



2013), evidence is mounting that guided play scaffolds young children's development and that it might prime critical neural mechanisms to help children anticipate how to respond to learning moments (Weisberg et al. 2014). It also helps children develop an understanding of how the world works (Gopnik 2012). To deepen our understanding, research investigating play's biological foundation in children is urgently needed. This research would provide a critical foundation for supporting calls to increase opportunities for play in all early childhood classrooms and to promote playful home environments.

As we await new discoveries from brain science, one finding is already clear: Play is a wonderful context for active, engaged, meaningful, and socially interactive learning. And, as two of the authors of this piece describe in their book *Becoming Brilliant: What Science Tells Us About Raising Successful Children*, play also prepares children to become social, caring, thinking, and creative citizens (Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek 2016). In fact, many researchers and teachers now concur that the "child-driven educational methods sometimes referred to as 'playful learning' are the most positive means yet known to help young children's development" (Lillard et al. 2013, 28).

Try This!

- Consider how you can introduce new vocabulary words that are relevant to the context of the children's play. For example, if children are pretending to move chickens to the barn, explain that a henhouse is called a coop. Solicit their ideas about the similarities and differences between a coop and a barn.
- Add specific information to what children say. For example, when a child says, "It's a barn," you can respond, "Yes, a barn is a building where animals live. The farmer stores food in the loft." While looking at a bird feeder together, you might say, "That red bird is a cardinal. It pokes its beak into the seeds."
- As children act out their dramatic play scenes, notice how they use props and what they say. What skills are emerging? What additional props could you add to help them try out new skills or refine their play strategies?
- Provide open-ended props (e.g., boxes, sponges, gloves, containers, tubes) and items that add complexity to play themes (e.g., clipboards for menus, play money for a store). As children begin to build and play, ask what props they need for their castle, boat, store, or house. They will surprise you with their insights and ideas.



This chapter supports the following NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards and topic areas:

Standard 2: Curriculum

- 2.B Social and Emotional Development
- 2.D Language Development
- 2.F Early Mathematics

Standard 3: Teaching

- 3.E Responding to Children's Interests and Needs
- 3.F Making Learning Meaningful for All Children