

Utilizing the Creative Curriculum as well as other proven early childhood methodologies we teach your child through art, music and purposeful play making sure they reach important early learning standards. We enable children to develop confidence, creativity and critical thinking skills.

The mission of our program is to provide children and families with quality child care that promotes individual growth and development. Our goal is to prepare children to be confident and creative lifelong learners by growing physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively through developmentally appropriate learning activities.

Hoboken Day Care 100 runs a hybrid learning program where much of our mornings are spent with more organized and academic (but fun and play-filled) activities and the rest of the day promotes play-based learning. Academics are easy to explain. We teach the children letters, colors, shapes, numbers, science, etc. These are the things that children need to know in order to succeed academically. But what is play-based learning? Why don't we focus strictly on academics like some daycare centers do? What benefits do children get from this hybrid approach?

What exactly is play-based learning?

Play-based learning is a type of early childhood education based on child-led and open-ended play. If you're picturing preschooler children finger painting or 'playing house', you're exactly right.

Play itself is a voluntary, enjoyable activity with no purpose or end goal. Believe it or not, activities like this lay the foundation for a child to become a curious and excited learner later in life. Play-based learning helps children develop social skills, motivation to learn, and even language and numeracy skills. Taking initiative, focused attention, and curiosity about the world are all a part of play.

Children are naturally wired to do the very thing that will help them learn and grow. The impulse to play comes from a natural desire to understand the world.

What play is NOT

Play is not 'work'. Play is not directed or prescribed by an adult and there's no desired outcome in play like in more 'work-oriented' activities. If a child is playing with colored bear counters and we ask them to sort them by color, they are not "finished" until they have sorted out all of the bears. While sorting by color, shape or size is an important skill academically, playing with those same exact bears but making them "talk", "play

with" each other or even just spilling them across the table allows the child to play at their own pace and still be actively learning. By making the toys "talk" they are learning communication skills. Having the bears "play" teaches a child how to script an activity; ex. What will the bears do next? Spilling the bears across the table can teach a child consequences of their actions; ex. How far can the bears spill across the table; how many bears will fall on the floor; how quickly can I pick them up and spill them again? While both 'play' and 'work' can contribute to a child's development, they are different from each other.

Recently, certain activities have been labeled as "play-based learning" when in fact they're gamified work. For example, using a song or game to get children to differentiate between "big A" and "little a" is not play-based learning – it's work disguised as play. (But it's still a great idea to make learning fun by turning it into a game!) A good way to differentiate the two is if there's an agenda for the activity, it's likely not true play-based learning. Agenda in this case means there is a goal for the child to achieve in order to complete the activity. In order to learn this I need to do this.

Elements of play-based learning

Play-based learning includes the following elements:

- **Self chosen:** A child voluntarily chooses to play, how they'll play, and for how long. An adult may initiate play insofar as he or she invites or suggests play but the child determines the rest.
- **Enjoyable:** Play is enjoyable for the child. This emotional aspect is important. There may be some frustrations or disagreements during play but overall it's pleasurable.
- **Unstructured:** A child has ample time to explore and discover during play. They're directed by their own interests, not by any prescribed rules or plans.
- **Process-oriented:** There is no end or learning goal. Instead, it's the process of play that's important.
- **Make believe:** Play often involves imagination, 'make believe', or 'playing pretend'.

Play-based learning helps a child develop holistically through social-emotional learning, developing confidence and motivation, and practicing cognitive skills. The academic or traditional approach to early childhood education is more focused on teaching young children cognitive skills and knowledge through structure and routine.

In play-based learning, children choose their own activities for the day or part of the day.

The room is often broken up into sections or stations like a block area, dramatic play area, and reading nook, among others. Play-based programs are also sometimes called

'child-centered' because the children guide their own learning with their curiosity and interests. Make no mistake, though, teachers are an active part of play-based learning. Teachers should be actively engaged in the children's play time. Teachers should be asking the students questions about what they are doing. Teachers should be on the floor or seated in a chair near the child and helping play along.

Meanwhile, academic programs are teacher-led and meant to prepare children for kindergarten. The teacher comes up with activities or games to help children learn letters and distinguish shapes, sounds, and colors. Children may spend time practicing handwriting or filling in worksheets. These programs are typically very structured with a daily routine and lots of activity prep from the teacher.

Pros and Cons of Play-based vs Academic programs

Play-based learning programs: Pros

- Children get to choose their own activities and topics and this keeps them interested
- Contributes to kindergarten readiness:
 - Play helps develop social skills and children with social skills are more successful in academics later on
 - Children in play-based programs score better on measures of self-regulation, cognitive flexibility, and working memory
Self-regulation and impulse control is predictive of later academic success

Play-based learning programs: Cons

- Children may not be exposed directly to learning letters, numbers, or scientific concepts
- Children may not score as highly on standardized testing (until after first grade)

Academic programs: Pros

- Early attention skills are predictive of academic success later on
- Children are more familiar with academic subjects by the time they enter kindergarten

Academic programs: Cons

- Can cause children to lose interest because they are being told what to learn and do
- Children in academic programs have been shown to score higher on standardized tests than their counterparts but this gap closes by first grade
- Children in academic programs often have more behavior problems than those in play-based programs
- Teaching academics earlier doesn't lead to faster cognitive development
- One of the most important things children need is self-confidence and judging them and telling them their ideas are 'right' or 'wrong' instills the opposite. It can make them feel ashamed or embarrassed for trying.
- Teacher-led learning can dampen creativity and curiosity

How do play-based environments support children's development?

You may be wondering, how are children learning if they're just playing all day? What do kids learn through play?

Even if it looks like the children are just having fun, play has a major impact on their development in every way.

Studies have conclusively shown play contributes to the following types of child development:

Social-emotional development

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), social-emotional learning is when children "acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions."

Children develop socially and emotionally through play as they imagine the world from a different perspective, understand the differences between themselves and others, learn how to interact with others, and more.

- Trying on different roles during play helps children learn how other people feel and think. When they role play and act out scenarios, they're exploring the possibilities of their actions in the real world.
- The social aspect of play helps children build friendships and learn how to cooperate and work together. It offers opportunities for them to learn to resolve conflict.
- Playing with others also helps children establish a sense of self. They can initiate play and make decisions, which empowers them to become confident and motivated learners.
- Creating art in a play-based learning environment exposes children to process vs product-focused art. Process-focused art experiences have no rules and no examples to guide the children. There is no right or wrong way to create. Meanwhile, product-focused art is based on instructions and guided by examples the teacher makes. In this type of art, there is a 'right' and 'wrong' way to create. Process focused art benefits children by allowing them to express their feelings or ideas the way they want to and they feel successful no matter what they make.
- Play reduces stress and serves as an outlet for anxiety.

Cognitive development

Cognitive development is a child's growing ability to use their intellect to process information. It includes problem-solving, language learning, and the interpretation of sensations.

Play has been shown to support healthy brain development. It also engages a child's mind and helps them hone early literacy and language skills, sensation and perception, and even basic science and math.

- Doing art like making collages or adding names to drawings helps children learn to represent ideas through images, use letters to convey meaning, and understand the purpose of writing.
- When children play, they use their imagination. Imagination is all about symbols: a laundry basket symbolizes a car, a stick symbolizes a fishing rod, and so on. Understanding symbols is key to reading and writing, as letters are symbols. The same goes for mathematical concepts and numbers.
- During dramatic play, children use language to talk to each other. They represent and act out stories, practicing their language and storytelling skills.
- Children develop an elementary understanding of scientific concepts as they learn how the world around them works. For example, what happens when you stack one block on top of another or what the feathers of a bird feel like.

Physical development

Physical development refers to gross and fine motor skills development and how a child uses their body. Through play, children build muscle mass and coordination, explore different tactile experiences, and get a healthy amount of exercise.

- Art and play expose children to different tactile experiences. They learn about the feeling of wooden blocks, soft plush toys, wet paint, and more.
- Play increases physical activity when compared to passive forms of entertainment like watching TV or playing games on an iPad.
- Children build muscle mass and coordination as they jump, climb, swing, run, and move during play.

Play-based learning contributes to kindergarten readiness

Even though kindergarten, and even PreKindergarten, has become increasingly focused on academic skills, children pass cognitive milestones at the same rate as in the past, before kindergarten became this serious.

A study in children ages 3-6 in schools across the country found there was no significant difference in development between these children and children from past studies from 1925, 1940, 1964 and 1979. Ultimately, teaching academic skills earlier does not affect a child's natural pace of development.

It's important that when your students get to kindergarten, they're comfortable in a school setting, comfortable engaging with other children, and excited to learn. Emotional learning is as important, if not more, as academic skills learning. This is what they will acquire in a play-based program.

How do I know the children are learning?

A high-quality play-based preschool will help children:

- Adjust to a school setting
- Be ready to learn
- Acquire better problem-solving skills
- Have better learning behaviors