ITRA NEWSLETTER
SPRING/SUMMER 2000

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This ITRA Newsletter chiefly contains the usual issues, such as Member Forum, conference announcements, Book publications, New Members, NCFL News, News from Toyland, and Children’s Corner.

It also includes a Brief Book Review or rather, one reader’s momentary concerning a new book about literacy in children, by Roskos and Christie, *Play and Literacy: Research from Multiple Perspective*. A bibliography by Don Nilsen, *Play, Games, and Sports*. Revised in June 2000 will be found separately. You will also read a few letters found in the secretariat’s mail box, one from a Dr Toy and two from hopefully coming play- and toy researchers.

Last page of the present Newsletter is an ITRA Membership Application form.

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MEMBER FORUM

From The Netherlands, Jeffrey Goldstein reports:
On 18 May, ITRA members Kathleen Alfano, James Christie, and Jeffrey Goldstein were in London to give a seminar on toy research at the annual general meeting of the Preschool Learning Alliance.

Jeffrey Goldstein summarized computer games research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge, Massachusetts) conference, ‘Computer and video games come of age: A national conference to explore the state of an emerging entertainment medium.’ The February 2000 conference was chaired by Henry Jenkins of MIT’s Comparative Media Studies Department.

Jeffrey Goldstein also submitted testimony on violent entertainment to the United States Senate hearing on ‘the impact of interactive violence on children,’ convened on 21 March 2000 by the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee.

From Austria, Waltraut Hartmann reports that after three year of work, a new curriculum for preschoolers has been successfully terminated.

A summary of the book is given under Book publications.

From Greece, Cleo Gougoulis reports:
The Hellenic Association of Toys and Carriages Manufacturers has launched a quarterly journal under the title Toys and Sales. The journal appeared in September 1999 and has so far published 3 issues. The journal Toys and Sales addresses members of the Association. It is published in Greek and deals with trade issues (best sellers, toy export reports, interviews with toy manufacturers, new releases), and wider issues such as toy safety and advertising.

2. New Books (I have written briefly about this in the previous Newsletter, but now the book is out.)

Cleo also tells us that:
The heat wave has cooled down so we can work without melting. Between thesis chapters, I am working with Maria and other colleagues (historians, sociologists, and archaeologists) on a new collective project on the History of Greek Toys. A bilingual edition will be the result of this collaboration and I am looking forward to it. I will write about it as soon as we sign the agreement with the Hellenic Archives for History and Literature who will sponsor the project.

The book is announced further down in this Newsletter, under heading Book Publications.

Linda Hughes, Ph.D, TASP Coordinator for Alternative Routes to Certification, Delaware Center for Teacher Education at the University of Delaware, Willard Hall 213, Newark, DE 19716., forwarded a mail to PLAY@LISTSERV.VT.EDU, from ODA Kanae so that “those of you with similar interests can establish contact with a new colleague.

ODA Kanae is interested in sport anthropology and looking for the scholars who have an interest in this field. I threw this topic on the list serve (Sport history) Is there any society or research group for sport anthropology in your country? If so, please contact. Kanae ODA, E-mail: oda_kanae@hotmail.com
CONFERENCES

Turkey October 2000:
The 3rd National Child Culture Congress with International Participation, organized by Ankara University Center for Research on Child Culture will take place in Ankara, Turkey, October 16-18, 2000. Theme of congress is The Changing of Childhood in Turkey and in the World

The congress will be held to address the issues of changing childhood from interdisciplinary domains; educational, David Elkind (US), Roger Hart (US), Artin Goncu (US), Mahmoud Yazbak (Israel), Avner Giladi (Israel), Jean-Pierre Rossie (Belgium), Gilles Brougere (France), and Allison James(UK) will present papers at the congress.

From Turkey, educators, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists will present papers on history of childhood, working children, present images of childhood and adolescence and child rearing practices.

The last half-day, two workshops are facilitated by Dr. David Elkind and Dr. Roger Hart. A Child photograph exhibition entitled Childhood from Ottoman to Republic will be also held. For further information, please contact Bekir Onur. E-mail: onur@education.ankara.edu.tr

CANCELLED SEMINAR

The earlier announced International Toy Seminar planned to take place in Seoul, Korea, October 2000 is cancelled.

BOOK PUBLICATIONS


Contents
Preface by Stefanos Pantelakis) ex-President of the Foundation for Research in Childhood
Introduction by Cleo Gougoulis

Articles:
Makrynioti, Dimitra. Play in the Kindergarten Curriculum. A critical reading of child-centered educational discourse.
Patsiou, Vicky Children's recreation. Representations of play in Greek 19th century Literature.
Kouria, Aphrodite. Children and Play in the work of Greek 19th and 20th century Artists.
Navridis, Klimis, Toys as commodities.
Gougoulis, Cleo, Adult and children's uses of industrial toys.
Kloni, Ada, Children, work and play in rural Greece: The case of Lygaria, Épirus.
Riga, Anastasia-Valentini, Descriptive representation of children's daily routines in a Greek summer camp. Observing intra-group behaviour in self-organized group games of middle childhood..

Contents
Foreword Margaret Meek

PART I: A COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE
2. The Narrative Connection: Stories and Literacy Greta G. Fein, Alicia E. Ardila-Rey, & Lois A. Groth
3. Symbolic Play, Phonological Awareness, and Literacy Skills at the Three Age Levels, Doris Bergen and Daria Mauer.

PART II: AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
5. Incorporating Literacy Resources Into the Play Curriculum of Two Icelandic Preschools. Johanna Einarsdottir.
7. Reading is Source of Entertainment: The Importance of the Home Perspective for Children’s Literacy Development. Susan Sonnenschein, Linda Baker, Robert Serpell, and Diane Schmidt
8. Through the Biocultural Lens: Some Observations of Literacy in Play as a Proximal Process. Kathleen A. Roskos

PART III: A SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE
10. Social Contexts for Literacy Development: A Family Literacy Program. Susan B. Neuman
11. "It Would Be as Good as Snow White." Play and Prosody. N. Amanda Branscombe and Janet B. Taylor
12. Literacy, Play, and Authentic Experience. Nigel Hall
14. COMMENTARY – Constructing Sociocultural Approaches to Literacy Education. Artin Gönçü and Eleni Karsarou

Afterword, Kathleen A. Roskos and James F. Christie

Brief Review
*Play and Literacy: Research from Multiple Perspectives* is a book that I have been looking forward to read from the first time when I met Kathy Roskos and Jim Christie at a conference somewhere in Europe several years ago. If not as an obvious part of everyday life, literacy as a research field was at the time unknown to me. Observing little children scribbling not only on a sheet of paper or – to the annoyance of a parent – on almost any surface, not least wallpaper, makes you understand that communicating by writing messages is essential for a human being. In my opinion the scribbling is the beginning of literacy in very young children.

By offering three over-bridging perspectives of which the first highlights the most widespread assumption about literacy solely being associated to printed text, this book very clearly demonstrates...
the complex nature of literacy, in but also far beyond anticipating it as connected to reading and writing skills only.

Any object, e.g. a sculpture, can be regarded, studied, and partly understood if you look at it from one angle only, but if you turn it around and look at it from different angles you will be able to perceive the object altogether. You can apply perspective such as material, color, form, utility, etc., which at the end of the day will make you appreciate the entire creation. This is the opportunity that this anthology gives the reader, a kind of Open Sesame! And Sesame opens.

It is an intriguing picture Roskos and Christie offer in this anthology with prominent scholars from various disciplines. One of many things that hit me is that the adult role in developing literacy in children, e.g. by offering a literacy-rich environment, is highlighted. Adults are indeed, significant agents within the play arena, and can arouse the child’s interest and curiosity for written material, just as when exposing the child a new toy.

On the other hand, one between-the-lines message at least, of this book is not to underestimate children’s ability to transfer any kind of object to literacy tools if they really want to just like they so often do with non-toy objects when turning them into playthings.

Part I presents a cognitive perspective which seems logic as “abilities of the brain”, or school related skills, are what most people regard as literacy. Therefore, it is the more refreshing to read how books and stories can inspire to dramatic play which in turn can nourish the interest to know more about how printed text connects with spoken stories. The importance of helping the child to phonological awareness in the early preschool ages is stressed, and to many a reader this is news, or something that has not been seen neither as a basis for future learning, nor literacy development.

It gives me a feeling of “the good life of yesterday” to find that reading fairytales, bed-time stories and nursery rhymes may be the very foundation in inspiring the child to take the step to fantasy land by means of symbolic play, the magic “if so” in children’s play.

Part II maintains that ecological circumstances have a vital bearing on the development of literacy in the home and school milieu respectively. Chapters in Part III show how literacy is intimately related to the social culture in which the child forms large parts of his or her personality and social interaction skills. It is pointed out that literacy is not a fenced-in matter but must be conceptualized and exposed to people in the social subculture to which they belong to in the community.

Children play their everyday life and the characters they meet in the environment, although in dramatic play they often illustrate plots and characters from distant imaginative sites that they have picked up while listening to stories, or looking at pictures in story books. Or from watching television I’d like to add. There is some research on how televised commercials influence children’s play contents and toy preferences.

What appears to me to be wanted after this book is some research on the impact of televised cartoons on children’s literacy. Programs such as Cartoon Network and Children’s Channel are often not translated into Swedish. I don’t know about for example German or French, or any other languages. The consequence is that our little Swedish TV-viewers must stick to the pictures to follow the plot, and must guess what the “actors” are saying, or what is written on signs in the scene of the story. This in turn might well lead to
misunderstandings. Some may say that this is good for learning English but for those children who don’t yet speak their mother tongue in the “adult” way, it will instead lead to confusion. They pick up words without being able to connect them to relevant situations.

I have heard little boys uttering “dirty” words in English without knowing the meaning of them. All television programs for children are in fact intimately connected to the social situation in which they are performed, which leads us to the last part of the book, namely the socio-cultural perspective.

To me, the chapters in Part III is to be taken as a conclusion of the total body of research reported in this anthology. The structure of the book feels logic by beginning with the cognitive perspective, ending with the socio-culture, thus embracing the ecological perspective which should be considered if we are to understand the impact of environmental factors in children’s literacy development.

This book is not merely an excellent research relate for experienced scholars, but should be a good source of knowledge for doctoral students learning the issue from “all around”, like the sculpture I used as an example above. It is also a book that I would recommend to teacher training departments in Universities and colleges, not to mention teachers already working in the field of early child education. All authors in this book, in one or another way, do confirm the relations between play and literacy. It also confirms the value of a rich social environment in which not only written material is available to the child, but also the people around the child. Most children are by nature curious and ready to learn. Let us not hamper that by referring to school textbooks as the one and only source for literacy development in children. Play and literacy are two sides of the same coin. Play leads to literacy and literacy leads to play.

Birgitta Almqvist


[Quality of Education in the Kindergarten. Transactional processes, methods and model for modern educational work at kindergarten as a relevant instrument in kindergarten teacher training]

Summary
Researchers in co-operation developed the following practice-oriented educational concept with field experts. The concept goes beyond a development-oriented and situation-oriented approach and embraces a cultural and ecological perspective. In other words: children, parents, kindergarten teachers, and culture are partners in development.

Together, they form an indissoluble ecological structure. For practical educational work at kindergarten it is important to understand the interaction or transactional processes - between the different partners of development. Every partner constantly transforms all other partners in development, who in turn have a transforming effect on the former.

Transactionalism is an approach that allows us for the first time to shed light on the complex interactions between children, kindergarten teachers, and kindergarten as a living environment. The focus of attention lies not so much on the attainment of given educational goals and objectives, but on the quality of transactional learning processes.
Transactionalism aims at making this altered approach comprehensible by looking at educational work at kindergarten from different angles:

- a psychological angle, the transactional processes at kindergarten are examined. Moreover, the learning and development processes which are enabled by education are studied;
- a pedagogical angle, the new image of the child, a wider understanding of education, and the role perceptions of kindergarten teachers are presented;
- the angle of quality research, the structural framework conditions at kindergarten are put to an analysis;
- a methodological-didactical angle, more light is shed on the planning and reflection of educational work.

Don Nilsen, Arizona State University, USA asked the ITRA Secretariat to forward the following message to play Scholars:

If you can accept attachments, here is one for the bibliography Play, Games, and Sports. The bibliography is Revised in June, 2000, and if you have an entry in the bibliography, please check it out to see that it is correct. If you have published something on Play, Sports, and/or Creativity, that should be included but is missing, please let me know.

Don L. F. Nilsen, Executive Secretary, E-mail don.nilsen@asu.edu
FAX: 480/965-3451, Phone: 480/965-7592

NEW ITRA MEMBERS
ITRA Secretary welcomes the following new members to our group:

Harv Ebell is a Ph.D. in Engineering Psychology, and the Senior Project Leader for TOY studies at Consumer Reports

Harv would like to participate in some technical discussions about strategies for testing toys.
E-mail: ebelha@consumer.org

Mark Frederick Allen is an, industrial designer at the Department of Design, Serious Fun Research Labs, Brunel University in Egham, Surrey, UK.

Mark writes “Future plans would include the establishment of a solid toy research within Serious Fun Research Labs (a research group founded Sept 1999), looking at current technology and the development/application of suitable technologies meeting the needs of children (and adults).
E-mail: mark.allen@brunel.ac.uk

Irini Karadimitri is the Financial Director at the Hellenic Children’s Museum in Athens, Greece.
Tel: +3001.331.2995
E-mail: hcm@compulink.gr

Annemarieke Willemsen, Curator Medieval Dept. At RMO, Riiksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden, The Netherlands, participated in the 2nd International Toy Research Conference in Halmstad in 1999 so some of you may well have met her there.
E-mail: a.willemsen@rmo.nl

Michel Manson at the Musée National de l’Éducation, Paris, France is already known by some of you. He participated in International Toy Seminar[Colloque d’Angoulême] 1997, organized by ITRA President Gilles Brougère in collaboration with the University of Charente, [l’Université de la Charente].
For nearly 20 years Michel has been cooperating with Gilles Brougère at the

E-mail: manson@inrp.fr

ITRA Board Member Sudarshan Khanna, India, introduced the following new ITRA members:

Mr Jogi Pangaal: may be well know to some of you. He attended the 2nd International Toy Research Conference in Halmstad, June 1999, and gave an interesting show on traditional homemade Indian playthings in the poster session. You can reach him on E-mail address: pangaal@vsnl.com alt. pangaal@hotmail.com

Gayatri Menon, E-mail gayatrimenon@yahoo.com Gayatri was participating in the NCFL-Unesco-Toy Workshop in Halmstad May 99. Ms Manju Gregory, who is director of the Puppet-theatre co and Author, also conducting workshops on Tales and Toys in England. E-mail: kabutar@lineone.net

Ms Mandira Kumar Sutradhar
599, 7 Main, 17A Cross, Indiranagar Stg 2, Bangalore 560 038.
Work: Tel: (0)80)5288545, (080) 5215191 Fax: 5288545. E-mail: sutra@vsnl.com

On behalf of the whole ITRA group, the secretariat wishes to welcome our new members. For you who are interested toys and would like to join the ITRA group there is a application form on the last page of this Newsletter. Please fill it in and mail it to the secretary

Birgitta.almqvist@friba.se

ITRA Secretary’s Mail Box

The mysterious Dr Toy
Believing that all Toy Doctors were members of ITRA, I was surprised one to find a letter from a Dr Toy, a mysterious person as far as I was concerned. I wrote back for more information, and a recent mail told me that behind the title Dr Toy hides a Stevanne Auerbach, PhD, apparently from the U.S. This to me earlier unknown fellow doctor whom I now welcome to our group, writes:

“I had the first web site to evaluate products for parents and teachers and have been doing so for over ten years. It has been a lot of hard work. I emphasize educational aspects of toys and playthings.

Before that I created and directed a special toy museum in San Francisco. I have written three books on toys and many hundreds of articles. My list of publications is included on the site as well as more information on the books.

I have been posting ways to say "toy" in many languages on our site. I also have guidance for selecting toys in different languages for parents and hope to continue this as it is possible.

May I obtain a copy of the Newsletter and membership application? Again thank you so much for writing and please let me know what I can do next to connect with ITRA. Is there a web site?

I hold the trademark for Dr. Toy and have been called that since the board of the toy museum started calling me that in 1985.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely
Stevanne Auerbach, PhD
drttoy@drttoy.com
www.drttoy.com
**Coming play- and toy researchers?**

Sometimes the Secretariat receives letters from young students, like these two from the United Kingdom. Let me present 15-year-old Beverly Sharp and a year 10 student E.J. Saunders, both living in Selby, North Yorkshire, U.K. I have for some time now been corresponding with Beverly, apparently a young lady, but I don’t know whether E.J is male or female. Maybe I will find out when I write back.

Both Beverly and E.J. are studying child development for a GCSE course, and both wrote to ITRA Secretariat to obtain information about their field of interest, which is “The Value of Play”. Beverly is studying what she calls “Intellectual play”, whereas E.J. studies “Benefits of imaginative play”.

Beverly is specifying her questions: What toys are manufactured to encourage the child to learn the alphabet, numbers and colours? Do you think these toys work and add to the value of play? How do you know/research if the toy will encourage the child to learn whilst playing? Do you think some toys improve the child’s intellectual knowledge? And, What toys are now being made to improve the child’s intelligence, is there any specialist companies that do this?

I you have some information to offer to these two ambitious young people who are sharing our interest, please contact: besha9699@hotmail.com

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**NCFL NEWS**

ITRA Secretariat announces that Eva Petersson, former Secretary of NCFL is now appointed Director of NCFL. Many of you have met Eva either at the 1st International Toy Conference in Halmstad in 1996 and/or at the 2nd International Toy Conference in 1999 and got to know her as a very competent and pleasant person.

The ITRA Secretariat wants to congratulate Eva and wish her good luck on her new position. You can contact Eva on mail: Eva.Petersson@ide.hh.se

Among several projects going on at the NCFL is KidsLab, which is presented below.

**KidsLab**

One and a half-year ago KidsLab started as a working group for child-centered design methods within a European Union project initiative called ESE (Experimental School Environments, see http://www.i3net.org/schools/)

The group is co-ordinated by NCFL in Sweden. Members of Kids Lab come from different professional backgrounds being:

- Pedagogics, Developmental Psychology, Perception - Action research
- Technology development, Interface Design, Usability

And from different countries:

- Sweden, The Netherlands, Belgium and Ireland

10 projects try to develop high-end early learning tools. KidsLab provides support to those projects by organizing workshops on specific problems related to design and children as users. Members of KidsLab are involved in several other industrial and research projects focusing on design for children.
Our aim is to give children a voice in the design process of products for them by
- Facilitating the dialogue between children and technology developers
- between education and technology developers
- between social sciences and industry
- develop a toolkit for design teams which helps them to communicate with children throughout the design process
- Learn as much as we can from a wide variety of projects

The following two examples will give an idea of KidsLab work in practise:

Example 1: Participatory design sessions with children: “How to wear a wearable?”
The session was performed for ESE project “Today’s Stories” in November 1999. The question from the design team was how and where children 6 to 8 years of age would like to wear a matchbox size camera. KidsLab worked with two times 15 children for one hour on what they would like the camera to “see” and where on the body it should be in order to make this possible. The answers varied from “seeing what’s behind me, “seeing through walls” to “seeing what my cat sees”.

As a second step groups of 3 children were given props as cameras, interfacing material, old belts, T-shirts to be cut, Velcro, pens and scissors in order to show us how and where to wear the little camera. After finishing children would explain their designs to each other and to us. By making the wearable the children were facing lots of usability issues in the context of what they wanted the camera to do. The design team got very concrete information about the requirements children have for wearing a camera. The resulting designs clearly mirrored children’s ideas.

Example 2: Workshop on Action-related sound
For the ESE project “CAREESS” a workshop was organized in which developers of sensor technology, interface designers, sound designers, music teachers and psychologists discussed how to provide children with expressive tools allowing to translate body movement into sound. The challenge of the workshop was to shape a shared space of imagination for participants from different backgrounds. A series of class room scenarios was developed next to a long list of questions to be taken into account along with a user centered description of alternative sensor technologies.

Example 3: Research
Students of the Industrial Design Faculty at the TU Delft worked weekly with children on designing their ideal classroom. Questions relevant for the students in order to work with children users as well as questions KidsLab faces in practical work become addressed in those sessions.

Topics which were investigated:
- The influence of expressing ideas with different material and in 3D vs. 2D
- The conditions under which professional prototypes of children’s ideas help to guide the discussion between designers and children in subsequent sessions.

For further information contact Lieselotte van Leeuwen, Co-ordinator. E-mail: kids@xs4all.nl

NEWS FROM TOYLAND
From Swedish Toy Review [Svensk Leksaksrevy] No.4/2000
Toys “R” US
In spite of recently having been fined SEK 100 000 for falsely having claimed their prices are the lowest on toys in Sweden, TOYS “R” US continues to announce, this time in the Swedish National Phone Book,
that their prices on toys are the lowest in the whole country. As the Swedish Toy Review, representing the Swedish toy retailers has the Swedish Consumer Institute reports Toys “R” US for lying about their prices.

**Greenpeace boomerang effect**
The debate concerning ftalates as softening ingredient in toys made of plastics, Swedish Toy Review fights against Greenpeace by claiming that so far no child in the whole world has come to any harm caused by ftalates in toys. Instead, “the apostles of a clean milieu” have been taken to court and sued to pay millions (SEK) since they have climbed up on the roof to a power station and choked the chimney, an action which can not be labeled civil disobedience, but sheer terrorism.

**Computer programs going downhill**
Third year in a row SEGA reported a heavy loss in 1999, in spite of 27% sales increase. As a consequence of the situation the managing director Shoichiro Irimarjiri has been forced to leave. SEGA Vice Chairman, 76-year-old Isao Ohkawa, replaces him. In spite of the great success with Game Boy and the Pokémon game, *Nintendo* in 1999 saw a profit decrease with one third compared with the year before. The company does however hopefully count with a much better result this year.

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**CHILDREN’S CORNER**

Sorry my adult friends, the kids aren’t home until school starts again late August. Therefore, I have nothing much to report, neither from the little ones in the home nursery nor from the preschoolers.

To meet kids now you must go out, because for children in the central and northern Europe at least, June, July and August mean summer, and for children in Sweden Summer recess begins June 8 and ends August 20 (can vary from one part to another). Following my own advice, I went out and met several children in playgrounds. This is my outdoor play report, specially for Children’s Corner in ITRA Newsletter:

I saw toddlers baking cakes in the sandpit, some 5-year-old girls were playing food store, selling and buying potatoes (gray stones), spinach (green leaves), and coffee (sand), and fish (small logs) etc. There is no limit in children’s fantasy when it comes to the open space where the nature holds so many excellent make believe materials.

I saw a group of 6-year-old boys occupied by a game of marbles. The marbles were so beautiful, all from the tiny ones in stone to the large glass marbles glittering in the sunlight. In *Toys With Nine Lives* by Andrew McClary, the author quotes writer Phil Strong remembering his grade-school days in the early 1900s: “…I heard homilies on the wickedness of playing marbles for keeps, and every year boys in the grades played marbles for keeps.”

Two mummies were exchanging news over the heads of their toddlers each of them steadily parked in car tire swings

I also met some kids in what I would call a natural playground where they were climbing trees, jumping from stone blocks, sailing little pieces of wood in a narrow stream surrounded by blooming bushes. I saw some boys hunting each other round trees shouting Bang! And all the time I heard happy laughter that filled my heart with joy.

### Brief epilogue

With this Newsletter the ITRA Secretariat wishes you all a joyful recess until we meet again in the autumn term of the first year of the 2nd millennium AD.
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME:..............................................................................................................

PROFESSION:.................................................................................................

HOME ADDRESS................................................................................................

WORK ADDRESS................................................................................................

PHONE..............................................

FAX......................................................

E-MAIL........................................................

PUBLICATIONS: .................................................................
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PERSONAL COMMENT:
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Please mail your application to ITRA Secretary: birgitta.almqvist@friba.se