

## The Power of Engaging Play: The Essential Element in Young Children's Learning



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## We are a community of educators interested in the early years

- 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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## 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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**“Play is a creative process, intrinsically motivated, freely chosen, and shaped by the child.”**

Dr. Isbell and Dr. Yoshizawa



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## Renewed Interest in Play

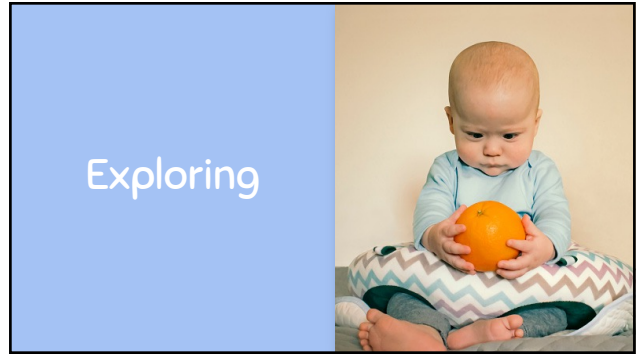
- Re-establishing appropriate experiences for the early years
- Brain development through play
- Whole body and mind connection
- Rediscovering the benefits of play on social emotional and mental health



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## Socio Dramatic Play

- Adapting and adjusting to the child's world
- Empathizing with others
- Using meaningful language
- Working collaboratively
- Persistence on task
- Cooperating with other children

(Sara Smilanisky)



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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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## Children's Play and The Language They Use To Communicate

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



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## What the Pediatricians Say...

“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.”

(American Academy of Pediatrics)



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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.”

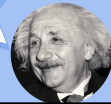
“Freedom to Learn – Book”



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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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## 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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## Benefits of Child-Directed Play

- Sense of personal control
- More opportunities to develop social skills and work 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
- Solve everyday problems
- Gain 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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## How Can We Provide 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



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“  
Interacting and  
Reflecting on Play  
Both During and  
After



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### 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)



(Trilling & Fadel, 2009)

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# Music

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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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# Possible Roles for the Teacher

- × Observer
- × Listener
- × Inviter
- × Facilitator
- × Co-learner

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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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