

The power of winter play

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Q: I'm curious about schools letting children play in the cold, snow, wind, etc. Should I be concerned about this when I send my little ones?

A: Bundle up your children before they go to school this winter because playtime outdoors is as crucial to their development as taking tests at desks.

Inspired by research from Finland, the top educational system in the world, where school children have 20 minutes of recess every 45 minutes throughout the day, the Detroit Waldorf School sends students out to play in all weather because of a strong belief in the power of play to help knowledge from classroom lessons take hold.

Research shows knowledge needs time to seep in — and that happens best when there is a break from straight-on learning. Waldorf philosophy is based on the idea of capturing what is natural for children, who experience the world through the senses. Learning takes place on the playground as deeply as structured learning.

Students at Waldorf play outside in all weather. Play is extremely important for assimilating new knowledge, building problem-solving skills and coordination, empathy and so intelligence. It also promotes the development of eye focus and coordination.

The play-based early childhood curriculum is grounded in the idea children have a huge need for movement. In this time of obesity in our increasingly sedentary society, we are focused on meeting the natural needs of our students while encouraging a healthy balance of learning and play.

A lack of enough play time, not to mention distance from fresh air and winter sunshine, leads to a lack of ability to self-soothe, to think outside the box and to develop a strong imagination.

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