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**„THE WORLD OF PLAY AND INTERACTIVE GAMES“**

**„PLAY AS A TOOL FOR HEALTHY INTERACTION“**

## **1. Talking about play...**

"One can learn more in an hour of play than in a lifetime of conversation." Platon

"Man is man in his entirety, in the true sense of the word, when they play."  
Friedrich Schiller

„People don't stop playing, because they grow older. They grow older, because they stop playing.“  
George Bernard Shaw

"Play is the highest form of research." Albert Einstein

"Play is the action, in which we learn how to live." Johan Huizinga

"Play belongs to the most important development factors of children." Friedric Fröbel

## 2. Educational value of play: which outcomes do we have?

### 10 QUALITIES OF PLAY

#### **(1) PLAY IS HAPPENING HERE AND NOW:**

Every participant is required to be involved in the present situation of the game, with its own rules, its players, ecc; the past and the future are secondary

#### **(2) HAVING FUN WHILE WE PLAY:**

To experience and share the joy with others is more important for the development of a person than winning or losing during a game

#### **(3) PLAYING GAMES NEEDS FREEDOM:**

Do not force anyone to play; appropriate support can help to motivate the participants

#### **(4) THE PROCESS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE PRODUCT:**

The result is not so important, but the process how to achieve the goal counts

#### **(5) A GAME AS A SECOND REALITY**

The consequences of an action during a game do not really happen

#### **(6) EXPERIMENTING COMMUNION AND DIALOG WITH OTHERS**

Working together with other players builds relationships; rather than an individual action, it promotes teamwork

#### **(7) THE ENTIRE PERSON IS INVOLVED:**

During a game all the human senses can be involved and contribute to a higher quality of life

#### **(8) SOCIAL AND COGNITIVE LEARNING:**

In a game we can test positive behavior, which is also needed in everyday life: taking responsibility, problem solving, communicate and cooperate, encourage others, learn to listen

#### **(9) PROMOTE THE „INNER“ CHILD**

Playing a game well can often develop skills we experienced in childhood and are lost, when get older: spontaneity, imagination, curiosity

#### **(10) CONNECTION TO EVERYDAY LIFE:**

Playing together means living together; share and respect the "rules of the game" can produce positive guidelines for life

*From: U. Baer / J. Schilling, "Was ist Spiel?" in: Gruppe und Spiel, No. 13, 4/1990*

### 3. A classification of play: which types of games exist?

Many experts of play have tried to classify the great variety of games existing. Due to the complexity of play it has not been possible to propose a uniform classification. The German sports pedagogue Dietrich proposed a classification of play into three areas: "playing with something", "playing like something" and "playing for something". Further he added the term "playing with others" to emphasize the social aspect. These types of games, proposed by Dietrich, evolve one after the other according to the age and stage of play-experience and influence one each other.

Years			
14	<p><b>Playing with something</b> („objects“)</p> <p><i>Material play</i></p>	<p><b>Playing like something</b> ("roles")</p> <p><i>Roleplay</i></p>	<p><b>Playing for something</b> ("rules")</p> <p><i>competition sportsgames</i></p>
13			
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vgl.: K. Dietrich (1980): Spielen. In: *Sportpädagogik* 4 (1), S. 17.

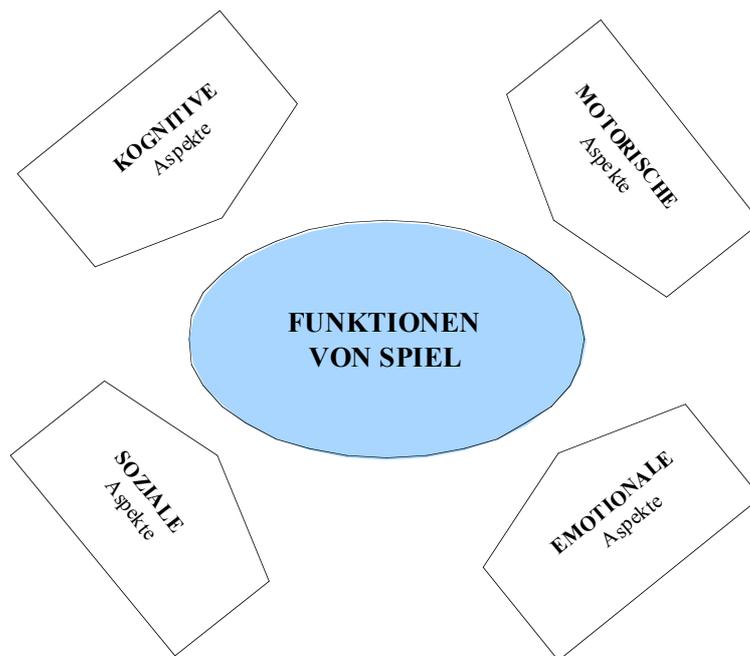
This classification illustrates the different functions and learning processes during a game. Parents and educators must therefore provide play experiences to children according to their abilities and needs. Maxim Gorky said in this context: "Play is the way in which children get to know the world in which they live" (Heimlich 2001, p. 59)

#### a) Playing for something:

The concept of „playing for something" not only applies to sports games known as football or volleyball, but refers to all forms of movement such as running games, as well as cooperative and competitive games. Everything revolves around the question: "How can I, as an individual or as a team, be better than the others?" From game to game there are many ways to finish as a winner. Sometimes this happens by scoring goals or baskets, collecting points, capturing someone and so on. Cooperative games are distinguished from competitive games to the fact that the groups must perform a task together and be able to do it in a certain time. Therefore also these games are "for something."

## 4. Functions of play: what do we learn while playing?

Positive play experiences promote essential learning processes for the development of a person. For this reason, the current pedagogy is using more and more play activities to improve the cognitive, emotional, motoric and social skills of children, as we see in the concept of Ulrich Heimlich.



vgl. U. Heimlich (2001): Einführung in die Spielpädagogik, p. 53.

From the perspective of the child we can say, that it discovers the environment first of all by **motoric and moving games**. For the young child experiencing joy in movement is an increasingly important resource. Running, sliding, being in balance helps to strengthen muscles and the sense of balance.

The **cognitive potential** of play is used in many circumstances. For example in school to help children learn topics, expand the vocabulary, improve knowledge in a playful way as well as for the elderly. All in all playing games are a successful way for cognitive learning, even if it is criticized from some experts as an "instrumentalization" of play.

The **emotional aspect** of play is of great importance, offering opportunities to experience and appreciate feelings. Healthy play experiences can have a positive effect on the mental balance of a person. In social working situations, for example, role-playing games are used effectively to deal with emotions and solve conflicts.

The **social aspect** is related to be in interaction with others. Playing games is almost always - regardless of whether it is in a cooperative or a competitive setting - a moment of "playing with others" and sets in motion a series of social learning processes. Working together with other players in a team, accepting the rules, developing plans and strategies to be successful, sharing the results ecc.

## 5. Games for different age groups

Playing with different age groups should respect the needs and the abilities that vary depending of age, play experience and cultural background. It is necessary to know well the world of children and teenagers with their interests and needs. Below are listed some ideas for different age groups.

### **Children: 7-10 years**

#### Needs

- develop skills and talents
- experience of group
- carry out various tasks

#### Possible games:

- storytelling games, scetches
- activities in nature like a treasure hunt, adventure games
- use nice materials: balloons, colorful balls, circus games

### **Children: 10-14 years**

#### Needs:

- need of challenges and stimuli
- strong desire to move
- start to take responsibility

#### Possible games:

- sportive games
- team games and light competition, but not just soccer
- teambuilding games: games with cooperative challenges for the whole group
- important: let them assume the role of "assistant" and "helpers" to explain and demonstrate games

### **Teens: 14 years**

#### Needs:

- need of freedom: having the possibiity to choose and to participate
- find confidence and develop responsibility
- experience of the group, teambuilding

#### Possible games:

- Do not use the word "game", instead "experiment", "exercise", "activity"
- as an adult moderator play with them, in an appropriate way
- having discussion-games about „hot topics“

## 6. The role of the moderator: how to explain a game well?

To explain a game well to a group you may need some helpful leadership qualities:

- ⇒ **Competence:** know different types of games
- ⇒ **Passion:** to transmit joy and passion for the game
- ⇒ **Choose the right game for the moment:**  
know the needs, the interests of the group and give them a suitable challenge
- ⇒ **Prepare yourself well:** having backup games in case you need to change
- ⇒ **Safety:** Watch out for physical and emotional safety
- ⇒ **Create a nice little story:** explain the rules of a game not only technically
- ⇒ **Use the appropriate language:** eg do not use the word "game" with teens
- ⇒ **Show good leadership and confidence:**  
at the beginning be clear about the rules and the way to play and keep everything under control, slowly engage people and make room for their ideas

## 7. Educate while playing: some final thoughts...

Some ideas to promote a dynamic and positive sense of relationship, when you organize a game or a sports activity.

### **1.) Transmit joy and passion for what you do:**

- Not be involved too much by the criticism of the participants
- Be sure that your work is an important contribution

### **2.) Be yourself a positive role model:**

- Transmit integrity, respect, authenticity, patience and the ability to listen
- My way to talk, organize, give limits etc. is always a possibility to "donate"

### **3.) Have a great esteem for the group:**

- First see the "person", then the following of the rules
- Appreciate a positive behavior of the participants

### **4.) Putting yourself in the shoes of others:**

- Be familiar with the needs and strengths of the group, then choose the games
- Provide safety (or limits) to those who need it

### **5.) Educating is always a way of learning from each other:**

- Encourage and believe yourself in a "culture of respect"
- "Relationships are more important than the content" (Ruth Cohn)