

# Edit<sup>o</sup>rial

Investment in children in Budget 2016 is a positive first step towards building a fairer future for children in Ireland. Extra investment to extend childcare services, including an earlier start date for joining the free pre-school year, paid paternity leave and an increase in child benefit will be welcomed by tens of thousands of Irish families. However, these measures must be followed up with sustained investment and action for it to have a true and lasting impact on those families who have spent years struggling against poverty and inequality.

In this issue of *ChildLinks* we look at the issue of Play. Play is one of the key features in how a child learns and is an important factor in their social, emotional and cognitive development. Play situations give young children the opportunity to explore the world around them, learn new skills and build connections with others, both socially and emotionally.

Play can also be a means through which a child copes with difficult situations and emotions. While stress, change and upheaval cannot always be avoided, it can make a great difference to a child to be able to play in a way that helps them to deal with feelings such as frustration, fear, bewilderment, confusion, hurt and loss.

This issue examines children's play stories and the importance to children of being included in play with others. It also looks at play in Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland, and the need for early years educators to have an understanding and knowledge of both child development and the stages and types of children's play in order to provide appropriate play opportunities and materials.

This issue of *ChildLinks* also examines the therapeutic value of play and how play therapy can provide children with an opportunity to 'play out' their thoughts, feelings and problems in a non-directive way, and in a safe environment with a caring therapist.

Two further articles give information on research studies. One study looks at the play interactions of infants under two within the home physical environment. The study explores and identifies ways in which young children develop and learn to negotiate objects and spaces of everyday life in the home. The second study explores how fathers and mothers interact with their babies and toddlers, and how different styles of interactions are related to characteristics of the mothers, fathers, and the children themselves. It asks questions such as, Do parents systematically interact differently with boys in comparison with girls? Do fathers engage in higher levels of physical play than mothers?

SINEAD LAWTON



# Enquiring About Life Through Play

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Children's play is not a new subject. Volumes have been written about it because play has been around for a long time. Animals played long before man came along. Like animals, children are born with a natural drive to play and, despite major social changes such as the shift to urban dwelling and the

technological age, humans continue to play. Why is this? Obviously the drive to play serves some important functions in human survival, development and progress – so much so that the United Nations (1989) has declared it a basic human right.

“...nothing lights up the brain like play.” (Brown & Vaughan)

So what is play? Play defies definition because, like all human practices, it is very complex. In the first place, the experience and the perception of play is very subjective, and secondly, like all human behaviour, play is always in a state of flux. It changes as society changes. In the end, almost anything we do can be play, depending on our attitude and approach. But why this compulsion to play? Sutton Smith (1997) reviews all the theories and suggests that actually the real benefit of play for human development is that it keeps the brain alert and flexible. Everyday life can lull the brain into routine ways of thinking but play drives the imagination and creativity. Brown & Vaughan (2010) in their book 'Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul' tells us that nothing lights up the brain like play. More recently again, Howard and McInnes' (2013) research finds that when children perceive something to be play, they instinctively approach it with more energy and openness to learning. The brain kicks into very active mode. So play exercises the brain in a different way to ordinary life. For us as early childhood educators this is most important. Peter Grey (2013) explains it this way:

“Many people think of play as trivial. They are right. The most delicious of all of the paradoxes of play is that its power lies in its triviality. Because it doesn't count, we are free in play to fail, and hence we are free to learn.”

(Grey, 2013)

Generally, when we think of children at play, we think of fun and energy, spontaneity, imagination and ideas. When adults think of their own play as children, they remember these feelings too. Here is what some adults I've spoken to say:

'I remember taking all the cushions off of the couches and then forming them into a den. I'd move the cushions around and then pretend I had to escape from a jungle and I'd jump on the cushions in between the couches and pretend I was being chased, and I had to avoid the crocodile infested waters. When I was feeling adventurous, I'd try jumping from one couch to another. I loved when my Mam or Nana were cooking because it meant I could play freely in the sitting room (on wet days!) and I wouldn't be checked on as much so I could be more daring!'

'Being the youngest of eight meant that there was always someone to play with. We climbed trees, made dens in the hay barn, cowsheds and the haggard. Sharp stones made a mark as good as chalk for playing hopscotch. We chased the cows, poked the hens with sticks, ran from the mad turkey, dressed up the dogs with rags and teased our neighbour's bull. My oldest brother made a swing from tying a rope over the branch of a tree, which leaned across the river. We fought and we laughed, we formed relationships, we acquired skills but most of all we were free to play what we liked without many rules or constraints and it was GREAT!'

What do we hear in these stories? They are stories of freedom, imagination, adventure, friendship, cleverness, happiness and plenty of physical activity. Of course, adults often look back with rose-tinted glasses but that's ok. One of the most important things about play is that it allows us to build a bank of memories – an image of ourselves as people who are capable of joy, exuberance, energy and risk-taking. These are identities and memories that sustain us throughout life. It's good to know that we have these resources. Indeed it's really important, as educators, to remember our own play and what we value about it because it helps us to recommit to and provide for children's play – particularly elements such as time, space and freedom to come up with ideas, move and be adventurous. It also helps us to see the difficulties and watch out for children who need help to participate. Nothing is more important to children than to be included in play with others. To be excluded can generate long-term challenges.

It's important too to listen to one another's stories because that's how we get to know each other and share our values. Your CV may give some insight into your education and work history but it tells us very little about who you are. Humans use stories to do that. Stories give us insight into not just events, but feelings and relationships and values. It is by telling stories and by being within stories that people make sense of their world and their place within it. Bruner (1996, 2007) tells us that they are a fundamental structure of human meaning-making – the human way of dealing with complexity.

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**It's by telling stories and by being within stories that people make sense of their world and their place within it.** Bruner (1996, 2007)

Gussin Paley (2009) tells us:

**An important component of free play is its physical expression. These are skills we have in common with all mammals; children crawl, run, climb, jump, push and pull, pounce and pummel, and hug and squeeze. Only human children, however, add narration. The most characteristically human skill of all is imaginative role playing in the context of storytelling and the dramatization of ideas and imagery.**

That's what children do in play. They construct stories – sometimes very short stories – sometimes longer stories. I'm sure you remember the games of 'house' or 'robbers' or 'school' and how these games grew more complex and you wanted to play them over and over again. All children bring the stories of their experiences to their play and they reconstruct them or they co-construct stories with others that are a generalised combination of all their experiences.

Children's play stories can be very short, even wordless. I've watched toddlers pick up a shopping bag and wave 'Bye Bye'. In this two-word story children recall the experience of leaving, of being left, of going shopping. They smile and toddle off – they tell us that this is an experience of short-term parting – one that they can deal with – one that they understand.

The following is a story that's based on action. Let's think about the humanising processes that are going on here – processes that take time and repetition – processes that we neglect at our peril.

Hugh is standing behind a small chair and is scrunching down and standing back up as if playing peek-a-boo. He's laughing to himself. This catches Clara's attention. Clara crawls over and pulls up to stand at the front of the chair. She's laughing back at Hugh. Hugh peeks out from behind the chair and she laughs again. Hugh repeats this a few times and both children are highly amused. Hugh then stumbles slightly and Clara giggles and Hugh says 'Aw, Oh' while making a shocked face. Clara's face changes to shock.

Play is always a double opportunity space for children (Hamo & Blum Kulka, 2007) – with opportunities to learn and develop in the micro interaction space and in the macro space of meaning making and relationships etc. As we can see in this story, the spaces impact on one another. The episode begins with Hugh playing alone – laughing to himself and recalling a play episode he's had many times at home, perhaps. We need to put ourselves in his shoes. He's wallowing in the movement and in the view of the world he gets as he crouches and rises. Then Clara is attracted by Hugh's reactions and is eager to be part of it. She tunes into Hugh's idea and joins in his laughter. Clara is able to change from laughter to shock as she empathises with Hugh's fright. In the micro interaction space they connect and share, in the macro space they share an understanding of disappearance and reappearance and the emotions of joy and shock.

The new buzz theme in education research is social and emotional competence. The research (Jones et al, 2015; Feinstein, 2003) is telling us that they are greater indicators of long-term success than any academic skills. Here we see children as they develop social and emotional skills through play – the ability to play together, regulate their responses, show empathy and develop friendship – all in the process of development through play. We see that they are alert to one another's cues, ready to engage and relate and extremely responsive. And they want to do it over and over again – because it's nature's curriculum.

Here's another story – this time involving older children. There are two stories developing and then they connect. We can see in this episode that their meanings about gender roles are being exercised – who can be beautiful princesses, who can be scared, who has the power etc. – meanings that are imported from the real world and embedded here in role play.

Three boys, Ashley, Tristan and Alby are playing around a big cardboard box that is a pretend bus. They have dinosaurs. Maia, Katie and Crista are looking on through the dressing-up clothes. Maia says 'Let's be princesses!' 'Yeah!' the others say. They each put on a princess dress and head towards the big bus.

The princesses stand huddled together, pretending to be scared. Ashley spots them. 'Quick. Let's roar at

them!' The boys all jump up with their dinosaurs and run towards the girls. 'Roar! Roar! Let's get them!' They chase each other around, dodging in between the tables. The girls hide under a table. They declare it to be their castle and dinosaurs can't come in. The boys return to the bus. Later the girls approach the bus again, looking for another chase.

Play with babies as young as three months old often involves building tension and anticipation. Games such as 'Round and round the garden' or 'Gee-up a horsey' do this. Older children do the same thing in what Corsaro (2003) calls 'approach-avoidance' play. He tells us that children often use these themes so that the play has an element of predictability about it. The children know what to expect. There are usually four elements – building up fear, then the chase, followed by the safety of the den and finally the desire to do it again. Here we see it in action. This is a form of play that crosses generations and continents. Why is it so prevalent? This play provides children with an opportunity to experience and manage the tension – to 'feel the fear and do it anyway' (Jeffers, 1988). What a wonderful skill to have for life! Children also develop this skill through risk-taking as they climb, jump and swing. In Sandseter's research (2006) children described loving the 'scaryfunny' feeling they get.

This next story from another educator has an element of approach-avoidance but is also an exercise in imagination. There is an interesting twist at the end.

A group of 5/6 children come running up to me screaming and laughing. I kneel and ask what happened. They talk about the dragon living behind the shed. We go to have a look and once again they all run away, screaming. Rob suggests they get swords and shields to fight the dragon. They come back with brushes, spades, buckets and bin lids. When any child declares that the dragon is coming, they all scream and run for cover. Eventually they decide that the dragon is too powerful and they have to try another way.

Katie puts her sword down and bravely goes behind the shed, much to the shock and resistance of the

others. She returns moments later explaining that 'it's a mammy dragon' protecting her 'baby dragons'. Everything changes. The children decide to keep the dragon as a pet. They name her 'Arnold the Dragon' and have great fun taking turns to fly around with her. Once inside, the children draw pictures of Arnold and even go to the gate at home-time to say goodbye.

Alison Gopnik (2014) tells us that 'from the perspective of human evolution, our great capacity is not just that we learn about the world. The thing that really makes us distinctive is that we can imagine other ways that the world could be'. So the ability to imagine is a distinguishing feature of human beings. We can see this all around us. Someone suggests 'Wouldn't it be great if...' and then they think about how to make it happen. This ability to imagine is what makes the world change. Here the children imagine there's a dragon and, in pretend mode, they all buy into the idea. This is a meta-level of intersubjectivity – they share the intention to pretend and to hold the idea of a dragon. Katie's idea is interesting and has a profound impact on the children's play and attitude. Gussin Paley (2009) tells us that play is like theatre – full of stories about someone who is lost and then found, is unloved and then loved, is in danger and then saved. Katie introduces this element. She changes the perspective and demonstrates that when we understand and see things from a different perspective, everything changes. The fierce dragon becomes an animal in need. The children exchange aggression for loving care. What a profound life lesson! As educators, this might be a lesson worth attending to. We could find ways of deepening and extending it.

It takes time for children to move from personal experience to more generalised rules about how the world works. As children bring their own personal experiences to shared play episodes, they co-construct stories – stories that no longer belong to any one child – but rather embrace the multiple voices that make them – as happens in this story below.

Annie and Emily are playing with blankets and a mat, while Aoife looks on. Annie says to Emily 'You are very sick, lie down'. Emily lies down. Annie says 'Here's a blanket, keep you nice and warm'. Annie continues

**...play provides children with an opportunity to experience and manage the tension – to 'feel the fear and do it anyway'. (Jeffers, 1988)**

'We need to drive to the doctor'. She takes a sitting position in front of Emily lying on the mat and pretends to put on a seat belt. Annie says 'I'm driving' as she turns the pretend key and changes gears. Her hands are out in front as if holding onto a steering wheel. She then announces 'We're here'.

Emily rises from the mat, pretending to be sick and upset and whines 'I want my Mammy'. Annie says 'I'm here pet, I'm your Mammy'. Emily then says 'I want Daddy'. Annie replies, 'No silly, you have a Mammy and a Momma'. Aoife who is observing this play episode says 'But I have a Mammy and Daddy'. Annie asks 'Do you want to be the Mammy?' Aoife joins the play.

Children don't vote in referenda or sit and discuss major social issues – they participate in play where these issues regularly arise. In play, children co-construct ideas about such issues as who goes to work, who has power, where people live and in this case what constitutes a family. Here, Annie introduces a new phenomenon to her two co-players – they stop momentarily to reflect on it and then they get on with it because they want to play. In this way, the world now becomes a place where some people have a Mammy and Daddy while others have a Mammy and Momma, as children stretch themselves to engage with others' experiences. The world is a big and strange place when you're a child (or an

adult) and play is a wonderful tool for getting to know it in an easy and complex way – but it takes time and repetition and multiple scenarios and roles.

We can see throughout these play episodes that there are human processes in development that help children to become more knowledgeable and capable participants in community. These are processes that are more notable when they are missing. Then they become significant problems. We can see in these play episodes too that children are learning to think and explore and communicate. We could tell many play stories that clearly exemplify children's engagement in literacy and numeracy and science as they play. Here, however, I want to make a case for the child's right to be and to enquire about the things that interest them. These young children are deeply involved in the making of their selves and they need time to do it before they begin the academic journey through school. Rogers (1980) tells us that each and every child wants to be the best that they can be. What they learn is deeply embedded in their being and in their sense of identity and belonging and, mostly unconsciously, they will draw on it for the rest of their lives. Like us adults they are enquiring about life: Who am I? What can I do? How do I relate to these others around me? How does it work? How can I be useful and valued? Try looking at play with this lens. Try listening to children's play stories.

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# SÍOLTA AND SUPPORTING PLAY

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

The importance of play in a child's life has been well documented. It is one of the key features in how a child learns and develops and, in many ways, it is how they approach life. Through play, children explore the world around them, and develop and practise skills. Play can also be a means through

which a child copes with difficult situations and emotions.

*'Play at its best in education situations, provides not only a real medium for learning but enables discerning and knowledgeable adults to learn about children and their needs.'*

(Moyles, 1989)

According to the Oxford English Dictionary ([www.oxforddictionary.com](http://www.oxforddictionary.com)), 'Play is an activity engaged in for enjoyment and recreation especially by children.' Play is not just recreational and enjoyable for children, it also provides them with the tools to understand how the world works. Every time a child plays, they learn. By sharing and taking turns, negotiating obstacles, exercising imaginations and interacting with others, children develop the skills and experience that will, in turn, lead to enhanced confidence and resilience.

The importance of play is acknowledged in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Article 31 recognises the significance of play as a specific right in addition to and distinct from the child's right to recreation and leisure.

Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009), recognises that young children learn and develop by doing things, by playing and having hands-on meaningful experiences. Aistear recognises that play is not a break from the curriculum and that providing for quality play is one of the best ways to implement the curriculum.

### **SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S PLAY**

It is important for adults to respond meaningfully to a child's play. In an early years setting, it is necessary for the educators to have an understanding and knowledge of both child development and the stages and types of children's play in order to provide appropriate play opportunities and materials. For early years educators to be able to support children, they need to continuously regularly refer back to recognised research and theorists in child development as well as Aistear and Siolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education in Ireland.

### **PLAY IN SÍOLTA**

In Siolta, the recognition of play is identified as one of its guiding principles and play is also considered important and significant enough to be included specifically as one of the 16 Standards for quality in early childhood education. Standard 6: Play comprises of seven components, which break the Standard down into 'bite-sized items' for the educator to consider. Play does not happen in isolation of other factors. The Siolta Standards on Environments, Interactions and Transitions show how play is truly supported by the sensitive interactions of staff, in an environment that is organised in such a way that children can easily and confidently explore. The way in which transitions are organised within the daily routine of an early years setting can help extend play opportunities for children.

### **Time Spent on Play**

In Siolta Standard 6, Component 6.1 asks the educator to consider how much time the child spends engaged in play and exploration, and whether play opportunities are maximised within the daily routine. We often forget that even the most mundane of 'jobs' can be made more fun and enjoyable by the adult, for example, clear-up, putting on coats, lunch/snack time, nappy changing.

Some examples of this during clear up time would be singing songs or using an egg timer to have playful 'races'. Modelling by adults who get down on the floor to clear up also helps children to understand what they would like the children to do. Playing a game such as Simple Simon when putting on coats – Simon Says put your arm in your sleeve – makes this fun for children. Lunch time can be a team event with many children having a job to do rather than just one helper, small children can put bibs on each other and children can collect their own lunches from the adult rather than sitting waiting for lunch. Adults sensitive to children's needs understand that young children are unable and cannot be expected to wait for long periods of time for transitions to take place. So a prop box with songs or memory games etc. for adults to dip into to use at these times can support children in changing routines.

Different types of play are identified in the 'Think About' section of this Siolta component (6.1) and the educator is asked to consider what proportion of the day is given over to each. In this component, as in others, it is important to reflect on why play matters and what it means to the child.

### **Accessible Play Materials**

In the next component of Standard 6, Component 6.2, the educator is asked to consider if the materials and equipment are freely available and accessible to the child. Having play materials that are accessible to the child means that they can explore their environment more freely, which means that their play can become more imaginative and creative. Albert Einstein said, 'Imagination is more important than knowledge'. If children are to become independent learners they must recognise that they can use space and resources for themselves, therefore each learning area and activity in the setting needs to have plenty of equipment and materials for the child to use freely. This includes paint materials, sand and water.

### **Play as Learning**

The third component in the Play Standard (6.3) focuses on the child's stage of development and whether the play and exploration opportunities provided support the child's transition

to new learning and development. For a child to be open to new learning they need to develop a sense of mastery and success. It is the adult's role to assess this and, through a daily plan and curriculum, to introduce challenges that are appropriate to the child's developmental needs and abilities. Play provides a lens into children's minds, revealing meaning and patterns not evident in a formal context. By observing a child, the educator can assess how to extend a child's learning to help make it as meaningful as possible for them. For example, when observing a preschool child who is showing an interest in climbing trees, an adult may ask them whether they want support in learning this skill. If the child agrees, this may take the form of standing near them as they start to climb up, which may make the child feel more comfortable about how high they can go, or providing information about what the child is doing. Understanding how motivated the child is to climb the tree, the adult may support them by saying 'That branch looks sturdy, you could put your foot there' or 'What branch will you hold on to with your hand while you move your foot over there?' This guidance can be provided if an adult sees that the child wants this support.

### Plenty of Play Materials

Siolta Standard 6, Component 6.4 is closely linked to Component 6.2 in that it asks the educator if there is plenty of equipment for the child to access. Young children cannot be expected to wait to take turns or share if there is an insufficient amount of the materials and equipment that children like to play with. The concepts of sharing and taking turns are difficult ones for young children to grasp and it takes time for them to develop an understanding of these. Children who are fully engaged in play should not be abruptly asked to end their turn as they may be totally engrossed in it and importantly making new meaning about their learning. Transitions (Siolta Standard 13) need to be planned for and children provided with support to adjust to changes such as settling in, routine changes within the day and going home time (see Barnardos 2012 publication *What's New? Supporting Children through Transitions in their Early Years*).

Materials and equipment on offer need to reflect the familiar to children but also give them challenges by providing them with objects and experiences that they previously had no knowledge of, for example, painting or other textural activities or objects that may be common place in some homes but not in others.

When children are asked where is their favourite place to play, many will say 'outside'. The same thought and planning needs to go into the outdoor environment as the indoor.

Equipment needs to be open ended, that is allow children to determine for themselves what to do with them and how to do it, varied and plentiful. Large, expensive equipment is not always necessary. What is important is that children have the opportunity to explore, create, hide, crawl, jump, be high, run, dig etc. Resources and equipment can be recycled from the environment and the community (this is where making connections with businesses in the community can help).

### Creativity and Exploration

The next component of Standard 6, Component 6.5 asks what play opportunities provided support new meaning, creativity and exploration. The 'Think Abouts' in this component ask the educator to think how open-ended play is used in their practice and how, as the adult, they extend the child's learning. The play equipment does not need to be sophisticated, in fact the simpler the play object is, the more versatile it can be.

Open-ended play equipment supports the child to develop a sense of an object having endless possibilities, for example, a wooden block can be a phone, a camera or a bulldozer, and children can use it to build endless creations. One piece of equipment can be used in different contexts and give different meaning to the child. What rich play opportunities are open to a child when they are provided with hoses from hoovers, boxes, pieces of differently shaped and textured materials to explore and use to make their own worlds. Simon Nicholson, an architect of the 1970s, proposed the theory of loose parts (see [www.readingplay.co.uk](http://www.readingplay.co.uk)). He began to influence those who were designing playgrounds but his ideas can be as easily transposed to indoor as well as outdoor. Loose parts that can be manipulated, moved around, put together and pulled apart again provide more opportunity for children to use and adapt as they choose. Examples of loose parts would be balls, guttering, varied textured cloth materials, sand, gravel, pallets, leaves, seeds, etc.

### Interactions and Play

Standard 6 Component 6.6 asks the educator to focus on their role in the child's play and to consider how the child interacts with other children. French (2007) stated that 'Adults need to plan for play and the specific interactions required to appropriately scaffold children's learning'. It is important that adults do not become 'big children' in the child's game, for example, joining a child's play and taking the play off in another direction as they get carried away with their own ideas about play. For example, in the home corner the child has the opportunity to carry out tasks and roles that they

may see demonstrated at home. They do not require direction which may stymy their learning but they require an adult nearby who is observing. The adult can join as a play partner if the child wants it, to help them enact their scenarios. They can provide added props or an idea if the child seems unsure what to do next. This idea may be accepted or not and adults need to respect the children’s rules and remain connected to

the play. The challenge for the adult is to enter the play as a co-participant rather than to dominate the play. The adult who sensitively follows the lead of the child in play and helps to extend play ideas with new thoughts or materials is providing the child with the opportunity to develop more complex ideas. The table below from Aistear highlights this and offers guidance for the educator in relation to different age groups.

**Table 10: The adult’s changing role in play during early childhood**

<b>Babies</b> (birth to 18 months)	<b>Toddlers</b> (12 months to 3 years)	<b>Young children</b> (2½ to 6 years)
<p>The adult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ provides a secure base from which babies can play and explore inside and outside</li> <li>■ provides safe, interesting objects and materials for babies to play with</li> <li>■ introduces babies to other people and places</li> <li>■ reads and responds to babies’ body language</li> <li>■ carries out care-giving routines, such as feeding and changing in a playful manner</li> <li>■ talks to, names and describes things for babies</li> <li>■ gives support to babies to try new things and also to practise and repeat activities</li> <li>■ affirms babies’ actions, feelings and behaviours.</li> </ul>	<p>The adult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ continues to provide a secure base for toddlers to play and explore inside and outside</li> <li>■ provides opportunities for toddlers to take risks, persevere, move, manipulate, create, pretend, and transport materials</li> <li>■ changes the environment and the opportunities it offers as toddlers grow (This includes equipment and materials and also changes in levels such as ramps, slopes, steps, and curves.)</li> <li>■ helps toddlers to experience a variety of types of play</li> <li>■ provides opportunities for toddlers to play in pairs and small groups</li> <li>■ is actively involved in playful, adventurous interactions with toddlers, for example active, physical play with them on the floor.</li> </ul>	<p>The adult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ continues to provide a secure base and to encourage active exploration inside and outside</li> <li>■ provides opportunities for young children to take part in a range of play activities, especially pretend play</li> <li>■ provides supports for play, such as a range of materials and equipment and adequate space, time and choice</li> <li>■ extends and changes the play props regularly, so that different scenarios can be created that reflect children’s changing interests and experiences</li> <li>■ provides materials to create dens and hidey holes</li> <li>■ provides direct support such as showing the children ways to join in the play of others, setting up a play scenario, discussing and describing the scenario before, during or after play, supporting children in handling emotions and conflict situations, and helping children make the transition in and out of role</li> <li>■ plays with children, exercising good judgement so that adult involvement does not threaten child autonomy or harm the ‘flow’ of the play</li> </ul>
<p>Birth → 1 → 2 → 3 → 4 → 5 → 6 years</p>		

The term Emergent Curriculum is used to describe how valuable play comes from children's own interests and experiences and is a helpful learning experience. While routine is important for children to feel comfortable and secure, the routines and activities cannot be adult driven or controlled all of the time. Component 6.6 also raises the issue of children interacting with each other and how, at times, some children will need support in doing so.

**For most children, play begins from birth. For some children, their early development and experiences may have compromised their capacities, knowledge and skills to be players. For these children, educators support [their] development as a player using intentional teaching strategies to explicitly teach children the skills they need to be a successful player.**

(Commonwealth of Australia, 2010)

Children are born as social beings whose social competence is enhanced through being and playing with others. Some children, however, struggle to participate fully with other children and the educator, therefore, needs to devise supportive strategies for dealing with this. The educator also needs to understand the child's behaviour and how at times some children choose to play alone for short periods and this must be respected. Children who do not know how to naturally join in with other children need supportive strategies implemented by adults. For example, supporting a child to ask the question 'Can I play' may very easily help children realise that smiling and asking ensures that others know that they wish to join in. Bringing a toy to the game can help in showing that children wish to participate. Finding someone else to play with if they are told 'no' is also an important lesson to learn. Small group times can also be the place to help to make children aware of how to be able to engage with play. Adults who model this cooperative behaviour with children can support them in entering play.

### Planning for Play

The last of Standard 6 Play, Component 6.7, focuses on planning and preparation of play within the context of the curriculum/daily plan. Play should not be incidental but should be devised in conjunction with planning for the curriculum/programme and adapted to meet the changing learning and development requirements of the individual child and the group as a whole. The educator needs to be aware of the necessity of observing children both individually and in groups while they are engaged in play. This will assist the adult in identifying the child's developmental needs and making plans for providing enriching activities. Observations aid the educator in identifying areas of interest for the child and the child's individual or particular learning and development needs, thus enabling the adult to support and scaffold future play experiences for the child.

### CONCLUSION

The Siolta Standard on Play supports educators in thinking about what they can and need to provide to foster 'developmentally appropriate, challenging, diverse, creative and enriching experiences' (Siolta Standard 2) and play opportunities to for children. The 'Think Abouts' provide educators with the opportunity to consider the practice that they implement with regard to that particular component. There is a research digest for each standard and they can be found on [www.siolta.ie](http://www.siolta.ie). These research digests provide information on what research says about good practice in the particular standard.

For more information see [www.siolta.ie](http://www.siolta.ie)

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# the therapeutic value of play in everyday practice in a preschool

MARIE WILLOUGHBY, Regional Development Worker and Síolta Mentor, Barnardos, and JACQUELINE O'CONNELL, Room to Bloom Montessori

In my role as Siolta Mentor, I sometimes have the opportunity to hear about some particularly high quality practice in early childhood care and education settings. What follows this introduction is an account, written by one of the educators involved, of one such example of practice. It reflects a number of areas of quality practice included in Siolta, the National Framework for Quality Early Childhood Education, including Parents and Families, Transitions, Interactions, Communication, Curriculum, Planning and Evaluation and Play. It highlights in particular the way in which play can be therapeutic in everyday practice in a preschool, when facilitated by educators who have a great appreciation of its value.

In the preface of her classic book *Play Therapy* (1989), Virginia Axline describes what a play therapy context can provide for a child. In this context Axline says a child:

“...can build himself a mountain and climb safely to the top and cry out for all the world to hear “I can build me a mountain or I can flatten it out. In here I am BIG!”

In a context where children’s play is highly valued, young children can have this opportunity to sometimes feel “big” in comparison to the “real” world where they are very often totally powerless and have to cope with all kinds of emotional and physical upheaval without having any choices.

While stress, change and upheaval cannot always be avoided, it can make a great difference to a child to be able to play in a way that helps them to deal with feelings such as frustration, fear, bewilderment, confusion, hurt and loss. By being able to play out feelings, a child can, as Axline says, bring the feelings to the surface, get them out in the open, face them and learn to control them or abandon them.

Early childhood educators can facilitate children to play in a way that is therapeutic, that helps young children to cope with the sometimes overwhelming feelings that they experience in the course of their lives. Educators can replicate aspects of a play therapy room where a child is in command of the situation; where they can test their own ideas, can express themselves, play with toys in their own way, make their own decisions; where the child is unhurried; where they can play out stressful events through storytelling, sand play, art, music, through small world play or role play; where the adults are sensitive to what the child is feeling and expressing through their behaviour and their play; where there is no probing; where adults respect a child’s ability to solve their own

problems if given the opportunity and where understanding and acceptance of feelings is conveyed by the adults. This helps children to feel secure, to learn to understand themselves a little better and to solve problems for themselves.

“An acceptance of the child’s ability to be a thinking, independent, constructive human being is vital.”

(Axline, 1989)

For high quality play in a preschool setting, children need active support from adults who:

- Are well informed about child development
- Are respectful of and interested in children
- Are knowledgeable about and value the importance of play and the powerful contribution it makes to children’s wellbeing, development and learning
- Understand the importance of relationships with other children and with adults
- Recognise learning contexts that are real and meaningful to the child
- Take account of children’s abilities, backgrounds, interests and experiences, and build on these

The piece of play-based work carried out in Room to Bloom Montessori by Jacqueline O’Connell and Manpreet Saini, two educators with the above competencies, and described below by Jacqueline, involved a combination of individual and group approaches. The intervention worked on a number of levels:

- First there was trust and openness on the part of parents in sharing what was happening at home for their little girl, in her best interests, with the educators at preschool, who were available to listen.  
(Siolta Standard 3 Parents and Families, Siolta Standard 13 Transitions)
- There was a desire on the part of the educators to understand and to provide a sensitive, thoughtful and considered response to the parents’ concerns.  
(Siolta Standard 12 Communication and Siolta Standard 5 Interactions)
- Having observed closely and identified a plan, the little girl was then supported to express herself in a facilitated and sensitive way at an individual level before bringing her issue to the rest of her group. In this way it was possible for her to express her experience in words and actions in the group, having first experienced acceptance of her feelings at an individual level.  
(Siolta Standard 1 Rights of the Child, Siolta Standard 5 Interactions, Siolta Standard 7 Curriculum, Siolta Standard 8 Planning and Evaluation)

- Bringing the issue to the whole group helped this little girl to find acceptance, to bring her experience to a place where she could feel 'big' rather than small, to be supported by her peers and to find her place and her sense of identity and belonging in the new group. (Siolta Standard 1 Rights of the Child, Siolta Standard 14 Identity and Belonging)

This example of quality practice also illustrates how all four themes of Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework can be incorporated into planning a considered, sensitive and caring response to a child's need for support, using play as the medium – Identity and Belonging; Communicating; Exploring and Thinking and in particular in this case Wellbeing.

### **Room to Bloom Montessori, Moyglass, Fethard, Co. Tipperary**

We have a little girl attending our service who had moved from England to live permanently in Ireland. She began the year in September with all the other children and seemed to be settling into her new life well. Then one day the parent approached me at pick-up time to ask if we had noticed any change in her daughter's behaviour at Montessori, as they were having a lot of trouble with her behaviour at home and she was wetting the bed. We hadn't noticed any change in class but I assured Mum that we would observe her daughter closely and would come back to her.

On closer observation, the first thing we noticed was that the little girl was shouting all the time. We could hear her way above all the other children and would have to remind her several times throughout the day to lower her voice, that we and the other children were beside her and could hear very clearly. The other thing we observed was that she seemed to be lost in thought for ages at a time, as though she was gone to another place in her head.

A day or two later we were in the middle of circle time when the little girl came up to me and it was like a dam opening, it all spilled out of her in the one breath. She said 'I used to live in England, in a white house with a blue door, my friend was Freya and we used to play together. I used to go to a place called Preschool and all my other friends were there too.' I asked her if she missed Freya and she said she did and that Freya was coming to visit her soon in Ireland. I spoke to the girl's mother when she came to pick her daughter up and I told her what had

happened. She said she had been talking a lot about her old home in England and was looking to go home. I realised then that the little girl was grieving. I told the mother that I would do some research to see how best we could help her in this process.

Over the weekend I went online and found an idea of having a box for her to put things into it that she associated with her old life in England, such as pictures of her friends, pictures of her family living in their old home or anything that she felt should go into it. She could then go to this box if she was feeling sad and look at the pictures and then talk to her parents about how she was feeling. I realised that that was the reason she was shouting, she wanted to be heard, to be listened to and not to be told that this was their new home and new life and to get on with it. I happened to have a lovely pink flowery box that I used to hold birthday cards in and I felt this would be a lovely gift to her to use for her memories.

I also went to Eason's Bookstore to see if I could find a book that we could read in class that would explain the feelings that we can feel when we move home and relocate to a new area, with new schools and friends. I was extremely lucky to come across an ideal little book that did just that called *My New Home* by Marta Altes.

On Monday we planned that we would read the book during circle time but during free play time I noticed that the little girl was sitting in a world of her own. I decided that I would read the book to her then on her own and see what would happen. I approached her and asked if she would like me to read her a story and she agreed. She listened attentively as I read and when I was finished she explained that that was just like her. She said she was like the little squirrel in the story. She had moved house to a new school and had new friends but she missed her other friends too. I then showed her the box I had for her and I explained to her that she could put pictures of her other home and friends or whatever she wanted into this box and that she could look at them whenever she wanted. She was completely excited about the box and kept asking was it hers to keep, and could she take it home with her. She returned to preschool the following day with the box to show us what she had put into it. She had a picture of her old house and one of her friend in the box. Her mother said she was all excited about the box and that it was just for her.



Manpreet and I then organised that we would set up the room using the doll's house with all the furniture in it on one table. We put the small world people in the house, in their beds. We then put a large truck belonging to the farm area on the other end of the table and this was to be remover's truck. We had two men driving that. Then on the other table we put another wooden house that we had but this had no furniture or people in it. When the children were all gathered around the table, I read them the story of the squirrel moving house. The little girl said she was like the squirrel, that she used to live in England and now she had moved to Ireland. All the other children were listening to her. After we finished the story we explained that the people living in the doll's house were moving home and we were to help them. The children began to take the furniture out of the house to put it in the truck. One of the children was taking the stairs when we asked the little girl if we could take the stairs. She said 'No, you can only take things like beds, tables and chairs.' One of the other little girls in the group said we would use the steps to get the furniture into the truck. When all the furniture was out of the house and in the truck we appointed one of the boys to drive the truck to the 'new' home on the other table. The children were very excited at this and the little girl was saying 'this house is in

Ireland'. When the truck arrived at the next table the children began unloading the truck and putting the furniture and the people into the new house. They continued playing with the houses, people and truck for some time afterwards.

The following morning when the little girl came to school she went straight to the new house and played with it with her friends.

We explained what we had carried out in the class to the mother and father of the little girl to explain to them that she was grieving the loss of her old home and all that came with it. She needed to be able to express how she was feeling and to process those feelings in a safe and healthy way. Above all, she needed to be listened to.

The parents really appreciated what we had done to help their little girl and said they saw a huge change in her behaviour almost immediately. I gave the parents a loan of the book to read to their little girl and her older sibling as a way of allowing the children the opportunity to say how they are feeling and for the family to discuss things they all might miss about their old home but also what things they like about their new one.



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## FURTHER READING

- *Play Therapy* by Virginia M. Axline, first published in 1947 by Churchill Livingstone and reprinted in 1989 by Longman. Today's play therapy is based on principles developed by Virginia Axline.
- *Windows to Our Children* by Violet Oaklander, PhD, first published in 1978. A 35th anniversary edition of this groundbreaking book was published recently.
- *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* by Bruno Bettelheim. Another classic first published 1978 and reprinted many times since then. Bettelheim reveals how fairy tales, which have been an integral part of childhood for hundreds of years, help children to cope with their emotions.



# **An affordance perspective on infant play in home settings: A 'just-right environment'**

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## INTRODUCTION

Children learn to be in the world through *doing*: typically in the form of play, incorporating social connection and interactions. However, not all play is social and not all learning involves people: the physical environment is an essential element that is often taken for granted and under-valued in this whole process. The physical environment is more than just a setting for social play – it also influences play significantly and, therefore, needs to be considered as a core factor in determining good practice in play provision. Few studies have focused on the role of the physical environment in influencing play and learning in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings and even fewer in home settings.

Learning environments have been identified as priority for researching infants' lives from the National Children's Strategy and from the knowledge that environments have been a relatively under-explored aspect in early childhood research (CECDE, 2007). Curricular and quality frameworks such as Aistear (NCCA, 2009) and Siolta (CECDE, 2006) have been developed for the early childhood sector. However, while these are intended to target early childhood learning, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent these guidelines can influence home settings. Furthermore, although home learning environments have been the focus of UK research (e.g. Melhuish, 2010; Melhuish, Phan, Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2008) this is an emergent area of concern in Ireland.

Home settings in early childhood contexts include the child's own home, and other homes where the child may be minded. In Ireland's national longitudinal study *Growing Up in Ireland*, statistics show that 73% of families organise informal childcare for their preschool-aged children with relatives or non-relatives in their homes, rather than in centre-based settings (McGinnity, Murray & McNally, 2013). Home settings, consequently, are the primary context for early childhood learning and of significant importance for research.

In 2007, the Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education (CECDE) Ireland issued a national call for research to be conducted on learning environments of children in early childhood. It was through this opportunity that my own research journey began. My interest in home settings has come from my background as a children's occupational therapist. When children fail to thrive, and have struggles to develop, the occupational therapist's job is to determine the effects on their well-being and development, and the impact on their daily lives. Through evaluating self-regulation, sensory, motor and perceptual development, assessing activity and participation, and task-environment analysis, occupation therapists

work to maximise the fit between the infant and the environment to best support learning and development. This requires a close connection with the infant's family and home setting to determine most accurately, the range and choices of tasks within the environment. For example, for families living in a first-floor apartment with no garden, the potential for the child to learn to ride a bike may be more limited than a family living in a rural setting with a lot of open space around the house. In addition, knowing about the family matters – it is through the shared family environment that children are enabled to play and learn. This includes family routines, habits, values, attitudes and play activities and preferences. Knowing about the home setting is therefore a vital consideration for effective practice.

## INTRODUCING THE STUDY

This paper originates from a larger PhD study which described play interactions of infants under two within the home physical environment (Lynch, 2012). The purpose of the study was to address the lack of research into **early play development** in relation to **Irish home environments** of young children. The study explored and identified ways in which young children develop and learn to negotiate **objects and spaces** of everyday life in the home. The study aimed to explore the following:

- What is the nature of the home social/cultural environment?
- What is the nature of play in the home environment?
- What is the nature of the child's interactions with the physical home environment over time?
- What are the attributes/affordances of the physical environments that influence this developmental progression?
- What are the characteristics of the transactional process between child and environment?

## STUDY DESIGN

A qualitative, ethnographic longitudinal design was used to allow in-depth exploration of particular aspects of our social and physical lives (Charmaz, 2006; Timmermans & Tavory, 2010). The study took place in five family homes over a twelve-month period (September 2009 to October 2010) to take into account the changing nature of home settings over time and across seasons.

## Participants

The sample of participants was recruited through local groups such as the Cork Childcare Committee, the National Childbirth Trust, acquaintances and community groups. Five families consented to take part in the study from five different locations in the Munster area: living in both rural and urban settings and consisting of families of one, two and three children (Table 1).

**Table 1: Introduction to infants and their families** *Pseudonyms are used to protect confidentiality*

Infant and age at onset of study	Family: social setting	Home: physical setting
Karen: newborn	Maria – mum Dinny – dad Erin – sister, aged 6 Tadgh – brother, age 3	West Cork Rural Dormer home
Sarah: newborn	Vicky – mum Michéal – dad Michael – brother, age 2½	Kerry Suburbs – housing estate Small town Semi-detached home
Joe: 1 year old	Aisling – mum Sean – dad Martin – brother, age 3	Cork Suburbs – housing estate Small town Detached home
Amy: 1 year old	Aileen – mum Muiris – dad	Kerry Rural Two-storey, detached home
Hannah: 1 year old	Clare – mum Kevin – dad Liam – brother, born 9 months into the study Naoise and Emily – cousins	Cork Urban – along a busy city road Terraced home

### Data generation

Participant observation was the primary method of data generation, which included the use of video, observation and interview methods. For this study, the home environment included the indoor and outdoor physical spaces, material environment such as toys or objects and the social environment such as the family. For the first meeting with the child and mother, demographic information was gathered along with a history of the infant's development to date and some environmental information. Each monthly visit lasted from one to two hours, with observations of play being from ten minutes to one hour in length, depending on the wakefulness or engagement of the infant.

### Data analysis

In this study, play events were analysed in relation to how the infant played with spaces and objects in the environment, rather than simply naming play items and frequency of use. Affordance theory guided the analysis of play events as it considers how individuals develop an understanding of the world based on the functional use of spaces and objects (Gibson, 1977). Affordances, or enablers, are intrinsic to the person-environment

relationship as they are based on the person's ability to perceive the potential affordance in the environment (e.g. a step can be a place to sit and play for an infant compared to a way to go upstairs for the adult).

### Findings

Play interactions were mapped from one month to two years through exploration of child-environment relationships. Findings illuminated the infant-environment relationship and identified that infants need spaces that can be described as **personal**, **social**, for **discovery** and for **mastery** in contrast to pre-schoolers who looked for spaces that were private, social or imaginary (Clark, 2007).

Completing the analysis through the lens of the physical environment resulted in the development of the transactional model (see Figure 1 on the following page). This emerged through the realisation that the infant-environment relationship is intertwined, each influencing the other: the physical environment is shaped by the social and vice-versa and it is through this interplay or transaction that the child moves and learns in the world.

**Figure 1: Transactional model of ecological occupational processes (Lynch, 2012)**



### Infant play

Transaction between the child-physical-social environments resulted in a form of play depicted in the study as infant play. In the literature, four key categories have been identified that relate specifically to infant play: sensorimotor play (Piaget, 1962), object play (Belsky & Most, 1981; Fenson, Kagan, Kearsley & Zelazo, 1976), exploratory play (Belsky & Most, 1981) and physical activity play (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). Interestingly, although social play in children has been researched (e.g. Parten, 1932; Rubin et al, 1978), studies have typically focused on children over two years rather than on infants. Furthermore, in infants, researchers have concentrated on areas such as intersubjectivity and early communication (e.g. Trevarthen, 1998). In this study, the infants engaged in these expected forms of play, including social play. Early social play typically happened during interactions between the infant and family members who provided social affordances and scaffolded social play events. Due to the young age of these infants, socio-dramatic or pretend play was not yet evident but by age 2 had begun to emerge. The study found that infants play according to the perceived and actualised affordances in their environments – utilising varied spaces and places for play. This resulted in the ability to map play in relation to the body-space relationship:

- Phase 1: Being in space: birth–1 month
- Phase 2: Body space and body play: 1–4 months
- Phase 3: Near space and sitting play: 4–8 months
- Phase 4: Middle space and reaching play: 8–12 months
- Phase 5: Home space and exploring play: 12–18 months
- Phase 6: Home space and advanced infant play: 18–24 months

These phases are overlapping and dependent on the infants rate of development and the environmental supportiveness: the phases move from the infant 'being-in-the-atmosphere-of-doing' at birth to active mastery of the environment at 2 years.

### Social affordances in infant play

Infants were found to engage in early social play during interactions with carers and siblings through observation, imitation and joint attention, and game playing in its simplest form. Key strategies used to engage infants in social play included enticement to play, modelling, verbal instruction or structuring the environment (Lynch & Hayes, 2014a). Parents orchestrated play in family homes and some integrated or embedded play in their daily routines while others liked to segregate play and considered it separate to family routines. Although four of the families had designated play areas at home, it was apparent that this strategy was primarily for order in the home rather than for play, a finding common in other studies (Primeau, 1998; Pierce, 2000). In fact, infants brought play items to where the parent was (often in the kitchen or family room) and chose to play nearby.

Social affordances did not only enhance play, they also shaped infant behaviour in general. During these first two years, play was found to be a central, integrated part of other tasks. We can see play in all daily routines of infants – at mealtimes, during bath times and toileting. The socialisation of infants into the broader family and social contexts involved limiting or marshalling the play activity to appropriate times so that by the time the infants were two, few were now playing during designated family routines (e.g., while eating at family mealtimes). Hence, although the physical affordances for play were still present in the environment, the social affordances had resulted in shaping infant play behaviours differently through what was socially acceptable or not (Lynch & Hayes, 2012a).

One significant finding in relation to learning environments was the influence of parental characteristics on play. This emerged through their values and attitudes towards the infant but in a broader way than had been anticipated. Parents were identified as being shaped by their own cultural experiences as children, including inter-generational influences as regards their own parents' work occupations. Furthermore, they also demonstrated varied ranges of playfulness and play styles during interactions. An ethnographic approach supported the emergence of this finding over time, where parents became more reflective and began to explore more their own reasons for why they behaved a certain way or on what influenced them. This resulted in a core overall finding: the important role of parental reasoning (Lynch, Hayes & Ryan, 2015). Parents were identified as using many forms of parental reasoning such as knowledge-based reasoning, sociocultural, future-based, personal, practical-based and narrative reasoning. Each contributed to parental reasoning processes in varied ways, influencing parental behaviour consequently, therefore influencing how play opportunities and environments were orchestrated. This perspective on

parental reasoning has great potential for professional practice in early childhood, in supporting a more family-centred approach to understanding parents' views, values and attitudes in terms of supporting optimal play environments.

### Infant play spaces

Through studying the physical environment of the home, this study throws light onto the relationship between play-space interactions. The physical environment was identified as being a learning environment when it provided affordances for interaction that met the infants' needs as observed through their motivation and choices in play. Within this context, infant space play was determined by availability, variety and complexity of spaces and was often mediated by the parents, especially during stationary play before the infant is independently mobile. As infants became more mobile, they sought variety in their play spaces, often choosing to play in multiple sites at one time. This should not be viewed as disorganised, distracted play; rather it is evidence of expanded space play. Similarly, as their play interactions developed, infants demonstrated a desire for playing in places that provided complexity, such as spaces that afforded climbing or sliding, so the function of the play spaces became more complex. Infant space play, therefore, requires a range of available and varied physical features to afford multiple play opportunities. For young infants this included floor play and equipment that afforded opportunities for the babies to stretch and arch their bodies to explore space. For older infants, this involved platforms of different levels on which to play or to climb for play. Floor play and platform play are therefore identified as key characteristics of rich play environments for these Irish infants (Lynch & Hayes, 2014b).

In some cases, there was a lack of availability of space play. For example, floor play was noted as being unpopular for young infants in this study and hence some parents avoided placing their babies on the floor to play. At an older stage, another parent limited space play through the use of a baby-walker, which provided mobility but restricted the infant's movements. In these cases, infants were seen to be slower to develop independent space play compared to other infants. These aspects of space availability have been the focus of specific attention in the US where parents have been targeted through training programmes to increase their awareness of the importance of floor play. It may be that this specific feature of space play is one that needs more attention in the Irish context. Further research on this aspect would be important.

Outdoor play was identified as being less common than indoor play and families appeared to have fewer strategies

around orchestrating outdoor play compared to indoor play. While indoor play was frequently orchestrated around family routines, few outdoor family routines were identified. Orchestrators of outdoor learning environments therefore need to take into account that they are influenced by the routines that can take place there. In designing outdoor play environments in home settings, consideration could be given to planning play alongside family routines to facilitate more outdoor play.

### CONCLUSION:

#### THE CONCEPT OF A 'JUST-RIGHT' ENVIRONMENT

Analysis of the environment provides detailed insights into infant interactions with the physical environment bedded within the social environment. The specific environments in this study that seemed to afford optimal opportunities for development included both object and space use, combined with the responsiveness of others (parents and siblings) to orchestrate play interactions in the physical environment. So processes that optimally engaged the infants were multidimensional, and provided physical, social and emotional affordances for successful play interactions. This study found that the ideal environment for infants is the '*just-right environment*' which takes a three-dimensional view of optimal play environments that include transactions between the infant, the physical environment and the social environment (Lynch & Hayes, 2012b, 2013).

Activity is always 'embodied and embedded' and performed in specific environments with specific affordances, opportunities and constraints (Adolf & Berger, 2006, p.164). Infants in the study showed different paths of development and their lives reflected the embedded nature of infancy when family contexts are taken into account. Equally, child characteristics leading to different rates of change and development reflect the embodied nature of development. Given these findings in relation to the specific nature of the infant-environment transactions, the environment needs to be construed as a just-right environment that specifically meets the needs of a particular child in a particular context.

A just-right environment involves availability of spaces and objects but also active participation on behalf of others in providing physical access to the environment, especially for infants who are stationary. It is not enough to have objects or spaces for play available, or to show and demonstrate how a toy works, but to have an ongoing dynamic process of enabling play to happen. Studies have shown that having a varied presence of toys in the home may be insufficient for infant development without the parents' involvement (Parks & Bradley, 1991). A just-right environment includes the ability of the parent to orchestrate the environment for access to the

available affordances in the home setting in a way that maximises successful interactions. This has been captured in the literature of being a process of facilitating the just-right challenge. Activities that have this just-right challenge lead to success and engagement and successful outcomes based on the interaction being not too difficult and not too easy (Bundy & Koomar, 2002). Consequently, these activities consist of moderately challenging tasks rather than highly challenging ones that can cause anxiety (Rigby & Rodger, 2006). Play is known to be highly related to an infant's sense of agency and control over the environment (Wohlwill & Heft, 1987). Therefore, a just-right environment aims to enable the infant to achieve mastery as a core aspect of play interactions.

## TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- Consider how you can provide A JUST-RIGHT ENVIRONMENT.
- Encourage a play-rich environment through available, varied and increasingly complex affordances.
- Assess the spaces and object affordances for play in your setting rather than listing what you have available for the child: how things are used is more important than what is available.
- Use assessment tools that include affordances in the items being measured.
- Consider how to best orchestrate play both indoors and outdoors, including routine activities that take place there.
- When working with families, try to explore their parental reasoning to help maximise meeting the child's needs.
- Toys and places for play are less about material goods and more about noticing opportunities in the everyday: the power of the ordinary wins out!

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# FATHERS' PLAY & YOUNG CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

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Understanding the role of fathers in nurturing children's development has become an important focus of research in recent years. It is now recognised that the tradition of equating fatherhood with breadwinning no longer applies. With sustained growth in women's participation in the labour force, the division of unpaid labour in the household (such as housework and taking care of the children) has come under scrutiny and led to an increased focus on understanding

men's lives as fathers and the shifting gender roles within families. Furthermore, with changing family structures, increasing numbers of children are living apart from their fathers, leading to further transformations in parental roles. Thus, questions about how fathers interact with their children, how those interactions compare with those of mothers and the effects of fathers' interactions on children's development have generated much interest.

## FATHERS, MOTHERS AND PLAY BEHAVIOUR

Many of the first studies on fathers' behaviour focused on the area of play behaviour. Play is a key factor in the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children beginning in infancy. Play situations give infants and toddlers the opportunity to learn new skills and build connections with others both socially and emotionally. Early studies (e.g. Lamb, 1977; MacDonald & Parke, 1984; Labrell, 1996) suggested that fathers specialised in play, while mothers' interactions were more concerned with caretaking. Fathers were more likely to pick up babies for the purpose of playing with them, whereas mothers were more likely to hold babies for caregiving purposes. Based on observations of mother-child and father-child interactions, fathers engaged more frequently than mothers in vigorous physical play, while mothers engaged more regularly in object-focused play and role play. Also, fathers tended to propose more unconventional games than mothers by, for example, using objects in ways that are distinct from how those objects are typically used. Mothers and fathers may also teach their children differently through play: in one study mothers sought to teach children through questioning and asking children to complete tasks (such as counting blocks) while fathers challenged children to take another step with whatever it was they happened to be doing (such as reaching for a ball) (John, Halliburton & Humphrey, 2013). These distinct patterns are not confined to the period of infancy and toddlerhood – although physical father-child play tends to peak when the child is two years of age, fathers are still more frequently physical play partners in later childhood than mothers (Russell & Russell, 1987).

In general, fathers are consistently found to be more tactile and physical in their play interactions; in contrast, mothers tend to be verbal and use toys to teach their children while playing with them. This suggests that infants and toddlers experience different forms of stimulation when playing with their fathers than with their mothers. On foot of these conclusions, it has even been suggested that there is a universal play style in which fathers engage (Parke, 2002), and that this may be related to biological differences between males and females. Male monkeys exhibit the same style of rough-and-tumble play as human fathers (Lovejoy & Wallen, 1988), which supports the idea that there may be a biological component to such patterns of behaviour. However, studies conducted in non-Western cultures such as India and Central Africa have revealed that the fathers rarely or never engaged in rough-and-tumble play (Roopnarine, Talukder, Jain, Joshi & Srivastav, 1990; Hewlett, 1987). This research reminds us that historical, cultural and familial ideologies impact on the time fathers spend engaged with their infants and the types of activities in which

they participate, which, in turn, shapes the quality of the father-infant relationship.

## WHAT DO CHILDREN LEARN DURING PLAY WITH THEIR FATHERS?

Although the findings on fathers as play partners are reliable, they have led to an oversimplified and stereotypical view of fathers as play partners. The reality is that fathers spend most of their time with children engaged in activities other than play. Also, because mothers overall spend more time with their infants and toddlers than fathers, in absolute terms, mothers spend more time playing with children than fathers. However, compared with mothers, fathers spend a greater proportion of their overall time engaged in play. Also, because fathers' play tends to be more boisterous and stimulating, it may be more memorable to the child, and may enhance the fathers' influence beyond what might be expected based on the amount of time they spend with their children (Lamb, 2010).

It has been proposed that one important difference between mothers and fathers is that fathers try to excite their babies, while mothers try to contain their young child's excitement and emotions. Through interacting with fathers, infants and toddlers are destabilised and emotionally aroused, and these experiences help young children to learn to deal with unexpected events, to take risks, to explore their environment and to be brave (Paquette, 2004). One important aspect of emotional development is learning to read a partner's emotional signals and in turn send signals back to the partner – being able to do this in a play interaction means that parent and child can adjust their behaviour so that neither become over stimulated or under excited, thus enabling the play to continue. Fathers may provide a unique opportunity to teach children these emotional skills due to the unpredictable nature of their play and due to the intense emotional levels that are sometimes achieved during these play interactions (Parke, 2002). Thus, play interactions with fathers are important lessons in managing emotions, which in turn can contribute positively to children's social development (Leidy, Schofield & Parke, 2013).

During interaction, the types of language that mothers and fathers use may also differ, which may shape the young child's language development. Some research suggests that fathers are less tuned into their child's linguistic abilities and, as a result, tend to speak to their child in ways that pushes the boundaries of the child's current language abilities. Fathers tend to make more direct requests, ask more wh- questions, use longer and more complex sentence structures and make more reference to past events, than mothers. These more

challenging language experiences may benefit children's language development – one suggestion is that because fathers' speech is less tuned to children than mothers' speech, children are given the opportunity to practice communicating with an 'untuned' companion, which may help them then when they go on to communicate with others outside the family (Tamis-LeMonda, Baumwell & Cabrera, 2013). In this way, fathers may serve as a 'bridge' to the outside world (Rowe, Coker & Pan, 2004; Paquette, 2004).

While some studies have found differences between mothers' and fathers' language (e.g. Ely, Berko Gleason, MacGibbon & Zaretsky, 2001; Tamis LeMonda, Baumwell & Cristofaro, 2012), others have concluded that, in many ways, mothers and fathers are similar in the language they use with their young children (e.g. Golinkoff & Ames, 1979; Pancsofar & Vearnon-Feagans, 2006; Rowe et al., 2004). Although there may be differences between mothers' and fathers' behaviours, as highlighted above, these differences do not tend to be large, and there is substantial variation from one mother to another, and from one father to another. Thus, while on average there may be small differences between parents, there is a lot of overlap as well. Put simply, differences

in mother-child and father-child interactions are not as big as we might think (Roggman, 2004). Fathers' play can vary from being quiet, pretend play with a toy, to rough and tumble physical play, while mothers can engage their child in tickling, bouncing, and lifting games. It may be that mothers and fathers establish different roles in relation to each other, and that little about their patterns of interacting has anything to do with them being a mother or a father, per se.

### FATHERS IN IRELAND

Turning now to consider the Irish situation more specifically, little research has considered how fathers in Ireland interact with their infants and toddlers. Findings from the infant cohort of *Growing up in Ireland* (based on 11,110 randomly selected families of 9 month olds) revealed that almost all primary caregivers of the babies were their mothers (99.6%), with only a tiny proportion of fathers taking on the role of primary caregiver. From six options, fathers in the study were asked to rate the three most important aspects of their role as fathers – over two-thirds of the fathers ranked 'showing love and affection' as the most important aspect of their role. Interestingly, playing with their baby emerged as a



key feature of how fathers defined their role – this was ranked as the second and the third most important aspect of their role by 22% and 25% of fathers, respectively. Only 3% of fathers ranked breadwinning, the role traditionally associated with fathers, as the most important aspect of their fathering role (Williams, Greene, McNally, Murray & Quail, 2010). More recently, Smith, Lovett, Doyle and O'Mealia (2015) investigated the experiences and perceptions of fatherhood among fathers and father figures participating in the Preparing for Life programme in Dublin. The data, based on interviews and focus groups, revealed that the men's conceptions of fatherhood included a number of different roles such as playmate, facilitator for learning and disciplinarian. In talking specifically about play, fathers believed that physical, rough and tumble play was positive for the child's development and for the father-child relationship. Fathers typically played with their children at weekends and in the evenings – with work obligations limiting the time they had with their children, fathers chose to spend their time playing with their children. Fathers also viewed this playmate role as a complement to other parenting roles which the child's mother typically performed. Together these results suggest that fathers in Ireland very much focus upon their role as playmates for their children, although fathering in Ireland is by no means confined to this role.

In an effort to further understand the role of fathers' play and interaction in their children's development, a new research laboratory has been established within the School of Psychology, at Trinity College Dublin ([www.infantandchildresearchlab.com](http://www.infantandchildresearchlab.com)). Research within the lab is seeking to understand how fathers and mothers interact with their babies and toddlers, and how different styles of interactions are related to characteristics of

the mothers, fathers, and the children themselves. For example, do parents systematically interact differently with boys in comparison with girls? Do fathers engage in higher levels of physical play than mothers? Are some children, by virtue of their mood or temperament, more difficult to read and respond to in a manner that encourages their play and exploration of their surroundings? To date, over sixty families have visited our laboratory and parents have engaged in play sessions with their babies, with sessions involving mothers and babies alone, fathers and babies alone, and where both parents come along, play sessions involving all three. In a bright and comfortable environment and a full box of toys, parents and toddlers soon tune into their natural way of being with each other. Our hope is that through detailed observation and coding of these play sessions, we will begin to understand more about styles of interaction within families in Ireland, and how parents' behaviours contribute to children's development.

### Note

Dr. Elizabeth Nixon is an Assistant Professor in Developmental Psychology at the School of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin. Kasie O'Reilly is a final year undergraduate psychology student at Queen's University Belfast, who has just completed a two month internship in the Infant and Child Research Laboratory at TCD.

Anybody interested in finding out more about the research within the lab or possibly participating in the research is invited to visit the website: [www.infantandchildresearchlab.com](http://www.infantandchildresearchlab.com) or get in touch directly: [enixon@tcd.ie](mailto:enixon@tcd.ie)/ 01 896 2867.

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# PLAY THERAPY

**RUTH McDONAGH, Project Worker, Barnardos, and Accredited Play Therapist**

In this article I will discuss what play therapy is, who can benefit from play therapy, the referral process, the principles of play therapy, how a child experiences the playroom, how to find a play therapist.

## **WHAT IS PLAY THERAPY?**

Play is how children make sense of their world. Many adults find expressing feelings difficult, and for children, who are just learning about their emotions and how to express them, it is

even more difficult. This is where the power of play comes to the fore. Play is a child's natural way of expressing themselves, 'Play therapy is based upon the fact that play is the child's natural medium of self-expression. It is an opportunity which is given to the child to "play out" his feelings and problems just as, in certain types of adult therapy, an individual "talks out" his difficulties' (Axline, 2002, p.8). Play therapy provides children with an opportunity to "play out" their thoughts, feelings and problems in a non-directive way, and in a safe environment

with a caring therapist. Figurines, animals, cars are all a safe means for children to express themselves in relation to what they are feeling. Play therapy is becoming a more effective and mainstream route for parents to access help for their children. 'By re-enacting and repeating events, often in a symbolic form, and by playing out their feeling and phantasies, children come to terms with them and achieve a sense of mastery.' (McMahon, 1992, p.3)

### WHO WOULD BENEFIT FROM PLAY THERAPY?

Play therapy is suitable for children aged from three to twelve years old and is an effective form of therapy for children experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties such as:

- Aggression
- Communication difficulties
- Low self-esteem
- Bedwetting
- Excessive shyness
- Selective mutism
- Developmental delay

Play therapy is effective in helping children through experiences of:

- Parental separation
- Anxiety
- Bereavement/loss
- Bullying
- Difficulties in school
- Trauma
- Adoption/foster care
- Domestic violence
- Abuse
- Neglect

'Play is children's means of assimilating the world, making sense of their experience in order to make it part of themselves.' (Mc Mahon, 1992, p.2)

### THE REFERRAL PROCESS

In my private practice, parents are referred for play therapy by their G.P., teacher/principal, adult counsellor or they become aware of the service through my website or, more

commonly, from parents who have been through the play therapy process with their own children. I usually arrange to meet with the parents/carers in the family home as this is more informal and gives me a good insight into family life. I complete an assessment to ascertain if play therapy is appropriate depending on the child's needs. The Goodman's Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire is used both before and after play therapy as a tool to measure the outcomes brought about for the child by attending play therapy. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire is 'a brief behavioural screening questionnaire that provides balanced coverage of children and young people's behaviours, emotions and relationships' (Goodman, 1997, p.581).

At the initial assessment meeting, I meet with the child at the family home. I generally tend to keep this brief, approximately ten to fifteen minutes, as the majority of time I spend gathering information from the parents about the child. I show the child pictures of the playroom and explain to them my understanding of why they are coming to the playroom. It is essential that the child is aware of why they are coming to therapy, for example, in a case where the child's parents have separated, it may be to help them feel calmer, and help them with their big feelings as they may have experience of Mummy and Daddy fighting a lot, or now Daddy lives in another house. It is really important that the child is not seen as the problem by the adults in their life and it is recognised that the child has experienced many difficult situations and by coming to play therapy it will help them feel happier in themselves. The length of time a child attends play therapy depends on the child's needs and the presence of supportive adults. Play therapy is not a quick fix and, depending on the child's needs and experiences, it can last for twelve or more sessions. 'Play provides emotional space for the repetitive expressions of many intense feelings such as sadness or anger (among others)' (Barnes, 1996, p.426).

### PRINCIPLES OF PLAY THERAPY

Non-directive play therapy is based upon the work of Virginia Axline who wrote *Dibs: In Search of Self* in 1964 describing how she used non-directive play therapy to help a young boy. Axline was very much influenced by Carl Rogers' Person

“Play is children's means of assimilating the world, making sense of their experience in order to make it part of themselves.”

(Mc Mahon, 1992, p.2)

Centred Approach. 'Non-directive therapy is based upon the assumption that the individual has within himself, not only the ability to solve his own problems satisfactorily but also this growth impulse that makes mature behaviour more satisfying than immature behaviour.' (Axline, 2002, p.14) Play therapy is based upon eight principles developed by Virginia Axline as outlined below.

1. **The therapist must develop a warm, friendly relationship with the child, in which good rapport is established as soon as possible.** Establishing a good rapport with the child is the basis of play therapy and it is important that the relationship is developed as soon as possible. The first contact with the therapist in the playroom should help the child to feel at ease; a smile and a soft tone of voice helps. The therapist explains to the child that they can play with the toys in many different ways. The therapist does not suggest or direct the child to any particular toys. As important as it is for the therapeutic relationship to develop, Axline states that while the relationship is very important it is not to be achieved by compromising the other seven principles.
2. **The therapist accepts the child exactly as he is.** This is one of Axline's fundamental principles in play therapy and it supports the development of the therapeutic relationship. The therapist shows acceptance of the child by their attitude, remaining calm and emotionally available to the child regardless of how the child is behaving. For example, if the child does not speak during the session, the therapist does not force the child to speak or ask any questions of the child. If the child is continually playing with the same toys the therapist does not attempt to get them to play with different toys. The therapist does not show any signs of impatience and avoids praising the child in relation to their art work or any materials they build as, if the therapist praises the child, the child may feel the need to please the therapist.
3. **The therapist establishes a feeling of permissiveness in the relationship so that the child feels free to express his feelings completely.** In order for a feeling of permissiveness to be established, it is necessary that the therapist is non-judgmental so the child feels accepted and free to talk. Play therapy is non-directive so the child gets to decide what they want to play with. If a true atmosphere of permissiveness is achieved, the child will be able to work through their difficult feelings without feeling they are being judged, for example, they might act aggressively toward a puppet or figurine that represents a family member.
4. **The therapist is alert to recognise the feelings the child is expressing and reflects those feelings back to him in such a manner that he gains insight into his behaviour.** For example, when a child attending play therapy due to difficult behaviours that started when a new sibling arrived demonstrated in their play that a baby figurine was being isolated by other family members and the child was expressing delight in this, a reflection might be, 'You look happy that the baby isn't going to the park with the others.'
5. **The therapist maintains a deep respect for the child's ability to solve his own problems if given an opportunity to do so.** The responsibility to make choices and to institute change is the child's. By tracking the child's play, acknowledging what the child is feeling and giving empathic responses, the therapist allows the child to repeatedly make mistakes without judgement, and to try things out in the safety of the playroom. This allows the child to build on their self-esteem and confidence, and trust in themselves to make the necessary changes needed to move forward in the therapy process.
6. **The therapist does not attempt to direct the child's actions or conversation in any manner.** The child leads the way; the therapist follows. If the child continually plays with the same toys the therapist does not suggest other toys to play with. The therapist does not direct any play and, when invited into the child's play, asks the child frequently for direction on what to do.
7. **The therapist does not attempt to hurry the therapy along.** It is a gradual process and is recognised as such by the therapist. It is important that the therapist allows the child time to settle in, explore the room, and begin to trust the therapist. Children will express their emotions when they are ready to do so. If a therapist attempts to hurry this process along, the child may retreat and have a reluctance to share their feelings.
8. **The therapist establishes only those limitations that are necessary to anchor the therapy to the world of reality and to make the child aware of his responsibilities in the relationship.** This is an important part of the therapy process where the

**It doesn't matter that we do not understand all that a child's play may mean. The task in play therapy is not to interpret it to the child but to stay with children as they find it out for themselves.**

(McMahon, 1992, p.54)

therapist is responsible for setting boundaries. Many children will test the boundaries as part of the process, and it is very important that the therapist holds the boundaries. For example, if the child is pushing the sand out of the sand tray, the therapist will remind the child that the sand stays in the sand tray, using a soft calm tone of voice, regardless of how many boundaries the child tests.

'It doesn't matter that we do not understand all that a child's play may mean. The task in play therapy is not to interpret it to the child but to stay with children as they find it out for themselves.' (McMahon, 1992, p.54)

### WHAT DOES THE CHILD EXPERIENCE IN THE PLAYROOM?

Whatever the reason for a child coming to the playroom, children will generally come running into the playroom. The child experiences the therapist unlike any other adult they know. Children who have attended play therapy have made these comments:

- *She sits beside me, sometimes copying the way I sit (I like that).*
- *She talks to me about what I'm playing (that's how I know she is always listening to me).*
- *She never gets cross with me even when I tried to spill the paint over the carpet; she tells me I have a choice, if I do it again she will put the paints away. I get to choose not to do it again.*
- *She can read my mind and tells me how I am feeling even when I shrug my shoulders after she asks me how I feel. It's too hard for me to tell her I'm feeling sad, she says if for me.*
- *She will play the same game with me again and again and never ask to stop or ask to play a different game.*
- *She never tells me to tidy up the playroom.*
- *I always feel better after I see her.*
- *She always tells me that she was glad I came to see her in the playroom.*
- *I get to decide what I play with.*
- *Monday is my favourite day of the week because I go to the playroom.*
- *It's fun.*
- *I'm going to be a play therapist when I grow up.*

### PLAY THERAPY TOOLKIT

The therapist uses a Play Therapy Toolkit as well as specialist techniques such as empathic listening and reflection to aid the therapeutic process. The toolkit consists of:

- Art
- Therapeutic storytelling
- Sand tray
- Clay
- Puppets
- Music
- Drama/movement/dance
- Creative visualisation

The most important item in the playroom for the child is the play therapist, not how big the space is or how many toys the play therapist has in their playroom. There are few rules in the playroom but there are as many as necessary to keep the child and therapist safe. A vital part of the play therapy process is ensuring that the sessions are consistent, occurring on the same day and time every week.

### HOW DO SESSIONS END?

Endings in play therapy are very important part of the play therapy process. As the sessions are drawing to a close the therapist begins to count down the sessions that they have left so that the child has plenty of time to get used to the idea that he/she will not be coming to therapy any more and that their relationship is coming to an end. In the final session, the therapist reviews the areas the child has worked on and goes through any art/clay work the child has done while in therapy. This gives the child plenty of time to understand the fact that the therapist and child will no longer be seeing each other on a weekly basis. The therapist reinforces to the child the changes and progress he/she has made during the therapy process.

It is best that parents-carers also meet regularly with the therapist to ensure that the child has an emotionally responsive adult to support them through the process. The therapist will not describe the child's play sessions to the parent in detail but will give feedback based on the themes that have emerged and other things they have noticed about the child, giving parents suggestions of changes they can make to help their child or how best to respond to their child.

## HOW DO I FIND AN ACCREDITED PLAY THERAPIST?

There are many play therapists now working in Ireland so how do you ensure that your therapist has the right qualifications and is working to best practice standards?

- Ask the play therapist where she/he trained and with which organisation he/she is affiliated. The play therapist should be on that organisation's website list of registered play therapists.
- Enquire if your play therapist has completed at least a two-year course in play therapy. There are many courses available in therapeutic play, however attendance at these courses does not qualify a person to practice play therapy.
- The play therapist must have regular supervision. Ask for the name of their supervisor and how often they receive supervision. The play therapist should be receiving monthly supervision.
- Ask the play therapist if there is someone with whom they have worked with that would speak to you. While play therapy is confidential, in my experience many parents would have no difficulty speaking privately to another parent about how they found they process.

## FURTHER READING

As part of the play therapy process I recommend for all parents to read the following books:

- *How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish.
- *The Whole Brain Child: 12 Proven Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind* by Dr. Tina Payne Bryson and Dr. Daniel Siegel.
- *No-Drama Discipline: the whole-brain way to calm the chaos and nurture your child's developing mind* by Dr. Daniel Siegel.
- *The opposite of worry* by Lawrence Cohen.

To contact a play therapist or information on play therapy training see [www.playtherapy.ie](http://www.playtherapy.ie)

### Information about Ruth McDonagh

Ruth has been practicing play therapy since 2008 and has become an Accredited Play Therapist affiliated with Play Therapy Ireland. Ruth is also trained as a Baby Bonding Therapist, Filial Play Coach, Parent Child Attachment Therapist. Ruth is also training to become a clinical supervisor for Play Therapists. Ruth has a practice in Athlone where she works privately. She also works as a Project Worker for Barnardos in a Family Support Project. Ruth can be contacted at [ruth.mcdonagh@gmail.com](mailto:ruth.mcdonagh@gmail.com) or 087 6547377.

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- McMahon, L., (1992). *The Handbook of Play Therapy*. London & New York: Routledge.

# Useful Resources on Play

The following resources are available to borrow from Barnardos Library. You can search the library catalogue on [www.barnardos.ie/library](http://www.barnardos.ie/library)

## Engaging Play

Open University Press, 2010

## Enhancing Learning Through Play: a Developmental Perspective for Early Years Settings

David Fulton Publishers, 2012

## The Excellence of Play

Open University Press, 2010

## Games and Activities for Exploring Feelings with Children: Giving Children the Confidence to Navigate Emotions and Friendships

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011

## Learning Through Play (2nd ed)

Hodder Education, 2011

## Make-Believe Play and Story-Based Drama in Early Childhood: Let's Pretend!

Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012

## Play Here, Play There, Play Everywhere

Dublin City Development Board, 2012

## Play in Early Childhood: From Birth to Six Years

Routledge, 2011

## Play and Learning in the Early Years

Sage Publications, 2010

## Play Speak Read: Language and Literacy through Play

Early Childhood Ireland, 2012

## Playing to learn: the role of play in the early years

Routledge, 2011

## Spaces for Young Children: A Practical Guide to Planning, Designing and Building the Perfect Space.

National Children's Bureau, 2012

## Thinking about Play: Developing a Reflective Approach

Open University Press, 2010

## BARNARDOS' LIBRARY SUBSCRIBED ARTICLES

- Beckett, H. (2010). *Adolescents' Experiences of the Right to Play and Leisure in Northern Ireland*. *Child Care in Practice*, 16(3), 227-240.
- Davey, C. & Lundy, L. (2011). *Towards Greater Recognition of the Right to Play: An Analysis of Article 31 of the UNCRC*. *Children & Society*, 25(1), 3-14.
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- Lynch, M. (2015). *More Play, Please: The Perspective of Kindergarten Teachers on Play in the Classroom*. *American Journal of Play*, 7(3). Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1070249.pdf>
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