UNICEF

Teacher TRAINING Packages

Facilitator Guide

NQF Level 4

Play Learning Materials Consortium (PLMC)

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CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

CAPS   Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement

DBE   Department of Basic Education

DHET   Department of Higher Education and Training

ECD   Early Childhood Development

ELDA   Early Learning and Development Area

HEI   Higher Education Institution

MKO   More Knowledgeable Other

NCF   National Curriculum Framework for Children Birth to Four Years

NELDS   National Early Learning and Development Standards for Children Birth to Four

NQF   National Qualifications Framework

PBA   Play-based Approach to teaching and learning

TVET   Technical and Vocational Education and Training

UNCRC   United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund (formerly United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)

GLOSSARY

agency refers to the feeling of knowing you can make decisions, do things by yourself, control your environment, voice your ideas, and feel valued and appreciated by the people who are important to you

assessment is a continuous planned process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about the development and learning of babies, toddlers and young children

child-initiated play is planned, chosen and started by the child

child-directed play activities are controlled, decided on, organised by the child while they are being played

co-opted play is when adults join in child-initiated and directed play towards scaffolding further learning

executive function is a set of thinking processes which work together to help us remember information we need to complete a task, pay attention during an activity, filter out distractions, control ourselves. They help us to think creatively and solve problems, and be flexible to adjusting our plans

free play (or unstructured play) is when children engage in open-ended play that has no specific learning objective.

guided play (instructional play) is when adult design play activities for children

intentional teaching means that teachers work with specific outcomes or goals in mind for all areas of children's development and learning

iterative means doing something over and over again in different ways

mirroring means that this guide employs similar play-based features for adult learning activities to those used to support play-based learning and teaching with children

open-ended questions are questions that do not have one correct answer. There are many possible answers and this encourages higher level thinking and problem-solving

play-based (approach/ teaching and learning) is creating learning opportunities for children through play to help them develop skills, understanding and solve problems based on their interests and strengths.

play environment is the setting in which children can safely explore different activities and learn about new things and have a fun time doing it.

playful instruction refers to games and other activities used by the teacher with particular learning objectives in mind.

reflect means to think deeply about an experience to develop a greater understanding so that our work continues to improve

scaffolding describes the role of a more knowledgeable other in guiding and supporting a child to learn new concepts and develop their skills.

structured play is play that has been designed with a particular learning objective in mind.

teacher-directed play activities are controlled, decided on, and organised by the teacher while they are being played

unstructured play or free play is when children engage in open-ended play that has no specific learning objective.

1. INTRODUCTION

General background

Background to project

There is widespread and growing international recognition of the importance of play for promoting effective development and learning in the early childhood years. This has been stimulated by research on brain development and the realisation that the demands of the 21st century require flexible and creative learners. The right to play is recognised in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, and the South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) is strongly promoting the adoption of a playbased approach for children from birth through the Foundation Phase.

To strengthen play in existing early childhood education programmes UNICEF, DBE and DHET commissioned the development of NQF aligned packages of teacher learning materials on play-based learning and assessment tools to complement existing training programmes for early childhood education and the Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3).

Development was informed by a rapid review of existing teacher education on play-based learning including pre-service/initial teacher education and in-service/continuing teacher professional development at higher education institutions and in technical and vocational education and training colleges, and non-profit and private Resource and training organisations This identified what already existed, and in particular gaps that needed filling. The importance of a dedicated training focus on play pedagogy in changing teaching practice has been demonstrated (Vu, Han and Buell, 2015).

Key findings of the rapid review taken into account in the development of the teacher training packages were that:

♦ the use of a playbased approach was more often implicit and "threaded through" the course material rather than specifically referred to, leaving it to teacher trainers to focus on play or not
♦ there was no common understanding of the continuum of play-based learning
♦ for HEI courses most of the references to play referred to Grade R only. With the exception of Play-SA, materials are primarily aimed at practitioners working with younger children.
♦ TVET courses are very prescriptive with high time demands and little if any discretionary time, which means that play will be excluded unless explicitly mentioned in the course materials.
♦ In course outlines where play is mentioned, there is more emphasis on theories and descriptions, and less focus on **how** to implement a play-based pedagogy/**how** to facilitate learning through play. In the materials reviewed there is more focus on activities.

How to use this guide

Taking account of the limited training time available for existing learning programmes this guide is not intended as a stand-alone module on play. Its suggested use is that three to four sessions, focused on core knowledge of what play is and why and how we use a play-based approach, are included in existing ECD learning programmes. The remaining content can be used as appropriate and adapted to the specific training/teaching context. For example, some of the 'how to' section could be integrated into the existing pedagogy sections of different learning programmes. A variety of experiential activities are provided for each topic and a selection can be made depending on the needs of your learners and available course time.

The teaching package for each NQF level includes:

♦ An up-to-date literature review for background reading
♦ An annotated bibliography at different NQF levels for additional reading for students and facilitators
♦ A facilitator guide with activities in shaded boxes
♦ An accompanying student guide with essential content and materials for activities. These guides are made up of separate sets of student handouts linked to each topic and are not designed as a full manual. We recommend that facilitators reproduce the relevant sheets for the sessions they plan to present.
♦ Timing required for different activities is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Time allocation for activities

Section of manual	Activity number	Activity Name	Time allotted
How adults learn			
	1.1	How we learned	30 minutes
	1.2	Features of play	30 minutes
Principles of play			
	4.1	Play is fun	40 minutes
	4.2	Play is intentional	30 minutes
	4.3	Play can be differentiated	30 minutes
	4.4	Play is meaningful	20 minutes
	4.5	Play is communicative	20 minutes
	4.6	Play allows choice	20 minutes
	4.7	Principles of play	70 minutes

Play-based approach			
	5.1	What is play?	60 minutes
	5.2	Characteristics of play	60 minutes
	5.3	How children play with others	60 minutes
	5.4	Five types of play	45 minutes
	5.5	The right to play	45 minutes
	5.6	How play supports development	45 minutes
	5.7	Play and executive function	90 minutes
	5.8	The play-based approach (PBA)	30 minutes
Play Continuum			
	6.1	Understanding the idea of a 'continuum'	15 minutes
	6.2	Matching play activities and forms of play	45 minutes
	6.3	Forms of play (video of children playing)	30 minutes
	6.4	Roleplaying the four forms of play	90 minutes
	6.5	Sharing control with children	40 minutes
	6.6	The moving game	20 minutes
How to do PBA			
Plan	7.1	Observation game	20 minutes
	7.2	Child observation (Part 1)	60 minutes
		Child observation (Part 2)	
	7.3	Intentional teaching	90 minutes
	7.4	Planning optimal learning	60 minutes
Set up	7.5	A welcoming learning environment	30 minutes
	7.6	Dream space	90 minutes
Teach	7.7	Scaffolding	45 minutes
	7.8	Follow child's lead	60 minutes
	7.9	My turn, your turn/serve and return	10 minutes
	7.10	Open-ended questions	60 minutes
	7.11	Playful modelling	60 minutes
Assess	7.12	Understanding play-based assessment	60 minutes
Reflect	7.13	The experiential learning cycle	60 minutes

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Terminology

In this guide we use the following terms:

Caregivers which includes parents, guardians and all other persons directly involved in caring for the children

Curriculum refers to both national curricula in current use i.e. the 0-4 years National Curriculum Framework and the CAPS Grade R - 3 curriculum

Early learning settings refers to classrooms, ECD centres, playgroups, creches, toy libraries, and any setting in which an early learning programme is delivered

Site refers to the place where the early learning programme is delivered.

Teachers refers to staff working directly with children, including ECD practitioners and Foundation Phase educators.

How adults learn

Purpose

This section introduces student teachers to the features of play that support adult learning.

Learning outcomes

- Understand that different features of play are important in supporting adult learning as well as child learning
- Become familiar with the features of play
- Reflect on the role of play for their own learning experiences

Human beings are born with a powerful capacity for learning which occurs across the lifespan.

At each stage in our growth and development we are learning even though this learning occurs in different ways and makes different demands of us. Learning also always occurs within a context, and this context either facilitates learning, or presents obstacles to it. This is as true for adults as it is for children.

We also learn in different ways and through different means. Research is showing us that one of the most powerful facilitators of learning is play, and that playful activities need to be present in children's learning environments if learning is to be as successful as it can be for the child's overall development.

There are some important features that make up the kind of play which supports children's learning. These features are aspects or properties of the kinds of play that help children to grow and develop. By looking carefully at the play that children engage in, or do, we as teachers can decide whether or not the kind of opportunities for play that we offer to our learners are likely to support their learning or not.

So what are these features? Research agrees that the most important features are:

- **Intentional**. Play has a purpose, and has a goal
- **Differentiated**. Play gives different children with different ways of thinking and learning an opportunity to participate
- **Active**. Play requires that children take part, that they engage, that they do not simply sit and watch
- **Fun**. Play has joy in it, it makes children happy, they enjoy themselves doing it
- **Choice**. Play is done by choice, not by force, the children themselves decide to do it.
- **Agency**. Play allows children to make decisions, do things for themselves, voice ideas, and feel valued.

Let's put this to one side for the moment, and think about adult learning. We will come back to a discussion of children's play.

Activity 1.1: How we learned (30 minutes)

Ask the participants to think about something that they remember learning later in their lives, as a young adult, or as a grown person. It needs to be something that was important to them. Perhaps they learned a musical instrument. Perhaps they learned to use Word on the computer. Perhaps they learned to grow a vegetable garden. Perhaps they learned another language.

Ask the participants to think about that learning experience, and then ask themselves these questions.

Ask them to put down some quick answers in the table below.

Question	My answer
Did my learning have a purpose or a goal? What was it?	
Did it give me with my own particular way of learning, a chance to participate? Did I participate in a way that helped me to create meaning out of the experience? How did this happen?	
Did I have to be active, or did I simply sit back and let it happen almost without me? Give an example of a way in which you were active in your own learning.	

Was it fun? Maybe parts of your learning process were fun. Are those the parts that you most remember? Or that you enjoyed the most? Give an example of what was fun.	
Did you, as an adult choose to engage in this learning, whatever your reason might have been?	
Were you involved in your learning, did you have to think about what you were doing while you were learning? Give an example of what/how you had to think.	

Discuss their reflections with the whole group.

Features of a positive and successful adult learning experience are often very similar to the features of the kind of play that supports learning in young children.

If we think about this more deeply, we could also say then that if adults were to engage in playful learning that has these features, they would also have successful learning experiences.

Activity 1.2: Features of play (30 minutes)

Let's Play!
This is a game that challenges participants to think about how things are organised in space, to do it quickly, and to work in a team.

Ask them to play the game and then to think about the features of playful learning, and to decide whether they are in the game they are playing.

Instructions:
Divide the participants into pairs or groups of 3.

Each group is given 40 matchsticks.
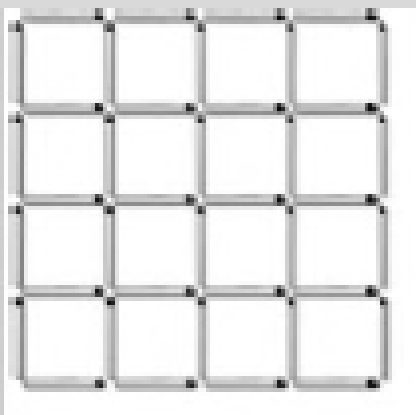
They are to arrange them in a 4 by 4 square grid (see below).

Their task is:
Using the matchsticks that you have been given, change this shape by removing 9 matches so that no square of any size remains.
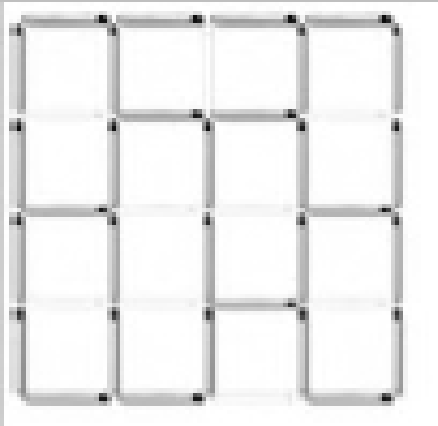
The first group to find the solution is the winner.

An alternative is to give the groups a time limit (6 to 10 minutes) and see how many groups can solve the puzzle within that time.

In these sessions, we want to engage in as much play as possible using the shared features of adult learning and children's play that have been briefly outlined here so as to make learning **Intentional, Differentiated, Active, Fun** and to make sure that there is **Agency** in the participants' own learning.

We will discuss how to create a playful environment in an ECD setting that will use these features of both adult and children's playful learning and give children in these care and educational environments opportunities for play that will support their learning as much as possible.

The intention is to think about play in these terms, to build playfulness into these sessions on play throughout, both in the way the sessions are structured and taught as well as the content, in order to support participants' learning. If the way children learn through play is **mirrored** in these sessions by the way participants engage in the sessions, then learning will be optimised.

This playfulness can then be passed down into what the participants do in their own ECD settings in terms of designing and implementing playful activities for their children.

If we want teachers to play with children, we have to play with teachers!

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: SUMMARY

Below is a summary of the important sections of a current literature review on play and play-based pedagogy for background information. For the full literature review and detailed references, see Appendix 1.

History of Play in Early Childhood Education and Development

The importance of play for early childhood development was recognised by the pioneers of early childhood education as well as by leading child development theorists. Jean Piaget explained how children actively construct knowledge by interacting with the environment, peers and resources. Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory maintains that children develop thinking by interacting with more experienced others - older children, peers and adults who scaffold their learning. Play is essential for developing language, self-regulation and symbolic thinking.

Until quite recently there was a strong focus on learning through free play only, but research has now shown that certain skills are best developed through experiences in which teachers build on children's interests and guide their play towards particular learning outcomes.

Play and Policy

The value of play for child development and learning has been recognised in the international commitment to the right to play in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is also emphasised in the South African National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy and the National Curriculum Framework for Children birth to four years. However, in practitioner and teacher qualifications play receives more emphasis for the younger years and Grade R, than for children in Grades 1 to 3. To promote play-based learning across the early years the Department of Basic Education has developed Play-SA an online course for teachers working with children from 0 – 9 years.

What is Play?

Play is usually referred to in terms of generally agreed characteristics: that it is joyful, motivating, actively engaging, social and valued as a process rather than an outcome. Neuroscience studies show how brain processes activated by these characteristics of playful experiences help children to learn and develop.

Developmental psychologists commonly divide play into five types: physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, pretend play and games with rules. Each of these takes different

forms as the child develops becoming more complex as children get older. Many studies show that children perform at significantly higher levels in playful rather than non-playful situations. Play is associated with language and maths development, social competence and developing of reasoning as well as with helping children adapt to formal schooling.

Play in Different Cultural Settings

Play is influenced by the social and cultural context in which it takes place. Most play studies and play-based teaching and learning approaches have been done and developed in Western cultures and we cannot assume that all children engage with play in similar ways. While play is often referred to as children's work in English speaking and European heritage cultures, in cultures where helping with family work is very important, play tends to imitate work activities or children bring a playful element to their chores. Who children play with is also culturally determined. In traditional societies in Africa for example, children are expected to play with other children and to receive any guidance they need from older and/or more expert playmates.

How particular cultures think about play affects the implementation of a play- based pedagogy. In societies where children are expected to play with children, adults may find playing with a young child for learning purposes to be a strange idea, or if teachers are expected to be strict as in Chinese culture, allowing play may be seen as negligence. Where academic content is prioritised, play is often not promoted.

Play-based Pedagogy – A Play Continuum

Based on what we now know about the importance of interactions between children and teachers to support learning, and recognition of cultural variations in play there have been attempts to understand how to apply this to a play-based approach. Previously we tended to think of free play and teacher structured activities as entirely different but it is more useful to view play as existing on a continuum. At one extreme is open-ended, free or child-led play in which children take the initiative as to what and how to play with materials and opportunities set up by the teacher. In the middle is guided play in which adults scaffold child-led play and at the other extreme more structured games where adults design, set rules and scaffold the play with a particular learning objective. It is now widely accepted that the combined use of the different types of play, and matching the type of play to the learning objective, provides for the best teaching and learning.

Implementing a Play-based Pedagogy

Research on play-based learning for early childhood education in general and especially in the early grades of schooling has identified a number of common pitfalls as well as guidelines for effective practice. When staff are not adequately trained, or there is pressure to cover a prescribed curriculum, it is difficult to implement an effective play-based

programme. It is also important to have a range of materials that are open and flexible and which allow children to engage with peers and adults. In the early school grades in many countries, including in South Africa, teachers tend to resort to more formal academic methods especially when there is limited physical space, few materials and a rigid daily schedule. Parents may also resist the idea that children are learning through play. Implementing a play-based approach has implications for how formative assessments should be conducted and this too is often challenging for teachers.

Conclusion

The world -wide focus on play pedagogy is relatively new and there is still much to be studied and learned in order to effectively integrate it into education for children from birth to nine years, across the range of cultural and social contexts. Further research is necessary to understand when and how different types of play are most effective, and how to introduce this to both teachers and parents.

3. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES

See Appendix 2 for a selection of references to relevant additional readings for background and preparation. The bibliography is organised by NQF level so that facilitators can use them as recommended reading.

4. PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

Purpose

In this section basic features of play are introduced through a series of active learning experiences. There are also opportunities to reflect on implications for supporting play-based teaching and learning.

Learning outcomes

♦ Develop an understanding of the principles which are important for learning through play
♦ Reflect on what these mean for teachers wanting to support play-based learning
♦ Experience the different principles of play by engaging in, and reflecting on, active learning activities

Play-based Approach Principles

Educators and researchers all over the world agree that play is an extremely important activity for young children. It encourages and supports learning in powerful ways. People have different understandings of what play is. How different people see play depends on their cultural and social contexts and backgrounds.

However, there is agreement about which principles are important when we talk about play and young children learning, and teachers teaching them.

We use these principles throughout this manual, because they are a useful way for teachers to:

♦ reflect on the play they see their children engaging in and learning from;
♦ to create more playful early learning settings which support learning; and
♦ to help assess children by observing them play and interacting with them in play.
Remember, we are interested in how children learn, and how they learn for themselves. Play is the activity that best helps children learn.

These principles are:

♦ That play is intentional. It is something children set out to do. It is not something that happens to them, or that is forced on them.
♦ That play can include many children from many backgrounds and abilities, and can be changed to give access to different children
♦ That children have to be active when they play
♦ That play is fun
♦ That children make choices about their play activities
♦ That children can lead, direct and control their own play activities.

♦ That play is meaningful because it offers opportunities for children to think about their world, and try to understand it better

♦ That many kinds of communication are involved in play.

♦ That one of the most important things about play is that it is a process.

These principles apply to all the different kinds and stages of play, whether it is free play, co-opted play, guided play or instructional play. These principles also apply to a play-based approach to teaching and learning. They are a useful guide for teachers to check that the play activities they are planning for the children will support learning.

These principles are all equally important, and they all need to be present in play and in play-based teaching and learning.

Figure 1: Principles of play

So let's start with the principle that most people associate with play, which is that the learning through **play activities should be fun.**

Different people and children will find different things fun. Fun is not something that can be measured, or forced on someone, but with this principle the idea is that any child should find play-based learning activities happy and joyful.

We know when a child is happy: it shows in the body language of children, in the things they say and in the excitement with which they play. Perhaps the child repeats the activity again and again to experience it many times. Perhaps the child chooses to engage in the play activity over everything else available. Perhaps the child simply cannot wait to do the activity.

All these are signs that the activity is fun. And when something is fun, motivation is high, the child is fully open to learning, and learning happens without the child needing to make much effort. If a game or playful learning activity is too difficult for the child, it will be frustrating and may make the child anxious. On the other hand, if the game is too easy and contains no challenge, it does not offer children an interesting opportunity to practise what they have learned. Then play might become boring and not fun.

Activity 4.1: Play is fun (40 minutes)

Participants will play the game 'I Spy' which is a well-known children's game. The first person to play looks for something in the surroundings and then gives a clue to the others to guess what it is using the first letter/letter sound e.g. "I spy with my little eye something beginning with b" (here the target is a ball).

Participants will use a very rough rating scale for 'fun' in games for this activity, and will play the game in four parts.

Not fun	Fun	Great fun	The best fun ever!
1	2	3	4

Part One
Participants play this game in its original simple form for two or three turns.

Then they rate it on the 'fun' scale.

Not fun	Fun	Great fun	The best fun ever!
1	2	3	4

The facilitator discusses the fact that for an adult there is not much of a challenge in this

game, and the fun might soon die out of it.

Part Two

The game is changed. This instruction is given to the participants.

In one minute jot down as many names of objects that you can see easily around you.

Participants then rate the game on the 'fun' scale.

Not fun	Fun	Great fun	The best fun ever!
1	2	3	4

Participants discuss whether Part Two is more of a challenge, and whether their rating of fun has changed.

Part Three

The game is changed again. The instruction is find one name of an object that you can see around you, for each letter of the alphabet.

Participants then rate the game on the 'fun' scale.

Not fun	Fun	Great fun	The best fun ever!
1	2	3	4

Participants discuss Part Three in the same way.

Part Four

The game is made much more challenging. Participants are asked to jot down the names of everything that you see around you that contains the chemical element hydrogen.

Participants rate this on the 'fun' scale.

Not fun	Fun	Great fun	The best fun ever!
1	2	3	4

Unless you are a chemist or a scientist, the game is now likely to be completely beyond your ability. How do you feel about playing this game now? You might be put off, you might rise to the challenge, but it certainly changes the fun element.

Participants look at the different ratings for fun that they gave the different versions of this game and see:

(i)   if their rating changes with each different game, and

(ii)   what changes did they notice, and why did you change them?

The next principle of play is that it has a purpose, and has a goal, it is **intentional**. Children choose to do it, it is not forced upon them This means that play should have a purpose to it from both the child's and the teacher's points of views, even if that purpose is simply to explore or practise a thinking skill. It is important to remember that there are different kinds of play and different stages of play, and the child may play for different reasons at different stages at different times, and in different kinds of play.

Think of a 6 year old child sitting in the sandpit pushing a small car up and down. While the child might learn something about wheels, it is not very clear what the purpose of this play activity is. But the child who plays with a car and makes a bridge for it to go from one point to another, has a purpose to that play.

From the child's point of view, the purpose might be, to explore which materials make a good bridge, how strong a bridge has to be, how long a bridge has to be to get to a certain point, and so on.

From the point of view of the teacher, the purpose of this play activity could be similar to that of the child, to learn about materials etc. But play changes, change is part of the nature of play. So in this case even though the child's play might change, for example the child might take the play in a different direction, the bridge might be extended, or it might have to turn a corner, or it might have to hold many cars or heavier trucks, there is still a purpose to it.

Activity 4.2: Play is intentional (30 minutes)

A play-based learning game is 'Battle of the Dice'.

Participants are put into pairs.

1. Each player starts with 2 dice and 5 rocks (or other counters).
2. The objective of the game is to capture all of the other player's rocks.
3. Players take it in turn to roll the dice. Each player adds up the sum of his/her two dice, and whoever has the higher number gets to "steal" a rock from the other player.
4. Continue playing until one player has ALL 10 rocks.

Participants are asked to play this game.

If there are no dice, write the numbers 1 to 6 on small pieces of paper, in two sets. Each player is given a set from 1 to 6. When it is a player's turn, s/he turns over two pieces of paper, and adds the sum of the numbers shown.

Ask the participants to answer these questions:

i) Is there a purpose to this game?
ii) Can children learn anything by playing this game? If so, what?

This game is both interesting and challenging, and encourages children's arithmetical thinking skills. It is at the heart of it, intentional. Presenting this game, or playing it with children, also gives teachers a chance to show something about mathematical thinking. The game encourages children to engage in shared thinking and problem solving in order to practise particular arithmetic ideas (addition, larger than, smaller than) and so it has learning value.

The next principle of play is that play is **inclusive** and **differentiated.** This means that activities in play-based teaching and learning must be designed and planned in such a way that any and all children can actively participate and benefit **including those requiring extra support** because of learning or physical disability, social disadvantage, cultural difference or other barriers to learning. Related to this is the idea that play can be changed to suit different children. Play gives all children with different ways of thinking and learning, with different strengths and challenges, an opportunity to participate.

In any South African classroom at this moment there are children who learn differently from others, children who might have particular challenges and difficulties, or simply children who find one way of learning (visual or auditory learning, for example) easier than another.

Activity 4.3: Play can be differentiated (30 minutes)

Play this game called 'Sounds Interesting '.

Any number of people can play, but participants will play in groups of 4 or 5 people.

The first person in the group chooses a single or double letter sound ('s', or 'ch' for example). S/he has to say whether they want the sound at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of a word. For example, "I choose the sound 'sh', and I want it at the end of the word (as in the word 'wish')."

Each person in the rest of the group has to think of a word containing this sound, and present it to the group. However, they have to present their word in any way OTHER THAN speaking it. For example they might spell it, draw it, or mime it.

Everyone has to guess what the word is with that sound in it. The first person in the group to guess the word, gets a point.

Then the next person takes a turn to present their word to the group.

When everyone's word has been presented for this round (for example 'sh' at the end of a word) the person with the most points is the winner of that round.

The next person in the group now chooses a different sound.

The game finishes when everyone in the group has had a turn to choose a sound, and the person with the most points wins the game.

Groups are to discuss:

i)   Does this game allow children with different abilities to participate?
ii)   What are those different abilities?
For example: If a child can't spell, s/he can draw their word. It is an inclusive game.

The next principle of play is that play is **meaningful.** Play gives children an opportunity to process information and to think. Through play, children can test out and practise what they know, and to try and engage with what they don't yet know about the world. Play-based activities and experiences can help children to strengthen what they already know. It also helps them to discover and test out new ways of thinking about the world. In this way it supports them as they try to extend their knowledge, understanding and skills.

Activity 4.4: Play is meaningful (20 minutes)

A good example of this is the game 20 QUESTIONS.

This is a very well-known spoken game that encourages thinking that involves reasoning. It allows players to use what they know, and extends their knowledge. This is done by asking a number of questions.

Participants working in one group play the game.

How to play:

One person thinks of a word. S/he tells the others if the thing they are thinking of belongs to the category of: Person or Place or Thing.

The rest of the players have to ask questions to try to guess what it is. There are two rules for this game:

1.   All questions must be answered "yes" or "no" ONLY.
2.   The other participants may only ask 20 questions IN TOTAL (not 20 for each person)
One person is the question counter, to make sure that the group do not ask more than 20 questions.

If the participants can guess correctly in 20 questions or less, then the next person has a turn.

If they cannot guess correctly in 20 questions or less, then the same person goes again.

The next principle is that there are **many kinds of communication in play.** It is in play that children find unlimited opportunities to share and communicate with each other. They share their understanding, they test out that understanding with others. They may even change their understanding a little by communicating about it with others.

Even when children play alone, they may not be communicating with another person, but they are thinking about what they are doing while playing, and in this sense it could be said that they are communicating with themselves.

Activity 4.5: Play is communicative (20 minutes)

A game that requires direct communication is 'Pictionary'.

Participants are to get into groups of 3.

Each person is given two words by the facilitator. The words are not to be shown to the rest of the group.

Examples are:

♦ scrambled eggs
♦ birthday
♦ paper plate
♦ full moon
♦ hotel
♦ hairy caterpillar

One person in the group chooses one of their words and has to either act out the word or draw it on a piece of paper. They have 2 minutes to do this, and then stop. The other group members have to try and work out what the word is. The person who guesses correctly draws or acts out the next word.

An important principle in play is that of **choice**. It is easy to overlook in a busy classroom Play needs to be voluntary, it needs to be the child's choice. The child him/herself needs to decide to do it. This is not always possible in a classroom, but as far as possible play-based teaching and learning should involve some choice for children. One way to do this can be give them a choice between two or three activities. Another way to bring choice into an activity is to allow children to change the play activity on their own, amongst themselves or even working with a teacher, freely. Children should and will change the content of their play, the direction it takes, and the purpose of their play when they feel the need to.

Activity 4.6: Play allows choice (20 minutes)

Ask each participant to think of a simple, easy game that they played when they were a child that they would choose to play now if they were given a choice.

Ask one or two participants to share their choice with the group.

Ask these participants to briefly describe the game.

Then ask them to answer these questions:

i)   Why would you choose to play this game?
ii)   Which of the principles discussed thus far apply to this particular game?

Throughout the discussions and play activities that the participants have been involved in so far, the principle of **agency** has come out very strongly. Agency is particularly important for children. While they play they are fully engaged, very involved in the play or playful activity, and are thinking all the while they do it, even though that thinking may take different forms as the play progresses.

Agency in play and play-based activities also means that children have the opportunity to lead, direct and control their own play activities while they are playing.

Even as adults, if we feel that we have some control in a learning situation, it makes us feel more confident and gives us a positive feeling, a feeling that we want to play. Through being able to have some say in the play activity, to be able to follow a direction that their developing mind wishes to follow, they can become more confident.

Having agency means that children are also **active** in their play. Good play-based activities require that children take part, that they engage, that they do not simply sit and passively watch. As adults too, we learn by watching, listening and above all, by doing.

All the games that the participants have played thus far have demanded their active participation, and in doing so, the playful games have been intended to support intellectual, emotional and even social engagement.

This is exactly what we hope to achieve in creating more playful classrooms through introducing play-based activities into the learning environments for young children. We want them to feel positive, to learn to think, to communicate and to socialise with one another.

As Maria Montessori said, "play is the work of the child", the work of developing and growing in understanding, knowledge and skills.

Note to Facilitator

Remember that in this course, in which we are playing games ourselves, we are trying to show the participants what we would like them to do in their own ECD settings (i.e. mirroring).

Activity 4.7: Principles of play (70 minutes)

Time to be active!

This activity aims to pull together all the principles of play that have been discussed.

Part One

Participants are divided into groups of 4. Each group is given a piece of string, a lump of playdough and four kebab sticks. The group's task is to invent a simple game **for children** where the following principles are clearly present:

(i) It is fun

(ii) It is intentional, it has a clear purpose which the group can identify

(iii) As many children as possible can play it

(iv) It requires that all children participate equally

(v) It is meaningful in some way

(vi) It helps children be actively involved

Participants are given 20 minutes to do this.

The game has to be:

a) written down, b) drawn out in a drawing or diagram, c) orally presented and demonstrated to the whole group.

Each person in the group takes on one of these tasks (writing, drawing, speaking or demonstrating) which makes sure that everyone in the group participates actively in inventing their game.

The small groups each present their games to the whole class. If there are too many groups, the facilitator chooses two or three games.

After each presentation, the participants discuss:

1. Can we clearly see all the principles of play working in the game?
2. If not, which principles were absent in the game?
3. How the game can be changed so that more of the principles are present in it?

Part Two

The facilitator chooses one of the presented games for the next part of the activity. Still working in their groups, the task for the participants now is to modify this game, in such a way that it becomes a **game for adults**.

Participants have 10 minutes to do this.

One group volunteers to present their ideas about the way in which they have changed the game. The modified game is presented, and participants are asked to discuss whether or not the modifications made to the game make it suitable for adults. If it is not suitable for adults, participants discuss how it can be changed still further, making sure that the principles of play are still present.

5. WHAT IS A PLAY-BASED APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING (PBA)?

Purpose

It is important for teachers and caregivers to understand how and what children learn through play, as this sets the stage for a play- based approach to teaching and learning. This section aims to deepen participants' understanding of play – what play is, its importance in children's learning, different types of play and some characteristics that can be seen when children are involved in play. A play-based approach to teaching and learning is then introduced.

Learning outcomes

♦ Understand the importance of play for children's development.
♦ Learn about the characteristics of children's play.
♦ Describe different types of play that support children's development and learning.
♦ Start to become familiar with the play-based approach to teaching and learning.

What is play?

The first step in understanding a play-based approach is to discuss what play is and how it relates to learning.

It has long been recognised that play is important for children's holistic growth and development. In any ECD setting you will see children of all ages engaged in and enjoying different types of play and the ECD practitioners working with the children will tell you "Play is children's work." But what does 'learning through play' really mean?

♦ Do children learn all they need to learn through play?
♦ Are there activities that help children learn in other ways?
Play is difficult to define because people understand it in different ways. It is easier to recognise play by looking at how children behave when they play.

Children are engaging in **free play**

♦ when they can choose for themselves what, when and how to play
♦ when it's something they want to do for its own sake and the enjoyment that it brings (and not for any rewards)
♦ when the activity or what they are doing (the process) is more important than how it turns out in the end (the product).

Activity 5.1: What is play? (60 minutes)

Preparation

Before the session set out play materials for different age groups.

Open-ended materials (that children can use in many different ways) work best.

For example:

♦ Babies (0–18 months): Pretend play materials, e.g. doll, bed and blankets, stroller, baby bottle, soft toys and animals, hats, a phone, a few plates and cups

♦ Toddlers (18 months–3 years): Water play materials: A large container of water (place oilcloth, plastic bags or mats under the container to protect the floor surface), plastic containers, bottles, jugs, cups, plastic tubing, sponges, sieves/containers with holes.

♦ Young children (3–5 years): Art materials for painting, drawing, cutting and pasting (collage) and modelling (clay or playdough).

Write out labels of different ages ranging from 6 months to 5 years. There should be one label for each participant and equally divided between the three age groups.

Hand out the labels and explain that participants will pretend to be a child of the age on their label and explore the materials set out. Guide groups to their activities and give them time to use the materials.

After the activity ask groups to share their experiences and to discuss whether they were play activities:

♦ Could they choose their own materials and use them in their own way?

♦ Did they enjoy what they were doing?

♦ Were they involved in the process of playing (rather than wanting to finish it)?

One person from each group reports back on their discussion.

Facilitate a discussion about whether what they were doing was *play*.

♦ What were you doing?

♦ How do you know you were playing?

Write down the key points on flipchart paper.

Explain that one way to know whether children are playing is to look at how they behave:

♦ Can they choose for themselves what, when and how to play?

♦ Are they doing the activity because they want to do it?

♦ Are they more focused on the process and not on how it will turn out in the end (product)?

Ask participants for examples of play that they have experienced or observed in an ECD setting. For each example, ask the participants to give reasons why they think it is a play activity.
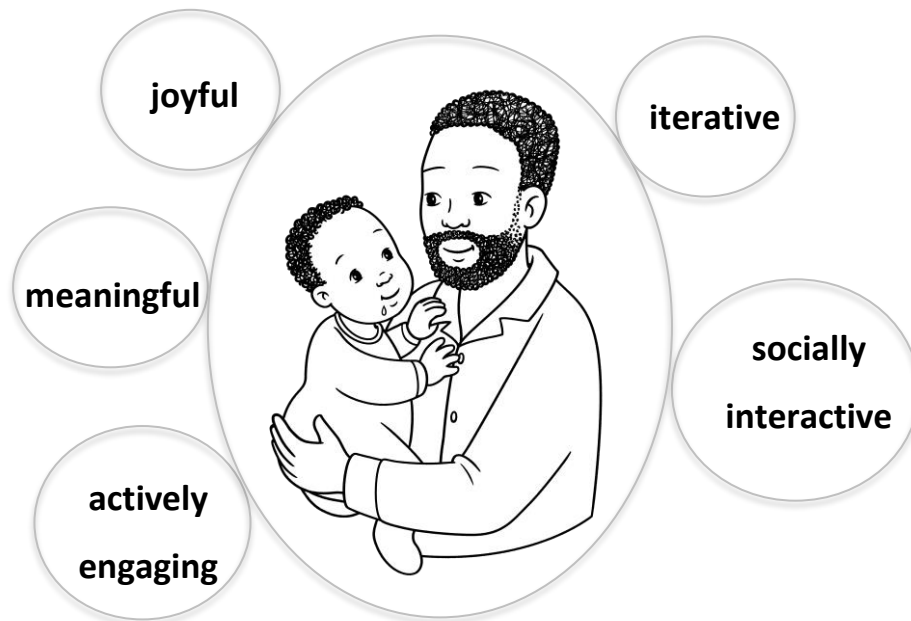
Figure 2: Characteristics of play (adapted from Zosh et al 2017)

Play is joyful

Children learn best when they are having fun. They enjoy play for its own sake and will play whenever they have the opportunity. As children play, they try new things and feel good when they succeed. This is important because it motivates children to learn.

Play is meaningful

Children make sense of themselves and their world through play. As they play, they make connections between familiar concepts and new information. In this way they are able to build on what they already know and understand.

Play is actively engaging

Children learn best when they are active. Children learn by doing, by using their five senses to explore the objects, people and places in their environment. As they pursue their own interests and ideas during play, they become deeply involved in what they are doing.

Play is iterative

Iteration means repeatedly doing something and learning more each time. As children play, they repeat actions several times to practise skills and explore new ways of doing things.

Play is socially interactive

During play children develop social relationships with other children. They learn important social skills as they communicate their thoughts and ideas and play together with other children. Social interactions also help children develop their language skills and master concepts in a creative way.

Activity 5.2: Characteristics of play (60 minutes)

Preparation:

Prepare sticky labels with the characteristics of play, one word per label.

The number of labels has to match the number of participants in the group.

Explain that you will be sticking a label on each participant's back and that they are not allowed to look at their own labels or tell anybody what is written on their labels. Tell participants that each word describes a characteristic of play. To find out what characteristic they have, participants should move around the room and ask other participants to describe their word or act it out.

♦   Give a few examples before starting the activity.
♦   Repeated: You do it over and over.
♦   Social: You do it with other people.

Participants mingle with one another until they are sure they know what their label says and then sit down. In the large group, invite participants to name their characteristic of play and say how they found out.

Summarise each characteristic using the information note above.

Explain that these characteristics help us to think more about what it should look like when children are playing.

View the following video clip *Cameron and Alexis playing with blocks* which shows two children playing with blocks during a free play activity.

http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/RMVideoSeries_PracticingObservation.htm

The purpose of watching this video is to identify which of the characteristics of play can be observed:

♦   joyful,
♦   meaningful,
♦   actively engaging,
♦   iterative, and
♦   socially interactive.

After the video ask for examples of the characteristics that were observed as the children on the video were playing.

Stages of Play: How play changes with social development

As children develop socially, they start to learn to play with each other. They move through stages of development that are increasingly more complicated. Children will often engage in different types of play at different ages and will move in and out of these stages.

♦ **Solitary play**. Children play alone as they explore objects around them, unaware of other children or adults around them. Babies most often play in this way.

♦ **Parallel play**. Children play alongside others. They play with similar things but do not interact with each other.

♦ **Associative play.** Children become interested in one another. They may play together and talk about what they are doing, but do not work together to complete a task.

♦ **Cooperative play.** Children share their materials and ideas. They often play together in games or to complete a project.

Understanding these stages of development helps teachers to know how to respond to and interact with children as they play.
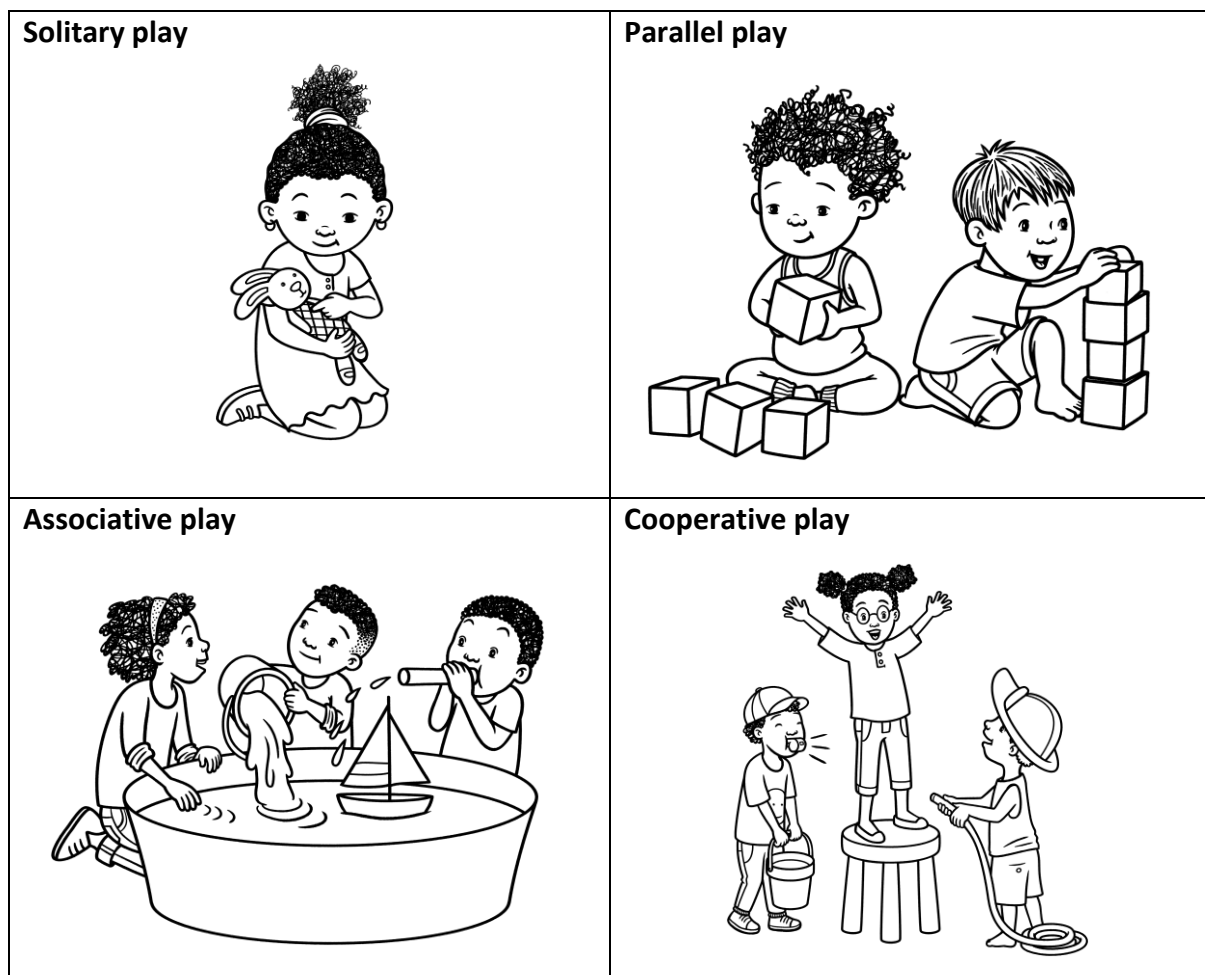
Solitary play	Parallel play
Associative play	Cooperative play

Figure 3: Stages of play

Activity 5.3: How children play with others (60 minutes)

Preparation:

Photocopy the pictures on the previous page of this guide (Solitary play, Parallel play, Associative play, and Co-operative play) and stick them onto cardboard.

Cut each picture into several puzzle pieces. Make sure that the number of cut-up pieces matches the number of participants in your group. For example, if you have 20 participants, photocopy each picture and cut it into 5 pieces.

Hand out one puzzle piece to each participant. Ask participants to move around and find people with the matching puzzle pieces and sit with the members of their group.

Ask groups to look at the complete picture and discuss what they see.

♦ How are the children playing?

Explain that as children develop and get older, they move through different stages in learning to play with each other. Give a brief description of each stage:

♦ Solitary play
♦ Parallel play
♦ Associative play
♦ Cooperative play.

Each group identifies the stage they think is demonstrated by the children in their puzzle and explains why.

Using the play materials set out earlier (see Activity 5.1), ask groups to prepare a role play to demonstrate how children will play in the stage shown in their picture.

Each group presents their role play with their chosen materials.

Make the point that children often move in and out of these stages as they grow and develop.

Discuss how important it is for teachers and caregivers to understand these stages of play when planning and interacting with children.

Five types of play

Physical play	Play with objects	Symbolic play	Pretend and socio-dramatic play	Games with rules

Figure 4: Types of play

There are different types of play that support the physical, social, emotional and cognitive domains of a child's development. Children need many opportunities to engage in these five types of play.

1. Physical play

Physical play is closely linked to children's physical development and includes:

♦ **Active exercise play** – play activities that support the development of children's gross motor skills, such as rolling over, crawling, running, jumping, sliding, hopping, galloping, skipping, and climbing.

♦ **Fine motor play** – play activities that support the development of children's fine motor skills and eye-hand coordination, such as grasping and shaking a toy, drawing, cutting, threading beads and completing a puzzle.

♦ **Rough-and-tumble play** - the very physical and active play that young children of all ages enjoy such as kicking, chasing, pulling and pushing, tickling, play fighting and wrestling.

2. Play with objects

Playing with objects is an important part of children's development. From an early age babies explore objects with their mouths, fingers and feet, and try to make things happen by shaking, dropping, rolling, knocking down or bouncing objects. Children find out about the nature of objects through their own actions, learn important concepts such as size, texture and shape, and develop thinking and problem-solving skills important for science and mathematics.

3. Symbolic play

Symbolic play starts to appear at about two years of age and refers to the child's ability to use a toy, object, picture or drawing to represent a real-life thing.

For example:

A child may hold a block to their ear and talk on the 'phone' or use a doll as their baby to feed and rock to sleep.

4. Pretend and socio-dramatic play.

During pretend play children take on other people's roles. Pretend play is often called socio-dramatic play because it involves social interactions. Children draw on their own experiences to explore the roles of people in their family and community and act out familiar events such as going to the shop or feeding the baby. In this way they start to make sense of the world around them.

Advances in technology allow children to replay stories and take on the roles of characters they have seen on television or in computer games.

5. Games with rules

Games with rules are those in which children understand and agree to follow the pre-set rules of what can and can't be done in a game. Examples of games with rules are board games like Lotto, and grid games like hopscotch. Rules may also be set and negotiated by children who are playing a game they have made up themselves. Games with rules develop social skills like sharing, taking turns and helping others. Children also develop their language skills as they explain and negotiate rules.

Activity 5.4: Five types of play (60 minutes)

Preparation:

Provide a wide selection of suitable play materials for each of the 5 types of play

Divide participants into 5 small groups and assign each group one of the 5 types of play:

♦   Group 1: Physical play
♦   Group 2: Play with objects
♦   Group 3: Symbolic play
♦   Group 4: Pretend and Socio-dramatic Play
♦   Group 5: Games with rules

Refer the groups to their Student Guide.

> 1.   Read the information in the student guide for the type of play you have been given.
> 2.   Discuss the types of play activities you could provide to help children develop and learn for
>   ♦   Babies (0 – 18 months)
>   ♦   Toddlers (18 months – 3 years)
>   ♦   Young children (3 – 5 years)
>   Write your ideas on flipchart paper.
> 3.   Choose one of these age groups and prepare a game, song or activity that will support this type of play.
> 4.   Prepare a presentation to:
>   ♦   Explain this type of play.
>   ♦   Share your list of activities.
>   ♦   Teach your game, song or activity to the rest of the class.

Groups take turns to present their information and teach everyone their planned activity.

Discuss the importance of including all children in these five types of play.

Point out that in an ECD setting of diverse children, play materials should reflect the lives and cultures of the families from which the children come, e.g.

♦   Pretend play should represent the clothing, cooking, work, music etc. of all the children and their families.
♦   There should be a range of colours of paper, paints, crayons, collage materials, playdough etc that represent children's skin tones, hair and eye colours.
♦   Crayons, scissors and other tools should be adapted for those children with disabilities who are unable to hold and use them.

Why is play important?

Figure 5: Children have the right to play

Children have the right to play

Play is recognised as being so important that the **right to play** is set down in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The South African government recognises this right and they have the responsibility to make sure that the rights of all children in South Africa to play become a reality. As teachers, we also need to protect the child's right to play by providing enough time and opportunity for play.

Activity 5.5: The right to play (45 minutes)

Materials:

♦ Poster card

♦ Collage materials, e.g. magazines, coloured paper, scissors, glue, paint, koki pens

Part 1:

Draw a spider's body in the centre of a sheet of flipchart paper.

Write the words "Children have the right to play" in the middle of the body.

Ask participants to think about why they think this is important.

They take turns to come up to the flipchart and draw a spider leg and write each new idea at the end of the leg.

Afterwards, read through what has been written.

Emphasise that the child's right to play is so important that it is written in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and that teachers need to explain the importance of play to the parents of the children in their programmes.

Children develop and learn through play

Hands-on active learning through play builds nerve connections in the brain. Giving children time to practise and repeat their experiences strengthens these connections.
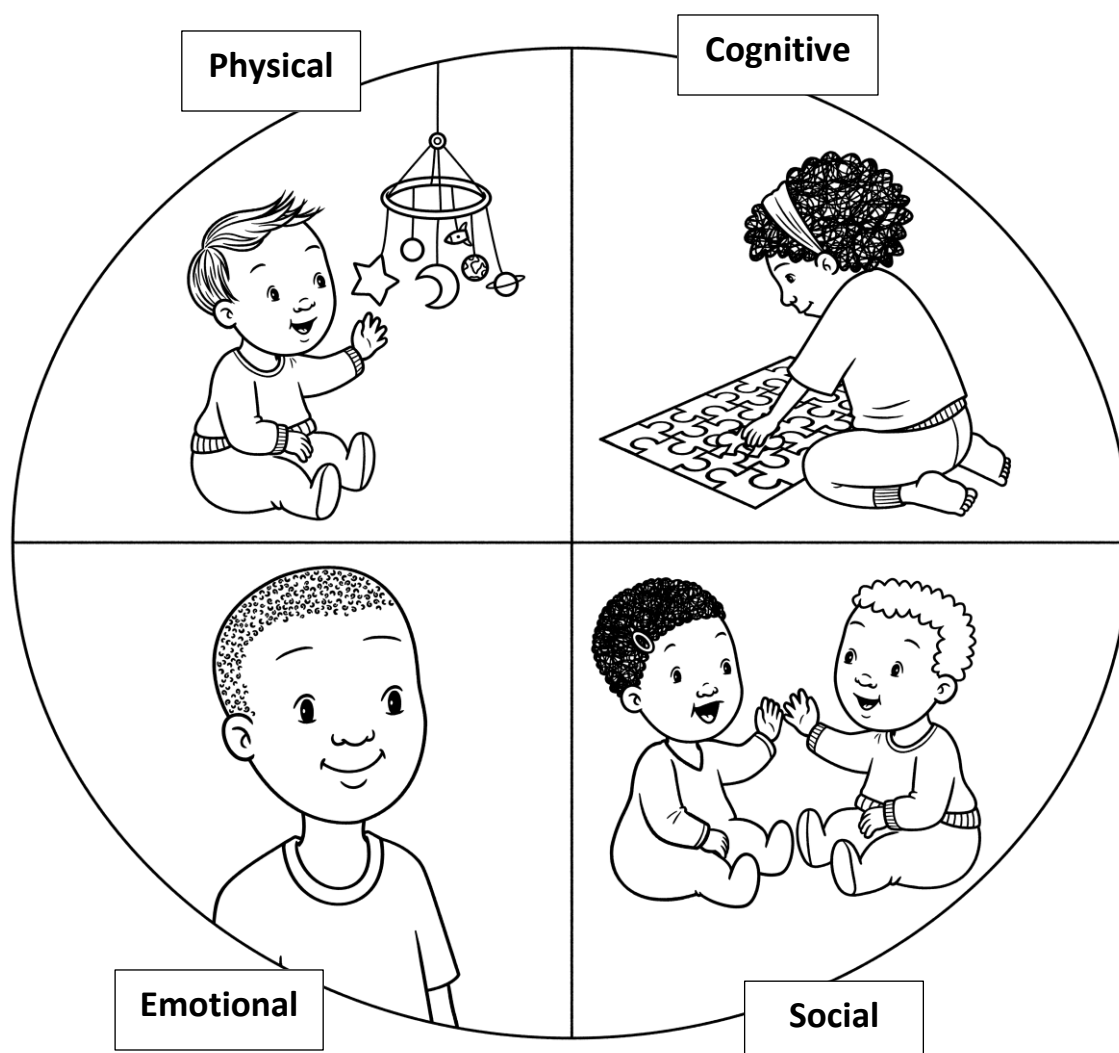
Figure 6: Child's development supported by play

Play supports all aspects of children's holistic development:

♦ **Physical development.** Play keeps children healthy and develops their bodies. As children move around and play, they use their bodies and strengthen their gross motor development. Activities that use smaller muscles like grasping a rattle, tearing paper, drawing and using scissors provide for their fine motor development and eye-hand coordination.

♦ **Social and emotional development.** An important life skill is being able to fit in and get along with other people. In playing with other children they learn to share, take turns, cooperate and build friendships. Pretend play helps children find ways to cope with their emotions as they act out fears and worries in their everyday lives.

♦ **Cognitive development.** As children play, they investigate objects, materials and living things and learn about themselves, other people and the world in which they live. They also develop cognitive skills that are important for concept learning, such as the mathematics concepts used during pretend play, construction and water play activities. Play offers children the opportunity to experiment with different materials, express their own thoughts and ideas, work through and solve problems. From an early age child start to think in symbols which is important for mathematics, reading and problem-solving.

♦ **Language development.** Play supports children's language and literacy development. Much of their play involves other children, and they use language to communicate and share their ideas. Their language skills increase as children attach meaning to the words they use during play.

Activity 5.6: How play supports development (45 minutes)

Participants return to the groups they were in for Activity 5.5.

Ask groups to identify how the play activity stimulates development in each of the following domains:

♦ Physical
♦ Social and Emotional
♦ Cognitive and Language

Groups list their ideas and then share them with the whole class.

Invite participants to demonstrate using the play materials available to them.

Play and executive function

An area in the front part of the brain is responsible for a set of important skills known as **executive function skills**. These skills help us to organise our thinking and manage our behaviour. They start to develop early in a child's life and continue through the early childhood and school years.

There are three areas of executive function skills:

1. **Working memory**. This is the ability to hold information in our memory and be able to draw on it and use it when needed.

   For example:

   A child can remember the rules of a game.

2. **Inhibitory control**. This is what we know as self-control and it is the ability to not be distracted by what is happening around us so that we can complete a task or control our behaviour.

   For example:

   A child is able to complete a puzzle without being distracted by sounds and activity around them.

   A child is able to pay attention during story time without being disruptive.

3. **Cognitive flexibility**. This is the ability to shift our attention and look at things in a new way where necessary. It teaches us to be creative and adapt or change our way of thinking in order to solve problems.

   For example:

   A child can switch from sorting cards based on the colour of the object to sorting based on a different rule, such as the type of object on the card.

In reality these three areas work together, with children developing important skills like

- planning
- setting goals
- paying attention
- focusing on a task and completing it
- asking questions
- using other people's ideas
- solving problems
- managing emotions
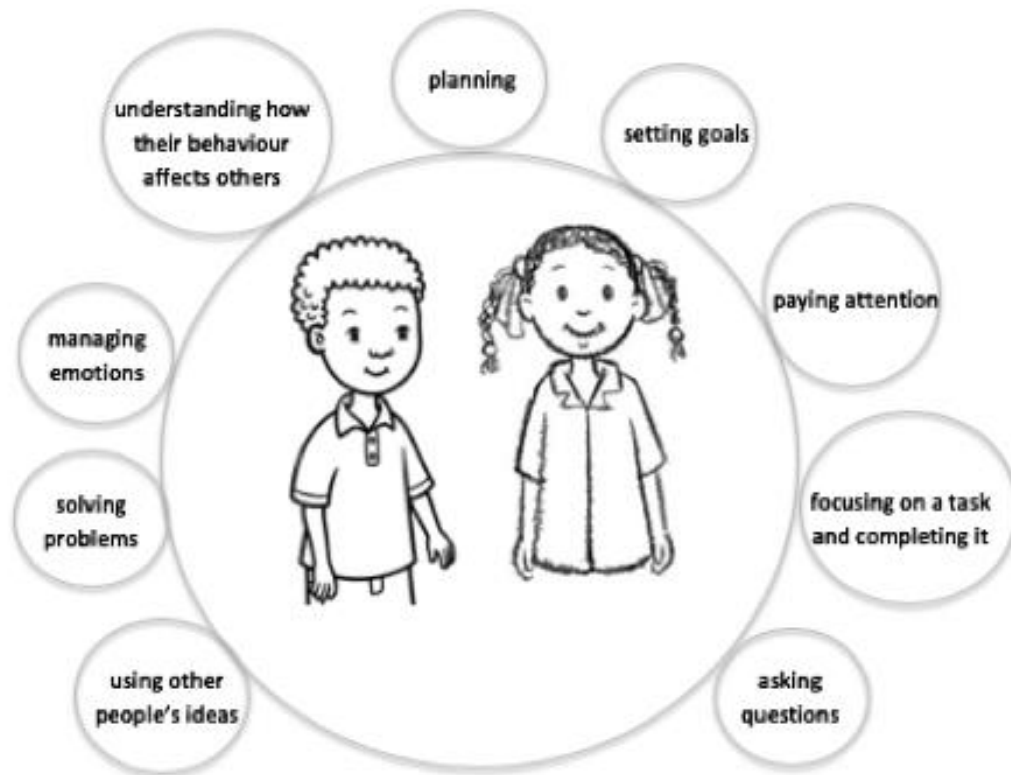- understanding how their behaviour affects others

Figure 7: Executive function skills

Here are some play activities that build children's executive function skills (adapted from https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/activities-guide-enhancing-and-practicing-executive-function-skills-with-children-from-infancy-to-adolescence/).

Table 2: Activities to facilitate development of executive function skills

Babies (0 – 18 months)	Toddlers (18 months – 3 years)	Young children (3 – 4 years)	Older children (5 – 7 years)
Hide and seek games: hide a toy, ball or object under a cloth and let the baby find it. Lap activities: hold the baby in your lap facing you and play 'peek-a-boo', 'pat-a-cake', fingerplay and other games with hand movements Simple pretend games with props such as a doll and baby bottle Talking and listening to baby	Active physical play and games like 'Follow the Leader'. Action songs like 'Heads, shoulders, knees and toes', 'Hokey Pokey' and 'Incy Wincy Spider'. Pretend play: children imitate familiar activities using simple props. Matching and sorting games and puzzles	Movement songs and games with actions. Obstacle courses Pretend play with children taking on different roles of people in their families and communities. Story-telling activities Matching and sorting games according to more than one attribute; puzzles	Active physical play and games that require attention to detail; ball games; some organized sport such as soccer and netball. Action songs and games with challenges such as singing in rounds, clapping different rhythms, songs that add on words or actions in each new verse Board and card games with rules, guessing games, I spy.

Activity 5.7 Play and executive function (90 minutes)

Preparation:

Photocopies of the Bingo Sheet

Give each participant a copy of the Bingo sheet and explain how to play the game:

♦ Participants walk around and talk to other members of the group.

♦ They find someone who fits one of the statements on the sheet. That person gives an example of this behaviour and signs their name in the square of their classmate's sheet.

♦ Participants can only get one signature from each person.

♦ If someone gets three squares in a row signed, they shout 'BINGO!"

Play the game until someone wins. In the large group, introduce the term "executive functions" and explain that these are the mental or cognitive skills that we need to organise our thinking and manage our behaviour. Use the information provided above to outline the three areas of executive function skills that young children need to develop:

♦ Working memory

♦ Inhibitory control

♦ Cognitive flexibility

Give practical examples of each of these and invite participants to share their own ideas.

Refer participants to their Student Guide and read through the kinds of play activities to do with children of different ages that develop and improve their executive function skills.

Divide participants into small groups according to the following age groups:

♦ Babies (0 – 18 months)

♦ Toddlers (18 months – 3 years)

♦ Young children (3 – 4 years)

♦ Older children (5 – 7 years).

Ask groups to prepare a role play to demonstrate one of the activities.

Groups take turns to present their activities.

After each activity, discuss the kinds of executive function skills children are developing.

BINGO!

Find someone who is good at

Remembering phone numbers	Finishing a task once starting	Organising events
Name: _____	Name: _____	Name: _____
Thinking before acting	Setting goals	Making use of other people's ideas
Name: _____	Name: _____	Name: _____
Asking for help when needed	Controlling your emotions	Keeping track of more than one thing at a time
Name: _____	Name: _____	Name: _____

What is a play-based approach to teaching and learning (PBA)?

In recent years thinking about play has focused largely on the role of adults in children's play experiences. In a play-based teaching approach, teachers know that children learn through play in an active and playful environment. They make sure that the environment is right for learning and they serve an important role in supporting children's learning.

Importantly, they recognise that:

♦ Sometimes children learn best from free play activities that are initiated and directed by the child with minimal support from the teacher. The child is free to choose their own materials and use them in their own way. The role of the teacher is to observe, join in the play and facilitate learning.

♦ Sometimes it is not possible for children to learn a concept or skill during free play, and the teacher needs to directly teach the skill or provide information. These teacher-directed activities need to be playful and support active and hands-on learning.

In play-based teaching and learning the teacher or caregiver

♦ **plans** playful activities that children can choose and decide for themselves how to play, as well as playful activities that are presented by the teacher (as individual, small group and whole group activities)

♦ sets up a playful environment to support learning

♦ teaches children by
  ♦ joining in and guiding their play
  ♦ presenting and leading play activities to teach new knowledge or skills

♦ **assesses** children's learning during everyday activities as children play and learn.

♦ **reflects** on what has happened and adjusts where necessary and uses the reflection to help plan the next step

You can think of the play-based approach to teaching and learning as a cycle with everything you need to do at key points in the cycle.
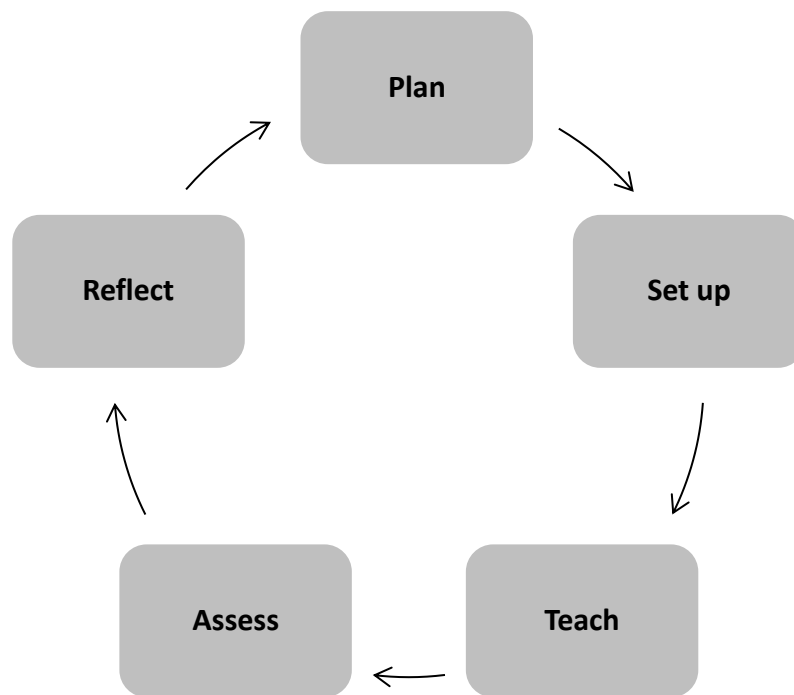
Figure 8: Play-based approach (PBA) to teaching and learning cycle

Activity 5.8 The play-based approach (PBA) to teaching
and learning (30 minutes)

Ask participants to think individually about the following question:

♦ Do you think children learn everything they need from play?
After a few minutes ask participants to find a partner and to share their opinions.

After another few minutes, have each pair find another pair and form a group.

Participants share their points of view again.

Lastly ask participants to find another group to make up groups of eight and finalise their views.

Ask each group to report back and write their findings on flipchart paper.

Use these findings to introduce a play-based approach to teaching and learning.

Display and go through the steps in the play-based teaching and learning cycle.

6. PLAY CONTINUUM: WHO INITIATES/CHOOSES AND WHO DIRECTS/CONTROLS THE PLAY?

Purpose

In this section there is a focus on understanding play-based learning and teaching as taking place through a continuum of play activities with children and teachers taking different levels of control of the play depending on particular learning needs and goals.

Learning outcomes

♦ Understand the play continuum as a way of bringing together the many different ideas on play

♦ Understand how levels of choice and control describe forms of play

♦ Understand the importance of encouraging agency in children and ways in which teachers can foster agency

♦ Understand what enables optimal learning and ways in which teachers can encourage optimal learning

Notes for the Facilitator: supporting the students

In this section you will be introducing the students to new concepts (ideas) like 'Play continuum', 'initiated play' and 'directed play'. It is unlikely that the students will know these words or be familiar with what the words mean. Go slowly. Take time to make sure that each student has a clear understanding of each concept before going onto the next activity.

Write down any new words and their meanings in the home languages of the students. If necessary ask the students to help you. Write the new words in big letters and put them where everyone can see them.

Introduction

Three things support teachers in providing play-based learning activities for children:

1. Planning activities according to a set of play principles (See Section 4 in this manual)
2. Understanding the different types and forms of play
3. Knowing how to implement play-based activities with children (in this guide we call this the PBA cycle of plan, set up, teach, assess and reflect).

   In this section the students will learn about the play continuum and the levels of 'initiated play' and 'directed play'. Let's start by first understanding the concept (idea) of a 'continuum'.

Understanding play as a continuum

A **continuum** is a range or series of things that are slightly different from each other but they lie somewhere between two different possibilities (merriam-webster.com).

(A 'continuum' can also be known as a 'spectrum'.)

Activity 6.1 below helps students to understand the concept (idea) of a continuum.

This is the first step to understanding a 'play continuum'.

Activity 6.1: Understanding the idea of a 'continuum' (15 minutes)

The students create a 'height continuum' by arranging themselves in a line in order of the length of their hair.

Purpose:

♦ to help the students understand the concept 'continuum'
♦ to enable the students to apply what they already know to a new learning context

Resources:
Two large long arrows made of paper. On the first arrow is written 'Short hair'. On the second arrow is written 'Long hair'.

Masking tape or string.

Facilitation:
Whole Group. The facilitator:

♦ creates a long line on the floor by stretching string in a straight line on the floor (or by sticking a long piece of masking tape on the floor). The line must be long enough for all the students to stand on the line.
♦ places one arrow (Short hair), at the beginning of the line and the other arrow (Long hair) at the end of the line:

♦ explains the idea of a 'continuum' to all the students by reading out and discussing the definition
♦ invites the students to make a 'how long is our hair continuum' by standing on the line in order of length of hair. The student with the shortest hair stands at the one end next to the arrow 'Short hair'. The student with the longest hair stands at the other end of the line next to 'Long hair'. The remaining students arrange themselves between these two students in order of the length of their hair.

Reflection

Whole group. The facilitator invites the students to reflect on the activity using the following questions as a guide:

♦ What did you notice?
♦ What happens if the different lengths of hair were not in order in the line? Is it still a continuum? Why not?
♦ What could come before "short hair" on the continuum you made? Where would you place someone with no hair?
♦ What other kinds of continuum are there?
♦ What is a "play continuum"?
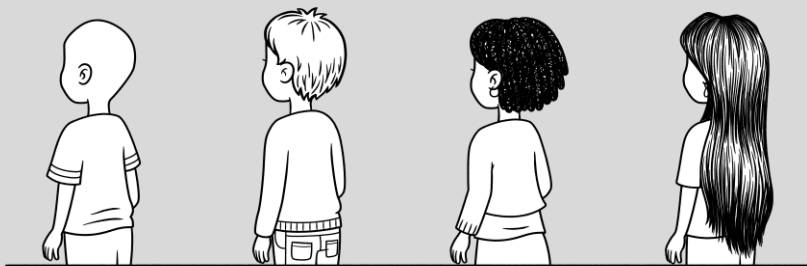
NOTES for the Facilitator

1) Reflection

♦ Don't rush the reflection part of an activity. The fun part of the activity gets the students' attention, but the real learning begins when the students reflect on what happened.
♦ Avoid closed questions that encourage either 'Yes' or 'No' answers. Ask open-ended question that encourage students to share ideas and give reasons.
♦ Ask one open-ended question at a time and wait patiently for the responses. When students have time to think they learn to reason, solve problems and think about their own context.
♦ When a facilitator begins a reflection with an easy open question such as 'What do you notice?', it gives every student the opportunity to participate. An easy open first question does not require a student to be knowledgeable or familiar with the language being used by the facilitator. The responses from the students to easy open questions also give the facilitator a good idea of the students' level of understanding.

2) Mirroring

♦ Facilitators want students to transfer what they have experienced in their training to the children they teach. This is what is called "mirroring". Facilitators can enable mirroring by asking the following questions after doing activities that students can transfer to their ECD setting context:

  ♦ Could you do this activity with your children?
  ♦ What would you need to change or do differently so you can do this activity with children?
  ♦ What could the children learn from doing this activity?
  ♦ How does this activity link with the curriculum?

What is a 'play continuum'?

There are many ideas on what is play for young children. The idea of a 'play continuum' (Zosh et al, 2017) brings together these ideas by suggesting that play ranges (moves up and down) between four main forms of play:

Figure 9: The play continuum

No form of play is better or worse than another on the play continuum. All four forms of play contribute to a child's development.

Playful instruction always contains elements of play. Examples of playful instruction are story, movement and music rings.

When children play they move from one form of play to another and back again on the play continuum. Here is an example:

> *Five children are playing outside. The children are playing their own game running, climbing and jumping around the garden pretending to be butterflies. The teacher is supervising but doesn't interrupt the game **(free play)**. After a while the teacher spots a teachable moment and intervenes by asking open-ended questions that get the children talking and thinking about insects **(co-opted play)**. The teacher puts out a mat with plastic insects, twigs and leaves **(co-opted play)**. The children continue their game **(free play)**. The teacher starts to plan how she can use the children's interest in butterflies to achieve the ELDA aims of the 0 - 4 years NCF curriculum. The teacher puts out drawing materials with paper cut into butterfly shapes. The children decide what colours and patterns to paint on the butterfly paper **(guided play)**. At story time the teacher reads 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar' and the children dramatize the stages of the butterfly's life cycle by following the teacher's actions **(playful instruction)**.*

How do we know the difference between each form of play on the play continuum?

Each type of play on the play continuum is defined by the levels of initiated play and directed play (Zosh et al. 2018). Tables 3 and 4 on the next pages explain.

Table 3: Initiated and directed play

Child initiated play/ Teacher initiated play	Child directed play/ Teacher directed play
Who initiated (started) **the play**: who planned, chose and decided what to do at the <u>beginning</u> of the game or play activity? Was it the teacher or the child/ren? If the play was started by the teacher we call it <u>teacher initiated play</u>. If the play was started by a child or children we call it <u>child initiated play</u> 	**Who directed** (controlled) **the play:** who decided, organised and told the child/children what to do <u>during</u> the game or play activity? Was it the teacher or the child/children? If the play was controlled by the teacher we call it <u>teacher directed play</u> If the play was controlled by a child or children we call it <u>child directed play</u>

Table 4: What are levels of play?

Level of *initiated* play	Level of *directed* play
A **high level** of initiated play refers to who did <u>all or most</u> of the planning, deciding and choosing at the <u>start</u> of the game or play activity A **low level** of initiated play refers to who did <u>no, or little</u>, planning, deciding and choosing at the start of the game or play activity	A **high level** of directed play refers to who did all or <u>most</u> of the controlling, deciding and organizing <u>during</u> the play activity A **low level** of directed play refers to who did no, or <u>little</u>, controlling, deciding and organizing <u>during</u> the play activity

We use alphabet letters to show the difference between high and low levels (we call this coding):

♦ capital letters **C** (**C**hild/**C**hildren)and **T** (**T**eacher) show a <u>high level</u> of initiated play and directed play.
♦ small or lowercase letters **c** (**c**hild/**c**hildren) and **t** (**t**eacher) show a <u>low level</u> of initiated play and directed play**.**

T	t	C	c
The **T**<u>eacher </u>did most of the initiating (starting the play) and directing (controlling the play)	The **t**<u>eacher </u>did very little initiating (starting the play) and directing (controlling the play)	The **C**<u>hild</u> (or children) did most of the initiating (starting the play) and directing (controlling the play)	The **c**<u>hild</u> (or children)<u> </u>did very little initiating (starting the play) and directing (controlling the play)

Table 5 below puts it all together to show the four forms of play on the play continuum as determined by the levels of who initiated the play and who directed the play.

Table 5: Four forms of play

Free Play **C**	Co-opted Play **Ct**	Guided Play **Tc**	Playful Instruction **T**
The **C**hild initiated and directed all of the play. The **child** decided and organised when, where, what and how to play, and who is playing. The teacher did not intervene or engage with the playing children.	The **C**hild initiated and directed most of the play. The **t**eacher occasionally intervened in the children's play in order to extend the children's learning e.g. by asking a question, making a suggestion, or adding extra toys.	The **T**eacher initiated and directed most of the children's play by setting out specific play activities e.g. creative art time and obstacle course. The **c**hild had some control because the child could decide how to do the activity.	The **T**eacher initiated and directed all the play. The teacher planned the play activity with a particular purpose in mind e.g. a story that teaches listening skills. The child follows the teacher's direction.

Activity 6.2 helps students to apply their understanding of how levels of initiated play and directed play determine the four different forms of play on the play continuum.

Activity 6.2: Matching play activities to forms of play (45 minutes)

The students match examples of play activities to the forms of play and the levels of initiated play and directed play.

Purpose:
♦ reinforces students' understanding of: 1) the play continuum, and 2) initiated play and directed play
♦ reinforces students' understanding of how levels of initiated play and directed play determine forms of play

Resources:
1) Glue (one stick or pot for each small group)
2) The facilitator prepares the following:

- Prints copies of Table 6 (you will need one copy for each small group).
- Cuts up one copy of Table 6 (discard the play form and code headings). There will be 16 play activities as in the photo below:
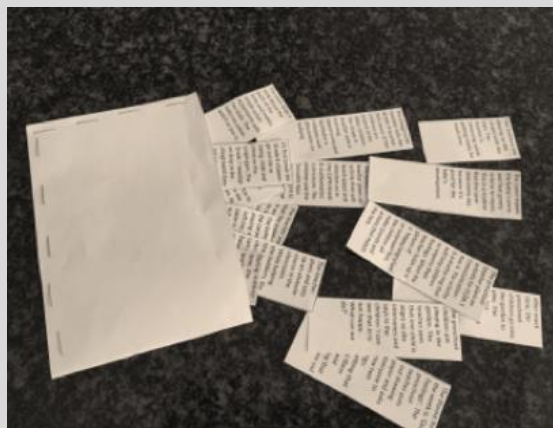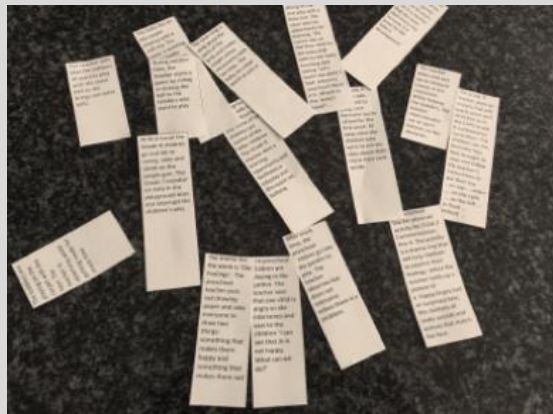
- Put the 16 activities into one envelope.
- Do the same for all the other copies of Table 6 until there is one envelope with 16 activities for each small group.
- Print copies of Forms of Play blank template so that there is one copy for each

small group.

Facilitation:

Whole Group. The facilitator:

♦ divides the group into small groups (3- 4 students in each small group)
♦ hands each small group one envelope (with 16 activities inside) and one copy of the Form of Play blank template
♦ explains the activity to the students as follows:
  ♦ Open the envelope and take out the 16 pieces of paper.
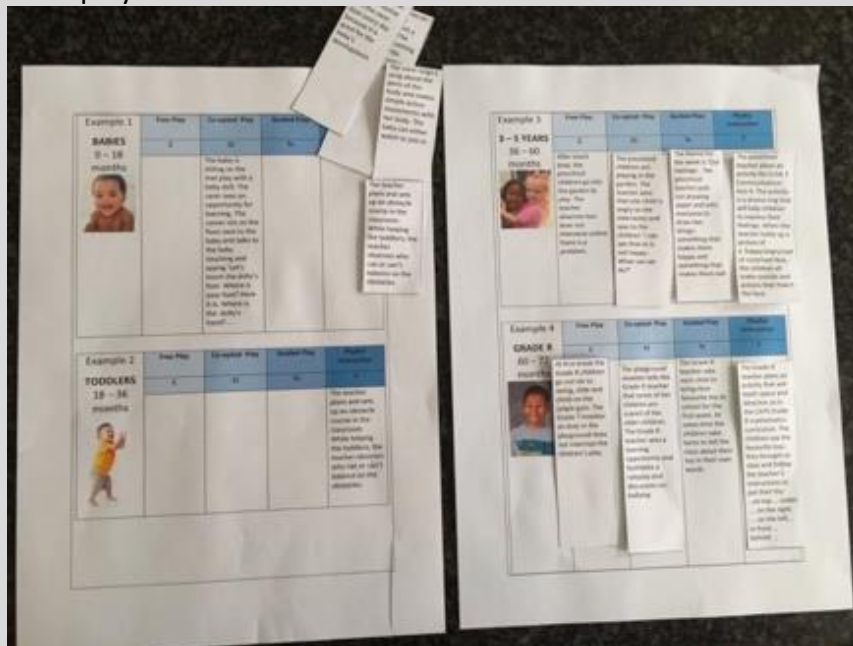 ♦ Each one is a play activity.
  ♦ Match the 16 activities to the blank spaces on the template by matching the activities to the age of children, form of play and the level of initiated play and directed play.

When each group has placed all 16 activities into the template, the facilitator refers the students to the Student's Guide. Each group checks that they have completed the Table 5 template correctly.

Reflection

Whole group. The facilitator asks the group the following reflection questions:

♦ What did you notice?
♦ What makes Free Play different from all the other forms of play?
♦ What makes Co-opted Play different from all the other forms of play?
♦ What makes Guided Play different from all the other forms of play?
♦ What makes Playful Instruction different from all the other forms of play?

Table 6 on the next page is part of Activity 6.2. Table 6 provides four examples of each form of play for a particular age group.

Table 6: Four examples of each form of play from babies to Grade R children

Example 1	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
Babies 0-18 months	The baby lies on the carpet playing with a soft toy. The carer is washing out a bottle while keeping an eye on the baby.	The baby is sitting on the mat play with a baby doll. The carer sees an opportunity for learning. The carer sits on the floor next to the baby and talks to the baby. 'Where is the baby's (doll) foot. Where is your foot? Here it is. Where is the baby's hand?'	The carer sings a song about the parts of the body and makes simple action movements with her body. The baby can either watch or join in	The carer moves the baby's arms and feet in time to music. This is a routine that the carer does every day with a different part of the baby's body. The carer has planned this as it is good for the child's physical development

Example 2	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
Toddlers 18-36 months	The toddlers are playing on the carpet with the toys. The teacher is observing while getting ready for snack time	The teacher sees that the toddlers all want to play with the same ball so s/he brings out extra balls	During outdoor time, the teacher starts a game by rolling or kicking the ball to the toddlers who want to play	The teacher plans and sets up an obstacle course in the classroom. While helping the toddlers, the teacher observes who can or can't balance on the obstacles.

	Free Play	**Co-opted Play**	**Guided Play**	**Playful Instruction**
Example 3	C	Ct	Tc	T
3 – 5 yrs 36-60 months	After snack time, the children go into the garden to play. The teacher observes but does not intervene unless there is a problem.	The children are playing in the garden. The teacher sees that one child is angry so s/he intervenes and says to the children 'I can see that Jo is not happy. What can we do?'	The theme for the week is 'Our Feelings'. The teacher puts out drawing paper and asks everyone to draw two things: something that makes them happy and something that makes them sad	The preschool teacher plans an activity for ELDA 3 Communication: Aim 4. The activity is a drama ring that will help children to express their feelings. When the teacher holds up a picture of a happy/angry/sad or surprised face, the children all make sounds and actions that match the face.
Example 4	**Free Play**	**Co-opted Play**	**Guided Play**	**Playful Instruction**
	C	Ct	Tc	T
Grade R 60-72 months	At first break the Grade R children go outside to swing, slide and climb on the jungle gym. The Grade 7 teacher on duty in the playground does not interrupt the children's play	The Grade 7 teacher tells the Grade R teacher that some of her children are being bullied by the older children. The Grade R teacher sees a learning opportunity and facilitates a roleplay and discussion on bullying with the children	The Grade R teacher asks each child to bring their favourite toy to school for the first week. At news time the children take turns to tell the class about their toy in their own words	The Grade R teacher plans a game that will teach space and direction as in the CAPS Grade R Mathematics curriculum. The children use the favourite toys they brought to class and follow the teacher's instructions to put their toy: on top, under, on the right, in front, behind, etc.

The blank template below is part of Activity 6.2. It provides four grids for each age group. One activity has been inserted into each grade to guide the students.

Template: Four grids of the four forms of play for each age group

Example 1	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
Babies 0-18 months		The baby is sitting on the mat play with a baby doll. The carer sees an opportunity for learning. The carer sits next to the baby and talks to the baby 'Where is the baby's (doll) foot. Where is your foot? Here it is. Where is the baby's hand?		

Example 2	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
Toddlers 18-36 months				The teacher plans and sets up an obstacle course inside. While helping the toddlers, the teacher observes who can or can't balance on the obstacles.

Example 3	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
3 – 5 yrs olds 36-60 months	After snack time, the children go into the garden to play. The teacher observes but does not intervene unless there is a problem.			

Example 4	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
Grade R 60-72 months			The Grade R teacher asks each child to bring their favourite toy to school for the first week. At news time the children take turns to tell the class about their toy in their own words	

NOTES for the Facilitator: Activities 6.3 and 6.4

Activities 6.3 and 6.4 deepen the students' understanding of a play continuum and how levels of initiating and directing play determine the four forms of play. When preparing for the two activities think about the following:

♦ If there are time constraints Activity 6.3 or Activity 6.4 can be omitted. It is preferable to omit Activity 6.3.
♦ If there is no internet access for the video, a facilitator can show the students pictures of children playing

Activity 6.3 below deepens the students' understanding of the play continuum by identifying each form of play in relation to the level of initiated play and directed play.

Activity 6.3: Forms of play (video of children playing) (30 minutes)

The students watch and discuss a video of children playing

Purpose:
♦ to deepen the students' understanding of how levels of initiated play and directed play determine the four forms of play on the play continuum

Resources:
1) projector, laptop and Internet access
2) Student Guides

Facilitation:
Whole Group. The facilitator:

Sets up the projector and connects the laptop to the internet,

Invites each student to turn to the person sitting next to them and to read the table in their Student Guide together.

Reminds the students to look out for levels of initiated play and directed play when they watch the video of children playing.

Clicks on one of the video links below. After one minute of watching the video, the facilitator pauses the video so that the students can discuss what they have seen. The facilitator uses the following questions to guide the discussion:

♦ What did you notice?
♦ What play did you observe?
♦ Who planned and started the play (initiated play)?
♦ Who organized and controlled the play once it had started (directed play)?

After each discussion resumes the video for another minute to reinforce the learning.

Repeats for the other videos:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZRpbqQpABU
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=340&v=lGIdyLpb1oE
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=280&v=YDQ5oDQ6ZIY
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=110&v=o9oCUVsWut4

NOTES for the facilitator:

Prepare for Activity 6.3 by watching the four video clips the day before.

Ask yourself 'How can I support students whose language is not the language that I am using in my sessions?'

Activity 6.4 below further deepens the students' understanding of the play continuum by actively engaging with the four forms of play and the levels of initiated play and directed play.

Activity 6.4: Roleplaying four forms of play (90 minutes)

The students create and present four roleplays of children engaged in 1) free play, 2) co-opted play, 3) guided play and 4) playful instruction. After each roleplay the students discuss what they observed in terms of initiated play and directed play and how each determined the form of play in the video.

Purpose:
♦ to apply the students' understanding of initiated play and directed play and how each determines the four forms of play on the continuum
♦ to work collaboratively with their peers
♦ to experience playful learning
♦ to make links between play, learning and the curriculum

Resources:
1) A copy of the case studies (see below). Cut the case studies into four separate case studies. Fold each case study so that the students cannot see the contents.

2) Props for roleplay: It is a good idea to get the students to find or make props for their case study; it encourages problem-solving, imagination and initiative. The list below is a guideline for the four case studies.

   Case Study 1: old blankets or sheets, climbing and obstacle items e.g. tables, chairs, tyres, ladders, cardboard boxes, rope, toys animals

   Case Study 2: items from the make-believe/fantasy area e.g. mirror, small table, chairs, dress up clothes, pots and pans, ball

   Case Study 3: 0 – 4 years National Curriculum Framework book, 3 small tables, small chairs, newspaper, white A4 paper, crayons, magazine pages, scissors, glue, flash cards, play dough

   Case Study 4: none

3) Student Guide

Facilitation:

Small group. The facilitator:

♦ divides the students into 4 groups.
♦ invites each group of students to choose one (folded) case study. Each group reads their case study but keeps it secret from the other groups.
♦ tells each group to find a quiet corner and to take 15 minutes to create a three-minute role play that demonstrates their chosen case study

Each group presents their role play to the other groups.

After each roleplay the students who have observed the roleplay guess:

♦ the form of play that was demonstrated
♦ the levels of initiated play and directed play (encourage the students to check using their Student Guide

The presenting group reads their case study out loud to the observing group and confirms the form of play, and the levels of initiated play and directed play.

Reflection

1)   Whole Group

After each roleplay the facilitator guides a reflection discussion by asking the students the following questions:

♦ What did you notice about the role play?
♦ What kind of play did you see?
♦ Who initiated and who directed the play activity in the roleplay?
♦ What would the children learn from this form of play?
♦ What links can you make with the curriculum?

2)   Individual

Journal: the facilitator writes six questions (below) on newsprint or on a board for everyone to see. The facilitator invites each student to write their answers in their journal:
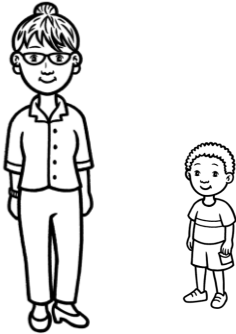
♦ The name of one play activity at your early learning setting?
♦ What form of play is this play activity?
♦ Who initiates (plans, sets out and starts) this play activity'?
♦ Who directs (controls) this play activity?
♦ What will the children learn when they do this play activity?
♦ How does this play activity link to the curriculum?

The case studies below are part of Activity 6.4 and demonstrate the four different kinds of play on the play continuum.

Four case studies

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">Case Study 1</td></tr>
<tr>
<td align="center">Form of play

Free play</td>
<td>A group of four year old children are playing a make believe game in the garden. They are pretending to be super heroes. The children run, jump, climb and 'rescue' pretend people and animals.
The preschool teacher observes the children playing but she does not intervene in any way in the children's play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td align="center">Levels of initiated play and directed play

C</td>
<td>The Children initiated (started) the play activity by deciding what game to play, who was going to play and where to play the game. The children directed (controlled) the play because they made all the decisions about what was happening while they were playing the game.
The teacher did not engage at all; the teacher did not initiate (start) the game and did not direct (control) the play activity.</td>
</tr>
</table>

Case Study 2	
Form of play **Co-opted play**	A group of five year old **children** are playing a make-believe game in the doll's corner. They decide they are a family and it is morning time. The mother is putting her makeup, the children are getting ready for school, the father is cooking breakfast, and the dog wants someone to play ball with him. The preschool **teacher** spots a learning opportunity and intervenes in the children's play by asking the children: ♦ What is Dad making for breakfast? ♦ Is it a healthy breakfast? ♦ What kind of things could be a healthy breakfast? ♦ Why is it important to have a healthy breakfast? ♦ What can happen if you don't have a good breakfast?
Levels of initiated play and directed play **Ct**	The **Children initiated (started) the play activity by** deciding when, how and where to play their game. The **Children directed (controlled) the play most of the time** by deciding what to do while they were playing the game. By intervening the **teacher directed (controlled) some of the play but it was at a low level** because it was the children who could decide most of the time.

Case Study 3	

Form of play
 	
Guided Play
	The Grade R **teacher** looks in the Grade R CAPS curriculum and notes that the children are learning number 2 next week. The teacher plans three art activities that will teach the children about number 2.
	
	The next week, the Grade R teacher looks at her planning and:
	
	♦ sets out three tables with:
	   1. paper with a number 2 written at the top, magazine pages, glue and scissors
	   2. paper with a number 2 written at the top and crayons for drawing
	   3. play dough with a number 2 flashcard.
	
	♦ instructs the **children** to 1)) colour in the number 2 and then cut out and stick two pictures, 2) colour in the number 2 and then draw two of their favourite foods, and 3) make the number 2 and two things out of dough.
	
	♦ rotates the children between the three tables until each child has completed all of the number two activities.

Levels of initiated play and directed play **Tc** 	The **Teacher started initiated (started) the play activity** by planning and preparing the three activities with a clear intention in mind (to help the children learn number 2). **The Teacher directed (controlled) the play activity most of the time** by choosing the activity materials, by setting out the activities in a certain way, and by telling the children what to do. The **children directed (controlled) some of the play but it was at a low level.** Although the children had to complete all three activities as instructed, each child could decide what two pictures to cut out, what two foods to draw, and what two things to make out of dough.

Case Study 4	
Form of play **Playful instruction**	The preschool **teacher** takes the 0 – 4 years National Curriculum Framework book and turns to the section on Exploring Mathematics ELDA 1.1. The teacher plans a movement ring that will teach the toddlers about big and small. The teacher writes down the actions she will do with the children in the movement ring. The next week at ring time the teacher looks at her planning and calls all the toddlers together on the carpet. The **children** copy the teacher who is doing the big and small movements she has planned: ♦ make a small mouth and then a big open mouth ♦ move like a small mouse and then like a big elephant ♦ be a small seed that grows into a big tree ♦ be a big dog and then a small dog ♦ take big giant steps and then small baby steps. ♦ The movement ring ends when the teacher tells the children to lie on the mat like small babies sleeping. When the teacher claps her hands the children grow big and go outside to play.
Levels of initiated play and directed play **T**	The <u>Teacher initiated (started) the playful instruction activity</u> by planning the movement ring with a clear outcome in mind**. The teacher directed (was in control of) the activity**. The teacher told the children exactly what and how to do the movements. The **children directed (controlled) <u>very little </u>of the play activity.** The teacher showed the children how to do all the movements.

Although the four forms of play described in the case studies above are separated into four clearly defined categories, it rarely happens that way in the classroom. For example: the **T** (teacher directed) play described above becomes **Tc** (guided play) the minute the teacher encourages a child to share their ideas by asking 'What other animals are big?' and 'Look around the room. What can you see that is small'?

Sharing choice and control during play facilitates agency and optimal learning

Agency

What does agency mean?

Agency is …   a good feeling that comes when you know you can:

- ♦ make decisions
- ♦ do things by yourself
- ♦ control your environment
- ♦ voice your ideas
- ♦ feel valued and appreciated by the people who are important to you

Why do teachers need to foster (encourage) agency?

Children who experience agency are likely to grow into confident adults with a healthy self-esteem (a good feeling about themselves as capable and valued).

How can teachers help children to experience agency?

A teacher can:

1. provide opportunities for children to succeed.

    This means planning activities that are interesting, enjoyable and a little challenging. If an activity is too easy or uninteresting the children will not experience meaningful success.

2. share control with the children

    This does not letting children do anything they want. Sharing control means giving the children choices and involving the children in planning, organising and making decisions.

Table 7: Teachers sharing control with children

Ways in which a teacher can share control:	Examples
Give children choices **The choices should be simple and clear**	♦ 'Today we have Marmite, fish paste and peanut butter sandwiches. You may choose which two kinds of sandwiches you would like to eat today' ♦ 'Would you like to play the drum or the shakers today?' ♦ 'We are painting today. What five colour paints shall we put out today?' ♦ 'Which ten books should we put out in the book corner this week.' (Did you notice that each choice above is about things teachers do every day with the children? Did you also notice that each choice is limited by time (*today/this week*) and number (*two sandwiches*, *drum or shaker, five colours, ten books*)
Involve children in making decisions	♦ 'Next month is our concert. Today we are going to choose songs to sing at the concert. Tell me your favourite songs. I will write them down and these will be the songs for our concert.' ♦ 'Children – we have a problem that needs sorting out. There is a lot of fighting in the garden because everyone wants to ride on the scooters but there are only three scooters at our school. How can we solve the problem and stop the fighting? '

NOTES for the facilitator: "mirroring"

Many teachers find it hard to share control with children. It can be daunting to start doing things differently. How can a facilitator help students to share control because it is very important for children to experience agency?

When a facilitator shares control with students, the students are likely to do the same by sharing control with the children they teach. We call this 'mirroring'. Here are some ideas on how a facilitator can share control with students:

♦ give the students choices
♦ involve students in decision making
♦ ask students open-ended questions that get them talking about their ideas, interests and challenges
♦ create opportunities for students to put their ideas and interests into practice.

When facilitators model sharing control the students will, in turn, nurture agency in their ECD settings by:

♦ giving children choices
♦ involving the children in decision making
♦ asking children open-ended questions
♦ giving children opportunities to use their ideas and make decisions.

Activity 6.5 helps teachers to identify appropriate (good) ways of sharing control with children.

Activity 6.5: Sharing control with children (40 minutes)

The students identify appropriate ways to share control with children

Purpose:
♦ Understand that there are appropriate and inappropriate ways of sharing control with children

Resources:
1) Newsprint and markers
2) Student Guide

Facilitation:
Individual. The facilitator asks each student to:

♦ read the checklist (below) in their Student Guide
♦ decide which of the four statements are appropriate ways of sharing control
♦ make a √ next to the statements that are appropriate ways of sharing control with children
♦ make a X next to the statements that are <u>inappropriate</u> ways of sharing control with children

Checklist: sharing control with children	
1. The teacher says to a child: '*I can see you like looking at the books on transport. Do you think we should put the toy cars and trucks in the block corner today?*'	
2. The teacher says to a group of children: '*It's your turn to be in charge so you can decide what we are going to do this morning*'.	
3. The teacher says to the children: '*We are making our own sandwiches today. We have peanut butter, marmite, cucumber, cheese and polony. What would you like to put on your sandwich?*'	
4. The teacher says to the children: '*I can see you all want to talk about the butterfly you found in the garden today but we can't. This week the theme is Transport.*'	

Whole group. The facilitator invites:

♦ the students to stand in a circle

♦ one student to read the first of the four checklist statements out loud.

♦ all the students to vote on whether the teacher's sharing of control in this statement was appropriate by jumping up and giving a thumbs up or bending down and giving a thumbs down sign. The facilitator counts the number of ups and downs and declares the outcome of the voting.

Ask one or two students briefly discuss their reasons for their answers.

The steps above are repeated for the remaining three statements.

Reflection

Pairs. Musical questions game

♦ The students stand up and move around the room to music (beat of a tambourine/ rhythm sticks/hand claps/singing/music)

♦ When the facilitator stops the music each student finds a partner

♦ The facilitator asks the first question from the list below.

♦ The students take turns (one minute each) to discuss the question with their partner. The facilitator alerts the students at the end of each minute.

♦ The facilitator invites two or three students to share their answers with the group

♦ The sequence is repeated. When the music stops the students find a different partner.

Questions list:

1. What is agency?

2. Why is fostering agency in children important?

3. How can we foster agency in children?

4. How can teachers share control with children?

5. What ideas do you have about sharing control with your children?

Optimal learning

What is optimal learning?
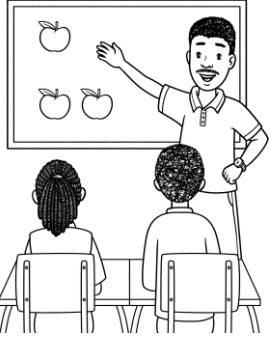
Optimal learning is …	is the best kind of learning. Optimal learning is closely linked to agency. This means that children learn best when they have a good feeling about themselves as somebody who is capable and valued.

How can teachers encourage optimal learning?

'*For optimal learning to take place children must experience agency and be supported rather than directed*' (p.14. Zosh et al, 2017). What does this mean? We have just learned about '*children must experience agency*'. We are now going to learn about '*children must …. be supported rather than directed*'.

Table 8 below shows the difference between teachers supporting and teachers directing children.

Table 8: Supporting and directing

When teachers direct children:	When teachers support children:
♦ The teacher is in control	♦ The teacher shares control with the children
♦ The children listen to the teacher	♦ The teacher listens to the children
♦ The children do what the teacher tells them to do	♦ The children are encouraged to share their ideas and experiences
♦ The teacher is responsible for solving problems and making decisions	♦ The teacher involves the children in solving problems and making decisions
♦ The children have few choices; they all do the same thing	♦ The children have many choices; they are encouraged to decide for themselves

Just as athletes need to exercise their muscles, so do children need to exercise their 'thinking and doing muscles' in order to learn (Zosh et al, 2017). Optimal learning (the best kind of learning) happens when teachers:

♦ Use a play-based approach (PBA) with children
♦ Move away from telling children what to do and say
♦ Move towards sharing control by offering children choices and involving them in making decisions

Activity 6.6: The moving game (20 minutes)

The students identify and explain the differences between directing and supporting children

Purpose:
♦ Understand that teachers facilitate optimal learning by supporting children
Resources:
1) one A4 poster with the words ' DIRECTING CHILDREN'
2) one A4 poster with the words 'SUPPPORTING CHILDREN'
3) Prestik or tape, newsprint, markers, scissors
4) Student Guide
Facilitation:
Whole group:

♦ The facilitator invites the students to stand in a circle holding their Student Guides.
♦ The students read the Supporting and Directing Table out loud. The students put down their Student Guide?.
♦ The facilitator sticks the poster 'DIRECTING CHILDREN' high up on the wall and the other poster 'SUPPORTING CHILDREN' on the opposite side of the room.
♦ The facilitator tells the students the 'rules' of the game:
  ♦ The facilitator reads out one of the incomplete statement from the list of six statements below.
  ♦ If a student thinks that the statement should end with the words 'directing children', the student stands next to the 'DIRECTING CHILDREN ' poster. If a student thinks that the statement should end with 'supporting children', the student stands next to the poster 'SUPPORTING CHILDREN'.
  ♦ The students are not allowed to walk. They can hop/skip/tiptoe/walk backwards/take giant steps to the poster. After each statement the movement must be a different one.
♦ After each move, the facilitator invites two or three students to explain why they choose a particular poster
♦ The facilitator then reads out the next statement and the process is repeated until all six statements have been read out

Statements:

1. When the teacher tells the children what to do most of the time, the teacher is ……

2. When the teacher invites the children to help solve a problem, the teacher is ……

3. When the teacher tells the children to colour in a photocopied picture of a family, the teacher is ……

4. When the teacher asks the children to draw their own family, the teacher is ……

5. When the teacher expects the children to sit quietly at a table for most of the day, the teacher is ……

6. When the teacher asks open-ended questions that encourage the children to share their ideas, the teacher is ……

Reflection:

1) Pairs. The facilitator:

♦ invites the students to find a partner (someone they haven't shared with yet) and sit on a chair facing their partner with their knees touching

♦ reads one of the five questions below out loud to the students

♦ invites each student to take a turn to discuss the question with their partner for one minute.

After the two minutes of discussion, the facilitator invites 2 or 3 students to share their answers with the whole group.

Questions:

♦ When is it a good time for a teacher to direct the children?

♦ What ideas do you have for supporting children?

♦ Could you do a moving game (like the one we have just played) with children?

♦ What would you need to do differently if you played a moving game with children?

♦ What would the children learn by playing a moving game?

2) Individual. The students write for 5 minutes in their journals. The facilitator suggests the following topics:

♦ Ideas on how they can support optimal learning for the children they teach

♦ A moving game plan that they can do with their children

NOTES for the facilitator:

If there are students who are not familiar with the language of instruction, the facilitator can:

1. invite a student to translate each statement

2. write the reflection questions in the home language of the students and stick to the wall where they can be seen by everyone.

7. HOW DO WE DO PBA?

Purpose

This section covers the different elements that contribute to effective play-based teaching and learning including how to plan for it, set up the spatial and material environment, intentional teaching strategies, play-based assessment and the importance of reflection.

Learning outcomes

♦ Understand that planning plays a critical role in the provision of quality play-based learning activities for children and how it supports optimal learning, classroom management and teaching satisfaction

♦ Understand that the two-part process of planning, including observing and preparing, are important first steps

♦ Consider the importance of setting up and resourcing an ECD environment to facilitate play-based learning

♦ Develop strategies for implementing play-based teaching in an ECD setting

♦ Learn about how to conduct play-based assessment

♦ Evaluate and reflect on teaching practice and use of the PBA cycle to improve practice

♦ Collaboratively plan and reflect on learning to develop critical thinking problem solving and communication techniques in students

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Planning play-based activities

This section on planning tells students what planning is, why planning is important, and how to plan. There are five playful activities in this section on Planning; each activity addresses a different aspect (part) of planning.

What is planning?

Planning is the first step in the five step teaching and learning cycle.
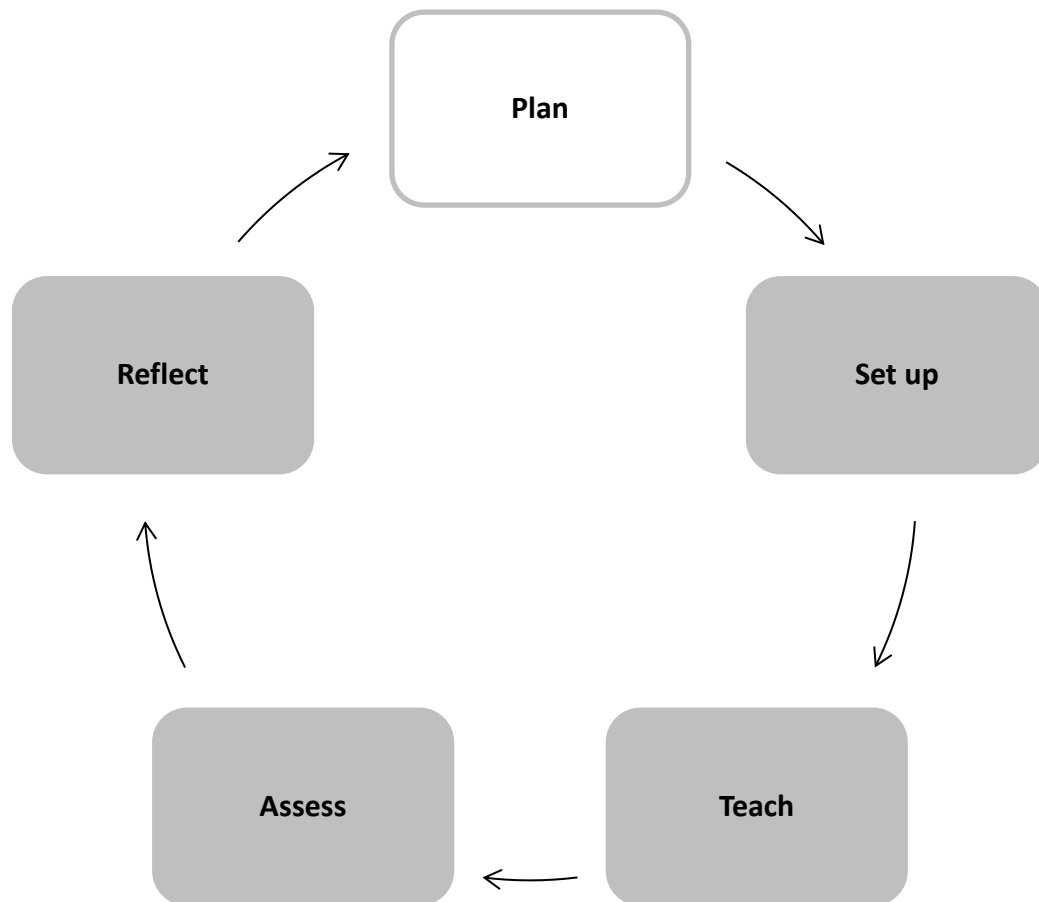
Figure 10: Play-based approach (PBA) to teaching and learning cycle - Plan

Here is a summary of the five steps in the cycle:

1. Plan:

Planning has two steps:

Step 1: the teacher first considers the children's needs, interests and the learning context before looking at the curriculum to see what the children need to learn.

Step 2: the teacher writes down a plan of how to teach the children. The plan takes into account what the teacher has found out in Step 1 about the children and the learning context.

2. Set up:

The teacher gets ready. The teacher looks at the written planning to see what materials to prepare and how to set up the space where the learning activity will take place.

3. Teach:

The teacher puts the planning into action by doing the teaching /learning activity with the children.
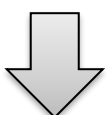
4. Assess:

The teacher checks to see if the children understand and can do what the learning activity taught them.

5. Reflect:

After the learning activity the teacher thinks about:

♦ What worked well when I did the learning activity? Why did it work well?
♦ What didn't work well? Why didn't it work well?
♦ What do I need to do differently next time?

The teacher returns to Step 1 and starts planning again. This time the teacher's planning is informed by the assessment findings and the reflection.
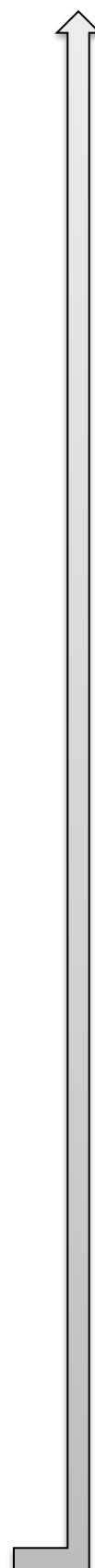
Why do teachers plan?

Planning is good for teachers and children. When teachers plan using a play-based approach we are sure to see:

♦ Happy and relaxed teachers who look forward to their day of teaching because they are well-prepared.

♦ Happy children who look forward to coming to school because the teachers are happy and relaxed and the learning activities are well-prepared.

♦ Fewer discipline problems because all the children are actively engaged in well-prepared activities.

♦ The children experience optimal (the best) learning because the teachers have been intentional (careful and purposeful) when planning and are well prepared.

Teachers planning = optimal learning

How do teachers plan?

Planning is a two-step process:

♦ **Step 1**: Preparing (getting ready) for planning
♦ **Step 2**: Implementing (doing) the planning

STEP 1: Preparing for Planning

Teachers prepare for planning by finding information that will help them to plan effectively (better). Teachers find this information in three ways by:

1. Observing the children
2. Looking at the curriculum
3. Considering the learning context

Let's take a closer look at how teachers prepare for planning in these three ways:

1. Observing the children

The teacher observes the children to find out:

<u>What the children already **know**</u> e.g. their name, age, numbers 1 - 6, how to share, what is a healthy food, the names of animals, the names of parts of their body etc.

<u>What the children can **do**</u> e.g. hop on one leg, draw a person, kick a ball, feed and dress themselves, listen with attention, match shapes, complete a puzzle etc.

<u>What the children are **interested in**</u> e.g. animals, books, playing with friends, water and sand play, building with blocks, creative art, singing etc.

2. Looking at the curriculum

The teacher looks at the curriculum to find out:

<u>What must the children **learn?**</u>

♦ If the Children are in Grade R, the teacher looks at the Grade R CAPS curriculum.

♦ If the children are in a programme for 0 – 4 year olds, the teacher looks at the 0 – 4 years National Curriculum Framework.

3. Considering the context

The teacher considers the learning context to find out:

<u>What is **affecting t**he children's learning?</u> What is blocking a child's ability to learn e.g. poverty and stress?

What <u>resources and opportunities</u> are available e.g. who can donate materials, what can parents and carers do to support their children's learning, and can the community library provide storybooks?

What <u>values </u>are important to the parents, carers and the community?

Observing the children as the first step in planning. Activity 7.1 introduces students to observing:

Activity 7.1: Observation game (20 minutes)

The students play a fun game observing (looking at) each other before and after they have made a change to their appearance. The facilitator asks open-ended reflection questions after the game.

Purpose:
♦ To provide a playful opportunity for students to practise observing.
♦ To help students make the link between observing the children and planning.

Resources: none required

Facilitation:

Pairs.

An **Observation Game:** is played in the following way:

♦ Each student finds a partner and they stand 1 metre apart facing each other.
♦ Each student looks closely at their partner without moving for 30 seconds.
♦ Each pair turn around and stand back to back without touching each other.
♦ Each student quietly makes <u>one </u>change to their appearance e.g. switches a watch to the other arm, takes off an earring, rolls up a sleeve, undoes a button, turns up a collar.
♦ When each person has made one change, the facilitator asks the students turn and face their partners again.
♦ Each student observes their partner again and identifies the change that has been made.
♦ The game is repeated four more times with the same partner.

Reflection:

Whole group: the facilitator asks the students the following open-ended questions:

♦ What did you notice about observing?
♦ How do teachers observe children?
♦ Why do teachers observe children?
♦ Why is it a good idea for teachers to observe the children before planning?

Application:

Whole group. The facilitator asks the students:

♦ How could you play the observation game with children?
♦ What would you need to do differently?
♦ What would the children learn by playing the observation game?
♦ How does playing the observation game link with the curriculum?

Activity 7.2. below has two parts.

PART 1

Observing a child
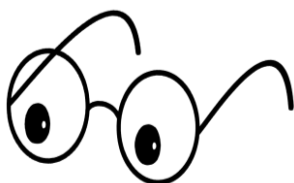
♦ Each student observes videos of a child and records their observation using the form below

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PART 2

Reflection on the observation

♦ The students reflect on the information they gathered using their completed observation forms

♦ The students draw conclusions on how observing informs planning

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Activity 7.2: Child Observation: PART 1 (15 minutes)
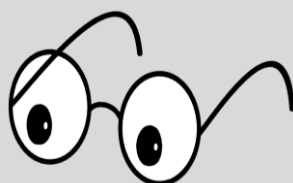
Purpose:

♦ To prepare for observing a child.

♦ To observe a videoclip of a child in an ECD setting.

Resources:

Observation form in Student Guide. A copy is provided below.

Videoclip of a child at play approximately 5 minutes.

1. Facilitation:

The facilitator:

♦ Refers the students to the Observation checklist in the Student Guide.

♦ The students and facilitator read the checklist out loud together. The facilitator answers any questions.

2. Observing a child

The facilitator shows the video clip and the students take notes about what they see on the form on the next page.

Activity 7.2 Part One: Observation Form

Child 1…………………………………………….	Child 2 …………………………………………….
1. What was the child doing? What did you observe about what s/he already knows, can do or anything that showed what s/he was thinking or feeling?	
2. What seemed to interest the child, what did s/he enjoy doing?	
3. Was there anything the child found difficult or challenging? (e.g. does the child find it difficult to listen and pay attention, have a special need)	

Activity 7.2 PART 2 is a follow up reflection session that takes place after students have handed in their completed observation form to the facilitator.

Activity 7.2: Child Observation PART 2 (45 minutes)

Purpose:
To help students understand that observing children leads to planning optimal learning activities.

Resources:
♦ Completed observation form (from Activity 7.2 PART 1).
♦ Music e.g. a drum, sticks, cell phone and speakers

Facilitation:
Individual.

The facilitator:

♦ Hands back each student's observation form.
♦ Invites each student to quietly read over what they have written on their observation form. Tells the students that they are going to use the information to play a movement game.

Whole Group

Movement Game:
The students move to music (or clapping or the beat of a drum/sticks).

When the music stops each student finds a partner and they stand facing each other touching their <u>hands</u> together.

The facilitator says 'Keep your hands touching while you tell each other what you found out about the children you observed?'

Each student takes a turn to tell their partner what they discovered about the child they observed without moving their hands away.

Repeat the sequence above (moving to music, finding a new partner, touching with a different body part (elbows, knees, hips, backs, shoulders) five more times. Each time the facilitator asks "What else did you find out about the child you observed?' and each time the students share more of what they observed with a particular body part touching one another (the facilitator may need to prompt students to ensure the answers relate to the child's knowledge, skills, attitudes, interests, and learning context).

Whole Group

Talking Wheel:
The facilitator sets up the Talking Wheel by:

Dividing the group into two groups.

Asking one group to make a circle with each person standing facing outwards.

Asking the other group to make a circle around the first circle with each person standing facing inwards. Each person is now standing and facing a partner.

The Talking Wheel game is played in the following way:

♦ The facilitator asks the first of the five questions (below).
♦ Each student discusses the question with their partner for approx. one minute each (give more time if you see the discussion is lively).
♦ The facilitator gives a signal to end the discussion and invites a few students to share their insights and ideas with the rest of the group.
♦ The outer circle then moves one step to the right so that each student is now facing a new partner.
♦ The facilitator asks the second question and the process is repeated until all the questions have been answered

<u>**Questions** for the Talking Wheel activity:</u>

1. How will knowing what children know, can do and feel help a teacher to plan?

2. How will knowing what interests and excites children help a teacher to plan?

3. How will knowing what challenges and influences children help a teacher to plan?

4. What are the benefits (good things) for children when teachers prepare for planning?

5. What are the benefits for teachers when they prepare for planning?

6. What happens when a teacher does not prepare for planning?

Application:
Whole Group.

The facilitator asks the students:

♦ How could you play the Movement Game with children?
♦ What would you need to change or do differently with children?
♦ What would the children learn from playing the Movement Game?
What links can you make between children playing the Movement Game and the curriculum

Now that the students have completed Step 1 (preparing for planning), they are ready for Step 2 (doing the planning).

STEP 2: Doing the planning

Planning optimal learning activities

Teachers want their children to experience optimal learning. Teachers also want to know what kind of activities will result in optimal learning. Optimal learning happens when teachers plan activities that:

♦ are fun for children

♦ are meaningful for the children

♦ actively involve all the children

♦ are done many times in different ways

♦ get children to play and work together

(Zosh et al, 2017)

Planning with intention

Teachers understand that everything they say and do impacts (has an effect) on the children they teach. Teachers need to ask themselves:

♦ why am I doing this activity with the children?

♦ what will the children learn by doing this activity?

Teachers who plan with a clear aim are sure to have a positive impact on the children. We call this being intentional. Being intentional means that teachers plan activities according to the characteristics of activities that lead to optimal learning.

This means that each activity:

♦ is fun for the children

♦ is meaningful for the children

♦ actively involves all the children

♦ is done many times in different ways with the children

♦ encourages children to play and work together

♦ fulfils the curriculum aims

Children experience optimal learning when teachers plan activities with intention.

Activity 7.3 is a case study (a story that has been made up in order to teach us something). The case study of Ms Blue and Ms Green helps students find answers to the following questions:

♦ What does intentional planning look like?

♦ Why is it important to be an intentional teacher?

Activity 7.3: Intentional teaching (90 minutes)

Ms Blue and Ms Green are preschool teachers. Although Ms Blue and Ms Green teach the same age group and use the same 0 – 4 years National Curriculum Framework aims, their activities are very different. By looking at how each teacher plans, we understand what it means to be an intentional teacher and how to plan optimal learning activities.

Purpose:

♦ To understand what it means to be an intentional teacher.

♦ To reflect on the impact of intentional planning.

Resources:

♦ Copies of Ms Blue and Ms Green's planning (copy of each is provided below).

♦ Large picture book with pictures of the five senses

♦ A4 blank white paper and crayons

♦ Storybook (or rhyme or song) about copying

♦ Newsprint and markers to make the following poster:

	Ms Green	Ms Blue
Was the activity fun for the children?		
Was the activity meaningful for the children?		
Did the activity actively involve all the children		
Was the activity done in different ways with the children		
Did the activity encourage children to play and work together		

Facilitation:

Whole group. The facilitator

♦ introduces the concept (idea) of a case study to the students by saying:

♦ A case study is a description of a situation or person, often both. Today's case study of Ms Blue and Ms Green will help us to understand:

♦ what it means to be an intentional teacher

♦ how to plan so that children experience optimal learning

♦ Introduces the case study by reading the following to the students:

♦ 'Ms Blue and Ms Green each teach a class of 4-5 year olds at the local preschool. Ms Blue and Ms Green have both planned a group activity according to the 0 – 4 years National Curriculum Framework's <u>Communication: ELDA 3, Aim 1</u>: *Children listen to sounds and speeches.* Although Ms Blue and Ms Green used the same planning form and have the same aim i.e. *Children **listen** to sounds and speeches,* their planning and the children's learning is quite different'.

♦ Tells the students 'We are going to do a roleplay with Ms Blue and Ms Green and their children' and divides the students into two groups i.e. 1) Ms Green and children, and 2) Ms Blue and children.

♦ Hands Ms Green's planning to one group. Hands Ms Blue's planning to the other group. Instructs each group to:

♦ read the planning done by Ms Blue or Ms Green.

♦ decide who is to roleplay the teacher and who are to roleplay the children.

♦ spend 15 minutes planning a 2 – 3 minute roleplay of the session planned.

♦ Each group takes a turn to present their 2 – 3 minute roleplay to the other group.

♦ Before beginning the reflection, the facilitator reminds the students to derole and to be themselves again.

Reflection:

1. After the Ms Green roleplay the facilitator asks the observing students:

♦ What did you notice?

♦ What did Ms Green's children learn?

♦ Did Ms Green's planning achieve the curriculum aim: *Children **listen** to sounds and speeches?* How?

♦ The facilitator pins up the following five question poster. The facilitator asks the students one question at a time. If the students respond positively to a question then the facilitator write YES in Ms Green's column. If the response is negative then the facilitator writes NO in Ms Green's column:

88	Ms Green	Ms Blue
Was the activity fun for the children?		
Was the activity meaningful for the children?		
Did the activity actively involve all the children?		
Was the activity done in different ways with the children?		
Did the activity encourage children to play and work together?		

2. After the Ms Blue roleplay the facilitator asks the observing students:

♦ What did you notice?

♦ What did Ms Blue's children learn?

♦ Did Ms Blue's planning realise the curriculum aim: *Children **listen** to sounds and speeches*? How?

♦ The facilitator points to the poster and asks the students the same five questions. If the students respond positively then the facilitator writes YES in Ms Blue's column. If the response is negative then the facilitator writes NO in Ms Blue's column.

3. Once reflections 1 and 2 are completed, the facilitator invites all the students to compare the columns on the newsprint. The facilitator asks:

♦ What do you see?

♦ Which activity do you think will lead to optimal learning?

♦ Why is Ms Blue's planning more effective?

♦ What advice could you give to Ms Green?

The planning for Ms Blue and Ms Green (below) is for Activity 7.3. Note that each offers alternative ways to do the planned activity. Use the option that suits your context.

Planning: Ms Green
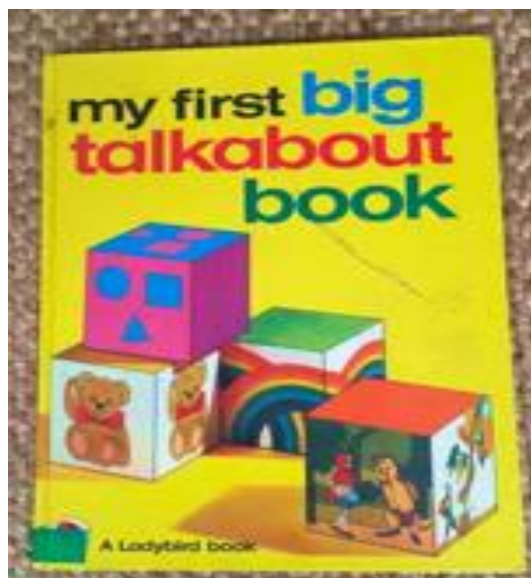
Date: 21st May

Teacher: Ms Green

Children: 4 – 5 year old class

Curriculum: Communication: ELDA 3, Aim 1: *Children listen to sounds and speeches*

Resources: *My First Big Talkabout Book*. A Ladybird book. If this (or a similar book) is not available then use one of the following:

♦ Google and print images of the five senses. Staple together to make a book.

♦ Google images of the five senses and create a Powerpoint slideshow

♦ Use objects. Find 5 open medium-sized boxes. Label box 1 'I hear with my ears'. Label Box 2 'I see with my eyes'. Label Box 3 'I feel with my skin'. Label Box 4 'I taste with my tongue'. Label Box 5 'I smell with my nose'. Fill each box with five items that relate to the sense on the label. Ask the same questions using the objects instead of pictures.

Activity:

1. Ms Green tells the children that it is now story time and everyone must sit quietly on the mat with their hands in their laps.

2. Ms Green holds up the *My First Big Talkabout Book* and asks the children 'What do you see?' Ms Green reads out the title of the book pointing and showing the children which word she is reading.

3. Ms Green reminds the children that the theme for the week is 'My Senses' and asks the children 'What are the names of the five senses'.

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4. Ms Green asks five questions which the children answer by pointing to the correct body part:

♦ 'Show me what part of our body we use to touch?'

♦ 'Show me what part of our body we use to see?'

♦ 'Show me what part of our body we use to taste?'

♦ 'Show me what part of our body we use to hear?'

♦ 'Show me what part of our body we use to smell?'

5. Ms Green opens the book and shows the children the following pages on the senses:

6. Ms Green asks the children the following questions for each page:

♦ 'What sense do we use here?'

♦ 'What is this?' (Ms Green points to some of the pictures on the page)

7. Ms Green hands each child a blank paper and asks the children to sit at the table and to draw the five senses.

Planning: Ms Blue
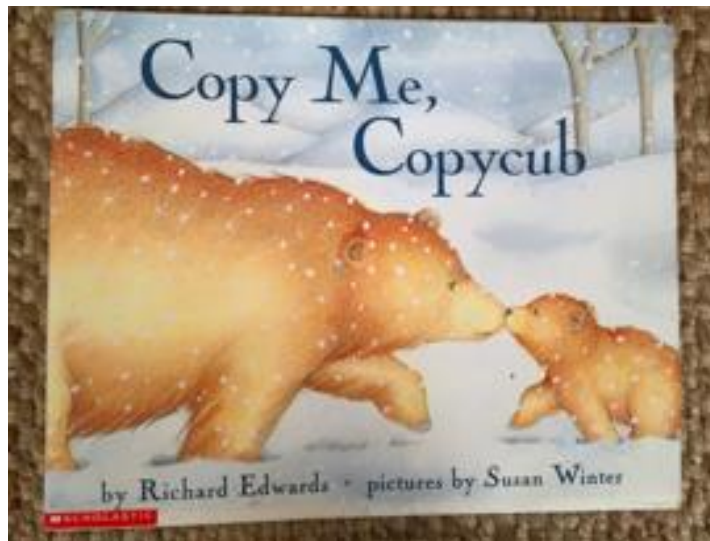
Date: 21st May

Teacher: **Ms Blue**

Children: 4 – 5 year old class

Curriculum: Communication: ELDA 3, Aim 1: *Children listen to sounds and speeches*

Resources: Storybook: *Copy Me, Copycub.* If this (or a similar book) is not available then use one of the following:

♦ look on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IiqiHzu31c for the *Copy Me, Copycub* story*.*
♦ read another storybook or make up your own story with a 'copy me' theme.
♦ say a rhyme which has 'copy me' actions e.g. 'Simon says …'
♦ play the 'Broken Telephone' game.

Special needs: Siya is hard of hearing so he sits near his teacher to see the story book pictures and lip read. Ms Blue will also use her hands and face in expressive ways to help Siya understand the story.

Activity:

1. Ms Blue sits the children in a ring on the carpet making sure that she can see everyone's face.

2. Ms Blue reads Copy Me Copycub to the children and shows them the pictures.

3. Ms Blue holds her arms up high and says 'Copy me'. Ms Blue plays the 'Copy me' game by asking the children to take turns to do something that everyone copies.

4. Ms Blue tells the children 'I am going to make some sounds and then you are going to copy the sounds I make'. Ms Blue makes the following sounds. After each sound the children copy the sound Ms Blue made.

- ♦ Hello how are you?
- ♦ Molweni. Ninjani?
- ♦ Goeiemôre. Hoe gaan dit?
- ♦ oooo
- ♦ ssss
- ♦ bbbb
- ♦ Hooray Hooray for today.

5. Ms Blue invites the children to each make their own sound or word or sentence for the group to copy. The children each take a turn to make a sound or say something that the other children copy.

6. Ms Blue asks all the children to lie down and shut their eyes as if they are sleeping. Ms Blue tells the children that when they hear the 'k' sound they wake up and go outside to play. Ms Blue makes the following letter sounds:

- ♦ o
- ♦ e
- ♦ m
- ♦ k

Activity 7.4 below helps students to understand what it means to be an intentional teacher.

Activity 7.4 Planning optimal learning (60 minutes)

The students work together as intentional teachers to plan optimal learning activities for babies, toddlers, 3 – 4 year olds, and 4 - 5 year old children. Each group presents their planning in a playful way to the other students.

Purpose:
- ♦ To practise what has been learned in this section about optimal learning and being an intentional teacher.
- ♦ To work together and share ideas on how to plan optimal learning activities.

Resources:
- ♦ profiles of four different age groups (a copy is provided below).
- ♦ four planning templates (a copy is provided below).
- ♦ blank paper for rough planning.
- ♦ 0 – 4 years National Curriculum Framework
- ♦ newsprint, Prestik, markers, crayons.
- ♦ music e.g. percussion instruments (if available). Banging a metal spoon on a hard plastic chair or a metal pot will also work.

Facilitation

Small groups. The facilitator:

- ♦ Playfully divides the students into four small groups by naming each student one of four animals i.e. lion, giraffe, rhino, zebra, lion, giraffe, rhino, zebra and so on.

- Asks all the 'lions' to form one group, the 'giraffes' to form another group, the 'rhinos' to form a third group, and the 'zebras' to form a fourth group.
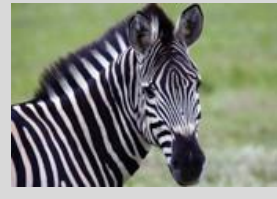
- Tells the students that each group is to plan and present an optimal learning activity for a group of children. The facilitator hands each group of students one of the following profiles:
    - babies
    - toddlers
    - 3 - 4 year olds
    - 4 – 5 year olds
- Hands each group of students a planning template and blank paper. Reminds the students to use the blank paper for writing up their ideas and rough drafts.
- Asks each group to take 20 minutes to:
    - read the profile
    - plan an optimal learning activity for their age group which:
        - links to the curriculum
        - is fun for the children
        - is meaningful for the children
        - actively involves all the children
        - is done many times in different ways with the children
        - encourages children to play and work together
    - decide how to present their planned activity to the other students for 2 – 3 minutes. The facilitator encourages the students to be playful and creative by using the newsprint, crayons and markers, singing, dancing, and dramatising.
- Each group of students takes a turn to present their planned activity to the other groups.

Reflection

Whole Group: after each presentation, the facilitator asks:

- What did you notice?
- What tells us that the activity will lead to optimal learning?
- How could you do the activity with your children?

The following four profiles are for Activity 7.4:

Profile 1: Babies

Name of the group: Giraffes   **Age of children**: 0 - 17 months

Special needs and challenges:
♦ Ben is a very 'floppy' baby and doesn't show any sign of wanting to crawl even though he is 10 months old.
♦ Maselele is very attached to one particular teacher and doesn't want anyone else to pick her up or feed her.

Babies' interests:
♦ The babies love music.
♦ The babies respond positively when they see another baby.

Home and community context:
Five of the six babies are parented by single mothers who work. The grandparents live nearby and help the mothers. None of parents in the babies group seem to know each other. They are in too much of a rush to get to work.

Opportunities for learning:
♦ The principal has just made some long pillows for the baby room.
♦ Two of the grandmothers have offered to come and help at school. One grandpa plays the guitar.

Profile 2: Toddlers

Name of the group: Lions   **Age of children**: 18 – 30 months

Special needs and challenges:
♦ Rita is new to the class and hasn't bonded with her teacher yet.
♦ Ntombi wants to be picked up and carried around all the time.

Toddlers' interests:
♦ The theme for the week is 'My busy body'.
♦ The toddlers love messy play.

Home and community context of the children:
The families come from well-resourced homes where most of the mothers are stay-at-home moms who don't work. Many of the fathers commute and work in another city; they seldom attend school functions and parents' meetings.

Opportunities for learning:
The teachers have been on a course on how to make toys from waste materials.

Profile 3: 3 - 4 year olds

Name of the group: Rhinos   **Age of children:** 3 – 4 year olds

Special needs and challenges:

♦ Musi is in a wheelchair but he loves to take part in the activities.

♦ Robert is very boisterous and tends to be rough with the younger children.

♦ Nabeela can't see very well and needs to wear her glasses all the time.

Children's interests:

♦ The theme for the week is 'Insects'.

♦ Musi's mother brought in a dead butterfly for everyone to see.

♦ It is nearly Easter and the children are all talking about the Easter bunny.

Home and community context of the children:

The children come from an area that is rife with gangsterism. The parents say they are scared of the gangs and keep their children safely inside all the time. The parents are not keen to attend school functions after work. The parents say that educating their children is a priority for them.

Opportunities for learning:

Kaylin's father brought six balls as a gift for the Rhino class.

Profile 4: 4 – 5 year olds

Name of the group: Zebras   **Age of children:** 4 -5 year olds

Special needs and challenges:

♦ Siswe is deaf in one ear.

♦ Mohamed is very active and finds it difficult to sit and listen without being distracted.

♦ Marie does not know her colours yet.

♦ Yonela is very clever and curious.

Children's interests:

♦ The theme for the week is 'Wild Animals'.

♦ The children love action stories, drama and moving to music.

Home and community context of the children:

Most of the children come from family-orientated homes where the parents live together in their own houses close to the school. Many of the parents know each other and socialise by getting together for a braai on the weekend. The parents view education as the road to success in life.

Opportunities for learning:

The game reserve is close by and the school can afford transport. One of the fathers is a game ranger.

The following blank planning form is for Activity 7.4. The facilitator hands one copy to each of the four groups and reminds them to write their ideas and first drafts on blank paper. The final draft is written on the planning form.

Planning

Date: Teacher:

Children's ages:

Curriculum:

Resources:

Activity:

Planning is the foundation of great teaching and learning.

Set up for play-based learning

Preparation is at the heart of any good teaching. Preparing an interesting, stimulating and playful classroom environment where children can play to learn is no different.

As teachers, we need to plan play-based learning well. In order to do so we have to very carefully 'set up' or prepare the environment for the children to play in. Using a play-based-approach to learning means that the environment itself must encourage and support children's play as part of their and your daily programme.

Both NELDS (National Early Learning Development Standards for children birth to four years) and The CAPS document for Life Skills in the Foundation Phase say that opportunities for active play are very important for young children in an ECD environment.

There is a cycle that we can follow that can help us prepare a good play-based learning environment.

The cycle is:

1. setting up/preparation of the environment,
2. working in it with the children and allowing them to be active partners,
3. observing and thinking about if our environment did actually encourage and support play-based learning for our children, and then
4. setting up the environment again, but this time based on the ideas and changes that our thinking tells us are needed.
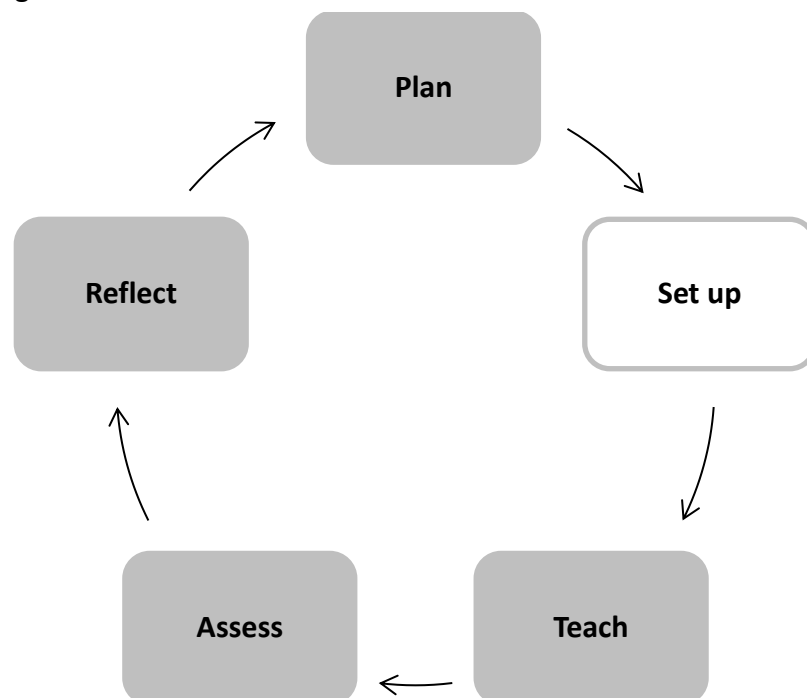
Figure 11: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Set up

We know that the classroom environment is much more than what we see.

The important things that lie behind a classroom environment that tries to support play-based learning are:

a) the good quality of teacher-to-child relationships,
b) the quality of play and learning experiences that the teacher has made available for children, and
c) what the teacher him/herself thinks about how learning grows and develops in children

The first very important setting up of a play-based environment is in the teacher's own attitudes. What s/he thinks about the idea of play-based learning, how she sees the children, and how s/he sees her/himself as the facilitator of play-based learning will make a difference to the ways in which s/he goes about preparing the learning environment.

Our starting point for play-based learning must be how we as teachers see children. What image they have of children is the starting point.

A teacher might see the child as someone who must wait for the teacher before doing any activity. The teacher might see the child as someone who cannot take control of a play situation and direct it themselves. The teacher might see the child as someone who cannot make choices about play.

Such a teacher will set up a learning space that is limiting for the child in many ways. It is not going to be a space that will help the child to learn through play.

On the other hand, the teacher might believe and trust that children can learn actively by freely playing with materials and working with teachers in play. The teacher might believe that learning in this way is a partnership. The teacher might believe that play is a powerful learning tool for children.

This teacher will set up a very different kind of classroom.

Imagine this example of two very different environments.

It is the beginning of a school day, and the children are expected very soon. There are two classroom environments ready for them.

Environment 1
There is a classroom with desks and chairs arranged in it, in clusters. The toys are all neatly packed away in boxes, nothing is left out on the floors or tables, which are bare. The teacher's table is quite dominant in the room. There are some charts and picture on the walls. The outside environment is equally clean and neat, with no toys visible. The sandpit is covered. The teacher is on her cellphone at her desk.

> **Environment 2**
> The classroom is an area in which toys and games are laid out ready for children to play with. There are things like blocks, crayons, paper, recycled materials such as empty bottles, boxes and tins laid out ready. A picture of a building is on the carpet next to some blocks. Through the door to the outside there is a pile of sand with some old tin cups and plates in it, and perhaps a spade. The teacher is seated next to the door on a small chair welcoming children in.

The teacher's table is in a corner against the wall.

In these two pictures it is clear which one is set up for play, where children may feel invited to start playing with things. The other is clearly more set up for the teaher's benefit, and although it may look attractive, it is not really inviting children to play. They both tell us what the teachers believe about about children and play. Think about your own ECD setting. How does it reflect your ideas about children's learning and play?

We can clearly see the teachers' understanding of different types of play that children need to engage in, and the teacher's own choices about what roles s/he will play during play with children, in the way these teachers have set up the learning environments.

The learning environment is therefore a kind of mirror which reflects what the teacher thinks about children's learning, and about how this teacher plans for play-based learning.

So, let us say that we want to give children a learning experience based on play.

We understand that we will be facilitators in this learning.

There are a number of things to think about when we set up a space for play-based learning.

We will consider them under the following headings:

i) The physical environment, which includes outdoors as well as indoors
ii) The psychological or emotional environment, how it feels for the child
iii) The materials placed in the environment

But first, it is useful to think about some general points.

General

♦ A learning environment is where both teachers and children will spend a lot of time, and so it needs to be a place that everyone who uses it can relate to it. Learning environments should be nurturing spaces that support the development of all children.

♦ How the environment for play-based learning is set up generally directs the way play will happen in the environment, and how children might direct their play, both inside the classroom and outdoors.

♦ Set up plays an important role in the way children feel about play. It affects how they behave towards one another. It affects how they communicate with one another in play partnerships, and it affects how they engage in play.

♦ All environments available to the child can support children's learning - the outside as well as the inside environment is important to think about.

♦ Even when play is 'free', with children deciding what and how to play, the space, the materials and the people to play with provide a certain structure which is important for teachers to think about.

♦ The environment should reflect of the culture that the child lives in which makes them feel understood and safe, as well as giving children the opportunity to extend and explore in many directions in their play.

(Kritchevsky, Prescott, & Walling, 1977; Loughling & Suina, 1982).

Physical environment

Environment can be defined as the physical environment, its surroundings, and a specific setting or context.

Here are some of the principles that should be considered in the physical setting up of a play-based learning environment.

Indoors

1. It should be light, well organised with noisy and quiet areas separated and as much room as possible for children to move around in and play in different ways.

2. There should be things in it that are **recognisable** to the child and to the teachers

3. The size of the space, but more importantly how the space is used, and how things are arranged within it, both indoors and outdoors will have an effect on children's freedom to choose their own activities. This will then have an effect on whether or not they extend and expand their play, how far they can use it to explore an idea, for example, and whether they can engage in different kinds of play. How space is designed encourages or discourages ongoing developing play. Small, squashed, badly designed play areas can make children irritable and uncomfortable, and do not allow them to put their energies into their activities.

4. Flexibility is also important. What works for one group of children may not work for another, and children need changes to keep them interested and focussed. In this sense the design of the early learning environment is never complete, but changes all the time as the children learn and as their needs change.

5. Different learning spaces can be very useful. Some play activities are better for large groups, other are better explored in smaller groups or in one-to-one partnerships, so allowing spaces for large group, small group and individual play opportunities and areas where activities can be left out and returned to later are important in terms of layout. Children are different in their own needs and learning styles. Each space within the bigger overall space of the early learning space, should also be considered in a way that invites children in, and encourages engagement with the play materials.

Outdoors

1. Setting up an outdoor environment is just as important, however small or limited it may be. Teachers need to give children the opportunity to play with toys or objects and materials or games, in the same way as those indoors. Working with outdoor materials such as sand, water, ropes, boxes, sticks and so on, are opportunities that extend the child's engagement in play, and provide different interesting play opportunities. Bringing outside, things such as construction materials that are normally considered to belong inside, can extend a child's learning environment. Thinking about moving things between the two environments, either for a short time, or for long periods can help teachers to think more carefully about the two different environments and what play opportunities they can offer children.

2. Indoor and outdoor kinds of play can be thought of as complementary to, or helping one another. Children using the outdoor space, however small, can play in a way that helps them to explore and ask questions and to think about things that they can then take indoors to different play activities and materials to try out in a different way. For example a child who is playing a balancing game on a plank, exploring what her/his own body does, may take the idea of balance inside, and work with it and extend it in her /his next construction activity with blocks.

Emotional environment

It is as important to think beyond the physical aspects of the early learning environment to 'emotional safety'. A child who feels welcomed, secure and has his/her emotional needs met is more able to pay attention, and to give positive energy to playing, and therefore to learning and developing.

Activity 7.5: A welcoming learning environment (30 minutes)

Participants are to think of their own cultural, social and family background, and imagine that they are setting up a welcoming learning environment for children from the same background as their own.

They are to think of 5 things they would do to make this environment as welcoming as possible. They are to give reasons for their choices. For example, maybe a teacher wants to have a small jar of flowers on a table near the door because she knows that most children don't see flowers at home and will be interested in them. Participants are to think of furniture, play materials, the arrangement of spaces within the environment, what might be on the walls, and so on. They should think about how they would like the child to **feel** on entering that space, NOT on how or what the children might play with.

They have 10 minutes to do this. Then the facilitator chooses 3 or 4 volunteers to share their ideas with the whole group. The discussion afterwards will focus on the reasons behind the choices, looking closely at: (i) the differences between these different learning environments, and (ii) things that are the same, all from the point of view of the way children might feel when entering and working in this environment.

Materials, objects, games and resources

1. Play environments should contain materials that encourage and support different kinds of play,. The teacher needs to think carefully about how the materials support and encourage children to think, to socialise with one another, and to develop emotionally, and physically. (Catron & Allen, 2007).

2. Children must be able to access the materials. Can all children easily get to the materials Can the materials be left out for some time if the play is an activity that children need to come back to (for example constructing a house or a village with blocks)?

3. Materials that can be used for many kinds of play, and not just one kind of play are the ones teachers should be most interested in. So toys like a puzzle can only be done in one way. Puzzles are important, but toys like blocks can be used in many ways by children, to do many different things.

4. We want play materials that invite children to play and encourage and help them to think. We want enough materials that can be used in many different ways and that give children opportunities to be creative. We want materials that help children to learn about one another and to play together and with their teachers We want materials that reflect the cultural diversity of the children and facilitates participation of children with different abilities.

5. We need to think carefully about how many materials are in the environment at any one time. Not having enough materials, and different kinds of materials limits ability to play, and can lead to boredom. But having too many materials can confuse children, and make them less interested in learning. With the right number of materials available, teachers can spend more time engaging and playing with their children, and less time trying to control behaviour and keep good order.

6. On a practical level, teachers need to think if the materials can be easily handled by the children? Are they safe for children? Are they easily put away, stored and cleaned?

7. New materials need to be brought into the learning environment to from time to time, to expand children's learning, or encourage a new direction in play. Change materials that no longer interest children.

By observing and paying close attention to how children play, teachers will see what is needed:

How are the children responding to the materials? Are they excited and interested? How do they use the materials? How long do they play? How do they extend their play with the use of the materials? How are the materials affecting children's friendships, the way they play together?

It can be useful to use the checklist on the next page to help you make decisions about whether your ECD environment is well set up for play-based learning. The brief checklist can be used in any environment at any time, and additional questions can be added.

Things to think about in the ECD setting / classroom	Yes or No
Stand at the door of your ECD setting/ classroom. Does the room look inviting for the children? Have you got some things in it that they will recognise and be happy to see?	
Do you think children will be physically comfortable there? Are there spaces for them to move around in? Are there different play areas to cater for individual, paired and group play?	
Get down to child's height and look at your room again. How does it look from a child's eye point of view? Are the play materials within reach? Can the children see things to play with?	
Go outside. Does your outside area look inviting for the children? Can they move around comfortably? Are there things there that will make them want to be outside? Is it safe?	

Thinking about these things will help a teacher to think about whether his/her classroom is well set up for play-based teaching and learning.

To summarise how to set up a play-based learning environment, we are going to do a design activity. Before we do so, let us think back to the principles of play that were outlined in an earlier section. These are:

♦ Play is intentional
♦ Play demands that children be active
♦ Play is fun
♦ Children make choices about their play activities
♦ Children can lead, direct and control their own play activities.
♦ Play is meaningful in that it offers opportunities for children to come to terms with and create meaning about their world
♦ Play is communicative.
♦ Play is a process.

For a learning environment to be fully set up for play-based learning, we need to make sure that these principles are followed.

Activity 7.6: Dream space (90 minutes)

This activity focuses on the set up of a play-based learning environment in terms of how it encourages and helps children to play.

Participants are told that they have been given the chance to set up a pre-school class for 5 year old children. They are the designers of the space, and can put into it whatever they feel is best for their particular context. This is to be a play-based classroom.

They should think about their ideal classroom, the one all teachers dream of, and there are no limits in terms of what they can design.

The facilitator makes the point that 'dreaming' in this very constructive way, is a kind of play in itself.

In groups of 3 or 4 people, they are asked to draw a plan of this dream classroom and clearly mark everything they wish to put in it.

In designing this dream space for play-based learning, participants might find it useful to:

1. Use the principles of play as a tool for design
2. Ask themselves some questions about the physical environment (indoors and outdoors), the emotional environment and the materials, or what they would like to put into their environment. These questions may help:

i) What is in my space(s)?
ii) Why is it there? Do I think it will be of interest to the children? Does it suggest to children some kind of play that they may like do have with it? Does it invite and promote engagement?
iii) Where is it? Have I placed it in a particular place, and if so, why?
iv) Who has access to it?
v) What kind of play do I want to encourage with this material?
vi) What else can I offer children in terms of an invitation to play?

They have 30 minutes to prepare their design.

These designs are all put up on the wall to make a little exhibition.

Participants and the facilitator then all take a walk around to have a look at the designs.

At each design, the facilitator asks the group who made that design to give reasons for **one choice** they have made in their design.

When the group returns to plenary, each participant is asked to write down one thing from any of the designs that s/he thought was a particularly good and well-motivated idea. Participants are asked to read this to the whole group.

Ask each participant to identify something from their dream design that they could introduce in the ECD space they work in, right now.

Teaching a play-based approach
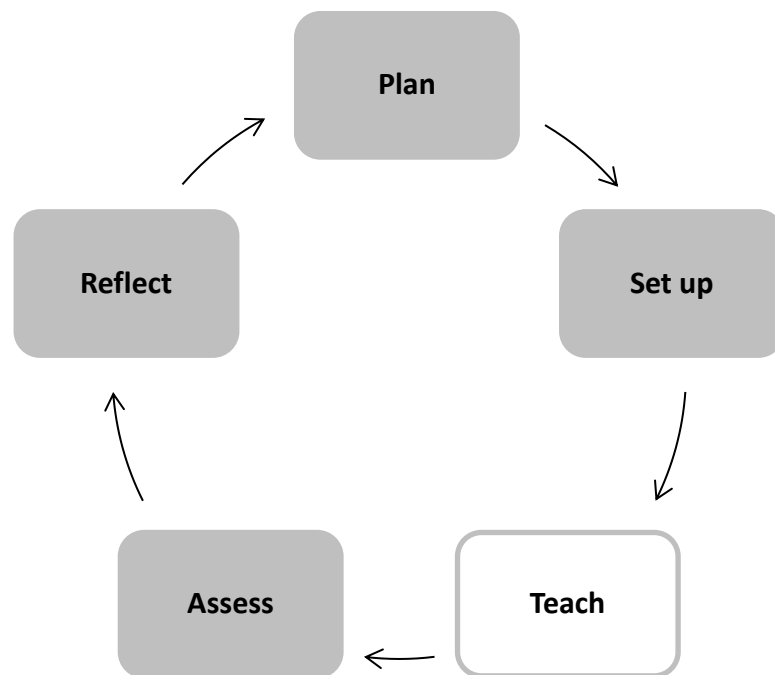
Figure 12: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Teach

Purpose

This section looks at how teachers help children learn as they interact with them during both child-directed and teacher-directed play activities.

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

♦ Increase their understanding of the different ways to facilitate learning through play
♦ Describe how scaffolding children's play extends their thinking and learning
♦ Explore ways to scaffold learning during child-directed and teacher-directed activities.

Teaching through play

Teaching through play means using playful ways to support children's learning, not only during child-directed activities but also during teacher-directed activities when introducing new concepts and skills. All learning activities in the daily programme should be playful and reflect the characteristics of play discussed in Section 4.

♦ Joyful
♦ Meaningful
♦ Actively engaging
♦ Iterative
♦ Socially interactive

Scaffolding refers to the different ways in which teachers support children during play to help them learn new concepts and develop skills.

In the same way that the scaffolding that supports workers while they are building or repairing a building is slowly taken away as the building work progresses, teachers provide support until the child has mastered the skill or concept and can work on their own. When the concept or skill is new, the teacher provides the most support and, as the child becomes more skilled, the teacher slowly takes the support away, based on how she sees that the child is responding.
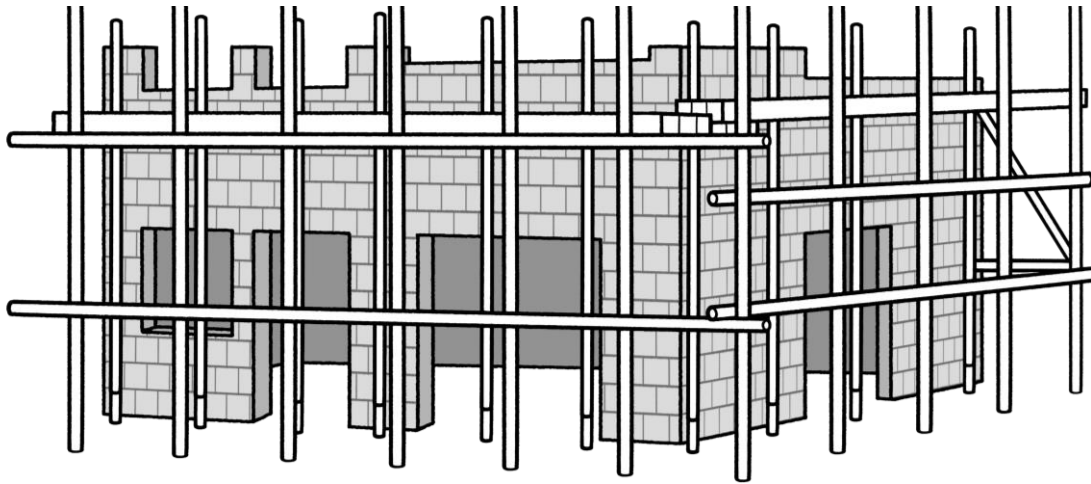
Figure 13: Scaffolding a building

Activity 7.7: Scaffolding (45 minutes)

Materials
♦ Picture of the scaffolding on a building

Start the session by standing in a circle. Explain that participants are going to clap a beat and you are going to say a word that describes an important part of the play-based approach "teach". On every fourth beat participants will take turns to say a word that describes teaching. Give a few examples:

♦ teach – concepts
♦ teach – demonstrate
♦ teach – listen

Get a regular clapping beat going and say the word "teach" on the fourth beat. The first person says their word on the next fourth beat, and everyone chants "teach" on the following fourth beat. The game continues until everyone has had a turn.

After the activity ask participants to recall their words and write them on flipchart paper. Do not discuss what participants have written at this stage, but highlight the importance of the teacher / caregiver's role in supporting children's learning. Explain that this session will be exploring some of these teaching strategies.

Show participants a picture of the scaffolding on a building. Ask participants

♦   What is the purpose of the scaffolding?
♦   When is it removed?

Explain that in the same way, teachers provide support to children, slowly taking away the support until the child is able to work on their own.

Scaffolding children's learning during play
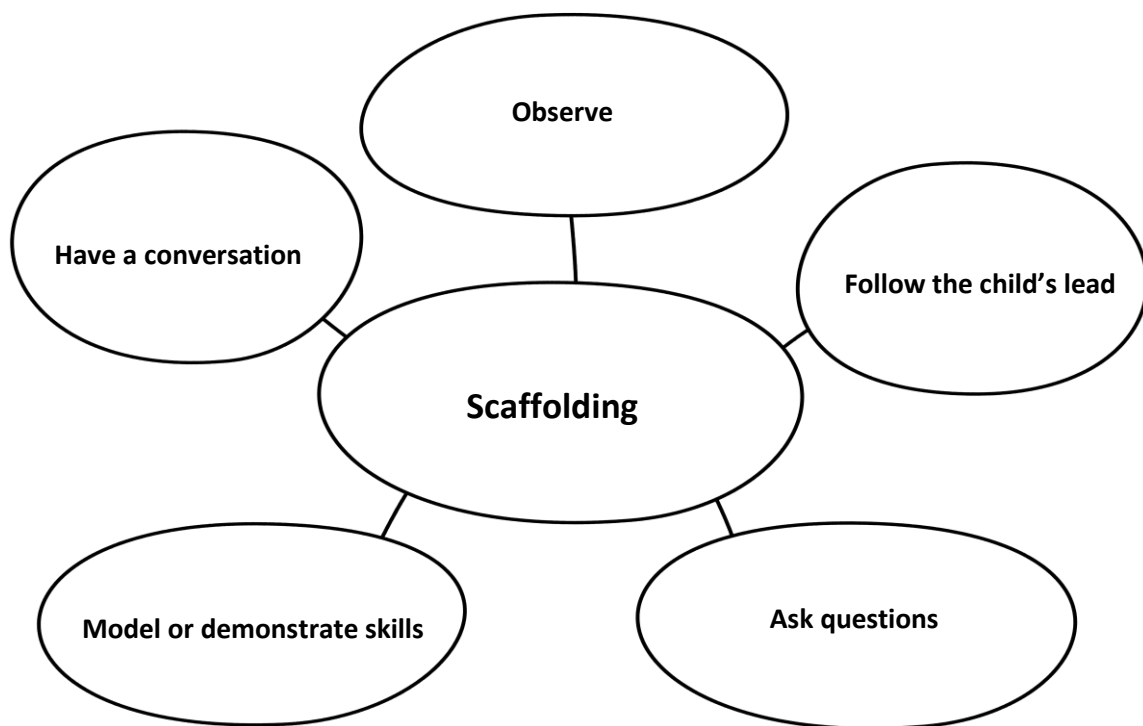
Figure 14: Scaffolding children's learning

Some of the ways that teachers can scaffold children's learning during play are:

Observe

It is important to take some time to first observe children as they play – to learn what they are interested in, how they are using the play materials and what they might be learning. This will help you to decide how best you can support their learning. For example, you can provide additional materials or by joining in the children's play to help them problem-solve, introduce new vocabulary or extend their learning about a concept.

Follow the child's lead

During child-initiated and child-directed activities teachers do not take the lead in the play activity. When joining in the play the teacher:

♦ builds on what children are already saying and doing
♦ encourages children to express their ideas
♦ uses children's ideas to extend their thinking and learning
♦ offers suggestions that support the child's ideas

Follow the CAR is a teaching strategy that is promoted by Head Start and the National Head Start Family Literacy Center.

The acronym CAR is an easy way to remember how to interact with the child:

Follow the child's lead by making sure that you have the child's attention and then:

C   Comment and wait OR
A   Ask a question and wait OR
R   Respond by adding a little more and wait.

It is important to give the child a chance to think about what you have said or the question you have asked.

Activity 7.8: Follow child's lead (60 minutes)

Materials
♦ blocks or other construction materials
♦ toy vehicles and other objects that roll

Begin by pointing out that the play-based approach gives teachers and caregivers the opportunity to follow the child's lead. Ask participants:

♦ Why do you think this is important?

Ask participants to think about how much time they spend instructing children rather than following their interests. Talk about the importance of building on children's ideas.

Outline the Follow the CAR strategy:

Get the child's attention:

C   Comment and wait OR

A   Ask a question and wait OR

R   Respond by adding a little more and wait.

Emphasise the importance of waiting (5 – 10 seconds) for the child to think. Ask participants to find a partner to practise using the Follow the Car technique.

Read out the following scenario:

The teacher is observing four-year-old Ashley playing with blocks. He has made a ramp by placing two blocks under one long block. He is now rolling different objects down his ramp.

Have pairs decide who will be teacher and who will be the child. Pairs practise the technique and then swap roles.

After the activity discuss what happened:

♦   How did you get the child's attention?
♦   What comments did you make? What did you say or do?
♦   How did the child respond?
♦   What questions did you ask?
♦   How did the child respond?
♦   What information did you add?
♦   How did the child respond?
♦   What do you think the child learned?
What part was the most difficult to do?

My turn, your turn
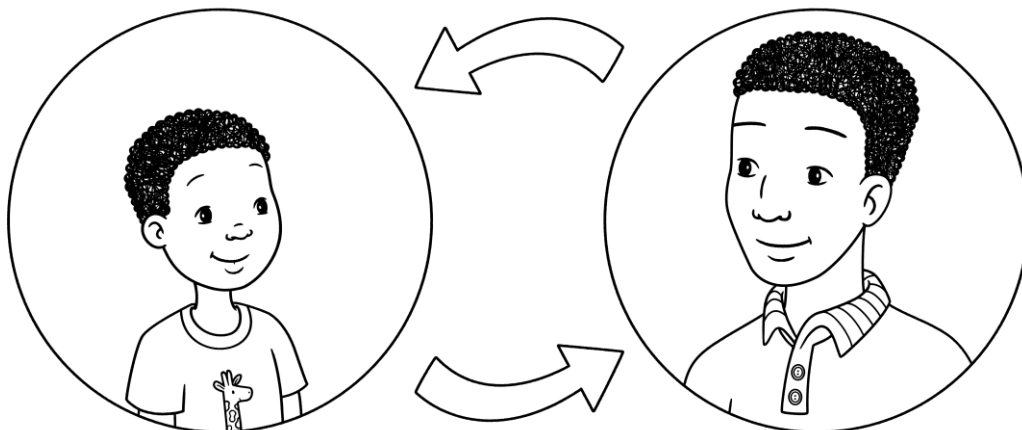
Figure 15: Taking turns

An important way to follow the child's lead is back-and-forth interactions typical of a conversation. This is sometimes called serve and return as in a tennis match. In the same way the baby or child initiates an interaction by reaching out, and the adult responds in a meaningful way by copying the child's sounds and gestures. For example, a baby makes eye contact with the caregiver, babbles and smiles. The adult responds by making eye contact and communicating in the same way with gestures, words and smiles – and then waits to see how the baby responds.

Activity 7.9: My turn your turn / Serve and return (10 minutes)

Ask participants to find a partner and to stand facing one another. Explain that one person in the pair will take the lead and use their bodies and facial expressions to move in any way they want. Their partner will "mirror" the movements exactly. After a few minutes, have everyone switch roles.

Reflect on the activity and introduce "serve and return" as a way to play and communicate with babies. Explain that an important way that caregivers follow the lead with babies in their care is called "serve and return" because the back-and-forth interactions are like a game of tennis.

Have a conversation

Having a conversation involves a two-way process of listening and speaking.

A good way to start a conversation is to describe what you see the child doing, or ask the child to describe what they are doing. Wait for the child to respond and give them an opportunity to share their ideas and explain their thinking.

Build on what they say by asking a question that relates to what they are doing, or providing language or information that will help to extend their learning.

Ask questions

Asking good questions is an important part of play-based teaching. There are different kinds of questions.

♦ Closed questions ask for information and can usually be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no', or one or two words. You can use closed questions to find out whether the child knows something or has learned something. For example
   ♦ What colour are your shoes?
   ♦ Which is the biggest block?
   ♦ How many cars do you see?
♦ Open-ended questions do not have one correct answer and encourage children to think of the many possible answers. As children explain their reasons, they extend their thinking and learn to solve problems.
   For example:
   ♦ What do you think will happen?
   ♦ How do you know…?
   ♦ How can you find out?
   ♦ Why do you need…?
   ♦ Can you think of a way to…?
   ♦ What would happen if….?
Make sure that when you ask questions you give children time to think about their answers.

Activity 7.11: Open-ended questions (60 minutes)

Materials:

♦ water play basin with water
♦ measuring containers e.g. cups jugs, bottles, tins, scoops, funnels
♦ sponges
♦ dishwashing liquid

Play the 'questions only 'game. Invite two volunteers to come to the front of the class and to have a conversation using only questions. Participants take turns to ask questions to each other. The first person to say something that is not a question is out, and another participant takes their place.

For example:

P1: Do you think it will rain tomorrow?

P2: Why do you think it will rain?

P1: Isn't rain forecast?

P2: How can we find out?

P2: Let's try our phones… (that person is out).

You can also play this game with all the participants standing in a circle and taking turns to ask questions.

After the game brainstorm the kinds of questions that were asked. As they are called out, list them in columns according to whether they are open-ended or closed questions, e.g.

Open-ended	Closed
Why do you think it will rain?	Do you think it will rain tomorrow?
How can we find out?	Isn't rain forecast?

Review the different kinds of questions, open and closed:

♦ Closed questions ask for information and have a limited or 'yes' 'no' response.
♦ Open-ended questions do not have a right answer that the teacher knows- there is more than one possible answer

Explain that questioning is an important scaffolding technique and that asking open-ended questions provides opportunities for children to engage in higher order thinking skills.

Write a few closed questions on flipchart paper or the board and have participants change them to open-ended questions. Here are a few examples:

♦ Are you wearing a dress today?
♦ Did you paint a picture of a house?
♦ Is that a leaf floating on the water?

111

- Have you see a ball like this before?
- What shape did you make?
- Did you enjoy that?
- Does a cat have four legs and one tail?

Point out that for toddlers the easiest questions to answer are "what" "who" and "where" questions.

Divide participants into small groups. Read through the instructions below and give participants time to discuss and make a list of questions and to prepare their role play.

Set out the water play materials.

Groups take turns to share their lists and then to present their plays using the materials provided. Reflect on what happened after each presentation. Discuss the kinds of questions that stimulated learning, invited problem-solving or extended a conversation.

Instructions

In your group, discuss and write down the kinds of open-ended questions you could ask children to extend their learning as they play with water.

Prepare a role play to demonstrate how you would use open-ended questions to extend children's learning during this activity. Tip: Remember to Follow the CAR!

Choose someone to play the role of the teacher and the rest of the group will play the roles of the children.

Model or demonstrate skills

There will be times when a concept or skill needs to be demonstrated by the teacher. What is most important to remember is that babies, toddlers and young children are active learners who learn by doing and that the activities should be playful.

Activity 7.11: Playful modelling (60 minutes)

Materials

♦ A variety of play materials

Explain that there will be times when the teacher will need to demonstrate a concept or a skill.

Show participants the video clip in which a teacher first models counting objects by touching and moving spoons as they are counted. She then uses a variety of methods to actively involve the children in practicing counting.

https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/kindergarten/professional-topics/intentional-teaching/communicating/numeracy-learning-in-kindergarten-counting

Then discuss:

♦ How did the teacher model counting skills?
♦ How did the teacher actively involve the children?
♦ Do you think this activity was playful? Why or why not?

Divide participants into small groups and ask them to plan a small or large group activity for an age group of their choice, in which the teacher demonstrates a concept or skill and involves children in a playful way. Point out that younger children have short attention spans so the activities need to be kept short, e.g. 5 – 10 minutes.

Invite groups to use the play materials provided.

Groups take turns to present their roleplays using the materials provided. Reflect on what happened after each roleplay, and draw attention to the need for hands-on active participation in all activities.

Assessing in a play-based approach
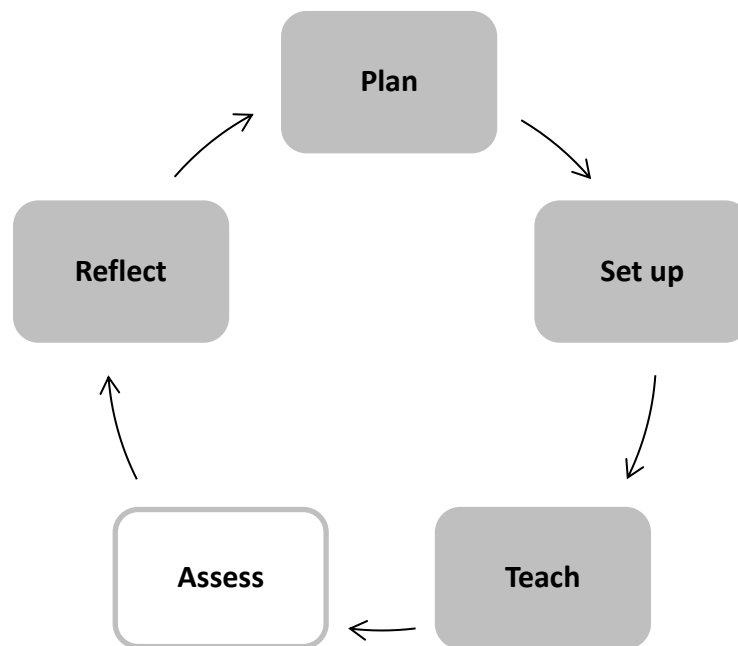
Figure 16: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Assess

Purpose

This session aims to introduce participants to play-based assessment. The session will cover the importance of play-based assessment and look at how teachers plan and prepare for play-based assessment in their everyday activities.

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

- ◆ Reflect on their own knowledge and experiences of assessing children's learning and development
- ◆ Understand and explain why play-based assessment is important
- ◆ Participate in play-based assessment activities.
- ◆ Describe how to plan and prepare for play-based assessment

What is play-based assessment?

Figure 17: Assessing through observing play

Play-based assessment involves observing and assessing babies, toddlers and children during everyday activities as they play alone and with others.

During play-based assessment

♦   Children are relaxed and not under pressure to perform and it is more likely that they will be able to demonstrate their learning.
♦   Teachers can learn more about what children know and can do than they would in formal testing procedures.
♦   All developmental areas can be assessed (physical, social, emotional and cognitive) as children are observed playing and interacting with other children.

Play-based assessment might involve:

♦   Playing games with babies to find out how they move and what they do with toys.
♦   Planning play activities for children to demonstrate specific skills, e.g. an obstacle course to observe children demonstrate physical skills.
♦   Interacting with children using play materials to find out more about their level of learning or understanding of a concept.

Set up the environment for play-based assessment

An environment where children play, explore and discover things for themselves is ideal for assessment. Make sure the play space is safe and that babies, toddlers and young children can explore freely with play things that

♦ are right for their stages of development
♦ support holistic development
♦ present challenges to children
♦ can be used by all children, including children with disabilities and other special learning needs
♦ reflect children's family backgrounds and culture.

Plan for play-based assessment

Your planned programme needs to provide play activities that cover the goals and indicators set out in the assessment tool.

1. Identify the indicator(s) in the assessment tool that you will be assessing.
2. Think about what skills or behaviours the indicator is asking you to look for and in what play activity children might demonstrate these skills and behaviours.
3. Consider any changes to the play environment and activities that might help the observation and assessment process.

UNICEF and the DBE have developed an assessment tool and guidance on play-based assessment for the South African National Curriculum Framework for Children Birth to Four Years.

Activity 7.12: Understanding play-based assessment (60 minutes)

Preparation:
♦ Identify two participants to play the role of teachers. Give the following scenarios to them beforehand so that they are familiar with them.
♦ Set up a balancing beam and provide a ball.

> **Scenario 1: Completing a checklist**
> The teacher chooses five children from her list to sit in front of her in a row. She calls up one child at a time and, reading from a checklist, asks them to do the actions.
>
> ♦ Jump forward with two feet
> ♦ Walk on tiptoe
> ♦ Stand on one foot
> ♦ Throw a ball (to the teacher)
> ♦ Balances walking across a plank
>
> She ticks off each skill on her checklist as the children do the actions.

> **Scenario 2: Play-based assessment**
>
> The teacher chooses five children and stands with them in a circle. They chant this rhyme:
>
> Everybody do it, do, it, do it
>
> Everybody do it, do, it, do it
>
> Just like me
>
> The teacher
>
> ♦ Jumps forward with two feet
> The children copy her.
>
> They continue chanting the verse with the children copying the following actions at the end of each verse:
>
> ♦ Walks on tiptoe
> ♦ Stands on one foot
> ♦ Throws a ball
> ♦ Walks across a plank.
> Then they chant while each child takes a turn
>
> _____(Child's Name) do it._____ (Child's Name) do it
>
> _____(Child's Name) do it._____ (Child's Name) do it
>
> Walk on tiptoe
> Stand on one foot
> Throw a ball
> Walk across the plank

♦ Start the session by having participants meet with a partner. Explain that you will ask a question and each will have thirty seconds to answer the question to their partner. When the time is up their partner continues to answer the same question for another thirty seconds.
♦ Ask the following questions:
   ♦ What is assessment?
   ♦ What do we need to assess?
   ♦ When do we need to assess?
   ♦ What is the best way to assess children's progress?
   ♦ What do you think play-based assessment is?
♦ After the activity invite participants to share what they have discussed and write key points on flipchart paper.
♦ Explain that participants are going to observe two different ways to assess children's learning. These children are between three and four years of age.
♦ Ask the two participants to play out their scenarios, choosing other participants to play the role of the children.
♦ Have a discussion after each play about what was observed.
   ♦ What did the teacher do and say?
   ♦ What did the children do and say?

- After the two plays facilitate a discussion around what was different about the two assessments. Discuss how children might feel if they are put in a testing situation and asked to do a number of actions and have these results ticked off on a sheet of paper. Point out that during the play-based assessment children were having fun and relaxed and not under pressure to perform. Explain that the best way to assess children is to observe them during the day during play activities.
- Ask participants what kinds of play activities could be observed to assess
  - Babies
  - Toddlers
  - 3 – 5-year-old children.
- Briefly outline the steps in planning for play-based assessment and explain that UNICEF and the DBE have developed and assessment tool and training package about play-based assessment.

Reflection as part of the play-based approach
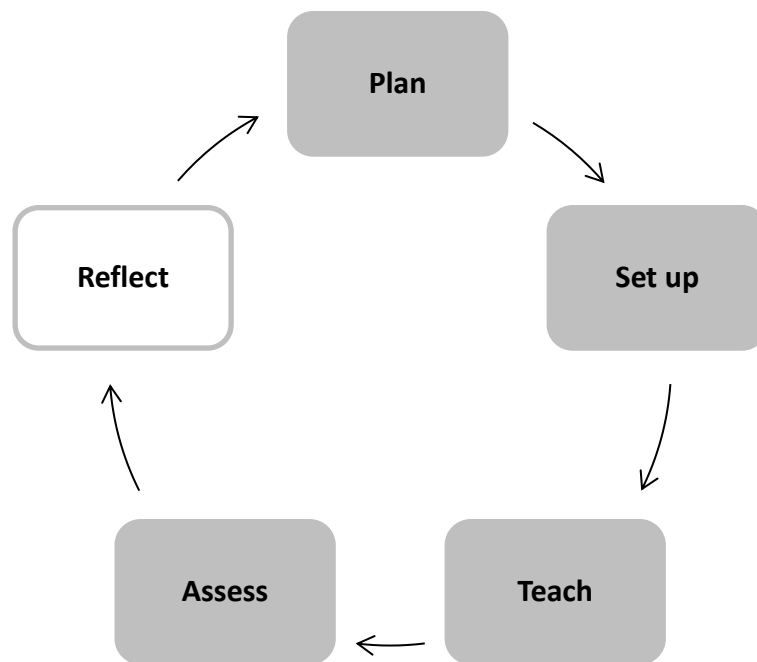
Figure 18: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Reflect

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to explain to participants what reflective teaching practice is and describe its importance in improving play-based teaching and learning. The session introduces the experiential learning cycle as a tool for reflective practice.

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

♦ Describe reflective teaching and its importance for play-based teaching.
♦ Explain how to use the experiential learning cycle as a way of reflecting on play-based teaching and assessment.

What is a reflective teacher?

We learn when we take the time to reflect or critically think about our teaching practice and use this information to make changes and improvements.

♦ Reflective teaching helps you to learn more about the children in your group and their developmental needs so that you can plan play experiences and interactions that best support their development.
♦ Reflective learning helps you to look at how you have been teaching – what worked well and what did not work so well. You use what you have learned to think of ways to do things differently and better, and then try these out to see if they work.

The experiential learning cycle

The experiential learning cycle is a tool that we can use to reflect on teaching and learning.
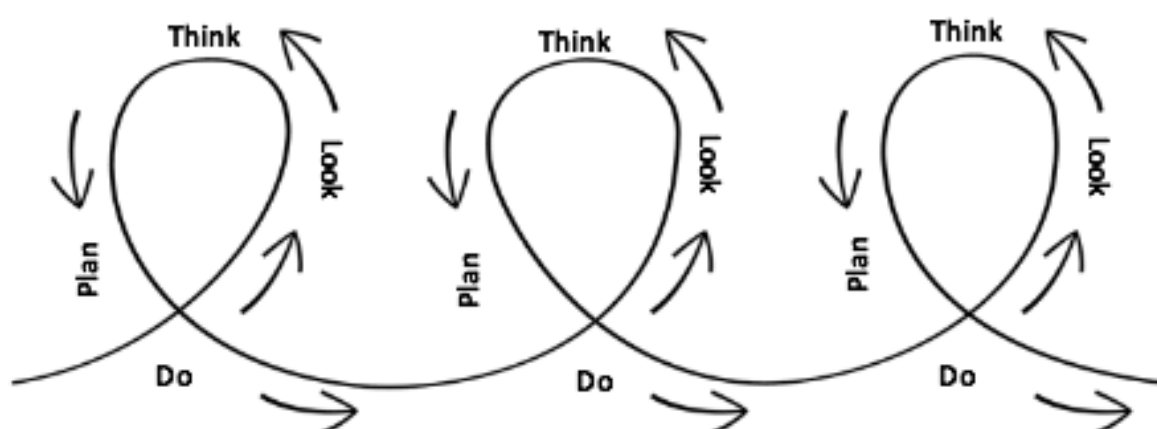
Figure 19: Experiential learning cycle

Table 9: Steps of the experiential learning cycle

We **plan** play-based activities to meet curriculum goals.	♦ The teacher plans a creative art activity for the toddlers in her group.
We **do** or **carry out** the planned activities.	♦ The teacher sets out art materials and a few children come to the table. She tells them that she will hand out the crayons and that they are to draw a dog. She gives every child a crayon. Joan does not want a blue crayon, puts it down and walks off. A few children start to make marks and draw lines on their pages with the crayons. The teacher joins Welekazi and draws four legs on her page. Welekazi tears the page and starts to cry.
We **look** at what happened.	♦ The teacher makes the following observations: ♦ The children at the drawing table were each given a crayon and I told them to draw a dog. ♦ A few of the children made marks on their pages for a short time and then started to grab crayons from each other. ♦ One child did not like the colour of her crayon and walked off. ♦ Welekazi did not like the shared activity of drawing the dog with me."

We **think** about why things happened the way they did.	♦ The teacher thinks that the activity was not a success:
	♦ Some of the children misbehaved and on the whole the children were not very interested in drawing a dog.
	♦ Most children did not stay long at the drawing table.
	♦ This activity was not appropriate for the children's ages. They did not have a choice of crayons and were not free to explore the materials in their own way. Welekazi was proud of what she had drawn, and I think this is why she got upset when I drew on her page.

Activity 7.15: Experiential learning cycle (60 minutes)

♦ Divide participants into small groups and refer them to their student guides.

♦ Read through the scenario and instructions together and give participants time to complete the task. One person from each group reports back on their discussion.

♦ Explain what reflective teaching is, using the information in the above note.

♦ Introduce the experiential learning cycle by drawing it on flipchart paper. Use the example from the table above to illustrate each step in the loop.

♦ Discuss what would happen if the teacher did not reflect on this activity.

♦ Encourage participants to use the experiential learning cycle on an ongoing basis to look at their teaching practice.

Small group task

Read the scenario and then discuss the questions that follow:

The teacher plans a creative art activity for the toddlers in her group. She sets out art materials and a few children come to the table. She tells them that she will hand out the crayons and that they are to draw a dog. She gives every child a crayon. Joan does not want a blue crayon, puts it down and walks off. A few children start to make marks and draw lines on their pages with the crayons. The teacher joins Welekazi and draws four legs on her page. Welekazi tears the page and starts to cry.

In your group, discuss:

♦ What happened?

♦ Why do you think this happened?

♦ What could the teacher do differently next time?

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Literature review

Play and Pedagogy: a brief review of the literature

Play in early childhood learning: historical and theoretical roots

Playful behaviours are typical of young animals as well as across a wide variety of human societies. Play is generally categorised into physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, pretend play and games with rules. How much the different types of play are emphasised and supported varies between cultures reflecting different values and beliefs regarding childhood and play, which relate to different social and economic contexts (Whitebread, 2012). [1]

Recognition of the importance of play in early childhood development is not new. Play was promoted by the forerunners of the preschools of today. Froebel's kindergarten in Germany was the starting point, followed by Elizabeth Peabody in the United States of America, Maria Montessori in Italy, Margaret McMillan and Susan Isaacs in England among others. These early education pioneers promoted hands-on, enjoyable, self-directed learning for young children, and saw the teacher's role as creating an environment in which this could take place.

Western theories of development have also promoted play. Jean Piaget's (1951)[2] constructivist orientation profoundly influenced nursery education for much of the last century. His view was that children actively construct knowledge by interacting with the environment, peers and resources. This approach emphasises the role of the child in initiating experiences and practising new skills. Psychodynamic theorists such as Freud, Erikson and Bowlby also saw play as important for young children but for them it was about providing avenues for the safe release of negative emotions and stresses – especially in the home corner. Their focus too was on free play.

More recently, the rise of socio-cultural developmental theorists, of whom Lev Vygotsky (1978)[3] is most prominent, has changed our understanding of play to emphasise the social and cultural context in which it occurs. While play and in particular the role of imagination is critical for developing self-regulation and language and other forms of symbolic representation, the socio-cultural theorists hold that children develop thinking by

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[1] Whitebread, D. (2012). The importance of play. A report on the value of children's play with a series of policy recommendations. Written for Toy Industries of Europe (TIE). Belgium.
[2] Piaget, J. (1951) Play, dreams and imagination in childhood. London: Routledge
[3] Vygotsky LS (1978) Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes. Cambridge,MA: Harvard University Press

interacting with more experienced others - older children, peers and adults who scaffold their learning and so help them learn about the world. This requires a more pro-active role for teachers and socio-cultural theorists attach greater significance to teacher-directed interactions than constructivists.

Some challenges for previously held understandings of play and pedagogy in the early years identified by Dockett (2011)[4] include

♦ changing understandings of play which emphasise the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs

♦ recognising that children learn in diverse ways and that play may not be the preferred strategy of all children

♦ demands for an earlier start to academic education especially for children who may be marginalised, not succeeding in school

♦ the role of individual teachers, beliefs and practices and how these impact on play in ECE

♦ the changing nature and experiences of play as children engage with popular cultures and a range of technologies (pp 34 – 35)

Efficacy evidence

The traditional preschool focus on free play has increasingly given way to a focus on the role of play as a vehicle for teaching, as well as learning. There is broad agreement that educationally effective programmes require a holistic curriculum, active child play with concrete materials, sensitive, mediated caregiver/child interaction and engagement with peers including adult led group activities as well as child-initiated activities (Montie, Xiang & Schweinhart, 2006; Sylva et al, 2007).[5]

Evidence from studies of the outcomes of Pre-K programmes in the United States suggests that when promoting school readiness, curricula focused on specific school readiness skills are more successful than a more general whole child curriculum which includes, but does not target early maths and literacy skills.[6] A balanced approach including whole and small

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[4] Dockett, S (2011). The challenge of play for early childhood educators. In Sue Rogers (ed) Rethinking play and pedagogy in early childhood education. Concepts, contexts and cultures. Pages 32 – 47. Oxford and New York: Routledge.

[5] Montie, J. E., Xiang, Z., & Schweinhart, L. J. (2006). Preschool experience in 10 countries: Cognitive and language performance at age 7. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 21*,313–331.
Sylva, K., Taggart, B., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Totsika, V., Ereky-Steven, K., Gilden, R., et al. (2007). Curricular quality and day-to-day learning activities in pre-school. International Journal of Early Years Education, 15(1), 49–65. http://dx.doi.org/10. 1080/09669760601106968

[6] Phillips, D, Lipsey, M, Dodge, K, Haskings R, Bassok, D et al (2017) Puzzling It Out: The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre-Kindergarten Effects A Consensus Statement. Washington DC: Brookings Institute.

group instruction as well as free choice time was found to be most effective (Jenkins & Duncan ,2017)[7]. Jenkins and Duncan warn that a focus on specific skill domains should not be conflated with highly teacher-controlled, direct instruction methods, such as large group worksheet-based academic activities, that have been linked with stress and reduced motivation in preschool children (Elkind, 1986; Stipek et al, 1995).[8]

Jenkins and Duncan conclude that

> *Far from the "drill and kill" methods justifiably admonished by child development experts, successful evidence-based, skill-focused curricula embed learning in playful preschool activities, including story-book reading, games, art, and discovery activities that are conducted in both small and large group contexts and grounded in a sound developmental framework. (p 39)*

The Center on the Developing Child (2016)[9] also recently reviewed evidence of what works to promote early childhood development. In relation to learning they conclude similarly that

> *The most successful (programmes) are guided by curricula that provide age appropriate, engaging activities focused explicitly on identified outcomes. Curricula that do not target specific outcomes are less likely to have significant impact on anything than those that are designed and implemented with clearly articulated goals in mind. Different capabilities (e.g. cognitive and social skills) and areas of achievement (e.g. reading and math) require different kinds of scaffolding at different ages, so effective learning activities are cumulative and sequenced to align with children's developmental stages (Center of the Developing Child; 2016, p 29).*

The implications of the evidence for the role of the teacher in delivering a play-based pedagogy are for careful planning targeted to individual children's developmental stages and provision of a range of different fun and meaningful opportunities to support learning.

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[7] Jenkins, J M & Duncan G.R (2017) Do Pre-Kindergarten Curricula Matter? The Current State of Scientific Knowledge on Pre-Kindergarten Effects: Washington DC: Brookings Institute p 37 - 44

[8] Stipek D., Feiler, R. Daniels, D. & Milburn S. (1995), "Effects of Different Instructional Approaches on Young Childrens Achievement and Motivation," *Child Development* 66, 1, 209-223.
Elkind, D (1986) "Formal Education and Early Childhood Education: An Essential Difference," *The Phi Delta Kappan* 67, no. 9 (1986):631-636. Cited in Jenkins & Duncan ibid

[9] Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016). *From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families.* Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

How policy has responded to child development perspectives on play

International commitments regarding play[10]

The Convention on the Rights of the Child which underpins South African Government policies for children provides that

> *State Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. (United Nations, 1989, Article 31).*

Play is defined in General Comment No 17 (United Nations, 2013, Paragraph 14c) as "any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Caregivers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake rather than as a means to an end". The United Nations recognises play as a fundamental and vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood, as well as an essential component of physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development.

Consistent with this definition and emphasis on a developmental perspective on free play and peer culture the general comment notes that usually where investment is made in play, it relates to structured and organized activities, but that the need to create time and space for children to engage in spontaneous play, recreation and creativity, and to promote societal attitudes that support and encourage such activity is equally important (Kjørholt, 2019).

South African policy relating to play

The National Integrated ECD Policy (Republic of South Africa, 2015) which outlines government's commitments to early childhood development states that the provision of early learning and stimulation requires "Providing *community and centre-based organised play-based early learning that complements the parent's role… (p 27)*". In respect of play the policy indicates that while play is a right in and of itself, play is important in promoting children's early learning and skills development and identifies some of the challenges to promoting play as being the

♦ lack of knowledge of the importance of play in early childhood,
♦ lack of implementation of play-based learning in early learning and development programmes, and
♦ a lack of opportunities to play and interact in a child-centred, secure, supportive and stress-free environment.

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[10] Kjørholt, Anne-Trine (2019) Early childhood and children's rights: A critical perspective. In A.-T. Kjørholt, H. Penn (eds.), *Early Childhood and Development Work*, Palgrave Studies on Children and Development, Palgrave. pp 17 – 38

The Department of Basic Education has recognised the importance of a play-based pedagogy for early childhood care and education and put in place initiatives such as Play-SA to support it. Education Minister Mtoshekga explained that *"the foundations that we lay in early learning and the foundation phase through play, will have an impact on the schooling careers of children up to matric and beyond. Play is learning in the early years…"* (Newsroom/Media Releases: Learning through playing: launch of online training for Early Childhood Development and the Foundation Phase, 09 March 2017). This was reiterated in the Minister's keynote address delivered at the release of 2018 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results, held at Vodacom Dome, Noordwyk, Midrand on 03 January 2019.

However, in curriculum and teacher training policy and guidelines play is largely associated with younger children. It is strongly promoted in the National Curriculum Framework for children from Birth to Four (Department of Basic Education, 2015). The Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development Educators (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2017), [11] which puts in place a set of guidelines for programmes leading to qualifications for ECD educators who are delivering or assisting in delivering ECD programmes, includes specific reference to play and notes *"The use of play as pedagogical mechanism to stimulate early learning and development is particularly important in ECD contexts and the National Curriculum Framework is rooted in play-based learning for ECD"*(footnote 2, p 18).

The Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015)[12] explains that *"Grade R prepares young children for formal learning.**The focus of this grade is on learning through play**, developing physical coordination as well as developing spoken language competence and fundamental ideas that will form a basis for the future development of number sense and literacy" (pp 25 – 26).* No reference is made to play-based pedagogy for Grades 1 to 3. Nor do the Curriculum Assessment Policy Standards (CAPS) refer explicitly to play except in relation to Grade R mathematics.

Further, even for younger children the play-focus in ECD related qualifications is seldom explicit leaving trainers and lecturers to interpret play as they see fit.

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[11] Department of Higher Education and Training (2017) The *Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development Educators.* Pretoria.

[12] Department of Higher Education and Training (2015) *Revised Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications.* Pretoria

The Programme for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education (PIECCE)[13] , which is developing a standardised programme framework and set of support materials for ECCE qualifications in the Higher Education Sector, has provided a Play Framework to guide development of support materials for qualifications for early childhood education[14] and so address this gap. PIECCE focuses on qualifications for those working with children 0 – 4 years.

What is play?

Whale play is universally recognised as a feature of young children's lives, it has not been easy to define and is usually referred to in terms of generally agreed characteristics. These include that is it enjoyable, intrinsically motivated, actively engaging and valued as a process rather than an outcome (Brooker & Woodhead, 2013)[15]. Learning through play experiences are said to be characteristically joyful, meaningful, actively engaging, iterative and socially interactive (Zosh, Hopkins, Jensen et al.,2017)[16].

Neuroscience helps us understand how playful experiences enhance learning. Lui and colleagues (2017) [17] examined the relation between these key characteristics of playful learning experiences and the interconnected brain processes that support children's capacity to learn. They summarise studies and find that a positive emotional state (joy) enables many higher cognitive functions such as enhanced attention, working memory, mental shifting and improved stress regulation that are useful for learning. Active engagement is related to executive functioning skills such as inhibitory control. Sustained engagement in an activity requires staying selectively focused on the situation. Repetition requires perseverance and some research suggests that this is correlated with improvements in working memory. The role of social interaction in learning is well established either through positive caregiver interactions from early infancy, or through peers in later childhood, which help children develop language, cooperation and social learning, and practise self- regulation.

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[13] The PIECCE collaboration includes UNISA, SAIDE, the Centre for Social Development at Rhodes University, BRIDGE and HEIs, NGOs and TVET Colleges involved in ECCE training for Birth to Four.

[14] Ebrahim, H., Excell, L., Martin, C., Shaik, N, Sotuku, N, Hannaway, D, Taylor, B & Bipath, K (2017) Play framework for the development of support materials for qualifications for early childhood education. Pretoria: PIECCE Project. (Version 1)

[15] Brooker, L. & Woodhead, M. (2009). The right to play. Early Childhood in Focus 9. Milton Keynes: The Open University.

[16] Zosh, J. M., Hopkins, E. J., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Neale, D.,Hirsh-Pasek, K., Solis, S. L., & Whitebread, D. (2017). Learning through play: a review of the evidence (white paper). The LEGO Foundation, DK.

[17] Liu, C, Solis, S.L., Jensen, H, Hopkins, E, Neal, D, Zosh, J, Hirsh-Pasek K and Whitebread, D. (2017) Neuroscience and learning through play: a review of the evidence (research summary). The Lego Foundation, DK.

Types of play

Developmental psychologists commonly distinguish five types of play

♦ physical play
♦ play with objects
♦ symbolic play
♦ pretend play and
♦ games with rules

Each of these takes different forms at the different stages of development and is a vehicle for learning. <u>Physical play</u> starts early and from the second year of life children are engaged in exercise play and rough and tumble. <u>Play with objects</u> begins when infants can grasp objects and investigate them by mouthing, dropping, batting, shaking. As they mature this evolves into constructing and making things. <u>Symbolic play</u> starts when the infant can make sounds and evolves into different uses of language including enjoyment of rhyming, joking. Drawing and music are also forms of symbolic play. Children engage in <u>pretend play</u> from about a year and this evolves into elaborate games involving others as they get older. <u>Games with rules</u> involve physical games but also number and language games. While the categorisation is useful, more than one form of play is often present in any particular activity.

Whitebread and colleagues (2017)[18] recently reviewed the evidence for the role of play in children's development, noting that several studies showed that children perform at significantly higher levels in playful rather than non-playful contexts. Their review found evidence of health and exercise benefits of physical play and some evidence for the association of physical play with academic progress, cognitive self- regulation and social competence. Object play links to gains in language, maths and spatial skills. There is good evidence that language play enhances development of language in many ways and that this links to other skills such as social skills, self- regulation and academic achievement. While there are limited study findings on pretend play, despite its prominence in socio-cultural theories of the significance of play, there is evidence that it may impact on social development,[19] is one way of developing reasoning skills and links to executive functioning and self- regulation.[20] Games with rules, especially number and linear number sequence, lead to improvements in mathematics and numeracy ability. Physical games with rules have been shown to help children adapt to formal schooling.

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[18] Whitebread, D.; Neale, D., Jensen, H.; Liu, C. Solis, S.L.; Hopkins, E., Hirsh-Pasek, K, & Zosh, J. M. (2017). The role of play in children's development: a review of the evidence(research summary). Denmark: the Lego Foundation.

[19] E.g Fung. W.K. & Cheng, R.W. Y. (2017). Effect of school pretend play on pre-schoolers' social competence in peer interactions: Gender as a mediator. Early Childhood Education Journal, 45 (1) 35 – 42.

[20] E.g. White,R.E. & Carlson, D. M. (2016). What would Batman do? Self-distancing improves executive function in young children. Developmental Science, 19 (3) 419-426. Cited in Zosh et al. 2017 ibid

Play in different cultural settings

As Dockett (2011) reminds us it cannot be assumed that all children engage with play in similar ways and the social and cultural relevance of play needs to be acknowledged. Most play studies and in particular the prevailing play and pedagogy discourse is Western and the discourse of Western early childhood *"may mask the fact that the close association between play and pedagogy taken for granted in English speaking and European heritage society is an alien idea for many other societies."* (In particular the)… *notion that freely chosen play will promote academic achievement can seem nonsensical"* (Marfo & Biersteker, 2011). [21]

While play is often referred to as children's work in English speaking and European heritage cultures, in cultures where helping with family work has greater significance play takes a different forms. Play tends to take place either in imitation of work, Lancy (2012)[22] refers to this as the play stage of the chore curriculum, or children bring a playful element to their chores. Who children play with is also culturally determined. In traditional societies in Africa for example, children are expected to play with other children and to receive any guidance they need from older and/or more expert playmates(Lancy, 2007; Ngaisake & Swadener, 2019; Dawes & Biersteker, 2011; Swart et al, 1996).[23]

How play is viewed in particular cultures affects the implementation of a play- based pedagogy. For example, in traditional African society the notion of an adult playing face to face with a young child is often seen as incongruous (Marfo & Biersteker, 2011). Cheng (2011)[24] points out that in Chinese culture teachers are expected to be stern and strict and allowing play and teachers to take a non-directive role would be regarded as a form of negligence by much of the community including teachers themselves. There have been questions about the utility of privileging play- based over other approaches to education for developing societies. Parental beliefs about experiential learning through play, and traditional theories (e.g. Vygotsky and Piaget's socio cultural and constructivist principles which talk to learning through play) are at odds with more academic curricula often found in

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[21] Marfo, K. & Biersteker, L. (2011) Exploring culture, play and early childhood education in African contexts. In S. Rogers (ed) Exploring play and pedagogy. Concepts, contexts and cultures p 73 – 85. Oxford and New York: Routledge.

[22] Lancy, David F. (2012). The chore curriculum. Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology Faculty Publications. Paper 574. https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/sswa_facpubs/574

[23] Lancy, David F. (2007) Accounting for variability in mother–child play. American Anthropologist, 109 (2) 273–284

Ng'asike, J. & Swadener, B. (2019) Promoting indigenous epistemologies in early childhood development policy and practice in pastoralist communities in Kenya. In In A.-T. Kjørholt, H. Penn (eds.), *Early Childhood and DevelopmentWork*, Palgrave Studies on Children and Development, pp 113 – 132 Palgrave/Macmillan.

Dawes, A & Biersteker, L (2011) Early Childhood Development. In Bame Nsamenang & Therese M.S. Tchombe (Eds.)*Africa's educational theories and practices: A generative teacher education textbook*.

Swart, T., Berman, L., Mahahlela, M., Mlonzi, L., Phakati, L. & Sixako, L. (1996). Mothers' ideas of model offspring inform training. *Recovery*, September, 22 – 26.

[24] Cheng Pui-wah, D. (2011) Learning through play in Hong Kong. Policy or practice? In S. Rogers (ed) Exploring play and pedagogy. Concepts, contexts and cultures p100 - 111. Oxford and New York: Routledge.

more developing countries (Roopnarine et al (2018); Ogunyemi & Ragpot, 2015).[25] Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009) [26] analysing play activity in early childhood education across countries note a number of different emphases for example, in Sweden and Japan free expression of feelings and thoughts and for socialisation was valued, while in China, where academic learning is highly valued, play was viewed as an instructional technique.

These prevailing values are mirrored in teacher attitudes. For example, studies of play-based pedagogy in Grade R and Foundation Phase classrooms reveal different interpretations of a play-based approach (Wits School of Education, 2009; Aronstrom & Braund, 2015)[27] and similar findings have been see in India (Gupta, 2011) , [28] Hong Kong (Cheng, 2011) and China (Wang & Lam, 2017).[29]

Play–based pedagogy: a continuum of strategies

In the light of current evidence of what is required for effective early learning, especially the importance of interactions between children and teachers to support learning, and recognition of cultural variations in play there have been attempts to understand what a play-based curriculum should entail. This has led to a shift from dichotomising free play and teacher structured play, to conceptualising play as existing on a continuum, defined by the relative activity and choice and autonomy of children and teachers.

Seeing play pedagogy as a continuum recognises that even when play is free, with children taking the initiative as to what and how to play, the environment set up, materials and people to play with provide a certain structure. At the other extreme is more structured or guided play in which the teacher provides more input. Zosh and colleagues (2017)[30] use the umbrella term of *playful learning* to cover free or child- led play, guided play in which adults scaffold child- led play as well as games where adults design, set rules and scaffold the play

[25] Roopnarine, J., Johnson, J, Quinn, S, Patte, M (2018) International Perspectives on ECE New York: Routledge. Ogunyemi, F.T. & Ragpot, L., 2015, 'Work and play in early childhood education: Views from Nigeria and South Africa', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 5(3), Art. #344, 7 pages. **http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v5i3.344**

[26] Pramling-Samuelsson, I. & Fleer, M. (2009) Commonalities and distinctions across countries. In I Pramling-Samuelsson and M. Fleer (Eds). Play and learning in early childhood. International Perspectives, pp 173 – 190. Springer Science & Business Media

[27] Wits School of Education (2009) Implementation of the National Curriculum Statement in the Foundation Phase. Report submitted by Wits School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand to Directorate: Curriculum Development, General Education and Training, Gauteng Department of Education. Johannesburg: Wits School of Education.
Aronstam, S. & Braund, M., 2015, 'Play in Grade R classrooms: Diverse teacher perceptions and practices', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 5(3), http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ sajce.v5i3.242

[28] Gupta, A (2011) Play and pedagogy framed within India's historical, socio-cultural, pedagogical and post colonial context. In S. Rogers (ed) Exploring play and pedagogy. Concepts, contexts and cultures pp 86 - 99.Oxford and New York: Routledge.

[29] Wang, Z & Lam, C (2017). An exploratory case study of an American-style, play-based curriculum in China. Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 31:1, 28 – 39.

[30] Zosh, J. M.; Hirsh-Pasek, J., Hopkins, E. J., Jensen, H., Liu,C., Neale, C., Solis, L. & Whitebread, D. (2018) Accessing the inaccessible: Redefining play as a spectrum. Frontiers in Psychology, 9, Article 1124.

with a particular learning objective. Edwards and Cutter- Mackenzie (2013)[31] also propose a continuum which distinguishes pedagogical play from free play or child initiated play. Pedagogical play includes open ended play in which teachers provide materials for children to explore, modelled play in which they demonstrate how to explore materials but children may choose whether or not to follow, through to purposely framed play where children must follow teacher demonstration. For Zosh and colleagues 'direct instruction', and similarly Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie's 'work' which is highly structured, is not seen as play. Pyle and Danniels (2017) also make the case for a nuanced play continuum and contrast play and play for learning.[32]

Cutter Mackenzie and Edwards' (2013)[33] work in the context of environmental education documents how rather than valuing one type of play over another, teachers in their study saw different types of play as offering a range of opportunities for supporting teaching and learning. They conclude that the combined use of the three play types (open-ended, teacher /child interaction and modelled) provide multiple opportunities for connecting content and experience. Similarly the most recent Lego Foundation white paper (Jensen, Pyle, Zosh, Ebrahim et al. 2019)[34] makes the case for a nuanced continuum of play with different types for different teaching and learning purposes.

Implementing a play-based pedagogy: pointers from research

Given the weight of evidence in support of a play-based pedagogy, we now take a closer look at what is necessary to realise this. If play is a vehicle for teaching as well as learning what are the implications for designing play environments and for providing the necessary teaching strategies and techniques? Research on play-based learning for early childhood education and most particularly in the early grades of schooling has identified a number of common pitfalls as well as guidelines for effective practice.

The Whitebread (2012)[35] study notes a range of challenges for play. Play is often ineffectively supported by inadequately trained staff; pressure to cover the prescribed curriculum limits play; and modern life provides increasingly limited opportunities for the free play and association with peers that were common to parents and grandparents. Also important to support play is the availability of materials and that are open and flexible and provide

[31] Edwards, S. & Cutter Mackenzie, A. (2013) Pedagogical play types: what do they suggest for learning about sustainability in early childhood education? International Journal of Early Childhood, 45, 327 – 346. Doi 10.1007/s13158-013-0082-5

[32] Pyle, A. & Danniels, E. (2017). A Continuum of play-based learning: The role of the teacher in play-based pedagogy and the fear of hijacking play. Early Education and Development 28, 3, 274–289. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2016.1220771

[33] Cutter Mackenzie, A. & Edwards, S. (2013) Toward a model for early childhood environmental education: Foregrounding, developing, and connecting knowledge through play-based learning. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 44:3, 195-213, DOI:10.1080/00958964.2012.751892

[34] Jensen, H., Pyle, A., Zosh, J. M., Ebrahim, H. B.,Scherman, A. Z., Reunamo, J., & Hamre, B. K. (2019). Play facilitation: the science behind the art of engaging young children (white paper). Denmark: The LEGO Foundation

[35] Whitebread, D. (2012) ibid

children with opportunities for creativity, social interactions with peers and adults and deep engagement. Milteer and Ginsburg (2012) also note challenges to out of school play from environmental and social factors such as violence, poverty, screen time and the like.[36]

Teacher understandings and preferences

A number of studies have highlighted teachers' understandings and preferences for different types of play and different roles during play (Dockett, 2011; Aronstrom & Braunde, 2015, Wits School of Education, 2009, Gupta, 2011, Wang & Lam,2017; Pramling Samuelsson & Fleer, 2011).[37] As Dockett (2011) notes the specific skill expected to be learned through play (e.g. socialisation vs literacy and numeracy) affects the approach. While this is entirely appropriate, and well-integrated into Cutter Mackenzie and Edwards' model discussed above, teachers in the early grades of schooling tend to resort to more formal academic methods. Within the British Reception classes, Dockett found free play was extremely limited. Challenges included a lack of support from school administration, curriculum and assessment expectations – a curriculum with little space to move, parental expectations, classroom management and a lack of materials, physical space or suitable routines. This was similar to findings in India (Gupta, 2011) and in South Africa (Aronstrom & Braunde, 2015, Wits School of Education, 2011). In many early childhood settings play takes place alongside other work-like activities often as an alternative or reward for work. Play is not really recognised as an instrument for learning future competencies. As Pyle, DeLuca and Danniels (2017) found in their comprehensive review of 168 studies of play-based pedagogies in kindergarten [38] despite theoretical moves towards a more integrated framing of play which sees the different forms of play as complementary to each other

> *…research focused on developmental learning has highlighted the importance of free play with a lack of teacher intervention, while research focused on academic learning has endorsed the use of teacher-directed play and mutually directed play where the teacher instead occupies an active role. (p 343)*

Assessment in play-based learning

Key to implementing effective play-based learning is understanding each child's learning needs and appropriate strategies for meeting these through assessment for learning. Here too there is a tendency for teachers to fall back on more formal methods even if they espouse play-based learning. For example, DeLuca (2018)[39] observes that though the move

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[36] Milteer, R. & Ginsburg, K. (2012) The importance of play: maintaining strong parent-child bonds. American Academy of Pediatrics 129 (1).

[37] Gupta, A (2011). Play and pedagogy framed within India's historical, socio-cultural, pedagogical and post colonial context. In S. Rogers (ed) ed) Rethinking play and pedagogy in early childhood education. Concepts, contexts and cultures. Pages 86 -99. Oxford and New York: Routledge.

[38] Pyle, A.; de Luca, C. & Danniels, E. (2017). A scoping review of research on play-based pedagogies in kindergarten education. Review of Education, 5 (3) pp. 311–351

[39] DeLuca, C. (2018) Assessment in play-based learning. In A Pyle (Ed) Play-based learning. Early Childhood Encyclopedia. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, pp 29 – 32

to play-based learning is becoming more established, integrating assessment in this context is challenging for teachers. In a study of 77 kindergarten teachers, Pyle and DeLuca[40]to examine their use of assessment during periods of play-based learning, withdrawing children from play to engage in assessment activities was most common. Digital applications and video recordings have been used but analysis and synthesis of data collected was time consuming and required specific skills and training.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in order to effectively integrate a play-based pedagogy into education for children birth to nine years, we would do well to follow Dockett (2011)

> *To be effective advocates for play early childhood educators need comprehensive and sophisticated understandings of play, grounded in research as well as practice that reflect the relevant social and cultural contexts. Educators also need to grapple with the ambiguities of play and the realisation that play is unlikely to be universally effective or desirable as a path to promotion learning in all contexts for all children. (p 44)*

Armed with an adequately nuanced understanding of play and the difference between play and a pedagogy of play, educators will be in a position to capitalise on its true potential.

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[40] Pyle A & DeLuca C. (2013) Assessment in the kindergarten classroom: An empirical study of teachers' assessment approaches. Early Childhood Education Journal 41(5):373-380. Secondary reference)

Appendix 2: Annotated Bibliographies

④**Department of Basic Education (2015). Pedagogy of play. Annex to the South African National Curriculum Framework for children from birth to four. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education. (12 pages).**

This accessibly written article provides an overview of play and pedagogy for babies, toddlers and young children. It gives a short summary of the characteristics and benefits of play, the five types of play and the development stages of play. Short descriptions are given of what children learn through different types of play activities (e.g. blocks, puzzles, make-believe, art and story). The article then explains what play pedagogy is, the need to balance child initiated and adult-directed play and the role of the practitioner in facilitating play. This is suitable for practitioners at NQF Level 4 as it is informative rather than evaluative.

④⑤**Brooker, L. & Woodhead, M. (2013). The right to play. Early Childhood in Focus 9. The Open University. (52 pages). Accessible at**
https://bernardvanleer.org/publications-reports/the-right-to-play/

This attractively illustrated booklet provides short, accessibly written summaries of theory, research and policy issues that can inform the implementation of Article 31 of the UN Convention on Children's Rights. Section 1 is about the concept of play, the ways culture defines play in children's lives, the role of play within early childhood pedagogy and children's own views on play. Section 2 looks more closely at the function of play in supporting children's development, including social, emotional and cognitive benefits. Section 3 is about the opportunities and challenges for realizing children's right to play, including the pressures of early schooling as well as child work, and the implications of commercialisation and the growing place of new technologies in young children's lives. Each section concludes with policy questions for consideration. While the main focus is on young children there is reference to early grades of schooling. This is suitable for practitioners and educators at NQF Levels 4, 5 and even as an introduction for those at Level 6 as it raises issues as well as providing information.

④⑤**Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) Learning, playing and interacting: Good practice in the early years Foundation Stage. UK Government. (61 pages). Accessible at**
https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/2412/7/85679136be4953413879dc59eab23ce0_Redacted.pdf

Based on evidence of pedagogical practices that lead to successful learning outcomes, this handbook unpacks the continuum of learning strategies from unstructured play through child initiated play supported by adults, focused playful learning activities guided by adults to highly structured activities. The guide includes illustrative case studies across different curriculum areas with reflection points and focuses on practical suggestions for each stage of the process as well as the adult's role of observing, assessing and then planning for learning. This covers responsiveness to the uniqueness of each child, the importance of positive relationships, how to create an enabling environment and how to support learning and development. Examples cover the age range from infancy to five years. There are many other references and links for further reading. While this is long, it is simply written and accessible and could be used at Level 4 as well as 5.

④⑤Lee, T. (2011) Scaffolding to develop problem-solving and self-help skills in young children. Texas Child Care, Spring 2011, pp 38 – 42

This accessibly written article explores different scaffolding strategies to help children master new skills. These include examples of organising the environment, cueing behaviours and modelling to support problem solving. For self-help skills examples are given of modelling, limiting choices. Laddering and providing feedback. This article is valuable in the context of play based learning as it gives practical suggestions of how to provide new tasks and structure linked to individual children's developmental needs and level, while allowing the child some autonomy and agency. Suitable for NQF levels 4 and 5.

④⑤⑥National Childhood Network(no date). Aistear learning and developing through play. Ireland: National Childhood Network. (19 pages). Accesible at http://www.ncca.biz/Aistear/pdfs/Guidelines_ENG/Play_ENG.pdf

Aistear is the *curriculum* framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland. This readable booklet explains how to use play to support attainment of different learning outcomes in the framework. These include well-being, identity and belonging communicating and exploring and thinking which overlap substantially with the South African National Curriculum Framework Early Learning and Development Areas. The resource guide begins with a description of play and its characteristics, types of play and play at different ages. It gives practical points on the role of the adult, preparing the environment and resources. There are also several examples of play activities linked to different learning areas and provided in different settings (home care, preschool, playgroup or classroom) for different age groups. Suitable for NQF 4, 5 and 6.

④⑤⑥New Foundland, Labrador Education and Early Childhood Development (2016) Full –Day Kindergarten Play-Based Learning: Promoting a Common Understanding. Canada. (76 pages). Accessible at https://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/pdf/FDK_Common_Understandings_%20Document_Eng_2016.pdf.

This guide was designed to help kindergarten (Grade R) teachers understand what play and play based pedagogy is and how to employ play strategies in implementing the kindergarten curriculum. It is readable with illustrations and practical examples. After an introduction to play and its benefits the guide focuses on aspects of play pedagogy, its characteristics, the role of the teacher (planning, assessment, the environment, strategies). There is a focus on inclusion and diversity is discussed. A useful list of video clips and internet references. Recommended for NQF Levels 4, 5 and 6.