

The Many Forms of Play



Research shows that children who have the opportunity to play while at school receive tremendous benefits physically, emotionally, academically, and socially. Here at Mulberry School, play is valued and incorporated at all grade levels, enhancing learning and helping build valuable social and self-regulatory skills. But did you know that play itself takes many forms? Read on for what different forms of play look like and how they contribute to a child's overall growth and development!

Educational Play: Play is directly connected to the curriculum through songs, rhymes, memory games, puzzles, math games, etc. These activities build content knowledge, language skills, and logic/problem-solving abilities.

Cheering Play: A brief but engaging way to relax students or liven up the environment; for example, playing a quick game of I Spy before coming to the carpet for a story. Cheering play increases a child's positive feelings about school.

Physical Play: Also known as a "brain break," physical play is often used as a class energizer or transition between lessons. A few rounds of Simon Says, Tag, or dancing to a song are examples. These activities build motor skills and help students feel they are part of a collective school community.

Pretend Play: Imagining and acting out different roles are part of pretend play. Children might explore different jobs, such as pretending to be a veterinarian; this type of play helps children to learn to collaborate with peers.

Authentic Play: Here, children find and use materials around them—leaves, stones, sticks, etc.—and invent ways to use them. Exploration of outdoor spaces, such as at recess or on outdoor field trips, is a big part of authentic play, boosting imagination, creativity, and collaboration.

Traditional Play: Typical outdoor recess games are part of traditional play—tag and other chasing games, hide-and-seek, basketball, and so forth.

Free Play: Free play is completely unstructured, with the purpose of simply relaxing and enjoying time with friends. Indoor and outdoor recess and free choice time are moments of free play, which enhances social skills and emotional well-being.

Process Play: The goal of process play is for children to design, explore, and create after being given a basic curriculum-related idea by the teacher. For example, in a social studies unit on economics, the teacher may challenge the class to create a store and design items to sell. This type of learning enhances both cognition and emotional growth.