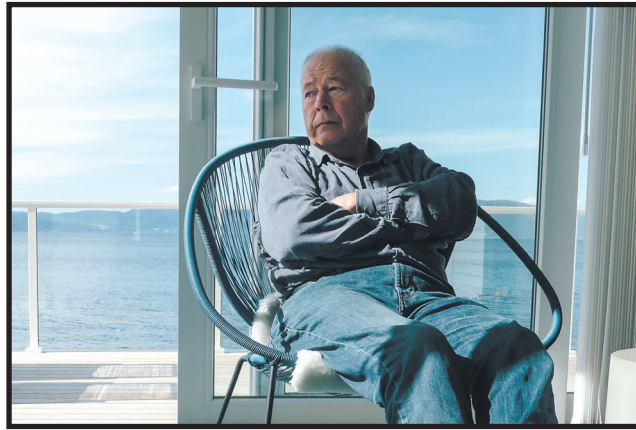


MEMORABLE DATES
ПАМЯТНЫЕ ДАТЫ



Pentti Hakkarainen (1944–2021)

On June 1, 2021, the International Children's Day, the Finnish developmental and educational psychologist Pentti Hakkarainen left this world. One of the most subtle connoisseurs of childhood, he focused his research on the play, and here he had more than just knowledge and understanding: a special feeling of childhood. Pentti honed and tuned this feeling as he studied and built the play together with the children, not caring about which of two participants – a child or an adult – create the zone of proximal development: both are creators when both develop!

The play became the center of Pentti Hakkarainen's scientific interests after years of research work in various fields of educational psychology. From the very beginning, however, the dominant leitmotif of his research work was learning and development in diverse contexts and at different levels of the educational system. While the subjects of his research went down the steps from higher education to the primary school – and finally into early childhood education, Professor Hakkarainen, with his encyclopedic knowledge in the professional sphere and far beyond, remained a passionate and tireless worker generating new and often unconventional ideas and beloved teacher to hundreds of educators and researchers, Pentti himself was always eager to learn and to share. Through the efforts of this original thinker, a skillful organizer of science and a charming polyglot, many outposts of the cultural-historical approach and the activity theory arose in Europe and on other continents.

“Pentti was a humble scientist, he did not emphasize his position, was always helpful and encouraging when a hesitant postgraduate student or early childhood education student doing his first dissertation was lost with his thoughts”

*Hilkka Munter, Professor, the Oulu University,
collaborator of Pentti Hakkarainen.*

“Although to an outsider Pentti sometimes seemed a stubborn and distant figure, those who knew him intimately and those he respected, saw him as a gentle, human-loving, and humorous man. In his company, it was

easy to enjoy the meetings of the research group as well as on the sauna sessions no less than in the winter when fishing on the ice of the lake with frozen fingers”

*Toivo Peppanen, a preschool teacher,
Pentti's former student*

Pentti Hakkarainen obtained his BS (1967), MS (1970) and PhD (1972) degrees at the Department of Psychology of the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. The topics of his MS and PhD dissertations (“Reliability and validity of personality tests used in Finland” and “Hierarchy of Goals in Curricula” respectively) indicate the trend of a young scientist towards the problem of developmental education and its motivation.

His interest in the Cultural Historical Activity Theory brought Pentti Hakkarainen to Moscow as a visiting scholar at the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. Here, through 1974–1975 he learned from prominent disciples of Lev Vygotsky, and his friendship and cooperation with Vasili Davydov, Vladimir Zinchenko and other renowned psychologists lasted for many years. Later he spent several years with Mike Cole at the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, University of California, San Diego, USA. It was Pentti to whom Mike Cole passed on early in 1990s his brainchild, *Journal of Soviet Psychology*, which later became the *Journal of Russian and East European psychology*.

“During the 1980s Pentti became a consulting editor for the journal and at the turn of the millennium (2001) he became the chief editor. He did a superb job. His extensive knowledge of the history and current status of Soviet and East European psychology both broadened the access of Anglophone scholars deep traditions of psychological theory and practice in that region. Under his stewardship, the journal has become a crucial resource for internationalization of Psychology.”

*Mike Cole, Professor Emeritus,
University of California San Diego.*

Decades of inconspicuous and grueling editing are far from Pentti's only contribution to building international collaboration among developmental psychologists. He

stood at the origins of ISCRAT (International Society for Cultural Research and Activity Theory) and its subsequent transformation into ISCAR (The International Society of Cultural-historical Activity Research).

In 1991 Pentti Hakkarainen defended his second Doctor of Educational Sciences (habil.) dissertation “Motivation, play and object-orientation of activity” and became the Professor of Education in the field of early childhood education at the Kajaani campus of the University of Oulu (1999–2013); he held this position later at the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences (2012–2018) and at the Vytautas Magnus University in Vilnius (2019–2021). This position offered Pentti the opportunity to focus on deepening, refining, and concretizing the framework of play and development.

Three main themes incited most of his interests until his last days: motivation to play and learn and two global crises – anthropological and environmental. The first attempt to solve these problems in the comprehensive way by integrating the theoretical approach with the experimental research was undertaken in the famous play lab “Silmu” in Kajaani; the project goes on successfully to this day in Vilnius. Together with Milda Bredikyte and his other collaborators, Pentti amassed a solid and persuasive body of evidence to prove that the narrative context of problem-solving changes the students’ motivation for learning making them, children and adults, initiative, creative, inquisitive, eager, and able to cooperate with each other and with their teachers in challenging learning activities. The core cooperative structure of this incredible lab involves the researchers (university professors) who are supervising the work of the university students working with young children. The parents of the kids are also present observing their small ones in the interaction with other children and with adults and being able to consult with the researchers. The students are trying to bring each child to the top of her/his potential ability to be creative and cooperative. Future teachers are learning to deal with children in the most indirect manner, without imposing adult’s will, choices, preferences – and at the same time helping children to find and to master cultural tools that allow them to reach higher developmental level. The researchers help students to observe and understand children’s intentions, to support children’s initiatives and to suggest only that fraction of help, which children are able and willing to digest here and now.

This unique structure of interaction opens rich educational and developmental vistas for all the participants: parents, children, and students. Young learners obtain self-sustaining motivation and personal sense of everyday classroom practices, whereas the conceptual changes in their minds bring them to more profound, coherent, and reflective understanding of subject matter of the lesson. The university students are gaining their first insights into the work of an educator in the way that can serve as a model for training teachers, which is nowadays recognized as the most rigid and hopelessly outdated element in the educational structure. The researchers are able to arrange and systematically observe

the emergence of child’s initiative and creativity and to describe the factors influencing the development and the individual characteristics of creative potential of children. The thorough study of the factors, both boosting creative development and blocking it, provides the educators with the lacking knowledge about the educational environment for each classroom. The international psychological community is given a new understanding of the mechanisms of cultural development through narrative teaching and learning. The educational community is provided with clever practical tools for teacher’s everyday work. In particular, the narrative approach in the vertically integrated learning communities where children of 4–8 years old are co-working seems to present an optimal model for building up a healthy transitional period. Such transition would smoothly bridge preschool and school stages of education and to solve the problem of “school readiness” for various “risk groups” of students – both for most bright kids and for disadvantaged ones.

“His contribution to scholarship with Milda Bredikyte has brought about completely new understandings of adult play guidance and children’s play development in a narrative play-world (Hakkarainen et al., 2013; Hakkarainen, et al., 2017). Significantly, he showed how play creates the zone of proximal development (Hakkarainen and Bredikyte, 2015) in one of the most inspiring papers I have ever read. The depth of theoretical understanding about play is unsurpassed, his commitment and contribution to both theoretical and empirical research of preschool children has brought out important new insights (see references below) that others will work on for years to come. As a scholar of note, Pentti’s ongoing contribution to play research will be very much missed. The cultural-historical community as a whole has lost one of its very best thinkers. The legacy he has left will endure through how others take forward his work, and in so doing, Pentti will continue to be with us in cultural-historical spirit.”

Marilyn Fleer,
Professor of Early Childhood Education,
Conceptual PlayLab, Monash University, Australia

Hakkarainen, P., Bredikyte, M., Jakkula, K., & Munter, H. (2013). Adult play guidance and children’s play development in a narrative play-world. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21(2), 213–225. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2013.789189>

Hakkarainen, P. and Bredikyte, M., (2015). How play creates the zone of proximal development, In S. Robson and S. Flannery Quinn (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of young children’s thinking and understanding*, (pp. 31–42). New York, USA, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

Hakkarainen, P., Bredikyte, M. and Safarov, I., (2017). Pretend play and child development, In T. Bruce, P. Hakkarainen & M. Bredikyte, (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of play in early childhood* (pp. 70–84), UK: Routledge Press, Taylor and Francis Group.