Playing For More Than Fun Essay, Research Paper

Playing For More Than Fun

In the fast-paced world of the twenty-first century, many parents are more concerned with their child’s education than how well they are developing by playing. Fifteen years ago, when I was four, preschool was simply a form of daycare. Now it is practically a requirement for three and four year olds. Parents are continually questioning how their child will develop educationally. I am constantly hearing about children, who at the age of three, are in so many activities that they are on the go from morning until night. All this is in preparation for a well-rounded education. But, has anyone ever stopped to think that the time taken away from a child’s free play would be detrimental to his or her development?

In the past decade psychologists have begun heavily questioning this themselves. A child begins to show signs of playing at the age of eight months when they respond to the popular game of peek-a-boo. According to Stanley Greenspan from Parents Magazine this is the time parents should start to free play with their children. As a child grows so will their form of play. Children should play by themselves to develop their creativity, but Greenspan states that parents should also commit at least twenty-five minutes a day to be a playmate (Greenspan 80). This may not seem like very much time, but sadly, parents have a hard time integrating even this little play into their busy schedules.

Being a playmate sounds a lot easier than it really is. Many parents see play as way to install morals into their children. This is fine; however the child should choose the games and set the tone for playtime together (Greenspan 80). Playing with a child allows a parent to expand their child’s knowledge and help them explore new concepts. Parents should be sure to encourage the child to be more curious, be an active learner, and provide an important head start for preschool and beyond.

Playing is not only a way to pass time though. It also paves the way for exploring emotions. When parents join in play, they can often help a child identify and reveal private feelings- whether they are needy, scary, anxious, or angry ones. Pretend play offers a child an outlet to express their feelings and lets a parent know what the child is feeling. Expressions of anger may make parents feel uncomfortable. But, censoring a child’s angry emotions during play may actually encourage them to express them in real life. Instead, a parent’s warmth, empathy, and support when a child acts out such negative emotions during play teach the child that the feeling of anger can exist side by side with the feeling of love. That, in turn, may help tame their anger. When a child begins to show anger through play, ask why the character is angry and what will make the character feel better (Greenspan 82).

When a child does begin school, textbooks should not replace play. Play, as well as a simple break during an hour of lesson, can actually increase the child’s performance (Moses 39). As part of the Trois Riviers project in Canada, entire primary school classrooms received an additional five-hour of physical education per week. The control classrooms received no physical education. The academic performance of the children in the experimental group was superior to that of the control group (Pellegrini 585). These results are consistent with a study that Stevenson and Lee later did in 1998. In the study they suggested that the frequent break between periods of intense work in Japanese schools (usually ten minutes every hour) maximized children’s cognitive performance (Pellegrini 585).

These studies seem to go hand in hand with Eppley’s article entitled ” School Should be a Place For Praise and Laughter” in Building Bridges to Academic Writing by Eppley and Eppley. In the essay he states that we should laugh and praise more in schools so it can be a more positive experience for children. Maybe we should play more as well.

Schools are increasingly looking for ways to improve test score and maintain children’s interest. As these studies have shown playing may actually be the answer that works. Although psychologists have just begun to study the effects of play on development it seems to be more important than ever believed. Playing may just be the one thing that helps children become well rounded and unique.

Works Cited

Eppley, George. “School Should Be a Place for Praise and Laughter.” Building Bridges to Academic Writing. California: Mayfield Publishing Company,1997.176-177.

Greenspan, Stanley. “Power Play.” Parents Magazine Feb. 1999: 79-81.

Moses, Barbara. “Career advice for Kids: Play More.” The Futurist Jan. 1999: 39.

Pellegrini, A.D., and Peter K. Smith. ” Physical Activity Play: The Nature and Function of a Neglected Aspect of Play.” Child Development 69 (1998) : 577-592.