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Engelsk versjon

Title: Aesthetic self-definitions. A critical re-conceptualization of children's socio-dramatic playing

Abstract:

The paper's reflections can provide a possible starting point for aesthetic and artistic interaction with/for children. By weaving together two threads of discourse, I conceptualize the significance of children's collective dramatic playing (pretend playing) in an aesthetic perspective. In one thread lies a discussion of how children can trouble and extend their identities through communication in the aesthetic form-languages and conventions that they compose in their dramatic playing. Whereas adults exchange thoughts verbally, children enter the aesthetic play-arena and converse and reflect with, and in, dramatic form. Through taking the perspective of, and momentarily becoming, the Other, the children can construct and problematize temporary fictional identities. In each dramatic enactment the players are in a reflective and reflexive process of both Being and Becoming. - They are intensely present in their imaginations and enactments, at the same time as they are amassing cultural-aesthetic experience and knowing. Earlier aesthetic experiences can become clarified through the expressive-communicative process and can thus become generalized Experience.

In the second thread of discourse, the paper troubles the theoretical identity of socio-dramatic playing. Along with developmental psychology, sociology has long dominated the theory taught in Norwegian early childhood studies programmes. Within sociology children's social play in their peer culture has been understood as interpretive *reproduction* and rehearsal of adult roles. I question this view through the use of the aesthetic concept of *mimesis*, defined in feminist theatre theory as *critical transformation*. In my interpretative work I show how two kindergarten girls intertextualize freely from their impressions of several child cultural aesthetic media. In their aesthetic, social play-arena they have the cultural occasion, space, and liberty to take control: to speak, to question, to represent, to transform and to redefine their experience and themselves. The players can experiment with standpoints, redefine their daily-day selves and, thereby, take back their power of self-definition. The cultural hegemony can be turned on its head.

The paper presents an extension of theory developed from my doctoral thesis *Drama Performance in Children's Culture: The possibilities and significance of form*: In order to make visible and better understand the cultural, aesthetic and reflexive aspects of children's collective dramatic playing, I applied a combination of theoretical perspectives from social anthropology, processual aesthetics, dramaturgy, and performance studies - in aesthetic analyses of play sequences, collected during a field study in a Norwegian day-care institution.