

The Little University News

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Welcome To Little U!

As spring quickly approaches, there are many new and exciting changes occurring at the Little University! On April 19th, Arwen began as my Assistant. Arwen recently graduated from Oberlin College with a creative writing degree, and had been working in a large childcare center. Arwen brings kindness, patience, fun, and exuberance to our group! Welcome Arwen!

With the addition of another "professor", Little University is now able to accommodate a maximum of eight infants and toddlers. As we begin to enroll more children, there will understandably be an adjustment period for everyone. However, with a little patience and a lot of love, we should be able to make a smooth transition to a slightly larger group size!

In April we welcomed the following **new** children and their parents:

DK and her mother and father. D is a petite one-year-old girl with a terrific smile! She brings the total number of girls up to two!

KC and his parents. K is an active 11 month-old on the verge of walking!



ES AND NK GOING FOR A RIDE

BJ and his parents. 14 month-old B is the oldest child enrolled at Little University! He loves to talk and has an infectious giggle!

FM and his parents. F is nine months old and he loves to interact with all of his new friends!

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Infant Development Update

The month of April has been a very busy one for the children at Little University!

EP has been enjoying toddler-hood and has acquired many new and exciting skills!



EP can easily climb up our Little Tikes slide and go back down again on his tummy! His mom and dad have also reported that EP can go up and down stairs and the “big” slide at a local park! EP also loves to put on his sandals with just a little help!

NK celebrated his first birthday on April 6th! Nicolai has recently discovered that he can walk backwards while pulling the “popper”.



He has also mastered walking forward while pushing one “xylophone” *and* pulling another!

ES has mastered crawling! She can now go anywhere in the room with ease. ES



can now be seen practicing her standing as well as a few new dance moves! ES will celebrate her first birthday on May 26th!

CG has had an exciting first two months at Little University! In addition to watching his friends and smiling at everyone, CG can



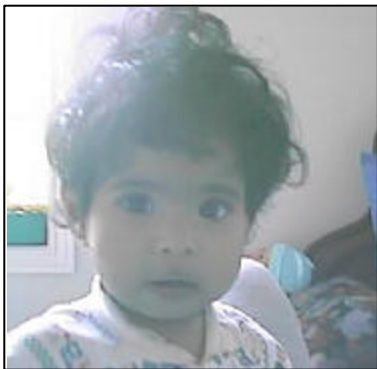
now roll from his tummy onto his back. He has even rolled from his back onto his tummy a couple of times! CG was recently out sick for a week. We are all glad that he is now well and coming back to play!

FM is feeling more comfortable in his new environment each day! FM enjoys interacting with his new friends, practicing his standing, and having snack



time. FM and his friend ES can often be seen at the snack table shaking their heads back and forth at each other!

DK is taking a cautious approach to her new friends at Little University. She



absolutely loves to be near Arwen and play with different toys. DK is an active crawler and can be seen trying to imitate a bear as she attempts to walk on her hands and feet!

KC will celebrate his first birthday on May 8th! KC loves to explore the different toys



and activities! He is able to cruise around the room while holding onto the furniture. KC also enjoys his new friends and has a great smile for all of us to enjoy!

BJ is happy and energetic, and he has been endlessly entertaining us with his contagious laughter and happy spirit. BJ



loves to “talk” and tells all of his friends great stories during the day. BJ will be on vacation in Germany for most of May, but we all look forward to his return in June!

Warmer Weather Soon...

As the sun begins to shine more and more, we will be going outside to play! Soon the backyard will be equipped with infant/toddler friendly toys to climb on and swing in! If you would like to have your child wear sunscreen, please bring a container to keep at Little University. Also, please provide outdoor footwear. Socks, shoes, or slippers are fine and will only be worn outdoors.

Although we will apply sunscreen if you wish, our outdoor times will generally be short. We may go outside several times during the day for short periods to reduce prolonged exposure to the sun. Although sunscreen helps to protect us from the sun's harmful UV rays, it isn't enough. It is important to limit young children's time spent in the sun to 20 or 30-minute periods. We will also be going outside when the shade is greatest in the backyard. Outdoor times will most likely be in the morning before 11:00 a.m. and after 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon.

Introducing...our new Teacher!

Hi. I'm Arwen. You've probably met me by now, but I'd like to tell you a little about myself. I'm from Corvallis originally but graduated almost a year ago with a creative writing degree from Oberlin College in Ohio. I've worked in several childcare settings including a large center and in a women's drug and alcohol rehabilitation center. Little University is my favorite childcare job so far and Tricia did NOT ask me to say so 😊. In addition to childcare, I tutor regularly and occasionally substitute at JEWL, a Sunday school in West Linn. In the Fall I plan to teach the youngest class (3-year olds) at JEWL and hope, by next summer, to go to graduate school for a Master's degree in teaching. I also like biking and reading, and have been making an effort to continue my writing. I look forward to getting to know you, and especially your children, even further.

Mark Your Calendar!

Little University will be closed the following days in May:

Friday, May 21st: No tuition due.

Monday, May 31st: Memorial Day, regular tuition will be due.

Little University T-shirts

T-shirts with the Little University logo are available for purchase! Children receive one T-shirt with their paid registration. If you would like an additional T-shirt, or a larger size, you can purchase one for \$7.00 (newborn through 36 mos.). Adult T-shirts are available for \$14.00 (S – XL).

Provider Appreciation Day!

Childcare Organizations nationwide have joined together to declare May 7th, 1999 the fourth annual national Provider Appreciation Day.

This day of recognition, to be celebrated annually on the Friday before Mother's Day was spearheaded by a group of volunteers in New Jersey in 1996. These individuals saw the need for a day of appreciation and recognition for child care providers and initiated a pilot program within their local network that was met with great enthusiasm by parents and providers. With the success of this pilot program behind them, the group accepted the challenge to expand the initiative to make Provider Appreciation Day a yearly event to recognize childcare providers everywhere.

To find out what you can do for Provider Appreciation Day, check out the for Provider Appreciation Day webstie, at <http://www.providersfirst.com/>.

The Importance of Play

The following excerpts were taken from the article, Play as Curriculum by Francis Wardle, Ph.D. This article appeared in the March/April edition of *Early Childhood News*.

By Francis Wardle, Ph.D.

“Play! There are two radically different views on the value of play. Early childhood educators, child development specialists, and some parents believe play is the best way for young children to learn the concepts, skills, and tasks needed to set a solid foundation for later school and life success. School administrators, many parents, and most politicians believe play is a waste of time, off task behavior, needless coddling of young children, messy and noisy, unstructured and uneducational—an unaffordable luxury in an ever-more competitive world. With the new emphasis on national and state standards and school accountability, many early childhood programs are eliminating play. Is play worth fighting for? If so, why?”

Definition of Play

While most of us know play when we see it, academics have had trouble defining it (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999). "Play involves a free choice activity that is non-literal, self-motivated, enjoyable and process oriented. Critical to this definition is the non-literal, non-realistic aspect. This means external aspects of time, use of materials, the environment, rules of the play activity, and roles of the participants are all made up by the children playing. They are based on the child's sense of reality" (Wardle, 1987, p. 27). "Children do not play for a reward—praise, money, or food. They play because they like it."(p. 28). Children who compete to make the best wooden ship are not playing. Children who are told they must use the block with an "A" on it to create a word are not playing, and children who are asked to label the colors of their paints, instead of using them to create a picture, are not playing.

This child-centered aspect of play creates the central dilemma. Increasingly, we expect education programs to meet prescribed adult objectives. Schools, funding sources, and curricular developers expect programs to teach specific outcomes and provide child-based results (Kagan & Cohen, 1997). And more and more parents expect their young children to be learning specific academic skills. If adults develop these standards and outcomes, there is no room left for child-centered learning—play. Ironically, at the same time we are eliminating play from the formal education of young children. Therefore, many of our children do not have access to the natural play experiences we experienced as children. They don't walk in the park collecting leaves, throw stones in the water to see the ever-expanding ripples, play racing-of-the-sticks under the bridge, build muddy castles on the banks of a cold stream, or create a frontier fort with their buddies. They don't scramble up gnarled trees, skip across meadows full of flowers, pick nuts from low branches, use a fallen tree as a natural balance beam, or sit on an old tractor imagining that they are leading a convoy of explorers across the Sahara Desert.

Why is Play Critical to Future Academic Success?

As we push more academics and computer instruction on young children; as we observe many of our children's hobbies become dominated by passive TV watching and computer games; and as we see many of our publicly funded early childhood programs become downward extensions of public schools, we need to advocate for children's right to play. More and more parents question the value of young children climbing trees, playing in the sandbox, and splashing paint all over themselves. Below are some of the various kinds of play, and why they are important.

Types of Play

Motor/Physical Play

Motor play provides critical opportunities for children to develop both individual gross and fine muscle strength and an overall integration of

muscles, nerves, and brain functions. Recent research has confirmed the critical link between stimulating activity and brain development (Shore, 1997). Young children must have ample opportunities to develop physically, and motor play instills this disposition toward physical activity. With so many American adults experiencing health problems from being overweight, we have a responsibility to encourage physical activity in young children.

Social Play

A variety of opportunities for children to engage in social play are the best mechanisms for progressing through the different social stages. By interacting with others in play settings, children learn social rules such as, give and take, reciprocity, cooperation, and sharing. Through a range of interactions with children at different social stages, children also learn to use moral reasoning to develop a mature sense of values. To be prepared to function effectively in the adult world, children need to participate in lots of social play.

Constructive Play

Constructive play is when children manipulate their environment to create things. This type of play occurs when children build towers and cities with blocks, play in the sand, construct contraptions on the woodworking bench, and draw murals with chalk on the sidewalk. Constructive play allows children to experiment with objects; find out combinations that work and don't work; and learn basic knowledge about stacking, building, drawing, damming, and constructing. It also gives children a sense of accomplishment and empowers them with control of their environment. Children who are comfortable manipulating objects and materials also become good at manipulating words, ideas, and concepts.

Fantasy Play

Children learn to abstract, to try out new roles and possible situations, and to experiment with language and emotions with fantasy play. In

addition, children develop flexible thinking; learn to create beyond the here and now; stretch their imaginations; use new words and word combinations in a risk-free environment; and use numbers and words to express ideas, concepts, dreams, and histories. In an ever-more technological society, lots of practice with all forms of abstraction—time, place, amount, symbols, words, and ideas—is essential.

But Why Play?

Play opponents argue that the ever-increasing amount of information and skills needed by young children require direct teacher instruction to specific goals and objectives. They believe we cannot afford to take valuable time away from important academic activities to allow children to hide in a fantasy world of play. But play is, in fact, the most efficient, powerful, and productive way to learn the information young children need.

First, children progress through stages of play, and through levels (complexity) of play. As children master new concepts and practice them through repetitive play, they progress to the next level. In essence, children create their own curriculum. Because children like to learn new information and want to master new tasks (ever watched a child persist in learning to ride a bike?) and because they hate to be bored, children self-diagnose what they know and what they can learn next. Play provides the ultimate curriculum for social, physical, and cognitive advancement. Secondly, by using materials, interactions with others, and mastery of tasks and skills to progress through levels of play, children develop a sense of control of their environment and a feeling of competence and enjoyment that they can learn. Finally, play provides a natural integration between all the critical brain functions and learning domains that are often missing with discrete teacher instruction. Recent brain research shows that this integration is very important to development (Shore, 1997).

Play is also a very effective way for children to accumulate a vast amount of basic knowledge about the world around them, knowledge needed for later learning in language, math, science,

social studies, art, and medicine. When playing with sticks in the sand a child learns about the properties of sand, how posts are used for building, the way materials must be retained from rivers, roads, and mountainsides, the effect of moisture on materials, the impact of wind and the nature of gravity, and ways of creating patterns, shapes, and lines by drawing in the sand. A child playing with tadpoles in a pond learns about the cycle of life, the properties of water including sinking and floating, the effect of cold water on the body's thermal system, and concepts related to water safety and drowning. Children engaged in socio-dramatic play experiment with words, phrases, and idioms they have heard and learn new and more complex ways to express themselves.

Role of the Teacher

Somehow the phrase, "free play" has entered our vocabulary. "Free play" means play free of structure and adult involvement. This is unfortunate, because adults have a variety of critical roles in supporting children's play. These roles include providing materials that encourage high-quality play, structuring environments, modeling play (like when the teacher becomes a

participant in a socio-dramatic activity), and introducing children to new play opportunities (girls on the workbench and boys in the dramatic play area). Vygotsky's idea of scaffolding (Berk & Winsler, 1995) is particularly useful in explaining the role of the teacher in extending play. Further, his concept of the use of private speech by children to structure, extend, and expand their own play, illustrates children's internalization of teacher scaffolding. The teacher does, in fact, have a central role in children's play.

Conclusion

To succeed in an ever-more complex and technological world, our children need a solid foundation based on play. We must be very careful about accelerating them too quickly into abstract skills and isolated concepts (Wardle, 1996). Lots of play at an early age enables children to develop the wide, integrated foundation required for future academic success. It also will develop in our children a love of learning, a love that is desperately needed by children who can look forward to a minimum of 13 years of formal education."

