



Designing for Children

- With focus on 'Play + Learn'

The cognitive space of Indigenous children - A natural way of awakening the senses and the cognitive tools

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Abstract: The paper explores

How children BE in the world and how learning and playing are not fragmented in to two separate activities and also how toys that children make are an aid to make sense of the world and the natural laws involved in this.

Second point is that learning is an autonomous process which is in children's control.

The paper begins with exploring how we know what we know and the inherent paradoxes in cognition and the difficulty in understanding 'reality'. Natural, biological process of how children make sense of the world is explored. Paradox of cognition, the cognizer and the cognized, being and knowing are also explored. The misunderstandings of the textualised regarding how children learn, want, grow up etc issues are also covered.

Key words: Being, biology, Cognitive space, innate qualities, inherent capacity that allows knowledge, autonomy, holistic, Autopsies, presence, meditation, spiritual

Introduction

Knowing is Being.

We are biologically wired to be in love, to live in beauty and to know the world.

Even though children are born with this inherent quality, the over all conditions in to which they are born dictate their beingness in the world. These conditions condition them to become what they are as they grow up.

Children brought up under conditions of freedom, autonomy, independence will be different from children brought up under control, coercion and dependency.

Value systems of NATURE - co operation, co- existence and sustainability are the cognitive conditions in which most tribal cultures grow up rather than the man made values of competition, greed and control.

Play and toy in children's lives.

Children in traditional, natural learning cultures are similar to any newborn living beings. All the games and other activities children do are a kind of a response to their biological needs. It seems that the evolutionary process of life itself evolves these activities. Awakening the intelligence of the body seems to me the first step towards acquiring knowledge. At the initial stages of learning (living) the tools for learning also get developed.

Our immediate contact to the world out side is through our senses. Senses are the door to the outer world as well as to the inner world. Sensitized sense awakens their sense of beauty, sense of order as well as sense of rhythm inherent in nature.

Initially most things children do naturally awaken the senses. Through children's experience of the world by handling, manipulation and interaction with materials and the natural environment, they learn the rules and principles that make the world operate. At the same time they also develop their cognitive tools, skills, intelligence, attention, patience etc that enable them to make sense of the world. Children are constantly integrating new information into developing understanding of their physical and social world.

Children learn by playing provided they are left alone and are protected from the coercive environment we are creating with the invention of every new gadget meant to 'help' the child and to 'develop' the world.

'Toys' that children make and the various games that children play are to comprehend the world they are in. At least this is what my study of children in non literate cultures seems to suggest.

Childhood of freedom

The indigenous world offers thousands of delights of free play to children. Children can play, explore and interact with the natural world with no restriction or supervision, structure or control. The autonomy and the independence of the child is the key factor. All the games children play in these communities have to do with sensitizing the senses, planning, balancing, guessing, developing the mathematical sense , understanding the

space, understanding who or what else is there to live with etc. This is the process of knowing the world. Mathematical senses or the sense of numbers, quantities, space get developed by engaging with the outer world. This subconscious process begins from the time of birth.

Among the rural tribal people the children grow up quite naturally developing various qualities needed in their adult life.

They learn to take care of themselves quite early, become tough, independent and responsible.

No child ever complains about heat, cold or rain and is at ease with what ever is the climate.

Childhood of Imprisonment

The lives of children in the so called developed or the developing societies today are much more structured and supervised, with few opportunities for autonomy and free play. Parents are in total control of the child. The child is made totally dependent and everything is decided by the adult. In fact children are born in to the adult world.

Their physical boundaries have shrunk. A number of factors have led to this. Parents are afraid for their children's safety when they leave the house alone; many children are no longer free to roam their neighborhoods or even their own premises unless accompanied by adults. Some working families can't supervise their children after school, giving rise to latchkey children who stay indoors or attend supervised after-school activities. Furthermore, children's lives have become structured and scheduled by adults, who hold the mistaken belief that this sport or that lesson will make their children more successful as adults.

When children do have free time, it's often spent inside in front of the television or computers. For some children, that's because their neighborhood, apartment complex or house have no outdoor play spaces.

The cognitive space/ environment of children in so called modern spaces with its gadgets, schools, malls is constantly coercing them to believe, to depend, to buy. And it hardly ever is providing space or opportunity to them for self discovery, or self initiative.

Cognitive conditions in tribal cultures.

Children are the standard for creating spaces- both the physical space and the psychological space.

Life happens on the ground. Every act- preparing food, cooking, eating, working, bathing etc and the child is included in these activities. No restrictions are imposed on children. They hardly ever hear words like "don't", "no" etc

There is no history of rape in tribal communities, nor there thefts. Neither there is history of madness nor of suicide.

Beating children is unheard of in these culture and children are never told 'no'.

Naturally, children grow up in these communities physically and psychologically healthy. They learn what is supposed to be learned in the most natural manner. Children decide what to learn. Not out of choice but since the adults don't interfere they are left free and learning happens naturally.

No one ever teaches them as teaching would teach 'to teach' and children would learn 'authority' or 'slave mentality'. Even we may not find a word for 'teaching' or 'learning' in their vocabulary, because to be alive means to learn.

All learning is done through experiencing or DOING and all teaching happens in BEING what is to be taught. Words have no role to play in this act of making sense as knowledge per se is wordless.

The physical space, the architecture, the activities, the relation to nature etc are all conducive for an organic and natural growth with deep ecological sensitivity. In that sense the tribal world is truly an inclusive world.

Making sense of the world

Children are by nature holistic, spiritual, artistic and scientific.

Children are observant of what goes on and imitates, play acts, constructs, abstracts, invents in order to make sense of what they see or what they experience.

Every activity that a child does on its own is not fragmented in to work, play, learn and every activity contains the laws that govern life-mathematical, physical, chemical, linguistic and other qualities like intelligence, reasoning, planning, spontaneity ,attention, care, responsibility etc. Now this is one type of cognitive space where children make use of their biological capacity to make sense of the world. A world in which they are free, autonomous, independent and responsible.

In modern scenario children are treated for attention deficit and drugged for what the adults perceive as hyperactivity. In fact adults create all these problems for the child by not responding as per the natural tendency of the child.

As self organizing systems children have the ability to comprehend the world and any short cut would only create confusion which will lead to cognitive damages.

References

The main write up is from my personal experience of living with the rural tribal communities and studies and documentation done to understand how children learn.