

# Enhancing Early Childhood Development through Play-Based Learning: Strategies for Educators

Educators Newsletter  
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## Introduction

Early Childhood educators play a crucial role in supporting a child's cognitive, emotional, and social growth. Research indicates that play-based and child-centered approaches can be more effective than more traditional academic-focused methods (LeForett et al., 2023). Intentional play helps children develop social competencies, problem-solving abilities, and self-regulation skills, providing educators with the opportunity to scaffold, observe, and assess development.

## Why play Matters

Play is the primary way children learn. For educators, play provides opportunities to scaffold, observe, and assess a child's development. Activities such as dramatic play, block building, and sensory exploration can help children to explore hands-on experiences while educators are trying new approaches, experimenting with different strategies beyond traditional methods, and adapting to the child's responses, demonstrating professional risk-taking to enhance learning. These can help educators:

- Encourage fine and gross motor development.
- Promote early literacy skills.
- Promote numeracy skills.
- Support social-emotional growth through cooperative play and conflict resolution

### Multi-Aged Classrooms:

Furthermore, multi-aged classrooms provide peer learning, leadership opportunities, and social modeling. Observations show how children learn from older peers through modeling, while older children build leadership skills and confidence. In practice, I have observed that children are most engaged when learning is embedded in play-based experiences. Educators often navigate through unpredictable interactions, adapt to each child's needs, and make difficult decisions in uncertain situations, demonstrating skills and comfort with working in ambiguous learning environments.



### Further Reading

LaForett, D., et al. (2023). Play-Based Learning and Academic Achievement in Early Childhood Education. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*.

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### Educator Strategies

- 1. Integrate STEAM Experiences:** Incorporate science, technology, engineering, arts, and math into play-based activities.  
a.e.g. building structures and exploring cause and effect through sensory materials
- 2. Professional Collaboration:** Work with colleagues to share strategies and insights to strengthen curriculum planning and responsiveness to children's needs.
- 3. Intentional Learning Centers:** Design centers with developmental goals.  
a.e.g. sensory table to support fine motor skills and exploration
- 4. Observation and Documentation:** Track children's developmental milestones and interests to guide instruction to create individualized learning experiences.

### Conclusion

Play-based learning is a professional tool that supports the holistic development of children. When educators are intentional about incorporating play, they can foster cognitive, social-emotional, and motor skills while also responding to individual developmental needs. By prioritizing play in the classroom, educators empower children to become socially competent and active, engaged learners, while continually refining their professional practice and learning.