

PLAY-Based Learning

Teachers and Administrators

What is Play-Based Learning?



Self-Chosen



Enjoyable



Process Oriented

Children naturally learn through play by engaging in and making sense of their world. Play-based learning is self-chosen, enjoyable and process oriented. These opportunities are experiences that are child directed and teacher facilitated. In play-based learning, teachers take an active role as intentional planners, observers and guides. Play-based learning maintains the joy of free play while allowing children to connect authentically with content. When children co-construct their learning with their teachers and peers, they apply it to their own lives and make meaningful personal discoveries as they progress towards learning goals.

Benefits of Play-Based Learning

- Builds executive function skills, content knowledge and creative thinking.
- Enhances problem solving skills.
- Develops reading, vocabulary and writing skills.
- Builds counting, classifying, measurement and patterning skills.
- Grows prediction and observation skills.
- Offers the opportunity to test ideas and make modifications.
- Helps children learn about themselves and the world around them.
- Allows children to apply what they learn to new situations.
- Builds confidence, the ability to collaborate and to express their feelings.
- Produces opportunities to expand thinking and try new things.
- Motivates children to take “safe” risks.

Masterson, Marie L., and Holly Bohart. *Serious Fun: How Guided Play Extends Children's Learning*. National Association for the Education of Young Children, 6453.

Shafer, Leah. “Summertime, Playtime.” *Harvard Graduate School of Education*, June 6452,

“Children learn as they play. More importantly, in play, children learn how to learn.”

-O. Fred Donaldson



Play-Based Learning: Role of the Teacher



Intentional Planning



When planning activities, specifically think about what you want the children to learn, how will you set the stage, what conversations or vocabulary you can introduce, and what teaching strategies you will use to deepen the play experience and foster the and outcome you desire.

Creating Challenges



Think about how you can extend play by adding to it or by giving the children a challenge that will bolster their learning through play.

Setting the Environment



Do you intentionally plan your environment? Do you think about furniture arrangement, access to materials, displays and the schedule of the day? Does the environment reflect the learning happening in your room?

Helping Children Solve Problems



When challenges arise, use probing questions, model and help guide the child to problem solving solutions.

Asking Guiding Questions



Prompt children to think and talk about their ideas. Asking guiding questions extends children's thinking while offering open-ended support.

Giving Specific Feedback



Offer children positive, specific feedback in a timely manner. Focus on one or two comments at a time. Asking for feedback from children in return increases their sense of importance and encourages critical thinking.

Encouraging Effort & Persistence



Congratulate children's efforts throughout the process and not just for a completed project.

Observing, Documenting & Assessing



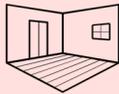
Use ongoing observations and documentation to help assess children's growth and development.

Setting the Stage for PLAY-Based Learning

Learning Environments

“The classroom is also a teacher,
what do you want your classroom to say?”

Room Arrangement & Materials



The environment sets the stage for the learning that will occur. A well designed physical space has different areas for children to play in. All of the usable space should be fluid and reflect the children’s needs. The room arrangement and materials should promote discovery, exploration and encourage progress towards learning goals.

Materials & Accessibility



Materials are an important part of the environment and should be intentional and accessible to the children everyday. In a play-based learning classroom, consider open ended learning materials such as loose parts, wooden blocks, dramatic play accessories and a sensory table. These types of materials allow children to create their own meaning in imaginative ways.

Scheduling



Your schedule is a part of the environment. Children need plenty of time to engage in child-led experiences and deep play.

Guided play-based learning should be weaved into your schedule throughout the day. The longer children have to engage, explore, reflect and construct, the more learning that occurs.

“Play is not a serious break from learning ,
play is learning.” - Fred Rogers

Environment Reflects Learning



The environment should reflect the learning that takes place in the classroom. Children should see their work displayed and be able to use visual resources to enhance their experience. Displays can consist of student work, photographs, pictures and anecdotal notes with learning goals. This type of environment can be a visual documentation of the learning that is taking place in your classroom.



Frequently Asked Questions about Play-Based Learning

For Families and Guardians

Is this going to affect my child's readiness for kindergarten and first grade?

Yes. Children who learn in a play-based environment have strong collaboration, communication and critical thinking skills as well a meaningful connection to content, creative innovation and confidence. Play-based learning helps children develop social skills, language and numeracy skills. Children who learn through play take initiative, have focused attention, and are motivated to learn.



Will my child be academically challenged?

Yes. Children in play-based programs score better on measures of self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and working memory (Diamond et al. 2007). Self-regulation and impulse control is predictive of later academic success. Engaging in play with teachers and peers helps children develop holistically through social-emotional learning, developing confidence and motivation, and practicing cognitive skills.

Are they just playing all day?

No, even in a play-based learning environment there is a place for teacher led instruction. However, children benefit from extended time within the day that is dedicated solely to guided play. This is a time when they take the lead and direct their own experiences. Children practice and reinforce their learning in multiple areas during play. Play gives them a space and a time for learning that cannot be achieved through teacher created activities. For example, in playing restaurant, children write and draw menus, set prices, take orders, and sort food groups. Play provides rich learning opportunities and leads to children's success and self-esteem.

What is my child learning? Through play, children's learning is deeper and more meaningful as they make sense of their world and apply their ideas to other areas of learning. Through play, children develop cognitive problem solving, critical thinking skills and perspective taking. Block play allows children to explore measurement and use comparative and mathematical language while experimenting and exploring scientific concepts. Children experience social problem solving, perspective taking, cooperation, and collaboration during play. Dramatic play supports the development of and authentic use of literacy skills such as speaking and listening. Children develop confidence and creative expression as they play.



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For Families and Guardians

What is the teacher's role in guided play-based learning?

In a play-based learning environment, the teacher's role is to be a facilitator of play. Teachers set the environment for learning, they ask guiding questions, design challenges, offer vocabulary and give feedback. As children play, teachers are making observations and documenting what they are seeing so they can set the stage for learning the next day. They use these observations for authentic assessment.



How can I support my child's play-based learning at home?



To support your child's learning at home, play with your child, ask questions, experiment, encourage curiosity by saying what you see them doing and just have fun. Respond positively to your child's interest. "Playing with your child helps to keep them engaged in the type of play where learning occurs. Your interest, questions and comments as you play along side will help your child use materials productively and the two of you will have lots of fun together." Gronlund, G. (n.d.). How to Support Children's Approaches to Learning? Play with Them! Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/support-learning-with-play>

Family & Guardian Resource:

[NAEYC position statement](#) on Developmentally Appropriate Practice

"Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence. [Play] gives [children] opportunities to develop physical competence and enjoyment of the outdoors, understand and make sense of their world, interact with others, express and control emotions, develop their symbolic and problem-solving abilities, and practice emerging skills." (NAEYC 2009, 14)

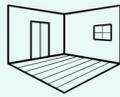


PLAY-BASED Learning

Types of Play: There Is a Difference

Guided Play

Guided play is the foundation for play-based learning. The teacher sets the stage by creating an environment that promotes exploration and discovery. Many open-ended materials should be provided to support the learning goals and objectives for each day. Children direct how materials are used. Teachers guide and support children by intentionally planning invitations to play and asking open-ended questions to promote engagement and discovery along with creative innovation, critical thinking, collaboration, connection to content and confidence.



Be intentional about the goals you want to achieve, environment you create, the materials you supply, the conversations you have and the observations you document.

Teacher Constructed Playful Learning Experiences

All early learning should be playful. The difference between teacher constructed playful learning and guided play is who initiates the experience. In teacher constructed playful learning experiences, the teacher takes the lead and gives instructions with set expectations. In guided play, children take the lead and choose how they will use the provided space and materials.

Free Play

Free Play is another form of play. This type of play is when the children have all the control and choose all the materials and decide how they want to use them. Free play differs from guided play in that the teacher is not creating activities with specific learning goals in mind. For example, when the children go outside to play for recess, they have autonomy to choose how to spend their time.

