

Introduction

Joseph Kwan
Susanna Chow

IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

The 'Surplus Energy Theory' was proposed in the nineteenth century by the philosopher Herbert Spencer. He postulated that play was a natural method by which children got rid of surplus energy or 'let off steam'. Contemporary play theories consider this an oversimplification and suggest that instead play is a learning process, a chance for children to explore, to experiment, and to discover for themselves.

For many people, children's play is synonymous with provision for physical activities such as climbing, swinging, jumping, running, and play areas are perceived as collections of play equipment. However, children are more than just physical beings and their total development must be kept in mind. Play is an integral part of a child's development and must be considered in its broadest meaning.

Play is often said to be the "work" of children. Through play, children learn basic concepts and skills which are important for their successful mastery of environmental and social demands. As early as 1932, Parten has already emphasized the role of play in developing socialization skills. He traced the development of social play (i.e., solitary, onlooker, parallel, associative, and cooperative play). This taxonomy is still being used widely today. Play is also important for children to acquire cognitive skills. Piaget (1962) described how play parallels cognitive development (i.e. sensorimotor play, practice play, symbolic play and games with rules). Ayres (1975) also emphasized the value of play in the development of adequate motor planning skills. The use of therapeutic play in treating children with motor or emotional difficulties is widely practiced.