

# PLAYWORK ESSENTIALS

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



Based on work by Louise Scott-McVie and Theresa Casey. Adapted by Michael Follett.

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# Introduction

Your school has decided that play is amazing, important, fun and good for children in so many ways. They are one of hundreds of schools that are using the OPAL Outdoor Play and Learning programme.

Play takes up a significant amount of time, in fact it is equivalent to 1.4 years of a child's primary school life.

## Play makes up 20% of school life



■ Play ■ Other

### Per Year

231 hours

37 days

7.4 weeks

Primary Years

1.4 years

There is no better activity for learning and development than play

(Doherty and Hughes, 2014)

OPAL schools call the people who are in charge of play 'The Play Team', because supporting children to play is what the job is all about.

Changing from being as a supervisor to thinking and acting like a playworker takes time, knowledge, reflection and practice. The play team in OPAL schools should have time to meet and learn together, study the online playwork essential course on the OPAL website and use this book as a basis for learning and reflection.

We hope that learning about playwork and understanding play better will enable you to improve how you provide play for your children, increase their wellbeing, happiness and learning and make your job more enjoyable and fulfilling.

Michael Follett

OPAL Founder

# Who is this booklet for?

If you spend any part of the school day managing or supervising children's outdoor play, then this booklet is for you. Playwork is the profession which specialises in the relationship between the child and the adult in play, and the playwork essentials set out in this booklet will help you to learn some of the main ideas which inform playwork. The booklet and OPAL's online course only form a very brief introduction. If you are inspired, you may find many books and courses which support a much fuller understanding of playwork. Further reading is suggested below.

## What is playwork?

Playwork is the profession which specialises in the theoretical knowledge and practical application of skills which optimise the most fulfilling and rich play opportunities possible for children and explores the relationship of the adult and child in play.

## 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) *Play Types – Speculations and Possibilities* 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'.



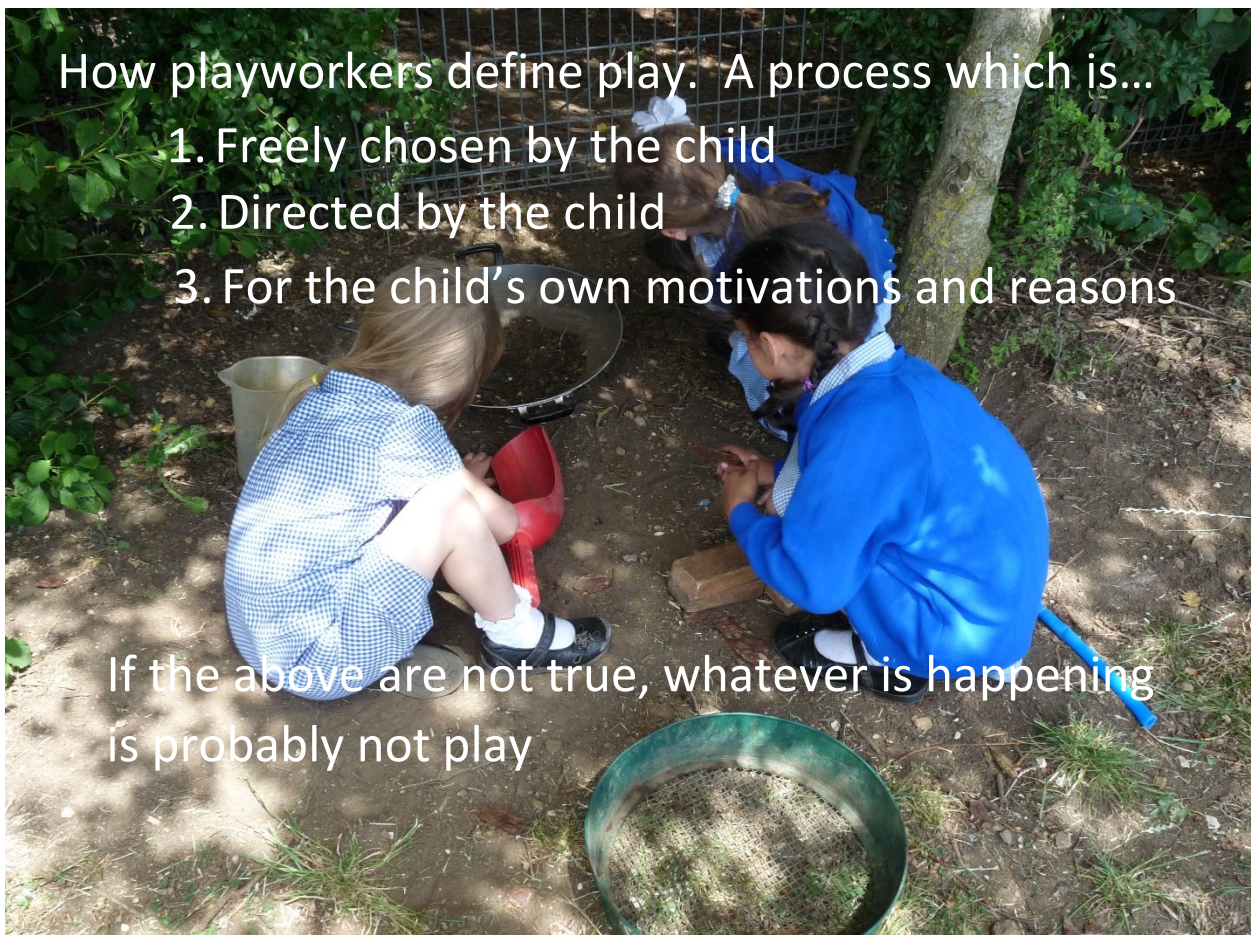
# But we already play in school...

Play opportunities are generally available to children in UK schools at breaktimes and lunchtimes, but this may total as little as 35 minutes of daily 'activity' if you factor in time spent eating, putting on coats and shoes, aimlessly standing around or queueing/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, lessening further throughout their time in primary school, and by secondary school has almost completely disappeared.

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

The attitude of adults has an equally important effect. Adults can unwittingly constrain and undermine children's play through a negative attitude towards it, or they can enthusiastically support play to deepen and become ever 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, enjoyment, wellness and resilience) and are therefore able 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, because of something lacking in the environment, or because the 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, play team member or teaching assistant, 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 the environment. These are all steps to success.

## Leadership

Without two clear leadership roles in schools, play will never be of a sustained good quality. All schools need strategic leadership from the **Curricular Lead for Play** and operational leadership from the **Play Coordinator**

## Time

As well as needing short play breaks at regular intervals throughout the day, children benefit greatly from opportunities to immerse themselves in play for more extended periods of time, ideally 60 uninterrupted mins.

## Environment

The outdoor environment is the perfect platform for play. Children need places that they can use in ways of their own choosing and which offer them variety, adaptability, challenges, space and access to the natural world.

## Resources

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

## Permission

Children play in environments where experimentation and learning are valued and permitted by adults. Being allowed to figure things out for yourself, to collaborate with peers, take calculated risks and get a bit dirty, should all be allowed.

# The benefits of play

## *How do you think you benefited from your play as a child?*

The gap in educational outcomes, particularly for those children from areas of multiple deprivation and, increasingly, 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 & literacy
- ✓ Mental health
- ✓ Emotional wellbeing
- ✓ Social development
- ✓ Learning about risk and challenge
- ✓ Play as therapy
- ✓ Resilience and character

## Playing and learning


### *The great play you provide at playtimes is important to the school*

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: 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.

Playing aids the development of concentration and attention. Playing in outdoor environments with natural features has been shown to be particularly helpful to this.

Moyles (1989) demonstrated that for every aspect of children's development, there is a form of play behind it. In combination, these forms of play support all aspects of physical, intellectual and social-emotional growth. Therefore, a balance of experience of each of these types of play is essential in bringing key developmental and learning benefits to all children.

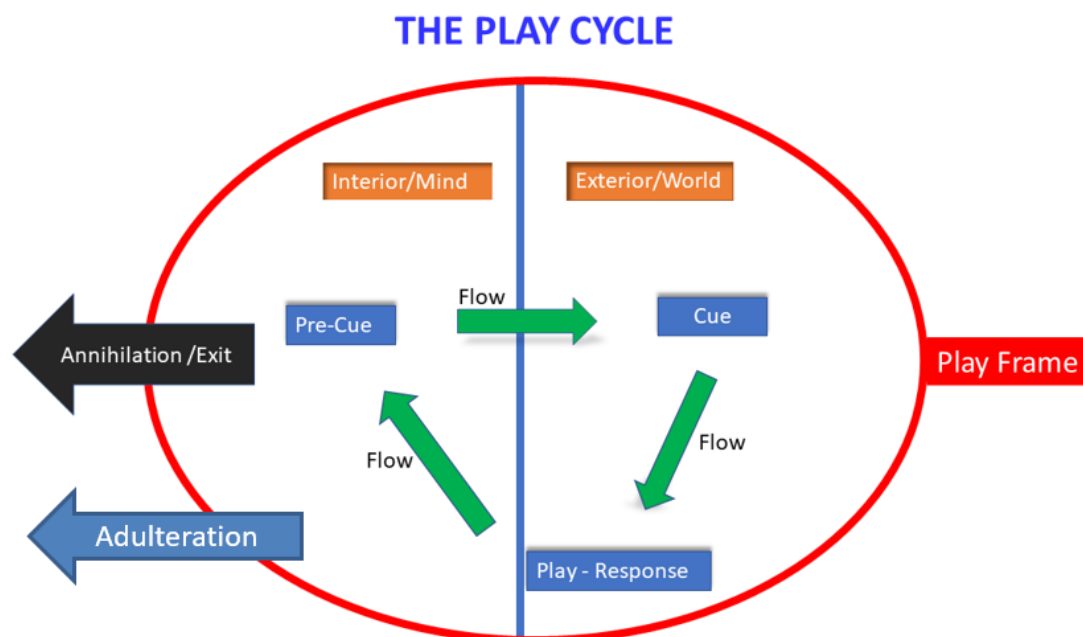


Play in all its rich variety is one of the highest achievements of the human species, alongside language, culture and technology.

*(Whitebread, 2012)*

# The play cycle

The play cycle is the way playworkers explain what is happening in play within the child, and what impact the adult has on the child. It is a very valuable tool for supporting reflective practice whenever adults are intervening in the play process.



- Interior/Mind What is happening in the child's head
- Exterior/World What is happening in the real world
- Pre-Cue The moment when a playful thought, idea or urge forms in the child's mind
- Cue The moment when a playful movement, noise or act becomes external
- Play - Response The feedback the child gets from people, environment or their senses
- Flow The deepening loop of action, reaction and understanding in play
- Play Frame The conditions which hold the flow of play together
- Adulteration The destruction of flow through imposed adult values or presence
- Annihilation /Exit The point at which the child leaves, or is forced to leave the cycle

Playworkers strive to create environments and situations where there are lots of opportunities for children to become deeply engaged in the flow of their own self-directed play. The playworkers' job is then to maintain the frame of the play, and not to intervene, adulterate or unintentionally annihilate the play with their presence or interruptions.

You will find more information on how playworkers value play on the page *The playwork principles*, on how to recognise different types of play in the *Understanding the play types* and *Schema in play*, and on how they intervene in play in the *Intervention styles*.



# The playwork principles

*Keep a reflection diary to understand how you do these things*

## 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. 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 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 interventions must balance risk with the developmental benefit and well-being of children.

# Understanding the play types

## *Build your learning through written observations and reflections*

This section 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

This section should help you to **identify, understand and provide** the play types. In the following pages, you will find each of Bob 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 the 2019 OFSTED framework

Because the differences between some play types such as Dramatic play and Socio-dramatic play, Fantasy play and Imaginative play are often 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 in integrating play into your day. While links are made to children's development and to the curriculum, it is not suggested you prioritise one set of play types to the exclusion of others – **they are all equally beneficially important and, for maximum enjoyment, children should be able to make their own play choices.**

Once you are aware of each of the play types, you should discuss with your play team how you can **continually improve the quality of your play offer.**

You can learn more about the 16 play types by looking on the free resources section of the OPAL website [outdoorplayandlearning.org](http://outdoorplayandlearning.org). Just register for free and you can access the playwork essentials course and the 16 playtypes videos.

### *Where do I start?*

Begin by allocating some time to observing children at play, and practice recognising each play type (see the template on p37). This will help you to understand the range of play available to the children in your setting, which types of play 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, site support staff, playground supervisors, teachers, etc.

# 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'

## OFSTED Criteria

Quality of Education - Knowledge and Skills

Behaviours and Attitudes – Employability

Leadership and Management - Vision and Ethos

Personal Development

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.

## What does it look like?

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

Testing 'what happens if...?'

Manipulating objects or environment and assessing their properties

Exploring fire, puddles, earth, etc.

## In school opportunities

Any kinaesthetic environments or subjects

PE

Science

Technology

ICT

Play time, lunch time, before and after school

## OFSTED Criteria

**Quality of Education** -Knowledge and skills development -Intent -Curriculum design

**Behaviours and Attitudes** -Attitudes to learning, discovery

**Student Experience** - Leadership and Management

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 playing 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)

# 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 while 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

## 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)

# Learning about myself and how to be in the world

- Communication play
- Dramatic 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. Empathy.



## 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.

## 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.

## 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.

## 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 outside a playful context

# Dramatic Play and Socio-dramatic Play

## What do children gain through these types of play?

A sense of the 'dramatic', reaction of an audience, self-expression, adopting identities, ego boost, 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.



## What does it look like?

Making plays, song and dance routines.  
Miming, pretending to be famous.  
Dramatisation of conversation.  
Dramatisation of everyday events, e.g. parent taking child 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.

## 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

## Some of the skills and dispositions developed

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

## OFSTED Criteria

**Quality of Education** - Curriculum delivery - Knowledge and skill development

**Behaviours 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).

## What does it look like?

Child enacts adult, or other, behaviours e.g. driving, cooking

Plays a family character, community person or celebrity.

Takes on different state e.g. dead or asleep

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

## Some of the skills and dispositions developed

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

## 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

## In school opportunities

Word games

Literacy time – poetry/rap, language use

Drama

Play time, lunch time, before and after school

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 agreed 'norms', avoiding micro-management by adults, allowing children to sort things out together.

## What does it look like?

Any social or interactive experience.

Negotiation of rules and social norms.

Board games.

Conversation/negotiation.

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, whereas whilst playing, children learn as a result of what they decide. This inevitably includes aspects of argument, debate, repression and control, as well as fun.

# 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.

Empathy, self-regulation, control.

## 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.

## 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 should 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 agreed by pupils, to indicate one's willingness to participate.

# Locomotor Play



## 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, slide, crawl, spin, run, kick a ball, etc.

## What does it look like?

Chase, Tig, hide and seek, throw/catch.

Climbing, jumping, swinging,

Ball games, Hula hoops, skipping, racing.

## Some of the skills and dispositions developed

Strength, physical literacy and stamina

Whole body coordination, agility

Raised heart rate, confidence

Communication, teamwork and social skills

## 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, so it's important to ensure 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, familiarity with their environment, learning where is safe and where must be avoided, the properties of objects, and a sense of ability to escape (up a tree. over a wall. out of sight).

# Learning about What it is to be human

- Deep play
- Fantasy play and imaginative play
- Recapulative 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, calibration of movement, common sense.

Learning to be safe enough.

## What does it look like?

Jumping off, climbing up, moving fast

Pushing boundaries, almost out of control

Imaginary monsters or scary animals

'Heart in mouth' moments

Achievement, confidence, need

Laughter, screaming with pleasure

## 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.

## 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 most schools, although it may happen anyway, with or without the knowledge of adults!

Children do however have an undeniable need for risk, challenge and adventure. The play environment should accommodate that within a framework of good risk-benefit assessment.

# Fantasy Play and Imaginative Play

## What do children gain through this type of play?

Access to 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 an 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 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 and comfort.

## 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, camps, homes and caves

Growing and cooking things

Playing war games and with weapons

Animal husbandry.

## OFSTED Criteria.

**Personal Development** - Enrichment - Fostering British Values - Citizenship

**Quality of Education** - Curriculum design - Delivery - Knowledge

**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)

# 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 actions. Opens up endless possibilities for 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.

# Schema in play

*Make an observation sheet and try and spot these, then think how you can add more and more opportunities.*

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.



**Trajectory:** is all about movement in a clear direction, including running, riding, and throwing.



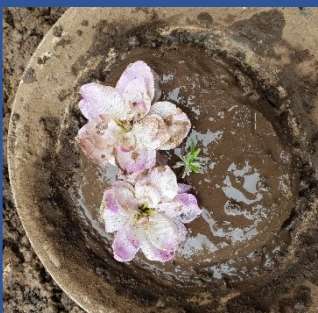
**Rotation:** is the exploration of anything circular, especially anything that rotates.



**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:** is the placement of objects or themselves in lines patterns or sequences



**Transporting:** the movement of everything from one place to another



**Connecting:** exploring how to join objects, people and materials together.



**Transforming:** how materials or people can change their nature and appearance.

# Loose parts

## *Nearly all play requires stuff to play with*

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 stuff 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!

Nearly all play requires stuff to play with, as well as places to play in. In schools, because there are a lot of children, an awful 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'll get worn out or break.

Children are incredibly inventive and will find ways of using loose parts in ways that adults cannot 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 step back to see what happens.



The things children make when they play are important to them. Near 'tidy-up time', give children some warning and, 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 when accompanied by 'tidy-up' music.

The 'Theory of Loose Parts' (Nicholson 1971) says that the more moveable things there are in a play environment, the greater the number of possibilities there will be for invention, creation and imagination.

# The R.A.P.I.D approach to risk

## *Schools must practice RAPID if they are to have OPAL play*

**Risk-benefit** Your school should have written risk-benefit assessments on file. These set out how the school manages identified common and serious risks in play. You should know what is in these assessments. If you have worries, your **Play Coordinator** and **Curriculum Play Lead** need to know immediately about any issues related to risk, that you think should be discussed by the team.

**Assemblies** Every school should hold regular play assemblies where risk management and mitigation are discussed with the children and records kept.

**Policy** All OPAL schools 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 both the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the Department for Education (DfE).

**Inspection** It is the duty of all play team members to constantly inspect the play environment to keep it free of hazards such as broken glass, broken objects and litter.

**Dynamic Risk Management** Play team members in OPAL schools should practice 'dynamic risk management' when on duty. This means they should be constantly aware of the changing nature of the play taking place in their allocated zone. Staff should have an idea of where all children are in their zone, how risky their play appears to be, and what resources they are using. Staff should support children to assess and manage their risks as much as possible for themselves, but they should also be vigilant and take immediate action, if ever they think that a risk of serious harm is becoming unacceptably likely.

For most of the time staff will simply need to practice 'relaxed vigilance', meaning that adults should always appear calm and confident, whilst constantly being alert and aware of the risks the children are taking.

Staff should always be prepared to intervene, if necessary. Intervention should balance the management of risks with preserving as much of the benefit of play as possible. Children should be empowered to gradually manage their own risks, as they steadily mature.

### **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 manage/stop the risky play **immediately**.
- If they think that serious harm is possible but not probable, they should **remain vigilant** and observe from close by. **Do not allow yourself to become distracted!**
- 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.

# Playwork intervention styles

*How will you apply them as a team, to enable a consistent approach?*

## 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

## Leave

the content/intent of play to children- let them decide what they want to do and how to do it

## Allow

children to decide what is appropriate behaviour – as far as practicable taking into account age, culture and setting

## Support

children to explore their own values as far as possible - they learn more about right and wrong from their peers than from playworkers

## Only

organise when children want you to - you don't need to organise 'entertainment' for children unless they specifically ask you for ideas

## 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

## Permit

children to improve their own performance- don't constantly offer to help, unless something is detrimental to their well being



# Being a member of the play team

## *From policing to playwork*

In OPAL schools, the people in charge of lunchtime play are referred to as ‘the play team’. They may have been referred to as lunchtime supervisors or teaching assistants before. In OPAL schools, the focus of these roles changes from one which is mainly about stopping bad things happening, such as accidents and misbehaviour, to one of mainly supporting amazing things to happen, in the form of better play.

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

The play team’s job, led by the play coordinator, 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. They will also need to regularly discuss;

- 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?**

Doing this is called ‘reflective practice’.

1. Work with your play coordinator to make up some observation and reflection sheets.
2. Choose a **play type, schema, principle** or **intervention type** and keep a record over a week of examples you see or what you have done.
3. At your next meeting discuss how you can make things even better.

Most of the improvements to play in a school should come from the play team.



# Ranging supervision of play

## *Use all of your grounds all of the year*

Under UK law there must be some supervision, but there is no recommended ratio for how many adults should supervise play, nor is there any guidance to what form supervision should take. This is left to the discretion of the school leadership.

**Ranging supervision** has been introduced into OPAL schools because schools have been underusing much of their grounds (typically for just 17% of available days) because of confusion about the purpose and style of supervision, or because of appearance issues.

If you are being asked to practice ranging supervision you will need to include the following;

1. Understand your range. How big is it? Are there areas that are hidden or have greater potential risk? How do you communicate with colleagues in a hurry?
2. Where are your children? What are they doing? You will need to be walking your range for much of your shift. You should know who is playing in the different parts of it, what and who they are playing with, and how risky the play is.
3. You should, with help from children, **keep your range free of hazards and litter**. Are there any planks with nails, are there sharp bits of plastics or are there glass bottles in the bushes? Are there any really sharp branches just at child eye level?

Rope play requires special vigilance and care (see the OPAL guidance sheet) and wires and twine should be removed altogether.

## **'Heads up' playwork**

You can effectively patrol your range and practice good playwork so long as you keep your eyes 'up' at all times. You are not there to entertain or chat to children (or colleagues) when on duty unless your play coordinator tells you otherwise, e.g., for delivery of playwork.

You can take a resource from one place to another, you can observe the play that is unfolding and you can ask children what they need in order for it to develop, all while remaining vigilant. You can set up resources in a new and inviting way for children to find and adapt and still keep your 'eyes on the prize' – child safety.

The skill inherent in your job is the ability to balance involvement in playwork with alertness and awareness. Even if you are deeply involved in some playwork intervention, you will also need to keep your 'head up', so you know what is happening elsewhere in your zone.

## **Dynamic risk management**

When children are able to take managed risks, supported by adults who are looking out for them and supporting them in their judgements, they will eventually end up having fewer accidents. However, OPAL is not about a free-for-all, anything-goes attitude to risk: it is about you using your common sense, skill and judgement to balance the needs of children to experience beneficial, challenging play with your responsibility to protect them from unnecessary, serious harm.

# Playwork pointers

*Try to do each of these every day*

**Intention** When you go into the playground each day, do so with the intention that you will do something to improve the quality of play

**Action** Do something with loose parts or the environment that makes a change to how it was before. – Draw out the rooms of a house in chalk - Put resources in a place they have not been before – Use loose parts to build a scene, e.g., vets, shop, hospital, hair salon

**Observation** Watch what children are doing and ask what you can do to help make it better or more fun. Can we make it stronger, safer? Do you need more of certain resources?

**Example** Do something playful and interesting yourself and watch children join in, then slowly leave and let the children get on with it.

- Make a model stick and leaf house
- Invent and play a new game
- Start building something with loose parts

**Invitation** When you are observing play, be alert to whether you are being invited to join or leave the play (play cue). If you are invited to join, then try to follow, not lead or take over.

**Consistency** Talk to your colleagues, so that you are all agreed about how you do things and so that the messages you give to children are consistent.

**Respect** Children are sensitive, and will copy adult behaviours much more than words. If you need to address an issue, always be respectful, come down to their level, and don't point or raise your voice. Always praise in public and reprimand in private.

# Conflict resolution

## *Give children the tools to make things better*

When children are arguing over something, 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 resolve most issues for themselves.

With the support of your OPAL leadership, try talking through this method from Peace First. If all of the play team use this approach consistently, you will find that over time, children become more competent at the skills of resolving conflict, and therefore need less adult intervention.

Before you start;

1. Come up close to the children, speak in a quiet voice and come down to their level.
2. Allow a bit of 'cooling off time' if tempers are up.
3. Try to avoid having an audience. Only deal with the parties involved, not spectators.

Once children have had some practice, it is OK to ask them;

1. Do you feel that you can sort this out by yourself?
2. If not, could you sort it out with another child helping you?
3. If not, then should I come over? We can go through the conflict resolution steps together.

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.

# Play types observation template

## *Written observations are essential in good playwork practice*

Children do not display all 16 of the play types all of the time. However, if the range of play appears to be limited to just a few play types, this would suggest a need to consider widening the range available, so every child can benefit. We can do this by changing the environment, the available resources, the policy on play, the amount of time for play or the attitude of the adults present. Use this sheet regularly or make your own in your play team to assess how rich your play environment really is!

Play types				Brief examples or explanation
	Never	Occasionally	Frequently	
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				

## Further reading

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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

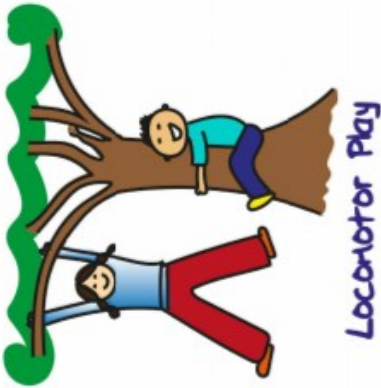
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Symbolic Play



Locomotor Play



Communication Play



Recapitulative Play



Role Play



Creative Play



Fantasy Play



Exploratory Play



Socio-dramatic Play



Object Play



Mastery Play



Deep Play



Rough and Tumble Play



Dramatic Play



Social Play



Imaginative Play

# PLAY TYPES



www.playscotland.org

A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types by Bob Hughes

emergelary.com