

Education article – September 7, 2017

All Children Need Time to Play

Young children learn best when they are given large chunks of time to explore, invent, manipulate and create. Children will grow in all aspects of development if given the opportunity to play. Play helps children develop skills that are essential for academic success. Play is the foundation of future success. Learning and play go together, they are a great combination! Like peanut butter and jelly!

Play is about being creative, solving problems, testing hypotheses, trying again and making sense of the world. The world needs creative thinkers and problem solvers and these skills start in the early childhood years. Children need time to experiment. Sometimes life is too busy and we do not allow children the opportunity to play. Play is not only about time, but it is also about the toys we give the children to play with. Children need toys that are open ended, meaning the items encourage children to play without things needing to be a specific way or have a certain outcome. Some of the best open ended toys are blocks, Legos, housekeeping items, dress up clothes and play dough. Toys should be of interest to the child and fun!

Adults need to make time to play with children and to allow children to play independently. There is nothing better than a morning to play (perhaps in your pajamas too) with no appointments at specific times. Parents can provide guidance during their child's play, but it is important not to take over the play. This is not always easy to do! While spending time playing with your child is "quality" time, the quality may be diminished, if the adult dominates the play. There needs to be a balance between adults interacting during play time and children being allowed to guide their own play.

As a coordinator of early childhood programs for ISD 518, I find myself advocating for the social and academic value that play brings to the early childhood classroom. The early childhood classroom is not a place for standardized testing and curriculum that is filled with structured academic experiences. Preschool needs to be hands on activities. Early Childhood classrooms need to have developmentally appropriate practices with play at the center of the curriculum.

Play is not a bad four letter word...it is a great four letter word, that just needs more time!

The District 518 Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) classes begin on Monday, September 18th. The class is for parents and children to attend together. Class time consists of parent/child activities, parents only discussion time and time for the children with a teacher/para. If you haven't tried ECFE before, I would encourage your family to give it a try. You can register in person at the Community Education office, online at www.isd518.net/enrichment or give us a call at 507-376-6105. This would be a great time to practice playing!

Tara Thompson

District 518 Early Childhood Coordinator

