Virtual workshop

LEARNING THROUGH PLAY
What it is and why it matters for all students?

ICERI 2020 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

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“Reintegrating diverse forms of play into children’s daily lives calls for a practical and concentrated plan of action to raise awareness and drive change.” - In Foreword to “Let the Children Play”
Plan of this webinar

PART 1: THE STATE OF PLAY
• How much do children play?
• What is ‘play’?
• Why play is declining?

PART 2: THE POWER OF PLAY
• Why is play important?
• What do doctors say?
• How does play benefit kids?

PART 3: LEARNING THROUGH PLAY
• What is learning through play?
• How to play the Finnish Way?
• What can we do?
PART 1: The State of Play
Cold fact:
Children today play less than before.
85% of parents say kids today spend less time playing than they did when they were their children’s age.

Gonski Institute, 2019
38% of parents say they don't feel they play enough.

30% of families spend less than five hours playing together every week.

10% of families spend less than two hours playing together every week.

61% of parents get distracted when they do play.

1 in 5 (17%) children say they are too busy to play.
United States: Only 13 states has laws that mandate recess time during the school day, and 8 has recommendations for physical activity in schools.


Mexico: Many parents don’t want to pay for the time their children play or sleep in Early Childhood Centers.

Australia: "The word 'play' has become problematic in Australian schools.”

*Let the Children Play, 2019*
Question 1: Why the kids don’t play anymore?
When Australians* are asked about the affect of smartphones and social media...

92% think smartphones and social media have reduced time that children have for daily physical activity and active outdoor play.

77% say social media is a distraction in their child's life that negatively impacts their wellbeing and family relationships.

*1700 respondents nationwide
80% of parents believe that children are under pressure to grow up too quickly.
Total number of compulsory instruction hours in primary and lower secondary schools

OECD, 2020

Duration of primary and lower secondary education

- Hungary: 8 years
- Latvia: 9 years
- Poland: 9 years
- Turkey: 8 years
- Finland: 9 years
- Slovenia: 9 years
- Austria: 8 years
- Estonia: 9 years
- Korea: 9 years
- Slovak Republic: 9 years
- Belgium: 8 years
- Greece: 9 years
- Sweden: 9 years
- Czech Republic: 9 years
- Lithuania: 10 years
- Japan: 9 years
- Germany: 9 years
- Italy: 8 years
- OECD: 9 years
- Iceland: 10 years
- Switzerland: 9 years
- Norway: 10 years
- Spain: 9 years
- Luxembourg: 9 years
- France: 9 years
- Chile: 8 years
- Ireland: 9 years
- Portugal: 9 years
- Canada: 9 years
- Mexico: 9 years
- Netherlands: 9 years
- Israel: 9 years
- US: 9 years
- Denmark: 10 years
- Australia: 11 years

5 years of schooling
WHAT IS PLAY?

Play

Play

Play

Pelata

Leikkiä

Soittaa
Play is an activity that is intrinsically motivated, entails active engagement, and results in joyful experience and discovery.
Different kinds of PLAY:

Guided ↔ Free

Intellectual ↔ Physical

Indoor ↔ Outdoor

Individual ↔ Social
PART 2: The Power of Play
Question 2: Why is play important?
DOCTOR’S ORDER:
The Children Must Play

“Play is integral to a child’s education. The importance of playtime for children cannot be overemphasized to parents, schools, and community organizations.”
DOCTOR’S ORDER: The Children Must Play

“The lifelong success of children is based on their ability to be creative and to apply the lessons learned from playing.”
DOCTOR’S ORDER: The Children Must Play

“Recess is fundamental to the school experience and develops lifelong skills of communication, negotiation, cooperation, sharing, and problem-solving.”
"Advocate for the protection of children’s unstructured playtime because of its numerous benefits, including the development of foundational motor skills that may have lifelong benefits for the prevention of obesity, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes.”
Executive function

- Working memory
- Flexible thinking
- Self-control

PLAY

- Imagination
- Curiosity
- Collaboration
- Risk-taking
- Joy
- Creativity
- Problem-solving
PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT
- Strong, healthy bodies
- Stress management
- Fine motor skills
- Coordination
- Agility

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT
- Independent thinking
- Language skills
- Scientific thinking
- Executive functions
- Inquiry skills

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
- Cooperation
- Negotiation
- Socialisation
- Communication
- Conflict resolution

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT
- Joy
- Empathy
- Resilience
- Self-regulation
- Self-confidence

PART 3:
Learning through play
Question 3:
Should we have more play in school?
When Australians* are asked about children's access to opportunities for free play...

- **93%** acknowledge the benefits of play.
- **51%** however, want less break time at school.
- **72%** think the first few years of schooling should focus more on learning through play than they do now.

*1730 respondents nationwide
Learning through play

- Free, unstructured play
- Guided play
- Games, structured play
- Direct instruction

Learning through play can be led by children or adults.
Learning through PLAY

- Structured play, games
- Guided play
- Free, unstructured play

Early childhood  Primary school  Lower secondary school  Upper secondary school

- Cooperative learning
- Project-based learning
- Problem-based learning
PLAY IN FINNISH SCHOOLS

Example of a typical 2nd grade day

- Mother tongue: 15' play
- Music: 45-60 mins LUNCH + PLAY
- Math: 15' play
- P.E.: 15' play

9.00
11.00
13.00
1. **Play is children’s right in Finland.** It is protected by international declarations and national legislation:
   - every child has right to play-based early childhood education and care
   - every child has an Individual Learning Plan in early childhood education

2. **Learning through play** has a significant role in promoting children’s well-being, interaction with others, and learning essential skills.

3. **National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care:**
   “The purpose of ECEC is to promote children’s holistic growth, development and learning in collaboration with their guardians. Understanding the importance and pedagogical possibilities of play for the child in the promotion of wellbeing and learning is essential for ECEC.”
Primary school (7 to 12)

1. **Playful learning in early years.** Schools design their own curriculum according to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education.
   - Whole-child approach (e.g. Transversal competences)
   - Regular 15-minute breaks every hour

2. **Learning through play** has an important role in promoting children’s well-being, creativity, and learning essential knowledge and skills.

3. **Authentic assessment allows more playful learning:** Children are not assessed using grades before Year 4 when all students must be assessed using scale 4 to 10. No external standardised assessments.
Other good examples

1. SCOTLAND: Active play

2. DENMARK/SWEDEN/CANADA: Forest schools

3. AUSTRALIA: Bush schools

4. CHINA: Anji play

National Position Statement on Outdoor Play and Learning: “Playing and learning outdoors is essential for our children and young people to understand, value, enjoy and protect our natural world. It connects them to their environment, enhancing their appreciation and understanding of its physical properties and diversity.”
What can we do?

Make time for play

Talk about the power of play

Encourage playful teaching
Some useful open access readings:
We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.

George Bernard Shaw
THANK YOU!