



Let the Children Play

Speaker: Pasi Sahlberg

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I started to work on this about four or five years ago, this idea of understanding of the play.

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And early childhood

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questions in general has never been really at the really core of my, my interest. But about four years ago, four or five years ago, I met my my co author, William Doyle, in New York. And we both we both had young children. And we started to think about, you know, talking about differences in Finland, when it comes to education and in the United States. And the play, of course, became a kind of a big issue. We were quite alarmed about the, the similar trends around the world, how the, how the time for children to play and the importance of play in within education and life in general has been declining, really around the world. So we we encased in this this world, A little bit more more deeply and started to look around whether the situation really is that bad in in most of the countries or all of the countries or whether they are kind of a positive for positive things. So that's that that was a kind of a starting point for the for the publication under the paper, we went into research and analysis of different things. I'm all excited because about this, this thing, and we adopted this notion that play is really a fundamental element of the human condition just to try to make our point that placements are something that we should do in our schools for the purposes of any particular outcomes or that the parents should be providing their children with a time to play because somebody somebody says so but we, we understand that the place not just that A natural fireflies, us humans but it's also among all the other animals. So it's a kind of a condition the way we express ourselves and, and we also understand that we learn many important things that we need in life now and in the future to play and we express our emotions and ourselves. And in the pain of times like this also the we cope with the fears that we may have better through play. And the play the way that we all and particularly children can better express their identities who they are, who they are. And finally, I think that the the notion of 21st century skills that has been there, around the education community, at least the last 20 years, includes many probably most of those skills that I've seen, included in the 21st century skills. I exactly those skills For the young people learn to play when they actively engage in play, for example, communication creativity, conflict resolution, self regulation and other thinking skills and and those are the things that we really believe. And we also know from research that often



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present when, when

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children or adults when we engage in high quality claims, we kicked off with the with a kind of a photo disc research we because we both William and myself, as I said we we are not the childhood play experts. Initially my research has been on many other other areas before that. And William is is the author and writer. So we The first thing we did is it took a massive amount of disk research reading a lot of research and project reports and surveys on child hooks. And and how does it manifest itself in different parts of the world and we also engaged in examining some aspects of the the global education policies and education reform reforms in general in order to understand how, how play is present or absent in these current education policies. And then we went to we established a poll of global experts. So we invited about 70 to 80 people that we consider through this disc research as some of the thought leaders and and leading scholars and experts in play, and we interviewed all of them. We asked them questions about why play is important and Waitwait should it be part of the bottle the children's growing up everywhere. And anywhere in the world right now. And then we put together we have this massive amount of data from these interviews and, and discourses and put it together as a first manuscript, we were actually able to mostly identifies what we call the bad news. And if if anybody reads the book, you know, the first seven chapters really is identifying a lot of kind of inconvenient truths or bad news or negative developments in most countries. So this is a this is a kind of a striking found finding. But we also want people to to show that they are some positive things. And it's true actually, that at the system level, we'll look at the countries overall and the international education policies and what the systems look like in the big picture, the situation regarding childhood play in school. or outside of the school is not very encouraging. So this development in Muslim countries has been similar in terms of declining time for children to play at home and also the kind of a play time being squeezed out from schools. But then the good news that we also want you to give in this book become more visible when we pick up close look at some of the countries for example, the United States that is often health and health as a one system, where mostly problematic things can be identified. But there are a number of interesting experiments happening in the United States and we are reporting some of those in the podcast and the selection of kind of a good news as we say, one of the one of those first experiments that we we really came across and I know that personally because in Working and collaborating with the with the leaders of this experiment, it takes place in northern part of Texas, in Dallas, Dallas area where we call this a triple resist experiment where the very simple idea that was actually transmitted by one individual person from Finland to to another Texas was to just give children three times more recess free time during the school day than they

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currently had

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where this was like 1010 years ago. And and of course, his political reasons, small, more resistant pockets led to more play during the school day. And the early results were really encouraging. I went to see the experiment myself there and basically everybody

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praise the positive impact

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of often Play Time and outdoor activities for children, their well being and happiness and engagement as a company to focus and concentrate on things. So that that was a thing that makes this particular experiment into our book. Then the other one a little bit different experiments that we we identified was in Scotland, what we call the active play statement. And I've been I've been advising the Scottish Government now for four years, and I've been taking a closer look at this active play in in Scotland. And it's a significant in the sense that it started as a as a as a minor experiment in one of the urban centres in Scotland, but has now been expanding as a national professional programme, really where the covenant has endorsed

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the display as part of the

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part of every community in every school and this active place simply means that children Young children in the primary school are given more time to play outdoors. Right? This is a false interesting that has happened to Scotland where the weather and discourage instances are not always that favourable for outdoor play. But again, the research results of extending time for outdoor play and often playing in that market and muddy puddles has been really positive for children's attention has ability to engage more activity in the academic, academic, and all school work in general. There's a third one that I would like to mention here the third pay experiment This is something that he least expected actually when we were looking at these IMG play or to play experiment in China. The underplay has now become famous because it's really spreading around the world. As a good example of a what they really are Showing them do the idea is that children, very young children are joking about children who are between two, three and five, six years old. So it's in the very earliest that they spent two hours of every day when they are in a kindergarten or preschool, outdoors playing freely. So it's a free free play experiment, and they can build and take some pain and they can get dirty and even they can even hurt themselves as they wish without any intervention of the parents or teachers or adults over there. And then what happens is very interesting in this experiment is that the kids go indoors, and

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they watch

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the recorded PlayStations when they're playing themselves and try to kind of understand and explain the others what they're doing, what's happening there. And the play again, the underplay has had a really positive impact on in many ways on these children, who often live in live In the families where the parents have high expectations for their academic performance, but the entrepreneur is now finding its way here in Australia, and in some parts of the United States less than San Francisco and

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some other states

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in many, many other experiments that you can actually find as a positive examples, if you get a little bit deeper into systems, all education systems today

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wish to do better.

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And this includes Finland and Canada and the UK and any system wants to improve the learning outcomes. They often what they do is that they launch new educational reforms

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that through my understanding,

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often include a kind of a different change combinations of all old conventional means like chasing the curriculum and a little bit more or less assessment or, or using computers with it. ISIS, as the evidence also shows around the world that many, if not most of these efforts that we have seen, and we will continue to see, fail or end up in a disappointment. And what's the one thing that many efforts to fix our schools admissions failure variable is that they, they do not take into account that the young people in our schools often left with all kinds of challenges emotional, social, behavioural, and that all make the learning in school and at home, must heart This is one of those things that we clearly realised when we're writing through this research and writing the book is that the children's well being and health has really declined in most parts of the world that that makes

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learning

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harder. However, the as I said many of the educational reforms and education policies from directly take this into function So we believe that before we can expect school learning



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among our children to improve,

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we need to help them feel better,

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be healthier and even happier in the school and experience learning as a positive thing in the school. And we argue in the book, we argue that play, if we do it properly and consistently, in school and at home can do

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all of these things.

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So research, for example, over the years has shown that,

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that when children engage in high quality play, are we in the book, we call it a deeper play,

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it can have a positive

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impact on their social development, emotional development, physical development, and also cognitive development. That is the that one of the big part of what our schools are doing.

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So we should know that

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that's not any play. We'll do that that's the kind of a misconception that people have as a system. No letting children play in school with do miracles is it don't. And that's why, in this book, we make a case for what we call the deeper play that requires that children's play is based on at least three, the following five elements that the educators teachers, who should be prepared to do that closely endorse and strengthen and monitor and these five elements are self directed play. That means that the children should be able to decide and lead the play they do, rather than play being directed by adults or somebody else. The second one is the

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intrinsic motivations that should be the Tiber



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of his play, rather than motivation that comes from outside where again, an adult or in a school case a feature will be will be the motivation for To learn to play the The third one is a play based on positive emotions. Children have to feel safe and happy and

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positive when they play rather than

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being scared or

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fearing doing afraid of doing something. The fourth one is that the play when play is what we call a process oriented rather than focusing on products getting something done. It's often in cases children in the deeper way and fifthly the more children can and will use their imagination when that plays that there is a play. So what we're saying here is that when,

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when learning to play is based

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on these elements and there may be some others we are we have a good reason to expect that also, what the children do in school or if they do these things at home, will lead to many of these very positive outcomes that never served. Many, many of these experiments are promising. I think the the first thing we really want to get this book to do in our societies and communities is that we all need to understand better what play actually is and why it is important in these days for development and learning of all children.

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And

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our research really indicates that,

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although parents may, may think that yes, play is part of the children's growing up and their lives,

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but when they are asked to



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choose whether, whether it's better for that you're going to be in the coaching class for mathematics or science or summer can weather learn more academics rather than played and the decision often indicate that the play is still kind of a secondary thing. So we would like to You know, all of us parents and teachers to understand much better what to play with the potential of and the power of play would be especially

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the policymakers that we have deciding

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what the schools

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will look like in the future.

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Then the Secondly, I think, if the, if the parents not now,

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all teachers if

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they wish to reduce or put some limits to the time our children and teenagers spend on screen based devices and media and technology, we believe that play can be a very potential alternative to do that. Too often, we see that, that parents and schools try to, to put limits to children's and young people's smartphone use or technologies, for example,

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is to,

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to introduce bans and, you know, take the devices away. We believe that play is much more positive way to do that. Let's put our devices away and go outside and play. And this is particularly something that we would like

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the parents to see. And

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especially outdoor play is an important, important thing. So hoping that if anybody reads this books book and is convinced that yes, play play has so many benefits, and also that the play time



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that the children

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spend time on playing outdoors or indoors today is much

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less than that many of the most of the parents did when they were of the same age than the children, that we need to do something,

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something about it,

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then that certainly, we also propose that parents and schools should adopt a principle that we call a an hour of play every day and this By this we mean that every school should offer every child every day, at least one or Reese's, and three times. And all the parents all the families should also put this one hour playtime, standard for themselves. That would mean that

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every every day, children would have

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preferably one hour outdoor time to play and express themselves. We know that many parents already do this. They play a lot with their kids. But not all. We also know that

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many of the schools and some of the schools like

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all the schools in Finland do that every every day. Children have one hour time to play but not all. Also, this is what we would like to

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encourage

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people to do. And then finally,

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I think we also encourage all adults, including certainly parents and teachers to play more play more among themselves, but especially play more with with the children.

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I think we think that this will make us

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better people are better parents and better teachers and, and happier people as well. And when we, when we are better we also

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we can take better care of our children and

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help them to,

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to live and learn to live live in this very uncertain and unpredictable world that we're living in.