



7.1 Understanding the concept of 'Play'.

“What are you doing Rohit? I have been waiting for you so we can go home now!” said mother. “I am very busy” shouted back Rohit and continued to play. He was too engrossed in what he and his friend were doing.

‘Play’ for children is an essential part of life. It is equally essential to development as it contributes to physical, emotional, social and intellectual development and well being of children. It offers an ideal opportunity for parents and caregivers to engage fully with their children.

Play comes naturally and effortlessly to children. Hiding in boxes, climbing trees, playing in the mud, kicking stones while walking back home, or wearing clothes that belong to grownups, are only some of the ways in which children entertain themselves and indulge in play activities.

Some interesting facts about ‘Play’.

On the 1st of February 2013, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognized the right of every child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities and free and full participation in cultural and artistic life.

Most educationists and psychologists describe ‘Play’ as a means of organizing information and learning. They believe that play is the work of children. It consists of those activities performed for self amusement that have behavioural, social and psychomotor rewards. It is child directed and the rewards come from within the individual child. It is both enjoyable and spontaneous.

Definitions :

Let us look closely at some definitions given by various experts.

According to Stuart Brown (2018), Play is something done for its own sake. It is voluntary, pleasurable, offers a sense of engagement and takes you out of time. The act itself is more important than the outcome.

According to Catherine Garvey (1977), ‘Play’ is the act of engaging in something for the pure enjoyment of it.

There are five elements that define play in young children.

1. It is pleasurable and enjoyable.
2. Play has no extrinsic goals.
3. It is spontaneous and voluntary.
4. Play involves active engagement.
5. It involves make believe.

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) described play as a primary way of learning for young children. According to him, “Play is the Engine Of Real Learning”.

Lev Vygotsky (1978) the Russian psychologist defines play as an activity desired by the child, involving an imaginary situation and rules that may or may not be laid down in advance.

Scales et al.(1991) define play as that absorbing activity in which young children participate with enthusiasm and abandon.

Psychology as a social science defines play as a physical, mental, leisure activity, that is undertaken purely for enjoyment or amusement and has no other objective.

Factors indicating the need for play.

Despite the fact that most children indulge in play voluntarily and very seldom need to be coaxed to play, there are a number of tell tale

signs that indicate a strong need for a young child to play outdoors.

Let us see what some of these indicators are :

- * Getting tired and frustrated easily.
- * Need to improve their co-ordination.
Example : falling or slipping easily.
- * Not meeting their gross motor milestones.
- * Having a short attention span.
- * Unable to sleep or eat well.
- * Have difficulty regulating their emotions.
- * Lethargic and uninterested in what is happening around.

As is true for all the domains of all round development, children pass through various stages of play before they have acquired social skills to indulge in social play. Let us try to understand the different stages of play observed in young children.

7.2 Stages of Play

Parten (1929) has recognized that there are primarily six stages of social play.

1. Unoccupied Play.

When a child is not playing with toys or with other children but just observing and focusing on an activity that temporarily holds his or her interest is called unoccupied play.

For example, a baby making random movements or a young child jumping in and out of mud puddles while walking in the rain.



Picture 7.1

2. Solitary Play.

This is observed when a child plays all by himself or herself. This type of play gives a child time to think, explore, create and concentrate. It also helps a child to regulate emotions.



Picture 7.2

3. Onlooker Play.

Children learn by watching others. They may be interested in what other children are doing but not quite ready to join in. Often a child may engage in forms of social interaction such as a conversation, asking questions or giving suggestions without actually participating in the play activity.



Picture 7.3

4. Parallel play.

This stage is marked by playing 'next' to but not 'with' other children. Children often pick up similar toys or play close to each other without any specific interaction.



Picture 7.4

5. Associative Play.

In this stage, a child plays with the assistance of another. In other words, playing together but not working together towards a goal with a specific purpose.



Picture 7.5

6. Co-operative or Social Play.

In this stage, children have acquired the skill to co-operate, work towards a collective goal, become a part of a larger group and usually taking on the role of a leader or follower. Play activities begin to assume a structure or have certain simple rules to follow.

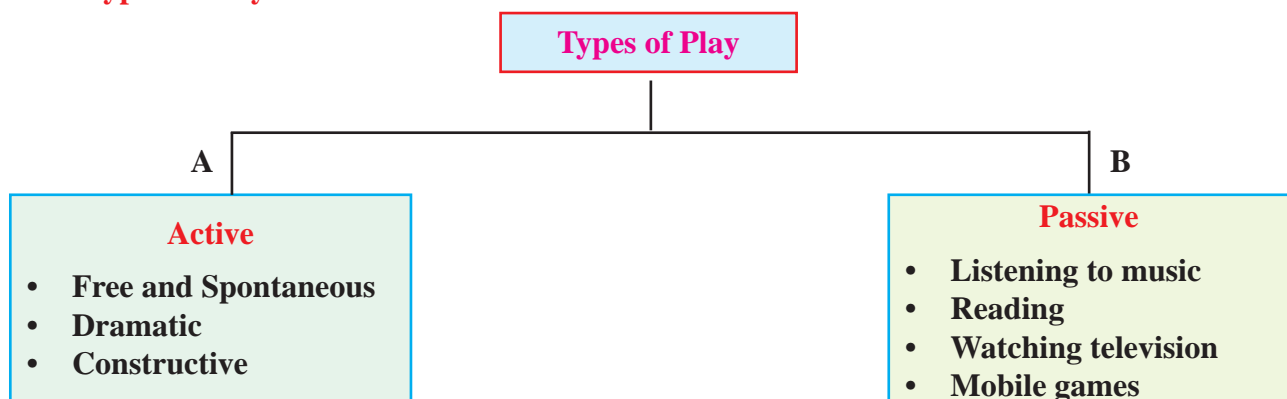


Picture 7.6

While there are six distinct stages in the development of play in children, play activities can be categorized into two types, namely Active and Passive play.

While active play may be observed both indoors as well as outdoors, passive play is usually observed indoors.

7.3 Types of Play.



A) Active play involves the following:

- **Free and spontaneous play.**

This type of play is always self initiated by a young child. As the name suggests there are no rules and regulations to be followed and continues until interest and enjoyment persist.



Picture 7.7

- **Dramatic play**

This is popularly known as ‘pretend’ or ‘make believe’ play. As cognitive faculties such as imagination and creative thinking develop, young children begin to enjoy role play and acting out situations or incidents they imagine. For example, a policeman directing traffic, a fire fighter, mother cooking for her family with pots and pans or having tea at the table.



Picture 7.8 (A)

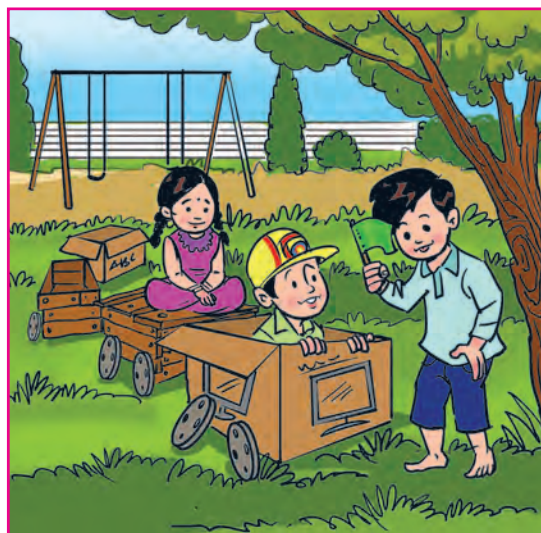
Picture 7.8 (B)

- **Constructive Play**

This activity is characterized by children making use of materials that they find around them to construct things which bring a lot of joy

and enjoyment. For example, a large collection of empty cardboard boxes or crates and paper plates may be used to make a long truck and its wheels.

Some other activities include exploring, games or collecting interesting things such as feathers, shiny stones or stickers.



Picture 7.9

B) Passive Play

An activity that does not call for active participation is termed as passive play. Here are a few examples:

- **Listening to music**

Listening to music as a source of enjoyment and amusement is a popular activity. There is a gradual increase in this activity as children grow older.



Picture 7.10

- **Reading**

This is another form of passive play. Factors such as bad weather, lack of space or playmates, influence the time spent in this activity.



Picture 7.11

- **Watching television or listening to the radio**

Though listening to the radio has sharply decreased in recent times, the time spent watching television, playing video games or watching content on electronic media has now become a very popular source of entertainment. Young children spend large chunks of time indulging in this form of passive activity.



Picture 7.12

7.4 Values of Play

Play is an excellent medium which children use to practice, rehearse and widen understanding of the world. In a nutshell, 'learning comes through play' and 'to play is to learn'. Play offers children a very valuable and rich variety of learning experiences making it possible for them to experiment, explore, manipulate and make discoveries using the five senses. However, it is common place for parents to view play as a sheer waste of time. They would rather have their child study or do something 'more' constructive with the time on hand.

Values of Play as given by Caplan (1973)

- * Play promotes growth and enhances body balance and co-ordination.
- * Play offers opportunities for mastery of the physical self.
- * Play is vitalizing.
- * Play is a voluntary activity and offers a child freedom of choice and action
- * Play provides a world of make believe that a child can master.
- * Play is a way of learning adult roles.
- * Play has elements of adventure in it.
- * Play promotes social interaction and refines interpersonal skills.
- * Play fosters language development.
- * Play offers interest and enhances concentration.
- * Play serves as an avenue for emotional outlet and expression.
- * Play is therapeutic. It helps to restore body balance in a positive way.

Did you know?

Play Therapy is a form of counseling in which play is used as a means of helping children express or communicate their feelings.

Activity :

Try to remember which your favourite outdoor activity was, when you were a young child. What did you and your friends enjoy doing the most?

What kind of play activity would you encourage a preschool child to participate in? Why?

What is holistic or all round development?

Holistic Development of a child is achieved when young children become physically healthy, mentally alert, emotionally secure, socially competent, able to learn, culturally aware and aesthetically creative. They grow up to become responsible and productive adults.

7.5 Play material and equipment for Holistic Development.

Let us now turn our attention to what we can select to promote the development of the different domains/ aspects of all round development.

Table 7.1 Play material and equipment for Holistic Development

Area of development	Play material.
Physical development	Jungle gym, slide, swing, pull and push toys, tricycles, ladders.
Gross motor development	Tricycle, skipping rope, ball, sand play material.
Fine motor development	Peg board, scissors, lacing cards, fixing toys, chalk, crayons, paint, beads, clay, small blocks, carpentry tools.
Language development	Picture books, picture cards, riddles, Information books.
Cognitive development	Puzzles, games and activities.
Creativity and aesthetic development	Paints, clay, sand, water play, music and movement, blocks.
Socio-emotional development	Toys that can be shared or used in a group Simple board games, blocks, doctor's set, dress up clothes, doll's house.

Now that we are aware of the importance of a conducive environment to promote play and the numerous values that it brings for all round development, we must bear in mind that there are a number of factors that influence the nature of play in young children.

Some of these include, the space available, parental awareness regarding developmentally appropriate materials, type of family structure, monetary resources available, and access to a variety of suitable play material.

Activity :

Imagine that you are in a toy shop and you have to choose a gift/toy for a young child. How will you select appropriate play material?

7.6 Selection of toys and play material

Here is a simple checklist that will help you to decide which play material/toy you could buy.

1. Is the play material/toy attractive? Colorful? ☐
2. Is it developmentally appropriate? ☐
3. Will it motivate a child to test out his/her ability? ☐
4. Is it multi functional? ☐
5. Is it sturdy and durable? ☐
6. Is it safe to play with? ☐
7. Is the paint used non toxic? ☐
8. Have the edges been rounded for safety? ☐
9. Will it promote different domains of all round development? ☐

If your answer is 'YES' to all of these questions, you can be quite sure that you have made an appropriate choice!

Think about it!

It is a good idea to avoid buying 'gender specific' toys such as cars and toy soldiers for boys or baby dolls for girls.

On the same note, toys and play material need not always be expensive or bought out. Toy libraries that allow and encourage borrowing a variety of toys are fast gaining in popularity. You may be able to start one such library on your own with available resources, to encourage young children to have access to appropriate play material.

Activity :

Make a list of all the locally available material that can be effectively used to make toys. Here are some ideas..... Bottle caps, homemade soft toys, coconut shells, empty egg cartons... Can you think of some more like these?



Reflection / Darpan

Observe children playing at a construction site. What material do they use to play with? How much time do they spend playing? What is the nature of their interaction with each other? Document your own observations.

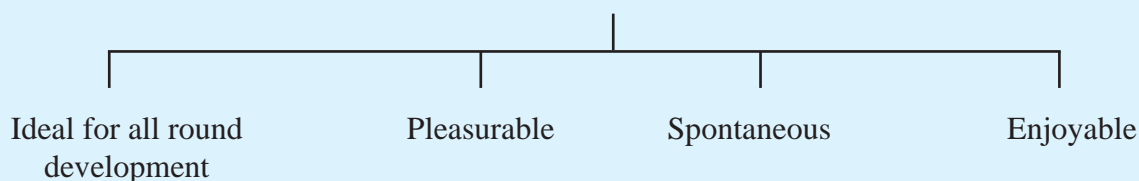
7.7 Role of parents in encouraging play.

Research suggests that responsive parents who guide and provide new challenges or ideas to their children during 'play' give them the best chance to handle emotional difficulties, build and develop social skills. Parents must always ensure that play activities are 'child led' and 'child centred.' Too much of interference or constantly directing children's play is likely to take away all of the fun and enjoyment.

Despite the numerous benefits derived from play, children and parents seem to be spending lesser and lesser time indulging in free and spontaneous play. A hurried lifestyle, changes in the family structure and increased focus on academic and enrichment activities seem to be some of the most important contributing factors.

Revise the points

Importance of Play



Indicators suggesting a 'need' for play

- Getting tired and frustrated easily.
- Not meeting gross motor milestones.
- Short attention span.
- Unable to sleep or eat well.
- Need to improve co-ordination.
- Lethargy.
- Difficulty regulating emotion.

Values of play

Promotes growth	Element of Adventure
Mastery of physical self	Social interaction
Vitalizing	Language development
Freedom of choice	Concentration
Learning adult roles.	Therapeutic

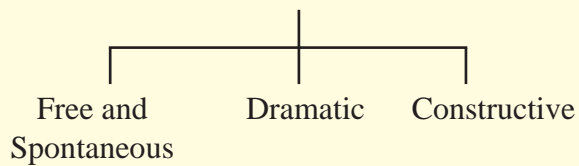
Revise the points

Stages of play

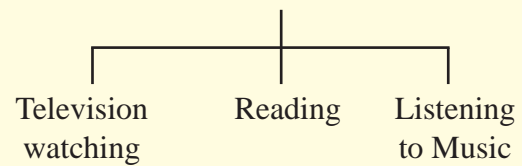
1	→	Unoccupied
2	→	Solitary
3	→	Onlooker
4	→	Parallel
5	→	Associative
6	→	Co-operative

Types of Play

Active



Passive



Criteria for Selection of Toys

- Safe
- Durable
- Attractive
- Colourful
- Developmentally appropriate
- Multifunctional
- Motivating
- Non toxic paint
- Rounded corners / edges

Role of Parents / Caregivers

- → Being responsive
- → Guidance when necessary
- → Providing challenges
- → Ensure activities are 'Child led'

Glossary

Abandon : Complete lack of inhibition or restraint.

Chunk : Large block or portion.

Extrinsic : External.

Lethargic : Inactive, dull.

Manipulate : Handle in a skillfull manner.

Psychomotor : Motor action proceeding from mental activity.

Spontaneous : Natural, unprompted.

Therapeutic : Helping one feel relaxed,healing.

Vitalizing : To give life to, energize.

Exercises

Q. 1. Fill in the blanks by selecting the appropriate word.

1. According to play is the engine of real learning.
a) Friedrich Froebel
b) Stuart Brown
c) Lev Vygotsky
2. The six stages of social play have been recognized by
a) Catherine Garvey
b) Parten
c) Scales et.al.

3. An activity that does not call for active participation is termed as play.
a) free *b) active*
c) passive
4. Parents must always ensure that play activities are 'child led' and centered.
a) parent *b) self*
c) child

Q. 2. Complete the table given below and classify the material according to the different domains of development.

- Skipping rope, riddles, scissors, tricycles, information books, peg board, sand play, crayons, ball, picture books

Gross Motor	Language	Fine Motor

Q. 3. Clarify the following terms.

1. Constructive play
2. Passive play
3. Play

Q.4. List the factors indicating the need for play

Q.5. What is the role of parents in encouraging and stimulating 'play' in young children?

Q.6. Describe in detail the values of play as put forth by Caplan.

Q.7. Write in brief the meaning and importance of 'play' in young children.

Q. 8. Read the following paragraph and find out the appropriate stage of play it describes.

- a. Kavita went to her neighbour's house. There she saw Sujay and Ajay busy playing with blocks. "What are you doing? she asks, as she stands by the door.

- b. On the way back from nursery school, a child climbed up and jumped down from a mound of sand, piled on the side of the road
- c. Savita and Kunal are busy going round and round on their tricycles.
- d. A group of 5-year-old children are busy playing with blocks. They build a house, a garage and a bridge. Each one works alongside the others, discussing and making common plans and decisions.
- e. During free play in a nursery class, few children run into the Doll's house and are soon engrossed in the activity.

Project / Self Study

- *Collect pictures of children playing in different settings. For example: in the park, on the school playground, at a recreational centre, or in your neighbourhood. Can you identify the different stages or types of play?*
- *Make your own scrapbook describing the stages and types of play and keep adding to your collection. You may even try your hand at making a sketch or take photographs.*

