Adult Play Guidance and Children’s Play Development

Mīlda Bredikyte
Kajaani unit of Teacher Education, University of Oulu, Finland
now at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences,
Vilnius, Lithuania

Contrasting views concerning adult’s role in enhancing children’s play:

- Scandinavian “free” play approach recommends that adults let children play alone
- Russian “didactic” play approach instructs “correct” play to children
Problems of play development

- According to some researchers (Mikhailenko & Korotkova, 2001, Bodrova & Leong, 2007) an increasing number of children do not develop mature forms of play before school age.

- Possible solution: adult intervention.

- Our project trains teacher education students how to intervene effectively in children’s play in order to support the development of more mature forms of play (narrative role-play).
We understand children’s play as

- The main age-appropriate form of learning & development:
  1. The primary form of a child’s thinking - a movement from ‘thinking’ using body movements and actions (gesture language) to thinking in words (concepts) (Vygotsky)
  2. Nonverbal form of narration: a child uses play as a medium to create narratives about himself and the world.

- A substantial feature of mature narrative role-play is the ability of the players to develop shared ideas and to construct a plot (storyline) together.
Developed narrative role-play

Criteria of mature narrative role-play:

• Social, co-constructed (2 and more participants)
• Imaginative (based on productive imagination)
• Creative (not stereotypical)
• Lasting in time (may last several months and develops over time)
• Challenging (demands action at the highest level of play skills)
• Has narrative structure
Our approach to play guidance was elaborated in the play laboratory Silmu at Kajaani University Consortium in 2002 – 2010

- Adult role was not only to observe children’s play, but also to intervene, actively play, and to construct play together
- University students had a task to plan, guide and observe joint play with different age groups of children
- Different types of evaluative materials were collected about guidance and play activities one day a week (plans, field notes, video tapes, observation protocols etc.)
Creative drama interventions

- Creative drama methods are used for interventions (Lindqvist, 1995; Bredikyte, 2001): adults and children in roles “act out” different adventures of the characters

- The main goal is to involve children to the process of active exploration, experiencing (perezhivanie) and reflection & to support the development of more mature forms of play

- Joint creativity (child-adult) and improvisation is the central focus
The most significant aspects of a successful adult intervention:

a) motivating shared theme;
b) active “in role” participation;
c) emotional involvement;
d) dialogic character of interactions;
e) dramatic tension in play script;
f) coherent and fascinating script;
g) elaboration of the “critical” turns in play.
Students reflections I

1. It is not simple to play with children, participation in play requires:
   • Learning the “language” of play
   • Real involvement - “once accepted you really have to play, not just ‘pretend’ that you are playing…”
2. Play with children is a challenge but also a pleasure.
3. Playing requires creative thinking, improvisational skills and the courage to explore new possibilities.
4. Children like adults who play with them; they view them as friends...
Students reflections II

5. Playing with children helps to understand their ideas and their thinking better.

6. It is amazing how easily an adult in role can influence a child’s behaviour!

7. If children are deeply involved in play they are able to concentrate well for a long time.

8. If play is motivating children can learn many things which are necessary for the activity.

9. The ability required of the teacher is to learn to be involved in play and to be able to observe the whole situation as if from the outside at the same time.
Who is playing, teaching, learning, & developing?

- The goal of student intervention is to develop joint play activity (taking roles and participating in play)
- Students are not experts of play. In play they “learn” to play and at the same time “teach” children to play (modeling play behavior)
- “Learning” of all participants is a result of joint play activity
- Spontaneous “free learning”: holistic and participatory, proceeds through search activity, careful observation and gradual imitation.
Conclusions

- Analysis of collaborative interactions revealed that adult participation in joint play activities creates the space supportive for the development of all participants (both children and adults).

- Playworld is a tool that moves participants into collaborative co-construction of shared activity system and prepares the next developmental step (self-development) in children + professional & personality development in adults.
Growth on personality level?

- Genuine participation in shared play activities is very difficult for many students (adults). This process requires “stepping out” of one’s own understanding and “meeting” understanding of “another”

- But if this happens all the participants become involved in creative process that bring change in participants by moving them to a new level of functioning and understanding - deep, experiential learning.
Thank you!

- milda.bredikyte@gmail.com
- milda.bredikyte@vpu.lt