

Importance of Play

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Play you say, there is too much of it, it is time we become more serious about learning and get down to the business of education. Have you ever reflected on the part that play may have in education? I have come to the conclusion that the presence of responsibility without having experienced play handicaps the student, yes even the teacher. The capacity to play is the Creator's classroom-lesson-plan for preparing His children to embrace full maturity and responsibility.



Play is the child's first experience

The experience of play for children includes freedom, enjoyment, discovery, and development of relationships. You can usually identify homes in your neighborhood where children live, as there are swings, tricycles, balls on the lawn and much more, most items suggesting play activities. When children are outside their homes the laughter of play fills the air with delightful sounds.

Freedom to enjoy toys, family, and pets fills the day from morning till night. The energy bank of children seems to be unlimited. Life has few obligations for the early stages of a child. Parents are often heard saying go out and play or enjoy your toys and we will call you when it is mealtime.

The freedom to play is not only enjoyable but leads to discovery of environment and the child's own capabilities of climbing, running, thinking, and creativity. What a master decision by God to start life's experience as children with the capacity to play. This tells me something about the character of God; He enjoys the laughter of children and delights in the playtime of his creation.

Interruptions to play

Just when children seem to be at the peak of pleasure, playing with toys, pets, on swings, tricycles, with friends the call rings out, Johnny its supper time, story time, bed time, some moment of obligation. Interruptions to play by responsibility is not at first well received by children as they want to continue to enjoy their friends and games. However, it is essential for children to experience that play though enjoyable does not go on forever. The resulting feelings of disappointment when play is interrupted are difficult for some children to handle responding in their verbal and physical temper expressions, as well as delays in responding. The child learns how many times the parent is willing to call before really meaning it, how to interpret the tone of voice, and the limits for getting their own way. The response of parents and the interaction they have with their children at the point of interruption of play establishes life long character for children. Either the child will learn that play will be interrupted with obligation or that life is to be a continuous seeking of pleasure without obligation with others there to serve them.

Pleasure in Obligation is equal to play

The challenge entrusted to parents is to help their children maintain a positive experience as they make the transition between play and obligation. The disappointment and upset feelings resulting from play interruption must be replaced by enjoyment from obligation. How important then that the parent's call to obligation is filled with words and actions such as kindness, consistency, fairness, insistence, and patience. The way the parent calls the child to obligation will engrain response attitudes for the future teacher, employer, and spouse.

The experience of obligation which could include involvement with family in eating, working, worshiping or rest often starts off with feelings of upsetness because play has been interrupted but hopefully does not end there. The experience of new responsibility can and should be made a time and experience of joyfulness as well. The delight of being with family, enjoying a meal, seeing the room clean, experiencing worship exposes the child to a new and important principle. **Enjoyment and happiness comes within obligation as well as from play.**

Parents who provide the play opportunity and do not indulge the child but are willing to interrupt play with respect (absent of abuse, coerces, belittlement, domination) and move the child to obligation while modeling and presenting responsibility in a positive light are teaching the young person balanced living and the principle of self control.

Play is a step toward God

To encourage play without including restriction is to unfit the child to live within the principles of the golden rule, show disrespect to God and teaches the child to focus on self. When such a child comes to the classroom he/she will not appreciate learning, show respect to a person in authority and have a dislike for anything that requires responsibility.

Teachers are front line workers who are impacted by young people who have experienced an unbalance between play and obligation. They meet children influenced by uninterested adults who transferred roles to others some of whom may have indulged in play to free themselves from obligation. Teachers also have the privilege of reinforcing what good parenting has done in the home and keep the balance in education. It is true that all play with no study makes Johnny a dumb boy; however, it is also true that all obligation without play prevents balance in character development as God intended.

The insightful parent or teacher realizes that the ultimate influence with the child comes when they become involved with play, interruption and responsibility. Winning the heart of the young person during play makes interruption with obligation easier and embracing of responsibility a delight. Once enjoyment is associated with obligation education is a delight, the love of work is there for life and the child is on the road to becoming a contributing member of community and open to God's voice.

The Goal of Play

The child who accepts, without complaint, with enjoyment, the three components of play, interruption and obligation, will find there is an easy step to embrace God. The inclusion of the three components brings the child into harmony with God, creation and the created impulses of his/her own being. To think that life owes only play leads to selfishness and the dissatisfaction of intemperance. To think of life, as all obligation without a time to play is to miss the renewing refreshment relaxation can bring.

God has so arranged His creation to enter life's experience in the natural setting of play. His plan draws

from those in leadership their abilities to not only provide safe and secure play experiences but also to see their responsibility to interrupt and move the child to be involved with the "joy" of obligation. **In order for the adult to lead the child to love's obligation (in home, school, church and community) they themselves must have embraced it.**

True educators recognize the trust of impressionable children and love them too much to be indulgent. Parents lay the foundation and teachers build on the foundation laid. For a teacher to not accept the trust of the child is to tend the child toward being unfit for relationships, society and eternity. Love for children entrusted to our care constrains us to include play, fair interruptions, and reasonable responsibility.