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Realising Potentials through Education:
Shaping the Minds and Brains for the Future

Active Playful Learning:

Where the Science of Learning Meets Education

The “factory model” of education that dominates classrooms around the world is outdated. Our current model of education neither prepares students to thrive in the 21st century nor does it address systemic inequalities. In our Brookings Big Ideas Piece (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2020), *A new path to education reform*, and in *Making Schools Work* (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2022), we argue for a developmentally appropriate pedagogy built on the latest science of learning while offering children rich curricular learning. This approach was a cornerstone of UNESCO’s Happy School’s movement (2024) and of recent work from the OECD arguing against the increased schoolification in education (OECD, 2020, p. 33). Our model addresses these recent trends through work in what we call *Active Playful Learning* (APL). It uses a 3-part equation, based in the science of learning, to realize this goal. We start with cultural contexts that embrace community funds of knowledge that children bring to our classrooms. We then add the “how” of learning such that if we teach in ways that capitalize on how brains learn, children are more likely to retain and transfer their knowledge.

Third, we add “what” the children need to know to thrive in a world dotted with Chat GPT, and with workplaces that will later require them to expand their repertoire of outcomes to include a breadth of skills, 6Cs -- collaboration, communication, content, critical thinking, creative innovation, and confidence (grit and growth mindset). In this talk, I demonstrate how this equation has been used to design an evidence-based pedagogical approach that is being evaluated in a longitudinal study in the US along with how it is being used to support community-based, out of school enrichment. We also speak to how aspects of the approach are being loosely applied to schools internationally in Japan, Vietnam, Iran, Mexico, and Ghana. Active, playful learning offers a powerful route for re-imagining our educational pedagogy and policy in ways aligned with the latest science of learning.



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