



THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY IN KINDERGARTEN



Observing Children & Play

The Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS) is an observational tool for teachers to understand the developmental readiness of children entering kindergarten. KIDS enables teachers to assess students' development while they go about their daily classroom routines, including during play.

What is Play?

"Play" describes activities that are freely chosen and directed by children. Teachers facilitate and construct play in kindergarten classrooms through child-directed time in centers (e.g., block play, dramatic play, sand and water play) and more structured, playful learning (e.g., finger plays, songs, and games that connect to content learning). No matter the specifics, implementing play in the classroom includes planned, purposeful activities. Productive and intentional play builds on children's initiative and interests but does not descend into chaos.

Why Play in Kindergarten?

Research shows that play-based learning is essential for children's academic, social, emotional, and physical development. Additionally, play is the most accessible approach to learning for young children. Kindergartners' brains are wired to learning *in context*, meaning they learn from parts of something larger rather than the immediate task at hand. For example, a child acting as a cashier while playing store with classmates could be practicing one-to-one correspondence and learning the concept of numbers in a more effective way than children practicing this concept on a worksheet.

Play is fun for children. Evidence suggests that children love playing because it allows them to practice, apply, and extend new learning. Playful learning helps children develop social relationships and connectivity, which are important to a child's persistence in school, love of learning, and self-efficacy.

Using Intentional Play as a Teaching Strategy

Play is essential to learning for all kindergartners. It can be academically rigorous and support gaps in a child's development. Using playful learning as a teaching strategy requires teachers to plan in the same way they would with more didactic methods. On the following page are a few ways that Illinois kindergarten teachers are already using play as an effective learning modality with all children.

**"Children learn
as they play.
Most importantly,
in play, children
learn *how*
to learn."**

*-O.F. Donaldson,
play researcher*