

# The Importance of Early Learning Professionals

The Power of Play offered by trained Early Learning Professionals:  
Thoughts on Advocacy During Times of Change



“Children at play are insulated from the alarming world around them. Play is a sanctuary of safety. Play is also the original school, far more effective anything society could possibly invent. Rather than try to make the home a school, it would be much more important in these times to make the home a true playground where Nature can take care of all of us. In true play, the engagement is in the activity, not the outcome.”

~Gordon Neufeld

[Article by Kristy Thomas](#)

[Program Director at Mckernan Child Development Centre & RIE® Intern](#)

As an early childhood director during the COVID19 crisis, I realize that what parents currently are missing most is the relationships with their daycare providers/early childhood educators and the care offered by them daily. It's the ability to go to work and not have children underfoot, fully trusting the child care choice they have made for their child's well-being. Some, may see our work also as an education of sorts, but for many, the thought that Early learning spaces also provide education is a bit misunderstood. This is one of the many reasons I appreciate the work of Magda Gerber and the RIE® philosophy. In this philosophy, Magda refers to us as “educarers®” and intentionally so. She describes our work as an ideal pairing of care & education and recognizes that one cannot be fully complete without the other. As you engage with the RIE® philosophy, you begin to understand that curriculum is everything in a child's day & is fully informed and made meaningful through the relationships built and interactions of both child and adult during each experience together (and apart).

As an early learning professional this is such a strong advocacy piece for me. While I absolutely understand and appreciate being acknowledged for the care we offer, I feel it is also crucial that our field is seen also as well informed educators of young children. It is through the intentional relationships I build with the children I care for combined with a strong understanding of child development and the importance of play where the true learning ‘magic’ happens.

With a strong understanding of these two elements as well as my role as facilitator, the importance of my role becomes so clearly important. On one hand, I am offering care during daily routines & building relationships; strengthening my bond with the children and families I serve, and on the other hand, I am putting my own knowledge into practice offering meaningful play experiences, provocations, and observing the outcomes to continue this cyclical process. Together, both play a vital role in educating young children effectively.

This leads me to my original thought of how especially during this time, this understanding of how both pieces work together, is something only trained Early learning professionals know fully. If our only focus is the daily routines and custodial care- we’re missing the point. Conversely, offering curriculum that is adult imposed, and developmentally inappropriate won’t work fully either. In both cases, children will be cared for and occupied during a parent’s workday, and learning may happen, but when an educated early learning professional engages in what we know to be our work: child centred, playful experiences together with children, real learning and education takes place.

During this time where we are finally seen as the essential service we’ve always known ourselves to be, what if we used this time to reach out to our community and advocate for our work? With our knowledge that children & families should be the centre of curriculum, we have the opportunity to build on those relationships and share the heart of our work.

With our knowledge that play is the core element in learning for young children, here is our opportunity to let that be known. Finally, if we know as co-learners, co-researchers, and co-imaginings of possibilities alongside children is our role, let’s share that understanding with those that are listening so that during this time of crisis, children can engage fully in their “sanctuary of safety” and come through it stronger than before. Perhaps even, our field too, will come out stronger on the other side, brought to the forefront and highlighted as a profession worthy of full respect.

“Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before.”— Loris Malaguzzi