Seeing the Learning in Play: Using Performance-based Assessment to Document and Enhance Learning in Play

Shannon Ayers and Ellen Frede
Agenda

• Background: If the children play when do I assess?

• Instrument: Why an instrument assessing play development and learning through play?

• Observing Play: What to look for?

• Using the Instrument: What does the data show us about the children?
If the Children Play When Do I Assess: A False Dilemma

• define play,
• review some research on its value for child learning, and
• introduce some ideas about the teacher’s role in play
INAPPROPRIATE GOALS OF LEARNING

• Too often completing the task is the goal communicated

• Focus is on discrete academics, instructions and completion not on understanding, learning or constructing knowledge.
**WORK vs LEARNING vs PLAY**

Hermione Marshall’s research in kindergarten classrooms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Type</th>
<th>Child’s View</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. worksheets and basic skills</td>
<td>1. only recess was play all else was work</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. integrated, problem-solving and creative tasks</td>
<td>2. “workplace of the mind not the factory (Spodek)” Both learning and work.</td>
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</table>
Play in Preschool

• In some classrooms and curriculum models, play is ostensibly central BUT teachers pull children out of play to “teach”
  – What is the message to children about their choices?
  – What is the message to teachers about their role in play?

• Play and child choice in teacher directed activities (beware of “work disguised as play” – DeVries and Zan)
What is play?

• Socio-dramatic or make believe play
• Constructive play (action vs. “hard fun”)
• Cooperative play
• Games with rules but play is inconsistent

What characterizes these activities:
Creating; problem solving; accomplishing with materials, thoughts, play themes, friends, and muscles
Value of Play

Children develop

• self-regulation skills
• more cooperative and longer lasting interactions
• memory development
• storytelling and story memory
• complex language and vocabulary
• imaginative and flexible thinking
• many scientific, mathematical, and social discoveries
• persistence
The Teacher’s Role in Play

• Two objectives
  – Getting children engaged in more sophisticated play and problem solving
  – Getting out of it as soon as possible

• Provide open-ended materials and adequate space

• Go on field trips

• Model sophisticated play routines

• Introduce games with rules
Why the ELS?

• A pre-emptive strike against state-wide testing
• Need for focused, manageable instrument based on state standards
• Research derived and validated
The Early Learning Scale

- Systematic assessment for preschool children
- Performance-based assessment scale
- Across domains
- Informs instruction with data
What’s Included in the ELS

• Must be measurable, develop on a continuum, and critical to present and future learning
• Math- Not just counting
• Science- Content Vs. Process
• Social Studies/Social Emotional Development
• Language Arts Literacy

Creative Arts
Health, Safety, and Physical Education
The Assessment Process

Early Learning Scale

- Observing
- Investigating
- Documenting
- Reflecting
- Analyzing
- Evaluating
- Hypothesizing
- Planning
- Instructing
Play Strands

• Quality and Attributes of Constructive Play
• Quality and Attributes of Cooperative Play
• Quality and Attributes of Sociodramatic Play
Quality and Attributes of Constructive Play

- Purposeful engagement is necessary to reap the benefits of play
- Relates to independence
- Initiative and exploration with materials
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Quality and Attributes of Constructive Play</th>
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<th>4</th>
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<tr>
<td>Does not engage with materials independently; Is not engaged during free play</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chooses materials, but needs support to engage and extend their use; Is engaged in activities during choice time, but may become off task in transition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explores and experiments with a wide variety of materials; Engages in purposeful activity for most of the time while moving independently from one activity to another</td>
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Quality and Attributes of Cooperative Play

• Non-social activity is cause for concern at preschool level

• Parallel play- limited social participation
  – Children play near each other with similar materials, but do not influence each other’s behavior

• Associative play- a form of social participation
  – Children are engaged in separate activities, but they interact by exchanging toys and commenting on the other’s behavior

• Cooperative play- true social participation
  – Children orient toward a common goal during play such as acting out a make-believe theme or working on the same product

• Games with rules
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<td>Usually plays alone; May engage in parallel play—plays near another child with similar materials, but not influencing the other’s play</td>
<td>Engages in associative play—engages in separate activities, but interacts by sharing toys or commenting on each other’s play</td>
<td>Successfully enters into play when a group of children are already involved; Expresses ideas for activities and acknowledges actions and accomplishments; Negotiates roles and sets up events</td>
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Quality and Attributes of Sociodramatic Play

- Mature play (Bodrova & Leong, 2007)
  - create scenarios
  - defined roles
  - invent props to fit roles
  - language use
  - immersed in play
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<td>Exclusively uses actual objects for intended purpose in pretend play</td>
<td>Pretend play is simplistic; Uses objects to stand for other objects in pretend play</td>
<td>Play has defined roles and story lines such as familiar story books, family life and community roles</td>
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Contact Information

Ellen Frede
efrede@nieer.org

Shannon Ayers
sayers@nieer.org