

On the Play of the Child

*Indications by Rudolf Steiner
for Working with Young Children*



Selected and edited by Freya Jaffke

Published by the Waldorf Early Childhood Association
of North America
on behalf of the International Association of Waldorf Kindergartens

ISBN 0-9722238-4-3



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First English Edition, 2004

Published in the United States by the
Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America
285 Hungry Hollow Road
Spring Valley, NY 10977

First published in German by the Internationale Vereinigung der Waldorfkinderergärten
e.V., Stuttgart as *Vom Spiel des Kindes*.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
0-9722238-4-3

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and articles.

[12] *Die Erneuerung der paedagogisch-didaktischen Kunst durch Geisteswissenschaft*,
(Basel), GA 301, *The Renewal of Education*.

[13] *Die gesunde Entwicklung des Leiblich-Physischen als Grundlage der freien
Entfaltung des Seelisch-Geistigen* (Dornach), GA 303, *Soul Economy and Waldorf
Education*.

[14] *Anthroposophische Menschenkunde und Paedagogik* (verschiedene Stadte), GA
304a, *Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy 2*.

[15] *Die geistig-seelischen Grundkraefte der Erziehungskunst* (Oxford), GA 305, *The
Spiritual Ground of Education*.

[16] *Die paedagogische Praxis vom Gesichtspunkte geisteswissenschaftlicher
Menschenerkenntnis* (Dornach), GA 306, *The Child's Changing Consciousness*.

[17] *Gegenwartiges Geistesleben und Erziehung* (Ilkley), GA 307, *A Modern Art of
Education*.

[18] *Die Methodik des Lehrens und die Lebensbedingungen des Erziehens* (Stuttgart),
GA 308, *The Essentials of Education*.

[19] *Anthroposophische Paedagogik und ihre Voraussetzungen* (Bern), GA 309, *The
Roots of Education*.

[20] *Der paedagogische Wert der Menschenerkenntnis und der Kulturwert der
Paedagogik* (Arnheim), GA 310, *Human Values in Education*.

[21] *Die Kunst des Erziehens aus dem Erfassen der Menschenwesenheit*, GA 311, *The
Kingdom of Childhood*.

The following have not yet been translated:

[22] *Geistige Zusammenhaenge des menschlichen Organismus* (verschiedene Stadte),
GA 218– the lecture of 20 Nov 1922 is not yet translated.

[23] *Der Weg zu Gesundem Denken und die Lebenslage des Gegenwartsmenschen*,
GA 335, (*Die Erziehung und der Unterricht gegenueber der Weltlage der Gegenwart*).

[24] 03 March 1906, Hamburg.

[25] 24 February 1921, Utrecht.

[26] 1 January 1922, Dornach (discussion).

References

The quotations in this book are all taken from Rudolf Steiner’s works. Each of these works has a standard number in the collected works of Rudolf Steiner, the Gesamtausgabe, published by Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach, Switzerland. In the list of English titles below, the corresponding “GA number” is given. Where possible, the titles of the most recent translations are used.

Throughout the text, reference is made to this list of twenty-six works, whereby the number of each book is put in brackets.

[1] *Mein Lebensgang*, GA 28, *Autobiography—Chapters in the Course of My Life: 1861-1907*.

[2] *Luzifer-Gnosis*, GA 34, *The Education of the Child*, 1996 edition, Anthroposophic Press.

[3] *Die Erkenntnis des Übersinnlichen in unserer Zeit und deren Bedeutung für das heutige Leben* (Berlin und Köln) GA 55, in *The Education of the Child*, 1996 edition, Anthroposophic Press.

[4] *Antworten der Geisteswissenschaft auf die grossen Fragen des Daseins* (Berlin), GA 60, *The Education of the Child*, 1996 edition, Anthroposophic Press

[5] *Menschengeschichte im Lichte der Geistesforschung* (Berlin) GA 61, *Self-Education: The Self-Development of Man in the Light of Anthroposophy*. (typescript)

[6] *Vor dem Tore der Theosophie* (Stuttgart), GA 95, *At the Gates of Spiritual Science*.

[7] *Die spirituellen Hintergründe der äusseren Welt. Der Sturz der Geister der Finsternis* (Dornach), GA 177, *The Fall of the Spirits of Darkness*.

[8] *Die Erziehungsfrage als soziale Frage* (Dornach), GA 296, *Foundations of Human Experience*.

[9] *Die Waldorfschule und ihr Geist* (Basel/Stuttgart/Dornach), GA 297, *The Spirit of the Waldorf School*.

[10] *Rudolf Steiner in der Waldorfschule* (Stuttgart), GA 298, *Rudolf Steiner in the Waldorf School*.

[11] *Konferenzen (mit Rudolf Steiner)*, GA 300, *Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner, Vol. 1*.

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flowers. Such a subconscious feeling of gratitude may arise in us whenever we look at nature. It may be felt every morning when the sun rises, when beholding any of nature's phenomena. And if we only act properly in front of the children, a corresponding increase in gratitude will develop within them for all that comes to them from the people living around them, from the way they speak or smile, or the way such people treat them.

This universal mood of gratitude is the basis for a truly religious attitude; for it is not always recognized that this universal sense of gratitude, provided it takes hold of the whole human being during the first period of life, will engender something even further. In human life, love flows into everything if only the proper conditions present themselves for development. The possibility of a more intense experience of love, reaching the physical level, is given only during the second period of life between the change of teeth and puberty. But that first tender love, so deeply embodied in the inner being of the child, without as yet working outward, this tender blossom will become firmly rooted through the development of gratitude. Love, born out of the experience of gratitude during the first period of the child's life, is the love of God. One should realize that, just as one has to dig the roots of a plant into the soil in order to receive its blossom later on, one also has to plant gratitude into the soul of the child, because it is the root of love of God. The love of God will develop out of universal gratitude, as the blossom develops from the root. . If, during the first period of life, we create an atmosphere of gratitude around children. . then out of this gratitude toward the world, toward the entire universe, and also out of a thankfulness for being in this world at all (which is something that should ensoul all people), the most deep-seated and warmest piety will grow. Not the kind that lives on one's lips or in thought only, but piety that will pervade the entire human being, which will be upright, honest, and true.

As for gratitude, it must grow; but this can happen with the intensity necessary for such a soul and spiritual quality only when it develops from the child's tender life-stirrings during the time from birth to its change of teeth. And then this gratitude will become the root of the love of God. It is the foundation for the love of God.

08/30/1924, in *Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy 2* [14], p. 212

Our being, as adults, enters a child's being just as the candlelight enters the eye. Whatever we are around a child spreads its influence so that the child's blood circulates differently in the sense organs and in the nerves; since these operate differently in the muscles and vascular liquids that nourish them, the entire being of the child is transformed according to the external sense impressions received. One can notice the effect that the moral and religious environment of childhood has had on an old person, including the physical constitution. A child's future condition of health and illness depends on our ability to realize deeply enough that everything in the child's environment is mirrored in the child. The physical and moral elements are reflected and affect a person's health or illness later.

04/20/1923, in *The Child's Changing Consciousness* [16], pp. 125-128

And yet gratitude is a virtue that, in order to play a proper role in the human soul, must grow with the child. Gratitude is something that must already flow into the human being when the growth forces, working in the child in an inward direction, are liveliest, when they are at the peak of their shaping and molding activities. Gratitude is something that has to be developed out of the bodily-religious relationship I described as the dominant feature in the child from birth until the change of teeth. At the same time, however, gratitude will develop very spontaneously during this first period of life, as long as the child is treated properly. All that flows with devotion and love from a child's inner being toward whatever comes from the periphery through the parents or other educators, and everything expressed outwardly in the child's imitation, will be permeated with a natural mood of gratitude. We only have to act in ways that are worthy of the child's gratitude and it will flow toward us, especially during the first period of life. This gratitude then develops further by flowing into the forces of growth that make the limbs grow, and that alter even the chemical composition of the blood and other bodily fluids. This gratitude lives in the physical body and must dwell in it, since it would not otherwise be anchored deeply enough.

It would be very incorrect to remind children constantly to be thankful for whatever comes from their surroundings. On the contrary, an atmosphere of gratitude should grow naturally in children through merely witnessing the gratitude that their elders feel as they receive what is freely given by their fellow human beings, and in how they express their gratitude. In this situation, one would also cultivate the habit of feeling grateful by allowing the child to imitate what is done in the surroundings. If a child says "thank you" very naturally—not in response to the urging of others, but simply by imitation—something has been done that will greatly benefit the child's whole life. Out of this an all-embracing gratitude will develop toward the whole world.

The cultivation of this universal gratitude toward the world is of paramount importance. It does not always need to be in one's consciousness, but may simply live in the background of the feeling life, so that, at the end of a strenuous day, one can experience gratitude, for example, when entering a beautiful meadow full of

Note from the Editor of the English Edition

We are very pleased to be able to offer this translation of study material for those working in Waldorf kindergartens and early childhood programs in the English-speaking world.

Freya Jaffke has compiled a wonderful resource for early childhood educators and all those interested in the profound significance of free, creative play in the life of the child.

We hope that this publication will be helpful as study material for the international gathering of Waldorf early childhood educators in Dornach, Switzerland, at Easter 2005, and will also continue to provide inspiration into the future.

Susan Howard
Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America and
The International Association of Waldorf Kindergartens

September 2004

Preface

In anticipation of the International Teachers Conference that will be held at the Goetheanum in Dornach during Easter of 2005, the conference planning group of the International Association of Waldorf Kindergartens felt the need for a comprehensive collection of quotations about children's play from the collected works of Rudolf Steiner. The main theme of the conference will be children's play in the broadest sense of the word. Imaginative play is greatly threatened in our time. Its tremendous significance for the young child and for all of later life will be explored at the conference, and it is hoped that the conference can serve as a focal point for intensive worldwide collaboration on this theme.

It is our hope that the quotations collected in this book will stimulate the reader to explore the context in which they were given. This in turn might give rise to further insights. Familiarity with an anthroposophical image of the human being is a prerequisite for a full understanding of the quotations. At the beginning of this book, which is published both in German and English, the present situation of children's play is described in an article by Joan Almon.

It is my hope that this book will inspire readers and that the many important suggestions contained in it will enrich the daily work of those who carry the responsibility of caring for young children and working together with their parents.

I am aware of the fact that a collection of quotations such as this one can never be complete. I would be grateful to receive suggestions for more quotations, which could be incorporated in the next edition.

Freya Jaffke, February 2004

sense organ, first of all, is to expose itself, or the human being, passively to the external world's influences. But within every sense organ an inner activity also occurs that has a will nature.

1907, in *Education of the Child* [2], pp. 33-34

By a proper application of fundamental educational principles during the first seven years of childhood, the foundation is laid for the development of a strong and healthy will; for a strong and healthy will must have its support in well-developed forms of the physical body.

1907, in *Education of the Child* [2], pp. 20-21

. . . (D)uring the first period of life the child is in the highest degree and by its whole nature a being of sense. The child is like a sense organ. The surrounding impressions ripple, echo and sound through the whole organism because the child is not so inwardly bound up with its body as is the case in later life, but lives in the environment with its freer spiritual and soul nature. Hence the child is receptive to all the impressions coming from the environment.

04/09/1924, in *The Essentials of Education* [18], pp. 27-28

In other words, we need to become more aware of how anything acting as a stimulus in the environment continues to vibrate in the child. We must be very clear that, in this sense, we are dealing with imponderables.

Children are aware, whenever we do something in their environment, of the thoughts behind a hand-gesture or facial expression. Children intuit them: they do not, obviously, interpret facial features since what operates instead is a much more powerful inner connection between the child and adult than will exist later between adults. Consequently, we must never allow ourselves to feel or think anything around children that should not be allowed to ripple on within the child. The rule of thumb for all relationships in early education must be this. Whether in perception, feeling, or thought, whatever we do around children must be done in such a way that it may be allowed to continue vibrating their souls.

The psychologist, the observer of souls, the person of broad practical experience, and the doctor thus all become a unity, insofar as the child is concerned. This is important, since anything that makes an impression on the child, anything that causes the soul's response, continues in the blood circulation and digestion, becoming a part of the foundation of health in later years. Due to the imitative nature of the child, whenever we educate the spirit and soul of the child, we also educate the body and physical nature of the child. This is the wonderful metamorphosis—that whatever approaches children and touches their spirit and soul, becomes their physical, organic organization, and their predisposition to health or illness in later life.

08/29/1924, in *Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy 2* [14], pp. 196-97

The only principle necessary at this stage is that human behavior should be worthy of imitation. This includes also thinking, because in their own way, children perceive whether our thoughts are moral or not. People do not usually believe in these imponderables, but they are present nevertheless. While around young children, we should not allow ourselves even a single thought that is unworthy of being absorbed by the child.

03/26/1923, in *Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy 2* [14], p. 66

Until age seven, children are entirely given over to the influences coming from their environment. The following comparison can be made: I breathe in the oxygen of the air, which is part of my surroundings, to unite, at the next moment, my bodily nature with it, thus changing some part of the external world into my own inner world, where it works, lives, and weaves within me. Likewise, with each indrawn breath, children up to the age of seven bring outer influences into their “inner soul breath,” by incorporating every gesture, facial expression, act, word, and even each thought coming from their surroundings. Just as the oxygen in my surroundings pulsates in my lungs, the instruments of my breathing, and blood circulation, so everything that is part of the surroundings pulsates through the young child.

08/29/1923, in *Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy 2* [14], p. 195

. . . (T)he young child is almost entirely one sense organ. What is the nature of a sense organ? It surrenders fully to the world. Consider the eye. The entire visible world is mirrored in the eye and is contained in it. The eye is totally surrendered to the world. Likewise the child, though in a different way, is surrendered fully to the environment. We adults may taste sweet, bitter, or acid tastes on the tongue and with the palate, but the tastes do not penetrate our entire organism. Although we are not usually aware of it, it is nevertheless true to say that when the baby drinks milk the taste of the milk is allowed to permeate the entire organism. The baby lives completely like an eye, like one large sense organ. The differentiation between outer and inner senses occurs only later.

04/19/1923, in *The Child's Changing Consciousness* [16], p. 99

Within this same context we must now look at another point. During the initial period of life, that is, from birth until the change of teeth, the child lives like one great multifaceted sense organ, but as a sense organ where will forces were working in every moment of life. For me to use the expression “a sense organ where will forces are working” may sound strange, but this is only because of the complete inadequacy of what we are told by contemporary physiology and the popular ideas derived from it. Today one does not associate will forces with the function of the human eye, for example. Nevertheless, even in the eye, the perceived image is due to will activity. The same is true of the functioning of every other sense organ: will substance is instrumental in creating the inner sense impressions. The task of a

Introduction

The following quotation is one of the most concrete indications that Rudolf Steiner gave concerning the kindergarten. Yet its content is fundamental and poses a challenge to us in regard to the way we do our daily work.

4/18/1923; in *The Child's Changing Consciousness*, bibliography number [16]

For the entire life of a preschool class revolves around the children adapting to the few people in charge, who should behave naturally so that the children feel stimulated to imitate whatever their teachers do.

It is unnecessary for preschool staff to go from one child to another and show each one what to do. Children do not yet want to follow given instructions. All they want is to copy what the adult does. The task of the kindergarten teacher is to adjust the work taken from daily life so that it becomes suitable for the children's play activities. The whole point of a preschool is to give young children the opportunity to imitate life in a simple and wholesome way.

A little later in the same lecture it says that this is “an incredibly important pedagogical task” and that it will “take a long time.” Hardly any work of this kind had been done at that point (1923!).

In many lecture-cycles for teachers and educators, Rudolf Steiner points to the importance of the first seven years for the whole of human life.

8/10/1923; in *A Modern Art of Education*, [17], p. 108

In true methods of education it can never be a question of considering the child as it is at a given moment, but in relation to the whole of its journey through life from birth to death; for the seed of the whole earthly life is already present in the first years of life.

Rudolf Steiner describes through a variety of new aspects how the little child is a being of imitation. He describes where this capacity for imitation comes from and what consequences this has for educators and for the environment which needs to be created around the child. Many descriptions are given of the young child as a sensory being and also as a being of will and how impressions from the environment work on the child.

Every teacher who lives intensively with the various indications given by Rudolf Steiner (also meditatively with certain passages) will notice a growing sense of responsibility towards the children. And it will become clear that education is based, in essence, on self-education. Rudolf Steiner even says:

The Child's Changing Consciousness, pp. 141-142

Essentially, there is no education other than self-education, whatever the level may be. This is recognized in its full depth within anthroposophy, which has conscious knowledge through spiritual investigation of repeated Earth lives. Every education is self-education, and as teachers we can only provide the environment for children's self-education. We have to provide the most favorable conditions where, through our agency, children can educate themselves according to their own destinies. This is the attitude that teachers should have toward children, and such an attitude can be developed only through an ever-growing awareness of this fact.

The passages from Rudolf Steiner's lectures in this book have been compiled mainly with an eye to children's play. They include the following aspects: the seriousness of play; the connection of play and work; the relationship of play to later life and health; and the importance of play materials. As the impulses for play always arise from the environment, some examples of the environment's influence are also included.

Out of his deep knowledge of the human being and his spiritual research, Rudolf Steiner was able to shed light on a variety of aspects in education. Apart from very important specific indications concerning different play materials, he was able to only give a few indications for the daily practice in the kindergarten. This task was taken up intensively when a kindergarten was started (after Steiner's death). This was accomplished, above all, by Elizabeth Grunelius, whom Steiner himself had asked to do this.

During the past eighty years of the twentieth century, there have been several books and articles written by Waldorf early childhood educators. (See *References*.) The authors of these publications have been able to point out detailed perceptions, for example, concerning the different stages of the freeing of the etheric forces in the child, the importance of the maternal etheric sheath, the play of the child, play and work, the creation of surroundings with appropriate play materials, ways to nurture the will of the child, and many other things.

Even though much has been accomplished in producing literature up to now, there is still plenty for the next generations of early childhood educators to do. It is also important to reexamine our own experiences and deepen them with the help of the anthroposophical study of the human being.

healthy moral sense if children see moral actions in their environment. If, before their seventh year, children see only foolish actions in their surroundings, the brain will assume the forms that adapt it to foolishness in later life. . .

. . . The joy of children in and with their environment must therefore be counted among the forces that build and shape the physical organs. They need teachers that look and act with happiness and, most of all, with honest, unaffected love. Such a love that streams, as it were, with warmth through the physical environment of the children may be said to literally "hatch" the forms of the physical organs.

The children who live in such an atmosphere of love and warmth, and who have around them truly good examples to imitate, are living in their proper element. One should thus strictly guard against anything being done in the children's presence that they should not imitate. One should not do anything that one would then have to say to a child, "You should not do that." The strength of children's tendency to imitate can be recognized by observing how they paint and scribble written signs and letters long before they understand them. Indeed, it is good that they paint the letters first by imitation and only later learn to understand their meaning. For imitation belongs to the time when the physical body is developing, while meaning speaks to the etheric, and the etheric body should not be worked on until after the change of teeth, after the outer etheric envelope has fallen away. All learning associated with speech in these years should be especially through imitation. Children will best learn to speak through hearing; no rules or artificial instruction of any kind can be good for this.

It is important to realize the value of children's songs, for example, as a means of education in early childhood. They must make pretty and rhythmical impressions on the senses; the beauty of sound is of greater value than the meaning. The more alive the impression is on the eye and ear the better. Dancing movements in musical rhythm have a powerful influence in building up the physical organs, and this should also not be undervalued.

08/10/1923, *A Modern Art of Education* [17], p. 108

Now, because the child is a most delicately balanced organ of sense, he is not only sensitive to the physical influences of his surroundings, but also to the moral influences, especially those of thought. However far-fetched it may appear to the modern materialistic mind, the child does, nevertheless, sense all that those in his environment are thinking. As parents or teachers we must not only refrain from actions that are outwardly unseemly, we must be inwardly true, inwardly moral in our thought and feeling, for the child senses these things and absorbs them. He does not merely shape his nature according to our words and actions, but in accordance with our whole attitude of heart and mind. The environment, then, is the most important thing of all in the first period of the child's education up to the seventh year.

1907, in *The Education of the Child* [2], pp. 17-23

With physical birth, the physical human body is exposed to the physical environment of the external world. Before birth, the protecting envelope of the mother's body surrounds it. What the forces and fluids of the enveloping mother's body have done for it thus far, must, from now on, be done by the forces and benevolence of the external physical world. Before the change of teeth in the seventh year, the human body has to accomplish a task on itself that is essentially different from the tasks of any other period of life. In this period the physical organs must form themselves into definite shapes; their whole structural nature must receive particular tendencies and directions. (Growth takes place in later periods as well; but throughout the whole succeeding life growth is based on the forces developed in this first life-period.) If true forms were developed, true forces would grow: if misshapen forms were developed, misshapen forms would grow. We can never repair what we have neglected as educators in the first seven years. Just as nature causes the proper environment for the physical human body before birth, so after birth the educator must provide for the proper physical environment. Only right physical environment works on the child in such a way that the physical organs correctly shape themselves.

Two "magic" words indicate how children enter into relationship with their environment. These words are *imitation* and *example*. . . Children imitate what happens in their physical environment, and in this process of imitation their physical organs are cast in the forms that thus become permanent. "Physical environment" must, however, be understood in the widest sense imaginable. It includes not just what happens around children in the material sense, but everything that occurs in their environment, everything that can be perceived by their senses, that can work on the inner powers of children from the surrounding physical space. This includes all moral or immoral actions, all wise or foolish actions that children see.

It is not moralistic talk or wise admonitions that influence children in this sense, but it is, rather, what adults do visibly before their eyes. The effect of admonition is that it shapes the forms, not of the physical, but of the etheric body. The etheric body is surrounded until the seventh year by a protecting etheric envelope, even as the physical body is surrounded before physical birth by the physical envelope of the mother-body. Everything that must evolve in the etheric body before the seventh year, ideas, habits, memory, and so on, all of this must develop "by itself," just as the eyes and ears develop within the mother-body without the influence of external light. The information in Jean Paul's excellent educational work, *Levana* or *Science of Education*, is no doubt true. He says that travelers have learned more from their nurses in their first years of life than they will in all of their journeys around the world. Children, however, do not learn by instruction or admonition, but through imitation. The physical organs shape themselves through the influence of the physical environment. Good sight will be developed in children if their environment has the proper conditions of light and color, while in the brain and blood circulation the physical foundations will be laid for a

Understanding and Fostering Healthy Creative Play

Joan Almon

Play is a fundamental activity of childhood, and the playful child is generally viewed as a healthy, active child. After a child has been ill, parents will often describe the seriousness of the illness in terms of whether the child was still able to play. "She was really sick and couldn't play at all," or "He was sick but was up playing," are comments often heard from parents. There is scientific research to support this view, showing that play is linked to children's healthy physical, social, emotional and mental development. The absence of play becomes a serious problem in children's lives.

There are many types of play, ranging from simple play where young children handle materials such as pots and pans and other household objects, to make-believe play where two or more children play out complex stories together. This can be in a single play session or over many days. One sees the same types of play among children all over the world, and one can speak of a common language of play. Children from different cultures, for example, can happily play together without knowing a single word of one another's spoken language.

At the same time, one sees differences according to children's age and development, their gender, and individual nature. Culture also plays a role. Among cultural differences, for instance, one sees that European children playing mother will push their dolls in prams, while in Africa they tie their baby dolls onto their backs with colourful cloths. Children imitate what they see around them and at the same time play bubbles up from deep inner wellsprings.

Even in situations of war or poverty, most children continue to play, although children suffering from serious illness or trauma may stop playing, at least for a time. What does it mean, then, that one hears in the U.S. and elsewhere that play is disappearing from childhood—that there is no time for play or that children have forgotten how to play? There are rising rates of physical and mental illness among children, and it may well be that this is related directly or indirectly to the loss of play. The World Health Organization, for instance, has sounded an alarm that mental illness among children may increase by 50% by the year 2020. At the same time, many countries are concerned about the increases in childhood obesity and related illnesses. Because play is so linked to children's healthy development, its absence must be taken seriously.

Waldorf early childhood educators have recognized the disappearance of play from childhood for some time, but increasingly we hear concern from other educators, psychologists and doctors. A child psychiatrist in the U.S., for example, recently wrote of a 50% reduction in children's play over the past 20 years. Interviews with experienced kindergarten teachers in the U.S. brought forward two common answers: there was considerably less time in their curriculum for play now than ten years ago, and when they gave children time to play, the children did not know what to do. A professor whose area of study is play noted a similar response. She asked

early childhood educators in a workshop how many had children in their kindergartens who did not know how to play. About 90% of the 200 teachers raised their hands. Experts are beginning to speak out about these problems in an effort to alert parents, educators, doctors and government officials. Organizations are also forming which are focusing on the importance of play, such as the Alliance for Childhood.

One naturally asks why play is disappearing, and there seem to be several answers. One is the amount of media children watch, and this includes television, films and computer time. The average time for a child in the U.S. to sit still in front of a screen is now between four and five hours per day outside of school time. This is time when children are not engaged in play, but it is also time when children are absorbing other people’s images. This limits the development of their own imagination.

Another factor is the growing emphasis on early learning. Using the U.S. as an example, five-year-olds are often attending all day kindergartens where they may spend 90 minutes a day on early reading, 60 minutes on mathematics, and devote time each day to science and social studies activities yet have no time for indoor play. Five year olds in many places in the U.S. are expected to enter kindergarten knowing their alphabet, basic sounds, numbers and much more. To prepare children for this, most pre-schools focus on teaching academics to three- and four-year-olds. Often, young children are tested on what they have learned in these early years so the stress on academic achievement becomes considerable.

A third factor is the growing amount of time young children spend in organized activities rather than in child-initiated play. Many young children are taking classes in gymnastics, sports, dance, music and other subjects. Some attend several classes a week after they return from their regular pre-school programs, leaving almost no time for unstructured play.

Perhaps the greatest consideration is that parents feel a need to see their children get ahead in life and push intellectual awareness and organized activities from the earliest ages, undervaluing play and discouraging children from engaging in it. Early childhood educators frequently complain that parents are insisting that the teachers push early academics even though they, the teachers, do not think the children need this push. Reaching the parents to help them understand the critical role of play in their child’s healthy development is probably the most important single step we can take in bringing play back into children’s lives.

An additional consideration with play is the role of imitation in stimulating play. Children need to see adults engaged in meaningful work, for it inspires children to play. Yet today’s children see very little real work in their environment. When helping children who can’t play, it is astonishing how quickly play can be reactivated once children are exposed to real work, whether it is cooking, gardening, carpentry or the like.

Creating the Right Environment for the Child

From the quotations above it is clear how important it is that special attention is given to the way the surroundings of the child are created. In order to create a good working atmosphere, the outward aspects and care of the environment are important, but there is also the inner attitude of the early childhood educator. The latter is equally perceptible for the child. In the following quotations the effect of the environment on the developing child is expressed.

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06/14/1920, in *Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner* [11], p. 99

It is certainly a correct observation that this poor handwriting first started when children's toys became so extraordinarily materialistic. It is terrible that such a large number of toys are construction sets. They really are not toys at all because they are atomistic. If a child has a simple worktable, then the child should learn to use it. I wish that children had toys that moved. This is all contained in *Education of the Child*. The toys today are terrible, and for that reason the children learn no dexterity and write poorly.

12/29/1920, Answer to a question [9]. Translated by J. K. S.

. . . I would like to point out that one does not harm the individuality of the child when one does not pay too much attention to the types of games which combine separate elements. In fact, from the standpoint of spiritual science, one should consider those types of games less valuable. Erector sets, building blocks and the like appeal too strongly to the intellect of the child. Much more beneficial types of playthings are those which bring more life to the child and such toys will vary according to the individuality of the child. I have been trying for a long time to promote this—but it is hard to make people enthusiastic for such small matters, such seeming trivial things—to reintroduce picture books for children with movable figures. There used to be such picture books, which had figures that one could move with strings at the bottom of the page; the figures would move, and whole stories could be created with them. Suitably varied according to the needs of individual children, this can have a highly beneficial effect. By contrast, things that remain still and also games that appeal to combining elements such as building blocks, are in fact not suitable for children's play. Building blocks are, after all, only a result of the materialism of our time.

I would also like to point out that the main thing one has to assess in games is to what degree the imagination of the child is allowed to be active. You can destroy the most beautiful powers in a human being by giving a child, a growing, developing child, a “beautiful” clown (in the case of boys) or a very “beautiful” doll (in the case of girls) from an artistic point of view, they are always awful, but the people who design them strive to make them “beautiful” dolls. . . Play materials that leave the greatest possible room for a child's imagination are the best. The child feels basically most happy with a doll or clown made out of a handkerchief, tied together at the top to form a little head. Such things should be fostered. Basically, it should be possible to turn soul activity into life and mobility. One will definitely find the right thing when one has an eye for temperaments, for example by giving a highly excited child really the most complicated toys possible, and by giving a slow child the simplest toys. The same method should be applied when it comes work done by hand. What a child does out of her own inclination is also very important for later years. One should follow the inner inclination of the child in letting the child walk slowly or fast: one should let an excited child walk fast, and induce a slow child which is lazy in thinking, to walk slowly in games or at other occasions. So in adapting the play to the individual the point is to treat like with the like and not the opposite. Those who really strive to treat children appropriately in the way that is described will get very far with these directions.

The absence of play can have serious consequences for the development of a child's imagination and creativity. Without play children are less likely to be able to form their own independent ideas. This in turn can have an impact on society, for democracies rely on citizens being able to think creatively and independently. On the other hand, totalitarian regimes do not tolerate such independent thinking and strive to hinder its development. If one wants to prepare children for life in an active and thriving democratic state, then it is critical that we help them play creatively when they are young.

For all of these reasons it has become very important that people recognize the vital role of play and do all they can to bring play back into childhood. The insights of Rudolf Steiner regarding play and the experiences in Waldorf kindergartens can be a great help in awakening an understanding of play and in inspiring us all to work on behalf of play.

The Inner Attitude of the Educator

Before proceeding to the quotations concerning play and play materials, we will include some passages of Rudolf Steiner's lectures here with guidelines concerning the appropriate inner attitude that we must foster as educators.

We hear about the child's divine spiritual being seeking to find a connection here on earth to a physical sheath. Here the most significant help for the child is the presence of the adult in its surroundings who has an appropriate inner attitude for in the kindergarten it is not so much the educational program that counts, but the inner attitude of the teachers.

08/11/1923; in *A Modern Art of Education* [17], pp. 131-132

True observation of man sees in the growing human being a work of divine creation. There is no more wonderful spectacle in the whole world than to see in the child how, from birth on, the definite gradually emerges from the indefinite in the body, how seemingly meaningless, undefined, arbitrary movements, change into movements determined by the soul, how more and more the inner being expresses itself outwardly, and the spiritual element in the body comes gradually to the surface. This being which the divine world has sent down to earth, and which we feel is revealing itself in the body, becomes a revelation of the Divine itself. The growing human being is indeed its most splendid manifestation.

If we learn to know this growing human being, not from the point of view of ordinary anatomy and physiology, but with an understanding of how the soul and spirit stream down into the body, then all our knowledge of man changes into religion, into truly devout and humble reverence in the face of what streams into the surface of things from out of divine depths. Then, as teachers, we have a certain quality that bears and sustains us, and that becomes for the child a natural authority in which he places spontaneous trust.

04/09/1924; in *The Essentials of Education* [18], pp. 24-25

Few things have a more wonderful effect on the human heart than seeing inner spirit and soul elements released day to day, week to week, month to month, year to year, during the first period of childhood. We see how, beginning with chaotic movements of the limbs, a gaze that focuses on superficial outer stimuli and facial expressions that do not yet seem to belong to the child, something is developing and impressing itself on the surface of the human form, something that arises from the center of the human being, where the divine spiritual being is unfolding in its descent from pre-earthly life.

thing works with tremendous living force on the child, because it offers him the possibility of using his fantasy. Naturally one must do this first oneself. But the possibility must be provided for the child, and this must be done at the age when everything is play. It is for this reason that all those things that do not stimulate fantasy in the child are so damaging when given as toys. As I said, today these "beautiful" dolls are somewhat out-dated, for now we give children monkeys or bears. To be sure, neither do these toys give any opportunity for the unfolding of a fantasy having any relationship to the human being. Let us suppose that a child runs up to us and we give him a bear to cuddle. Things like this show clearly how far our civilization is from being able to penetrate into the depths of human nature.

From *Autobiography—Chapters in the Course of my Life* [1]. Translated by JKS.

I was captivated especially by certain kinds of toys that I still value highly today. They were picture books with movable figures, which could be pulled below the page with threads. One would follow along small stories with the help of these pictures, which one could bring to life oneself by pulling the threads. I would sit for hours on end with such picture books, together with my sister. From them I also learned the first basics of reading, and this seemed to happen by itself.

11/22/1920, in *Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner* [11], p. 212

You have a system with the moveable pictures that have strings attached to them; you have a short text and above it a moveable picture.⁴ I find that very useful for picture books. Such picture books are extremely necessary in kindergarten. If you would only continue to work on it! Modern books are so boring.

From a discussion with English guests held on 5 January 1922 in Dornach, quoted in *Kunst und Handarbeit (Art and Handwork)*, by Hedwig Hauck. Translated by J. K.S.

Question: How can educators best meet the needs of children from five-and-a half to seven years old, who usually ask what they should do?

Dr. Steiner: Well, in children of that age the feeling for authority is already somewhat present, but the urge to imitate still has the upper hand. That should be the guiding principle for what one does with those children. What I indicated about the picture books with movable figures applies especially to children of that age; those books work extremely well. It is a good thing to occupy their awakening life of imagination with those types of books.

⁴ The idea was later taken up by Hilde Langen, who published several children's stories in that form.

stuff; tie it together, make the head here, paint in the nose, two eyes, et cetera. Healthy children far prefer to play with these than with “lovely” dolls, because there is something left over for their fantasy; whereas the most magnificent doll, with red cheeks, et cetera, leaves nothing leftover for the child’s fantasy. The fine doll brings inner desolation to the child.

08/27/1906, in *At the Gates of Spiritual Science* [6], p. 52

The most important thing during the first seven years is to nourish a child’s sense organs. He will see with his eyes how people round him are behaving. Hence, during these years we must try to influence a child’s senses, to draw them out so that they become active on their own account. That is why it is such a mistake to give a child one of those “beautiful” dolls. They hinder him from setting his own inner powers to work. A normal child will reject the doll and be much happier with a piece of wood, or with anything that gives his imagination a chance to be active.

06/12/1920, in *Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner* [11], p. 80

You can probably work best with the children you have when you have them do meaningful things with simple objects. Anything! You should try to discover what interests the children. There are children, particularly girls, who can make a doll out of any handkerchief. The dolls’ write letters and then pass them on. You could be the postman or the post office. Do sensible things with simple objects.

When the change of teeth begins, the children enter the stage when they want to imagine things, for instance that one thing is a rabbit and another is a dog, sensible things that the child dreams into. The principle of play is that until the change of teeth, the child imitates sensible things, dolls and puppets. With boys, it is puppets, with girls, dolls. Perhaps they could have a large puppet with a small one alongside. These need only be a couple pieces of wood. At age seven, you can bring the children into a circle or ring, and they can imagine something. Two could be a house, and the others go around and live in it. In that game, the children are themselves.

With musical children, you can play something else, perhaps something that would support their musical talent. You should help unmusical children develop their musical capacities through dance and eurythmy. You need to be inventive. You can do all these things, but you need to be inventive, because otherwise everything becomes stereotyped. Later, it is easier because you can connect with things in the school.

07/19/1924, in *Human Values in Education* [20], p. 65

. . . “beautiful” dolls, with real hair. What sort of dolls are these? They are the kind that cannot activate the child’s fantasy. Now let us do something different. Tie a handkerchief so that you have a figure with arms and legs. Now the child must develop his fantasy if he is to imagine this as having the human shape. Such a

***Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy* [14], pp. 160-161.**

When entering early life, human beings not only receive what is passed on by heredity through their fathers and mothers, but they also descend as spirit beings from the spiritual worlds into this earthly world. This fact can be applied practically in education when we have living insight into the human being. Basically, I cannot think of impressions more wonderful than those received while observing a young baby develop if we participate inwardly in such a gradual unfolding. After the infant has descended from the spiritual world into the earthly world, we can observe what was blurred and indistinct at first, gradually taking on form and shape.

If we follow this process, we feel direct contact with the spiritual world, which is incarnating and unfolding before our very eyes, right here in the sensory world. Such an experience provides a sense of responsibility toward one’s tasks as a teacher, and with the necessary care, the art of education attains the quality of a religious service. Then, amid all our practical tasks, we feel that the gods themselves have sent the human being into this earthly existence, and they have entrusted the child to us for education. With the incarnating child, the gods have given us enigmas that inspire the most beautiful divine service.

04/08/1924; in *The Essentials of Education* [18], p. 14

For the small child before the change of teeth, the most important thing in education is the teacher’s own being.

04/08/1924; in *The Essentials of Education* [18], p. 14

The most important considerations have to do with the kind of person one is, what impressions the child receives, and whether or not one is worthy of imitation.

Imitation

All play and activity of the child is based on imitation. In the majority of quotations below, Rudolf Steiner describes how the young child functions entirely as a sense organ during the first phase of life. Steiner shows us what and how the child, up to approximately age seven, imitates, and he does this in a variety of ways.

To begin with, we will give a few quotations that guide us into the realms where imitation originates. Imitation here on earth is a continuation of a habit formed in the spiritual world.

08/09/1919; in *Education As a Force for Social Change* [8], p. 11

Children carry their prenatal experiences in the spiritual world into physical existence after birth. In the spiritual world, we human beings live in the beings of the higher hierarchies; everything we do arises out of the nature of the higher hierarchies. There, we are imitative to a much greater extent because we are united with those beings we imitate. Then we are placed into the physical world, but we continue our habit of being at one with our surroundings. The habit of being at one with the beings in our surroundings, of imitating them, continues. We continue to imitate those who are responsible for our upbringing and who are to do and feel only what we should imitate. It is extremely healthy for children to be able to live not so much in their own souls, but in the souls of the people around them. . .

In the future, we must attend to the fact that the child's behavior is imitative. In raising children, we need to continuously keep in mind how we can best create the most favorable environment for their imitative behavior. Everything done in the past regarding imitation must become more and more conscious and more and more consciously connected with the future. People will need to remind themselves that if children are to grow up to meet the needs of the social organism, they must be free. People become free only if they were intensively imitative as children. We need to intensely develop the strength, the natural strength, of children in preparation for that time when they begin to become socially interactive. In spite of all political complaining about freedom, and in spite of all the other talk, people will become free only if we ingrain the strength of imitation in them during childhood. Only what we thus implant during childhood can serve as a basis for social freedom.

and even eyes with which they can go to sleep when laid down, real hair and goodness knows what all! But this kills the fantasy of the child, for it leaves nothing to the imagination and the child can take no great pleasure in it. But if you make a doll out of a napkin or a handkerchief with two ink spots for eyes, a dab of ink for a mouth, and some sort of arms, then with imagination that child can add a great deal to it.

It is particularly good for children to be given the opportunity to add as much as possible to playthings out of their own fantasy. This enables children to develop a symbolizing activity. Children should have as few things as possible that are finished and complete and what people call "beautiful." For the beauty of such a doll that I have described above with real hair and so on, is only a conventional beauty. In truth it is ugly because it is so inartistic.

03/03/1906 [24]. Translated by JKS.

What matters are the thoughts, the attitude and the atmosphere with which one surrounds the child. . . It depends on the surroundings how the attitude of the child in turn will take shape in a noble direction or not. It is therefore possible to influence the child, systematically, fully consciously, by setting an example in ordinary, daily life. Everything children absorb goes in through the senses, and children will imitate everything that goes in. In this way one is able to influence the child harmoniously.

It would be a very important thing to work with this thought in anthroposophical circles, in order to perceive better and better how incredibly important the surroundings are for a small child. Let us try to clarify this in more detail. Many people believe they do a child a great favor with a "beautiful" doll. In the eyes of a clairvoyant, however, this is the worst thing one can do for a child. By giving a child a "beautiful" doll one forces the child's urge to imitate into prescribed channels rather than stimulating it; the creative power is killed. When one observes children rightly, one will see more often than not that they throw the most beautiful toys away and make new ones out of the simplest materials. Imitation should not curtail the imagination. Children have to live in an imaginative world, they should be occupied by playing and pretending and thus develop their own forces in creating their own world of inner pictures. And a "beautiful" doll will not activate this inner force. What children play is done in imitation of what they hear and see; playing demands exercise of the will. This awakens certain energies, and two things will be fostered: dexterity and the ability to maintain equanimity in the face of a great diversity of circumstances. These are a few starting points from which to view the education of the small child.

08/23/1922, in *The Spiritual Ground of Education* [15], p. 98

May I say a very heretical thing: people are very fond of giving children dolls, especially a "lovely" doll. They do not see that children really do not want it. They wave it away, but it is pressed upon them. Lovely dolls, all painted! It is much better to give children a handkerchief, or, if that can't be spared, some piece of

awakening that remains inwardly active and alive. By making such experiments yourself, you will see what a difference there is between giving a child playthings that leave as much as possible to the power of imagination and giving finished toys that leave nothing for the child's own inner activity.

12/01/1906, in *The Education of the Child* [3], p. 57

So you can see that spiritual investigation sheds light even on practical details. The developing organs must be treated in ways that promote their health and inner forces. The child should not be given toys that are too finished and perfect, such as building blocks or perfect dolls. A doll made out of an old table napkin on which eyes, nose and mouth are indicated is far better. Any child will see such a homemade doll as a lady attired in beautiful finery. Why? Because it stirs the imagination, and that induces movement in the inner organs, and it produces a feeling of well being in the child. Notice how such a child plays in a lively and interested way, throwing body and soul into what the imagination conjures up, while the child with the perfect doll just sits, unexcited and unamused. It has no possibility to add anything through imagination, so the inner organs are condemned to inactivity. Children have an extraordinarily sound instinct for what is good for them, as long as only the physical body has become free to interact with the external world, and as long as they are in the process of development.

11/20/1922, in GA 218 [22]. Translated by JKS.

Up to the change of teeth, we could say, the child will be surrounded by the world of parents and family. But in addition to that, children's schools will be needed, schools for playing. We only do the right thing by the child when we know how the play of the young child works on in the physical organism; then we can act accordingly in how we develop the activity of play. Just imagine how it is for a child to get a ready-made doll, for example, one of those "beautiful" dolls, complete with a beautifully painted face, one that is, in other words, as "perfect" as it can be, imagine what that does for a child. Coarse anatomy won't reveal these things, but such a child's blood-flow will be tardy, and the physical organization will be disturbed. We are completely unaware of what a grave sin we are committing there, how such dolls work on the child! When, on the other hand, we put together a doll ourselves from some rags, when we do this together with a child, and when we paint eyes on the cloth so that the child witnesses this as it is being done, in the moment of creation, then this will be absorbed into his or her organism and mobilize it; it will go into the blood and the breathing.

08/13/1924, in *The Kingdom of Childhood* [21], pp. 21-22

You should experience the changing of the teeth through careful observation like this. The fact that children were previously wholly sense organ now enables them to develop above all the gift of fantasy and symbolism. And you must take this into consideration even in play. Our materialistic age sins terribly against this. Take, for example, the so-called "beautiful" doll that are so often given to children these days. They have such beautifully formed faces, wonderfully painted cheeks,

04/16/1924, in *Roots of Education* [19], p. 60

Only on the basis of this knowledge can we correctly understand what expresses itself in the life and activities of children under seven. They simply continue in their earthly life a tendency of soul that was the most essential aspect of life before birth. In the spiritual realm, one surrenders completely to the spirit all around, lives outside oneself, all the more individually, yet outside of one's self. One wants to continue this tendency toward devotion in earthly life—wants to continue in the body the activity of pre-earthly life in the spiritual worlds. This is why the whole life of a small child is naturally religious.

10/12/1917; in *The Fall of the Spirit of Darkness* [7], p. 114

And if they do not imitate sufficiently they will not have enough in them later that they can use.



“Musicians” playing for their dolls, with their improvised “music stands” in front.

gently upwards to the brain. They mold the brain like a sculptor who works upon his material with a fine and supple hand, a hand permeated with the forces of the soul and spirit. Everything here is in a formative process, in organic development. The child looks at the handkerchief-doll and that becomes formative force, real formative force, which then flows upwards from the rhythmic system and works upon the structure of the brain.

If, on the contrary, we give the child one of the so-called “beautiful” dolls which can move, which has moving eyes and painted cheeks, real hair, and so on, a hideous, ghostly production from the artistic point of view, then the plastic, brain-building forces that are generated in the rhythmic system have the effect of constant lashes of a whip. The child cannot as yet understand these things and it is as though the brain were enduring the lashings of a whip. The brain is thoroughly whipped, thoroughly flogged in a fearful way. Such is the secret of the “beautiful” doll and it can be applied to many of the playthings given to the child today.

04/14/1924, in *The Roots of Education* [19], pp. 31-32

We thus have to learn gradually that it is not so much a question of *inventing* from our own abstract thoughts all kinds of things for little children to do, such as using rods and so on. Children do not spontaneously do things like that. Their own soul forces must be aroused, and then they will imitate what the adults do. A little girl plays with a doll because she sees her mother nursing the baby. Whatever we see in adults is present in children as their tendency to imitate. This tendency must be considered in educating children up to the seventh year.

We must bear in mind, however, that what we educate is subject to change in the child’s organism; in children everything is done in a more living and animated way than in adults, because children are still a unity of body, soul, and spirit. In adults, the body has been freed from the soul and spirit, and the soul and spirit from the body. Body, soul, and spirit exist side by side as individual entities; in the child they are still firmly united. This unity even penetrates the thinking.

We can see these things very clearly through an example. A small child is often given a so-called “beautiful” doll, a painted creature with glass eyes, made to look exactly like a human being. These little horrors are made to open and shut their eyes and do all sorts of other things. These are then presented to children as “beautiful” dolls. Even from an artistic perspective they are hideous; but I will not enlarge on that now. But consider what really happens to a child who is presented with a doll of this kind, a doll that can open its eyes and so on. At first the child will love it because it is a novelty, but that does not last.

Now, compare that with what happens to a child if I just take a piece of rag and make a doll out of that. Tie it together for a head, make two dots for eyes, and perhaps a big nose, and there you have it. Give that to a child and she will fill out the rest through imagination in soul and spirit, which are so closely connected with the body. Then, every time that child plays with the doll, there is an inner

punishment has crept in, a way of beating the child which is never realized as such, because men’s minds are too little directed to the spirit.

Parents often think it desirable to give their little girl a “beautiful” doll as a plaything. This “beautiful” doll is a fearful production, because, for one thing, it is so utterly inartistic, in spite of its “real” hair, painted cheeks and eyes that close when it is laid down or lifted up! We often give our children toys that are dreadfully inartistic so-called copies of life: the doll is merely one example. All modern toys are tending to be of the same type, and they represent a form of cruel punishment to the child’s inner nature. Even when punished children often behave well in the presence of others simply because convention demands it; equally out of politeness they do not always express aversion towards toys like the “beautiful” doll, although this dislike is deeply rooted in their souls. However strongly we may suggest to children that they ought to love such toys, the forces of their unconscious and subconscious life are stronger, and they have an intense antipathy to anything resembling the “beautiful” doll. For, as I will now show you, such toys really amount to an inner punishment.

Suppose that in the making of our playthings we were to take into consideration what the child has actually experienced in his young thought up to the age of six or seven, in the process of learning to stand upright and to walk, and then we were to make a doll out of a handkerchief, for instance, showing a head at the top with two ink-spots for eyes. The child can understand and, moreover, really love such a doll. Primitively, this doll possesses all the qualities of the human form, in so far as the child is capable of observing them at this early age. A child knows no more about the human being than that he stands upright, that there is an “upper” and a “lower” part of his being, that he has a head and a pair of eyes. As for the mouth, you will often find it on the forehead in a child’s drawings! There is as yet no clear consciousness of the exact position of the mouth. What a child actually experiences is all contained in a doll made from a handkerchief with a couple of ink-spots for eyes. An inner, plastic force is at work in the child. All that comes to him from the environment passes over into his being and there becomes an inner formative power, a power that also builds up the organs of the body. . .

. . .If the child, for example, has a father who is constantly ill tempered and irritable, and as a result of this the child lives in an environment of perpetual shocks and unreasonableness, all this turmoil expresses itself in his breathing and the circulation of the blood. This means, however, that the lungs, heart, and the whole vascular system are affected by such a condition. Through the whole of his life the child bears, plastically formed within him, the inner effects of seeing his father’s ill temper.

This is merely an example to show you that the child possesses a wonderful plastic power and is perpetually at work as a kind of inner sculptor upon his own being. If we give the child the kind of doll made from a handkerchief, these plastic, creative forces that arise in the human organism, especially from the rhythmic system of the breathing and blood circulation, and build up in the brain, flow

The Child’s Play

For orientation, short indications are given for this chapter as to the content of the various quotes on children’s play.

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Should preschool have the character of kindergarten? (06/14/1920 [11])	30

04/18/1924; in *The Child's Changing Consciousness* [16], pp. 70-73

Generally speaking, education has followed in the footsteps of our modern civilization, which has gradually become more and more materialistic. A symptom of this is the frequent use of mechanical methods in preference to organic methods, and this just during the early years of childhood up to the change of teeth, which is the most impressionable and important time of life. We must not lose sight of the fact that, up to the second dentition, the child lives by imitation. The serious side of life, with all of its demands in our daily work, is reenacted in deep earnestness by the child in its play. . . The difference between a child's play and an adult's work is that an adult's contribution to society is governed by a sense of purpose and has to fit into outer demands, whereas the child wants to be active simply out of an inborn and natural impulse. Play activity streams outward from within. Adult work takes the opposite direction, namely inwards from the periphery. . .

. . . In their play, children mirror what happens around them; they want to imitate. But because the key to childhood has been lost through inadequate knowledge of the human being, adults have intellectually contrived all kinds of artificial play activities for children of kindergarten age. Since children want to imitate the work of the adults, special games have been invented for their benefit, such as "Pick-up Sticks," or whatever else these things are called. These artificial activities actually deflect the child's inner forces from flowing out of the organism as a living stream that finds a natural outlet in the child's desire to imitate those who are older. Through all kinds of mechanical manipulations, children are encouraged to do things not at all suitable to their age. Particularly during the nineteenth century, there were programs for preschool education that involved activities a child should not really do; for the entire life of a preschool class revolves around the children adapting to the few people in charge, who should behave naturally so that the children feel stimulated to imitate whatever their teachers do.

It is unnecessary for preschool staff to go from one child to another and show each one what to do. Children do not yet want to follow given instructions. All they want is to copy what the adult does, so the task of a kindergarten teacher is to adjust the work taken from daily life so that it becomes suitable for the children's play activities. There is no need to devise occupations like those adults meet in life, except under special circumstances such as work that requires specialized skills. For example, children of preschool age are told to make parallel cuts in strips of paper and then to push multi-colored paper strips through the slits so that a woven colored pattern finally emerges. This kind of mechanical process in a kindergarten actually prevents children from engaging in normal or congenial activities. It would be better to give them some very simple sewing or embroidery to do. Whatever a young child is told to do should not be artificially contrived by adults who are comfortable in our intellectual culture, but should arise from the tasks of ordinary life. The whole point of a preschool is to give young children the opportunity to imitate life in a simple and wholesome way.

cubic and quadrilateral stones, the children were meant to build miniature architectural monstrosities. This kind of thing has a far-reaching effect upon the development of the child's imagination, for it begets an atomistic-materialistic attitude, a mentality which always wants to put bits and pieces together to form a whole. If one wants to come to terms with practical life, it is far better to allow full play to the child's ever mobile and living imaginative powers than to foster intellectual capacities which encourage the atomistic nature of present-day thinking. The child's imagination represents the very forces that have just freed themselves from performing similar creative work within the physical formation of its brain. This is the reason that one must avoid, as much as this is possible, forcing these powers of imagination into rigid and finished forms.

Let us imagine two nurses who are looking after a child between two-and-a-half and five years old. One of them, she may be very fond of the little girl in her charge, gives her a "beautiful" doll, a doll that has not only painted cheeks and real hair, but even eyes that close and a movable head. I believe there are dolls that can even speak! Well, she gives such a doll to the little girl, but as it is finished in every detail, there is nothing left for the child's imagination to create. Its yearning for creative mobility cannot be satisfied. It is as if its forces of imagination were put into a straightjacket. The other nurse, who has a little more understanding for the inner needs of the child, takes an old piece of cloth that is of no use for anything else. She winds a thread around its upper end until something resembling a head appears. She may even ask the little girl to paint two black dots on the face, perhaps even more, for eyes, nose and mouth. Now the child's imagination is stimulated. The child can be creative instead of having to put up with fixed and finished forms and contours, and so experiences a far more lively and intimate response than with the so-called "beautiful" doll. Play materials, as much as possible, should leave the child's power of fantasy free. And since intellect is not the same as fantasy or imagination, the activity of putting together many parts is hardly in harmony with the type of fantasy that is characteristic of a child of this age.

Anything that calls forth an inner feeling of liveliness and mobility is always most suitable for the young child. For example, a children's book with cut-out and tastefully colored figures which can be moved by pulling strings attached below, so that they will do all kinds of things, such as embracing or thrashing each other, always stimulates the child to invent whole stories and in this way is an extraordinarily wholesome means of play activity. In a similar way, games with other children should not be too formal, but they should leave plenty of scope for the child's imagination. All these suggestions spring from knowledge of man which is founded upon reality and which enables the educator to acquire the necessary insights, especially as regards the practical side of life.

08/10/1923, in *A Modern Art of Education* [17], pp. 113-116

In this age too, when all eyes are so concentrated on the physical and external and there is so little understanding for the soul and spirit, a terrible form of

1907, in *The Education of the Child* [2], pp. 19-20

As the muscles of the hand grow firm and strong through doing the work for which they are suited, so the brain and other organs of the physical body of human beings are guided into the correct course of development if they receive the proper impressions from their environment. An example will best illustrate this point. You can make a doll for a child by folding up an old napkin, making two corners into legs, the other two corners into arms, a knot for the head, and painting eyes, nose and mouth with spot of ink. Or you can buy the child what is called a “pretty” doll, with real hair and painted cheeks. We need not dwell on the fact that the “pretty” doll is of course hideous and apt to spoil the healthy aesthetic sense for a lifetime; for education, the main question is different. If the children have the folded napkin before them, they have to fill in from their own imagination what is necessary to make it real and human. This work of the imagination shapes and builds the forms of the brain. The brain unfolds as the muscles of the hand unfold when they do the work they are suited for. By giving the child the so-called “pretty” doll, the brain has nothing more to do. Instead of unfolding, it becomes stunted and dried up.

If people could look into the brain as a spiritual investigator can, and see how it builds its forms, they would certainly give their children only play materials that stimulate and enliven its formative activity. Toys with dead mathematical forms alone have a desolating and killing effect on the formative forces of children; on the other hand whatever kindles the imagination of living things works in the proper way. Our materialistic age produces few good toys. It is certainly a healthy toy, for example, that, with movable wooden figures, represents two blacksmiths facing each other and hammering an anvil. These things can still be bought in rural areas. The picture books where the figures can be moved by pulling threads from below are also excellent and allow children themselves to transform a dead picture into a representation of living action. All of this causes a living mobility of the organs, and through such mobility the proper forms of the organs are built up.

12/29/1921, in *Soul Economy and Waldorf Education* [13], pp. 118-120

Whatever one’s attitude may be, as educators we must respond to the child’s imagination or fantasy that seeks to express itself outwardly through his playing with toys, or in games with other children. This urge to play, between the age of two-and-a-half and five, is really nothing but the externalized activity of the child’s powers of fantasy. And if one has the necessary ability of observation for such matters, one can foretell a great deal regarding the child’s future soul life, its character, and so on, merely by watching him play. The way in which a young child plays is a clear indication of his potential gifts and faculties in later life. What is of utmost importance now, is that one meets this inborn urge to play with the right play materials. In past times, people have responded to this according to their own particular understanding.

At one time a regular epidemic spread throughout middle Europe of giving children boxes of building bricks, especially at Christmas time. Out of separate

This task of adjusting life as one carries it out in the presence of the child in a meaningful, purposeful way, according to the needs of the child, is in accordance with the child’s natural and inborn need for activity and is an enormously significant educational task. To contrive little stick games or design paper weaving cards is simple. But it is a tremendously important and necessary task to adapt and transform our complicated ways of life, such as a child does when, for example, a little boy plays with a spade or some other tool, or when a girl plays with a doll; in this way children transform adult occupations into child’s play, including the more complicated activities of the adult world. This is a challenging task for which hardly any previous “spade-work” has thus far been done. One needs to recognize that in children’s imitation, in all their sense-directed activities, moral and spiritual forces are working, artistic impulses that allow the child to respond in an entirely individual way.

Give a child a handkerchief or a piece of cloth, knot it so that a head appears above and two legs below, and you have made a doll or a kind of clown. With a few ink spots you can give it eyes, nose, and mouth, or even better, allow the child to do it, and with such a doll, you will see a healthy child have great joy. Now the child can add many other features belonging to a doll, through imagination and imitation within the soul. It is far better if you make a doll out of a linen rag than if you give the child one of those perfect dolls, possibly with highly colored cheeks and smartly dressed, a doll that even closes its eyes when put down horizontally, and so on. What are you doing if you give the child such a doll? You are preventing the unfolding of the child’s own soul activity. Every time a completely finished object catches its eye, the child has to suppress an innate desire for soul activity, the unfolding of a wonderfully delicate, awakening fantasy. You thus separate children from life, because you hold them back from their own inner activity.

08/10/1923; in *A Modern Art of Education* [17], p. 116-119

If we would give loving help to the child at play we must realize how many inner, formative forces are active in his being. In this respect our whole civilization is on the wrong road. . .

. . . The first great essential is to learn to deal with them lovingly, and lovingly give them only what their own beings demand. We should not inflict inner punishments by giving the child toys of the type of the “beautiful” doll. We should be able to live with the child and fashion dolls that the child himself inwardly experiences.

Thus play also is something that calls for true insight into the nature of the child. If we babble like small infants and think to bring our speech down to their level, if we do not speak in a genuine way in which the child can experience that our speech is genuinely coming out of our inner being, we bring an untruthful influence to bear upon the child. On the other hand, however, we must be able to descend to the stage of the child’s development in everything that has to do with

the will-nature, in everything that goes into his play. We shall then realize that intellectuality—a quality so much admired in our modern age—simply does not exist in the child’s organic nature, and should, therefore, have no place in his play. The child at play will naturally imitate what is going on in his surroundings, but it will seldom happen that a child of four expresses a wish to be, let us say, a philologist, although he may say he would like to be a chauffeur! Why? This is because everything a chauffeur does can be seen. It makes a direct pictorial impression. It is different with a philologist, for what he does makes no such impression; it is non-pictorial, it simply passes by unnoticed by the child. In play, however, we must introduce only what does not pass by the child unnoticed. Everything intellectual leaves the child unaffected, it passes him by. What, then, must we adults do if we are to help the child to the right kind of play?

Now when we plow, make hats, or sew clothes, and so on, all these things are done with a certain purpose, and the intellectual element lies in this purposefulness. When we discern the purpose of something in life, we penetrate it intellectually. But everything in life—no matter whether it be plowing, building carriages, shoeing horses, or the like, besides having a definite purpose, contains another element in outward appearance, something that lives in its sheer outward appearance. At the sight of a man guiding his plow over the field, one can feel—apart from the object of plowing—what one might call the sculptural, formative quality of the activity, which lives in its image, which becomes a picture. If we struggle through to a feeling for this pictorial, formative element—quite apart from its purpose—(and it is our aesthetic sense that enables us to do this)—then we can begin to make toys that really appeal to the child. We shall not aim at intellectual beauty (as in the modern doll), but at something expressed in the whole movement, in the whole feeling of the human being. Then, instead of the “beautiful” doll, we shall produce a primitive, truly enchanting doll something like this one, but that is already something for older children!¹

Therefore, in order to become true educators, the essential thing is to be able to see the truly aesthetic element in the work, to bring an artistic quality into our tasks, such as the creation of play materials. If we apply this aesthetic element to the process of making play materials, we then begin to come closer to what the child wills out of its own nature.

Our civilization has made us, with very few exceptions, wholly utilitarian and intellectualistic, and we what offer our children is the result of what we have “thought out” with our brains. But we ought not to give them what adult life has thought out, but rather what can be felt and experienced in later life. This is what the play materials should express. If we make a child a toy plow, the essential thing is that it should express the aesthetic-formative quality of plowing, for this will help to unfold the full forces of the human being.

¹ Dr. Steiner here showed a doll made by pupils of the Waldorf School.

The inner forces are prevented from developing and working, calling forth the activity of the senses and stimulating them to become active. (08/27/1906 [6])	40
Let them do sensible things with plain and simple objects, handkerchief doll. (06/12/1920 [11])	40
A proper human imagination cannot be built up out of play with monkeys and bears. (07/19/1924 [20])	40
Basically soul activity should be able to be turned into inner activity, handkerchief doll. (12/29/1920 [9])	44
Movable Wooden Toys	
Two blacksmiths facing each other on movable wooden bases, hammering an object. (1907 [2])	34
Moving Picture Books	
Things that call forth a feeling of inner vitality are always better, for example, a moving picture book. (12/29/1921 [13])	34
See chapter 1 of <i>The Course of My Life</i> . [1]	41
From <i>Faculty Meeting with Rudolf Steiner</i> . (11/22/1920 [11])	42
From a discussion with English guests in Dornach on 5 January 1922, quoted in <i>Kunst und Handarbeit (Art and Handwork)</i> by Hedwig Hauck.	41
Answer to a question (12/29/1920 [9])	42
Sets of Building Blocks	
Building blocks are discussed in the following quotes:	
(12/29/1921 [13])	34
(12/01/1906 [3])	38
(06/14/1920 [11])	41
(12/29/1920 [9])	42

Toys and Play Materials

When Rudolf Steiner talked about the pedagogy for the first seven years, he especially mentioned toys and play materials in connection with the development of the imagination of the child. He placed great value on very simple dolls and often took a big handkerchief out of his pocket while he was speaking in a lecture, tied a few knots in it and thus created something that was stimulating for the imagination. Numerous passages are quoted here which stress the importance of the doll. A few of these have already been quoted before in the passages concerning play, because it was difficult to take them out of context.

In addition Steiner recommends movable toys made out of wood, for example two hammering blacksmiths, and talks about the importance of books with movable pictures. He often has negative things to say about sets of building blocks and the like. Individual quotes were grouped together thematically to the extent that that was possible. Of course this wasn’t possible in cases where Rudolf Steiner mentioned several types of toys in one passage.

The Doll

Stimulation of the imagination by means of the primitive doll (1907 [2])	34
Now the child’s imagination is stimulated so it can be creative instead of having to put up with fixed, finished forms and contours. (12/29/1921 [13])	34
Children inwardly abused by the “beautiful” doll. When the child looks at a handkerchief doll, formative forces are generated, shaping the brain’s structure from out of the rhythmical system. (08/10/1923 [17])	35
When playing with the primitive doll, the child springs to life each time and remains vitally engaged. (04/14/1924 [19])	37
The primitive doll awakens the imagination; the inner organs begin to work. (12/01/1906 [3])	38
Effect of the doll on the physical constitution of the child, making a doll with the child. (11/20/1922 [22])	38
First the child is entirely a sense organ, and develops imagination through play, up to the time of the change of teeth, the materialistic age sins against this, the “beautiful” doll. (08/13/1924 [21])	38
The atmosphere we create around the child is important, the effect of the “beautiful” doll. (03/03/1906 [24])	39
The inner life of the child wilts next to the “beautiful” doll. (08/23/1922 [15])	39

Certain kindergartens, worthy in other ways of great recognition and respect, have made great mistakes in this regard. Kindergartens developed by Froebel and others out of true inner love for children have failed to realize that imitation is a part of the very nature of the child, who can only imitate that which is not yet permeated by an intellectual quality. We must therefore not introduce into the kindergarten such various forms of handwork as have been ingeniously “thought out.” The arranging of sticks, basketwork and so on, that play so large a part in modern kindergarten methods, have all been ingeniously thought out. Kindergarten work ought rather to be arranged so that it contains an actual picture of what older people do, and not mere inventions. A sense of tragedy will often arise in one possessed of a true knowledge of man upon entering one of these modern kindergartens—for they are so full of good intentions and the work has been so conscientiously thought out. They are based on infinite goodwill and a sincere love of children, yet they have not realized that all intellectualism (everything that has been only thought out) ought to be eliminated. Kindergarten work should consist simply and solely of the external imitation of the external picture of what grown-up people do.

A child whose intellectual faculties are developed before the fourth or fifth year bears a dreadful heritage into later life. He will simply become a materialist. To the extent that an intellectual education is given to the child before the fourth or fifth year will he become materialistic in later life. For the brain is so worked on that the intellectually spiritual takes hold of it, lives in its forms. The human being, because this process has taken place too soon, comes to the view that everything is just material.

If we would so train the child that as a human being he may comprehend the spirit, then we must delay as long as possible bringing that which is outwardly spiritual in its purely intellectual form. Although it is highly necessary, in view of the nature of our modern civilization, that each person should be fully awake in later life, the child must be allowed to remain as long as possible in the peaceful, dreamlike condition of pictorial imagination in which his early years are passed. For if we allow his organism to grow strong in this non-intellectual way, he will rightly develop in later life the intellectuality needed in the world today.

If the child’s brain has been flogged in the way I have described, permanent injury is done to the soul. Just as the use of baby-language adversely affects the digestion, just as unloving, misguided coercion in the process of learning to walk has an unfavorable effect upon the metabolic system in later life, so the flogging of the child in this way from within harms the soul. It must be a primary aim of education to do away with this flogging of the soul (the so-called “beautiful” doll) which is also a flogging of the inner physical being because the child is a being of body, soul and spirit, and in order to bring the play of children on to its proper level.

06/10/1920, in GA 335, *Education in the Face of the Present-day World Situation*, not published in English [23]. Translated by JKS.

We see how children devote themselves to play during the first years of their lives. Giving direction and guidance to play is one of the essential tasks of sensible education, which is to say of an art of education that is right for humanity. The child plays. When one has sharpened one's observation of the world and human life. . . one will notice the difference between the way different children play: it varies from one child to the next. To a superficial observer, almost all children play in a similar way. On closer scrutiny, one will notice that each child plays in a different way. Children's play is quite individual. It is a remarkable thing to observe how playing in childhood means engaging in soul and spirit in a way that can only happen when the power of thought is still working within the organism, as is the case up to the time of the change of teeth. It is truly remarkable to see how the child's soul and spirit are active in free play. The element of thought has not yet been absorbed. And it is a kind of play which comes into being without any notion of use or practicality; it is the kind of play in which the child only follows what comes from within. This seems to contradict the principle of imitation. The way the child lives into play originates in the freedom of the child's soul, but only seemingly so. For when one observes more exactly, one will see how children incorporate everything they experience in the world they live in. Everything that is going on around the child is put into the play activity. When one has sharpened one's powers of observation in this respect, one will no longer look upon play of this kind as something interesting, something which just happens in a certain phase of the child's life. One will put playing in perspective and view its character in the context of a total biography.

Only then, by learning through comparison, will one learn to observe what is taking place in the different phases of a human life. In the mineral world, one can compare zinc and copper. In the animal world, one can compare, say, a June bug to a ladybug. All kinds of comparisons of this kind can be made. In exactly the same way one can compare the different stages of human life to one another. When we have developed an eye for this in the way characterized today, we will discover something highly remarkable. We will discover the consequences of children's play for later stages of life. We will see the outcome of the particular character of play, and what it leads to later on in life. Using tangible experiences as a starting point, one is led to the phase of life that lies more or less between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-eight, the time of life during which people find their way into the world and have to grapple with real-life experience. This is when one takes one's first steps towards becoming independent and comes up against life. This phase constitutes a metamorphosis of the particular character of the way a person used to play as a child. Before the change of teeth, the child has freely created out of its own soul activity, using dolls and other play materials; a certain pattern or structure of activity became visible there. When one has learned to discern and recognize this, one will see how characteristic traits return between the ages of twenty and thirty. What became visible as play characteristics during early childhood can be recognized in the way a person acts when confronted with the demands of real life. When a person comes up against serious things in terms of



Caring for the baby dolls-the doll is one of the most significant playthings for the young child.

mobile within the child. Through such organized games the child's own inner activity is gradually being dulled down, and as an activity is being imposed upon the child from without, it loses interest in such movements.

Yet it is precisely this free play that ought to be observed and studied. One must get to know the child intimately, and then one will know what to do in order to stimulate the right kind of free play in which, of course, both boys and girls should take part together. In this way, through the inner mobility that accompanies the children's outer movements, their organic functions will act together harmoniously.

06/14/1920; in *Faculty Meetings with Rudolf Steiner*, Volume One [11], p. 95

A teacher: Should the preschool be like a kindergarten?

Dr. Steiner: The children have not started school yet. We cannot begin teaching them any subjects. You should occupy them with play. Certainly, they should play games. You can also tell stories in such a way that you are not teaching. But, definitely do not make any scholastic demands. Don't expect them to be able to retell everything. I don't think there is any need for an actual teaching goal there. We need to try to determine how we can best occupy the children. A teaching goal is not necessary. What you would do is play games, tell stories, and solve little riddles.

I would also not pedantically limit things. I would keep the children there until the parents pick them up. If possible, we could have them the whole day. If that is possible, then why not? You could also try some eurythmy with them, but don't spoil them. They shouldn't be spoiled by anything else, either. As I said, the main thing is that you mother the children. Don't be frivolous with them. You would not want to do anything academic with them. You can essentially do what you want.

In playing, the children show the same form as they will when they find their way into life. Children who play slowly will also be slow at the age of twenty and think slowly about all their experiences. Children who are superficial in play will also be superficial later. Children who say that they want to break open their toys to see what they look like inside will later become philosophers. That is the kind of thinking that overcomes the problems of life. In play, you can certainly do very much. You can urge a child who tends to play slowly, to play more quickly. You simply give the child games where some quickness is necessary.

what works and does not work in life; when faced with matters of usefulness and practicality: in those circumstances we can see a reemerging of an attitude which showed itself in free play earlier on.

Just think what this means. We want to educate effectively and know: you observe a characteristic disposition in the play of a child; you guide and direct it now and this will bear fruit twenty years from now, when this person will be coming to terms with the world, a world which should be useful to him and in which he should find his proper place. Just think what feelings arise in the soul of the early childhood educator, who realizes: what I accomplish with this child, I accomplish for the grown-up person in his twenties. What matters here is not so much a knowledge of abstract educational principles, or pedagogical rules which one can produce from an intellectual basis to determine didactic steps. What does matter is that a deep sense of responsibility develops in our hearts when we view life in this way. Real knowledge of the human being does not only speak to our intellects; it speaks to both our hearts and minds and affects our worldview and the way we stand in life. It moves us through and through and works right into our sense of responsibility as teachers. We are not merely looking for an art of education that cleverly calculates the most effective educational methods that could be applied, but we are searching for an art of education which is such that it truly meets the human condition of our time, and which acts on the basis of true insight into the nature of the human being. Such knowledge gives us a sense of responsibility that is, at the same time, a social sense of responsibility towards the whole of humanity. The art of education springs from fundamental feelings, which can only arise in us from a true view of the world.

03/14/1912; in GA 61. *Self-education: The Self-development Of Man in the Light of Anthroposophy*. Not published in English, but available in typescript from the Rudolf Steiner Library, Ghent, New York. [5], pp. 11-12

Thus spiritual science reflects the pattern of a being that includes a higher self, just as in joy and compassion we include others without losing our identity. And as we are aware of our larger self through our ability to enter into the essential being of others so in the case of the child, apart from what we can draw upon as teachers and what grows and matures out of normal consciousness, we can say that, distinct from the normal self, a higher being exists that is already working upon the child. When we reflect upon this we find something that is exercising a special kind of formative influence on the child; whilst with our orthodox education we can only appeal to the personal self of the child. Where do we find that which acts upon the child as a higher self, as a higher entity that is part of the child, yet never enters into his consciousness? Strange as it may seem, it is none-the-less a fact that this begins to be manifested in purposeful, well-organized play. In the child's play activity, we can only furnish the conditions for education. What is gained through play activity stems fundamentally from the self-activity of the child, through everything that cannot be determined by fixed rules. The real educational value of play lies in the fact that we ignore our rules and regulations, our educational theories and allow the child free rein.

What does the child do when left to its own devices? In play, the child experiments with external objects in order to find out whether or not they respond to his own activity: he generates an act of will. Through the way in which the external objects respond to the operation of the will, the child learns from life, if only through play, in a totally different way than normally follows from the influence of another personality and his pedagogical principles. Therefore, it is of primary importance that we introduce a minimum of the rationale into the child's play-the less rational and the more imaginative element the play activity, the better. Therefore, when we give the child a toy where the illusion of the movement of people and things is created by pulling strings or some such device, whether it be a child's picture book with mechanical figures of people and animals or some other kind of toy, we educate the child better through free play than when we give it the most finished building blocks. For the latter are too rationally conceived and reflect the more personal element than the more imaginative play materials, where the child tentatively explores the living, creative potentialities, not rationally, but intuitively.

To a certain extent, play activity is an important factor in education for our whole life.

Further quotations on play materials can be found on page 32.

01/12/1911; in *The Education of the Child* [4], pp. 96-97

The human instinct for education has created a wonderful common means of enabling young children to work on changing, modifying, and mobilizing what lives in their spirit-soul, thus providing free space for the formation of human nature. What that means is play. That is also the way we can best occupy a child. We should not give children concepts with fixed boundaries, but rather ideas that allow the freedom to think about them, so that children can err here and there. That is the only way we can find the predestined path of thinking arising from each child's innate interest. Tell a fairy tale to excite the child's mental activity. Do not tell it so that fixed concepts develop, but so that the concepts remain flexible. A child will then work the way someone works who tries this and that, and by trying tries to discover what is proper.

A child works to discover how the spirit must move to best shape his or her particular constitution according to inner predetermination. That is how play works. Play differs from activities with more fixed forms because children can still, to a certain extent, do what they want when playing. From the start, play has no clearly defined contours in the children's thoughts, nor any clearly defined movement in their organs. Through play, children have a free but definable manner of acting upon the human soul constitution. Play and the accompanying soul activity of the young child arise from a deep consciousness of what truly constitutes the nature and essence of the human being.

pushed apart, as it were, and only the body retains what the individual absorbed during early development as the seed of later life.

Now this is the strange thing: when an experience affects the soul, its consequences are soon visible, even when the experience was unconscious. Physical consequences, however, take seven or eight times longer to manifest. If you educate a child of three or four so that you present what will influence the soul's life, then the effect of this will appear in the eighth year; and people are usually careful to avoid doing anything with a child of four or five that may affect the soul life in an unhealthy way during the eighth or ninth year. Effects on the physical body take much longer to manifest, because the physical body must free itself of the soul and spirit. Therefore, something that influences the soul life at four or five may come to fruition in the physical body when that person is seven or eight times as old, for example, in the thirty-fifth year. Thus, a person may develop an illness during the late thirties or early forties caused by ill influences that affected that soul while at play as a child of three or four.

08/24/1922; in *The Spiritual Ground of Education* [15], p. 32

Thus, for instance, it is necessary for a teacher to see precisely all that is happening when a child plays, a little child. Play involves a whole complex of activities of soul: joy, sometimes also pain, sympathy, antipathy, and particularly, curiosity and the desire for knowledge. A child wants to investigate the objects he plays with and see what they are made of. And when observing this free activity of the child's soul, an activity unconstrained as yet into any form of work, when observing this entirely spontaneous expression, we must look to the shades of feeling and notice whether it satisfies or does not satisfy. For if we guide the child's play so as to content him we improve his health, for we are promoting an activity that is in direct touch with his digestive system. And whether or not a man will be subject in old age to obstruction in his blood circulation and digestive system depends upon how his play is guided in childhood. There is a fine, delicate connection between the way a child plays and the growth and development of its physical organism.

04/14/1924; in *The Roots of Education* [19]. Translated by JKS.

And what flows through us as teachers and educators into the children during the first phase of life works down into blood, breathing and digestion. It becomes a seed that grows into health or sickness some time around age forty or fifty. Yes, it is so: the way the educator behaves towards the young child forms the predisposition to inner happiness or unhappiness, to health or sickness.

01/06/1922; in *Soul Economy and Waldorf Education* [13], pp. 276-277

The first step in this direction in an education based on knowledge of humankind is to learn to understand the particular ways in which children want to move if given free rein. The kind of stereotyped games with their inhibiting rules are really quite alien to the young child's nature, for they suppress what should be left freely

child's inborn energy, capacity and gift for play into artistic channels. These still permit a freedom of inner activity while at the same time forcing children to struggle with outer materials, as we have to do in adult work. Then we can see how precisely this artistic activity makes it possible to conduct education so that the joy of engaging in artistic activities can be combined with the seriousness of play, contributing in this way to the child's character.

03/25/1923; in *Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy 2* [14], pp. 56-57

All children play. They do so naturally. Adults, on the other hand, have to work to live. They find themselves in a situation that demands it. If we look at social life today, we could characterize the difference between the child at play and the adult at work in the following way: Compared to the activities of the adult, which are dictated by necessity, the child's play is connected with an inner force of liberation, endowing the playing child with a feeling of well-being and happiness. You need only observe children at play. It is inconceivable that they are not in full inner accord with what they are doing. Why not? Because playing is a liberating experience to children, making them eager to release this activity from the organism. Freeing, joyful, and eager to be released, this is the character of the child's play.

What about the adult's work? Why does it often, if not usually, become an oppressive burden? (And this will be even more so in the future.) We could say that the child grows from an experience of liberation while playing into the experience of the oppressive burden of work, dictated to the adult by social conditions. Doesn't this great contrast beg us to ask: How can we build a bridge from the child's liberating play activity to the burdensome experience in the sphere of the adult workday?

If we follow the child's development with the artistic understanding I spoke of just now, we will find such a bridge in the role art plays at school. If applied properly as an educational tool, art will lead from the child's liberating play activity to the stage of adult work. With the help of art, this work no longer needs be an oppressive burden. Unless we can divest work of its oppressive character, we can never solve the social question. Unless the polarity between the young child's playing and the adult's burdensome daily work is balanced by the right education, the problem of labor will reappear again and again in different guises.

04/14/1924; in *The Roots of Education* [19], p. 33

We need an art of teaching based on knowledge of human beings—knowledge of the child. This art of education will arise when we find a doctor's thesis that works with a case of diabetes at the age of forty by tracing it back to the harmful effects of the wrong kind of play in the third or fourth year. People will see then what we mean by saying that the human being consists of body, soul, and spirit, and that in the child, body, soul, and spirit are still a unity. The spirit and soul later become freed of the body, and a trinity is formed. In the adult, body, soul, and spirit are

12/29/1920; in GA 297, *The Spirit of the Waldorf School* [9]; the quote below is from the answer to a question asked after the lecture, which has not been included in this publication. Translated by JKS.

One will be dealing with the play of very young children. The way a child plays is most characteristic of the individual child before age approximately five. Of course, children also play after that age, but all kinds of other things will be mixed in and play no longer flows as completely from inner arbitrariness, if I may call it that. If one wants to effectively lead play, one will have to develop an eye for what we call the temperament disposition of the child, and other things that are connected to temperaments in children. People usually think that a child that displays a phlegmatic's character should be put on the right track by something lively and stimulating. Likewise, when people are faced with a child which is disposed to be introspective or melancholic in temperament, which may not be there yet as such, but be there as a disposition, they would like to steer such a child in the right direction with something cheerful. This is basically not a very correct way to think about it, especially where play is concerned.

On the contrary, one should try to study the basic character of the child, for instance, find out whether it is a slow or a fast child, and then try to adapt the play to what one finds. So one should try to keep the slow tempo also in play when dealing with a slow child, and keep a fast tempo when dealing with a fast child and only gradually lead on to a transition from that. One should meet the child with exactly that which springs from his or her inner being. People make the worst mistakes in education when they think that like should not be treated with like, but that the right treatment would be to bring opposites together.

08/13/1924; in *The Kingdom of Childhood* [21], pp. 18-19

But all the things that you are usually advised to do with kindergarten children are quite worthless. The things that are introduced as kindergarten education are usually extraordinarily "clever." You could be quite fascinated by the cleverness of what has been thought out for kindergartens in the course of the nineteenth century. The children certainly learn a great deal there, they almost learn to read. They are supplied with letters of the alphabet that they have to fit into cut out letters. It all looks very clever and you can easily be tempted to believe that it really is something suitable for children, but it is of no use at all. It really has no value whatsoever, and the soul of the child is impaired by it. The child is damaged even down into the body, right down into physical health. Such kindergarten methods breed weaklings in body and soul for later life.²

On the other hand, if you simply have the children there in the kindergarten and conduct yourselves so that they can imitate you, if you do all kinds of things that the children can copy out of their own inner impulse of soul, as they had been

² *Translators Note.* In Germany, the children remain in the "kindergarten" until their seventh year so that the above remarks apply to all school life up to this time, including, for instance, the "Infants" departments of state schools in England.

accustomed to do in pre-earthly existence, then indeed the children will become like yourself, but it is for you to see that you are worthy of this imitation. This is what you must pay attention to during the first seven years of life and not what you express outwardly in words as a moral idea.

If you make a surly face so that a child gets the impression you are a grumpy person, this harms the child for the rest of his life. This is why it is so important, especially for little children, that, as a teacher, you should enter very thoroughly into the observation of a human being and human life. What kind of school plan you make is neither here nor there; what matters is what sort of a person you are. In our day it is easy enough to think out a curriculum, because everyone in our age is now so clever. I am not saying this ironically; in our day people really are clever. Whenever a few people get together and decide that this or that must be done in education, something clever always comes out of it. I have never known a stupid educational program; they are always very clever. But what is important is that you have people in the school that can work in the way I have indicated. You must develop this way of thinking, for an immense amount depends upon it, especially for that age or life epoch of children in which they are really entirely a sense organ.

08/19/1924; in *The Kingdom of Childhood* [21], p. 118

Herein lies the root of all evil in much of the education of today, and you find, for instance, in the “exemplary” kindergartens that different kinds of work are thought out for the child to do. In reality, we should not allow the children to do anything, even in play, that is not an imitation of life itself. All Froebel occupations and the like, which have been thought out for the children, are really bad. We must make it a rule only to let the children do what is an imitation of life, even in play. This is extremely important.

05/10/1920; in *The Renewal of Education* [12], pp. 216-221

We need to see how one stage of life affects another. . . When a child is long past school age, has perhaps long since reached adulthood, this is when we can see what school has made of the child and what it has not. This is visible, not only in a general abstract way, but also in a very concrete way.

Let us look at child’s play from this perspective, particularly the kind of play that occurs in the youngest child from birth until the change of teeth. Of course, the play of such children is, in one respect, based upon their desire to imitate. Children do what they see adults doing, only they do it differently. They play in such a way that their activities lie far from the goals and utility that adults connect with certain activities. Children’s play only imitates the form of adult activities, not the material content. The usefulness in and connection to everyday life are left out. Children perceive a kind of satisfaction in activities that are closely related to those of adults. We can look into this further and ask what is occurring here. If we want to study what is represented by play activities and, through that study, recognize true human nature so that we can have a practical effect upon it, then we must continuously review the individual activities of the child, including those

does not notice anything about the way a particular way of playing comes out in later character traits. The child will develop other strengths and talents; what constituted the special character of the child’s play goes down as it were into the hidden recesses of the soul. But later it reemerges in a particular way. It comes back between age twenty-five and thirty, which is the time of life in which we must find our way into the world; it is also the time of meeting the outer world and learning from experience and destiny. Some will fit in readily, others less readily. Some derive a certain satisfaction from their dealings with the world; others are less successful in what they undertake, they have a difficult destiny.

It is necessary to gain an overview of the totality of human life and see how the sense of play reemerges again in this sense of life between the ages of twenty-five and thirty. In that way one will get a picture that is artistic in nature, and one will know how to guide and direct the impulse to play in such a way that it will make a difference. It will give the child something for much later in life.

03/25/1923; in *Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy 2* [14], pp. 57-59

The high esteem for what is human and an extraordinary love for the human being are needed during one’s evolving childhood days; this was the case for Schiller, whose (alas!) insufficiently known *Letters on the Esthetic Education of the Human Being* was based on those qualities.³ We find in them a genuine appreciation of the artistic element in education, rooted in German culture. We can begin with these letters, and spiritual science will deepen our understanding. Look, for example, at child’s play and how it flows forth simply because it is in a child’s nature to be active. See how children liberate from their organization something that takes the form of play; their humanity consists of something that takes the form of play. Observe how necessity forces us to perform work that does not flow directly from the wholeness of our human nature; it can never express all of our nature. This is how we can begin to understand human development from childhood to adulthood.

There is one thing, however, that we should never lose sight of; usually, when observing children at play, people do so from the perspective of an adult. If this were not so, one would not hear again and again the trifling exhortation that “children should learn through play.” The worst thing you could do is teach children that work is mere play, because when they grow up, they then will look at life as if it were only a game. Anyone who holds such a view must have observed children at play only with an adult’s eyes, believing that children bring the same attitude to play as adults do. Play is fun for an adult, an enjoyment, a pleasure, the spice of life. But for children, play is the very stuff of life. Children are absolutely earnest about play, and the very seriousness of their play is a salient feature of this activity. Only by realizing the earnest nature of child’s play can we understand this activity properly. And by watching how, in play, human nature pours itself in complete seriousness into the treatment of external objects, we can direct the

³ Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), German poet, playwright, and critic.

nature of the child in the games we introduce, the children will also lack skill in finding their place in life. This is how these things are related: The urge to play, the particular way in which a child plays, disappears and sinks below the surface of life. Then it resurfaces, but as something different, as the skill to adapt to life. There is an inner coherence in life throughout all its stages. We need to know this in order to teach children in the right way.

12/29/1920; in *The Spirit of the Waldorf School*[9]. Translated by JKS.

When one appreciates how the child plays in the first years of its life, up to about age five, one will accommodate the play of the child accordingly. Working with the intrinsic character of the child's individuality will prepare something in the child which will only come out much later in life. In order to do that, one has to be able to take the full span of human life into account. A botanist will observe the totality of the plant. Present day psychology tends to only look at an isolated moment in time. Let us observe the human being around age twenty-five to twenty-eight, or a little earlier, focusing on the time of life when we find our way into real life experience and should come to terms with the practicalities of life, the time when we gather real life experience and are becoming conscious of our aims. Adequate and exact observation of this phase of life will show how this is linked to the play of the child, between birth and age five more or less. The individual nature of play is a prelude to the way in which a person will meet life between age twenty and thirty; it will show in the way a person adapts and finds his aims in life. In early childhood we develop the roots, if I may express it this way, of what will appear later on as blossom. This type of insights can only be gained through perceiving interconnections in the way the anthroposophy can do by looking deeper into human nature. Such connections can only be perceived by taking the whole human being into account. We have to feel the total burden of the human being pressing on us so to speak, if we want to be proper educators. We have to feel how we can learn to perceive the particular predispositions to be found in every individual child.

02/24/1921; from an published lecture held in Utrecht. Translated by JKS.

But we also know that the child imitates when playing. Basically the urge to play is not totally original; things that the child perceives in the environment are imitated. The unprejudiced observer will observe soon enough that imitation lies at the basis of play. But every child plays differently. When one educates the little child before the age of seven, one must discern very carefully. In order to assess children's play properly, one needs an artistic sense, because things are different with every child. The early childhood educator must school his or her observation in order to develop an artistic eye to detect the individual quality of a child's play. In essence, each child's play is particular to that child.

The way a child plays, especially at ages four, five and six, goes down in a certain way into the depths of the soul as a force. The child grows up, and at first one

that are transferred to the physical organs and, in a certain sense, form them. That is not so easy. Nevertheless, the study of children's play in the widest sense is extraordinarily important for education.

We need only recall what a person who set the tone for culture once said: "A human being is only a human being so long as he or she plays; and a human being plays so long as he or she is a whole human being." Schiller wrote these words in a letter after he had read some sections of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*. . .

. . . We could also, however, compare this kind of play with other human activities. We could, for example, compare children's play before the change of teeth with dreaming, where we most certainly will find some important analogies. However, those analogies are simply related to the course of the child's play, to the connection of the activities to one another in play. In just the same way that children put things together in play—whatever those might be—not with external things but with thoughts, we put pictures together in dreams. This may not be true of all dreams, but it is certainly so in a very large class of them. In dreaming, we remain in a certain sense children throughout our entire lives.

Nevertheless, we can only achieve a genuine understanding if we do not simply dwell upon this comparison of play with dreams. Instead, we should also ask when in the life of the human being something occurs that allows those forces that are developed in early children's play up until the change of teeth, bear fruit for the entirety of external human life. In other words, when do we actually reap the fruits of children's play? Usually people think we need to seek the fruits of young children's play in the period of life that immediately follows, but spiritual science shows how life passes in a rhythmical series of repetitions. In a plant, leaves develop from a seed; from the leaves, the bud and flower petals emerge, and so forth. Only afterwards do we have a seed again; that is, the repetition occurs only after an intervening development. It is the same in human life.

From many points of view we could understand human life as though each period were affected only by the one preceding, but this is not the case. If we observe without prejudice, we will find that the actual fruits of those activities that occur in early childhood play become apparent only at the age of twenty. What we gain in play from birth until the change of teeth, what children experience in a dreamy way, are forces of the still-unborn spirituality of the human being, which is still not yet absorbed into, or perhaps more properly said, *reabsorbed* into the human body.

We can state this differently. I have already discussed how the same forces that act organically upon the human being until the change of teeth become, when the teeth are born, an independent imaginative or thinking capacity, so that in a certain sense something is removed from the physical body. On the other hand, what is active within a child through play and has no connection with life and contains no usefulness is something that is not yet fully connected with the human body. Thus a child has an activity of the soul that is active within the body until

the change of teeth and then becomes apparent as a capacity for forming concepts that can be remembered.

The child also has a spiritual-soul activity that, in a certain sense, still hovers in an etheric way over the child. It is active in play in much the same way that dreams are active throughout the child's entire life. In children, however, this activity occurs not simply in dreams, it occurs also in play, which develops in external reality. What thus develops in external reality subsides in a certain sense. In just the same way that the seed-forming forces of a plant subside in the leaf and flower petal and only reappear in the fruit, what a child uses in play also only reappears at about the age of twenty-one or twenty-two, as independent reasoning gathering experiences in life.

I would like to ask you to try to genuinely seek this connection. Look at children and try to understand what is individual in their play: try to understand the individuality of children playing freely until the change of teeth, and then form pictures of their individualities. Assume that what you notice in their play will become apparent in their independent reasoning after the age of twenty. This means the various kinds of human beings differ in their independent reasoning after the age of twenty in the just the same way that children differ in their play before the change of teeth.

If you recognize the full truth of this thought, you will be overcome by an unbounded feeling of responsibility in regard to teaching. You will realize that what you do with a child forms the human being beyond the age of twenty. You will see that you will need to understand the entirety of life, not simply the life of children, if you want to create a proper education.

Playing activity from the change of teeth until puberty is something else again. (Of course, things are not so rigidly separated, but if we want to understand something for use in practical life, we must separate things.) Those who observe without prejudice will find that the play activity of a child until the age of seven has an individual character. As a player, the child is, in a certain sense, a kind of hermit. The child plays for itself alone. Certainly children want some help, but they are terribly egotistical and want the help only for themselves. With the change of teeth, play takes on a more social aspect. With some individual exceptions, children now want to play more with one another. The child ceases to be a hermit in his play; he wants to play with other children and to be something in play. . .but often the boys like to play soldier, (they at least want to be a general) and thus a social element is introduced to the children's play. . .

What occurs as the social element in play from the change of teeth until puberty is a preparation for the next period of life. In this next period, with the completion of puberty, independent reasoning arises. At that time human beings no longer subject themselves to authority; they form their own judgments and confront others as individuals. This same element appears in the previous period of life in play; it appears in something that is not connected with external social life, but in

play. What occurs in the previous period of life, namely, social play, is the prelude to tearing yourself away from authority. We can therefore conclude that children's play until the age of seven actually enters the body only at the age of twenty-one or twenty-two, when we gain independence in our understanding and ability to judge experiences. On the other hand, what is prepared through play between the ages of seven and puberty appears at an earlier developmental stage in life, namely, during the period from puberty until about the age of twenty-one. This is a direct continuation. It is very interesting to notice that we have properly guided play during our first childhood years to thank for the capacities that we later have for understanding and experiencing life. In contrast, for what appears during our lazy or rebellious years we can thank the period from the change of teeth until puberty; thus, the connections in the course of human overlap. These overlapping connections have a fundamental significance of which psychology is unaware.

01/13/1921; in *Rudolf Steiner in the Waldorf School* [10], pp. 72-73

To be sure, the most important time with regard to people finding their way into life is not their school years, but a much later time, the time when they are in their twenties, between the ages of twenty and thirty. This is the time that earlier ages (which we cannot and do not want to wish back) called the transition from apprenticeship to mastery. There is sometimes something extremely sensible in the designation of such transitions.

This is the time in which people actually fully grow up. They must then find a way to become skillful in life. Then something happens that I would like to compare to the following image taken from nature. Let me remind you of a certain river that flows through Corinthia and Krain. As it flows from its source, it is known as the Poik. Then it disappears into a hole and is no longer visible. After a time it comes to the surface again. It is the same river; it has simply flowed underground for a while, but now as it continues above ground, it is called the Unz. Then it again disappears and flows underground. When it surfaces again, it is known as the Laibach. It surfaces again and again; it is the same water, but sometimes it flows underground.

It is also like this in a human life. There is something present in human life in the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh years of life, and also during the school years, in the form of children's urge to play. Everything that belongs to children's play is especially active at this age. Then, like the river, it sinks below the surface of human life. Later, when sexual maturity arrives and other things happen, we see that this urge to play is no longer active in the same way. But when people enter their twenties, the same thing that was present in play surfaces again. However, it no longer functions as the urge to play; it is now something different. It has now become the way in which the individual can find his or her way into life. And in fact, if children are allowed to play in the right way according to their particular potentials, when they are introduced to the right games, then they will be able to adapt to life in the right way. But if we miss out on something about the