

Learning Through Play: An Introduction

Play gives children natural opportunities to engage in concrete and meaningful activities that develop cognitive, language, and social skills. Through play children increase their knowledge of self, others, and physical world.

Play exercises different types of cognitive skills:

Functional skills involve sensory and motor development, both gross and fine motor.

Constructive skills involve using objects or materials to create something or solve a problem.

Dramatic skills involve symbolic and pretend play.

Play also exercises different types of social skills:

Solitary-playing alone

Parallel-engaging in activities similar to other children in close proximity

Cooperative- playing interactively with other children

The cognitive types describe the complexity of a child's play skills. The social types describe the level of social interaction the child is engaged in. Social and cognitive skills are interrelated and often overlap. Children may demonstrate several social and cognitive elements during one play activity.

While engaging in these types and levels of play, children practice many skills. A child's motor development becomes increasingly more refined through the physical activity that play naturally provides. Children increase their vocabulary and facility with language by using it to express emotions, thoughts, and ideas. Children learn the importance of social rules, how to control their emotions, and how to resolve conflicts with others. Children learn to solve problems and exercise their creativity and imagination.

Play is the ideal way for children to learn and practice these skills. Because play is fun, children will repeat activities over and over. This repetition fosters the practicing of skills for which the child is developmentally ready until they are mastered. Experiences that happen often create permanent neurological connections and thus real learning. Children gain confidence as they experience fun and success in play. This increased confidence encourages children to seek out even more challenging activities. Ideas and concepts expressed during play increase and become more complex as their play skills increase and become more complex.