Dealing with toys: focussing the performativity in dealing with material in the middle childhood

The neglecting of materiality in pedagogy becomes apparent especially in the fact that a pedagogical theory of toys does not exist. In fact, the issues of play/game, things and playfully processes of learning are discussed (for example in the theories of Fröbel, Montessori and Mead). But things as toys, to which the intention of initializing playing is inherent, do not get attention, although within childhood, toys have a central meaning for the production of sense and meaning. Especially the performativity of social identities and differences can be reconstructed empirically on the basis of children's dealing with toys. Thus, two aspects come into sight.

Firstly, toys have a demanding character: they encourage for example to re-enact real worlds or create imaginary ones, or to interact with the toys themselves or with other people about the toys. Referring to the performed social identities and differences, toys do not seem to be neutral. They are emphasised with meanings concerning differentiations of gender, milieu, culture etc. Differentiations therefore affect children's play.

Secondly, children's dealing with toys is dynamically, toys are not only used in destined ways. Children often give own meanings to their toys, which can transform the original destiny. Both perspectives shall be considered in an empirical design, which focuses on the production of meaning in dealing with toys and in looking at the toys themselves. The contribution introduces into the design and first results of an explorative study, which aims on the reconstruction of using toys. Within the study, photographs of children with their favourite toys were examined by the documentary method of picture interpretation. The reconstruction of the pictures provides information about the huge spectrum of producing meaning within the intermediation of toy and the child's subject. The contribution closes with some methodological questions about photographs as empirical data, the relation of explicit and implicit knowledge of using things and doing difference, and the methodological challenges that are connected to the research an materiality.

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