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promoting the value of play

PLAY AND THE LEARNING PROCESS

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DEFINITION AND THEORY OF PLAY

Play is described as a spontaneous – creative – desired activity – carried out for its own sake and is entirely natural.

Play is vital for the development of children and an essential ingredient in mature adulthood.

It is the most complete educational process of the mind ensuring that each individual achieves knowledge and wisdom.

Theory of Play

There are many, and a few are mentioned below.

1. Karl Groop's rehearsal for living theory devised from the study of animals – important because it postulates play as a means of growth and development. It is probably true for lower animals but rehearsal for the complexity of our adult life would be virtually impossible.
2. Stanley hall's recapitulation theory that play follows a set pattern according to the development of the human species. This can only be a partial explanation as child and adult play has an important creative element exclusive to themselves.
3. Superfluous Energy Theory. This explains one aspect but the energy expended in play is incidental to the pleasure and enthusiasm play engenders.

All the theories however show some of the elements involved and the fact that play has been studied and researched so carefully over the years stresses its importance in the educational process.

The play we are considering should not be confused with relaxation, pastime or exuberant fun. It is rather quite serious effort applied to an absorbing desired activity.

Play and Work

Play cannot be considered in the same terms as work that is related to energy output.

The measure of play is the degree to which it gives pleasure and is desired.

Some forms are related to large amounts of effort and some to small amounts but work effort has no necessary relation to the value of play to the child or the personality growth of the individual.

The amount of work effort may have a beneficial effect on muscular tone but does not necessarily mean emotional satisfaction or mental gain to the individual.

What matters most in play is the **freedom absorption** and **concentration** with which it is carried out.

Educationalists agree that we all need creative experiences and tend to seek what is good. Many believe that children have a bias towards good because good things tend to grow whereas evil things tend to lead towards their own decay.

So far this probably has been too theoretical but has been done to emphasize how important play is considered to be.

Values of Play

We need to consider and be concerned with the positive values of play to normal people and personality development.

A child's play is a way of exploring and experimenting while he

- *builds up a relationship with the world and himself.*
- *is learning to learn, and to come to terms with his environment.*
- *learns to cope with everyday life, master skills and above all to gain self confidence.*

Play helps a child mature by continually altering their awareness of the world and changing their perception.

Play also enables a child to be free from conflicts, terrors and rages and to discover permissible and acceptable outlets for impulses.

For very young children play serves as a means of non- verbal communication. It secures concentration for a length of time, develops initiative imagination and intense interest. No other activity calls so fully on the resources and energy that are latent in everyone.

Where are children going to play?

With whom ?

With what ?

It is becoming increasingly difficult to supply their basic play needs of

- *somewhere to run*
- *somewhere to shout*
- *somewhere to climb*
- *water to splash in*
- *mud and earth to play with*
- *children to share with*

Where children are is where they play

Some children are asked what they liked doing best and it was not going to the pictures or even family outings but the times when they could escape to places which are disused, overgrown and silent.

To a child the best parts of a park are the least maintained, he is attracted to slopes, bushes, long grass.

Children have all the potential and attributes necessary to develop their potential. It is up to us to see that they have the opportunity to do so.

They can also learn by – practical experience what things feel like – the results their actions will bring. How other people will react to them and how they will react to other people.

The more stimuli which can be provided and the more relationships they can have the better.

Although play is divided into different kinds e.g. sand play, water play etc. if play is truly play remembering that it is a spontaneous desired activity carried out for its own sake each real play experience is a new individual creative experience whatever the medium used.

Children need to be able to use all kinds of raw and manufactured materials with which to exercise their imagination and limited muscular ability. Whilst using them he is finding out about weight textures, colors and possibilities of materials.

Adventure play is the overcoming of mental and physical obstacles and gaining new skills whilst exercising all muscles with as much co-ordination as possible in climbing, crawling, jumping, hanging, balancing. This handling of their environment shows in their increased self- confidence.

Our task is to see that they do not become discouraged by the obstacles being too difficult or by us being too restrictive.

PLAY AND GAMES.

True play as described is unrestricted.

Games have rules.

However research has shown that the games children enjoy when on their own are usually those not learnt from adults but from each other or “made up” spontaneously. Games in which they may deliberately hurt each other, take risks, promote fights, play ten against one and yet in which they consistently observe their own sense of fair play.

It is interesting to note that games have a universal form appearing in different name and some variation in ritual. Common characteristics are:

- a “home” base
- a “safe” territory.
- venturing on or through enemy territory.
- “Opting out with Barley”

ROLE OF THE SUPERVISED PLAYGROUND.

The role of a supervised playground is to provide opportunities for play in a relaxed friendly and structured setting. It provides for creative individual and group activities at a basic level.

The role of the leader is to provide opportunities for all kinds of activities and to learn the elementary skills required to give confidence to play games and sports and to endeavor to meet needs as they arise through special activities which may only apply for as long as the need exists.

Most of what has been said applies to children's play but adults also need the same kind of desired and complete involvement kind of activity.

If it has not been possible for them to experience the sense of achievement and satisfaction through play in their childhood they tend to try and fill this gap by indulging in what appear to be childish activity and are considered to be in their second childhood.

As Professor Scarfe of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver says "The spirit of play is vital to all humanity, the basis of most of the happiness of mankind, the means by which humanity advances creatively, scientifically, intellectually, and socially. Not only is it vital to childhood but the spirit of play is vital to all mankind.

In understanding children's play we will have understood the key to the process which educate the whole child. Because we live in a highly civilized world, all play activities need the kindly sympathetic, understanding teacher who will provide materials, suggestions, kindness, freedom and space, and who, by example will set standards of behavior and discipline with which children can experiment creatively to their own advantage.

References

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