



STUDY OF DEVELOPMENTAL ACTS IN PRACTICE

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Developmental research project

- The project was carried out in a specific play environment (the research laboratory of play “Silmu”) constructed at Kajaani campus, University of Oulu, Finland
- Silmu is:
 - Creative play club for young children
 - Learning site for students, teachers and parents
 - Research laboratory on Play, Creativity, Imagination and Early Years’ Development

Participants and organization of the Play Lab SILMU

- 90 children (from 3 weeks to 6-years-old) and their parents
- 150 ECE students
- 3 university teachers - researchers
- The activities lasted 2002 - 2010, about 1600 hours of video material.
- From 4-7 hours per week.

Theoretical framework

- Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory forms the framework of the research.
- Very general questions coming from the theory and research:
 - What is play?
 - Is imaginative (pretend/role/ narrative) play still important?
 - What it does for child development?

The unit of development – poly-subject

From the perspective of cultural-historical theory the subject of development is an integrative whole that includes the *child*, the *adult*, *symbolic cultural tools*, and the *act of mediation*

Developmental act (B. El'konin, 1994)

We define creative acts in concrete situations *as moments of the appearance of qualitatively new phenomena in a child's activity*:

- Methodologically catching these moments requires the construction of favorable environments and a follow-up study of play and learning.
- In most cases a creative act is not an individual phenomenon, but a collective unanticipated creation .
- Children are not consciously changing themselves or acquiring new traits, but participating in joint activity, which challenges them to confront their momentary real self.
- Often adult and peer provocations or disturbances are behind these moments. Adults may have the role of a helper who can reveal what the children's behavior looks like and reinforces new features.

Unit of observation, unit of analysis

- The unit of analysis of play activity - *actions of a subject (poly-subject) that construct play events* and move the activity forward.

Case study I: Tower building - *adult help through direct intervention* in a young child's activity

- A boy's (2.1) and a student's joint tower building activity lasting 45 minutes



The study aims at:

- Analyzing how the play event is constructed through dialogic interactions between the child and the adult
- Defining the main steps of successful mediational act (that brings to a developmental act)?

- *Stepping into child's play, expanding the initial child's idea (Episode 1)*
- *Involvement in construction: taking turns (Episode 2)*
- *Guided building (Episode 3)*
- *Enriching joint play activity with reflection (Episode 10)*
- *Reaching togetherness and flow experience (Episode 13)*

Steps of adult intervention

- Observing and trying to join child's activity
- Stepping into child's play, expanding the initial child's idea
- Getting involved into joint activity:
- Reaching togetherness and flow experience

Strategy for joint interaction

- Student's focus is on development of joint play activity
- Following child's intentions
- Becoming a participant, co-player – being “inside” play activity
- Taking role of a helper, supporter, model for imitation
- Constructing play actions in constant dialogue: turn taking
- Leaving the space for child's self-development

Case II: A Story of Don Quixote the Lonely Dragon Fighter

Individual path of sense creation in play: case study lasting for 2 years

- I year - A boy (3.4) experiments with: big blocks; knight's helmet & sword; dragon's figure (from stories, books & play)
- II year - The boy (4.4) is involved in castle play (role play with students); a book about castles was read.



Two years later (5.5)

- Formulates the question: "Where evil comes from?"
- Painted several pictures most probably looking for the answers to the question: "How to fight the evil?"
- Drew a book with a possible answer...



After a week:

Two brave knights & two levels of representation



The path of sense creation leads to creation and manipulation of symbols and signs

- The child's activity started from experimenting with blocks, knight's helmet and sword, then moved to more elaborated building of a wall/castle and some kind of role-play
- Role-play reached its peak after a year in joint play together with students: dragon is coming!
- Narrative from dragon play “moved” to drawings and in a year was transformed into series of pictures and oral narration

Interpretation

- Starting point for play is a strong need to express certain emotional experiences/ideas
- The child starts play by imitating the others (adults and peers) and seeking for the resources in cultural environment. We can say that the child develops the play, but ...
- The play activity as any artistic creation demanding to follow certain rules (through roles) and structure (form). We can say that play activity develops the child ...
- Classical situation of any artist struggling the contradiction between the content and the form/material! Resolution of this contradiction brings cathartic discharge of emotions, which is at the basis of an aesthetic reaction
- In play one must creatively overcome, resolve, conquer own feelings through giving them a “material” form and while doing this live through one’s own catharsis.

How ZPD is created in play activity?

- Human relations are given personal, emotional expressions
- Certain symbol systems as rules and “language” are required
- Adequate and culturally approved form is found or re-created: play, drawing, narrative and etc.

Cultural content of the ZPD

- Modern world with different modes of representation shapes the ways, how children construct sense and meaning and how they think. In play children create multimodal, rich texts
- Experimenting and playing with ideas, colors, sounds, forms, shapes, movements and materials is necessary content. From the child's point of view they are play (and as our empirical material shows develops following the same steps)
- Rich action possibilities, peers, history of shared play experiences and friendships are necessary for play development: only participating in seemingly random and chaotic play activities children “learn” to play

Thank you!

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