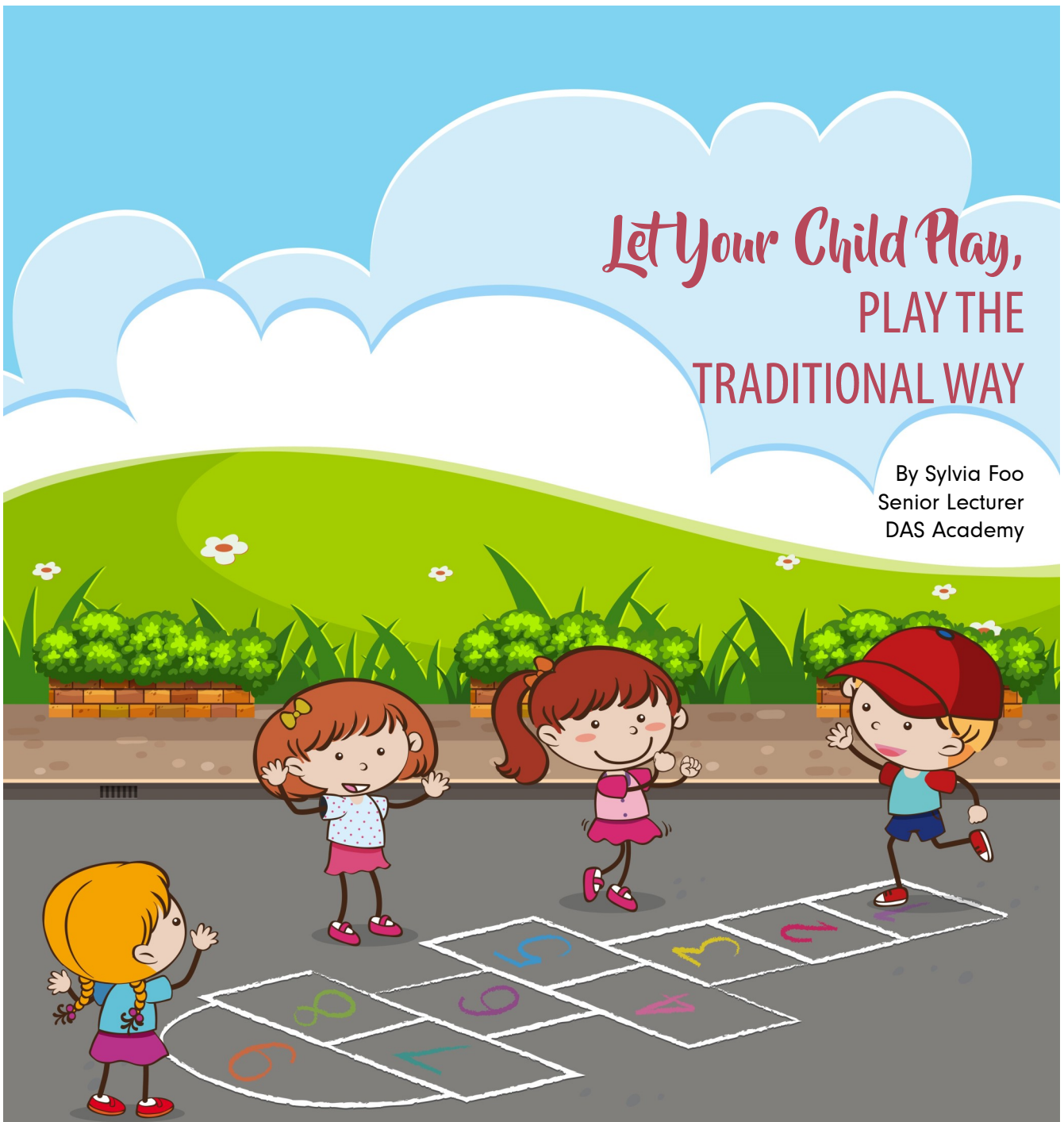


Let Your Child Play, PLAY THE TRADITIONAL WAY

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It is often said that you can tell which era a person grew up in from the music he listened to or the shows and movies he watched. I remember telling my student about my favourite television series, Little House on the Prairie, when I was in secondary school.

My student wrinkled up her nose in disgust that I actually enjoyed watching the adventures of three sisters growing up on a farm in the American Midwest in the 1870s and 1880s.

Some of her comments included, “Where got fun running around on a farm and countryside?”, “You mean they had to make their own games? No computer, right?” and the mother of all comments, “Wah, if I have to play like that, I will go mad. Better study instead.” My student’s comments about the nature of play a long, long time ago is perhaps typical of the modern era where digital games play a prominent role in the play or leisure diet of our children and students. Even adults in public transport are hooked on their small screens, pressing furiously away to get higher scores on the latest Candy Crush or Minecraft installment.

Don't get me wrong. There are benefits from playing online and mobile games. Digital games have the power to stimulate curiosity, imagination and encourage the use of logic to solve problems through puzzles and riddles. But like any other diet, it is good to vary our children's menu of games so they get a balanced intellectual, physical and social development. A diet of predominantly fast food is not healthy even if that fast food has less salt and sugar or is fried in olive oil.

Adding traditional games to your child's diet of play is one way to increase variety and promote the development of important skills. I consider traditional games to be those that do not involve computers or high-tech gadgets. They can be simple and inexpensive such as Hopscotch, Five Stones, Pick-Up Sticks and Cat's Cradle (The Patterned String Game). Traditional games can include board or word games such as Monopoly, Chess, Scrabble, and Cluedo as well as card games like Happy Families, Old Maid and Snap. There are today newer versions of traditional games in toy stores such as Uno, Rush Hour, Jenga, Twister, Pictionary and Hedbanz.

HOW DOES PLAYING TRADITIONAL GAMES BENEFIT YOUR CHILD?

Firstly, some traditional games require physical movement unlike digital games which are primarily sedentary in nature. A common concern of parents is that children are not getting enough physical activity because they already spend a lot of their time at the table doing homework and studying for tests and examinations. Moreover, some dyslexic children may have problems with their physical dexterity and co-ordination or they may have ADHD.

Traditional games that require physical movement provide increased opportunities for dyslexic children to jump or stretch and even improve their hand-eye coordination. They also give the ADHD child a chance to train his focus and decision-making while having fun. A game like Pick-Up sticks requires an ADHD child to learn to concentrate and control his impulsivity as he decides which is the better stick to pick up. This is unlike playing a digital game which can overstimulate his senses.

Secondly, traditional games can stimulate your

child's brain through logical thinking and strategy the same way that digital games can, but without him being exposed to scenarios that are excessively violent. Games like Rush Hour can help your child to visualize how he can move the red car forward in as few moves as possible. Monopoly teaches your child to be careful with how he spends his money and to make good decisions. Cluedo helps your child to look for clues to make deductions. Looking at context clues is an important part of inference, a higher level reading comprehension skill.

Finally, traditional games can help your child to improve his communication and social interaction skills. Digital games often require the player to interact only with the game itself. There is little need to connect with others. Playing traditional games requires children to spend time with their parents, siblings or friends without a virtual medium. They develop the intangibles such as learning to ask questions politely, taking turns, following the rules of the games, showing empathy to players who lose and controlling their temper when they themselves lose. Most of all, happy memories are created as children with bond with their parents, siblings and friends over traditional games. Satisfaction is gained from being together in the spirit of fun and during the lively banter. There is no need to keep increasing one's score on a game to have a sense of enjoyment or achievement.

There is room for both digital and traditional games in our children's play diet. How is a balance to be achieved? A good way to look at it is to first consider how much family time we have given the nature of life in a fast moving and stressful society. It then becomes important to ditch the small and big screens regularly and return to playing traditional games with our children during family time. This will make the limited time we have with them more emotionally fulfilling as relationships are built and strengthened.

References:

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