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See Inside

The Death of Preschool

The trend in early education is to move from a play-based curriculum to a more school-like environment of directed learning. But is earlier better? And better at what?

By Paul Tullis | Thursday, November 3, 2011 | 3 comments

On a perfect Southern California morning not long ago, a gaggle of children gathered in the backyard of a million-dollar home in an upscale Los Angeles neighborhood to celebrate the birthday of twin four-year-old girls. The host parents had rented a petting zoo for the day, and kids jumped gleefully in a bouncy castle out in the driveway. On the terrace, a few parents chatted beside an alluring spread of bagels, coffee and fruit.

Most of the kids at the party attend the same preschool. The father of one child enrolled there, where tuition is $14,300 a year for half a day, was asked what he likes about it.

"I like that my daughter can tell me what kind of whale it is we see in a movie," said the man, sporting a seersucker jacket. "They seem to be teaching things that other schools don't."

"You ask them what they did in school today," chimed in another dad, "and they're like, 'Oh, today we learned about pointillism.' There's a whole series on Picasso, a four-month project on Klimt."

The first father continued his praise. "You go in there, and they're sitting down, learning something," he said. "At other preschools, they're just playing."

These parents might be surprised to learn that "just playing" is in fact what nearly all developmental psychologists, neuroscientists and education experts recommend for children up to age seven as the best way to nurture kids' development and ready them for academic success later in life. Decades of research have demonstrated that their innate curiosity leads them to develop their social, emotional and physical skills independently, through exploration—that is, through play. Even animals as diverse as squirrels, horses and bears engage in, and cognitively benefit from, play [see "The Serious Need for Play," by Melinda Wenner; *Scientific American Mind*, February/March 2009].

The trend among preschools, however, is to engage children in activities that look more and more like school for older kids. Early-childhood educators are turning to a method known as direct instruction, which the National Institute for Direct Instruction, an advocacy group, defines as "teaching that emphasizes well-developed and carefully planned lessons ... and clearly defined and prescribed teaching tasks." So children spend more time sitting, listening and following instructions and less time playing pirates.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children, a Washington, D.C.–based organization that proposes standards for preschools, has changed its guidelines to focus more on specific achievements. In 1998 its standards "were more general in nature," says deputy executive director Barbara Willer. When the standards were last updated, in 2006, children were suddenly expected to demonstrate proficiency in 58 distinct topics in seven academic areas, including literacy, math and science. Although nobody is

recommending either entirely free play or eliminating it altogether, even Willer advocates for balance: "Primarily focusing on seatwork or lecturing with little or no time for children to interact, explore, investigate and play is not an effective teaching strategy for active young children."

Nevertheless, the challenge of putting those guidelines into practice has tilted many preschool teachers toward traditional classroom activities such as lectures, flash cards and tests. "Scientists are baffled," says Alison Gopnik, a professor of psychology at University of California, Berkeley. "The more serious science we do, the more it comes out that very young children are not designed to do focused, goal-directed behavior we think of [as appropriate] for older children but are to a phenomenal degree very sophisticated about learning from the things and the people around them."

The Infant Intellect

Gopnik, with her colleagues Daphna Buchsbaum and Thomas L. Griffiths, demonstrated these sophisticated learning methods in a study published this year. The researchers showed two groups of children a toy that played music in response to a particular sequence of actions. With one group, an experimenter demonstrated several lengthy sequences of actions that made it play music; with the other, she pretended not to know how it worked. The kids in the first group imitated the experimenter. Although they successfully got the toy to play music, they did not figure out that only two actions embedded in the sequences were needed to produce sounds. The group without direct instruction, however, discovered the more efficient solution without the "teacher" ever having showed it to them.

In a similar study also published this year, developmental psychologist Laura Schultz of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and her colleagues showed two groups of children a toy that did a number of things, including emitting squeaks. When left to play with it, the group for whom the experimenters demonstrated how to make it squeak could only make it squeak. The group given the toy without any direct instruction, however, made it squeak and discovered its other features, too. Direct instruction, these studies suggest, inhibits children's natural curiosity and their ability to learn.

Such expressions of inquisitiveness reveal how children investigate their world. For example, youngsters use dramatic ("pretend") play to try to exert control over their environment just as they grow strong enough to do so. Running around in circles, playing with blocks and climbing on a jungle gym may seem like exercise or goofing off to an adult, but several studies have shown that children infer a basic sense of physics through these activities. The possession of fine-motor skills—learned through activities such as drawing and cutting, which coordinate finger movement with visual perception—is one of the strongest predictors of academic success, according to a study last year by David Grissmer and his colleagues at the University of Virginia's Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning.

Further evidence of children's innately sophisticated learning methods comes from long-term studies of how children acquire language. In a University of Kansas study in 1995, psychologists Betty Hart, Todd Risley and their collaborators tracked 42 families with one- and two-year-olds and recorded every verbal interaction between parents and children. They found no instances of direct teaching among the kids who went on to develop the widest vocabularies and richest use of language. As Peter L. Mangione, co-director of the Center for Child and Family Studies at WestEd in San Francisco, a nonprofit public research and development agency, puts it, "Storytelling, singing, playing, telling jokes—those are the building blocks of extensive vocabularies. Not direct teaching."

Preschool ... or Precollege?

So why the shift to direct instruction at preschools today? Mangione sees two forces at work: "The perception is the earlier you start doing formal learning experiences, the better." A second factor, he and others agree, is standardized testing. The law passed by Congress in 2001 known as No Child Left Behind encouraged preschools to include more direct instruction in their curricula by mandating standardized tests in math and reading for all public school third graders. Schools failing to meet certain benchmarks face stiff penalties. Consequently, teachers in the earlier grades come under pressure to prepare kids for the coming high-stakes assessments.

Children enrolled in the federal Head Start preschool program for underprivileged children are also assessed as a result of No Child Left

Behind. Yet, wrote Deborah Stipek, dean of Stanford University's School of Education, in 2006, "If the test used to assess early-childhood programs focuses on isolated skills, children are likely to be taught isolated skills." Such a shift, she continued, would tend to foster direct instruction.

Stipek was right: a report by the Alliance for Childhood, an international NGO promoting healthy child development, found an average of 20 to 30 minutes a day of testing and test preparation among kindergarteners in Los Angeles and New York. This past spring a New York City mother sued her daughter's $19,000-a-year preschool for failing to prepare the girl for the standardized tests that private schools rely on for kindergarten admissions. The suit cited an article in the *New York Times* as evidence of what has become an accepted fact of life among professional-class Manhattan parents in recent years, despite the absence of proof: admission to what is considered an "elite" preschool is a necessary first step to admission to the Ivy League.

Gopnik says the preschool teachers with whom she speaks regularly tell her they know that play is best for their small charges, but they feel squeezed between two sides. On one, as if confirming Mangione's hypothesis, is policy makers; on the other is parents.

It might seem ironic that this shift toward direct instruction and earlier introduction of academics is most visible among the children of some of the best-educated parents, at a time when American society as a whole is the best educated it has ever been—especially given all the science supporting play-based learning. But Gopnik points out that with many affluent people moving far away from family members when they enter adulthood and most women entering the workforce right away, fewer new parents have taken care of nieces, nephews and cousins, as they did in earlier times, before raising their own children. They may have no experience with the very young. "But what they have lots of experience with is going to school and work; they're really good at that, so it's natural they think that's what children should be doing as well. Not having seen what a three-year-old is like, they think they should put children in situations that are more academic."

Montessori Shir Hashirim, the place attended by the children of that L.A. birthday party, would appear emblematic of Gopnik's notion. Housed in a small, craftsman-style bungalow tucked between an apartment building and a recording studio a few blocks from the Hollywood Freeway, the school is considered one of the most exclusive preschools in the city, with pupils coming from the wealthiest neighborhoods. Inside, posters of well-known works by Picasso, Matisse, Léger and van Gogh cover walls freshly painted in bright colors. Soon after I sit down on a small, blue stool to observe the children, someone offers me an espresso.

This Montessori school is ostensibly based on an educational program developed by an Italian woman of that name early in the 20th century, which encourages children to discover new concepts using "materials that develop their cognitive powers through direct experience," in the words of the American Montessori Society. But in the first few minutes of observation, it is clear that direct instruction is part of the program.

One five-year-old boy is quizzed on the human skeleton. A girl pores over flash cards of words composed of two consonants surrounding the letter a. She sounds them out slowly with the help of a teacher, who repeats the sounds more quickly and more closely together.

"Sad!" the girl finally says.

"Tomorrow you have to read the same words," the teacher informs her.

Another girl aged four or five, in a long magenta skirt and a sequined T-shirt, assembles a puzzle that forms a map of Asia. After putting the largest piece on the floor in front of her, she approaches a teacher for direction.

"Find Vietnam," the instructor says. The girl digs through the puzzle pieces and places Vietnam on the floor. She goes back to the teacher.

"What's next to Vietnam?" asks the grown-up. The little girl's eyes dart nervously about the room as she searches the recesses of her tiny mind for the answer.

"Cambodia," she says.

"Good," the teacher responds. "Now find Cambodia."

As the girl does so, I ask her what she knows about Vietnam.

"I don't know because I haven't been there," she tells me. "I've only been to Thailand."

Brains under Pressure

Salvatore Vascellaro teaches preschool teachers as a member of the faculty at New York City's Bank Street College of Education, one of the oldest and most well-regarded such schools in the U.S. Confirming what the girl had told me, he says, "Nothing is as rich for kids as when they engage the world physically." Although I had already spoken to Vascellaro, I was still impressed to see a preschooler identify the countries of Southeast Asia and assemble their shapes on a map. My seven-year-old sure could not do it. But, Vascellaro asks, "What would she do with that knowledge other than spout it back to adults? We want kids to draw relationships from what they see. To think and question and act on these things." A child's play is essentially improvisation—a chance to try out new concepts by imagining scenarios or thinking up ways to manipulate a toy.

More troubling is the idea that children may suffer when deprived of play. Emphasizing the acquisition of skills such as early reading and geography comes with a trade-off—less time spent on social and emotional development, which are themselves important to a child's ability to learn. "When we say every five-year-old must leave kindergarten reading," Vascellaro adds, referring to a policy some educational programs are adopting, "we've put some kids at a distinct disadvantage." The ability to read can come anywhere between the ages of three and seven and be considered normal. "If you're going to fail in kindergarten, boy, it's downhill from there."

Early academic experiences can forge dramatic long-term links with mental health later on, as Lawrence Schweinhart, now president of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti, Mich., and his colleagues showed in 1997. They followed 68 three- and four-year-olds, all living in poverty, through age 23. Almost half of those in a heavily academic preschool went on to have emotional problems, compared with only 6 percent of those in the play-based preschool. The latter group also had fewer felony arrests and spent fewer years in special education diagnosed with emotional impairment.

Perhaps most disturbing is the potential for the early exposure to academics to physiologically damage developing brains. Although the brain continues to change throughout life in response to learning, young children undergo a number of sensitive periods critical to healthy development; learning to speak a language and responding to social cues are two such domains. Appropriate experiences can hone neural pathways that will help the child during life; by the same token, stressful experiences can change the brain's architecture to make children significantly more susceptible to problems later in life, including depression, anxiety disorders—even cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Bruce McEwen, a neuroendocrinologist at the Rockefeller University, notes that asking children to handle material that their brain is not yet equipped for can cause frustration. Perceiving a lack of control is a major trigger of toxic stress, which can damage the hippocampus, a brain area crucial to learning and memory.

That's probably not what the man in the seersucker jacket hopes for his daughter, who knows so much about whales.

Play - Evolutionary, Universal & Essential

by Stuart L. Brown, M. D.

What is shared by mass murderers, felony drunk drivers, starving children, head banging laboratory animals, anxious overworked students, and all reptiles? They don't play. What do most Nobel Laureates, historically renowned creative artists, successful multi-career entrepreneurs, and animals of superior intelligence have in common? They are full of play throughout their lives.

There is something profound about play, yet the full story of play has not been told. Most of us do not spend much time pondering the subject of play, or consider it as basic as, say, oxygen or sleep. Hold your breath for 45 seconds and your body will tell you of its need for air. Stay awake for two full nights and every cell will ache with the need to sleep. Try staying awake unendingly for two weeks and it is fatal. But when an adult misses play for a few days about all that seems to happen is that life loses its brightness and sense of purpose or meaning. Be seriously deprived of play in childhood, though, and the consequences are likely to be dire, though delayed. So we do not equate the need to play as belonging in the survival ballpark with food or sleep. Staying alive and play deprivation don't seem directly linked. Or are they?

Every child, well-fed and safe in addition to breathing and sleeping, also universally spontaneously engages in play. From the first moments of post-feeding nipple play, to the shared babbling between parent and child, to peek-a-boo and ring-around-the-rosy, any bonded protected nourished child is energized by and finds its waking hours dominated by joyful acts of play.

But where does play fit into the big scheme of things? An evolutionary look at it shows that as it has developed over the eons, it closely accompanies the establishment of a large brain and warm bloodedness. The smarter, more flexible, and adaptive the creature, and the more they play, paradoxically, the greater is their immediate risk to life and limb. So play is different, more connected to the details of the environment than oxygen or sleep, but just as inevitable--and necessary.

Snow leopards box, kelp-laden sea lions play tug of war, otters do most anything in order to play; bats dabble with their sonar, killer whales tease sea gulls, ravens slide down snow banks on their backs, and given the chance, wild wolves and grizzly bears play with each other despite their dissimilarity in size and long carnivorous heritage. And humans? Well, we are the champions of play, designed by biology for play through all of our lives, but sculpted by culture as to its adult forms.

Play movements are recognized across species lines, and play signals, such as a relaxed open mouth expression, (the "play face") can be seen in both mammals and birds and is understood by both to mean "no harm will come to you, what follows is play." Thus play, anciently and slowly established during evolution, has established a language which forms the basis for trust of others and forms an action pattern of beginning integrity. Play signals and languages are powerful and can override more stereotyped communications such as those which frequently precede a fight. We have not learned to utilize these languages fully in our daily dealings with each other.

Play also reduces the social distance between individuals and assists in the development of more intricate intimate bonds. It provides a repertoire of behaviors to alleviate stress and helps the player cope with ambiguity.

Authentic play, which occurs whenever the playfulness itself gives more pleasure than any goal associated with it, is the means by which adaptability and flexibility are added to the players' existence. Thus play serves as the grounding core of learning.

My studies of violent anti-social men (murderers, drunken drivers) revealed major play deprivation. Detailed evaluations of other selected comparison populations show the importance of play to their healthy adaptable development. Thus, play seems necessary as an antidote to the development of violent tendencies as well as a partner to effective socialization.

Play and games seem necessary for the development of community which requires mutual trust, cooperation, and common goal setting. They are necessary to develop a sense of future optimism and perseverance. Handicapping, the play induced behavior where the stronger one voluntarily withholds domination in a situation of unequal power, is learned in the crucibles of solitary and social play by all social creatures.

For humans, play is also surprisingly active in the shaping of one's own inner private narratives (actual sense of self), and thus is directly related to mental health and elasticity. It is also the means by which we shape a model world.

Thus it serves as fulcrum to whatever takes on meaning. The growing virtual world, which is now often being seen as the only reality in which we exist is, at base, a play-imaginary world.

Play also acts as a freeing non rational action. Play emanates from intrinsic special systems of the organism. Witness a monkey leaping and pirouetting gleefully from a tree into a pond while looking at peers, and play can be seen as art in action. Once thought to be the domain of humans, a predilection to choose symmetry (beauty) in matters such as mate choice, rather than being driven by blind instinctive forces is now seen by numerous leading edge investigators as also a capacity of some animals. A close look at the sources of aesthetics links it with the capacity to play.

So, it appears that nature has provided us options we do not always appreciate or incorporate into our lives. Perhaps the time has come for us to allow its wisdom to be enacted.

Play - *"Are There Tree Forts In The Yard"*

Participants in Jenny Chapman's workshop had an entire day to rediscover their delight in play as they examined and created indoor and outdoor play spaces.

As adults we forget what is essential to play; people have therefore to participate in play to learn about it, Jenny contends. In this spirit, workshop participants began by constructing elaborate hats for themselves from simple materials, then made posters about their favourite childhood play spaces before moving to fort building -that favourite of childhood pastimes- in the afternoon.

Play spaces should allow for intimacy, creativity, exploration and challenge, Jenny argues. She illustrated her point with slides of different play grounds at parks and day care centres. Areas which are loosely structured, offer uneven surfaces, heights and depths, hidden spaces and raw materials (e.g. sand) are much more stimulating and child-centered than the flat, hard, streamlined and ultra-safe play areas often constructed by adults. Such areas are intrinsically confining because they restrict any improvisation on the part of the children using them. And while adult concern for child safety is legitimate, Jenny stress, children need to experience physical risks to gain important motor skills and dexterity, as well as to pursue their curiosity and desire for knowledge.

An inspiring space for play is vital to children's creativity, curiosity and leaning, Jenny contends. Materials to play with are also important, but need only be of the simplest nature. Open-ended materials which exist in every home and are often not designed for play usually work best; newspaper, plastic containers, glue and tape, string, old cloth.

Using plastic sheets, masking tape and a fan, the group created a "dark-cave" play space (for details on how to construct the cave, please see Michelle deSalaberry's column "Wind" in this issue). Everyone piled into the cave where they listened to a story about clay, held clay in their hands, and projected stars onto the ceiling.

Wanting a yard, Jenny encouraged the group to use the conference site for the creation of their own play spaces. Returning from lunch, I noticed the efficient concrete surface of the Whistler Conference Centre had been broken by coloured streamers and irregular shapes. By the registration desk, an igloo constructed from paper bags and masking tape covered with white cloth, stood quietly in a neglected corner. The participants had regrouped in their room to wrap up the workshop. On the way downstairs, I almost passed by a fort made from scarves, plastic hoops and wooden slats taped together teepee style which now occupied a small valley between two wooden railings.

As if on cue, a little girl who had quickly taken up residence after the adults had departed popped her head out from under a cloth door and invited me to come in and see her house.

- Jenny Chapman
Reviewed by Sharon English

"If you watch children learn to walk, they don't read about it and walk, they watch, try it, stumble and try it again."

- Susanne Kersta, Ph.D.
Associate Chair of Chemical Engineering,
University of Alberta (talking about how to help students become engineers - by doing)

Play's the Thing

by Keith Thompson

"No behavioral concept has proved more ill-defined, elusive, controversial, even unfashionable," the prominent naturalist Edward O. Wilson has written about play. To paraphrase a Supreme Court justice: Play may be hard to define, but you know it when you experience it. The Dutch philosopher Johan Huizinga, in his classic book *Homo Ludens: The Play Element in Culture*, showed that what we call play operates in law, war, science, poetry, philosophy and art -- in virtually every aspect of life. He insists that other things can be explained in terms of play but that play, being fundamental, can't be explained in terms of other things. Huizinga even declares play a wider, more all-embracing concept than seriousness -- for the ideas of seriousness excludes play, whereas the ideas of play can very well be taken seriously.

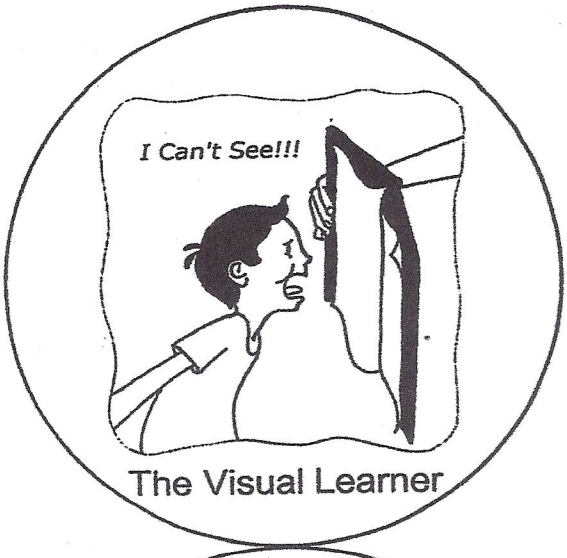
"Let's simply say that play is whatever absorbs us fully, whatever creates purpose and order, whatever involves us in as much meaningful interactions as is possible," writes Mill Valley journalist and martial artist George Leonard in his book *The Way of Aikido: Life Lessons from an American Sensei*.

Emerging evidence from diverse fields suggests that play may be as important to life as sleeping or dreaming -- for other animals as well.

"Risk"

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool,
To weep is to risk appearing sentimental,
To reach out for another is to risk involvement,
To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self,
To place your ideas, your dreams, before a crowd is to risk their loss,
To love is to risk not being loved in return,
To live is to risk dying,
To hope is to risk despair,
To try is to risk failure,
But risks must be taken, because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing.
The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, and is nothing,
They may avoid suffering and sorrow, but they cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love, live,
Only a person who risks is free.

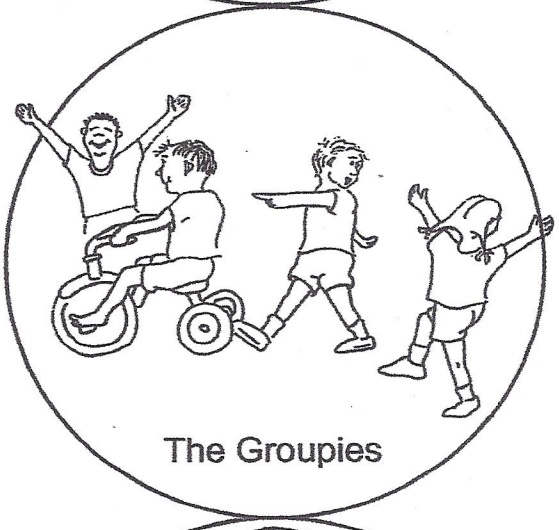
-- Learning Styles --



The Visual Learner

The Walkman

The Mobile Learner



The Groupies

Touchie Feelies

Leave Me Alone

Illustrations -
© Michael Leeman

-- Stages of Play --

Solitary • Parallel • Onlooker • Associative • Cooperative

INVITATIONS WE SEND	
Come on in and give it a try	*Come on in and let me do it for you*
• Accepts boys need to move often	• Encourages similarities
• Encourages risk taking	• Promotes compliance
• Supports creativity	• Enjoys products, not process
• Encourages being different	• Expects perfection

THE RULES

For Children:

Run
Jump
Dig
Explore
Talk
Build
Tear Down
Pour
Yell
Saw

Hammer
Paint
Ride
Imagine
Sing
Wonder
Measure
Ponder
Play
Be alone

Examine
Experiment
Express
emotion
Be excited
Work
Lead
Follow
Watch
Hear

Smell
Taste
Mix
Create
Daydream

THE RULES

For Parents:

Observe!

Listen!

Be ready to "step in" with guidance when a child is on the verge of:

-hurting themselves

-hurting another child

-destroying property

What Children Can and Cannot Do -

To the young child, all the world's focus is on "Me!" (S)he does not doubt that even the forces of nature are somehow centered around them. To enhance a child's total growth, we must first look "inside" to see things as (s)he sees them in order to know what they are ready for. On the following pages you will find the list of the things "children can and cannot do." This list is derived from Pardin's work on Child Development -- research she began in the 1930's. We have focused on the top four: Can't Share, Can't Take Turns, Can't Collect Information, Can't Empathize the rest are also listed on the last page.

Children Cannot Share

Children have to be allowed to fully possess before they can be expected to share.

Whenever you get in a power struggle with a child -- you lose.

No one seems to consider that the child being asked to give up what they have might be on the verge of a personal discovery important to their growth.

Relationships are easily ruptured as the result of "forced sharing."

Requiring children to share makes one child angry at you (as well as their classmate) and it makes the other child dependent on you to for rescue whenever the situation arises.

Forced sharing models that bullying is an acceptable way to resolve conflict.

Possession is one device the young child uses to hammer out autonomy. Just as babbling comes before talking, owning comes before sharing.

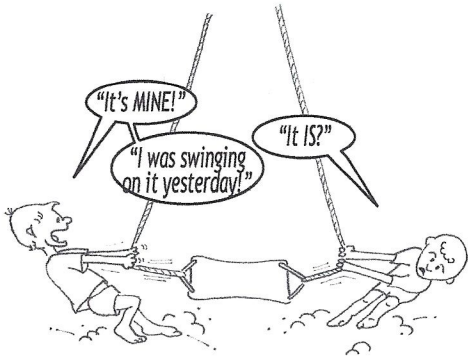
Children -- Cannot Take Turns

Ask him if you can use it when he's through.

But, I want it!

And I want you to have it.

Ask him if you can use it when he's through.



Children Cannot Collect Information

Children remember only what is important to them.

LUNCHROOM RULES

- NO TALKING
- GO DIRECTLY TO YOUR ASSIGNED TABLE
- DO NOT WASTE TIME
- CLEAN UP YOUR EATING AREA IMMEDIATELY UPON FINISHING
- NO SHARING OF FOOD
- ENJOY YOUR LUNCH

Having a "List of Rules" for children does not work.

Often to children our "rules" simply don't make sense.

Adults end up saying things like:
"How many times have I told you?

"If I've told you once, I've told you a hundred times!"

"I warned you this would happen."

Growth happens bit by bit.

Children learn about conduct from watching the adults in their world.

It is up to adults to be there for children.

Children do not learn to be moral by learning to obey rules that others have made up. This is contrary to the goal of children becoming self-regulators of their own behavior. The message to kids is not that we will work together to help anyone who stumbles but rather that anyone who violates a pre-established edict is in big trouble!

free school

No:

Clocks
Calendars
Chairs
Cell Phones
Compulsory Circle Time
Computers
Cameras
Cute
Cramped Curriculum
Color by Number
Cynics

Calendar for Children

			now	NOW	now	NOW
NOW	now	now	NOW	now	NOW	now
now	now	now	NOW	now	now	NOW
NOW	now	now	now	now	NOW	now
now	now	now	now	NOW		

Children Cannot Empathize

em • pa • thy n.
Gr. em pathos - feeling: used to translate. 1. the projection of one's own personality into the personality of another in order to understand him or her better.

Do not make children say they are *"Sorry."*

It is not normal for the ego-centric child to worry about another's feelings.

You can only model empathy you can't give it to a child or insist a child be empathetic.

Refrain from using, *"Oh, look at his face."* From your caring reaction to a hurt child, the perpetrator knows he's done something wrong.

Always remember:
- how would you like to be treated
- take quick care of things
- move on

Assure the child with, *"We'll get through this together."*

Because young children are at the ego-centric stage of their development, they are unable to put themselves in the role of the actor for the sake of understanding, or empathizing with, how the other child feels. You can make them say, "I'm sorry" but they don't mean it.

What Children Can and Cannot Do - continued . . .

I CAN'T CENTER ON MORE THAN ONE ASPECT AT A TIME - "Pick up your toys, put on your shoes, and wash your face, we are going out to play." This statement has four aspects. Most young children, if they can remember it at all, will remember only the last or the one most important to them, but with so many other aspects, they are easily overwhelmed and then mistakenly thought of as either forgetful or unable to concentrate.

I CAN'T REVERSE WHAT HAS BEEN DONE - If a child reaches to put his/her finger in an electric wall outlet and you say "don't do that", the child is confused because he/she doesn't know how to reverse this action. The statement "Pull your hand back, that is dangerous" reverses the situation by putting in words what you want the child to do.

I CAN'T CONSERVE - Have you have ever watched a young child pour from a full pitcher into an empty glass? Notice that they often continue to pour until the pitcher is empty; not until the glass is full. Because they can't see the difference, they have no idea that all that milk or juice won't fit in that small glass.

I CAN'T TELL YOU THE TRUTH WHEN YOU SET ME UP - If you have seen a child do something that you dislike, and you ask them if they have done it, they will probably say "no". Don't ask a question if you already know the answer. The real issue here is not the child "lying" but rather the adults in the child's life not supporting the truth.

I CAN'T SIT DOWN FOR VERY LONG - "A young child has to make a conscious effort to sit still. A large chunk of children can't do it for very long. It's a very energy-consuming activity for them. Small children actually get more tired if they have to sit still and listen to a teacher talk than if they are allowed to move around the room." Martha Deckla, Johns Hopkins Univ. Hospital

I CAN'T PLAY WITH ANOTHER CHILD UNTIL I AM READY - Early friendships are based on (a) you are standing next to me (b) you have a toy I want, or (c) we have the same color clothes. If allowed to grow and change at their own pace, children naturally begin to interact with other children.

I CAN'T TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REAL AND FANTASY - When a child has a dream, it is very real to them. Telling them not to be a "baby" or to "go to sleep" is very difficult. Also, playing-out fantasy, such as "playing dead" is a very important way children confront things they may be worried about.

I CAN'T EXPRESS MY FEELINGS IN WORDS VERY WELL - Children resort to physical means of communication because they don't have words to express their frustration. Learning to "read" other people around them (body language) is a critical part of their development.

I CAN'T HAVE PERSPECTIVE - The only real difference between children and adults in emotional development is experience. Adults have been around a lot longer, most children have to face their own problems and deal with the world as they see it. When you are only four, you feel things more.

I CAN'T THINK IN TERMS OF RIGHT AND WRONG - Many young children cannot think in terms of cause and effect. With regard to their safety and well-being, it is our job to protect and take care of young children -- they cannot be responsible until they are developmentally ready.

I CAN'T BE READY BEFORE I'M READY - Children all grow and develop at their own rate -- not ours. The gift of time is something all children deserve. As parents, avoid comparisons and forcing children into situations before they are ready.

(Source: Dan Hodgins)

Coping With Difficult Times

(DEATH & DYING)

No people who turn their backs on death can be alive. The presence of the dead among the living will be a daily fact in any society which encouorages its people to live.

We shall be healthy, when graves of friends and family, and memorials to the people of the recent and the distant past, are intermingled with our houses, in small graveyards, as naturally as winter always comes before the spring. In every culture there is some form of intense ceremony surrounding death, grieving for the dead, and disposal of the body. There are thousands of variations, but the point is always to give the community of friends left alive the chance to reconcile themselves to the facts of death; the emptiness, the loss, their own transcience.

from A Pattern Language.

Everyday our children are exposed to views of violent death with no reconciliation. Random shootings, neighborhood violence, television violence and deaths (the news, conversations overheard, etc.). One of the most important things I have learned from having experienced difficult times is that songs, books and stories, that will help people cope with death must be in their lives BEFORE they experience grief and loss.

When adults are dealing with the sadness of the death or dying of a loved one they must be careful not to neglect the needs of the child. Too often adults think the child is incapable of undertanding any part of death. It is important that we understand the developmental way children think.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW WHEN HELPING CHILDREN UNDERSTAND DEATH

- Explaining Pysical Death (death of a body) - the body stops walking, doesn't eat, doesn't have to poop anymore.
- Use the Correct Terminology - use the word "dead," not "lost" or "passed away."
- Make sure the child knows the dead do not hurt.
- Make sure they know that death is: Irreversible -- Permanent -- Painless
- Let or encourage children to ask questions
- Have books about death
- Let children participate in ceremony / help set up ending practices
- Allow children to grieve in their own way
- Share feelings with the child - (don't be afraid to cry)
- Provide support for the child

- Maintain the child's daily routine
- Death can be a celebration
- Remember it is not the age but *the relationship* when determining whether a child attends a funeral
- Describe the person in a coffin as "looks dead, eyes closed, mouth closed, *not* looks peaceful.
- When asked 'Are you going to die' -- answer honestly, "No, I do not expect to die for a long, long time."
- Get a physical
- Establish memories -- "This is the first birthday since your father died."

CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF DEATH

Stage One (ages 2 to 4) At this stage, children don't believe death is final. It is temporary and reversible. They attempt to equate it with something they know (sleep, parents going on vacation). They are more interested in what death means right now (person is never coming back) rather than on how it happened.

Stage Two (ages 4 to 10) Children at this stage understand that everything that lives will die, although they may or may not apply this to themselves. They play imaginary games (ghost, superheroes, and role play) in an attempt to understand death and to deal with their fears.

Stage Three (ages 10 up) At this stage, children understand death is personal, , inevitable, universal and final. They may have fears related to this understanding. At all ages,part of the fear of death is that they will be separated from their parents.

STAGES OF ACCEPTANCE OF DEATH

DENIAL • ANGER • BARGAINING • DEPRESSION • ACCEPTANCE

RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

Children's Books

Tough Boris - (Mem Fox)
Wilfrid Gordon MacDonald Partridge - (M. Fox)
Sophie - (M. Fox)
You Hold Me, I'll Hold You - (Jo Carson)
The Very Best of Friends - (Margaret Wild)
Remember Me - (M. Wild)
Old Pig - (M. Wild)
Go Tell Aunt Rhody - (Aliki)
Everett Anderson's Goodbye - (Lucille Clifton)
Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs - (T. dePaola)
Yonder - (Tony Johnston)
Miss Tizzy - (Libba Moore Gray)
Miss Bridie - Chose a Shovel - (Leslie Connor)
Goodbye Mousie - (Robie H Harris)
Who Killed Cock Robin - (Etienne Delessert)
Lighthouse - (Robert Munsch)
The Three Questions - (Jon Muth)
Dr. White - (Jane Goodall)

The left-hand column of the chart below lists some examples of what parents and educators typically say to boys who are "in trouble." The right-hand column offers some more effective responses (with blanks for you to fill in as appropriate):

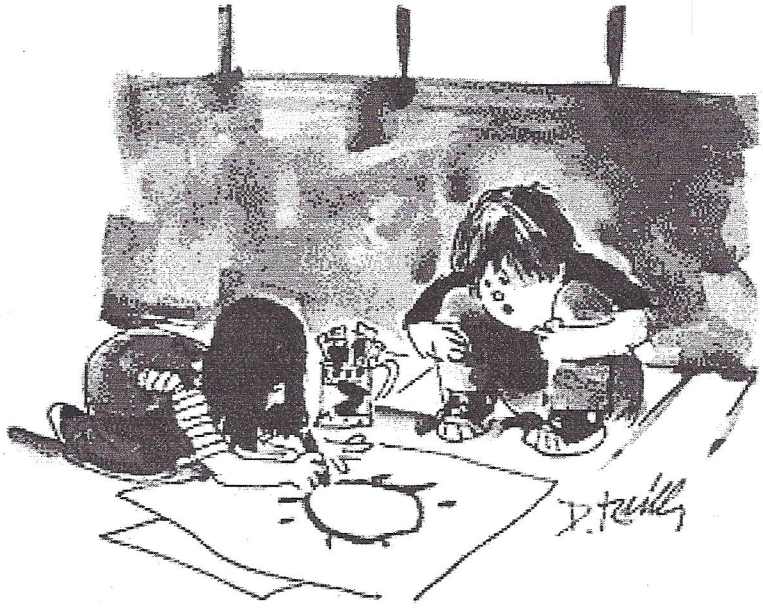
EFFECTIVE RESPONSES	
Instead of saying . . .	***Say . . .***
We don't hit our friends.	Let me show you what to hit.
No running.	Run on the tape over there.
We share our toys.	When you finish with this, make sure ___ gets it.
We don't call our friends names.	His name isn't _____. It is_____
Use your words.	Tell him you want it.
Make a better choice.	Tell him: It is hard for me to wait for that truck, and that is why I hit.
We don't say, 'I hate you.'	What do you want that he has?
Use your inside voice.	Alice, move away from him. He likes to use his louder voice.
No spinning with those beads.	Stand back, he likes to spin.
No pushing.	Did you ask if she wants to be pushed?
We don't play guns.	Did you ask if he wanted to play?

Thoughts on Art

Although Arts & Crafts are usually lumped together, they are not synonymous. Art is not color-by-number, nor is it copying teacher's model; producing jack-o'-lanterns indistinguishable from one's classmate's. Because Art resides in the domain of creativity, which by definition means to bring something into existence, the "art experience" is much deeper and much more significant. "Crafts," on the other hand, have a limiting effect on creativity in that they involve specific directions that must be adhered to in order to produce some"thing." In art, however, the artist is "self-directed" and has total ownership of the experience. The more control the child has over the process, the likelihood that the experience is more meaningful to the child greatly increases. In order for art to be creative, children must be free to experiment with a wide variety of materials and be free to invent and change. The role of the adult is to provide the materials, the place and the time.

The following pages contain a partial list of art activities that occur regularly at the Roseville Community Preschool. The art activities listed here are the ones more often experienced by most of the children in the school. Some art experiences are solitary and perhaps peculiar to one certain "kind" of artist. Every effort is made to honor requests from the children for different materials. The adults NEVER model or participate with the children while they are creating.

Art never has to "be" anything. We don't ask the children to tell us about their art. We do not judge or make comments about their work. Since art and language reside in two separate parts of the brain, it is important to resist using children's artwork as fodder for a language exercise. Art stands alone. There is no correlation between putting words on a piece of artwork and illustrating a story.



"I only draw with software."

Parent Handbook Agreement

I have read the Bloom Children's Center Parent Handbook. I hereby agree to adhere to all policies therein, upon enrolling my child at Bloom Children's Center.

Signed _____ Date _____

(parent/guardian)

Signed _____ Date _____

(parent/guardian)

My student's name(s):

_____

_____

_____