

International Toy Research Association

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NEWSLETTER SPRING 2005



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Greetings from the President of ITRA



Gisela Wegener-Spöhring.
President of ITRA
University of Cologne, Germany:
<http://www.uni-koeln.de/ew-fak/paedagogik/wegener-spoehring>

I am happy to announce the fourth. ITRA World Congress *TOYS AND INNOVATION: new research into play activity*. It will take place from the sixth. to eighth. July 2005 in Alicante, Spain, bringing people from research, education and industry together in an interesting, lively and vigorous dialogue. Toys are used by children all over the world and the manufacturing of toys is a massive international industry.

The aim of ITRA, since its foundation in 1993, has been to further academic study and scientific research into toys and playthings. ITRA has grown and now has members in 23 countries.

Our association organizes an international scientific event every four years. These events are a meeting point for researchers and have been, from the very beginning, an excellent framework for communication between them and the business world. Congresses have been held in France, Sweden and Great Britain.

Our partner in organizing our 4th. International Congress is the Research Association of the Toy and Associated Industries (AIJU), in Alicante, Spain. They are a non-profit organization founded in 1985, dealing in research, development, and the technological innovations involved in manufacturing toys.

Holding the conference in an area where a large number of industries of the toy sector are concentrated will provide an unprecedented occasion for contact between the spheres of business and research.

We shall be able to promote the exchange of information that will enable scientific efforts to be more in tune with the requirements of toy manufacturers and, at the same time, give manufacturers awareness of the contribution of the scientific world.

This event will bring professionals in the fields of play and education into contact with the latest trends and conclusions drawn since our last meeting in London. Visit the website of the congress at;

[www. aiju.info/ivthitracongress/](http://www.aiju.info/ivthitracongress/)

Preliminary Program

Wednesday 6th. July

09.30-10.30	Opening Ceremony
10.30-11.30	Keynote Lecture. Brian Sutton- Smith <i>The Never Never World Of Toy Research</i>
12.15-14.15	Parallel Sessions 1 <i>Toys for all. Play and disability</i> <i>Toys, Games and Gender</i> <i>Toys, Games and Science</i>
16.00-18.00	Parallel Sessions 2 <i>Play during Medical Care</i> <i>Toy Design</i> <i>New Technologies in the Field</i>
20.00	Official Reception

Thursday 7th. July

09.30-11.30	Parallel Sessions 3 <i>Toys for all the ages. Intergenerational Play</i> <i>Computer Games and Mass Media</i>
12.00-14.00	Parallel Sessions 4 <i>Attitudes to Toys. Choice and Use of Toys</i> <i>Traditional Toys and Games</i>
16.00	Visit to the Toy Valley Visit to the Ibi Toy Museum
	Celebration of 100 years of toy making
20.30	Cocktail Party (<i>Jardines de la Casa Gran</i>)

Friday 8th. July

09.30-11.30	Parallel Sessions 5 <i>Academic Research and the Toy Industry. 1</i> (Symposium led by Jeffrey Goldstein.) <i>Toys and Games in Education. 1</i>
12.00-14.00	Parallel Sessions 6 <i>Academic Research and the Toy Industry. 2</i> <i>Toys and Games in Education. 2</i>
16.00-17.30	Closing Ceremony
17.30-18.30	ITRA General Meeting

Do visit <http://www.valledeljuguete.com/> to learn about the Toy Valley.

Toys, Games and Media

The book, *Toys, Games and Media* is based on papers that were presented at the ITRA Conference in London in August 2002. Brian Sutton-Smith has contributed the foreword. The publisher is Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. www.erlbaum.co

The President and the board are sure that you join them in offering thanks to Gilles Brougere, David Buckingham, and Jeffrey Goldstein, the editors of *Toys, Games and Media* for their splendid work.

Their book offers a state-of-the-art glance at where toys have come from and where they are likely to go in the years ahead. The focus is on the interplay between traditional toys and play and toys and play that are mediated by, or combined with digital technology. As well as covering the technical aspects of computer-mediated play activities, the authors of the chapters in the book consider how technologically enhanced toys are currently used in traditional play and how they are woven into children's lives. The authors contrast their findings about technologically enhanced toys with knowledge of traditional toys and play. They link their studies of toys to goals in education and to entertainment and information transfer.

This book will be of great appeal to you all. It is particularly appropriate for courses that deal with the specialised subject of toys and games.

Contact Eva Petersson, the Secretary of ITRA for information on how to obtain the book.
eva.petersson@ide.hh.se

Members' Forum

Our warm congratulations to Cleo Gougoulis, our treasurer, on attaining her doctorate. Cleo was awarded the title of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology by University College, London on the 30th of April 2004. The title of her thesis is: "*The Material Culture of Children's Play: Space, Toys and the Commoditization of Childhood in a Greek Community*". The thesis consists of seven chapters. It also includes three appendices with quantitative data, deriving from a survey on children's play preferences, illustrations and a full description of the games played by the children of the community of Palaia Phocaea, Greece, during the period of the author's fieldwork. This fascinating ethnography steps out of the usual mould in dealing with the material aspects of children's play in more than one context. So schoolyard play, neighbourhood play and play within the home are discussed as interrelated contexts for the enactment of children's playful interactions with the social world. The theoretical perspective adopted by the thesis is Corsaro's theory of interpretive reproduction. Cleo's multicontextual approach enables her to include factors beyond the school environment that influence children's play in the school playground and to challenge arguments concerning models of dichotomous gender socialisation. The section on neighbourhood play deals with issues of appropriation of space and its contestation in the context of the transformation and reproduction of social, spatial and temporal boundaries that circumscribe children's play in the

particular community. The thesis also includes a lengthy discussion of children's play at home as the main site of symbolic constructions. Emphasis is laid on the content and context of the construction of children's imaginary domains to address issues arising from the commoditization of toys and their influence upon children's play.

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Eva Petersson from Sweden tells us that the European project, Pla@yground (91893 – CP – 1 – 2001 – 1 – MINERVA – M) co-ordinated by Halmstad University in Sweden, has reached completion.

This challenging project was concerned with developing new learning technologies by integrating physical and virtual aspects of children's environments.

The partners in the project were: Halmstad University, School of Information Science, Computer and Electrical Engineering (IDE), Sweden. (Christina Aderclou, Lotta Fritzdorf, Eva Petersson);

Virtua Ltd., UK. (Lesley Talbot-Strettle);

Fordern durch Spielmittel, Spielzeug für behinderte Kinder, Berlin, Germany. (Siegfried Zoels); Alce Rosso, Ivrea, Italy. (Vittoria Burton);

British Toymakers Guild, Bath, UK. (Robert Nathan).

For further information, please contact Eva Petersson, project co-coordinator, at Halmstad University, School of IDE.

eva.petersson@ide.hh.se

Stevanne Auerbach, Phd. Is known as "Doctor Toy". She is on a national tour to support quality toys and smart play.

Dr. Toy suggests you check her website for links to all kinds of informative sites, including: Women in Toys, Playing for Keeps, Toys for Tots, ASTRA, Playthings Magazine, and Shopatron.

www.drtoy.com

Patrice Chazerand from Belgium, Secretary General of Interaction Software Federation of Europe (ISFE) offers to send to whoever is interested PEGI•INFO a free, quarterly newsletter for academics and professionals.

Recent issues of PEGI•INFO outlined what the future may hold for PEGI as mobile and online gaming are picking up quickly with world consumers. Mobile and online gaming are playing a growing part in what economists call the "value chain" of this industry. Everyone concerned with protecting minors from unsuitable content worries about these new outlets that are proving particularly popular with the younger generation.

Exploring and charting "new media" territories can only improve ways to address the protection of minors around the world from unsuitable content, hence the delivery of this quintessential public service.

The newsletter is created and printed by Alpha•Doc

More info: <http://www.pegi.info>

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<http://www.isfe-eu.org>

The Association for the Study of Play, TASP, invite you to their website

www.csuchico.edu/phed/tasp/

The TASP Series, *Play and Culture*, is currently accepting manuscripts for Volume 8. This is a peer reviewed, national publication. Series editor is Jim Johnson of Penn State University and editor for Volume 8 is David Kuschner, University of Cincinnati. The Series publishes papers that reflect different disciplines that engage in the scholarly investigation of play. These papers may include, but are not limited to, anthropology, psychology, sociology, education, recreation, history, folklore, dance, the arts, communication, kinesiology, philosophy, cultural studies, women's studies, physical therapy, and musicology.

Deadline for submissions is May 15, 2005. Anticipated publication date for the volume is winter 2007.

Manuscripts should be typed, 12 font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides. Styled guidelines for the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (Fifth Edition) should be followed. Send four copies of the manuscript and a disk or CD to:

David Kuschner

david.kuschner@uc.edu

The Educational Centre for Games in Israel has moved into its new premises. It is the heritage centre for toys and games in Israel.

Helena Kling

playgame.ecgi@gmail.com

CONFERENCES

Some members of ITRA took part in the Seminar in January of DigiPlay 4: ***Teaching with, Learning from Computer Games***. It was a sell out. Congratulations. It is highly recommended to visit its website.

<http://les1.man.ac.uk/cric/digi/digisems4.htm>

The Eighth International Conference on Textbooks and Educational Media

Call for Papers

The International Association for Research on Textbooks and Educational Media (IARTEM) in co-operation with the IUFM of Caen (Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres de Basse-Normandie) has the pleasure of inviting professionals from all over the world who work in the field of textbooks and educational media research and development to participate in the eighth IARTEM Conference.

The conference *Caught in the Web or Lost in the Textbook?* will take place in

Caen, France, October 26th – 29th, 2005

<http://www.iartem.no>

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iartemconference2005@caen.iufm.fr

TASP 2005 Conference and 31st Annual Meeting was held on FEBRUARY 23 to 27, 2005 in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The theme of the 2005 conference was "The Dynamic of Play."

For information contact: Dr. Ann Marie Guilmette, 2005 TASP Conference Chair, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University, 500 Glenridge Rd., St. Catharine's, Ontario, L2S 3A1, Canada, E-mail: aquilmette@brocku.ca

Susan Oliver, Executive Director of Playing for Keeps tells us that **Playing for Keeps 2004 International Conference** was held October 7-9, 2004 in Washington, D.C.

The conference included the latest research on children and play. This year's event included a special focus on the role of children's entertainment and technology in play. It also included new policy initiatives that several U.S. play organizations are launching to impact children's play. Co-sponsoring the event was PBS KIDS, Erikson Institute, Association of Children's Museums, and Zero to Three. Speakers from all those organizations were represented plus Fisher-Price, Target, and Mister Rogers' Neighbourhood.

Information can be found at Blues Clues, Sesame Street Workshop, and many more—including Jerome Singer of Yale University (emeritus), Edward Ziegler of Yale University (emeritus), Barbara Bowman of Erikson Institute, James Johnson of Penn State University, and Brian Sutton Smith of the University of Pennsylvania (emeritus).

www.playingforkeeps.org.

3rd International Conference on Multimedia and ICTs in Education (m-ICTE2005)

Badajoz (Spain), June 8-10th 2005
<http://www.formatex.org/micte2005>

Some of the topics to be covered will be:

- Collaborative learning
 - Coaching & tutoring
 - Active & interactive learning
 - Knowledge and skills in virtual environments
 - Systems for special needed persons
 - Teaching/learning strategies
 - Collaborative learning/groupware
 - Adaptive and intelligent applications
 - Application of instructional design theories
 - Evaluation of learning technology systems
 - ICT in Continuing/Adult Education
- For any question or suggestion, <mailto:m-icte2005@formatex.org>.

Borja Gonzalez

m-ICTE2005 Secretariat
C/ Zurbaran 1, 2 Office 1
06001 Badajoz
SPAIN

Email: m-icte2005@formatex.org

ICAT 2004. The 14th International Conference on Artificial Reality and Telexistence, was held

November 30 – December 2, 2004 at Coex in Seoul, Korea. Artificial reality was the forerunner of virtual reality (VR) and is the technology that provides human beings with the experience of interacting in an artificially generated environment. Telexistence, on the other hand, is a concept named for the technology that enables human beings to have a real-time sensation of being at a place where they do not actually exist and interact with a remote environment, virtually ubiquitous. One of the

special sessions concerned the latest research on Entertainment and included presentations about cultural computing, mixed reality and media for social and physical interaction, mixing real and virtual theatre, virtual interactive space and entertainment, and virtual and augmented reality for edutainment. The conference also hosted a

VR/Media Art and Technology Exhibition.

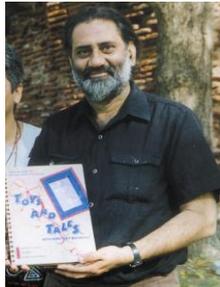
*The Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) and the Virtual Reality Society of Japan (VRSJ), 2004, have published *The Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Artificial Reality and Telexistence*. ISSN Number 1345-1278.*

Toy Innovation Center & Toy Design & Development Postgraduate Program in India

Sudarshan Khanna & Gayatri Menon

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Mr. Sudarshan Khanna,
<khanna@nid.edu>

Principal faculty of industrial design and head, toy center at NID, India. Prof. Sudarshan Khanna is internationally known for his pioneering work on toys-culture & education. He is recipient of National Award for lifetime work on science popularization among children through the medium of indigenous toys. A board member of ITRA, Prof. Sudarshan Khanna has authored 3 books on toys



Ms. Gayatri Menon
<gayatri@nid.edu>

Industrial designer and coordinator, toy design and development program, has been recognized for her work on Design for Children. Gayatri has been invited as tutor-facilitator for workshops on toys for children with special needs held in Italy, UK and Germany. She has also conducted toy workshops at national level and coordinated the toy design intervention project for Indian toy industries.

National institute of design (NID) India, a multidisciplinary institute, was established in 1961 for design education, applied research and advanced training in the areas of industrial design and communication design. In the past many years, a number of faculty led initiatives were carried out in the area of educational aids and play material, toys for child development etc. Some students also took up this area as an area of specialization as part of their projects and studies. But it was in 2001 that a Toy centre was set up in the institute.

Why toy design? - The vision for the program

“Toys today are perceived well beyond mere play material and are also understood as means of learning, development and culture orientation”

India has a large population of children. About 40 percent of India’s population (more than 400 millions) is less than 18 years. The variety of industrial, social and cultural setups is getting tuned to the needs of a specialized program in toy design. The Indian Toy industry is now realizing the urgent and critical need for design development as

the central part of their activities. The stiff international competition and potential opportunities in the Indian toy industry sector brought the need to do away with the ad-hoc way of functioning, underlining the need to develop an overall long term, indigenous strategy and sustained professional inputs for rejuvenating the toy Industry.

India with its rich tradition of toy making, skilled human resource and technological skills ranging from small-scale industrial set ups to hi-tech software development proves ideal for the development and progress of the Indian Toy industry. Apart from this, India also has a huge informal toy sector, which includes indigenous craft/cottage toy making. But the toy design professional capability for all these sectors is very limited.

Industrially underdeveloped but culturally rich countries like India have vast, diverse living traditions of indigenous toys and toy making. There is growing awareness about the significance of education and development aspects relating to toys and play.

Toy Innovation Centre (TIC);

Toy centre at NID has been recently renamed as Toy Innovation Centre (TIC). The centre acts as a nodal centre for carrying out professional design and research projects with toy industries, building linkages to institutions and industries and carrying out medium/long term research and development projects in this area. TIC also has a Toy Evaluation Lab (TEL). This has been recently established to conduct activities and workshops and thereby build up a system and method for Toy evaluation. The TIC studio is also engaged in design and development of the selected design concepts of faculty and students.

Post Graduate Toy Design and Development Program

The two and a half year P.G. Toy Design Program was initiated in 2002 with the long-term view of providing professionally capable human resource for developing this sector. The program provides project based design education in the area of toy design to graduates in engineering/technology, computer applications/ information technology, child development/therapy, architecture/Interior design and related areas.

It aims to provide professional services through trained designers to the toy industrial sector and educational and developmental sector. The toy designer can look forward to a fulfilling career as an in house toy designer in toys and games industries, national and international bodies/institutions working with children, design consultant, entrepreneur, design educator etc.

Toy Design Educational Programme: Content and approach

The two and a half year P.G. Toy Design Program initiated from 2002 is a multidisciplinary and 'child oriented' program. It aims to build a bridge between diverse groups of children-parents, toy industrial sector, educationists. It also covers wider issues pertaining to socio cultural aspects and market economy factors. The education is based on an amalgamation of theory and project work in various areas including educational play material and games, developmental toys, outdoor play equipment, soft toys, multimedia games etc.

Basic inputs like elements of form, ergonomics, design methodology etc. combined with specialized inputs in child psychology, testing methods, character design, computer software's etc. is given as part of the course. Research projects, fieldwork in craft design development, and industry/institution sponsored projects and training give the necessary real life experience.

Networking with Industry/Organizations

NID has good contacts with the Toy Association of India (TAI), based in Delhi as well as the Toy Association,(TAITMA) based in Mumbai. The toy centre has worked on professional project for UNIDO on design capability building and design intervention strategies for the Mumbai based Indian toy industries sector. The students have also carried out industrial training/projects with Indian toy industries as well as HABA toy industry, Germany.

NID has signed a MOU with Fordern durch Spielmittel-FDS, Germany for the designing of developmental toys. The international workshop in Jan 2001 was conducted under the partnership of NID and FdS. We have also signed a MOU for a student-faculty exchange program with School of Art and Design, Halle, Germany. An exchange of two toy students from India and three toy students from Halle for a period of 2-3 months has also taken place successfully.

An Applied Research Project: “Toys for Tomorrow”; a vision-action forum

An international FORUM for networking industry, education, research and practice has been set up jointly with FdS, Germany and other partner organisations. The world of toys, play and children is changing rapidly. There is far more variety, purpose, interactivity and merging of technologies taking place. The rapid changes in technologies, globalization of markets, and the emerging importance to educational/developmental toys, the active role of the media and the evolving play behaviour patterns of children are changing the context and concept of toys.

We can envisage the active participation of communities, institutions in the development of children and the active interest displayed by industries in indigenous innovations and methods. At the same time, we also witness the fragmentation of knowledge and experiences on one hand and the increasing complexities of processes on the other hand. How can we bring about a more holistic understanding and an integrated approach necessary for the process of designing toys?

The challenge lies in being able to bring about an effective synergy to realize the desired results. We need to create opportunities to exchange knowledge, experiences and insights of different institutions and individuals: Industries, academia, researchers and practitioners, in order to come up with better methods for effective convergence in the midst of scattered efforts in the toy development sector. We hope that the working together between seemingly diverse group of researchers and practitioners and the experiences of the industrialized countries and those with long cultural heritage shall bring out their best through this FORUM.

All interested people and professionals, groups will be asked to make a summary of their research-results, professional experiences, innovative designs, teaching methods, individual insights connected with future developments concerning the world of children and share it with the FORUM. This forum will provide a much-needed venue

for interaction and exchange for study, research and practical aspects. An international steering committee meeting took place in the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, India last year. The meeting nominated the following members as managing committee and the committee members of

“Toys for Tomorrow”; a vision-action forum

An international FORUM for participation of industry, education, research and practice to facilitate development for children

- Prof. Sudarshan Khanna, India - Chairperson
- Mr. Siegfried Zoels, Germany – Vice Chairperson
- Ms. Shefali Tokas, India – Vice Chairperson

- Prof. Jatin Bhatt, NIFT, India – Member
- Prof. Dr. Purna Mohite, M.S. University, India – Member
- Ms. Gayatri Menon, NID, India – Member
- Ms. Eva Petersson, IDE, Halmstad Univ., Sweden – Member
- Prof. Dr. Gisela Wegener-Spoehring, ITRA & Univ. Cologne, Germany – Member

This is the beginning of a sustained collective collaborative work for all those interested in “Toys for Tomorrow” in the context of near future developments, aspirations and projections. At the Toy centre, NID we look forward to build positive network and linkages for fulfilling the vision and purpose of starting the toy design activities as a means of contributing to the educational, developmental, social and emotional needs of children.

What is the future of toys? Toys will continue as long as play exists. In addition, they will continue to be designed and nurtured as long as there is creativity & innovation, celebration & fun, interactivity and experience, education & learning.

Design for children's play

By Mathieu Gielen, Delft University of Technology

Mathieu Gielen is a part-time lecturer at Delft University of Technology and designer of products for children's play.

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Does designing for children differ from designing for adults?

Since 2000, a course on designing for children's play is taught at the Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands. The course is a special elective for Master students within the department of Industrial Design Engineering. The basic idea behind the course was that if so many of our students graduate on products for children, some preparation to the subject would be useful. (Other voices said that a designer must be able to retrieve information about any customer, be it an adult or a child, and a special course on the matter was irrelevant.) In the past four years, with 150 students taking the course, some insight was gained in the usefulness of special attention to the subject. In this article, I will explain the structure of the course, some outcomes in terms of products and research ideas, and on the way will highlight the relevance of a special focus on children's play within an industrial design engineering department.

The toy design program

The objectives of the course are, in formal language: "to acquire knowledge on the development and needs of children and the role of toys in this; to acquire knowledge on learning and the role of means for informal learning in this; and to acquire skills in applying this knowledge in the design process". The last part may be the most important and is certainly the most fun: on a total time schedule of 80 hours, at least 40 hours are used by the students to make a design of a toy, playground equipment, interactive exhibit or any other object that enables playful use by children.

The teacher, operating as a coach in the design process, checks if proper use is made of the knowledge that students gather themselves and that is brought to them in more or less conventional lectures. In short, the lectures cover the following topics:

- Physical, cognitive, and social-emotional child development. These are subjects that can easily fill a full five-year program in itself, so in our course only the basic ideas are illustrated. The same goes for play theory, and for 'learning through play'. Together they form the context for thinking about play, and a very responsible, intellectual grown-up vision on play.
- Children's interests and preferences. To cater for the child's perspective on play and play value, interviews with children are combined with marketing knowledge and demonstrated in samples of, among others, children's

drawings and television commercials. Not always a reliable source, but certainly a potent antidote against an unbalanced vision in which the educational value of a toy is so dominant that it leaves no room for fun. We call this the children's vision on play. And it is this balance between qualities as perceived by adults on one side and children on the other side which the students need to examine in a practical design. Those who understand it best, achieve a design in which both are combined and reinforce each other.

- Creativity techniques are a part of our general education program, but in this course some four techniques are presented that are especially useful for toy design. The central thought of the course is that 'toys are tools for play' (which is of course not our invention) and that if you want to design a toy, you start by designing an activity. The toy is then derived from the activity. To help students with thinking in activities, scenario techniques are useful. Because not all children are equal, another technique uses various child characters as inspiration for idea development. Another reason for the attention to creativity is that students often tend to settle for first ideas, not out of ignorance but because play is such an ill-defined activity. Students who are trained to design cars, coffee-makers, street lighting and so on, often are bound by restrictions and driven by well-defined goals, for instance: making a machine that produces a tasty cup of hot coffee within a limited amount of time, and that can function well for some years, is safe and cost-effective, and so on. Play however has no purpose but to be play; the activity is the valuable part. Without the usual functional and other goals, 'everything' is possible; designers call this 'a large solution space'. However, not everything within this space makes for interesting play. It is up to the students to find the best play value within the vast solution space. One good way to do this is by investigating first ideas and developing them further with the help of creativity techniques. The assignments handed out to the students are formulated in an open-ended way, so as to stimulate the exploration of the solution space. Some examples will be mentioned later on.
- Designing with children. From 'simple' product testing to full participatory design, a whole range of methods to involve end-users in the design process is available to designers nowadays. When it comes to cooperation of children with grown-up designers, some methods yield better results than others. Although generally the students do not have enough time to set up a participatory design project within the course, many do short tests of their concepts, and the students often appreciate this part very well. Even if the outcome is that the design fails to raise the children's interest, the students have had a very good learning experience just interacting with the children.
- Other topics that are part of the course are the aesthetics and ergonomics of designing for children, safety, and designing for children with handicaps.

When starting the course, it was thought that the main benefit of the course would be in transferring knowledge on children and play to the students. As I have pointed out, it appeared to be much more important that students realize and experience that there is a balance between what makes play worthwhile from different perspectives, and that they have the skills to recognize the difference between a promising first idea and a well-developed play concept. The course has helped students who want to specialize

on children's products to start their graduation projects with a more mature vision of what play is and what it should do to children.

Examples of design assignments

As mentioned before, the assignments are used to have the students internalize the knowledge presented in the course and to practice design skills. That the outcome in terms of viable product concepts is not always of high quality is of less importance. Still some concepts are quite noteworthy.

The assignment given is always to some extent vague, allowing (and forcing) students to translate it into more down-to-earth terms with the help of their interpretation of adults' and children's vision on play value.

Some examples of recent assignments are:

- Nicely demolished: besides building, tearing down is an appreciated part of many types of play. In some circumstances, it is regarded rather as vandalism than play. How can demolition be made possible in an acceptable way?
- Save boys' behaviour: research shows that boys do less well at school because they fail the right role models and typical boyish behaviour is not appreciated. Design a toy or play concept that helps strengthen boys' behaviour.
- The invisible computer: computer games are ever growing in popularity. But the structural appearance of the computer has hardly changed, nor has the hardware for interaction. What different interaction channels are possible, and what new types of play would be possible with these? Design an example interaction device and appropriate game.
- Shyness is nice, but... : design the perfect team play for very shy children.

Two student projects will be described in more detail, as they show outcome in terms of products and research: Peek-a-Boo and Emotion Objects.

Peek-a-Boo

When observing young hearing-impaired children, it can be seen that their alternative communication leads to differences in play behaviour from hearing children. For instance, they look up from their play to investigate their surroundings more often, and this sometimes leads to them being distracted from their play. Assignment in this project was to design a toy that would fit the needs and interests of hearing-impaired children ages 1 to 3 years old.

Student Janneke van Oorschot made observations of children at play and interviewed the staff of a day-care-centre for these children, and found out that in these early ages, the basis is laid for skills necessary for team play. During play, alternative communication such as sign language requires that a child is both receptive to facial expressions and hand movements and at the same time still engages in the play itself. Day-care workers are constantly drawing the child's attention to their face during play.

Van Oorschot designed a toy that can be used as a tool for playing 'peek-a-boo' with more visual impact, see figure 1. It is a cuddly toy in the form of a mask. When it covers and uncovers the face of someone, the child's attention is drawn to both the toy and the facial expression of the person behind it.

Eyes, nose and mouth of the toy can be changed or removed, presenting the toy with ever-changing expressions. An adult playing with the child, or the child by itself, can experiment with these expressions, which is both very funny and instructive.

Besides, the toy is a friendly companion, with ears as handgrips for carrying it with you. Peek-a-boo was adopted by the NSDSK (Dutch Foundation for Deaf and Hearing-Impaired Children) and produced for the children in their care in a series of 500 pieces.



Figure 1: Peek-a-boo

Emotion Objects

Starting from the goal to find a format that would allow 4-5 year old children in schools to be more physically active, Jeske Weerdesteijn studied dance theory and found that the emotions conveyed by dance through body movement match very well with what young children are starting to learn about. She designed a series of six objects, representing emotions in abstract forms but related to human movements (see figure 2).

For instance, the form representing anger is aggressively coloured in red and purple and has pointed arms that pop right back when you push them down. It stands firmly on the ground, whereas the object for joy swings around on its instable half-round ground plate, making ringing sounds and waving its arms.

The idea behind it was that through interaction with these objects, children would notice their movements and learn to recognize which emotions have a relation with them. By imitating and varying on these movements within the context of a

gymnastics lesson, they would explore their possibilities for experiencing and communicating emotions through body movements.

After the set of objects was built (and the course was finished), Weerdesteijn continued her work in a research project, first validating the recognition of the emotions expressed by the objects with children aged 4-5, and later exploring their usability as playful emotion-educators within gymnastics class [1,2].



Figure 2: Emotion Objects

Research on designing for play

To conclude this article, I would like to spend a few words on research on play that is useful for designers. As can be understood from the two student projects, designers often make use of research results or, if such research is not available, conduct their own researches. Design typically is an integrative activity: knowledge on various subjects as consumer preferences, psychology, ergonomics, material science et cetera is combined in the search for new products. Essential to the use of information is that it is in some way connected to design; it must be in an appropriate format or must be translated into it.

Reading about research on play from a developmental perspective, it has often occurred to me that researchers took toys as an established fact, and concentrated on what was to be said about the child. For instance, most techniques for observing children at play are designed to describe the play pattern of the child, its motivation, involvement, cooperation and such. As designers, we are also interested in the relation that these aspects have with the characteristics of the toy. Play develops in an interaction between one or more children and their surroundings and artefacts, tools, toys. Understanding how play is in part shaped by toys may help us to design better tools for play, that is- better toys. I hope that this understanding will be fed by the researchers associated with ITRA.

References

[1] Weerdesteijn, J.M.W.; Desmet, P.M.A.; Gielen, M.A.: Moving design: to design emotion through movement. *The design Journal*, submitted.

[2] Weerdesteijn, J.M.W.; Gielen, M.A.; Desmet, P.M.A.: Playing with body language and emotions: understanding emotions and exploring body language with the help of 'emotion objects'. *Proceedings of the 2004 ICCP conference on play and learning*, submitted.

PUBLICATIONS

Members have recommended
looking at the following publications.

Imagination and Play in the Electronic Age by Dorothy Singer. Harvard Press. 2004

Children's Play: The Roots of Reading by Edward F. Zigler, Dorothy G. Singer, & Sandra J. Bishop-Josef (Eds.). Zero to Three Press, Washington D. C., 2004.

Sociable Technologies: Enhancing Human Performance when the computer is not a tool but a companion by Sherry Turkle in *Converging Technologies for Improving Human Performance* edited by Michail C. Rocco and William Sims Bainbridge, 2003. Kluwer Academic Publishers. ISBN 1-4020-1254-3

Lynne & Michael Roche are publishing a **celebratory book** of their doll making work Look at their website: www.roche-dolls.co.uk

Dolls & Houses International is a new bi-monthly magazine dedicated to dolls' houses and miniatures. The first issue came out in Spring 2004. Get further information at: www.dollsandhouses.com

The Toymaker is the official journal of the British Toymakers Guild. Robert Nathan, 124 Walcot St., Bath, England. BA1 5BG. Tel. +44 (0)1225 442440 info@toymakersguild.co.uk

Dr. Toy's Gift Guide provides suggestions on making informed toy selections, tips on how to care for and clean toys, and guidelines for maximizing the play value and the learning potential of toys.

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Secretary's Concluding Note

**The Secretariat looks forward to seeing you in Alicante
6th, 7th, and 8th of July 2005!**

Meanwhile we would like to hear from you regarding any requests or suggestions you may have concerning the Secretariat's services.

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