

## On the Phenomenon of Play in Education – School as Play?

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### Abstract:

In contemporary pedagogy, understood as a social science, the term 'play' is used relatively extensively. It is interpreted as a targeted pedagogical or didactic tool. An alternative and inspiring view of the phenomenon of game in terms of philosophical psychology or phenomenological philosophy can be found in authors with a Christian background. This article wants to point out the argumentative and philosophical contradictions of these currents regarding the understanding of play – especially with regard to the increase in personal knowledge, emotional balance, socialisation, or the influence on the cultivation of self-reflection of one's own existence based on the experience of play.

### Keywords:

play, symbolic play, play with rules, didactic game, self-reflection, meta-pedagogy

### Learning by playing

The authors of the most published pedagogical dictionary in the current Czech pedagogical environment define playing as follows:

A form of activity that differs from work and learning. A person is engaged in play throughout his life, but in preschool age it has a specific position – it is a leading type of activity. Play has a number of aspects: cognitive, practice, emotional, movement, motivational, creative, fantasy, social, recreational, diagnostic, therapeutic. It includes individual, pair, small group and large group activities. There are games that require special tools for their operation (toys, aids, sports equipment, tools, devices). Most play takes the form of social interaction with explicitly formulated rules (given by the actors' agreement or social conventions). In play, a lot of attention is paid to its progress (games with a predominance of cooperation, with a predominance of competition). The initial situation, course and results of some play can be formalised and the decision-making of actors can be studied in an exact way. These questions are dealt with by a special mathematical discipline – game theory.<sup>1</sup>

This view categorises the game in different ways according to aspects (on the basis of which, for example, we learn, diagnose, or treat), and to the number of participants, and the use of aids. The view considers it one of the forms of human activity. Some games can be formalised, and this

<sup>1</sup> Jan Průcha, Eliška Walterová, and Jiří Mareš, *Pedagogický slovník* (Praha: Portál, 1995), 78.

subsequently enables one to study the decision-making of actors exactly (objectively assess, evaluate, categorise). It is interesting that the view considers most games as an activity with explicitly formulated rules, however, it assigns a specific position to the game, especially in preschool age. This is the age when individuals are unable to cooperate regarding rules, compete purposefully, or adhere to social conventions.

The didactic game is then defined as follows:

It is an analogy of children's spontaneous activity, which pursues (not always in an obvious way for pupils) didactic goals. It can take place in the classroom, in the gym, on the playground, in the village, in nature. It has its own rules, requires ongoing management, and final evaluation. It is intended for individuals and groups of pupils, while the role of the pedagogical leader ranges widely, from the main organiser to the observer. Its advantage is a stimulating charge, as it awakens interest, increases the engagement of pupils in the activities carried out, stimulates their creativity, spontaneity, cooperation, and competitiveness, forces them to use various knowledge and skills, to involve their life experience. Some didactic games are close to model situations from real life.<sup>2</sup>

### An Analogy of Spontaneous Activity?

Let us try to unravel what is meant by the analogy of spontaneous activity. First of all, the definition states that the didactic game has a clearly defined didactic goal, that is, the goal of learning. It can take place in different environments and the goal of the game, that is, the learning goal, may not be obvious to the pupils. The definition does not name a specific goal. It can be understood from the context that it is about a learning goal that a particular teacher considers important and is set by that teacher.

The role of the pedagogue is thus understood as the determining element of the didactic game of children. He is the one who arouses interest, increases engagement, stimulates interest. At the same time, he is the one who forces pupils to use knowledge and skills and at the same time forces them to engage their life experience, creates model social situations, and leads pupils in the process of taking different social roles in them. He is the one who encourages spontaneity, creativity, cooperation, and competition. At the same time, he creates the rules, continuously controls the game, is an organiser and an observer, and at the end of the game, an evaluator. Due to the position of the teacher in the didactic game, he is also a guarantor of correctly played roles.

From this point of view, the game is entirely understood as a targeted activity, with an emphasis on the fulfilment of tasks; the formulation explicitly refers to pedagogical pressure. In this respect, the pupil is not a subject in the game, in fact, he is an actor in the prepared game. He does not even have to know the goal of the didactic game – why, what, and how he should do it. Although the pupil is encouraged to be spontaneous in the didactic game, spontaneity itself is not a condition of this play. In this respect, however, it is rather the opposite of spontaneous activities considering the point of view of the phenomenology of play. The basic attributes of the game in this concept are spontaneity, authenticity, the experience of being different in time or taste, interest, liveliness.

### Theory of Play

Probably the clearest and most in-depth overview of game theories can be found in Jiří

2 Průcha, Walterová, and Mareš, *Pedagogický slovník*, 48.

Černý's study *Fotbal je hra*. It deals with theories of play from an aesthetic (Schiller), sociological (Marx, Kaplan), cultural-philosophical (Huizinga, Caillois), and psychological point of view, which is central to pedagogy.

Karl Gross is considered to be the founder of the theory of play. He was convinced that the game is the training of instincts and, in humans, it is the training and practice of instinct behaviour. Sigmund Freud believed that play is an expression of the 'repetitive drive', that is, a person's traumatic experience is compensated for so many times by the repeated deployment of play energy, until finally the human 'I' can pass from passivity to activity, important for the emancipation of any individual. Alfred Adler hypothesised that even play is dominated by the desire for power and self-assertion and is a manifestation of this effort, as children feel their smallness, weakness, and subordination to adults. C.G. Jung believed that play stems from the 'collective unconscious' and has a therapeutic effect. Stanley Hall, according to atavistic theory, saw in play the application of ancient drives (fighting, climbing trees), which no longer correspond to the present and are thus harmlessly processed in this way. The work of Jean Piaget, who sees play as a kind of assimilation, an adaptation of human intellect to more and more demanding tasks in the course of childhood and adolescence, is a great contribution to further philosophical investigation.<sup>3</sup>

Given the overlap of psychological research with philosophy and, above all, with pedagogy, let us take a closer look at Jean Piaget's understanding of the development of play.

## Original Form

Jean Piaget refers to the original form of play as practice play and defines it as follows:

It is the original form of play that already occurs at the sensorimotor level, i.e., at the age of up to two years. It does not include game technique or symbolism, but it is based on repeating activities that the child has already learned in order to adapt to the environment. For example, a child discovers that a suspended object can be swung. First, he repeats everything so that he understands and adapts to the environment. Then, when the child can do that, he swings the object for simple 'functional joy' or the joy of making something happen and applying the newly acquired knowledge. The same is true of adults when they exult over the features of a new TV, computer, or car.<sup>4</sup>

In more than 20 years of research into experimental dramaturgy,<sup>5</sup> one essential thing has become clear regarding the possibilities of awareness and self-reflection of this phenomenon – this joy of adults is often unreflected upon, just like that of children. A significant change in adults occurs at the moment when the individual realises that he is cheering or that someone is watching him while playing. They then have the option of either entering into an open game – that is, cheering consciously, enjoying the cheering with the onlookers or with themselves, thereby creating an admitted game.<sup>6</sup> Or they will feel ashamed and then try to escape from the situation. However, they lose the possibility of admitting unconscious play and the subsequent self-reflection. The phenomenologist Eugen Fink points out this aspect in the work *Oáza štěstí* [*Oasis of Happiness*]:

3 Jiří Černý, *Fotbal je hra (pokus o fenomenologii hry)* (Praha: Československý spisovatel, 1968), 111.

4 Jean Piaget, *Psychologie dítěte* (Praha: SPN, 1970), 50.

5 Cf. Stanislav Suda, *Experimentální dramatika* (České Budějovice: Episteme, 2017).

6 Cf. Ivan Vyskočil, *Dialogické jednání s vnitřními partnery* (Brno: JAMU, 2005).

In the end, it is not even true that mostly only children play games. It is more likely that adults play games just as much, only differently, more mysteriously, more disguised. How many hidden, disguised, and mysterious games there are still in the 'serious' affairs of the grown-up world, in their honours, ranks, social conventions—how much of a 'scene' in the meetings of genders! Play is not a marginal phenomenon, no occasional, accidental phenomenon. By its very nature, play belongs to the state of being of human existence, it is a basic existential phenomenon.<sup>7</sup>

In this aspect, the methodological level of the research should be mentioned. An existential phenomenon can only be captured through observation or in the authentic statements of acting actors. Jean Piaget conducted this research using unstructured interviews and the observation of children during play, that is, a highly qualitative approach to personal individuality.

However, this methodological approach is in contrast to the methodology of game research based on social sciences, as understood by current pedagogy: 'The initial situation, course, and results of some games can be formalised and the decision-making of actors can be studied exactly. These questions are dealt with by a special mathematical discipline – game theory.'<sup>8</sup>

We come to the second contradiction in the understanding of the game – the methodological one. Pedagogy as a social science has the ambition to accurately study the decision-making of actors using quantitative methodology.<sup>9</sup> The phenomenological approach is qualitative.<sup>10</sup>

## Symbolic Play and Play with Rules

If we return to Piaget's forms of play, he then lists symbolic play as the next in development.

Symbolic play says more than other forms of play about the function that play has in a child's (and not just a child's) life. A two-to three-year-old child is constantly forced to adapt to the social world of elders whose interests and rules are foreign to him. The same is true of the physical world, which is also beyond its comprehension. In this environment, to which the adult adapts quite well, children are unable to satisfy their emotional and intellectual needs. The younger the child is, the more problematic its adaptation becomes. For emotional and intellectual balance, he needs to perform activities that would not be motivated by the need to adapt to reality, but on the contrary by an effort to actively adapt reality to himself, without coercion and sanctions.<sup>11</sup>

Symbolic play is followed by play with rules. However, it must be said that the individual types of play are intertwined. It is not that practice play has disappeared with the advent of symbolic play or play with rules. Gradually, the child discovers various games, but they all remain in psychomotor memory as options.

Play with rules grow out of practice play and symbolic play. At first, young children do not follow the rules, even if they are included in the games of the elders. Children learn rules from others. With the development of a child's life in society, the importance of these games increases. Some

7 Eugen Fink, *Oáza štěstí* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 1992), 8.

8 Průcha, Walterová, and Mareš, *Pedagogický slovník*, 78.

9 Ibid., 151.

10 Cf. Tomáš Řiháček, Ivo Čermák, Roman Hytych et al., *Kvalitativní analýza textů: čtyři přístupy* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2013), 9–43.

11 Piaget, *Psychologie dítěte*, 50.

of these games are carried over with adult participation, others are not (such as marbles). Besides children's joint activities and verbal exchanges, games with rules are one area of socialisation. From about the age of seven, play is very structured. Emphasis is placed on getting along with others and understanding accepted rules which are used to compete fairly.<sup>12</sup>

At this point, I would like to point out the problem of the aforementioned didactic game or various educational games once again. Even play in the sense of the activity structure, that is, play with rules, can be very demanding in terms of the necessity of adapting to reality. Again, it can be very coercive. If the play lacks voluntariness, spontaneity, fulfilment of the feeling of 'being in the game', it can be an activity that puts a lot of pressure on the child, even with the help of sanctions in the form of a bad grade or the teacher's displeasure.

### The Social Function of Play

In the experience of the play phenomenon, we do not care whether our ideas are rational or irrational; for the most important thing is the experience of the game itself. It is about the magic of the moment. Once this magic, this desire to play, disappears, it is the end of it. The game only defines the space. If this potential is exhausted, one leaves the given game. Conversely, I can only be 'in the game' by jumping over puddles in my imagination. I can play football, that is, a game with rules, and not be 'in the game' at all, for example, because I am not in the mood for a fixed match today. However, this is where the function of the game with rules as the play phenomenon ends, and the training of skills to achieve a result begins (a purpose is achieved). This moment is important to realise the goal, whether the goal of the game is only success or if it is an experience of performance.

Game actions have only their own internal purposes, and none of them go beyond it. When we play for physical fitness, military education, or for health, the game is impaired because it has become an exercise for something else. It is the pure self-sufficiency, the full, self-contained sense of the act of playing that allows the possibility of a human sojourn in time to appear in the game. This does not drag us and does not drive us, but rather provides a delay [...] the game gifts us with presence. Playing means activity and creation.<sup>13</sup>

The state of 'being in the game' functions as something more – as a space which can change relationships through the rules (the opponent becomes a teammate). It can create players' new attitudes (being a teammate is cool!) and take responsibility for the relationship (even after losing we remain friends). Unlike symbolic play, which provides a completely rule-free space that depends only on relationship, play with rules defines a space within which relationships must move. It reduces it, structures it, makes it complex from a certain point of view, creates higher demands for adaptation while maintaining the state of 'being in the game'. The skills acquired during the game are then a technique important for being in this field. The game itself in the sense of structure is only a tool. If we start talking about the game in a sense of recreation or work, for example, professional football players talk about football as their job, from which they make a living, then it is no longer about the game itself. The phenomenon of 'being in the game'

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Fink, *Oáza štěstí*, 16.



is slowly disappearing, and skills aimed at winning or making a living are beginning to be acquired purposefully – through training. One then has a formalised, rationalised game. The player knows why he plays it and for what purpose; the tool of the ‘game’ becomes the goal itself.

In this respect, we come to the border between philosophy and developmental psychology. In every culture, children play different games.<sup>14</sup> Children (and not only them) create these games themselves or take them from their elders when they feel the need for them. The subordination of one’s own ‘I’ to the rules is imposed by an individual or freely developed in cooperation with others. For example, a child goes from the symbolic game to the game with rules by itself quite naturally, unconsciously, spontaneously, and happily. But only at the moment when he is already equipped for it and the need for it appears. If the game is not fun, the child will not accept it. Children play different games depending on what best suits their needs. So the game itself has no purpose. Meaning is only sought on its basis. This is exactly what Jean Piaget points out with regard to the importance of emotional conflicts in symbolic play.

In the symbolic game, primarily emotional conflicts reappear. If some banal scene occurs at lunch, the child is sure to reproduce it in an hour or two while playing with a doll. The child is sure to find a happier solution as he either makes a more sensible impression on the doll than the parents in previous situation, or he includes in the playing what self-love prevented him from admitting at the table (e.g., finishing the soup which he does not like – it is easier, after all, because the soup is symbolically eaten by the doll). If the child was afraid of a big dog, he will surely correct it in symbolic play and the dogs will stop being mean, or the children will stop being afraid. Generally speaking, symbolic play can serve to resolve conflict and tension, to compensate for unsatisfied needs, to reverse roles (obedience and authority), to expand the ‘self’, etc.<sup>15</sup>

The function of the symbolic game is manifested not only in emotional, but also in recognition forms.

A little girl, who some time ago was asking about the mechanism of the bells which she had observed during the holidays in the old village belfry, once stood motionless at her father’s table, making deep sounds. ‘You are disturbing me a bit, you see I am working.’ ‘Do not talk to me,’ replied the girl, ‘I am the church.’ Once she was disturbed by the sight of a plucked duck on the kitchen table. In the evening she stretched out on the couch and looked sick. She did not answer the questions at first, then said in a weak voice, ‘I am a dead duck!’<sup>16</sup>

Piaget adds that in these examples one can see how the symbolism of the game can ultimately fulfil the function that inner speech has for an adult. A child does not reflect on the event that has interested or excited him, he is not content with recalling it in his mind, but uses more direct symbolism, plays out the situation, and this allows him to relive the event. A child does not play any role in the sense of a script, does not think that something would be appropriate to play again, does not play the church or the duck, but is actively involved in the game. In the game, the child names the fact and tries to arrive at a solution that is acceptable for him. The role serves him in the process of discovering a reciprocal relationship. He tries to be his father, sees his social role from the opposite angle, and by taking the position of ‘father’ he adopts the other’s social perspective.

14 Cf. Eugen Fink, *Hra jako symbol světa* (Praha: Český spisovatel, 1993).

15 Piaget, *Psychologie dítěte*, 51.

16 Ibid.

Thanks to the role, he changes the relationship or lets it disappear according to the needs of the game, but he does not do so purposefully. A child does not know that he has to choose a role in order to cope with the environment. The child is *'in the game'*, he *'plays himself'*, he does not use the game for any purpose. Thus, through play, one attempts to enter into functional relationships by adopting different social perspectives.<sup>17</sup>

A certain philosophical approach to socialisation is documented in these examples. A child, a person, enters into relationships based on playing, naturally, spontaneously. He can thus discover authentic relationships without sanctions. In case of psychological discomfort, he leaves the game and looks for a game (bond, relationship) at a qualitatively different level. So – for emotional and intellectual balance, he needs to perform activities that would not be motivated by the need to adapt to reality, but on the contrary by an effort to actively adapt reality to himself, without coercion and sanctions. Piaget even sees this balance between assimilation and accommodation as intelligence.<sup>18</sup>

## A Socially Deterministic View

The behavioural approach says that a person can be educated by external influences. The point is that the pupils learn everything that is needed through conditioning as efficiently and quickly as possible. It is teaching focused on skills and their practice, formalisation. Eugen Fink draws attention to misunderstandings regarding the understanding of the phenomenon of play in the education of children.

It is praised, as 'appropriate for a child', that kind of education that achieves this transformation of a person in education without hard and sharp breaks, when work is presented to children almost like a game – as a kind of methodical and disciplined play, and when difficult and burdensome things are only suddenly revealed [...] in the background we find the common opinion that playing belongs to the psychological structure of childhood, and that it recedes into the background during one's development.<sup>19</sup>

As a contrast, it is possible to state how socialisation is understood by *Pedagogický slovník* [Pedagogical Dictionary].

Socialisation at school has a specific form. Pupils have to adapt to the conditions of institutionalised upbringing and education, [...] and it places demands on the professionalism and human qualities of teachers. Shortcomings in the process of socialisation, caused either by innate dispositions or by the influence of the environment, are reflected in the deviant behaviour of the individual, who must be integrated back into society with the help of re-socialisation, e.g., with the help of educational programmes, prison, etc.<sup>20</sup>

In this definition of socialisation, the pressure on the adjustment of individuals is very dominant; there is even a belief about the need to correct individuals who do not adapt to the conditions of the institutionalised school and the demands of the teachers. It is interesting that there are no

17 Cf. Horst Heidbrink, *Psychologie morálního vývoje* (Praha: Portál, 1997), 94.

18 Piaget, *Psychologie dítěte*, 50.

19 Fink, *Oáza štěstí*, 16.

20 Průcha, Walterová, and Mareš, *Pedagogický slovník*, 202.

mentions of relationships, the individual himself and the organisation of society as such. The institutionalised school creates pressure aimed at curricular, that is, rational and planned adjustment of the individual to external requirements; in Piaget's concept it would be the accommodation. The question then is the assimilation counterpoise leading to balance. Thus, the third opposition of the compared approaches arises, which lies in a different approach to understanding the pressure which adjusts the individual within the framework of socialisation.

## Role Playing?

What space do individuals have in school when we know that for emotional and intellectual balance it is necessary for them to perform activities that would not be motivated by the need to adjust to reality, but on the contrary by an effort to actively adjust reality to themselves without coercion and sanctions? In a phenomenological sense, it would probably be the discovery of voluntary, spontaneous activity and an active, creative rendering of one's own role in a game. Can a school didactic game and role-playing in it be such an alternative, just like current pedagogy imagines it? Let us look at the definition of role playing.

It is a teaching method that induces model social situations and leads pupils to assume different social roles in them. Adopting a certain role and behaving in a certain role forces students to understand the viewpoints and experiences of other people; it leads them to alternative problem solving, to a deeper understanding of interpersonal relationships and conflicts.<sup>21</sup>

The definition suggests that a method is an acting entity. However, it should be emphasised that the teaching method is not what induces model social situations and leads pupils to assume different social roles in them. Indeed, the teaching method itself is not the agent in the situation. It is the acting pedagogue who induces model social situations and leads pupils to assume different social roles in them. In the same way, considering the general role playing and its automatic outcomes, it cannot be said that the acceptance of a certain role and behaviour in a certain role forces students to (just by itself and objectively) understand the viewpoints and experiences of other people, that it leads them to an alternative solution to problems, to a deeper understanding of interpersonal relationships and conflicts. The one who creates the rules of the game and evaluates the course of the game, and thus also the roles, is the teacher. The teacher decides to what extent the acceptance of a certain role and the behaviour in a certain role forces the pupils to understand the viewpoints and experiences of other people. The teacher creates the structure of the game, sets the rules of the didactic game, evaluates role-playing, and thus leads to alternative problem solving, to a deeper understanding of interpersonal relationships and conflicts. The student must therefore play the role well and meet the requirements set by the teacher's authority. In this respect, the individual again adapts to the environment, and it is certainly not assimilation, but accommodation.

## In-role Behaviour

The sociologist Goffman,<sup>22</sup> based on Shakespeare's metaphor 'All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players', describes human interactions using theatre terminology.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Erving Goffman, *Všichni hrajeme divadlo* (Praha: Portál, 2018).



It is concluded that we often shape our own behaviour regardless of what we experience, so that in our role we try to create a certain impression according to a certain scenario (for example, a doctor uses means to appear credible to his patients, a teacher plays the role of a serious or an open-minded teacher). We prepare for our role to play it as convincingly as possible for our audience, and our behaviour in and out of role can vary greatly. In the book called *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffmann hits upon a fundamental contradiction between role-playing and the actual game experience. The goal of such role-playing is to make an impression, to present oneself, not to aimlessly play for the sake of joy alone and thereby discover the possibilities of relationships with oneself and others. Goffman talks about in-role behaviour, self-presentation, stylisation, playing a role for a purpose.

For clarification, we can help ourselves with English, in which the nuances are clearer. Play could be understood as a game with rules or a drama play. If we go to football or the theatre, we go to see either a game or a play. A player and an actor both play something. In Czech, considering the theatre matter, we would say that one is an author's actor or an actor. He is the one who acts, creates, and adapts reality to himself and to the environment (in Piaget's terminology he assimilates something). On the contrary, the one who in the drama play behaves as expected according to the rules from the outside, plays the role conventionally and fulfils the tasks as expected, and is not actively acting, does not adjust reality, does not create (accommodate) it.

## Conscious Action

In pedagogy, impromptu actions, open dramatic playing, or improvisation are considered a part of our everyday lives. The premise is the idea that if we try model situations properly, it will prepare us for life. This phrase is used didactically – prepare an improvisation on a theme, with props or with a story.<sup>23</sup> But how to 'prepare' an unprepared and spontaneous activity?

An experimental experience would be to perform unprepared in front of an audience in a theatre or in front of students during a lecture.<sup>24</sup> Almost everyone knows how difficult it is to speak in public without being hidden behind a role or a prepared speech. Jan Werich commented on this topic as follows:

'One such tiny, unimportant cliché is the claim that improvising on stage is easy. All you have to do is come on stage and say whatever comes to your mind. That contains about as much nonsense as claiming that when a driving license holder gets behind the wheel of a Maserati racing car, that he becomes a racing driver. Before the driving license and before the Maserati, he must have the ability, the talent, and then he begins to learn. Diligently. I believe that improvised comedy between two or more partners involves a mutual positive and human relationship. People have to know each other, they have to like each other, or at least have a common love, so that they can go for fun all the way to space, or to prehistoric times, as there are no limits to the imagination!' [...] 'You know it is a mystery?' Werich said after a moment. 'I have often thought about it. How many times have I been a listener to myself during those pre-scenes. I did not know what to say: I started something and did not know the end. I stood there waiting to see how it would turn out. And when there was some applause, I almost clapped too. Not to myself – but to that mouth which said it. Because everything happened as in hypnosis, it seemed to me that I was an interpreter of some wave, that I was communicating something from somewhere, that I was passing on

23 Cf. Eva Machková, *Jak se učí dramatická výchova* (Praha: AMU, 2007), 111–157.

24 Cf. Suda, *Experimentální dramatika*, 12.

messages. And Voskovec confirmed to me that he used to have the same feelings. We were both more curious about what was going to happen than the audience.<sup>25</sup>

Similar to authors from the field of phenomenology of play or developmental psychology, Jan Werich emphasises the relationship (bond) as a basic condition of the play experience. He considers fantasy, irrationality, even mystery to be other essential attributes of play.

From the point of view of qualitative methodology, this excursion into the realm of art and narrative is not only permissible, but even desirable.<sup>26</sup> It is therefore possible to draw another contradiction in the approach to the game – while the social science discipline emphasises the situation and the model of behaviour to which the individual is supposed to adapt; from the phenomenological point of view it is about emphasising the relationship.

### A Path to Self-reflection...

Research on acting in unprepared situations is comprehensively presented in the monograph called *Experimentální dramatika*,<sup>27</sup> so this article only refers to it in a few findings.

Based on the results of nearly twenty years of research on case studies of open dramatic play, it appears that one of the essential factors in the study of authentic actions is precisely noticing the phenomenon of a spontaneous game. It is about registering and accepting how the phenomenon of play in life exists among us. It is about when and how it appears, when and how we are set and willing to accept it as one of the basic existential phenomena. From twenty years of pedagogical research on thousands of statements, it follows that students consciously and reflectively notice the phenomenon of play – as a liberating and purposeless activity – between the third and sixth year of their studies at the earliest.

Often the problem is that one is often unaware of one's behaviour in unprepared situations (along with its consequences). One needs to 'see' oneself somehow in order to even begin to think about one's behaviour. For example, other people provide us with this image by reacting to our behaviour. It does not only apply to some vitally important situations; sometimes it is enough to see oneself on a video recording or hear oneself in a tape recording. A person often likes to see himself better, to cultivate a certain image of himself, which is why the observed image of his own actions is often unpleasant. However, this 'mirror setting' is not yet self-reflection itself.

Student self-reflections show that people feel strange when they see or hear themselves for the first time. One sees and hears how one behaves, speaks, and looks somehow different from one's own internal perception, that there is a different idea of oneself than the image provided offers. It depends on the student's attitude whether it will challenge him to start asking why there is such a big difference between his own self-image (his behaviour) and his real image. However, one may have confused self-reflection and negative self-evaluation. Instead of a study challenge, there may be dissonance over how one's image appears in the records. One of the outputs of years of continuous research in experimental drama is the question of feedback, evaluation, reflection, and self-reflection.

What does self-reflection and its development over time actually mean? From the research, self-reflection appears to be a pause in which there is an opportunity to put the lived particulars into context, to ask what each experience means. The possibility to take experience 'into

25 Jiří Janoušek, *Rozhovory s Janem Werichem* (Praha: HAK, 1999), 18.

26 Cf. Řiháček, Čermák, Hytych et al., *Kvalitativní analýza textů: čtyři přístupy*, 75–104.

27 Cf. Suda, *Experimentální dramatika*.

one's game', the possibility not to worry about self-critical assessment, the possibility to see oneself from a different perspective, and thus gain space to change one's own attitude, or at least the way of looking at things and thereby feel freedom. As Viktor Frankl writes, freedom does not mean changing external circumstances, freedom is choosing one's own attitude.<sup>28</sup> But there is a very long and difficult road to that. The ability to continuously reflect is the beginning of the path to self-awareness, to self-responsibility, to one's personality as such. Vladimír Smékal's view is very inspiring: 'Awareness of the contents of one's consciousness and personality characteristics as well as the results of actions in the background, or in confrontation with moral standards or at least images of the ideal self.'<sup>29</sup>

The current trend in pedagogy understands self-reflection as self-evaluation, self-definition for the purpose of strategic decision-making in the future:

In general, it is a conscious self-knowledge, self-definition, self-evaluation, on the basis of which an individual's relationship to himself arises. The individual reflects on himself, on the peculiarities of his personality, looks back on his actions, thoughts, attitudes, feelings; it recapitulates a certain section of his own life or behaviour and decision-making in situations that are important to him. The goal is to evaluate oneself, decide what and how to change, and choose a strategy for the future.<sup>30</sup>

So we can stop at another contradiction in approaches. On the one hand, there is an emphasis on a successful strategy for the future at the cost of self-definition and self-evaluation. On the other hand, an approach that prefers self-acceptance based on the ethical dilemmas of one's viewed and conscious actions is emphasised.

## Meta-pedagogy

However, it should be emphasised that even the scientific workers of contemporary modern pedagogy are aware of a certain reduced perspective. The term 'meta-pedagogy' is therefore defined by *Pedagogický slovník* as follows: 'It is a description and evaluation of pedagogy itself as a scientific discipline, of its status, results, development trends. Here [in the Czech Republic], this scientific self-reflection of pedagogy (unlike abroad) is not developed.'<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, a certain awareness of the lack of self-reflection of pedagogy as a social science field is contained in this quote from meta-pedagogy. The dictionary in all seven updated editions between 1995 and 2017 leaves this definition unchanged. In foreign language literature, the works of, for example, Max van Manen, devoted to pedagogical phenomenology<sup>32</sup> and methodology,<sup>33</sup> are among the most published. It has not yet been translated in the Czech Republic. Thus, the questions of real reflection on current pedagogical practice do not yet appear in our pedagogical science and research. However, it is necessary to mention again that it is not a self-reflection of pedagogy, as the definition offers us. Pedagogy as a field is not a consciously acting subject that can reflect on itself. According to the aforementioned quote by Vladimír Smékal, this belongs only to researchers as individuals.

28 Cf. Viktor Emil Frankl, *Vůle ke smyslu* (Brno: Cesta, 2006), 109.

29 Vladimír Smékal, *Pozvání do psychologie osobnosti: Člověk v zrcadle vědomí a jednání* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 2004), 353.

30 Průcha, Walterová, and Mareš, *Pedagogický slovník*, 259.

31 Ibid., 116.

32 Max van Manen, *Pedagogical Tact* (New York: Left Coast Press Inc, 2015).

33 Max van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice* (New York: Left Coast Press Inc, 2014).

## Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the comparison of individual definitions, this article aims to point out the different approach to playing and to the phenomenon of playing in the concept of contemporary pedagogy as a social science on the one hand and authors from the circle of phenomenologically thinking philosophers, psychologists, and pedagogues on the other. Several basic contradictions and conflicts emerge in the lines of argument of both currents of opinion.

As the first contradiction, I would mention the point of view on the purposefulness and purposelessness of play. While pedagogic science introduces the term didactic play, the basic phenomenological attribute of play is defined as purposelessness, spontaneity, authenticity, the experience of a different being in time or taste, interest, liveliness. From a phenomenological point of view, the pedagogical use of didactic play is rather the opposite of spontaneous activity.

The second contradiction in understanding the game is the methodological aspect. Pedagogy as a social science has the ambition to accurately study the decision-making of actors using quantitative methodology. The phenomenological approach is purely qualitative.

The third significant contrast is the understanding of play as a means of socialisation. According to pedagogical science, pupils must adapt to the conditions of institutionalised upbringing and education, the planned curriculum, and the demands of teachers. On the other hand, according to developmental psychology, the experience of the phenomenon of play allows children to enter into relationships based on playing naturally and spontaneously. For emotional and intellectual balance, children need to perform activities that are not motivated by the need to adapt to reality, but on the contrary by an effort to actively adapt reality to themselves, without coercion or sanctions.

The fourth significant contrast of play is the concept of acting in an unprepared situation. While, for example, the didactics of drama education presupposes rational preparation and practice of model situations, from a phenomenological point of view it is about emphasising the relationship in truly unprepared action. The awareness of relationship, alongside fantasy and irrationality, is even understood as a basic condition of the game experience.

Reflecting on one's own actions in the game appears as another significant contrast. While in the didactic model situation the individual plays a role in order to solve a conflict or problem, what happens then in an unprepared situation can open the way to reflection on one's own unexpected and unprepared actions, that is, to self-reflection.

A more general contrast is the meta-pedagogical level. That is, the level of philosophical overlap of a certain way of thinking and its consequences at the ethical level. While pedagogy as a social science field does not develop this level, for the philosophy of education or the phenomenology of play, this level appears to be the most essential.<sup>34</sup>

## Acknowledgments

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the cited publication *Pedagogický slovník*, which describes the current pedagogical reality very concisely. In this regard, the authors have done a precise job, they do not introduce a personal point of view, and they describe reality completely objectively and impartially. In particular, they prepared substantial study material for the meta-pedagogical level.

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34 Cf. Radim Palouš, *K filozofii výchovy* (Praha: SPN, 1991).

Likewise, thanks also go to the opponents, and their very carefully drawing attention to the formulation and formal shortcomings of the considerations, the line of argument, and the entire study.

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