

**Math Can Be Fun**  
**(This is not fiction!)**

**By**  
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If you think math can't be fun please go to the following web site

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDAG405awRk>

and see a video of a 2nd grade class doing what is called a math "sprint". The children are learning and playing at the same time. To me, the way the "sprint" was organized is not important. What was important is that the students were engaged mentally and physically and seemed to be enjoying the learning process.

I have often lamented the fact that in an effort to increase the time of instruction in the elementary grades, many school districts have either eliminated or reduced the time for recess. In addition, the idea of "fun and games" in the classroom seems to have been sacrificed in order to have the youngsters spend more time on task academically. In my mind such a strategy is counterproductive to learning. Students at this age need time to "play".

**Without this time, their attention span lessens and as a result while their bodies remain in class it is possible that their minds don't.**

On the other hand, there is no denying that there is a need for more time being spent on task. Thus the healthy solution lies in combining "playfulness" and academics so that each emerges more productively than it would have if it had been done at the exclusion of the other.

To me "playfulness" includes having students enjoy being in class and being engaged by the excitement of the how the subject matter is presented. You may already have exciting ways of accomplishing this; and if so, it would be great if you were willing to share then with others who visit this website.

When students are playfully engaged (in my sense of the term) they are not looking around the room or trying to see what is happening outside. They are paying attention and enjoying it.

I hope you will look at the material on this web site and see if there are ways that you might incorporate into your own teaching. Or you may already be doing things such as this on your own; in which case we would be delighted if you would take the time and share your experiences on our web site.

In closing I want to share with you the abstract of a presentation that my son Steven has given to many professional groups whose work involves working with children. It is food for thought. Steven is the founder and director of “Project Joy”, a not-for-profit organization that uses cooperative play to work with children who have experienced severe psychological trauma (you can view his website at [www.projectjoy.com](http://www.projectjoy.com))

## **Playfulness - the single most important trait of childhood**

We often ask professionals who dedicate their lives to helping the most wounded and vulnerable of our nation's children one simple question – “If you had the power to nurture just one trait in a child that would best help that child overcome any and all adversity that they face in their lifetime, what would that trait be?”. In other words, what trait best helps a child develop resiliency? We have had the honor of asking this question to thousands of outstanding teachers, social workers, coaches, psychologists, psychiatrists, parents, etc. and have heard some great answers – answers like trust, confidence, self-esteem, trust, discipline, and creativity to name a few. One answer that we almost never hear, and the one that we believe to be most important to children, is that it is the trait of playfulness. Playfulness is the motivation to freely and joyfully engage with, connect with, and explore the surrounding world. What could be more important than that? Playfulness is an approach to life – an attitude. It is a spirit with which one can approach every (and we mean every) aspect of life – the good, the bad, and the ugly.

### **Play v. Playfulness**

When most people think of play, they usually think of it in terms of a type of activity – let's say playing baseball, swinging on a swing and/or making sand castles in a sandbox. However, our belief is that an activity alone can't be considered play unless it is engaged playfully. I would suggest that on any given Saturday afternoon, at ball fields across America, there are many children who are “playing” baseball without any sense of joy, passion, connection or empowerment. For those children, “working” baseball would be a far more accurate description.

On the other end of the spectrum, activities that we generally think of as work – such as doing math homework, raking leaves, cooking dinner and/or cleaning one's bedroom – can be better described as “play” if they are approached in a playful manner. According to British historian Arnold Toynbee, “The supreme accomplishment is to blur the line between work and play.” At Project Joy, we couldn't agree more.