

Why Play-Based Learning?

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Overview

The Early Years Learning Environment (EYLF) is built on the understanding that the principles of early childhood pedagogy guide the practice of early childhood educators. In order for EYLF to be established appropriately, early childhood educators need to know what play is, why it is important, and finally how to implement and assess a play-based program and their role in it.

Questioning Practice

Researchers have found that an educator's pedagogy is one of the most important aspects when assessing the quality of children's learning, so to implement the EYLF educators need to discuss and describe their understandings of the practice principles. The EYLF defines play-based learning as a context for learning through which children organize and make sense of their social worlds, while actively engaging with people, objects, and representations. Educators need to stop and ask themselves, what is play?

Brain Development

Research in brain development has taught us that play shapes the structural design of the brain. Play also provides active exploration that assists in building and strengthening brain pathways. When young children play they are allowed to explore, identify, negotiate, take risks and create meaning, children who engage in these experiences are more likely to have well-developed memory skills, language development, and are able to regulate their behavior, which leads to enhanced school adjustment and academic learning.

Fostering Play-Based Programs

Physically active play promotes significant health and well-being benefits, allowing for the development of motor skills. A high-quality, play-based learning program can include the following: (1) a daily schedule that includes active indoor and outdoor physical play, (2) integration of music, movement and creative expression, and (3) adult-child interactions that included moderate to high levels of physical activity. Play helps to develop dispositions for learning which include curiosity, openness, optimism, resilience, concentration, and creativity.

What Educators Can Do

First of all, educators need to know the children and families in their center, assess and document children's learning, and know the child's interests. Second, with the help of the family, educators need to sit down and develop a plan on how to use play-based activities to promote learning. There are four important ways to plan the environment to provide quality play experiences: (1) the physical environment, (2) the social and emotional environment, (3) the intellectual environment, and (4) the temporal environment.

Barblett, L. (2010). Why play-based learning? *Every Child*, 16(3), 4-5.