



Finger Play: A Pedagogical Reflection¹

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There exist various voids and vacancies in our educational discourses. Indeed, there is talk of egocentrism and cognition in children, of the infant's ability to grasp and let go, and of the child's developing sense of self and other. However, rarely has educational discourse seriously dealt with the hand. We might wonder why educational and developmental theories have focused so heavily on the head and the heart (thinking and feeling), on the mouth and the genitalia (verbalization and sexuality), and so lightly on the hand. I would like to ask what may be the pedagogical significance of the hand by examining the common early childhood practice of finger play.

The Object

This little pig went to market,
This little pig stayed home,
This little pig had roast beef,
This little pig had none,
And this little pig cried, Wee-wee-
wee-wee-wee,
All the way home.

Please picture the vivid scene that the words of this finger poem call forth. I do not mean just the observational scene of the visual senses, but also the imaginative picture constituted by our other senses, including our reflective faculties, so that an inner view, a whole image, some kind of essence emerges. And if we now combine the picture of our external perceptions with our inner feelings, childhood recollections, and pedagogical reflections, then the scene rapidly turns extremely complex and pregnant with meaning.

The logic of verbal discourse forces us to transform the simultaneity of impressions into a sequential order, so I can make a beginning anywhere in reflecting on the scene of finger play. The scene of finger play represents a strong sense of particularity and intimacy together with a high level of commonality and generality. In this "play" the child is most likely seated on the lap of an adult—most likely the mother, the father, or a grandparent. For the sake of this description let us picture mother and child.

The bodies touch and stir each other, the lap of the parent is for the small child the safest and most comfortable spot in the world. More likely than

not the mother braces the lower arm of the child with the left hand, in such a way that the child is supported but not confined. While it moves its fingers the child can feel the play of muscles and of sinews perhaps as far as the elbows. We may assume that the child's attention is firmly fixed on itself or at least on its own body. The inner sensations of the child's body, hands, eyes and ears all share in an all consuming awareness in the mother's words and gestures. The fact that the child possesses its body, controls its own body, and is not merely helplessly or unconsciously at the mercy of its corporeality is evident in the movements of the child's fingers. These fingers are set in motion by the mother, whether through a gentle pressure of the index finger or through a gentle grasp.

A German finger rhyme goes as follows:

This is the thumb,
this one shakes the plums,
this one picks them up,
this one brings them home,
and this little rascal eats them all up.

"This is the thumb." As the mother recites each line of the finger poem she takes each finger one by one and folds it into the hand. The child begins to take up this motion with the fingers. But it would be superficial to speak of imitation. The child does not imitate the movement of the adult but corresponds in the original sense of being co-(together)responsive, answeringly engaging in response to the gentle pressure exercised by the mother. The child exerts a counterpressure in such a way that it replies to the finger pressure of the mother with its own force equivalent to that pressure. But although the child's finger movements are correspondingly engaged in the movements of the mother, one may also say that, in another sense, the child is copying something.

What is the child copying? Certainly not the movement of the mother, not the concrete bodily element of this actual moment, not the attitude of showing or teaching the word rhymes. Rather, copying is something that has been initiated by the mother, something that exists *between* the two of them—a phantasm, an image, a project, an idea? Maybe there is some truth to all of these. But an additional interpretation suggests itself, something quite obvious. When the fingers are folded one after the other, a basic *rule* emerges. A story line accompanies each finger movement. Thus a relationship forms between bodily movement and meaning. The finger story has a *beginning* and an *end*, and it sustains and symbolizes a *relationship* that lasts beyond this moment.

All this is accompanied by a close contact of the bodies, a thoroughly private and intimate situation, an individually determined exchange of bodily gestures and the careful interjection of meanings. At the same time something of a general nature is happening that goes far beyond this particular situation. This general aspect has to do with the language that

accompanies the hand movements and that always brings out, in a spontaneous manner, this theme of generality. For example, one of the manifestations of this theme of generality is distinction. The story or finger poem is not just a simple counting verse but an exercise in logical speech operations. In contrast to the experience of personal intimacy and bodily gesture the distinctions are drawn between "this here" and "that there" (compare Wittgenstein, 1960, p. 308); further, there is the initial act of simply pointing out through verbal gesture ("this is the thumb ...") and the more meaningful action ("this one shakes ... this one picks them up ..." etc.); and the distinction is drawn between observable action and its moral value ("and this little rascal ..."); finally there is the distinction between word and object since the child does not for a moment forget that this is his or her own hand—and yet the child has been introduced to the modality of the "as if."

"This is the thumb"—the finger poem begins with the act of name giving, which provides an experience of an immediate certainty of the senses. "This one shakes the plums"—jumps to the level of symbolization; the mother gently shakes the finger but it is only pretend. In this double action of sensory assurance and symbolic representation something is happening that will be typical for the educational growth of the child: the constitution of self, of self-awareness, and awareness of the things. This constitutive process goes through the following distinctions: the sensorily affirmed certainty of sense perception, the differentiation between "this" and "that" achieved through the orientation of the senses, the simultaneous distinction between "my body here" and "those things there," and the transposition that is made possible by language so that there can be a fusion between the experience of evidence provided by the senses and the conceptual experience of something that is not present.

At first the child just listens to the mother and only joins in here and there, until at last the child is able to say the whole verse by himself or herself, and thus develops a sense of focus on self. This means that the child can be left alone to concentrate on his or her own body, object relations, and speech. It also means that, by developing a grasp on the world facilitated by the nursery material, the child comes into its own as the story teller. Against the argument that the child is merely imitating the mother I would maintain that the notion of imitation would then have to include all these aspects. And if there is a situation of imitation, then it would need to encompass this entire complex of meanings. By exercising each individual bodily gesture and speech act, the child copies—if it copies anything at all—the process of self-constitution, self-becoming.

With these interpretations the pedagogical significance of finger play is by no means exhausted. Thus far I have only commented on its beginnings which are nevertheless of fundamental importance. I have alluded to the fact that this entire process would not be possible without the

relationship to a “thou”—without a dialogical relationship to the mother—but a more detailed explanation would be required that I will omit here.

The hand permits a form of knowledge that raises several fundamental questions. I have already indicated that playing with the hands in the activity of finger rhyme produces the sense of certainty in the child. This is less trivial than might first appear. Wittgenstein (Gebauer, 1984) raised the question under what condition the Cartesian doubt is unfounded:

If a blind man asked me, “do you have two hands?” then I would not have to reassure myself by looking at my hands. Indeed I do not know why I should trust my eyes if I had any doubt about the question. Why should I not need to test my eyes first to make sure that what I am seeing is indeed both hands? What is to be tested by what?²

But this kind of proof cannot really be furnished with the aid of quizzical discourses; rather, it has already been settled through the interplay between the hand and the eye. Actions and speech games rely on this sense certainty of the bodily a priori. Finger rhymes exemplify this matter. If finger rhymes were merely the invention of the German Biedermeier, then they would not deserve such exhaustive examination. However, they date back through modern history of all European languages as far as the reaches of the printed word and pictorial images. Why is it, then, that mothers, fathers, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and other adults have chosen the hand as such distinct medium of their pedagogical relation to young children?

Historically

At the height of the Middle Ages artists created paintings in which the hands of the interacting persons depicted were still represented with stereotypically meaningful gestures; however, the hands were curiously enlarged to a disproportionate degree. A little later the Madonna and Child icons, which at first presented a rather rigid countenance, began to give way to icons in which not only the hands but also the body of the infant started to show movement.³ The baby Jesus stretches and reaches out with his hands; he tries to grasp, clasp, hold tight, let go, play, open his fingers, and so forth.

The cover picture of an anatomy textbook published in Basel in 1543 shows a woodcut portraying the author (Vesalius, 1543). The man is holding a lower arm upright, and the skin of the arm is cut away so that the muscles are exposed as far as the fingertips. Why is the lower arm shown in the instance of a textbook on anatomy when any other part of the body might have been chosen? In Rembrandt’s “Anatomy of Dr. Tulp” we see the surgeon break all the rules of the art. He does not cut open the abdomen but demonstrates the lower arm and finger muscles (compare Mollenhauer, 1986).

The hands of the child Jesus and the Madonna and the hands of the surgeon represent quite different traditions. The “hand of discourse” and the “hand as tool” reflect diverse cultural projects. This is immediately apparent when one bears in mind how widely in various cultures the “hand of discourse” has been depicted as expressive gesture and means of communication—as in Indian dances, in Etruscan frescoes, or on ancient Greek vases. Similarly, “the hand as tool” has always been thematic in cultural artistic sources. The hand has always been both an organ of work in an external sense and an organ of expression in an internal sense. And this distinction is an aspect of a body of knowledge that goes back to the origins of human being, realizing that these functions have been iconologically divided into the communicative and the instrumental dimensions. Unlike some materialist theories, I do not believe that this distinction speaks of the advent of a late cultural stage; rather, from the outset the hand has pointed in two directions: outward and inward. The degree of divergence into discourse icon and tool icon is only more markedly evident in modern iconography than in Stone-Age cave drawings or in paintings on ancient Greek vases.

I have offered a rough and ready descriptive image. The entire tradition of visual arts in the Middle Ages is characterized by a richly differentiated spectrum of hand gestures and symbols, the meaning of which is rendered poor justice by the modern term “communication” (think, for example, of the divine hand of creation, the blessing hand, the vulgar hand, the greeting hand, and the hand gestures of defense, explanation, demonstration). The hands in medieval pictures are symbols of something general (unless they involve expressions of individual approaches and of relationship patterns (compare Garnier, 1982). During early modern times this order of general symbolization changes, and the hand of discourse comes to depict not merely what is objectively typical, but also what is basically intrinsic.

A good example of the transition is the interesting self-portrait of the Italian painter Parmigiano from 1524. In a curved mirror one sees the torso of the artist, and in front, on the lower edge and with the *back* turned to the viewer, lies the hand of the artist in detail—everything else is distorted by the curvature of the mirror. In a careful interpretation of this picture, Warnke (1987) quotes a text of the year 1405 by the painter: “You must always take care of the hand and protect it from work that is too hard.” In this juxtaposition between tool and lore, the hand of the painter gains a certain value, as in the case of finger rhyme.

The hand in this new position has become free—or so it would appear—for *interaction*, and not solely for the representation of typified interaction rites (as in dance, for example), but also for the representation or portrayal of *individual expression* within the general realm of social interaction. The hand was perhaps always free for interaction without this being recognized and especially noted. At the beginning of modern

times, however, the hand becomes an organ specifically selected to represent discourse, and a discourse that not only announces or transports truths going beyond the individual, but that brings the *subjectively* intended meanings into contact with the objective meaning concepts of society. The play of the fingers means something *for me* (as an expression), *for you* (as dialogical information) and *for us* (as objective meaning). It is for this reason that from now on finger play in pictures is so difficult to decode. There are mixed gestures of many meanings; they can be affirmative, critical, or indeed subversive.

As I have now arrived at the point of forming hazardous conjectures, I can risk this one too: In the school regulations of the 16th century we see for the first time complicated and embarrassing directives on how to constrain and discipline children, the principle being to subject them as much as possible to the yoke of the tasks set by the curriculum, not only in the schoolroom but in the world outside as well. It would not surprise me if we discovered that the brutal habit of teachers strapping or hitting children's hands began in this century. If an awareness had arisen that finger play possessed hard to decode personal meanings that might contribute to intersubjective intimacy that is difficult to control, then the suspicion might also arise that a subversion of the educational project might take place by socially uncontrolled gestures of the hand. Somewhat later, an extreme case of this "subversion" could be that teachers registered with disgust the masturbating hand, withdrawing from the outside world and turning into nothing other than an "instrument for talking to oneself." Think also of the hand occurring in Grimm's fairy tales symbolizing the evil in the child that still arises even out of the grave.⁴ And then there is the hand that "rises against the father." It seems that in the contexts of modern times the hand has become a highly equivocal symbol. In terms of the history of the species, it points to the basic human fund of competence, while in an epochal sense it points rather to differential experiences of facilitating and suppressing.

For the time being, the source material in folklore research on the subject of finger rhymes goes back only as far as this. So the question arises whether finger rhymes are the discovery of early modern times, whether they are nothing more than the subversive nursery curriculum of a mother, profiting from the advances in technology and its cultural symbolic equivalent while countering the educational institutional establishment. This question warrants careful study, but equally worthy of study is the question whether there is something "behind" the finger rhymes, and whether there is something behind these historical connotations that goes back much farther.

Primevally

Hermeneutic interpretation must aim to reach farther. What is the meaning of the hand and thus of finger play in the appraisal of the history of the species for human existence? This question is of pedagogical



significance since (in a way that cannot be elaborated here) the genealogy of the human spirit must ground itself in basic sensory experience with every new born child. How indeed could this be otherwise? The theory of such an explanation, an “esthesiology of spirit” (Plessner, 1980), therefore, has its rise in the paleontological transfer from the anthropoid to the human. I hope I shall manage to demonstrate in a few words that this is not too farfetched.

Paleontologically the hand enters the history of the species at that “moment” when the anthropoid stands up and arms and hands are no longer front legs (compare Leroi-Gourhan, 1984, especially p. 296). First of all, the hand takes over the function of grasping food and biting, then it learns to make a fist, to scrape and scratch; it discovers its “soft inner side” (von Campe, 1982; Braüer, 1986) and increases its range and expands its capacity of working at the construction and manipulation of tools. At this point of walking erect the hand becomes mobile and grasping, intercepting, forming, and spontaneous, as well as feeling, sensitive, and receptive. These two competences of acting and feeling stand in opposition to one another and are vital. The evolutionary development of standing on two legs opens the field of the eye and hand (Plessner, 1980, p. 370) in which the hand can take a middle position between the far-ranging eye and the immediate self-awareness of one’s own body. Indeed it is always very moving to observe the dramatic event when a child begins to learn to walk. So the hand is more than an active organ that reaches into the outer world, more than a receptive organ transmitting feelings from within; the hand is also a communicative organ that establishes both connection and distance between interacting subjects.

(Think, for example, of the role of the hand in greeting ceremonies such as the handshake. When one extends a hand in greeting to a small child, the child may shrink back, hiding his or her hands behind the back as if afraid of the intimacy with the stranger. This intimacy would inevitably be felt through the sensitive inner face of the hand. Adults, in contrast, fully aware of the significance of the gesture, may greet one another frequently not by offering the hand but by bowing the body slightly while the hands remain at one’s sides or clasped behind the back. In this way the adult acknowledges attentiveness to the other, but in an abstract manner, deliberately avoiding more concrete intimate contact by means of the hand.)

In the history of the species this development of the hand is an event comparable in its significance to the development of language, which presumably took place at the same time in our evolution. The hand as “manual labor” provides the active relationship to the outside world and at the same time to nature, thus becoming an instrument of achieving distance between subject and object. Through its sensitivity, however, the hand is always in a position to overcome this distance. Moreover, the “hand of discourse” is able to create distance to others by helping to break

through close symbiotic relations (as between the newborn and the mother); and yet the hand is able to maintain contact in spite of complete corporeal separation into “my body” and “your body”—this intercorporeal contact is a form of discourse in the sense of maintaining a mental contact. In this position, the hand displays the *wish* (von Campe, 1982, p. 26),⁵ opening the view through its corporeal mediation to the distant future, to that which has not yet been achieved, an impulse to the other, without wishing to fuse with him or her.

It would appear that finger rhymes are the everyday educational manifestation of a primeval anthropological affair. Through the open palms and fingers, mother and child show themselves jointly receptive, sensitive to impressions that come from the outside and that simultaneously assure them of their own bodies. The playful moving of the fingers signals the potential of the hand to act, its physiological uniqueness and operational field. The verbal commentary of the finger rhyme or story converts this anthropological affair, in turn, into a story and thus into the history of mankind. The detachment from the situation that is achieved in this way, together with the intimate contact between mother and child, symbolizes the subject-object relationship, the bond (in spite of the separateness articulated by the mediating hand), and the individuation of the child, while maintaining an authentic togetherness.

Falsifications⁶

However plausible the process of interpretation may be—and the interpretations could easily be extended and supported and others could be added to them—it nevertheless involves falsifications. The truth of a theory is based not on abstract generalities, but on historical concreteness. My reflections have so far been founded on an innocuous version of the finger rhyme, a sort of standard version that has been followed by generations of European mothers and fathers. The example that made this practice possible was given by Fröbel (1927). His version goes as follows:

Dieß ist das Däumchen,
Es sieht aus wie ein Pflümchen.
Dieß Fingerchen gerade zeigt,
doch aber auch gar schön sich neigt.
Dieß Fingerchen das größte ist,
obgleich es nur das mittelst ist.
Dieß Fingerchen trägt's Ringelein,
Drum ist es auch wie Gold so rein.
Dieß Fingerchen das kleinste ist,
Die Fingerzahl gar fein beschließt.
Und verschieden nun auch ihre Gaben sind,
so sind sie einig doch beisammen, liebes Kind.

This is the thumb,
it looks like a plum.

This finger points straight
but it can also bend very nicely.
This finger is the largest one
although it is right in the middle.
This finger wears the ring,
that is why it is as pure as gold.
This finger is the smallest one,
and brings the finger count to an end round.
Their talents are all so different
yet at the end they are all together, dear child.

With the charming sobriety of a good philologist, Schenda (1985) has confronted this bourgeois version with a straightforward link to social reality. With some variations, the following version has been handed down through many European languages over the past centuries:

Der ist der Dum'
Und der ißt gern Pflum'
Der sagt: Wo nehme?
Der sagt: stehle!
Und der sagt: wenn ich noch so klein wär,
thät ich doch keine Pflum stehle. (p. 156)

This is the thumb
And this one likes plums,
This one says: Where from?
This one says: Steal 'em!
And this one says: However small I may be,
I'd never steal a single plum.

Diligent philological research shows us then that we are faced broadly with two different slants, on the one side there is the trivialization of the whole affair and on the other side the sculpturing of social history. Which is the genuine article, and which is falsification? Numerous documents from many nations and centuries always represent this latter version giving ground to the conclusion that the finger rhyme was originally concerned with material desires. However noble the form of the verse may be, it appears that the moral of the story is not just some vague truth from anthropology or from some educational theory, but rather that it is concerned with a basic affair of day-to-day living taken from the world of poor people—people who do not have any plums but like eating them, and since they are not being given any, they set out to steal them. But unfortunately, there is always somebody who does not play along! That's life. And a hand with five fingers suffices to transmit this truth to coming generations. There is no real difference if in Naples, for example, the finger rhyme begins with the little finger—the moral remains the same. We find the same moral in another version in which there is nothing left for the small one—who is left sucking his thumb.

En voilà un qui coupe la soupe,
en voilà un qui la goûte,

En voilà un qui la trempe,
En voilà un qui la mange,
Voilà la petit glinglin
Qui arrive trop tard et n'trouve pas rien
Et fait couin! (Schenda, 1985, p. 158)

This one makes the soup,
this one tastes it.
This one puts the salt in,
This one eats the soup.
Here's the little chap
who arrives too late and finds nothing—
Oink! Oink! Oink!

Whatever verbal form the older finger rhymes may possess they are always concerned with the question of have and have-not, wealth and poverty, high and low, large and small. The falsification perpetrated by Fröbel (1927), the representative of modern preschool education, is obvious. Is this a case of nursery ideology? Education in the service of falsehood? A “correct” or at least an understandable class morality was twisted by Fröbel into an educational simulacrum that now meant everything and nothing. Only the fingers of the hand are left; gone is the opposition; gone is the story; the self is now merely confronted with “very nicely” and “largest” and “gold” and “fine” and with “talents” and “together,” and similar harmonious niceties!

However trivial and insignificant the subject may be, finger rhymes can evidently highlight the transformations that are carried out by society's educational system as it deals with the cultural contents of everyday living. This could be termed “educational ideology.” Friedrich Fröbel engages in ideological labor when he takes the original version of the rhyme and changes it into its opposite, saying in effect “Thumb bow down” or “Little one bend down, face your fate” (Fröbel, 1927). Not a word is left about the attempts to share the unevenly distributed resources of society, even though this may mean bending the law, not a word about the fact that the finger rhymes deal with the ancient subject of hunger and a full belly (here evidently the ancient subject of the hand meets the likewise ancient concern of have and have-not), of master and servant, and of morality and the difficulty poor people experience in complying with a system of law that is imposed upon them. Here is the Alsatian version:

Das isch d'r Düme
Dä frißt gern Pflüme
Dä sait wo nämme?
Dä sait in's Herr Garde.
Dä klei Spitzbue will's im Herre saghe. (Schenda, 1985, p. 156)

This is the thumb
This one likes plums
This one says where from?

This one says in master's garden.
This little rascal is going to tell the master.

Fröbel (1927) has cleansed the finger rhyme of such irritations and left nothing but a thin abstract veneer of generality in which the fingers appear only as a counting mechanism. But surely a more vigorous characterization is warranted here! A counting mechanism devoid of all imagination is trading on a childishly pious rhetoric verging on nonsense, on a middle-class morality of ownership and community ("this little finger carries the ring ... their talents are all so different, they are all together in the end, dear child"). The lesson is that the greater the distance to societal reality, the nearer we are to educational truth. So it is clear that finger rhymes are more political than one might imagine.

Nevertheless, Fröbel's version is not a *complete* falsification. Granted his rhyme is cleansed of any recollection of the material place of origin of the other versions, and this is compensated for by the stricter direction of the child's attention to the hand as an organ of its own body, to its ancient figure. Fröbel was concerned with the introduction of symbols pregnant with significances of the history of mankind into the educational experiences of small children. It is a fair assumption that this was his aim even if he did not quite come out with the right rationale (compare Bollnow, 1977, p. 178). It may indeed even be illegitimate to speak of "falsifications." Just as the hand appears in pictorial illustrations with a particular historical gesture, receiving its particular meaning from its cultural localization, so it is that finger rhymes also bring forth only few didactic components, bearing in mind the vast number of possibilities: the story of rich and poor, the position of the smallest in the group, fine motor movements, counting and anatomical naming, and so forth.

Themes

What, then, does the child learn, sitting on the mother's lap when he or she experiences the finger play, subsequently joins in, and finally becomes the teller of the story himself or herself? What is the specific nature of this educational event? It looks as if the answer might lie completely in the realm of the educational significance of the hand.

- The child learns to devote its attention to the field of eye and hand and to localize the hand as the all-important medium in this field between the far-reaching eye and the immediacy of the body.
- The child learns that it "has" its body and that therefore this body or its part, the hand, can be an expression of its own self as well as a "sign" for others and other things (compare Hegel, 1973, p. 239).
- The child learns here to make fundamental distinctions: above all those between "this here" and "that there" with strict reference to the body as "my body" and "your body" and "not-body," the separation therefore between inside and outside, subject and object.

- The child learns this in an almost symbiotic link with the mother, but also as a transition or emancipation from the symbiotic relation. The child learns the subject-object differentiation, therefore, without having to be afraid of losing the intimacy of close attachment.
- The child learns that there is a communion of language in which the symbiotic melding with the mother can be ended and replaced by the intersubjectivity of joint cooperation (for example, in stealing) and its representation in the language game.
- The child learns in this way also something about the bodily nature of interaction. The finger rhyme is always two things at the same time: a story told in speech that has nothing to do with the body, as well as a direct communication between the bodies of mother and child by the touching and moving of the fingers and by sitting on the safe lap of the mother.
- Finally, the child learns freely, and to all appearances involuntarily, that human society is comprehensible in the structure of the triangle of I, you, and it—and that this triangle is crossed not only by the possibilities of inside and outside, expression and sign, but also by the problems of material survival (at all events if one leaves aside Fröbel's version of the finger rhyme).

Recollections of this kind based on pedagogy and anthropology have these days rather a nostalgic air about them. It really seems as if the hand were being gradually withdrawn from its mechanical functions and one gets the impression that the project of alleviating the hand since the beginning of modern times has been driven to a point at which the confrontation with external nature had come to an end, or at least the motor become subordinate to the sensory and symbolic. Musing on the educational significance of finger rhymes would then appear rather as a sort of educators' swan song, for they are always a bit behind the times and more inclined to hold onto the old and familiar, however archaic this may be, rather than come to terms with a perhaps highly disturbing future. At all events one cannot just reject this out of hand. Leroi-Gourhan (1984) comes to the aid of educators:

The fact that the significance of the hand, this organ of fate, should diminish is of itself of no great consequence. The snag is that its activity is closely correlated with the equilibrium of those regions of the brain which are related to it. "Not knowing what to do with one's hands" would on the level of the species be no cause for undue concern, thousands of years could go by before such an old neuro-motor dispositive degenerated, on the individual level however the matter is rather different. A person who is not able to think with his hands loses a part of his normal philogenetic human thinking. (p. 320)⁷

Support comes from another side as well. Lorenzer (1972) has described the "Mama"-cries of the small child as an "introductory situation" into

human society. Lacan (1966) is of the view that every human being experiences in early childhood a “mirror stage” in which the person becomes aware of his or her body and his or her subjectivity in a mirrored confrontation. I hope I have succeeded in showing that finger rhymes provide both a social introductory situation and a mirror situation. There are, however, several “mirrors” at work: one’s own hand, the mother as the other person, speech as the intersubjective element, and the question of material survival as theme of the historical existential world. What corresponds *inside* the child to this highly complex situation? After passing through the different levels of interpretation and arriving at the résumé of educational theory, the answer is extremely simple: Finger rhymes represent with reference to the body, you, speech, and command over nature, *the birth of “I”*.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Schenda for the project of this small text. His article on finger rhymes (1984) is packed full of material. It closes with a challenge to teachers, albeit couched in rather implicit terms. The source material that is only briefly mentioned in the encyclopedia article is dealt with at greater length in an essay published roughly at the same time; here the expectation with regard to teachers is underlined in confronting them energetically with their own tradition (Schenda, 1985). In this modest framework of a small essay I attempt to insert a few lines into the picture drawn by Schenda when he writes at the conclusion of the encyclopedia article: “The hand is not only ‘the symbol of humanity in its total development and history,’ it is also ontogenetically of the greatest significance” (p. 1152). Whether indeed “modern teachers are united in the opinion that finger rhymes should find again a more important place in playful interaction with small children” (p. 1153) I don’t know. At any event, I share Schenda’s opinion and try to bring some arguments to bear in this direction.
2. This article contains an extensive discussion of the sense of certainty.
3. The enlargement of the hand can be studied most impressively in the pictures of the Bamberg apocalypse (compare here: *The Book of Revelation*. Colored pictures from the Bamberg apocalypse around 1020, with a commentary by J. Schiller, Hamburg 1955); an example of the mobility of the hand as an organ of sensorimotor excitement can be seen for example in Giotto (1266/67-1337) and Duccio (1255-1318).
4. Number 117 of the fairy tales collected by the Grimm brothers. The “disobedient” hand could represent here an older motive with an educationally bourgeois legitimation; in other words, the hand of perjury growing out of the grave (compare Kriss-Rettenbeck, 1972).
5. Von Campe (1982) and Révész (1944) have already pointed at this connection between activity and the production of wishes or needs: “There is a reciprocity between hand and need. Needs form the hand and the hand creates the needs. As long as the hand had only to cope with tasks from the vital sphere it retains its animal character, confined to its purely biological functions, morphologically primitive and incapable of development. It is only when social, cultural and civilizing needs are roused that the hand gains its *human* character through its function of working, forming, and giving expression. The spiritual nature—or rather the ends that spring from the spirit and that can be achieved by the activity of the hand—lends the hand its character of the *human hand*” (p. 19).
6. The following passage depends to a considerable extent, especially as regards the source material, on Schenda (1985).
7. Leroi-Gourhan (1984), shortly prior to this, says: “Initially the hand was a tool for holding stones, and man’s triumph has consisted in making out of this an increasingly skilful servant of his production notions. The hand has performed a

continuous highlight from the earliest paleolithic times right down to the 19th century. In industry it still plays an important part for a few toolmakers who make those parts of machines of which the mass of the employees need have nothing but an arm with five fingers to distribute the material or an index finger for pressing buttons. We are still in a transition stage, for there can be no doubt that the phases in the production of machinery which are not mechanized are gradually being eliminated" (p. 319).

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