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Abstract: This paper considers utilising the sociocultural concept of learning activity to understand parents' learning about young children's play in the context of community playgroups and social media use. Parents' knowledge about children's play influences the provision of parental-provided play experiences for young children and can be enhanced through participation in a community playgroup. Increasingly, playgroup parents are using social media to communicate about children's play at playgroup and this social situation for learning about play is yet to be theorised for maximising young children's access to play-based learning experiences in early childhood. Learning activity as a sociocultural concept, recognises learning as an activity for self-development. It has been applied to formal education contexts but has not been used to understand parents' learning in informal early childhood education contexts. This paper explores its potential for generating new knowledge about parents' learning about play in the home and community by conceptualising learning as an activity enacted within the social situation of community playgroups and social media. Implications for the mobilisation of this social situation are framed in the context of parent engagement in early childhood education.

Keywords: learning activity, play, sociocultural theory, parents, early childhood, parent education, children

Word count: 6994

Introduction

Parents who attend community playgroups are using social media affiliated with the playgroup to communicate with each other about children's play (McLean et al., 2017). For example, in Australia, Playgroup Victoria hosts the Wonderful World of Playgroup (PGV, 2018) where playgroup leaders and parents from community playgroups come together in social media to share ideas and resources for play. Many community playgroups also have social media such as Facebook, affiliated with the playgroup to

communicate with families between sessions. Little is known about the nature of parents' learning about play in community playgroups and social media and the influence this learning has on the provision of play in the home and community. In this paper, the term 'parents' is used to refer to mothers, fathers, kinship members and carers who attend community playgroups with their children. Social media is used to refer to social media such as Facebook, which is affiliated with the playgroup.

There has been a shift in emphasis in research and policy from promoting *parent involvement* to *parent engagement* in children's learning (Goodall, 2015). This change recognises the contribution of research evidencing the importance of children's experiences in the home learning environment (Sylva et al., 2004) on learning and development outcomes including social and emotional wellbeing (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003), literacy and numeracy (Anders et al., 2012) and positive relationships (Sylva et al., 2004). Parent engagement initiatives including those using technologies and social media, have tended to focus on raising parents' awareness of children's learning through play, using prescriptive models of delivery (Evangelou and Wild, 2014). Community playgroups offer an alternative to this model that may be more responsive to the needs of families and communities.

There are different views about play (Gaskins, 2014), including instrumental play as a means to achieving school readiness (Wood, 2014) and unstructured play as an end in itself (Elkind, 2007). Recently, Western-European play-based discourses have been challenged to reconsider play as universal cultural activity in children's everyday activities (Gaskins, 2014). Despite differing views, community playgroups as sites for children's play operate in 75 percent of Australian postcodes (Playgroup Australia, 2018) including remote, Indigenous and marginalised communities.

Playgroups in Australia

Playgroups in Australia are early childhood services (DETV, 2018) where parents with their children come together in the community to socialise and engage in play. These include supported and community playgroups. Supported playgroups are facilitated by paid, trained professionals and community playgroups are volunteer-based, parent-led groups (McLean et al., 2017). Community playgroups provide an appealing context for parent engagement initiatives aimed at building knowledge about play. This is because these groups evolved in response to a lack of preschool provision and at a grassroots and voluntary level by mothers, with the aim to socialise and provide play experiences for children (Townley, 2018). Play as the focus of children's activity in these groups occurs in the absence of a prescribed curriculum and in response to the needs and interests of participating families (McLean et al., 2017). Research has reported social benefits of community playgroup participation (e.g. friendships and support networks) (McLean et al., in press), including opportunities for children's socialisation through play, however, little is known about the nature of parents' learning about play in community playgroups and the extent to which this informs provision.

Parents' Social Media use

Research shows that both new parents (Bartholomew et al., 2012), and parents of adolescents (Doty and Dworkin, 2013) use social media. Social media use by parents, particularly mothers (Duggan et al., 2015) provides an avenue for accessing and discussing parenting information with others who have similar interests (Valtchanov et al., 2014). More recently, social media use by parents has given rise to social media networking sites (e.g. Momstown - Valtchanov et al., 2014), and the development of parenting apps (e.g. EasyPeasy – Jelley et al., 2016) which often form an auxiliary function in parenting interventions. Reflecting parents increasing use of social media in

society (Duggan et al., 2015) community playgroup parents' social media use has evolved organically as cooperative or *joint* activity (McLean et al., 2017). Such activity is of interest because it blurs the boundaries of offline playgroup participation and online social media participation.

Although parents' use of social media in community playgroups is increasing, this activity is yet to be conceptualised for realising benefit to communities through maximising young children's access to play in its many forms including spontaneous, unstructured play (Elkind, 2007) and adult guided play (Wood, 2014), and as an alternative to top-down approaches to parental education. While a variety of theoretical perspectives may be deployed to understand parents' social media activity, including Actor-Network theory (Latour, 2005) and the notion of dialogic spaces (Wegerif, 2015), this paper specifically draws on ideas derived from the sociocultural tradition.

Sociocultural Theory, Leading Activity and Learning Activity

Sociocultural theory, informed by the thinking of Vygotsky holds that cultural mediation of tools promotes learning and development (Wertsch, 1991). In recent years, this idea has been built upon by others to examine human activity in context including collaborative learning with peers (Littleton and Mercer, 2010), guided participation practices (Rogoff et al., 2003) and mastery of cultural tools through 'increasing levels of shared understanding' (Wertsch and Kazak, 2011, p. 165). However, core to Vygotsky's argument is the idea that activity explains human consciousness (Kozulin, 1986). Vygotsky (1997, p. 7) described three important concepts for his work: 'the concept of higher mental function, the concept of cultural development of behaviour, and the concept of mastery of behaviour by internal processes'. Through his study of higher mental functions, he described 'socially laden' (Kozulin, 1986, p. 265) or meaningful activity as the generator of consciousness. This central idea has enabled the

development of leading activity as a bridge between one psychological function and the next. This paper uses the concept of leading activity to propose learning activity as productive means of understanding parents' engagement with social media for learning about play.

Defining Activity using a Sociocultural Perspective

Vygotsky theorised learning as an activity for the development of a person's mental functions which is enacted in the cultural and historical social environment of that person, through interdependent social and individual processes. Mental functions are the means via which people engage with their world. He theorised that these processes generate co-constructed knowledge through intermental functioning which a person then internalises to achieve mastery of behaviour as intramental functioning (Wertsch, 1991).

Following his death Vygotsky's colleagues, Leontiev, Elkonin and Davydov continued to theorise the concept of activity. This body of work has established two interrelated ways of thinking about activity that may be useful for theorising parents' activity about play in the context of community playgroup and social media use. The first is *leading activity*, which was introduced by Vygotsky to describe play as the predominant form of activity for the mental development of preschool children. The concept of leading activity was further elaborated by Leontiev and Elkonin who developed a periodisation of mental development for thinking about development over age periods (Kravtsov and Kravtsova, 2011). The second refers to the concept of *learning activity* (Davydov et al., 2003; Elkonin, 1999) as a cultural tool for the development of the psychological function of reflection (Zuckerman, 2003). Like play, learning activity is a leading activity for development, however, learning activity is the

predominant form of activity throughout schooling (Elkonin, 1999) and into adulthood (Davydov, et al., 2003; Repkin, 2003).

This paper proposes the use of the sociocultural concept of learning activity for theorising parents' activity about play in community playgroups and social media. It is noted that learning activity is a sociocultural construct, and as such may not be applicable across all social groups (Wertsch, 1991). Nonetheless, using learning activity to understand parents' learning about play via social media may inform the mobilisation of social media in ways that benefit family knowledge about play, therefore increasing young children's opportunities for play at home, and in the community.

The remainder of this paper has four main sections. The first section refers to the literature regarding the use of the concept of learning activity in education. The second section describes key theoretical ideas underpinning learning activity, the third section identifies the components of learning activity and the fourth section considers design for learning activity. Theoretical examples based on previously reported research (McLean et al., 2017) using a closed form of social media, are used to show how these key ideas and elements may be considered in relation to parents' activity about play in the context of community playgroups and social media use. The final section provides concluding thoughts about the use of the concept of learning activity for theorising parents' learning about play in early childhood.

Learning Activity in Education

Vygotsky's (1997, p. 49) theorised that learning leads development across the lifespan and that through activity people are 'directed towards mastery of … [their] own behaviour'. In its broadest sense Vygotsky referred to learning activity as representing the range of practices that enable a person to actively construct knowledge in a social context and maintain control over this process through self-determined goals and

methods for achievement and evaluation (Zuckerman, 2003). This process leads to self-change in a person defined by a new self-awareness which changes relations with others. Davydov et al. (2003, p. 64) argue that learning as an activity in any type of educational program can foster reflexive development needed to 'to study or teach oneself'. In this sense learning activity as the leading activity for the development of reflexivity is 'self-propelled' (Zuckerman, 2003, p. 180).

The sociocultural concept of learning activity has been used to understand learning in elementary school (Bodrova and Leong, 2007; Kravtsov and Kravtsov, 2011) and higher education contexts (Edwards, 2012) as task orientated, voluntary, cooperative and joint activity directed towards solving a problem. It does not appear to have been used to understand parents' learning in informal education contexts such as playgroups, however, it has been used to conceptualise the ability to teach oneself as 'a process of life-activity' (Repkin, 2003, p. 28), which indicates its relevance for understanding parents' learning about play in this contemporary context.

Kravtsov and Kravtsova (2011, p. 33) describe conditions for the 'full development of learning activity in every child'. Kravtsov and Kravtsova (p. 33) indicate that a condition for the achievement of fully formed learning activity is 'mastery of reflection and self-regulation' which is attained through working in cooperative relationships in partnership with a teacher. Similarly, Bodrova and Leong (2007) describe learning activity in elementary school contexts as child-initiated activity that is guided by the teacher. This suggests that teachers play a significant role in facilitating children's development as independent learners through fostering the development of reflective practices, including the evaluation of one's own efforts in problem solving and in controlling one's own actions and interactions with others in learning activity.

Edwards (2012) describes a pedagogical approach for bringing together theory and practice in higher education using the concept of learning activity. This approach focuses on the convergence of technology and assessment for the development of reflection in early childhood teacher education students. Edwards (2012, p. 596) uses the concept of learning activity to theorise her approach to supporting the 'development of reflection as a new mental function' in students. She proposes that technology including online discussion platforms, in appropriately designed learning activity can create powerful learning situations and contexts for 'learning with intent' (p. 593). The literature about learning activity in formal education contexts does suggest a significant role for teachers in the design of learning activity for the development of reflection. Although theorised for adult learning (Repkin, 2003) less is known about learning activity in contemporary, informal contexts for parents' learning such as community playgroups and social media.

Learning Activity and the Development of Reflection

Vygotsky (1998, p. 108) theorised that the 'drawing together of memory and attention with intellect is the most essential and distinctive trait of the transitional age'. In reference to this period of adolescence Vygotsky was describing the internal process of controlling one's own attention and logical memory for supporting the transition to thinking as a central psychological function. Using the example of a school-age child Vygotsky shows how this is at first an external process as it is controlled by adults and assimilated by the child. Leontiev considers assimilation a form of appropriation for describing the meanings learners take from objects, ideas and concepts in cultural context (Mercer, 1994). Others consider assimilation in terms of 'voice' (Bakhtin, 1981), 'institutional voice' (Eun, 2018), and even 'dialogues' (Wegerif, 2015). The central idea is that the language becomes one's own via enculturation. A child

continues to develop what is initially known as involuntary attention (in that it is directed by an adult), until the process becomes internalised in adolescence and a person then controls and directs his or her own attention and memory to support thinking. The leading activity for the internal mastery of memory and attention for the individual control of mental functions is learning activity.

Elkonin and Davydov, theorised learning activity as the leading activity for the 'development of reflective consciousness' (Karpov, 2015, p. 515). Significantly, the transition to the formation of reflection is achieved through mastery of learning behaviour as essential activity for lifelong learning. Hence, in the development of reflection in the context of community playgroups and social media use, parents are situated as capable learners actively engaged in directing voluntary attention to culturally defined experiences of children's play including ideas, concepts and play-based discourses, in joint activity with others.

Reflection and Self-teaching

Reflection is more than awareness of one's own activity. Reflection in this sense does not serve any purposeful function because 'reflection in the mirror cannot change the fate of the object reflected' (Vygotsky 1998, p. 120). Instead, reflection requires mastery of behaviour, a consciousness of actions and control of internal mental operations – making conscious through introspection what exists in an un-reflected form (Kravtsov and Kravtsova, 2011). In this way reflection is a dynamic process of change in the learner himself or herself and is essential for the development of the ability to teach oneself (Davydov et al., 2003). Theorising parents' learning about play within the context of community playgroups and social media use requires consideration of reflection as a mental function for bringing about self-change. For example, imagine a parent who has been playing with his or her child using wooden blocks at playgroup

who later posts an image in social media with the comment: '*Jonah [child] and I [parent] built a tower out of wooden blocks'*. This comment suggests a mirroring of the parent's awareness of his or her activity with their child but not necessarily a change in behaviour that could lead to the further provision of similar play experiences. Alternatively, the social media posting: '*Jonah and I had fun splashing in the puddles in the park. There were autumn leaves everywhere. Let's meet in the park for playgroup. We can play in the autumn leaves with the children,'* suggests a higher level of self-awareness in the parent's conscious action to reflect on the play activity - including his or her and the child's participation as enjoyable, and in serving a purposeful function through enrichment of knowledge expressed as an idea for play at playgroup.

Davydov et al. (2003) propose that reflexivity and the ability to teach oneself are interconnected but not the same. A person uses reflective processes to self-teach but the ability to teach oneself also requires agency. In other words, a person must act with agency to identify the limits of his or her knowledge and in finding ways to expand his or her knowledge beyond identified limits (Davydov et al., 2003). Further, a person's motivation to engage in learning activity is internal. Repkin (2003, p.14) uses the example of a person reading a textbook to show how the same external manifestation of an activity can have a very different internal goal from one person to the next. He notes that a young child with a textbook may be imitating reading, a teacher may be using it to get teaching ideas, an editor may be checking for errors and a reviewer may be analysing content for review. Hence, learning activity in informal education contexts takes place in response to self-identified need and is internally motivated activity. Not *all* activity is learning activity – 'if there is no need there is no activity' (Repkin, 2003, p. 20). In the social situation for parents' learning about children's play created by community playgroups and social media use a parent's self-identified need to expand

his or her knowledge about play requires the identification of the limitations of existing knowledge and the means to build new knowledge including theoretical content and resources. It further requires a parent to choose to engage in joint activity with other parents at the playgroup and in social media with the intent to learn.

For example, a parent noticing his or her toddler's interest in rough-and-tumble play may have a self-identified need to learn more about this play. At playgroup this might involve talking with other parents about experiences of toddlers' rough-and-tumble play. In social media this conversation might also include parents sharing links to online resources including guides (e.g. RCN, 2019). For this parent the internal goal may be to expand his or her knowledge of toddlers' rough-and-tumble play, however, for another parent the internal goal might be different. For another parent it might be to foster children's creativity through free play. Here, the focus of attention in joint activity at playgroup and in social media is likely to be on following children's interests. Still further, another parent's motivation for participation in social media may be to reminisce about play with other family members (e.g. partner, other siblings). 'Each activity has its specific tasks' (Repkin, 2003, p. 14). Essentially the goal and the outcome of learning activity is not an external manifestation but rather self-change in the learner. Development is seen as 'the process of becoming an agent' (Repkin, 2003, p. 15) for one's own learning. In informal contexts for learning such as community playgroups and social media, joint work and the process for problem solving is multivoiced (Wertsch, 1991) and may serve multiple purposes for parents' development as 'individual agents of reflection' (Davydov et al., 2003).

Mastery of Learning Activity and the Social Situation of Development

Learning activity is theorised as the place where reflection 'emerges and develops' (Davydov et al., 2003, p. 71). As the leading activity for the development of reflection it

is derived from a social situation of development referred to as *collective theorising*.

Vygotsky (1987, p. 198) theorised the social situation of development as 'the

completely original, exclusive, single and unique relation, specific to the given age,

between the child and reality, mainly the social reality that surrounds him'. It includes

cultural and material conditions, and a person's interactions with others. It arises from a

person's new self-awareness, and as a predicament that determines relations between a

person and their environment. In the social situation of development of collective

theorising people give attention to a common activity together and collectively theorise

about their learning. In the context of community playgroups and social media use this

would involve parents giving attention to children's play such as play-types (e.g. socio-

dramatic play and construction play) (Bergen, 2015) and collectively theorising about

forms of play (e.g. traditional play – Wood, 2014), participation practices (Rogoff et al.,

1993) and relationships for play (McLean et al., 2017) through thinking, talking and

sharing with other parents at playgroup and in social media. Importantly, it is through

mastery of learning activity that a person develops reflection. This is achieved when a

person acting on his or her intention to learn, collectively theorises by engaging with

others and with content for the facilitation of his or her learning (Zuckerman, 2003).

The social situation for parents' learning about play created by community playgroups

and social media encompasses institutional values (Mercer, 1994) about play of the

broader society including educational play discourses (Wood, 2014), however, a diverse

range of families participate in playgroups. Hence, what parents collectively theorise

about play varies in response to group and individual needs. Similar to Wertsch and

Kazak (2011), this paper proposes that parents bring different values and levels of

shared understandings about play to the social situation of development which are

expanded through collective theorising with others at playgroup and in social media.

Mastery of learning activity occurs when a person can externalise his or her learning voluntarily, under any condition and reflect on its process (Kravtsov and Kravtsova, 2011). In formal education this is described as the learner verbalising the content and the process of his or her learning, evaluating and exercising control over actions and through interactions and self-regulation of his or her activity (Kravtsov and Kravsova, 2011). Similarly, in the context of community playgroups and social media use mastery of learning activity would require a parent to externalise his or her learning about play and evaluate and reflect on the content and process for informing the application of this new learning to the provision of play in the home and community.

Components of Learning Activity

The analysis of learning activity in the context of community playgroups and parents' social media use requires consideration of two components of learning activity as socially elaborated experience (Davydov et al., 2003). These are *learning task* and *learning actions* (Repkin, 2003). The goal of learning activity must be learning – where mastery occurs through joint activity with others, with the result or outcome being a change in the person as the subject of their activity. For example, a parent's goal may be to learn ways to be involved in children's play. Socially elaborated experience could involve the parent observing and talking to other parents about ways to interact with children during sociodramatic play. In social media it could be in the form of posts and replies about parents' involvement in children's socio-dramatic play. For example, a parent might post an image and comment, '*Aish and I in the home corner. Aish [child] is putting the doll to bed in the cradle and telling me [parent] to hush while the baby is sleeping'.* Another parent might comment on this post, '*Logan and I put the dolls to bed with lullabies*', which prompts the reply, '*At home we sing Kum-ba-yah at bedtime. We can sing it to the dolls too.*' In this example the goal of the first parent's learning

activity – to be more involved in their child's play, shapes the learning task.

Learning task 'is connected with the mastery of theoretical generalisation of knowledge' (Repkin, 2003, p. 23). Essentially, learning task determines theoretical content to be mastered to solve a problem and represents *what* a person is learning. In the previous example the content for learning task might include songs to sing together and strategies to support playful interactions such as guided and modelled interactions (Wood, 2014). Mastery of theoretical knowledge enables the parent as an agent of his or her activity to be involved positively and in new ways in his or her child's socio-dramatic play.

Learning actions refers to the actions a person takes to engage with the learning task (Repkin, 2003) or *how* a person is learning. A person determines the ways in which he or she will interact and engage with others to learn theoretical content for mastery. This means that a person acts with agency to 'initiate and maintain' (Zuckerman, 2003, p. 189) learning actions, including summarising, measuring, comparing and other actions for solving the task (Edwards, 2012). Further, learning actions include 'the use of conceptual and physical tools which allow the learner to move towards mastery of theoretical knowledge and prompts change in him or her as an agent' (Edwards, 2012, p. 595). Physical tools in a community playgroup would include books and charts of rhymes, songs and ideas for play. Conceptual tools would include beliefs, understandings and theories about play that parents collectively draw on to inform the provision of play. Learning actions that parents might engage in include summarising children's play experiences, making connections between play at playgroup and home and comparing their child's involvement in play over a period of time.

Edwards (2012) describes how the *form* and *function* of technology can support the development of reflection in students in higher education contexts. Edwards shows

how technology can take on the form of a database of theoretical knowledge for learning task or as an application such us Microsoft Office PowerPoint for comparing key ideas as learning actions. She shows how the function of technology can be to provide access to theoretical knowledge in a database for learning task and to enable learning actions such as the manipulation of ideas and knowledge. It may be that social media has a similar flexible form and function in the context of parents use in playgroups. For example, social media may take the form of a repository of knowledge about play as learning task in the postings and shared links of playgroup families and as an application such as Facebook to view, reply and express ideas in image and text about play, as learning actions. It may also serve a function for providing access to theoretical knowledge about play for learning task and for clarifying, questioning and making connections about play as learning actions.

Figure 1 summarises how the key ideas and components of learning activity may be realised in parents' learning about play in the context of community playgroups and parents' social media use.

[Figure 1 near here]

The components of learning task and learning actions provide a way to think about the nature of parents' learning activity about play in the context of community playgroups and social media use. This is because learning activity occurs in the social situation of development for collective theorising whereby a person gives attention in activity with others to the *what* and the *how* of their learning. Learning task represents what a person is learning and learning actions represent how a person goes about this learning, however, parents' joint activity in community playgroups and social media is not facilitated by a trained educator who provides structural components to support

learning. Therefore, another mechanism is needed to stimulate the self-teaching that takes the place of structural components. Davydov et al. (2003) explain this mechanism as design for learning activity.

Design for Learning Activity

The structural component of learning activity is 'designed to support learning' (Edwards, 2012, p. 595) and enables a person to self-regulate and evaluate their learning. Kravtsov and Kravtsova (2011, p. 33) describe how teachers facilitate children's learning activity through 'individual assignments' and 'the cultivation of task-orientated cooperation and partner relationships.' Similarly, Edwards (2012) describes her role as a teacher educator in providing a structural component to support students' mastery of learning task and learning actions. This is a problem for design for learning activity in informal education contexts where there is little or no support from a teaching adult for the 'formation of task-orientated communication' (Kravtsov and Kravtsova, 2011, p. 33) and as a growth point for self-reflection on 'the theory and practice of learning activity' (Davydov et al., 2003, p. 73).

Learning activity in the absence of a teaching adult is considered life-activity. Repkin (2003, p. 26) provides reasoning for thinking about learning activity in a practical sense whereby a person's life-activity is interrupted because he or she has recognised limits of his or her own knowledge. He proposes that if the learning task is of importance to a person, he or 'she needs to evaluate the situation and elucidate the reason' and take control over actions to expand his or her own knowledge. Kravtsov and Kravtsova (2011, p. 32) identify four hierarchical concepts for the facilitation of learning activity. These are: 1) organising space to meet learning goals; 2) planning and sequencing actions; 3) drawing on different materials; and 4) analysing, reflecting and comprehending one's own activity and self as the subject of this activity. In adult-life a

person controls the structural component of his or her learning. By bringing to the foreground children's play at playgroup as the object of his or her attention a parent might organise learning activity so that the space - physical (i.e. playgroup) and non-physical (i.e. social media), planning and actions with physical and conceptual tools, and use of materials supports his or her reflective processes for learning about play. For example, during playgroup a parent might intentionally talk with other parents about children's play interests at home or participate in play with children using resources (e.g. books) and materials (e.g. pinecones, twigs). In social media the parent might share links to online resources for play, images of play and post comments about children's engagement in play experiences. In learning cultivated through joint offline and online activity there exists potential for a bi-directional flow of knowledge from home to playgroup and vice versa. That is, learning activity is both self-propelled based on self-identified need and institutionally influenced, but through dynamic processes of appropriation leads to mastery. Reflection as the final hierarchical component is critical for parents' learning about play to be realised in a broader societal context through the increased provision of children's play experiences (i.e. repeated, enriched and/or new ideas) (McLean et al., 2018).

Davydov et al. (2003) describe a design for learning activity which supports its use for theorising parents' learning about play in community playgroups and social media. Davydov et al. propose that teaching oneself 'means to build relations with oneself as one does with others' (p. 69) in ways that bring about new self-awareness for the development of reflection. Davydov et al. (2003, pp. 71-72) describe three layers 'for the existence of reflective processes' in learning activity. These are: 1) thinking directed towards solving tasks; 2) communication and cooperation; and 3) self-awareness. These layers 'are intertwined but are irreducible to one another' and show

how reflection is developed. In the first layer, Davydov et al. claim that thinking directed toward solving tasks requires a person to reflect on the thinking processes behind, and outcomes of, his or her actions. Reflection in the second layer, provides a mechanism for bringing out what exists within a person in an un-reflected form into the social plane in the development of a shared understanding. In the third layer reflection provides 'a growth point for the theory and practice of learning activity' (p. 73) whereby what is externalised in cooperation with others becomes internalised as new self-awareness.

Davydov et al. (2003, p.73) theorise that these layers can be thought of as concentric funnels. The inner funnel provides the pivot for learning and sets a 'vector of motion' of learning activity through all funnels. In formal education contexts, the teacher creates the inner funnel by determining the theoretical content that will provide the focus of attention for thinking directed toward solving a problem. In the middle funnel the teacher further positions children to collectively theorise about the problem through cooperation and communication in joint activity with others. The outer funnel represents the child's self-awareness of their social reality in relation to one's own behaviour, thinking and actions as encompassing all three funnels and as the meaning-making basis for full learning activity. What is significant about Davydov et al.'s design for learning activity for theorising parents' learning about play in the contemporary learning context of community playgroups and social media use, is that these funnels are inverted in design for learning activity in adulthood (Figure 2).

[Figure 2 near here]

The inversion of these concentric funnels of design for learning activity in adulthood has the inner funnel as a person's self-awareness of a problem to be solved that requires new learning. This self-awareness sets in motion reflective processes for self-teaching and the 'cultivation' (Davydov et al., 2003, p. 73) of reflection. In the context of community playgroups and social media use a parent's new self-awareness of the need to expand his or her knowledge about play comes from the intersection between community playgroups and social media itself (Figure 3). As design for learning activity this new self-awareness defines the educational goal and provides the pivot to set the vector of motion for self-propelled learning activity, which is realised through a parent choosing the cultural content and forms of cooperation with others for transforming the limits of his or her knowledge about play.

[Figure 3 near here]

The use of learning activity for conceptualising parents' learning about play as an activity enacted within the social situation of community playgroups and social media suggests potential benefit for communities. This is because mastery of learning activity results in new self-awareness for the application of knowledge to practice. A parent's participation in the reflective processes of learning activity may promote new self-awareness for transforming current thinking and practices for the provision of play. In a practical sense this could include a change in the forms, types and frequency of parental-provided play experiences and in participation practices and relationships for facilitating children's play. Further, the potential for communities to benefit from parents' learning extends beyond the individual or the playgroup and more broadly into

communities through knowledge shared and applied within and across community networks.

A limitation of the use of learning activity is that not all parents' participation in community playgroups and social media is learning activity (Karpov, 2015). As participation is internally motivated activity the use of this concept may not allow for consideration of other reasons for participation including socialising with others, or parents moving in and out of learning activity in response to individual learning needs. Nonetheless, learning activity offers a way of thinking about parents' awareness of play as a growth point for building further knowledge.

Conclusion

While learning activity has not been widely used outside of formal education contexts the literature indicates its significance as a concept for understanding learning beyond the bounds of teaching (Repkin, 2003) and as essential human activity for self-development (Davydov et al., 2003). The identification of learning activity as a concept for theorising this contemporary education context for parents' learning about play provides a first step to enable mobilisation of the social situation for the benefit of all playgroup families in the provision of play in early childhood.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Figure 1: Parents learning about play in community playgroups and social media using the sociocultural concept of learning activity.

Figure 2: Three concentric funnels of design for learning activity (Davydov et al., 2003) in elementary school years and from early adulthood.

Figure 3: Self-awareness in the design for learning activity (Davydov et al., 2003) as the intersection between community playgroups and social media and as the pivot for parents' self-propelled learning about play.