



# Playful

Encouraging children to make connections through imagination and creativity to explore alternate worlds and ways of thinking. These worlds, not bounded by reality, offer the freedom children need to innovate and enact new possibilities.

Classrooms where playful pedagogies operate are often characterised by active learning and engagement, language-rich interactions, open-ended questions and humour.

## What does it mean to be a playful teacher?

Playful pedagogical practice is enacted through adult-child relationships based on trust, acceptance and a sense of belonging. Playful adult practices encourage young learners to participate, to explore and to experiment with objects and ideas in new and unexpected ways.

## Examples of playful practice

*Playful practices may arise from:*

- a science activity growing bean seeds with the question, 'Imagine if your seed grows strong and as tall as the highest building. What might happen and what would you do?'
- playing with language while sharing a board game with young learners, for example taking a rhyming focus when moving a counter, 'Oh boo-hoo Mr Blue got two, what about you Red Fred and Mrs Green Bean?'
- using rhyme and alliteration in everyday talk, 'Oh that dough was icky sticky squishy squashy, now my hands they need a washy'
- combining active movements and games with key concept developments. For example, counting on and counting backwards is reinforced through rocket count-downs and blast off, fishing for numerals or alphabet skittles
- telling a story using a dramatic voice and expressions, and props
- taking an active role in dramatic play with young learners.

## What makes an experience playful from a young learner's perspective?

- The experience invokes young learner's curiosity and imagination.
- Young learners are agentic and decision makers.
- Learning is active and engaging.
- Classroom experiences afford opportunities to experiment with materials, ideas and the properties of objects, often transforming the use of an object in play.

## Creating a playful physical environment

*Teachers consider:*

- providing a wide range of open-ended materials, such as lengths of fabrics in assorted colours and textures, or natural materials
- using classroom space in flexible ways so there are opportunities for young learners to extend their play, for example by creating three dimensional buildings, caves, offices, shops, space ships
- locating resources so that young learners can independently access materials as required for their play.

*'A playful approach tends to reduce stress in the classroom; cultivate joy, pride and self-confidence; and foster social bonding; all of which support efforts to improve executive function and academic achievement.'*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Diamond, A., & Lee, K. *Interventions shown to aid executive function in children 4–12 years old. Science*, 333, 954–964.



