

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE  
AN  
TO SUPPORT  
LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

# CHILD'S PLAY



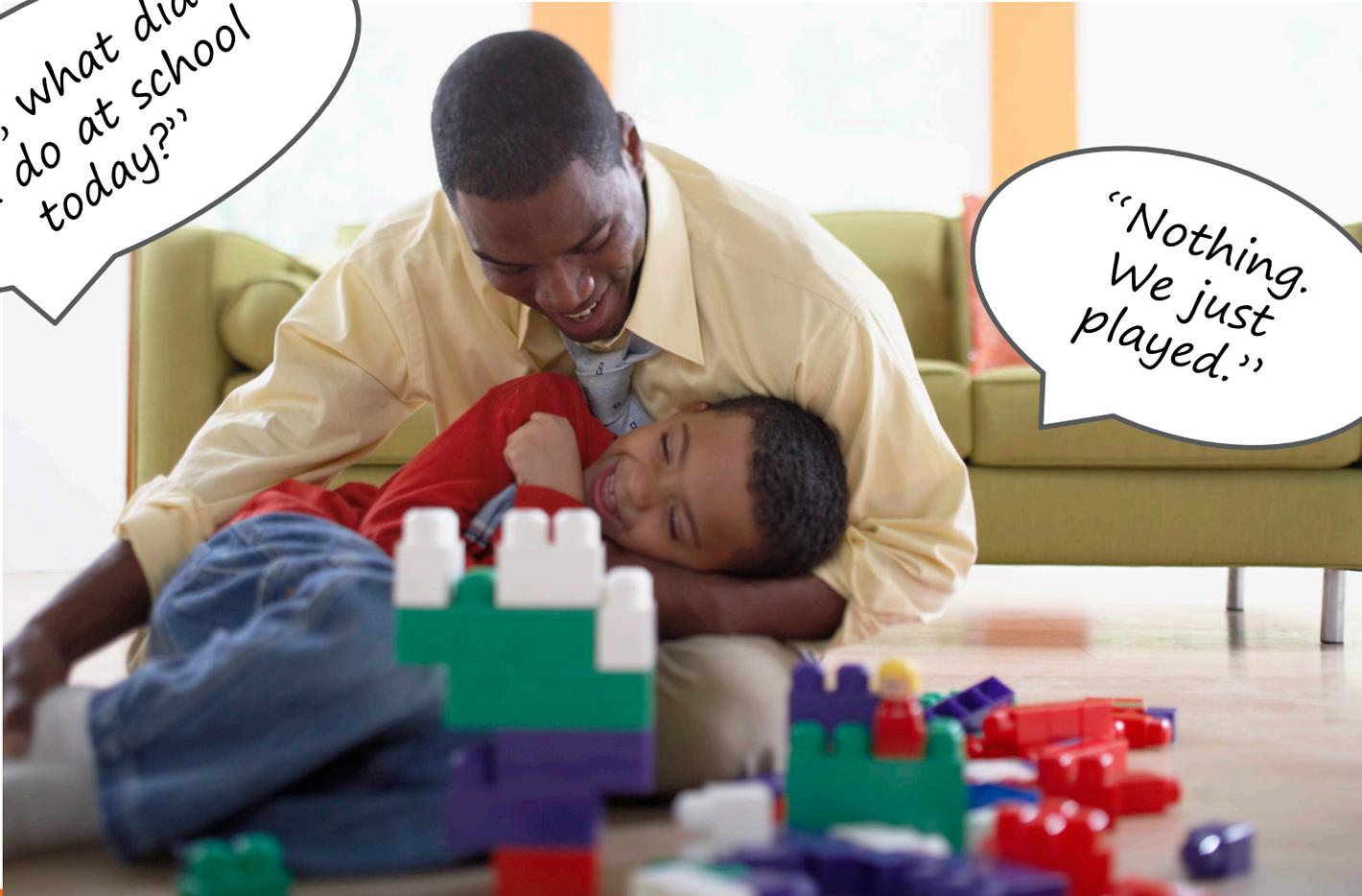
An  
*Early Childhood  
Curriculum &  
Assessment  
Network (ECCAN)*  
Resource

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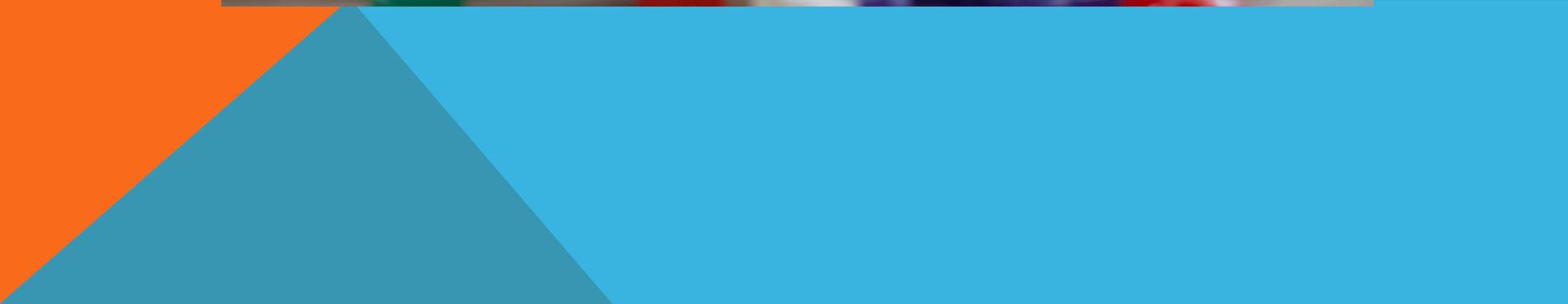
*Your Facilitator ...*



“So, what did you do at school today?”



“Nothing. We just played.”



## AT YOUR TABLES ...



- *What are parent/family and administrator perceptions of “play”? Do they associate play with learning?*
- *When you think of “play”, what images come to mind?*
- *Do YOU associate play with learning?*

# COMPARISON OF HOME VS. SCHOOL PLAY

| Dimension                | Home   | Child Care or School Setting  |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Peer Interactions        | None or mixed-age  | Same-age groups   |
| Group size               | Alone or with 1-2 others                                   | Large groups; multiple children   |
| Materials and equipment  | Varies, but typically restricted by space, messiness, cost | Larger selection - Easels, musical instruments, art materials, scissors, etc. |
| Guidance/Supervision     | Often "free play" with supervision for safety              | Intentional play choices aligned with learning goals; adults provide guidance |
| Adult/child interactions | Listens to child requests; focus on safety                 | "scaffolds"/facilitates/guides play; models play; asks questions              |
| Planning                 | Limited; "go play"   | Intentionally planned based on child interests and learning goals             |

**Source:**

Brewer, J.A. & Kieff, J. *Fostering Mutual Respect for Play at Home and School*, Childhood Education Journal, Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI), Winter 1996-97

# WHY PLAY?

*“While early formal instruction may appear to show good test results at first, in the long term, in follow-up studies, such children have had no advantage. On the contrary, especially in the case of boys, subjection to early formal instruction increases their tendency to distance themselves from the goals of school, and to drop out of it, either mentally or physically.”*



*Dr. Lillian Katz,  
Professor Emeritus,  
University of Illinois*

## INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE ...

A German longitudinal study comparing graduates of 50 play-based classes with graduates of 50 achievement-focused classes found that “by age 10, the children who had played excelled over the others ...

- more advanced in oral expression, reading, and math
- better adjusted socially and emotionally
- demonstrated more creativity and intelligence



Source: Almon, J. & Miller, E. *The Crisis in Early Education: A Research-based Case for More Play and Less Pressure*. Alliance for Childhood, November 2011. [www.allianceforchildhood.org](http://www.allianceforchildhood.org)

# INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE ...

“Countries where they actually have more recess tend to have higher academic performance than countries where recess is less.”

Sergio Pellis, Researcher at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada  
[npr.org/topics/education](http://npr.org/topics/education)



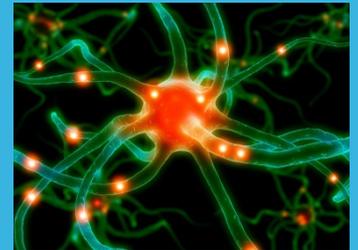
# BRAIN DEVELOPMENT AND PLAY

- Play - vital to brain development during early childhood years
- Strengthens neural connections
- Wires brain's executive control center for regulating emotions, making plans and solving problems

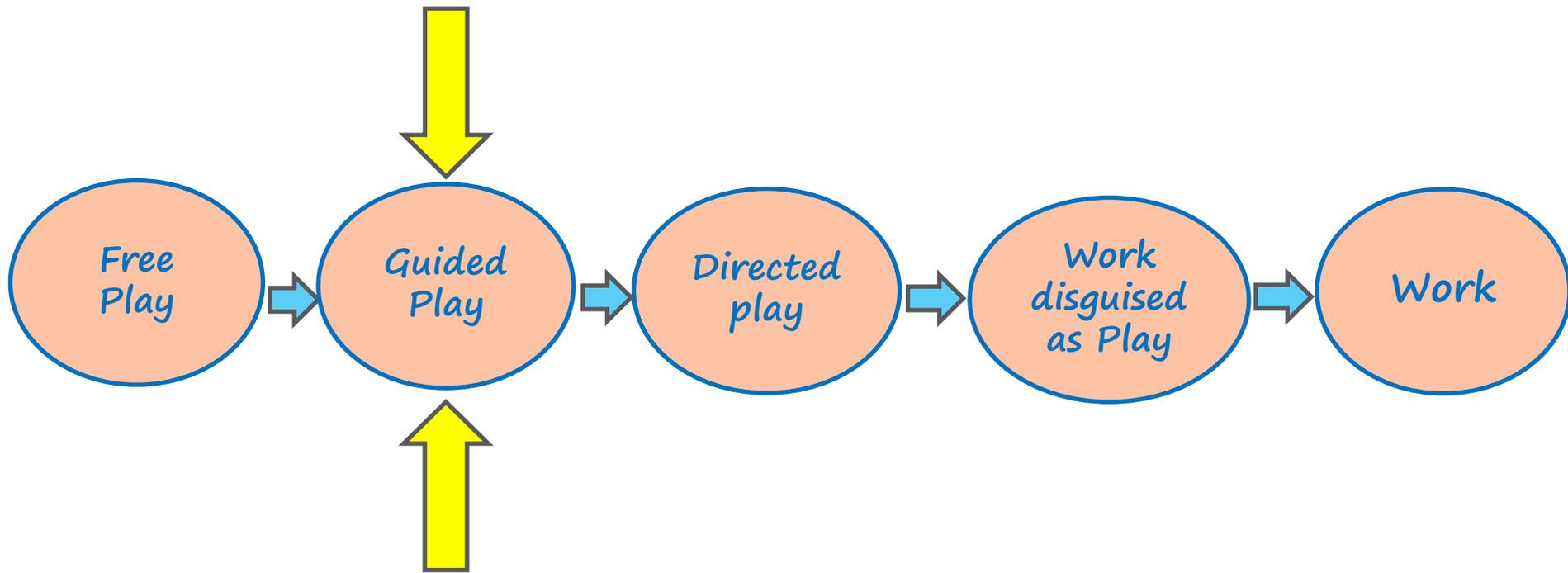
*“Play seems to be so important to our development and survival that the impulse to play has become a biological drive.”*

*Stuart Brown, MD, Play Research Scientist*

Nell, M.L. & Drew, W.F. From Play to Practice: Connecting Teacher's Play to Children's Learning, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington, DC., 2013, p. 15



# PLAY – WORK CONTINUUM



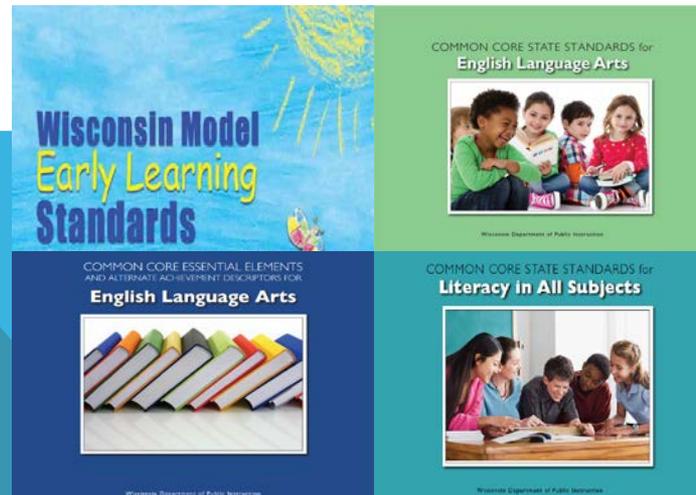
# NOT JUST ANY PLAY ...

- Purposeful, complex play
- Dramatic play with roles/characters and “scripts”
- Extended time periods of engagement
- Learning standards intentionally incorporated into play options

“... builds self regulation, language, vocabulary, and abstract [representational] thinking ... all directly linked to later academic achievement.”

# LEARNING STANDARDS SUPPORT PLAY

The Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS) specify developmental expectations for children from birth through entrance to first grade. The standards reflect all the domains of a child's learning and development: Health & Physical Development; Social and Emotional Development; Language Development and Communication; Approaches to Learning; and Cognition and General Knowledge. Success in achieving the WMELS provides the foundation for learning and success in K-12 standards.



# WMELS GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. All children are capable and competent.
2. Early relationships matter.
3. A child's early learning and development is multidimensional.
4. Expectations for children must be guided by knowledge of child growth and development.
5. Children are individuals who develop at various rates.
6. Children are members of cultural groups that share developmental patterns.
7. Children exhibit a range of skills and competencies within any domain of development.
- 8. Children learn through play and the active exploration of their environment.**
9. Parents are children's primary and most important caregivers and educators



## GUIDANCE FROM THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (DPI):

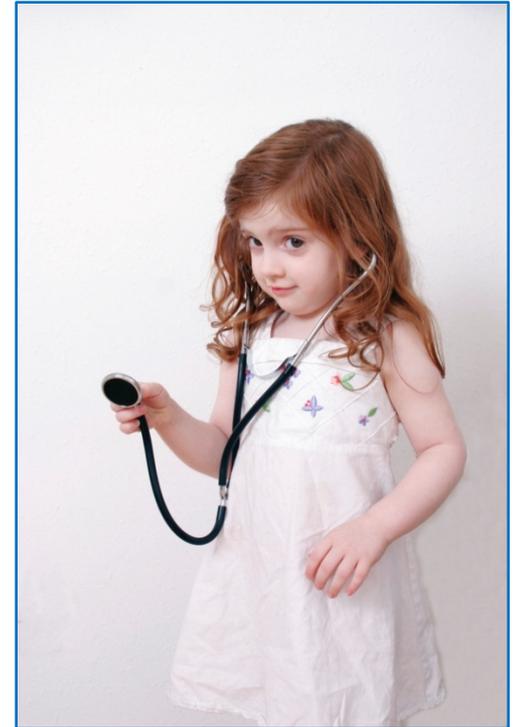
*In early childhood settings ...*

1. Deliver *content-rich curriculum with challenging but achievable goals in ways that honor and respect the unique learning needs of young children*
2. Use a *play-based curriculum to develop self regulation, language, cognition, and social competence*
3. Core or universal curriculum should include support for *all developmental domains and content areas as described in the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards (WMELS)*

# ACHIEVING STANDARDS AND CURRICULUM GOALS

- Not only addressed in teacher-led small and large group instructional times
- Supported by the types of play materials and dramatic play opportunities provided

*PLAY is not taking a break from learning; PLAY IS LEARNING*



| Learning Standard                                 | Examples in Play  |
|---|---|
| <i>Communicates through language and gestures</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Role-playing in dramatic play</i></li> <li>• <i>Acting out a story</i></li> </ul>   |
| <i>Expresses ideas through writing</i>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Writing on clipboard in nature center</i></li> <li>• <i>Writing notes in post office center</i></li> </ul>                                  |
| <i>Participates as member of a group</i>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Turn-taking during a game</i></li> <li>• <i>Role-playing in dramatic play</i></li> <li>• <i>Plans block building with others</i></li> </ul> |
| <i>Resolves social conflicts</i>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Agrees to play scenario roles</i></li> <li>• <i>Discusses options over a disputed toy</i></li> </ul>  |
| <i>Demonstrates number concepts</i>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sets table in restaurant dramatic play center</i></li> <li>• <i>Gives change in grocery store play center</i></li> </ul>                    |

# ASSESSMENT

- *Best practice requires multiple sources of data*
- *Observation / Documentation*
- *Authentic or functional assessment*
- *A child engaged in daily activities demonstrates natural applications of his/her knowledge*
- *PLAY provides the natural opportunity for this to occur*



# TEACHERS ROLE



Teachers play a vital role by ...

- Planning guided and enriching play opportunities
- Scaffolding children's learning with modeling, questions, props, and challenges
- Intentionally integrating learning standards and curriculum goals
- Documenting learning through functional or authentic assessment practices

# RECOMMENDED READING

- Gronlund, G. *Developmentally Appropriate Play – Guiding Children to a Higher Level*, Redleaf Press, St. Paul, MN., 2010
- Heidemann, S. & Hewitt, D. *Play: The Pathway from Theory to Practice*, Redleaf Press, St. Paul, MN., 2010
- Nell, M.L. & Drew, W.F. *From Play to Practice: Connecting Teachers' Play to Children's Learning*, NAEYC, Washington, DC., 2013