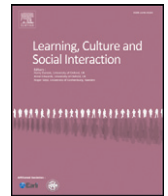




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Full length article

## Broadening rules and aligning actions: Children's negotiation while playing hide-and-seek during break time

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the emergence of the children's rule negotiation, while they play hide-and-seek during school break times, and how it transforms the playing. Break times refer to the free-time interspaces between organized scheduled lessons during the school day and are settings among others in children's everyday life where they are able to play and explore. Usually, in Swedish primary schools, there is a morning break, lunch break, and shorter pauses between lessons. Usually children are allowed to spend the break times in a schoolyard. The article provides a micro-level insights of a group of 10 and 11 years old children's negotiation process regarding rules to be followed while playing hide-and-seek, in Sweden the game is called "the jar". Observational data was produced during 11 break periods and was analysed through the lens of cultural historical activity theory (Leontiev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978). The analysis indicates that the children's negotiation process is a collective embedding of agency. Negotiation concerns children broadening the collective interpretation of rules and making micro-adjustments in their courses of action in order to align them. The negotiation of rules is a collectivudual (Stetsenko, 2013) enterprise of producing and using negotiagency in changing the circumstances in play.

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### 1. Introduction

*It is time for a break. Children from the class enter the schoolyard and run to a certain area nearby a lamppost. They engage in a hide-and-seek game, which in Sweden is called "the jar". One player is the seeker and turns to the lamppost, the home base, closes their eyes and counts to thirty while the other players hide in different places in the schoolyard. They hide behind buildings, trees, stones, and playground equipment. When the counter/seeker reaches thirty, he/she tries to locate all the hiders and to "jar" them. When a hider is located the seeker runs to the lamppost and shouts when touching it: "The jar for (the name of the located one), one-two-three!". The first to be "jared", or found, by the seeker will be the seeker during the next round. If the hider is faster than the seeker to get to the lamppost, when located, the hider touches it and shouts: "The jar for me, one-two-three!". If the hider is the first to get there and to touch the lamppost and shout, that child will not be the one who is the seeker during the next round and does not hide again until the next round begins. Some children do not hide at all from start but stay in the area to watch. Sometimes children seem to help the seeker or the hiders during the play and are sort of helpers without taking any other role in the play. It is obvious that the children participate differently.*

*[(Excerpt from field notes from the first days of fieldwork: 150119; 150120).]*

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This article explores children as agents in the jar-play seen as a cultural activity (van Oers, 2014) in order to contribute to cultural historical research on children's play and learning. Research on play by Hakkarainen (2006), Hännikäinen, Singer and van Oers (2013) and van Oers (2013) mainly concern pre-school and younger children in classroom settings. This article attempts to deepen understanding of play, first by focusing older children and second by focusing on play during break times during the school day. These break times are settings with particular regulations, which differ from classroom settings, but still are part of a school activity. The article draws upon the concept of the collectival (Stetsenko, 2005, 2013) which implies that “every individual human being is conceived as profoundly and deeply social” (Stetsenko, 2013, p. 16). Thus, the collective embedding of agency is fundamental in the cultural historical framework. The dialectic relations between child and culture imply that play activity concerns both individual's development and learning to participate in a certain culture, and the forming and transforming of culture as a historical, collective issue (Hays, 1994; Stetsenko, 2013). Furthermore, the article draws upon cultural historical reasoning on research on agency (Edwards, 2005; Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004) concerning the relational aspects of agency. Relational agency refers to “a capacity to align one's thought and actions with those of others in order to interpret problems of practice and to respond to those interpretations” (Edwards, 2005, pp. 169–170). It highlights how actions of individuals relate to the intentions of others. Relational agency affects the object of activity by expanding it (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004) and is “found in a capacity for engaging in the micro-negotiations which elicit understandings, reveal one's own interpretations and allow for alignments to accomplish the transformation of the object that is being worked on” (Edwards, 2005, p. 171). Here, relational agency is expressed in one's ability to engage in negotiation.

Children's play is largely examined from an individual psychological perspective (see, for example, Frost, Wortham, & Stuart, 2001) which emphasizes the meaning of play in the cognitive development of the child, and from a sociological perspective (see, for example, Corsaro, 2014) which emphasizes the meaning of play in socialization. In the cultural historical field, research on play by van Oers (2014) suggests that play is a cultural historical activity within a certain activity format. He elaborates on the understanding of the relationship between play and learning by focusing on how children role-play. Within the cultural historical framework suggested by van Oers (2014), we can consider the use of rules and the negotiation of rules in games and play, and how they are regulated by culture and history. Further we can explore how the rules are defined in games such as the jar, from the perspective of collectively (Stetsenko, 2005, 2013) motivated activity. If we considered negotiation as expressing the collective embedding of activity we should explore what functions the rules play, the issues children raise during negotiation, and if established rules are followed. This research aimed to better understand the notions of agency and negotiation within the cultural historical research on the collectival.

This article explores the emergence of the rule negotiation among children, ways the rules are negotiated, and the ways play transformed, from the perspective introduced. This exploration serves to address gaps in the research as suggested by van Oers (2013): “further studies are needed on how decisions and evaluations of rules, allowed degrees of freedom, and involvement are negotiated, both by adults and children” (p. 196), and by Edwards (2005): “we still know too little about the micro level negotiations that form the evolving shape of the collective” (p. 180). The three research questions explored were:

- How are the rules negotiated in the jar-play?
- How is the jar-play transformed through negotiation of rules?
- How does the children's agency for negotiation of rules emerge?

Using the concept of the dynamic of demands and motives as an analytical tool, the article seeks to contribute to research on transitions (Hedegaard, 2014; Hedegaard & Fleer, 2013; Zittoun, 2009). Using the notion of micro-adjustments, it seeks to contribute to research on transformations *within* an activity setting (Fleer, 2014). Using the concept of transformative agency, the article intends to contribute to research (Barma, Lacasse, & Massé-Morneau, 2015; Engeström, Kajamaa, & Nummijoki, 2015; Haapasaari & Kerosuo, 2015; Sannino, 2015; Sannino & Laitinen, 2015; van Oers, 2015) based on the Vygotskian model of double stimulation (Vygotsky, 1997b). In following section, the conceptual tools are presented further. The methodology in producing data and in analysing is presented in Section 3. In Section 4, the findings are reported and discussed. Finally, Section 5 provides a summary of the findings and concluding remarks.

## 2. Tools in unpacking the collective embedding of negotiation

Based on the research questions three key analytical tools are used: the concept of the *dynamic of demands and motives* is used to explore children's negotiation as actions in a play activity, the notion of *micro-adjustment* is used to explore children's motive reorientation, and the principle of *double stimulation* is used to explore the emergence of transformative agency. The tools meet the ambition to “unpack” the collective embedding of negotiation and bring about an analysis from the perspective of children and their play as a dynamic collectival endeavour of micro-adjustments and emerging agency.

### 2.1. The concept of the dynamic of demands and motives in exploring children's play activity

Negotiation is culturally, historically and socially embedded in activity, which makes it a collectival (Stetsenko, 2005) phenomenon. Activity is concretely realized by goal-directed, mediated (Vygotsky, 1978) actions in an activity setting (Hedegaard, 2014). Goal-directed jar-play actions take shape in a break time activity setting, which is part of the broader school activity or practice. The collective object-related activity relates to the social, historical and cultural values and is oriented towards a certain motive (Leontiev, 1978). The children playing the jar together are not necessarily driven by the same motives as their needs and corresponding motives may differ. Thus, from the angle of the motive, the jar-play may be a tool for children realizing

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