

The Theory and Use of Play in the Psychotherapy of childhood

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Theories have been put forward concerning children's play which relate it to phylogeny and to an impulse towards preparation for life.

Psycho-analysis tends to regard play used as a therapeutic tune mainly as an expression of impulses and ideas rapeseed the: consciousness owing to incompatibility with other parts of the psyche.

While in substantial agreement at points with other theories I believe play, if regarded from the angle of treatment, to be Mt different, in nature and purpose from what has yet been suggested an the following grounds:-

1. In early childhood the child has no power of distinction between the 'me' and 'not me' between the outside (skin sometime) and the inside (interior bodily sensations) feelings (hunger, cold, etc., and affect (rage, pleasure, etc.) There is a central awareness which experiences and endeavours to organise experience. This mass of experience I believe to form a total whole unanalysable into component parts.

2. Experience suggests that Spearman's a postulate concerning adults that any lived experience tends to produce in the experience a knowing the character of the experience, applies to early childhood. A child wet then use the material of the We he has already had to cake to himself pictures of new experiences. Since an infant has only bodily experience his picture will be in bodily terms.

3. The child, like the adult, endeavours to master this experience by grouping it. Whereas, however, the adult groups is experience by perception of external impersonal qualities of the object, the child groups his by subjective reaction to the object, i.e. the feelings aroused by the object in him.

(b) is able to detach the perceived characteristics from the fundamentals (black hat, black shoes, blackness) and preserve the separateness of the fundamentals, the child when perceiving a common character fuses the fundamentals into a total whole.

The Impulse to Play

This globular mass of experience and concept is dynamic. It presses always towards expression in action,

(a) To relieve the tension of excitation

(b) In order that by externalisation it may be realised and absorbed into the total psyche.

Sensation and experience can only be expressed in terms consonant with it. One cannot, for example, express shapes in music. The nature of early experience is such that sensation affect, concept, memory and feeling all coalesce into an indivisible whole. For expression of it, there is therefore needed a medium which is itself plastic, multi-dimensional and indivisible. Play, in suitable circumstances, can provide this medium.

Nature of Play

The material expressed in play cannot be represented in words. not on account of repression, but because language is incapable of expressing it. I suggest that this part of the psyche is called the primary system. As the child grows, so cognition develops. Cognition (conscious) could then be termed the secondary system. The primary system persists through life but diminishes in volume as development proceeds. To cognition the primary system is 'unconscious' because its content is not susceptible of expression in secondary system terms.

Neurosis

If a child fails to express the material of his primary system in such a way as to make contact with it, there is a tendency for ideas of the primary system to dominate him. Adaptation to life then becomes unsatisfactory and any of the neuroses may ensue.

Use of Play in Therapy

Simple provision of suitable opportunity for play can relieve many slight neuroses. The severer neuroses can only be resolved by enabling the child to build a bridge between the contents of the primary and secondary system. As aids in this procedure

certain pieces of apparatus and a technique have been devised, which are illustrated in the Congress exhibition.