

Play School: Open Wide, Learn Inside (and Out) – Part One (with apologies to the ABC)

June 7, 2015

The opportunity to play – to engage in freely chosen interactive or independent activity outdoors or indoors, to experiment with toys, language, emotions and character roles – is the key to the school of life. Play is so important that it has been recognised in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989:

“1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, **to engage in play and recreational activities** appropriate to the age of the child...

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to **participate fully in cultural and artistic life** and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.”

Play can be about performing actions with objects that represent items in real life, such as pretending to feed dolls or drive cars. This symbolic play appears at around ages 2-3, and involves children exploring the properties of materials with their mouths, hands and other body parts. Children start to play with language in rhymes and songs, and express emotions including happiness, sadness and more.

As children develop from approximately 3-8 years, play becomes more elaborate and extensive. Children develop the ability to use costumes and take on the roles of characters such as doctors and princesses (Frozen’s Elsa can be found in kindergartens across Melbourne) and act out complex scenes around a theme. They begin to use materials like blocks to construct a representation of something such as a city. Children are better able to use symbols and explain their actions. By age 6, games with rules become popular.

How is your child’s play different to your experience as a young girl or boy? Chances are you ran around outside with your brothers and sisters and mates from down the road, without much adult supervision. Soft mat-like surfaces at the playground and safety nets around trampolines were yet to come. Perhaps there were more animals to play with in your backyard.

The nature of play has evolved over time, and there have been changes in the amount of time spent playing indoors rather than outside, and the level of adult supervision, which may be partly attributable to concerns about ‘stranger danger’. The degree of cleanliness and risk in play is regulated more closely and a greater amount of time may be spent in structured, organised activities as opposed to unstructured ones. Electronic devices are far more accessible now and watching DVDs or playing games on an iPhone is associated with time spent sitting or lying down rather than physical activity.

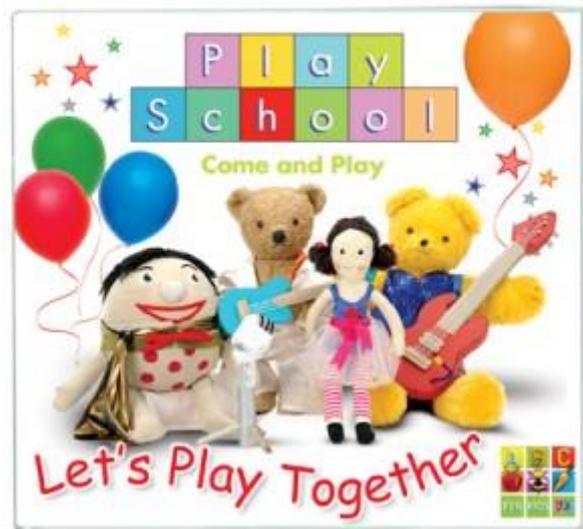
What kinds of equipment and toys does your child play with? Do these play materials encourage passive or active play? Many toys available today produce sounds and light up when buttons are pushed, leaving the child to expect the play to ‘happen’. Having a variety of low-tech toys as well as high-tech ones accessible to your child will stimulate their imagination. Toys that are spin-offs from TV programs and movies are also common and

while Peppa Pig or Minions can bring much joy to children, these figures come with an existing character description. This can restrict play, as the child does not create the toy's personality or actions because these characteristics have already been determined. Again, providing a balanced selection of toys will promote creativity and inventiveness.

“The best toy is 90 percent child and 10 percent toy...The perfect toy's meaning and its use changes at the child's behest.” (Susan Linn, Harvard, co-founder of campaign for commercial-free childhood)

*“And the first time I laid eyes on it,
it became my heart's delight.
It went zip when it moved
Bop when it stopped
Whirrr when it stood still
I never knew just what it was
And I guess I never will.”*
(from *The Marvelous Toy* – Tom Paxton, 1968)

By Nicola Anglin (Speech Pathologist)



[Vince Borg](#), [Sarah Young](#), [Vicky Andrews](#) and [Emma Lorenzin](#) all have a special interest in speech development and language difficulty. Book your child an appointment with a speech therapist at Box Hill Speech Pathology Clinic on (03) 9899 5494 or direct your child speech therapy questions to enquiries@speech-therapy.com.au.

<http://www.femail.com.au/play-school-lets-play-together-cd.htm>

References:

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