



# THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY



## Adult support

**Perception of Play:** Creating an atmosphere where activities are seen as play enhances focus, attentiveness, and overall well-being during tasks, establishing a positive foundation for learning.

**Social Interaction:** Facilitating social interaction during play positively influences learning outcomes, benefiting adaptive skills and communication for children engaging with peers or adults.

**Encouraging Pretend Play:** Supporting pretend play is crucial for language development and narrative skills, enabling children to create meaningful links to their knowledge and experiences.

**Iterative Play:** Opportunities: Providing opportunities for iterative play, involving repetition with variation, fosters creative and innovative problem-solving skills, contributing significantly to cognitive development.

**Meaningful Connections:** Adults can support meaningful connections by integrating children's learning into various aspects of their lives, making the learning experience more relevant and impactful.

**Recognition of Play:** Acknowledging the value of playful learning as more than just an enjoyable activity is essential. Recognising its significance contributes to the overall development of children

## Peer support

Children who enter early years with social skills developed through peer play may transition to early years with fewer difficulties than children who have fewer experiences of peer play (Ladd & Price, 1987)

Peer play allows children to learn academic skills from more advanced playmates, and is associated with cognitive growth (Wentzel, 2009)

Social learning theorists suggest that children can learn from others by observation (Bandura, 1977)

Children imitate same-age and older peers (Brody & Stoneman, 1981), and can learn new actions by observing others (Nielsen, Moore, & Mohamedally, 2012)

Children receive feedback, and have opportunities to practice problem solving, communication, social coordination, and perspective taking through peer play (Cheah, Nelson, & Rubin, 2001; Coplan & Arbeau, 2009)

Role play provides children with practice in regulating their behaviour in ways that help sustain the interaction (Elias & Berk, 2002; Howes, 1992)

Conflict within peer play can benefit children as they learn to negotiate a balance between their own and others' desires (Ladd, 2005)

Preschoolers' positive interactive play in the classroom is associated with positive outcomes including vocabulary, literacy, and mathematic skills, as well as positive learning engagement in the classroom (Coolahan, Fantuzzo, Mendez, & McDermott, 2000; Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2012)

## Wellbeing

- there is an increasing focus on academics to the detriment of play (Gray, 2011).
- Stone (2017) play is essential for wellbeing
- (Clark, 2017) "Play processes are crucial underpinnings of wellbeing"
- Play is essential for the development of a healthy brain both cognitively and emotionally (Tonkin & Whitaker, 2019) a
- Play is important also throughout childhood and adulthood (Tonkin & Whitaker, 2016)
- Benefits of play to wellbeing:
- physical activity ie exercise, socialisation, stress relief, fun and laughter
- an opportunity to problem solve and test things out
- self regulation and learning to control emotions and behaviours such as aggression
- Play is linked to Csikszentmihalyi's idea of 'Flow' and that ability to get lost in something to get such enjoyment that you lose all sense of time which is what 'Flow' is, that which is thought to contribute to wellbeing.
- Play is a mechanism that allows children to learn self regulation (Whitebread, 2012.)
- (Howard & McInnes, 2013) Children demonstrate increased emotional well-being when they perceive an activity as play rather than not play

## Vygotsky (e.g. 1967, 1978, 1994):

Play is crucial because it allows children to internalize and practice cognitive skills within their Zone of Proximal Development.

Play provides a context where children can practice and develop skills that they would not be able to perform alone but are supported to perform whilst playing with a more knowledgeable other which can be either their peers or adults.

Vygotsky particularly emphasised the importance of pretend play because symbolic thinking can be seen as a precursor to more advanced cognitive abilities that the MKO supports the child to extend.

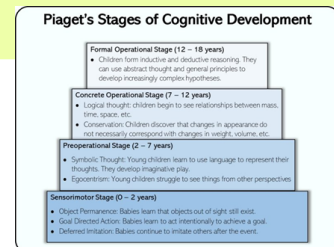
Within play, social interactions require children to create and negotiate roles, rules and scenarios which Vygotsky argued contributes to the development of language, problem-solving skills, and other cognitive abilities such as abstraction, emotional regulation, imagination and perspective taking.

See Veraksa et al., (2022) for a summary of the empirical evidence supporting a link between play and cognitive development.

## Piaget (e.g. 1945, 1948, 1964):

Play is a tool through which children explore their environment and thus construct their understanding of the world.

An assimilation process: new experiences that children encounter through play are related to their existing cognitive schemas thus extending their understanding of the world. At each of Piaget's four stages of development, play provides new experiences that allow for this assimilation.



## Social development

Play gives us opportunity to road test our social competencies. In particular the competencies of theory of mind and emotion recognition. (Zhao & Gibson, 2023)

These are the cornerstones of building friendships and social support networks. (Zhao & Gibson, 2023)

Play provides a zone of proximal development, and EYFS is the ideal time to lay the foundations for good social skills. (Veraksa et al., 2023)

Play in EYFS has a protective factor: friendships and social support networks are strongly linked with good mental health. (Zhao & Gibson, 2023)

