

## *Soperezhivanie*: Dramatic events in fairy tales and play

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### **Abstract**

The concept of *perezhivanie* has gained theoretical attention and is beginning to feature in empirical studies of young children, where the role of emotion is foregrounded (e.g., Ferholt, 2010). However, the idea of a *collective perezhivanie* of adults and children in early childhood settings has not yet been researched. In the context of collective emotional imagination (Fleer & Hammer, 2013; Fleer & Peers, 2012), this paper foregrounds the key relations between audience and players, and between real relations and role relations. It extends a line of work developed by Zaporozhets (1986, 1986/2002, 1994/2005) and furthered by Strel'kova (1986) and El'koninova (2001, 2002) on a related concept known in Russian as *soperezhivanie*. Through a study of 25 children, three educators, and the first named author, participating in a fairy tale festival in a multi-age children's care setting in Australia (60 hours of video observations) the concept of *soperezhivanie* is drawn upon to make sense of the experiences of the participants. It was found that moments of collective *perezhivanie* were co-experienced by children and teachers when teachers took a role in the play and the group united around a key moment of emotional contradiction in the fairy tale. This research provides insights into ways in which early childhood educators can plan for children's emotional development in collective whole group contexts. The outcomes make a contribution to the unfinished work of Vygotsky on the concept of *perezhivanie*.

### **Keywords**

*Perezhivanie*; *soperezhivanie*; emotions; imagination; double-subjectivity; fairy tales; cultural-historical theory; play

## Introduction

Despite the recent interest in research focused on children's play (Göncü & Vadeboncoeur, 2016), and the longstanding plethora of research into how individuals and small groups play (Pellegrini, 2011), few studies have investigated how role-play is co-experienced by adults and children in early childhood settings. The present study seeks to contribute to this research base through drawing upon the concept of *soperezhivanie* to examine the nature of children's and teachers' interactions during role-play in group settings. The concept of *soperezhivanie* or co-experiencing is discussed further below. The study reported in this paper has two related goals. The study seeks to examine firstly how children and teachers collectively co-experience a group event; and secondly how children variously contribute to the role-play of a familiar fairy tale where children empathise with the main character and collectively share the same imaginary situation and emotional tension. The aim of the research is to better understand the emotional moments collectively created in group settings where adults and children co-experience the role-play of a familiar fairy tale over an extended period.

In the existing literature that provides the background to the present study, three key research outcomes are evident. Firstly, what is known is that a cultural-historical reading of play foregrounds the creation of an imaginary situation where children change the meaning of objects and actions in order to give new meaning to the situation (Vygotsky, 1933/1966). The longstanding research that underpins this conception of play, states that play creates the conditions for children's development in the early childhood period (Hakkarainen, 2006). However, much of the empirical research in recent years has been directed to examining play as a pedagogical approach (e.g., OECD, 2006), rather than how teachers contribute to supporting the development of imaginary play. Secondly, much of the research that has emerged over the past ten years has centered on how play can support children's learning, due in part to the calls for greater cognitive outcomes in the early childhood period. What has been missing from this recent research has been a holistic focus on children's engagement in play, where emotions, creativity and other forms of development are intertwined with learning. Thirdly, most literature in the field of early childhood education is based on the premise that play is the private domain of children, yet both research into dramatic play in the Arts (Dunn, 2003) and the study of children's playworlds (Bredikyte, 2011), has shown that adults have a central role in developing children's play, where creativity, imagination, and emotions are foregrounded (e.g., Connery, John-Steiner, & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010). More needs to be known about how play (Vygotsky, 1933/1966) creates the dramatic conditions (Dunn, 2003) in which children and teachers (Linqvist, 1995) can co-experience emotionally charged events or tensions that support development.

This paper specifically reports on a study in a multi-age group setting, where the fairy tale *The Frog King*<sup>1</sup> (Grimm, 2005) was told, retold, and dramatised over several sessions. The concept of *soperezhivanie* is used to examine the nature of children's and teachers' role play during moments of emotional encounters in this group setting. By examining both individual and collective moments of emotional engagement in a multi-age setting where the fairy tale is dramatised, deeper insights into the development of emotions in group settings can be explored. The related concept of *perezhivanie* is also used in combination with *soperezhivanie* to analyse both individual and collective discernible moments when adults and children, audience and players are united. Our findings are consistent with those of Adams and March (2015), who found that when using the concept of *perezhivanie* as the unit of analysis, it becomes possible to examine identifiable moments in group settings, when participants become collectively oriented toward a common goal within the larger

flow of the whole group. Together, these concepts point to an “ideal plane of emotional imagination” (Zaporozhets, 1986/2002, p. 58) that we sought to investigate in group settings in the present study.

To achieve the goals of this study, the paper begins with a review of the theoretical literature, where the depth and power of the concept of *soperezhivanie* is presented. This is followed by the research design, a presentation of two vignettes taken from the full data set, and a discussion of each to illustrate the findings of the study where emotional development in group settings is foregrounded.

## **Theoretical foundations**

In line with the focus of this paper, a theoretical rather than general literature review is presented. The theoretical discussion focuses on the cultural-historical literature related to: first, emotional imagination and the emotional tensions found in fairy tales; second, the concept of *perezhivanie*; and third, the related concept of *soperezhivanie*. The theoretical discussion draws upon those relevant empirical studies of young children that have used the concept of *perezhivanie* (e.g., Ferholt, 2010), double subjectivity of emotions in play (e.g., Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010) and *soperezhivanie* (e.g., Zaporozhets, 1986).

### *Emotional imagination and tension*

In a cultural-historical study of emotions, it is important to consider the theatrical origins of Vygotsky’s conception of emotions (Smagorinsky, 2011). The metatheatre of Vygotsky’s time was characterised by an “oscillation” between two or more dramatic worlds: the world of the theatre (metatheatre), the world of the play in the making (where the actors play the characters), and the world of the audience (Green & Swan, 1986). The oscillation between dramatic worlds produced a dramatic situation. The importance of the dramatic situation (or “category”) for child development has been elaborated by Veresov (2014b) as a special kind of social relation that brings about development. This helps to explain Vygotsky’s (1931/1997) key idea that this special kind of social relation (category) “appears on the stage twice, in two planes, first, the social, then the psychological, first between people as an intermental category, then within the child as an intramental category” (p. 106). Importantly, Green and Swan (1986) point out, the world of the audience may superimpose itself on the world of the theatre and on the world of the play in the making, as is seen in children’s pantomime still today. Vygotsky (1936/1999a) explains how the emotion presented by the actors on stage became the emotion of the whole audience “because it was to a large degree a crystallized formulation of the attitude of large social circles” (p. 241). Here, he hints at stage emotions as a kind of *ideal form* (Vygotsky, 1935/1994) of emotions experienced by society at large, an ideal form that manifests itself in the actor’s portrayal. He goes on to explain that the stage expression of this “crystalized formulation” of the ideal form was for these social circles, “a kind of means of realization and artistic interpretation of themselves” (Vygotsky, 1936/1999a, p. 241). Vygotsky saw the actor’s emotions as a “fact of art” which extends beyond the individual personality of the actor, beyond the actor’s own self-awareness, to “make up a part of the emotional dialogue between the actor and the public”. The actor’s emotions experience a “transformation of feelings” which are only understandable within “the broader social-psychological system of which they are a part” (p. 241). Thus Vygotsky conceived of emotional transformations as being co-experienced by actors and audience.

In the field of early childhood, Zaporozhets (1986/2002), drawing on Gal'perin, describes how “emotional images reflect reality in its relation to the individual’s needs and interests”. Such images relate to both the external environment and the internal state of the individual and, in “problematic situation(s) appearing in children’s consciousness”, they merge together resulting in “an emotionally colored field of reflection of the perceived reality” (p. 62). As Vygotsky stated:

Every feeling, every emotion seeks specific images corresponding to it. Emotions thus possess a kind of capacity to select impressions, thoughts and images that resonate with the mood that possesses us at a particular moment in time (Vygotsky, 1930/2004, pp. 17-18).

Furthermore, the emotional imagery, or “emotionally colored field of reflection” carries with it a motivating force. The “partial reflection” of objective reality is not only realized from the perspective of the person interested in that reality, but this interest, according to Zaporozhets (1986/2002), can be “broadly social” as confirmed by his data describing “the early emergence of empathy in children, (who) co-experience with another person, in particular with a literary hero” (pp. 62-63). To capture these emotional moments in imaginary situations, the present study drew upon concepts that had already fruitfully been used in the study of fairy tales where dramatic conditions were purposefully created to study children’s emotional development.

#### *Fairy tales and the concept of perezživanie*

Zaporozhets was instrumental in establishing the links between the idea of art and fairy tales and the concept of *perezživanie* stemming from Vygotsky’s work. Writing in 1981 for the congress of 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of L. S. Vygotsky’s birth, Zaporozhets (1986) notes how over the course of his short life, Vygotsky continually returned to the need for a theoretical consideration of the problem of emotion. In this document, Zaporozhets specifically identifies the term “emotional *perezživanie*” with Vygotsky’s experimental and theoretical investigations of human feeling in *The Psychology of Art* (Vygotsky, 1925/1971), “The teaching about emotions” (Vygotsky, 1933/1999b), and investigations in the field of inclusion. He explains Vygotsky’s thinking in relation to *perezživanie*:

not as a reflection in the consciousness of the subject’s intra-organic state, but that which s/he, the subject, has not only perceived and understood, but has also really lived and survived (*perezhit*), that vital experience of successes and failures, victories and defeats, that s/he has gained as an individual (*lichnost’*), as a member of society, entering into the course of activity in multifaceted relation with the surrounding material world and surrounding people (Zaporozhets, 1986, p. 279, first author’s translation).

Zaporozhets’ understanding of Vygotsky’s thinking seems to unite both *perezživanie* as phenomenon (that vital experience of successes and failures) and as a concept (the unity of child and environment). Veresov (2014a) has conceptualised *perezživanie* as both a phenomenon and as a concept, which includes *perezživanie* as a unit and a unity, and *perezživanie* as a prism that includes the social situation of development, the general genetic law of cultural development and development as drama. These concepts are intertwined in Vygotsky’s system of concepts surrounding *perezživanie* and need to be understood as an integrated whole.

Vygotsky noted that the unity of emotions and cognition takes place through imagination and this forms the essence of the concept of *perezživanie* for early childhood development. In the context of this study where fairy tales are examined, we highlight how “the fairy tale is possible in childhood:

emotionally and intellectually. The preschooler lives in the past and the future—time and space appear spatially” (Vygotsky, 2005, p. 90). From this understanding, Zaporozhets and colleagues conducted a series of psychological, psycho-pedagogical, and psycho-physiological studies examining the genesis of emotions in infants and preschool children.

Zaporozhets and colleagues investigated the dependence of the development of emotions on the content and structure of children’s actions, on the character of the interrelation of the child with the people around them, on how they acquire certain social values and ideals, and how they master moral norms and rules of behaviour (Zaporozhets, 1986). This line of work is therefore linked with the concept of *perezživanie*, as expounded by Zaporozhets. For instance, Zaporozhets (1986/2002, see also, 1986) argued that children in group settings experience fairy tales “in the ideal plane of *emotional imagination*” (p. 58). Emotional imagination, rather than being internally driven and individual to the child, is something that is realised through social activity in the collective situation of telling, retelling and dramatising fairy tales (see Fler, Hammer, & March, 2014) and in children’s play.

Fairy tales allow for “*an imaginary and predictable genre that is emotionally charged and contained*”, and where emotionally imaginative situations “*help children to become aware of their emotions and feeling state*” (Fler & Hammer, 2013, p. 243). The collective *perezživanie* of children and adults in such settings is only beginning to feature in early childhood research (Fler, 2014b). However, more needs to be understood about how children’s play as a form of collective *perezživanie* offers new insights into real relations and role relations during play when fairy tales are used as a cultural device to support children’s development. The related notion of *soperezživanie* (co-experiencing) introduced by Zaporozhets (1986) is a tangible concept for elucidating opportunities for collective *perezživanie* in early childhood settings where fairy tales are foregrounded.

#### *The concept of soperezživanie*

The Russian term *soperezživanie* can be translated as co-experience and is directly related to the concept of *perezživanie*. With colleagues, including L. P. Strel’kova, Zaporozhets investigated the development of children’s co-experience of emotions during various kinds of joint play and related activities in both the kindergarten and the home. They researched the “emotional *perezživanie*” generated through the perception of stories as a co-experience. They paid particular attention to the conditions and laws that generated social feelings in the child, the emotional relation to events and actions, having meaning not only for her/himself personally, but also for those around, specifically, sympathy, empathy, and assisting peers and adults (Zaporozhets, 1986, p. 280). In participating in societally sanctioned activity with others, the child works out an inner emotional relation to other people, and in the process generates “empathetic *perezživanie*”, which plays an essential role in the development of prosocial motives of behaviour (p. 281). In this way, a child experiences an inner form of activity “affective imagination”, which Vygotsky termed the “second expression” of human emotions (Vygotsky, 1925/1971), in the process of which emotions not only appear, but are transformed and develop.

Kravtsova (2010), in drawing upon the idea of a “second expression” of human emotions, gives attention to children’s dual positioning or double subjectivity in their play. Kravtsov and Kravtsova (2010) explain that, in play, the child occupies two positions simultaneously: s/he is both in the sense field (fantasy situation) and in the visual field (real situation), flickering in a state of tension between the two fields. This state of tension is what Vygotsky (1933/1966) refers to as

the imaginary situation. A doubleness of feeling and thinking comes to the fore as children experience the emotions and actions of fairy tale characters in a relation of *soperezzhivanie* (co-experiencing).

Co-experiencing extends to the characters in the story and also the children and adults in their play context (Zaporozhets, 1986). Fler (2014b) develops the idea of double subjectivity as a component of *perezzhivanie*, as a scientific concept, and in collective early childhood settings. In Fler's (2014b) research, the example is presented of a child, Henry, who is both scared of the spider in the yard of his preschool, but also interested in observing it with the other children during free-play. He goes on to express this double-subjectivity through both describing the spider to another child, imagining new aspects, and through role-playing being the spider. Fler finds that the concept of double-subjectivity is helpful in explaining the unity of emotions and cognition in the act of role-play. This is further explained as "a very special imaginary relation with the environment". Fler found the theoretical use of the concept of *perezzhivanie* to be helpful in highlighting how emotionally charged situations, such as those found in fairy tales and adventurous journeys are not just experienced, but that a level of consciousness of the situation is foregrounded. An important aspect of *soperezzhivanie* that is alluded to here, is the idea of children becoming more conscious of their emotions as they develop from primary emotions to social emotions and conscious feeling states (see Damasio, 2003).

The doubleness of feelings and the corresponding consciousness of emotional states has also been explored in the work of Lindqvist (1995) and those who have developed her original research into playworlds. In Ferholt's (2010, 2014) playworlds study, one child, Milo (a first-grader) associates closely with the teacher who plays the role of the White Witch (from C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) during a performance in front of the children. Milo imitates the teacher's pointing gestures as he enacts the performance. Drawing on Vasilyuk, Ferholt describes how "Milo is inserting himself into the story of others" and that through this, he experiences what the researchers describe as a process of *perezzhivanie* (Ferholt, 2014, p. 64) resulting in a facial expression which they interpret as "showing great peace" (p. 61). We use Zaporozhets' notion of *soperezzhivanie* to explain this kind of relation between the child and her/his environment (Vygotsky, 1935/1994) as this concept was developed specifically in the context of early childhood studies of emotion development. In the process of living through the events of the story with the character of the White Witch (as embodied by the teacher), we can see that the complex interrelation of real relations and role relations, in which "Milo revitaliz(es) his autobiographical emotional memories by imitating another's physical actions" (Ferholt, 2014, p. 63) illustrates Vygotsky's idea of the "second expression" of human emotions.

In Zaporozhets' work, the idea of the second expression of human emotions was theorised further. He found intra-organic shifts during the appearance of emotions caused by imagined events, whilst listening to fairy tales and anticipating the results of the actions of the fairy-tale hero. These intra-organic shifts exerted an influence on the child's future actions, but this influence was found to be mediated by internal mental activity that develops in the image field, the "field of the emotional cognitive reflection of the surrounding reality" (Zaporozhets, 1986/2002, p. 63). In Ferholt's (2014) study, where she notes for example, "the children had been wondering for many weeks who would 'be the White Witch' in their playworld" (p. 60), there is also evidence of the role of anticipation.

What comes through strongly in the contemporary and longstanding literature is the significance of co-experiencing the imaginary situations of fairy tales, where the adults have a central role in the role-play. Yet, as discussed in the introduction, the literature on play has generally not foregrounded the significant role of the adults in co-experiencing, with children, the emotional tensions where they anticipate events and empathise with the characters. Only in the drama literature is the adult's role inside of children's imaginary play featured (see Dunn, 2003). The foundational work of Lindqvist (1995), which drew upon drama pedagogy, opened up this line of inquiry for play researchers. For instance, Bredikyte (2011) and Hakkarainen (2010) have both drawn attention to the key role adults have in being "in the play" and actively participating in the imaginary situation with children. Bredikyte (2011) notes that in relation to the student teachers in her play intervention that, "an outstanding attribute of the activity was the deep emotional involvement of the participants. Both students and children were immersed in the activity. This might be connected with the students' decision to take roles and enter into the children's play" (p. 149).

Fleer and Peers (2012) also found a significant relation between children's play and the pedagogical practices of the teacher for supporting, expanding, and making conscious emotions and cognition within the imaginary situation. They argue that the teacher should take a more active role in creating and maintaining imaginary situations. Yet the research has shown that even though play and the dramatisation of fairy tales is a valued practice in early childhood settings, teachers rarely enter into children's imaginary play to support children's development in Australia (Fleer, 2015), they do this with a great difficulty in Sweden (Lindqvist, 1995), and with clearly more success in Finland (Hakkarainen, Bredikyte, Jakkula, & Munter, 2013), and the US (Ferholt, 2010), for those settings researched. More needs to be known about how teachers and children co-experience play in contexts where fairy tales are used to support children's emotional development.

In the study of fairy tales presented in this paper, the concepts of emotional imagination (double subjectivity or second expression), *perezzhivanie*, and *soperezzhivanie* are used to capture the emotionally charged situations experienced in a group setting where individual and collective feelings are made visible.

## **Research design**

When the theoretical literature on emotions, imagination and drama are considered together in the context of fairy tales, a holistic research context seems to emerge. The concepts of *soperezzhivanie* and double subjectivity appear to have been helpful for a cultural-historical understanding of children's play. However, we know very little about how these concepts explain the dramatic events in collective early childhood settings in Australia, where fairy tales are used. The research reported here took the form of a qualitative empirical case study to investigate this question.

## *Sample*

The children's centre is located within the south-eastern region of Australia, in a largely middle-class area where families are predominantly from a European heritage background. The study took place in the occasional care group, which met each Friday at the community centre that housed the children's centre. Twenty-five children aged from 1.8 to 5 years (mean age 3.4), together with three educators and the researcher took part in a six-week fairy tale festival. Three focus families also took part in the study.

### *Data collection and analysis*

The first named author was both the instigator of the research and a participant in it, as well as an observer. This dual positioning is in accordance with cultural-historical research methodology (see Kravtsova, 2010). As a participant it was not possible to reliably capture all the activity in the centre using a hand-held camera. Therefore, two video cameras were placed on tripods to capture the activity of the group from different perspectives as the story of the Frog King (Grimm, 2005) was told and retold orally by the first author in a story telling circle, dramatised by the children under guidance from the bachelor-qualified teacher or one of the diploma-qualified educators, and a range of play activities such as collectively building the castle from the story took place. Another camera was held by the researcher and operated when she was not directly involved in interacting with the participants. This methodology allowed the whole research context to be captured on video and also allowed for the researcher to respond to developments as they occurred using the handheld camera. Data generated through the study includes 40 hours of video data in the centre, 20 hours of focus family video data, the researcher's field notes and reflections, correspondence with staff, and informal semi-structured interviews with family and staff. Only video observations from the data in the centre are discussed in this paper.

The video data were analysed using three iterative layers of analysis (Fleer, 2014a). Attention was initially directed to instances of children's *soperezkhivanie* with characters from the story and to moments of whole group collective engagement involving both children and teachers around the imaginary situation of the fairy tale. The selected data were organised into video clips, which instantiated the categories under investigation. From this analysis, a set of data protocols was developed, which included a detailed log of activities and emerging themes. Clips were then linked together according to the themes evidenced across the data set. In this second layer of analysis, the data protocols were developed using the emerging concepts of *soperezkhivanie* with the characters from the story and *soperezkhivanie* with peers. It became evident at this stage of analysis that there were moments of "double-subjectivity" related to dramatic events in the story in which children would use social referencing, which indicated a possible emotional contradiction. The data set was then re-analysed for all moments of double-subjectivity and dramatic events in the fairy tale, consistent with the iterative approach. The instances uncovered in this third layer of analysis were then analysed across the data set using the categories of *soperezkhivanie* and collective *perezkhivanie*. Other categories in the analysis are beyond the scope of this paper. Due to word limitations two examples are presented here to illustrate the findings.

### *Summary of the data set*

The two examples presented in this section were selected to illustrate the key concepts. The first instantiates one child's co-experience of the fairy tale events through empathising with a character in the story. The second illustrates the collective *perezkhivanie* of the whole group, teachers, and children, united and co-experiencing a moment of double subjectivity in the fairy tale.

### *Example 1: Individual soperezkhivanie*

The following data were recorded towards the end of the study. The children had received a "letter from the frog" at morning circle, which had been designed by the staff to provoke a series of activities. Following these, the centre director, Jayne, came out of the office to discuss something with a staff member. Alana looked up from the pasting table.

*Alana:* Jayne, remember the frog from the fairy tale story?  
*Jayne:* I do.  
*Alana:* He sent us a letter!  
*Jayne:* (With an amazed tone) He sent you a letter?  
*Alana:* He sent everyone a letter.  
*Jayne:* How fantastic. What did the letter say?  
*Alana:* He was in the well for a very long time  
*Jayne:* Hmm  
*Alana:* And the wicked witch made his legs all short.  
*Jayne:* So how did he become a frog? Did he tell you that in the letter that he sent to the centre? (Pause)  
Did the wicked witch make him a frog?  
*Alana:* No the wicked witch gave him short legs!  
*Jayne:* So what happened to him? How was a frog able to write a letter?  
*Alana:* It got very dirty from being in that well.  
*Jayne:* It would, wouldn't it? How long was he in the well for?  
*Alana:* Forty years maybe.  
*Jayne:* (Amazed tone) That's a long time!  
*Alana:* He got stuck in the well very long because he couldn't get out.  
*Jayne:* Poor frog.

### *Example 2: Collective perezhivanie*

A group of 15 children are sitting in a circle with three educators and the researcher, as the storytelling session of the Frog King fairy tale approached its ending, in which Faithful Henry appeared with the white horses. The child Amy (3.8) called out "I want to be the princess". She had played the role of the princess the previous time the group had listened to, then dramatised the story. On this occasion another child, Leone, had been chosen to play the role of the princess and was sitting in the middle of the circle with Wayne (3.8), playing the King. Kylie (2.6), playing the role of the frog, was sitting with educator Tina, and Brian (3.7), playing the role of Faithful Henry, was with educator Mary, while the rest of the group (age range 1.9 to 5.0) formed a circle around them. Tina addressed the group of children in general:

*Tina:* So the story starts off with the princess, doesn't it? And where is she?  
*Amy:* At the well!  
*Tina:* She's at the well. What is she playing with?

As she asks the question, Tina lifts her up-turned hand as if tossing an imaginary ball into the air. Several children imitate the gesture and one of them calls out:

*Child:* Golden ball!  
*Tina:* So where's our princess? Do you want to stand up for me, Leone? (Leone stands up in the middle of the circle). So you're at the well and you are playing with your favourite golden ball and you are throwing it up in the air, and you're catching it (Tina says this rhythmically in time with her own gestures). Can everyone do that? Including you Leone? (More children join in the ball tossing gesture as Tina narrates). Throwing it up in the air, and catching it. And what happens after she's thrown it up a few times? Does she catch it again?

Several children kneel up, shaking their heads.

Child: No!

Tina: *She doesn't does she? And where did it end up?*

Children: (In unison, several children kneeling up). *In the well!*

Tina: *So how does the princess feel?* (Leone smiles, does not respond. Tina continues in a pretend upset voice, with a sad upturned mouth). *So Leone, the princess is very upset.* (Leone is still smiling broadly). *Can you cry, Leone? You be very upset, hoo hoo, you've lost your ball.* (Tina places her hands over her eyes, pretending to cry). *Hoo hoo.*

As Tina does this the educator to her right, Mary, uses an exaggerated hand gesture and wrinkles her face at the children opposite as if crying. Mary then looks to Brian who is leaning against her and laughs with him and the children, presumably having enjoyed pretending to be sad.

A second video camera recorded the children facing Mary at the far end of the circle. At the precise moment when Mary pretended to be sad and then laughed, these children seemed highly amused, kneeling up and laughing; Arieh (2.8) was sitting behind his older brother, Larry (5.0) on the couch flapping his arms up and down in laughter. All the children were looking towards the two educators and the children enacting the scene. The whole group seemed somehow to be emotionally connected and focussed in unison.

## Discussion

The first vignette shows how one child demonstrated empathy for the character of the frog in discussion with an adult. Alana's empathy for the plight of the frog has produced in her an "emotionally coloured field of reflection" as she expresses the emotion through the "affectively imagined" element of the frog of having been given short legs by the witch. The emotions she is feeling seem to be becoming *intelligent* and *generalized* (Zaporozhets, 1986/2002, p. 57) as she works out a plausible explanation for why the frog could not get out of the well. It can be inferred that the dynamic unity of affect and intellect is at play here. Zaporozhets acknowledged that although fairy tales possess the requisite content and compositional structure for creating favourable conditions for preschool children to feel empathy with the characters in the story and to live through the events with and experience the feelings of their chosen character (*soperezzhivanie*) as Alana appears to have done here, for some children, merely listening to the story was not enough to arouse this type of "emotional perezhivanie".

The second vignette illustrates a common practice in early childhood centres in Australia as a storytelling session is enhanced with what Strel'kova named as "play-dramatisation" (Zaporozhets, 1986, p. 282). For children who require more than just listening to the story to arouse such feelings, play-dramatisation provides an external (interpsychological) form of the story, so that, for example, Leone could imagine herself to be physically sitting by the well, feeling as though she were tossing the ball into the air and watching it fall into the well, as Tina narrates, with voice intonation and gestures, for Leone to follow. In such situations, Strel'kova (1986) noted, the role relations in play and real relations between players are worked out, new feelings are allowed to emerge between the participants and existing feelings can be transformed.

Having participated in a number of story telling sessions, play-dramatisations, and collective play activities within the same shared imaginary situation (Fleer & Peers, 2012) of the Frog King fairy

tale, the teachers and children together have had many opportunities to act with and co-experience the emotions (*soperezzhivanie*) of the characters in the story. Sawyer (2014) notes how collaboration and social interaction increase in the process of preparing for a performance. He proposes that “acting is an ensemble art form, and it is hard to isolate the creative contribution of any one actor” (p. 251). The analysis now turns to the “ensemble” and to examine how the *soperezzhivanie* of the individual children developed to a collective *perezzhivanie* of the whole group as the emotional anticipation intensified and, reciprocally, how the collective *perezzhivanie* of the whole group came to be experienced by individual children.

Amy, who has been very emotionally attached to playing the role of the princess over the weeks of the study, demonstrates her *soperezzhivanie* with this character through her overt keenness to play the role and through answering questions concerning the princess in the story, for example, “At the well!” The real relations of Amy with the other children are coloured by her emotional attachment to the main character. Many of the children, particularly the younger children look toward her when the princess is mentioned. The real relations of the children as they experience Amy’s emotional attitude with her are thus interwoven with the role relations in the fairy tale.

Fleer, Hammer, and March (2014) outline the importance of the structure of the fairy tale for generating emotional tension and in particular the crossing of the threshold from ordinary life into the magical realm. This episode encapsulates one of the dramatic events (“category” or crisis) in the Frog King fairy tale, as the adventure begins for the main character, the princess, with a blunder which reveals an “ unsuspected world” of magical forces beyond her comprehension and experience, heralded by the appearance of a talking frog—the crossing of the threshold (Campbell, 1993, p. 51). Tina captures a familiar, everyday, quality with her slow, rhythmic narration “Throwing it up in the air, and catching it”, accompanied by the tossing gesture. The children are clearly anticipating the “blunder” and the appearance of the “loathsome frog” and Tina builds the sense of anticipation with her question “Does she catch it again?” By this stage, the group of children calling out answers (“At the well”, “golden ball”) has expanded to include most of them as they shout in unison, “No!” Thus the children together with the adults mutually constitute the growing sense of anticipation built into the structure of the fairy tale.

The circle formation around the players (as in Shakespearean times) creates a sense of audience and allows for interaction with the players (Green & Swan, 1986). Indeed, at some times it is hard to distinguish the players from the audience, particularly as they call out in unison (“In the well!”). As they kneel up and call out, the episode has a pantomimic feel about it, enhanced by the use of gestures and exaggerated facial expressions, which invite imitation from other children, and even the adults. In such moments we see the unity of affect and intellect that Vygotsky considered characteristic of the higher, specifically human, feelings. A transformation of emotions becomes possible *between* the players, “developing within this system, the emotions are intellectualized, they become *intelligent*, generalized, and anticipatory” (Zaporozhets, 1986/2002, p. 57). As Vygotsky, (1936/1999a) states:

The essence of the problem ... consists in the relation of the artificially produced emotion of a role to the real, live, natural emotion of the actor playing the role (p. 243).

In the play-dramatisation, prompting and questioning is required from the adults to draw out the feeling state of the children, as individuals playing roles, and to make conscious the collectively co-experienced emotions of the group. Quoting Stanislavsky, Vygotsky explains that the path of

development of an actor's emotions is indirect and "tortuous", requiring coaxing. Unlike the feelings they experience in real life they are "more likely feelings and concepts that are purified of everything extraneous" they become "generalized, devoid of their aimless character" through a process of "artistic shaping" (Vygotsky, 1936/1999a, p. 243). The emotions expressed in the fairy tale also take on a generalised *ideal form*, having been artistically shaped and intensified through centuries of oral story telling tradition. Fairy tales act as vectors of emotion for children in such settings; they convey emotions through time and space through a generalised system of emotional imagery. In much the same way as Zinchenko, Pruzhinin, and Shchedrina (2011) see metaphors as "living" transporters of meaning, fairy tales can be conceptualised as "living" transporters of emotion, conveying affect across time and space through emotional imagery that is immediately relatable to children and can be co-experienced by teachers and children together.

Tina invites Leone to consider the feelings of the princess at the moment she loses her favourite plaything, but Leone does not respond. We can only infer whether this might be through shyness at being the centre of attention or perhaps because she cannot put it into words. As Vygotsky notes: "art is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society, which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life" (p. 249). Through the interactions with Tina and the audience around her, Leone's real life feelings (whatever they may be) are potentially drawn into "the circle of social life", as Tina swaps tactics from verbal coaxing, to placing her hands over her own eyes and pretending to cry (pantomime-style) using the generalised sound "hoo, hoo". As Vygotsky notes, as well as requiring "some expression of our imagination", an emotion "is expressed by our mimic, pantomimic, secretory, and somatic responses" (1925/1971, p. 209). Having failed to draw a verbal response from Leone, Tina resorts to pantomime (changing subject positioning, see Fleer, 2015) to invoke imitation and encourage Leone, and the children experiencing the dramatisation with her, to try out their feelings more physically.

From here, a discernible moment of whole group, collective *perezzhivanie* becomes evident as another educator, Mary, imitates Tina's gesture by placing one hand over her eyes, but at a distance, which serves to both indicate that this is pretend (Lillard, 2007), and ensure that she does not lose eye contact with the children. She also uses an exaggerated crying expression to indicate the feeling state of sadness, continuing the pantomime performance and encouraging the children to experience the feeling state with her, or at least to express the societally sanctioned facial expression for feeling sad. She then laughs with the children at the fun of it all. At this highly significant moment, two important things are happening. Firstly, an adult is taking a role in the play (Hakkarainen et al., 2013). Mary has been drawn into the imaginary situation beyond the role of narrating in order to help the children work through the *soperezzhivanie* with the princess of feeling sad. This clearly delights the children watching her. Secondly, the group is collectively experiencing a moment of double-subjectivity, pretending to feel sad at losing the golden ball, but actually having great fun as players, audience and players united. Real relations and role relations are experienced as a unity. This is one of several instances in the larger study from which this vignette is drawn, in which a significant moment of emotional connection of the whole group, takes place around a moment of collective double-subjectivity at a key point of tension in the tale. As Vygotsky states "the experiences of the actor are not so much a feeling, of 'I' as a feeling of 'we.' The actor creates on the stage infinite sensations, feelings, or emotions that become the emotions of the whole theatrical audience" (Vygotsky, 1936/1999a, p. 241).

Through participating in such play-dramatisations, children have the opportunity to act with and co-experience the emotions of the characters in the story, or to co-experience with other children

and adults the fun of dramatising the story together. These two positions—*soperezživanie* with characters and *soperezživanie* with peers and adults—interact in this dramatic moment to produce a collectively experienced double-subjectivity, an emotional and cognitive unity of the group, which we have shown to be a form of collective *perezživanie*.

## Conclusion

The legacy of Zaporozhets and colleagues' long line of research has been examined, linking the *soperezživanie* of children and adults with fairy tale characters and the interrelations between role relations and real relations. In both the example of an individual child co-experiencing the emotions of the frog character suffering in the well, and in the whole group collective *soperezživanie* as they co-experience the moment of double subjectivity with the princess, the importance of adults taking on a role in the imaginary situation (between the visual field and sense field) has been shown to be vital if emotion and imagination are to resume centre stage in early childhood education and be considered as a unity. As with the research of Zaporozhets and colleagues, this study found that fairy tales have an important role to play in creating the conditions for intensifying and explicitly developing emotions in the social relations between people. More specifically, their structure creates opportunities for double subjectivity to be collectively experienced and this creates a tangible way for early childhood educators to enter the imaginary situation with children in group situations.

It has been shown how the concepts of double-subjectivity and *soperezživanie* can make visible moments of whole group collective *perezživanie*, making a contribution to the current academic discussion around the concept of *perezživanie*. At the same time, this research provides insights into ways in which early childhood educators can plan for children's emotional development in collective whole group contexts, by focusing on co-experience as a relation between adults and children. This will contribute to the development of practical pedagogical strategies for early childhood educators to reclaim the full value of play for early childhood education and development and their important role in it

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<sup>1</sup> Synopsis: A princess drops her golden ball into the well at the edge of the forest and a frog rescues it in return for a number of promises. The princess runs away once the frog retrieves the ball, forgetting about the promises. The frog comes to the castle, knocks on the door and demands to eat from her golden plate, drink from her golden cup and sleep in her bed as promised. Eventually, in her disgust, she throws the frog against the wall in anger and he turns into a handsome prince, they ride away in a carriage pulled by eight white horses led by the Prince's servant Faithful Henry, who has been heartbroken at the prince's wicked enchantment. The prince becomes king and marries the princess.

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