

# Value of play-based learning

Over the Christmas season my wife and I had a chance to reconnect with an old friend and his spouse; I say old in that we've known him and been good friends for over 30 years, not because he is actually old.

While we didn't spend a lot of time together, we did get a chance to spend a few hours reminiscing about old times, talking politics, and catching up on family. One of the stories my friend shared was about the gift he gave his granddaughter, a huge cardboard box filled with bubble wrap.

Some of you may already be gasping and thinking to yourself, "What a cheapskate." Some of his family may have thought that as well. My friend's granddaughter, however, could not have been happier with the gift. She tossed aside all the previously opened gift-wrapped boxes filled with structured games and toys and spent most of the holiday playing with her grandfather and the gift he gave her. She spent hours creating forts and castles, and was immersed in adventures that could only be created by a child's imagination.

As adults we are all too quick to organize every second of our children's lives. What we are forgetting is that unstructured play is essential for a child's social and emotional development. Research is clear that play serves an important function as it aids in social development and fosters the development of invaluable skills. Play allows children to develop communication skills, to compromise, co-operate, and problem solve and to learn to control their emotions. As they create stories around their activities, it also develops their literacy skills.

When parents register their students within the early learning programs within the Horizon School Division, they can expect such programs to be play-based. Through play, we are ensuring

that your child develops the skills necessary for more structured adult-led instruction within school.

My friend may have saved some dollars on his gift by not buying a toy that directs a child's learning, but the gift he gave his granddaughter will last a lifetime, for he gave her the gift of imagination and the ability to explore, to discover, and to create.

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