

UNICEF
Teacher TRAINING Packages

Student Guide

NQF Level 6

Play Learning Materials Consortium (PLMC)

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Acronyms

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

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

co-opted 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

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.

A. 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: How we learned

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

Think about that learning experience, and then ask yourself these questions.

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 your 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.

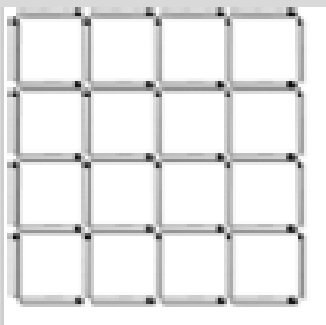
If we think about this more deeply, we could also say then that if adults were to engage in playful learning that has these features, they would also have successful learning experiences.

Activity: Features of play

Get into pairs or groups of 3. Your group will get 40 matchsticks to arrange in a 4 by 4 square grid (see below).

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

The first group to find the solution is the winner.



Reflection:

Answer these questions about the game you have just played.

1. Did this game have a purpose or a goal? What was it?
2. Did it give people with different ways of thinking an opportunity to participate?
3. Did it require you actively took part?
4. Was it fun? Did you enjoy yourself while you were doing it?
5. How much could you direct and control the game?

B. PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

Purpose

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

Learning outcomes

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:

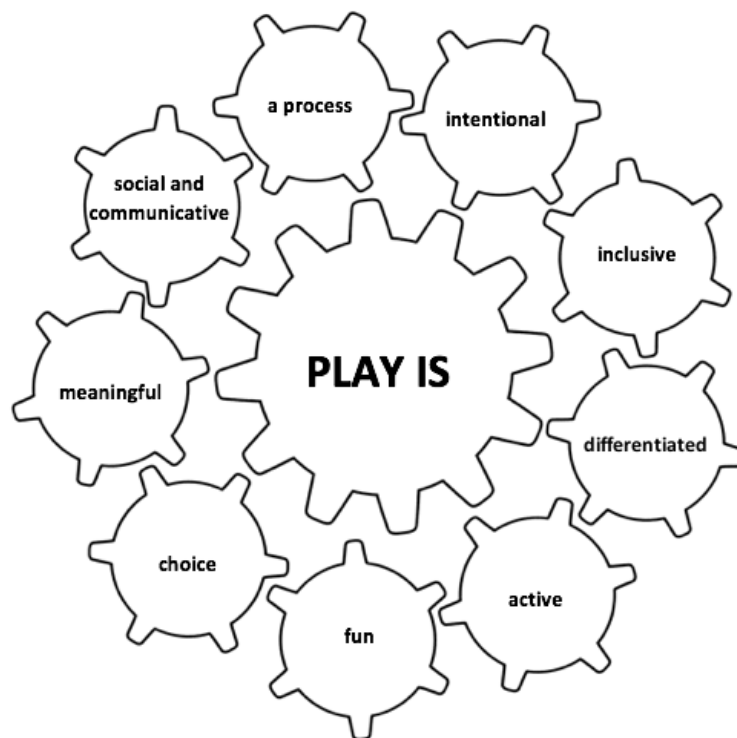
- ◆ to reflect on the play they see their children engaging in and learning from
- ◆ to create more playful classrooms which support learning
- ◆ to help assess children's learning through play.

These principles are as follows:

- ◆ 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.



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 C). 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 C). 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 Play is fun

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

Part One

Play this game as instructed by the facilitator.

Rate it on the 'fun' scale.

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

Part Two

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

Rate the game on the 'fun' scale.

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

Part Three

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

Rate the game on the 'fun' scale.

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

Part Four

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

Participants rate this on the 'fun' scale.

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

Reflection:

Look at the different ratings for fun that you gave the different versions of this game and see: (i) if your rating changes with each different game, and (ii) what changes did you notice, and why did you 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: Play is intentional

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

Playing in 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.

Reflection:

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 C), 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: Play can be differentiated

Play this game called 'Sounds Interesting'.

Any number of people can play, but you 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:

Discuss with your group:

- ◆ 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: Play is meaningful

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 extend their knowledge. This is done by asking a number of questions.

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: Play is communicative

A game that requires direct communication is 'Pictionary'.

Participants get into groups of 3.

You will each receive two words from the facilitator. The words are not to be shown to the rest of the group.

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

Reflection:

Look at the list of characteristics of play at the beginning of Section B, 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: Play allows choice

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

Describe the game and why you choose to play this game, giving very specific reasons.

Reflection:

The whole group discusses

- ◆ 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 you 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 you 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.

Activity: Principles of play

Part 1

Divided into groups of 4. Each group gets their materials from the facilitator. 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.

You have 20 minutes to do this. The game has to be:

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

Each person in the group takes on one of these tasks (writing, drawing, speaking and demonstrating).

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

Reflection:

After each presentation, you will 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?

Part 2

Still working in your small group, the task is to modify the game given by the facilitator, in such a way that a literacy or a numeracy aspect is built into it. It should be suitable for children of 8 years old.

You have 10 minutes to do this.

Reflection

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

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

Purpose

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

Divide into small groups. Each group will get a pile of cards and koki pens.

Think about what comes to mind when you hear the word 'play'. Each group member 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 and then display it.

Reflection: Compare your definition with the criteria described by Hughes (2003).

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: Characteristics of play

Form groups of 5 or 6 people. Each group gets a sheet of flipchart paper and koki pens.

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. Each group makes a note of similarities and differences in what has been written. One person from each group presents the shared ideas to the larger group. Each small group will be assigned an age group and play materials.

In your group:

- ◆ Read through the Characteristics of Play from the Aistear Early Learning Curriculum Framework.
- ◆ 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?

Groups will then take turns to demonstrate how their play materials support the different characteristics of play.

Stages of play

Solitary play 	Parallel play 
Associative play 	Cooperative play 

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

 <p>Physical play</p>	 <p>Play with objects</p>	 <p>Symbolic play</p>	 <p>Pretence and socio-dramatic play</p>	 <p>Games with rules</p>
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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 emphasised 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: Five types of play

Look at the five signs (one for each type of play) displayed in the room. Think about which type of play you feel you know the most about and proceed to that sign.

Once everyone has decided, each group is going to be a “panel of experts” who will be presenting their information on their play topic on a special television programme.

Refer to the page numbers in the selected readings for your 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 your groups, read your section and discuss what you have read. Record the main points to present during the panel interview and decide how you will share this information.

After each panel presentation, a “roving mic” will go to members of the “audience” to give them a chance to ask questions related to each type of play.

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/eedc/files/pdf_fdk_common_understandings_-document_eng_2016.pdf

Activity: Role-playing types of play

You will be put into groups and assigned a topic from 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).
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.
 4. One member from each group shares information about the type of play your group has focused on. The group then presents the role-play to the larger group.

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

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: Zone of proximal development

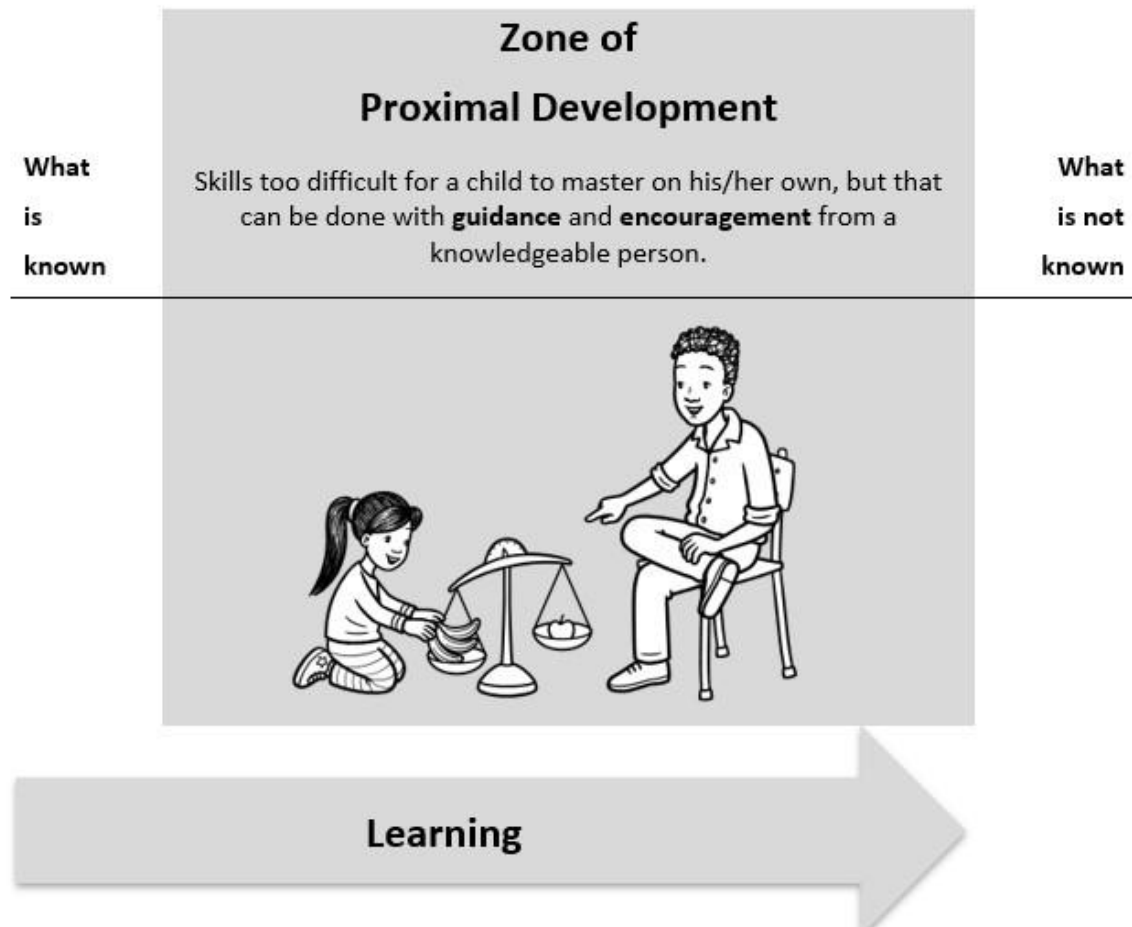
The facilitator will demonstrate a prepared scenario to show how an adult could help a child on a specific task within the ZPD and will explain the role of the adult in a play-based approach.

In pairs, share an example of a time when you observed a child trying to complete a task on their own that was too difficult. Think about

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

Reflection

Discuss the different examples suggested by the pairs, and write a list of what could have helped and could have been done.



Zone of Proximal Development

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: Attachment in play and learning

Brainstorm

- ◆ What is attachment?

Watch a video clip of an experiment developed by Edward Tronick in 1978 called the **Still Face Experiment** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apzXGEbZht0>) to help us understand children's attachment needs.

After watching 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?

Think about the kinds of play experiences that can be included in the daily programme to strengthen relationships with children.

Divide into small groups which will each be allocated a different age group:

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

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.

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

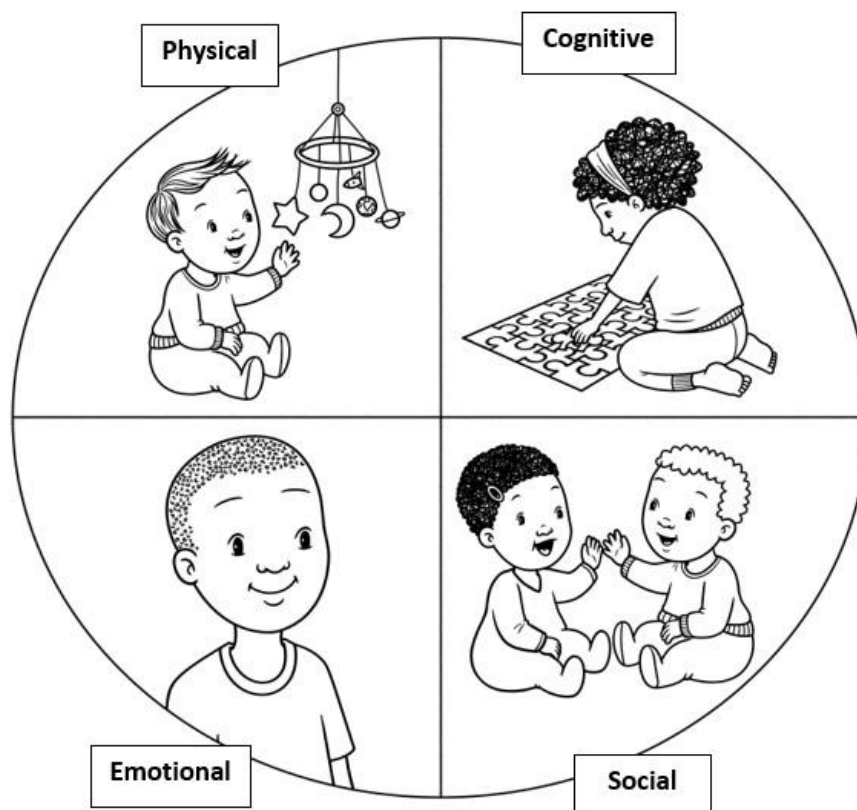
It is widely accepted that play is the most important way that babies, toddlers and young children develop and learn across all developmental domains (physical, social, emotional and cognitive).

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](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.



Developmental domains

Activity: Why play is important

Participants form two circles of equal numbers with one circle standing 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.

Each person gets a sentence strip from the facilitator.

As music plays everyone will move in time to the music, towards his/ her right.

When the facilitator shouts “Stop!” you will be facing a new partner. Read the sentence to your partner and discuss its significance in children’s development and learning. After you have swapped sentences the music starts again.

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:

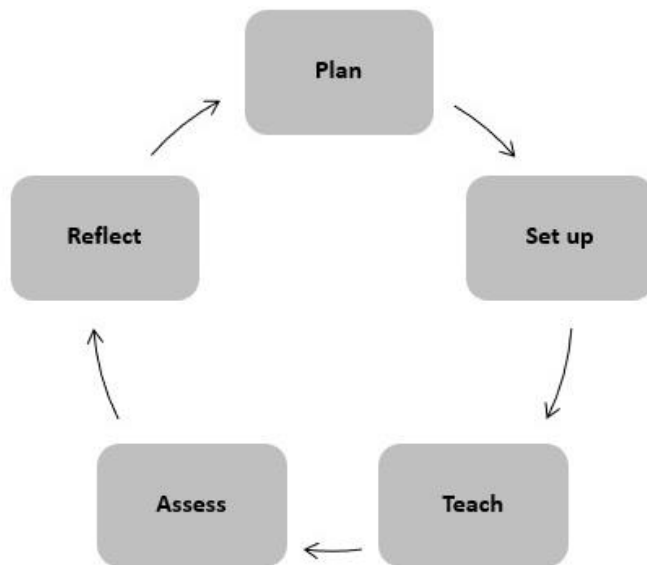
1. **Working memory.** This is the ability to hold information in our memory and be able to draw on it and use it when needed.
2. **Inhibitory control.** This is what we know as self-control and it is the ability to not be distracted by what is happening around us so that we can complete a task or control 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)



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
- ◆ 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/eedc/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: Play, teaching and learning

Brainstorm:

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

Divide 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 ECD 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 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.

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.

D. 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) 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: Understanding and applying a continuum

Part 1: Creating a continuum

- ◆ You are going to make a continuum. Each participant receives a strip of newspaper and the group will create a continuum using the strips of newspaper.

Reflection

Discuss:

- ◆ 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?

Part 2: Creating different continuums

Divide into three or more small groups. Each group receives a note with a secret task.

Find a quiet place and 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.

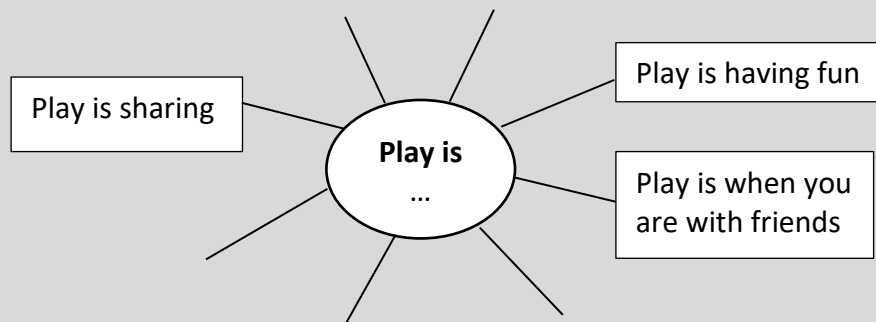
Part 3: What is play ?

All the students sit closely together in a circle.

You will play a broken telephone kind of game called '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.



Reflection:

Revisit the definition of a continuum and answer the question

- ◆ What might a play continuum look like?

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:



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 or 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.

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

The next table explains the levels of initiation and direction in the context of the different forms of play on the play continuum.

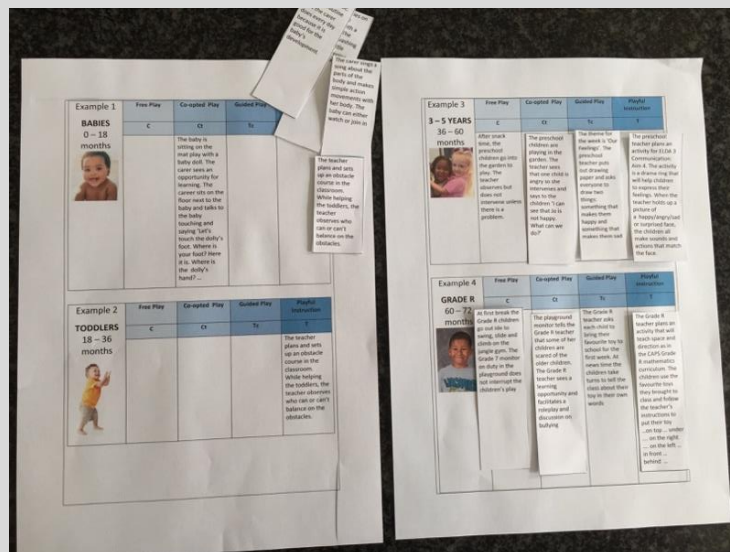
Levels of initiation and direction on the play continuum

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 child 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.

Activity: Matching teaching activities to forms of play

Students will match examples of play-based teaching and learning activities to the forms of play on the play continuum.

- ◆ Divide into small groups (3 – 4 students in each group).
- ◆ Each group will get one envelope (with 20 play activity strips) and five matching templates.
- ◆ 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. Remember that each form of play is determined by who initiates and who directs the play and at what level.




Reflection:

Discuss:


- ◆ 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.

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
<p>GRADE R</p> <p>5-6 years</p> 				

Template for Grade 1 - 3 children

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

Statements for the Templates

✂ Sentence strips

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 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 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.

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 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 tadpoles.' 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.

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.

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.

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 things 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.

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 put 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 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: Role-playing four forms of play

Students are divided into 4 groups. Each group takes a case study, reads it but keeps it secret from the other groups.

Each group finds a quiet corner and takes 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.

Each group will present 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 form of play, and the levels of initiation and direction in the play, and the link to the curriculum.

Reflection

The whole group discusses 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.

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).

Pair up with someone who teaches the same age children.

Discusses how to do a Guided Play (**Tc**) activity with the children.

Individually writes a Guided Play (**Tc**) activity for your ECD setting/ school using the blank planning form in your 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 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**).

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: Sharing control

Read the following text out loud:

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.

How can you turn these five ideas into practical activities for teachers?

Divide into groups according to the age of the children you teach i.e. babies, toddlers, 3 – 5-year-olds, Grade R, and Grades 1 - 3.

Each group gets a newsprint sheet and discusses and writes down their ideas on how they share control with their age group.

Walk around and read the five posters which are on display.

On your own complete the Table: Sharing control with children in your Student Guide.

Application

Turn to the person next to you and cross-check your completed Tables.

Add any new ideas onto your table.

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

Ask open-ended questions

Consider the children's interests and preferences

Provide opportunities for children to use their own ideas

Invite children to take part in decision making

Offer children choices

Practical examples of how to share control with children

Teacher says: We can put balls or scooters out today. Which one would you like?

Teacher says: How could you do that differently?

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?

Ask parents and caregivers about the child's likes and dislikes.

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: Understanding and nurturing agency

Part 1

Open your Student Guide and 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 into five groups which each gets a statement from the reading to discuss for 10 to 15 minutes, makes notes on newsprint and presents to the whole group.

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

Part 2

Stand and form a circle. Students play a game stepping forward if they agree with a statement and stepping back if they disagree.

Reflection

Find a partner and discuss each of the following questions for 3 minutes:

- ◆ 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: The benefits of sharing control

Find a partner and discuss the picture on the next page for 5 minutes.

Reflection

Answer the following questions:

- ◆ What do you see in the picture?
- ◆ Are there benefits of sharing control? Explain your opinion.

On a blank A4 page list the benefits of teachers sharing control with children.

Application

With your partner discuss the following questions for 5 minutes:

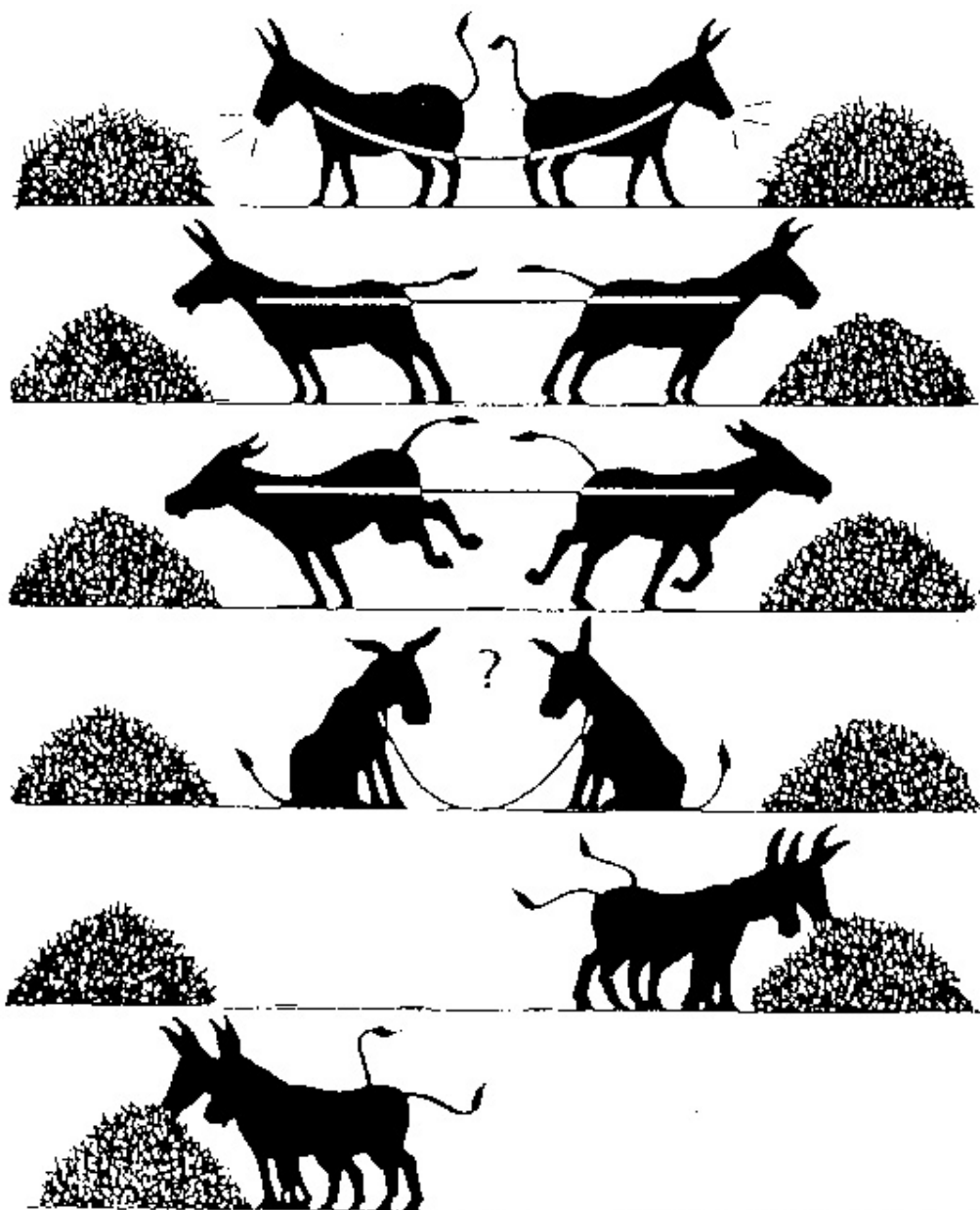
- ◆ How could you use the donkey picture in the classroom using the PBA?
- ◆ What would the children learn?
- ◆ What links can you make with the curriculum?

Activity: Summary: The play continuum

Look at all the posters and newsprints created in this section reviewing what you have learned.

Complete the Summary and Feedback form in your Student Guide and write:

- ◆ The three most important things I earned about the play continuum.
- ◆ The changes I made/will make in my classroom / ECD setting in response to my learnings.
- ◆ The areas where more information or clarification is needed.



The two donkeys¹

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 Pres

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:

E. HOW DO WE DO A PLAY-BASED APPROACH?

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.



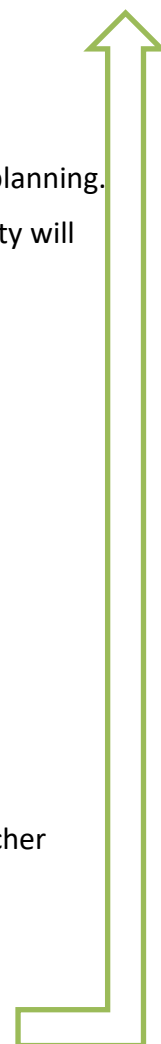
Assess: The teacher checks to see if the children have understood and can do what the planned learning activity taught them.



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

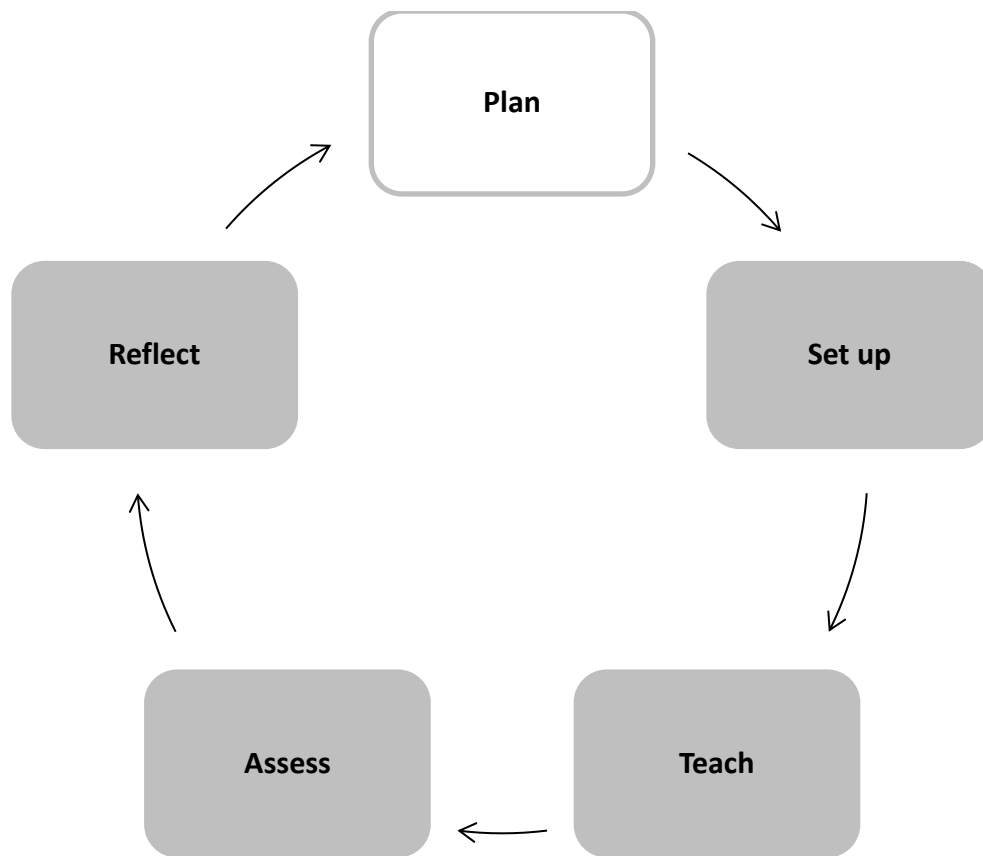
- ◆ What worked well? Why did it work well?
- ◆ What didn't work well? Why didn't it work well?
- ◆ What do I need to do differently next time?

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.



Play-based approach to teaching and learning cycle - Plan

Activity: Planning – the benefits and consequences

Part 1 Define planning

- ◆ Think about *What does the word 'planning' mean to you?*
- ◆ Help create a definition of 'planning'.

Part 2 Movement game

- ◆ The facilitator will lead you in a movement game to demonstrate the need for planning.

Part 3 Sharing ideas on how to plan

- ◆ Form small groups of 3 – 5 based on the age group you teach e.g. all the toddler teachers form one group, all the Grade R teachers form another group, etc. If your group is more than 5 students, then split the group into two smaller groups.
- ◆ Each take 5 minutes to share with your group how you plan at your school/ ECD setting.
- ◆ Share and discuss the planning forms you 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.

Activity: How to observe

Part 1: Kim's Game 1

- ◆ Tray 1 with 14 different everyday items is put in front of the students. Observe what is on the tray for 60 seconds. The tray is covered and you are asked to remember what you saw on the tray.
- ◆ Tray 2 with 14 different everyday items is put in front of the students and you observe for 60 seconds. When the facilitator covers the tray you write down for 60 seconds what you saw on Tray 2.
- ◆ When the facilitator uncovers Tray 2, compare what you wrote with what is on Tray 2.
- ◆ Now write what you remember seeing on the covered Tray 1.
- ◆ When Tray 1 is uncovered compare what you wrote from memory with what is on the tray.
- ◆ Compare what you remembered for Tray 1 with what you remembered for Tray 2.

Reflection:

Answer 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

- ◆ The facilitator makes small changes to Tray 2 and you need to guess what they are e.g. what is missing or what has been replaced.

Reflection:

- ◆ What did you notice?
- ◆ How can teachers make sure they don't miss important details?

Part 3: Child in a corner

- ◆ Partner with the person sitting next to you.
- ◆ Look at the picture of **the child standing in a corner** and discuss what you see for one minute.

Reflection:

Students share their observations, and discuss the contributions that are assumptions and opinions and different possible interpretations of the contributions.

Think about what happens when teachers make assumptions about children?



With thanks to the Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU)

Activity: Observing children as part of planning

Part 1: Observation

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

If this is not possible observe the video clips.

Part 2: Reflection on observation

The facilitator will lead you in a game to address the following questions:

1. Think about the two children you observed.
 - ◆ What did you find out about their knowledge, skills and attitudes?
 - ◆ 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 interests and preferences?
4. How will knowing what interests and excites children help a teacher to plan?
5. What did you find out about the learning context i.e. what people and things are influencing the children's development?
6. How will knowing what challenges and influences children help a teacher to plan?

Reflection:

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

Students to spend 10 minutes writing in their journals. Share your insights with the whole group by taking turns and reading out loud from your journal.

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
<p>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)?</p> <p>For what you saw, is the child on track in terms of curriculum requirements for this content, attitude, or skill. Are there any gaps?</p>	
<p>2) What seemed to interest the child, what did s/he enjoy doing and what did s/he avoid?</p>	
<p>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).</p>	

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:

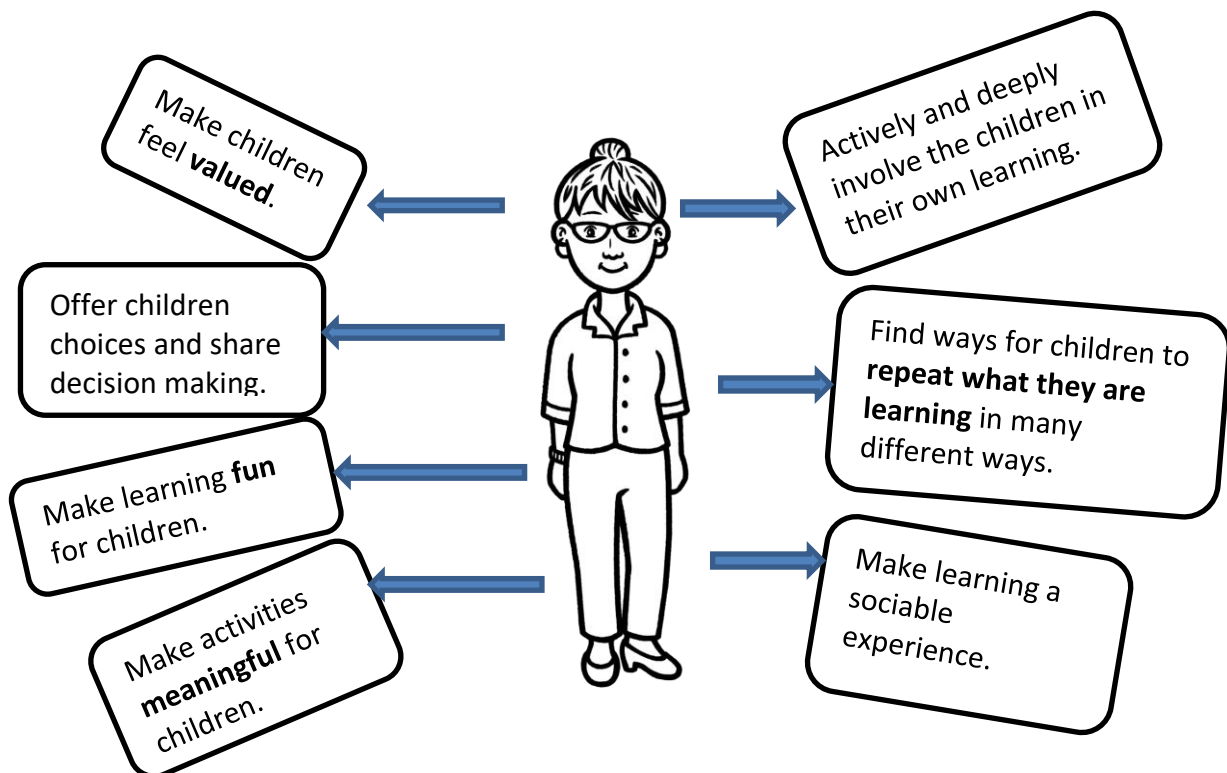
- ♦ make the children feel valued
- ♦ offer choices and share decision-making with children
- ♦ actively engage all the children in fun and meaningful ways.

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.

The figure 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.



How to plan optimal learning activities for children

Activity: Understanding optimal learning principles

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

Part 1: Number Game

The facilitator plays a number game with the students.

Reflection

After the game consider:

- ◆ 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.

Questions to discuss with a partner.

Reflection:

- ◆ 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?

Part 2: Graffiti Posters

- ◆ Each group of students stands at one of the seven newsprints displayed in the room.
- ◆ Discuss the question and then write or draw answers to the question (graffiti). After 4 minutes 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, each group gets a highlighter pen and 1) highlights the 3 – 4 most important points on the poster they are standing next to, and then 2) prioritises the most important points by numbering them. The most important is numbered 1, the next is 2 and so on.
- ◆ Each group gives feedback to the whole group by reading out the highlighted points in priority order from number 1.

Reflection

Answer 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?

Activity: Optimal learning planning in action

Play the Simple Simon says game in the following way:

- ◆ Bring your chair to the empty space in the room and place it randomly at least ½ metre away from the next student's chair.

Follow the facilitator's instructions if they are prefaced with *Simple Simon says*. If you follow instructions without the preface you are out and take your chair to the side.

Reflection:

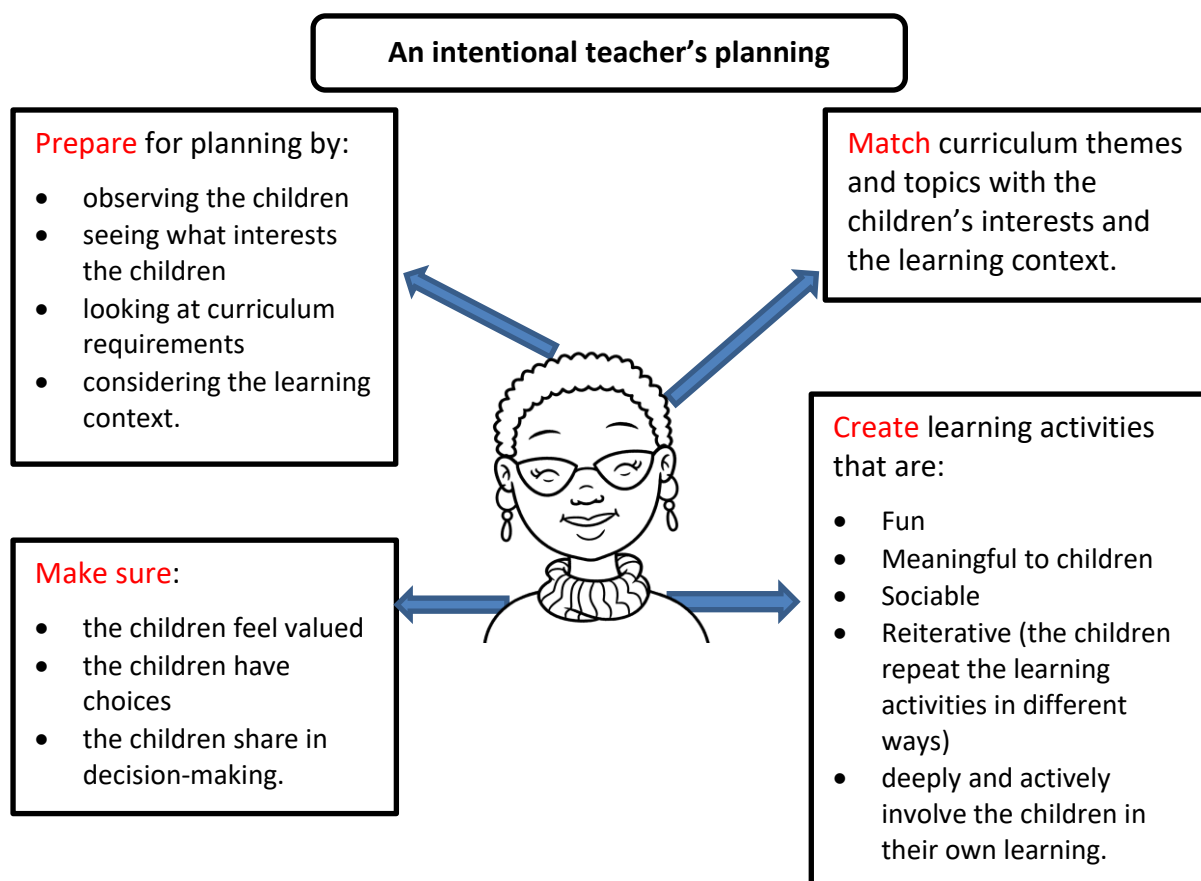
Find a partner and discuss the following questions.

After each discussion two or three students will share their answers with the whole group:

- ◆ Which characteristics of an optimal learning activity did you notice in the Simple Simon says activity?
- ◆ What would children learn from playing this Simple Simon says game?
- ◆ How could you adapt the Simple Simon says game for different age groups?
- ◆ What links can you make between the Simple Simon says game and the curriculum?

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 agenda

Activity: Planning a play-based learning activity

Divide into small groups of 4 – 5 students.

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

Read and discuss the instructions (below) before writing your planned 5 – 10 minutes PBA activity on newsprint.

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 with their planning.

Application

Individual:

Plan one PBA activity for children and write it on the blank planning form (below).

Find a partner and share the PBA activity you have 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 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.

Planning

Date:

Teacher:

Age of children:

Curriculum:

Materials:

Activity:

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.

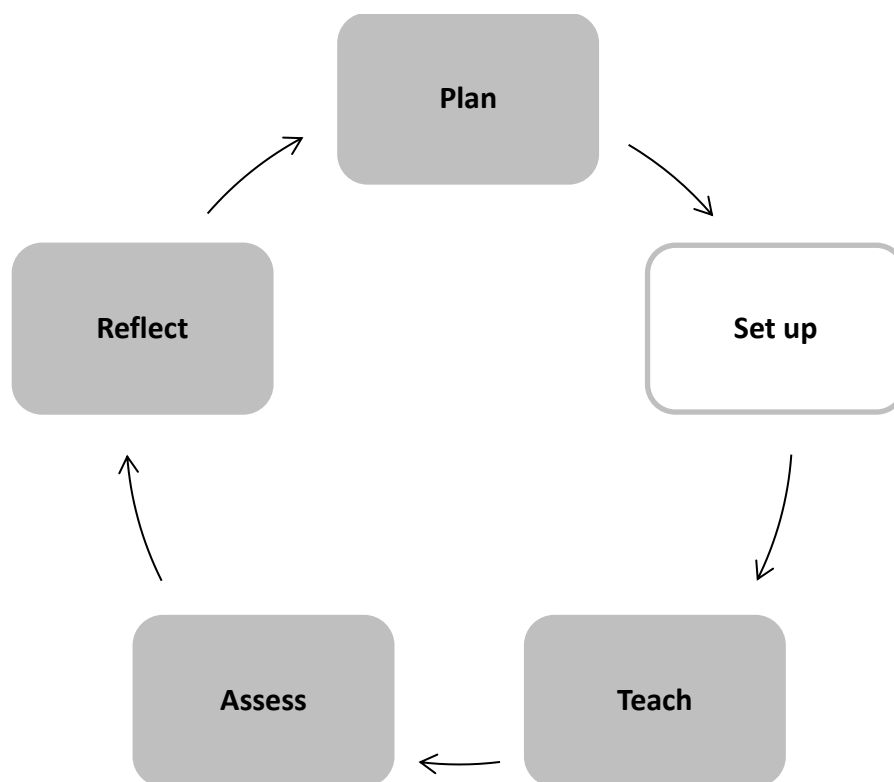
As teachers, we need to plan play-based learning well, and in order to do so we have to very carefully and deliberately 'set up' or prepare the environment for play. Using a play-based approach to learning requires the environment itself to encourage and support play as part of the daily programme.

"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.



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: How teachers see children

Make a mind map on a piece of paper. In the centre of the map is the word 'child'.

Use the following questions to help you:

- ◆ 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 your ideas about children. You can add to your mind map any contributions of interest from other group members.

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: Creating a PBA environment

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

Indicate 5 things that you would do to make this environment as welcoming as possible, and give reasons for your choices. 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 you would like the child to **feel** on entering that space, NOT on how or what the children might play with.

Reflection:

Volunteers 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 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 B) 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 teaching and 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: Designing a dream play space

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

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

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

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

1. Use the principles of play as a tool for design
2. Ask yourselves some questions about the physical environment (indoors and outdoors), the emotional environment and the materials, or what you 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?

You have 30 minutes to prepare your design.

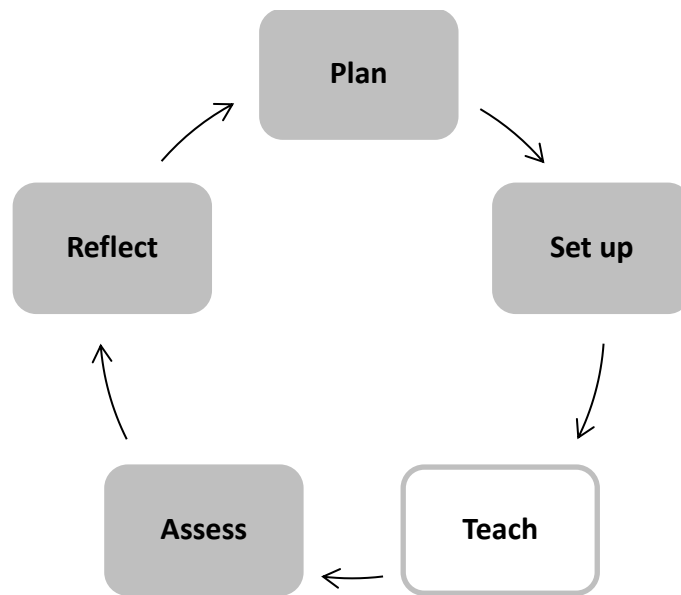
These designs are all put up on the wall to make an exhibition.

Look at the designs and ask different groups to give reasons for one choice they have made in their design.

Reflection:

In the whole group, write down one thing from any of the designs that you thought was a particularly good and well-motivated idea, and why you chose it. Share this with the whole group to form a collective set of good ideas.

Teaching using a play-based approach



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 the teacher



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: Teacher's role in PBA

Part 1:

Break into small groups which will each receive some small cards.

Think about 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.

Part 2:

Note the different roles that the teacher plays on pages 41 and 42 of the reading.

- ◆ Stage manager
- ◆ Mediator
- ◆ Player
- ◆ Scribe
- ◆ Assessor and communicator
- ◆ Planner

Each group gets flipchart paper and a different coloured koki pen and is assigned one of the above teachers' roles. Discuss what this would look like in practice. Write or draw your ideas on the flipchart paper.

After five minutes pass on your papers to another group. Tick off those points that you agree with and add your own new ideas. Repeat the process until each group has had a turn to discuss each of the roles.

Part 3:

Participants sit in a circle and take turns to throw the two dice that the facilitator will provide. They give an example of the teacher's role in play according to the roll of the dice. 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 and to describe a teacher's role.

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: The intentional teacher

Part 1:

Brainstorm: What is an intentional teacher?

Read and discuss the quote from the Head Start reading above.

Observe a video clip of intentional teaching

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8a_QKF8XSM)

In this video you will see and hear teachers demonstrate and explain the different roles that they take on as intentional teachers. As you watch the video, note these roles on a sheet of paper.

After the viewing, break into small groups. Share your 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 teachers ask?

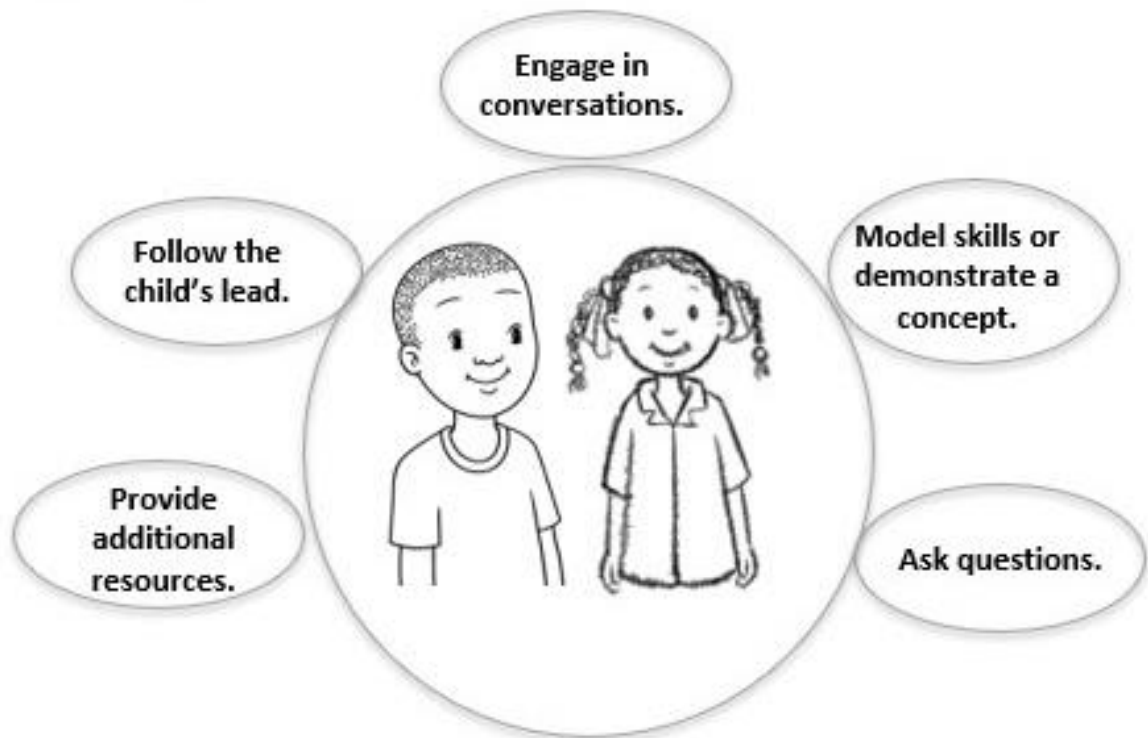
Part 2:

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.

Think about the intentional teaching strategies you have observed and discussed and complete the grid below to identify actions you can apply to your 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



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

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: Let's practise scaffolding

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.

Divide into small groups with each group getting one of the scenarios below and choosing 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. Review the strategies previously discussed.

You should demonstrate some of the following:

- ◆ Following the child's lead
- ◆ Active listening
- ◆ Engaging in conversations
- ◆ Questioning techniques

- ◆ Modelling and demonstrating
- ◆ Providing additional resources

Groups present their role-plays, and the whole group discusses the different strategies used.

Reflection:

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?

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: Teachable moments

Part 1:

Look at the examples of child-guided and adult-guided experiences on page 3 of the selected reading. Read the page individually and then share your understanding of the two examples with a partner.

Share examples of child-guided and adult-guided experiences in your classroom practice.

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

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 into groups and each group receives a task.

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.

Prepare and then present your plays. After each role-play discuss:

- ◆ 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?

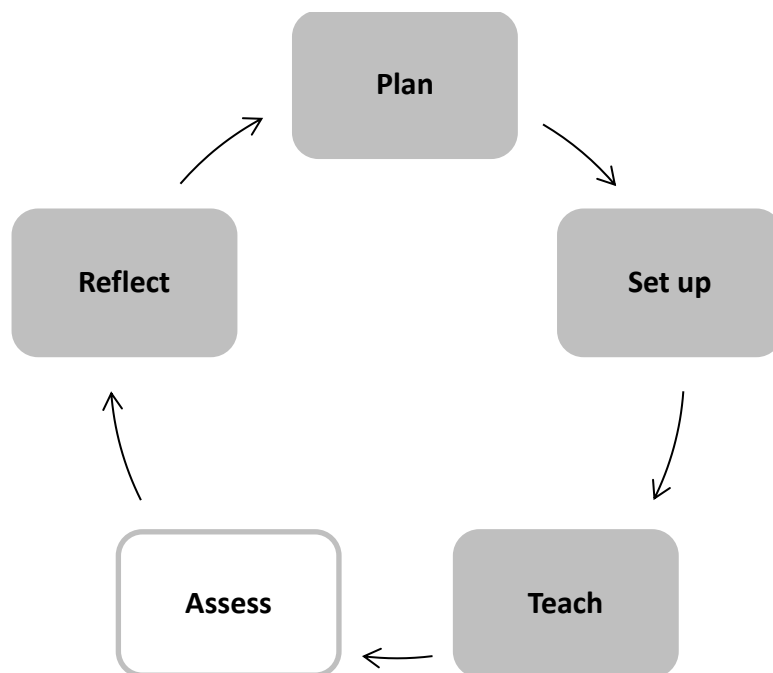
Part 2:**Discuss:**

- ◆ What is inclusive practice?

In your group, return to the scenario and discuss an inclusion strategy that will ensure that a child who is visually impaired can fully participate in your planned learning activity.

Take turns to share your ideas. Make suggestions to the larger group.

Assessing in a play-based approach



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: What is play-based assessment?

Part 1:

Fold a sheet of paper into four squares. As the facilitator asks questions you should walk around the room and ask four other participants to each write their responses to the question in one of the squares.

In the large group, share the ideas you have been given.

Part 2:

View the video clip (Praptee's Self- portrait)

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

and write down all the skills and/or behaviours that you observe during a play activity.

After the video divide into small groups and write down all the skills and behaviours you observed Praptee demonstrating.

Record these according to their developmental domain on a sheet of flipchart paper.

One person from each group presents their findings to the whole group.

Reflection:

In the whole group discuss the following questions:

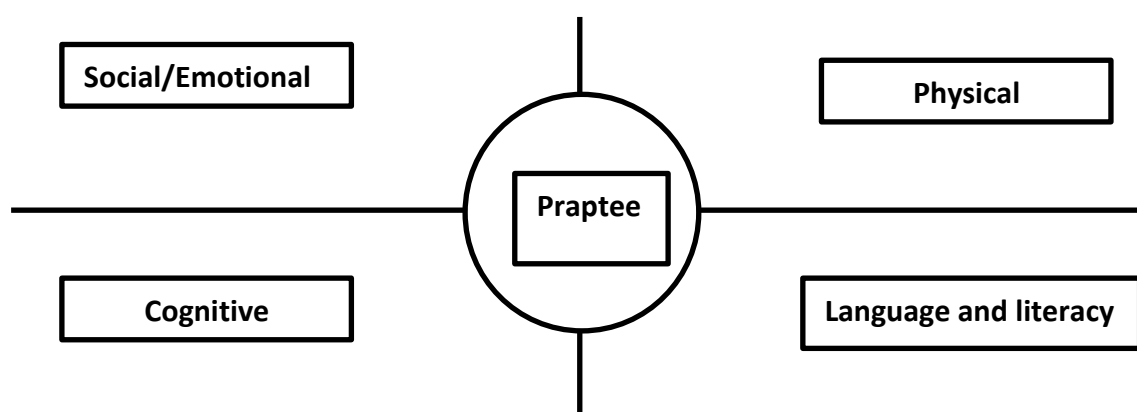
- ◆ How would more traditional practices have been used to assess these skills?
- ◆ What are the advantages of using play-based assessment?
- ◆ How might you integrate this assessment practice in your own early learning setting?

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



Play-based assessment

Activity: Play-based assessment tools

Divide into small groups and review the selected reading.

Going clockwise around the circle, 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 by completing the sentence "One new idea that I want to try out in my classroom/early learning setting is...because..."

Groups summarise their ideas on sheets of flipchart paper and present these to the larger group.

Activity: Observation in play-based assessment

Consider: What can we learn through our observations of children as they play?

View a video and write down exactly what you see and hear happening on a sheet of paper.

Participants view a video clip of Michael builds a castle

(http://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/rmvideoserries_practicingobservation2), which shows a child problem-solving as he builds his block structure:

Replay the video if you need more time to record your observations. After watching the video take turns to call out descriptions of what you saw happening.

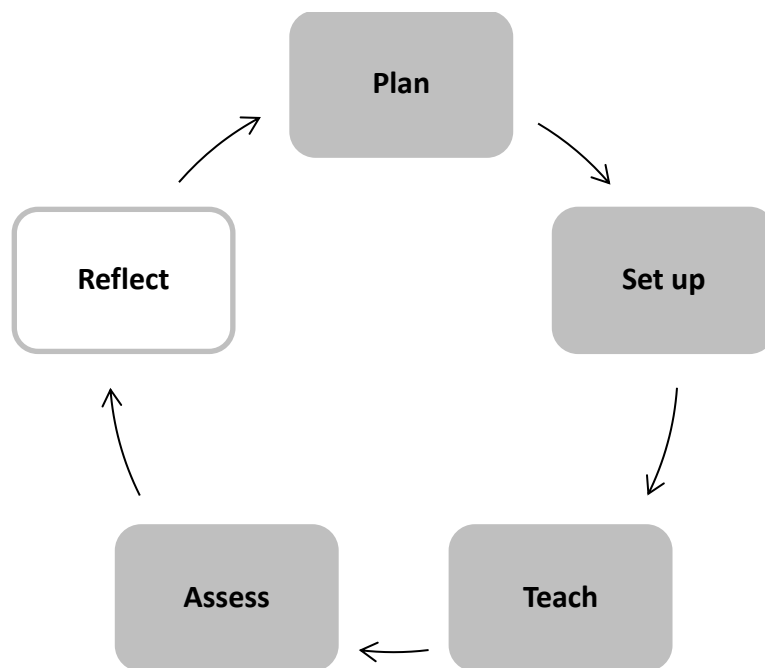
Review the list of observations. Identify whether it was factual by writing an “F” or an opinion by writing an “O” alongside each sentence.

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



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

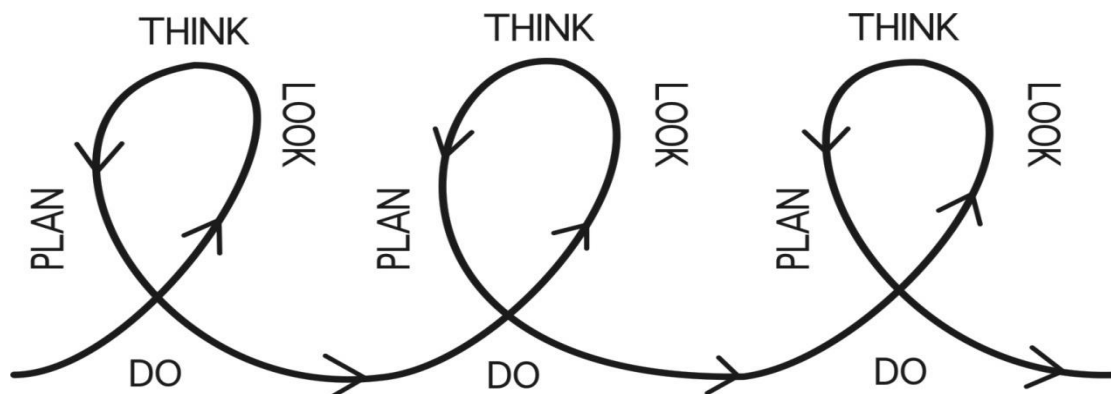
- ◆ decide if they have met the goals for the children in their group
- ◆ learn about individual children's developmental needs
- ◆ identify concerns and think about some kind of intervention for the child(ren)
- ◆ plan learning experiences that will best support the children's development.

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.



Experiential learning cycle

Activity: Reflection as a key part of teaching practice

Share with a partner a teaching experience that you 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, share some of your experiences and what you learned.

Divide into small groups. Each group receives a copy of the following question sheet

- ◆ 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?

Write down your answer to the question on your paper and then pass it on to person sitting next to you. In this way, each group member writes an answer to every question on a different paper.

Reflection:

Groups give feedback to the large group one question at a time.

Make a list of all the ideas the groups have generated to improve your reflective teaching practice.

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