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# Invitations to Play: Using Play to Build Literacy Skills in Young Learners

by Meghan K. Block, Ph.D.

Burke, A. (2018). *Invitations to play: Using play to build literacy skills in young learners*. Ontario, CA: Pembroke Publishers. ISBN 978-1-55138-336-1



In her book, *Invitations to Play: Using Play to Build Literacy Skills in Young Learners*, Anne Burke discusses an important and timely topic—the importance of play in the early childhood and early elementary classrooms. In her words, “...the best way for all young learners to learn is through play” (p. 7). Burke not only discusses the importance of play in children’s learning, but also describes the different ways in which children play and explains the different types of play. She then offers numerous ideas of activities and experiences teachers can provide to support literacy development through children’s play.

Burke’s book is divided into nine chapters; each chapter addresses ways in which different elements of the curriculum can be supported through children’s play. Throughout the book, she discusses building language, playing with print, supporting mathematical skills, exploring science, and building citizenship through play. Each chapter contains relevant classroom examples and scenarios to illustrate key ideas and suggestions. In addition, Burke provides useful ideas to implement in the classroom as well as suggestions for parents to extend the learning through play in the home. Each idea contains a thorough explanation, including what to do, how it supports literacy development, and why play provides an appropriate way for children to practice the highlighted skill.

In her first chapter, Burke recognizes that the classroom is a complex place and that there are sometimes



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obstacles to establishing a play-based curriculum; yet she offers educators compelling reasons to include play. She argues that play encourages problem-solving and social interactions which are critical to children’s development yet might be neglected in traditional classrooms. She uses the bulk of the chapter to guide educators to create a play-based curriculum and spends time discussing the value of play in children’s academic and social development. Educators will find both the research and the recommendations useful as they consider supporting literacy development through play in the early elementary classroom.

Throughout the book, Burke argues and provides evidence to support the claim that play supports the development of the whole child, and that important literacy skills can and should be developed during play. In fact, play often is a process through which children are intrinsically motivated to learn and practice important

## Must Read Texts

early literacy skills. Ultimately, play can and does provide authentic contexts for children to practice literacy skills. For example, dramatic play centers offer many opportunities for children to acquire and apply early literacy skills. One center Burke suggests is a café. One thing children might do in this center is create a menu or write signs—opportunities for authentic writing.

Though the book is text heavy and lacks photographic examples, readers will be inspired by Burke's thoughtful recommendations and well-organized text. Burke writes an articulate book in which the language is accessible, and the content is informative. It's well-worth the read. This book will be most appealing to educators who are

looking for ways to infuse more literacy learning into children's play or those who are simply looking to add more play into their classroom. Educators will finish reading the book with many simple ideas to incorporate authentic learning experiences that support children's literacy learning.

## Author Biography

**Dr. Meghan K. Block** is an Associate Professor of Elementary Literacy in the Teacher Education and Professional Development Department at Central Michigan University. Her teaching and research interests focus on early literacy development and instruction. She can be reached at [block1m@cmich.edu](mailto:block1m@cmich.edu).

