

## Play Your Way to Literacy



### The Work of Play

Presented by Dr. Betsy Diamant-Cohen

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## Agenda

1. Value of play – supported by research
2. Ages and Stages
3. Play and Storytime
4. Types of play
5. Lack of Play
6. Improving the quality of children's play
7. Practical tips for adding more play

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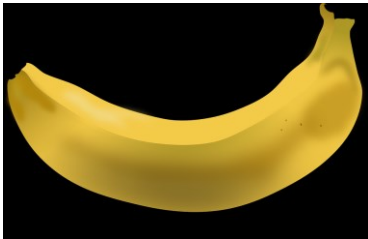
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## Go Bananas!



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## A is for Apple...

Write down as many words, experiences, activities and concepts that can relate to a real apple.

Describe how it looks, smells, feels, tastes...

Describe what you can do with it...

Describe what you can know about apples...

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## Direct Experience Leads to Understanding

- RIGHT ON, PIAGET!!!
- "Hands on, minds on, feelings on" experiences are the foundation for the development of symbolic understanding



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## Direct, Hands-On Experience

- Stimulates language
- Leads to understanding
- Allows the formation of symbolic thought
- Involves multiple pathways in the brain
- Holds the power of DISCOVERY learning



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# play

/plā/ 

## verb

Engage in an activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose.

## noun

Activity engaged in for enjoyment or recreation, especially by children.

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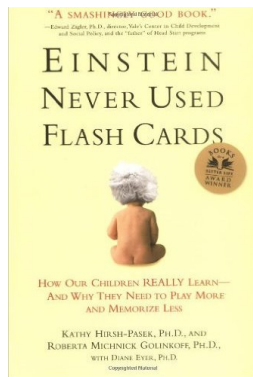
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“Drill & Kill”

vs

Learning  
Through  
Experimentation  
and Play



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## Dr. Stuart Brown

- Founder, National Institute of Play
- Trained in general and internal medicine, psychiatry and clinical research
- Instigator and Executive Producer of the three-part PBS series, “The Promise of Play.”

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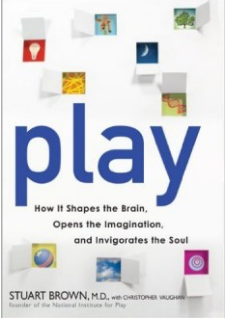
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"The opposite of play is not work – the opposite of play is depression."

*Dr. Stuart Brown*

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### Dr. Brown's 7 Properties of Play

1. Apparently purposeless (done for its own sake)
2. Voluntary
3. Inherent attraction
4. Freedom from time
5. Diminished consciousness of self
6. Improvisational potential
7. Continuation desire




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### Play affects mental and physical health

- Emotional control
- Social competency
- Personal resiliency
- Continuing curiosity




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Play is an essential part of a child's life.



- Enables perspective-taking
- Builds social and linguistic competence
- Builds relationships

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Play builds social, emotional, and cognitive skills



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**Research supports the value of play;  
It builds skills in many domains**



- Relieves stress, confronts fear
- Fine & gross motor skills
- Language & communication skills
- Math skills
- Science skills
- Social skills

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## Developmental Tips are Your Tools To Help Parents

A few short and simple sentences with 3 parts

- 1. **WHAT?** – Identifies what the action is
- 1. **WHY?** – Tells parents why it is important
- 1. **HOW?** – Explains how it might be replicated at home

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Now, think of a Developmental Tip!




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From birth to 12 months, children use ALL of their senses.



Babies enjoy:

- Exploring the world
- Having pleasurable play interactions with parents and other people
  - Builds babies sense of self-worth
- Being entertained with songs, books and conversations
  - Is the beginning of reading readiness




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Books can be played with or read aloud



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From 12 months to 24 months, children build relationships and discover what their bodies can do.



They enjoy:

- Playing peek-a-boo,
- Handing an item to someone and taking it back,
- Waving and blowing kiss,
- Following one-step directions and getting appreciation.
- Hearing stories, looking at pictures and what they are.



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Strengthening Parent/Child Bonding while building social, emotional, and literacy skills



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**From 24 months to 36 months, children learn problem solving.**



They enjoy:

- Showing that they have minds of their own,
- Experimenting with independence,
- Puzzles
- Moving- crawling, leaping, running and walking
- Often wanting to do things "by myself."



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**At age three, children participate in pretend play.**



They enjoy:

- Playing dress-up and make-believe games,
- Sharing toys with others,
- Listening to stories (while seated!),
- Playing games with playmates.



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**From ages three to five, the world of play expands!**



Preschoolers enjoy:

- Storytelling with others during imaginary play,
- Conversations,
- Somersaults and tumbling,
- Painting,
- Counting,
- Word play.

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### Storytime/ Circle Time Builds Early Literacy Skills

- ✦ Exposes children to books
- ✦ Build vocabulary
- ✦ Introduces other people's point of view through stories
- ✦ Expands general knowledge
- ✦ Models book reading behavior




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### The Six Skills That Help Children Become Ready to Learn to Read

- Print awareness**
- Letter knowledge**
- Phonological awareness**
- Vocabulary**
- Narrative skills**
- Print motivation**




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### ECRR2: Five Practices that Help Children Become Ready to Learn

- Talk
- Sing
- Read
- Write
- Play




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### Storytime/Circle Time Can Also....

- ❖ Awaken imagination
- ❖ Give opportunities to practice teamwork
- ❖ Help children practice their self-regulation skills
- ❖ Strengthen parent/child bonds
- ❖ Incorporate play experiences
- ❖ Build 21<sup>st</sup> century skills




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### 21<sup>st</sup> century skills



Creative thinking, being able to go outside of the box, is developed through play experiences.

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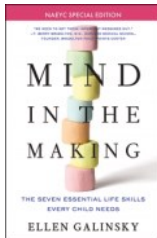
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### Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs

1. Focus and self-control
2. Perspective taking
3. Communicating
4. Making connections
5. Critical thinking
6. Taking on challenges
7. Self-directed, engaged learning




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**Storytime is not a performance**



Welcoming Comments remind parents that it is participatory and explains why it is valuable.

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**Infusing Play into Your Storytimes!**



It's time to get serious about play!

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**Different types of play can strengthen a variety of skills and lead to literacy.**



1. Physical play
2. Competitive play
3. Puppet play
4. Arts and crafts play
5. Music play
6. Constructive play
7. STEM play
8. Book play
9. Role-playing, storytelling, and fantasy play
10. Digital media play

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## 1. Physical Play

- Movement fires up the brain
- Builds fine and gross motor skills
- Entices children to exercise
- Promotes health
- Gets out excess energy
- Helps children practice behavior regulation
- Increases focus and retention
- Enhances learning by physically acting out words and concepts



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## Ages and Stages of Physical Play



- ✓ Infants kicking and waving,
- ✓ Babies rolling and crawling,
- ✓ Toddlers pushing and walking,
- ✓ Children climbing, running, hugging, tagging, jumping, leaping, hopping, turning, and dancing. (Preschoolers have more finely developed motor skills)



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## Recommendation: Add Movement to Storytime!

Allows children to connect concepts to actions.

Develops self-awareness and self-regulation.

Helps retain learning.



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## Creative Movement Leaping Lizards



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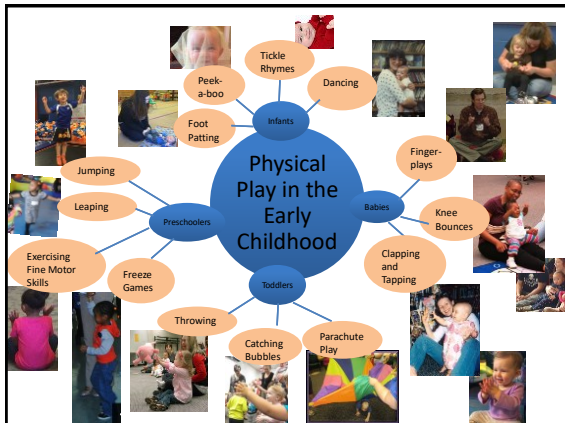
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## 2. Competitive Play

- Teaches rule-following and turn-taking
- Builds self-confidence when a child wins
- Teaches how to accept losing with grace (hopefully!)
- Involves functioning as part of a team.



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### Examples of Competitive Play



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### 3. Puppet Play Benefits

- Gives children practice communicating
- Prompts children to use words and sentences
- Builds narrative skills
- Is a natural platform for using the imagination



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### Children love puppets.

Puppets can put shy children at ease. They easily capture children’s attention.



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### Acting out the story of "The Three Little Pigs"



(with construction paper puppets)



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### Activity: Puppet Interviews

- Interview your puppet.
  - Ask for the puppet's name.
  - Find out what the puppet's favorite activity is.
  - What is the puppet's favorite food?



- Be ready to introduce your puppet and share his/her/its answers with the group!

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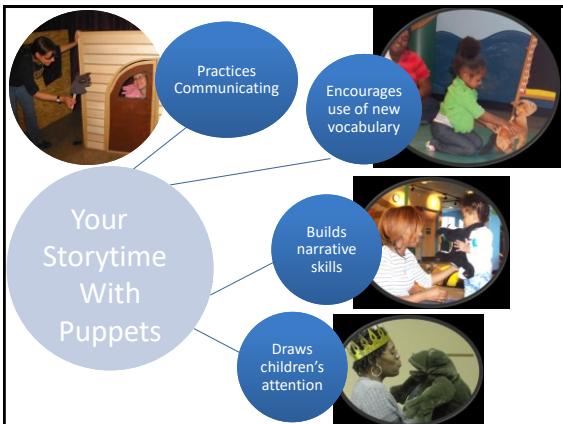
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**4. Arts and Crafts Play**

- Helps to build fine motor skills which are later used for writing
- Encourages creativity
- Exposes children to a variety of materials
- Enhances visual literacy



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### 5. Music Play - Singing

Singing is great way to teach vocabulary words and to recognize emotions.



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### Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Row, row, row your boat,  
Gently down the stream.  
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,  
Life is but a dream.



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A collage of circular images showing children engaged in musical activities. One child is playing a xylophone, another is playing a drum, and others are playing stringed instruments. A large blue circle in the center contains the text "Your Storytime with Musical Instruments". Two smaller blue circles contain the text "Cause and Effect" and "Listening Skills".

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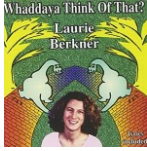
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### Using Musical Instruments Strengthens Listening Skills



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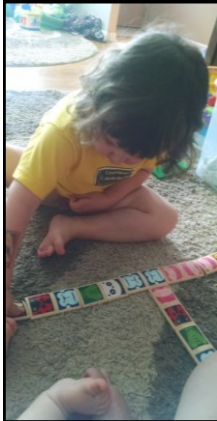
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### 6. Constructive Play

- Learning through action and observation
- Practices engineering skills: manipulation, building, and fitting things together.
- Applies cognitive and motor skills



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**T**ake five minutes or an hour,  
 Build a car, or build a tower.  
 Make up a story, tell that, too.  
 I want to hear the tale from you.  
 I might then ask a thing or two,  
 And listen for your point of view.

Help children build these STEM skills:  
 Constructing  
 Creative Thinking  
 Making Hypotheses

### Using Block Play In Your Spaces

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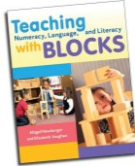
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## Playing with blocks encourages imagination



It also builds math and language skills

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## Block play can build self-esteem



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## Block play strengthens early literacy skills

I just built the biggest castle in the world!

This is a castle.  
Girls only!



Block play builds problem solving skills.

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The **IMPORTANCE** OF **PLAY**.  
 Particularly **CONSTRUCTIVE** Play,  
 IN **PUBLIC LIBRARY PROGRAMMING**



**ALSA**  
Written for the Association for Library Service to Children by Sue McCool Nispeaco  
 Adopted by ALA's Board of Directors, September 10, 2012

### Let's Build!

1. Divide into groups.
2. Group A builds while Group B observes and takes notes.
3. Group B observes while Group A observes and takes notes.

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**7. STEM Play**

- Involves experimentation
- Introduces children to science, technology, and math in fun ways
- Encourages children to recognize science in the world around them
- Models enjoyable learning activities for parents




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**Soakers go well with Arts & Crafts Activities**

- Pop-up programming
- "Soak up" time
- Works with all ages





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### Diffusion Butterflies

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### Floam!

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### Simple Steps for Soakers

- 1. Portable.
- 2. Simple (not too many “props” involved; easy to set up and disassemble).
- 3. Safe (only use non-toxic materials and never leave the table unattended).
- 4. Age appropriate.
- 5. Unusual (not something that a child is likely to do at home or at school).

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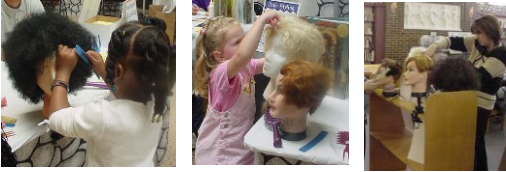
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Soakers can involve science experiments, arts and crafts, and even hairdressing!



Rapunzel's Hair Styling Salon

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What's Inside?  
*Using the clues to form a hypothesis*



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Making snow  
*(sodium polyacrylate )*



<http://www.thinkgeek.com/product/79ea/?cpg=cj&ref=&CJURL=&CJID=1215086>

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### Exploring Size -- Moving Molecules *Can you make the pinwheels spin?*



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### Soakers can go along with books



Write your own story



Make woolly sheep



Try origami



Pet a Rabbit



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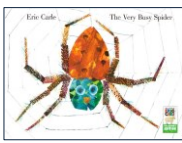
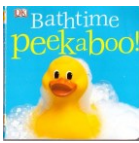
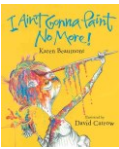
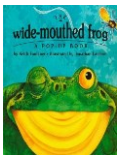
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### 8. Book Play

- Builds motivation for learning how to read
- It's fun!!!
- Legitimizes using a book without reading it



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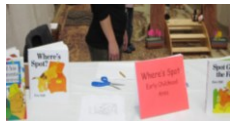
### Create temporary early literacy spaces!

During Children's Book Week, section off part of your library and make a children's book come alive.

Choose a book.

Create stations with activities.

Use signs.



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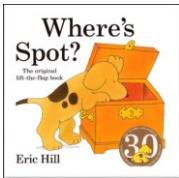
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### Where's Spot?



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Using a simple plastic bucket, a ladle, shredded paper, a bowl, and a stuffed animal dog makes the story come alive.



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### Rosie's Walk




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### 9. Scarf Play



**Playing with colored translucent scarves** ignite everyone's imagination. They can be waved, blown, scrunched up, and thrown.

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### Other forms of Imaginative Play: *Role-playing, Storytelling, and Fantasy Play*

- Encourages a natural mode of learning
- Allows children to construct meaning in their worlds
- Strengthens psychological, intellectual and social development




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### 10. Digital Media Play - Benefits

- Build's upon children's aptitude for technology
- Familiarizes children with technology.
- Gives opportunities for collaboration
- Encourages social interactions
- Enables some children to communicate better
- Allows non-writing children to express themselves in print




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Technology itself is not good or bad, it is what is done with it that matters.




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What's happening to creativity?



"The more our time 'digital native' kids spend on entertainment media, the more we lose the tactile intelligence critical to design and manufacture physical products. So let's encourage children to start physically building and tinkering again."

(Leonard & Bridges 2013)

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### The Conversation Duet

#### Research Tidbits

Passive viewing does not stimulate the brain  
Cell-phone interruptions reduce learning

#### BUT

Back-and-forth interaction matters  
Video chats between people are the same as personal conversations



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Most computer games are not open-ended

#### Electronic games often:

- follow a script
- involve repetitive actions to reach a goal without stimulating the imagination
- electronic games played individually often replace group or team games.



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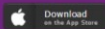


### Felt-Board Mother Goose on the Loose



#### Felt Board - Mother Goose on the Loose

Felt Board - Mother Goose on the Loose is a nursery rhyme flannel board app designed for young children to use together with parents and caregivers. Children can move felt pieces, sing, and tap along with popular nursery rhymes and songs.



<http://www.softwaresmoothie.com/app/felt-board-mother-geese-loose/>

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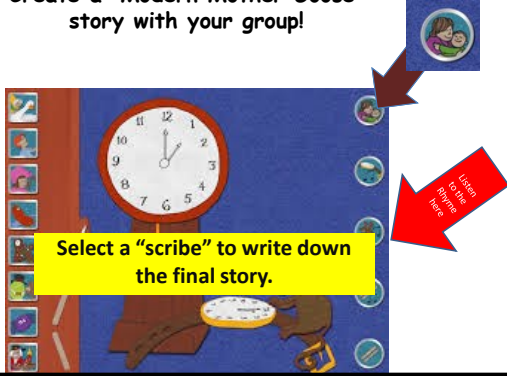
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Create a "Modern Mother Goose" story with your group!



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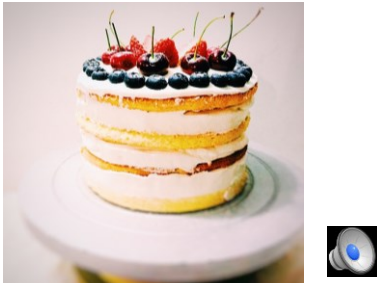
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Let's use technology to build self-regulation skills!



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Another Freeze Game



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### Tips about Using Digital Media

Using apps in storytime




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**BECOMING A MEDIA MENTOR**  
A Guide for Working with Children and Families

Claudia Haines, Gen Campbell, and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC)  
FOREWORD BY CHIEF OF BOSTON

**The best way parents can help their children prepare for the future is by talking, singing, reading, writing, and playing with them.**

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Guided play is a planned play environment, enriched with objects that provide hands-on, experiential learning opportunities, infused with learning goals.

*Berger, 2008*




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### 5. Lack of Play

Despite the enormous benefits of play, genuine play experiences for many children in the United States today are limited.



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“Monkey bars” were once considered standard playground equipment



Picture by Nels P. Olsen, creative commons:  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/deed.en>



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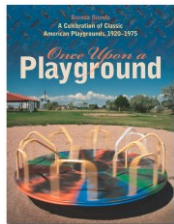
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Carousels were also popular, since they helped children build many skills

- Develops muscle integration and strength
- Improves balance
- Gives children experience with taking risks
- Involves working together as a team



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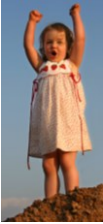
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### These types of risky play involved



- Goal-setting
- Determination
- Persistence
- Coordination
- Strong muscles
- Conquering fear
- Learning through mistakes
- Building sense of competence & self-confidence




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### Playground equipment today

- Strengthens muscles
- Promotes safe, fun activity
- Tries to inspire imagination
- May include “academic games”




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### Play is disappearing!



In 1981, a typical school-age child in the US had 40% of her time open for play. By 1997, the time for play had shrunk to 25%

In the last two decades, children have lost 8 hours of free play per week. *(Elkind, 2008)*

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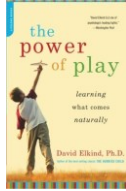
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## Problems with the State of Play

- In preschools
  - Some still mistakenly focus on academics
- In schools
  - Accountability has replaced creativity
  - Recesses have been shortened or eliminated
- In neighborhoods
  - Safety concerns keep children indoors
- In homes
  - Electronic games played individually often replace group board games




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## 6. Suggestions for Improving Children's Play Experiences

1. Nurturing environment
2. Scaffolding / guided play
3. Engage parents via developmental tips and written prompts
4. Take inventory of your space for play opportunities and make the most of it
5. Keep it inclusive!




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## 1. Create a Nurturing Environment

**It's all about Connections!**




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### “Learning” according to Mr. Rogers

- Self-esteem
- Sense of trust
- Capacity to look & listen carefully
- Curiosity
- Capacity to play
- Times of solitude




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## 2. Scaffolding / Guided Play

“Zone of Proximal Development”



New knowledge builds on previous learning.

Ideal learning takes place when adults look at where children are and then **scaffold** them!

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### “What Babies Know About Physics and Foreign Language”

The new information economy, as opposed to the older industrial one, **demand more innovation and less imitation, more creativity and less conformity.**

New studies show that explicit instruction, the sort of teaching that goes with school and “parenting,” can be limiting. When children think they are being taught, they are much more likely to simply reproduce what the adult does, instead of creating something new.

- Alison Gopnik, NY Times, July 30, 2016




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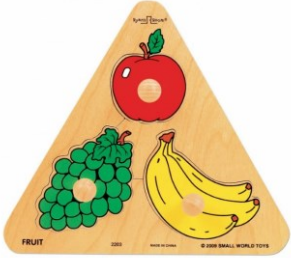
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### Puzzle guided play



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This is NOT an example of scaffolding!

Take that block and put it over here.



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This is NOT scaffolding either.

What letter is on that beanbag?



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Labeling is not scaffolding.

What a nice structure you are building.

What a nice structure you're building.

What structure do you have here?

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### 3. Use Developmental Tips to Engage Parents

**THE EARLY LITERACY KIT**  
A Handbook and Tip Cards

**Social and Emotional Development** **S.T.**

**Tip**  
When you play your children's favorite activities, try changing the objects they use to play with. For example, use a toy car to play with blocks or a toy truck to play with a ball. This helps children learn to use objects in new ways and encourages them to play with objects in new ways.

**Language Development** **L.T.**

**Tip**  
When you play your children's favorite activities, try changing the objects they use to play with. For example, use a toy car to play with blocks or a toy truck to play with a ball. This helps children learn to use objects in new ways and encourages them to play with objects in new ways.

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## Developmental Tips

- As an “aside” during library programs
- As an “aside” during informal conversations with library visitors
- “Dropped into conversation” while speaking with a parent in the Early Literacy Play Area

**Try memorizing one or two developmental tips, or keep them written on cards at your desk.**

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It's great that he's playing with blocks; he's problem solving.

Look! She's figuring out how tall she can get them and which shapes fit together.

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Let parents know the vital role they play in ensuring their child has a healthy play "diet"



**Eat 3 well-balanced meals every day**  
 FEEL BETTER  
 WORK BETTER  
 FEWER ACCIDENTS  
 Eat the basic 7 EVERY DAY!

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### 3. Engage Parents

A few simple signs with intentional words can help expand an activity and increase its benefits.

Signs can tell parents about the value of play



**Tidal Pools**  
 Growing...  
 Smiling, rolling, wriggling too,  
 Are things most babies like to do,  
 Help your baby bond with you,  
 By playing games like "Peek-a-boo."  
 Working for together needs and wants,  
 Are children's developmental needs.

But.... too many signs create clutter

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### Fill in the blanks for Positive Play Experiences

- "Thank you for \_\_\_\_\_."
- "What a good problem solver you are, you were able to \_\_\_\_\_."
- "It's so much fun to play with you; you are so good at \_\_\_\_\_." (sharing, taking turns)
- "You were being so kind when you \_\_\_\_\_."

*The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning*

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### 6. Practical Tips for Adding more Play




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### Inventory Your Physical Spaces for Play Opportunities



Where can you add stimulation for more play in your physical environment?

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Provide toys and games

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### Use Early Literacy Activity Centers

- Promote early literacy skills;
- Inspire children to explore and learn through self-discovery;
- Demonstrate the purpose of reading and writing and inspire children to explore;
- Demonstrate the purpose and power of print;
- Encourage social interactions and oral language development;
- Invite children to gradually understand print concepts;
- Provide practice with real life experiences that require reading; and
- Add an element of fun to the library – kids learn when they are having fun.



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### Infuse Play Into Other Areas



Add new opportunities for play in your physical environment.

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### Consider extending play outside

<http://librarymakers.blogspot.com/2016/06/let-wild-rumpus-start.html>

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### Scaffolding

Carissa Christner, Wild Rumpus, Week 3

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### Keep it Inclusive: Include Play for Children of All Abilities

- Multisensory
- Easy to use and/or easy to activate
- Kept in a convenient location that is easily accessible for children who are using wheelchairs or other devices
- Allows for experiencing success.
- Popular with children.

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### Summing UP



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The most rewarding play experiences are child initiated and directed.



- Self-directed
- No time limit
- Children create their own rules
- Everyone is engaged

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### ++ It All Adds Up ++

Research tell us that play is essential in the lives of children.

Playful learning can be in free and guided play.

Scaffolding is directed by the child, but initiated or guided by an adult.

Digital media, as well as books and toys, have a role to play in children's development.

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Early childhood teachers, librarians, and parents can create a wide variety of play opportunities for children.




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### Checklist

- Focus and self-control
- Perspective taking
- Communicating
- Making connections
- Critical thinking
- Taking on challenges
- Self-directed, engaged learning
- Talk
- Sing
- Read
- Write
- Play

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**++ It All Adds Up ++**

**YOU HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY!!!!**




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### Checklist

- Value of play – supported by research
- Ages and Stages
- Play and Storytime
- Types of play
- Improving the quality of children’s play
- Practical tips for adding more play

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If we want to encourage learning, innovation and creativity we should love our young children, take care of them, talk to them, let them play and let them watch what we do as we go about our everyday lives.

We don’t have to make children learn, we just have to let them learn.

*-Alison Gopnik*




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Thank you for joining in today!



**Dr. Betsy Diamant-Cohen**

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