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In my 32 years of teaching, mostly in inner-city schools of Los Angeles where students in many of my high school classes had failed to receive basic instruction in phonics, I was told by my administrators to ignore these deficits in the interest of moving them on to graduation. Fortunately, I had received help from many mentors who showed me how to engage students in playful approaches to learning, including the reading of young-adult novels and a playful approach to grammar instruction. As I moved toward retirement, I had time to read about the brain and its connection to language and stumbled on a book by Kieran Egan on cognitive tools for stages of educational development. All of those tools were related to sparking students' imaginations, which is what active playful learning is essentially about. Since oracy precedes literacy, music is the easiest way for children (and adults, speaking languages other than English) to learn how words work together to create meaning. Mirror exercises where learners pair with partners, one moving arms and legs following the lead of another, then bring the focus to the movement of mouth, tongues, and lips in forming sounds can help students see how certain sounds are made. Students memorizing each other's name builds human connection essential to learning. Using the Grace Fernald's technique having learners looking at words and using their fingers to trace those letters in cursive in a tray filled with salt or syrup until they felt ready to get up and write that word on the board and return to the task of tracing if any errors were made allowed my students to own the world represented by these words, whether they were states, counties, political leaders, or musical composers. This is all playful learning.

When teachers struck for higher wages back in the late 1980's, we also won the right to use the copy-machine when computers and printers moved beyond dot-matrix—allowing us to produce our own educational materials—I was told by one person selling reading workbook exercises he created that I could do the same. But, the nature of acquiring knowledge involves learning from our mistakes. I never wanted to produce educational materials when I could see that they fell short of the goals I had when creating them. Yet, when I see what districts around this state are purchasing that comes under the label of "evidence-based approaches to learning," I mourn the loss of innocence that comes from learning from the mistakes we all make. We have bitten the fruit of knowledge handed to us and have left the fruitful garden of innocence, where learning comes, not from getting the right answers on an interim or summative assessment, but from recognizing how we might do better the next time we try.

How can teachers learn these approaches without the help of the ODE? You are

looking at how community colleges could expand their service to our communities by providing training for certain professions, which could include providing classes for teachers, sharing approaches to learning with each other in a collaborative environment, earning salary points or stipends, and returning to their classrooms to see how they work for students. By developing non-hierarchical relationships with colleagues outside the framework of their individual schools, each can be a leader and follower in sharing playful approaches to learning, where students become leaders in their own learning experiences, seeking help when a teachable moment arrives. Brainstorming works that way. Students' responses to questions (which allow teachers to assess their strengths and signal what needs to be addressed) create a collaborative space where teachers can introduce new information to help students move forward. Such an approach was suggested by the great American educator, John Dewey, whose work formed the basis for teachers in University schools to share in experimental settings. Then, the SAT changed the game to lessen the task for colleges.