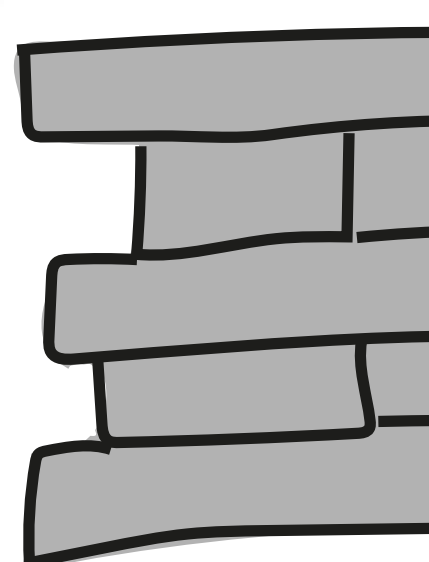


# Play Types Toolkit

## Bringing more play into the school day

The Play Types Toolkit is for **schools** and **education professionals**, and others working with children in various settings.

Louise Scott-McKie and Theresa Casey



*“Play is key to raising attainment”*

Scottish Government



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot



# Contents

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

Bob Hughes

## Introduction

What do we mean by play types?	<b>Pg 4</b>
Key considerations	<b>Pg 6</b>
The benefits of play	<b>Pg 7</b>
Playing and learning	<b>Pg 7</b>
Getting it right through play	<b>Pg 9</b>
How to use this toolkit	<b>Pg 11</b>

## Learning about the physical world

Creative play	<b>Pg 14</b>
Exploratory play	<b>Pg 15</b>
Mastery play	<b>Pg 16</b>
Object play	<b>Pg 17</b>

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

Communication play	<b>Pg 20</b>
Dramatic play and socio-dramatic play	<b>Pg 21</b>
Role play	<b>Pg 22</b>
Social play	<b>Pg 23</b>

## Learning about my body and limits

Rough and tumble play	<b>Pg 26</b>
Locomotor play	<b>Pg 27</b>

## Learning about what it is to be human

Deep play	<b>Pg 30</b>
Fantasy play and imaginative play	<b>Pg 31</b>
Recapitulative play	<b>Pg 32</b>
Symbolic play	<b>Pg 33</b>

## Further information

Further reading	<b>Pg 36</b>
Other sources of advice and information	<b>Pg 37</b>
Resources for the classroom and playground	<b>Pg 38</b>
Risk benefit assessment	<b>Pg 39</b>
Observing children's play	<b>Pg 40</b>
Play types observation	<b>Pg 41</b>
Play and cognitive development	<b>Pg 42</b>

"We want Scotland to be the best place to grow up, a nation which values play as a life-enhancing daily experience for all our children and young people. Play is vital from the early stages of brain development and bonding with parents and carers, and promotes independence and autonomy for the teenage years. Children's play is crucial to Scotland's wellbeing, socially, economically and environmentally. **Children learn as they play.** Indeed children learn how to learn when they are playing and bringing more play into the school day will foster children's natural curiosity and motivation to learn."

Maree Todd, Minister for Childcare and Early Years.



# 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.<sup>1</sup>

(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)<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> 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*<sup>3</sup> 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...

**Play opportunities** are generally available to children in Scottish schools at playtimes and lunchtimes, but this may total only 60 minutes of the day and often less if you factor in eating, putting on coats and shoes or lining up. The extent to which children play in class time varies greatly, with opportunities for play tending to decrease sharply after the early years through primary school and into secondary school.

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.



# 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<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

**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.



<sup>4</sup> Physical activity guidelines for children and young people. <http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/fitness/Pages/physical-activity-guidelines-for-young-people.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> White, R. (2004) Interaction with Nature During the Middle Years: Its Importance to Children's Development & Nature's Future. White Hutchinson Leisure & Learning Group  
Herrington, S. and Brussoni, M (2015) Beyond Physical Activity: The Importance of Play and Nature-Based Play Spaces for Children's Health and Development

# 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)<sup>6</sup>

## 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 learning<sup>8</sup>: 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 school<sup>9</sup>. Playing aids the development of concentration and attention<sup>10</sup>. Playing in outdoor environments with natural features has been shown to be particularly helpful to this.

Moyles<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

(Whitebread, 2012: 3)

<sup>6</sup> 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>

<sup>7</sup> 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](http://www.importanceofplay.eu/IMG/pdf/dr_david_whitebread_-_the_importance_of_play.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> 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](https://www.gezondheidsraad.nl/sites/default/files/Nature_and_health.pdf) Accessed 22 June 2017

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

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

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









# 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.

I arrived at the gym hall carrying several cardboard tubes, parachutes, plastic and inflatable balls, a large blue net, several ropes and a large structure I'd made using strong elastic and (more) tubes. I set about creating a temporary playground. I had balls hidden under a net, precariously balanced tubes, a bubble wrap bag filled with more coloured balls and a rope strung up from the top of a door to the bottom of a bench with movable parts attached. I was pretty happy with what I'd done and looking forward to seeing things play out.

My first visitor was instantly drawn to a pile of loose tubes and began to build. I was super impressed with his patience and ingenuity as he problem-solved his way to creating the structure he had in mind. He wasn't very flexible about what he wanted to create but was plenty flexible about how he would get there. Ten minutes later he walked off grinning without a glance at anything else in the hall. His work clearly done.

My next group were a young excitable bunch who wanted everything, all at once. The newly built structure was quickly dismantled and investigated in every possible manner, balls were kicked, thrown and pushed through tubes and in the shortest time the space looked completely different again. One child was enjoying spinning between moments of close inspection of the elasticated cardboard structure. I picked it up and he got inside with me and we span the entire thing around and around. I created a loop with a piece of spare elastic that I could stand in with him and spin whilst experiencing the pressure from the band around our lower backs. Another would not rest until he had exhausted the sensory potential of every object. Some played for a few minutes, some played the whole session and all played uniquely.

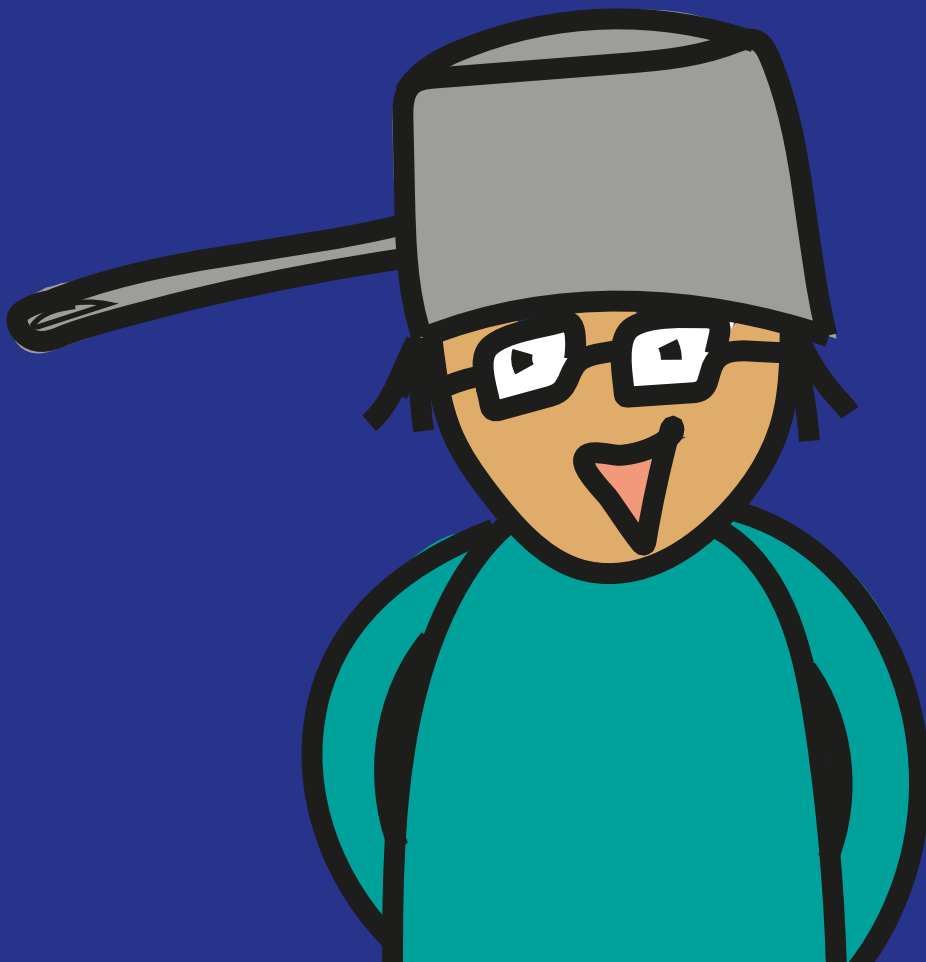
*Changing a space changes the way we move within it, we enter the space and it has new potential; when a familiar space becomes a little less familiar the rules and expectations for what we do in that space get fuzzy around the edges making new room for creation, mischief and discovery.*

Max Alexander, playworker, The Yard, [playradical.blog](http://playradical.blog)



# 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.

## Curricular links

### Expressive Arts

EXA 0-02a/0-05a/0-06a

EXA 1-02a /1-05a/1-06a

EXA 2-02a /2-05a /2-06a

EXA 0-17a/ 1-17a/2-17a

### Technologies

TCH 0-11A/ 0-09a

TCH 1-11a/2-11a

**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.

## Curricular links

### Technologies

TCH 0-01a through to 0-13a

TCH 1-01a/ 1-04b/1-05a/1-09a/1-10a/1-11a

Almost every Science outcome would benefit from this type of play as exploration is key to understanding in this curricular area.

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.

## Curricular links

### Technologies

TCH 0-04a  
TCH 1-04c/1-09/1-07a/1-10a/1-12a  
TCH 2-04c/2-06a/2-07a

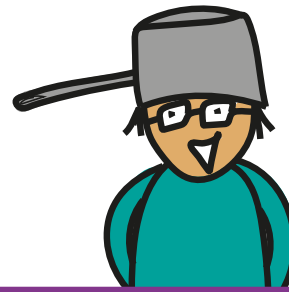
### Sciences

SCN 0-03a/ 0-07a  
SCN 1-03a/1-05a/1-07a/1-08a/1-15a  
SCN 2-08b/2-10a /2-16a & b / 2-18a/2-19a

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.

## Curricular links

### Technologies

TCH 0-10a/ 0-12a

TCH 1-10a/1-12a

TCH 2-10a/2-14a

### Mathematics

MTH 0-16a/1-16a & b/2-16a & b

MNU 0-11a

### Sciences

SCN 0-15a/1-15a

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>

We noticed that some children rarely exhibited dramatic play or socio-dramatic, imaginative and fantasy play. They preferred activities with set instructions. Whenever we took materials for dressing up some of the children would look at them however did not have the confidence to try anything on in front of all the other children.

To encourage greater use of their imaginations we provided various hats, masks, accessories and words to play charades with. The first session began with each of the playworkers picking a hat or accessory to wear. This made the children laugh and encouraged them to explore the accessories. They began dressing up the adults, adding to and changing their outfits.

After a while, one of the children decided to try some of the outfits. Gradually more children experimented with becoming different characters and personas. They then found the bag of words for charades and, with help from the playworkers, joined in playing the game. They were hesitant to begin with, so one of the playworkers had the first turn at acting out a word. One of the children guessed it and then decided to have a turn acting. After this, the majority of children had the confidence to join in and those who didn't want to be in the spotlight were happy to join in with the guessing.

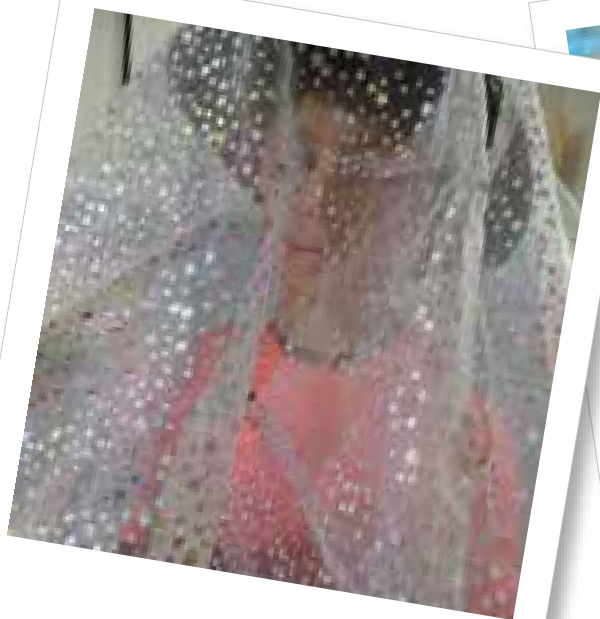
We have since provided resources to inspire the children's dramatic, imaginative, fantasy and socio-dramatic play in most sessions, resulting in a huge difference in the frequency of these play types occurring.

One boy arrived at a session telling us he was bored, so he had a look at the resources to make him 'unbored'. He proceeded to spend the rest of the session dressing up and changing character from a superhero to a fairy to a dog. He also encouraged the other children to join in and every child at the session spent at least some of the session dressing up.

Children who used to think they were 'too cool' to dress up now love exploring the resources. The children who were too shy to join in are increasing in confidence with each session, adding accessories to change their persona and joining in with the other children's games. By providing a few simple prompts we managed to encourage all ages and genders to use their imaginations, experiment with these types of play and play together.

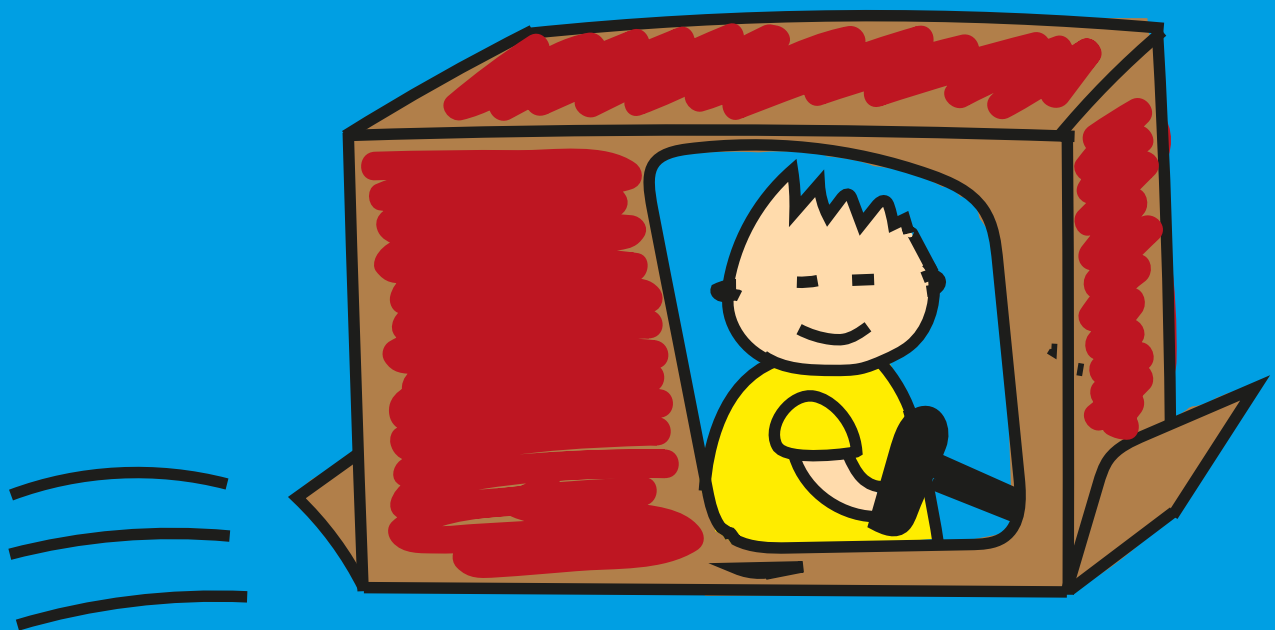
**Ashleigh Cotter, Community Playworker, Play Midlothian**

[www.playmidlothian.org.uk](http://www.playmidlothian.org.uk)

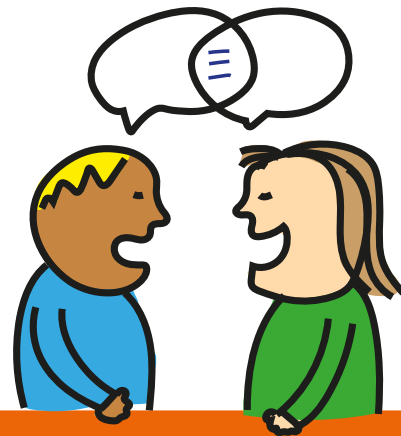


# Learning about **myself** and how to be in the world

- 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.

## Curricular links

### Literacy

LIT 0-01a/0-11a/0-20a/0-09a/0-10a

LIT 1-02a/1-03a/1-09a

LIT 2-03a/ 2-06a/ 2-10a

### Modern Languages

MLAN 1-01a/1-07a

MLAN 2-01a/2-07a & b

### Expressive Arts

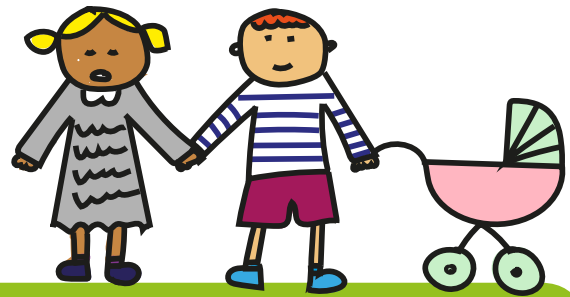
EXA 0-12a/1-12a/2-12a

EXA 2-14a

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.

## Curricular links

### Health and Wellbeing

Many Health and Wellbeing outcomes might be explored through this type of play.

### Expressive Arts:

EXA 0-12a/ 0-13a/0-14a

EXA 1-13a

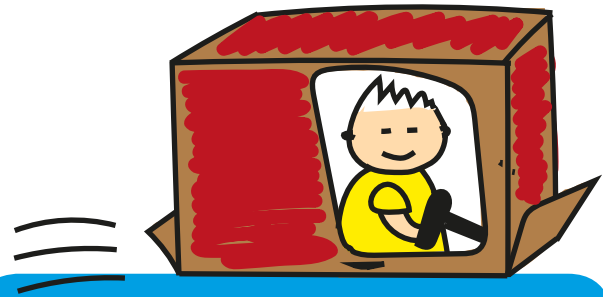
EXA 2-13a

### Literacy

LIT 0-09a/0-09b/0-10a/0-31a

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.

## Curricular links

### Literacy

LIT 0-10a

LIT 1-02a/1-03a

LIT 2-02a

### Expressive Arts

EXA 0-13a/0-14a

EXA 1-13a/1-14a

### Health and Wellbeing

HWB 0-02a/0-04a/0-05a/0-07a/0-08a/0-44a/0-45a/0-47a/0-49a/0-51a

HWB 1-02a/1-04a/1-05a/1-07a/1-08a/1-44a/1-45a/1-47a/1-49a/1-51a

### Social Studies

SOC 0-20a/01-17a

SCN 1-03a/1-05a/1-07a/1-08a/1-15a

SCN 2-08b/2-10a /2-16a & b / 2-18a/2-19a

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.

## Curricular links

### Health and Wellbeing

HWB 0-14a /0-23a

HWB 1-14a/1-23a

HWB 2-14a/2-23a

### Social Studies

SOC 0-17a

SOC 1-17a

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.

Risk, adventure, shelter building, natural play materials, fire and Curriculum for Excellence all are components of the playground at Thornlie Primary School. The kind of adventurous natural play created stimulates learning, develops confidence, improves health and enables urban children to develop a love for the natural world. For the school, this project is central to its educational vision.

Developing such an ambitious approach to play involved more than providing new features. The school developed policies and risk benefit frameworks, invested in training and liaised with parents and the authority school estate managers.

## Features in the playground

- A fallen tree
- The fire pit
- A long willow tunnel in the form of an upturned boat
- Loose materials such as wooden pennies, logs, branches, blankets, crates, tubes, hay
- A large sand pit provides space for all ages to play
- Hillocks and dips add interest to the open grass and mowing regimes create paths through the space.

A comparison of pre- and post-project observations demonstrates improvements in physical activity, social interaction and creativity. The value of what's been done is measurable in terms of attainment, attendance and behaviour

Play is important for its own sake at Thornlie but staff have noticed the impact it has in the classroom too. They notice that children learn when given freedom and opportunities to think for themselves and remark that they have "seen more mathematics in the playground with no guidance whatsoever in 10 minutes than we could have done in the class."

The full case study can be found at <https://www.ltl.org.uk/resources/results.php?id=453>





# 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.

## Curricular links

**Health and Wellbeing**

HWB 0-15b/0-45b/0-49a

HWB 1-45b/1-49a

HWB 2-49a

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

## Curricular links

### Health and Wellbeing

HWB 0-21a/0-22a/0-23a/0-24a/0-28a  
HWB 1-21a/1-22a/1-23a/1-24a/1-28a  
HWB 2-21a/2-22a/2-23a/2-24a/2-28a

### Expressive Arts

EXA 0-08a/1-08a/2-08a

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).

There is something basic, instinctive and emotionally warming about nurturing a fire. Once the initial excitement of roasting marshmallows, and all the sensory experiences that go with fires died down, small groups of older children often remained competently maintaining the fire and chatting amiably about life or telling jokes.

I observed from a distance ready to offer support if needed but not so close as to inhibit conversation or language. Much can be learned about children by being in the background if the space and resources are right.

Forays into the woods with a wheelbarrow at the start of the day became part of the ritual. Who was coming? Who would ride in the barrow and who would push. Who was heaviest/lightest/strongest and where was best to sit in the barrow to make it easier to balance both for the pusher and one being pushed. Then to adapt those calculations to the changing landscape en route to the woods.

We saw in this mathematics, physics, language, geography, spacial awareness, balance and control.

In the woods, experienced children helped others identify sticks that would burn and estimated whether there was enough. Lots of tree-climbing took place. One child claimed to be spider man and others agreed, due to his dexterity. Once back at the club the sticks were arranged in size, thickness and the bigger bits cut.

The day after having a fire I observed two children discover that wood from the old fire made marks and watched their excitement as they experimented with it on the tarmac. Excitement rose and infected the whole group with the realisation that they could mark their bodies. A frenzy of body painting began. Naturally this was followed by an impromptu armoury to make weapons from sticks and whatever other materials they could find.

I was watching history evolve before my eyes. This kind of 'stuff' can never be planned but will happen in the right environment, with the right resources and skilled adults who quietly facilitate in the background.

**Lesley Creevy, playworker, assessor and trainer**

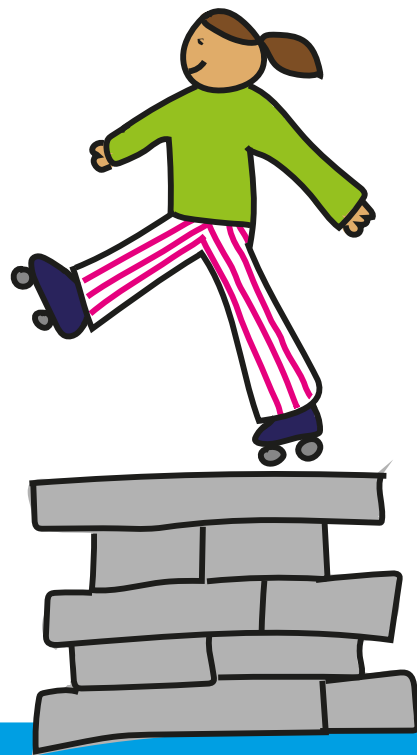


# Learning about **what it is to be human**

- 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.

## Curricular links

### Health and Wellbeing

HWB 0-16a/0-17a/0-18a

HWB 1-16a/1-17a/1-18a

HWB 2-16a/2-17a/2-18a

**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.

## Curricular links

### Literacy

LIT 0-09a & b/ 0-10a/0-26a/ 0-31a

LIT 1-26a

### Expressive Arts

EXA 0-06a /0-14a

EXA 1-06a/1-14a

EXA 2-06a/2-14a

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

RME

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

Fires

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.

## Curricular links

### Sciences

SCN 2-14a & b

SCN 1-02/2-02b

SCN 0-03a/1-03a

Health and Wellbeing:

HWB 1-04a/ 1-30a & b

HWB 2-35a

### Social Studies

SOC 0-02a/0-04a

SOC 1-02a/1-03a

SOC 2-03a

**“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.

## Curricular links

### Social Studies

Understanding of Social Studies may be enhanced by this type of play, particularly in study of place and historical topics.

RME and Health and Wellbeing:

In both curricular areas, concepts might be explored at a deeper and more abstract level using symbolic play.

### Expressive Arts

EXA 1-03a

EXA 2-03a

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.



# Further **information**

- Further reading
- Other sources of advice and information
- Resources for the classroom and playground
- Risk benefit assessment
- Observing children's play
- Play types observation
- Play and cognitive development



# Further reading

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# Other sources of advice and information

**Play Scotland:** [www.playscotland.org](http://www.playscotland.org)

**Grounds for Learning:** <https://www.ltl.org.uk/scotland>

**Inspiring Scotland Knowledge Hub:** <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/knowledge-hub>

**IPA Scotland:** [www.ipascotland.org](http://www.ipascotland.org)

**IPA World:** [www.ipaworld.org](http://www.ipaworld.org)

**Play Wales:** [www.playwales.org.uk/eng](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng)

**Scottish Government:** [www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot)



# Resources for the classroom and playground

The easiest, cheapest and quickest route to a collection of resources is a **letter home to parents** letting them know the kinds of things you would like. After that, try charity shops, jumble sales, haberdashery and hardware shops, builders and local businesses.

## Resources for the classroom

**Dressing up box.** There is no need to buy ready-made costumes. Children's imagination and creativity is better served if you fill your dressing up box with interesting fabrics, hats, second-hand clothes and accessories. The children can then turn these into anything they want them to be.

**Linen basket.** Table clothes, sheets, curtains and rugs that children can use to make tents and magic carpets. Be prepared for classroom furniture to become the supporting structures for all of these.

**Fixings box.** Keep a supply of simple fixings such as pegs, string, elastic bands and bulldog clips.

**A bag of treasures.** Look out for interesting objects such as brass teapots, mirrors, large sea shells, funny ornaments and peacock feathers which act as prompts and props for children's play. Avoid china and ceramics which break too easily. Metal and wooden items can take more of a bashing.

**Creative supplies.** Paint, paper, glue of course but also found objects, household items to take apart to glean materials (e.g. old radios), vast supplies of cardboard boxes, factory off-cuts, natural materials. Allow for abundance and consider creative materials consumable so that you don't need to be too precious with them (especially with materials that are ultimately destined for the compost heap or recycling).

**Of course, all of these items can be used outdoors too...**

## Resources for the playground

All the indoor items would be great outdoors too. Resources get messier outside so, if possible, have separate classroom and outdoor supplies available.

**Roofs.** Tarpaulins, shower curtains, sails are all great as they are waterproof. Bedsheets and duvet covers, old curtains, table clothes, blankets and oversized clothing are best kept for dry days. Try adding (or growing) natural materials such as palm fronds, reeds, leafy branches.

**Supports.** Hay bales, large cardboard boxes, tubes or plastic packaging, wooden pallets, brush handles, clothes poles, guttering, cut timber, logs.

**Decorative.** Coloured fabrics, treasures such as those listed earlier, flags, bunting and fixings.

**Perching points.** Old sections of camping mats cut up are great little seats for children, cushions, logs, boulders, picnic rugs.

**Classics.** Skipping ropes, balls, hoops, chalk.

The suggestions above are just that - suggestions. Allow children to choose materials and use them in their own way.

A den building guide and other useful resources can be found at: <http://www.muddyfaces.co.uk/infodocs>

See Loose Parts Play Toolkit for a comprehensive guide to introducing and using loose parts in schools <https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/hub/loose-parts-play>

# 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*

A *Risk-Benefit Assessment Form* was produced by the Play Safety Forum (2014) to support a balanced approach to risk management using the process of risk-benefit assessment (RBA). It is aimed at those involved in providing play opportunities in a range of contexts, including schools, early years services, out-of-school childcare settings, play areas, public parks, green spaces and playwork settings. The Risk-Benefit Assessment Form can be adapted to suit the provider's needs.

This form and other resources on risk management in play can be found at:

<http://www.playscotland.org/resources/managing-risk-play-provision>

Learning through Landscapes has also produced a series of generic risk-benefit assessments for their work which follow this approach:

[www.ltl.org.uk/spaces/ltlriskbenefit.php](http://www.ltl.org.uk/spaces/ltlriskbenefit.php)

Play Wales' schools toolkit also includes very useful resources:

[www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit](http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/schoolstoolkit)

# 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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### Louise Scott-McKie

is a lecturer in Primary Education at the University of the West of Scotland. She has particular interest in 'opening up' education for those who often slip through the margins. This has led to her focus on play and outdoor learning.

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## About Play Scotland

Play Scotland delivers the child's right to play in Scotland. Play Scotland is the national organisation for play in Scotland, working to promote the importance of play for all children and young people and campaigning to create increased play opportunities, to ensure all children and young people **#playeveryday**

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Symbolic Play



Locomotor Play



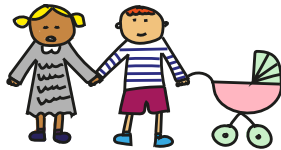
Creative Play



Exploratory Play



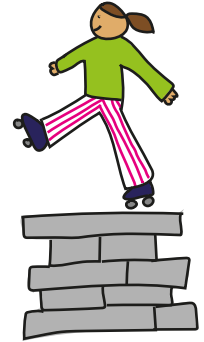
Communication Play



Socio-dramatic Play



Recapitulative Play



Deep Play



Fantasy Play

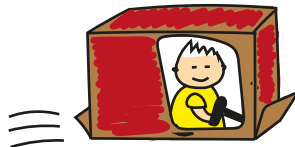
# PLAY TYPES



Object Play



Mastery Play



Role Play



Imaginative Play



Rough and Tumble Play



Dramatic Play



Social Play



[www.playscotland.org](http://www.playscotland.org)

[emeroleary.com](http://emeroleary.com)

A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types by Bob Hughes

