Chapter 15

Creative Growth Through Play and its Implications for Recreation Practice

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A cherished belief among many play specialists is that play enhances the development of creativity.¹ The fact is, the paths to play have many dead ends, detours, and debris that discourage instead of enhance the development of creativity. These bad road conditions are numerous and often not easily visible until it is too late. The traffic engineers, road crews, and policemen who manage the journey through play (i.e., parents, teachers, recreation leaders, therapists, and others) must work hard to remove these roadblocks. If they do not, play experiences will almost certainly help to make non-creative children and later adults.

We propose to demonstrate these roadblocks with a general model of the stages, or choice points, involved in play. This model is the authors' integration of diverse ideas about play as well as some that, up to now, have not been closely linked to play. The model is the result of the authors' many discussions between themselves and with students. The detailed ideas included in the model are not novel; we have borrowed heavily from previous research and theory. What is original is the particular ways in which we have tried to integrate the ideas to provide one view of play and its link to creativity.

It seems to us that our emphasis, in the model, on the importance of exploratory behavior and its balance against too much or too little directiveness and structure, as a path to creative growth, provides a focal point for examining some possible limitations of current recreation practice. In the last part of the chapter we explore those limits. But first it is important to look at the path to creative growth and the ways in which it can be blocked.

The main ideas from previous work that we have relied on are those of Hull,⁵ and Linford and Jeanrenaud,⁶ who laid the groundwork for viewing play as a series of critical stages; reinforcement theorists such as Hull⁴ and Skinner,⁶ whose principles of learning help to show how movement through the stages of play can be enhanced or retarded; arousal theorists, particularly Berlyne,⁴ and Fiske and Maddi,⁶ whose ideas about concepts like novelty, complexity, curiosity, and exploration help to define the distinctive crossroads on the path through play; personality and development theorists like Piaget,⁸ Harvey, Hunt
and Schroder,9 and Eysenck,10 whose ideas illustrate how different combinations of persons and environments, for both players and managers, can produce different outcomes at the different stages of play; and some investigations of play and creativity such as those by Torrance,11 Lieberman,12 Sutton-Smith,13 and Bishop and Chace,14 which have demonstrated that play is a powerful medium for inhibiting or enhancing creative potential. These authors and works are mentioned here so that the rest of the paper can proceed without continual reference to previous literature.

Refer to the diagram in Figure 1. For our purposes, a journey through play begins at:

THE ATTENTION STAGE

There is a story about an old farmer who used to periodically whack his mule on the snout with a stick of firewood. When asked why he did this, the farmer replied, “I can’t I’am him nuthin if’n I don’t first git his attention!” Now, we do not recommend the whack-between-the-eyes method to get a kid started at play. But the farmer’s wisdom, verified repeatedly by psychological research, is sound in principle: In order to begin learning anything, the person must first pay attention to some object or situation. No attention, no learning. No learning, no creativity.

NOVELTY

Novelty, or the extent to which an object differs, relatively or absolutely, from what has occurred before, helps to gain one’s attention. So does the intensity of the object or situation—how much it stands out from the rest of its environment. Things that are familiar or plain will not grab our attention very often or for very long. How many of you have noticed the light bulb in your ceiling lately? If you have, our guess is that it had stopped producing light. When was the last time you marvelled at a gray cement wall that you passed?

Those with an economic motive, like top manufacturers, understand very well the old farmer’s wisdom. Have you ever seen a child in a department store, grasping towards a brightly-colored toy and throwing a temper tantrum, because his mother is trying to pull him away? If so, you have witnessed first hand the significance of the attention stage of play.
Figure 1
Model of the Behavioral Stages and Blocks to Creativity Through Play

OBJECT OR SITUATION
  directiveness
    high moderate/low
    novelty, intensity
      high low

ATTENTION
  novelty, intensity, incongruity
    moderate
    high low

APPROACH
  directiveness
    unilateral informational accelerated autonomy protective
    unreliable reliable
    incompetent tutor competent tutor

EXIT
  tutor reinforces conforming responses
  EXPLORATION
  tutor reinforces exploration repertoire of potentially novel responses
  EXPLORATION
  chance reinforces exploration repertoire of potentially novel responses
  EXIT
  chance reinforces exploration repertoire of potentially novel responses
  EXIT

ASSIMILATION
  tutor reinforces potentially inappropriate responses
  potentially appropriate responses
  EXIT
  EXPLORATION
  tutor reinforces potentially inappropriate responses
  potentially appropriate responses
  EXIT
  CREATIVITY
  creativity by MIRACLE
  EXIT

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CURIOSITY

The approach-avoidance conflict, must be resolved into approach if play is to occur. Novelty and intensity also make a person approach or avoid a play object or situation. But their effects are a little different from those at the attention stage. Novelty and intensity are increasingly related to attentiveness: The more of them, the greater the attention. But they have an "inverted U" relation with avoidance-approach.

More novelty or intensity, up to a certain level, increasingly makes the person want to approach the play thing or situation. But beyond this critical level, adding more novelty or intensity produces greater avoidance. This effect seems to happen because too much novelty or intensity creates fear, not wonder.

Approach does not have to mean literally moving toward an object. It can also mean sustained interest, or not actively avoiding the object. This is an important distinction for spectator forms of play, where the play thing or situation is supposed to do something to the person, instead of him to it. This meaning of approach is illustrated by a circus performance that one of the authors attended. In part of the show, a gorilla escaped from his cage and his trainer to create havoc and fear among the other circus performers in the arena. This display riveted the interest of the children in the audience, who seemed delighted by these antics, until the gorilla leaped over the arena wall into the spectator section! The younger children, terrified, then began crying, clinging, and in some cases running for the exit. Soon the "gorilla" took off his hooded
mask to reveal a man in a gorilla costume. The children immediately composed themselves and either returned to their seats or went over to the man-gorilla to get a closer look. Clearly, the children’s approach tendency was close to or at the peak of the “inverted U,” before the “gorilla” jumped out of the arena. The novelty and intensity were just too high and avoidance reactions followed. Finally, the object was transformed to one that was relatively familiar but still somewhat novel—enough to produce literal approach and even touching.

This example demonstrates that approach (or avoidance) can be psychological as well as physical. The example also shows that distance between player and object and the presence of barriers between them can affect the amount of approach or avoidance.

In summary, if you present a child with optimum amounts of novelty, intensity, distance, and barriers in a play situation, he will be inclined toward curiosity; he will resolve the approach/avoidance conflict in favor of approach.

EXPLORATORY PLAY

Exploration is the manipulation of the new object or situation in order to discover its properties. Berlyne distinguishes between two kinds of exploration: 1) specific exploration, aimed at finding a single answer to a problem or challenge and 2) diverse exploration, aimed at finding in the environment elements that can produce excitement or distraction. Exploration is the means (not necessarily conscious or deliberate) by which the individual acquires a wide range of information; it adds to the person’s repertoire of possible ideas and responses. The availability of this repertoire at a later time makes it possible for the person to produce many ideas or actions in a given situation; this potential is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for creativity to occur.

The complexity of the play thing or situation determines how much the person will explore it. A complex thing has many different parts and/or unusual arrangements or combinations of parts; so certain kinds of novelty affect exploration too. An object or situation that has many things to see, hear, touch, smell, taste, and manipulate, especially in unusual ways, is more complex than one with fewer of these features and is more likely to encourage exploration.

Imagine a cuckoo clock with a dial that permits choosing the cycle in minutes with which the cuckoo sounds. Now add complexity by providing three doors and three “cuckoos”—a bird, a lion, and an old car—with an unpredictable pattern of which one will come out of which door. Add more by allowing the three cuckoos to do different things when activated—the lion can croak like a frog or toot like a car’s horn, the bird can roar like a lion or moo like a cow, and the car can bark as well as squirt water from a radiator leak. As more and
more features like these are added and the child has some way of influencing, though not precisely determining, their occurrence, the frequency and duration of exploratory play should increase.

These rules about complexity and exploration hold, of course, only if the parts of the object did not produce so much intensity or novelty that an avoidance reaction occurred. Given that approach takes place, then complexity should be increasingly related to exploration.

**ASSIMILATION**

Assimilation or consolidation play is the repetition of behaviors or situations, which, during the exploratory stage, appeared challenging or were reinforced; such repetition permits the child to assimilate or master the behavior or situation. As a rule, unless other people impose the constraints that we discuss later, the child’s assimilation play does not involve 100 percent repetition. Complete repetition of behavior, all the time, would seem to discourage the development of creative abilities. The natural tendency of the child, according to Freud and Piaget, would be to make subtle transformations in his play or the situation. These situations are the child’s attempts to bring the object or situation within his range of comprehension or ability. These attempts are not divergent exploration but are forms of specific exploration that result in mastery; this word, although a good one to describe the outcome, does not necessarily mean that the child is diligently striving to master some specific skill, like a high school student strives to memorize the parts of the body for an anatomy course. Mastery or comprehension tend to follow (if not interfered with) not necessarily by the child’s design or intent but often simply as a result of practice.

Assimilation play, along with formal training, helps the individual acquire proficiency in various responses; this proficiency is the other necessary condition for creativity.

**CREATIVITY**

Creativity is the production of novel responses that have an appropriate impact in a given context. If several truckloads of creativity were dumped in your front yard, this definition probably would not help you to identify it. But the definition does neatly summarize, if somewhat cryptically, the essence of extensive research and writing about creativity. Most people would probably agree that redundancy of ideas or products is not creative, but neither is novelty for novelty’s sake; if the idea or product does not resolve some problem or affect
established beliefs or practices, it is regarded as not appropriate and thus not creative, for the given context, although it might be appropriate in another place or time.

Our concern is to outline the general conditions that are likely to enhance or, more often, inhibit the person’s ability to make novel and appropriate responses. According to the definition, if either of these abilities fails to develop, the person will be incapable of creative performance.

The first condition for creativity, the ability to make novel responses, comes primarily from the exploratory play experiences of the person; the attention and approach experiences are critical as well, but mainly because exploratory play cannot occur without them. In exploratory play the child learns the many different things that the environment can “do” and the many things that he can do to it. Over time, in many exploratory play situations, he accumulates a repertoire of potential responses that he can call upon, if and when he needs to. The more responses he accumulates, the greater the probability that at least one of them will be novel in some context, sometime. Also, the more there are the greater the possibility of combining several to yield a novel pattern of behavior, even though one response would not be novel in the given context. In short, exploratory play, by providing many potential responses, helps make the person potentially creative, in that he is able to emit those responses in some future context.

Exploratory play probably also increases the person’s motivation to make novel responses, or at least reduces his fear of making them. Studies of humans and other animals suggest that fear of novelty is an acquired drive and that it is greatest in animals whose early environmental experiences are impoverished. We believe it was Piaget who said, “the more a child has seen and heard, the more he wants to see and hear.” And we would add that this probably applies to the stimuli produced by the child’s own responses.

The second condition for creativity, the ability to make appropriate or useful responses, comes primarily from the assimilation-play experiences of the person. It is during assimilation play that the person develops, through repetition and transformation, specific, known skills. He is not trying to find out all the things that the environment can do or that he can do to it, as in exploration; he is perfecting, within the limits of his existing abilities, his understanding of or skill at some particular situation or task. He is figuring out how to hammer a nail, throw a football, ride a bike, or why mother insists that he eat with a fork, not his hands, why he goes to the dentist, or later how a barometer, carburetor, or electric motor works.

In short, there is a kind of learning, distinct from exploration, that results in the acquisition of particular performance skills that are, or are intended to be, thorough and permanent. The more thorough and permanent the skills developed in a given domain of performance, the more likely it is that the person can
make appropriate responses, and thus is potentially creative, in that domain. And the more frequently specific-skill learning is concentrated in one domain, the less potential creativity the person has in other domains: It is not likely that a professional novelist will help to invent a new breed of computers, and we would not expect an electronics engineer to win the Nobel prize for literature.

To briefly summarize, these are the major stages. By successfully progressing through these stages repeatedly, on many encounters with the environment during development, the person would become creative. Progression can be blocked, however, by environmental, social, and personality factors; the more often this happens, the less creativity will develop. We have seen how the degree of novelty, intensity, incongruity, and complexity affect these stages. Now we will look at some other factors that can block the development of creative ability.

**BLOCKING PROGRESS TOWARD CREATIVITY**

*Control* can be exercised by parents, older friends or relatives, teachers, etc. For lack of a better word on which most people can agree, they will be referred to as tutors. Tutors, then, can exercise control either directly on the child by means of directives and/or reinforcements (rewards and punishments), or indirectly through manipulation of the child’s play environment, including its degree of novelty, complexity, intensity and incongruity.

Control can be exercised with over-directiveness, under-directiveness or moderate directiveness. Over-directiveness can take several forms. The tutor can draw the child’s attention against his will, and show him how to handle an object or situation before the child has had time to be curious about it or to explore it. For instance, the tutor may say this to the child: “Here, come with me, I want to show you something: see this plane? I want you to play with it, and I’ll show you how to hold it...” This condition is called unilateral since all the information passes from the tutor to the child, and none from the child to the tutor. If the plane flies and does not crash, the condition is considered as reliable.

Under this form of over-directiveness, reinforcement is contingent upon conformance to directions. So punishment might sound like this: “How many times must I tell you not to hold your ball with your left hand?” Because both curiosity and exploration were circumvented, the behaviors displayed during assimilation play are limited to the motions dictated by the tutor. Consequently, the child becomes fearful, dependent upon his tutor’s instructions, imitative, conforming and non-creative.

If the tutor’s directives are unreliable, i.e., produce undesirable outcomes or contradict previous directions, the child faces a multiple conflict: following directions does not necessarily lead to desirable outcomes; not following them
certainly leads to punishment. Besides having missed exploration, the child has no alternative solutions to the tutor's instructions. Consequently, he reacts with distrust and anger towards the tutor, and might try to oppose him. Often, therefore, behaviors opposed to directions and that escaped punishment are perceived as rewarded, even though they may be regarded as inappropriate by his society. So, the child might become rigidly anti-authoritarian and non-conforming—but not creative.

The tutor can also provide unnecessary assistance. For example, he might say this: "Here, this is too hard for you, I'll do it!" Under the protective interpersonal conditions, the tutor is over-responsive to the child's wants. While the tutor might interfere at any stage of the child's experience he tends to do so mostly when the child meets his first obstacle during exploratory play, thus preventing assimilation play. Therefore, while the development of novel responses might not have been affected as severely as under unilateral conditions, acquisition of proficient responses, whether appropriate or not, will have been inhibited.

One response, however, will have been fully explored and assimilated: manipulation of the tutor in order to elicit his assistance. The child might, therefore, become an expert at social manipulation, but without confidence in his own ability to achieve anything. So, he remains dependent on others to be creative in his place.

Under-directiveness occurs when the tutor exercises no control over the child. This is considered to be the accelerated autonomy condition. Spontaneous attention, curiosity, exploratory and assimilation play all occur, but in the absence of any guidance by the tutor. Reinforcement is dispensed by the environment. Behavior is rewarded whenever environmental consequences are pleasant, and punished whenever environmental consequences are adverse.

For instance, a child's attention has been caught by a toy which is lying on a table. He decides to explore the toy. Because he is too small to reach it, he grasps the table cloth and pulls on it until the toy falls on the floor. If the toy breaks, the child's behavior has been punished. If not, the child's behavior has been rewarded and table cloth pulling might become one of his favorite play activities.

As this example illustrates, the absence of adult guidance makes it difficult for the child to learn about his society's sense of appropriateness. So while he might have developed a wide repertoire of novel responses, few of them will be appropriate, thus limiting his creativity.

Moderate directiveness, as in the interpersonal informational condition, is most likely to lead to creativity. The tutor manipulates the environment so as to provide the child with an environment structured in such a way that the child will almost always proceed through a progression of experiences. Although the child's approach and exploration are experienced as spontaneous, they actually follow a predetermined path leading to the discovery of appropriate responses.
For instance, if the tutor decides that the child will learn about cooperation, he sets up a game where success depends directly on the degree of cooperation between the players. He does not tell the child what to do. The child's desire to succeed motivates him to test alternative approaches, including the cooperative one. The consequences of the various approaches are compared. This information is stored and thus becomes available for combination with previously stored information, so that conceptual links can be drawn. In other words, the seeking of alternate solutions has been elicited, and concept formation made possible.

To that, the tutor may add social reinforcement by congratulating profusely the child for cooperating or initiating exploration. So, the behaviors likely to be learned during assimilation play are those rewarded during exploration as well as exploration itself. The child thus develops a wide range of appropriate and novel responses, the two necessary skills for creativity.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control Conditions</th>
<th>Creative Skills</th>
<th>Resulting Creativity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Novelty</td>
<td>Appropriateness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unilateral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unreliable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protective</td>
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<td>Accelerated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Note: + means existing skill; — means absent skill.

In summary (see Table 1), of the control conditions discussed above, only the last one offers the opportunity to develop both novel and appropriate responses. The unilateral condition, by bypassing exploratory play and emphasizing assimilation play, encourages the development of appropriate responses (at least when the tutor is competent), but discourages the development of novel responses. The protective condition allows some exploration, but no assimilation. Therefore, while some novel responses might develop, neither appropriate nor inappropriate learning occurs. Finally, in the accelerated autonomy condition, exploration and assimilation both take place, but the absence of guidance results in the learning of many inappropriate responses.
PERSONALITY OF PLAYER AND TUTOR

The environmental effects and tutoring practices that we have outlined are probably determined, in part, by the personality characteristics of both learner and tutor; some effects of personality are undoubtedly independent of what is actually present in the environment or what the tutor intends at any given time. On the other hand, the stages that we have discussed obviously help to shape the personalities of people in some ways. So movement through the stages and the participants’ personalities are in a dynamic relationship; they influence one another. This dynamic interplay continues throughout development, which, though concentrated on one’s early years, probably is a lifelong process.

The player or learner will be motivated or able to notice, approach, or explore things depending, in part, on his past experience in doing so. Some kids will approach and explore things that other kids will not even notice or will be frightened by. Piaget’s phrase, “the more he will want to see and hear,” is highly relevant to this point; so is the added notion: the more he will be able to see and hear. Fiske and Maddi’s idea of high- and low-activation people (seekers or avoiders of stimulation) could be an example of a pertinent personality characteristic, which presumably develops out of experience.

Eysenck’s introverted and extraverted types, which he believes are largely inherited, are other examples. The introvert has a nervous system characterized by high levels of cortical arousal and low levels of reactive inhibition (mental fatigue or boredom); the extravert is just the reverse. These differences suggest that introverts should be less impulsive, more conscious of details, more persistent at various tasks, and more capable of long-term memory than extraverts; these hypotheses have been supported by a variety of studies. Extraverts, because of their high boredom potential, presumably would attend to and approach novel stimuli more than introverts but would engage in less detailed exploration and less consolidation play. This reasoning would conclude that, given the same developmental circumstances, introverts have a better chance of becoming creative than extraverts.

Now consider the personality of the tutor. Even with the best of intentions for the outcome of his tutoring, what he can actually do will be partly dictated by his own personality. In fact, his intentions—what he thinks should be done—will be somewhat preconditioned by his personality. This, to us, is a vital point for the management of play experiences: A tutor, say a recreation leader, cannot simply decide to manage play for the betterment of the player and expect to do so entirely on the strength of his own motivation and game skills. His personality might be such that he cannot recognize or manage the delicate balance between exploratory and consolidatory play. If his aim is the enhancement of creativity, he will almost certainly fail (unless someone else plugs the holes that he leaves).
A highly extraverted tutor, for example, if Eysenck's meaning of extraversion is correct, would probably emphasize a great variety of novel but, for learning purposes, superficial experiences in play. This approach, if prolonged or used often enough, seems likely to produce a jack-of-all-trades-but-master-of-none kind of player. Such persons, though often interesting, are hardly models of creative production.

Because tutors were once players and learners, their personalities have been shaped by the developmental experiences that we have described. The methods of control used by tutors, outlined previously, were derived largely from the childhood training conditions described by Harvey, Hunt and Schroder. Those authors claim that the different training conditions produce distinctive adult personalities, ranging from the highly concrete, authoritarian, rigid person to the highly abstract, open-minded, adaptive one. What this means, in our terms, is that tutors who were frequently exposed to directive, unilateral methods of control in their development are likely to become concretistic, authoritarian personalities who, as tutors, will employ directive, unilateral methods of control.

**SUMMARY**

We have not tried to give a precise and exhaustive rendering of relevant personality characteristics. We have merely attempted to point out the importance of personality, for both player and tutor, and to suggest a few directions for further thought and research. The reader might have concluded by now that in order to promote creativity in others a tutor must be creative himself. We do not disagree with that conclusion. Unfortunately, telling would-be tutors to "be creative" is about as helpful as telling an alcoholic that he really ought to stop drinking. Clearly, it is easier said than done.

We have presented a model of stages of play, which is really a view of developmental experience adapted to play, in order to reveal various roadblocks to creativity. Figure 1 (page 185) summarizes this model. We have not often referred to Figure 1 throughout our discussion. We hope that the figure, bolstered by the text, adequately summarizes our major points: a) the critical stages of play or, more generally, development, b) the dynamics between these stages and personality development, and c) the many roadblocks to creativity as well as the nature of the singular path that is likely to lead to it.

Recreation rhetoric sometimes extols the joys and wonders of play and its role in creative development. And researchers, including ourselves, have often looked to play as one source of creative behavior. We do not wish to squelch pretty thoughts or discourage positively-oriented research. But perhaps an alternative view should be heard and researched: If our model is somewhere along the right lines, the greater miracle is that anybody at all ever becomes creative.
IMPLICATIONS

This chapter has referred to childhood learning and experiences and their effects on later creativity. But "later" actually never comes. Recent research findings are beginning to re-emphasize what many individuals have always known but some of our institutions forgot: the need for creative development continues throughout the life cycle right up until death and, so far as we know, perhaps beyond it. Thus, fundamental ideas about the paths to creativity are relevant to adult behavior and development. And the recreation professionals who develop recreation institutions, programs, and the training of other recreation professionals are heavily implicated in that process, whether they want to be or not. Sometimes it seems that they do not want to be.

Recreation personnel are supposed to be "people-oriented." In their personal lives they most clearly are. Both casual observation and psychological test data show that recreation personnel are about as extraverted as you are likely to find. But in their professional behavior—what they do on the job, what they write books about, and what they try to teach others to do—many seem to show greater concern with things like organizational charts; staff assignments; budget preparation, defense and allocation; facility or resource design and maintenance; and the rules and regulations that shall govern people's recreation behavior. These activities smack of a love for things and their orderly arrangements rather than a genuine concern for people as such. It is fair to ask whether anyone, recreation professional or otherwise, can really be genuinely concerned with people. Perhaps most of us are only capable of being genuinely concerned with a person or two. As is often suggested, if you discover that your true friends can be counted on one hand, do not be dismayed—feel fortunate.

Nevertheless, one must wonder what this heavy emphasis on things and abstract process is doing to recreation's potential for fostering creative growth in child and adult participants. In the terminology of the model presented above, the recreation field sometimes seems like the unilateral, reliable (?) , competent (?) tutor who reinforces conforming responses and expects participants to assimilate the response alternatives proffered. The sterility of many recreation programs and places and the apparent lack of concern for exploration (by professionals or by the public they serve) is notable. Perhaps most or all recreation professionals occasionally allow, consciously or unconsciously, exploratory behavior to appear. But, often, these instances seem too infrequent and too superficial.

Some counter arguments to this characterization of the recreation field need to be acknowledged. First, organizational charts, budgets, rules, etc. are necessary and serve valuable functions. It is hopelessly idealistic to imagine that parks, playgrounds, recreation centers, and some resources can manage themselves. We might be surprised, however, at the positive outcomes that
would follow a loosening of the reins in some instances. Total loosening, or a 
*laissez-faire* philosophy, in addition to being disastrous in some ways, will not 
promote creative growth in participants, as we tried to show by the accelerated-
autonomy form of directiveness. Partial loosening of the tight structure of 
planning and programming might, of course, lead to *less well-managed* outcomes. But as our model also shows, well managed tasks constitute only a 
necessary not a sufficient condition for creative development of players.

Second, there is the claim, related to that of poorly managed outcomes, that 
people will “muck things up” (the environment, facilities, other participants’ 
recreation) if recreational experiences are de-controlled. This rationalization for 
emphasizing institutionalized processes in recreation reminds us of the one used 
by some hunters to justify the killing of other animals for “sport.” The hunted 
animals, it is claimed, are deficient in natural predators or sustenance, so if men 
do not kill them, they will die anyway from overpopulation or competition for 
scarce resources. Some of these benevolent-minded sportsmen do not appear to 
question how their prey came to be in this unnatural predicament in the first 
place. Perhaps because of the actions of previous “benevolent-minded” men? 
To what extent does the perceived need to regulate recreation experiences stem 
from some consequences of having regulated them in the past? Is it possible 
that some “mucking up” behaviors are exploratory forms of protest against 
institutionalized processes that were conceived in order to prevent people from 
“mucking things up?” There is evidence that this is exactly what happens in 
some types of regulated work situations, such as assembly lines. It is ironic that 
the recreation profession promotes itself as the opposite of such situations, as the 
guardian of people’s leisure—the freedom from constraints and from the 
necessity to be occupied. Exploratory behavior is an important quality of 
leisure, and, if our model is correct, is essential to one of the outcomes of leisure —creative growth. Yet, such behavior is often blocked by the very people who 
claim to be leisure specialists.

The irony of the discrepancy between recreation’s words and deeds can be 
seen another way. It can be fairly said that recreation is not alone among the 
service professions in its bureaucratized ways. Medicine treats patients’ 
diseases pretty well but often makes the recipients feel degraded and helpless in 
the process; many teachers teach well but seem unable to help students learn 
(and there is a difference); school administrators sometimes appear to forget 
both teaching and learning; counselors sometimes devote enormous energy to 
describing their clients’ problems in terms of some personality model rather than 
helping to solve the problems; and some policemen are good at enforcing the 
law but forget to help and protect the public.

An important difference between recreation and these other fields is the 
distance between rhetoric and reality. Most doctors know that they are highly 
trained technician-scientists who can remove your ulcers, prescribe the right 
antibiotic for your infection, or possibly repair your malfunctioning heart. They
do not claim to do more. Recreation is one of the few fields, along with certain branches of mysticism and Sunday-morning evangelism, that claims significant effects on crime reduction; family functioning and unity; social and community development; physical fitness; mental health and therapy; the development of attitudes, values, leadership, and character; psychological and spiritual growth; and “self-actualization.”

One wonders how a field can know or do anything about family problems when it seems blissfully unaware that in this explosive, exploratory world there are two-parent families, one-parent families, no-parent families, nuclear families, extended families, childless families, living-together-but-unmarried families, married-but-living-apart families, homosexual families, communal families, and probably many more. As for self-actualization, Abraham Maslow’s eternal sleep might be foreboding indeed, if he knew that the existing practice of recreation is being touted as the pathway to that ultimate state of personality development.

People, especially in America, are today exploring a large variety of lifestyles and leisure pursuits. Much of this is motivated by an urge for creative growth. Some do not participate much in the hubbub but, instead, observe it, investigate it, try to understand it. Whether as participants or observers, people in other fields appear to be more aware of leisure, its current stirrings, its myths, its possible futures, than many recreation professionals.

In Psychology Today a sociologist investigated the rapid growth of around-the-clock activity in American cities. He showed the banks, supermarkets, garages, restaurants, discotheques, theatres, tour agencies, laundries, and other privately owned facilities were adopting all-night hours to cater to this nocturnal life. No mention was made of public recreation facilities. Are they involved in this latest trend? Many recreation personnel can tell you who won last year’s Orange Bowl game and the exact score or the latest attendance figures at the community swimming pool. But do they have a clue, or do they care, what people are seeking by wandering about in the middle of the night?

Economists and other social scientists are investigating possibilities for completely revising the calendar and work-leisure cycles—for instance, a nine-day week with alternating six-day/three-day, on-off cycles. The way in which we structure and allocate time goes to the heart of what leisure is all about. Yet, where are the recreators—the leisure specialists—in thinking innovatively about this most fundamental commodity?

It is perhaps in the area of research that the reluctance of many recreators to engage in or encourage exploratory behavior is most noticeable. Recreation practitioners often complain of the irrelevance of research, the researcher’s apparent lack of concern for “meeting” the practitioner’s needs. Despite decades of thought and careful research into the nature of creative thinking, these complainers still are unaware of a fundamental fact: Relevance is not something that is given; it is something that is conceived or created in an
individual's mind. The internal creative flame often needs external sources of fuel to feed it. But the sources, in themselves, are neither relevant nor irrelevant. It is an exploratory attitude and behavior that make them so.

After these critiques, it is appropriate to acknowledge that there are some changes, which perhaps signify exploratory thinking, in the recreation field. There is a growing emphasis on the leisure problems of special populations that are not in the mainstream of American or Canadian life; there is increasing recognition of the importance of personality, the individuality of leisure, and the possible need for individual lifestyle counselling; in a few communities, recreation departments are "opening up" facilities to multiple and unusual uses, dictated by the felt needs, or whims, of the participants. These approaches had to grow out of some exploratory thinking, because they show a recognition of the idiosyncracies of human needs—those that cannot be handled by the standardized operating procedure given by organizational charts and activity schedules. In a field that claims to deal in a quality, leisure, that represents freedom from constraints and uniformity, these kinds of approaches should be the rule, not the exception.

REFERENCES

1. The part of this paper that describes the model of play and creative growth originally appeared in Jeanreanud, C. and Bishop, D. "Road Blocks to Creativity Through Play." In Wilkinson, P. (Ed.). Play in Human Settlements. London: Croom and Helm, Ltd., 1979. We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of Paul Wilkinson and Croom and Helm, Ltd. in allowing a different and expanded version of our original paper to appear here.


