



PLAY AS LEARNING STRATEGY FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN PRE SCHOOL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT :

Preschool education is education imparted to children in 3-6 years age group. It is the first stage of organised education. Preschool education is also known as pre-primary education. Pre school education is that which helps in a child's emotional, social and personal growth and development. Pre school children during this age group are curious beings, discovering and investigating the world around them. They use their senses seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching to accomplish their tasks. Play is the tool for this work—the tool young children use to explore the mysteries of the physical and social worlds. In play, children learn collaboration and conflict resolution with friends as they investigate the properties of equipment, materials, and routines. Through the phenomenon of play, children develop and learn as they participate in activities in every area of the classroom. Play affords children the ability to improve their language, social, physical, math, science, and thinking skills. The development and enhancement of these skills promotes their self esteem. The objective of the present paper is to emphasize play as learning strategy for skill development in pre school children.

Keywords: Pre school, Pre school education, play, skill development

INTRODUCTION

Pre school is the first experience of the child in a structured setting, to learn the importance of sharing and learn new things which fosters personal growth and development. Apart from growth many skills are learnt by the preschool children since there is continuous interaction and exposure with children of the same age group and with teachers. Preschool is an early childhood program in which children combine learning with play in a program run by professionally trained adults. Children are most commonly enrolled in preschool between the ages of three and five. Child play can promote brain development in many ways, including providing the child with a better understanding of the world and setting the groundwork for later brain growth. At birth, infants' brains are equipped with an overabundance of brain cell connections (synapses). Synapse overproduction allows information captured from the early years to build a foundation for the brain. Eighty percent of the brain growth takes place during these years.

As rightly said by Albert Einstein that ‘Play is the highest form of research’ proves right especially with this age group because they learn to find answers to their numerous questions through exploration, experimentation and conversations during guided and scaffold play in purposeful play environments created by adults. These experiences nurture natural curiosity in young minds and they are always eager to inquire. Preschool children don’t explore their environment but also develop physical coordination skills. Activities involving running, climbing, beading, art and craft help develop hand-eye coordination, and fine and gross motor skills. It involves transformation of mental images to languages so that thoughts and knowledge can be transformed into information. Exposure to rich language through role plays, read aloud sessions and stories helps to enhance the child’s vocabulary, thereby promoting language skills.

Play can be defined as a voluntary activity that is actively pursued to derive pleasure. Children learn best through play. Children should engage in play activities which are neither too challenging nor too easy for their developmental level. In a play based approach stimulating materials and activities are made available by the teacher and children self select activities according to their interest at each point of time and learn at their own pace. The teachers role is that of a facilitator and she does not carry out any specific structured activities. In order to enable children to benefit from this approach teachers need to observe and identify learning opportunities and make play materials available accordingly. Wathu (2017) study shows that pre-schoolers’ develop holistically through play.

Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development. It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them.

TYPES OF PLAY

Dramatic - Fantasy-directed play with dressing up in costumes, assuming roles as characters, using toys to represent characters in stories, creating imaginary settings, and pretending to take on the roles of adults.

Manipulative - Holding and handling small toys often used to build objects but also found in puzzles, characters, beads, etc.

Physical - Using the whole body in activities like jumping, running, hopping, balancing the body use of play materials like bikes, balls, jump ropes, hoops, play structures, etc.

Creative - Using art materials such as paint, clay, markers, pencils, glue, etc. The play takes place in the process of using the materials.

Constructive play - Constructive play allows children to experiment with drawing, music and building things. This helps them to develop their movement skills and become less clumsy. Constructive play also helps children to understand distance and size

Social play - By playing with others, children learn how to take turns, cooperate and share. This also helps them to develop their language skills.

PLAY AS STRATEGY FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Communication Skills : Play helps children develop key language and communication skills. When playing with other children learn to communicate effectively, and listen intently with others. During these early years, when a child’s vocabulary is rapidly growing, participating in teacher-led play where their conversation is encouraged in a natural way can be especially effective in boosting their communication skills.

Motor Skills : Active play also quickly works to develop strong motor skills in children. Activities like running, jumping, and throwing help children develop strong gross motor skills. Participating in sports, climbing, and skipping require core strength, hand-eye coordination, and encourages a strong sense of balance, Coloring, drawing and crafting encourages and develops fine motor skills.

Social skills and Emotional Development: Playing also provides opportunities for children to learn social interaction. While playing together, children learn to cooperate, follow the rules, develop self-control, and generally get along with other people. Play-based learning also plays an important role in the development of healthy social and emotional habits in children. When children play with other children, they learn to cooperate, communicate and engage with their peers in a way that ensures they feel that they are one among them. These interactions give them the ability to develop relationships, and nurture their sense of emotional and social intelligence. Play can encourage children to work through common emotions and scenarios - both positive and negative—which in turn strengthens the way they are able to interact and cope with the world around them.

Creative Skills : Pre schoolers love to express themselves and their ideas using crayons, paints, play dough, clay, scissors, glue and paper. The child involves in making basic shapes and might **enjoy** experimenting with texture, space and colours. For example, preschoolers often draw houses with shining suns above the roof. This is because this kind of picture is made up of basic shapes like squares, triangles and circles., drawing human figure with eyes, ears, nose etc., Creativity and Imaginations may seem like hallmarks of childhood, but they are important skills that are learned—not inherit. Play and playful learning, foster this sense of creativity, and allow children to navigate so many scenarios in their lives - both real and imagined.

Creativity is closely tied to divergent thinking, which is the thought process that explores many possible solutions and generates new ideas. Many studies have found that playing is highly associated with divergent thinking. Garaigordobil and Berrueco (2011) studied the effects of the play program to preschool children and revealed that the play program was effective in developing children's creative behaviors.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving : As children interact with the world around them, especially in ways that inspire their creativity and critical thinking skills, they learn to become effective problem solvers. From planting seeds in their community garden, to helping bandage and imaginary scrape, to reading about others' joys and pitfalls, they see cause and effect, and begin to notice both the patterns around them, and the consequences of actions, both simple and They begin to predict outcomes, and start to consider a variety of choices and actions during story telling.

Empowering Education Through Play : The importance of play-based preschool programs encourages the children to begin their education in an environment of playful learning environment. These children continue to approach their learning with the critical thinking and communication skills that make them curious, well-rounded, and successful members of their communities.

CONCLUSION: Play is imperative in a child's development, play-based preschools may provide a better learning environment than other alternatives. When choosing a preschool, parents should pay attention to how classes are conducted, whether the "play to learn" approach is used, and how much free-play is allowed. Play is an essential and critical part of all children's development. Play starts in the child's infancy and ideally, continues throughout his or her life. Play is how children learn to socialize, to think, to solve problems, to mature and most importantly, to have fun. Play connects children with their imagination, their environment,

their parents and family and the world. In a playful pre school environment the child will be able to learn these skills apply them in later years of life and can live a happy and successful life.

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