

Summary of Presentation by

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at Fairfax Futures' 4<sup>th</sup> Annual School Readiness Symposium

April 26, 2008, Fairfax, Virginia

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### **Want to Play? - Utilizing Play to Promote Children's Social and Emotional Development**

Play provides young children with opportunities to learn, practice, and develop numerous emotional and social skills, which can be critical for successful, competent interactions with their peers. During play young children practice expressing and managing their emotions because early peer interactions can be highly emotional and arousing like during disputes over toys (Berk, Mann, & Ogan, 2006). Preschool children's ability to regulate their emotions and behavior is central to their developing social competence and can predict their positive interactions with peers (Ramani, Brownell, & Campbell, 2008). During cooperative pretend play, children also develop their social and communicative skills by engaging in discussions with peers, asking each other questions, and resolving disagreements (Howes, Unger, & Matheson 1992). Adults can utilize play to foster the development of these emotional and social skills. For example, during conflicts in play, adults can help children to control their emotions by suggesting strategies children can use to manage their arousal and by encouraging them to engage in positive, cooperative interactions.

Play can also promote numerous cognitive skills, such as planning, problem-solving and mathematics skills. During cooperative pretend play, children will negotiate, assign roles to one another, and coordinate their behavior, which are important skills for cooperative problem solving (Ramani, 2005). Play activities, such as board games like Chutes and Ladders, can also promote children's numbers skills. These types of number board games are especially beneficial for improving the early mathematical abilities of children from low-income areas whose early number skills tend to trail behind that of their peers from middle-income backgrounds (Siegler & Ramani, 2008; Ramani & Siegler, 2008). Adults can promote learning during play by providing children with meaningful, age-appropriate play activities, such as number board games and blocks for building. While engaged with these activities, adults can ask children questions about numbers, patterns, measurement, and shapes to enhance their early mathematical and problem-solving skills.

In sum, children's everyday play can have an important role in children's development, and we can utilize these play activities to promote children's emotional, social, and cognitive growth.

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