

Submitter: Scott Hays
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB948

Honorable Members of Senate Committee on Education

I am a retired public school teacher who spent twenty years teaching in a two-room, K-8 necessary small school in California. I taught all subjects in the upper grade classroom (4-8), but the nature of the school put me in contact (direct and indirect) with students in the primary classroom on a daily basis. I have extensive practical experience with student learning and various methodologies to support it across those 9 grade levels. On retirement, I moved to Oregon and worked in the Education Department at the Oregon Zoo, overseeing and planning professional development for summer camp teachers (grades K-8), among other duties. I also served as Vice-Chair of both the Democratic Party of Oregon and Clackamas County Democratic Party Education Caucus. I believe I am qualified to comment on the importance and value of play-based learning.

At Coffee Creek School, the primary teacher (also principal and superintendent of the district) and I implemented play-based learning before it was a "thing." We had no mentors, we had no guidelines, and we had no training. We simply recognized that kids (like adults) need an occasional break from academic rigor, but those "breaks" do not have to exist only as empty or meaningless activity. We easily incorporated what is now called "Guided Play" regularly into our lesson plans -- role playing, art, dance, games, hands-on exploration (individually or in groups), and more. All served to help children internalize the skills and concepts we were teaching. I suspect many of those activities had greater impact on student learning than textbook/lecture approaches ... and even today, I have students verifying this suspicion in my regular contact with them.

"Free Play" learning was a thing we just sort of "did." In science and reading, it was pretty easy to set a time for students to freely explore (again, independently or in groups) topics, concepts, or questions we wanted them to explore. It never amazed me just what kinds of questions (and, ultimately, answers) the kids could come up with when allowed time and freedom to "play."

Luckily, for today's teachers, there are resources available to guide practice. No one, today, has to experiment to find best practices. In my professional opinion, providing time for teachers to include this method of instruction in their day will help students better understand the concepts and utilize the skills taught in the rest of the day