

Peter Gray's 5 Conditions Of Play

Excerpted from The Value of Play I: The Definition of Play Gives Insights by Peter Gray Ph.D.
These ideas are expanded upon in Gray's amazing book Free To Learn.

Play Is Self Chosen And Self Directed

Play is, first and foremost, an expression of freedom. It is what one wants to do as opposed to what one is obliged to do. The joy of play is the ecstatic feeling of liberty....Players are free agents, not pawns in someone else's game.

Play Is Activity In Which Means Are More Valued Than Ends

Play is activity conducted primarily for its own sake. The playful student enjoys studying the subject and cares less about the test. In play, attention is focused on the means, not the ends, and players do not necessarily look for the easiest routes to achieving the ends.

Play Is Imaginative, Non-literal, Mentally Removed In Some Way From "Real" Or "Serious" Life

In play one enters a realm that is physically located in the real world, makes use of props in the real world, is often about the real world, is said by the players to be real, and yet in some way is mentally removed from the real world.

Play Has Structure, Or Rules, Which Are Not Dictated By Physical Necessity But Emanate From The Minds Of The Players

The rules of play are the means. To play is to behave in accordance with self-chosen rules. The rules are not like rules of physics, nor like biological instincts, which are automatically followed. Rather, they are mental concepts that often require conscious effort to keep in mind and follow.

Play Involves An Active, Alert, But Non-stressed Frame Of Mind

Because play involves conscious control of one's own behavior, with attention to process and rules, it requires an active, alert mind. Players do not just passively absorb information from the environment, or reflexively respond to stimuli or behave automatically in accordance with habit.