

## Engaging Students in Rich Content Through Play

Katlin Hastings

In today's society academics is introduced earlier in American school curriculums. The world is changing and children are expected to know more and reach higher standards to move on to different grade levels. Teachers are so focused on academics that there is less time and chance for play than students in former generations. What some educators do not realize is the importance play has in the developing mind. It helps with cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002). Another aspect of play being integrated into school curriculum is that it directly affects how children are shaped into adults (Ailwood, 2003). It opens student's minds to think more creatively throughout their lifetime (Hartmann and Rollet, 1994).

There are two types of play that usually happen in the classroom: structured and child driven play. Structured play happens when there are activities assigned to children to go along with the material they are learning. Child driven play is when children are given free time to play with different toys in the classroom (Ginsburg, 2006).

Teachers are professionals who assist children's brain development. In the early years especially, play is a big part in cognitive development. Play has been linked to children improving their attention, planning skills, and attitudes to teachers and peers in the classroom. It also helps with creative thinking, divergent thinking, and language development (Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002). A study done in 1999 called "*The effects of storytelling and pretend play on cognitive processes, short-term and long-term narrative recall,*" found that in storytelling, pretend play is more effective

in helping students recall complex narrative structure than pictures. The pupils that had dolls available to them did significantly better than those with pictures to re-tell the story. In addition, the pretend playgroup gave more complex narratives than those in the storytelling group (Sook-Yi, 1999). These findings show that play is crucial in cognitive development, particularly in reading. If educators put more play in activities students are learning about, children's minds will have a better chance at growth and development.

It is no surprise that children like to play. If teachers put more play into their practice, there would be a strong benefit in children's gross and fine motor abilities, plus it helps with body awareness. Playing with small toys, like Legos and putting together puzzles, helps children develop fine motor skills. Riding bikes and playing catch helps children develop gross motor skills. By letting students have free playtime, it allows them to feel more confident and secure about themselves and their bodies because it helps children develop skills essential for everyday life (Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002). Allowing children to actively play is a big part in keeping children healthy. With the world becoming increasingly aware of the obesity problem in America's society, letting kids be active and playing outside is a great way to encourage children to exercise in and out of the classroom (Ginsburg, 2006).

Parents do not only expect school to educate their students on academics, but also on how to be good people and a responsible citizen in today's society. School is responsible for social and emotional development, which largely contributes to

the way people act. Through play, children learn to interact with others around them, it helps them learn about the importance of sharing and taking turns. It gives children the chance to match their actions with others and take in different viewpoints from peers that do not match their own (Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002). Child driven play helps children develop negotiation skills, resolve conflicts, and self-advocacy. Play allows children to take on adult roles, while still being a child. It is just in a make believe situation (Ginsburg, 2006).

In the book "Play: Positive Intervention in the Elementary School Curriculum," Hartmann and Rollet experimented in preschool through second grade classrooms and how having or not having toys in a classroom affected students throughout their school years. It was found that children who had toys implemented into the school curriculum found more contentment in going to school and adapted to their new environment better. Those in the play program were also found to be more creative in the way they did projects and solved problems in school and every day life. Teachers in the playgroup stressed the joy, good mood, and gratification in children's play. This study proves that play is beneficial to children learning and makes teaching more enjoyable for educators.

Play is essential for children to grow and develop into respectable citizens. Not only does it help children become adults, but it also has important affects on a child's brain and the way they act. Allowing

children time to play and correlating play into the curriculum has many crucial benefits that are too important to be left out of the school day. Before taking play out of your curriculum, be sure to think of the consequences it has on your student's development.

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