Whole Body Development through Play

Jinping Li

BEFORE YOU READ: What is “whole body development”? Name the five senses.

When you see a toy that looks cute or interesting, you sometimes buy it for your child without thinking. How do you know whether the toy will be helpful for your child or not? In this essay, I will talk about all the different ways that kids can learn by playing. It doesn’t always involve toys!

Outdoors

I work with kids at a preschool daycare center in Boston, where we focus on the kids’ whole body development. We have outdoor play every day, because when the kids jump and run, they develop their gross motor skills. The kids listen to the sounds of the outdoors—rain, wind, birds, traffic—and we play a game with them where they guess what is making these different sounds. This helps develop kids’ auditory sense. We also take them outside to observe and touch trees as they go through seasonal changes. These activities develop children’s visual and tactile senses.

Indoors

Indoors, kids develop their fine motor skills by playing with playdough or using scissors to cut along the lines. Kids love science and seeing how things work. For example, they love to watch a paper flower open in a bowl of water or a home-made “volcano” erupt. They love to plant seeds and watch them grow. Construction toys can spark their creativity and imagination. For example, they might use building blocks to build a pretend house, car, or castle. When they play with cooking toys, they imagine themselves in different roles in the house. Little kids don’t realize that they are learning with everything they do, so it’s our job as teachers to expose them to dozens of different activities and ways of playing.

Social and Personal Skills

Indoor and outdoor toys and games do more than develop kids’ gross and fine motor skills. They also help kids learn about sharing, taking turns, and waiting. Through play, they improve their language skills and learn how to communicate with peers. Through a wide variety of structured and unstructured play, kids have fun and learn many types of social and personal skills.

So, if you’re in the toy store, and you’re wondering if a toy will be helpful to your child, just ask yourself: does this toy help develop my whole child, or is it just cute and flashy and will entertain her for a couple of minutes?

AFTER YOU READ: What do fine and gross mean in this context? What are some examples of gross motor skills and fine motor skills? Look at the career pathway on p. 49.

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