

Play: A Panacea for Child Socialization

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Abstract

The importance of play in the socialization of children cannot be over emphasized. To this end, this paper discussed the concept of socialization, the concept of play, types of play, barriers to play, play and child socialization. Finally, it was recommended among others that teachers should adopt play method in teaching and learning so that children can socialize and be creative.

Keywords: Play, Child Socialization, Panacea, Early childhood, Education, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Socialization is the process that prepares humans to function in social life. According to Nmom (2002:116) socialization is the fulfillment of individual potentials for personal growth and development. It is the process by which humans are transformed into a self having a sense of identity, being capable of discipline and ordered behaviour, and endowed with ideals, values, and aspirations. Although there are biological factors through the 'Gene' or generic compositions that brings about physical features such as size, shape, temperament and other capabilities in children. The actual humanness is acquired through the process of socialization because it builds instincts and drive in children. Children identify themselves, build personality, develop concept of love, freedom, justice, right, wrong and others through the process of socialization.

In this new millennium, teachers, parents, caregivers, administrators are faced with challenges which relate with preparing children for the future in a world of uncertainties. The dilemma of socialization has always established ways of helping children to get ready to face their unknown world from the known. Anxiety about socialization has been heightened by the present state of the world, with new threat posed by climate change, terrorism, cultural and religious differences, poverty and technology. This calls for seriousness on the part of all stakeholders in education to properly educate and socialize our children to survive and thrive in the world.

Solving the problem of socialization made people like Jerome Bruner, Jean Piaget, and other psychologist to make suggestions on how the problems can be solved. Bruner in his book: *Beyond the Information Given* (1973) focused on cognitive processes such as problem-solving, explanation and play and Jean Piaget's work supports this approach.

Play is clearly needed to tackle the socialization challenges of the 21st century. In this work, focus will be on the meaning of play, types of play, the barriers of play and the role of play in child socialization.

Concept of Play

The Welsh Assembly Government play policy (2002) defines play as: “encompassing” children’s behavior which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward, and is a fundamental and integral part of a healthy development, not only for individual children, but also for society which they live.” This means that play is freely negotiated. Children choose by themselves when, how and what to play. Children decide the rules of the play. In a similar vein, Johnson (2007) defines play as “an intrinsic self renewing constant that humans can enter into. It takes the form of arts, drama, language use and human actions and ideation generally”. Play in humans can also be said to be a separate mode of existence different from being in a reality state of mind so as to adapt to ordinary life circumstances (Johnson, Christic and Wardle, 2005). All children and young people need play. Play is a biological, physical, psychological, social and emotional necessity, and is the basis for health development and well being of individual and the society in general.

In the views of Johnson (2007) play is a two edged sword. To him while play is life affirming, it is not necessarily a positive force for creativity. Play rather is expressive and affective as well as a process that can be cognitively controlled.

Types of Play

Play is a child’s serious occupation. To John Dewey, play is a serious business. The pioneering developmental psychologist Lov Vygotsky thought that in the preschool years, play is the leading source of development. To Mana Montessori, play is work of thee child.”

Parten (1933) identified six types of play as discussed below:

- **Unoccupied Play:** This is a relatively infrequent style of play. In this type of play, the child is relatively stationary and appears to be performing random movements with no apparent purpose.
- **Solitary Play:** This is oftenly seen in children between ages 2 and 3 years. Here children are completely engrossed in playing and does not seem to notice other children. Apparently, they play alone.
- **On looker Play:** Here the child takes an interest in other children’s play but does not join. May ask questions or just talk to other children, but they may engaged actively in watching them.
- **Parallel Play:** The child may watch other children’s play but not actively engaged with them.
- **Associative Play:** This type of play involves strong social interaction between the children while they are playing.
- **Cooperative Play:** Here some level of organization enters children’s play. For example, play has some rules, roles and is grouped based. To Parten (1933) learning to play means learning to relate with others.

Other types of play according to Department of Education on training and development include Drama, fantasy, exploratory, manipulative, physical and games with rules:

- **Drama:** Children take on roles and play or act. It can be fiction or non-fiction.
- **Fantasy:** Children create props and use these as they engage in fantasy adventures. For example, mountain climbing. They can put ropes on tree trunks and climb as mountain climbing adventure.
- **Exploratory:** Here they explore the properties and functions of materials, equipment and objects. For example, experimenting with tools to see how it works.
- **Manipulative:** Children manipulate and explore objects, parts and materials. For example, building with building blocks, working with puzzles.
- **Physical:** Children explore movement and ways to combine movements. For example, skipping with skipping ropes, throwing and catching balls.
- **Games with rules:** Children create rules for games and follow the rules to reach a shared goal. For example, computer games, may be played with rules

Barriers to Play

Contemporary life style poses serious threats to play in children. Elkind (2007) opines that competitively organized sports at younger age, technology, toys, use of academic play things hinder play in children. Johnson (2007) quoting Elkind (2007) reports that Elkind (2007) in his book: *The Power of Play: How spontaneous, imaginative activities lead to happier healthier children*, Elkind posits that positive experiences results when home, school and community activities for children represent a well proportionate blend of play, work and love. Other barriers to play include over protection of children by parents, fear of the safety of children and academic success by parents, video games and watching of DVDs among others.

Play and Child Socialization

Play activities are essential for healthy development of children. Play, influences the development of fine and gross muscles for motor skills, language, socialization, emotional well-being, creativity, and learning ability among others. Basically, play make children active. Play content should come from the child's own imagination and experiences. Unfortunately, the play experience for today's child especially those in the urban areas are structured. Children are passively entertained by electronic media like TV, Video games, internet and computerized toys. This robs children of unstructured play which their parents experienced, and does not allow genuine interaction with other kids and reduces time for creative play.

Experts in Early Childhood Education (ECE) noted that play helps in developing all the domains of the child positively. In the views of Churcher (2000) the child needs both physical and mental activities for his physical and intellectual development because these qualities are determinants of personality. In a similar vein, Okafor cited in Ekanem, Essien and Ekanem (2011) observed that at preschool age, play activities are highly responsible for emotional adjustment and mental development of children. When children involve in play activities and with other kids, they expand their horizon. They learn from other's activities and their behaviour. During play, children make simple rules, they learn to takes turns, share the play facilities

(equipment or toys) clap for good performance and cheer the best performer. The child learns from the actions of his peer and assesses himself from the point of acceptance.

Play socializes the child and helps him in building up a personality. Experts in Early Childhood Education (ECE) have agreed that play life of a child is an index for his social maturity and provides insight into his personality than any other activity. This is in line with the view of Barrow (1977) who states that all of the school influences, affecting the social area perhaps the most significant ones have to do with play-games, sports, dance “under physical education activity. Similarly, Peretomode (1999) noted that the child’s survival depends on social development and that enables him to acquire knowledge, tasks, habits, standard of judgment and morals. Play gives children freedom to learn and make choices of what to learn. The achievement of total development of the child which is the ultimate goal of education can be achieved through play.

The school is a major agent of the child’s socialization, the teacher can adopt the play-way method of teaching children in order to inculcate behaviours that can enhance the building of their personality. The school is a good agent for the child’s socialization. It is through the school that all round development of the child - mentally, physically, emotionally and socially can be achieved. Play becomes that basic tool for this achievement.

CONCLUSION

Play is a child’s serious occupation and through play children can rule their world. They also explore their world through play. Play helps children to develop a broader range of skills and understanding of their environment. Therefore, play should be employed during teaching and learning for effectiveness and efficiency.

Educational Implications

- Play is an important tool for learning and well being during early years and beyond, therefore, teachers should encourage guided play in the school.
- Play facilities and space should be made available in primary schools to promote physical and mental exercise while helping pupils to relate with one another.
- Opportunities should be provided for interaction during teaching and learning to enhance children’s innovation and creativity.
- Parent Teachers Association should assist schools in the provision of play facilities.
- Teachers should use the play method in teaching because it enhances leaning and socialization.
- Government should make and implement policies that emphasize the creation of play environment in both public and private primary schools.

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