

# Perceptions of Parents and Teachers in India on Play and Child Rights: A Comparative Study

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**I**NDIA IS A PREDOMINANTLY HINDU NATION with large minorities of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. There are more than three hundred seventy-five million children in India, the largest number for any country in the world. Obedience to authority, passivity, and interdependence are highly valued. Parents traditionally have high authority over the lives of their children. Mothers are the primary disciplinarians. Discipline is often strict and children are taught to obey their parents. Scolding, yelling, slapping, and spanking are considered appropriate and necessary for socializing children.

Children are expected to do well in school as they possibly can, as education is highly respected in Indian society. Play is generally considered a mere wastage of time and energy.

## Significance of Play

Play is essential to a country's development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and youth.

It is a resource that promotes creativity, which can be used during adulthood. It is also invaluable in its contribution to the development of thinking and ideas.

It is viewed as a fundamental right of childhood; as expressed in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Interest in providing quality play opportunities for children gradually increased, and the need for international action was evident. In 1955 a major seminar on playgrounds was held in Europe. In 1961, the International Play Association (IPA) was born. Though India is a member of IPA, it is not actively promoting the IPA Declaration of the Child's Right to Play.<sup>1</sup>

Children no longer have the freedom to explore woods and fields and find their own special places. Informal neighborhood ball games are a

thing of the past, as children are herded into athletic leagues at increasingly younger ages. Add to this mixture the hours spent sitting still in front of screens - television, video game, and computer - absorbing other people's stories and imaginations, and the result is a steady decline in children's play. Increasingly, preschool and kindergarten children find themselves in school settings which feature scripted teaching, computerized learning, and standardized assessment. Physical education and recess are being eliminated as new schools are built without playgrounds. Children's play, in the creative, open-ended sense is now seriously endangered.

The demise of play will certainly have serious consequences for children and for the future of childhood itself.

Since a child has distributed time for home and school, the child also has distributed time with parents and teachers. However, even those children who are fortunate enough to have abundant available resources and who live in relative peace are not receiving the full benefits of play. Because every child deserves the opportunity to develop to their unique potential, child nurturers must consider all factors that interfere with optimal development and press for circumstances that allow each child to fully reap the advantages associated with play.

Therefore, a question arises: what is the perception and awareness about play among the two groups who play critical roles in children's lives?

Children's time is distributed between the parents and teachers. If the parents are the first teacher for the child, the teachers are the second parents for children. Since kindergarten, children are handed over to the teachers and teachers nourish them and bestow them with love, support and good habits. Parents, on the other hand, are responsible for the overall development of the children. Therefore, it is imperative to survey the parents and teachers' perception and awareness of importance of play in the lives of children.

In the following sections, I report on a survey of parents' and teachers' perception and awareness of importance of play in the lives of children.

### **Survey Objectives**

The survey had the following objectives:

1. To study the perception of teachers with respect to play in the development of children;

2. To study the perception of parents with respect to play in the development of children;
3. To study the awareness among the teachers of intellectual, emotional, social and physical values of play in the development of children;
4. To study the awareness among the parents of intellectual, emotional, social and physical values of play in the development of children;
5. To compare the awareness of parents and teachers of intellectual, emotional, social and physical values of play in the development of children.

### **Methodology of Study**

The survey adopted a Descriptive Comparative Method. It covered sixty-six parents and seventy-six teachers of pre-primary and primary classes in the district of Greater Mumbai in India.

The survey employed the following tools:

1. Questionnaires
  - » parent's perception of play (eleven multi-choice items)
  - » teachers' perception about play (nine multi-choice items)
2. Rating scale
  - » scoring used the following scale: Agree - 3 points, Neutral - 2 points, Disagree-1 point. The scoring for negative items was reverse.
  - » this rating scale was used to quantify the following:
    - awareness of role of play in intellectual development of the children - twenty items, seventeen were positive item and three were negative items
    - awareness of play in emotional development of the children – with sixteen items, fifteen were positive items and one was negative item
    - awareness of role of play in social development of the children – all positive items.
    - awareness of role of play in physical development of the children - eleven items, all positive items.

## Procedure and Data Analysis

All six questionnaires were close-ended. Feedback from five experts validated the content of the tools. The questionnaires were distributed to parents and teachers with required instructions, and collected after two days.

The data collected were scored, tabulated and analyzed. The descriptive analysis of the data consisted of computation of percentage, mean and graphical description. For inferential analysis, t- test was computed.

## Descriptive Analysis of Data

The following tables present response to specific items in the questionnaire.

### 1. Which of the following statement reflects your opinion the most?

Statements	Teachers	Parents
a. Play is enjoyment, fun, and amusement	79%	74%
b. Play leads to social development	77%	60%
c. Play leads to cognitive development	67%	30%
d. Play is physical activity	69%	73%
e. Play is creativity and imagination	54%	41%
f. Play is non-structured activity	44%	4%
g. Play is child's work	26%	29%

Most of the parents and teachers perceive play as enjoyment, fun, and amusement. They also understand the role of play in social and physical development of children. While teachers regard the cognitive role of play, parents are not convinced about it.

### 2. Which of the following statement reflects your opinion the most?

Statements	Teachers	Parents
a. To me, play and learning is the same thing	13%	8%
b. To me, play is different from learning	8%	16%
c. To me, play must be combined with learning	84%	75%

Play is the child's laboratory but very few parents and teachers regard play and learning as the same thing.

**3. Which of the following statement reflects your opinion the most?**

Statements	Parents
a. Everyday first play and then lesson/study	34%
b. Everyday first lesson/study and then play	61%
c. Lesson in the week and play at the weekend	4%

Play is so important to optimal child development still parents perceive it as a reward to be given after the child has completed her/his study.

**4. Which of the following statement reflects your opinion the most?**

Statements	Parents
a. Play is waste of time	0%
b. Play is good but for spare time only	61%
c. Children can't always play they have got to grow up	29%

Most parents perceive play as a spare time activity. They also feel that children have to stop playing at some stage and grow up. All parents agree play is not waste of time.

**5. Depending on the degree of significance, put in order the environments below that you believe have influence in social and emotional development of your child in order.**

Statements	Parents' ranking
a. Environment where my child plays with his/her friends	1st
b. Environment where my child plays with his/her family elders	2nd
c. Environment where my child plays with his/her toys him/herself	3rd

Parents perceive child's play with his friends as most significant followed by her/his play with family.

6. *Depending on the degree of significance, put in order the most common reasons why parents play with child.*

Statements	Parents' ranking
a. To detain the child	3rd
b. To communicate with child	2nd
c. To educate the child	1st

Parents perceive play as a medium of educating children.

7. *In choosing toys for your child which criterion is primarily significant for you?*

Statements	Parents
a. Developing imagination and creativity of my child	43%
b. Helping development of mind of my child and preparation him/her for school skills	63%
c. Providing detainment of my child him/herself for a long time	2%

Parents regard toys as helpful for the development of mind and preparation for school skills.

8. *What does your child/children do when she/he stays at home?*

Statements	Parents
a. Watching TV	73%
b. Playing Outdoors	53%
c. Playing indoors	41%

When at home, children spend their time mostly by watching TV.

**9. What do you do when your child is playing?**

Statements	Parents
a. Shopping	6%
b. Cooking	53%
c. Watching TV	18%
d. Play with the child	63%

Mothers are either cooking or playing with the child when their child is playing.

**10. How much time should a child below six years play in a day?**

Statements	Parents
a. less than 1 hour	2%
b. 1-2 hours	45%
c. 2-3 hours	35%
d. More than 3 hours	16%

Most of the parents feel children below six years require between 1-2 hours of play.

Statement	Agree	Disagree
I want to reduce the number of hours my child/children plays	19%	81%

Majority of the parents do not want to reduce their children play time.

**11.** *How often do you make provision for learning through play in your classroom?*

Statements	Teachers
a. Always	38%
b. Seldom	31%
c. Rarely	23%
d. Never	8%

Few teachers make provisions for learning through play.

**12.** *How do you promote play among your children?*

Statements	Teachers
a. Provide materials and equipment	58%
b. Provide space	38%
c. Provide time and opportunities	74%
d. Participate in play	29%

Majority of the teachers promote play by providing time and opportunities.

Statement	Agree	Disagree
Do you think that we should reduce the play activities in the classroom	2%	98%

Almost all the teachers think that play activities should not be reduced.

Statements	Teachers
a. Play is waste of time	2%
b. Play is something that you don't want to do but have to do	41%
c. Children can't always play they have got to grow up	7%



d. Play is good but for spare time only	11%
e. It is difficult to fit play into the curriculum	16%
f. Play is a reward to be given at the end of work	72%

Majority of the teachers perceive play as reward to be given at the end of work.

**13. What kind of play do children like the most?**

Statements	Teachers
a. Dramatic play	30%
b. Art activities	23%
c. Outdoor play	67%
d. Playing with blocks	15%

Teachers think that most children love outdoor activities.

**14. What kind of things interferes with children's play?**

Statements	Teachers
a. Overprotective parents	66%
b. Parental attitudes about play	44%
c. Discipline problem	52%
d. Limited equipments	41%
e. Rigid schedules	70%
f. Inadequate space	66 %
g. Bad weather	26%

Teachers think that rigid schedules, inadequate space and overprotective parents interfere with play.

15. *Where do the children play?*

Statements	Teachers
a. Playground	89%
b. Classroom	64%
c. Corridor	33%

**Inferential Analysis of Data**

In order to test the null hypotheses, 't' test was used.

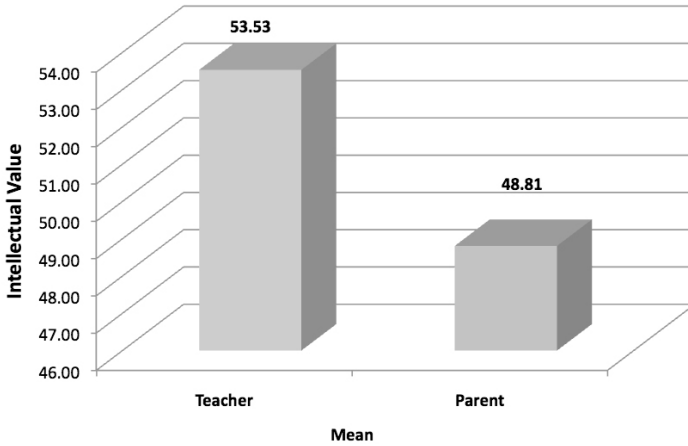
1. Relevant Statistics for Significance of Difference between Means for intellectual Value

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the awareness of parents and teachers with respect to the awareness of the intellectual value of play.

Intellectual value	N	M	SD	t	Table Value (0.05)	S/NS
Teachers	76	53.53	5.53	4.78	1.98	S Df=140
Parents	66	48.80	2.65			

Interpretation - Since the obtained value of 't' is greater than the table value the null hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 level of significance.

**Graph Depicting Mean Value of Teachers and Parents**



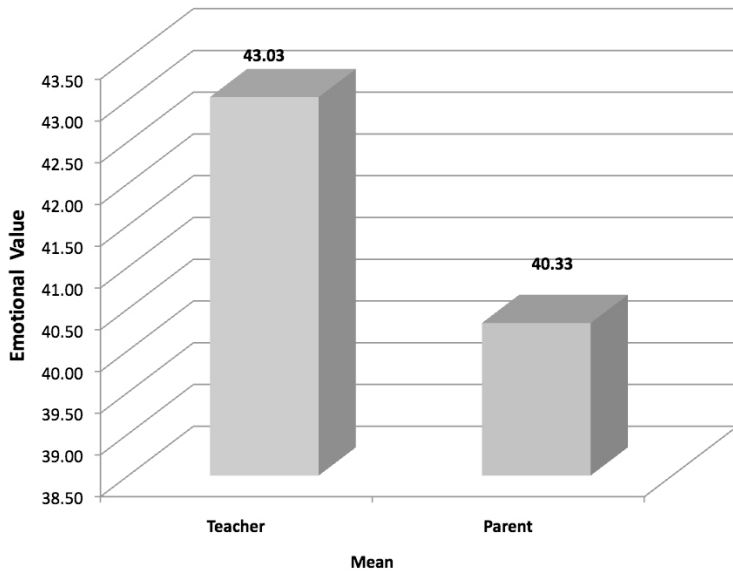
Conclusion - There is a significant difference in the awareness of teachers and parents about the role of play in the intellectual development of the children. The mean value of teachers' awareness is higher than that of parents.

2. Relevant Statistics for Significance of Difference between Means for Emotional Value

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the awareness of parents and teachers with respect to the awareness of the emotional value of play.

Emotional value	N	M	SD	t	Table Value (0.05)	S/NS
Teachers	76	43.03	5.73	0.0016	1.98	NS Df=140
Parents	66	40.33	2.90			

### Graph Depicting Mean Value of Teachers and Parents



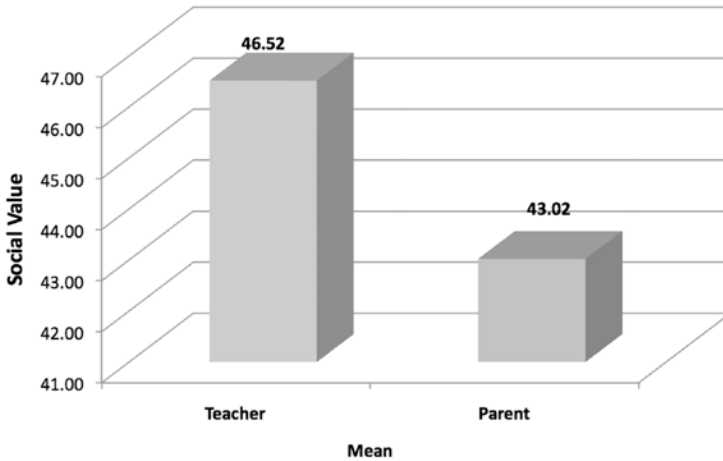
Interpretation - Since the obtained value of 't' is lesser than the table value the null hypothesis is accepted at 0.05 level of significance.

Conclusion - There is no significant difference in the awareness of teachers and parents about the role of play in the emotional development of the children.

### 3. Relevant Statistics for Significance of Difference between Means for Social Value

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the awareness of parents and teachers with respect to the awareness of the social value of play.

**Graph Depicting Mean Value of Teachers and Parents**



Social value	N	M	SD	t	Table Value (0.05)	S/NS
Teachers	76	46.52	6.71	0.0009	1.98	NS
Parents	66	43.02	4.11			Df=140

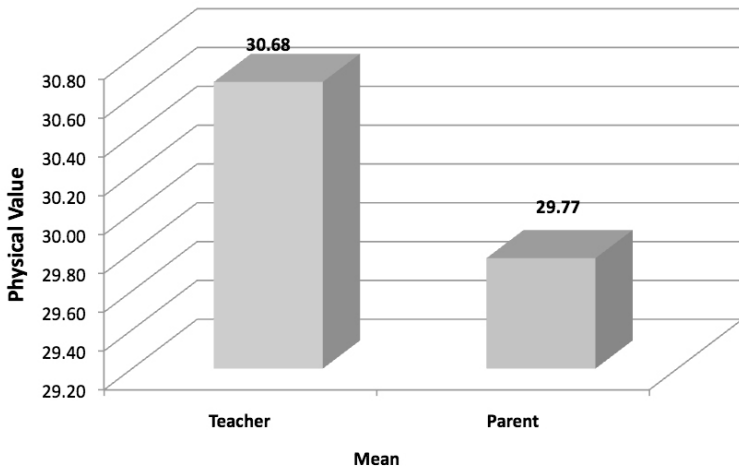
Interpretation - Since the obtained value of 't' is lesser than the table value the null hypothesis is accepted at 0.05 level of significance.

Conclusion - There is no significant difference in the awareness of teachers and parents about the role of play in the social development of the children.

**4. Relevant Statistics for Significance of Difference between Means for Physical Value**

Null Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference in the awareness of parents and teachers with respect to the awareness of the physical value of play.

## Graph Depicting Mean Value of Teachers and Parents



Physical value	N	M	SD	t	Table Value (0.05)	S/NS
Teachers	76	30.68	3.44	0.2397	1.98	NS
Parents	66	29.77	4.54			Df=140

Interpretation - Since the obtained value of 't' is lesser than the table value the null hypothesis is accepted at 0.05 level of significance.

Conclusion - There is no significant difference in the awareness of teachers and parents about the role of play in the physical development of the children.

### Major Findings and Discussions of the Study

#### Parents' and Teachers' Perception of Play

The study was an eye-opener as it generated far reaching findings.

Both parents' and teachers' definitions of play included enjoyment, fun, or some type of amusement; social development; cognitive activity and physical activity. Though play promotes cognitive development most parents do not regard this role of play though a majority of teachers perceive

the intellectual role of play. The significant people who should play a vital role in promoting play in the lives of children do not perceive play as involving creativity and innovation.

Play is about creating a world in which, for that moment, children are in control and can seek out uncertainty in order to triumph over it – or, if not, no matter, it is only a game. In this way, children develop a repertoire of flexible responses to situations they create and encounter. Therefore, children should be given control of play situations, but most parents and teachers do not consider play as child's activity but something that requires adult interference.

In spite of what Piagetian theory says about how preoperational children learn through active involvement and interaction with their environment, which is facilitated through play, parents and teachers seemed to be separating play and learning into a dichotomy; children were either playing or they were learning.

Play and learning go hand-in-hand but most of the parents and teachers feel they are different and components of learning has to be combined into play by careful planning.

The articles of the CRC are often grouped into the 'three Ps': protection, participation and provision. Children can create their own self-protection through play, and that play is the principal way in which children participate within their own communities. Play acts across several adaptive systems and contribute to health, well-being and resilience. Given the benefits of play and the consequences of playlessness, it is clear that play is fundamentally linked to children's rights as a whole. Play is not a luxury to be considered after other rights; it is an essential and integral component underpinning the four principles of the CRC (non-discrimination, survival and development, the best interests of the child, and participation). But majority of parents and teachers feel play is an activity meant to be undertaken during spare time. Children should play only after study that too if time permits.

Parents consider the environment the children play with their friends as most influential, followed by the play with family and siblings. While selecting toys for playing, parents are keener on the educational role rather than development of imagination and innovation. Parents play with the children with the purpose of educating. Communicating through play was ranked only second to educating.

Most of the students spend their free time watching TV. Playing outdoors comes only next to viewing TV. While children are playing mothers are cooking, but a lot of mothers do play with their children. Most parents think a child below six years needs to play only between one to two hours a day. Parents did not want to reduce the limited time they are giving their children to play.

Whether children are working on new physical skills, social relations, or cognitive content, they approach life with a playful spirit. The children's love of learning is intimately linked with their zest for play. Hence learning and play should be integrated. Very few teachers make provisions for learning through play on a regular basis for the preprimary and primary children. Some teachers never made provisions for learning through play.

Teachers listed provision of a variety of materials and equipments and participation in children's play. Teachers also listed providing time and opportunities, and providing space. Teachers are not advocating reduction of play time in the school timetable because school already provides limited time for play.

If we are to save play, we must first understand its nature. Creative play is like a spring that bubbles up from deep within a child. It is refreshing and enlivening. It is a natural part of the make-up of every healthy child. But most of the teachers perceived play as something to be given at the end of work. Many also responded that making provisions for play is something they have to do but not want to. Many teachers felt it is difficult to fit play in the curriculum and play is good for spare time.

Majority of the teachers responded that children love outdoor games. Children also like dramatics, art activity and playing with blocks.

When teachers were asked what kinds of things interfered with children's play, the most frequently mentioned factors were related to adult interference, such as overprotective parents, adult criticism, and parental attitudes about play being a waste of time. Another major category was behavior and discipline problems of the children, including social and emotional problems and social attitudes and behaviors. Other factors mentioned frequently were limited equipment or supplies, rigid schedules, inadequate space, and health problem of children. A few teachers mentioned such factors as television and bad weather.

The children are not given enough opportunities to freely access a wide range of quality rest, leisure and artistic activities. When teachers were



asked where children play, the most frequently given response was playground. Another category of response was classrooms and the corridors of the school.

### **Awareness of the Role of Play among Teachers and Parents**

Children are not machines. You cannot simply add more fuel and speed them up. They are governed by internal processes that are sometimes called the laws of child development. In general, all parents and early childhood teachers have a great responsibility to cater to the developmental needs of the whole children. Moreover they are responsible for helping and facilitating the children's development of prosocial skills that are necessary for them to succeed in society.

Although parents and teachers know the importance of play they do not seem to realize the implications of play in promoting and developing the whole child. The awareness among the teachers is significantly higher than that of the parents with respect to the intellectual value of play in the life of children. There is no significant difference in the awareness of teachers and parents with respect to the emotional, physical and social role of play. The mean value for teachers is higher than that for parents on awareness about the intellectual, emotional, physical and social roles of play.

### **Recommendations**

The results from this study may prove useful to the parents, educational agencies, policymakers and psychologists in general and early childhood teachers in particular.

1. One implication of this study is that effort must be made to assist teachers, parents and administrators as well as policymakers to work collaboratively in the process of giving play its central role in children's learning programs and granting pre-school children their right to play and be free from academic pressure.

2. As play disappears from the landscape of childhood we need to recognize that its demise will have a lasting impact. Decades of compelling research have shown that without play, children's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development is compromised. Their capacity for communication will be diminished and their tendency towards aggressiveness and vi-

olence will increase. In short, human nature as we have known it will be profoundly altered, intensifying many of the problems that are already afflicting children and society. If we do not invest in play, we will find ourselves investing much more in prisons and hospitals, as the incidence of physical, and mental illness, as well as aggressive and violent behavior escalates. Therefore it is imperative to launch National Effort to Restore Play in India.

3. An honest assessment is needed on the success or failure of direct instruction and other early academic approaches in kindergartens and nursery programs. In a seven-hour day, children get twenty-five minutes of being free from academics. Anyone who has had experience with five-year-olds will know that due to increased direct emphasis on academic success we fail to give enough importance to the activities listed in Article 31 that are necessary for the child's full and healthy development. We must focus on the question of what children need for their long-term healthy development.

4. Before it is too late and play has completely slipped out of the lives of young children, there is a need to organize public awareness campaigns about play's importance, directed at parents, teachers and policymakers.

5. The adults including parents, teachers, educational agencies, policymakers and psychologists should be aware of the importance of play, and promote and protect the conditions that support it. Any intervention to promote play must acknowledge its characteristics and allow sufficient flexibility, unpredictability and security for children to play freely. However, children's play belongs to children; adults should not destroy children's own places for play through insensitive planning or the pursuit of other adult agendas, or by creating places and programs that segregate children and control their play.

6. Teachers should use different types of play in developing prosocial behavior. They should not confine to one particular way of teaching or emphasize on formal way of teaching.

7. The parents should be given the opportunity to develop their knowledge regarding child development and parenting skills. Parents' education should be a compulsory component of any pre-school program. Pre-school teachers need to be stimulated and experts need to work together in finding methods that would lead to a more elaborate play among the children, to prolong it and make it interesting. The administrators responsible for pre-school should have at least a minimum level of preparation and experience

in the field. This is one of the ways by which we can listen to children's voices and fulfill their needs.

8. The Right To Play should be included as one of the Fundamental Rights in the Constitution of India. There is no doubt that once this right is included in the Constitution of India the status of Physical Education Games & Sports will be elevated to a very dignified required level.

9. The government should establish physical spaces for children. Parks should be set up that are eco-friendly and safe along with facilities for children to play.

10. Some of the challenges have to be addressed such as (dirty and pitiable condition of the parks, limited access to parks, bullying by older children and gambling, construction of temples and mosques in spaces that children themselves had cleared for games, encroachment by builders in the spaces allocated for parks, Resident Welfare Associations' (RWA) reluctance to allow children to play ball games in the parks, parks made ornamental, children losing out space to play due to grazing of animals and sewage pipes running next to the parks overflowing into the parks, lack of playgrounds, sports equipment and sports teachers in government schools, and lack of safety for girls.

11. The state authorities should also appoint qualified games teachers in schools for training children in different sports.

12. Some strategies to promote play include:

- Making physical education an examinable subject for academic credit to give it greater priority in the curriculum;
- Providing in-service training for school teachers in physical education methods to make teachers more aware of the importance of physical education;
- Providing teachers with the knowledge and confidence to deliver high quality, inclusive and enjoyable programs; and
- Conducting training to specifically address gender issues and how to deliver adaptive sport and physical education for children with disabilities.

13. Further research should be done to prove that play has significant impact in developing the healthy child.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Full text of the IPA Declaration of the Child's Right to Play available at <http://ipaworld.org/about-us/declaration/ipa-declaration-of-the-childs-right-to-play/>.