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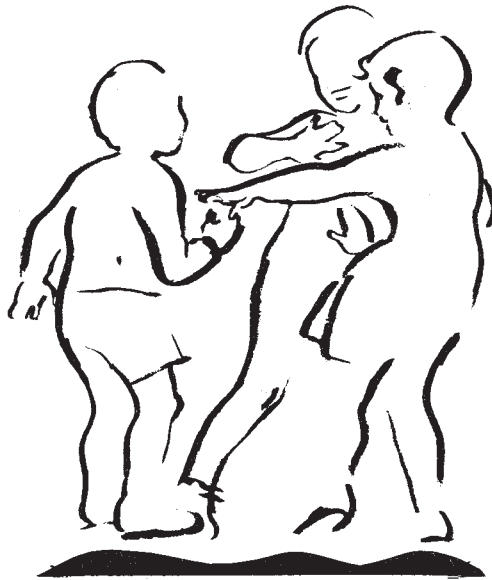
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PLAYING

A Kid's Curriculum

1,001 Activities for Young Children, Ages 2-6



SANDRA J. STONE

ILLUSTRATED BY FRAN KIZER

 GOOD YEAR BOOKS

Acknowledgments

To William M. Stone, for his enormous assistance in readying this book for publication.

To Dr. Reynaldo Gomez, associate professor at Arizona State University, for being a strong advocate for children's play and for inspiring the development of this book.

Dedication

*To my children,
Jeff, John, Jason, and Brian.*

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Cover illustration by Karen Kohn.

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ISBN 978-1-59647-003-3

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INTRODUCTION



LAY IN EVERY LAND. Play in every culture. Play in every language. Play everywhere—the children of the world play. Experts have defined play as intrinsically motivated, freely chosen, process-oriented as opposed to goal-oriented, enjoyable, ordered, just pretend behavior. This activity of play is a function of the entire human race. Is it purely entertainment? Is it valueless? Is it unimportant? Or, does it serve a multitude of roles in the development of children?

For educators, play is increasingly seen as a fertile field where a broad range of learning can thrive and flourish. And its values are continually being assessed, defined, and affirmed.

Play is real. It is vital. It helps children learn about their world naturally. Children use play to test ideas, discover relationships, abstract information, express their feelings and ideas, define themselves, and develop peer relationships. Active “players” develop and accumulate their own knowledge about their world and their place in it.

Piaget states that “children should be able to do their own experimenting and their own research. Teachers, of course, can guide them by providing appropriate materials, but the essential thing is that in order for a child to understand something, he must construct it himself, he must re-invent it. Every time we teach a child something, we keep him from re-inventing it for himself. On the other hand, that which we allow him to discover by himself will remain with him visibly, . . . for the rest of his life” (Piers [ed.], p. 27).

“For all the rest of his life” is a powerful statement. Through play, we see a child becoming who he or she is and will be. The play processes children use give them “ownership” of themselves and their world. In play, the key word is “engaged.” Children are actively involved in play. They internalize their discoveries, discoveries that belong to the individual child for *the rest of his or her life*.

For educators, who are child-centered in approach, it is essential that play be an important component of the educational process. Unfortunately,



play is often taken out of the curriculum for young children when learning is defined in terms of only the academic. In *Play as a Medium* (1988), Bergen expresses how “play has been undervalued as a curricular tool by educators and by parents because society has defined the goals of learning, especially school learning, very narrowly. . . . Play, which allows children to choose their learning focus and which fosters a broad range of developmental goals, should be included as an essential learning element . . .” (Bergen [ed.], 1988, p.1).

For young children, curriculum should be child-centered with open-ended learning experiences and a broad range of developmental goals. A structured, narrowly defined program can only inhibit a child’s educational development. A less structured program will put more emphasis on intrinsic motivation, learning by discovery, cognitive process, and the well-being of the child from a whole-child perspective (Hess & Croft, 1972). A program with a focus on play provides these important ingredients.

The purpose of *Playing* is to provide educators with a guide for using play activities with young children purposefully and confidently. This book includes:

- Noted research into the values of play, which are cited in order to strengthen the teacher’s position for utilizing play activities.
- Types of play and methods for how they can best be implemented.



- Play observation and play tutoring techniques, which are presented so teachers can maximize the play value for children.
- An extensive selection of play activities for young children.
- Suggestions for extending play activities to various content areas, to include additional concepts, and to develop more play.

Play education affords teachers the opportunity to go with the “natural flow of learning.” Consider, for example, a father and his young son who venture into a river in a canoe. The father and son wish to take the river to a designated spot. The father knows how the river circles about, twisting and turning, meeting itself from time to time. He knows he may choose to reach his destination by going up river *against* the flow or down river *with* the flow. Wisely, the father chooses to go with the flow knowing he will reach his destination faster and with less stress.

Wise teachers see a river of knowledge. When the young child enters the river, the teacher may direct him or her to “go with the flow” by providing play experiences, or “against the flow” by providing a structured, regimented academic program. Play affords children the freedom to learn without stress. And with this freedom comes the joy of learning that can last a lifetime.

THE VALUES OF PLAY

Researchers have found that the values of play are extensive and encompass the whole child—cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Play is a vital medium for thinking processes. It contributes to cognitive growth by providing exposure to a multitude of experiences, which enriches the thinking of children.

Erikson (1963) states that “child’s play is the infantile form of the human ability to deal with experience by creating model situations and to master reality by experimenting and planning” (p. 222). Piaget sees play as practice in consolidating newly acquired mental skills. Play facilitates the translation of experience into internal meaning.

Research substantiates a strong relationship between play and cognitive development. Vygotsky (1976) sees play as having a direct role in cognitive development with symbolic play having a crucial part in developing abstract thought.

In a study by Lieberman (1977), playfulness in kindergartners was found to correlate with higher scores in divergent thinking. Through play, children use divergent thinking to research solutions to problems. Play has been recognized as the highest form of research (Caplan & Caplan, 1974).

Play provides many opportunities for children to create, invent, and design as they build, draw, and dramatize. Play is a natural avenue for the expression of creativity. Dansky and Silverman (1973, 1975) conducted experimental studies and found a causal relational between play and creativity. Creativity is considered the highest form of problem solving.

Play encourages problem solving through discovery. Bruner (1972) found that play enhanced children’s ability to solve problems by increasing their behavioral options. In fact, several studies have found that play encourages children’s problem-solving abilities (Sylva, Bruner, Genova, 1976; Simon & Simon, 1983). Play also encourages cognitive flexibility in the solution of problems (Pellegrini, 1981, 1984). Consider how adults use language to talk through problems to seek solutions. In the same way, children play through problems for solutions (Vygotsky, 1967).