



The Process of Self-Active Play

As summarized by Dr. Walter F. Drew from the [Authors Q&A on NAEYC](#)

This is a follow-up resource from our [Play Is The Way](#) conference.

- Develops the power of concentration, the capacity to focus and engage the mind in purposeful attention.
- Develop the capacity of elaboration, expansion, imagination, vision, reasoning with complexity and richness.
- Develop the ability to organize ideas around a central concept; higher ideal or luminous belief or understanding that will serve as a guide in life.
- Develops self-control of the mind.
- Develop mental silence and sense of peacefulness.

Develops the power of concentration, the capacity to focus and engage the mind in purposeful attention. For both children and adults, exploring open-ended materials, arranging, constructing, playfully exploring them in patterns and designs, personal expressions, is a deeply satisfying sensory experience. The mind focuses through fingertips, concentrating on the task at hand. Whatever the age or ability level, whatever the background or needs of the individual, as the inquiry as play ensues with open-ended materials, there is a dynamic transformation of the tactile, visual reusable play resources and objects, along with a corresponding flow of thoughts, questions, discoveries, which form new inner awareness, patterns and relationships. The knowledge derived from actively constructing from such self-direct hands-on personal experience, carries with it emotional meaning, as well as a sense of power, control and accomplishment. Knowledge derived from self activity is alive!

Develop the capacity of elaboration, expansion, imagination, vision, reasoning with complexity and richness. Open-ended materials like, blocks, fabric, twigs, pebbles and stones, colorful plastic caps, clay, paint, and a world of other non-representational reusable resources allow both children and adults to uncover, spontaneously express and elaborate on their emerging ideas. The nature of the mind naturally begins to imagine and create, to define meaning and purpose with the objects and how they are used. An inner narrative unfolds a story is told. This process of controlling and defining purpose engenders a sense of power, self-determination, and authority. It is essential for both children and adults to feel a sense of power and control in their lives. The self active play with open-ended materials helps them to take charge, make choices, and determine the content and meaning of their experience. In this way, the process of synthesizing content and meaning from direct concrete manipulative experience, of engaging creativity and “making sense” out of the materials and their own actions, occurs naturally as they construct with the openness, the non-representational quality of the materials. If carefully considered, the underlying thoughts and feelings connect with relationship and events occurring within day to day existence.



Develop the ability to organize ideas around a central concept; higher ideal or luminous belief or understanding that will serve as a guide in life. As children and adults across the human lifespan engage in play and art making they are connecting with their personal ideas and impulses through the focused doing and making of three-dimensional playful representations. This hands, heart and mind organizing physical experience, enables and support elaboration, this exploration and expansion of ideas into bigger patterns and mental framework or schema. The act of learning how to learn, how to put materials together into harmonious, self satisfying forms, of connecting materials with ideas through personal intention, is a coherent process reflecting wholeness and creativity. As teachers participate in a self active play experience they gain insight, they realize the intensity of feelings and the depth of learning that takes place during play. This insight opens the possibility of impacting and transforming their professional practice.

Develops self-control of the mind. The ability to self-regulate and direct one's mind in a positive way and to remain detached from troublesome thoughts or negative influences is an essential life skill. Learning to explore, use, and control open-ended materials through play is a way for children to further develop the ability to experience the power to control and regulate their attention and complete a task successfully. Through self active play children and adults have an opportunity to strengthen resilience and their sense of competence demonstrated tangibly in the visual representations created during their play and the shared narratives which follow the experience.

Develop mental silence and sense of peacefulness. The intense focus, full sensory engagement and emotional meaning occurring during self active play gives rise to feelings of tranquility, completeness, equipoise. Especially during solo contemplative play we are more receptive and readily available to inspiration arising from deep within our heart and soul.

