



Play Based Development of Children

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Play is the most important activity in children's lives. Play is not only a source of great pleasure for children but also the basis of all their learning and development. Theoretically there is a widespread acceptance of the idea that play is very important for a child; but at the practical level, play is too often replaced with worksheets and highly structured forms of learning. However, research verifies that play is a vehicle that enhances a child's total development. Play, with or without material, influences all aspects of development, i.e. social, emotional, physical, motor and intellectual.

This realisation has resulted in a growing demand from parents and professionals for meaningful activities and play material for young children. This paper is about learning materials and activities that can contribute to conceptual, perceptual, and language development of young children.

The Essential Benefits of Play

- Children learn a lot through play. Play has been said to be “nature’s way of educating a child.”
- Play is central to the network of learning. It makes learning deep, broad, relevant, thorough and imaginative.
- Play allows children to struggle, manipulate, explore, discover, and practice.
- Play enables children to understand and express their thoughts and feelings about the world.
- Play helps children to learn in a concrete form.
- Play nurtures development of learning processes like observation, experimentation and creativity.
- Play also enables a teacher to give individual attention and evaluate a child.
- Play teaches the advantages of harmony and the value of compromise.

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- Play increases muscle development and muscle control.
- Play also functions as a kind of language laboratory.
- Play makes learning enjoyable.

The child is naturally curious and she/he learns through doing. At the pre-school stage successful approaches are largely based upon practical experiences, play activities, and materials which are relevant to the development of children and suit their interests. By organising selected play activities and materials in school we can increase the educational power of children's play. The teacher needs to plan the play by providing the necessary supporting environment, materials, and equipment. Positive social relationships that develop among children during play are very valuable in their socio-emotional development.

Initiating Play Activities

Teachers should have a short meeting with the children before presenting them with new material or a new toy. The teacher can talk about the material's uses and can also acquaint the children with its limitations. Often the teacher can stimulate new interest in a play activity by introducing a degree of novelty in it. Rearranging the block area, setting up some signs in the dramatic play area, or introducing a few new materials will make something that has become an "old hat" an attractive new activity once again. At the same time, the teacher must be careful not to disrupt the flow of activities when intervening in play. One

must be careful not to provide too much for the children—too much material, too much information, or too much structuring. Remember that the personality, interest, and developmental stage of children have a great influence on the type of play they enjoy.

Providing Enough Variety of Materials and Activities

The child needs a variety of play and play material to become well rounded and creative. The play material certainly influences the child's play.

Activities and learning material need to be changed or added from time to time, as children start feeling bored doing the same thing again and again. Activities and materials are tools for the teacher to use to teach and reinforce learning.

The child receives information about the world through all the senses—touch, sight, hearing, taste, and smell. Each of these has a direct channel to the brain, where information is stored up and built on. Material and activity which stimulate the senses by offering different sounds, patterns, colours, textures, and smells, are very rewarding. Material in which the child gets a response when he/she pushes a lever or presses a button, making something turn or jump out, teaches her/him about cause and effect i.e. if they carry out a certain action they will get a certain response. This encourages further exploration and promotes an understanding of how things function in the world.



Table activities such as jigsaw puzzles, stacking and nesting toys, self-corrective puzzles, construction toys, looking at books together, hiding objects and memory games help increase the attention span of young children.

If the game is not in keeping with the children's level or it is too difficult, the children very soon go off on a tangent or start throwing the pieces around. In such situations, it is always better to move on to something else.

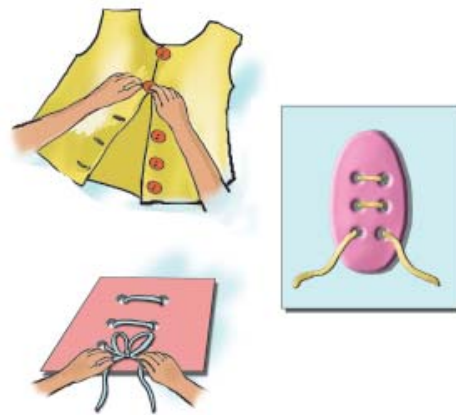


Then there are other materials like, fastening frame, locking device, puzzles (simple and complex), games like dominos, lotto, readiness material (self-corrective number puzzles, wooden, magnetic or plastic letters, templates, etc).

These are designed to promote small muscle development and eye-hand coordination and problem-solving skills. When children work in a group it enhances language development. Stacking and nesting toys, which can be arranged by size or nested one into the

other, help develop mathematical skills. Construction sets like table blocks or interlocking blocks can be combined with other toys, to help children play out their own dramatisation.

Manipulative materials provide the child with many opportunities to develop and elaborate such concepts



as colours, shape, size, pattern and order. They necessitate the use of perceptual-motor skills, such as eye-hand coordination, visual discrimination, etc. Very frequently, children engage themselves in quiet, self-directed learning activities that are either self-correcting or open-ended in nature. Manipulative learning materials are also valued because they involve the child in the kinds of skills and thinking that provide the foundation for the development of reading, writing, and mathematical operations, as well as provide the child with gratifying successful experiences (Kuschner & Clark, 1977:123).

Setting up the Right Environment

The environment the teacher provides to encourage play is just as important as how she conducts the activities and plays with the children. While planning, the teacher has to be practical as well as stimulating. The teacher should expand the child's world by creating a rich and relaxed atmosphere that will stimulate the children's imagination.

Learning materials can be used in a variety of ways, including child initiated and teacher initiated activities. When the child initiates the play, it may simply (but importantly) involve exploration. Children need to determine what tasks they want to pursue while playing with the materials. Teachers should be suggesters, modelers, and prodders. They should create a stimulating environment in the classroom for young children to explore, investigate, discover and experiment, so that the best possible experiences occur. These experiences may be utilised as an opportunity to



Play with material allows children to explore concepts develop language skills, and thinking power amongst children.

In order to sustain and extend the play, a teacher could suggest additional ways of working with the material. She could challenge the children with questions such as, "Have you ever thought about how the beads on the string would look if they were strung in a pattern such as two reds and then one blue, two reds and then one yellow, and so on?" In teacher initiated play, a teacher usually invites the child to play with the equipment, suggests ways of using the material and establishes rules for games like dominos. Both kinds of play, child initiated and teacher initiated are valuable. The selection depends on the situations and nature of children. However, it must be clearly noted that although learning materials themselves stimulate the children's imagination, the teacher's presence and guidance are needed to help the children focus on the concept being learnt through games and activities. For example, dominos can also



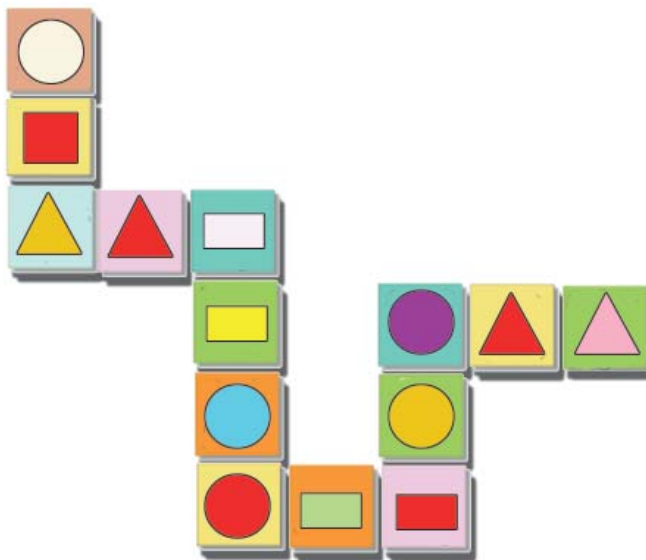
be used as blocks or for building corrals and fences. This is very important and adds great value to children's play. However, as play progresses, the teacher can show the children how to play dominos with the blocks.

This does not mean that teachers should always prescribe what children should do with the materials. However, there are both intellectual and emotional advantages in doing so. This also increases the bonding and positive relationship between the teacher and child.

Teachers also need to experience the materials they provide to children as it helps them to understand. Interaction with the material helps the teacher learn about a child's conceptual development. In this way he/she gets better acquainted with the children, their needs, their emotions, their desires, and their interests.

Selecting Materials

While deciding on materials for enhancing classroom learning, it is imperative that educators make wise and careful selections. The materials can either be developed by the teachers or procured from the market. However, the



following points must be considered while selecting the materials:

1. The materials should be appropriate for the children's age level.
2. The materials should be appropriate for the children's level of development, abilities, needs, and interests.
3. The materials should be such that they encourage children's participation and involvement.
4. The materials should be simple.
5. The materials should be durable and safe.
6. The materials should be versatile enough to unfold creative and inventive potential of children.



Lastly, the effectiveness of the materials depends on the arrangement, display in classroom, organisation, care and maintenance. The children need to be provided with adequate tools and opportunities. The materials kept should be accessible to children. There should be open shelves for storage. Displayed materials should be changed periodically to sustain children's interest.

Children's play is naturally spontaneous and pleasurable but the teacher has an important role in children's play as observer, organiser, supervisor and evaluator.

