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**We are here today as a community of early childhood educators...**

- The importance of YOU, as an educator
- WE have a shared view of how young children learn
- Together WE are stronger

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**As a group of early childhood educators we want to:**

- Be knowledgeable
- Support each other
- Communicate effectively about play, thinking, and creating

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**Play is...**

- Active
- Spontaneous
- Joyful
- Self-initiated
- Intensely involved
- Avenue to learning
- Internally motivated
- Persistent

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**\* Renewed Interest in Play**

- Re-establishing appropriate experiences for the early years
- Brain development through play
- Whole body and mind connection
- New studies and research

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**Play with Language**

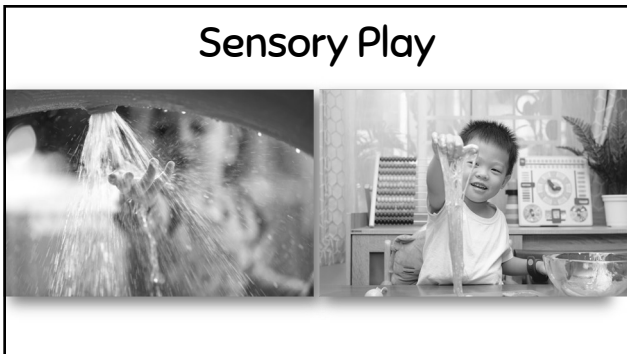
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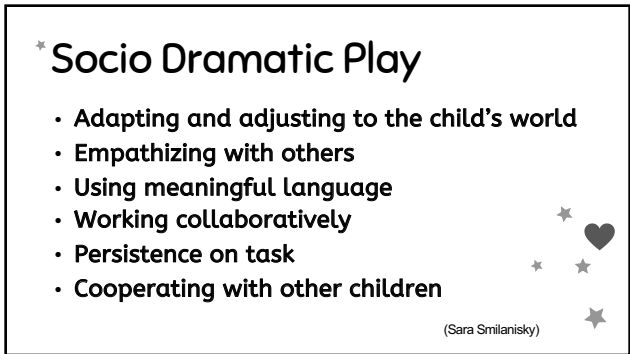
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## Cooperative Play



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## Physical Play



- Large Motor
- Small Motor
- Inside and Outdoors
- Challenges and Risk



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## What Can We Learn from Observing and Recording Children Play?

- What children are thinking
- Their emotional issues and feelings
- The language they use
- How they work with others
- What they are creating and solving problems

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## American Academy of Pediatrics

“Play is essential for helping children reach important social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones...”

“It is also helpful in developing the ability to cope with problems and issues that will strengthen their ability to adjust.”

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## What Do the Experts Say?

Jean Piaget: “Thinking and play are interconnected, each impacting the other”



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## What Do the Experts Say?

Lev Vygotsky: “During play, children use their language to accompany activity...and move to higher levels of understanding.”



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## What Do the Experts Say?

Multiple Intelligences

Howard Gardner: “In play, children are using thinking, language, movement, and the arts in meaningful activities.”



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## What Do the Experts Say?

Peter Gray: “I present compelling evidence that over the past 50 years—as children’s opportunities for free play and exploration have declined—there has been a dramatic rise in anxiety, depression, and suicide in young people, who have not had the opportunity that free play provides to find meaning and joy in life.”

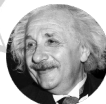
“Freedom to Learn – Book”



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## What Do the Experts Say?

Albert Einstein: “My best ideas are when I am playing!”



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Let’s RENEW what we know



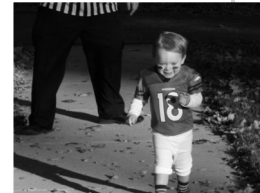
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In the United States, During the Past Century, Children’s Play Time Has Decreased Significantly

- Less play in school (fewer recesses)
- Less time for play in early childhood programs
- Less playtime with other children exasperated by Covid
- More play directed by teachers, parents, and coaches

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## More Directed Play with Rules



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★ **Child-Directed Play**

- Sense of personal control
- More opportunities to develop social skills and working with others
- Impacts the development of oral language and cognition
- Deepens the understanding of how the world works
- Increases intrinsic motivation and competencies



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**How Does Play Promote Thinking in Early Childhood?**

- ★ **Use, adapt, and adjust their life experiences into play**
- ★ **Gains confidence in their ability to make decisions and solve problems while gaining self-control**

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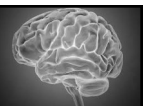


**Impacting Cognition**

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**Brain development**

- Research shows that experience and opportunities during play are essential to the development of neural pathways
- Each process is unique
- Growing and adapting
- Optimal learning immersed in real-life and hands-on meaningful activities



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**Emotional Issues**



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**Developing Responsibility**



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## Providing More Opportunities for Play

- Extending the time for play, which provides in-depth engagement
- Variety of child choices are provided: space, materials, and possible ideas
- Increased time outdoors: Nature play and physical activity



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## Small Groups

### Choice or Center Time



### Project Work



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## Benefits of Choice/Learning Areas

- ★ • **Small Group: Multi-Age**
- **More Involvement: Active Learning**
- **Making Choices**
- **Using Language**
- ★ • **High Interest**
- **Working Together: Cooperation**
- ★ • **Focused Activity**

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Block Center

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## Innovative Play Areas



Inventor's Center/Area



Greenhouse Center/Area

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“

*Interacting and Reflecting on Play Both During and After*



”

## Creating a Play Environment that Matches

- ★ • Cognitive level
- Executive function
- Personal experiences
- Active way of learning
- ★ • Interest in materials
- All levels of development



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## MIT Sandbox Summit

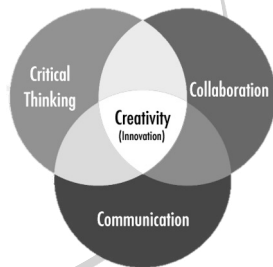
(Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

“Play that is open-ended stimulates creativity and fosters the social and critical skills that are needed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” (2015)

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## PLAY: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

- Creativity
- Communication
- Collaboration
- Critical Thinking (Problem Solving)



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## Creativity



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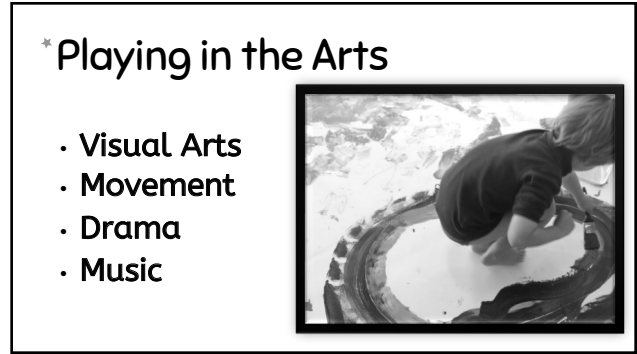
## Collaboration



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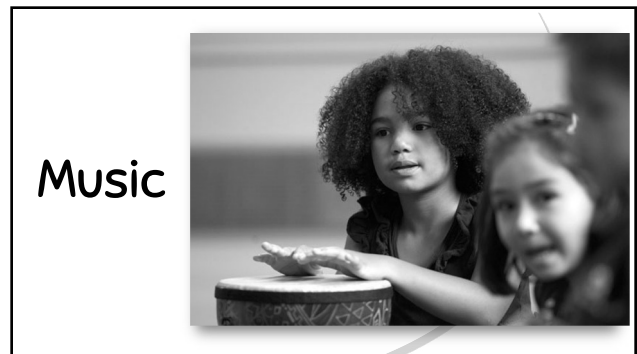
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## Creative Teacher



- Responds to play in a positive way
- Prepares the environment
- Supports when needed/stays away
- Selects the areas, materials, and experiences
- Follows children's interest
- Leads reflections, takes pictures, and shares observations

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## Play For ALL Children



- Open-Ended
- Flexible Opportunities
- Learning Together
- Successful Experiences
- Joyful Participation

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## Play Positive Benefits:

- Extends intellectual development
- Enriches languages and conversations
- Develops social skills in meaningful ways
- Builds confidence in the ability to make choices and influences play
- Encourages creative thinking, problem solving, and innovative possibilities
- Inspires engagement and joyful involvement



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## Let Us Say "YES" To:

- More play opportunities
- More possibility to be thinkers and problem-solvers
- Creating and learning in a developmentally appropriate way



**YES, WE CAN!!!**

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