



## **Rutgers Community Programs**

### **Creative Play Program** *for Children 2.9 – 5 years*

### **Ready, Set, Go!**

#### **The Benefits of a Play-Based Program**

*“We need to honor the innate capacity for learning, that moves the limbs and fills the souls of every young child. The child’s love of learning is intimately linked with the zest for play”*

-Joan Almon

One of the questions we are asked most frequently is, “But when do the children learn?” In fact, a better question would be, “When are the children *not* learning?” For preschool-aged children, play is overwhelmingly the main vehicle for learning. In his article *The Death of Preschool*, Paul Tullis notes that “nearly all developmental psychologists, neuroscientists and education experts recommend [play] for children up to age seven as the best way to nurture kids’ development and ready them for academic success later in life. Decades of research have demonstrated that their innate curiosity leads them to develop their social, emotional and physical skills independently, through exploration—that is, through play.” Adult brains function differently from preschoolers’ brains; because we can gain understanding through direct instruction, we often assume that the earlier children are exposed to such teaching the better. In fact, play nurtures the skills that lead to success in adulthood: flexible thinking, emotional insight, problem-solving capabilities, creativity, the ability to make interdisciplinary connections, and social dexterity. When 3- and 4-year-olds engage in hands-on, self-directed activities, they not only enhance their understandings of the world around them and all aspects of their development; they learn how to learn.

In **Ready, Set, Go!** we view ourselves not as teachers, but as facilitators of learning. As Joan Almon explains, a play-based program embraces two approaches simultaneously: children are

given the time and space to carry out their own ideas into play (with assistance from teachers as needed), while teachers offer experiences that enhances children's understandings of the world. Thus, "the children's own play and the content offered by teachers enhance one another."

### **About Our Program:**

- Our curriculum units are theme-based, meaning we focus on a single theme from a few weeks to several months, depending on the engagement of the children and the directions in which they lead us. This allows them to explore a topic in depth through multiple lenses, including dramatic play, storytelling, science, block building, sensory play, art, and more.
- The framework for each day includes free play, morning meeting, snack, story and a good-bye meeting. The interdisciplinary nature of our program means that other experiences, such as science, music, story acting, and gross motor play are interwoven throughout the week. This allows experiences to occur organically based on where the children are. In addition the children visit the Art Room twice a week.
- We have a mixed-age classroom with children from 3- to 5-years-old. When children of different ages interact in a group setting, the benefits are staggering. Younger children learn from watching older ones; older children experience the pride that comes with leadership and nurturing. Because children fall into very different places on various developmental spectrums, a mixed-age room means they have various peers to connect with for different purposes (e.g. a 3-year-old who loves puzzles can work with a 5-year-old; a 5-year-old who is younger emotionally can connect with a 4-year-old). Our mixed-age classroom, along with other elements, contributes to our ability to educate the whole child - cognitively, emotionally, physically, and socially - in ways that are developmentally appropriate.

## **RESOURCES**

For more information about the benefits of play-based learning and mixed-age classroom settings, check out the following articles and resources:

The Vital Role of Play in Early Childhood Education - Joan Almon  
[http://www.iaswece.org/waldorf\\_education/articles/education\\_toward\\_freedom.aspx](http://www.iaswece.org/waldorf_education/articles/education_toward_freedom.aspx)

Children Understanding the World Through Play  
*in "Introduction to Early Childhood Education"* - Virginia Casper & Rachel Theilheimer  
[http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/dl/free/0073378488/791932/cas78488\\_Ch04pp95\\_125\\_R.pdf](http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/dl/free/0073378488/791932/cas78488_Ch04pp95_125_R.pdf)

The Death of Preschool - Paul Tullis  
[http://waldorfpittsburgh.org/waldorfcom/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/The-Death-of-Preschool\\_-Scientific-American.pdf](http://waldorfpittsburgh.org/waldorfcom/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/The-Death-of-Preschool_-Scientific-American.pdf)

Give Childhood Back To Children - Peter Gray  
<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/give-childhood-back-to-children-if-we-want-our-offspring-to-have-happy-productive-and-moral-lives-we-must-allow-more-time-for-play-not-less-are-you-listening-gove-9054433.html>

The Benefits of Mixed-Age Grouping - Lillian G. Katz  
<http://ecap.crc.illinois.edu/eecearchive/digests/1995/lkmag95.html>