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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an open symposium designed to help participants: (1) better understand the nature of play and the nature of the child in the education process; (2) be more effective in their efforts to facilitate children's growth, development, and learning; and (3) continue to make a difference in children's lives. The notion of play as a medium for learning was presented, and the importance of the play-education-child triad was established and discussed. Fifteen countries were represented in the discussion. Participants came to a concensus on six position statements regarding children's rights in general and the child's right to play specifically. Statements concern: (1) the use of play throughout the entire educational process; (2) the necessity of adults' recognition of the vital role of spontaneous play in child's development; (3) play as a means of improving the society of the future; (4) the child's right to play as a means of reducing the alienation in society; (5) the necessity of encouraging adults to recognize the importance of the child's right to play, and improving the natural, cultural, and interpersonal environment as a result; and (6) the necessity of adults' seeing play through the child's eyes and providing activities in which children play freely and parents participate. Three references are provided. (GLR)

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THEME SESSION I
"WHY PLAY IS THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT OF THE CHILD"
OPEN SYMPOSIUM PRESENTATION
JUNE 7, 1990

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NOTE:

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During the past few days some of my IPA Colleagues and I were brought together to discuss "Why Play is a Fundamental Right of the Child"...To create an exchange of dialogue.

An Exchange to help us, in our respective disciplines, to better understand both the nature of play and the nature of the child within the education process;

An Exchange to help us expand our play foundation so we might be even more effective in our relationships with children's growth, development, and learning;

An Exchange to help us continue to make a difference in the lives of children.

But, "Play" is a function and phenomenon difficult to define any one way and, thus, offers quite a challenge when presented for discussion within an interdisciplinary group from around the world.

For play has indeed been a gigantic puzzle that theorists, philosophers and practitioners have been trying to piece together and solve during the past 150 years (Spodek & Saracho, 1988):

- we have wrestled with problems in defining play;
- we have disagreed with one another about it's definition;
- we have provided many explanations for why play occurs and how to tell when it will occur;
- we have suggested how it functions in the process of education and development;
- and we have argued about whether adult interventions in children's play help or hurt these processes.

Fifteen years ago Sheehan (1975) wrote,

"To play or not to play? That is the real question. Shakespeare was wrong and that anyone with a sense of humor can see that life is a joke, not a tragedy. It is a riddle and like all riddles has an obvious answer: play, not suicide....

In play you realize simultaneously the supreme importance and the utter insignificance of what you are doing. You accept the paradox of pursuing what is at once essential and inconsequential. In play you can totally commit yourself to a goal that minutes later is completely forgotten.

Play, then, is the answer to the puzzle of our existence... It is not simply a method of relieving tension and providing relaxation. Nor is it a service activity preparing us for the more serious and important everyday world, the real world.

Play, as the true player knows, is the most real thing that he does. Indeed, one must play with a passionate involvement, play as if his life depended on it, if play is to mean anything at all. (pp.182-84)

Play appears to affect almost every human achievement, and to be the basic foundation of human culture. (Huizinga, 1950).

Play is an integral part of the human being's quest to actively seek out knowledge. It is truly a "medium" for learning.

And it is this "medium" that has brought us together this week to establish the importance of the triad PLAY/EDUCATION/CHILD.

We came together on Monday and Tuesday to share dialogue on "Why Play is The Fundamental Right of the Child." Fifteen countries were represented in discussion:

Africa	Japan	Peoples Republic of China
Australia	Macao	Russia
France	Netherlands	Sweden
Hong Kong	New Zealand	United Kingdom
India	Norway	United States

And, participants came to a concensus on 6 position statements.

Statements we hope will generate policy and advocacy for children's rights in general and the child's right to play specifically.

Our position statements are:

1. Play combines all aspects of every child's development, and therefore must be used through the education process.
2. The recognition of the vital role of spontaneous play in a child's development must be promoted among all adults, especially parents.
3. The call for the child's right to play is not just for the sake of today's children, it is the means through which they will be able to form a better society for all human beings in the future.
4. If we are to change the alienation in our society, we will have to secure and restore the right for the child to play.

5. Adults, must be encouraged to recognize the importance and necessity of the right for the child to play, thereby improving the natural, cultural and interpersonal environment.
6. Adults must see play through the child's eyes, and provide community activities, where children play freely with adult participation.

These statements are indeed fundamental to the child's right to play and must be valued by all those who have an influence on children's growth, développement and learning.

One of my favorite "play" quotes is from George Bernard Shaw, ("The playwright" - no pun intended, of course), who said, "Man does not cease to play because he grows old, Man grows old because he ceases to play!"

To me, this simple statement is a reminder that:

While we may progressively look older on the surface we must never lose the child in us and the instinct to play. For this is what will keep us young - this is our fountain of youth.

It is something of precious value to pass on to the next generation.

Sometimes we have to band together - like we have this week - to ensure that during the process of advancing technology, cultural change and education reevaluation, the child still maintains the right to play.

For if the child loses that right, the instinct for play will fade, he will be caught up in the workmill of competition and stress - and the spark for play will just disappear.

For, the child is not a machine - a computer - a mechanical piece of sterile, cold, hard material;

The child is with heart, soul and feeling, filled with an overflowing curiosity, with an abundance of energy to explore, and with a love for nature.....

But like nature all too easy to pollute, to crush and to destroy---- to be reduced from an ever changing shape, to a standardized square - to fit into square holes - square holes that we, as well meaning parents and educators, have unwittingly shaped for them.

The challenge to the adults of today for the children of tomorrow exists within the 6 position statements I have presented to you, and within the comments of my colleagues that follow this afternoon.

My personal challenge to you is quite simple. It is to allow the child to be a child, to do child like things, and to build the playful memories of childhood that will influence yet another generation.

References

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