

A history of children's play and play environments: toward a contemporary child-saving movement

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Early Historical Views on Children's Play

What! Is it nothing to be happy, nothing to run and jump all day? He will never be so busy again all his life long. Plato, in his Republic, which is considered so stern, teaches the children only through festivals, games, songs, and amusements. It seems as if he had accomplished his purpose when he had taught them to be happy ... Do not be afraid, therefore, of this so-called idleness. (Rousseau, 2001, p. 84)

Records of children's play date back to antiquity, even earlier than classical Athens and Greece. Archaeological excavations of ancient China, Peru, and Egypt reveal drawings of various play scenes and play things such as tops, dolls, rattles, and other toys made of pottery and metal. Anthropological studies of primitive people among various cultures reveal evidence of acting, singing, storytelling, arts and crafts, dancing and rhythmic movement, and games and contests (Mitchell, 1937). Many games were of religious significance, dating back to ancient rites of divination. Plato expressed the idea that people were God's playthings and should spend their lives in the noblest of pastimes. He urged state legislation regarding children's games and offered practical advice to mothers on nursery play (Johnson, 1937). Plato was far from alone in his belief that play was valuable for children's development. Throughout recorded history, many of the most prominent philosophers/educators/thinkers appeared to understand that play was essential to the development of a full childhood and a happy and well-developed person.

Children's Play in Ancient Greece and Rome

During the time of Plato and Aristotle, about a half century before the birth of Christ, the classical Athenian attitude toward children saw them as simply cute, not to be taken too seriously, but to be loved and enjoyed. Plato divided children's development into levels or stages. During infancy (birth to 3 years) the child was to be protected and cared for, develop no fears, and experience little pain. The nursery stage (3 to 6 years) was for playing, and hearing mother goose stories and fairy tales. Punishment was to be infrequent and mild. During the elementary stage (6–13 years) boys and girls should be placed in separate living quarters and learn letters, mathematics, music, religion and morals. Boys were to receive

some military training. The middle stage (13 to 16 years) was for advanced study of arithmetic, poetry, and music. From 16 to 20 years boys were to receive formal military and gymnastics training.

Up until the entry to formal education outside the home, children were to exercise through play under the watchful supervision of adults. They were allowed to play much as they pleased, but their play was seen as less serious and of lesser consequence than the play of adults. Indeed, the act of grown men entering into the games of children was viewed with contempt—a waste of time. Children's play was to be diverted into productive channels such as helping to identify aptitudes, and toys were to be used to prepare for future occupations as adults, such as building and teaching (Golden, 1990).

Plato's *Republic* (360 B.C.) is his chief treatise on education (Rusk, 1956). Jean-Jacques Rousseau later called this the greatest treatise on education ever written and said that those who wished to know the meaning of public education should read it. Education for Plato would begin early because of the importance of initial impressions. Tales and fables should be carefully selected to ensure that those first heard by the child should be models of virtue. Good (or virtue) and evil were considered of such importance as to be substituted for true and false, for God is the author of all things good and children must be taught to conform to His principles. Music and gymnastics, Plato believed, should also begin early, for musical training is the most potent of educational instruments and is the counterpart of gymnastics. "Education has two branches—one of gymnastics, which is concerned with the body, and the other of music, which is designed for the improvement of the soul" (Plato, 2000, p. 153). As accurately pointed out by Rusk (1956), we do not have to look to modern times, or to Herbart, Froebel, or Montessori, to find play as a guiding principle in education, for such was formulated by Plato.

Plato's proposed education would be a sort of amusement, allowing the teacher to better determine the natural bent of the child, and compulsion would not be used. In his *Laws*, Plato (2000) emphasized the positive significance of play, yet he admitted that there are both good and bad pleasures (Plato, 1952, p. 384), just as there are good and bad or right and wrong opinions (p. 623). Plato and other great thinkers to follow were concerned with children's play and with other fundamental factors in education. In defining the very nature and power of education, Plato inserts play into a central role.

... anyone who would be good at anything must practice that thing from his youth upwards, both in sport and earnest ... for example, he who is to be a good builder, should play at building children's houses; ... the future warrior should learn riding, or some other exercise ... The most important part of education is right training in the nursery. (Plato, 1952, p. 649)

Up to the age of six boys and girls were to play together, but after the age of six they were to be separated. "Let boys live with boys and girls in like manner

with girls" (Plato, 1952, p. 650). At the right times or ages, the appropriate training would be introduced: music, gymnastics, arithmetic, the alphabet, the mind of nature existing in the stars. All children would have such knowledge as that of a child learning the alphabet, but those who would be rulers of the state would have additional studies to prepare for their future role.

The Greek educational games included games for the nursery, gymnastic exercises for the school, and the social games of adults. In the nursery, both boys and girls played with rattles, hoops, balls, swings and tops. Even then, adults distinguished between boys and girls in their provision of toys. There were stilts and carts for the boys and dolls for the girls, and children were allowed to make their own toys. Plato did not countenance an excessive number of toys but advocated play tools for carpentry and free play or natural modes of amusement. Many Greek children's outdoor games are familiar even today; Odd or Even, Slap in the Dark (guessing who boxed the ear), Hunt the Slipper, Catch Ball, Hide and Seek, Heads or Tails, Tortoise, Blind Man's Buff, Kiss in the Ring, Tag, and many others. A Greek boy was sent to the *palaestra* (ancient Greek wrestling school) at age seven. Here, at the break of day for school he engaged, along with his pedagogue, in early morning active play: racing, leaping, wrestling, singing, and dancing until time for later morning rest and lunch. Older boys were admitted to the *gymnasia* for participation in the pentathlon: running, jumping, throwing the discus, boxing, and wrestling. Little wonder that the world still marvels at the physical perfection of the ancient Greeks and their influence on art, especially sculpture (Johnson, 1937).

Aristotle studied with Plato for twenty years, then traveled, tutored Alexander the Great, and after twelve years returned to Athens and established the Lyceum, a school located in a garden, where he taught until his death. He did not write a book dedicated to education but discussed the topic in other works (Aristotle, 1925, 1943). He proposed that training (Aristotle, 1943) should fall into stages according to children's developmental stages: early home education, grammar school, and training in rhetoric from five to seven years of age. The curriculum included reading and writing for utility, gymnastics for health and strength, and music for character formation, enjoyment, and education. The curricula were expanded for older children. For health and proper habits, the young child should be given milk, allowed to move her body, and exposed to cold. Up until the age of five there should be no demands for study or labor lest growth be impeded, but there should be sufficient motion to prevent the limbs from being inactive. The home rearing should allow much play and physical exercise. This could be achieved through amusements, which were for the most part imitations of future occupations. The rattle was given to infants because it was suited to the infant mind but education was a rattle or toy suited for older children.

Aristotle, like Plato, believed that until children are five years old they should be taught nothing lest it hinder growth. Children should be as active as possible, even in their play, to avoid an indolent habit of body. Such activity could be

acquired through play, which should not be too hard or too easy—children who played slowly or without spirit would not develop an aptitude for any branch of science. During the first few years of a child's life toys were seen as useful and even later, when the child was being taught to read, Aristotle would give him ivory figures or letters to play with.

According to Aristotle, the branches of education to be entered after age seven were reading and writing, gymnastic exercises, and music, but “the first principle of all action is leisure” (Quintilian, 1965, p. 322). Both leisure and occupation were required, but leisure was better. Amusement was needed during pursuit of occupations more than at other times ... amusement gives relaxation, whereas occupation is always accompanied with exertion and effort. Pleasure springs from the noblest sources; therefore music, drawing, and gymnastics are introduced at the proper times. Parents should train their sons not simply because education is necessary or useful but because it is liberal or noble.

During the first century of the Roman Empire, education was left in the hands of the *pater familias* (highest ranking male in a familia) and, being a matter of private rather than public interest, lagged far behind education in Greece. The Greek Plato elucidated the education of the philosopher with the end being that of the speculative life. In contrast, the Roman Quintilian (35–97 A.D.) detailed the education of the orator, aimed at the practical life. From infancy, even when cared for by nurses, children's minds should be imbued with excellent instruction and should be a pleasure to them. Quintilian did not “disapprove” of items or toys, or whatever could be invented for stimulating children to learn. He emphasized that, during play time, memory, which is so important to an orator and strengthened by exercise, can profit from the sayings of eminent men and poets.

Quintilian would have education begin early, provided that no burden or requirement be too exacting. The first instruction was to be in the form of play, for one who cannot yet love studies should not learn to hate all learning. Perhaps the idea of the kindergarten is thus foreshadowed (Smail, 1938). Quintilian condemned corporal punishment as degrading, unnecessary, and ineffective given proper instruction, and he insisted that teachers must recognize differences in temperament and intellectual gifts among pupils. Not unlike later great reformers, he emphasized the value of observing children and recognizing their individuality—strong premonitions indeed given contemporary educational practice. He recognized that the main purpose of education was to foster mental activity but games had their place in his educational scheme: “nor should I be displeased by a love of play in my pupils, for this too is a sign of alertness; only let there be moderation ... so that ... refusal to allow them may not breed hatred of studies” (Smail, 1938, p. xxv).

Threads of Quintilian's thought pervade the philosophies of the great humanists of the Renaissance. Martin Luther stated that he preferred Quintilian to

almost all other authorities on education for he gives a model of eloquence and teaches by the happiest combination of theory and practice. John Stuart Mill called his work an encyclopedia about the thoughts of the ancients and on the whole field of education (Colson, 1924; Smail, 1938).

The Play of Medieval Children

During the latter period of the twentieth century historians explored and extensively documented the life of children during the medieval period. Aries (1962), French historian of the family and childhood, studied the metamorphosis of childhood through paintings and diaries across four centuries and described the medieval child as a little adult and childhood as being undiscovered until the end of the Middle Ages. Since he did not discover pre-twelfth century art portraying childhood, he concluded that there was no place for childhood in previous periods. Aristocratic children played with toys during infancy, were taught to play musical instruments, dance, and sing as early as age two and participated in festivals by age three. While he still played with dolls, the child of four or five practiced archery, played cards, chess, and adult games, and by age six was playing parlor games and pantomime games commonly played by adults. By age seven there was riding, hunting and fencing, and starting school or work.

Such variety in play, common among aristocratic children, did not apply equally to the children of the poor. Many died young and others were sent away to school or to serve in other people's homes. Aries argued that childhood was not a distinct cultural phenomenon until the Renaissance or the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries.

In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist ... as soon as the child could live without the constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society ... The absence of definition extended to every sort of social activity: games, crafts, arms. (Aries, 1962, p. 128)

Aries found no example of a collective picture of medieval times in which children were not seen in the presence or service of adults. In a rich anthology prepared by ten historians, DeMause (1974, p. 1) summarized his major conclusions, seemingly echoing Aries' findings:

The history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken. The further back in history one goes, the lower the level of child care, and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorized, and sexually abused. (DeMause, 1974, p. 1)

DeMause went on to point out that a favorite medieval doctrine was "Work is worship" and everyone, even the littlest children, had work to do. There was no separate world of childhood; children lived their lives with adults, never

apart, sharing the same games, toys, and fairy stories (Tucker, 1974, p. 229). Bruegels' famous paintings of festivals, and other works of art, were commonly used as evidence for this view of childhood by Aries, DeMause, and other historians. The searching of documents, records, and original papers by later historians painted a more complete and somewhat different portrait of medieval childhood.

Aries' research focused primarily on France and, to a lesser degree, England. His sources were essentially limited to paintings, sculpture, and diaries, and the bulk of his writing was about the Renaissance or the 14th through 16th centuries. The research of Orme (2001), Shahar (1990), Crawford (2000), and other contemporary historians on medieval childhood stands in contrast to that of Aries; all rebut some of his major conclusions and examine the previously unexplored richness of evidence, including translated sources, writings, art, records, and archeology, demonstrating that medieval adults considered childhood a distinct period, treated children with affection and care, and allowed them their own possessions and play activities.

Adults provided culture for children by means of toys, games, and literature, but children created their own toys and games as well. They spent time by themselves, talking and playing away from their elders, sometimes against their elders' conventions and wishes. (Orme, 2001, p. 6)

Also relying primarily on depictions of childhood in works of art, Schorsch's (1979) conclusions about childhood during the medieval and Renaissance periods were similar to those of Aries in some respects, but his descriptions of play were more liberal:

The reality is that until fairly modern times most children were either abandoned by their mothers or farmed out to other women shortly after birth and that, in fact, both the family and the family house as we know them today did not even exist until well into the 17th century. (Schorsch, 1979, p. 12)

Acknowledging exceptions to the rule, Schorsch maintained that medieval adults dealt with children much as they dealt with their animals—both shared the dirt, worms, and every manner of disease that being a child or an animal implied. Such degraded living, characteristic of the most destitute and poor throughout history, has not applied to the rich and not necessarily to those falling in between these extremes.

Despite such dire descriptions of the state of the child, Schorsch devotes a chapter to children playing vigorously with their friends yet finding this painful to the conscience, even producing guilt at feelings of delight. Fathers and clergymen set about restraining play and thus destroying evil, yet the medieval community engaged in play, sports, and games as amusement and enjoyed

festivals, holidays, and celebrations as “a natural part of life itself” (Schorsch, 1979, p. 77). “Each medieval man, unlike the generations that followed, gave his child as much access to entertainment as to the work of the day” (p. 78).

Hanawalt's (1993) extensively documented history of childhood in medieval London, utilizing court records, coroners' rolls, literary sources, and books of advice, as does the work of Orme, weaves a more complete description of childhood during that period. These writers demonstrate through rich data that medieval adults recognized and paid close attention to the various stages of childhood, though the meanings of these stages were not dissimilar to those described for other periods. Play, they demonstrated, was common to both children and adults. Playing, pimping, carousing, soliciting, and working were common in street life though the streets were often little more than sewers, helping to explain the stories of dirt and filth in some accounts. Extreme contrasts of luxury and poverty lent further insight into conflicting accounts of life during this period, with drunken immorality, cruelty, and crime existing side by side with the large gardens and grandeur of the rich.

As far back as the twelfth century adults in London knew that children would and should play. Hanawalt (1993) describes their play life in some detail, noting that on Shrove Tuesday children brought fighting cocks to their schoolmasters and watched cockfights. They also played ball in London fields, competing with students from other schools. At various times, they played tag, ball games, ran races, rolled hoops and imitated adult ceremonies copied from marriages, festivals, pageants, and church masses. By the late fourteenth century many guilds required that apprentices achieve functional literacy before enrolling. Some students went on to enroll at university and a few were sent abroad for university study. Some girls may have attended grammar school with boys and yet others received separate schooling. Schorsch (1979) found that girls, being considered inferior in temperament and condition, were not admitted to fifteenth century choir schools or sixteenth century grammar schools. They were taught literacy and religion at home or in the petty schools that later became the dame or academy schools of the 18th and 19th centuries. Encouraging girls' training in music and dance was considered to be a sign of the devil at work.

The school day and the play of twelfth century eight-year-old Richard in London was described by Hanawalt (1993, p. 81). Richard's day began at 6 a.m., with washing and getting ready for school. He made his own bed, greeted his parents and said prayers with them. His parents were illiterate but held schooling in high regard. Richard looked at the shops and ran to make it to school on time. He was reverent toward his schoolmaster in order to avoid a whipping but today everyone behaved so no one felt the sting of the willow twigs. He was tired from the Latin exercises when he walked home for his midday dinner. After dinner, while his elders were busy with guests, he was free to play and on

this fateful day he joined his friends for street games. Today's game was to hang from a beam protruding from London Bridge. Richard was feeling brave from the wine given him at lunchtime but his hands slipped, resulting in a fatal plunge into the river. Accidents, some fatal, were the fate of many children playing unsupervised in the streets and byways of medieval London.

Throughout recorded history, as now, children played games appropriate to their stages of development. During the medieval and Renaissance period they played with small objects such as marbles and balls and even dice and chess made from various materials. Jumping, swinging, and balancing devices and "totters" or "merry totters" were used, probably referring to swings, seesaws, or spring boards (Orme, 2001, p. 179). The deeper one looks into the depth and variety of children's play during earlier centuries, the more similarities with the play of modern children become visible. The types of toys and the nature of games change with children's age and development and reflect the beliefs, occupations, pleasures, and state of technology of the time and culture, but the basic nature of play across centuries, countries, and cultures is remarkably similar.

During the medieval period, children played games of chase and competition, games depicting elders and heroes, games reflecting vivid imaginations, and games of war. Children's observation of and participation at adult festivals, athletic events, and musical and dramatic productions or public plays are historic sources that influence and provide substance for play. No historic age or culture appears to have been devoid of children singing simple songs and rhymes and making crude musical instruments. War and other disasters were common throughout history. Children's games emerged from direct experiences of and through hearing about war from the conversations of adults. There are indications that the natural therapeutic qualities of play stimulate children to engage in war games and games related to the traumatic consequences of other man-made and natural disasters (Frost, 2005b).

Girls were expected to be more demure, modest, or proper, to attend to household tasks, and to be reserved about entering into boys' games, but, then as now, they did so from time to time. There are elements of truth in the point of view that play helps prepare children for adult roles. Girls learned household tasks such as cooking, tending house, sewing, and gathering food and practiced their skills in play. Similarly, boys worked with adult men in rural and urban trades such as carpentry, farming, and tending animals, and practiced and extended their skills through play. Even war games helped equip boys to use bows and arrows and other weapons. Girls' toys included dolls and household items they used for make-believe play, as do modern children. Only recently have girls entered extensively into many of the physically challenging ball games and athletic contests traditionally played by boys.

Marked differences have always existed in the play of the poor and the rich. Poor children made some of their own toys, assigning to them their own names, yet they played many active organized games similar to those of rich children

and probably equaled or surpassed them in certain physical abilities. Such games as chess, tennis, and others requiring special equipment were more common among the rich. In cities children played in the streets, vacant areas, and surrounding fields, and in the country children played in the barnyards, fields, and forests, a pattern that exists today but is diluted by the growing interest in indoor technology play.

Toys are children's first treasures. At first they give pleasure, stimulate interest, amuse, comfort, even teach. For centuries babies and young children were given rattles and toys to handle, chew, shake, and spin. As children developed physical and mental skills, tops and balls were time-proven toys, and dolls and small vessels were favorites for pretend play. With advancing skill and age, children engaged in play with puppets and model figures of soldiers and animals. Both poor and rich children made their own toys using sand, rags, string, sticks, and whatever scrap material was at hand.

Irrational Play, Child Abuse, and Accidents in Medieval Times

This book is written from a child development/education perspective and emphasizes those forms of play commonly seen in families, schools, and other supervised places. Other forms of child activity, which may be described as illogical or "irrational play", were also common across the ages—bullying, abusing animals, violent fighting, gambling, gang play of various sorts, and sexual play. Fights were likely during school and after school involving bullies and groups or gangs. Such violence continued into early American schools, and, perhaps in lesser degree, into contemporary schools. Outdoor play places at school or in the neighborhood were typically lacking in adult supervision and likely places for arguing, bullying, and fighting. Although fields for organized games were common across the centuries, the present writer found no evidence that organized, equipped places like school playgrounds with adult supervisors and periods called "recess" existed during the medieval period.

Many children in the medieval period were abused by adults, both at home and at school. For this the law offered little relief. Families, friends, neighbors, and clergy sometimes came to the rescue of children who were abused, whether by family members, schoolmasters, or employers of child laborers. For example:

Henry Machyn, the London chronicler of the mid sixteenth century, reported how in 1563, a man named Penred, who had a child to teach, beat him so severely with a buckled belt that the affair came to public notice. The master was set on the pillory, whipped till the blood ran down, and the boy's injuries were exhibited, the "pitiest sight to see at any time." (Orme, 2001, p. 101)

Accidental injuries to children were common during the medieval period. This topic, related to children's play and play environments, will enter into

discussions of the modern period when play environments are discussed in Chapter 7. The marvelously thorough, scholarly research of Orme (2001) gives perhaps the best available insight into this issue. First, he says, there were miracle stories of parents taking their injured children to saints or shrines, with beneficial results. More boys than girls were discussed in records of both rich and poor, perhaps because boys were more active than girls or even because their survival was of greater interest. The stories of miracles and coroners' reports revealed that the accidents then were quite similar to those of today and they had similar causes. Infants were caught in cords or straps, burned in fires, crushed by falling objects, or eaten by pigs entering houses through open doors. With growing mobility, additional hazards were introduced: crawling into hearths to be burned by fire or scalded by liquid in cooking pots, falling into vessels of liquids or pools of water, swallowing various small objects, putting objects in the ears and nose, being cut or punctured by tools, and falling from open windows. Not unlike today, many injuries resulted from the absence or distraction of parents or the carelessness of one too young to monitor wisely. Unlike today, parents were rarely held accountable for children's injuries.

History leaves no doubt that children played, and played extensively, during the medieval period, although many among their elders disapproved, believing that playing led to truancy, indolence, vandalism, and inattention to school work and church activities. Some believed that certain types of play and games were acceptable while others were bad, such as games of dice which were equivalent to gambling, and ball games that could destroy property—even doll play by girls was criticized by some as image worship. The effects of play and frivolity on education were wrapped in the cloak of their presumed destructive effects on discipline, character, morals, and attentiveness. Despite the criticism, disapproval and censoring of their play, medieval children played extensively and enthusiastically.

With a child's experience and advancing development, play becomes more physical for running and jumping, more dexterous for building and creating, more social for developing friendships and engaging in games. Little in this respect has changed since the Middle Ages. Play, it seems, has innate qualities and transcends ages and cultures. All healthy children play. Play was recognized for centuries by many great philosophers as being essential for children's development, yet as far back as the ancient Greeks some adults tried to control it, and some attempted to abolish it in favor of other activities (Orme, 2001, p. 165). Given its history and the extent of scholarly research demonstrating the developmental values of play, one can only stand amazed that many contemporary school administrators, politicians, and parents favor the reduction or dissolution of play, recess, and playgrounds.

Reformation and Renaissance Philosophers/Educators on Play

Though not generally recognized, Martin Luther (1483–1546) brought about a reformation in education as well as in religion. His influence on religion, called by some the most important event in history since the birth of Christ and a singular event for the German people, is seen worldwide through the activities of the Lutheran Church. His was a powerful influence in changing the repressive, cruel discipline extant in many places during the Middle Ages and fostering attractive schoolrooms and pleasant studies—even music and physical education—in the schools. In the words of Luther: “Our schools are no longer a hell and purgatory, in which children are tortured over cases and tenses, and in which with much flogging, trembling, anguish, and wretchedness, they learn nothing” (Painter, 1889, p. 67).

Despite his great intellect and extraordinary scholarship and writing, Luther was sensitive to aesthetics, a lover of nature, a skillful musician, and a poet—all playful activities. To him the right training of children was a divine requirement and parents were to spare no diligence, time, or cost in educating them. Children's education should be liberal and pleasant and adults should adapt themselves to children's ways, prattle with them, enter into their activities, and train them in a childlike way in the midst of their play (Painter, 1889).

Not the least of Luther's contributions to education was his anticipation of modern pedagogy. He was a careful observer of children and proposed that methods of instruction be adapted to their nature, a precursor of modern views about individual differences and developmentally appropriate practice. Indeed, in his *Letter to the Mayors and Aldermen*, he noted that children have a natural desire for being active, such as running and jumping, and they should not be restrained from such activity—since we preach to children we must also prattle with them. “Let no one think himself too wise, and disdain such child's play” (Painter, 1889, pp. 154–5). Luther's liberal education would include time in school, work at home, learning a trade but also playing ball, running, and tumbling. He proposed universal, compulsory education and state support of schools and censured monks and schoolmasters who prohibited children from playing at the proper time, thus making them “mere logs and sticks.”

A century after Luther, John Amos Comenius, a Czech theologian, reinforced Luther's educational ideas, proposing an educational ladder for all children, both boys and girls, beginning with the mother school for children up to 6 years and progressing through to university. Like Luther, he emphasized instruction in “useful knowledge,” morality, and religion. Many of the great educational reformers were commonly steeped in church doctrine, believing that God operates in everything, and they made religion a central component of their proposed schools. Like Luther, Comenius proposed easier, more humane methods of instruction than those seen in most schools of his period.

Instead of developing an antipathy towards learning, children should be “enticed by irresistible attractions, so that they should gain no less pleasure from study as from playing and amusing themselves” (Comenius, 1910, p. 77).

The remarkable likenesses in philosophical thought carried over into educational ideas and principles are perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the views of Comenius. “Almost every educational idea of Comenius can be found in some other great thinker; in Plato and Aristotle; in Cicero, Plutarch, and Quintilian ... and in Erasmus of Rotterdam, not to mention Francis Bacon” (Ulich, 1945, p. 188). Such similarity in thought, susceptible to foreign influence, is attributable by Ulich to an equally strong faculty of systematic integration, which is fundamentally different from mere imitation, enriching itself through others’ ideas but not springing from them. For the benefit of all those great educators-thinkers to follow him, Comenius’ profound intuition into human growth allowed him to formulate the classical laws of teaching.

Comenius pre-dated John Dewey through his focus on learning through active, firsthand experience with the subjects or skills to be learned. His emphasis on things over words and doing over passive study was later to be seen in the philosophies of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, and Piaget. He broke with the harsh educational methods of his era and focused on play as a vehicle for promoting healthy development, calling for humor and lightness in every lesson. Contemporary schools can learn lessons about recess and playgrounds from his words:

In the playground, boys are urged to run, to jump, and to play games with balls, since it is necessary to put the body in motion and allow the mind to rest. Forbidden pastimes are games played with dice, wrestling, boxing, and swimming, since these are either useless or dangerous. (Comenius, 1910, p. 6)

Comenius’ educational method was formulated to ensure that the art of intellectual discipline was so firmly established that “sure and certain progress” could be made. All the subjects to be learned should suit the age of the students and nothing beyond their comprehension would be presented to them for learning and the cycles of learning would be laid out much as the seasons. The reader may immediately think of Froebel when seeing the reliance on nature that Comenius later illustrated in his curriculum. For example, he compared his methods for instructing children to the stages in the development of a tree. The very young are tenderly cared for by parents, much as they would care for tree shoots carefully planted that take root and put forth buds. Later the child’s education is compared to caring for a tree with branches and buds that are not yet developed. Eventually, the student will resemble a tree covered with fruit waiting to be plucked and used.

Such reflection about the natural cycle of animals and plants led to basic educational principles: beginning early, proceeding from the general to the particular and from easy to difficult, avoiding overburdening students, proceeding according to what the intellect is prepared to receive, teaching through the senses, and making education pleasant (Comenius, 1910, p. 127). The reader will later see the contrast between such views and contemporary practices that reflect industrial models of education that focus on the important components of literacy and scientific knowledge yet withhold instruction in the age-old benefits of play, arts, spiritual understanding, politeness, charity, ethics, patience, and manners as espoused by Comenius and other great reformers before and after his time.

Writing in the seventeenth century, John Locke influenced a number of eighteenth century, prominent historical figures in philosophy. In the field of education these included Rousseau, Basedow, Pestalozzi, Herbart, and others. Locke's aims for education revolved around several themes: virtue derived from proper religious training, wisdom in practical matters, breeding or good manners in accordance with English standards, and learning or knowledge based on practical judgment. Learning was not to be forced or achieved through compulsion lest children learn to dislike learning.

I have always had a fancy, that Learning might be made a Play and Recreation to children; and they might be brought to desire to be taught, if it were propos'd to them as a thing of Honour, Credit, Delight and Recreation, or as a Reward for doing something else; and if they were never chid or corrected for the neglect of it. (Locke, 1989, p. 208)

In *How to Bring up Your Children*, Locke (1902) explained that children should have playthings or toys of different sorts, but should be allowed to play with only one at a time. This would teach them not to lose or spoil their playthings and help prevent them from being wanton and careless or from becoming squanderers and wasters (p. 100). He believed that such restrictions, to be managed by the tutor or parent, are seemingly unimportant, but nothing that can form young children's minds and introduces good habits should be overlooked. Whatever the child does leaves an impression during that tender age and can influence tendencies to do good or evil. Nothing that exerts such influence should be neglected.

People of condition (wealthy) who shower their little ones with many toys do the child great harm, teaching them pride, vanity, and covetousness even before they can speak. Such children, Locke observed, grew so accustomed to abundance that they never thought they had enough, always asking, "What more? What new thing shall I have?" Locke responds to this dilemma by maintaining that playthings should not be bought for children except when they are older and in need of certain toys such as tops and items that are required for exercise.

Even then children should continue to make toys for themselves, sometimes delighting in having an adult help with a difficult problem. The young child can secure playthings from nature, sticks, pebbles, sand, and from items such as pieces of paper and keys already available in the home.

Locke's training in medicine was a probable cause for his interest in child health. Though a healthy body was a necessary condition for education, having a sound mind was more important, and exercise of the senses was essential for developing the mind. Apparently some critics overlooked Locke's treatment of the development of the young in such works as *How to Bring up Your Children*, and he was criticized for emphasizing some mental faculties at the expense of others (Locke, 1902, p. 36). In his work, Locke speaks of observing children at play, leading him to advise against suppressing play but replacing it with educative play. This perhaps influenced later scholars who suggested a play curriculum for young children in many schools and child development centers. Locke's "play-way" meant that learning should be made as much a recreation to children's play as play is to learning and the task of learning should begin at the right moment, when the child is ready (Rusk, 1956).

Though Locke had little access to the psychology of learning extant today, he made a beginning by entering into the world of the child to learn and discover features of growth and development useful in the formulation of his educational philosophy. We now know that observing children in their natural play environments leads to understanding of their stages of development and gives insight into their abilities or capacities at different stages. Such understanding appears to have been extant among the great reformers discussed here. A fundamental outcome of carefully observing children is comprehending the profound differences in their developmental abilities, capacities, and needs, and understanding, valuing, and responding to their individual differences.

Pre-modern Philosophers on Play

During the eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–72) was a giant among philosophers. His book *Emile* made a strong case for beginning a child's education early, which was initially to center in the family and be conducted in harmony with the nature of the child and guided by its dictates. He reacted against the harsh child-rearing practices of his time, such as binding children in swaddling clothes to avoid having to care for them and to ensure they caused no trouble. (Since about 4000 B.C., some children were wrapped snugly in blankets or similar materials to restrict their movement.) The heart of his education for the young child was family life involving both mother and father, an emphasis that is echoed by contemporary psychologists. Like Luther and Comenius, he identified developmental stages in childhood and believed that education should address individual differences in children, natural learning, and a curriculum that grew out of natural interests and curiosity. Memory work

should be abandoned in favor of activities that foster judgment, and reasoning and play should be central components of children's everyday lives. During the first five years of life children were to learn totally from their own direct experiences, their exploration of the environment, and a curriculum guided by the development of the child. To Rousseau, the most important and most useful rule in education was "not to gain time, but to lose it." Despite his genius, Rousseau's *Emile* attracted criticism from religious leaders who objected to his "atheism," or postponing religious education until adolescence, from educational leaders who believed his system fraught with practical impossibilities, and even from those who denounced him as a plagiarist. "Certainly not every pioneer in education after Rousseau, beginning with Pestalozzi, is merely a disciple of Rousseau. Thinking men may have much in common and still be original" (Ulich, 1945, p. 218).

In his classic *Emile*, Rousseau (2001) made his case for play, leisure, and the development of strong, healthy bodies. "A feeble body makes a feeble mind ... The weaker the body, the more imperious its demands; the stronger it is, the better it obeys" (Rousseau, 2001, p. 24). Nature, he believed, must be given time to work. He rejected the common perception of adults that play was essentially doing nothing, and favored children's natural running, jumping and engaging in festivals, games, singing, and amusements.

Rousseau wished to train all the senses and saw a connection between development and efficient use of the senses and the child's playful activities, letting the child perform every exercise that encourages agility: jumping and leaping, climbing trees and walls, and letting the child run barefoot indoors and in the garden. Because children are always moving freely, it is easy, he believed, to engage them in learning through natural activities. Will the plank be long enough to reach the other side? Will two fathoms of cord be enough to hang a swing from a tree? Here are two villages. Which one can we get to first? When a child flies a kite or whips a top, he is training eye and hand and increasing his strength. He argued that children should be given the same games as men: football, archery, tennis, billiards, and musical instruments. They can only learn to master their limbs and strengthen them by using them; otherwise they may grow up to be clumsy as are many men. Children can be seen at carnivals and comedy houses swinging, dancing, and walking on their hands with great skill. With proper training and practice children can engage in acrobatics, playing musical instruments, as well as reading and writing. The supposed incapacity of the young for adult games is imaginary and the lack of success is for want of practice.

We must never forget that all this should be play, the easy and voluntary control of the movements which nature demands of them, the art of varying their games to make them pleasanter, without the least bit of

constraint to transform them into work; for what games do they play in which I cannot find material for instruction for them? (Rousseau, 2001, p. 133)

For Rousseau, work and play were all one to the child, his games are his work, and he does not know the difference. In play and games the child brings everything: the cheerful interest, the charm of freedom, the bent of his mind, the extent of his knowledge. He contrasts his carefully educated child with the child of a tutor who makes a point of wasting no time and “loads his mind with a pack of rubbish.” The many questions of the tutor are pedantic and useless. The child quickly stops listening to the everlasting questions. Such a teaching or testing method, not unlike the contemporary American-style high stakes testing, is pedantic and useless; a question by a skillful teacher would reveal the child's intelligence and academic ability much more quickly and thoroughly. The central point here is that one needs good judgment if one is to estimate the judgment of a child.

Rousseau relates the story of a Lord Hyde who, anxious to test the progress of his child, took a walk with the child and his tutor where schoolboys were flying kites. He asked his son, “Where is the kite that casts this shadow?” Without hesitation and without looking upward the child responded, “Over the high road.” And he was correct. The high road was between the kite and the sun. Lord Hyde kissed his child and later gave the tutor an annuity in addition to his salary. This practical method in a real-life context contrasted sharply with the pedantic, endless questioning of tutors that Rousseau rebelled against, illustrating how turning the child from trivial details to observing, judging, and reasoning was far more effective.

Johann Pestalozzi (1746–1827) was greatly influenced by Rousseau's ideas about the nature of the child and implemented them a generation later. Among the great educational reformers, Pestalozzi was the first to establish a school for children, personally teach them, and apply the ideas of earlier reformers, representing a new era in education. He was successful in changing many long-standing educational views and practices. He deplored and initiated reform in three particular practices: the exclusion of children of the poor from schooling, rote learning, and cruel punishment. Kindness ruled in his school, as he abolished flogging and posited love as the foundation of his work and regarded it as essential to the child's physical and intellectual abilities. Like Rousseau, he believed in individual differences in children's interests, needs, and rates of learning. He originated the concept of readiness, and substituted time and experience for rote learning. His idea that objects and events must be seen, felt, and observed in their concrete form would later influence the writing of Dewey, Montessori, and Piaget (Frost and Kissinger, 1976).

Pestalozzi's (1977) educational principles revolved around his desire to improve the indescribable conditions of the poor, perhaps evolving from his

personal experience of poverty. His lessons to contemporary educators included his tenet that the children of the poor required greater refinement of instruction than the children of the rich. He believed that reform should begin with the individual instead of society and was dependent upon helping the individual help himself. Like Rousseau, he held that education was essentially a process of establishing healthy conditions for the natural unfolding of the child and, like Comenius before him and Froebel and the humanists to follow, he believed that schools should protect and nurture the children's self-esteem. His views on education focused on the "organic whole," including the intellectual, the physical, and moral and religious relationships with others and with God. Instruction would proceed from object lessons, from the known to the unknown, and from concrete to abstract. The child was not to be forced but should be guided to make his own judgments rather than rely upon those of others. The environment would follow the plan of nature to stimulate full development of the child, much as a good gardener would do for his plants. A chief principle was "learning by doing," a theme later to be made popular by John Dewey. (See Pestalozzi, 1892, 1977; Ulich, 1945; Rusk, 1956.)

Pestalozzi emphasized in the higher exercises of the mind the Comenius principle that "things should be learned by doing." Faith is cultivated by believing, not by reasoning; love by loving, not by talking about love; thought by thinking, not by appropriating the thoughts of others; and knowledge by personal investigation, not by endless talk about art and science (Painter, 1889). In *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, first published in 1801, Pestalozzi's (1977) most important treatise on education, he explained his method of instruction as implemented by Gertrude, the ideal teacher. He described the methods of his ideal teacher as more playful and practical than didactic. Rather than using the tone of an instructor who would say, "Child, this is your head, your nose, your hand," she would say gently: "Come here, child, I will wash your little hands," "I will comb your hair," "I will cut your fingernails." Such was taught so thoroughly that the child could in turn teach the younger children. In this classic work, Pestalozzi (1977, pp. 139–40) reduced all instruction to three branches: sense impression as the absolute foundation of all knowledge, the nature of teaching, and his prototype wherein nature itself determines the instruction. He argued that these branches, though unpopular, were historically correct and psychologically inevitable.

Pestalozzi focused on sense impressions or training the senses as the point of beginning of all instruction; yet his focus on instruction belies his emphasis on play as an educational tool. To him, instruction was by necessity easy, pleasant, and delightful, to the contemporary reader characteristics of play or playfulness.

From the moment that a mother takes a child upon her lap, she teaches him. She brings nearer to his senses what nature has scattered afar off

over large areas and in confusion, and makes the action of receiving sense-impressions and the knowledge derived from them, easy, pleasant, and delightful to him ... in her pure simplicity, she follows the high course of Nature without knowing what Nature does through her; and Nature does very much through her. (Pestalozzi, 1977, p. 145)

In *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children* (1977) and *Leonard and Gertrude* (1892), Pestalozzi summarizes his most important educational principles. Fundamental to these principles was the point that play is a natural gift, propensity, or inclination of children, and following its dictates would result in a free-play approach to delightful or playful activities.

The richness of its charm and the variety of its free play cause the results of physical necessity to bear the impress of freedom and independence. Here, too, the Art must imitate the course of Nature, and by the richness of its charm and variety of its free play, try to make its results bear the impress of freedom and independence. (Pestalozzi, 1977, p. 202)

The word “play” rarely occurs in the works of Pestalozzi, yet he had a profound influence on one of his pupils and disciples, Friedrich Froebel, who studied with him, learned from him, took exception to certain of his methods but employed many of his ideas in his school, including the integration of play into his curriculum. Froebel developed his own school for children and overshadowed the other great philosopher-educators of the Middle Ages and the reformation in his depth of understanding about play and its implementation into educational methods for children.

Friedrich Froebel: The Architect of the Kindergarten or “Garden for Children”

Froebel (1782–1852), the son of a Lutheran minister, followed most of the great philosopher-educators discussed here by placing great importance on faith and God in all aspects of his educational program. Arguably, his work was more influential in promoting play and natural play environments for schoolchildren than that of any other historical figure. His early surroundings brought him daily into contact with nature and he learned to love being alone in the woods with the streams, the plants, and the animals, all of which became the objects of contemplative thought for him and were to exercise a prominent influence on his children's program. He later became a forester's apprentice, enlarged his knowledge of nature, and, while living for a period entirely among plants, changed his religion into a “religious life in nature” (Painter, 1889, pp. 280–1). His higher education at the University of Jena extended his vast knowledge of nature and science, including lectures on botany, architecture, natural history, physics, chemistry, finance, and forest matters—he later found himself in prison for nine weeks for being unable to pay his debt at the university.

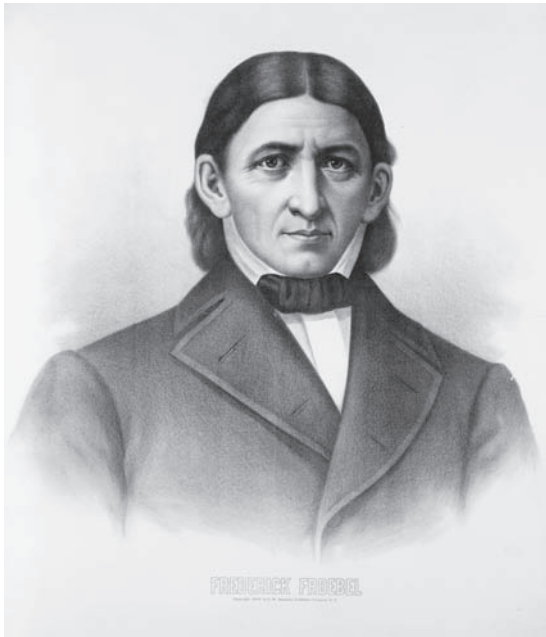


Figure 1.1 Friedrich Froebel, father of the “kindergarten” (garden for children).

Source: First published by C. W. Bardeen, c.1897, Syracuse, NY. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The turning point of Froebel’s life came when a school principal offered him a job as a teacher, interrupting his short-term work with an architect. In this new role he felt for the first time that he had found his place in life, that the “fish was in the water.” He was soon to become one of many scholars to study in Pestalozzi’s school. During his first visit, he experienced a variety of emotions—arousal, elevation, depression, and bewilderment. He felt that in Pestalozzi’s methods there was no organized connection between the subjects of education (Froebel, 1908). He was sympathetic toward the goals of the school but felt that the methods ranged from lacking to successful. He believed that the nature of the child should be emphasized in both method and subject matter. After spending two years at Pestalozzi’s school and intensive intellectual reflection, he opened the first kindergarten in 1837 in Blankenburg, Germany.

Froebel’s philosophy of education was religious in nature. He believed that in all things there lives an eternal law based on an all-pervading, eternal unity. A quietly observant mind and clear human intellect would never fail to recognize this unity that is God, the source of all things. Froebel’s education was rooted in nature and subject to its laws; harmony in thinking, feeling, willing, and doing; subordination of self to the common good; and leading man to an

inner harmony and unity with God. Like Rousseau he envisioned several stages in the development of the individual—childhood, boyhood, and man. From Froebel, Rousseau, and Pestalozzi there springs the modern emphasis on “child centered” education and individual differences in child development. These concepts will be revisited when later discussing the effects of the contemporary standardization of school curricula, and the nature and effects of the high stakes testing movement on children's play and play environments.

Froebel's curriculum was based upon the child's inner unfolding much as a young plant unfolds, requiring tender care and nourishment rather than force and restraint. Education was to grow out of the natural interests of the child and, hence, from life itself. His vehicle of instruction was play, which was to be instructive and enjoyable, unlike the rigid instruction and dull, passive tasks prevalent during his day. The physical body is developed through callisthenic exercises, the social instincts by association with companions in play and work; the senses are cultivated by means of playthings; and the mind is exercised by imitative or inventive uses of Froebel's “gifts” and “occupations.” He designed his own materials, the “gifts,” consisting of such objects as blocks, cubes, balls, and cylinders which were to be handled, examined, counted, and so on. These were to be played with and manipulated alone until all possible meanings had been explored. Then they were used in combination with other gifts for further development of ideas or concepts aimed at understanding the environment. The “occupations,” including such things and activities as paper cutting, weaving, drawing, painting, threading, and stringing, invite transforming and creating activities. The gifts were intended to lead to discovery and the occupations to inventiveness (Froebel, 1887; Ulich, 1945; Frost and Kissinger, 1976). The idea that young children learn best from actively manipulating and exploring concrete materials was further supported in the twentieth century by Dewey, Montessori, and Piaget.

Froebel credited the children themselves for teaching him how to teach them. Considering their ways, he saw their delight in movement, their powers of observation, their use of senses, their ability to invent and construct, and he turned this to the interest of children. This was an “ah ha” moment, for he saw, perhaps more clearly than any of his predecessors, the power of play in the education and development of children. He could, and did, convert children's energies, activities, amusements, occupations, all that goes by the name of play, into educational instruments and therefore transformed work, even manual labor, into play (see Froebel, 1887; Painter, 1889). Froebel exhibited deep insight into children's play and his respect for its profound significance in their development.

Play is the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage, and, at the same time, typical of human life as a whole—of the inner hidden natural life in man and all things. It gives, therefore, joy, freedom, contentment,

inner and outer rest, peace with the world. It holds the source of all that is good ... Play at this time is of deep significance ... the germinal leaves of all later life. (Froebel, 1887, p. 55)

The earliest stage of development for Froebel's child, the period of childhood, was life for the sake of living. The second period, that of boyhood, was the period of learning, and the period in which training predominates either at home, as taught by members of the family, or at school by a teacher. The child was a "school-boy" who had grown from a period of making the internal external to one of making the external internal through the conscious communication of knowledge for a definite purpose. What the child formerly did for the sake of the activity (play), he now did for the sake of the result (work). In childhood he imitated domestic life, in boyhood he shared the work of the family in the field, forest, meadow and garden, and in the trade of the father. All this was accompanied by the daring adventures of childhood: exploring caves and ravines, climbing trees and mountains, and roaming the forests.

From such explorations the child brought to light exciting new stones, plants, and animals, with questions to be answered and further discoveries to be made. He constructed his huts and fortresses with rocks, boards, and branches, learning to use tools and eventually to assess heights and take in views of a beautiful whole. The child would need an external point, self-chosen—a box, closet, grotto, hut, or garden—on which he could center his activity. Brooks or streams also entered into the child's play and required the building of bridges, canals, dams, and mills. Froebel (1887, p. 111) believed that boys who played in these ways made good pupils and would become efficient men. Particularly helpful during boyhood was the cultivation of gardens, for here the child could see his work bearing fruit, subject to the inner laws of natural development, and depending upon the quality of his work. Even if the child could not have his own garden, he should at least have boxes and pots in which to grow a few plants. All this was to be incorporated into Froebel's kindergarten and extensively incorporated into early American kindergartens.

Throughout the history of children's play from antiquity, the great philosopher-educators gave only limited attention to the nature of play consisting simply of activity as such, but emphasized its definite, conscious purpose or the thing or outcome to be represented, for example the free, organized games of running, boxing, ball games, wrestling, and games of hunting or war. Many of the activities were mere practice and exercise of strength. Froebel recognized that such activities were increasingly seen among boys as they advanced in age, and he waxed lyrical about the values of such play, just as he had done about the values of play of a different sort that were characteristic of early childhood.

It is by no means, however, only the physical power that is fed and strengthened in these games; intellectual and moral power, too, is

definitely and steadily gained and brought under control ... Whoever would inhale a fresh, quickening breath of life should visit the *playgrounds* of such boys ... Would that all who, in the education of boys, barely tolerate playgrounds, might consider these things! ... Every town should have its own playground. (Froebel, 1887, pp. 113–14, italics added)

Here, in his classic *Education of Man*, the term “playground” is introduced by Froebel. His writings are the first to provide an extensive description of the characteristics and functions of children's school playgrounds as prepared, organized, and supervised by adults. Although his were by no means the first play environments designed and developed by adults for or with children, they appear to be the first to be called “playgrounds.” If this is accurate, and contrary to modern thought, the term “playground” did not arise with the onset of manufactured play equipment. Froebel's playgrounds were nature and gardens established on schoolyards and it was there in nature that children played. These playgrounds were in many ways little different from the country surroundings and farms where most children lived, but they were established at Froebel's school where the children spent their days and had their daily times for play—their recesses—and were also rich places for learning.

For Froebel, outdoor life for children should encompass far more than providing times and spaces for children's play. Outdoor life in open nature is particularly valuable because it develops, strengthens, ennobles, and lends a higher significance to all things. His short educational walks or excursions with his pupils became a valuable means of education, even for the younger schoolchildren. During these walks, he would have children forget their hurrying and search for the details in nature, thus helping them to see the whole of the area in which they lived and to learn that they were a part of it. Careful inspection should reveal to children the mutual relations of mountains, valleys, and rivers, the natural abodes of animals; the interrelationships and mutual dependence of living things; the inner constancy and unity of all things and phenomena in nature. On such excursions, children should also see man and his unity with nature, in his occupation's social circumstances, actions, manners, customs, and language. The learning resulting from such experiences during the first stage of childhood conditioned the child for later subjects of instruction, but not before the above subjects, on which all others depended, had been fully presented. Being in the forest and wilderness, common among boys, was not the same as living there, learning its essential properties, and becoming intimate with nature.

Froebel's influence on the role of play, nature, and the outdoors in American education, especially kindergartens and child development centers, is perhaps unsurpassed. His influence, not so widely known, reached to the American child study movement of the early twentieth century. The great American

educator William T. Harris, writing in the introduction to Froebel's *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (1909, p. vii), identifies him as the great pioneer and founder of child study (see Chapter 4) and of the pedagogic theory of intellectual values. Harris also credits G. Stanley Hall for his labors in the movement.

Joachim Liebschner (1992), a trustee of the National Froebel Foundation, reviewed a rich collection of Froebel's original writings found in Berlin's Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften to glean deep and personal insights into the man, his philosophy, and his influence. He concluded that: "No philosopher, no educator before Froebel had seen the importance of play for educational purposes with such clarity" (p. 62). Froebel had little to say about play during his first fifty years of life, devoting but a few pages in his *Education of Man* to the importance of play in education and never attempting to develop a coherent theory of play. He did propose three types of play: symbolic play or representations of ordinary life, creative play, where the material being played with is the only limiting factor, and imitative play or re-creating what is learned in school.

Over time, a shift in focus was gradually seen in Froebel's papers as he began to turn his attention to play in early childhood, and in 1837, when he was fifty-five, play became central in his thinking as a means for educating children. During the next several years he founded the kindergarten, the gifts and occupations, and the movement games, and he wrote his *Mother Song Book* (Blow, 1908; Froebel, 1887, 1909; Liebschner, 1992). In his kindergarten, play was the central instrument for learning but he was ambivalent about the degree of freedom needed; early on he emphasized letting children play with blocks and build what they like, but later he provided a blueprint on how and what to build with bricks or gifts. Play to Froebel was more than a mere tool for the educator; it was also valuable for its intellectual, social, and emotional benefits. He was quite modern in this belief and, like Huizinga, in his view that, "play was essentially a manifestation of the cultural advancement of a society" (Liebschner, 1992, p. 56).

Linking the Contributions of Early Scholars

Lacking the advantages of first-hand experience, historians depend upon original documents and the work of other historians in formulating histories of earlier people, cultures, and eras. The earliest prominent writers about children's play made their original contributions through observation, reflection, and direct experience. The great philosophers that followed were avid students of such early writings, which enriched their existing perspectives and influenced their theories and practices. Beginning in ancient Greece and Rome, the sages or great thinkers discussed here understood and recommended that children should be treated with kindness, that corporal punishment should be banned, that there were developmental stages in childhood, and that children

should receive early education within the family but not be introduced to formal education until they were about five years of age. Further, children should be allowed to play at home and at school, for play supports health and physical development and helps prepare children for roles later in life. Indeed, they argued that education should be an amusement, learning should be pleasant, a wide variety of games and amusements should be encouraged, and work should have playful qualities.

The "Renaissance" is aptly named, signifying as it does the revival or flowering of the arts, literature, and vigorous intellectual activity. The works of the great Reformation, Renaissance and pre-modern thinkers in Europe are of great importance in tracing the history of play, for their work, building upon that of their predecessors, was characterized and applied in ever deeper conceptualizations and in broader contexts. In certain respects they revived play-related themes and conclusions much like those noted for Greek and Roman scholars, yet they also reached new, emerging themes and conclusions. Consequently, over time, the nature of play and its importance in child development gradually occupied the growing attention of scholars and resulted in ever-deeper theoretical perspectives and broader practical applications.

Historians have only recently put to rest the common view that children's play and amusements during the medieval period were universally restricted or prohibited. Many religious leaders and parents considered play as the work of the devil and subscribed to such prohibitions, but, despite this, most children were given playthings or toys, many made their own toys, and virtually all played their games much as children have done throughout recorded history. The records show that poverty versus affluence has always been a primary factor influencing the availability of children's time, toys, places, and supervision for play, but, excepting the most extreme conditions of child labor, abuse, war, and natural disasters, children are remarkably skillful in creating such basic play conditions for themselves.

Leading scholars of the Renaissance and the Reformation refined and broadened the perspectives on play set forth by such figures as Plato, Aristotle, and Quintilian. They proposed that education should be reformed, harsh discipline banned, and schooling pleasant. Children should be taught according to stages of development, individual differences should be addressed, both boys and girls should be educated, and children should learn through doing. The pre-modern scholars discussed here became avid students of children at play, helping to enrich existing views or theories, adding substance to knowledge of play, and leaving a rich body of knowledge for later scholars. For example, "learning by doing," a theme developed by Comenius, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, was later to become a basic principle espoused by Dewey, Piaget, and Montessori. All understood, as did the ancient Greeks and Romans, that play was essential for

health and development. Comenius was influenced by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Plutarch, Quintilian, Erasmus, and Bacon (Ulich, 1945).

With time and experience, Renaissance writers began to describe the play and games of children in greater detail, pointing out that children engaged in various forms of play, both illogical and logical and both helpful and harmful. They also gradually applied such knowledge in schools, expanding the curricula to include play and recreation, nature study, and work and play in natural settings and gardens. Education was to be liberal, focusing on play and instruction to strengthen physical, moral, artistic, and intellectual powers. By the time of Froebel, many philosopher/educators saw play as essential for children's physical, intellectual, social, and aesthetic development. There are certain common threads among the philosophies and work of many of the world's most prominent philosophers and scholars of earlier historical eras, and the more recent research of leading scholars across the behavioral sciences. Despite the passage of centuries, many of the lessons drawn out here are still widely ignored in American schools and in American playgrounds—specifically, the lessons that individual differences in children are universal, that there are stages in childhood that should be recognized, that adults can learn much about child rearing and education by observing children, that all the senses should be trained, that direct experience should play an important role in child rearing and education, that work and learning should be playful, that kindness should rule over punishment, that objects and events must be seen, felt, and observed in concrete form, that schools should be child centered, and that play and exercise are essential for the health and development of children. These are lessons forgotten or yet to be learned by those responsible for contemporary actions to reduce recess, playgrounds, and free, spontaneous outdoor play. The chapters that follow will add meaning and substance to these conclusions.