

September 13, 2014

Dear Parents:

A well-known psychologist, Jean Piaget, once wrote “play is the work of children,” but what exactly is the “work” that children do and why is it important?

Decades of research in early childhood education have consistently reported that play is vital to a child’s social-emotional development and academic success. However, not everyone understands the connection of play to learning and development. As a teacher in your community, I continually strive to provide your children with a developmentally appropriate, high quality play-based curriculum. The following information summarizes the benefits of play from Hoorn et al. (2014) and Nell et al. (2013).

Physical Development: Through play, children refine their gross and fine motor skills by engaging in a wide variety of movement. As children mature, play helps strengthen their muscles in complex ways, helping them develop a stronger sense of body awareness, space, and direction.

Cognitive Development: Playful experiences help children build healthy neural connections. Play creates new brain pathways that didn’t exist before, and with every connection, a child’s mind is strengthened and enhanced. These neural connections facilitate children’s decision-making and problem solving skills that are necessary for future academic learning.

Language Development: Playful social interactions provide children with a safe, risk-free environment to practice communicating through meaningful conversations, gestures, art, and other forms of verbal and nonverbal communication. Play allows language to naturally emerge.

Math and Science Development: Experiences with hands-on materials such as blocks contribute to children’s understanding of mathematical and scientific concepts. Just as engineers go through the design process in figuring out how things work, young children go through the very same process. Through trial and error, children learn about concepts such as gravity and the laws of physics as they produce tall towers and complex architectural constructions.

Social-Emotional Development: Play provides an authentic context for children to make friends, manage their emotions, and make safe choices. For instance, when children play together, they learn to self-regulate their behavior in order to remain cooperatively engaged.

The work of childhood, play, is the cornerstone of early childhood education. I have provided you with some valuable information on the importance of play. I hope you as a parent will become an advocate for the integration of play in the daily life and learning of young children. Play isn’t just fun, it develops essential physical and thinking skills that are crucial for your child’s social-emotional development and academic success throughout their life. If you would like more information or have any questions on this important topic, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Ryan Kurada, M.Ed.
Elementary School Teacher

References

Hoorn, J. V., Nourot, P. M., Scales, B., & Alward, K. R. (2014). *Play at the center of the curriculum* (6th ed.). Pearson.

Nell, M. L., Drew, W. F., & Bush, D. E. (2013). *From play to practice: Connecting teacher's play to children's learning*. Washington, DC: NAEYC