



Review Article

Play as a Manifestation of Children's Imagination and Creativity

Ayman ALJARRAH¹

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Abstract

This theoretical paper sheds light on the interrelatedness between play, imagination, and creativity, and the importance of realizing this interrelatedness in early childhood education. Based on a thoughtful review of relevant literature, I suggest that children's play manifests and prompts their imagination and creativity. In addition, I argue that play is a fundamental element in teaching and learning that has the potential to change the classroom environment into an expansive and creative environment. In that space, we can see a real educative play that can "engage, intrigue, interest, puzzle, and enchant" (Jardine et al, 2003, p. 22). Imagination, play, and creativity are necessarily interrelated and interwoven as one fabric; they complete and prompt each other, and together they support learning, opening the door to the possible and the not-yet experienced.

Keywords

play, creativity, imagination, possibility thinking, little c creativity

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¹ PhD candidate, University of Calgary, Educational Research/ Curriculum and Learning, Calgary, Alberta Canada. E-mail: aaljarra@ucalgary.ca

Introduction

Play can be understood as “the purest, most spiritual activity of man (sic) at [childhood], and, at the same time, typical of human life as a whole—of the inner hidden natural life in man (sic) and all things ... Play at this time is not trivial, it is highly serious and of deep significance” (Froebel, 1887, p. 55). Froebel’s claim can best be supported by Vygotsky’s (1967) claim that play is the leading source of development in pre-school years. Moreover, researchers see creativity as an essential life skill and recommend that it should be fostered by the education system (Burnard & White, 2008; Craft, 2000; Sawyer, 2011). However, actualizing play in the classroom raises a great many problems, given that few studies on play and creativity respond to the pedagogical challenges posed by directing children’s free play to be creative/educative.

Play is a simple but hard to articulate concept, especially when one is talking about play in early childhood. For in such a stage, to play means to live life as it is actually lived. It describes children’s actions and coactions with each other, with their environment, and with those who share it with them. It is their way of living, inquiring, and learning. Davis, Sumara, and Luce-Kapler (2008) claimed that children are more content and engaged when they are working within a playful environment that “allows or calls for creativity, innovation, problem solving, and other occasions for flexible response” (p. 84).

To gain some insight into the origins of the word “play,” and consequently, to realize why this phenomenon is already a manifestation of our life in all its aspects; why it is far away from being a childish activity; and why “it is an essential human quality that is evident in everything we do” (Davis, 1996, p. 221), it is important to search its roots and synonyms in language. This is important because when one is trying to articulate an idea that is expressed in a word, one must keep in mind that this word defines and limits the idea that it is used to represent (Huizinga, 1955). In addition, this search may be helpful in understanding the importance of play in the field of education.

What is Play?

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the English verb “play” has its roots in the Old English words *plegan* and *plegian*, which mean “more rapidly; occupy or busy oneself; exercise; frolic; make sport of; mock; perform music,” and which are related to the Germanic word *plegan*, which means “occupy oneself about.” Other cognates can be found in other old languages; (e.g., in Arabic—my mother tongue, and one of the famous Siamese languages—there is the word *la’iba*, which means “laughing and mocking, amuse oneself; recreation; take part in”; in the Old Saxon language there is the word *plegan*, which means “vouch for; take charge of”; in Old Frisian there is the word *plega*, which means “tend to”; in Middle Dutch there is the word *plejen*, which means “to rejoice; be glad”; and in German there is the word *pflügen*, which means “take care of; cultivate.”

This glance at the origins of the word *play* indicates that the word reflects a kind of activeness, volunteerism, engagement, movement, and enjoyment. This conclusion can best be supported by Seath’s (2007) claim, which he made based on

his review of the origins of the word *play* in Huizinga's (1955) work. According to Seath, *play* and its synonyms in different cultures have been used to describe a wide range of activities with specific characters, some of which are: movement; insignificance; comparison and the divine; playful attention; contest; recreation; laughing and mocking; play as a whole; rhythmic movement; swinging and waving about; ceremony and care; and battle.

Gadamer (2004) gave examples to explain how the word *play* has been used. Based on different metaphorical senses that were reflected through these examples, Gadamer noted that "in each case what is intended is to-and-fro movement that is not tied to any goal that would bring it to an end ... Rather [this to-and-fro movement] renews itself in constant repetition" (p. 104). According to Gadamer, the actual subject of play is the play itself, and not the subjectivity of the individual who is playing. The to-and-fro movement is the cornerstone of play, no matter who or what performs this movement (Gadamer, 2004).

Huizinga (1955) himself described play as

a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious,' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings that tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means (p.13)

Another informing definition (description) of play came from Gwen Gordon who has done extensive and creative work in the field of play since 1989. As a coach, producer, and consultant, Gordon guides people to widen and deepen their playgrounds toward lives of artful play. Gordon (2008) suggested a definition of play based on what she sees as irreducible features of play, and which were highlighted by different theorists (e.g., Gadamer, 1975; Hans, 1981; Koestler, 1964; Millar, 1968; Sutton-Smith, 1997; Winnicott, 1971). By rolling (blending) most suggested conditions together, Gordon (2008) stated that

play is the voluntary movement across boundaries, opening with total absorption into a highly flexible field, releasing tension in ways that are pleasurable, exposing players to the unexpected, and making transformation possible. Transformations occur as frames bisect and the parts and the whole interpenetrate, increasing the differentiation of the part, the integration of the whole, and the range, coordination, and spontaneity of movement between and among them. (p. 12)

Huizinga's description and Gordon's definition of play indicated that play includes amongst other aspects: imagination, intrinsic motivations, openness, and ambiguity. It is far away from being the opposite of seriousness, but it absolutely has something against rigidity, control, predictability, and linear progression.

This brief review of the origins of the word *play* intends to clarify the importance of play in the field of education, and, to be more specific, in children's learning. Based on Davis's (1996) argument that "play is only play in the playing" (p. 212), I will not put myself in a paradoxical situation by trying to pin the word "play" to any restricted definition. I prefer to deal with play, as suggested by Millar (1968), as an adverb that describes "how and under what conditions an action is performed" (p. 21), or to describe children's actions and doings as active members

in their society; or more expansively, I prefer conceiving of play as children's way of living and learning.

Play, Childhood, and Education

As one can induce from the previous glance at the origins of the word *play*, different forms of play are manifestations of children's lives. Based on this understanding, and having in mind Dewey's (2013) argument that "the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which [s]he finds him/[her]self" (p. 33), it may be possible to argue that the stimulation of these powers can best be done through a simple, and yet a powerful, invitation: "Come on, let's play" (Jardine, Friesen, and Clifford 2006, p. 58). According to Jardine et al (2006), it is a powerful invitation to enter "what is possible, living, and foreseen" (p. 59) in this or that subject. It is an invitation to start an adventure; full of excitement, possibilities, movement, and surprising events.

Play, in early childhood, is not and should not be conceived as a relief from serious learning, nor is it an activity in the service of something which is not play. In the same way, our children are not, and should not be understood as "human resources waiting to be engineered but players with a craving for experience" (Rodriguez, 2006, p. 15). Play is our children's serious business; it is their way of being in this world. Jardine (1988) saw play as a sense-making activity that imparts meaning to actions. Play, according to Jardine, should be taken as an end in itself and not as in the service of something that is not play. Jardine (1988) stated that,

play opens up a possible world of meaning which encompasses the player and in which the player finds him or herself. The activity of the individual [is to explore] a world of meaning which goes beyond that individual and directs his or her actions. (p. 32)

Given these understandings, it is clear that *play*, especially in early childhood, is far away from being the opposite of seriousness. In addition, play is far away from being a random or silly activity within which anything goes. It is "play" because it is an invitation to keep moving, to keep active, and to keep playing. If we consider the active nature of classroom settings, then it will be easy for us, as educators, to adopt both Hall's (1912) suggestion that play should be the basis of education in early childhood, and Davis's (1996) assertion that "[where] there is play; there is learning" (p. 222). According to Davis, "play is not so much an activity as it is an acceptance of uncertainty and a willingness to move" (p. 222).

Dewey (1902) discussed Froebel's educational principles to explain the serious work of play, especially in early childhood. These principles, according to Dewey (1902), are:

- The primary business of school is to train children in co-operative and mutually helpful living; to foster in them the consciousness of mutual interdependence; and to help them practically in making the adjustments that will carry this spirit into overt deeds.
- The primary root of all educative activity is in the instinctive, impulsive attitudes and activities of the child, and not in the presentation and application of external material.

- These individual tendencies and activities are organized and directed through the uses made of them in keeping up the co-operative living already spoken of; taking advantage of them to reproduce on the child's plane the typical doings and occupations of the larger society. (pp. 117-18)

Dewey (1902) saw that these principles represented Froebel's educational philosophy; and consequently, it may be possible for us to consider them as a good ground for a philosophy of play; i.e., "the free play, the interplay, of all the child's powers, thoughts, and physical movements, in embodying, in a satisfying form, his (sic) own images and interests" (pp. 118-19). According to Dewey (1902), and in contrast to our taken-for-granted conception of play in education, which is, mostly, related to some external, and prescribed activities of the child, it is precisely this interplay between the child's powers, thoughts, and physical movements, that makes an activity worthy of the name "play," or to use Dewey's words "educative" play. This idea of play as "interplay" can be easily conceived when we admit that "play denotes the psychological attitude of the child, not his (sic) outward performances" (p. 119).

If one tries to combine Davis's (1996) argument that "there is play; there is learning" with Dewey's conception of "educative activity," then it is possible to claim that *there is play; there is educative activity*. This claim, in addition to Davis's argument, can be considered as an invitation to think about what it is within "play" that deserves to be described as "educative." To answer such a question, one needs deep and thoughtful research that can inquire into all aspects of play in the field of education. This article can be considered as an invitation for researchers, especially those whose area of interest is education in early childhood, to pay more attention to this rich field.

Based on a thoughtful review of the literature on the use of the word *play* in the field of education, I noticed that most approaches to play conceive of it either as an activity in the service of something that is not play, or as an end in itself. According to Jardine (1988), the first approach can be described as the technical approach to play; a monological, and univocal approach, under which "play becomes legitimate only to the extent that it can be demonstrated that children will... 'get something from it'—that 'something' being a 'skill' whose development can be thereby controlled, manipulated and predicted" (p. 26).

Under this vision of play, Gordon and Swimme (2003) argued that "our play is relegated and defined by economic interests." "*Our play*" refers to anything we do "with our deepest, spontaneous impulse to join and enjoy life" (p. 13). Our play includes not just what we do for adventure or sport, but also how we do anything. For Gordon and Swimme, as for Davis (1996), play is not merely a particular kind of activity, but instead it includes anything we do "playfully, with vitality, freedom, intimacy, spontaneity, and creativity" (Gordon, & Swimme, 2003, p. 13). But this "play" is starting to decay in a period where the language of the market is dominant. Based upon Swimme's (1984) claims that every species has its own habitat within which its true powers of life can be evoked, and that the true habitat of the human is adventurous play, and because we are starting to deny this habitat, it may be true that we are denied the opportunity to become truly human, or at

least, it may be possible to claim that, through deemphasizing play in the field of education, we start to *dehumanize education*.

The second approach to play conceives of it as an end in itself and not in the service of something else, which is not play. Play is the occurrence of movement; i.e., to-and-fro movement. So, when we say that “something is ‘playing’... [this means that] something is going on or that something is happening” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 104). Gadamer’s (2004) description of playing indicates that “play is not to be understood as something a person does” (p. 104); i.e., the actual subject of play is the play itself.

Huizinga (1955) suggested that children know no conceptual distinction between being and playing, and based on this suggestion, Gadamer (2004) saw that the to-and-fro motion of play follows of itself, and that such movement “happens, as it were, by itself” (p. 105) as a kind of relaxation under the absence of purpose and strain. Within such an understanding of play, the player is initially absorbed by the structure of play itself, and so is freed from “the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence” (p. 105). This freedom can be considered, according to Huizinga (1955), as a characteristic of play itself; i.e., the motive of play is the experience it affords, and not something else. In addition, and according to Rodriguez (2006), Huizinga assumed that “playing is a medium where lived experience is organized as a structured situation,” and as such, “the lived quality of play cannot be captured by the vocabulary of mechanical motion” (p. 3). Rodriguez (2006) asserted that play is meaningful by virtue of its essential nature; it resists mechanical and quantitative measurements and explanations.

If it is true that play frees the player from strain, then it is possible to consider children’s play as their best medium for learning and inquiring. Piaget (1963) argued that *play* is the answer to the question, “How does anything new ever come about?”, and I think that it is possible to use the same words to approximate an answer to Huebner’s (1967) questioning about “learning how to learn” (p. 134). It may be more appropriate to start with questions like: “How do we learn?”, “How do we start learning?” and “How can learning best be supported by teaching?” A possible answer regarding such wonderings is “play.” Based on Piaget’s (1963) conception of play, one may consider play as the starting point for creativity and inventiveness. The idea of play in early childhood education is not new. If it is acceptable to conceive of children as innate beings, and if it is true that “the mode of being of play is so close to the mobile form of nature” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 105), then it may be possible to claim that children’s being and playing are interwoven as one fabric.

I completely agree with Davis (1996) that in Piaget’s conception of play, “the educative import is lost as one progresses to more complex modes of thinking and reasoning” (p. 213). According to Davis (1996), it is possible to use Dewey’s perspective on play as an applicable concept “across developmental stages and maturational levels” (p. 213). According to Dewey,

The first stage of contact with any material, at whatever age of maturity, must inevitably be of the trial and error sort. An individual must actually try, in play, to do something with material...and then note the interaction of his energy and that of the material employed. This is what happens when a child at first begins to build with blocks, and it

is equally what happens when a scientific man (sic) in his (sic) laboratory begins to experiment with unfamiliar objects. (cited in Davis, 1996, p. 213)

The previous discussion should be understood as an invitation to those who care for the lives of children and who are willing to take their voices and experiences seriously to strive for a balance between the two approaches (i.e., the approach that conceives of play as an activity in the service of something that is not play, and the approach that conceives of play as an end in itself). I think it is fair to follow Gordon's (2008) advice to recognize the validity of the two approaches. Gordon (2008) articulated her definition of play based on this advice. And it may be possible to use this advice to argue that no one of the two approaches to play can be used to encompass all aspects of children's play. Educators need to know how to weave a conception of play using the best in the two approaches. Gordon (2008) articulated an excellent definition of play based on the belief that our universe, an alive universe, can be both playful and lawful.

Neglecting Play in Classroom Settings

Listen. Don't talk to each other. Stop playing. Sit down. Don't move. Stop annoying others. Be serious. The class is a place where you have to sit. These are some of the expressions that I used to hear, and imitate, in every teaching environment I have ever worked in. As a young teacher, the most important thing that I had to learn was to manage the classroom environment in a way that guaranteed quiet, seated listeners (who may have been sleepers or calm, passive receivers). As early as 1902, Dewey discussed almost the same control problem after a conversation with a furniture dealer while he was trying to find suitable desks and chairs for his school. Unable to satisfy Dewey's requests for desks and chairs which seemed thoroughly suitable to the needs of the children, the dealer noted: "You want something at which the children may work; these are all for listening" (p. 31). It was as if to say that these were for seating, controlling, taming, or, to use an extreme expression, enslaving. Dewey (1902) described this conventional classroom environment as

rows of ugly desks placed in geometrical order, crowded together so that there shall be as little moving room as possible, desks almost all of the same size, with just space enough to hold books, pencils, and paper.... The workshop, the laboratory, the materials, the tools with which the child may construct, create, and actively inquire, and even the requisite space, have been for the most part lacking. (pp. 31-32)

Instead of making the classroom a natural environment for our children, within which they can grow and flourish; instead of keeping the play in play; i.e., allowing the children to live their lives as actually lived, instead of striving for a balance between the playfulness and the lawfulness of our alive universe, our tendency to privilege clarity, distinctness, accountability, rigidity, and control directs us to relegate such an important human quality as play, and to conceive of it as "childish, haphazard; ineffective, and inefficient" (Davis, 1996, p. 212). And by doing that, we fail to create a classroom in which children may feel a kind of belonging, for which they may care and feel a kind of responsibility, and within which they may collaborate, play, enjoy, inquire, learn, and flourish.

Play, Imagination, and Creativity

Davis (1996) asserted that play is not and should not be thought of as “off-task behavior,” nor should it be thought of as “goofing around” (p. 213). According to him, the creative and re-creative aspects of play, which have been forgotten as it has become associated strictly with recreation (i.e., a leisure activity), are at the heart of the serious business of schooling. Davis (1996) suggested that play is “the locus of [children’s] incredible creativity” (p. 221). According to him,

playing must be thought of as a sort of bricolage. [Webster’s online dictionary defines bricolage as a construction achieved by using whatever comes to hand. It is a term derived from the French verb bricoler (meaning “to putter about”) and related to bricoleur, the French name for a jack-of-all-trades.] The function of playing is to open a space of possibilities.... Creativity arises out of the background of those possibilities, selecting out through repetition and formulation those actions that are new and useful. (p. 220)

Another telling note came from Norris (2012) who argued that “play” plays a vital role in enabling acts of creation and co-creation. According to him, play is a disposition towards a task that fosters thresholds of possibilities, from which fresh ideas can emerge. It acts as a midwife facilitating new insights, inventions, practices, treatments, or artistic pieces.

In another paper (Aljarrah, 2016), I explored metaphors of creativity in order to develop a description of creativity that can be used as a framework to explore creative acts in classroom settings. Re-reading the literature on creativity opened my eyes to the fact that it is impossible to talk about creativity without coupling it with two other aspects of our life as human beings: play and imagination. Creativity, play, and imagination are interrelated and interwoven as one fabric. Davis (1996), in his description of play as a sort of *bricolage*, asserted that play opens a space of possibilities, out of the background of which arises creativity. Connecting this claim with both his claim that play reveals what is not yet known, and Greene’s (1995) claim that imagination may free us “to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet” (p. 19), indicates that creativity, play, and imagination are interrelated and interwoven; they complete each other, and together they support learning. This conclusion can best be supported by Gordon’s (2003) claim that play frees us from our fixed mindsets, from the tyranny of habit, from the mundane and the ordinary, from the rational and from the need to know and be in control. According to Gordon and Swimme (2003), “Play is the ability to take leaps off of our familiar spots, like leaps of imagination, into the unknown” (p. 14).

Craft (2000, 2002, 2003) concentrated on specific modes of children’s playful life such as being imaginative, asking questions, and playing as aspects of possibility thinking, which can be considered as the engine of little c creativity (a form of creativity that children may exercise in “the making of choices and in making something of friendships, and in exploring specific activities such as role-play or construction with bricks” (Craft, 2003, p. 148)). According to Craft (2000), possibility thinking includes refusing to be stumped by circumstances by being imaginative, asking questions, and playing. Briefly, it involves “the exploration of any knowledge domain and the perception of alternative possibilities” (p. 112). Craft’s words that describe possibility thinking and little c creativity can be seen in

Davis's (1996) words while he is interpreting his students' answers to his question, "What are you doing?" while they were working on assigned "problematic" questions. One of the occasional answers was "Oh, nothing, we are just playing around with this question" (p. 216). According to Davis (1996), a thoughtful glance at the actions of students who are "just playing around" with a task will assert that there is playing in learning, and it is exactly this "playing" which allows interesting things to happen. Davis (1996) asserted that the key element in this "playing around" is "the allowing of space for movement" (p. 217). According to him, this playing around "suggests a turning and re-turning, a back-and-forth, a repetition and recursivity that are perhaps more in harmony with the ways we learn and live than the lock-step, straightforward structures of many textbooks" (p. 217).

According to Craft (2003), little c creativity involves the use of imagination, intelligence and self-expression [in daily life]. Craft (2003) argued that fostering young children's resourcefulness and encouraging them to consider and implement alternative possibilities in a range of contexts, including play, relationships, collective activity such as circle time and 'formal' curriculum areas such as early mathematics, requires the embracing of little c creativity. According to Kenny (2008), "creativity blooms in the daily lives of individuals who come to fully know who they are (i.e., experience the expansiveness of their spirit, whether or not one refers to that experience as self-realization or spiritual integration)" (p. 597).

One of the metaphors that I like to use to describe creativity in classroom settings is "the art of expanding possibilities" (Aljarrah, 2016). I feel that the use of this metaphor to describe creativity is an acknowledgment that creative acts are basically imaginative acts. In addition, it is possible to argue that children's play is an embodiment of their imagination, and as such it is our responsibility as pedagogues to create a safe, playful classroom environment, within which we act as mature players whose responsibility is to direct children's free play to be creative. Directing does not mean bounding, limiting, depriving, nor oppressing. It needs a caring, loving, responsible, responsive, watchful, thoughtful, imaginative, playful, and creative teacher. Within such learning environments, teaching, playing, imagining, and creating will necessarily interwoven as one fabric.

This interrelatedness between play, imagination, and creativity was clearly demonstrated by Dr. Fraser Mustard when he stated that "play expands intelligence, stimulates the imagination, encourages creative problem solving, and helps develop confidence, self-esteem, and a positive attitude toward learning" (a quote retrieved from the Galileo Educational Network Website). In addition, Tsai (2012) hoped to unleash the creative potential of an individual through bringing "play mood into classrooms, provid[ing] appropriate stimulation, and cultivat[ing] a risk-free learning environment" (p. 18).

The argument that I am trying to make here is that children's imagination and play are the bases for their creativity. Children usually engage in their world through their imagination and play, and if there is any way to recognize children's creativity, it is only through their engagement in the world. Because imagination and play may involve uncertainty and unpredictability, and because they are

unscripted, they allow children to practice improvisation. Through the practice of improvisation, creativity might unfold as collaborative emergence.

Legitimizing Play in the Field of Education

If it is acceptable to claim that play is one of the most important, innate and purest human qualities, then play is already present as an inseparable part of all aspects of our lives; as such, it is foolish to try to legitimize what can be considered as a medium within which we may live our life as it is actually lived. But because of the dominant language of industrial society within which everything is acceptable to the degree that it can be organized, managed and controlled, and within which the concept of play is distorted (Gordon, & Swimme, 2003), it is important for educators to try to purify the element of play, and to think about how to return this missed element to the field of education.

Real play, according to Gordon and Swimme (2003), is infinite realm that can perpetuate creativity or evolution or possibility. It opens the door to the possible, to the as yet not experienced. It can be considered as “the antithesis of the modern ideals of certainty, predictability, and linear progress” (Davis, 1996, p. 222).

Taking play as a fundamental element in teaching and learning has the potential to change the classroom environment into an expansive and creative environment within which we can see real educative play that can “engage, intrigue, interest, puzzle, and enchant” (Jardine, Clifford, and Friesen, 2003, p. 22). For me, this conception of imaginative engagement is a pure kind of play that “invites children most fully, most generously, into the club of knowers” (p. 22); the club of learners. Within such a playful environment the teacher and students are “passionate, robust” (p. 17) and playful learners. Within such an environment, the experiences of students and teachers are appreciated and welcomed. And, within such an environment, there is space for the unlimited “energies that children bring to school [which] are deeply embodied” (p. 161).

It is important to keep in mind that play in the classroom in its purest and fundamental form is not and should not be conceived as a releasing of children from the hard work of learning, or meant to ease this learning. According to Jardine et al. (2003), “Learning, ultimately, should help students see that things can be other than as they seem, other than as they are.... Children like to work hard—if that work is meaningful, engaging, and powerful” (p. 102). Within this vision, learning is a kind of play, and play is a form of learning. Jardine et al used the expression “hard fun” to describe the kind of learning that life in this rapidly changing -and I may add living and challenging - world calls for. And this “hard fun” may be considered a synonym for what Gordon and Swimme (2003) called “our play,” which they used to describe the joining and enjoying of life based on our deepest and spontaneous impulses. Such impulses, according to Dewey (1902), need to be worked out, and working them out involves “running up against obstacles, becoming acquainted with materials, exercising ingenuity, patience, persistence, alertness, it of necessity involves discipline -ordering of power- and supplies knowledge” (p. 37).

Dewey reminded educators that those children who are entrusted to our care are human beings, social beings, and education is a social process, a process of

living, and those who are to be educated are social individuals, and that education should proceed with this in mind. Given these understandings, I think the first step in any true effort to reform education is to concentrate on this social factor, and to think of how to return it to the field of education, or to be more specific, to think of how to socialize (humanize) education. A starting point of such socializing is the welcoming of children's innate powers, interests, and experiences. To encourage them to fully engage in their learning environment, to which and within which they feel connected, and effective. This welcoming is an invitation to play.

Concluding Remarks

Aoki, one of the greatest and the most influential educators around the world, criticized the separating of work and play, which he, himself, did at the starting of his teaching career in 1945 (Aoki, Pinar, & Irwin 2004). According to him,

what [he] did not realize then was that [he] was teaching an ethic—an ethic that separated work from play, that sublimated work and deemphasized play, and sanctified the rather simple-minded attitude of either work or play, but never, never, work and play together. (p. 357)

The important claim that one can read through the words of Aoki is not whether play is a legitimate human experience or not, nor whether play is an important aspect of human life, nor whether it is important for education. In response to such wonderings, many who work in the field of education will assert that play is a legitimate human experience and an important aspect of human life; as such, it is important for education. Furthermore, it is “the key element in any event of learning” (Davis et al, 2008, p. 84). What is important in Aoki's words is that the technical language that separates work from play in education is a dominant one nowadays. In such language, “play tends to be contrasted to work, and so it is often associated with distraction, purposelessness, and disorder” (Davis et al., 2008, p. 84). It seems that those who insist on this segregation have forgotten the origins of the word “play” that reflect, for the most part, a willingness to move, to work, and to be open, flexible, imaginative and creative. According to Davis et al. (2008), “Such usages as ‘stage play,’ ‘word play,’ ‘child’s play,’ and ‘play of ideas’ might be interpreted to suggest that the opposite of play is not work, but rigidity or motionlessness” (p. 84).

If we accept the claim that play is “a vital quality of all living forms, [and accordingly the lack of play is an] indicator of an inert (or dead or equilibrated) form” (Davis et al., 2008, p. 84), and that education “is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (Dewey, 2013, p. 35), then our primary concern as educators should be the creating and sustaining of a playful and a free space for ourselves and our students with(in) which a real education (i.e., learning through living the life as it is actually lived) may occur and flourish, and with(in) which everyone is always a learner and co-learner, investigator and coinvestigator, a journeyer and co-journeyer, a creator and co-creator, and most importantly a player and a co-player. These ideas can be used to interpret Aoki's (2004) words when he stated that “to be educated is to be ever open to the call of what it is to be deeply human, and heeding the call to walk with others in life's ventures” (p. 365).

Indisputably, within such a playful environment, the curriculum will be a living curriculum and an inviting one, within which the teacher and students will live the curriculum (Aoki et al., 2004). Such a playful environment is needed for all the agencies of the classroom to be ever open for possibilities, and for the classroom to be an ever-expanding space of possibilities. According to Greene (1995), for such an expanding space of possibilities to emerge and flourish, it needs all the passions, engagements, tolerance, caring, and imagination of diverse people who are speaking as who and not what they are. Within such spaces, play and learning are inseparable, and such inseparableness points, according to Davis (1996), to a participatory sort of teaching “in which the teacher does not stand outside to direct play, but becomes a vital part of the action” (p. 222). By engaging in the play, the teacher is also a player (learner) who “is assigned the tasks of presenting possibilities and, through attending to students’ responses to these possibilities, opening spaces for play” (p. 223).

If we try, as educators, to conceive of playing not as much as efficacious method or material by which to transmit a piece of knowledge about a specific subject matter, or to achieve predefined goals, but instead, to conceive of it as an aspect or a feature of living life as it is actually lived, and as the serious business of our students, then all subject matters will show their playful aspects, which in turn will encourage the students to engage in their work effectively and intrinsically. Such engaging vision of the classroom as a playful field is the starting point of great, imaginative, and exciting adventure, within which everyone—teacher and students—is a significant player. And within such playful environments will be “the movement of bodies and minds not stifled by hard desks and narrow ideas and rigid purposes. Laughter. Crying together. Memories and experiences cultivated, shared” (Seidel & Jardine, 2014, p. 9). According to Seidel (2014), her being as a teacher with children is no more than preparing “a joyous, creative day for [them]. [And] here we are together today and that is all” (Seidel & Jardine, 2014, p. 9).

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