

All Work And No Play Makes For Troubling Trend In Early Education

Science Daily (Feb. 12, 2009) — Parents and educators who favor traditional classroom-style learning over free, unstructured playtime in preschool and kindergarten may actually be stunting a child's development instead of enhancing it, according to a University of Illinois professor who studies childhood learning and literacy development.

Anne Haas Dyson, a professor of curriculum and instruction in the U. of I. College of Education, says playtime for children is a "fundamental avenue" for learning, and attempts by parents and educators to create gifted children by bombarding them with information is well-intentioned but ultimately counterproductive.

"That approach doesn't appreciate the role of play and imagination in a child's intellectual development," Dyson said. "Play is where children discover ideas, experiences and concepts and think about them and their consequences. This is where literacy and learning really begins."

What Dyson calls the "banning of the imagination" in schools may be influenced by what some critics have called the "Baby Genius Edutainment Complex," a cottage industry of mind-enrichment products developed specifically for infants and toddlers and marketed to anxious parents eager to give their children's cognitive abilities an early boost.



*Anne Haas Dyson, a professor of curriculum and instruction at Illinois, says playtime for children is a "fundamental avenue" for learning.
(Credit: Photo by L. Brian Stauffer)*

"I see this 'Einstein in the crib' trend as a societal reduction of children to the means for fulfilling parents' desires for intellectual distinction," Dyson said.

"Children learn the way we all learn: through engagement, and through construction. They have to make sense of the world, and that's what play or any other symbolic activity does for children."

While Dyson does see some value in teaching the ABCs to children in pre-kindergarten, she thinks that trying to accelerate learning actually works against a child's development. Kindergarten and preschool, she said, should be a place for children to experience play as intellectual inquiry, before they get taken over by the tyranny of high-stakes testing.

"I'm certainly not opposed to literacy in the early grades," Dyson said, "but the idea that we can eliminate play from the curriculum doesn't make sense. Kids don't respond well to sitting still in their desks and listening at that age. They need stimulation."

For the entire article go to:
<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/02/090212125137.htm>