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PLAY POLICY

DEFINITION OF PLAY

A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool: Presenting the Evidence by Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk and Singer, provide a definition for play that will be used for this policy.

Researchers generally discuss three types of play, although in practice, these often merge.

- Object play: the ways in which children explore objects, learn about their properties, and morph them to new functions
- Pretend play: either alone or with others, variously referred to as make-believe, fantasy, symbolic, socio-dramatic, or dramatic play, where children experiment with different social roles.
- Physical or rough-and-tumble play: which includes everything from a 6-month child's game of peek-a-boo to free play during recess (p24).

Whether play centers on object, fantasy and make-believe, or physical activity, researchers generally agree that eight features characterise ordinary play:

- Play is pleasurable and enjoyable
- Has no extrinsic goals
- Is spontaneous
- Involves active engagement
- Is generally all-engrossing
- Often has a private reality
- Is non-literal, and
- Can contain a certain element of make-believe (p26).

RATIONALE

The Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia (p29) tells us that Early Childhood is typically Kindergarten to Year 3. The Curriculum Framework (p29) states, children achieve the outcomes when their learning experiences enable them, through play and experimentation, to observe, manipulate and explore objects, materials, technologies, physical movement and other phenomena. They need frequent opportunities to make, build, design and draw both utilitarian and creative purposes in both indoor and outdoor settings.

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia 'Belonging Being & Becoming' (p9) states:

They bring their diverse experiences, perspective, expectations, knowledge and skills to their learning.

Children's learning is dynamic, complex and holistic. Physical, social, emotional, personal, spiritual, creative, cognitive and linguistic aspects of learning are all intricately interwoven and interrelated.

Play is a context for learning that:

- Allows for the expression of personality and uniqueness
- Enhances children to make connections between prior experiences and new learning
- Assists children to develop relationships and concepts
- Stimulates a sense of well-being.

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (p9) calls for children to actively construct their own understandings and contribute to other's learning. They recognise their agency, capacity to initiate and lead learning, and their rights to participate in decisions that affect them, including their learning. The framework reminds us that children's learning influences their life chances. Well-being and a strong sense of connection, optimism and engagement enable children to develop a positive attitude to learning.

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (p15) states, play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine. When children play with other children they create social groups, test out ideas, challenge each other's thinking and build new understandings. Play provides a supportive environment where children can ask questions, solve problems and engage in critical thinking. Play can expand children's thinking and enhance their desire to know and to learn. In these ways play can promote positive dispositions towards learning. Children's immersion in their play illustrates how play enables them to simply enjoy *being*.

Play is an essential part of optimising every child's development. It is so important that the United Nations High Commission has stated that it is every child's right to play.

Miller and Almon write... play does not mean 'anything goes'. It does not deteriorate into chaos. Nor is play so tightly structured by adults that children are denied the opportunity to learn through their own initiative and exploration.

The American Academy of Paediatrics issued a major clinical report concluding that 'play is essential to development... Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength. Play is important to healthy brain development. It is through play that children at a very early age engage and interact in the world around them. Play allows children to create and explore a world they can master, conquering their fears while practicing adult roles, sometimes in conjunction with other children or adult caregivers. As they master their world, play helps children develop new competencies that lead to enhanced confidence and the resiliency they will need to face future challenges. Undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills.' (Miller, M & Almon, J.)

ADULT ROLES

Play allows teachers to engage with students in interactions and social contexts that are vitally important for learning. By planning and providing challenging and worthwhile experiences that include a variety of materials, teachers promote learning and high-level thinking skills.

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (p15) states, educators use strategies such as:

- Modeling and demonstrating
- Open questioning
- Speculating
- Explaining
- Engaging in shared thinking
- Problem solving to extend children's thinking and learning.

MATERIALS

A wide range of materials are required to promote children's creativity and their ideas. Materials that are mixed together in play settings support a richer investigation that in turn helps children's oral language, literacy, numeracy, creativity and initiative.

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (p16) states, materials enhance learning when they reflect what is natural and familiar and also introduce novelty to provoke interest and more complex and increasingly abstract thinking. Environments and resources can also highlight our responsibilities for a sustainable future and promote children's understanding about their responsibility to care for the environment. They can foster hope, wonder, and knowledge about the natural world.

ASSESSMENT

Meaningful assessment is used as an indication to the teacher, student and parent as to where the child is currently at and what areas and skills and understandings need to be planned for in the future.

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (p17) states, assessment for children's learning refers to the process of gathering and analysing information as evidence about what children know, can do and understand. It is part of an ongoing cycle that includes planning, documenting and evaluating children's learning.

Assessment strategies include:

- Reflection - oral, written, pictorial
- Self-assessment
- Work samples
- Individual, small group and whole class assessment
- Teacher observation
- Anecdotal records.

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (p17) states, on-going assessment processes that include a diverse array of methods capture and validate the different pathways that children take toward achieving these outcomes. Such processes do not focus exclusively on the endpoints of children's learning; they give equal consideration to the 'distance travelled' by individual children and recognise and celebrate not only the giant leaps that children take in their learning but the small steps as well.

REFERENCES

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