

Speaking Out for Play-Based Learning: Becoming an Effective Advocate for Play in the Early Childhood Classroom

Oliver, S. J., and Klugman, E. (2004)

Overview

As an educator becoming an advocate for play-based learning is the first step in making change in the classroom environment. By speaking up and making a stand change can start to unfold. This article provides a framework in which educators and administrators can follow to create change in the early childhood classroom.

Changing Expectations

Culture has become increasingly focused on the achievement of functional skills in the early childhood classroom, focusing on pre-literacy and elementary arithmetic manipulations. Child-centered, play-based learning is losing ground to adult-directed, instruction-based philosophies, despite what teachers know about children's learning experiences.

The Role of Classroom Teachers in Advocating for Play-Based Learning

A director or teacher has a unique ability to bring personal knowledge, experience, and passion about play-based learning to colleagues, parents, and the community through the goal of influencing the values that guide decisions about their children's education.

The Starting Point: Clarifying your own philosophy and values

Clarifying your own philosophy and values about how children learn best and most naturally is the first step in advocating for play-based learning in the classroom. Being a leader on this issue will be respected when you are grounded in knowledge-based and hands-on experience.

Strengthen your communication skills

An important step to effectively speaking out for play-based learning is to develop better communication skills. This not only includes the improvement of speaking and writing skills but also developing a simple, consistent, and convincing message that links play to learning.

Document what you know about the link between play and learning

By being in a position to see learning through play on a daily basis, a classroom teacher or administrator has a better understanding of play-based learning. The challenge is to document what you observe in play and learning and how the two are linked.

Spreading the word

The key point to remember in advocating for play-based learning is to make sure your audience understands the connection between play and learning.

The teacher as policy maker

Do not underestimate the impact of one person. Remember that small and one-to-one influences have always been the base of important and enduring change.

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