

Finland

Narrative learning in play environment (Silmu)

The research laboratory of play is part of a university research centre for developmental teaching. It has three functions: First, to conduct experimental research on children's play, second, to educate teacher students, and third, as a creative play club for families with children (mostly aged 3 to 6). The aim of the project is to foster creative, independent thinking and communication in the children through joint narrative play and creative drama methods. At the same time, teacher students learn about the most effective forms of adult participation in children's play and how different forms of play support child development. The activity centre is located in a small house on the university campus. A model has been developed that allows the application of practices in other clubs for families, with the potential to be beneficial for multicultural groups in which local and newly arriving families can learn about each other's culture.

Main focus of Innovation: LEARNERS, TEACHERS, CONTENT, RESOURCES, ORGANISATION

Other keywords: non-formal/blended

General Information

Name of the ILE: Narrative learning in play environment (Silmu)

Location/Address: Kajaani campus, University of Oulu

Website: <http://www.kajaaninyliopistokeskus.oulu.fi/tutkimuskonsortio/developunit.htm>

Rationale

Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21st century learning challenges?

The environment is planned to promote children's development and cultural learning at the age of 3-6years. Our focus is on imagination and mature forms of narrative play especially development of symbolization, language and thought in young children.

According to comparative studies children's imaginative play is rapidly disappearing for different reasons in many countries at the same time as growing evidence tells that playful learning is systematically more effective than learning invoked by direct teaching.

In our environment all activities are coordinated to promote the development of joint play. Different creative drama methods are used to enhance children's play activities. A central tool of pedagogical intervention is dialogical drama with puppets (DDP), which integrates children's activities during the day. Joint play world of adults and children is created using this tool. A story or tale serves as imaginative frame in a play world.

As a result children with students start creating play worlds in the form of long lasting play activities. Play world is "born" in our experimental site and narrative is mainly self-created, but not adult planned project based on some known story or book.

The analysis of children's developmental trajectories revealed different paths of development. Most of the children between 5 and 6 years were involved in some form of "storytelling" activity. Some children constructed their narratives while playing with other children, others "told" their stories by painting; some children made puppet story presentations; few children created own storybooks. Children clearly are developing their personal "narrative voice" which express their thinking.

Evidence

Is there any evidence or indications showing that this initiative achieves the outcomes that it is aiming at?

The changes we observe among the participants of organized activities provide strong evidence of our achievements.

The changes among children we observe are both on collective and individual levels: (1) transition from daily themes to imaginary plots takes place; (2) combinatory plots of several stories are used; (3) children develop persistent long-term themes (lasting several months, sometimes years); (4) young children take active part in play; (5) a broader repertoire of cultural tools is used in play: children start telling their own stories, drawing, dramatizing, making books and puppets, etc.; (6) collaborative play activities are prevailing; (7) a community of players is born; (8) general creativity is stimulated.

Changes in student's learning are both collective (team) and individual levels:

Students practice and gradually learn team work. Their competencies are easily observed during the final practice when they have to take the whole responsibility for the organization of multicultural group of young children and their families. Students are responsible for: (1) writing the program; (2) planning the activities and organizing the environment; (3) finding and inviting the families; (4) in collaboration with the participants (families and children) organizing and running the activities during one semester; (5) documenting the activities (digital, video, written reflections).

Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE

What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)

Our general goal of child development is creative, independent thinking and communication with the world, each other and oneself through joint play and “storytelling” (narration).

Our main goals for the student's learning are: (1) To get some basic knowledge about different forms of play young children become engaged in; (2) To learn how to observe, describe and analyze play activities; (3) To understand and be able to explain how play activities support child development and learning; (4) To learn to play with different age children or otherwise to support and enhance their play; (5) To acquire experiences and practical skills independently organizing educational environment for young children and their families.

Learners

Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?

The first group - children and their families: during 6 years in total 62 children from 30 families attended the activities in Play laboratory. Once a week 13 to 17 children with their parents (mostly mothers but also fathers and grandparents) participate in activities every year. All are volunteers.

The second group - university students: during 7 years 180 students from the department of teacher education attended the courses.

The third group - university teachers-researchers: four university people were involved in the activities.

Facilitators

Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?

For each session 10-15 students, a music teacher and 1-2 university teachers – researchers are present. University teachers are organizing the courses and guiding student's learning. The curriculum, time schedule and all activities are discussed and planned in detail together between the teachers and the students; later the students are responsible for the practical implementation of planned activities with children. They videotape the activities, write field notes and observations of individual children and communicate with parents.

Organization of the ILE

How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?

The research laboratory of play “Silmu” (PlayLab) is a part of the Research Center for Developmental Teaching and Learning at Oulu University in Finland. The activities organized in the laboratory are part of the University courses organized for the students participating in teacher education program. Activities are organized once or twice a week, they last about 3 hours, from 9.00 to 12.15.

University research team develops the curriculum and pedagogical methods. Creative activities are at the core of the curriculum. The working title of the curriculum is - play generating narrative curriculum. Both the curriculum and the organization of the environment including time management are based on careful observation and pedagogical documentation. The emphasis is on syncretistic and creative nature of early childhood and on the child as an active constructor/participant of his/her development. Hence the main principles behind the curriculum are child centeredness and child appropriate practices.

At the same time we see adults as organizers and creators of cultural environment and models of higher forms of behaviour. Consequently, our students are also active, constantly involved in different creative activities (such as storytelling, puppet and drama presentations, singing, painting, constructing, handcraft, modelling, etc.).

Dialogical drama with puppets method for story dramatizations is used as the main interventional tool. Basic components of the DDP method:

- Narratives: traditional folk tales, fairy-tales, fiction, self created stories
- Puppet presentation (sometimes dramatization) of a story
- Dialogic form of interactions

Main principles of adult and child interactions are the following:

- Children and adults are seen as co-creators of joint activities
- Child's own initiative, his/her intention is the starting point for adult intervention
- To notice, to "understand" child's intention/idea, to support it and bring to the point where the child becomes aware of her own idea and is able to express it in play, painting or any other creative form.

Learning Context

In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

The experimental site is situated at the University campus area in a small cozy house (former gardener's house) with six rooms. Eight activity centers are organized for children's activities: (1) Blocks and building play area; (2) Dramatic play area; (3) Story reading and telling, singing, drawing area; (4) An area for board games, puzzles, assembly kits; (5) Group meeting and painting area; (6) Handcraft area; (7) Creative drama area; (8) Kitchen area.

History of ILE

Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?

Play research laboratory started autumn 2002. From the very beginning the laboratory was planned to carry three functions: (1) experimental research laboratory on children's play for graduate and postgraduate students and other researchers; (2) educational site for university students; and (3) creative play club for children and families.

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

All the activities are funded by the Oulu University, Kajaani department of teacher education.

Learning Outcomes

What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?

Amended text:

During 6 years quite many families with their children attended our site. In total 62 children from 30 families. I am adding the table showing the amount of years each child and each family participated in the activities.

Children and families in Silmu, years 2002/03, 2003/04, 2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08

	Less than 1 year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	All
Children	6	23	15	9	4	0	62
Families	3	11	6	4	2	2	30

The age of participating children ranges from 6 weeks to 6 years but our main focus is on 2 to 5-years-old children.

The general goal of our experimental laboratory of play is to study children's play and its effects on child development. In addition to that we not just observe play as it happens but use different strategies to stimulate creative play activities among participating children. This gives us the possibility to study the effects of adult interventions (mainly creative drama) on children's play, and to define the most effective forms of adult participation and support.

Individual children as well as some long-lasting joint play activities are followed over the time focusing on the developmental changes in the activity along with the level of participation, involvement and creative initiatives of the participants. The most representative cases are analyzed and described as case studies through different periods of time starting from one semester (12 play sessions) up to two years.

Qualitative methods are used to describe individual children's development and the development of joint long-lasting play activities.

Ongoing dynamic assessment of individual child development (including competencies and skills) is made by the students; university teachers guide the students in this work and follow the development and professional growth of students both on individual and group level.

Documentation describing or evaluating the ILE

Is there documentation on this learning environment? Is there a website? Films? Research reports or evaluations? Other forms of documentation? (please supply references or links)

Activities are videotaped with 2 - 4 cameras. Students write field notes, on the spot observations and daily reports + detailed narrative of the most interesting joint imaginative play activities are made.

A short film on DVD introducing the activities is available (15 minutes).

Practices from Play laboratory are presented on the documentary about Vygotsky:
<http://www.vygotskydocumentary.com/index.html>

Links:

<http://www.kajaaninyliopistokeskus oulu.fi/tutkimuskonsortio/developunit.htm>

<http://ierg.net/confs/viewabstract.php?id=179&cf=3>

<http://ierg.net/confs/viewabstract.php?id=185&cf=3>

<http://www.centrepompidou.fr/streaming/symposium/en/session3.htm>

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Conference abstracts and paper presentations

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Bredikyte, M. 2008. Cultural Creativity as the Zone of Proximal Development in Play // IInd ISCAR Congress: Abstract and paper presentation, San Diego, USA.

Bredikyte, M., Hakkarainen, P. 2008. Play-world as a tool of cultural development // TASP Conference: Workshop, Tempe, USA.

Bredikyte, M., Hakkarainen, P. 2007. Why play creates the zone of proximal development? 24th ICCP Conference: Abstract and paper presentation, Brno, Czech Republic.

Bredikyte, M. 2007. Cultural Creativity as the Zone of Proximal Development in Play // 17th EECERA Conference: Abstract and paper presentation, Prague, Czech Republic.

Bredikyte, M., Hakkarainen, P. 2007. Symbolic tools of learning and development in early age // 35th NERA Congress: Abstract and paper presentation, Turku, Finland.

Bredikyte, M., Jakkula, K., Munter, H. 2007. Play development in University teaching: on the basis of the activities in SILMU research laboratory // Kasvatustieteen paivat conference: Abstract and paper presentation, Oulu, Finland.

Bredikyte, M., Hakkarainen, P. 2007. Cultural Development of the Child through Narrative Learning // A European and International Symposium on research carried out into evaluating the impact of arts and cultural education on children and young people: Abstract and paper presentation, Paris, France.

Website <http://www.centrepompidou.fr/symposium.educart.paris2007/>

Bredikyte, M. 2006. Play as a form of children's community // 16th EECERA Conference: Abstract and paper presentation, Reykjavik, Iceland.

Bredikyte, M. 2006. Story Dramatization and Creative Play // Imaginary Education Research Symposium: Abstract and paper presentation, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.

Bredikyte, M. 2005. Creative Acts in Play as a Unit of Child Self-Development, Ist ISCAR Congress: Abstract and paper presentation, Sevilla, Spain.

Other information you consider to be relevant to describe the ILE

We see many different possibilities for broader application of the practices applied in our experimental laboratory. Developed model (with some minor modifications) can be used organizing: (1) clubs for the families with young children; (2) multicultural groups for new immigrant families to meet local families and "learn" each other's culture; (3) after school groups for mixed age children, and etc.; (4) environment for the future teachers to experiment new ideas, approaches and pedagogical methods.

We see the developed model as a 'product' created by the university community for the broader society and would believe there are many possibilities for its wider application.