



PLAY IS THE WAY TO LEARNING

By Mary Stuart, E.C.E.D.H.

Forget the flash cards, and the ABC homework sheets, if we want to see our children become competent, critical thinking and harmonious human beings, we'll get off the "fast-food style" of "education" and get back to the basics of learning for young children which is simply PLAY. Ask any leading expert - Dr. Lillian Katz, Dr. Spock, Penelope Leach, Dr. Stanley Greenspan, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, Dr. Frasier Mustard and any new upcoming researcher they will all agree, prove and promote that: **PLAY IS THE WAY TO LEARNING.**

Real learning for children *and adults* is hands on. Regardless of what the media and what "child expert" companies selling extremely expensive gadgets, toys, CD, DVD, you can't hurry learning, you can not create super babies/children, you can't give them an "edge" over others - but you can retard the process, produce anxious children, and turn-off children to learning with too much emphasis on ROTE learning - being able to regurgitate 123's, ABC's. Child development is DEVELOPMENT. Each and every child goes through stages of growth and they develop. That is the way it is.

This is the time of year that our centres are gearing up for a new year and there are always some teachers and parents alike that want to get "updated"; try something new. That is our nature; that is what we tend to do. However, new and old research stills tells us the same:

CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH PLAY.

So what are they doing? What are they learning?

Play develops curiosity and self determination. Through active exploration of materials attractively displayed, children have to opportunity to explore at their own pace determining for themselves what materials can/can't do. It is active and it is creative.

Play builds knowledge of ourselves and social relationships. The "Mine/Me" stages has an opportunity to move to the co-operative play stage by interacting with others in games, in manipulative areas, in negotiating for the red block, blue car, leader/follower in the imaginary trip to the zoo. Just like all areas of development, social skills have to be taught, coached and practiced. Play is how children discover what are acceptable negotiation techniques and which are not. Controlling the emotions of rejections, of misunderstandings, frustrations and anger in a safe comfortable way enhances a child's enjoyment with himself and with others. This is a good thing...

Play builds self-esteem, a sense of personal power and problem-solving skills. With hands-on, self-directed satisfying materials, play teaches children to believe in their own inspirations; they can plan, make decisions, experience control and express ideas through their active, play-filled creativity. The encounter problems and learn how to solve them. How do I make the Lego tower get bigger without falling over? How do I make those sand castles? How do I get my red car back from Sam? Confronting problems in play helps children learn how to see options, to try different solutions and to make decisions.

Play builds language and communications skills. As children develop a greater understanding of objects, materials and relationships, they begin to master their meaning and vocabulary and complex ideas begin to form. Communication comes while practicing conversations skills such as paying attention to someone who's talking, listening carefully and then taking turns.

Play builds both large and small physical skills. Building balance, strength, co-ordination all comes from fun-fill exhilarating opportunities to run, jump, skip, climb, openly and freely in a safe and happy, encouraging environment.

Little hands want to do but can't until the right stage of development is acquired and that comes from manipulating playdough - pinching, poking, from experimenting with paint brushes, markers, crayons chalk. After this stage, comes the time for pencils, scissors and their finer requirements. Who wants to sit at a desk and copy??? We didn't like it back in our day why should we possibly think this would work now?

Play brings all learning together. It is multi-dimension, multi-sensory, comfortable and natural. As much as we want to move away from it, we can't:

PLAY IS THE WAY TO LEARNING! So let's have some FUN!

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