

The Gift of Play: Recognizing and Respecting Young Children's Amazing Possibilities

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Reflection

Think of a time when you played as a child.

Questions for Reflection

- Who was present?
- Where did you play?
- What motivated you to play?
- What did you discover as you played?
- What feelings did you have as you played?

Some Thoughts about Play

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- Maria Montessori describe play as “*the child’s work*”
- Biologist Karl Groos wrote about play as children’s “*preparation for life*”

Dr. Alison Gopnik (2016) expresses the following about play:

“It’s a truism that children learn through play. But how do they do it, and why? By definition, play is an act of spontaneous exuberance that isn’t designed to accomplish much of anything in particular. And yet the ubiquity of play in childhood suggests that it must be serving some special function.”

P. 13, *The Gardener and the Carpenter*

Dr. Gopnik (2016) later states:

“Our job is not to shape our children’s minds; it’s to let those minds explore all the possibilities that the world allows. Our job is not to tell children how to play; . . . We can’t make children learn, but we can let them learn.”

The Gardener and the Carpenter. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux,
P. 20

“If you watch infants closely, you will see that they clearly do not differentiate between work and play, and amusement and learning. You will see that in almost every waking moment they are occupied with thoughts and actions of discovery and accomplishment. They seem to have an agenda. They are busy in what some might call play, others work, others amusement, and others learning. In fact, they are busy with all of these things at once.”

Dr. Ron Lally, Program for Infant/Toddler Care

Video Observation

Was this work or was this play?

Dr. Emmi Pikler's thoughts about early motor development reflect her philosophy on play:

“While learning during motor development to turn on the belly, to roll, creep, sit, stand and walk, he is not only learning those movements, but also how to learn. He learns to do something on his own, to be interested to try out, to experiment. He learns to overcome difficulties. He comes to know the joy and satisfaction which is derived from this success, the result of his patience and persistence.”

Reflection

How do you play as adults?

How do Elsa and Peter play?

Some Thoughts as We Reflect on Our Own Play

- Each person, within her or his own abilities, is capable of enjoying play and learning through play. Play takes on many different forms.
- We determine our play.
- Our play is unpredictable and feels risky. It opens up new possibilities for exploration, discovery, and learning.

Experiment (Phase 1)

Play with Others

- You will have two minutes for this activity. A timer will help us keep track of how much time is left.
- The purpose of this activity is to accumulate as many points as possible to win the game.
- As soon as the timer starts, the person with the ball will throw it to another who is far away.
- When you receive the ball you must jump four times in the air changing directions, while saying your name very loudly. Completing this task gives you one point.
- Upon completion of the previous task, immediately throw the ball far away to another person.
- When the bell rings, time is up.

Reflection on Phase 1

- What feelings did you experience when you played with the beach balls?
- What did you learn?
- What kept you engaged in the play?

Experiment (Phase 2)

Another Way to Play



Reflection on Phase 2

- What feelings did you experience when you played this time?
- What did you learn this time that was different from the first time?
- What kept you engaged in the play this time?

The Competent Infant

When young children use their competence to learn, they strengthen their ability to learn how to learn.

Questions for Discussion

What are infants capable of learning on their own?

VS.

What kinds of learning do we think require our help?

Dr. Carol Dweck's Research

Fixed versus Growth Mindset

Fixed Mindset

- Babies are dependent on us to teach them in order for them to develop and learn.
- The possibilities for learning are fixed, defined by adults.

Growth Mindset

- Babies are capable of developing and learning through their own self-initiated and self-determined play and *effort*.
- The possibilities for learning and growth extend beyond what we can imagine.

Growth Mindset: The Adult Role

- Infants and toddlers learn from us through our nurturing them in relationships, not through our structuring play experiences for them.
- In nurturing infants and toddlers, we attend to their health and safety, create places where they can play, and share our social and cultural ways of being with them.

Babies at Play

As we watch and analyze video examples,
keep in mind the competent infant and a growth
mindset.

Questions About the Video Example

- What did you observe?
- What did the child learn?
- How was his mood?
- How was your mood when you watched this?

Follow-Up Question

- What would have happened had an adult intervened and tried to direct or structure Benze's play?

An invitation to watch Benze again

- What else did you notice?
- What made the learning through play that you observed possible?

Infants and Toddlers' Different Types of Attention as They Play

- Wandering Attention
- Divided Attention
- Sustained Attention
- Focused Attention

- What types of attention did you observe?

An invitation to watch this video again

Questions to Consider

- What role did the **space** for play have on the types of attention the children showed while engaged in play?
- What role did the amount of **time** for play have on the types of attention the children showed while engaged in play?

Closing Thoughts

“It is crucial that the child discovers as much as possible on his own. If we assist him in accompanying every task, we deprive him of the single most important aspect of his development. A child who achieves things through independent experimentation acquires an entirely different kind of knowledge than does a child who has ready-made solutions offered to him.”

Dr. Emmi Pikler