

Arkansas Children's Week
April 13-19, 2008

“I’m not just playing— I’m learning!”



Diana Courson, Editor

Susan Lindblom, Contributing Author

Arkansas State University

Childhood Services

JoAnn Nalley, Director

Sponsored by

Arkansas Department of Human Services

Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education



2008 Outstanding Early Childhood Professionals



The Arkansas Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education and the Arkansas Early Childhood Commission are accepting nominations for the OUTSTANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS OF 2008.



We are looking for persons who are making a significant contribution to the early childhood field in Arkansas. Our children deserve the best and because of the fine efforts of the professionals throughout our state they receive the best! *We want to recognize and honor these outstanding persons who care for our children!*



For more information or to request a nomination form you can contact the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education at 1-501-682-9699 or 1-800-445-3316 or visit our website at www.arkansas.gov/childcare.



Arkansas Department of Human Services
Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education



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Dot Brown
Jackie Buxto
Deana Howell
Lori Kammerling

Cloria Lee
Susan Lindblom
Dee McLemore
Jamie Morrison
Ann Patterson

Kalani Sarver
Kathy Stegall
Melissa Taylor
Ratha Tracy
Cara Walloch

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Geania Dickey
Kim Jackson

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Sr. Mary Thomas O'Keefe
Michelle Pounds
Jennifer Smith

Melissa Taylor
Bebe Walton
Marcy White
Vicki Worrell

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Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education
Director Office

P.O. Box 1437, Slot S-140 Little Rock, AR 72203-1437 • 501-682-0494 • Fax: 501-683-6060 • TDD: 501-682-1550

February 2008

Dear Early Childhood Professional:

Arkansas Children's Week is a great opportunity for CELEBRATING CHILDREN! This booklet, **"I'm not just playing---I'm learning"** is an excellent guide for lots of fun activities and strategies to use with children of all ages in your programs. But, more importantly, this guide gives you a reference to the many ways children learn through play.

"Arkansas Children's Week" workshops will be offered in twenty-one Arkansas cities during March. These workshops will offer you even more activities that connect children's play with learning. Look on page 72 and locate a workshop near you then call and register now.

Do you have a staff member who is truly outstanding? Nominate them as an OUTSTANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL OF 2008. Check page 2 for more information.

Wear your T shirt day is April 15, Need t-shirts for ACW? There's an order form on page 6.

Please join together in your communities and Celebrate Young Children---they aren't just playing-----they are learning!

Sincerely,

Tonya Russell, Director
DHS/Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education

ACW
2008

T-SHIRT DAY

APRIL 15, 2008



**Join with others across the state
and wear you ACW shirt with pride!**

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Arkansas Children's Week
 April 13 - 19, 2008
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Customization is available for \$1.50 per shirt, minimum 24 shirts!

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What We Know About Play



You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.

Plato

What is play?

It's hard to state a concise definition of play, but we know it when we see it. Most of us would say that play is fun and relaxing. Some might say that it is frivolous or silly or unimportant. Researchers over the past 50 years have found that play is essential to human development and have identified the following elements that can help us define play.

- **Self-selected**

It's only play if we choose it for ourselves. If someone else chooses the activity for us or requires our participation, it is no longer play.

- **Enjoyable**

We find pleasure in play activities, even when they may be challenging.

- **Engaging**

Play activities fully capture our attention. We are focused on the experience.

- **Flexible and spontaneous**

The goals and direction of the activities may change as the play progresses.

- **Non-literal**

When we play, we are not limited by reality or rational expectations. We are free to represent the world as we wish, attaching symbolic meaning to objects and words.

- **Process-oriented**

The experience of playing is more important than the end result or product.



Why is play important?

"Through their play, they discover the world...and themselves."

Fred Rogers

(Mister Rogers' Neighborhood)

Play is the most efficient, powerful, and productive way for young children to learn the information and gain the skills they need.

They increase their **knowledge** of the physical world, knowledge that is a critical foundation for academic pursuits. Through first-hand experience with real objects, children begin to understand how the world works.

Play experiences **reduce stress** levels, which increase the efficiency of thinking and learning. During play, children learn to cope with life's problems in a way that is comfortable and meaningful to them.

Many **social skills** can only be learned through experience. Play provides the opportunity to develop skills for solving social problems—negotiation, compromise, cooperation, sharing, taking turns. Children develop flexibility and the ability to consider different perspectives. Young children who have abundant dramatic play experiences seem to be more socially competent.

Interacting with others during play strengthens the child's **communication** skills. Children practice using speech correctly and increase their vocabulary. Conversation skills are enhanced as children play. Play activities provide abundant opportunities to apply emerging literacy skills.



As children use materials, interact with others, and master new tasks and skills, they develop a sense of control of the environment. They gain a **feeling of competence** and a satisfying enjoyment in their ability to learn. Through play they develop dispositions for perseverance and risk-taking.

Play integrates critical brain functions and learning domains. Adult-directed learning activities are often narrowly focused and lack this important **integration**, which brain research shows is very important to development.

Screen Time and Play Time

In 2001 the National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families, reported that **the average two to three year old spends more than four hours a day in front of a screen** (television or computer). One in six children in that age group has a television set in his/her bedroom. Toddler remote controls and a television channel for babies are indicators of the prevalence of screen time for children. In many homes the television is on six hours a day. Although the children may not be actually watching television, the background noise and motion on the screen can disrupt the child's thinking and language development. The supervising adult may be focused on the TV and not available to play with the child.



The American Academy of Pediatrics (2007) issued a report on the importance of play. This report cites television and video/computer games as one reason for the decrease in free play time. **Active, creative play has known benefits for physical and mental health.** An appropriate level of organized activities can also be beneficial. However, there is "ample evidence" that screen time (TV, computers, video games) does not support good health and in fact, has some harmful effects. The report advises pediatricians to emphasize the advantages of active play and discourage parents from the overuse of passive entertainment (e.g., television and computer games). Active child-centered play is a time-tested way of producing healthy children.

What does this mean for those who educate and care for children? In general, children will have more than enough screen time at home. **Use the valuable time that you have with children to encourage active, creative experiences.** They can always watch TV later, but they may not have opportunities to paint the sidewalk or build a block tower at home. They will learn to use computers at school and at home, but your program may be the only place that provides opportunities for children to write and produce a play or investigate the grocery store or listen to the wind.



Are television and computer games bad for children? When carefully selected and supervised, probably not. The concern is that when children are sitting in front of a screen, they are not riding a bike or reading a book or playing with friends. Screen time reduces the amount of time available for more meaningful and productive play.



Stages of Play

Through his observations of children, psychologist **Jean Piaget** identified three categories of play.

- **Functional Play**

(also called Sensorimotor Play)

Infants and toddlers enjoy **moving** objects and using their **senses** to explore their world. Functional play is commonly seen during the first two years of life, but can be observed during the play of older children and adults. This is sometimes called *practice play* because the child (or adult) repeats the play in order to practice a new skill or to internalize new information. Filling and dumping is a favorite with very young children.



- **Symbolic Play**



Symbolic play begins around age two and continues throughout life. Symbolic play is an important task of preschool children. Through symbolic play, preschoolers learn to represent their experiences, feelings and ideas. They master the use of language and develop social competence.

There are two levels of symbolic play. We observe *constructive play* when children use materials to make something—a play dough snowman, a Lego car, a card table house. In *dramatic play* children take on roles as they play out familiar or fantasy experiences. This pretend play may be alone or with others, and often involves real or invented props.

Three year olds repeat familiar themes, such as mommies and babies or puppies and kittens. Four year old play is both more physical and more social, as children test boundaries and resolve leader/follower struggles. Older five year olds value rules and routine, which means tattling is commonplace.

- **Games With Rules**

School-age children have developed the **mental and social skills** to engage in games that have **agreed upon rules**. These may be well-known games, such as soccer or Monopoly. These games may also be invented (or adapted) by the players, who create (or modify) and agree upon the object of the game and its rules. Examples of invented games are playground jumping contests and card games with unique “house rules”.



Types of Play

ONLOOKER

The onlooker watches others playing. This child does not try to join in the play and seems to be comfortable as an observer. Children can learn about playing by watching others.



SOLITARY PLAY

Younger children often play on their own. In solitary play, there is no interaction with adults or children around them. Solitary play may also be seen in older children who are involved in very complex play or who choose to separate themselves for a period of time.



PARALLEL PLAY

As children gain social competence, they play near others. Children engaged in parallel play do not try to merge their play activities with that of others around them. Three children might be playing in a sandbox, but they do not try to coordinate or connect their activity; each plays independently.

ASSOCIATIVE GROUP PLAY

Children play near others who are engaged in similar activities. They share materials and talk about their play, but each continues the play in his/her own way.



COOPERATIVE PLAY

Children work together to determine themes, roles, situations, and rules for their play. These negotiations include a great deal of conversation and problem solving.

The Role of Play in Brain Development

The most important role that play can have is to help children to be active, to make choices, and to practice actions to mastery. They should have experience with a wide variety of content (art, music, language, science, math, social relations) because each is important for the development of a complex and integrated brain. Play that links sensorimotor, cognitive, and social-emotional experiences provides an ideal setting for brain development.

Doris Bergen
"Play's Role in Brain Development"
Association for Childhood Education International

As the brain develops we observe changes in children's play. It has been suggested that play offers indications of the child's level of brain development. In turn, appropriate play experiences stimulate and strengthen development of the brain. Adults who effectively facilitate age-appropriate play are enriching children's thinking and strengthening brain development.

Birth to 12 months

In the first months of life, the sensorimotor areas of the brain are very active, making connections that will be used throughout life. Play during early infancy focuses on sights, sounds, tastes, and textures in the environment. Older infants (6-8 months and older) become more social in their play, enjoying simple games like peek-a-boo. They enjoy repetitive play with objects and begin to give one-word names to objects.

- Provide many safe and interesting objects.
- Demonstrate ways to use the objects and encourage children to explore and expand those uses.
- Play with children to stimulate development in areas of the brain related to language, social, and emotional interactions.

Ages 2-3

The toddler brain is 2 ½ times as active as the adult brain. Language and comprehension begin to develop. Toddlers and young preschoolers begin to understand emotions, but self-control is difficult. Pretend play is typically evident, indicating the brain is capable of simple symbolic thought.

- Provide props for pretend play: dolls, trucks, brooms, telephones.
- Model pretend play, while describing your actions.
- Play games with rhymes and silly songs.



Ages 3-8

The child's brain is increasing its processing speed, memory, and problem solving during this period. Attention levels and impulse control increase. Children are able to engage in increasingly complex themes that employ roles, scripts, and costumes. Older children in this age group enjoy playing games with rules.

- Enhance development of the higher brain centers by providing space, time, and materials for creative sociodramatic play related to a variety of themes. Loose parts (see pages 28-32) are a good choice, as they require symbolic thinking.
- Play simple board games, memory games, and puzzles. Keep in mind that children's processing time will be slower than yours, so give them plenty of time to think.
- Children seek out peers as playmates. There is much discussion of rules and fairness, as well as competition and cooperation. The role playing and problem solving inherent in play activates the higher brain centers.

Play and Brain Development

Language-rich Social Interactions

Humans are uniquely “wired” to learn language. Infants and young children, particularly, need to experience many types of verbal interactions and enrichment.

Infants and young toddlers need:

- ✓ pleasant talk and conversation
- ✓ labeling of objects and happenings around them
- ✓ singing
- ✓ to hear rhymes and chants
- ✓ to listen to others engaged in pleasant conversation
- ✓ to share picture books and simple story books

During early childhood and the early school years, children need:

- ✓ to be included in conversations
- ✓ opportunities to interact socially with other children
- ✓ stories read to them (even after they learn to read on their own)
- ✓ singing
- ✓ dramatic play

Infants first communicate through crying, squirming, listening, and looking. Vision and hearing develop quickly and the child’s disposition to learn language is very strong during the first three years of life. Language-rich interactions actually build the brain’s capacity to understand and use language. The more we talk and sing and read to babies, the more their language ability grows.

We know that children who have experienced language-rich social interactions have larger vocabularies, are more successful in their communications with others, and make rapid progress in learning to read at the appropriate time. Because language helps children think, children who have had language-rich interactions are better thinkers. Their learning is enhanced and they can become quite successful with challenging activities and problems to solve. In the long run, these children have a better chance at school success.



Play and Brain Development

Music, Movement, Art, Pretend Play

It's not just for fun, although it is fun. Participation in music and movement activities, in art, and in pretend play builds strong connections in the child's brain.



It seems that early and continued exposure to music strengthens the types of thinking involved in logical and mathematical problem-solving. Children need opportunities to listen to many types of music and different musical instruments, to become familiar with a variety of songs, and to learn to play a musical instrument.

Although simply listening to classical music or learning to play an instrument does not raise the child's IQ, singing to and with infants and young children does strengthen the brain's wiring. Participating in musical activities such as singing, rhythmic activities and dance, engages many areas of the brain and enhances development in many domains—physical/motor, emotional, social, language, and cognitive.



Opportunities to create through drawing, painting, sculpting, and other art activities are essential experiences in early childhood. The child must mentally form pictures, then recreate those pictures through art. This mental task requires the use of imagination, language, symbols, and knowledge of one's surroundings.

Art engages the mind by bringing the child's attention to color, shape, form, size, weight, placement, depth and distance, proportion, feature and detail, subject, theme, or story. Art is never required to be perfect for it represents the imaginations and creations of the child artist's mind. Like music, enjoyable art experiences relax the mind allowing the brain's chemistry to support positive feelings and behaviors.

In pretend play, children recreate their own personal experiences and their hopes, dreams, and imaginings. Pretend play engages the mind in unique ways. Children learn to communicate, cooperate, and negotiate during small group pretend play. Participating in pretend play allows children to:

- "Try on" the behaviors of others, experience how certain events might feel.
- Use imagination and creative abilities
- Improvise to create props and spontaneous scripts
- Experiment with and use more vocabulary
- Engage and improve language skills
- Experiment with and experience a variety of social interaction techniques
- Employ increasingly more effective conflict resolution strategies
- Experience team work and cooperation

Play and Brain Development
Sensory-rich, Hands-on Novel Experiences

Infants and young children experience the world through their senses. Seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and tasting enable the brain to grow neurons that make **trillions of connections throughout the brain** and the body. Although children naturally use their senses as they play, adults can easily insure sensory-rich experiences. For example, add ice to the water table, vary the textures of toys and learning materials, provide materials that make interesting sounds.

New and novel experiences help the brain form connections that strengthen the new knowledge or skill. Replace sand with clean aquarium gravel or cotton balls. Provide a variety of objects for children to explore on the overhead projector.

First experiences truly matter. A **rich interactive environment** includes a wide variety of opportunities for sensory experiences. As infants become mobile, the possibilities for exploration expand to include new objects and places and new kinds of social interactions. Toddlers and preschool children are usually eager to try new experiences. While all of these explorations and new experiences are going on, a great deal of learning is taking place that supports brain growth and neurological development.

Adults who respond to the child's cues are able to stimulate and extend the play by providing **new props and materials at appropriate times**. Put out a collection of boxes, old sheets and blankets; observe what the children do with the materials.

In order for the brain to do its job, children need **safe environments for exploring** and trying new things. Be sure that materials are clean, safe, and age appropriate. Monitor the environment for potential hazards and correct problems immediately.



How to Play with Children

One of the adult's roles in children's play is that of partner. As we play with children we learn more about them, we scaffold their development, and we have fun. The following considerations can guide your play interactions with children.

- Remember that children play in different ways at different ages. Provide age-appropriate activities and materials.
- Allow children to explore, investigate, and draw their own conclusions. There is no substitute for children's personal observations, discoveries, and construction of knowledge. In other words, don't impose your ideas and knowledge on the child.
- Follow the child's lead (as long as it is safe). Let the child change the game, even if it doesn't match your adult sense of logic or need for completion.
- Listen to children, but avoid telling them what to do.
- Talk about what the children are doing. The adult role is sometimes that of a play-by-play commentator at a sporting event. You describe the action and interview the players to find out what they are thinking and feeling and what they plan to do next. "I wonder where that frog is going now." "You are washing that baby. She must have been dirty."
- Allow plenty of time.
- Encourage experimenting and expect mistakes.
- Don't compete with young children; this can be discouraging to them.



Adapted from Parenting and Child Health, "Playing With Children".
<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=122&id=1943#5>

Teaching Through Play



Children's play is not equivalent to adult play. The adult steps sideward into another reality; the child advances forward to new stages of mastery.

Erik Erikson

Overview of the Adult Role in Children's Play

The most important part of the child's day is the time spent in meaningful play experiences. Children's playtime is not staff break time. Adults play an essential role in supporting successful play.

- Provide adequate space for play. Successful play experiences require plenty of space to move and to manipulate materials and equipment in the environment.
- Provide adequate time for play. Satisfying play requires an abundance of uninterrupted time that allows the play to develop. Children need to be able to leave the play and return to it later.
- Provide interesting, open-ended materials. Carter and Curtis (1996) refer to this role as "provisioning the environment". Effective teachers spend a lot of time in gathering authentic materials (real objects) and toys that will invite children to explore and represent as they play.
- Observe and respond to children's play. Closely observe children as they play. Look for emerging skills, approaches to problem solving, frustrations, and social interaction. As the play develops, you may offer thought-provoking comments, ask open-ended questions, or offer additional props. At times children will need your help in negotiating conflict.
- Plan experiences that will enrich the play. As you observe, notice where children seem to have inadequate or incorrect information. Also notice variations on the theme of the play. Based on your observation, invite family and community members to visit your group, arrange field trips, and bring in appropriate children's books. These opportunities will add to the foundation from which children develop their play.
- Play with children when it is appropriate. When adults enter into the play, they model how to play and they demonstrate that play is valuable. In addition, adult participation in children's play helps the child reach beyond what he would be able to do on his/her own. (Vygotsky called this "scaffolding".) As you join children's play, follow the children's direction without dominating the play activities. Know when not to play—recognize those times when you can provide more effective support by observing.

Planning Space for Play

As you plan for learning through play, consider the following examples of a safe play and learning environment. Think about your space and add other safety precautions.

Is the space **safe** for children to explore?

Are electrical outlets covered?

Is there space to move easily from one area to another?

Are hazardous items secured out of children's reach?

Does each space **match the type of activity** expected to occur there?

Are there cushions and pillows in a cozy reading area?

Is there open space for large constructions in the block area?

Are there places in the art area for paintings and sculptures to dry?

Is there a place to store unfinished work until the next day?

Is there ample space for movement in the music area?

Does the space allow for **flexibility**?

Can the space be rearranged by the children?

Can adjacent space be annexed to expand the play area?

Can materials be used in more than one way?

Can materials be moved from one area to another to accommodate children's play?

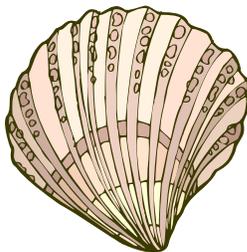
Is the space **comfortable and warm**?

Does the area have child-size equipment?

Do displays reflect the lives of the children in the group?

Is there a variety of textures?

Are there more natural materials than plastic and metal?





Does the space invite children to **wonder, explore, and imagine**?

- Are there many interesting objects?
- Are there tools for pursuing investigations?
- Is there an abundance of open-ended props?
- Are there items from nature?

Does the space encourage the development of **relationships** among children and adults?

- Are the sand/water tables positioned so that children stand on opposite sides, facing each other?
- Are there comfortable places for adults to sit while interacting with children?
- Is there a place to be alone?
- Are there places to be with friends?



Does the space encourage **self-expression**?

- Are writing materials readily available in play areas? (paper, pencils, crayons, markers, pens, clipboards, chalk)
- Does the art center contain varied materials?
- Are there designated places for children to display their creations?

Does the space appeal to the **senses** and the child's awareness of **beauty**?

- Is there natural lighting?
- Is the space colorful without being overwhelming?
- Are displays well-designed and attractive?

Planning Time for Play

Many adults would say one thing they would like to have is more time. You are in the unique position of being able to give the gift of time to the children with whom you work. Meaningful play takes time to develop. After you have set the stage by providing space and selecting materials, be sure to plan ample time for children to play.

Plan **long blocks of time** for play.

Children need a minimum of 45 minutes. An hour or more is better!

Avoid interrupting children who are engaged in play.

Allow children the time to complete an activity to their satisfaction before moving to the next one. For example, do not require children to rotate to another interest area after a designated length of time. Refraining from imposing your time on children demonstrates respect for their play and learning. If we want to help increase attention spans, we must allow lots of time for children to learn to focus and follow through. Also, avoid calling children from meaningful play for small group instruction. Instead, look for and create opportunities to provide needed skill instruction within the play setting.

Keep the schedule **flexible**.

A familiar routine provides security and cues for behavior, but make provisions for children to extend their play time when needed.

Allow children to **return to their play**.

If it's time for lunch before the dramatic play tea party" concludes, don't require children to put away all their props. They can tidy the area while preserving the play setting to return to after lunch or rest time. Block structures can be allowed to stand until tomorrow. Older children can be involved in devising solutions for maintaining the play area until they are able or ready to come back to it.



Planning Materials for Play

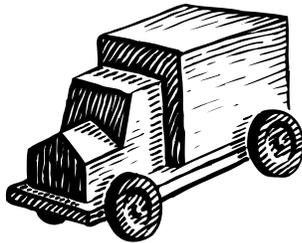
Carefully selected materials can make the difference between meaningful play that leads to significant learning and aimless, unproductive play. Consider the following points as you choose toys and learning materials.

Age appropriate.

Are the toys safe and sturdy for these children? Choose materials that are suitable for the range of development and interests within your group.

Skills and concepts. What are your learning goals for children? Select materials that will provide many opportunities for children to develop and apply those skills and concepts. Offer materials that will allow you to observe the child's progress and to support the learning.

Supply and demand. Do you have enough toys? Children need plenty of toys from which to choose. You will also need duplicates of popular toys to reduce disputes and waiting time.



Variety. Do you have an interesting assortment of materials? Be sure to provide classic toys such as dolls and Legos and open-ended materials like play dough, blocks, and puppets (see "Loose Parts", pages 28-32). Include materials not usually found at home—finger paints, musical instruments, hammer toys (Koralek, 2004, *Spotlight on Young Children and Play*, p. 31).

Authentic. Have you included authentic materials? Provide real objects that are safe for children to use in their play—plastic bowls, baskets, rulers, measuring cups, clothespins, maps.

Natural. Does the environment include both items from nature and items made from natural materials? Plastic is sturdy, colorful, and usually safe, but doesn't provide the same sensory richness as wood and fabric. In addition, children need indoor nature experiences such as counting seeds, using leaves in creative art, and floating pieces of bark in the water table.

Challenge. Do the materials offer a bit of a challenge to children? Toys that have been mastered don't sustain interest for long. Materials that fail to intrigue children or excite possibilities are not likely to facilitate successful play.

Rotated. Are children losing interest in a toy? Sometimes children simply need some guidance in new ways to use the toy. Or perhaps it's time to replace that toy with something they haven't played with recently. Establish a system for appropriately rotating learning materials.

Added. Do children need additional materials? Observe children's play and add props and materials that will extend and enrich their learning.

Storage. Are materials inviting to children? Display toys in sturdy containers on labeled shelves. Avoid stacking containers so that children can easily take what they need and put away at clean-up time. Store unused materials in closets and file cabinets, on shelves and pegboards. A label system for your storage area will help keep it organized.

Involving Families

- Ask families what children like to play with at home.
- Share with families your observations about what children like to play with during the day.
- Invite families to donate loose parts (see "Loose Parts", pages 28-32)
- Suggest household items that make good toys, such as plastic bowls, dress-up clothes, and paper towel tubes.
- Invite families to help organize storage areas.
- Work with families to make appropriate learning materials.

What Makes a Good Toy?

Recently I was astounded by a television commercial for a new preschool bicycle. The child sits on the stationary bike, which is connected to electronic gadgetry that shows animated images on the TV screen. As the child pedals the bicycle, the screen depicts his/her journey.



Here's why this commercial troubles me. We know that our country is in a health crisis that includes dramatic increases in childhood obesity and juvenile diabetes. The primary cause seems to be the combination of a sedentary lifestyle and a fast food diet. In other words, too much fried food, not enough fruits and vegetables, and inadequate physical activity. I'll give the toy manufacturer points (but not many points) for trying to get kids off the couch. It would be much better, however, to actually encourage children to spend time outdoors, viewing real scenery and imagining their own journey stories. Research is showing the importance of regular contact with the natural world for good mental health and cognitive functioning.

What does this mean for our work with children and families? We have two primary responsibilities. First, we must **invest in good toys** that will help "children learn about themselves and their world,...that nourish their need for imaginative play." (Elkind, 2005) Second, we must **support families** in countering the heavy marketing to children in a culture of consumerism.

What makes a good toy? The best toy can be played with in many ways—it doesn't do just one or two things. A good toy is well-made and attractive, it matches the child's age and interests, and it stimulates development of the child's physical, cognitive, social, and/or emotional skills. The best toys also foster imaginative play.



Look for toys that have borne the test of time: wooden blocks, dolls (not "fashion" dolls or action figures), wooden puzzles, play dough, crayons, tricycles/bicycles, peg boards, Duplo and Lego sets, and balls. Here are some suggestions for different ages.

- **For infants:** rattles, busy boxes, stacking toys, shape sorters, soft baby dolls, board books
- **For toddlers:** balls, push and pull toys, stuffed animals, crayons, play dough, simple puzzles
- **For preschoolers:** dolls, animal figures, vehicles, blocks, art materials, balls, wooden puzzles
- **For school-agers:** board games, construction sets, doll house, roller skates, puppets, art materials, jig-saw puzzles

Children don't understand marketing in the same way that adults do. Piaget helped us understand that young children base their view of the world on how things look. They believe what they see, which makes them especially vulnerable to marketing campaigns. Adults need to limit the amount of television children watch. Not only do they learn best from interactions with people and real objects, but reduced TV time reduces the amount of advertising to which children are subjected.

Investing in Good Toys

The environment rating scales outline the types of materials to which children should have access during the day. Busy teachers and administrators with limited budgets must make wise decisions on which items to purchase and which to improvise. The list below highlights learning materials that are worth buying. Be willing to pay a bit more for better quality; in the long run, you'll be glad you did.

Wooden unit blocks. A good set of unit blocks is definitely an investment, but over the life of the blocks, the cost is pennies a day. And the play value is priceless. Include a line item in your budget for blocks and add new shapes and additional pieces every year. Wooden hollow blocks are also a good investment after you have a good supply of unit blocks.

Puzzles. For toddlers and preschoolers, these will be good quality wooden puzzles. For older children, include jigsaw puzzles and a variety of brainteasers and 3-D puzzles.

Manipulatives/Table Toys. Unifix cubes, wooden beads with laces, Duplo and Lego blocks, wooden inch cubes, and peg boards.

Math/Science. Balance scale, non-breakable thermometer and magnifier, tangrams, and parquetry blocks.

Dramatic Play. Non-breakable mirrors and a variety of dolls, animal figures, and vehicles.

Whenever possible, choose natural materials instead of plastic. According to David Elkind (2005), artificial materials do not give children the rich sensory experience they need. Wood, cotton, and wool (if not allergic) also have a warmth and comfort that synthetics do not. "We should not underestimate the comfort and stress reducing qualities of natural materials, particularly for young children."



LOOSE PARTS

Loose parts is a term coined by architect Simon Nicholson, to refer to open-ended materials that provide opportunities for transporting, transforming, and using one's experience and imagination. Given the chance, children will use loose parts as invented props to support their play and investigation of the world. Children transport and transform them in remarkable ways.

Deb Curtis and Margie Carter
Reflecting Children's Lives

A favorite joke among parents is that children enjoy playing with the box more than they do the toy that came in it. Loose parts are interesting bits and pieces of the world that children use in their play. Loose parts can be carried around inside and outside, in pockets, in wagons, in buckets. They can become anything the child imagines. Don't have a hair dryer? A block of wood will work just fine. Need a rocket ship? Try that laundry basket.

If you think of loose parts merely as substitutions for real objects or better toys, then you are missing their value. Unlike detailed toys with definite themes and characteristics, the play possibilities for loose parts are endless. In 1971 Simon Nicholson stated, "children's inventiveness and ability to discover are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in their environment".¹

Children need lots of *stuff* in their play environments. They need to be able to gather chairs and crates and blankets to build a fort or a playhouse. They need rocks and milk cartons and string for their inventions. They need snap beads and bowls to fill and dump. In our homogenized, catalog-ordered classrooms, we sometimes forget to include the gear that fuels children's play.

The adult's responsibility is to make appropriate loose parts accessible to children. The next step is to observe to see how children are using the materials. Adults then extend and enrich the play by using open-ended questions and comments and by adding new materials.

¹Rivkin, M. S. (1995). *The Great Outdoors: Restoring Children's Right to Play*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

LOOKING FOR LOOSE PARTS

Lists of loose parts are endless. The lists on these pages are just a sample. Check your closets, cupboards, and basement for items suggested here. Use the Loose Parts Planning Sheet to organize your ideas for using loose parts with your children.

Safety Note: Be sure that all materials are clean, safe, and age-appropriate. Do not use small objects with children who are likely to put such items into mouths, ears, noses. Know your children and plan accordingly. Loose parts for infants and toddlers will be much larger than for preschool and school-age children.

For the Block Area

Unit blocks	Clothespins
Cardboard blocks	Paper towel tubes
Foam blocks	Twigs and small sticks
Craft sticks	Wheels
Thread spools	Wooden cubes
Buttons	Ruler
Wood scraps (sanded smooth)	Tape measure
Boxes	Protractor
Crates	A level
Pieces of cardboard	Baskets
Packing peanuts	Marbles
PVC pipe	Small balls
Soda straws	Animal and people figures
Chenille sticks	Maps

For the Dramatic Play Area

Artificial flowers	Dolls
Fabric squares (about 1 yard lengths)	Non-breakable mirrors
Clothespins	Large hair curlers
Scarves and ribbons	Stuffed animals
Boxes	Baskets
Dress-up clothes, hats, shoes	Flashlights
Work gloves	Telephones
Stethoscope	Magazines, calendars
Cloth tote bags	Empty food containers
Suitcases, backpacks	

For the Math/Science Area

Buttons
Cotton balls
Craft sticks
Soda straws
Sea shells
Acorns
Rocks
Rulers
Muffin pans
Empty milk cartons (clean)
Clean jar lids
Shape sorter

Nesting cups
Stacking rings
Peg boards
Magnets
Non-breakable mirrors
Seeds
Animals
Balance scales
Magnifying glasses
Tweezers, tongs
Stethoscope
Graph paper, pencils, markers

For the Library Area

Books
Magazines
Story tapes, tape player
Puppets
Flannel board figures
Variety of paper
Pencils, pens, markers
Alphabet stamps

Plastic or rubber alphabet letters
Name cards
Chalkboard and chalk
Story-related props, such as a stuffed bear or a toy steam shovel
Alphabet letters cut from textured materials

For the Art Area

Cotton balls, coffee filters
Craft sticks, paper bags
Pieces of cardboard
Chenille sticks
Thread spools
Buttons, ribbons
Yarn and string
Blocks of Styrofoam
Paper towel tubes
Feathers, sequins

Leaves
Toothbrushes
Crayons, markers, pencils
Scissors, glue, chalk
Lots of paper
Stapler, paper clips, tape
Rubber bands
Alphabet noodles
Variety of paints and brushes

For the Water Area

Measuring cups and spoons
Plastic cups
Sieves
Medicine droppers
Turkey baster
Butter tubs
Blocks of Styrofoam
Ice cubes
Slotted spoon
Squeeze bottles
Small pitchers

Sea shells
Plastic tubing
Funnels
Fishing floats
PVC piping, joints
Sponges
Plastic film canisters
Corks
Fish net
Ping Pong balls
Plastic people and animal figures



For the Sand Area

Cups
Buckets
Sea shells
Spoons
Shovels
Craft sticks
Combs
Pieces of cardboard
Rocks
Soda straws
Twigs

Ice cubes
Sieves
Funnels
Plastic film canisters
Small plastic cups
Coffee scoops
Slotted spoon
Large salt/pepper shakers
PVC pipe
Colander
Small rakes



LOOSE PARTS PLANNING SHEET

I have these loose parts in my learning environment. _____

These are some ways that I have seen the children use loose parts. _____

Here are other loose parts that I could put out for the children. _____

Think about the ways in which children might use the loose parts listed on this sheet.
What open-ended questions or comments might you make that will support and extend
their learning?

What are some loose parts that you might ask friends and families to donate to your
program?

Buying, Borrowing, and Improvising

I'm not much of a cook, but recently I was trying a new recipe (a very big event at our house!). The recipe called for one cup of buttermilk, which of course I didn't have. I considered my options: 1) run to the store, 2) knock on the neighbor's door, 3) change to a different recipe, or 4) make my own buttermilk (lemon juice or vinegar in milk). As I reflect on my attempt at cooking, I realize we have similar options in our child care programs.

Sometimes when we don't have what we need, we buy it. There are some things that can't be improvised very well – we need flour, we need eggs. There may be ways around them, but it is best to use the original ingredients. For example, we choose to invest in a good set of unit blocks.

Sometimes we borrow what we need. You may work in a program where you have a supply room or where staff share materials in other ways. This is a great use of resources. The public library and the Arkansas Child Care Resource Center are also available for you to borrow books and other materials.

Sometimes we change to another recipe or postpone the cooking. This is not the best option for our work with children. Children are learning every day, all day. Our job is to add the right ingredients at the right time.

Most of us frequently find creative ways to make up for what we don't have. Like the lemon juice or vinegar that we stir into the milk, we find alternative ingredients that work effectively in our early childhood programs. We improvise. When children improvise, we call it creativity and may view it as a cognitive milestone. For example, when a 3 year old picks up a curved block, holds it to her ear, and says, "hello," we note that she is demonstrating skill in using symbols.

Certainly our children deserve the best materials in sufficient amounts and we should continue to advocate for adequate funding of early education programs. However, it is also good to provide improvised materials, which offer children opportunities to use imagination and representation.

Safety First

Please use great care and good judgment when collecting and using materials with young children. Teachers, parents, and other adults must carefully determine that the materials are clean and are not sharp, toxic, or potentially harmful before allowing children of any age to use them. All activities involving young children require close and uninterrupted supervision.

Making the Most of Free Choice Time

Researchers in the IEA Preprimary Project observed and followed **5,000 four-year-olds** and their teachers in preschools and child care centers in **15 countries**. Participating countries included Finland, Greece, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Spain, Thailand, and the United States. Across all countries, certain classroom practices were identified that related to better language and cognitive skills at age seven.

Several findings from this research have implications for our classrooms. The seven-year-olds did better on **language assessments** if their preschool settings had emphasized free-choice activities. They did better on **cognitive assessments** if they had spent more preschool time in small group, individual, and partner activities and if they had access to a greater number and variety of materials.

Here are some suggestions from authors Montie, Claxton, and Lockhart on making the most of free-choice time.

- schedule free-choice time both indoors and outdoors
- provide enough materials for all children to be engaged
- move around the room and observe each child's choices
- participate as a play partner--start by observing and listening to children
- follow children's leads in play and problem solving
- give children time to solve problems and offer support if needed
- offer suggestions for extending play, staying within the play theme
- ask questions sparingly and make them thought provoking and relevant to what children are doing
- allow children time to think and respond
- introduce new, meaningful vocabulary
- acknowledge individual work and ideas
- provide information and examples that help families understand the importance of play and free-choice time in supporting children's learning

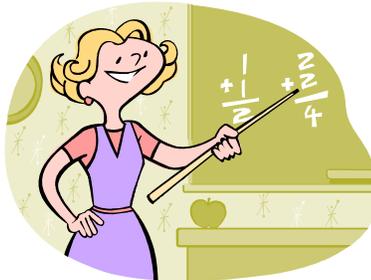


Source: Montie, J., Claxton, J., and Lockhart, S. (2007). A multinational study supports child-initiated learning, *Young Children* 62(6), pp. 22-26.

Teaching Through Play

Most of us would agree that children learn through play. Children learn best when they are fully engaged in hands-on activities with materials and people of their choice. If children are learning through play, shouldn't we be teaching through play? What should adults be doing and saying in order to teach through play?

Let's begin with some definitions. When you think of the word *teacher*, what image comes to mind? Do you see someone like Miss Corey, who always had a special activity for her second graders on Friday afternoons? Do you visualize a person like Mrs. Meyers, who assigned seat work while she worked with reading groups? Maybe you picture Ms. Jones, the coolest teacher in fifth grade because she went bungee jumping during summer vacation! Perhaps you remember a favorite teacher from kindergarten or band or senior English. All of these are teachers, using their individual style and talents to teach.



What, then, is *teaching*? Is it imparting knowledge? Is it providing instruction? Is it guiding someone else's learning? The correct answer to these questions is, "Yes." The common element among the teachers described above seems to be **helping others learn**. An effective teacher knows and uses different teaching strategies for different skills and concepts, as well as for different students. For young children and for older children in out-of-school settings, teaching approaches that support learning through play should be at the top of the list.

Teaching through play is a combination of teacher-assisted and child-initiated learning opportunities. The adult's role varies at different points in the play and learning processes. To be successful in teaching through play, the teacher must have a good **understanding of child development**, of the expected sequence for learning. The adult must **know as much as possible about each individual child** in order to facilitate learning and play.

The elements of teaching through play can be organized into three actions: observe, interpret, and respond. Adults can develop skill in each of the three actions that will enhance their ability to teach through play.

Observe the play

Use observation as a way to **get to know a child**. Notice what and whom the child chooses to play with, how the child responds to different people and situations, the prior knowledge the child brings to the play scenario, apparent misconceptions, and emerging skills. Remember that listening to the child is an important part of observing.

Use observation to **gain insight into behavior**. Where and when did the behavior occur? Who was present? What was happening in the environment? What happened before this behavior occurred? What did the child seem to be feeling, needing, or intending?

Use observation to **assess learning and development** over a period of time. Tools such as checklists, notes, and photographs document children's progress toward learning goals.

Use observation to **solve problems**. Is there frequent conflict in the dramatic play center? Are children reluctant to clean up? Focused observations can provide useful information on how to resolve these problems.

Interpret the play

Use a series of observations to help you identify **children's needs and interests**. What seems to stand out as you review your observations?

Multiple observations can highlight **evidence of skills** that are emerging or mastered. After reviewing a series of observations, a picture of the child's progress begins to emerge. Compare the child's overall performance to standards, such as benchmarks or performance indicators.

Identify areas in which **specific instruction** might support the child's learning. Does the child need to acquire skills or competencies that would enable more successful play and effective learning? Could these skills/competencies best be gained through teacher-assisted instruction?

Summarize **how the child interacts with others**. Through play children demonstrate their preferences and competencies in the social/emotional areas. Good observations allow you to create a summary of the child's ability and approaches.

Identify particular **times or spaces that seem to be challenging** for a child or for the group. Careful observation can provide information to guide you in making adjustments to reduce or eliminate problems.

Respond to the play

Good observations and valid interpretations lead to appropriate responses. Sometimes your response will be an immediate comment, question, or added prop. At other times, your response occurs later as you make changes to the environment or the curriculum.

Adjust the environment. This may mean rearranging furniture, changing the schedule, or adding/removing equipment. What might make it easier for children to engage in meaningful play?

Remove/add materials. Consider the level of challenge, the number of pieces, the interest demonstrated by the children. What might enrich the play? How can you support new directions for the play?

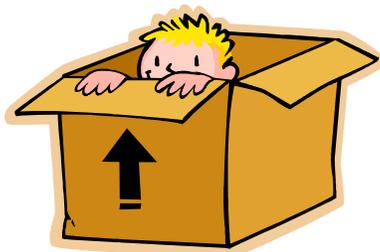
Make a comment or ask a question. An adult's well-timed comments and questions help children sustain their play and gain new meaning. Avoid quizzing children and interrupting the flow of their work. Appropriate open-ended questions and comments can support the child's thinking and guide them toward satisfying solutions.

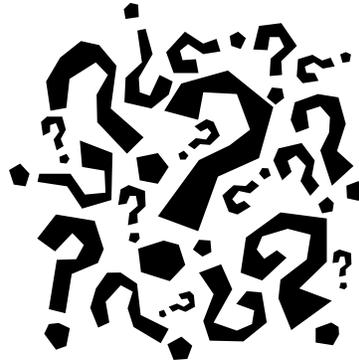
Focus on the process. Ask questions that help extend the child's play. "That is a noisy truck. What is it honking at?"*

Support problem solving. Help children define the problem and learn negotiation skills. Encourage them to think about alternatives. Suppose one child has grabbed a marker from another child, who then cries. The adult might say, "It looks like there is a problem here. Can each of you say what just happened?" If the children are too young and lack verbal abilities, the adult can say, "It looks like you both need that marker. Next time, you can tell Lupe, 'That's mine!'" The adult then offers another marker.*

Do nothing. Sometimes the best response is to continue observing and interpreting. Too often adults intervene at the wrong time, short-circuiting the process and the learning for children. Literally think twice before commenting or questioning. If the children are safe (physically and psychologically), it may be better to wait. Continue observing their approaches to solving the problem.

*Koralek, 2004, *Spotlight on Young Children and Play*, pp. 30-31.





Asking Good Questions

A scientist who received the Nobel Prize to reward his lifetime accomplishments and discoveries once told this story when asked to explain his success. "My mother, like most other mothers of immigrant families in Brooklyn in the early part of the 1900's, was always eager to greet us when we came home from school. The usual question from most of those mothers was, 'What did you learn today?' My mother, though, asked, 'Did you ask a good question today?' And that made all the difference. From my earliest memories I was encouraged to be curious, to wonder, to take initiative in finding connections in my world."

This is a wonderful, true story of the lifelong impact of an adult who knew the importance of supporting curiosity and encouraging a child to make sense of the world around him. Asking good questions is one of the best ways adults can guide children to making new connections in their understanding.

Learning Is for Life

My grandson was studying for a social studies test using his pre-test material. I began studying with him. The first part of the study sheet involved statements that could be completed by selecting the proper phrase from a listing provided by the test givers. One of these involved telling why congress passed the Homestead Act of 1862.

My grandson knew the phrase that was necessary to complete the statement; however, when I asked him what the Homestead Act was, he had no clue. I kept telling him learning was for life, not just to pass a test. By the time we finished, he told me he didn't want me to study with him again because I made him think. I told him that was the nicest thing he had said to me.

[Thanks to Jackie Buxton, St. John's Episcopal Day School, Harrison, for sharing this true story.]

Open Questions	Closed Questions
Many possible answers; encourages divergent thinking	One right answer
Requires higher level of thinking, making connections, and mentally reconstructing past experiences	Requires simple recall of something already learned
Can lead to much more language and extended communication opportunities	Often needs only one or two words to answer; requires little conversation
Often designed to get insights into child's thinking and support making logical connections	Often designed to find out what the child knows

Good questions...

- Are open-ended and divergent, able to be answered with any number of responses, not just looking for one right answer.
- Are questions to which the adult does not know the answer—otherwise questions may just be an intrusion and close off real thinking and communication. Good questions begin with teachers' genuine curiosity, their desire to know what children think.
- Cause children to analyze their experiences, to synthesize and communicate their understandings, to re-evaluate, probe, and deepen their developing concepts.
- Often begin with "wh", such as "What, who, when, where, why, and how?"



Teaching Through Play: A Reflection

By Diana Courson

My career seems to have come full-circle. I began as a kindergarten teacher before we knew the terms *developmentally appropriate practice* or *emergent curriculum* or *benchmark*. Along the way I became acquainted with concepts such as learning centers, compensatory education, whole language, behavioral objectives, readiness, phonemic awareness, projects, and accountability. After numerous professional development opportunities and 37 years of experience, I find my philosophy and practice to be quite close to that with which I started: facilitating learning through play.

The strategies listed on pages 41-42 compare teaching through play to other approaches. The lists come from my experience; at one time or another I've done most of the things on both lists. I've sometimes tried to use other approaches and I can say that teaching through play is better. Here are some of my reasons.

There were fewer behavior challenges as learning generated excitement and fully engaged children.

Curiosity and creativity energized the adults and the children.

Families were more fully involved with the child's learning.

My children were always "ready" for the next step in their education; kindergarten and first grade teachers welcomed my students.

When I was teaching through play, I couldn't wait to get to work.

Out of the Box: Teaching Through Play

I will never forget JoAnn Nalley doing a presentation years ago on thematic boxes for the learning centers. At the time I was an avid believer in a particular scripted, structured curriculum. Talking about a BOX, I was locked into one and had no intention of changing. Then JoAnn took the lid off her boxes. She showed (with much enthusiasm) what it was like to learn outside the box. She could turn the dramatic play center into the local pizza parlor, a beauty salon, or a doctor's office. She incorporated math, science, books, art and all the disciplines into those boxes of fun. I am thankful that she opened the lid on my box that day so I was able to think outside it and accept that learning does not have to be *classwork*, it can be *playwork*.

[Thanks to Melba Connelly, Gram's House, Benton, for sharing this experience.]

Skills and strategies for teaching through play

- Set the stage for learning based on knowledge of individual needs and interests: provide space and select materials.
- Observe children as they play.
- Provide support when needed by (1) recognizing “teachable moments”, while following the child’s lead, and (2) providing instruction for specific skills that will enhance the play.
- Ask questions and make comments that stimulate thinking and creative problem solving.
- Provide additional materials and experiences to extend and enrich the play.
- Join the play in order to model skills, dispositions, and attributes, such as enthusiasm, cooperation, and curiosity.
- Assess children’s learning and document progress.
- Re-set the stage for learning based on information from assessments.

Teaching Through Play

- Topics of study emerge from interactions with children.
- Learning center time is the most valuable part of the schedule and is allotted as much time as possible.
- Whole group time is brief. Small group activities are planned when needed to address specific skills or concepts.

Other Teaching Approaches

- Themes selected and scheduled by the adult as much as one year in advance.
- Learning center time is “filler” to occupy children between teacher-initiated activities.
- Circle time is a prime teaching time.

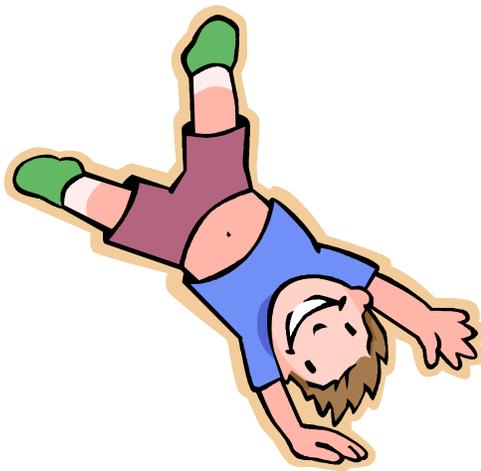
Teaching Through Play

- Children have many choices.
- Abundant supply of loose parts.
- Dramatic play and blocks are essential areas and are given abundant time, space, and attention.
- The entire day is part of the “school day”; children are learning all the time.
- A flexible environment allows children to re-arrange space and materials during play.
- Art “projects” are seldom used; art center supports creative expression by offering a rich assortment of materials and media.
- Clean-up does not impede play.
- Adults skillfully use questions and comments to extend thinking and expand the play.

Other Teaching Approaches

- Children assigned to learning centers and/or required to remain in one center until time to rotate.
- Adults give more attention to instruction than to children’s play in learning centers.
- Children are called away from their play to complete the daily activity at the “teacher table”.
- Learning center rules are inflexible, resulting in restricted play.
- A new art project is offered every day, usually related to the theme.
- Structured clean-up routine always enforced, which may short-circuit play.
- Few open-ended questions and comments; focus is on recall.

Learning Through Play



In play, the child always behaves beyond his average age; Above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development.

Lev Vygotsky

Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Mental Processes

I'm not just playing—I'm learning about the world

As children play, they gain knowledge of how the world works and they find their place in the world. Construction experiences, like playing with blocks, strengthen the foundations of math, science, reading, and writing. Children also develop physical coordination, build self esteem, and learn how to work with others.

There is no substitute for a good set of unit blocks. Many types of blocks are available, but the most versatile and durable for preschool and school-age children are unit blocks. Unit blocks (and their "big brother", hollow blocks) represent a financial investment for many programs. Although blocks seem expensive initially, they should last for many years and in the long run actually cost only pennies a day.

Facilitating Block Play and Construction

Significant learning occurs, so allow ample space for building.

Plan and implement a flexible clean-up routine.

Provide lots of blocks.

Add loose parts and accessories.

Have paper, writing tools, and tape nearby for creating signs and sketching building plans.

Take photographs of works in progress and completed structures.

The design and creation processes require thought and patience. Avoid imposing unnecessary time limits.

When building must be interrupted, have a flexible plan that allows children to continue the work later.

Notice children's interesting ideas, building techniques, and teamwork.

Provide construction challenge cards. Children may choose to design a solution to one of the challenges.

Plan field trips that will enrich the play.



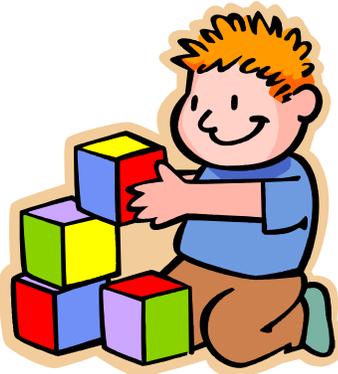
Learning that might be observed during block play

Skills

- Learn new words as they describe sizes, shapes, and positions
- Sort and classify as they work with different sizes and shapes
- Learn about weight, gravity, and balance
- Represent thoughts and ideas
- Explore cause and effect
- Recognize, reproduce, and create patterns
- Develop problem solving strategies
- Understand number concepts
- Recognize similarities and differences
- Use reading and writing skills
- Explore concepts underlying maps and models

Beyond Benchmarks

- I can do it!
- I can represent ideas using blocks, construction materials, and pencil/paper.
- Other people have interesting ideas.
- Other people see the world from a different perspective.
- When my idea doesn't work, I can try it another way.
- Solutions for one problem can be modified to solve another problem.
- When we work together, we can do great things.



Assessing Learning in the Block Area

We know that children are learning in the block center. We know that building with blocks is a significant part of the foundation of a good early education program. Our challenge is how to assess and document learning and development that occurs in the block center.

Teaching Numeracy, Language, and Literacy with Blocks, by Abigail Newburger and Elizabeth Vaughan, describes stages of blockbuilding (see p. 47). For each stage, the authors provide a list of typical children's behaviors and correlate the behaviors with sample benchmarks. For example, when building a fence or a wall, the child may name what he/she is building, "I'm making a pen for the pigs." This demonstrates the use of planning in approaching a task or activity (Arkansas Early Childhood Benchmark 1.8). Assessment in the block center consists of observing children carefully and then comparing their activities to the benchmarks.

Sharon MacDonald, in *Block Play*, identified six tips for assessing children in the block center.

1. Take photographs to document a skill or concept. A series of photos taken over time creates a log of the child's progress.
2. Collect work samples. Be sure your block center includes paper, pencils, and clear tape for children to make signs and labels, to draw pictures, and to write stories about their constructions. Photocopy significant samples of the child's work and save them in a portfolio.
3. Make anecdotal records. Record factual, non-judgmental observations of a child's activity. These narratives document the child's emerging skills.
4. Make audio recordings of events. Ask children to tell a story about their structure or make up a song about what's going on in their building. Children may also describe how they constructed the building or how it will be used. Tape recordings will help assess oral language development.
5. Develop your own checklist. Select some of the skills and concepts from your benchmarks or other learning standards. Create a list of items that can be answered "yes" or "no"; these should be items that require little or no back-up documentation. When a child masters a skill, check it off.
6. Include information from parents. Keep notes from parents and drawings or photographs from home that relate to skills in the block center. Parents will appreciate sharing the assessment process if they understand its value and purpose.

Stages of Block Building

Children move through a series of predictable stages in their blockbuilding. Teachers who understand these stages are better prepared to support learning through block play.

Stage 1: Toddlers enjoy carrying blocks around. At this beginning stage, blocks are not used for construction, although children may sometimes stack blocks randomly. In stage 1 children are exploring the physical attributes of blocks--shape, size, weight.

Stage 2: Children's first building attempts are typically flat rows of blocks on the floor or vertical stacks of blocks. Although children don't set out to build a road or a tower, the results of their efforts tend to resemble such structures.

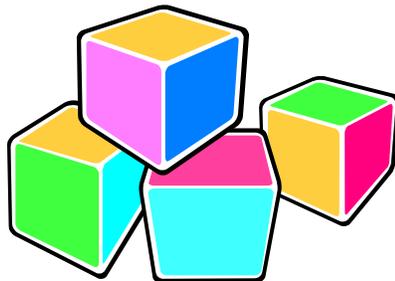
Stage 3: As children gain experience with blocks and how they can be used, they begin to experiment with bridges, doors, and gates. In this stage children use two blocks to support a crosspiece.

Stage 4: When children have regular opportunities to play with blocks, they begin to build enclosures. We can observe children placing blocks to define a space.

Stage 5: As children gain experience with blocks, they create buildings that incorporate symmetrical patterns and require balance.

Stage 6: At this stage, children's structures become more complex. Children give their buildings names based on the function of the building.

Stage 7: Children use their block structures for dramatic play and to represent familiar objects and buildings.



I'm not just playing—I'm learning to think

Children are natural scientists! They have an innate sense of curiosity about how the world works, making the early years a wonderful time to help children develop good thinking skills. Learning to ask questions, look for answers, talk about discoveries and make decisions are important skills that will stay with children throughout their lifetime of learning.

Math and science play involves two "curriculum" areas and can occur naturally all day throughout the early childhood classroom. Through math and science play, children can learn to observe, measure, count, compare, make predictions and discuss answers to questions about the world. All these activities contribute to good thinking skills.

Facilitating Math and Science Play

Encourage curiosity and wonder.

Take advantage of the "teachable moments" all around you. A new book, construction near your center, flowers blooming, water play, or a bouncing ball can all turn into interesting learning experiences for children.

Look for numbers, shapes, patterns and comparisons throughout the day.

Find opportunities for math and science learning in every area of the classroom.

Use mathematical language in conversation.

Provide an ample supply of tools that children can use to investigate their environment. (tools for measuring, tools for observing, tools for recording data and ideas, tools for comparing)

Extend children's thinking by posing questions and wondering aloud.

- I wonder what will happen if we mix the yellow and blue paint?
- I wonder how many times it will rain before the last day of school?
- I wonder how many cups of water will fit in this bowl?
- I wonder if there are any bugs on our playground?
- I wonder which car will go faster down the ramp?
- I wonder how many cubes we can stack before they fall over?

Learning that might be observed during math and science play

Skills

- Understand number concepts and operations
- Use standard and non-standard units of measure
- Develop spatial awareness
- Understand and use position words
- Sharpen observation skills
- Compare objects
- Classify objects by one or more attributes
- Predict outcomes
- Record data using words, pictures, graphs, and charts
- Demonstrate curiosity
- Investigate cause and effect
- Observe and describe changes

Beyond benchmarks

- I live in a world filled with wonders.
- I can find answers to my questions.
- Knowing about the world helps me make better choices.
- There is always more to learn.



Bringing nature into play



We know that children need daily physical activity for optimal development and learning. Playgrounds are good places for physical activity, but some playgrounds may not be sufficient for children to connect with nature. Our children (and adults) need regular experiences with trees, grass, weeds, mud, rocks, bugs, and worms. The natural environment supports children's developing independence and autonomy. Safe outdoor spaces invite children to expand their boundaries and explore just a bit farther.

Children's outdoor play is different from time spent indoors. The sensory experiences are different, and different standards of play apply. Activities that may be frowned on indoors can be safely tolerated outdoors. Children have greater freedom not only to run and shout, but also to interact with and manipulate the environment. Children are free to do 'messy' activities outdoors that won't be tolerated indoors....

Children experience the natural environment differently than adults. Adults typically see nature as background for what they are doing. Children experience nature, not as background for events, but rather as a stimulator and experiential component of their activities. The world of nature is not a scene or even a landscape. Nature for the child is sheer sensory experience. Children judge the natural setting not by its aesthetics, but rather by how they can interact with the environment....

All the manufactured equipment and all the indoor instructional materials produced by the best educators in the world cannot substitute for the primary experience of hands-on engagement with nature. They cannot replace the sensory moment where a child's attention is captured by the phenomena and materials of nature: the dappled sparkle of sunlight through leaves, the sound and motion of plants in the wind, the sight of butterflies or a colony of ants, the imaginative worlds of a square yard of dirt or sand, the endless sensory experience of water, the infinite space in an iris flower.

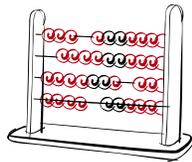
Source: White, R. & Stoecklin, V. Children's Outdoor Play & Learning Environments: Returning to Nature. Kansas city, MO: White Hutchinson Leisure & Learning Group. Retrieved January 3, 2006, from <http://www.whitehutchinson.com/children/articles/outdoor.html>

Materials to support math and science play

Observing: magnifiers, binoculars or “observation glasses” made from cardboard tubes, writing materials for drawing and recording observations.



Comparing and Classifying: loose parts, natural objects, ice cube trays or sorting trays, attribute blocks.



Numbers and Counting: foam and wooden numerals, counting frame/abacus, variety of counters, loose parts, number/numeral matching games, writing materials to record tally marks or numbers.

Measuring: measuring cups and spoons, ruler, balance scale, measuring tape, yardstick.



Shapes and Spatial Awareness: pattern blocks or cards, wallpaper scraps cut into squares, unit blocks, parquetry blocks, attribute blocks, variety of maps and writing materials for making maps.



Patterns: pattern blocks, tangrams, unit blocks, buttons, colored counters, natural objects, unifix cubes, beads and string, pegs and pegboards.

Natural science materials: collections of natural objects (rocks, leaves, shells, sticks, nuts and seeds), classroom pets, plants



Physical science materials: sensory table with a variety of materials (water, sand, rice, water and sand mixture), balls, ramps, variety of blocks, wheels, musical instruments and noise makers, prisms and light catchers, flashlights, play dough and other sensory materials (clay, cornstarch and water)





Math and Science in Art

Encourage children to mix paint colors.

Paint with a variety of tools (large and small brushes, foam brushes, rollers, stamps, sponges) and surfaces (paper, fabric, plastic, foil, wood, burlap).

Make and color play dough and provide a variety of tools to explore it.

When making collages, provide children with a variety of adhesives that includes glue sticks, glue in bottles, contact paper, and tape.

Provide children with materials to create three-dimensional objects such as wood scraps, clay, chenille stems, and Styrofoam pieces.

Make paper sculptures using newsprint scraps and a mixture of water and flour.

Create pictures using eyedroppers, colored water and a variety of surfaces (newsprint, paper towels, fabric).

Provide children with large pieces of paper to use for drawing and painting on the floor. Tape paper to the bottom of tables and encourage children to draw while lying on their backs.

Provide children with graph paper or grid paper for creating designs.

Provide children with items such as beads and straws for counting and stringing patterns.

Make collages with natural materials collected outside.

Math and Science in Dramatic Play

Provide props to encourage math language and behaviors such as cash registers, calculators, price tags and signs and play money.



Use dramatic play themes that naturally encompass math and science concepts such as restaurant, doctor's office, veterinarian's office, grocery store, and camping.

Encourage dramatic play outdoors by providing ample tools for playing in sand and dirt such as shovels, various sizes of buckets and bowls, spoons and rakes.

Provide props that can easily be counted and sorted such as bowls and utensils, hats and shoes.

Math and Science Displays in the Learning Environment

Display charts with plants where children can record the number of times plants are watered.

Display prisms and light-catching objects in windows and encourage children to describe the effect they have on light coming through the windows.



Set up displays of natural objects with which children can interact by observing, sorting, matching and counting. Use seasonal objects such as pumpkins, apples, leaves, flowers and nuts.

Books for Encouraging Thinking and Learning About the World

A Cool Drink of Water by Barbara Kerley

All the Places to Love by Patricia MacLachlan

Bread, Bread, Bread by Ann Morris

Color Dance by Ann Jonas

Do Lions Live On Lily Pads? by Melanie Walsh

Feast for 10 by Cathryn Falwell

Is It Larger? Is It Smaller? by Tana Hoban

Measuring Penny by Loreen Leedy

On the Go by Ann Morris

On My Beach There Are Many Pebbles by Leo Lionni

Parts by Tedd Arnold

Pattern Bugs by Trudy Harris

Shapes, Shapes, Shapes by Tana Hoban

The Wind Blew by Pat Hutchins

This is the Rain by Lola M. Schaffer,

What Do Wheels Do All Day? by April Jones Prince

I'm not just playing—I'm creating

People sometimes wonder about the value of creative play such as art, music or dramatic play. But good teachers know activities such as these have tremendous value for healthy brain development and the development of many skills necessary for success in life. Materials that stimulate the senses are especially important as children learn about sights, sounds, and texture. Many connections have been made between exposure to the creative arts and later success with both literacy and math skills.



Materials and props for creative play should be available in most areas of an early childhood learning environment, including the outdoor environment. Include materials that encourage children to think creatively, pretend, and explore new things. Props should be open ended, and while teachers can suggest or demonstrate ways to use materials, children should always be encouraged to use materials freely without following a model or working toward a pre-determined outcome.

Facilitating creative play

Creative play can be messy. Cover the work space and have a supply of smocks for children to wear. Provide cleaning tools and involve children in clean-up.

Allow time for children to explore the materials.

Ask good questions. (see pp. 38-39)

Provide an abundant supply of open-ended materials.

Provide many types of materials.

Devise safe storage for incomplete work so that children can continue their work later in the day or week.

Observe and listen more than you talk.

Provide space for art, music and movement, and sensory play (such as sand and water).

Include interesting works of art and music in the child's day.

Comment on the process as children are engaged in creative experiences.

Learning that might be observed during creative play

Skills

- Describe properties and relationships of objects
- Represent thoughts, ideas, experiences
- Find more than one solution to a problem
- Experiment with new materials
- Use imagination
- Increased fine and gross motor control

Beyond the Benchmarks

- I am capable.
- There are many interesting objects and materials in the world.
- There are many ways in which I can express my thoughts and feelings.

Creative Sensory Play

Be sure to include sensory play such as sand or water every day.

Add interesting props to sand and water such as water colors, sponges or bubbles.

Use other sensory materials such as play dough, clay, cornstarch and water or a mixture of equal parts white school glue and liquid starch. Encourage children to help when mixing these sensory materials and gradually add color so children can make swirls and patterns as they mix.

Plan for sensory play both indoors and outdoors.

Encourage children to describe their observations through all of their senses. Children can describe tactile feelings (how things feel when touched), noises, tastes, and sights as well how things change.

Creative Music and Movement Play



Provide cassette or CD players for children to use independently. Use a variety of music with children including contemporary, classical, jazz, and new age, as well as music produced specifically for children.

Involve children in making up new lyrics to familiar tunes.

Use scarves, ribbons or fabric scraps as props for movement. Encourage children to move their scarves freely with the music.

Provide musical instruments for children to use both in small groups and informally during center time. Musical instruments can also be made by children using paper plates, coffee cans and materials that make noise when shaken.

Creative Art Play

Rotate art materials frequently and make sure that paint and glue are available daily for older children, and as often as possible with supervision for younger children. Collage materials, painting tools and painting surfaces should be rotated and replenished frequently.

Provide smocks and appropriate floor coverings so children can be independent when participating in art or messy play. Always locate messy play areas near a water source for easy clean-up



Differing surfaces can provide a variety of experiences for children as they engage in creative art. Make sure to provide different kinds of tools for painting and drawing (paintbrushes, combs, toothbrushes, “natural” brushes such as leaves or sticks, rollers, sponges) and a variety of work positions (painting at an easel, working on the floor, working on a tabletop).

Share stories and examples of artwork from famous artists. Purchase inexpensive poster frames and create an “art gallery” in the learning environment so that children can see work created by themselves and other children in the group.

Experiment with different types of paint and don't be afraid to mix in sand, glue, water or oil to give paint a different texture and properties.

Make sure that all children have frequent opportunities for creative art. With proper supervision and appropriate equipment even very young children can use markers, glue sticks, and safety scissors to create works of art. Contact paper, sticker dots and colored tape are good materials for very young children to use to experiment with colors, patterns and designs.

I'm not just playing—I'm learning how to live

Dramatic play is not only one of the great joys of childhood, it also offers abundant opportunities for children's development. Children develop interpersonal skills, particularly cooperation and conflict resolution, and improve their language and problem solving abilities in pretend play.



Around the age of two, children begin to pretend to cry, sleep, and eat. They soon include a stuffed animal, doll, or favorite toy in their play. They also begin to transform objects into symbols—a simple block becomes a fast race car or a stick makes a fine horse.

As children approach three, they begin participating in make-believe play with other children. Dramatic play gradually becomes more elaborate and complex. Four- and five year olds engage in sociodramatic play, which provides opportunities to rehearse adult roles. Such play helps children make sense of the world.

Early pretend play often focus on home experiences. Children pretend to cook, clean, and care for younger children. That's why a home setting and props are a staple in early childhood programs.

As children's play matures, the themes of their play branch out to include other settings: doctor's office, grocery store, pizza restaurant, riding the bus. Experiences outside the home enrich the child's dramatic play.



Dramatic play fosters emotional development as children work through fears and worries in a safe context. Social skills are promoted as children communicate and negotiate their roles and actions. Another plus is that children use language more frequently and more elaborately in pretend play than they do in virtually any other activity.

[Adapted from: Diffily, D. & Morrison, K. (1996). *Family-Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs.*]

Facilitating dramatic play

Provide authentic materials (real life objects).

Provide multipurpose props, which can be used in many different ways and require more imagination than realistic, specific props.

Encourage children to make their own props.

Ask good questions and make comments that extend the play.

Brainstorm with children about new uses for familiar objects (What might you do with a potato?).



Plan experiences that will provide scenarios for dramatic play.

On field trips, point on the people at the site, the roles they play and how they relate to each other.

When appropriate, help children plan their play: what they are going to play, who will play each role, and what is going to happen.

Learning that might be observed during dramatic play

Skills

- Uses props in symbolic representation
- Social competence: negotiation, cooperation, conflict resolution, friendship
- Increased vocabulary
- Demonstrate problem solving ability
- Plans his/her play
- Sorts and counts objects

Beyond Benchmarks

- Practice taking different perspectives through role playing
- Begin to demonstrate the ability to delay gratification

Dramatic play in other centers



Provide boats, people figures, and other materials in the water table.

Include puppets in the library area or set up a separate puppet play area.

Props in the block area will include animal and people figures, vehicles, clothing, and large boxes.

Watch for spontaneous dramatic play as children enjoy books and stories. Using flannel board pieces to retell a story can be a form of dramatic play.

The open space and equipment outdoors always stimulates dramatic play. Encourage dramatic play on your playground by providing blocks, animal and people figures, dishes, and other props that are easy to clean.

Books that inspire dramatic play

Who Took the Farmer's Hat? by Joan Nodset

The Doorbell Rang by Pat Hutchins

Just Me by Marie Hall Ets

Pete's Pizza by William Steig

Caps for Sale by Esphyr Slobodkina

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak

Good Dog, Carl by Alexandra Day



Recommended reading

"Chopsticks and Counting Chips: Do Play and Foundational Skills Need to Compete for the Teacher's Attention in an Early Childhood Classroom?", by Elena Bodrova and Deborah J. Leong. *Beyond the Journal*, May 2003.

http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200305/Chopsticks_Bodrova.pdf

DRAMATIC PLAY ENRICHMENT PLANNING GUIDE

First-hand experiences with the world around them enrich children's dramatic play and significantly strengthen their learning. Use this form to help you plan field trips and adapt it to plan enrichment experiences within your program.

Field trip site _____ Date of trip _____

Purpose of the trip _____

What will you do to prepare children for what they will experience on the trip?

What will the children see, hear, smell, touch, and taste during the trip? Who will the children see?

What dramatic play props will you provide for children after the trip?

I'm not just playing—I'm learning to read and write

Play is considered an important context in which to develop literacy skills. However, the role of play in literacy development goes well beyond opportunities to pretend or practice reading and writing. Vygotsky and his colleagues found that significant cognitive and social development occurs during play.

According to Leong, Bodrova, Hensen, and Henninger (1999), play promotes four major skills that are crucial to the development of literacy:

- Underlying cognitive skills—the ability to learn deliberately
- Development of symbolic representation
- Oral language
- Introduces literacy skills and concepts (purpose of reading and writing, practice on encoding and decoding messages, establishing sound to symbol correspondence, voice to print match, comprehension of text)

Through play children have many opportunities to use literacy skills in real ways. Including a variety of books and writing materials in every learning center will encourage children to draw pictures, consult books, make lists, label drawings, and engage in rich dramatic play schemes that naturally incorporate literacy concepts, behaviors and skills throughout the day.

Facilitating literacy through play

Provide open-ended materials that invite symbolic representation.

Incorporate songs, rhymes, chants into play.

Provide books in all interest areas.



Offer writing tools and paper in many areas.

Provide letter shapes to be used in play (sand molds, sponge letters, etc.)

Plan field trips and other first-hand experiences.

Support problem solving experiences.

Model reading and writing in meaningful contexts—making lists, creating signs.

From Play to Literacy

Sara Wilford, in "From Play to Literacy", has identified five distinct literacy goals that can be reached by supporting children's natural inclination towards playful endeavors.

Development of symbolic processes

Understanding that a prop or a person can be symbolized or represent something or someone else in a pretend play drama underpins the realization that a written word stands for a spoken word, and that letters, alone or in combination, can represent sounds.

- ✓ Provide a classroom structure that includes a flexible schedule and sufficient inviting materials.

Fostering of language growth, both semantic and contextual

In their dramas and discussions, children expand their vocabularies and elaborate on the meanings of their words and actions so as to be understood by others.

- ✓ Provide an environment that encourages literacy growth: songs, rhymes, and chants; a well-stocked classroom library; a designated place for play with graphic and written symbols; imaginative play.

The ability to solve problems in a meaningful, creative context

The problem solving that children engage in as they build a skyscraper or an airport, work through social dilemmas, or at later ages construct a game with rules has direct implications for toleration of trial and error crucial in creative writing and the prediction and decoding necessary for tackling a challenging text.

- ✓ Provide a curriculum that is relevant to children's interests and development and that is rich in problem-solving opportunities, trips and investigations.

The motivation or disposition to persist

While the term “practice” can imply dry and meaningless rote learning, motivation or the disposition to persist turns practice into pleasurable work such as rereading familiar texts as a bridge to more difficult ones, struggling with a book whose subject or story is of intrinsic interest to the reader, writing an important messages such as “Don’t knock down my building,” and dictating a letter or story.

- ✓ Provide a an environment that encourages children to experiment with language and supports imaginative play.

The joyful engagement in all aspects of literacy

This goal is intimately tied to motivation and to the centrality of *story* in human lives. It is the “fuel” that feeds a lifelong thirst for literacy and can be seen in children’s play with the sounds of language, their ebullience in the creation of dramatic scenarios, and the zest they bring to the choice of a new storybook or writing effort.

- ✓ Provide an environment that invites children to dictate stories, create stories, and listen to each other’s stories and that includes abundant opportunities for sharing high quality children’s literature.



Adapted from: Wilford, S. (2002). From Play to Literacy: Implications for the Classroom. *Issues in Early Childhood Education: Curriculum, Teacher Education, and Dissemination of Information*. <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/pubs/katzsym/wilford.html>

BOOK PLAY

By Susan Lindblom



How can books support good play?

Good play doesn't always just "happen." Children become more engaged in creative and productive play when teachers provide quality materials and a stimulating environment. Children's experiences and interests, as well as available props and materials, all contribute to sustained creative play.

Many teachers find that some type of "springboard" is sometimes helpful in facilitating good play in the classroom. Books and stories can be a wonderful catalyst to play as they provide information, stimulate imagination, and give children ideas and themes to use in all areas of the learning environment. A book about growing pumpkins can stimulate a gardening project and investigation of pumpkins, or a classic folk tale can stimulate rich dramatic play.

A wide variety of good quality children's books is important in an early childhood learning environment. Books to stimulate good play could be information books that focus on a real life event, object, or theme, or classic tales with engaging characters and interesting stories. Good play is most often stimulated by books or stories that involve objects, events, or situations that are familiar to children and can be easily expanded upon with real props and materials in the classroom and outdoor environment.

Props and activity ideas that extend a story can lead to greater exploration of a topic and comprehension of a story. Good extension activities can be introduced or supported by an adult, but can often be carried out in children's informal play during center time.

How to use questions to encourage play and thinking

Teachers can extend children's thinking about a book or story by asking good questions. Questions that begin with "I wonder...," or "Do you think...?" encourage children to relate stories to their own lives at home and at school. After a book is read aloud in a large or small group of children, teachers can ask children questions and record their answers on poster board or chart paper. Try to ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer, or follow up yes/no questions with further questions. (see pages 38-39, "Asking Good Questions") Post questions and children's responses in the environment so that they can be referred to as play develops in different areas of the classroom.

In the Tall, Tall Grass

By Denise Fleming

Rhyming words describe the actions of familiar backyard creatures. Each page contains simple text and colorful illustrations devoted to each creature, for example, "Pull, tug, ants lug..." and "Strum, drum, bees hum..."

Questions to Extend Children's Thinking

- Where have you seen a _____ before? (Fill in with creatures from the book: caterpillars, hummingbirds, bees, etc.)
- I wonder if we could find any of these creatures on our playground.?
- Do you think any of these creatures would make a good pet? Which ones and why?

Extensions for Play in Small Groups or Learning Centers

Make a large laminated picture card for each creature and place in a roomy area (such as the circle time area) during center time, along with a copy of the book. Children select a card and act out the movement or action of each creature. Younger children may need teacher support, but older children should be able to play independently. [Targets motor, creative and thinking skills.]

Provide magnifiers and "observation glasses" made from pipe cleaners or paper towel tubes for children to use outside. Encourage children to look for creatures during outdoor play, and make lists of creatures found from the book and creatures found not from the book. Count the number of creatures and compare the number found from the book with the number found not from the book.

[Targets observation, thinking, math and literacy skills.]

Provide props for the block area that include strips of green construction paper or fabric, figures representing as many of the creatures from the book as you can find, and a copy of the book. Encourage children to create their own "tall grass" and be creative in representing both creature actions found in the book and new actions not found in the book.

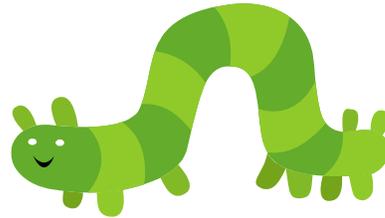
[Targets motor, creative and thinking skills.]



The Very Hungry Caterpillar

By Eric Carle

A caterpillar tries to satisfy his hunger by many different kinds of foods. The story incorporates the concepts of counting and the days of the week.



eating

passing of

Questions to Extend Children's Thinking

- Do you think caterpillars really eat _____ (ice cream, lollipops, etc)?
- How do you think you would feel if you ate all the food that the caterpillar ate?
- I wonder which food the caterpillar liked the best?

Extensions for Play in Small Groups or Learning Centers

Hold a tasting party using foods from the book. As children taste different foods, encourage them to describe tastes and flavors and record which foods are their favorites. Children's responses can be represented in many different ways including drawings, writing experiences and graphs. Post these in the learning environment so that children can refer to them as they engage in informal conversations and dramatic play.

[Targets observation, fine motor, math and literacy skills.]

Lead a discussion about healthy foods and "junk" foods with children. Cut out and laminate many different kinds of foods from magazines, advertisements and newspapers. During center time encourage children to sort cards into groups of healthy foods and junk foods. Observe to see other ways children think of to use the cards.

[Targets thinking skills.]

Raise a butterfly or moth from a caterpillar purchased from a kit (many educational supply companies sell these kits). Encourage children to observe each day as the caterpillar goes from chrysalis to moth. Children can make drawings of the different developmental stages, use tally marks to count the days spent in each stage, and describe and write about the changes taking place.

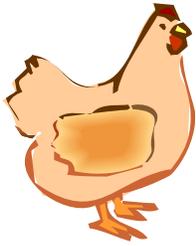
[Targets observation, thinking, math and literacy skills.]

Provide strips of colorful fabric in the dramatic play area. If children need prompting on how to use the strips, suggest that they might become butterflies.

[Targets creative and social skills.]

The Little Red Hen

By Paul Galdone



In this classic fairy tale, a hen works hard to grow wheat to make flour to use in a cake she bakes, while her companions choose to not help her. When the cake is finally ready, the dog, cat and mouse miss out on eating the delicious cake and learn a lesson about helping with household projects and chores.

Questions to Extend Children's Thinking

- What things do you do to help your family out at home?
- Do you think the hen should have let the other animals have some cake?
- I wonder if a hen could really make a cake all by herself? Why or why not?

Extensions for Play in Small Groups or Learning Centers

Provide props inspired by the story of the red hen. These might include typical housekeeping props such as dishes, pots and pans, brooms, gardening tools, pillows for the resting animals, and a copy of the book. Children can take turns acting out the parts of the different animals and can extend the story through their own experiences. [Targets creative and motor skills.]

Use a simple recipe to cook or make a snack with children. If kitchen facilities aren't available at your program, use a recipe that doesn't involve baking or that uses simple equipment such as a toaster oven. Make sure to observe safety precautions when cooking with children and that children wash their hands before handling any food items. [Targets self help, social, and math skills.]



Create a helper chart of jobs in the classroom that includes all children. Keep the jobs simple so that children can easily complete them independently. Post the chart in a conveniently accessible area and encourage children to incorporate their classroom jobs as part of their play during center time. [Targets social and self help skills.]



Pumpkin, Pumpkin

By Jeanne Titherington

A child plants a pumpkin seed and watches it grow into a plant that produces a pumpkin. He picks the pumpkin, scoops it out and carves a face into it. He saves a few seeds to plant in the spring for pumpkins the next year.

Questions to Extend Children's Thinking

- I wonder how many seeds are in our pumpkin?
- What kinds of food do you think we could make from a pumpkin? What else might we do with a pumpkin?
- I wonder if any pumpkins grow around where we live?
- Do you think pumpkins are any other color besides orange?

Extensions for Play in Small Groups or Learning Centers

Plant pumpkin seeds in small containers with children. Pumpkin vines will be too large to grow in a classroom, but children can take home the plants with instructions on how to care for them (refer to the back of seed packages for tips on raising pumpkins). If garden space is available at your program, pumpkin vines could be grown outside. As seeds grow, encourage children to observe what is happening using tools such as magnifiers and rulers. Provide writing materials for children to draw and record their observations.

[Targets observation, thinking, and literacy skills.]

Bring a pumpkin for children to investigate. Cut open the pumpkin and invite children to help scoop out the pulp. Encourage children to use words to describe the feeling of the pumpkin pulp and record their responses on poster board or chart paper. Ask children to make predictions about the number of seeds in the pumpkin and record their answers. Involve children in counting the seeds as much as possible and compare the actual number to the predictions that were made.

[Targets motor, thinking, observation, math, and literacy skills.]



Use a piece of string to measure around a large pumpkin. Cut pieces of string the same length as the pumpkin measurement and encourage children to find things in the classroom that are bigger than, smaller than, and the same length as the circumference of the pumpkin. Record their findings on poster board or chart paper and display in the learning environment.

[Targets thinking, math, and literacy skills.]

Resources



Play is the highest form of research.

Albert Einstein

Resources

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Arkansas Children's Week 2008
"I'm not just playing—I'm learning!"

Workshop Schedule

We know that children learn through play, but how can we teach through play? In this workshop we'll explore the value of play and learn more about how adults can facilitate learning through play. Dress comfortably and be prepared to have fun while you learn!

Competency Area: Supporting Learning and Development through Curriculum Planning and Implementation

Level: Intermediate

Time: All evening workshops are 5:30-8:30 p.m.
 Saturday workshops are 9:30 a.m. -12:30 p.m.

City	Date	Site
Arkadelphia	March 6	Community Enrichment Center 301 N. 23 rd (Feaster Park)
Batesville	March 6	UACCB, Independence Hall Room #104 2005 White Drive
Bentonville	March 31	Bentonville United Methodist, Hines Hall 201 NW Second
Cabot	March 18	First Methodist Church, Eaton Room 2003 South Pine
Conway	March 10	Adult Education Center 615 E. Robins Street
El Dorado	March 11	South Arkansas Community College 300 South West Ave.
Fayetteville	February 28	Donald W. Reynolds Boys and Girls Club 560 North Ruppel Rd.
Fort Smith	March 25	Fort Smith Public Library 3201 Rogers Avenue
Harrison	9:30-12:30 March 8	First United Methodist, Second Season Room 1100 West Bower
Hot Springs	9:30-12:30 March 15	St. Michael's School 1125 Malvern Avenue
Jonesboro	April 3	ASU Childhood Services 615 University Loop East

Little Rock	March 3	North Little Rock Community Center 2700 Willow Road
Magnolia	March 4	Bancorp South, Cal Partee Room 300 North Jackson
Monticello	March 25	UAM Gibson Center 517 University Drive
Mountain Home	April 3	ASU Mountain Home 1600 South College
Pine Bluff	March 10	JRMC Conference Center, Classroom R 1600 West 40 th
Russellville	March 13	First Methodist Church, Fellowship Hall 304 South Commerce
Springdale	March 4	Jones Center, St. Louis Room 221 922 East Emma
Texarkana	<i>9:30-12:30</i> March 1	Sugar Hill Methodist 1621 Sugar Hill Road
West Memphis	March 3	First United Methodist, John Mack Smith Room 215 North Missouri St.
Wynne	March 13	First United Methodist Church 800 North Falls Blvd.

REGISTER TODAY!

Call ASU Childhood Services, 1-888-429-1585, or 1-870-972-3055.

Register online, <http://chs.astate.edu>, click Training Opportunities

