

WHY PLAY-BASED PRESCHOOL?

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An inside look on how play-based preschool positively impacts school readiness, social, and emotional development



"Even though it seems like children are just playing, they are learning valuable lessons, including important social skills and cooperation with others. These skills are foundational for future relationships and communication with others."

Sheryl Rosin, Ph.D., CCC-SLP
Director/Owner Palm Beach
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SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT & ACADEMIC READINESS

Before children enter grade school, it is imperative that they have developed the social, emotional, and behavioral skills necessary for learning. Over the last fifty years, curricula has strayed away from including play or child-lead learning. Negative effects such as increased behavioral problems, inhibition of independence, and increased depression and anxiety have been noted by educational researchers. Through play-based preschool, developmentally appropriate pragmatic goals are addressed in a fun, creative, and child-directed way. A play-based learning environment is an important aspect of developing self-regulation, promoting language, cognition, social competence, and problem solving. Play helps to develop new neural connections in the brain. When children engage in play, they are able to rehearse pragmatic skills in a low-risk environment as opposed to a pass/fail high-risk academic-based model. This will help to develop self-confidence, persistence, and the ability to explore and develop curiosity. Children who are given the opportunity to think creatively and be directors of their own learning, significantly increase their academic readiness. They are able to express opinions, frustrations, use decision making, and discover new interests. Current research states that parents, policy makers, and educators should target children's emotional and behavioral adjustment prior to starting kindergarten, directly linking children's social emotional development to school readiness.

It has also been shown that children's social and behavioral competence are significant indicators of future academic success. Academic achievement is foundationally built on social emotional skills. Smith (2008) states, "programs that have a focus on social skills have been shown to have improved outcomes related to drop out and attendance, grade retention, and special education referrals. They also have improved grades, test scores, and reading, math, and writing skills". Play is the best way to facilitate the development of these foundational skills! Play-based learning benefits include:

- Increased engagement
- Independent learning
- Creativity and imagination
- Taking other's perspectives
- Self-awareness and self-reflective learners
- Language development
- Empathy
- Reduced behavioral needs
- Conflict resolution
- Foundational skills for academics
- Development of fine and gross motor skills
- Spatial understanding
- Self-regulation and emotional regulation



PLAY-BASED LEARNING AS A DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

How can educators meet the needs of each individual child with diverse cultural backgrounds, learning profiles, and sensory needs? Differentiated instruction aims to consider and support learners of multiple intelligences, abilities, and profiles. It provides students varied ways of learning content, engaging in the learning process, and showing understanding through product. Play-based strategies can help differentiate instruction and meet learner's needs. In a study conducted by Vogt, Hauser, Stebler, Rechsteiner, & Urech (2018) it was found that kindergarten students who participated in an eight-week play-based learning intervention compared to traditional kindergarten learning had higher learning gains overall. Through semi-structured interviews, researchers reported that with the play-based model, the diverse needs of the students were better accommodated compared to the traditional kindergarten control group.

"My son thrived in his play-based preschool. I watched his confidence grow, friendships develop, and saw him learn through play, exploration and discovery. Academics were integrated, setting a strong foundation for kindergarten, but delivered in a more appealing way, through play, that focused on the whole child - social, emotional and cognitive. It provided the perfect balance of exploration and structure. I have observed my son's class and watched how the children successfully share ideas, toys, and materials -skills that helped develop social skills and build friendships. This year he will be entering kindergarten, and I have full confidence in his preparation thanks to the foundation set by his preschool. Play was the vehicle for him developing the creativity, resiliency, self-regulation, and speech and language skills needed to confidently transition to elementary school. We are thankful to his teachers because his love for learning grows every day."

- Jill Kohlbecker, Play Pals Preschool Mom

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD WITH PLAY-BASED LEARNING?

Start by spending some time looking at local school's curriculum for project-based, experiential-based, and social-emotional learning programs. For children with special needs, you can search for Speech Pathologists who specialize in play-based early intervention models such as the PLAY Project. Occupational Therapists who are Sensory Integration certified will help accommodate your child's sensory needs based on functional development. There are many fun examples of how you can incorporate play into your preschooler's home life. Many activities such as treasure hunt, movement songs, or nature collages, will align with an academic standard for four to five year olds without even realizing! Go ahead and check out your state's early learning standards. If you frequent the South Florida area, you can check out Play Pals, an inter-professional therapeutic preschool for

Students who had a range of mastery from low to high in mathematical concepts, were better accommodated by the play-based model, decreasing a possible achievement gap. Using play as a differentiated instructional strategy can support learners who may have underdeveloped social-emotional skills, or who may lack self-esteem or self-directed learning. It may also, as noted in the kindergarten study, close a possible achievement gap between low and high mastery students. By providing an equitable and nurturing play-based learning environment, educators can cater to all learning profiles supporting students to reach their fullest potential.



children with or without a diagnosis that impedes their successful participation in typical preschool programs. The program uses a play-based curriculum and follows the principles of the PLAY Project, an early intervention model that uses child-lead play to facilitate pragmatic skills, pretend play, and emotional thinking. This multidisciplinary program caters to the individual learner and focuses on foundational social-emotional skills needed for future academic success.

For more information on Play Pals please call **561-842-8996**

Resources:

PalmBeachSLS.com

ThePLAYproject.com

InterplayTherapy.com

Casel.org



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