



# { parent-theses }

a quarterly journal for parents produced by John Allison

Number 1, Autumn 2010 ~ Creative Play

## *Editorial ~ the year foretold...*

This is the fifth year of { *parent-theses* } and I'm delighted to say that interest in it continues to grow. Apart from the direct circulation to my email lists, a number of schools publish articles in their newsletters, and others bind each issue and file them in their parent library. You may have discovered the four { *parent-theses* } Collections at <http://groups.google.com.au/group/parent-theses> and perhaps even noticed the first special edition on a theme — Bullying — which reprints a series of articles drawn from the 2007 journals. If you are a recent subscriber you might find numerous interesting articles in these Collections.

As I put the Collections together, it gave me an opportunity to review what I was doing. In each issue I've tended to mix a range of issues across a range of childhood phases. This year one theme will be featured in each issue. So in this issue we explore the importance of *Creative Play*, with particular reference to the first six - seven years. Following some introductory aphoristic comments from myself, I have gathered three important contributions from Joan Almon, Ruth Wittig, and Cynthia Aldinger.

The series of articles edited from a lecture on parenting (which is available in full on my website [www.johnallison.com.au](http://www.johnallison.com.au)) will continue in the first two issues of this year. And the Toolbox continues... And reflections on the seasons... Happy reading!

## *Autumn and the Nature Table*

Each Autumn, Nature calls, "Look around you!" The valleys are wreathed in mist in the mornings, and the nights we waken from seem wreathed in dreams. The sunlight seems so golden, and the foliage glows warmly. I came home from the city recently, feeling exhausted, and went for a walk in the National Park across the road. I felt enlivened again, and walked home grateful for the calming, healing and vivifying effect of Nature.

Do you keep a nature table with your children? Here is a source of wonder, of reverence and gratitude — so often our lives today are disconnected from the light and air, from seeing and breathing, from the steady pulse of world-processes. Just try connecting again with the seasons of Nature, and notice the change in family dynamics.

## *Playing, Being, Working*

A child is playing and nothing else exists for her in that moment. Few adults can give such attention to their immediate situation, so willingly, for so long. And it *is* real work.

Play enables the child to live into a whole world. It is a world of her own making which borders on to the world we think is the real world. Through manifold creative acts the child pushes back these boundaries, to increasingly inhabit the world we know but all too often have forgotten how to understand. Play is a participatory pathway into the reality of this so-called real world.

A child playing is ordering the world. Play is an experiment into the nature of reality. Things are either obedient to her imagination, or not. Play is a brave adventure into the possibilities and limitations of things. It is the true basis of problem-solving.

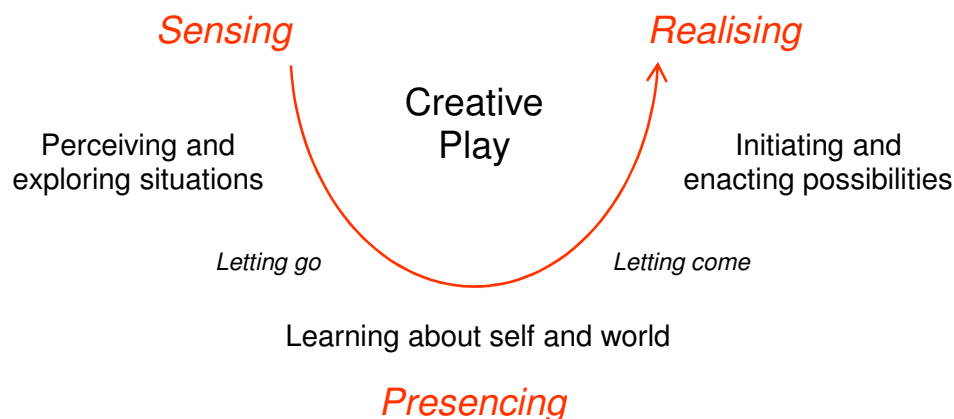
A child playing is discovering her relationship to the world. The encounter reflects back into her developing sense of self.

A child playing is working out real situations. Play brings these situations into a coherent narrative that makes sense. In the world of play any thing can become anything. And everything. There is nothing missing within the whole world of play. It is always as minimal and elaborate as necessary. It is what it is.

We can summarise... A child playing is:

- Perceiving and exploring situations
- Learning about self and world
- Initiating and enacting possibilities.

We can then place this on a U Path, along the lines developed by Otto Scharmer:



A child is playing. Our responsibility as adults is to protect and nurture this world of play, this realm in which anything is possible. Which leads to everything that works...

~ *John Allison 2010*

## *The Vital Role of Play in Early Childhood Education*

*[This is an excerpt from Joan's Almon's contribution to an anthology called "A Crisis in Early Childhood Education: The Rise of Technologies and the Demise of Play" published in 2003 by Greenwood as part of their Child Psychology and Mental Health series. I am grateful to Joan for permission to feature it here. The full text can be downloaded from [www.waldorfresearchinstitute.org/pdf/BAPlayAlmon.pdf](http://www.waldorfresearchinstitute.org/pdf/BAPlayAlmon.pdf)]*

The ability to play is one of the principal criteria of mental health.

~ Ashley Montagu

In over 30 years of working with children, families, and teachers in kindergartens all over the world, I have observed one consistent feature of childhood: *Creative play is a central activity in the lives of healthy children.* Play helps children weave together all the elements of life as they experience it. It allows them to digest life and make it their own. It is an outlet for the fullness of their creativity, and it is an absolutely critical part of their childhood. With creative play, children blossom and flourish; without it, they suffer a serious decline. I am hardly the first to note this fact. The central importance of creative play in children's healthy development is well supported by decades of research. And yet, children's play, in the creative, open-ended sense in which I use the term, is now seriously endangered. The demise of play will certainly have serious consequences for children and for the future of childhood itself.

Parents, teachers, and mental health professionals alike, are expressing concern about children who do not play. Some seem blocked and unable to play. Others long to play, but policies and practices at home and in school have driven open-ended, self-directed play out of their lives. Children no longer have the freedom to explore woods and fields and find their own special places. Informal neighbourhood ball games are a thing of the past, as children are herded into athletic leagues at increasingly younger ages. Add to this mixture the hours spent sitting still in front of screens — television, video game, and computer — absorbing other people's stories and imaginations, and the result is a steady decline in children's play.

Increasingly, pre-school and kindergarten children find themselves in school settings which feature scripted teaching, computerised learning, and standardised assessment. Physical education and play-time are being eliminated; new schools are built without playgrounds. While allegedly, these approaches are providing 'quality education', they trivialise and undermine children's natural capacities for meaningful and focused life lessons through creative play, and this leaves many children profoundly alienated from their school experiences.

I have observed the steady decline of play over the past 30 years, but even I was astonished by a recent call from a counsellor in an elementary school in Virginia. She had been talking with a first grade class and used the word 'imagination'. When they stared blankly at her, she explained its meaning, but the children continued to look

puzzled. "You know," she said, "it's when you pretend to be someone you're not," and she gave an example from her own childhood when she loved to play 'Wonder Woman'. She would put on a cape and fly down the hill near her house with her arms outstretched, pretending to be aloft. "That's imagination," she explained. "But we don't know how to do that," said one child, and all the others nodded their heads in agreement. Not one child in that first grade seemed to know what imaginative play was.

### *The Nature of Play*

If we are to rescue play, we must first understand its nature. Creative play is like a spring that bubbles up from deep within a child. It is refreshing and enlivening. *It is a natural part of the make-up of every healthy child.* The child's love of learning is intimately linked with a zest for play. Whether children are working on new physical skills, social relations, or cognitive content, they approach life with a playful spirit. As a friend said of her eight-month-old recently, "It just seems that she's working all the time." But is it work or play? In childhood there is no distinction.

Adults are convinced that we need to 'teach' young children. It is certainly true that we need to set an example in all kinds of activities. We also need to create appropriate spaces where children can play and learn, and we need to lend a helping hand — and at times even intervene when things are going wrong. But mostly we need to honour the innate capacity for learning that moves the limbs and fills the souls of every healthy young child.

Nathan at one year came with his parents to the summer house we share as a family. He was delighted to find several staircases in this house, for in his own home there was only one step, and he had long since mastered it. Now he gave full vent to his wish to climb stairs. Over and over he would climb up and down. We took turns standing guard, but he rarely needed our help. He was focused and concentrated, and did not like to be taken away from this activity. He gave every sign of being a happy, playful child while climbing, yet he was also clearly exploring and mastering a new skill and one that was important for his long-term development. Most important, it was a task he set for himself. No one could have told this one-year-old to devote hours to climbing. He did it himself, as will every healthy child whose sense of movement has not been disturbed.

Here is another example of child-initiated play that is also work. Ivana at age four came to kindergarten one Monday morning and proudly announced that she could tie her shoes. I must have looked sceptical, because it is beyond the skill level of most children of her age. Ivana — determined to demonstrate her new prowess — promptly sat down on the floor and untied and then retied her shoes into perfect bows, looked at my astonished face, and beamed. Later in the day I asked her mother how Ivana had learned to do this.

Her mother laughed and described how over the weekend Ivana had pretended that she was going to a birthday party. She folded scraps of paper into little birthday packages.

She then raided her mother's yarn basket and used pieces of yarn to tie the packages with bows.

She probably tied 60 or 70 packages during the weekend until she had at last mastered the art of tying bows. She clearly felt ready, and she did her work in the spirit of play. If, instead, someone had required Ivana to learn to tie her shoes before she signalled her readiness and interest, and proceeded to give her formal instruction, learning would have been transformed into a tedious and stressful task.

The simple truth is that young children are born with a most wonderful urge to grow and learn. They continually develop new skills and capacities, and if they are allowed to set the pace with a bit of help from the adult world they will work at all this in a playful and tireless way. Rather than respecting this innate drive to learn, however, we often treat children as if they can learn only what we adults can teach them. We strip them of their innate confidence in directing their own learning, hurry them along, and often wear them out. It is no wonder that so many teachers complain that by the age of nine or ten, children seem burned out and uninterested in learning. This is a great tragedy, for the love of learning that Nathan and Ivana displayed can last a lifetime. Furthermore, it is intimately bound to our capacity to be creative and purposeful.

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi identified a creative state which he termed 'flow', and which I believe is comparable to the state that children enter into, when deeply engaged in play. In their book *Creative Spirit*, Goleman, Kaufman and Ray describe the state of 'flow' as the time "when people are at their peak. Flow can happen in any domain or activity — while painting, playing chess, making love, anything. The one requirement is that your skills so perfectly match the demands of the moment that all self-consciousness disappears."

Csikszentmihalyi recounted the following vignette to illustrate the nature of 'flow'. A neurosurgeon was deeply engrossed in a difficult operation. When the procedure was finished, he inquired about a pile of debris in the corner of the operating room. He was informed that part of the ceiling had caved in during the operation. The surgeon had been so engaged in the flow of his work that he had not heard a thing!

Children engaged in healthy play display a depth of concentration that can also be characterized by 'flow'. I think of five-year-old Peter watching intently as two girls in the kindergarten were creating an especially beautiful play scene on a tabletop. They were deeply engrossed and so was he. It happened that on that day the fire department descended on us, because one of the teachers had called them after noticing an electrical odour in her room. Three fire engines roared up our driveway. Peter's friend Benjamin ran up to him, crying, "Peter, Peter, the fire engines are here!" But Peter was so intent on watching the play scene that he did not respond. Benjamin tried again with the same result. He shrugged and rushed back to the window to watch the firemen arrive. Finally, Peter emerged from his concentration, saw the fire engines, and hurried to the window.

The state of flow experienced by scientists, physicians, artists, and others can be intimidating. Do we want to enter so wholeheartedly into life and learning? It does not fit the contemporary picture of 'multi-tasking' where one is doing many things at once, but usually none of them very deeply. Yet it is an important state of being if we want to flex our inner capacities to the fullest and offer our greatest gifts to the world.

*~ Joan Almon 2003*

[Joan Almon has been a Waldorf early childhood educator for over thirty years and also served as founding Chair of the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America. She is currently the Director of the U.S. branch of the Alliance for Childhood, a broad-based advocacy group that brings together educators, health professionals, parents and others to work on common concerns, such as the need to restore imaginative play and other healthy essentials to childhood.]

## *A Child's Work...*

Observe the child at play.

He is totally involved. Perhaps you come upon him unexpectedly and call him. He does not hear... you say he is too engrossed. When you call him for tea, invariably he wants to 'finish'... To finish what? What is he working at? What needs finishing? — not only in the short term particular play activity but rather in the overall span of these formative years.

Ask the basic question ... What is play? Why does the child play and play and play?

The baby, the toddler, the younger child, the older child ... play. These early years are formative years, these early years are filled with play.

A man expects to work, and child expects to play ... and play ... and play a little longer.

The child explores his environment in play, and assumes responsibility for it, he practises responsibility.

Through serious participation in the activity of play he strengthens his concentration.

In many a situation he need initiative, creativity is expressed, practicalness is tested. Independence and confidence are called forth.

The child is tuned and fulfilled in play. He knows the satisfaction of a 'good days' activity'. He can apply himself to life and living, to his environment — within the play situation. There is purpose and direction in his play.

Play prepares the child for the future.

Rudolf Steiner said, "Play works from within outwards, work from outside inwards."

Consider the qualities within the activity of play and you will see that play is constantly being transformed into work.

Sometimes he says he's playing, sometimes he says he's working.

At first the child is carried by impulse from within. This wonderful movement play itself out and shows itself in his continual coming and goings, his uninhibited body movement, his constant chattering. In his joy of exploration — everywhere — in his touching and tasting — of everything.

The young child is naturally bubbling over with a spontaneous unformed impulse, to do, to go, to make, etc. He plays with his toes, he plays with his food, he plays with the saucepans, he plays with the blocks — for a little while — then he moves on, and plays with the dolls, with the pram, etc. And so on.

Gradually he becomes more aware of his environment and he enters into his environment more seriously through play.

Gradually he stays longer within an activity and immerses himself in the content, in the theme that has arisen in the stream of imagination.

Then he hearkens more to the 'outer world', he is tasked from 'outside'. He accepts responsibility — in play — and thus work begins to emerge.

You could say that play is the forerunner to work.

And do not permit your concept of work to be limited. Work is not something onerous, to be avoided. Work is not the burden and bane of living. We need something that is fulfilling, we need work that is purposeful, rewarding. Work spans the gamut of the professions, work encompasses all stations in life, work binds together, knits together the community. Work also develops and transforms me.

"Play works from within outwards, work from outside inwards."

*~ Ruth Wittig 2010.*

[This edited extract from Ruth's *A Child's Work* is reprinted here with her permission. Copies can be obtained from Ghilgai Steiner School, email [edadmin@ghilgai.com.au](mailto:edadmin@ghilgai.com.au).]

## *Toys and Play*

When we are creating a work space — an office, a classroom, a retail establishment — there are certain tools we need for specific tasks. We wouldn't normally think of using a hammer to screw a socket into the wall or a screwdriver to drive a nail into a cabinet. We try to find the tool that best serves the need for the task at hand. If we consider toys to be tools of early childhood, we need to give some thought to what types of toys best serve the child through the various stages of development.

The most appropriate toys in the early years are simple and open-ended. The best toys are '90% child and 10% toy'. It is worth making the effort to find toys that will invoke the child's natural creativity, imagination and healthy development. Toys made from natural materials, such as wood, rubber, wool, cotton, silk, and metal, provide varied sensory experiences and are almost always non-toxic. Think of the 'toy' that has most stood the test of time — the sandbox. It is hard to get more open-ended and natural than that! Watching young children at a public park, I am always struck by how fascinated they are with the stones and pebbles used in the walkways. The natural world readily provides numerous 'playthings' for little ones.

Of course, another thing we consider when choosing toys is the age of the child. While birth through to the age of eight are considered the years of early childhood, we do not expect a six-month-old to be able to build a block tower. The following is an outline of the phases of early childhood and a consideration of the qualities most needed in toys.

### *Infant Toys*

In infancy, the most available and the most interesting 'toys' are the child's own extremities. Left to her own devices, a small baby will discover her fingers and toes and spend time talking to them and chewing on them. One might place one or two simple toys, like a wooden rattle, cotton handkerchief or small bowl, on either side of an infant so she can 'discover' them as she reaches out. This encourages large motor development and often is the catalyst for learning how to roll over. This also helps to develop muscle coordination and strength.

Self-initiated activity is better for the baby than contrived entertainment systems. Infants do not need infant gyms, mobiles, or other fancy gadgets as long as there are people around for them to observe. "[S]hort of being raised in isolation, a baby will encounter enough stimulation in most households to do the trick — anything from banging pots and pans together to speaking to a sibling. The key phrase here is 'properly stimulated', which is not the same as expensively stimulated or the worse fate, over stimulated." (Rosenberg and Reibstein, Newsweek, Spring/Summer 1997).

### *Crawlers and Creepers to Early Toddlers*

As infants become mobile, they are interested in everything in their surroundings. Anything has the potential to be a 'toy'. This is the time when safety becomes an issue. Things that were able to be on a lower shelf now get moved up, for instance.

This is a good time to introduce toys that move — the rocking horse, the pushcart, soft knitted or wool balls, for example. Toddlers also love things that can stack or fit inside each other, or things that have lids. Of course, toddlers are quite interested in the activities of older children and will even begin to imitate some of their creative play activities like pretending to have a tea party.

Outside, the sandbox becomes an important place, and water play is welcomed. They also can spend an amazing amount of time 'playing' with a knothole in a tree or a fallen

pinecone if they are not interrupted. They are like little scientists, really 'studying' the form and detail of things. Too many objects can be distracting and can keep them from discovering a variety of ways to play with just a few things.

### *Toddlerhood to Three*

In late toddlerhood to around three is the beginning of exploring what it is to play 'with' other children. There is a tendency toward what is commonly called 'side-by-side' play. Children are aware of being with another child, but they are still living mostly in their own space. It is not a time of easy sharing. Imagine how a scientist would feel if she were intently studying something under the microscope and someone just took it away all of a sudden. It is a bit shocking and, in the case of children, often leads to tears. This is a natural part of growing up, however, and the caregiver uses discretion in helping to determine what the best solution is for the given incident. It is not necessary to have an overabundance of each thing in order to avoid conflict. Rather, such times are valuable learning experiences that often lead to surprising solutions.

Toys at this time include 'home environments' such as little kitchen sets, dishes, tables and chairs that can be moved around to create 'houses', large cloths and dress-up clothes, large wooden puzzles that have beautiful pictures underneath single pieces, a few shaped animals and some simple musical instruments such as clappers or pentatonic chimes. The child is learning 'thingness' and naming the objects, so it is important to provide toys that are identifiable yet beautiful.

### *Pre-School*

As the child moves into pre-school age, many of these same toys are still applicable and needed, but play starts to become a bit more cooperative. Children begin to create story themes to accompany their imaginative play, so they spend part of their time gathering props. Depending upon how media-influenced the child has been, their props can be very creative. The media-saturated child tends to think things have to be a certain way (as advertised on TV or in a movie).

Children who are still free in their imaginations can turn a piece of wood into a telephone or loaf of bread. At this time, it is helpful to provide a variety of natural objects mixed with a few formed objects. For example, one would still provide toy dishes, but the child may decide that a piece of coconut shell is also a bowl or cup or that pine cones are the food being served. In other words, their toys no longer need to be as 'formed' or 'real' as those of the toddler, who is so busy identifying 'things' for what they really are.

### *Five- and Six-Year-Olds*

Around five, the child begins to move more and more into creative imagination. Children still spend time plotting their themes, but that in itself can be fulfilling, and they may never get around to gathering many props. However, they still need potential props,

especially those that will strengthen their large muscle development. Now they may want to have heavy play-stands or furniture to move around to create roofs and walls for their environments.

Outside it is a good time for fort-building and other large motor activities. At the same time, we want to foster healthy fine motor development, so things like sewing baskets, yarn work and real tools become more important. Projects that extend over periods of time are desirable. This is especially important in our current fast-paced culture. The greatest gift we can give our children is the gift of time to really penetrate their play.

At a time when toy manufacturers tell us our children need more and more, this is actually a time when they are happy to create with less if we let them and offer encouragement. Playing store with empty boxes and colourful beads, working on projects, spending lots of time in nature and having ample large muscle activity by climbing, hauling things in wagons and using riding toys provides a full life of play. It is also a time when children enjoy creating small environments like the dollhouse or towers for their cars or decorated shoeboxes for their toy animals, etc.

### *The Doll*

The doll continues to play an intimate roll in people's lives, from infancy to grown up. For grown ups it is usually in the vein of a collector's item rather than as a play object. For the child it is wonderful if the doll can become more of a 'beloved', rather than a part of a 'collection'. Materialism encroaches upon us soon enough without encouraging our young children to become consumers through collections. When this happens the doll, or whatever comprises the collection, loses that special intimate quality that calls forth nurturing from the child.

The infant's doll is best represented by a simple knot doll that the child can chew on. Such dolls can be made from cotton flannel with a tied off head and hands that have been stuffed with wool.

As the child grows older, natural fibre dolls that have limbs and hair can be dressed, wrapped in blankets and loved. While the children may have them in various states of dress or undress throughout the day, it sets a good example to wrap them in blankets and tuck them away at the end of the day so the child can see us modelling how one cares for them. The doll is the only toy that actually represents a person, and it is important for the children to learn a particular kind of respectfulness for their care.

By providing the right toys for children at different ages, parents can provide them with the tools they need for creative play, which is truly 'the work of early childhood'.

*~ Cynthia Aldinger 2005*

[Cynthia Aldinger is the director of *LifeWays* ([www.lifewaysnorthamerica.org](http://www.lifewaysnorthamerica.org)). I am grateful for permission to reprint her articles in *{ parent-theses }*].

## *Being Good Enough is Pretty Good ~ part 4*

Pay attention to what works, do more of it, and try to understand the principles involved. And also: pay attention to what doesn't work, and *stop doing it*.

~ Nathaniel Branden, *The Art of Living Consciously*

This essay is based on several talks I gave in Melbourne during 2008-2009. The first three parts have been published in previous issues of this journal, and the whole essay is available as a download from my website [www.johnallison.com.au](http://www.johnallison.com.au). In the earlier parts, I introduced some of the key ideas of Donald Winnicott. Most importantly, the mother, the family, and the home, are seen as *containers*, the basis of protection and nurture. I also introduced several 'tools' with which *good enough* parents can orientate themselves, and establish the moral and practical ground of the family.

Now, that's all very well, you might be thinking at this point, if I could take some time out I might try a reflective exercise, and it could come to something, and maybe I'd even feel good about it at the time... And I could think about homemaking and the life processes... But life actually isn't like that! What about those situations which just happen, when all the ideal learning goes out the door and I'm yelling at my child or feeling helpless, or what's worse, ashamed because I'm just not *good enough*, let alone *perfect*? What then?

First, learn about the *pause button*. It's the most basic tool to develop in response to Branden's injunction to "pay attention to what doesn't work, and *stop doing it*." Sometimes you simply have to *stop*. "Count to ten," our mothers said to us, and it isn't bad advice, as it can let the voice of conscience get a word in. However, it seems that a little more than counting is often necessary. *So pause, and reflect — how will my next words or actions help things to go forward?*

This is a really great tool! It can even become a family asset. As your children enter adolescence, you could suggest that in those rather heated moments, anyone can press the pause button... Or maybe say, "We all have to stop, right now, and think about our next words, and decide what will be helpful for everyone..." Sometimes it can be useful to call for time-out. "I just need to go out and hang up the washing, while you tidy up a bit, and then we'll continue..." The following is a personal process tool for self-checking at such times. Pause, and reflect:

What is happening *right now*? In relation to the immediate situation, what do I want right now? What am I trying to achieve?

What am I doing right now to prevent myself from achieving this? What can I choose to do that will change this?

Decide it will be different; in your mind, complete the sentence: "I choose to..." Take a deep breath, and move on. *Let go*, in order to *let come*.

This is action learning. With a little practice it really works. Then, there is the *replay button*. I recall one evening sitting by the bed of a dying friend; she asked what was troubling me, and I told her of an event from earlier that day — a significant crisis in my life. She looked deeply, kindly at me and murmured, "Ah, John... Imagine how it will seem in a year's time. I know it seems sad now, but perhaps you can begin to see it from there, just a little bit..."

How wise a person can be near death! So, in the evening, imagine yourself climbing to the top of a familiar hill. From there you see the wide landscape of your life, and particularly the features of the day. Imagine just sitting there for a while, and now suddenly some time has passed. From this detached vantage-point, you can ask yourself:

What now seems important about the day and its happenings? And what now appears unimportant, and was really a waste of time and effort?

When — that is, in what situations — did I have difficulty mastering the tensions between the different elements of my personality?

When and how did I give myself a chance either to intervene or do it differently? And when did I simply give way to instinctive or reactive urges?

What led me to pay more attention to my reactive self than to my aspiring self? And what helped me to pay attention to my aspiring self?

What unintended consequences did my behaviour have? Is there anything I need to say or do as a follow-up?

This reflective practice is a dialogue conducted by the *True Self* (one of Winnicott's terms), together with the good enough human being, and the other person in you who is simply not good enough. You might notice that it's a personal *secreting* process. Now, don't try to interpret the events in the light of this review — just see them. Don't try to suppress or justify anything, and don't try to explain anyone else's behaviour. For the True Self strengthens its presence in your life just through being enabled to witness what's happening. Remarkably, things will change when you do this...

~ John Allison 2009.

[The conclusion to this series of articles will appear in the Winter issue.]

"Play is vital to being human and without it we would be much diminished. Although we cannot define precisely what play is, we know that it has a great value in itself and is essential for our physical, emotional and mental health, regardless of its other practical and utilitarian ends. Play is also a time when there are no goals beyond the activity itself."

~ Christopher Clouder and Janni Nicol

## *In the Toolbox: what you can do to help your child play*

- Reduce or eliminate screen time: Give your children a chance to flex their own imaginative muscles. They may be bored at first. Be prepared with simple playthings and suggestions for make-believe play to inspire their inner creativity.
- Curtail time spent in adult-organised activities: Children need time for self-initiated play. Overscheduled lives leave little time for play.
- Choose simple toys: A good toy is 10 percent toy and 90 percent child. The child's imagination is the engine of healthy play. Simple toys and natural materials, like wood, boxes, balls, dolls, sand, and clay invite children to create their own scenes — and then knock them down and start over.
- Encourage outdoor adventures: Reserve time every day for outdoor play where children can run, climb, find secret hiding places, and dream up dramas. Natural materials — sticks, mud, water, rocks — are the best raw materials of play.
- Bring back the art of real work: Believe it or not, adult activity — cooking, raking, cleaning, washing the car — actually inspires children to play. Children like to help for short periods and then engage in their own play.

Reprinted with due acknowledgments from a brochure *Time for Play, Every Day: it's Fun — and Fundamental* published by the Alliance for Childhood. The Alliance for Childhood promotes policies and practices that support children's healthy development, love of learning, and joy in living. Their public education campaigns bring to light both the promise and the vulnerability of childhood. The Alliance acts for the sake of children themselves and for a more just, democratic, and ecologically responsible future. For more information visit their web site at [www.allianceforchildhood.org](http://www.allianceforchildhood.org).

“Play is joy. When we play, we are fully integrated into ourselves and we feel at one with the world. This is the wisdom of childhood. It does not have to be taught and yet, in order to bear fruit later in life, it needs to be sustained and appreciated. For a young child, the adult's role is that of a protective facilitator and through this activity one finds a childhood in oneself that is both health giving and life enhancing.”

~ Christopher Clouder and Janni Nicol

**Postscript:** I want to draw attention to two excellent resource books on play by Christopher Clouder and Janni Nicol (from which I've quoted in this issue): *Creative Play for your Baby* (ISBN 13-978-1-85675-271-8); and *Creative Play for your Toddler* (ISBN 13-978-1-85675-286-2) — both published by Gaia Books, London.