

UNICEF
Teacher TRAINING Packages

Facilitator Guide

NQF Level 5

Play Learning Materials Consortium (PLMC)



CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	1
Acronyms	1
Glossary	2
General background	4
How adults learn	8
2. LITERATURE REVIEW: SUMMARY	12
History of Play in Early Childhood Education and Development	12
Play and Policy	12
What is Play?	12
Play in Different Cultural Settings	13
Play-based Pedagogy – A Play Continuum	13
Implementing a Play-based Pedagogy	13
Conclusion	14
3. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES	15
See Appendix 2	
4. PRINCIPLES OF PLAY	16
Purpose	16
Learning outcomes	16
5. WHAT IS A PLAY-BASED APPROACH (PBA)?	25
Purpose	25
Learning outcomes	25
What is play?	25
Why is play important?	33
A play-based approach to teaching and learning (PBA)	40
6. PLAY CONTINUUM: WHO INITIATES/CHOOSSES AND WHO DIRECTS/CONTROLS THE PAY?	42
Purpose	42
Learning outcomes	42
Understanding play as a continuum	43
What is a ‘play continuum’?	45
7. HOW DO WE DO A PBA?	63
Purpose	63
Learning outcomes	63
Play-based teaching and learning activities	64
REFERENCES	108
APPENDICES	110
Appendix 1: Literature review	110
Appendix 2: Annotated bibliographies	122

1. INTRODUCTION

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)
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Glossary

accommodation takes place when the child has to make changes to what they know and understand when this does not match the new information.

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

assimilation happens when a child adds new information to what they already know and understand

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

constructivists believe that children are active participants in their own learning and that they construct (build) knowledge for themselves through their experiences and interactions with their environment

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

developmentally appropriate means activities and teaching strategies that meet young children at their stage of development and takes into consideration the needs of the individual child.

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

teacher-initiated play opportunities are planned, chosen and started by the teacher

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

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.

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

zone of proximal development is the area between what the child can do without help and the skills that are too difficult for the child to do on their own. The ZPD is the middle area which is what the child could achieve with the guidance from a more knowledgeable other

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
Approach			
Adult learning	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

What is PBA?			
	5.1	Defining play	45 minutes
	5.2	Characteristics of play	60 minutes
	5.3	How children play with others	30 minutes
	5.4	Five types of play	60 minutes
	5.5	The right to play	15 minutes
	5.6	Views on play	45 minutes
	5.7	Why play is important	60 minutes
	5.8	Play, teaching and learning	45 minutes
Play continuum			
	6.1	Understanding the idea of a 'continuum'	30 minutes
	6.2	Matching activities for children to forms of play	30 minutes
	6.3	Video of children playing	30 minutes
	6.4	Roleplaying four forms of play	60 minutes
	6.5	Fostering agency	25 minutes
	6.6	The daily programme	40 minutes
	6.7	Summary	20 minutes
How to do PBA			
Plan	7.1	Observation	15 minutes
	7.2	The role of observation in preparing for planning	40 minutes
	7.3	Case study	60 minutes
	7.4	Planning a PBA activity	80 minutes
Set up	7.5	Creating a PBA environment	30 minutes
	7.6	Dream space	90 minutes
Teach	7.7	Intentional teaching	20 minutes
	7.8	Child-directed or teacher-directed?	45 minutes
	7.9	Scaffolding learning	45 minutes
	7.10	Follow the child's lead	45 minutes
	7.11	Open-ended questions	30 minutes
	7.12	Let's practise scaffolding	60 minutes
Assess	7.13	What is play-based assessment?	45 minutes
	7.14	Observation in play-based assessment	45 minutes
Reflect	7.15	Experiential learning cycle	30 minutes
	7.16	Overview of PBA cycle	30 minutes

List of Tables

Table 1: Time allocation for activities

Table 2: Initiated play and directed play

Table 3: Levels of initiated play and directed play

Table 4: Examples of each level of play for 0 – 9 year old children

Table 5: Changes in forms of play

List of Figures

Figure 1: Principles of play

Figure 2: Stages of play

Figure 3: Types of play

Figure 4: UNCRC Article 31

Figure 5: Zone of proximal development

Figure 6: Play-based approach to teaching and learning Cycle

Figure 7: The play continuum

Figure 8: Didactic teaching vs. PBA

Figure 9: Play-based approach to teaching and learning Cycle - Plan

Figure 10: Play-based approach to teaching and learning Cycle – Set up

Figure 11: Play-based approach to teaching and learning Cycle – Teach

Figure 12: Scaffolding Learning

Figure 13: Play-based approach to teaching and learning Cycle – Assess

Figure 14: Play-based approach to teaching and learning Cycle – Reflect

Figure 15: Experiential learning cycle

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 have an innate and 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:

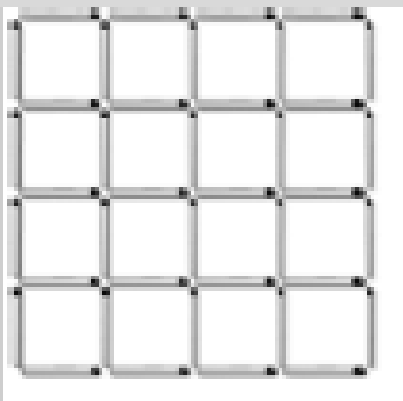
Divide the participants into pairs or groups of 3. Each group is given 40 matchsticks. They are to arrange them in a 4 by 4 square grid (see below).

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.

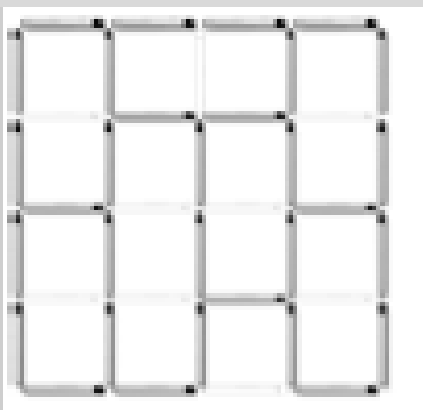
The first group to find the solution is the winner.

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.



Facilitator notes

Below is the solution to the game:



Participants answer these questions about the game they have just played.

1. Did this game have a purpose or a goal? What was it?
2. Did it give people with different ways of thinking an opportunity to participate? (They could just look and work it out, they could draw the patterns on a separate piece of paper, they could move the matchsticks around.)
3. Did it require that they actively take part?
4. Was it fun? Did they enjoy themselves while they were doing it?
5. Were they involved in it, and thinking while they played it?

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 PlaySA - 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 in relation to 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

Educators and researchers all over the world agree that play is an extremely important activity for young children because it supports their learning significantly. People have different understandings of what play is, and define it differently, often based on their cultural and social contexts and backgrounds. However, there is some agreement about which principles are important to think about when we talk about play as a means by which young children engage in learning, and teachers in teaching. These are not the only principles, but are most commonly agreed on, and most helpful to teachers.

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 means of play.

Remember that play is the activity that best facilitates children's construction of their own knowledge.

These principles are:

- ◆ That play is intentional (it has a purpose)
- ◆ That play is inclusive, and can be differentiated (changed or modified) to give access to different children
- ◆ That play demands that children be active
- ◆ That play is fun
- ◆ That children often make choices about their play activities
- ◆ That children can lead, direct and control their own play activities, or can participate in play activities led, directed and controlled by teachers / caregivers.
- ◆ That play is meaningful in that it offers opportunities for children to come to terms with and create meaning about their world
- ◆ That play is social and communicative
- ◆ That play is a process rather than a product.

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. They also apply to a play-based approach to learning. This is because these principles are helpful for teachers to have in mind when they plan any kind of play activity, and is a useful way for teachers to check that the play activities they are planning for the children are in fact those that will support learning.

These principles are not presented in order of importance, they are all equally important, and they all need to be present in play and in play-based learning for children to benefit.

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, it is not something that can be measured, or forced on someone, but with this principle the idea is that any child engaging in a particular play-based learning activity should do so happily. The activity should be such that the child experiences a deep level of joy. 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.

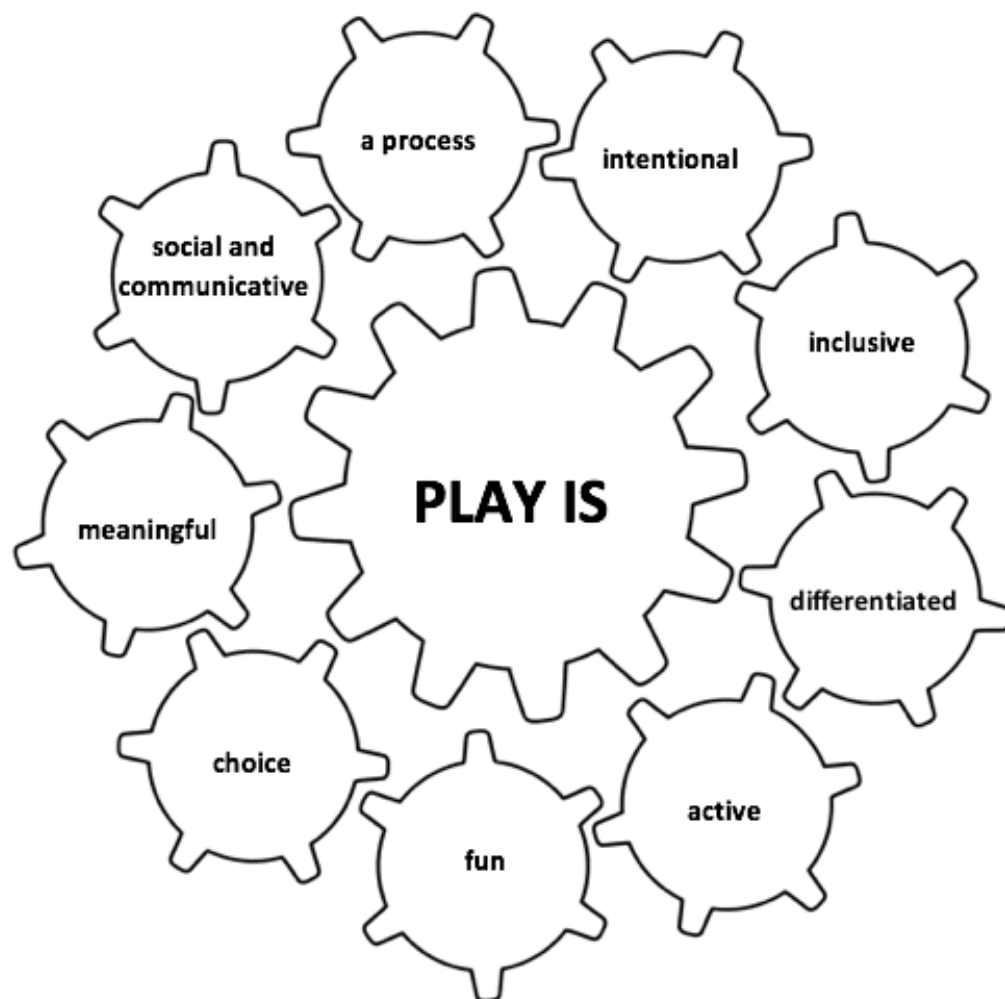


Figure 1: Principles of play

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 difficult for a the child, it will be frustrating and anxiety provoking rather than fun to do. On the other hand, if the game is too easy and contains no challenge, and does not offer children an interesting opportunity to practise what they have learned, then the play might be 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.

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 1	Fun 2	Great fun 3	The best fun ever! 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 1	Fun 2	Great fun 3	The best fun ever! 4

Discuss 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 1	Fun 2	Great fun 3	The best fun ever! 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. This instruction is given to the participants.

Find one name of an object that you can see around you, for each letter of the alphabet.

Rate the game on the 'fun' scale.

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

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 1	Fun 2	Great fun 3	The best fun ever! 4

Participants discuss the change in rating, and possible reasons for it. 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 they change them?

The next principle of play is that it has a purpose, and has a goal, it is **intentional**. This means that play should have, from both the child's and the teachers' points of views, a purpose to it, even if that purpose is simply one of exploration or of practising a cognitive skill. It is important to remember that there are different kinds of play and different stages of play, and the intentionality of play may be different in each.

Think of a 6 year old child 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 is involved in making a bridge for it to go from one point to another, has a purpose to that play. The purpose might be, from the child's point of view, 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. The purpose of this play activity from the point of view of the teacher could be similar to that of the child, to learn about objects and materials. But play changes, change is part of the nature of play, so in this case even though the child's play might change in its nature or content, 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)

At a Primary school level, 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:

- ◆ Is there a purpose to this game?
- ◆ 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 in its essence, intentional.

In presenting this game, or playing it with children, it also gives teachers a chance to model mathematical thinking or to facilitate the game appropriately. 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 which is directly related to the principle of **inclusivity**, is that it is **differentiated**. Play gives all children with different ways of thinking and learning, with different strengths and challenges, an opportunity to participate. In any one South African early learning setting at this moment there are children who learn differently to others, children who might have particular challenges and difficulties, or simply children who favour one medium of learning (visual or auditory learning, for example).

The principle of differentiation means that activities in play-based learning must be designed and planned in such a way that any and all children can participate and benefit. It is not simply that all children can watch the game, but that all children can actively participate, including those requiring extra support because of learning or physical disability, social disadvantage, cultural difference or other barriers to learning. The play activity needs to support these children as much as any other child.

The principle of play being **meaningful**. Play gives children an opportunity to process and think, to 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, as well as 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 4.3: 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:

- ◆ Does this game allow children with different abilities to participate?
- ◆ What are those different abilities?

If a child can't spell, s/he can draw or mime their word. It is an inclusive game.

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 this it is.

There are two rules for this game:

1. All questions must be only be answered "yes" or "no".
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 play is **communicative**. It is in play that children find unlimited opportunities to share with each other. They share their understanding, they test out that understanding with others, and they may even change their understanding a little by having been in communication about it with others.

Even in solitary play, children 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 the 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 one of their words.

An important principle in play, and one that is easy to overlook in a busy early learning setting is that of **choice**. Play should be voluntary, and should not be forced. The child should have some choice. This is not always possible, but play-based learning should always have at least some part of choice. For example, children can be given 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:

- ◆ Why would you choose to play this game?
- ◆ Which of the principles discussed thus far apply to this particular game?

Throughout the discussion and play that participants have been involved in thus far, the principle of **agency** is right of the heart of it all. 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 in engaging in play, children have the opportunity to lead, direct and control their own play activities.

Even as adults, if we feel that we have some control in a learning situation, it feeds into confidence and a positive engagement. Positive emotion is an important source of energy for children during their development. Being able to have some say in the play activity, to be able to follow a direction that their developing mind wishes to follow, all feeds into creating this.

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 but 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 early learning settings, in introducing play-based activities into the learning environments for young children.

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, we are **mirroring** with the adult participants what we would like them to do in their early learning settings with their children / learners. In this manual we take a play-based approach to adult teaching and learning to demonstrate it and encourage student teachers / caregivers to take a play-based approach to teaching and learning with their children.

Activity 4.7: Principles of play (70 minutes)

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

Time to be active!

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) It will be accessible to as many children as possible
- (iv) It requires that all children participate equally
- (v) It is meaningful in some way
- (vi) It promotes active engagement

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. Were all the required principles of play present 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

This section sets the context for thinking about a play-based approach to teaching and learning. Through interactive activities, discussions and readings, participants will have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of play and play-based teaching and learning and its benefits for children's development and learning.

Learning outcomes

- ◆ Understand the importance of play for children's development.
- ◆ Recognise the characteristics of play in children and how these can inform practice.
- ◆ Describe different types of play that support children's development and learning.
- ◆ Become familiar with the play-based approach to teaching and learning.

The first step in understanding a play-based approach to teaching and learning is to discuss what play is and its relationship to learning.

What is play?

Learning through play is a teaching principle in most Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes, but what does 'play' mean? The Oxford English Dictionary provides many definitions of play, including

- ◆ engage in activity for enjoyment and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose
- ◆ engage in a game or activity for enjoyment
- ◆ amuse oneself in imaginative pretence.

Many early childhood theorists, psychologists and researchers have tried to define play from their own perspectives (points of view). For example:

Jean Piaget (1962) defined play as the way a child assimilates, or how the child adds new information to what they already know and understand.

One of the difficulties in understanding play lies in the fact that play does not have clear goals or material results (Hakkarainen, 2004). Hughes (2003) suggests three criteria that may help to define play:

1. freedom of choice
2. personal enjoyment
3. the focus is on the activity itself rather than its outcomes.

Activity 5.1: Defining play (45 minutes)

Ask participants to teach a partner a game they played when they were children. After the activity discuss:

- ◆ What did you like about this game?
- ◆ Did you learn anything while playing this game?
- ◆ What makes it a play activity?
- ◆ Has play changed at all since you were a child do you think?

List the ideas on the flipchart or board.

View the following video clip Cameron and Alexis playing with blocks which shows two children playing with blocks during a free play activity. The play experiences in the video clip demonstrate the three criteria of 1) freedom of choice, 2) personal enjoyment and 3) the focus on the activity itself.

http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/rmvideoseries_practicingobservation

After the video discuss:

- ◆ Who is directing the activity?
- ◆ Are children free to explore the materials in their own way?
- ◆ Do you think the children are enjoying themselves? Why do you think so?
- ◆ Is this play? What makes it play?

Brainstorm with the group to come up with a definition of play. Write their responses on flipchart paper.

Read or display the definitions of play provided in the above note and discuss what they mean. Explain that early childhood specialists have found it difficult to come up with a common definition of play. Outline the three criteria suggested in the information above (freedom of choice, personal enjoyment and focus on the activity and not the end result) that can help teachers reflect on whether an activity is, in fact, play. Highlight the following in the discussion:

If the adult controls or takes over the play too tightly there are fewer opportunities for children to engage actively with learning.

If children are involved in the activity because they want to and not because they are being instructed to, then it is a play activity.

Characteristics of play

The characteristics below are defined in the Aistear Early Learning Curriculum Framework: Learning and Developing Through Play

http://www.ncca.biz/Aistear/pdfs/Guidelines_ENG/Play_ENG.pdf

1. **Active.** During active play, children use their bodies and minds in play by interacting with the environment, materials and other people.
2. **Adventurous and risky.** This type of play involves children exploring unknown or new concepts or ideas. When children engage in adventurous or risky pretend play, they are able to explore these concepts or ideas in a safe place or in a way which supports their safety.
3. **Communicative.** Play presents a natural opportunity for children to share information and knowledge. Children can communicate verbally, using words or through the way they use their bodies. The messages they communicate can be simple or more complicated.
4. **Enjoyable.** Simply put, play is fun! When children play they should be enjoying themselves and they can often find excitement in and find something fun in or through their play. If they aren't having fun, it probably isn't play. Instead of playing to win, children should be playing to play and have fun!
5. **Involved.** Remember that play is a child's work, and just like adults, they need to concentrate while they are playing. They should be able to focus and to concentrate during their play. Children might become very involved while playing as they are actively thinking about what they are doing.
6. **Meaningful.** Play provides opportunities for children to make sense of their world. Through play, children process and think about the things they have seen and heard, about what they know and what they don't yet know. These experiences help children to build upon what they already know, to test out new ways of thinking about the world and roles and to grow their knowledge, understanding and skills.
7. **Sociable and interactive.** While it is healthy and necessary for children to play on their own, at least some of the time, play gives the a special chance for children to be with other children in a fun and meaningful way and build relationships with other children and adults.
8. **Symbolic.** Children are able to test out roles, feelings, behaviours and relationships, and to go over things that have already happened so that they can make sense of them. Symbolic play may just look like pretending, but it is actually laying the foundation for understanding of themselves and the larger world.
9. **Healing and health-giving.** When play is fun, engaging and meaningful, it can be very helpful for children. Play can be a natural way for children to relieve stress and work through different or difficult emotions and experiences.
10. **Voluntary.** Play is a self-chosen activity that can happen at any time and that children can change, on their own or amongst themselves freely. Children should and will change the story, characters, materials, events, locations and purpose of their play when they want to.

Activity 5.2: Characteristics of play (60 minutes)

Preparation and materials:

- ◆ 3 tins of the same size, a ball, 2 pieces of chalk or 2 sticks.
- ◆ Set up the game in an open space indoors or outdoors. Place the 3 tins one on top of another and mark a straight line a distance from the tins.

Play the 'Thayma' game:

1. Divide the group into two equal teams.
2. Teams stand behind a line a distance away from the three tins.
3. The first player has three chances to throw a ball and knock down the tins.
4. If successful, the player runs to the tins and places them back one on top of the other, draws a square around the tins and hops over the tins three times.
5. If the ball misses or is thrown too far the players shout 'Thayma' until the ball is returned.
6. If after three throws the player has not hit the tins, the first player from the other team becomes the thrower.
7. The game continues until everyone has had a turn or after an agreed time is up.

If you do not have the space or means to play this game, a few volunteers could demonstrate it to the whole class; or read the description of the game on page 16 of <https://mypphysed.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/traditionalgamesteachingresource.pdf>

and have participants answer the questions below.

After the activity reflect briefly on whether the game met the criteria for play:

- ◆ Was there freedom of choice?
- ◆ Was the game enjoyable?
- ◆ Were participants engaged in the activity for the sake of it (or was there some 'reward')?
- ◆ Give a summary of the key points in the note above on the 'Characteristics of Play'.
- ◆ Reflect on what characteristics of play, if any, were present in the 'Thayma' game.

Preparation and materials:

- ◆ A large, empty cardboard box for each small group.
- ◆ Divide participants into small groups according to the age groups that they will be focusing on in their practical work and give each group a cardboard box.

Ask the groups to reflect on the characteristics of play and to use them to design a playful activity for their age group. Each group demonstrates their activity and identifies which characteristics of play are in it.

Briefly discuss the ways in which all children, including those with barriers to learning would be able to participate in each of the activities.

Stages of play

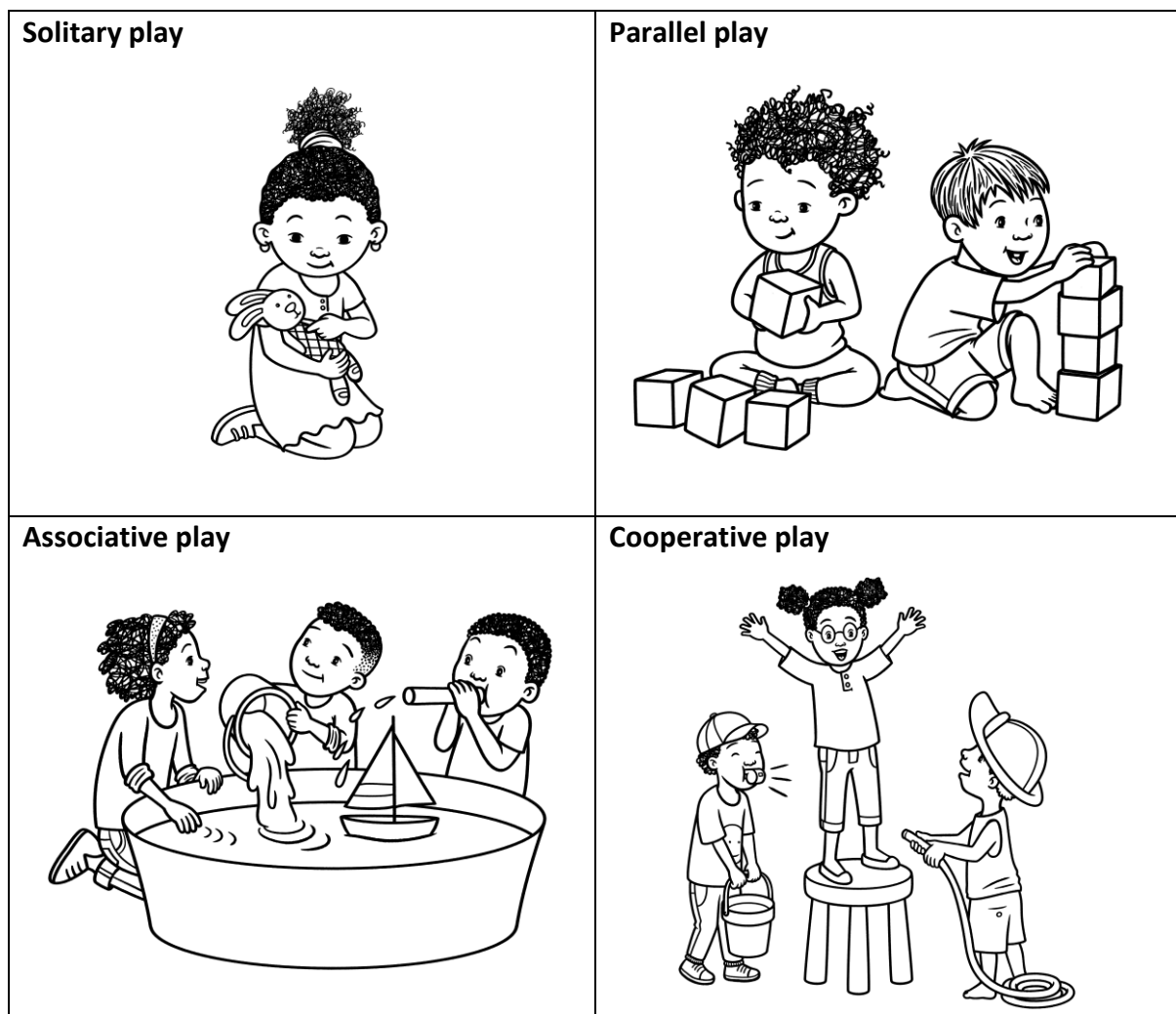


Figure 2: Stages of play

The following stages of play can be seen as moving from least to most involvement with others. They can also be seen as different types of behaviours that children can be involved in as they play.

- ◆ **Solitary play.** Very young children mostly play alone as they explore objects in their environments, unaware of others around them. They may try to communicate with one another but do not have an understanding of playing together at this stage. Although this is typical behaviour in babies, toddlers and older children can also engage in and learn from solitary play.
- ◆ **Parallel play.** Children play alongside others. They play with similar objects and may watch and talk to each other, but they are still busy mainly with their own activities and do not play together.
- ◆ **Associative play.** Children start to become interested in one another. They may play together doing similar activities and talk about what they are doing, but do not work together to complete a task.
- ◆ **Co-operative play.** Children start to share their materials, discuss and put their ideas into action together. They often play together in games or to complete a project.

Activity 5.3: How children play with others (30 minutes)

Materials:

- ◆ Toys and props for the roleplay activity.
- ◆ Use the visual presentation on the stages of play that children go through in their development, using key points from the information note above.
- ◆ Divide participants into small groups and have them discuss the following scenarios. They are to decide on which type of play each scenario describes.

Scenario 1

A group of children enter the fantasy play area. Thulani picks up a pot and says “I love to cook. I am going to make supper.” He starts to pretend to cook on the stove. Namhla says to Leah, “Let’s set the table for supper.” “Okay, I’ll get the plates” agrees Leah. “How many people will be at the table?” she asks. “Six”, says Namhla. As Leah places the plates on the table, Namhla puts a spoon next to each plate. Two other children want to join in the game and Thulani tells them that they need to knock at the door first. Leah brings a doll and they all sit down at the table and pretend to eat.

Scenario 2

Kim is sitting on a blanket with a soft toy in her hand. She bangs it up and down on the floor. She loses her grip and the toy rolls across the floor. Kim crawls after her toy and picks it up, laughs and shakes her head. She swipes the toy hard with her hand and it rolls some distance and disappears out of sight. Kim crawls after it but cannot find the toy. She sees toys on a shelf nearby, picks up another toy and once again starts bouncing the toy on the floor.

Scenario 3

Children are on the mat busy exploring what has been put out for them. Alana is dropping shapes through holes in a box. Fezile is also playing on the mat. He has made a road out of blocks and found a small car to push along his road. Fezile gives the car a push and says “Brrmm, brrmm!” Alana hears the sound, looks up and sees the car moving along the blocks and laughs. She picks up another shape and tries to fit it through the hole.

Scenario 4

Maphelo and Puleng are outdoors playing with water. They are experimenting with objects to see which ones will float on top of the water and which ones will sink. Puleng pushes a sponge under the water and then squeezes the water into a container. She does this a few more times and then says to Maphelo “I wonder if this bowl of water will sink.” Maphelo sees what she is doing, and places two small stones in a shallow container and says, “I think I can make these float.”

One person from each group reports back on each scenario. Discuss any differences. (The correct answers are Scenario 1: Cooperative Play, Scenario 2: Solitary Play, Scenario 3: Parallel Play and Scenario 4: Associative Play)

Ask participants to return to their groups and to prepare a roleplay to demonstrate the type of play they have been assigned. Groups prepare and then present their roleplays. After each presentation discuss if, and how, the participants (role playing children) were interacting with each other.

Five types of play






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

Figure 3: Types of play

The Future of Play Report (Lego Foundation, 2013) suggests five types of play that can be seen in all cultures and that support the physical, social, emotional and cognitive domains of child development.

1. **Physical play.** This type of play includes active exercise play, fine motor practice and rough-and-tumble play. Physical play is important for gross and fine motor coordination and for building strength and endurance.
2. **Play with objects.** Young children are scientists. As they explore, investigate, and experiment with different objects in their world they develop their thinking skills and learn to problem-solve.
3. **Symbolic play.** Children use a toy, object, picture, drawing or other mark-making to represent real-life objects.
4. **Pretence and socio-dramatic play.** Pretend and socio-dramatic play, which involves dressing-up and role-playing, promotes cognitive and social development, and has been known to improve self-regulation (the ability to manage their own behaviour and thinking) in children.
5. **Games with rules.** As well as learning to follow rules of the game, children learn to share and take turns and help one another.

All five types of play are found in all cultures. It is important to remember however, that play may be influenced by how a family or culture value play, and how much adults play with their children. Marfo and Biersteker (2011) reported on the playful lives of children in Southern African cultural groups. They cite Sedite (2009) who highlights the important role that older children play in young children's learning of traditional games, where play helps with the development of physical agility, concepts, as well as cultural and social learning. In relation to Shona games, Nyota and Mapara (2008) note that older children play an important role in adapting games for younger children. Swart (1996) describes an Ndebele practice in which children are encouraged to go around in mixed-age groups called *ubungani*, within which much learning takes place. Roughly translated, *ubungani* means friendship, comradeship, or playing together. Similar groups are known in Sotho communities.

Activity 5.4: Five types of play (60 minutes)

Preparation and materials:

Display five sheets of flipchart paper in different parts of the room with the following headings

1. Physical play is...
2. Play with objects is...
3. Symbolic play is...
4. Pretence and socio-dramatic play are...
5. Games with rules are...

Divide participants into five groups and ask each group to stand next to one of the sheets of flipchart paper. Give each group a (different colour) marker and explain that they will have 10 minutes to write their ideas and examples of the type of play about the statement on their sheet. After 10 minutes ask groups to rotate to the next sheet of flipchart paper and give them another 5 minutes to add new ideas to what the first group wrote. Continue in this way until all the groups have written on all the five flipchart sheets. Summarise the points made by each group (identified by the colour of their marker) and include key ideas from the notes on the five types of play.

- ◆ Discuss with the whole group whether these types of play are available in the settings where the participants are doing their practicals.
- ◆ Explain that the next activity focuses on one of the types of play – games with rules. Divide participants into small groups and give each group simple play materials such as a ball, a piece of rope, sticks, stones, a doll, a blanket. One of the groups is not given any materials.
- ◆ Instruct the groups to choose an age group and create or share a traditional game with rules that they will teach to the whole class. Give groups time to design and practise their game.
- ◆ Groups take turns to teach everyone their game and identify how children could develop and learn from the game.
- ◆ Discuss how games with rules would be taught to children in the ECD programme, taking into consideration the families' cultural values and beliefs around play.
- ◆ Remind participants that inclusion is about all children being given an equal opportunity to participate in the planned programme. Present the following scenario:
Ajay has poor vision and does not move around too much on his own.
How would you adapt your game so that Ajay can join in?
- ◆ Participants return to their groups and discuss their ideas about play for Ajay. Have one person from each group report back.
- ◆ Discuss how every child can be included in all five types of play.

Why is play important?

Now that you understand what play is, you need to think about why play is so important for children's learning and development

The right to play

Play is a fundamental right of all of the world's children. This is clearly stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), a treaty which sets out the universally accepted rights for children.



Figure 4: UNCRC Article 31

South Africa has ratified (approved) the UNCRC which means that the government recognises that play is an essential experience that enriches children's learning and development, and ensures that the rights of all children to play become a reality. Even though play is a right, many young children in South Africa face challenges in realising their right to play, and may have limited opportunities to play at school and at home. For example:

- ◆ In some cultures play is seen as an activity that can happen after work and family chores are done.
- ◆ There are different beliefs about what play is appropriate for boys and girls and there may not be equal opportunities for play.
- ◆ Many cultures view play as something that children do on their own without the involvement of adults.
- ◆ Many children are exposed to environmental dangers such as pollution, lack of local safe play areas and green spaces, and also high levels of crime and violence (Bartlett et al., 1999; Brooker and Woodhead, 2012).
- ◆ Electronic media is widely used by children of all ages. They spend more time playing electronic games and watching television than they do in other playful activities.
- ◆ Barriers to learning and development for children with disabilities and other special learning needs may not have been successfully removed.

Activity 5.5: The right to play (15 minutes)

- ◆ Explain that all children have the right to play, and that this right is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- ◆ In buzz groups (2 or 3 participants form a group from where they are seated) have participants discuss how families of young children in their community view play and if it is seen to be important.
- ◆ Participants report to the whole group. As each group reports back, list the challenges in realising children's right to play on the flipchart or board. Invite participants to share their ideas on how to address these challenges and to create opportunities for children to play.

Theoretical and historical views on play

There is a long research history on play and there are many theories of play that explain how and why children play, and how play affects their development. This section provides an outline of some of these theories.

Jean Piaget (1896–1980) was a constructivist theorist who believed that children are active participants in their own learning and that they construct (build) knowledge for themselves as they interact with their environment. According to Piaget, play does not necessarily teach anything new, but gives children the opportunity to practise what they have learned. Piaget proposed that play supports cognitive development through the two processes, he called “assimilation” and “accommodation”.

- ◆ **Assimilation** happens when a child adds new information to what they already know and understand.

Baby squeezes a toy and finds out that it makes a noise. S/he uses this information as s/he explores other objects and finds out that they also make a noise when s/he squeezes them. S/he adds this new information to fit in with what s/he already knows – some objects make noises when they are squeezed.

- ◆ **Accommodation** takes place when the child has to make changes to what they know and understand when this does not match the new information.

What happens when the baby squeezes an object and finds out that it does not make a noise? S/he tries shaking it and discovers that it makes a noise. Now s/he must change her/his thought structure to – some objects make noises when they are shaken or squeezed.

Piaget noted three different stages of play that emerge during early childhood:

- ◆ **Functional play** (also called sensorimotor play). It is through repeated actions and practice during everyday play activities that children develop their motor skills.

For example:

- ◆ pushing a toy car backwards and forwards
- ◆ filling and dumping water, sand or objects
- ◆ stacking blocks to make a tower, knocking it down and starting again.

- ◆ **Symbolic play.** This involves different kinds of pretend play and the use of symbols, where one thing is used to mean another.

For example:

- ◆ using a doll as their baby, feeding and rocking baby to sleep
- ◆ galloping on a broomstick pretending to be riding a horse
- ◆ using a block as an iron pretending to iron clothes

- ◆ **Games with rules.** Children must follow the rules to play the game.

For example:

- ◆ hopscotch
- ◆ ball games
- ◆ board games
- ◆ pretend games that children have invented.

Piaget believed that all children pass through these stages in the same set sequence, becoming skilled at one level before moving on to the next.

Lev Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) was a Russian psychologist who like Piaget, was also a constructivist theorist. He believed that learning takes place when children interact with both the environment and with the people around them.

In Vygotsky's view (1978) when play is initiated by children, they are in control of their own learning. He suggests that when children play, they set their own level of learning and it is therefore always developmentally appropriate.

Vygotsky believed that social and cultural aspects are important in children's play. He proposed that during make-believe (pretend) play children act out events and ideas that they come across in their daily lives, and in so doing they develop an understanding of their world, and the people around them.

According to Vygotsky, during make-believe play children use symbols that stand for real things. This helps them to understand that objects and ideas can be represented in different ways such as through art, language, maths symbols, music, song, dance and drama.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Vygotsky placed a strong emphasis on social interactions and believed that children learn through their interactions with their peers and with adults. According to Vygotsky (1978), there is a difference between what children can learn on their own and what they can do with support. He believed that higher order thinking can only be learned through the guidance of what he called More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs), e.g. teachers, parents, caregivers, capable peers (children who already know something). He is known for introducing the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The ZPD is the area between what the child can do without help and the skills that are too difficult for the child to accomplish on their own. The ZPD is the middle area which is what the child could do with the guidance from an MKO.

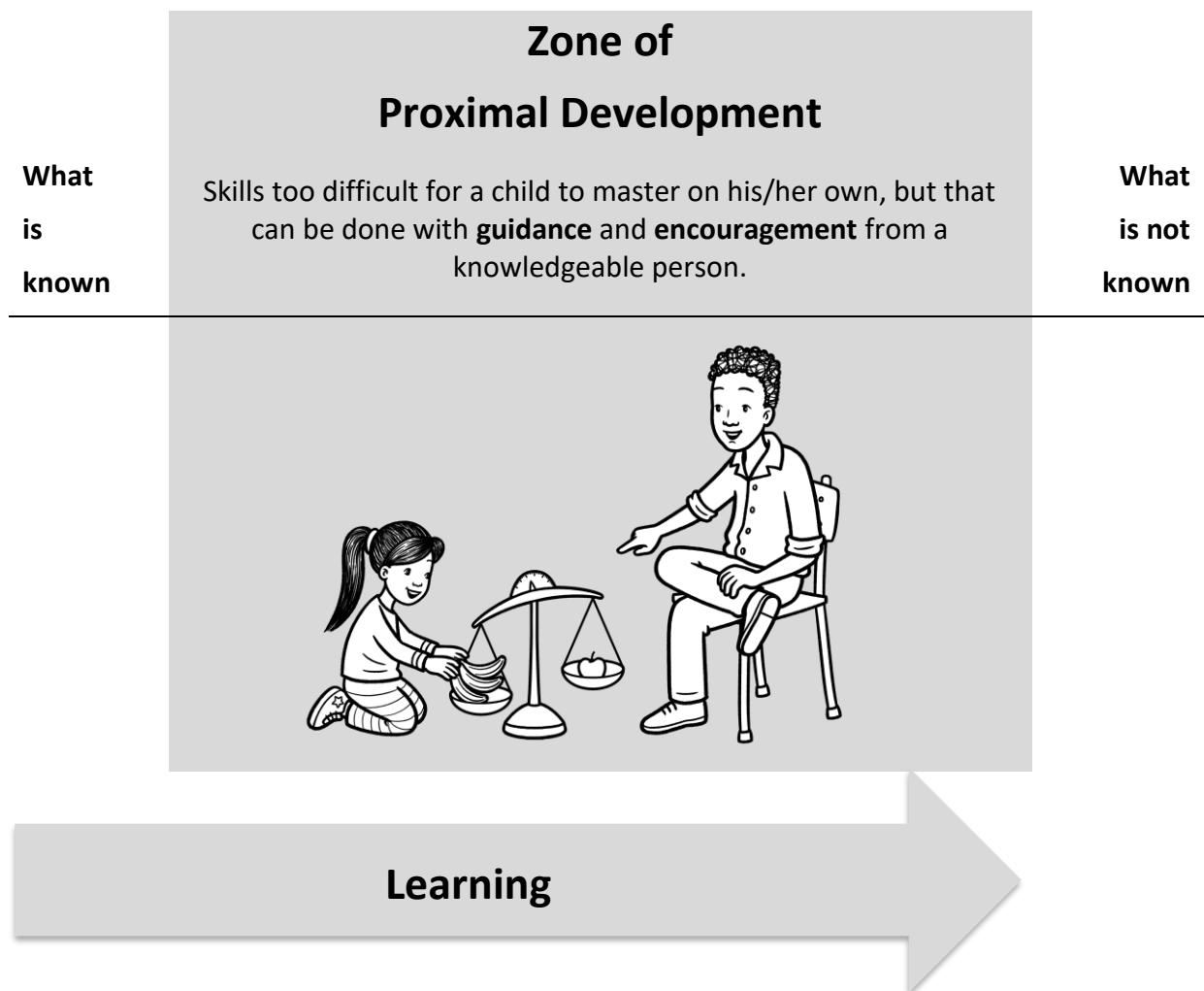


Figure 5: Zone of proximal development

Teachers plan activities that allow children to practise what they already know and can already do so that they can complete activities on their own, but the ZPD is the area where teachers can best support learning. Planned activities should focus mainly on being slightly above the level of what children can do on their own.

The ZPD can help us to think more carefully about our teaching practice. Strategies for teaching and learning in the ZPD are explored in the Section on Teaching in this facilitator's guide.

Erik Erikson (1902- 1994) was a psychoanalyst who is known for his eight Psychosocial Stages of Development that he believed we pass through during our lifespan. At each stage of development there is a 'crisis' that needs to be faced before we can move on to the next stage.

Erikson believed that play is very important in the early stages of children's development. Play gives children the opportunity to discover and build their own understanding in a safe world. He said that for play to be successful there must be:

1. Freedom within set limits.
2. The opportunity to discover.

Erikson believed that true play cannot take place if either of these is absent.

Mildred Parten was a researcher who observed children as they played. She noted that children of different ages played differently. She suggested six stages of play:

1. **Unoccupied play.** The child observes but does not play.
2. **Solitary play.** The child plays alone.
3. **Onlooker play.** The child watches other children play and may copy what they are doing, but does not join in.
4. **Parallel play.** Children play on their own, but side by side.
5. **Associative play.** Children share materials, play and talk about what they are doing but do not work together to complete a project
6. **Cooperative play.** Children share their ideas and materials and work together, often for long periods of time, to complete a game or project.

Parten's stages are still used by early childhood educators today, but many researchers now disagree about whether there is a set sequence of stages that children move through, and they have presented alternative views.

Activity 5.6: Views on play (45 minutes)

Materials:

Collage materials, paints, scissors and glue for 3 small groups

Preparation:

Copy the statements about theorists' views on play above and cut them into strips. There should be one strip of paper for each participant and an equal distribution (more or less) of each statement so that participants can work in three small groups. For example, if you have 24 participants, cut out 8 copies of each statement.

Statements:

Children are active participants in their own learning and construct knowledge as they interact with their environment

Social and cultural aspects are important in children's play

For play to be successful there needs to be freedom within set limits and an opportunity to discover.

Hand out strips out paper to each participant. Ask participants to form three small groups according to their statements. Explain that these are the views of three theorists who have researched play to understand why children play and how it affects development. Refer participants to the information on the theories of Vygotsky, Piaget and Erikson in their manuals and ask groups to match the theorist to their statement.

Children are active participants in their own learning and construct knowledge as they interact with their environment. (Piaget)

Social and cultural aspects are important in children's play. (Vygotsky)

For play to be successful there needs to be freedom within set limits and an opportunity to discover. (Erikson)

In their small groups, participants complete the following task:

1. Read the information about your theorist's view on play.
2. Using the materials provided, create an advertisement for an ECD programme that is based on the views of your theorist. Draw attention to how play is used in teaching and learning.

The advertisements are shared with the whole group. Use the advertisements to summarise the views of Piaget, Vygotsky and Erikson on play, referencing the above notes.

The benefits of play

The benefits of play have long been recognised as very important for young children's development and learning (0 – 9 years) and are supported by theorists and researchers of early childhood development.

- ◆ **Developmental domains.** It is widely accepted that play is the most important way that babies, toddlers and young children develop and learn across all developmental domains (physical, social, emotional and cognitive).
- ◆ **Brain development.** Research confirms the importance of play in children's development (McCain, Mustard, & Shankar, 2007). When children explore the world through playful experiences neurons in their brains form connections and pathways to make sense of the information. Repeating these experiences strengthens the connections in their brains so that they become permanent.
- ◆ **Play and executive function.** 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 our impulses, think creatively and solve problems, and be flexible to adjusting our plans (Diamond, 2013). Children develop their executive function skills when they are deeply involved in an activity. For example:
 - ◆ Playing peek-a-boo and hiding games with babies develops their working memory skills, their ability to focus and pay attention, and they help the child build self-control.
 - ◆ Pretend play with toddlers develops their working memory as they remember and play out their roles, focus their attention and helps them control their impulse to do other things
 - ◆ Playing games with rules helps young children to follow multiple step instructions, practise taking turns and avoid distractions.

Activity 5.7: Why play is important (60 minutes)

Divide participants into small groups and give them the following scenario:

A parent of one of the children in your class wants to know why her child is playing all day. She wants her child to learn to read and write so that he is ready for school.

Ask groups to discuss what they would say to the parent. Groups complete their discussion and one member from each group reports back. Alternatively each group can develop a roleplay to demonstrate how the teacher would respond to the parent. Players from each group present their roleplay.

Summarise the ideas presented by asking guiding questions like:

- ◆ Why is play important?
- ◆ What does play promote?

Ask participants if they know of any parents and teachers who believe that play is not important for learning.

Ask participants what they know about executive function. If this is new to most participants watch the following video which explains what executive functions skills are and why they are important for lifelong learning:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efCq_vHUMqs

View the following video clip Joy and Johna working on a puzzle which shows two children building a puzzle together.

http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/rmvideoseris_practicingobservation

After the video discuss:

What did you observe about Joy and Johna's learning during this play activity? What executive function skills are being used as they play?

Refer back to the notes

A play-based approach to teaching and learning (PBA)

Play-based learning is a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning that supports healthy child development. It recognises that children learn best by being actively involved with people and objects, and that play is the activity that allows children to construct their own knowledge in a hands-on, play environment.

In recent years, people have started to rethink the purposes and nature of play and the role of adults in the planning for play and playfulness in education settings (Wood, 2009). In ECD programmes, play has typically been viewed as free play and child-initiated – with children free to choose their activities and explore, experiment and discover for themselves. Free play is however not always useful for certain kinds of content and concept learning, and children’s activities may need to be scaffolded by a more knowledgeable adult.

The play-based approach to teaching and learning recognises that

- ◆ at times children learn best from free play activities initiated and directed by the child with adult involvement.
- ◆ at other times children learn best from guided play activities that are directed by the teacher (in small or whole groups).

A play-based approach considers

- ◆ planning for learning opportunities (individual, small group and large group) and a balance between child-initiated activities and more structured teacher-guided activities.
- ◆ setting up the learning environment and play materials to support playful learning and exploration.
- ◆ teaching through a mixture of child-initiated play and teacher-guided play
- ◆ assessing children’s learning during everyday activities as children play and learn.
- ◆ reflecting on and using the information gained during assessment to plan the next steps in children’s development and learning.

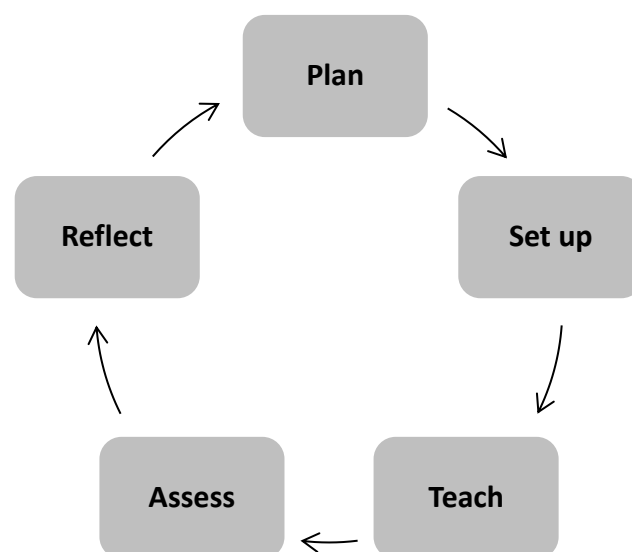


Figure 6: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle

Activity 5.8: Play, teaching and learning (45 minutes)

Preparation:

Write the following statement on a sheet of paper:

“Children learn all they need to know and understand through play activities.”

Divide the group in half for a debate. One group will argue in favour of the statement and the other group against it. Explain that it does not matter whether they personally agree with the statement - they just need to defend it with their group.

Give the groups some time to discuss reasons for or against the statement and to prepare their arguments.

Have one person from each team present their opening argument one after the other.

Facilitate the debate by inviting one person at a time to present further arguments for their team, making sure to give equal time to each team.

Once the debate starts to get slow or if it gets too heated, bring it to a close by asking for concluding arguments. A colleague can sit in on the debate and declare a winning team at the end of the debate, or you can ask participants to vote by raising their hands.

After the debate, find out whether any participants changed their own views as a result of the arguments presented. Use key points from the debate to introduce the concept of a play-based approach that is inclusive of both sides of the argument.

6. PLAY CONTINUUM: WHO INITIATES/CHOOSSES 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 inform types 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

TIPS for the Facilitator: supporting students' learning

- ❖ Write down new words and their meaning in the languages spoken by the students. Use Google Translate and ask a first language speaker to check the wording for you.
- ❖ Continuum, initiated play and directed play are big words that describe complex ideas. It is unlikely that the students will know these words. Make sure that the students have a clear understanding of each before going onto the next activity.

Let's start by understanding the idea of a 'continuum'.

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

1. Adhering to a set of play principles (See Section 4 in this manual)
2. Understanding how who initiates and directs play determines each type of play along the play continuum
3. Implementing the cycle of planning, setting up, teaching, assessing and reflecting.

This section explores the second point above.

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).

Activity 6.1: Understanding the idea of a 'continuum' (30 minutes)

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

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:

- ◆ Large long arrows made of newsprint/card
- ◆ On the first arrow is written 'Short'. On the second arrow is written 'Medium'. On the third arrow is written 'Tall'. On the fourth arrow is written 'Very tall'.
- ◆ Masking tape or string.

Facilitation:

Whole Group: the facilitator:

- ◆ creates a long line on the floor using string or masking tape
- ◆ explains the idea of a 'continuum' to all the students
- ◆ invites the students to create a 'height continuum' by standing on the line in order from the shortest to the tallest
- ◆ matches the four arrows with the words 'short' 'medium' 'tall' and 'very tall' to the line of students by placing the arrows next to the line made by the string/masking tape.
- ◆ invite the students to reflect on the continuum using the following questions as a guide:
 - ◆ What did you notice?
 - ◆ What happens if we change the order of the heights? Is it still a continuum? Why not?
 - ◆ What could come before and after the continuum you made?
 - ◆ What other kinds of continuum are there?
 - ◆ What is a play continuum?

TIPS for the Facilitator: the reflection process

- ❖ Don't rush the reflection. The activity is the fun part that gets the students' attention. The learning happens when the students engage with the open-ended questions after the activity. Ask one question at a time and wait patiently for the responses.
- ❖ When you ask open-ended questions you give the students an opportunity to think for themselves, to make connections, to apply their understanding, and to share their ideas and experiences.
- ❖ When you start the reflection with an easy open question, such as 'What do you notice?', it gives every student the opportunity to engage irrespective of entry level and familiarity with the language of instruction. The responses also give the facilitator a good idea of the students' level of understanding and interest.
- ❖ Remind student teachers that they should use these strategies when working with children in their early learning settings.
- ❖ After every activity get the students to transfer and apply what they have done to their early learning setting. For example: after doing Activity 1 with the students ask them the following open-ended questions:
 - ❖ Could you do this activity with your learners?
 - ❖ What would you need to change or do differently for children?
 - ❖ What would the children learn from the activity?
 - ❖ What links can you make with the curriculum?

What is a ‘play continuum’?

There are many theories on what play is for young children. The idea of a play continuum¹ (Zosh et al, 2018) brings together these theories by suggesting that there are four main forms of play stretching from free play to playful instruction:



Figure 7: The play continuum

The continuum does not start or end with these four types of activities. For example: Didactic Instruction comes after Playful Instruction on the continuum but it has not been included on the play continuum because Didactic Instruction does not have the characteristics of play.

One form of play is not better than another on the play continuum; each one has its place in the development of a child.

Table 2: Initiated play and directed play

Who initiates play:	Who directs play:
Who plans, chooses and starts the play activity? Is it the teacher or the child/children?	Who controls, decides and organises the play activity while it is being played? Is it the teacher or the child/children or both?
A high level of initiated play refers to who started the play by doing all, or most, of the planning and choosing	A high level of directed play refers to who has led the play by doing all, or most, of the controlling and organizing during the play.
A low level of initiated play refers to no, or little, planning and choosing by the player/s	A low level of directed play refers to who had done no, or little, controlling and organizing during the play

The form of play is decided by who starts, chooses, and controls the play activity. We call this levels of initiated play and directed play (Zosh et al. 2017). We use the capitals **C** (Child/Children) and **T** (Teacher) when the levels of initiated play and directed play are high. We use the lowercase **c** (child/children) and **t** (teacher) when the levels of initiated play and directed play are low.

¹ A good reason for thinking about play in terms of a continuum is that there are many forms of play and sometimes one form changes and/or becomes mixed with another (Zosh et al. 2018)

The table below explains the levels of initiated play and directed play in terms of high and low levels of who initiated and who directed the play:

Table 3: Levels of initiated play and directed play

Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
C	Ct	Tc	T
The C hild initiates and directs all of the play. The child decides and organises when, where, what and how to play, and who is playing. The teacher does not intervene or engage with the playing children.	The C hild initiates and directs most of the play. The teacher occasionally intervenes 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 initiates and directs most of the children's play by setting out specific play activities e.g. dough, drawing, obstacle course, balls, etc. The child has some control because the child can decide which activity to do and how to do it.	The T eacher initiates and directs all the play which is planned with a particular purpose in mind e.g. a story activity that teaches listening and attention skills as per the curriculum. Playful instruction always contains elements of play e.g. it actively engages and is enjoyable for the children. Examples of playful instruction are story, movement and music rings. The child follows the teacher's direction.

The following activity helps students to apply their understanding of the play continuum and forms of play to teaching children. Tables 4 and 5 can be found below Activity 6.2.

Activity 6.2: Matching activities for children to forms of play (30 minutes)

The students match examples of play (Table 4) to the forms of play (Table 5)

Purpose:

- ♦ to help the students understand the concept of 'initiated play' and 'directed play' in terms of activities for 0 – 6 year olds

Resources:

The facilitator:

- ♦ provides envelopes (one for each small group of students)
- ♦ prints copies of Table 4 (one for each small group)
- ♦ cuts up the copies of Table 4 into the 16 play activity examples (the type of play and code heading are discarded) and puts them into the envelopes. There needs to be one envelope with 16 Table 4 play activity examples for each small group
- ♦ prints copies of the Table 5 template (one copy for each small group)

Facilitation:

Whole Group: the facilitator:

- ◆ Divides the group into small groups (3 – 4 students in each group).
- ◆ Hands each small group one envelope (inside each envelope are the 16 Table 4 activity examples) and a Table 5 template.
- ◆ Explains the activity to the students as follows:
 - ◆ Open the envelope and take out the 16 pieces of paper
 - ◆ Place the 16 activities on Table 5 template matching the activities to the age of children and the type of play
- ◆ When each group has completed Table 4 the facilitator:
 - ◆ Hands each group Table 3 so that the group can check if they have completed Table 5 template correctly
 - ◆ Asks the group the following reflection questions:
 - What did you notice?
 - What is essential to Free Play?
 - What is essential to Co-opted Play?
 - What is essential to Guide Play?
 - What is essential to Playful Instruction?



TIPS for the facilitator: supporting and extending Activity 6.2



If the students need extra support, the facilitator can glue four of the 16 activities into Table 5 template as a guide.

If the students need a more challenging exercise and they enjoy competitive games, then you can turn Activity 6.2 into a game. The race starts with 'Ready Steady Go' and ends with a group shouting 'BINGO' because they are the first to correctly place all 16 activities in the blank template.

The table on the next page provides examples of each type of play for each age group for Activity 6.2.



Table 4: Examples of each level of play for 0 – 9 year old children



	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
Baby 	<p>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.</p>	<p>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 saying 'This is the foot?' 'Where is your foot?'</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>The carer moves the baby's arms and feet in time to music. This is a routine that the carer does everyday with a different part of the baby's body. The carer has planned this as it is good for the child's physical development</p>
	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
Toddlers 	<p>The teacher is putting out snacks while watching the children playing on the carpet</p>	<p>The teacher sees that the children all want to play with the same ball so s/he brings out out extra balls</p>	<p>During outdoor time, the teacher starts a game by rolling or kicking the ball to the children who want to play</p>	<p>The teacher plans and sets up an obstacle course. During ring time all the children take a turn to do the obstacle course. The teacher takes notes on who can or can't balance.</p>

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
3 – 5 yrs 	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 fantasy corner. The teacher sees that one child is angry so s/he intervenes by asking the children 'I can see that Jo is not happy. What can we do to help Jo?'	The teacher puts out drawing paper and asks everyone to draw two things: something that makes them happy and something that makes them unhappy.	The teacher plans an activity for ELDA 3 Communication: Aim 4. The drama ring 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 have to make sounds and actions that match that face.
	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
Grade R 	At first break the children go outside to swing, slide and climb on the jungle gym. The Grade 7 monitor on duty in the playground does not interrupt the children's play	The playground monitor tells the Grade R teacher that some of the children are scared of the older children. The teacher sees a learning opportunity and facilitates a roleplay and discussion on bullying	The 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 teacher plans a mathematics activity that targets the outcomes for CAPS Grade R mathematics. The children sort, match, count and draw conclusions using the favourite toys that they brought to class

Below is a blank template to be completed by the students as directed by Activity 6.2.

Blank Template for Activity 6.2

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
Babies 				
	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
Toddlers 				

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
3 – 5 yr olds 				
	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
Grade R 				

When children play they can move from one form of play to another and back again on the play continuum. No form of play on the play continuum is better or worse than another. Each form of play contributes to a child's development. Here is an example:

Five children are playing outside. The children have made up and are playing their own game running, hopping, climbing and jumping around the garden pretending to be dragonflies. 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 some 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 s/he can use the children's interest in insects to achieve the NCF curriculum ELDA aims. 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).

When there was a change in the level of initiated play and directed play, the form of play changed.

Table 5: Changes in forms of play

Free play	Co-opted play	Free play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
C	Ct	C	Tc	T
The children played their own butterfly game in the garden	Teacher intervened by asking questions and putting out plastic insects	The children continued playing their own game	The teacher told the children to paint butterflies but the children could choose their own colours and patterns	The teacher taught the children about the life cycle of a butterfly by reading a picture book and leading a dramatisation

The following activities, 6.3 and 6.4, both deepen the students' understanding of forms of play. The first activity would be best with internet access; the second activity can be done without electronic resources.

TIPS for the Facilitator: Preparation

- ❖ Activity 6.3 prepares the students for Activity 6.4 and ideally should not be omitted. If there is no Internet access, a facilitator can use the following:
 - ❖ posters or photographs of children playing
 - ❖ invite one group of students to roleplay children playing while the other students observe the roleplay

- ❖ Prepare for Activity 6.3 by watching the video the day before. Ask yourself:
 - ❖ What open-ended questions do I need to ask the students?
 - ❖ How can I support students who are second language students and/or have other barriers to learning?

Activity 6.3: Video of children playing (30 minutes)

The students view and discuss the videos of children playing in different ways (free play, co-opted play, guided play and playful instruction)

Purpose:

- ◆ to deepen the students' understanding of how levels of initiated play and directed play determine different forms of play on the continuum

Resources:

- ◆ projector, laptop
- ◆ Student Guide

Facilitation:

Whole Group

- ◆ Set up the projector
- ◆ Invite the students to work in pairs by reading the tables in the Student's Guide. One student reads the text pertaining to the teacher; the other student reads the text pertaining to the child.
- ◆ Ask the students to watch for the levels of initiated play and directed play in the children's play in the video (a video may start in the middle or end. If this happens click on the red timing indicator below and move it back to the beginning on the left side).
- ◆ Click on the first video link below. After one or two minutes 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 form of 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 resume the video for another minute to reinforce the learning. Repeat for the other videos.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=w9XGxwtPPYw

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=37&v=EqweG9uU1Uk

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=JLX7nCqW8f0

Activity 6.4: Roleplaying four forms of play (60 minutes)

The students create and present four roleplays of children playing in different ways (free play, co-opted play, guided play and playful instruction). Afterward the students discuss each roleplay in terms of initiated play, directed play and forms of play on the play continuum.

Purpose:

- ◆ to deepen the students' understanding of initiated play and directed play and how each determines different forms of play on the continuum
- ◆ to work collaboratively in playful ways with peers
- ◆ to experience playful learning
- ◆ to make links between play, learning and the curriculum

Resources:

- ◆ A photocopy (or handwritten) copy of the four case studies below. Cut and fold into four separate case studies.
- ◆ Props for roleplay e.g. table, newspaper, ball, small sheets & blankets, paper, crayons, magazine pages, scissors, glue, and play dough, etc.
- ◆ Student's Guide

Facilitation:

Small group

- ◆ Divide the students into 4 groups.
- ◆ Each group chooses one (folded) case study. Each group reads their case study but keeps it secret from the other groups.
- ◆ Each group finds a quiet corner and takes 10 minutes to create a three-minute roleplay that demonstrates their chosen case study
- ◆ Each group presents their roleplay to the other groups.
- ◆ After each roleplay the observing students identify:
 - ◆ the form of play
 - ◆ the levels of initiated play and directed play (by consulting Table 3)
- ◆ The presenting group reads their case study out loud confirming the form of play, and the levels of initiated play and directed play.

Whole Group

- ◆ The group reflects on each roleplay guided by the following questions:
 - ◆ What did you see?
 - ◆ Who initiated and who directed the play activity? What was the result?
 - ◆ What would the children learn from this form of play?
 - ◆ What links can you make with the curriculum?

Individual

Journal: each student writes:

- ◆ The name of one play activity they do at their school
- ◆ This play activity's level of direction and control, and form of play
- ◆ What the children are learning when they do this play activity
- ◆ The link with the curriculum

The following four case studies are used in Activity 6.4. Each case study explains one form of play in terms of initiated play and directed play.

Case study 1	
Form of play Free Play	It is outdoor play time. A group of children decide to play an action hero game. They run around the garden, climbing, kicking a ball, and jumping while playing the pretend game. The teacher observes but does not intervene or engage with the children
Levels of initiated play and directed play C	The Children initiated and directed the play. They were in control all of the time. The children directed the game by deciding what, how and where to play. The teacher did not start, organize or control the children's play.

Case study 2	
Form of play Co-opted play	It is free play time. A group of children decide to play an action hero game. They run around the garden, climbing, kicking a ball, and jumping while playing the pretend game. The teacher observes. When a learning opportunity (teachable moment) presents itself, the teacher steps in and engages with the children in ways that extend their learning e.g. asking open-ended questions and providing additional resources. Although the teacher is intentional the intervention is not planned.
Levels of initiated play and directed play Ct	The Children initiated the play and directed the game most of the time. The children started the game and decided what, how and where to play. By intervening the teacher had some level of direction but it was low because the children could choose how to respond. The children could keep on playing their game, or stop and talk to the teacher, or change their game because of what the teacher said and did.

Case study 3	
Form of play Guided Play	<p>The teacher plans three art activities in order to help the children's understanding of big and small as indicated in Exploring Mathematics ELDA 4.3 in the 0 – 4 years National Curriculum Framework. The teacher sets out three tables with: 1) paper, magazine pages, glue and scissors, 2) paper and crayons for drawing, and 3) play dough.</p> <p>The teacher instructs the children to make something big and something small. The teacher rotates the children between the three tables until each child has completed all three activities.</p>
Levels of initiated play and directed play Tc	<p>The Teacher initiated, directed and was in control most of the time. The teacher planned and directed the three activities with a clear intention in mind.</p> <p>The children had some level of direction but it was low. Although the children had to complete all three activities as instructed, each child could decide how and what to paint, draw or model.</p>

Case study 4	
Form of play Playful instruction	<p>The Grade R teacher plans a movement ring in order to teach the children about big and small as set out in the CAPS Grade R Mathematics document. The teacher calls all the children together on the carpet.</p> <p>All the children sing along to the teacher's choice of song before copying the teacher's actions: 1) being a small mouse and a big elephant, 2) a small seed growing into a big tree, 3) being a big bird and a small bird, 4) becoming small and then big, and 5) taking big and small steps.</p>
Levels of initiated play and directed play T	<p>The Teacher started, directed and was in control all the time. The teacher planned and organized the movement activities with a clear outcome in mind.</p> <p>The children had no control over the choosing and directing the play. The teacher chose the song and movements and the children participated in playful ways. There was no opportunity for the children to change the activity.</p>

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 an early learning setting. For example: the **T** (teacher directed) play described above becomes **Tc** (guided play) as soon as the teacher encourages a child to share or asks an open-ended question.

Agency and optimal learning

Agency is a good feeling that comes when you know 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.

When a teacher shares choice (planning and choosing) and control (organising and controlling) with children, it gives children the opportunity to experience agency i.e. a feeling of being capable, purposeful and a valued contributor. Agency thrives when children feel listened to, know that their ideas matter, are actively engaged in meaningful ways, and have choices. Fostering agency by sharing control does not mean letting children do anything they want.

TIP for the Facilitator:

Read the paragraph above again. Read it out loud to yourself but change two words. When you see the words 'a teacher' replace it with the word 'I'. When you see the word 'children' replace it with the words 'my students'.

Many teachers find it hard to share control. It can be daunting to start teaching differently. But, if we want to be good teachers we need to ask open-ended questions, engage with the children's interests, and give children opportunities to use their ideas and make decisions. The next activity helps teachers to share control in appropriate (good) ways so that children can experience agency.

Activity 6.5: Fostering agency (25 minutes)

The students identify appropriate ways to encourage agency in children

Purpose:

- ◆ Identify appropriate shared control opportunities that foster agency in children

Resources:

- ◆ Student Guide

Facilitation:

Individual

The facilitator asks each student to work on their own and to:

- ◆ read the statements below in their Student Guide
- ◆ put a ✓ next to the statements that are opportunities for children to experience agency because the teacher is sharing control in appropriate ways.

1. The teacher says to the children: 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 the 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

- ◆ Invite four students to each read a statement out loud.
- ◆ After each statement the students vote on whether the teacher's sharing of control was appropriate by giving a Thumbs up or Thumbs down sign.
- ◆ The group briefly discuss their reasons for their answers.

Pairs

- ◆ The students stand up and move around the room (to the beat of a tambourine/rhythm sticks/hand claps/song/music)
- ◆ When the music stops each student finds a partner
- ◆ The facilitator asks the first question below
- ◆ The students discuss the question with their partner for one minute each
- ◆ The sequence is repeated i.e. after each question and answer, the students move around the room to the music. When the music stops the students find a different partner.

Questions:

1. What is agency?
2. Why is fostering agency in children important?
3. What actions or things foster agency in children?
4. What is the teacher's role in fostering agency?
5. What activity do you do with your children that fosters agency in appropriate ways?

Optimal learning (the best kind of learning)

What is optimal learning?

Optimal learning (the best kind of learning) is closely linked to agency (a good feeling about yourself as a capable and valued person). For optimal learning to take place '.... children must experience agency and be supported rather than directed' (p. 14. Zosh et al, 2017)

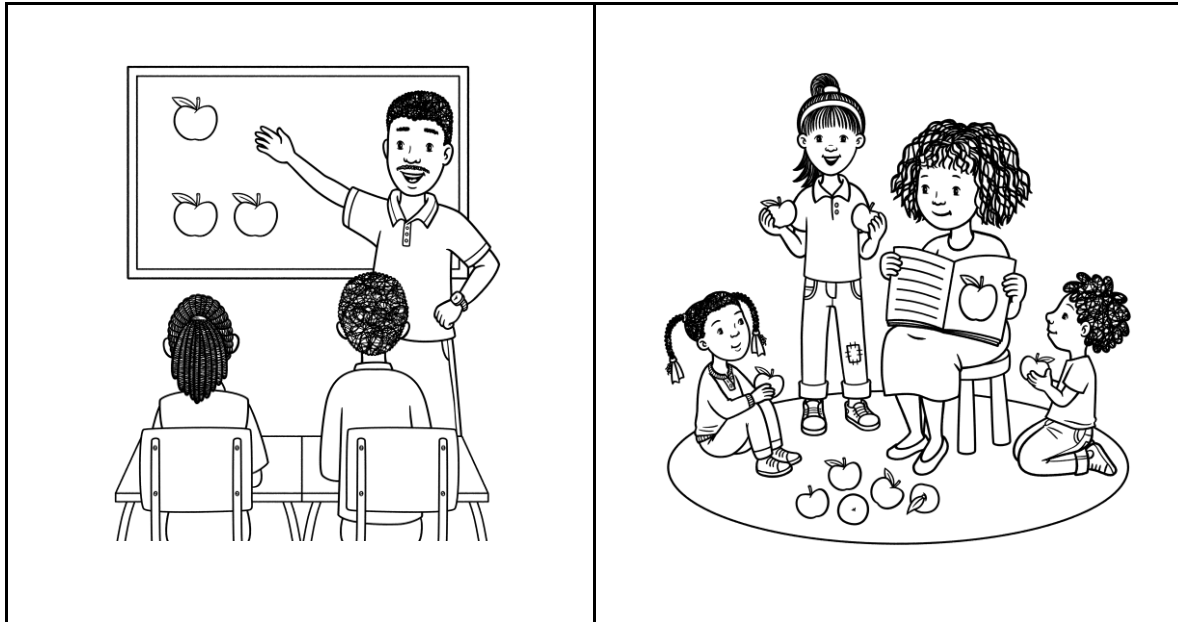


Figure 8: Didactic teaching vs. PBA

Optimal learning happens when teachers:

- ◆ move away from telling children what to do and say
- ◆ move towards a play-based learning approach
- ◆ share choice and control
- ◆ plan and facilitate activities that are intentional, fun, active, inclusive, foster agency, and offer children choices.

Optimal learning and the daily programme

The key to optimal learning is for teachers to share choice and control. Just as athletes need to exercise their muscles, so do children need to exercise their 'thinking muscles' in order to learn (Zosh et al, 2017). This means that a teacher needs to provide opportunities for children to plan, choose, decide, organise, and problem-solve in order to exercise their 'thinking muscles'. How do we do this?

The first step is to provide a daily programme with balanced levels of initiated play and directed play.

Activity 6.6: The daily programme (40 minutes).

The students are encouraged to look critically at the levels of initiated play and directed play in a daily programme for 4- 5 year olds.

Purpose:

- ◆ The students apply their understanding of initiated play and directed play and the sharing of choice and control to the daily programme.
- ◆ The students think critically about the daily programme in terms of providing opportunities for children to experience agency.
- ◆ The students plan changes that will lead to agency and optimal learning
- ◆ The students share ideas, work together and actively use their 'thinking muscles'.

Resources:

- ◆ Large poster of daily programme on newsprint (visible to group), journals,
- ◆ Reflection question for journal written on newsprint/board

DAILY PROGRAMME for 4 – 5 year-old children		
7.30 - 8.30am	Welcome	T
	Health check	
	Free play (inside)	C
		Ct
8.30 – 9.00	Morning ring	T
9.00 – 10.00	Creative art activities	Tc
10.00 – 10.30	Toilet and wash	T
	Snack	
10.30 – 10.50	Music/movement/drama ring	T
10.50 – 11.30	Free play (outside)	C
		Ct
11.30 – 11.50	Story	T
11.45 – 12.05	Toilet and wash	T
12.05 – 12.25	Lunch	T

Facilitation:**Pairs**

- ◆ The students look at the poster of the daily programme and read it through together
- ◆ The students play the Word Wheel game (see the instructions below) using the following five questions. (If there is insufficient space the students discuss, in pairs, the same questions).
 - ◆ What do you notice about this daily programme?
 - ◆ Is this daily programme balanced in terms of shared initiated play and directed play? Who is making all the decisions? Who is in control? Give reasons for your answer.
 - ◆ What happens when a teacher make all the decisions?
 - ◆ What happens when a teacher shares control with the children?
 - ◆ What small changes could you make so that the children experience agency and optimal learning?

Individual**Journal:**

- ◆ The facilitator writes on newsprint/board 'How can I nurture agency and optimal learning in children?'
- ◆ The facilitator asks the students to write the statement and their ideas in their journals
- ◆ The facilitator invites the students to share their ideas with the group.
- ◆ Each student chooses and writes in their journal one small change to implement
- ◆ The facilitator reminds the students to take photos and videos of their implementation to show at the next session keeping in mind the ethics of working with children

Word Wheel Game:

1. Ask the students to choose a partner
2. Ask the students to form two circles; one circle is inside the other circle. One partner stands in the inside circle, the other partner stands in the outside circle. Both partners face each other.
3. The facilitator asks one question and the partners discuss the question for 1-2 minutes each.
4. After each question the facilitator invites two or three students to share insights arising from their discussion with their partner
5. The outside circle then moves one partner to the left so that they are facing a new partner.
6. Repeat Steps 3 – 5 until all the questions are discussed.

Let's summarise what we have been learning about the play continuum

Activity 6.7: Summary (20 minutes)

The students summarise the important learnings in the sessions on the Play Continuum

Purpose:

- ◆ The students identify the critical points about the play continuum
- ◆ The facilitator can informally assess:
- ◆ Have the students understood the important learnings in the session/s?
- ◆ Are there any gaps or misunderstandings and is additional facilitation required?

Resources:

- ◆ Blank A4 paper (one per student)
- ◆ Student Guide

Facilitation:

Individual

- ◆ The facilitator hands each student a blank piece of A4 paper and asks each student to take 2 minutes and quietly write down the three most important things they have learned about the continuum of play

Whole group

- ◆ Invite each student to roll their paper into a ball and to have a 'snow ball fight' by throwing and catching the different balls of paper. (First remind students to watch for the signal from the facilitator that tells the student to stop throwing and to catch and keep one ball of paper)
- ◆ When the facilitator give the signal e.g. both arms up in the air, each student catches and keeps one ball.
- ◆ Standing in a circle, each student takes a turn to read out loud what is written on their paper. Points that have already been read are not repeated.

TIP for the facilitator:

- ❖ If there are insufficient ideas being expressed and support is required, the facilitator can invite students to read over their notes before they write and read what they have learned out loud.
- ❖ if there is a lot of repetition of learnings being read out loud or the group of students is very large, a facilitator can ask the students to read out only one learning or to share with a small group or a partner.

7. How Do We Do PBA?

Purpose

The purpose of this section is to find out what contributes to effective play-based teaching and learning. This section includes how to plan, set up the learning environment, use intentional teaching strategies, assess in play based ways, and to understand 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

TIPS for the Facilitator:

- ❖ Remind students of the ethics and protocols involved when working with children.
- ❖ Encourage the students to write in their own words. When students copy from other texts it does not show whether the students have understood the core concepts or not.
- ❖ Remind the students to complete the activity tasks on time for the reflection sessions
- ❖ Ask open-ended questions to encourage the students to think critically, to be imaginative and to problem-solve
- ❖ Write critical questions and new words or concepts on newsprint in the languages used by the students. Stick them up so that all the students can see.
- ❖ Encourage students to discuss and share in the language of their choice as much as possible. Invite the students to translate for their peers.

Play-based teaching and learning activities

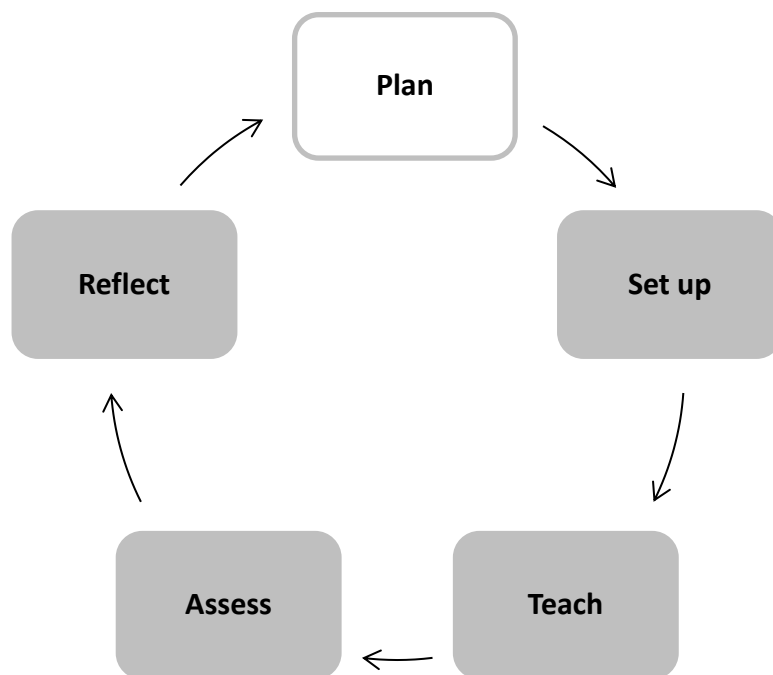


Figure 9: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Plan

Let's first look at all five steps in the PBA cycle above:

1. **Plan:** Planning has two steps. The teacher first considers the children's needs and interests and consults the curriculum. The teacher then plans and writes down what and how to facilitate learning with the children.
2. **Set up:** The teacher gets the learning activity ready according to the written planning. The teacher prepares teaching resources and sets up the space where the activity will take place
3. **Teach:** The teacher facilitates the planned learning activity with the children using the teaching resources
4. **Assess:** The teacher checks to see if the children have understood and can do what the learning activity taught them
5. **Reflect:** The teacher thinks about the activity and asks herself: What worked well? 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 answers help the teacher plan properly for the next learning activity. The cycle begins again.

Planning

Planning is good for teachers and children. When teachers plan effectively 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 learning activities are enjoyable
- ◆ Fewer discipline problems because all the children are actively engaged in meaningful learning
- ◆ Optimal learning

Planning is the first step in a five step cycle that helps teachers to provide quality play-based learning experiences for children.

There are numerous practical activities in this section. Each activity addresses a different aspect of planning using a play-based approach. These activities help students to understand the importance of planning and how to plan quality play-based learning activities. Notes and tips provide the facilitators with useful additional information.

Planning is a two-step process:

- ◆ Step 1: Preparing for Planning
- ◆ Step 2: Doing the Planning

STEP 1: Preparing for Planning

Teachers prepare for planning by finding out information that will help them plan effective activities for their learners.

Step 1 involves three activities:

1. The teacher observes the children in order to find out:
 - ◆ What the children already know and can do
 - ◆ What the children are interested in
2. The teacher looks at the curriculum in order to know:
 - ◆ What the children must be able to do and know before they go to the next class?
3. The teacher considers the learning context and understands:
 - ◆ The challenges and barriers to optimal learning. For example: what is the effect of poverty and gangsterism on the children's learning?
 - ◆ What resources and opportunities are available?
 - ◆ What values are important to the parents/caregivers and community and how to involve them in the children's learning
 - ◆ How to manage the classroom so that the children and teacher enjoy learning together.

Activity 7.1 helps the students to understand the importance of observing the children before doing the planning.

Activity 7.1: Observation (15 minutes)

This activity invites the students to observe each other before and after they have made a change to their appearance. The open-ended reflection questions enable students to understand the role of observation in effective planning.

Purpose:

- ◆ Enable students to practice observing
- ◆ Introduce the first step in planning i.e. observing the children

Resources:

none required

Facilitation:

The facilitator:

- ◆ Invites each student to find a partner and to stand together 1 metre apart facing each other
- ◆ Tells the students the rules of the observation game:
- ◆ Each student studies their partner closely without moving for 30 seconds
- ◆ Each pair then turns around and stand back to back without touching each other
- ◆ Each student quietly makes one minor change to their appearance e.g. switches a watch to the other arm, takes off a ring, rolls up a sleeve, or turns up a collar.
- ◆ When each person has made one change, the facilitator asks the students to turn and face their partners again.
- ◆ Each student studies their partner and identifies the change that has been made.
- ◆ Repeat four more times

Whole group

The students reflect on the activity guided by the following questions:

- ◆ What did you notice?
- ◆ What do we do when we observe?
- ◆ Why is it important for teachers to observe the children before they do planning?
- ◆ How will observing your children help you to plan better?
- ◆ How and when can you observe your children?

Activity 7.2 is a practical activity that allows students to:

- 1) practise observing young children
- 2) make the link between the information gathered through observation and effective planning.

Activity 7.2: The role of observation in preparing for planning (40 minutes)

Part 1: The students observe video clips of two children and complete two observation forms (one form for each child)

Part 2: The facilitator and students reflect on the information they gathered (using their completed observation forms) and draw conclusions about how to prepare for planning

Purpose:

The students will:

- ◆ Understand the role of observation in effective planning
- ◆ Practice observing babies, toddlers, or young children
- ◆ Make links between observation and effective planning

Resources:

Observation form. See below in Facilitator's Guide and in the Student's Guide.

Facilitation:

Part 1 - Observing

Students observe a video clip/clip of two children and complete the observation form for each child.

Facilitation:

Part 2 - Reflecting

The students reflect on what they have observed.

Pairs

The facilitator:

- ◆ Invites the students to pair up with a partner
- ◆ Asks the following questions which each student discusses with their partner for 2 minutes (alert the students when to change over) using their completed observation form:
 - ◆ What did children do, what did you learn about what they know, can do and anything that showed what they were thinking or feeling
 - ◆ How will knowing what the children know, think, feel, and can do already help a teacher to plan effectively?
 - ◆ What did you find out about the two children's interests and preferences?
 - ◆ How will knowing what interests and excites the children help a teacher to plan effectively?
 - ◆ How will knowing what things challenge and influence the children help a teacher to plan effectively?

Whole group:

The facilitator hands each student a blank piece of paper with the following headings (see template below):

- ◆ What are the benefits for children when teachers prepare for planning?
- ◆ What are the benefits for teachers when they prepare for planning?
- ◆ What happens when a teacher omits Step 1: Preparing for planning?

Asks the students to spend 5 minutes writing answers to the three questions:

Invites the students to crumple up the paper into a ball and have a 'snowball' fight for 1 minute. Each student makes sure that they have one 'snowball' in their hand at the end of the fight.

The students smooth out the 'snowball' and read quietly to themselves what is written on the paper

The students share with the group by reading insightful answers out loud. They do not share what has already been read by another student.

Template is for Activity 7.2:

What are the benefits for children when teachers prepare for planning?

What are the benefits for teachers when they prepare for planning

What happens when a teacher omits Step 1: Preparing for planning?

TIPS for facilitator

The facilitator prepares for Activity 7.2 by:

- ◆ reading over the observation notes (see below) with the students and clarifying 1) exactly what needs to be done, and 2) any concerns
- ◆ reminding the students of the ethics when working with children
- ◆ confirming the date of the reflection session and reminding the students to bring their three completed observation forms to the reflection session

The observation form required for Activity 7.2 is on the next page:

Observation Form:

- ◆ Observe two children.
- ◆ Write each child's **first** name and age on the dotted lines.
- ◆ Write your observations in the space below.

Child 1.....	Child 2
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?	
What seemed to interest the child, what did s/he enjoy doing?	
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)	

STEP 2: Doing the planning

Step 1 was preparing for planning by observing the children, looking at the curriculum, and understanding the learning context. Step 2 is how and what to plan so that children can experience optimal learning.

Research (Zosh et al, 2017) has provided a helpful play-based planning guide by identifying the five characteristics that underpin optimal learning through play:

Optimal learning through play happens when the activity:

1. is experienced as joyful
2. helps children find meaning
3. involves active, engaged, minds-on thinking
4. involves iterative² thinking e.g. experimentation³, hypothesis testing⁴
5. involves social interaction.

If teachers plan with these five characteristics of play in mind, the result is sure to be happy children experiencing optimal learning, with supportive teachers.

Intentional teachers: know that everything they do (or don't do) impacts on a child's development, and so they plan and act purposefully with a goal in mind in order for children to have positive learning experiences.

An intentional teacher is one who thinks carefully and bases planning on:

1. things the children enjoy and are interested in
2. the five characteristics of activities that underpin optimal learning (See above in this manual)
3. the curriculum requirements
4. the Principles of Play (See Section 4 in this manual).

The case study in Activity 7.3 compares two teaching styles and raised critical questions (and answers) such as:

- ◆ What intentional planning looks like?
- ◆ Why is it important to be an intentional teacher?

² Iterative means doing something over and over again in different ways

³ The process of trying out new ideas and ways of doing things

⁴ Hypothesis testing is the process of finding out if an idea or theory is true.

Activity 7.3: Case study (60 minutes)

Ms Blue and Ms Green are teachers. Although they teach the same age group, they plan in different ways. By looking at each we can gain insights into how to be an intentional teacher who purposefully plans for optimal learning.

Time: 60 minutes

Purpose:

- ◆ To demonstrate how an intentional teacher can plan according to the five characteristics of activities that lead to optional learning

Resources:

Students manual Activity 2: Case study 60 minutes

Facilitation:

Whole group:

The facilitator introduces the case study to the students by saying:

*This case study is not real; it is made up to demonstrate something we are learning.
Today's case study is about planning learning activities.*

The facilitator reads out the case study: '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 an activity for their children for *Exploring mathematics: ELDA 4, Aim 3: Children explore shapes, space and measurement*. Although Ms Blue and Ms Green used the same planning form, their learning activities turned out to be quite different. In your Student Guide read what they have planned'

The students take turns to read out loud the planning done by Ms Green and Ms Blue (see the two planning forms below):

TIPS for the facilitator:

Activity 7.3 is suitable for roleplaying.



Divide the group into two groups:

- 1) Ms Blue and the children in her class, and
- 2) Ms Green and the children in her class.

Provide the resources listed in each case study and let each group spend 10 minutes preparing their roleplay as per Ms Blue or Ms Green's planning form. Each group observes the other group doing the roleplay. After each roleplay the facilitator engages all the students using the reflection questions.

The **facilitator** introduces the checklist below by telling the students:

'Ms Green and Ms Blue are pleased that you have read their planning. They are both keen to know if their planning will lead to optimal learning through play. Help the two teachers to find out by checking if their planning engages with each of the five characteristics for optimal learning through play'

Write a ✓ in the box under Ms Blue and Ms Green's name if you think their activity they have planned will ...	Ms Blue	Ms Green
		
(1) be fun for the children (be experienced as joyful)?		
(2) make sense and be interesting for children (will it be meaningful to the children)?		
(3) get all the children actively involved in ways that gets their minds working (active, engaged, minds-on thinking)		
(4) get the children doing the activity again and again in different ways so that they keep learning (iterative thinking e.g. experimentation, hypothesis testing)?		
(5) get the children working together (social interaction)?		

Reflection:

Whole group

The facilitator invites the students to reflect on the case studies using the following questions:

- ◆ What did you notice?
- ◆ What does your checklist tell you about Ms Blue and Ms Green's planning?
- ◆ Where are the five characteristics for optimal learning through play in each teacher's planning? Refer the students to the characteristics for optimal learning in the Student

Guide. Ask the students to underline the characteristics for optimal learning in each case study if they see the activity:

- (1) is experienced as joyful,
 - (2) helps children find meaning,
 - (3) involves active, engaged, minds-on thinking,
 - (4) involves iterative thinking e.g. experimentation, hypothesis testing,
 - (5) involves social interaction
- ◆ What Principles of Play did you notice in each teacher's planning?
 - ◆ Refer the students to the Principles of Play (section 4 in this manual) Ask the students to underline the Principles of play in each case study if they see the activity is:
 - ◆ Intentional
 - ◆ Inclusive
 - ◆ Differentiated
 - ◆ Active
 - ◆ Fun
 - ◆ Choice
 - ◆ Focused on child agency
 - ◆ What planning suggestions do you have for Ms Blue?
 - ◆ What planning suggestions do you have for Ms Green?
 - ◆ How do you adapt Ms Blue's planning for babies and toddlers?

Implementation

Small group

The facilitator divides the whole group into small groups according to the ages they teach. The facilitator invites the students to implement what they have learned by saying:

- ◆ 'Work together to plan an activity for the age group you teach using the blank planning form in your Student Guide (see copy below)?'
- ◆ 'Decide when and how you will implement what you have planned today with your children'.
- ◆ 'Take photos and videos of your implementation to share with your group at the reflection session on (date of reflection session)'.

Planning

Date: 21st May

Teacher: Ms Blue

Children: 4 – 5 year old class

Curriculum: Exploring Mathematics. ELDA 4. Aim 3 Children explore shapes, space and measurement.

Resources:

Story: puppets, stones, thorns, plastic wild animals (lion, buffalo, rhino, elephant, crocodile)

Obstacle course: ladder, tins, tables, chairs, tyres, stones, sticks

Special needs: Peter is in a wheelchair. Although Peter can't do the obstacle course, he can do the same space and direction movements using his hands and the story resources

Learning Activity:

1. **I tell the children a story** about a little boy called Kosi who goes on an adventure. Kosi climbs up a tree and over a mountain, jumps over thorns, goes under a bridge, tiptoes in between the wild animals and goes through a river by stepping on the stones in the river. He has tea with his granny and then goes back home the same way.
2. After the story **the children go outside and I ask them an open-ended question:** 'How can we set up an adventure course like the one in the story of Kosi?' The children help set up an obstacle course using the ladder, tables, jungle gym, 6 tins, tyres, paper shapes, stones, plastic animals, and any other equipment and materials they can find.
3. I ask the children to **find a friend** and sit together in a line. Each pair takes a turn to **do the adventure course together**. Those who are waiting for their turn, give encouragement (by saying and showing with their hands) to climb up the ladder (tree) and over the jungle gym (mountain), jump over tins (thorns), crawl under tables (bridge), tiptoe in and out the tyres (wild animals inside each tyre), and step on 6 stones (stones in the river).
4. The children eat their snack outside (tea with granny) before **doing the obstacle course again**. This time I will ask the children another open-ended question 'How can you do the course in a different way?' I put the adventure materials out for the rest of the week so that the children can make their own adventure courses and keep on learning about positions in space.

Planning

Date: 21st May

Teacher: Ms Green

Children: 4 – 5 year old class

Curriculum: Exploring mathematics ELDA 4. Aim 3 Children explore shapes, space and measurement.

Resources:

Wild animal poster,

A4 paper with the outline of one wild animal drawn on it (one paper for each child).

Crayons,

Prestik.

Learning Activity:

1. The children sit on the mat in a circle. We all look at the poster of the wild animals. I ask the children five questions:
 - ◆ Which animal is at the top of the poster?
 - ◆ Which animal is at the bottom of the poster?
 - ◆ Which animal is on the right side of the poster?
 - ◆ Which animal is on the left side of the poster?
 - ◆ Which animal is in the middle of the poster?
2. I put the A4 papers with the animal outlines on the mat. Each child takes a turn to choose their favourite wild animal. When everyone has a paper, the children sit at the tables and colour in the animal. When the children are finished colouring in, I stick their animal pictures on the wall with prestick.
3. When the children are waiting for lunch to be served, I point to each child's drawing and ask the five questions again:
 - ◆ Which animal is at the top of all the animal pictures?
 - ◆ Which animal is at the bottom of all the animal pictures?
 - ◆ Which animal is on the right side of all the animal pictures?
 - ◆ Which animal is on the left side of all the animal pictures?
 - ◆ Which animal is in the middle of all the animal pictures?

Blank planning form for Activity 7.4:

Planning

Date:

Teacher:

Children's ages:

Curriculum

Resources:

Learning Activity:

Activity 7.4 helps the students to implement their learning about planning by planning a PBA activity. Students will know when Activity 7.4 is successful when they have clearly integrated into their planning the two most important ideas that are the foundation of PBA:

1. Principles of play (See above in this manual) as:

- ◆ Intentional
- ◆ Inclusive
- ◆ Differentiated
- ◆ Active
- ◆ Fun
- ◆ Choice
- ◆ Child agency

2. Optimal learning through play which:

- ◆ is experienced as joyful
- ◆ helps children find meaning
- ◆ involves active, engaged, minds-on thinking
- ◆ involves iterative thinking e.g. experimentation, hypothesis testing
- ◆ involves social interaction.

Activity 7.4: Planning a PBA activity (80 minutes)

The students first create a one page profile of an imaginary class for which they then plan a 15 minute play activity. The students end by reflecting in a playful way what they have planned.

Purpose:

- ◆ The students use their creativity and imagination
- ◆ The students work together to create a planning form and plan a PBA learning activity for children
- ◆ The students look critically at their planning in terms of implementing a PBA.

Resources:

Copies of the profile template (imaginary class), blank A4 paper. Student's manual

Facilitation:

Small groups: The facilitator:

- ◆ divides the students into small groups according to the age of the children they teach or care for (make sure that a group is not more than 4 students).
- ◆ invites each group to create (in five minutes) a one page profile (description) of an imaginary class the same age as the children they teach or care for using the template.
- ◆ Invites each group to work together for 20 minutes to:
 - ◆ Create a planning form with headings of their choice on a blank A4 paper
 - ◆ Plan a 15 minute play activity for their group of imaginary children that facilitates Exploring Mathematics ELDA 1: Children show awareness of and are responsive to number and counting.
 - ◆ Write up the planned 15 minute play activity on the planning form.

TIPS for the facilitator

Do not spend more than five minutes on the profile activity.

The facilitator can change the curriculum aim to suit the study context

Whole group: The facilitator

- ❖ sticks up three flash cards YES NO MAYBE in three corners of the room
- ❖ asks students one of the following question (in italics below). The students move to the corner that best reflects their answer to the question.
- ❖ follows up after each question by engaging the students in sharing and discussing their answers
- ❖ repeats the process for all the questions:
 - ❖ Is your planned play activity fun for the children? The facilitator invites two or three students who are in the YES and NO corners to share their answers
 - ❖ Is your planned play activity meaningful for the children? Invite students in the YES corner to share how they made their activity meaningful for children.
 - ❖ Does your planned play activity involve the children in active, engaged, minds-on thinking? Invite students in the NO corner to share how they could get the children actively participating? (If there are no students in the NO corner, invite the students in the YES corner to share ideas.)
 - ❖ Does your planned play activity provide children with iterative thinking opportunities to experiment, test ideas, and redo actions. Invite students in the YES corner to share how their play activity engages children in iterative thinking.
 - ❖ Does your planned play activity provide the children with opportunities to be sociable? Invite students in the NO corner to share one way in which their play activity could get the children working and playing together? (If there are no students in the NO corner, invite the students in the YES corner to share ideas)
 - ❖ Does your 15 minute play activity relate to the Principles of play? The facilitator invites two or three students from the YES and MAYBE corners to share one Principle.
- ❖ Provides time after the activity for the students to make changes and/or additions to their planning.
- ❖ Invites the students to make and share copies of their completed planning. The goal is for each student to start building a portfolio of learning activities.

Template for Activity 7.4: Profile of imaginary children

Profile of the children in my early learning setting /group

Name of our group:

Number of children in our class/group:

Age of children:

Children's interests:

Home and community context of the children:

Challenges and barriers to learning:

Opportunities for learning:

Set up for play-based learning

Preparation is at the heart of good teaching, and preparing an interesting, stimulating and playful early learning environment in which children can play to learn is no different.

As teachers, we need to plan play-based learning well, and in order to do so we have to very carefully and deliberately 'set up' or prepare the environment for play. Using a play-based-approach to learning means that the environment itself must encourage and support play as part of the 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 state that opportunities for active play need to be provided for children.

We can think of setting up as being part of a cycle that we follow in preparing a play-based learning environment.

The cycle is: setting up/preparation of the environment, working in it with the children and allowing them to be active partners, observing and reflecting on how well the environment did actually encourage and support play-based learning, and then re-setting up according to the ideas and changes that reflection shows are needed.

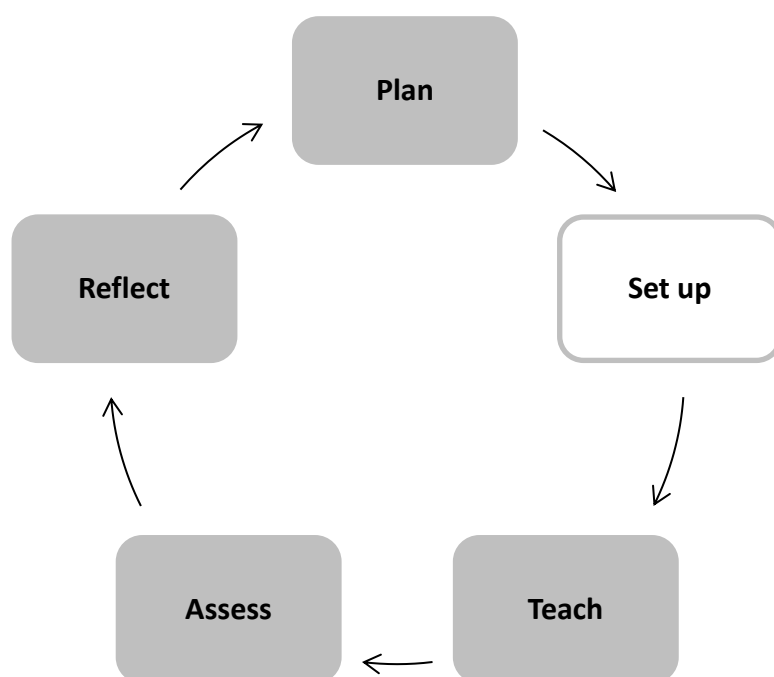


Figure 10: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Set up

We know that the early learning environment is much more than what we see. The quality of teacher-to-child relationships, the quality of experiences that s/he gives children access to, and what the teacher thinks about how learning grows and develops in children, are all in the background of an early learning environment that tries to support play-based learning.

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 s/he sees the children, and how s/he sees her/himself as the facilitator of play-based learning will affect all the ways in which s/he goes about preparing the learning environment.

How teachers see children, what image they have of children is the starting point for play-based learning. A teacher who sees the child as someone who must passively wait for the teacher to engage in anything, who cannot take control of a play situation and direct it, or who cannot make choices about play, for example, 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 facilitate a play-based learning approach.

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 environments 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 teacher'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 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 environment is a direct mirror of the teacher's thinking about children's learning, and about his/her plans for play-based learning.

So, let us say that we want to give children a learning experience based on play, and 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 think about them under the following headings.

- ◆ Physical environment, which includes outdoors as well as indoors
- ◆ The psychological/emotional environment
- ◆ The materials placed in the environment

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

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 shapes the way play happens, and how children direct their play, both inside and outdoors.
- ◆ Set up plays an important role in the way children feel about play, how they behave towards one another, how they communicate with one another in play partnerships, and how they engage in play.
- ◆ All environments available to the child have the possibility to support children's learning, and the outside as well as the inside environment is important to think about.
- ◆ Even when play is 'free', with children taking the initiative as to 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.
- ◆ We need to think about how much the environment should be a reflection of the culture that the child lives in. Research is clear that there are cultural differences in play. While we want to give children the opportunity to extend and explore in many directions in their play, there also needs to be a level of familiarity where children can feel understood and safe.

(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. 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.

3. 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.
4. Different learning spaces can be very useful. Some play activities are better for large groups. Others 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: Creating a PBA environment (30 minutes)

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

They are to think of 5 things they would do to make this environment as welcoming as possible, and to give reasons for their choices. They are to think of furniture, play materials, the arrangement of spaces within the environment, what might be on the walls, and so on. The focus is on 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 both the differences between these designed learning environments, and the similarities from the point of view of the way children might respond emotionally.

Materials, objects, games and resources

1. Play environments should offer materials that are specifically put there to encourage and support a wide range of kinds of play, and possibilities for play. The teacher needs to think carefully about how the materials support and stimulate the thinking, social, emotional, and physical development of children (Catron & Allen, 2007).
2. Accessibility is very important. Can the children easily get to the materials? Can all children in the environment get to these materials? Can the materials be left out over a period of time if the play is an extended activity?
3. We want play materials that encourage engagement, that stimulate and challenge thinking. We want materials that are open and flexible and provide children with many opportunities to be creative, to facilitate social interactions with other children and teachers, and that encourage deep engagement by the children.
4. Careful thought should be given to how many materials are in the environment at any one time. Not having enough and enough different kinds of materials limits children's ability to play, and can lead to boredom. On the other hand, having too many materials can discourage children. Too many confuse children, and make them less capable of learning. Too few and too many materials can both give rise to behaviour difficulties in the learning space. 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.
5. On a practical level, are the materials able to be easily handled by the children? Are they safe? Are they easily put away, stored and cleaned?
6. Changes in the kinds of materials that are available to children also need to be made. New materials need to be rotated into the learning environment to expand children's learning, or encourage a new direction. Those materials that are no longer engaging or interesting for children need to be rotated out.

All of these things, which materials, how many of them, regular changing of materials, the introduction of new materials and removal of old materials is guided by careful observation and reflection on the part of the teacher.

How are the children responding to the materials? Are they excited and interested? How do they use the materials? Is it constructive or not? How long do they play, how do they extend their play with the use of the materials? How are the materials affecting friendships, play partnerships? All these questions can only be answered if the teacher pays close attention to the children at play.

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 pull together all our thinking about how to set up a play-based learning environment, we are going to do a design activity. Before we do so, let us reflect back on the principles of play (See section 4 in this manual). 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 truly and fully set up for play-based learning, we need to see these principles at work in the environment. The environment is what will bring the children into contact with the kinds of experiences and activities that will promote learning in the way that children learn best, through play.

Activity 7.6: Dream space (90 minutes)

This activity now focuses on the set up of a play-based learning environment in terms of how it facilitates 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 most appropriate for their particular context. This is to be a play-based classroom/early learning space. They should think about their ideal space, 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 mental play in itself.

In groups of 3 or 4, they are asked to draw a plan of this dream ECD space 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:
 - ◆ What is in my space(s)?
 - ◆ 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 to have with it? Does it invite and promote engagement?
 - ◆ Where is it? Have I placed it in a particular place, and if so, why?
 - ◆ Who has access to it?
 - ◆ What kind of play do I want to encourage with this material?
 - ◆ 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 using a play-based approach

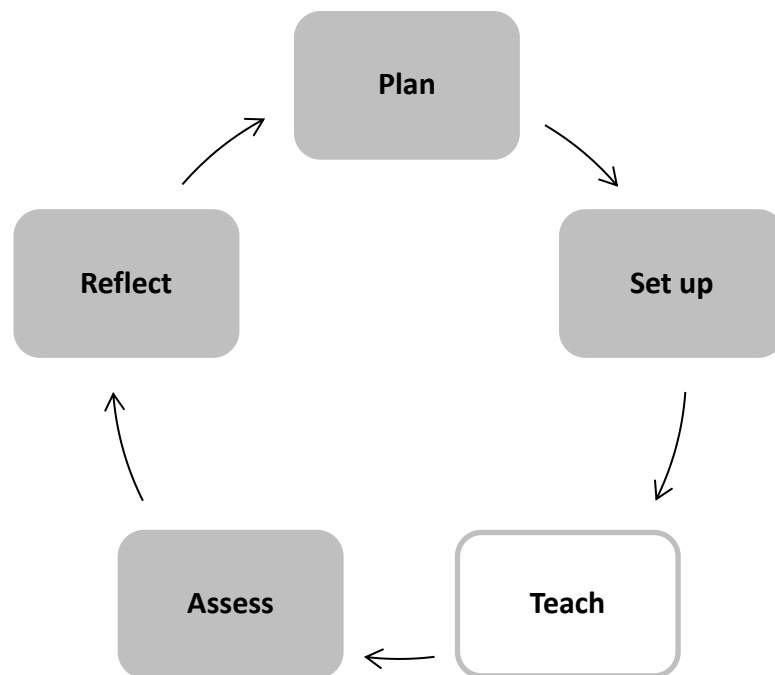


Figure 11: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Teach

This section looks at the ways teachers can encourage children's development and learning through a play-based approach to teaching and learning. We will use the words 'intentional teaching' to describe the role the teacher plays in providing children with the appropriate support to help them proceed to the next level in their learning. You will learn about different teaching strategies that meet the developmental needs of individual children as well as address the content areas of the curriculum that need to be taught and learned.

The intentional teacher

To be intentional is to act purposefully, with a goal in mind and a plan for making it happen (Epstein, 2014)

Intentional teaching means that teachers act with specific outcomes or goals in mind for all domains of children's development and learning (Epstein, 2014)

Teachers who are intentional use a variety of teaching strategies to support children's learning, and are able to explain exactly what they are doing and why they are doing it.

Intentional teachers try to do the following:

- ◆ Plan opportunities for child-initiated/directed and teacher-initiated/directed learning. Sometimes children learn best through their own discoveries and explorations. For some content children learn best from teacher-guided experiences and instruction, such as small group and whole class activities. This is when teachers introduce and model new concepts and skills in a playful way to children. Intentional teachers choose what works best for the curriculum item that is to be taught, as well as the individual learning needs of the children in their group. All planned activities should be playful and meaningful to the child.

- ◆ Understand what each child knows and can do. The developmental levels of the different children who the teacher is working with are matched to the planned activities to help children move to the next level of development.
- ◆ Are guided by curriculum goals. The teacher knows the goals and concepts that need to be taught as they are set out in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for the Foundation Phase and the South African National Curriculum Framework for Children Birth to Four Years (NCF). The teacher also has plans for both individual and group experiences for the children so as to meet these learning goals.
- ◆ Use different teaching strategies. Learning does not just happen. The teacher's role is to use a number of different teaching strategies that advance children's learning to the next level. How teachers interact with the children should be linked to learning goals and the skills to be taught and learned.

The sections that follow explore play-based teaching strategies that support children's learning and development.

Activity 7.7: Intentional teaching (20 minutes)

Explain that this session will focus on the important role that the teacher plays in supporting and extending children's learning through play.

Preparation

- ◆ Make a red arrow and a blue arrow.
- ◆ Make small cards with the following words written on them:

Red cards	Bluecards
Play	Teaching
Child – directed	Teacher – directed
Unstructured	Structured

- ◆ Find an open area in the training room or outdoors. Place the arrows next to each other, pointing outwards. Tell participants that you are going to show them a red card or a blue card. They should choose the teaching strategy they prefer and follow the arrow.
- ◆ Hold up the PLAY and TEACHING card and let participants choose and follow the arrow. Ask a few participants from each group to give reasons for their choices.
- ◆ Continue in this way with the CHILD-DIRECTED and the TEACHER-DIRECTED cards, and finally the UNSTRUCTURED and STRUCTURED cards.

If it is not possible to physically do this activity, hold up the cards and have participants raise their hands according to their preferences.

After the activity, debrief, and then ask:

- ◆ Does it have to be one or the other? Why? Why not?
- ◆ Remind participants that the play-based approach includes BOTH free play activities initiated and directed by the child, as well as guided play activities, initiated and directed by the teacher. What is important is that the teacher thinks about how best

to promote children's development and learning, and then carefully chooses the best strategies for this learning.

- ◆ Introduce the term 'intentional teacher' and explain that an intentional teacher acts with specific goals in mind for children's development and learning, and uses many different strategies to accommodate the children's needs. Use the information above to explain the role of the intentional teacher in play-based teaching and learning.

Activity 7.8: Child-directed or teacher-directed? (45 minutes)

- ◆ Read the following description of a 'play' scenario in which a teacher sets up a travel agency in the fantasy play area with a clear goal: Children who are invited to play at buying and selling holiday trips will learn maths and geography concepts (You can adapt the activity to better meet the teaching and learning context).

Two children are directed to 'work' in the shop and two are to be the customers. As the children make their way to the roleplay area, it is clear that none is willing to play the customer.

Kim (to the teacher): 'Me and Chloe don't want to be in the travel shop'.

The teacher says they have to stay there. Chloe and Kim stand in the shop but refuse to join in the play ... Lauren comes into the shop and Chloe says, 'We don't want to be here, it's boring.'

Lauren: 'Well, come out then'.

Chloe: 'We're not allowed'.

Divide participants into small groups and ask them to discuss:

- ◆ Why do you think the children behaved in this way?
 - ◆ Who initiated the activity?
 - ◆ Who controlled the activity?
 - ◆ What choices did the children have?
 - ◆ Do you think this is play-based teaching and learning? Why or why not?
 - ◆ What role could the teacher have played in this activity?
 - ◆ How could you have adapted the activity to make it more playful and attractive to the children?
- ◆ One person from each group reports back on their ideas. Discuss how children's choices are often controlled by the teacher – as in this scenario – and highlight the importance of children initiating and directing their own play during free play times. Discuss what might have happened if children had been able to initiate and direct this play scenario.

The ZPD in practice

You have learned about Vygotsky and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (See Section 5 in this manual) . The teaching and learning focused within each child's ZPD needs to be challenging enough for the child to learn new skills or behaviours.

- ◆ When learning is too easy, children will practice what they already know and become bored.
- ◆ When learning is too difficult, children may become frustrated, feel that they are not good enough, or just give up.

Understanding each child's ZPD is important for planning guided learning opportunities in the ECD setting.

- ◆ **Groups of children.** The curriculum standards of the NCF and the Foundation Phase CAPS describe the competences that children need to develop and they set goals for different age groups. Guidance is given on the types of activities that can be used to meet these goals. The teacher uses these as well as her own ongoing observation and assessment of her children to plan play experiences for them.
- ◆ **Individual children.** Observing children as they play during the planned activities helps the teacher to understand what each child knows and can do, and to identify the differences in the ZPDs of each child in her group.

Scaffolding learning

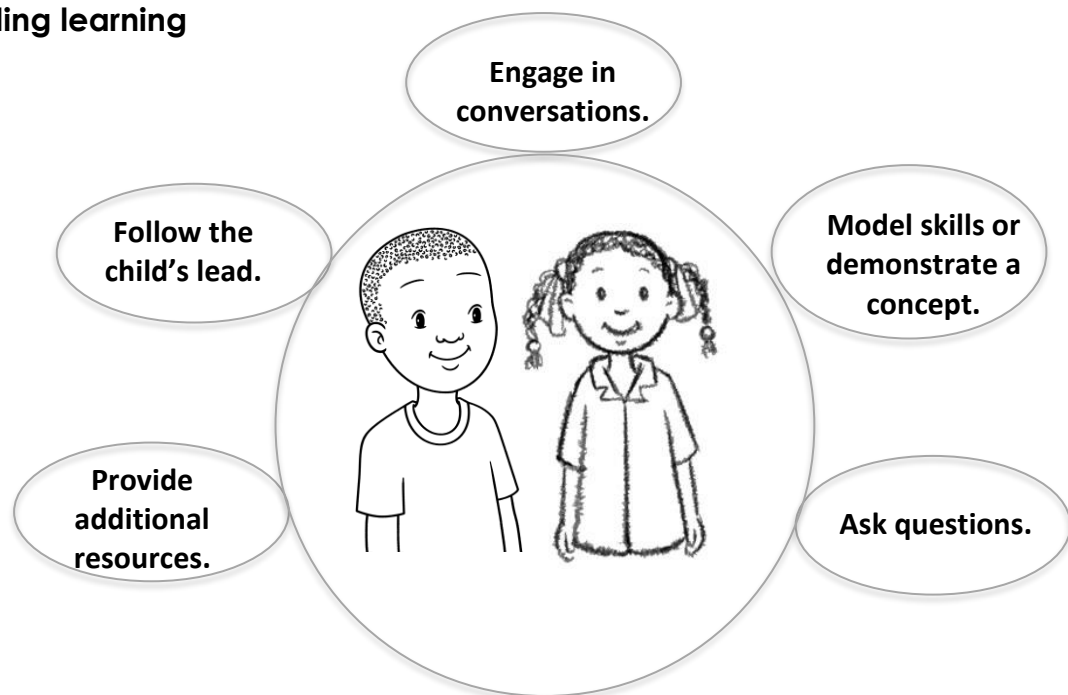


Figure 12: Scaffolding learning

To apply the ZPD in teaching and learning, teachers support and guide children through a strategy called scaffolding. Based on Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD, Jeremy Bruner, an American psychologist, developed and used the word 'scaffolding' to describe the role of the adult in guiding a child within that child's own ZPD to learn 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 continues, teachers provide support until the child has mastered the skill or concept and can work independently. In the early stages, 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 s/he sees that the child is responding.

Scaffolding works very well when teachers are intentional. They observe and assess children as they play and get to know their individual strengths and abilities, and then plan learning activities that are within children's ZPD. Teachers think about how best to provide children with just the right level of guidance.

There are many different ways that scaffolding can be used to support children's learning. The following suggestions describe how to help scaffold children's learning during everyday activities in the ECD setting.

Follow the child's lead. Remember, in play-based learning child-initiated and child-directed activities are seen as important and useful.

- ◆ Before language develops in babies, they provide cues that let their caregivers know what they need and when they are ready to play. Caregivers get to know the babies in their care, and the own special ways of communicating their needs. They try to read the child's cues to understand the child's messages and then put out toys and watch to see if the baby is interested. They respond in a way that encourages the baby to interact further, to play some more.
- ◆ When the intentional teacher joins an older child in a play activity, s/he follows the child's lead and interests. The child will be more motivated to learn from these shared experiences when they enjoy the activity for itself and use the materials in ways that are most meaningful to them. The teacher's role is to challenge the child without giving the child her/his own ideas. The teacher does this by building on what children are doing, encouraging them to share their ideas and problems and inviting them to consider other ideas.

For example, a child is building a castle from sand and water:

"Tell me about what you are making."

"Why do think this part collapsed?"

"Shall we try to build it up again."

"How should we do it?"

"What could you add to the sand to make it hold together better?"

What happened?"

"What did you find out?"

Teachers often find it difficult not to step in and finish the child's task, but remember that we want children to solve their own problems. Give them time to try out their ideas, even if we as teachers know that they might not work.

Engage in conversations. A conversation between two people involves one person speaking while the other person listens and responds appropriately. Conversation is the basis for children's learning, and how teachers talk and listen to children makes a difference to their thinking and learning. By having conversations with children, teachers can promote thinking and understanding of concepts. Some good ways of having conversations with children are:

- ◆ Describe what you see the child doing.
- ◆ Wait for the child to respond.
- ◆ Encourage the child to explain their ideas.
- ◆ Don't interrupt.
- ◆ Introduce the language the child needs to learn new concepts or to talk about what s/he is doing.
- ◆ Don't overload the child with too much information.
- ◆ Ask questions that relate to what the child is doing and saying.

Ask questions. Questioning is a good way of scaffolding in a play-based approach. Good questions support the child's efforts in problem-solving and understanding, and helps teachers to find out what children are thinking and already know. There are different kinds of questions teachers can ask children:

- ◆ **Closed questions.** These are questions that simply ask for information and can usually be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no', or one or two words. Closed questions are useful for assessing understanding of a concept, e.g.
 - ◆ Are you happy or sad?
 - ◆ What is this food called?
 - ◆ What shapes do you see?
 - ◆ Do you have more long sticks or more short sticks?

Closed questions are also appropriate to use with young children who are just starting to use and understand language, e.g.

- ◆ Is it a cat?
 - ◆ Is it red or blue?
- ◆ **Open-ended questions.** These are questions that do not have one correct answer. There are many possible answers. Open-ended questions stimulate higher level thinking and encourage problem-solving. For example:
 - ◆ What do you think will happen?
 - ◆ Why do you think that happened?
 - ◆ How can you find out?
 - ◆ Is there another way to do it?
 - ◆ What do you need to do?
 - ◆ If

Open-ended questions often start with ‘Why...?’ or ‘How...?’

Make sure that when you ask questions you give children time to think about their answers.

Model skills or demonstrate a concept. There will be times when a concept or skill will first need to be demonstrated by the teacher before it can be further explored during other child-directed and teacher-directed activities.

Provide additional resources. The teacher adds new play materials to the existing ones already set out, that still relate to what the children are doing and learning.

Activity 7.9: Scaffolding learning (45 minutes)

Preparation:

- ◆ Before the session, write one of the following scaffolding techniques on a slip of paper for each small group.
 - ◆ Follow the child’s lead.
 - ◆ Engage in conversations.
 - ◆ Ask questions
 - ◆ Model skills or demonstrate a concept.
 - ◆ Provide additional resources
- ◆ Briefly reflect on Vygotsky’s concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the role of the teacher in making sure that teaching and learning is focused within the ZPD (of the group and the individual child). Use the information on Bruner’s theory of scaffolding. Reflect on how teachers need to plan play experiences that are within the child’s ZPD (slightly above the level of what they can do on their own).
- ◆ Explain that participants will now explore some ways in which teachers can scaffold in order to support and extend children’s learning.

Facilitation:

- ◆ Divide participants into small groups and have each group choose one of the slips of paper. Groups discuss examples of this scaffolding technique from their own experiences or those they have observed in the early learning setting , and list these on a sheet of flipchart paper. One person from each group reports back on their ideas. After each group’s feedback add information if needed, using the information given above.
- ◆ Point out that participants may need to ‘unlearn’ some of their current teaching strategies that do not fit in with this approach, and that this requires time and practice.

The activities that follow further explore scaffolding strategies in practice.

Activity 7.10: Follow the child's lead (45 minutes)

Preparation:

- ◆ Provide construction materials for the roleplays.

Facilitation:

- ◆ Introduce this section by saying that the intentional teacher talks about what the child is focused on and responds to their ideas and thinking.
- ◆ View the video clip which shows a teacher interacting with a small group of children as they use a winch to raise objects to the ceiling.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byIL-3W7pAI>
- ◆ After the video discuss the role of the teacher:
 - ◆ How did the teacher respond to and extend the children's ideas?
 - ◆ What questions did s/he ask?
- ◆ Emphasise that following a child's lead is a powerful and meaningful way of interacting with children . Review the example of how a teacher follows the child's lead in the example in the above information note.
- ◆ Participants pair up. Provide each pair with a few items of construction materials. The participants roleplay following the child's lead with one person taking the role of the adult and the other the child. Use the following scenario:
A child is making a fence out of construction materials.
- ◆ Give the pairs about 5 minutes to practise their strategy and then have them switch roles.
- ◆ After the activity, debrief.
- ◆ Summarise by emphasising that this strategy requires teachers to:
 - ◆ Allow the child to lead the play and do what they want to do – and not what the teacher wants them to do (or often does for them!).
 - ◆ Build on the children's interests, use and extend their ideas.

Activity 7.11: Open-ended questions (30 minutes)

Materials:

- ◆ Crayons and paper for drawing
- ◆ Copies of the questions below in this guide, one per participant

Facilitation:

Provide crayons and paper and ask participants to draw a picture of a house.

- ◆ Each participant chooses a partner. Hand out a copy of the questions and explain that participants will take turns to interview their partner about their drawing, using the questions provided.
 - ◆ Did you draw a picture of a house?
 - ◆ Can you tell me what you like about the house you have drawn?
 - ◆ How many rooms are in your house?
 - ◆ How would you get from the sleeping area to the cooking area?
 - ◆ Does the door have four sides?
 - ◆ What colour is the roof?
 - ◆ What do you think would happen if there was no roof?
 - ◆ How are the windows and door the same?
 - ◆ What else could you add to your picture?
 - ◆ How many people live in the house?
- ◆ Participants reflect on whether the interview questions are closed or open-ended questions. Write them on flipchart paper under the headings as each is discussed, as illustrated below:

Open-ended	Closed
Can you tell me what you like about the house you have drawn?	Did you draw a picture of a house?
What do you think would happen if there was no roof?	How many rooms are in your house?

- ◆ Participants take turns to interview one another.
- ◆ After the activity, invite participants to share examples of their responses to the questions.
- ◆ Ask participants to explain the difference between open-ended and closed questions.
 - ◆ 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.
- ◆ Discuss the value of each questioning technique using the information in the above note. Reflect on how questioning is an important scaffolding technique and that asking open-ended questions provides opportunities for children to engage in higher order thinking skills because they need to think beyond a one-word answer.

- ◆ Divide participants into small groups and give each group an appropriate toy or play item according to the ages of the children they are working with. Groups complete the following task:
 - ◆ Discuss and write down the kinds of questions you would ask children to help them move to the next level in their learning.
 - ◆ Prepare a roleplay to demonstrate to the rest of the class how you would scaffold a child's learning, using these types of questions. Choose someone in your group to play the role of the teacher and the rest of the group will play the roles of the children.
 - ◆ Groups take turns to present their roleplays. Reflect on what happened after each presentation and encourage all participants to give constructive suggestions and ideas. Point out that using questions as a way of scaffolding requires plenty of practice.

Activity 7.12: Let's practise scaffolding (60 minutes)

- ◆ Explain that this activity will provide an opportunity for participants to put into practice what they have learned about strategies to scaffold children's play.
- ◆ Provide an overview of how a teacher has planned to meet the following goal from the Exploring Mathematics Early Learning and Development Area (ELDA) for children: *Children sort, classify, make comparisons and solve problems.*

Divide participants into small groups and give each group one of the scenarios below.

Scenario 1

Planning for fantasy play, the teacher intentionally sets out a variety of clothes for people of different ages, e.g. a baby, a child, adult clothing.

Plan a roleplay to demonstrate how the teacher would scaffold learning and development as the children play.

Scenario 2

Planning a sorting activity, the teacher sets out a variety of pictures of clothing and a sorting tray with different compartments.

Plan a roleplay to demonstrate how the teacher would scaffold learning and development as the children play.

Scenario 3

Planning a teacher-directed small group activity the teacher provides a box of children's clothes for all types of weather. S/he brings pictures of different kinds of weather according to the weather chart, e.g. sun, wind, cloudy, rain.

Plan a roleplay to demonstrate how you would scaffold learning and development as the children play.

Scenario 4

Planning a structured whole class activity the teacher displays different kinds of clothing such as shorts, dresses, T-shirts, jerseys and boots. Together with the children, the teacher makes a chart of how many children are wearing each item.

Plan a roleplay to demonstrate how the teacher would scaffold learning and development as the children play.

- ◆ Before the groups begin the task, review the scaffolding strategies that have been discussed previously. Tell them that you expect that groups should demonstrate at least some of the following:
 - ◆ Following the child's lead
 - ◆ Active listening
 - ◆ Engaging in conversations
 - ◆ Questioning techniques
 - ◆ Modelling and demonstrating
 - ◆ Providing additional resources
 - ◆ Give groups time to discuss and prepare their roleplays.
 - ◆ Groups present their roleplays.
 - ◆ After the groups have presented their roleplays, discuss the different strategies used as a large group.
 - ◆ Comment on the roles of the teacher and the children:
 - ◆ Who initiated?
 - ◆ Who directed?
 - ◆ What did the teacher do?
 - ◆ How did the child/ren respond?
 - ◆ Emphasise that these scaffolding techniques are skills that require plenty of practice.
- Summarise the main points from the session and clear up anything that requires further explanation.

Assessing in a play-based approach

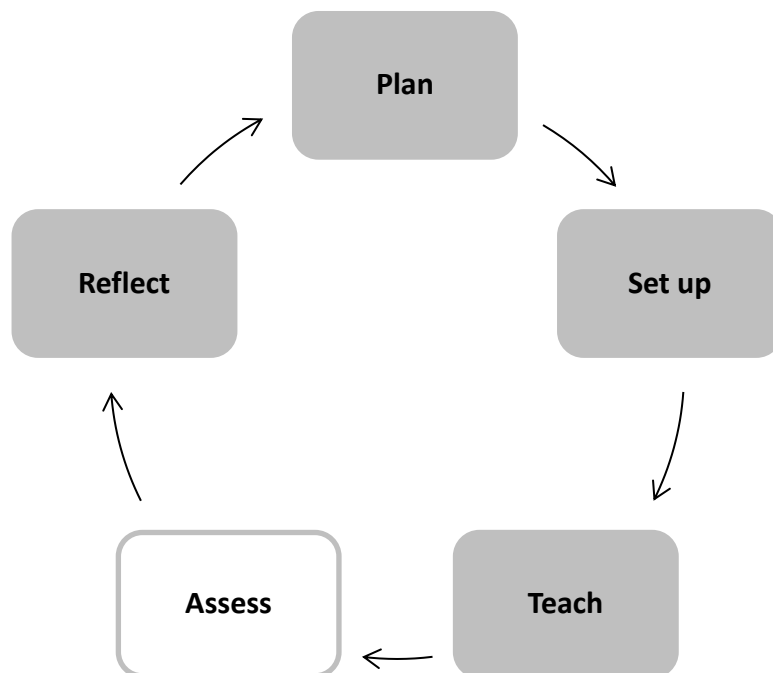


Figure 13: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Assess

Play-based assessment

Assessment helps teachers to recognise children's progress and is a very important part of learning and development. In play-based assessment, the teacher brings together evidence of learning and development during daily programme activities as children play and learn. Teachers and caregivers observe and document what happens in the children's natural setting, during planned activities as well as other play activities that happen as children play and demonstrate their learning. This gives teachers and caregivers the information they need to plan for the next steps in learning and to meet the individual needs of the children in their care.

Play-based assessment

- ◆ depends on a stimulating learning environment
- ◆ provides information on how each child is progressing in all areas of development
- ◆ tells the teacher more about how children learn
- ◆ helps the teacher to plan ways to best support each child's learning
- ◆ helps teachers to notice things about children who may need support or help in their development
- ◆ does not put children in a testing situation
- ◆ makes sure that the play-based environment and materials reflect children's homes and own experiences so that a true picture of the child's abilities can be obtained.

There are many different ways to assess children and every ECD setting will have their own assessment system. However the teacher chooses to assess children, remember that assessment should be carried out as children play and learn. Thinking about what the teacher wants to know about the children before s/he observes will help him/her to decide on the best way to gather information needed through watching children play.

For example:

- ◆ Assessments of babies are usually done as the caregivers interact with each baby. They may plan games to find out how babies explore and investigate.
- ◆ Assessments of specific skills such as physical skills can be done by setting up an obstacle course outdoors and observing how children move along it.
- ◆ To learn more about children's understanding of a concept, the teacher might plan a play-based small group activity and focus on a few children (no more than three or four children) to observe as they play with learning materials and respond to questions.

Teachers are often unclear about how to assess play-based learning. 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.

Teachers and caregivers should remember that children come from different families and cultures and must be aware that the assessment tool indicators may not consider some cultural expectations or practices. It is therefore important to get as much information as possible from families about their childrearing practices and what their children do at home so that the teacher can get a full understanding of the child.

Activity 7.13: What is play-based assessment? (45 minutes)

- ◆ Ask participants to find a partner and share a memory (positive or negative) they have of being tested at school and how the experience made them feel.
- ◆ In the large group invite participants to share some of their experiences. Tell participants that testing does not work well with young children, and brainstorm why not. List the responses on the flip-chart or board. Answers might include:
 - ◆ Testing can cause anxiety and stress and children may not perform well.
 - ◆ Skills are tested in isolation (out of a natural context) with little meaning attached.
 - ◆ A test may not show emerging skills that are just starting to develop over time.
 - ◆ Children may feel a sense of failure.
- ◆ Ask:
 - ◆ What is the best way to collect information about (assess) young children's knowledge and skills?
- ◆ Play the video of Gabby and Nicholas which shows the two toddlers engaging with one another as they play:
http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/RMVideoSeries_PracticingObservation.htm
- ◆ Then discuss:
 - ◆ What physical skills did you observe?
 - ◆ What social skills did you observe?
 - ◆ What cognitive skills did you observe?
- ◆ Emphasise that most of the assessment information that we need can be acquired as children play and interact during the daily programme.

Why do we observe?

Both CAPS and the NCF have identified that observation is the main way to gather information about children's learning. Through observation we learn about each child's development and use this information to:

- ◆ track children's progress over time in all developmental domains (physical, social, emotional, cognitive, language and communication)
- ◆ better understand how each child learns best
- ◆ find out how each child is meeting the curriculum goals in order to plan learning experiences that support learning and development
- ◆ identify any children who are not progressing as they should
- ◆ communicate with families about their children's development and learning.

Observing objectively

Observations about the children in your care should be factual, accurate and objective (exactly what you see and hear yourself). It is important that you do not allow your own opinions, biases or assumptions to influence what you observe, as this may effect your observation in a negative way.

- ◆ Write down the facts. What is the child doing? What are they saying?
 - ◆ "Juliet is sitting at the table, doing a puzzle. She has placed five pieces together. She is holding one piece and trying to find where to place it."
- ◆ Think about whether someone else observing would describe the child's behaviour in the same way. For example, two observers might interpret the behaviour differently:
 - ◆ "Juliet can't finish the puzzle. The remaining pieces are just lying on the table"
 - ◆ "Juliet has sorted the remaining puzzle pieces according to their colour so that she can join the pieces together that are the same colour."
- ◆ Do not make assumptions. Do not write what you think is happening about what the child can or cannot do, or how you think the child is feeling. You may miss things that do not fit with your opinion.
 - ◆ "Juliet can't do the puzzle. She is confused and frustrated and is trying to force the piece to fit."
- ◆ Describe what you see and hear in as much detail as possible. This will help you to identify the child's achievements and needs as accurately as possible.
 - ◆ "Anathi is lying on his back on the mat. He rolls over from his back to his tummy and reaches for the rattle next to him. He rolls back over onto his back and shakes the rattle up and down with one hand. He makes sounds ba-ba-ba-ba, with a big smile on his face."
- ◆ Be aware of your own biases. You may have different expectations for girls and boys, or you may assume that a child with a special educational need or disability is at a disadvantage. It is important not to jump to conclusions and give each child the same consideration.

It is important to remember that children come from different families and cultures and that every family and culture is unique and special in its own way. When using the assessment tool be aware that the indicators may not consider some cultural expectations or practices. For example, not all families may value independence or initiative as behaviours they would like to see in their children; or there may be different expectations for boys and girls. Views will differ on temperament, behaviour management and expressing feelings. Once again, you can see the importance of gathering as much information as possible from families about their childrearing practices and what their children do at home.

How do we observe?

- ◆ **Choose which children you want to observe.** All children in the ECD setting need to be observed regularly as they play, and daily observations need to be built into your schedule. It is important to plan these observations so that you can set aside the time during your busy day. At the beginning of each term work out a roster of the children you will observe every week to ensure that all the children are observed as often as possible. For example, if you observe 2 children for 5 to 10 minutes a day, you will be able to observe them a few times each term to build up a picture of their development. The fewer children there are in your care, the more frequent your observations can be.
- ◆ **Decide on what will be observed.** Each observation should have a focus and you need to know what skills and behaviours you will be looking for in relation to the assessment tool indicators. This will guide you to choose a setting and play activities and materials where children will be able to use a skill or demonstrate a behaviour
- ◆ **Think about how you will observe.** There are many different ways of observing children and every ECD setting will have their own system for organising their observations. However you choose to observe children, remember that observations should be carried out as children play and learn. Think about what you want to know about the children – this will help you decide on the best way to gather information. For example:
 - ◆ Observations of babies are usually done as you interact with each baby. You may play a hide-and-seek game to find out how baby explores and investigates.
 - ◆ If you want to find out how children communicate with one another, you might observe them during pretend play activities.
 - ◆ You may want to find out how children are developing a specific skill such as balancing, and set up a balance beam outdoors to observe children as they move along it.
 - ◆ To learn more about children's understanding of a concept, you might plan a small group activity and focus on a few children (no more than three or four children) to observe as they interact with learning materials and respond to questions.
 - ◆ You may decide to focus on the skills and concepts children develop in the learning areas you have set up, rotating to a different learning area every day.

- ◆ **Interview children.** Asking children questions and recording what they say and do is an important observation strategy. As you interact with children, listen to what they say and think of possible questions you can ask children to demonstrate their understanding. Be sure to give children ample time to response to questions.
 - ◆ Closed questions ask for information and are useful for checking if children have understood something. They are usually answered with one or two words. For example: “Is this a tall glass or a short glass?”
 - ◆ Open-ended questions have a number of possible answers, and are useful for gathering information about children’s level of understanding, thinking skills and ability to solve problems. They often start with “Why?” and “How?” For example, “How could you make your paint thicker?”
- ◆ **Be prepared.** Keep a notepad and pen with you so that they are ready when you need to jot something down.
- ◆ **Observe over time and in different settings.** Evidence of development and learning cannot be based on a single observation. It is important to observe what skills and concepts develop over time and in different learning situations. Plan to observe at different times of the day, during free play activities indoors and outdoors, during group times and routine times, and as children move from one activity to another. Observe children as they are alone, with other children and with adults. Listen to children as they ask questions and talk to others.
- ◆ **Be prepared for spontaneous learning experiences.** There will be things that children do and say during the daily activities that you think are important and need to be recorded. Keep a notepad nearby to make a note of these incidents.

Activity 7.14: Observation in play-based assessment (45 minutes)

- ◆ Explain that the Foundation Phase CAPS and the National Curriculum Framework for Children Birth to Four Years have identified observation as the main tool for assessment of children.
- ◆ Brainstorm:
 - ◆ What can we learn through our observations of children as they play?
 - ◆ List participants' ideas on flipchart paper or the board.
 - ◆ Make the point that observing children to identify aspects of their development for purposes of assessment needs to be accurate and factual, as the decisions they make based on their observations will influence each child's development and learning.
 - ◆ Explain that participants will view a video and they should write down exactly what they see and hear happening on a sheet of paper. Participants view a video clip of Michael builds a castle, which shows a child problem-solving as he builds his block structure:

http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/rmvideoserries_practicingobservation2

- ◆ Replay the video if participants need more time to record their observations. After watching the video let the participants take turns to call out their descriptions of what they saw happening. Write down the sentences exactly as they are called out on the flip-chart or board.
- ◆ Explain that an important observation skill is to observe objectively and that this requires our observations to be factual and accurate, and that we should not allow our own opinions, biases and assumptions to influence what we observe.
- ◆ Go back to the list of observations and review each description. Identify whether it was factual by writing an "F" or an opinion by writing an "O" alongside each sentence. Discuss how descriptions that are opinions or assumptions could be changed so that they are factual.

For example:

- ◆ Michael puts three blocks on top of one long block to make a support. F
- ◆ Michael is frustrated because the blocks all fell down. O

Reflection as part of the play-based approach

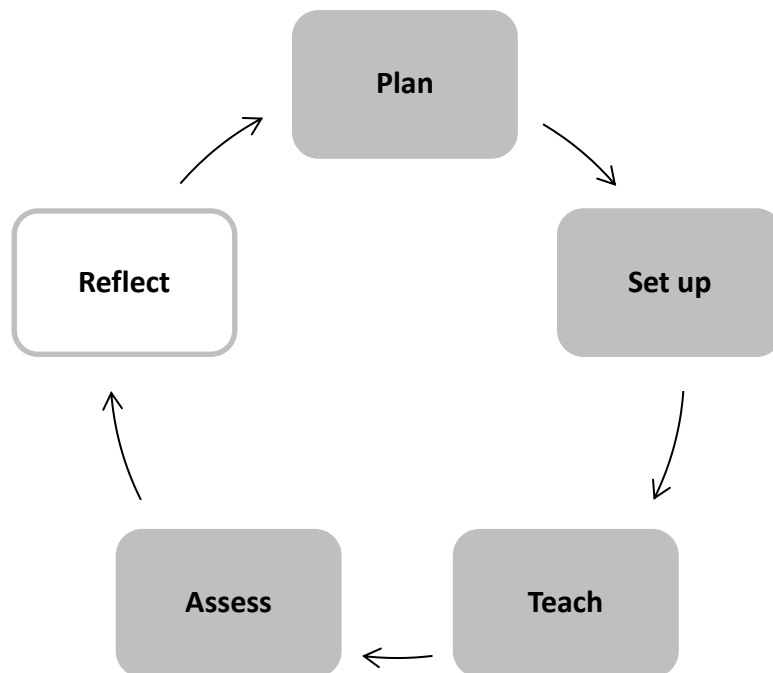


Figure 14: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Reflect

Purpose

To introduce participants to effective ways to use reflective practice in play-based teaching and learning.

Learning outcomes

- ◆ Describe reflective teaching and its importance for play-based teaching.
- ◆ Strengthen reflective practice skills for teaching and assessment.
- ◆ Use the experiential learning cycle continuously for teaching and assessment practice.

What is a reflective teacher?

An intentional teacher often reflects carefully and critically on their teaching and assessment to

- ◆ decide if they have met the goals for the children in their group
- ◆ learn about individual children's developmental needs
- ◆ identify concerns and think about some kinds of intervention for the child(ren)
- ◆ plan learning experiences that will best support children's development.

When teachers take time to reflect on their planned activities, they are better able to understand

- ◆ how each child is progressing in their development
- ◆ what developmental tasks children are working on
- ◆ the next step in the children's learning
- ◆ if there is anything about any child that the teacher needs to be concerned about

The experiential learning cycle

Reflective teaching is an ongoing process of reflection and action that helps teachers to better understand how and why things have happened with the children in their class the way they did, and then to think of ways to do things differently, and try these ideas out to see if they work.

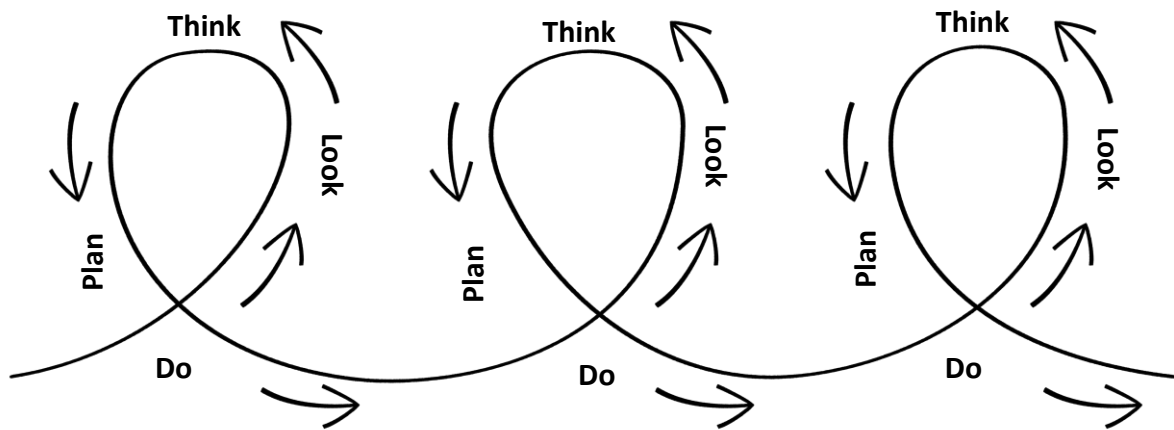


Figure 15: Experiential learning cycle

Teachers plan and do play-based learning and assessment experiences and then ask themselves what happened, and why. This gives the teacher good ideas about what the way forward might be for the children and where they need to go from there. Teachers must make the reflection process an essential part of their teaching practice all the time. This means that the teacher needs to make time to:

- ◆ **Do.** The teacher plans and implements a play- based learning experience to meet learning goals.

For example, the teacher plans a creative art activity for the toddlers in the group. S/he sets out art materials and a few children come to the table. S/he tells them that s/he will hand out the crayons and that they are to draw a dog. S/he 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.

- ◆ **Look.** After the activity, the teacher looks at what is happening / happened to understand the learning that took place.

- ◆ What materials did the child or children use?
- ◆ How were the materials used?
- ◆ What did children do and say?
- ◆ What concepts or skills were demonstrated?
- ◆ Were all the children able to participate and complete the activity?
- ◆ How was learning scaffolded?
- ◆ Was the activity too easy or too difficult?
- ◆ Were the objectives met? How do you know?
- ◆ Did the children learn in other ways to those planned?

“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.”

- ◆ **Think.** The teacher thinks about why things happened the way they did.
 - ◆ What worked well?
 - ◆ What didn't work well? Why do you think this was?
 - ◆ If some children did not understand the concept/skill being learned why do you think this was?
 - ◆ Could other play materials have been used?
 - ◆ Was there enough variation in the play materials?
 - ◆ Could you have scaffolded the learning differently?
 - ◆ How could you change things so that they do work well?
 - ◆ “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. I can now see that 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.”
- ◆ **Plan.** The teacher plans the next play-based activities and the next assessment activities using what s/he has learned in her looking and thinking.
 - ◆ What materials and activities will build on this learning experience?
 - ◆ Which learning goals should be focused on next?

“ I will set out a variety of crayons and paper and let the children choose their materials, so that they can create their own pictures.”

Activity 7.15: Experiential learning cycle (30 minutes)

Materials

- ◆ Drawing materials and paper

Facilitation

- ◆ Divide participants into small groups and provide drawing materials for each group.
- ◆ Ask participants to think of an experience when they learned something important by looking back at what had happened. Each participant draws this event on a sheet of paper. Participants take turns to describe the experience with the group members.
- ◆ In the large group, invite participants to share a few examples and discuss how they learned.
- ◆ Introduce the experiential learning cycle by drawing it on flipchart paper and explaining each loop. Use one of the examples generated by the group in the previous discussion. Ask participants to look at their drawings and discuss the experiential learning cycle that they think occurred in their own experiences.

- ◆ Discuss what would happen if we did not reflect on our experiences (For example, we would probably make the same mistakes over and over again).
- ◆ Explain that reflective practice is an important aspect of intentional teaching and assessment. Ongoing reflection helps teacher to understand how children are progressing as well as improves their own teaching practice.

Activity 7.16: Overview of PBA cycle (30 minutes)

View the following video clip in which Lilly who is 6 months old is just learning to crawl and is moving around and exploring the environment. Participants will reflect on the developmental tasks Lilly is working on as she plays and interacts with the people around her, and use this information to help them plan more activities for Lilly.

http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/rmvideoserries_practicingobservation

After the video participants return to their groups to discuss their observations and respond to the following questions:

1. What play materials did Lilly use?
2. How did she use them?
3. What developmental skills or behaviours did you observe?
4. What physical skills did Lilly use?
5. Did Lilly communicate with the caregiver and other child? How? Give an example.
6. Did Lilly problem-solve? How? Give an example or a description.
7. What role did the caregiver play in supporting Lilly's development? Explain why you think this was helpful or not helpful?
8. What skills and behaviours do you think Lilly still needs to work on? Why?
9. What do you think is the next step in her learning?
10. What play activities and materials can you plan to support Lilly's learning?

Groups take turns to report back.

Summarise by reviewing the above list of questions that teachers can ask in each stage of the experiential cycle to help them reflect on their teaching and to make informed decisions about the children and the programme.

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8. 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).⁵

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)⁶ 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 to prominence of socio-cultural developmental theorists, of whom Lev Vygotsky (1978)⁷ 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 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

⁵ 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.

⁶ Piaget, J. (1951) Play, dreams and imagination in childhood. London: Routledge

⁷ Vygotsky LS (1978) Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

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)⁸ 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).⁹

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.¹⁰ A balanced approach including whole and small group instruction as well as free choice time was found to be most effective (Jenkins &

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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>

¹⁰ 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.

Duncan, 2017)¹¹. 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).¹²

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)¹³ 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.

¹¹ 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

¹² 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. Cited in Jenkins & Duncan (2017)

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 (2017)

¹³ 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 play¹⁴

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.

¹⁴ 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),¹⁵ 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)¹⁶ 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.

The Programme for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education (PIECCE)¹⁷ 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

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Department of Higher Education and Training (2015) Revised Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications. Pretoria

¹⁷ 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.

development of support materials for qualifications for early childhood education¹⁸ and so address this gap. PIECCE focuses on qualifications for those working with children 0 – 4 years.

What is play?

While 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 it is enjoyable, intrinsically motivated, actively engaging and valued as a process rather than an outcome (Brooker & Woodhead, 2013)¹⁹. Learning through play experiences are said to be characteristically joyful, meaningful, actively engaging, iterative and socially interactive (Zosh, Hopkins, Jensen et al 2017)²⁰.

Neuroscience helps us understand how playful experiences enhance learning. Lui and colleagues (2017)²¹ 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.

Types of play

Developmental psychologists commonly distinguish five types of play

- ◆ physical play
- ◆ play with objects
- ◆ symbolic play
- ◆ pretend play and
- ◆ games with rules

¹⁸ 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)

¹⁹ Brooker, L. & Woodhead, M. (2009). The right to play. Early Childhood in Focus 9. Milton Keynes: The Open University.

²⁰ 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.

²¹ 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.

Each of these takes different forms at the different stages of development and is a vehicle for learning. **Physical play** starts early and from the second year of life children are engaged in exercise play and rough and tumble. **Play with objects** begins when infants can grasp objects and investigates them by mouthing, dropping, batting, shaking. As they mature this evolves into constructing and making things. **Symbolic play** 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 **pretend play** from about a year and this evolves into elaborate games involving others as they get older. **Games with rules** 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)²² 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 situations. 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 was evidence that it may impact on social development,²³ is one way of developing reasoning skills and links to executive functioning and self-regulation.²⁴ Games with rules, especially number and linear number sequence, lead to improvements in mathematics/numeracy ability. Physical games with rules have been shown to help children adapt to formal schooling.

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 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

²² 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.

²³ 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. Cited in Whitebread et al. (2017)

²⁴ 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. Citations in Whitebread et al. (2017)

many other societies.” (In particular the)... notion that freely chosen play will promote academic achievement can seem nonsensical” (Marfo & Biersteker, 2011).²⁵

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)²⁶ 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 (Ngaisake & Swadener, 2019; Dawes & Biersteker, 2011; Swart et al, 1996).²⁷

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)²⁸ 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 more developing countries.²⁹ Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009)³⁰ analysing play

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ Lancy, David F. (2012). The chore curriculum. Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology Faculty Publications. Paper 574. https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/sswa_facpubs/574

²⁷ 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 Development Work*, 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.

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ Roopnarine, J., Johnson, J, Quinn, S, Patte, M (2018) International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education New York: Routledge.

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)³¹ and similar findings have been seen in India (Gupta, 2011)³², Hong Kong (Cheng, 2011) and China (Wang & Lam, 2017)³³.

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)³⁴ 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 with a particular learning

³⁰ Pramling-Samuelsson, I. & Fler, M. (2009) Commonalities and distinctions across countries. In I Pramling-Samuelsson and M. Fler (Eds). *Play and learning in early childhood. International Perspectives*, pp 173 – 190. Springer Science & Business Media

³¹ 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>

³² 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.

³³ 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.

³⁴ 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.

objective. Edwards and Cutter- Mackenzie (2013)³⁵ 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.

Cutter Mackenzie and Edwards' (2013)³⁶ 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.

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)³⁷ 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 children with opportunities for creativity, social interactions with peers and adults and deep engagement.

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).³⁸ As Dockett (2011) notes the specific skill expected to be

³⁵ 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

³⁶ 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

³⁷ Whitebread, D. (2012) *ibid*

³⁸ Gupta, A (2011). Play and pedagogy framed within India's historical, socio-cultural, pedagogical and post colonial context. In S. Rogers (ed) *Rethinking play and pedagogy in*

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 and 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 kindergarten³⁹ 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)⁴⁰ observes that though the move 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 DeLuca⁴¹ 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.

early childhood education. Concepts, contexts and cultures. Pages 86 -99. Oxford and New York: Routledge.

³⁹ 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

⁴⁰ 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

⁴¹ 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. Cited in DeLuca (2018)

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.

Appendix 2: Annotated bibliographies

KEY: ECD NQF ④ ⑤

④ ⑤ Brooker, L. & Woodhead, M. (2013). **The right to play. Early Childhood in Focus 9. The Open University.** Accessible at <https://bernardvanleer.org/publications-reports/the-right-to-play/> (52 pages)

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.

④ ⑤ 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.

④ ⑤ Lee, 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.

④ ⑤ ⑥ National Childhood Network(no date). Aistear learning and developing through play. Ireland: National Childhood Network. (19 pages)

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.

④ ⑤ ⑥ New Foundland, Labrador Education and Early Childhood Development (2016) Full –Day Kindergarten Play-Based Learning: Promoting a Common Understanding. Canada. Accessible at ? (76 pages)

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.

⑤ ⑥ Epstein, A.(2007). The intentional teacher: choosing the best strategies for young children’s learning. Washington DC. National Association for the Education of Young Children. (Chapter 1, 8 pages)

This chapter explains the idea of intentional or purposeful teaching which aims at supporting children towards particular outcomes for development and learning, both academic (literacy and numeracy and more general developmental domains (social emotional, cognitive, creative, physical). It presents the case for a combination of child- and adult-guided learning experiences depending on when each is more likely to be effective for the particular content and individual children’s needs as assessed by the teacher. Suitable for NQF Levels 5 and 6.

⑤ ⑥ ⑦ Pyle, A. Ed. (2018) Play based learning. Encyclopedia of Early Development. University of Montreal, Canada: Centre of Excellence for Early Child Development.

This is an accessibly written compilation of short papers from leading experts focused on different aspects of play based learning for children up to five years. Each introduces the subject, summarises recent research, identifies gaps and presents implications for policy and practice. Topics include defining play-based learning, the role of make-believe in developing self-regulation, social and cognitive development and play-based learning, how guided play promotes learning, assessment of play-based learning, play and mathematics, digital play and a final paper provides an overall commentary on the subject. The papers provide a brief but informative summary of each topic with additional references for further study. Recommended for NQF Levels 5, 6 and 7.

⑤ ⑥ ⑦ Bodrova, E. & Leong, D. (2015). Vygotskian and post-Vygotskian views on children's play. American Journal of Play, 7, 3 371 – 388.

This article discusses the work of Lev Vygotsky and colleagues have influenced play studies. In particular Vygotsky considered the make-believe play of pre-schoolers and kindergartners as the means by which they overcame the impulsivity of toddlers and developed the intentional behaviour needed for higher mental functioning. Play also has a role in creating the zone of proximal development. The article outlines the theory of play developed by Elkonin based on these ideas. His Psychology of Play identifies ways that play facilitates higher mental functioning and explains the stages of play development. The authors also present recent research based on Vygotskian principles including a decline in play maturity and the need for support for play. They caution against turning play into another teacher-directed activity. This is an extremely useful summary of the Vygotskian approach to play which could be a valuable source of ideas for educators. Suitable for NQF 5, 6 and 7.

⑤ ⑥ ⑦ 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.

This white paper draws on research evidence to make the case for a nuanced view of play as a spectrum in which different types of play free, adult guided or more structured games all play a part in the facilitation of learning. Which is used depends on the particular capacity or skill that is the focus of intentional teaching. For example instruction draws the learner's attention to critical features and addresses misconceptions while scaffolded discovery gives learners practice in applying new strategies and concepts. Using both allows children to develop the deep understanding needed to apply in new situations. In addition seven country case studies (including South Africa) shows how play facilitation or academic content learning practices are applied in different early learning settings and some of the contextual and cultural challenges to realising play facilitation in practice even if it is mandated in policy. The paper identifies a number of areas for further exploration if play facilitation is to become a sustained and practical reality and how this could be adapted to different cultural contexts. Suitable for NQF Levels 5, 6 and 7.

⑤ ⑥ ⑦ Wasik, B.A & Jacobi-Vessels, J. L. (2017) Word Play: Scaffolding Language Development Through Child-Directed Play. Early Childhood Education Journal 45:769–776 DOI 10.1007/s10643-016-0827-5

This article discusses the importance of adults' scaffolding of children's language and especially vocabulary during children's play as the basis for academic learning. It begins with a discussion of the different types of play and adult's role in them including free play and 'scaffold play' in which the adult has a specific learning objective that they are trying to achieve with the child but the child is actively involved in directing the play. While recognising the value of both – free play for creativity and self-regulation, they note that free play tends to be based on ideas and language that children already know. Scaffold play allows for promoting thinking and language development. Drawing on research evidence the authors suggest a number of practical strategies for supporting children's language learning without limiting their thinking and creativity. Accessibly written and applied, this article is suitable for learners at NQF 5, 6 and 7.

