

perceptual process or activity not predominantly perceptual by which one apprehends an object or some aspects of an object or situation'.

Why play?

The importance of play in development of thinking especially in young children is indisputably accepted by psychologists. What are the purpose or functions of play or why do children play are fundamental questions which educationists, parents and adult alike should be concerned with if they want their children or pupils under their care to be intelligently, actively and physically developed. In childhood, it is the characteristic of the developing body to be continually but purposefully active, the developing mind to be alert and curious for curiosity is the fundamental part of intelligence and developing personality to be eager to establish rewarding relationships with other peoples. Thus does a child becomes a healthy, useful, we adjusted being, contented and self respected. Play which provides suitable opportunities to strengthen the body, improve the mind, develop the personality and acquire social competence, is therefore as necessary for the child as food, warmth and protective care. It represents for him, according to his changing needs, word and intentions: apprenticeships to independent living, research and occupational therapy and recreation.

In this paper we will try to explore and critically examine the importance of various aspects of play in the development of thinking in children.

Block play

Most psychologists and researchers on child development recognized the importance of block play the development of thinking of the child. Blocks are probably the most widely accepted material for the use of children because they have the clear stamp of approval of children themselves since they use them more often than any other play materials. Blocks offer a simple method of understanding what is going on within the child. Hendrick (1975) claimed that blocks provide endless opportunities for the development of emerging perceptual skills and blocks are one of the timeless classical play materials that have withstood the many comings and goings of ideologies and theories of early childhood. Block play also offer opportunities for the child to acquire information that lays the foundation for additional learning. For example, through the manipulation of blocks a child learns the concept of equivalence that is two small blocks equal one larger one. When a child is given blocks may be he scrambles them through without purposes. Later, when he achieves the ability to coordinate conservation that is from four blocks for example, can be piled up into a variety of shapes and yet retain quality of fourness and they provide additional opportunities for the child to demonstrate the principle of transitivity (that is four short blocks equal to two larger ones, which in turn equal to one long one). As blocks by nature are unstructured, they may be used to build anything that suits the child fancy. Children can create many formations, figures and shapes from their 'destroy' and 'rebuild' play. Younger ones may content themselves with the experience of staking and balancing for its own sake and perhaps assign a useful function to the construction at a later point in the building process. Later children are able to make blocks grow by placing them on top of each other and with obvious pleasurable excitement when he

repeatedly knocks (destroy) them down thus, externalizing the trauma of the falls. Later, the blocks may serve as the building stones for a miniature world in which an ever increasing number of physical, mental and social experiences are dramatized. Once the children master balancing and coordination of the blocks, they begin to form them into objects and figures. Thus, from a simple cube base platform, a child may be able to build a high tower, a house, a bridge, a block building and others. They do not achieve these formations and structures by chance or 'out of nothing'. Instead, children have to think, to coordinate and through aides and deep concentration on block formations from 'destroy' and 'rebuild' and 'trial and error' method. Thus, from a simple thinking of forming a block platform, the child after many hours of deep and committed play, is able to produce a house, a tower, to more complicated structures created from within and out of divergent thinking. Undoubtedly, blocks foster the development of creative thinking.

Water play

Another valuable yet one of the freest plays for children cited by many psychologists and researches is water play. Not only it is the finest play opportunities we can offer to children but it is absorbing and soothing too, for children will stay with it a long time and come away refreshed and relaxed if it is well presented. It is valuable in a sense that it offers children many opportunities to work through conflicts and provides relief from pressures and tensions and it stimulates social play. By pouring and measuring, it develops eye and hand coordination of children. Besides, children also acquires intellectual concepts having to do with estimating quantity (how much will the cup really hold), with conservation (but it looks like more in the tall

bottle) and with physical properties of water (what becomes of the water when pour on the hot side walk). When children play with water in 'sinking', 'floating' and pouring, they coordinate the understanding properties of the play materials accordingly to what happen to them when placed on water. Thus a boat or any other floating objects are placed first, so that other smaller and sinking objects like marbles and gravels can be accommodated on them. Then when they begin to move or pull the 'boat with cargo' they will do it gently for they realize that vigorous or sudden pull may capsize or sink the boat. The order of what to place first and 'what carries what' needs some sort of organisation and thinking. They will not place a sinking object if they think it will soak and sink, unless of course they do if they do it deliberately for the joy and pleasure of it. Undoubtedly, water play does provide room for development of thinking in children. They may not involve in the first place though, but when objects have the characteristics of sinking, floating and soaking they begin to choose and coordinate them before placing them onto water. Besides, playing with water also offers opportunities for the child to acquire information that lays the foundation for additional learning where the child will acquire the knowledge of volume, which leads ultimately to developing the concept of reversibility.

Mud and Sand Play

Mud and sand play is fairly common to many cultures. They are primary natural materials which fascinate small children because of their changing characteristics, their plasticity and their versatility (Hart, 1979). Their wonderful messy and unstructured qualities make them among the most popular creative play materials among children. They offer rich tactile sensory

experiences and provide emotional relief as well. Messing and slipping through water, sand and mud is relaxing and is thought by some psychologists to provide relief. Older children play imaginatively and cooperatively with each other while digging tunnels, constructing roads and carrying on 'bake-off' but sand and mud are also rewarding for younger children especially when the opportunity to mix, stir, pour, measure, mould and squish them. Making a tunnel in the sand may look simple though. Unless proper 'digging' and 'tunnelling' and 'borrowing' or scientifically speaking good engineering and architecting is done, the tunnel is bound to collapse in no time. But with the correct weight and the right amount of sand is being dug, correct judgement and good calculative ability the tunnel stays boldly. Often children create statues or structures from sand clay that we never care to look at. What a beautiful creative piece of work! Children do not achieve their end products without hard labour and toils. They think, they coordinate, they mix, they dig and all sorts of other thoughtful and intelligent work before they can achieve this. There are so many stages of thinking and planning involved in their mud and sand play. They may begin from simple and unpurposeful sand scrambling and mixing but through experiences, good observation and untiring efforts and thought, soon they are able to produce sand formation and structures of creative and intelligent value. The constructive elements in mud and sand play show clearly the development of thinking in children. They have to think of how much sand is required, what mixture or property will it be able to squish into structures. Only through understanding and constant practice and organised thinking that they will achieve these objectives.

The Chasing Play

Chasing play is another play which is present in all cultures and it is the easiest form of all play. It is made up of two responses namely 'approach' and 'threat' and almost always involves pairs. One pursues, the other flees. Chasing always involve active running or other form of loco-motions. The one whose turn is to chase will try to tag or touch the other. On the other hand, the runner or the fleeing one often approaches the chaser before fleeing away. This invitation to play sometimes is by dangle, tag, jump or make play signals which actually invites pursuits and chased and being pursued by is a reward in itself. In this chasing play there are various elements of pretending involve characteristically terms as purpose, that is one wants to get away but not too far, and intentions that is one wants to be chased but not caught. When being chased the fleeing partner will adjust his speed accordingly. He will run at the right speed but not slow enough to be caught. He must run variably at the right time and to avoid being chased, he will change his running into 'zigzag', here and there and multi directions. All of these adjustments of speed, right timing and the variable nature of running need quick, systematic thinking and proper planning. No doubt there is much thinking and excitement involved if they wish to enjoy the fun of the play.

Adventurous or Exploratory Play

Children living in the countryside are very fond of adventurous play. Furthermore, countryside provides naturally all kinds of exciting things to do: trees to climb, brooks to jump over, things to lift, stepping stones to balance, wood to play 'hide and seek', humpy grounds to slide down or roll in and strange

paths to follow. These play elements provide much room for the development of thinking. In hunting play, they are quick to locate the animals' hideout and quick to decide collectively to surround the animals' and the technique to apply to stray them away from their nearest safety hide-outs. In trees climbing, they can think of how to climb big trees by various methods and in times of danger, they are quick to think to climb to safety when attacked by wild boars. When crossing river with swift current, they can think of the safest method to do it without inviting danger by swinging across using strong creeping plants or by making hanging bamboo bridge. This is truly so among the Ibans or Dayaks of Sarawak, Malaysia. When they are hungry or thirsty in the jungle, they know how to look for safe edible fruits or leaves. The Gikuyo boy in Kenya roams the countryside and learns to distinguish a great variety of wild lives and nature. His interest brings him in contact with these things since they constitute the furnishings of his play activities (Siann G, 1980 pg.35).

In most cases exploratory play involves collecting things. It is a common kind of play for every normal child especially those above three years old. Children collect and sort the things to match with something else, for example, leaves with trees and seeds for counting. It gives them a sense of pride to have larger collection than their playmates and they often engage in long trading or bartering sessions. Older child keeps his collections in some systematic arrangements. Systematizing his collection is fun by itself but it also enables the child to display it better and thus win the admiration and envy of his playmates. While young children's collection is random in character, older children collect those things which have prestige in the peer group. There is a systematic and organized thinking involved in the collecting play. The child has to think what to collect and

be selective in his collecting. The coordination of the things collected with his precious play also needs a systematic thinking and high organisational ability. He has to think of size, length, weight and colours of the materials to collect if he wishes to earn appreciation, admiration and envy from playmates and above all the joy and pleasure of his collection play.

Games With Rules Play

Games with rules play are popular among older children and always exist in all cultures. For example, Sepaktakraw in Malaysia and Indonesia, Tiro (Morocco), hu tu-tu (India), Ichi-Ni-San (Japan), Putung-Putung (Korea), Cebollas para Mama (Puerto Rico) and Matatiru-tirulo (Nicaragua). Almost in all cases they involve a high degree of skills including full understanding and acceptance of abstraction involved in sharing taking turns, fair play and accurate recording of result. It always involves win-loose and peer-age children, under tacitly acknowledged leadership, improvise their own rules for cooperative play. Team games which challenge competitiveness in older children and adults, become increasingly subject to rules imposed from without, and, to impose from without, and, to be rewarding, must be played strictly according to recognized constitution. Besides, they also promote the spirit of give and take such as the 'ekak' game in Nigeria. They also provide countless opportunities for acquiring social skill: how to enter a group and be accepted by them, how to balance power and bargain with other children so that everyone gets satisfaction from the play. All this social 'give and take' which is the key to successful group interaction, involves thinking and understanding. A child who is new to the group will think of the best possible mean to participate, usually when he sees opportunity to perform better

so that he will be easily accepted by the group. At times of crisis or misunderstanding, he has to think when at best he will give in to ensure of this continuity of acceptance in the group and when it is best for him not to give in. This is not a simple decision to make even in grown-ups. He has to make intelligent yet unselfish decision.

In playing with others, children learn to establish social relationships with strange peer groups and how to meet and at times solve the problems such relationship brings. Hart rightly said that it is through social play that a child gains confidence, self-reliance, initiatives, independence and makes his important social contacts with his peers. He first learns to curb voluntarily his interest of another, to accept orders from others, to confirm to group decision, to give and take services and to share. He learns to think to do all these things of his own free will because in that way lies the possibility of being a recognized and well-liked member of the community. It is not an easy endeavour though. It is achieved by the child through good understanding and knowledgeable observation of the group. Much thought is put before he could interact successfully and accepted with pride and open arms and heart by the peer group.

Conclusion

It is obvious that play is of significant importance in the development of thinking especially in children. Play could be called the child's *raison d'être* and if we are going to have a healthy society, we have to have the adult *raison d'être* too. We have to recognize the fact that play seems to continue throughout life and thus we must give proper attention on children's play if we are going to have generations of the young people

who can use their leisure for rest, relaxation and renewal of physical and mental health. It is indisputable that play serves the child as relaxation and amusement, as enjoyment and as rest. Play also serves as the child-mean for making contact with his environment and it represents to the child the external expression of his emotional life and therefore in this aspect serves the child the function taken by art in adult life. Besides, it makes the bridge between the child's consciousness and his emotional experience and so fulfills the role that conservation, introspection, philosophy and religion fill for the adult. Such play in childhood partakes of the nature of and fulfils much of the same social purpose as work in adult.

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