Naturalist Intelligence. Children who are strong in this area may observe nature; notice changes in the environment; enjoy conducting experiments; sort and categorize objects; like using magnifying glasses, microscopes, binoculars, and telescopes to study nature; like to care for pets; and enjoy gardening.

While people all possess, to some extent, intelligence in all of these areas, most exhibit higher levels in one or more areas. Moreover, no one intelligence exists by itself, so there is interaction between and among intelligences. Gardner explains that people have the capacity to develop all of their intelligences if given appropriate encouragement, enrichment, and support.

The Creative Curriculum applies Gardner’s theory by showing teachers how to provide opportunities for every child to pursue his or her special talents and to demonstrate areas of strength. The use of interest areas—each with different materials—gives children opportunities to learn using their particular kind of intelligence rather than forcing them into a mold. In keeping with Gardner’s notion of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences, the Curriculum gives learning social skills the same level of importance as learning content. It includes plenty of physical activity and chances to explore nature, along with traditional academics such as literacy, math, science, and social studies.

Smilansky: The Role of Children’s Play in Learning

Sara Smilansky’s research focuses on how children learn through play and the relationship of play to future academic success. Smilansky distinguishes four types of play: functional, constructive, dramatic or pretend, and games with rules.

Functional play. Functional play is a form of play in which children use their senses and muscles to experiment with materials and learn how things go together. It satisfies children’s need to be active and to explore. Typically, in functional play, children repeat their actions over and over while talking to themselves about what they are doing. Functional play is the earliest to appear and continues throughout childhood whenever there are new objects to explore.

The Creative Curriculum shows teachers how to create an environment that allows for functional play experiences by including new materials in each interest area. As children play with these materials they learn about their world. The Creative Curriculum teacher facilitates this learning by making descriptive statements that convey information or asking questions that get children to think about what they are doing.