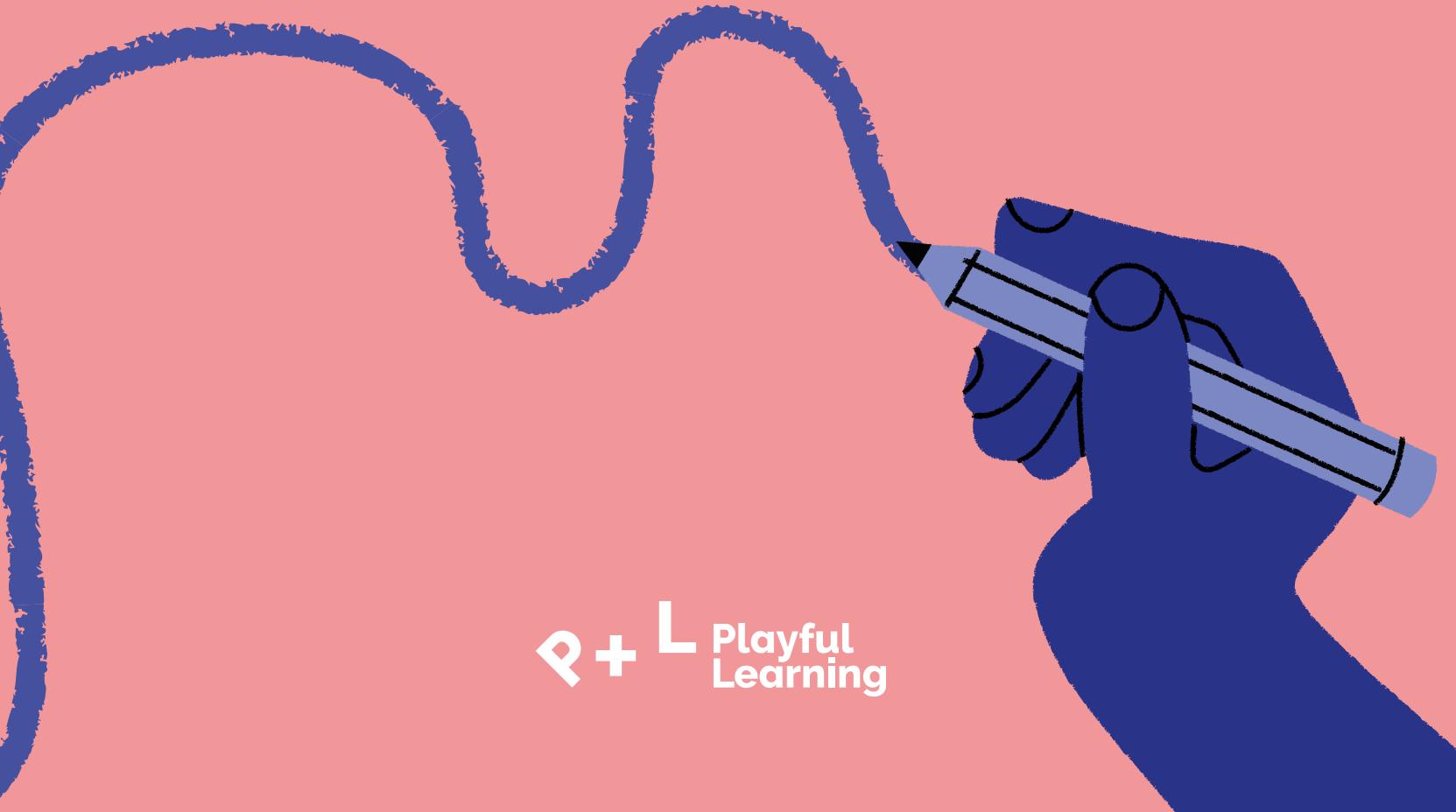


PlayBook 4



P + L Playful Learning

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Introduction

Most Danish children thrive, but recent studies have highlighted increasing well-being issues among children and young people.

The national study 'Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care' (Kvalitet i dagtilbud) conducted by the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) and the Danish Center for Social Science Research (VIVE) shows that children's play requires special attention and is not given sufficient priority in pedagogical praxis. According to the report, pedagogical work incorporating play is about creating opportunities for all children to participate in and express themselves through play. It is through play that children develop their identity, social skills and an understanding of the world.

Several studies indicate that the well-being of schoolchildren is declining. The national well-being survey from the Ministry of Children and Education in 2023 showed, among other findings, that more than one in four pupils in Danish school classrooms do not think that their classes motivate them to want to learn more. In 2021, the study The Good Children's Life – according to the Children (Det gode børneliv - ifølge

børnene) conducted by Think Tank Mandag Morgen (Monday Morning) and the LEGO Foundation showed that motivational and exciting teaching is important for many children's well-being at school – and, according to them, teaching involves experimenting, failing and trying out new things, using your body and senses actively and adopting a hands-on approach to the subject.

There is a need to address challenges to well-being and motivation in pedagogical praxis. There is also a need to create a setting enabling social educators and teachers to meet these challenges and the children's wishes for experimental and exploratory teaching. In Playful Learning, we strengthen children's play, creativity, curiosity and desire to explore through playful approaches. We give social educators and teachers room to learn how to use playful approaches in daycare institutions and schools.

¹ <https://www.eva.dk/dagtilbud-boern/undersoegelse-kvalitet-dagtilbud-0-2-aarige-boern>

² <https://uddannelsesstatistik.dk/Pages/Topics/19.aspx>

³ <https://taenketaenken.mm.dk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Det-gode-boerneliv-ifølge-boernene.pdf>





Play is not just for fun. Play is our force of life. Our way of being – and our way of learning. We are born with the desire to explore, examine and experiment. We know that children play house and learn about social roles. They spin around themselves and discover their physical limits. They make up stories and learn to use their imagination.

Playful approaches are when we let elements from play inspire and qualify pedagogical activities and teaching. Playful approaches are characterised by daring the unpredictable, insisting on meaningfulness and drawing on imagination and fantasy – precisely as we know it from play. Playful approaches rouse our curiosity, creativity and desire to explore. Playful approaches create space for the individual in the community, strengthen our commitment and prepare us for an unpredictable future.

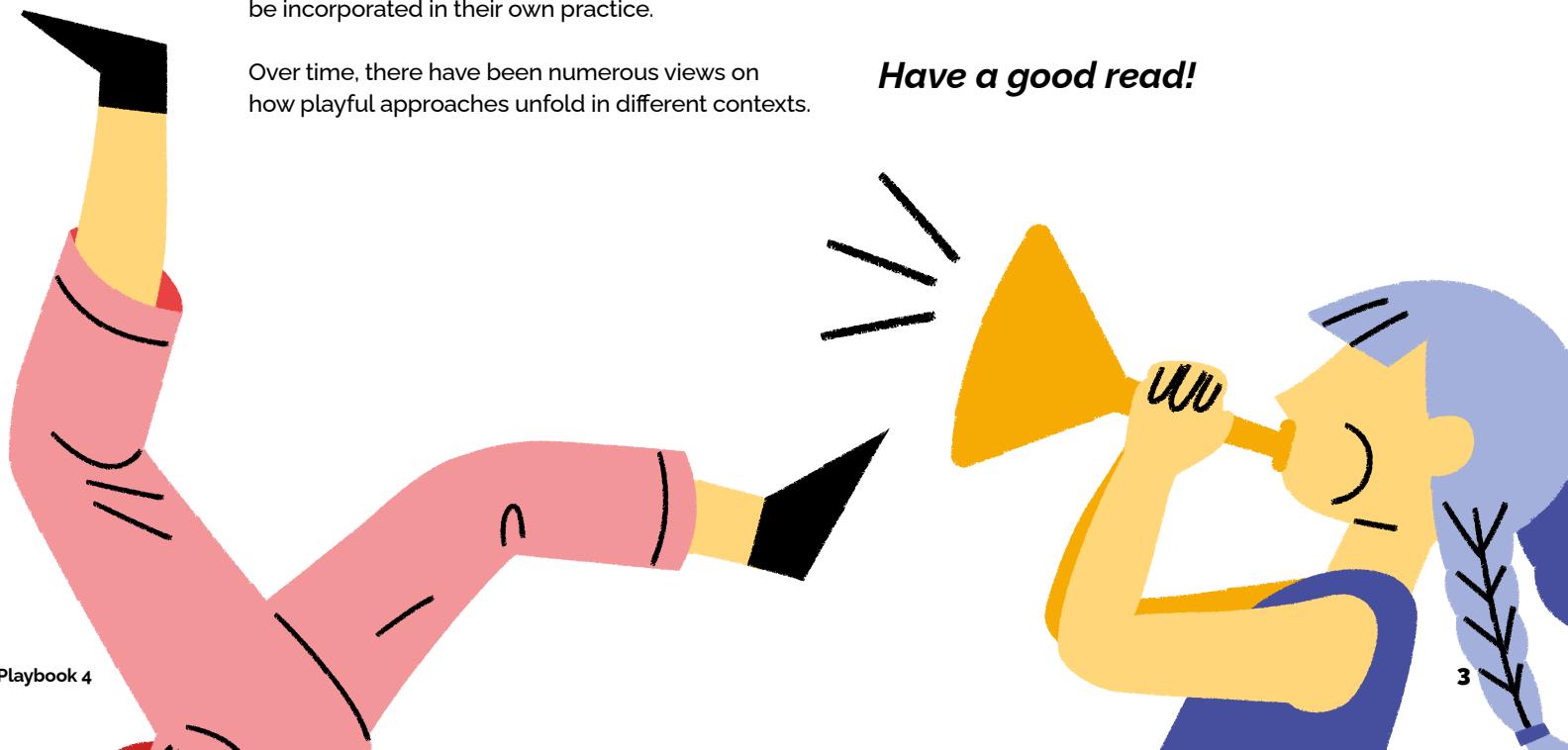
The use of playful approaches will always depend on the social educator's, teacher's or lecturer's assessment and reflection on how it can meaningfully be incorporated in their own practice.

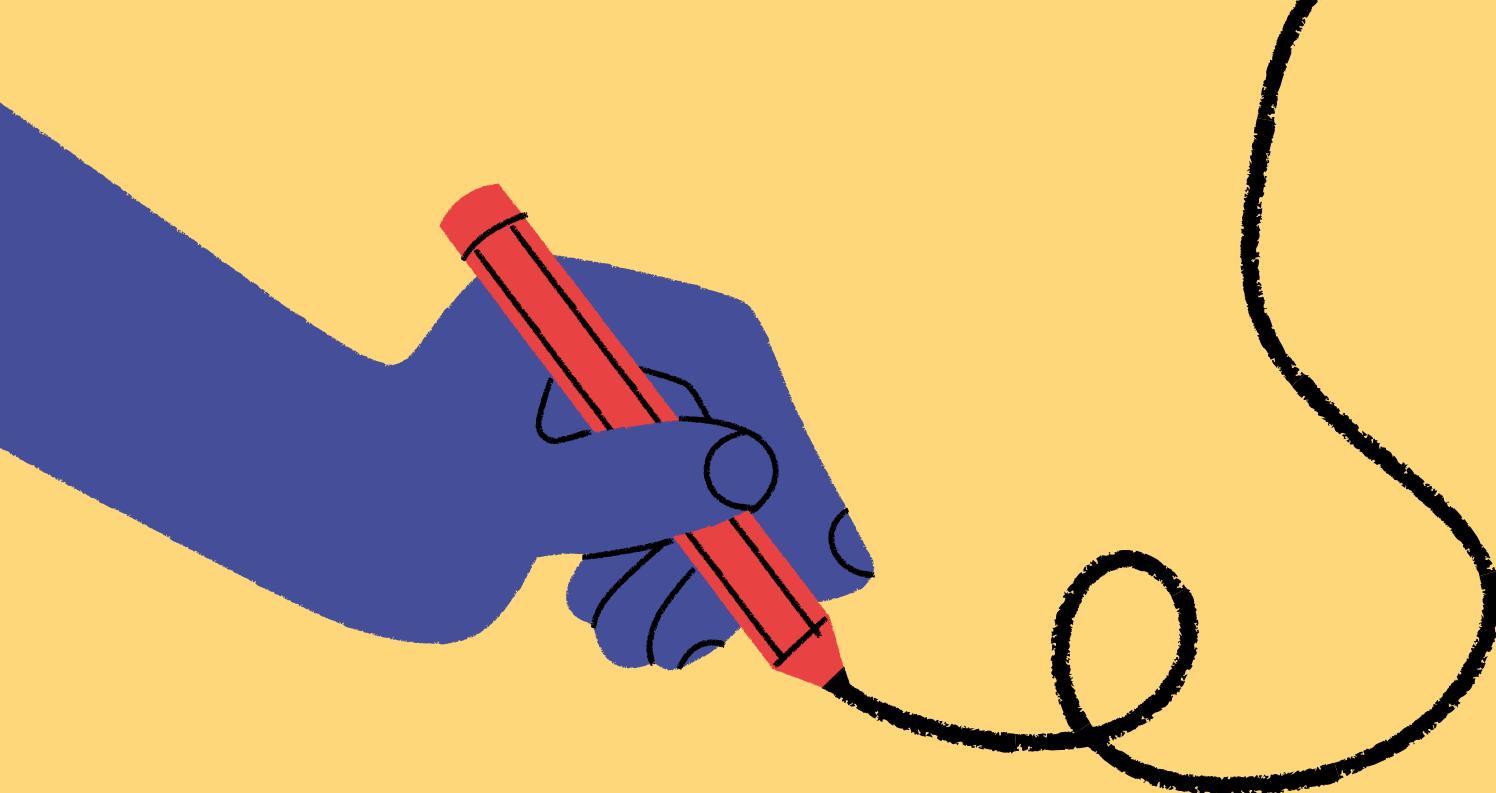
Over time, there have been numerous views on how playful approaches unfold in different contexts.

We have previously shared these experiences in PlayBooks 1-3 through examples of teaching designs, principles of playful teaching as well as the didactic basis developed based on experiences with and reflections on teaching that incorporates playful approaches.

In this PlayBook edition, we will share experiences from the four projects: Leg For Dig, Play@Heart, P+L Praxis and P+L Praxis Research. Together, we have examined what playful approaches mean for children. We have experienced and learned that when we want to talk about the importance of playful approaches, we must also talk about what is required of social educators and teachers to use playful approaches. The articles highlight that playful approaches can create new and more participation opportunities in daycare institutions and schools. And that when social educators and teachers work with playful approaches, it strengthens their professional pride and makes a difference for the children.

Have a good read!





Background

Since 2018, Playful Learning has been used in the social education and teacher education programmes at the Danish university colleges based on a vision of strengthening children's play, creativity, curiosity and desire for exploration through playful approaches.

The education of the social educators and teachers of tomorrow was a natural starting point for working towards achieving such an ambitious vision.'

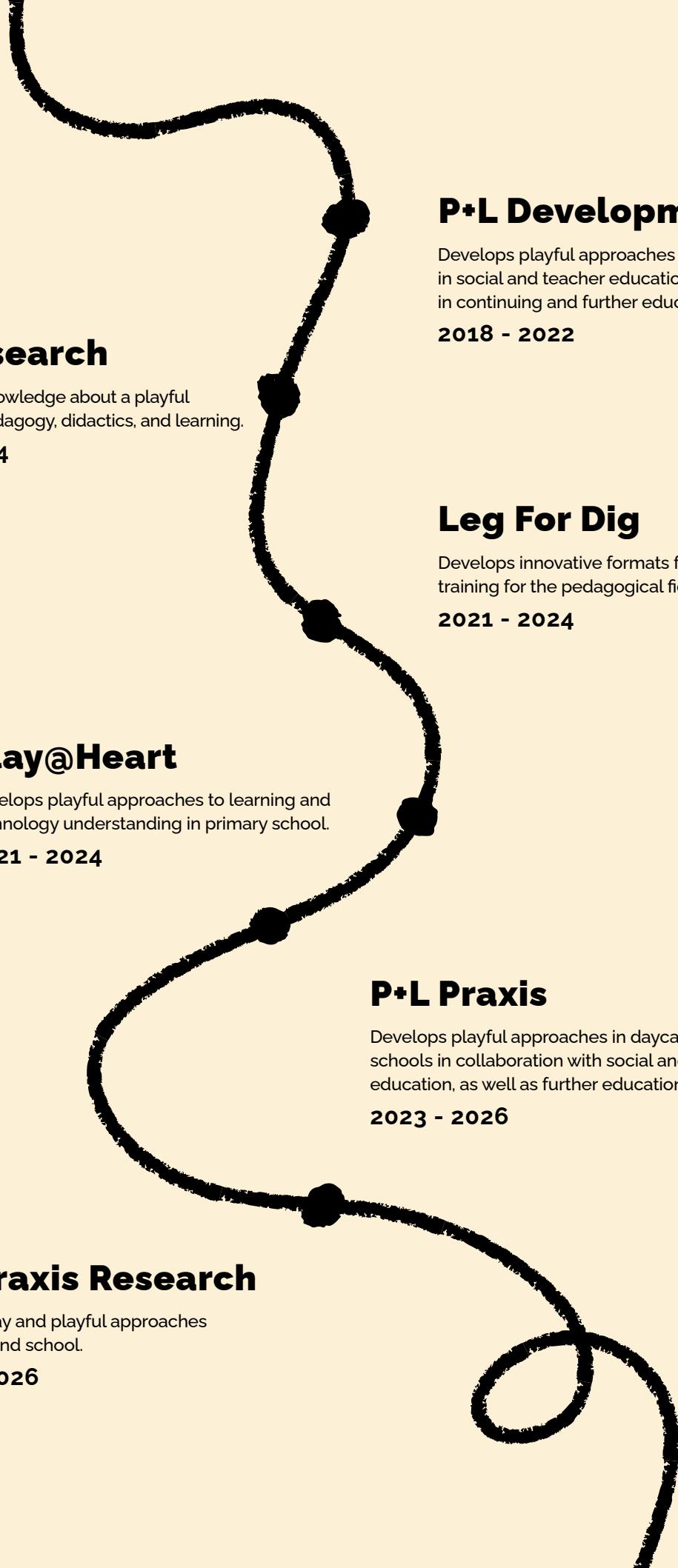
In the first years, the overall focus was on examining and experimenting with how playful approaches unfold in the teaching when used, for example, in mathematics in the teacher education programme or in bachelor project supervision in the social education programme. PlayLabs were developed and established at the university colleges, which made it possible for both lecturers and students to gain experience with the importance of space and materiality in the ability to unfold playful approaches in the teaching. A national development community was created consisting of lecturers from the social education and teacher education programmes throughout Denmark.

In 2019, the development project in the social education and teacher education programmes was expanded with a comprehensive research project. The purpose of the research project was to expand

the language of playful approaches in education and to examine the importance of playful approaches to didactics, space and materiality as well as cultural change with a view to supporting an anchoring of Playful Learning in the education programmes.

In 2021, Playful Learning took its first steps towards praxis and included the university colleges' continuing and further education programmes in the development project and launched two new projects: Play@Heart and Leg For Dig, which established collaboration between education programmes and schools and daycare institutions, respectively.

Playful Learning became an overall programme, consisting of several projects working with a joint vision, but in different contexts and arenas and with different target groups. In 2023, Playful Learning launched P+L Praxis and P+L Praxis Research projects as well as with focus on strengthening Playful Learning's work through international collaboration.



P+L Research

Creates new knowledge about a playful approach to pedagogy, didactics, and learning.

2019 - 2024

P+L Development

Develops playful approaches to learning in social and teacher education as well as in continuing and further education.

2018 - 2022

Leg For Dig

Develops innovative formats for in-service training for the pedagogical field.

2021 - 2024

Play@Heart

Develops playful approaches to learning and technology understanding in primary school.

2021 - 2024

P+L Praxis

Develops playful approaches in daycares and schools in collaboration with social and teacher education, as well as further education.

2023 - 2026

P+L Praxis Research

Explores play and playful approaches in daycare and school.

2021 - 2026



Leg For Dig

Leg For Dig develops continuing and further education programmes that strengthen children's well-being, development and learning through a playful approach.

Playful approaches help strengthen children's well-being, development and learning and can create play environments with diverse participation opportunities. Therefore, Leg For Dig is fully engaged in the development of new continuing and further education courses for social educators, which will be offered through the local university colleges in 2024.

The objective of the continuing and further education courses is to create learning and cultural change in the everyday life of all social educators and teachers working with children aged from 0-15 years in daycare institutions and schools/after-school recreation centres. The courses are tailored so that they are based on precisely the challenges that may arise in everyday life such as well-being

issues, inclusion, learning motivation and participation opportunities. And they cater for all employee groups: social educators, managers, daycare workers, social educator assistants and pedagogical assistants.

Since 2022, ambassadors from the six university colleges in Denmark have collaborated closely with staff and children in a number of selected daycare institutions throughout Denmark. The collaboration has provided an opportunity to get right up close to and use as a basis specific opportunities and challenges in the children's everyday lives, where social educators, daycare workers, social educator assistants and pedagogical assistants experiment and contribute on an equal footing to finding good solutions – together with the children that it is all about.

In the following article by Christoffer Richard Møller, Communications Coordinator for Leg For Dig, you can read about what it means for the children that the social education staff in the Humlebo daycare institution embrace a playful approach and dare to join in the children's play.

Feel free to join in the play!

It is important for social educators also to dare to step off the sidelines and become a co-participant in children's play. Because children love it when adults join in their play. And through play participation, the adult can help facilitate alternative forms of play and contribute to creating new participation opportunities for the children. This can be difficult in an everyday life that may often be governed by scheduled activities and adults who are used to taking the lead.

It may feel transgressive for social educators to immerse themselves completely in play. For what will your colleagues not think if you are lying on the floor writhing like a snake, or what if a parent were to arrive while you are digging for a hidden treasure and think: what is she doing – shouldn't she be looking after my children? And does it make any sense at all to join in the play; after all, I am the adult in charge of supervising the children, keeping track of time and handling other practical matters. If I join in the play, will I be working in a pedagogically qualified manner?

The short answer is yes, if you ask play researcher Hanne Hede Jørgensen from VIA University College. While children most often play with their peers, the presence of adults in play may have a positive effect on the children's participation opportunities. When adults participate in children's play, they can help create a play environment characterised by a sense of security and trust. Children who are insecure can feel more confident and comfortable when an adult figure is involved in their play. This can make them open to exploring new ideas and taking risks together with the other children. Children often experience joy when they see that adults are engaged and interested in their play. It is a way for adults physically to show children that play is important and has value. It is therefore extremely important to get down to the children's eye level and join in the play:

"Because, otherwise, I don't think you can see things from a child's perspective at all. And I think that the most important aspect when working pedagogically is to meet the individual child on their own premises and try to understand its unique world. And if you really want to understand children, you also have

to join in their play," says Hanne Hede Jørgensen, PhD and Associate Professor in the social education programme at VIA. Here she conducts research into children's play and examines the good daycare institution life through children's and adults' stories. She has also participated in the research project 'Can I join in?' (Danish title: 'Må jeg være med') on social educators' importance for children's participation in play. According to her, participating in play as an adult can help create more diverse participation opportunities for the children.

"We know that children notice each other's play skills and recognise each other as playmates when adults are involved. The children may feel more secure in practicing certain play situations when the adults participate. And when the adults join in play, the children think that they are actually fun to play with," says Hanne Hede Jørgensen.

Invitations to play

But how do you actually behave when you are on the floor playing with the children? Social education staff can provide support and develop children's play in several ways. According to the play researcher, there are two basic positions. You can either participate by remaining at the edge of the play, where you

Christoffer
Richard Møller,
Communications
Coordinator for Leg
For Dig





are actually not playing, but are a spectator of the children's play. From here, you can, for example, intervene to provide care for those who need it. And then there is the position where you participate directly in the play, and where you follow the children's initiatives and perhaps also initiate some play actions that the children can follow. According to the play researcher, it is all about being attentive to the children's play invitations. They do not always have to be verbal. They may also be non-verbal bodily actions. So it is about being open, intuitive and present in relation to reading the individual play situations.

"For example, you can imitate and repeat some of the things that the children do as a supportive gesture. You can also try to put some of your own ideas into play and see if the children embrace them. If the children are playing a fantasy game, you can propose a make-believe practice where you say: try to see what I have here while you pretend to have something. And you can then see if the children embrace it," says Hanne Hede Jørgensen.

Palle-Emil Stouby, who is Assistant Professor in the social education programme at UC Syd, University College South Denmark, and one of the 12 play ambassadors for the Leg For Dig project, has also worked extensively with adults as co-participants in children's play. For him, being an adult co-participant in play is all about being present, open and curious. This means you do not enter the play situation to manage it or control the outcome.

"It's not about defining where the play is going. You need to join in and assume a role on the children's terms. You must be open to being a mailbox if that's the role that the children assign to you. You have to dare being a blade of grass or a father who is sent to work," says Palle-Emil Stouby.

Some children need the adults to get involved in their play to support their play activities, while others are more independent. Some children may be reluctant to participate in 'free play' and need adult help to join in the play and to become good at playing. Adult intervention may be relevant if the play has come to a halt or is too monotonous and needs to be taken to new places. Here, the adult can add new energy to the play by stepping in as a co-participant.

"This helps children who may have some difficulty with play structures, framework and rules. Here, social education staff can step in and support the children in their play, so that the children experience their



participation as a success. I see from the daycare institutions that I work with that some of the more cautious children have become more inclined to participate," says Palle-Emil Stouby..

Then we said you were a dog

"Do you want to play with me?" At the Humlebo daycare institution in Løgumkloster, this has become a frequent question from children who are highly enthusiastic that the adults want to join in their play. Because something has changed since the daycare institution has introduced so-called Play Fridays, where the adults follow the children's lead and initiatives and participate actively in playing as virtually equal playmates, unlike on the other days, which are characterised by more planned activities.

Humlebo is one of the partner daycare institutions that form part of Leg For Dig, where they have had Palle-Emil Stouby attached as a consultant. And, together with him, they have made great efforts to get the social education staff to participate more in the children's play. This has required an organisational change. Every Friday, the adult-led activities are pushed aside in favour of following the children's lead and initiatives. The adults get down on the floor and are ready to go with the flow.

"At first, the children were completely confused about the adults wanting to play with them, because they haven't been used to that. But now they absolutely love it. They've started seeing us as active players and saying: 'you are a dog', or "you are this or that". And

they didn't do that previously. Because, then, I was an adult, and not someone you played with," says Linda Bøgh Lindholm, who is a pedagogical assistant at Humlebo.

Play Fridays have created a really positive development in the house, and Linda Bøgh Lindholm sees some children who are growing, who believe more in themselves and who dare to participate in developing the play further themselves, after they had some secure and pleasant success experiences together with an adult participant in their playing.

"Children who find it difficult to be a part of play communities find it easier to get into it when an adult participates in the play. The children are simply happy and we experience fewer conflicts. The place is buzzing with extra happy children on Fridays, and this atmosphere also makes itself increasingly felt on the other days," says Linda Bøgh Lindholm.

Have you 'just' played today?

Det at lege med og følge børnenes initiativer er noget, Joining in play and following the children's initiatives is something you can easily forget in a busy and hectic everyday life with many adult-controlled activities. They are also familiar with this situation in Humlebo. And, just like Linda Bøgh Lindholm, many of her colleagues in Humlebo also experience that it may be transgressive to give yourself completely to play. You may be afraid of appearing silly or frivolous to your colleagues. Or you might be embarrassed if parents were to see you fooling around on the floor. It may also be about a loss of control. You may be used to the adult having to keep track of everybody, checking the time and knowing when it is time for lunch.

"You may have forgotten that play is an essential part of your pedagogical skills. However, there may still be uncertainty about whether a playful approach is professionally valid, because we have been told for many years that the pedagogical work must consist of measurable activities. The view that effective pedagogy must be measurable is a barrier to play," says Hanne Hede Jørgensen.

This has also been Palle-Emil Stouby's experience in his work with pedagogical praxis through Leg For Dig. He has had to push for a cultural change in the Leg For Dig daycare institutions.

"We've had to break some norms and values a little in relation to where pedagogy has moved in the past

10-20 years. There is a learning-driven understanding which has had a very powerful presence in the pedagogical praxis. So we've had to counter this. Making it valid for social education staff to engage in play. We need to get rid of the notion that we're 'just' playing or it is 'only' play," says Palle-Emil Stouby.

Fortunately, a change is taking place. And children's play is a key element in the strengthened pedagogical curriculum from 2018. For example, the curriculum stipulates that play "has a value in itself and must be a consistent part of early childhood education and care" and that "children's spontaneous and self-organised play must (...) be recognised and respected and given ample space in everyday life in early childhood education and care facilities."

Proud of playing

Back at Humlebo, Linda Bøgh Lindholm can also feel that it has become more permissible for adults to join in the play because playing with the children has a meaning. It has become easier for her to argue for her pedagogical work when she chooses to join in the children's play.

"I have been a social educator assistant for many years and I have longstanding experience, but it is as if I can only now really argue for what I'm really passionate about, which is participating in play with the children," says Linda Bøgh Lindholm.

Palle-Emil Stouby also finds that the children are not the only ones benefitting from adults joining in their play. He sees a noticeable change in the social education staff, who have become happier and prouder.

"In my work with pedagogical praxis, I experience that a rediscovered respect for pedagogical professionalism is emerging. That there is a sense of pride in being a social educator or a social educator assistant when you join in the play and when we dare to return to something as fundamental as playing," says Palle-Emil Stouby.





Play@Heart

Play@Heart is a national school development project focusing on playful approaches to technology literacy. Since 2021, 12 schools have participated in the project and worked to develop technology understandings in all subjects through a playful and experimental approach. The schools also develop creative learning environments, PlaySpaces, where play and technology understanding can unfold in new ways.

Two school years have passed, and the third and final school year is now well underway. The teachers and social educators experience enthusiastic pupils and an approach to teaching that offers immersion and more participation opportunities for the pupils. This occurs when teachers dare let go of their control and dare to use unpredictability in teaching that puts the pupils' curiosity first and when school principals provide an opportunity to rethink the school day in a new and different way.

The cultural change in schools is primarily driven by a belief that the development is based on the schools' reality, initiatives and curiosity. Each school receives funds to release 6 teachers, who make up the school's capacity teams. The capacity teams supports the development and dissemination of playful approaches to technology literacy in the schools.

In the following, you can read an essay by Louise Maagaard Høybye, who is the principal of Højslev Skole – one of the participating schools in Play@Heart. The essay is about Højslev Skole's experiences from working with playful approaches to learning without compromising on teaching and learning standards.

To play or not to play – that should not be the question

A school principal's perspective on the value of playful approaches to learning



Louise Maagaard
Høybye, Principal
Højslev Skole

Witches, scientists, soothsayers, a unicorn, birds and a ringmaster with top hat and tailcoat. They all swarm around the children who are arriving, half awake, for school at Højslev Skole on an early school morning. Smoke cannons, bonfire and barrel organ music. The morning sun breaks through. Everyone is looking at each other in wonder, but with curiosity. This is how a school day may start when you work with playful approaches to learning.



Benefiting from playful approaches

Based on the Play@Heart project, Højslev Skole works with new understandings of learning and didactics, and experiences from the past two years show that the playful approaches make a difference to the pupils' learning outcomes. The moods, laughs and experiences boost the learning – in relation to both technology literacy and knowledge of the subjects in general. New ways of teaching are developed, where curiosity, joy and wonder activate the whole person and create a fertile ground for well-being, a sense of community and connection to the subject-related content, because pupil and subject meet each other both cognitively and emotionally.

The schoolyard is buzzing. With surprise, delight and a slight tinge of fear – because what's going on? Why are teachers and social educators dressed up, and who are actually behind the masks and suits? You have to fight your way through mythical figures, a portal and then a flock of clucking birds with birdseed, colourful eggs and a hatched human-sized chick. Nothing makes sense, but the senses are

awakened. Eyes are opened wide. A new school day is dawning, but something is different. There is talk in the corridors. Some of the youngest pupils need to be reassured by a familiar adult. It is all sorted out before the workshops of the school day are kicked off.

This set-up is not an everyday occurrence, but an example of how mood-creating scenarios can be used to support the development of a school that provides room for imagination, creativity and synergy between play and learning. The result speaks for itself; lots of laughs. Beating hearts. A new way of meeting each other where subject-related issues and social interaction are reconstructed through playful teaching.

Incipits and teasers as new didactic tools

It may sound like a scene from a fairy tale, but it is instead the starting signal for a new pedagogical praxis at an ordinary primary school in Denmark. A



new praxis is dawning, where the use of senses and experiences can support commitment and a desire to learn. With newly acquired didactic tools such as teasers and incipits, play atmospheres are created where surprise, wonder and curiosity are aroused – and the learning environment is boosted.

Teasers are used as small surprising tableaux: a witch sneaks past the students with her Voodoo doll, a masked and hooded person dances around scarily, large human birds screech, crazy scientists babble away and an angry old man is suddenly sitting in the communal area scolding everyone.

Incipits through stagings of themes, universes and relevant issues, which help inspire a more experimental form of teaching which, using playful and creative approaches, re-designs and gives new meaning to the teaching.

This is not always an easy exercise, as it requires deep academic and didactic understanding to create curiosity and maintain meaning for the pupils. It

requires an innovative mindset, but the past two years have shown that there is no lack of ideas among the school's pedagogical staff. When you get started, the teamwork offers a rich and entertaining potential for creating playful approaches to the teaching together.

New participation opportunities

With a focus on strengthening creative and pupil-involving processes, the teaching becomes more varied. Design processes and entrepreneurial thinking are incorporated. Creative and product-oriented didactics are gaining ground together with the inclusion of analogue and digital technologies, which are combined with playful didactic tools.

The pupils experience new ways of participating in the teaching because their perspectives are invited inside, and the content of the subjects taught can unfold in several ways. It motivates the pupils, and they become more equal partners in the learning space, as their wonder and experimentation take on greater and more legitimate importance in the teaching.

If you want to understand the theoretical aspects, these approaches are closely linked to self-determination theory and Louise Klinge's research into relational competence. The playful approaches used in the teaching tone down the direct competence-oriented approach that has long been dominant in the primary and lower secondary school system, to make room for autonomy and cohesion. The pupils' perspectives and thoughts are given new spaces in which to unfold, and the school's communities are strengthened when pupils and teachers are creative together.

In this way, the playful approaches have an optimising effect on learning because the pupils are given broader opportunities for connecting with the contents of the subjects in ways that are meaningful to them individually.

Learning from play

The playful components support the unfolding of the contents of the subjects. This is done through small and large incipits, through scenario building and through a school life where play is invited into the academic space, where joy, meaning and strengthened learning are created in a school life that can unfortunately be difficult for many.

You see this, for example, when a large bag of teddy bears in a 7th grade opens up for completely different conversations about leisure life in the subject German. For teddy bears can fly, take fencing lessons or keep giraffes in their garden. It provides completely different narratives and language expression possibilities when the teddy bear steps forward instead of a shy teenager who does not want to talk about personal stuff.

Play and learning are linked in the same way when the mathematics teacher works with coding and technology literacy in a scenario in which pupils in the 9th grade imagine themselves on a mission to the moon. The pupils use computers in the control centre to code the mindstorm robots that, in the room next door, have been dispatched to a lunar landscape with imagined mountains and craters. Here, the robots will collect boxes of important raw materials and avoid at

all costs the large balloon with poison, which, in case of collision, will destroy not only the moon, but the entire solar system. A camera records and transmits images to the control room, so that the pupils code and guide the robots through the obstacles in real time. The scenario has been set, the assignment has been given and the pupils are immersed in strategy and coding. The race for resources and time is on. For who knows if the gas balloon will burst.

With the eager excitement about winning the space race, technology literacy and competence take on importance, and mathematics, social studies, physics/chemistry and history merge into a meaningful learning space that naturally incorporate subject-related knowledge, praxis testing and joint reflection.

Free the enthusiasm

Occasionally, special moments arise when the pupils' enthusiasm takes over, when the joy becomes uncontrollable and almost too great because they have exceeded themselves, their normal academic abilities or everything they thought school was. Situations that take on a sheen of magic because the community creates an atmosphere of something that goes beyond the expectations that both children and adults have of the learning space.

The whole school experienced this one morning, as described by way of introduction. And the intermediate level had the same experience when they showed up at Airport Højslev for security checks, baggage carousels and airport staff as an incipit for a large-scale work on the countries of Europe. This brings on big smiles, and creates a learning community between children and adults via the invitation given by the staging.

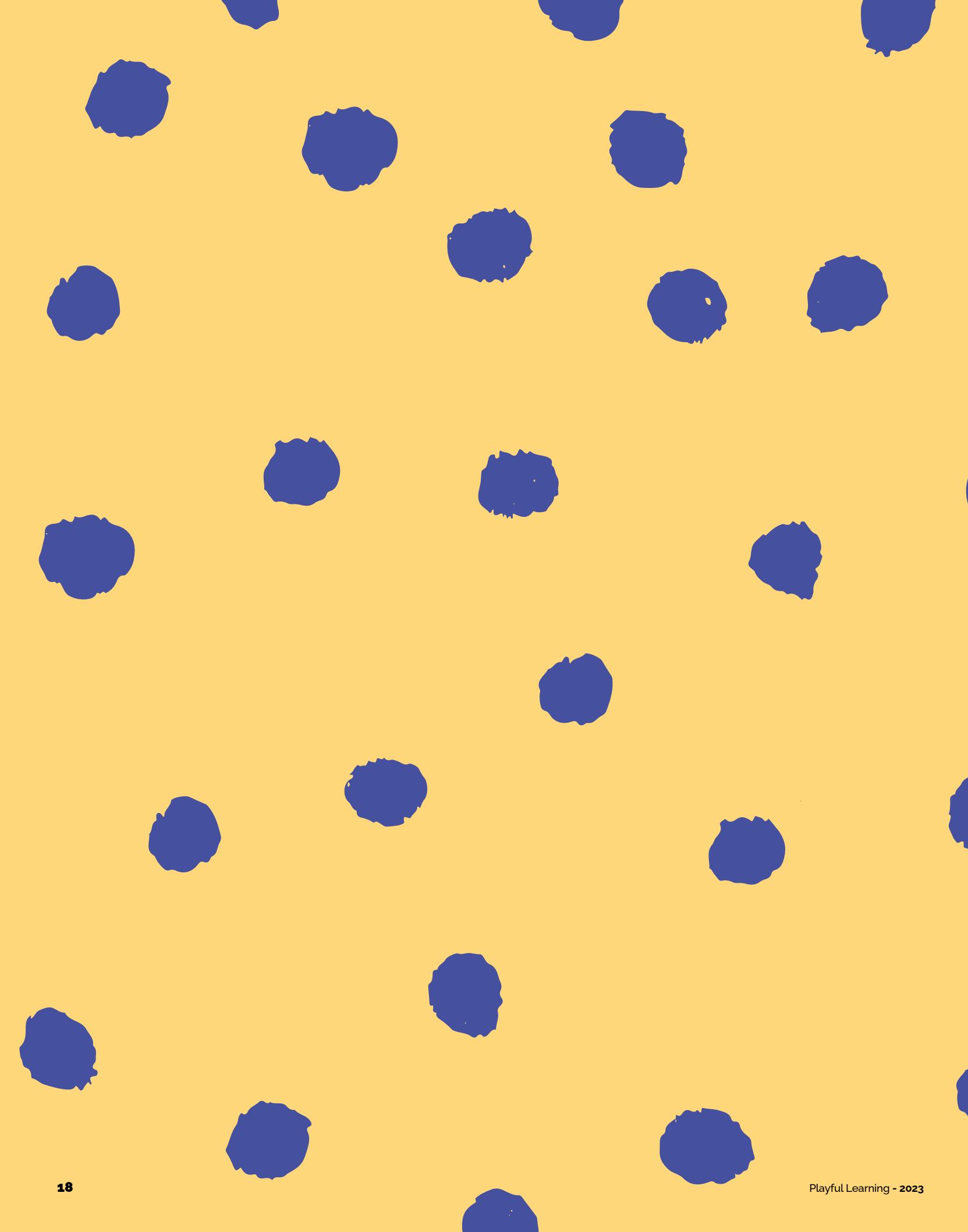
Here it becomes clear that the playful approaches to learning can offer something very special. Because the starting point is play, but the end point is learning. This makes the pupils forget that they are in a learning situation and the link between subject and child becomes authentic..

Not just for fun

Play@Heart is not just for fun. It is for learning. For small and large pupils and for the social educators and teachers who use a playful approach to boost learning. This is not rocket science, but rather about revitalising a view of children and learning, where children's meaning and being in the world as children are used as a starting point for the school's teaching of subjects.

I believe the schools of the future can create the much-demanded variety and motivation with this approach to professionalism in pedagogical praxis. And to play or not to play should therefore not be the question.





P+L Praxis

P+L Praxis explores how playful approaches to children's and young people's development, well-being and learning can strengthen pedagogy and didactics in daycare institutions, schools and the social education and teacher education programmes.

The project achieves this by creating new types of learning communities between lecturers and students in the teacher education and social education programmes and the social educators and teachers and their children and young people in the school, after-school recreation and early childhood education and care areas.

Each collaboration is based on the participants' own academic and professional resources and they are invited to join the exploratory development

work, so that the collaboration becomes professionally valuable for everyone.

The project stands on the shoulders of P+L Development, which, since 2018, has created knowledge and experience about how playful approaches can be brought into play in pedagogical and didactic contexts.

Throughout the project period, the collaboration is expanded and developed with pedagogical praxis.

In the following two articles by Anne Haugbølle Thomsen, Project and Communications Coordinator in P+L Praxis, you can read about the experiences of lecturers, social educators, teachers, students and children who have ventured into playful experiments as part of the initial phase of the project.

New play goggles give the staff a child's perspective as well as a helicopter view

Annette spots two children standing on a table throwing wooden blocks, not far from the other children. Instinctively, she is about to ask them to stop and get down off the table or only throw soft balls, but then she restrains herself. Instead, she asks what they are doing. "We're feeding fish," she is told. The blocks are feed, and the blue carpet around the table is a fish pond.

Anne Haugbølle
Thomsen,
Project and
Communications
Coordinator,
P+L Praxis



Annette would never have guessed this herself, but she can actually see it, now that they mention it, so instead of stopping the game, she says: "That looks really fun. Can I help you avoid that anyone steps into the lake?" They think that is a good idea. So they quickly stack some stools around the table to shield off the area, so that no one is hit on the head by wooden blocks or wades out into the fish pond. And they then play on.

Annette Bønløkke Slot Hansen is a social educator at Randlev Friskole og Børnehus, and, for her, the situation is a living example of the unforeseen and educational actions that can occur when you as an adult dare to latch on to the children's initiative instead of stopping their play. It helps give the children a new awareness of what they are doing when playing, while also making it easier for her to find out how she can meet the needs that the play situation calls for:

"Before, I would probably have said 'stop, stop, stop! We do not throw wooden blocks', and I would then have interrupted their play. It would probably have been the most impulsive, and perhaps also an easier, reaction, but if I'm going to help the children become good at playing, I will have to adopt a hands-on approach and join in the play, right?"

Together with her colleagues and the head of the daycare institution, Lisbeth Dyrup Petersen, Annette Bønløkke Slot Hansen has entered into a collaboration with Lone Wiegard and Birgitte Laursen, Associate

Professors from VIA University College. The collaboration is part of the initial phase of Playful Learning's new project P+L Praxis, where staff from daycare institutions and primary and lower secondary schools join forces with lecturers and students from the teacher education and social education programmes to explore how playful approaches can strengthen children's and young people's development, well-being and learning.

For Birgitte Laursen, the collaboration is first and foremost about protecting and enhancing the learning outcomes that children naturally obtain by playing:

"It's vital for children to participate in play. This is where they develop in all respects. If you ask the children themselves, they would never think that play and learning are not inter-connected. It is only we adults who try to separate play and learning once in a while. Children learn all the time when they are playing." There is also agreement on this at Randlev Friskole og Børnehus, says Lisbeth Dyrup Petersen and adds: "It's therefore so important as staff to be able to meet the children where they are world champions; namely in play."

The project gives the institution's pedagogical staff knowledge, inspiration and motivation to examine their own approach to children's play, says Annette Bønløkke Slot Hansen and mentions their physical surroundings as a specific example:



"It's actually so basic, but we normally don't think about how the design and arrangement of our premises inspire play. It was only when we were asked about it that we began reflecting on our surroundings and how the children actually use them. We started with small, but significant, initiatives such as changing the location of blocks so that the children could reach them themselves instead of having to ask us to get them."

Looking at yourself

In this way, it has been educational having other people's perspective on the work on a daily basis, says Annette Bønløkke Slot Hansen. It forces you to look at yourself and your workplace in a new light and thus avoid becoming 'home blind', as she puts it. And right now, her eyes are directed at herself. She and her colleagues are adopting this perspective to investigate how they should position themselves in different play situations so that it benefits the children as much as possible. Because the different play situations may involve different needs, she says and adds: "This obviously makes it a balancing act that you have to practice."

The exercises often present themselves spontaneously during the day, as was the case with the children's fish pond game, and therefore the play focus has quickly become an integral part of the staff's and the children's everyday lives, says Lisbeth Dyrup Petersen:

"This makes every play situation a case for assessment that requires special focus on the children's play dynamics. As an adult, it's very much about letting go of what you think is a good game and instead trying to participate in the game on the children's terms."

And it is not always easy, but the exercises train you to meet the children's challenges and conflicts in other ways, says Annette Bønløkke Slot Hansen:

"You build up a different readiness to change a play situation if problems arise – for example if a child becomes uncomfortable or is in an unequal dominance relationship. It becomes easier for me to spot and resolve conflicts when I approach their playing questioningly and enquiringly – instead of 'chaos reacting'."

The courage to experiment with your own reaction patterns has thus been gradually strengthened as the staff has embarked on more experiments. But the

motivation to change your everyday pedagogical praxis stems to a large extent from the collaboration with Lone Wiegard and Birgitte Laursen from VIA, they explain:

"The collaboration has given us a professional space for reflection and development that we didn't have before," says Lisbeth Dyrup Petersen, and Annette Bønløkke Slot Hansen adds: "Without lecturing us, Birgitte and Lone have given us a lot of professional knowledge that we can use as a foundation. They've asked us questions that make us stop and wonder about our praxis."

A more democratic children's culture

Everyone found it meaningful to work with play in such a concentrated form, so it was quickly decided that new, clear role distributions should be introduced among the staff, so that the employees each have more time to immerse themselves in play while someone else handles other tasks.

The new staff structure has meant that the project has left an imprint on the whole institution, says Lisbeth Dyrup Petersen and highlights how the children have also had to learn to decode the adults' new way of approaching their play:

"In case of conflicts, we will basically enter into the situation wondering what is happening and try, in as far as possible, to help the children proceed with a good game. Here, many children can quickly become defensive right away, but when they experience that we meet them at their eye level and ask questions, this automatic reaction disappears and we create a different relationship of trust," she says.

In this way, she believes that they have been able to create "a more democratic children's culture", as she herself describes it, play has been given more space in the daycare institution:

"Because we take children's play seriously, the children now have more influence. Of course, as adults, we still have the right of veto, but we're more involved in the playing than we were before," she says and highlights how it has also affected the staff's working environment: "We don't have to keep an eye on them in the same

way and dictate what is right and wrong. We now say more yes than no. And if things go wrong, well, we act accordingly."

The approach also seems to have rubbed off on the children who have been in the daycare institution for a long time. As something new, several of them have, in fact, begun to ask whether the adults want to join in their play – or to actively tell the adults not to participate:

"I've also experienced that children have said 'no adults with a raised palm,'" says Lisbeth Dyrup Petersen and laughs.

The diversity of play

For Helle Hovgaard Jørgensen, Senior Associate Professor in play and child and youth culture at UCL University College, the staff's efforts are an expression of a way of challenging their own established structures and moral conceptions:

"The adults work with their own curiosity rather than focusing on maintaining established structures. They dare to set aside or reassess the prevailing ethics of right and wrong when they experience that the power of the play is strongest," she says, and mentions Annette Bønløkke Slot Hansen's encounter with the children's fishpond game as an example:

"She lets the game be open to input by adopting a dialogue-based and inquisitive approach to the situation instead of just ascertaining that the children are doing something that they are not allowed to do. This means that the children accept without hesitation her proposal to build a wall of stools, because she speaks the language of play. She goes along with the premise of the game."

According to Helle Hovgaard Jørgensen, this requires that you possess professional knowledge that play is dominated by a diversity of languages and language use:

"In play, there is a constant interaction between opinions, where all opinions can potentially condition each other, and you accommodate this as an adult when you choose to enter into a dialogue with the children. Because the driving force of play is precisely the language or stories that swirl into each other when you play. And when, like social educator Annette, you accept the idea that the children feed fish, you also

get the opportunity to contribute and develop the universe of play."

When play pushes boundaries

However, not all play situations are necessarily easy to relate to as an adult, says Annette Bønløkke Slot Hansen:

"If I'm to speak on behalf of the entire staff group, it has actually been more transgressive to sit down and be a playful adult than we predicted. It's relatively easy to sit down and build with blocks or trains, but as soon as you actively engage in the children's role-play, it becomes more demanding for you as a social educator."

Helle Hovgaard Jørgensen also recognises this challenge from her research. Especially in situations where the children's play becomes euphoric and contrary, adults may find it difficult to participate:

"This is a type of play that challenges the norms, values and cultural notions we have about being a child, young person and pupil in daycare institution and school life. But when we turn the world upside down, are brought out of control, push the boundaries and so on, new questions, perspectives and ideas are whirled up about what we can imagine – and the world actually needs that," says Helle Hovgaard Jørgensen.

Despite the uncertainty and challenges that the more experimental and playful approach to the children require, Annette Bønløkke Slot Hansen is generally enthusiastic about what the approach has meant for her, her colleagues' and the children's everyday lives:

"It makes a huge difference to your job satisfaction. Feeling involved and one hundred percent present in the play with the child is enormously valuable professionally. We now act much more on the children's terms than before. And that's what we want to do."

Back in the daycare institution, the two children on the table are running out of fish feed. All the wooden blocks have been thrown into the pond, so they have to get down and pick them up again. "Watch out!", exclaims Annette. "There are sharks in the water!" The children squeal, laugh and immediately jump away from the carpet. More children now gather around to see what they are doing, and suddenly the room has been turned into one big feeding party with stools and wooden blocks scattered all over the place.



Teacher and students on shaky ground: Is a playful approach to learning sustainable?

"The librarian doesn't actually know how many books there are in the library." This is how Karina begins a math lesson in the fifth grade. She asks the pupils how many books they think there are and how they would examine this themselves.

Anne Haugbølle
Thomsen,
kommunikations-
koordinator,
P+L Praxis



In response, the pupils throw around numbers and strategies, until Karina suggests that they go on a joint trip to the library so that they can try to figure it out together. And then the pupils go exploring by themselves. Some start counting all the books in the library, but lose their count along the way and have to start all over again. Others estimate how many books a single shelf contain and then multiply this, a third group counts the number of books on one shelf metre before measuring all the library's book rows, and a fourth group asks for paper and pencil so that they can arrive at a number by drawing.

Karina Frank Flyger is a school teacher at Højmeskolen in Odense, and she knows very well that the librarian can find out how many books there are on the library's shelves through just a few clicks. It is only something that she is pretending because it sparks the pupils' curiosity in a different way, she says. At the same time, the open assignment gives the students the opportunity to adopt an exploratory and experimental approach, which Karina Frank Flyger would very much like to support even though she obviously never knows where precisely it will lead them:

"I do it anyway because I believe that it's healthy not to engage in run-of-the-mill teaching, and because it makes you more present as a teacher in your teaching. And it makes room for everyone – at all levels."

Together with several of her pupils, Karina Frank Flyger collaborates with students and lecturers from UCL University College as part of P+L Praxis. One of the lecturers is Associate Professor Knud Erik Christensen, who is also an ambassador for the project. If it were up to him, the student teachers would follow Karina Frank Flyger's example by building up the courage to adopt a more playful and experimental approach to their future classroom teaching.

In spring 2022, he asked students from his visual arts module to 'play with' a work of art by Asbjørn Schou; two contrasting, drawn wall surfaces that together embrace the visual arts room at UCL in Odense. The



purpose was to explore and maintain the impressions, self-reflections and eye-opening experiences that the students got from studying the work:

"I believe that there is great learning potential in adopting an interpretive and producing approach to an object field such as a work of art in visual arts. When you dare let go of your focus on didactics for a while and only approach an assignment in a sensory and exploring manner, there will be greater opportunity for new insights, which can then be incorporated in the teaching," he says and adds: "This is one of the benefits from working with playful approaches to learning."

Student teachers on shaky ground

The student teachers were asked to treat their experiences didactically and transfer them to tangible learning courses about Asbjørn Schou's work of art for an entire cohort of sixth graders whom Karina Frank Flyger brought with her to UCL.

Together with her group, student teacher Cecilie Bjørnsteen chose to work with video stories. Here, the pupils had to explore the work on the walls by drawing lines on Asbjørn Schou's work of art through plexiglass. The purpose of the assignment was for the pupils to immerse themselves in the work of art and let their pen be guided by the impulses they have along the way – just like the ones Cecilie Bjørnsteen and the other students had when they themselves explored the universe of drawing. And then the pupils' drawings acquired voices. They used an app that made the persons move their mouths and express their deepest thoughts and feelings through video.

This part of the exercise required a certain amount of courage from the pupils, and it was not necessarily made easier by their assignment being set by a group of student teachers they had only just met. Cecilie Bjørnsteen and her group were prepared for this:

"We used ourselves as examples," she says, describing how she herself offered insights about the inner and outer lives of the persons, which might seem "silly", as she herself puts it, but which were important for creating a safe space for the pupils: "It made it less vulnerable for the pupils to state what the different persons in the work made them think of."

Once the pupils had begun sharing their thoughts about the persons in the work of art, things took off. For example, two of the boys had the idea to create stories

about characters across the walls of the work. This was an idea which the student teachers had not planned themselves, but which they were pleasantly surprised by. And this was exactly the kind of unforeseen experiences that Knud Erik Christensen hoped they would have:

"It's important that the students learn that they don't have to avoid shaky ground. They need to feel that the ground will not give way beneath them. They might even discover something they wouldn't otherwise have done if they had just stayed within their familiar territory."

The courage to fail and try again

It was also Karina Frank Flyger's impression that the students' experiments bore fruit. For example, one of her pupils, who normally has difficulty concentrating, completely immersed himself in the assignment:

"Obviously, the students didn't know him, and no special considerations were made for him, but he got some obstacles that he understood and that suited him well. And then the students let him get on with his idea, even though it wasn't what they had imagined themselves." However, that was no obstacle to the learning outcome, she recalls: "He still learnt the same as the others. He simply learnt it in his own way."

In general, she experienced a visual arts room with "pupils who were having fun" and who were allowed to take an open and exploratory approach to the exercises, because assignments such as drawing on plexiglass meant that they did not have to worry about making mistakes. There was no such thing as making drawing mistakes, and this is not necessarily something they experience on a daily basis, she says:

"Our children and adolescents grow up in a culture of achievement. They must perform and deliver every moment of the day in every subject. They are not allowed to make mistakes. They are required to meet unattainable standards during their school day. And once they get home, they also have to appear as perfect on social media."

Therefore, it's important that children are given space to be playful at school, because, in play, there is no right or wrong in the same way:

"It's about showing the pupils possible approaches, that it's okay to fail. Because when they create something where their mistakes disappear again, we



give them the courage to fail and try again. And there is much important learning in that," says Karina Frank Flyger.

The belief that the pupils will learn what they are supposed to

For Karina Frank Flyger, a playful approach is about using your senses and working with aesthetic learning processes and exploratory teaching. It is a work approach that she believes can be experimented with advantageously in several different subject areas. It gives the pupils more opportunities to express themselves in different ways and to provide input that the teacher can seize and use actively in the teaching. However, it may be difficult, she acknowledges:

"I think that what can sometimes cause friction between teacher and pupils may be that, as a teacher, you become so keen on passing on an idea that you have had to the children, that they should preferably think the same as you, so that we make sure that they learn what they are supposed to. It can be difficult to let go and still trust that the pupils will get the learning



they need, because you mean so well and want to give them the best possible learning."

However, she herself cannot help regularly challenging her pupils and her own teaching methods by venturing into situations where they dare the unpredictable. For her, it is about creating positive experiences for both pupils and teacher:

"If you link learning to experiences you will remember, then I hope and believe that the learning sticks better. This is about learning over time – more than here-and-now learning. But I dare to work this way."

Is a playful approach always inclusive?

Despite her faith in the learning outcomes of using a playful approach to teaching, Karina Frank Flyger does not believe that it should necessarily be adopted in every learning context. For her, playfulness is very much about creating space for pupils to develop their competences to bring skills into play:

"To find out how many books there are in the library, the pupils must obviously have certain competences beforehand. They must be able to count, add or multiply." And, in her view, acquiring these skills presupposes that you also approach the teaching in more conventional ways:

"Sometimes, this is necessary to learn a specific skill. And I actually think that the pupils can accept that, as long as they also get the other stuff. In reality, the combination or variation is probably what makes you succeed."

For Mikkel Snorre Wilms Boysen, who is Senior Associate Professor at University College Absalon and Senior Researcher in Playful Learning, Karina Frank Flyger's observations highlight important questions about the work with playful approaches in primary and lower secondary schools: Can a pupil participate in a playful learning process without already possessing certain skills? And is the playful classroom, by definition, versatile and inclusive?

"It's important that you consider what building blocks you – directly or indirectly – ask the pupils to use when working with a playful approach in your

teaching. This applies to both the skills you want to bring into play and the competences you expect the pupils to have when it comes to being playful, experimental and exploratory," says Mikkel Snorre Wilms Boysen.

If, however, like Karina Frank Flyger, you succeed in getting all pupils – at all levels – engaged in the playful learning experiment, "then you will also find gold", he says:

"Several studies show that playful approaches to learning have the potential to bring us closer to what we need to learn, because it can strengthen many children's motivation. So even though you as a lecturer can experience getting into deep water in the exploration of the playful, you also get the opportunity to realise a great learning potential."

At the same time, Mikkel Snorre Wilms Boysen refers to the Ministry of Children and Education's well-being survey as a motivating factor: "If we're to increase well-being in our schools, we need to look at the framework for and approaches to teaching. And, here, a playful teaching approach can help train pupils to be inquisitive, find problems, ask critical questions and explore solutions on their own. And these are, in fact, competences that are in great demand in society."

Back at Højmeskolen, Karina has owned up: "It was all a lie. I did talk to the librarian, but it was mostly about a baking recipe, and she doesn't really care to know how many books there are in the library. She can just look up. But why do you think I asked you to find out?"

The pupils now offer several different answers. For example, they mention the four basic arithmetical operations and the purpose of adopting an exploratory approach to a problem. And they then continue to work with the library's surroundings: "What if the library had to be painted, how much paint would that require?", asks Karina. "And what if we packed all the books into removal boxes; how many boxes would we need, and how heavy do you think they would be?"



P+L Praxis Research

Playful Learning's new research project, P+L Praxis Research, explores how playful approaches can create participation opportunities for children and young people aged 0-15. The project will be conducted together with social educators and teachers from daycare institutions and schools in the period 2023-2026.

Research shows that playful approaches can increase children and young people's scope for action, experience of joy and cohesion in communities. Therefore, playful approaches have the potential to expand participation opportunities in daycare institutions and schools and thus strengthen children's and young people's well-being, development and learning.

At the same time, research indicates that playful approaches do not constitute a quick fix to complex problems. The use of playful approaches to pedagogical activities and teaching can be connected with new challenges, especially for vulnerable children and young people. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the social

educators' and teachers' competences in applying playful approaches in their pedagogical praxis.

In the research project, the social educators and teachers will work closely with researchers from the six Danish university colleges, Aalborg University, Danish School of Education (DPU) – Aarhus University and Design School Kolding. Together, the opportunities offered by play and playful approaches are explored in practice in three day nurseries and two schools. The project focuses on the day nurseries' work with curriculum themes and the schools' work with Danish and mathematics at lower secondary school level.

In the following article by Senior Associate Professor Helle Hovgaard Jørgensen and Professor Julie Borup Jensen, national project managers in P+L Praxis Research, you can read about the potential of playful approaches in relation to creating new and more participation opportunities in daycare institutions and schools.

Playful approaches can create more participation opportunities in early childhood education and care facilities and schools



In recent years, playful approaches to learning have been gaining ground in the education system. This emergence can be understood as a showdown with a neoliberal and one-sided focus on performance, competition and speed (Jensen et. al. 2021, Whitton 2018).

Helle Hovgaard
Jørgensen, PhD and Senior Associate Professor at UCL University College, and Julie Borup Jensen, Professor at Aalborg University

Playful approaches to learning appeal to a desire for change among social educators, teachers, managers and politicians – a desire to create new and better settings for children and young people. The core question of play, 'what if...?', forms the very basis for imagining change, and for this reason alone, playful approaches to learning are interesting in relation to daycare institutions, schools and education.

In this article, we take a closer look at how playful approaches can expand participation opportunities for children, young people and students in daycare institutions, schools and educational institutions. We focus on why it is necessary that social educators and teachers have sharp and nuanced knowledge of and a diverse, but precise, language for playfulness to enable them to succeed in creating more participation opportunities in daycare institutions and schools.

The article is based on knowledge from Playful Learning's research project, which has conducted research into playful approaches in the social education and teacher education programmes since 2019. We argue that the knowledge of the research project has value in the pedagogical praxis in which social educators and teachers are already engaged.

Play from an educational and formative perspective

Play philosopher Thomas Henricks (2008) says that play is about what it means to be in the world and about expressing our humanity. If we listen to this claim, playful approaches in daycare institutions and

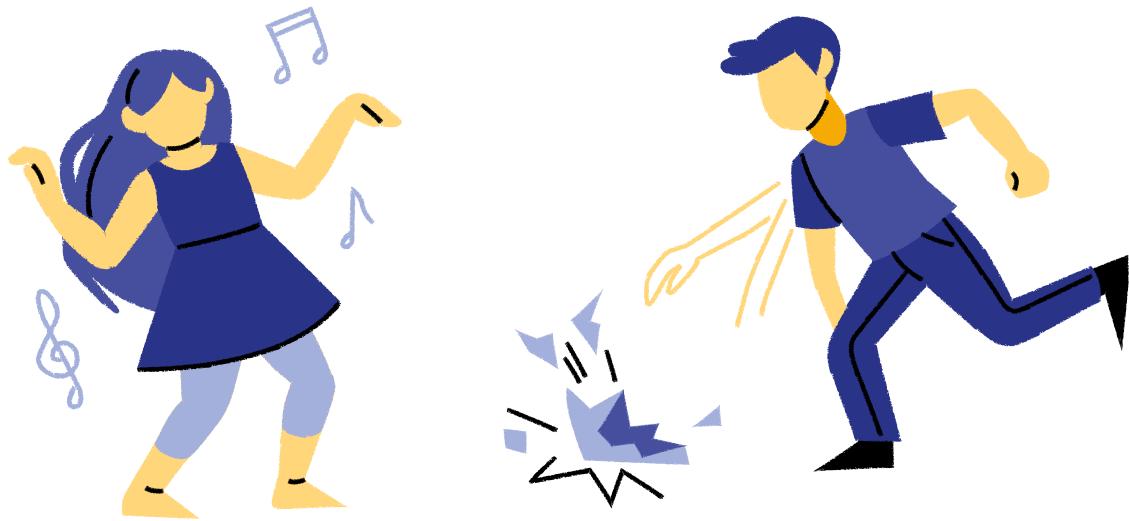
schools can play an important role in our ability to work with children and pupils as whole people in a community with others.

This is supported by both the strengthened pedagogical curriculum, which adopts a general educational and formative perspective on the child's development, and the objects clause of the Danish Act on the Primary and Lower Secondary School System (Folkeskoleloven), which attaches importance to the child's the all-round development and democratic general formation. Play, as defined by Henrick, can help achieve these objectives. However, this also makes it important to create familiarity with the qualities of play among students in the social education and teacher education programmes, so that they can use the qualities of play in line with other pedagogical and didactic actions.

More paths to learning

Playful Learnings forskningsprojekt har forsøkt i relationerne mellem legende tilgange til undervisning på pædagog- og læreruddannelserne og de studerendes udvikling af professionskompetencer. Forskningsresultaterne peger på, at legende tilgange giver de studerende flere muligheder for at deltage i fagene og for at udvikle deres kompetencer. Et vigtigt fund er, at når underviserne har en nuanceret forståelse og et sprog for kvaliteterne i leg, kan de bedre bringe det legende i spil på en intentionel måde i deres undervisning.

Playful Learning's research project has conducted research into the relations between playful



approaches to teaching in the social education and teacher education programmes and the students' development of professional competences. The research results indicate that playful approaches give students more opportunities to participate in their courses and to develop their competences. An important finding is that when the lecturers have a nuanced understanding and a language of the qualities of play, they can better adopt playful approaches intentionally in their teaching.

One of the lecturers' purposes in using playful approaches in their teaching is to increase participation opportunities to support the students' learning. The students experience more ways of working with the academic material, because playful approaches draw on physical, imaginative, reflexive and creative processes (Boysen et al. 2022). When the students are active in an imaginative process where their bodies, materials, space and academic content interact with each other, for example in the shaping of a sculpture or the performance of a role play, they can better connect to the academic material, each other and the space in which the learning processes take place. In other words, playful approaches can help the students participate in the community around a subject in many places and ways – and not just one. Likewise, the lecturers are given the opportunity to support many and diverse ways of participating in the didactic space and thus engaging more students.

Playful approaches in daycare institutions and schools

The above research results can be translated into both daycare institutions and schools. In daycare institutions, we can take a closer look at the social educator's praxis in the organisation of pedagogical activities. One example could be that the social educator works with the curriculum theme 'nature, outdoor life and science', including the phenomenon

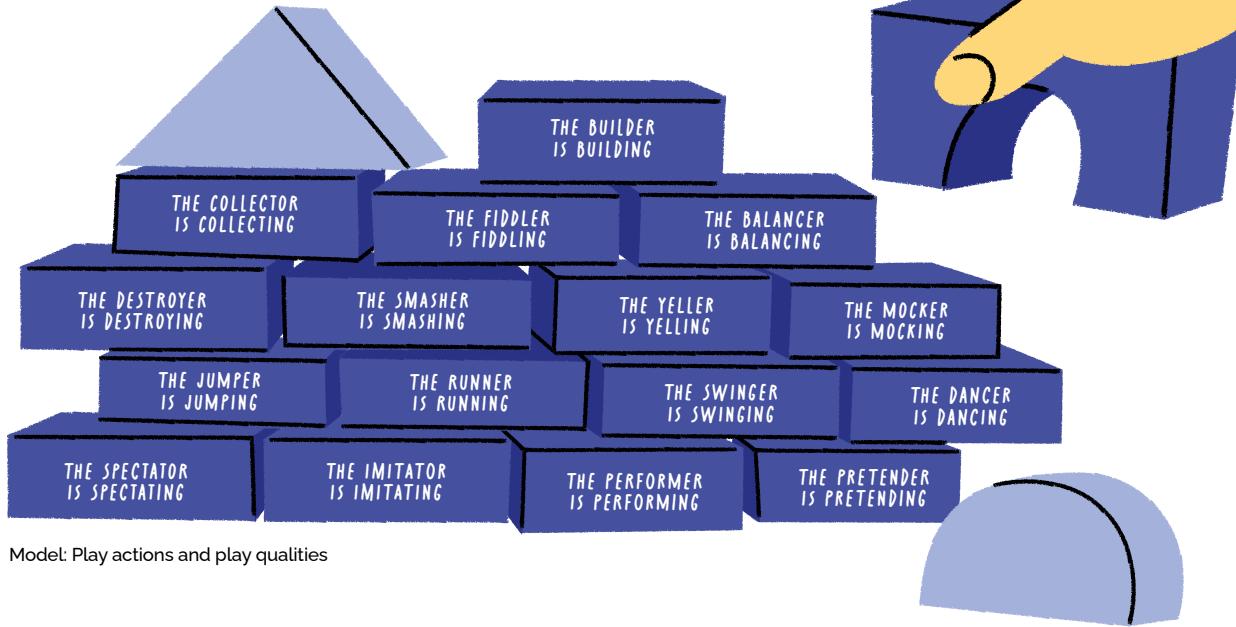
of speed and acceleration. Here, the social educator can create many and diverse participation opportunities by including outdoor space materials such as a climbing tower and sandbox or indoor space materials such as tables and chairs. The social educator can then play with varying the slope of the objects and experiment with getting balls and balls, both large and small, light and heavy, to roll on the tilted surfaces. Children can get their whole bodies moving when they slide, roll or roll down surfaces experimenting with inclination, and thus gain experience with speed and acceleration.

Teachers can include playful approaches in expanding participation opportunities – even at lower secondary school level. Phenomena such as hypothesis formation, argumentation and problem-solving form part of many subjects. Here, playful elements such as fantasy, imagination and the core question of play 'what if' can form the starting point for the pupils jointly experiencing the possibilities of the subjects to understand their world and the society around them. This playful approach to exploration and problem-solving can help create more participation opportunities for pupils – just like the students in the social education and teacher education programmes.

However, it is essential to nuance and qualify knowledge and language for playful approaches to learning if the potential for expanding the participation opportunities is to be unfolded.

Nuanced and precise language for playful approaches

From Playful Learning's research project, we know that play is often associated with childhood and something childish, and that playfulness is often seen as a contrast to learning and serious education. We also know that teachers and social educators often plan play based on their own experiences with play, which often stem



from their childhood (Skovbjerg & Jørgensen 2022). These common-sense understandings of play and playfulness make it necessary to develop nuanced and precise concepts for play and playful approaches to learning, so that playfulness becomes a qualified part of the didactic toolbox.

The research project has established different nuances of playfulness, where we understand play as a praxis form involving a number of actions. These actions have certain qualities or characteristics that contribute to playfulness. Skovbjerg & Jørgensen (2022) have identified 16 specific actions performed by participants in situations experienced as playful and contributing to the playful processes. As a result, they have developed 16 'play qualities'.

The play actions and qualities are: the collector who collects, the builder who builds, the fiddler who fiddles, the balance maker who balances, the smasher who smashes, the destroyer who destroys, the yeller who yells, the teaser who teases, the jumper who jumps, the runner who runs, the swinger who swings, the dancer who dances, the spectator who spectates, the imitator who imitates, the performer who performs, the pretender who pretends.

Knowing that collecting, building, smashing, yelling, imitating etc. are qualities of play enables us to examine how they can be incorporated in ways that create more and diverse ways of participating in the work with curriculum themes in daycare institutions and subject-related contents in schools.

Materiality also plays an important role in the unfolding of playful approaches. Social and material aspects

are linked in connection with pedagogical activities and teaching (Schrøder et.al. 2022). When materials with many applications are available, this opens up for creativity and imagination in the learning processes and thus increases participation opportunities.

Playfulness creates connections

We conclude by highlighting the participation opportunities we believe playful approaches to learning can create in daycare institutions and schools. Whitton (2018) points out that playful approaches to learning contain values such as openness, democracy, risk-taking willingness, learning through mistakes and inner motivation. When we talk about playfulness as an opportunity to express ourselves as individuals in communities in daycare institutions and schools, one of the focus areas is that playful interaction with the curriculum themes or the subject-related contents can create more opportunities for participation (Whitton 2018).

The increased opportunities for participation consist in the qualities of play being linked to other parts of children's and young people's way of being in the world than the purely cognitive approach. The playfulness stresses the interpersonal connection because it activates the body, senses and emotions and makes visible that all children, young people and adults experience the world through their body with senses, sensations and emotions.

Playfulness contains values such as inclusion, acceptance of others (people and the outside world) and openness to changing one's own view of the world through playful experiences (Whitton 2018), and a

focus is seen on how cognitive, social and emotional effects of play create connectedness between participants in play processes.

Playful approaches – new privileges?

With participation as the pivot, we conclude with an important point of focus in relation to playful approaches to learning. If the understanding of playful approaches to learning becomes too narrow, participation opportunities may become restricted in new and inappropriate ways, where children are excluded from the communities in daycare institutions and schools. Whitton (2022) asks the question of whether play and playful approaches to pedagogical activities and teaching inadvertently create new privileged and potentially exclusionary practices.

The potential of playful approaches to expand opportunities for participation makes it necessary critically to consider whether power, privilege and reproduction of prejudices become an unintended part of playfulness, so that some participation forms, some bodies and some experiences in children and young people are overlooked in or outright excluded from the community. If we talk about the potentials of playful approaches to increased participation opportunities in educational communities, we must also have an eye for how playful approaches support democratic communities, include, give way to social justice and similar values (Whitton, 2022).

In other words: playful approaches to learning are not a quick-fix that solves all problems with participation in education, teaching or pedagogical activities. However, with careful, reflexive, pedagogical, didactic considerations and nuances, playful approaches can become a significant contribution to more and more inclusive participation opportunities in our education system. With a diverse and precise language for playfulness, we can plan pedagogical activities and teaching with a focus on creating more participation opportunities, as this gives us a concept of specific actions and qualities that support play.



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Podcast series on the importance of playful approaches to well-being and school satisfaction

Well-being is declining among children and young people. How are we to understand this development? What are the causes? And what can we do to strengthen well-being and school satisfaction?

We explore this in this theme series of the Playful Learning Podcast – with a special focus on a playful approach as part of the solution. We have invited three different voices in the well-being debate to join the Playful Learning Podcast to give an in-depth presentation of their perspectives and learn more about the nuances of the debate. Scan the QR codes and listen to your favourite podcast app.



Episode 1: Well-being and school satisfaction with Noemi Katznelson/Aalborg University

In the first episode, we take stock of the development in the well-being of children and young people and discuss the concept of well-being with Noemi Katznelson, Professor and Head of Centre for Youth Research (CeFU) at Aalborg University. Noemi talks, among other aspects, of an education system that focuses on readiness and where experimenting, trying out and failing are given low priority.



Episode 2: Well-being and school satisfaction with Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen/Save the Children Denmark

In the second episode, we delve into a new study from Save the Children Denmark – Red Barnet together with Secretary General Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen. One of the findings of the study is that 31 per cent of the children do not experience that everyone is part of the community in their class. Hear the children's own perspectives on their well-being and how a playful approach can help strengthen the sense of class community.



Episode 3: Well-being and school satisfaction with Marie Holt Hermansen/the Association of Danish Pupils

In the third and final episode of the podcast series, we have invited the then Chair of the Association of Danish Pupils (Danske Skoleelever (DSE)), Marie Holt Hermansen, to a conversation about the pupils' school experience and their relationship with the teaching. Marie shares her perspectives on how we can create more varied, playful and praxis-oriented teaching, where more people want and have the opportunity to participate.





See you in 2024



Tobias Heiberg,
Head of programme

In 2024, we will see professional pedagogical communities throughout Denmark, where education meets profession with playful approaches as the joint framework of exploration. In specific terms, this means that P+L Praxis will bridge the gap between those who are studying to become social educators and teachers and those who are already working in the field.

The project is supported by the new research project, P+L Praxis Research, which will explore how playful approaches can create participation opportunities for children and young people aged 0-15.

Playful Learning's first research project is rounded off and the results from four years of extensive research are disseminated in scientific publications, video material, design models and didactic inspiration and reflection tools.

We will also see the culmination of Leg For Dig and Play@Heart, where the 12 institutions and 12 schools round off their three-year project phases. Experiences, knowledge and inspiration from the two projects will be shared and disseminated.

Last, but not least, Playful Learning's participants will strengthen the international relations. We will see students, lecturers, social educators and teachers who encounter other pedagogical environments from other countries who are also engaged in exploring and disseminating playful approaches to development, well-being and learning.

Contact us and follow our work

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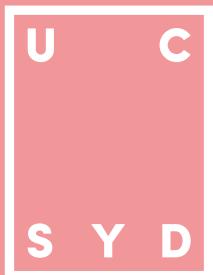


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