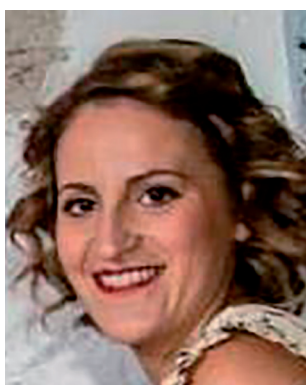

EDUCATING BEYOND THE EMERGENCY. A PRELIMINARY OVERVIEW ON THE USE OF PLAY IN SITUATIONS OF CRISIS

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Abstract

If scientific literature (mainly psycho-pedagogical) on the child's play is already immense and epistemologically recognized and internationally sanctioned by both the UN Declarations and Unicef, the same can not be said about the use of play in emergency situations (cultural, humanitarian, social, political). We refer both to the war zones and refugee camps as well as natural disasters, as (unfortunately) the most recent history testifies to us.

The present article, therefore, starting from the distinction between "play for the sake of play" and "play-like activities", constitutes the outcome of a first attempt to gather in a coherent and critical corpus the researches on this topic, trying to highlight the heuristic and pedagogical value of the use of the play in situations of crisis.

KEYWORDS: PLAY, EDUCATION, SITUATIONS OF CRISIS, EMERGENCY IN EDUCATION, INCLUSION, DISABILITY, CHILDREN, PLAY FOR THE SAKE OF PLAY, PLAY-LIKE ACTIVITIES.

1. Introduction

War has always been a sworn enemy of childhood. If for centuries wars had the form of clashes between soldiers, with civilians in the role of spectators and casual victims, those of our time are almost exclusively massacres of unarmed people. From the Second World War onwards, over 90% of the fallen in the wars are civilians, in half of the cases children. These are the effects of modern conflicts, whose theaters are no longer trenches or battlefields, but cities, villages, schools and hospitals (UNICEF, 2007).

Haeen is a little child of the Orthodox Christian community of Erbil, in the district of Ainkawa (Kurdistan, Iraq). A row of terraced houses, all the same: two floors, a small courtyard bordered by a gate. A stationary fruit and vegetable van on the corner and a queue of women busy shopping. At first sight nothing strange, except a roar of children that grows, and expands in the air. Nothing would suggest that there is an improvised kindergarten inside one of those small houses. Its rooms that would normally accommodate the living room, kitchen and bedrooms have been equipped with small rows of desks, and there is even a room to play. Colored carpets on the floor, puppets, colored balls, a tiny slide. It is the kindergarten of Father Jacob, prior of the Orthodox monastery of Mar Matti, in Bartella, a town a few kilometers from Mosul. Like all children with him, he fled from there in the summer of 2014, when the advance of Daesh¹ put thousands of people on the run, arriving in large numbers in Erbil. He did not hesitate to accept them, even if there were any assistance or services and he did not

have the means to welcome all those families. Unable to find a place for everyone, Father Jacob sought a solution and arranged a small rented house up to transform it, thanks to donations and fund-raising events, into a kindergarten with 5 classes for 150 children between 3 and 5 years. As he explained: “We do not have specialized personnel here, only many teachers of good will who are trying to help these children, the first victims of the traumas we all suffered. [...] Children often ask when they can go home and, really, we do not know what to say”. Among these children, there is Haeen, a three-year-old child with carrot-colored curly hair and two curious eyes. “Haeen never wanted to play, she was isolated, sad, it is not usual behavior in children, who usually can not wait to be together and have fun”. Then, one day after another, thanks to the interactions with other children and to the various psychosocial support activities, as part of the Child Support Program, she started to smile too. Maybe the memories of the war will simply disappear with time, but, as Father Jacob said, “we can not erase them, we can work to make these children happier”².

Haeen is one of the daughter of contemporary wars and abuses that are happening and conditioning the lives of many children scattered around the most fragile areas of the world. These children, for the most various reasons (e.g. large-scale disasters, men-made catastrophes, everyday hazards, etc.), can not or, as Haeen, do not want to play as if “war” and “childhood” were two oxymoronic conditions of life.

This story, indeed, like many others over the centuries, inevitably leads us to ask a series of

¹ Some international political leaders have been referring to ISIS calling it “Daesh”: it happened for the terrorist attacks of November 13th (2014) in Paris that French President François Hollande attributed it to “Daesh” (they were claimed by ISIS on Saturday 14) and when US Secretary of State John Kerry spoke about the dangers of “Daesh” during the international negotiations in Syria. There are two other ways to define ISIS: “ISIL”, that is a different interpretation of the same acronym that gives rise to ISIS, and “Islamic State”, that is the name with which the group calls itself from June 2014. Summing up, even though many international newspapers use “ISIS”, we can say that using “Daesh” instead of ISIS or ISIL or Islamic State has a very precise value, namely that of partially excluding the adjective “Islamic” from the concept of ISIS.

² The story of Haeen and the Community of Father Jacob is inspired by the article “I bambini e la guerra. La storia di Haeen, che non voleva giocare”, retrieved from: http://www.huffingtonpost.it/martina-pignatti-morano/i-bambini-e-la-guerra-la-storia-di-haeen-che-non-voleva-giocare_b_8767850.html.

questions, not only as citizens of the world, but above all as person. What are the crisis situations today? What consequences do they have on children, their educational process and their spontaneous urge and desire to play? What image of childhood and its characteristic playfulness do give us back?

If the scientific literature (mainly psycho-pedagogical) on the child's play is already immense and epistemologically recognized, the same can not be said about the use of play in emergency situations (cultural humanitarian, social, political). We refer both to the war zones and refugee camps as well as natural disasters, as (unfortunately) the most recent history testifies.

The present article, therefore, starting from the distinction between "play for the sake of play" and "play-like activities", constitutes the outcome of a first attempt to gather in a coherent and critical *corpus* the researches on this topic³, trying to highlight the heuristic and pedagogical value of the use of the play in situations of crisis. Indeed, given the intrinsic polysemy of this human phenomenon and, at the same time, its permeability with respect to the historical-social and cultural conditions, the majority of the play activities represent always something (Fink, 1960), as if it were a ludic anthropological lens (Kaiser, 1996).

2. Children, play and emergencies: a new-erending story

The twentieth century was an infinity of things. It was also the century of children, the time in which for the first time in human history, childhood has affirmed and obtained a formal recognition – at least in the Western Countries – its peculiarities. This consideration of the world of child and childhood certainly appears as one of the constitutive traits

of contemporary Western culture.

In 1900, the Swedish designer, reformer and social theorist Ellen Key published a manifesto with an evocative title: *The Century of the Child* (1900), a declaration for social, political, aesthetic and psychological change that presented universal rights and the well-being of children as a mission for the future. Her thought inaugurates the reconsideration of the value of childhood that, from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, has been at the center of theoretical and practical research in the psycho-pedagogical and medical field, as well as a series of legislative and educational and cultural proposals aimed at to the protection of the child internationally (Gecchele, Polenghi, & Dal Toso, 2017: 9)⁴.

2.1. The importance of play

Parallel to the growing interest in the world of childhood, the significance and importance of the play and its educative and psycho-pedagogical value are more widely acknowledged. As it is known, the interest of pedagogy and psychology towards child's play dates since the very beginning of these disciplines and many perspectives over the centuries have followed one another, offering multiple interpretative models (Besio, 2007; Staccioli, 2004). It is now unquestionable that the play represents for each child, beyond his/her social, bio-physiological, cultural, economic, politic, etc. conditions, a rewarding and vital experience linked both to the conditions of pleasure and enjoyment connected to it and to its crucial importance for the overall development of the child's cognitive, socio-relational and psychological skills (Winnicott, 1971). In line with this, the wise pedagogical research (from Froebel to Dewey, from Montessori to Agazzi sisters) today accredits the play not as one of the countless occupations of the human being, but as the engine of his/her most

³ This overview does not pretend to be exhaustive, as representative of a certain way to decline the play in the current context of crisis and emergency.

⁴ This perspective is questioned, from the Eighties, by Neil Postman who affirms that in the twentieth century, because of its progressive mass-medialization, it has been passed from the discovery of childhood to its demise (Postman, 1982: 10).

important activities, as a permanent formative device and ontologically embodied in the same idea of humankind and culture (Huizinga, 1938). Especially after the Second World War, the interest in play gradually begins to grow in a dual way. Firstly, among the ruins of many European cities, interdisciplinary groups of professionals implemented psycho-educational interventions aimed at “alleviating” the inevitable wounds of the war and the difficult conditions of its reconstruction through initiatives like those called by Klein “therapeutic play” (Klein, 1929). In this sense, key-words for the second part of twentieth century were «processing of trauma, resilience, resistance, prevention, training and learning in crisis situations, educational care» (Isidori & Vaccarelli, 2015: 17). Secondly, the number of contemporary designers and artists who decide to put their art at the service of the “toy industry” is increasing, promoting the idea of the “good” toy: well designed, safe and non-violent⁵.

However, in addition to being recognized as a fundamental pedagogical device and the first and crucial form of knowledge of the world by the child, today “playing” is a right proclaimed and recognized, first, by the 1959 UN *Declaration of the Right of the Child* and reiterated by its edition of 1989, in particular Article 31: «1) States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. 2) States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity». It is the first, but necessary attempt to establish a link between the material rights and the immaterial aspects of the child’s life as the right to play presupposes that the child,

as well as the adult, participates in social life and in that need self-transcendence which supports human life in a personal and relational sense (Besio, 2010).

Therefore, this represents an epochal change, in terms of pedagogy and politics of childhood, which is reaffirmed by UNICEF and which leads to the birth of various associations, including *International Play Association (IPA)* and its related *Declaration of the Child’s Right to Play* – originally edited in November 1977 in preparation for the International Year of the Child (1979) and updated in 2014, *Declaration on the Importance of Play*.

2.2. Play and emergencies

Although the play seems a constituent tract of childhood and «every child should be able to enjoy these rights regardless of where he or she lives, his or her cultural background or his or her parental status»⁶, however there are children who can not or do not want to play for a variety of reasons. Often these reasons concern emergency and crisis situations where «play is often given lower priority than provision of food, shelter and medicines» (UN, Committee on the Right of the Child, 2013). On the one hand, in fact, it is undeniable that the twentieth century was full of great achievements for children in which educational and cultural services have increased, even for those children who live with a disability or a dislocation. On the other hand, however, it was crossed by dictatorships, world wars, massive bombings and massacres and natural catastrophes in which civilians also became victims and military targets and childhood was militarized (Gecchele, Polenghi, & Dal Toso, 2017: 10). The child lives an existence in many ways less uncertain but still fragile. And, therefore, how to guarantee this universal right to play even in crisis situations?

⁵ In this regard, it is noteworthy the recent exhibition held at the MoMa in New York dedicated to play and toys, entitled *The century of the child: Growing by Design, 1900-2000* (2012), an ambitious survey on the design of the 20th century, an overview through 500 objects to tell how design, artists and architects – many of whom are not by chance women – have designed the world of childhood.

⁶ See: UN, *General comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts* (art. 31).

What are these emergency situations? What scenarios (pedagogical, political, cultural, social, humanitarian) do current crisis situations open?

The word “crisis”, of Greek derivation (κρίσις), originally indicated both “separation” (from the Greek verb κρίνω, “to separate”, and in a broader sense, “to discern”, “to judge”, “to evaluate”) and a series of secondary acceptations including its meaning, born in the medical field, as “critical period”, “critical phase”. This etymological sense of *change, transformation over time* – originally declined in terms of the course of a disease – during the centuries has taken on a negative meaning – overshadowing the positive one as “possibility of change”, “resolved phase” – and is now mostly used to indicate a worsening of a situation, the perturbation or sudden change in the life of an individual or of a community, with more or less serious and lasting effects (e.g.: spiritual, religious, conscience, social, etc.).

The history, past or more recent, offers numerous examples of “crisis”, especially since the early twentieth century when the changed complexity of the historical and social reality brings out, on the one hand, new forms of “catastrophes” (e.g.: environmental catastrophes related to the new and massive industrial production or to the levels of pollution) and, on the other, socio-political transformations that, first, changed the nature of war conflicts up to becoming “global” and, in the second part of the twentieth century, gave rise to some of the most profound disaster conditions – both natural and man-made – that have led to the impoverishment of the so-called Third World countries.

These are the kinds of emergencies to which, in the contemporary world, the scientific community is trying to answer both according to the natural sciences’ point of view and educational sciences’ perspective (sociology, psychology, anthropology, etc.). This fact glimpses interesting food for thought.

In particular, strongly related to the development of psychology of emergencies (Mitch-

ell, Lebigot, Crocq, DeClercq) and sociology of catastrophes (Barton, Dynes, Drabek, V.A. Taylor), a new discipline called *pedagogy of emergency* or *emergency pedagogy* (Kagawa, 2005) has started, a branch still little known in the scenario of pedagogical disciplines with a specialized epistemology (e.g.: social pedagogy, special pedagogy, etc.) (Isidori & Vaccarelli, 2015: 71). It concerns a theoretical and practical proposal at the crossroads between pedagogical reflection, research and educational and didactical intervention to restore the issues that the current “emergencies” (cultural, humanitarian, political, social, economic, political) open in the educational studies.

In the international literature (mainly French and English) starting from the Nineties (Sinclair, 2001), the expression *pedagogy of emergencies* or *emergency pedagogy* (Kagawa, 2005) refers to those timely actions planned to restore, following a sudden phenomenon, the essential and basic conditions to allow, even in the presence of wars, natural disasters or in restoration of post-conflict peace and “stability”, the education of children, young people and adults (Sinclair, 2001). In particular, it focuses on: the person or the community; the strategies activated; and the social and local concerns created by the unexpected crisis.

Within the countless intervention strategies that every day are set off by pedagogists, educational professionals, operators and international organizations (such as NGOs and IGOs)⁷ to manage the enormous educational problems related to the major emergencies hit on a global scale, now this paper try to highlight which of these intervention models adopt activities based on play activities or that in some way include them. The final goals are to clarify the anthropological, epistemological and pedagogical reasons behind these approaches and what consequences these crises have on the image of childhood, on the children’s life and on their accessibility to fully enjoy the mentioned “right to play”.

⁷ International organizations have played and play a fundamental role, especially, in helping to set the international agenda, mediating political bargaining, providing place for political initiatives and acting as catalysts for coalition-formation.

3. Play-based interventions in today situations of crisis

As we pointed out in the previous paragraph, the expression “crisis or emergency situations” includes all humanitarians, natural and man-made disasters that today, as in the past, afflict the world. Catastrophes that are characterized as *non-places* where entire generations lead their existence in conditions of stable precariousness (think, above all, of refugee camps, post-conflict cities or entire nations devastated by the power of nature) in which “the provisional is lived as definitive” and “the definitive is lived as provisional” (Augé, 1993: 172).

And in these non-places, children are the “invisible majority”. Children are under threat every day. Not only their lives are at risk, but they risk becoming child soldiers, being forced into child labour, early marriage or trafficked for exploitation. These children need protection. A report by UNICEF (2016a) reviewed that children are being used in war zones in at least 20 countries around the world. They are being forced into child labour to earn money for their refugee or displaced families, for instance, Syrian girls are being married off early as families seek to protect and secure the future of their daughters, and children fleeing war are easy targets for trafficking into slavery. Because of the complexity of these kind of phenomenos, the reality is much more complicated than the traditional dicotomy portraits by literature between children and young people as “passive victims” and “active treats” (Sommers, 2006: 6; Wessels, 1998).

In another report, UNICEF reveals that an estimated 535 million children (nearly one in four) «live in countries affected by conflict or disaster, often without access to medical care, quality education, proper nutrition and protection» (2016b), whether for reasons of physical location, psychological difficulties, administrative and social barriers or other causes (Save the Children, 2006).

The geopolitics of these emergencies concerns in particular 3 areas: Sub-Saharan Africa is home to nearly three-quarters (393 million) of the global number of children living in countries affected by emergencies, followed

by the Middle East and North Africa where 12 per cent of these children reside (Poulatova, 2013). The impact of conflict, natural disasters and climate change is forcing children to flee their homes, trapping them behind conflict lines, and putting them at risk of disease, violence and exploitation. Nearly 50 million children have been uprooted, more than half of them driven from their homes by conflicts (Poulatova, 2013). As violence continues to escalate across Syria, the number of children living under siege has doubled in less than one year. Nearly 500,000 children now live in 16 besieged areas across the country, almost completely cut off from sustained humanitarian aid and basic services. In northeastern Nigeria, nearly 1.8 million people are displaced, almost 1 million of them are children. In Afghanistan, nearly half of primary-aged children are out of school. In Yemen, nearly 10 million children are affected by the conflict. In South Sudan, 59 per cent of primary-aged children are out of school and 1 in 3 schools is closed in conflict affected areas. More than two months after Hurricane Matthew hit Haiti, more than 90,000 children under five remain in need of assistance.

Despite significant progress and *The Dakar Framework for Action* commitment to «meet the needs of education system affected by conflict, natural calamities and instability» (UNESCO, 2000), too many children are being left behind because of their gender, race, religion, ethnic group or disability; because they live in poverty or in hard-to-reach communities, or simply because they are children. Children to whom these circumstances deny the right to play. But what happens to children when they can not play? When, how do they replace the paly with war, sufferings? As reported by IPA, «Play deprivation is highly detrimental to affected children, communities and society as a whole. Not playing deprives children of experiences that are regarded as developmentally essential and results in those affected being emotionally, physically, cognitively and socially disabled. If normal play experiences are absent the child is more likely to become violent and antisocial. Although data on the impact of not playing for humans is space, the findings of the studies that do exist give cause for

concern. If children are kept in and not allowed out to play, they are likely to manifest symptoms ranging from aggression and repressed emotions and reduced social skills, to inactivity and an increased risk of obesity. Adults reporting environmental restrictions on play (e.g. having less time to play) are more likely to be overweight and have less healthy lifestyles» (IPA, 2014)⁸.

So, although in crisis situations, play is a fundamental educational device for the child (UNESCO, 1999), helping him/her not only to cope with stress, anxiety, depression and trauma due to the emergency, but also to keep him/her anchored to that childhood dramatically interrupted by the crisis itself (Euli, 2007), very little evidence exists on children's play in situations of crisis.

Today, the development of standard emergency education response concern mainly child-friendly spaces, school-feeding programmes and educational kits⁹ (Penson, Tomlinson, 2009). However: Is the play used in this kind of interventions? How?

3.1. What kind of play is promoted?

This paper, aiming at highlighting the main ways play can make a positive difference in the lives of those children who are facing extraordinary situations, offers a first overview on the use of play in situations of crisis and emergencies starting from the distinction between “play for the sake of play” (Besio, 2017) and “play-like activities” (Visalberghi,

1958). Quoting Besio: «it was the Italian pedagogist Aldo Visalberghi (1958) who systematised these issues clearly, in a way that is still productive today for a critical reading of the existing research in the field and for future directions. Indeed, according to him, the play activity has the following characteristics: a) it is demanding, it requires a complete commitment by the player; b) it is continuative, it develops continuously in a child's life; c) it is progressive, because it can become gradually and increasingly complex; no play activity is exclusively repetitive and equal to itself; d) it envisages the end of an activity, not requiring a continuation once the game has ended. Many activities carried out in schools or in educational contexts that include learning objectives can have the appearance and even the structure of play activities and can, of course, have amusing and fun characteristics. For these activities and programmes, Visalberghi proposes the expression *play-like*. They have the same first three characteristics as the play activities, but not the fourth one, since they do not end in themselves, but have educational objectives and a final scope, that of learning» (Besio, 2017: 38-39).

As it is easily imaginable, most of the educational interventions implemented within emergency settings are principally school-based. As Baxter underlines, they concern «three different types of alternative access programmes: accelerated learning,

⁸ To face these conditions, in 2015 IPA launched a new project *Access to play in crisis (APC)* composed by two parts: a training project (tool kit) and an international research project aimed at fill the lack in studies by conducting empirical researches in sic countries (India, Japan, Lebanon, Nepal, Thailand, Turkey). The first results were presented at the *IPA Triennial World Conference* host in Calgary last September, 2017. For further information, see: <http://ipaworld.org/what-we-do/access-to-play-in-crisis/> (retrieved: January, 2018). Following the world conference, it was also published *The Access to Play in Crisis Handbook* (IPA, 2017) to support people and agencies working in crisis situations so that they are better able to understand and support children's everyday and community-based play opportunities at two levels: 1. the practical application of children's right to play within programmes for children in situations of crisis; and a raised awareness of this right at a strategic level so that the resources and networks will support sustainable impact. The Playshop introduce the new Handbook using a practical interactive and fun style so that participants gain an insight into ways in which we can support the play rights of children in very challenging situations and, in doing so, support their physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development. The Playshop focus on the practical elements of facilitating play including: the role of adults, supporting play, features of the environment, balancing risk and benefit and reflective practice. Participants reflect on the implications for a range of different circumstances in which children face barriers in exercising their play rights. They are invited to contribute their own experience and observations so that together we can further develop our understanding of play in the context of crisis.

⁹ They are called “school-in-a-box” by UNICEF and “Teacher Emergency Package” by UNESCO and generally contain, in one easily transportable container, the basic materials (e.g. exercise book, pencil, erasers, scissors, chalkboard, chalk) that teachers need to teach a group of children in an emergency (Penson, Tomlinson, 2009: 46). This idea of “one-size-fits-all” solution is developed in response to the breakdown of formal provision of education. They have been used for the first time in Somalia in 1991, implemented in 1993 and subsequently used mostly in conflict zones (Abrioux, 2006).

home-based or community-based schools and education programmes that are partly literacy/numeracy and part skills training» (Baxter, 2009: 45). They carry “alternative” topics (e.g. hygiene, peace educations, etc.), and can be used in post-conflict situations as well as for educational access for otherwise marginalized children, such as children labourers, children living in remote geographical areas and very poor children. This kind of experiences, where a central role is played by teachers as change-agents (Shepler, 2011) and where “play” is replaced by teaching and learning activities, are sometimes included in school-feeding programmes (Penson, Tomlinson, 2009) starting from Barnard’s statement that «in many cases food is more essential to the boys and girls than education» (Barnard, 1887). Aiming at removing the obstacles to learning caused by malnutrition, they contribute to children’s more general cognitive development (Levinger, 1986)¹⁰, the improvement of school enrollment and attendance and learning capacities (IRC, 2002: 29).

Alongside these experiences, there are also *alternative curriculum programmes* developed because the mainstream curriculum is not attempting to respond to the perceived needs and are, therefore, “filling the gap” (Baxter, 2009: 91). They are generally composed by “preventive programme” (such as HIV and AIDS education) as well as “psychosocial programme” designed in order to «help overcome negative consequences of conflict or disaster and associated trauma» (Baxter, 2009: 33) and to change behaviours according to modern behaviour change approach (Glanz, Lewis, & Rimers, 1990; Grizzell, 2007)¹¹.

A different role could be played by “children-friendly spaces” which, by definition, «are community programme to create larger protective environment[as they] are developed with communities to protect children during

emergencies through structured learning, play, psychosocial and access to basic services» (Save the Children, 2007: 4). Although they are not schools and usually do not seek to provide formal schooling, the main goal of children’s protection is often linked with the provision of psychosocial support. In this way, also these “children-friendly spaces” created as “spaces to give children the space to be children” (Penson, & Tomlinson, 2009: 30), areas for children to come to express themselves through sport, recreational activities, drama, drawing, games, theater (UN, 2013), in most cases all these activities are subjected to rehabilitation and therapeutic purposes. And though few organizations or agencies adopt this psychosocial approach, the general label of “psychosocial” is often used for characterizing these humanitarian projects as they rapidly become attractive and fashionable for Western donors (Summerfield, 1996: 12).

This also seems to be validated by some reports presented to the aforementioned *IPA Triennial World Conference* of 2017¹²: whilst they confirm the positive impact that play has on children’s developmental outcomes in various settings, including for children affected by crisis situations, and on creating inclusive contexts, they generally promote integration, belonging and resilience through play activities based on programmatically clear educational goals.

We refer here, for instance, to *Equitas Play it Fair! Approach* (by Claudia Sighomnou and Ruth Morrison), a play-based project grounded in human rights values (e.g. respect, inclusion, equality) that is being used internationally to build children’s resilience and participation in post-crisis contexts (e.g. Syrian Refugees in Canada, children in Sri Lanka, children in Haiti). In particular, reinforcing the important role that play (grounded in a human rights-based approach)

¹⁰ In reality, very little research has been done on the effectiveness of school-feeding programmes (Levinger 1986) and there was no empirical evidence to demonstrate a causal link between school feeding and educational results (Sack, 1986; Loewald, 1986; WFP, 2007).

¹¹ Modern behaviour change models are a combination of behaviourist perspectives (mainly Skinner), social-learning theory and social cognitive model (see: Bandura, & Walters, 1963; 1977; Bandura, 1986; Perry, Barnowski, & Parcel, 1990).

¹² All the abstracts of the conference presentations are available online: <http://canada2017.ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Concurrent-Session-Descriptions.pdf>. Retrieved: January 25th, 2017.

can make in countering disconnect and social isolation that refugee children (and families) experience, it supports children, firstly, by building their social-emotional competencies, communication skills and healthy mental development, through regular physically active play-based activities that counter disconnect and social isolation by fostering a sense of belonging, connectedness with peers and adults, increased self-confidence, inclusion, and acceptance. Secondly, it builds the knowledge and skills of community-based organizations so that they can lead activities that include children who have experienced crisis and support them to take on leadership roles and reach their full potential in their communities.

A similar approach is also presented related to the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011 that damaged a wide area of the land in Northern part of Japan, together with the subsequent tsunami and nuclear power station accident. Children who experienced these terrible disasters and the post-disaster situation have suffered in mental, physical and social ways for their development and affected by PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). The authors (Isami Kinoshita, Kumi Tashiro, Mari Yoshinaga, Mitsunari Terada and Hitoshi Shimamura) address the role of play, adventure playgrounds and other play interventions, including mobile play, for their healthy development which addresses mental, physical and social issues of children after the disasters, learning from the experiences after the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Leonor Diaz, instead, presents how play was used as an avenue for psychological debriefing through instruction (PDI) which was offered to children who experienced the devastating effects of a series of natural disasters. The processes undertaken included creation of developmentally appropriate activities for young children that focused on interactive story sharing and play and actual implementation of these learning opportunities to children-at-risk. Planning of content and delivery of the psychological debriefing through instruction took into account knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice from story selection and

thematic play-oriented activities.

Another example could be offered by the experiences of “clowns nudging” and “hospital clowning” (Anes, IPA Calgary, 2017) in which, by engaging children in a playful interaction and pushing their natural instinct to play, the clowndoctors performances and workshops can successfully convey non-formal learnings and support the transmission of important life-skills to the target groups, thus contributing to decrease the level of stress and fear that prevails among crisis-affected persons by successfully triggering, a shift of focus in the sea of negative feelings experienced – from insecurity, hopelessness and disillusionment to a more optimistic prospective in life including happiness and positive solution finding.

As evidenced by these but also many other experiences, the play itself is often included and subordinated to a therapeutic-rehabilitation framework (Boyd Webb, 2015) that, according to Visalberghi definition, uses this device as an “excuse”, a “diversion” to wrap the child to participate in rehabilitative and educational activities in order to orient him/her towards certain educational objectives that do not start from the child’s needs. This attitude of hyperprotection, against that idea of “play as risk” and adventure, that the child likes so much, is not shared by everyone (e.g. Opie & Opie, 1969), but at the same time this tendency is nourished by that liminal border – that has not been addressed clearly until now – between education and rehabilitation as both «aim for the same goal: give the child an opportunity to make positive and useful experiences, for training new effective abilities, so positively influencing the structure of the brain and consolidating new learning» (Besio, 2017: 37).

In this sense, these “play-like activities” become important factor of “educational care” rather than education and aimed to satisfy needs rather than desires (Potestio & Togni, 2011).

This “ludomatics” perspective (Besio, 2010: 86), based on learning methods intentionally proposed by the adult in an extrinsic way, certainly finds its theoretical justification in the same formative effectiveness recognized

by many psychologists and pedagogists over the centuries who stressed the positive effects that play and playing have in the different dimensions of the person's life (biophysiological, cognitive, recreational, emotional, psychodynamic, etc.).

In this sense, from this very first review on this field research, it seems that the idea of play as "play for the sake of play" is generally replaced (implicitly or explicitly) by proposed and programmed "play-like activities": «while play has extraordinary educational value and can be used as an incomparable educational 'hook', it undoubtedly loses some of its play features: for example, freedom, pure ludic spirit, transgression, autonomous initiative, and autotelism» (Besio, 2017: 38).

This has contributed to overshadow the genuinely ludic, fun and recreational dimension of the play linked to that idea of "*delectare*"¹³ and to implement the risk of its negative intellectualization (Vygotskij, 1981) weakening its healthy and innate eudemonological tension. Although such ludiform activities are certainly driven by noble aims, opting mainly for them implies the risk of losing that idea of play that some authors of the past (Fink, 1957; Claparède, 1968; Parlebas, 1997; Aucouturier, 2005) indicated as "an oasis of joy" or "moment of pleasure". An aspect that should never be underestimated, especially in those areas of the world in which, due to the deep wounds that affected them, "playing" is not automatic and spontaneous and that would really need to recover that recreative, fascinating and instinctive idea of the play as pure realization of the free expressiveness of each child, an authentic vehicle for a message of freedom, peace and hope. In a certain sense, it would be desirable to retrace the story and make the reverse passage from *ludos* (play with rules) to *paidia* (play without constraints) – and not vice versa – in order to restore that authentic meaning of playfulness that is not "controlled" or "goal-oriented" but related to the spontaneous sense of fun, en-

joyment, light-hearted (Besio, 2017: 39). According to Bondioli, «the scope of this ludic action is neither therapeutic nor strictly "educational", but simply ludic and its intrinsic happy sharing is simultaneously its meaning and its "purpose" (Bondioli, 2002: 86). To adopt and be aware of the suitable scaffolding strategies to support children in situations of emergencies and crisis, teachers, caregivers, practitioners and operators need to understand better the meaning of children's play activities and they do not need to have beautiful, innovative or latest generation games because "toy" is whatever is interesting for the child and meets his/her instinctive desire to play. Bateson said that everything that people do can be a "play", it concerns the spirit with which they do it (Bateson, 1996).

4. Conclusion

As reported by IPA: «the lack of play impacts on all children wherever they live. Children living in poor or hazardous environments, children in situations of conflict or humanitarian disaster, asylum-seeking and refugee children, children in street situations, and migrant or internally displaced children are likely to be unreasonably affected by environmental constraints on their enjoyment of their right to play. Policy makers who are sensitive to children's play needs in the planning, design and management of programmes to support such children will create more desirable environments and alleviate the possible effects of lack of play» (IPA Handbook, 2017: 15). Despite the lack of data on the use of play-based activities in emergencies areas and the consequent need for future in-depth analysis and researches, play is more important than ordinary for children living such extraordinary lives. According to Hyder, it becomes fundamental not only as necessary feature to childhood and essential component of his/her development, but especially a means to regain

¹³ This Latin expression was mainly used as synonymous of "pure pleasure, enjoyment, pleasantness". Especially referred to poetry, arts and, in general, aesthetics, this word recalls us the ancient Horace's motto "aut delectare aut prodesse volunt poetae" ("the poets wish either to profit or to please") and the traditional contrast between two possible functions of the poetry: moral (*prodesse*) and hedonistic (*delectare*). This dichotomy animated the aesthetic debate up to the eighteenth century when, thank to Baumgarten (*Aesthetica*, 1750-1758), the scholars seek to weld the link between the ethical and veritable sphere of art within the boundaries of subjective judgment and taste.

“lost childhood” (Hyder, 2004) restoring that positive meaning included in the Greek etymology of word “crisi” as “moment of decision”, “resolved moment” according to which the “possibility of change” becomes the necessary prerequisite for a general improvement, a rebirth.

5. References

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