



Universiteit
Leiden

Child's Play

Ludic Culture in Early Modern French-Dutch Schoolbooks

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Dr. Alisa van de Haar	French Language and Culture (LUCAS) (History of Education)
Dr. Céline Zaepffel	French Language and Culture (LUCAS) (History of Play)

Project description

Two prevailing notions persist regarding late medieval and early modern educational culture. Firstly, there is the belief that schooling was inaccessible to girls. Secondly, it is often assumed that lessons were 'all work and no play', with corporal punishment being the norm rather than the exception. For the sixteenth-century Low Countries, renowned for its high quality of education, relatively many sources have been preserved that allow us to test these two ideas. Drawing upon archival sources as well as printed schoolbooks, historians of education have successfully debunked the first (mis)conception: the early modern Low Countries actually counted many schools for girls, especially Dutch and French schools where they learned to read and write in one or two languages respectively.

Much less is known, however, on the second notion: to what extent was play an integral part of educational culture in the early modern Low Countries? Studies in art history (focusing, for instance, on Brueghel's famous painting *Children's games*, Figure 1) and archaeological findings have proven that play held significant importance in the lives of early modern children. Nevertheless, it remains uncertain what the role of playtime and games was in a school setting. A considerable corpus exists of sixteenth-century schoolbooks that permit to answer to this question. So-called 'dialogue books' were used to practice everyday conversations in Dutch and French. These short booklets contain model dialogues describing scenes from daily life, including life at school. For this project, a corpus of 12 dialogue books in French and Dutch written by schoolmasters from the Low Countries has been selected (see Appendix). The Research Assistants will examine this corpus in order to answer the question: to what extent and how was play integrated in early modern school curricula in the Low Countries, and did differences exist between girls' and boys' schools?



Figure 1. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Children's games*. Oil on panel, 118x161 cm, 1560. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Research Trainee Profile

This Research Traineeship is open to students in the third year of their BA as well as MA and ResMA students. The main tasks of the Trainees include:

- Creating an overview of the current state of the research on the topic of play in the Early Modern Low Countries
- Conducting a comprehensive survey of the selected corpus (see: Appendix)
- Preparing a conference presentation for an academic audience
- Organising and delivering a public lecture
- Co-authoring a blog post to present the project's findings

Ideally, both Research Trainees should possess a working knowledge of Dutch, French, and English. Skills in early modern palaeography, knowledge of early modern French and Dutch, and experience in working with rare books are an asset, but no requirement. The allocation of tasks within the project will take into account the backgrounds and experiences of the Research Trainees.

This project offers valuable experiences for the Research Trainees, including:

- Receiving guidance in navigating the academic world and understanding the conventions of academic conferences.
- Learning to collaborate effectively with other project members in a research project with set deliverables.
- Exploring a potentially new area of expertise and acquiring new research skills.

Collaboration

This project situates itself at the intersection of two fields: the history of play, in which dr. Zaepffel is an expert, and the history of education, with which dr. Van de Haar has extensive experience. In his foundational work *Homo Ludens* (1938), Dutch historian Johan Huizinga demonstrated the profound significance of play as one of the main formative elements in human culture. More precisely, human culture is born out of play, which places this activity at the very heart of all human social interactions. Additionally, art historians have observed that in the early modern period, visual culture frequently depicted children engaged in play, often with toys such as hoops. Archaeological research has confirmed these findings, as it has unearthed many objects related to child's play. Nonetheless, crossovers between the history of play and the history of education are still rare. Despite Marie-Laure Ryan's recent studies on modern games which show how interactivity and immersion involved in the act of playing are essential to an efficient transmission of educational concepts, the idea persists that schools were mainly sites of physical punishment, where lessons were learned mostly by negative reinforcement rather than by a playful approach. Supported by preliminary findings of references to play in early modern schoolbooks, this project proposes to bridge the divide and actively seek out how play is described in the corpus of dialogue books, and what its status and function was in the context of institutional education. The Research Trainees will thus make a valuable contribution to our understanding of childhood in a historical context.

Deliverables

The concrete intended project results are:

- A conference presentation (for instance: Mediëvistendag, Jaarcongres 17e Eeuw, or another suitable conference)
- A public lecture (to be organised, for example, in collaboration with the study association of the BA/MA-programme of the Research Trainees)
- A co-written blog post (to be submitted to a platform such as the Leiden Medievalist Blog)
- The supervisors will offer guidance for potential PhD project proposals and provide general career counselling.

Planning

Phase 1: February to mid-March 2024. Starting up.

- Dividing tasks depending on the experience and expertise of the Research Trainees.
- Reading and assessing relevant secondary literature on the history of play and the history of education.
- If the students require further training in a specific skill such as palaeography or Middle French, they will be given the opportunity to work on this.

Phase 2: mid-March to May 2024. Analysing.

- Analysing the primary sources in two phases: first, a distanced reading is applied to identified relevant passages; then in a second phase the selected passages are submitted to close reading and contextualised by means of the available secondary literature.
- Selecting the sources to be discussed in the conference presentation, the public lecture, and the blog.

Phase 3: June to August 2024. Producing deliverables.

- Preparing and giving the conference presentation. The trainees present the first version of the blog post and use the received feedback to improve the final version of the text.
- Writing, revising, and submitting the blog post.

Student Application

In order to apply for the position of Research Assistant within the project 'Child's Play', please send your CV and a letter of motivation in English or French to the two Supervisors:

Dr. Alisa van de Haar: a.d.m.van.de.haar@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Dr. Céline Zaepffel: c.v.zaepffel@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Appendix – Corpus

Berthout, Jan. *Seer gemeyne tsamencoutingen in vier capittelen. Collocutions bien familiares en quatre chapitres*. Leuven: Johannes Masius, n.d.

Heyns, Peeter. *III. Dialogues pueriles, en alleman et françois des quatre saisons de l'an*. Frankfurt am Main: Paul Brachfeld, 1588.

La Premiere et la seconde partie des dialogues françois pour les jeunes enfans. Het eerste ende tweede deel van de Francoische t'samensprekinghen overgheset in de Nederduytsche spraecke. Antwerp: Christophe Plantin, 1567.

Meurier, Gabriel. *Colloques, ou nouvelle invention de propos familiers: Non moins vtils que tresnecessaires, pour facilement apprendre François et Flameng*. Antwerp: Christophe Plantin, 1557.

Meurier, Gabriel. *Commvnications familiares non moins propres qve tresutiles à la nation Angloise. Familiare commvnications no leasse proppre then verrie proffyttable to the Inglishe Nation*. Antwerp: Peeter van Keerberghen, 1563.

Meurier, Gabriel. *La guirlande des jeunes filles contenat [sic] une singularité de menus propos quotidiens par le moyen, des-quels elles pourront facilement apprendre François & Flamen*, Antwerp: printed by Jan van Waesberghe, 1564.

Meurier, Gabriel. *Propos puerils ordinairement usez es escoles vulgaires*. Antwerp: Jan van Waesberghe, 1565.

Meurier, Gabriel. *Le Perroquet mignon des petits enfans françois-flameng*. Antwerp: Jan van Waesberghe, 1580.

Meurier, Gabriel. *Dialogue Chrestien contenant le devoir des enfans a l'endroit de leur parens*. Antwerp: Jan van Waesberge, 1586.

Trier, Gomes van. *Verger des colloques recreatifs. Lust-hoff der vermakelijcker t'samensprekingen*. Zwolle: Zacharias Heyns, 1611.

Valery, Magdalena. *La montaigne des pvcelles, en nevf dialogves, svr les noms des neuf Muses. Den Maeghden-Bergh, in negen t'samen-spraken, op de namen vande neghen Musen*. Leiden: printed by Jan Paedts Jacobsz, 1599.

Vivre, Gerard de. *Douze dialogues et colloques, traitans de diverses matieres*. Antwerp: Jan van Waesberghe, 1574.