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**The Physical Play and Motor Development of Young Children: A Review of Literature and Implications for Practice**

Center for Early Childhood Education

Eastern Connecticut State University

Author: Dr. Jeffrey Trawick-Smith

What you have to do is run real fast up the hill and then down the hill, and if you fall, the wolves will eat you. But they aren’t real wolves, it’s just pretend, so don’t be scared.

(A four-year-old child teaching a three-year-old peer how to play)

Decades of research have shown that play is an important mediator in the physical, social, cognitive, and language development of young children (Bergen, 2002; Garvey, 1993; Vygotsky, 1976). In spite of this, play faces threats from many directions in modern American life. The growing emphasis on standards, assessment, and accountability in schools has led to a reduction in outdoor and active physical play. In many schools and centers, play has been all but eliminated to make room for quieter, academic learning (Stipek, 2006). Preschools and kindergartens in public school settings have become particularly regimented and adult -directed, with teachers feeling compelled to increase literacy and numeracy instruction at the expense of play time (Golinkoff, Hirsh -Pasek, & Eyer, 2004). Passive television viewing and use of other media are also replacing active play, and have even been found to interrupt the play of young infants (Schmidt, Pempek, Kirkorian, Lund, & Anderson, 2008; Zimmerman, Christakis, & Meltzoff, 2007).

The purpose of this review is to describe and interpret research examining the effects of physical play, from birth to age five, at home and school, across all areas of development. The document is intended to inform the professional practice of teachers, caregivers, and policymakers who advocate for play or who are striving to include physical and outdoor play more often and more effectively in their schools and centers. It is also intended for parents who are trying to enhance the health and physical development of their own children. The review includes research-based guidance for professionals in inclusive classrooms and settings, and addresses adaptations in play environments and adult play interactions to meet the needs of children with disabilities.