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Playing in the Zone.
A Vygotskian Interpretation of Young Children's Television-inspired Play and
Talk.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Masters degree of
Education at Massey University.

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1999

Abstract

Children's 'representational play' has been extensively acknowledged as contributing to early learning and development. This qualitative case study examined a specialised form of representational play prompted by children's television watching. Participants involved children over the age of 3 years attending a community based childcare centre in a city in New Zealand. The study was carried out over a period of 2 weeks and employed 'naturalistic, observational' and 'stimulated recall' techniques during data collection. Children's 'television play' and talk became both the focus of the investigation and the unit of analysis. The original focus of Superhero play was extended to include other forms of television play that emerged as dominant themes within the studied centre. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning was used as a theoretical tool for analysis with special attention given to Vygotsky's concepts of 'intersubjectivity' and 'cultural tools.' Intersubjectivity was defined and discussed in relation to children's appropriation of 'cultural tools' during representational play. A Vygotskian focus necessitated embedding these concepts within Vygotsky's wider theory of learning and development. Vygotsky's concept of the 'zone-of-proximal development' therefore was also considered in regard to 'television related play and talk'. Nelson's (1986) concept of 'scripts' was examined as Vygotsky viewed language as a primary 'mediating tool' that significantly contributed to children's intersubjective understandings. This study concluded that 'Superhero play' and other forms of television play are the outcome of children's appropriation of sociocultural influences. The study's conclusion supported Vygotsky's theory of development that sees learning as occurring as the result of children's 'internalization' and 'appropriation of cultural tools'.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and thank my family and a few other special people who have supported me far beyond the call of duty. Andrew Batt, my husband, for always allowing me the space and time to do what I had to do. Our children David, Jon, Tim and Rose for their endless understanding and acceptance of a 'mother who studies'. My parents Catherine and Philip for believing in me. My dear friends Gloria, Rachel, Sue and Robin for being there. My colleagues and friends at the Christchurch College of Education for their ongoing support. The staff, children and their families at the centre where this study took place, for their generosity in allowing me to observe them and be part of their lives. My supervisors Joy Cullen and Roy Shuker for their encouragement and for sharing their experience and expertise.

Andy, this one is for you.

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