

PLAY DEVELOPMENT:
A VALID COMPONENT OF HUMAN MATURATION

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Introduction

Language may be defined as a: learned, shared, arbitrary, formal system of vocal symbols used by humans to share information. Language provides people with the phonological, semantic and syntactical bases to convey feelings, beliefs, ideas and desires. The deprivation of language interferes not only with the person's capability of expressing himself, but also with the capability of interacting with others. Halliday (1973) stated:

Language provides the mechanism with which people establish interpersonal relationships, regulate the behavior of others, satisfy material needs or desires, explore and organize their environment, and exchange messages and information with other people.

The recognition of language as an integral part of living has resulted in the development of numerous intervention programs for language-delayed children.

Language-delayed children may not recognize that language can assist them in influencing someone else's actions, or in becoming a part of others' activities (Hatten, 1981). Based on this presumption, some language intervention programs have been designed to facilitate the child's development of language by using a pragmatic approach. This approach involves studying the use of language in context, that is, interacting with real listeners and hearers in actual situations (Bates, 1974).

Children learn language not through a formal teacher-student lesson, but by interacting with adults and other children in everyday activities. An important point stressed by Hatten (1981) is that language is learned, but it is not taught. Language-delayed children need to be introduced to situations where communication is pertinent, but not overly stressed. A language intervention program that involves the learning of communication used in various environments and situations, but does not convey a negative feeling of failure if an error occurs, is highly desirable. Play used as a language intervention strategy allows the speech-language pathologist to address the specific language deficits of the child, while presenting practical situations which are pleasing and intriguing to the child. This author, however, will further examine the feasibility of utilizing play as a means of facilitating language development.

Summation of Support for Play

Play has been erroneously labeled as an activity employed to occupy children's time and hands while adults address the pertinent issues of life. Children's play is not only a necessary part of their physical and mental development, but an introduction to the pertinent issues of life which they will face as they, too, become older. Play can be utilized as an instrument for facilitating learning in children; however, its credibility as a teaching strategy

has been challenged repeatedly by authors in science, philosophy, and behavioral psychology publications. The acceptance of play as an educational means fluctuates with the presiding public opinion on what the children ought to learn while attending school. Society vacillates between desiring a very rigid, grammatically correct, and rule-obeying structured school program and one where children are allowed to experiment, experience and develop their own opinions, likes and dislikes.

The use of sense-stimulation as a medium for learning has been recognized and advocated by some of the greatest educators the world has witnessed. According to Tomlinson (1974), Plato and Aristotle stressed the importance of training the hand as a preliminary to the formation of right habits of mind. Montaigne, Locke, Rousseau and Froebel believed that education should be the development of human capabilities: physical, mental and spiritual. They stressed that sensorial education was as important as the tutelage of Latin and Greek.

Though they had little effect on the public's opinion of play as a useful intervention method, the importance of sensorial education emphasized by the educators influenced other progressive educators. Maria Montessori introduced a learning program that placed emphasis on sensory stimulation. Montessori used sensorial materials not to train the senses but to give children the experience of using their

senses to make fine discriminations. Montessori developed a program where the child is the instigator of his learning (Glitter, 1970). Learning occurs by arousing the child's curiosity in a lesson and then allowing him to investigate the concept at his own speed, according to his capacities and in a noncompetitive atmosphere. The Montessori Method of teaching introduced the idea of using methods appropriate to the age level of the child and the use of the child's senses when introducing concepts (Gardner, 1966).

Hartley et al. (1957) and Kubie (1949) reiterated that play is the natural language of the child. A child is able to translate impulses, feelings and fantasies into action by utilizing play. These authors (Hartley et al. and Kubie) expressed support for the theory of play as a special function in the development of the individual's character structure, in the formulation of the child's expectations of the world, and in the molding of his approaches to other people. Play allows the child to vent his frustrations, which concern the adult society, in a direct, nonverbal mode of communication. Play is used by the child to make up for defeats, sufferings and frustrations, especially those resulting from a technically and culturally limited use of language (Erikson, 1940).

A resounding theme found in the support of play is the child's need for personal observation, activities and direct knowing. Children need to be allowed to explore

situations and form opinions based on their observations and experience. No teacher or program of instruction can be an adequate substitute for actual participation by the child when attempting to learn a concept. Frank (1968) stated:

The child learns not only to look but to see, not only to hear but to listen, not only to touch but to feel and grasp what he handles with his sensory capacities. The child masters his many experiences through play which is frequently addressed as a seemingly nonpurposeful activity which is actually the most intensive and fruitful learning in his life.

Frank indicated that a child discovers himself through play and seeks personalized ways of coping with the world. He is using play in an idiomatic fashion; the child is giving his own meaning and emotional significance to play. After the child has mastered different situations, people and playthings through his play, he turns toward more abstract items. The child focuses his play on learning and perceiving ideas, concepts, and assumptions. He is learning how to explore, to make-believe, and test out his own hypotheses by experiencing situations through play.

Children need to receive not only the opportunity for experiences, but a variety of repeated, concrete experiences (Hartley, 1971). The child must have the chance to repeatedly relate to the situations if he is to establish a personal relationship. He needs to manipulate the situation by using all his senses before he can profess an understand-

ing of the situation's content. A child's comprehension of a situation comes from sheer repetitive practice.

Cognitive growth, however, is only one kind of development play facilitates. Hartley (1971) stated:

Play is an important part of the child's developing value system. The values we see emerging in children's play relate to courage and curiosity, commitment without reserve, self-acceptance, optimism, gaiety, cooperation and emotional maturity.

The values developed during play will direct the child as he grows older and encounters situations that question his professions and principles.

Bettelheim (1972) stated, "Play is his (child's) language of expression and also, if we are ready to understand, of communication." Children express their ideas and emotions through play which allows them to master the emotions which would otherwise overwhelm them. However, adults are reluctant to acknowledge or become involved with child's play. Adults do not consider child's play as a serious and effectual aspect of maturity, thus, resulting in the diminished support for play as a medium for learning (Frank, 1968). Play, however, is an activity which is concerned with the whole child, not just with one small part of him, and to deny him the right to play is to deny him the right to live and grow.

The one aspect of play which adults question is the fact that children enjoy their play enormously. Adults are suspect of this form of self-indulgence and presume that

play is spoiling the children. Cass (1971), however, provides attributes developed by children through play which nullifies the adults' assumptions. According to Cass, play:

uses every ounce of a child's energy; encourages child's imagination; develops skills of both body and mind; brings about understanding, warmth, and sympathy towards others.

shows how to compete, how to take hard knocks, how to win gracefully; shows how to struggle through to a desired end.

offers healing for hurts and sadness; breaks down tension and releases pent-up urges toward self-expression; is the working partner of growth, for activity is as vital to growth as food and sleep.

Classical Theories of Play

The skeptical opinions possessed by adults regarding the significance of play in children's lives are based upon previously stated theories. These theories have become known as the classical theories of play. They were postulated hundreds of years ago to explain why people play (Gilmore, 1966). Found under the heading of classical theories of play are the surplus energy theory, the relaxation theory, the pre-exercise theory and the recapitulation theory (Spodek, 1979).

The surplus energy theory speculates that children have a constant excess amount of enthusiasm which induces them to expend some of the surplus energy. Children's expenditures of surplus energy are categorized as play if the energy used is not goal-directed. This theory separates

work from play by determining if the expended energy is employed for either a goal-directed activity, which becomes work or a purposeless activity, which becomes play (Spodek, 1979). The simplicity of this theory and the typical playful nature of a healthy child compel one to contemplate the validity of this theory. However, the theory does not envelop all circumstances in which play arises.

The relaxation theory of play contradicts the surplus energy theory. According to the relaxation theory, play is a recreational activity that helps replenish energy lost in work activities, thus, the contradiction. As stated by Spodek (1979), "... one activity cannot provide both a means for sloughing off excess energy and a means for creating new energy." Upon further perusal, the relaxation theory implies that children's involvement in work activities require periodic intermissions, thus play. However, the inference that children engage in work activities is unjustified. Our present-day society does not endorse or practice child-labor; therefore, children do not play as a means to rejuvenating energy.

The pre-exercise theory proposes that play is instinctive behavior. Groos (1916) stated:

My own view is that there is no general impulse to play, but various instincts are called upon when there is no occasion for their serious exercise, merely for purposes of practice, and more especially preparatory practice, and these instincts thus become special play.

Children engage in play activities that resemble adult conduct but are somehow incomplete or imperfect (Garvey, 1977). Play foreshadows the children's future adult existences.

Upon closer inspection, however, the pre-exercise theory does not present an acceptable explanation of play. For example, the parenting of dolls by young children is more an imitative behavior than an instinctive one. The children are only recreating the adult activities they observed and not instinctively displaying adult behaviors toward the dolls. Another example that disputes the theory's conjecture is stated by Spodek (1979):

The fact that many present vocational roles were not even conceived of during our childhood would raise serious questions about the validity of this pre-exercise theory.

The recapitulation theory proposes that play is a re-enactment of the evolution of mankind. Hall (1907) stated:

The play of children reflects the course of evolution from prehistoric hominids to the present. The history of the race is recapitulated in each child's development.

Play permits children to relieve themselves of primitive and useless instinctual habits while at the same time preparing them for the intricately performed activities of the adult contemporary lifestyle. This theory alleges the play of children resembles more closely the activities of primitive people than the behaviors of contemporary adults.

These classical theories - surplus energy, relaxation, pre-exercise and recapitulation - have since been abandoned or altered and adapted to more current theoretical conjectures (Garvey, 1977). The more modern theories of play accept the fact that children play and attempt to demonstrate the process of play, unlike the classical theories which try to explain why children play.

Modern Theories of Play

Modern theories of play are characterized as dynamic theories. Two dynamic theories presently exist; one based on psychoanalytic psychology, the other from Piagetian theory. The psychoanalytic theory regards play as a cathartic activity which permits children to prevail over formidable conditions (Spodek, 1979). Children can utilize a fantasy play situation to obtain a realistic idea of life. Fantasy play permits the child to investigate obscure adult roles and examine situations of personal distress. Play is the children's approach to manipulating life's adversities; they first conquer the pain and dilemma of the situation through their fantasy play and then gain the knowledge and strength to confront reality through their conquest.

The psychoanalytic theory of play was instrumental in developing early childhood educational programs in which a teacher was an observer, not a participant in children's activities. Spodek (1979) regarded the teacher in a

nursery school based on the psychoanalytic theory of play as a child therapist and not an educator. The teacher was only a stage setter and never a character in the play.

The second dynamic theory of play, which is based on Piagetian theory, is observed presently as a more realistic conjecture of play development. Piaget's theory on child development centers upon two processes: assimilation and accommodation. The process of assimilation begins when an infant initiates meaningful activity; he is controlling his experiences. Isaacs (1972) stated:

He follows with his eyes, explores with them, turns his head; explores with his hands; grips, lets go, pulls, pushes; explores with his mouth; moves his body and limbs; explores jointly and alternately with eye and hand, etc. All this brings experiences which come to him as the products of his activities.

The infant abstracts information from his experiences and places that information into the organizing schemes representing what he presently knows. This becomes the process of assimilation which is a fundamental component of human learning and growth, and a dynamic occurrence throughout his life.

Accommodation occurs when the infant encounters a discrepancy between his organizing schemes and the information he is receiving from his experiences. Accommodation is the process through which the infant's organizing schemes are modified when they do not fit adequately with his developing knowledge. Thus, according to Isaacs (1972):

The assimilative processes constantly extend their domain while at the same time accommodation steers them into ever more successful adaptation to the world. This dual process, and the endeavour to maintain an equal balance between the two sides, are for Piaget the chief controlling factors of intellectual growth.

Piaget considered play as a requisite gradation in the child's cognitive development. Play is the intermediate step between an infant's sensorimotor experience and the development of symbolic thought. The child employs make-believe play only as an entertaining activity, but is unknowingly stimulated to reflect upon the nonexistent objects which he has represented by various items. In fact, according to Pulaski (1971):

Piaget suggests that the development of language is also dependent upon the symbolic function of play. First comes the actual sensory-motor experience with an object or action; then comes the make-believe reliving of that experience; and finally comes a word which represents the whole schema verbally.

The knowledge, therefore, of both play development and language development of a child will enhance an educator's work with a language-delayed child.

Play Development/Language Development

There are four parts to play development - sensorimotor play, productive play, reproductive play and games with rules play. The various stages of language development - inner, receptive and expressive - will be presented in conjunction with the stages of play development.

The first stage in play development is sensorimotor play. This stage is often ignored by adults due to the lack of employment of traditional play articles. Sensorimotor play begins in infancy and is usually prominent until age two. Butler et al. (1978) described sensorimotor play as:

... engaging in simple muscular activities, repeating actions and imitating them, trying new actions, imitating and repeating them, and becoming familiar with one's body by exploration.

Inner language involves an internal process of associating or assimilating incoming stimuli, as the result of previous stimulation. Garnica (1973) and Edwards (1974) described the sensitivity and ability of infants to distinguish speech sounds from other sounds and to respond to them differently. De Villiers (1978) stated:

This special responsiveness may activate analyzers for the extraction of structure from speech, segmenting it into speech sounds, words, and even larger units.

At about three or four months of age children begin to produce sounds that approximate speech. The frequency of the child's babbling of sounds will increase until it reaches a peak between nine and twelve months of age. The child will continue to play at repeating and imitating sounds until his attention is focused on imitating others speech and actions. Between ten and fifteen months of age most children will start producing their first clearly interpretable words and the frequency of babbling will

decline. Expressive language development between 18 - 24 months of age begins with the use of one-word sentences and concludes with two-to-three word sentences.

The second stage of play development, productive play, extends from about two to four years of age. Children learn the uses of simple or manageable play materials and use them to satisfy their own intentions. As children become more proficient at manipulating materials, they commence to construct and produce things that are relevant to them and not to external reality. The children are projecting their cognitive processes on to physical items. Productive play is summed up by Butler et al. (1978) as:

... when children begin to use simple play materials ... they create and construct things, playing longer and concentrating longer. They rough out themes around which to organize their play. Their growing use of language is one reason for these new abilities.

Receptive language development involves the reception and the comprehension of spoken language, associating the word with its referent, and perceiving the implication or function of a word (Weiss and Lillywhite, 1981). This stage of language development overlaps with both the development of inner language and expressive language. As the child develops an internal meaning for external sounds, actions, and experiences he is cultivating his receptive aptitude. The continuing accommodation of external stimuli permits the receptive language development to mature at a faster pace than expressive language development; therefore,

an infant as young as six months of age may have a perceived meaning for a word but be unable to meaningfully use it before ten months of age.

The child's receptive capability begins its ascent up the vocabulary development ladder at about 18 months of age. His advancement will be swift at first and then taper off to a ten percent increase at five years of age. According to Berry (1969):

Between 2.6 and 3.0, a child almost doubles the number of words he uses in speech. In this period his vocabulary may jump from 460 words to 910 words. By 4 years, however, he is increasing his vocabulary only by approximately 20 percent.

The third stage of play development is reproductive play. This stage of play occurs between four and seven years of age, and is an extension of productive play. However, this stage of play is more refined and less egocentric than productive play. The child is acknowledging physical reality by demonstrating what he comprehends about both physical and social realms of experience. Reproductive play allows the child to have experiences that will augment his personal growth, both mentally and socially. Hartley et al. (1957) wrote:

What is perhaps not so frequently emphasized is the great plasticity of the young during these years, their instant response to environmental impacts, their relative freedom from compartmentalization, and their consequent readiness to benefit from favorable experiences and to assimilate these into their growing concept of self.

Reproductive play allows the child to project himself into the role of another person, thus a child explores another's point of view.

Just as the four year old child moves away from his ego-centric attitude toward play, he also shifts from ego-centric speech to communication. The child is learning the significance between reality and himself (Berry, 1969). The child is acknowledging that there are limitations placed on one's existence either by physical reality or by cultural mandate. His recognition of limitations signals a change from the use of expressive speech to transactional speech. Transactional speech is used by a child to accomplish something that he desires to be done in reality and not in fantasy. Transactional speech provides the junction between the ego-centric speech of a child and adult language.

The last stage of play is games with rules. This period of play extends from approximately seven to twelve years of age. Michelson (1974) described this stage of play development, "as the gang stage because as healthy children achieve increased independence from adults, they increasingly enjoy playing with their peers." Children begin to appreciate the need for rules and regulations as they engage in games with others because they realize that the rules are based on mutual consent, meaning they can be altered. Children have to learn how to interact with the

behaviors of others that may occur in the game. Piaget felt that since games with rules are social in nature, an increased amount of assimilation and accommodation is occurring in children; each child is adapting himself to accommodate the others conduct.

Play Therapy/A Language Intervention Program

Play therapy is one method that can be employed to enhance the language development of a child - a language intervention program.

The speech-language pathologist's role in language stimulation is to facilitate the natural development of language in a child. The speech-language pathologist utilizes various activities not only to stimulate the child's language development, but also to stimulate his interest in speaking. Mattick (1981) stated, "Children will use language more fully if there is something of importance to communicate, that is, of importance to them, and not to the teacher." The speech-language pathologist must present activities that lead the child to consider language as an effective tool for communicating with other people.

The use of information that pertains to both the development of play and language will facilitate the speech-language pathologist's search for choosing content and strategies for a remediation program. The employment of standardized language assessment tests and a knowledge of

play development can provide strategies which may enhance language learning. However, the speech-language pathologist must remember that just as each child is different so is his language development. Explicitly stated by Tough (1974):

Each child has his own private model of the world built from the experiences he has had of it. This private world of his consists not only of places and people and things, and of relationships between them, but of the feelings through which he relates to the external world. These images, impressions and feelings, within each individual child, provide the source of his own particular set of meanings.

Speech-language pathologists are encouraged to engage children in activities where language is a natural component. Cole (1982) offered the following list of situations where language intervention can be incorporated:

As children play with toys, interact with others, encounter obstacles they cannot overcome, make new discoveries, become angry or frustrated, want things they cannot locate or reach, and otherwise act on and interact with their world, the clinician can assist them in learning the language that logically fits into their activities.

The speech-language pathologist is encouraged to develop intervention programs that use children's interests, needs and abilities as the bases for therapy activities.

CONCLUSION

The validity of play as an essential component of a child's development has undergone scrutiny for sometime by educators. Frank (1968) stated:

They (school administrators) refuse to recognize that most of the basic learning for living and social life cannot be taught formally but must be

learned through daily living, playing and enjoying the opportunities at each stage of the life cycle.

Children must be active participants in their own growth and learning, which involves both play and language development. A common misconception held not only by lay people but by educators as well is that a child's maturation involves only physical and mental development. The development of play, language, and speech in a child is also a part of his maturation and just as imperative to his overall personal growth as are physical development and mental development.

The exclusion of play from educational curriculums for not only pre-school children but also for grade school children reiterates the point that our society perceives play as an unproductive activity of childhood. Educators are reluctant to accept play development as a part of the child's whole maturation process. Play development, however, is not the only aspect of a child's growth that is misunderstood by school administrators. Curriculums are devised according to Arnaud (1974) "on the basis of **adults'** notions of **what children need to learn** - with little regard for how children at different ages learn most naturally and effectively." Educational circles are urged to further explore the integration of developmental components before producing curriculums for pre-school and school-age children. If our society intends to provide our children with the most effective educational programs, we must

- acknowledge all integral parts of maturation, particularly play development.

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