

In this presentation I will address the question of how play can be used in teaching.

I will present some findings that I have made working with Master Thesis, a work still in progress. (Didactical Perspectives on Learning and School Development, 60 credits . "Teaching with a playful perspective")

I know that there are a lot of us here who think that play should be used primarily for its own sake. I would agree that play is important for its own sake. But I also think that play sometimes can be a very good motivation to learn. Play and education does not have to be opposites.

I, now and then, use play during and between lessons of more traditional nature. There are different kinds of play, the definitions are many, and I now will show you some examples of different types of play that also works as teaching methods.

These examples come from my work as a teacher in primary school, in central Stockholm, Sweden.

Foto and film on a power point

These are examples of free play within certain themes.

Pic. 2, 3,4 : Here they learn about ancient history. The children got a lot of merchandise and played market place.

5 film : Another day, we played ancient village in a park just behind the school. With a sort of fireplace.

(Foton sshoolday 1921, pic. 6, 7, 8,9)

This is a much more directed type of play, where we get to experience how it was to be a child in our school in the year of 1921.

Often I use a game between lessons, as a break. Here the children are doing the machine. (**Film 0167**)

The rule is to invent a sound and a motion that fit into the machine. Then I put up and down the power, until it explodes.

Play is often used as an opposite towards school work. It can be considered as time wasting. This was also the starting point for my paper in Didactical Perspectives on Learning and School Development, 60 credits, called "Teaching with a playful perspective".

Theories of learning and theories of play have often been understood as separated fields of knowledge. In academia these fields has been divided from each other.

Play as a way of learning has not been accepted as a proper way of learning in Swedish schools, even though play more or less is an integrated part of class room practice, as I just have showed you.

We know that children play to experience and test what they can do with the world around them, with objects as well as with words, signs and symbols.

The same processes can be used in learning if we could expand what we mean by learning. The redefinition of the concept of learning was made obvious through, for example with virtual games. With this new way of playing it is more obvious that it is the same processes for playing as for learning. With these new resources for play and communication, new demands and new possibilities have been raised for learning.

This has opened a window between theories of play and theories of learning.

My study

In this new situation have I have done a small study about what happened when a teacher, a colleague, did a lesson with a playful perspective. I have used ethnographic methods like filming, taking notes, doing interviews and participant observation. I have analyzed what the children did and how the teachers reflected on the lesson and what was happening.

My case study was related to research project using learning study as a method.

A learning study is a new coming way in school context to focus on special objectives of learning. A researcher and teachers are joint together systematically trying how to fulfill the learning-objectives as effective as possible. The idea is that you first try with one design of the lesson, then you analyze and maybe you change the design, to become more effective.

This researcher, an old colleague, came from the institution of Education and Communication in Engineering Sciences, subject of technology. She wanted to find out how the children would learn the function open/close –possibilities.

So,

In a class with 8 years old the learning study aimed to find how to make the children understand and gain knowledge of how a door or hutch can be opened and closed.

At the first trial the teachers, myself included, wanted to try a playful perspective in designing the lesson. First the class teacher made a lesson about different way of opening and closing- function, for examples hinges, screw caps, snap caps and so on.

After that the perspective of playful teaching began. Their class teacher gave them a little animal, a bit of fluff – **like this – Visa en tuss-**. She told them, with a whispering voice, that these animals had come to the class, and they needed somewhere to live.

With playful perspective I mean that what the teacher said to the children was supposed to be interpreted in another way. She gave them signals of play. She said “animals” even if she and the children of course saw that it was not an animal, but a piece of fluff. She asked them invent what animal it was, what it needed and to build it a house, with doors and other openings in it. She told them that it was very important with the openings, of course.

The children got the message immediately. They started to build, and play, at once. The teacher tried a bit to stop them, asking them to talk about the animal they got, before building, but only a few listened. Now an hour of activities begins.

Here are some results. Pictures:

Here you see the for example the condorfluff, the green fluff, bild 11, with his glider. He needs it, because on his planet Condor, there are no roads.

Bild12, . This fluff-animal , lightgreen, really likes to play; she has her own swimming pool, a swing and a playhouse.

Bild 13. This is a fluff-ice bear. He has his red hat on. The door is really adapted to the form of the ice bear.

BILD 14. Here is the remote control and that games consol of the very rich fluff. You can even see that he's rich, because he is colors in gold. (We did not see that, until the boys told us...)

When I analyzed the material, I found some themes, expressed in dichotomies, which might explain some problem with teaching with a playful perspective.

I started with a question of what happens when a teacher do a lesson with playful perspective. I found four different themes, with their own separated challenges. With this in mind I think I can overcome the challenges.

Klicka: Work - play

It was obvious that the children played during the building the houses. They talked with "play voices", they let the animals try all the things they were building. But when they got the question if they played during the lesson, during the interviews afterwards, they looked a little anxiously at each other and most of them said no, or maybe... In the school context it is not accepted to play around. This time it was a bit straight because the teacher sort of asked them to play.

- This discovery remind me to chance my attitude that play and working for learning are not the same, it reminds me of stop saying thing like: Now, it is for real, no playing around.

Klicka: Learning objectives – creativity

The learning objective was the function of closing and opening possibilities. Since the children made lots of other stuff, learned and played other things, this was not an effective lesson for learning the objectives we teacher had decided.

So when we design the next lesson, for another group of children, we had to take away the playful perspective. This group did not build a house; the task was too unspecified and the creativity could not be controlled by us.

Predefined goals seem to be the opposite of more or less free play activities. Of course we suffered as teachers taking away the playful perspective.

- This challenge shows me that I must highlight more values than just a specific learning objectives, working with playful perspectives.

Klicka: Teacher's expectations – children's own trace

The learning objective was the function of closing and opening possibilities, for us teachers. The children know that, but it was not their first priority. Very quickly they found their own trace in this session. It was to use this unexpected opportunity to make something really funny. They made toys to play with. They made whole fantasy worlds around these pieces of fluff. When the teacher came to talk with them, they could tell about how the open-close function will work, but they had not build that yet. Instead they built footballs, Cotton-candy's, swimming pools, gliders and all the stuff the animal could live and play with.

After the lesson I hear on the MP3 –player how Ruth encourage the others:

Pupils voice: pic. 16

“about the open-close eh, do something so big that we can put in our hands properly to play.” Frida responds: “Are we going to play with them?” Ruth answer: “no, but so it can be played with”. This is also an example of how the children don't quite know if it is accepted to play or not. Can something so funny, done on work time, be played with??

Of course these girls played a lot with their houses, when they had permission to take them to the afternoon club.

- This challenge shows me that the children will always found out their own way of seeing something meaningful. Can I cooperate with the children to explore a wider repertoire outside of the lesson contents? What is fun, meaningful from the children's point of view? How can I combine the wider repertoire that the children search for with the school curriculum with predefined goals?

Bild 17:

Be done – continue

In school contexts, you are supposed to be done with your work. In play, it can continue, and go on forever, or it can just fade away. These differences were obvious in the project.

The researcher was not happy with the lesson with the playful perspective, because the children were never finished. The activities

could go on and go on. They did not priority open close-functions, but they constricted gliders, swings and a lot of other stuff.

The time order to do things, in a grown-up-way: first talk about the animal, then construct, was not the order that the children used. For them it was impossible to know for example who the rich fluff was, before they had found some golden pieces of wood. In play you can't always plan first, the planning and the play are simultaneous.

- This challenge reminds me of sometimes letting the child's time's order rules. And reflect about what to the loose? And what to gains?

Conclusion

By doing this deep analyzes of a lesson with playful perspective, I have systematically gain a lot of knowledge about how these children are thinking, learning and playing. Since the process of learning and the process of playing have many similarities , and I always had have a desire for working more with play I now see that it is possible and much more fun.

And here are the four challenges (pp)

- work – play,
- learning objectives- or creativity,
- teachers expectations or children's own trace
and
- be done or continue

This gives me tools to work with and reflect about, using play or a playful perspective in the classroom.

Thank you for listening,

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