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Play, unity and symbols: Parallels in the works of Froebel and Jung

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Fredrich Froebel is recognized as the father of kindergarten (Wolfe, 2002), but is it possible that Froebel had a significant influence in the field of analytical psychology? The ideas of Carl Jung, who pioneered the field of analytical psychology, bear striking similarities to Froebel's ideas about play, unity and the use of symbols. The circumstances of their lives offer possible explanations for these similarities. Froebel and Jung were sons of ministers and both were criticized by traditional religious leaders. While Jung was born in Switzerland, Froebel was born in Thuringia which was a German Principality. Froebel did live in Switzerland for a time before being driven out by religious leaders of the Catholic faith. However, these simple coincidences could not possibly explain the similarities in their work. Froebel died in 1852, and Jung was not born until 1875. There is no possibility that these men could have ever conversed, but it can be argued that Froebel had a very important impact on Jung's life and beliefs about play, unity and the use of symbols. It is probable that Jung attended a Froebelian kindergarten. By 1872, kindergarten had become mandatory throughout Switzerland, and Froebel's method was the required curriculum (Stein, 1997). Because Jung was born in Switzerland in 1875, it is reasonable to assume that he would have been educated in the method of Froebel. This early influence could explain the remarkable parallels in their most fundamental ideas. This paper describes the parallels in the works of Froebel and Jung with regard to their ideas about play, unity and the use of symbols.

Key words: Play, kindergarten, unity, symbols.

IDEAS ABOUT PLAY

There are three parallels that can be drawn between Froebel and Jung with regard to play. These include; (1) role of play in development, (2) play as a spiritual expression, and (3) play as a form of artful expression. Each parallel or connection will be described.

Role of play in development

Froebel and Jung both believed that play was connected to development. Froebel suggested, "play is the highest phase of child development - of human development at this period; for it is a self-active representation of the inner representation of the inner from inner necessity and impulse" (Froebel, 1888). Jung associated play and development with regard to the drive toward activity.

According to Jung, "this urge (during development) starts

functioning when other urges are satisfied; indeed, it is perhaps only called into being after this has occurred. Under this heading would come the urge to travel, love of change, restlessness and the play instinct" (Jung, 1960).

Play as spiritual expression: Another parallel related to play involves spiritual expression. Froebel believed that "play is the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage and at the same time, typical of human life as a whole - of the inner hidden natural life in man and all things" (Froebel, 1888). He also considered "the first impressions of the soul...come to the child in the first plays of the senses by its own activity..." (Froebel, 1895). Jung originally took a Freudian perspective on play, associating it with sexuality. This is seen in the following quote. "The puppy's playful attempts at copulation begin long before sexual maturity. We have a right to suppose that man is no exception to this rule" (Jung, 1961). Over time, however, this changed. Jung took a more Froebelian attitude that play was an expression of the soul and the re-

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presentation of spiritual activity (Jung, 1961). Still, we believe Froebel went further than Jung in the spiritual nature of play. Froebel implied that play was a spiritual pre-requisite for the work of social justice. He said, “a child that plays thoroughly, with self-active determination, perseveringly until physical fatigue forbids, will surely be a thorough and determined man, capable of self-sacrifice for the promotion of the welfare of himself and others” He also said, “the plays of childhood are the germinal leaves of all later life” (Froebel, 1888).

Play as a form of artful expression: Perhaps their greatest parallel with regard to play has to do with how play is related to art and artful expression. Froebel believed the child “wishes to make something so that his inward desire may also appear externally” (Froebel, 1899). Making something suggested creativity and art. But Froebel was even more explicit in making this connection. He made a connection between play and drawing. He found that “the drawing...is of general, universal and comprehensive importance in the training of the human being. As a complete presentation of his creative power, it renders it possible for man, by the strong impression of pure humanity, to become within himself, and by his own action, a second creator of himself, as well as a creator and outward representer of pure humanity and human nature” (Froebel, 1899). He promoted drawing as both a form of play and an art form. Froebel described, “the rudiments of drawing are therefore invariably and quite completely developed amongst the students through the study and constant practice of the various games, especially those involving construction...” (Froebel, 1891).

Similarly, Jung made found creative activity to be related to play. “Hence it is easy to regard every creative activity whose potentialities remain hidden from the multitude as play. There are, indeed, very few artists who have not been accused of playing” (Jung, 1971). Jung also suggested that “it is worth noting...the play instinct retires into the background in favour of the aesthetic mood...” Finally, Jung tied play with art through the notion of active imagination or fantasy. “It is difficult to say where...play begins - necessarily so, for an unconscious product is the creation of sportive fantasy...out of which play arises (Jung, 1961).

THE THEMES OF UNITY AND WHOLENESS

The themes of unity and of wholeness can be found throughout the writings of both Froebel and Jung (Froebel, 1974; Jung, 1954; Wolfe, 2002). From his study of botany and architecture, Froebel became interested in symmetry and in natural unity. This idea of organic unity “would affect and underline Froebel’s educational theories, materials, and methods” (Wolfe, 2002). Early in his career as a teacher, Froebel was captivated by the ideas of Pestalozzi, but he became disenchanted somewhat with Pestalozzian ideas after spending time at the Pestalozzi in-

stitute in Yverdon. “Though impressed with Pestalozzi’s work, he was concerned about the lack of focus on unity and interdependence” (Wolfe, 2002). Froebel spent much of his later career “searching for a theoretical basis for and an understanding of the concept of unity” (Wolfe, 2002). He felt that all of life rested on the concept of unity, sprang from unity and would return to unity (Froebel, 1889), and he felt that this idea must be expressed through every activity done with children (Wolfe, 2002).

Wholeness is a theme that permeates the work of Carl Jung. For Jung, a person’s journey through life should be “a move in the direction of wholeness” (Read et al., 1954). Jung described many aspects of the psyche (Jung et al., 1970). These include the ego, the unconscious and the shadow (Read et al., 1954). Some aspects of the psyche are positive. Some are viewed as negative, but each individual must strive not to eliminate the negative aspects of the personality but to bring them “together in an – admittedly precarious – unity” (Read et al., 1954). Jung’s legacy, the discipline of analytical psychology, is a formalized way of getting guidance in bringing all aspects of the psyche into a unified whole.

This theme of wholeness permeates the work of both Froebel and Jung. Each man took the idea into his own particular field of interest. Froebel sought to educate children about the interconnectedness of the world (Wolfe, 2002). Jung sought to educate individuals about the integration of all aspects of the human psyche (Read et al., 1954). The men had different objectives and perhaps different audiences, but they referred to the idea of wholeness in very similar language. In the first paragraph of Froebel’s major work, *The Education of Man*, (Froebel, 1888) he wrote, “in all things there lives and reigns an eternal law...This all-controlling law is necessarily based on an all-pervading, energetic, living, self-conscious and hence eternal unity...This unity is God. All things have come from the Divine unity, from God and have their origin in the Divine unity, in God alone”. Froebel’s goal was “to bring children closer to God, to this unity” (Wolfe, 2002).

Jung’s goal was also to bring people closer to a state of wholeness or of unity (Read et al., 1954; Storr, 1983) and he, too, spoke of unity as God. “This integrating factor...is named the Self; an archetype which not only signifies union between the opposites within the psyche, but is a God-image, or at least cannot be distinguished from one” (Storr, 1983).

THE USE OF SYMBOLS

Froebel and Jung both attempted to represent their ideas about unity through the use of symbols (Jung, 1968; Storr, 1983; Wolfe, 2002). This emphasis on symbols is the second major parallel to be discussed. The use of symbolism is significant both for the similarity in the representations of the concept of unity and also for the em-

phasis on symbols in general in the work of both men.

Froebel's idea of unity was expressed as a sphere (Froebel, 1888; Wolfe, 2002). The sphere can be seen in many of the "gifts" or materials which Froebel used with children. The first gift was a set of soft crocheted balls. In playing with this gift, "children would experience a sense of 'God', unity and connectedness" (Wolfe, 2002). The sphere is seen in later gifts as well. Froebel (1888) saw the sphere not only as a symbol of unity but also as an "outward manifestation of unimpeded force, diffusing itself freely and equally in all directions".

Jung's symbol for unity was the mandala. Mandalas are circular images which can be "drawn, painted, modeled or danced" (Storr, 1983). Visions of mandalas appeared to Jung, and as he drew what he envisioned, he claimed to be able to witness the integration of his psyche (Storr, 1983). Jung went through a time of prolific drawing of mandalas as he contemplated their significance and reported, "I no longer know how many mandalas I drew at this time" (Storr, 1983).

It is certainly interesting that Froebel and Jung chose similarly shaped objects as representations of their ideas of unity, but this is not the only significance of symbols in the work of both men. Each placed a great emphasis on the use of symbols. Froebel noticed that children often took objects and used them in pretend play as completely different objects, and he "felt that the process could be reversed by giving children objects that had certain cosmic truths or realities...Froebel was interested in the symbollic knowledge that the object contained" (Wolfe, 2002). In other words, Froebel observed children using sticks as horses or leaves for dinner plates, and he theorized that universal truths might lie within certain objects themselves. He believed that if the truth existed in the object, the truth might be transmitted to the child through manipulation and observation. This would explain the use of the sphere in Froebel's gifts. If children were given spheres to manipulate they "would begin to understand the underlying unity of life" (Wolfe, 2002). The sphere was not the only shape used to represent universal concepts in Froebel's educational materials. The cube was used to represent the concept of diversity. "It was an object that had many edges, many corners, and many sides" (Wolfe, 2002) and was thus the exact opposite of the sphere. Froebel used the cylinder to represent the "dynamic equilibrium or reconciliation of opposites" (Wolfe, 2002) because it could be stacked like a cube or rolled like a sphere. Jung would refer to this idea of unity existing alongside and within opposites as the "union of the opposites" (Storr, 1983).

While Froebel used symbols to attempt to transmit cosmic truths, Jung spoke of the symbolism of dreams. Dream analysis is an important tool in Jung's analytical psychology (Jung, 1963, 1968). "A key in a lock may be a sexual symbol... (or may be) intended to symbolize...the desire for God" (Jung, 1968). In his book, *Man and His Sym-*

bols, Jung (1968) outlines both the possible meanings of symbols and the importance of symbolism in dreams.

Fredrich Froebel and Carl Jung both saw life as a quest toward wholeness. Jung thought that the human psyche was made up of many parts which must be integrated if the individual wishes to be whole (Storr, 1983). Froebel saw the universe as an interconnected whole and sought to impart this idea to children through the use of instructional materials and methods (Wolfe, 2002). Each man relied heavily on the use of symbols in his work. Froebel used symbols that he supposed might contain essential truths of the universe (Wolfe, 2002), and Jung felt that the symbolism in dreams could be used to help people move along the path to wholeness (Jung, 1963; 1968). Froebel symbolized wholeness, or God, through the use of the sphere (Froebel, 1974; Wolfe, 2002), and Jung drew countless mandalas as a way of representing the Self (Storr, 1983).

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS TODAY

What messages do Froebel and Jung offer today's educators? Many educators speak of educating the whole child (Bredenkamp and Copple, 1997), but is this the same wholeness of Froebel and Jung? There are remnants of Froebel's influence in today's schools, but these remnants do not really show the commitment to unity that Fredrich Froebel would have intended. For example, children in classrooms all over the world are gathered into circles every day, but teachers might be surprised to know that Froebel, who is credited as the originator of the practice of "circle time", intended this arrangement "to help children gain a sense of unity and interconnectedness" (Wolfe, 2002).

For Jung, the purpose of education was to help children develop their own personalities and to separate from their mothers (Jung, 1954). Parents must deal with their own psychological problems, and schools must "(guide) the child into the larger world" (Jung, 1954) and help children to become independent from their families. Surely this goal is seen in schools as parents are encouraged to leave their reluctant 5 year olds with kindergarten teachers, but crucial aspects of Jung's ideas are neglected. A child's independence is encouraged by having her leave her mother to attend school, but Jung would have educators go much further. To be true to Jung's aim of education, schools cannot merely attend to a child's intellectual and physical needs. The child must be treated as an emotional and spiritual being.

In an age of tougher academic standards and insistence on scientifically proven methods, teachers would do well to heed the voices of Fredrich Froebel and Carl Jung. If it is truly important to educate the whole child, then it is unacceptable to concentrate on isolated skills and purely quantitative methods of assessment. To educate the whole child, teachers must acknowledge all aspects of the child

and realize that “spiritual values and qualities of the soul elude purely intellectual treatment” (Jung, 1954).

Conclusions

Jung would have had the experience of working with Froebel's gifts and occupations which were rich with symbols of wholeness and unity. Froebel's aim of bringing children to recognize the powerful divine unity of God (Wolfe, 2002) could have been a large part of Jung's early education. This early influence could have caused Jung to spend his life searching for wholeness, a wholeness which he called Self (Storr, 1983). If it was, in fact, Froebel's method of kindergarten education that influenced Jung's search for wholeness, then it is altogether reasonable to state that Froebel did have a great impact on the discipline of analytical psychology.

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