

ESTABLISHING THE LIFE PLAYGROUND A DEVELOPMENT ARENA WHERE FUN IS TAKEN SERIOUSLY

[Foto tekst: The older kids are concentrated on competing in the outside area at Club Valhalla in Viborg.]

“A plain and joyful, active life on earth
As such, I would not with kings' exchange”
Excerpt from the poem Open Letter for my Children, Grundtvig, 1839

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[Foto tekst: Two kids are laughing and playing foosball.]

FOREWORD

Oversættelse af 'Etablering af Livslegepladsen' – Dansk til Engelsk

The book you are holding has come to existence via a study- and development project. A small group of youth club pedagogues and their managers experienced a need for a richer and more nuanced understanding of their educational work. Through the years they had in the recreational youth club established what they, with their own words, described as a "life playground", and they observed that kids and youngsters learned a lot about life, and not least courage to embrace life, through the life playground.

But what was it actually able to do, and how could they actively maintain and develop it? In other words: How could the life playground become a work tool?

Let us begin by establishing the term: In short, the life playground is a pedagogically organised leisure and experimental creation of community between kids/youngsters and pedagogues. To describe how you understand and establish pedagogical recreational offers, like the life playground, is the exact aim of this book.

The question was first formulated in the recreation- and youth club Valhalla of Viborg youth school, but the answers reach beyond this specific context. We will attempt to broaden the subject and bring specific tools for use and inspiration for other recreational organisations.

The question of the life playground is sought to be illuminated via a study- and development project supported by the union of pedagogues BUPL and their development fund and in cooperation with www.upol.dk.

You can read more about BUPL's development fund on BUPL's webpage under Research and Development. The full rapport, which this publication is built upon, can be found on upol.dk.

THEORY AND METHODS

Through a dataset collected between April 2020 and February 2021, the question of the life playground has been sought to be illuminated. The material is collected by the following methods:

- Action Learning Course
- Kids as co-examiners through the research wall
- Kid interviews
- Logbook
- Interviews with the pedagogues

ACTION LEARNING COURSE

As humans we want to do something when we learn something. We want to do something actively about what we learn, and then we live with the consequences or do something with these consequences.

It is this dynamic process between experience and learning, acting and thinking that creates learning and development.

The pedagogues at Club Valhalla experiences their work in recreation- and youth pedagogy as an important contribution to the development in kids and youngsters, but there was a need for a stronger description and common understanding of what they did. They established the term *life playground* as a description of the environment they had created in the youth club, and to figure out if the life playground could be developed further, they created a starting point in three questions:

1. The accessibility of pedagogues and playthings

Can we create an increased opportunity for the kids' own initiatives to start spontaneous games?

We want to increase the presence and the feeling of community with help from increased activity, visualisation of the opportunities of the house in the form of visible activity tools and pedagogues.

2. Will the kids want to be involved in the evaluation of the youth club?

We want to be curious of the kids' perspective.

3. What will it mean for the club if the game room is closed, and the screens are moves out of the club?

By doing this, can we create more presence and increase the feeling of community and creativity in the day-to-day? Create a culture in the house where virtues like community, presence, empathy, creativity, fun, spontaneity, and relational understanding of interplay are increased?

ACCUMULATION OF REFLECTIONS OF ACTIONS (MODEL USED IN THE ACTION LEARNING COURSE)

Actions	Why?	How?	What happened?	What are you thinking?	Next step
Accessibility					
Do kids want to be involved in					

the evaluation of the club?					
No screen					

KIDS AS CO-EXAMINERS

Kids and the youngsters are not just objects for research but an acting participant around the question: What makes a life playground (their recreational youth club) fun? The pedagogues created a research wall, the kids were involved in the project's intentions, and they were encouraged to draw something, to write a rhyme/poem, or to take a photo for the wall. The ambition was to co-create with the kids about the development of the life playground through their perspective. But there was something that they had to be especially aware of. Conversations with the kids are powerful conversations where the adults are in charge. This superiority of power can unintentionally influence the opinions and perspectives of the kids. Therefore, is it uncertain if it is the kids' perspective that emerges, or if it is the applied perspective of the adults that the kids and the youngsters assume.

To get around this problem, conversations has been had with kids about their contribution to get as close as possible to their actual perspective.

The research wall is complemented by child interviews from nine kids in total. All the interviews have a starting point in two questions:

1. **When does fun appear in your everyday life?**
With the intention of gaining insight along with the kids, we constructed a daily routine on a poster and let that be the guide for the conversation about when the kids experienced fun in their life.
2. **What is cool/fun in the club?**

THE LOGBOOK

Through the entire period the pedagogues have been writing a digital logbook. They have observed the day with a focus on, what they found of fun in the mutual interplay of the kids and in the interaction with the pedagogues.

The starting point of the logbook was:

1. **What fun did you discover today?**
 - Describe the situation/incident/event.
 - Who, where, what and how?
 - If able, take a photo and insert in the logbook.
2. **What role did you play in regard to making fun happen?**
3. **When reflecting on your discovery – your own and the kids' role in the fun event/discovery – which new initiatives/actions do you think you could try in the nearest future?**

The above-mentioned methods are complemented by focus-group interviews with the pedagogues.

WHY IS THE LIFE PLAYGROUND IMPORTANT?

A life playground can be a highly important arena for kids' and youngsters' learning, development, and education. Play can be community-creating and democratically educational. Kids and youngsters practice in creating a community through play, they train courage and develops intimacy and friendships, but the purpose of kids play is the play itself – and preferably more of it.

There is nothing pointing to the fact that the "fabric" important for kids and youngsters to grab hold of their life and life-conditions cannot be introduced to them in a way that is lively and fun. This fabric does not need to belong to a specific subject, for them to establish connections to that life and those historical facts and experiences, concerning i.e. the planet Earth, democracy or the anatomy or capacities of humans.

"We are at Kærvænget [street red.] with a class, and we brought a fishing net. Some kids are catching, with Anders and Monica (the pedagogues), a bottle in the water. They see something in the bottle, and it turns out to be an eel that they tip into a bucket. The whole class is excited about it and smiles and laughs. "A" tries to pick it up with their hands to the great amusement of the squealing girls".
(Excerpt from the pedagogue's logbook)

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When the educational opening against the world happens through recreation and play, it has to be fun for the kids and youngsters in order for them to take part in it in their free time, but it is not just for the sake of fun. It is deeply serious – seriously fun leisure time. It is the life playground.

THREE GOOD REASONS

Why should there be such a big focus on fun at the life playgrounds? We pinpoint the three most essential reasons.

Firstly: Recreational youth clubs and other recreational organizations have historically been known by how kids and youngsters “vote with their feet”. They participate in an after-school activity if there is something to latch on to, and if there is not, they will leave. We know that this is mainly about fun. That fun is the most important parameter for kids and youngsters.

We know that older kids and youngsters choose after-school activities primarily because they think they are fun, and the parents also chooses fun when they mark down what is most important for them in their kids' choice of after-school activities. To have fun is therefore the most important independent mark of quality regarding the choice of after-school activities of older kids and youngsters.

[Foto tekst: Picture of the kids' research wall]

[Foto tekst: Drawing from the kids' research wall]

The drawing from the kids' research wall is a happy face with the text: “The club is the best place to be”. Subsequently the drawer has been asked to elaborate. That lead to the text beneath the drawing.

Picture from the logbook. A child has placed their head by the blower giving air to the Airtrack.

“Absence of fun is a bleak life scenario. A dissatisfactory life.”

[Foto tekst: Four boys from the club have their arms around each other's shoulders and smiles into the camera.

Secondly: Fun can loosen up responsibility and create joy and pleasure, or what we, in other words, call well-being. Fun can contribute to physical, mental, and social well-being. Fun in the past builds an expectation of fun in the present and the future.

Fun is promoting well-being - to feel good in the present, but it is, at the same time, an insurance about fun in the future.

Fun can thus create well-being in the past, present, and future. It is primarily a social phenomenon and rarely something, they experience alone but instead alongside with others. Fun is then connected to community.

This was two good reasons to engage in fun and establish life playgrounds in recreational organizations. If fun still sounds too frivolous and silly, then you, as a reader, as this third reason, ask yourself this question:

How would life be if there was no fun?

The answer to this question leads directly towards why fun, in the life of kids and youngsters, should be a conscious strategy both pedagogically and politically. Absence of fun is a bleak life scenario. A dissatisfactory life.

THE STONE MASONRY

If you look up the word fun in the dictionary, you can read that it means ‘random work.’ Pedagogy is not built up around randomness, but it does contain an element of randomness in that you cannot completely predict the result. You can be intentional and set a course but not determine the result beforehand – or as a pedagogue expressed it (fully aware that kids are not made of stone):

“It is kind off like a stone masonry. Some kids arrive with a lot of edges, and we help them polish the edges so they run a little smoother (...) Then you can become someone because you obtain some values and becomes an overall good person capable of functioning.”

Being a part of educating (forming) people through a ‘stone-masonry’ is a strong image of the function of the life playground as an arena for education and pedagogy. Like a creative and almost artistic process that contributes to the

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education of people with healthy values, ethics, and morals. A pedagogy that creates individuals able to function in the communal society alongside others.

There can be no doubt that this is a rather serious undertaking we are talking about – and not just for fun; or more accurately; precisely for fun. It is fun when it is taken seriously.

FUN AND WELL-BEING IS CONNECTED

In the present society, there is a tendency that fun in life is something to feel embarrassed about. As some random, frivolous, and irrational mess. But when people are asked about their relation to fun, they point to the fact that it has something to do with joy and happiness. This paints the picture that fun is really about human well-being. And precisely the general lack of well-being among people – kids and youngsters in particular – have in the last few years invoked political and pedagogical attention.

That fun is worth pursuing is shown for example when turning to Grundtvig who had this wish for his kids: A plain and joyful, active life on earth as such, I would not with kings' exchange. The joyful and active life has to do with the enthusiastic, the high spirited, and the exciting – or the courage to embrace life.

Fun has been seen as something mundane and frivolous, primarily because it doesn't serve an instrumentally rational purpose which can be measured. But if you dive a little more into the term there is a lot to gather, including well-being, learning, education, and development.

“Those who only take jest as jest, and seriousness as seriousness, he and she has actually understood both poorly.”

Piet Hein

THE DEFINITION OF FUN

Fun is the focal point and starting point for the life playground. To establish a life playground it is therefore a prerequisite to have defined the term fun. The English sociologist Ben Fincham have done the work for us in his mapping of fun as a phenomenon. Fincham define it like this:

- Fun can be localized more precisely to certain point in time – it starts and ends 'very precisely'
- Reaches beyond the usual and breaks with the normal/routines and can with that create a transgression compared to what we normally do.
- Is often connected to activities involving and accepting assumptions and rules which frames the activity.
- Attention to fun creates a temporary easing in responsibility, but fun is not necessarily irresponsible.
- What has been fun in the past can create expectations about what will create similar fun situations in the future.
- Fun is usually a discipline in creating a community and rarely something that is experienced alone.
- Fun is connected to identity, and what the individual finds funny is varying, but it does say something about the individual.

When we have asked kids and youngsters about where fun have the best conditions, they unequivocally answered that fun thrives better at leisure time. It can occur during school hours, when school is connected to fun, but based on the statement from the kids and youngsters, fun works best after school. Leisure time can thus be of great value as that part of time in a human life that contribute to well-being and courage to embrace life.

But there is a struggle for time – also for leisure time. At the same way as fun, leisure time has also been seen as something frivolous, whereas work and duty have been seen as the serious counter piece. Maybe we need a richer understanding of leisure time to protect it.

ABOUT TIME AND THE FIGHT FOR IT

The historian Søren Mørch writes somewhere that the human got popular when we, with the invention of the clock, started to measure time. Before the clock, we humans lived in accordance with the course of nature. The farmer could look up at the sun, and if his stomach growled at the same time that the sun was on its highest at the sky, it was noon and it was time to eat.

Today, we use the clock when determining the time and adjust our own place in time and space. With the measuring of time, it also became a commodity to be negotiated. Benjamin Franklin, American scientist and politician, stated that, “Time is money”. Since the measuring of time, through the clock, the employee and employers fought for, and negotiated about, time for work, time for leisure time, and how much an hour should cost in the job market.

In this fight, the leisure time as “fun” has been seen as something frivolous.

We have a stereotypical and simplified view of work as the only good and the leisure time as this relaxing frivolous counter piece. With reforms and laws around kids and youngsters since the 00s, this view has been confirmed. Leisure time is

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expensive and something we can't afford, while school and education is seen in the context of Denmark's competitiveness on a global job market.

Therefore, you can with good reason ask if leisure time can even have any value in itself, if it is not linked to paid work and qualification through school and education.

There can however not be any doubt about the value of leisure time if we ask kids and youngsters, who informs that, for them, leisure time has both a relaxing and serious dimension and value.

LEISURE TIME HAS ITS OWN VALUE

With leisure time being so important for kids, at the same time as the legislation hijacks the leisure time in favor of more learning, we need a richer description and understanding of leisure time as something not connected to school and work. Leisure time has its own value, as a time for creating community, developing courage to embrace life, and encouraging well-being.

At the life playground, leisure time can be defined as follows:

- **Leisure time is, by own understanding, a fun, self-imposed, desirable, and satisfying activity, or operation that you as a human work and take part of in life.**
- **Leisure time is the time away from uncomfortable obligations, and where the comfortable and fun obligation among the participants is understood as the most important.**

Leisure time can furthermore be split up into a relaxing leisure time and a serious leisure time.

RELAXING LEISURE TIME

The relaxing leisure time is recognized by the absence of a demand for any special effort from its participants. The relaxing leisure time can bring about psychological pain, depression, and drowsiness if there is an abundance of it in life – think only of the leisure time and absent structure following the corona-lockdown.

We notice that the relaxing leisure time has a frivolous and not particularly constructive side living within, but this frivolous side has certain advantages – for instance, a space/break from performing, creativity, infotainment, maintenance of social life through conversation, a high level of intimacy, well-being, quality of life, and appreciation of beauty.

It is in the relaxing leisure time break that we find a space where we can lean towards each other in conversation and work out what we, alone and together, are going to engage with in life. Hereafter, the relaxing leisure time is suspended, and it merges into the serious leisure time.

SERIOUS LEISURE TIME

What is experienced as serious leisure time, revolves around one or more activities or mutual connected actions that needs to be followed to achieve a result which is desirable for the participants. But it is not connected to 'livelihood'.

The serious leisure time do contain several advantages as well:

Personal: Serious leisure time develops valuable identities, the feeling that your potential is applied, expresses knowledge and valuable experiences, carries a lot of good memories along.

Social: Serious leisure time creates a togetherness, gives opportunities to gain new friends, memberships, creates connection and relations in a social world, contributed to the one feeling necessary to the community by producing and contributing with their own valuable input.

But the serious leisure time also contains disadvantages:

Serious leisure time is not pure amusement. For example, serious leisure time is connected to stage fright, having to perform and being on, intense concentration, preparing and persevering for a long time. It is also connected to the disappointment of not being able to excel, not doing as well as expected, but you live with the costs, which often are small.

Leisure time, both the relaxing and the serious, gives opportunities to work up good memories and experience that you can draw on in life.

[foto tekst: boy relaxes with his phone on the club sofa.]

[foto tekst: Three girls pet the club's bunnies]

THE ELEMENTS OF THE LIFE PLAYGROUND

THE TERMS OF THE LIFE PLAYGROUND AS A DYNAMIC DIMENSION

The life playground is not something that simple are in the world as a firmly defined thing. The life playground is, on the other hand, created in a lasting dynamic interaction between kids, pedagogues, activities, play, remedies, local communities, feelings, values, communication, and experimentation. All of it are actors who defines what we understand as a life playground.

You must be aware of not getting stuck in a permanent structure or a certain way of doing things. There will always be a structure but relate to it in an open and playful way. The life playground needs to be created, stabilized, and recreated constantly, depending both on the interest, problems, and challenges of the group of kids and youngsters, re-thinking and a playful access to the world that again creates interests, and new ways of being in the world.

THE ROLE OF THE ADULT – THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE PEDAGOGUES

Accessibility is very important at the life playground both accessible adults and accessible playthings. Accessibility is about the kids' options to get a hold of the play-equipment and the pedagogues as companions in play. The pedagogues at the life playground must make an extra effort to create accessibility to play- and activity things, reach out to the kids who are not participating, encourage participation in joint activities, and at the same time support courage and willingness to take risks through persuading kids and youngsters to try.

This is done also through a planned spontaneity where the pedagogues are both planning through week-plans with determined activities and at the same time keeping options open for spontaneous plays, ideas, and actions to arise, which can be seized with the kids. When done this way, you create more play, more roleplays, and plays across genders, and the daily attendance will rise.

The kids demand adults as playmates, as facilitators, community-creators, mediators, and sparring partner.

"It is cool when the adults want to play with us." (Quote, kid interview)

For kids and youngsters, it is important that the life playground is a place that revolves around fun play, activities, and friends, but in one area they note a clear difference from other youth clubs and organizations, as they recall from their own experiences with leisure time, which is that the adults are leading and participating in the play and activities as a kind of co-playing expert.

"The adults are important when it comes to the activities going well, and it's nice that they want to play with us". (Quote, kid interview)

THE ACTIVITIES – THE KIDS' INPUT

At the life playground, the kids and youngsters are continuously involved in the evaluation and it is something that they want if they are asked. That is why kids and youngsters will be involved at regular intervals in the evaluation of life playgrounds. The logbooks can be made accessible to the kids and youngsters' input. The research wall can do something that you with regular intervals can put some energy into, to keep searching for updates on the kids' perspective on the life playground. There can be many themes that can be discovered together in this manner.

[øverst på siden] There was a good idea! Pedagogue and kids are building a homemade BMX-trajectory at the life playground in Club Valhalla.

WHEN THE ACTIVITIES ARE TAKEN SERIOUSLY, SOMETHING EMERGES...

There should be space to relax on the life playground and to withdraw if needed. But there should be more than that. 'Too much relaxation' at leisure time is not good, and activities are different that relaxation. It becomes a tool that the pedagogues use to create confidence and courage to embrace life. The pedagogues use themselves as masters who can show what lies beneath the activity and what is needed to master the activity, and this mastering will spread. The kids will start to show each other what is needed – they teach and will eventually become play- or activity champions.

"It is through our communication and activities that we try to push them. Not into any panic-zones, but into the nearest development-zone: You can just sense that this guy here needs a little push to actually try something. And then you see the excitement when he succeeds, and then he will begin to venture out himself if he just learnt something on a trampoline or a BMX". (Quote, pedagogue interview).

[foto tekst: An excited and concentrated girl with a bike helmet stands with her mountain bike at the top of a home-made ramp made out of pallets.]

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The activities are fun, but it is serious fun, also from the kids' perspective.

"We see some kids who doesn't have the courage at all to go the first round (tracks for mountain bikes in the forest), and all of a sudden they just come flying and asks, 'can I go another round', and their hands are in the air the whole bus ride home, because it is the greatest feeling to have dared to do something they didn't think possible for them. To dare to do something gives experience. That is what contributes to us becoming more complete people who can function socially on the job, in a relationship, function in great leisure time – because we dare learn from mistakes. That is what I want to give them."

(Quote, pedagogue interview)

TURN IT UPSIDE DOWN AND DO IT DIFFERENTLY

"We look around at the things that surrounds us at the club, and we say, 'this thing we will use in this way, now we will use the bicycle tires to make advent wreaths or clothing'. I think we have a thousand examples of that – handicap scooters that we race with and much more."

(Quote, pedagogue interview).

The pedagogy behind the life playground uses and creates fun actively and knowingly. The pedagogues have an experimental (and reflecting) approach, and the exact experiment where the crooked and the slightly "on the edge" finds a room is the engine for this type of pedagogy.

These experiments are both planned and spontaneous, but it is important that you, as a pedagogue, dares to involve yourself, that you possess courage or willingness to risk also regarding introducing the new where the world opens itself up to kids and youngsters and can be seen in new ways. It is in the crooked and different experiment that the fun is living and growing.

On the life playground you, as a pedagogue, take pride in making something other than the usual. In an educational perspective, it is about opening the world for the kids in different ways than they are used to. Opening a, for now, undiscovered world where much can happen, and most is possible. You will step into the new together, test it out, and return home to the usual to reflect about the experience.

On a life playground the pedagogues seek to impose identities on themselves and the kids of adults and kids who are brave, open, curious, and testing. It is fundamental that you problematize and questions the world and the things in it as they were meant too from the beginning. The world's norms are examined with the kids, and you experiment with other presentations of the original intention and usage of things; the bicycle tire which becomes an advent wreath, Christmas tree and gifts who no longer stands on the floor but is hung from the ceiling, electric scooters meant for elders are magically transformed into tuned race machines who can be used for racing others in the club.

Club as a life playground is, in the kids' perspective, not all fun, understood as something spontaneous and random. The kids take it seriously. It is here that they learn to see the world in new ways. It is here where they get to know themselves. And an experimenting approach to life creates courage.

"How about we try putting lighter gas in a water basin with soap, and set fire to those bubbles?" We try that, and they (the kids, red.) come up and says, 'how about we burn the table tennis balls in tin foil and make smoke bombs?' – We have created an experimenting environment." (Quote, pedagogue interview)

From the above quote, we can see pedagogues and kids who negotiates about the company they form together and about what should happen. This negotiation, where the pedagogues are invited into the kids' world and where the kids become experts and set the course, is seen as a big privilege by the pedagogues.

LET IT GO OFF THE RAILS

Over-responsibility and to always be careful in a world full of rules is killing fun at the life playground. Having freedom to do your own things means that there is not always someone who puts a stop to what is happening. It is a spoken value on the life playground that life starts where the comfort zone ends. The pedagogue's job on the life playground becomes to balance irresponsibility in a responsible way. Which means that whatever happens gets a long leash before it is stopped. In other words, it is allowed to go a bit off the rails.

"To have a water balloon fight who ends up 2 meters inside is alright. Or that some socks get holes because you forget to put your shoes on. That is not allowed at home, and maybe it doesn't work at home. And we do have a lot of parents who says: 'everything and nothing happens at this place. There is room to be free'". (Quote, pedagogue interview.)

As a pedagogue on the life playground, you must be able to accept that the fun is risky sometimes and that you must control your own fears and over-responsibility so as to not accidentally stop the good and the fun.

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"Once in a while there are elements of irresponsibility where I am thinking; 'I hope this goes well.' But when it goes well the payoff is 10 times better than when you have worked with belt and braces. I believe that in life you have to go out where you can hurt yourself. That is the things you remember. That is where it can really go wrong."

"You are allowed to get some bruises. Those are life's medals. Then you can see that you have learnt something, that you have experienced something."

The courage to do this is not the same as irresponsibility. The life playground obviously accepts the norms and rules for safety, no matter if you are on the playground or in the local area in the forest or by the lake.

For the pedagogues is it simply important that the kids are not overprotected, and that they problematize this over-protection, the institutionalized child life that it can lead to, in their perspective, and at the same time stabilizes a good so-called responsible irresponsibility. They do not place guilt at the parents or the kid but tries to design a life playground, which animates a daring responsibility.

"Kids are not taught to take care of themselves if everything is wrapped for them. Then they don't have to think for themselves. We can do some things where you might hurt yourself a bit – where you have to think for yourself, and I think that is an important lesson. You are allowed to get some bruises. Those are life's medals. Then you can see that you have learnt something, that you have experienced something." (Quote, pedagogue interview)

THE ENVIRONMENT – DARING TO DO – DARING TO FAIL

At the life playground there are many activities that are constantly tried to be as accessible for the kids as possible. It is through the activities that the serious pedagogical work appears.

"It is about participating in the life happening around you instead of closing to many doors by worrying about what others are thinking. I want them to experience something, that they learn something, that they think it's awesome coming here every day. They ask sometimes about the quote at the door, 'Life starts where the comfort zone ends', what does that mean exactly? Then we talk about them about daring, perhaps daring to fail in the pursuit of knowledge and learning new things." (Quote, pedagogue interview)

It's about teaching kids through the experience of saying yes, that courage to embrace life comes through trying it out together, learning from it, and lifting each other up.

"When we go into the woods and are driving over jumps, we try to show them how. I think it means something to teach each other to master some things, for example some tricks with a ball or on a bike. And also, the kids can do other stuff. It's awesome to learn something new from them like for example a match-trick ... that curiosity of what we each can contribute with is very important to let bloom, instead of a fixed idea of what you should be able to do." (Quote, pedagogue interview)

To dare show yourself for who you are and what you can do is important for the pedagogues at the life playground – and that is an exact culture filled with performances that should seem conducive for creating a community.

PERFORMANCE AND COMPETITION – IN THE RIGHT WAY

The pedagogues have nothing against competition and to perform, life is a performance in itself, but performance must not be used to keep others down:

"Sometimes I give them a lesson in 'if you can do something, then you're a show-off'. No, I say if you are interested in seeing what someone would do instead of holding other people down and be envious, then perhaps you as well could do something or learn something. Be curious instead of envious. In the club you must be able to approach and show with pride what you can do – and then maybe someone else will be thinking that that is something they too would like to learn." (Quote, pedagogue interview)

Therefore, the pedagogues make competitions that breaks with the usual games like soccer or basketball. This makes it possible for everyone to be equal in different competitions for example in electric scooter-race or in the below mentioned example where a new competition or other event is invented to reset any advantages.

"It can be unproblematic to throw a ball at a 'marshmallow treat'-machine making it release a tennis ball with a key inside that you then have to run down and use to take some locks with a riddle, for then to run up and drink a glass of water and then have it timed. It might be a competition where you think, I was better, yes, perhaps I got a better time, but maybe it was just fun to be a part of because it was a fun competition." (Quote, pedagogue interview)

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Games and fun are often connected, but the pedagogues problematize to win and thus creating winners and losers in a given context. Therefore, they limit activities that are only about winning. They try to break the norms of the games by making up other competitions.

Thus, not said that you should not perform. You must! The life playground is not a performance-free space. It is a necessity that everyone contributed with their individual performances. When everybody contributes, everybody wins.

[foto tekst: A pedagogue cheers while a kid concentrates on a play of ping-pong.]

THE PARTY CAN HAPPEN ANYWHERE

In the recreational club, the camping trip is a very attractive and important activity that is used twice a year. On these trips you are often many gathered and there are many chores or duties that are necessary if the camp has to work. Here it is expected that kids and youngsters perform.

This work, that among other things include cooking, cleaning, and washing, is also turned into an experimental form where a serious fun practice is created.

"There are many laughs when we have to cook, and there should be, because there is much food to cook. Many want to come and look and participate, but we make it into something special for those kids who joins, and we say to those who comes in from outside that, "this is a closed party. Yes, this is not for you." (Quote, pedagogue interview)

The pedagogues consciously transform the boring chore into the sweet chore. They establish the duty/work as something fun, and it becomes fun by experimenting with all the ways and repertoire that normally is done in cleaning after cooking for 45 people. They listen to music, establish it as a 'closed party', and as an example you can see pictures from the camp of kids and adults as living conveyor belts transporting porcelain and tableware amongst them to and from the sink and dishwasher.

EXPERIMENT "NO SCREENS"

In many places screens of many forms takes up a lot of space, and they can be great in some situations, but they can also steal presence and pedagogical opportunities.

At the life playground is it important to think about where, when, and how much time the digital media should occupy, and how much attention it steals from the common purpose of presence and community.

The pedagogues in the life playground-project were aware that they could not take the life playground for granted as a natural world, but that it constantly needed to be stabilized. What was in focus? Which elements contributed to that goal that they had for their pedagogical practice. The pedagogical practice on the life playground is creating community and democratic education – to teach the kids to grow and be able to function in a democracy by daring to be themselves, be themselves, oblige the community, and show solidarity with the ones who are suffering.

Until now, they had added focus on availability, presence, and co-playing pedagogues. What would happen if these actions at the same time were connected to less digitalizing and screentime?

"We see constellations of new playgroups and new plays."

By turning off the screens it gave room for other functions and pedagogical identities. The kids' attendance is now even bigger than before and that also counts for the children who earlier used the screens as much as they could. The analogue play has become fun, there is more playing, both more plays started by the kids finding each other in new constellations and plays started by adults.

"We see constellations of new play groups and new games (...) Even old activities like dripping candles, playing musical chairs and blind man's buff have attracted a lot of participants, even though these activities seem a long way from the world of video games." (Quote, pedagogue interview)

LET THE RINGS RIPPLE OUT: NEW YOUNG LEARNING-CHAMPIONS

The life playground is a value-based community that focuses on supporting risk-taking and courage to embrace life. As a child or a youngster, you are taught to take responsibility for the community by daring to show yourself to each other. This is opening the door for others to dare to show themselves. When you dare to show yourself to others, this risk-taking can transform into trust and courage when it is supported pedagogically. That is how a great foundation is made for the development of a person.

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As the courage develops in the kids, the responsibility grows for the common life playground, and the kids and youngsters become play- and learning champions for each other and the pedagogues. This negotiation, where the pedagogues are invited into the kids' world and where the kids become experts and sets the course, the pedagogues will see an important element. The kids are trained to take responsibility for the community.

FREEDOM AND DIRECTION

On the life playground freedom is core, and values weigh more than rules. This freedom does not equal a performance free space. It is closer to a space of indeterminacy where it is not immediately expected that kids and youngsters perform anything distinct, but that everybody are figuring out together what is worth striving for in a fun and crooked way. When the goal has been determined together, a course is set for the project that everybody can take part in, and thus a both relaxing and serious fun leisure time has started.

THE ELEMENTS OF THE LIFE PLAYGROUND – IN SHORT

The pedagogues are play-experts and happy to play

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The pedagogues secure a practical community creation between kids, youngsters, and the pedagogues through the right and available playthings.

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The pedagogues act as tour guides, helping the individual in going beyond their comfort zone in the balance between relaxing and serious performance.

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Kids and youngsters are first and foremost seen as people with different conditions for participating.

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The play and all the activities carry the life playground's function to develop courage to face life in kids and youngsters. A development which is fixed in them as an establishment of values, a form of life-anchor that they can draw on in their journey through life.

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What happens on the life playground is based on what kids and adults find fun and interesting. Basically, it arises from the reshaping of the immediate meaning or purpose of things or in other words: By playing with the world.

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To be open, curious, and playful to the world requires that you as a pedagogue are brave, that you, along with the kids, are looking for boundaries, and cross those boundaries responsibly.

[foto tekst: A pedagogue is laughing and having a good time with the kids while they eat ice cream and talk in the outside area at Club Valhalla.]

[foto tekst: Three girls stand on each other's shoulders while smiling at the camera]

THE LIFE PLAYGROUND ... IS THIS SOMETHING, WE SHOULD DO?

WHAT CAN A LIFE PLAYGROUND FURTHER IN KIDS?

Oversættelse af 'Etablering af Livslegepladsen' – Dansk til Engelsk

Establishing a life playground requires that you as a pedagogue relates openly, curiously, and playfully to the world. That you are brave, and with the kids are looking for boundaries and cross these boundaries jointly and responsibly. When you do this, both pedagogues, kids, and youngsters point out that it promotes:

Friendships – Well-being – Courage to embrace life – A democratic mindset

WHERE CAN THE LIFE PLAYGROUND BE ESTABLISHED?

Life playgrounds can in principle be establish anywhere with pedagogically organized leisure time. In recreation- and youth clubs, in continuation school, on construction playgrounds, in after-school programs ...

Perhaps the life playground can even be established as a border crossing-function between school and leisure. Such an experiment could be fun. – Serious fun.

IF YOU WANT TO ESTABLISH A LIFE PLAYGROUND IT IS WORTH NOTING THESE POINTS:

1. The fun analogue play with community-creating practices is at the heart of the playground. Playthings and 'play champions' are always easily accessible for kids and youngsters.
2. As a pedagogue, you like to play, and you are an expert in play. You must be able to take the lead and inspire, initiate, and facilitate community-creation through fun play and activity, and you are rarely one who only watches. You are a participating observer.
3. As a pedagogue, you decode the kids' interests and commitment in the world and build the life playground based on this decoding, but at the same time you insistently introduce the kids to something new, different, and surprising that breaks from their own immediate interest.
4. Pedagogues adapt the expectations to the individual. Not everyone has to climb equally high up in a tree. Not everyone should be able to do the same thing.
5. Pedagogues support the kids' participation through gentle insistence on the yes. With the support of you and the other kids they can find the courage to exceed what they could not immediately do or dared to do.
6. As a pedagogue, you make life fun with kids and youngsters by breaking everyday routine, and you create experiences for and with them.
7. As a pedagogue, you invite the kids into the construction of the life playground. You inquire the kids about their perspective through customized methods such as a research wall, logbook, or poster.
8. Once you have built up, you are also ready to tear down and start all over again with construction. Community-creating processes are at the centre, but there is also an eye for products and results.
9. Digital technology and screens are used when they have a purpose of creating community.
10. As a pedagogue you want to be exploratory and experimental with the play, but you are at the same time reflective of the practice. Feel free to set aside time and space for the reflection.
11. The pedagogues are constantly working on the formula home (safe), outside (unsafe), back home (safe). When we are out, we are allowed to cross boundaries. When we are back home again, we reflect.
12. There have to be room for relaxing leisure time where no particular efforts from kids or adults is required.
13. The life playground is a place for freedom where the kids want to stay.

[foto tekst: A girl rides on her mountain bike in full speed across the Club's homemade ramps]

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