

## **"Working at Play or Playing at Work? A Froebelian Paradox Re-examined"**

It is, I feel, only fitting and appropriate that here in this place, this college that is named after him and where his ideas and practices were reproduced over many generations that my lecture today addresses a theme central to the thought and writing of Friedrich Froebel, conceptions of the role of play in education. There is a further reason why I have chosen to discuss Froebel's ideas and this is that I have spent much of the last twenty odd years researching the kindergarten movement in an attempt to understand the politics of education and the role of ideologies within that field. In all this time I have been less concerned with what Froebel said than with what others thought he said, their interpretations of his work and the meanings they made of it (Brehony 1992; Brehony 1997; Brehony 1998; Brehony 2000; Brehony 2000; Brehony 2003). This is one of the first times that I have approached the truth claims raised by Froebel's methods. But rather than ask the empirical question of whether or not they work or are effective, I have chosen to focus on philosophers and social theorists who are loosely connected to the intellectual tradition of which Froebel was part and ask questions about the nature of play and work in school and in society generally.

Play is notoriously difficult to define. As Professor Joad would have said, it all depends what you mean by it but we all have little difficulty in identifying it in the practice of everyday life. Mark Twain in his novel, *The adventures of Tom Sawyer*, proposed that, 'work consists of whatever a body is obliged to do, and play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do.' (Twain 1903) Many have suggested something similar but our problems begin when we try to theorise or explain what play is. This is perhaps because it signifies a large number of different activities and, as Sutton-Smith (Sutton-Smith 2001) has argued, it is highly ambiguous. Much has been written in education on this theme since Froebel's death in 1852 but play, as many authors conclude, continues to defy precise definition.

My task today is not so much as to supply definitions but to probe a particular dimension of the debates that originate in German philosophy. So I propose we undertake a journey in the history of ideas or intellectual history as it now tends to be called, a journey through time and space that begins with Froebel in the German States in the early nineteenth century and terminates in the present. But first I would like to make a detour to San Francisco and Woodstock in the late 60s and early 1970s.

'Let the children play' is a song recorded by Carlos Santana. What you are probably thinking, has this to do with Froebel and his views on play and

work? I will readily concede that the link appears tenuous. I chose it as it raises questions of translation, an issue with Froebel's texts, and of meaning and interpretation, matters that have been at the centre of most of my academic work in the sociology and history of education. The lyric is anything but complex. The song's meaning is to be sought in both the music and the lyric, lacks a complex lyric. It is, nevertheless, a lyric that because of its ambiguity is able to convey more meaning than a literal reading would suggest. The central ambiguity revolves around the children. In one reading, the song is a demand that children should be allowed to play and it presupposes that there is something restraining them. This much is readily understood. As recent research carried out by the Children's Play Council and the Children's Society found (The Children's Society 2003), children's play is often constrained by the opposition of adults who see play as trivial or frivolous but who also fear what Sutton Smith calls its 'dark side' play's is association with subversion, disorder and transgression

Returning to the song, when the context in which the song was produced is taken into account in the interpretive process, 'children' might be taken to include the young adults of the sixties who were either labelled, or defined themselves, as hippies. For many hippies, work was something associated

with the Puritan ethic that 'straights' did while they, on the other hand, valorised play in all its many manifestations but particularly in its irrational, disruptive and creative forms. The association of play with creativity is a long standing one and was made forcefully by the German writer Friedrich von Schiller who died in 1805(Schiller 1994). Among the sixties texts that made the association, Richard Neville's, 'Play Power' was a programmatic statement of hippy notions of work and play(Neville 1970).

The 1960s was only one of the few historical conjunctures in which the binary, play and work have been in heightened tension and opposition.

Such has been the absolute dominance of the work ethic. The significance of this binary is that often our definition of concepts depends on our knowing what they are not. In this case, we know that play is not work which is generally taken to be its opposite. Arguably, whenever a concept of play is present one of work is not far away. .In the liberal social climate of the sixties widespread attempts were made in the West to incorporate play into the curriculum of schools for young children. In the furtherance of this aim, the name of Froebel was invoked, as in the Plowden Report of 1968<sup>1</sup> for example, to grant it legitimacy.

## **The Froebel Movement and manual training**

Friedrich Froebel, is widely heralded as the apostle of play in education in texts on early years education as well as others. To him is attributed the often cited slogan 'Play is the work of the child' or, in another gendered version, 'a child's work is his play'. I have not been able to find the source of these faintly sinister, and Orwellian rhetorical statements whose illocutionary force is to legitimate play by asserting that it really is work but I did find the emphatic statement that 'Play is indeed the child's work' in a book published in 1932 by the child psychologist, Susan Isaacs (Isaacs 1932).

Froebel was not the first by any means to suggest that play should be used in the education of children. For example, John Locke (Locke 2001), among others, argued that play made work in school more palatable but Froebel made play more central to his pedagogy than any previous educationist. However, during the course of studying the writings of prominent figures in the Froebel movement in England such as Eleonore Heerwart (Heerwart 1884) and Friedrich Froebel's nephew, Karl Froebel (Froebel 2001) I was struck by the emphasis they placed on work. One Froebelian text in particular, struck me with great force. I found it in the British Library while looking for evidence to support the claim that Bertha

Ronge gave an explanation of the kindergarten at the educational exhibition organized by the Society of Arts in London in 1854. The text, published in 1854 at Dresden, is entitled *A connected series of playthings and occupation for early childhood* and its author is given as F. W. A. Froebel.<sup>2</sup> However it was almost certainly written by the Baroness Bertha von Marenholtz-Buelow an indefatigable worker in the Froebelian cause who propogandized for the kindergarten and women's work in many European countries including this one. In the book, the Baroness, who later wrote a manual training interpretation of the kindergarten entitled, *Handwork and Headwork* said of Froebel's kindergarten that:

This method does not rest alone upon the principle of *ocular demonstration*, which has often been applied. But Fröbel goes farther and teaches in play, consequently without much exertion, and in an entertaining manner, the chief rules and knacks of technical skill, in order to pave the way, in the fullest sense of the word, for a *training for labour*, such as the pressing wants of the age demand, and to fit the labouring classes for earning their bread betimes' (Marenholtz-Buelow 1883).

The kindergarten, in the eyes of the Baroness, had other functions but, as may be seen, preparation for labour was foremost among them,

Only by means of *right occupation*, the great object of education, *moral improvement*, is to be attained, and by a proper preparation for *labour*, a *certain means of subsistence* may be opened to every one. Let us then not overlook the importance of *Fröbel's* work, and led (sic) us strive, by universal application, to facilitate its *progressive development.*' (p 9)

Prior to this discovery, I had tended to view, what I called after the Froebelian journal of the same name, the Hand and Eye tendency, as an opportunist adaptation. This grouping in the English Froebel movement became ascendant in the 1890s and it promoted the kindergarten as the first stage of a scheme of manual training in elementary schools. Numbers in the Froebel Society were falling and the difficulties in securing the implementation of the kindergarten in the public elementary schools were seemingly insurmountable, so it was rational for some Froebelians to attach themselves to the programme of those Raymond Williams (Williams 1965) labelled, the 'Industrial Trainers' who advocated manual training in schools. This strategy may also have been attractive as some of the leading industrial trainers like Philip Magnus, were Germanophiles and had

Froebelian inclinations. In addition, a number of Froebelians who promoted handwork had become interested in wood Sloyd, a system of woodcarving promoted in Sweden by the Froebelian Otto Saloman. It became so fashionable in educational circles that many English teachers and educationists, including Arthur Acland, the so-called first 'minister' of education, spent their holidays learning Sloyd at Nääs in Sweden (Brehony 1998).

### **Froebel on work and play**

This realization that support for the promotion of handwork was warranted by Froebel's discussion of work led me to conduct a new reading of Froebel's texts on play, seeing them this time as intimately bound up with his conception of work. I later found support for this approach in the writing of Elsie Riach Murray, head of the kindergarten at Maria Grey Training College, a prominent figure among those I call the revisionist Froebelians in England. The revisionists were the Froebelian women who rejected the orthodox interpretation of the gifts and occupations and revised Froebelian practice in the light of the criticisms of G. Stanley Hall, John Dewey and the practice of the Pestalozzi-Froebel House in Berlin (Brehony 2000). In 1914, Murray wrote, 'It is impossible to make plain how Froebel regarded play,

until it is known how he regarded work, work, too, not only for a child but for a human being' (Murray 1914).

In *The Education of Man*, his most philosophical book, Froebel presents his views on work before he discusses play, although developmentally he makes clear that play should precede work in the education of the young child. He began his discussion of work, as he often did of other topics, he was, after all, a reformer, with a critique of existing practices. He wrote: 'At present the popular notions of work and the pursuits of practical industry are wholly false, superficial, untenable, oppressive, debasing, devoid of all elements of life'. (Brehony 2001)

He attacked,

The debasing illusion that man works, produces, creates only in order to preserve his body, in order to secure food, clothing, and shelter, may have to be endured, but should not be diffused and propagated (op.cit: 32).

and proclaimed that.

Religion without industry, without work, is liable to be lost in empty dreams, worthless visions, idle fancies. Similarly, work or industry without religion degrades man into a beast of burden, a machine (op. cit.: 35)

For the Romantic Idealist philosophers, many of whom he had read (Brehony 2003), the starting point, when considering work and production was the self -constitution of humans through self-activity, but Froebel chose as his point of departure, a God who works creatively and productively. He wrote,

This is the high meaning, the deep significance, the great purpose of work and industry, of productive and creative activity. We become truly godlike in diligence and industry, in working and doing, which are accompanied by the clear perception or even by the vaguest feeling that thereby we represent the inner in the outer; that we give body to spirit, and form to thought; that we render visible the invisible; that we impart an outward, finite, transient being to life in the spirit. (op. cit.: 31)

It is noticeable that many of Froebel's ideas exhibit a marked similarity to those of the members of the Jena Romantic circle and other idealist philosophers. For example, in a formulation reminiscent of Friedrich Wilhelm von Schelling he declared,

Primarily and in truth man works only that his spiritual, divine essence may assume outward form, and that thus he may be

enabled to recognize his own spiritual, divine nature and the innermost being of God (op. cit. 32).

From this analysis Froebel drew the conclusion that:

The young, growing human being should, therefore, be trained early for outer work, for creative and productive activity (op.cit. :34)

### **Froebel on play**

Echoing Michel de Montaigne the great figure of the French Renaissance who wrote in 1575, 'the plays of children are not performed in play, but are to be judged in them as their most serious actions'<sup>3</sup> Froebel declared that in childhood, 'play is the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage' and 'play at this time is not trivial, it is highly serious and of deep significance' (op. cit. :55). In Froebel's most famous and most quoted aphorism, 'the plays of childhood are the germinal leaves of all later life' he invests play and childhood with a significance for later life surpassed by no other theorist until perhaps Freud and stakes his claim as the leading theorist of play.

But even in his discussion of play, Froebel emphasizes the role of work as when he wrote of how in the phase of childhood, children imitate the work of their parents. He distinguished work from play both developmentally and in terms of their productive capacity. In the phase of boyhood (Froebel only

spoke of one gender) he wrote, 'what formerly the child did only *for the sake of the activity*, the boy now does *for the sake of the result* or product of his activity' (op. cit.: 99) and that if formerly 'activity brought joy to the child, work now gives delight to the boy' (op. cit.:102)

Later, in the *Education of Man* when discussing the nature of the education to be provided by the family and the school in the phase of boyhood, Froebel returned to his theme of the desirability of the inclusion of 'some external pursuit, some externally productive work'. He suggested that this might take the form of domestic duties such as errands. He condemned the Latin and high schools in which he claimed that, 'the pupils are wholly debarred from outwardly productive work' and argued in what for him was a rare appeal to experience, that it showed that 'external, physical, productive activity interspersed in intellectual work strengthens not only the body but in a very marked degree the mind in its various phases of development, so that the mind, after such a refreshing work-bath (I can find no better name), enters upon its intellectual pursuits with new vigor and life.' (op. cit: 236-7)

Froebel's, then, is a theory of self realization of unfolding through activity that takes the form of play followed by work but if the *Education of Man* was the only text of Froebel's that we had, it is conceivable that he would have

been regarded principally not as an advocate of play in education but, like many contemporary educationists who followed Rousseau, like Pestalozzi, Basedow, Robert Owen and von Fellenberg, as a proponent of work. This, for Froebel, like these other educational theorists took the form of the imitation of adults. Hence the examples he gave of domestic work. But he also thought of it as involving manual dexterity that would be useful, he thought, for 'the training of poorer children' (Froebel, Brehony et al. 2001). Significantly, there is no room in his view of work for what we conventionally call learning or formal instruction. When he opposed play to work he followed Rousseau's rejection of passive learning and learning from books (Rousseau 1974). Finally, It is also worthy of note that Froebel's child is almost always a universal subject once he stopped regarding it as German. Thus he rarely differentiated between boys and girls though he wrote almost exclusively of boys and only infrequently did he refer to social class.

On one of the rare occasions he did he recommended that,

Every child, boy, and youth, whatever his condition or position in life, should devote daily at least one or two hours to some serious activity in the production of some definite external piece of work  
.(Brehony 2001)

Froebel failed in his attempts to produce a scheme for the education of older children and so his writings on the kindergarten contain almost nothing on productive of work in the sense that he had discussed it in *The Education of Man*. His later writing was almost concerned entirely with early childhood and his gifts and occupations the play materials, that he devised for young children. The gifts and occupations together with the *Mother's Songs, Games and Stories* (Brehony 2001) constitute the core of Froebel's play pedagogy. They were chosen specifically for the lessons that could be derived from them and he claimed that their arrangement was logical. Notably, there was little scope for children to play spontaneously with the materials as he provided comprehensive guides to their use. These he referred to as 'sufficing instructions' which, he claimed, would provide 'a direction sufficient to enable parents and nurses and teachers to use the play' (Brehony 2001). Moreover, he reportedly once said, that 'without rational, conscious guidance, childish activity degenerates into aimless play instead of preparing for those tasks of life for which it is destined' (Marenholtz-Bülow 1894).

### **The intellectual context of Froebel's thought**

Interpretation of texts, as Ricoeur reminds us, (Ricoeur 1991) should have regard to the context in which they were produced as well as to their

internal structure and characteristics. At this point, it is perhaps useful to situate Froebel's thought in its wider intellectual context and consider briefly some of the elective affinities between Froebel's thinking and that of his German idealist and Romantic contemporaries. The term 'elective affinities' is associated mainly with the German Sociologist Max Weber (notably his work on the Protestant Ethic) (Weber and Kalberg 2002), but it is also the title of a work by Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, whose interest in Alchemy, the transmutation of base metal into gold, and in the occult was typical of German Romanticism (Faivre 1994; Faivre 2000). Traces of the occult were also present in the anti-Newtonian, nature philosophy of which, Goethe was only one of a number of exponents known to Froebel and whose views he shared. Goethe's notion of 'Nature as source', as Charles Taylor put it in his *Sources of the Self* slides easily into pantheism, the notion that the universe is God. Pantheism is present, also in the work of the English poets, Coleridge and Wordsworth who, like the nature philosophers, held that a force immanent in nature was held responsible for unfoldment or as Taylor, terms it, 'expressivism' (Taylor 1989). This was a pre-Darwinian notion of an inner power striving to realize itself externally. For Froebel this took place at the level of the individual child. For the German philosopher, Hegel, on the other hand, the power, which he

termed the Absolute Spirit, realized itself through history and within institutions through a dialectical process. Another major thinker who held a similar conception was Karl Marx, who coincidentally, satirised Johannes Ronge, the founder of the first kindergarten in England who, like Marx, was a refugee in London from the revolution of 1848 (Marx 2002).

### **Marx, labour and alienation**

Famously, Karl Marx claimed to have stood Hegel on his head when he replaced the Absolute Spirit with the proletariat. But surprisingly perhaps, the materialist Marx and the idealist Froebel initially at least were close in their views on work and self-realisation. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx using Hegelian concepts, argued in a way that in some respects paralleled Froebel, that self-realization came through the objectification of labour (Ricoeur and Taylor George 1986) by making, in Froebel's terminology, the inner the outer. Marx wrote that, 'man produces himself not only intellectually, in his consciousness, but actively and actually, and he can therefore contemplate himself in a world he himself has created' (Marx 2000). However, due to the existence of private property and the division between labour and capital, the worker experiences 'objectification as loss of and bondage to the object, and appropriation as estrangement, as *alienation*.' (ibid) Workers become estranged or alienated

from the products of their labour, the labour process itself, fellow human beings and their species being or human nature. Alienation in one form or another was present in the thought of Rousseau, Schiller and Hegel among others (Meszaros 1970) but in Marx the concept took on a new character for, to compress an extensive discussion, work under conditions of capitalist social relations no longer provides self realization but alienation. There is then in Marx views on labour, a tension or contradiction between its potential for self-creation on the one hand and its position under capitalism as the source of alienation. For Marx's collaborator, Engels, this contradiction was expressed in more empirical than Hegelian philosophical language. In the *Condition of the working class in England* he wrote:

Another source of demoralisation among the workers is their being condemned to work. As voluntary, productive activity is the highest enjoyment known to us, so is compulsory toil the most cruel, degrading punishment. Nothing is more terrible than being constrained to do some one thing every day from morning until night against one's will. And the more a man the worker feels himself, the more hateful must his work be to him, because he feels the constraint, the aimlessness of it for himself. Why does he work? For love of work? From a natural impulse? Not at all! He works for

money, for a thing which has nothing whatsoever to do with the work itself (Engels 1969).

That an instrumental attitude to work was not simply a product of the early stages of industrial Capitalism was borne out by research conducted nearly a century and a quarter later by Goldthorpe's team that conducted the affluent worker studies at the Vauxhall car plant at Luton in the 1960s. For the affluent workers the "job" was seen as a means to an end. Their main objective was to earn sufficient money to support their life outside paid work (Goldthorpe, Bechhofer et al. 1969).

In the *German Ideology*, as they moved further away from Hegelian concepts, Marx and Engels, located alienation in the division of labour, of which they took that between material and mental to be the most fundamental. It is against this background that Marxist educational theory with its stress on polytechnical education, which would combine mental and manual labour in order to produce what Marx referred to as, 'the totally developed individual' (Marx and Fowkes 1976) was developed later by ruling communist parties into an educational orthodoxy (Castles and Wüstenberg 1979).

An education containing training for productive activity and productive activity in schools lends itself to the conditions in societies dominated by

necessity and scarcity whatever the philosophical claims made for it. In the early years of the Soviet Union, the Bolshevik economists, Bukharin and Preobrazhensky: describing their conception of the unified labour school, wrote in almost Froebelian terms that,

A child's first activities take the form of play; play should gradually pass into work by an imperceptible transition, so that the child learns from the very outset to look upon labour, not as a disagreeable necessity or as a punishment, but as a natural and spontaneous expression of faculty. Labour should be a need, like the desire for food and drink; this need must be instilled, and developed in the communist school (Bukharin and Preobrazhensky 2001).

Makarenko, the leading Soviet educationist of the early years of Stalin's regime stressed the similarities between play and work and like Froebel used 'activity' as a third term that synthesized their opposition. 'How does play differ from work?' he asked and answered by saying that,

Work is the participation of man in social production, in the creation of material, cultural or social values....Play has only an indirect relation to social goals (Makarenko 2002).

But in spite of his orientation towards production, Makarenko prescribed free play in conjunction with guided play for children under six.

The French Communist elementary school teacher Célestin Freinet, the founder of a large movement of teachers, whose pedagogy included his pupils regularly printing a paper, had a different approach. He distinguished between play-work and work-play. Jeu-travail or play-work was free play including imitative play which could cross the line and become jeu-haschich or play-drug; the dark, addictive threatening kind of play. Travail-jeu, on the other hand was real work done by children. What 'drives life onwards from the earliest age' is 'not play, it's *work!*' he wrote in *L'Education du Travail* (Beattie 2002).

Finally, in this selection of Marxist views on play and work, C L R James, an independent revolutionary Marxist and former Trotskyist theoretician, wrote in 1951 that,

Children's play is work -- work which constantly challenges the child as an individual and as a social being. It is the new mode of labor -- cooperative, creative, planned by the children themselves, developing a natural and spontaneous leadership, and obliterating all division between manual and mental labor (James 1951).

The opening assertion of the identity of play and work is familiar, as we have already seen. The view of play as a new mode of labour is different

but his conclusion signaled utopian yearnings and also possibly his love of cricket:

Children express in play what the worker is denied in production.

Free and spontaneous play makes it possible for the child to organize himself, to associate and work with other children in his own way. The activity of a child shows us not only what he wants but what we all want (ibid) .

### **Froebel Revised**

Turning from the Marxist tradition, to the Froebel movement, toward the end of the nineteenth century Froebel's educational ideas and the Romantic, idealist philosophy they were enmeshed in, had fallen out of fashion among those in the US like G. Stanley Hall and John Dewey who were engaged in constructing the disciplinary field of the sciences of education (Depaepe 1992; Depaepe 1997; Van Gorp, Depaepe et al. 2004). Based largely on psychology institutionalized in the universities, the disciplinary field of education began to emerge in the early twentieth century as it was differentiated from philosophy and the 'commonsense' of the teacher trainers. Since Froebel's theories and the kindergarten practice dominated the field of early childhood education, if not always in the schools, in the US, England and elsewhere, this necessitated a critical

evaluation of them in order to see if they conformed to the newly established criteria of the sciences of education. What transpired was a thorough revision of the kindergarten by Hall, Dewey and other men from the newly established university departments of education, of what had become the kindergarten orthodoxy.

Hall, was awarded the first PhD in Psychology in the US, and was prominent in founding the field of educational psychology. This subject with its positivist approach soon came to dominate the discourse of early childhood education. Child study, which was promoted by Hall, unlike Froebel's approach, relied on the empirical study of children though Hall's commitment to Darwinian theory frequently inflected his interpretation of the results. Hall regarded the ideas and practices of Froebel and his, mainly women, followers as, 'in crying need of being supplemented, amplified, occasionally corrected, and in some definite respects abandoned' (Hall 1911). His polemics against the US Froebelians and their leader, Susan Blow, a member of the St Louis Hegelian circle, were sharp and intense. The gendered nature of Hall's vituperative criticisms of the 'conservative' Froebelians is evident in this description of Froebel's, *The Education of Man*

which to adepts in the psychological disciplines has always seemed a nondescript medley and conflation of unorganized *aperçus* (a really unreadable book with seven seals, though it is), one of the best and most nourishing of all infant foods for novices in the speculative field, a book which will and should always be dear to women's souls, not so much for what it teaches their intellect, as because it makes them feel so profoundly the burden of the mystery of the nascent soul, the greatest miracle of life, and the sanctity of the offices of ministration to it, and shows that this insight and function are central and cardinal in the universe. (op. cit.: 2)

I searched for this text in our Froebel Archive<sup>4</sup> but curiously it is not there.

Regarding the gifts and occupations, Hall opined that,

the scheme as it left his own hands was a very inadequate embodiment of his educational ideas, even for his own time. He thought it a perfect grammar of play and an alphabet of industries; and in this opinion he was utterly mistaken'.(op. cit: 17)

The phrase 'alphabet of industries' indicates that Hall was fully aware of the work aspect of the kindergarten a view further reinforced by his description of the kindergarten as 'the little school factory' in which occupations were produced. (op. cit.: 18)

In his assault on the conservative Froebelians and their adherence to the gifts and occupations and 'the knights of the holy ghost', Kant, Fichte and Hegel, Hall cited research conducted in kindergartens in Santa Barbara in 1898 that provided evidence for the view, that given a choice, children would not choose the gifts and occupations if other play material was available. The Burks', who conducted the research, noted that children were neither consulted on their choice of play material nor on the use to be made of it. (Beatty 1995) This was an argument for child chosen activities and free play which drew from Susan Blow, an Hegelian and leader of the Froebel movement in the US, the observation that children given choice of play would 'transform themselves into sneaking foxes and writhing rattle snakes'. As Shapiro observed of Blow's position, 'free play was only one step from complete disorder in the classroom and moral chaos for the child' (Shapiro 1983). He further pointed out that the Hegelians feared the dark side of play and the consequences of kindergarten anarchy spilling out into other social institutions.

Turning to Hall's own treatment of play and work, he saw play from the perspective of contemporary psychology

Play is from within from congenital hereditary impulsion. It is the best of all methods of organizing instincts. Its cathartic or purgative

function regulates irritability, which may otherwise be drained or vented in wrong directions, .... psychic traumata may, if over tense, result in "hysterical convulsions." It is also the best form of self-expression; and its advantage is variability, following the impulsion of the idle, perhaps hyperemic, and over nourished centers most ready to act (Hall 1907).

He saw work on the other hand as:

menial, cheerless, grinding, regular, and requires more precision and accuracy and, because attended with less ease and pleasure and economy of movement, is more liable to produce erratic habits (ibid).

The solution, he thought, was to 'so suffuse work with the play spirit, and vice versa that the present distinction between work and play will vanish' and if this did not work he added, 'we may at least find the true proportion and system between drudgery and recreation' (ibid).

## **Dewey**

John Dewey, who abandoned the Hegelian philosophy of his youth for the philosophy of Pragmatism also criticized Froebel's pedagogy, and the use of the gifts and occupations in particular, but his tone was much more measured than Hall's. He objected to Froebel's notion of unfoldment on the

grounds that concrete facts of experience gained from the gifts and occupations were held to be symbols of a transcendental idea of 'complete unfoldedness'. Since adults, argued Dewey, were the formulators of the symbolism what occurred was not development but 'as arbitrary and externally imposed scheme of dictation as the history of instruction has ever seen' (Dewey 1966).

Kindergarten employments are calculated to give information regarding cubes, spheres, etc., and to form certain habits of manipulation of material (for everything must always be done "just so"), the absence of more vital purposes being supposedly compensated for by the alleged symbolism of the material used. (op. cit. : 198)

Rejecting the symbolism that Froebel, like the nature philosophers, generally, thought pervaded the universe, Dewey wrote,

There is, then, nothing mysterious or mystical in the discovery made by Plato and remade by Froebel that play is the chief, almost the only, mode of education for the child in the years of later infancy. (Dewey 1910)(how we Think ch 12)

For Dewey the distinction between play and work was not one of ends, as Froebel had asserted, but of time span which influenced 'the directness of

the connection of means and ends'. Play activities, as they become more complex 'pass gradually into work'. But crucially, for Dewey, both play and work are both 'equally free and intrinsically motivated'. He recognized, however, that for the majority work was not experienced like this although like Marx he thought it ought to be. 'If the mass of mankind has usually found in its industrial occupations nothing but evils which had to be endured for the sake of maintaining existence, the fault is not in the occupations, but in the conditions under which they are carried on' (Dewey 1966) In these conditions, work became what he called drudgery and, he explained that,

Activity carried on under conditions of external pressure or coercion is not carried on for any significance attached to the doing. The course of action is not intrinsically satisfying; it is a mere means for avoiding some penalty, or for gaining some reward at its conclusion. What is inherently repulsive is endured for the sake of averting something still more repulsive or of securing a gain hitched on by others. Under unfree economic conditions, this state of affairs is bound to exist. Work or industry offers little to engage the emotions and the imagination; it is a more or less mechanical series of strains.

Only the hold which the completion of the work has upon a person will keep him going.' (Dewey 1966)

This could be taken as an argument for children's rights and for free play but if work for Dewey was unsatisfying, play had its negative side too. It could, he wrote, become 'fooling', 'demoralizing', 'idle excitement' and 'idle amusement'. Dewey's disparagement of play even while he advocated it in school indicates his privileging of work over play even when he criticized the Puritan work ethic (op. cit.: 203).

The ideological conflict in the Froebel movement engendered by Hall and Dewey was very intense but the revisionists triumphed as they did in England and the content of play in the kindergarten was expanded beyond the gifts and occupations by their followers such as Maria Findlay, Grace Owen, Henrietta Brown Smith and Elsie Riach Murray.

### **Free Play and the leisured classes**

It is evident that Hall and to a greater extent Dewey, stressed the free aspect of play and thought that in school it should not be subject to too much guidance. The notion of play as a freely chosen activity was central to the conception of play held by Johan Huizinga who, in his classic text '*Homo Ludens*', asserted that, 'all play is a voluntary activity. Play to order is no longer play'. The first and main characteristic of play was 'that it is

free, is in fact freedom'. To the objection that children must play due to their instincts, he responded that they play because they enjoy playing 'and therein precisely lies their freedom' (Huizinga 1998). Not only is this a highly restrictive definition of play but also it presupposes conditions in which freedom through play can be realized. Often this view has been adopted by advocates of what might be termed 'an aristocratic' ideology of activity for its own sake, freed from necessity and scarcity. The right-wing philosopher Michael Oakeshott expressed this position well when he argued that,

In these days when the satisfaction of human wants is taken to be the only important activity, those who devise our systems of education are apt to find a place for all that I have called "play" only if they can regard it as "work" of another sort. In this situation, generations may be deprived of that acquaintance with the activities of *Homo ludens* that was once thought to be the better part of education' (Oakeshott 1995)

Etymologically, he observed

School comes from 'a Greek word *skole*, which means "leisure" or "free time." A school was understood to be a place where one was

introduced to those activities and attitudes towards the world that were *not* concerned with satisfying wants, where one was introduced to those activities of explanation and imagination that were "free" because they were pursued for their own sake and were emancipated from the limitations and anxieties of "work." (ibid)

### **The Nineteen Sixties and Marcuse**

Herbert Marcuse, a member of the Frankfurt School synthesised the theories of Freud and Marx to produce a critique of industrial capitalism that many claim greatly influenced the student revolt and the counter culture of the 1960s. As I mentioned at the outset, the nineteen sixties was perhaps the first period in history when the work ethic was widely criticized.

Challenges to work had been mounted previously by utopian writers such as Karl Marx son in law, Paul Lafargue who wrote *The right to be lazy* (Lafargue 2000) in which he opposed not leisure to work but laziness, on the grounds that leisure was merely recuperation prior to work and laziness was a refusal of work.

Following Freud, Marcuse argued that civilization required a transition from the pleasure principle to the reality principle which among other things necessitated a shift in values from joy (play) to toil (work) (Marcuse 1969).

This phylogenesis is mirrored in the development of the individual

(ontogenesis), so the individual child has to give up the pleasure principle and accept the reality principle. But the victory of the reality principle is never completely secured. Marcuse adopted Marx account of alienation to claim that individuals spend the largest part of their life engaged in labour that was 'painful time' as it was marked by the absence of gratification. (op. cit. : 51) Moreover, he also discussed Freud's view that humans were naturally averse to work, that work in civilization is labour and labour is unpleasantness that has to be enforced. Marcuse accepted that some kinds of work such as artistic work was pleasurable but the bulk of work is imposed by necessity and not selected through a free choice.<sup>5</sup> While for Freud there was no escape from civilization, Marcuse speculated about the possibility of a non-repressive civilization. He began with Freud's view that some areas of experience escaped repression: children's fantasy play and art. He also thought that the automation of processes of production could provide the necessary material conditions for 'the free play of human faculties *outside* the realm of alienated labor.' (Marcuse 1969) Marx who, contradicting his earlier position on alienation had also glimpsed this possibility when he wrote that,

'the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases;'

and

‘Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom’ (Marx 2000).

The distinction between necessity and freedom between play and labour. was caught by Marcuse in his assertion that, ‘play is *unproductive* and *useless* precisely because it cancels the repressive and exploitative traits of labor’ (Marcuse 1969). For Marcuse, the realm of freedom was one in which, as Schiller had suggested, people would have the freedom to be what they ought to be which was freedom itself, the freedom to play.

While the leisure industries have expanded rapidly since the 1960s and in the sphere of play in childhood, its commodification has expanded so that the toy and video games industry alone was worth globally US\$69.493 billion.<sup>6</sup> But Marcuse’s utopia of freedom and play shows few signs of materializing. In Britain, the long hours culture has led to workers working the longest hours in Europe, on average 44 hours per week, three and a half hours longer than the European average. While some in the world undoubtedly derive satisfaction from their work, after all Froebel pointed to a connection between research and play, (Brehony and Froebel 2001) the majority of the world’s workers probably do not. Last week a report from CAFOD, the Catholic Relief overseas Development agency, highlighted

conditions in the computer manufacturing industry in Mexico, Thailand and China. Workers in this modern industry face long shifts on low pay in illegal short-term contracts that lack holidays, health, pension, and employment benefits. In China, the report provided evidence of, how at peak times, workers will work for 15-16 hours a day, seven days a week. They can be exposed to dangerous chemicals, smoke, metal dust and loud noise while assembly-line workers are expected to stand, working, for 11 hours (CAFOD 2004). As in many other employment sectors, little scope for self-realisation appears to exist in these factories.

In England, the move towards supply-side welfare-to-work measures that include Sure Start, to the extent that it is concerned with employment, in order to reduce both the numbers on benefit and the costs of benefits have led to an expansion of the low wage service sector. This also offers little opportunity for the self-development envisaged by the theorists who have been considered here.

### **The Foundation Stage**

In this context it is hardly surprising that play in education has come in for so much criticism in recent years. As many here will be aware, the emergence of the Foundation Stage, the term given to the schooling of was marked by an ideological conflict of some considerable proportions

which led to the defeat of the first attempt to impose a curriculum on children in their early years when even the Government's advisers rejected it<sup>7</sup>. This was replaced by the Foundation Stage of early learning, which is a new stage of education for children age 3 to 5 which many practitioners found more acceptable not least because it reinstated a role for 'well-planned play' in this stage. Doubtless play in the early years is once again to be subordinated to other requirements. For Margaret Hodge, currently the Minister of State for children, the 'foundation stage is about developing key learning skills such as listening, speaking, concentration, persistence and learning to work together and cooperate with other children. It is also about developing early communication, literacy and numeracy skills that will prepare young children for key stage 1 of the National Curriculum.'<sup>8</sup>

The National Curriculum and its assessment procedures are a very good example of how the life world, as Habermas has it, has been colonised by instrumental rationality (Habermas 1987). In order to illustrate this process I shall cite Professor Ted Wragg, Who writing of the foundation stage profile, explained that,

The multicoloured booklets have pretty ministry logos on the cover. Teachers affix 117 labels to each five-year-old under 13 headings: (1) dispositions and attitudes; (2) social

development; (3) emotional development; (4) language for communication and thinking; (5) linking sounds and letters; (6) reading; (7) writing; (8) numbers as labels and for counting; (9) calculating; (10) shape, space and measures; (11) knowledge and understanding of the world; (12) physical development; and (13) creative development. Each of these 13 scales has nine levels, hence the 117 labels which must be affixed - and this must be done each term. A teacher of 30 reception-class children could tick and cross from 3,510 to over 10,000 boxes in a year.(Wragg 2003)

Unsurprisingly, as the instrumental rationality of the National Curriculum with its technologies of targets and constant assessments seeps down into the Early Years, researchers report that nurturing valuable play activities in school is not that easy(Drummond and Moyles 2004). A recent report by Tricia David concluded that the research in the area found that, 'despite their general commitment to integrating play into the curriculum, teachers find a play-based pedagogy difficult to sustain, because precise learning outcomes can be difficult to achieve or measure, and progression in learning difficult to demonstrate' (Hofkins 2003). The teachers' attitudes

towards play in the US seem to be similar(Brown and Freeman 2001) which suggests that the root of the problem lies not only in the performance indicator regime of the National Curriculum but in dominant views of what constitutes work.

The issue of measurement, which, as Cutler and Waine have shown (Cutler and Waine 1997) is central to performance regimes that seek to capture intangible outcomes, is the ground on which debates on play in education are now conducted. Defenders as well as critics of play both seek to quantify its utility mainly from a cognitive perspective. Where once Froebelians grasped at Piaget's work to legitimate their pedagogy, now supporters of play turn to brain research. But citing this work to legitimate play, whatever its other merits, is to fall into the trap of positivism, of the belief that play's utility can be quantified and that if so rational debate will decide practice. Study of the history of education tends to suggest that the latter is unlikely and many like Tina Bruce reportedly think, with good reason, that 'Play cannot be pinned down and turned into a product of measurable learning' (House 2003).

## **Conclusions**

Froebel was more an advocate of activity in education than play understood as a freely chosen activity.

Children's play is regarded with suspicion and is sometimes actively opposed by many adults who fear its consequences.

Rather than engage in a search for an essentialist definition of play it is perhaps more fruitful to seek for the meanings of play in conjunction with its opposite, work.

Play and work are opposed to each other even though they share many characteristics. For work to take on the characteristics of play scarcity and necessity need to be overcome.

Considerations of children's play rarely escape the views of play and work held by adults in relation to themselves.

Children's right to play in and out of school must be upheld not simply as a means of facilitating development and learning but because the freedom it entails is essential both for the child and for society.

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<sup>1</sup> "In play, children gradually develop concepts of causal relationships, the power to discriminate, to make judgements, to analyze and synthesize, to imagine and formulate" (p. 193).

<sup>2</sup> This is almost certainly a false attribution because Froebel died in 1852 and the style of the text indicates that he was not the author. Subsequently, Prof Helmut Heiland identified the author as the Baroness Bertha von Marenholtz-Buelow.

<sup>33</sup> Of the education of children in Essays 1575

<http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/montaigne/montaigne-essays-1.html#11>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/froebel/archive/index.asp>

<sup>5</sup> The notion of free choice is taken from (free choice from Freud *Civilisation and its Discontents*).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.btha.co.uk/pr/pr260601.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/335898.stm>

<sup>8</sup> Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage QCA 2000