

LEARNING TO  
PLAY  
THROUGH THE  
STAGES OF  
PLAY



DAWN BAKER

39+ years  
teaching and  
directing  
Married 43  
years



I love my family,  
ART and SCIENCE  
and my cat GIBBS



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# OBJECTIVES

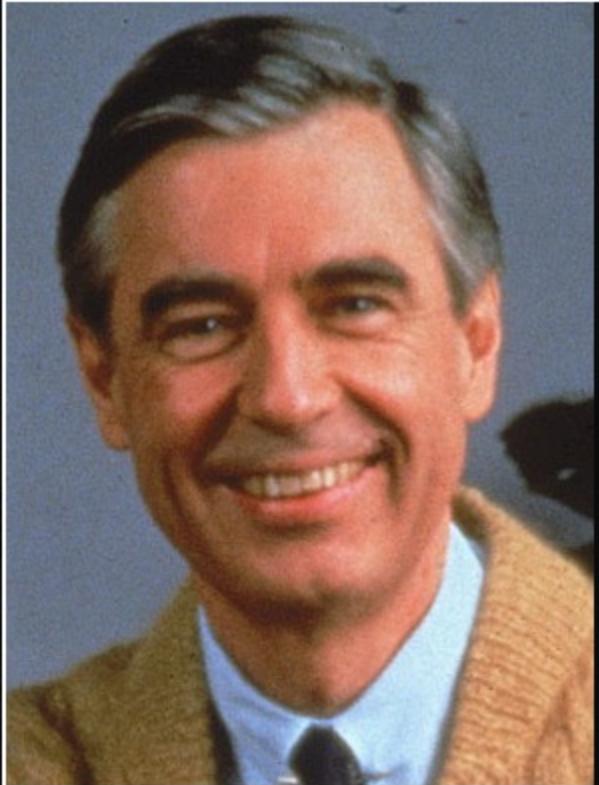
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- Review the stages of play for children ages 0-5years and discuss how we can help children as they move through the stages of play
- Share activities that will support each stage of play
- Discuss helping children as they begin to transition from one stage to the next
- Investigate how to use various play stages to help with our assessment/parent conference
- Creating a safe play environment for all children
- Use the stages of play to help us set up our classroom

LET'S JUST  
START TO  
THINK ABOUT  
PLAY





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.

— *Fred Rogers* —

AZ QUOTES



Dr. David Stuart, author of the book Play, states on page 60 of the book-

"Play is a state of mind that one has when absorbed in an activity that provides enjoyment and a suspension of time. And play is self-motivated so you want to do it again and again."



# The 6 Stages of Play



Unoccupied Play 0-3 months  
Solitary Play Birth-2ish  
Spectator/onlooker Play 2+  
Parallel Play 2 years-3ish  
Associative Play 3-4 years  
Cooperative Play 4+

A working knowledge of the stages of play can  
Support teachers in maintaining an Age Appropriate  
and  
DAP classroom

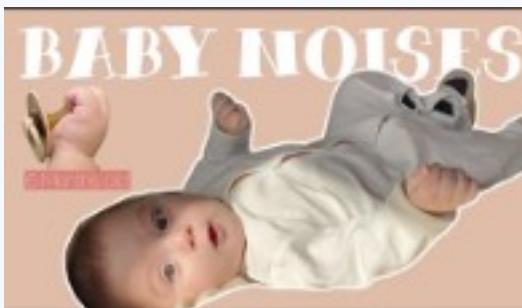
- Classroom setup
  - Lesson planning
  - Activity Choices/manipulatives
  - Social/Emotional Expectations
  - Physical Expectations
  - Language opportunities
  - Classroom management
  - A peaceful and joyful classroom
- Filled with successful children



DAP-Developmentally Appropriate Practice

## Unoccupied Play 0-3months

- Body moves a lot
- Eyes are moving
- Makes beautiful baby sounds
- Responds to sound
- Making connection between smells/touch and sound
- Motor driven
- Sensory driven
- Discovering so much about their body.
- Begins to find fingers and toes
- Responds to smells



## Property Laws of a Toddler



1. If I like it, it's MINE
2. If it's in my hand, it's MINE
3. If I can take it from you, it's MINE
4. If I had it a little while ago, it's MINE
5. IF it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way
6. If I'm doing or building something, all of the pieces are MINE
7. If it looks like mine, it's MINE
8. If I saw it first, it's MINE
9. If you are playing with something and you put it down, it automatically becomes MINE
10. If it's broken, it's YOURS.

## Solitary Play

### Birth-Toddler/2 years old

- Plays alone or with an adult
- Not interested in what others are doing
- Sometimes more about the toy itself (boxes)
- Lots of sounds begin and then words
- Expresses emotions
- Usually very sensory driven
- Children have very little special sense
- Like to snatch things from others
- Moves quickly from thing to thing
- Dumps and moves
- Can only clean up a little but gets better with time and practice
- Can become very engrossed in something
- Doesn't always like to transition from activity to activity



## Spectator/Onlooker 2+

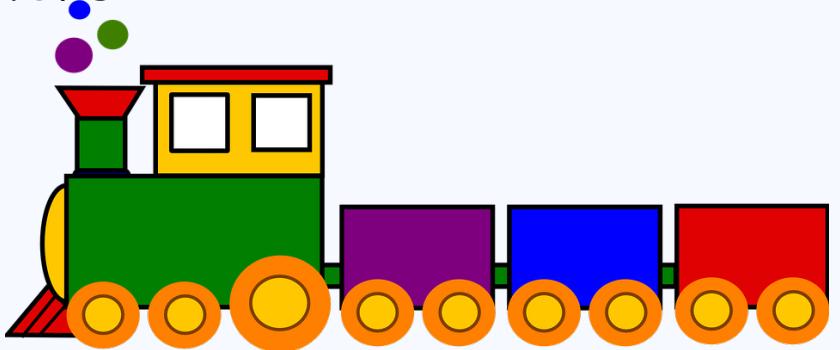
- Prefers to watch rather than engage
- Sometimes moves around the room to view what is happening
- Sometimes will engage with an adult
- Sometimes will engage with a toy but keeps eyes on the room
- Sometimes looks from behind something
- Can sometimes be thought to be shy (or they are shy)



Tell me what you see?

## Parallel Play 2 years-3ish

- Will sit next to another child and play with a different toy
- May share a toy such as a doll house, but has no real interaction with the other child.
- Might do something related to what everyone else is doing, but it is their story alone
- May build using fantasy and story telling
- ☺sometimes seem as if they are talking to themselves
- They have no direct involvement with others





What do you see?

## Associative Play 3-4 years (maybe even 5)

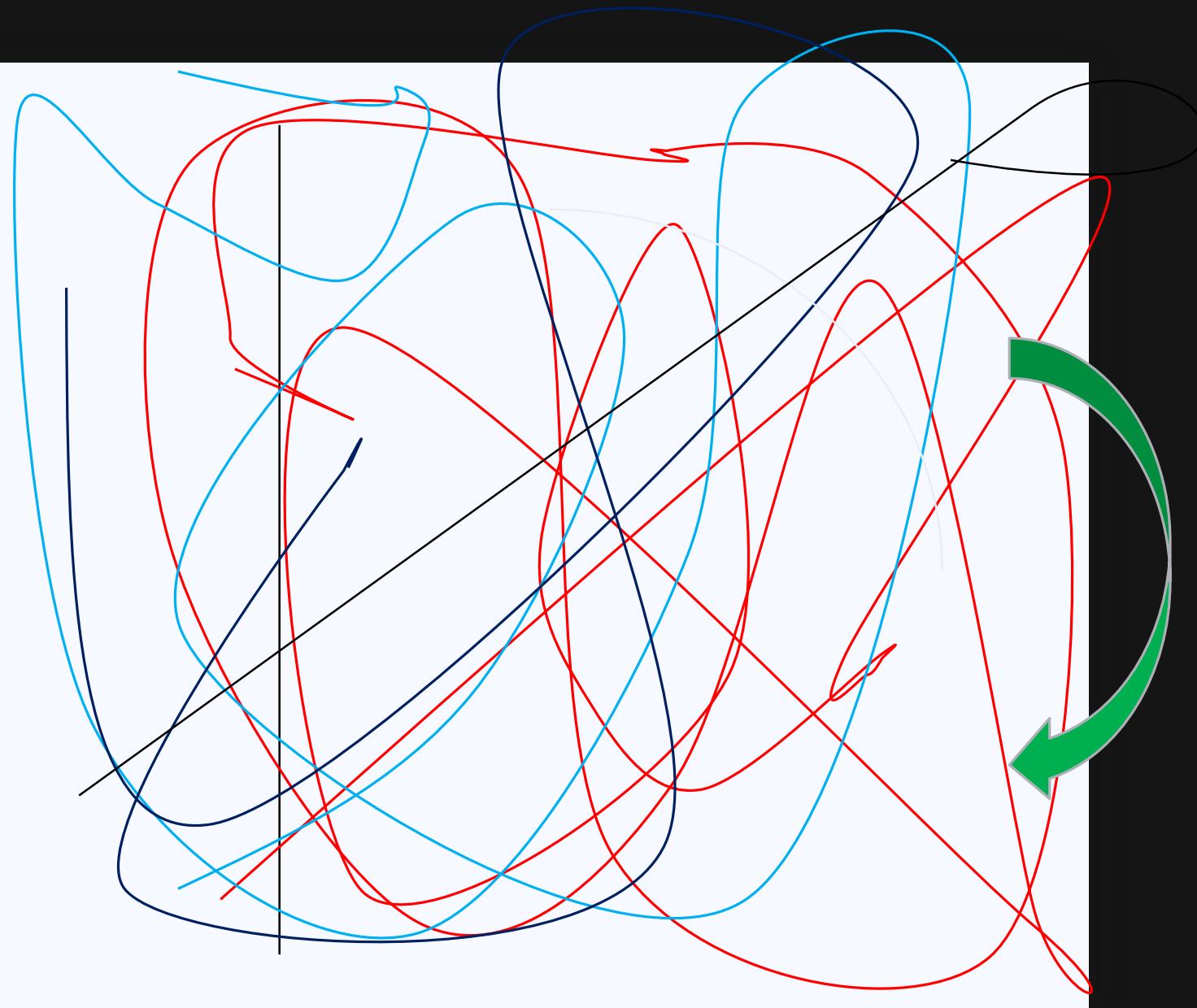
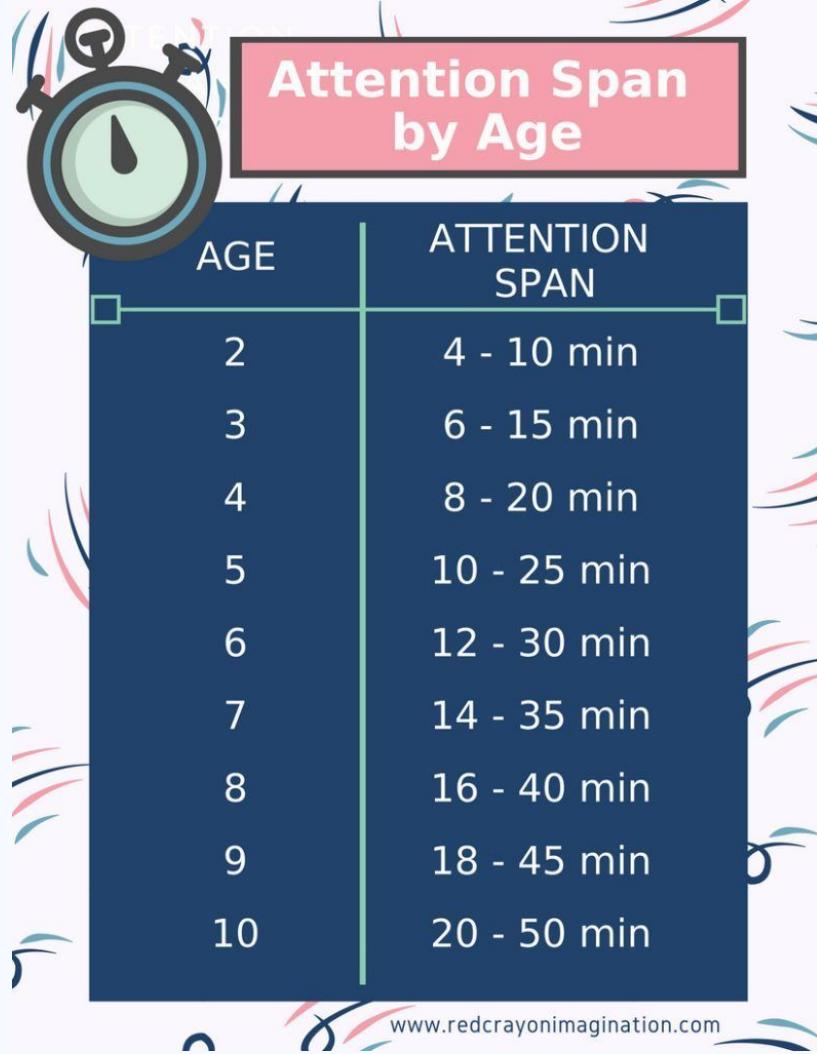
- Might interact with other child playing but there is no real shared story to the play
- Might be playing on the same piece of equipment, but doing their own thing
- Will talk with other children but still doing their own thing
- Begins to be able to share tools, such as scissors and markers
- May be present in circle time, not really engaging in songs and fingerplays...unless something catches their attention
- Might exchange toys with another
- There are no roles defined during play

## Cooperative Play 4+

- Plays with others and begin to invest their thought and time into the play
- Has interest in both the activity and the child
- Builds a story together
- Less fussing during play
- Children with a sibling may exhibit this a little sooner
- Teachers can begin to have children work in partners for short term things
- When opportunity arises, they can learn to compromise
- Roles in play
- Leaders emerge
- Learning how to be graceful loser and winners



What do we see?



# PLAY STAGES HELP US TO SEE



- New friendships emerging
- Language skills growing
- Problem solving skills evolving
- Gaining confidence in social setting
- Creativity is developing both in play and interaction with others
- Vocabulary
- Awareness of time and space
- Transitions are easier to manage
- Fine motor skills increasing
- Large motor skills development
- Spatial awareness increases
- Ability to regulate frustration
- Using words to problem solve
- Self-regulation begins to be seen
- Thinking processes are joining with actions and words.
- The ability to share feelings connected with actions
- The ability to show empathy





**The end...I think?!**

Questions?

Thoughts?

How will you use this information in your classroom?

# What's Your Play Personality?

## The Joker



A person who loves to joke and make others laugh

## The Artist/Creator

Enjoys creating and making things



## The Explorer



A person who loves to explore something new or different, either physically or emotionally or mentally

## The Director



Enjoys planning & executing events, loves organization.

## The Kinesthete

Someone who loves to move and push their body to see what it can do



## The Competitor



Loves a competitive game with rules, and likes to play to win

## The Collector

Enjoys gathering interesting collections of objects and experiences



[www.encourageplay.com](http://www.encourageplay.com)

Information from Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul by Dr. Stuart Brown & Christopher Vaughan

Just for fun..  
Which play  
personality do you  
have?

