

Play-based Learning in the Early Grades

I am 5

I'm a risk taker and mess maker.

I'm a confident doer of exciting things. I'm not built for desk sitting. My busy brain craves action and novelty.

I'm not as grownup as some people think—I still need to play, move, and explore.

(Don't Rush My Childhood)



Play-based Learning in the Early Grades

Peggy Ondera U-46 Director of Early Learner Initiatives
Dr. Julie Kallenbach Educational Consultant

Elgin U-46 Journey

Benefits of Play-based Learning

Resources

Questions

State and Local Context

- Currently 79% of districts in Illinois offer FDK
- Elgin U-46 moving to FDK in 16-17



U-46 Context



- 2700 Kindergarten students
- 250 students in Full Day K Intervention model
- 80 students in Extended Day K (tuition-based)
- 2400 students in half-day program

U-46 Process

- Committee of 23 PK, K, 1st teachers
- Balance of areas of the district and language expertise
- Met weekly from November to January
- Wrote a Framework Document

U-46 Full-Day Kindergarten Framework



U-46 FDK Framework

- Is based on NAEYC Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice and U-46 Guiding Principles
- Is aligned to state standards and the domains of Danielson's Framework for Teaching
- Utilizes U-46 curricular resources
- Defines critical attributes of play

Effective Teaching Practices

- Creating a caring community of learners
- Teaching to enhance development and learning
- Planning curriculum to achieve important goals
- Assessing children's development and learning
- Establishing reciprocal relationships with families

(Lauer, 2011)

Framework includes sample schedules, examples, charts, photos, videos and high-quality kindergarten practices.

The Block Center

Description of Activities

In the block center, students use social skills, math, writing, science and visual spatial skills. This center allows for self-regulation to expand as children share materials and ideas. Children recreate their world with various materials and role-play with small theme-based manipulatives. Critical thinking and problem solving are constantly evident here.



Materials

- At least three types of blocks; Wooden unit blocks, cardboard bricks, Duplos,
- Magnetic building sticks
- A large space for building
- Building plans, blueprints
- Clip boards
- Pens, pencils, crayons and paper
- Cars, trucks, people and animal figures
- Construction hats and shirts
- Books about construction and transportation



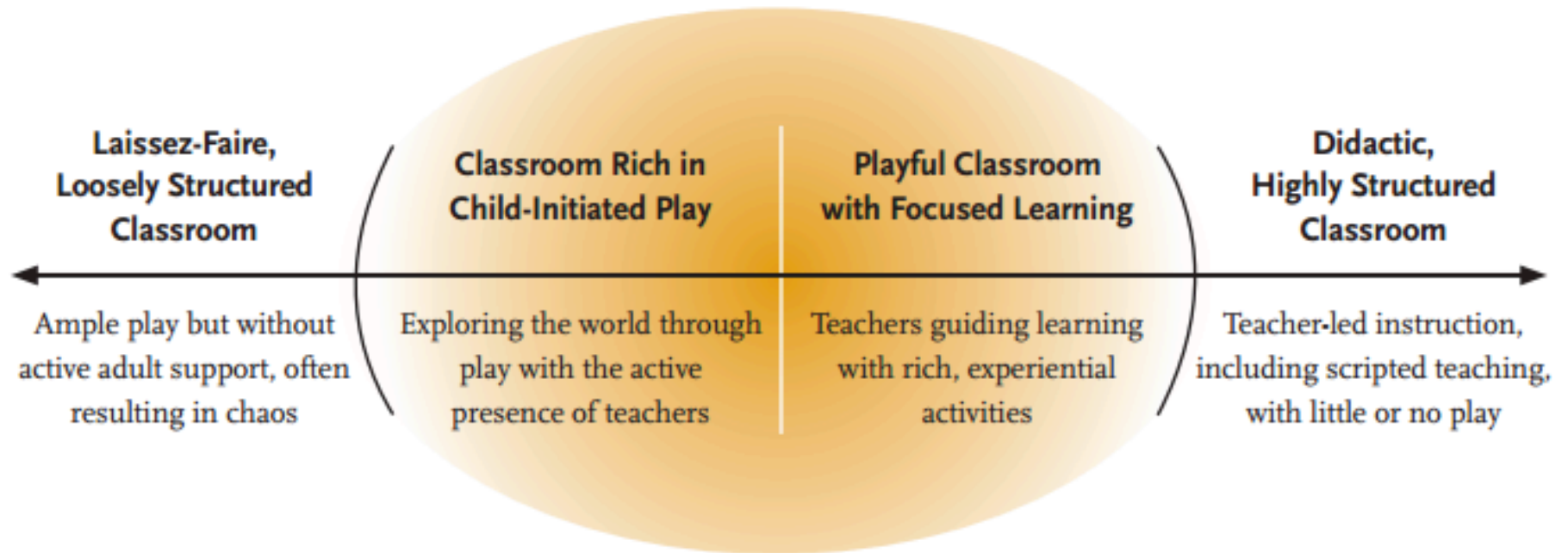
Research on Play-based Kindergarten

Children in play-based kindergartens have a double advantage over those who are denied play: they end up equally good or better at reading and other intellectual skills, and they are more likely to become well-adjusted healthy people.

Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School, 2009

Classroom Structure

THE KINDERGARTEN CONTINUUM



Ideal Classroom

- Children are actively engaged, playing and working with materials and other children.
- Children have access to materials. They are not all doing the same thing at the same time.
- Teacher works with individuals, small group , and whole group at times. There is a balance of activities.
- Children's original artwork and writing is displayed.
- Academic content is embedded in meaningful everyday experiences.



Ideal Classroom



- Children work on projects and have time to play and explore for long periods of time.
- Children have time to play outside every day, weather permitting.
- Teachers read to children throughout the day.
- Curriculum is adapted to the needs of the students.
- Children and their parents look forward to school.

(NAEYC, Release #12)

KIDS assessment



- KIDS (2015) is a child observation, best practice assessment instrument that informs curriculum.
- Supports teachers in observing, documenting, and reflecting on children's learning, development
- Aligned to state standards
- Is the only ISBE required assessment for kindergarten.
- Replaces the U-46 report card

8 Days of Professional Development

- Developmentally Appropriate Practices
 - Play-based learning
 - KIDS assessment
 - First 20 Days: Environment, Schedule, Centers
 - Social emotional learning: Second Step
 - Science: U-46 Curriculum & National Geographic
 - Balanced Literacy Framework and Writing Pathways
 - Math: Eureka

The background features a vertical gradient from dark blue at the top to green at the bottom. Overlaid on this are numerous overlapping circles of varying sizes and opacities, some appearing as solid shapes and others as thin outlines.

Benefits of Play-based Learning

The Importance of Play

“Preschool and kindergarten children benefit from play and playful learning, from choosing their own activities, and from individual and small group pursuits rather than whole group ones.”

Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Laura E. Berk, and Dorothy G. Singer, *A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool: Presenting the Evidence* (Oxford University Press, 2009)

The Importance of Play

“ Play is essential to development... Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development”

(American Academy of Pediatrics clinical report, 2011)



let them
choose

let them be
creative

let them
be
curious

let them
take
risks

let them
connect
with
others



"It is a happy
talent to know
how to play."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Play is our brain's
favorite way of
learning."

Dianne Ackerman

"Play is the highest
form of research."

Albert Einstein



Characteristics of Play

- Psychologists have identified five characteristics of play (Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983; Gray, 2011)
 - Play is intrinsically motivated, self-chosen, self-directed, and, players are always free to quit
 - Play must be freely chosen, is an activity in which means are more valued than ends
 - Play must be pleasurable, guided by mental rules
 - Play is nonliteral
 - Play is actively engaged in by the player.

Types of Play

- Large motor
- Small motor
- Mastery
- Rules-based
- Make-believe

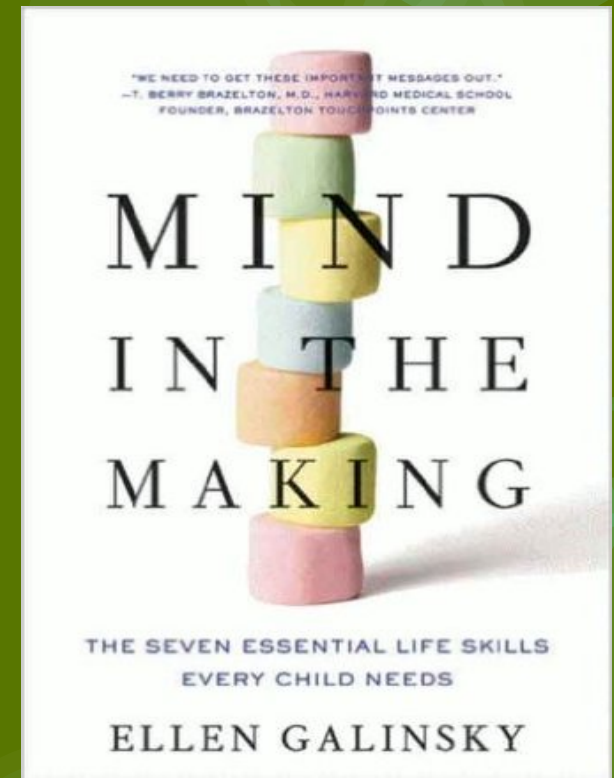


- Symbolic
- Sensory
- Playing with the arts
- Language
- Construction



Mind in the Making

- In her book, *The Mind in the Making* (2010) author and researcher Ellen Galinsky defines seven essential skills that children need to develop.
 - Focus and Self Control
 - Perspective Taking
 - Communicating
 - Making Connections
 - Critical Thinking
 - Taking on Challenges
 - Self-directed, Engaged Learning



Socio-dramatic Play

Socio-dramatic play involves the verbal interaction of two or more children as they engage in imitative and make-believe play.

Smilansky and Shefatya (1990)

Socio-dramatic Play

There is a developmental sequence in children's symbolic thinking that begins with oral language, is then demonstrated in symbolic play, and culminates in the ability to use written language.

Vygotsky (1978)

Kindergarten



TCR 18:19.51:

naeyc.org



Developmentally
Appropriate Practice:
Focus on Children in
First, Second,
and Third Grades

Carol Copple, Sue Bredekamp,
Derry Koralek, and Kathy Charner, editors

naeyc

Children in Primary Grades

- Development does not occur in neat compartments; progress in one developmental domain influences progress in other domains
- Delight in their new intellectual, social and physical prowess
- Are increasingly aware of how they compare to peers
- Care a great deal about social approval
- Learn in uneven, episodic ways
- Cannot always perform on demand
- Can become easily discouraged

Children in Primary Grades Prosper with...

- Teachers who focus on each child holistically
- Integrated learning
- A blend of child-guided and teacher-guided activities
- Concrete experiences
- Exploration of topics of interest to them
- Teachers who intentionally plan experiences to build or reignite positive approaches to learning
- Authentic assessment

1st Grade Card Shop

- Sharing experiences about greeting cards
- Discussions about types of cards
- Making signs and greeting cards
- Adding drawings and designs: shapes, patterns
- Pricing: thinking and collaborating
- Developing the Scenario: planning and organizing
- Pretend play: negotiating roles, turn-taking, self-regulation
- Sales: addition and subtraction problems

Rigor

Play scenarios address multiple standards

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.1](#)

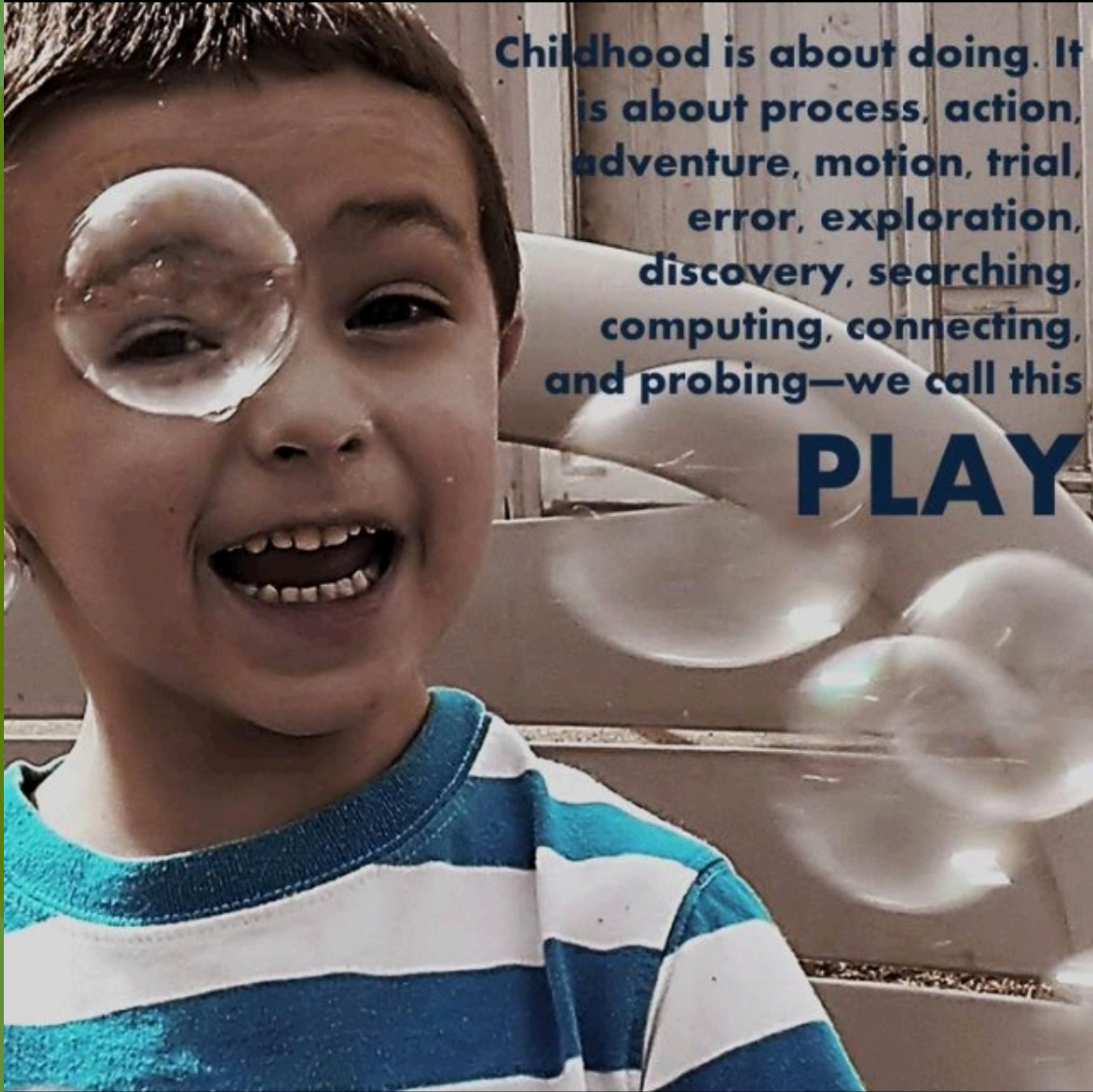
Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *grade 1 topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.6](#)

With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

Rigor

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.1](#)
[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.5](#)
Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.
- [CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.1.OA.C.6](#)
Add and subtract within 20, demonstrating fluency for addition and subtraction within 10.
- [Social and Emotional Standards for Illinois Early Grades 1B.1a.](#)
Identify one's likes and dislikes, needs and wants, strengths and challenges.

A young boy with dark hair and a wide smile has a large, clear bubble on his right eye. He is wearing a blue and white striped shirt. In the background, several other bubbles are floating in the air. The scene is set against a light-colored wall.

Childhood is about doing. It is about process, action, adventure, motion, trial, error, exploration, discovery, searching, computing, connecting, and probing—we call this

PLAY

STUDY FROM 1973 ON 2ND GRADERS

- . Two classes of 48 second graders
- . Dramatic play one day per week for social studies
- . Model community designed and constructed by students
- . Greater gains in factual knowledge, productive thinking,
- . Positive effect on behavior in the classrooms

Playful Experiences are Learning Experiences

Most play involves exploration, which is an act of investigation.

= NGS STANDARDS

Play is a gateway to a state of flow.

= ENGAGEMENT

Evidence exists that play is a tutorial for coping with real life challenges.

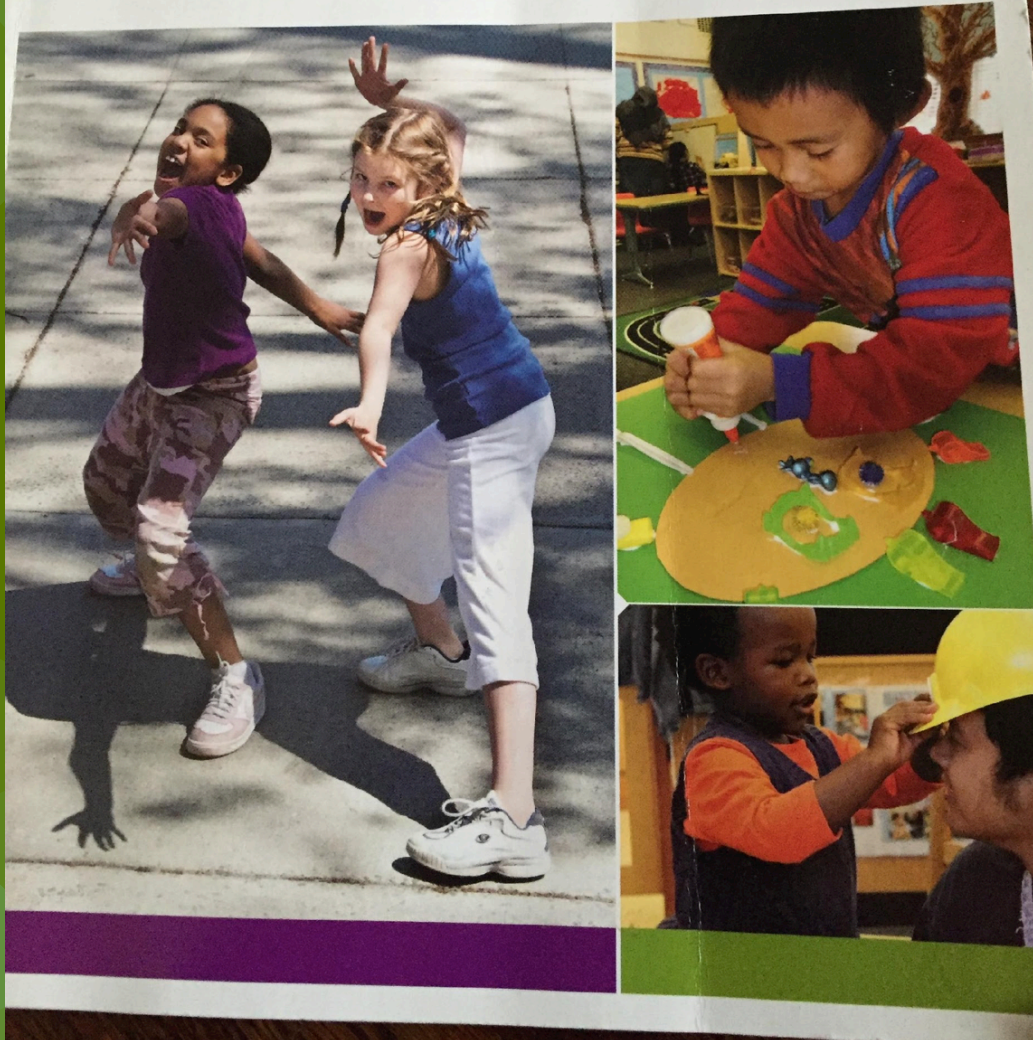
= SOCIAL EMOTIONAL

Spotlight on Young Children

naeyc

Holly Bohart, Kathy Charner,
and Derry Koralek, editors

Exploring Play





Play for All Children: Access to Quality Play Experiences as a Social Justice Issue

We believe, as do developmental theorists (Piaget 1976; Vygotsky 1980), play therapists (Kestly 2014), and researchers (Gray 2013) that play is essential to a child's cognitive, physical, emotional development. In fact, that the provision of play is a way to ensure that all children have equal opportunities to play. These opportunities are essential to the development of all children.

There are three major ways, especially for children whose families have low incomes. Research, including our own (see Jarrett 2013), shows that compared with children who attend schools and live in neighborhoods with greater resources, children in poverty and children from racial/ethnic represented groups have 1) less access to school playgrounds, 2) less access to daily classroom schedules, and 3) more structured and less playful learning experiences in early age. These experiences are detrimental to the development of all children.

Children from Poverty and from Racially Underrepresented Groups:

- Have lower quality playgrounds
- Have less time in the schedule for recess
- Have more structured instruction and less playful learning in school from an early age

Jarrett & Waite-Stupiansky, 2009

Implications

- Provide sufficient time in Birth to Third Grade for child-initiated activities:
- Choice embedded
- Purposeful and intentional planning to address standards
- Teacher facilitation of learning through scaffolding and open-ended questioning



Next Steps

- Look at other frameworks for 1st, 2nd?
- Teachers analyzing their day to look for child-initiated learning?
- Integrated PD (science projects, math centers, etc,?)
- Book study (Power of Observation, Powerful Interactions, etc.)

Resources

British Columbia Ministry of Education, Full Day Kindergarten Program Guide. Retrieved online <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/teach/kindergarten>

Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Office of Early Learning. Washington State Full Day Kindergarten Guide (Public Draft). August, 2015. Retrieved at <http://www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/pubdocs/WAFull-dayKGuide-PublicReviewDraft.pdf>

References

- Bodrova, E. & D. J. Leong. 2007. *Tools of the mind: The Vygotskian approach to early childhood education*. (2nd ed). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R.M., Berk, L. E. and Singer, D. G. 2009. *A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool: Presenting the Evidence*. Oxford University Press.
- Inzlicht M, Schmeichel BJ, and Macrae CN. 2014. Why self-control seems (but may not be) limited. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2013.12>
- Jarrett, O., & Waite-Stupiansky, S. 2009. Recess: It's indispensable! *On Our Minds, Young Children* 64 (5): 66-68.
- McKinney, J.D. and Golden, L. Social Studies Dramatic Play with Elementary School Children. *The Journal of Educational Research*. Vol. 67, No. 4 (Dec., 1973), pp. 172-176.
- Miller, E., & J. Almon. 2009. *Crisis in the kindergarten: Why children need to play in school*. College Park, MD: Alliance for Childhood.
- Sutherland SL and Friedman O. 2013. Just pretending can be really learning: children use pretend play as a source for acquiring generic knowledge. *Dev Psychol*. 49(9):1660-8.



Questions?