An Examination of the
Four-Year-Old Master Dramatist

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Play is a natural and effective means by which young children learn, but in the current push for early education many children are experiencing more formal learning settings and strategies and less time for self-directed play. Staff in early childhood services need the support of research and experience in order to promote play, to better understand the various play styles of children, and to improve their own skills as facilitators of children’s play and hence learning. Major issues in the play debate are

1. Adults working with young children need "playfulness" as a personal characteristic.

2. Adults need to enhance children’s socio-dramatic play by, offering first-hand experiences, providing props and opportunities to play out experiences, observing children and then intervening in play effectively.

3. Adults need to trust that children can control their own self-directed socio-dramatic play.

Le jeu constitue un moyen naturel et efficace d’apprentissage chez l’enfant, mais devant les pressions actuelles pour faire des apprentissages précoces, beaucoup d’enfants connaissent des environnements et des stratégies éducatives plus formels et moins de temps pour auto-diriger leurs jeux. Le personnel des services à la petite enfance recueillent le support de la recherche et de l’expérience afin de promouvoir le jeu, de mieux comprendre les différents styles chez les enfants, et d’améliorer leurs propres habilités comme promoteurs du jeu chez l’enfant, et donc, de l’apprentissage. Les principaux aspects dans le débat sont:

1. Les adultes qui travaillent avec des enfants ont besoin de posséder une "joie de vivre" comme caractéristique personelle.

2. Les adultes doivent stimuler les jeux de rôle en offrant des expériences directes,

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Children and adults playing together is the sight I like to see when I visit early childhood centres and classes. I believe that, in spite of the fact that children are being offered "school-type" activities increasingly, and being given fewer opportunities to play freely in a self-directed way.

My interest in the area of socio-dramatic play was fired initially when my work involved me in the supervision of a number of preschool centres with a view to improving the day-to-day functioning and content of the programs. I was dismayed to find that staff of the centres seemed very earnest about their tasks and there was very little lightheartedness and joy evident in the settings that I saw.

Playfulness, a disposition of the young, is a trait which is of benefit if carried on into adulthood. Ashley Montagu (1981) has written about the phenomenon of maintaining the traits of infancy and childhood and uses the term, neoteny. He and others who have explored the area say that those who can maintain the playfulness trait are likely to be more creative, more flexible, more inquiring.

In his book Growing Young, Montagu