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School is a place for learning and not for fun and games. Almost every elementary school student is familiar with this tired adage. Maybe they have heard it uttered by their parent or worse yet from one of their teachers. Extracurricular activities such as recess, gym, and organized sports have come under some undue scrutiny over the years. However, when closely analyzed the things that are learned during these activities are not only important for health reasons, but are also closely linked to the skills essential for a child's overall growth.

First and foremost, playtime is necessary for a child's health and well-being especially considering that America is a country gripped by an obesity epidemic. The CDC (Center for Disease Control) defines obesity as having an excess of body fat (Center for Disease Control, n.d.). This problem has impacted our youth quite seriously as childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years. More specifically, the percentage of children aged 6-11 years old in the United States who are considered obese increased from 7% in 1980 to nearly 20% in 2008 (Center for Disease Control, n.d.). These are scary statistics that only seem to be getting increasingly worse. The CDC makes clear that healthy lifestyle habits, including physical activity, can lower the risk of becoming obese (Center for Disease Control, n.d.). These habits start in the home, but they need to continue while the student is at school. This includes having access to opportunities like recess, gym, and sports. However, there is more to playtime than the health related benefits.

During a child's formative years, playtime can be important because it encourages creativity and imagination. Simply put children need to play in order to learn. This is quite evident when watching the way in which kindergarteners interact with one another. Children need to build with blocks, put together puzzles, play with paint, and use their imagination in role playing scenarios.

You may be asking yourselves how these activities could have any bearing on your child's academic performance, but you might be surprised to find out how important they really are. Children who play with blocks are taught about math and science. Working with puzzles stimulates the brain cells increasing their efficiency and capacity. During this process, the brain produces a chemical called dopamine that is responsible for learning and memory. When kids paint, they are developing an understanding of color and design. When cutting and drawing, they are enhancing the development needed for writing. Finally, imagination and creativity are bolstered through the role playing scenarios. These play sessions can teach children about social bonds while they learn to them to work well within a group.

These playtime activities are an important part of early childhood education, but as your child grows up, playtime continues to be a necessary part of his or her development. Today's children have a very structured classroom setting, which can result in lost opportunities for exploration and imagination. Recess, gym, and organized sports are an integral part of a well-balanced learning environment because "exercise could help ramp up the development of a child's brain (Richardson, 2009)." As research shows that, "children who engage in complex forms of socio-dramatic play have greater language skills than non-players, better social skills, more empathy, more imagination, and more of the subtle capacity to know what others mean (Almon, Miller, 2009, p. 2)." During playtime their behavior is conditioned. These sessions act as microcosms for the real world where the children are put into situations that force them to interact with one another in a constructive manner.

School is a place for shaping young minds and teaching students the skills that will prepare them for late in life. Playtime, including recess, gym, and organized sports, should fit into every school curriculum not only because it helps aid in student stress relief, but also because it is a crucial part

of their educational growth.

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