

A MANDATE FOR PLAYFUL LEARNING

Framing the definitions and the evidence

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek
Temple University

Roberta Michnick Golinkoff
University of Delaware

THE CAPULETS AND MONTAGUES OF EARLY EDUCATION: WARRING FACTIONS OR COMPATIBLE APPROACHES?



Direct instruction (**vs or via**) playful learning

Confounding issues of curricula *and* pedagogy

THE CASE FOR A CORE CURRICULUM

Foundational academic and social skills are critical for school success!

- Early cognitive skills in language, preliteracy, numeracy, executive function and emotion regulation predict later elementary school achievements.
 - NICHD, Early Child Care Research Network, 2005; Scarborough, 2001; Storch & Whitehurst, 2001; NELP Report, 2009; Dickinson & Freiberg, in press; Baroody & Dowker, 2003; Raver, 2002
- Interventions in these skills make a big difference in later outcomes -- they are malleable
 - Diamond, Barnett, Thomas, & Munro, 2007
- Interventions have have both short and long term effects on outcomes.
 - Campbell, Pungello, Miller-Johnson, Burchinal, & Ramey, 2001; Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Campbell & Ramey, 1995; Schweinhart, 2004; Weikart, 1998; Reynolds, Ou, & Topitzes, 2004; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2006

PLAYFUL LEARNING: STRONG CONTENT VIA PLAYFUL PEDAGOGY

- Free play

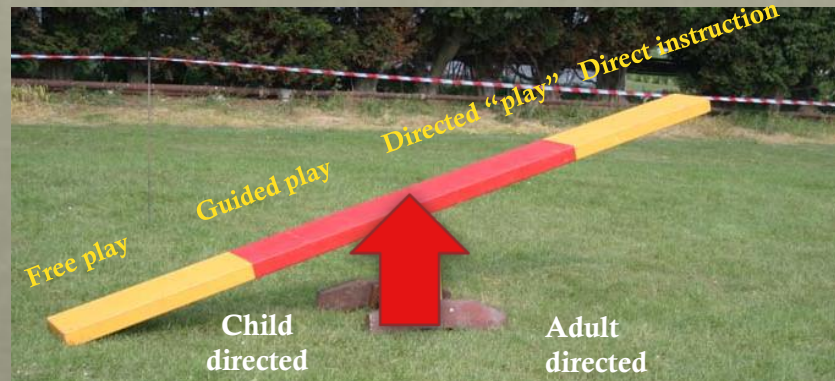
- whether with objects, fantasy and make believe, or physical, is 1) pleasurable and enjoyable, 2) has no extrinsic goals, 3) is spontaneous, 4) involves active engagement, 5) is generally all-engrossing, 6) often has a private reality, 7) is non-literal, and 8) can contain a certain element of make-believe (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Garvey, 1977; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003; Christie & Johnsen, 1983).

- Guided play

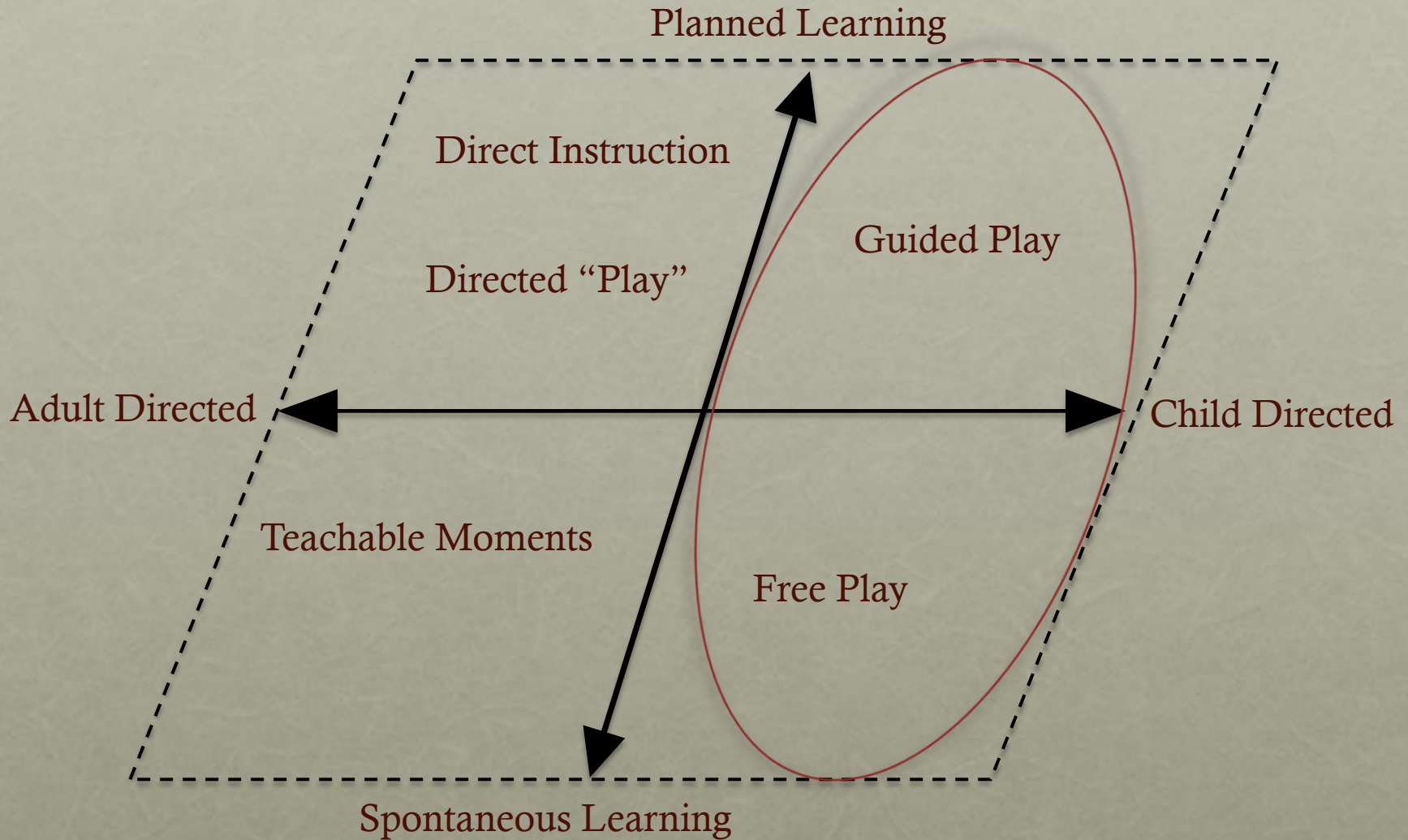
- educators structure an environment around a general curricular goal that is designed to stimulate children's natural curiosity, exploration, and play with learning-oriented objects/materials (Fein & Rivkin, 1986; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Marcon, 2002; Resnick, 1999; Schweinhart, 2004)

OPERATIONALIZING GUIDED PLAY: SEVERAL CONCEPTIONS

- Guided play is always child directed:
 - Adults populate environment for child discovery
 - Adults gently guide and comment on or reinforce child action and discovery (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, in press)
- Guided play vs directed “play”: Playful learning lies on a continuum (Miller & Almon, 2009)



Dimensions of Early Learning Contexts



ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES FROM PLAYFUL LEARNING

- **From free play**

- **Math and science**

- Sarama & Clements, 2009a, 2009b; Tamis-LeMonda, Uzgiris, & Bornstein, 2002; Ginsburg, Pappas, and Seo, 2001

- **Literacy and language**

- Dickinson, Cote, & Smith, 1993; Nicolopoulou, McDowell, & Brockmeyer, 2006; Pellegrini & Galda, 1990; Dickinson & Moreton, 1991; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Bergen & Mauer, 200

- **Social-emotional skills**

- Birch & Ladd, 1997; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997

- **Executive function**

- Krafft & Berk, 1998; Elias & Berk, 2002; Fantuzzo, Sekino, & Cohen, 2004; Lemche, Lennertz, Orthmann, Ari, Grote, Hafker, et al., 2003

- **From guided play**

- **Math**

- Arnold, Fisher, Ginsburg, Inoue, & Seo, 1999; Doctoroff, & Dobbs, 2002; Griffin & Case, 1996; Griffin, Case, & Siegler, 1994; Whyte & Bull, 2008; Clements & Sarama, 2007; Fisher, 2009; Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006

- **Literacy and language**

- Christie & Enz, 1992; Christi & Roskos, 2006; Einarsdottir, 2000; Kavanaugh & Engel, 1998; Roskos & Christie, 2004; Saracho & Spodek, 2006; Nicolopoulou et al. 2006; Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006

- **Social-emotional skills**

- Brackett, Rivers & Salovey, in press; Ashiabi, (2007); Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006; Burts et al., 1990; Burts et al., 1992; Hirsh-Pasek, 1991; Love, Ryer, & Faddeis, 1992

- **Executive function**

- Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Diamond, Barnett, Thomas, & Munroe, 2007; Blair & Razza, 2007; Duncan, Dowsett, Claessens, Magnuson, Huston, Klebanov, et al., 2007; Gathercole, Tiffany, Briscoe, Thorn, & ALSPAC Team, 2005; Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006

Though some studies use random assignment, most of the data are from correlational and observational studies.

WHY MIGHT PLAYFUL LEARNING WORK AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL?

- Consistent with well worn developmental principles of how children learn
 - Active not passive
 - Meaningful context
 - Whole child approach to learning
- Naturally uses mechanisms that foster strong learning
 - Interest
 - Engagement
 - Intrinsic motivation and autonomy
 - Attention

KEY POINTS AND DIRECTIONS FORWARD

- A strong core curriculum and playful pedagogy are NOT incompatible
- Data suggest playful learning offers a midground position to foster high quality preschool education
- We need more research to secure the operational definition of playful learning and guided play
- We need more high quality research to examine the impact of playful learning on academic and social outcomes
 - Random assignment studies comparing playful learning to free play alone and to direct instruction
- We need research that goes beyond the claim for an association and that looks at the **mechanisms** that drive the association between play and learning.