



# ***Play-Based Kindergarten: Supporting Hands-On Active Learning***

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# Reflect on Your Practice

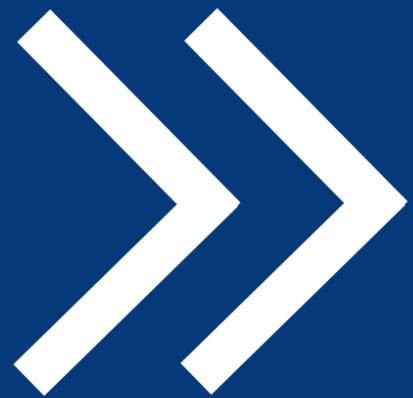
- What activities are your favorite to teach?
- What experience do you think your students enjoy most?
- What lessons do you think best support students' learning?



# Reflect on Your Practice

How much does your classroom currently provide opportunities for **exploration, movement, expression, and play?**





# Substantive Educational Content of an Adequate Education Law

RSA 193-E:2-a

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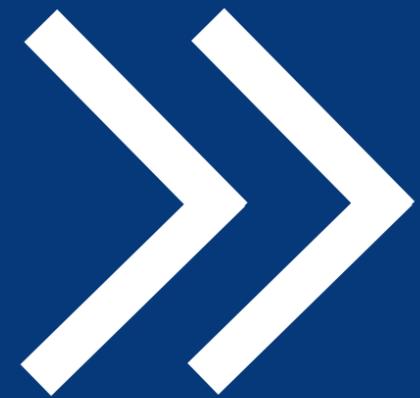
Instruction in support of kindergarten standards shall be engaging and shall **foster students' development and learning in all domains** including physical, social, cognitive, and language.

# RSA 193-E:2-a

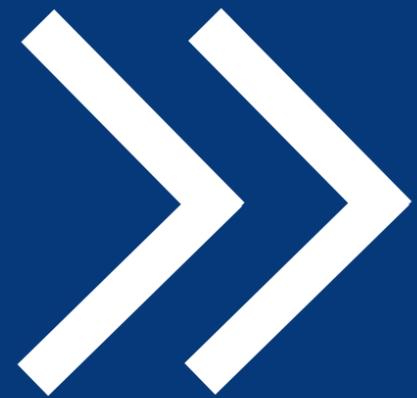
Educators shall create a learning environment that facilitates **high quality, child-directed experiences based upon early childhood best teaching practices and play-based learning** that comprise movement, creative expression, exploration, socialization, and music.

# RSA 193-E:2-a

Educators shall develop literacy through guided reading and shall provide unstructured time for the discovery of each child's individual talents, abilities, and needs.



# The Connection Between Play and Learning



It is not just *what* students need to learn, we need to **consider *how* students learn** so that we can best promote their development.

# Play is Authentic

For children, play is **fundamental for learning**, exploring, developing new skills, and connecting with others



# Play is Authentic

- Without any instruction, children in all cultures of the world engage in play
- Research with animals, shows that play promote early brain development



# Play is Authentic to Learning

Learning takes place best when

- **students are engaged** and enjoying themselves
- **content connects to prior experiences** and knowledge





# Play-Based Learning

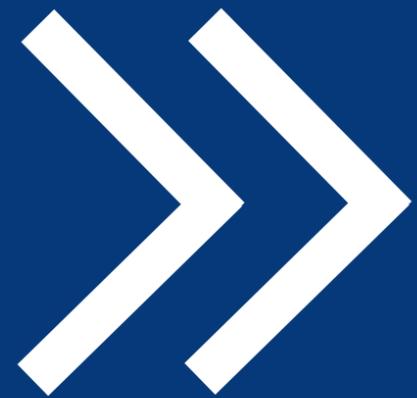
# Constructivist View of Education

- **Learning is the construction of meaning** in an active and continuous process
- To promote construction:
  - Engage students' **interests**
  - Inspire **experimentation** through challenge, inquiry, and adequate time
  - Foster **cooperation**



# Comprehensive View of Development

- **Academics**, cognitive skills
- **Social** awareness, skills
- **Emotion** expression, management
- **Self-regulation** of thoughts, behaviors
- **Aesthetics** appreciation, production
- **Physical** development and health



Educators not only to support age appropriate knowledge and skills, but instill **confidence, curiosity, and love for learning**

# Play-Based Learning

- A pedagogical approach that emphasizes play in promoting learning
- Play-based learning is not just play
  - Play does not necessarily lead to learning
  - Learning is fundamental to play-based learning



# Play-Based Learning

- A developmentally-appropriate strategy that can be **integrated with mandated academic standards**
- An **essential aspect of many early childhood curricula** and educational philosophies



# Continuum of Play-Based Learning

Child-  
Directed  
Free Play

Mutually  
Directed  
Guided  
Play

Teacher-  
Directed  
Guided  
Play

# Free-Play

- Play that **is child-directed, voluntary, internally motivated**
  - socio-dramatic/pretend play, free exploration of materials, non-structured recess
- Teachers prepare the environment, step back, supervise and support as needed



# Child-Directed Free Play: Group Problem Solving



# Child-Directed Free-Play

Important for **developmental learning**

– **Social skills**

- Communication, social rules, friendships, understanding of others, sense of belonging

– **General cognitive development**

- Problem solving, planning, executive function skills, representational thinking

– **Self-Regulation and Self-Efficacy**

- Patience, perseverance, emotion regulation, pride

# Guided Play

- Free play alone might not be sufficient to promote academic learning
- Guided play activities provide a level of teacher direction to **drive specific academic learning**

# Mutually Driven Guided Play

- Intervene or support students free play to target specific skills
- Identify a topic of student's interest and design lessons around topic to target specific standards



# Mutually Driven Guided Play: Helping Children Guess the Goal



# Teacher-Directed Guided Play

- Focus on define skills and use play elements to actively engage students in learning
- Teachers scaffold by structuring the environment or by providing sensitive feedback and questions



# Play from the View of Children

Children distinguish between play and work and do so with cues

## Play

Emotional Cues	Environmental Cues
Voluntary	On the floor
Under child's control	Lack of adult involvement
Easy	No adult evaluation
Fun	No finished product
	Physical

## Work

Emotional Cues	Environmental Cues
Compulsory	At a table
Under adult's control	Adult Involvement
Hard	Adult evaluation
Can be fun	Finished product
	Sedentary

# Teacher-Directed Guided Play



<https://unh.kanopy.com/video/sound-learning>

# Teacher-Directed Guided Play

Examples include:

- Predesigned mathematics games
- Incorporate targeted vocabulary and literacy goals into play or exploratory contexts
- Identifying appropriate manipulatives that leads to exploration and knowledge construction



# Play-Based Learning Supports Comprehensive Development

# Benefits of Play across Developmental Domains

## **Cognitive** domain

- Focus, abstract thinking, mathematic and spatial reasoning, problem solving

## **Aesthetic** domain

- Generate and use materials and tools in innovative ways

## **Language** domain

- Vocabulary and communication practice, engage in literacy activities such as writings and book reading

# Benefits of Play across Developmental Domains

## **Physical** domain

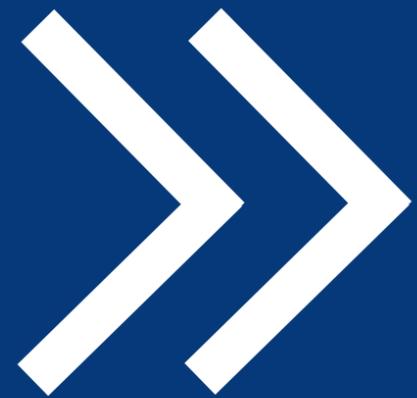
- Fine- and gross-motor skill development

## **Social** domain

- Cooperation, perspective taking, interpersonal relationships

## **Affective** domain

- Self-regulation, emotional awareness and understanding



The **key to high-quality is what happens inside the classroom**; namely, the interactions between the members of the classroom.

# Play-Based Learning Teaching Strategies

- Prepare the environment and materials
- Provide sufficient previous experience and information
- Provide enough time and space
- Use the least obtrusive approach to support learning
- Observe, assess, and extend thinking respectfully

# Play-Based Learning Teaching Strategies

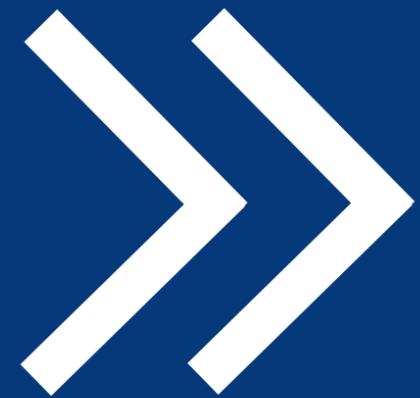
- Observation and assessment
- Nondirective and directive statements
- Questions
- Model and demonstrate
- Physical intervention (adding or taking away materials)



# Respectful Commentary and Questioning

- Pose a problem  
“What would happen if...?”
- Make a leading statement  
“Have you considered...”
- Think of possibilities  
“What would happen if...”
- Clarify thinking  
“Tell me what you are thinking.”





# Individual Differences in Students' Engagement in Play-Based Learning

# Differing Levels of Social Involvement

- Onlooker
- Solitary Play
- Parallel Play
- Associative Play
- Cooperative or Organizational Play



# Accounting for Individual Differences in Play

- Maturity
- Practice or skill differences
- Family life experience
- Cultural differences
- Quality of the environment
- Content of instruction and teacher interaction strategies

# Play-Based Learning Requires Time

- Effective play-based learning requires we **give students time to explore, reflect, and construct**
- Full-day kindergarten provides a unique opportunity to allow the time needed to explore and construct knowledge

# Helpful Resources

- National Organization for the Education of Young Children

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/play>

<http://nhaeyc.org/>

- Center for Education Innovations

<https://www.earlylearningtoolkit.org/playful-learning>

- KQED's Mind/Shift

<http://ww2.kqed.org/mindshift/>

# Questions and Comments?



University of  
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If we have time,  
let's plan guild-play lessons together.

# Kindergarten Mathematics Standard

- Identify whether the number of objects in one group is greater than, less than, or equal to the number of objects in another group, e.g., by using matching and counting strategies.

# Kindergarten Mathematics Standard

- Describe objects in the environment using names of shapes, and describe the relative positions of these objects using terms such as above, below, beside, in front of, behind, and next to.

# Kindergarten English/Language Arts Standard

- Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds.

# Kindergarten English/Language Arts Standard

- Participate in shared research and writing projects.