

## **LAB EXERCISE #10**

### **PLAY**

Play is a critical part of a child's development. It is through play that children develop a sense of self, that they refine language, that they learn to negotiate with others and that they expand their imaginations. For children, play can take many forms but it remains an extremely important part of the child's life.

It has been said that "play is the work of the child." It has also been said that children today do not have as many chances to play as children did in previous years. There are many other views of play and its value to development. However, most developmental psychologists agree that play is crucial for a child's development

Researchers have identified many different types of play. The type of play in which a child engages changes as a child grows older. Play is connected to cognitive development. As children mature cognitively, their play changes qualitatively.

Infants engage in sensorimotor play in which they explore objects and their world. Once children develop the ability to mentally represent objects, an ability which typically occurs in the second year of life, they begin to engage in symbolic or pretend play. A shoe becomes a cup. At very young ages, pretend play is often not representational. Any object can become any other object. Children will mimic the adults in their lives. Pretend play remains an important type of play for older children, as well, although its form changes.

In the early years, children often engage in parallel play. In other words, two children may play side by side, engaging in similar activities, but not interact with one another.

As children get older, they begin to engage in social play with others. Games become a part of the play world. They begin to differentiate between play and work ("school"). Their play may become more gender-stereotyped and children tend to play with the same-sex playmates. Children's play becomes more complex and involved. Dramatic play becomes common. There is more cooperative play among older children in which each child has a role to play. Sometimes this cooperative play can appear to be uncooperative.

Children often invent games with elaborate rules which adults can find hard to follow. The rules frequently do not follow the logic of adults although the children involved see the rules as making absolute sense.

One issue surrounding older children's play involves the level of direction that adults should have in children's play. Another revolves around the recent influence of computer games and whether or not such items stifle creativity.

In this exercise, you will be observing two groups of children (one older and one younger) to determine patterns of play. Before beginning the observation, you will need to diagram the play area, indicating approximate size and listing the materials available. Include this diagram with your lab report. This is not as detailed as the diagram you drew in Lab #2. It serves to set the scene for the play. You may choose to copy your Lab#2 drawing and use it here. Use a highlighter to indicate the play areas and colored markers with show where the children are.

During your time at the center, watch two different groups at play. You should try to observe one group of children under the age of 4 and one group of children over the age of 4. Watch each for 10-12 minutes. Then answer the questions about each group. You should take notepaper with you in order to write down your observations and make certain to take copies of the diagrams from Lab #2.

### Younger Children's Group

- Describe the children involved in the play. Include first name, gender and ages.
- Who initiated the play sequence? How did it start?
- What did the children do? What role(s) does each child play?
- Describe what happens during the play. (Make sure to include any new children who happen along and become included in the play.)

### Older Children's Group

- Describe the children involved in the play. Include first name, gender and ages.
- Who initiated the play sequence? How did it start?
- What did the children do? What role(s) does each child play?
- Describe what happens during the play. (Make sure to include any new children who happen along and become included in the play.)

LAB REPORT  
PART B QUESTIONS

1. What age differences in play did you notice? Describe in detail.
2. What gender differences in play did you notice?
3. Were adults involved in the play? If so how? Discuss the issue raised above. Should adults actively participate in children's play? Why?
4. What do you think children gained from their play today?