LET'S.....PLAY

By Christina Bass
Picture this…

The beginning of the school year, new to the school, trying to make an obvious positive impression, when the assistant principal entered the room to find 21 students sprawled across the room; dice flying, balls bouncing, candy wrappers and paper airplanes being thrown, paint splattering, not to mention the music playing in the background—

YIKES!!!!!
Called into the assistant principal’s office that afternoon, I just knew what was coming…

“As I walked into your room today it was completely chaotic; a real hot mess.”

Feeling as if I would not have a job in the morning, and before I had the opportunity to defend the reason we were “playing”, the assistant principal continued with words that affirmed the very reason why we do what we do and how play creates such relevant experiences to the learning process.
The assistant principal went on to explain that what she originally had thought to be chaos, was truly a learning environment. As she rotated from station to station, she had questioned the students about what they were doing and why. Each student was not only able to answer her questions, but she realized that each student (from my special needs students to the gifted students) were actively engaged, on-task, excited about what they were doing, able to apply the information, and building relationships through the process.
To the untrained eye, it may appear that we are simply providing time for free play so we can take a break from our role as teacher, parent, counselor, nurse, referee, and maid, not to mention a trying to have a life outside of the field.
In reality, we are providing infinite opportunity for growth and development, while covering the state standards, meeting the needs of all students, individualizing and differentiating instruction, motivating students, promoting the development of life skills, fostering a sense of community, and raising a generation that loves learning, all as an added bonus.

In our “busy-ness” we often overlook the very basic idea how play not only enhances the learning process, but IS the learning process.
“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation.”

-Plato
CLASSIC GAMES FOR ALL ABILITIES...

- Tic-Tac-Toe: place vocabulary terms, spelling words, or even math problems in each square; students give definitions, correct spelling, or solve problems to earn their “x” or “o”.
- Place pictures, colors, numbers, etc. on students’ backs; they rotate around the room asking one another yes/no questions to guess what is on their back.
- Use the “Jeopardy” format for reviewing units.
- “Toss Across”-students toss bean bags to squares that have math problems, vocabulary terms, etc. and wherever the bean bag lands is the problem the student solves.
- Create your own “Candy Land” game with numbers or letters instead of colors (can also use vocabulary, concepts, etc.).
- Stand Up/Sit Down-call out information and have students stand, sit, dance, etc., when you call out information (i.e. if rain is a form of precipitation then stand up; if 2+2=4 dance, etc.).
- Use playing cards and dice for math games.
SO......

HAVE FUN and remember to PLAY