

Is play training for progress?

– What does play of elderly people tell about children's play?



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2014



Contents

- 1. What is play? Stereotype and critique
- 2. Elderly in play
- 3. Play in elderly life
- 4. Play and question



1. What is play? – The mainstream stereotype

- Play is central for children's life
- Play is children's activity to develop competences for their **future life**
- Play is **learning, development and progression**
- Compare young dogs playing biting in order to learn for life



Critical questions (Brian Sutton-Smith)

- The biological-naturalistic understanding expresses the **"rhetoric of progress"**
- It subordinates play to a certain educational and qualifying "function", pointing "forward" in human life
- The configuration of progression developed with the rise of **industrial culture**
- and its pattern of growth, development of achievement, and forward mobility
- It has dominated Western thinking since about 200 years



Why and how do elderly play?

An underexplored field

- **"We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing"** (George Bernard Shaw)
- Do we really stop?
- Elderly do not just turn back to become play children, but they play in other ways – but how?
- And **do elderly people by play really want to learn "for later life"?**

2. Elderly in play

– a rich, unexplored world

- **Playing alone:** crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, sudoku, solitaire
- Play with grandchildren, play with pets
- **Social games:** rummy, canasta, bridge, doppelkopf, domino, bingo
- **Bodily play:** boules and bocce in Southern Europe, petanque, traditional games in Flanders, Nordic walking, dancing...

Boule in Mediterranean cultures and France



Petanque, or Provencal boules



Boules nantais, Bretagne





Traditional games

- **Boule nantaise** in Nantes, workers' town in Bretagne – a coffee bar game of elderly people (Guibert 1994)
- Threatened by lack of support by authorities who support youth sport, not elderly sport – **ageism?**
- **Flemish traditional games**, in urban pubs: elderly lower-class males (Renson et. al. IRSS 1997)

Boccia in Belfast Northern Ireland



Petanque in Wiedergården Denmark 2010





3. Play in the life circle

- **Children "play"**
(the one-sided age bias of play research!)
- **Young people** flirt and party – play facebook, computergames, parkour
- **Adults "have no time"** – but hazard (casino) games, play with kids, hobby, entertainment
- **Elderly play** – what and how?



Culture and emotions in the play of elderly

What contributes to life quality of elderly?

- **Sociality** against loneliness
- **Laughter**, humour, smile, fun
- No dark play?
- **Curiosity**

(Lone Kühlmann/Henning Kirk 2012)



Play for health? – Questions to the “rational” fitness machine

- **Lonely** fitness work instead of social togetherness?
- **Serious** work instead of play and laughter?
- **Routine** and boring repetition instead of curiosity?

Compare: Why and how do elderly use green nature?

- Statistical data: Jette Hansen-Møller 2011
- Motivations: Not so much motion
- Rather experience of nature, following the seasons



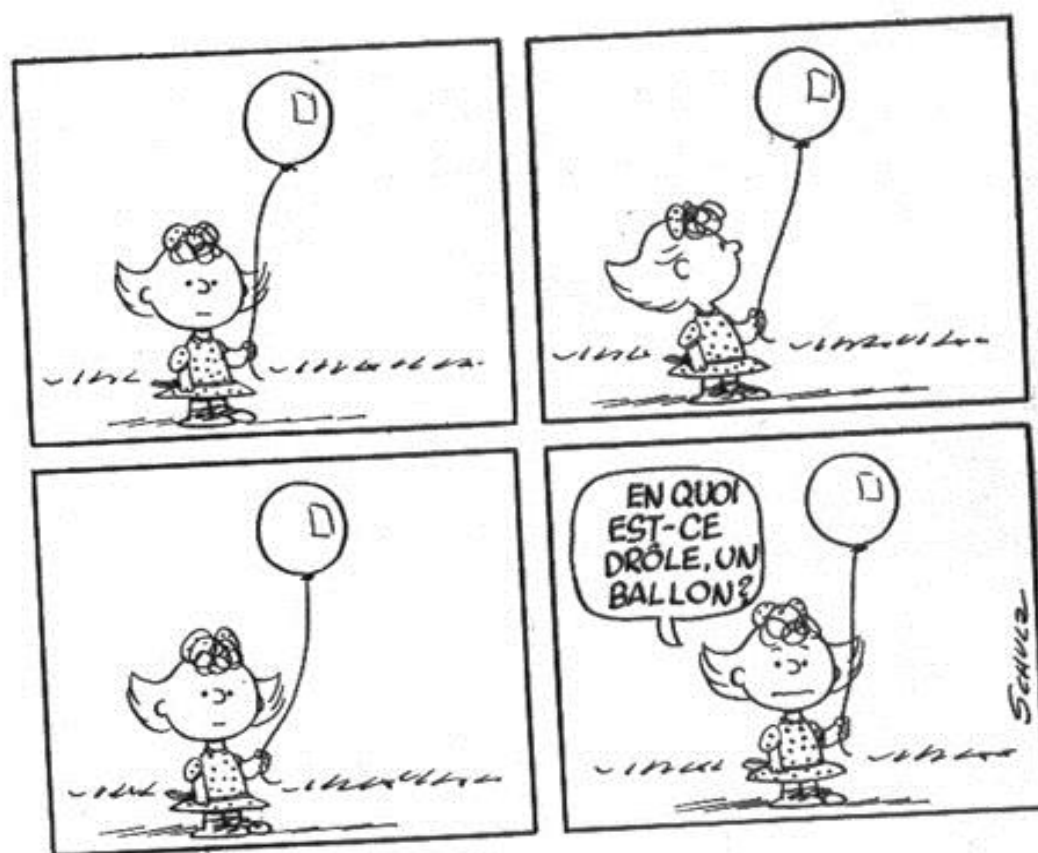


Green nature in the life circle

- Children: reject walking and promenading – **play at the wayside**
- Young people: prefer **action** – adventure race, camp fire, singing...
- Adults: follow the **path**
- Elderly: calm and meditative movement, **experiencing** nature

4. Play and question: What is funny with a balloon?

Sally Brown in Charles M. Schulz: Peanuts





Funny with play is not the balloon, but playful seeking

- The fun of play is **neither in the thing nor in the individual**
- It is in playful curiosity as **relation: striving towards the other** – seeking, expectancy
- This striving does not mean progress of **perfection** – as in Olympic sport
- The laughter of play points towards the **imperfection** of the world



Is play a way of putting question to the world?

- "All truth is curved" (Nietzsche) – and play is curved
- "Ich lach mich krumm" (Laughing my arse off)





Play as progress?

Questioning the straight line



play learning production