

IS CHILDHOOD IN EXTINCTION?

by **Karina Tenenbaum**

It is from some school observations that the question about the real place of children in American society has been raised.

When we think about childhood, we know that play is intrinsic to children, so ludic activities should come first. It is strange to imagine that this is not considered when organizing the activities for the operation of any Elementary School.

“ **IF WE TALK ABOUT SCHOOLS IN FLORIDA, THE FACT THAT THERE ARE NO BREAKS DURING SCHOOL HOURS IS PARTICULARLY STRIKING AND IT ALSO CALLS FOR CONSIDERATION SINCE THESE CHILDREN DO NOT HAVE FREE TIME FOR RECREATION DURING THE EXTENDED SCHOOL HOURS.** ”

Schools provide lunch-time and this time could be planned according to the same schools, as an opportunity to socialize, talk, move and play.

However, and despite the fact that lunchtime is the only scheduled time to take a break from school activities, it is not always an opportunity for recreation. As noted in the facts, it is the authorities of each educational establishment who decide whether this time will be only used for the child to cover their need for food or if, during that period of time, the need for play and interaction with peers will also be considered.

Not having an institutionalized approach and leaving the needs of children to the person in charge of the educational establishment consideration raises a serious problem. For some reason there is a prominent tendency to put off play time and contact with peers.

NEEDLESS TO SAY, EVEN ADULTS NEED A BREAK DURING DAILY TASKS; TIME FOR COFFEE, TALKING ON THE PHONE, A LITTLE BREAK DURING WORK HOURS IS ALWAYS NEEDED. THESE LITTLE BREAKS RECOGNIZE THE LIMITS OF HUMAN CONCENTRATION AND, FAR FROM PROMOTING DISPERSION; THEY ALLOW A RE-LAUNCHING IN THE WILLINGNESS TO WORK AND A BETTER PERFORMANCE.

Nowadays, schools do not seem to encourage the relationship between children. There is an operational mode which rewards 'good behavior', rewarding those who do not speak, run or move. The child who behaves closest to the operational ideal in the classroom will surely be chosen as a teacher's assistant to monitor his/her peers' behavior exposing those breaking the established rules.

This strategy in place to allow a "good operation" in the classroom has consequences. We could say that while these procedures are implemented, they require the child to renounce to his

childlike natural behavior, such as curiosity and movement; meanwhile companionship, friendship, and solidarity are excluded from the school curriculum. Creating bonds and common codes with their peers does not matter.

It is assumed that when children get home, then they can play. However, reality demonstrates that types of entertainment such as TVs, computers and video games are solitary; there is no need to interact with others, to share, create bonds, accept different viewpoints, establish certain rules or re-create reality situations like play allows.

This type of solitary activity with a device produces an increase in isolation where each one is secluded in their own world.

Instead, play tends to the unification and integration of personality. Creativity is one of the main functions of play, as well as symbolization. Play has a fundamental role in relation to aggression and displeasure experienced by the child; during play the child can create a socially acceptable way to handle these emotions. Through play, surrounding reality is symbolized; it is a way of transforming and expressing anything that happens. Through play the child can take an active stance on what lives passively; if a parent scolds the child, a doll will surely then be scolded as well.

WE MUST REMEMBER THE VALUE OF FICTION THAT PLAY ENTAILS. PLAY IS THE SCENE THAT THE CHILD CREATES TO SUCCESSFULLY DEVELOP A WAY TO DEAL WITH WHAT IS UNPLEASANT AND WHAT CAUSES UNCERTAINTY; IT IS A SCENE IN WHICH HE TRIES TO RESPOND TO WHAT HE STILL DOES NOT KNOW.

Nowadays, it appears that we do not sometimes remember the main function of play. Sometimes, adults are frightened and react accordingly when children represent their aggression during play.

This clearly shows us that not only play space and human bonds are in the process of deterioration but also symbolism is. When this symbolic value is not considered, we take the risk of confusing material reality with the psychological reality which is staged during play.

Today we live in a time in which bringing a toy gun to school can be considered a crime, and if a child makes a hand gesture of pointing to someone as if he had a gun, then he is considered violent. This is something that happens even though the child may be only a few years old.

TIME TO PLAY WITH OTHERS IS BECOMING EXTINCT. FANTASY AND SYMBOLISM WHICH ARE INHERENT TO PLAY ARE TAKEN LITERALLY; THIS WAY PLAY IS LOSING ITS BASIC ESSENCE.

The question we could ask ourselves is about the consequences that this situation brings along. We can observe and analyze certain trends; for example, that more often we need less from each other being isolation and selfishness more predominant, and in this causes debilitation of social bonds. Failure to provide socially acceptable spaces for expression will allow the establishment of ways neither acceptable nor healthy, in which children will be punished, restricted, and probably diagnosed.

It is striking that in American culture mother's day, father's day, teacher's day, grandparent's day, Valentine's day and even Halloween's day are observed but children's day is not really observed or remembered. »

We forget about the children except when the time comes to consume; that is when children are on the agenda. In a society that has a distinctive trait and is sustained by the idea of material ownership, children are also taken into account and addressed with a range of sophisticated objects for consumption. That is when the child becomes himself an object of consumption.

The rights and laws protecting children indicate that a category of privilege is granted. They are legally protected from abuse, neglect, and mistreatment; the State makes sure that this status of well-being is guaranteed.

However:

“ WE CANNOT IGNORE THE DISCOMFORT THAT CHILDHOOD IS GOING THROUGH AND IT DOES NOT SEEM JUST MERE COINCIDENCE THAT CHILDREN ARE BEING MORE AND MORE MEDICATED, WITH INCREASING PROBLEMS OF HYPERACTIVITY AND LACK OF ATTENTION AT SCHOOLS, WITH MANIFESTATIONS OF VIOLENCE AT EARLY AGES, WITH PROBLEMS OF DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, ETC. THE LIST COULD GO ON TO NAME ALL THE TYPES OF CLASSIFICATIONS USED NOWADAYS TO LABEL AND NAME THOSE SAME CHILDREN WHO, PARADOXICALLY, ARE TO BE PROTECTED. ”

The place of children today is in question while the essence of their being is forgotten. ¶