

The Importance of Play in Early Childhood Education

Course 210: Professor Diaz

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Abstract

Play is very often viewed as a reward for kids or just a time for them to have fun. However, for many years there have been many theorists that have supported play as a viable tool for the development of children. Through play or guided play children are given amazing opportunities to work on their development. This element has helped children increase their vocabulary, problem solve, practice their cognitive, social, and physical skills. Once the new standards were implemented in early childhood classrooms, children have been put to obtain specific academic standards, but these standards fail to realize some children may not be ready for them. Since the implementation of common core children have either had very limited play time or none. Therefore, it is important to fight and advocate for play to continue being part of the early childhood classroom before it is completely gone. Parents and the department of education needs to be informed on the importance of play for children in early childhood classrooms. Through this essay I will show reasons to why I am choosing to advocate for play not be removed from classrooms. Removing an important staple of a classroom would not be developmentally appropriate and it will only impact children in an unfavorable way.

The importance of Play in the Early Childhood Classroom

Play is an important component in early childhood education. The implementation of play in early childhood classrooms has been a staple due to the benefits it has on childhood development. There have been many theorist and experts that have supported the positive influence of play in the early childhood classroom (Isbell & Yoshizawa, 2016). Theorist Lev Vygotsky expresses that during play children use language to support their activities and eventually reach higher levels of understanding. While engaging in play time children can make choices, solve problems, converse, and negotiate (Copple & Bredekamp, 2005). Children can use their imagination that attributes to help them practice their social, physical, and cognitive skills. However, many think that play is the essence of freedom and spontaneity but its more than that. It is during this time that children are encouraged to regulate their own behavior and restrictions on what they can say and do because of play (Copple & Bredekamp, 2005.) As children pretend play, they are becoming more capable of self-regulation and take initiative to follow the rules. Additionally, it has been noted that children show more problem solving, more empathy, cooperation, longer attentions spans and higher language levels through interactive play, compared to structed activities. Play is the medium for learning, and the foundation for creative development (Isbell & Yoshizawa, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

The implementation of play in early childhood education has been an important asset to child development, therefore the need to prevent play from being completely eroded is imperative. Play is where children are given the liberty to independently lead their development. Through play children development contributes to advances in vocabulary, language, attention, imagination, and problem solving. If play is not part of the early childhood classroom learning journey, then families and children will be affected. If play is pushed out of the picture children will be impacted negatively because it will take away the opportunities for them to develop socially and emotionally. Furthermore, this can leave children without some of the important skills needed for success.

The need to prevent play from disappearing in early childhood classrooms needs to be addressed immediately. The problem was greatest once the common core standards were introduced. Schools are now pushing for academic standards, but unfortunately some children are not ready for these standards to be taught to them. Children are set to meet specific criteria which means more instruction and less independent play. Play and academic learning go hand-in-hand which means multiplying opportunities for learning. Educators and theorist have supported and labeled play as a staple in classrooms which is why intervention needs to occur now. The opportunities for children to develop skills and be part of a developmentally appropriate classroom is diminishing. The target audience for this issue would be the Department of Education and parents. I am trying to prove that the academic standards being addressed is only taking away from children. This audience is in position to help and understand because they are part of the community that makes educational decisions for children. However, to do so I will

provide evidence and resources that demonstrate the power of play. Additionally, I will provide research that goes back to theorist and current research that shows how children learn best through play.

Research

Research suggest that play has been sacrificed in favor of practices intended to promote children to be ready for kindergarten. The implementation of play in classrooms has been an essential element in learning. The removal of play in the life of children has been happening at a very fast pace and it's something educators and parents should be afraid of losing in early childhood classrooms. Guided play takes place in a school environment that contains materials to stimulate and support children's creativity and curiosity, through play is where children's thinking is pushed with questions and information.

Article 1

According to the Alliance for childhood, children are now spending way too much time being taught and being tested on literacy and math skills rather than spending time learning through play (Miller, E., & Almon, J. (2009). The article argues that "child-initiated play must be restored in kindergarten," because it is important for young children's healthy development and by the slow process of it being removed it can cause consequences for children. Furthermore, the article addresses that play is beneficial for children because they work hard at play because their motivation comes from within, and they are learning the powerful lessons of pursuing their own ideas which will lead to a successful conclusion. Additionally, the article states that "on a typical day, kindergartners in Los Angeles and New York City spend four to six times as long being instructed and tested in literacy and math (two to three hours per day) as in free play or "choice

time” (30 minutes or less) (Miller, E., & Almon, J. (2009).) Schools are putting kindergarteners under pressure to meet inappropriate expectations. Moreover, play is important because according to the article children are being denied the benefit of a major stress reliever.

The authors purpose is to inform as to why play is essential in classrooms and why slowly diminishing it will cause a negative effect on children. Through this article the author gives information to support the implementation of play in the early childhood classroom but also gives the outcomes of reducing or eliminating play from early childhood classrooms. I selected this research source because it gives reasons as to why advocating for play to continue being an asset to early childhood is important. Play does not simply mean that anything goes for a child in fact it means that experiential learning leads to lifelong benefits. The information provided by this article teaches that the power of play works as an engine of learning in early childhood and it is a vital source for the development of children. Children who part of a play-based classroom have an advantage than children who do not have play as part of their school experience. All children deserve to grow and learn in a play-based school.

Article 2

In research from Elkind (2006) it is stated that play remains vital to children’s health and creativity. In fact, he states “combining ideas from Sigmund Freud and Jean Piaget, the author views play as one of three necessary elements of a full life, the others being work and love.” Through play, children can create new learning experiences which eventually acquire emotional, social, and intellectual skills that they are unable to obtain in another way. Within the article it is discussed that adults respond negatively to play because it can be defined as just having fun and a waste of time. However, although play is meant to be fun it is the best contributor to learning

because it is a fundamental mode of learning. “Jean Piaget once wrote, “Play is the answer to the question: how does anything new come about?”, when children are all given opportunities and time for them to engage in self-initiated play, their development is being ensured.

The author's purpose is to provide knowledge behind the importance of play for children. Through the knowledge the author gives from the reading he is informing people in what ways play helps children and how the idea behind play is more than just a superfluous activity. Based on the information given the author demonstrates to be on board with maintaining play in classrooms and establishing why although it seems like play is not essential there are consequences if it is eliminated from early childhood classrooms. I chose to use this source because it provides background information from theorists who have supported the importance of play but also because it gave facts on how children have positive benefits from having play incorporated in their daily school schedule. One can learn from this article that the benefits of play should not be overlooked by parents or school administrators because it's a luxury and children learn so much through it.

Article 3

According to Overstreet (2018) schools are being asked to educate the most diverse student body in our history to higher academic standards than ever before. Therefore, early childhood education is being impacted negatively. Play and exploration has been sacrificed so kindergarten readiness practices can be implemented. If opportunities for play as an education practice is deprived students lose on critical thinking, problem solving and collaboration. Furthermore, within the article it is stated that research on play in the early childhood setting has

revealed that it is a vital element of literacy learning. While children are at play, they can explore structures of adult world and they are able to make meaning of the world. It is also discussed that play is important because children discover solutions to problems they face in the real world. When common core was introduced in 2010 more rigorous expectations were set in place which ignored developmentally appropriate practices for young children. “The use of play with young children is not specified in the standards Overstreet (2018),” the standards that have been implemented are taking away from benefits children receive through play. Play has been and continues to be the highest expression of human development in childhood.

The author of the article is trying to inform readers that new standards are not supporting children’s development the way that play does. Based on the information the author is giving it is being established that though play children can work on their development. Through the information the author has established that they are for the importance of play being part of early childhood. The author establishes their position by proving the negative outcomes of common core and goes back to relay as to why play is needed in classrooms. The research provided by the article is why I chose this source. It gave a comparison with the new standards and when play was completely in the classrooms of early childhood. The comparison gave the insight on the negatives of common core and was able to show how play covers aspects common core does not, hence the importance of play. Upon reading the article once can learn that play enriches the life of children and the standards that have been implemented are not supporting this important factor for children.

Small Advocacy Action

Play is often viewed as a waste of time or not necessary in a classroom. Therefore, I would advocate for the issue by providing parents with feedback on how play has been helping their children's development. Additionally, I can provide research that has concluded that play has benefits in early childhood education. Through these parents are able to understand and analyze that play is an essential tool and highly effective for the development of children.

Large Advocacy Action

The action I would take is aimed toward everyone who has a responsibility and interest in the education for young children, which is the department of education and parents. In order to help my audience, understand why play is important for early childhood classrooms I would begin by holding a campaign. The campaign that I would hold will consist of articles and videos that promote the importance of play. Additionally, I would provide evidence gathered from my classroom that demonstrates how children are able to work on their development through guided play. It would be by job as a teacher to influence the Department of Education and parents into acknowledging that play is not a form of reward but rather a tool to teach children and for them to learn. Moreover, I would state how the new standards are affecting children. I would show research by limiting them to work on their development since these standards are made to meet academic standards. Over the years theorist have supported play as an appropriate form of learning which is why I would also hand out articles to engage them into understanding that this has been a viable method for a long time, supported by early childhood educators.

If play becomes eliminated from early childhood education parents, children and teachers will be impacted. Teachers play a major role in a child's education, which is why it is so

important for them to support play in the classroom. If teachers are not fighting for this, they will face the damage children will have on their early childhood development. Children may experience lack of cognitive, emotional, physical, and social elements. If children are put to work in academic standards and do not have play time, they will be the ones negatively impacted. It is during play time that children are gaining knowledge that they will carry on. Parent's need to be reassured that if their children are not having play time in school, they are losing more than just playing.

Commentary

This issue was very important for me to choose to advocate out of personal experience. I worked in the Pre-k program for five years and I saw firsthand how much children learn through play. Based on the thematic unit we had a lot of the activities planned were intended for children to work on their development. However, very often parents would question why children only played in school. Due to this we had parents who were worried that their children were not obtaining instructional material come into the classroom to observe how much children learned through guided play activities. The director of the school stated that to please parents we should offer worksheets for them to work on. My coworker and I were not happy with the directors wishes but had to follow rules. Parents gave us feedback on the worksheets and ended up agreeing that the children came home with less to speak about from the worksheets. That experience led us to inform parents about the importance of play prior to children starting pre-k in our school. It helped them understand that what seemed like just fun time was however the essential tool for a developmentally appropriate classroom. This topic has already affected me as an early childhood educator but will continue to do if its not fixed. Children for years have

benefited through play, if it is not incorporated in the classroom, I will put children at risk of losing out on opportunities that are essential to them. Overall, play is part of a successful classroom and a tool for children to succeed as well. Removing an important staple of a classroom would not be developmentally appropriate and it will only impact children in an unfavorable way.

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