

Running Head: AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF PLAY

Yesterday and Today, I Always Play

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Play is a complicated word. The word play can have multiple definitions. The definition depends solely on who you ask. In the dictionary, play is defined as “to amuse oneself, as by taking part in a game or sport; engage in recreation” (Guralnik). Serena Arnold, a multi-faceted woman, has her own definition of play. According to Arnold, play is characterized by nine different characteristics. These characteristics include privacy, rhythm, negotiation, form, chance, freedom, challenge, pretense (pretend) and success. Arnold believes that in order to be playing, all nine characteristics have to be present. Arnold sees these nine characteristics as an action system.

Along with Arnold, Joseph Levy has his own definition of play. Levy categorizes play through three different behaviors. His three categories include suspension of reality, intrinsic motivation and internal locus of control. Like Arnold, Levy believes that play exists when the player has a chance to experience all three behaviors. Throughout my paper, I will be describing a few past and present play experiences and how they included all three of Levy’s characteristics. Also, I will be discussing the play facilitation that took place during my play. Along with that, I will include quotes from both Reggio Emilia and current brain research on play. I will be focusing primarily on the relationship between brain research and play.

Unfortunately I do not remember any extremely young play experiences. I do not have one experience that I remember as being my earliest recollection. What I do remember is a lot of different play experiences starting around the age of six. My first experience I am going to describe is one particular experience when I was playing with my Barbie’s. I loved Barbie’s when I was young and I played with them all the time. I would play with them once a day if I had the opportunity, and sometimes more than once a day, and I would play with them for hours on end. I had dozens of Barbie’s, all different shapes, sizes, ages and ethnicities. Of course you

had to have all the accessories to go along with your Barbie's, and I did. Some of my accessories included different cars; I had a Barbie Jeep and a Barbie Corvette. I had animals which included horses, cats and dogs. I had a Barbie school set, a Barbie garden, a Barbie gym and many more Barbie accessories. Although I loved all my Barbie accessories, I had one particular accessory that was my favorite. I had a Barbie "Dream House." This house was huge and it had everything that a Barbie wanted and/or needed. It was a two story house with numerous rooms and when I was young this house was enormous to me. I remember thinking I could live in the house with the Barbie's.

In this particular experience I was playing with my friend Sarah. "Children are open to exchange and reciprocity. From early in life they negotiate with the social and physical worlds - with everything the culture brings them. Children are looked at through an 'At positive approach,' not an 'At risk approach'. Education is based on relationships" (Malguzzi). After Sarah and I greeted each other we started the playing by locking ourselves in my room. Of course we couldn't really lock ourselves in the room but we did our best to have privacy. Then we began to take all of the Barbie's out of their storage boxes along with all of their accessories. When we took everything out it covered the entire floor. Basically, my room turned into a Barbie dream world. Then Sarah and I would lay all the Barbie's out on the floor and choose which ones we wanted to be ours. Sometimes we would fight over what Barbie was whose, but we usually resolved our disagreements right away. We would soon realize that there were many more Barbie's to still choose from and we didn't want to leave those Barbie's out. After we choose all of the Barbie's we would then take a long time dressing them and doing their hair. I remember my favorite Barbie dress was a brick red ball gown that made every Barbie look like a princess. After each Barbie was dressed and ready we then picked their friends and boyfriends.

I specifically remember that all of the adult Barbie's had to have a boyfriend or a husband, and if they had a husband they surely had children. One thing I remember that we never did was choose names for the Barbie's. They always had the same name they came with. There were multiple Barbie's with the names Barbie, Stacey and Ken. Then we would begin to create a scenario the Barbie's would live out. This scenario was that one Barbie was getting married. The Barbie that was getting married was one of the Barbie's I had chosen and the groom was picked by Sarah. We picked out the wedding dress, the groom, the bridesmaids and groomsmen, the flowers and the guests that would attend. Then we held the wedding ceremony which turned out so lovely. The wedding was held outside in a garden and there were a lot of guests in attendance. During the wedding I played the roles of Ken and Barbie while Sarah played the role of the pastor who was performing the ceremony. After the wedding was over Barbie and Ken moved into the Barbie "dream house" right away. Then Barbie and Ken began to start their new life together. Each day, Ken would go to work and Barbie would stay at the house doing numerous things. Then all of the sudden, out of nowhere they had kids and their family would continue to grow and grow really fast. Sarah and I played with this scenario for awhile; probably a couple hours or so. I remember that the Barbie "Dream House" was where every Barbie wanted to be. All of our playing took place in or very near the house. Then after a few hours, our moms came into the room and told us that it was time for us to stop playing because Sarah had to go home for the day. I always hated the time when we had to stop living in the Barbie dream world and I absolutely hated to clean everything up. I felt so sad when the Barbie's had to go back in their boxes because the Barbie's had become such good friends to me. Then Sarah left and the day went on where I was once again living in reality. Although I wasn't living in the

Barbie world anymore that day, I couldn't wait until the next time Sarah came over so we could create a whole other Barbie world.

In this play experience with my friend Sarah, I experienced all three of Joseph Levy's characteristics of play. First off, I experienced internal locus of control. I experienced this characteristic just by choosing which Barbie I was going to play with. Once I chose a Barbie that Barbie belonged specifically to me and I chose what and what not that Barbie would and could do. I was in control because I chose her outfits, her hair style, her friends, the position she stood or sat in and where she went in the room. "Brain research confirms that physical activity-moving, stretching, walking-can actually enhance the learning process" (Jensen, p. 34). Also, I chose everything that she said and everyone that she came into contact with. Without that Barbie in my hand she was lifeless. Once she was in my hand whatever she did was because of the control I had over her. Secondly, I experienced intrinsic motivation. Playing Barbie's was satisfying to me because it made me feel like an adult and like I was all grown up like mommy. I liked the fact that I was in control and could make all of the choices. It was also satisfying to me because it was just fun. I liked the fact that I could be creative and experiment with different clothes and hairstyles. One thing that Reggio Emilia is based on is "creativity and aesthetics" (Meerilinga). I was able to let my creative juices flow without any guidance which felt really rewarding to me. According to Reggio Emilia philosophy, "what is most appreciated all along is the shared sense of satisfaction and accomplishment as individuals and group" (Hendrick, p. 73). Lastly, I experienced suspension of reality. I experienced this characteristic once the Barbie's came out of their boxes and my room was transformed into a Barbie dream world. Because I was in control of the Barbie's I would drift off into another world and actually pretend that I was the Barbie. When I was playing, the Barbie would do things that I always wanted to do or often

did. I lived out my fantasies and dreams through the Barbie. With the Barbie's I would use my imagination to create all different kinds of places and settings that we would both experience.

Along with Levy's three characteristics of play there were a few play facilitation techniques that enhanced my play experience. First there was indirect guidance. Indirect guidance was present because of the Barbie's, all the accessories, my room and money. My room allowed us to have the space to escape into the Barbie dream world. The Barbie's and accessories allowed us to do the playing and create exciting and dreamy situations. Without the reality of money, I would have had no Barbie's and therefore not have had any opportunities to be in control and escape reality. Secondly there was direct guidance, specifically verbal guidance. There wasn't a lot of direct guidance provided, but both Sarah's mom and my mom would occasionally make sure that we were playing nicely and safely. If we didn't play nice our moms would warn us we would have to stop playing if we couldn't be respectful towards each other.

My next play experience that I want to describe is when I was around ten years old. The experience included my two cousins, Krista and Kimmy, and myself. This play experience always took place at our grandparent's house in their office. What the three of us did was pretend that we had a ticket service. This ticket service consisted of booking trips and events and then selling the tickets for that event or trip. The three of us would take turns being the employee and the costumers. Since there were three of us, one person always sat out until that sale was over. Our rule was that only two people could play at one time; the employee and customer. Before we started to play we had to make tickets and money. We had some monopoly money we used, but it wasn't enough because trips are expensive, so we had to make more. The tickets and money were made of white computer paper. We cut multiple pieces of

paper in a square shape. On the money we wrote different dollar amounts. We left the tickets blank for the time being and then stored them all in one of the desk drawers. After the tickets and money were made, we made sure the computer and calculator was on. After the set-up was done, we were ready to play.

On this particular day, I started off as the worker. Once the ticket service was open, Krista came into the room from outside in the hallway. She introduced herself and then said that she wanted to book a trip to Hawaii. As soon as I heard her request, I began typing on the computer to find out the price of her trip. I didn't type anything specific on the computer I just felt like it was the right thing to do; it seemed official. Once I found the price for the trip I told her how much it was and that the trip needed to be paid for right away. She proceeded to pay me in monopoly money and then I reached into the drawer to get her trip tickets. Once I took them out of the drawer I wrote on the ticket what it was for, how much it cost and when she paid for it. Then I used my grandparent's big calculator to print a receipt. When the receipt printed Krista had to sign it to vouch that she had paid for her trip. After she received her tickets and her change she left the room, but the experience wasn't over yet. She came back in after a few seconds to turn her tickets in. All of the sudden I was no longer the ticket sales person I was the person she turned her tickets into to go on her trip. I took her tickets and checked over them to make sure everything was taken care of. Everything was fine so Krista left the room to begin her trip to Hawaii.

In the ticket sales play experience I experienced Levy's three characteristics of play. First off, I experienced suspension of reality. I experienced this characteristic because in this situation I was a ticket sales worker. I wasn't Nichole sitting at her grandparent's house with her two cousins. I was a business woman in her office helping her first customer of the day. The

room was no longer upstairs in Santa Clarita. The room was in Los Angeles at an office building on the first floor. Through the experience, I used my imagination to take me into the business world. Secondly, I experienced intrinsic motivation. Playing the role of a business woman was satisfying to me because I liked the fact that I was the one in charge. I also liked the fact that I had costumers who wanted to come to my business to buy tickets, instead of another business, and that my costumers treated me with respect. It felt really good to have my costumer look up to me and come to me for help. Thirdly, I experienced internal locus of control. I experienced this behavior of play because I was living out the role of a worker. Brain research quotes, "Play is the language of children. While adults use words as tools to communicate, children use play materials symbolically, instead of words, to represent their changing world" (Fuller). When I was the worker I had the power to sell the tickets to the costumer if I wanted to. If I didn't like the way I was being treated I could tell the costumer that I wasn't going to sell her anything. I was also in control because I was the one behind the desk. Behind the desk I had the power to use the computer and the calculator. I also had the power behind the desk to open the drawer and get out the tickets and money. Without the role of the worker there would be no ticket sales. I was in control of the situation mainly because of the role that I was playing in the experience.

In the ticket sales scenario there was different play facilitation guidance; both direct and indirect. The direct guidance came before the playing actually started. The direct guidance was physical guidance. My grandma would go up to the office with the three of us and make sure that there was nothing sharp or dangerous we could hurt ourselves with. Once she removed anything dangerous and left the room our play began. The indirect guidance came during the play. The office at my grandparent's house helped us be able to create a ticket selling office. "Children's best and most exciting work involves an intense or arousing encounter between

themselves and their inner or outer world” (Vaage). Without the computer, calculator and desk we could not have been able to play. Essentially, the office was the indirect guidance through the means of equipment, material, space and environment. “The environment is seen here as educating the child; in fact; it is considered as ‘the third educator’...” (Edwards, P. 148).

The next experience I want to describe happened mainly when I was in the sixth grade. This play always took place during recess at my elementary school. At my school there was a big baseball diamond right in the middle of the playground. Everyday at recess all the girls and all the boys would separate into two different teams. The teams usually ended up being boys versus girls and that is true in this case. When we had separated into teams one person from each team met in the center of the diamond. In the center the two players played rock, paper, scissors to determine who would be up to bat first. Once everything was set to begin, we took our place on the diamond and began our kickball game.

This particular experience the girls were up first. Two different girls on my team went before me. They each kicked the ball and made it to one base. Now it was my turn. I stepped up to the plate and waited for the pitch. The first pitch came and I decided to let it just go by. I thought to myself that one strike wouldn’t hurt; I wanted to keep the boys team on their toys. Then, the next pitch came and I kicked the ball as hard as I could. To my surprise, the ball soared clear over the head of the boys and I began running for the bases. I ran as fast as I could while I heard the girls on my team cheering in the background. I passed first, second and third base, then I started to run for home plate. The boys had just got the ball but it was too late; I had kicked a homerun. Everyone was cheering, even the kids on the playground who weren’t playing. I was so excited and tired from running so fast. I can’t remember much about the rest of the game, I can only remember how proud of myself I was.

In this play experience that took place at my elementary school Levy's characteristics were all present. First, intrinsic motivation was present. Playing kickball was satisfying because it made me feel good about myself. When I kicked the homerun I felt excited and proud of myself. Second, I experienced internal locus of control. I experienced this when I was up at bat (even though we were kicking the ball, not hitting it). When I was up at bat I used my foot to kick the ball which gave me the power. When I was up to bat no one else had the control or power to kick the ball. I was the only one who had control over my foot and my reflexes. Third, I experienced suspension of reality. I experienced this characteristic also when I was up to bat. When the ball was coming towards me I imagined that I was really in a baseball field with a packed stadium. I also imagined that everyone was cheering for me to score when I was running the bases of the diamond. "It's helpful to think of the brain as a muscle. One of the best ways to maximize the brain is through exercise, and movement. Everybody feels better after exercise. There's a reason for it" (Madigan).

Through kickball there was different play facilitation guidance. The indirect guidance came from the baseball diamond, the playground, the school, my classmates and the ball. Without the school existing play, in the form of a game, would not have been able to occur. "In later childhood and early adolescence, children enjoy developing their skills through team and individual sports, games, with increasingly more complex rules, and specialized club and youth activities" (Isenberg, p.5). Likewise, without the playground, the diamond and all of my classmates the play wouldn't have been able to occur either. The direct guidance comes from the teachers and the staff. The guidance is mostly verbal, but it could possibly be physical. In this experience, our teacher had to tell us once to make sure that we were being respectful to each

other. In other experiences, there had been instances where one of the teachers had to come and escort one of the players off because they were being verbally aggressive.

The last experience of play I want to describe is the play that I engage in now. My play comes in the form of an amusement park. Disneyland is my favorite amusement park. A few friends of mine and myself go all the time because we have season passes. Disneyland to me is truly the happiest place on earth.

Levy's characteristics of play are present when I go to Disneyland. First off, intrinsic motivation is present. I feel very satisfied when I go to Disneyland because it is enjoyable to me and I feel that I am able to let myself relax. At Disneyland I have the ability to let go of the worries and stress that comes from the responsibility world. It's a time for me to enjoy my leisure time. Second, I experience internal locus of control. I am in control at Disneyland because I have the ability to choose and plan my day out just the way I want it to occur. No one else will tell me what to do or how to do it. I have the power to choose my destiny when I'm at Disneyland. Third, I experience suspension of reality. Sometimes when I'm at Disneyland I pretend that Disneyland belongs to me and I have the ability to do whatever I want. With my friends, we pretend that we're not just normal everyday Disneyland-goers. Sometimes we pretend to be famous, invisible or we like to have unusual accents.

Through going to Disneyland I experience indirect and direct guidance. I experience indirect guidance through the physicality of Disneyland. With Disneyland existing, I am able to experience play. If Disneyland was not around, then I would not have the ability to experience play in my adult years. "The Reggio Emilia approach to education is committed to the creation of conditions for learning that will enhance and facilitate children's construction of "his or her own powers of thinking through the synthesis of all the expressive, communicative and cognitive

languages" (Edwards and Forman, 1993)" (Reggio). I also experience direct guidance. The direct guidance usually comes in the form of the people I am with and the guidance is mostly verbal guidance. The people I am with usually put in their opinion or comments about what we should do that day. They help me make decisions and make the day extra fun.

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