



The Learning Institute

Play (Part 1): What is play?

Overview

The purpose of this CPD relating to play is to encourage practitioners to think more deeply about the definition of play and how it differs from - or is similar to – work, so that they can provide more targeted and appropriate play-based activities. The CPD is suitable for anyone working with - or wanting to work with - young children and/or anyone who simply has an interest in play. It has been separated into parts, you can undertake all parts in turn as they can build on each other, or you can just undertake the particular part that is of most interest to you. In part 1 of this CPD you will be introduced to play, what it is and how it might be defined.

Target audience

Early years workers/managers/key persons, those in or interested in working within nurseries and pre-schools or reception and Key Stage 1, TAs (particularly those who may work within the Early Years Foundation Stage)

Duration

Approximately 1 hour

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Introduction

Play and playfulness is often seen as important in our society, particularly in supporting children's learning and development (Fisher, 2008). For example, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Department for Education (DfE) 2017, p.9) make it a legal duty for children to learn through play. Gooch (2008), Moyles (2015) and Fleet and Reed (2019) argue that there are many challenges in embracing play both as an overarching concept and for its benefits to young children's learning. Play in young children's learning (or indeed learning at any age) is often misunderstood and undervalued. However, when practitioners and parents have a deeper understanding of play they have a greater awareness of the life-long benefits it provides. They are also better equipped to provide effective play-based opportunities for young children (Blaise, Edwards and Brooker 2014; Moyles, 2015; Goodliff and Canning, 2018; Ferholt, Nillson and Lecusay, 2019).

Many writers and researchers have tried to define play and yet there is still a lack of agreement about what play is (Eberle, 2014). Professor Janet Moyles sums up the situation when she says that "grappling with the concept of play is analogous to trying to seize bubbles, for every time there appears to be something to hold on to, its ephemeral nature disallows it being grasped" (Moyles, 2015, p.44). However, Scott Eberle, writing in the American Journal of Play in 2014, adds that we all recognise play when we observe it (2014, p.214).

So why is it important that we have a definition of play? Many writers believe this is important as without a definition we cannot be sure of what we are providing. We also cannot be certain that the play opportunities that we provide link to our aims for our children. For example, some writers believe that play and learning are closely related whilst others question this belief (Grieshaber and McArdle, 2010). Quite often, the reason behind such disagreements is a different understanding of play.

In addition, MCInnes et al.'s (2011) research highlighted that practitioners' understanding of play strongly influenced their abilities to provide effective learning/play opportunities for young children. And as Early Years practitioners have a statutory duty to 'implement' learning and development through 'planned, purposeful play' (Department for Education, 2017, p.9). This makes it even more important that we all understand our own definitions of play.

Objectives

- To understand that play is a contested concept.
- To evaluate the activities associated with work and play.
- To consider more deeply our own definitions of play.

Resources

A means of recording your ideas, such as a note paper and pen.

Internet access to the following videos:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTEovndcFa0> (3:39)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJgGCdOr4iw> (3:28)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9tJBluH1Zw> (Watch the girl in the peach top and blue leggings until 5:05)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qclB3fvuhBM> (1:18)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqIVjlZN4Fw> (3:04)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UgQsaC9c6A> (1:31)

Task 1

Spend a few minutes writing down words that you associate with play. Aim to note as many as you can without analysing any one word too deeply.

In the same way, note down words that you associate with work.

Review the two lists noting any similarities and differences. Take note about how you feel about them? Which list appeals to you more and why?

Task 2

Go to the resource section above and watch each of these 6 videos in turn. All the videos are less than 5:15 minutes long.

For each of the videos: -

1. Choose 5 words from both of your lists from Task 1 that describe what the participant is doing.
2. Decide if you think the participant(s) is playing. Why do you think this?

Task 3

Review your answers to Task 2. Decide how far your definition of play is to do with:

- Who is involved in the activity?
- How much choice there is in the activity.[]?
- Whether or not there is a purpose to the activity and what that purpose is.
- Whether the participants are showing that they are having fun.

Try to write your own definition of play. Try it out next time you see someone playing. Does it capture all that you see going on? Why/why not?

Task 4: Reflection on learning

- What knowledge did I already have that has been refreshed by this CPD?
- How has this CPD developed my knowledge and understanding?
- How can I apply what I now know to my practice?
- Consider how you can record your goals/targets so that you will make use of them when you are able to return to the classroom.

Further reading

Eberle, S. (2014) 'The elements of play: toward a philosophy and a definition of play', *American Journal of Play*, 6 (2), pp. 214-233. Available at: <https://www.journalofplay.org/sites/www.journalofplay.org/files/pdf-articles/6-2-article-elements-of-play.pdf> (Accessed: April 2020).

Lester, S. and Russel, W. (2008) *Play for a change: Play, policy and practice, a review of contemporary perspectives*. Available at: <http://www.playengland.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/play-for-a-change-low-res.pdf> (Accessed: April 2020).

Sources

These sources have informed this CPD module although they are not all freely available online. You do not need to read these sources to complete the CPD; however, you may wish to look out for them for further study after completing the CPD module. They are particularly useful for existing Foundation Degree students.

Blaise, M., Edwards, S. and Brooker, L. (2014) 'Theoretical perspectives on play and learning', in Brooker, L., Blaise, M and Edwards, S. (eds.) *The Sage handbook of play and learning in early childhood*. London: Sage, pp. 5-8.

Department for Education (2017) *Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage: Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2> (Accessed: April 2020)

Ferholt, B., Nillson, M. and Lecusay, R. (2019) 'Preschool teachers being alongside young children', in Alcock, S. and Stobbs, N. (eds.) *Rethinking play as pedagogy*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 17-32.

Fisher, J. (2008) *The foundations of learning*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Fleet, A. and Reed, M. (2019) 'Entering contested waters', in Alcock, S. and Stobbs, N. (eds.) *Rethinking play as pedagogy*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. xviii – xx.

Goodliff, G. and Canning, N. (2018) 'Introduction: young children's play and creativity – multiple voices', in Goodliff, G. et al. (eds.) *Young children's play and creativity – multiple voices*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. xi-xiv.

Goouch, K. (2008) 'Understanding playful pedagogies, play narratives and play spaces', *Early Years Journal*, 28 (1), pp. 93-102.

Grieshaber, S. and McArdle, F. (2010) *The trouble with play*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

McInnes, K. et al. (2011) 'Differences in practitioners' understanding of play and how this influences pedagogy and children's perceptions of play', *Early Years*, 31 (2), pp. 121-133.

Moyles, J. (2015) 'Starting with play: taking play seriously', in Moyles, J. (ed.) *The excellence of play*. 4th edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp.41-55.

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