

Play as Pedagogical Philosophy and Praxis - A Pedagogy and Ethics for Social Contexts

Per Apelmo & Dan Tedenljung

Abstract

Play as attitude and skill is something that almost everyone comes to possess at an early age. Play is vital to personal development and is critical in terms of bodily, spiritual and intellectual maturity, and as a mode through which the individual deals with all the situations she encounters, good and bad alike. In many adults, play and the ability to play have been stunted and limited by a number of factors in social relationships, schooling, culture and society. The remarkable thing about adults in terms of play is that their ability to play can be well developed in one area, but otherwise stunted and limited in social contexts. We believe that an adult with the ability to play is a valuable colleague in any field. In adulthood, people sometimes need to recapture the ability to play in order to live life to the full. The focus of our attention in this study is on play and the role that play has for adults in terms of skills acquisition and ethical/moral development, at both the personal and group levels. The purpose of the study is to investigate the conceptual tension between play, social roles and inhibitions, by drawing on research into play, and by tying the research results into a pedagogical application for adults borrowed from Expressive Arts (EXA). In our opinion, the key concepts adduced in this study concerning the attitude to social encounters through play are borne out in the research of B. Knutsdotter Olovsson, B. Røed Hansen, M. Soltved, D. Stern, C.R. Rogers, and by P. Freire's notion of praxis, M. Buber's I & Thou relationship, and by E. Levinas' ethics of the encounter with the radical other. This deepens the understanding of the moral and ontological dimensions of play, and [of] the interpersonal dilemmas faced by a person who has never learned how to play, or by one who has completely or partially lost the ability to play as an adult, whose creativity has been stunted, and who needs help healing her relationship with her surroundings.¹

Introduction – an example of play

The EXA² Spring Symposium is an event held annually, with representatives primarily from Europe and North America. The 2013 symposium was held in

¹ The empirical knowledge base has been documented continuously for many years and placed into relation with theory and philosophy. The present article provides an example of how empirics, theory and philosophy can be merged into a new whole.

² Expressive Art use the creative arts as a form of therapy. At the heart of EXA is intermodality, i.e. the transition between different expressive forms of aesthetic expression. The forms of expression at the heart of EXA are Body/Movement: bodily expression in the form of movement and interpretation; Music/Sound/Voice: improvisations of sound and rhythm using both the body and musical instruments. Image/Form: portrayal using various forms and materials such as painting, sculpture, collage. Drama: psychodrama, sociodrama, improvisation, liberating theater. Poetry/Myth: poetry, prose and fairytale, expressions based on verbal language. Conversation/Interaction: process-oriented work (see P. Apelmo 2008; 2009). EXA is applied within both psychotherapy, pedagogy and social work (broadly defined), and as a tool for organizational/leadership development. EXA can be seen as a means of play comprising a theoretical and

Rovaniemi, Finland. In addition to "community art" and a few lectures, the days of the symposium revolved around three workshops held on three occasions. The symposium was kicked off on the evening of day one and ended at lunch on day six. The schematic representation that follows constitutes our empirical basis for this article.³

Community art

Expressive forms of aesthetic expression give participants opportunities to "network", to meet others, thereby also continuing to meet themselves through those others and through the expressive forms of aesthetic expression that are set in motion. The work done at the Symposium, is grounded in the community that the Symposium itself constitutes, and, in the groups formed by a process, in which expressive forms of aesthetic expression are crucial. The work in its entirety, is done in these groups: as individuals, in pairs, in groups of three, and in other constellations. The participants work creatively together and individually, providing impetus, direction and pushback to each other's experiences. This year's Symposium was themed overall around the Kalevala myth, held up to exemplify a locally rooted mythology and its context.

Workshop 1

The participants were encouraged to mirror and mimic each other using voice improvisations. "I/thou" encounters other "I/thou's" in work done in pairs. The participants were also split into groups of four for improvisational work. A shared tapestry of sound was created by having each participant compose their own *ostinato* (a musical theme repeated over and over again). Within this tapestry of sound, the participants took turns doing their own solo improvisations. Voices opened up. In addition, participants did pair work with dancing sticks (a wooden pin held between the index fingers) and worked with balls in motion as a group. Everyone was asked to be aware of and to formulate and summarize the experiences, feelings and associations that the exercises brought to the fore. After that, texts and voice improvisations were assembled into short-duration performances and portrayals.

Workshop 2

As the participants walked in through the door, each was given a large length of cloth and asked to explore human interaction using the cloth as a prop. This exploration took a variety of forms. One participant wrapped herself in it: material that

philosophical base linked to various forms of applied communication by and through expressive forms of aesthetic expression (Ibid).

³ In future articles, our empirical data will be presented in more detail.

binds like a shroud, hampering freedom of movement. The participants proceed by trial and error, and the person who wrapped herself in the cloth has to shuffle along in small steps or to hop with both feet together to move forward. She gradually frees herself from her length of cloth and is inspired by the other to keep exploring.

The length of cloth becomes a tool that the participants can play with; one person jumps along with the cloth fluttering in the breeze; another swings it like a banner in the wind, another gathers it up and pulls the cloth forth from his closed hand like a sorcerer, wrapping it around his neck like a necktie, like a bow tie; another participant spreads the cloth out as if to set the table, still another concludes by folding the length of cloth, placing it solemnly in front of her and kneeling before it, her back bent in reverence.

The work in this workshop is done in four basic phases introduced by the⁴ workshop leaders. Working together, the participants get a feel for what it is like to slowly turn one's palms up and down, to open and close them. They try doing work in pairs, encountering one another through eye contact and by leaning in towards one another, and then switch to doing the opposite, creating distance by slowly leaning back. In the same way, they try to expand by straightening their backs and stretching their bodies, only to then seek the implosion of diminishment, i.e. by curling up.

Workshop 3

The participants warm up together as a big group using vocalization and movement, then introduce themselves to each other once again in small groups. The participants dress up. There are plenty of props, both clothing and other item, and their task is to think about something important that has happened, and something that they look forward to in the future. After that, the participants are tasked with giving performances to each other based on the thoughts and feelings that their combined work may evoke.

A personal comment

By doing this exercise, the participants are given the opportunity to enact and work through their personal myths, sometimes based on and intermingled with estab-

⁴These were the four phases used: *Entering*, implying that something new awaits when entering the third space/the ludic zone. *Expanding*, which involves investigating opportunities in the ludic zone based on the current theme. An area for expanded awareness is on offer here. *Exiting*, which involves leaving the ludic zone. *Reflection*, which involves reflecting on what is going on in the ludic zone and tying this in to the challenges and opportunities inherent in daily life.

lished myths of a religious, political and/or ideological nature. Those whose work involves interacting with others on a daily basis: whether as health workers, social workers, educators or psychotherapists, encounter both mythology and other people. "Working phenomenological" using expressive forms of aesthetic expression, and focusing on what is actually experienced through the senses, becomes a way of deconstruct the myths that we are constantly cultivating in our lives, and which risk placing unthinking constraints on our imaginations, creativity and moral sense. It is essential to begin by noting the way in which the experience leaves traces and to only then seek to interpret the impressions – to begin by paying attention and feeling things out before it is time to ask: what do *I* view the experience as and how do *I* interpret the experience?

A more general comment

The participants were all personally involved in play, as adults. Most possessed basic training and experience in Expressive Arts, meaning that they had tools related to and basic knowledge of how play can be shaped forth using expressive aesthetic forms expression. For some, it was still a personal challenge to participate and to muster the courage to play in the way and using the forms that was/were available. For some others, the challenge was of a more general nature, in the form of “life knowledge” to reclaim play as a “life area”; or specifically, to step into the ludic zone with one's own voice and movement. For others, the challenge was to enter into their individual experience, and thereby encounter themselves. For still others, the challenge was to relate to others in a creative way as part of a process in which play is recaptured in every aspect relevant to communication skills.

Theoretical reflections

Play as transcendent philosophy and praxis

Our conception of play is not only the origin of the present article, where we intend to argue on the basis of a practice-generated research. We try to describe the experience of the practice through theoretical concepts, despite the feeling we have that the language we hereby becomes dependent on obscure the concept of play in pedagogical practice.

Play, as in the field of literature, reflects the dual condition of being human; to exist as an entity which is dependent on meeting with others to realize their own relevance. We, as adults, need to rediscover the potential room that play offers us to act pleasurable, rampant and shameless, with no obligation to perform. We

realize that through play we can recapture some of our lost innocence, the spontaneous man, the playing man.

Play is a pre-cultural phenomenon, which is surrounded by cultural institutions and the conditions that shape people as cultural beings.⁵ Many have attempted to systematize the understanding of play.⁶ This has led to different approaches regarding the social and psychological functions of play time and spatial conditions, its therapeutic uses, communicative elements, agencies or evolutionary remarks. Play is not that easy to define.⁷ Play concern many moods, uses many kinds of artifacts, appeals to our senses in various ways. Playing affects and promotes our attitudes, passions and can be detected as an activity that is ongoing in all practices and in all aspects of social life.

... *playing has a place* and a time. It is not *inside* by any use of the word (...). Nor is it *outside*, that is to say, it is not a part of the reputed world, the not-me, that which the individual has decided to recognize (with whatever difficulty and even pain) as-truly external, which is outside magic control.⁸

The field of play⁹ and its transcendent potential, and challenges, unlocks the doors into the mystery of the world and being. Play as educational practice is to mold free space, initiated by subjects who are carriers of a gift to create. We, as human beings, live enclosed, as incorporated parts, within the relationships through which we come to be. We are living through the transition from a modernist point of view – from understanding the self as a verifiable reality – to a postmodern point of view: understanding the self as a constructed reality – a narrative, social concept of self, a self-based on relationships and communication.¹⁰ Language – communication by means of every type of language, including the non-verbal modes of communication – is the medium through which the process takes place. We use these languages in order to construct, organize and create meaning out of the material that then becomes the stories we tell. Submerged and incorporated in relationships, with the ability to abstract slightly and stand aside, to open a window to critical reflection, and to do so in the constant awareness that, despite everything, we are en-

⁵ J. Huizinga (1949), D.W. Winnicott (1971/1982).

⁶ See for example: G. Bateson, D. Berlyne, J. Bruner, E.H. Erikson, S. Freud, J. Piaget, D.I. Slobin, B. Sutton-Smith and L. Vygotsky.

⁷ S. Nachmanovitch (1990).

⁸ D.W. Winnicott (p. 55, 1971/1982).

⁹ D.W. Winnicott (1971/1982).

¹⁰ Paraphrased from H. Anderson (1997).

closed within and impregnated by the context, by the flows of communication, by the shaping forth of existence in the manner in which it appears. Right there. Right now. As the focal point of the now, of the instant: a focal point of what was once known¹¹ – right there and right now. We come into existence, and are constituted and confirmed, in relation to life made manifest through language/languages.¹² Play offers the ability to communicate socially through several channels/languages beyond merely the verbal: the body's expression through motion and interpretation; improvisations of sound and rhythm using the body and musical instruments; interpretation using a variety of forms and materials, such as painting, sculpture, collage; psychodrama, sociodrama, improvisation, liberating theater; poetry, prose and fairytales, forms of expression based on verbal language and conversation and interaction by and through process-oriented exercises.

Play as emancipation

Play, creativity and listening call on a person to move toward congruence and humanization. Movement in this direction is impeded by consumerism, injustices, exploitation and various types of violence. The direction is confirmed by a longing for freedom, for liberation from the things that bind, fetter and diminish; it is confirmed by a longing for fair conditions and in the struggle to regain a humanity that has been lost, both as individuals and as a society. The challenge and the task that faces each of us is to liberate ourselves from oppression and restrictive structures. In this sense, true generosity is a struggle to prevent the underlying causes of various kinds of restrictions and social vulnerability.¹³

Play has a shaping, fostering and developmental effect.¹⁴ This holds true in the sense that the individual learns how to perceive herself as an acting subject, as a being in praxis, as a social organism and as a citizen. Play also shapes our attitude to cooperation and social intercourse, it opens the way to devotion to others, transcendence of self and timelessness. It is its own reward. By its very nature, play is a form of expression that offers those who tread down its path both freedom and self-actualization. When at play, it is always possible to start over and try again.¹⁵

¹¹ D. Stern (2004).

¹² P. Apeldoorn (2008).

¹³ See for example M. Buber (1923/2013), P. Freire (1970/1993), D.W. Winnicott (1971/1982), B. Knutsdotter Olovsson (1998), H. Andersen (1999), S. Todd (2003).

¹⁴ B. Knutsdotter Olovsson (1998).

¹⁵ B. Knutsdotter Olovsson (1998), D.W. Winnicott (1971/1982), B. Røed Hansen (1991), M. Soltved (2005)

Play involves an ever-recurring alternation between tension and release that lets those at play experience apogee moments.¹⁶ And herein lies the transcendence of play: in the overstepping of the direct experience of the situation and the social, of one's own subject[ivity] in the encounter with another, and in communication in the form of narration, both verbal and non-verbal.¹⁷

Being at play trains people's ability to develop and practice teamwork and taking turns, reciprocity, attentiveness, trust and shared consensus. Play trains the body, mind and emotional capacity.¹⁸ Play trains the comprehension of symbols and symbolic language, while nurturing social roles and the [use of] symbolic significances as a tool for ordering in understanding existence. There is a symbolic content in play; play can feel emotionally liberating; play creates opportunities for working through challenges and conflicts. Play has social and communicative content. As an open approach to life, play opens the way to creativity and to the ability to both experience and get involved in the creation of expression. Play and creation require encouragement and stimulation in order to develop.^{19 20}

Recent research into play describes play both as a developmental experience and as an activity that can go haywire.²¹ In the group that was studied, it was noted, inter alia, that some children seemed to lack the ability to play. When the adults intervened as a result and provided a framework and constructive guidance for how to play, the child gained the ability to play and was then able to participate in free play.²² Røed Hansen terms playing itself text (symbolic plane) and the structure of the play the context (plane of reality). An inability to play appears to stem, inter alia, from the inability to differentiate between these planes and/or to flexibly and smoothly transition between these two planes.²³

To play requires a knowledge of codes and techniques; it requires uninterrupted time, security, and not being bound by an expectation to perform. While at play, inner notions marshal and draw on technique and skill, showing the way to the productive state wherein something new is created and discovered, where it be-

¹⁶ F.J.J. Buytendijk in "Wesen und Sinn des Spiels" (1933) as quoted in M. Soltved (2005).

¹⁷ See for example D.W. Winnicott (1971/1982), B. Knutsdotter Olovsson (1998).

¹⁸ B. Knutsdotter Olovsson (1998).

¹⁹ B. Røed Hansen (1991) citing J. Bateson, J. Singer, D.W. Winnicott, K.L. Lombardi & E. Lapidus samt M. Theophilakis (1990), M. Soltved (2005) citing F.J.J. Buytendijk (1933).

²⁰ See e.g. B. Røed Hansen (1991), B. Knutsdotter Olovsson (1998).

²¹ M. Soltved (2005) citing L. M. Holmgren (1993, p. 198).

²² B. Knutsdotter Olovsson (1998).

²³ B. Røed Hansen (1991) citing J. Bateson (1972).

comes possible to cross boundaries, and where such boundary crossing actually occurs.²⁴ For its emergence, this ludic zone depends on confidence and trust.²⁵ Creativity *per se* and creativity as an attitude to life is in line with play.²⁶ Play is creative order and concentration. Play is design. Play lays the groundwork for deconstruction and reconstruction. Play is a tool for injecting order into chaos. Play, such as art, myth and theory, is the attempt of the human being to understand and grasp existence. Play is a striving to establish context, structure, form or some other fixed point of reference. The conditions on which play and the ludic zone depend are shifting, because play is a product of the participants' various lived experiences and the cognitive experience gained from the context in which they have lived. When several people play together, this is an event that touches on interpersonal, intersubjective aspects. Immediate and emotionally intersubjective participation is crucial when it comes to fostering new zones of interpersonal interaction.²⁷

Philosophy

Play as an I/Thou relationship

Play presupposes a willingness to engage in I/Thou-I/Thou encounters, a willingness to enter into a relationship and to enter into communication-in-relation [ship]. The other encounters me as a Thou, and I enter into the immediate relationship. The essence of a relationship is to be chosen and to choose oneself, to be at the mercy of another subject, while at the same time being an acting subject oneself. It is just this entering into relationships that enables human development, and humanization as the human calling.²⁸ The Thou-world is opened up by means of this immediate relationship, at play in the encounter with the other, and in the encounter with art and theory, and not least in my encounter with myself. The encounter with the other, with art, with a text, prepares the way to an encounter with humanization.

The It-world limits play and the ludic zone

The playground is a site where individuals standing at the center of their own universes convene; they come to the playground filled with their own mystique about body and mind, and with their own truth-mystique. The encounter is a forum for exploring how the individuals come together; all parties contribute their own histo-

²⁴ B. Knutsdotter Olovsson (1998), D.W. Winnicott (1971/1982).

²⁵ D.W. Winnicott (1971/1982).

²⁶ D.W. Winnicott (1971/1982).

²⁷ B. Knutsdotter Olovsson (1998), D.W. Winnicott (1971/1982), D. Stern (2004).

²⁸ M. Buber (1923/2013) and P. Freire (1970/1993).

ries to the formation of the encounter. If any of the parties is granted interpretive priority, if any of the parties' history is regarded as more true, the ludic zone is impaired. When an interpretation is imposed on an individual, when my values and my attitude are projected onto others, this is an act of violence.^{29 30 31} The It-world objectifies, and this is an inevitable process – being-in-relation is inevitably followed by observing the same relation.³² Every answer and every interpretation binds the individual down in the It-world. The It-world smothers play. And yet none of us can live exclusively in the Thou-world, in and through I/Thou-I/Thou relationships.³³ Rather, we are all challenged to consciously relate to both dimensions, to deliberately choose a path in balancing the two positions. There is a fundamental imperative to observe and to name in conjunction with even the most intense form of play.

Play, and through it an I/Thou-I/Thou encounter, presupposes a striving to learn from the Other rather than learning about the Other. Learning from the other emphasizes reciprocal accountability in the parties encountering one another.³⁴ This has to do with an ethics in our relationships with Otherness and our way of relating the Otherness. Ethics are regarded as a social construction that emphasize accountability.³⁵ We create an ethic in each encounter. The ability to relate in this way does not primarily presuppose knowledge of the Other, but rather receptivity, sensitivity and openness to the Other. Openness to an unpredictable, possibly disturbing instant of attentiveness to the Other, signals above all a responsibility for the Other. If both parties have the same wishes, this entails reciprocal accountability. Reciprocity presupposes this form of openness.³⁶

Play in and through confidence and trust

The fundamental prerequisite for play is confidence and trust³⁷ in and within the social space. As a community, EXA was able to offer this social space by virtue of

²⁹ See P. Freire (1970/1993) for a discussion of oppression and the consequences of oppression.

³⁰ See S. Todd (2003) for a discussion of freedom from violence.

³¹ For a discussion of the concept of violence and E. Levinas, see A.T. Peperzak (1993, p. 129): “Violence, according to Levinas, is defined through its opposition to the basic human relation of transcendence. It does not permit us to get surprised, accused or converted; it tries to find out to what extent the freedom of the Other can be captured, used, reduced.”

³² M. Buber, (1923/2013).

³³ M. Buber (1923/2013).

³⁴ S. Todd (2003).

³⁵ E. Levinas (1969).

³⁶ S. Todd (2003).

³⁷ D.W. Winnicott (1971/1982).

the collective experience assembled during previous meetings, and thanks to the often high level of competency of the participants. Process leadership³⁸, as well as the confidence and trust that formed with regard to the process leaders, created the conditions needed for implementation. Naturally, the process leaders provided important input through the framework and by means of the direction they set for the work, which we as participants accepted. The process leaders were available, and were part of organizing and sometimes leading the play. This was done in order to help those participants with less confidence in their own skills to be able and to have the courage to play as an adult. Some of the participants knew how it felt to have one's own creativity constrained or belittled. There were many of us participating, and the immediate relational communication took place primarily with other participants. Some of the participants chose, off and on, to coordinate in a particular way with the process leaders. The process leaders' unequivocal acceptance of and positive attitude to the participants' play, the participants' creative forms of expression in the manner in which they unfolded, was crucial.³⁹ By creating, by playing, we make everything right. There is nothing ugly or wrong, only different forms of authentic expressions.

Philosophy and praxis

The societal contexts of play

The form of pedagogical context referred to in this article (where EXA⁴⁰ Spring Symposium is an example) constitute social systems. These systems are based on contexts; in its turn the consequence, of continuous social communication-in-relation. The social systems refer both to a system-world and a life-world, and comprise individuals who stand in relation to one another by means of communication, based on all the various channels of communication at humanity's disposal, be they linguistic or sensual/bodily.

Buber was a keen critic of modernity in the form in which it manifested during the infancy of industrialism. He referred to modern society as the "It-world". Buber issues an explicit warning about the objectification of human beings and the formalization of interpersonal relationships. It is admittedly possible to live in the past, in a world of ideas, in a world of getting-to-know in order to profit by and make use of. But a person who lives only there is no longer a human being.⁴¹ To devote

³⁸ With regard to process leadership see P. Apeldoorn (2009).

³⁹ Cf. "Unconditional positive regard" from C.R. Rogers (1980/1995).

⁴⁰ **Expressive Arts (EXA) will be presented further in the next article.**

⁴¹ M. Buber (1923/2013).

oneself exclusively to cause-and-effect, to strict logic, means losing oneself, as in this case there is no space for the unexpected, that which has not yet been glimpsed or understood, for the uncertainty and the search for the fragile and sloppy.⁴² Known experiences repeat themselves in the "It-world"; this serves to maintain, facilitate and shape peoples' lives. This also increases the possibility of getting to know this world, of using it, which in turn diminishes a human being's relational ability. As a consequence, modern man is prevented from living in the now, in presence. All ready-made answers, all ready-made forms, frozen codes and set structures bind the human being to the "It-world". Man's destiny is corrupted as a result. The human being is reduced to one who observes rather than one who sees, one who takes advantage of instead of one who receives, one who stands aside instead of actively attempting to influence ongoing processes of transformation.

Freire argues that the task and the challenge for every individual inheres in the stubborn pursuit of liberation from oppression and restrictive structures. This is a matter – for those experiencing oppression in one form or another – of liberating themselves and their oppressors, of clarifying the structures that restrict, impede, and at times violently suffocate, in favor of structures leading toward the humanization of the human being.⁴³ Every order given means that one person's choice is being imposed on another, which alters the consciousness of the person to whom the order is given. That person's consciousness, which shapes itself to accord with the person giving the order, conforms to the conditions, forms and structures offered.

It is the concrete situation that breeds oppression that needs to be changed. This radical demand to objectively reorder reality, to struggle against subjectivist immobility, does not imply a denial of the role of subjectivity in the struggle to change structures. To detach objectivity from subjectivity, to deny the latter when analyzing reality or acting with it, is objectivism. On the other hand, to deny objectivity, in analysis or in action, results in a form of subjectivism leading to egocentric positions. This amounts to a denial of the action itself, in that objective reality is denied. Neither objectivism nor subjectivism, or "psychologism", is what is being proposed here; instead, we propose objectivism and subjectivism (and therefore also "psychologism") in a constant, reciprocal relation. World and action are closely interdependent in dialectical thought. But action is human only when it is not divorced from reflection. Fatalism, resignation and the sense that change is impossible is the

⁴² D. Stern (2004).

⁴³ P. Freire (1970/1993).

product of a historical and sociological situation.⁴⁴ What is required is trust in the Other, in others, trust in the people, as Freire expresses it, in order, together with others, i.e. people whose experiences differ from mine, to see, analyze and name conditions, and to subsequently transform them through action. This requires “conversion” to the people, conversion to change, and a conversion that involves seeing life-world and system-world from a new perspective. This conversion away from seeing the universe of my own life as The Only Truth sometimes requires a profound rebirth. In all phases of their liberation, the oppressed must regard themselves as human beings engaged in the ontological and historical calling to become more complete human beings. Actual reflection leads to action. The liberation of the oppressed is a liberation of people, not of things.

Play as the conquest of knowledge

Schooling and education play a crucial role in how we relate to each other and to the world in which we live. Traditional instruction/banking education has an intermediary character: The teacher is an intermediating subject, while the student is assigned the role of a listening object. The content, whether it relates to values or to empirical dimensions of reality, tends to become lifeless. By projecting absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, we negate education and knowledge as an investigative process.⁴⁵ The objective is to “transform the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation that oppresses them”, because the more easily the oppressed can be induced to adapt themselves to this situation, the more easily they can be ruled.

The banking perspective presupposes a split between the human being and the world: the human being is only *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; the human being is an observer and not the creator of something new. In this view, the human being is not a conscious being: she is, rather, the possessor of *one* consciousness: an empty “brain”, passively open to the introduction of elements deposited from the reality of the surrounding world. This view paves the way to cultural invasion. The banking perspective is based on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, space-centric view of consciousness, and it transforms students into receiving objects while promoting a culture of silence (as well as a silenced citizen). Banking education inhibits creativity and tames (though without quite being able to destroy it) the intentionality of consciousness, by isolating consciousness from the world. In so doing, it severs the human being from her ontological and historical calling to

⁴⁴ P. Freire (1970/1993).

⁴⁵ P. Freire (1970/1993).

become more completely human. The banking theory and practice of education do not succeed, as instructing and fixating forces, in acknowledging people as historical beings. Unfortunately, those who embrace the cause of freedom are surrounded by and influenced by the climate that shapes the banking perspective, and they often fail to see its underlying significances or dehumanizing power, and therefore believe that radical change has to do with the distribution of resources. Paradoxically, they utilize precisely this alienating instrument in what they envisage as a quest to liberate.⁴⁶

The theory and practice of education as a subjectifying discipline⁴⁷ proceeds on the basis of the human being's historicity. Education as a subjectifying discipline affirms people in their process of becoming – as unfinished, incomplete beings in and by a reality that is likewise unfinished. In contrast to other living creatures that are unfinished, yet not historical, the human being knows she is unfinished; she is conscious of her incompleteness. In education as a subjectifying discipline, people develop their capacity to critically comprehend the way in which they exist in the world by which and in which they find themselves: They learn to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. The starting point is always the human being in the “here and now”, which constitutes the situation in which she is oppressed, the context in which she is placed, out of which she elevates herself, and in which she intervenes. Only by proceeding on the basis of this situation – which determines her perception of it – can she begin to move. In order to do so in an authentic way, she must perceive her position not as fated and immutable, but simply as limiting – and therefore as a challenge. A quest to transition from a naïve, magical, fatalistic view, to the ability to comprehend oneself and reality, to comprehend one's context and the world about. From resignation to motion. From silence and passivity to creative participation. Human beings have a boundary-crossing capability, a capacity to see and analyze their lives in a quest for change. Change is possible through a praxis in which action and reflection are one.⁴⁸

Education as the praxis of freedom – in contradistinction to education as the praxis of dominance – denies that the human being is abstract, isolated, independent and not tied to the world. Knowledge only emerges and is only conquered through invention and re-invention, through a constant, impatient, continuous and hopeful process of investigation that people undertake in the world, and together with one another. Such an education is based on creativity, and stimulates reflection about

⁴⁶ P. Freire (1970/1993).

⁴⁷ See G. Biesta, (2010/2016)

⁴⁸ P. Freire (1970/1993).

and action through reality, and thus answers humanity's calling as a being that is only truly authentic when actively engaged in a process of investigation and creative transformation. Todd advocates freedom from violence in teaching situations. She helps us see some of the pitfalls that we unthinkingly risk stumbling into. Pitfalls entailing that a perspective is imposed on the Other, that one way of interpreting the world becomes the dominant way. Rogers tackles similar issues, i.e. how listening and the art of listening imply total openness, free of any preconceived notions about what the result of an encounter ought to be. Both advocate love and congruence in their criticism of present societal arrangements. Winnicott, who in a diplomatic way questioned the existing order whereby the psychoanalyst and psychotherapist assigned themselves the role of expert in relation to human life, and which accorded them unquestioned interpretive priority at the expense of the freedom of those they encountered, concurs in this view. Like Winnicott, Knutsdotter Olovsson draws attention to the societal factors that cause human beings to lose the ability to play, the ability to draw on their creative powers, and hence also some portion of their confidence in themselves and their possibilities.

Play as ethics

For Levinas, ethics represent something concrete emerging in the encounter between people. In such an encounter, a moral conflict is generated in the situation. The ethical responsibility for the other arises, or exists, prior to the rationality of, for instance, resolving conflicts that arise. What this implies is that an ethics precedes the occasion (or the application of such ethics), and that the ethics therefore always arises in the contact between subjects.⁴⁹ Hence, the humanization of culture can never come down to inventing a new kind of ethics. Instead, ethics are regarded as a principled way of relating to others. This way of relating to others pleads with us to allow ourselves to be transformed by the interpersonal encounter.

The meaning of encountering another has to do with the interpretation of that other. According to Levinas, it is part of our ontological precondition that we reduce the other to being the same as we ourselves are, in manifestations of our own self-conception. Levinas distinguishes between the idea of totality and the idea of infinity. Within the concept of totality, that which is other and that which is the same is integrated into a whole. Under the notion of infinity, the distance between that which is other and that which is the same is maintained. According to Levinas, the idea of totality is theoretical, but the notion of infinity is a moral one.⁵⁰ Infinity

⁴⁹ S. Todd (2003).

⁵⁰ E. Levinas (1969, p. 83).

transcends what finite beings lack. In this way, the I is able to transcend this relation by welcoming the other. The fact is that the idea of infinity is already present in the welcoming of that which is other, hence also of the other. This welcoming of the Other is the beginning of our moral consciousness.⁵¹ In so doing, Levinas adopts a view that does not reduce the Other to the same: thou art like me. What this does is to establish a separation which, according to Levinas, is part of the connection in our being.⁵²

As a result of the thought of infinity that arises in the relation with that which is other, the individual is unable to merge herself and others into a totality. Nor is it sufficient for the subject to refer back to herself in order to encounter the other. The separation of the self from others is a form of non-participation. The being of an I which no longer participates in the encounter with the Other is manifested in the self and not in the Other. Herein lies the risk that I, through my interpretation, will disregard what type of person the other might be. Of course, this separation also entails a form of violence against the other and the denial of the subject's autonomy. In point of fact, this happens at the very point when I believe that I know what the other wants to convey before she has even spoken. In other words, an ethical conflict is generated in the very description of the other. And if the other is reduced to comport with our conception, in practice we have already broken off contact, because the description of the other is intended as a means of entrapping the other in our proper world.

Levinas therefore does not view our ability to engage in reasoning about the other as the starting point for encountering one another as human beings. Levinas appeals to our sensibility instead. This sensibility goes back to a point antecedent to the origination of the thought, before we summon forth a set of rationalities by which to explain the world. Our sensibility is a state of active expectancy. This state of active expectancy is characterized by the satisfaction we feel in waiting, listening, hoping, believing and loving before we fall back on our conceptual world, our ideas. For Levinas, the ethical instant in which the moral element emerges inheres in the level of sensitivity when the subject encounters something that it wants to enjoy, something that it wants to make part of itself, but which cannot be consumed. That which the I wants to enjoy but cannot consume is that which originates in the encounter with the other, in the ludic zone, in the intermediate space, in a field of potential. The reason that this thing cannot be enjoyed is attributed to an inherent

⁵¹ E. Levinas (1969, p. 84).

⁵² E. Levinas (1969, p. 41).

resistance, that is to say, to the subject's unwillingness to allow itself to be consumed by the other's egoism.

From Levinas' point of view, a power relation arises out of such a meeting. Our vulnerability stems from experiences of being in the power of others. Our loneliness is invaded by others who demand to swallow us up. But because we do not easily allow ourselves to be reduced to some domain of the other's interpretive world, or some dimension of the other's enjoyment, the other's desire for this type of satisfaction can never be fulfilled.⁵³

Propinquity to others is not merely a matter of physical space: I am more *capable* of approaching the other to the extent that I feel responsible for such other. We understand that propinquity to the other demands a kind of response, a response which, in turn, presupposes an ability on my part to respond, or which at least creates in me the desire to respond in a way that makes the encounter possible. A new subjectivity arises through the responsibility for the other. The very meaning of being a social being is to exist "for others". When I emerge in opposition to others – the other – as a significant capacity to respond to the other (cf. substitution), this means that I emerge as a new subject for the other. If the responsibility for the other is dependent on us being caught in each other's worlds but at the same time are capable of choosing to transcend these limits, our fundamental approach must be *in favor of* the interpersonal relation (i.e. to create conditions for face-to-face encounters).⁵⁴ The encounter with the face of the other is the concrete relation. Openness is discovered as a responsibility we can *hope* to find in the other and in the encounter with that other's ethics. The overstepping (the transcendence) cannot, according to Levinas, be totalized. There is no concrete ethics or relation outside of this relation to the other. Thus, it is in the attitude to the other that we find the radical value of humanization and the motives impelling us to dare to hope and to acknowledge our need for others, needs which make manifest our desire for contact with one another. This may be reason enough to in fact pursue a potential concretization of the social and pedagogical relation within the aesthetic, rather than reducing human relations to other kinds of rationalities, especially hedonistic and economic ones, based as they are on enjoyment and consumption.⁵⁵

⁵³ E. Levinas defends the subject and her freedom, yet not in a way that holds her forth as an ego in search of its own satisfaction, but as a subject, free to come into existence for-the-other, free to be transformed by new experiences. Naturally this entails a great risk, a risk of being defined within a new totality that the subject does not wish to be a part of.

⁵⁴ E. Levinas (1969, p. 39).

⁵⁵ Cf. A. T. Peperzak (1993, p. 139).

Discussion and further questions

Play is a phenomenon in which different senses and different expressive forms of aesthetic expression are called upon. The connection to EXA is self-evident. Play is the ability and the means by which both children and adults actively master and work through both an inner and an outer world.⁵⁶ Play is and becomes model-forming, and a means of development.

So what happens when adults recapture [the ability to] play, create an enhanced awareness of and actively utilize their ability to play and to communicate, in both verbal and non-verbal forms? And what happens when adults use their creative abilities with the intention of encountering one another through play?

The questions we ask: *Which dimensions of communication are lost by the fact that we orient ourselves toward the verbal dimension so unambiguously, and at such an early stage? Does this also entail us losing our earliest experience and ability to communicate through the senses?*

From birth, we are trained in a type of non-verbal communication. This non-verbal communication plays a crucial role in how we understand ourselves in relation to our surroundings. Perception, noticing things; in communication and in contact with everyone who offers us relations we are given access to the words that gradually shape and construct our narrative understanding, allowing us to orient ourselves in the world-around. Here we gain a preliminary understanding (always preliminary, although ever-expanding) of what it is to be human. Communication, interaction and relation literally allow us to survive. Without this fundamental point of entry into life, hope dies and we continue on our way with severe psychosocial handicaps.⁵⁷

The totality of the senses, the communication of the senses, non-verbal communication made manifest in rhythm, form and intensity, is preverbal in nature. Gradually, the ability to communicate is acquired in the form of verbal language and cultural discourses. Conversation is critical to language development.⁵⁸ The words emerge as symbols that comprehend experiences and open the way to verbal communication. Verbal communication becomes a tool that uncovers, explains, opens up perspectives, but which simultaneously excludes, splits things up, divides and

⁵⁶ M. Soltved (2005) citing E.H. Eriksson (1950, p. 197).

⁵⁷ See for instance the experiences of children who have gone through orphanages or the like. Moreover, it was the orphanage children and the experiences of institutionalized children that gave the impetus for early attachment research.

⁵⁸ M. Hedenbro/Lidén (2003, p. 51).

diminishes. The world widens, literally and on all other levels, through the process of our becoming human.

The interface to the unknown expands. But not everything can be expressed in words – meaning that there are experiences that are left unsaid.⁵⁹ The point of this project is to prepare the theoretical/philosophical groundwork for communicating experiences through other forms of expression, other forms of communication and other forms of participation. That which the participant lacks words for, or which the participant is not yet prepared to put into words, can be expressed/formulated in so many ways other than through words.⁶⁰ What was formerly a no man's land can be interpreted and affirmed, while complex connections and contexts can be established, and affect and rhythm captured and embodied. A conscience grounded in the body, not yet conscious in the cognitive sense, can be expressed through the arts before being denominated through verbal language, with a different responsibility in open subjectivity.

Those who live in a state of close intersubjectivity with a preverbal infant are afforded excellent opportunities for practicing/maintaining non-verbal communication skills.

The questions we ask: *Don't we lose sight of important aspects of educational work by limiting communication to the cognitive-verbal dimension?*

All people have the potential to acquire knowledge and competency, to master and cultivate the forms of knowledge. This potential is based on play, imagination, curiosity, the desire to experiment, expressivity – a desire to express oneself in various ways. This potential is developed in relation to and in interaction with other people. It lays the groundwork for learning processes: cognitive, sensual and emotional ones alike. It lays the groundwork for creating deeper awareness and for acquiring knowledge and life skills, knowledge through action and deriving from intuition. This process can take shape and can be shaped in and by expressive forms of aesthetic expression. Yet the point, on the one hand, is that the cognitive acquisition of knowledge is not always necessary, and that, on the other, it is not the only form of pedagogical praxis. And herein lies the challenge: offering both the "I/Thou" and "I/It" modalities with due regard to balance and context, without thereby diminishing the overriding and central role played by verbal communication in the construction of reality.

⁵⁹ M. Hedenbro/A. Lidén (2003).

⁶⁰ No expression produces a full translation of our emotions who is also our bodily experiences anchored, see M. Nussbaum (2008, p. 127).

Most of us want to encounter a person in a degree of the "I/Thou" relation, irrespective of the reason for the encounter. To encounter myself, the other, art, nature: naked, openly, in the here and now, to dare to remain, without resorting to calculation or analysis; to abandon oneself to the "I/Thou" encounter and to the other's "I/Thou" in order to enter this "I/Thou" in to relation with the "I/It". "I/It" refers to the impulse to name, analyze, measure, weigh, and calculate, to acquire control and surveillance, to form strategies both in terms of my own life and in terms of myself in relation to others. Reflecting on one's own life and the lives of others. Putting one's experiences together. What is my attitude toward these poles of my personality? How do I balance one pole of my personality in relation to the other? How do we evolve? Through a transcendence of the subject by an operation of the will and by the challenge inherent in the infinite, or simply by extrapolating from experience. For example, what is my attitude to nature: while on a ski trip on a dazzling winter's day in which my "I" is attuned to "One [ness]", in harmony with nature? What is my attitude when I encounter art in the form of an image, a movie, a piece of music, a poem? What is my attitude towards encounters with people: contacts, meetings, surface and depth, in relation to others? How can we stimulate curiosity about unknown experiences and find life?

We are also thinking of brokenness, complications, thorniness and the impossibility of getting through, both to ourselves and to others. We, as Buber emphasizes, are thinking about: a spiritual dimension of human life that is divorced from a religious dimension. We are thinking of encounters replete with something more, something greater in our encounters with nature, works of art, other people, and in encounters with ourselves: where everything seems to fit and be in harmony.

Buber clearly describes the human possibilities of subject-to-subject relationships. Buber's subject-to-subject relationship ceases to exist at the point where the genuine encounter ends, where the *Thou* is no longer at the center as a totality, as a dialogical partner. Subject-to-subject relationship: how easy it is to have an encounter with the other, but one full of preconceptions, preconceived opinions, prejudices, and sometimes even condemnations! And how difficult it is to leave all of this behind! How difficult it is, instead, to really try to see the other and to oneself attempt to step out of the shadows of the limited images of the self, to have the courage to choose the *encounter*.

According to Buber, we can resort to a world of ideas and live in that world of ideas simply to escape having to wrestle with life. In this way, the "It-world's" repression of the "Thou-world" is alleviated. Do we not live, at least at times, in a world of ideas in the belief that it is the only world available? And in this case, does not

the world of ideas obscure our experiential base, the conviction grounded in the experience gained through the "I/Thou-I/Thou" encounter? And does the world of ideas not foreclose us from the "Thou-world" within ourselves, and with others, in relationships, in the spiritual realm?

With regard to ethics and the humanization of the culture, we ask the following:
What is oppression?

And so onto the scathing critique of our times. Is it really such a big deal? In the modern world, the "Both-And-World", the human being is unable to discover life. How oppressed are we in the "It-world"? How fundamental is the "It-world" in the construction of the subject? Is the oppressor in us grounded in a state of material prosperity? Is it not possible to be an oppressor and simultaneously poor? Is one automatically an oppressor simply because one has influence? When does oppression become structural? What are the contexts in which we identify organizational solutions implemented through democratic decisions whose consequence is oppressive, and restrictive in the sense that humanity's calling, humanization, is restricted or impeded? How can we gradually be borne into a deeper awareness of ourselves, of contexts, of life stories and our being as a society? How do I/we reach through to a state of continual creation of the new: to a state of being transformed and renewed in encounters with the other?

We conclude by asking: *Instead of language as the fundamental unit for the construction of reality, might we instead be able to speak of "communication-in-relation" as a fundamental educational and social objective?*

We see relations and "communication-in-relation" as fundamental to becoming human. In the ontological sense, intersubjectivity comes before subjectivity. "Communication-in-relation" can be the unit that endows the construction of reality with a "more permanent openness". We see "communication-in-relation" as a concept that encompasses all of the human being's possibilities of communication, all the "languages" on which human beings can draw.

There are no teachers or students in the exploration of everyday reality. Where everyday reality consists of pedagogical, social or therapeutic praxis, we are a subject/subject pair in which the one encounters the other in a process. Encounters between people require love, humility, faith, hope and critical thinking. They also require trust in play. To criticize the world is to create and re-create it. To gain knowledge, to gain knowledge and to link it to praxis, is a shared task. We learn from one another and in so doing seek the truth that supports our work, in the awareness that doing so is necessary despite truth's ever-provisional nature.

Together, at play, in conversation and interaction, we explore the world: we deconstruct in an attempt to identify a liberating reconstruction.

Our aim in upcoming articles is to present the EXA as a tool, linked to different examples of research and from the development work that has taken place in connection with the program for personal development (PPU) in social work education, Mälardalen University (from 2008 until present day). We will also present the students' reactions to the course and our methodological considerations. Finally, it is our ambition that the basis of our experience to formulate an adult educational approach of higher education based game that educational philosophy and practice.

References

- Anderson H. (1997). *Conversation, Language, and Possibilities: A Postmodern Approach to Therapy*. New York: Basic Books
- Apelmo P. (2003/2009). *EXA; Expressive Arts – Uttryckande Konst. Tillämpning i skola och socialtjänst – teoretiska perspektiv och exempel*. Eskilstuna: Utvecklingsarbetet Fristadsbarn, Fas 2 rapport nr 4, Eskilstuna Kommun. Lunds Universitet, Pedagogiska rapporter 2009.
- Apelmo P. (2008). *Den ickeverbala kommunikationens betydelse. Kommunikation av kroppsligt förankrad erfarenhet*. Uppsats. Psykoterapeutprogrammet, Umeå Universitet.
- Apelmo P. (ej publicerad). *Pedagogisk praxis – en pedagogik för sociala sammanhang*. Manus 2015.
- Biesta G.J.J. (2010/2016). *Good Education in an Age of Measurement. Ethics, Politics, Democracy*. New York: Routledge
- Buber M. (1923/2013). *I and Thou*. London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Freire P. (1970/1993). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin Books
- Hedenbro M. Lidén A. (2003). *Att bygga en familj*. Stockholm: Liber.
- Huizinga, J. 1949. *Homo Ludens: A study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Knutsdotter Olofsson B. (1998). *I lekens värld*. Stockholm: Liber förlag.
- Levinas E. (1969). *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*. Pittsburgh Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press.
- Nachmanovitch, S. 1990. *Free Play. Improvisation in Life and Art*. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc.
- Nussbaum, M.C. (2001). *Upheavals of Thought. The Intelligence of Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Peperzak A.T. To the Other. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. (1993) *Purdue University Press e-Books*. Book 20.
- Rogers C.R. (1980/1995). *A Way of being*. NY: Mariner Books.
- Røed Hansen, B. (1991). Betydningen av oppmerksomhet og samspill i psykoterapi med barn. *Tidsskrift for Norsk Psykologforening* nr 28, s 779–788
- Soltvedt M. (2005). *BOF Barnorienterad familjeterapi*. Stockholm: Mareld.
- Stern, D. (2004). *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life*. New York: W.W. Norton

Todd S. (2003). *Learning from the Other. Levinas, Psychoanalysis, and Ethical Possibilities in Education*. New York: State University of New York Press

Winnicott, D W. (1971/1982). *Playing and Reality*. New York: Routledge.