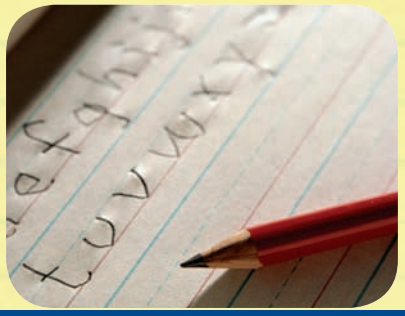
PEARSON NEW
INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Introduction to Early Childhood
Education: Preschool Through
Primary Grades
Jo Ann Brewer Sixth Edition



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children and what learning is taking place as children participate in play. It is the teacher's job to recognize the academic, social, cognitive, and physical growth that takes place during play and to be able to communicate these changes to parents and administrators. Evaluation means that materials, environments, and activities must be carefully considered in light of the curriculum goals, and changes must be made if needed.

Planner

Finally, the teacher has to serve as a *planner.* Planning involves all the learning that results from observing, elaborating, and evaluating. The teacher must plan for new experiences that will encourage or extend children's interests.

NAEYC CRITERIA
3.47

For example, a parent who was a shoe clerk could come to the classroom to share her occupation. She might measure the children's feet and demonstrate that part of her job is to show the customers several choices of shoes in the proper sizes and to help them try on shoes. In planning to continue the children's obvious interest, the teacher might do several things: gather a collection of many kinds of shoes, find a rack suitable for storing them, borrow several of the instruments used for measuring feet, and so on. The teacher's careful planning will result in days of active play involvement by the children as they arrange chairs to make a shoe store, write up sales, and bag shoes to send home with the "customers." The teacher can encourage the children to talk about the different kinds of shoes and who wears them, to draw shoes, to create signs for their shoe store, and even to write stories about shoes. When the children tire of the shoes and no longer demonstrate interest in playing with them, the shoes should be removed. By that time, the teacher will have already planned other experiences that will pique the interest of the children and can be extended in play (Ford 1993).

Parents and Play

- Invite parents to observe a play time at school. Provide a guide sheet that will encourage parents to look for those academic skills being learned in play. For example, list classification, grouping, seriating, analyzing, and so on to help parents notice these skills. On the back of the sheet, you might describe examples of these skills in housekeeping play, block play, and other play areas. The guide sheet might also list social skills, such as sharing, turn taking, cooperating, and others.

In planning for play that contributes to development, teachers should consider the following guidelines:

NAEYC CRITERIA
2.7

1. Make sure children have sufficient time for play.
2. Help children plan their play.
3. Monitor the progress of play.
4. Choose appropriate props and toys.
5. Provide themes that can be extended from one day to the next.
6. Coach individuals who need help.
7. Suggest or model how themes can be woven together.
8. Model appropriate ways to solve disputes. (Bodrova and Leong 1996, p. 132)

Play in Primary Classrooms

Most teachers are aware that play is much more acceptable in classrooms of preschoolers and kindergartners than it is in classrooms of primary-grade children. The expectation that only serious learning should take place in

www.

www.pathsoflearning.org/library/play.cfm

An action guide called "Play and Playfulness—Their Vital Role in Learning and Life," which contains links to research, readings, and websites that support play in children's lives

primary classrooms is prevalent among parents and also among some teachers. Others believe, however, that play can be serious learning for primary-grade children. Granted, the play of first- and second-graders does not look like that of preschoolers and kindergartners; nonetheless, many play experiences are appropriate for primary-age children.

For example, children in the primary grades enjoy exploring and building with various materials, creating new machines from old parts, inventing toys, building robots and models, and working out basic physics problems (such as dropping different materials from different heights and measuring the speeds at which they fall). Activities for primary-grade children usually must be based on the children's special interests in order to generate enthusiastic participation, which is not so much the case with preschoolers. Children in primary grades certainly continue to play, although that play may be illicit and hidden from the teacher.

Wasserman (1992) tells stories of the Wright brothers and Frank Lloyd Wright and their early play experiences, "messing about." Sadly, these ingenious and productive individuals, who contributed so much to our knowledge and our lives, often had to stay out of school in order to indulge their curiosities and play. Wasserman asserts that "messing about" is essential for developing children's creative-thinking and problem-solving skills. Teachers should encourage children to discover and explore what really fascinates them, whether that be building with blocks or exploring chemical processes.

Primary-age children are also interested in games with rules and enjoy learning to play a variety of board games. Although this type of play may not provide as many opportunities for exploring problems and creating solutions as "messing about," playing board games can help children develop social and communication skills.

Benefits of Play at School

When play is accepted as a vehicle for carrying forward the curriculum, children can learn organizational skills, develop oral language skills, and learn to take risks in solving problems (Perlmutter and Burrell 1995). Play that aids children in their development can be achieved at school if teachers provide time, space, materials, and sanction for play activities.

Obviously, children need time to plan and carry out play episodes if they are to develop knowledge and skills in play. No child can get organized and complete a satisfying block construction in the ten minutes allotted to play in some classrooms. Christie, Johnson, and Peckover (1988) and Christie and Wardle (1992) found that the play patterns of children in longer play periods were more mature than those of children in shorter play periods.

Space and materials are also prerequisites for productive play. Materials such as sand, water, blocks, and paint take up large amounts of space. Teachers may have to arrange the classroom so that the same space is used for different activities during the day.

Sanctioning play is important, as children will pick up subtle hints from the teacher that play is important or not important. One way for the teacher to make sure the children feel that play is important is to join in. It is a real art to know when and how to join in without disrupting the play or changing it to meet adult definitions of appropriate play.

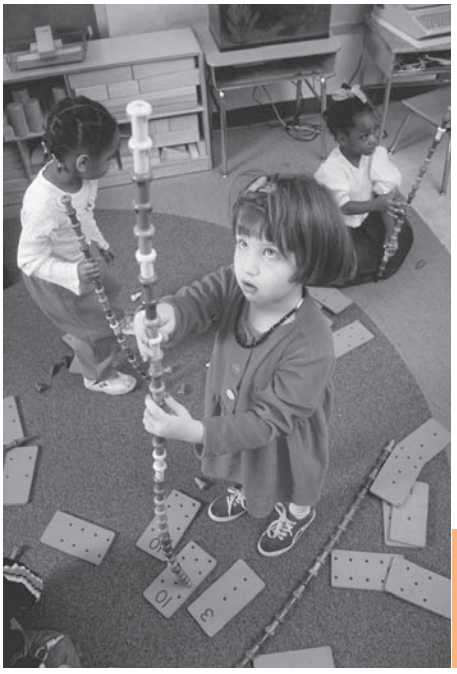
Other ways a teacher might indicate that play is important are to talk about play when children evaluate their day and to share the products of play. Often, teachers share and display only the products of work activities, such as drawings or pieces of writing; as a result, children come to believe that play is unimportant in comparison. To validate the importance of play, a teacher might take photographs of block constructions or of children discovering the attributes of water and share these along with artwork and stories.

As children gain experience and maturity, play in the classroom should reflect these changes. Children of different ages and different developmental levels use materials in different ways, so teachers must be alert in providing materials that will challenge the children to develop more in their play. For example, if the housekeeping center for five-year-olds is exactly the same as that for four-year-olds, play in that area by five-year-olds may stagnate. It is the responsibility of the teacher to add materials that will stimulate new play or allow children to play out their fantasies.

Selecting Materials for Play

Teachers have many choices when selecting materials for play. **Open-ended materials**—those that allow multiple outcomes and unique uses in each encounter—are the most useful. Such materials may be fluid materials that have no inherent structure, such as sand and water, or structured materials, such as various forms of blocks. Blocks, sand, and water do not have built-in functions that limit the possible outcomes of playing with them. Therefore, they are conducive to creative thinking and problem solving in children.

Children playing with blocks can create structures that represent their own understandings of the real world or that represent their fantasy worlds. Players can reproduce known structures or design totally new ones; they can control the outcomes and determine when the structure is complete without fear that it will be criticized or rejected. Players with blocks are free



Open-ended play materials encourage creative thinking and problem solving in children.

to make discoveries about the relationships among the block shapes and sizes and about the physics of stacking blocks. These children can experience the aesthetic pleasure of the feel of blocks and the symmetry of their constructions.

Children playing with sand and water are free to explore the properties of the materials and to learn how the materials respond under different conditions. They are in charge of the outcomes and derive satisfaction from playing to meet their own goals. Sand and water allow for individual experimentation and also group interactions. Children using sand and water establish their own goals and feel satisfaction when those goals are met.

Materials that allow children to make play choices and allow multiple outcomes are necessary for the best play environments. Many materials can be considered open ended if it is possible for children to use them in different ways. For example, teachers might supply rollers, boxes, balls, and targets that will help children develop concepts in physical science (Kamii and DeVries 1978). These materials are open ended to the extent that children have choices in exploring the arrangements and outcomes that can be achieved with them. Many commercial materials, on the other hand, are limited in terms of what children are able to do with them, providing only one or two options. When dollars for purchasing materials are limited, open-ended materials are the best investment.

Play as a Teaching Strategy

WWW.

www.usask.ca/education/coursework/mcvittiej/methods/play.html

An explanation of the teaching strategy play–debrief–play and how to implement it in the classroom

Teachers have choices when deciding how to present new information or concepts to children. Some information must be presented in a teacher-directed format. For example, safety rules, such as those about fire, cannot be explored; they must be stated firmly. But generally speaking, *telling* is the least successful strategy for presenting information to young children. Even young children can repeat words or phrases, but verbal responses only indicate that they have learned the words; such responses do not measure children's understanding at all.

PRAXIS

Be able to describe how play can be used as a teaching strategy to teach specific concepts

Play is one of the **teaching strategies** available to teachers as they plan for children's learning. The following examples illustrate goals that could readily be achieved through play:

NAEYC CRITERIA

3.16

- To encourage children to learn about appropriate clothes for the weather, provide many different pieces of clothing in the dress-up area.
- To encourage children to learn how to create secondary colors, provide paints in primary colors.
- To encourage children to demonstrate the ability to classify, provide leaves, shells, keys, buttons, and models of farm and zoo animals.
- To encourage children to learn the characteristics of three-dimensional shapes, provide the shapes in boxes, geoblocks, and regular building blocks.
- To encourage children to learn about water erosion on landforms, provide water in containers (so that the flow can be varied) in the sandbox or gardening area.

Using play experiences as teaching strategies requires that the teacher observe how children use materials and that he ask questions to guide children's thinking and reflections. As Sutton-Smith (1986) reminds us,

> Although we use play in various ways in the classroom for our own purposes, we need to remember that the children have purposes of their own, and need to deal with purposes largely by themselves (even if under distant supervision), making use of this vital and universal kind of communication [play]. (p. 13)

Teachers can make plans for play experiences, but children's needs must be honored and they must be allowed to use play for their own learning. In other words,

> Play, then, offers the child the opportunity to make sense out of the world by using available tools. Understanding is created by doing, by doing with others, and by being completely involved in that doing. Through play, the child comes to understand the world and the adult comes to understand the child. (Chaille and Silvern 1996, p. 277)

Vygotsky's belief that representational play includes rules for behavior is obvious even to untrained observers when they watch children who assign or accept roles and are then chastised if they fail to behave according to those roles. For example, the child playing "dog" cannot go to work nor can the "baby" watch television. As summarized by Berk,

> From this perspective, the fantasy play of the preschool years is essential for further development of play in middle childhood—specifically, for movement toward game play, which provides additional instruction in setting goals, regulating one's behavior in pursuit of those goals, and subordinating action to rules rather than impulse—in short, for becoming a cooperative and productive member of society. Play, in Vygotsky's theory, is the preeminent educational activity of early childhood. (1994, p. 33)

Teachers have many opportunities to plan environments and materials so that learning goals can be achieved in playful activities. Observations of children at play will guide teachers in choosing other play materials that will help children learn concepts and clarify and extend their understandings.

Selecting guided play as a teaching strategy does not imply that play is assigned; it means that careful thought is put into the selection of materials and intervention in children's play. A teacher might put out an assortment of materials that she expects will invite children to explore a new concept. If children do not learn the concept from interacting with the materials, then the teacher must choose other materials or select a different approach. Assigning a child to complete a task means that he no longer has a choice and that the teacher has chosen a strategy other than play.

Cooper and Dever (2001) found that sociodramatic play was an excellent vehicle for integrating the curriculum. They asked children to choose a theme for the dramatic play area and then used that theme to engage children in writing, oral language development, mathematics, and other content areas. Through their work, the children developed and enjoyed the selected theme.

Thus, teachers must be thoughtful when intervening in children's play and avoid trying to force their own agendas on the children. For example,

LEARNING PLAN Teaching Discrimination of Plane Geometric Shapes to Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Children

Framework Goals: Name, describe, sort, and draw simple two-dimensional shapes.

Objectives: When presented with a collection of plane geometric shapes, children will be able to discriminate among the shapes. (Some children may be able to name the shapes.)

Procedure:

1. Arrange a collection of plane geometric shapes of many colors in a box on a low table.
2. As children play with the shapes, many will naturally sort them in some way. If the children sort them by color, ask if there is another way to sort them. You may need to show children an example of two shapes that are the same shape but different colors.
3. If children sort the shapes by shape, help them to describe the shapes (three sides, four equal sides, a circle, etc.).
4. Add other colors and sizes of shapes as children become more skillful in their sorting and describing. (Be sure to add triangles that are not equilateral triangles.)
5. Add plane shapes to other play areas, such as the blocks area, the dramatic play area (pizzas, square plates, rectangular trays, and so on), the music area (triangles, tambourines, drums, etc.), and the art area (sponges cut in shapes for printing).

the teacher can begin to play with a small group and propose a theme for the play, but the children must be allowed to reject that theme or convert it to one following their own interests. The teacher can also assume a role in sociodramatic play, such as the "neighbor coming over for lunch," but such an intervention must be done carefully. Moreover, the teacher will need to think about how to leave the play so that the children can continue on their own (Ward 1996).

Communicating the Benefits of Play

Teachers have an obligation to explain to parents and administrators the benefits of the time children spend playing during the schoolday. Teachers are and should be accountable for children's learning. Part of that responsibility is to be able to provide specific information about individual children and their play experiences. The following section applies specifically to assessment of play.

One form of data to be shared is the *anecdotal record.* With this type of record keeping, the teacher or another adult records the child's behavior and verbalizations for a brief period of time. Judgments about the child's intentions or motivations should be clearly labeled as such in the record and distinguished from descriptions of the child's overt behaviors. At the end of the day, these notes are placed in the child's file. Over a period of time, the notes should reveal some patterns that will help the teacher talk to others about the child's growth through play.

For example, the teacher might have noted that Jennifer played alone with the blocks and made horizontal patterns with them. A few weeks later, an observer might note that Jennifer had started to use vertical patterns along with the horizontal ones. Later, Jennifer might be seen building a vertical structure with a friend. Still later, she might build a vertical and symmetrical structure. An observer might note that Jennifer had talked about her building before she began the construction and completed a structure that matched her plans. These records would clearly reveal