



Kalyan Ashok

### Games and sports play a vital role in the development of the child.

To play is a natural instinct in a child and it has a universal character. And the world over, every child wants to play. Why should a child play? There are several interesting theories. One is the 'instinct theory'. It is through sheer instinct that a child loves to play; it is a natural physical action. There is another theory that suggests that a child has an excessive and expendable energy and the only way it can be spent is through playing.

Then there is a theory of expression. A child wants to express her feelings, which also comes through play. When they play, children express varied emotions: joy, cheerfulness, anger and disappointment. Through play, a child learns new things. A physical activity on the ground helps a child to develop certain physical attributes like a good posture, movement, anticipation, improving hand and eye coordination and so on. Basically, a child learns through doing. In the USA, they call it 'movement' education.

In India, the education is through repetition and imitation, where the child is taught to follow his or her peer or the teacher or the parent. The learning process for a child has to be informal and that can come only through play, where there is freedom for a child to follow the natural instinct. The stress on informal mode is due to the fact that the attention span of children is limited. When they are very young, they get distracted easily during formal learning processes. And hence the need to inject lot of informality in educating a child. That can be done only through play or sports, and its proper integration with formal education would make a solid bedrock for a sound educational system.

What a child learns in class is in a formal mode, and often there is no freedom for a child to indulge in any action, which she can call truly a self made process. Whereas in play, a child, though within certain rules, is able to initiate her own actions.

Games and sports play a vital role in the development of the child. The child learns the virtues of team work, imbibes the spirit of sportsmanship, learns as she grows, learns to face an adverse situation gamely; the child learns to focus better at the task on hand and the child also learns to enjoy the fruits of sharing, giving and helping. Playing or sports enables a child to emerge as a well rounded person.



There is a notion that one plays to win. But in a child's case, nothing can be farther than the truth. A child simply enjoys playing and loves being in the midst of a physical activity. A child doesn't really think about the consequences of winning or losing. The competitive spirit, as they grow, is injected into their system. But this doesn't come into play when they are very young and are learning the rudiments of a chosen sport. It is for the educationists to define how much should be the accent on the competitive factor. In the formative years, however, the child should be allowed to enjoy the sport and have fun - winning or losing simply doesn't matter.

True, one can claim that children should know a thing or two about winning and losing and some even cite

the examples of the Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union or China, where children are picked at an early age and put in sports schools and trained to be champions, through strict diet control, overload of training and drilling the 'killer instinct' into them. Such children do become medal winning machines, when they attain their teens or adulthood. But in the process of becoming a champion, they lose their entire childhood, which is a wonderful phase of one's life. Stories abound in such nations, about the physiological ill effects of heavy loads of training, food supplements and psychological problems these children develop when they grow up. No amount of counselling is going to bring back their lost childhood. It is only during pre- adolescent and adolescent period, that the child develops the maturity to take on the taxing loads of training. In India, it is a different case altogether. Parental and academic pressures hinder a child achieving her natural potential in sports. Every parent dreams that their child, just because he plays tennis or cricket and attends a reputed coaching clinic, will become another Leander Paes or Sachin Tendulkar. As a sports writer, I have covered many junior swimming, athletic and tennis events and have often watched parents cry hoarse, egging on their child to over reach herself. No harm in encouraging children, but they should avoid over expectations and allow the child to enjoy his game.

Indian educationists have under estimated the impact of play and sports on the child's well-being and growth. No wonder, sports is not a treated as a subject in the curriculum. Many schools do not have proper

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playing facilities or physical trainers to train them in sports. Even children, who excel in sports, fail to take it up as a career option because of lack of encouragement. Sports, has at best, become a tool for gaining admission in professional courses through the 'sports quota', at the collegiate level.

Several promising young swimmers, athletes, basket ball players and cricketers have virtually bid adieu to sports when they entered the realm of professional courses. A few do manage to balance both in a successful manner. Shikha Tandon, an Olympian swimmer from Bangalore, now pursuing hers Masters in Biotechnology in the United States, says: "Balancing both is difficult but if you are determined, you can do it. I spent six hours in classrooms and labs and another six hours in the swimming pool, without losing focus on either my studies or swimming career". Shikha was lucky as she studied in Shree Bhagwan Mahaveer Jain College, whose chairman Chenraj Jain is an avid sports enthusiast and the college sports persons get time off for training and for participating in events. "The last thing I want to see is a sports person in my college cooped in class room. I always tell them to go and practice, we will conduct special classes for you!", says Mr. Jain. "It is unrealistic to expect a player to pursue sports once he or she is in a professional course. Because they are studying to be doctors and engineers not a full time sportsman who wants to be a part time doctor," says Mr. L.R. Vaidyanathan, the former Dean of Bangalore University College of Physical Education.

"Sport should be made relevant to life like any other subject," observes Mr. Vaidyanathan. He is perfectly right because sports is yet to become a part of school curriculum in most states, barring a few like Karnataka, Punjab and Kerala.

A proper integration of sports into educational system would help the child to evolve as a better person and enhance his overall development. Play, recreation, games, sports, they all mean the same thing to the child, and takes a special connotation for the child as she grows and discovers the nuances.

The State's role in providing standard education with a proper staple of sports and play cannot be underestimated as most of the educational institutions are run by the Government. In a welcome move, Karnataka has initiated a move to teach sport as a subject from Standard IV to IX. After a break for SSLC in the 10th, sports is again a compulsory subject in the

11th and 12th (PUC). There is now a growing awareness among educationists to provide a good mix of sports and education to children. NCERT has come up with suggestions on making sports an integral part of academics. A UNESCO Declaration on the right of children to play is being worked out.

Various governmental committees, like the H.N. Kunzru Committee, Kothari Committee and Radhakrishnan Committee, have all recommended that sports and physical education be integrated with academics. Several institutions, have started the concept of pre-school sports at the Montessori level itself and an interesting example is the pioneering

work done by Mrs. Shirly Madhavan Kutty, who runs a highly reputed Montessori School called 'Magic Years' in Delhi.

Despite these initiatives, sports education does not figure very high on the list of priorities in our country. The Union Sports Ministry would rather see a clutch of champions than focus on giving a good sports education to a child and the same notion is reflected in society's outlook as well. This mind set needs to change as a sports conscious child not only becomes a happy and healthy child, but also grows up to be a model citizen, if not a great sportsman.



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