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CCT 601: Critical Thinking
6 March 2007

Journal 4: Methodological Doubt, Belief, and the Structure of Play

I was really shocked to read how strongly Piaget's developmental model lingers in contemporary curricular design. Beyer's article upset me for its systematic blindness to children and their demonstrated abilities. Worse yet, he dresses his grave misjudgments up in a cloak of advice, which, presumably he hopes, educators will take. What am I talking about? Specifically, Beyer denies that children possess higher-order thinking skills until they are explicitly taught in a classroom context. However, to see that children do possess and use these skills quite effectively, we need only to observe their play. Developing skills is not the hard part—the difficulty lies in the *transfer* of critical thinking skills to dissimilar domains. To glean successful strategies to promote transfer, we should again turn to those we as educators aim to serve: the children, and their imaginative play.

Many¹ have noted that imaginative play—be it in the form of make-believe or some other structured game like chess, tag, or soccer—requires its participants to restrict their actions according to a (sometimes ill-defined) set of abstract rules. These rules are sometimes, though, not always arbitrary. To play a game, then, the players need to check the current state of the game against the rules, and then perform all sorts of higher-order functions—analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and decision-making—in order to stay in the game, let alone win—if winning is, indeed, the aim. How does one win at a game of House?

Indeed, many games, like House, lack a clear set of rules, or even a clear objective. These games are especially mentally taxing (from an objective point-of-view) because the level of abstraction is highest. In House, players must isolate and distill the meaning and actions of individual roles of players from the society of the home, enact them, and respond to others and the “pretend” environment dynamically according to the constraints of the role. In such games, the rules may even change without warning, and changes are not always expressly communicated to all players at the same time. Yet children are sensitive to behaviors that do not comply with the rules of the game, and will often and immediately call out cheaters.

Most tasks in life have the same form as an abstract game. In fact, adult language reflects the game-like nature of life. Consider the adage, “All's fair in love in war,” and note that singles are said to “play the field.” Though the consequences² may differ from a schoolyard game of soccer, the underlying structure is the same.

Society is a collection of rules much like any child's game, no more or less artificial and equally abstract. In previous entries, I have called the collection of rules *culture*. Knowing the rules of society allows an individual to take advantage of the proverbial loopholes in the system. In classroom environments, it may prove useful to couch problems (in science, history, etc.) in context of games. In this framework, problems from diverse academic fields may give rise to new examples of old games already known to students. I.e., games enable an easy shift in perspective and

¹See Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*, or Minsky, *The Emotion Machine*, for example.

²Grown-ups enjoy games just as much as children. If you don't believe me, listen to WEEI sports radio anytime, especially after a game or near a draft. Of course, there was the murder of Andrés Escobar, the Columbian soccer player, who was murdered shortly after scoring an own goal in the 1994 World Cup.

encourage transfer of skills. The playing field might look and respond differently in two academic disciplines—compare clay and artificial tennis courts, e.g.—but if the rules are sufficiently alike, then a student who recognizes the similarities can play ball in a foreign field.

Games provide a useful tool that have elements of methodological belief and doubt built-in their structure naturally. To play a game well, an individual must steep himself in the rules of the game, believe it is real, and play from within the constraints of the game space.³ Games make the existence—if not the form and content—of foundational structures clear through the visibility of their rules. As such, children are likely to discuss the merits of a call, examine fairness of the rules, and consider the utility of the game itself. Game are self-reflective in their nature. Better still, children understand and play games well before they ever step foot in a classroom.

³Game space is exactly the same thing as a behavior space, except that the set of accepted behaviors are dictated by the rules of the game.