

ABA in the Classroom



Adult Supported Play

Play is one of the most important activities for children. Research has identified links between play and the development of both cognitive and social learning skills that are the building blocks for more complex skills needed to support a child as they get older. Play supports a growth in memory, self regulation, symbol recognition, social development, as well as academic learning.

Although play can be fun and enjoyable, it can also be a challenge for some children. Many children need time to develop their play skills and require extra support from an adult in order to learn appropriate play skills. Children who are impulsive, engage in conflict with others, are withdrawn or isolated, as well as those with language/communication, sensory, and physical impairments often require additional focused support from an adult.

Play can be categorized into many different types of play. Some children may show preference for one or more types of play; however, it is important that they experience a variety of play as means to enhance their learning and development. Categories of play include:

Type of Play	
Creative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allows child to explore and share their thoughts, ideas, and feelings through the use of body and materials• Uses imagination
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Includes physical, explorative, manipulative, and constructive play• Develops, practices, and refines fine and gross motor skills, coordination, and balance
Pretend	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Includes pretend, make-believe, dramatic, socio-dramatic, role, fantasy, and small world play• Uses child's imagination and the pretend use of objects, actions, and situations (such as occupations and experiences)• Supports in the development of language skills (from concrete to abstract), early numeracy and literacy skills, communication skills, and positive social skills with others
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involves playing with sound and words including rehearsed and spontaneous vocalizations
Games with Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allows children to expand their play skills from following simple rules such as taking turns to negotiating rules with others

The way in which a child interacts with others is also important as adult support may be required to initiate play opportunities. A child may engage in the following types of play:

- **Solitary Play**—Playing alone
- **Spectator Play**—Watching others but not joining in play
- **Parallel Play**—Engaging in similar play as others, side by side, but not interacting
- **Associative/Partnership Play**—Beginning to play together through imitation, or use of similar items
- **Cooperative Play**—Interacting with others, taking turns, sharing, collaborating, developing , and negotiating during play



When programming to support students in play, it is important to consider the play characteristics as well as the type and way in which the student engages in that play.

Characteristics of play include:

Active: *Students use their bodies to interact with the environment, materials, and others*

Adventurous and risky:
Students can explore the unknown through play and learn to take risks safely through pretend play

How to Support Learning Through Play

Supporting student play is more than providing students with props, time, and space to develop their play skills. It also requires observation/assessment, consultation, planning, and **participation** in their play to promote independence and make play achievable and enjoyable for all.

Planning for Play

- Prepare, plan, and organize activities based on observation and assessment of students' current play skills; continue to expand on learning and development as skills are learnt
- Focus on students' individual strengths, interests, abilities and needs; play that emerges from the child's interest can also support self regulation as using their interest can engage their focus, consider the perspectives of others, encourage communication with others, and build connections between items and people, and ideas
- Provide student choice of activities

Direct adult facilitation of peer interactions can promote interaction and extend the length of time that children play together

Communicative: *Communication can be shared with others using verbal and non verbal communication skills*

Enjoyable: *Play should be fun and exciting for the student, motivating them to continue to engage in the play activity*

Meaningful: *Provides students with greater understanding of their knowledge and builds on current skills*

Sociable and interactive:
Play should incorporate a variety of social and solitary play opportunities

Symbolic: *Allows students to re-enact past or rehearse future events*

Therapeutic: *Play can help students express their emotions and work through their experiences*

Voluntary: *Play should follow the student's lead; if the student is forced to engage in an activity, it's not play*

Supporting Play

- Talk with the student about their play, enhancing their understanding of their behaviour (both positive and negative)
- Take part in play to enhance student skill development through priming of play, modeling of appropriate skills (joining others, taking turns, negotiating, transitioning between roles and activities) and use of positive reinforcement for displays of positive play skills
- Fade out adult involvement as play skills enhance
- Encourage all students to be team players and support interactions by acting as a mediator and intervene when necessary (uncomfortable or hurtful situations between peers)
- Change play activities and materials regularly to reflect changing needs, interests, and experiences
- Change environment, simplify the activity, contrive situations to provide student with greater opportunities to practice skills, incorporate visualto promote student independence

Reviewing Play

- Observe play opportunities and identify barriers that may be hindering student play
- Share information with the student's family and identify if concerns are also observed in other environments
- Use gathered information to support future planning for the student

References:

- Brown, M. & Bergen, D. (2002). Play and social interaction of children with disabilities at learning/activity centers In an inclusive preschool. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, Fall/Winter*.
- Leong, D. L. & Bodrova, E. (n.d.). *Why children need play*. Retrieved July 28th, 2015 from <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/why-children-need-play-0>.
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). (2009). *Guidelines for good practice: learning and developing through play*. Retrieved July 28th, 2015 from <http://www.ncca.biz/Aistear/>

