

Hello,

I've had the privilege of serving students, preschool age through middle school, in five title one school districts in the Portland Metropolitan over the last ten years. Over those ten years, I've served as a classroom and substitute teacher; in both long and short term placements. I share this because it has been something very special to observe children from various ages, backgrounds and cultures, while observing these children having opportunities to connect with their learning. It's through play-based learning that creates a pathway to deepening their understanding of concepts and skills, while making meaningful discoveries.

Children are brilliant. They are creative, thoughtful and critical thinkers. They approach problems with ease, interest and the purest curiosity. When we allow children to use play-based learning, we (*as the teacher supporter*), are encouraging them to deeper that brilliance that they already have. When we disregard or don't encourage children to critically think and deepen their thinking, we (*the adults*) can really limit them from what could be possible. **Children's ideas are limitless** and it's our responsibility not to limit them.

I adopted play-based learning when I moved into a preschool position in a title one school. I had come into the classroom partially through the year due to an unforeseen circumstance with the previous teacher. I had the privilege to be guided through learning about play-based curriculum within this specific preschool program. I had never heard of play-based learning, but once I learned (*and saw*) the power of play, it was almost like my teaching philosophy needed a reboot; a shift. What I used as my teaching guide in my earlier years of teaching wasn't working, and I knew that. I'd seen children across the city disengaged, discouraged, and talked with students who at such a young age felt like their only job was to be compliant to the content that teachers are supposed to teach. Some children were learning, but most were not connected to the content or the material that I was teaching on. Children weren't connecting to the content, and frankly, neither was I. I kept using that guide because that is what I was told to do, but we have an opportunity to change that, for our children in Oregon. How could such young children, already grow up to think that their own creativity didn't matter? I valued my creativity as an adult, so I didn't understand how or why that value wasn't already imprinted or continuously growing into their learning. We need the dreamers and the thinkers. **If as educators, we didn't ignite that fire in children's hearts, then what's the true and honest purpose of teaching children?**

Children crave connection; connection to others, connection to our world, connection to their community; their world, the list goes on. **Why not create an environment where opportunities like these curate spaces for them to connect?**

In that preschool classroom, I watched 19 children build together, stretch their thinking, focus on really difficult tasks, use numerous materials that challenged but also inspired them. I also saw children encouraged to expand their language development by simply being curious to learn more about topics/content that inspired them. I firsthandedly saw children engaging with others in their classroom community and learning to regulate their emotions through the art of play. I've even watched children solve arguments through that same play. Once I shifted from that preschool classroom, I took every opportunity to bring play-based learning into every classroom that I substituted in for an entire year. I walked into a new classroom each day, not knowing anything about the school sometimes, nor the students I was going to be serving that day. I came in with a play-based lens and encouraged, and depending on the age (*middle school*), challenged students/children to expand their critical thinking through play. My mind was blown that something like play-based learning could weave in and out of so many classroom communities, even up to middle school age. That is truly how I knew that this approach was and continues to be a foundational piece of children's learning. As a teacher, I finally figured out what teaching really meant, when I learned to lean into the philosophy that it really is through the child's creativity; that's where the learning begins.

Play-based learning benefits children to come intentionally alongside their thinking in ways that, as adults, we tend to lose once we limit our creativity. It is by exploring big ideas through materials, building, art, investigation; constructive play, to name a few. **How can letting children play, be imaginative and create more not benefit their overall development?**

**I support SB 1596** and I truly believe that children in Oregon deserve to have structured, curated spaces/time in their school day to be still in their play, get creative and explore their imagination in their classroom and school communities.

**Let's start focusing on the whole child.**

Sincerely,

Hannah Huber