

Playworlds and Narratives as a Tool of Developmental Early Childhood Education

Pentti Hakkarainen

University of Oulu (professor emeritus), Oulu, Finland

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6725-1822>, e-mail: phakkar@gmail.com

Milda Bredikyte

Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas/Vilnius, Lithuania

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0667-6477>, e-mail: milda.bredikyte@vdu.lt

We shortly introduce some main ideas of a project of scientific research collective “School” (Shkola) led by academic V.V. Davydov. The collective elaborated a new project — “Concept of preschool education” [9] that would better meet the developmental and educational needs of young children and create the basis for learning activity at school. The project has inspired development of playworld pedagogy in Sweden and Finland. Now 30 years later, attempts to design systems of developmental early childhood education try to concretize central concepts of Davydov’s project. This article presents interpretation and elaboration of the main ideas of the project in playworld pedagogy developed in Scandinavian early childhood education. We propose a systematic transition from joint adult — children play, to independent children initiated play. Children’s personality development presupposes esthetic reaction and contradictory unity of affect and intellect in narrative role play. We have concluded that present attempts to design new developmental early childhood education programs cannot forget the ideas of the collective from the 1990’s.

Keywords: play pedagogy, playworld, narratives, developmental early childhood education, affect and intellect, narrative role play, esthetic reaction, tales and stories.

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Игровые миры и нарративы как средства развивающего образования в дошкольном возрасте

Пентти Хаккарайнен

Университет Оулу, Оулу, Финляндия

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6725-1822>, e-mail: phakkar@gmail.com

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Милда Бредиките

Университет Витовта Великого, Каунас/Вильнюс, Литва

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0667-6477>, e-mail: milda.bredikyte@vdu.lt

В статье вкратце представлены основные идеи проекта «Школа» научно-исследовательского коллектива под руководством академика В.В. Давыдова. Этот же коллектив создал и новую «Концепцию дошкольного воспитания», которая лучше учитывала задачи развития и образовательные потребности детей дошкольного возраста и подготавливала почву для формирования учебной деятельности в школе. Благодаря этой концепции в Швеции и Финляндии стала интенсивно развиваться игровая педагогика. Теперь, спустя 30 лет, предпринимаются попытки конкретизировать ключевые понятия теории Давыдова на основании опыта создания системы развивающего дошкольного образования. В статье описывается интерпретация и осмысление основных идей концепции дошкольного воспитания Давыдова в педагогике «игровых миров», разработанной в рамках скандинавского дошкольного образования. Мы предлагаем системный переход от совместной игры ребенка со взрослым к независимой игре, инициируемой самими детьми. Личностное развитие детей предполагает в качестве необходимого условия эстетическую реакцию и противоречивое единство аффекта и интеллекта в нарративной ролевой игре (narrative role play). В заключение делается вывод о том, что предпринимаемые в настоящее время попытки спроектировать новые развивающие образовательные программы для дошкольников так или иначе опираются на идеи, сформулированные коллективом ученых в 1990-х годах.

Ключевые слова: игровая педагогика, игровой мир, нарративы, дошкольное образование, аффект и интеллект, нарративная ролевая игра, эстетическая реакция, рассказы и истории.

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Introduction

Theoretical elaboration of the problems of developmental early education has started in the 1980's under the direction of V.V. Davydov. He organized a scientific research collective "School" of 30 people for preparing a modern concept of early childhood education. The project plan of the "Concept of early childhood education" (*Konceptsia doshkol'nogo vospitania*) was published in 1988. Summary of the ideas and work process was published after two years [1]. A new approach towards early childhood education formulated by V.V. Davydov's research team has stimulated and initiated three projects in 1990's: in Russia, Sweden and Finland. Projects in three countries have an individually in-

terpreted common cultural-historical framework and each of them tries to solve local problems of early childhood education. If we describe differences of emphasis shortly they are — creative imagination and general development in Russia, aesthetics of play in Sweden, and narrative play and learning in Finland. The project in Russia was partly motivated by the political and ideological changes, but also by the need to promote developmentally appropriate approach and curriculum for early age children from 1 to 6-years-old. Creators of El'konin—Davydov system of school education emphasized, that program for primary school is not suitable for education of younger children (5—6-years-old children) in preschool classes [12].

Developmental preschool education should focus on preconditions of theoretical thinking and substantial generalizations. What are these preconditions? The concept presents the idea of future oriented early childhood education, which focuses on *personality development* of every child. V.V. Davydov interpreted personality development intertwined with creative imagination of the child [11]. A general requirement was the *creation of "children's world"* in preschool institution. Developmental early childhood education should introduce *basic human values* to children. The project plan emphasizes *parallel development of universal human abilities and individual differences* of all children. *Joint play of adults and children* was the main method of introducing human values to children. The project inspired two experimental early childhood education projects in Scandinavia in the 1990's. The first one focuses on the development of children's esthetic imagination in play [30] and the second — on narrative learning in playworld environment [24]. The first one was carried out in Sweden at the university of Karlstad and the second in Finland at Kajaani university consortium.

Lindqvist's aesthetics of play was based on Vygotsky's "Psychology of art" and his ideas on the development of play and imagination [38; 39; 42]. Both projects integrated creative drama pedagogy tradition of play guidance in early childhood education with Vygotsky's cultural-historical approach. Projects elaborated in cooperation methodological approach starting from tales and stories as a framework for developing joint playworlds. The aim of introducing human values presented in tales and stories in esthetic form was to stimulate children's self-initiated play activity. Following the idea of Davydov's team's project, adult providers participated in play as partners.

Several versions of playworlds have been designed and carried out in Sweden and Finland in thirty years. We have separated following playworld types constructed in Finland: 1) imaginary playworlds developed by children independently (long-term peer play) [26]; 2) playworlds aiming at children's personality development (emphasis on moral issues) [19]; 3) narrative playworlds aiming at child development and creativity [3; 5]; 4) playworlds preparing transition to school learning

[21]; and 5) playworlds as learning environments of school subjects [25]. Playworld pedagogy has been integrated to master's degree studies in early childhood teacher education at the university level and further education studies in playworld pedagogy are organized for in-service early childhood educators [22]. All playworld types can be understood as attempts to influence on child development and learning.

The problem of analyzing play and development into units

There are several interpretations in the history of cultural-historical approach on the relation between play and development. In Elkonin's [14] classic periodization model continuity of stages between leading activity types was explained with the help of the division of each stage into two functional parts: motivational and practical-technical. Motivational function in play was associated with a new type of human relations. A different idea about the character of leading activity in cultural development was presented in the elaboration of the general stage model by Slobodchikov and Tsukerman [36]. Vygotsky's general genetic law was taken as the basis of periodization: after socio-cultural formation of new collective abilities starts individual appropriation of psychological states and processes (internalization). It was supposed that different contradictions are guiding children's developmental efforts of attaining something new collectively or individually. Additionally, the products of leading activities in this model were interpreted using Erikson's [16] idea that the critical contradictions at each stage can never be finally resolved in a person's lifetime [44].

Vygotsky did not elaborate in his play lecture the relation between play and child development in detail. But he proposed that narrative role play (*sjuzhetno-rolevaja igra*) creates the zone of proximal development. The zone was defined in terms of future challenges of children's psychological development. Instead of joint problem solving with adults or competent peers here are listed some future potentials, which bases are formed in role play: "Action in the imaginative sphere, in imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions and the formation of real-life plans, and

volitional motives — all appear in play and make it the highest level of preschool development” [39, p. 96]. Compared to his other definition of the zone in problem solving situations these domains have a longer time perspective and another system character, which requires elaboration of the idea of unit. It might be better to name this long-term zone instead of proximal.

How these phenomena are created in social relations of play and internalized as psychological new formations in individual mind? Vygotsky’s explanatory sketch starts from genetic contradiction of play between visual and sense fields and moves to play rules, which adopts strong affective power “forcing” the child to follow them because stronger affect gets its power from the emotional satisfaction play brings (Spinoza). What kind of developmental unit Vygotsky might have in mind in this analysis? Kinship of emotional reactions in play and art forms or play as a source of emotional reaction [30] encourages to search Vygotsky’s analytic unit from esthetic—emotional reactions in arts.

We may conclude that the unit of play would be analyzed using the genetic contradiction of play between visual and sense field. Unit of development has in Vygotsky’s elaboration contradictory character. Analysis into units: “must find holistic characteristics of the whole in which they are presented in a contradictory form and with help of which appearing concrete questions are tried to be solved” [40, p. 16]. In Vygotsky’s play analysis we have two alternative candidates of the unit: 1) genetic contradiction between visual field and sense field or 2) affective movement in sense field carried out ‘as if’ with realistic objects. Vygotsky looks for a holistic unit of verbal thinking and ends up to word meaning as internal side of a word. Where are social relations and co-construction of sense meaning?

A fresh attempt to solve genetic contradiction of play unit was made by Kravtsov and Kravtsova [27]. They proposed two simultaneous positions of the subject of play: ‘outside play’ and ‘in play’. ‘Outside play’ would be visible play behavior in front of other players and ‘inside play’ the child acts in sense field of his/her imagination. The authors use coincidence of the two positions as the criterion of play: if the positions do not coincide the activity is not genuine play. They write: “On

the basis of our analysis equal parallel positions of the subject in play activity and outside it will be the criterion of play activity” [27, p. 52]. The analysis of two positions of the subject becomes more complicated if we apply it to collective play of several children or joint play world of adults and children.

In our experimental joint playworlds of adults and children we create collective play. In vertically integrated groups (4—8 years old) preparing children for school transitions about 30 children all participate in play with 3—4 adults (basic team is elementary grade teacher, day care teacher, and helper). Collective play based on carefully selected tales and stories started from a problem or obstacle in the story line dramatized for children during play world session.

In “Rumpeltiltskin” playworld the king visited children’s class. He proudly demonstrated his gold-broidered cloak and other golden symbols of the majesty. He made a comment: “I am wondering why my wife has stopped to spin golden thread. This was the reason I took her to my wife. Perhaps her fingers are sore.” Children slipped the truth: “She did not spin golden thread from straw. It was that creature “Rumpeltiltskin”. The king was stunned and cried: “I’ll throw her to the jail if she has lied to me! But she is the mother of my daughter. What shall I do? Children can you help me and propose what I should do? Write to me!”

In children’s self-initiated play there often are 10 to 15 participants. Each player ‘in role’ participate in role character and is aware that he/she is directing the character. It is possible to interpret that me-subject is final object of play in the social network of players. Participants have to estimate the others’ sense fields on the basis of visual play actions and give feed-back through their own role behavior. We have supposed the existence of two layers of ‘inside’ play: on the level of collective and individual subjects.

This is visible in joint play of adults and children participating in narrative play adventures. Analysis of different narrative play episodes with participation of several children and adults revealed, that in spite of mutually agreed theme and active participation in construction of play events, each participating child is developing his/her own play script. For example, four children

decided to build a ship and sail in search of the pirates who stole the king's crown. Children start together to build the ship and sail to the sea. As soon as the ship leaves from the port, each child finds a space and starts developing own play 'subtheme'. A 4.10-years-old girl is putting her baby to sleep in a quiet corner, 5-years old boy starts repairing small cars on the deck of the ship, another 3.4-years-old boy becomes a sea policeman and 4.6-years-old girl starts preparing a soup in a big kettle on the deck. There is little interaction between children, and they all develop separate scripts but as soon as captain (5-year-old boy in role) announces that he can see a pirate ship approaching, all children come together and start developing joint play event again.

We argue that both levels of subjects have to be included into the analysis and construction of play activity — individual and collective. This means that we have to enlarge the unit in the analysis of play. In the Slobodchikov—Tsukerman [36] model of development a unit covers three steps: 1) interactive social play; 2) individual internalization of psychological processes; and 3) next interactive social activity. It might be difficult to decide when a collective subject of play has occupied an 'outside' position, but involvement of all playworld participants can be analyzed from mutual contacts between role characters [23; 35].

The problem of contradictory unity of affect and intellect in preschool play

The principle of unity of affect and intellect was central in Vygotsky's theory on psychological development of the child, but the argument was derived using general inclusive logic: "thinking and affect are parts of a unified whole — human consciousness" [41, p. 251]. The methodological challenge of studying and analyzing personality is its specific character as the object of study. Living object (personality) cannot be studied using methods of natural sciences because they destroy the object by dividing it into elements. Personality as the object of study cannot be divided — personality as a whole is the unit and living contradiction.

Vygotsky proposed that the relation of affect and intellect is dynamically changing in different ages and each step of the development in thinking

has its corresponding step in affect development. This trajectory of unity is connected to growing consciousness and will. Vygotsky wrote: "Things do not change from the fact that we think about them, affect and functions connected to it are changing when we become conscious of them. They form another relation to consciousness and other affect. Accordingly, the relation to the whole and its unity changes" [41, p. 251]. For us this relation is important in play at preschool age. In cultural-historical play research a special function and role in play-based development has been inscribed to affective-motivational domain of play [15].

It is important to keep in mind that the unity of affect and intellect in Vygotsky's analysis is between poles of contradiction, which children have to solve in their play construction. Vygotsky himself gave a concrete example of contradiction in his play lecture: between pleasure of play in child and pain caused by illness. But this is an example of two affects, not affect and intellect. An example of contradiction between children's lack of understanding imaginary play situation and affective state can be found in a research project of Zaporozhets' group [29]. Insufficient cognitive capacity of understanding imaginary play situation influenced on activation of (affective) brain functions in part of children in this study. Affective-motivational characteristics of play situation did not work without comprehension of total situation in this experimental study and these children were not able to solve the contradiction between affect and intellect.

It seems that contradiction between two poles (in play — outside play position; educator role: "mama" — pedagogue) are lacking the dynamics of Socratic contradiction: the contradiction produces a third alternative. Davydov [11] speculated about possible driving contradiction in children's joint construction of narrative role play. The idea, schema (*zamysl*) of a future, non-existing play is a whole without details. Its driving contradiction is between the idea and structure of play (content and theme in El'konin's analysis). The idea resembles one of the criteria of personality development by Davydov (whole before details). We have emphasized likeness of children's play and art forms. They both use imagination which combines emotion and cognition. In both affects

are experienced as if they were real ones according to Vygotsky [38].

Vygotsky's explanation of esthetic reaction has dual aspects: 1) Work of art always depends on a conflict between content and form and effect is achieved when form destroys its content, 2) "Explosion" that destroy nervous energy. He writes: "Another peculiarity of art is that — while it generates opposing affects in us — it delays the motor expression of emotions (of account of the antithetic principle and — by making opposite impulses collide — it destroys the affect of content and form, initiating an explosive discharge of nervous energy" [38, p. 206].

Trials of solving theoretical and methodological problems

Attempts to develop children's play in early childhood education are mainly focused on individual play skills and motivation during last decades in spite of Vygotsky's general genetic law of development (from interpsychological to intrapsychological). Still more seldom are organized joint play activities of adults and children, in which adults are genuine play partners and children accept them as companions. Introduction of separate children's play planning sessions [2] or story-line planning [33] have not yielded permanent results enhancing quality of play and its developmental impact.

There are a few interesting experimental projects, which have enlarged "standard" approach to preschool play and early childhood education. Two examples demonstrate the character of enlargement. "Golden Key" experimental program is not just play enhancement attempt. It aims at changing children's institutional life as a whole. A family life model is adopted, joint happenings (sobytiya) deviating from daily routines are systematically organized and learning activities do not follow "school model". Another example can be found from Italy in "Reggio Emilia" approach claiming that a whole city is needed for the education of a child. Here education in institutions is expanded to the city and all citizens are educators. But what should be the core expanded educational unit?

Corsaro [8] constructed his sociology of childhood on Vygotskian ideas emphasizing interpretive reproduction in which innovative and creative

aspects of children's participation in society is central. According to Corsaro, "Children are not just internalizing society and culture, but actively contributing to cultural production and change" [8, p. 18]. This has been formulated as "creative dominant" or "culture — creating function" of developed childhood and developing child in Kudryavtsev's [28] sketch on developed childhood. There is a difference in approaches because Corsaro focuses his analysis on collectives and phenomena of peer culture. Creativity and culture creation are not analyzed in terms of collective social interaction in peer cultures. In our research projects constructing children's playworlds we have tried to reinterpret Vygotsky's idea of "unit of development".

Playworld as method of developing children's play culture

We propose a multistage holistic process of playworld construction instead of traditional teacher task. Play is not just a simple cognitive assignment, but complex activity led by child's genuine emotional involvement and motivation. Advanced social role play is disappearing from the whole world and children lack experience and necessary skills to initiate and carry out imaginary role plays of a peer group or multi-age group. There are not attractive shared play ideas partly because of information flood from corporate 'educators' of peer culture. In last five, ten years information technology has changed children's social interaction and family life in Scandinavia. Screen time has extended. Children use mobile phones and laptops several hours each day. Family interaction has shrunk because adults also are hooked on modern technology. Addiction to technology starts at preschool age or earlier. A new phenomenon during school breaks is a paradox: children are together each alone connected to smart phone chat. Face to face contacts have transformed to virtual ones and peer culture is constructed around digital media use., which unites and separates at the same time. Popular kinderculture has a great impact on children's peer culture and more and more education takes place through peer culture in social places other than preschool or school [37].

Playworld as a tool of developmental early childhood education might look as a paradox. The adults construct a joint imaginary world with children in order to stimulate children's own initiatives and motivation? Play is children's own activity and adults as play partners should be aware of it. According to our observations most children play alone or with one partner only in early education institutions. Theoretical value of collective whole group play is underestimated because one child's play often is understood as the basic unit in theoretical analyses. Adults seldom are serious play partners in children's groups. Playworlds are joint play activities of adults and children aiming at creation of children's play culture in the classroom.

Main components of playworlds

Playworlds are based on 'narrative logic' described by Fisher [17; 18] and Bruner [6], who proposed the use of 'the narrative construal of reality'. According to Bruner, people do not only present to each other rational, scientific arguments, but tell stories about themselves and their worlds. Narrative has another important function in human development: "It is through narrative that we create and recreate selfhood, and self is a product of our telling and retelling. We are, from the start, expressions of our culture. Culture is replete with alternative narratives about what self is or might be" [7, p. 86]. Both Fisher and Bruner think that stories and storytelling is the basis of social interaction and method of expressing and transmitting meaning and sense.

In play children are using narrative mode to construct their knowledge and understanding of the world and phenomenon. Their own interpretations and wishes are reflected in play. In play children follow narrative rationality, which is based on consistency and credibility of the story. A consistent story has enough details, several levels and believable characters. Meaningfulness of the play-story can be evaluated from the correspondence between role actions and the general habitus of role characters. Credibility of the story line of play under construction children estimate using their own experience and familiar stories as a standard of comparison.

Playworlds are based on cultural stories — folk tales, fairytales or good contemporary

stories, reflecting human values and aspirations. Young children cannot adopt values and ideal forms without special elaboration. They have to be given aesthetic form argued Lindqvist [30] following Vygotsky's idea how play corresponds to the imaginary process, or the aesthetic form of the fairy-tale. When joint playworlds of children and adults are constructed two types of aesthetic forms are used as tools: 1) lyric-musical form that can be compared with poem, music and dance, and 2) dramatic — literal form follows folk tale trajectory [34]. This kind of play is like blues scheme, which variations children improvise [31]. Aesthetic forms effectively concretize Vygotsky's basic contradiction of play between visual and sense field according to our experience.

Playworlds require genuine adult participation in play. The idea of adult's partnership with children in early childhood education is a challenge. Quite often educators understand their participation in children's play as advisor or controller and do not accept play roles that children propose. This is partly truth, only. Our studies have revealed [3] that two positions necessary in adult play participation. Adults have to be able to be genuine children's play partners and at the same time play guiders. This necessary ability to capture both adult and child's point of view simultaneously might be more difficult than expected. We argue that the boundary between the two positions is important in the creation of children's worlds. Davydov joked that a sure failure will follow from the selection of the wrong position.

Organization of playworlds in early childhood education

In the following we describe how we proceed in playworld construction from a joint motivating theme to children's independent self-initiated play through intermediate stages preparing children's 'own' play in successful pedagogical interventions. We have observed how difficult it may be for children to start a joint role play even on the basis of well-known story plot. If children have not formed a joint idea of the play, attempts of the teacher to guide play events are vain. Simply giving children a task to start play after reading the fairytale and dividing roles to them often leads to conflict [24].

We think that emotional reaction is essential in order to wake up children's own initiative and self-initiated play. This is why we use a longer time to find really good story, which not directly tells about values and ideals behind our theme but creates mysterious atmosphere and emotional tension on several levels. The teacher has to transmit this emotional tension to children and demonstrate her/his own emotions. We have found oral storytelling and/or dramatization of the story to be effective methods of creating necessary emotional tension and raise children's motivation [22]. As Zaporozhets [43] points, dramatization of the story is necessary to some children. Sometimes we might dramatize the whole story by inviting the characters (teacher in role) visit the classroom and tell the story from a character's individual point of view. Repeating the story several times, emphasizing contradictory positions and individual nuances of characters create dramatic collisions, which stimulate children's self-initiated play construction. Touching joint feelings are able to wake and stimulate shared play ideas. Shared emotional 'perezhivanie' of a tale or story is a necessary precondition for joint self-initiated play on a theme.

The following stages how to proceed to the construction of the playworld:

Stage 1. Selection of an interesting theme (fabula) for the narrative framework of a playworld. The selection is based on observation of children's free play and other joint activities, pedagogical documentation and educational goals. The theme is selected from basic human values best suiting for child group's needs (e.g. safety and danger, helping and deceit, friendship and hate, honest and dishonesty etc.)

Stage 2. Giving moral and esthetic form to the theme. Classic tales and stories are used to explain and clarify the selected theme [30; 43]. A classic story raises questions and aggravates moral contradictions. In a good story moral lesson is hidden between the rows and never told directly [38]. A good story always has dramatic collisions and attractive events, to which children react. A story unites experiences: esthetic form creates a frame 'imaginary world', situation for the events and background for play. Carefully selected story rouses emotions, motivates and

creates a safe environment for exploring scary phenomena. On the basis of children's feed-back the most attractive story among alternatives is selected to be used as playworld framework.

Stage 3. Selection of most attractive events and characters in a story. Children draw, write and tell about their impressions about the story and why they like them. New events, role characters and dramatic collisions are planned and added to playworld adventures based on continuous evaluation of children's initiatives and play behavior after each joint weekly playworld session. New playworld elements are added by dramatizing characters and play events, staging environments and preparing symbolic transition to playworld (e.g. traveling with time machine, opening a magic door).

Stage 4. Constructing concrete playworld environment. Environments can be constructed with minimal elements. Few hints waking children's imagination is enough (e.g. disorder of children's tables can arouse whole series of speculations). Symbolic transitional rituals (singing the adventure song, dressing adventure t-shirt, moving to near-by forest etc.) move children to narrative logic and daily environment is interpreted differently (play substitutions!). After transition of symbolic boarder children's imagination starts to build the space anew.

Stage 5. Projects. A typical playworld project may start from children's products at the stage 3. Children have proposed to make imaginary animals or other props described in the story (e.g. dragons from mesh and pulp). Another type of project has been to construct specific stages for play (e.g. caves of subgroups). A specific project was children's reinterpretation of TV series — Pokemon figures and their adventures were transformed to softer bunny play adventures [26].

Stage 6. Self-initiated free children's play and play culture. The ultimate goal of playworld approach in Finland and Sweden has been to stimulate creation of children's own play culture. Our main criterion has been self-initiated children's play, which continues and reflects values and moral tensions of joint playworld themes. All stages are not always necessary and self-initiated play may start early and proceed parallel with playworld adventures. Six stages do not always

proceed linearly and strictly separated from each other. Boundaries between stages are flexible and linear proceeding between them is not a must. Children's self-initiated play has sometimes started after the introduction of the story and evolved along with the new events in a playworld [20]. Playworld play can move the boarders of the zone of proximal development only if children feel play to be their own activity. This is why in playworld at some stage free, child-initiated play on the theme is obligatory. Playworld can be understood as a tool to produce children's joint self-initiated play.

Discussion

Both Scandinavian experimental play projects in Sweden and Finland chose relevant ideas from the "Concept of preschool education", which became the leading ones in organizing experimental activities. The idea of introducing *basic human values* to children seemed quite traditional, but the way and method appeared to be very innovative and drastic. A requirement to create "*children's world*" resonated with Mouritsen's [32] concept of "children's culture". Still the idea of *joint play of adults and children* was very revolutionary to the existing culture, where child's play was always considered his/her sacred space and adults were not allowed to step into it. At the same time, these ideas revealed theoretical and methodological problems that are still not solved today, but our play projects, at least partially, addressed these issues on a practical level. We might say that playworlds — is an attempt to solve theoretical and analytical problems raised by Davydov's scientific group.

Attempts to use tales and stories in early childhood education has often been understood in the west as a teaching and learning task — how children learn narratives, language and "good" or moral behavior. Children's 'natural' interest to narrative form stimulate the use of books and other material made for children. The idea that story/narrative might be a starting point for the children and adults to explore and experiment with basic cultural values and norms in the form of joint play was really new in Scandinavian context. Construction of playworlds start from traditional folk or classical stories. Tales and stories are carefully

selected because their esthetic quality only can stimulate children's motivation and self-initiated play. Dramatic collisions of the story line fire dual emotional reaction, which is necessary contradiction in esthetic reaction according to Vygotsky [38]. Contradictory esthetic reaction in children starts experimenting with the idea (*zamysl*) of self-initiated play. Children's self-initiated play has always two parts: one — coming from a story and another — from child's experiences in real life situations. In play, children try to unite these two parts creating a simple story line, for example, evil force (Gnome, witch, etc.) has kidnapped the princess and a rescue team is ready to free her. Participating children choose the roles, construct play events and develop play script.

We argue that realization of the 'concept' of early childhood education proposed by Davydov's team is not possible without narrative logic and children's exploration of collective self-initiated narrative role play. The project demanded construction of 'children's worlds' as the site of early childhood education. Children's worlds of the project have same characteristics with our playworlds: (1) both propose joint imaginary play of adults and children (adults as play partners in roles); (2) cultural ideals and values mediated through tales and stories; (3) personality development of each child as the goal of education. These general traits are transformed to alternative teacher education programs and experimental educational practices going on over thirty years.

Davydov's team's project operates in the landscape of possibilities and is based on experts' thought experiments. Ideas are now taking the form of early education programs and materials [4]. Scandinavian experimental projects have focused on the use of narratives and drama pedagogic methods of developing children's play activity and early childhood teacher education programs. An encouraging general result from narrative approach has been return of sociodramatic make-believe play, which many researchers have observed disappearing around the world. Groups of 20—30 children play together, analyze problems of play characters and help solving them. In vertically integrated classes age differences of children has not been a problem because helping happens in imaginary environ-

ments. There also are several examples of children's independent self-initiated play based on joint narrative play of adults and child groups. A promising fresh attempt to explain the transition from play to learning activity by assisting the change from narrative logic to rational logic is offered by Zuckerman's team [45].

In conclusion, it must be acknowledged that ideas formulated in the project are only partially realized in practice and only on a small scale. The theoretical and methodological problems have not been solved as well. The concept of developmental early childhood education created by Davydov's scientific team remains relevant today.

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Information about the authors

Pentti Hakkarainen, PhD in Educational Psychology and Educational Sciences, Editor-in-chief of Journal of Russian and East European Psychology, University of Oulu (professor emeritus), Oulu, Finland, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6725-1822>, e-mail: phakkar@gmail.com

Milda Bredikyte, PhD in Social and Philosophical Sciences (Education), senior researcher and associate professor at Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas/Vilnius, Lithuania, ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0667-6477>, e-mail: milda.bredikyte@vdu.lt

Информация об авторах

Пентти Хаккарайнен, PhD, главный редактор Journal of Russian and East European Psychology (Журнала российской и восточноевропейской психологии). Эмерит-профессор, Университет Оулу, Оулу, Финляндия, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6725-1822>, e-mail: phakkar@gmail.com

Милда Бредиките, PhD, старший научный сотрудник, доцент, Университет Витовта Великого, Каунас/Вильнюс, Литва, ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0667-6477>, e-mail: milda.bredikyte@vdu.lt

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