



The Importance of Play

by Jenn Berman

In a rush to give our children academic and intellectual advantages, misguided schools and parents are pushing children to focus on reading, writing and testing. This, however, comes at the detriment of play, which is so crucial to their development. In a recent

report issued by The Alliance for Childhood, it was revealed that kindergarteners' playtime has greatly diminished. The study found that children spend four to six times as long being instructed and tested as they do in free play.

Studies show that play promotes problem solving, creativity, learning, attention span, language development, self-regulation, social skills, increases IQ and even helps children work through difficult life events. Play is the "work" of children. Here are eight reasons parents need to fight for play in the schools and make sure their children have free play at home:

Play Develops Problem-Solving Abilities

Researchers put a desirable toy in a clear box and told four and five-year-olds to get the toy out

of the box without moving out of their chairs or leaning towards it. One group of kids was allowed to play with sticks and toys, while a second group was shown a solution to a problem but were not allowed to play and a third group did not get either opportunity. The children who were allowed to play did much better than either of the other two groups. They worked more eagerly and persistently and demonstrated better problem-solving abilities.

Play Allows Children To Experiment With Being In Charge

Throughout their day, kids are told what to do. During play, children get to experience what it feels like to be in charge and gain a sense of mastery.

Play With Other Children Helps Social Development

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Play helps children learn important social skills like taking turns, collaboration, following rules, empathy, self-regulation, and impulse control.

Play Helps Children Assimilate Emotional Experiences

Pretend play, in particular, helps children integrate emotional experiences they need to work through. It allows them to express the things that they may not be sophisticated enough to talk about with adults.

Play Improves Concentration

Attention and concentration are learned skills. Play is one of the most natural enjoyable ways for a child to begin developing these skills. We have all seen a child so lost in play that they don't even hear a parent calling her name. This focus is the same skill that one needs years later to write a term paper, listen to a lecture or perform piano.

Play Helps Develop Mathematical Thinking

Because play teaches children about the relationships between things, it actually helps develop the type of reasoning that aids in math-

ematical performance. According to Professor Ranald Jerrell, an expert in development of mathematical thinking, "Experimental research on play shows a strong relationship between play, the growth of mathematical understanding, and improved mathematical performance."

Play Promotes Language Development

Play, especially dramatic play, requires children to use and be exposed to language. In a study of four-year-olds who frequently engaged in socio-dramatic play, researchers found that when compared to a non-socio-dramatic playgroup, these children exhibited an increase in the total number of words used, the length or their utterances, and the complexity of their speech.

Repetition Of Play Creates Neural Pathways

Each time a child performs a play activity, like stacking blocks, the synapses between brain cells are activated, and over time the level of chemicals needed to make that connection becomes less and less, making it easier to perform the task.



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