

the importance of play essay sample

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



Play is a child's work. Play is important for children's development and for children to learn. Through play, children learn about the ever-changing world (Elkind, 2003). Teachers and families often view the value of play in different ways. Early childhood teachers say that "play is a child's work" while parents ask, "Did my child just play all day?" The different descriptions of the value and purposes of play add to the dilemma of what and how classroom teachers can support learning and development for young children. When children play, they have active engagement with materials. Play allows children to be attentive to the process at hand, and children display a positive affect when playing (Nell & Drew, 2013). Children begin to think symbolically when they play. For example, using a block and pretending it is a telephone, or pretending a pegboard with pegs is a birthday cake. Play is directed by the child and the rewards come from within the child. Play is enjoyable and spontaneous.

Play helps children learn social and motor skills and cognitive thinking. According to Fromberg and Gullo (1992), play enhances language development, social competence, creativity, imagination, and thinking skills. Play is needed for healthy development of children. Research shows that 75 percent of brain development occurs after birth. Play helps with that development by stimulating the brain through the formation of connections between nerve cells (C. M. Bailey 2006). Play also helps children to develop language and socialization skills. Play allows children to learn to communicate emotions, to think, be creative and solve problems. As children grow and develop, his or her play evolves. There are certain types of play that are associated with, but not restricted to, specific age groups.

Unoccupied play: In the early months of infancy, from birth to about three months, children are busy in unoccupied play. Children seem to be making random movements with no clear purpose, but these movements are the initial form of play. **Solitary play:** From three to 18 months, babies will spend much of their time playing on their own. During solitary play, children are very busy with play and they may not seem to notice other children sitting or playing nearby. This is a common type of play in infants and toddlers because they have limited social, cognitive, and physical skills.

Onlooker play: This happens most often during the toddler years. This is where the child watches other children play. Although children may ask questions of other children, there is no effort to join the play. **Parallel play:** From the age of 18 months to two years, children begin to play alongside other children without any interaction.

They begin to show their need of being with other children their own age.

Associative play: When children are around three to four years of age, they become more interested in other children than the toys. They start to socialize with other children. This play is sometimes referred to as “loosely organized play.” They do not set rules, although they all want to be playing with the same types of toys and may even trade toys. **Cooperative play:** This type of play begins in the late preschool period (4 to 5 years). The play is organized by group goals. There is at least one leader, and children are definitely in or out of the group. They begin to play games with rules such as, Simon Says, Follow the Leader, and team sports. **Symbolic or Fantasy play:** Children learn to try new roles and situations, experiment with languages and emotions with this type of play. Children learn to think and create

beyond their world. They assume adult roles and learn to think in abstract methods.

They will stretch their imaginations and use new words and numbers to express concepts, dreams and history. There are many benefits to play. Children gain knowledge through their play. They learn to think, remember, and solve problems. Play allows children to be creative while developing their own imaginations. Children use fine and gross motor skills in their play. They react to each other socially. They think about what they are doing and going to do. They use language to talk to each other or to themselves and they very often respond emotionally to the play activity. The integration of these different types of behaviors is key to the cognitive development of young children. The relationship between play and cognitive development is described differently in the two theories of cognitive development which dominate early childhood education-Piaget's and Vygotsky's.

Piaget (1962) defines play as assimilation, or the child's efforts to make environmental stimuli match his or her own concepts. Piagetian theory says that play, in and of itself, does not necessarily result in the formation of new cognitive structures. Piaget claims that play is just for pleasure, and while it allows children to practice things they have already learned, it did not necessarily result in the learning of new things. For example, a child who puts on a raincoat and a firefighter's hat and rushes to rescue his teddy bear from the pretend flames in his play house is practicing what he has already learned about firefighters. In contrast, Vygotskian theory says that play actually facilitates cognitive development.

Children not only practice what they already know—they also learn new things. An example of this would be, a child playing in the block center announces to his teacher, “ Look! When I put these two square blocks together, I can make a rectangle!” Whether children are practicing what they have learned in other settings or are constructing new knowledge, it is clear that play has a valuable role in the early childhood classroom. In conclusion, play is an essential and critical part of all children’s development. Play starts in the child’s infancy and ideally, continues throughout his or her life. Play is how children learn to socialize, to think, to solve problems, to mature and most importantly, to have fun. Play connects children with their imagination, their environment, their parents and family and the world.