



THERAPY NEWS

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Creative Thinking and the Future

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While spending time in a waiting room, I happened to see a title in a parenting magazine - "Raise the Next Steve Jobs." Being a child therapist who spends many sessions with kids in tears over the pressures of achievement, I felt some concern for this article. Jobs, of Apple fame, was a creative genius who attained great success with his brilliant ideas. But giftedness is not the only factor in future success. We know our culture promotes hard work and long hours as a way to do well in life. Most parents want their child to be successful, but often use superior academics as a sole measure of assurance for a winning future. Parents start children early with their high expectations for achievement. Kids are exposed to a multitude of extra curricular activities and advanced programs that require a heavy workload. I have personally experienced children falling asleep in their

after-school sessions due to exhaustion. There are other key pieces that help people flourish in life: social and emotional development, interest in various perspectives, self-control, independent thinking, as well as persistence. The way to cultivate these traits may be during 'down time' interacting with friends and family. Allowing kids space to experiment, sans the micro-management from an adult, to brainstorm or play with concepts. It is said that Jobs also played with ideas by breaking his staff into small groups to just 'fool around' with concepts. This type of creative thinking does require a lighthearted approach. Through the safe psychological distance of play, solutions to serious problems can be devised more fruitfully. These creative-thought groups did put forth a good effort, but with a *balance* between work



"Who has time to play these days? Life is pretty darned serious. But play is essential for both kids and grown-ups to stay healthy, creative and productive."

• *Stuart Brown, Psychiatrist and author of "Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination and Invigorates the Soul"*

and play. Free play can build right-brained abilities to create innovative products to help the world. Our society may not prosper without an imaginative labor force to carry them into the future. As for the 'genius mania,' where it is suggested one should raise the next Steve Jobs, a whiz-kid will not be created through a purely academic path.



Eight Reasons Play Helps One to be Healthy, Happy and Productive

1. **Play has been scientifically proven to be good for the brain.**
2. **Sometimes the best way to learn a complex subject is to play with it.**
3. **Play helps solve BIG problems.**
4. **Kids do better academically when they have recess.**
5. **Play teaches us how to use our imaginations.**
6. **Playing at work isn't just useful; it's essential.**
7. **Rough-and-tumble play teaches us how to cooperate and play fair.**
8. **Play helps us learn to be friends.**



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Resources

"The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development"

<http://www2.aap.org/pressroom/play-public.htm>

"The Decline of Play and the Rise of Psychopathology in Children and Adolescents"

<http://www.journalofplay.org/sites/www.journalofplay.org/files/pdf-articles/3-4-article-gray-decline-of-play.pdf>

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Springtime is Coming!

Reduced Free Time and Potential Effects

Despite the numerous benefits that result from play, for both children and parents, time for free play has been markedly reduced for kids. Currently, school-children are given less free time and physical outlets at school. Many school districts reacted to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001³⁷ by reducing recess time, the arts and physical education to focus on reading and math. This change may have repercussions on children's ability to store new information, as kids' cognitive capacity is enhanced by specific changes in daily activity. A physical education class may not offer the same benefits as the free play of recess. Fewer kids have less time for exploratory play, as they are hurried to adapt to adult roles and prepare for their future at earlier ages. Caregivers can receive advertised messages that *good* parents expose their children to every opportunity to excel, buy an over-abundance of enrichment tools and make sure the kids partake in a wide variety of activities. As a result, much of parent-child time is spent organizing special activities and hauling children between all those varied interests. This is tough on the entire family and cuts down on relaxed family time where kids can learn important life lessons. The family home can serve as a

stimulating environment where kids can learn through casual interactions. Reading together, discussing observations and opinions, as well as learning the art of good communication through teachable daily moments can advance creative thinking. This type of interaction is important for healthy emotional and social development. The question to be considered may be, "at what point is a young person 'overscheduled' to their emotional or developmental detriment?" Most highly-scheduled children are thriving, but some kids are reacting to the pressures to achieve with anxiety and signs of stress. Free time, child-driven and creative play can offer *protective benefits* against the effects of stress. Consider the evidence that child and adolescent depression is on the rise through the college years (please take time to read important information in the linked reports provided above).

It is vital that parents and our culture consider the delicate balance between preparing for a bright future and living fully in the present. The concepts of play, free time, child-centered activities and rich parent-child interactions must be safeguarded to ensure balance in children's lives for their optimal healthy development.