, a driver and passengers, and so on. In plot role play a child reveals his or her role not through special movements or by mimicking, but through communication with the other play partners. The opportunity to change roles during the process of play helps a player to consider different situations from different positions.

One of the most favoured childhood games used to teach children how to read is playing post office. The person playing a post-person reads the addresses and brings the letters to the correct recipient, and this person in turn carries out tasks described in the letter or replies to the sender. If children and/or adults have poorly developed plot role play, then all of their actions are made in the imagined plane. For example, the recipient of a letter does not read it but instead invents the text (as if he or she was reading) and so on. At the same time, when plot role play becomes a form of life-activity, then the reading of letters, carrying out of

tasks and writing of replies to the sender becomes real.

The imagined situation of 'games with rules' is determined by a rule. If a rule dictates how a player should walk or speak, or how to play with a ball, then there is a situation where a rule has its roots in reality. However, the comprehension of the rule is made in the child's imagination. This 'double-subjectivity' supports play with rules. Once again, it is play and the inclusion of any specific content leads to its suppression. But if it acts as a form of life-activity then this play helps to realize and carry out various forms of activity. On a large scale, all learning activity of primary school children is play with rules. A study has been conducted in which children using play with rules were taught functional thinking. After many years (the children were taught in fourth grade), it turned out that these school graduates had the best knowledge of how to use mathematical concepts in their daily functions (Kravtsov, 1995).

CONCLUSION

The last question we want to discuss is that of conclusions about play and the study of play in non-classical psychology. In other words, is it possible to consider play as a unit of non-classical psychology? According to L.S. Vygotsky's theory, this question may be stated as follows: is it possible to consider play and its development features as a unit of non-classical psychology? Will play have all the characteristics of psychology not evident in the classical model?

From one side, play may be understood as a model of a person's life. In play we simulate real relationships and real situations. From the other side, the mechanism of transitioning from natural psychic functions to higher functions is not active in play. Any psychic function initially appears as a real relationship in a group, so it is collective per se, and play is initially an individual activity (Kravtsova, 1996). Further, if we imagine a collective activity where one participant creates an imagined situation, another formulates its rules and a third plays the roles, this will not be play at all. If a child or adult does not have the experience of individual play, he or she may collectively interact with other people, but in this process he or she will realize some activity other than the collective-distributed activity. Also, even if a person has an individual play experience, in collective play each participant will still realize play. Without this realization, he or she cannot understand the general sense of play or his or her partner's play positions, or the logic and features of his or her own play behaviour.

Thus play, in spite of its different components, characteristics and developmental stages, is principally holistic. This very unity is inherent in a person, in his or her personality, and cannot be comprehended, imagined, developed and corrected on the basis of the sum of his psychic functions, processes, activities, behaviour and so on. This is the main difference between classical and non-classical psychology – to separate, to dissect, to study in isolation or to construct, to create and to design. This conclusion fully coincides with the thought of L.S. Vygotsky that the old classical psychology was not able even to approach the study of personality, because it did not know the history of the development of higher psychic functions (more commonly known as 'higher mental functions' in the Western literature) that had become, in his opinion, the basis of non-classical psychology. Our conclusions about play therefore align with the purpose of non-classical psychology.

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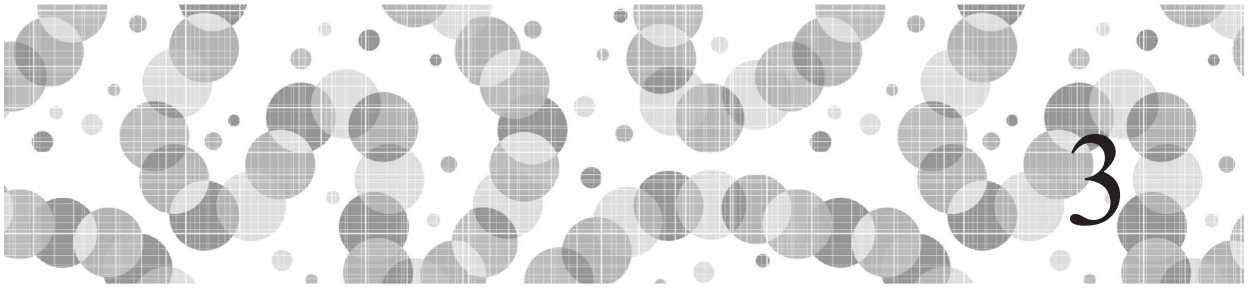
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3

Children's Play as Cultural Activity

Suzanne Gaskins

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood educators and play scholars in many Western societies argue that children's play is in decline and under attack (Crain, 2003; Elkind, 2007; Gray, 2013). Their concern stems from initiatives by schools to increase the amount of time focused on structured learning for young children while decreasing the time spent in unstructured play, in parallel with attempts to improve children's test scores and to address inequities in educational outcomes across cultural groups and social classes (Russ and Dillon, 2011). Parents in such societies, especially middle-class parents, have reduced free play time even further by seeking more structured after-school activities for their children, including enrichment classes, organized sports and academic tutoring (Hofferth and Sandberg, 2001; Lareau, 2003). Further reducing children's 'traditional' play time are choices by the children themselves regarding how to spend what leisure time they have, with the introduction of television, video games, computers and online communities into children's lives (Buckingham and Willet, 2006; Willett, Robinson and Marsh, 2011). In the face of such competition, play proponents make a passionate case for the unique value of children's free play for their development and learning (e.g. Singer, Golinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek, 2006).

What is missing from these arguments is a recognition of the culturally and historically specific importance of such play in Europe, Canada, Australia and the United States (Brooker, 2010; Fleer, 2010a). When one considers the role of play in children's lives in other times and places, it becomes clear that while play may serve a unique role in some children's lives today, it may have assumed a greater centrality in their lives because of changes in both economic practices (with adult work taking place outside the home) (Mintz, 2006; Lancy, 2008) and culturally specific understandings of childhood (focusing on the child as precious and needing to be protected) (Zelizer, 1985; Prout, 2005).

Much of what has been claimed as the unique characteristics and advantages of play – and used in its defence against encroaching formal instruction – in fact may not necessarily be unique for all times and cultures (Fleer, 2005; Edwards, 2006). For contemporary children growing up in worlds where play is a primary way of spending their time, their cognitive, social and emotional development may indeed be influenced by the types of play they engage in. For children growing up in worlds where play is only one of many ways of spending their time, play may have a much less central impact on development and learning. Although play has often been assumed to be the universal primary way in which children engage in the world outside of formal schooling, this has not been the case across the centuries and across the globe.

This chapter provides support for this claim by looking at the complex ways in which culture organizes the parameters of children's everyday lives, demonstrating how children are regularly engaged in meaningful activities other than play and how play is experienced differently across cultures. Building on those insights, the chapter concludes by exploring the implications for theory and application of viewing play from a culturally comparative perspective, and proposes some critical research questions still needing to be answered.

CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHILDREN'S EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES AND PLAY

Play is a cross-disciplinary area of research with a strong contingent of scholars found in the fields of education, psychology, sociology, history and anthropology. Unfortunately, these disciplines' differences in both theory and methods lead to a lack of cross-disciplinary engagement, leading many play scholars to be unaware of each other's research. This chapter will present the extensive anthropological record of children's everyday play in a form designed to engage scholars from other disciplines.

Anthropologists who study children frequently focus on issues of socialization and enculturation (Lancy, 2008; Montgomery, 2009). Much of the early ethnographic work focused on describing children's everyday activities reported that play was an important, and arguably universal, activity because it served as a medium of socialization (Schwartzman, 1979). While the specific content of play might vary across cultures, the process of play looked similar enough across cultures – in spite of large differences in the resources available for it – for anthropologists to argue that play should be considered a universal characteristic of children (Schwartzman, 1979).

More recent anthropological work has focused on differences in meaning more than similarities of form. It describes 1) how cultural understandings influence the process of play as experienced by children in their everyday lives (Gaskins, Haight and Lancy, 2007) and 2) how children become committed to culturally organized play practices through everyday activity patterns (e.g. Lancy, 1996; Göncü, Mistry and Mosier, 2000). In contrast to earlier work, it suggests that play varies in important ways across cultures, both in cultural meaning and in its contribution to the patterns of children's everyday experiences that form the basis of socialization.

It is possible to see very different pictures if one chooses to focus on the cultural similarities of play or the cultural differences. In the end, it is important to do both. This chapter will focus on a number of differences, not to dismiss the claims about similarities in play across cultures or its universality as a feature of childhood, but rather to provide a counterweight to them.

The Relationship of Work and Education to Play

Perhaps the most significant difference across cultures that provides structure to children's

lives is the range of roles assigned to them. Children have varying amounts of opportunity to participate in adult productive activities according to the economic system of their culture. Children have many more legitimate roles in the everyday sustenance activities of their household in hunter-gatherer and agrarian societies than in industrial and postindustrial societies (Lancy, 2008). Much of the work being done by adults is organized at the level of family or home and there are roles that children productively fulfil, even before they reach full adult competency, through legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In industrial and postindustrial societies, adult work is traditionally organized primarily outside the home, and is often more specialized. This means there are minimal work roles for children, and children may not see much of the work done by adults.

A second major difference that sorts societies into the same two groups is the centrality of formal education. In hunter-gatherer and agrarian societies, much of a child's education is typically informal, taking place within the family and within the context of participating in adult work. While more structured forms of education exist in some of these societies, such as formal apprenticeship (Lancy, 2012), religious instruction (Moore, 2006) and initiations (Schlegel, 1995), observational learning in situ is a dominant and intentional strategy for preparing children to assume adult roles (Gaskins and Paradise, 2010), allowing them to construct shared meanings about cultural institutions and practices (Rogoff, Paradise, Mejía-Arauz, Correa-Chávez and Angelillo, 2003). In contrast, in industrial and postindustrial societies, education has moved to take place primarily in formal, specialized institutions that operate in isolation from adult work (Rogoff et al., 2003).

Observational learning – that is, learning by watching other people and events – is described as a central mechanism for learning in the earliest ethnographic studies of children (e.g. Fortes, 1976 [1938]). While observational learning is found in all cultures, in those cultures where children learn primarily through participation in family work it is not only strongly encouraged and supported but also culturally amplified (Rogoff et al., 2003; Gaskins and Paradise, 2010). Children become experts at extracting information from ongoing activities and constructing meaning from that information. Their efforts are rewarded when their increased competence leads to more responsibility and inclusion in family work. Interestingly, observational learning shares two very important characteristics with play – intrinsic motivation and child-directedness. In addition, learning through observation can be invisible and unintentional, as in play, through repeated exposure to everyday events (Gaskins and Paradise, 2010).

Taken together, these two differences in everyday environments for children (child v. adult-centric daily activities and informal v. formal learning environments) produce patterns of experience that differ greatly. Children who are denied roles as regular legitimate participants in adult work, and who are educated in segregated settings such as schools, spend most of their time in child-centred, adult-mediated, age-segregated environments, with most of their activities having little resemblance to those of adults and being free of real-world consequences. Children who regularly engage in family work and learn primarily through observation and engagement spend most of their time involved in productive activity, embedded in a social world of family, with limited leisure time.

It is not hard to see how play takes on different meanings under these different sets of circumstances. In a society that organizes and values child-oriented activities, play becomes a primary resource centred on social engagement, escape and expression of personal sentiment. In a society that supports and values children's contributions to adult-oriented activities, play becomes a less central resource used for knowledge practice and leisure. In both cases, play can serve as an opportunity to explore meanings with few

real-world consequences, but the nature of that exploration differs dramatically.

Beliefs about Children and Play

A second significant difference across cultures is caregiver beliefs about the nature and value of play, which are inextricably tied to more general beliefs about mechanisms for children's learning and development. There is abundant evidence that cultures differ in their beliefs about how children grow up and become competent members of their society (Lancy, 2008; Montgomery, 2009). Some folk theories about the nature of children place more emphasis on maturation as a mechanism for development, while others place more emphasis on environmental shaping through experience (Lancy, Bock and Gaskins, 2010). Some cultures emphasize the importance of teaching children through intentional, verbal lessons, while others think children learn primarily by watching and participating in family activities (Rogoff et al., 2003).

Gaskins, Haight and Lancy (2007) have argued that such differences in beliefs yield three major cultural perspectives on play that can be extracted from the ethnographic record: play may be cultivated, accepted or curtailed. Middle-class parents in the United States and China, for instance, value children's play as an important medium for learning and development and cultivate play by providing abundant resources. In contrast, Kpelle parents in Liberia accept play as a dominant behaviour of childhood but place less emphasis on play as a medium for learning and development, and therefore offer *many* fewer play resources. The Yucatec Maya of Mexico curtail play to some degree because they expect children to contribute to household work (and children curtail their own play by seeking more involvement in adult activities).

One of the more influential play resources that can be provided by adults is their own participation in children's play. In societies where play is cultivated, parents often actively sustain or even extend the children's play (Haight and Miller, 1993; Lancy, 2007). In fact, it may be through early modelling that parents are able to amplify the level of importance that children come to place on play, especially fantasy pretence (Gaskins, 2013).[1] In cultures where play is accepted, and especially where it is curtailed, significant adult mediation of, support of and participation in children's play is the exception rather than the rule, since play is considered to be an activity limited to and organized by children. Ethnographic research from all parts of the world describes how children construct their own toys, organize their play agenda, find their own play partners, resolve social disputes, take physical risks and socialize younger children into games and routines, while adults stay at the periphery (or beyond) (Lancy, 2008).

SOCIAL WORLDS IN PLAY

There are many different configurations of children's social worlds across cultures. Twentieth-century research on children's development has tended to assume that children are living in small, nuclear families and that if both parents work outside the home, infants and preschool children are often placed in groups of non-related children of similar ages for the purposes of childcare, prefiguring the kind of social environment they will find when they enter school. However, cross-cultural research shows that many children spend the majority of their time in larger, more complex family and community structures. Thus, although traditional research on play has assumed that playmates are same-aged, supervised friends, it is important to recognize the kinds of variation in social worlds that exist, and not limit our understanding of play to only one kind of social structure (Göncü and Gaskins, 2011). Playing with siblings or friends, playing with children the same age or of varied ages and playing with or without adult supervision – each of these differences has an impact on the nature of children's play.

Friends v. Siblings

One of the most significant differences across cultures is whom children have as their regular play partners. In some contemporary societies, especially in the middle class, children spend their time primarily split between their nuclear families on the one hand (where there might be only one or two other children) and same-aged peers on the other, often while directly supervised by adults in formal settings (Lareau, 2003). In other societies, such as the Kpelle of Liberia (Lancy, 1996) and the Gusii of Kenya (LeVine et al., 1994), children might spend the majority of their time away from home in mixed-age groups of children, who may or may not be relatives, with little adult supervision. In still others, like the Yucatec Maya, children may stay close to home and spend their time with their multi-generational and extended families, playing primarily with siblings and other child relatives (Gaskins, 2006). Among peers, there is some evidence that coplaying is always a negotiated and fragile event (Corsaro, 1985; Löfdahl, 2010). Play among siblings and other relatives can minimize this dynamic because of the recognition that today's playmate will be tomorrow's playmate and that the relationship extends beyond the play activity (Gaskins, 2006).

Same-age v. Mixed-age Play Partners

Children who play in mixed-age groups inhabit a much more hierarchical environment than children who play in same-age groups. Children in mixed age groups come to the play activity with acknowledged and uncontested differences in knowledge, skills, strength and power. There may be cultural expectations that the older children will entertain or take care of the younger ones, as for the Yucatec Maya (Gaskins, 2006), or there may be few constraints on their exercise of control over using their superior position to dominate others, as for the Kpelle of Liberia (Lancy, 1996). In either case, older children usually conceptualize, organize and direct the play, and thus opportunities for younger children to use play as personal expression may be limited. Negotiations over control of the play agenda are very different in same-age play groups, where children must negotiate or assert their superiority rather than having it be tacitly accepted by all (Corsaro, 1985).

Supervision v. Independence

Adult supervision tempers many less positive aspects of children's play, including their experiences of exclusion, dominance, teasing and punishment by others. This effect is present whether the play is among friends or relatives, in mixed-age or same-age groups. Cultures differ widely in relation to how closely they think children's play needs to be monitored. Some cultures see value in protecting children from each other, while others believe that within the play group, important socialization occurs that adults should not interfere with (Tobin, Wu and Davidson, 1991). Unmonitored play has the potential for being more child-driven, but potentially distressing for those who are excluded or mistreated.

Play as Integrated or Specialized Activity

Many kinds of play have been identified by researchers and theorists. While there is no definitive, exhaustive list, many classification systems include the following types: physical play, including rough and tumble; construction and object play; language play; pretend play; and games with rules (Smith, 2009). While these types of play may be combined and are at times hard to categorize, it is usually not difficult to identify when children are playing because their play is isolated from other cultural activities.

However, in some societies, the line between play and other activities is not so clear. In cultures where children are engaged

in daily chores and work beside adults in the production of food, they often bring a playful approach to their work. Thus, 'down time' during cattle herding is filled by building pretend corrals filled with pretend cattle (LeVine et al., 1994). Chasing birds in a field becomes informal racing (Fortes, 1976 [1938]). And returning home with meat purchased for the family meal becomes a chance to pretend to be a truck (Katz, 2004). The extent to which the children are working or playing is unclear in their seamless stream of behaviour. Little is known about how such interwoven playful work differs from the 'purer' play of non-working children that has been more closely studied.

Children also bring a work-focused tone to their play when they practise real-world skills within the play frame, whether it is through pretend play, competitive games or other types of play. For children who live in societies where they are expected to contribute to adult work, such practice play is directly motivated by a desire to become more competent at practical skills in order to be included in adult activities (Bock and Johnson, 2004). Examples abound in the ethnographic literature of children's play used to learn such skills as how to use a bow and arrow, to navigate a canoe, to prepare food or to take care of babies (Lancy, 2008). Such practice is often undertaken quite seriously and tenaciously. So while it is playful in the sense that it does not have direct consequences in the real world, the activity is not motivated primarily by fun (although fun may indeed be had). It is self-imposed learning through purposeful trial and error.

PLAY AS INVENTIVE V. INTERPRETIVE BEHAVIOUR

One of the most central claims about play from European and American perspectives is that it allows children to explore and express their own feelings and understandings about the world (Gaskins and Miller, 2009). It is in this sense that play is thought to be therapeutic (e.g., Clark, 2003) and to promote creativity and imagination (Singer and Singer, 1992). While many kinds of play can allow such self-expression, pretend play and the production of narratives is thought to be the epicentre of such activity (Paley, 2004). The primary use of play for children's self-expression may not apply in all cultures. For instance, young Yucatecan Mayan children who are playing with older children do not have control of the narratives pursued in play (Gaskins, 2006) and may not feel a strong need to 'rewrite' their experiences through pretend play (Gaskins and Miller, 2009).

However, there is a more central argument to be made about cultural differences in pretend play – namely that pretend play can focus either on narratives that invent unrealistic roles and events (such as going on an adventure to upside-down land or being pirates) or on narratives that interpret realistic ones (such as having breakfast or going to school) (Gaskins, 2013). (Obviously, some narratives incorporate both kinds of play.) These two kinds of pretend play have different emotional and social affordances. In contrast to inventive pretend play, the goal of interpretive pretend play is not self-expression or creativity – the goal is to understand reality better through enactment.

In many cultures, especially those in which children share adult work, children engage in pretend play, but their pretending is primarily limited to interpretive play, enacting events and roles that are within their experience (Gaskins, 2013). Under these conditions pretend play can be thought of as trying on roles, relationships and activities in anticipation of their real lives when they are older. The pleasure is in accomplishing a credible re-enactment, which may involve social critique or irony (e.g. pretending to be a drunk does not imply that the child wants to grow up to be a drunk). The more extensive the child's knowledge base about the world, the more elaborate, complex and accurate the pretend play can be. In order to engage together in interpretive play, children must share the same knowledge base.

Yucatec Mayan children's play falls squarely in the category of interpretive play (Gaskins, 2013). It is conducted in a mixed-age group of relatives who play together on a regular basis. Not only do these children share knowledge of the everyday world, they also share previous enactments of this world in their play, since most play groups have a limited repertoire of scripts they enact repeatedly. The older children choose the script for the play session, assign the roles and direct the unfolding of the activity. Younger children follow directions and do their best to give credible performances based on their more limited understanding of activities and relationships. If youngsters prove incompetent at performing a role, they are given appropriate lines to repeat by the older children. If the script demands exceed their capacity altogether, the younger ones choose to drop out and engage in solitary object play nearby. Older children (six–eight years) actually spend more time in pretend play than younger children (three–five years), because as their understanding of the everyday world increases, re-enacting it becomes increasingly complex and interesting (Gaskins, 2000).

Interpretive pretend play shares many elements with inventive pretend play. A play frame is established and maintained, props are recruited and used to symbolize objects, roles are performed and dialogue is spontaneously created. However, all of this is constrained by what the children know to be true about the real world. By participating in interpretive play, children are expanding their understanding of the world and internalizing it as constructed cultural meaning, as Vygotsky (1967) proposed. Such learning is less central during inventive play, when children are not constrained in script production by their real world. Likewise, the emotional catharsis that can occur in inventive play, when children construct unrealistic scripts that better match their desires or address their fears, is less central during interpretive play.

Traditionally, interpretive pretend play and inventive pretend play are not distinguished in the literature on pretend play and its role in development and learning (e.g. Paley, 2004; Singer, Golinkoff and Hirsch-Pasek 2006). Rather, the entirety of pretend play is considered together as a single type of play, including both internalization of the 'what is' and expressive release through the 'what if'. It is only through the description of pretend play in other cultures – where inventive play is not typically present – that the stark differences between the two become clear.

THE IMPACT OF CONCEPTUALIZING PLAY AS CULTURAL ACTIVITY

What is gained by seeing children's play as an outgrowth of their culturally organized everyday activities? The most fundamental impact is on our conceptualization of play as an innate and spontaneous universal behaviour in children, which must be refined. On the one hand, the fact that children in such disparate environments show an inclination to play supports the idea that play is a basic predisposition of children. However, this chapter has presented significant cultural differences in children's play that have important implications for play theory and its applications in support of children's development and learning.

Basic Theoretical Claims about Play from the Perspective of Cultural Diversity

There are five major theorists whose work provides the backbone for how play is conceived of today: Freud, Piaget, Vygotsky, Mead and Bateson. None of these theorists worked from an anthropological perspective per se, but some of their ideas support the data and conclusions drawn in this chapter. Note that all but one of these theorists focuses on pretend play. While they appear to be working on a common problem, these theorists fall into two distinct groups once the distinction between inventive and interpretive play is made.

Freud (1920), a psychologist who dealt primarily with clinical populations, argues that the motivations for and enactments of pretending come from the individual child's unrealized desires, frustrations and creative expression. It is primarily because of Freud's interpretation of play that we think of play as emotionally cathartic and potentially healing (see also Erikson 1950 and Peller 1971). Piaget (1945) conceptualized play as a predominance of assimilation over accommodation in his theory of adaptation. For him, play emerges from the desire to make sense of lived experiences – not necessarily traumatic ones. In Piaget's terms, symbolic play is a form of representational assimilation – children represent the world according to their understandings and preferences.

Both Freud and Piaget view play as being important for its ability to give children a way to cope with the confusion and frustration that arises in everyday life because of their immaturity. They conceive of individual children constructing pretend scripts that intentionally deviate from reality as a way of dealing with frustrations from everyday life (Piaget) and fears caused by traumatic events (Freud). As such, they consider play as a form of individual expression of feelings and ideas about past experience, thus focusing on inventive pretend play more than interpretive pretend play.

Vygotsky and Mead, however argued that play is an act of representation that is more socially grounded and future-oriented even as it derives from past experience. Like Piaget, Vygotsky (1967) believed that children are led into the world of symbolic play by tendencies that cannot be realized in the world of non-play. He argued that pretend play leads to generalized tension reduction and wish-fulfilment. However, he attributed greater significance to the developmental outcomes of play than did Piaget. Vygotsky considered play as the leading activity of early childhood, placing children in the Zone of Proximal Development where their behaviours in play (alone or with others) would support the development of more complex cognitive understanding (Vygotsky, 1967). For him, children enacting specific roles in play must use abstract social rules that they cannot yet formulate outside of play; through their enactments, they become more conscious of them (Fleer, 2010b). Likewise, Mead (1934) provides a theory of the development of self through assuming other identities in pretend play, thereby mirroring the self in the process of contrasting the child with others.

Vygotsky and Mead are talking about groups of children using pretend scripts as a 'reality check' on their understanding of the world and their place in it. While Vygotsky's theory emphasizes play as a medium for supporting the child's developing understanding of the social organization and Mead's emphasizes it as a support for the child's developing understanding of self, these positions are in fact two sides of the same coin. And by being grounded in social experience, both processes are most clearly present in interpretive pretend play rather than in inventive pretend play.

Unlike the other theorists, Bateson (1955) focuses specifically on group play and the social mechanisms needed to sustain it through interaction. He provides a theory about how pretend play is co-constructed and sustained by children, as they inhabit two communicative frames simultaneously. To produce pretend scripts together, they must recognize the 'play frame', embracing shared pretend meanings that exist only through symbolic relationships with real objects and people, while at the same time they never fully give up their position in the real world. He argues that part of the work of pretend play is to coordinate navigation between these two worlds and clearly signal when one is entering the play frame by sending a message to other players that 'this is play' (Bateson, 1956). Bateson's theory of metacommunication is relevant for both kinds of pretend play, inventive and interpretive, so long as the play is social. Interpretive play, in which shared social practices and meanings

are explored through play, is carried out most successfully with play partners who have similar knowledge about the real world. It is, perhaps, more complicated to achieve intersubjectivity (Göncü, 1993) in inventive play, because personal meanings are being explored; this can be done successfully only when there is also a shared understanding with play partners of the affective and symbolic meanings involved (and also makes adults more satisfying play partners). By emphasizing the social nature of play, Bateson lays the groundwork for recognizing the cultural organization of children's social worlds as an important part of understanding how they coordinate their actions through intersubjectivity (Göncü and Gaskins, 2011).

The insights into the cultural organization of play illuminate the importance of some of the theoretical distinctions made by these theorists: is play fundamentally individual or social? Is it expressive or rule-based? Is it an escape from reality or a commitment to it? These distinctions help clarify how the theorists are at odds with each other in terms of their claims about motivations for play, supportive social environments in play and the potential outcomes of play (Göncü and Gaskins, 2011).

Applying Play to Learning from a Cultural Perspective

How does understanding more about cultural differences in children's play change the way play is conceptualized as a support for children's learning? Reading most textbooks or popular books on play, one would conclude that play is a central activity for children's development, uniquely promoting their problem-solving abilities, their theory of mind, their creativity, their social skills, their language and communication skills and their discovery and consolidation of knowledge. This chapter has demonstrated that play is not necessarily uniform and unique. Perhaps play researchers have attributed such advancements to play because the children they have studied do not have many opportunities to learn through other activities. Children who spend more time working than playing, assuming they do so in a social group, may in fact be learning problem-solving skills, theory of mind or social skills as well as, if not better than, they would through play.

By looking at the development of children's skills and abilities across a wide range of cultures that differ in their commitment to play, the unique contributions of play to development could be disentangled from those that are shared with other everyday experiences. For some areas of development, play may serve a very important role when it is the primary activity of children, yet serve a less important role when it coexists with other activities. In other areas of development, it may be that play indeed has a unique and important role independent of other experiences, so that children who play more demonstrate more strength in those areas. Research sorting through these possibilities has not yet been carried out and, until it is, we cannot know if play has a unique role in development and learning. But it should be clear that imagining all children learn the same things from play is overly simplistic.

CONCLUSION

The anthropological study of play provides compelling evidence that play is a robust and universal behaviour in childhood, observed in some form or another in every culture where children's everyday lives have been studied. At the same time, those studies suggest that there are many important ways in which culture shapes the contours of children's play: what other activities children are allowed or encouraged to do (especially work and school), shared beliefs about the nature of play and its role in children's lives, how children's social worlds are organized, whether play occurs as an independent activity or is integrated into other activities and whether the goal of play is *inventive* self-expression or *interpretive* internalization of cultural meaning. The significant variation in

the play experience that results from the cultural organization of these contours of everyday life suggests the consensus that play is universal, intrinsic and uniquely important for maximizing children's development and learning may not be fully justified. The goal of future research should be to clarify how a universal behaviour like play is also shaped by cultural understandings and practices, leading it to be expressed in a variety of forms.

A significant theoretical issue that arises from considering cultural variation is how play derives its meaning for children through individual expression of needs and wants and frustrations (inventive play), or alternatively through exploration with others of the meaning of social roles and relationships (interpretive play). This question not only has implications for various theories about the role of play in children's development but also identifies two distinct categories of pretence that have not been distinguished from one another. On a more practical level, considering cultural variation in play leads to questions about the generalizability of claims about play's role in development and learning. Data from one very specialized cultural ecology, where play is highly cultivated, is not sufficient to answer questions about play's unique contribution to children's development and learning in all environments.

NOTE

1. A corollary practice in middle-class American families arises from the intersection of two beliefs – the power of play for learning and the importance of adult participation in children's play. Here, adults 'hijack' children's play for more specific educational purposes, such as introducing play conversations peppered with school-like questions (looking for right and wrong answers) or promoting activities around educational toys, with adults sustaining and guiding the child's engagement (Haight and Miller, 1993). Such adult-directed play is in conflict with the general notion of play being spontaneous and intrinsically motivated (Rogers, 2010), but the conflict may go unnoticed by its proponents – whether they be parents or educators (e.g. Bodrova and Leong, 1995) – even when the children do not share the adults' understanding of the activity (Brooker, 2010; Fleer, 2010).

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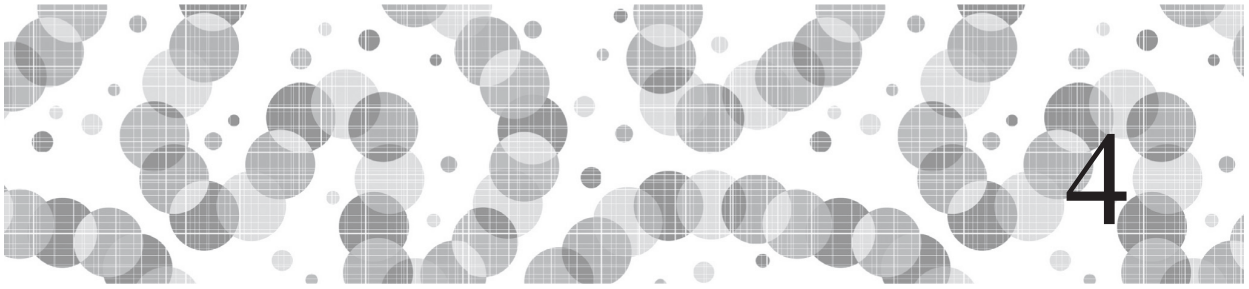
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4

Make-believe Play and Self-regulation

Adena B. Meyers and Laura E. Berk

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a vital time for laying the foundations of self-regulation, a set of capacities (often termed executive function in contemporary research) that enable children to engage in self-initiated, purposeful behavior in relatively challenging situations. By age five–six, the well-regulated child can wait for a turn, resist the temptation to grab a desired object from another child, spontaneously share a toy with a classmate, follow classroom routines (clean up independently after a play period), and willingly help an adult or peer with a task (Bronson, 2001; Blair, 2002; Berk, Mann and Ogan, 2006). Furthermore, when faced with a demanding activity – writing one's name, riding a bike, working a complicated puzzle, or controlling negative emotion – self-regulated children exert intentional effort, even when they would prefer to do something else.

Young children who exhibit the capacities just mentioned have made substantial progress in gaining control over their thoughts, emotions, and behavior. The mental operations and strategies required to do so include sustaining attention, inhibiting impulses, and flexibly redirecting thinking and behavior (Welsh, 2002; Welsh, Friedman and Spieker, 2008). Attainment of these executive processes in early childhood positively predicts academic achievement and social maturity, from kindergarten through secondary school (Blair and Razza, 2007; Duncan et al., 2007; Blair and Diamond, 2008; Rhoades, Greenberg and Domitrovich, 2009; Pagani et al., 2010; Romano et al., 2010).

While self-regulation is burgeoning, young children exhibit major transformations in imaginative play. From the middle of the second year through ages four–five, make-believe evolves from simple imitation of adults' actions (pretending to drink from a cup) to complex, cooperative creation of imaginary scenes with peers enacting a spaceship launch. (Rakoczy, Tomasello and Striano, 2005; Kavanaugh, 2006). This coincident development raises the possibility that make-believe play and self-regulation

are interrelated. In this chapter, we review major twentieth-century theories addressing the contribution of pretense to young children's advancing mastery over their own thinking, emotions, and behavior, followed by a critical analysis of relevant evidence. We conclude with twenty-first-century challenges for research.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Freud's psychoanalytic theory first called attention to the emotion-regulating function of make-believe. In his view, pretense is a form of pleasurable wish fulfillment through which young children act out doubts, anxieties, and desired outcomes in nonthreatening contexts and, thus, learn to manage intense emotion. In make-believe play, children relive anxiety-provoking experiences (parental discipline, a dental visit) but reverse roles (the child becomes the doctor rather than the patient). As a result, the child exerts control over, and thereby surmounts, unpleasant experiences (Freud, 1961). Erikson (1950) expanded Freud's vision, proposing that fantasy play enables young children to explore potential roles in their social world. As children enact roles in sociodramatic play, they participate in a miniature social organization in which they must cooperate, regulating their behavior to realize joint play goals. Moreover, through emulating admired adults in play, young children internalize social norms, gain a sense of their future, and are motivated to follow those norms.

Piaget (1962) also accepted the emotion-regulating function of make-believe and its contribution to children's knowledge of social role possibilities, but otherwise stressed that make-believe is one among several symbolic capacities that develop rapidly in early childhood. Through it, young children practice and, consequently, strengthen their capacity to mentally represent their experiences. Although mental representation is crucial for self-regulation, Piaget (1966) believed that symbolic play contributes little to children's advancing cognition. Rather, in play children merely exercise and solidify symbols acquired in other contexts.

Vygotsky (1978), in contrast, regarded make-believe as powerfully influential in children's learning and, especially, in their advancing self-regulation. Rejecting Freud's wish fulfillment and Piaget's symbolic practice perspectives, Vygotsky proposed that pretense has two unique features that clarify its profound contribution to self-regulatory development. First, the creation of imaginary scenes using substitute objects aids young children in distinguishing internal ideas from concrete reality. When children use a block for a telephone or a TinkerToy for a lollypop, they change an object's usual meaning, thereby detaching mental symbols from the real objects and actions to which they refer. Through playful opportunities to 'act independently of what they see' (p. 97), children increasingly use thought to overcome impulses and choose deliberately among alternative courses of action.

Second, for Vygotsky (1967), an inherent property of pretense is following social rules. the child pretending to go to sleep conforms to the rules of bedtime behavior; the child imagining herself to be a mother follows the rules of parental behavior. Young children immersed in play continually face conflicts between social rules and what they would do if they behaved impulsively, and almost always opt in favor of the rules. Fantasy play is the first context in which young children willingly place constraints on their own actions. In pretense, rule-governed behavior becomes a new form of desire that responds to the child's need to become an accepted member of his or her culture.

In sum, for Vygotsky, in separating mental symbols from reality, children strengthen their *internal capacity* to become socially responsible; in engaging in rule-based play, they respond to *external pressures* to act in socially desirable ways. Vygotsky concluded that among all activities, pretense affords young children their greatest opportunity to become self-regulated and responsible.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

Although questions remain, initial findings from experimental and observational studies lend credence to the idea that sociodramatic play and self-regulation are developmentally linked. Research supports several of Vygotsky's ideas about the mechanisms through which pretend play facilitates development of self-regulatory abilities. In addition, a number of studies have established connections between pretend play and specific self-regulatory skills, including inhibitory control, socially responsible behavior, and the ability to manage intense emotions.

Pretense as a Zone of Proximal Development

According to Vygotsky, self-regulation develops in the context of supportive interactions between children and more experienced members of the community, including adults and more competent peers. When a child and adult (or older peer) engage in cooperative interchanges, they create a Zone of Proximal Development – an appropriately challenging context in which the child acquires understandings and competencies that would be out of reach without such support (Vygotsky, 1978). The term *scaffolding* has been used to describe the support that adults (or older peers) provide as children develop skills within their Zone of Proximal Development (Wood, 1989).

Consistent with this notion, observational and ethnographic studies indicate that early sociodramatic play is scaffolded by adults and – more often in village cultures – by older siblings as a means of socially transferring cooperative, prosocial habits to children. Anthropological research reveals that adult involvement in children's pretense varies as a function of the value placed on play in different cultures (Gosso, 2009; Gaskins, this volume). In urban, industrialized, middle-class contexts, play is 'culturally cultivated' by adults who value it as a developmentally beneficial activity and frequently play with their children (Gaskins, Haight and Lancy, 2007). Haight and Miller's (1993) ethnographic study of pretense among middle-class European American children supports this interpretation. They conducted extensive in-home observations of make-believe, following nine children from 12 to 48 months of age. Although quantity of pretense increased over time, play was predominantly social (as opposed to solitary) at every age, with mothers serving as the primary play partners for children aged 12–36 months. Developmental changes in maternal–child pretense suggested that mothers initially support children's make-believe through modeling, later through reciprocal play, and eventually by providing opportunities for play with peers.

In contrast, in non-industrial and rural societies and among low-income families, play is 'culturally accepted' – valued as a way to occupy children while adults work (Gaskins et al., 2007; Gosso, 2009). Children tend to play together in mixed age groups in which older children (siblings, cousins, and neighbors) supervise and support younger children's play. Although adults and children generally do not play together, they spend time in close proximity, with children observing and assisting as parents engage in subsistence tasks. Children's pretense often involves imitating adults' household activities, hunting, or community celebrations. Make-believe thus appears to serve an important socializing function, even in societies where adults may not directly cultivate it.

However, considerable cultural variation exists in the quantity of time devoted to make-believe, and in some societies play appears to be 'culturally curtailed' (Gaskins et al., 2007). For example, Gosso (2009) described research on the Yucatan Maya people, among whom fiction and make-believe are not valued, falsehood is frowned upon, and children seldom engage in pretense. Instead, they spend most of their time with adults, and socialization occurs through children's participation in work at an

early age. Thus pretense appears not to be universally prominent in early childhood, suggesting that its influence on self-regulation is limited to cultures in which the social worlds of adults and children are largely distinct.

Pretense and Private Speech

According to Vygotsky, self-regulation involves the use of thought to overcome impulses. Private, or self-directed, speech is one mechanism through which Vygotsky believed children acquire self-regulatory skills. Between the ages of 2 and 6, children frequently engage in audible private speech, with 20–60 percent of their spontaneous utterances being self-directed (Berk, 1992). As children develop, private speech is internalized as silent, self-regulating thought. Research suggests that private speech contributes to self-regulation and other cognitive abilities (Bivens and Berk, 1990; Berk and Spuhl, 1995). Children produce more private speech when engaged in challenging tasks within their Zone of Proximal Development (neither too easy nor too difficult). Supporting Vygotsky's views about the connection between imaginary play and self-regulation, evidence suggests that pretense functions as a source of self-regulating private speech (Krafft and Berk, 1998) and as a context for the development of impulse control (Cemore and Herwig, 2005; Kelly and Hammond, 2011) and socially responsible behavior (Elias and Berk, 2002).

Krafft and Berk (1998) examined the association between private speech and make-believe play among 59 three- and four-year-olds in two preschools. One was a Montessori preschool where activities were highly structured and pretense was discouraged, the other a traditional preschool where sociodramatic play was encouraged. Observing each child for four ten-minute periods during the least structured part of the day, researchers unaware of the study's purpose coded play behavior (functional, constructive, fantasy, unoccupied onlooker, or transition), activity type (open-ended with no correct goal or solution v. closed-ended with one correct goal or solution), speech (self-directed v. other-directed), and level of adult and peer involvement.

Although peer involvement was equivalent in both settings, the traditional preschool children engaged in more open-ended activities and fantasy play, less constructive play, and fewer closed-ended tasks compared to the Montessori children. In addition, more self-directed speech occurred among children in the traditional preschool than in the Montessori preschool, with higher levels specifically of fantasy-related private speech, self-guidance, and inaudible muttering (partially internalized private speech). After controlling for verbal ability and age, total private speech was associated with fantasy play, other open-ended activities, and associative peer involvement. Both self-guidance and fantasy-related private speech were related to make-believe and associative peer involvement, suggesting that children used private speech to develop imaginary scenarios and guide their own behavior during sociodramatic play. Closed-ended activities, constructive play, and transition were negatively associated with private speech, as was direct teacher involvement. This latter finding suggests scaffolding of children's play is most effective when adults participate as observers and helpers rather than assuming a directive role.

These results are consistent with an earlier cross-sectional study of 30 children aged 2–6, each of whom was videotaped for 9 minutes of play in a lab (Gillingham and Berk, 1995). Findings indicated that complex pretense increased with age but private speech remained high (averaging 2.3 speech utterances per minute), rather than decreasing with age as it typically does in other contexts. Since private speech is correlated with task difficulty, the authors interpreted the high levels of private speech among older participants as evidence that children create increasing challenges for themselves, which they attempt to surmount in the context of play. In sum, evidence suggests that make-believe

creates a Zone of Proximal Development in which children develop and practice self-regulatory skills.

Pretense and Inhibitory Control

The mental abilities that facilitate self-regulatory behavior include such executive function (EF) tasks as inhibiting impulses, controlling attention, and planning. As noted previously, Vygotsky believed that pretense provides a context in which children willingly subordinate their immediate desires to follow the social rules embedded in play scenarios. Consistent with this notion, two studies provide preliminary evidence of an association between imaginary play and inhibitory control among 3- to 7-year-olds (Cemore and Herwig, 2005; Kelly and Hammond, 2011).

Cemore and Herwig (2005) used a delay-of-gratification paradigm to assess inhibitory control among 37 three- to five-year-olds. Researchers observed children after telling them they could have one treat immediately or two treats after a waiting period. Length of delay was significantly correlated with children's interview responses about their imaginary play behavior at home. Unfortunately, researchers interviewed children about their play after administering the delay task, leaving open the possibility that experimenter bias influenced child interview responses. Other measures of play behavior (including videotaped observations at school and maternal and teacher reports) were not significantly associated with delay of gratification. However, the correlation for teacher report of play at school was modest ($r = .29$) and approached significance ($p < .10$) – a potentially important finding given the small sample size.

Additional modest support for a pretense–inhibitory control relationship comes from a study by Kelly and Hammond (2011). They measured inhibitory control among 20 four- to seven-year-olds. The children were shown pictures of a moon on a black background and a sun on a blue background, and asked to say 'sun' and 'moon' in response to congruent pictures. After the first 16 trials, they had to give the incongruent response (saying 'sun' to the moon picture and vice versa) for the next 16 trials. Accuracy on incongruent trials was significantly correlated with scores on a standardized test of pretense skills, and with observations of spontaneous symbolic play during a 20-minute unstructured period. After controlling for mental age, partial correlations between inhibitory control and both play measures remained moderately high (.40 for the unstructured play and .55 for the standardized play assessment), though the association with unstructured play was no longer statistically significant. Consistent with Cemore and Herwig's (2005) results, these findings point to an association between imaginary play and children's ability to inhibit prepotent responses. The results should be viewed as preliminary in light of the small sample, however, and it should be noted that Kelly and Hammond also assessed children's generativity (ability to generate ideas – an executive function skill), but did not find strong evidence of an association with pretense.

Pretense and Socially Responsible Behavior

Private speech and impulse control provide the foundation for more complex self-regulatory abilities enabling children to cooperate with peers and adults, persist with challenging tasks, and behave responsibly in various contexts. Just as pretense has been linked to the underlying developmental processes of private speech and impulse control, sociodramatic play predicts improvement over time in young children's socially responsible behavior. Specifically, Elias and Berk (2002) used a longitudinal design to examine the association between pretense and future self-regulation skills among 53 middle-SES preschoolers. Researchers blind to hypotheses observed each child in the fall and again several months later during free play, cleanup, and circle time. Play intervals

were coded as sociodramatic (involving interaction), complex socio-dramatic (involving interaction and at least three other play elements such as role play or make-believe with objects), or solitary dramatic (involving at least one play element, but no interaction). Self-regulation was assessed by coding children's cooperativeness and helpfulness during cleanup and their attentiveness during circle time. In addition, children's impulsivity was assessed via parent report.

Analyses revealed a connection between pretense and self-regulation that depended on the complexity and social elements of play. The frequency and persistence of children's complex sociodramatic play in the fall predicted future cleanup behavior after controlling for age, vocabulary, and baseline cleanup behavior. Similar effects were not found for social play that lacked complexity, and solitary dramatic play was negatively related to future cleanup self-regulation. No effects of play on circle time attentiveness were observed. Further analyses revealed that the association between complex sociodramatic play and future cleanup behavior was strongest for children rated as highly impulsive and near zero for those lowest in impulsivity, suggesting that pretense may play an especially important role in the development of self-regulation among children deficient in this area.

Harris and Berk (2003) attempted to replicate these results with a small sample ($N = 19$) of low-SES 4-year-olds. In the winter, researchers observed children using procedures similar to those just described. In late spring, self-regulation was again measured during cleanup and circle time. In contrast with Elias and Berk's findings, results revealed a negative association between make-believe play and concurrent (winter) cleanup, and no association between make-believe and future (spring) cleanup behavior. Interestingly, children's engagement in art and manipulative activities in the winter positively predicted concurrent and future cleanup, a finding inconsistent with Vygostkian predictions regarding pretend play and self-regulation.

The researchers informally observed that teachers engaged in more scaffolding behaviors during art and manipulative activities (compared to pretend play); also, these activities had built-in goals. Both features may have fostered self-regulation. Furthermore, the observers noted that many of the sociodramatic play themes children enacted in this setting involved violence and conflict. Based on previous findings indicating that violent and negative play themes impede development of executive function, emotion regulation, and moral development (Dunn and Hughes, 2001), Harris and Berk speculated that the thematic content of play in their study could explain the lack of association between complex sociodramatic play and future self-regulation.

In sum, the benefits of imaginary play seem to depend on its complexity and thematic content. Peer interactions, symbolic object substitutions, and cooperative verbal dialogues (as opposed to simplistic pretense) predict increased self-regulation, whereas violent, antisocial themes predict poorer executive function and moral immaturity.

Pretense and Emotion Regulation

A component of self-regulation particularly important for adaptive functioning and mental health is emotion regulation – the ability to understand, control, cope with, and productively use affective experience. In line with psychoanalytic theory, experimental research suggests that children engage in thematically relevant sociodramatic play following exposure to stressors, and that such play reduces anxiety. In other words, make-believe appears to play a role in children's emotion regulation.

Several decades ago, researchers demonstrated that children use thematically relevant imaginary play to cope with stressful situations (Barnett, 1984; Barnett and Storm, 1981). Barnett and Storm showed 40 three- to five-year-olds a scene from a movie in which a dog (Lassie) and her owner parachuted from an airplane during an electrical storm. Children were randomly assigned to

an anxiety-inducing condition in which the characters appeared to be in great danger following the jump, or a neutral condition showing the dog and owner safely reunited. After presenting the assigned movie segment, researchers observed each child in an unstructured play situation with a variety of toys, including one that resembled Lassie. Compared to children in the neutral condition, those in the anxiety-inducing condition more often played with the Lassie toy (either hugging and cuddling it or acting out events related to the movie theme). Among children in the anxiety-inducing condition, anxiety levels measured by child self-report and Palmar Sweat Index scores increased following the movie and declined following the play period. Since all children had the opportunity to play, it is possible that the negative effect among children in the anxiety-inducing condition would have resolved over time even without the opportunity to play. Still, that children chose to engage in play related to the stressful movie theme and their anxiety subsequently declined suggests that pretense helps young children cope with unpleasant feelings.

In a subsequent study, Barnett (1984) examined effects of play on stress management among anxious and non-anxious three- to five-year-olds. Researchers assessed children's anxiety levels and assigned them to one of four conditions for their first day of preschool: 1) solitary free play; 2) free play with peers present; 3) solitary non-play (listening to a story about trees and shrubs); and 4) non-play (listening to the same story) with peers present. Compared to children with low baseline anxiety, highly anxious children in the play conditions engaged in more dramatic/fantasy play; they also showed greater declines in anxiety compared to high anxiety children in the non-play conditions, and compared to low anxiety children in all conditions. The presence of peers did not facilitate play or emotion regulation. High anxiety children exhibited elevated anxiety in the presence of peers and (in the play condition) tended to play by themselves even with peers present. Taken together, these studies lend support to the psychoanalytic view that children use pretense to process and gain mastery over unpleasant and intense affect, but also suggest that, at least for anxious children, solitary play may be more effective than social play as a means of stress management.

Galyer and Evans (2001) further explored the role of pretend play in emotion regulation by examining associations between young children's play behavior and mothers' reports of their emotion management skills. Mothers' ratings of children's emotion regulation were associated with their ratings of children's pretend play at home. In addition, when researchers presented children and mothers with an emotionally arousing play scenario in which a hungry crocodile puppet threatened to eat toys, children's ability to successfully resolve the conflict and continue playing was correlated with maternal ratings of emotion-regulation skills. These results provide additional evidence that pretend play may facilitate children's ability to cope with stressful situations and regulate strong affect.

Creation of Imaginary Characters and Theory of Mind

A feature of make-believe that has received increased research attention is children's creation of imaginary characters, which includes imaginary companions (ICs) and character impersonation. Correlational evidence reveals that children who engage in this type of make-believe also exhibit more complex and imaginative pretense. For example, in their study of 152 preschoolers, Taylor and Carlson (1997) reported that children's imaginary character creation was significantly related to preference for high-fantasy toys among four-year-olds. It was also significantly related to use of imaginary objects while pretending among three-year-olds, and marginally so among four-year-olds. In a subsequent study, Bouldin (2006) interviewed 74 children about fantasy experiences related

to dreams, daydreams, scary thoughts, pretend play, and ICs. She also asked parents about the presence of ICs, finding perfect agreement between child and parent report. Compared to children without ICs, those with ICs reported more vivid imagery and mythical content in dreams and pretense.

In light of the association between complex make-believe and self-regulation, a number of researchers have examined whether children who create imaginary characters also show signs of more effective self-regulation, such as understanding others' viewpoints and emotions and self-regulatory self-talk. For example, in the study described previously, Taylor and Carlson (1997) investigated if imaginary character creation is associated with perspective-taking skills, using several Theory of Mind (ToM) tasks to assess children's ability to differentiate their own mental representations from reality and from others' perspectives. ToM performance was associated with imaginary character creation among four-year-olds (but not three-year-olds) after controlling for verbal intelligence and age. The authors speculated that the discrepant results might have been due to a floor effect among three-year-olds on the ToM tasks. In a follow-up study, Taylor, Carlson, Maring, Gerow and Charley (2004) reassessed 100 of the original 152 children. Although neither ICs nor imaginary character impersonation at time one predicted future perspective-taking abilities, impersonation (but not ICs) at time two was correlated with children's concurrent understanding of others' emotions.

Finally, a retrospective study (Brinthaupt and Dove, 2012) indicated that college students who recalled having had ICs as children engaged in more self-regulatory self-talk as adults. Specifically, participants in the IC group reported more self-reinforcing self-talk (such as 'something good has happened to me') and more self-managing self-talk (such as 'I want to remind myself of what I need to do') than did participants in the non-IC group. Although prospective research is needed to confirm the interpretation, these findings lend support to Vygotsky's view that pretense (in the form of childhood ICs) enhances development of self-regulation through a pathway involving private speech and behavior-regulating thought.

Pretend Play Interventions

A number of interventions have been devised with the goal of enhancing young children's self-regulation through sociodramatic play. One such intervention, *Tools of the Mind,* is an early childhood curriculum based on Vygotsky's theory, which emphasizes sociodramatic play and includes numerous activities designed to promote self-regulation (Bodrova and Leong, 2007). Experimental research suggests that the curriculum produces gains in a variety of self-regulatory skills, but results are inconsistent. In a study with predominantly Latino participants, Barnett et al. (2008) randomly assigned children to *Tools of the Mind* or a control curriculum. When the researchers compared children's outcomes on measures of language, social, and cognitive development, the most robust finding was that teacher ratings of behavior problems at the end of the year were higher for children in the control than the *Tools* classrooms. In a second study, Diamond, Barnett, Thomas and Munro (2007) compared 85 children randomly assigned to the *Tools* curriculum with 62 control group children. At the end of their second year of preschool, children in *Tools* outperformed controls on executive function measures involving inhibitory control and cognitive flexibility. Recent attempts to replicate these results have been unsuccessful. However, Farran, Wilson, Lipsey and Turner (2012) compared children randomized into 32 *Tools* and 28 comparison classrooms, and found that children in both conditions improved equally on all outcome measures (including several executive function skills such as attention, inhibitory control, and working memory). Thus, although initial research on this curriculum was quite promising, its generalizability may be limited.

Research suggests that adults facilitate pretend play most effectively by supporting and extending – but not controlling – children's play themes and choices. Ogan and Berk (2009) compared the effects of two make-believe training protocols on the development of self-regulation among low-income 4- and 5-year-olds: a direct teaching intervention in which 24 children were taught specific play skills and a supportive guidance intervention in which 21 children were helped through encouragement, but were not disturbed when meaningfully engaged in elaborate play scenarios. In both conditions, children met individually, twice per week for eight weeks, with a research assistant who presented a play theme and invited each child to play with toys. In the direct instruction condition, the researcher assigned roles and followed a script, prompting children with questions such as 'what's the first thing the mom and child should do?' and instructing them about what to do next. Scripts included preplanned practice of self-regulation (e.g. planning, impulse control/inhibition, rule following, and prosocial skills). In the supportive condition, the researcher did not intervene unless the child stopped playing or did something dangerous or destructive.

Researchers blind to the study's hypotheses administered pretest, post-test, and two-week follow-up measures of self-regulation, assessing delay of gratification, gross-motor control, fine-motor control, suppression and initiation of behavior, effortful attention, and planning. Results revealed that more pretense occurred in the supportive condition, whereas children in the direct instruction condition were more often unoccupied. Also, the supportive condition produced more improvement in fine-motor control and planning, and (for girls only) behavior suppression and initiation.

Summary of Research Findings

Research to date suggests that pretend play and the development of self-regulation are closely linked. Children's make-believe is related to such self-regulatory processes as private speech and impulse control. Pretense appears to play a role in emotion regulation, though solitary play may be more beneficial than social play for highly anxious children, at least in some contexts. Evidence also links complex, sociodramatic play to socially responsible behavior, but effects vary depending upon the dramatic themes being played out, with violent themes less likely to produce gains in prosocial self-regulatory skills. Children whose pretense includes imaginary characters may have a developmental advantage with respect to social and cognitive perspective-taking skills, though longitudinal research raises questions about how these effects unfold over time. Interventions designed to improve self-regulation through play have been met with mixed results, and there is some indication that adult involvement in children's pretense should be supportive but not intrusive to achieve maximum benefits. In economically secure, industrialized contexts, adults appear to scaffold children's early pretense, whereas in subsistence economies children are more likely to model adult behavior when pretending with older peers. In some cultures, pretend play is discouraged and occurs infrequently, suggesting it is one of multiple pathways for the development of self-regulation.

TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY CONTEXTS

Our analysis reveals a general pattern of association between pretense and self-regulatory competencies, but its reliability, generalizability, and underlying causal mechanisms have yet to be established. Investigations in a variety of contexts, and with larger, more diverse samples, will enable researchers to examine interactions among play elements and their effects within various demographic sub-groups. Researchers have begun to examine constructs such as executive function and effortful control using measures that offer precise and controlled

approaches to assessing the contributions of make-believe to self-regulation (e.g., Cemore and Herwig, 2005; Diamond et al., 2007; Ogan and Berk, 2009; Kelly and Hammond, 2011), but more work in this area is needed. Moreover, researchers must tease apart the role of pretend play specifically, as opposed to related experiences, in the development of various self-regulatory capacities.

Smith (2009) proposed three hypotheses regarding the causal role of pretense in child development, suggesting that make-believe is either 1) crucial to healthy development; 2) one of multiple possible pathways to good outcomes; or 3) an epiphenomenon, associated with factors responsible for healthy development but not causally related to them. Smith concluded that the second hypothesis, termed 'equifinality,' represents the most plausible account. However, in a subsequent review of the pretend play literature, Lillard et al. (2013) argued that the existing evidence is generally not sufficient to support a causal relation between pretense and developmental outcomes (including self-regulation). Acknowledging that more research is needed, these authors designated the epiphenomenon hypothesis as the best account of the evidence to date, proposing adult involvement as a plausible 'third variable' explaining correlations between pretense and healthy development.

Although we agree that more research is needed to understand the functions of pretense in early childhood, we consider it unlikely that play is merely an epiphenomenon of healthy development (see Berk and Meyers, 2013). Pretend play is goal-directed, rich in language and symbolic object substitutions, and a prime context in which children willingly subordinate their activity to social rules. Thus, it is inherently self-regulatory. As such, it offers opportunities for young children to develop and practice diverse prosocial skills, including social cooperation, perspective-taking, and turn-taking. In addition, sociodramatic play requires children to deploy essential aspects of executive function, including sustained attention, frustration tolerance, impulse control, and planning. Moreover, as early as age two, rich, extended symbolic play is heavily child-controlled, even with adult play partners (Fiese, 1990; Haight and Miller, 1993). After age two and a half, socio-dramatic play with peers increases rapidly in frequency and complexity, making it unlikely that adult involvement fully accounts for developmental benefits. Cultural variation certainly calls into question the notion that play is 'crucial,' but research indicates that make-believe is likely one of several pathways through which children become self-regulated. As Weisberg, Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2013) argued in response to Lillard et al. (2013), 'The most fitting explanation of the data writ large is that play, or something strongly linked to play, is related to child outcomes' (p. 36).

Increased use of experimental and longitudinal designs in contexts such as parent–child and peer playful interactions, preschool curricula, targeted interventions, and community settings providing playful enrichment (such as children's museums) is vital for enhancing our understanding of how to harness make-believe play (or its correlates) to promote self-regulation. However, a key conundrum for researchers is that pretense does not transfer easily to the laboratory. Training studies in which children are randomly assigned to play instruction or control conditions have been touted as offering the strongest possible evidence of make-believe's causal influence on developmental outcomes (e.g. Lillard et al., 2013), but such manipulations may not capture the most important and influential elements of children's make-believe. As Bergen (2013) points out, adults typically recall childhood play occurring over long time periods, without adult presence – contexts quite distinct from laboratory settings, and in which experimental manipulation may be impossible. Although other evidence suggests that adults can and do facilitate young children's pretend play, effective adult scaffolding seems to require an indirect, facilitative approach rather than a direct, intrusive one (e.g. Fiese, 1990; Haight and Miller, 1993; Krafft and Berk, 1998;

Ogan and Berk, 2009), further complicating efforts by researchers to design experiments with play as the independent variable.

In response to these challenges, Weisberg et al. (2013) called for larger-scale longitudinal designs using sophisticated statistical modeling to examine the influence of various pretense elements, and possible causal pathways, over time. Given its complexity, Weisberg et al. suggest that sociodramatic play should not be treated as a unitary construct. Assessment and observation methods that capture multiple play elements (such as intrinsic motivation, flexibility, positive affect, and non-literal action) can be used along with statistical techniques such as structural equation modeling to test hypotheses about latent constructs underlying observable variables. With sufficiently large samples, such studies could explore interactions among play elements, investigating, for example, if different types of adult or peer involvement are associated with changes in children's play behavior, motivation, dramatic themes, persistence, and positive affect, and if these changes in turn facilitate (or hinder) self-regulatory skill development. Experimental manipulations of play environments (as opposed to training protocols directly targeting children's behavior) could provide another fruitful avenue for future research.

The current trend in many US preschools to supplant playful educational experiences with academic drill and practice presents opportunities for natural experiments addressing the developmental impact of subtracting sociodramatic experiences from children's lives. In this context, investigations targeting preschoolers with few out-of-school opportunities for make-believe play and those at risk for self-regulatory deficits will be particularly important.

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5

Cultural–historical Perspectives on Play: Central Ideas

Bert van Oers

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to explain the central concepts of a cultural–historical approach to play. The cultural–historical theory of human development was originally formulated by Vygotskij[1] and his colleagues (Leont'ev and Lurija) in the first part of the twentieth century in an attempt to find an explanation for the development of human consciousness. The most complete and reliable overview of the roots and early developments of Vygotskij's cultural–historical approach is given by van der Veer and Valsiner (1991). For current discussions it is important to assess the meanings of Vygotskij's concepts that were central to his cultural–historical approach. However, from a cultural–historical point of view we should'nt be content with an exegesis of Vygotskij's ideas on play and development. Some of the Vygotskian concepts need further elaboration and reformulation in today's context (see, for example, Lambert, 2000), especially when we want to remain true to a cultural–historical approach.

WHAT IS A CULTURAL–HISTORICAL APPROACH?

Cultural–historical approaches to human development reject the idea that human behaviour and development is essentially a natural process that follows laws of nature. In his study on the historical development of higher psychological functions, Vygotskij (1983/1931) acknowledged that human beings are also natural entities and as such subject to natural laws of growth and maturation. However, what makes people 'human' in his view is precisely the culture that settles in their consciousness, behaviour and development. More precisely, it is the way people learn to deal with objects and other human beings that is crucial in the cultural development of human activities. This cultural influence on human actions (oriented at material, perceptual, linguistic and conceptual objects) is exerted by other cultured human beings. This process is called mediation and is the core of human beings' enculturation process. For this mediation, adults, including

educators, use language and other symbolic means, first for the regulation of other people's actions. This process of 'other-regulation' gradually changes into a process of self-regulation in children. From that moment, the person starts to regulate his or her own actions with the help of cultural meanings (Wertsch, 1985).

For a deeper understanding of the complexity of human development, it is helpful to see it as a multilayered process. Historical understanding for Vygotskij means 'to study something *in the process of change*' (Vygotsky, 1978: 65). For Vygotskij, changes should be analysed at different levels, and each level contains different mechanisms (laws) that explain these changes and their differential outcomes (see also Scribner, 1997b). Cultural–historical approaches view human development as 'the emergent outcome of transformations within and among different developmental domains' (Cole, 1996: 146). Hence, the modern human being is a complex product of changes on the phylogenetic level (evolution of the species), the cultural level (cultural history – producing new pedagogical ideas and settings), the ontogenetic level (individual development) and the microgenetic level (changes in actions, perceptions, language, emotions etc.). Each of the higher levels sets the conditions for the lower levels. Moreover, changes at the phylogenetic (biological–evolutionary) level, or the ontogenetic level (individual development), are based on essentially different mechanisms from those that underlie changes at the microgenetic level (transformations of actions). So, for example, the actually attained level in cultural history (e.g. ideas about good educational settings) sets constraints for ontogenesis and microgenesis through the type of tools that are made available in everyday interactions with children, and through the ways in which children are taught to use them. Hence, for example, cultures without written language will approach their offspring differently (as to ways of communicating) from cultures that have developed written tools for communication and want to pass these tools on to their children. The use of written language will significantly influence children's development (see Vygotsky, 1978: 105–19; see also Cole, 1996). It is just one demonstration of how cultural developments may radically change our interactions with children and the developmental outcomes that result from them.

When Vygotskij first proposed his cultural–historical view of human development, it fitted well in one of the dominant political philosophies of his time (the 1910s–1920s in the former Soviet Union). Marx and, especially, Friedrich Engels had already argued for a vision of the human being as a historical product that is formed by the conditions he or she lives in and the activities he or she is engaged in. And both the life conditions and the activities are products of a long preceding cultural history. Due to their dialectical relationships with their cultural environment, human beings internalise culture and start changing their environments from their own points of view, feeding personally processed cultural meanings back into their environments.

By that time Vygotskij and his colleagues were anxious to find empirical evidence to support this cultural–historical assumption regarding human development. In order to test the assumption, they decided to make a research expedition to Uzbekistan and Kirghizia (two distant regions of the Soviet Union that had lived for a long time under completely different societal conditions as compared to Moscow: Islam was the dominant religion and most of the people were illiterate at the time of the early 1930s). To their surprise, the researchers found remarkable differences between test results in Moscow and these remote areas of the Caucasian region (see Lurija, 1974/Luria, 1976 for an account of this research project), especially with regard to the use of abstract thinking and categorisations. The researchers explained these differences by referring to variations in cultural tools that

these people employed (especially language and abstract concepts). This research project demonstrated the essential importance of language as a means for cultural mediation, but it was only a very general relationship that was described. Later cross-cultural studies by Michael Cole (1996) and Sylvia Scribner (1997a) supported the conclusion regarding the necessity of language for individual development, but could add a new dimension by pointing out that it is not the language per se but how it is used that determines the qualities of cognitive processes.

It is important to note that Vygotskij's cultural–historical approach goes beyond sociocultural studies that merely endorse the influence of culture on the course and content of human development and only study cultural influence by itself (as an independent variable), without taking serious notice of the historicity of the educational situation and of the ideas of the educators. A cultural–historical approach to human development acknowledges the historicity of the cultural contents, the situation and the educators' ideas, and tries to understand children's development as an outcome of a child's complex interaction with them. A cultural–historical approach that focuses on developmental change should not be confined to the study of child development, but should take into account the history and changeability of the cultural context itself. Child development is not only dependent on the nature of the child's development, but is deeply dependent on the cultural choices of the educators that are embodied in the cultural settings, the cultural goals we expect to be achievable for children and the way in which we engage children in interactions with adults and peers. As a consequence, a cultural–historical approach essentially rejects the assumptions of developmentalism that are common to most developmental stage theories (see, for example, Morse, 2003) and which explain human ontogeny by reference to the fixed dynamics of a developmental theory.

THE SOCIAL REPRESENTATION OF PLAY

Cultural activities are highly influenced by people's general conceptions of these activities and of the entities involved in them. Take 'education', for example. Children are an essential part of this enterprise, but the notion of childhood is not a self-evident concept. Historical studies have shown that the notion of childhood has evolved over the centuries (Ariès, 1960). Over the years, people in different cultures and historical periods have developed specific ways of conceiving childhood and specific ways of speaking about children; about what they are, about what we should do with them or about what is absolutely prohibited to do with them. How we conceive of children and their education is dependent on cultural values, folk psychologies or academic theories. These conceptions of childhood and education are sometimes so strong that they reduce the child to images that are dictated by the corresponding theories (Engel, 2005). Each vision of children represents what we can call a *social representation* that regulates people's ways of thinking and talking about childhood and its future. Social representations (Moscovici, 1988) are powerful images of social phenomena and narratives that regulate how to act and talk about them.

Similar reflections are possible about the notion of play. One of the ways in which culture influences children's play and mediates educators' activities is based on their culturally developed social representation of play (van Oers, 2012a). Many authors have already stressed the status of play as a cultural construction (Göncü et al., 2007). This cultural construction of play is gradually built up over generations and endorses a specific narrative or 'rhetoric' (Sutton-Smith, 1997) about play, how it manifests itself and what we can expect from it.

The currently dominant social representation of play strongly emphasises the self-initiated nature of children's play and refers to the aspects of joyfulness, purposefulness and

freedom in its narrative, often referring to the nature of young children as immature, spontaneous and rich in fantasies (see Smith, 2010). The narratives of most current social representations of play are inherently rooted in the developmental assumption, seeing play mainly as a characteristic of children in a specific stage of development. Expressions such as 'play is the child's work' (see, for example, Paley, 2004) can be seen as testimony of this assumption. However, from a cultural–historical point of view, this representation is problematic for three main reasons:

1. It gives no clear account of the *position of adults* with regard to children's play. Most narratives that originate from the dominant social representation of play are very reluctant to accept or specify the adults' position in children's play. Nevertheless, play often occurs under adults' supervision (which is by itself a cultural choice – see Roopnarine et al., 1994; Lancy, 2007). If educators decide that adults ought to stay out of play, a cultural–historical approach requires that convincing cultural reasons should be given, rather than reference to the spontaneous and unspoiled nature of young children. In the current social representation of play, the adult is often accepted as a provider of rich opportunities, toys and protection, but the influence of this position on the children's play is not critically reflected.
2. The current representation of play is ambivalent on *the issue of learning in the context of children's play*. It accepts processes of spontaneous learning in play, accepts that peers in play learn from each other and sometimes emphasises the importance of guided play with an eye on the promotion of play-based learning. However, there is no elaborated theory of playful learning (see, for example, Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009: 53–4).
3. The current representation of play gives no detailed theoretical account for *the development of playing throughout ontogeny*. What happens with play after early childhood? Vygotskij, El'konin, Dewey, Piaget and many other theorists of play stress that play does not die out after childhood, but transforms into a playful attitude towards cultural reality, games and sports. In Vygotskij's words: 'For the school child play becomes a more 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: 104). El'konin's (1972) periodisation of human ontogeny also limits play to the early stages of development (until about the age of seven), and does not explain how the play of older children relates to school learning. It seems that both Vygotskij and El'konin were still caught in some kind of developmentalism, even though El'konin (1978) emphasises that play is an historical outcome related to how we see the role of young children in Western industrialised countries. Play, in his view, is children's way of getting access to adult culture. It is obvious that El'konin is sensitive to cultural and historical differences, but he seems blind to play as older children's or adolescents' way of accessing adult culture. The reason for this limited conception of play is not clear in El'konin's work. For El'konin, play seems to be an independent stage in education (Braun, 1991: 217), preparing for future industrious and disciplined activities in society.

Below I will explain a point of view from which a cultural–historical approach may address these three problems and contribute to innovation in the social representation of play.

Play as a Cultural Problem

A cultural–historically inspired social representation of play first of all needs to get rid of developmentalist assumptions and conceive of play as a cultural problem related to decisions as to how actors are supposed to take part in cultural activities (or cultural practices), and what outcomes to expect. Such a social representation should articulate how playful accomplishments of activities and playful learning are basically rooted in cultural decisions.

The relationships between culture and play were intensively studied by the Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga in his famous book *Homo Ludens* (Huizinga, 1938/1951; references to this book are to the original Dutch version). Although often quoted and discussed, Huizinga's main point is more often than not inadequately presented. Huizinga's argument is mostly used

to support the claim about the importance of play *in* culture. However, in a foreword to one of the editions of his book he expressly rejects this interpretation, and stresses that he was not interested in investigating the role of play in culture alongside other cultural expressions or artefacts. What he tried to do was build an argument for the essentially playful nature of culture and cultural practices. Therefore he writes:

> Culture, in its initial stages, is played. It does not originate out of play as a living fruit that releases itself from the mother's body; culture develops in play and as play (Huizinga, 1938/1951: 224).

Elsewhere in the book he explains: 'In playing, a community expresses its interpretation of life and the world' (68). He goes on to say that culture is just the evaluation that is attached in human historical judgements to these exhibited played practices.

For the elaboration of his argument, Huizinga defined play as a 'voluntary activity accomplished within specific temporal and spatial boundaries, according to voluntarily accepted but stringent rules and characterised by an intrinsic goal, accompanied by feelings of suspense and pleasure, and with an awareness of being different from ordinary life' (Huizinga, 1938/1951: 47). On this basis he demonstrated that practices in the ancient Greek world (such as religious services, jurisdiction, trading, language use, science and so on) were originally accomplished in a playful way. In the course of the execution of these playful practices, new needs, problems and goals emerged that called for solutions and further elaborations of the practice with new rules, tools or rituals. However, according to Huizinga (103, 254, 266), there is no guarantee that cultural practices will necessarily maintain their playful character in the course of their development. This depends on the cultural environment's wish to maintain this playfulness in organised practices.

Huizinga's cultural–historical analyses are important to keep in mind in the development of a cultural–historical concept of play. Huizinga conceives of play and culture as a unit that thrives in cultural practices and creates opportunities for further developments. The intrinsic relationship between culture and practices is close to the point of view of Vygotskij, Leont'ev and El'konin. What Huizinga contributes to their cultural–historical interpretation of play is the idea that play is basically a way of executing practices, not a special phenomenon that may exist outside practices or precede them. It is impossible to talk about play without specifying the activity in which this is embodied. It then seems consistent to conclude that play in a cultural–historical approach is actually a quality of activities in the same sense that colour is a quality of things. Like colour, play does not exist other than as an abstract notion. Whether an activity will manifest itself as play depends on the intentions, values and interests of the participants in an activity. Making this decision is basically a cultural problem that makes the occurrence of play essentially a cultural phenomenon.

THE CULTURAL–HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON PLAY

The Imaginary Situation

The founders of the Vygotskian approach to play (Vygotskij, Leont'ev and El'konin) did not develop a clear-cut theory of play, but they stressed close relationships between play and children's actions. According to Vygotsky, 'Play is imagination in action' (1978: 93). In Vygotskij's eyes a defining characteristic of a child's play is the fact that it is based on an 'imaginary situation' (93–4). Despite the close connections that Vygotskij sees between the imaginary situation underlying play and human activity, he is not very specific about what exactly is imagined about the situation.

Leont'ev (1983) also struggles with the concept of the 'imaginary situation' and rejects the interpretation that play is based on

the child's imagined fantasy worlds. Leont'ev (310) argues that children, in their desire to act like adults, imagine the action potentials of the situation: what can we do here? Hence, we must conceive of the imaginary situation underlying a child's play as his or her imaginations regarding the action affordances of the situation and particularly of the activity he or she is involved in. Therefore imagination emerges from being involved in human activities, rather than being the source of these activities. And this is also true, according to Leont'ev, when we construe the relationship between play and imagination. Imagination arises and is stimulated through involvement in playful activities. However, what a child 'sees' in the situation depends on his or her personal relationship with this situation, his or her background knowledge about the situation, and the help the child gets from others in interpreting the meaning of this situation. Interpreted in this way, the concept of the 'imaginary situation' comes close to what Bateson (1972) named as a 'play frame' (187–8). He conceived of this frame as a psychological picture of the situation that helps the player to evaluate the 'messages' a situation exhibits for the actor: what belongs to the play and what does not? In our cultural–historical interpretation, these messages imply both action potentials (what can or should be done?) and meanings (cultural and personal values that can be attributed to the situation and its objects).

The Format of Playful Realisations of Activities

In elaborations of Leont'ev's activity theory, I have elsewhere emphasised the importance of looking at the process qualities of activities, rather than just mapping the structure of constituent actions, goals and tools (van Oers, 2012a). Characteristically, human activities are often not an execution of a fixed plan of actions, but a dynamic open process that may change more or less as to the script, the accomplishments of actions, goals and the use of the tools. As Lompscher (1975) and Brušlinskij (1982) pointed out in the 1970s and 1980s, activities are not stable structures of organised actions and goals. While carrying out activities, actors sometimes adjust the goals, reinterpret the rules, or change the tools and the order of actions. Activity is a directed but fluid process too, guided by personal motives. Brušlinskij (1982) used this idea to characterise the processes of communication and thinking as essentially versatile endeavours. In my analyses of children's play, this versatile process character of human activities is taken as a basis for the understanding of play. I approach play *as a mode of human activities*, combining the ideas of Leont'ev, Brušlinskij and Huizinga. Play is one version of human activity.

Recently I have argued for a way to characterise human activities on the basis of what I call 'the activity format'. The activity format refers specifically to the ways in which activities can be carried out, rather than to a detailed microgenetic analysis specifying motive, goals, actions, operations, tools, etc. This is not an attempt to deny the value of micro-analyses of activities. Micro-analyses are essential for the understanding of specific aspects of activities such as learning and interactions, but they cannot grasp the overall, gradual evolutions in activities such as play, thinking or communication.

The format of activities is defined by three parameters: rules, involvement and degrees of freedom. As I have previously argued (van Oers, 2012a; 2013), the specific values of these parameters indicate whether an activity will be experienced or recognised as play. On the basis of this format, play activities can be defined as those activities that are accomplished by actors with *high involvement* (and actually provide the conditions for maintaining this involvement), that are based on *rules* acknowledged by the actors and that allow the actors some *degrees of freedom*. Degrees of freedom are considered essential by almost all play researchers for the occurrence of

play. However, in these cases freedom is mostly negatively defined as 'freedom *from* interference by adults', or freedom from pressure by externally imposed purposes. In the cultural–historical account, freedom is positively defined as the freedom *to* change, to resist, to produce extravagant ideas and so on. This innovative freedom is the basis for the process character of play that manifests itself in changes of the rules, new applications of tools and redefinition of goals in play. However, as Vygotsky (1978: 103) has pointed out, there is no absolute freedom in play. The limitations of a player's freedom are the consequence of the necessity of the rules that coregulate play. That is why it is better to speak about 'degrees of freedom' in play, rather than 'free play'. Part of the excitement of play for children is to solve the inherent tensions between rules and freedom, to explore the action possibilities of activities in their own ways within the confines of their interpretations of the compelling limits of these activities.

It is important to emphasise that activities formatted as play are to be distinguished from other activity formats that impose strict rules, sanction just one interpretation and application of the rules and do not provide conditions to maintain the actors' engagement in the ongoing activity. Such activities do occur in society in the case of rituals, strongly proceduralised operations (such as with dangerous machines) and, for example, some teaching methods based on fixed action programmes. It is obvious that not everything in human cultures is play. In fact (as Huizinga also noticed), one of the dangers for playful versions of activities is that they become more and more ritualised into fixed and compulsory action programmes. With the help of the activity format, non-play activities can also be characterised.

Within a cultural–historical perspective, it is important to reflect further on the status of the activity format, and especially how decisions on the value of its parameters are taken. All human activities (including conventionalised cultural practices such as trading, traffic, music, studying, sports, etc.) are somehow regulated by rules. One of the consequences of a format analysis of human activities is that, in essence, all activities can be accomplished in playful versions or in more strictly proceduralised versions. In all cases, it is the cultural context that decides how activities may be carried out. Hence, the decision of when and how children can play is basically a cultural (and sometimes even political) problem. El'konin (1978: 67) was aware of this historical dimension of children's play. He emphasised that the growing complexity of cultural processes and their related activities raise the need for the development of playing. He points out that cultural decisions are at the basis of children's play and these decisions are dependent on moments in cultural history. When work processes are becoming more and more complex, it is impossible to include children easily in these activities and new ways must be invented to give children access to these activities. When family life changes as a result of economic developments (e.g. working parents), society has to invent new ways of engaging children that are accessible and keep them connected to their community. According to El'konin, permitting children to use objects from their environment in their own playful ways is still a construction of a relationship between a child and cultural–historically produced objects.

Summarising the arguments above, we may conclude that it is the cultural context at a certain moment in cultural history that decides how the parameters of the activity format are to be filled in. This is especially so in terms of how much freedom is permitted to the actors in a given situation and how important we find the actors' involvement. In the context of children's play, involvement is generally seen as an important condition and educators often take measures to create optimal conditions for involvement, e.g. by introducing rich and exciting toys or by preventing adult interference in children's play. But even here, cultural decisions have to be taken with regard to which objects or toys are

made available (some toys or cultural tools – such as knives or lighters – are deemed dangerous by parents, others as spoiling children's creativity).

With respect to adult involvement, cross-cultural studies have demonstrated that the view on parents' right or duty to engage in children's play is diverse among different cultures (Lancy, 2007; Roopnarine, 2011). From the perspective of cultural–historical activity theory, all sociocultural activities are essentially seen as basically interpersonal endeavours in which more people actually or virtually participate. Hence there is in principle no objection to adult participation in play as long as the play format for the children themselves is not destroyed.

The Cultural Function of Rules

In the different views on the role of the adult and the value of toys or tools, we can also recognise different social representations of play. Social representations are always products of cultural history, and as such they are the first and most influential resource for solving the problem of when and how playful versions of activities are allowed in certain situations for certain actors. From their adopted social representation of play, adults (parents, teachers, inspectors) decide how much freedom children can have in a (pre) school context, how important personal engagement is, how it should be dealt with in institutional situations (such day care settings and nursery schools), which rules should be introduced and to what extent these should be obeyed. Social representations function as a historically produced basic resource for deciding on the playfulness of the activity format in a given situation.

From an educational point of view, playful versions of activities are always based on decisions regarding the type of rules that may be introduced and how strictly they should be followed by the participants in play. In agreement with El'konin, rules should be seen as products of cultural history: rules are the most important elements of human activities as cultural–historical phenomena. In general we can distinguish between the following four rules, which have varying but important functions in playfully formatted activities.

1. *Social rules*: define how children in play should interact. This refers not only to moral rules like 'be kind to each other' but also role-based rules concerning the way a doctor treats his patients. In role play children usually know the rules from their everyday practices and often conceive of them as moral rules like in a shop play: 'stealing is not allowed'. A participating adult can decide to clarify or endorse those rules, or to introduce new more sophisticated social rules, like how to tell bad news to a patient. Evidently, these decisions depend on the teacher's understandings of play and her assumptions about the level of social development of the playing children. A special type of social rule is the use of proper words in specific situations. In their play children often need new words for communication and maintaining social relationships in the context of their role play. As we have demonstrated in our play-based curriculum, teachers can successfully decide to support children's need for communication by providing appropriate vocabulary, without impairing the play quality of children's activity (van Oers and Duijkers, 2012). Needless to say, this type of learning basically fulfils a social need. Conceptual explanations of the word's meaning might be inappropriate in the given socially marked situation.
2. *Technical rules*: rules that should be followed in order to use a tool or objects properly. When building a high tower with building blocks, a participating adult may decide to explain how the blocks can be put on top of each other in order to make the tower as strong as possible, after some frustrating failed attempts by the children. When using scissors or complicated toys (like computers) children may themselves invite the adult to show the technical rules. Here again we can see that the decision to introduce special objects, tools and their technical rules is based on the adults' presumptions regarding the value and dangers of these tools. In some cases, adults (but peers too!) explain the technical rules for spelling and writing when children are observed struggling with the cultural tool of script. These decisions are always built on other people's presumptions about the importance of following these rules or

learning these rules in the present situation. Again it should be emphasised that there is nothing wrong with the introduction of such technical rules per se as long as children can accept these rules as contributions to their engagement in the ongoing play, and don't feel frustrated in their degrees of freedom and involvement.

3. *Conceptual rules*: rules that explain how to use cultural objects properly on the basis of concepts. In their play children may ask questions – 'How come the light is not working in my doll's house?' – that teachers may try to explain in more or less conceptual terms. In early years classrooms we observed how peers explain to each other the conceptual rules of counting or making graphs (see van Oers, 2012c). The introduction of conceptual rules must be an answer to the children's need to develop a deeper understanding of their current word meanings, for example counting numbers or words like 'grandmother'. In many situations, educators decide to avoid the introduction of conceptual rules, often justified by developmentalist arguments ('young children can't learn this'). However, the examples above demonstrate that young children can indeed deal with conceptual rules. It is important to keep in mind that the introduction of conceptual explanations should only answer the playing child's needs and not the teacher's ambitions to teach children new concepts in play. Hence, in our view the decision to exclude or include conceptual rules should be based on psychological conditions with regard to children's needs, personal interests and actual level of cognitive development, and the type of pedagogical assistance a teacher can offer. In our own research we have been able to reconcile the introduction of abstract schematic representations into children's role play without destroying the play format (see van Oers, 2012b). Again it must be stressed that the introduction of conceptual rules and tools only makes sense if it is compatible with the play format of children's activity.
4. *Strategic rules*: these rules intend to improve the course of the activity as a whole, to create conditions for desired outcomes or to maintain the ongoing interactions. In children's role play, this can be frequently witnessed. For example, when deciding how to play 'family', who will be the mother, the father, the child, the baby? Or in children's decisions to step in and out of play for a moment of reflection on new ideas from the participating players, or for planning the activity, or to evaluate new impulses from others into the ongoing activity: is this still contributing to this activity in a playful way? When problems arise in the context of their role play, 5–7-year-old children often show the need to resolve them by negotiating with each other about the play, its goals and its rules. It has been demonstrated that this meta-communicative strategy can contribute to a better understanding of the play-theme (Williamson and Silvern, 1991) and often leads to intermediate agreements, planning and changes in the goals, tools and roles in the role play. Such spontaneous events of strategic acting may be supported by an adult, if requested by children.

Despite the important function of rules in cultural–historical activities, we should keep in mind that rules do not need to be verbalised. For the youngest children most of the rules are better described as tacit regularities that children maintain in their actions, without being able to verbalise them properly. This of course is not a strange phenomenon in human activities, as, for example, the speech activities of most people demonstrate regularities of this type. Nonetheless, they can use their language perfectly most of the time. The same is true for playing: children's activity may show regularities on a pre-verbalised level (like in manipulative play). Assisting children in their play is also educational in the sense that implicit spontaneous regularities can be made explicit and even formulated as rules by adults and more advanced peers. Introduction of new social, technical, conceptual or strategic rules in children's play is in essence not a matter of developmental age, but is based on the sense they make for answering children's needs as players of cultural practices, and on the help received from more knowledgeable others in applying the rules properly.

Viewing rules and children's ways of dealing with them in a context that also allows freedom of interpretation and organisation, opens up new perspectives on the continuity of play development throughout human ontogeny. All types of rules can be included in play activities at all developmental levels, provided proper needs have emerged in the activities and appropriate help is available.

Moreover, practices of conceptual learning in which children are likely to participate in later stages of development may also be formatted in playful ways. Children can playfully participate in diverse forms of cultural activities and, as a consequence, can participate in diverse forms of play. Play can continue throughout ontogeny and productive learning activity can also be organised in a playful way (van Oers, 2012b). This dimension in the development of playing is not consistently elaborated by Vygotskij and El'konin.

CONCLUSION

The cultural–historical perspective on play needs further empirical research in order to corroborate it and figure out more precisely how children, in their play, can learn how to deal with the freedom that they have as players.

In this chapter I have given a consideration of the meaning and consequences of a cultural–historical approach to play and proposed a theory of play based on the notion of activity format. On a theoretical level this cultural–historical activity approach to play can answer the critiques of Vygotskij's 'theory' of play (as set out in Lambert, 2000). Even more importantly, this cultural–historical activity approach shows a way out of the restrictive assumptions associated with developmentalism. The approach, however, does not argue against developmental processes per se. Development occurs as a historically conditioned process of growing complexity, and not as a manifestation of a universal natural pattern of stage-wise progress.

Play is here presented as essentially a cultural problem, based on value-laden decisions of educators and/or policy makers regarding what play is and how, where and when it should be implemented (see also van Oers, 2013). Remnants of developmentalism are still evident in Vygotskian interpretations of play as well, especially in research on the transitions of play to learning. In the present cultural–historical activity theory of play, it is obvious that play as a mode of cultural activity contains opportunities to learn and vice versa: learning activity can still (if permitted by the teacher) exhibit the quality of play (see van Oers, 2012b). The theory of play offered here can solve the problem of play and learning, and reconceptualises the question of the transition from play to learning into a question of learning within playful versions of human activities.

NOTE

1. There are different ways of spelling Russian names (using the Cyrillic alphabet) in Western alphabetic symbols. I have tried to be consistent in this by using the United Nations system (UN83) as a method of transliteration which does more justice to the actual Cyrillic spelling of Russian names. As a result, some names may now appear in a different form from the ones the reader may be familiar with (for example, Vygotsky v. Vygotskij or Luria v. Lurija). In cases of renowned publications (for example, Vygotsky, 1978) the spelling of the names has not been changed.

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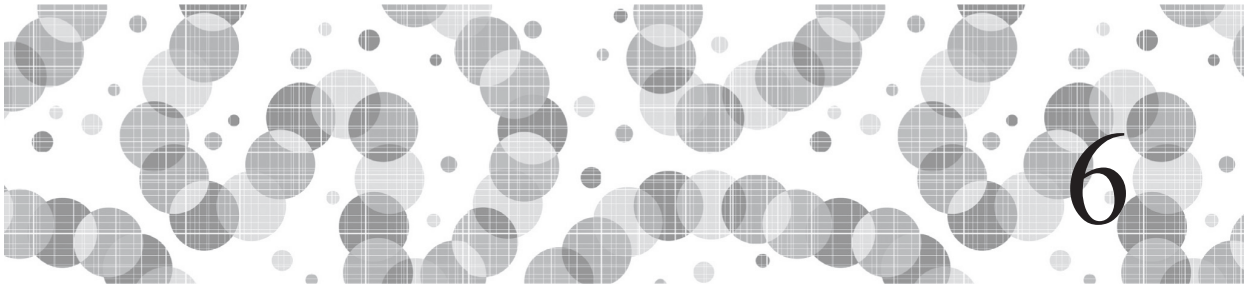
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6

Postcolonial and Anti-racist Approaches to Understanding Play

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw

INTRODUCTION

Developmental theory often forms the backbone both of early childhood education practices, especially in Western contexts, and of play-based approaches that are based on them. For instance, children's play is often depicted as a right of childhood and as the foundation for learning (Grieshaber and McArdle, 2010). In recent years, however, several authors (e.g., Lenz Taguchi, 2009; Olsson, 2009) have argued that a focus on developmental theories silences other ways of thinking about young children's play. Postdevelopmental perspectives in education reject the notion of universal stages of childhood or a universal child; they recognize diversity among children in terms of class, gender, 'race', sexuality, ethnicity, places of origin, abilities, and other social factors. In early childhood, these theories emphasize that the meanings of children's play cannot be fixed in any one context, and points of reference for locating meanings of their play cannot be seen as single or transcendent (Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 2007; Burman, 2008).

This chapter provides an overview of the use of postdevelopmental perspectives to understand young children's play; it identifies the key elements of this literature by tracing critical insights in relation to the intersection of play and racisms. The chapter's first section highlights how postdevelopmental perspectives emerge from a need to complexify understandings of children's play. The section introduces some of the earliest work on attending to racisms in early childhood education, through projects such as anti-bias and multicultural education, and briefly reviews the critiques to these approaches that emerged through postdevelopmental perspectives. The chapter's second section traces the primary arguments of anti-racist and postcolonial perspectives and shows how these theories expand and go beyond multicultural and anti-bias approaches to understanding children's play by unpacking how play reproduces dominant societal norms. Although not much has been written yet about anti-racist and

postcolonial perspectives as they relate to play, the scant published literature has many implications for play pedagogies, in particular for thinking about the colonizing aspects of children's play and how educators might intervene. The chapter concludes with a discussion of fertile future directions in which postdevelopmental perspectives on play might address issues of racism and ongoing colonialism. In particular, it highlights the potential of discursive–material perspectives to provide alternative ways to challenge the colonialisms encountered in early childhood education, and it notes the troubling marginalization of Indigenous knowledge in postcolonial literature.

EXTENDING THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: MULTICULTURAL AND ANTI-BIAS APPROACHES

Postdevelopmental perspectives on social justice respond to pioneering work in early childhood education on diversity and difference. As early as 1939, Clark and Clark investigated children's racial attitudes and demonstrated that young children are not color-blind or without race consciousness. Many subsequent early contributions in the field (Derman-Sparks and the ABC Task Force, 1989; Paley, 1979, 1997; Gonzalez-Mena, 1993) – and some recent ones that draw on their insights (Klein and Chen, 2001; Lane, 2008) – address the lack of debate about diversity issues in the field. For example, Derman-Sparks (and ABC Task Force, 1989; Derman-Sparks and Ramsey with Edwards, 2006) moved forward the discussions in early childhood education that assumed a universal child, without attention to racial or cultural identity. In her research in classrooms, she paid attention to children's racial identity (including white racial identity) and brought forward how racisms and historical constructions of whiteness are always present in classrooms and how they emerge in children's play. Her anti-bias approach is still influential today.

Gonzalez-Mena (1993) was another pioneer in the field who highlighted the importance of attending to cultural differences in early childhood education. Her work re-envisioned developmental understandings of play by showing that cultural differences matter. She noted, for example, that cultural differences may influence the amount of stimulation provided to children during play, the number of choices offered to children, and the adult role in children's play. In her book *Multicultural Issues in Child Care*, Gonzalez-Mena reports on an experiment she conducted. First, she records a scenario in a child care center that shows how infants and toddlers play during the day. She then asks a group of adults to view this scenario. The result is that the viewers react differently to what takes place in the scenario. Some adults in the study noted that the children seemed bored and did not have enough materials to play with. Others argued that there was too much going on for the children. Yet another group of adults thought that the environment and materials offered to the children to play was perfect. Gonzalez-Mena (1993) concludes that these three different reactions from the adults connect to their cultural values and beliefs. She writes,

> Some cultures wish to promote calm, placid styles of interaction and temperament, so they prefer less stimulating environments. They worry that the babies will get overstimulated in the exciting play and intense interactions if they aren't toned down. Some cultures value activity; others value stillness. Active cultures promote exploration and movement for infants because these activities help develop problem-solving skills (1993: 76).

Culture is here presented as a determinant of how children's play is approached and valued.

Paley (1979, 1997), by shifting the focus from culture to racism and, more specifically, to the invisibility of racism in discussions of children's play in the North American context, also changed how play pedagogies are perceived. Her ethnographic work shows that classrooms are important spaces for children to negotiate racial identities. More importantly, she helped her readers to challenge the invisibility of white identities in play encounters. In

The Girl with the Brown Crayon, for instance, Paley (1997) describes how she and the children spent an academic year exploring themes of race and identity through drawing and storytelling. The children and Paley reinvented ways to tell stories about themselves through children's books. Paley's work encouraged educators (e.g. Araujo and Strasser, 2003) to see children's play differently by paying attention to how children negotiate themes of cultural and racial belonging through their everyday play encounters. Araujo and Strasser describe a story from a classroom where a teacher used storytelling to address 'children's racial comments' and their 'misconceptions about race and skin color' (2003: 179). For instance, in order to respond to a child's comment that 'blacks are strangers,' the teacher 'created a problem-solving scenario to show that a stranger can include both black and white people' (178). By doing this, Araujo and Strasser argue, the teacher 'minimized the importance of skin color and focused instead on the understanding of the concept of strangers' (2003: 178).

Grugeon and Woods (1990) were education innovators who worked in the context of the United Kingdom. In *Educating All: Multicultural Perspectives*, they challenged the racial structures that support education and engaged with educators in understanding how racism works in classroom environments. Their research is significant because it made visible the importance of thinking about and challenging racism in classroom environments and emphasized that teachers have a role in these processes. Grugeon and Woods brought teachers into discussions of racism. In doing so, they acknowledged that educational institutions are political spaces.

Another important text, *The Early Years: Laying the Foundations for Racial Equality* (Siraj-Blatchford, 1994), also recognized early childhood classrooms as political spaces. Its author suggested that educators are obliged to understand how racism emerges through children's engagements with each other. Here is a powerful example that Siraj-Blatchford used to open the book:

> Six three year olds sat around a table in a large nursery school in a shire county playing with playdough. A mother sat with them talking to individual children about their 'work', explaining, encouraging and taking joy in the children's learning and talk. Jennifer was going to be four years old the following week. She began to enthuse about her forthcoming birthday party. Mark, Sarah, Kylie and Nathan were going to be sent invitations to attend her special day. Nisha, a child of South Asian parentage was not mentioned. Kylie reminded Jennifer that Nisha had not been invited. Looking at Nisha, Jennifer said, 'My mummy doesn't want any blackies in the house' (1994: 3).

Siraj-Blatchford discussed how teachers can deal with racist incidents such as this one, how to create an anti-racist curriculum that would prevent these kinds of incidents, and how to involve families in anti-racist work. Importantly, Siraj-Blatchford argued that policies, legislation, and training also need attention in successful anti-racist pedagogies, and provided examples of how these might be developed to combat racisms.

One of the most comprehensive recent accounts of anti-bias pedagogies is the work of Lane (2008). In her text *Young Children and Racial Justice*, Lane outlines why an anti-bias approach like the one Derman-Sparks put forward needs to be implemented and how racial equality can be addressed in Early Years settings. Lane describes resources for a wide range of levels – from government to educators – and suggests that the kinds of resources available to children for play activities (for instance, dolls with a range of skin colors, hair textures, and physical features; photographs of people from various parts of the world; books that reflect a multicultural society) are important in creating anti-discriminatory classrooms. However, Lane emphasizes that play resources need to be coupled with discussions among teachers and with children. For example, she states, 'Alone [dolls and books] cannot counter racism – talking about issues is likely to be more effective in changing attitudes than having resources reflecting our multicultural society which no-one plays with' (2008: 204).

Rethinking Multicultural and Anti-bias Approaches

The idea of accepting other cultures and embracing multiculturalism changed discussions in early childhood education and altered how we view children's play pedagogies. The discourses of multicultural and anti-bias approaches to education have not gone without careful scrutiny, however. Several scholars have put forward critiques that extend how we perceive play and that situate multicultural and anti-bias approaches within the context of governance (e.g., Rhedding-Jones, 2002; Vandenbroeck, 2004, 2007). These scholars suggest that multicultural and anti-bias approaches do not go far enough to challenge developmental norms while simultaneously considering how pedagogies are part of governing and colonizing strategies. For example, although multicultural and anti-bias approaches were introduced to preserve the integrity of diverse cultures, some cultural studies scholars (e.g. Giroux, 1993) argue that the actual effects of multicultural and anti-bias interventions lead in the direction of assimilation. Critiques of assimilation 'interrogate the structural and subjective workings of normative whiteness' (Robinson and Jones-Diaz, 2006: 66) embedded in multicultural practices.

A critique of multiculturalism as approached in early childhood education is that often it is framed in essentialist and universal views of culture and development. These views erase complexity and heterogeneity within, across, and among children, creating 'others' through categories such as 'immigrant,' 'refugee,' 'newcomers,' and 'indigenous' and pathologizing these children and families through vulnerability discourses (Robinson and Jones-Diaz, 2006; Vandenbroeck, 2007).

Another area of contestation is how culture and race are conceptualized in anti-bias and multicultural approaches (Adair and Doucet, this volume). The approach to using culture as an analytic tool of interpretation holds several dangers. For example, if we interpret other ways of thinking about children and their education as a matter of cultural difference, we risk seeing the 'other' as a threat to cohesion (Inda, 2000; Worley, 2005).

Others have argued that multicultural and anti-bias approaches ignore constitutive social relations of power (e.g. Becher, 2004). While the anti-bias approach has been recognized for its consideration of power relations (for instance, anti-bias educators are encouraged to recognize that institutional and societal structures create and maintain injustices such as sexisms and racisms; Derman-Sparks and ABC Task Force, 1989), later researchers posited that this analysis of power relations did not go far enough; they focused their work on micro-interactions, complexities, and contradictions of power dynamics (Robinson and Jones-Diaz, 2006; Vandenbroeck, 2007). In the words of Vandenbroeck:

> Power relations *are* acknowledged in the anti-bias approach and this has been a significant evolution, compared with the previous multicultural discourse. However, they are often described in a dichotomous way, defining victims (ethnic minorities) and perpetrators (majority), resulting in (with all due respect) sloganeering that racism affects the (white) offenders as much as its (black) victims. This dualistic model does not allow us deep analysis of how power relations occur, nor does it help us in dealing with racism among ethnic minorities or in seeing how specific (economically poor) families – both black and white – are marginalized or subject to institutional discriminations. The framework fails in analyzing the subtleties and reciprocities of power relations (2007: 26).

The anti-bias approach itself has been the target of much of the critique of multicultural approaches. For example, scholars such as Vandenbroeck (2007) and Rhedding-Jones (2002) note that the guidelines proposed for educators in the anti-bias curriculum tend to be individually focused. In other words, children's attitudes are the main focus of intervention. Many of the anti-bias curriculum's goals (for example 'nurture each child's construction of a knowledgeable, confident self-concept and group identity'; 'promote each child's comfortable, empathetic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds')

center on conflict avoidance or resolution. Derman-Sparks' intention was to teach children the skills to take a stand for social justice by seeing another person's point of view. However, if educators believe that young children are not developmentally ready to learn these skills, they sometimes end up teaching children to be polite and to avoid conflict, rather than getting into another person's shoes to understand about fairness.

Despite the limitations of the anti-bias curriculum, Derman-Sparks' contribution to the field remains important because it brought discussions of racisms to the field. Without such pioneering work, the anti-racist and postcolonial perspectives that 'reconsider the theoretical framings of the work on diversity and equity in early childhood education' (Vandenbroeck, 2007: 27) would not have been possible. The following section explores anti-racist and postcolonial perspectives.

POSTDEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVES: ATTENDING TO COLONIALISMS

This section explores how postdevelopmental theories have been employed to interpret children's play, with an emphasis on anti-racist and postcolonial perspectives. For clarity's sake, these different lenses are presented one at a time. However, they are not singular approaches; they can and do work together to enrich understandings of play, and they are always intersecting with other social factors, such as gender and sexuality (see Blaise, this volume). What these perspectives have in common is that they decenter developmental interpretations of play and bring a semiotic account of how children's negotiations during play are linked to governance. Thus they allow educators and researchers to challenge the norms embedded in developmental perspectives and interrupt social injustices that are reproduced in children's play. This work draws on poststructural theoretical perspectives, specifically on the work on discipline and power proposed by philosopher Michel Foucault and developed by early childhood scholars such as Cannella (1997). These perspectives challenge both the notion of the rational child who naturally plays and the idea that play is an important and innocent characteristic of childhood. They also link children's play to colonial projects such as nation-building.

Anti-racist Perspectives and Play

Anti-racist theories depart from the assumption that racism can be understood merely in relation to 'race.' Race is viewed instead as intersecting or interlocking with other markers of inequality, such as gender, nationality, migration, class, sexuality, ability, language, and so on (hooks, 1984; Anthias and Lloyd, 2002; Razack, 2002). Anti-racist scholars use the terms *racialization* and *racialized* to move away from an unexamined conception of race as an essential category toward an analytical view of assumptions about 'race' and how these assumptions are fundamental to our understanding of people and their cultures (Hall, 1997; Ali, 2006). Anti-racist perspectives also pay specific attention to the racial normalization and categorization that is part of society (MacNaughton, 2005). Goldberg (1993) argued that:

> racialized discourse does not consist simply in descriptive representations of other. It includes a set of hypothetical premises about human kinds … and about the differences between them (both mental and physical). It involves a class of ethical choices. … And it incorporates a set of institutional regulations, directions, and pedagogical models (47).

Anti-racist approaches differ from anti-bias and multicultural perspectives in that they re-envision identity as rational and unified (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994) and simultaneously question the often-assumed construction of racialized children as 'vulnerable' and 'at risk' when compared to the civilized, superior, white Euro-American citizen (MacNaughton and Davis, 2009). Instead of understanding racialized identities as natural

and fixed, anti-racist approaches (drawing from poststructural theoretical frameworks) see them as active, productive, ongoing, and complex. Identity is seen to be socially constructed, mobile, multiple, and always in a process of formation in relation to the social context and to others in the lived environment; identity emerges through discourse and representation (Hall, 1990, 1997; Bhabha, 1994). With this approach, children are viewed as crafting mixed identities within the cultural boundaries of their communities and nation (Taylor, 2008).

In early childhood education, an anti-racist perspective complicates and interrogates 'race,' as shown in the example of research conducted by MacNaughton and Davis provided later in this chapter. It makes visible the effects of racialization, which can be understood as a possible effect of encounters with 'racial' difference. In this way, the discursive and material processes by which social significance is attached to categories of difference in ways that are potentially divisive and discriminatory are made visible in play encounters. These categories include differences in skin and hair color, language and accent, clothing, religious markers, citizenship status, performance and intelligence measures, and inferred 'personality' traits, among others. (An example drawn from Taylor [2008] can be found below in the section 'Postcolonial Perspectives and Play.')

Borrowing from anti-racist theories, early childhood scholars began to critically reflect on the ways in which young children's and educators' racialized identities are constantly negotiated within different and oppositional discourses in their play. Further, they suggested that unpacking the discourses at work in children's play (e.g. Robinson and Jones-Diaz, 2006) – both between and among teachers and in the classroom with young children – is an important part of creating socially just pedagogical possibilities. This work brings to educators' attention the need to challenge racisms in the classroom. For example, when encounters with social injustices emerge in children's play, it is the role of the educator to deconstruct dominant understandings with children, such as binary constructions of race (MacNaughton, 2005). Through this approach, anti-racist scholars are unmasking the power relations within which discourses of tolerance and acceptance of difference operate through children's play (Robinson and Jones-Diaz, 2006; Taylor, 2007; MacNaughton and Davis, 2009). They also engage with children's play as a way to actively resist racisms and other structural inequities (MacNaughton, 2005; Pacini-Ketchabaw and Berikoff, 2008; Taylor, 2008).

Anti-racist scholars – and particularly anti-racist feminist scholars – bring forward the importance of critical reflection (as a critical literacy of 'race,' racisms, anti-racisms, and racialization). Lee and Lutz, for example, point to 'the need for critical readings of how power operates and how it transforms, and reforms, social relations, through racial categories and consciousness' (2005: 4). This need is just as critical when interpreting and analyzing children's play. The examples reviewed below engage with this critical literacy of race, racisms, and racialization in classrooms.

A group of scholars in Australia examining the social construction of whiteness and considering the critique of multiculturalism have done extensive work with young children by exposing racial power games and the reconfiguration of these games in early childhood classrooms (see MacNaughton, Davis, and Smith, 2009). These researchers explored the race hierarchies and the dynamics of race relations that are commonplace in young children's play encounters. Specifically, they observed how children grouped themselves during play times, the characters they chose to act out during free play, the roles different children chose to take during play, and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that were evident during play. Another interesting method they employed was ethnographic feedback – actively seeking feedback from children on the data they gathered. Through this process, the children were able to elaborate, correct,

or fill in how they negotiate race in their daily play encounters.

Researchers in many countries (for example The Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Denmark, South Africa) use persona dolls to engage children in play. The use of persona dolls with children has a long history that began in the USA in the 1950s with preschool teacher Kay Taus (a member of the Anti-Bias Task Force, see Derman-Sparks and Anti-Bias Task Force, 1989), who describes the dolls as follows:

> While Persona Dolls can look just like the regular dramatic play dolls, they're different because they have individual identities just like the children in the classroom do. They have a family, they live in a certain town, in a particular house or apartment building, they have certain friends, and these things don't change. The individual identities for the dolls are created at the beginning of the year after the teacher knows all of the children in his/her classroom so that some of the dolls can reflect the physical characteristics, identities, lifestyles, and circumstances of the children in the classroom (Taus, 1987, cited in Brown, 2001).

The hope is that the dolls raise children's awareness of racisms and encourage them to challenge racisms in the classroom (Brown, 2001; Jesuvadian and Wright, 2011).

In the United Kingdom, Connolly (1998) conducted an ethnographic study with young children in a primary school in a predominantly poor, urban, multicultural, working-class community to explore how children's identities are shaped through gender and race discourses. His analysis, which draws on poststructural and anti-racist lenses, considers political, social, and economic dimensions and traces how they relate and find expression in children's everyday encounters. Connolly explores how ethnicity, racism, gender, sexuality, and class intersect in complex ways in the social worlds of five- and six-year-old children to shape specific identities. His study addresses 'the active and diverse ways in which [young children] make use of discourses on "race" and 'the significance of "race" in the development of young children's gender identities' (5). In his findings, Connolly describes, in great detail, the multiple ways in which discourses of 'race' have an impact on children's lives.

For example, in one of his case studies Connolly speaks of the production of racialized masculine identities among Black boys and the constant shifting and negotiations that take place in the production of these identities. This particular case study on the school playground reveals how, through play, a group of Black boys develops and negotiates gendered and racialized identities in relation to other Black boys, white children, and girls. From his observations of, and conversations about, what takes place in the school playground, Connolly has learned that 'the field of masculine peer-group relations provides one of the central dynamics, not only for the appropriation and reproduction of racist discourses but also for their contingent and contested nature' (1998: 111). Although Connolly did not address play specifically, many of his findings have implications for what to pay attention to when observing how children play. Educators need to become vigilant to how racist and gendered discourses might creep into children's conversations in play encounters. Connolly's research unmasks the innocence of children's play and situates it within political discourses rather than in the children themselves.

Postcolonial Perspectives and Play

Viruru (2005) notes that research into children's play needs to contest and question the power relations embedded in the universal categorization of all children under the normative gaze of Western neoliberal models of childhood development and care. Postcolonial perspectives offer possibilities to acknowledge and resist both these power relations and other unjust effects of colonialism. Postcolonial theories make visible and confront the oppressive potentials that may be hidden or subtle in taken-for-granted understandings of play (Cannella and Viruru, 2004; Viruru, 2005). Postcolonial theories encourage interpretations that embrace 'divergent

thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes' (Viruru, 2005: 23).

Cannella and Viruru (2004) outline how play becomes entangled with patriarchal colonialisms in Western societies:

> The idealized version of childhood that is represented through play as natural and normal perpetuates the Western dominant ideologies that are hoped to ultimately prepare children to be like the more 'advanced' Western male adult.... Play represents the biases and values of Western societies that privilege explorations with objects and monocultural notions of progress. The acceptance of play as a universal construct applicable to all creates a corporate structure of normalization and, consequently, labels for those considered abnormal because they cannot or choose not to play (108).

Viruru's (2001) ethnographic study in a nursery school in urban India questions the universal notion that children's play is a natural phenomenon. Further, Viruru argues that norms on play 'exported' from Western societies to other countries undervalue and undermine (or colonize) other sources of knowledge about raising and educating young children. She questions the grand narrative of play and challenges the belief that Euro-Western play pedagogies are superior to other pedagogies.

Scholars working with Indigenous knowledges (Ritchie and Rau, 2010) have also employed postcolonial perspectives to shift discussions of pedagogies in early childhood education. From their research in New Zealand, Ritchie and Rau argue that colonial perspectives based on Euro-Western ideas about childhood invisibilize, other, and silence Maori perspectives about childhood. Although they do not specifically address play, they outline a Maori approach to early childhood education that is not solely based on Western developmental notions that privilege play as the way in which children learn. The major implication from their work is that researchers and educators need to question how play pedagogies based on developmental Euro-Western norms might silence other ways of knowing and being.

Importantly, postcolonial theories enable critical enquiry into the effects of colonization in the present. They provide a framework from which to understand the lingering impacts of European colonialisms in terms of persistent social inequities that are divided along racial lines (Pacini-Ketchabaw and Berikoff, 2008; Taylor, 2008; Ritchie and Rau, 2010). The relevance of these ideas in play theory and pedagogies has not yet been realized. Much of the work with postcolonial theories in early childhood education has been conducted in postcolonial spaces such as India, North America, New Zealand, and Australia. This section reviews research that addresses pedagogical issues which may be relevant to the theorization and operationalization of play.

An example of how a postcolonial lens might be used to complexify understandings of children's play is the work of Pacini-Ketchabaw and colleagues in Canada. The focus of her participatory action research has been on how early childhood educators can employ postcolonial strategies to uncover the dynamics of racialization in their classrooms and actively challenge racism. In this research, early childhood educators are engaged in developing 'new' languages to understand their practices and to actively challenge dominant colonialist discourses that emerge during play (Pacini-Ketchabaw and Berikoff, 2008; Pacini-Ketchabaw and Nxumalo, 2010). For example, the 58 educators in the study engaged in multiple readings of the observations of children's play they collected from their classrooms to consider events from developmental and multicultural perspectives as well as through other frameworks, including postcolonial perspectives (Pacini-Ketchabaw and Berikoff, 2008).

In one case, when the educators read an example of children's dialogue from an anti-racist perspective, they realized that racism was part of the children's everyday play and that further action and vigilance were required in the ways they interpreted children's play.

For example, they decided to challenge the violence inherent in colonialism and the operation of power that created racialized and colonial hierarchies in their classrooms (Pacini-Ketchabaw and Berikoff, 2008). Shifting how they read the dialogue allowed them to realize that everyone was implicated in racism, and that hiding instances of racism and colonialism in their classrooms was not going to eliminate it. In this way the group has opened up a dialogue about racisms and colonialisms, allowing for more opportunities to learn how to counter them in practice.

Using postcolonial lenses, Taylor (2008) conducted an ethnographic study of children's play in Australia in which she focused on the links between macro social processes and the micro politics of children's play. Paying attention to children's identity performances, Taylor showed that children's play is not innocent; children 'can and do recognize cultural difference as gendered and as racialized' (2007: 147). Taylor notes that when children play, they 'are able to recognize the links between cultural diversity, power and belonging, and can be cognizant players in negotiating the cultural politics of identity' (147). For instance, she recounts a moment of play in the sandpit where a four-year-old boy who had just arrived in Australia from the Middle East attempted to join a group of white boys in their play. The Middle Eastern boy was rejected several times and, in one instance, he was told by one of the white boys that 'he cannot play with them because he does not talk like them' and his skin is dark brown (2008: 201). Taylor explains how this moment is 'an unambiguously racialized struggle over belonging,' not only in the sandpit where the boys are playing, but also in the early childhood center they all attend and in relation to the Australian nation:

> Not only did the children share an understanding of their border's selective gatekeeping function, but they had no trouble in articulating their respective racialized subject positions in terms of prevailing Australian discourses of core white and marginal nonwhite ('brown') cultural belongings (201).

Through her illuminating examples of how children's conversations during play are political, Taylor (2007, 2008) challenges notions of the innocence of childhood. Children's play needs to be considered within the context of nation-building discourses that position whiteness as superior and normal.

CONCLUSION

The postdevelopmental research that this chapter has reviewed can make significant contributions to understanding how racisms and racialization matter in children's play encounters. One important contribution these scholars have made is their challenge of developmental explanations of racialization. They have acknowledged the invisibility of colonial pasts, presents, and futures in children's play. Overall, this body of work has focused attention on the role of discourse in creating social injustices, and how they emerge during children's play encounters. Through postdevelopmental perspectives, scholars can unpack dominant discourses that are present in children's play, making visible how power circulates, how it regulates what counts as desirable, how it shapes what is spoken through language, and how it shapes racialized subjectivities. For example, anti-racist and postcolonial perspectives on children's play enable critical enquiry into the effects of colonization in the present. They provide a framework from which to understand the lingering impacts of European colonialisms in terms of persistent social inequities that always emerge in children's play. They also highlight the ways in which negotiations of race emerge in children's play, decentering developmental multicultural perspectives and bringing a semiotic account of how children's negotiations with 'race' emerge through daily play encounters. Yet very little has been done on these accounts, as this chapter has shown. More research that directly tackles play pedagogies is needed.

The introduction of discourse analyses of children's play has made the field differently

aware of the politics of early childhood education, and is creating spaces for thinking about and acting toward social justice in children's play. Emerging discursive–materialist perspectives that pay attention to the 'more-than-human' (see for example Lenz Taguchi and Blaise, this volume – the latter for an explanation of materialist perspectives) are expanding and adding to the discursive analysis reviewed here. However, only a few analyses have been made so far of the intersection of materialist and postcolonial theories (Pacini-Ketchabaw and Nxumalo, 2010; Taylor and Giugni, 2012; Taylor, Blaise, and Giugni, 2013; Nxumalo, 2012). Much more needs to be done to bring discourse and materialist ontologies of race (Saldanha, 2006) into early childhood education and, specifically, to address children's play. In the context of early childhood education and play, this material-discursive conceptualization of the workings of colonialisms might provide new trajectories for research that interprets and analyzes the negotiations of 'race' and racialization in children's play differently.

Accounts of children's play that draw from postcolonial and materialist perspectives have the potential to be realized as decolonizing pedagogies that go beyond mere critique. While critique is important, it is not enough for the realization of pedagogies that are socially just.

This chapter has not addressed Indigenous perspectives on play; however, it is important to note that postcolonial perspectives on play need further investigation in relation to Indigenous knowledges. The marginalization of Indigenous knowledges in postcolonial literature on play is troubling. Although important and powerful work that uses both Indigenous knowledges and postcolonial perspectives exists in early childhood education (e.g. Viruru, 2005; Ritchie, 2012; Ritchie and Rau, n.d.), much more research is needed. Thus an important avenue for future research is attending to how Indigenous voices continue to be marginalized in the research literature that addresses racialization and colonialism in relation to play.

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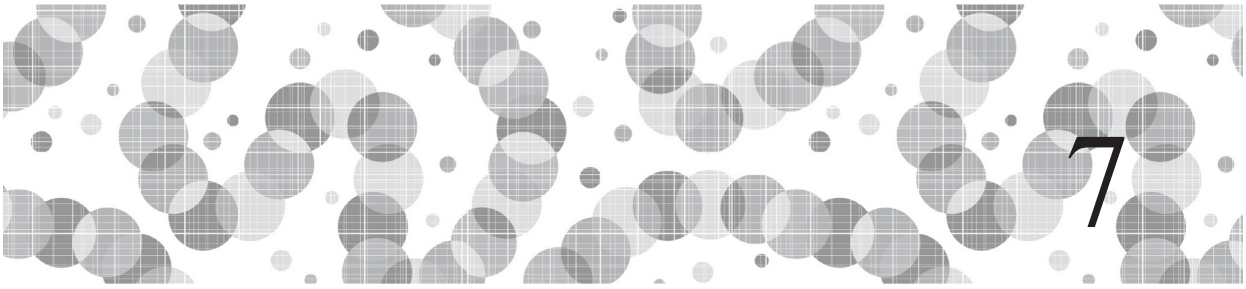
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7

New Materialisms and Play

Hillevi Lenz Taguchi

INTRODUCTION

> Imagine a sandbox full of sand and a very young child standing there in front of a red plastic bucket. The child's hand is grabbing a handful of sand and then slowly letting it go above the bucket. The light wind carries the grains, spreading them out across the surface of the sandbox in a wider area: the child's eyes closely observing the glittering flow of sand, swirling in the wind and catching rays of sun: the grains spreading, dancing, and gently descending towards the sandpit surface to become part of the greater whole. Some, however, gets swallowed up by the shadows inside the bucket (Adapted from Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010: 527).

What goes on in this sandbox play? Who is playing with whom? Who or what transforms in this event? Who or what, in this event, has power to learn, to play: to act? Most of us, without hesitating, would state that this is an image of a child playing with sand. Although the text above states that we should imagine 'a sandbox full of sand' and then describes the play of sand with the wind and sunlight, our perceptual style and habits of seeing as childhood researchers naturally centre the child (Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, 2010). As a consequence, our research questions will be formulated in ways that make the child an active agent, playing with the sand and bucket as passive tools. These materialities have, however, in some learning theories been understood as crucial artefacts for the child's learning (e.g. Kress et al., 2001). In some of these theories there is an important sense in which the material world around the human subject affords it with possibilities of action; for instance, buttons for pushing or sand for throwing or constructing (Gibson, 1977). Materiality has even been understood more or less explicitly as an 'active pedagogue' itself in the Reggio Emilia approach (Reggio Children, 2008), as it has in the Montessori approach preceding it. However, human intention and perception (a human object-directedness), or human discursive language (as in the constructivist, sociocultural and social constructionist theories), are still the only possible driving forces of transformation and learning in these theoretically

informed ways of reading the image of sandbox play. Moreover, there is an ontological separateness between fixed and passive tools in the material world, contrary to agentic and transformable human beings in these theories and practices of learning. Hence, in the reality produced by this dominating constructivist, cognitivist or social constructionist research, only humans are granted agency and power to act, to learn and to transform. This is because of the ontological underpinnings – the nature of being – that these dominating theories rely on.

The 'material turn' in the social sciences and humanities research has, since at least 20 years back, severely challenged this way of understanding reality that puts human beings at the centre of knowledge-production and hierarchically above the rest of the world (Åsberg et.al., 2011; Hird and Roberts, 2011). As the material turn has come to our awareness in the field of childhood studies, a number of researchers of diverse theoretical directions claim to 'have already' considered the impact of material reality in their accounts.[1] Others, however, have claimed that thus far, material that can make us understand children's play and learning in new and transformative ways has been neglected and not considered. It is in terms of such a proposed neglect of the material that Karen Barad (2007) writes:

> Why are language and culture granted their own agency and historicity, while matter is figured as passive and immutable? … Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that doesn't seem to matter anymore is matter (132).

It is in line with such a radical, still emerging and quickly growing response to the 'material turn' in childhood studies that this chapter suggests reading the image of sandbox play in ways that produce another kind of reality, where matter is seen to matter in more forceful ways.

1. It suggests imagining the sand and bucket as equally playing with the child's hand, body, eyes and perceptive and productive bodymind.[2]
2. It suggests granting agency to the sand and bucket in their interactions with the child, its body and discourses of sandbox play.
3. It suggests viewing the bodymind of the child, the sandbox, sand, bucket, as well as discourses and notions of play and learning, as playing with each other in a relational and horizontal field of play.
4. It suggests that humans and non-humans are to be understood as performative agents that have power to act and transform each other and themselves.
5. It suggests that the materiality of the sand can equally transform the notions, conceptions and emotions of the child, as much as the child can transform the sand.

This chapter examines why early childhood teachers and researchers might want to read the sandbox play in this way, and what we might learn about children's play and learning if we make matter *matter* in a more significant way; as entangled with human discourse and human bodyminds. This is something quite different from the 'old' materialisms of various critical studies based on Marxist theorizing, which is also why this line of research has been referred to as 'new materialisms', based on some decisive ontological shifts (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2011, 2012). This ontological shift means granting matter agency in what is understood as an interdependent relationship between discourse and matter: that is, what is called the co-constitutiveness of materiality and discourse, giving rise to concepts such as the 'sociomaterial', the 'materialdiscursive' and 'natureculture' as relations of coexistence (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2008).

In the field of play and learning, an ontology that does not put human beings in a taken-for-granted human-centred (anthropocentric) position, as separate from matter and as the only possible agent, can mean devoted engagement in issues of children's relations to the more-than-human world of animals, geographies, material places and ecologies (Taylor, Pacini-Ketchabaw and Blaise, 2012). It can also mean that research on play and learning can pay greater attention to the

performative agency of different matter and the environment that will make us think differently about how we organize and perform childhood practices. The granting of agency to matter, the non-human, or what can be understood as the 'minoritarian' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) produces a reality that has strong ethical and political implications. These not only concern children's participation, inclusion and the enforcement of children's power to act in early childhood settings but also concern the participating force of non-humans, matter and environments that take equal part in the production of our 'common-worlds' (Taylor and Giugni, 2012). Hence, children's power to act can be increased in attentiveness to their becoming-with more-than-human agents in our childhood practices.

The next section provides a brief historical background to the 'material turn' in order to understand the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this research. In the second part of this chapter, a review of some of the central studies of this turn is provided to show what kind of knowledge this research can produce, for whom and for what, and what the future possibilities might be in this still emergent research.

THE 'MATERIAL TURN'

The 'turn to the material' in the social and educational sciences can be understood to build on and work in continuity from critical, feminist, postcolonial, queer and intersectional theoretical accounts that developed in the 1970s and into the present (Lykke, 2010). If critical pedagogy can be understood to have contributed to granting children stronger social agency in the 1970s (James and James, 2008), and if feminist theory has granted women the agency to think and act on equal terms with men, the 'material turn' is a post-humanist (Braidotti, 2013) line of theorizing that, for reasons of ethics, sustainability and equality, grants agency to non-humans and the more-than-human world, in order for all of these agents to live better together (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2008). These new theories and philosophies of materialisms have far-reaching transdisciplinary characters, cutting through disciplines from the natural, technical and computer sciences, as well as the social and human sciences (Åsberg et al., 2011).

What is new in these theories can be conceived in the shift of ontology and concepts, such as the shift from a transcendental ontology to a relational ontology and the shift from the concept of interaction to intra-action. Whereas a transcendental ontology aspires to know or search for a lost origin, truth, law or meaning, understood to be independent from and transcending human worldly experiences, a relational ontology is constituted by inter-relations, interdependencies and coexistences of meaning and matter. Only human subjects or human language can be the agent of change in the epistemologies that build on transcendental ontologies, as is the case in constructivist and social constructionist epistemologies. In a relational ontology, difference is the condition of the world's continuous becomings, where humans and non-humans continuously become different in themselves in their interrelations (Deleuze, 1994; Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2011). This has crucial consequences for the new materialist epistemologies. Knowledge, in the humanist and social sciences, cannot only be derived through representations in human language (or meaning-making discourse) produced in human interactions. Instead, knowledge is produced in *intra*-actions that take place in sociomaterial and materialdiscursive relations – that is, in between humans and non-humans, discourse and matter, as relations of porosity and interdependence, where the respective agents have no fixed and inherent border (Barad, 2007). It also means that intention and agency can no longer be understood as owned and produced by human agents only, but rather as something that is dispersed and distributed to many diverse agents of different materialities and that is co-produced and thus emerges as a consequence of their intra-actions (Barad, 2007).

Let us briefly turn to the sandbox play to exemplify the consequence of this turn to a relational ontology. The child's power to act in this image is expanded in an event of becoming-with the sand, the wind and the sun (Haraway, 2008). This posthumanist notion of becoming-with differs in important ways from how the still dominant humanist philosophical tradition understands being and becoming. In dominant thinking, the child's becoming is understood to be a state of lack in a process of becoming the ideal of a transcendental humanist subject and thus a complete human being and responsible citizen (Lee, 2005; Prout, 2005). Being constitutes an outcome of the idea of a perfect development of the child, where becoming refers only to the process leading up to that end state, as in any developmentally appropriate or constructivist-learning study of research. Contrary to such a humanist (and transcendent) understanding, the posthumanist notion of becoming-with constitutes an ontological turn in that it questions the notion of being, the given, stable, detached subject of a specific identity with distinctive borders in relation to other beings of identity. Instead all becomings are understood as interdependent and intertwined and thus without fixed boundaries. Rather, they are permeable and porous, in communication and mutually transforming in this relation, but in different ways, with different force, intensity and speed; because each agent has its own different style of becoming, as Deleuze (1988) writes. The notion of becoming-with not only disrupts and destabilizes the asymmetrical power-relations in some central binaries but also blurs them altogether. This goes for binaries such as humans/non-humans; adults/children; language/matter; culture/nature, but also the Self/the Other, white/black, male/female and masculine/feminine.

When new materialists argue that materiality has been neglected, this is a critique not only of what is understood as an overemphasis on the human subject of humanism but also of an overemphasized focus on the constituting forces of language and meaning-making discourse, which has been the focus of social constructionist, poststructuralist and queer studies for the past 15 years (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008). Thus, the new materialists would argue that both of these epistemological accounts neglect materiality – understanding matter either as fixed tools or backdrops for human agents (humanism), or as passive culturally constructed materiality or artefacts, produced by discursive practices (social constructionism). Although the latter theories focus on discourses, norms and practices and what has been understood as subjectless forces and power production, the focus remains on how humans are discursively constituted and how human discourse constitutes and transforms the world – and matter (Braidotti, 2013). Hence, matter is not understood as being productive of agentic or constitutive force in social constructionist and discursive theories, which also means that matter cannot be understood as a force in the production of meaning and discourse (Braidotti, 2013; Latour, 2013). How materiality indeed becomes a productive force in children's meaning making is a crucial aspect in new materialisms studies of children's play and learning (Lenz Taguchi, 2010).

REVISITING THE SANDBOX

In recalling the sandbox play, the habitual style of seeing impels us to see an independent child with agency, intentionally grabbing hold of some sand and letting it go to observe what happens (humanism). In a social constructionist way of producing knowledge, we understand the image instead in terms of the child being produced by meaning-making (discursive) practices of playing with sand. The child is simply trying to figure out how to play with the sand in relation to norms and established practices of playing in a sandbox. Discourses on age and gender might also intersect with those on play, and regulate how girls and boys of different ages are understood to play with sand differently. It is the child who has the discursive ability to transform something in

this event, not the sand or the bucket. Therefore, both the humanist and social constructionist way of reading this image reduces the materiality of the sand and bucket to tools of human play and learning. Ontologically, the sand and the child are understood not only as detached from each other but also in an asymmetrical power relationship, where only the child is granted (discursive) agency to act, transform, play and learn. Hence, the social constructionist way of reading the image does not manage to transgress the subject/object and discourse/matter binary divides (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Braidotti, 2013; Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2011).

In a new materialist reading of the image, the glittering sand and the child are in a co-constitutive relationship. The child cannot thinkfeel (perceive) the beauty of sand swirling and shining in the wind and sunlight *without* these particular grains of sand, the wind and the sunlight. And the grains of sand cannot be grabbed, tossed in the air, rearranged or reflect sunshine as they are dropped from the hand of the child without the child and its discursively inscribed actions, the wind and the sun. The sand cannot swirl around without the wind either, independently of the human child. Mutual transformations, thus becomings-with, are produced among all these agents in their intra-actions. In the chain of events, human discursive thinking is entangled somewhere along the line as well. To state it simply: the sand is affected by and affects the child; and the child (and its' discursively inscribed perceptions) affects and is affected by the sand (Deleuze, 1988). Barad (2007: 152) summarizes this relation when stating that neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior: 'the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity'. To repeat, and to conclude this section; ontologically, nothing can exist on its own: a body cannot pre-exist its interaction with other matter (Barad, 2007).

'MATERIAL TURN' RESEARCH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDIES

The research questions that guide new materialist research have the aim of studying how discourse and matter are co-productive in activities of play and learning where children intra-act with other humans and the more-than-human material world in the 'common-worlds' of early childhood spaces. Thus, the research reviewed for this chapter will focus only on studies that put to work a relational ontology where matter is granted (co-productive) agency in its intra-activity with other matter, human discourse and human bodymind agents. The studies picked for this review should be understood as important in relation to what they are trying to do and produce in terms of knowledge, as they represent different kinds of research focus, transdisciplinary research or new experimental methodological practices.

In terms of methodological issues, the review will show that new materialist analysis can be understood in terms of producing postinterpretivist analysis (St. Pierre, 2010). This means that the researcher does not seek to interpret the meaning of data or understand reality as something separate from the researcher to be studied at a distance. Rather, the researcher acknowledges how she or he is already a part of the reality studied. It is, as Barad (2007: 185) writes, a 'study of practices of knowing in being', where different agents in reality are 'trying to make themselves intelligible to each other', including the researcher her-/himself. In the studies reviewed below there are examples of, for instance, how a researcher discovers that her own researching female body becomes a part of children's play and gendered explorations of their subjectivities (Blaise, 2013). The challenge for the new materialist researcher is how to consider the agency of the material in the production of knowledge in the methodological practices of collecting data and doing analysis (Lenz Taguchi, 2012). This kind of postinterpretivist research constitutes something new, in relation to the discursive

and social constructionist research paradigms of reading data from different perspectives or doing multiple readings from different discursive standpoints or positionings in the data, but it is also inclusive of and crucially dependent on what has been learnt from poststructural theorizing and research.

Becomings-with Preschool Classrooms, Material Things, Food and Music

Karin Hultman's (2011) study extends feminist poststructural enquiry by exploring young children's constructions of gendered subjectivity in preschool classrooms to show that they are not just shaped and constituted by performative discourses, but rather co-constituted by matter and discourse in complex networks. These networks include and grant strong and forceful agentic qualities to the classroom itself, the furniture and material objects for play and learning. Hultman's analytical tools are drawn from a mix of Bruno Latour's (2005, 2013) 'Actor Network Theory' and Karen Barad's theorizing illustrated above. By analysing two short memory stories told by grown-up women, Hultman shows how children are in significant relations with non-human matter that acts, performs and produces in its connections to other matter and discourse. The girl in the first story traverses from one room to another. She transforms from becoming materialdiscursively co-produced as a 'proper' schoolgirl in one classroom, to not passing as a competent or 'proper enough' girl in another. She might even be understood as disobedient and rebellious, as she presses her body against the wall of the large playroom to avoid the running bodies of other children playing. Hultman concludes that this girl cannot be a proper schoolgirl 'on her own': she is understood, either as proper, courageous, incompetent, a 'misfit' or an 'ultra-feminine girl', only in connection with these different rooms and a wide range of actors, human, non-human, and discursive. 'Thus, she is not a girl *in* the room but rather *of* this room', writes Hultman, with reference to Barad (2003: 23).

Based on ethnographic data from an early years classroom in a project on exploring the construction of 'naughty children', Liz Jones (2013) shows how things and objects, such as the chair, the soft toy and the soft carpet on the floor, simultaneously 'school' children's bodies as they can dislocate sedimented pedagogical practices so that something new becomes possible. By intertwining poststructuralist and new materialist theoretical accounts, Jones shows how the teacher's chair has a materialdiscursive history with specific powers in relation to the children and teachers, which gives the chair a capacity to unseat the child, Jack, after his unallowed sitting on it. The chair is not a passive and inert thing in itself to be used by humans, but can, writes Jones, rather, be seen as 'toying with Jack', 'redolent with vibrations, sensations, movements and intensities that call to the boy and encourage him to make the move from obedient boy to transgressor' (2013: 7–8). The chair is, writes Jones, in a poststructural sense, a sign – saturated and enveloped in meaning – but in a discursivematerial sense the chair also has the potential to affect, to release a force, and the capacity to be affected and transformed, both in terms of its mattering and meaning. In their mutual materialdiscursive interaction and respective continual becomings, Jack transforms from obedience to disobedience, as 'new circuits of causality' are produced in their encounter (2013: 9).

Christina MacRae (2012) calls into question the notion of agency in her article on a series of encounters with a baby doll in art-making practices with small children in a preschool. In this article, MacRae shows how she as researcher transforms her thinking and theorizing to understand how material objects act on children and become productive of their play. This means a shift in MacRae's prior ontological presuppositions, where only children had agency to animate and transform material objects such as dolls. A plastic doll becomes 'vibrant matter' as two very young girls interact with it, writes MacRae (123). The doll

seemed to call the girls into action in their playing with it. The girls' conversation can be understood more as statements of what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) calls 'collective enunciations': their utterances do not seem to emerge from individual experiences, nor are they stated with specific intentions; rather, they were called forth and emerged as actualized consequences of what was going on in the interactions of playing with the material dolls. Playing becomes a collective assemblage where imagination and materialdiscursive desire and knowing intra-act with bodies and matter in a space where binary distinctions between humans and non-humans, adults and children are blurred.

The becomings of children with food in the materialdiscursive practice of eating is explored in Nina Rossholt's (2012) article 'Food as touch/touching the food'. Eating is understood as a complex practice of different forms of touch on the body and inside the body, in the encounter with the materiality of food and matter such as spoons and bowls. In her analysis of ethnographic data observations of children (under the age of three) when eating together with the teachers, she shows that food on the table, bowls and spoons to eat with enact dominating discourses of age, play and learning. How to eat properly can be a learning experience but is not accepted as playing. Materialdiscursive practices of eating vary in relation to different children, depending on their eating habits – that is, how they touch the food in different ways and use spoons, etc. The teachers regulate children's bodies accordingly, as bodies either in-place or out-of-place, in relation to dominant discourses on proper eating habits. But the children's bodies are not just discursively inscribed; children actively participate in the materialdiscursive production of themselves as in-place or out-of-place eaters. Rossholt's analysis also shows how the materiality of children's resistance practices – how to hold the food and eat – can influence and alter adults' discourses on eating. Hence, matter and discourse are mutually implicated in practices of eating in preschool contexts.

In a study on transdisciplinary mathematics and gender by Anna Palmer (2010), it is possible to see how mathematics teaching and learning in early childhood practices can be understood as a bodymind experience, involving many different bodily faculties intra-acting in the process. Children transform their mathematical conceptions in their becomings-with music, pens and papers and their gendered notions, while drawing and writing choreography to a piece of music. This study shows how mathematics can be understood as a porous and distributed discipline which can be accessed and experienced by way of other intersecting disciplines such as dance and music: bodily movements and graphical signs intra-act in this work with the children's mathematical concepts that can be understood as explorative algebra. Moreover, all of these different intersecting disciplines are gendered in ways that put to work materialdiscursive processes that can both normalize and help us queer our taken-for-granted understandings of gender and mathematics.

Childhood Places and Spaces as 'Common-worlds' of Co-dependencies

Place and pedagogy can both be understood as assemblages, writes Iris Duhn, and 'a pedagogy of places assembles and folds into places of pedagogy' (2012: 104). Duhn shows how the preschool classroom, its yard and surroundings are, in different ways, territories where specific activities are to take place, designed to teach children predetermined things. Hence, sand belongs in the sandpit, and pots and pans in the dolls' corner. But these territories might also be deterritorialized, folded into each other, remade and opened up for change; so that sand might move into the dolls' corner. Pedagogies of places can negotiate flows of desire where matter, humans and more-than-humans can come together to modulate the self and each other in new ways. This is a move away from contemporary understandings of early years

pedagogy, with its emphasis on educating autonomous, self-directed and independent learners, writes Duhn (2012: 104). Duhn's article 'Places for pedagogies, pedagogies for places' opens up the ethics and politics of the studies reviewed below, which in decisive ways push early childhood play and learning into a relational ontology and thus into hopes of a less hierarchical space of childhood becomings and an increased power to act.

In her article '"Becoming worldly with: An encounter with the Early Years Learning Framework'," Miriam Giugni (2011) redirects our understanding of children's play with clay from a developmental framework as fine-motor experiences or children's abilities of producing a three-dimensional clay-figure. She displaces events of play with clay to become significant events of activism, politics and ethics in a relational ontology. She exemplifies how teaching is constituted by assemblages of material discursive entanglements in two examples of young children playing with clay. When three very young girls play with clay while talking to each other and the teacher, it becomes impossible to untangle the multiple performative agents at work in the entangled material discursive processes that Giugni calls processes of 'becoming-worldly', with inspiration from Donna Haraway (2008). One girl enacts questions of identity, sexuality, gender and citizenship in and with the moulding of clay. She materializes, in her becoming-with the clay, her lived experiences and sense of justice, a same-sex couple going out to shop for their baby, while complaining that this couple cannot be married in Australia and that this is unfair. In the second example, the children discussed Easter and searched for 'Jesus' on an internet search engine. They found imagery of the statue *Pietá* by Michelangelo that intrigued them greatly. Why were Maria and Jesus White? Was it only because of the white marble the statue was made from? The white marble statue and the chunks of brown clay were slowly moulded into Pietà-figures by the children's hands while questions of Jesus' and Maria's skin colour were debated. Where did they come from? And how are people from the Middle East perceived in Australia today? These materialdiscursive productions of children's creative play with clay and socio-political notions, constitute practices of becoming-worldly in another way; enacting 'another worldliness', as Giugni writes. And these practices are, she concludes, both activist and ethical in their striving for openness to contradiction and difference, as well as in their critique of existing early childhood practices. In this way they constitute an opportunity for hope and change.

As noted above, the material turn constitutes a decisive turn to ethics. This becomes explicit in Affrica Taylor and Mirian Giugni's (2012) article on a reconceptualizing inclusion in early childhood communities in the conceptual framework of 'common-worlds'. A children's picture book by Jeannie Baker is used as a springboard to discuss how children's worlds do not begin and end with human interpersonal relations and concerns, but constitute entangled worlds shared with 'hosts of human and more-than-human others' (2012: 111). In the case of Ben in the story, he is involved in playful, ethical and political 'queer kin encounters' of 'worldling', as he gets to know the 'lurking below' of the world of the seas in a cold-water Australian marine environment off Tasmania's east coast. These encounters and relations are understood as 'queer', following Haraway (2008), because the relationships between humans and non-humans (even children) are not symmetrical in terms of power, and thus need to be problematized rather than romanticized, as in the commercial images of children and wildlife. Instead, they need to be discussed in terms of how humans can 'live responsively' in 'questioning relationships' with the more-than-human world, write Taylor and Giugni (2012: 113). In line with Haraway's relational ontology, children and adults in childhood 'common-worlds' need to figure out how to live and flourish together with