

It Looks Like Play

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Introduction

- *Play is the work of childhood. Play is how children begin to understand their world. Play is the means by which children develop muscle strength, emotional understandings, knowledge about things and processes, feelings they have and relationships with other children and adults. Simply defined, Play is:*
- **Plenty** of appropriate, interesting, safe play materials are available to use.
- **Lots** of work space is provided.
- **Ample**, uninterrupted blocks of time to permit them to engage deeply and,
- **You**, to support, protect, appreciate. Keep play meaningful and keep play safe.

The Value of Play

- Playing with others is important to a child's development. Life skills are learned when children play that can help them to make and keep friends.
- When children play, they make choices, freely direct their activities with one another, practice, experiment and learn.
- When children play they learn how to cooperate, when to lead and when to follow and how to solve problems.
- As teachers we must remember that learning to play well with others is not a one-time lesson. It takes time and patience. Help the children with some activities and keep an eye on them at all times. Only get involved when they need your help. Give them a chance to resolve differences on their own.
- Accept that aggressive behavior is normal. When something happens that is upsetting, talk with everyone. Help each child try to see the other child's point of view. This will help children learn how to avoid and deal with arguments.

The Value of Play in the Classroom

One of the most effective measures of Play in the classroom is in Learning Centers/Areas/Stations.

Purpose of Learning Areas:

- They offer a variety of skill levels.
- They provide opportunities for children to try new things.
- They provide children opportunities to practice skills.
- They support social interactions between children.

In order to get the most out of these experiences, we need to set some guidelines for play.

- Provide the right amount of space.
- Plan how to respond in a positive manner.
- Redirect behaviors to a more positive activity.
- Teach children to use words to express feelings, desires and needs.
- Assume a child does something for a good reason, even if the action is not nice.
- Pay attention to basic comfort and needs.

The Importance of Play in Early Learning

Children's work is play. Through play, they learn, explore, experiment, discover and make life long connections. Early childhood educators know that children learn through their senses. Anything that they can touch, see, hear, smell or taste is a learning experience. Everyday activities in the classroom leads to learning.

- Circle Time - an opportunity for the children to learn how to organize their thoughts.
- Creative movement - children enjoy both listening to music and making their own; moving their body through space, in time to the music or pretending to be a falling leaf tapping into the child's imagination and artistic side. Finger play promotes language development, fine-motor skills and coordination as well as self-esteem. Listening to music also teaches important pre-reading skills. Creative movement expands a child's imagination and a fun method of physical fitness - one of the important goals of child development.
- Art-a good art project teaches a child that his creativity is limited only by is own imagination; reinforces and expands on the information a child has already learned in other context; excellent for developing a child's fine-motor skills. Art projects build a child's self-esteem. The process, not the product, is the most important element of preschool art projects.

The Importance of Play continued

- Outdoor Play - Outdoor fun is one of the favorite parts of any young child's day. Outdoor play refines a child's gross-motor skills. The cross lateral movement involved is critical to a child's later success in reading and writing. Outdoor play is also important because children can loose their imaginations while getting physical.
- Cooking - since cooking is a basic life skill, it fosters a child's sense of competence and independence when he can do it. Math skills are also an important part of the process as the cook needs to count and measure the ingredients. Cooking also refines small-motor skill as a child stirs, dices, and adds ingredients. It also teaches nutrition-foods that are good for you and help you grow. A child also discovers how things change if you alter the environment; liquid batter becomes a cake when baked; juice cups become popsicles when frozen. Cooking also helps a child's reasoning ability. He learns cause and effect.
- Snack Time - Snack time is an opportunity for a child to learn social skills as she chats with her friend in the seat next to her. Passing out the snack and distributing a napkin and a cup to each child teaches one-to-one correspondence and counting skills. Pouring the juice from a small pitcher to an individual cup requires small-motor control. Cleanup time after snack is another educational opportunity. A child's sense of competence and independence are reinforced. Also a time to associate mealtime with pleasant feelings.

The Importance of Play cont.

- Building with Blocks- Blocks helps children learn scientific, mathematical, art, social studies, and language concepts; use small-motor skills; and foster competence and self-esteem. Building with blocks also teaches life skills, using spatial relations, stability and balance. A child learns about depth, width, height, length, measurement, volume, area, classification, shape, symmetry, mapping, equality, and inequality - all from building with blocks. It also fosters a feeling of competence, teaches cooperation and respect for the work of others, encourages autonomy and initiative. Sorting and storing blocks teaches classification and one-to-one correspondence, which are important math skills.
- Dramatic Play - Playing make believe lets a child bring the complicated grown-up world down to size. Children who are active in pretend play are usually more joyful and cooperative, more willing to share and take turns, and have larger vocabularies than children who are less imaginative. Imaginative play helps children to concentrate, to be attentive, and use self control, to be flexible, and learn empathy for others. Dramatic play also encourages children to think abstractly, helping them to understand that words represent ideas.
- Manipulative Activities - helps children develop fine-motor skills, which is a precursor to being able to write.

The Importance of Play cont.

- Cooperative Play - working together helps children to learn to respect the ideas of others. They develop social skills, and social competence is an underlying goal of early childhood education. Children in cooperative play learn to contribute to joint efforts and how to problem solve by working together to find a solution.
- Sand and Water (Sensory) - a child has a practical math lesson in fractions when she pours a cup full of sand into a two-cup container. Her fine-motor skills are also being developed as she washes a tea set or maneuvers a cup full of sand into a sifter. Her eye-hand coordination is helped. It helps children to explore and learn about cause and effect.
- Puzzles - puzzles require abstract thinking: the ability to see a space and envision what belongs there. Puzzles also require fine-motor control to place the pieces into place. Having puzzles for varied skill levels permits children at all stages of development to experience success.
- Books - children learn language skills from books. Whether they are looking at a book individually, or being read to as part of a group, when you make books a part of a young child's day, you set the stage for a lifelong interest in reading.
- Cleanup - preschoolers learn to sort, classify, match, and organize when they put the toys back on the shelf. Children learn that helping behaviors and orderliness are valued. They learn how to follow simple directions, work together as a group is another exercise in cooperation, language and social skills. This also enhances competence, independence and responsibility along with self-esteem for a job well done.

Parent's Point of View

Early childhood educators understand the importance of play in young children's development. Parents on the other hand, do not. As a teacher of young children, we have a responsibility to help parent's understanding the importance of play.

- Play provides for all areas of child's development.
- Emphasizes learning as active/interactive process.
- Presents highly motivated opportunities for learning.
- Is pleasurable.
- Allows for differences in developmental ability, interest and learning style.
- Contributes to brain development.
- Promotes acquisition of foundational skills.

If none of this information help, then show them the section attached titled "What My Child is Learning". This is a list of the regular centers used and what skills they help children to develop. It will help parents to see *It Looks Like Play*, but is oh so much more!