

## Playworlds: A didactical avenue to assist in the development of the mind-material-body development of the young child

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**Abstract:** We are living in a time with many new possibilities for overall childcare, but also inconsistencies about how to care for young children, especially very young children. Traditionally, child-rearing practices struggle to comprehend the meaning of families and place of young children in a changing society, while the care of young children remains 'a complex and emotionally charged' task (Bowlby, 2007, p. 309). The question that begs answering then is how do we go about in future to address this problem? One suggested avenue is a unique form of pedagogy, that was coined by Lindqvist (1995) called, playworlds.

This playworlds pedagogy has been developed over the last three decades in five different countries: Sweden, Serbia (former Yugoslavia), Japan, Finland and the United States. This educational practice consists of adults and children co-creating, entering and exiting imaginary worlds (Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998). In other words, adults and children co-participate in adult forms of creative imagining, which require extensive experiences in disciplines of drama, arts, sciences, engineering and technology, on the part of the adults. It not only requires an in-depth understanding of the physical and emotional developmental stages of the young child, but also how to align that with the didactical demands of the evolving activities.

Complete involvement of both adults and children in the playworld experience, especially the quality of the emotional-cognitive engagement (perezhivanie), is a very important aspect of playworlds (Marjanovic-Shane, Ferholt, Miyazaki, Nilsson, Rainio, Hakkarainen, & Beljanski-Ristic, 2011; Brennan, 2014). In these playworlds children's play is enriched by cultural artefacts and adult participation while, simultaneously, adult participants in playworlds revitalize their dormant ability to engage in symbolic play. These playworlds can additionally lead to significant changes in almost all developmental domains including perception and attention, cognition, will and self-direction as well as emotional development (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 97-100). Playworld activities in Finland (see Hakkarainen, 1999, 2004, 2006, 2008; Rainio, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2010) have three roots: mixed age teaching groups designed for the development of children's school readiness; the model of The Fifth Dimension (Cole, 2006); and the model of play pedagogy developed by Lindqvist (1995).

The aim of this paper will be to share the experiences and findings, of the authors' involvement in developing unique playworlds in the South African context, spanning the last two years with two root focusses; Co-teaching with classroom teachers, utilizing STEAM related content, to children in the second and third years of schooling and Co-teaching mixed age groups of young children (0 to 8 years) together with their parents, also focussing on STEAM related content, on several consecutive monthly gatherings at a local fair in town. The content focus of the co-designed curriculum for each playworld interaction, was to create a playworld where imagination and reality was merged. This was realised through the means of a narrative, pictures and puppets called the 'Space Shifters and their journeys'.

A key question that arises is whether these playworlds may in future, also prove radically important outside of current educational practices? Ferholt and Lecusay (2010) state:

*'(Playworlds) raise the question of just what sorts of development we would like to foster in schools: only development which will allow children to succeed in formal educational settings, and possibly development toward adult stages of knowledge, wisdom or skill, or, also, creative development, development toward an unknown future which is significant to adults and children alike, in their roles both in and out of schools. (p. 82)'*

**Keywords:** Imaginary worlds, mind-material-body, playworlds, Space Shifters, STEAM, young children



**Author Biography:** Dédé was educated at Potchefstroom University for Higher Education (1984). She obtained post-graduate degrees in education, art history, languages and literature (1988). She has been involved in teaching languages and visual arts at various levels and at various schools throughout Gauteng, the Free State and North- West province for the past thirty one years. For the past twelve years I taught Art to pre-service education students at tertiary education level, at the North West University, Potchefstroom Campus, where I acted as the head of the Subject Group Visual and Performing Arts for Education (2007-2019).

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