

# *Reflections on Child's Play*

Let us consider this in connection with the child's play, especially how the child plays between birth and the change of teeth. This play depends, as is obvious, on the one hand upon its impulse toward imitating. You know children do what they see grownups do, but they do it in a different way. Their play is far removed from the purpose and usefulness with which adults connect sense activities. It is only the formal side of adult activity that is imitated by the child, not the material side. Its usefulness is absent; the child pursues no definite purpose. Akin to what in the adult is purpose, in the child is a sense of satisfaction. . . We must also observe the soul qualities that flow over into the bodily organs if we want to study that which manifests in the child's playful activity. This is not so simple, but the study of the child's play activity in the widest sense would be extraordinarily important for the art of pedagogy. . . We must ask ourselves; when does the moment arrive in human life when those forces that are developed in the early child's play become fruitful for the complete, external life of the human being? When really do we reap the fruit of the child's play? . . . If one observes without prejudice, one finds that the real fruits of that activity which manifests in the first play only appears in the twenties. What we acquire in play from birth to the change of teeth, what lives itself out in the child in a dreamlike way are forces of the spirituality of the human being which at that time are as yet unborn and are not yet absorbed into the human body, or one might say reabsorbed. I have already shown you how the same forces which organically work in the human being up to the change of teeth, after having produced the teeth, are free, and then some are present as forces of ideation, as the activity of thought. Thus, in a certain way, something is set free from the body. On the other hand, that which the child uses on play,

which lives in this play, which is not bound up with life and therefore has no purposefulness or usefulness as its characteristic—all this, has not yet grown (united itself) with the body. Thus, the child has a soul activity in its body that works in the body up to the change of teeth, and then appears in the forming of concepts which can then be remembered. On the other hand, there is a soul spiritual activity that, so to speak, hovers etherically, lightly, over the child, which is at work in its play, just as in the whole of life the dram activity is at work. But this activity is not only developed in the dram life, but also in play, that is an outer reality. That which developed in an outer reality, recedes just as the germ forming force in the plant recedes within the leaf and the petal, and reappears only in the fruit; so the force that is applied in the child's play reappears in the twenty-first or twenty-second year in the human being as intellect, now independently collecting its experiences in life.

I should like to ask you to try and seek for this connection. Go over conscientiously in your minds such experiences as you have had with children, try to understand the individual character of their play, especially the individual character of their free play, up to the change of teeth; picture to yourselves the individuality of these children, and then, as a hypothesis, see how this individual character of the child, as shown in its play up to the change of teeth, reappears in the special character of its independent judgment after the twentieth year. In other words, types of people after their twentieth year, as regards their variety of outlook on the experiences of life, differ as children in their play up to the change of teeth.

You see, if you really think out these matters in keeping with full reality, then you get a feeling of the immeasurable responsibilities connected with education and teaching. For you arrive at

the following ideas: What I do with the child forms the adult beyond his twentieth year, and you see from this that one must understand the child, the complete course of life, not merely the age of childhood, if one wants to build up a real art of education. . . So we must say: what play gives to the child up to the seventh year only embodies itself in the twenty-first or twenty-second year with the human life. . . It is very interesting to draw our attention to the fact that what we possess as faculties for our intellect, for our experiencing of life, for our social times, this we owe to our early years of childhood.

Rudolf Steiner, from *The Basel Course on Pedagogy*, April-May 1920, Lecture 13. Also in *Understanding Young Children*, WECAN, p. 52.

Dr. Paul MacLean ties the process of imaginative development to the development of play that becomes the essence of creativity and high level reasoning. He feels the link between the emotional limbic brain and the frontal lobe of the neocortex allows for the ultimate expression of human creativity and development.

Play represents full mind/body integration, through specific myelinated pathways between the limbic system (thalamocingulate division), and the frontal lobes of the neocortex. When we are able to take in our fill of sensory stimuli, process and integrate it with richly developed base patterns, and express new insights in a creative way, we are then truly at play. The human urge to create comes from the play impulse.

Carla Hannaford, PH.D., *Smart Moves, Why Learning is Not All In Your Head*, pp. 65-66..

Not only is more of the brain involved in play than was suspected, but it also seems to activate higher cognitive processes. "There's enormous cognitive involvement in play," says [Mark] Bekoff [of the University of Colorado]. He points out that play often involves complex assessments of playmates, ideas of reciprocity and the use of specialized signals and rules. He believes that play creates a brain that has greater behavioral

flexibility and improved potential for learning later in life. "It's about more connectedness throughout the brain," he says.

The idea is backed up by the work of neuropsychologist Stephen Sivy of Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania. Sivy studied how bouts of play affect the brain's levels of a protein called c-FOS—a substance associated with the stimulation and growth of nerve cells. He was surprised by the extent of the activation. "Play just lights everything up," he says. He speculates that by allowing connections between brain areas that might not normally be connected, play may be enhancing creativity.

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