

Play: “Can you hear me now?”

Listening to the Voice of Play

“The importance of play” is a theme that arises repeatedly in child care books, magazines, and professional development resources. There are even organizations whose single purpose is to help project the important voice of play and play-based practices. What are the voices of play trying to tell us?

Educators, health professionals, and researchers know how important play is in the lives of children, but many are clearly seeing the consequences of diminishing play. Authentic, pure forms of play are often replaced with electronic time, toys and materials lacking in creative value, structured activities, expectations for educational outcomes, and the hurried shuffled lives of busy families.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has developed a clinical report titled *“The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds.”* This report offers guidelines on how pediatricians can advocate for children by helping families, school systems, and communities consider how best to ensure play is protected as they seek to create the optimal developmental setting for children.

To view report go to:
<http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/119/1/182>

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Those listening to what is currently being said about play will hear many “voices”. Most “voices” of play are based on child development and in uncovering the roles, relevance, and knowledge connected to play.

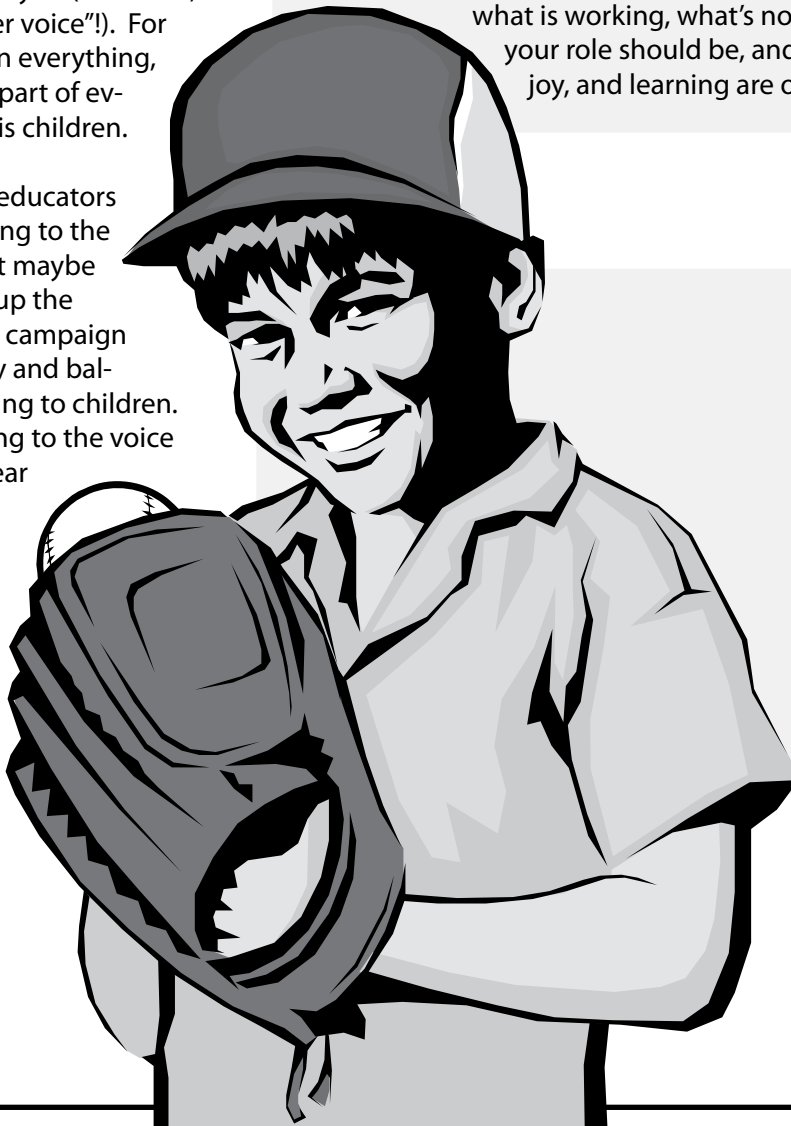
Research in play suggests that not only is play needed for the healthy development of young children, but play supports higher level cognitive thinking, language development, self regulation, social skills, and physical development. Play also has been defined as one of the optimal ways children learn compassion, self confidence, and self-motivation. On the flip side of play research is mounting evidence that play is diminishing in the lives of young children.



The voice of play

The voice of play is ever present when you are an early educator. Children will turn any time and anything into play (this alone can portray the magic and value of play). We've all watched play's phenomena unfold right in front of us. Think of the child at snack time that has lined up all her crackers and has given voices, names, and actions to each dancing cracker and initiates a conversation with you (of course, in a "dancing cracker voice"!). For children, play is in everything, on everything, a part of everything... play is children.

Passionate early educators are always listening to the voice of play. But maybe it is time to turn up the volume a bit and campaign for children's play and balance what we bring to children. Maybe by listening to the voice of play we will hear the children.



A little bit of help for listening to the voice of play:

- ◆ Know your philosophy on play
- ◆ Explore and research play; read articles, books, and discuss the role of play with colleagues, children, and families
- ◆ Know your state's Early Learning Standards and seek training and literature on implementing such ideas into an exciting curriculum that intentionally supports best practices in child development
- ◆ Communicate to parents the importance of play
- ◆ Stop, listen, and look; observe and document play. Discover what is working, what's not, what occurs, who interacts, what your role should be, and most importantly, where the fun, joy, and learning are occurring!

Educator Leo Bascaglia says:

"It is paradoxical that many educators and parents still differentiate between a time for learning and a time for play without seeing the vital connection between them."

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Supported by funds from the Office of Child Development and Early Learning, a joint office of the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Public Welfare.

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