

## **PLAY VS WORK**

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According to Frost and Klein (1979), play and work probably lie on a continuum. However, play can be differentiated from work by defining their unique characteristics. What makes play "play" and work "work"? Play has at least four fundamental qualities that distinguish it from work; it is designed primarily for its own enjoyment, it is controlled by the child, it has a dose of fantasy, and it is internally motivated.

Play is designed primarily for its own enjoyment. Typically, the process of play is what is important, not the product. However, work is designed for a product. Work is engaged in for what may be gained as a result (Lefrancios, 1986).

The quality and quantity of play is controlled by the child (McKee, Play working partner of growth, 1986). When the child decides that he or she no longer wants to play, all the adult encouragement cannot recover the play. However, work is controlled by others. In fact, if a child is required to continue to play even when he doesn't want to, it turns into work.

Play has a dose of fantasy. The enjoyable part of play is that it can be done without the fear of reprisal. The child can pretend to be an animal, adult, automobile or anything that his imagination will allow. However, usually work does not encourage fantasy. It is task and reality oriented.

Play is internally motivated. Children will play without the need for external rewards. Parents do not have to give children allowances or grades in order for children to be motivated to play. Work, on the other hand, is often associated with external reinforcements. Children receive allowances for cleaning their room. They get grades for their performance in school.

By distinguishing between play and work, adults can look at what each has to offer the child. Play enables a child to try out a whole range of roles, acts, and behaviors without the fear of reprisals. Then test their own and others reactions to them. They can adopt the roles, acts and behaviors that they want and discard the others. Thus, play helps children to develop identity and gain a superior understanding of oneself and ones world (Chafel, 1987 in Early Childhood Research Quarterly) For example, Bruner, a cognitive psychologist, found that children learn language more rapidly when in play situations (McKee, 1986).

Through play, children can investigate the sensory qualities of their environment. Children can experiment with the functional uses of their environment and incorporate their understanding into broader social, emotional, intellectual and physical understanding. The poking, inspecting, biting and banging of toys are just as important for learning as the "proper" way to use the toy.

The fantasy involved in imaginative play is one of the purest forms of symbolic thought. Symbolic thought is necessary for language, reading and abstract thinking. Imaginative play permits the child to assimilate reality in terms of his own interests and prior knowledge. It is an arena in which thoughts can be freely tested without fear of failure.

Play also contains rich emotional value. Children can act out their feelings and frustrations. Through play, children can often deal with the stresses of life, walloping their dolls when they are angry, hugging their teddy bears when they are afraid. Parents

capitalize on the advantages of play whenever they get their children involved in play so they can "go out for the night."

The importance of play has been recognized by numerous psychologists; Anna Freud, Virginia Satir, etc. Play therapy gives the psychologist insights into the child's thinking, history, and adaptive behaviors.

Play is a very important medium from which children can gain a better understanding of the world. Through play, children not only learn about their world, they actively participate in their world. Play can be guided and channeled so it becomes more productive. Equipment plays an important role in the play. Equipment should encourage the use of imagination and evoke play. The play should not be in the equipment, but within the child. Some toys dictate to the child how it should be used. For example, a truck designed like a fire-engine will virtually assure that the child will play with it like a fire engine. This may be good if the adult wants the child to learn about fire engines, but it might be bad if the adult wants the child to increase the child's creativity.

Adults can also channel the play towards more productive learning. By teaching children how to care for toys and equipment, the child will learn respect. By questioning the child about possible uses of the toy the adult may encourage divergent thinking. Thus, though play can result in some negative outcomes; such as when children abuse equipment, through guidance the adult can increase the chances of play being an extremely positive experience. Work, however, is based on different requirements, thus creating different outcomes.

Work is typically designed for a product, controlled externally, based on reality, and externally motivated. When a person is required to work, a product is usually expected to stem from the work. Furthermore, this product is often judged by some criteria as reflecting "good" work or "poor" work. The judging criteria is determined by some external "correct" model. Good work is reinforced, poor work is usually reprimanded.

Because work entails a product and a judgment, people can easily determine whether change has taken place in the person's behavior. Thus, if the product comes closer with the model, or the person produces more (i.e., quality and/or quantity increases) one can say behavior has changed or learning has taken place.

The influences of work is not always with a product. Work is also associated with stress, ulcers, suicide, feigned illness, etc. It is interesting to note that as our schools have instituted more product oriented teaching, there has been an increase in the incidence of stress and other problems with children.

Rothlein and Brett (1987, Early Childhood Research Quarterly) found that many parents and teachers do not regard play as important for young children. Parents did not have much interest in their child's play during preschool and defined play in a limited sense. Eighty percent of the teachers they interviewed did not include play as an important part of their curriculum. In fact, teachers and parents separated play and learning, viewing that a child could not be doing one while doing the other.

The view that play is not important stems from a belief that it does not accomplish anything (not product oriented). However, as I have reported above, although play, by nature, may not have a specific outcome goal, the gains made during the process of play are of enormous importance. It should be valued as a critical aspect of childhood, and

allowed to stand on its own merits. It does not have to be equated to work, nor should it, anymore than an apple needs to be equated to an orange to gain respect.