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Beginnings

Let's Play with Our Children!

by Walter F. Drew

For the past two years I have been involved with creative play workshops for parents — *hands on* play experiences for adults. Using an abundant variety of unusual *recycle* materials, as well as clay, blocks, and paint, we play — sometimes alone, sometimes with others. Adults, we fiddle and explore with stimulating materials, using them in different ways for organizing, building, arranging, or otherwise creating unique three dimensional patterns and designs which no one has ever seen before.

"The colors attracted me . . . as did the idea of building something. I began to put the pieces out one at a time, according to how the colors looked together. The construction has a tilt, an unevenness, and a rolling quality . . . sort of like life itself. . . ." — Margaret

Spontaneous creative play relaxes us and focuses our attention, so that we can experience our own creativity. In the same way as children engage in the reverie of spontaneous play, we — as adults — rediscover the joy and importance of play and creativity.

Play develops curiosity and self-determination.

Play encourages us to follow our own intuition and satisfy our curiosity. We find out about the world through self-active exploration and determination, both of which develop naturally through active creative play.

"As I was playing with the materials, I imagined myself back in my grandmother's time and this was my one-room school house (pointing to her structure). This is the first time as an adult I was able to follow my imagination and do this. I play with my children, but I only follow their imagination, not my own." — Doris

Following play, we talk about our experiences. Focusing first on the physical play, we share what we did, how we used the materials, what thoughts or feelings we had as we played, and whatever associations are summoned by our play. Reflecting and sharing aloud about our play experience validates us and the importance of play in relationship to creativity. Our play reveals new knowledge of our world and new potential for us as learners.

Play builds knowledge of ourselves and social relationships.

Play provides a safe way to explore different roles and to express other facets of our personalities. New connections are made.

"At first I didn't want to do this. But then as I got started . . . all of my inner feelings started to come out. With kids, you put your feelings on the back burner and deal with their feelings. Then, you realize that you have to take a moment for yourself." — Linda

Play builds self-esteem and a sense of personal power.

Hands-on, self-directed, satisfying play teaches us to believe in our own inspirations. We can plan, make decisions, experience control, and express our ideas through creative activity.

"You have to believe in yourself and focus your imagination on what your goal is, then you can accomplish it . . . say, 'This is me! I can do it!" — Geraldine

It is up to us as parents to observe, listen, and interact with our children in play to better understand the importance of their instinctive, spontaneous, creative play — and to engage in play ourselves. We can make our children's play hearty, enjoyable, and safe, through our companionship and encouragement.

Play enables us to focus and develops our power of concentration.

Play relaxes us and helps us to focus. The experience of being absorbed in a pointed play activity develops our capacity to concentrate and leads to a sense of fulfillment and a feeling of productivity.

"At first, I found that things that worked before didn't work today. But as I continued to work at it, I became engrossed in the play and forgot everything else. How often this happens to children! I see why they enjoy their play so much." — Rita

Each of us, child or adult, has a developmental need to experience our creativity through play. It is essential, not only to understand, but to represent, to express this capacity through form and action — and, in turn, to value and help develop that ability within our children. But first we as adults must be aware of that power within ourselves.

Play builds the foundation for success and personal competence.

The richer the play experience, the richer the potential for understanding and self-expression. Fantasy play is important in forming this base of experience.

"I tried to think of how these dowels could represent people; I stood some up. As people they looked beautiful. I had tall ones, short ones, some are heavy. I love people and we have all kinds of people to deal with. I see all kinds of people here." — Hattie

Play teaches us to value differences.

Through play we come to see the natural diversity in what other people make, think, say, and feel. We learn to value differences rather than fearing them.

"I kept looking at others' stuff and thinking, 'What can that be?' Then I thought about how awful it is to ask a kid, 'What are you making?' or 'What is it?' It doesn't have to be anything in particular, it can just be." — Julie

Play is the heart of rejuvenation.

Play allows us to see things differently. *Messing around* with recycle materials, blocks, paint, and clay is fun. Making playfulness part of our daily lives facilitates quality time.

"I didn't know what to do with the materials, so I just listened to the music and then my mind started to wander far away and I began building a castle. I felt very peaceful and calm as I was playing and building." — Marilyn

Let's play with our children! Let's take the time to relax and play for our own well-being! Through creative play everyone learns in their own way — exploring, thinking, discovering. We don't have to know all the answers; we don't have to be certain of what needs to be done next. In play we acknowledge our willingness to be equal, to not know, to learn with our children. We interact with an attitude of "What happens if . . . " or "I wonder if . . . ."

By playing as adults — by ourselves or in collaboration with others — we learn again to value the play and creative energy of children.

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