

## Pillar 3. Creating playful opportunities

### Key points

- Playful opportunities are not confined to play time; they can be found in all types of learning activity, even the most structured and teacher-directed lessons.
- Help children to make full use of resources and space.
  - Resources that are authentic are very stimulating to children; *overuse* of ready-made materials can stultify children's imagination.
  - Children should be able to use the maximum available space during play and should have frequent and regular access to outdoors play.
  - The setting should be arranged so as to facilitate choice and independence for children.
- Encourage socio-dramatic play and the development of imagination
  - by suggesting dramatic roles, modelling roles yourself and encouraging the children to develop roles using their own imagination;
  - by being aware of the role of the imaginary in play, including imaginary situations, imaginary roles and imaginary rules; and
  - by not tightly constraining play by the nature of available resources.
- Link play to literacy and numeracy
  - by scribing for the children as they document their experiences or, if they are able, helping them to write for themselves;
  - by making books and other literacy tools available for integration with children's play sessions;
  - by planning opportunities to use mathematics during play; and
  - by being aware of the potential for physical materials, such as sand and water, in promoting early skills relating to the mathematics of capacity and to science/understanding of the world around us.
- Plan for progression in play just as you would for other activities.

The range of choices can be changed regularly. Sometimes too much choice at once can encourage 'butterfly' behaviour, that is, flitting from one activity to another and not settling on any.

Suggest ways of making children's dramatic play more systematic, by encouraging them to think about appropriate behaviour when performing a particular role (e.g. "If you were a \_\_\_ and \_\_\_ happened, what would you do?").

Such as compost in the sand tray or real items in the shop.

Such as plastic food or elaborately made costumes.

Children should be encouraged to use their imaginations in playing with mundane props in new and exciting ways, e.g. a line of large blocks or cushions as a bus, a large cardboard box as a boat.

Such as matching place settings at a table to the number of players, shapes in model making and counting in a wide range of activities.

### QLI indicators of success

- *Higher-order thinking skills*: Children are seen to be involved in decision-making, problem-solving, use of imagination and critical enquiry.
- *Multiple skill acquisition*: Children demonstrate progress in a suitable variety of cognitive, motor, academic and social skills.
- *Independence*: Children very often determine their own activities and show evidence of self regulation.

### *Pillar 3. Creating playful opportunities*

#### *Cameo 1. Structured play: Iceland in the house corner*

Year 1/2 composite class

There has been plenty of preparation, including a lot of oral language that will be appropriate for the context and the suggestion of dramatic roles.

Children are given the tools to resolve disputes independently.

Free choice can reinforce gender stereotypes, one of the reasons why it isn't always a good idea.

The teacher does not interrupt fruitful play when the children are getting on well on their own, so this episode has more of the characteristics of free play.

The children have previously seen a very short film of the Arctic and discussed it. They talked about what you might need to survive in 'Iceland' so that they could plan for an expedition there and about which wildlife would be seen there. It was suggested that they might want to make a list of items during structured play that would be needed in Iceland. The house corner has been transformed into Iceland by means of a sheet pegged up as a tent, a pretend sleeping bag inside and some items from the house corner kitchen arranged to make a campfire. There is a plastic sledge sitting outside it. During structured play, there is some competition to use Iceland. The teacher, Miss Robins, reminds the children that they know what to do when that happens. One child goes to fetch a timer and starts it up. Several children are spotted making lists, sometimes collaborating with one another. The boys talk a lot about the danger from polar bears and hunting with the sledge. Girls tend to make 'meals' on the campfire or snuggle down in the sleeping bag. Miss Robins does not often interact with them but she glances over regularly and intervenes if imagination seems to be waning.

They are given a choice about making a list; it is only a suggestion.

The props are not elaborate and not all ready made, giving the children a chance to use their imagination.

Children, including boys, are writing because they want to do so.

It may become desirable to gently encourage boys and girls to explore non-gendered roles.

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#### Cameo 2. Outdoor play: Jungle drama

Small group in a Year 1 class

The CA has previously been briefed fully by the teacher. She is taking a more professional teaching support role here, as CAs often do in DAP classrooms.

The children work out the plot themselves, with supportive questions from the CA when necessary, such as "What has happened to the hunter?"

The CA acts as a facilitator and supports the children in constructing the drama themselves but she does not direct the action.

The classroom assistant (CA) is taking a small group of children for a drama session. They have previously read a story about animals in the jungle. Five of the children choose to wear (previously homemade) cardboard masks of jungle animals and hide in the jungle (a small shrubbery in the playground), each enthusiastically practising their part. One child opts to play a hunter who is hurt and cannot walk properly. The children decide that he should go to the far end of the shrubbery and shout that he is hurt and needs help. The 'heroine' must rescue him, avoiding the fierce animals and finding a route through the jungle while supporting him as he leans on his 'spear' and hops on his uninjured leg. The animals 'stalk' him on tiptoe and enjoy making a lot of scary noise. The heroine supports the hunter back to camp (a wooden hut beside the playground). The CA provides prompts if the action seems to be failing but she does not direct the whole action. This kind of play can eventually mature into planning for writing drama.

Structured socio-dramatic play is thought to be particularly important for this age group.

The shrubbery is used imaginatively as a resource and making the masks has got them thinking about the topic.

The CA does not dictate who plays which roles; the children choose for themselves whenever possible.