

TOP

Tips on parenting



IN THIS ISSUE:

1

Play for Play's Sake

4

How to Help Your Child Read

6

Science Corner:
Welcome Spring with Egg-citing Activities to Do at Home



TOP is published & produced by:
The Emma Eccles Jones Center for Early Childhood Education at

Utah State UNIVERSITY.

Play for Play's Sake

by Dr. Susan L. Churchill and Denise Payne

When was the last time you *just played* with your child? Did you follow your child's lead and just enjoy the encounter, or did you direct the play and try to teach something through the activity? Parents and early childhood teachers both know that play is related to literacy development, social skills, physical development, and a host of other important childhood skills. We often use playtime to help them learn. For example, as a young girl in preschool class pretends to be a hairdresser, the teacher is pointing out that curlers are round and the brush is blue. As parents, we have goals of our own and goals for our children—we're focused on outcomes, and we often want to make sure our children are constantly learning something. We want their play to be functional. Of course, learning through everyday experiences is extremely important, but do we take these learning goals too far? When children play, "function" is not what they experience. Children are simply playing and having fun. The goal of this article is to highlight the importance of play just for play's sake. In other words, rather than focusing on what skills play is useful for developing, we are advocating that children be allowed to play *just because*.

"As parents, we have goals of our own and goals for our children. . ."

Play is, by definition, intrinsically motivated. This means that children (or adults) want to do the activity, rather than being directed or coerced about what to do or how to do it. Children tend to focus on the fun or the process of their play experiences, rather than focusing on the end product as adults often do. Focusing on the end product can lead to a fear of taking risks or trying new things because of the potential for failure. On the other hand, emphasizing the process helps children feel good about their work, which helps them be self-motivated to continue learning. When children are intrinsically motivated, they will naturally learn to solve problems and master skills.

Mihaly Csikszentmihaly (1991) describes the concept of *flow* as a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter. The state of flow occurs within optimal experiences that are an end in themselves. Children have these optimal experiences when they are playing. In fact, "play is perhaps the only human behavior that integrates and balances all aspects of human functioning" (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988, p. 1).

continued on page 2 ...



Play for Play's Sake

...continued from page 1

The dichotomy of work and play in the adult world is something we teach children as they grow. "Now it's time to do your home **work**." "After your chores, you can **play**." But, work and play do not have to be separate activities. Other cultures treat their "work" as playful activities (Anderson, 1998). Rather than dichotomize work and play, we should reevaluate our concepts of both. Children are very good at defining play versus work. They know at very young ages that activities directed by teachers (or parents) are not play. When adults interfere or try to structure activities, even if adults think the activity is "playful" – children are no longer playing – they define the activity as work if they are not in control and quickly lose interest.

Adults can support and extend play episodes, and facilitate and promote positive play in a variety of ways.

Adults' attempts to structure and direct children actually provide high amounts of stress, and children often respond by becoming more rebellious (Sutton-Smith, 1994). It is a busy world for adults, but we must remember that children are children and should be allowed to play and simply be children. We as adults value our leisure time, so let's allow children to do the same.

This is not to say that adults should not participate in their children's play. Adults can support and extend play episodes, and facilitate and promote positive play in a variety of ways. This support may be especially beneficial for children with developmental delays. In order to facilitate play and fun, we suggest the following (based in part on Rogers & Sawyers, 1988):

1. Offer a rotating variety of properly functioning toys, objects, and environments (indoors and outdoors).

2. Keep the environment safe indoors and outdoors, yet recognize that cuts and scrapes are a natural part of childhood play.
3. Show interest and encouragement in children's play.
4. Stimulate children's play by offering toys that are appropriate to their developmental level.
5. Avoid using models for children to copy – allow them to explore and discover on their own.
6. Talk with children about their work rather than giving everyone the same praise. For example, "You've used a wide assortment of colors!"
7. Allow children to solve their own problems.
8. Allow children to be messy.
9. Provide enough time and safe space so that children are not interrupted.
10. Model playing while working – show children that work time can be fulfilling and fun.
11. Advocate for your child's right to play at school/preschool.

Most importantly, adults should impose as few verbal and physical restrictions as possible. They must support but not force play. Adults must allow children to control their own play situations and offer only enough assistance or advice to get them started. When playing with children, follow the children's cues or directions. Find ways to gently encourage children to be involved. Help children feel loved, secure, and respected.

Children in today's world are often shuffled from place to place, activity to activity, starting during their preschool years – gymnastics, preschool, play group, and so

activity corner

Plant a Garden!

Ask your child to help you plant a garden this spring! As you work together in the garden your child can learn valuable math and science skills. In the garden, the child can measure the rows, count the seeds, watch the plants grow, pick vegetables, and look for insects. The child will also learn how water, sun, and nutrients in the soil help plants grow.



How Can I Stay Involved in My Child's Classroom?

by Mary Bowne, M.S.

forth. It is often said that play is the work of childhood, and we often make play work-like when we constrain, divert, and organize play. Children's play should not be their work - it should be their play.

References

Anderson, M. (1998). The meaning of play as a human experience. In D. P. Fromberg & D. Bergen (Eds.), *Play from birth to twelve and beyond* (pp. 103-108). New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

Csikszentmihaly, M. (1991). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper and Collins.

Rogers, C. S., & Sawyers, J. K. (1988). *Play in the lives of children*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Sutton-Smith, B. (1994). Paradigms of intervention. In J. Hellenborn, R. V. D. Kooij & B. Sutton-Smith (Eds.), *Play and Intervention* (pp. 3-21). New York: State University of New York Press.

~Susan Churchill is an assistant professor in Family & Consumer Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She teaches and conducts research in the area of early childhood.

~Denise Payne is a master's student in Family & Consumer Sciences Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Have you ever asked yourself, "I wish I could spend more time being involved within my child's classroom, but I don't have the time during the day!"? Many parents are asking that exact question. Here are a few helpful ideas that will allow you to stay involved within your child's classroom, without always having to take time off from work.

- Participate in open houses, home visits, family fun nights, and parent-teacher conferences – which are usually held at night.
- Communicate on a daily basis, either verbally or written, with your child's teacher through phoning him/her during your lunch break, writing letters or reading letters that come home, maintaining a communication notebook between you and the teacher, and reading messages posted on bulletin boards.
- Visit your child's classroom during your lunch break. Even 15 minutes spent with your child will make a difference.
- Assist with field trips (walking or driving) – if time allows.
- Bring in supplies the children will use for art projects (recyclable items).
- Donate books or materials you no longer use or would be willing to borrow.
- Offer to help the teacher at home by cutting, coloring, etc.

Your willingness to stay involved not only benefits the children in the classroom, but your individual child as well as the teacher. Studies have shown positive outcomes from parents who volunteer their time, either in or out of the classroom. Your child will notice your involvement and will model your behavior by assisting others in life.

~Mary Bowne, M.S., is an early childhood educator. She received her Master's degree in Human Development and her Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education at South Dakota State University.



Give TOP as a Gift!

TOP: Tips on Parenting newsletter Subscription Gift Certificates are available for purchase! To obtain a gift certificate, please call (435) 797-8629 or send e-mail to eejcenter@cc.usu.edu. You may also download a gift certificate in Adobe PDF format from our web site at <http://www.coe.usu.edu/ecc/top>.

TOP Gift Certificates make great baby shower, birthday, thank you, and holiday gifts! An annual subscription to TOP (for yourself or for a gift) is only \$5.00 per year.



How to Help Your Child Read

by Dr. Kathy Kalmar

How exciting, your child is going to kindergarten this year! Where did those five years go? Children look forward to going to school believing they will learn to read, and so they will. What's a busy parent like you to do to help your child succeed? The purpose of this article is to give you a head start and a helping hand as your child learns to read. If teachers were to tell you to enroll your child in an enrichment class, invest in a computer, or purchase an expensive set of encyclopedias, you'd find a way to do that. Instead there's a much simpler and less costly way to accomplish this goal. You can help your child, and it's so simple and economical you won't believe it. This works.

Meet basic needs for health, safety, and welfare

The first thing you need to do is be sure your child's basic needs for love and affection, good food and water, medical and dental care, plenty of sleep (about 10 hours) are met. Be sure they run and play and get exercise. Loving your child, disciplining your child, guiding your child and treating your child with respect and acceptance lays the foundation for reading success. With these things in place, all systems are go. These factors are critical to their sound growth and development. Once that's done, then provide plenty of attention and stimulation. How do busy parents do this?

Talk to Your Child

It's that simple. Talk with your child. When she says "Doggie?" support her response and extend her remark by saying, "That's a dog all right. It has black and white spots. It's smaller than Aunt Anne's pet terrier." Saying this confirms the child's idea and provides additional information about color, size, and even the breed. In turn, these remarks increase her vocabulary while drawing her attention to details. Doing so, you are elaborating on the topic, thus increasing your child's understanding. When parents use other words to describe dogs, such as pooch, pet, puppy, and even mutt, children learn more about dogs that will help them make sense out of those words when they meet them later in books. Talk between a parent and child is one important way to build oral language competence. To learn to read, children need to talk. They learn to talk by listening to you talk and then by talking themselves. Start conversations with your child and encourage them to tell you about their daily experiences. Ask questions that call for more than a simple yes or no answer. When talking with your child say things like, "Tell me about your day" or "Tell me about your ride to school." This provides the opportunity to use more words and sentences. Then, most impor-

tantly, listen to your child's answers.

Using Language and Opportunities to Write

In the course of your every day life, take the opportunities that arise to show how reading and writing work together. Do that by sending Grandma an e-mail. Through dictation, children learn that reading is simply speech written down. They learn that what they say can be written. Once it is written, it can be read. This means children must talk to read. They need to talk frequently so that they can begin to see this relationship. Dictating a message in a greeting card, writing lists for grocery shopping, composing a "Keep Out" sign for a bedroom door are other ways to show children that what they say can be written and read. Read their message back to them to check for accuracy and to see if what you wrote was what they actually said or wanted to say. More importantly, when you are in their company, use good, clear English and very little slang. Be sure to pronounce the endings of words clearly too. Say the "ing" when asking, "What are you doing?" instead of "What's happenin'?" or "Whatcha doin'?" Speaking the endings clearly not only helps them become better speakers, it helps make them better spellers as well.

Twenty Minutes A Day Is All It Takes

When I was raising my two children, teachers told me to read to my children daily but they never told me why. Here's the reason: book talk is different from the talk used in everyday speech. People don't say, "He said," how are you doing, Samuel." They just say, "Hi, Samuel." The language of books is different from what children hear at home and at school. Therefore, read every day so they can learn "book talk." That way the language conventions of books become as familiar to them as their own name. Reading to them helps them see that words can be read, that they convey meaning, and that children can learn to read words too. Research shows that reading to children does help them learn to read and write. Reading daily gives them the background information and a sense of the storyline and structure of the story (beginning, middle, end, setting, characters, etc.) that they need to make sense out of the story. From hearing many well-written stories with a plot and storyline, children can learn to predict what will likely happen next in a new story, building their confidence as they comprehend the story and follow the plot. Since there is a definite difference between the way people talk and the words used to write



stories, reading aloud becomes very important to learning to read.

Read Old Favorites Again and Again

Reading the same books aloud over and over helps children become fluent readers while they comprehend the meaning of the story through your comments and their questions. They begin to know what word is coming next and soon may help you read if you point to the words as you read. It really is that simple: reading to your child daily helps them learn to read – period. Re-reading a story helps the child understand the functions of print, punctuation marks, and a sense of how print is used and of what people are doing when they are reading. From

you, they learn how to hold the book, turn the page, read from front-to-back as well as learn that people write books and illustrate them. Children who have been read to frequently and early in their lives – the earlier the better – tend to both read and write more easily. Research proves it. In addition, children who were read to early develop positive attitudes toward reading. Don't stop there. Read a variety of genres and don't forget to read informational books as well. Much of the reading that children will do later is to read for information. Children are curious about their world. Reading non-fiction provides just that: information that answers their questions about the people, places and things in their world. My own experience, both personally and professionally, proves

it. I read aloud frequently, and in time my children read aloud to me. To this day, books flow between us. In fact, several years ago, my daughter earned her master's degree in... reading! This experience can be yours too. All you really need to do is read daily to your child. That's it. It truly is that easy. While the cost is low, the result, a child who reads, is priceless.

References

Morrow, L. (2001). *Literacy development in the early years: Helping children read and write*. MA: Allyn and Bacon.

No Child Left Behind act of 2001, Pub. L. 107-110, 115 Stat.1425.

Paciorek, K. (Ed.). (2002). *Taking sides: Clashing views on contradicting issues in early childhood education*. Guilford, CT: McGraw-Hill/Duskin.

~Kathleen Kalmar is an assistant professor at Sagenaw Valley State University. Her research looks at standard-based instruction in Kindergarten. She is the author of two books and numerous articles. Recently, she became a grandmother for the first time.

question corner

How do I respond to my 2 1/2-year-olds continuous questions? When I answer her questions, she keeps asking "why." For example, when I say, "We don't need to turn on the light because it is daytime." She asks, "Why?" I explain, "Because the sun is shining outside." Then she asks again, "Why?" It is at this point that I don't know what to say. Can you help?



~Susan in Colorado

As children develop the ability to ask questions, they first rely on questions that often require a simple yes or no answer. However, between 29-32 months children discover that they can ask wh-questions including "why." Children begin asking more why questions because they gain more information using this strategy. They may also use why questions as a way to keep the conversation going. Continue patiently answering your daughters questions, soon she will have mastered the use of why questions and begin using more how and when questions. By the time she is 41-46 months she will begin combining the word why with other words creating more elaborate and specific questions. Through your continued patience in answering her why questions, you will help your daughter develop new language skills and increase her understanding of the people, places, and things in her world.

~Heidi Malloy, Ph.D., is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Metropolitan State University.

question corner features questions posed by parents to early childhood experts who provide brief responses in this newsletter. If you have any questions you would like answered, please send e-mail to eejcenter@cc.usu.edu or mail to EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education • Utah State University • 6515 Old Main Hill • Logan UT 84322-6515.

science corner:

Welcome Spring with Egg-citing
Activities to Do at Home

by Rebecca Monhardt, Ph.D.



Often common materials and objects found at home can provide opportunities for children to engage in scientific inquiry. The unpretentious egg is one such object. What could be better than egg investigations to welcome the coming of spring? In Pagan time, eggs represented the rebirth of the earth after a long and harsh winter, and in almost all cultures, eggs have been the symbol of life. The Romans, Gauls, Chinese, Egyptians, and Persians all cherished the egg as a symbol of the universe.

Did you know that the study of eggs actually has a name: oology! Once you start researching eggs, it is really fascinating to find out all the interesting facts and lore associated with them. The shapes, sizes, colors, and textures of eggs vary greatly as do the animals that hatch from them. When we hear the term “egg-shaped” we have clear idea of what that means. Did you know that eggs actually vary in shape according to the animal that laid them? A great reference for studying bird eggs is a beautiful book by Maryjo Koch titled *Bird Feather Egg Nest*. In addition to the beautiful illustrations, the author includes fascinating information about bird eggs, from the thimble-sized eggs laid by hummingbirds to the three and one-half-pound eggs laid by an ostrich and all the eggs in between! This is a book the whole family will enjoy.

The egg was once believed to have special powers. In ancient times, eggs were buried under the foundations of buildings to keep away evil spirits, and in France brides stepped on an egg before crossing the threshold of their new homes. While modern science would not support these and other superstitions related to eggs, I do think that the egg has great potential in encouraging children to engage in scientific thinking.

Here are some science activities with eggs that may interest your budding oologists:



FLOATING/SINKING EGGS

For this activity, children will need a large glass or jar, tap water, table salt, and a raw egg. Add tap water to the container and ask children to predict what will happen to the egg when it is placed in the water. Will it sink or will it float? When children test their prediction, they will observe that the egg will sink to the bottom of the container. Then have children slowly add salt to the water in the container. This will cause the egg to float to the top. For an additional challenge with older children, ask them if they can figure out a way to

get the egg to float exactly in the middle of the jar. They can accomplish this by carefully adding fresh water to the jar with the floating egg. This will form a layer of pure water on top of the salt water and the egg will stay suspended in the middle of the glass.

Science explanation:

The density of pure, fresh water is one. Materials with a density of less than one will float while those with a density greater than one will sink. Salt water is slightly denser than pure water so objects that sink in fresh water may float in saltwater.

ARE YOU STRONG ENOUGH TO BREAK AN EGG?



For this activity, you will need a raw egg and a plastic baggie. Place the egg in the baggie and have children hold the egg with both hands, placing one end of the egg in each palm. Have children try to push their palms together as hard as they can, being careful not to shift the position of the egg. Is it possible to break the egg when it's held this way? Let the strongest person in your family try this. They won't have any better luck! Then have children hold the sides of the eggs and squeeze. Using just their thumb and one finger, they will find that the egg breaks very easily.

EGGSHELL DOMES



For this activity, you will need four eggs. Gently break open the small end of each egg by tapping it on a table or counter. Carefully peel away some of the eggshell and remove the contents for another use. Put a piece of masking tape around the middle of each eggshell to prevent the eggshell from cracking when you cut it. Carefully cut around the eggshell right through the masking tape so that you have four half eggshells with even bottoms. Put the eggshells, open end down, on a table in a rectangular formation that is just slightly smaller than a book. Will the eggshell support a heavy hardback book like a dictionary? Have children gently place a book on the four eggshells. They won't crack. Have children predict how many books they can add to the stack before the eggshell foundation cracks. They may be very surprised! Have children begin to notice buildings that have domes or research houses in other parts of the world to find out how many designs incorporate domes (igloos, huts, and hogans).



Science explanation:

An egg's shape gives it great strength, and the curve of the egg distributes the pressure evenly rather than concentrating it at any one point. The weight on the top of a dome shape is carried down along its curved walls to its wide base. No single point on a dome supports the whole weight of an object on top of it. This is why domes are often used in large buildings that cannot have pillars supporting them such as planetariums, hockey rinks, and stadiums.



BOUNCING EGGS

Have children put one egg in a jar of water and another egg in a jar containing vinegar. Wait about 24 hours and then have them observe the eggs in both jars. While the eggs soaked in water will be virtually unchanged, children will find that the egg soaked in vinegar now has a soft pliable shell. Have children look carefully at the egg with the dissolved shell and then place this egg in water overnight, making sure the egg is covered entirely with water. When this egg is observed the next day, children will see an amazing transformation. They can even bounce the egg like a ball on solid surface. To transform this same egg once again, place it in a jar of corn syrup (e.g., Light Karo). Again, have children observe what has happened to the egg. It will deflate! What will happen to this egg if it is rinsed off and placed once again in a jar of water?

Science explanation:

Eggshells are 93-98% calcium carbonate. Vinegar is a mild acid. The reaction between the vinegar and the egg shell causes the shell to "dissolve." The membrane surrounding the yolk and albumin remains intact. When the "shell-less" egg is placed in water, the membrane allows water to enter the egg. When the egg is placed in corn syrup, the water passes through the membrane out of the egg. This activity illustrates the concept of osmosis.



EGG DETECTIVES

Everyone loves a mystery and here's an egg mystery that children will love to solve. Give children a raw egg and boiled egg. Have them spin the raw egg on its side as fast as they can get it to spin. Then have them stop the egg from spinning by pressing gently on it with one finger. Then have them quickly remove their finger. What happens? The egg will start spinning again. Then have children try this same thing with a boiled egg. The outcome will be different! Present children with a bowl of eggs, some raw and some

boiled. Have them help you sort the eggs by applying the information they learned from the spinning eggs.

Science explanation:

The inside of a raw egg is liquid. Once the egg is set in motion and then stopped, the inertia will set the egg in motion again.

NATURAL EGG DYES

Here are two methods to use in coloring eggs with natural dyes. Because boiling water is necessary, complete adult supervision is needed and children should never be allowed to do this on their own. But, children can prepare the natural dye material and experiment with various materials to get different effects.



Method I

Wash boiled eggs with a mild soap and dry them completely with a paper towel or cloth. Fill a plastic sandwich bag with dye material and a small amount of water. Spinach leaves, tea bags, onion skins, dandelion flowers, beets, blueberries, strawberries, and red cabbage are just a few natural materials that will work well. Then add an egg to each prepared bag. Close the bag tightly with a bag twist, rubber band, or string. Have children predict what colors they think each material will produce. Place the sandwich bag into a cooking pot filled with water. Boil ten minutes and then cool completely. Untie the baggie and remove the egg. Different colors will be left on the egg from the natural materials. What other natural materials can produce an interesting dye?

Method II

To make eggs look marbled, wrap boiled eggs with shredded red cabbage in a piece of cheesecloth and fasten. You don't need to put the eggs in a plastic baggie. Boil the package in water for about ten minutes. Cool completely before unwrapping. If you want some green spots on the eggs, sprinkle them with baking soda before unwrapping. To make the eggs shine, wipe them with vegetable oil.

References

Griffin, M. & Seed, D. (1990). *The Amazing Egg Book*. New York: Perseus Publishing
 Monhardt, R.M. & Henriques, L. (1997). Interdisciplinary learning: Adding an egg to the mix. *Science Activities*, 34(1), 22-28.

~Rebecca Mohnhardt is an associate professor in the Department of Elementary Education at Utah State University.



Emma Eccles Jones Center for Early Childhood Education
 College of Education and Human Services
 Utah State University
 6515 Old Main Hill
 Logan, UT 84322-6515

TOP: tips on parenting

is published quarterly by the Emma Eccles Jones Center for Early Childhood Education at Utah State University.

Editor: DR. HEIDI MALLOY
 (651) 793-1337 • heidi.malloy@metrostate.edu

Managing Editor: NISSA BOMAN
 (435) 797-8629 • nissa.boman@usu.edu

TOP Article Review Panel:

- DR. JIM BARTA Utah State University
- DR. DEBORAH BYRNES Utah State University
- DR. MARTHA DEVER Utah State University
- BARBARA DEBOER Utah State University
- DR. BILLIE ENZ Arizona State University
- DR. RENEE FALCONER U. of Southern Mississippi
- DR. THOMAS LEE Utah State University
- DR. D. RAY REUTZEL Utah State University

Submission inquiries should be directed to Heidi Malloy. Please direct all other questions, suggestions, or comments to Nissa Boman. TOP is also available in Spanish and on our web site at: www.coe.usu.edu/ecc/top.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to EEJCECE, USU, 6515 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-6515.

Items in this publication are copyrighted and may not be published or reproduced in any form without the consent of TOP's Editor.

Copyright ©2003 by the Emma Eccles Jones Center for Early Childhood Education. All rights reserved.

Thanks for reading TOP!



I'd like to subscribe to **TOP!**

For a one-year subscription to TOP, fill out the following information and send check or money order for \$5.00 (the cost of printing and distribution) to:

EEJ Center for Early Childhood Education
 Utah State University
 6515 Old Main Hill
 Logan, UT 84322-6515

NAME : _____

ADDRESS : _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP: _____

VERSION: ENGLISH SPANISH

WHERE DID YOU OBTAIN THIS ISSUE OF TOP?

