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## Want Preschoolers to Become Successful? Allow Them to Play More

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## Want Preschoolers to Become Successful? Allow Them to Play More

By Kim Nassoiy  
UCF Forum columnist

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I work in a field where play reigns supreme. I'm an early childhood educator.

I have studied the research and know how children learn best. Yet, I watch curriculums and policies being written that stifle the learning of our youngest citizens in preschool. They are being asked to learn things beyond their capabilities. Teachers are being asked to teach things that are not developmentally appropriate. There seems to be no stopping the sometimes misguided "machine" that seeks to theoretically turn children into the best and the brightest.

Many would ask, "Why is this a problem?"

We want our children to be successful in school and life. Getting children on the right path to success is where the discrepancies begin. Many believe that preschools should be teaching children to read, write and perform basic math skills. Parents want to see handouts done during the day and even ask if there is homework for the children. These things have very little meaning to children.

Play is work to children. They want to use their senses to discover and explore. They want to figure out what something does or how it can be used. Think of it as "biology with a lab." They don't even want an adult's help.

For those of you with children or who work with them, you know this to be true. Children are often saying to their adults: "No" or "I can do it myself."

Through play, children develop a love of learning. They are the facilitators of their own education. This is essential to becoming a lifelong learner.

In a perfect world, children and adults would have the opportunity to learn through exploration. Most knowledge, however, is still passed by lectures and rote memorization, which does not build critical thinking skills.

As the late Stanford Professor Paul Hurd said: “Too many facts, too little conceptualizing, too much memorizing, and too little thinking.”

A recent Psychology Today article, “The Emerging Crisis in Critical Thinking,” addressed the deficit in problem-solving skills in today’s college students. These students are the babies of the '90s “baby genius” push. Educators used flashcards with infants and toddlers and spent more time on rote learning than letting them play.

Children spent little time discovering and failing at tasks, which teach persistence and resilience. The opportunities to fail and try again were missed, which are crucial to learning and brain development.

All the research supports what early childhood teachers know: It is time to get back to the basics.

Let the children play. Let them love learning and become the educators of tomorrow.

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