

BLOCKME!

Putting a Rebellious toy concept to the test

Play objects designed for for rebellious play offer possibilities for physically and socially active play and derives its play value from balancing rebellion and conformism, rulemaking and rule-breaking. In doing so it is aimed to provide a setting where children can behave in ways that may not normally be stimulated. playing with a rebellious toy is meant to help children to explore the boundaries of how they can behave and the consequences that might derive from that, in a safe and playful way. The concept of rebellious play was introduced in the paper 'Rebel by Design' (Gielen & Van Leeuwen, 2013). BlockMe is a first attempt to methodically study an intentionally designed rebellious toy.

The BlockMe prototype toy that resulted from this vision consists of a building block set that allows for quick creation of child-sized tower structures. Two of these blocks were made interactive and acted as a sort of time-bomb. these interactive blocks would respond to loud sounds, waking the block up. Subsequently it gets progressively more agitated over time. When the interactive block reaches a certain level of 'agitation' it starts to vigorously shake, causing the construction to collapse. Before this happens the block can also be calmed and 'subdued' by gently touching and stroking it. By doing so the construction can be saved.

By offering these opposite play schemes the concepts plays on a perceived struggle between the inherent joy of creating something, but also the excitement of eventually destroying what was built. Offering these two possibilities is meant to provide an incentive to switch from one to the other when the urge arises to do so. It acts as an incentive for children to balance their individual desires with group expectations. This should result in a potentially difficult decision to make: do you (selfishly) act by reacting on these urges, or do you continue to be in service of the group and conform by doing what is expected of you?

A study was conducted to put the BlockMe prototype to the test. To do so observations were conducted at a primary school, where four play sessions were organized. A total of 47 children, both boys and girls aged from 8-10 years old, participated in the study in groups of varying sizes. From the observations there were 38 relevant play situations identified. Only 4 of which were determined to have happened because of the prototype. It seems therefore clear that play with the prototype did not lead to any structural rebellious behavior.

Fundamentally, it seems that the opposite possibilities for play that BlockMe is supposed to provide, do not actually manifest themselves as such in the prototype that was trailed. Seeing as this is the main mechanism that is supposed to trigger rebelliousness and conflict, the general perceived absence of these opposite possibilities in the prototype may provide an explanation for the lack of intended rebelliousness

