

ExchangeEveryDay

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Is Joy Being Left Behind?

A smile is the universal welcome.
Max Eastman

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According to Judy Ellis, writing in **Education Leadership** ("The Neuroscience of Joyful Education," Summer 2007), "Brain research tells us that when the fun stops, learning often stops too." In the introduction to her article she summarize her views...

"Most children can't wait to start kindergarten and approach the beginning of school with awe and anticipation. Kindergartners and 1st graders often talk passionately about what they learn and do in school. Unfortunately, the current emphasis on standardized testing and rote learning encroaches upon many students' joy. In their zeal to raise test scores, too many policymakers wrongly assume that students who are laughing, interacting in groups, or being creative with art, music, or dance are not doing real academic work. The result is that some teachers feel pressure to preside over more sedate classrooms with students on the same page in the same book, sitting in straight rows, facing straight ahead.

"The truth is that when we scrub joy and comfort from the classroom, we distance our students from effective information processing and long-term memory storage. Instead of taking pleasure from learning, students become bored, anxious, and anything but engaged. They ultimately learn to feel bad about school and lose the joy they once felt.

"My own experience as a neurologist and classroom teacher has shown me the benefits of joy in the classroom. Neuroimaging studies and measurement of brain chemical transmitters reveal that students' comfort levels can influence information transmission and storage in the brain. When students are engaged and motivated and feel minimal stress, information flows freely through the affective filter in the amygdala and they achieve higher levels of cognition, make connections, and experience 'aha' moments. Such learning comes not from quiet classrooms and directed lectures, but from classrooms with an atmosphere of exuberant discovery."

Designing Learning Environments

In **Caring Space, Learning Places: Children's Environments that Work**, James Greenman provides a comprehensive look at designing an effective learning environment, both from a physical as well as social perspective. This week, **Caring Spaces** is on [sale at a 20% discount](#).

Motivate Teachers

FREE registration today!

Gain support, information and inspiration about the new NAEYC Accreditation standards as Julie Bartkus hosts a conference call with the NAEYC Academy for Early Childhood Program Accreditation.

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