

The Impact of the Loss of Free, Undirected Play on The Lives of Children

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- I. Introduction: Worried about the loss of play**
- II. A Disclaimer: Comparing different eras of childhood is tricky**
- III. Growing evidence that there is a loss of play in our culture**
 - A. Definitions of play.
 - 1. “The spontaneous activity of children”
 - 2. A “signature mammalian behavior”
 - 3. “The inborn disposition for learning, curiosity, imagination and fantasy” (David Elkind)
 - B. The tendency to make play into “the work of childhood” and the adult temptation to improve on play.
 - C. Film Clip: “**The Nueva Forts**”
- IV. What are the cultural threats to free, undirected play?**
 - A. Loss of “social capital,” neighborhood and time.
 - B. Irrational fears and the need for control.
 - C. Parenting informed by trauma theory.
 - D. Global competition, academic ambition and homework.
 - E. The rise of organized sports.
 - F. Screen time.
 - G. The need to be a “great” parent.

V. What Are the Signs that the loss of free play is having an impact on children?

- A. Obesity.
- B. Increased stress and anxiety.
- C. Increased ADHD, fragility and depression in late adolescents.
- D. Social incompetence, inability for form and maintain groups.
- E. Excessive dependence on parents.
- F. The loss of contact with nature.

VI. Will our children lose the capacity to play? Will they forget?

- A. Is the lack of play and the increase in technological imagery producing changes in children's brains?

“Indeed, the evolutionary gain in neural plasticity that distinguishes human beings seems to have been at the cost of innate capability.”
(B.Wexler, Neurobiology and Culture)

- B. What are teachers seeing in the classroom and at recess?

VII. The Future of play

- A. Pessimists and optimists. Hara Marano declares that, “Play is nearly dead.” Is that true? I don't see children losing the *capacity* to play. When they are given the time and space to play, they quickly re-invent it.
- B. We need to advocate for play, create and protect environments for it.
 - 1. Kindergarten mothers who learned to turn their backs so they couldn't see their sons play in a field behind the school.
- C. Felix Adler said, “We need to give children lots of sunshine when they are young. They are going to need it later.” Play is the sunshine of childhood.