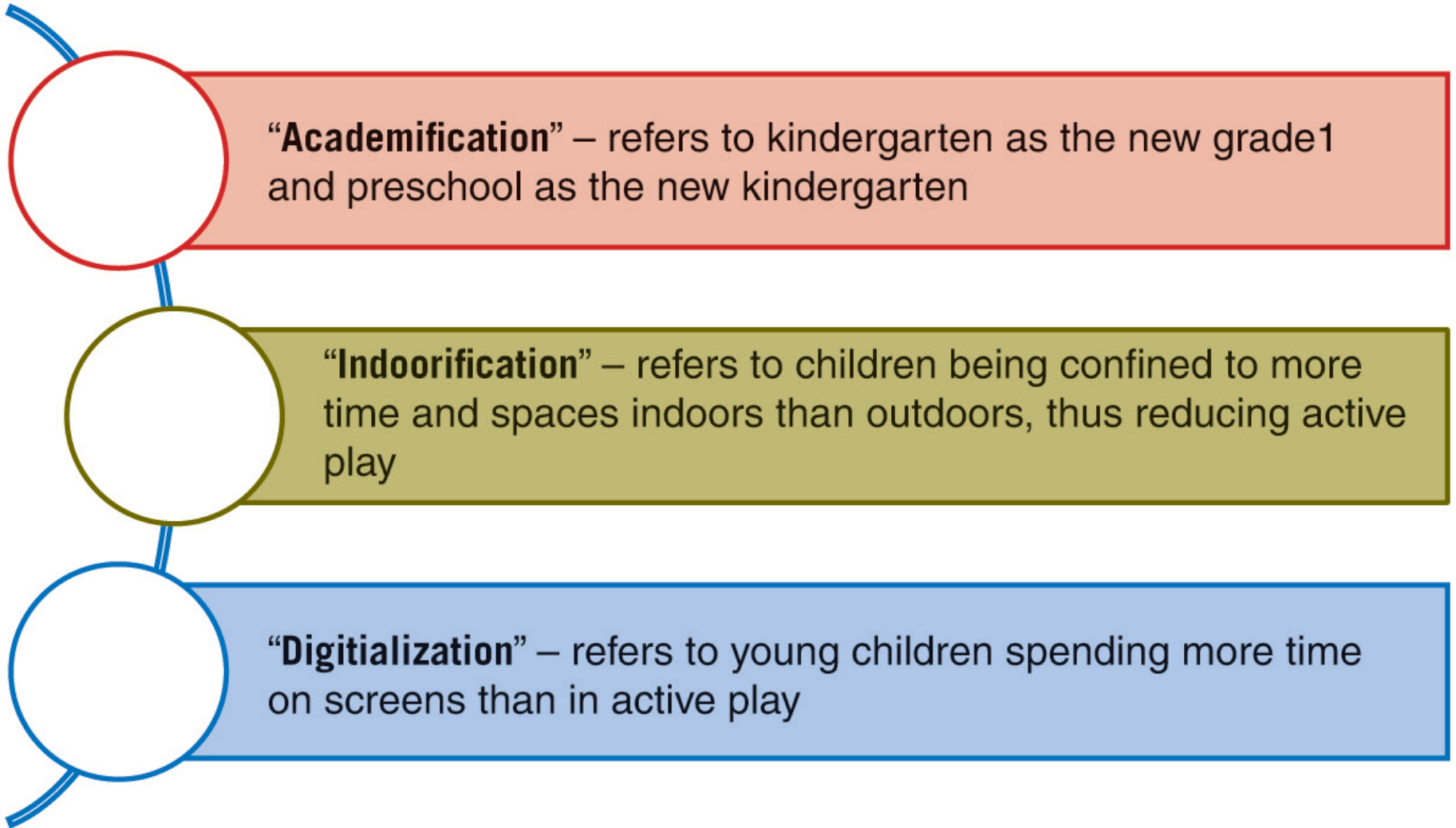


The Process of Play





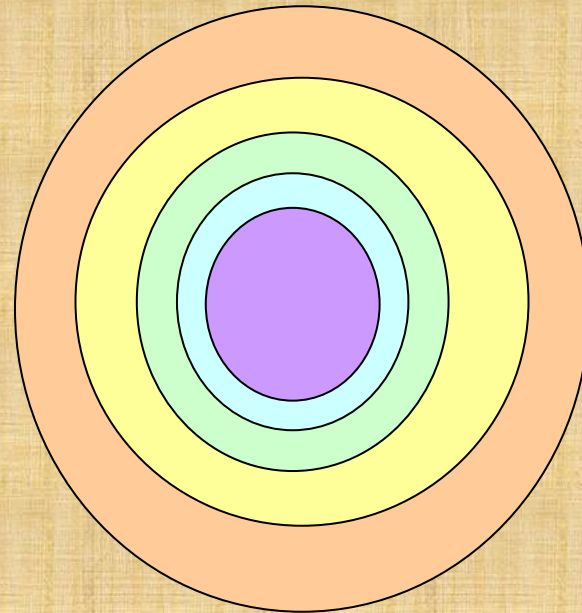
“Academification” – refers to kindergarten as the new grade 1 and preschool as the new kindergarten

“Indoorification” – refers to children being confined to more time and spaces indoors than outdoors, thus reducing active play

“Digitalization” – refers to young children spending more time on screens than in active play

Play from an Ecological Perspective

- Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory examines how environmental influences contribute to a child's play through the five environmental systems:
 - Microsystem
 - Mesosystem
 - Exosystem
 - Macrosystem
 - Chronosystem



Play from an Ecological Perspective

Microsystem: Play is influenced by the child's family

Mesosystem: Play is influenced by the interactions and relationships between the family and early learning teachers

Exosystem: Play is influenced by federal, provincial, and territorial policies

Macrosystem: Play is influenced by culture and societal ideologies

Chronosystems: Play is influenced by environmental conditions and timing of events

How Children Learn and Play

- Many theories and perspectives about how children and adults learn exist
- The constructionist theory refers to how humans learn and that knowledge is constructed based on experiences
- From the constructionist perspective, children flourish in play environments where they are co-learners with peers, and in some cases where adults and children become co-learners

How Children Learn and Play

- Children gain more opportunities for their curiosity to be simulated and to embrace active play when they:
 - Are viewed as capable of constructing knowledge
 - Interact with peers and adults about ideas, possibilities, strategies, and ways of knowing during the active play process
 - Make play personal that is based on their prior knowledge and interests
 - Are encouraged and flexible scheduling occurs

How Children Learn and Play

- Children gain more opportunities for their curiosity to be simulated and to embrace active play when they:
 - Share both the physical space and opportunities for play to be a social process
 - Have play environments that provide time, space, natural and recyclable materials, and opportunities to ponder and tinker with ideas as individuals or in groups
 - Have hands-on experiences that engage their minds and their hands

Unique Features of Play

- **Motivation**
- **Active engagement**
- **Process rather than product**



Play, Learning, and Motivation

- Play and intrinsic motivation are interrelated with spontaneous exploration and curiosity
- Bruner (1961) identified 3 internal motivators that influence play and learning:
 - Curiosity
 - Desire to show oneself and others what you know and what you are able to do
 - Striving toward a common goal with others

Play, Learning, and Motivation

- Intrinsic motivation can be described as:
 - Children engaging in a behaviour or activity because their curiosity has been triggered
 - Following the child's interest which allows for trial and error that is personally rewarding, satisfying, and pleasurable
- Intrinsic motivation includes mastery, challenge, and curiosity

Play, Learning, and Motivation

- Environments that stifle children's natural interests and spontaneous play can impact the development of self-regulation skills
- Self-regulation is the “ability to monitor one's behaviours, emotions, cognitive processes, and social interactions” (Braund & Timmons, 2021, p.2)
- Developing self-regulation is essential in advancing attention skills, memory, cognitive flexibility and to interpret behaviour and social interactions

Play, Learning, and Motivation

- Play and its contextual principles are driven by positive emotions
- Children exhibit positive emotions when they feel comfortable in their play surroundings
- Positive emotions increase children's spontaneity, sense of curiosity, and focus on their play task

Play, Learning, and Motivation

- Developing self-regulation is essential because it is interconnected to advancing:
 - Attention skills
 - Memory
 - Cognitive flexibility
 - Ability to interpret behaviour and social interactions

Play, Learning, and Motivation

- A child's level of self-regulation and internal motivation is connected to his/her/their ability to:
 - Exercise patience and persistence
 - Exhibit flexibility, curiosity, and exploratory play
 - Approach new experiences

Play, Learning, and Motivation

- Intrinsic motivation is affected by:

Challenges

Curiosity

Fantasy



Play, Learning, and Motivation

- **To support the building of intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and executive functioning skills:**
 - Listen, observe, and provide children with autonomy to execute experiences that align with their interests and ideas
 - Offer environments and opportunities that allow children to exhibit positive emotions, feel important and lovable
 - Provide resources to enhance the child's play ideas
 - Encourage and support children to make choices and decisions

Play, Learning, and Active Engagement

- Active engagement in play is *children's work* during their early years and leads children to develop skills and abilities in:
 - Language development
 - Cooperation
 - Sharing
 - Problem solving
 - Expansion of curiosity
 - Coordination of body skills

Play, Learning, and Active Engagement

- Inclusive environments are a human right of all children
- Exclusive play spaces that do not consider universal design principles or inclusive practices can:
 - Reduce friendship development and connections to the environment
 - Impact the types of active play engaged in
 - Increase feelings of isolation in the play space

Play, Learning and Active Engagement

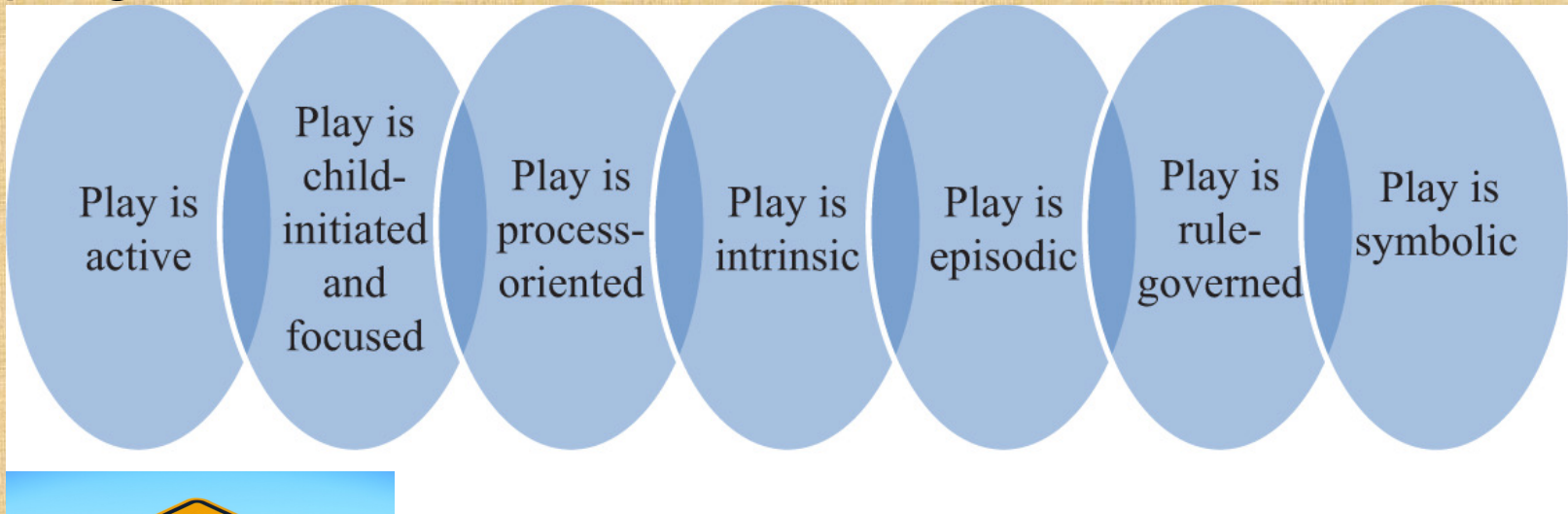
- Children require active play to support them in:
 - Developing skills to manage stress and to formulate a healthy lifestyle
 - Acquiring a balance of vigorous play and quieter activities to enhance each of the child's opportunity for full, balanced development of their abilities

Play, Learning, and Play as Process Rather than Product

- Children's play experiences should:
 - Focus on the process of play rather than the production of a product
 - Allow children to be in control of their play by being given the freedom to engage in play, explore, and to be able to make mistakes without the feeling of failure
 - Evolve by making playing experiences voluntary and self-initiated

Characteristics of Play

- The 7 common characteristics of play helps the early learning teacher to understand the foundation of play and their roles and responsibilities in early learning programs



The Play Process

- Children advance through 5 phases in the play process. They are:
 - Phase 1: Body Play
 - Phase 2: Motoring Movement Play
 - Phase 3: Imaginative Play
 - Phase 4: Intentional Imaginative Play
 - Phase 5: Peer Play with Rules
- The 6th phase occurs during adulthood:
 - Phase 6: Adult Play

The Play Process

- Progressing through the phases is dependent on building on previous learning and experiences
- Several developmental and environmental conditions contribute to the progression of the play process
- Children require new play materials and opportunities to achieve new skills, perfect skills or modify skills
- Children intuitively advance to the next level of play when they have had sufficient experiences at any given level

Classifying Play Experiences

- Piaget (1970) suggests that children participate in three distinct stages of play. They are:
 - **Functional / sensorimotor play (birth to age 2)**—Children focus their play on simple, repetitive muscle-like movements with people, objects, and sounds
 - **Symbolic / dramatic play (ages 2 to 7)**—Children focus their play on beginning to express fantasy, use props, and take on roles other than being children
 - **Games with rules (school-age children)**—Children negotiate the rules before they engage in a play experience

Classifying Play Experiences

- Sarah Smilansky (1968) made significant additions to Piaget's play stages. She identified that:
 - Children between the ages of 4 and 6 years of age participate in social / dramatic play that is complex and sophisticated. She labelled this as a **constructive play** stage.



Classifying Play Experiences

- Mildred Parten (1932) examined play from a social-behaviour perspective. She identified that play progresses through a series of stages:
 - **Solitary Play**—The child generally plays alone. There is limited or no interaction with other children or materials that other children use.
 - **Parallel Play**—Children begin to either play independently or beside peers; they do not play with peers.
 - **Associative Play**—Children begin to share play materials and participate in similar activities.
 - **Cooperative Play**—Children participate in group play. They determine a common goal and then each child works towards meeting the goal.

Classifying Play Experiences

- Seagoe (1970) identified:
 - As children approach 7 to 9 years of age, they participate in **cooperative competitive play**
 - This involves play in which children focus on team sports and victory, such as soccer and hockey (Dietze, 2006).

Children and Theories of Play

- Classical theorists examine play through theories of:
 - Surplus energy
 - Recreation / relaxation
 - Practice
 - Recapitulation

Children and Theories of Play

- *Surplus-energy theory* suggests that play is a mechanism to allow humans to burn off excess energy that is not required for survival and can cause children to become restless and unable to stay on task
- *Recreation / relaxation theory* suggests that play is a mechanism to replenish energy after hard work has occurred (directly opposite of surplus energy theory)

Children and Theories of Play

- *Practice theory* suggests that play is a mechanism whereby children practise adult roles and roles that are directly related to culture and community
- *Recapitulation theory* suggests that children engage in play that has them revisit the developmental stages their ancestors passed through (this differs from practice theory)

Children and Theories of Play

- Modern theorists examine play from the perspective of why play exists and the consequences of play for the child. The modern theories grouping includes:
 - **Psychoanalytic theory (Freud and Erikson)**—Through play, children act out feelings and work through challenges by role switching and repetition
 - **Cognitive-developmental theory (Bruner, Piaget, Sutton-Smith)**—Play is a venue for children to use materials, interact with people, and build knowledge about the world they live in
 - **Neurobiological theory**—Suggests that the quality of children's play environment can positively or negatively affect their brain development

Children and Theories of Play

- Contemporary theorists examine play from current societal issues such as diversity, social justice, and the relative nature of truth and knowledge
 - **Sociocultural theory**—Children learn about their social and cultural contexts through their daily living experiences. This theory is influenced by the work of:
 - **Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**—Suggests that, through play, children stretch their boundaries to figure out situations and then construct knowledge
 - **Bronfenbrenner**—A child's development is impacted by both the person and their environment, which includes family, community, culture, and society

Children and Theories of Play

- Contemporary theorists examine play from current societal issues such as diversity, social justice, and the relative nature of truth and knowledge
 - **Goncu**—The values and beliefs that adults have about play, directly influences the quality of the play experiences that are extended to children
 - **Critical educational theory**—Critical theorists examine how play is influenced by gender, class, and racial inequalities within society

Putting Play Process into Perspective: Building on Children's Strength

- Not all children follow the play process in the same way
- Children's play processes are influenced by:
 - Culture, life experiences, their strength, and adult attitudes and support systems
- Early learning teachers are therefore encouraged to develop a program philosophy that focuses on the strength and gifts that children bring to the environment

The Role of Early Learning Teachers in Play

- Early learning teachers promote children's play by:
 - Role modeling positive attitudes towards play
 - Preparing appropriate play environments
 - Observing and documenting children's play
 - Promoting play and opportunities for expansive discoveries
 - Promoting play in and with nature

The Role of Early Learning Teachers in Play

- The 3 appropriate levels of participation in children's play experiences by adults or early learning teachers are:
 - **Parallel play**—Where the adult plays beside the child, and not with the child
 - **Co-playing**—Where the play episodes include a child or group of children and an adult
 - **Play tutoring**—Where the adult, a child, or group of children play as the adult leads the play for a short period of time

Summary

- The **Process of Play** requires consideration and understanding of:
 - Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory
 - Motivation & Engagement Process
 - Characteristics of the Play Process
 - Theories from Piaget, Smilansky, Parten, and Seagoe
 - Classical Modern Contemporary Theories
 - The Strength and Gifts of the child
 - The Role of Early Learning Students and Teachers