



The layers of play-helping play to work

Developed at Guildford Nursery School with guidance and support from Professor Tina Bruce

Adults need to sensitively '*observe, support and extend*' play (Bruce, 1987, p.65).

The following tables help educators to decide what they are observing and how best they might support and extend the child's development and learning. The ambition is for children to be able to engage in transformative imaginative play. Whilst it is unlikely to see imaginative play before the other layers, it is entirely probable to observe the same child playing at a range of layers within the same week.

Foundations of play	Emerging imitative play	Developing literal pretend play	Deepening imaginative play
<p>A child uses their senses and physical movement to explore and get to know the space, materials.</p>	<p>A child imitates people and their actions.</p> <p>A child behaves like someone or something they know, e.g. like their mummy.</p>	<p>A child becomes something or someone they know.</p>	<p>A child imagines themselves as someone or something or an idea.</p> <p>This is imaginative play that rearranges what is possible or likely in real life and also creates impossible worlds and people.</p>
<p>The child is exploring their environment, the resources, the possibilities.</p> <p>They might:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manipulate the playdough, the clay, sand etc. Seeing what is possible. - Imitate what another person has done/is doing, e.g. rolling the clay between their hands. - Watching what other children and adults do and sometimes doing the same. - Name objects as they move/manipulate them. 	<p>The child is beginning to use their first-hand experiences in play.</p> <p>They might:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rock the baby. - Feed another child or doll. - Sit in a buggy as if a baby. - Stir sand/mud etc. in a pan. - Act like a dog. - Imitate others, e.g. mime the actions of typing on a laptop. - Move like a train with their arms going round and round. 	<p>The child is using their learning in literal pretend play scenarios. You see role play beginning. The child explores what is possible.</p> <p>They might:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make something stand for something else, e.g. a block for a phone, sand for food etc. - Pretend to be someone else, e.g. a Mum, a baby, dog etc. - Take on a character from a story or their real life. 	<p>The child is using their learning to transform and rearrange real life.</p> <p>They might:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pretend to be a burglar - Pretend to travel to space - Use resources to make a spell and turn others into frogs - Make a story that is about a mixture of events they have experienced but re-ordered and changed. Supposing...what if...
<p>Across all the layers of play, you will observe:</p> <p>Children acquiring increasing mastery and technical prowess. Children who are intrinsically motivated. Children playing alone, alongside or with others. Play that flows, is flexible and that fades away at the end of the episode.</p> <p>The role of the adult matters and is crucial.</p>			

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<p>Resources and the environment need to support children's schemas.</p> <p>You know the child's context so you can make connections for the child.</p>	<p>Props are often the real thing such as a real mobile phone, real saucepans etc.</p> <p>You provide resources to support a child's play.</p>	<p>Resources need to be open-ended so they can stand for something else.</p> <p>You model using a resource to stand for something else, e.g. you pretend a block is a phone.</p>	<p>There needs to be plentiful opportunities for children to create their own resources, characters and narratives.</p> <p>You model and support children to make their own props.</p>
<p>You sing songs and rhymes to accompany everyday actions. Rhythm and tone of voice help in language development that has meaning:</p> <p><i>Tune of Row, row your boat.</i> <i>(Referring to the use of our knives)</i> Chop, chop, chop your banana With the teeth pressed down. Hold the knife and give it a push, I wonder what you found?</p>	<p>You share a story e.g. 'Dear Zoo' having shown the children videos/photos of the relevant real animals.</p> <p>A child uses props to retell/repeat the story.</p>	<p>You tell a story e.g. 'Peace at last' using props.</p> <p>A child takes on the characters and re-enacts the story.</p> <p>The character develops earlier and the narrative is still slight, e.g. "I'm Mummy cooking."</p>	<p>You tell a story e.g. 'The three Billy Goats Gruff.</p> <p>A child uses this story as a base to tell one of their own. Or the story follows the same storyline but the characters are dinosaurs and an evil monster.</p>
<p>You sing rhymes and songs with the children several times a day as you go about the day and with small groups.</p>	<p>You tell simple stories with a repetitive refrain and encourage the children to join in with the actions.</p> <p>You scribe the stories children tell you and then read them to the children.</p>	<p>You tell children stories with strong characters and encourage the children to act as the characters with you.</p> <p>You read children's stories to them and encourage them to act as the characters.</p>	<p>You tell stories and ask children to act as the characters within the stories.</p> <p>During the telling of stories, you change some of the characters so that children understand that stories can be altered.</p>

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<p>Children need to be introduced to plentiful authentic first-hand experiences.</p>	<p>You support and encourage all children to engage in a wide range of first-hand experiences.</p> <p>You provide resources so that the children can play their first-hand experiences, e.g. frying pans in role-play area after making pancakes.</p>	<p>First-hand experiences continue to be provided in order to deepen development and learning.</p> <p>Children draw upon these experiences enriching the play so that it is not narrow in content.</p>	<p>Children are supported to become experts in chosen first-hand experiences such as woodworking, cooking etc.</p> <p>The richer the experiences, skill and expertise the children develop the richer the play scenarios become as children transform and rearrange what they know imaginatively and creatively.</p>
<p>The adult intentionally teaches the child what they can do with materials.</p> <p>You might do hand over hand to show what is possible.</p> <p>You label objects, e.g. "this is clay."</p>	<p>You teach children games with rules and play them with individuals, pairs and small groups, e.g. What's the time Mr. Wolf.</p>	<p>Playing culturally appropriate games with the children is a regular feature of the curriculum.</p>	<p>You enable and support children playing games to use the rules, make new rules and change the rules whilst understanding that in play there is no harm physically to people or equipment, e.g. play fights in a world of goodies and baddies.</p>
<p>You model how to interact with another child.</p> <p>You bring in one more child to your play with a child.</p> <p>You enable a child engaged in solitary, focused play to wallow in this.</p>	<p>You model playing with another child, e.g. "Please may I have a cup of tea." "Would you like one of my biscuits (playdough)?"</p> <p>You show how to include 1-2 more children in the play.</p> <p>You encourage a child to make a pizza protecting their solitary play if they are deeply focused.</p>	<p>You model or suggest ideas that build on the child's play.</p> <p>You might simply provide a resource that you can see might help the play to develop.</p> <p>You might do this for a child engaged in solitary play, or a social play scenario.</p>	<p>You model, suggest, encourage, co-participate, observe and become a companion if appropriate/needed.</p> <p>Solitary play might involve a child talking out loud in different voices using particular play props. The play might need protection.</p> <p>The play might extend to include other children with the help of a companionable adult or children who are experienced players.</p>