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Work and Play in Second Language Instructional Activity

Abstract
An implicit and metaphorical identification of learning with work activity frames the language used to construct learning and the orientation of the teaching practices foregrounded in formal educational settings. Play practices -improvisations, simulations, creative writing, games- as exploratory and creative processes are sometimes present in the L2 classroom, although rarely at the center of L2 pedagogy. In L2 research, the developmental powers of learning as play are marginally explored because of the limiting effects of a learning as working identification (but see exceptions: Lantolf 1997; Lantolf 1999; Cook 1997; Cook 2000; Broner and Tarone 2001; Belz 2002; Pomeranz and Bell 2007; Bell 2009). Inspired by Vygotsky's (1978) research on play as a major developmental force, it is argued that learning as play should be transformative. It is defined with the following four features: developmental-historical, imaginative-creative, regulatory-intentional, and conceptual-framing. Three examples are used to illustrate a transformative practice inspired by play: Strategic Interaction (Di Pietro 1987), Creative Writing, and Concept-based Teaching. Learning as transformative play should foreground different pedagogical possibilities when researching and teaching languages in formal educational settings.

1 Introduction

The social and historical complexity of institutional educational settings makes the definition of learning activity a challenge. In the globalized world of second language standards, learning activity as the core issue in instructional settings is often constructed as efficient mastery of outcome-oriented tasks that can be understood through descriptors and milestones, see for instance standards in Council of Europe (2001) or ACTFL (2014). The attribution of features such as efficient, task-oriented, or outcome-based to formal learning processes is seen as neutral and transparent. These features are the historical frames underneath the edifice of the culture of education in modern societies (Bruner 1996). The underlying rationales are almost always

opaque to participants (Smith 1998). Assumptions are invisible because they are a historical given. It is quite challenging to spot large social and educational frames behind instructional activity in late modern society when participants are part of the picture. The framing is not in sight. In this article, I consider how learning activity is framed and defined through an implicit, sometimes explicit, metaphorical identification of learning with work activity.

In what follows, I analyze how a pragmatist learning as efficient work understanding frames pedagogical practices in the L2 classroom. I also reflect on why play elements are at the periphery of the L2 classroom. The marginal presence of creative and exploratory play is based on an implicit understanding of both learning as efficient work and genuine learning antithetical to play. Play is framed under a motivational-enjoyment umbrella, a simple and sometimes needed break to return to real learning-as-work tasks. This type of play as basic competitive games is certainly present in the classroom, although it is maintained at the margins of classroom activities. Finally, I review Vygotsky's understanding of play activity (Vygtosky 1978) as a major force in the development of historical identities, imagination, self-regulation, and abstract conceptual thinking in children. Inspired by this Vygotskyan understanding of play, I argue for the centrality of learning based on transformative play in L2 instructional activity.

2. Large frames are hard to see: the learning-work equation

Instructional activity, that is, teaching-learning in formal settings, is a historically and culturally situated activity that integrates features of learning, working, and playing.[1] Instructional activity in classroom settings focuses on organized learning. A classroom is an ideal context for careful explaining, conscious learning, and guided understanding and practice. On one hand, instructional activity shares organizational features of work. It is part of an adult working reality where teachers work for schools and administrators. On the other, play elements such as make-believe learning exercises, ritual but creative activities, games and simulations, school recess, and artificial but coherent assignments are also present in instructional contexts. Such is the

[1] Schools have a tendency for encapsulation and isolation (Engestrom 1996).

mixed nature of instructional activity where learning, work, and play are intertwined.

A functional logic of efficient work in formal learning is predominant in shaping large-scale education efforts. It is present in goal-driven syllabi, mechanically-oriented homework and quizzes, repetitive learning exercises, real-world transactional tasks, rule-regulated behavior, or outcome-oriented assignments and assessments. Classroom learning that over-emphasizes an efficient, functional, and measurable orientation to learning is based on the logic of work from a pragmatist point of view. There are historical circumstances to understand why learning is equated with work in modern societies. Good quality work needs to be measurable and efficient. Tasks are divided, and standards are set. The consequences of measurement in work activities has an effect on how to establish pedagogical milestones in learning curricula. Furthermore, there is a logical expectation that learning should prepare students for future work-related activities. Work activity is considered the leading activity of adult life in late modern societies[2]. This expectation is over-emphasized in contemporary societies where production, efficiency, and pragmatism are paramount. Play, although critical in adult leisure activities, is seen as optional, even childish, and generally non-productive in the adult world. This is also the case in learning activity. Playfulness may be seen as relatively important for motivation and student engagement, but it is seen as peripheral for real learning measurement. A pragmatist, productive, utilitarian, work-based understanding of education in general, and L2 learning in particular, may be coherent with the spirit of efficient standardization of modern and late-modern societies. To be sure: an

[2] Leontiev (1981) observes how different moments in human development are characterized by a main leading activity. The three basic categories for leading activities in human life seem to be: play, learning, and work. At a developmental level, one may distinguish them. Toddlers fundamentally play in daycare, children fundamentally learn in schools, and adults fundamentally work in offices and factories. However, learning, working, and playing are not exclusive realities. Activities are not neatly compartmentalized in late modern societies. Play provides extensive learning opportunities, learning is most often constructed as working, and there is considerable learning in adult work activity. The same activities for the same participant may be sometimes predominantly play, work, or even learning. Professional sports are a good example where play becomes work. Artistic activities are sometimes work based on play as creativity. Indeed, the necessary fluid and dynamic nature of human activity makes compartmentalization into exclusive categories complicated, and probably taxonomically misguided.

outcome-oriented and work-driven construction of instructional activity is helpful. It neatly organizes and frames teaching/learning intangible outcomes through the logic of efficient work. Even if an understanding of learning as work is coherent with late modernity contemporary views on the roles of work and play in adult life, it still needs to be pondered and examined. It over-emphasizes production, sameness, negotiation and reality, and outcomes at the expense of creativity, difference, transgression and imagination, and explorative alternative identity forming processes.

Still, and as mentioned above, the powerful framing effects of the identification of work with learning derives from its invisibility. And it is the case indeed that an implicit mapping of learning activity with work has remained largely unchallenged in much of the literature in contemporary theorizing in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) with few notable exceptions (see for instance Lantolf 1999; Sullivan 2000; Cook 2000). A work metaphor for understanding SLA supports efficiency and practicality in all fronts: instructed SLA is a about a focus on tasks and outcomes. It also sets priorities in research agendas.

The ultimate goal for instructed SLA through a learning-is-working lens is effective and efficient participation in global societies (MLA report 2007). This participation is constructed as naturally driven by the logic of work organization in late market societies and the protocols of professional business exchanges in human interactions. Students who aim to attain superior proficiency in a second language are assumed to need considerable effort and countless hours of hard work. Serious, committed, and hardworking learners may avoid any type of learning as play so as not to lose precious time in the L2 learning process (but see Bell 2009 on the benefits and complexity of humor in the language classroom).

In short, even when playfulness is present in language classrooms, it is implicitly assumed that its usefulness is more connected to relaxation in working towards goals and outcomes rather than promoting identity-formation, self-regulation, creativity, transformation and development, transgression and imagination, and communicative and conceptual development.

3. Conceptual metaphors of learning as efficient work and learning as joyful play

A statement such as learning a new language is hard work seems irrefutable at first. Theoretical constructions emerge in a specific historical and social circumstances which favor certain types of ontological, epistemological, and ethical principles (Valsiner and van der Veer 2000 on intellectual interdependency). Theories are based on explicit, sometimes implicit, metaphorical understanding of difficult to define abstract notions explained in terms of concrete objects. Examples such as the *mind* is a computer, a language is a system, communication is a business transaction, or learning is accumulation of input are helpful concretizing conceptual devices, but they can be limiting as well (cf. van Lier 2007).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980), in their pioneering work on everyday metaphors, contend that conceptual understandings reflected in the language used to talk about everyday lives help us to understand complex reality in specific ways. *LOVE IS A JOURNEY*, *the MIND IS A CONTAINER*, or *IDEAS ARE BUILDINGS* are three of many underlying conceptual metaphors implicitly contained in how people talk when they make sense of everyday experiences.

Part of power of metaphors, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), is their invisibility. This implicit metaphorical conceptual system, the metaphors we live by as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued, is not transparent to participants. It builds on their linguistic constructions of the world, and we are not conscious of these. We are not aware we use these metaphors, but the language we use reflects them. It is how we talk about issues that gives away the framing metaphors. For instance, the conceptual metaphor *LOVE IS A JOURNEY* is revealed in expressions such as: *Our relationship is at a crossroads; We can't turn back now; Our love is of the track; We'll have to go our separate ways.* The argument is that these linguistic frames are indeed conceptions through words that speakers take for granted in the sociocultural construction of complex issues through language.

Here it is argued that a conceptual metaphor for learning operates in the culture of education in modern societies. Learning as the central process in educational settings is defined in terms of work. Learning is a diffuse complex process. It is better explained by metaphorical thinking. The *LEARNING IS WORK* metaphor helps practitioners understand the more abstract and fluid quality of learning activity. The more subjective, chaotic, abstract, and intangible quality of learning compared to the more objective, organized, concrete, and measurable logic of work activity justifies the mapping of work features onto learning activity. Work as a modern activity is a cultural construction with specific implications in late modern, market-driven,

hyperconnected societies. Work, as well as learning as work, is laborious, serious, and repetitive. Learning as work, as well as work activity, should be efficient, well organized, goal-driven, measurable, and accountable.

The reasons why students are viewed as workers in the classroom are coherent with the logic of contemporary societies. Classrooms are part of work activity for adults. Teachers and professors are paid to teach. Students pay to learn, often times, through sustained effort and sacrifice. As mentioned above, the power of a conceptual metaphor lays in its invisibility. Teachers are not generally aware that they construct learning activity as work, and even more, that many of the classroom practices implemented are justified by an implicit understanding of learning as work.

The *WORK METAPHOR* is partly reflected in the language used to talk about learning. Words such as homework, tasks, collaboration, negotiation, scaffolding, design, effort, situated practice, or group work index a work view of learning activity. Consider examples in (1) which may be commonly heard in a classroom:

LEARNING IS WORK METAPHOR
You have to *work really hard* to learn Spanish indicative/subjunctive.
We are going to *work* in groups today.
Remember to do your *homework* for tomorrow.
This learning *task* requires some *serious effort*.
You have to really *practice and work on* your conjugations.
These situated *practice tasks work really well* for beginning learners.
These are *really hard-working* students.
You need to clarify that point so that it *works in* that paragraph.
Language learning is hard *work*

There are certainly instances where teaching language reflects an underlying learning as play understanding in expressions such as in (2):

(2) LEARNING IS PLAY METAPHOR
We are going to do *role-plays* today.
Since it is Friday, I have some *games* for the class.
You should *play* with that idea in your paper.
You need to *play* and *juggle* with it to really learn this concept.
He is a *team-player in* this class.

However, these types of expressions are less frequent and not as central in classroom discourse work-related expressions. It is also revealing to note that linguistic expressions where learning is constructed as play may be

substituted for terms and expressions that are also part of the learning- as-work metaphor. Games and role-plays may be constructed as tasks, and the teaching of writing in modern language classes is not so much about playing with ideas but working them into neat paragraphs.

(3) LEARNING AS PLAY IS ALSO WORK
We are going to do *role-work* today.
Since it is Friday, I have some *tasks* for the class.
You should *work* with that idea in your paper.
You need to *work* and *struggle* with it to really learn this concept.
*?[3] He is a *team-worker* in this class.

The reverse does not tend to be true: thinking about examples of work in terms of play. Consider examples in (4) as parallels to (1):

(4) LEARNING AS PLAY IS ALSO WORK
*? You have to *play really well* to learn indicative/subjunctive in Spanish.
*? We are going to *play* in groups today.
*? Remember to do your *home-play* for tomorrow.
*? This *learning game* requires some *playful* effort.
*? You have to really *play* on your conjugations.
*? These situated practice *games play* really well for beginning learners.
*? These are really *hard playing* students.
*? You need to clarify that point so that *it plays in* that paragraph.
*? Language learning is *hard play (or even: *?Language learning is playing hard).*

One could argue that these phrases are just a question of collocations in language. One could take the example of "hard play", or even "play hard", which sounds incoherent compared to collocations such as "hard work" when applied to instructional activity[4]. Still, the point is that "working hard leads to language learning" is conceptually more coherent than "playing hard leads to language learning". The argument here is that this is the case because of our cultural understanding of learning in terms of work activity.
At the very least these examples reveal an easier mapping of working onto learning vs. play onto learning. It also points to the power of implicit conceptual metaphors to understand, concretize, and discursively explain the

[3] *? It is used to mark examples which do not sound semantically coherent.
[4] In organized sports this collocation makes sense: "You have to play hard to win." "You have to work hard to win" is less likely. And you can say, "You have to work hard to play tennis well."

nature of complex processes such as learning. In any case, lurking beneath the present argument of conceptual metaphors is the idea of behavioral fidelity to the metaphors used to explicate teaching. This does not necessarily have to be the case. Language and discourse do not determine teaching practices, although they may orient priorities, which is the argument here. Still, there is a need for additional analysis of the recent history of L2 learning to reflect on pedagogical proposals based on learning as work.

4. Learning as work in the recent history of L2 teaching

It is argued here that learning-as-work research and teaching practices have been adopted by the profession as of paramount relevance to the teaching field, partly because they are coherent with a late modern cultural identification of learning with working. A cursory review of the recent history in L2 teaching is provided to illustrate the power of the work = learning equation. Pedagogical practices in schools are many and eclectic. Still, through the publications in the field of SLA, it seems that the learning as work metaphor acted as one of the determining forces in situating learning-as-work pedagogical practices as central to the field of SLA.

In the field of L2 teaching, and before the arrival of the different Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches that flourished in the 1970s and 1980s, classrooms were constructed as mechanical realities in which students learned to translate, repeat, and drill (Pomerantz and Bell 2007). Learning was not necessarily boring or devoid of any creativity or playfulness. It is reasonable to assume that pedagogical practices were eclectic and there was room for creativity. However, before CLT, learning opportunities provided to students as understood in the L2 literature were framed under a productive efficiency metaphor of learning as repetitive work. A behaviorist understanding of learning as repetition was framing these efforts (see Savignon 1997 on the influence of behaviorism on L2 teaching in the 1960s).

Play and games were integrated into the pedagogical practices for the communicative language classroom starting in the1970s and well into the 1980s. Several reasons could justify the emergence of this new trend: the importance placed on self-expression and interaction that came with CLT (Savignon 1997), the emphasis of humanist approaches to language teaching coming from the 1960s as a reaction to behaviorism (see for instance Richards and Rogers 2002 on Community Language learning), and perhaps partly

because of the prominence placed on learning languages as if L2 learners were children (Krashen 1985).

In the 1980s, under the CLT umbrella, learning as play can be found in several publications: language games used for conversational fluency in the communicative classroom (Klippel 1984; Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby 1984; Crookall and Oxford 1990 among others), Theater Arts as projects for language courses (Maley and Duff 1982; Smith 1984), and simulations (see for instance, Jones 1982) as a relevant tool to promote communicative competence. In these proposals, there are ideas for integrating creativity, imagination, and playfulness as the essence for promoting interactions in the communicative language classroom. In retrospect, it is also revealing to point out that there were well developed "play-inspired" CLT approaches in the 1970s and 1980s: see for instance Oller and Richard-Amato (1983) description of Simulations, The Silent Method, Sociodrama, or Strategic Interaction. They all have faded away in the 1980s and 1990s, and they do not seem to be an important part of mainstream research on instructed SLA in the 2000s and beyond.[5]

Savignon (1997) highlights how games, simulations, and theater arts in the CLT classroom have an intrinsic value beyond a motivational argument. For Savignon (1997), play activity such as simulations provide involvement and allow teachers to become one of the players in the classroom simulation (Savignon 1997, 195). Savignon (1997) also comments how theater arts brings fantasy, in the sense of creativity to the class. The acceptance of play as a component of the curriculum also increases the possibilities for a variety of group-building strategies, although Savignon cautions that a curriculum cannot be based exclusively on play activities (Savignon 1997, 187). This seems to have been the key. Play was not seen as a central approach to construct curricula. Although there were certainly approaches mentioned above (for instance Di Pietro 1987 Strategic Interaction) which connivingly argued that play in the sense of simulations, creativity, and drama-based improvisations could and should be used for constructing curricula and entire courses.

In mainstream eclectic CLT, play survived in language games used in classrooms for motivation and fun. In the introduction to learning game monographs of the 1980s, authors claim that if there is to have any relevance

[5] There is a revealing irony in Oller and Richard-Amato (1983) precisely titled "Methods that Work", when indeed the publication is about approaches that are fundamentally about play.

for teachers, games must be clearly related to practice. Consequently, these publications are compilations of language games or game-type activities for promoting communicative development in the classroom. In these listings of games with brief introductions there is no theoretical account of why games are beneficial from a research or theoretical perspective. For instance, Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1984, 1), in their outstanding compilation of language games, argued using a logical rhetorical move that the inclusion of games in the classrooms, will help to sustain interest and work in language learning:

> Why Games? Language learning is hard work. One must make an effort to understand, to repeat accurately, to manipulate newly understood language and to use the whole range of known language in conversation or written composition. Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain interest and work.

Games are constructed as opportunities for relaxation and motivation, although Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (1984, 1) acknowledge that some games create a genuine context for meaningful language use in the classroom, and argue that games "are thus not for use solely on wet days and at the end of the term". Motivation and fun are common justifications for proposing the implementation of games in the language classroom so as to nurture positive attitudes in learners (see for instance Jones 1982; Klimova 2015). Still, if play were to be considered a developmental force, other issues such as creativity, emotion, imagination would be paramount in learning processes.

Moreover, when a play element is present in the CLT classroom, Cook (2000, 193) argues that CLT "has neglected those pleasurable, emotive and controversial aspects of social interaction which are expressed through the genres of play". Even when there is an attempt to include samples of authentic language use in the communicative classroom, there is a privileged place for business discourse, polite conversation, and basic referential functions, whereas genres such as songs, jokes, prayers, and advertisements are not as central.

Although games and simulations were part of CLT in the 1980s, at least if one considers the publications for language teachers in this decade, the publication of language teaching games took a back seat during the next decade. From the point of view of language teaching methodology, the 1990s are the decade where Task-based approaches to L2 teaching and research rose to prominence in the field. Revealingly enough, the games of the 1980s are quite similar to the tasks that became central to the field of SLA in the 1990s.

In this respect, it could be argued that Task-Based Learning (TBL) approaches were instrumental in making some features of games part of the language classroom through the notion of tasks.

Significant and revealing for the present argument is that tasks fall under the implicit but prevailing learning-as-work metaphor. In task-based learning negotiation, outcomes, and real transaction are explicitly highlighted. Nunan (1989, 5) explains how the concept of task has been defined differently in several fields of study. Nunan (1989) uses Long's (1985, 89) definition: "a task is a piece of work undertaken for oneself of for others, freely or for some rewards". Tasks are in this respect very much part of a work-based understanding of learning (see also Cook 2000 below).

Nunan (1989, 40) also distinguishes two types of tasks for classrooms: real-world tasks and pedagogical tasks. But real-world tasks are not "real". These tasks require learners to approximate in class the sort of behaviors that may be required of them in the world beyond the class. This is indeed make-believe play of the sort found in language games and simulations for the classroom. Pedagogical tasks focus on the teaching of specific issues using strategies such as division of roles, information gaps, shared and conflicting goals for the completion of actions that parallel language games.

Indeed, many of the tasks proposed in TBL (see for instance, Willis's 1996 framework for task-based teaching) could be considered games: Information gap tasks as guessing games, sorting tasks as classification games, listing tasks as memory games, and debate tasks as simulation games. These tasks, like games, are outcome-oriented, participants have clearly specified roles, and language is a medium to attain an objective. Similar to the language games before, sometimes tasks integrate competition (debate tasks), other times there is an element of cooperation (information gap tasks). To be sure, the power of the learning- as-work metaphor is such that if games were considered peripheral although valuable for motivation in the 1980s, tasks are considered central and productive for anything and everything in the language classroom. Crookes and Gass (1993, 4) propose: "a task is a productive analytic unit for looking at classrooms and a productive unit with which to construct syllabi and materials". Tasks are units for research, syllabus design, task-based teaching, and assessment.

TBL is a major contribution to CLT. The point here is to realize how proposals that are coherent with the implicit conceptual metaphor of learning-as-work have become more prominent in the field of Applied Linguistics in the last decades. The result is that TBL is considered in the

SLA research community as one of the leading contributions in the last few years, whereas games have hardly been treated as an object of research. Confirming the hypothesis outlined here about the importance of conceptual metaphors in organizing language teaching in the classroom, the games of the 1980s were a complementary and non-essential activity to most pedagogical approaches for teaching languages. To be sure, valuable pedagogical approaches with significant insights for the communicative classroom - approaches that were creative and playful- have been almost forgotten (Silent Way, Sociodrama, Strategic Interaction, etc.). TBL, however, and the notion of task, clearly based on a learning-as-work metaphorical mapping, has been the basis for successfully constructing a whole and unique approach to language teaching and research.

In the field of SLA, Cook (2000, 157) has already argued that a narrow understanding of the notion of task proposed by Long (1996) is too restricted: "there seems to be in the choice of the word task an implied alignment of language education with work". Cook (2000, 161) explains how even a broader interpretation of task based on the importance of meaning, spontaneity, and reality is opposed to an understanding of language play where form, artificiality, and ritual also matter. Cook (2000, 195) outlines several recommendations so that a play element in language can enrich the language classroom. Among other proposals, Cook (2000) argues that a play element helps teachers justify the explicit teaching of deductive rules and the use of play genres and literature in basic language courses. It supports the importance of artifice in the classroom and understands the relevance of variety of interactional patterns in teaching. It also better conveys the forces of freedom and tradition in teaching methodologies.

Towards the end of the 1990s, and the beginning of the 2000s, there is a questioning on the lack of research on language play and its connection to L2 learning. Lantolf (1997; 1999), Cook (1999; 2000), Broner and Tarone (2001), Belz (2002), Pomerantz and Bell (2007), and Bell (2009) challenge the consideration that play elements, language play, and humor specifically, are not seen as central for L2 teaching and learning. This lack of relevance of language play in teaching is accompanied by a lack of theorization and research on play, and specifically language play in SLA, which also feeds back into the marginalization of play activity in the L2 classroom.

From a Sociocultural Theory (SCT, henceforth) perspective based on Vygotsky's research proposals, Lantolf (1997; 1999) argues that language play in L2 acquisition is about the focusing of attention with the purpose of

internalizing language. Language play is not simply fun. Language play is a fundamentally developmental activity which is self-initiated by students with the intent of focusing on a new language feature. Inspired by SCT, Sullivan (2000, 119) also remarks the limiting effects of the work metaphor still frame L2 teaching from a communicative perspective. Exploring the underlying assumptions of a Western construction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in a Vietnamese classroom, Sullivan remarks:

> Another core notion underlying the CLT approach is the concept of work. CLT includes 'pair work', 'group work', 'task-based learning', 'co-construction', 'scaffolding', and 'collaboration'. Each of these terms incorporate the notion of work. We work at tasks just as we work when collaborating... If the terms 'pair work' and 'group work' were changed to 'pair play' or 'group play', we would have a very different image of the purpose of groups.

To conclude, it is argued here that the learning as work metaphor is a powerful force in orienting practices in the field of SLA. Practitioners have adopted more easily pedagogical practices that are coherent with a common-sense understanding of learning as work. It is coherent with implicit and strong assumptions about the goals of L2 teaching in late modern societies. This is not to say that there have not been proposals and pedagogical practices that integrate play construction and understanding of classroom learning. There are certainly approaches based on a diffuse understanding of learning as play such as language learning games, gamification, and creative oriented activities. However, it seems that they are peripheral to main research, teaching, testing efforts in the field.

5. Learning as transformative play: A Sociocultural theory take

A third step in thinking about learning in a more complete fashion, and to go beyond a basic identification of learning activity with work is to widen the notion of learning to include play. This also requires a careful consideration of play and to go beyond the commonsense view that play is for fun. In contrast to views of play as trivial and circumstantial, play is a fundamental object of research in academic scholarship. Play is a transformative developmental activity in human ontogenesis (Bruner, Jolly, and Sylva 1976). Research on play illustrates how it is not only for enjoyment or relaxation, but it is a significant historical and cultural force in human History

(Huizinga 1956). The notion of language games is central in Philosophy of language (Wittgenstein 1958), in Sociology (Callois 1961), and in psychological therapy (Berne 1973).

Precisely, this reclaiming of the importance of learning as play in the classroom requires understanding play from a developmental point of view. A sociocultural understanding of L2 learning (Lantolf 2000; Lantolf and Poehner 2008; Negueruela and Garcia, 2016) helps practitioners to go beyond the motivation-for-learning and student excitement understanding of play. Play in the classroom is a transformative developmental force. Learning as play may bring enjoyment to some learners, but it should move beyond relaxation, fun, or gamification. Play may be beneficial from the point of view of classroom engagement, the creation of learning opportunities, and the generation of excitement and student-centered classroom dynamics. Nevertheless, the argument here is that play is a psychologically developmental and transformative activity.

In human ontogenesis, play is one of the critical leading activities in the sociocultural development of pre-schooled children (Vygotsky 1978, 98). In a Sociocultural understanding of human development, the influence of play on children's development is "enormous" (Bruner, Jolly, and Sylva 1976). From a SCT perspective, there are four features of developmental play as outlined by Vygotsky (1978): (1) It is historical. Play promotes going beyond the present; (2) It is imaginative and regulatory: creates alternative worlds guided by rules; (3) It is intentional: it promotes self-regulation and autonomy; (4) It is conceptual: it is about perception becoming conception, that is, the emergence of categorization and abstract thinking.

First, play is developmentally historical. It promotes the emergence of a future-oriented reality. Play creates an imaginary situation based on an unattainable present. Understanding children's play only based on the present pleasure that it brings to children is incomplete. Play brings the future into the present. For children, play appears to resolve the tension of the frustrating present. It creates a future that has not yet arrived. It represents a future in the making: "To resolve this tension the preschool child enters an imaginary, illusory world in which the unrealizable desires can be realized, and this world is what we call play" (Vygtosky 1978, 93). From a SCT perspective, play for children is about a make-believe future reality that becomes present through imagination.

Second, play is ruled-based. It is about make-believe imagination framed by rules. Play activity appears early in child development. It evolves, changing

the relationship between imagination and rules. The evolution of play from childhood to adult life is explained by the dialectical relationship between imaginary situations and rules: "the development from games with an overt imaginary situation and covert rules to games with covert imaginary situation and overt rules outlines the evolution of children's play" (Vygotsky 1978, 96). An example of play for children is Vygotsky's description of a child playing horse with a stick. Play continues to be critical in adults in competitive, creative, artistic, and game like activities where rules and imagination are intertwined (e.g. like a chess game, where adults unreflectively understand the imaginary qualities of king or queen figures but need to overtly know the rules of engagement to play). For children, rules mark the division between work and play, "a division encountered at school age as fundamental" in a child's ontogenesis (Vygotsky 1978, 104).[6] In work, which for the child generally means school, others impose rules, whereas in play activity, rules are jointly constituted. This is critical for the third feature of play as a developmental activity.

Third, play fosters the emergence of intentionality, purpose-oriented activity, and self-regulation. Play is not a rule-free activity, and a paradox is established in play, whereby play creates an imaginary situation but reality sets the rules of operation. The child freely accepts the rules of play. A game is "a rational and appropriate, methodical and socially coordinated system of behavior or consumption of energy, subordinated to definite rules" (Vygotsky 1997, 93). Children's wishes are realized through play when they allow the categories of reality pass through play activity. For Vygotsky (1978, 103), "the purpose defines the game and justifies the activity". In play, the internal world of the child becomes united with the external reality: "imagination, interpretation, and will are the internal processes carried by external action" (Vygotsky 1978, 100).

Fourth, play is about perception becoming conception. The child learns to act cognitively in play activity, and the unity between immediate motives and simple perception is lost. For children, each perception is a stimulus to the activity. "But in play, things lose their determining force. The child sees one

[6] Rule-constituted activities are those where the rules are necessary for the performing of activity, that is, play activities such as: chess, basketball, etc. If the rules are broken, the activity cannot continue. Rule-governed activities are those where the rules are not essential for the activity. For instance, in the case of driving, one must follow the different traffic regulations, but they can be broken, and the activity still continues (see Searle 1998).

thing but acts differently in relation to what he sees. Hence, a condition is reached in which the child begins to act independently of what he sees" (Vygotsky 1978, 97). It is through play that the child separates the field of meaning from the visual field. The relevance of play in children is such, that "it is through play the child achieves a functional definition of concepts or objects, and words become parts of things" (Vygotsky 1978, 99). Play separates meaning from action and objects, and in this distancing from reality, abstract thought emerges. Play creates an imaginary situation and can be considered as a means to develop abstract thought. "The essence of play is creating a new relation between the field of meaning and the visual field, between situations in thought and real situations" (Vygotsky 1978, 104). In play, as opposed to basic unmediated perception, meaning is foregrounded, and action or object are backgrounded. Meaning and intentions originate the activity.

From the point of view of development, and according to Vygotsky (1978) these four features of developmental play (historical, imaginative, regulatory, and conceptual) create a zone of proximal development for the child, where a child always behaves beyond his mental age. This is the wider background of play: "Action in the imaginative sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions, and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives, all appear in play and make it the highest level of pre-school development" (Vygotsky 1978, 102). The relationship between play and development can be compared to the instruction-development relationship, "play provides a much wider background for changes in need and consciousness" (Vygotsky 1978, 102).[7] Precisely, it is the quality of play as a voluntary creative transformative activity that makes it especially meaningful for L2 research and L2 pedagogy.

6. Learning as developmental play: Preliminary implications for the L2 classroom

The goal of this final section is to reflect on how a transformative developmental understanding of play prioritizes different pedagogical possibilities for L2 classroom. Framing teaching/learning activity through

[7] Newman and Holzman (1993) also articulate concrete ideas and practices for psychological therapy and community intervention inspired by Vygotsky's ideas on play as a transformative revolutionary activity.

transformative play foregrounds four features: identity and history, emotion and imagination, regulation and intentionality, and conceptual understanding. Here I briefly illustrate how a transformative play perspective offers a different road to approach L2 teaching/learning. I focus on four topics: (1) transformative play to better explain actual practices for communicative development; (2) reintroducing pedagogical approaches that were based on play as transformative, such as Di Pietro (1987) Strategic Interaction; (3) Creative writing programs as a source of L2 development; (4) conceptual teaching for communicative development.

In general, a first step for a transformative understanding of play for L2 instructional activity is to illuminate the real but make-believe nature of L2 communication in classroom settings, the actual playful nature of using the L2 in classrooms, the importance of encouraging creative and artificial language play in students, the relevance of allowing for an open and playful dynamic in learners' communication, the changing roles of students and teachers, or the significance of creativity as imitation in language development as opposed to repetition as mimicking (see also Cook 2000 on repetition and language play). These are already pedagogical practices in approaches that promote communicative development in the classroom. The goal here should be to make them central for setting learning goals for language programs.[8]

A second step to reclaiming transformative play as learning is to reintroduce communicative teaching approaches from the 1970s and 1980s that argued for play and creativity as major developmental forces. There were pedagogical proposals that foregrounded simulations, creativity, community, as seen in Oller and Richard-Amato (1983). To be sure, the argument here would be that the L2 professions would do well in recovering pedagogical proposals based on play so as to re-think their contribution through a more complete understanding of learning as not only work but also play. The goal is not to adapt some activities and techniques from these approaches, but to construct whole courses and curricula based on the notion of play as historical, imaginative, regulatory, and conceptual.

For instance, and from the present perspective, one of the communicative approaches from the 1980s that appropriately exemplify a transformative

[8] In this article I have not explored digital games and its connection to L2 learning (see for instance Acquah and Katz 2020). Gaming is certainly a relevant topic to be explored connected to Vygotsky's understanding of play.

understanding of learning as play is Di Pietro (1987) Strategic Interaction (SI). A SI approach to communicative development in the L2 classroom argues for the scenario as a pedagogical tool to promote communicative development. The scenario is a tool to construct a whole program. For sake of brevity, I offer Table 1 below as an illustrative feature-based heuristic to show how SI foregrounds learning as transformative play.

FEATURES OF TRANS-FORMATIVE PLAY	HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT Focus on identity.	IMAGINATIVE Focus on creativity as alternative results.	REGULATORY Focus on the connection between emotions, intellect, and intentions.	CONCEPTUAL Focus on conceptual frames in communication.
STRATETIC INTER-ACTION	Focus on role of participants as historical agent in communicative contexts. Start with needs to students. Syllabi are emergent and the outcome of instruction.	Promotes guided improvisation as the key to communicative development.	Centers on language as used to resolve tensions and establish identities. Strategic competence is central.	Debriefing on interpersonal communication after improvisations.

Table 1. An analysis of SI through transformative play features.

The key of SI is designing improvisation activities, scenarios o various configurations, so that the student may experience and understand the improvisational yet structured nature of human interaction. This drama-inspired approach promotes strategic competence first. The key to a well-designed scenario are conflicting roles and dramatic tension. Through these scenarios students improvise and prepare in groups so as to participate in communicative situations where they have to be strategic. They also learn to understand the three-dimensional nature of interpersonal communication: there is a message, there is a transaction, and there are roles and identities at play. Much could be said about how SI is indeed a fruitful approach for promoting communicative development through improvisational play based on drama techniques (see Alatis 1993). Suffice it to say here that improvisation, drama, creativity, and reflection are placed at the core of L2 teaching.

A third step is to think about how central pedagogical issues such as the teaching of reading/writing and interpretation are re-framed from a transformative play approach to learning. The argument will be that Creative Writing Programs should be the core of writing programs in L2 teaching. Writing/reading instruction, the emergence of literacy, is a core developmental activity from a sociocultural perspective (cf. Scribner and Cole 1981; Bodrova and Leong 1996). More specifically, research on reading/writing in the L2 classroom has developed pedagogical proposals to argue for the centrality of multiple literacies, texts and interpretation in the L2 classroom through the notion of design (cf. Kern 2000).

A transformative play orientation to learning questions a canonical approach to the teaching of writing in the classroom. From a utilitarian perspective, writing is constructed as a process where there is the production of an artifact: writer as worker engaged in the production of a manuscript through different drafts. From a work as labor perspective, one could argue that reading/writing is as a craft: writer as artisan engaged in the task of composing a specific text for a specific context: genres. Learning as transformative play highlights the role of writers as artists. This implies foregrounding creativity: meaning-making through creating texts by exploring the developmental powers of transformation and transgression. The issue is not to conform ideas to a genre, but to question and break genres through writing, self-expression, and exploration. The goal is that this process will promote an understanding of canonical genres through the creation of new models of writing. This approach is reserved mainly for "creative writing programs".

In L2 teaching, creative writing courses as a source of L2 development are rare and truly exceptional. There are certainly writing courses which integrate a few creative writing techniques. However, creative writing is a marginal pedagogical approach in L2 writing instruction. L2 reading-writing programs or writing courses which specifically play with language and focus on literature as play, rather than on literature as themes analysis and argumentation, are indeed quite rare. A focus on imagination and language play through creative writing in Foreign Language Departments at universities is almost absent outside of Creative Writing Programs. L2 writing courses should find inspiration in Schools of Arts, and Creative Writing Schools. Certainly, creative writing tasks are used in some L2 writing courses. The point here is to frame a whole L2 reading/writing program and based an entire course on creative, self-expression exercises where students write stories

to understand a story, write a poem to understand a poem, or write/perform plays to understand a play. In the end, from a transformative play perspective, the goal of teaching reading/writing for L2 learners is to foreground identity development and creativity.

A final example to understand learning as transformative play is to focus on the conceptual nature of L2 development from a sociocultural psychology perspective (Vygotsky 1986). L2 development is about the quality of cultural tools made available to learners in formal teaching (Negueruela 2003). Cultural conceptual tools are the key to explain the internalization of new conceptual knowledge (Arievitch and Stetsentko 2000). Marjanovic-Shane and Beljanski-Ristic (2008) argue that play and art are central in conceptual development. From a play perspective, the promotion of conceptual internalization in the L2 classroom is about understanding language through creative transformation and transgression (Negueruela 2008a). From a conceptual approach, L2 instructional activity is about both: (1) the internalization of categorization in a new language; and (2) the emergence of self-regulation through these new categories of meaning (Negueruela 2003).

These new categories of meaning connect with the teaching of complex grammatical notions. These challenging notions are connected to thinking-for-speaking patterns (Slobin 1996), such as aspect, modality, or voice (see Negueruela 2008a; Negueruela 2008b; Swain et al. 2009). A conceptual approach to L2 grammar based on the teaching categories of meaning is not about explaining complex notions in the classroom. It is a question of exploring how mastery of meanings and forms may be better promoted from a learning-as-play perspective that understands the importance of creativity as the basis for self-regulation, identity, and interpersonal communication. The issue is conceptual transformation, using the concept as a tool for understanding second language communication (Negueruela 2003). Different creative activities (drawing, drafting, designing, and conceptualizing) are at the core of internalization from a transformative stance (Negueruela-Azarola and Fernández-Parera 2016). The key principle is playful-guided creativity that leads to mastery of conventions and the internalization of complex conceptual categories.

7. Concluding Remarks

The implicit, sometimes explicit, learning-is-efficient-work identification defines, constructs, and assesses instructional activity through an outcome-oriented understanding of instructional processes. It prioritizes rational cognition, task-based approaches to teaching and assessing, and frames goals of curricula in terms of standards and norms, which are certainly helpful but contingent on specific educational frames. This learning-working equation also tends to leave out, or at the very least marginalize alternative results, emotional experiences, exploration, and creativity. These are paramount to personal identity, interpersonal communication, and meaningful L2 development.

An understanding of how the learning-working mapping operates to foreground pedagogical practices should allow practitioners in education, and specifically in the field of SLA, both researchers and teachers, to rethink priorities in teaching, testing, and research agendas. The hope is that this essay opens up a preliminary exploration of different priorities in curricula and syllabi based on a different type of understanding: learning as transformative play, which is still not fully explored as an object of L2 research. To be sure, the thesis here is that this is the case because learning is almost always implicitly framed in SLA/Applied Linguistics as containing work features. The work metaphor for teaching and learning is not exclusive to the field L2 teaching. It is present in most educational contexts. If play is seen as leisure activity, then there is no central place for creativity, imagination, arts in the classroom setting, where productivity is paramount.

The minimal theorization and research in the L2 teaching on play activity until relatively recently also maintains instructional activity as play in a marginal role in most language classrooms. Research on creativity in the field of Applied Linguistics (Swann and Maybin 2007) suggests that we need to understand creativity not based on the notion of novelty and artistry produced only by talented experts, but as a socially oriented, contextualized, and critical phenomenon present in everyday contexts. From the present perspective, and as Cook (2000) points out, the over-emphasis on reality, practicality, and efficiency in language classrooms, transactional communication in tasks, sameness in meaning without theorizing meaning, preponderance of reality over artifice, attention paid only to implicit diffuse inductive meanings and not forms, structural nature of language in teaching

even at the level of discourse and genre, and lack of value placed on play elements such as language play (Lantolf 1997; Pomerantz and Bell 2007) and humor (Bell 2009), not only limits but also may even hinder classroom-learning opportunities.

From a learning as transformative play perspective, ultimate attainment in L2 learning is not about rapid and natural fluency, perfect and precise accuracy, and sophisticated and elegant complexity (House and Kuiken, 2009). The final goal is artistic and humanist development. It is about identity and voice: creativity, artifice, and transformation. In this sense, for learners to be ready for a world of ever-changing realities, classrooms need to play hard, play in groups, engage in home-play, and play with language (Lantolf 1997; Cook 1997; Cook 2000; Broner and Tarone 2001; Belz 2002; Pomerantz and Bell 2007; Bell 2009). The final outcome of L2 development, if there is such goal, is improvised, transformative, and transgressive playfulness to establish and maintain agency, social relationships, and identity exploration.

In the end, the hope is that transformative play promotes meaningful L2 learning and significant engagement in learners. As Vygotsky's (1978, 102) remarks inspired by Spinoza: "in play activity, the rule becomes the desire". Understanding language learning as transformative play may also confirm the pedagogical experience of language teachers who witness the intense engagement and significant learning that play brings about in classrooms. Properly designed improvisations, simulations, Theater Arts, Creative Writing, language play, humor, imaginative improvisations, or any creative make-believe instructional activity should be at the core of language programs. The hope is that this essay initiates a reflection for teaching and research communities to be able to derive concrete, feasible, and pedagogically appropriate applications for specific contexts at the level of curricula, testing and assessment, and course design.

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