

PUMP PRIMING

The term pump priming was used by Sara Smilansky (1969), a foremost authority on children’s play and learning, to describe the teacher’s role in infusing children’s play with new ideas. This might be accomplished by providing direct experiences such as a field trip or attending a live theatrical production. It may also be accomplished by reading to children, viewing a documentary film, or bringing an interesting guest into the classroom. Educators are well aware that what children take from an experience may not be immediately apparent.

Pump priming by the teacher is a means of stimulating interest and providing focus for self-directed play. While this may seem a contradiction, it is always important for teachers to expand the students’ interests and knowledge beyond what they may get at home. As educators’ observe children’s play they may recognize that another type of experience will extend or enrich the play. They may also plan experiences that will stimulate play. (Listening to a story about boats motivated some to want to make their own boats to test at the water table. Counting to 50 in different ways prompted one child to build two circles of 25 blocks to make 50. Putting a frame over the wooden sandbox with hooks on the top cross bar led children to experiment with pulleys to lift and empty the sand.) One of the challenges is providing opportunities for children to make connections to personal experiences and to objects, systems, and events in the world in which they live.

Pump Priming	Reflect on the Following
Through Direct Experience	What direct experiences can take place in the school playground? What is in the children’s immediate environment? (local park, interesting business such as a bakeshop, construction site)? Excursions into the broader community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local theatre production. • Museums. • Nature areas, farms, zoos. • Mall. Bring the community into the classroom, invite: e.g. artists, musicians, community workers, parents to demonstrate a hobby or skill, business owners, etc.
Through Vicarious Experience	Literature (fiction, nonfiction, poetry). Personal accounts. Film. Television