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# EXPOSING THE MYTHS OF **PLAY**

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# PLAY

- Play occurs naturally
- Children are always ready to play
  - any time, any where
  - by themselves, or with others
- Play forms the foundation of early childhood education, as early as from infancy

# Agenda of this Talk

01

Unique features  
of play

02

Importance  
of play

03

Practical skills  
to promote play

# WHAT IS PLAY?



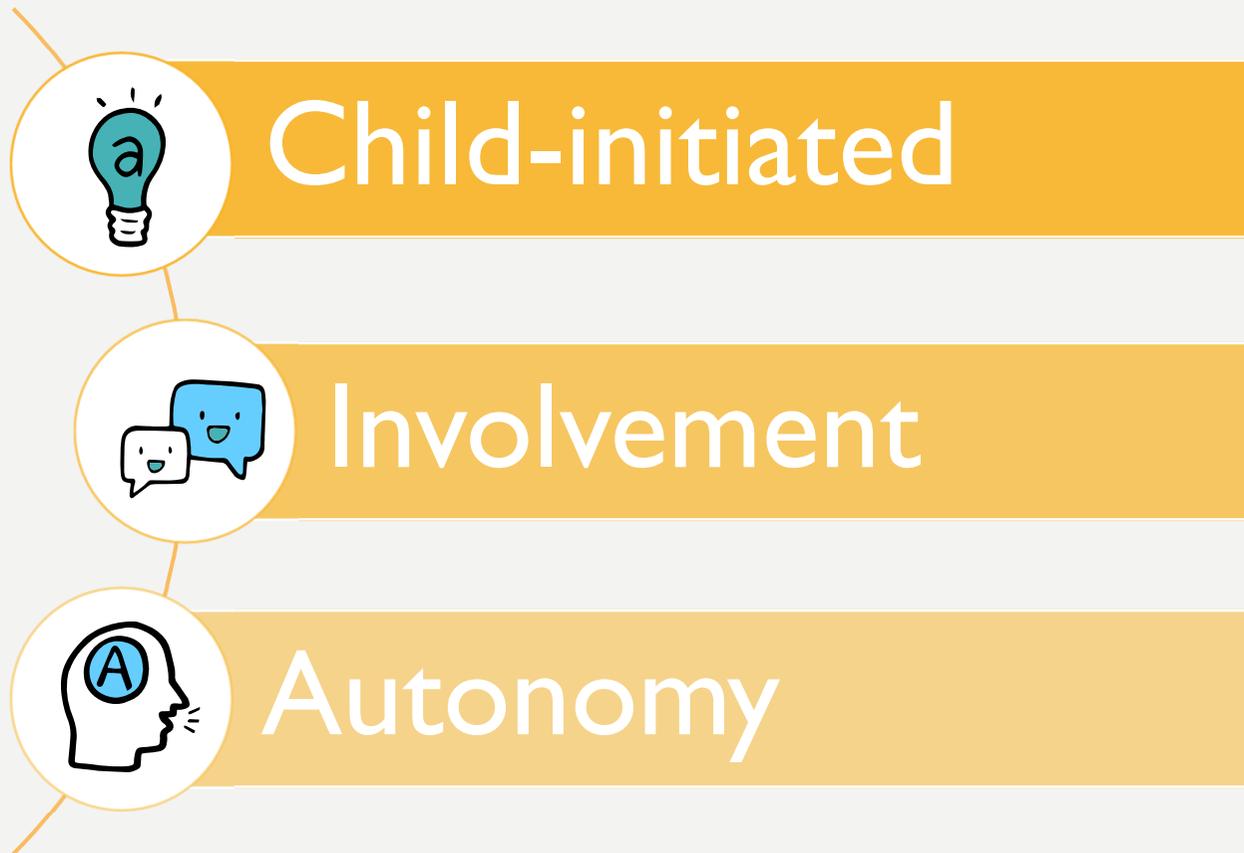
“A physical or mental leisure activity that is undertaken purely for **enjoyment** or **amusement** .”

(Hughes, 2010)

# PLAY implies.....

- enjoyment, happiness, pleasure... all are positive words
- a variety of activities and experiences that can be observed not only in children, but in adults
- the natural vehicle by which young children learn

# UNIQUE FEATURES OF PLAY



(Bruce, 2011)

# Child-initiated

- Purely children/personally directed behaviour
- Children cannot be made to play – they make their own decision to play so they are more engaging in the activity as it is relevant to own needs and interests
- Children construct, control, and change the direction of play

# Involvement

Play is children's "work" –

- They should concentrate on their play
- With no intention of learning something, or improving any skills
- Just want to gain a deep sense of enjoyment

# Autonomy

## Children's motivation to play

- Children play because they want to, they find it rewarding or satisfying; not because they want to please others, or to learn something.

# Autonomy

Children should be allowed to

- choose whether or not to play, and how to play
- create their own play to meet their own needs and desire
- establish the rules of the play
- shape the play as they go – they may change the characters, events, objects, or location, and direct their own actions during play

# **Play that is child-initiated, with involvement and autonomy**

When playing, children:

- focus on own tasks
- deeply involved in what they are doing
- control what they are doing
- initiate play time

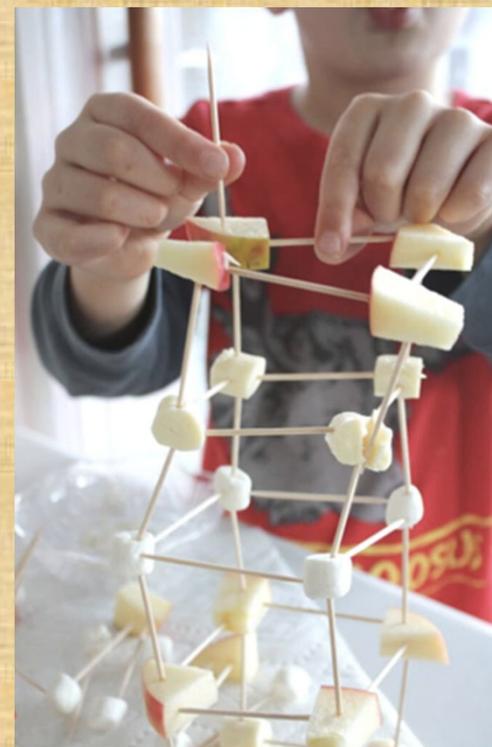
# EXAMPLES OF PLAY



Constructive play



Dramatic play



Exploratory play



## Constructive Play

- about constructing or making something



## Dramatic Play

- the child to reflect on what they experienced in the real world and everyday life
- take on roles and act them out with own thoughts and expression



## Exploratory Play

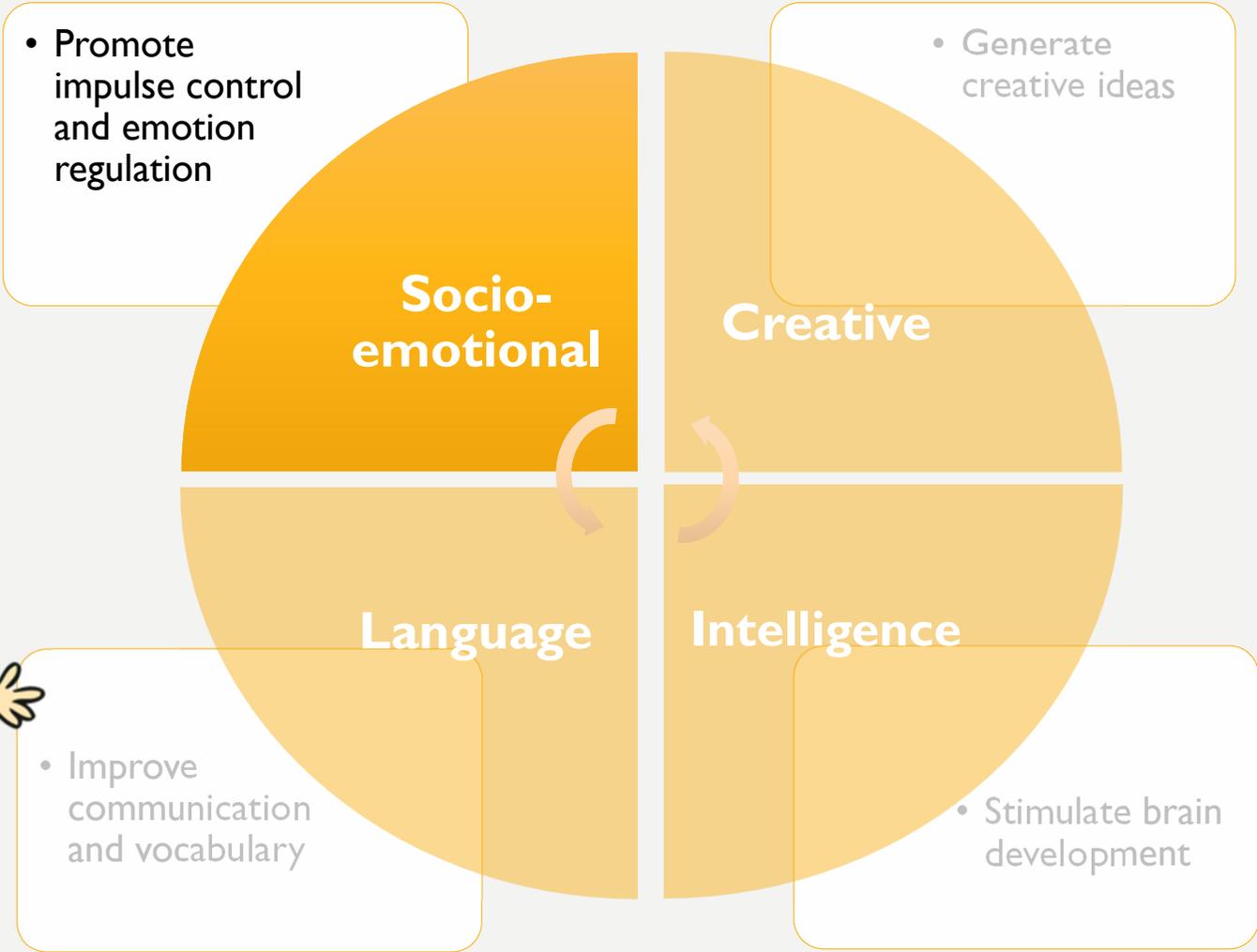
- hands-on exploration – the child examines objects or investigates topics by using different senses (see, listen, touch, smell, move, etc.)
- children can play safely under parents' supervision
- can enhance children's sensory skills, creative and critical thinking

# **BENEFITS OF PLAY**

Play –

The learning outcomes or benefits occur naturally, not planned.

# BENEFITS OF PLAY



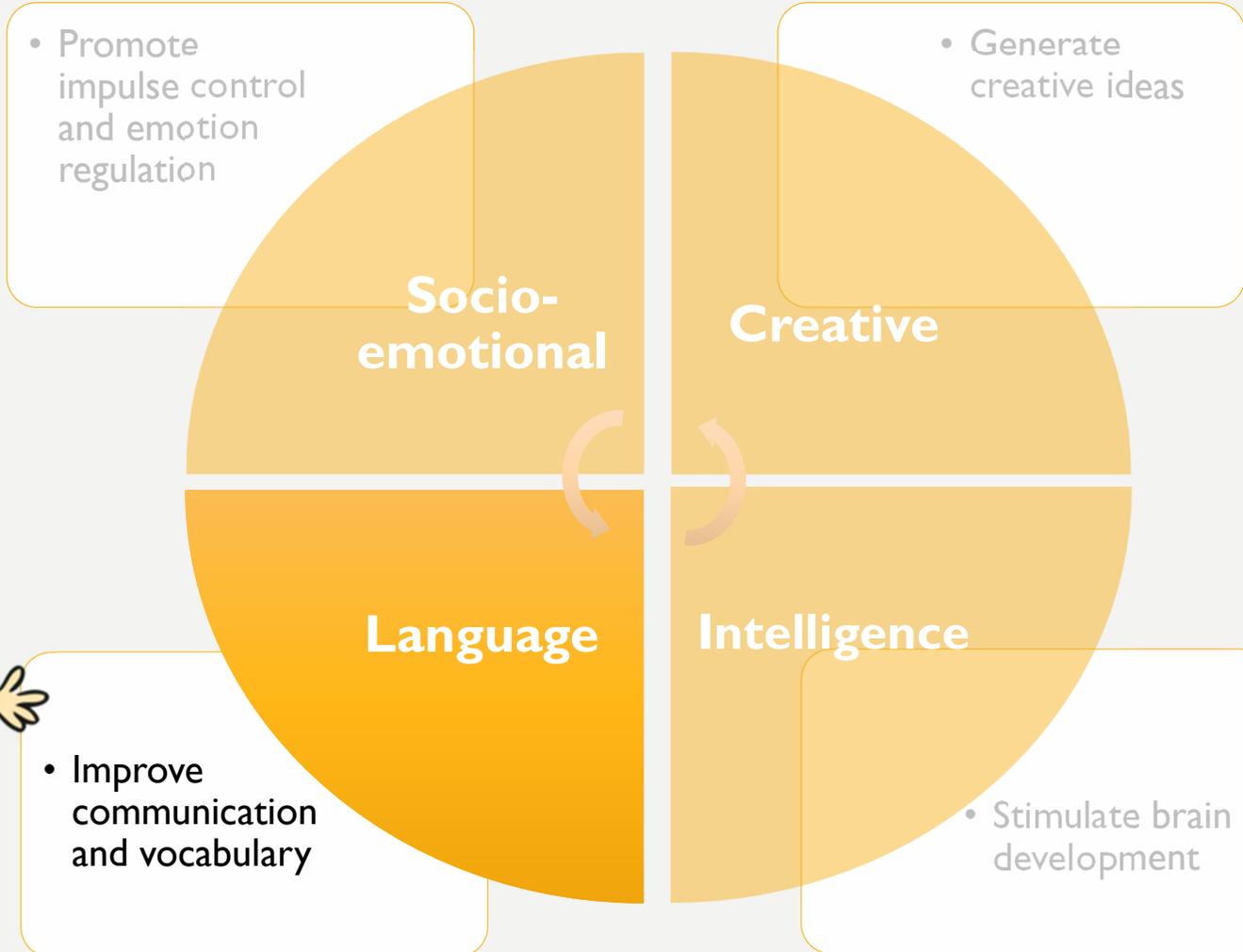
(Li, 2021)

# Socio-emotional

Play promotes impulse control and emotion regulation

- In play time, children have the opportunity to learn about themselves and others
  - become aware of the impact of their behaviours
  - develop skills in conflict resolution, negotiation, trust, and acceptance
- Children can try out different ways of dealing with social situations, and try on feelings, emotions, and social rules.

# BENEFITS OF PLAY



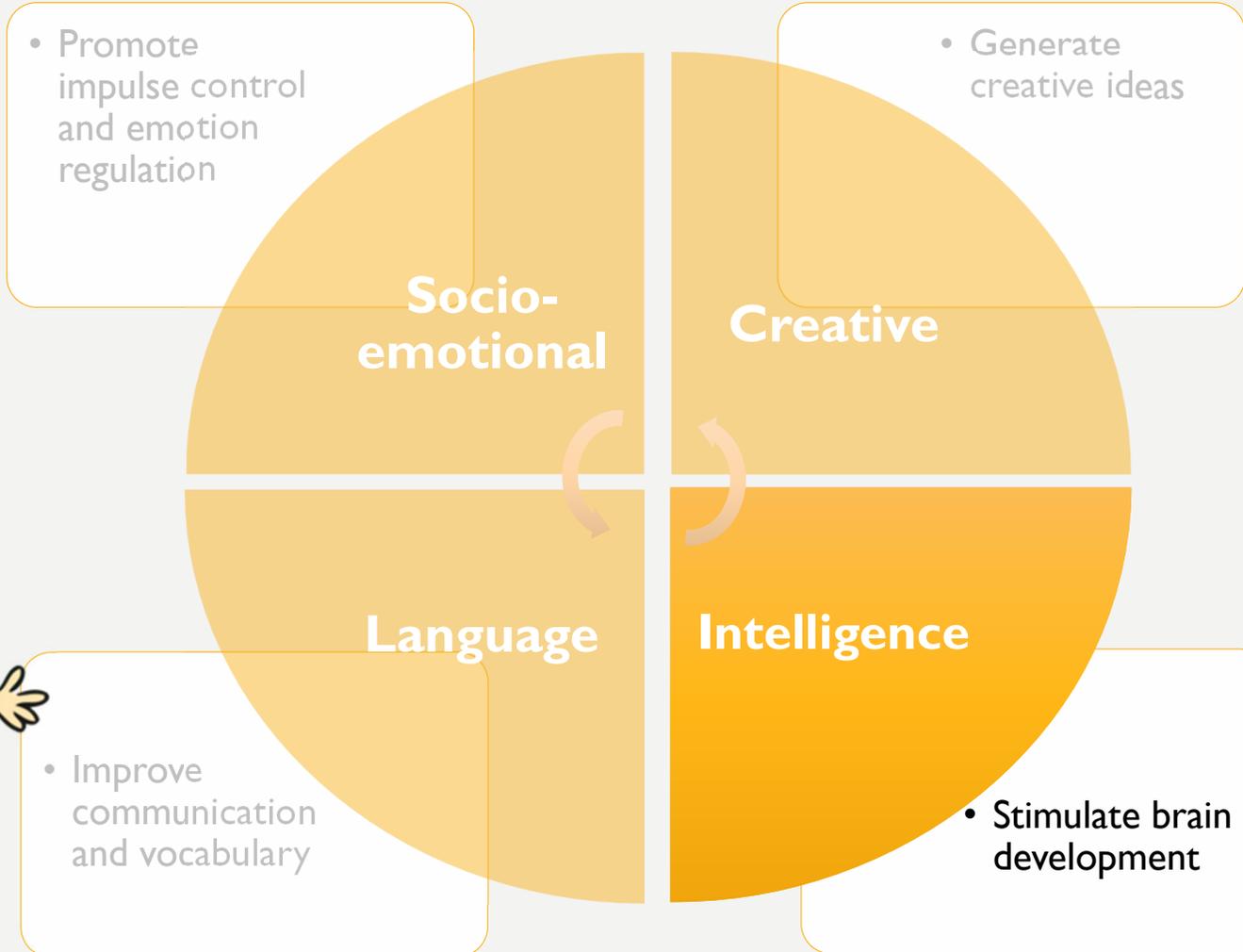
(Li, 2021)

# Language

Play improves communication and vocabulary

- Play offers opportunity for the development of language skills in relation to vocabularies, pronunciation, sentence construction, and transmission of meaning and content.
- Children can observe others' facial expression, and actively listen to others

# BENEFITS OF PLAY



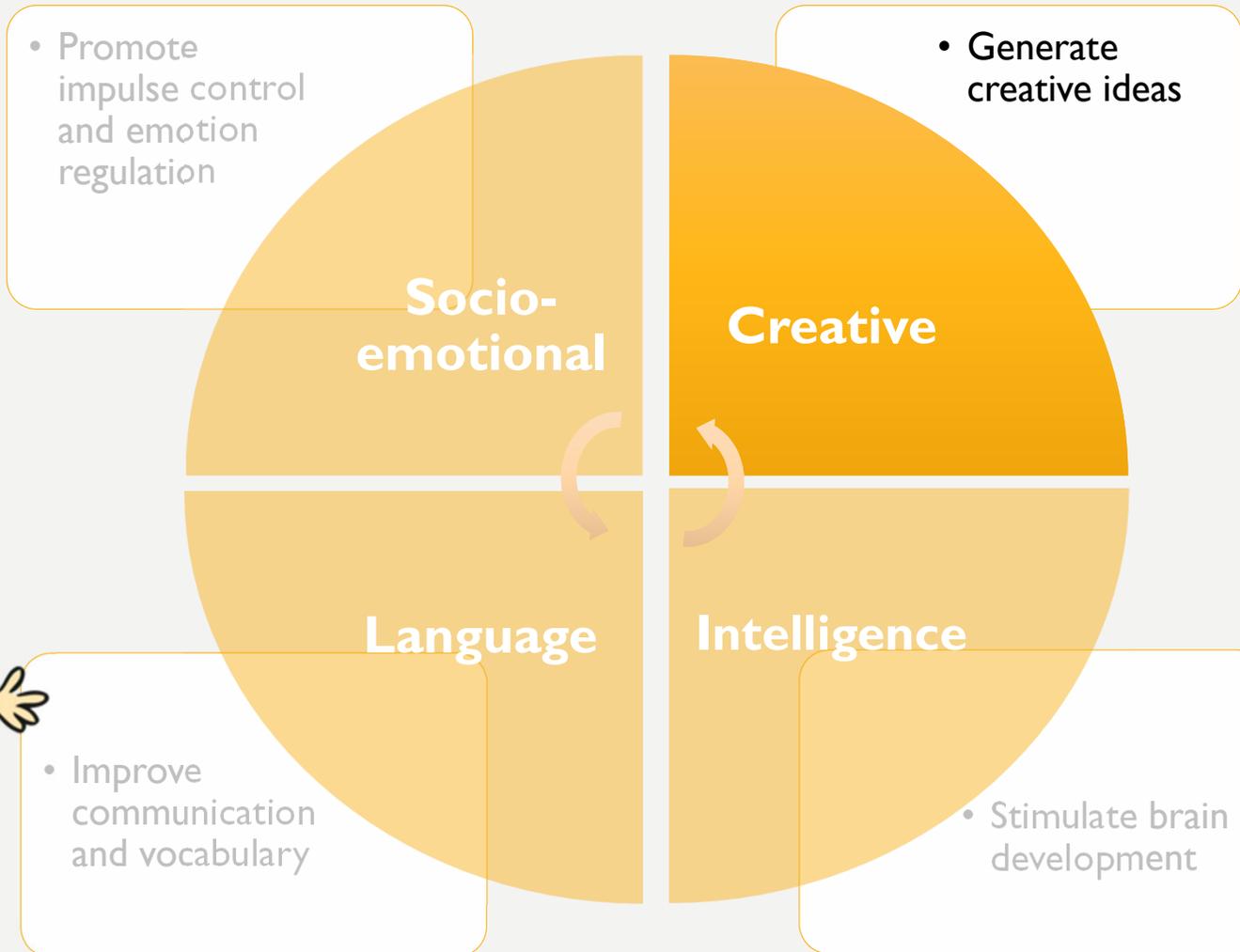
(Li, 2021)

# Intelligence

Play can stimulate brain development

- Play offers opportunity to learn about objects, concepts, and ideas, e.g. sorting, sequencing, weight, and balance
- Children develop problem-solving strategies, and the ability to allow one thing to stand for something else
- Children actively think of solutions in order to achieve own goals

# BENEFITS OF PLAY



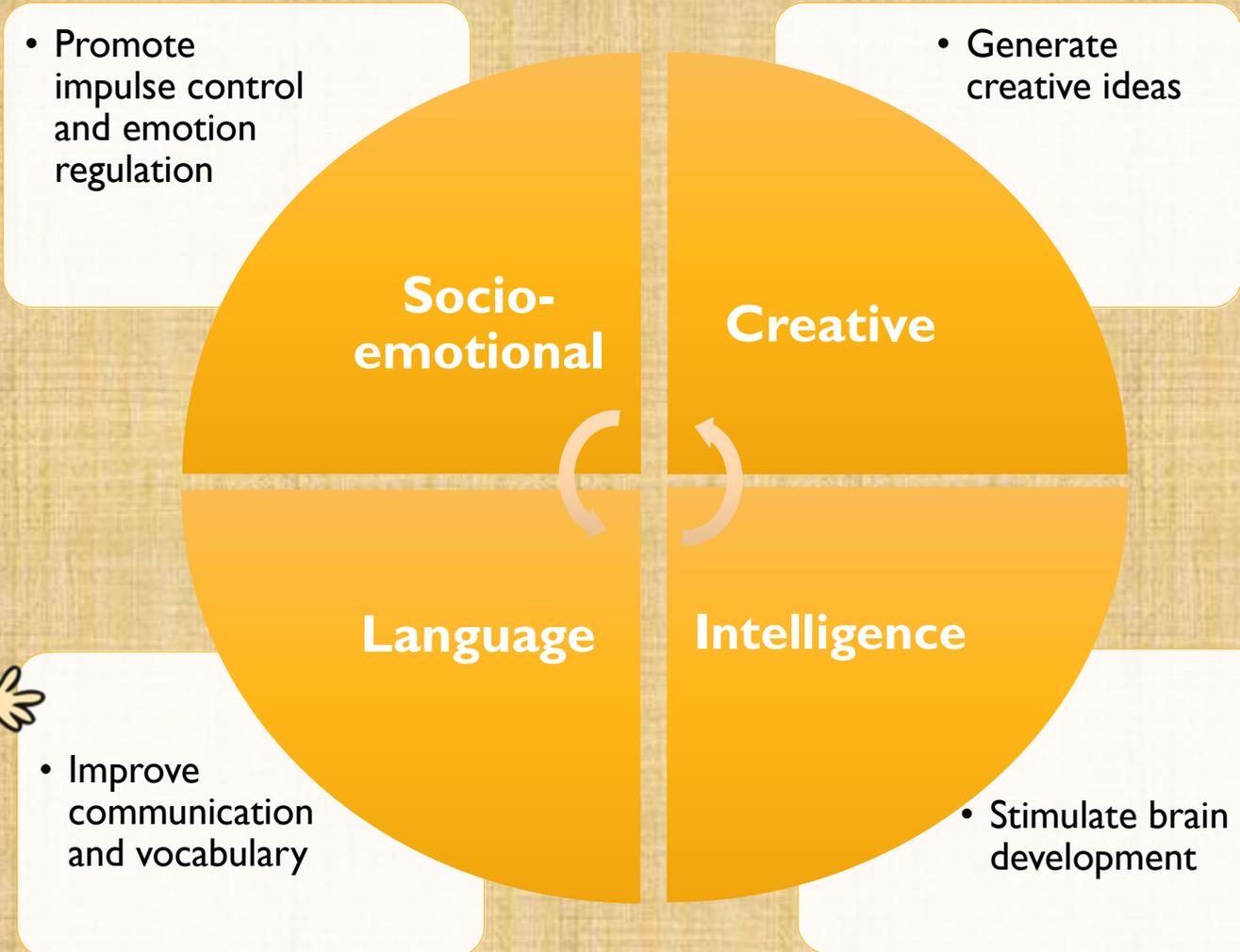
(Li, 2021)

# Creative

Play helps generate creative ideas

- Children will think during play, or have a storyline for the play. They may change the play, or lead to other stuff and thereby enhance their creativity.

# BENEFITS OF PLAY



(Li, 2021)

# Other benefits of Play

Play can help promote children's development in different aspects

- Motor movements and coordination
- Visual ability
- Promote physical health and fitness in terms of the cardiovascular system, muscle tone, weight and height
- Brain development

# LEARNING THROUGH PLAY AT HOME

Play encourages communication

Play improves cognitive development

Play encourages relationship building

(Wheeler, Connor, & Goodwin, 2009)

# WHAT ARE THE MYTHS OF PLAY?



## Some may think that:

- Play has to have a purpose
  - many times play itself has no purpose, and the learning outcomes occur naturally
- Play is a waste of instructional time
  - play has been proved to be one of the most effective teaching methods at the early childhood level

## In fact:

- Play allows children's imagination to run really wild
- Play has numerous benefits for the learners

A child's playroom with a white table, colorful chairs, and toys. The room is bright and clean, with a white shelf in the background holding various toys. A colorful polka-dot pillow is on the table. A stack of colorful rings is on the floor. A teddy bear is on a yellow table to the right. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white box with an orange border.

# MYTH #1

Play is **not** educational.

## FACT:

Play can expand children's **critical thinking** and **creativity**.

(Goodliff, 2018)

- Play is not like ordinary type of learning, e.g. doing homework, revision, or anything that is related to practice.
- However, it is as important as traditional learning methods.
- When playing, children expand their critical thinking skills while gaining the ability to adapt and be flexible.

# PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

- Find some materials around (e.g. masking tapes, papers) to decorate or set up a play area at home.
- Write different alphabets on small notes and stick onto the tapes randomly.
- Then say a word and ask the child to find out all the related alphabets without being caught by the tapes.





The game can help:

- enhance the child's spelling skills and gross motor skills
- enhance relationship between child and parent

# PRACTICAL EXAMPLES



A child's playroom with a white table, colorful chairs, and various toys. The room is bright and colorful, with a white table and chairs in the foreground. There are colorful toys on the table, including a stacking ring toy and a teddy bear. The background shows a white shelf with more toys and a colorful patterned pillow.

## MYTH #2

**Toys** are needed for play.

## FACT:

Children can use the **objects** surrounding them to encourage **play**.

(Santer, Griffiths, & Goodall, 2007)

- Toys have their values, yet some toys have specific ways to be played with, allowing little room for change and limiting children's imagination.
- Children can play with anything, anywhere.
  - The best toy is actually around you.
  - Getting toys with no rules helps enhance creativity.
  - Use whatever you have to boost imagination and creativity.
- Buy toys that allow your child to use imagination to play with, e.g. dress-up books, dolls, blocks.

- Just play with what you can find at home – books, outdated magazine, tissue paper rolls, rubber bands, markers, strings, clips, etc.

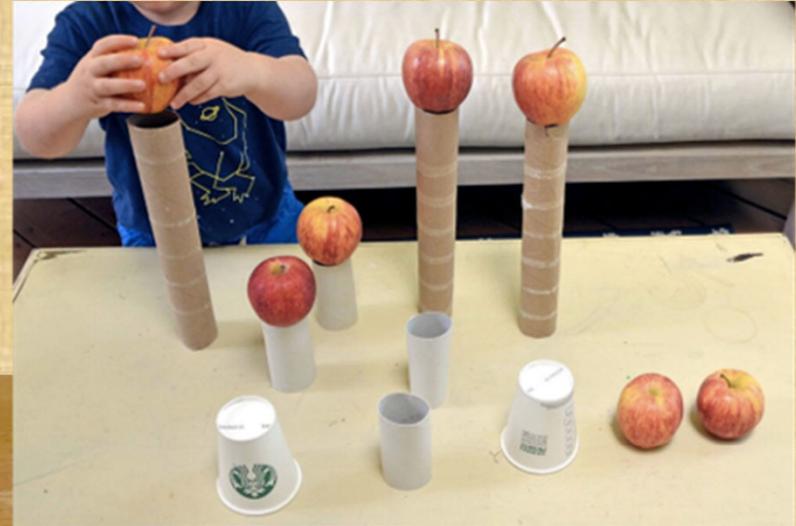


Use legs to catch a falling magazine



Fire rubber bands at toilet paper rolls

# PRACTICAL EXAMPLES



A child's playroom with a white table, colorful chairs, and toys. The room is bright and organized, with a white shelf holding dolls and a colorful polka-dot pillow. A yellow table with a teddy bear is visible on the right. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white box with an orange border.

# MYTH #3

Play is **messy**.

## FACT:

Sometimes play only requires **little** space and **little** clearing up.

(Goodliff, 2018)

- Play may require little space and little clearing up time.
- Messy play can be under control
  - get ready with tools that may help in keeping things tidy or in restricted areas
  - control the portion and the time – give out the play materials little by little, not all at one go
- Most important thing – the time you spend with the child. It needs patience, communication, exchange of ideas, so that you both enjoy and have fun.



# PRACTICAL EXAMPLES





**ANY QUESTIONS?**

## Enquiry I

Jessie, I'm really worried. You just said, every child should play. But my daughter won't. Her teacher told me that she seemed to be very unhappy during play time at school. She just sits there and do nothing. At first I thought she might be bullied by classmates, but her teacher didn't think so.

I often bring her to the playground, but she does not play. She just sits aside, watching other kids play, and smiling foolishly. That's weird. I don't know if she has autism or other problems. It worries me.

## Quick Response

- Children may not have been exposed to different kinds of play, play materials, or play themes.
- Children may not know how to join in, what to do, how to do it, what to say. They may be worried about not playing successfully, or being rejected by others.
- Some are just shy, need some time to warm up. They need more time on observing others, learning how to blend in the situation or play environment.

## Quick Response

- Solution: Parent may provide more play experiences to the child
  - playing with the child at home, playing different kinds of games, or using different materials
  - doing more fieldtrips with the child (e.g. to different parks)
  - providing demonstration (e.g. through pretend play), showing your child how to do it

## Enquiry 2

Dr Lam, I don't know any play strategies. I simply buy my kid some toys, and he can do what he likes. However, he always says the toys are boring. I do not know if I should buy him more toys, or do anything.

Actually I'm puzzled. What should I do when my kid is playing? Should I play with him, or let him play on his own? But every time I play with him, I can't help thinking about what to teach him through the play. Am I on the right track?

## Quick Response

Young children need parents to provide many things to facilitate their play:

- provide time, space, materials, and experiences for them to play
- act as a resource person to help them solve conflicts, explain play ideas, and cooperate with one another at their play
- be the practice person for your children – provide yourself into the game, play with your children, and move them to higher level of play skills

## Enquiry 3

I'm so upset by my children. They play with anyone – other kids, their dad, and even our maid. They are quite happy, no problem at all. They just do not like to play with me.

I really do not understand. I'm willing to play with them, and do whatever they ask me to, but they quickly lose interest and turn away. Have I done anything wrong?

## Quick Response

During play time, children may not like what parents instruct them to do. Some parents are very controlling, trying to dominate the whole play time.

Solution:

- Try not to talk a lot; let the kid says.
- Try not to say “No”, or you should do this, you should do that.
- Try asking the child: what do you think? what do you want me to do?

## Reflect on yourself:

- Play is child-initiated
- Kids want themselves and you to be involved
- Autonomy – did you let your kids direct the whole play time?

With your help and support, children will enhance their self-esteem and confidence because they are more successful in play. They can

- elaborate the roles they play with greater accuracy
- better fit into a social group
- more easily solve problems, communicate their ideas with more fluency, and show more empathy towards their peers
- practise leadership skills when they put forth new play ideas

A photograph of a child's playroom. In the foreground, there is a small wooden table with colorful legs (red, blue, yellow) and a matching chair. The table has a patterned cloth on it. In the background, there is a white shelf with various toys, including dolls and a teddy bear. A colorful polka-dot pillow is on the shelf. To the right, there is a yellow table with a teddy bear on it. The room has a light-colored carpet and a blue wall.

**As learning can  
take place in play,  
the lessons of play  
extend far beyond  
childhood.**

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**~THANK YOU~**