

Positive Playtime

A Kindergarten Readiness Outreach Workshop



Early Literacy Focus

Play is one of the best ways for children to learn language and literacy skills. Play helps children think symbolically: a ruler becomes a magic wand, today becomes a time when dinosaurs were alive, a playmate becomes an astronaut exploring space. Through play, children realize that one thing can stand for another. This also helps children understand that written words stand for real objects and experiences, and practice vocabulary.

The Program

This is a workshop for the whole family to engage with play as a way to help young children develop skills to help them get ready for kindergarten, including early literacy skills, early STEM, and executive function abilities.

Overview

Activity	Focus	Time
Introduction	Share early literacy focus	5 min
Book	Share a book that illustrates a child playing, imagining, inventing, etc.	10 min
Individual Activity: Toy Transformation	Hand out everyday objects and ask everyone to share how it would become a toy	10 min
Group Activity: Playhouse Game	Play this game to transform every room in your house into a play zone	10 min
Family Activity: Mini Cardboard Challenge	A simple cardboard box can provide hours of enjoyment. What can your family make together?	20 min
Wrap Up	Reflect and Goal Set	5 min

The Details

Introduction

Welcome participants and deliver the following messages:

- This program is for the entire family
- Today we will do different play-based activities that will help you build skills to get your kids ready for school
 - We will develop our creative thinking skills
 - Brainstorm ways to transform your house into play zones that promote learning
 - We will use fine motor skills, engineering, and imagination to create cardboard inventions

- Everything we do today is something you can continue to do at home
- YOU are your child's best teacher, and doing things together helps your child learn

Book

Sharing a book is a great way to introduce a concept to the group and model reading aloud to adults. In the study of child development, the theory of constructionism is one where children are given control over their world in age-appropriate ways and learn through making things, which is our focus today. Select a book from your library that illustrates the concept of play, imagination, invention, etc. Check out the book list below for ideas and recommendations.

Share Research

Below are several different research-based comments to share during this program. Choose one or two that you would like to focus on and practice saying them out loud in your own words before the workshop. As you move through the different activities in the workshop, find ways to share the comments. All of these comments are based on Every Child Ready to Read (ECRTR) research and were written by early childhood expert Saroj Ghoting for the Idaho Commission for Libraries' long-running ECRTR workshops.

Individual Activity: Toy Transformation

Supplies needed:

Objects that can be found around the house – wooden spoons, storage containers, etc. You can have more than one of any item, and make sure that there are enough objects for every participant to have one.

For this activity, hand out objects to all of the participants and have them think about how they might play with the object or make it a toy. Would a wooden spoon become a drumstick? Can the USB cord be attached to another toy to play vacuum? Is the storage container a table for a stuffed animal tea party? Have each person tell the group their idea for transforming their object into a toy.

Group Activity: Playhouse Game

Supplies needed:

Playhouse Game cards

Any house can be a playhouse with this game! Start by sharing some tips on ways to encourage learning and play for children (you may want to write these out on a white board or large piece of paper ahead of time). Then use the Playhouse Game cards from ICfL to play the game.

Tips on How to Encourage Learning and Play

Label everything – chairs, toy containers, the TV. This promotes print awareness, an important early literacy skill.

Use letters, especially the letters in a child's name – this promotes letter knowledge.

Talk about numbers and find ways to count things.

Find opportunities to sort things by color, size, shapes, etc. This helps with alphabet knowledge, and is an important early STEM skill.

Find ways to measure and compare to promote STEM thinking.

Imaginative play involves opportunities to dress up and use props.

When children play together, they learn to take turns, share, and develop self-regulation skills – all of these are important aspects of executive function.

Blocks and other building toys help strengthen engineering skills.

Take a book or story you know a child loves, and act it out with them; or encourage them to act out a story they know.

To Play the Game

Each family is a team, and each team is dealt a set of cards:

- One card is a room in a house (blue cards)
- One card is an amount of money to spend (green cards)
- One card is a type of play (red cards): imaginative (make-believe), building, Early STEM (counting, sorting), or print-based (labels or letters)

As a team, each family must decide how to use their cards to create a play area in the house and share with the group. Play as many rounds as you have time for.

To wrap up this activity, deliver these messages:

- Play can happen anywhere and doesn't have to be expensive.
- Dramatic play helps children develop narrative skills and executive function abilities, playing with letters helps develop letter knowledge, and sorting and counting activities help children develop early STEM skills.

Family Activity: Mini Cardboard Challenge

Supplies needed:

- Cardboard (from library or other local source)
- Box cutters (provided by ICfL)
- Markers or other items to decorate cardboard creations
- Painters Tape (1 roll provided by ICfL)

A cardboard box has the potential to become anything. For this activity, families will decide on what they would like to make with the box and then execute their design.

As the activity is wrapping up, deliver these messages:

- Coming to an agreement with a friend on what to play is an important executive function skill for kids to master before school. You can help them learn by doing activities as a family where you all agree on a course of action.
- Building something out of cardboard requires some engineering abilities and helps children develop early STEM skills, which are important for school readiness.

Wrap Up

As the program is wrapping up, deliver the following messages:

- Today your family came together to learn about positive ways to play together
- When we transformed everyday objects into toys, your child was engaging in symbolic thought, which is important for developing language skills

- The Playhouse Game showed us that play can happen anywhere and that it doesn't have to cost a lot. Being a little more intentional with your space can help children have a play experience that is language-rich and STEM-focused.
- Our mini-cardboard challenge offered chances to come to a consensus, make decisions, and engage with engineering – all of which will be important when your child starts school
- Check out the Vroom tip cards in your child's school supply kit for more ideas on how to play together.
- Pass out ICfL school supply kits – one per family.

As a final activity, give adult participants the parent survey to fill out and return to you. Give children the Positive Playtime Kids Reflection Activity to work on while their grown-ups are filling out the survey.

Return completed adult surveys to Jennifer Redford at ICfL:

- Scan and email them to: jennifer.redford@libraries.idaho.gov
- Mail them to Jennifer's Attention at ICfL: 325 W. State St., Boise, ID, 83702
- **Remember to count** the number of kids and adults who attend your program – you will need those numbers for your Summary Report

Supplies

Everyday objects

Playhouse Cards (ICfL)

Cardboard

Box cutters (ICfL)

Markers

Painters Tape (ICfL)

Books

"Doll-E 1.0" by Shanda McCloskey

"The Most Magnificent Thing" by Ashley Spires

"What Do You Do With an Idea?" by Kobi Yamada

"Rosie Revere, Engineer" by Andrea Beaty

"The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend" by Dan Santat

"Let's Do Nothing!" by Tony Fucile

"My Friend Rabbit" by Eric Rohmann

"Is Everyone Ready for Fun?" by Jan Thomas

Research-Based Comments to Adults

Play and Language Development

Playing and learning go hand-in-hand. Children love to explore the world around them and do it through play and experimenting, trying things out.

Play is one of the best ways for children to learn language and literacy skills. Play helps children think symbolically: a ruler becomes a magic wand, today becomes a time when dinosaurs were alive, a playmate becomes an astronaut exploring space. Through play, children realize that one thing can stand for another. This also helps children understand that written words stand for real objects and experiences.

There is a strong relationship between play and language. When children do pretend play, they use one object to represent another. For example, a block may represent a truck or a cell phone; a pencil may symbolize a magic wand. One thing is representing another. This is the same kind of thinking children need to read. They need to know that the picture of the apple represents the real apple, that the written text “a p p l e” is not the real apple, it represents the real apple. In this way, children learn and use symbolic thinking.

Both books and play offer chances to allow children to think of ways to solve problems. We should not be too quick to tell the answer or solve a problem. When children solve a problem, they are using abstract thinking, thinking of something that is not already given. Abstract thinking is also used when they try to understand what they read.

Pretend play helps children think symbolically and develop oral language skills. As children play store or pretend to be an animal, they talk about what they are doing. They practice putting thoughts into words.

Dramatic play helps develop narrative skills as children make up a story about what they are doing. This helps them understand that stories happen in an order: first, next, last.

Make-believe gives children a chance to act out real-life situations, work through worries and fears, and use their imagination to solve problems.

There are many types of play, such as allowing a child to explore on their own, role-playing, acting out a story. There are word games. Some types of play are more directive, requiring children to follow a set of rules. Today, we are looking for the types of play that will encourage the most language development.

Play is important for children because it is the way they explore and come to know about the world. Play offers adults a window into the child’s mind, what and how he or she is thinking, which helps us understand our children. Open-ended play, like playing with blocks, offers opportunities for children to solve problems, to make up stories and situations, and to explore how blocks work—when they fall over, for example. Their explorations provide openings to build strong language skills as well.

Ways of Playing

Playing is one way to encourage children to use their imagination. When they use their imagination, they are thinking about things that they can’t necessarily see right now. Based on the child’s interest, we can add new words and ideas to what they are playing.

You can see that open-ended materials like boxes, blocks, and other materials offer endless possibilities to what your child can do as s/he plays. This sense of discovery supports the joy in learning.

Dramatic play, retelling stories, is one good way to help children understand how stories work, with a beginning, a middle and an end. As they get more skilled at telling stories, they can include more details and more description. Making up their own stories is also good!

It may be hard at first or for younger children to act out a whole story. You can start with some simple motions throughout the telling of the book. Another time, you can encourage children to actually act out the story.

Using predictable books or stories, ones that repeat makes it easier for children to act out stories. They can say the repeated phrase or do a repeated action as you narrate the story.

When children play dress-up, they are pretending to be someone other than who they really are. By roleplaying different situations, they explore new feelings, new actions, new possibilities. As you follow their lead, you can add to their vocabulary and to their knowledge.

Dramatic play, acting out stories or situations, is one way to develop children's language skills. When they retell stories they learn how stories work. When they enact an event, you help them learn new things or help them tell what happened in sequence. These all help them understand what they will read.

Children practice and reinforce their learning during play. In playing restaurant, children write and draw menus, set prices, and take orders.

Adding writing materials to all areas of your child's play makes an easy and natural connection to later reading and writing.

Adult Role in Play

Adults have a strong role to play in building language skills through play. It is important to not take over the child's play and ideas. On the other hand, by asking a question or making an observation about what the child is doing, we may be able to encourage more problem solving or support more imaginative play and language. Sometimes preschool play can be repetitive. They keep replaying the same scenario. By offering another alternative, you are expanding their play and their world.

[Here is one example: let's say a child is pretending to cook and asks you, the adult, what you would like to eat. You say pizza, and after some back and forth with the child, it is determined that you would like green peppers and mushrooms on your pizza and you would like to drink apple juice with it. The child serves you and takes the dishes away and then asks you again what you'd like to eat and the whole scenario is played over again with few changes. By the third time you might say that you are getting a bit tired of pizza and would like something else—maybe spaghetti and salad and bread. Oh, what ingredients do we need to make spaghetti, spaghetti sauce and salad? Let's make a list. Oh, we don't have all those ingredients? Well, we will have to go to the grocery store. So now there is a whole new play scenario to build on. You have extended your child's play.]

The goal of open-ended play is to allow the child to take the lead, to explore. Adults support their play and look for ways to enrich it by adding new words, information the child may not know, asking open-ended questions, wondering together, and watching.

Even while you are cooking, you can keep your child occupied with items you have in the kitchen. It can get a bit noisy, but encouraging your children to explore these items or having them tell you a story while you cook is a great time to build their language skills.

You are your child's first teacher, and your home is where your child begins to learn.

You can make your home a great place to learn and help your child get ready to read. It does not take money to create special spaces where you and your child can talk, sing, read, write, and play.

As parents, you are the biggest supporters of your child's learning. You can make sure they have as much time to play as possible during the day to promote cognitive, language, physical, social, and emotional development.