UNICEF

Teacher TRAINING Packages

Facilitator Guide
NQF Level 6

Play Learning Materials Consortium (PLMC)

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Acronyms

CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ELDA	Early Learning and Development Area
HEI	Higher Education Institution
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
NCF	National Curriculum Framework for Children Birth to Four Years
NELDS	National Early Learning and Development Standards for Children Birth to Four
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PBA	Play-based Approach to teaching and learning
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund, (formerly United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Glossary

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

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

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

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

attachment is the process through which babies and young children form close emotional connections with their caregivers

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

cognitive flexibility is the ability to be shift our attention and look at things in a new way where necessary

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 (teacher –guided) 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

inclusion is ensuring that all children who experience barriers to learning, including those who are disabled, will have their needs met appropriately. This might be different for different children.

inhibitory control is the ability to not be distracted by what is happening around us so that we can complete a task or control our behaviour.

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

pedagogy is the method and practice of teaching

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

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

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

psychodynamic theory is a view that explains personality in terms of conscious and unconscious forces, such as unconscious desires and beliefs (e.g. Freud)

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.

schema is a set of linked mental representations of the world, which we use both to understand and to respond to situations

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

teachable moments are unplanned opportunities that arise spontaneously in the playroom that the teacher can use to facilitate learning

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

working memory is the ability to hold information in our memory and be able to draw on it and use it when needed.

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

General background

Background to project

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

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

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

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

♦ The use of a play-based approach was more often implicit and "threaded through" the course material rather than specifically referred to, leaving it to teacher trainers to focus on play or not.

♦ There was no common understanding of the continuum of play-based learning.

♦ for HEI courses most of the references to play referred to Grade R only. With the exception of Play-SA, materials are primarily aimed at practitioners working with younger children.

♦ TVET courses are very prescriptive with high time demands and little if any discretionary time, which means that play will be excluded unless explicitly mentioned in the course materials.

♦ In course outlines where play is mentioned, there is more emphasis on theories and descriptions, and less focus on **how** to implement a play-based pedagogy/how to facilitate learning through play. In the materials reviewed there is more focus on activities.

How to use this guide

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

The teaching package for each NQF level includes:

♦ An up-to-date literature review for background reading

♦ An annotated bibliography at different NQF levels for additional reading for students and facilitators

♦ A facilitator guide with activities in shaded boxes

♦ An accompanying student guide with essential content and materials for activities. These guides are made up of separate sets of student handouts linked to each topic and are not designed as a full manual. We recommend that facilitators reproduce the relevant sheets for the sessions they plan to present

♦ Timing required for different activities is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Time allocation for activities

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

What is PBA?			
	5.1	Defining play	30 minutes
	5.2	Characteristics of play	60 minutes
	5.3	Five types of play	60 minutes
	5.4	Role-playing types of play	60 minutes
	5.5	Zone of proximal development	60 minutes
	5.6	Attachment in play and learning	60 minutes
	5.7	Why play is important	30 minutes
	5.8	Play, teaching and learning	60 minutes
Play continuum			
	6.1	Understanding and applying a 'continuum'	45 minutes
	6.2	Matching teaching activities to forms of play	60 minutes
	6.3	Role-playing four forms of play	60 minutes
	6.4	Sharing control	60 minutes
	6.5	Understanding and nurturing agency	60 minutes
	6.6	The benefits of sharing control	15 minutes
	6.7	Summary: The play continuum	20 minutes
How to do PBA			
Plan	7.1	Planning: the benefits and consequences	60 minutes
	7.2	How to observe	60 minutes
	7.3	Observing children as part of planning	60 minutes
	7.4	Understanding optimal learning principles	60 minutes
	7.5	Optimal learning planning in action	40 minutes
	7.6	Planning a play-based learning activity	60 minutes
	7.7	Summary of how to plan PBA activities	15 minutes
Set up	7.8	How teachers see children	25 minutes
	7.9	Creating a PBA environment	30 minutes
	7.10	Designing a dream play space	90 minutes
Teach	7.11	Teacher's role in PBA	90 minutes
	7.12	The intentional teacher	60 minutes
	7.13	Let's practise scaffolding	60 minutes
	7.14	Teachable moments	90 minutes
Assess	7.15	What is play-based assessment?	60 minutes
	7.16	Play-based assessment tools	60 minutes
	7.17	Observation in play-based assessment	45 minutes
Reflect	7.18	Reflection as a key part of teaching practice	60 minutes

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Terminology

In this guide we use the following terms:

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

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

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

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

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

How adults learn

Purpose

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

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

♦ 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. It begins very early, young infants have even been referred to as "scientists in the crib" (Gopnik, Meltzoff, & Kuhl, 1999) due to their natural curiosity and drive to learn. This capacity to learn follows us all the way into adulthood, although it takes different forms, but in essence it remains a basic human activity, and something that we are all capable of throughout our lives.

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 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. In particular, playful experiences help children engage in deep learning. Play can support a deep understanding of ideas in children, that allows them to connect concepts and skills, apply their knowledge to different situations, and spark new ideas (Winthrop & McGivney, 2016.)

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 children 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.
- ♦ **Agency**. Children have the opportunity to lead, direct and control their own play activities.

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

Activity 1.1: How we learned (30 minutes)

Purpose: To reflect on the features of adult learning

Materials: Question and answer grid (see below)

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

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

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

Question	My answer
Did my learning have a purpose or a goal? What was it?	
Did it give me with my own particular way of learning, a chance to participate? Did I participate in a way that helped me to create meaning out of the experience? How did this happen?	
Did I have to be active, or did I simply sit back and let it happen almost without me? Give an example of a way in which you were active in your own learning.	
Was it fun? Maybe parts of your learning process were fun. Are those the parts that you most remember? Or that you enjoyed the most? Give an example of what was fun.	
Did you, as an adult choose to engage in this learning, whatever your reason might have been?	

Were you involved in your learning, did you have to think about what you were doing while you were learning? Give an example of what/how you had to think.	
Discuss their reflections with the whole group.	

It might be a surprise to see that the features of a positive and successful adult learning experience are very similar to the features of the kind of play that supports learning in young children.

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

Activity 1.2: Features of play (30 minutes)

Purpose: This is a game that challenges participants to think about how things are organised in space, to do it quickly, and to work in a team

Materials: 40 matchsticks per small group

Facilitation:

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

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

Their task is:

Using the matchsticks that you have been given, change this shape by removing 9 matches so that no square of any size remains.

The first group to find the solution is the winner.

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

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

We will discuss how to create a playful environment in an early learning setting (classroom, ECD centres, playgroups, creches, toy library etc) that will use these features of both adult and children's playful learning and give children in these educational environments opportunities for play that will support their learning as much as possible.

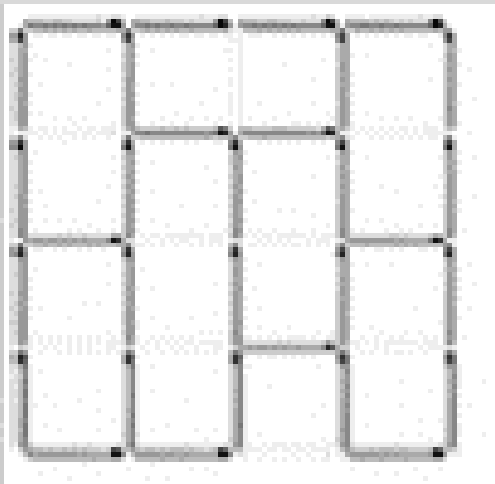The intention is to think about play in these terms, to build playfulness into this course on play throughout, both in the way the course is structured and taught as well as the content, in order to support participants' learning. If the way children learn through play is mirrored in the course by the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

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

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: SUMMARY

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

History of Play in Early Childhood Education and Development

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

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

Play and Policy

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

What is Play?

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

Developmental psychologists commonly divide play into five types: physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, pretend play and games with rules. Each of these takes different forms as the child develops becoming more complex as children get older. Many studies show that children perform at significantly higher levels in playful rather than non-playful situations. Play is associated with language and maths development, social competence and developing of reasoning as well as with helping children adapt to formal schooling.

Play in Different Cultural Settings

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

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

Play-based Pedagogy – A Play Continuum

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

Implementing a Play-based Pedagogy

Research on play-based learning for early childhood education in general and especially in the early grades of schooling has identified a number of common pitfalls as well as guidelines for effective practice. When staff are not adequately trained, or there is pressure to cover a prescribed curriculum, it is difficult to implement an effective play-based programme. It is also important to have a range of materials that are open and flexible and which allow children to engage with peers and adults. In the early school grades in many countries, including in South Africa, teachers tend to resort to more formal academic methods especially when there is limited physical space, few materials and a rigid daily schedule. Parents may also resist the idea that children are learning through play. Implementing a play-based approach has implications for how formative assessments should be conducted and this too is often challenging for teachers.

Conclusion

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

3. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHIES

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

4.   PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

Purpose

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

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

♦   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.

Play-based Approach Principles

Research carried out all over the world in many different countries and contexts shows clearly that play is an extremely important activity for young children. Educators have recognised this for decades, and many have promoted approaches to education, and creating and designing environments in which this kind of learning can take place. Early examples are Maria Montessori in Italy, Margaret McMillan and Susan Isaacs in England and Friedrich Fröbel in Germany, amongst others. Today, play is thought to be one of the most important activities that best facilitates children's construction of their own knowledge.

It is not only a natural way in which learning takes place, but it is now recognised as a valuable teaching tool, because it can support and nurture children's learning in powerful ways. Research into the study of children's brains and brain processes also shows, from a different perspective, that playful experiences can strengthen learning. In spite of this, play is a very difficult thing to define in itself. Educators, academics and researchers often have different understandings of what they think play is, and it is important to consider different cultural and social contexts when trying to define play.

However, there is agreement about which principles or characteristics are important to think about when play is seen as a means by which young children engage in learning, and teachers in teaching. The principles used in this manual are not the only principles, but represent the most commonly agreed on principles, and those that are thought of as being most helpful to teachers in particular.

We use these principles throughout this manual as they are a useful way for teachers:

♦   to reflect on the play they see their children engaging in and learning from;

♦   to create more playful classrooms which support learning, and

♦   to help assess children's learning through play.

These principles are that:

♦ play is intentional
♦ play is inclusive, and can be differentiated to make sure that all children can take part
♦ play invites children to be active
♦ play is joyful and full of fun
♦ children make their own choices about their play activities
♦ children can lead, direct and control their own play activities
♦ play is meaningful because it provides opportunities for children to understand and create meaning about their world
♦ play is communicative
♦ play is, above all, a process.

These principles apply to different kinds and stages of play, whether it is free play, guided play or instructional play, or physical, pretend or symbolic play. These principles are useful in a play-based approach to learning because they are helpful for teachers to have in mind when they plan any kind of play activity. It is also a useful way for teachers to check that the play activities they are planning for the children are those that will support and nurture learning.

The principles are not presented here in order of importance, they are all equally important, and all need to be present in children's play and in play-based teaching and learning in order for children to benefit as much as possible.
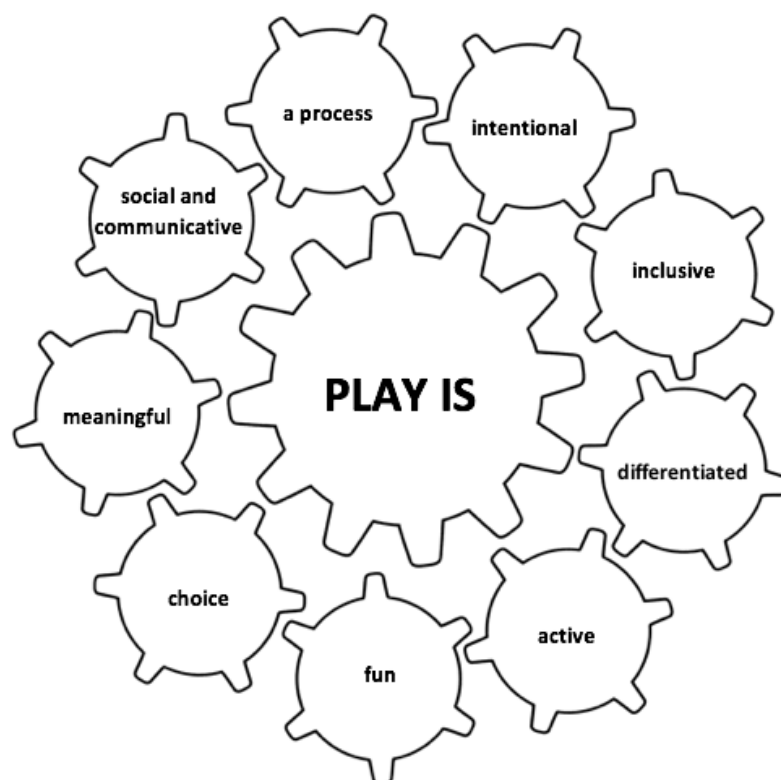
Figure 1: Principles of play

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

Different people and different children will find different kinds of play fun. Fun is not something that can be measured, or forced on someone, it should be an integral part of what happens when children play. With this principle, the idea is that any child engaging in a particular play-based learning activity should do so happily and the child should experience 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 positive emotions they show while playing. Perhaps the child repeats the activity again and again so as to experience it many times. Perhaps the child often chooses to engage in that particular play activity over everything else available. Perhaps the child simply cannot wait to do the activity.

All these are signs that the activity is fun. And when something is fun, motivation is high, the child is fully open to learning, and learning happens without seeming to involve much effort on the child's behalf.

Fun also relates to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (see Section 5). If a game or playful learning activity is too far out of the child's ZPD, it will be frustrating and anxiety-provoking rather than fun to do.

On the other hand, if the game is too easy and presents no challenge, the child does not have to do any thinking work, the cognitive accommodation, that Piaget feels is so important in the learning process (see Section 5). It also may not offer children an interesting opportunity to practise what they have learned.

In both these cases play can become boring and not fun.

Activity 4.1: Play is fun (40 minutes)

Purpose: To demonstrate the play is fun principle.

Materials: Rating scales (four for each participant)

Facilitation:

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

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

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

Then they rate it on the 'fun' scale.

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

Discuss the fact that for an adult there is not much of a challenge in this game, and the fun might soon die out of it.

Part Two

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

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

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

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

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

Part Three

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

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

Rate the game on the 'fun' scale.

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

Part Four

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

Participants rate this on the 'fun' scale.

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

Reflection:

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

Participants look at the different ratings for fun that they gave the different versions of this game and see: (i) if their rating changes with each different game, and (ii) what changes did they notice, and why did they change them?

The next principle of play is that it has a purpose, and perhaps 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 mention here the idea of iteration. This is when children play the

same thing many times, when they go back to the activity so that they can try out possibilities, perhaps change the thoughts they have about what they are doing, and discovering new things about the game or activity which will encourage new thinking. It is important to remember that there are different kinds of play and different stages of play, and how intentional play may be at any given moment, different in each.

Think of a child sitting in the sandpit simply 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 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 child might go back to the car and the bridge many times in order to make these discoveries and try things out.

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 how different materials behave, about length, and so on. But play changes, change is part of the nature of play, and even in change there is still a purpose. So in this case even though the child's play might change in its nature or content, for example the child who is exploring the idea of bridges, might make the bridge longer, or make it turn a corner, or try to hold many cars or heavier trucks. In addition, in guided play, the teacher might intervene and change the purpose of the play activity in order to promote a particular skill or learning.

Activity 4.2: Play is intentional (30 minutes)

Purpose: To demonstrate the play is intentional principle.

Materials: 2 dice and 10 counters per pair of players

Facilitation:

At a primary school level, a play-based learning game is 'Battle of the Dice'.

Participants are put into pairs.

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

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

Reflection:

Ask the participants to answer these questions:

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

This game is both interesting and challenging, and encourages children's arithmetical thinking skills. It has a very clear intention or goal and has possibilities for iteration, being played many times in different ways.

Presenting or demonstrating this game, or playing it with children in guided play also gives teachers a chance to model mathematical thinking. In this case, the teacher becomes the MKO (more knowledgeable other) in Vygotsky's thinking (see Section 5), someone to offer guidance through the game, or to facilitate the game appropriately. This is especially true if the teacher wishes to change the game in some way to make it more challenging for children, or for example to show a different mathematical idea.

The game also encourages children to engage in shared thinking and problem solving to practise particular ideas and so it has social learning value as well.

The next principle of play which is directly related to the principle of **inclusivity**, is that it is **differentiated**. Play can give all children with their many different ways of thinking and learning, with different strengths and challenges, an opportunity to participate. In any South African classroom there are children who learn differently from others, children who might have particular challenges and difficulties, or simply children who favour one medium of learning (e.g. visual or auditory learning) rather than another.

The principle of differentiation means that activities in play-based teaching and learning should be designed and planned in such a way that all children can participate and benefit. It is not simply that all children can passively watch the game. The way the play is designed and presented to children should be such that all children can actively participate, including those requiring extra support or mediation. There are children with learning or physical disabilities, children who are socially disadvantaged, and children from a wide variety of different cultures. The play activity needs to support all children as equally as possible.

Activity 4.3: Play can be differentiated (30 minutes)

Purpose: To demonstrate the play can be differentiated principle.

Facilitation: 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.

Reflection:

Groups are to discuss:

♦ Does this game allow children with different abilities to participate?

♦ What might these different abilities be?

♦ How does this game do so?

♦ Do you agree that this is an inclusive game? Support your answer.

The next principle is that play is **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 play supports them in their attempts to grow their knowledge, understanding and skills.

Remember that the idea of 'meaningfulness' of play needs also to take into account different social and cultural contexts in which that play is happening.

Activity 4.4: Play is meaningful (30 minutes)

Purpose: To demonstrate the play is meaningful principle.

A good example of this is the game 20 QUESTIONS.

This is a very well-known spoken game. It allows players to use what they know, and extends their knowledge. This is done by asking a number of questions. Participants working in one group play the game.

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

The rest of the players have to ask questions to try to guess what it is.

There are two rules for this game:

1. All questions must 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, the same person goes again.

Reflection:

♦ What kind of learning or skills can be consolidated or promoted in this game?

♦ Think of ways in which this game can be changed in order to promote other learning.

Play is **communicative.** It is in play that children find unlimited opportunities to share and communicate with each other. They share their understanding, they test out that understanding with others, and they may even change their understanding a little by having discussed it with others.

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

Activity 4.5: Play is communicative (20 minutes)

Purpose: To demonstrate the play is communicative principle.

Materials: Word cards (enough for two for each participant)

Facilitation:

A game that requires direct communication is 'Pictionary'.

Participants are to get into groups of 3.

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

Examples are:

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

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

Reflection:

Participants are to look at the list of characteristics of play at the beginning of this section, and answer these questions:

♦ What types of communication are happening in this game?
♦ Which of the principles of play discussed so far are present in this game ? Give examples to justify the answers.

An important principle in play, and one that is easy to overlook in a busy early learning setting is that of **choice**. Research shows that to be useful and beneficial for the child, play needs to be voluntary and not forced. It needs to have an element of the child's own choice and preference. For example, the child him/herself decides (i) to do it, (ii) how to do it, (iii) to change it, (iv) how to change it, (v) when to stop, and so on. This is not always possible in an early learning setting / classroom, but as far as possible play-based learning should

contain this element of choice. At the most basic level, 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. 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, even if this is in guided play, where children can be encouraged to make suggestions.

> ### Activity 4.6: Play allows choice (30 minutes)
>
> **Purpose:** To demonstrate the play allows choice principle.
>
> **Facilitation:**
>
> Ask each participant to think of a simple, easy game that they played when they were a child that they would choose to play now if they were given a choice.
>
> Ask one or two participants to share their choice with the group.
>
> Ask these participants to briefly describe the game.
>
> Then ask them why they would choose to play this game, giving very specific reasons.
>
> **Reflection:**
>
> Ask the whole group:
>
> ♦ Which of the principles discussed thus far apply to this particular game?
> ♦ How does having choice make a difference to how children engage in play, and what children learn through it?

Throughout the discussion and play activities that participants have been involved in thus far, the principle of **agency** has been strongly present. Agency is of particular importance for children. Agency in play and play-based activities means that in engaging in play, children have the opportunity to lead, direct and control their own play activities. While they play they are engaged, involved in the play or playful activity, and are thinking while they do it, even though that thinking may change and take different forms as the play progresses. This relates to the principle of **choice** discussed above**.**

Even as adults, if we feel that we have some control in a learning situation, it feeds our confidence and positive engagement. Positive emotion is an important source of energy for children during their development and learning in whichever context. Having some say in the play activity and freedom to follow a direction of their interest helps to create a positive foundation for learning.

Having agency means that children are also **active** in their play. Well planned play-based activities require that children take part, that they engage, that they do not simply sit and passively watch. People learn by watching and listening, but we also learn above all, by doing, which is why the participants are asked to play the games in this section, and not just hear about them.

The examples of activities presented here demand active participation to model the way that playful activities should be used with children.

In creating more playful classrooms, in introducing play-based activities into learning environments for young children, the aim is to support and promote cognitive, emotional and even social engagement of young children.

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

Note to Facilitator

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

Activity 4.7: Principles of play (70 minutes)

Purpose: To review all the principles of play that have been discussed.

Materials: A piece of string, a lump of playdough and four kebab sticks per group of four

Facilitation 1
Participants are divided into groups of 4. Each group is given their materials. The group's task is to invent a simple game for children aged 4 years old where the following principles are clearly present. The game must be:

(i) Fun

(ii) Intentional, it has a clear purpose which can be identified

(iii) Accessible to as many children with different strengths and challenges as possible

(iv) Designed so that all children participate equally

(v) Meaningful to children from many different social and cultural backgrounds

(vi) Promote active engagement by ALL children

Participants are given 20 minutes to do this. The game has to be:

a) written down

b) drawn out in a drawing or diagram

c) orally presented

d) demonstrated to the whole group.

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

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

Reflection:

After each presentation, the participants discuss:

1. Did the game demonstrate all the required principles?
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?

Facilitation 2
The facilitator chooses one of the invented games for the next part of the activity.

Still working in their groups, the task for the participants now is to modify this game, in such a way that a literacy or a numeracy aspect is built into it. If this is already present in the game, then participants are asked to change the game so that it is suitable for **children who are 8 years old.**

Participants have 10 minutes to do this.

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

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

Purpose

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

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

♦ 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 and stages of play that support children's development and learning

♦ become familiar with different theoretical approaches to play

♦ become familiar with the play-based approach to teaching and learning.

What is play?

Before discussing a play-based approach to teaching and learning, we must understand what play is and why it is important for young children's development and learning.

Defining play

Many early childhood theorists, psychologists and researchers have tried to define play from their own perspectives.

♦ "Play is the work of the child" was how the Italian educator Maria Montessori defined play.

♦ Lev Vygotsky defined play as activity that is (a) "desired" by the child, (b) "always involves an imaginary situation," and (c) "always involves rules" (which are in the minds of the players and may or may not be laid down in advance).

♦ David Elkind, child psychologist and educator, provided the following definition: "Play is the activity by which the infant or young child learns about herself and the world."

♦ The Convention on the Rights of the Child defined play in general comment No 17 (United Nations, 2013, Paragraph 14c) as "any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Caregivers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake rather than as a means to an end".

While play is difficult to define common characteristics of play have been identified. Hughes (2003) suggests that when children play there is:

♦ **Freedom of choice.** Children are playing when they can choose for themselves what, when and how to play.

♦ **Personal enjoyment.** Children can be said to be playing when it's something they want to do for its own sake and the enjoyment that it brings (and not for any rewards).

♦ **Focus on process**. Children are playing when the activity or what they are doing is more important than how it turns out in the end.

Activity 5.1: Defining play (30 minutes)

Purpose: To consider possible definitions of play

Materials: Small cards and koki pens for each small group.

Facilitation:
Divide participants into small groups and hand out a pile of cards and koki pens to each group.

Ask participants to think about what comes to mind when they hear the word 'play'. Each participant writes one word on a card and shares it with the group. The group uses these words to come up with their own definition of play.

Each group displays their definition. Discuss and compare the definitions and highlight how hard it is to define play.

Introduce the three criteria that describe children's behaviour when they play:

♦ freedom of choice

♦ personal enjoyment

♦ focus on the process.

Reflection:
End by asking students to reflect on how these criteria are present in the definitions they presented.

Characteristics of play

The following reading from the Aistear Early Learning Curriculum Framework provides a description of the characteristics of play:

Reading: Page 53, National Childhood Network (no date). Aistear learning and developing through play. Ireland: National Childhood Network. Accessible at http://www.ncca.biz/Aistear/pdfs/Guidelines_ENG/Play_ENG.pdf

Activity 5.2: Characteristics of play (60 minutes)

Purpose: To identify characteristics of play and apply them to play activities for different age groups.

Materials:

Play materials for different age groups, e.g.

- Babies and toddlers: Pretend play (e.g. dolls, kitchenware, clothes)
- Young children: Construction materials
- Grade R: Drawing or painting (crayons, paints, paper)
- Grades 1-3: Bats and balls.

Facilitation:

Have participants form groups of 5 or 6 people. Hand out a sheet of flipchart paper and koki pens to each group. Ask one member from each group to put a circle in the middle and write "Characteristics of Play" inside the circle.

Group members sit around the paper and working alone jot down ideas about the characteristics of play. In their groups, each participant shares what they have written with the other members of the group and explains their reasons for including this characteristic. Make a note of similarities and differences in what has been written. One person from each group presents the shared ideas to the larger group.

Participants return to their groups. Assign each group an age group and hand out the play materials. Refer participants to the reading from the Aistear Early Learning Curriculum Framework on characteristics of play.

In your small group:

- Read through the Characteristics of Play.
- Look at the play materials you have been given and identify characteristics from the reading that they could support.
- How would you encourage and help children as they play with these materials?

Give the groups time to complete the task. Groups take turns to demonstrate how the play materials support the different characteristics of play.

Stages of play

Solitary play	Parallel play
Associative play	**Cooperative play**
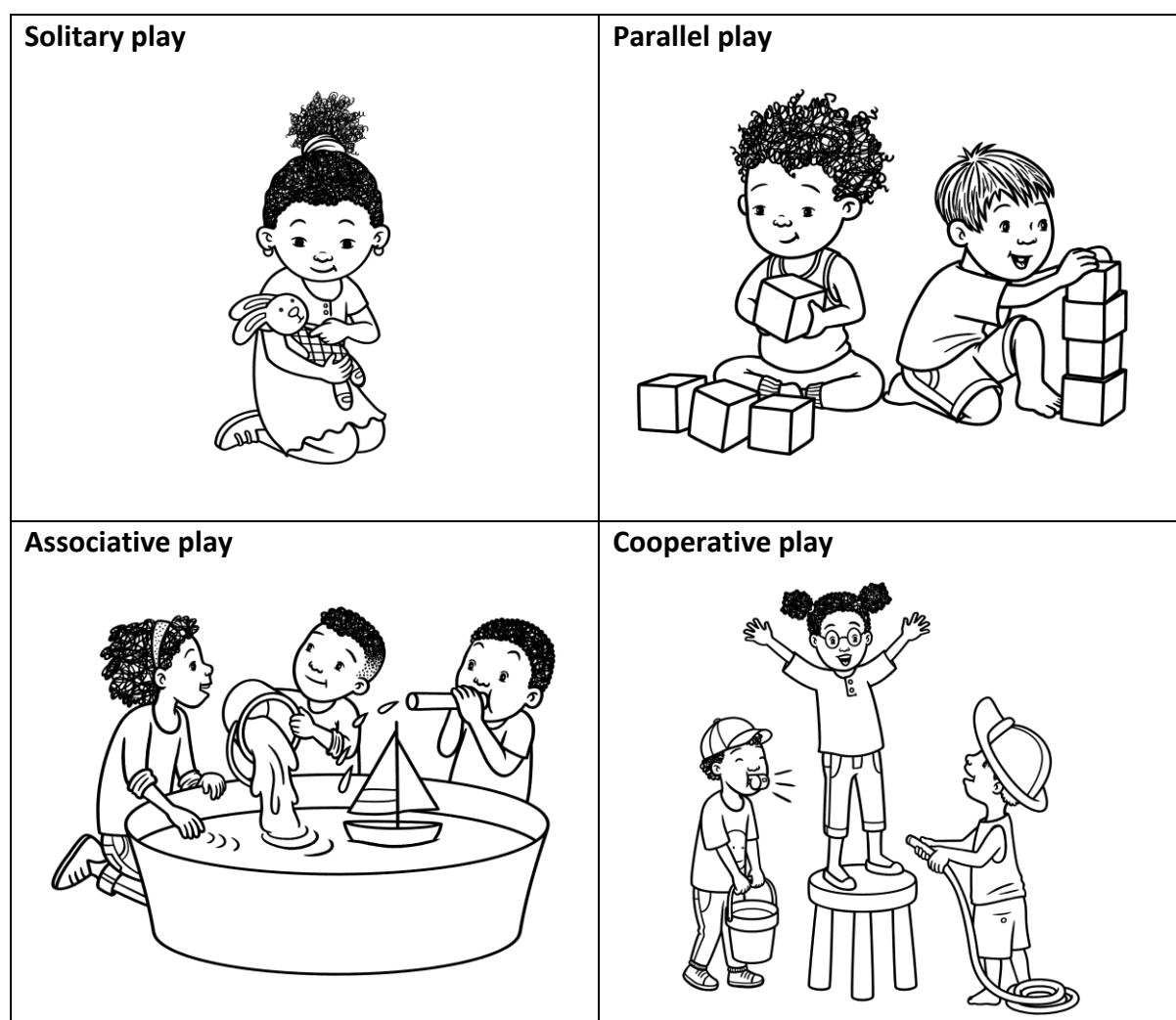
Figure 2: Stages of play

Mildred Parten (1932) researched the social development of young children and noted that, with age, children's play becomes increasingly more complex. She defined four stages of social play that are still used today:

1. Solitary Play
2. Parallel Play
3. Associative Play
4. Cooperative Play.

Children move in and out of these stages throughout their childhood. Read more about these stages in the following resource:

Reading: Pages 12 – 14, New Foundland, Labrador Education and Early Childhood Development (2016**) Full–Day Kindergarten Play-Based Learning**: Promoting a Common Understanding. Canada.
https://www.gov.nl.ca/eecd/files/pdf_fdk_common_understandings_-document_eng_2016.pdf

Five types of play

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

Figure 3: Types of play

Whitebread (2012) proposed five different types of play, which can be found in all cultural groups. How much the different types of play are empha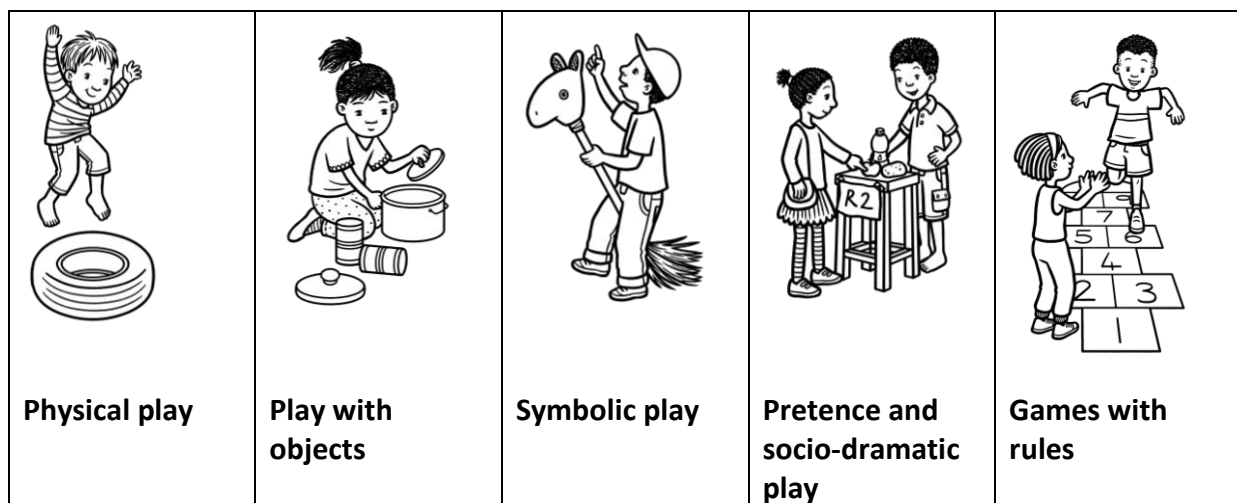sised and supported varies between cultures based on different values and beliefs regarding childhood and play, which relate to different social and economic contexts.

The five types of play support all developmental domains – physical, social, emotional and cognitive domains. These types are:

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

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 the extent to which 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 are instrumental in adapting games for younger children. Swart and colleagues (1996) describe an Ndebele practice in which children are encouraged to go around in fairly stable 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.

Read more about these types of play in the following resource:

Reading: Whitebread, D., Neale, D., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Solis,S.L., Hopkins, E., Hirsh-Pasek, K. Zosh, J. M. (2017). **The role of play in children's development: a review of the evidence** (research summary). Denmark: The LEGO Foundation.

Activity 5.3: Five types of play (60 minutes)

Purpose: To explore the five types of play
Materials:

♦ Five large signs, one for each type of play. Display these in different parts of the training room.

♦ Chairs and tables set out in front of the room for the "panels of experts"; provide props such as a "roving microphone", "TV cameras" etc.

Facilitation:

Briefly introduce the five types of play, using the above information. Draw attention to the five signs in the room, and ask participants to think about which type of play they feel they know the most about and to proceed to their sign.

Once everyone has decided, explain that each group is going to be a "panel of experts" and that they will be presenting their information on their play topic on a special television programme.

(You can use the name of an actual television current affairs programme or create a fictitious programme.)

Refer participants to the page numbers in the selected readings for their type of play:

♦ Physical play (page 6)

♦ Play with objects (page 10)

♦ Symbolic play (page 14)

♦ Pretence and socio-dramatic play (page 18)

♦ Games with rules (page 24).

In their groups, participants read their section and discuss what they have read. They record the main points that they will present during the panel interview and decide how they will share this information.

Be creative with the panel interview. Have groups take turns to sit on the panel and give their views on their type of play. After each panel presentation, use a "roving mic" to go to members of the "audience" and give them a chance to ask questions related to each type of play. Group members use the knowledge and understanding gathered during the activity to answer the questions.

Theoretical and historical views on play

Many theorists and researchers have studied play and there are theories of play that explain how and why children play and how play affects their development. Understanding some of these theories can help you support children's development in a play- based approach to teaching and learning.

The Constructivist view on play

Constructivists believe that children are actively involved in their own learning and that they construct knowledge for themselves as they explore and interact with the social and physical environment. Importantly, constructivists recognise the role of play in young children's development.

A brief overview of two constructivist theories can help us understand the importance of play.

Jean Piaget (1896–1980) was a Swiss psychologist who strongly influenced our understanding of children's development. He spent many years observing and documenting the behaviour of his own and other children and concluded that children construct their own knowledge in response to their experiences.

Piaget (1962) identified three types of knowledge that children acquire which help us to understand what children learn through active play and exploration, and what children learn from other people.

1. **Physical knowledge** has to do with objects in the world that children find out about mainly through active exploration using their five senses.
2. **Social knowledge** is about the social world and can only be learned from other people – their culture, tradition and language.
3. **Logico-mathematical knowledge** refers to how the brain organises and puts together pieces of knowledge to form new knowledge.

Piaget used the term **schema** to describe the basic building block that the child uses to organise knowledge and information (Piaget & Cook, 1952). These schemas change as things happen and new information is received.

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 of **assimilation** and **accommodation**.

♦ **Assimilation** happens when a child adds new information to what they already know and understand.
♦ **Accommodation** takes place when the child has to make changes to what they know and understand when this does not match the new information.

Piaget noted three stages of play that emerge during early childhood.

1. Functional play
2. Symbolic play
3. Games with rules

It is helpful to look at these types of play to understand how play develops. The following reading provides further information on these types of play:

Reading: Pages 14 – 16, New Foundland, Labrador Education and Early Childhood Development (2016**) Full–Day Kindergarten Play-Based Learning**: Promoting a Common Understanding. Canada.

https://www.gov.nl.ca/eecd/files/pdf_fdk_common_understandings_-document_eng_2016.pdf

Activity 5.4: Role-playing types of play (60 minutes)

Purpose: To use role-play as a technique to consolidate understanding of the types of play

Materials:

♦ Play materials for role-plays of the types of play (e.g. construction toys, collage materials, pretend play materials, board games)

Facilitation:
Divide participants into 4 groups and assign the topics of the selected reading (pages 14 – 16) as follows:

♦ Group 1: Functional Play (pages 14 and 15)
♦ Group 2: Symbolic Constructive Play (page 15)
♦ Group 3: Symbolic Dramatic Play (page 16)
♦ Group 4: Games with rules (page 16)

Refer participants to the student guide and read through the instructions together. Give the groups time to complete the task. One member from each group shares their information about the type of play they have focused on. The group then presents their role-play to the larger group.

Reflection:
Allow participants an opportunity to ask questions after each presentation and clarify where needed.

1. Read and discuss the information about the type of play you have been given.
2. Write key points about your understanding of this type of play on a sheet of flipchart paper to present to the larger group.
3. Use the information in the "Learning happens here" sections of the reading to plan a role-play that demonstrates this type of play.

Lev Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) was a Russian psychologist who developed a socio-cultural theory. His theory focused on the way children construct their knowledge through social interactions within the context of their culture, family and other people.

Play is central to Vygotsky's theory. His view differed from Piaget because he believed that play **does** teach children new things as well as provide an opportunity for them to practise what they know. Vygotsky maintained that play is a social and cultural activity and he noted

(1978, p.102) that play "contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development." In Vygotsky's view 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 pretend play was a leading factor in development and that during 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

♦ 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.

Vygotsky is well-known for introducing the idea of the **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).** In his theory (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 mental processes can only be learned through the guidance of what he called **More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs)**, e.g. teachers, parents, caregivers, and/or capable peers.

The ZDP 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 that marks what the child could achieve with the guidance from an MKO.
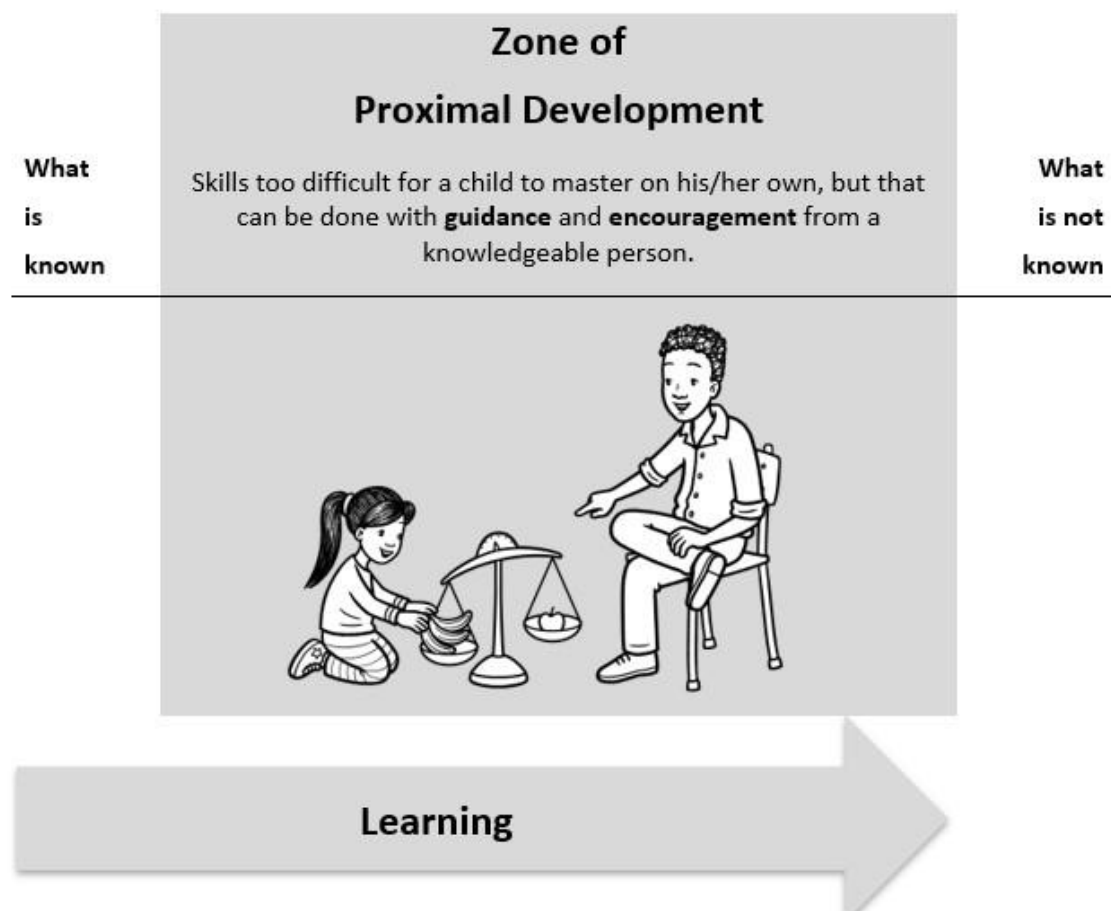

Figure 4: Zone of Proximal Development

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

Activity 5.5: Zone of proximal development (60 minutes)

Purpose: To demonstrate the ZPD
Facilitation:
With a colleague or participant, prepare to demonstrate how a teacher would help a child to progress within a specific task within their ZPD.

Here is a scenario you could use or you can develop your own:

A child is sitting on their own drawing with crayons. They draw a person with a huge head, one eye, no ears and small legs. The teacher joins the child:

♦ "Can you tell me about who is in your picture?"
♦ "How many eyes do you have?"
♦ "How many eyes does your person have?"
♦ "Can you show me?"
♦ "Can you show me your ears?"
♦ "Do all people have ears?"
♦ "Do you have ears?"
♦ "Does your person have ears?"
♦ "Can you show me?"

Demonstrate your prepared scenario to show how an adult could help a child on a specific task within the ZPD. Talk about the importance of planning activities that are within the children's ZPD (the whole class as well as the individual child) and explain that this theory is further explored in later sessions on the role of the adult in a play-based approach.

Have participants find a partner and ask them to share an example of a time they observed a child trying to complete a task on their own that was too difficult.

♦ What made the task too difficult?
♦ Who could have helped? What could they have done?

In the larger group, discuss the different examples and write a list of what could have helped and what they could have done. Using the information about the role of the adult, introduce Vygotsky's idea of the Zone of Proximal Development.

Summarise Vygotsky's views on play.

Psychodynamic theories

Psychodynamic theorists focus on how early experiences affect a child's future development.

Attachment theory

♦ **John Bowlby (1907-1990)** was a British psychologist working with children and one of the first people to recognise that babies and young children need strong, stable relationships with their primary caregivers. Attachment is the process through which babies and young children form close emotional connections with their caregivers. These close relationships are key to children's development and learning as they influence the extent to which children will explore their environment. Through these relationships children's 'sense of emotional security will create strong connections in the brains' (Lindon, 2005) and encourage learning and development. Babies, toddlers and young children who form secure attachments with their caregivers and teachers will know that there is someone there to support them and they will develop a feeling of safety and trust. This secure emotional base will give them confidence to play, explore the world around them and form positive relationships.

♦ **Erik Erikson (1902 – 1994)** was a psychoanalyst who is known for his Psychosocial Stages of Development that everyone passes through across their lifespan. At each stage of development there is a 'crisis' that needs to be faced before we can move on to the next stage. The first four stages describe the development from birth to childhood.

They are:

1. **Infancy (0 – 1 year): Trust vs. Mistrust.** Babies need to feel safe and secure in their world and develop a sense of trust in the people around them.

2. **Toddler (1 – 3 years): Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt.** Toddlers are learning to do things for themselves, learn rules and develop control over their bodies as well as their own behaviour.

3. **Early Childhood (3 – 6 years): Initiative vs. Guilt.** Children are curious about learning and exploring the world around them. They are increasingly able to take responsibility for planning and carrying out activities.

4. **Elementary School (5 – 12 years) Industry vs. Inferiority.** Children are learning that work is meaningful and worthwhile. They compare themselves to other children.

Like Piaget, Erikson believed that children construct their knowledge and discover for themselves in order to understand. He believed that play is very important in the early stages of children's development because it gives children the opportunity to discover and build their own understanding in a safe world. He identified two conditions for **successful play:**

1. Freedom within set limits

2. The opportunity to discover.

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

♦ Emotional attachments early in a child's life have significant consequences for their playfulness. Theorists such as Freud, Erikson and Bowlby saw play as important for young children as providing a safe release of negative emotions and stresses. Erikson (1950) states that 'solitary play remains an indispensable harbour for the overhauling shattered emotions after periods of rough going in the social seas.' (page 194).

Activity 5.6: Attachment in play and learning (60 minutes)

Purpose: To explore the importance of attachment in children's play and learning

Materials: Flip chart paper, Video clip of Stillface experiment:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEbZht0

Facilitation: Brainstorm:

♦ What is attachment?

List the participants' ideas on flipchart paper. Define attachment as the close emotional connection that is formed between adults and children.

Tell participants that they are going to observe a video clip of an experiment developed by Edward Tronick in 1978 called the **Still Face Experiment** to help us understand children's attachment needs. A mother and child will interact for a while and then the mother will hold her face still for three minutes and not react to her child at all. It is important to let participants know that the baby will get a little upset, and assure them that the mother and baby have a close relationship and that this was the only time that this happened.

After the video discuss what happened:

♦ How did the mother and baby interact?
♦ What happened when the mother stopped responding to her baby?
♦ What do you think would happen if there was little or no connection with the mother over time?
♦ What does this tell you about the relationships between children and adults in your programme?

Highlight the importance of building strong relationships and forming secure attachments with children of all ages in their programmes. Ask participants to think about the kinds of play experiences that can be included in the daily programme to strengthen relationships with children.

Divide participants into small groups according to different age groups:

♦ Babies and toddlers (0 – 3 years)
♦ Young children (3 – 4 years)
♦ Grade R (5 – 6 years)
♦ Grades 1 – 3 (7 – 9 years).

Ask the students to think about the important role caregivers and teachers have in encouraging attachment and secure relationships.

♦ Design a play activity (individual, small group or whole group) to help form secure and positive relationships between a teacher or caregiver and the children.

♦ Demonstrate this activity to the larger group.

Give the groups time to complete the task and then share their play activity with the whole class.

Why play is important

Children have the right to play

The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that

> *State Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts (United Nations, 1989, Article 31).*

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 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 hazards 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.

Curriculum policies and guidelines

♦ In curriculum and teacher training policy and guidelines play is strongly promoted in the National Curriculum Framework for children from Birth to Four (Department of Basic Education, 2015).

♦ The Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015) explains that "Grade R prepares young children for formal learning. The focus of this grade is on learning through play, developing physical coordination as well as developing spoken language competence and fundamental ideas that will form a basis for the future development of number sense and literacy" (pp 25 – 26).

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).

The following reading provides information on the benefits of play in these developmental domains.

Reading: Pages 25 - 33, New Foundland, Labrador Education and Early Childhood Development (2016**) Full–Day Kindergarten Play-Based Learning**: Promoting a Common Understanding. Canada.

https://www.gov.nl.ca/eecd/files/pdf_fdk_common_understandings_-document_eng_2016.pdf

It is important to remember that not all families see play in the same way as we do. Play may be influenced by how a family or culture value play, and the extent to which adults play with their children. We need to respect differences and try to understand them.
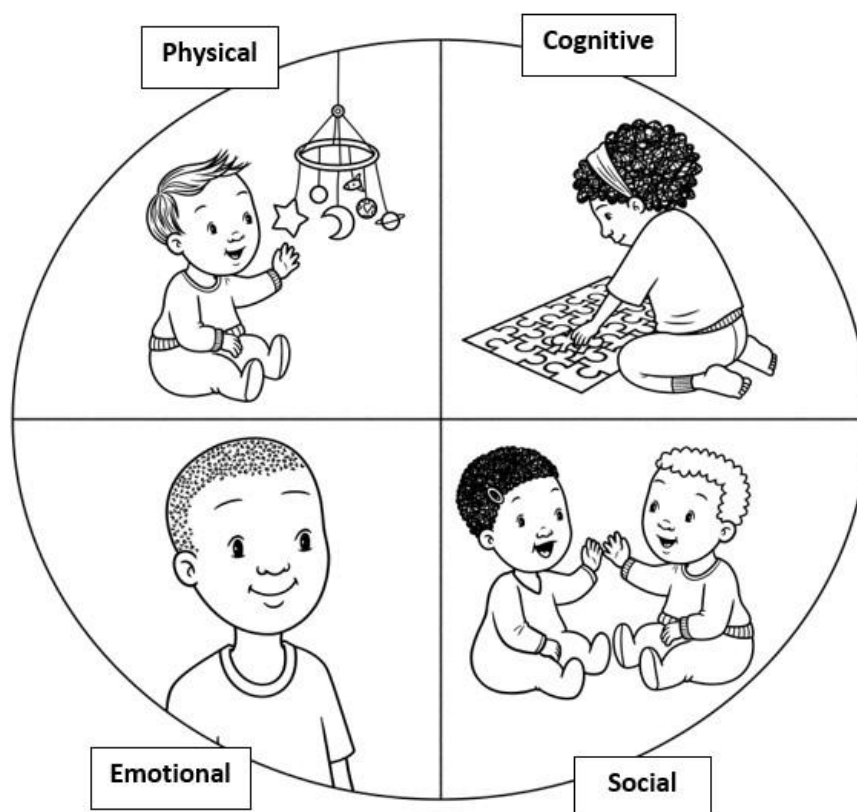

Figure 5: Developmental domains

Activity 5.7: Why play is important (30 minutes)

Purpose: To think about the ways that babies and toddlers develop and learn through play across the developmental domains.

Materials:

♦ Photocopy and cut the sentence strips below so that there is one sentence strip per person

♦ Music - musical instrument or recording.

Facilitation:

Explain to participants that this activity will help them to think about the important ways that babies and toddlers develop and learn through play across the developmental domains.

Ask participants to form two circles of equal numbers and then have one circle stand inside the other circle. Those in the inner circle face outwards and those in the outer circle face inwards, so that everyone faces someone who will be her/his partner. Hand out a sentence strip to each person.

Explain that you will play some music and that everyone will move in time to the music, to their right. When you shout "Stop!" they will be facing a new partner. They read the sentence to their partner and discuss its significance in children's development and learning. They swap sentences and the music starts again. Repeat the activity several times.

After the activity, summarise the main ideas and refer participants to the selected reading. (The quotes in the sentence strips have been taken directly from the text.)

Children use multisensory experiences resulting from their interactions with people and things in their environment to understand the world around them.
As children pretend play, objects become arbitrary, abstract symbols for real items required for the play.
Play provides opportunities for children to approach problems with an open mind and to solve problems using a variety of divergent ways.
During play children learn about social roles and the social world around them.
Play provides many opportunities for children to see things from other's perspectives.
Play allows children to learn and practice the principles that underlie all social exchanges such as talking, listening, speaking, taking turns, leading and following.
Children's oral language skills are enhanced through play as they explore the sounds used to form words and experiment with putting them together in creative and fun ways.
Through simple rhyming games, children learn about the structure of words and their meanings.
Playful learning enhances children's vocabulary as compared to more didactic practices such as direct instruction.
Children's oral and written language skills are enhanced as they play with letters, sounds and purposeful writing in all areas of the classroom.
Play supports mathematics development by providing children with opportunities to use concrete objects to compare, classify, quantify and sort using several attributes.
Play supports mathematics development by providing children with opportunities to use concrete objects engage in problem-solving, logical and flexible thinking.
Play supports mathematics development by providing children with opportunities to engage in patterning, measuring and geometry.
Gross motor development is supported through active play and repeated use of the large muscles. Movements become more coordinated and they develop a better awareness of body, space, and direction.
Fine motor development is refined as students cut, glue, lace, button, paint, sculpt, print, draw, build with blocks (large and small), engage in sensory play, put together puzzles and structures, etc.
Play supports the development of self-regulation and emotional development. It helps anxiety, frustration, normal developmental conflicts, traumatic situations, unfamiliar concepts, and overwhelming experience
Because there is no right or wrong way to play, children have successful experiences that positively influence their self-concept.

Play, the brain and executive function

The early years are very important for brain development and learning. The prefrontal cortex of the brain is responsible for executive function skills. There are a set of cognitive processes which work together to help us to organise our thinking and manage our behaviour. They start to develop early in a child's life and continue through the early childhood and school years.

There are three areas of executive function skills:

1. **Working memory**. This is the ability to hold information in our memory and be able to draw on it and use it when needed.
2. **Inhibitory control**. This is what we know as self-control and it is the ability to not be distracted by what is happening around us so that we can complete a task or control our behaviour.
3. **Cognitive flexibility**. This is the ability to shift our attention and look at things in a new way where necessary. It teaches us to be creative and adapt or change our way of thinking in order to solve problems.

Children need many opportunities to practise their executive function skills. The following resource identifies age-appropriate play activities to strengthen these three areas of executive function.

Reading: **Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University** (2014). Enhancing and practising executive function skills with children from infancy to adolescence.

www.developingchild.harvard.edu

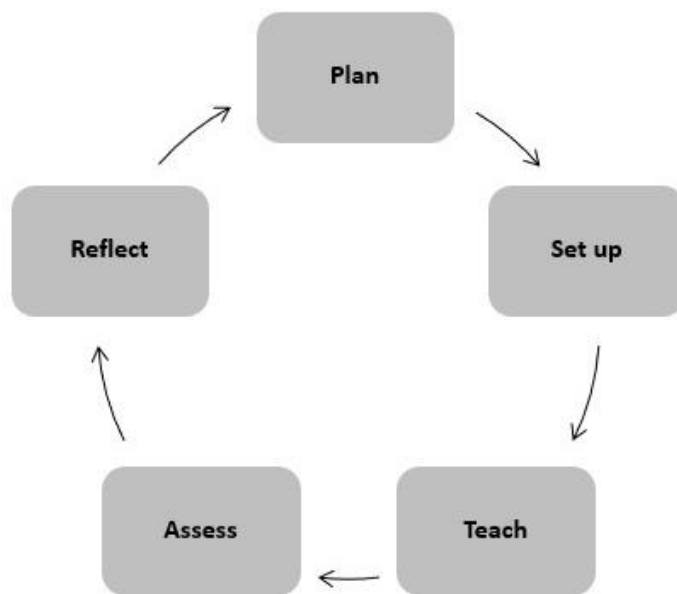# A play-based approach to teaching and learning (PBA)

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

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 without 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.

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- 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.

Characteristics of play-based pedagogy can be found in the following resource:

Reading: Pages 35-37, New Foundland, Labrador Education and Early Childhood Development (2016**) Full–Day Kindergarten Play-Based Learning**: Promoting a Common Understanding. Canada.

https://www.gov.nl.ca/eecd/files/pdf_fdk_common_understandings_-document_eng_2016.pdf

Dockett (2011) has presented challenges for understanding play and implementing a play pedagogy in the early years:

- Changing understandings of play which emphasise the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs.
- Recognising that children learn in diverse ways and that play may not be the preferred strategy of all children.
- Remands for an earlier start to academic education especially for children who may be marginalised, not succeeding in school.
- The role of individual teachers, beliefs and practices and how these impact on play in ECE.
- The changing nature and experiences of play as children engage with popular cultures and a range of technologies (pp 34 – 35).

Activity 5.8: Play, teaching and learning (60 minutes)

Purpose: To find out about the play-based approach to teaching and learning

Materials:
- Collage materials, paints or koki pens, glue, a poster board for each small group
- Flipchart paper and markers

Facilitation
Review the previous activities that have focused on the importance of play and explain that, based on what participants have learned, they will now look at what this means for play-based teaching and learning.

Brainstorm:

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

Write participants' responses on flipchart paper. Read and discuss what participants have written.

Give a summary presentation of a play-based approach, using the information in this guide.

Divide participants into small groups according to different age groups, e.g.:

♦ Babies and toddlers (0 – 3 years)

♦ Young children (3 – 4 years)

♦ Grade R (5 – 6 years)

♦ Grades 1 – 3 (7 – 9 years).

Scenario

The staff at your centre or school takes a play-based approach to teaching and learning. As the new year approaches, parents of enrolled children are wanting to know what this means for their child's learning and education.

In your small group, read pages 35-37 of the selected reading and discuss what this means for your programme.

Design a leaflet that provides a clear picture of your play-based programme that includes information about:

♦ the learning environment

♦ the learning materials

♦ the role of the teacher/caregiver

♦ the curriculum.

Give the groups time to complete the task and design their leaflets. One member from each group shares their leaflet with the whole group. Discuss what is alike and what is different about the programmes for different age groups. Address issues of concern, such as play not being seen as important in the Foundation Phase classrooms, or the pressure of curriculum demands. Invite participants to think of possible solutions.

6. PLAY CONTINUUM: LEVELS OF INITIATION AND DIRECTION IN PLAY

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

♦ understand how the play continuum links different forms of play

♦ understand how levels of choice and control define forms of play

♦ understand why and how to foster agency in children

♦ understand optimal learning and ways in which teachers can mediate it

♦ analyse, adapt and apply learnings to their early learning settings

♦ think critically, problem solve, share and generate ideas for applying theory to practical teaching activities.

Understanding play as a continuum

Successful teachers provide play-based learning activities for children by:

1. adhering to a set of play principles
2. understanding the levels of initiation (choice) and direction (control) of play that underpin each form of play along the play continuum
3. implementing the cycle of plan, set up, teach, assess and reflect.

What is a 'play continuum'?

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

Activity 6.1: Understanding and applying a continuum (45 minutes)

Purpose:
To enable the students to:

♦ understand the essential characteristics of a continuum in preparation for learning about a play continuum.

Materials:

♦ Poster with definition of a continuum as above

♦ 5 cm wide strips of newspaper ranging in length from 1.5 metres to 10 cm, one for each student

♦ Masking tape (or string), blank paper, markers.

Facilitation 1: Creating a continuum

♦ Tell the group you are going to find out about a continuum.

♦ Display the poster on the wall and read out the definition.

♦ Tell the students that they are going to make a continuum.

♦ Stick the masking tape on the floor in a long straight line and invite each student to take one strip of newspaper.

♦ Tell the students to put their strips in an order to create a continuum using the strips of newspaper.

Reflection
Ask the students:

♦ What kind of continuum have you made?

♦ How do you know this is a continuum?

♦ What would happen if we moved some of the paper strips?

Facilitation 2: Creating different continuums
Divide into three or more small groups. Give each a note.

1

Create a continuum based on the ages of your group. (Keep in mind that a continuum is a range or series of things that are slightly different from each other but they lie somewhere between two different possibilities)

2

Create a continuum based on the weight of the bag/s you brought here today. (Keep in mind that a continuum is a range or series of things that are slightly different from each other but they lie somewhere between two different possibilities)

3

Create a continuum based on the height of shoe heels your group is wearing today. (Keep in mind that a continuum is a range or series of things that are slightly different from each other but they lie somewhere between two different possibilities)

Invite each group to find a quiet place and to take 5 minutes to create a continuum. Blank paper, tape and markers are available.

Each group takes a turn to present their continuum (without naming it) to the other two groups highlighting what makes it a continuum.

Facilitation 3: What is play ?
Invite all the students to sit closely together in a circle (on chairs or on the floor).

Tell the students the rules of the game by saying 'We are going to play a broken telephone kind of game called the 'What is play?' When passing on words to the person

next to you, each person is going to whisper 'What is play? Play is ….' and then add a __different__ word or phrase to finish the sentence.

Examples:

♦ Student 1: Play is …. when you are with friends

♦ Student 2: Play is …. when you play dominoes

♦ Student 3: Play is …. when you are having fun.

Invite the students to 'popcorn' (calling out in random order) what they heard. Capture as many ideas as possible by writing them in a mindmap on newsprint.
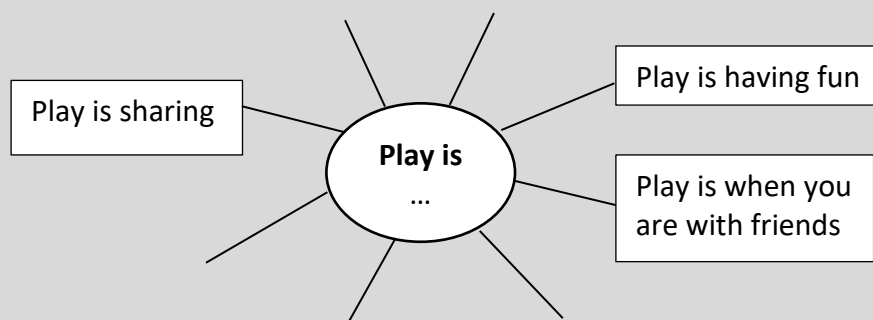
Reflection and application:

Point to the newsprint showing different ideas there about play. How could we put all these ideas together? Revisit the definition of a continuum and ask:

♦ What might a play continuum look like?

Write the students' ideas on newsprint (when the play continuum is introduced refer back to the students' ideas).

NOTES for the Facilitator: the reflection process

Don't rush the reflection part of an activity. The activity is the fun part that gets the students' attention. The learning happens when the students engage with the open-ended reflection questions after the activity. Ask one question at a time and wait patiently for the students' responses.

Ask open-ended questions. This gives students opportunities to reason, think for themselves, problem-solve, communicate their ideas, show what they already know, and to apply their learning.

When you start the reflection with an easy-open question, such as 'What do you notice?', it gives every student the opportunity to engage irrespective of entry-level and familiarity with the language of instruction. The responses also give the facilitator a good idea of the students' level of understanding and interest.

Remind students that they can apply the reflection process with children in their early learning settings. Help the students to transfer what they have experienced in their session to their classroom/ ECD setting (**mirroring**).

Forms of play on the play continuum

There are many theories on what play is for young children. The play continuum is one way of drawing together the various theories of play, and its many forms, into a coherent pedagogy.

The play continuum (Zosh et al, 2018) has four forms of play that range between free play and playful instruction:

Figure 7: The play continuum

The continuum stretches between free play and playful instruction. In a discussion of pedagogy didactic activity could come after playful instruction on the continuum but this has not been included on the play continuum because it does not embody to essential characteristics of play. Unsupervised play could precede free play on the play continuum but is not included as young children need to be supervised even when the adults are not involved in the children's play.

Each form of play is decided by who starts/initiates, chooses, and controls/directs the play activity (Zosh et al. 2017). We use the capitals C (Children) and T (Teacher) when the levels of initiation and direction are high. We use the lowercase c (children) and t (teacher) when the levels of initiation and direction of play are low.

Table 2 below explains these ideas further.

Table 2: Initiation and direction

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

Table 3 explains the levels of initiation and direction in the context of the different forms of play on the play continuum.

Table 3: Levels of initiation and direction on the play continuum

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

The following activity enables the students to apply their understanding of the play continuum by matching teaching activities to forms of play. Tables 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 are below Activity 6.2.

Activity 6.2: Matching teaching activities to forms of play (60 minutes)

The students match examples of play-based teaching activities to the forms of play on the play continuum.

Purpose:
To enable students to understand the play continuum as a range of forms of play depending on the levels of initiation and direction

Materials:

♦ Table 4 (babies), Table 5 (toddlers), Table 6 (young children), Table 7 (Grade R) and Table 8 (Grades 1 – 3)

♦ Large envelopes (one for each small group of students)

♦ Copies of Tables 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8 (one set for each small group)

♦ Copies of matching templates for the different age groups (one set for each small group).

The facilitator prepares the following:

♦ Cut up the copies of Tables 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8. Discard the headings that say, 'form of play' and 'code (**C**, **Ct** etc)'. Each set (4, 5, 6, 7 & 8) will have 20 play activities.

♦ Put each set of 20 play activity strips into one envelope. You will need one envelope with one set of 20 play activities for each small group.
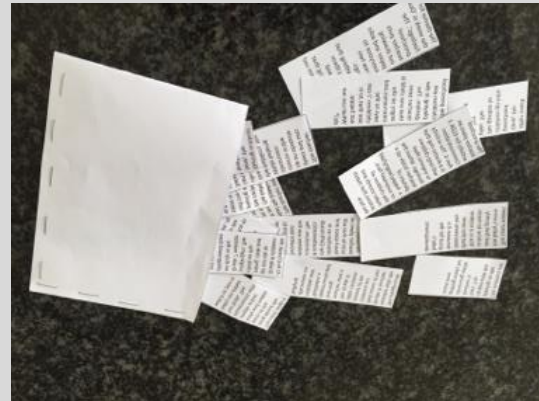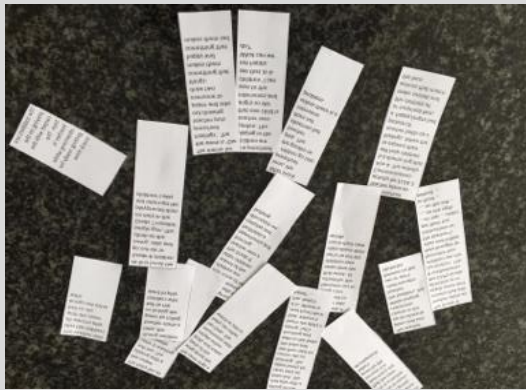
♦ Print one set of templates for play activities for each of the five age groups (one set for each small group).

Facilitation:

♦ Divide into small groups (3 – 4 students in each group).

♦ Each group gets one envelope (with the 20 play activity strips) and five matching templates.

Explain the activity to the students as follows:

♦ Each group places the 20 play activities on the five templates by matching each activity to the age of children and the form of play. Remind the students that each form of play is determined by who initiates and who directs the play and at what level.
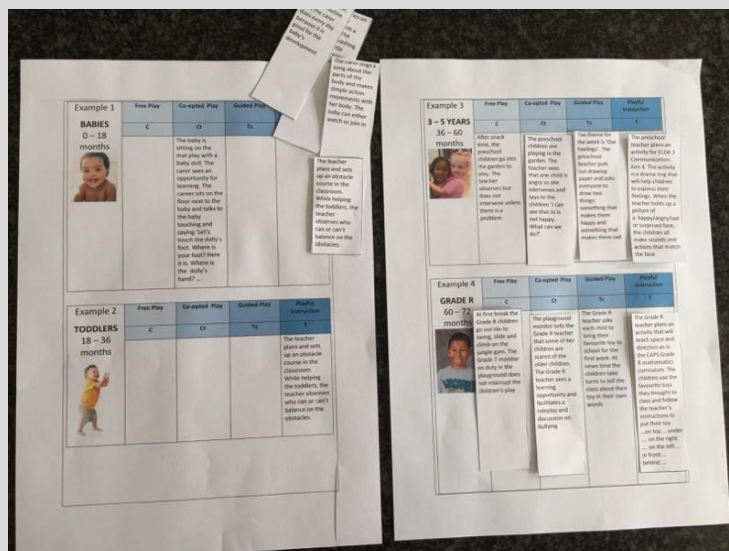
♦ When each group has completed the task, the facilitator invites the students to look at the statements in the Student Guide and to check if they have matched the 20 play activities correctly.

Reflection:

The facilitator asks the group:

♦ How did you know which activity was Free Play? What are the essential characteristics of Free Play?

♦ How did you know which activity was Co-opted Play? What are the essential characteristics of Co-opted Play?

♦ How did you know which activity was Guided Play? What are the essential characteristics of Guided Play?

♦ How did you know which activity was Playful Instruction? What are the essential characteristics of Playful Instruction?

♦ Were there disagreements in your group and how did you decide where to place the activities?

♦ Choose one of the five age groups and think of an example of an age-appropriate play activity for each of the forms of play on the continuum.

NOTES for the Facilitator

If the students need a challenge and they enjoy competitive games, turn Activity 6.2 into a matching race. The matching starts when the facilitator shouts 'Ready steady go! '. The first group to finish matching shouts 'BINGO'. The winner is the first group to correctly match all 20 activities.

The following five tables provide examples of each form of play for each age group for Activity 6.2.

Table 4: Babies: Examples of forms of play

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
BABIES 0 – 18 months 	A baby lies on the mat playing with a soft toy. The teacher doesn't engage with the baby but is keeping a watchful eye on the baby while tidying up.	The teacher notices that the baby is trying to crawl, finds a new toy and puts it on the mat just out of the baby's reach. When the baby stretches out for the toy the teacher encourages the baby.	The teacher plays Peek-a-boo with the baby.	The teacher plans a sensory activity for the 1 year olds based on ELDA 3 Communication Aim 3: *Children make meaning by 'reading' what they see, hear, smell, taste and touch*. The teacher makes a sensory basket for the babies with a perfumed cloth, an apple, a smooth plastic ball, a rough sponge, a marmite rusk, a honey rusk, a rattle, a shaker, and a colourful baby book. Babies explore the items and the teacher talks to them using words e.g. *touch, skin, rough, smooth, taste, tongue, sweet, salty, ear, hear, loud, soft.*

Table 5: Toddlers: Examples of forms of play

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
TODDLERS 18 – 36 months	The teacher puts playdough, crayons, and books on the tables and lays soft toys on the mat. The teacher watches but doesn't intervene in the children's play.	The teacher puts playdough, crayons, and books on the tables. While the toddlers are engaging in free play, the teacher notices what they are doing, asks open-ended questions, describes what they are doing and suggests extensions.	The teacher sets up a discovery activity for the toddlers based on ELDA 6 Knowledge and understanding of the world. Aim 1: *Children explore and investigate their life world*. The teacher puts out a table with shells, a pine cone, a pineapple, an orange, apple and lemon cut into slices, mint and rosemary, a bell, a drum, a squeaky toy, pairs of old glasses, and magnifying glasses. The children are asked to explore the items on the discovery during the week.	The teacher sets up an activity based on ELDA 3 Communication Aim 3: *Children make meaning by 'reading' what they see, hear, smell, taste and touch* The teacher takes a shoe box and cuts a hole in the top. The box is filled with a small ball, an apple, a toy car, and a rattle. The teacher asks the child to put their hand through the hole and to guess what they are feeling.

Table 6: 3 – 5-year-old children: Examples of forms of play

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
3 – 5 YEARS 36 – 60 months	A small group of four-year-old children go into the dolls' corner to play. The preschool teacher observes, but does not intervene in the play.	The children playing in the dolls' corner decide to go 'shopping'. The teacher sees this as an opportunity for the children to learn numbers so gives the children materials to set up a 'shop' e.g. boxes, cans, plastic bottles, shopping bags and bottle tops (money). The teacher writes R1, R2, R3, R4 or R5 on each item in the 'shop'.	The preschool teacher plans an activity for ELDA 4 Exploring Mathematics: Aim 3: *Children explore shape, space and measurement.* The teacher says to the children: '*Today we are having a circle day'* The teacher talks about circles, shows examples and invites the children to go on a treasure hunt around the classroom to find thing that look like circles.	The preschool teacher plans a number ring for ELDA 4 Exploring Mathematics: Aim 1: *Children show awareness of and are responsive to number and counting*. Start with an action number song. The teacher then says a number and the children jump, then clap, then kick that amount of times. Next children take turns to give her the same number of counters as she calls out. The ring ends with a number rhyme.

Table 7: Grade R children: Examples of forms of play

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
GRADE R 6 years 	At first break the Grade R children go outside to swing, slide and climb on the jungle gym. The teacher on duty in the playground does not interrupt the children's play.	The children show great interest in a colouring-in pattern book that a child has brought to school. The teacher sees a maths learning opportunity and invites them to look around the classroom for objects with patterns and to make a pattern.	The Grade R teacher introduces patterns. Grade R CAPS *Copy and extend simple patterns using physical objects and drawings.* She provides pattern cards and invites children to copy them using attribute shapes, counters and bottle tops.	The Grade R teacher wants children to understand what a pattern is Grade R CAPS *Copy and extend simple patterns using physical objects and drawings .* The teacher says '*Let's make a pattern book for our class*'. The teacher and children first discuss what a pattern is before making patterns with coloured bottle tops. The children then copy the pattern. The children end by drawing their own patterns on A4 paper. The teacher staples the patterns together to make a book.

Table 8: Grade 1 - 3 children: Examples of forms of play

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
GRADES 1 - 3 7 – 9 years	Grade 2 children go for first break. Some of the children play a hopscotch game, some kick a ball, and some play hide and go seek. The teacher on duty in the playground supervises, but does not interrupt the children's play.	The children show great interest in a jar of tadpoles that a child has brought to class. The Grade 2 teacher sees an opportunity for teaching Beginning Knowledge, and introduces the children to Grade 2 CAPS topic *Animals and creatures that live in water.* The teacher and children create a discovery table on water life. The children put the tadpoles, books on water life, and bring items on water animals from home to put on the table.	The Grade 2 teacher extends the children's interest in frogs and tadpoles with a creative art lesson: CAPS Life Skills: *Create in 2D Draw or paint pictures related to topics of the term; focus informally on line, tone, texture, colour* The Grade 2 teacher says '*Let's make a poster for our discovery table*'. The children draw their own pictures and the teacher sticks them onto a large blue paper. The teacher writes *Animals and Creatures that live in Water* on the poster and sticks it on the wall by the discovery table.	The Grade 2 teacher plans a lesson for CAPS English First Language: Shared Reading *Reads a short written fiction or non-fiction text with the teacher, using the pictures to develop vocabulary, the title for prediction and answering short, oral questions about the text* The teacher reads a story on the life cycle of the frog. After the story the teacher says '*Let's make our own book about our tadpol*es.' The teacher and children generate short sentences which the teacher writes on A3 paper. The teacher staples the pages to make a book. The children and teacher read the book together and decide on a title. The teacher asks questions about the book.

Below are the five templates which match the five age groups.

Template for Babies

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
BABIES 0 – 18 months 				

Template for Toddlers

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
TODDLERS 18 – 36 months				

Template for 3 – 5-year-olds

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
3 – 5 YEARS 36 – 60 months				

Template for Grade R

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
GRADE R 6 – 7 years				

Template for Grade 1 - 3 children

	Free Play	Co-opted Play	Guided Play	Playful Instruction
	C	Ct	Tc	T
GRADES 1 - 3 7 – 9 years 				

In the play-based early learning approach the activities move from one form of play to another and back again along the play continuum. Here is an example.

> The toddler group are playing outside. They are rolling, chasing, throwing and kicking a ball around the garden. The teacher observes the children, but doesn't interrupt the game (free play).
>
> After a while the toddlers start to fight over the ball. The teacher intervenes by picking up the ball and saying to the toddlers '*I can see that everyone wants to play with the ball, but nobody likes fighting so let's do something that makes everyone happy. We can do two things: we can put the ball away or we can find some more balls. Which one is the best solution*?' The teacher listens to the toddlers and then puts out extra balls (co-opted play).
>
> The children continue playing with the extra balls puts out by the teacher (free play).
>
> The next day the teacher extends the toddlers' interest in balls. The teacher puts out big and small balls, bats, old tennis rackets and lays out big plastic buckets on their sides. The children now kick and hit the balls and score goals (guided play).
>
> The teacher uses the children's interest in balls to plan an activity for the 0 – 4 years NCF:
>
> ELDA 1: WELL-BEING. Aim 4: Children are physically strong and show interest and abilities in physical activities
>
> ELDA 4: MATHEMATICS. Aim: Children explore shape, space and measurement.
>
> At ring time the toddlers and teacher sing an action song about a bouncy ball. The toddlers follow the teacher's actions. They pretend to be bouncy balls by jumping up and down, sideways, forwards and backwards, over a piece of string, in and out of hoola hoops and rolling around (playful instruction).

Activity 6.3 engages the students in reiterating (repeating the learning in a different way) their understanding of the play continuum by role-playing each type of play.

> ## Activity 6.3: Role-playing four forms of play (60 minutes)
>
> The students create and present four role-plays of children and teacher playing in different ways (free play, co-opted play, guided play and playful instruction). Next they all plan a guided play activity to implement with their children.
>
> **Purpose:**
> Enable students to:
>
> ♦ deepen their understanding of the play continuum in terms of initiation and direction and how each determines forms of play on the continuum
>
> ♦ work collaboratively in playful ways with peers
>
> ♦ plan a guided play activity to implement in an ECD setting.
>
> **Materials:**
>
> ♦ Copies of the four case studies below
>
> ♦ Props for role-plays e.g. tables, chairs, dolls corner items, scarves, balls, rope, hoola hoops, recyclables (plastic bottles, milk cartons, newspaper, boxes, tins, etc.), soft

toys, sheets and blankets, paper, crayons, markers, magazine pages, scissors, glue, and play dough, etc.

♦ Student's Guide for Table 3 Levels of Initiation and Direction on the play continuum
♦ Student's Guide for Blank planning form.

Facilitation 1:
Divide the students into 4 groups.

Invite each group to choose one (folded) case study. Each group reads their case study but keeps it secret from the other groups.

Each group finds a quiet corner and take 10 minutes to create a three-minute role-play that demonstrates their chosen case study. The students may copy or adapt their case study or create a new one as long as it demonstrates the same form of play. Refer the students to the Table in their Student Guide.

Each group presents their role play to the other groups. After each role-play the observing students identify the form of play and the level of initiation and direction, what the children would learn, and the link with the curriculum.

The presenting group then reads their case study out loud confirming the type of play, and the levels of initiation and direction, and the link to the curriculum.

Reflection and application
The facilitator guides the whole group reflection by asking the following questions:

♦ Which form of play happens most often in your ECD setting?
♦ Is any one form of play most beneficial for children? Give reasons for your answer.

The facilitator reads out, and the students discuss, the statement by Zosh et al (2018) ' … children perform better in guided play than in free play and equal to or better than indirect instruction.' (p. 3).

Facilitation 2:
The students pair up with someone who teaches the same age children.

Each pair discusses how to do a Guided Play (**Tc**) activity with their children.

Facilitation 3:
Each student individually writes a Guided Play (**Tc**) activity for their ECD setting on the blank planning form in their Student Guide.

When thinking about the play continuum and how children develop through different forms of play, keep in mind the following:

Although each form of play contributes to how children develop, researchers, Zosh et al (2018) assert that '… adult support and focus on a particular learning goal' are important elements when learning through guided play.

Although play described in the case studies below are separated is separated into four clearly defined forms, it rarely happens that way in ECD settings. For example:

Teacher-directed (**T**) play becomes guided play (**Tc**) as soon as the teacher encourages a child to say and do something in their own way.

As soon as a teacher intervenes and redirects free play (**C**) it becomes co-opted play (**Ct**).

The following four case studies are used in Activity 6.3. Each case study represents one form of play and explains who initiated and who directed the play.

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

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

Case study 3	
Form of play Guided Play	The teacher plans a space exploration activity for Exploring Mathematics ELDA 4. Aim 3: *Children explore shape, space and measurement* in the 0 – 4 years National Curriculum Framework. The teacher reads the book 'Going on a Bear Hunt' The children join in the actions and making of sounds. We're Going on a Bear Hunt *Michael Rosen • Helen Oxenbury* The teacher sets up an obstacle course. The teacher calls the children and says 'We are going to do an obstacle course. It will be like the Bear Hunt. We are going under, over, up and down in and out and around.' The teacher and children together: crawl <u>under</u> a table climb <u>over</u> a table step-up on a box and jump <u>down</u> balance <u>on</u> a rope laid on the ground jump <u>in and out</u> hoola hoops walk <u>around</u> a big chair The teacher says '*Let's see you do it again. Show me what you can do*!' The children do the obstacle course again in their own way.
Levels of initiated play and directed play **Tc**	The **T**eacher initiated, directed and was in control most of the time. The teacher planned and directed the three activities with a clear intention in mind. The **c**hildren had some level of direction but it was low. Although the children had to complete all three activities as instructed, each child could decide how to move through the obstacle course.

Case study 4	
Form of play Playful instruction	The teacher plans a shape activity for Exploring Mathematics ELDA 4. Aim 3: *Children explore <u>shape</u>, space and measurement* in the 0 – 4 years National Curriculum Framework: The teacher makes a set of skittles by sticking a circle, a triangle, a rectangle, an oval, a heart, a diamond, and a square onto 2-litre plastic bottles. The teacher puts some sand in the bottle of each bottle to make them more steady. Every day the teacher takes a group of children and teaches them the skittle game. The teacher lays out different cardboard shapes and sets up the skittles on the floor. After rolling the ball, the child picks up the knocked down skittle and matches the shape on the bottle to the shape on the floor. The teacher asks the children to name the shape.
Levels of initiated play and directed play **T**	The **T**eacher started, directed and was in control all the time. The teacher planned and organized the skittle activity with a clear outcome in mind for the children i.e. learn to match and name shapes. The **c**hildren had no control over the choice and directing of play. The teacher chose the game, made the materials, and told the children what to do. There was no opportunity for the children to do the activity differently. It was, however, a play activity and fun for the learners.

The following blank planning form is for Activity 6.3.

Planning Form

Date:

Teacher:

Age of children:

Curriculum

Resources:

Activity:

Agency and optimal learning

Quality play-based approach (PBA) learning experiences for children comes from understanding the play continuum in relation to nurturing agency and planning optimal learning activities. This section helps students to understand 1) what agency and optimal learning is, and 2) how to enable agency and optimal learning in children.

What is agency?

Agency is when children feel valued and appreciated by the people who are important to them and feel confident because they can:

♦ make decisions

♦ do things by themselves

♦ take control of their environment

♦ voice their ideas.

When teachers share control (choosing, organising, deciding and directing) with children, it gives children the opportunity to experience agency i.e. a feeling of being capable, purposeful and valued.

Agency thrives when children feel listened to, know that their ideas matter, are actively engaged in meaningful ways, and can make choices and participate in decision-making. However, nurturing agency by sharing control does not mean letting children do anything they want. Many teachers find it hard to share control.

It can be difficult to start teaching differently, but it is important to nurture agency in children. Here are some ideas on how to share control with children:

♦ Ask open-ended questions that get children talking and teachers listening.

♦ Plan learning activities that relate to the children's interests and preferences.

♦ Give children opportunities to use their ideas.

♦ Involve children in making decisions.

♦ Offer children choices.

Activity 6.4 enables students to match the five ideas on sharing control (above) to practical and appropriate ways of sharing control with children.

Activity 6.4: Sharing control (60 minutes)

Purpose:
Enable students to identify practical ways to share control with children 0 – 9 years old.

Materials:

♦ Student Guide for Table 9 Sharing control with children.

♦ Markers, newsprint

♦ 5 newsprint sheets with the following headings:

What practical things can teachers do and say to share control with **babies**?	What practical things can teachers do and say to share control with **toddlers**?	What practical things can teachers do and say to share control with **3 – 5 year olds**?

What practical things can teachers do and say to share control with **Grade R** children?	What practical things can teachers do and say to share control with **Grades 1 - 3** children?

Facilitation:
Invite the students to open their Student Guides and read out loud the following text:

Many teachers find it hard to share control. It can be daunting to start teaching differently, but it is important to nurture agency in children. Here are some ideas on how to share control:

♦ Ask open-ended questions that get children talking and teachers listening.

♦ Plan learning activities that relate to the children's interests and preferences.

♦ Give children opportunities to use their ideas.

♦ Involve children in making decisions.

♦ Offer children choices.

Ask the students: How can we turn these five ideas into practical activities for teachers?

Divide the group into five according to the age of the children taught by the students i.e. babies, toddlers, 3 – 5-year-olds, Grade R, and Grades 1 - 3.

Hand out one newsprint sheet to each group and invite them to discuss and write down their ideas on how they share control with their age group.

Display the posters.

Invite the students to walk around and read the five posters.

Asks the students to individually complete Table 9 Sharing control with children in their Student Guides.

Application
In the whole group:

Ask each student to turn to the person next to them and cross-check their completed Table 9. Allow them to add any new ideas on their table.

Table 9: Sharing control with children

Match the ideas on the left side to the practical examples on the right side by drawing a line from one to the other. The first one has been done to show you how to do the rest.

Ideas on how to share control with children	Practical examples of how to share control with children
Ask open-ended questions	Teacher says: We can put balls or scooters out today. Which one would you like?
Consider the children's interests and preferences	Teacher says: How could you do that differently?
Provide opportunities for children to use their own ideas	Teacher says: What would you do?
	Teacher says: Oh dear! We have a problem. What ideas do you have on how we can solve the problem?
Invite children to take part in decision making	Ask parents and caregivers about the child's likes and dislikes.
Offer children choices	Put out a variety of art materials so that children can choose how to make their own artwork.
	Teacher says: Today we have oranges and apple slices. You may choose which ones you would like to eat.

My best ideas on how to share control with children:

Activity 6.5 builds the student's understanding of agency and how to share control with children.

Activity 6.5: Understanding and nurturing agency (60 minutes)

Purpose:
Enable students to:

♦ Deepen their understanding of agency and sharing control

♦ Identify opportunities for nurturing agency in children

♦ Consider part of a research paper on agency.

Materials:

♦ A paragraph from p.14 in Zosh et al (2017) is divided into five parts. Each part is written on a piece of paper (see below). Each statement is then folded and placed in a basket or box.

> Having agency does not equal 'anything goes' for children either at home or in education contexts.

> Agency in learning through play means seeing the child as capable rather than a blank slate to be filled.

> Agency is about the balance of initiative in the child adult relationship: are children's interests listened to? Are they consulted on decisions that concern them? Do they initiate an activity and invite adults to join them in play and decision-making?

> Two dimensions may be helpful to consider: how planned the learning environment is, and how much the child and adult control the evolving 'flow' of activities.

> What opportunities do children have for exerting their thinking and actions in a social context where others hold the same rights?

♦ Newsprint, markers.

Facilitation: Part 1
Invite the whole group of students to open their Student Guide and ask for a volunteer to read the following text out loud:

> Having agency does not equal 'anything goes' for children either at home or in education contexts. Agency in learning through play means seeing the child as capable rather than a blank slate to be filled (Daniels & Shumow, 2003). Agency is about the balance of initiative in the child adult relationship: are children's interests listened to?

Are they consulted on decisions that concern them? Do they initiate an activity and invite adults to join them in play and decision-making? In other words, what opportunities do children have for exerting their thinking and actions in a social context where others hold the same rights? Two dimensions may be helpful to consider: how planned the learning environment is, and how much the child and adult control the evolving 'flow' of activities (p.14 in Zosh et al. 2017).

Divide the students into five groups and explains 'Each group is going to discuss one part of the reading (above) and present it to the group. In this way we will get a clearer understanding of agency.'

♦ Invite each group to choose one of the five folded statements from the basket/box and to discuss what the statement means for 10 - 15 mins. Make notes on newsprint.

Each group presents their findings to the other groups in a PBA way i.e. fun, meaningful, actively involved, social and reiterative.

Facilitation: Part 2
♦ Invite the students to stand and form a circle
♦ Say 'Now that we know what agency is, let's play a game. I am going to read out a statement. If you agree with the statement step forwards. If you disagree with the statement step back.'
♦ Read out each statement below. After each response ask one or two students to share their reasons for stepping forwards or backwards.

Statement 1:
Agency happens when a teacher says to children:

I can see you all want to play with the new toy cars and trucks. I am going to make a rule. Only boys can play with the cars and trucks.

Statement 2:
Agency happens when a teacher says to children:

I am not at school tomorrow so I am putting you all in charge when I am not here.

Statement 3:
Agency happens when a teacher says to children:

The cook is deciding what to make for lunch next week. What do you like for lunch? I will write down your ideas and we can share them with the cook.

Statement 4:
Agency happens when a teacher says to children:

You are too little to decide which colour to paint. Teacher will choose for you.

Statement 5:
Agency happens when a teacher says to children:

Some of the children are not sleeping after lunch. I can see they are trying, but they are just not sleepy. Does anyone have any ideas on what to do?

Statement 6:
Agency happens when a teacher says to children:

Let's put away the nest and eggs Sizwe brought to school. Our theme for the week is 'My body' and today we are learning about the parts of our body.

Statement 7:
Agency happens when a teacher says to children:

We have a problem. Cindy and Dwayne are fighting all the time. How can we help them find a happy solution to the problem?

Statement 8:
Agency happens when:

The teacher gives a baby one soft toy to play with.

Reflection and application
The facilitator invites the students to find a partner and to discuss for 3 minutes each of the following questions:

- Why is sharing control with children important?

- How can a teacher share control and manage the classroom at the same time?

Optimal learning

Optimal 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).

This means that teachers must:

♦ move away from telling children what to do and say

♦ move towards a play-based teaching and learning approach

♦ share choice and control

♦ plan and facilitate activities that are intentional, fun, active, inclusive, foster agency and offer children choices (Zosh et al, 2017).

Just as athletes need to exercise their muscles, so children need to exercise their 'thinking muscles' in order to learn (Zosh et al, 2017). This means teachers stop telling children what to do all the time and start encouraging children to choose, decide, solve problems and follow their own ideas and interests. What do you think happens to children when there are no opportunities to plan, choose, organise and problem-solve?

The next activity is a quick, fun exercise in identifying the benefits of sharing control.

Activity 6.6: The benefits of sharing control (15 minutes)

Purpose:
Enable students to:

♦ identify the benefits of sharing control

♦ apply the activity to the ECD setting.

Materials:

♦ Picture of two donkeys[1]

♦ One blank A4 paper for each student.

Facilitation
Invite students to find a partner and discuss the picture of the two donkeys for 5 minutes.

Reflection

♦ Ask the following questions:

  ♦ What do you see in the picture?

  ♦ Are there benefits of sharing control? Explain your opinion.

♦ Hand each student a blank A4 page and ask them to list benefits of teachers sharing control with children.

♦ Say *'Let's make a snowball and have a 60 second snowball fight!'* The students crush their A4 paper (with the list of benefits) into a ball and throw them at each other for 1 minute.

♦ Invite the students to pick up one 'snowball', smooth out the page, and take turns to read one benefit out loud.

Application

♦ Invite the students to return to their pairs and discuss the following questions with their partner for 5 minutes:

  ♦ How could you use the donkey picture in the classroom using the PBA?

  ♦ What would the children learn?

  ♦ What links can you make with the curriculum?

---

[1] Downloaded off the internet Instrumental enrichment: An intervention program for cognitive modifiability
R Feuerstein, Ya'acov Rand, MB Hoffman, R Miller – 1980 Baltimore: University Park Press
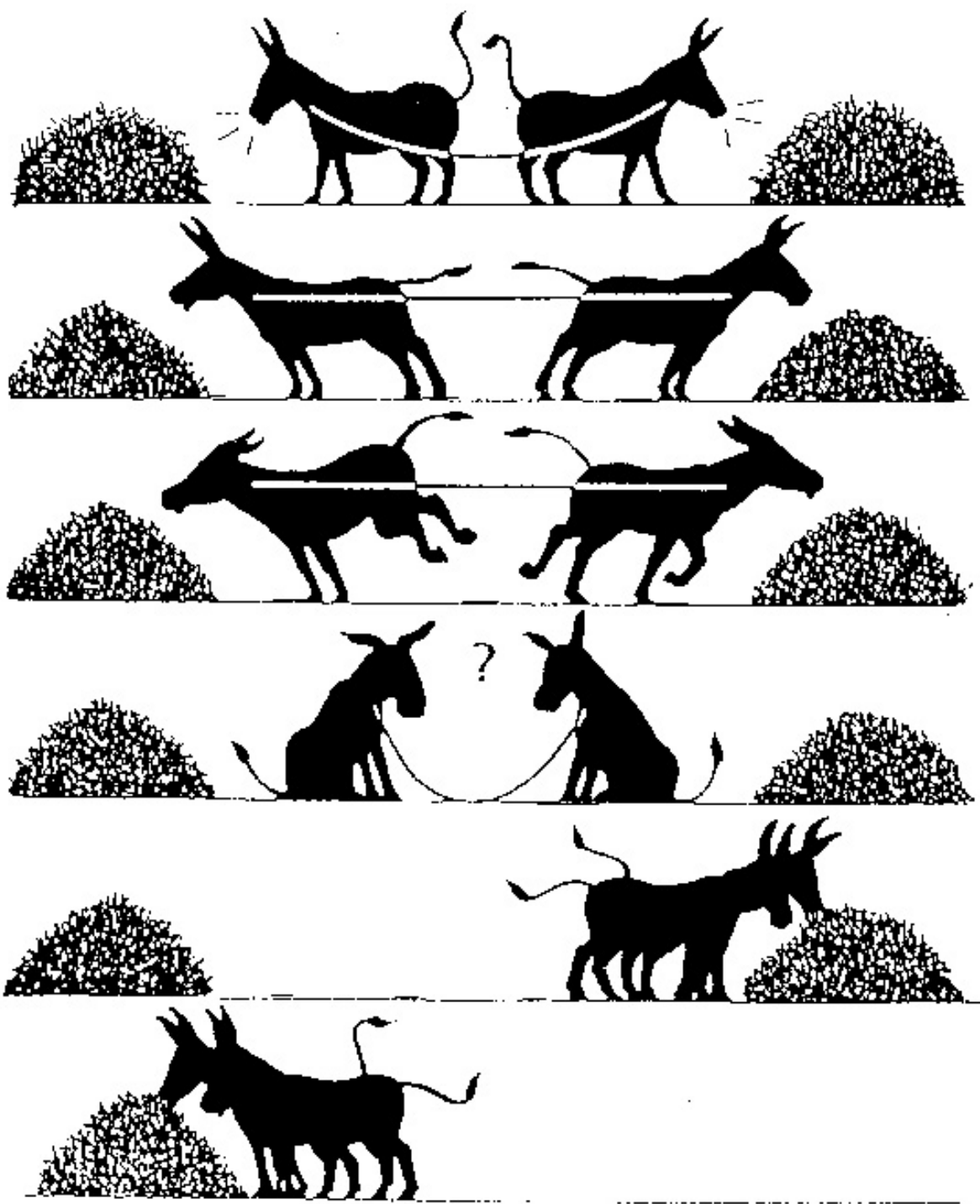
Figure 8: The two donkeys

Activity 6.7 concludes the section on the play continuum. The students summarise what they have learned, identifying the gaps in their understanding and note any changes made as a result of their learning.

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Activity 6.7: Summary - The play continuum (20 minutes)

The students summarise what they learned about the play continuum.

Purpose: To enable the student to identify what they have learned and how they could apply this learning in their ECD context.

Note the areas where more information or clarification is needed.

Materials:
♦ Summary and feedback Form
♦ Newsprints and posters made by students and facilitator during Section 6.

Facilitation:
Point out the posters and newsprints created in this section and invite the students to walk around the room for 5 minutes revisiting what they have learned.

Invite each student to turn to the Summary and feedback Form and write:

♦ The three most important things they learned about the play continuum.
♦ The changes they made in their classroom or ECD setting in response to their learning.
♦ The areas where more information or clarification is needed.

</div>

Summary and feedback Form

Summary and feedback on the play continuum
The three most important things I learned about the play continuum, are:
The changes I have made (or plan to make) because of my learnings are:
Things I don't yet understand and need more information on are:

7.   How Do We Do A 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

Participants will

♦   understand the play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle

♦   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

♦   think critically, problem solve, share and generate ideas for applying theory to practical teaching activities.

Play-based teaching and learning activities

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 to teach and how to facilitate the children's learning.

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.

Assess: The teacher checks to see if the children have understood and can do what the planned learning activity taught them.

Reflect: The teacher thinks about the activity they planned and taught. The teacher thinks about:

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

The answers inform what the teacher plans for the next learning activity.
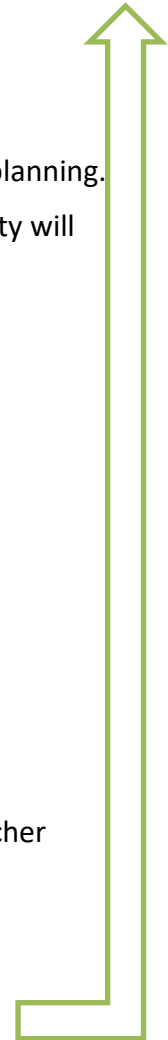
Planning

Planning is the first step in a five-step cycle that leads to quality learning experiences for children.
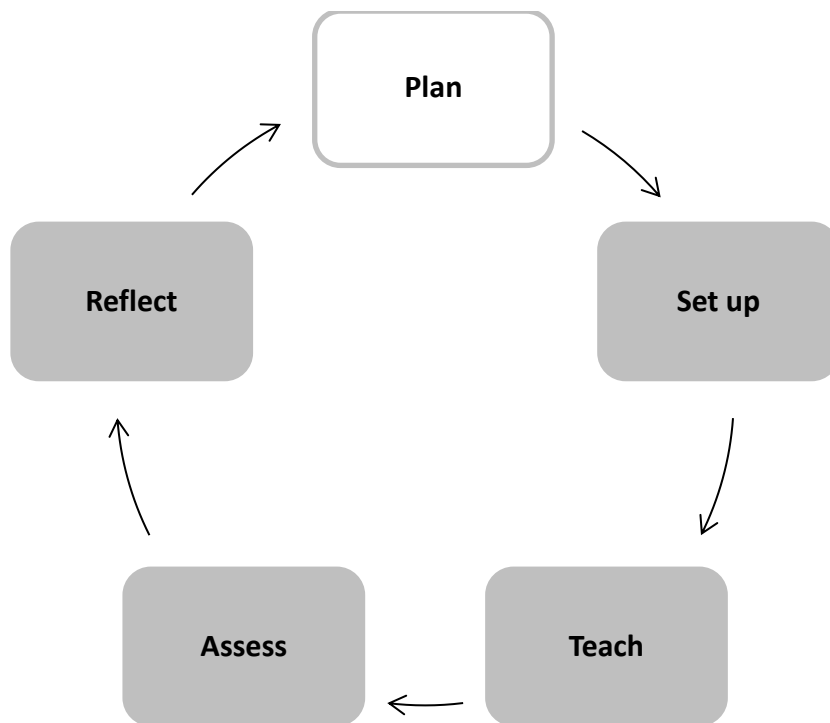
Figure 9: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Plan

Activity 7.1 introduces planning to the students in three parts: the students first brainstorm their own ideas, then engage with open-ended questions, and end by sharing planning tools.

Activity 7.1: Planning - the benefits and consequences (60 minutes)

Purpose:
To enable the students to

♦ Understand the concept of planning
♦ Recognise the benefits of planning and the consequences of not planning
♦ Gain insights into different ways of planning

Materials:

♦ Newsprint and markers.

Facilitation 1: Define planning

♦ Ask the students "*What does the word 'planning' mean to you*?" and write up the students' ideas on newsprint
♦ Work with the students to create a definition of 'planning' and write it on newsprint

Facilitation 2: Movement game

♦ Tell the students: 'Let's find out what happens when teachers don't plan'.

♦ Invite the students to find a partner and make an inner and outer circle with partners facing each other.

♦ Demonstrate how to do the rhythmic question and answer game by stamping out the question: '<u>Wha</u>t (right foot) <u>happens</u> (left foot) <u>when</u> (right foot) <u>teachers</u> (left foot) **don't** (right foot) <u>plan</u> (left foot). All the students practice stamping and saying the question. As the students become confident combine stamping with another movement e.g. snapping fingers, clapping, slapping thighs, shrugging shoulders.

Everyone stamps/shakes/slaps while chanting the words of the question. After the question each student takes a turn to share one answer with their partner.

Repeat 3 more times.

♦ Tell the students. "We are going to do that again but this time we are going to find out what happens when <u>teachers do plan</u>. Let's do a different movement. Who has an idea of what we can to do with our bodies?"

The students suggest movements for the question '<u>What</u> (movement) <u>happens</u> (movement) <u>when</u> (movement) t<u>eachers</u> (movement) <u>plan</u> (movement)?' Everyone chants and moves to the words of the question. After the question each student takes a turn to share one answer with their partner.

Repeat 3 more times.

Facilitation 3: Sharing ideas on how to plan

♦ Invite the students to form small groups of 3 – 5 based on the age group they teach e.g. all the toddler teachers form one group, all the Grade R teachers form another group, etc. If a group is more than 5 students, then split the group into two smaller groups.

♦ Tell each student to take 5 minutes to share with their group how they plan at their ECD setting/ school. The students share and discuss the planning forms they use.

When teachers plan play-based learning activities, there are much more likely to be:

♦ Teachers who look forward to their day of teaching because they are well-prepared.

♦ Children who look forward to coming to school because the learning activities are well thought out, prepared and enjoyable

♦ Fewer discipline problems because the teachers and classrooms are prepared and the children are engaged in meaningful learning

♦ Optimal learning

Planning is a two-step process: Step 1 is preparing for planning; Step 2 is doing the actual planning.

STEP 1: Preparing for Planning

Teachers prepare by finding out information that will help them plan effective learning activities for their children. Step 1 involves three activities:

1. Observing the children
The teacher finds out:

♦ what the children already know and can do
♦ what the children enjoy and are interested in.

2. Looking at the curriculum
The teacher finds out:

♦ what the children must be able to do and know before they go to the next grade
♦ the gaps in the children's learning
♦ what topics/themes, concepts and ideas will be of interest to the children.

3. Considering the learning context
The teacher finds out:

♦ the challenges and barriers to optimal learning e.g. children with visual impairment, children with learning disabilities, children whose home language is not the same as the language of learning and teaching
♦ the resources and opportunities that can facilitate teaching and learning
♦ the values that are important to the caregivers and community and ways to involve parents in their children's learning
♦ ideas on how to manage the classroom so that everyone enjoys learning together.

The next two activities enable students to understand how to

1) observe the children,
2) look at the curriculum
3) consider the learning context to help teachers to plan.

Activity 7.2 helps the students to have a deeper understanding of observation as the first step in planning.

Activity 7.2: How to observe (60 minutes)

Purpose:
To enable the students to:

♦ practice observing (as the first step in planning)
♦ think critically and make realisations about observing e.g. to notice how easy it is to miss details and changes, to write down / record what they observe rather than rely on memory and to guard against making assumptions.

Materials:

♦ 2 trays

♦ 30 everyday items e.g. toothbrush, pen, lipstick, soap, apple, cup etc. (6 of the items must be similar looking e.g. blue soap & green soap, a black pen & a blue pen, a wooden peg & a plastic peg)

♦ 2 cloths big enough to cover each tray

  This could also be presented in a series of powerpoint photographs.

♦ 1 piece of blank paper for each student

♦ Picture of a child standing in a corner (see below)

♦ Newsprint and markers.

Example of a tray sourced from http://www.teachkidsart.net

Part 1: Kim's Game 1

♦ Place Tray 1 with 14 different everyday items in front of the students and ask each student to observe for 60 seconds what is on the tray. Cover the tray and then ask them to remember what they saw on the tray. Tray 1 is left covered and put to one side.

♦ The facilitator hands each student 1 piece of blank A4 paper.

♦ The facilitator places Tray 2 with 14 different everyday items in front of the students and asks each student to observe for 60 seconds the items on the tray. The facilitator covers the tray and then ask each student to write down in 60 seconds what they saw on Tray 2. Uncover Tray 2 and each student compares what they wrote with what is on Tray 2.

♦ Place the covered Tray 1 in front of the students and ask the students to write in 60 seconds what they can remember seeing on Tray 1.

♦ Uncover Tray 1 and the students compare what they wrote from memory with what is on the tray.

- The students then compare what they remembered for Tray 1 with what they remembered for Tray 2.
- Ask the following reflection questions:
  - What did you notice?
  - Why is it important for teachers to write down what they see at the time they observe children?
  - What else should be written down? Why?

Part 2 Kim's Game 2

Facilitation

- Remove 1 item from Tray 2 (without the students seeing the item being removed). Uncover the tray and ask the students what is missing.
- Cover Tray 2 again and (without the students seeing) replace two items with very similar looking items e.g. swop green soap for blue soap, and swop the blue pen for a pencil. Uncover Tray 2 and ask the students '*What has changed?*'
- The facilitator asks the following reflection questions:
  - What did you notice?
  - How can teachers make sure they don't miss important details?

Part 3: Child in a corner

- Ask the students to partner with the person sitting next to them.
- The students look at the picture of **the child standing in a corner** and discuss what they see for one minute.

♦ Invite three or four students to share what they observed about the child in the corner.

For each contribution ask the students if it is fact that can be verified from the picture or an assumption or opinion.

- Discuss the contributions that are assumptions and opinions and different possible interpretations of them.
  - ♦ What happens when teachers make assumptions about children?
  - ♦ Remind students of the ethics and protocols involved when working with children. What 'rules' can we make for observing children? Write up the students' ideas on newsprint.

With thanks to the Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU)

Activity 7.3 is a two-part practical activity that enables students to:

1) observe young children in an ECD setting

2) link the information gathered from their observation to effective planning.

Activity 7.3: Observing children as part of planning (60 minutes)

Part 1: The students observe of two children in an ECD setting (or watch video clips) and complete two observation forms

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

Purpose:
To enable the students to:

♦ practice observing children in an ECD setting (or video clips for practical purposes)

♦ apply the information gathered by observing to planning

♦ realise that observing is a critical part of effective planning.

Materials:

♦ Observation form (see below)

♦ Music (can also use a drum, tambourine, sticks or clapping)

♦ A4 size flashcards with names of the following body parts:

| feet | elbows | shoulders |

| ears | thumbs | back |
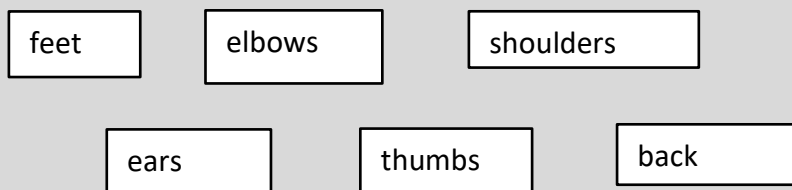
♦ A newsprint poster with the following questions:

> **Journal**
>
> What are the benefits for children when teachers prepare for planning?
>
> What are the benefits for teachers when they prepare for planning?

Facilitation 1: Observation

Observe two children at an ECD site or school and complete the observation form.

If this is not possible observe the following videos.

http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/rmvideoseries_practicingobservation2

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=byIL-3W7pAI

Facilitation 2: Reflection on observation

Tell each student to turn to their completed observation form and says: 'Take five minutes to read over your observations. They are going to be part of the game we are about to play'.

Ask the students to move to the open space in the room.

Explain the rules of the game: 'Move around the room in time to the music. When the music stops I will hold up a large flashcard with the name of a body part. Find a partner and connect with each other using the body part you see on the flashcard. I will then ask you a question (see below). Discuss the answer with your partner without breaking body contact. We will do it six times as we have six questions. Each time find a different partner'.

Questions:
1. Think about the two children you observed. What did you find out about their <u>knowledge, skills and attitudes?</u> What do they already know, do, think and feel?
2. How will knowing what children know, think, feel, and can do help a teacher to plan?
3. What did you find out about the two children's <u>interests and preferences</u>?
4. How will knowing what interests and excites children help a teacher to plan?
5. What did you find out about the <u>learning context</u> i.e. people and things that are influencing the children's development?
6. How will knowing what challenges and influences children help a teacher to plan?

Reflection:

Whole group. The facilitator displays the newsprint poster:

> **Journal**
> What are the benefits for children when teachers prepare for planning?
>
> What are the benefits for teachers when they prepare for planning?

Ask the students to spend 10 minutes writing in their journal using the questions on the poster as a guide.

Invite the students to share their insights with the group by reading out loud from their journals.

The observation form required for Activity 7.3 is below:

Observation Form:

Write each child's **first** name and age on the dotted lines.

Write your observations in the space below.

Child 1…………………………………………….	Child 2 …………………………………………….
1) What was the child doing? What did you observe about what s/he already knows (knowledge), can do (skills) or anything that showed what s/he was thinking or feeling (attitudes)? For what you saw, is the child on track in terms of curriculum requirements for this content, attitude, or skill? Are there any gaps?	
2) What seemed to interest the child, what did s/he enjoy doing and what did s/he avoid?	
3) Was there anything the child found difficult or challenging? (e.g. does the child find it difficult to listen and pay attention, have a special need etc).	

STEP 2: Doing the planning

In Step 1 the students prepared for planning by observing, engaging with the curriculum, and considering the learning context. In Step 2 the students learn how to plan play-based approach (PBA) activities so that children experience optimal learning.

Researchers (Zosh et al. 2017) found that optimal learning happens in children when they experience agency (feeling self-confident, valued and competent) and when they engage in activities with particular characteristics:

1. Agency

Children experience agency when teachers:

♦ make the children feel valued

♦ offer choices and share decision-making with children

♦ actively engage all the children in fun and meaningful ways.

2. Optimal learning activities

Optimal learning activities:

♦ are **joyful** for children

♦ are **meaningful** for children

♦ actively involve the children in their own learning

♦ are **iterative** i.e. offer different ways for the children to repeat what they are learning,

♦ involve **social** interaction.

Figure 10 below pulls together Zosh et al (2017)'s ideas on agency and optimal learning activities and serves as a guide on how to plan effectively.
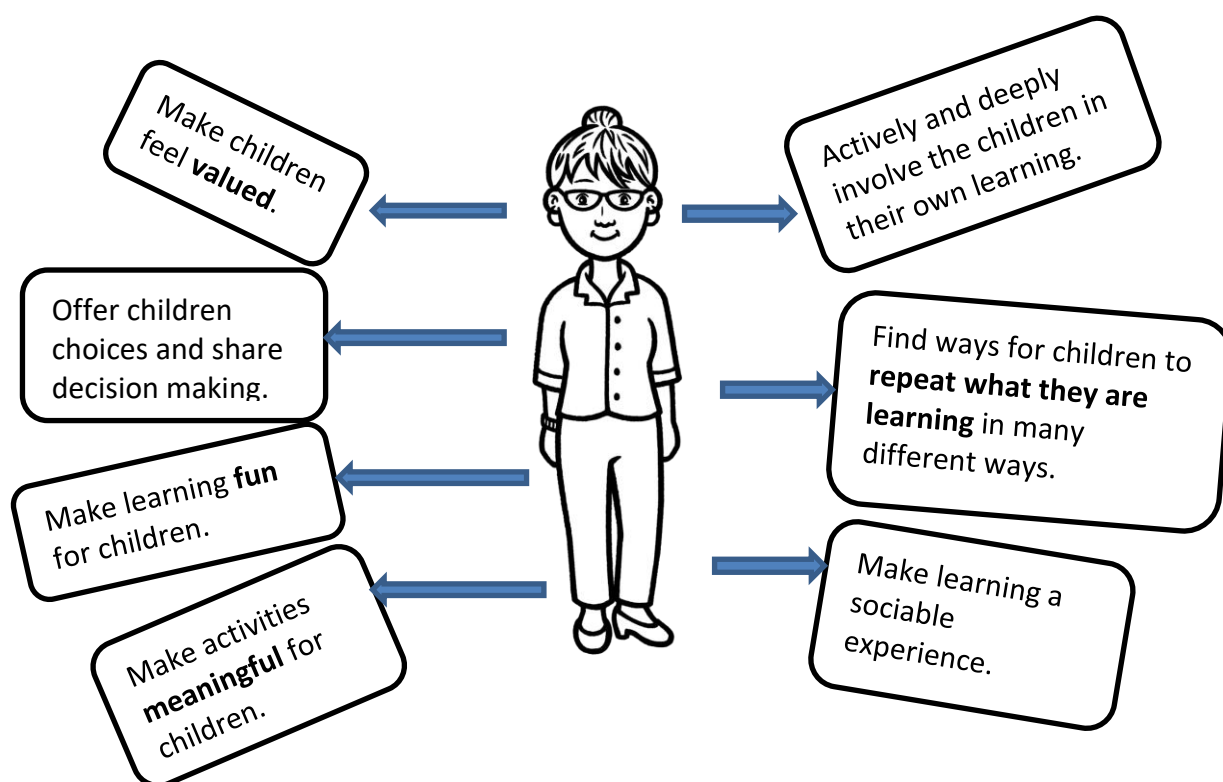
Figure 10: How to plan optimal learning activities for children

The next activity enables students to find out what each of the characteristics of agency and optimal learning (described above) means for teachers when they are planning.

Activity 7.4: Understanding optimal learning principles (60 minutes)

The students reflect on the application of Zosh et al's (2017) principles on optimal learning activity to practical activity planning.

Purpose:
Enable the students to:

♦   participate in a simple optimal learning activity and apply it to their teaching context

♦   apply optimal learning principles to practical planning ideas.

Materials:

♦   Music (can also use a drum or tambourine or clapping or singing)

♦   Figure 10 – How to plan optimal learning activities for children

♦   14 markers, prestik, 7 highlighters

♦   Seven large sheets of newsprint with questions as follows:

How do teachers make **children feel valued?**	How do teachers offer children **choices and share decision making**?	How do teachers make learning **fun** for children?	How do teachers make learning **meaningful** for children?

How do teachers **actively** involve the children in their own learning?	How do teachers get children to repeat their learning in different ways?	How do teachers make sure that **learning is a social** experience?

Facilitation 1: Number Game

♦   The students move in time to music. When the music stops the facilitator holds up a number card e.g. 3. The students gather in groups according to the number they see e.g. make groups of 3 students.

♦   Repeat using different numbers e.g. 8, 2, 6. End with the number 5 (so that the students are in small groups of five ready for Facilitation 2). (Adapt this number to suit the group you are facilitating).

Reflection

♦ Refer the students to Figure 10 and ask:

  ♦ Which characteristics of an optimal learning activity did you notice in this number game?

  ♦ Will this game help children to learn numbers effectively?

  ♦ If so, how? Explain.

Ask the students to turn to the person next to them and to discuss the following questions.

♦ How could you do this with young children (3 – 5 years)? What would they learn? What links can you make with the National Curriculum Framework?

♦ How could you do this game with Grade R children? What would they learn? What links can you make with the CAPS curriculum?

♦ How could you do this game with Grade 2 children? What would they learn? What links can you make with the CAPS curriculum?

After each question has been discussed invite 2 or 3 students to share their answers.

Facilitation 2: Graffiti Posters

♦ Put up the seven newsprints around the room. Place two coloured markers at each station.

♦ Invite each group of students from Facilitation 1 to stand at one of the newsprints.

♦ Explain that each group is going to discuss the question and then write or draw answers to the question (graffiti). After 4 minutes the group will move to the next newsprint, read what has been written and then add to the answers. Don't repeat what is already written. Do this for all the posters.

♦ Once every group has written on all the posters, hand each group a highlighter and ask the students to 1) highlight the 3 – 4 most important points on the poster they are standing next to, and then 2) prioritise the most important points by numbering them. The most important is numbered 1, next one is 2, and so on.

♦ Each group gives feedback by reading out the highlighted points in priority order from number 1 to the whole group.

Reflection
Ask the following questions:

♦ What did you notice?

♦ Did you all agree on the most important points? If not, why?

♦ How can a teacher manage the classroom when implementing PBA planning?

NOTE to facilitator:

❖ What characteristics of optimal learning activities are present in your own teaching setting?

❖ Is the students' learning enjoyable, meaningful, iterative, and social?

❖ Do the students have choices, help make decisions and feel valued?

What does optimal learning activity planning look like in action? Activity 7.5 enables students to experience an optimal learning activity for children that transfers principle ideas into teaching and learning. Activity 7.5 **mirrors** the PBA by using role-plays and a game to engage the students in their own learning.

Activity 7.5: Optimal learning planning in action (40 minutes).

The students participate in a game in which they experience the characteristics of optimal learning activities.

Purpose:
To enable students to:

♦ experience an optimal learning activity

♦ identify the characteristics of optimal learning activities that inform planning

♦ make links between planning, the characteristics of optimal learning activities, the PBA, the curriculum, and later learning.

Materials:

♦ Large empty room space for movement.

♦ Newsprint and markers, prestik

♦ Chairs (one per student) or other objects such as bags, books, shoes.

Facilitation:
Whole group. The students play the Simple Simon says game in the following way:

♦ Invite the students to bring their chair to the empty space in the room and place it randomly at least ½ metre away from the next student's chair.

♦ Explain that 'Today you are pretending to be four-year-olds. I am the pretend teacher. When I say 'Simple Simon says ….' each person repeats the sentence and then follows the instructions:

  ♦ Simple Simon says put your foot <u>under </u>your chair.

  ♦ Simple Simons says put your chin <u>on top of</u> the chair.

  ♦ Simple Simons says put your hand <u>under</u> your chair.

  ♦ Simple Simons says put your elbow <u>on</u> the chair.

  ♦ Simple Simon says put your toes <u>in front of </u>the chair and your fingers <u>behind </u>the chair.

  ♦ Simple Simon says put your one leg <u>behind</u> the chair and your other leg <u>in front of</u> the chair.

  ♦ Simple Simon says walk <u>around</u> your chair.

  ♦ Simple Simon says walk <u>around</u> two chairs.

  ♦ Simple Simon says sit <u>on</u> your chair.

  Give some instructions with preface *Simple Simon says* and others without e.g. *Put* your hand on the chair. Students should only follow instructions that come with the preface. If they follow instructions without the preface they are out and take their chair to the side.

Being an intentional teacher when planning

Intentional teachers know that everything they do (or don't do) impacts on a child's development. An intentional teacher plans carefully and acts purposefully so that children have optimal learning experiences.

An intentional teacher's planning

Prepare for planning by:
- observing the children
- seeing what interests the children
- looking at curriculum requirements
- considering the learning context.

Match curriculum themes and topics with the children's interests and the learning context.

Make sure:
- the children feel valued
- the children have choices
- the children share in decision-making.

Create learning activities that are:
- fun
- meaningful to children
- sociable
- reiterative (the children repeat the learning activities in different ways)
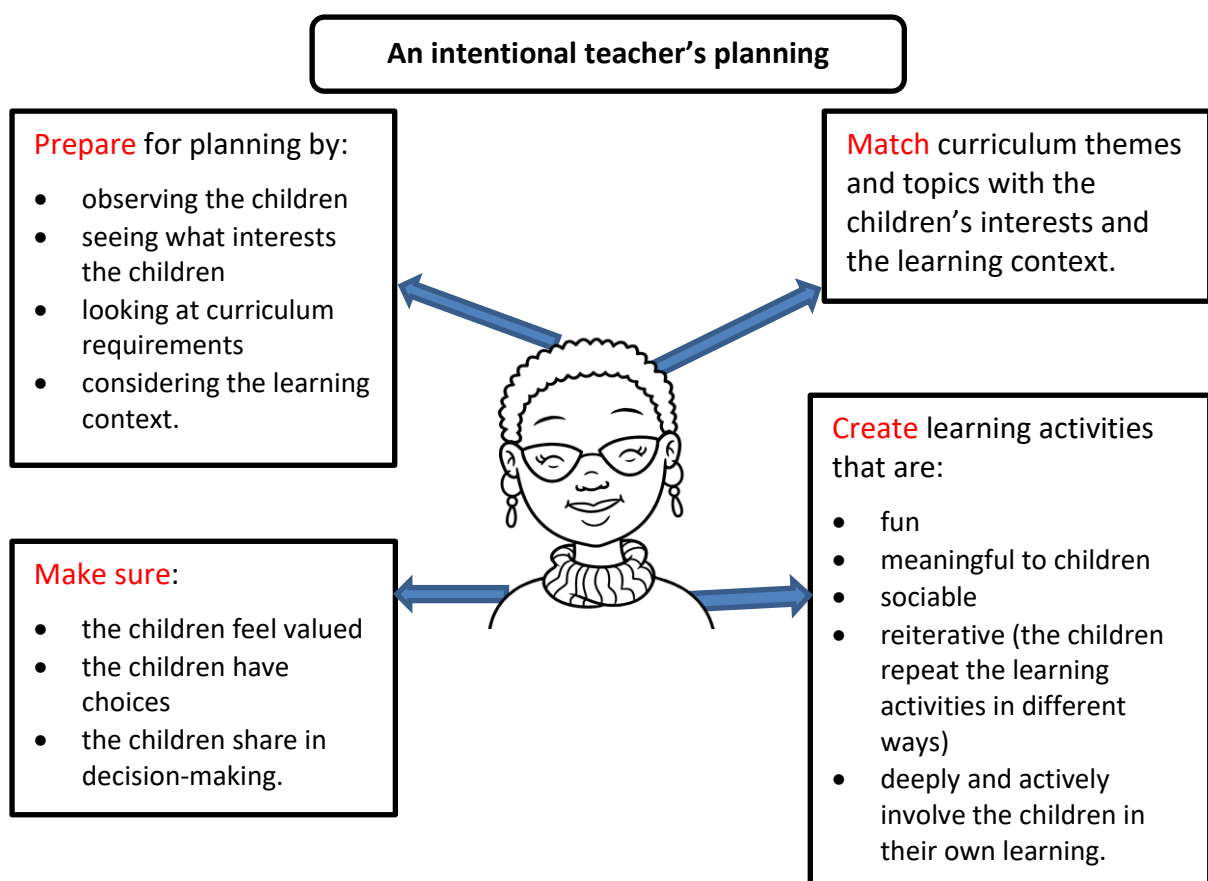- deeply and actively involve the children in their own learning.

Figure 11. An intentional teacher's planning agenda

Activity 7.6 enables the students to use the ideas in the intentional teacher's planning agenda and apply them to planning a practical play-based teaching and learning activity. The planning can be implemented by the students in an ECD setting.

Activity 7.6: Planning a play-based learning activity (60 minutes)

Purpose:
Enable students to:

♦ apply their learning of how to plan (Steps 1 and 2) into practice

♦ plan a PBA activity.

Materials:

♦ Newsprint, markers, prestik, staplers, tape, glue, scissors

♦ Props e.g. balls, rope, scarves, dolls, soft toys, percussion instruments, blank paper, crayons and recyclables e.g. tins, bottle tops, sticks, milk cartons, cardboard boxes

♦ Copies of the 0 – 4 NCF and the CAPS Foundation Phase curricula.

Facilitation:

♦ Divide the students into small groups of 4 – 5 students.

♦ Explain: Using our knowledge of optimal learning activities and the intentional teacher's planning agenda, plan your own PBA learning activity.

♦ Hand each group a set of instructions (below) and show them what props are available.

♦ Each group reads and discusses the instructions before writing their planned 5 – 10 minutes PBA activity on newsprint. Give the students 20 minutes to complete their planning.

♦ Each group presents their planning to the other groups.

♦ After each presentation the students identify the characteristics of a PBA learning activity by cross-checking the intentional teacher's agenda (Figure 11) with their planning.

Application
Individual:

Each student plans one PBA activity for children and writes it on the blank planning form.

Each student finds a partner and takes one minute to share the PBA activity they planned.

Instructions for planning a PBA activity for children

1. Take 20 minutes to plan a 5 - 10 minutes PBA learning activity for children.
   The planning should:
   - link to the curriculum
   - take into account the children's interests and the context
   - make the children feel valued
   - offer choice and an opportunity to make decisions
   - be fun
   - be meaningful for children
   - involve the children actively in their own learning
   - be iterative (the children repeat what they are learning in different ways)
   - be sociable (engage children in groups, pairs, and one on one with other children and the teacher).

2. **Write the planned activity on newsprint** showing the age group and the links with the curriculum.

3. **Present your planning** to the other students.

Blank planning form for Activity 7.6.

Planning

Date:

Teacher:

Age of children:

Curriculum:

Materials:

Activity:

Activity 7.7 is a fun way for students to summarise their learning and conclude the section on how to plan PBA activities for children.

Activity 7.7: Summary of how to plan PBA activities (15 minutes)

Purpose:
Enable the students to reiterate their understanding of how to plan PBA activities i.e. intentionally preparing (Step 1) and planning activities that nurture agency and optimal learning in children (Step 2).

Materials:

♦ A ball or bean bag for each small group.

Facilitation:

♦ Ask students to get into small groups of about 10 students. They sit or stand in a circle.

♦ Give one student a ball and they call out a characteristic of planning PBA activities and then throw the ball to the next student who calls out a different point. Continue until all the ideas are exhausted.

Set up for play-based learning

Preparation is at the heart of good teaching, and preparing an interesting, stimulating and playful early learning setting/classroom 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 requires the environment itself to encourage and support play as part of the daily programme.

> "The environment is the most visible aspect of the work done in the schools ... it conveys the message that this is a place where adults have thought about the quality and instructive power of space." Lella Gandini (1998)

Both NELDS (National Early Learning Development Strategies for children birth to four years)(Department of Basic Education, 2009) and the CAPS document for Life Skills in the Foundation Phase (Department of Basic Education, 2011) provide for opportunities for active play.

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

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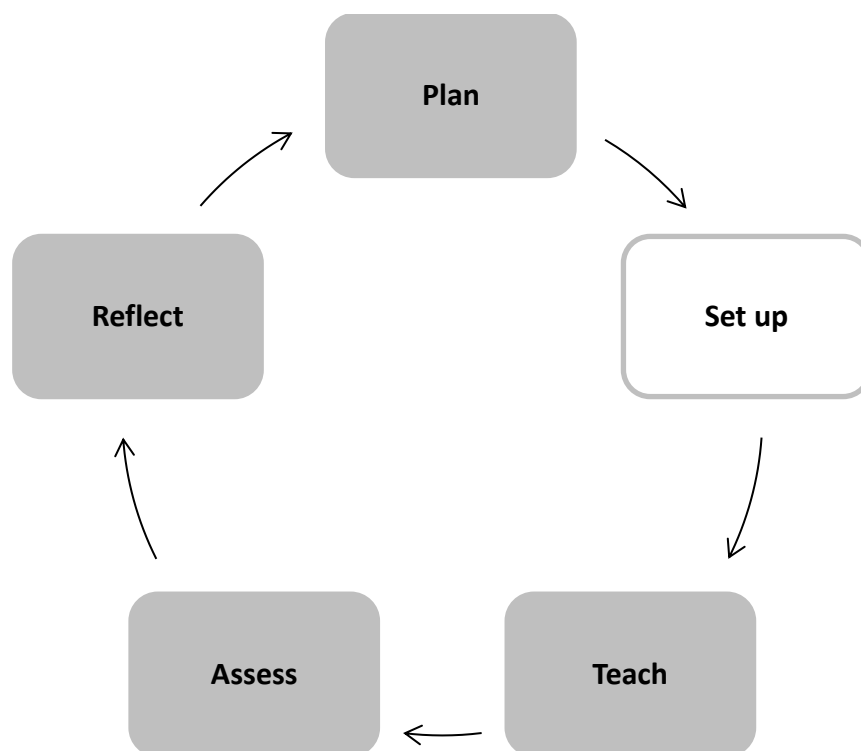

Figure 12: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Set up

We know that the classroom environment is much more than what we see. The quality of teacher-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 the important aspects of a teaching environment that tries to support play-based learning.

The teacher's own attitudes about play will have an important influence on the play-based environment s/he sets up. 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.

Activity 7.8: How teachers see children (25 minutes)

Purpose: To explore how teachers see children, what image they have of children as a starting point for play-based learning.

Materials:

♦ Pen and paper.

Facilitation:

Ask students to each make a mind map on a piece of paper. In the centre of the map is the word 'child'.

They write down words that for them describe children and children's learning. They can use the following questions to help them:

♦ What is a child?

♦ Do children bring anything into the world with them, and if so what?

♦ How do children learn best?

♦ Can children be trusted?

♦ Should children be allowed to direct their own learning?

♦ What are some positive characteristics of children?

♦ What are some 'limitations' of children?

Reflection

In small groups compare their ideas about children. Each student can add contributions of interest from other group members to their mind map.

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, 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, a space that is set up by a teacher who believes and trusts that children can learn actively through free interaction with materials and teachers in a partnership, who believes that play is a powerful learning tool, will set up a very different looking classroom.

In the same way, a teacher's understanding of different types of play that children need to engage in, and the teacher's own choices about what roles s/he will take during play with children, can be seen in the way the learning environment is set up.

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

We will consider 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.

General

♦ A learning environment is where both teachers and children will spend much time, and so it needs to be a place to which everyone who uses it can relate. 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 unfolds, and how children direct their play, both inside the classroom 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 potential 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, and 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.

Physical environment

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

Some principles that should be considered in the physical set up of a play-based learning environment include:

Indoors

1. It should be light**, well organised, comfortable**, have things in it that are **recognisable** to the child and to the teachers working in the space with the children.

2. There should be plenty of **room**, or as much room as possible for children to move around in and to play in various ways.

3. The amount of **noise** is also important. Noisy vs. quiet areas are good to think about so that children can play in different ways and in different social partnerships.

4. The size of the space and **how things are arranged** within it, will have an effect on children's freedom to choose their own activities. This will then affect whether or not they extend and expand their play, how far they can use it to explore an idea, and whether they can engage in different kinds of play. Small, squashed, badly designed play areas can make children irritable and uncomfortable, and does not allow them to put their energies into their activities or develop their play over a period of time.

5. **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 classroom is never complete, but changes all the time as the children learn and as their needs change.

6. Different learning spaces can be very useful. Some play activities are better for large groups, other are better explored in smaller groups or in one-to-one partnerships, so allowing spaces for large group, small group and individual play opportunities in terms of classroom layout is important. Children are different in their own needs and learning styles.

Outdoors

1. Setting up an outdoor environment is just as important, however small it may be. Teachers need to give children the opportunity to play with toys or objects and materials or games. 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. It is also important to think about what kinds of play are possible outdoors, and to have resources there that facilitate these kinds of play.

3. Paying attention to the kind of play activities and kinds of play that will be suitable for outdoors means thinking about children's physical movement, construction, sensory exploration and manipulation. What can be put outdoors that cannot be placed indoors or that will not work indoors, needs to be thought about.

4. Indoor and outdoor kinds of play can be thought of as complementary to, or helping one another. Children using the outdoor space 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 body does, may take the idea of balance inside, and work with it and extend it in their next construction activity with blocks.

Emotional environment

It is as important to think beyond just the physical aspects of the classroom and to consider '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.

We should think about how we want children to experience their time in our classrooms. Do children feel excited, curious, drawn into something interesting and good? Are there play activities that make children feel this way?

Activity 7.9: Creating a PBA environment (30 minutes)

Purpose: To explore setting up environments for learners from different backgrounds.

Facilitation:

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

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

Reflection:

After 10 minutes the facilitator chooses some volunteers to share their ideas with the whole group. The discussion will focus on:

1. What are the reasons behind the choices made?
2. What are the differences and the similarities between these designed learning environments?
3. How could you ensure that the environment is inclusive of all the children in the class including family structure, disability, culture?

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. It is also important to think about materials that might be unusual, that might make children interested in playing with them. For example, putting out mirrors, natural objects such as autumn leaves, bowls of coloured water, tins and boxes of different sizes, and so on.
3. 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?

4. Flexibility is important. Make sure to include materials that are more open-ended, that can be used for many kinds of play. For example, blocks are more open-ended than a puzzle, because many things can be done with blocks, and play can go in many directions.

5. We want play materials that encourage engagement, that stimulate and challenge thinking. We want materials that are open and flexible and provide children with opportunities to be creative, to facilitate social interactions with other children and teachers, and that encourage deep engagement by the children.

6. Careful thought should be given to how many materials are in the environment at any one time. Not having enough or 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 and make them less capable of learning. With the right number of materials available, teachers can spend more time engaging and playing with their children, and less time trying to control behaviour and keep good order.

7. Materials should be easily handled by the children, safe, durable and easy to clean and store.

8. 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 packed away.

The teacher should carefully observe and reflect on which materials are best, how many are needed, when to introduce new materials and removal of old ones. Teacher should pay pays close attention to the children at play and consider the following:

♦ How are the children responding to the materials?

♦ Are they excited and interested?

♦ How do they use the materials? Is this constructive or not?

♦ How long do they play and extend their play with the use of the materials?

♦ How are the materials affecting friendships/ play partnerships?

To consolidate our thinking about how to set up a play-based teaching and learning environment, we are going to do a design activity. Before we do so, let us reflect back on the principles of play (See Section 4) that were outlined in an earlier section. These are:

♦ Play is intentional.

♦ Play demands that children be active.

♦ Play is fun.

♦ Children make choices about their play activities.

♦ Children can lead, direct and control their own play activities.

♦ Play is meaningful in that it offers opportunities for children to come to terms with and create meaning about their world.

♦ Play is communicative.

♦ Play is a process.

For a learning environment to be fully set up for play-based learning, we need to see these principles at work in the environment. The environment is what will bring the children into contact with the kinds of experiences and activities that will promote learning in the way that children learn best, through play.

Activity 7.10: Designing a dream play space (90 minutes)

This activity focuses on the set up of a play-based learning environment in terms of how it facilitates play.

Purpose: To explore an ideal environment for play-based learning.

Facilitation:

Tell participants that they have been given the chance to set up a pre-school class for 5 year old children. They are the designers of the space, and can put into it whatever they feel is most appropriate for their particular context. This is to be a play-based classroom/early learning setting

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

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

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

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

   ♦ What is in my space(s)?
   ♦ Why is it there? Do I think it will be of interest to the children? Does it suggest particular types of play that they may do in it? Does it invite and promote engagement?
   ♦ Where are things placed and why? Are materials accessible?
   ♦ What kind of play do I want to encourage with this material?
   ♦ What else can I offer children in terms of an invitation to play?

They have 30 minutes to prepare their design.

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

Participants and the facilitator then look at the designs, and at each design ask the group that made that design to give reasons for one choice they have made in their design.

Reflection:

In the whole group, ask each participant to write down one thing from any of the designs that s/he thought was a particularly good and well-motivated idea, and why s/he chose it. Invite each participant to read this to the whole group and form a collective set of good ideas.
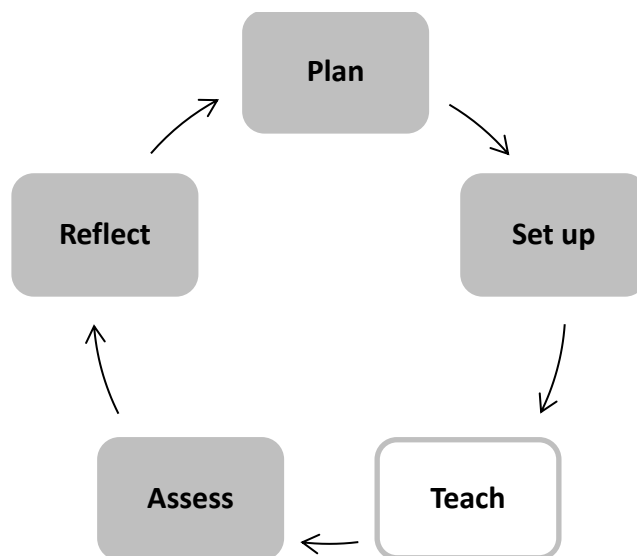
Teaching using a play-based approach

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

Purpose

In the section on the play continuum we discussed how, in play-based teaching and learning, there are opportunities for children to experience both child-directed and adult-directed activities. In this session we explore the role of the adult in supporting and extending learning in a combination of involvement in children's own play (co-opted play) and intentionally planned small and large group play activities (guided play and playful instruction).

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

♦ identify common practices when implementing a play-based approach to teaching and learning

♦ explore the different roles that the teacher takes on during play

♦ define intentional teaching and describe teaching strategies to support and extend children's learning during play.

♦ evaluate and reflect on the application of PBA in their teaching.

Common practices in play-based teaching and learning

Teachers play a key role in supporting and extending children's learning, and bring their own knowledge, skills and experiences to the early learning setting. The following reading suggests common practices for the implementation of a play-based approach.

Reading: Pages 52-53. New Foundland, Labrador Education and Early Childhood Development (2016**) Full–Day Kindergarten Play-Based Learning**: Promoting a Common Understanding. Canada.
https://www.gov.nl.ca/eecd/files/pdf_fdk_common_understandings_-document_eng_2016.pdf

The roles of a teacher

Figure 14: The roles of a teacher

According to Jones and Reynolds "*The Play's the Thing*" (2011) there are six important roles that a teacher takes on during play. These are described in the following reading:

Reading: Pages 41 – 43, New Foundland, Labrador Education and Early Childhood Development (2016**) Full–Day Kindergarten Play-Based Learning**: Promoting a Common Understanding. Canada.

Activity 7.11: Teacher's role in PBA (90 minutes)

Purpose: To reflect on the different roles teachers play in a PBA and apply the roles for teaching and learning for children of different ages.
Materials:

♦ Small cards and koki pens for each group

♦ Prestik.

Facilitation 1:

Divide participants into small groups and hand out some small cards to each group. Ask the following question:

♦ In your play-based classroom or ECD setting what do you expect to see the teacher doing?

Each group member writes one idea on each card. The completed cards are placed in a pile.

Group members review the ideas and cluster the cards according to similar ideas and display them on the board or wall.

One member from each group reports back on their ideas.

Refer groups to the selected reading (pages 52 and 53) and add any new information not included in their reports.

Facilitation 2:

Ask participants to note the different roles that the teacher plays on pages 41 and 42 of the same reading.

♦ Stage manager

♦ Mediator

♦ Player

♦ Scribe

♦ Assessor and communicator

♦ Planner.

Participants return to their groups. Hand out a sheet of flipchart paper and a different coloured koki pen to each group. (The different colour will allow each group's ideas to be tracked).

Assign one of the above teachers' roles to each group, and ask them to discuss what this would look like in practice. Give groups five minutes to write or draw their ideas on the flipchart paper.

When time is up, ask the groups to pass on their papers to another group. Ask participants to tick off those points that they agree with and to add their own new ideas. Repeat the process until each group has had a turn to discuss each of the roles.

Display the flipchart papers on the wall and summarise the shared ideas of the class. Invite groups to explain their own points (identified by the colour of their koki pen).

Facilitation 3:
Materials:
Make two dice from cardboard boxes:

Glue plain paper on each side of 2 square cardboard boxes. On the first one, write the following on each side of the box:

♦ Stage manager

♦ Mediator

♦ Player

♦ Scribe

♦ Assessor and communicator

♦ Planner.

On the second dice, write the following age groups on each side of the box:

♦ 0 – 18 months

♦ 18 months – 3 years

♦ 3 – 4 years

♦ 4 – 5 years

♦ 5 – 6 years

♦ 7 – 8 years.

Have participants sit in a circle and take turns to throw the two dice. They give an example of the teacher's role in play according to the roll of the dice.

For example, if the dice land on STAGE MANAGER and 0 – 18 MONTHS, the participant might describe how the teacher provides a safe play environment for babies that encourages them to move around and explore play materials through their five senses.

The dice are then passed on to the next person and the process is repeated until all participants have had a turn to throw the dice.

The intentional teacher

"In everything teachers plan and do …they need to be highly intentional. That is, they need to work with the outcomes for children in mind and consciously seek out every opportunity to help children achieve these outcomes through the learning experiences they plan, the ways they interact with children, and the ways they create and regularly modify the environment". Head Start Leaders Guide to Positive Child Outcomes (2003, p 21).

Teachers who are intentional are able to explain exactly what they are doing and why they are doing it. The following reading describes how the intentional teacher understands children's development and learning, acts with curriculum goals in mind and uses a range of teaching strategies to mediate children's learning and development.

Epstein, A. (2007). **The intentional teacher: choosing the best strategies for young children's learning**. Washington DC. National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Activity 7.12: The intentional teacher (60 minutes)

Purpose: To explore intentional teaching strategies employed in a PBA teaching and learning environment.

Materials:

Video clip https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8a_QKF8XSM.

Facilitation 1:

Brainstorm: What is an intentional teacher?

List participants' responses on the flipchart or board. Read and discuss the quote from Head Start above.

Tell participants that they are going to observe a video clip of intentional teaching. In this video they will see and hear teachers demonstrate and explain the different roles that they take on as intentional teachers. As they watch the video, ask participants to note these roles on a sheet of paper.

After the viewing, break into small groups. Have groups share their observation notes with one another and respond to the following questions:

- How did the teachers plan with a purpose?
- How did the teachers encourage children to become involved in the activities?
- How did the teachers engage the children in conversations?
- How did the teachers encourage children to express their ideas and thoughts?
- How did the teachers guide children's explorations?
- How did the teachers provide opportunities for children to solve their own problems?
- What kinds of questions did the teacher ask?

Take one question at a time and ask for each group's response. Add any important information that may be missing.

Facilitation 2:

Ask the students to reflect on the importance of understanding how children typically develop and learn, and using this information to decide on the best strategy to accommodate this learning style. For example, modelling is an important way for babies and toddlers to learn– by imitating facial expressions, actions, sounds and language.

Students think about the intentional teaching strategies they have observed and discussed and complete the grid below to identify actions they can apply to their own teaching practice.

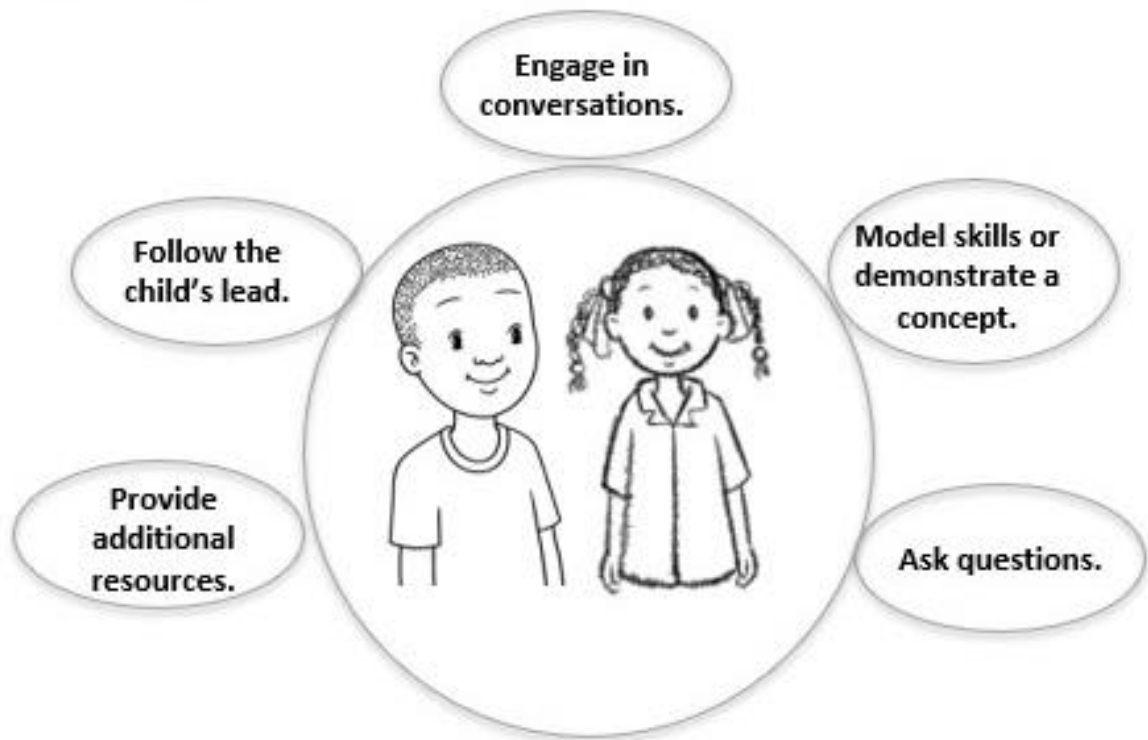| Teaching strategy	Practical examples for implementation
Planning with a purpose	
Encouraging involvement	
Engaging in conversations	
Encouraging children to express their ideas	
Provide opportunities for problem-solving	
Asking questions	

Scaffolding children's learning

Figure 15: 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 their own ZPD to learn new concepts and develop skills.

In the same way that the scaffolding that supports workers while they are building or repairing a building is slowly taken away as the building work 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

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their care, and their 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 holding conversations with children, teachers can promote thinking and understanding of concepts. Some good ways of having conversations with children are:

♦ Describe what you see the child doing.

♦ Wait for the child to respond.

♦ Encourage the child to explain their ideas.

♦ Don't interrupt.

♦ Introduce the language the child needs to learn new concepts or to talk about what s/he is doing.

♦ Don't overload the child with too much information.

♦ Ask questions that relate to what the child is doing and saying.

Ask questions. Questioning is a good way of scaffolding in a play-based approach. Good questions support the child's efforts in problem-solving and understanding, and helps

teachers to find out what children are thinking and already know. There are different kinds of questions teachers can ask children:

♦ **Closed questions**. These are questions that simply ask for information and can usually be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no', or one or two words. Closed questions are useful for assessing understanding of a concept, e.g.

  ♦ Are you happy or sad?
  ♦ What is this food called?
  ♦ What shapes do you see?
  ♦ Do you have more long sticks or more short sticks?

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

  ♦ Is it a cat?
  ♦ Is it red or blue?

♦ **Open-ended questions**. These are questions that do not have one correct answer. There are many possible answers. Open-ended questions stimulate higher-level thinking and encourage problem-solving. For example:

  ♦ What do you think will happen?
  ♦ Why do you think that happened?
  ♦ How can you find out?
  ♦ Is there another way to do it?
  ♦ What do you need to do?
  ♦ If ……

Open-ended questions often start with 'Why…? or "How…?"

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

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

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

Activity 7.13: Let's practise scaffolding (60 minutes)

Purpose: To provide an opportunity for participants to put into practice what they have learned about strategies to scaffold children's play.

Provide an overview of how a teacher has planned to meet the following goal from the Exploring Mathematics Early Learning and Development Area (ELDA) for children:

Children sort, classify, make comparisons and solve problems or

CAPS Mathematics content area: Data handling: learners have skills to collect, organise, display, analyse and interpret given data.

Materials:
♦ Variety of clothing - baby, child, adult
♦ Pictures of clothing for different weather
♦ Icons of different kinds of weathers from a weather chart.

Facilitation:
Divide participants into small groups and give each group one of the scenarios below and ask them to choose the age group they are planning for

Scenario 1
Planning for fantasy play, the teacher intentionally sets out a variety of clothes for people of different ages, e.g. a baby, a child, adult clothing. Plan a role-play to demonstrate how the teacher would scaffold learning and development as the children play.

Scenario 2
Planning a sorting activity, the teacher sets out a variety of pictures of clothing and a sorting tray with different compartments (or on the table).

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

Scenario 3
Planning a teacher-directed small group activity the teacher provides a box of children's clothes for all types of weather. S/he brings pictures of different kinds of weather according to the weather chart, e.g. sun, wind, cloudy, rain.

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

Scenario 4
Planning a structured whole class activity the teacher displays different kinds of clothing such as shorts, dresses, T-shirts, jerseys and boots. Together with the children the teacher makes a chart of how many children are wearing each item.

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

Before the groups begin the task, review the scaffolding strategies that have been discussed previously. Tell them that you expect that groups should demonstrate some of the following:

♦ Following the child's lead

♦ Active listening

♦ Engaging in conversations

♦ Questioning techniques

♦ Modelling and demonstrating

♦ Providing additional resources.

Give groups time to discuss and prepare their role-plays. After the groups have presented their role-plays, discuss the different strategies used as a large group. Comment on the roles of the teacher and the children:

♦ Who initiated?

♦ Who directed?

♦ What did the teacher do?

♦ How did the child/ren respond?

Emphasise that these scaffolding techniques are skills that require plenty of practice.

Summarise the main points from the session and clear up anything that requires further explanation.

Child-directed and teacher-directed play

The best outcomes for children in play-based teaching and learning occur when there is a combination of child-directed play and teacher-directed play.

♦ Child-directed play activities are initiated and led by the child as they explore, experiment and investigate the play materials.

♦ Teacher-directed play activities provide opportunities for teachers to introduce a concept or model a skill.

The role of the teacher is to intentionally engage children in different ways. The example on page 3 of the selected reading below illustrates the different roles that teachers take on to support learning during these play activities.

> Epstein, A. (2007). Page 3, The **intentional teacher: choosing the best strategies for young children's learning**. Washington DC. National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Intentional teachers consider whether teacher-directed or child-directed activities work best for the curriculum that is to be taught as well as the individual learning needs of the children in their groups.

Activity 7.14: Teachable moments (90 minutes)

Purpose: To compare child guided and adult experiences and discuss the importance of teachable moments that provide unplanned opportunities for learning.

Facilitation 1:
Refer participants to the examples of child-guided and adult-guided experiences on page 3 of the selected reading. Ask participants to read the page individually and then share their understanding of the two examples with a partner. Take a few comments from the whole group.

Invite participants to share examples of child-guided and adult-guided experiences in their classroom practice.

Discuss the importance of teachable moments that take advantage of unplanned opportunities for learning.

Read the following scenario:

Scenario
During outdoor play time a group of children discover a bird's nest lying on the ground. There are three tiny eggs in the middle of the nest. They call their teacher over and are curious to know all about what they have found.

Divide participants into small groups and assign a number 1 – 3 to each group. Ask participants to keep in mind the teaching strategies discussed in Activity 7.12 and 7.13 as they complete the task. Let them choose the age group they will focus on.

Group 1:

Plan a role-play to demonstrate how you would take advantage of this teachable moment during child-directed free play outdoors to help children understand more about birds and how they hatch their eggs.

Decide on an age group and the concepts that you will focus on.

Group 2:

Plan a role-play to demonstrate how you would help children understand more about birds and how they hatch eggs during a planned whole class activity (playful instruction).

Decide on an age group and the concepts that you will focus on.

Group 3:

Plan a role-play to demonstrate how you would help children understand more about birds and how they hatch eggs during a focused small group activity.

Decide on an age group and the concepts that you will focus on.

Groups prepare and then present their role-play. After each role-play encourage discussion:

♦ What new concepts were taught and learned?

♦ How were these learned?

♦ What was the teacher's role?

♦ What teaching strategies were used?

♦ What aspects of the curriculum were covered?

Emphasise the importance of striking a balance between child-directed and teacher-directed teaching and learning, and *ensuring that all experiences are playful.*

Facilitation 2:

Ask:

♦ What is inclusive practice?

Participants should understand that this means full and meaningful participation of all children in the programme. Discuss the important role the teacher plays in ensuring that all children (and groups of children) can participate in their play-based programmes. This means breaking down barriers to learning and development.

Return to the scenario and tell participants that one of the children in the group who found the nest is visually impaired. In their groups, participants discuss an inclusion strategy that will ensure that this child can fully participate in their planned learning activity.

Groups take turns to share their ideas. Encourage further suggestions from the larger group.
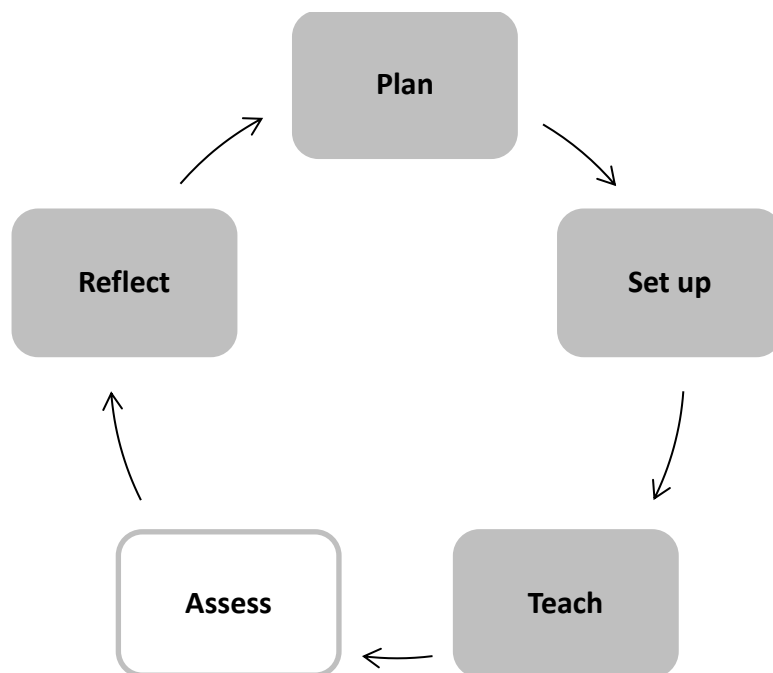
Assessing in a play-based approach

Figure 16: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Assess

Purpose

This section aims to highlight the importance of assessment of children as they are engaged in play. Different play-based assessment tools and techniques for collecting information are introduced and participants will reflect on when and how these might best be used.

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

♦ understand what play-based assessment is

♦ practice gathering evidence of learning and development during a play experience

♦ consider the assessment tools and techniques that need to be in place for play- based assessment

♦ compare and contrast play-based assessment with more traditional practices.

What is play-based assessment?

Traditionally, standardised tests were used to formally measure a child's performance. In play-based assessment, evidence of learning and development is gathered during daily programme activities as children play and learn.

Some play-based assessments require teachers to direct an activity, asking the child to complete particular tasks. Other assessments involve free play with the child taking the lead and minimal direction from the teacher other than the set up of an appropriate play environment.

Activity 7.15: What is play-based assessment (60 minutes)

Purpose: To consider the features and advantages of play-based assessment

Materials:

♦ 1 sheet of A 4 paper per participant

♦ Flip chart paper

♦ Videoclip Praptee's Self- portrait
  http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/RMVideoSeries_PracticingObservation.htm

Facilitation 1:
Give each participant a sheet of paper and ask them to fold their paper into four squares. Explain that you will ask a question and that they should walk around the room and ask four other participants to each write their responses to the question in one of the squares.

Ask: What is play-based assessment?

Participants circulate to complete their squares.

In the large group, have participants share the ideas they have been given. List every new idea on flipchart paper or the board. Emphasise the importance of gathering evidence of learning and development as children play.

Facilitation 2:
Explain that participants will view a video clip and write down all the skills and/or behaviours that they observe during a play activity. Play the video "Praptee's self-portrait" in which the child demonstrates a wide range of physical, social, cognitive and literacy skills as she creates her self-portrait.

After the video divide participants into small groups and ask them to write down all the skills and behaviours they observed Praptee demonstrating. Record these according to their developmental domain on a sheet of flipchart paper

Give groups time to complete the task and then have one person from each group present their findings.

In the whole group discuss the following questions:

♦ How would more traditional practices have been used to assess these skills?

♦ What are the advantages of using play-based assessment ?

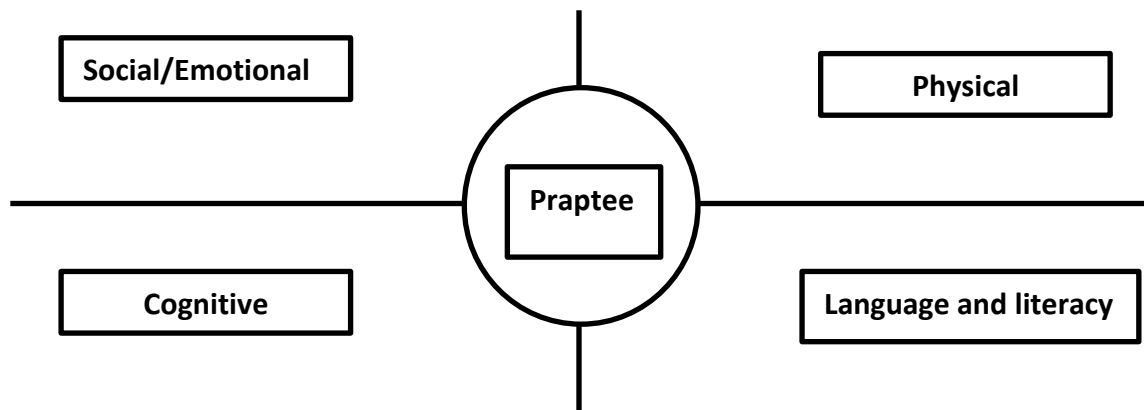♦ How might you integrate this assessment practice in your own early learning setting?

Figure 17: Play-based assessment

What does play-based assessment look like?

Observation records provide teachers and caregivers with a developmental profile or picture of each child's development. Apart from these observation records, other assessment tools and techniques to be used in play-based assessment are described in the following reading.

> **Reading**: Pages 56 – 58, New Foundland, Labrador Education and Early Childhood Development (2016**) Full–Day Kindergarten Play-Based Learning**: Promoting a Common Understanding. Canada.
> https://www.gov.nl.ca/eecd/files/pdf_fdk_common_understandings_-document_eng_2016.pdf

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Activity 7:16: Play-based assessment tools (60 minutes)

Purpose: To investigate and discuss different play-based assessment tools and plan how to apply these in their early learning setting to build up a developmental profile of each child's progress.

Materials: flipchart paper and markers

Facilitation:
Divide participants into small groups and ask them to review the selected reading.

Going clockwise around the circle, have participants take turns to complete the sentence: "One play-based assessment tool that I use now/could use now is effective because…"

When everyone in the group has had a turn, repeat the process with participants completing the sentence "One new idea that I want to try out in my classroom/ECD setting is…because…"

Groups summarise their ideas on sheets of flipchart paper and present these to the larger group.

Activity 7.17: Observation in play-based assessment (45 minutes)

Purpose:

♦ To explain observation as the main tool for assessment in Foundation Phase CAPS and NCF for Children birth to four years

♦ To distinguish between fact and opinion to ensure objective observation.

Materials:

♦ Flipchart paper and markers

♦ Video clip http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/rmvideoseries_practicingobservation2

Facilitation:

Ask students: What can we learn through our observations of children as they play?

List their ideas on flipchart paper or the board.

Make the point that observing children to identify aspects of their development for purposes of assessment needs to be accurate and factual, as the decisions they make based on their observations will influence each child's development and learning.

Explain that participants will view a video and they should write down exactly what they see and hear happening on a sheet of paper. Participants view a video clip of Michael builds a castle, which shows a child problem-solving as he builds his block structure:

Replay the video if participants need more time to record their observations. After watching the video let the participants take turns to call out their descriptions of what they saw happening. Write down the sentences exactly as they are called out on the flip-chart or board.

Explain that an important observation skill is to observe objectively and that this requires our observations to be factual and accurate, and that we should not allow our own opinions, biases and assumptions to influence what we observe.

Go back to the list of observations and review each description. Identify whether it was factual by writing an "F" or an opinion by writing an "O" alongside each sentence. Discuss how descriptions that are opinions or assumptions could be changed so that they are factual.

For example:

♦ Michael puts three blocks on top of one long block to make a support. F

♦ Michael is frustrated because the blocks all fell down. O

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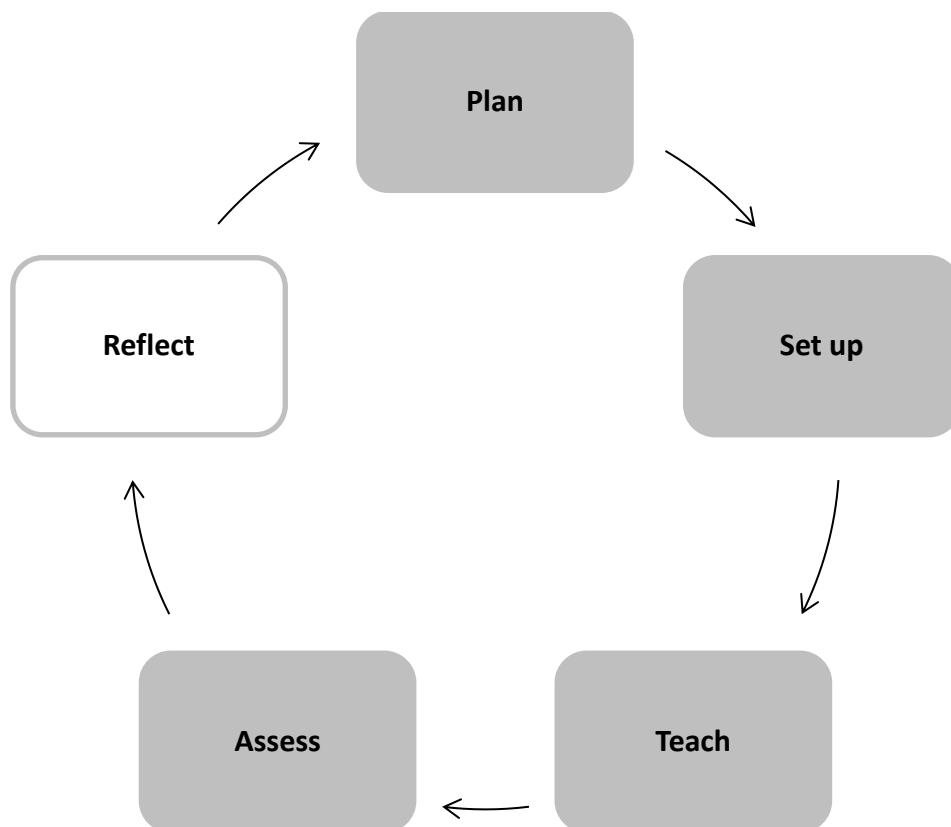
Figure 18: Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Reflect

Purpose

This section offers guidance on how to develop as a reflective teacher in early learning settings.

Learning outcomes

Participants will:

♦ understand reflection as part of the PBA cycle
♦ assess their own reflective practice skills
♦ identify steps to improve reflective teaching practice.

What is a reflective teacher?

Reflective practice helps teachers to improve on what they do as they evaluate their own teaching practice. This involves thinking critically about their teaching and assessment practice 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 kind of intervention for the child(ren)
♦ plan learning experiences that will best support the 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 a continual process of reflection and action. The learning cycle requires teachers to progress through different phases of the learning process. They first do or engage in an activity or experience, and then look at and reflect on what happened during this experience. Teachers are then able to think about and analyse what and why things developed. They use their learning to make improvements that are necessary and apply this when they plan the next experience.
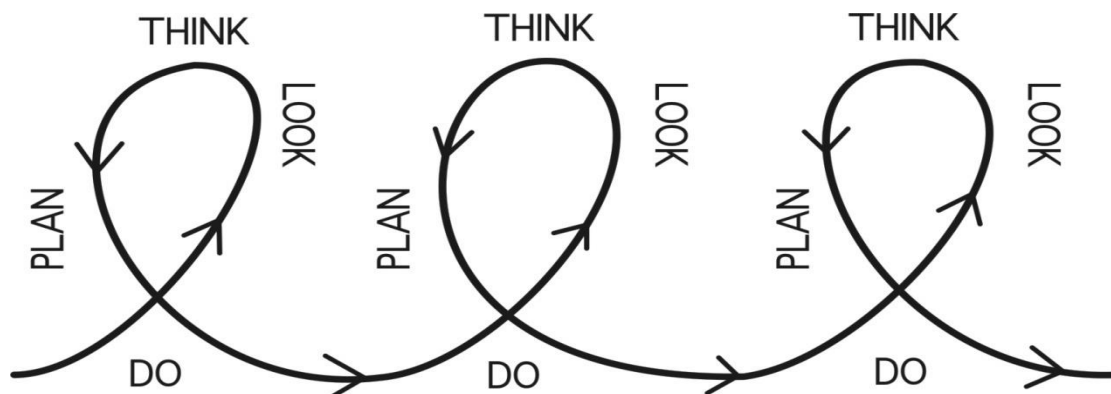

Figure 19: Experiential learning cycle

Activity 7.18: Reflection as a key part of teaching practice (60 minutes)

Purpose: To understand how reflection fits into the PBA cycle and how it is critical for improving teaching practice

Materials:
Question sheets for each participant (Examples or similar questions of your own)

- How often do you reflect on/evaluate your teaching practice?
- How do you reflect on/evaluate your teaching practice?
- What have you learned from reflecting on your teaching practice?
- How do you apply what you learn from evaluating your teaching practice?
- How do colleagues help you to think about and improve your teaching practice?
- How do you use the ideas of others in your teaching practice?
- What actions could you take to improve your reflective practice?

Facilitation:
Start the session by asking participants to share with a partner a teaching experience that they were not happy about.

- What was the experience?
- Why do you think this happened?
- What did you learn from this experience?

In the large group, invite participants to share some of their experiences and what they learned.

Review the experiential learning cycle by drawing it on flipchart paper and explaining each loop iterates/repeats. Use one of the examples generated by the group in the previous discussion. Discuss the importance of reflective practice in play-based teaching and assessment.

Divide participants into small groups. Give each member of each small group a copy of the prepared questions. Group members write down their answer to the question on their paper and then pass it on to person sitting next to them. In this way, each group member writes an answer to every question on a different paper.

Reflection:
In the large group, take the feedback from the groups, one question at a time. Make a list of the ideas the groups have generated to improve their reflective teaching practice.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Literature review

Play and Pedagogy: a brief review of the literature

Play in early childhood learning: historical and theoretical roots

Playful behaviours are typical of young animals as well as across a wide variety of human societies. Play is generally categorised into physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, pretend play and games with rules. How much the different types of play are emphasised and supported varies between cultures reflecting different values and beliefs regarding childhood and play, which relate to different social and economic contexts (Whitebread, 2012). [2]

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

Western theories of development have also promoted play. Jean Piaget's (1951)[3] constructivist orientation profoundly influenced nursery education for much of the last century. His view was that children actively construct knowledge by interacting with the environment, peers and resources. This approach emphasises the role of the child in initiating experiences and practising new skills. Psychodynamic theorists such as Freud, Erikson and Bowlby also saw play as important for young children but for them it was about providing avenues for the safe release of negative emotions and stresses – especially in the home corner. Their focus too was on free play.

More recently, the rise to prominence of socio-cultural developmental theorists, of whom Lev Vygotsky (1978)[4] is most prominent, has changed our understanding of play to emphasise the social and cultural context in which it occurs. While play and in particular the role of imagination is critical for developing self-regulation and language and other forms of symbolic representation, the socio-cultural theorists hold that children develop thinking by interacting with more experienced others - older children, peers and adults who scaffold their learning and so help them learn about the world. This requires a more pro-active role for teachers and socio-cultural theorists attach greater significance to teacher-directed interactions than constructivists.

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[2] Whitebread, D. (2012). *The importance of play. A report on the value of children's play with a series of policy recommendations*. Written for Toy Industries of Europe (TIE). Belgium.

[3] Piaget, J. (1951). *Play, dreams and imagination in childhood*. London: Routledge

[4] Vygotsky L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: the development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge,MA: Harvard University Press

Some challenges for previously held understandings of play and pedagogy in the early years identified by Dockett (2011)[5] include

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

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

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

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

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

Efficacy evidence

The traditional preschool focus on free play has increasingly given way to a focus on the role of play as a vehicle for teaching, as well as learning. There is broad agreement that educationally effective programmes require a holistic curriculum, active child play with concrete materials, sensitive, mediated caregiver/child interaction and engagement with peers including adult-led group activities as well as child-initiated activities (Montie, Xiang & Schweinhart, 2006; Sylva et al, 2007).[6]

Evidence from studies of the outcomes of Pre-K programmes in the United States suggests that when promoting school readiness, curricula focused on specific school readiness skills are more successful than a more general whole child curriculum which includes, but does not target early maths and literacy skills.[7] A balanced approach including whole and small group instruction as well as free-choice time was found to be most effective (Jenkins & Duncan, 2017)[8]. Jenkins and Duncan warn that a focus on specific skill domains should not be conflated with highly teacher-controlled, direct instruction methods, such as large group

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

[6] Montie, J. E., Xiang, Z., & Schweinhart, L. J. (2006). Preschool experience in 10 countries: Cognitive and language performance at age 7. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 21*,313–331.

Sylva, K., Taggart, B., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Totsika, V., Ereky-Steven, K., Gilden, R., et al. (2007). Curricular quality and day-to-day learning activities in pre-school. *International Journal of Early Years Education, 15(1)*, 49–65. http://dx.doi.org/10. 1080/09669760601106968

[7] Phillips, D., Lipsey, M., Dodge, K., Haskings R., Bassok, D. et al. (2017). *Puzzling it out: The current state of scientific knowledge on pre-kindergarten effects: A consensus statement*. Washington DC: Brookings Institute.

[8] Jenkins, J. M. & Duncan, G.R. (2017). *Do pre-kindergarten curricula matter? The current state of scientific knowledge on pre-kindergarten effects*. Washington DC: Brookings Institute p 37 – 44.

worksheet-based academic activities, that have been linked with stress and reduced motivation in preschool children (Elkind, 1986; Stipek et al, 1995).[9]

Jenkins and Duncan conclude that

> *Far from the "drill and kill" methods justifiably admonished by child development experts, successful evidence-based, skill-focused curricula embed learning in playful preschool activities, including story-book reading, games, art, and discovery activities that are conducted in both small and large group contexts and grounded in a sound developmental framework. (p 39)*

The Center on the Developing Child (2016)[10] also recently reviewed evidence of what works to promote early childhood development. In relation to learning they conclude similarly that

> *The most successful (programmes) are guided by curricula that provide age-appropriate, engaging activities focused explicitly on identified outcomes. Curricula that do not target specific outcomes are less likely to have significant impact on anything than those that are designed and implemented with clearly articulated goals in mind. Different capabilities (e.g. cognitive and social skills) and areas of achievement (e.g. reading and math) require different kinds of scaffolding at different ages, so effective learning activities are cumulative and sequenced to align with children's developmental stages (Center of the Developing Child; 2016, p 29).*

The implications of the evidence for the role of the teacher in delivering a play-based pedagogy are for careful planning targeted to individual children's developmental stages and provision of a range of different fun and meaningful opportunities to support learning.

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[9] Stipek, D., Feiler, R., Daniels, D. & Milburn, S. (1995).Effects of different instructional approaches on young childrens achievement and motivation, *Child Development* 66, 1, 209-223. Cited in Jenkins & Duncan (2017)

Elkind, D. (1986). Formal education and early childhood education: An essential difference, *The Phi Delta Kappan* 67, no. 9 (1986):631-636. Cited in Jenkins & Duncan (2017)

[10] Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2016). *From best practices to breakthrough impacts: A science-based approach to building a more promising future for young children and families*. Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

How policy has responded to child development perspectives on play

International commitments regarding play[11]

The Convention on the Rights of the Child which underpins South African Government policies for children provides that

State Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. (United Nations, 1989, Article 31).

Play is defined in General comment No 17 (United Nations, 2013, Paragraph 14c) as

"any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Caregivers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake rather than as a means to an end".

The United Nations recognises play as a fundamental and vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood, as well as an essential component of physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development.

Consistent with this definition and emphasis on a developmental perspective on free play and peer culture the general comment notes that usually where investment is made in play, it relates to structured and organized activities, but that the need to create time and space for children to engage in spontaneous play, recreation and creativity, and to promote societal attitudes that support and encourage such activity is equally important (Kjørholt, 2019).

South African policy relating to play

The National Integrated ECD Policy (Republic of South Africa, 2015) which outlines government's commitments to early childhood development states that the provision of early learning and stimulation requires "Providing community and centre-based organised play-based early learning that complements the parent's role… (p 27)." In respect of play the policy indicates that while play is a right in and of itself, play is important in promoting children's early learning and skills development and identifies some of the challenges to promoting play as being the

♦ lack of knowledge of the importance of play in early childhood,

♦ lack of implementation of play-based learning in early learning and development programmes, and

♦ a lack of opportunities to play and interact in a child-centred, secure, supportive and stress-free environment.

The Department of Basic Education has recognised the importance of a play-based pedagogy for early childhood care and education and put in place initiatives such as Play-SA to support it. Education Minister Mtoshekga explained that "the foundations that we lay in

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[11] Kjørholt, Anne-Trine. (2019). Early childhood and children's rights: A critical perspective. In A.-T. Kjørholt, H. Penn (eds.), *Early Childhood and Development Work*, Palgrave Studies on Children and Development, Palgrave. pp 17 – 38

early learning and the foundation phase through play, will have an impact on the schooling careers of children up to matric and beyond. Play is learning in the early years…" (Newsroom/Media Releases: Learning through playing: launch of online training for Early Childhood Development and the Foundation Phase, 09 March 2017). This was reiterated in the Minister's keynote address delivered at the release of 2018 National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results, held at Vodacom Dome, Noordwyk, Midrand on 03 January 2019.

However, in curriculum and teacher training policy and guidelines play is largely associated with younger children. It is strongly promoted in the National Curriculum Framework for children from Birth to Four (Department of Basic Education, 2015). The Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development Educators (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2017),[12] which puts in place a set of guidelines for programmes leading to qualifications for ECD educators who are delivering or assisting in delivering ECD programmes, includes specific reference to play and notes

> *"The use of play as pedagogical mechanism to stimulate early learning and development is particularly important in ECD contexts and the National Curriculum Framework is rooted in play-based learning for ECD"(footnote 2, p 18).*

The Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015)[13] explains that

> *"Grade R prepares young children for formal learning .The focus of this grade is on learning through play, developing physical coordination as well as developing spoken language competence and fundamental ideas that will form a basis for the future development of number sense and literacy" (pp 25 – 26).*

No reference is made to play-based pedagogy for Grades 1 to 3. Nor do the Curriculum Assessment Policy Standards (CAPS) refer explicitly to play except in relation to Grade R mathematics.

Further, even for younger children the play-focus in ECD related qualifications is seldom explicit leaving trainers and lecturers to interpret play as they see fit.

The Programme for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education (PIECCE)[14] which is developing a standardised programme framework and set of support materials for ECCE qualifications in the Higher Education Sector has provided a Play Framework to guide

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[12] Department of Higher Education and Training. (2017). *The policy on minimum requirements for programmes leading to qualifications in higher education for early childhood development educators.* Pretoria: Author

[13] Department of Higher Education and Training. (2015). *Revised pPolicy on themMinimum requirements for teacher education qualifications*. Pretoria: Author

[14] The PIECCE collaboration includes UNISA, SAIDE, the Centre for Social Development at Rhodes University, BRIDGE and HEIs, NGOs and TVET Colleges involved in ECCE training for Birth to Four.

development of support materials for qualifications for early childhood education[15] and so address this gap. PIECCE focuses on qualifications for those working with children 0 – 4 years.

What is play?

While play is universally recognised as a feature of young children's lives, it has not been easy to define and is usually referred to in terms of generally agreed characteristics. These include that is it enjoyable, intrinsically motivated, actively engaging and valued as a process rather than an outcome (Brooker & Woodhead, 2013)[16]. Learning through play experiences are said to be characteristically joyful, meaningful, actively engaging, iterative and socially interactive (Zosh, Hopkins, Jensen et al 2017)[17].

Neuroscience helps us understand how playful experiences enhance learning. Lui and colleagues (2017)[18] examined the relation between these key characteristics of playful learning experiences and the interconnected brain processes that support children's capacity to learn. They summarise studies and find that a positive emotional state (joy) enables many higher cognitive functions such as enhanced attention, working memory, mental shifting and improved stress regulation that are useful for learning. Active engagement is related to executive functioning skills such as inhibitory control. Sustained engagement in an activity requires staying selectively focused on the situation. Repetition requires perseverance and some research suggests that this is correlated with improvements in working memory. The role of social interaction in learning is well established either through positive caregiver interactions from early infancy, or through peers in later childhood, which help children develop language, cooperation and social learning, and practise self- regulation.

Types of play

Developmental psychologists commonly distinguish five types of play

♦   physical play
♦   play with objects
♦   symbolic play
♦   pretend play and
♦   games with rules

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[15] Ebrahim, H., Excell, L., Martin, C., Shaik, N., Sotuku, N., Hannaway, D., Taylor, B. & Bipath, K. (2017). *Play framework for the development of support materials for qualifications for early childhood education*. Pretoria: PIECCE Project. (Version 1)

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

[17] Zosh, J. M., Hopkins, E. J., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Neale, D.,Hirsh-Pasek, K., Solis, S. L., & Whitebread, D. (2017). *Learning through play: a review of the evidence (white paper).* Denmark: The LEGO Foundation.

[18] Liu, C., Solis, S.L., Jensen, H., Hopkins, E., Neal, D., Zosh, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K. & Whitebread, D. (2017). *Neuroscience and learning through play: a review of the evidence (research summary).* Denmark: The Lego Foundation.

Each of these takes different forms at the different stages of development and is a vehicle for learning. **Physical play** starts early and from the second year of life children are engaged in exercise play and rough and tumble. **Play with objects** begins when infants can grasp objects and investigates them by mouthing, dropping, batting, shaking. As they mature this evolves into constructing and making things. **Symbolic play** starts when the infant can make sounds and evolves into different uses of language including enjoyment of rhyming, joking. Drawing and music are also forms of symbolic play. Children engage in **pretend play** from about a year and this evolves into elaborate games involving others as they get older. **Games with rules** involve physical games but also number and language games. While the categorisation is useful, more than one form of play is often present in any particular activity.

Whitebread and colleagues (2017)[19] recently reviewed the evidence for the role of play in children's development, noting that several studies showed that children perform at significantly higher levels in playful rather than non-playful situations. Their review found evidence of health and exercise benefits of physical play and some evidence for the association of physical play with academic progress, cognitive self- regulation and social competence. Object play links to gains in language, maths and spatial skills. There is good evidence that language play enhances development of language in many ways and that this links to other skills such as social skills, self- regulation and academic achievement. While there are limited study findings on pretend play, despite its prominence in socio-cultural theories of the significance of play, there was evidence that it may impact on social development,[20] is one way of developing reasoning skills and links to executive functioning and self- regulation.[21] Games with rules, especially number and linear number sequence, lead to improvements in mathematics/numeracy ability. Physical games with rules have been shown to help children adapt to formal schooling.

Play in different cultural settings

As Dockett (2011) reminds us it cannot be assumed that all children engage with play in similar ways and the social and cultural relevance of play needs to be acknowledged. Most play studies and in particular the prevailing play and pedagogy discourse is Western and discourse of Western early childhood:

> *"may mask the fact that the close association between play and pedagogy taken for granted in English speaking and European heritage society is an alien idea for*

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[19] Whitebread, D., Neale, D., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Solis, S.L., Hopkins, E., Hirsh-Pasek, K. & Zosh, J. M. (2017). *The role of play in children's development: a review of the evidence(research summary).* Denmark: the Lego Foundation.

[20] E.g Fung. W.K. & Cheng, R.W. Y. (2017). Effect of school pretend play on pre-schoolers' social competence in peer interactions: Gender as a mediator. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 45* (1) 35 – 42. Cited in Whitebread et al. (2017)

[21] E.g. White,R.E. & Carlson, D. M. (2016). What would Batman do? Self-distancing improves executive function in young children. *Developmental Science, 19* (3) 419-426. Citations in Whitebread et al. (2017)

many other societies." (In particular the)... notion that freely chosen play will promote academic achievement can seem nonsensical" (Marfo & Biersteker, 2011).[22]

While play is often referred to as children's work in English speaking and European heritage cultures, in cultures where helping with family work has greater significance play takes a different forms. Play tends to take place either in imitation of work, Lancy (2012)[23] refers to this as the play stage of the chore curriculum, or children bring a playful element to their chores. Who children play with is also culturally determined. In traditional societies in Africa for example, children are expected to play with other children and to receive any guidance they need from older and/or more expert playmates(Ngaisake & Swadener, 2019; Dawes & Biersteker, 2011; Swart et al, 1996).[24]

How play is viewed in particular cultures affects the implementation of a play- based pedagogy. For example, in traditional African society the notion of an adult playing face to face with a young child is often seen as incongruous (Marfo & Biersteker, 2011). Cheng (2011)[25] points out that in Chinese culture teachers are expected to be stern and strict and allowing play and teachers to take a non-directive role would be regarded as a form of negligence by much of the community including teachers themselves. There have been questions about the utility of privileging play- based over other approaches to education for developing societies. Parental beliefs about experiential learning through play, and traditional theories (e.g. Vygotsky and Piaget's socio-cultural and constructivist principles which talk to learning through play) are at odds with more academic curricula often found in

[22] Marfo, K. & Biersteker, L. (2011) Exploring culture, play and early childhood education in African contexts. In S. Rogers (ed) *Exploring play and pedagogy. Concepts, contexts and cultures* pp 73 – 85. Oxford and New York: Routledge.

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

[24] Ng'asike , J. & Swadener, B. (2019). Promoting indigenous epistemologies in early childhood development policy and practice in pastoralist communities in Kenya. In In A.-T. Kjørholt, H. Penn (eds.), *Early Childhood and DevelopmentWork*, Palgrave Studies on Children and Development, pp 113 – 132 Palgrave/Macmillan.

Dawes, A. & Biersteker, L. (2011). Early Childhood Development. In Bame Nsamenang & Therese M.S. Tchombe (Eds.)*Africa's educational theories and practices: A generative teacher education textbook*. Yaonde, Cameroon: Presses universitaires d'Afrique.

Swart, T., Berman, L., Mahahlela, M., Mlonzi, L., Phakati, L. & Sixako, L. (1996). Mothers' ideas of model offspring inform training. *Recovery*, September, 22 – 26.

[25] Cheng Pui-wah, D. (2011). Learning through play in Hong Kong. Policy or practice? In S. Rogers (ed) *Exploring play and pedagogy. Concepts, contexts and cultures* pp100 - 111. Oxford and New York: Routledge.

more developing countries.[26] Pramling-Samuelsson and Fleer (2009) [27] analysing play activity in early childhood education across countries note a number of different emphases for example, in Sweden and Japan free expression of feelings and thoughts and for socialisation was valued, while in China, where academic learning is highly valued, play was viewed as an instructional technique.

These prevailing values are mirrored in teacher attitudes. For example, studies of play-based pedagogy in Grade R and Foundation Phase classrooms reveal different interpretations of a play-based approach (Wits School of Education, 2009; Aronstrom & Braund, 2015)[28] and similar findings have been see in India (Gupta, 2011)[29], Hong Kong (Cheng, 2011) and China (Wang & Lam, 2017)[30].

Play-based pedagogy: a continuum of strategies

In the light of current evidence of what is required for effective early learning, especially the importance of interactions between children and teachers to support learning, and recognition of cultural variations in play there have been attempts to understand what a play-based curriculum should entail. This has led to a shift from dichotomising free play and teacher structured play, to conceptualising play as existing on a continuum, defined by the relative activity and choice and autonomy of children and teachers. Seeing play pedagogy as a continuum recognises that even when play is free, with children taking the initiative as to what and how to play, the environment set up, materials and people to play with provide a certain structure. At the other extreme is more structured or guided play in which the teacher provides more input. Zosh and colleagues (2017)[31] use the umbrella term of playful learning to cover free or child- led play, guided play in which adults scaffold child- led play as

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[26] Roopnarine, J., Johnson, J., Quinn, S., Patte, M. (2018) *International perspectives on early childhood education* New York: Routledge.

[27] Pramling-Samuelsson, I. & Fleer, M. (2009). Commonalities and distinctions across countries. In I. Pramling-Samuelsson and M. Fleer (Eds). *Play and learning in early childhood. international perspectives*, pp 173 – 190. New York: Springer Science & Business Media.

[28] Wits School of Education. (2009). *Implementation of the national curriculum statement in the foundation phase.* Report submitted by Wits School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand to Directorate: Curriculum Development, General Education and Training, Gauteng Department of Education. Johannesburg: Wits School of Education.

Aronstam, S. & Braund, M. (2015). Play in Grade R classrooms: Diverse teacher perceptions and practices', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 5(3), http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v5i3.242

[29] Gupta, A. (2011). Play and pedagogy framed within India's historical, socio-cultural, pedagogical and post colonial context. In S. Rogers (ed) *Exploring play and pedagogy. Concepts, contexts and cultures,* pp 86 -99.Oxford and New York: Routledge.

[30] Wang, Z. & Lam, C. (2017). An exploratory case study of an American-style, play-based curriculum in China. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, *31*:1, 28 – 39.

[31]Zosh, J. M.; Hirsh-Pasek, J. , Hopkins, E. J., Jensen, H., Liu,C., Neale, C. , Solis, L. & Whitebread, D. (2018). Accessing the inaccessible: Redefining play as a spectrum. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9,* Article 1124.

well as games where adults design, set rules and scaffold the play with a particular learning objective. Edwards and Cutter- Mackenzie (2013)[32] also propose a continuum which distinguishes pedagogical play from free play or child-initiated play. Pedagogical play includes open-ended play in which teachers provide materials for children to explore, modelled play in which they demonstrate how to explore materials but children may choose whether or not to follow, through to purposely framed play where children must follow teacher demonstration. For Zosh and colleagues 'direct instruction' , and similarly Edwards and Cutter-Mackenzie's 'work' which is highly structured, is not seen as play.

Cutter Mackenzie and Edwards' (2013)[33] work in the context of environmental education documents how rather than valuing one type of play over another, teachers in their study saw different types of play as offering a range of opportunities for supporting teaching and learning. They conclude that the combined use of the three play types (open-ended, teacher /child interaction and modelled) provide multiple opportunities for connecting content and experience.

Implementing a play-based pedagogy: pointers from research

Given the weight of evidence in support of a play-based pedagogy, we now take a closer look at what is necessary to realise this. If play is a vehicle for teaching as well as learning what are the implications for designing play environments and for providing the necessary teaching strategies and techniques? Research on play-based learning for early childhood education and most particularly in the early grades of schooling has identified a number of common pitfalls as well as guidelines for effective practice.

The Whitebread (2012)[34] study notes a range of challenges for play. Play is often ineffectively supported by inadequately trained staff; pressure to cover the prescribed curriculum limits play; and modern life provides increasingly limited opportunities for the free play and association with peers that were common to parents and grandparents. Also important to support play is the availability of materials and that are open and flexible and provide children with opportunities for creativity, social interactions with peers and adults and deep engagement.

Teacher understandings and preferences

A number of studies have highlighted teachers' understandings and preferences for different types of play and different roles during play (Dockett, 2011; Aronstrom & Braunde, 2015, Wits School of Education, 2009, Gupta, 2011, Wang & Lam,2017; Pramling

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[32] Edwards, S. & Cutter Mackenzie, A. (2013). Pedagogical play types: what do they suggest for learning about sustainability in early childhood education? *International Journal of Early Childhood, 45*, 327 – 346. Doi 10.1007/s13158-013-0082-5

[33] Cutter Mackenzie, A. & Edwards, S. (2013) .Toward a model for early childhood environmental education: Foregrounding, developing, and connecting knowledge through play-based learning. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 44:3, 195-213, DOI:10.1080/00958964.2012.751892

[34] Whitebread, D. (2012) op cit

Samuelsson & Fleer, 2011).[35] As Dockett (2011) notes the specific skill expected to be learned through play (e.g. socialisation vs literacy and numeracy) affects the approach. While this is entirely appropriate, and well-integrated into Cutter Mackenzie and Edwards' model discussed above, teachers in the early grades of schooling tend to resort to more formal academic methods. Within the British Reception classes, Dockett found free play was extremely limited. Challenges included a lack of support from school administration, curriculum and assessment expectations – a curriculum with little space to move, parental expectations, classroom management and a lack of materials, physical space or suitable routines. This was similar to findings in India (Gupta, 2011) and in South Africa (Aronstrom and Braunde, 2015, Wits School of Education, 2011). In many early childhood settings play takes place alongside other work-like activities often as an alternative or reward for work. Play is not really recognised as an instrument for learning future competencies. As Pyle, DeLuca and Danniels (2017) found in their comprehensive review of 168 studies of play-based pedagogies in kindergarten[36] despite theoretical moves towards a more integrated framing of play which sees the different forms of play as complementary to each other

> *… research focused on developmental learning has highlighted the importance of free play with a lack of teacher intervention, while research focused on academic learning has endorsed the use of teacher-directed play and mutually directed play where the teacher instead occupies an active role. (p 343)*

Assessment in play-based learning

Key to implementing effective play-based learning is understanding each child's learning needs and appropriate strategies for meeting these through assessment for learning. Here too there is a tendency for teachers to fall back on more formal methods even if they espouse play-based learning. For example DeLuca (2018)[37] observes that though the move to play-based learning is becoming more established, integrating assessment in this context is challenging for teachers. In a study of 77 kindergarten teachers, Pyle and DeLuca[38]to examine their use of assessment during periods of play-based learning, withdrawing children from play to engage in assessment activities was most common. Digital applications and video recordings have been used but analysis and synthesis of data collected was time-consuming and required specific skills and training.

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[35] Gupta, A, (2011). Play and pedagogy framed within India's historical, socio-cultural, pedagogical and post colonial context. In S. Rogers (ed) *Rethinking play and pedagogy in early childhood education. Concepts, contexts and cultures*,pp 86 -99. Oxford and New York: Routledge.

[36] Pyle, A.,de Luca, C. & Danniels, E. (2017). A scoping review of research on play-based

pedagogies in kindergarten education. *Review of Education, 5* (3) pp. 311–351

[37] DeLuca, C. (2018). Assessment in play-based learning. In A. Pyle (Ed) *Play-based learning. Early childhood encyclopedia,* pp 29 – 32. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

[38] Pyle, A. & DeLuca, C. (2013). Assessment in the kindergarten classroom: An empirical study of teachers' assessment approaches. *Early Childhood Education Journal 41*(5):373-380. Cited in Deluca (2018)

Conclusion

In conclusion, in order to effectively integrate a play-based pedagogy into education for children birth to nine years, we would do well to follow Dockett (2011)

> *To be effective advocates for play early childhood educators need comprehensive and sophisticated understandings of play, grounded in research as well as practice that reflect the relevant social and cultural contexts. Educators also need to grapple with the ambiguities of play and the realisation that play is unlikely to be universally effective or desirable as a path to promote learning in all contexts for all children. (p 44)*

Armed with an adequately nuanced understanding of play and the difference between play and a pedagogy of play, educators will be in a position to capitalise on its true potential.

Appendix 2: Annotated bibliographies

④⑤⑥ **National Childhood Network(no date). Aistear learning and developing through play. Ireland: National Childhood Network. (19 pages)**
http://www.ncca.biz/Aistear/pdfs/Guidelines_ENG/Play_ENG.pdf
Aistear is the **curriculum** framework for children from birth to six years in Ireland. This readable booklet explains how to use play to support attainment of different learning outcomes in the framework. These include well being, identity and belonging communicating and exploring and thinking which overlap substantially with the South African National Curriculum Framework Early Learning and Development Areas. The resource guide begins with a description of play and its characteristics, types of play and play at different ages. It gives practical points on the role of the adult, preparing the environment and resources. There are also several examples of play activities linked to different learning areas and provided in different settings (home care, preschool, playgroup or classroom) for different age groups. Suitable for NQF 4, 5 and 6.

④⑤⑥ **New Foundland, Labrador Education and Early Childhood Development (2016) Full –Day Kindergarten Play-Based Learning: Promoting a Common Understanding. Canada. Accessible at**
https://www.gov.nl.ca/eecd/files/pdf_fdk_common_understandings_-document_eng_2016.pdf (76 pages)
This guide was designed to help kindergarten (Grade R) teachers understand what play and play-based pedagogy is and how to employ play strategies in implementing the kindergarten curriculum. It is readable with illustrations and practical examples. After an introduction to play and its benefits the guide focuses on aspects of play pedagogy, its characteristics, the role of the teacher (planning, assessment, the environment, strategies). There is a focus on inclusion and diversity is discussed. A useful list of video clips and internet references. Recommended for NQF Levels 4, 5 and 6.

⑤⑥ **Epstein, A.(2007). The intentional teacher: choosing the best strategies for young children's learning. Washington DC. National Association for the Education of Young Children.**
(Chapter 1, 8 pages)

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

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

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

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

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

⑤ ⑥ ⑦**Jensen, H., Pyle, A., Zosh, J. M., Ebrahim, H. B.,Scherman, A. Z., Reunamo, J., & Hamre, B. K. (2019). Play facilitation: the science behind the art of engaging young children (white paper). Denmark: The LEGO Foundation.**

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

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

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

⑥ ⑦ **Aronstam, S. & Braund, M. (2015). Play in Grade R classrooms: Diverse teacher perceptions and practices, *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 5(3), Art. #242, 10 pages. http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ sajce.v5i3.242**

This study looks at the perceptions of 104 educators in the Western Cape about supporting and using play in the Grade R classrooms in primary schools and ECD centres. Both well resourced and under-resourced environments were sampled. The authors review the literature with a cultural lens on understandings of play. Interviews with educators indicate their belief in the value of play but contrast informal and structured/formal play, with educators generally preferring structured play as they are uncertain of their role during informal play. Challenges regarding implementation of play pedagogy across schools include inadequate teacher training on their different roles in supporting play but also space and availability of materials as well as the and explores educators' views on play in the curriculum. Suitable for NQF Levels 6 and 7.

⑥ ⑦ **Bobis, J. ; de Vries, E.; Dockett, S. et al. (nd). Playing with Mathematics: Play in Early Childhood as a Context for Mathematical Learning. In L. Sparrow, B. Kissane, & C. Hurst (Eds.), *Shaping the future of mathematics education: Proceedings of the 33rd annual conference of the Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia.* Fremantle: MERGA**

In this Symposium four contributors give brief perspectives on the key role of play in young children's mathematics learning and examine the teacher's role in facilitating and extending it. Paper 1 reflects on how educators struggle to explain ways that they could use play to promote learning, and the essential requirement that they should understand mathematical content as well as how children learn in order to capitalise on opportunities for learning through play. Giving examples of different play activities in which there are mathematical learnings, they reflect on both the playful and learning content, inherent in each. In Paper 2 teachers' perspectives on play including maths experiences are explored as they move to greater engagement with children in play away from the notion that play-based learning and teaching are at odds. Paper 3 reports on a larger study on toddlers' mathematical learning outdoors. They looked at the role of teachers in providing resources and

environments for exploration. The final paper seeks to determine Big Play – big ideas for early mathematics concepts that could be an opportunity for conversation, discussion, a question, or just observation and recording for later investigation towards mathematics development. Suitable for NQF Levels 6 and 7.

⑥⑦**Clements, D. H. & Sarama, J. (2016) Math, Science, and Technology in the Early Grades.** *The Future of Children, 26, 2, Starting Early: Education from PreKindergarten to Third Grade* **pp. 75-94. Princeton University. Accessible at**
https://www.jstor.org/stable/43940582

The authors review various effective curricula and approaches for promoting Science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) in the early grades(Pre-K through K to Grade 1). While recognising that young children have an inherent interest in science and maths concepts which is shown during free play, Clements and Sarama cite evidence that calls for a more focused approach to STEM, indicating that free play, even if teachers intervene at teachable moments is ineffective. Teachers need to match content, levels of thinking and activities fine tune to children's level of thinking and cover all steps in the developmental progression of the development of concepts. They do however talk of enriched high-quality learning rather than simple instruction mentioning manipulatives, games, computer-assisted learning and robotics. This directed approach would enhance rather than compete with play-based approaches. Suitable for NQF Levels 6 and 7.

⑥⑦**Cutter-Mackenzie, A. & Edwards, S. (2013). Toward a model for early childhood environmental education: Foregrounding, developing, and connecting knowledge through play-based learning. Journal of Environmental Education, 44(3), 195–213, DOI: 10.1080/00958964.2012.751892**

The starting point for this article is the diverse pedagogical approaches of environmental education on the one hand, now included in the Australian Early Years Learning Framework, which involves the gaining of specific values and knowledge and the focus on active learning through play for early childhood education which has less engagement on specific knowledge. Their study of 4 – 5-year-old children (kindergarten in Australia) sought to examine types of play - open-ended, modelled, and teacher-child interactions as providing opportunities for young children and teachers to develop knowledge through experiences about environmental education. Their fieldwork generated a potential model of "purposefully framed" play which connects learning across the three play types - with provision of open-ended play, then modelled play, and finally opportunities for

teacher/child interactions and engagement. While examples are given from environmental education, the approach would apply equally to other learning areas and is helpful in providing an integrated rather than dichotomised approach to the types of play. Suitable for NQF Levels 6 and 7.

⑥⑦**Edwards, S. & Cutter-McKenzie, A (2013).Pedagogical play types: What do they suggest for learning about sustainability in early childhood education? International Journal of Early Childhood, 45:327–346. DOI 10.1007/s13158-013-0082-5**

While the authors write from the perspective of sustainability, a key aspect of environmental education, this article focuses on how to integrate the conceptual basis of sustainability education

with existing play-based pedagogies. Using a continuum approach including more open-ended and freely chosen play to more teacher orientated play-based activities, they examine how different play types suggest different opportunities for teacher's engagement with children's learning on biodiversity. Edwards and Cutter-McKenzie used Vygotsky's description of combinatorial activity to consider the extent to which each play type prompts teachers to plan for children's engagement with biodiversity concepts in ways that are most likely to support knowledge construction. This article includes an excellent literature review and will be useful for educators seeking to unpack the elements of play-based pedagogy as much as for environmental educationalists. Suitable for NQF Levels 6 and 7.

⑥⑦**Lancy, D.F (2007) Accounting for Variability in Mother-Child Play. American Anthropologist, 109 (2) 273–284**. (11 pages)

This article by a leading anthropologist challenges the notion that cultures where mother-child play is not the normal child-rearing strategy are unenlightened and depriving their children of a self-evident route to normal development and an unlimited good. From an anthropological rather than psychological perspective and drawing on ethnographic descriptions of childhood rather than the observations of children in the upper strata of modern society, Lancy points out that mother-child play is often absent and that there are cultural and contextual explanations for this. In other words what psychology sees as natural, anthropology sees as cultural. He questions whether one should export play as a culture-specific child-rearing strategy to settings where it may be incongruent to local beliefs and practices. This provides an interesting local and indigenous knowledge perspective to play as an educational practice and explains some of the challenges of different cultural belief systems to play as pedagogy. Suitable for NQF Levels 6 and 7.

⑥⑦**Lancy, David F. (2012) "The Chore Curriculum"** *Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology Faculty Publications.* **Paper 574.**
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/sswa_facpubs/574

 This chapter drawing on anthropological studies in Africa demonstrates how play among young children is the first stage of preparation for work. While Lancy recognises that "children's motivation to engage in make-believe and object play cannot be attributed solely or even primarily to the desire to learn their culture. The essence of play is its purposelessness. Still, there is little play that does not echo adult activity." There is indulgence for very young children in that they play roles that are not gendered, but as they mature, play is gendered. There is a progression towards learning is by participation in actual chores or tasks under supervision of older children and elders. The chapter looks at the role of older children in scaffolding learning in traditional African cultures and the lack of adult involvement in children's play. This is a useful article in that it highlights the traditional

practices that may well contribute to current parent and teacher attitudes about play and learning. Suitable for NQF Levels 6 and 7.

⑥⑦ Ogunyemi, F.T. & Ragpot, L., 2015, 'Work and play in early childhood education: Views from Nigeria and South Africa', *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 5(3), Art. #344, 7 pages. **http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v5i3.344**

This article examines work and play within the framework of a constructivist early childhood curriculum, highlighting some of the cultural and contextual constraints to implementing a play-based educational approach in ECE centres in both Nigeria and South Africa where academic learning is strongly entrenched as compared with a whole child constructivist approach. The authors reflect on the different dimensions of play and work within a constructivist early childhood education paradigm, with a particular focus on playful learning. What is particularly useful in this article is a frank discussion of what educative play is and a debunking of the notion that all play is worthwhile and educational. There is also a useful unpacking of the features of constructivist learning of different models of play (prefiguring the play continuum) . Suitable for NQF levels 6 and 7.

⑥⑦ **Pyle, A. & Danniels, E. (2017).** A Continuum of play-based learning: The role of the teacher in play-based pedagogy and the fear of hijacking play. Early Education and Development 28, 3, 274–289. **http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2016.1220771** (16 pages)

This paper highlights the tension between academic and developmental perspectives on learning and play and the lack of play in many kindergarten classes. Because there has been an emphasis on play as child-directed practice, teachers are unclear about how to implement a play pedagogy. The authors describe a small qualitative study including observations and teacher interview of 15 kindergarten classrooms. They describe two types of teachers one who dichotomise play and learning and so were challenged about how to meet academic demands through play, and the others who saw teachers as playing a role in play to support academic learning. They describe a play continuum including free play, inquiry play, collaboratively designed play, play-based learning and learning through games. This could be usefully compared with other play continuums presented in the literature. Suitable for NQF levels 6 and 7.

⑥⑦ **Ramani, G. B. & Eason, S. H. (2015). It all adds up: Learning early math through play and games. The Phi Delta Kappan. 96, 8. 27 – 32**

This article from the United States is an application of play to the teaching of early maths focused on kindergarten and first grade (equivalent to Grades R and 1 in South Africa). Citing studies from Head Start children's classrooms it provides practical examples of how play and games were used to promote the common core math standards and provides five recommendations for teachers. A useful practical example for Grade R and 1 educators. Suitable for NQF 6 and 7.

⑥⑦**Rogers, S. & Evans, J. (2007). Rethinking role play in the Reception Class. Educational Research, 49, 2, 153 – 167.**

This qualitative study of the role-play of children aged 4 – 5 years (Reception class in the United Kingdom)is used to highlight challenges between offering what is meant to be an informal play-based curriculum and how children respond to that provision. The methodology is child-focused to elicit their experiences. The focus is on role play because of its significance for early social and symbolic activity. It was found that role-play was negatively affected by lack of indoor space, and interruptions by teachers when children's play was interrupted due to time tabling of other activities. Further, teachers often grouped children rather than allowing for free choice. A useful article for practitioners in the South African Foundation Phase context to study as there are clear parallels. Suitable for NQF 6 and 7.

⑥⑦Whitebread, D.(2012). The importance of play. A report on the value of children's play with a series of policy recommendation. Written for the Toy Industries of Europe. Accessible at http://www.importanceofplay.eu/IMG/pdf/dr_david_whitebread_-_the_importance_of_play.pdf (55 pages)

David Whitebread is a developmental cognitive psychologist and early years specialist. This report focuses on the value of children's play in supporting healthy holistic development of young children. It summarises the literature of research on children's play and its role in education in different cultural and historical contexts; explores research on the psychological processes through which play impacts on learning and development and sets out the research on five categories of play commonly used and factors which support or inhibit play. The review also includes the views of leading European play researchers and Play Organisations on key issues such as the value of play, screen-based play, the role of adults in children's play and provision for play. There is a short section on policy and recommendations for promoting play. There is an extensive bibliography. This is suitable for NQF Levels 6 and 7.

⑥⑦**Whitebread, D., Neale, D., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Solis,S.L., Hopkins, E., Hirsh-Pasek, K. Zosh, J. M. (2017). The role of play in children's development: a review of the evidence (research summary). Denmark: The LEGO Foundation. (39 pages)**

This paper summarises evidence relating children's play and their learning and development from a range of disciplines including evolutionary psychology, developmental psychology, anthropology, neuroscience and education. It then presents evidence for the 0 – 8 age range related to the five different types of play – physical, play with objects, symbolic play, pretend play and games with rules. Key points are provided in summary boxes for each type of play. The concluding section looks at when and how play is more effective than other contexts for learning in relation to the five characteristics of play (see above) and identifies areas for further research. Suitable for strong learners at NQF 5 and for NQF 6 and 7.

⑥ ⑦**Zosh, J. M., Hopkins, E. J., Jensen, H., Liu, C., Neale, D.,Hirsh-Pasek, K., Solis, S. L., & Whitebread, D. (2017). Learning through play: a review of the evidence (white paper). Denmark: The LEGO Foundation. (39 pages)**

Zosh and colleagues summarise current evidence on the role and importance of children's learning through play with a view on how it helps develop lifelong learners with skills and mind-sets to manage the uncertainties of rapid social change, new technologies and global challenges in the 21st Century. This requires holistic learning and learning to learn skills. The authors claim that play is the tool for this and present a continuum of playful learning from completely free play to more guided and adult designed and scaffolded play and that optimal learning takes place when the activity is joyful, meaningful, actively engaging, and involves iterative thinking and social interaction. Examples are given of studies linking each of these characteristics to aspects of learning. Finally the paper identifies future research directions to enhance what is known about play and learning. Suitable for NQF Levels 6 and 7.