

SMART MOVES

JULY EDUMAG

keller

IT'S TIME TO PLAY

DIG INTO PLAY... Dirt Is Good

As COVID forces students to engage in schooling from home, often online and sedentary in front of a screen, those attending school cannot participate in physical education or sport.

Even recess is often restricted in order to ensure social distancing.

Active physical play has been relegated to the not-important, not-urgent category. But play matters and it matters most when we are growing brains.

This current generation of youngsters spends less time than any other generation on self-directed outdoor play.



Run a school like a Play School

Because our broken schooling system is designed for academic results and tertiary acceptance, we are failing to prepare students for adult life and the world of work.

Maybe it is time to research why learning is so effective at Play School.

...read more on page 2



Creativity is a lesson not a time filler

Creativity in the classroom makes a fundamental difference when it is intentionally orchestrated.

We have to provide opportunities for **what if** thinking. Wading through a steady daily diet of critical thinking denies students of these opportunities.

...read more on page 6



DIRT IS GOOD

The current generation is spending less time playing than any other generation before them.

The current generation of school going children have the highest level of stress.

Anxiety shuts down the brain for cognitive learning.

Dirt is Good... real good

Maximum security prisoners are guaranteed to spend one to two hours per day outside, yet two thirds of children say there is not the opportunity to play outside.

To make matters worse, 10% of children, according to Dr Pasi Sahlberg, NEVER play outside. Isn't it sad that we have to compare our children to maximum security prisoners to realise the error of our ways? If you haven't had to throw your kids in the bath to get rid of the DIRT, your kids have not played hard enough.

Watching my grandchildren grow up in this age, I have been able to identify the difference between play and shiny-eyed play. When the kids have been outside, in the dirt, covered in mud, having enjoyed the fresh air and sun while dad gardens, they come inside with messy bodies and shiny eyes. It is the shiny eyes that matter.

Prisoners will testify to the vital role the outdoor time has on their emotional and psychological survival - basically their well-being. The ability to exercise, play games, walk, breathe the fresh air and see the sky is fundamental to their survival.

When children play outside in the dirt without adult supervision, real play becomes a state of mind. All the five far senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell) and the two near senses (vestibular and proprioceptors) are activated. The games are self-initiated and self-motivated. As I watched my two grandsons playing, the three year age gap meant that although they were in the same area, they played their own imaginary games, engaging from time to time to discover what the other was doing.

Both their games were creative, physical and the language that they used to engage with Granny, who sat on the bench enjoying the warm winter sun, was rich. The plasticity of the brain means that during childhood, play is essential in laying neural pathways. Their creative minds naturally tap into their curiosity. Although there was nothing wrong with the well-point pump, the one was actively involved in repairing it, using self-constructed tools out of bark and irrigation bits and bobs that were lying nearby.

“

If you haven't had to throw your kids in the bath to get rid of the **dirt**, your kids have not played hard enough.

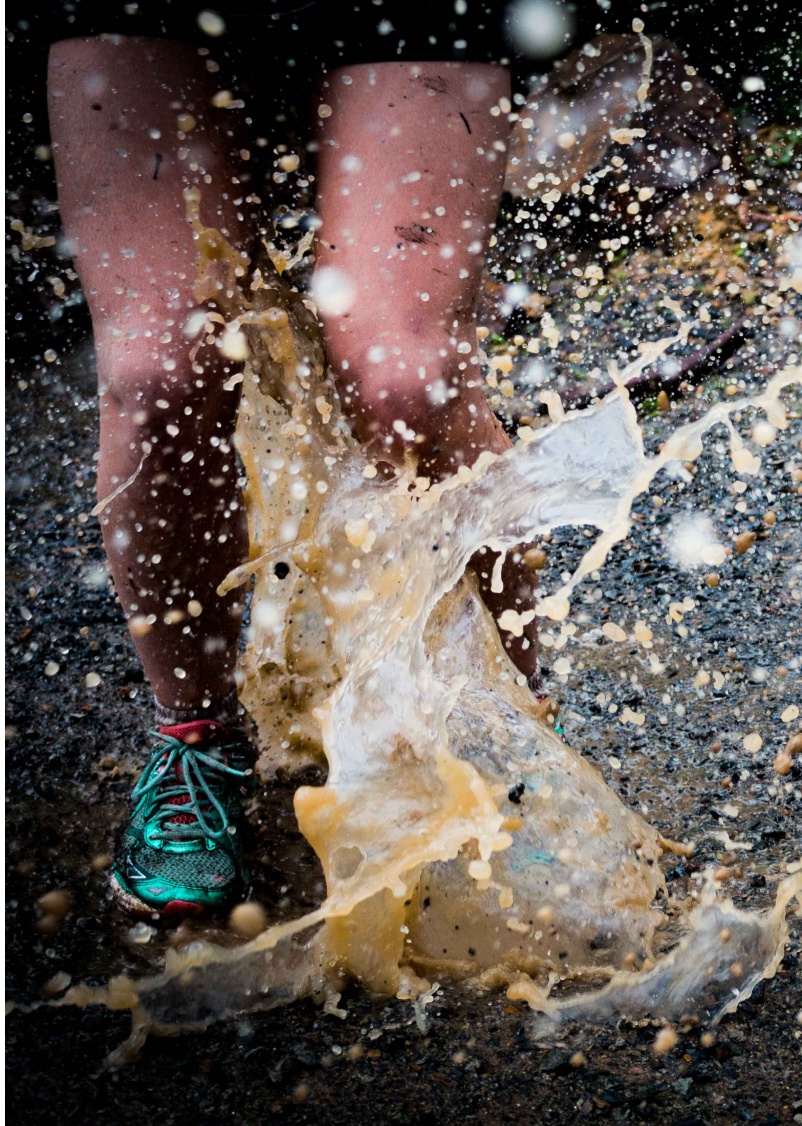
”

But why are our children not playing outside? The 24 hours news cycle from around the world brings all the international nastiness and craziness directly into our homes. We are now more aware of the evils in the world than ever before. And although we don't want to be ostriches and bury our heads in the sand, we must recognise that this impacts the way we raise our children. What we see heightens our anxiety and impacts our world view of children.

Social media is affecting the way the brains of our children are developing. By the age of 3, screen time has been the dominant way children play. In fact, recent research seems to indicate that by the age of 7, children have spent 2 years 3 months in front of a screen. If we accept that children sleep about 10 hours a day, one can calculate that more than half a child's life by 7 has been spent in front of a screen and most of this time has been alone. 80% of parents report that their children prefer virtual sport to active sport.

We have got to get our children out playing. It is not only a leisure activity, but it is an essential part of education. Despite the very clear and bold statements from scientists and researchers, PLAY is almost extinct in schools and homes and may need to be handled in the same way as we do an endangered species.

Instead, a group of bureaucrats - mostly politicians and educators appointed by politicians, has placed standardised testing ahead of play. As early as 9 years of age, students are required to sit a formal test that often lasts an entire school day of six hours, under the supervision of strangers. The papers are carried off site and the results published, often about the teacher and the school.



SCIENCE DEMANDS PLAY

1930 Children's Charter in USA recognised how important PLAY was for children

1989 The Convention of the Rights of the Child declared that every child has the right to leisure and play.

2007 USA Academy of Paediatricians, "Play is essential to development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and youth. Play also offers an ideal opportunity for parents to engage fully with their children. Despite the benefits derived from play for both children and parents, time for free play has been markedly reduced for some children. This report addresses a variety of factors that have reduced play, including a hurried lifestyle, changes in family structure, and increased attention to academics and enrichment activities at the expense of recess or free child-centered

This GERM (Global Education Reform Movement) ignorantly believes that testing produced an improved output. What they failed to identify is that school leaders and teachers would become so anxious about the exposure that they would adapt the entire school year to prepare for a test and the biggest loser was PLAY.

What parents were slow to recognise is that focusing on academics at an early age has **NO** long term advantage. There is **NO** benefit giving students Homework unless it involves reading and there is **NO** evidence that classroom technology improves learning.

The best learning comes in an environment where time is allocated to **PLAY** so that students, both young and old, can de-stress and focus when academic work is presented.

The message is clear. Every School Leader, the School Board and Education Departments must be held accountable to prove that 60 minutes of the academic day is dedicated to active physical play.

“The master in the art of living makes little distinction between his work and his play.”
James Michener.

Kevin Carroll who worked at Nike as a creative catalyst, believes that PLAY is serious business and we need to embrace it. Over 20 000 play histories have provided evidence. **The National Institute for Play** has declared that PLAY is as important to us as drinking, eating and sleeping. Play is at the root of creativity, innovation, problem solving, abstract thinking and imagination.

So let's get play back into every staffroom, classroom and home in our country.

“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.”
Plato.

Go play!



play.”

2010 Centre for Disease Control and Prevention reported on the association between physical activity and academic achievement. This huge study with peer reviewed research papers showed that play enhances concentration, attention and improves behaviour.

2011. The European Union declared that all children have the right to PLAY.

2013 USA Academy of Paediatrics again highlighted the vital role play has in child and teenager development.

2013 The National Association of Medicine recommended 60 minutes of vigorous activity per school day.

2017 Centre for Disease Control in both USA and China indicated PLAY is essential in Early Childhood Development.

2018 The World Bank indicated that children learn best through play and social interaction.

2018 USA Academy of Paediatrics again demanded that play take its right place in education.

2020 USA Academy of Paediatrics announced that toy giant, Melissa & Doug, would work with the association in a multi-year project to promote non-screen time, hands on play with a focus on interaction and connection.

Despite this, play is almost extinct.

Why?

School leaders should think of ways to get their staff to resign from adulthood for a while and flex their play muscles. When teachers play, learning becomes full of fun.

Mark Twain's

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

This classic story reminds us how to turn work into play. When Tom was assigned to whitewash Aunt Polly's 810 square foot fence it seemed like a burden. When his friend Ben strolled by and mocked Tom for having to work, he made as if it was such fun. When Ben wanted a chance to try and paint, Tom refused. Only when Ben offered Tom his apple for a chance to paint, did he agree. Soon, more boys arrived and fell into Tom's trap. Twain's powerful message from this story is that work is only a chore when you are obliged to do it.

And this is where we have made a huge error in the way we run schools. If school was play, the intrinsic reward would drive performance.

Instead, we have made school a chore. Intrinsic motivation, innovation, engagement, creativity, behaviour and focus have tumbled. We live in an age where students have a massive desire for autonomy, mastery and purpose.

Autonomy is the urge to direct our own lives, **mastery** is the desire to get better and **purpose** is the yearning to do something we do in service of something larger than ourselves.

Extrinsic motivation cripples innovation. The *If you do this ... then* is a worthless strategy in schooling. Rewards may improve short term results, but cripple long term performance.

Despite this being shouted from the mountain top after the brilliant 1993 book, *Punished by Rewards* (A Kohn), schools continue to operate using the carrot and stick, badge on blazer, prize-giving extrinsic reward system. And they fail.

“

...extrinsic motivation
cripples innovation...
and the world is
screaming for
innovators.

”



The seven deadly flaws of the Carrot & Stick approach.

1. They can extinguish intrinsic motivation.
2. They can diminish performance.
3. They can crush creativity.
4. They can crowd out good behaviour.
5. They can encourage cheating, shortcuts and unethical behaviours.
6. They can become addictive.
7. They can foster short-term thinking.

Drive, Daniel Pink, 2009

SPARK CREATIVITY & INNOVATION IN CLASS



So many of our teachers don't regard themselves as creative - but the very act of being a teacher requires creativity.

Often, creativity exercises are used as time fillers at the end of a module of work. You hear teachers say ... "When you are finished the task you can spend time being creative!"

Patti Drapeau's book on ***Sparkling Student Creativity*** (2014) is a must read for educators. She makes use of Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) description of the two types of creatives, ie. the Big C and the Little C. The Big C's are the creatives whose work is renown and often leads to change, while the Little C's are people who use their creativity to affect their everyday lives.

So many of our teachers don't regard themselves as creative - but the very act of being a teacher in South Africa today, requires creativity.

They believe that creativity is beyond their reach and reserved for Big C's. This is not true. The first step is to teach all students that you don't need to be a Big C to be creative.

This results in an immediate drop in the pressure around being creative and they are assisted to create realistic expectations about themselves regarding their ability to be creative.

Without a doubt, creativity lifts a lesson. It grows a high level of excitement and interest making the lesson more engaging.

The moment students feel engaged, their attention improves, learning is ignited and they feel a sense that their contribution to the lesson has worth.

The classroom is the starting point. When students walk into a creative classroom, the environment sends a powerful message:

1. You are safe to be creative.
2. In this class we support unusual ideas.
3. Choice is a vital part of learning in this classroom.
4. Here we encourage multiple solutions.
5. Novelty is important.

“ A creative learning environment that embraces students and engagement along with critical thinking and creative thinking skills is essential to student achievement ”

(Boykin & Noguera, 2011, 2012; Marks 2000.)

Creative classrooms always recognise the relationship between the content they are studying and how the student thinks about the content. A regurgitative lesson, therefore, can never be a creative experience.

Check out the
HOW TO - GUIDE
on the next page

THE HOW TO - GUIDE

STEPS TO SPARKING CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN CLASS

STEP ONE

Design a CREATIVE classroom space

STEP TWO

Prepare for a CREATIVE road trip

Road ONE

Creative thinking verbs and phrases

- Choose the verb carefully. Words like “describe” is a recall verb based on previous knowledge that you want them to sprout out.
- Rather choose the verb “Brainstorm”. This will result in students generating known ideas as well as new ideas and stretching possibilities.

Road TWO

Creative strategies

- Try starter phrases like, “How might you design....?” or “Devise your own way to ...”
- Try reverse brainstorming by getting students to think from another perspective like:
 - “How can we increase pollution?”
 - “How can we promote more wars?”
 - “What is the most ineffective study method?”

Road THREE

Innovation and creative problem solving

- Innovative ideas come from a slow hunch, sudden insight or pure chance (Johnson, 2010).
- Always present a problem or allow students to identify a challenge based on a given scenario.
- Unless students can access their pre-frontal cortex where their executive function skills reside like self-control, attention and sequencing, they will never innovate.

Road FOUR

Creative products

- These can be simple or sophisticated. Allow opportunities for students to present their product for review and rework it. Creative products are seldom first time performers.
-

STEP THREE

Arrive at the destination.



#kellerthinking

