

Pretend play is less beneficial for early child development than play that's rooted in real life

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Child-raising and early education would do well to shift towards play, books, and visual media that are more rooted in real life. Young children—particularly those aged over three years—often prefer these things to pretend play that involves fictional characters, cartoons, and fantasy. Play that's based on what adults do can enhance early child development.

This advice challenges Western beliefs that fictional, pretend play is central to early child development and the growth of individual creativity. No strong evidence supports the idea that pretend play based on fiction or fantasy has a unique, causal role in creativity. And some evidence suggests that it can disrupt children's thinking.