

NETWORKING NEURONS E-Newsletter

Summer 2007

A resource from the WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
www.wccf.org

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It is with excitement that I send the latest issue of Networking Neurons. Over the years this e-newsletter has been a valuable resource from WCCF. It is designed for those of us that know the importance of staying current on brain development research and resources. It will be sent quarterly with each issue having a specific theme.

The focus of this issue is on the importance of play in the development of young brains. This is an area I know many of you feel strongly about. It is my hope that this information and the resources offered here will assist you in promoting more play in both formal and informal learning situations for all the young minds eager for these opportunities. -- Deborah

Feel free to forward these messages to any other interested parties, and encourage others to sign up for this and/or other WCCF mailing lists at <http://capwiz.com/wccf/mlm/signup/> If you would like to be removed from the recipient list, simply reply with the words "remove from list" in the message. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions feel free to e-mail me at deborahschmid@wccf.org

This issue's topic: *Realizing the Value of Play*

Albert Einstein called play, "the highest form of research."

With the information found here, hopefully the summer can be a time to initiate some wonderful opportunities that will be fun and create some significant brain connections for our young children!

1. Pushing Infant Brain Development
2. Play and Child Development
3. Brain Games
4. Books on the Importance of Play
5. New Resource from WCCF to promote brain development through play

1. Pushing Infant Brain Development:

"Whoever wants to understand much must play much"
- Gottfried Benn, German Physician, 1886-1956

With additional information on brain development being revealed, a pressure is put on parents to make their children smarter. The message that comes across is to make sure you have and do the “right” things, meaning that parents need to have flashing electronic toys, CDs and videos. The following offers parents information on what IS most important in providing what infants need. This comes from: www.americanbaby.com.

The Basics are Best

Every parent wants to give their child the best start in life. But when it comes to a baby’s brain development, forget the high-tech gizmos, language flash cards, and “required” hours of classical music. It turns out that the things babies need most – attention and affection from parents and caregivers – come naturally in most families. “Most good parents who provide a healthy, sensitive environment are doing just what they should be doing.” Says Rick O. Gilmore, Ph.D., an assistant professor of psychology at Penn State University. As for “extras” like music appreciation: “If you like Mozart and want to play it in your home, great. If you like Garth Brooks, that’s great too,” he says.

How You Can Help

Babies do need exposure to language, says Dr. Gilmore. Simple things like talking and reading to your baby – which most parents do naturally – can be a good way to introduce your child to language. But if, for example, you are reading to your baby and she’s not enjoying it, stop. “There isn’t a quota that has to be filled,” he says.

One thing parents should do: Be sensitive to your child’s interests and needs. Some kids like a lot of stimulation—from activities, reading, games – while others don’t. By observing your child, you can gauge his capacity for stimulation. Also, keep in mind that infants are sensitive to the degree to which their parents are responsive to them, says Dr. Gilmore. “Generally speaking, during the first few months of life, parents should try to be as responsive to their babies as possible – within practical limits, of course.” So comfort your baby when she cries (you don’t have to worry about “spoiling” her at this age), but don’t beat yourself up if you can’t be available to your child every second of every day. “Try to make time for yourself,” adds Dr. Gilmore. “Your mood and health are important for your baby’s development.”

An additional article discussing watching television and DVD’s is addressed at http://www.brainconnection.com/SITEWare/2007/05/07/ap.worldstream.english/D8OVU7L05_news_ap_org.anpa.php3

2. Play and Child Development

“Do not ... keep children to their studies by compulsion but by play.”
- Plato, Greek Philosopher 427 -347

Following is the abstract from a recent report on play published in the January 2007 issue of *Pediatrics*. The link to the full report is below.

The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds

Kenneth R. Ginsburg, MD, MEd and the Committee on Communications and the Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health

Abstract:

Play is essential to development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and youth. Play also offers an ideal opportunity for parents to engage fully with their children. Despite the benefits derived from play for both children and parents, time for free play has been markedly reduced for some children. This report addresses a variety of factors that have reduced play, including a hurried lifestyle, changes in family structure, and increased attention to academics and enrichment activities at the expense of recess or free child-centered play. This report offers guidelines on how pediatricians can advocate for children by helping families, school systems, and communities consider how best to ensure that play is protected as they seek the balance in children's lives to create the optimal developmental milieu.

<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;119/1/182#SEC2>

3. Brain Games

"A child loves his play, not because it's easy, but because it's easy, but because it's hard". - Benjamin Spock, American Pediatrician 1903 -1998

Here is a link to fun brain games from Neuroscience for Kids

<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/chgames.html>

4. Books on the Importance of Play

"Children at play are not playing about. Their games should be seen as their most serious minded activity."

- Michel de Monaigne, French essayist 1533 -1592

Playing to Get Smart. Elizabeth Jones and Renatta M. Cooper

Early Childhood Education

Pub Date: Nov 2005, 128 pages

Free play helps your child build knowledge, skills, and creativity at his own pace.

In her book *Playing to Get Smart*, Betty Jones, Ph.D., urges parents to understand that children and adults who are skilled at play with both things and ideas, have the power, influence, and capacity to create meaningful lives. They are more receptive to ambiguity than those who are stuck in the way things are or were. Play is a "happy talent."

Open-ended play helps foster happy talent in a relaxed way. It also supports the mission behind the American Academy of Pediatrics' 2006 Report on the Importance of Play, which emphasizes that all children need free, undirected play for creative growth, self-reflection, and decompression. By simply fiddling around with a wide range of materials, your child practices a wealth of brain-boosting skills that will serve him in school and throughout his life.

-Walter F. Drew Ed.D From Parent & Child magazine

Einstein Never Used Flash Cards: How Our Children Really Learn -- And Why They Need to Play More and Memorize Less

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Ph.D., and Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Ph.D., with Diane Eyer, Ph.D.

September 2004.

Einstein Never Used Flash Cards shows why -- and how -- to step away from the cult of achievement and toward a more nurturing home life full of imaginative play and love of learning.

Play Is Back:

Reassuring to parents and educators, *Einstein Never Used Flash Cards* shows why -- and how -- to step away from the cult of achievement and toward a more nurturing home life full of imaginative play and love of learning.

Here's the message that stressed-out parents are craving to hear: It's okay to play! In fact, it's more than just okay -- it's better than drilling academics. After decades of research, scientists and child development experts have come to a clear conclusion: Play is the best way for our children to learn.

* Children who are prematurely pushed into regimented academic instruction display less creativity and enthusiasm for learning than their peers.

* Children who memorize isolated facts early in life show no better long-term retention than their peers.

* Children who learn through play also develop social and emotional skills, which are critical for long-term success.

Somewhere along the line, we've gotten off track by stressing academic products and programs to our preschoolers. Thankfully, Dr. Kathy Hirsh-Pasek and Dr. Roberta Michnick Golinkoff have a simple remedy for our children that is based on overwhelming scientific evidence from their own studies and the collective research results of child development experts.

Einstein Never Used Flash Cards goes beyond debunking the myths spread by the accelerated-learning industry. Parents and educators will find a practical guide to introducing complex concepts through smart, simple, and loving play.

For every key area of a child's development (speech, reading, math, social skills, self-awareness, and intelligence), you'll understand how a child's mind actually learns. Then you'll discover exercises (40 in all) that will showcase emerging skills and leave your child smiling today -- and prepared for tomorrow.

- By Buzzle Staff and Agencies

Published: 8/28/2004

The Power of Play: How Spontaneous, Imaginative Activities Lead to Happier, Healthier Children

David Elkind
2007

“The Power of Play is so important and timely. It shows us that play is more than fun and excitement- it is a child’s way of learning about his world, about himself, about his playmates. In an era of consumerism and parental pressure, Dr. Elkind defends that most wonderful aspect of childhood-our children’s chance to dream and make this a wonderful world for them and for us.” --- T. Berry Brazelton

5. New Resource from WCCF to promote brain development through play

NOW AVAILABLE !

Help Me Learn More While I’m Four Activity Cards

A packet of 40 activity ideas has been created for you and the child you care about. The activities are built around every day tasks, so you can easily create learning opportunities with a child during your daily routines.

Children learn through everything they do. . .

- This compact pack of cards makes it easy for you to provide activities that are based on how a child learns..... through play and having fun with you.
- Included is an explanation of how a child’s brain benefits from each activity.

The cards can also be used by early childhood educators and home visitors wanting to share ideas with parents. The suggestions can be:

- added to parent newsletters
- posted on parent information boards
- demonstrated at parent night workshops or discussion groups
- used for interactive activities at family nights

Your child will think they are playing..... You will KNOW they are learning!

Card sets are \$5 each and can be ordered by contacting Lisa Carlson at lacarlson@wccf.org or by phone 608/284-0580, ext 304