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CHILD'S PLAY: IT'S ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

In Choosing a Preschool, Experts Recommend Child-Centered Play

KING OF PRUSSIA, Penn. (Oct. 29, 2008) — With so much information about preschools available to parents, it can be difficult to choose the right program. One approach to evaluating a school that can help parents choose is the level of emphasis on learning through play. For young children, play is the *natural* way to learn, according to the experts.

In fact, research studies confirm that children who are allowed to play function better later in life, both socially and academically.

“Young children who learn through play are more ready to make their own decisions, advocate for themselves and use creativity to solve problems as they grow,” says Dr. Kyle Pruett, a Yale University child psychiatrist and consultant to the Goddard School, the fastest-growing franchise preschool program in the United States.

Dr. Pruett points out that play helps children learn to solve problems, promotes flexibility and motivation, teaches regulation of emotions and builds resilience and confidence. Play is also essential to the development of the child's brain, triggering trillions of neural connections that form the basis of healthy cognitive function and mastery of the child's physical world.

Playing alone and with others not only builds brain development, it also helps children develop social skills and a sense of ethics. The most effective play is free of evaluation and correction (after all, throwing a ball shouldn't be "right" or "wrong"), while promoting autonomy.

"True play is actually hard work," says Sue Adair, Senior Manager of Quality Assurance at Goddard Systems, Inc. "The child lost in play is exploring infinite possibilities. Caretakers and parents can assist the child's growth by participating in play and creating an environment that encourages play as a means to meet new developmental challenges."

So after parents have checked the basics that are required for any preschool, how can they find one with the right emphasis on play?

Adair suggests looking at three things:

- **Find a school that puts a priority on learning through play.** For young children, play is unstructured and freeing. It's not about expensive toys, in fact, the simpler the toy, the more ways it can be used by a child developing his or her imagination. Toys and equipment should be carefully chosen, first for safety and then for how they stimulate young imaginations and help children develop.
- **Look at the total environment.** Environment means having clean, safe and spacious places to play, as well as the resources to provide imaginative, rewarding playtime. It also means a caring and well-trained staff, a critical element for any preschool. "Remember, how children are treated is as critical to their development as what they are taught," says Dr. Pruett.

- **Ask about enrichment programs.** Only the best preschools offer special enrichment programs at no extra cost, as part of the tuition. Enrichment programs — including yoga, manners and world cultures, for example —develop the whole child by encouraging their innate curiosity and imagination.

“At the end of the day, parents know they’ve chosen the right child care program when their children are given time for child-centered exploratory play during the day,” Adair says. “For a child, play isn’t optional. The educational and other benefits of play are so important – in terms of healthy bodies and minds – that parents should put play at the top of their list when comparing preschool programs.”

About The Goddard School®

The Goddard School® (<http://www.goddardschool.com/>) is a nationwide franchise of Goddard Systems, Inc. headquartered in King of Prussia, Penn. With 300 franchised schools nationwide and 40,000 children enrolled, Goddard is the fastest-growing preschool franchise in the United States. Goddard was recently recognized by *Entrepreneur* magazine as the “#1 Childcare Franchise” for the seventh consecutive year (January 2008) and was also recognized by *Franchise Times* magazine as one of the “Top 200” U.S.-based franchise systems by worldwide sales.

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