



What Does a Child Learn From “Play?”

By Mary Johansen, owner – Children’s Legacy

When a parent picks up a child from child care, one of the first questions they ask their child is, “What did you do today?” The usual answer is “I Played.” In the parents mind, there may not be a connection between the value of play and its impact on a child’s learning, but every experience a child has is a learning experience!

In the **BLOCK CENTER**, the child:

- develops his/her large and small muscle control;
- improves his/her eye-hand coordination;
- explores spatial relationships and comparisons of sizes and shapes;
- plans and solves problems while working with other children.

In the **HOME CENTER**, the child:

- makes decisions;
- imitates the people he knows...their work...their feelings...their words...
their environment;
- develops his/her senses;
- increases his/her understanding of his/her world and where he/she fits in;
- uses and practices expressive language.

In the **DRAWING CENTER**, the child:

- develops eye-hand coordination and small muscle control;
- tries to use proper pencil and scissor grips consistently;
- experiments with form, line, movement, shape and spatial relationships;
- uses his/her creativity to plan, design, and implement an idea.

In the **GYM CENTER**, the child:

- develops muscular strength and coordination;
- experiments with locomotor activities;
- strengthens his/her agility and balance;
- relieves his/her tensions and uses his/her energy constructively and imaginatively.

In the **LISTENING AND MUSIC CENTER**, the child:

- experiences a variety of rhythms and tones;
- learns additional memory skills;
- differentiates among sounds;
- expresses him/herself through creative movement, rhythm instruments,
and singing;
- listens to literature and music;
- encounters new language patterns;
- assimilates new concepts and vocabulary.



In the **GAMES CENTER**, the child:

- develops his/her eye-hand coordination and small muscle control through the use of a variety of manipulative materials;
- forms sets of objects;
- identifies shape;
- associates number concepts and numerals;
- sequences numerals, pictures, and stories;
- matches numerals, letters, textures, colors, shapes, and sizes;
- reproduces patterns and designs;
- explores one-to-one correspondence.

At the **WATER PLAY TABLE** and **SAND TABLE**, the child:

- develops his/her eye-hand coordination;
- becomes responsible for cleaning up after him/herself;
- learns the importance of sharing materials;
- creates an imaginary world;
- exchanges thoughts, ideas, and plans with partner;
- measures and makes comparisons.

In the **SCIENCE CENTER**, the child:

- develops his/her senses;
- observes sequences of life processes;
- formulates and evaluates predictions;
- makes classifications and generalizations;
- increases his/her powers of observation;
- gathers simple data and bases his/her decisions upon that data.

In the **LIBRARY CENTER**, the child:

- learns respect and care for books;
- identifies with imagined events and situations;
- tells and dictates stories;
- expands his/her interest in words and books;
- learns to sequence pictures and events in stories;
- interprets pictures and their details;
- acquires familiarity with front-back, top-bottom, left-right progression.

In the **WOODWORKING CENTER**, the child:

- gains a feeling of competence;
- solves problems which are important to him/her;
- strengthens his/her large and small muscles;
- develops eye-hand coordination;
- creates a project according to his/her own plan and design.

In the **PAINTING CENTER**, the child:

- expresses his/her unique feelings and ideas;
- experiments with form, line, movement, shape, and spatial relationships;
- develops eye-hand coordination;
- learns to respect the artistic expressions of others;
- uses his/her creativity by planning, designing, and constructing an idea.



In the **PUZZLE CENTER**, the child:

- develops eye-hand coordination and small muscle control;
- works with a whole object and its parts;
- sees the interrelationships between sizes and shapes.

There are many types and stages of play and as the child matures they go through each of the stages at their own pace.

Cognitive Play

Functional

Simple repetitive muscle movements with or without objects

Dramatic

Substitution of an imaginary situation or object in a pretend play situation

Constructive

Manipulation of objects to construct or create something

Games with rules

Acceptance of prearranged rules and adjustments to them in organized play

Social Play

Solitary

Child plays alone and independent

Parallel

Child plays beside rather than with other children

Group

Child plays with another child or group of children striving to attain a common goal

Other

Exploratory

Child seeks sensory information or stimuli

Rough and Tumble

Play fighting or playful physical activity

Chase Games

One or more children planning to chase or actually chasing another child or children

Aggression

Real fighting – with intent to hurt or defend



Non-Play

Unoccupied

Child is not playing. Child is watching anything of momentary interest.

Onlooker

Child is watching other children play. Child may converse with players but does not participate.

Transition

Preparing for or moving from one activity to another

The importance of play cannot be overemphasized when it comes to how a child learns!