

A young boy with dark hair, wearing a blue denim jacket, is sitting on a wooden floor and playing with colorful plastic blocks. He is looking towards the left with a slight smile. In the background, other children and an adult are visible, but they are out of focus. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an indoor classroom or play area.

PLANNING FOR **PLAY**

.....
Strategies for Guiding
Preschool Learning

Kristen Kemple, PhD

PLANNING FOR **PLAY**

.....
Strategies for Guiding
Preschool Learning

Kristen Kemple, PhD



www.gryphonhouse.com



Copyright ©2017 Kristen Kemple

Published by Gryphon House, Inc.

P. O. Box 10, Lewisville, NC 27023
800.638.0928; 877.638.7576 (fax)
www.gryphonhouse.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or technical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior written permission of the publisher. Printed in XXXX. Every effort has been made to locate copyright and permission information.

Cover image used under license from iStock.com. Interior images used under license from Shutterstock.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

[To Come]

Bulk Purchase

Gryphon House books are available for special premiums and sales promotions as well as for fund-raising use. Special editions or book excerpts also can be created to specifications. For details, call 800.638.0928.

Disclaimer

Gryphon House, Inc., cannot be held responsible for damage, mishap, or injury incurred during the use of or because of activities in this book. Appropriate and reasonable caution and adult supervision of children involved in activities and corresponding to the age and capability of each child involved are recommended at all times. Do not leave children unattended at any time. Observe safety and caution at all times.



Dedication

This book is dedicated to my parents, Elizabeth and Roger, who allowed me the freedom of play, and to my children, Nick and Susi, who remind me daily of its power.





Table of Contents

■	Introduction	1
1	Understanding the Complex—and Simple—Nature of Play	3
2	Promoting Development and Learning	14
3	Understanding the Teacher’s Roles as Children Play	29
4	Encouraging Social-Emotional Competence	54
5	Developing Self-Regulation	90
6	Promoting Mathematical Learning	114
7	Fostering Language Learning and Literacy	138
8	Supporting Play and So Much More	154
■	References and Resources	184
■	Index	192







Introduction

Play has begun to take a back seat in the lives of young children. This is a disturbing state of affairs, which seems to be happening for several reasons. With changes in technology and an increase in “screen time” in children’s daily lives, they spend less time playing and more time in passive and sedentary activities. Increasing emphasis on high stakes testing of narrowly defined skills has led to a belief that time spent in classrooms on play is not learning time, and is therefore wasted time. Even in afterschool programs and extracurricular activities, children spend less time in play and more on structured activities. Educators and researchers in early childhood development are experiencing a sense of disbelief that they are having to defend the value of play for kindergarten and primary-aged children, let alone for those as young as preschoolers!

The forces that are pushing play out of the lives of young children are forces rooted in misunderstandings about the way young children develop and learn. Though play is not the only way children progress in the early years, it is an indispensable context and process for learning.

This book is designed to illustrate the value of both free play and guided play in preschool children’s learning and development. In each chapter, you will find anecdotes that explore the possible ways children play, what they can learn from their self-motivated engagement, and how teachers can support that learning. In other words, play is presented not as an activity that is simply allowed to happen, but instead as a process that requires teachers to be knowledgeable, to plan well, and to be intentional. To make the most of preschoolers’ play, teachers will consider important child development and learning goals that can be supported through play, as well as specific strategies for capitalizing on and enhancing the power of play for children’s educational benefit and well-being.







one

Understanding the Complex— and Simple—Nature of Play

Children play. All over the world, children play. They do not need to be forced or coaxed into playing. They will play in the absence of things that are typically considered as toys and will find ways to use a stick, a dirt pile, a door-stopper, or their toes as a plaything. They may even play with no object at all and simply imagine a plaything's existence. They may play alone, with other children, or with an adult. Play is in the nature of human beings, especially young human beings. Children play, and it is a very good thing that they do!

Play is a pleasurable activity that contributes to children's learning and development in very important ways. Because play is enticing, generally fun, and an excellent process and context for children's learning, play has great value to early childhood education. Unlike eating food loaded with added sugar, playing is not something adults need to restrict from children. Unlike eating broccoli or spinach, we do not need to persuade them. What a lucky break: Something children want to do is actually good for them!



Defining Play

Let's look at the question, "What is play?" We can potentially respond from a variety of perspectives, including researchers' views. At first, it may seem odd to think that there are scientists who study play. The phenomenon called play has been studied over many years by scholars from a variety of fields including anthropology, ethology, sociology, psychology, medicine, and education. To an extent, the description of play depends on whom you ask. Oddly, although play has been studied for a long time, a single definition of play is elusive.

Few authors writing about play would be brave enough to profess a final definition of play.

—**JO AILWOOD**, *professor of early childhood education*

Play is a function of living, but it is not susceptible to exact definition . . . the play concept remains distinct from all other forms of thought in which we express the structure of mental and social life.

—**JOHAN HUIZINGA**, *historian*

It is interesting that while most people (including young children) know this thing called play when they see it, it is still not possible to adequately pin it down with a single definition. This highlights the multifaceted nature of play. Rather than being a simple category of behavior, play is complex. However, education researchers have proposed some defining characteristics that are generally supported.

Play...

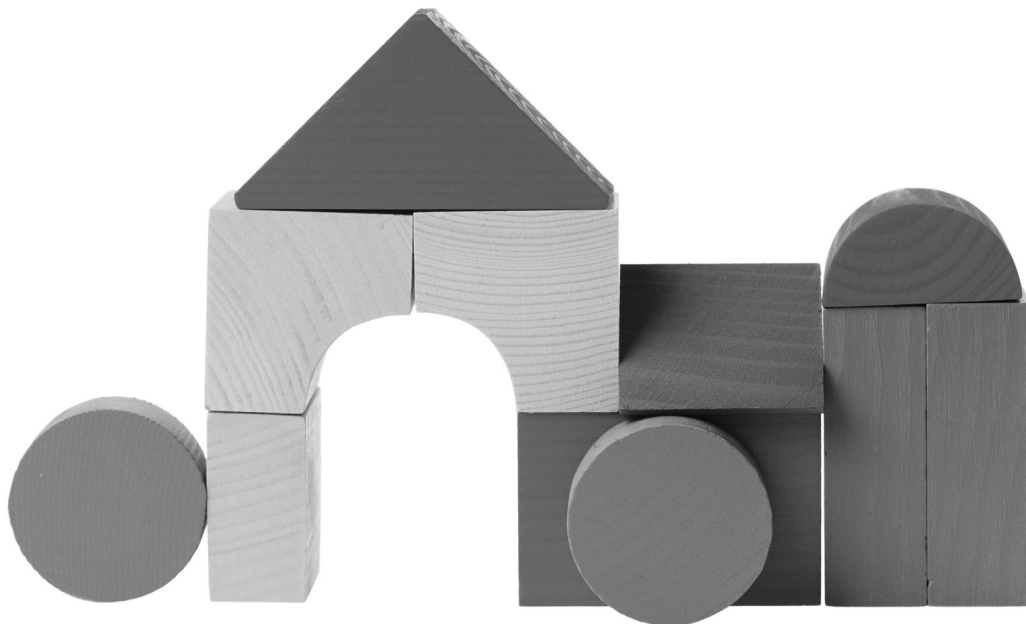
- is enjoyable.
- is spontaneous.
- involves active participation.
- is intrinsically motivated.
- is voluntary.
- is symbolic.
- is free of external rules.
- is dominated by the players.
- is meaningful.
- is episodic.
- involves suspension of reality.

Let's explore that list a bit more to understand children's play. Play is enjoyable, which means it is generally fun. Children like to play. When an activity is basically unpleasant for a child, it is not play. Play has no extrinsic goals; it is voluntarily carried out for the intrinsic pleasure of doing it. Children play because they want to engage in the process.

If a child engages in an activity primarily for the sake of gaining an external reward, the activity is not play. Play is its own reward. Play is characterized by active engagement by the child. Simply listening to a story or watching a demonstration, for example, certainly may be valuable activities. However, because the child is not actively engaged, these activities are not play. Children's active involvement in play often leads to deep engrossment in the activity.

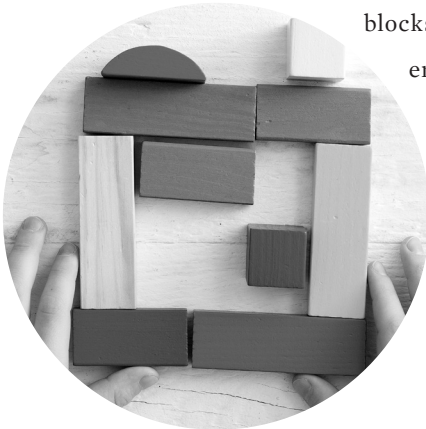
Play often includes an element of make-believe. Although make-believe is carried out as if it were in some way real, the player understands that it is not. The poker chips transformed into coins are not literally money. Suspension of reality allows a small boy in a firefighter's hat to be a 6-foot-tall hero. It is understood that a child making chopping motions at the base of a tree is not really chopping it down; the action is symbolic.

Play is dominated by the players. Children decide the direction the play will take. Even though play may be governed by rules or expectations of some sort, they are expectations the children create or agree to. Play is free of externally imposed rules. Adults do not tell the players how or what to play, although they may offer suggestions or guidance or intervene to maintain safety. You can see evidence of these characteristics of play in the example that follows.



OBSERVE AND LEARN:
Carly and Her Castle

Three-year-old Carly is busy in the block center. She lines up the small, square unit blocks, laying them flat and arranging them to form an enclosure. She places each block purposefully, being careful to create straight edges to her enclosure. After the rectangular enclosure is complete, she says to herself, “Now there gots to be the door,” as she removes one of the blocks to make an opening. “The mom and babies live here, coming home,” she chatters quietly to herself. She places small dollhouse figures inside the enclosure and then moves them about for a few moments while humming. Suddenly Carly pops



up and goes to a shelf to get a basket of small decorative architectural blocks—arches, turrets, columns, and so on. She stacks several more unit blocks on the enclosure and tops them off with the architectural blocks, saying, “Well, yes, it’s the queen. Her girls and her need a nice castle. Princesses. . . princessssssssses. . . princey princesses.” Carly cocks her head to the side with a small smile as she lays several of the figures down. “Now, bed-time princesses.”

No one told Carly to use the blocks to make an enclosure. On her own initiative, she decided what the structure would represent and what it would look like. She is thoroughly involved in her activity, and it has her rapt attention. She is not watching someone else make a castle and create a story—instead she is actively engaged in doing this. Carly is pretending. The blocks are not really a castle, the dolls not really royalty, and she knows this. Her make-believe activity involves a private reality: Carly’s own ideas and fantasy about what goes on among queens and princesses in castles. Carly’s play has no extrinsic goals; the goal is the play process itself. Her purpose in this activity is not to obtain something, such as a sticker or approval or even a finished product to take home. The pleasure of the activity is its own goal. Carly’s relaxed demeanor in this situation shows that the activity is enjoyable for her. She is just playing. Or, to say it differently, “Wow! She is playing!”

Types of Play

Play comes in many forms. When you see young children engaged in playing, what you see may be object play, construction play, pretend play, rough-and-tumble play, games with rules, and often some combination of those happening all at once. The world of children's play is rich, varied, and complex.

Object play: child acts upon objects to find out what they can do

Construction play: child creates or builds something to represent another thing

Pretend play: requires suspension of reality as a child lets an object, idea, person, or action represent something else

Solitary pretend play: child engages alone in pretend play

Sociodramatic play: a type of pretend play in which two or more children engage together in pretense with a shared goal

Game with rules: competition between individuals or teams that is regulated by either longstanding rules or temporary agreement

Rough-and-tumble play: characterized by running, chasing, fleeing, wrestling, jumping, play hitting, smiling, and laughter

OBSERVE AND LEARN:

Robin Sliding Cubes

Robin holds a small, red, wooden cube that he slides forcefully into another small, green, wooden cube, sending the green cube sliding across the smooth surface of the manipulatives table. He retrieves the green cube, then slides the red cube more forcefully, sending the green cube skidding more quickly across the table, over the edge, and onto the floor. Robin retrieves the green cube from the floor and this time slides the two cubes in short jerky motions across the table.

Robin is engaged in object play. He is manipulating the cubes to see what he can make them do. He is not simply exploring the nature of the objects themselves; he is experimenting with how he can act upon them. If, in Robin's mind, the cubes are representing crashing race cars, then his play is also pretend play. Although he is not taking on a role himself, he is making one object (a cube) represent another (a car).

OBSERVE AND LEARN:

Shaquan and Omar Create a Structure

Shaquan and Omar play together on the outdoor patio. They use large, hollow, wooden blocks to create two walls, which stand three feet high opposite each other. The boys then carefully place several long planks so that the ends of the planks rest on each of the two walls. Shaquan and Omar then huddle together beneath the structure.

Shaquan and Omar are engaged in construction play. They have used objects (blocks, in this case) in such a way that the objects are transformed into something else. There is also an element of object play involved, as the boys have explored what they can do with the blocks. If the boys are imagining that the construction they are building is a shelter of some sort and perhaps that they are hiding from zombies, then they are not only engaging in construction play—they are also engaged in pretend play.

OBSERVE AND LEARN:

Sam and Chelsea and a Lunch Box

Sam and Chelsea are in the dramatic play center. As Sam dons a red cape, Chelsea reminds, “Don’t forget to take your lunch box, dear. There’s potatoes and a corn.” She extends a plastic lunch box toward Sam, who draws back and says with disgust, “Super guys don’t eat corn and potatoes. I have super powers to get chicken nuggets whenever I get hungry.” Chelsea frowns and shakes her head, saying, “Well, okay. I have to go to work.” She picks up a purse and stomps out of the dramatic play area.



There are several types of pretend. The type of play in which Sam and Chelsea are engaged is the most complex form of pretend play. They take on roles and coordinate a play scenario—sociodramatic play. They are enlisting an object or action or person to symbolize another object or action or person. Sam is pretending he is a superhero; he and his red cape are standing for an “actual” superhero. Chelsea is pretending there are potatoes and corn in the lunch box. Chelsea is representing herself as an employed person as she walks off with her purse to go to her imaginary work place.

OBSERVE AND LEARN:

Austin, Marco, and Samir Engage in Rough-and-Tumble Play

Austin, Marco, and Samir are thoroughly engrossed as they run around on the playground with a great display of energy, whooping and hollering and knocking each other down. They make crashing noises as they tumble on the ground, then pick themselves up and resume running.



Observation of the boys' facial expressions and tone of voice reveals that there is no real anger involved in this activity. The boys are play fighting rather than engaging in actual aggression.

OBSERVE AND LEARN:

Karina and Jihyun Try a Game with Rules

Karina and Jihyun, two older preschoolers, have pulled out the Candy Land game and are moving their pieces along the path as they draw cards according to the rules they have been taught. "Let's make a new rule that the blue cards really mean red!" suggests Karina. "Okay!" replies Jihyun. They continue the game using this new rule, until the two girls agree that it is too hard to remember. They then revert to the manufacturer's rules.

Games with rules are a bit different from other types of play, because the games are guided by explicit requirements. However, even in play that includes rule-governed games, the rules are under the control of the players. If players agree to the rules, whether they are original or revised or invented, this activity is considered to be play. Games with rules become common after the ages of six or seven, but some preschool children enjoy playing games with rules.

Free Play and Guided Play

We've seen that play may be solitary or social. It can also be freely chosen and governed by the children or guided by an adult. In the examples so far, children initiated the play. The children decided what to play with and how to play with it. The children in each of these scenarios controlled the direction of the play. Katrina and Jihyun, for example, chose the Candy Land game from among a variety of other options. They could have chosen another board game or chosen to draw at the journal table or to build at the block center. They controlled the way they played the game, alternating between the original rules they had learned and a modified rule they invented. Free play is type of play in which children choose what to play with and how to play, with little or no intervention from an adult.

Guided play is a bit different. Let's imagine that Shaquan and Omar's construction play with the large hollow blocks began like this:

Ms. Jenkins sits down with Omar and Shaquan after calling them over to the outdoor block area on the patio. She wonders aloud whether they can build a bridge that's big enough for both of them to sit under. The two boys rise to the challenge with enthusiasm.

While consulting with one another, they stack three rectangular blocks end on end, and three more end on end about two feet away from the first stack. The two stacks of blocks are quite high and precarious. Ms. Jenkins observes, "Wow, looks wobbly. Is this going to work?" "Yes!" proclaims Omar.

As the boys lay a plank across between the two stacks, the construction comes tumbling down. "I know," says Shaquan. "Let's do it this way." He lays a rectangular block on the floor, so that its largest face is flush against the carpet. Then, he stacks another on it in the same way.

"What are you thinking?" asks Ms. Jenkins. "This way is stronger," says Omar. The boys then complete a sturdy bridge and sit under it together.

Ms. Jenkins asks, "So, how did you lay the blocks to make the bridge stronger?" "We put this part onto the floor," says Shaquan, pointing to the largest face of one of the blocks. "What part is that?" asks Ms. Jenkins.

"The big part," says Shaquan. "The biggest part," says Omar.



In this version of Shaquan and Omar’s construction play, the teacher has initiated the play. She has offered a challenge to the boys with a goal in mind—constructing a sufficiently sturdy bridge that is large enough to arch over two boys. Ms. Jenkins has in mind several principles of geometry and mechanics that the boys’ play will support. As the play unfolds, largely under the direction of the children, Ms. Jenkins takes advantage of opportunities to support the boys’ learning through her brief comments and questions.

Guided play is initiated by an adult with potential learning goals in mind but unfolds mainly through the child’s choices during the play. The adult may provide support to move the child toward achieving potential goals.

In an early childhood classroom, both free play and guided play involve a teacher. However, the teacher’s role is different in these two kinds of play, as illustrated in the table that follows.

Types of Activity

TYPE	ADULT INITIATED	CHILD INITIATED
Adult directed	Not play	Not play
Child directed	Guided play	Free play

Adapted from Weisberg, Deena, et al. 2015. “Making Play Work for Education.” Phi Delta Kappan 96(8): 8–13.

As the table demonstrates, free play and guided play differ in terms of who initiates the play. Free play is initiated by the child, for the child’s own purposes. Guided play is initiated by the adult, who has potential learning goals in mind. Both types of play are directed by the child; in other words, the child has control of the direction the play takes. Beyond the initiation, the adult’s role differs in these two types of play. In free play, the adult’s role is to occasionally respond to the child’s play and to intervene only when issues of safety and rights are at stake. In guided play, the adult provides support to increase the likelihood that the child will reach the potential learning that the adult has in mind.

Bring **playful learning** to your preschool classroom

Play is learning! But play in the early years is endangered by the emphasis on strong academics, mounting parental expectations, and pressures on early childhood teachers to prepare young children for the rigors of kindergarten and beyond. With that, gains made by play experiences including readiness-skill and social-emotional development have fallen away.

Young children learn best through play. Planning for Play helps educators understand the different types of play and the rich opportunities offered through carefully planned time and environments designed for valuable pre-K play experiences. Learn how to get the most out of the play in your classroom:

- How to support play without taking it over
- How to guide play toward important concepts and skills
- How to use materials to provoke rich play
- How to get a reluctant child to play with peers
- And so much more!



Kristen M. Kemple, PhD, is a professor of early childhood studies at the University of Florida. She serves on the consulting editors board for NAEYC and is an active presenter at major national conferences. She previously worked as a teacher in Head Start, as well as in a variety of other early childhood programs. She has been an early childhood teacher educator for 30 years and has been fascinated by play since she was an infant. She is a founding faculty member of the Unified Early Childhood Proteach Program at the University of Florida, begun in 1992 as one of the first cross-departmental inclusive teacher education programs in the United States. She is the author of a wide variety of publications on early childhood development and education. Her current scholarship is focused on play, creativity, and social-emotional learning in early childhood.

GH 10538

U.S. \$

Gryphon House
www.gryphonhouse.com