The Characteristics of Play

Primarily, play is:

1. self-chosen and self-directed;
2. process rather than product driven;
3. contains structures or rules established by the players themselves;
4. imaginative, non-literal and removed from reality;
5. occurs between those who are active, alert and non-stressed.

(Gray, 2013; Brewer, 2007)

Piaget's Cognitive Developmental Stages

Pre-Operational Cognitive Stage	Concrete Operational Cognitive Stage	Formal Operational Cognitive Stage
Typical Age Band: • Language development a hall mark of this stage • Do not understand concrete logic • Cannot mentally manipulate information • Unable to understand the opinion of others • Increased use of pretending and use of symbols (eg a broom is a horse) • Little understanding of the principles of 'conservation' • 'Centration' – the tendency to focus on only one aspect of a situation at one time in both social and non-social contexts • Speech is egocentric • Animism: This is the belief that inanimate objects (such as toys and teddy bears) have human feelings and intentions • Artificialism: This is the belief that certain aspects of the environment are manufactured by people (e.g., clouds in the sky) • Irreversibility: This is the inability the reverse the direction of a sequence of events to their starting point	**Typical Age Band:** • Grasp of logical concepts limited to tangible areas (can conserve numbers not mass) • Can mentally manipulate information – begins to take other points of view • Infers what another person is thinking • Still magical in their thinking • Still animism – during the first stage only objects that move have a purpose. In the next stage only objects that move spontaneously are thought to be alive • Able to justify their thinking • Just learning to organise their thoughts cohesively • No abstract reasoning yet • Able to distinguish fantasy from reality • Able to apply creative thinking to problem solving • Increased memory, attention span • Greater impulse to control persistence and resilience working on a project	**Typical Age Band:** • Hypothetical-deductive reasoning: the ability to think scientifically through generating predictions, or hypotheses, about the world to answer questions. • Problem solving becomes systematic and organised, rather than trial and error. • Abstract thought – concrete operations carried out on ideas, rather than things (as seen in the earlier concrete operational cognitive stage). Individuals can think about hypothetical and abstract concepts they have yet to experience. E.g., beauty, love, freedom, morality • Individuals understand the concept of transitivity – that a relationship between two elements is carried over to other elements logically related to the first two. • Adolescent egocentrism – or heightened self-focus. This comes from attributing unlimited power to their own thoughts. • Create an imaginary audience – the adolescents' belief that those around them are as concerned and focused on their appearance as they themselves are. • Personal fable – belief that one is unique, special, or invulnerable to harm.

Urges in Children's Play

Gathering – collecting treasures

Transporting

Deconstruction – piling up and knocking down

Construction

Huts (enclosure) – both small and large

Throwing (trajectory)

Enveloping - wrapping things in paper, leaves,

Connection – putting things end to end, tying together

Posting - putting things into things

Patterning and ordering – sorting, classifying, seriating

Families

Rotation – rolling, spinning, drawing, winding

Orientation – looking at things from another angle, eg hanging upside down, through legs

Transformation – turning something into something else, changing properties, mud, flour

Climbing

Jumping

Digging and burying

Tug of war

Tumbling and wrestling

Running and chasing

Playing with water

Playing with fire

Schema in Children's Play

Action Focused Schema		Climbing
		Jumping
		Tumbling and wrestling
		Tug of war
		Running and chasing
		Digging and Burying
		Gathering
		Connection
		Posting
		Patterning and ordering
		Orientation
		Enveloping
		Rotation
		Trajectory
		Transporting
Thinking + Action Focused Schema		Playing with Fire
		Playing with Water
		Transformation
		Enclosure
		Deconstruction
		Construction
		Families

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Functional Types of Play

Physical Play: Develops strong bodies, coordination, balance and endurance. Encourages risk-taking and resiliency, assessment of dangers and a self-awareness as to the body's limits.

Language Play: From 'baby' language (eg cooing, babbling) through to understandable sounds and words, playing with language is a developmental process that needs time to occur. Playing with phrases, puns, rhymes, alliteration is play with linguistic construction. As adults, language play is known as poetry.

Exploratory Play: Much if not all play children engage in is exploratory. As skills develop, their curiosity and motivation lead to further discoveries and the need for new or refined skills. When imagination and creativity combine with exploration in adulthood, science occurs.

Constructive Play: The intent in constructive play is to produce something created from the imagination. Constructive play can also be with words and sounds, as well as with substances. In modern day play, constructive play includes computer programs, written stories, secret codes – it can be intellectual as well as manual.

Fantasy Play: Rules are recreated and imagination is extended in fantasy play. Ideas are played out logically and consequences are explored. Hypotheses can be formulated and what might be possible is considered. In pretend play, children exercise imaginative capacities that allow consideration for things not immediately present. This forms the basis for executive functioning, a higher order cognitive skill.

Social Play: When children engage in imaginative play with others, they learn to manage their behaviour and interaction in order to meet a shared understanding of what is or is not acceptable. Children learn to not only agree but also to concede, a valuable life skill.

(From "Free to Learn", Peter Gray, 2013)