

Learning through Play in Speech–Language Therapy

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Disclosures

- Assistant Professor at Rockhurst University
- Owner of The Informed SLP, LLC
- Regular contributor to SpeechPathology.com and SpeechScience.org

The information shared with you today is the result of a literature review on **play-based learning and instruction for speech and language**, performed in 2014 and updated to-date. Clinical examples shared do not come directly from empirical studies but instead are based on the presenter's interpretation and clinical application of available research to-date.



Play may have a unique ability to enhance learning and generalization

What is “play”?

Broad definition

- flexibility and nonliterality
- positive affect and intrinsic motivation
- active (rather than passive) engagement
- no extrinsic goals or learning that must occur

Narrower definitions occasionally include

- episodic
- rule-governed
- process-oriented
- artifacts
- other people

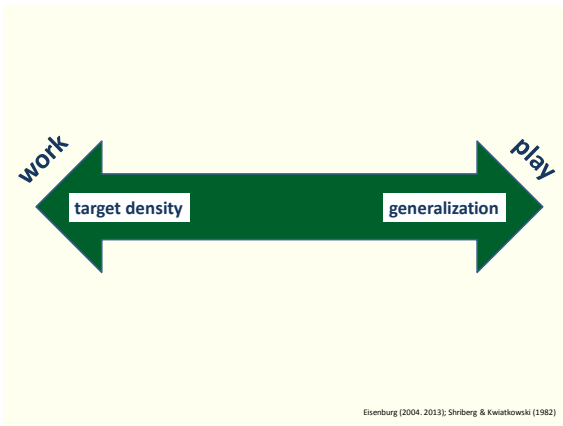


Dietze & Kashin (2012)
Harsh-Popsek & Golinkoff (2003)
Isonberg & Sabatino (2003)
Krasnor & Pepler (1980)
Miller (2017)

Types of play

- functional play**
exploration or functional use of objects
begins before age 2
- construction play**
blocks, legos, race track
- games with rules**
Candy Land, Don't Break the Ice
begins around school age
- outdoor and movement play**
kick all, hopscotch
- symbolic, dramatic, and pretend play (“as-if”³)**
kitchen, zoo, camping
begins around age 2

Dietze and Kashin (2012)
Ganey (1980)
Kostelnik et al. (2011)
Watson et al. (2011)

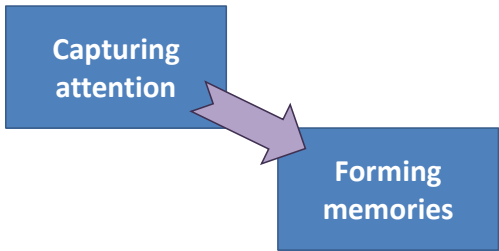


So what are SLPs supposed to *do*?

- **playful learning** involves at least a couple (several?) aspects of **play**
- ... we don't know for certain *which* of these has the biggest impact on learning; any/all could contribute to the benefit of playful learning
- current *best guess* from available studies^{e.g. 1-3} centers around **capturing attention**, **forming memories**, and sacrificing as few elements of pure **play** as possible

1. Ebbeck et al., 2013
 2. Hirsch-Pasek et al., 2008
 3. Resnick, 2004

1



2

- **required targets**
 - child *must* use these in order for play to continue
 - “require” by considering *how to obtain access to a result*:
 - social interaction
 - funny/amusing consequence
 - parts of a whole
 - toys
- **suggested targets**
 - modeled and used heavily by clinician, but not required of child

Play-based therapy *is NOT* unstructured or uncontrolled therapy. Instead, the *best* execution of playful learning involves a high level of control by the instructor, imperceptible to the child.

*The idea of pre-planning targets for play-based sessions is mentioned throughout our literature, e.g. Leonard & Deevy, 2017

Example: speech



Example: speech



Consider method, not toy



Drill play and other fun work



When we need to drill

- Who is easier to do drill-based activities with?
 - Preschoolers?
 - Early Elementary?
 - Late Elementary?
 - Middle/High School?
- drill work requires the ability to attend to something that's somewhat "boring", and persist
- "The Batman Effect" (White et al., 2016)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKAxGIWrByE>



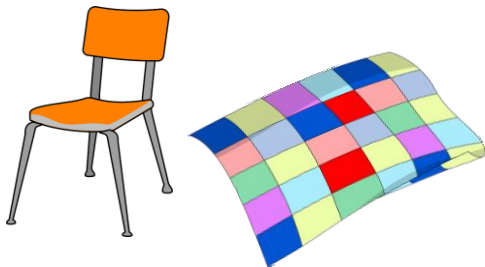
Play-Based Tx: Language

- generalization vs. target density¹
 - "Because **embedded-therapies** rely largely on consequent instruction (i.e., instruction delivered after a child had attempted a target form), a possible problem for embedded therapy is the low dose of teaching episodes if a child never or infrequently attempts the target form."¹
 - major concern for language, because we know *high dose* is required for children with developmental language disorders^{2,3}
 - use drill within playful learning? ("mini- and micro-lessons")¹

"Vocabulary comes alive for the child when parents and caregivers build on children's focus of attention by offering information that the child is craving."⁴

1. Eisenberg (2013)
 2. Gray (2003)
 3. Storckel et al. (2016)
 4. Harris et al. (2011)

Example: Language



Example: Language



Language: don't forget the context!

Story-telling:

- 3rd person
- Possessives
- Past tense

Pretend play:

- 1st person
- Present tense
- Future tense



"Goldilocks & The Three Bears" felt board, by Chenille Kraft Company

THANK YOU

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