The Power of Play: Using Play to Enable Skills and Support Behavior

By Maria Sargent
Free materials and resources for teachers and families!
1. Write your name in cursive

Maria Sargent
Right Handed

- Cross right leg over left
- Circle hanging foot (R) counter-clockwise

Left Handed

- Cross left leg over right
- Circle hanging foot (L) clockwise
Brain-Based Environments
If we are typing something normal, we use the regular font...

*(Symbol Level)*

*If we wish to emphasize it a bit, we underline it*

*(Black & White Line Level)*

*If we want it to stand out more, we put it in bold*

*(Silhouette Level)*

*If we want it to jump out, we put it in color*

*(Colored Picture Level)*
Typical Print VS// Early Childhood Print

Typical letter “H”  
(Symbol Level)

Early Childhood letter “H”  
(Silhouette Level)
Address
Every
Cue Level
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Black/White</th>
<th>Silhouette</th>
<th>Colored Picture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photograph</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not-to-Scale Imitations</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real-Size Imitation</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete Object</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apple</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Use Both Processing Directions
Part-to-Whole & Whole-to-Part

Whole

to Part

Part

to Whole
Guided Learning

Discovery Learning
Use Both Processing Directions
Part-to-Whole & Whole-to-Part

Whole

to Part

Part

to Whole
Whole Language Lives On

Apple
Appropriate Behavior in Group Activities

- Hands to self
- Feet to self
- Listen
- Take turns talking
Strategies for the General Classroom
HOW WELL ARE THEY REALLY PLAYING?
More Than LENGTH of Play!
Do they avoid building structures?

Very Whole → Part
Do they use the structure?

Very
Part → Whole
Expanded Use of Classroom Areas
Inspiring Pictures

Unusual Items

Props

Natural Materials
Math

Science

Emotional

Aesthetics
Children Struggling with Discovery Play
Fluidity of Materials

- Open-ended and fluid materials increase behavior and aggression problems

Adjust materials to ensure success
Fluidity of Materials
Water Play
Only water
Probably not a wise idea in most room 😊
Requires high intrinsic control...

Unusual Open-Ended Props
Items like tubing, etc. require quite a bit of imagination and intrinsic control.

Known Open-Ended Props
Items child has seen before. Moderate level of control needed because open-ended.

Known Props
Items that are known by the child and lend themselves to use with water (i.e. washing items)
Fingerpaint
Finger-Painting on Table
Probably not a wise idea in most rooms 😊
Requires high intrinsic control...

On Paper
Defines area and is easier...

On Paper in a Tray
Even more definition of area. Sets boundaries.

With Brush
Removing hands from fluid material can help many children.

Using Concrete Item
Using a known item like a car can help suggest “usage” to struggling children.

Paint in Sealed Bag
This removes the child from the fluid material. Taping pictures on the table under the bag will encourage children to “uncover them”. This gives meaning to even the youngest child!
Think through the skill until you figure out the sequence!
Children Struggling with Complex Play
Horizontal Play Expansion

Enrich current play levels

- Up
- Down
- Elevator
- Gas
Vertical Play Expansion

Increase complexity of play levels
down + gas + 

down + gas + 

down + gas + 

down
With a single toy

Between toys within one area

Between Areas

Doll

doll + house items

Housekeeping

Writing Center
Using Play to Develop Behavioral Skills
Aggressive Play Intervention

Cue

Red square

Schedule

Costume

Write “new” script
CONVERSION METHOD
AGGRESSIVE OUTDOOR PLAY
IMPULSE CONTROL
QUIET BODY
EMPATHY FOR PAIN
Using Play to Develop Foundational Understanding
Integrated Learning

- Physical
- Mathematical
- Musical
- Scientific
- Artistic
- Emotional
- Language
Physical

- Coordination
- Visual Perception
- Spatial Orientation
- Fine Motor
Mathematical

- Seriation of blocks
- Match/sort/classify
- Sequence & pattern
- Measure & weigh
- Equivalence

![Image of children playing with blocks and patterns](image)
Musical

- Instruments
- Build to music
Scientific

• Balance
Scientific

- Balance
- Color mixing
Scientific

- Balance
- Color mixing

- Inclined planes
Scientific

- Balance
- Color mixing
- Inclined planes
- Pendulum, etc.
Artistic

- Designing
- Aesthetics
Using Play to Run Intervention Programs
Removing Perseverations

1. Take the actions the child uses the most and develop into a functional play action

2. Think hard about what you can do to extend their current skills.
Establishing Eye Contact

1. Use parallel activities to create natural turn-taking situation

2. Make your turn “more sensory/appealing”

3. Prompt eye contact and eventually require…
Capture Your Hard Work!
Additional Concepts to Consider
How Far CAN You Go???
b, p, d and q
Remember to Think Out-of-the-Box
FORCE
Demonstrate how waves transfer energy
MAKING OBJECTS MOVE

Chain Reaction
The
Lost
Methods
“Play is the highest level of child development.... It gives...joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer rest, peace with the world...”

Friedrich Froebel
(1782 – 1852)
Shapes from crystals
Constructed with flat sticks in 2-D form
Eventually constructed in 3-D form
Explore Lost Theories & Concepts

Friedrich Froebel (1782 – 1852)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plate I(a)</th>
<th>FIRST GIFT</th>
<th>Plate I(b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Here Here.</td>
<td>2. Wind up:</td>
<td>25. There he falls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Up up up.</td>
<td>20. Roll back.</td>
<td>28. He sinks deep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. To the left.</td>
<td>Always larger:</td>
<td>29. Look for it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. To the right.</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>30.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Tip tap tap.</td>
<td>Always smaller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inventing Kindergarten

Norman Brosterman
The Missing Skill
THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Helping students develop thinking skills, self-reflection, and internal behavioral control

By Maria Sargent
THE MODERN “NOISY” WORLD!

Learning to Tolerate “Silence”

Body-Cued Silent Thinking
Free materials and resources for teachers and families!
PDF Files

VISUAL PROCESSING DISORDERS

WHEN 20/20 VISION IS NOT ENOUGH!

By Maria Sargent
10-15 Minute Videos
Neuro-Break

180 Brain Activities for the Classroom

By Maria Sargent and Kara Stewart
Opposite Lines

Draw a picture that has the same sides just sideways. When you draw, do you have your hand in a diagonal direction?

Happy, Happy, Happy

Close your eyes and remember something very important. Try throwing your hands through the air as you remember.

Hand Alphabet (A-C)

Learning to sign the alphabet is a wonderful thing. Let's start at the beginning.

Owl Eyes

Sit with your head completely still and move your eyes all the way up and then all the way down. Notice where your eyes go. How could you get them to go back up?

Finger Touch

Touch your fingers to your thumb and then repeat with the other fingers as fast as you can. Now, try your other hand.

“Leader of the Band” March

Lift one leg high in the air while holding out arms. Switch to the other leg smoothly.
Penny Balance
Balance a penny on one finger and try to
transfer the penny to your other hand
without it falling. These new shadow are a bit harder.
Can you do them?

Hand Shadows (eas

Hooray Dance
Alternate moving with right arm and right leg and then your left arm and your left leg. Reverse!

Monkey Dance
Work with a partner.
First you do one dance and then your partner repeats your dance and adds one.
Then change partners and dance.

Direction Challenge
Using your desk or a wall, you can practice moving in different directions.
Try vertical lines and diagonal lines.
You can try changing the position of your hands.
Which were easier and which hardest?

Circle-Pass
Tear yourself a circle from some scrap paper (about the size of a half-dollar).
Can you hold it between your two index fingers and pass it all the way down to your pinky?
Can you come back?
Play Intervention:
Developing advanced play skills and using play to achieve behavioral goals

Removing Perseverations

A similar turn-taking process can be used to slowly transform a non-play action into a true functional play schema. This technique can be especially useful when working with children who tend to flap, throw or spin toys rather than playing with them. Like the earlier approach used to establish eye contact, the key to success will be your ability to pick a set of objects that will interact well with the child's current action. Some I have used in the past include:

- **Throwing**
  - Place objects down with control
  - Stacking, pressing, pushing

- **Spinning**
  - Turning objects then stopping the action
  - Winding, turning, stopping a spin

- **Flapping**
  - Bringing object/finger down to press for a purpose
  - Fanning, pushing, button press

Then, the rest depends on your creativity! Since this is so dependent on the situation, behavior, toy preference, age of the child, etc. I will provide an example in hopes it will give you enough insight into the process to proceed on your own. If stuck, though, just contact me, and we will brainstorm together!

For this example, I will focus on a child that is throwing toys. This infantile action can be seen as part of the normal play sequence in very young children. What adult hasn't wornied of the old "throw the toy out of the playpen or off the highchair tray" game? The problem emerges when the child gets stuck at that level and cannot figure out what else to do with the toy. This usually leaves them with the option of either mouthing or throwing the object, neither age appropriate for most preschoolers.
Cutting Sequence

- One-Snip Cutting
- Linked Snips
- Straight Line
- Square Corner (Adjusted)
- Square Corner (Smooth)
- Curve (Adjusted)
- Curve (Smooth)
- Circle
- Reversal
- Complex Shapes

Single String

Multiple Single Strings

Multiple Single Strings that Combine AND Separate

Some type of color coding. Eventually adds in different shapes.

Simple masking of shape with additional symbols

Moderate masking of shape using a symbol overlay

Complex masking of shape using shading of symbols

Color coding removed so child must rely on shape only

Single String

Multiple Single Strings

Multiple Single Strings that Combine AND Separate

Only water

Unusual Open-Ended Props

Known Open-Ended Props

Known Props:

- Items that are known by the child and lend themselves to use with water (i.e., washing items)
Managing Weak Play in Open-Ended Areas

As I just mentioned, many of our children lack the ability to play well. They may play "long", but the depth of their play is limited, and their ability to generate ideas for play scenarios are reliant on pre-existing visual cues (i.e. cartoons, movies, video games, etc.).

This has a direct application to a child's ability to manage open-ended materials that do not readily suggest a scope or play theme. These open-ended areas (i.e. blocks, water, and sand) require quite a bit of creativity, and because the children are unable to generate ideas on how to use the materials on their own, they tend to become rather aggressive with those toys. This is why these classroom areas can be so challenging to control!

Even the best behaved child can struggle with behavior when using open-ended toys like puppets or water, so if this is a problem in your room, rather than just close those play areas or ban those toys, just adjust them a bit. Our goal is to scaffold the play environment so the children do not have to operate totally on their own. It is rather easy to do once the concept is explained, and many of us already use some of this already through teaching intuition.

Since this concept quickly moves into techniques for aggressive play, there is a full booklet created on this topic at www.Naure-Teach.com titled, Reducing Aggressive Play. It discusses "fluid" toys and shows how to scaffold their use for different play skill levels.

Meanwhile, here is an example of how such scaffolding might be created for water play:

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Teaching Eye Contact

The key to many play-based interventions for children with intensive needs is the use of turn-taking interactions. This takes on a new twist, though, when the goal of the intervention is establishing the interaction itself! It is just this problem that we will tackle in this section.

When working with children who refuse to make eye contact, the first step is to choose a toy that is strongly reinforcing for the child. The toy must be something that can draw the child's attention from a short distance (i.e. plays music, has flashing lights, moves, etc.). You then must figure out a way to make your turn with the toy more interesting and reinforcing so the child will pay attention. This varies so much that I will just give you a few examples of things I have used in the past:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Likes</th>
<th>Toy Chosen</th>
<th>Child's Version of Toy</th>
<th>My Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Xylophone</td>
<td>Stuffed with paper to mute sound</td>
<td>Normal so sound is loud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trucks</td>
<td>Remote Control</td>
<td>Wheels bent or surface controlled so it doesn't travel far or well</td>
<td>Operates normally and rolls far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Play</td>
<td>Pat Mat</td>
<td>Normal with floating sponge shapes</td>
<td>Glitter added and penlight turned on underneath</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2 + 1 = 3
...combination of levels

PLUS physical cues. We will get to that in a moment 😊
The Difference Between Creating Activities and Creating MEANING

By Maria Sargent
Free materials and resources for teachers and families!
PDF Files

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10-15 Minute Videos
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