

Research Seminar ‘Children’s Risk-taking in Play: Professional Attitudes and Role Expectations’

Tuesday October 30th 2018, University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht, the Netherlands

The University of Humanistic Studies (UvH) proudly announces that professor Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter will be our keynote speaker at a seminar on Tuesday October 30th 2018. She is the founder of research in the field of ‘risky play’ with many publications to her name. She has defined risky play and described six categories. A good opportunity to get acquainted with her research and discuss risk and challenge in children’s play as well as the role of the educator.

9.30 – 13.00 Plenary morning program

- **09.30 – 10.00** Registration, coffee and tea
- **10.00 – 10.15** Welcoming speech by professor dr. Gerty Lensvelt-Mulders, rector of the University of Humanistic Studies and professor of Research Methodology and Theory of Sciences

- **10.15 – 11.00** Keynote lecture by Professor dr. Ellen Beate Hansen Sandseter, Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education, Trondheim, Norway

Providing Risky play for children’s experiences

A natural part of children’s physical play involves engaging in play that is a bit scary and somewhat risky; risky play. This presentation will focus on what risky play is, why it is important for children’s experiences and development, as well as discussing factors influencing children’s opportunities for risky play such as parents and practitioners perceptions and attitudes, societal regulations and cultural frames/values. Based on Ellen’s research, risky play, injuries and injury prevention in Norwegian preschools and how they provide and handle risky play will also be a central theme in the presentation.

- **11.00 – 11.45** Lecture by Louis Tavecchio, professor emeritus of pedagogy at University of Amsterdam

The importance of exploration and exploring borders from pedagogical perspective: the meaning of risky play for healthy physical and mental development.

From birth, children discover the world through their play. They explore borders and in this way they get a grip on the world around them. It is the responsibility of adults to ensure a good growth climate, at home, in day childcare and after-school childcare, at school and in all kinds of youth organizations. From what pedagogical vision do professionals work in these educational environments outside families, so that children learn to assess risks, become self-reliant and gain confidence? In today’s society risks are, in certain respect, different compared to childhoods of parents and (some of the) professional educators themselves. In what way do children nowadays get opportunities to grow up well and safely, without curtailing their living space with risk-averse activities and overprotective behavior? The need of children to be stimulated, pushed and encouraged to -of course to some extent- take risks in their play is as immense and important, as the need for stability and security.

- **11.45 – 12.30** Presentation by Martin van Rooijen, PhD Candidate University of Humanistic Studies

Improving professional competencies to increase children’s outdoor play risk-competence in after school childcare settings; preliminary results

Although risk is considered a crucial element of children's play, the opportunities are diminishing. However, the necessity of offering children play that enhances their risk-competence is understood by policy makers, which needs advanced education of childcare. Child care educators deal with competing discourses towards risky play. A model of influencing factors on professional' attitudes is used to get insight in complex practice on different levels: cultural and regulatory factors, parental relationship, personal attitudes and constructs of children. This research aims in enhancing childcare workers' competencies towards facilitating children's risk-taking in play and interacting with parents, colleagues, management and safety inspectors. Educators of seven Dutch after school care locations are offered a professionalization program, facilitating risky play with loose parts and involving stakeholders. Change of professional attitudes is evaluated using the TRiPS instrument and by multiple case-study, identifying working elements of the program. Preliminary findings will be discussed, outcomes are expected on greater understanding and improved competencies of educators on facilitating risk-taking play and on interacting with stakeholders. Also it should provide insight in children's experiences of risky play and how they value the role of adult interventions.

12.30 – 13.30 Lunch break

13.30 – 14.15 Plenary

- Sanne Frazer MSc, researcher at VeiligheidNL (Dutch Consumer Safety Institute), The Netherlands

The role of parents towards risky play of their children

Most parents are aware of the importance of risk-taking in play, but find it difficult to give their child opportunities to learn to assess risks and explore their borders. To support Dutch parents, VeiligheidNL (Dutch Consumer Safety Institute) developed an online application, the 'Groeiboom' (Growth Tree). This focuses on parents with children aged 5 to 7 years, with a positive attitude towards risky play. With this tool they get insight into their own behavior and that of their child (ren), and based on their profile they get tailored advice how to facilitate risky play. This presentation discusses the results of a study among parents of the effect, usability, appreciation and adherence of the 'Groeiboom'. Has tolerance for risky play changed after using the tool?

14.15 – 16.15 Afternoon scientific forums

14.15 -15.00 First round

- dr. Rasmus Kleppe, Associate professor Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway.

Risky play of toddlers in daycare

This presentation will draw mainly on knowledge from Kleppe's recent doctoral thesis and discuss some of the main findings. First, that children were observed to engage in risky play from one year of age; and how observations of risky play in this age group might be interpreted in relation to the existing understanding of risky play. Second, the presentation will focus on how ECEC staff interacted with toddlers in risky play and third, how the ECEC centers' physical environment afforded risky play. The presentation will finish with discussing implications for practice and relevance for various cultural contexts.

- dr. Gaby Jacobs, professor at Fontys University of Applied Sciences Eindhoven

Normative professionalization of pedagogical workers in afterschool child care

A variety of influencing factors can make it hard for professionals to develop their own view on risky play and to deal with resistances, and this can lead to dilemmas when supervising outdoor play. Reflecting on and learning to deal with the often contradictory values and views at different levels, as well as with the structures (such as protocols, laws and regulations) that form the wider

framework of the profession, is referred to as 'normative professionalization'. In this lecture the potentials of a professionalization programme will be explored, focused on pedagogical values and standards of childcare practitioners; their views regarding risky play; interacting with parents/caregivers or the childcare organisation's management, which may differ from their own; and their own perceived competence (or lack thereof) in this field. Attention will be given to dilemmas deriving from tension between personal values, organizational policies and societal views and how this influences professionals in their practice.

15.00 – 15.30 coffee and tea break

15.30 – 16.15 Second round

- dr. Lisette van der Poel and graduated bachelor students, University of Applied Sciences Utrecht
Various perspectives on loose parts play of children, aged 4-12 years
Within a PhD-research project, bachelor Pedagogy graduate students from Utrecht University of applied sciences examined effects of introducing 'loose parts' on after-school childcare playgrounds. Some of them studied whether children and their educators experienced differences in play behavior of, and interactions between children. Other students investigated how loose parts could be used to create more creativity and variety in children's play behavior, and how playing with loose parts could be used to stimulate the development of children's self-esteem and ability to estimate risks. Even though these were small-scaled studies and conducted in different childcare settings in order to answer different research questions, some trends could be identified in children's play and in educators reactions and interventions to loose parts play, which will be presented in this lecture.
- Dr Shelly Newstead, Managing Editor International Journal of Playwork Practice, Common Threads UK
Playwork in non-traditional playwork settings
Playwork is a nationally recognised profession in the UK which began in the adventure playgrounds set up just after the Second World War. Today playwork is used to work with school aged children in their leisure time in a wide range of different settings, including schools and childcare. This workshop will explore how the PARS model of playwork practice can help adults who work where children play to make decisions about appropriate levels of risk in children's play. It will include interactive exercises using case studies and video clips so that participants can practice making risk-benefit assessments. We will finish with discussing if the 'playwork approach' could be suitable for professionals working with children in Dutch childcare settings.

16.15 – 17.00 Networking reception

Participants of the seminar are from various disciplines and play advocates, from the Netherlands and surrounding countries, engaged in research or projects on children's play and the role of educators. Also invited are professionals of the seven organizations who have participated in the PhD research project: pedagogical workers of after school childcare and management staff. The attending fee for participants is 40 euro, for which lunch and drinks are offered. Registration is now open:

<https://www.uvh.nl/actueel/agenda/research-seminar-risky-play> .

For international guests there will be an optional visit to adventure/nature playgrounds in Amsterdam on Monday 29th October in the afternoon. After registration you will receive at a later stage an e-mail with detailed information and the possibility for signing up for this. All inquiries at Martin van Rooijen, martin.vanrooijen@phd.uvh.nl