



THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY: DO WE DO WHAT WE SAY?

What is Play?

Properties of Play

- Apparently purposeless
- Voluntary
- Fun
- Potential to improvise
- Desire to continue

“Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.”

-Fred Rogers

Does the **program curriculum** emphasize learning through sustained, open-ended, free-choice, child-initiated play rather than teacher-led instruction or teacher-directed activities?

- What is the main educational goal?
- Are free-choice learning centers the primary mode of learning?
- What is the teacher's role - a facilitator of learning rather than a provider of direct instruction?
- How are students' progress monitored and assessed?
- Is there an emphasis on the process of learning rather than a desired product?
- Is atmosphere of discovery, exploration and appropriate risk-taking encouraged?
- Are children invited to make decisions about which topics are explored?

Does the **daily schedule** prioritize large blocks (at least 50 minutes) of open-ended, free-choice, child-initiated play, both indoors and outdoors?

- Is most of the indoor class time made up play in free-choice learning centers?
- Is the amount of time for outdoor play adequate for exploration of the natural environment and for social play?
- What is the balance of free play and guided play in your program's playful learning?

Program Environment: Do indoor and outdoor play spaces and materials prioritize sustained, open-ended, free-choice, child-initiated play?

- Are the indoor classroom materials and amount of space adequate for sustained free-choice play?
- Do outdoor spaces and materials encourage exploration and social play?
- What level of physical risk-taking is accepted and encouraged?

Action Plan: How can we better prioritize play in our programs?

Curriculum Design	
Daily Schedule	
Program Environment	

Resources

Brown, S. (2009). *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination and invigorates the soul*. New York: Penguin.

Hassinger-Das, B., Hirsh-Pasek, K., Michnick Golinkoff, R.M. (2017). *The Case of Brain Science and Guided Play: A Developing Story*. NAEYC. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2017/case-brain-science-guided-play>

Perry, B. D., Hogan, L. & Marlin, S. J. 2000) Curiosity, pleasure and play: A neurodevelopmental perspective. HAAEYC Advocate