

# Children and Play

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# State of Play Research

- Much on developmental course of play
- Less on how play helps

# Fairly Solid Support

- *Play Fighting*: Emotion Regulation/Social Competence
  - Rodents (Pellis & Pellis, 2006)
  - Primates (Harlowe & Suomi, 1971)
  
- Recess for attention, social competence
  - When school = sit and listening (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005)

# More Limited Support

- **Language/Narrative** (Pelligrini & Galda, 1993)
- **Creativity** (Dansky, 1980, but see Smith & Whitney, 1987)
- **Social Competence** (Youngblade & Dunn, 1995)

# Frequent Problems with Oft-Cited “Evidence” on Benefits of Play

- Typically correlational
- Trainers and/or post-testers not blind
- No/inadequate comparison group
  - » Need research using Gold Standard designs

# Other Unresolved Questions About Pretense

- What happens neurally when people engage in pretense/fictional worlds? (Decety, Lillard)
- What crosses the real/pretend boundary? (“Quarantine” Leslie, Bandura)
- How is transmigration accomplished?
- Is learning in play better, the same, or less good than learning in real?
- When, and due to what aspects of play?

# What Aspects of Play?

*Pretend as a “leading context”*

*(Siraj-Blatchford, 2009)*

- Embodied Cognition/Context
- Child’s Free Choice
- Peer Involvement
- Planning
- Inhibition of Real
- Mastery/Stress Reduction

# Implications for Preschool Programs

Didactic, teacher-centered programs



Stipek, D., Feiler, R., Daniels, D., & Milburn, S. (1995)

“Compared to children in child-centered programs, children in didactic programs rated their abilities significantly lower, had lower expectations for success on academic tasks, showed more dependency on adults for permission and approval, evidenced less pride in their accomplishments, and claimed to worry more about school.” Also Rescorla et al 1991.



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Didactic, teacher-  
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Child-centered  
playschools  
“pure discovery  
learning”

(Mayer, 2004)

# Two studies from

29 September 2006 | \$10  
**Science**

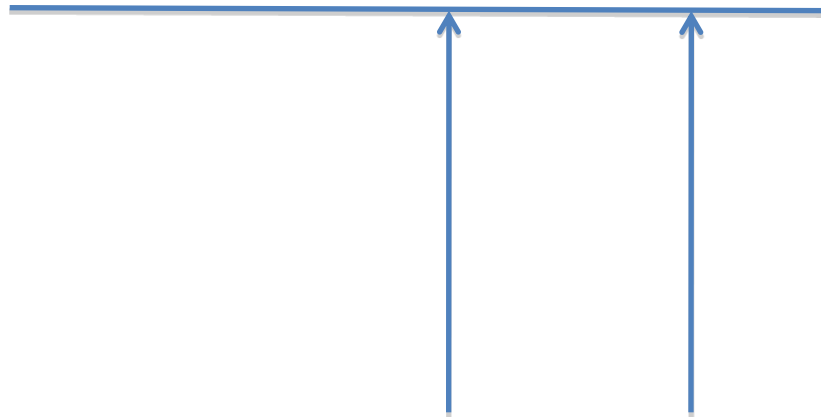
EDUCATIONFORUM

Didactic, teacher-  
centered programs

Child-centered  
playschools

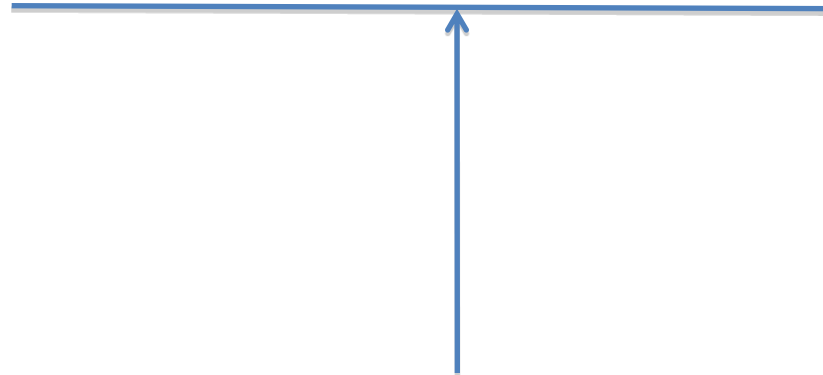
Lillard & Else-  
Quest (2006)  
Classic  
Montessori

Diamond, Barnett,  
Thomas, & Munro  
(2007)  
“Tools of the Mind”



# Implications for Preschool Programs?

Didactic, teacher-centered programs



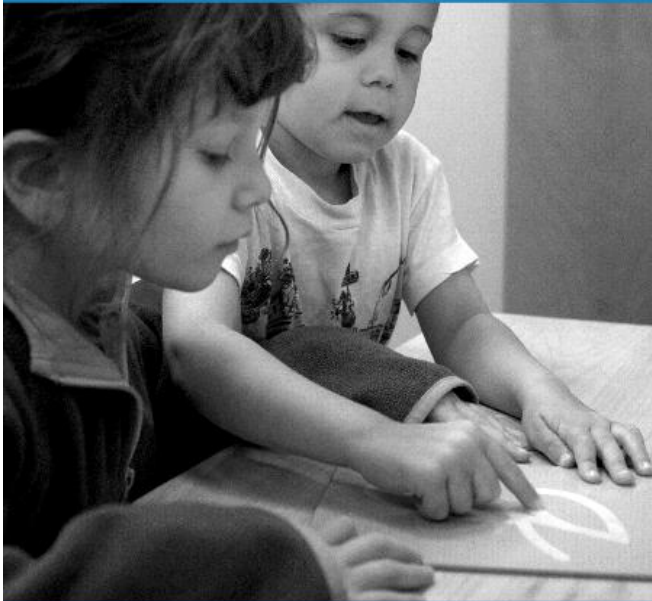
Child-centered playschools

Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley (2002)

Best outcomes when child centered AND strong instructional frame

# MONTESSORI

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE GENIUS



ANGELINE STOLL LILLARD

*Photographs by An Vu*

*Education is not acquired by listening to words, but by virtue of experiences in which the child acts on his environment.*

*The teacher's task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment made for the child. (Montessori, 1949)*

# Fantasy versus Play

## – Deloache:

- pop up books
  - fantasy books
  - cartoon pictures
  - “fun” letters
- not as helpful to learning as plain and realistic



# Summary

- Know some ways play helps young
- Less clear on pretend play
  - If so, why, and what aspects for what outcomes
- What adults create for fun can sometimes interfere with learning
- Balance of teacher-structured and child-initiated activity seems to optimize important developmental outcomes