



Tel 03 8846 4111
Email info@playaustralia.org.au
Web www.playaustralia.org.au

promoting the value of play

PLAY FREES LANGUAGE

Author Unknown

The young child learns through play. As soon as children can move they use their bodies to express emotions and ideas. Through this play children learn discrimination and forms of effective behavior. They use their bodies in intent exploration of their physical and social environment and gradually come to the use of language.

There are four basic ways by which children come to know and understand their world through play:

IMITATIVE PLAY

In early infancy children imitate their parents in simple copying of sound e.g. the mother imitates the baby's sucking and this may induce the baby to reproduce that sound on a voluntary basis. Simple games like Peep-Bo see the young child reproducing the parent's action and sound. As children grow older they move into pretence and tend to copy the whole person, usually the most important and powerful figure in their lives.

i.e. mother and father.

EXPLORATORY PLAY

Children explore their environment through movement. They play firstly with their tongues and lips, hands and fingers, feet and toes. As they grow more active they explore more widely – tasting, scribbling, mixing, filling, throwing, pulling, climbing into and under small spaces. In later exploration they use objects e.g. saucepan lids, boxes, blocks. They arrange these and the objects become toys that are played with in many novel ways with novel effects creating novel relationships. As children play they put words and sounds together in all sorts of combinations – children explore language through play.

TESTING PLAY

Children test themselves out in innumerable ways. As they crawl, pull, lift, push, hammer, splash, they directly test what they can do in a given situation. They show the ability to adapt their play to suit the situation available.

As children grow older they play with other children and obtains their own self-validation by using others as their standard of competence. In the games that children play together, particularly the traditional games such as Hide and Seek, What's the Time Mr. Wolf the child tests their ability to hide, to escape, to capture and to rescue.

MODEL CONSTRUCTION

Children build their own world as they play with blocks, building houses, cars and trucks, dolls and "teddies". This is most obvious at about the age of four. Alone or with others children attempt to put their understanding of their experiences into the creation of play situations that are unique and significant to them. This play may take the form of fantasies about novel human relationships seen in films and on television. Children try to make sense out of their observation of their environment through their play.

It is essential that adults understand that children's playing is really the activity of intelligence and that there is great value to the perceptive adult in watching the child at play. If the adult understands the importance of play in the child's development they will gain an understanding of the individual personality and the ways in which the child can be helped to learn.

Play is unique in specific ways. Children begin to play because they want to and once they are playing they make their own choices and put their behavior together in their own personal way. When children enter play there is definite relation of feelings but as it continues there often arise new forms of feeling and tension which may be introduced. The play may take on a more dramatic form which will need a more intensive and involved participation on the part of the player. Children become absorbed in their creation and are able to produce through play imagination, invisible companions and so organize in this way the responses which they call out in other people and so call out in themselves. The ability of children to express themselves through play enables them to gain a true sense of identity that implies the process of self- discovery, self- expression and a communication of self to others. This sense of identity is demonstrated by actions in which children see themselves making things happen and being a true participant. The more completely and positively this process takes place in children the more successfully they will be able to cope with and enrich their society.

One cannot assume however that all children when they come to school have had a rich experience of play. There are many reasons why this may be so and it is essential that the teacher actively encourages play activities which can be seen as essential for the child's intellectual, emotional, physical and social development. If the emphasis in language learning is placed too quickly on the formal modes such as reading and writing and there is inadequate provision made for the speaking and listening aspects of language the child's language acquisition will be affected negatively.

The teacher's perception of their role as the encourager of active language acquisition is all important. The teacher must create situations in which children will want to be involved.

If children are truly involved they will want to talk. In the security of the situation structured by the understanding teacher children will have the freedom to learn from other models, to explore with confidence, to test themselves against themselves and with others in the safety of the play and building their own model of reality.

Through movement activities the teacher can create an atmosphere, an environment in which the children will be encouraged to look more closely at the things around them that may normally be taken for granted.

When movement is accompanied by sounds and speech, children can learn that language is fun, experimenting and exploring language is acceptable, that sharing sounds and speech with others is enjoyable.

The teacher's reactions are crucial to the way in which children will feel free to develop the situation. The teacher must, if concerned with expression, allow children to explore language within their own range.

If it is initially stumbling and hesitant the teacher must accept it with understanding. By talking out their thoughts and ideas to a sympathetic listener they will come to some realization of what they are all about. The most spontaneous language is at the earliest exploratory age from three to five years. This language is full of bold brave hesitations.

It is unfortunate that if children lack security, confidence and understanding in the school situation we again see these hesitations occurring. They are no longer brave and bold, no longer happening because of active imaginative exploring but are there because they have learnt to worry about form and are trying to give the teacher what they feel the teacher wants.

Children will gain facility in language usage through situations created for excitement, motivation and enjoyment in language. Stimulating circumstances must be provided by the teachers who can do this without making it artificial strategy. Movement activities provide many such situations. An important factor is that without co-operation and sharing of space and ideas there will be little enjoyment for children or teachers. Through this sharing the whole group comes to support each individual and with this caring support the individual gains in security and emotional well-being. There is a growth in sensitivity to others and an increasing ability to establish sound relationships between individuals, the group and the environment.

IDEAS FOR MOVEMENT

When children are sharing space and moving freely the surface they are working on becomes the structural limit to their creative movement. If they are working outside, the surface may provide a natural variety of slope, texture, balance and safety. Teachers should look for interesting areas in the school ground that will provide a variety of surfaces and area. Natural playgrounds, adventure playgrounds, standard playground equipment, all provide for a range of activities. In this environment there may be things to hold onto, to push, to pull, to climb through or under or over, to hang from to hide in – all of these and many other factors will influence the creativity of the movement and the children should be encouraged to see the possibilities for variety.

In the classroom, the floor becomes the most important factor in movement. Allow the children to remove their shoes and socks so that they can really feel this marvelous floor that takes their weight, that supports them, that will never let them down. Talk about how the floor feels – let them move freely and imaginatively and encourage them to talk to one another about the floor and what they can do with it and on it. Let them explore individually, with a partner or in a small group to see how many different ways can move on this firm surface. Suggest different ways in which they might balance their weight on their own or with others. As they move always encourage the caring for others, the sharing with others that the activities involve.

Bring the children together in small groups. Ask them to form circles and in this formation work with each other on the floor. Let them lie on their stomachs, looking at one another, touching hands, touching feet. Ask them to lie on their backs and see how they can move, stretching arms and legs. Ask them who they could be, how did they get there, why are they on their backs, what is going to happen next?

Give them time to relax, experiment, talk and laugh together. Encourage freedom of individual interpretation but don't pass judgement on performance.

Use the cymbal for control or you may use it as a percussion background noise to assist in the development of the activity. Give the children time to talk to one another when they are resting, ask them to plan another way of working together. They may like to work in sitting, kneeling or standing positions instead of lying down. They may like a mixture. Suggest alternatives and allow the group to make its own decision.

Children feel differently about themselves as they explore situations. They can be involved in an individual movement and yet be aware of others moving and how they look as they move.

The child's perceptual skills can be stimulated as motor skills are developed. A child looks, observes, concentrates, and extends their original ideas.

The teacher can reinforce this learning by emphasizing the movements she observes with her accompanying flowing narrative; e.g. “Some children are going in, some out. I can see hands low to the floor, twisting and turning. I can see thrusting, pushing heavy movements and I can see gentle, flowing smooth movements.”

The adult doesn't direct or stop the movement, demonstrate or praise or condemn, but becomes a supporting background voice suggesting alternatives that the children can ignore or adapt as they will. The child's body becomes the medium, the creator and the critic. Children can explore movement and sound with confidence because as long as they are sincerely involved they cannot fail.