

UNICEF  
Teacher TRAINING Packages

# **Student Guide**

## **NQF Level 5**

Play Learning Materials Consortium (PLMC)

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# 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.

# A. 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.

### Activity: How we learned

Think about something that you remember learning later in your life, as a young adult, or as a grown person. It needs to be something that was important to you. Perhaps you learned a musical instrument. Perhaps you learned to use Word on the computer. Perhaps you learned to grow a vegetable garden. Perhaps you learned another language.

Think about that learning experience, and then 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.	



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.

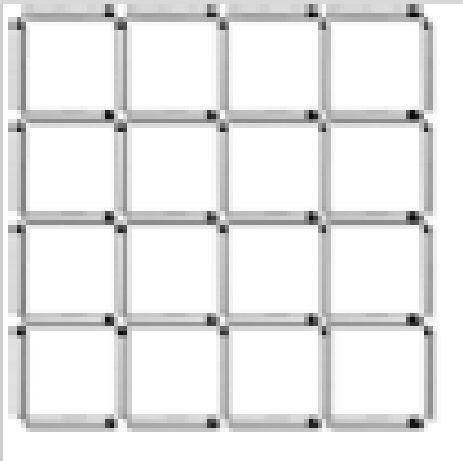
### **Activity: Features of play**

Let's Play!

Get into pairs or groups of three. Your group will get 40 matchsticks. Arrange them in a 4 by 4 square grid (see below).

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.



Answer these questions about the game you 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?
3. Did it require that you actively take part?
4. Was it fun? Did you enjoy yourself while you were doing it?
5. Were you all involved in it, and thinking while you played it?

## B. 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.

These principles 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:

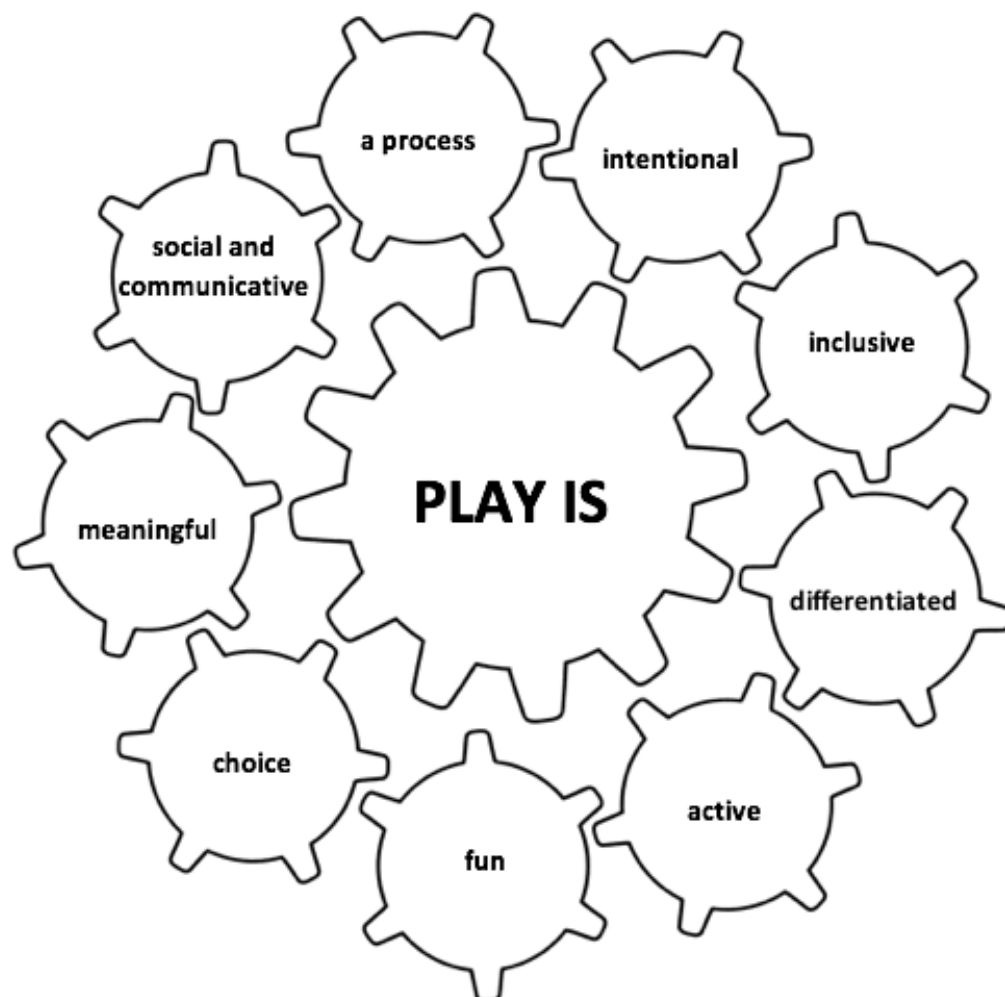
- ◆ That play is intentional (it has a purpose)
- ◆ That play is inclusive, and can be differentiated (changed or modified) to give access to different children
- ◆ That play demands that children be active
- ◆ That play is fun
- ◆ That children often make choices about their play activities
- ◆ That 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.



## 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: Play is fun

We will play the game 'I Spy' which is a well-known children's game.

#### Part One

Play this game as instructed by the facilitator.

Rate it on the 'fun' scale.

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

#### Part Two

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

Then rate the game on the 'fun' scale.

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

#### Part Three

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

Jot down the names of everything that you see around you that contains the chemical element hydrogen.

Rate this on the 'fun' scale.

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

Look at the ratings for fun that you gave the different versions of this game and see:

- if your rating changes with each different game, and
- what changes did you notice, and why did you change them?

The next principle of play is that it has a purpose, and has a goal, it is **intentional**. 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 years old child sitting in the sandpit pushing a small car up and down. While the child might learn something about wheels, it is not very clear what the purpose of this play activity is. But the child who plays with a car and 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: Play is intentional

Get into pairs.

- Each player starts with 2 dice and 5 rocks (or other counters).
- The objective of the game is to capture all of the other player's rocks.
- 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.
- Continue playing until one player has ALL 10 rocks.

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. 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: Play can be differentiated**

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?

### **Activity: Play is meaningful**

Play the game 20 QUESTIONS in one large group.

#### **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: Play is communicative**

A game that requires direct communication is 'Pictionary'.

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:

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: Play allows choice**

Think of a simple, easy game that you played when you were a child that you would choose to play now if you were given a choice.

Briefly describe your game to the group.

Answer these questions:

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

**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.



## Activity: Principles of play

Time to be active!

### Part One

Divide into groups of 4. Each group will get 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

You have 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).

The small groups each present their games to the whole class.

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

Modify your game so that it becomes a game for adults, making sure that the principles of play are still present in the game.

## **C. 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: Defining play

In the following video you will see two children playing with blocks during a free play activity. Observe how the children are interacting and record your observations.

Think about whether or not you think the children are playing.

- ◆ 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?

## 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](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: Characteristics of play

The whole group will play the “Thayma” game, following the facilitator’s instructions.

Think about whether the game you just played 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.

### Small group task:

Divide into small groups according to the age group of the children you teach.

Reflect on the characteristics of play and, using the cardboard box you have been given, design a playful activity for your age group. Remember to think about how children with barriers to learning will also participate.

Plan to demonstrate your activity to the larger group and explain which characteristics of play would be experienced.

## 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.

**Solitary play**



**Parallel play**



**Associative play**



**Cooperative play**



**Stages of play**

### **Activity: How children play with others**

In your group, read the scenario you have been assigned. Discuss:

- ◆ Which type of play you think this is ?
- ◆ Why do you think so?

#### **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 out 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 has just 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.”

In your small group, prepare a roleplay to demonstrate the stage of play you were given. Present your roleplay to the whole group.

## Five 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.

 <p><b>Physical play</b></p>	 <p><b>Play with objects</b></p>	 <p><b>Symbolic play</b></p>	 <p><b>Pretence and socio-dramatic play</b></p>	 <p><b>Games with rules</b></p>
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## Types of play

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: Five types of play**

Divide into five groups.

#### **Part 1:**

Each group stands next to one of the five headings. Each group has a different colour marker and will spend ten minutes writing their ideas and examples of that type of play on the sheet. Groups will rotate to the next sheet and add any new ideas to what the first group wrote until each group has been to all five sheets.

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...

#### **Part 2a:**

Using the materials provided to your group (if any):

1. Choose an age group to focus on.
2. Design a game with rules that you will teach to the larger group.

#### **Part 2b:**

Ajay has poor vision and does not move around too much on his own. Discuss how you would adapt your game so that Ajay can join in.



# 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.



### 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: The right to play

Form a buzz group with 2 or 3 people sitting next to you. Discuss:

- ◆ How do the families of the children in your programme view play?
- ◆ Do they see it as being important to their children's development? Why or why not?

## 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.

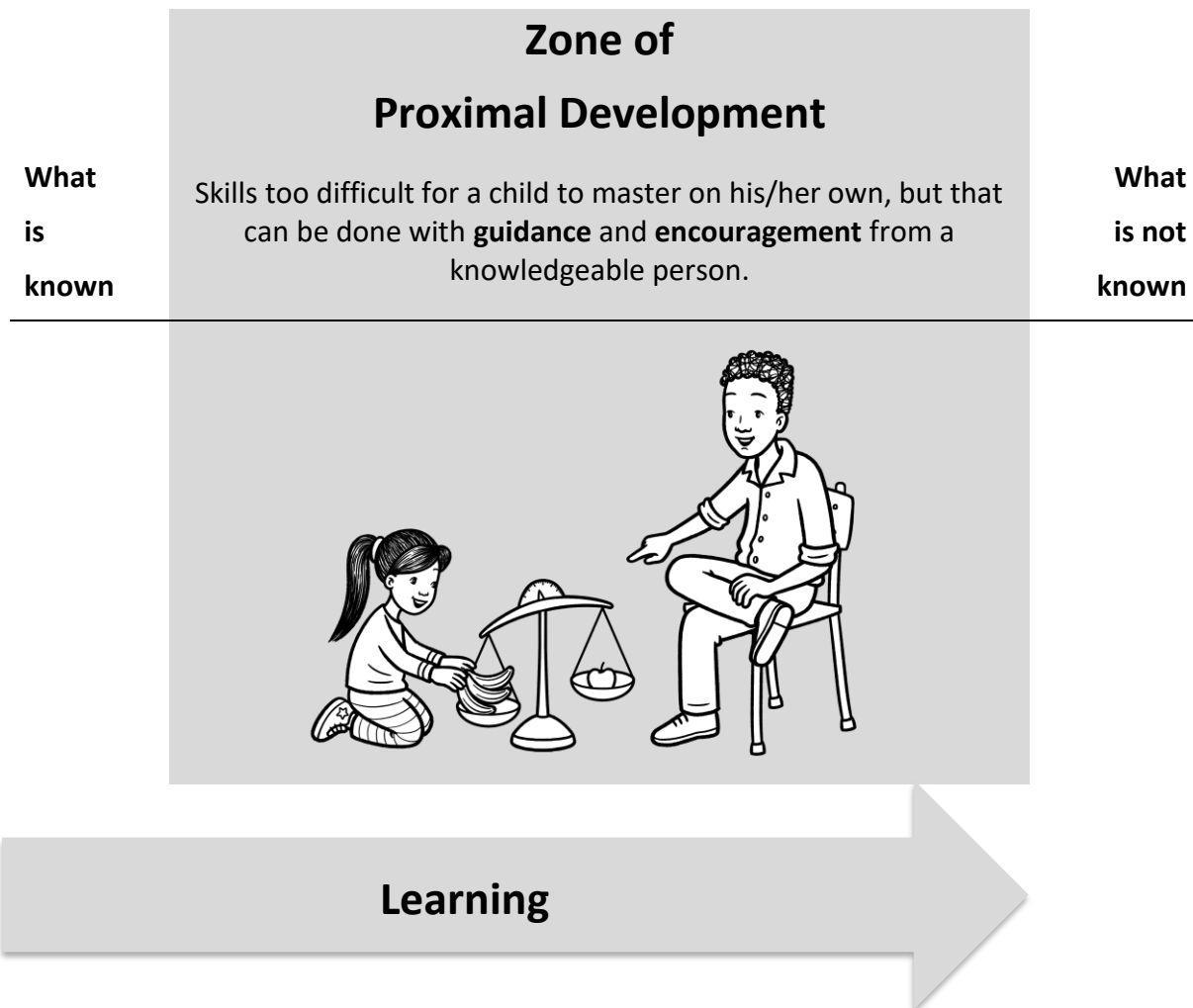
## **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**

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. 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.

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.



### Zone of proximal development

**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: Views on play**

In your small group:

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 the assigned theorist. Draw attention to how play is used in teaching and learning.

## **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: Why play is important**

Small group task

### **Part 1:**

In your group, read the following scenario and answer the question below:

*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.*

How would you respond to the parent? What would you say?

### **Part 2:**

Prepare a roleplay of the conversation between the teacher and the parent

### **Part 3:**

View the video that explains what executive function skills are and why they are important for lifelong learning.

### **Part 4:**

View the video clip of two children working on a puzzle together. Make notes about what you observed children doing and think about what executive functions skills are being used as they play.

# 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.

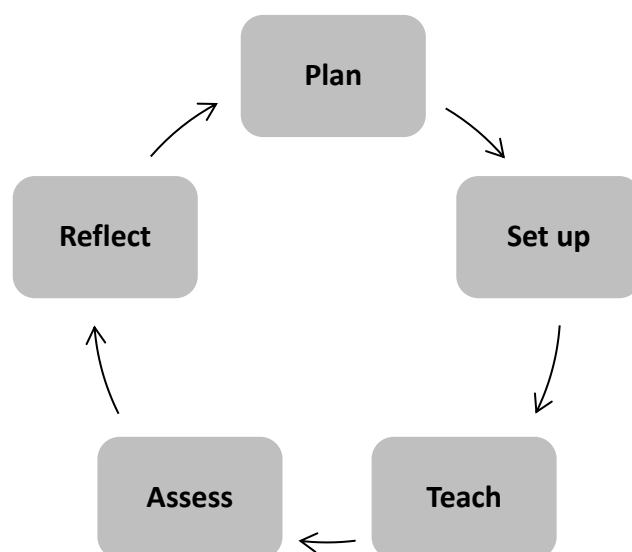
In recent years, people have started to rethink the purposes and nature of play and the role of adults in the planning for play and playfulness in education settings (Wood, 2009). In ECD programmes, play has typically been viewed as free play and child-initiated – with children free to choose their activities 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.



**Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle**

**Activity: Play, teaching and learning**

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

Each team will discuss the above statement. One team will argue in favour of, or agree with, the statement. The other team will argue against the statement.

Instructions:

Before the debate starts you will have 10 minutes to prepare.

Choose someone to write key points to use during the debate.

Choose one person from your team to present the main ideas in the opening argument.

After the opening arguments have been presented, other members of the team will be involved in presenting further arguments, as well as asking and responding to questions from the opposing team.

An external judge will declare the winning team at the end of the debate based on the strength of the argument.



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

### Purpose

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

### Learning outcomes

- ◆ Understand the play continuum as a way of bringing together the many different ideas on play
- ◆ Understand how levels of choice and control inform types of play
- ◆ Understand the importance of encouraging agency in children and ways in which teachers can encourage agency
- ◆ Understand what enables optimal learning and ways in which teachers can foster optimal learning

### What is a 'play continuum'?

There are many theories on what play is for young children. The idea of a play continuum (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:



### 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.

The form of play is decided by:

1. who plans, chooses and starts the play activity. We call this initiation.
2. who, organises and controls the play activity. We call this direction (Zosh et al. 2017).

Initiation	Direction
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

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.



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:



#### Levels of initiated play and directed play

Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
<b>C</b>	<b>Ct</b>	<b>Tc</b>	<b>T</b>
The <b>C</b> 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 <b>C</b> 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 <b>T</b> 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 <b>T</b> 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.

**Activity: Matching Activities for Children to Types of Play.**

Put the 16 statements below into the correct spaces in the grid.

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
<b>Babies</b> 				
	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
<b>Toddlers</b> 				

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

## Statements for the Grid

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ At first break the Grade R 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.
- ◆ After snack time, the preschool children go into the garden to play. The teacher observes but does not intervene unless there is a problem.
- ◆ The teacher is putting out snacks while watching the toddlers playing on the carpet.
- ◆ The baby is sitting on the mat play with a baby doll. The teacher sees an opportunity for learning.
- ◆ The preschool teacher plans an activity for ELDA 3 Communication: Aim 4. The activity is a drama ring that will help children to express their feelings. When the teacher holds up a picture of a happy/angry/sad or surprised face, the children all have to make sounds and actions that match that face.
- ◆ The carer moves the baby's arms and feet in time to music. This is a routine that the teacher does everyday with a different part of the baby's body. The teacher has planned this for ELDA 1 Aim 4: Children are physically strong and show abilities and interest in physical activities.
- ◆ The carer sits on the floor next to the baby and talks to the baby saying 'This is the foot?' Where is your foot?' The carer sings a song about the parts of the body and makes simple action movements with her body. The baby can either watch or join in
- ◆ The 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 Grade R teacher asks each child to bring their favourite toy to school for the first week. At news time the children take turns to tell the class about their toy in their own words.
- ◆ The preschool children are playing in the fantasy corner. The teacher sees that one child is angry so she intervenes by asking the children 'I can see that Jo is not happy. What can we do to help Jo?'.
- ◆ The preschool teacher puts out drawing paper and asks everyone to draw two things: something that makes them happy and something that makes them unhappy.
- ◆ The Grade R 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.
- ◆ The teacher sees that the toddlers all want to play with the same ball so she brings out out extra balls.
- ◆ During outdoor time, the teacher starts a game by rolling or kicking the ball to the toddlers who want to play.
- ◆ The teacher plans an obstacle course for ELDA 1 Aim 4: Children are physically strong and show abilities and interest in physical activities. During ring time all the toddlers take a turn to do the obstacle course. The teacher takes notes on who can or can't balance.

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).

The diagram below shows how a change in the level of initiated play and directed play changes the form of the play.

#### 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

### **Activity: Video of children playing**

Watch the video clips presented by the facilitator.

Answer the following questions for each video clip:

- ◆ 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)?

Watch through the videos a second time if you need to re-look at the play activity.

### **Activity: Roleplaying four forms of play**

Divide into small groups. Each group will receive one case study from the facilitator.

Use the case study to create a 3 minute roleplay that demonstrates the scenario described in the case study. You have 10 minutes to prepare your roleplay.

Each small group will present their roleplay to the whole group.

The observing students identify:

- ◆ the form of play
- ◆ the levels of initiated play and the level of directed play

After all the groups have presented, the whole 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?

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 an idea or asks an open-ended question.

## Agency and optimal learning

**Agency** is a good feeling that comes when a person or child:

- ◆ feels valued and appreciated by the people who are important to them
- ◆ feel confident because they can:
  - ◆ make decisions
  - ◆ do things by yourself
  - ◆ control your environment
  - ◆ voice your ideas

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.

### Activity: Fostering agency

Each student works on their own to read the statements below and to put a ✓ next to the statements that are opportunities for children to experience agency because the teacher is sharing control in appropriate ways.

Think about reasons why you made this choice.

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.	

Following the instructions for the activity from the facilitator – think about the following questions:

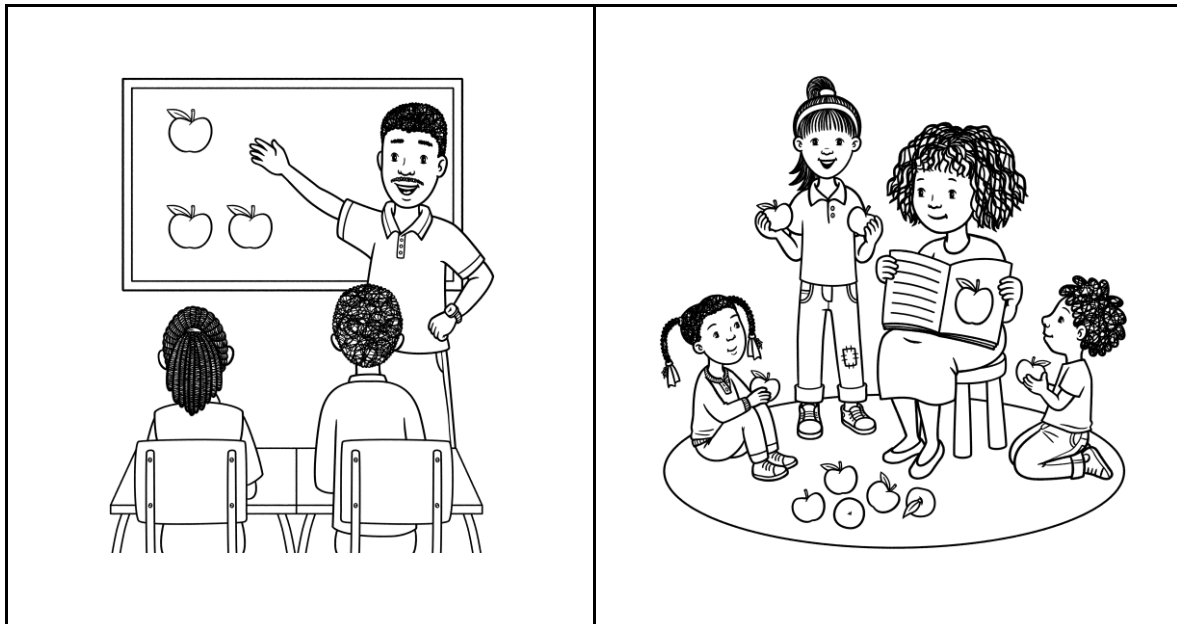
1. What is agency?
2. Why is fostering agency in children important?
3. What actions or things foster agency in children?
4. What is the teacher's role in fostering agency?
5. What activity do you do with your children that fosters agency in appropriate ways?



## 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)



### 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.

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: The daily programme

Look at a daily programme for 4- 5 year olds provided by the facilitator in terms of initiated and directed play

Each session is coded according to C, Ct, Tc, T.

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

In pairs, students play the Word Wheel game (following the facilitator's instructions) using the following five 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?

Each student thinks about the statement: 'How can I nurture agency and optimal learning in children?' and jots down their ideas in their journal.

Discuss these ideas in your group.

Think about one small change to implement in your practice.

## E. How Do We Do PBA?

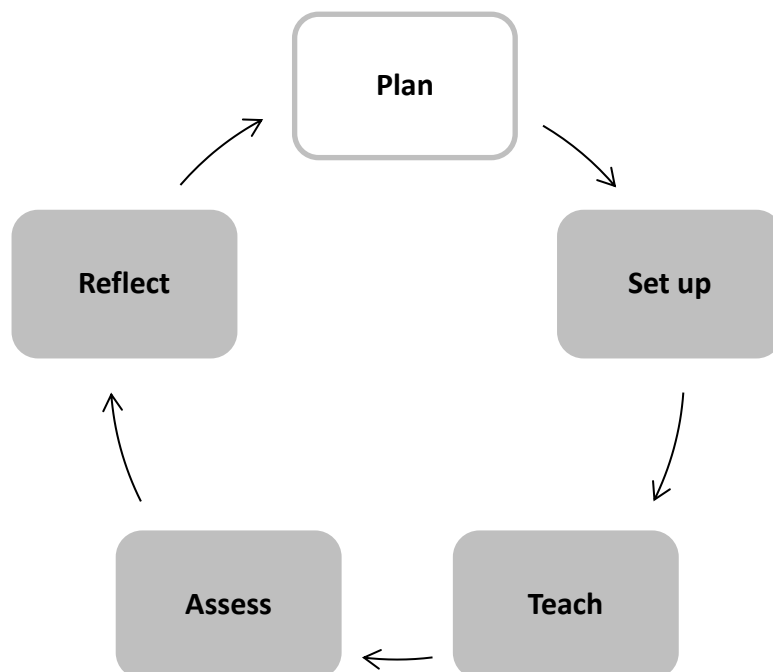
### Purpose

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

### Play-based teaching and learning activities



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?

## 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 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.

## Observation of children

### Activity: The role of observation in preparing for planning

#### Part 1:

Observe the video clip of two children and complete two observation forms one for each child.

- ◆ Write each child's **first** name (only) and age on the dotted lines.
- ◆ Write your observations in the Observation form 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)	

#### Part 2:

Think about the following questions:

- ◆ 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?

## **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 iterative<sup>1</sup> thinking e.g. experimentation<sup>2</sup>, hypothesis testing<sup>3</sup>,
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.

### **Being an Intentional Teacher**

Teachers know that everything they do (or don't do) impacts on a child's development. Intentional teachers plan and act purposefully with a goal in mind so that children have a positive learning experience that leads to optimal learning.

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 of Ms Blue and Ms Green below compares teaching styles and offers opportunities to practice your planning so you can discover:

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

### **Activity: Case study**

Read the two examples of different planning, Ms Blue and Ms Green. Then complete the checklist thinking about the five characteristics of optimal learning through play.

---

<sup>1</sup> Iterative means doing something over and over again in different ways

<sup>2</sup> The process of trying out new ideas and ways of doing things

<sup>3</sup> Hypothesis testing is the process of finding out if an idea or theory is true.

# 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?



## Checklist

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)?		

### Activity: Planning form

Using the blank planning form on the next page work in your small group to plan an activity for the age group you teach.

## Planning

**Date:**

**Teacher:**

**Children's ages:**

**Curriculum**

**Resources:**

**Learning Activity:**

**Activity: Planning a PBA activity**

Create a one page profile (description) of an imaginary class on the profile of children template below.

Plan a 15 minute play activity on the blank planning form below.

**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:

## Blank planning form

### Planning

**Date:**

**Teacher:**

**Children's ages:**

**Curriculum**

**Resources:**

**Learning Activity:**

You need to integrate into your planning the two most important ideas that are the foundation of PBA:

1. Principles of play which means your planned activity is:
  - ◆ Intentional
  - ◆ Inclusive
  - ◆ Differentiated
  - ◆ Active
  - ◆ Fun
  - ◆ Offering children choices
  - ◆ Nurturing child agency
2. Optimal learning through play which means that your planned activity:
  - ◆ 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

## Set up for play-based learning

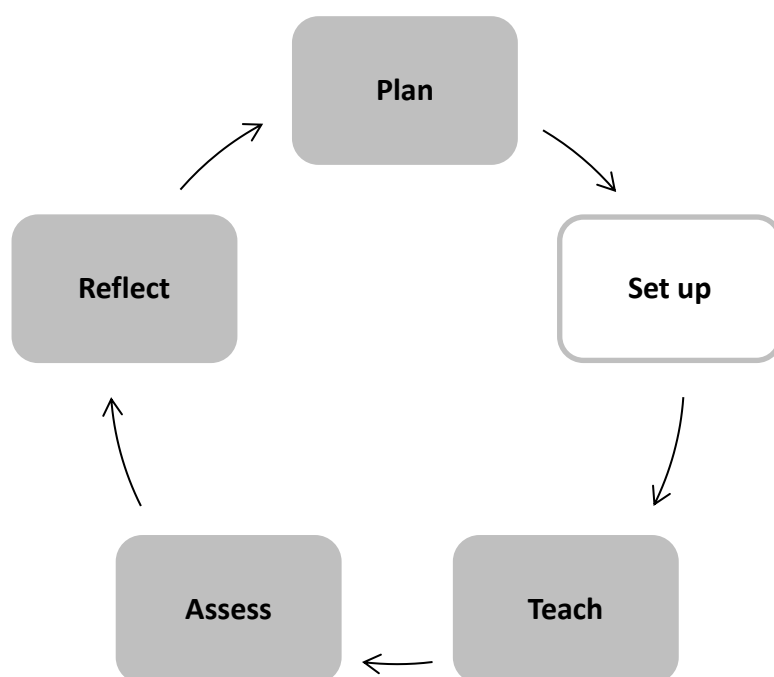
Preparation is at the heart of good teaching, and preparing an interesting, stimulating and playful early learning environment in which children can play to learn is no different.

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.



### 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 pictures it is clear which one is set up for play, where children may feel invited to start playing with things. The other is clearly more set up for the 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 this teacher has set up the learning environment.

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 so 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: Creating a PBA environment**

Think about the cultural, social and family background that you come from, and imagine that you are setting up a welcoming environment for children from the same background as yourself.

Think of 5 things you would do to make this environment as welcoming as possible, and give reasons for their choices. Think about furniture, play materials, the arrangement of spaces within the environment, what might be on the walls, and so on. The focus is on how you would like the child to **feel** on entering that space, NOT on how or what the children might play with.

### **Materials**

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 following checklist 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
<b>Stand at the door of your ECD setting/ classroom.</b> Does the room look inviting for the children? Have you got some things in it that they will recognise and be happy to see?	
<b>Do you think children will be physically comfortable there?</b> Are there spaces for them to move around in? Are there different play areas to cater for individual, paired and group play?	
<b>Get down to child's height and look at your room again.</b> 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?	
<b>Go outside.</b> 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. 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: Dream space**

You have been given the chance to set up a pre-school class for 5 year old children. In groups of three or four design the space, and put into it whatever you feel is most appropriate for their particular context. This is to be a play-based classroom/early learning space. Think about their ideal space, the one all teachers dream of, and there are no limits in terms of what you can design.

Draw a plan of this dream ECD space and clearly mark everything you wish to put in it.

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

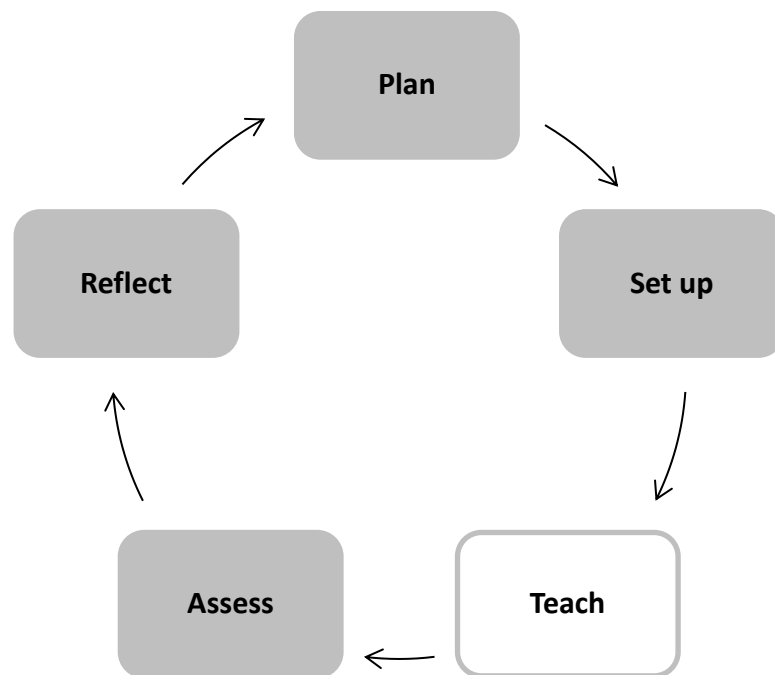
1. Use the principles of play as a tool for design
2. Ask yourself questions about the physical environment (indoors and outdoors), the emotional environment and the materials, or what they would like to put into their environment. e.g.
  - ◆ What is in my space(s)?
  - ◆ Why is it there? Do I think 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?

You have 30 minutes to prepare your design. When you are finished put it up on the wall to make a little exhibition.

Take a walk with the group and your facilitator to have a look at and discuss the designs.

At the end of the activity identify something from your dream design that you could introduce in the ECD space you work in, right now.

## Teaching using a play-based approach



### 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.

### **Activity: Child-directed or teacher-directed?**

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'.*

In your group, discuss the following:

1. Why do you think the children behaved in this way?
2. Who initiated the activity?
3. Who controlled the activity?
4. What choices did the children have?
5. Do you think this is play-based teaching and learning? Why or why not?
6. What role could the teacher have played in this activity?
7. How could you have adapted the activity to make it more playful and attractive to the children?

## The ZPD in practice

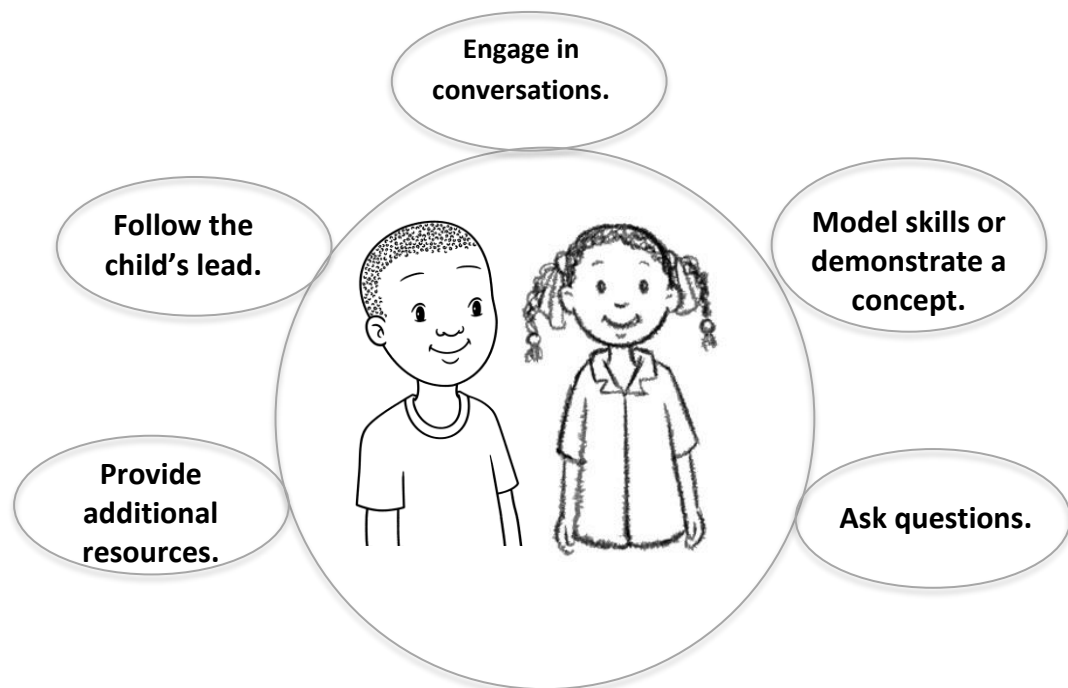
You have learned about Vygotsky and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (See Section 5 in this manual) . The teaching and learning focused within each child's ZPD needs to be challenging enough for the child to learn new skills or behaviours.

- ◆ 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



## 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 term '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: Scaffolding learning**

In your group:

- ◆ Discuss examples of the scaffolding technique you have selected.
- ◆ List these examples on a sheet of flipchart paper.
- ◆ Select one member of your group to report back on your ideas to the larger group.

### **Activity: Follow the child's lead**

#### **Part 1:**

Watch the video of a teacher interacting with a small group of children as they play. Watch what the teacher says and does, and record your observations.

#### **Part 2:**

In pairs using the materials provided, roleplay the following scenario.

#### **Scenario**

A child is making a fence out of construction materials.

With your partner, decide on who will play the role of the adult and who will play the role of the teacher.

Using the materials provided, roleplay with your partner how the adult follows the child's lead by responding to their ideas and thinking.

Switch roles after 5 minutes.

### **Activity: Open-ended questions**

#### **Part 1:**

Draw a picture of a house. Take turns to interview your partner by asking the following questions and record the responses:

- ◆ 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?

## **Part 2:**

- ◆ Look at the play item you have been given.
- ◆ Discuss and write down the kinds of questions you would ask children as they play 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.

### **Activity: Let's practise scaffolding**

Read the scenario you have been given and plan a roleplay to demonstrate how you would scaffold learning and development.

Use some of the scaffolding techniques you have learned about in this session:

- ◆ Following the child's lead
- ◆ Active listening
- ◆ Engaging in conversations
- ◆ Questioning techniques
- ◆ Modelling and demonstrating
- ◆ Providing additional resources

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

#### **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.

#### **Scenario 2**

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

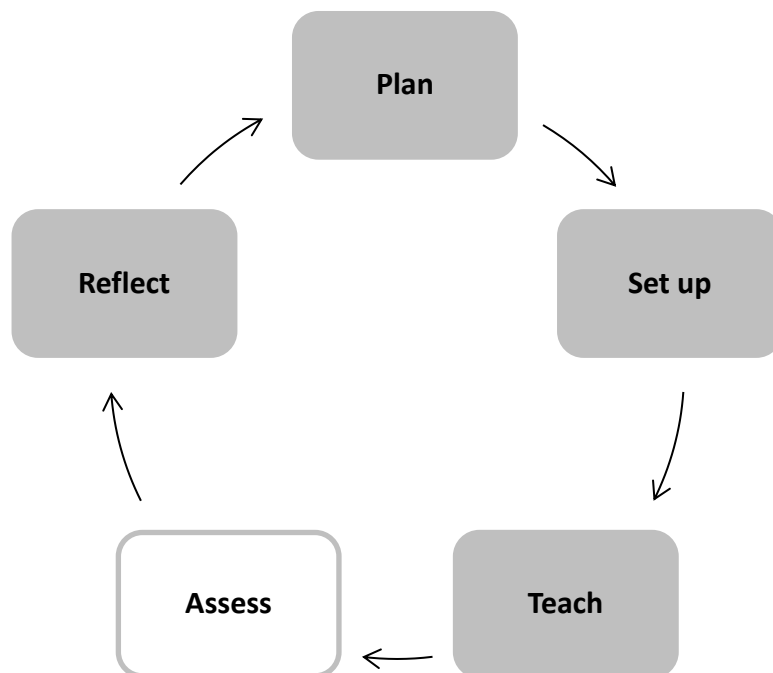
#### **Scenario 3**

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.

#### **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.

## Assessing in a play-based approach



**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 gather 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: What is play-based assessment?**

#### **Part 1:**

With your partner share a memory (positive or negative) that you have of being tested at school.

How did that experience make you feel?

#### **Part 2:**

Watch the video where you will see two toddlers engaging with one another as they play. Observe how the children are interacting and record your observations.

Discuss:

1. What physical skills did you observe?
2. What social skills did you observe?
3. What cognitive skills did you observe?

### **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: Observation in play-based assessment**

Watch the video where you will see Michael building a castle with blocks.

Write down exactly what you see and hear happening.

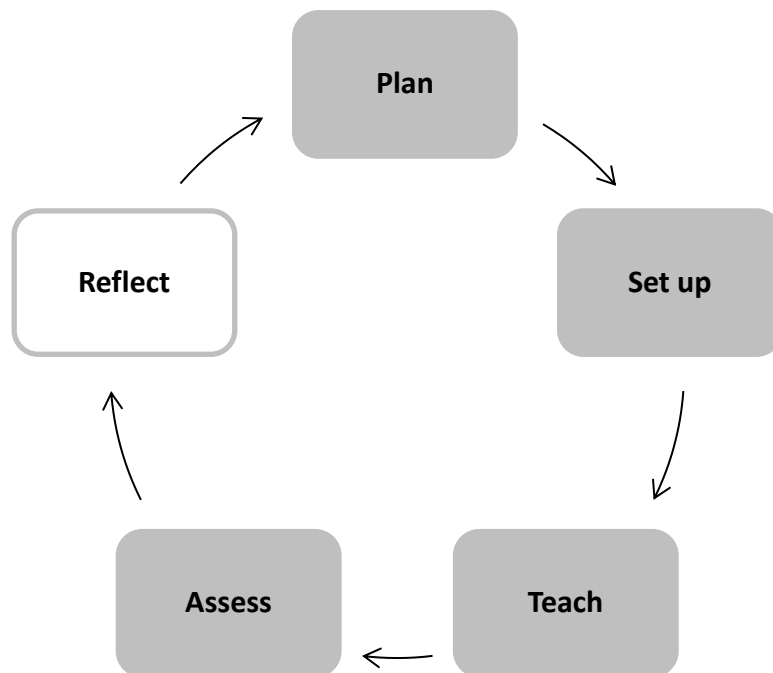
Then go back to the list of observations and review each description.

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.



## Reflection as part of the play-based approach



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

### What is a reflective teacher?

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

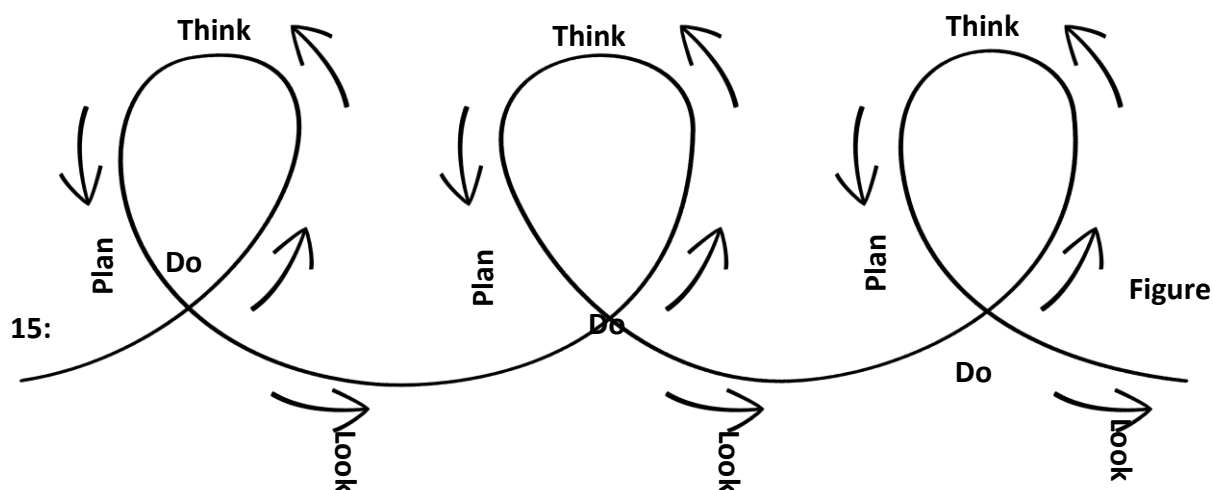
- ◆ decide if they have met the goals for the children in their group
- ◆ learn about individual children's developmental needs
- ◆ identify concerns and think about some kinds of intervention for the child(ren)
- ◆ plan learning experiences that will best support children's development.

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.



### 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: Experiential learning cycle**

- ◆ Think of an experience when you learned something important by looking back at what had happened.
- ◆ Draw this event on a sheet of paper.
- ◆ Share the experience with the other members of your group.

**Activity: Overview of PBA cycle**

In the following video you will observe Lilly, who is 6 months old, and just learning to crawl and is moving around and exploring the environment. Record what you see Lilly doing and saying in the space below. You will use this information to plan activities to support Lilly's development and learning.

In your group, discuss your observations and answer 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?

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