

THEORIES OF PLAY

A. Early Classical Theories

1. Surplus Energy (Schiller 1873 Spencer 1875)

Play is the result of surplus energy that exists because the young are freed from the business of self-preservation through the activities of their parents. Energy finds its release in the aimless exuberant activities of play.

(Based upon postulates: a quantity of energy is available to the child; there is a tendency to expend energy thought is not necessary for maintenance of life balance.)

2. Relaxation Theory (Lazarus 1883 Patrick 1916)

(Recreation) Play is seen as a mode of dissipating the inhibitions built up from-fatigue due to tasks that are relatively new to the organism. Thus, play is found more often in childhood. Play replenishes energy for as yet unfamiliar cognitive activities of the child and reflects deep-rooted race habits -- phylogenetically acquired behaviors that are not therefore new to the organism.

(Phylogenetic - functions common to the race Ontogenetic - functions specific to the individual requiring training)

3. Pre-Exercise Theory- (Groos - 1898) Play is the necessary practice for behaviors that are essential to later survival. The playful fighting of animals or the rough and tumble play of children are essentially the practice of skills that will later aid their survival.

4. Recapitulation Theory (G ' Stanley Hall - 1906 Wundt - 1913)

Play is seen not as an activity that develops future instinctual skills, but rather, that it serves to rid the organism of primitive and unnecessary instinctual skills carried over by hereditary. Each child passes through a series of play stages corresponding to and recapitulating the cultural

stages in the development of the race. (Plays roots are in the ritual of the savage and his need for magic)

5. Growth Theories (Appleton 1919)

Play Is a response to a generalized drive for growth In the organism. Play serves to facilitate the mastery of skills necessary to the function of adult behaviors.

6. Ego Expanding Theories - (Lange - 1902 Claparde - 1911)

Play is nature's way of completing the ego an expressive exercising of the ego and the rest of the personality; an exercising that develops cognitive skills and aids in the emergence of additional skills.

Current Theories of Play

1. Infantile Dynamics (Lewin)

Play occurs because the cognitive life space of the child is still unstructured, resulting in failure to discriminate between real and unreal. The child passes into a region of playful unreality where things are changeable and arbitrary.

(Buytendijk)

The child plays because he is a child and because his cognitive dynamics do not allow for any other way of behaving. Play is an expression of the child's uncoordinated approach to the environment.

2. Cathartic Theory - (Freud 1908)

Play represents an attempt to partially satisfy drives or to resolve conflicts when the child really doesn't have the means to do so. When a child works through a drive through play he has at least temporarily resolved it.

3. Psychoanalytic Theory - (Buhler - 1930. Anna Freud 1937)

Play represents not merely wish-fulfilling tendencies but also mastery -- an attempt through repetition to cope with overwhelming anxiety-provoking situations. Play is defensive as well as adaptive in dealing with anxiety'.

4. Cognitive Theory (Piaget - 1962)

Play is derived from the child's working out of two fundamental characteristics of his mode of experience and development. These are accommodation and assimilation -- the attempts to integrate new experiences into the relatively limited number of motor and cognitive skills available at each age.

Accommodation- the attempt to imitate and interact physically with the environment.

Assimilation - the attempt to integrate externally derived precepts or motor actions in a limited amount of schemata.

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