

Learning through play is ...

Supported by Science

- Scientific evidence demonstrates that neural pathways in the brains of children are built through the exploration, thinking, problem-solving, and language expression that occur during play.

Supported by Experts

- Experts identify play as a leading source of social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive development. Intentional play-based learning allows children to investigate, ask questions, solve problems, and engage in critical thinking.

Supported by Children and Families

- Children are naturally driven to play, and early learning through play often takes the form of manipulating objects, acting out roles, and experimenting with different materials.

(From "Statement on Play-Based Learning," Councils of Ministers of Education Canada, 2012)

The Value of Play

- play is pleasurable and encourages a sense of wonder and curiosity
- play is a natural physiological impulse
- play is an important medium to social, emotional, and cognitive development
- play promotes creativity and problem solving
- play develops large and small motor skills
- play creates a sense of confidence in the ability to make decisions
- play helps nurture the idea of safety

How can You Promote Learning through Play at Home?

- Cook and bake together.
- Do puzzles of all kinds.
- Sort things (laundry, cutlery, toys, shells, keys) in various ways (colour, size, shape, lustre).
- Put on puppet plays.
- Play word games such as Twenty Questions.
- Sink and float various objects in a pan of water.
- Play counting games and recite counting poems and songs.
- Dance and sing and move.
- Provide access to computer environments that provoke active thinking.
- Read aloud with your child and talk about words; play with words.
- Talk with your child often about what they have learned through play.



This pamphlet is part of a series to inform parents about the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Public School Program.

For more information, contact your child's teacher.

Let's talk about ...

Learning through Play



Through play, children have valuable opportunities to interact with others in a variety of social settings and to use language meaningfully as they plan, explore, imagine, experiment, manipulate, dramatize, negotiate rules, and pose and solve problems.

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Learning through Play

Children make sense of and learn about their world through play. Play is considered to be “children’s work.” It lies at the heart of innovation and creativity. As children investigate and experiment with materials and interact with one another through play, they develop skills in problem-solving, social competence, self-regulation, and communication. Playing to learn is a natural pathway through which children grow intellectually, emotionally, socially, artistically, and spiritually.

Play to Learn

Play in the classroom is often intentional and planned by the teacher to meet specific subject-related curriculum outcomes. Because play is a natural impulse in children to explore their world while having fun, play is a logical pathway to learning. Types of play include

- **Functional Play:** often seen as practice or repetition, such as a mental challenge like repeating songs or a physical challenge like skipping
- **Constructive Play:** often seen as creating or building, such as dramatic play with or without props
- **Rough and Tumble Play:** often seen as active and pretend play, such as wrestling or superhero play
- **Games with Rules:** often seen as acknowledging rules to conform to a structure of play, such as taking turns and teamwork

(From *Play to Learn: Building Literacy Experiences for Young Learners*, Anne Burke, 2011)

Play in the Classroom

Play-based learning in the classroom often involves designing, building, testing, estimating and measuring, and exploring ideas through words and movement.

Play-based learning in the classroom might look like

- making decisions around the size and shape of a tower to prevent it from falling down
- making up “shows” with song and dance to practise expressing ideas and to explore story development
- using cars and ramps and varying the slope to adjust speed
- sorting through various tools and materials to make a boat and testing how it floats
- using objects like toothpicks or paper clips as units for measuring
- placing magnetic letters on a metal cookie sheet to explore letters and words

Achieving Outcomes

Often, a range of outcomes can be achieved in a single learning experience. For example, constructing a bird feeder, observing it outdoors, and fixing it to make it more usable could help a student achieve multiple curriculum outcomes:

- selecting methods and materials to construct and decorate the bird feeder can achieve arts outcomes
- estimating, sorting, and measuring materials to be used can achieve mathematics outcomes
- learning about birds and what they need to survive while recording observations can achieve science outcomes
- writing about the process and sharing ideas with classmates can achieve English language arts outcomes

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