

6. Observing Everyday Playing Scenarios

Here are two play episodes of the type that many of us will have seen children involved in. There is nothing extraordinary about either, unless you consider all playing extraordinary. It is a layer of life like no other – real, yet not real. There are no playworkers involved in these.

Swimming Pool

I was watching three children, two boys aged seven and three and a girl aged five, playing by a swimming pool. The two older ones were making up jumps such as ‘the karate jump’, ‘the tomato jump’, ‘the splasherooni’, ‘the bomberooni’, ‘the sidesplits’ and so on. They were more or less taking turns to jump in and out of the pool and would announce each jump with great swagger; the jumps causing huge splashes and much laughter. The three-year old watched and giggled, and he jumped up and down to show his pleasure. This activity continued for twenty minutes or so, with the jumps becoming more exaggerated. At no time did the children jump on each other, although there were a few near misses as the excitement grew. The two children would jump in and then haul themselves out to jump again. The little boy made no attempt to go in the water but just watched and laughed. The seven-year old announced that it was his last jump (you could see that they were becoming cold) and after this last jump (which I think was ‘the football jump’) the three-year old folded his arms, nodded his head and said, ‘That was most impressive J.’ This made the other two children laugh loudly and they rushed off to tell their mums what the little one had said.

Clapping Games

My granddaughter had become interested in clapping type games. Her favourites were ‘My Mother says’ and ‘A sailor went to sea, sea, sea’ and one that is very complicated that involves lots of different moves with the hands and finishes up with having to guess which finger has prodded your back and getting a slap on the arm if you get it wrong.

When her friends were not around and I was there, I played these with her. We played them over and over again, getting faster, or slower; louder or quieter; softer or harder; sometimes altering the words a bit and occasionally making up our own rhythms and rhymes.

Most of the time it was very important to her that we get the words and the rhythm exactly right; so if there was any form of hesitation, a missed clap or we said the words wrong we had to start again. She sometimes decided that she liked the mistakes and then we just had a melee of words or clapping to finish that go. Sometimes she’d be doing something else, we’d be walking along the road, or I’d be doing something else and she just came up and put her hands up as a cue. One quick go seemed to do the trick and off she’d go to do her own thing.

Questions

Chapter 1

- Reflect on these two scenarios. Do you remember playing in this way when you were young? Does it stir any emotional connections?

Chapter 2

- What spheres of thought or possible benefits of playing are relevant here?
- Would the benefits of these types of playing be of the therapeutic, developmental and/or evolutionary nature?

Chapter 3

- Which play types are the children accessing in these two examples?

Chapter 4

- Can you get a picture of what type of children were playing in these scenarios? Were they displaying any particular types of behaviour that might make you stereotype them?

Chapter 6

- If you were involved as a playworker with either of these scenarios, what are the health and safety considerations that you would have to take account of? Would you have to make any intervention into the playing and if so what would it be and for what purpose?

Chapter 7

- What play affordances are offered by water – in a swimming pool? In wild water? What are the differences in play potential?

Chapter 8

- Clapping games are a traditional form of play. Can you think of other types of traditional play that children are involved in today? Reflect on one of these and consider why it (or a version of it) might be popular with children throughout the ages and in different parts of the world.