



# The Learning Institute

## Play (Part 2): Play and learning

### 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 were introduced to play, what it is and how it might be defined. In this section, part 2, you will be encouraged to explore how play may support children's learning.

### 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 2-2½ hours – the completion time will depend how quickly you work and whether you undertake any of the extension activities.

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## Introduction

In part 1 of this CPD you were introduced to play, what it is and how it might be defined. In this section, part 2, you will be encouraged to explore how play may support children's learning.

Fisher (2008, p.15) argues that play and playfulness is often seen as important in our society, particularly in supporting children's learning and development, and it is often considered as innately human. Whilst it may be said that many animals play as a way to learn and practice skills needed for real life and survival, Fisher believes that it is only humans that incorporate imagination into play. It is this added aspect that sets humans apart from other animals, it allows humans to learn and build new information drawn each other and from other species to support our evaluation. Essentially, imagination has many purposes but these include the skills and ability to tell stories and communicate new ideas; creative play such as musical play, art play, dramatic play and dance play allow humans to express feelings, such as sadness, joy and wonder. Fisher (2008, p.16) further states "play allows children to represent ideas, to rehearse and practice and to explore relationships, materials, objects, ideas and feelings". Basically, play stimulates and supports the growth and development of the brain, which in turn provides the foundations for all future learning and understanding (Westermann, Thomas and Karmiloff-Smith, 2014; O'Donovan and Melnychuk, 2015). It is, therefore, not surprising that play is considered to have a huge impact on children and their overall development and wellbeing.

Yet, Fleet and Reed (2019, p.xvii) explain that the debate about play is still going strong. That is, the debate about whether play is "...something that passes the time in early years settings, or a facilitating experiential opportunity for growth and wellbeing". Although many within the early years workforce may argue this debate should be well behind us, particularly in light of the many books and research projects relating to the importance and benefits of play, play is still very much contested. This is in spite of the fact that learning through play is mandatory inclusion within the EYFS (DfE, 2017).

The purpose of this element, part 2 within this CPD, is to explore how play supports the learning and development in young children and how it can be supported effectively. If you already work in early years then you will already have a foundation of understanding in how important play is for the children in your care. If you are new to early years, then this may serve as an informative guide to start you on your journey to understanding play more fully. Either way this CPD will explore play in more depth and the vital role of play in children's development.

More specifically after completion of part 2 of this CPD on play you will:

- Have a deeper awareness the role of play within a young child's learning and development.
- You will have looked at the role of play in developing the brain
- Have explored ways in which play can be promoted effectively

These tasks will allow you to build on your understanding from part 1 which examined the wider concept of play and allow you to begin to make links between play and learning.

## Objectives

- To become more aware of the role of play in young children's learning.
- To begin to explore how play develops the brain.

- To become more aware of the role of the adult in identifying and providing for effective play opportunities. .

## Resources

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

Internet access for the following documents:

- Gillespie, L. (2016) 'Rocking and rolling: it's never "just play"!', *Young Children*, 71 (3). Available at: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/jul2016/rocking-rolling>.
- Hassinger-Das, B., Hirsh-Pasek, K. and Golinkoff, R.M. (2017) 'The case of brain science and guided play: a developing story' *Young Children*, 72 (2). Available at: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2017/case-brain-science-guided-play>.
- Mohammed, R. (2015) *Characteristics of Effective Learning: play and exploration in action*. Available at: <https://eyfs.info/articles.html/teaching-and-learning/characteristics-of-effective-learning-play-and-exploration-in-action-r160/>.

Internet access for the following videos

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2wWDEBktC0>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h\\_-1O\\_rBLPU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_-1O_rBLPU)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxR597JvYt0>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uH4-lqm-t4Q>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S\\_mwqo7UMEA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_mwqo7UMEA)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KX6KRm3Bugg>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnaMrlvAl7o>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzBSjg681x8>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpiYNkkNmEo>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDI5T51zh0>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygwVQWEEfEU>

## Task 1: What do we already know?

Reflecting back to part 1, you were asked to create a list of words that you most related to play. Revisit this list, or if you are completing this part in isolation take 5 minutes to write a list before you move on.

Now in the next 5 minutes write down any words you most associate with learning. Note any similarities and difference in your lists – why do you think this might be?

Your response to the above task will uncover your underpinning thoughts about what play is and what learning is to you. It is the understanding we have, based in our own beliefs about things, that impacts on the value we place on specific activities such as play and learning. Without an awareness

of this we cannot know what shapes our interactions with children, whether this is our own children or the ones in our care.

Watch the following two video clips about play and learning. The first video is a rather more informal clip but shares some key concepts about play and learning (running time 6:30). The second video features commentary from educators, play experts and representatives from the chief executive of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (running time 5:10). While watching note any thoughts about how play and learning might be linked.

Video 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2wWDEBktC0>

Video 2: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h\\_-1O\\_rBLPU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_-1O_rBLPU)

Look back to your list about what learning is and what play is. Do you want to add or change anything?

Now write your own definition of what play and learning are and how the two ideas might come together. Are your thoughts the same as they were, or have you been persuaded to change your views? Why?

## Task 2: The importance of play for learning

Now we will consider in more detail the question of how important play is for learning. Gillespie (2016, p.94) claimed “it’s never “just play” - it’s learning. Learning that emerges through play is deep and meaningful to children because they have shaped it themselves”. But just what are children learning?

Hirsch-Pasek and Golinkof (2016) cited in Gillespie (2016, p.92) refer to six skills that children need to successfully navigate adult life: collaboration, communication, content, creative innovation, critical thinking, and confidence. These skills are naturally promoted in play as underpinned by Gillespie (2016). Access the article here:

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/jul2016/rocking-rolling>.

While you read ask, and note down your response to, the following questions:

- What value do you place on play?
- How do your own values influence the way you interact with children to support their learning? Are these interactions playful?
- Do you agree with the article? Why?

The article has three “think about it” suggestions at the end. You may like undertake these as an extension activity, if you do choose to complete these activities remember to note down your responses and keep them with the rest of your work.

This next activity requires you to watch at least one video from each group (you can of course watch as many as you wish to extend your learning but for this activity the minimum is one from each group).

While watching a video from group one, consider what the children are learning while they are playing. Write down as many ideas as you can.

## **Group one**

Firefighter play - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxR597JvYt0> (running time 3:37)

Planning a spaceship - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uH4-lqm-t4Q> (running time 1:44)

The builder's yard - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S\\_mwqo7UMEA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_mwqo7UMEA) (running time 5:40)

While watching a clip from group two, consider what the children may be learning but also how the adult supports this, if indeed you feel that they do. Write down as many ideas as you can.

## **Group two**

Sandpit play - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KX6KRm3Bugg> (running time 2:25)

Quiet play outside - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnaMrIvAl7o> (running time 2:34)

Fishing trip - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzBSjg681x8> (running time 2:36)

To think in more depth about the learning that may be occurring through play we can turn to the EYFS (DfE, 2017), which is the framework that assesses children's learning and development. There are seven areas of learning and development; three areas are considered prime areas and four specific. Additionally, there are three characteristics of effective learning (CoEL) which support that learning may look different for each child (and indeed each adult).

Children should ideally develop in the prime areas first as they will support children developing the skills needed for the specific areas. The prime areas are: communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development (DfE, 2017, pp.7-8).

The four specific areas are: literacy, mathematics, understanding the world and expressive arts and design (DfE, 2017, pp.7-8).

However, the EYFS (DfE, 2017, p.10) states that children learn in different ways and this should be acknowledged when considering and planning for learning. The three CoEL are: playing and exploring, active learning creating and thinking critically. If you are new to CoEL Mohammed (2015) offers an interesting article that explains them further which can be found here

<https://eyfs.info/articles.html/teaching-and-learning/characteristics-of-effective-learning-play-and-exploration-in-action-r160/>.

This next activity requires you to pick either the areas of development (prime and specific), the CoEL or you could if you wish pick Hirsch-Pasek and Golinkof's (2016, cited in Gillespie, 2016, p.92) previously mentioned six skill areas. Whatever you pick make these your headings. Consider your lists constructed while you watched the videos - can you slot your ideas underneath your headings? You can re-watch the videos if you wish. This activity should take no more than 10 minutes.

## **Task 3: How play builds brains**

Watch the video clip below - how does play support brain development? Do you agree?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpiYNkkNmEo> - Building brains through play, a parent's master class (running time 5:26)



Read the following article by Hassinger-Das, Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2017) which can be found here: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/may2017/case-brain-science-guided-play>. Consider the notion of guided play and answer the following:

- Do you agree with the concepts of guided play? Why?
- How do Hassinger-Dar, Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff claim guided play supports brain development?
- Do you feel that children's unguided (so their independent) play would work just as well to support brain development? Why?

## **Task 4 – The role of adults and the environment in creating effective play spaces that support play and learning**

Watch the following clip and record:

- How children's play is supported by adults?
- What key elements do children need for effective play spaces?
- What does this tell us?

Loose parts play outside - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDI5T51zh0> (running time 5:05)

## **Task 5: Reflection on learning**

Now think about the way in which you are interacting with children and what context, whether that is as a parent, as a childminder in a home environment or as an educator within a setting or reception class. Consider the following questions and note your thoughts:

- In what ways do you feel play is supported?
- What may need to change?
- Who could initiate this change?
- What is your role within this?
- What now?

## **Further activities linked to play**

You may like this article on the diversity of play – available here:

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/17/08/diversity-play>.

This delightfully quirky TED talk is not based in early years but instead considers the benefits of play and being playful on the learning and development of adults (running time 18:27 minutes) – available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-NT1-BdOvI> – “life with give you reasons not to play, and you have to fight back!

## 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., Nilsson, 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.

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

O'Donovan, C. and Melnyczuk, V. (2015) 'Brain development and play', in Moyles, J. (ed.) *The excellence of play*. 4<sup>th</sup> edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp.56-69.

Westermann, G., Thomas, M.S.C., and Karmiloff-Smith, A. (2014) 'Neuroconstructivism', in Goswami, U. (ed.) *Childhood cognitive development*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, pp.724-748.

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