



Play-Based Learning

Children are born learning. They learn through play by observing, exploring, experimenting, talking, pretending and having fun.

Babies come into a world that is entirely new and unknown to them. They explore and learn about the world and people around them by using all their senses, moving their bodies, and interacting with others. Toddlers do things over and over to see if the same thing happens every time. They repeat the words, songs and rhymes of the adults close to them. Older children add props, use more complex language, and engage their friends in extensive pretend games. All of these play experiences provide an important foundation for understanding language, learning about the world, solving problems, getting along with others, and achieving success in school and life.

Play-based learning is important because:

- Play encourages children to practice language and develop vocabulary as they interact with adults, express themselves and talk with other children.
- It provides children with hands-on experiences that build a solid foundation for school success.
- Through play, young children develop the ability to express their feelings, ideas and needs. They learn to listen, take turns, and consider the feelings, ideas and needs of others.
- Pretend play develops imagination and creativity. It provides opportunities for children to recreate and understand their real-life experiences.

Adults support a child's development with stable care, consistent gentle guidance, nurturing relationships, shared conversation and an environment that supports play-based learning. Caring adults can further support a young child's play by:

- Providing enough time for children to get thoroughly involved in play
- Offering toys and materials that allow children to be creative
- Participating in children's play with props, questions, suggestions and stories
- Limiting TV and computer games to 1 hour or less per day
- Balancing outdoor and indoor play time
- Offering children a variety of new and enriching experiences
- Reading books and telling stories together.

In this pamphlet you will see young children and adults playing. Next to each photo there is a short list of skills and concepts the children are learning. This is not a comprehensive list, but rather a sampling of the wide range of knowledge that interactive adults can offer young children in play based learning.



Play-Based Learning



When I **play with board games** I am learning:

- about colors and shapes
- matching skills
- how to “see” the number of objects in a small group without counting (i.e., dots on a die)
- counting with one-to-one correspondence
- to take turns
- to solve problems

When I **play with musical instruments and dance** I am learning:

- to coordinate my body with what I hear
- about fast, slow, loud, soft, high, low
- new vocabulary
- basic number concepts as I anticipate the beat
- about the emotional power of music, rhythm and movement
- awareness and identification with my culture and the cultural heritage of others
- how to participate with others



When I **play on riding toys** I am learning:



- how to coordinate my arms and legs
- strength and balance
- about speed and position in space
- how to negotiate and take turns with other children
- to control my movements and be careful of others
- to become independent and self-confident

When I **play with play dough or clay** I am learning:

- concepts of “more” and “less”
- concepts of shape, size and space
- to develop the muscles in my fingers and hands
- the amount of a substance remains the same even when the shape changes



When I **play with puzzles** I am learning:



- hand-eye coordination
- self confidence
- concepts of shape, size and location
- how shapes can slide, flip, turn and combine to make new shapes
- to solve problems

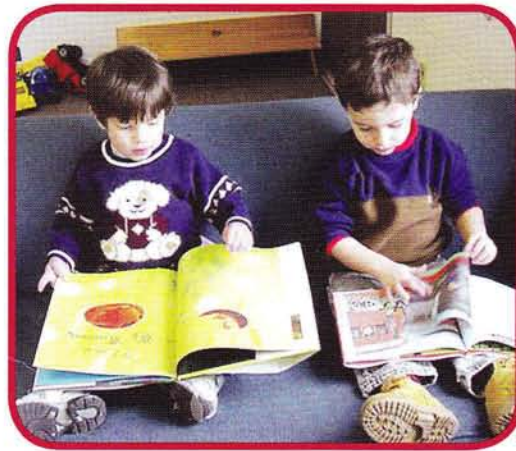
When I **participate in large and small group activities** I am learning:

- routines
- to listen and understand spoken language
- new songs and poems
- new vocabulary
- to share my ideas with others
- to be part of a community
- to cooperate and be considerate of the needs of others
- self-control



When **someone reads a book to me**
I am learning:

- that reading is enjoyable
- to listen to spoken language
- new vocabulary and new information
- to look at the pictures and see details about the book
- to express my own thoughts, feelings and ideas
- that the words on a page have meaning
- to turn the pages from front to back and left to right
- that a book has an author and an illustrator
- to tell and retell stories



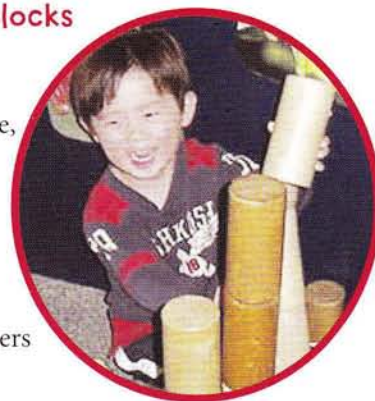
When I **play with water**
I am learning:

- about wet and dry
- to fill, pour, dump and measure
- about the properties of liquids
- what happens when water mixes with other materials
- that some things sink and some things float



When I **play with blocks**
I am learning:

- cause and effect
- concepts of shape, size, space, number and patterns
- to express my ideas visually
- to explore the properties of blocks
- to solve problems
- to cooperate with others



When I **play with puppets or dolls** I am learning:

- to express ideas with words
- to take the role of someone else
- to use my imagination
- to make sense of my experiences through pretend
- to tell and retell stories



When I **paint at the easel & fingerpaint**
I am learning:

- to be creative and use my imagination
- hand-eye coordination
- to explore texture
- to identify and mix colors
- to make shapes and patterns



When I **play with glue and collage materials**
I am learning:

- to be creative and use my imagination
- to explore textures
- to create shapes and designs
- to identify and create patterns



When I **explore nature**
I am learning:

- new vocabulary
- to appreciate nature and develop a sense of wonder
- to make observations about things in my world



When I **sort toys and other things**

I am learning:

- how things are the same and/or different
- to put things in groups
- concepts of color, size and shape
- logical reasoning



When I **sing songs or recite rhymes/fingerplays**

I am learning:

- to develop memory skills
- to hear and repeat the rhythm language and sound
- to recognize rhyming words
- to play with sounds and words
- to appreciate different cultural sounds and rhythms
- to express myself creatively



When I **play on climbing equipment**

I am learning:

- self confidence
- concepts of space and position
- physical strength, coordination and balance
- to use my imagination
- how to live a healthy, active lifestyle
- to solve problems
- to cooperate with others



When I **play with sand**

I am learning:

- to be creative
- to fill, pour, dump and measure
- how to use shovels, scoops, rakes, strainers, funnels
- to explore texture and weight
- to observe changes



When I **scribble-write and draw**

I am learning:

- to represent my thoughts and ideas in many ways
- to exercise my imagination and creativity
- to hold a pencil, paint brush, marker as a writing tool
- to coordinate my hands and eyes
- that print and drawing is purposeful and meaningful



When I **do cooking projects** I am learning:

- healthy eating habits
- about differences in taste
- how heat and cold change things
- how to measure
- part-whole relationships
- an awareness of cultural traditions
- life skills



MADISON METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICT
DEPARTMENT OF TEACHING & LEARNING



Engagement

Learning

Relationships



The Madison Metropolitan School District believes that the *Engagement, Learning and Relationships* of all children are important.

Engagement – When young children feel physically and emotionally safe, they:

- are curious and positive about the world
- are ready to learn
- participate in learning experiences
- are motivated to learn and pursue their interests
- are proud of their accomplishments
- are part of a community of learners

Learning – When young children participate in new experiences, they:

- grow socially and emotionally
- learn to solve problems, communicate and work with others
- gain life skills and the academic skills needed for school

Relationships – When young children are encouraged and supported by their caregivers they:

- communicate verbally and non-verbally in a positive way
- show respect, responsibility, enjoyment and compassion for themselves and others
- cooperate with others and solve problems peacefully
- learn to value the diversity, gifts and strengths of others

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“Four decades of research and practice offer unequivocal evidence for the critical importance of play for children’s development. Play has been found to contribute to development in the domains of social, emotional, and cognitive development, including language, numeracy, and literacy.”

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Ph.D.

Play=Learning: How Play Motivates and Enhances Children’s Cognitive and Social-Emotional Growth, p. 29. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.



Resources

Launching into Literacy and Math

<http://oldweb.madison.k12.wi.us/tnl/lilm>

Madison Early Learning Standards

http://oldweb.madison.k12.wi.us/tnl/lilm/docs/early_learning_standards.pdf

Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards

<http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/EarlyLS.htm>

Collaborating Partners

<http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/>

City of Madison Office of Community Services

Child Care Unit

www.cityofmadison.com/commserv/CommunityAccreditation.html

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

Publication: *Young Children*

<http://www.naeyc.org/>

National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)

www.nafcc.org

Zero to Three

Publication: *The Zero to Three Journal*

<http://www.zerotothree.org>

This document was written in collaboration with members of the Launching into Literacy and Math Team, 2008.
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“In social pretending, preschoolers engage in lengthier interactions, are more involved, draw more children into their activity, and are more cooperative. In view of these findings, it is not surprising that 4- and 5-year-olds who spend more time at sociodramatic play are advanced in intellectual development and are judged more socially competent by their teachers.”

Laura E. Berk, Ph.D.

Awakening Children’s Minds: How Parents and Teachers Can Make a Difference, p. 119.
New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001.