

Playwork Essentials

and Play Types Toolkit for Primary Schools

An introduction to essential playwork skills and knowledge for all adults working in schools



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"An ideal resource
for early learning and
childcare, schools and other
play providers."

Bob Hughes

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Welcome

Your school has enrolled in the OPAL Primary Programme. This booklet will introduce you to some of the most important ideas needed to help staff to provide amazing play opportunities for every child, every day.

Playtime takes up over 1.4 years of a child's life at primary school, so a school with 300 children will be providing around 60,000 child-hours of play per year. OFSTED and wider society now accept that having lots of good quality, social, outdoor play is a necessity for the physical and mental well-being of all children.

Your school wants to ensure that playtime quality at your school is comparable with the best schools in the country. I hope that the ideas in this booklet act as a helpful resource in supporting the development of playwork skills, knowledge and practice in your play team.

Michael Follett

OPAL Director



Introduction

Playing is an integral part of children's day in many educational and childcare settings. Children play before the bell goes in the morning; at playtime and lunchtime; and after school ends. Increasingly, playing is part of class time across Scotland too. Educators are getting better at recognising the interconnections between **playing, learning, growing, developing, being healthy and being happy.**

In schools, there are many opportunities to observe the variety and complexity that emerges when children are playing. At playtime we might see children building **entire 'worlds' in a sand pit, continuing dramatic play and make-believe in sagas lasting several days, chasing, hiding, playing clapping games, power games and social games.** There might be **rough and tumble, climbing, gathering and adventures** all within the children's own choice and direction, often with very little adult intervention.

There is no better activity for learning and development than play.¹

(Doherty and Hughes, 2014:176)

This complexity gives us a clue to the value to be gained from recognising and understanding play types in schools - it is through ensuring children have access to the broadest range of play types that they can also gain their wide-ranging benefits. Through play children **encounter, explore and make sense of the world** and their place within it, they test ideas, apply them in the physical world, make learning real and discoveries meaningful. When playing children use their bodies and minds. Crucially, playing is highly motivating and driven by children's own interests.



Play encompasses children's behaviour which is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. It is performed for no external goal or reward, and is a fundamental and integral part of healthy development – not only for individual children but also for the society in which they live.

(Scottish Government, 2013: 12)²

¹ Doherty and Hughes (2014) Child Development: Theory and Practice 0-11. Harlow: Pearson Education

² Scottish Government (2013) Play Strategy For Scotland: Our Vision. <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0042/00425722.pdf>

Who is the Toolkit for?

The **Play Types Toolkit** is intended for schools and education professionals, though we are sure people in other settings will also find it useful.

The aim is to **highlight the range of types of play children experience**, their vital contribution to learning and development, and to **make integration of play into the curriculum simpler**.

What do we mean by play types?

Play types can simply be described as the different behaviours we can see when children are playing. There have been numerous attempts to categorise different types of play.

This toolkit uses the play types from play theorist Bob Hughes' (2006: 33) *PlayTypes – Speculations and Possibilities*³ in which he explains that 'each play type is both distinctly and subtly different from the others'. It is useful to be able to recognise them since 'engaging in each one is a necessary corollary for a child's healthy development'.



But we already play in school...

The provision of good play opportunities is essential for the well-being and development of children. During their seven years at primary school, a typical child will experience 1.4 years of playtimes. For 50% of UK children, this is likely to be the only social, outdoor, free-play they regularly experience. Schools which follow the OPAL Primary Programme are committed to making sure that every child has an amazing playtime every day.

As well as time for play, evidence shows us that the **physical environment has a significant impact on children's play experience**. A stimulating and varied environment which makes playful resources available to children supports more varied and complex play opportunities indoors and out.

The attitude of adults has an equally important effect – adults can unwittingly constrain and undermine children's play through their attitude to it or they can support play to deepen and become more complex. When adults understand and value play they are more able to recognise the benefits children are deriving from it (such as learning, physical activity, fun) and therefore to provide suitable opportunities and resources.

If children appear not to be engaging with the whole range of play types we might ask whether that is because they choose not to, something in the environment or attitude of adults is stopping them or perhaps something else is happening that it would be useful to try to understand.

How we define play

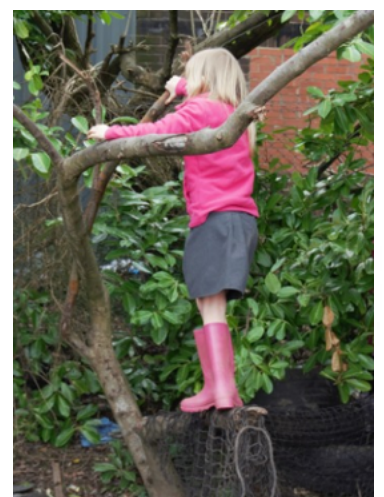
Play is process that is...



Freely chosen by the child

Directed by the child

From the child's own motivations and reasons



Key considerations

Whether you are a **class teacher, head teacher, regional educational leader or indeed head of education**, the following considerations are helpful to bear in mind. Putting them into practice might require small changes to routines and resources or wider changes to school policy and environment.

Time Children need plenty of time to play. As well as short bursts of play at regular intervals through the day,⁴ children benefit from opportunities to immerse themselves in play for more extended periods of time.

Environment The physical environment is a platform for play. Children need spaces that they can use in their own way and which offer variety, flexibility and, especially outdoors, challenge and natural features.⁵

Resources Suitable resources for playing, such as loose parts, natural materials etc. enable children to extend and elaborate on their play activity.

Permission Children will play with language, ideas and actions in environments where experimentation is valued. Adults' response to playing and learning shows this through 'permission' for trial and error; being allowed to figure things out yourself; collaborating; testing concrete properties of the physical world or abstract ideas and concepts. These are all steps to success.



The benefits of play

The gap in educational outcomes, particularly for those children from areas of multiple deprivation and for boys, highlights the need for interventions that address the social, emotional and physical needs of pupils as well as their academic needs.

The benefits of play are broad, encompassing:

- Health and wellbeing
 - Early childhood development
 - Cognitive development
 - Physical activity
 - Mental health
 - Emotional wellbeing
 - Social development
 - Learning about risk and challenge
 - Play as therapy.
- (Play Scotland, 2012)⁶

Playing and learning

Playing contributes greatly to such diverse areas as **language, arts, culture, science, maths and technology**.

Furthermore, play supports self-regulation as a key developmental mechanism: this ability is increasingly shown to be vital to academic success.

Research provides considerable evidence that play can develop the cognitive abilities needed for formal learning⁸:

Play aids development of problem solving capabilities, creativity, representational skills and memory. Another important consideration is the emotional literacy and control needed to learn in school⁹. Playing aids the development of concentration and attention¹⁰. Playing in outdoor environments with natural features has been shown to be particularly helpful to this.

Moyles¹¹ demonstrated that for every aspect of children's development, there is a form of play. In combination, all of them support aspects of physical, intellectual and social-emotional growth and therefore a balance of experience of each of these types of play is beneficial to children.

Play in all its rich variety is one of the highest achievements of the human species, alongside language, culture and technology.⁷

(Whitebread, 2012: 3)

⁶ Getting it Right for Play: The Power of Play: an evidence base. Play Scotland, 2012 <http://www.playscotland.org/getting-right-play/getting-it-right-for-play>

⁷ Whitebread, D. et al (2012) *The Importance of Play: A report on the value of children's play with a series of policy recommendations* http://www.importanceofplay.eu/IMG/pdf/dr_david_whitebread_-_the_importance_of_play.pdf

⁸ Health Council of the Netherlands (2004) *Nature and Health: The Influence of Nature on Social, Psychological and Physical Well-being*. https://www.gezondheidsraad.nl/sites/default/files/Nature_and_health.pdf Accessed 22 June 2017

⁹ Zigler, E and Bishop, Josef (2009) Play Under Siege: A Historical Perspective. *Zero to Three*, 30 (1) pp.4-11

¹⁰ Elkind, D. (2007) *The Power of Play: How Spontaneous, Imaginative Activities Lead to Happier, Healthier Children*. Cambridge: De Capo Press

¹¹ Moyles, J. (1989). *Just playing? The role and status of play in early childhood education*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Schema in Play

“The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct.” -Carl Jung

Schema are common patterns of enquiry children are drawn to explore through their play. All good play environments will support deep exploration of all schema for all ages.



- ✓ Rotation: exploration of anything circular, especially anything that rotates.
- ✓ Trajectory: is all about movement in a clear direction, including running, riding, and throwing.
- ✓ Enclosing: is about being enclosed in cosy and comfortable spaces or enclosing others.
- ✓ Enveloping: is similar to enclosing but is about wrapping up, or placing objects inside other objects.
- ✓ Positioning: children exploring a positioning schema tend to position objects or themselves in lines, patterns or sequences.
- ✓ Connecting: exploring how to join objects, people and materials together.
- ✓ Transporting: the movement of everything from one place to another.
- ✓ Transforming: how materials or people can change their nature and appearance.

Getting it right through play



Source: Casey, T. & Scott-McKie, L. (2017) Play Types Toolkit. Edinburgh: Play Scotland

The Playwork Principles

These are based on the recognition that children and young people's capacity for positive development will be enhanced if given access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.

1. UNDERSTAND NEED

All children and young people need to play. The impulse to play is innate. Play is a biological, psychological and social necessity, and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals.

2. UNDERSTAND PROCESS

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.

3. SUPPORT PROCESS

The prime focus and essence of playwork is to support and facilitate the play process and this should inform the development of play policy, strategy, training and education.

4. ADVOCATE FOR PLAY

For playworkers, the play process takes precedence and playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas.

5. CREATE SPACES

The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play.

6. LEARN AND REFLECT

The playworker's response to children and young people playing is based on a sound up to date knowledge of the play process, reflective practice.

7. UNDERSTAND ADULT IMPACT

Playworkers recognise their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker.

8. CHOOSE INTERVENTION STYLES

Playworkers choose an intervention style that enables children and young people to extend their play. All playworker intervention must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.



How do you think knowledge of the playwork principles and the play types in your school would contribute to fulfilling the OFSTED inspection framework?

You will find OFSTED framework links to each of the play types in this booklet

OFSTED Inspection Framework 2019



How to use this toolkit

The toolkit aims to:

- highlight the range of types of play children experience
- highlight their vital contribution to learning and development
- make integration of play into the curriculum simpler.

To do this the toolkit should help you identify, understand and provide for play types.

In the following pages, you will find each of the Hughes' play types set out with:

- what this type of play might look like
- examples of what children gain through engaging in this type of play
- in school opportunities
- links to Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes
- illustrative examples and short case studies.

Because the differences between some play types – dramatic and socio-dramatic play, fantasy and imaginative play – are so subtle, for the purposes of this toolkit we have grouped them together.

These pages are intended to provide a straightforward reference point to assist you to integrate play into your day. While links are made to children's development and to the curriculum, the toolkit does not suggest you prioritise one set of play types to the exclusion of others – they are all important and children should be able to make their own play choices.

Where do I start?

Begin by allocating some time to observing children at play and practise recognising play types (See the format on p41). This will help you understand the range of play available to children in your setting, which types of play that are particularly prominent, which are observed rarely, and whether children have sufficient time, space, resources and permission for play.

This exercise is useful for everyone who spends time with children in the playground – **classroom assistants, support staff, janitors, playground supervisors, teachers and head teachers.**

Bear in mind, play types are rarely seen in isolation. Playing children move between play types and combine them with great speed and complexity.

Loose Parts

Loose parts refer to anything in the play environment that is not fixed and that children can use as part of their play. They can be natural materials like logs and stones or man-made like tyres, crates or planks. We can think about loose parts being like ingredients for a cook. However good your kitchen is, nothing great is going to be created unless you have a varied choice of ingredients.

The 'Theory of Loose Parts' (Nicholson) says that the more moveable things in a play environment the greater the number of possibilities there will be for invention, creation and imagination. Nearly all play requires stuff to play with as well as places to play in. In schools, because there are a lot of children, a lot of stuff is required to play with. Schools which give their children lots and lots of varied loose parts to play with will always have much better-quality play than those that don't.

There are some important golden rules to providing loose parts.

PLENTIFUL - Lots of children require lots of stuff. Around four pieces per child is a good guide

VARIED - It does not really matter what it is but there should be lots of different stuff

ACCESSIBLE - Children should always be able to get out and put away the loose parts themselves

SAFE ENOUGH - Adults should check and monitor the suitability and condition of loose parts

REPLACED - When things are played with every day they get worn out and break.

Children are incredibly inventive and will find ways of using loose parts in ways that adults cannot not imagine, however a good playworker can always add some inspiration by setting up some loose parts in a new place or in a new way, and then seeing what happens.

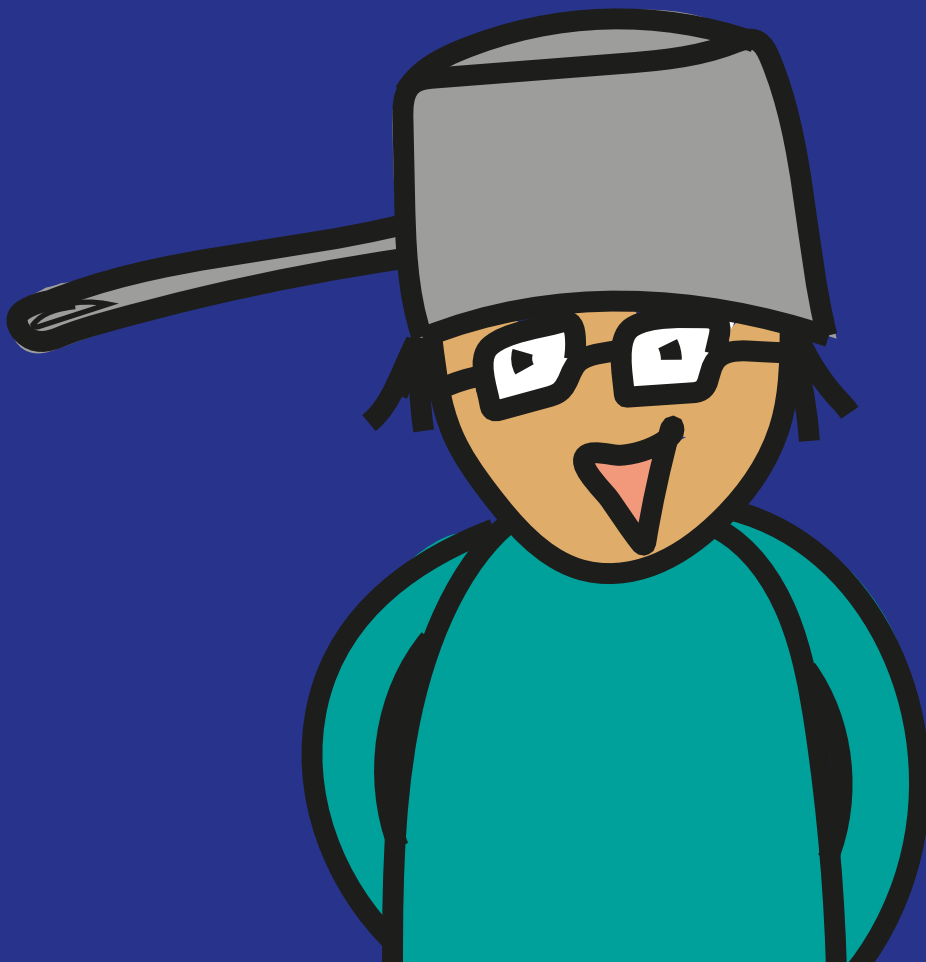
The things children make when they play are important to them. At tidy-up time give some warning, if possible record important creations with a camera or let them remain in place to be returned to another day.

Finally, the only way to manage tidy-up is for every child to pick up two or three things, take them to the loose parts store and chuck them in. The maximum time spent tidying up should be four minutes. This works especially well accompanied by music.



Learning about the **physical world**

- Creative play
- Exploratory play
- Mastery play
- Object play



Creative play



What do children gain through this type of play?

Enjoyment, self-expression, mastery of skills particular to specific contexts, development of motor skills and integration of concepts appearing in different fields.

In school opportunities

Expressive arts time

Play time, lunch time and after school

Teachers' approach to both: valuing the time spent creating without a focus on the end product and providing plentiful supplies of novel and non-standard materials.

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Thinking, sensitivity to and appreciation of colour, texture, shapes, smells, etc.
Problem solving, 'private speech', self-regulation, confidence, fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination.

What does it look like?

Making, painting, manipulating materials

Using imagination and inventiveness with materials and ideas

Use of any medium for its own sake often in new combinations

Original expression of emotions, feelings and ideas

Playing with 'loose parts'

Solitary or in groups according to the choice of the child at that time

Not relying on pre-produced art and craft supplies or the direction of adults.

OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education

- Knowledge and Skills

Behaviours and Attitudes

- Employability

Leadership and Management

- Vision and Ethos

Personal Development

- Enrichment

Over-management by adults isn't conducive to creativity: we should give children plenty of time, access to changing supplies of materials and tools, and permission to experiment in a creative atmosphere. Don't be boring!

For creative play, it is critical that the child has control over their own experience.

Exploratory play



What do children gain through this type of play?

Emotional satisfaction, access to information, may reduce uncertainty and stress around novel or complex situations.

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Thinking, reasoning, problem-solving, assessing risk, readiness to encounter new experiences, creativity, 'private speech', self-regulation.

In school opportunities

Any kinaesthetic environments or subjects

PE

Science

Technology

ICT

Play time, lunch time, before and after school

What does it look like?

Physically exploring an environment – going higher, further, jumping over, jumping on, swinging from, climbing.

Testing 'what happens if...?'

Manipulating objects or environment and assessing their properties

Exploring fire, puddles, earth, etc.

OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education

-Knowledge and skills development

-Intent -Curriculum design

Behaviours and Attitudes

-Attitudes to learning

Leadership and Management

- Student Experience

The environment must be navigable but also, worth exploring
i.e. offer the possibility of discovery, surprise, novelty, challenge.

Key questions: 'What if?' 'I wonder what...?' 'What would happen if...?' 'Why not?'

Mastery play



What do children gain through this type of play?

Understanding of their relationship with the physical properties of the world around them (limits, balance, respect, control, power), understanding of affective ingredients in the environment (what impact does it have on them?)

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Respect for the natural environment, deeper understanding of elemental forces and natural phenomena, satisfaction, motor skills, problem solving, logical reasoning, planning, communication skills when played with others.

In school opportunities

Eco projects

School grounds projects

Science

Technology

Play time, lunch time, before and after school

What does it look like?

Digging holes

Building moats in sand in the path of the tide

Fire building and setting things alight

Changing course of streams (building dams)

Growing things

Blocking drains to create puddles

Demolition and construction.

OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education

- Intent
- Coverage and appropriateness

Behaviour and Attitudes

- Attitudes to learning

Personal Development

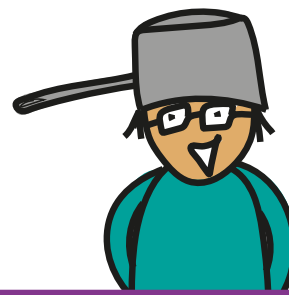
- Enrichment
- Health and wellbeing

Leadership and Management

- Safeguarding

Engaging in Mastery Play is how children begin to understand and develop a power relationship with the physical environment that surrounds them. That relationship is constructed from an evolving knowledge of what the environment will allow the child to do to it, and what it will not." (Hughes, 2006: 47)

Object play



What do children gain through this type of play?

Infinite and interesting sequences and combinations of hand-eye manipulations and movements which bring about new and wider understanding of the possibilities of everyday objects.

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Flexibility of thinking and ideas, fine motor skills, thinking, reasoning, problem-solving, creativity, 'private speech', self-regulation, foundations for abstract mathematical concepts.

In school opportunities

Technology

Literacy: particularly describing things

Expressive arts and creative activities

Science

Play time, lunch time, before and after school

Playful ethos in the classroom: introducing rotating supplies of intriguing objects available for play, showing appreciation of unconventional uses and ideas, holding back the impulse to show what it can do.

What does it look like?

Simply playing with objects!

The object itself is the focus of the play and may be used in unexpected or unconventional ways

Testing, discovering the possibilities of an object

Can involve any object e.g.

- sticks and stones
- household items
- treasures
- a puzzle
- an old tyre, a plank, a branch
- living creatures.

OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education

- Implementation
- Curriculum delivery
- Pedagogy

Personal Development

- Enrichment

Leadership and Management

- Student experience

Object play allows children to discover the innumerable qualities, uses and functions of an object. Children are left to discover uses and functions without significant adult intervention or guidance. Suggesting the 'correct' use of an object can destroy the play.

The Paperclip Test

See Sir Ken Robinson's short explanation of Divergent Thinking:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzBa-frc2JA>

Conflict Resolution

When children are arguing, telling tales and falling out, the best way that adults can support them is to give them a clear method to follow so that they can learn to resolve issues for themselves.

With your OPAL leadership, try talking through this approach from Peace First. If all of the Play Team use this approach consistently, you will find children gradually learn that they can sort out most conflict without the need for adult intervention.

Before you start

- Come up close to children, lower your voice, and bend down to their level
- Allow a bit of cooling off time if tempers are up
- Try to avoid having an audience, by only talking with the parties involved

Once children have had some practice it is OK to ask:

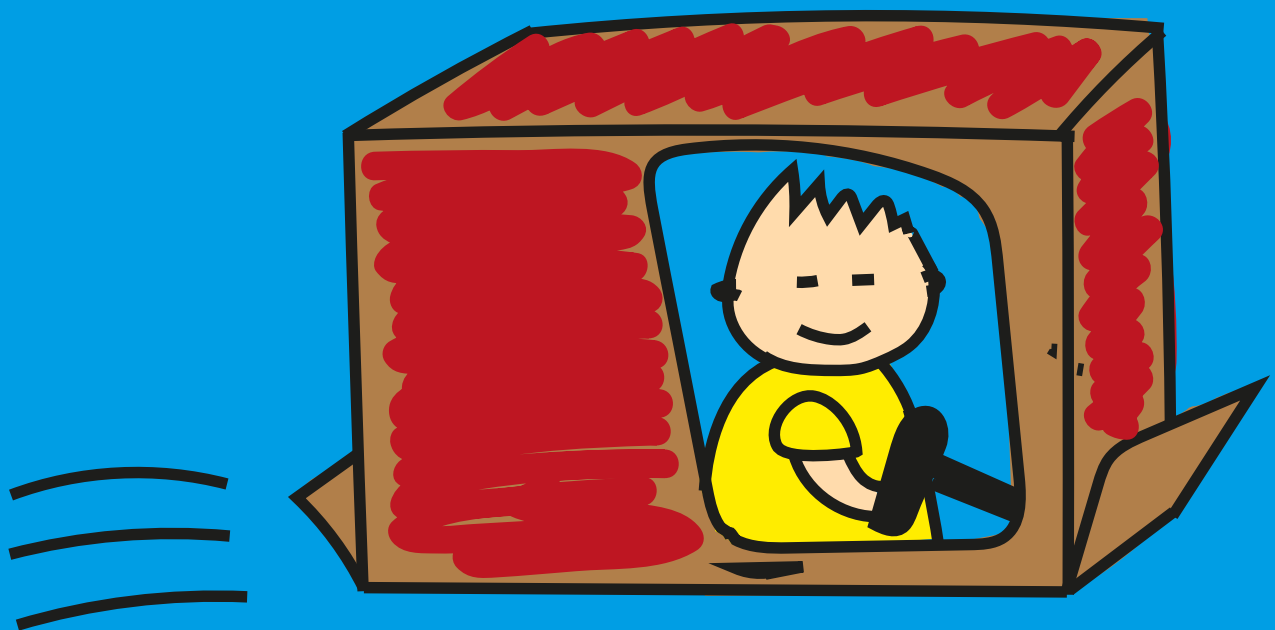
- Do you feel you can sort it out yourself?
- If not could you sort it out with another child helping?
- If not then should I come and support you through the conflict resolutions steps?

Prompts to Help Students Address Conflicts

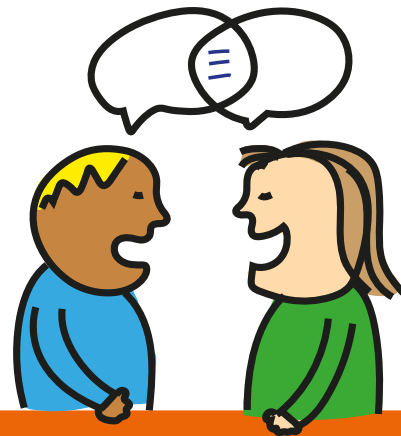
Action	Sample Language	Why It's Useful
Clearly name the student's feelings.	"It looks like you're feeling _____ right now."	Helps student identify feelings; informs and reminds student that all feelings are valid (as long as they are handled appropriately).
Acknowledge that conflict is a <u>normal</u> part of friendship.	"He's mad at you. That happens sometimes."	Affirms that conflict happens and is a healthy part of life.
Ask questions to prompt empathetic thinking.	"Sounds like Sammy is pretty sad. Why do you think she might be feeling that way?"	Humanizes the other person in the conflict and emphasizes multiple perspectives; encourages students to empathize with one another.
Give students the language for resolving conflicts on their own.	"Tell Johnny how you're feeling. Start with I feel ..."	Young students may need specific prompting to help them express themselves and their feelings in a healthy, respectful way. For older students, consider asking them how they could share their feelings with the other person (or people) involved in the conflict.
Prompt students to think about what they plan to do to fix the problem.	"It's frustrating when that happens. Do you want to talk to him about it or do you want to let it go?"	Acknowledges feelings while prompting students to apply their problem-solving and peacemaking skills. Allows students to take ownership over how to deal with conflicts of varying magnitudes.

Learning about **myself** and how to be in the world

- Communication play
- Dramatic play and socio-dramatic play
- Role play
- Social play



Communication play



What do children gain through this type of play?

Vocabulary, nuances, dual meanings, pleasure to be found in language, including fun/rude words and sounds, body language and facial looks.

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Oral language development, expansion of vocabulary and social skills. Preparation for more formal language concepts such as rhyme, poetry and onomatopoeia.

In school opportunities

Literacy activities

Drama activities

Play time, lunch time, before and after school

Playful ethos in the classroom – some acceptance and enjoyment of silly jokes, rude sounds and funny faces.

What does it look like?

Mickey-taking

Imitation for comic effect

Singing

Rhyming

Talking in slang or 'street'

Non-verbal communication: gesture, hands and body language

The 'play face' (giving the message that 'this is play') and other signals of intention.

OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education

- Progress
- Knowledge and skills development

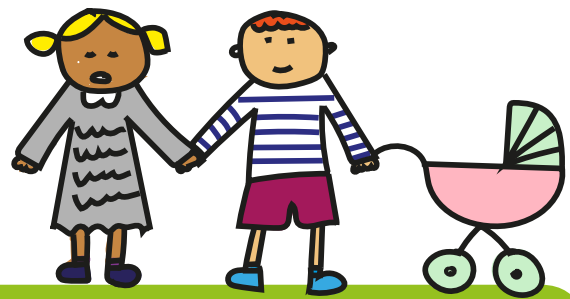
Personal Development

- Enrichment
- Citizenship
- Health and Wellbeing

The emphasis here is on the process – and joy - of communication. It can be between children, children and adults, other living creatures, puppets, dolls, any other inanimate objects. Maybe even with the sky or a passing cloud!

Communication play often shows high degrees of subtlety and sophistication, even when words or gestures are crude or would be unacceptable or hurtful outwith a playful context.

Dramatic and Socio-dramatic play



What do children gain through this type of play?

A sense of the dramatic, reaction of an audience, self-expression, adopting new identities, cathartic effect.

Socio-dramatic play may involve real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature. Events enacted might have happened or be yet to happen but may be difficult for the child to understand.

In school opportunities

Drama

Dance

Play time, lunch time, before and after school

Features of the play environment: platforms, stages, amphitheatres and gathering areas or more private spaces for enactment.

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Language development, performance, expression, communication, literacy, narrative, artistic and creative skills.

What does it look like?

Making plays

Song and dance routines

Miming

Pretending to be famous

Dramatization of conversation

Dramatization of everyday events e.g. parents taking children to school

In front of an audience or 'for' an audience in a looser sense

Socio-dramatic play

Use of adult phrases or language in play situations

Re-enactment of social situations to understand or gain control

Recognised by their 'real life' contexts and exaggeration of emotions.

OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education

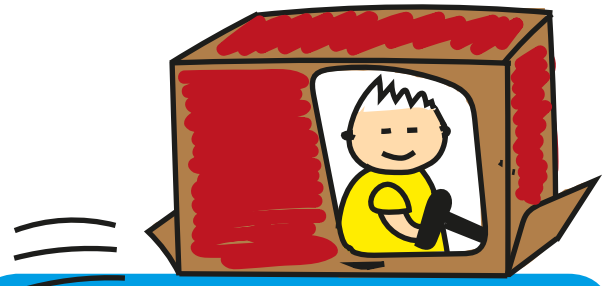
- Curriculum delivery
- Knowledge and skill development

Behaviour and Attitudes

- Employability
- Fostering British Values
- Citizenship

Playing in scenarios which represent real, possible or desired domestic, social or cultural situations provides children with a useful way to pre-empt, play through and rehearse situations and reactions. It gives the opportunity to engage in understanding the everyday behaviour of others.

Role play



What do children gain through this type of play?

Access different ways of being, interpreting them from their own frame of reference. May be of an intense personal social, domestic or interpersonal nature (though not always).

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Narrative skills, point of view, observation, social and groupwork, language development, communication skills.

In school opportunities

Word games

Literacy time – poetry/rap, Scots language

Drama

Play time, lunch time, before and after school

Playful ethos in the classroom: acceptance and understanding of pretence and imitation in play, supplies of props and dressing up, resisting the urge to shape the role play from an adult frame of reference (e.g. by interjecting comments such as 'but would your mother really do that?')

What does it look like?

Child enacts adult or other behaviours e.g. driving

Plays family character, community person or celebrity

Takes on different state e.g. dead or asleep

Mimicking and imitation of mannerisms, voice, dress and actions.

OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education

- Intent
- Appropriateness
- Delivery
- Knowledge and skills development

Behaviour and Attitudes

- Attitudes to learning
- Respect

Personal Development

- Enrichment
- Fostering British values
- Health and wellbeing
- Citizenship

Leadership and Management

- Vision and ethos
- Student experience

Role play is a way to explore identity. It enables caricature and amplification of particular traits, imitation of accents, change of gender, culture and race.

Social play



What do children gain through this type of play?

Engagement with social dynamics, how children/adults/groups react to various situations, verbal cues, looks, food, customs etc.

Experiences in which the rules and criteria for social engagement and interaction can be revealed, explored and amended.

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Emotional intelligence, social and groupwork, language development, communication skills.

In school opportunities

Collaborative work in any area

Play time, lunch time, before and after school

Playful ethos in the classroom: valuing the time taken negotiating rules and 'norms', avoiding micro-management by adults, allowing the children to sort things out together.

What does it look like?

Any social or interactive experience

Negotiation of rules and social norms.

Board games

Conversations

Locomotor games

Running the tuck shop and other playful enterprises

Creating things together.

OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education

- Appropriateness
- Curriculum design

Behaviours and Attitudes

- Attitudes to learning
- Respect

Personal Development

- Enrichment
- Citizenship

Children need the opportunity to explore and experiment with different forms of interaction with other human beings. Among adults, children are often taught and corrected, whilst at play, children learn as a result of what they do. This, inevitably includes aspects of argument, repression and control as well as well as fun.

Blue Coat Primary

An OPAL school case study



Blue Coat Primary school in the Cotswolds was the first school in the UK to score 100% in OPAL's audit scheme.

The school has managed to continue to provide interesting and varied play over five years. What can we learn from Blue Coat?

- Play is provided by 'The Play Team'. The team see their job as providing great play.
- The Play Team are led by the Play Coordinator who manages resources and the team.
- The Play Team meet regularly to discuss how to manage and improve play quality.
- The Play Team are valued for their contribution to school life.

The field at Blue Coat is open and used every school day. Every child has access to a pair of welly boots and can use the field in wet or dry weather.

Play Team members work with children to manage risks and as a result children are very competent in managing risk themselves.

Children's enjoyment of play is celebrated at Play Assemblies, where they also discuss issues of managing risk and resources with the children.

The play environment includes:

- A 50 ton sandpit
- A water barrel filled daily
- A big shed of loose parts
- Access into areas of trees and bushes

As a result of the great play provision now on offer at Blue Coat Primary, the Play Team say they are much happier in their work. This is because most of the behaviour and discipline problems have disappeared. Staff have found that the job of playwork is much more enjoyable than that of 'policing' and the school now records fewer accidents and fewer incidents.

Teachers say there is more time for teaching after playtimes and parents say they value the job that the Play Team does.



Learning about **my body and limits**

- Rough and tumble play
- Locomotor play



Rough and tumble play

What do children gain through this type of play?

Experiences of close encounters, social bonding, physical activity, insights about yourself in relation to others, fun.

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Emotional and social skills, judgement, respect for others, foundations for physical, personal and interpersonal relationships.

In school opportunities

PE

Wider school contexts

Play time, lunch time, before and after school

Playful ethos in the playground: not being too quick to intervene or prohibit rough and tumble play, encouraging children to respect boundaries and to exercise their choice to participate or not.



What does it look like?

Play face and body language make play fighting distinct from actual fighting

Tests of strength

Physical contact games

Wrestling

Playful pushing, shoving and jostling

Often pulling back, retreating or 'feinting' to rebalance power between players

Often lots of laughter.

OFSTED Criteria

Behaviours and Attitudes

- Behaviour
- Respect

Personal Development

- Health and wellbeing

This is a much misunderstood but very important and well researched play type. In a school context, universal prohibitions of forms of rough and tumble play aren't uncommon. A middle ground could be found so that there is some agreement over times and places where rough and tumble play is or isn't allowed, or a school code to show willingness to participate.

Locomotor play

What do children gain through this type of play?

Physical health and competence, the fun of moving, competing, getting out of breath.

In school opportunities

PE

Play time, lunch time, before and after school

Features of the play environment: open space as well as a varied landscape with opportunities to climb, jump, throw, clamber, crawl, spin, run etc.

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Strength and endurance, whole body coordination, agility, raised heart rate, communication and social skills.



What does it look like?

Chase, tig, hide and seek
Climbing, jumping, swinging
Ball games, hoola hoops, skipping.

OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education
- Knowledge and skills development

Personal Development
-Health and wellbeing

Leadership and Management
- Student Experience

This often is the dominant play type in school playgrounds though it's important that locomotor play doesn't push all other types of play to the margins.

Locomotor play also offers children the chance to develop a sense of themselves in space, familiarity with their environment, learning which parts are safe and which must be avoided, the properties of objects from a distance including a sense of ability to escape (up a tree, over a wall, out of sight).

The Play Team

In OPAL schools the people in charge of lunchtime play are usually referred to as the Play Team. The Play Team may previously have been called Dinner Ladies or Lunchtime Supervisors. Many schools also use Teaching Assistants to supervise play. OPAL supports these roles to change from one which is mainly about stopping bad things happening, such as accidents and mis-behaviour, to one of mainly ensuring amazing things happen, in the shape of better play.

The playwork profession has spent many years defining what the role of adults should be in supporting children's free play, and for this reason OPAL encourages everyone who is overseeing free-play in schools to think and act as a playworker would.

In one school one of the Play Team saw a child playing with a milk carton on a string which they called their 'doggie'. They asked the child if they had seen the Crufts dog show that had been on TV recently, and if a dog show would be fun to put on. The next day the playground was full of carton doggies and over the next few days different parts of the show evolved, including dog agility and best in show. All this came from an observant bit of playwork!

The Play Team's job is to enrich and diversify play, without taking the ownership of play away from the children. A good Play Team will all work together to ensure children have plenty of resources and are supported to be independent and creative.

In order to do their job well a Play Team needs time to come together to think about three things.

1. What are we trying to achieve in our work?
2. How well have we done recently?
3. How are we going to do it better in the future?

The Play Team does a very important job in schools. They are responsible for 20% of school life and in OPAL schools it is recognised that good quality play is hugely important to the health, happiness, development and well-being of children.

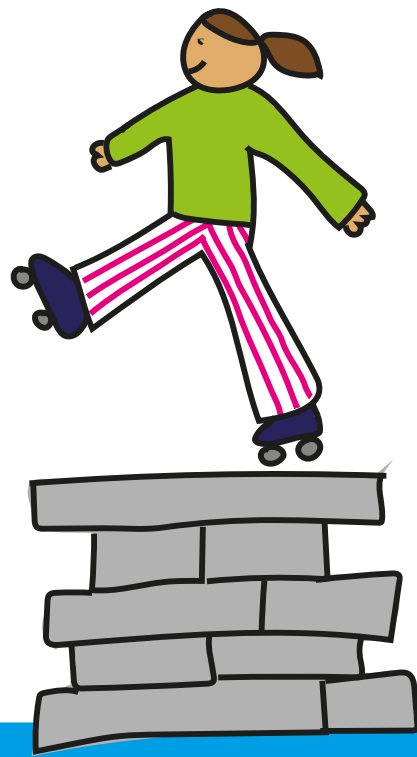


Learning about **what it is to be human**

- Deep play
- Fantasy play and imaginative play
- Recapitulative play
- Symbolic play



Deep play



What do children gain through this type of play?

Encounters with risky and even potentially life-threatening experiences, thrills and exhilaration, engaging with ideas of life and death.

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Risk assessment, focus and concentration, confronting fears, fine calibration of movement.

In school opportunities

Elements of deep play may sometimes be seen in PE, outward bound activities and in the playground when children make their own decisions to tackle something which makes them fearful. Knowledge of deep play as a type of play can help inform understanding of, and responses to, children's behaviour in and out of school.

What does it look like?

Engagement in any activity with element of real danger
Riding a bike along parapet
High tree climbing
Use of apparatus in unintended ways.

OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education - Intent - Coverage
Personal Development - Health and wellbeing
- Citizenship
Leadership and Management - Safeguarding

This is not a play type likely to be routinely encouraged in schools, although it may happen with or without the knowledge of adults.

Children do however have a need for risk, challenge and adventure. The play environment should accommodate that within a framework of Risk Benefit Assessment.

Fantasy play & Imaginative play



What do children gain through this type of play?

Access other realities, enabling children to access experiences with a potentially high impact in a manner which is controlled and gradual, creation of alternative outcomes, emotional equilibrium.

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Language development, vocabulary and rhyme, communication, literacy, artistic and creative, social and groupwork skills. Also forms the basis for figurative language.

In school opportunities

Literacy contexts

Drama

Expressive arts

Play time, lunch time, before and after school

Playful ethos in the classroom: showing delight at eating an imaginary sweet, accepting the existence of a talking goldfish, enquiring after the health of a uncle who is a superhero, etc.!

What does it look like?

Being a fire breathing dragon

Casting spells and 'doing magic'

Unconventional use of props

Being a tree/ship

Patting invisible animals/
eating invisible food

Use of objects as other objects
e.g. using a park bench as a bus.

OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education

- Knowledge and skills development

Behaviour and attitudes

- Attitudes to learning

Personal development

- Enrichment

- Health and wellbeing

- Equality and diversity

In this play type, children are playfully engaged in situations created entirely from imagination and where the conventional rules which govern the physical world do not apply.

Recapitulative play



What do children gain through this type of play?

Accessing the behaviour of earlier human evolution, enormous satisfaction.

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Recapitulative play may involve benefits shown across all play types but in particular is associated with elemental forces and deep human instincts and drives.

In school opportunities

Science

Literacy

R.E.

Social subjects (particularly history)

Play time, lunch time, before and after school

Features of the play environment: earth, soil, clay and water, varied terrain and heights, fire bowls, outdoor cooking, natural building materials.

What does it look like?

Rituals

Fire

Playing with/in the elements

Body paint, shields and face markings

Dens and caves

Growing and cooking things

Playing wars and with weapons

Animal husbandry.

OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education

- Curriculum
- Design
- Delivery
- Knowledge

Personal Development

- Enrichment
- Fostering British Values
- Citizenship

Leadership and Ethos

- Vision and ethos

"If you look at some of what children do when they play, you will see reflected in that, some of what human beings did in the ancient past." (Hughes, 2006: 51)

Symbolic play



What do children gain through this type of play?

The ability to use words, gestures or images to represent actual objects, events or action, opens up endless possibilities into play scenarios.

Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Abstract thought, visual representation, language development, communication, literacy, numeracy, artistic and creative skills.

In school opportunities

Social Studies

Drama

PE games

Play time, lunch time, before and after school.

What does it look like?

Props given specific symbolic meaning
Camps to symbolise 'home'
Spray hearts to denote love
Flags to denote a tribe
Rope to represent an area of water.

OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education

- Teaching - Pedagogy
- Knowledge and skills development

Behaviour and attitudes

- Attitudes to learning

Personal Development

- Enrichment
- Health and wellbeing

Leadership and management

- Student experience

To some extent, all play can be described as symbolic. Symbolic play allows children to represent an abstract idea, a feeling, something that isn't there or isn't seen. It enables children to access experiences which feel important but whose potential significance can only be guessed.

Playwork Intervention Styles

- 
- A photograph of four children playing on a grey brick wall. They are reaching up to touch or move colorful objects (yellow, blue, red) attached to the wall. The children are wearing bright jackets: pink, blue, purple, and purple with a yellow stripe. The scene is outdoors on a paved area with a blue mat in the foreground.
- ✓ Wait to be invited to play – this doesn't have to be verbally, it can be a gesture or other action by the child (Play cue)
 - ✓ Enable play to occur uninterrupted – don't interfere, manipulate or take over
 - ✓ Enable children to explore their own values as far as possible - they learn more about right and wrong from their peers than playworkers
 - ✓ Leave children to improve their own performance- don't constantly offer to help unless something is detrimental to their well being
 - ✓ Leave the content/intent of play to children- let them decide what they want to do and how to do it
 - ✓ Let children decide why they play - there's no need for rewards or end products or even to get involved if they don't want you to
 - ✓ Enable children to decide what is appropriate behaviour – as far as practicable taking into account age, culture and setting
 - ✓ Only organise when children want you to- you don't need to organise 'entertainment' for children unless they ask you for ideas

Playwork Pointers

When you go into the playground each day, do so with the intention that you will do something that improves the quality of play.

Do something with loose parts or the environment that makes it different from how it has been before.

- Draw out rooms of a house in chalk
- Put resources in places they have not been before
- Use loose parts to set up a scene i.e. vets, shop, hairdresser.

Watch what children are doing in their play and ask what it is that they need to make it even better or more fun.

- Can I help make it stronger?
- Do you need more of a certain resource?

Do something interesting and playful, then see if children come and watch you. Let them join in, then slowly move away so the children are playing by themselves.

- Make a model stick and leaf house
- Invent and play a game
- Use resources to start to build something

When you are observing play, be alert to when you are being invited to join in or leave the children's play. This might be spoken, by a look, or an action.

If you are invited to join children's play try to follow and not lead. If you provide some leadership, look to return control to the children as soon as possible.

Be aware that you need to balance supervision and playwork. It's OK to sometimes join in, but at all times remain watchful of children in your zone.

Talk with your colleagues so that you are consistent in the way that you manage play.

Children are sensitive and copy adult behaviours, always treat them with respect, come down to their level, don't point or raise your voice and talk calmly.

When managing risk, discuss issues with children and work together for a solution that keeps as much of the benefit of the play as possible.

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Other sources of advice and information

OPAL Outdoor Play and Learning: outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk

Learning Through Landscapes: ltl.org.uk

Play Scotland: playscotland.org

Play England: playengland.org.uk

PlayBoard NI: playboard.org

Play Wales: playwales.org.uk

Outdoor Classroom Day: outdoorclassroomday.org.uk

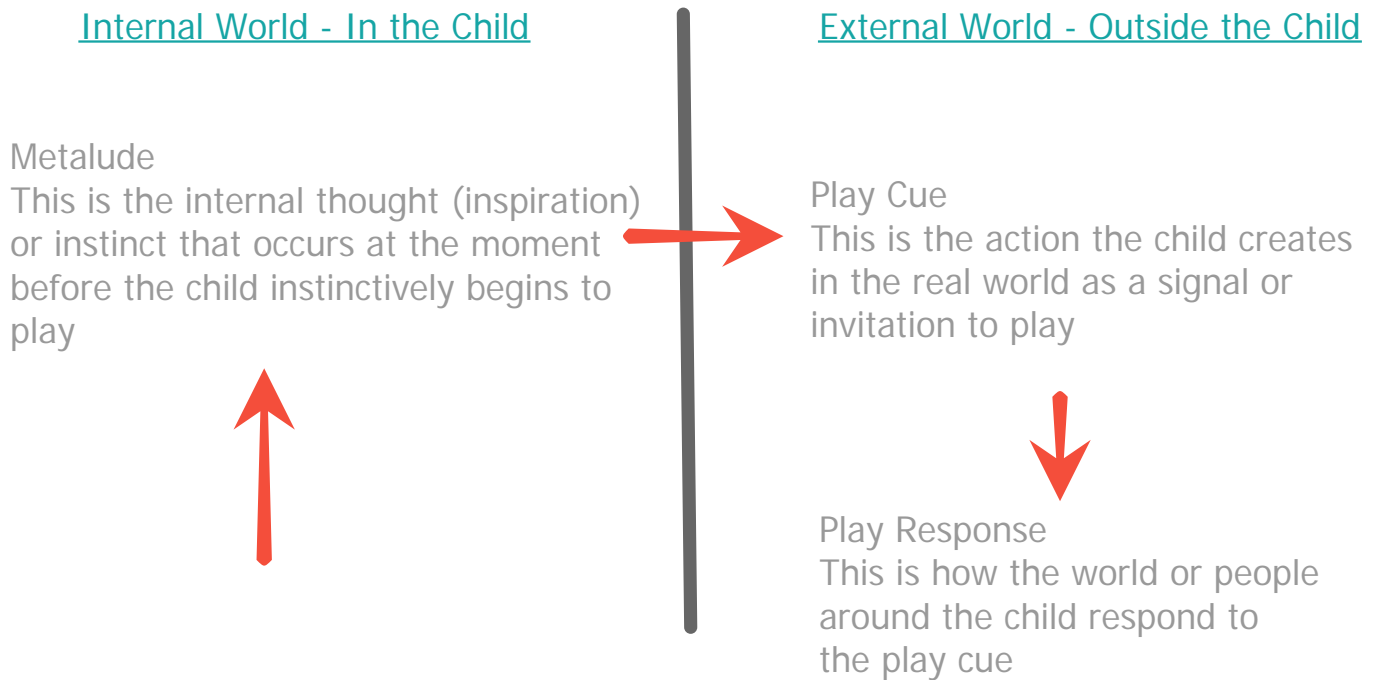
ISGA: internationalschoolgrounds.org

International Play Association: ipaworld.org



The Play Cycle

The Play Cycle is a way to understand what is happening in play. It is widely used in the playwork sector as the basis for interpreting what is happening in play, and how adults should respond to play.



Flow

This is where the cue and response feed back to the child, taking them deep into their interior world, where they become deeply engaged in the play process. Playworkers should be conscious of their impact on the flow and support its continuation.

Play Frame

This means the physical situation or place, or the imagined situation or game that allows the play cycle to take place. Adults in the play environment should be alert to what is sustaining the play frame so as not to 'adulterate', disrupt or destroy it.

Annihilation

This is when the play cycle is ended, either by the child's loss of interest or by the situation changing.

Play Cues

A good play environment will be varied enough to trigger many types of play cue. Good playwork involves being aware of how to respond or not to play cues.

Adulteration

This is where an adult disrupts or intervenes in the play cycle for their own reasons.

Risk-Benefit Assessment

In play provision, a degree of risk is often beneficial, if not essential. **Children and young people enjoy challenging, adventurous play opportunities** where they can test themselves and extend their abilities. Giving children the chance to encounter hazards and take risks provides other benefits, such as the chance to learn how to assess and manage these and similar risks for themselves.

Accidents and injuries are not necessarily a sign of problems, because of the value of such experiences in children's learning. Unlike conventional risk assessment, risk benefit assessment (RBA) takes account of benefits by bringing together consideration of risks and benefits when deciding on appropriate responses.

"One thing kids never lack is imagination to invent their own games with the simplest of props. HSE has always encouraged children to learn through play, whether climbing trees, painting with their hands or throwing stones into a lake, we want children to enjoy life and all the experiences it brings." Health & Safety Executive

OPAL Schools all have a play policy where they state that risk and challenge are essential for children's learning and development, and that enabling children to learn how to identify and manage risks in a supported environment is a good thing. This approach is supported by the Health and Safety Executive

Your school will also have written Risk-Benefit Assessments to guide all adults in how you manage many of the common or serious risks. You should know what is in these and be able to suggest things you think should be assessed if you are worried about any serious risks not already covered in them. Your Play Coordinator and Curriculum Play Lead will also want to know about any issues related to risk that you think need to be discussed with children at play assemblies.

Play Team members in OPAL schools should practice 'Dynamic Risk Management'. This means they should be aware of changing nature of the play taking place in their zone. They should have an idea of where children are, how risky their play appears and what resources they are using. They should support children to assess and manage risk as much as possible for themselves, but they should also be vigilant and take action, if they think that risk of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely.

For much of the time staff will need to practice what OPAL call 'relaxed vigilance', meaning that you should not constantly pass your anxieties on to the children but should be alert and aware of the risks children are taking and prepared to intervene if needed.

Intervention should balance the reduction of likelihood or severity or harm with preserving as much of the benefit of the play as possible and empower children to manage risks they encounter in future.

When to intervene

- If staff think that serious harm, meaning death, life-long debilitating injury or hospitalisation, is imminent or probable they should intervene to either stop or manage the risk immediately.
- If they think that serious harm is possible but not probable, they should remain vigilant and observe.
- If serious harm is very unlikely, then they should focus their attention elsewhere or act to improve the quality of the play offer using their playwork skills.

Observing children's play

Observing children playing supports us to think about how and why children are playing the way they are and the things that we can do to respond to their play needs. You can use these questions to draw some conclusions and consider steps you can take. It's often useful to have observations made on different days and times and by different people to compare.

A typical observation could include:

- Date
- When are children playing?
- For how long are children playing?
- Approx. number of children and ages
- Weather
- Brief description of site or episode of play (*e.g. playtime in the woodland area at the back of the playground, lunchtime-whole playground*)
- Space – *what sort of spaces are children playing in? What do they offer children in terms of play? How are the children making use of them? Are they suitable for playing?*
- Resources – *What are children playing with? How are they using them? Are there enough things to play with?*
- Play types – *Are you observing a wide or limited range of play types? (see opposite)*
- Other adults – *How are they responding to children's play? Are adults helping children to play or stopping them from playing? Are they standing back when not needed?*
- Challenge and uncertainty – *Are children managing risks for themselves? Are there hazards in the environment that it would be better to try to control or mitigate?*
- What are your initial reflections of what's happening? – *Can you check these with children?*



Play types observations

Children do not display all of the play types, all of the time. However, if the range of play appears to be limited this would suggest we consider widening the range available. We can do this through changes in: the **environment, available resources, the general atmosphere, time for play or the attitude of adults.**

Play types	Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Brief examples or explanation
Is the children's play initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves?				
Are the following types of play observable?				
Communication				
Creative				
Deep				
Dramatic & socio-dramatic				
Exploratory				
Fantasy & imaginative				
Locomotor				
Mastery				
Object				
Recapitulative				
Role				
Rough & tumble				
Social				
Symbolic				

Play and children's cognitive development

Jean Piaget argued that **experiencing the world in three dimensions** by physically interacting with it is essential for cognitive development, but for many children, their world is now flat. Moving things, throwing and hitting things, floating them in water or burying them in sand etc. are all crucial for young children's development.

Contact with nature for as little as 10 minutes at a time, can have a positive impact on children's **cognitive functioning**.

Contact with nature, including through outdoor play, has been associated with children's **ability to concentrate and be self-disciplined**.

The evidence demonstrates the importance of play in the development of **language skills, problem solving, gaining perspective, representational skills, memory and creativity**.

Allowing children the **time and freedom to play freely**, completing their chosen activities in their own time and to their own satisfaction, promotes the development of **concentration and attention**.

Three elements of play are thought to underpin brain-based learning: orchestrated immersion in complex experiences; relaxed alertness; and active processing (i.e. meta cognition).

Through exploring their environment children gather information and understanding of their surroundings helping them develop **spatial skills** such as a sense of direction.

Play is an important vehicle for developing **self-regulation** as well as for promoting language, cognition and self-competence.

Play involving **art, craft and design** on any medium gives children **the opportunity to develop the fine motor skills of hand and finger control** required for hand-writing.

The **physical activity** involved in play can increase **fitness**, also helping improve **cognitive development and classroom behaviour**.

When playing children relax, knowing that adults will not interfere or judge them, and this **alleviates** some of the **anxiety** associated with having to achieve and learn.

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About OPAL

OPAL Outdoor Play and Learning is a registered not-for-profit community interest company. OPAL creates conditions so that every child can have an amazing playtime in everyday...with no exceptions. OPAL works in schools in the UK, across Europe and in Canada. Further information can be found at outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk

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Symbolic Play



Locomotor Play



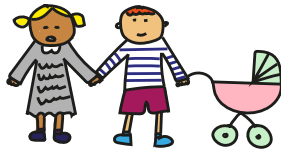
Creative Play



Exploratory Play



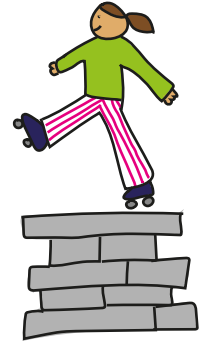
Communication Play



Socio-dramatic Play



Recapitulative Play



Deep Play



Fantasy Play

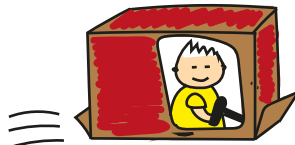
PLAY TYPES



Object Play



Mastery Play



Role Play



Imaginative Play



Rough and Tumble Play



Dramatic Play



Social Play

