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A pedagogy of play. Reasons to be playful in post-secondary education

Abstract

Background: Teaching experientially in post-secondary education has challenges; institutional constraints, neoliberal management, and a colonized learning environment. We discuss playing as a form of experiential education. **Purpose:** We challenge conventional teaching and offer an alternative to enrich and broaden conventional pedagogies. We argue for the benefits of playfulness and how this leads to creativity, wellness, and improved graduate employability. **Methodology/approach:** As provocation to the consequences of neoliberalism in education, we examine the literature from a biased position as advocates of play and experiential education. We argue for faculty to adopt an ontology and pedagogy of play. **Findings/conclusions:** Play is well represented in the literature; contributing positively to a range of health and educational outcomes. As play manifests in numerous forms in post-secondary education, faculty would benefit from a clear educational rationale for an ontology and pedagogy of play. We share examples from our practice which highlight spontaneous and planned play and playful attitudes/behaviors and suggest how play may be integrated as planned curriculum. **Implications:** Ideally, these concepts resonate with faculty allowing them to challenge conventional pedagogies and confirm play in practice with the underpinning of experiential education research.

Keywords: play, pedagogy, ontology, ludic, post-secondary education

Introduction

In this paper, we argue for the importance and integration of play as pedagogy and propose the development of a playful ontology as a desirable way of being for educators in post-secondary institutions. There is evidence that engaging in play as adolescents leads to adults that are better able to navigate an ever changing social, emotional, and cognitive landscape, and that to be playful is a state which many adult humans would like to be in, and most children arguably should be (Siviy, 2016). Play is not just physical interaction; it is an integral part of everyday activities, engaging in social interactions, and interacting with playful thoughts. Playfulness as a state of mind represents a way to escape, at least for a moment, from the pressure, tensions, and conflicts of everyday reality (Šimůnková, 2018) and the authors take every opportunity to do this! A playful ontology shows that instances of play can occur within the everyday, where play is a technique which can subvert, disrupt and contravene established norms and the order of things. Therefore, play is not only about playing games. It fundamentally involves playfulness which is an attitude, an approach, and a life philosophy; we do not have to play games to be playful (Šimůnková, 2018).

There appears to be, however, several problems for play in post-secondary education. First, learning must adhere to policy frameworks in neoliberal politics where student outcomes are measured and teaching performance assessed (Ball, 2012; Shore, 2010). Second, good quality play can be resource-intensive and require high levels of pedagogical skill and organization, as well as time (Bennett, Wood, & Rogers, 1997). Third, play may threaten the teacher's control and disrupt their lesson plans, challenge assumed and shared values, and provoke concerns about risks. In fact, there is a cultural mistrust of play in educational contexts (Wood, 2013) and we would be remiss to not point out how often we have been criticized for noisy classrooms, or to explain why our students were apparently

‘playing outside’ during class time. Our case is not helped by a lack of a precise operational definition of play, a consistent view that play is the opposite of work and a fear of play as a form of subversion. This mistrust is further influenced by our Victorian educational heritage, where parents, policymakers, colleagues and fellow professionals have this persistent view and fear of play (Wood, 2013). Working at universities where the essential structures and procedures are still firmly rooted in the Victorian church influenced era (we are thinking of deans, gowns, and the language and ceremony of the academy) it is perhaps no surprise that our playful mindsets are triggered by these anachronistic conventions.

The purpose of a university education, as suggested prominently in the education literature, is graduate employability (Ball, 2017, Times Higher Education, 2017). This is evidenced throughout the discourse, where it is seen as a key metric used to compile and rank universities (Complete University Guide, 2018; McLean’s Magazine, 2017) as well in the policy dialogs of governments over the last 20 years or so (Ball, 2017; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995; HESA, 2017). An employer survey in the UK suggests that “nearly a quarter of companies are not satisfied with graduates’ problem-solving skills, which should be a prime output of higher education” (Confederation British Industry, 2014, p. 70). In this respect, we argue that encouraging and facilitating adult playfulness is desirable because it has been linked to increases in creativity and spontaneity (Barnett, 2007). Our assertion is that creative thinking and problem solving are desirable graduate employability attributes sought by employers. Are we, as faculty, prepared to challenge institutional heritage, relinquish a bit of control in the classroom, and allow for emergent and experiential learning outcomes through increased play among our students? Arguably of greater significance for those who view education through a more humanistic lens, research of adult playfulness describes a clear relationship between exhibiting playfulness and experiencing positive emotions (Ruch, Proyer, & Weber, 2010). We know this to be true ourselves, as we feel better when play is

present in our courses. We are playful because it makes us feel good! Research on playfulness shows its relation to positive outcomes that include: improved academic performance (Proyer & Ruch, 2011); an enhanced quality-of-life with humor as a character strength (Ruch et al., 2010); stress coping (Qian & Yarnal, 2011); positive attitudes toward the workplace and job satisfaction, and providing a lubricant for social situations and positive constructive teamwork in work settings (Yu et al., 2007). On many occasions, lighthearted humor and playfulness has allowed group dynamics to improve and benefits to interpersonal effectiveness in groups is palpable. We use playfulness and humor as a social lubricant during teaching – to reduce anxiety and stress and make the learning environment fun and joyful – as well as in faculty meetings. We find that the ability to laugh and make fun of ourselves and a situation in a playful way can make difficult conversations less awkward. In training outdoor leaders and youth workers, the second author conducts "check-ins" at the beginning of every teaching session which often involves movement and laughter. The result is a bodily-felt experience, which allows for bonding and belonging in the group. These short activities pay dividends in group performance and individual presence in classroom settings, online, and outdoors alike.

First, we share the constructions of play across the lifespan before outlining the broad array of individual and social benefits of play for adults. We then problematize the neoliberal norms in post-secondary education that limit play, share our proposition for a pedagogy of play and playful ontology as implementation strategies for educators, and last, offer concluding thoughts and recommendations. Our aim in writing this paper is to playfully unsettle institutional norms and challenge the dominant discourse in post-secondary education to make room for play and playfulness as a key to successful, creative, and fun learning experiences for our students. While we offer a few examples of play in our practice as educators, this paper is not a 'how to' guide for faculty. We defer to other great resources

on that front (see Farber, 2020; James & Nerantzi, 2019; Tierney et al., 2014) and focus herein on the theoretical and philosophical arguments for play in post-secondary education.

Constructions of Play Across the Lifespan

"We all play occasionally, and we all know what play feels like. But when it comes to making theoretical statements about what play is, we fall into silliness. There is little agreement among us, and much ambiguity" (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 1). Sutton-Smith suggests that play is not easily defined, although numerous theories and conceptualizations, such as we briefly review below, have been offered. Play is an inner-directed activity which elicits a pleasurable or exciting experience and its value may be aligned with actualization of one's potential (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Henricks (2006, 2015) reconsiders play from a sociological perspective[i]. He highlights how both educational researchers and psychologists reflect an idealistic and somewhat romantic vision of human development with the central belief that people, and especially young children, are naturally active and curious; "If only we release them from the drudgery of routine social existence, they will fashion wonderful new worlds using their own sense of what is intrinsically satisfying as a guide" (ibid, p. 6). In this context, play is seen as a kind of echo between the cognitive and the emotional aspects of experience.

Experiential education has always engaged a range of emotions to enhance learning, and here we argue for the inclusion of play to add humor, fooling, and silliness as feelgood factors to the other emotions our students may experience. Henricks (2015) argues for 'The play of possibility' stating that: "If there is an overarching contribution of play to human affairs, it is to facilitate peoples comprehending their own character and capacities in their life worlds … it extends the theory of player self-realization … and to evaluate the role of play in the contemporary era" (p.17). This is a general theory of play as behavior that promotes self-realization in which he articulates a conception of self that includes individual

and social identity. Early developments in the theory of play included: the role of imaginative play in assigning meaning, influencing volitional motives, and as a valuable developmental process in children (Vygotsky, 1933, 1980); that play is experienced throughout life's developmental stages and assists in strengthening new skills from sensorial-motor activity, to symbolic games, and finally games with rules (Erikson, 1972; Piaget, 1951/1989); that play provides an avenue to deal with experiences considered negative or abnormal and becomes a central aspect of an adult's emotional life (Erikson, 1994; Freud, 1952); that play is a legitimate aspect of adult life and key building block of human civilization, evident in law, art, poetry, and philosophy (Huizinga, 1949); and, that numerous typologies and definitions have attempted to isolate what play is more specifically (Caillois, 1958/2001).

So, what is play? To increase the structure and an understanding of play, Caillois (1958/2001) organized play into categories of competition, chance, mimicry, and excitement and suggested play can be engaged with in a state of *Paidia* (i.e. child-like, care-free, joyful, and spontaneous) or in a *Ludus* state (i.e. discipline, effort, patience). Similarly, Whitebread et al. (2012) offer a typology including physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, pretense/socio-dramatic play and games with rules. From a child and adolescent developmental standpoint, these categorizations and depictions of play seem straightforward and are easily aligned with concepts of experiential learning based on learning-by-doing (Dewey, 1938/2007). How can this understanding of play be seen and understood in early adulthood, or for our purposes, in post-secondary education?

Kolb and Kolb (2010) suggested a holistic model with play and learning as unified, arguing for play as an integral part of human growth and development across the lifespan. Citing neurological and physiological stimuli, the authors posit numerous benefits of play in adult lives: self-actualization, personal growth and development (ability to control anger or extreme competitiveness, compassion, accepting of others), encourages learners to take

charge of their own learning, and that an equal value is placed on both process and outcome of learning. Brookfield (1995) stated that "almost every textbook on adult education practice affirms the importance of experiential methods such as games, simulation, case studies, psychodrama, role play and internships" (p. 5).

Children learn to play, learn from play, and develop the ability to use play in adult learning settings (Brougère, 1999). Brougère discussed a paradox of play (i.e. a child comes to play for pleasure but ends up learning) and proposes that adult play simply requires a debriefing after play to "enable the construction of learning" (1999, p. 140). He goes on to suggest play is socially negotiated and constructed, and when acceptable in certain contexts, is an ideal informal learning process. The author also suggested the gap in how play pedagogy is depicted between children and adults should be closed, and instead be represented as a developmental continuum. Playfulness in early adulthood can re-frame situations in a new way through the use of amusement, humor, and entertainment (Barnett, 2007), allow greater ease of reflection through fictional scenarios (Brougère, 1999), and be explored through somatic/embodied learning (i.e. accessing knowledge held in our bodies) or narrative learning (i.e. meaning making through story) approaches (Clark, 2001). Playfulness engages learners emotionally, which is a key ingredient of learning, creativity and meaning making in adult learning (Dirkx, 2001). If nothing else, play in education gets students out of their desks and heads, even if only momentarily, and are refreshed in doing so.

The use of the term *ludic* became popular in the 1960s, in both Europe and the US, to label playful behavior, and playfulness has become increasingly a mainstream characteristic of modern and postmodern culture (Frissen et al., 2015). Sturrock and Else (1998) called the play cycle practice *therapeutic playwork*, and suggested it was rich in creative and healing potential. Recently, King and Sturrock (2020) explore how the *play cycle* can be used to

support the work of practitioners and researchers in whatever setting they may find themselves, whether that be playwork, early years, or any educational setting.

Play and playfulness have been empirically supported as keys to learning and human development, from childhood and throughout life. Our focus is on emerging adults (Arnett, 2007) in post-secondary education (18+ years of age) and the contributions of play to learning for this population. While possibly eluding any one clear definition, the construct of play we refer to in this paper reflects the typologies shared above and aligns with the literature of experiential education and student-centered adult learning (Estes, 2004; Fenwick, 2000). Our pedagogical practices incorporating play are intended to increase our students' ability to see the positive in situations, not take themselves too seriously, maintain an open mind, embrace challenges, and increase their ability to deal with failure and adapt to change (Guitard, Ferland, & Dutil, 2005).

The Benefits of Play for Adults

Playfulness correlates with several psychological and physiological benefits, including nonlinear, divergent thinking; problem solving; physical activity; emotional regulation; and imagination (Gordon, 2014). The benefit of playfulness in adults includes enhanced creativity, humor, motivation, and positive emotions. Neuroscientists Bateson and Martin (2013) explored the relationship between play, playfulness, creativity, and innovation. They suggested that playful play, in which the mood is positive and aims undetermined, assists creativity by generating novel combinations of thoughts or actions, or by providing experiences that enable the subsequent production of novel solutions to problems. It is worth noting that we use Ken Robinson's (2007) definition of creativity as "the process of having original ideas that have value." It is different from imagination, which is the ability to recall things that are not present in our senses, and playfulness. We consider playfulness to be a mixture of an openness to not being self-important, to playing the fool, not worrying about

competence, not taking social norms as sacred, and finding ambiguity and double meanings as a source of knowledge and pleasure. Our playful attitude involves an openness: to surprise, to being a fool, to self-construction or reconstruction of the worlds and places we playfully inhabit, but as James and Nerantzi (2019) highlight, there is not a single uncontested definition, and at times these definitions are in tension particularly when used synonymously with creativity.

Perhaps more familiar literature for experiential educators, and readers of this journal, is Csikszentmihalyi's concept of *flow*. We suggest that this is useful here as it weaves together elements of experiential education, adult play, and creativity. As Csikszentmihalyi (2000) discusses in *Beyond boredom and anxiety,* flow is a state of peak enjoyment, energetic focus, and creative concentration experienced by people engaged in adult play. This has become the basis of a highly creative approach to living and that society without play grows stilted and stunted and, if people are discouraged from spontaneous expressivity in play, they may overlook other possibilities when solving problems. When discussing the sociological implications of flow, Mitchell (1988) suggested that creative acts in play call for a willingness to "follow the flight of hazardous processes, to surrender the self to forces beyond one's control" (p. 57). He argued that a creative life is one that is vitally experienced and satisfying, but it "… cannot be led easily or safely. It is demanding, challenging and stressful" (ibid, p. 57). This is perhaps why adult play in post-secondary education is not the normal or mainstream pedagogical approach. One mantra we find useful is *to embrace the chaos*, however challenging and stressful this may be, because allowing our students to be playful in their learning can lead to chaos – albeit enjoyable chaos – in the classroom!

Navigating Play and Playfulness in Post-secondary Education

Huizinga (1949) introduced *Homo ludens* arguing that play is primary to, and a necessary condition of the generation of culture, and therefore, humans are more than just the

biological species Homo sapiens. It is evident from the literature that definitions of play are contested, unclear, and culturally located. Hughes (2012) articulates a taxonomy of sixteen different types of play, or "playtypes."[ii] In play theory, there is much discussion about free play versus structured play and that these debates may reflect the judgements made about g*ood* and *bad* play and the social values these types of play may have (Broadhead, Howard, & Wood, 2010).

For the purposes of this paper, we propose the following conceptions of play adapted from Meckley (2002) and Fagen (1981 cited in Bateson, 2005). Play is chosen and invented by the player. It is pretend that is done as for real. Play focuses on doing - it is the process not the product. Play is done by the players, not the supervisors or leaders, and requires active involvement. Play is fun, social, voluntary, experimental, and creative, occurring only in a relaxed and safe context. Not all play is inherently good as not all play is necessarily *good play,* and Wood (2010) highlights the problems associated with *dark play* and *cruel play* where these forms of play are not about fun and inhibit growth and learning for all participants. Play is founded in power relationships around peers, gender, ethnicity, special needs, and can be chaotic, subversive, and unpredictable (Wood, 2010). The management, planning, and facilitation of play therefore is a complex, multi-faceted process.

Of interest for post-secondary education, play is an important form of behavior that facilitates creativity, which is the generation of novel actions or thoughts. This is different from innovation (Bateson & Martin, 2013). Innovation is both a process and an outcome. It is the production or adoption, assimilation, and exploitation of a value-added novelty in economic and social spheres (Edison, Ali, & Torkar, 2013). Bateson and Martin (2013) argued that playful behavior and playful thoughts generate radically new approaches to challenges; playfulness is a positive mood state that facilitates and accompanies playful play and facilitates creativity, sometimes immediately and sometimes after considerable delay

(Bateson & Martin, 2013). Playfulness is about entering a state of mind that has a distinctive, special relationship to time, space and everyday rules, restrictions and boundaries, and is characterized by a more flexible and creative attitude towards events, consequences, and held ideas; play enables the adoption of a playful, experimenting attitude towards ourselves, and our life experiences (Jones, 2014). Glynn and Webster (1992) uncovered five features that constitute adult playfulness; playful adults are spontaneous, expressive, fun, creative, and silly. Playfulness is the predisposition to frame (or re-frame) a situation in such a way as to provide oneself (and possibly others) with amusement, humor, and/or entertainment. Individuals who have such a heightened predisposition are "typically funny, humorous, spontaneous, unpredictable, impulsive, active, energetic, adventurous, sociable, outgoing, cheerful, and happy, and are likely to manifest playful behavior by joking, teasing, clowning, and acting silly" (Barnett, 2007, p. 955). When we read this, it was as though a colleague had been observing our teaching and professional interactions of the last few years, the statement resonated strongly with us. James and Nerantzi (2019) summarize this well when they state that play: "In its limitless forms, it is a means of freeing up thinking, opening new channels, confronting obstacles and reframing persistent challenges" (p. xiv).

Unsettling the Dominant Discourse in Post-secondary Education: Time to Play

In a postmodern society the commodification of education sees the traditional idea that knowledge and pedagogy are inextricably linked, replaced by a new understanding of knowledge as a commodity (Lyotard, 1979/1984). Lyotard's classic work, *The postmodern condition,* stressed the emergence of performativity, namely that everything is evaluated according to easily measured and therefore predictable outcomes. This is a society dominated by private enterprise and competitive markets (Tomlinson, 2001) and where educational performance is measured against prescriptive, measurable, and predictable learning outcomes, standard measures, standardized testing, and key performance indicators. In the

UK, USA, Canada, and other developed economies, the commodification and marketisation of education has been built on a neoliberal political philosophy, which is principally associated with emphasizing the efficiency of market competition and the role of individuals through free choice; at the heart of this commodification is a view of human beings as rational, autonomous, utility-maximizing individuals (Roberts, 1998). The public sector has been transformed and in the place of traditional ideals of welfare, community, and a sense of obligation toward others, the new rules are those of the market (Olssen & Peters, 2005). The impact of the efficiencies and consumerism of the free market on outdoor education was first articulated by Loynes (1998) in *Adventure in a Bun*. He took the concept of McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1993) to help explore the changes evident in outdoor education and expressed concern that market-place values (the efficiency, calculability, predictability and control of McDonaldization) were detrimentally impacting the provision of outdoor education experiences. Humberstone and Stan (2012) noted how neoliberal ideologies contributed to a change to informal educational experiences away from diverse and individual student-centered learning towards consistent production and replicable outcomes.

The political landscape in the UK remains to the right of the political spectrum with central control by the state of educational provision and the curriculum in primary and secondary education. Government directs educational policy influenced by its commitment to neoliberal ideas. Biesta and Säfström (2011) discussed how the former idea of education as a school for all - understood in terms of democracy, solidarity, and justice - has been reframed by Liberal and Conservative politics. They argue that there has been a discursive shift in the educational discourse characterized by a return to *positivistic* knowledge produced by brain research, evidence-based research, positivistic psychology, and leadership and efficiency ideas in all matters concerning schooling. The new right of politics redefines the whole idea of a welfare state from within by changing the whole educational infrastructure. It involves

changing the totality of the educational landscape, from the early years to post-secondary education (Biesta & Säfström, 2011). This economic political landscape, that has influenced post-secondary education, is probably familiar to many around the world. Neoliberalism, market forces and performativity, where students are viewed by some as customers and post-secondary education has become a commodity, has been well critiqued. These debates range beyond this paper but for a start see Biesta (2004) on *Reclaiming a language for education*, Ball's (2012) *Politics and policy making in education*, Davies and Bansel (2007) *Neoliberalism and education,* and Giroux's (2002, 2004) discussions on the pedagogy and politics of neoliberalism in post-secondary education.

While this does not sit comfortably with our personal philosophies on the purpose and practice of education, it is the landscape in which we practice. The realities of post-secondary education in the 21st century mean that it is not possible to ignore the social, political, and cultural layers that influence and inform both the policy and practice of education. We need to remain mindful of, and challenge, the dominant Western values inherent in our educational systems, or what Robinson (2010) describes as the "factory model" of education. Robinson (2011) champions a radical rethink of education systems, to cultivate creativity and acknowledge multiple types of intelligence. He provides a strong argument for creativity in the curriculum and a clear understanding of the social, historical, and cultural constructions of education that we have inherited. Additionally, we suggest that it is useful to challenge our associated social constructions of what it means to be "adult" or "grown up." We argue that there is a cultural association that views playing as childish and frivolous and without any great sense, which is opposed by the view of Proyer and Ruch (2011), and those of us, who see playfulness in adults as an intellectual act that can help transform our educational endeavors. Playful approaches to problem solving can allow creative solutions to emerge, and

teaching in the time of a global pandemic, as we are currently doing, calls for these other ways of teaching experientially.

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) is a business organization that provides a voice for companies at a regional, national, and international level to policymakers. In (2011) the CBI combined with the National Union of Students (NUS) and produced a report titled *Working towards your future: Making the most of your time in higher education,* which addressed the employability agenda. At the heart of the CBI and NUS employability report (2011) was that of a positive attitude as can be seen in figure 1 below, the summary of employability graduate skills.

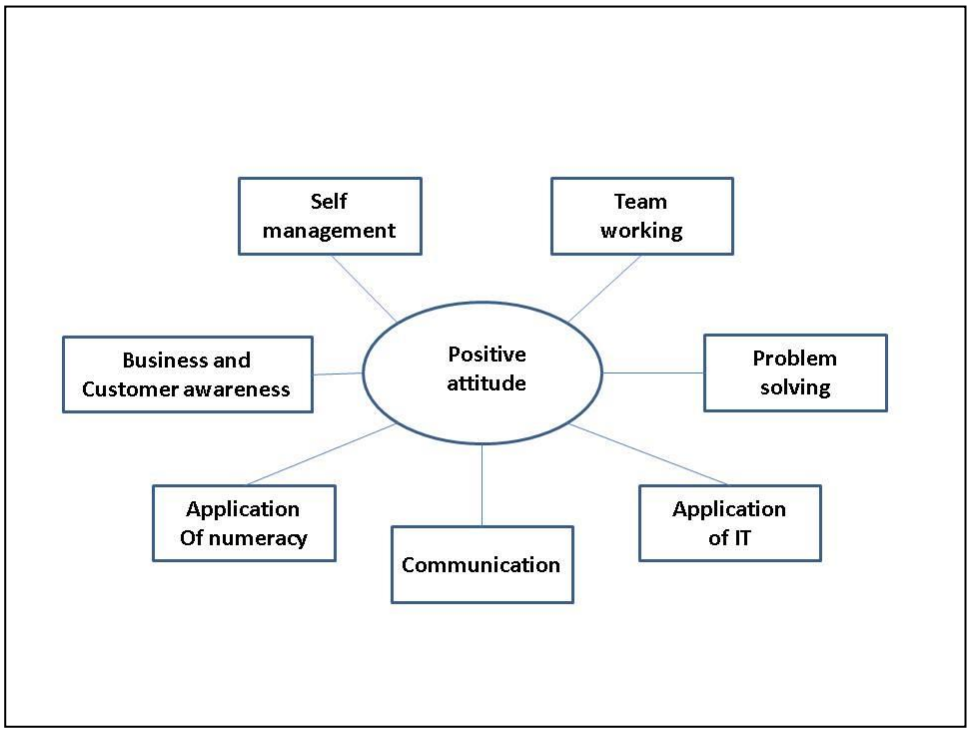

Figure 1: Employability Graduate Skills, CBI (2011, p.14)

Later the CBI again reported on post-secondary education and graduates stating, "Nearly a quarter of companies are not satisfied with graduates' problem-solving skills, which should be a prime output of higher education" (CBI, 2014, p. 70). It is our argument that (a) successful participation in playful experiential learning directly exposes students to the desirable qualities as shown in figure 1, and (b) a playful pedagogy may develop a more

creative graduate who is adept at problem solving. For example, to undertake a successful outdoor expedition in a group, a positive attitude, self-management, teamworking, problem solving skills, and customer (client) awareness are all essential. However, a playful pedagogy and experiential learning could be applied in many subjects including management, business, engineering, and the humanities, and not just limited to education or the use of the outdoors.

A Pedagogy of Play for Adult Students

It may be that the terms *play, playful,* and *playtime* are so culturally loaded and associated with *child, children,* and *childlike* that we need to consider and incorporate other established terms for adult play. As discussed above, Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) *flow* is a state of peak enjoyment, energetic focus, and creative concentration experienced by people engaged in adult play. Wood (2013) highlights play is culturally misunderstood and we need to understand play as a social and cultural practice. In this sense, we advocate that a pedagogy of play is an adventurous approach to learning in post-secondary education. That is, to provide learning opportunities and outcomes which are experiential, playful, fun, and authentic, which is important since authenticity is at the heart of learning (Beames & Brown, 2016).

When we teach new concepts or theories, we can engage students in experiential activity as a source of embodied learning to inform, and more importantly remember, the ideas taught. For example, to introduce systems theory to a first-year leadership class, we have taken students out of the class into a larger open space on campus. Students are asked to spread out and receive instructions on what is about to happen. Several scenarios can be presented to demonstrate the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all students as a system. One favorite is to describe students as being a prey animal (e.g., squirrel, rabbit, mouse) and to pick another student to be a predator (e.g., fox, wolf, eagle) who will be chasing you, and a second student to be your safety resource (e.g., burrow, hedge, tree).

Students are told to keep the safety resource between themselves and the predator, ideally in a straight line. Students are not to indicate who they have chosen as predator and safety resource but are instructed that to ensure their safety they need to keep the safety resource between them and the predator once the activity begins. As every student has made their own choices about predator and safety resource, there are multiple combinations of students now secretly imagined to be in relationship to each other. When the activity starts, the resulting mayhem is chaotic and exciting, challenging, and very fun for students. As it is often impossible to get every students' predator and safety resource aligned, the group keeps moving, each student's movement causing others to shift and adjust in turn. When the activity either slows down, or you believe the embodied experience of the activity has been met, a discussion on what happened follows. An often-used series of prompts in an experiential leader's toolbelt are: What? So what? Now what? (Rolfe, Freshwater, & Jasper, 2001). These prompts allow our students to think critically about the meaning of systems theory principles, and how they might work with this new knowledge framework in a meaningful way. A lecture or seminar on systems theory then becomes more relevant to students as they have just had a playful, fun, and embodied experience of systems theory to reference, and better remember.

Playtime (or recess) is the period during the school day in the UK where children take a break from lessons and go outside to play. It is a break from the work of learning, it takes place outside, and it is a chance for school pupils to play; by implication then it is not inside and it is not learning because students are not being taught by teachers. This traditional view of the learning process is discussed by UNESCO (2003) which sees the teacher as the expert and the dispenser of knowledge to students. It is largely a broadcast or banking model of learning (Freire, 1970) where the teacher serves as the transmitter of knowledge to the students as empty vessels. This traditional educational paradigm is often characterized by the

following views of learning. First, learning is hard. Many view learning as a difficult and often tedious process. According to this view, if students are having fun or enjoying what they are doing in a learning activity, then they probably are not learning. Second, learning is based on a deficit model of the student. It is a process of information transfer and reception, an individual or solitary process, and is facilitated by breaking the content into smaller isolated units (UNESCO, 2003). In the classic work *Teaching as a subversive activity*, Postman and Weingartner (1971) highlight how our educational systems break knowledge and experiences into subjects, relentlessly turning wholes into parts, history into events, without restoring continuity, and this is still evident today. Similarly, Illich's (1971) classic *Deschooling society* argued about the ineffectual nature of institutionalized education. His argument remains relevant and pertinent to our discussion today about the need for play. This is supported by recent research (Rice, 2009) who argued that playful learning requires a shift from the concept of students as passive consumers of knowledge towards active creators of knowledge. As a result, playful learning can enrich and augment existing approaches to learning for students in higher education.

People who have been schooled down to size let unmeasured experience slip out of their hands. To them, what cannot be measured becomes secondary, threatening. They do not have to be robbed of their creativity. Under instruction, they have unlearned to "do" their thing or "be" themselves, and value only what has been made or could be made (Illich, 1971, p. 30). Robinson (2010, 2011) suggests that this persistent view of the learning process emerged out of the factory model of education which, by the turn of the 20th century, was highly effective in preparing large numbers of individuals needed for employment in low-skilled industry and agriculture jobs. The innovation of classrooms of 30 students was created along with the concept of standardized instruction to everyone, the traditional didactic teacher-centered approach to learning. This was followed in the late 20th century and the first

part of the 21st-century with neoliberal standardized testing regimes as found in many developed nations (Apple, 2000).

Of course, play and playful approaches to learning have long been championed for younger children, including Montessori and Froebel amongst others, and we see faculty colleagues involved with early years and primary education still advocating learning through play as a fundamental approach for learning in young children. However, we argue that our cultural constructions of education regard playing as childish, for children, and that by high school age and for young adults in post-secondary education, the conventional way, the factory model, is highly dominant. Post-secondary education still sees young adults in rows of desks, indoors, undertaking the *serious business* of learning, just as they did as children. We argue for *play* and *playfulness* to be part of a planned cycle of learning activities; planning, determining leader roles, play activities and observing, assessing, reflecting, and evaluating sessions are all part of the ongoing cycle of the facilitation of learning. One way of conceptualizing this playful pedagogy is *The Integrated Pedagogical Approaches* to play model (adapted from Wood, 2010) shown in figure 2.

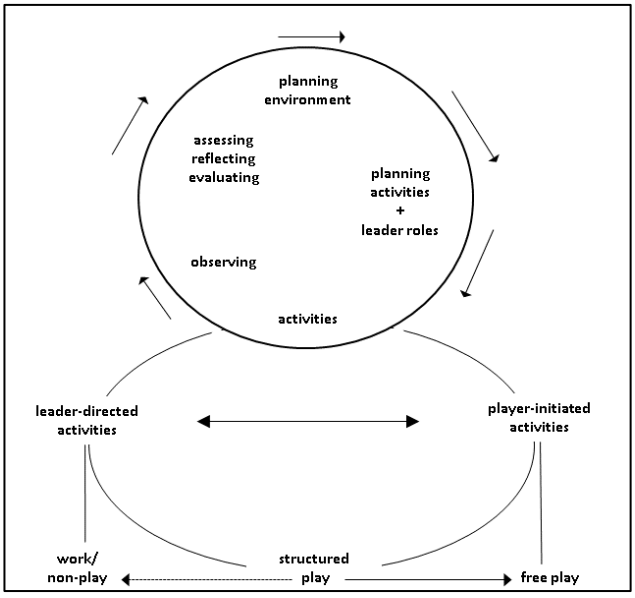

Figure 2: The model of Integrated Pedagogical Approaches (adapted from Wood, 2010).

This model provides a structure and articulation of our playful practice in post-secondary education. Play and playfulness in practice happens on the continuum from structured to free play, along with the spectrum of leader-directed activities to player-initiated activities. In practice, this will depend upon the subject. For example, the continuum in Wood's model between teacher/leader-directed activities (work/non play) and student/player-initiated activities (free play) can be experimented with in the classroom. Additionally, it is possible to set an assignment that allows students to teach content to each other utilizing playful pedagogy indoors (e.g., act out what conflict and conflict resolution looks like without speaking) or outdoors (e.g., create an artwork of found nature objects that can depict risk management). The opportunities are only limited by the teacher and student imaginations, and for those who wish to know more of the 'how to' do this we have suggested some key texts above creating space for playful learning, as depicted in Figure 2 remains solidly in a learning cycle that is easily adhered to and justified in post-secondary education; it is however, the willingness of the teacher/leader to engage and build a classroom culture conducive to playful ways. A recent study by Kangas et al. (2017) found that playful teachers are creative and innovative when adopting technological innovations in their work and that this requires both pedagogical and emotional engagement. In general terms, we suggest that approaches include the playing of games, storytelling, active learning activities, and some unstructured free time to play can also be useful.

Towards a Ludic Ontology

In order to engage with a pedagogy of play in practice, and to recognize and hold the importance and value of play and playfulness, we argue that it is critical to embody a *ludic ontology*. Adopting a playfully way of being in the world obviously allows for increased opportunities for playfulness. We have proposed the pedagogical model of play above, in order to help generate and structure opportunities for playfulness and the development of

creativity, and to do this our personal professional practices, the teaching of students, embrace a *ludic ontology*. Also, it is worth noting that our ludic ontology manifests itself in other aspects of working in a university: faculty meetings, interdisciplinary research projects, and the daily routines and rituals of working in an institution. A ludic ontology helps us navigate through the structures of daily working life in a university where our professional practice as university teachers specializing in outdoor and experiential approaches to education, may not be perceived by some colleagues as mainstream, proper, serious, or normal. As James and Nerantzi (2019) argue that embracing this

> "is essential at a time when universities around the world are struggling with increased numbers and reduced resources. … We are all tasked with coming up with new, bright, motivating, resourceful and efficient solutions to support diverse learners to attain, while juggling bureaucratic and regulatory demands" (p. xiv).

Conclusions

Humans can remain playful through the lifespan if encouraged to do so, thereby creating intricate cultures, ingenious inventions, and exquisite artistic expressions which may indicate that playfulness is not the special distinction of a few, but every human's birth-right (Gordon, 2014). The meaning of being human is that we are more than just our species of *Homo sapiens* and we generate our culture by being playful (Huizinga, 1949). There are multiple reasons why engaging in playtime, playing, and being playful, are useful as an adult or "grown-up" engaged in post-secondary education, and these reasons are well-founded. We are not just middle-aged academics hoping to not grow old! The English psychoanalyst Winnicott (1971) proposed that being creative, and the creativity of everyday life, is the adult form of playing. Winnicott argued that by playing, the person is not afraid to operate in the intermediate area between subjective and objective world where for a moment they have no need to engage in the constantly difficult negotiation with the external world that is our day

to day experience. We have argued that adopting a ludic ontology and a pedagogy of play, can lead to a fun, fulfilling inhabitance of our university teaching and provide opportunities for students to reclaim their creative playful selves. That said, we maybe playful in operation, but we are very serious, mostly, with our educational intent and purpose. To finish, we enjoy teaching in post-secondary education in a manner that is best extolled by Barnett (2007) when he describes the nature of playfulness as, "typically funny, humorous, spontaneous, unpredictable, impulsive, active, energetic, adventurous, sociable, outgoing, cheerful, and happy, and are likely to manifest playful behavior by joking, teasing, clowning, and acting silly" (p. 955).

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[i] It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all the sociological perspectives of Marx, Durkheim, Weber Simmel and Goffman, but these are all found in this work.

[ii] Sixteen playtypes: Symbolic, Rough and Tumble, Socio-Dramatic, Social, Creative, Communication, Exploratory, Fantasy, Imaginative, Locomotor, Mastery, Object, Role, Deep, Dramatic, Recapitulative (Hughes, 2012).