

Kids need time to enjoy imaginative free play

Americans are working on average 62 hours per week. "Is it any wonder," says Marjorie Kostelnik, Ph.D., chairperson of the Department of Family and Child Ecology at Michigan State University, "that when we don't have recreation for ourselves, parents of three and four year olds want child-care workers to cut the play and get to learn-

ing?" However, as Kostelnik explains, "If we think about how adults learn, we will reevaluate pushing such materials as workbooks at age three." Connecting the dots to make a map of Michigan is not play. It is work disguised as play, she says. Kostelnik reminds us that as adults we learn best when we

ALL ABOUT FAMILIES



ALICE MCCARTHY

decide what and how we will learn. When kids have "free play" or even guided play (we create the scene such as a cooking area) that's when they learn best.

Moreover, she says, "Play can't be rushed." Can you learn how to refinish a table in 20 minutes? Of course not. Preschool teachers need to allow 60 minutes as a minimum to provide "good" play. She compares "good" play to all the planning that goes into Thanksgiving dinner! Play includes children planning what they are going to do in their play.

Kostelnik says that children must have free-play time to learn. In preschools where teachers provide plenty of free play,

classrooms have fewer discipline problems. Children who are encouraged to play will also be advanced in their number and reading skills as they move into the early grades.

As you think about free play, you may be interested in materials from a group called Teachers for Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment. This group has recently issued a Toy Action Guide that you can obtain by writing to: TRUCE, P.O. Box 441261, West Somerville, Mass. 02144.

The guide gives examples of toys that encourage children to use their imagination; promote respectful, non-stereotyped, non-violent interactions, and will stand the test of time. Some of the toys recommended continue to be a part of a child's play as he or she moves through different ages and stages. A very helpful listing of toys for healthy and creative play — with reasons for the choices

made — is included in the eight-page Toy Action Guide. In addition, two pages of toys to avoid are included — again, with why the group does not recommend the toy.

TRUCE is a national group of educators deeply concerned about how children's entertainment and toys are affecting the play and behavior of children in classrooms. You may send a small donation to cover their printing and mailing costs.

With all the demands of the holidays, please remember Marjorie Kostelnik's important advice about play — make it for your child. Send for the Toy Action Guide from TRUCE. It too will help with providing free play. For example, the guide reports: Spiderman Venom Action Figure, Child of Venom, a highly grotesque and sexualized female figure. Links divorce, being a bride, sex, violence and death in inappropriate ways.

Marjorie J. Kostelnik is chairperson of the Department of Family and Child Ecology at Michigan State University. For 13 years, she served as program supervisor for the Child Development Laboratories on campus. A former child-care, Head

Start and nursery-school teacher, as well as elementary-school specialist, Kostelnik has been actively involved in helping early childhood programs explore the implications of developmentally appropriate practices. Whether in the United States or abroad, much of this exploration has focused on how teachers can translate their understandings into practical strategies they can use immediately.

Three years ago, Kostelnik was elected vice president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. She teaches and writes in the area of early childhood education, as well as works with early childhood programs in the community.

All About Families runs every other week in The Eccentric Newspapers. Birmingham resident Alice McCarthy, Ph.D., is a nationally known parent educator, writer and editor. She is the mother of five children and grandmother to eight young children.

To leave a message for McCarthy, from a touch-tone phone, call (313) 963-2047, mailbox 1894, or write her at The Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

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