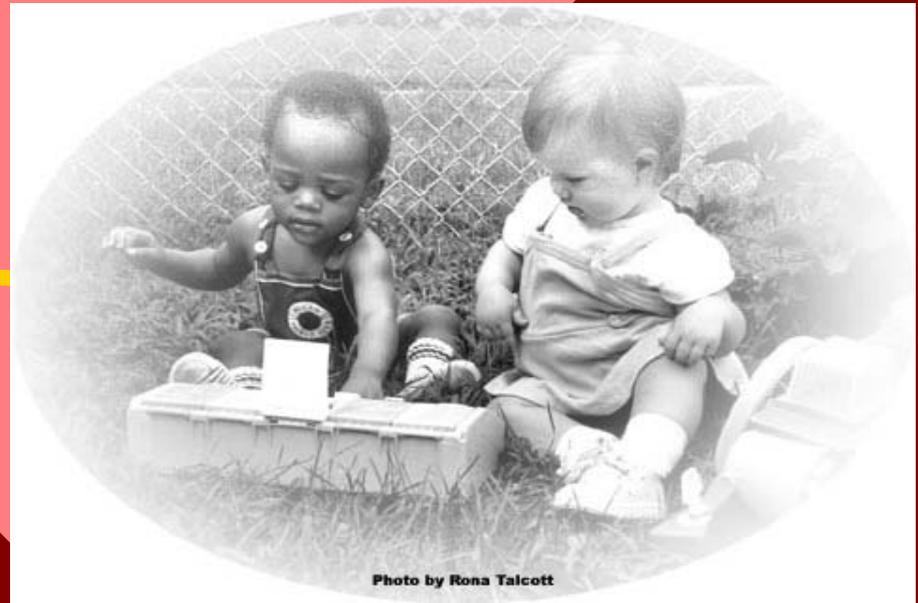




An Exploration of Play in Kenya

Dr Maggie Robson
Senior Lecturer
Keele University
UK



Why is it important to study play in Kenya?

Six Major Reasons:

1. Fundamental Right (UN Convention)
2. Play is important in child development
3. It is the theoretical base of play therapy
4. May help to convince parents and teachers that play is important
5. To contribute to the success of the Kenyan Early Childhood Development Policy (ECD)
6. The theory of play rests on observations of European children



Why is it important to study play in Kenya?



Source: <http://kabiza.com/images/aochildren2.jpg>
Accessed 19th March 2009

Play is a fundamental right of all children and recognised as such in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989).



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...'children's ...play has been hypothesised to contribute to the cognitive, motor and social development of children, including the development of perception, attention, memory, problem-solving skill, language, communication, creativity, logic operations, emotion regulation, self regulation, social skills, gender roles, social relationships, conflict resolution, coping with stress and so on.'

(Power, 2000)



Why is it important to study play in Kenya?



It is also the theoretical base for play therapy:

'When children play imaginatively, in whatever context, they create a fictional world, which can be a way of making sense of their real world' (Cattanach (2003)

And

'Children playing in therapy create a symbolic or metaphoric world where the power to change or reconstruct events belong to the children. In this play space, the children make acts of representation through which they can interpret or re-interpret their own experiences by playing imaginary worlds'

(Cattanach,1995)



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However, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in their policy review of early childhood care and education in Kenya suggest that the importance of play to healthy development is not universally recognised and argue that:

'Without using concrete evidence, it will be difficult to convince the parents as well as teachers that play is the best medium in which young children develop, learn and prepare for their future' (UNESCO, 2005)



Why is it important to study play in Kenya?

The Kenyan Government is committed to developing its Early Childhood Development Policy (ECD)

(UNESCO, 2005, van de Linde, 2006, Bogonko Bosire, 2006)

- The success of the ECD programme in Kenya is, to some extent, dependent upon the understanding of how and why such children in Kenya play. It aims to provide opportunities for the holistic development of children before they encounter a more structured and didactic regime in primary school.
- Kaga, (2006) argues that this foundation improves children's educational performance. He notes that '...ensuring holistic development -rather than early primary education - is the best way to prepare young children for successful schooling. Children perform best in school when they have had opportunities to develop socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively in their early years.' (Kaga, 2006).



Why is it important to study play in Kenya?

Many of the traditional theories of play are founded on the work of western psychologists (Piaget, 1951, Freud (in Millar, 1968), Winnicott, 1964 and Erikson, 1950) and are based on observations of western children's play.



Nuffield Research Foundation Funded Research Project

Small grant to:

1. Collect rich descriptions of children's play
2. Pilot an observation schedule

It is hoped to use the data gathered here to conduct comparative studies in Europe, the US and other parts of Africa



Sample

Observers (working in pairs)	Nairobi Location	Rural Location
Mary Otieno & Judith Ouko	Kibera slums	Nyanza Province, Bondo District - approximately 30 k from Kisumu
Merab Akinyi & Reuben Ngugi	Outskirts of Nairobi - between Kibera slums & modern Olympic Houses	Nahashon - approximately 30 k from Kisumu
Grace Oture & Rose Oballa	Buru-Buru Estate	South Nyanza Province - approximately 500 k from Nairobi
Peter Olumile & Jane Odangah	Lavington District	Vihiga District



Observations

Each child was observed by a pair of observers 4 times for approximately 45 minutes each time:

2 different times in school

2 different times at home

There were 4 urban children and 4 rural children - 16 observations in total



Children

Child (Aliases)	Age	Location
Mary	8 years	Outskirts of Nairobi - between Kibera slums & modern Olympic Houses
Jed	8 years	Kibera slums
Joseph	9 years	Lavington District
Dotty	10 years	Buru-Buru Estate
Shiro	8 years	Nahashon
Mike	9 years	Nyanza Province, Bondo District
Eunice	10 years	Vihiga District
George	8 years	South Nyanza Province



Preliminary Findings: Comparison to Piaget's Stages of Play

Age (Approximately)	Characteristics
Early to late infancy	Non-symbolic practice games- repeated movements to consolidate, perfect or elaborate a skill e.g.
Early childhood (before age 6)	Make-believe & symbolic games - play in which something stands for something else -toys represent something else, pretending to be someone else
Late childhood (before age 12)	Games with rules e.g. hide and seek, find the lion



Kenyan Children & Piaget

All the children were between the ages of 8 & 10 so we would expect them to be playing make believe, symbolic play & games with rules. They did!

- **Jed** - They are playing a game called Kati. Two girls hold play. They have a ball and they try aiming and hitting the girls in the middle if you are hit by the ball then you are out of play and have to be rescued
- **Dotty** - Some children who have been brought to the line are saying we are the policemen and some are saying we are the robbers. Dotty's turn reaches and she is brought to the line and she says, 'am a robber.' When everybody is on the line, they count, one, two, three.....ten. Then they all run scattering in different directions. The police are chasing the robbers. Dotty is a robber. She has been caught by a police but she breaks loose.



Differences in Play: Rural & Urban

Qualitative data does not aim to generalise but there did seem to be commonalties in some of the observations:

When playing at home, rural children and children from the poorer urban homes tend to play more made up games and the urban children who came from more comfortably off homes seemed to have more technology based e.g. playing while watching TV



Differences in Play: Rural & Urban

Rural Home & Poorer Urban Home

- Shiro has a few friends around her at home, three boys. She has taken a stick and has a tin. She hits the tin and a boy comes, picks it up, and runs away with it. She is hitting the tin after the toys; however, it is holding the stick in the mouth. A fourth boy has come to join.
- Eunice gets in to skip and this time they sing along a song called Jimmy do You Love Eunice? She skips and skips and skips as the brother swings the rope (This game entails questioning and where the rope stops as you skip is what becomes the answer to the question. Some of the choices available were, Nyumba ya nyasi, mabati, simiti-Utafanyia wapi harusi? *Where will you wed? Church, toilet, bafu, Utakuwa na watoto wangapi-10, 30, 40, 50,60etc)*

Urban Comfortably off Home

- Joseph has put it (the car) upside down indicating that the car has rolled and awaiting help, looking at it, he has stopped driving to watch Television, a cartoon program about spider man is running. He momentarily recovers the *overturned* car back on the road (table)
- Mary keeps looking at the Television and mouthing the remote control then she plays with it. She talks to her sister, telling her she has many things.



Taking on adult roles in Rural Areas

Eunice (10) has taken her lunch and also made sure she has given food to younger brother and sister. Her parents left in the morning.

Eunice is called by the grandmother to attend on house chores. She is cleaning some basins. She carries the basin to go and wash. Carries the cloth for washing. She finally finishes washing

George (8) comes out with a bucket of water. He then brings out a sack and pours its contents on the ground. They are sweet potatoes. All this is happening outside his uncles house. He picks a potato at a time and washes. He scrubs the potatoes very thoroughly and puts the clean one on a separate piece of rug..... He continues to wash the sweet potatoes. They are talking about the war between the Luos and the Maasai. They talked about how the attacks were scary. (George's home is at the border of Maasai and Luos.)

Mike (9) tells us that at this time they don't play coz they have roles to play. They carry Jeri cans to go fetch the water. He goes for the first trip comes back and empties into the big drum in the next room. His bro joins him and the go the next trip together. They come back and empty again into the drum in the house again. Go for another trip together again and do the same routine. When they come back, he doesn't go the next round but his brother goes to fetch the water. He sets his waters outside but his brother empties into the big drum in the house. He starts removing the utensils one after another. He places them where he had put the water. He moves from room to room looking for the dirty utensils. He locks the door and goes to the shop. He tells us he is going to the shop to buy soap to come and wash utensil. He says that they usually take turns in washing the utensils. He tells us his brother will cook food. Their mum has gone to the market to sell food stuffs for money. He has a very serious face at this time. He comes back and washes the dishes one after the other until they are all over then he takes them to the house.



Conclusions: Influence of Culture

Play always takes place within a context - inside the home, in the compound, at school etc.

Play which explained by these contexts are labelled *cultural-ecological theories*

We could use these to explain the differences and the similarities in the play that was observed here in Kenya



Culture

- Culture is often assumed to be shared within a geographic area e.g. the Kenyan Culture
- It's not - varied as each snow flake in a snow storm and ...as difficult to capture and describe
- Kenyan culture could be viewed as a snow storm - family, school, friendship, work place and even conferences all have their own unique culture and each flake adds to the overall storm
- Culture is always in transition



Role of Culture in Play

'Play, a dominant activity in all cultures, is viewed to be a cause and an effect of culture. Play is an expression of a particular culture; play is an important context or vehicle for cultural learning/transmission, as well as an indicator and reflection of child development'

(Roopnarine & Johnson, 1994, p.5)



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