This book includes eight chapters reflecting various approaches towards the theme of play for children with disabilities that characterised the work of the COST Action TD1309 "LUDI–Play for Children with Disabilities". Alongside these multifaceted points of view, some theoretical aspects emerged as a common background: the ICF-CY theoretical perspective, the vision of "play for the sake of play" and play as a fundamental right of every child.

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Daniela Bulgarelli, Ed.

PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH ON PLAY FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

COLLECTED PAPERS

LUDI Play for Children with Disabilities

cost EUROPEAN COOPERATION IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Daniela Bulgarelli (Ed.)

Perspectives and research on play for children with disabilities

Collected papers

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Cover illustration: Inclusive play at school (Camilla, 10 years, Italy).

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Mabel Giraldo

4 Children with and without disabilities in disasters. A *narrative overview* of play-based interventions into the humanitarian programmes and researches.[9]

Abstract. The scientific literature (mainly psycho-pedagogical) on the child's play is immense and epistemologically recognized, but the same cannot be said about the use of play in emergency situations (natural, humanitarian, social, political). Few researches exist on this subject, especially focused on children with disabilities.

The paper analyses the situation of children (with and without disabilities) in natural and man-made disasters and of the attention given to this vulnerable population within academic researches and humanitarian programmes. Then, this article reflects on the pedagogical value of the role and the use of play in crisis situations for all the children. In particular, starting from a narrative review of the academic literature and research in area, it aims at proposing a preliminary overview of the different play-based interventions promoted worldwide in such emergencies.

Keywords: Play, crisis situations, education in emergency, children with disabilities, play for the sake of play, disaster.

4.1 Introduction

Crisis situations have always been a sworn enemy of childhood. For centuries they mainly concerned wars in the form of clashes between soldiers, with civilians in the role of spectators and casual victims. From the Second World War onwards, the extent of the emergencies has been massively amplified. Firstly, the theaters of modern conflicts were no more battle fields, but cities, villages, schools and hospitals, as over 90% of the fallen in the wars were civilians, in half of the cases children (UNICEF, 2007). Secondly, new men-made (such as industrial accidents, chemical disasters, terrorism, etc.) and natural (such as tzunamis, earthquakes, floods) disasters have opened up.

Today, all these emergencies do not affect all people evenly: often they supervene to pre-existing vulnerable conditions of some groups, such as for example disability

9 This article is an update and in-depth revision of a previous paper entitled *Educating Beyond the Emergency. A Preliminary Overview on the Use of Play in Situations of Crisis* published in the journal "Today's children – Tomorrow's parents (TCTP)", within the special issue "Play and children with disabilities – interdisciplinary perspectives" (2018, pp. 48-61).

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and age. Thus, children and, especially, children with disabilities are widely recognised as particularly vulnerable and in need of specific interventions in crisis situations (Bizzarri, 2012).

Conservative estimates suggest that 7 million children with disabilities are impacted by disasters each year (Peek & Stough, 2010). Millions more acquire disabilities during childhood as a consequence of disasters. Historically, children with disabilities have been overlooked by disaster researchers and professionals and, for this reason, are effectively deprived of the humanitarian aid they need due to a lack of identification and referral procedures, poorly adapted services and poor access (Battle, 2015: 238). This is even more surprising since children with disabilities are among the least prepared and most poorly supplied, ultimately experiencing amplified physical, psychological and educational vulnerability (Alexander, 2011).

Although the recent *Resolution 2475* (UN, 2019), adopted by UN Security Council, calls upon Member States and parties to armed conflict to protect specifically persons with disabilities in conflict situations and to ensure they have access to justice, basic services and unimpeded humanitarian assistance[10], a small body of research (mainly on war or post-conflict emergencies within the legal, political and sociological framework) focused on this topic (Alexander, 2011). Therefore, further investigations, especially from an educational perspective and also including all the actual forms of disasters, are needed, with respect to the historical-social and cultural conditions: What are the crisis situations (including all humanitarian, natural and men-made disasters) today? What consequences do they have on the children (with and without disabilities), their life and their educational process? How can it be possible for them to live their infancy in spite of drama, fear, bereavement? Is it possible to imagine that they preserve their spontaneous urge and desire to play as the most vital expression of their childhood? Can play become a source of well-being, renaissance and even resilience?

In order to answer to these questions, this article reflects on the pedagogical value of the role and the use of play in crisis situations for all the children. In particular, starting from a *narrative review* of the academic literature and research in area, it aims at proposing a preliminary overview of the different play-based interventions promoted worldwide in such emergencies.

10 This first-ever resolution of its kind, adopted by UN Security Council in June 2019, encourages Member States to ensure to persons with disabilities enjoy equal access to basic services, including education, health care, transportation and information and communications technology (ICT) and systems, and that States undertake measures to enable the meaningful participation and representation of persons with disabilities, including their representative organizations, in humanitarian action and in conflict prevention, resolution, reconciliation, reconstruction and peacebuilding. It also urges proactive steps to eliminate discrimination and marginalization on the basis of disability in situations of armed conflict and compliance with the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) (2006).

4.2 Emergencies and children (with and without disabilities): a neverending story

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 in the human life. This topic, as a constitutive traits of contemporary Western culture from the end of the Nineteenth Century onwards, has been at the center of theoretical research in the psycho-pedagogical and medical field, as well as a series of legislative, educational and cultural proposals aimed at the protection and development of the child internationally (Gecchele, Polenghi & Dal Toso, 2017: 9)[11]. Among them, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) (UN, 1989) was an important reminder of the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children, including, not secondarily, the right to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts.

Neverthelss, today's reality of childhood is not progressive as hoped. Around the world children are exposed to violence in multiple forms getting them caught in the crossfire; these events involve particularly children with disabilities. In fact, emerging research suggests that disasters have differential and most often negative consequences for individuals with disabilities (Parr, 1987; Rockhold & McDonald, 2009; Kett & Twigg, 2007). Epidemiological studies also indicate higher exposure and mortality rates for persons with disabilities in such crisis situations (Chou et al., 2004). Thus, although the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD, 2006) outlines the obligation of State Members to protect and ensure the safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk (art. 11) – including natural disaster and armed conflicts – and today, as mentioned, the same mission is specifically recalled by UN *Resolution 2475* (2019), in practice disability is still rarely considered in humanitarian programmes (Kett & van Ommeren, 2009).

What are these emergency situations? What scenarios (pedagogical, political, cultural, social, humanitarian) do current crisis situations open? What consequences do these emergencies have for children (with and without disabilities)?

11 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).

4.2.1 Pedagogy of emergency: a framework for today's crisis situation*s*

The history, past or more recent, offers numerous examples of "crisis", especially since the Twentieth Century when the changed complexity of the historical, political and social reality brought out new forms of "catastrophes" (men-made and natural) as well as transformed the nature of war conflicts (up to becoming global). In such disasters, today a significant role is played worldwide – not without ambiguity (Hemment, 1998; Smith & Vaux, 2002) – by Governamental organisations as well as by the international cooperative movement and many NGOs: in managing emergencies, ensuring first aids and protection and, in general, supporting the global development of the most socially and economically backward countries as well as helping to set the international agenda, mediating political bargaining, providing place for political initiatives and acting as catalysts for coalition-formation.

The scientific community, for its part, tries to give its meaningful contribution from many areas: among them, natural, educational, psychological, anthropological sciences.

In particular, new fields of study and intervention are born: for example, the psychology of emergencies (whose main exponents are Mitchell, Lebigot, Crocq, DeClercq) and the sociology of castrophes (Barton, Dynes, Drabek, V.A. Taylor), together with a new discipline called *pedagogy of emergency* or *emergency pedagogy* (Kagawa, 2005). This last, in particular, started within the broader discourse on educational policy (Sinclair, 2002), 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). It concerns a theoretical and practical proposal at the crossroads between pedagogical reflection and educational interventions to face the issues that the current emergencies (cultural, humanitarian, political, social, economics) open up in the distablished and destroyed educational systems (UNESCO, 1999; Pigozzi, 1999; Sinclair, 2002).

Within the international literature (mainly French and English) starting from the Nineties[12] (Sinclair, 2001), pedagogy of emergency deals with education during and after complex humanitarian hazards, rapid responses during crisis and post-crisis educational reconstruction, referring to those timely actions able to restore the essential and basic conditions to allow the education of children, young people and adults (Sinclair, 2001).

12 This research field has become especially important from the "Education for All Summit" at Jomtien (1990) and the "World Education Forum" held at Dakar in 2000 which emphasized the role of education in addressing and preventing problems arising from conflicts and natural disasters (Chand et al., 2004).

4.2.2 Children and emergencies: geodemographic data

"Crisis or emergency situations" are characterized as *non-places* where entire generations lead their existence in conditions of stable precariousness (refugee camps, post-conflict cities or entire nations devastated by the forces of nature) in which "the provisional is lived as definitive" and "the definitive is lived as provisional" (Augé, 1995: 172). In these non-places, children are the invisible majority. Not only are their lives 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) refers 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 this kind of phenomenos, the reality is much more complicated than the traditional dicotomy portraited in the related literature, between children and young people as "passive victims" and "active treats" (Sommers, 2006: 6; Wessels, 1998).

In another document, 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 particularly 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 conflicts, natural disasters and climate changes 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 (pre-exsisting or acquired) disability; because they live in poverty or in hard-to-reach communities. Or simply because they are children.

4.2.3 Children with disabilities in disasters: twice as vulnerable[13]

The impact of war, conflicts and disasters on children with disabilities is even more severe. These children may have a pre-existing disability prior to emergencies or they may have reported an impaiment due to the conflict or the disaster. Vulnerability in their cases is exacerbated by facing natural and man-made hazards and their indipendence reduced (Miles, 2013), by factors that include mobility difficulties, pre-existing medical conditions, and existing social and physical structures and policies (Peek & Stough, 2010; Boon et al., 2011). Physical disabilities can limit children's effective responses to disaster; in Haiti, hundreds of children lost their limbs from crashes during the 2010 earthquake, while others under-went amputation as a result of secondary infections (Alexander et al., 2012). Moreover, pre-existing disabilities may be due to medical conditions related to illness, malnutrition, and abuse when disaster strikes (Boon et al., 2011). Additional impairments may be acquired and further health issues might be faced as a result of inadequately staffed shelters that are not prepared to meet their medical needs (Lemyre et al., 2009). Children with autism spectrum disorders may suffer from sensory integration problems related to their high sensitivity to light, sounds, odors, tastes, and touch that make them particularly vulnerable during disasters (Boon et al., 2011). Children with hearing difficulties are disadvantaged in recognising an (impending) disaster or in accessing to emergency information when oral directions are given unaccompanied by sign language or visual hints (Boon et al., 2011). Children with intellectual disabilities and mental health problems face severe disadvantages and confusion, for example in recognising signs of environmental danger or understanding impending threats

13 The concept of "vulnerability" has been the subject of intense debate and interpretation among scholars. The term is often used in divergent ways, for different purposes (Bankoff et al., 2004), and sometimes out of its original theoretical framework. In this paper, in line with the studies on disaster and humanitarian programmes (Alexander et al., 2012), the concept is used according to the philosophical and political paradigm of "social vulnerability" (O´Keefe et al., 1976) and, consequently, viewed as a social construct associated with fragility in the face of natural hazard (Cutter et al., 2000; Gaillard & Pangilinan, 2010; Phillip et al., 2010; Singh et al., 2014). According to Ranci (2002), a state of vulnerability can be synthetically defined as a life situation in which the subjects' autonomy and self-determination ability is permanently threatened by an unstable integration into the main systems of social integration and resource distribution.

(Kailes & Enders, 2007) or they may become anxious and confused in response to emergency signals (Scotti et al., 2007).

While the disaster literature highlights the overall effects of emergencies on children as a vulnerable group in society (UNICEF, 2007; Peek, 2008; Gaillard & Pangilinan, 2010), researchers rarely examine the experiences of children with disabilities during disasters, regardless of their type of disability (Peek & Stough, 2010; Boon et al., 2011). In addition, the more pressing needs of living arrangements, food and basic healthcare in countries affected by conflicts and other disasters are understandly prioritised over disability. As a result, children with disabilities are overlooked in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) planning or emergency training (Ronoh et al., 2015). This lack of research and emergency programmes reinforces the perception of their inherent vulnerability and risks to increase their invisibility as well as the level of discrimination (Alexander, 2011).

The existing literature is concordant on some common problems that can increase the probability of negative effects of disasters particularly in the case of children with disablities. First, as recognised by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2014), their specific needs are often overlooked, especially in the early phases of humanitarian emergencies. There is plenty of evidence on the widespread failure to recognize the specific needs of children with disabilities during disasters, and, when these needs are indentified, a tailored response is not available (Alexander, 2011). Oversights and omissions appear almost inevitable in such circumstances.

Secondly, most of the problems experienced by children with disabilites in emergencies are directly attributable to limitation in staffing and management (Twigg et al., 2011). According to Clive and colleagues (2010), these issues concern poor DDR planning, confusion about the roles and responsibilities and misplaced assumptions among emergency managers that disability service providers can meet all needs of the persons with disabilities in a crisis. As a result, persons with disabilities (especially children) remain largely invisible to emergency officials (Twigg et al., 2011) and disregarded in most disaster response systems (Kailes, 2008).

A third set of problems refers to some local and pre-exisiting social, political, cultural and educational barriers. Social distancing or stigma on disability may further limit access to primary resources, social networks, and other sources of psychological support during a disaster, or make it difficult for a child with a disability to adjust emotionally to a new neighborhood or community (Tierney et al., 1988). As disabilities are strongly associated with social, structural and financial disadvantages, families caring for children with disabilities become even more vulnerable in facing a crisis situation. In addition, these barriers may include non-flexible government policies and service funding constraints.

Although these problems and the small body of research on children with disabilities involved in disasters (Alexander, 2011), several UN and non-governmental organization initiatives have started to consolidate a “disability focus” within the humanitarian sector (Kett & van Ommeren, 2009) leading to the recent *Resolution*

2475 (UN, 2019). At the beginning, in 2012 new guidelines, entitled *Including everyone: INEE pocket guide to inclusive education in emergencies* (2009)[14], were drafted by the Inter-agency Network on Education in Emergency (INEE) ensuring the inclusion of children with disabilities in the work of the education cluster, through specific measures: by making school buildings physically accessible, providing training to teachers, and raising both awareness and perceptions of disability amongst teachers, parents, other children, communities, humanitarian actors and policy-makers. Similarly, *Sphere Handbook*[15], translated into more than 30 languages, include "persons with disabilities" as a cross-cutting problem in disasters recognizing them as a "vulnerable group", along with women, children and elderly. More recently, UNICEF has developed guidance to help make sure that children and adolescents with disabilities are included in all stages of humanitarian actions, from preparing for emergencies to recovering from them. *Including Children with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action* guideline[16] consists of six booklets – respectively dedicated to general guidance; nutrition; health and HIV/AIDS; water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); child protection; and education – full of practical actions and tips.

In addition, Alexander (2011) suggests some useful initiatives such as *Verona Charter on the Rescue of Persons with Disabilities in Case of Disaster* (2007)[17], the non-governmental organization (NGO) *Handicap International* (2006; 2008)[18] or again some manuals of best practice by the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)[19].

Despite these efforts, education for children with disabilities in emergencies remains marginalised, and it is particularly difficult to hold donors accountable for including disability issues in humanitarian relief efforts. Especially, most programmes and manuals focus on disability as a crosscutting issue or on protecting persons with disabilities as a vulnerable group, rather than indicate specific actions for realizing inclusion and overcoming barriers. As suggested by Kett and van Ommeren (2009), «there is little evidence that these guidelines are used to any effect with people with disabilities, in part because of a lack of standards and indicators to monitor inclusion; but also because of the lack of awareness and training at the field level» (p. 1801). It is a vicious circle within which the children with disabilities usually risk being considered as mere passive recipients of aid (Twigg et al., 2011: 252). Consequently, the problems with the potential vulnerabilities of children with disabilities during disasters are poorly understood (Ronoh et al., 2015), as well as their psychological impact (Joshi &

14 See: https://inee.org/system/files/resources/INEE_Pocket_Guide_Inclusive_Education_EN.pdf (retrieved: July, 2019)

15 See: https://www.spherestandards.org/handbook-2018/ (retrieved: July, 2019)

16 See: http://training.unicef.org/disability/emergencies/index.html (retrieved: July, 2019)

17 See: www.eena.org/ressource/static/files/Verona%20Charter%20approved.pdf (retrieved: July, 2019)

18 See: https://hi.org (retrieved: July, 2019)

19 See: https://www.fema.gov (retrieved: July, 2019)

O'Donnell, 2003). Thus, the children are largely portrayed as "helpless" in the face of disaster (Smith et al., 2012).

4.3 Educating beyond the emergencies: the possible role of play

Play is recognized as a constituent tract of childhood and one of the child's rights: «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»[20]. 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, Commettee on the Right of the Child, 2013).

Thus, why and how might the universal right to play to all the children (with and without disabilities) be guaranteed even in crisis situations? What forms can it take? What supports can be made available?

4.3.1 The importance of play for all the children

The significance and importance of 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 play represents for each child a rewarding and vital experience linked both to the connected conditions of pleasure and enjoyment, beyond his/her social, bio-phisiological, cultural, economic, politic, etc. situations; it is also universally known for 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) accredits play not as one of the countless occupations of the human being, but as the engine of his/her most 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 as a field of intervention against disasters gradually begins to grow in a dual way. First, it has been used by interdisciplinary groups of professionals who, among the ruins of many European cities, implemented psycho-educational interventions addressed to children, aimed

20 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).

at alleviating the inevitable wounds of the war (one example is Klein's "therapeutic play"; Klein, 1929). This pioneering experience was then replicated and disseminated, along the second part of the Twentieth Century, where psychological intervention has variously been adopted in the forms of «processing of trauma, resilience, resistance, prevention, training and learning in crisis situations, educational care» (Isidori & Vaccarelli, 2015: 17). Second, active cultural and political shifts in the population's attitudes at large have been actively provoked by artists and contemporary designers by intervening in the toy industry, promoting the idea a new toy: well designed, safe and non-violent[21].

Furthermore, play is a right proclaimed and recognized by the 1959 UN *Declaration of the Right of the Child* and reiterated by its edition of 1989, in particular in the 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 into the social life (Besio, 2010).

This epochal change had enormous consequences in child pedagogy as well as in infancy politics and it led to the birth of various associations in the field, including *International Play Association (IPA)* which in occasion of the International Year of the Child (1977) issued its *Declaration of the Child's Right to Play*, updated then in 2014 with the title *Declaration on the Importance of Play*. In particular, IPA, with the document *The Play Rights of Disabled Children IPA Position Statement* published in 2015, affirms that children with disabilities have the same right as other children to sufficient time and space to play freely, in the ways they choose, without being unduly overprotected.

In this regard, the General Comment N° 17, related to the UNCRC Article 31, mentions the problems associated with the even more dramatic lack of attention on play in the case of emergencies and vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities and children in situations of conflict, natural disaster or humanitarian crisis, among others (art. 31). They need specific attentions and the right to play must be ensured to all children in order not to limit their developmental opportunities. As suggested by Bianquin (2018), this is underlined also by the *Convention of the Rights*

21 In this regard, it is noteworthy the 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.

of Persons with Disabilities (2006), which devotes its Art. No. 7 to the expression and the protection of the rights of children with disabilities, giving then emphasis to the need to guarantee them an adequate educational process in an inclusive system throughout life (Article 24) and to ensure their participation in all recreational activities, entertainment and sport, including education (Article 30).

Multiple physical and social barriers prevent children with disabilities from exercising their rights under Article 31 and reduce the naturalness of their play. For example, children with physical disabilities' playing skills are generally affected by the severity of motor functional limitations and the possible association with other types of disability (Besio, 2010). Children with intellectual disabilities, especially medium-severe, are not eager to playful interactions with peers preferring to play with the younger companions, and usually prefer to repeat the play activities they already know; they usually do not like to explore new activities or try to transfer their games to other contexts (Meyers & Vipond, 2005). Due to their impairment in comprehension, they rarely have the opportunity to reach the more complex types of play. Children with autism spectrum disorders tend to hinder their participation in play activities and they do not disclose a natural inclination towards what happens around them; they are used to be attracted by some particular objects intensely and in an exasperated way (Jordan, 2003). The visual impairment causes a serious decrease in the quantity and quality of usable games, which eventually converge on board games, based on preformed materials.

But beyond these barriers, play for all the children is an intrinsic and necessary element as human beings and is configured as one of the most significant indicators of their bio-psycho-social health (Besio, 2010). It represents a decisive factor for the development of cognitive, motor and emotional abilities: play is discovery, exploration, and stimulation (Besio et al., 2017).

4.3.2 Play-based interventions in emergencies

Within the interventions that every day are set off by pedagogists, educational professionals, operators and international organizations (such as NGOs and IGOs) to manage the enormous educational problems related to the major emergencies hit on a global scale, some of them adopt activities based on play or that in some way include it. Over the years, these experiences have produced a certain amount of materials, documents, operational and methodological proposals (mostly accessible online) aimed at ensuring to all children involved in crisis situations to fully enjoy the aforementioned "right to play".

What happens to children when they can not play? Then, how do they replace war, sufferings by playing? Do they usually play, even in dramatic contexts and conditions? How do they play in these situations?

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 scarce, 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)[22]. 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 filling the lack in studies by conducting empirical researches in six countries (India, Japan, Lebanon, Nepal, Thailand, Turkey). In its related Handbook (IPA Handbook, 2017), fully endorsing UNCRC and UNCRPD, IPA states that every child, included those with disabilities, should have equal opportunities to enjoy his/her right to play in their everyday lives.

So, although in crisis situations, play has to be recognised as a fundamental educational tools for all the children (UNESCO, 1999), helping them not only to cope with stress, anxiety, depression and trauma due to the emergency, but also to keep them anchored to their own childhood, that was dramatically interrupted by the crisis itself (Euli, 2007).

Unfortunately, as reported in the following paraghaph, few researches focus on children's play in crisis situations, especially related to children with disabilities.

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22 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: August, 2019). After the world conference, it was also published *The Access to Play in Crisis Handbook* (IPA Handbook, 2017) to support people and agencies working in crisis situations in understanding and supporting 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 crisis situations; and 2. a raised awareness of this right at a strategic level so that the resources and networks will support sustainable impact. The Playshop introduces 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 focuses 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 be in invited to contribute their own experience and observations so that together we can further develop our understanding of play in the context of crisis.

4.3.3 What kind of play is promoted in crisis situations?

In what follows, a first overview on the role and the use of play in crisis situations within the humanitarian programmes and researches is presented[23].

As it is easily imaginable, most of the educational interventions implemented within emergency settings are principally school-based. As Baxter (2009) underlines, they concern «three different types of alternative access programmes: accelerated learning, home-based or community-based schools and education programmes that are partly literacy/numeracy and part skills training» (p. 45). In this kind of experiences, a central role is played by teachers as change-agents (Shepler, 2011) and play is replaced by teaching and learning activities. In fact, the so-called *educational kits*[24] generally contain, in one easily transportable container, the basic materials (e.g. exercize book, pencil, erasers, scissors, chalkboard, chalk) that teachers need to teach a group of children in an emergency (Penson & Tomlinson, 2009: 46). Moreover, these programmes can carry "alternative" topics (e.g. hygiene, peace education, 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. In advocating also for the importance of education in emergencies, literature focuses especially on the development of more inclusive education systems and schools (Miles, 2013).

Furthermore, these educational interventions 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, 1987). Aiming at removing the obstacles to learning caused by malnutrition,

23 The data presented in this paragraph have been selected starting from a *narrative overview*, also known as an *unsystematic narrative review* (Oxman & Guyatt, 1993; Collins & Fauser, 2005), of the primary sources related to the use of play-based interventions for children (with and without disabilities) in crisis situations. All the documents (n. 10) included (papers, proceedings, chapters in book and reports) in the review have been selected by surfing the website of the organisations and associations of the area as well as using the EBSCO host and ERIC databases. Aiming at analysing the use of play in emergencies, the review follows these steps: 1. exploring the humanitarian educational programmes proposed by the main NGOs, associations or international organisations; 2. selecting those programmes or researches that provide specifically play-based startegies; 3. analyzing and discussing the play-based strategies used starting from the distinction between "play for the sake of play" (Besio et al., 2017) and "play-like activities". This narrative overview does not pretend to be exhaustive, as representative of a certain way to decline play in the current context of crisis and emergency.

24 They are called "school-in-a-box" by UNICEF and "Teacher Emercency Package" by UNESCO. 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, emplemented in 1993 and subsequently used mostly in conflict zones (Abrioux, 2006).

they contribute to children's more general cognitive development (Levinger, 1986)[25], 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 tha 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)[26].

A different role could be played by *Child-Friendly Spaces* (CFS) which, by definition, «are community programmes 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). The related Handbooks, edited by UNICEF and Save the Children, generally mention children with a disability as a vulnerable group, proving some (general and common) tips for realizing inclusion: in terms of space accessibility («for example, by providing ramps for wheelchair access in addition to or instead of steps») or social inclusion and partecipation. They suggest some proactive measures pointed out also by the UNCRPD.

Although these CFS 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, even if CFSs have been 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) –, their play-based interventions are generally 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 at the aforementioned *IPA Triennial World Conference* of 2017[27]: whilst they confirm the positive impact that

25 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).

26 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).

27 All the abstracts of the conference presentations are available online: http://canada2017.ipaworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Concurrent-Session-Descriptions.pdf. Retrieved: August, 2019.

play has on children's developmental outcomes in various settings, including children affected by crisis situations, and on creating inclusive contexts, they generally promote integration, feeling of belonging and resilience through play activities based on programmatically clear educational goals.

It is, for instance, the case of *Equitas Play it Fair! Approach* (Sighomnou & Morrison, IPA Calgary, 2017), 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, it reinforces the important role of play (grounded in a human rights-based approach) in fighting disconnection and social isolation experienced by refugee children (and families), by supporting children in two ways. First, it re-builds their socio-emotional competences, communication skills thus promoting healthy mental development, through regular physically active play-based activities. Secondly, it disseminates the knowledge and supports the skills of community-based organizations so that they can lead activities including children who experienced crisis to the goal of supporting them to take on leadership roles and exploit their full potential in their communities.

A similar approach is also presented by Kinoshita and collegues (IPA Calgary, 2017) related to the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011 that damaged a wide area in the 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 address the role of play, adventure playgrounds and other play interventions for healthy development (mental, physical and social issues of children after the disasters).

Diaz (IPA Calgary, 2017), instead, presents how play was used in disasters 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 sharing interactive stories and play, as well as on actual implementation of these learning opportunities to children-at-risk. Planning of content and delivery of the PDI 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" in emergencies (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 could successfully convey non-formal learning and support the teaching of important life-skills to the target groups, thus contributing to decrease the level of stress and fear of crisis-affected persons – from insecurity, hopelessness and disillusionment to a more optimistic prospective in life including happiness and positive solution finding.

The experiences presented show that play is often included in the humanitarian programmes, but what idea of play emerges from them? What features and purposes does it assume?

In order to answer these questions, we adopt the useful distinction between "play-like activities" (Visalberghi, 1958) and "play for the sake of play" (Besio et al., 2017). The first ones are initiated and conducted by the adult, in educational, clinical or social contexts; they appear playful and pleasant, but their main objective is other than play (that of cognitive or social learning, functional rehabilitation, psychological support, etc.). The second ones are instead started and carried out by the player (alone, with peers, with adults) with the sole purpose of play itself (fun, joy, interest, challenge, competition, etc.).

According to this distinguishing feature, within the humanitarian programmes and researches for children in crisis situations play is often subordinated to therapeutic-rehabilitation goals (Boyd Webb, 2015). Also in the case of programmes and guidelines developed specifically for children with disabilities, play is then used as a means to obtain scopes other than fun, or as a context of improvement of compromised developmental areas of the children; thus, it is not surprising to read in this literature the frequent use of the expression "play therapy". Serious games are possible examples of these activities: they might be devoted to improveing community resilience and preparedness, to teach disaster risk management skills, or to recover from trauma (such as abuse, parents' loss, armed attacks, etc.).

This tendency is nourished by that liminal border, not yet clearly addressed until now between education and rehabilitation, since 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, p. 37). According to Visalberghi's definition, these kinds of interventions adopt play as a fun and motivating mode for inducing children to take active part to rehabilitative and educational activities, thus orieìnting them towards specific educational objectives. In this sense, these "play-like activities" become important factors of "educational care" rather than education and aim at satisfying needs rather than desires.

This "ludomatics" perspective (Besio, 2010, p. 86), based on learning methods intentionally proposed by the adult in an extrinsic way, certainly finds its theoretical justification in the positive effects (widely recognized in the related sciences) that play and playing have in the different dimensions of the person's life (biophysiological, cognitive, recreational, emotional, psychodynamic, etc.).

This initial review on the field literature seems to highlight that, when it comes to play, it is generally the case of "play-like activities", even if this choice involves a loss of value for play itself. Quoting Besio (2017): «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» (p. 38).

This use of play in crisis situations has contributed to overshadow its genuinely ludic, fun and recreational dimension and to implement the risk of its negative intellectualization that Vygotskij more than fifty years ago already feared (1967).

Although such play-like activities are certainly driven by advanced goals, opting mainly for them implies the risk of losing that idea of play that some authors of the past (amoung the others Fink, Claparède, Parlebas, Aucouturier) indicated as «an oasis of joy» (Fink, 1957).

In the particular case considered in this study – crisis situations – the pure and ludic play, instead of being neglected, should be steadily supported and fed. In these contexts, in fact, children's play might lose its characheristics of vital force, spontaneity, and recovering this ricreative, fascinnating, revitalizing instinct of play as pure realization of the free expressiveness of oneself, may reveal salvific for the child, innovative as a message of freedom, peace and hope. This understanding would inaugurate a new way of looking at play and being in play, as adults aware of its natural life-giving dimension even in the case of very serious situations. That adult, however, may carve out an unprecedented role, which is not that of the educator, or psychologist, but is that of the experienced player, who is inside play, but knows which play he/she wants to play and why.

4.4 Conclusion

The present narrative overview underlines the importance that play (especially in the form of "play-like activities") could assume even in crisis situations. At the same time, the study confirms the overall lack of data on the use of play-based activities in emergencies areas (especially related to children with disabilities) and the consequent need for future in-depth analysis and researches at two levels.

First, from the empirical point of view, in order to give greater systematicity to humanitarian programmes and related researches, more experimental studies are needed, aiming at assessing the impact and effectiveness that these play-based interventions have or may have on all the children in crisis situation, their infancy, their well-being, and their educational process. Second, from a theoretical perspective, more comprehensive frameworks are welcomed as to give a scientific and methodological coherence to the different experiences and as to indicate the way for further possible play-orientered approaches. These considerations are even more valid for children with disabilities who represent a variable almost completely unexplored by scholars, policy makers and international organisations.

In this way, not only the *pedagogy of emergency* as discipline would be implemented and enriched (especially by a proper "disability focus"), but such renewed researches would also allow scholars, policy makers, educational professionals, operators and international organisations to support childhood and its spontaneous urge to play even during and after disasters. As resulting here, for

all the children (with and without disabilities) living such extraordinary situations as hazards, conflicts and natural or men-made disasters play is more important than ordinary. According to Hyder (2004), play is fundamental not only as necessary feature to childhood and essential component of his/her development, but especially as a means to regain "lost childhood" restoring that positive meaning included in the Greek etimology of word "crisi" as "moment of decision", "resolved moment"[28] according to which the "possibility of change" becomes the necessary prerequisite for a general improvement, a rebirth.

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28 The word "crisis", deriving from Greek (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 interpretations 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.).

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