

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

The importance of play cannot be overemphasized. In their work, *Early Years Study 2*, Mustard and Shanker (p. 49) cite several factors that make play essential to learning. Their research shows the following:

- Play expands intelligence. As children explore materials they learn properties, functions, and associated vocabulary. They apply this knowledge as they design and create.
- Play allows children to apply new language and test the reasoning associated with literacy, math, and science concepts. As children play with others, they use language in various ways to plan, direct, negotiate, clarify, influence, etc. Through exploring materials at the water centre, for example, they learn about the properties of water – that it flows and takes the shape of containers – and they use the skills of inquiry and language to compare, predict, and draw conclusions.
- Play stimulates the imagination and encourages creative problem-solving. For example, as children freely explore the materials at the collage centre to design their own creation, they use their problem-solving skills to choose the appropriate materials that will best meet their needs, and to figure out how to fasten and join materials to create the desired effect.
- Play develops confidence, self-esteem, a realization of strengths and areas for improvement, and a positive attitude toward learning. Having chosen the construction material Marbleworks, two children problem-solve together how to stabilize the structure, how to construct the ramps so the marble will follow a pathway, and how to construct the pathways so the marble will travel quickly. When others choose the same material but struggle with their design, they offer to help – “We’ll show you how.” They proudly share their learning with the group.
- Play is a significant factor in brain and muscle development. As children kick and throw balls as part of their outdoor games, they develop eye-hand coordination. As they use construction materials to connect, balance, and place pieces, they develop fine motor control.

