

## A HOLE IN MY STOCKING: DISRUPTING POWER THROUGH PLAY IN THE KICKSTARTER CREATIVE ARTS PROJECT

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*This article focuses on the importance of play as a necessary and developmental tool for creating democratic spaces in rural South African Primary schools through examples in the Kickstarter Creative Arts pilot project case study (The KS project). The KS project is an Educational teacher empowerment and artist in residency programme, designed as a case study to assess the impact of the Creative Arts at the Intermediate level (Grade 4, 5 and 6). The project illustrates how play, as supported by Winnicott and Vygotsky, is developmental and can be a mechanism for greater humanization in the classroom. The metaphor of a stocking is employed to advocate for experience, as per the work of John Dewey. As the methodology of the Kickstarter project is experiential, it encourages personal artistic growth for teachers, allowing play and creating shifts in the power dynamics and relationship between teachers and pupils within the classroom. As teachers engage with a democratic approach, they find learners more willing, more empathetic and more engaged. It is proposed that the KS project become aligned with the Basic Department of Education and rolled out nationwide in South Africa for the “Arts as method” approach to all subjects.*

**Keywords:** Play, Power, South Africa, Rural Primary Schools, Kickstarter Creative Arts Project

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## **Introduction**

Stockings are a vivid memory from my childhood. I remember running to my mother's knees and pulling the transparent garment away from her legs, thinking it was her peachy satin "skin", watching it first billow and then sink back and cling tightly to her limbs again – like an astounding feat of magic. Stockings were fascinating and to a child's touch the texture was like nothing felt before: stretchy and sinew-thin, like the silky strands of a spider web. I delighted in pulling them over my hands and pushing my fingers through the membranous elastic sheen, delighting in my new emergence as a webbed creature.

This preoccupation was altered a few years later with the reality of having to wear stockings every day as part of a prescribed school uniform. The stretchy sinew-like material became scratchy and uncomfortable, the spider strands tore into ladders, and the tightly clinging close fit felt restricting and suffocating (this is not to mention the complexity of even trying to get them on in the morning, which regularly involved contorting, manoeuvring and much pulling, yanking, tearing and frustration).

This stocking metaphor becomes a lens to observe the South African classroom with its preoccupation with STEM (Sciences, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and strict, disciplinarian tradition. As the practise of donning a stocking, the education system has been criticized of limiting, squeezing and restricting, rather than nurturing learners into curious, creative and productive adults (Goetze, 2016).

However, the South African Basic Department of Education (BDE) is acknowledging that the Arts have a vital role to play, with regard to creativity and critical thinking. In her recent address of the Education Sector during a media briefing update, the minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, spoke of the "Integration of the Arts into the Mathematics, Science and Technology (STEAM)" (DBE, n.d.). Unfortunately, the minister's words appear to be lip-service in the context of the reality: many teachers lack the necessary skills to teach the Arts and have themselves had little exposure to professional artistic experiences (Andrew, 2012). The danger of policy being enforced by the BDE decision makers is that the content may not manifest in the process and that a watered-down version may be implemented, further weakening arts practice in the classroom. What is lacking is an authentic integration of democratic arts practice which engages participation in the classroom. The education project pilot, the Kickstarter Creative Arts project (KS) 2015-2016, which I project managed<sup>1</sup>, allowed for moments of child-led exploration and creativity, driven by the Arts subjects, yet grounded within the current South African Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). The project, like a snugly-fitted stocking, was seamlessly embedded within the school day, covering the curriculum thoroughly. In the monitoring and evaluation of the project teachers reported better relationships with their learners and that this created a better learning environment (ASSITEJ SA, 2017).

Throughout this essay the notion of 'better relationships' between teachers and learners will be explored, alongside the fact that play can disrupt the teacher-dominant structure within the classroom – as it is a catalyst for authentic engagement. A thorough and comprehensive implementation of the Arts policy, and that play offers children the chance to pursue imaginative process

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<sup>1</sup> During the pilot of the KS project I was the lead project manager, responsible for all logistics, training, communications and curriculum development - as well as stakeholder relationship management.

and experience, will be argued for. The work of Vygotsky and Winnicott will be discussed to define and support the concept of play as necessary and developmental. I strongly advocate that the Arts are the best vehicle for humanisation and the creation of democratic spaces, as per the writing of John Dewey, and as witnessed in the classrooms of nine-to-twelve-year olds in the Kickstarter Creative Arts project. Through memory and personal anecdotes, the metaphor of a stocking, to underpin my arguments, will be used.

## Child-centred approaches

As learning should be an exploration of the world through experience (as my playful exploration of my mother's stockings was), I am drawn to current methodologies of child-centred pedagogy. For the purposes of this essay these methodologies will be referred to as "progressive" to distinguish them from the more conventional South African practice. In many South African classrooms children "learn" by sitting still, listening and repeating, and lack play as formal learning (Rule & Land, 2017). Progressive schools, by contrast, focus on the individual and the links between experience and learning ("Reggio Emilia Approach," n.d.). I advocate for experience as, not unlike a stocking, it transforms and takes shape, allowing for malleability in the approach to learning.

Philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer John Dewey's ideas of Consummatory Experience resonate with my own as progressive education focuses on present experience that is "learning by doing", including an emphasis on critical thinking, life-long learning and problem solving to enhance developmental skills (Dewey, 1998, p. 96) .

Dewey urged that learning aroused an active quest for information and was constructed from the daily experiences of one's life – moving through the world one gains skills which are then transferable to new situations. Learning was therefore a life-long process (Dewey, 1998). Experience creates relevancy and personal purpose within the classroom as learners are able to locate themselves and their lives within their education.

South African classrooms do not consider the needs and capabilities of individual learners which prepares them for uniformity in an industrial working world (Robinson, 2006). Akin to the experience of pulling on a stocking, the traditional system has strangled creativity and curiosity rather than nourishing learners into eager, responsive and imaginative adults (Goetze, 2016). Even the structure of most traditional classrooms places restrictions on learner's behaviours, freedoms and interactions:

"The limitation which was put upon outward action by the fixed arrangements of the typical school classroom, with its fixed rows of desks and its military regimen of pupils who were permitted to move only at fixed signals, put a great restriction upon intellectual and moral freedom" (Dewey, 1998, p. 70).

Dewey does, however, caution about the polarising effects of tradition vs. progressive education. He says that educational theory is no exception in creating "*Either-Ors*" and there is danger in building a new curriculum purely in negation of the traditional (Dewey, 1998). Although I concur with many aspects of child-centred pedagogy, the potential flaw is that it minimises the importance of the content, which is a vital component in the Kickstarter Creative Arts project.

## **Background of the Kickstarter Creative Arts project**

One cannot observe education in South Africa without acknowledging the country's complex socio-political and colonial past. Almost three decades on the legacy of Apartheid and the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (later renamed the Black Education Act of 1953 – a segregation law which enforced racially separated educational facilities) lingers in many South African classrooms (Aldridge, Fraser, & Ntuli, 2009). It is a daunting task to adequately address the histories of Arts Education in South Africa and this article does not allow for an in-depth study. However, it is important to frame that rural schools in South Africa exist in conditions of dire poverty, with stark socio-economic inequalities resulting in violent communities (Murriss, 2016). The historically exclusionary system impacted the teachers within the project, as exposure to formal Arts training during their own pre-service education would have been culturally questionable, notably limited or non-existent (Andrew, 2012). In this fractured landscape, there was a need for an Art Education initiative which could adequately train teachers and equip them with the skills to deliver high quality Arts lessons for their schools.

The Kickstarter Creative Arts project (KS) is an Educational teacher empowerment and artist-in-residency programme, designed as a case study to assess the impact of the Creative Arts at the Intermediate level (Grades 4, 5 and 6) in peri-urban and rural primary Schools in South Africa (ASSITEJ SA, 2017). The project is implemented and managed by ASSITEJ SA, the South African arm of the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (originally entitled in French as Association Internationale du Théâtre de l'Enfance et la Jeunesse- ASSITEJ). This organisation was originally established in 1965 as an international alliance of experts involved in theatre for children and young people (ASSITEJ International n.d.). The KS project is sponsored by Rand Merchant Bank and is the first of its kind in South Africa. It was originally implemented as a case study to assess programme outcomes for both target and beneficiary groups, that is, creative arts teachers and their pupils, across 20 different schools (ASSITEJ SA, 2017).

The aim of the project (piloted in 2015-2016) was to assess the impact that a solid, well-delivered Arts intervention can generate in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS - The National Curriculum policy in South Africa) curriculum Intermediate phase. The South African policy statement includes the Arts (Music, Dance, Dramatic Arts and Visual Arts) as a compulsory subject in the curriculum (Creative Arts) from the foundation phase all the way till Grade 12. This spans the totality of the curriculum as a mandatory subject till Grade 9, as Creative Arts, and can then be taken as optional subjects (Dramatic Arts, Visual Arts, Music and Dance) to the final year of high school.

The methodology of the project is experiential, which supports aspects of child-centred pedagogy ("Empower Education," n.d.). The Artist Facilitators (AFs) and teachers receive training which guides them through a step-by-step process of physically making artworks and performances themselves. The result is that the teaching and delivering of the Creative Arts (CA) material in the manual is understood and experienced by the AFs and teachers, allowing for a greater embodiment of knowledge. This approach is pivotal given that training for the subject has not been adequate in the past<sup>2</sup> (ASSITEJ SA, 2017).

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<sup>2</sup> In 2015, during our initial baseline assessments of the schools within the project, we found that up to 89% of teachers teaching the subject had not received formal training in Arts subjects (ASSITEJ SA, 2017). Those who had received training report that it was a mundane reading out of the policy document and included no practical workshops or training on how to implement the subject in the classroom.

ASSITEJ SA aims for the Kickstarter Creative Arts project to become a national project to encourage further engagement with Arts and play in classrooms throughout the country. In most South African primary schools, play is common place (like the stockings worn as part of a uniform). However, it is restricted to the playground and is not welcome in the formal classroom space (Aronstam & Braund, 2015). Through varying definitions of play we will find why it is of vital importance to create more effective learning environments within the classroom.

## Play

*“To Play is to be in the world. To Play is to be Human.”*

(Sicart, 2014, p. 1)

Play is often defined as an act of recreation or enjoyment, mostly performed by or associated with children. (“play | Definition of play in English by Oxford Dictionaries,” n.d.) However, play is more radical than what this definition suggests as evident in the work of Perry Else, where he describes play as an exploratory mode of discovery: “playing is a process not a product; playing is a way of doing things not an end in itself” (Else, 2009, p. 30). He goes on to mention the numerous undertakings where play is significant, such as identity, using one’s body in different ways, when creating Art and interacting with others and the world.

Play is also developmental as noted by Russian psychologist and polymath Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky, 1896-1934, who explores play as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is the difference between what a learner can do unaided and what they cannot. Most children will follow an adult’s example and will moderately develop the capacity to take on greater tasks (Holzman & Newman, 1993). Vygotsky believed that through play the child is always exploring possibilities beyond themselves. “Play gives a child new forms of desires (rules). It teaches her to desire by relating her desires to a fictitious ‘I’ to her role in the game and its rules. In this way, a child’s greatest achievements are possible in play, achievements that tomorrow will become her basic level of real action and morality” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102). A child’s role playing of various situations results in them deepening their capacity to take on and understand greater tasks. Vygotsky claims that in play a child is always striving to behave beyond their development capacity: “in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.102). Therefore, play can be viewed as the process by which humans make sense of the world around them which is meaningful to each individual (Else, 2009).

Play is therefore developmental, significant and important. Donald Woods Winnicott, 1897-1971, a paediatrician and psychoanalyst, renowned for his contribution to the study of children’s well-being, considered play as the key to emotional and psychological welfare. He observed not only the ways that children play, but also the way adults “play” through making art, engaging in sports, hobbies, humour and meaningful conversations. He saw play as vitally important to the development of authentic selfhood. Therefore, play becomes an active undertaking which is key in a number of human pursuits.

At this juncture, it is important to define play as both a concept and, as how it is practically utilised in South African schools, in order to argue why it is of significance in the KS project. In early childhood, it is widely understood that play is the dominant role of engagement within the nursery school or

creche<sup>3</sup> where children are predominantly instructed through the use of play, games and creative arts (such as painting, movement, music and story reading) in order to support cognitive development (Overstreet, 2018). Engagement takes place on mats on the floor or seated in circles, with the teacher seated amongst the children, at their level, in an unthreatening manner. Research on play in early childhood development (ECD) reveals it is a vital element of learning and the area in which literacy skills are best developed. As Overstreet claims in her article, citing Nitecki and Chung, play is “a powerful vehicle to refine social, cognitive, physical and language skills” (Overstreet, 2018, p. 217).

However, as learners mature and move into “big” school (more formal, traditional institutes educating learners from roughly five or six years and up), many of these vital elements are forgotten in favour of more “typical” classroom practice. These include the adoption of formal school uniforms, sitting on chairs at desks in rows and a single dominant teacher figure who is at the front of the class, usually standing, to instruct the lesson (Dewey, 1998). These environments offer less freedom and call for uniformity and the playful way in which the learners used to be engaged is lost (Robinson, 2006). A recent study found that there is little grasp of the pedagogy of play in South African classrooms and that teachers have not received adequate training in this area (Aronstam & Braund, 2015).

Play is developmental, significant and vital in South African classrooms. It is a flexible and adaptable process which can be described and done in a multitude of different ways. My “using” of my mother’s stockings in different, adaptable ways, may have taught me more than the actual wearing of them, i.e. more than the purposes they were originally designed and intended for. In both the work of Vygotsky and Winnicott play is seen as a necessary developmental process which is both educational and self-affirming and therefore it must be included as a vital component of curriculum at all phases.

### **Play in the Kickstarter Creative Arts project**

Play is vital to growth and human evolution and is used in many ways in the KS project. One aspect of this is the use of games, especially at the outset of every KS lesson, to warm up and prepare the learners. The type of game depends on the genre and the lesson. For example, a physical warm up game may be needed for dance, a free drawing exercise for art, etc. The rules of these games may vary too. Sometimes they are competitive; sometimes they are explorations; sometimes they are simply used to warm up the body, stretch their muscles and get the learners moving in the space. Not only do these games allow play and freedom but they are also opportunities for the learners to take risks, as they exist in a space which is free from consequence. For example, a learner could get something wrong which may result in them being out in the game, but this failure is not catastrophic to their lives. In this way, the classroom can become a space for failure which is self-contained and manageable. Learners could work through issues of failure and defeat without the stakes being detrimental, therefore allowing experience and the learning to build resilience

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<sup>3</sup> Terms widely used in South Africa to describe the phase of childhood education from ages 2-5, often also interestingly referred to as ‘play school’.

applicable in later life. In an undemocratic classroom there would be no room for failure, nor any space to practise being wrong.

As previously mentioned, the methodology of the project is experiential, i.e. one cannot make a dance without dancing. The learners are actively engaged in the making, the doing, and the creativity of the lesson. Most often the learners work in groups, collaboratively deciding how they should create/complete the task at hand. A facilitator or teacher may give an instruction or set a creative task but will then allow the group to explore the ways and means in which they choose to create or complete the task. The learners may explore various movements (in a dance lesson) or act out various scenarios (in a drama lesson) in order to unpack the task and come to a decision about what to use in the final product. These are essentially various explorative “acts of play” (with various task-dependant tools utilised: the body, voices, space, or instruments) with the aim of producing a product, i.e. a dance, a song, a painting or a play. Miguel Sicart speaks of play as “a way of engaging with the world – not as an activity of consumption but as an activity of production” (Sicart, 2014, p. 5). Exploration and play are vital components in choice and creation.

In most South African classrooms teaching practise takes the form of prescribed knowledge being dictated in facts to the learner (Goetze, 2016). Often these facts are rooted in the past and deemed relevant or important by external bodies who are not in direct contact with learners or have little knowledge about their culture, languages and lives (Andrew, 2012). Learners are therefore rendered powerless in the process of their education and are subject to a system which doesn’t allow freedom, both in the scope of the curriculum and in the classroom space.

Learning here means acquisition of what already is incorporated in books and in the heads of elders. Moreover, that which is taught is thought of as essentially static. It is taught as a finished product, with little regard either to the ways in which it was originally built up or to changes which will surely occur in the future. It is to a large extent the cultural product of societies that assumed the future would be much like the past, and yet it is used as educational food in a society where change is the rule, not the exception (Dewey, 1998, p. 5).

This is the case with the learners in the Kickstarter project. Their lives are constantly in flux, with very little consistency or safety, due to the socio-economic situations and communities in which they live (Murriss, 2016). Therefore, much of the prescribed curriculum is irrelevant, nor does it assist them in dealing with the traumatic experiences they face every day. A consummatory curriculum, one which speaks to the lives of the learners, where “schooling is to become a means of personal fulfilment, to provide a context in which individuals discover and develop unique identities” and “with many dimensions for personal development” (Eisner & Vallance, 1974, p. 105) is quintessential to these communities.

Although the learners in the KS project are instructed in the steps of the lesson, what shape that task takes, what dance the children choose to create with the tools they have been given and what characters or theme the play will have, is dependent upon the learners’ decisions in that moment. Therefore, those creative choices provide the learners with their own autonomy within the class. They are the ones dictating how the creation will unfold. This provides learners with a degree of freedom not available in their other subjects where most often the facts are dictated. Play is therefore an essential element of the Kickstarter Creative project as it allows

for failure and defeat, as well as autonomy, growth, creativity and curiosity of the learner, and the making of tangible products through those very interactions.

## Play and Power

*“Play is what I do when everyone else stops telling me what to do”*

(Else, 2009, p. 6)

Power is a complex, pervasive construct that requires more in-depth analysis than this article allows. I draw briefly on Foucault’s theories and my experiences in educational settings for the purpose of this article. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault outlines the historical development of systems of rank, order, hierarchies of knowledge or ability, classification and surveillance in the penal system and the evolution of educational structure (Foucault, 1975). He notes how the development of punishment, from torture as public spectacle to an economy of suspended rights is also evident in educational organisation (Foucault, 1975). Schools are compared to penal institutions in the management and control of attendees’ movement and access through timetabling, prescribed breaks, designated spaces and surveillance (Foucault, 1975). This is significant in the South African context as the Apartheid system limited equal access to quality education for the majority of South Africans which, in turn, impacts not only knowledge and content, but also the teaching practise, methodology and general understanding of the Arts (Andrew, 2012).

Power dynamics are not only evident in the historical systems of educational structure – the classroom mimics these systems of control. Power is asserted in the physical arrangement of space and the relationship between teachers and learners in a classroom. In a traditional South African setting, the roles are clear: the teacher is the one asking the questions and the students must answer in the “correct” ways. Donnelly et al. refer to this as the *Didactic Contract*, stating that it is the dominant mode students and teachers conform to daily in most classrooms. “These routines dictate certain roles and limitations where students and teachers alike negotiate the most expedient approach to arrive at the desired answer” (Donnelly et al., 2014). This study observed the possible power shifts in inquiry-based processes in the classroom but found that the entrenched roles of hierarchy between teachers and students are still dominant and problematic. This contract is not an explicit one but is based on implicit teacher and learner expectation of classroom behaviour and how they should interact (Donnelly et al., 2014).

The teacher’s domineering physical standing position is significant as they are positioned above the seated learner and appear as a foreboding figure of authority. Viewed in this context, the classroom becomes a complex setting with undercurrents of power and control (Donnelly et al., 2014). The prescribed stocking is a metaphor for this and is emblematic of the prescriptive limitations and restrictions that become imposed as learners are instructed on how to behave, when to ask questions and even how and when to learn.

One could argue that these systems provide structure. Just as the stocking enhances shape and support for the leg, one could argue that the desks and chairs, the dominant teacher, and the other apparatuses of the system supply structure and discipline (Ball, 2013). My concern with the dictatorial classroom is that power and punishment are often synonymous. Dominance can be problematic if it is limiting

the learner's growth (be that fear of expression, individualism or fear of punishment). In many cases, teachers inflate their own sense of control through the mechanism of punishment. A more humane approach, one which offers a neutralising of these power structures, is advocated for by Dewey (1998):

“One may assume, I suppose, that one thing which has recommended the progressive movement is that it seems in accord with the democratic ideal to which our people is committed than do the procedures of the traditional school, since the latter have so much of the autocratic about them” (Dewey, 1998, p. 24).

Teachers who had been trained in institutions which, openly, or at least tacitly, entrenched apartheid systems of education perpetuate control – as it is the only system they can operate within (Andrew, 2012) and there is evidence of this during the KS project. In the first year of the pilot, there were reports of teacher resistance to the “creative noise” the lessons produced. Teachers tried to control or reduce the learners' immersion in the creative process if it got too loud or seemed out of control. The facilitators were frustrated by the teachers' attempts to squash this experience as they (the AFs) saw the “creative noise” as productive, akin to a musical “jam” session where the learners were just “getting going” and being excited and enthralled by the creative process. The teachers' fears relate back to the *Didactic Contract* and structures of power (Donnelly et al., 2014). In a traditional classroom, the learners are silent, passive vessels; if the class becomes noisy the assumption is the teacher has lost control. The KS process challenged the teachers' fear of this contract being breached by the learners' rising volume, as the noise was productive in these instances. Vygotsky speaks of the action of play allowing freedom, “in that it is a novel form of behavior liberating the child from constraints” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 96). Once the teachers in the KS project came to understand that the “creative noise” and play was productive (and even necessary to) the process, they were more open to allowing it in their classrooms (ASSITEJ SA, 2017).

The Kickstarter project allowed learners to include their everyday experiences in the classroom. Children were frequently observed acting out scenes of alcohol abuse or violence in the drama lessons which are clearly enactments from their socio-political backgrounds in the rural context of South Africa (Murriss, 2016). “Quite often the playful mode is when children feel they are free to make their own choices without intervention from others” (Else, 2009, p. 33). Just as I used to stretch and contort my mother's stockings to explore and understand them so, too, are the learners expanding their realities and stories in an attempt at meaning making and must be allowed the space to explore relevant difficult topics in order to reconcile their interpretations of them.

Another example of a democratic approach to learning was evident in a classroom in Zamdela, just outside of Sasolberg in the Northern Free State Province of South Africa. Sasolberg is an industrial town divided into three main areas: the CBD, the Vaal Park residential suburb and the “township” of Zamdela. Vaal Park is an affluent area, whilst Zamdela is the area formerly reserved for black people during South Africa's past of racial segregation. Even though the school is under-resourced and has very little in the way of Arts materials the teachers we had trained on the project were highly-motivated individuals. Upon arrival at the school and visiting the teacher's classroom, all the desks and chairs had been moved out of the usual configuration and stacked against the walls, allowing for an open, neutral space in the room. This subversion of the original classroom set up (desks and chairs in rows, with the teacher standing in the front of the classroom to assert command) is what Scott G. Eberle refers to as “imagination and pleasurable expectation” (Eberle, 2014, p. 223) because anticipation, paradoxically, gives way to surprise. This anticipated surprise occurs because “memory

and prediction share a neural substrate . . . [thus] players in a state of anticipation may be remembering a future pleasure” (Eberle, 2014, p. 223). The learners stepping into a changed space, with no desks and chairs to sit on in the predictable routine, would be curious, surprised and possibly even in anticipation of a “known pleasurable expectation” (Eberle, 2014, p. 223).

During the aforementioned visit, the learners were both excited and receptive as they formed a circle to begin. Then, as part of a movement-based and focused drama exercise, the learners formed pairs, faced each other and enacted a mirroring task, where one partner closely followed the other’s movements in silence. As the last small giggles died down and the learners began to focus and really hone into the exercise, the teacher noticed that one learner did not have a partner due to the uneven numbers in the class. “Come,” she called out to him, “we will be partners,” and proceeded not only to join the general group in the game but allowed the learner to initiate the movement.

This was a startling, willing act of vulnerability. That a teacher should so readily relinquish her dominant status and move from authority to participant, speaks to the humanising impact of the Arts and a shift in the teacher practice throughout the process. Her current receptiveness links back to the earlier frustration of the facilitators, when the teachers were unwilling to invest in the creative process nor enact the vulnerability necessary to support the learning. A distinct change is witnessed in the choice to support the learner by directly involving herself in the task and place that learner’s need above her dominance. By moving into direct action with the group she undermined her position of power and interacted with the learner on the same level.

Whether the teacher’s choice in that moment was motivated by her humane need to include the child or by her own decision to join the game for her own enjoyment is not relevant. What is important is that she was open and willing to engage and shift the dominant narrative of hierarchy in the traditional classroom, knowingly or not (Donnelly et al., 2014).

Her readiness to leap in also speaks to her trust in the process of play and that the other learners were so invested in the task that they did not require an authority figure to watch over them, rather that they were entirely absorbed in their own concentrations centring around the paired-task at hand. This example is what Misty Ferguson would refer to as a “new authentic mutual humanity” (Ferguson, 2018, p. 45). The shift in power structure through play and laughter invites a new, deepened humanity into the classroom.

Garfath, a teacher exploring play in his classroom, speaks of the shift in his own practice, confessing that he spent years “denying his own playfulness as a means of bringing the will of the children into accord with his own will” (Garfath, 2015, p. 113). “Garfath soon realized that the greatest opposition to play and playfulness was his own ego, his own need for absolute control” (Ferguson, 2018, p. 45). These shifts in perception regarding dominance and power can be likened to the laddering of a stocking, changing its materiality through material failure – similar to the acceptance that “creative noise” equals a productive, “healthy” Arts classroom. Garfath’s realisation is one of personal awareness but indicates how play can neutralise autocratic struggles in the classroom:

“As the power struggle is lessened a new authentic mutual humanity emerges, as do new possibilities for learning in conjunction with the development of individual and collective voices expressing this freedom from imposed oppositionality in the classroom” (Ferguson, 2018, p. 45).

This is further articulated by a teacher in the Kickstarter project:

“The workshop opened my eyes. I enjoy now being able to reach all my learners and seeing them blossom and grow more confident. I used to speak at them. I used to stand in front of the class and just talk. But now I understand that we are partners. They too must contribute their thoughts and ideas. This has been a beautiful relationship. Teacher, Free State school” (ASSITEJ SA, 2017).

As the learners witness their teacher playing and laughing, it allows them to connect on a level which is greater than the traditional, superficial pupil-teacher interaction. The learners witness the teacher as someone: a human with emotions and expressive capacity and not just as a figure of authority. This, in turn, shapes the child’s view of actual learning in that it can be pleasurable and fun.

This humanity is further reflected in the data gathering during the Kickstarter Pilot which took place at the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017. Over 40 teachers from the 20 schools participating in the project were asked the question “Have you observed a change in your relationship with the learners and do you think this creates a better/more effective learning environment?” A staggering 100% of the teachers responded favourably. They went on to say that their relationship with the learners was better and that the learners now trusted and confided in them (ASSITEJ SA, 2017). Authentic play cultivates tenderness, and this nurtures closeness between teachers and learners, fostering understanding, compassion and greater independence as trust grows. I full-heartedly agree with Garfath when he states that play is an invitation to “communicate something forcefully genuine and to discover something equally genuine in me” (Garfath, 2015, p. 118).

## Conclusion

My experience with stockings was originally sensory: scrunching and stretching, manipulating and twisting the elastic nylon layers. Experience is paramount to understanding (as supported by Dewey) and my engagement with the stocking, both physically as a child and in the unravelling of this essay, was playful and imbued with curiosity to discover more. This approach is crucial to child-centred pedagogy, with its focus on individual progress and discovery through play. As play is developmental and assists in the expansion of a child’s growth, the play practice within the KS project is educational and rooted in experience.

Play shifts the traditional South African classroom power structures through extensive Arts-based group work and the creation of original works together. Teachers become less autocratic as they readily involve themselves in the play and warm-up games throughout the sessions and grow with the learners. As teachers engage with a deeper democratic approach (as outlined by Garfath, Ferguson and other examples), they find learners more willing, more empathetic and more engaged in their classrooms. Play exposes joy and laughter which allows for deeper human interaction and connection. This creates intimacy both between learners and their teachers and builds autonomy which allows for trust. Play is therefore a mighty means to disrupt power and nurture greater humanisation and compassion within classrooms globally, as evidenced in the Kickstarter Creative Arts project. We need to support play as an approach of nurturing curiosity in children if we wish to see critical thinking and classrooms of productive learning in the future. The project has also allowed for greater teacher

understanding of artistic process and stresses the importance of thorough implementation and practical Arts training for all those involved.

The next step for the KS project would be to become aligned with the BDE and roll out nationwide training not only in the Arts subjects but for the “*Arts as method*” approach to all subjects: how to teach Maths, Science and technology with Arts-based practice and methodologies. This would considerably and authentically integrate the Arts within the South African education landscape.

I propose that this approach is adopted nationwide in South Africa as not only does it offer radical learning but increases empathy and understanding, all of which are vital components currently lacking in our fractured, violent and unequal society.

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