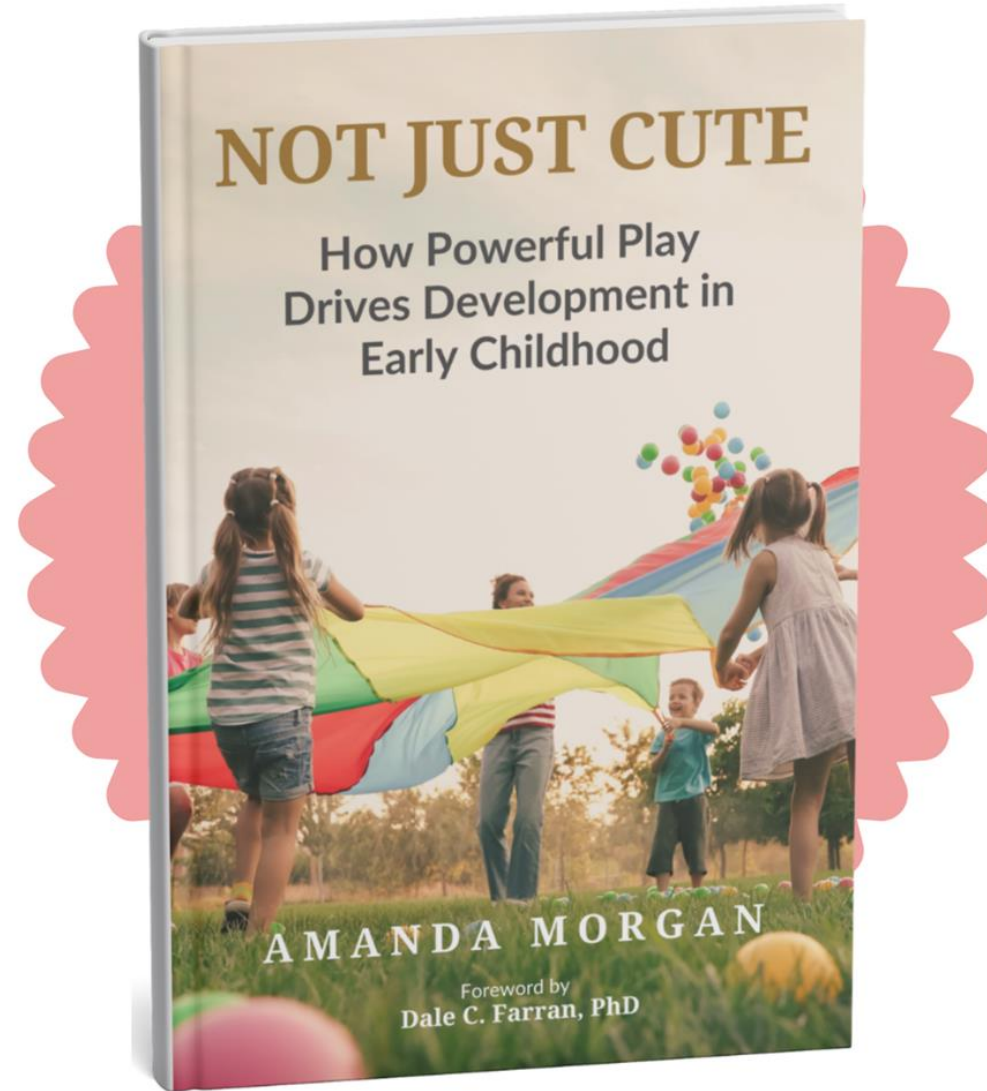




The Science of Play:

A framework for deep, joyful, and developmentally essential learning





Perry Preschool Project 1962-1967







Tennessee Voluntary PreK Program (TNVPK) “Effects of a statewide pre-kindergarten program on children’s achievement and behavior through sixth grade” (*Dev. Psychology*, 2022)

"It's like saying **spinach** is really good for you, but we can't afford spinach. But here, I've got this **Easter grass**. Maybe that will be just as good."

– Dale Farran

Vanderbilt University, Lead Researcher on TNVPR Study

(via “The Tennessee Pre-K Debate: Spinach Vs. Easter Grass.” NPR, 2015)



ANNENBERG
BROWN UNIVERSITY

EdWorkingPaper No. 23-885

Why are Preschool Programs Becoming Less Effective?

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University of Delaware

Margaret Burchinal
University of Virginia

Jade M. Jenkins
University of California,
Irvine

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Peisner-Feinberg
University of North
Carolina

High-quality preschool programs are heralded as effective policy solutions to promote low-income children's development and life-long wellbeing. Yet evaluations of recent preschool programs produce puzzling

Pre 2000 vs Post 2000

Good News:

Bad News:

Pre 2000 vs Post 2000

Good News:

Outcomes have improved
for all preschoolers.

Bad News:

Pre 2000 vs Post 2000

Good News:

Outcomes have improved
for all preschoolers.

Bad News:

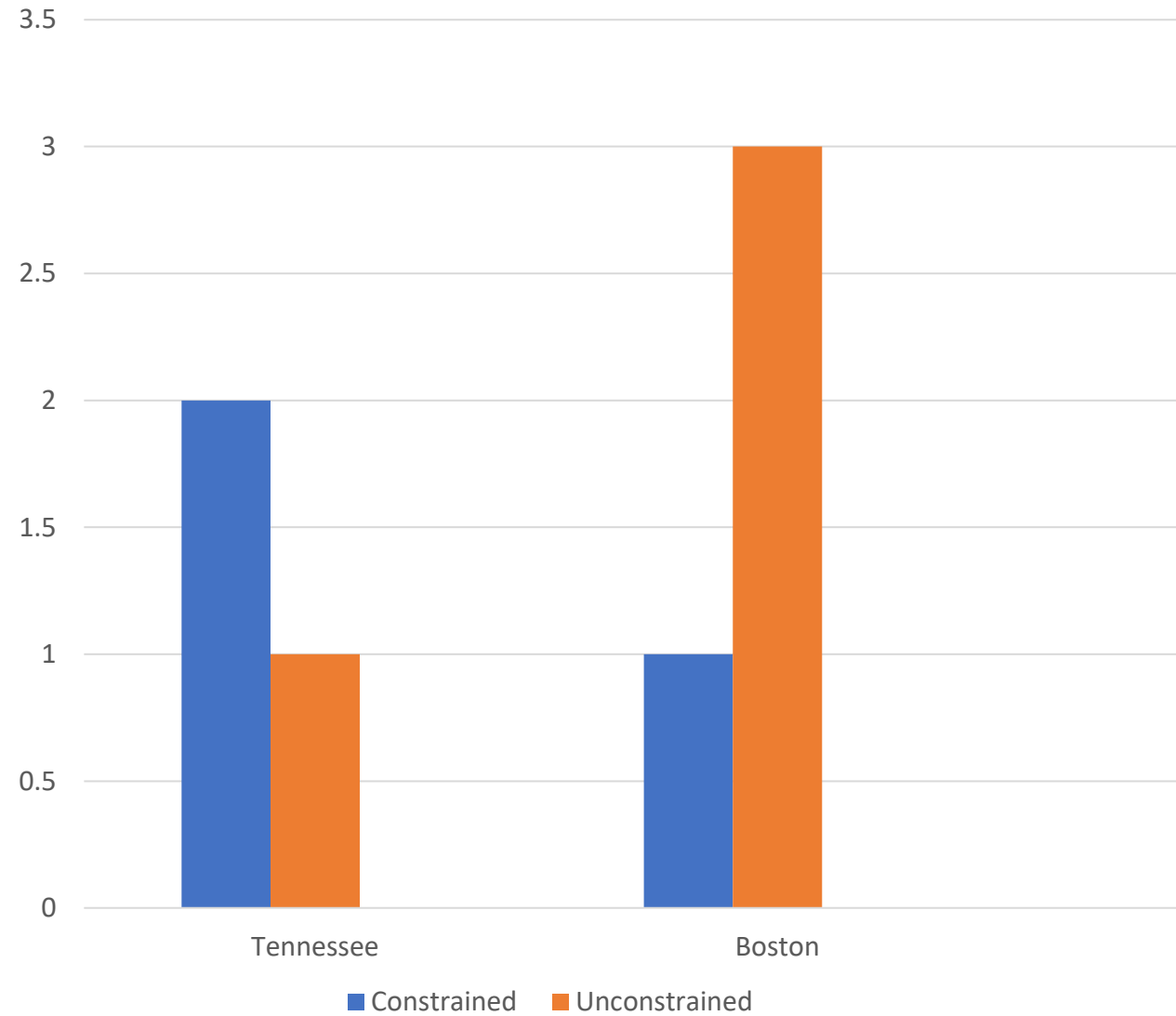
WHAT and HOW we teach
has changed.

Pre 2000 vs Post 2000

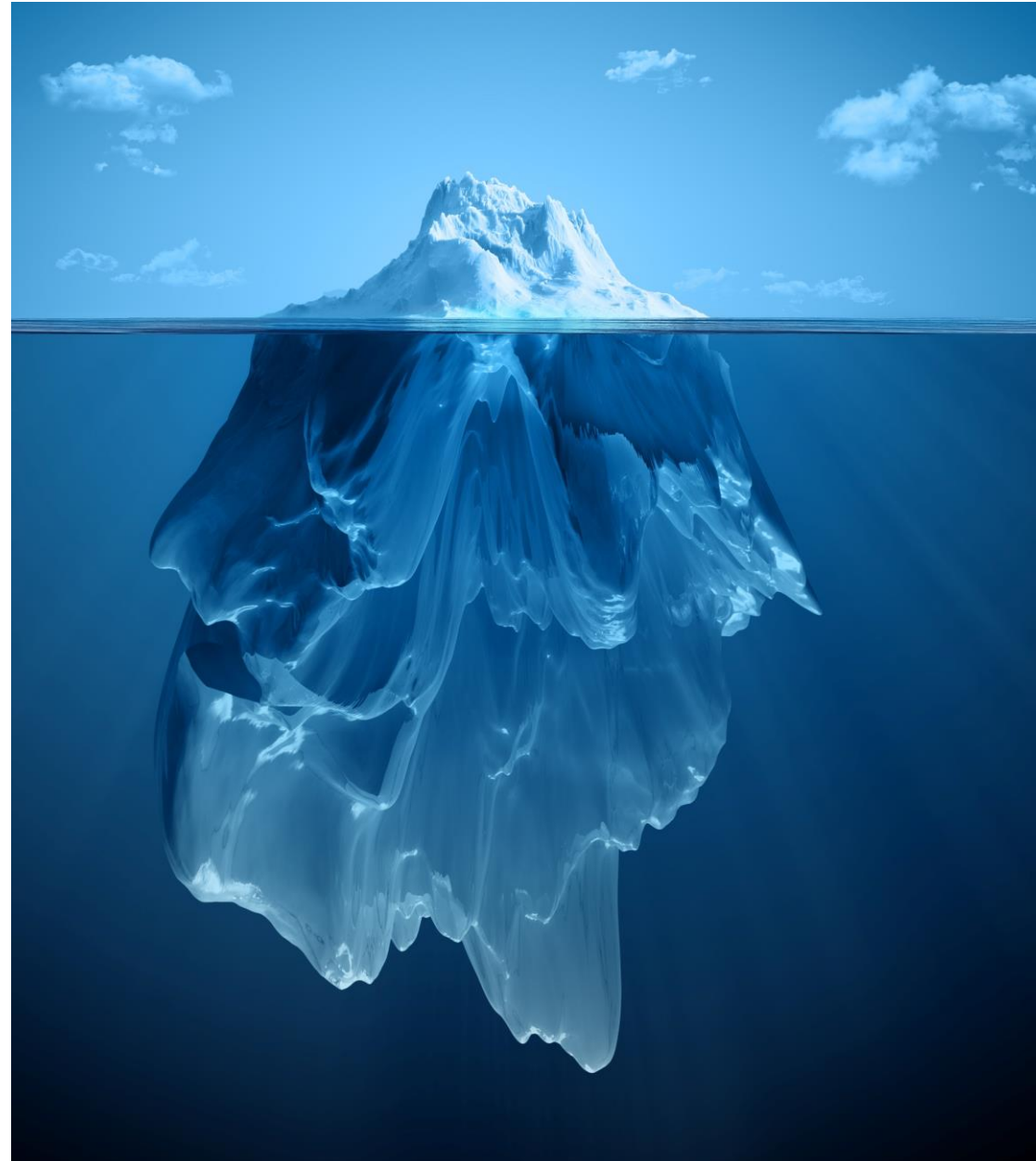
POLL:

What change do you think has most impacted this outcome?

Relative Focus



McCormick, Weiland, Hsueh, Pralica,
Weissman, Moffett, Snow, Sachs.
**“Is Skill Type the Key to the PreK
Fadeout Puzzle?... ”**
(*Child Development*, 2021)



Dale C. Farran, PhD
**“Early Developmental
Competencies or Why
PreK Does Not Have
Lasting Effects”**
(*DEY*, 2022)



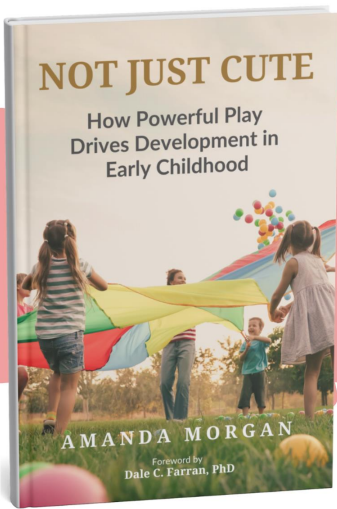


why
we
play

Why We Play

POLL:

What misconceptions do people have about why we play in ECE?



Play is...

...essential for **mental health** and wellness.

...ideal for promoting **learning** and **brain** development.

...full of golden opportunities for **soft skill** development.



Play is... ...essential for mental health and wellness.

Peter Gray

“The Decline of Play and the Rise of Psychopathology in Children and Adolescents”

(American Journal of Play, 2011)

Gray, Peter, et al.

“Decline in independent activity as a cause of decline in children’s mental well-being: Summary of the evidence.”

(The Journal of Pediatrics, Sept. 2023)





Play is... ...essential for mental health and wellness.



“Pervasive Passivity”





Play is... ...essential for mental health and wellness.



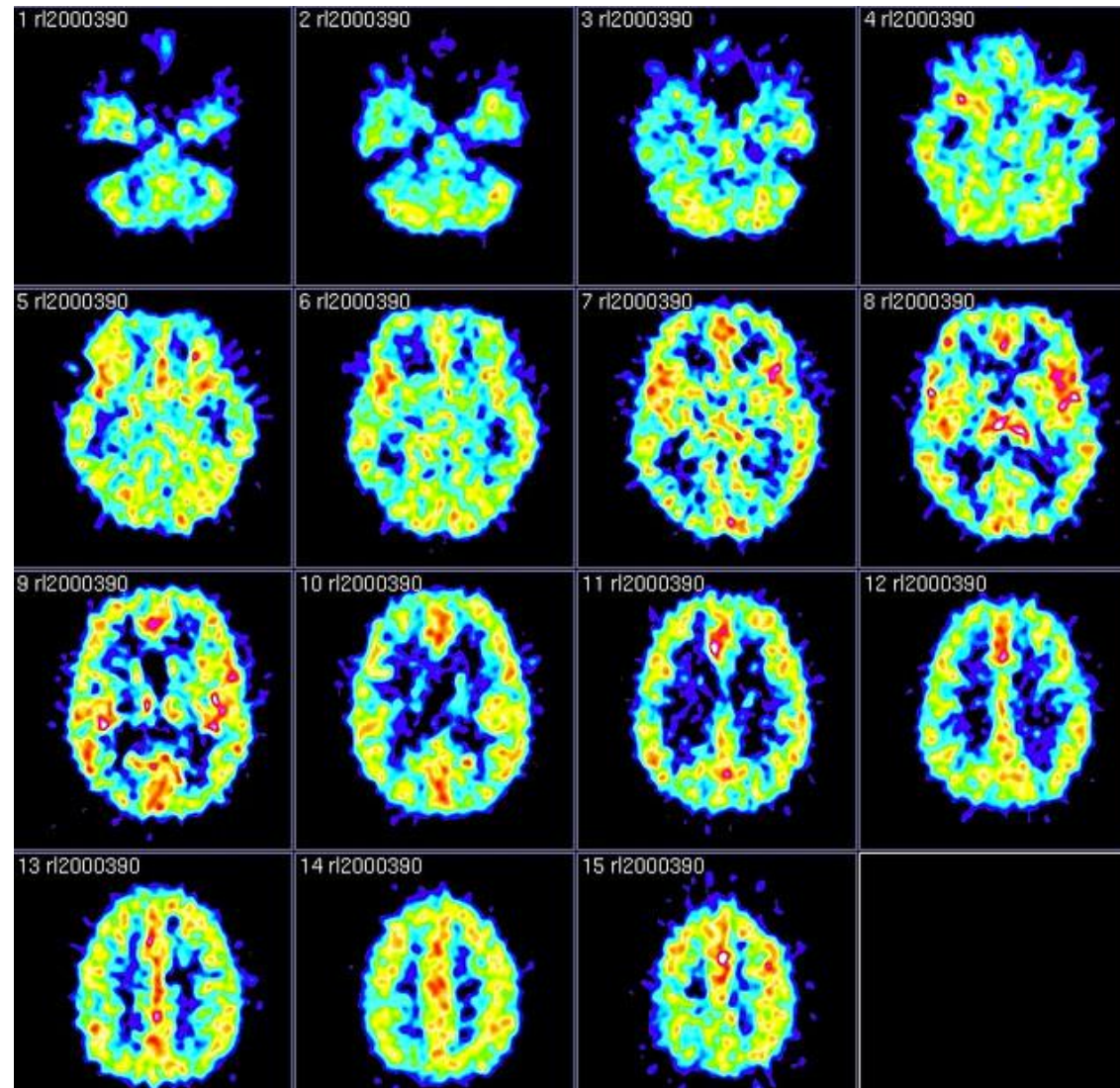
PLAY = Joy + Agency



Play is... ...ideal for promoting **learning** and **brain** development.



Play is... ...ideal for promoting **learning** and **brain** development.



"Neuroimaging research reveals the disturbances in the brain's learning circuits and neurotransmitters that accompany stressful learning environments...Joy and enthusiasm are absolutely essential for learning to happen -- literally, scientifically, as a matter of fact and research."

-Judy Willis MD (edutopia)



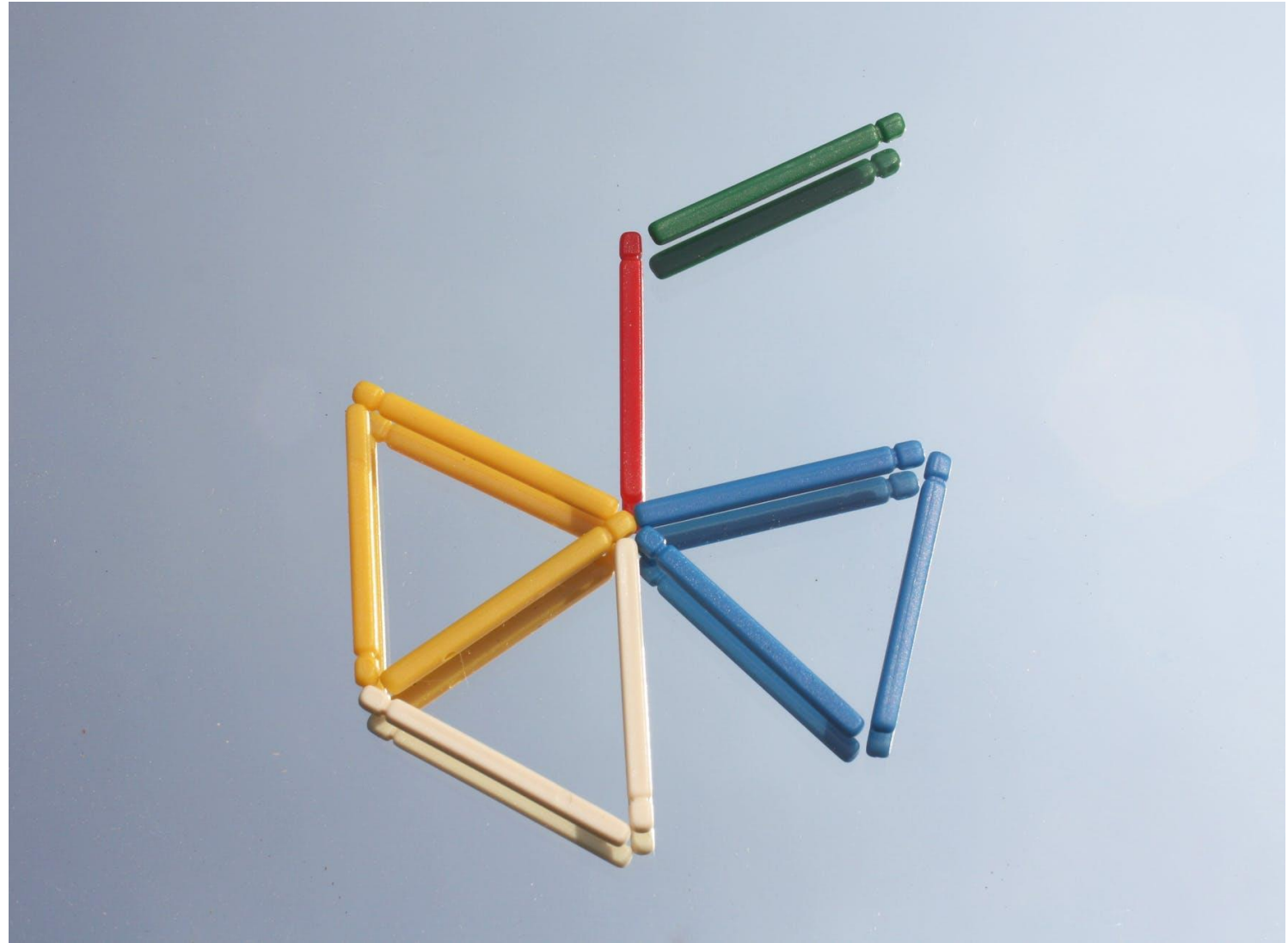
Play is... ...ideal for promoting **learning** and **brain** development.

“We want *RIGOR*.”



Play is... ...ideal for promoting **learning** and **brain** development.

Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek,
Newcombe, & Golinkoff
**"Taking Shape: Supporting
Preschoolers' Acquisition
of Geometric Knowledge
Through Guided Play."**
(*Child Development*, 2013)



PLAY = Joy + Agency

RIGOR = Joy + Agency

PLAY

is the method.

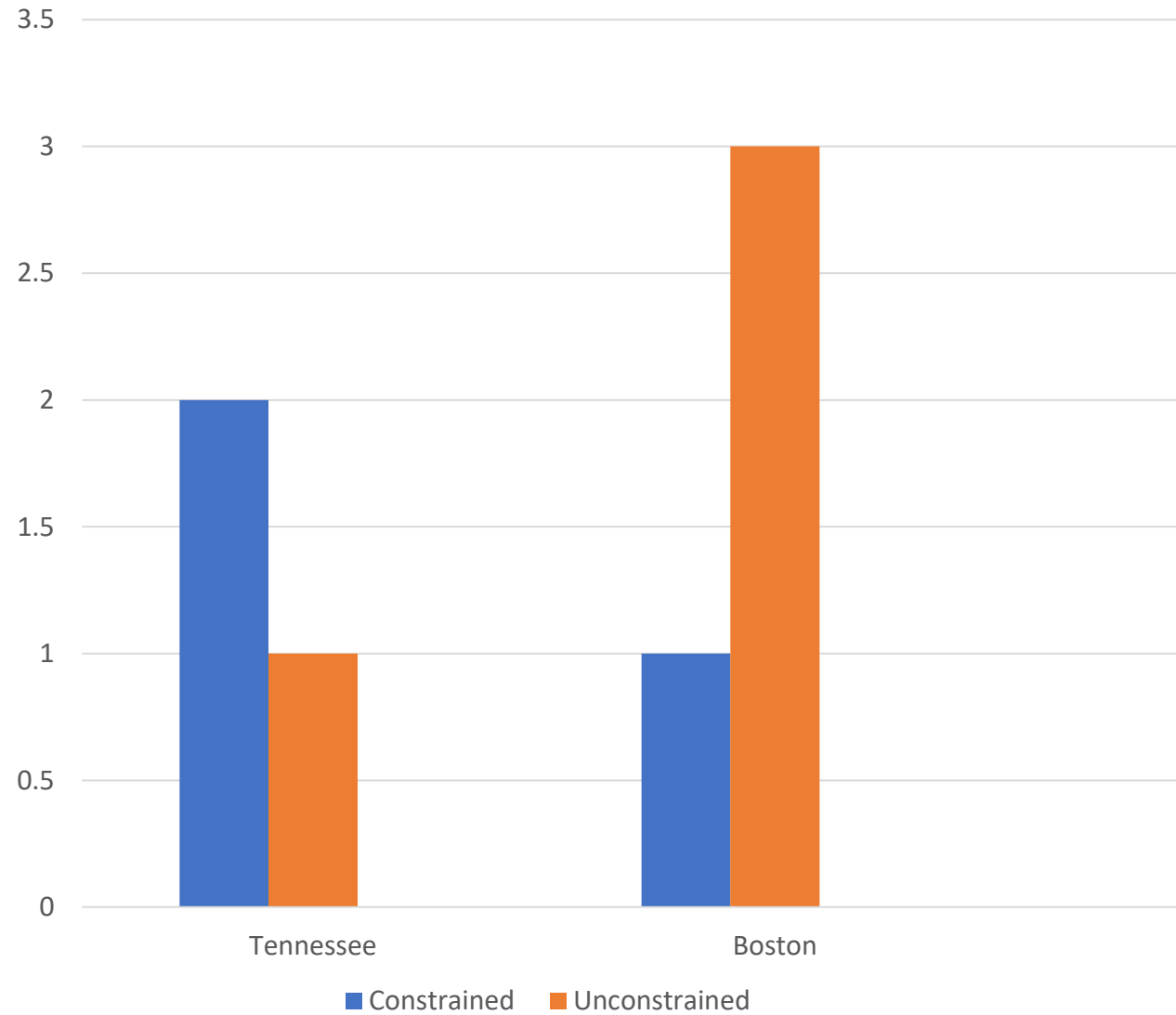
LEARNING

is the outcome.



Play is.....full of golden opportunities for soft skill development.

Relative Focus



McCormick, Weiland, Hsueh, Pralica,
Weissman, Moffett, Snow, Sachs.
**“Is Skill Type the Key to the PreK
Fadeout Puzzle?... ”**
(*Child Development*, 2021)

- Peer Problem Solving
- Understanding People's Feelings
- Shares Materials with Others
- Cooperates with Peers
- Is Helpful to Others
- Listens to Others' Point of View
- Can Share Ideas/Opinions Tactfully
- Is Friendly

Soft Skills

Jones, et al, "...The Relationship
Between Kindergarten Social
Competence and Future Wellness"
(*American Journal of Public Health*,
2015)



A Tale of Two Studies

Walter Gilliam

“Pre-kindergartners Left Behind: Expulsion Rates in State Prekindergarten Systems” (*FCD Policy Brief*, 2005)

(*NAEYC Presentation*, 2009)

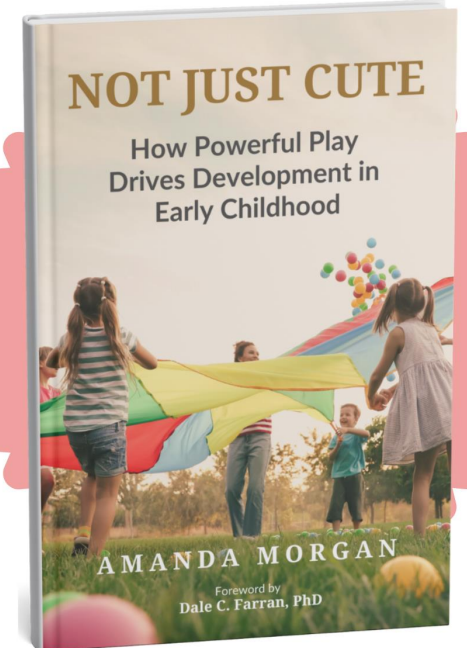
Bassok, Latham, Rorem

“Is Kindergarten the New First Grade?” (*AERA Open*, 2016)



“It seems that in a developmentally appropriate, play-based approach to early childhood education, children have the opportunity to practice and build soft skills.

In inappropriate environments they’re punished for not already having them.”



The Long-Term Effects of Universal PreK in Boston



“Sleeper Effect”

- No influence on short term measures like standardized test scores in elementary or middle school
- More likely to graduate high school, take the SAT, and go to college.
- Less likely to be suspended or incarcerated

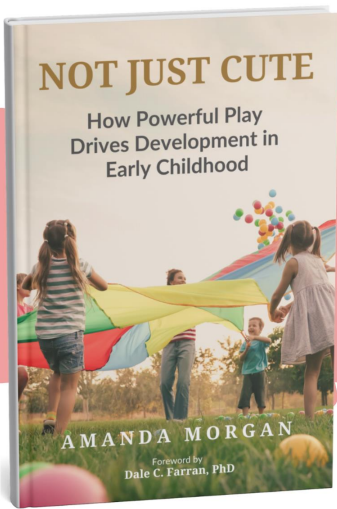
Gray-Lobe, Pathak, & Walters

The Long-Term Effects of Universal PreK in Boston”

(NBER, Policy Brief, 2021)

PLAY = Joy + Agency

SOFT SKILLS =
Joy + Agency



Play is...

...essential for **mental health** and wellness.

...ideal for promoting **learning** and **brain** development.

...full of golden opportunities for **soft skill** development.

Why do we need play?

Because we're human.



A portrait of Dr. Alison Gopnik, a woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing a red top and a necklace with green leaves and red berries. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera.

“(A) crucial factor that sets children apart from AIs is the way that they **learn socially**, from other people. AIs can learn from very **specific and controlled** kinds of human supervision. But human children learn from the people around them in much more **sophisticated** ways.”

-Dr. Alison Gopnik, Psychologist, UC Berkley

(via “The Ultimate Learning Machines” Wall Street Journal, 2019)

A portrait of Dr. Alison Gopnik, a woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing a red top and a necklace with green leaves and red berries. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera.

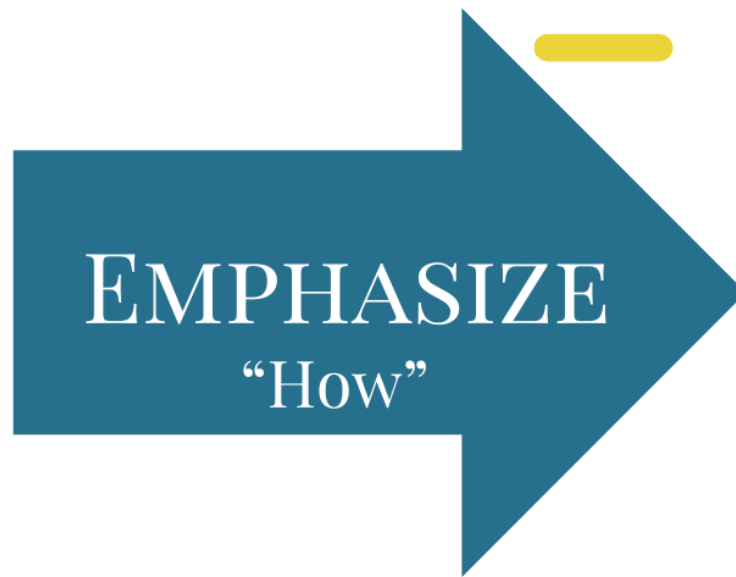
“Another secret of children’s learning...they are **insatiably curious** and **active experimenters**...Als have mostly been stuck inside their mainframes **passively absorbing data**... We’re collaborating with computer scientists...who try to make Als that are similarly **curious, active learners**.”

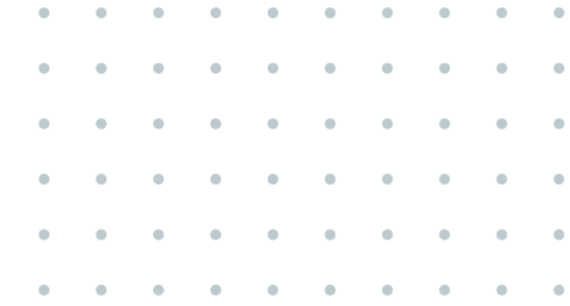
-Dr. Alison Gopnik, Psychologist, UC Berkley

(via “The Ultimate Learning Machines” Wall Street Journal, 2019)



Play is Not Just Cute.





- Play's Potential
- Dev. Objectives
- Child's Needs

EMPHASIZE

MAXIMIZE





RECOGNIZE

- Invitations
- Implementation
- Interactions

MAXIMIZE



“They knew that what we were doing was good for kids. But they didn’t necessarily have the **why**, or the **research**, or the **facts** to confidently **defend** it to others, and to **advocate** for it, and to **explain** it.

And to take it a little bit *deeper*.

I feel like my teachers see themselves more as **early childhood professionals.**”



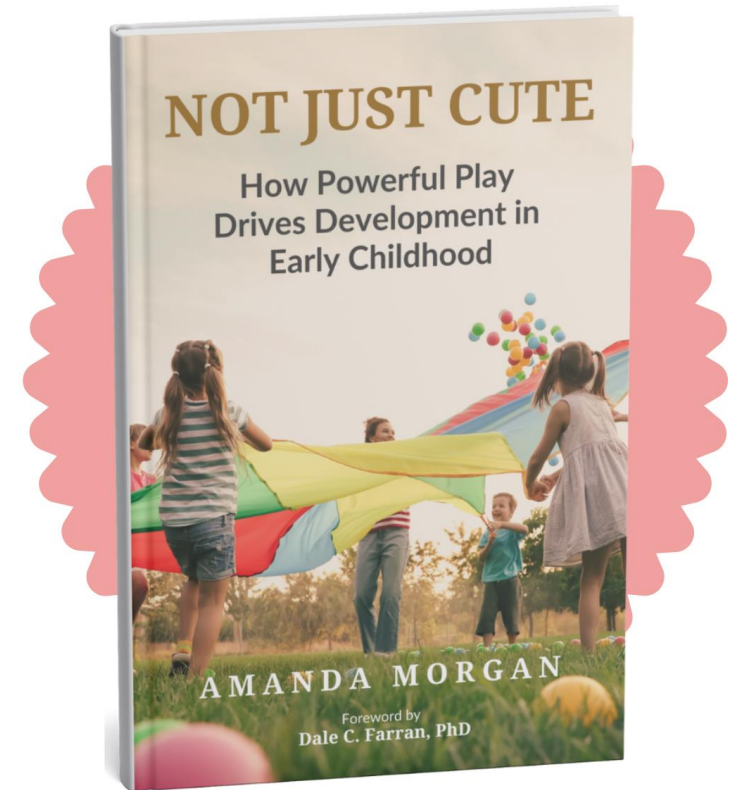


Take Your Team Deeper into PLAY:

Not Just Cute Book Study



notjustcute.com/book



Take Your Team Deeper into PLAY:



[notjustcute.com/powerful play](https://notjustcute.com/powerful%20play)

Take Your Team Deeper into PLAY:



notjustcute.com/speaking



PLAY is often talked
about as if it were a relief from
Serious Learning.

But for children, **play IS**
serious learning.

PLAY is really
the work of childhood.

