

# Activities

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## 1 What is Play?

### Activity 1

Play is reflective of the context in which it takes place (Bateson 1955). After visiting a variety of play environments, identify and reflect upon the way in which the environments affect the types of play you identify through the lens of the seven rhetorics.

# 1 What is Play?

## Activity 2

The examples of research draw on findings that suggest children, after play, “are focused in class and better able to attend to academic tasks” and that “unstructured play provides opportunities for children to develop social skills that are not acquired in more formal classroom environments.” From your own experiences of play, your memories of play, or observations of children at play: (1) Why do you think play might offer these benefits? (2) What qualities of “unstructured play” might be important to these areas of benefit and opportunity for children?

# 1 What is Play?

## Activity 3

Play is often trivialized as being frivolous, unproductive, and a general waste of time. Using the research cited above, compose an “elevator speech” to convince a naysayer about the positive impact of play on the cognitive development of children. (An elevator speech is a short summary used to quickly define a position and its value.)

# 1 What is Play?

## Activity 4

Consider the summary and findings of the Dansky & Silverman research:

How do you think the children might have seen/understood what they were being asked to do?

What different understandings of the findings might there be? For example, do you think the way children understood the first part of the research activity (why they were being asked to draw, watch an adult play in a certain way, or play with objects) might affect their response to the second part of the research?

What do you think the research might tell us about adult attitudes towards research and children?

How do you see the idea of creativity being interpreted within this research—what is being seen as creative or not creative?

# 1 What is Play?

## Activity 5

If you work with children, create an arrangement whereby you can observe children playing over the course of a week. Identify common themes across the various types of play observed. Reflect upon the therapeutic benefits that certain play themes offer to the children. Are these therapeutic benefits observable across all types of play?

# 1 What is Play?

## Activity 6

If you work with children, create an arrangement whereby you can observe children playing in a variety of settings and analyze variables that impact their activity levels (sedentary, moderate, vigorous) during play. How do your findings compare with those from the study highlighted above?

Traditional approaches have involved adults designing play spaces for children without engaging with children themselves. What do you think this research reveals about such traditions?

# 1 What is Play?

## Activity 7

Interview someone over the age of 45 about their play experiences as a child and compare those experiences with someone under the age of 25. What influence does the culture of fear barrier have on the experiences of both people? What strategies would you employ to overcome the present-day culture of fear?

# 1 What is Play?

## Activity 8

Poll a segment of parents about access to outdoor play spaces in your local community. How do your results compare with the national statistics from the United States found above? What factors might be common, what might be different, in relation to various communities and children's access to play spaces? Think about issues raised in this section and how you understand commonalities and differences.



# 1 What is Play?

## Activity 9

Interview a veteran teacher about the status of recess in the present day classroom. Determine if recess has been an important element of the school day during the past 25–30 years. Have attitudes towards recess changed during that time? If so, what societal factors have influenced the change?

## 2 Play and Schools

### Activity 1

Play Memory:

Illustrate a detailed picture of a play memory from your childhood. Reflect upon how certain elements have changed over time. For instance, what elements of your play memory might be common/uncommon for young children today?

## 2 Play and Schools

### Activity 2

What societal forces are impacting the endorsement of “prescriptive curricula and teacher directed pedagogical approaches” in kindergartens as described above? What arguments might be made in favor of such a direction for play within kindergartens? What kinds of influences, pressures, and needs might they be responding to? Further, what arguments might be made to counter “prescriptive curricula and teacher-directed pedagogical approaches” and what reasons might be given for an alternative approach such as “child-initiated play and experimental learning with the active support of teachers”?

## 2 Play and Schools

### Activity 3

Conduct a classroom observation of an early childhood or elementary school classroom and document the presence or absence of elements on a playful pedagogy spelled out in this section of the chapter (play, playful learning, and playful teaching). Next, reflect on how the presence or absence of these elements impacted the learning environment (student engagement, classroom culture and climate, teacher attitude). In order to conduct such an observation proper permissions and background clearances must be obtained.

## 2 Play and Schools

### Activity 4

Principle 7 of The Declaration of the Rights of the Child states in part that “the child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities shall endeavor to promote the enjoyment of this right.” Reflecting upon the results of the research studies mentioned above, do recent societal trends seem to support or detract from Principle 7?

## 2 Play and Schools

### Activity 5

Using the information gleaned from the studies mentioned above, prepare an “elevator speech” that advances the benefits of recess to the development of the whole child. An elevator speech is a brief summary used to advocate your case to an influential audience quickly. The idea behind the elevator speech is that it should be possible to persuade your audience to consider your position in the time frame of a typical elevator ride (30 seconds–2 minutes). Consider a variety of audiences who would benefit from this speech. Deliver and refine the speech often.

## 2 Play and Schools

### Activity 6

The inclusion of play as an important and consistent part of the school day has changed over time.

- How do you view these changes being supported and challenged within the examples of research throughout the chapter?

## 2 Play and Schools

### Activity 7

Moyles (2010) provides a useful framework for instituting a playful pedagogy through infusing three important concepts of play and playfulness into school curricula: (1) play; (2) playful learning; and (3) playful teaching.

- Using examples of research from the chapter, reflect upon the benefits and drawbacks of implementing playful versus didactic instructional practices.



## 2 Play and Schools

### Activity 8

Use the examples of research on recess to answer the following question.

- What does the recent marginalization of school recess say about how society views children?

## 3 Play and Other Institutional Settings

### Activity 1—Debate

Organize a debate on the topic pay for play. One group will take the position that a commercial playground should be built in the local community while a second group will make the case for building a free access playground. Both groups will conduct research on the pros and cons of each playground configuration and present their cases to a third group of students serving as a playground planning panel. After deliberation, the panel will render a decision on which playground to build for the local children.

# 3 Play and Other Institutional Settings

## Activity 2—Conduct a neighborhood play audit

Walk around your local neighborhood in search of spaces where children can play (streets, parks, gardens, etc.). Next, determine whether or not children actually spend time playing in these spaces. After conducting this informal audit reflect on your findings in light of the societal factors mentioned in the research above that make commercial playgrounds so appealing to many parents today. What are the underlying societal factors causing this apparent disconnect between parent fears and national statistics on child safety?

## 3 Play and Other Institutional Settings

### Activity 3

The therapeutic play types mentioned above help children to cope with a variety of stressors associated with hospitalization. Reflect on how these types of play might be applied to children experiencing fear, trauma, and maltreatment across various settings, cultures, and societies.

# 3 Play and Other Institutional Settings

## Activity 4—Making the Case for Play in Prisons

You are the head of a national charity that funds a yearly project to support and enhance play opportunities for children in your local community. This year there are two finalists for the \$100,000 grant. The first finalist's project is to provide play pods filled with loose parts to encourage child-initiated play at several local elementary schools. The second finalist's project is to institute a play in prisons project in the federal prison in your local community for the children of incarcerated parents. After considering both projects your committee is split right down the middle and you are to cast the deciding vote. In your heart you believe the play in prisons project is the most worthy to receive the funds, but you know that local sentiment will favor the school play pod project. Write a press release that outlines your decision to fund the play in prisons project.

## 3 Play and Other Institutional Settings

### Activity 5

A central theme of children's access to play revolves around the notion of freedom. Such a stance holds that access should be *free of charge*, that children are *free to come and go* as they please, and that children are *free to choose* where they play, how they play, with whom they play, and how long they play (Else 2009). How do you see this issue of freedom being encouraged and challenged within the examples of research throughout the chapter?

# 3 Play and Other Institutional Settings

## Activity 6

Use the examples of research on play in prisons and in hospitals to answer the following questions.

- Do you think the research supports the claim therapeutic play offers an important coping mechanism for hospitalized children that allows them to process through an illness, a procedure, a surgery, and other invasive treatments?
- How do play in prisons projects compromise or support the opportunity to help children to try and make sense of their situation within the reports of the research?

## 4 Play in Informal Settings

### Activity 1

If you have access to children through your professional working environment, observe them playing in three very different outdoor settings—e.g. a field, a forest, and a fixed equipment playground. Alternatively, think about your own childhood experiences of playing in different settings. Identify which characteristics of the environment have an impact on the nature of the children's play. What types of play predominate in man-made areas? What is the impact of landscape features on children's play? Do you see any evidence of recapitulative play?



## 4 Play in Informal Settings

### Activity 2

Gill suggests the lives of children should be seen as an indicator of the health of a community. Do you agree? If so, what does it mean when so many of our children live an indoor existence, and outdoor play is increasingly rare. Consider whether you think that might be storing up problems for the future.

## 4 Play in Informal Settings

### Activity 3

Tim Gill (2007) describes children as a declining species in the great outdoors. He says if these were birds we were talking about, we would be forming a committee to protect them. The findings of Wooley et al. (2009) and the OnePoll (2011) survey have been described as shocking. Do you feel this is a fair description, or are the results merely a reflection of perfectly reasonable changing attitudes towards children and their play? Consider the implications for society in general of a generation of children who have only limited experience of playing outdoors.

# 5 Play Deprivation

## Activity 1

It is interesting to reflect on the ethics of Harlow's experiments. Do you think it is ever acceptable to experiment with animals in order to learn lessons for human society? What do you think can be learnt about children's play from watching animal play behavior? What can you definitely NOT learn about children's play from watching animal play behavior? What are the clear differences between human and animal play?

# 5 Play Deprivation

## Activity 2

Interview your parents or someone from an older generation to find out about their play when they were children:

- The physical range of their play.
- The extent of their freedom to choose their own play activity.
- The risks they took in their play.
- The presence of adults in their play environments.

Compare their responses to your own experiences of play as a child.

# 5 Play Deprivation

## Activity 3

Examine the evidence of this study carefully. Consider the following points:

- How do the findings summarized above challenge your ideas about what you think of as basic conditions for children? Try to be specific about which details of the findings challenge your ideas and why that is.
- How does the presence or absence of play and the conditions for play feature in your ideas about basic conditions for children?
- In what ways do the findings challenge our generally accepted view of child development?
- To what extent is it legitimate for the researchers to claim that play was the most significant causal factor in the change of the Romanian children? What supports this claim? What do you think might challenge this claim?

## 5 Play Deprivation

### Activity 4

- What do you think this research reveals about the relationship between poverty and play? Would you, for example, conclude that (a) it indicates that poverty acts to reduce play, or (b) the link between poverty and play deprivation is tenuous at best?
- This study was conducted during the summer; do you think that has any effect on the research findings? Is it, for example, likely that the quality of children's play living in such conditions is diminished during the long cold winter months?
- Consider the research and its implications for play: is it possible for us to justify spending money on play provision in the poorer areas of our city?

# 6 Playwork

## Activity 1

Locate an after-school club in your neighborhood. Spend at least two sessions doing voluntary work with the children. Try to identify hard evidence of some of the short and long-term benefits found by Davidson & Barry. Setting these benefits against the costs of the agency, how might such provision be justified?

## 6 Playwork

### Activity 2

Playworkers see risk and challenge as essential elements of a good quality play environment. Given the modern concerns of health and safety, and our increasingly litigious society, how realistic is it to expect the adventure playground concept to survive in the twenty-first century? Reflecting on the example of The Venture, prepare evidence in support of the adventure playground concept.



# 6 Playwork

## Activity 3

Taylor (2008) has explored the synergies between playwork and the theory of loose parts in some detail. She suggests the theory was especially suited to the 1970s, where it “touched contemporaneous preoccupations with egalitarianism, self-governance and tempering the impacts of urbanization, with creativity and alternatives to the established order” (2008, p. 43).

The concept of heuristic play was first developed in the 1980s (Goldschmied & Jackson 1994). It involves children in the exploration of the properties of materials and artifacts; in particular the sort of materials to be found in the average household—pots, pans, wool, strips of material, etc. The approach has considerable overlaps with the theory of loose parts. Study the concept of heuristic play in greater depth (Riddall-Leech 2009) and consider its synergies with the loose parts approach. Where do the two approaches converge/diverge? Reflecting on the previous research example, do you think these two concepts are still relevant today?

## 6 Playwork

### Activity 4

This is a powerful piece of research, which challenges us to rethink our attitudes not only to the broad issue of children's place in society, but also to some very specific issues such as opening times. Consider the socio-cultural obstacles to Palmer's recommendations for retuning to community rhythms. For example, what would be the obstacles to opening until later in the evening? What would be the arguments for and against opening a play project to children of all ages?

# 6 Playwork

## Activity 5

This section has made the argument that playworkers have a unique relationship with children—a relationship that cannot be matched by any other adult who comes into contact with children. Do you think people such as teachers, nursery workers, and children’s nurses would be prepared to accept that? If not, what sort of arguments do you think they could make in support of their case? Consider this in light of your own experience of those professions.