Let's Play! for Leaders

Joyful learning is research-based

Playful learning environments have a positive impact on executive functioning, language skills, math skills, interactions and relationships, and social-emotional resilience (Yogman et al., 2018).

Play provides opportunities for multilingual children to navigate which language to use when and with whom, and to blend their multiple languages and cultural practices. Children also make sense of the different cultures they bring with them during play settings (Axelrod, 2014).

Guided play, in particular, results in increased learning. Adults help "set the stage for thought and action" so that the learning goal is discoverable, but children direct the activity (Mardell et al., 2023).

How can you build shared understandings of playful learning?

- Talk with families about how their children play at home and in the community.
- Consider how your understandings of play include providing space for children to use their full linguistic repertoire.
- Read about the impact of playful learning with multilingual children.
- Connect policies and practices to your shared understandings.

Note: We use play, play for multilingual children, play for learning, purposeful play, and joyful learning interchangeably.

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How can you leverage school or program structures to support playful learning?

- Ensure play is built into schedules, including planning time.
- Identify opportunities for play in your curricula.
- Provide funding for playful learning resources.
- Hire bi/multilingual coaches, teachers, etc. who value and/or have experience with play.

How do you provide playful professional learning for staff?

- Onboard new staff through and about play.
- Include fishbowl experiences of guided play in workshops, coaching sessions, and mentoring.
- Provide opportunities for teacher action research about play.

How do you promote playful family and community connections?

- Find opportunities for family and community partnerships around play.
- Engage playfully during school or program gatherings.

How do you lead playfully?

- Model how you learn through play.
- Get feedback from staff. Do they feel agency, joy, and opportunities to explore?
- Make play visible. Share examples in the environment, newsletters, staff meetings, etc.

Resources

Axelrod, Y. (2014). '¿Tu te acuerdas de ganchulinas?': Longitudinal research with young emergent bilinguals. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 15*(2), 94–108. https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2014.15.2.94

Garcia, A. (n.d.). Policy recommendations: Dual language learners. New America. https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/care-report/policy-recommendations-dual-language-learners/

Mardell, B., Ryan, J., Krechevsky, M., Baker, M., Schulz, T. S., & Liu-Constant, Y. (2023). A pedagogy of play: Supporting playful learning in classrooms and schools. Project Zero. https://pz.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/PoP%20Book.pdf

Yogman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. (2018). The power of play: A pediatric role in enhancing development in young children. *Pediatrics, 142*(3). https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2058