

PLAY



"play is vital to a child's development, equipping them with the skills necessary to tackle humanity's future"

GOODWIN ET AL, 2008 (1)

ISU believes in the power of play as being an essential ingredient for social, emotional, cognitive, creative and linguistic development.

Biological importance of play and well-being

Over the past few decades, school days have become longer, while the time and space available for children to play (both within and outside of school hours) have declined. Based on his own and others' research, Dr. Peter Gray has revealed a strong relationship between the decline of play opportunities for children in the USA over the last half century and an alarming increase in child psychopathology. Various studies have shown that animals and humans who have limited play experience when they are young demonstrate often severe anti-social behaviour as adults (2). Richard Louv's studies have linked the lack of outdoor play to some of the most disturbing childhood trends, such as the rises in obesity, attention disorders, and depression (3). Bornstein reviewed evidence of pretend play and the relationships between the complexity of this type of play and children's emotional well-being (4). At ISU we ensure that we honour children's rights to: unstructured, child-initiated play; opportunities to play and learn outside; opportunities to learn through imaginative, expressive play; and participation in individual and social physical play.

Cognitive development

Bruner revealed that as more complex animals evolved, the length of biological immaturity increased, facilitating an increase in learning and in the amount of different types of play - physical play in mammals, play involving objects in primates and symbolic play in humans (5).

Marcon found that playful learning in pre- schools in the USA was associated with better short and long-term academic, motivational and well-being outcomes by the end of junior school (3). Darling-Hammond & Snyder, in a study of 50 'playbased kindergartens' and 50 'academic-based early learning centres' in Germany, found that by Grade 4 the children from the former were more advanced in reading, maths and social/emotional skills (6). A number of studies have proven that children are able to perform tasks in play at significantly higher levels than in non-playful contexts (e.g. a study of 3-7-year-old children 'standing sentry' by Manuilenko) (7). Diamond, Barnett, Thomas & Munro found that children attending pre-schools using a play-based curriculum have higher self regulatory abilities than children attending regular, instruction-based pre-schools (8). Vygotsky declared that when children's play is spontaneous, child-initiated and self-controlled, they set themselves appropriate challenges, and so create their own 'zone of proximal development' within which learning is most powerfully enhanced (9).

Learning and Teaching

At ISU we ensure that our inquiries utilise play-based learning as a powerful strategy for sustaining motivation for learning, understanding concepts, and development of skills, including: problem solving, creativity, language, executive functioning and social skills. Examples include: expressive play, such as exploring paint; manipulating objects and tools, such as counters, tinkering stations and lego; use of symbolic play to develop imagination and creativity; drama, for example taking on the role of an archaeologist or exploring moral values through role-play; and playing games with rules such as chess.

Partnership

You may find it helpful to consider the following reflective questions:

- How much unstructured playtime do your children have at home?
- How might you encourage your child to engage in play outside of school?
- How do you relax and model the importance of wellbeing and play?



CITATIONS:

1. Goodwin, Polman, et al. To play is to learn. Time to step back and let kids be kids. World Economic Forum. 25 Jan 2018. Online Article. 2. Gray, Peter. The Decline of Play. TEDx. 13 June 2014. Youtube. 3. Louv, Richard. Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder. 2008 Algonquin, N.C. Print. 4. Zosh, Hopkins et al. Learning through play - a review of the evidence. The Lego Foundation, D.K. 2017. Whitepaper. 5. Bruner, Jerome. Nature and uses of immaturity. 1972. American Psychologist. Journal Article. 6. Darling-Hammond, L., & Snyder, J. Reframing accountability: Creating learner-centered schools. (1992). Journal. 7. Manuilenko, Z. The development of voluntary behavior in preschool-age children. 1975. Journal of Russian and East European Psychology. 8. Diamond, A., Barnett, S., Thomas, J., & Munro, S. Preschool program improves cognitive control. Science. 30 November 2007. Online Article. 9. Vygotsky, Lev. The Role of Play in Development. In Mind in Society. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. 1978. Print. 10. Prideaux, Sophie. Why making time to play with your children will make you happier. The National 25 November 2018. Online Article.