



EXPLORING THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY AND LEISURE IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

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Abstract

In the 19th century, (Victorian era) leisure and play were uncommon and had a very reduced amount of significance. Leisure was regarded as misuse of time. Children mostly worked in the mines under unsatisfactory conditions. "The Victorians however believed that if individuals had leisure time, they were to use it to improve themselves. From the 1870's research on play began to be of scientific interest and was branched into three directions based on its Cognitive, Emotional and Social value". (Santer, Griffiths and Goodall, 2007). The intent of this paper is to explore how play and leisure promotes child's imagination, independence and creativity. The paper shall discuss the various play and leisurely activities of children and how it develops their social skills and learning. Play is very effective in building resilience as children tend to take risks while playing. The paper puts light on the role of adults in children's play and leisure. Children learn the process of problem solving as they deal with real situations while playing. The paper explores the importance of play and leisure in the life of a child and its contribution in the development of cognitive, emotional and social domain.

Keywords: *Play, Leisure, Development, Learning.*

Introduction

Play refers to activities of man that are free and spontaneous, activities which are self-generated and done with one's own choice without any planning. Children mainly use their



first hand experiences of life while playing. Children at play coordinate their ideas, feelings and make sense of their relationships with their family, friends and culture. They select their own props while playing. Play is motivated and powerful both in the affective and cognitive domains, both in the immediate and in the long run. (Santer, Griffiths and Goodall, 2007).

Leisure is a state of mind which is ordinarily characterised by un-obliged time and willing optimism. It can involve extensive activity. The key ingredient is an attitude which fosters a peaceful and productive co-existence with the elements in one's environment. (Veal, 1992). Play and leisure are the central to the experiences of children. They learn properties of objects, materials and also discover ways in which they could be used in a creative manner. When children perform certain tasks, they learn through their experiences. Activities helps them to develop social skills. If the children are not provided time for play and leisure, they become stressful. Children prefer to play with skilful adults who could support them while playing.

Important Forms of Play and Leisure in Early Childhood.

1. Pretend, fantasy and socio-dramatic play:

It includes 'role play', where in children pretend with objects, actions and situations. There is a creation of imaginary play frame in order to create a play episode or event. It involves interaction and verbal communication with one or more play partners. (Kernan, 2007).

2. Language and word play:

Unrehearsed and spontaneous manipulation of sounds, and words often with rhythmic and repetitive elements. As children get older, this kind of play often incorporates rhyme, word play and humour. (Kernan, 2007).

3. Rough and tumble play:

This includes or involves fighting, kicking, tumbling, chasing and rolling on the ground. Children derive fun and enjoyment from this type of play.

4. Exploratory play:

It is a play in which children use physical skills, and sensations in order to learn about their properties. In this type of play children try to gain knowledge about the world through their senses.

Types of leisure activities that children have a preference are quite diverse. Popular forms of leisure may include.

1. Hobbies:

Most popular hobbies among children are collecting stamps, autographs, acting, music and exploring nature.

2. Reading:

Children often curl up with books, that may include story books, illustrated comics and poetry.

3. Writing:

Parents and adults mostly advise the children to write in order to improve their vocabulary and writing skills.

4. Sports:

Children are mostly encouraged to take up explorative activities so that they remain physically fit and active. This may include swimming, playing games etc.

5. Volunteer activities:

Helping others appeals to individuals on almost all age groups. Children often use their skills to help the elders and even individuals of same age group.

As said before, play refers to ‘free and spontaneous activities’, these activities are without any planning. Leisure is also enjoyable and it is done with a purpose. It gives children opportunity to develop competencies, interests and a healthy sense of confidence. Children habitually take these activities to learn new things and often find them amusing. Leisure is said to be a mental and spiritual attitude.



Role of Play and Leisure in Promoting Child’s Imagination, Independence and Creativity

It has been demonstrated that children playing with toys are like scientists and learn by looking and listening to those around them. (Yogman, 2018). Play helps shape strong learning basis because later levels of learning are built upon former ones, in the process called as ‘scaffolding. The qualities of freedom, curiosity, creativity, imagination and trust are best developed in early childhood play. The power of play also improves self-esteem and inter-personal relationships. The cognitive processes involved in play are similar to those involved in learning; motivation, meaning, repetition, self-regulation and abstract thinking. (Goldstein, 2012). Play promotes children’s imagination as they think about various things and often go out of the box. Many a times children play ‘pretend play’ where in they assume to be somebody else. They frame their own speech and dialogues which they use while interacting during play. While playing in group children assign themselves roles such as father, mother, sister, neighbour etc. Children also dress according to their play character in pretend play. This promotes their imagination and social skills. Research shows that children use free play to express their emotions and learn to deal with their fears and scary experiences. With their imagination children turn any equipment into a car and any place into a market or classroom. Children use their imagination to experience different feelings and outcomes. A wide variety of experts agree that play is essential for a child’s brain development. Studies have shown that free play affects neurological development and determines how the neural circuits of the brain are wired. (Voice of Play, 2019). Creativity is an important skill to have because it allows kids to create their own worlds using clay, paint or crayons. When children play together, they build on each other’s pretend worlds which strengthens creative insight and adaptability.

Through play children learn:

- Express their emotions and expose their inner feelings.
- Develop communication and language skills.
- Deal with conflict and learn to negotiate.



- Maintain emotional balance, physical and mental health and well-being.

Leisure activities like reading help in promoting imagination and creative thinking of the children. They learn new vocabulary and values through books. Many a times children write poems and articles by their own, this gives them a chance to express their inner emotions and ink their opinions. Sports and adventurous activities help children to explore things around them. Children become independent and tend to take risks. They become resilient as they overcome problems while exploring things around them. Children learn to use their time constructively by choosing a leisure activity. In the recent times it is noted that children spend a lot of time surfing internet and playing digital games. When asked to children about their hobbies they say that they like to play games on internet or surf internet. In the world of cyberspace, it is very essential to guide children to take up an activity which will benefit them in the long run. Internet has its own benefits like children learn a lot of things through different useful websites. The parents can help the child learn through digital play by choosing good quality apps, games and other media. Involvement in leisure allows the child to develop skills not only for a particular activity, but that are useful in other facets of life. Developing these skills may take numerous attempts. Once the child develops these skills, leisure provides a base for faith in their capabilities, the activity and others. The self-confidence of the child gained through leisure experience can then carry over into other settings such as school, thus allowing the child to be fruitful in all areas of life.

Play and Leisure in the development of Cognitive, Emotional and Social domain.

Cognitive development refers to the way in which a child learns, solves problems, acquires knowledge about surrounding environment and increases the ability to interact with. (Building Blocks, 2019). Play and leisure is a key for healthy cognitive development. Even spending time playing with the child is essentially good for the child's cognitive development. That is because playing together builds relationship between the child and the parent. It also gives the child confidence to keep exploring and learning about the world. Psychologist Edward Fisher in his study found that 'socio-dramatic play' results in improved performance in both cognitive-linguistic social and affective domain. (Dewar, 2006).



Vygotsky, a social constructivist believed that all children's learning takes place within a social context, thus learning appears on the social level before being internalised on the psychological plane. Vygotsky believed that all forms of play grow from the imagination. In play, children engage in imaginary situations, are free from situational constraints, create definitions of roles and subordinate themselves to rules that are created within the imaginary situation. (Santer, Griffiths and Goodall, 2010).

Engaging in play benefits children to increase self-confidence and self-esteem. Play is also supposed to reduce or remove symptoms of stress and depression. When children have fun and enjoyment in playtime or while doing a leisure activity (music, sports, adventure) they will feel good about themselves and about what they are doing. There are many ways through which play and leisure can produce these benefits that will stay with them throughout their lives. Play allows for a healthier, more socially acceptable way of expressing one's feelings and opinions. Children are able to express their emotions through play which will in turn reduce aggression. Expressing feelings through play will allow a child to work through his or her problems, rather than internalizing them. In doing this the child will be forming a basis for healthy emotional, mental, social and physical well-being by learning how to manage his or her emotions in a socially acceptable way. (Discover Leisure Education, 2013).

According to Eric Ericson children's personalities develop in response to their social environment. Children are curious and often show a need to learn about the world around them. Ericson believed that if children are discouraged constantly by adults, then they will develop feelings of incompetence or ineffectiveness. He also believed that the way in which the family and neighbours respond to children affects their future development. Play promotes social development of the children. Children often play in groups this helps them building friendship and social relationships. Children become more aware of the social rules and norms. Involvement of parents is also important as they act as a guide in the child's play. Children learn that the peers are important and its very essential to keep the bond in future. Children keep aside all the social barriers while playing, they forget about their race, religion, ethnicity etc. Children learn communication skills; they also learn values through playing. Many a times children are encouraged to take up volunteer activities like helping elder



members of the society, doing community work and so on. Through these leisurely activities' children build better social relationships. This helps them to feel better about themselves.

It is noticed that children who are denied to take up leisure activities and play show poor attention and concentration. They often have problem in expressing and regulating emotions. They do not understand the consequences of their actions. They always require an adult to play with them. These children find difficulty in maintaining social relationships.

Conclusion

Play and Leisure are very essential in the development of the child. The role of adults is very important in children's play. If the children are demotivated and constantly monitored by parents then they will develop low self-esteem. On the other hand, if the children are given too much freedom in their play then it might give out negative outcomes. Exposure to risk without any guidance may turn to be harmful for the children. If children are not provided time for play and leisure, they become stressful and demotivated. Hence, Play and Leisure promote the development of social, emotional and cognitive domain.

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