
UNIT 8 IMPORTANCE OF PLAY IN DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

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8.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit, you have read about play, its characteristics, the theories about why children play, how children's play changes with age, and kinds of play.

Why do we emphasize the importance of play? What do children learn through play? **Why should Early Childhood Care Education be play-based? Why should it use play as the medium of learning?** Learning and development takes place when children play! In this Unit, we have explained how play supports learning and development, what the role of the educator is in supporting and encouraging children's play, and how different factors influence play.

Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to:

- explain how play fosters the development of children;
- understand why ECCE programmes should use play as the medium of learning;
- describe the role of adults in supporting children’s play and learning;
- explain how observation of children’s play helps in understanding their development; and
- explain various factors that influence children’s play.

8.2 ROLE OF PLAY IN DEVELOPMENT

Let us understand how play fosters development in all developmental domains.

8.2.1 Play Promotes Cognitive Development

You know that cognitive development refers to the development of the child’s thinking abilities and the acquisition of concepts. Based on your reading of Block 4 and 5 of MCD-001, can you state some cognitive abilities and concepts that the child develops during early childhood years?

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The child develops the ability to observe, match, compare, classify, seriate, predict, infer, reason, and solve problems. Some concepts that the child acquires are that of everyday objects and events, people and relationships, colours, size, distance (far-near), animals, food, and many more. **Play helps in the development of children’s thinking processes and helps them to acquire concepts and content knowledge.** In this way, play helps the child to learn.

The following example describes Radha’s play with the mud pot and shows how some thinking abilities and concepts are fostered through her play. Radha, a four-year-old, discovers some properties of a mud pot while playing and begins to understand what happens to things when they fall. Let us read the example to further understand this.

Radha was playing near a ladder that was resting against a wall. She saw a small clay pot lying nearby. She played with it by filling it with mud and emptying it. After some time, she picked up the pot and tried to balance it on the step of the ladder. It fell and broke. She looked at it for a while, picked up

one of the pieces, and put it on the step again. The piece fell and broke into smaller pieces. Radha repeated her experiment with one of these smaller pieces. This time the piece fell but did not break. She picked up this piece, looked at it for a while, then threw it away and went inside the house.

What specific learning took place in this play episode? Write your thoughts and compare them with the example given. As you reflect upon what Radha learned as a result of this experience, remember that Radha did not plan for this learning to take place. She did not play with the intention of learning. She played because she was enjoying the activity. Learning happened spontaneously as she was playing.

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Radha repeatedly tried to balance the piece and saw it fall making it clear that her curiosity was aroused. It seems that **she had grasped the cause-effect relationship** between falling and breaking. Perhaps questions such as, “*Will the piece fall again? Will it break again?*” also came to her mind.

When the piece did not break the third time, she was equally curious – it **seemed that she had anticipated (expected) that it would break**. However, when it did not break, perhaps in her way, she noticed that a very small piece does not break (**development of reasoning skills**) though she may not understand why it is so. Her curiosity may lead her to ask somebody who will clarify her understanding.

When the mud pot fell and broke, Radha was introduced to the concept of ‘fragility’ – that things may break if they fall. Radha perhaps does not yet understand that the small piece would also break if thrown with a greater force. **This means that the child learns what she is mentally (cognitively) ready to learn.** This understanding was not present within her zone of proximal development. As her thinking develops, she may try to throw things with different forces. As she has similar experiences of objects falling during play, she will see that some things break when they fall while others do not. Thus, over some time she will develop her understanding of what happens to different things when they fall and **refine the concept of fragility**, i.e., ‘breakable’ and ‘unbreakable’ objects.

Reading the above example would have brought to your mind many other situations where you have observed children playing. Note one of these incidents in the margin. If you cannot recall such a situation, just observe a child/ a group of children playing for some time. Can you now explain what this child/ group of children learned through their play in terms of development of thinking abilities, acquisition of concepts and content knowledge? Some learning that you may see in their play could be:

- understanding of cause and effect
- forming an idea that they can affect people and objects
- ability to anticipate and predict what may happen
- development of reasoning skills
- finding solutions to problems (for example, if we do not have a ball to play with, what can be the substitute)
- knowing about properties of objects, acquiring concepts such as light/heavy; big/small, hard/soft; rough/smooth, and many others as they handle different objects during their play
- acquiring specific information (what we call content knowledge).

8.2.2 Play Supports Construction of Knowledge

We have discussed what the child learns through play. Let us now understand how this learning takes place through play, in terms of Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories of cognitive development.

Piaget's theory of cognitive development states that learning involves the process of assimilation and accommodation. **Piaget sees play primarily as assimilation. When the play experience does not permit assimilation anymore, the child accommodates. In this way, thinking develops.** Let us understand this through an example.

Eighteen-month-old Shankar threw a plastic block inside a plastic bucket. On hitting the bottom of the bucket, the block made a sound. Smiling, Shankar put another block inside it and again heard the sound. He repeated this activity with some other plastic toys around him and always there was the sound. Then, Shankar threw a small stuffed teddy into the bucket; it did not make a sound. This led Shankar to stop his 'throw in the bucket' game. He looked into the bucket, picked up the teddy bear, and threw it in again, only to again get the 'no-sound' result.

In this example, Shankar discovered that throwing the block in the bucket would produce a sound. In terms of Piaget's theory, he developed the schema (a mental idea) that throwing a block leads to sound. When he threw different plastic items in the bucket, always hearing the sound, this was the process of assimilation. His schema was expanding to include the idea that other objects make a sound too. He was adding the new experiences to his already existing experiences – he was adding new knowledge to existing knowledge. When he saw that other plastic toys also made a sound, these experiences fitted into his already existing way of thinking. All the objects he was throwing in the bucket were being assimilated into his idea of 'objects that make a sound'. However, when the teddy bear did not make a sound, Shankar had to revise what he already knew about 'throwing', 'objects' and 'sound', and he had to accommodate (change) his schema. So the act of playing involves assimilation. When assimilation cannot take place any further, the child accommodates and then, developing the new schema, starts the play again.

You have read that Vygotsky states that learning takes place when the activity is within the child's zone of proximal development. This means that the activity is something that child is not yet able to do but can learn to do if she gets support. **Play creates the zone of proximal development.** In the play, children have the **freedom to choose things that are of interest to them.** So they chose those activities which are within their zone of proximal development – which is difficult to do presently but not so difficult that the child does not try to do them. Thus, learning becomes a pleasure and not a burden. In the example concerning the four-years-old Radha, she was not yet cognitively (mentally) ready to understand that a change in the force of the throw can result in the small piece breaking. Therefore, this idea did not occur to her and she did not try it out.

Both Piaget and Vygotsky explain that cognitive development is the process of being able to make increasingly sophisticated mental representations. **Play gives the child opportunities to rapidly advance in their mental representations.**

Let us consider children's pretend play to understand this. Initially, the child uses a replica of the real object in pretend play to represent the real object – a toy telephone instead of a real phone. Then they use objects which can in some way be associated with a telephone — they 'look like' a phone while these are quite different in appearance, yet can be used to perform the same function. So a rectangular pencil box may be used as a 'phone', as its shape reminds the child of the rectangular phone. This is a more advanced representation than the use of a toy phone. Finally, the child needs no object to help her to make the representation. She can now play by imagining mentally that she has a phone in her hand as she places her hand next to her ear and talks to an invisible partner. **Being able to make such advanced mental representations during play helps later in the development of abstract thinking.**

During play, children act upon objects and interpret the results of their actions which leads to learning. During play, they discover and learn by doing. Play exemplifies 'learning by doing'. When one finds out for oneself, this leads to a better understanding of the concept than when one is **told** about it without being allowed to **try it out.** Learning is more permanent when one does things for oneself than when the teacher says so.

In our discussion till now, we have tried to show how the child's free play leads to spontaneous learning. Children may not be able to describe what they have learned during their play, but a careful observer tuned in to children's actions and body language cannot fail to notice that children are actively thinking and acquiring concepts as they play. Through their play, children begin to form a concept of themselves as someone who can think and act.

8.2.3 Play Promotes Imagination and Creativity

You would have seen children pretending to be ‘father’, ‘mother’, ‘teacher’, ‘policeman’, ‘vegetable seller’, ‘shopkeeper’, ‘driver’ or ‘pilot’ during play. They **take on many such roles** during play and **imagine what it is to be like someone else** — to feel, act, think, work and behave like them. For example, when playing mother to the doll, Aparna told the doll that she would not get the sweet because it is not good for her at that time. This was exactly the explanation offered to the child by her mother when she had asked for a sweet. The child has learned the appropriate behaviour and showed it by imitation during play.

Of course, children do not always act out exactly what they have experienced. **Make-believe, fantasy, and pretense** are integral aspects of children’s play. In the play, it is possible to be creative and to do more than in reality. A plate may become a mirror for a three-year-old girl and a complicated spaceship for a 10 years-old-child. A string of matchboxes can be a train. Playing with this ‘train’, children may pretend to pass through a forest, cross a river and fight with robbers. Do not be surprised if the train moves on a road instead of a rail track! **Play does not have to be a mirror of reality. Rather, it provides a flexible situation that allows the child to be creative.** It nurtures imagination, which is the starting point of any new action in human life leading to inventions, discoveries, and breakthroughs in both the technological world and at the human (spiritual) plane. Observe a group of children playing and note what they imagine or pretend to be.

8.2.4 Play Promotes Physical and Motor Development

You have read that physical development and acquisition of motor skills depend upon:

- a) maturation of the body; and
- b) the opportunities available to the child to practice these skills.

Play provides the child with opportunities to practice. For example, repeated efforts by a four-month-old infant to reach for the rattle lying just beyond her reach, allows her to practice, and so does perfect the skill of rolling over. The child is maturationally (biologically) ready at four months to roll from one side to another and the play situation gives her the chance to practice this skill.

There are many situations during play that give the child an opportunity to practice newly emerging skills. When the infant repeatedly climbs onto the bed and gets down from it, when she throws the key ring under the table and bends to pull it out, when she makes the tower with blocks, breaks it, and builds it again, she is practicing her newly-acquired physical and motor skills.

When children balance on bricks, jump over walls, climb steps, hang from bars, play games of chase, and ride bicycles, the coordination of their large

muscles improves. Playing with a stick and digging holes with it in the ground, making a necklace by threading leaves, drawing and painting are activities that give the child practice for fine motor coordination.

You may have noticed that after days of repeatedly doing an activity with complete absorption and interest, the child suddenly loses interest in it and moves on to another activity. Can you think about why this happens? This often happens because in the period when the child was continuously practicing the activity, she was developing her skills. Once she has mastered the skill involved in that activity, she does not find the activity as interesting. The child's zone of proximal development has changed and she now looks for something more challenging.

8.2.5 Play Helps in Acquiring Language and Literacy

You know that to learn a language one has to hear it and practice speaking it. What role does play have in this?

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The playful interactions with the caregivers, from the time the child is born, give the infant plenty of opportunity to hear the language and motivate her to speak. When the infant is about six months of age, her vocalizations are a repetition of syllables like “gagaga”, “bebebe”, “mamama” and “mum mum mum”. When the mother hears these sounds which resemble adult speech, she feels happy and responds to the child by talking or making pleasing sounds. This provides feedback to the infant, motivates her, and encourages her to repeat the sounds. These are the beginnings of speech. During these interactions, the child learns to discriminate between various speech sounds.

In most cultures, as the child grows a little older, parents and educators begin to narrate stories, rhymes and riddles. This enhances phonological awareness (awareness of sounds of a language) that helps the child to discriminate between various sounds. Gradually, the child also gets introduced to various formats of language (question, statement, rhymes). She understands how language can be used in different ways. The ability to take turns, empathize and understand another person's perspective is integral to sustaining verbal communication. These abilities are strengthened as children play with each other, share play material, wait for their turn to use play equipment, and give and follow instructions to play.

Play not only fosters oral language development but also literacy (reading and writing). The desire to learn to read and write has a strong motivational component. Children have to want to learn to read and write; they have to find reading and writing meaningful. When the adults in the child's environment use literacy as part of their day-to-day activities, then,

many children's play activities reflect the use of literacy. In their pretend play, children may act as a waiter in a restaurant noting down a list of orders or may become a doctor writing out the list of medicines prescribed or the mother reading the newspaper, or the father reading the list of things the mother has given him. Such pretend play situations help children to understand the uses of literacy in different contexts. Studies have shown that children's success in learning to read and write is directly linked to their understanding of the purpose of written language and how it works.

When the child participates in an enjoyable 'read-aloud' storytelling session with the adult, she learns many aspects of print conventions/awareness (that one reads from the top of the page to the bottom; from left to right in English) and learns the link between spoken and written language. She also develops the motivation to read.

Learning to read and write also involves auditory and visual discrimination, to differentiate between letter sounds and letter forms.

These abilities are developed in play situations such as when children differentiate and arrange their play materials based on shape, colour and size (arranging blocks from longest to shortest, or putting all red beads in one basket and blue beads in the other basket), as they identify and name different sounds they hear around them, as they draw on paper, their impressions of events, people and objects.

In fact, drawing is of great significance in the development of language and is seen as an initial stage of writing. Drawing helps the child to understand how experiences can be represented on paper. This is just a step away from understanding that written words also represent personal experiences. When the teacher discusses with the child what she has drawn and writes a line about her drawing, the child forms a linkage between spoken and written forms of language. We have explained drawing as a stage of writing in MCD-001, Block 5.

Learning a language is not simply a matter of discriminating among various spoken sounds and written letters and words — we need to then be able to integrate the different sounds we hear into meaningful clusters which represent a phrase — only then what we hear will make sense to us. Otherwise, it would remain just a collection of sounds. Having discriminated the written letters, we need to integrate the letters into meaningful words. This means that we need to develop perceptual integration skills. By 'perceptual integration' we mean, being able to integrate or unite information from all our senses to make meaning. Perceptual integration is based on the neurological development in the brain. It takes place as a result of connections between the neurons in the brain. These connections increase in number and are strengthened due to physical activity. Play provides the opportunity for such physical activity. Thus, **play helps in perceptual integration which is needed for learning to read and write.**

Language, as you know, is a system of symbols. **Play provides the opportunity for using symbols.** When the child uses a block to represent a

telephone in a play situation, it is this same ability that will help her to understand that 'P', '13' and 'lion' is just a combination of lines (symbols) that represent letters, words and numbers. When children are encouraged to draw their experiences (which is also a way of symbolic representation), one often finds that letter forms and words appear in children's drawings, provided their environment contains print and if they have been exposed to storybooks. Children's invented words may not correspond in terms of correct spellings, but if you take time to ask the child what she has written, you will find that there is a logic in her invented spellings. This reflects her developing understanding of the complex system that is written language. Even when you want to emphasize the learning of specific letters, this is usually more successful when it is introduced through play activities than when the child is forced to learn and write the letters as part of a strict classroom routine through direct instruction. When learning to read and write is made into a formal activity, and the child is pressurized to master skills for which she is not yet ready, she loses interest. This, unfortunately, happens in many nursery schools every day.

8.2.6 Play Helps Children to Learn to become Social

Can you state what 'learning to be social' involves? Compare your answer with ours.

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Learning to be social involves:

- a) Forming relationships with others
- b) Understanding that one's self is different from the others
- c) Working together in a team
- d) Waiting for one's turn
- e) Sharing and cooperating
- f) Resolving conflicts through discussion with others
- g) Taking up leadership roles
- h) Learning appropriate behaviour and values

Are all these skills learned through play? Yes! Observe a group of children playing together for a few minutes or a six-month-old infant in playful interaction with the caregivers and you will see many of the above abilities being displayed and learned by children.

Let us read a few situations which show how play helps in the child’s social development.

- a) Play gives the parent and the child a chance to express and receive love. In the first year, the interactions and play of the mother or other caregivers with the infant, as she bathes, feeds, clothes her, and puts her to sleep, help the infant to develop an attachment with her. This is the infant’s first social relationship and it has a lasting impact on many of her **future relationships with people**.
- b) During the first year of life, the baby plays with her own hands and feet, and things within her immediate reach. Gradually, through her play, when she sees the effect of her actions on objects, she begins to understand that her body is separate from other objects in the surroundings. This is the first step in the **development of the concept of self**.
- c) As she grows older, she plays with other children and learns to **share, follow the rules of the game and wait for her turn to play**. Thus, she begins to **learn to take into consideration another child’s point of view**. These are developing social skills.
- d) During play, children often enact what adults do. In this way, they engage with a **variety of adult roles**. Children explore the codes of behaviour of their particular social group while interacting with others during play. They learn about festivals, traditions and beliefs – in other words, they learn about their culture.
- e) Often during playtime, children may get into a dispute over a toy or two – three of them may want to be the leader at the same time. When this happens, children learn to **negotiate (discuss and come to a solution)** with each other, **solve** the problem, give a **reason** for their views and **reach a solution** that is acceptable to all. Skills related to working with different people, in different situations get formed during such play time encounters.

8.2.7 Play Helps in Emotional Development

Emotional development involves:

- a) Learning to express various emotions in an appropriate manner
- b) Developing a positive sense of self, self-esteem and confidence
- c) Developing independence and valuing interdependence

Would you like to add to this list? How do you think play provides an opportunity for emotional development? Write your thoughts in the margin and let us read further to understand.

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You would remember reading about how children express emotions and deal with them through play in 'Psychoanalytic theories of play' in Sub-section 8.4.4 of Unit 8. You have read that sometimes, in day-to-day situations, children do not express all that they feel. This may be because of fear of adults or because the situation does not permit it. If these feelings remain bottled up for long, can harm the child. **An imaginary play situation sometimes gives the child a way to express these pent-up feelings** (feelings she may not have expressed). The following example brings this out clearly.

Four-year-old Raza was often scolded by his parents for the most minor violation of a rule. For the slightest discrepancy, he was slapped. This child would often sit on a chair and pretend that it was a horse. He would hit the chair and say, "Go faster, faster still."

The child, in the given example, is full of anger and resentment towards his father but cannot show his feelings to him. The imaginary play situation gives the child a way to express his anger. It helps him to work out his emotions. Play therapy is based on this function of play.

- b) Children's play provides them with opportunities to express delight, joy, anger, fear, distress, and other emotions. In the play, there is the freedom to do as one chooses, so long as one does not hurt others. Playing the scene of a battle, children can scream, throw things about, and pretend to hit others, which they would not be allowed at other times. **As they express these emotions, they receive feedback from the children and adults around them, about appropriate ways of expression.**
- c) Exploring the environment and mastering situations during play gives the child **confidence** and a feeling of **independence**. Through team games, children also learn the importance of cooperating and understand how winning requires the interdependence of team members. During play, children learn that winning and losing are a part of the game and that they must accept both situations and not feel disappointed when they lose. Similarly, they should not feel superior when they win. Of course, this learning will happen only when we adults learn to cooperate and share instead of being competitive and thinking of ourselves. Often, it is we adults who teach competition to the children.

8.2.8 When Children do not get the Opportunity to Play

As you would have understood from the discussion in the above sections, theorists and all researchers agree that children learn through play and that play fosters development. However, **in some situations, children do not get an opportunity to play. For example, when they are brought up in institutions that only focus on providing physical care, when they have severe disabilities and when they are employed as child labour.** Let us read what may happen in each of these situations.

- a) Evidence from studies reveals that children who have no opportunities for play and stimulation tend to lag (are slow) in one or more areas of development. Observations of infants who have been placed in institutional care have led to some conclusions regarding the role of play in development. In the institutions studied, often one caregiver looked after a large number of children and was unable to spend enough time with each child. Infants were not talked to, played with, or picked up. The emphasis was mostly on routine physical care: changing clothes, giving food, and health check-ups. The social interaction with a loving caregiver was missing. In some institutions, it was seen that children were placed in cribs with the sides covered with cloth. As a result, they could not see beyond the crib. They had no toys except those hanging by the cord at the top of the crib, which the child could not reach. In such cases, cognitive, language, physical, and motor development were slow. Simply removing the cloth covers from the cribs so that the infants could see other cribs and adults moving around made a marked difference to their liveliness and alertness.
- b) Sometimes, it can also be that children do not play because they cannot see, hear or explore things around them or cannot observe how other children are playing. This can be seen in children having visual or hearing impairment. Some children may not be able to play like other children of their age because they have difficulty moving around, as in the case of children with cerebral palsy. Due to their physical difficulties, it may be difficult for them to hold and manipulate toys and other play objects. Thus, the children's play gets affected because of their physical condition and this can affect their development. In such situations, the adults need to make specific efforts to help the children to play, such as:
- By bringing toys and play materials to them instead of waiting for the child to ask for or reach for the play material;
 - By adapting the game and the play material so that the child can also join in with others; and
 - By providing the child with aids and devices that can help her to move and hear.
- c) Children employed as labour do not get a chance to play as they are engaged in difficult and dangerous work for long hours and may not find the time or children of their age to play with. In such circumstances, lack of play, as well as the dangerous work they are involved in adversely (negatively), affects their development.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) The paragraph given below describes a play situation. Read it carefully and in the space provided write about various areas of development that are being fostered through the play activity. Describe how this happens in each case in 3-4 lines as given in the example below.

Play Situation

A group of four-year-olds is playing in the open. Some children are talking excitedly and chasing each other. Four are playing on the swing. Each child waits for her turn to swing. One child pushes the swing for the others. While waiting for their turn, two children begin to play in the sand. They draw shapes with a stick. One child says, "I have made a parrot." The other child says, "I have made an elephant. Do you know what happened to the elephant in the jungle? He fell in a river, and then ..." In this way, the child went on to narrate an imaginary incident. The child who is pushing the swing counts till the swing goes back and forth ten times and then asks the child who is swinging to get off. The next child then gets her turn.

Language Development in the Given Play Situation

During play, children are talking to each other. One child is telling the other about an imaginary incident. She is putting events in sequence and is using words to express herself. Thus language development is being fostered.

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c)

2) How does play foster different types of development?
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3) List four ways in which the caregivers and educators can help children learn through play.
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8.3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PLAY AND ECCE

In Indian society, play is seen as an inherent part of childhood. It is accepted that children will play and that it is quite natural for them to play. Since adults see play as a form of enjoyment and entertainment for children, they may have difficulty understanding how it leads to learning in an educational setting. They may agree that during their play children learn many things but may find it difficult to understand that play can be used as a medium of education. They see 'play' and 'learning' as two separate things. Many may question why in the early childhood centres children are encouraged to play rather than learn to read and write as older children do in formal schools. The early childhood teacher may face pressure from children's families to 'teach' children by the traditional methods (the only way the parents perhaps themselves know) used for older children.

Furthermore, in many ECCE centres, educators may be under pressure to teach formal skills of reading, writing, and numeracy to children so that children learn faster in grades. This happens due to a strong presence of a competitive culture with too much focus on marks. This pressure of formal and fast learning damages children's desire and the ability to learn.

The first six years are significant in the life of a person. Development proceeds at a very fast rate and the child learns concepts and acquires skills. As parents or early childhood care educators, it is important to remember that the home or the ECCE centre must have an environment that encourages children to explore objects around them, interact with other children and adults, and actively engage in doing things. Only then will children learn. Such an environment gives the children plenty of opportunities to play because exploration and interaction happen through play. **Play is naturally the medium of the child's learning in the early years.** In short, when you plan organized learning experiences for children in ECCE centres including for children with disabilities, these should happen through the medium of play and play activities. Why do we emphasize this? What exactly do we mean by play-based learning? Do adults, i.e. parents and teachers have a role in play-based learning? Let us read about this in the following three sub-sections.

8.3.1 Why Should Play be the Medium of Learning in Early Years?

a) During infancy, thinking develops through activity

As an infant, the only way the child can learn is by doing an activity. This is because all early learning is through the senses and the body. As the baby sees, hears smells, touches tastes, and moves her body texture to touch various objects, she learns about their colour, shape, size, smell, sound, and feel (**The child is curious by nature**). As she plays, the child gradually

learns that objects not visible to her do exist somewhere else. When things fall down, she learns that they may break. It is not possible to tell the infant about objects and describe their properties or explain to her how to interact with people. These are learned as the child discovers these by herself during play activities. Play situations provide opportunities for infants to handle and examine objects, explore the surroundings and find out for themselves. During this process, they learn concepts, find answers to the questions in their minds and understand the reason why things happen the way they do. In other words, children make discoveries.

You have read that learning involves the formation of synaptic connections in the brain. These connections are formed when the brain is stimulated; play provides stimulation which results in activity in the brain and enhances synapse formation.

b) Children learn by doing

Learning through discoveries made during play remains the best way of learning all through childhood. It leads to a better understanding of concepts than when the child is simply told about them, without being allowed to try them out. This is true for us even as adults as you would realize from your own experience. For example, cooking something is a different experience from merely hearing a recipe from a friend.

When a child throws a stone in water and sees it sink to the bottom and then throws a stick and sees it float, she realizes that some things sink and others float. After repeated experiments and clarifications from adults, she understands why some things sink and some float. Instead of being allowed to do this activity, if the child is merely told about this concept, it would not be so interesting for her. Thus, play is an ideal medium for discovery learning.

c) Play holds the child's attention

Children have a short attention span. They find it difficult to attend to one activity or to sit in one place, for long periods. Formal instruction where the teacher talks and the child listens to causes get boredom and loss of attention. In the early years, imparting concepts through play activities is most effective because **play involves the children physically, mentally, and emotionally and so they can attend longer to an activity.**

d) Learning through play is fun

Another reason why learning should be through play activities is that **play is the spontaneous activity of the child.** It is something she does on her own because she enjoys it. It is not an activity forced on her by the adult. Children choose to play and so their motivation to learn is high during play. It is only fair that we help children learn through ways they enjoy and make learning a stimulating and rewarding experience for them.

e) Play allows the child to choose appropriate activities

We learn, when the activity we are required to learn, is neither too simple nor too complicated; when the activity is at the right level of difficulty in our zone of proximal development. So, when we adults want to plan an activity for the children, we ought to be guided by their play activities, as that will tell us what is most appropriate for the child at that point. **Play, therefore, is an enjoyable medium through which children learn things they are ready to learn.**

f) Play helps in academic readiness

The concepts the child learns during play, the preparation for reading and writing that happens spontaneously through play activities, and the ability to participate in a group that develops during play situations will help the child later to adjust in school. **Thus, play helps in academic readiness.** Play also nurtures the spirit of inquiry and a desire to find out, which is the basis of learning. The child's increasing self-confidence as she masters new things during play makes her sure of herself and willing to accept challenges – these are qualities that she will need to do well in school.

8.3.2 What is Play-Based Learning?

Let us understand what we mean by play-based learning. You will come across other similar terms, such as 'play-based pedagogy', 'play as a pedagogical tool' and 'pedagogical play'.

By all of these terms, we are referring to the use of play in early childhood education to promote the learning of young children. Some questions that come to one's mind when we speak of the use of play in learning could be:

- a) Are children able to learn through their free-play alone or are some connections for learning needed to be made by adults?
- b) If the adult intervenes and modifies children's play activity or sets up a play activity, can it truly be called play?
- c) When children are left to play by themselves how will we know that children have grasped the content knowledge that you want them to have? Well, they may learn something, you may say, but will they learn what we intend them to learn?
- d) Can we assume that providing stimulating play concepts and materials will be sufficient to enable children to construct understanding, and derive the content knowledge which is embedded in these play materials? Will giving of materials ensure that children will have used their cognitive abilities, such as observation, matching, and classification, during their play? For example, if you have provided attractive and realistic toys of different animals to children, can we be sure that they have derived what characterizes and differentiates the different animals by using these play materials?

- e) How do we include play in the classroom?
- f) How much time is to be given to it?

One of the first things to understand is that while ‘play’ refers to the freely chosen activity of the child which leads to investigations and learning, ‘play-based learning’ involves more than free-play. It requires the teacher to play a more proactive role in children’s play. The teacher needs to interact with children during their play and support children’s conceptual learning, development of process skills, and acquisition of content knowledge. Let us understand this through an example.

In the earlier example of Radha experimenting with the mud pot, Radha may have realized that small pieces do not break but we cannot be sure. Of course, Radha will realize this on her own as she has other experiences, but the caregiver can help her to understand this from this experience itself. In other words, **the caregiver can draw the child’s attention to the possibilities she may have missed.** For example, if the caregiver had been with Radha she could have said, “*Radha, did you see that the pot breaks but small pieces do not break?*”, thus helping Radha to understand what she had seen. The adult can also **extend the child’s discovery.** She could have asked Radha to throw a big piece of the pot on a softer surface like sand or grass or in water and see what happens. This would have led to other discoveries such as the piece does not break in the water.

If we wish children to acquire content, develop cognitive abilities (such as reasoning, analyzing, and predicting) and acquire concepts through play, then, the teachers need to be more explicitly engaged in children’s play so that it leads to learning. Simply observing children’s play may legitimize children’s learning, but it would be insufficient to support learning. Whenever there is an intentional focus on learning, the teacher’s role becomes more proactive. **So a play-based learning environment means balance between providing opportunities for:**

- a) Child-initiated play in the presence of a caring and responsive adult, where children are free to choose their play; and
- b) Intentional playful interactions and experiential activities planned and guided by adults as well as the use of spontaneously occurring situations by adults to promote learning.

We can understand play-based learning in another way. It means that principles of children’s play should inform learning. Learning should be an enjoyable process, where children actively construct their knowledge through hands-on activities and experiences. The play-based classroom does not mean children do anything they want and it deteriorates into chaos. Neither does it mean that it is so controlled by teacher-guided play activities that children cannot learn through their own initiative and exploration.

The philosophy of play-based learning has been a part of the educational philosophy of many educational pioneers since the 16th century. The early pioneers were very vocal in supporting children’s free play. What has been

debated in present times is the need for adults' involvement in children's play. So the present focus is on a balance between child-initiated and adult-guided play. Various approaches and models of ECE curriculum such as Emergent Curriculum, High Scope, and Reggio Emilia follow play-based learning. You will read about the educational philosophy of some thinkers as well as features of some approaches and models in ECCE in Units 9 and 10 of this Block.

You may ask, **is there any place for direct instruction in a play-based learning environment?** By 'direct instruction' we mean when the teacher formally teaches the required content to children. The opinion of some people is that there may be some direct instruction for a short period. But this should not be a source of stress for the child. Essentially, play-based learning is a child-focused, student-centered approach.

So how would we see the teachers and students interacting in a play-based classroom? What would they be engaged in doing? Let us find out!

- a) There would be a variety of materials and children would be engaged in activities where they would be exploring, imagining, creating and problem-solving. The environment would be intentionally designed to stimulate children's exploration.
- b) Teachers and children would co-create knowledge; the teacher would not be seen as an authority figure who is the holder of all knowledge but as one who explores along with children and displays an attitude of curiosity and openness in the classroom, through the use of questions, interactions and taking interest in the discoveries in the classroom.
- c) Teachers remain active even when children are engaged in unstructured free play by observing and guiding them.
- d) Teachers observe children's play and activities to know what interests children and what is their developmental level. Using this knowledge, they identify the themes and topics in the curriculum.
- e) Interactions are respectful among children, classmates and the teacher.

Let us see what play-based pedagogy is not!

- a) When direct instruction is practiced for the major part of the day and whole group work is carried out, it is not play-based pedagogy.
- b) Settings, where children are given chance to play after they complete their 'work', are not play-based.
- c) When the teacher mainly selects what the children will play with and for how much time, and children move from one play setting to another, under the direction of the teacher. This is also not play-based pedagogy.
- d) ECE settings where the environment is not designed to sustain play are not following play-based pedagogy.

8.3.3 Role of Parents and Educators during Learning through Play

The role of the parent or teacher in play-based and activity-based learning, both at home and in preschool, is critical. Let us understand what the parent and the early childhood educator are expected to do in helping children learn through play and activity.

Broadly speaking, we can look at the adult's role in three ways:

- a) The role of the adult in creating the physical environment for play;
- b) The role of the adult in interacting and responding to children during the play; and
- c) The adult's observation of children's play to know about their development and interests.

Let us quickly discuss each!

a) Creating the Physical Environment

The physical environment has to be such that it stimulates children's exploration and play. The adult has to intentionally design the environment with play in mind. This means she has to:

- i) provide space for play (indoors and outdoors)
- ii) provide play materials; and
- iii) include time for both child-initiated and adult-guided play in the daily schedule.

In terms of materials, the educator can provide a variety of open-ended materials which will stimulate child-initiated free play. So materials like blocks, clay, paper and equipment for drawing and painting, and play materials like puzzles and shape boards allow children to use their imagination and creativity freely. Besides this, she can intentionally keep such material which will lead the children to develop specific abilities and concepts. For example, making a tub of water and a variety of objects available to children is most likely to prompt them to play by putting various objects in the water. As they do so, they are likely to see for themselves that some objects (like leaves, twigs and paper) float while others such as spoons and pebbles sink. This can then lead to discussions about things that sink and float and why. Thus, the teacher does not directly teach children which objects float and which sink but creates or arranges the situation in such a way that discoveries take place during their play. What the parent or the teacher needs to remember is that while creating opportunities for discovery, they must be guided by children's interest and their level of understanding.

b) Adult's Interactions and Response to Children during their Play

How much should the adult be involved in children's play to support it? The answer to this question has to be decided by the parent or the educator on a situation-to-situation basis. The adult should not ignore children's play;

neither should she overpower the children's play, controlling it completely. So, depending on the context, the children's developmental level, and the information the adult has gathered through observations of children's play, the adult can take on various levels of involvement. In the following points, we have described various degrees of adults' involvement in children's play, beginning with the least involved to the most involved.

- i) The adult can pay attention to and watch as children play. **When the adult is an onlooker or observer, it legitimizes the child's play.** During observation the adult is near the child, watching her play and even occasionally exchanging smiles or a few words — the adult takes on the role of an 'appreciating audience'. Thus, by simply paying attention to the children's play, the adult lets the children know that their play is a valuable and important activity. Studies have shown that children's attention span increases when there is an adult present during their play.
- ii) The adult may help the children prepare for the play activity and provide support during the play, but does not actually join the play. Her role could be to help the children **understand their discoveries during play**, such as by asking questions, and making comments. She could **facilitate play between children** and help them to sustain their play by providing ideas, helping them to organize themselves, and giving them time to think. **She could be a listener** giving full attention and time to the children as they explain or show what they have been doing. She could be a sounding board for children, reflecting their thoughts to them. The parent or educator can **extend the child's discovery by suggesting how they can modify or adapt the activity.**
- iii) The adult can join the play and becomes a play-mate or play partner, following the actions developed by the child and enjoying it.
- iv) The adult can also play parallel with the child and **demonstrates to children different play behaviours.** As the child is playing on her own, the adult initiates a similar play. For example, as a child is looking at and holding blocks, her mother, who is sitting next to her can herself play with the blocks by building a tower with them and sometimes commenting on her play — "I'm going to build a tall tower". In this case, the mother is playing sitting next to the child, but not directly interacting or talking to her. This gives the child an opportunity to observe a more skilled person playing and get ideas about how to extend her play.
- v) The adult actively joins the children in their play, taking on the **role of a leader**, suggesting what children can play with, how they can play, and actively extending and enriching their play. She may do this in different ways. She could plan the activity and take the lead role. Whatever the level of involvement in the actual play, the adult needs to be sensitive and flexible.

c) Understanding Children's Development through their Play

Observations of children at play can provide considerable information about their abilities, level of understanding, interests and personality traits. This is because while playing children are not inhibited or conscious and, therefore, one can see them at their best. Their activity is not being controlled by adults. Based on this information, the educator can identify appropriate themes, play activities, and materials to extend children's learning.

Some examples of how to play situations providing an insight into children's development are shared as follows:

- i) When the mother tries to attract the infant's attention by shaking her bangles and the child does not respond to the sound on more than one occasion, it is a cause for concern. It can imply that there is some problem with the child's hearing which must be investigated.
- ii) During play when the child separates stones according to size, leaves according to their shape or groups flowers according to their colour it shows that the child understands these concepts (size, shape and colour). Thus, the child's **play activities help us to know about the child's cognitive abilities.**

The following incident further shows how observations of play help us to assess whether children have understood concepts or are repeating them from memory.

A three-year-old child could recite numbers from 1 to 10 in the correct sequence. This might make us conclude that the child knows numbers. However, observation of the child during play showed that this was not true. While playing with stones with another child she said, "You take one stone and I will take four." She gave the child one but picked a handful for herself, saying that they were four. The child knew the meaning of 'one' and 'many' but did not know the difference between 2, 3, 4 and 5. She was reciting the number names from memory.

- i) We can know children's level of physical and motor development when children jump from heights, climb trees, hop, play with pebbles or sand, and so on.
- ii) The child's drawings and stories, apart from reflecting her motor and cognitive skills, may also give us an idea about her emotional development.
- iii) Play also reflects the child's social development, as in the following case.

While playing, Anita fell down and started to cry. Pavit, a four and a half years old, saw Anita crying. He walked up to her, wiped her tears, and said, "Don't cry. Is it hurting? I also feel pain when I fall. Let us put some medicine on it, it will become better."

Pavit could understand that Anita was hurt and must be feeling pain (empathize). He was able to see the event from her point of view (shows cognitive ability) and understand her emotions.

The following table lists some do's and don'ts regarding adult involvement in children's play.

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a variety of play opportunities. Provide children time, materials, and space for play. • Observe children's play. • Be responsive to the child's play and help extend children's enjoyment and interest in their play. • Know when the child needs more adult interaction, and when lesser interaction is needed during play. • Be sensitive to the child's moods. • Facilitate play between children during group play. • Ask children small questions about their play. • Communicate to parents the importance of play. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not create overly structured play opportunities — be flexible. • Do not abruptly interrupt children's play — give the child time to finish her activity. • Do not overpower children's play or unnecessarily intervene during their play.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Fill in the blanks.
 - a) The adult can also play parallel with the child and to children different play behaviours.
 - b) When an educator a variety of open-ended materials, it stimulates child-initiated free play.
 - c) The physical environment has to be such that itchildren's exploration and play.
 - d) When the adult is observers a child's play, it the child's play.

2) What is the role of adults during learning through play?

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8.4 FACTORS AFFECTING PLAY

The kind of games children play, the play materials used, the content of their play and the time they can spend in play are influenced by many other factors. In this section, you will learn how these factors influence play.

8.4.1 Age

The age of the child influences the kind of play activity she chooses; the content of her play; and the amount of time spent in a particular play activity by her. It happens because the child's physical, motor, social, cognitive, and language abilities change and develop with age.

The following points further clarify this aspect:

- a) A six-month-old child plays by picking up the objects in her reach and exploring them by putting them into her mouth, looking at them, banging them, and dropping them. For a four-year-old child, riding a tricycle and making objects with sand is great fun. An eight-year-old child likes to ride a bicycle, climb trees and play hop-scotch. Here, the physical abilities of the children influence the kinds of games they chose.
- b) The increasing social competence of the growing child changes the quality of interaction between children, and thus, influences the play activities. Children move from solitary play to cooperative play, as they grow in age and as their social skills develop.
- c) The developing cognitive skills of the child enable her to engage in complex forms of play. You have read in MCD-001 how play changes from sensory-motor play to symbolic play. This is possible because of the development of thinking abilities. Children can play games with complex rules as their thinking develops. If you observe a three-year-old child and a six-year-old child playing with a doll, you will find that the details of the play of the two children are different. The six-year-old child will plan details like dressing the doll for school, teaching her, giving her food, helping her with homework, and taking her out to play, as though she is the doll's 'mother'. This is because she can think, plan and imagine in far greater detail than a three-year-old because of her enhanced cognitive abilities.
- d) The amount of time spent in a particular play activity also varies with age. Generally, the younger the child, the shorter is her attention span for a particular activity. Therefore, there are more frequent changes in her play activity.

However, while age influences children's play as described above, **there are individual differences among children and the child's play may not always be as you would expect of her age.** This is more likely when the child has a disability.

8.4.2 Gender

You may have observed that while many of the play activities of boys and girls are similar, many play activities are also widely different. Boys and girls play different types of games. The amount of physical activity, the type of play material and toys used for play, and the theme of the game are some of how the play activities of boys and girls differ. Do you think boys and girls are born with such play preferences?

While your thoughts in the space below and compare these with our discussion.

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If you notice, the play of infant boys and girls, you will find that their play is similar. Play at this age primarily includes exploration of their own bodies and objects. As girls and boys grow older, they start showing preference in particular play activities. Girls like to wear their mother’s dress, play with dolls, pretend to cook food, and play hop-scotch. Boys like to wear their father’s clothes, ride a bullock cart, plough the field or play with guns. Boys engage in more vigorous games compared to girls. Boys are also observed to engage in physical fights more than girls; the play of girls is comparatively more co-operative. What could be the reasons for these differences?

Physiological differences between boys and girls could be one of the reasons which lead boys to choose more vigorous play activities. **But much of the play preferences of children are a result of how parents socialize the children.** Children’s gender influences the way people interact with them and the expectations people have of them. This, in turn, influences their play preferences. For example, boys as compared to girls are more likely to climb trees in a park. It is not as if the girl is physiologically unable to climb trees. But perhaps, when the girl first climbed a tree, she was told by her mother to be more ‘girl-like’ and do things that girls do. The boy, on the other hand, was praised for his efforts. Thus, boys take part in such vigorous outdoor play activities, more than girls.

In many homes, particularly, those belonging to the lower socio-economic class, girls are required to look after younger siblings and help in the household work as part of their day-to-day activities. Their play reflects such situations. In rural areas, boys may help their father in the field or do outdoor jobs and these situations appear in their play. In the present times, especially in urban areas, girls enact the role of doctor or policewoman in their play as women are seen engaged in these professions.

Parents foster play preferences by giving different play materials to boys and girls. Girls are given dolls, utensils, and the like, to play with. Boys are given guns and cars like toys. For instance, Hari, a four-year-old, when asked by his sister to play with her dolls refused emphatically saying, “I don’t like to play the games of girls.” But he can be seen playing with the dolls when he thinks no one is looking! Certainly, he does not have an inborn dislike for doll play.

8.4.3 Culture

Culture influences one’s way of life, which also includes child-rearing practices. India has many communities and all of these have their way of life. While we share many commonalities, some practices are specific to a particular community. Children’s play reflects the culture of their community.

In most parts of our country, massaging infants is a traditional practice that delights the infant. During this activity, the mother usually sings songs to the child, talks to her, and plays with her. In all parts of India, there is a rich variety of mother-infant games. The infant’s play in this context is very different from those who live in another culture where this practice is not followed.

As children grow older, they begin to play pretend games during which they imagine themselves as different characters and act like them. Most of these roles that they take on are those that they see adults around them performing in real life. As the roles performed by adults vary with the culture, children’s role-play will also be different from culture to culture. Thus, while children across cultures will engage in role play, the content of their play will be different from culture to culture, reflecting the roles they see.

The themes in children’s play also reflect the various festivals and customs specific to their region. Most cultures in the world have a rich tradition of toys for children. However, the type of toys varies from country to country and, within our own country, from region to region. Thus, culture determines what children play and how they play.

8.4.4 Social Class

Social class influences the time available for play; the type of toys and play materials available to children; the kind of play; the space available for play; and the extent of parental participation in children’s play.

Let us read about each of these aspects in some detail.

- a) Children from poor families who might be spending the major part of the day assisting their parents at work, get very little time for play. They find time for play amidst their work. Children from families who have more resources and who do not have to assist parents in work or household responsibilities are likely to have more time for leisure and play.

- b) Social class makes a difference in the type of toys and play material available to children. While children from richer families can buy expensive and readymade toys from the market, children from poor families are more creative in using readily available objects and materials such as play materials such as stones, bottle caps, empty tins, shells, old tyres, newspapers. They are also more likely to create their play materials – you may have seen the children tying a stone to a piece of string and dragging it on. In fact, for most children, the determining factor is not how expensive the play material or toy is, but whether it serves its purpose in the play activity. A lovely shell gathered at the beach is often more attractive to a young child, than a plastic toy brought from the market.
- c) Social class may also influence the kinds of games children play. While poor children may engage more in physical movement-based outdoor play such as climbing trees, rolling a cycle tyre, children from rich families who have more material resources available to them may prefer to play with video games, computer games, puzzle boards, skating, badminton and so on.
- d) Social class may also determine the space available for play for children in the house. In families with bigger houses, a separate area may be given for children's play. They may also have their garden for play. Children living in one-room houses will have to find space for play in the streets, lanes, roads, or parks.
- e) Social class also influences parents' participation in their children's play activities. Parents from poorer families are likely to spend most of their time earning a livelihood and may have little time to guide their children's activities. Also, parents from middle and upper-income levels are more likely to be aware of the importance of play in children's development as a result of education. Thus, they might spend more time with their children during their play and guide them. However, it is also important to stress that **education by itself does not ensure that the adults will be sensitive to the needs of children or be aware of the importance of play in development.** In many families from the middle and upper SES, both the parents are working and come home late at night. They hardly have time to interact or play with their child. Also, many parents from middle and upper-SES families put enormous stress on academic achievement and consider children's play a waste of time. Thus, while we can speak in very broad and general terms about the role of SES in children's play, **we cannot make definite statements in favour of a particular class as being more sensitive toward the importance of children's play.**

8.4.5 Ecology and Setting

The city with its crowded living conditions offers little open space for play. But children still manage to find space. You can see them playing in the narrow lanes, on the roads alongside the traffic, and on the terraces of houses. While children should not be denied an opportunity to play, a constant endeavour is required to ensure that children play in safe and secure

neighbourhoods. Rural and tribal areas provide more open space for play and the children are closer to nature.

8.4.6 Media

Media can be broadly divided into three categories: Print media, broadcast media, and interactive media. Print media includes newspapers, magazines and books. Broadcast media includes radio and television and movies. Interactive media includes social media, the use of the internet, and video games. Interactive media is available to children through a variety of devices: computers, laptops, iPad, and mobile phones. Nowadays, even pre-school children are growing up in environments saturated with the internet, computer, and video games that strongly catch their attention. The print, broadcast media, and interactive media differ greatly with regard to the type of stimulation they provide to children. Books require children to read and find out for themselves. This process of learning requires the active participation of children and thus fosters a spirit of inquiry and curiosity. Television and radio programmes, on the other hand, usually require children to sit passively, listen and watch. Generally, the programmes tell them what they should know instead of allowing them an opportunity for discovery. Thus, the guidance of adults becomes essential. The interactive media allows children's participation in the activity being displayed on the screen by clicking on it. So in a way engaging with interactive media is a more active process as compared to watching television programmes.

But the point is that both television programmes and interactive media do not provide children with direct first-hand experience of playing with materials and equipment that challenge their thinking and problem-solving skills. Such active play with concrete and actual objects in the company of peers is necessary for the development of thinking abilities, social skills, language, and gross and fine motor abilities. Further, often children engage with these media all by themselves with no parental support and guidance. However, there is no substitute for direct interaction with parents and teachers for learning and development.

The use of broadcast and interactive media whether for learning or entertainment frequently limits children's time for vital activities such as vigorous physical play, reading, conversations, spending time with peers and family, storytelling, participating in regular exercise, and developing other necessary physical, mental and social skills. This harms children's development and health.

Further, a lot of content on television, video games, social media, and the internet has violent content which has been a public health concern for many years, and its impact on young children is even more harmful.

So, children below 18 months should not be exposed to screen media such as television, computer, or mobile phone. Children older than 18 months, should be exposed to screen media for a short duration only wherein they should be exposed to only quality programmes for young children with adult supervision. Also, there should be ample hands-on play activities for children to engage in other than watching media.

8.4.7 Quality of Experience

You have been reading about how the age of the child, gender, ecology, culture, resources available to the family, and media determine the content of the play, the time available for it as well as the space and material used for play. **However, a major factor that influences the quality of children's play is the type of experiences they have in the family and neighbourhood.** The following two examples illustrate this point.

In the *first family*, both the mother and the father leave for work early in the morning and return in the evening. Every day, before leaving, the mother massages the infant and during this time she talks to her and plays with her. The mother takes the child to her place of work where the child is taken care of in a crèche. In the evening when both the parents return from work, the father plays with the child while the mother prepares the meal.

In the *second family*, the mother is with the child in the house the whole day. Her focus is more on the management of the household. Her interaction with the child is during the times she bathes or feeds the child. The father has long working hours and by the time he comes back from work the child is asleep.

One would think that the mother who is with the child at home the whole day would be interacting and playing with the child for a longer time. However, this may not always happen. The parents who are working may be more careful of the fact that since they are away from the child for long hours, they must spend quality time with the child in whatever time they are together. It is possible that the infant belonging to the first family has more opportunities for learning and developing a stronger sense of security. **So ultimately it is the quality of experiences that matter and not just the quantity of time with the child.**

Parents and caregivers who are aware of the importance of play activities for children can provide an environment conducive to play, irrespective of economic status, education, or ecological setting.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) Mark the statements as true (T) or false (F).
 - a) Boys and girls play similarly during infancy. ()
 - b) The type of play activities children find a stimulating and enjoyable change with age. ()
 - c) A pretty toy purchased from the shop is more interesting for children than homemade toys. ()
 - d) All cultures and communities encourage young children to play. ()
 - e) Television involves the child passively, while books involve the child actively. ()

2) How do given factors affect children's play?

a) Gender:

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b) Social Class:

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8.5 SUMMING UP

Learning and development takes place when children play. Play fosters development of children by facilitating construction of knowledge; promoting imagination and creativity; promoting physical and motor development; helping in acquiring language; helping in development of social skills; and helping in emotional development.

In some situations, children do not get an opportunity to play such as when they are brought up in institutions that only focus on providing physical care, when they have severe disabilities and when they are employed as child labour promoting cognitive development.

As play is naturally the medium of the child's learning in the early years, there is a need to plan organized learning experiences for children in ECCE centres including for children with disabilities, through the medium of play and play activities. While play refers to the freely chosen activity of the child which leads to investigations and learning, play-based learning involves more than free play.

The role of the parent or teacher in play-based and activity-based learning, both at home and in the preschool, is critical and can be broadly seen in three ways: creating the physical environment for play; interacting and responding to children during the play; and the adult's observation of children's play to know about their development and interests.

Observations of children at play can provide considerable information about their abilities, level of understanding, interests and personality traits. This is

because while playing children are not inhibited or conscious.

There are various factors affecting play, such as age, gender, culture, social class, ecology and setting, media and quality of experience.

8.6 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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8.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) **Physical and motor development:** Running and playing on the swing aid physical and motor development. Playing in the sand and drawing shapes with a stick fosters fine motor skills.

Social development: Playing together and also learning to wait for their turn on the swing helps the children to learn to cooperate.

Cognitive development: While narrating the story, the child has to recall it and string the events logically in the right sequence. While counting the number of times the swing goes back and forth, the child understands the concept of number. Children who are drawing shapes in the sand are becoming familiar with different shapes.

Emotional development: Talking excitedly and expending energy by chasing each other could be helping the children in coping with their pent-up emotions and energies.

- 2) Play provides opportunities to express feelings and emotions. It also allows the freedom to express feelings that may not be allowed in other situations.
- 3) The caregiver can:
 - help the children understand their discoveries
 - provide opportunities for discovery
 - extend the discovery
 - plan appropriate play activities

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) a) demonstrate
b) provides
c) stimulates
d) legitimizes
- 2) The adult can:
 - a) Create the physical environment for play;
 - b) Interact and respond to children during the play; and
 - c) Observe the child's play and know about children's development and interests.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- 1) a) True
b) True
c) False – a simple homemade toy can be more or equally interesting for the child to play with than an expensive toy purchased from the market.
d) True
e) True
- 2) a) While physiological differences between boys and girls can affect their play, much of the differences in their play are a result of how parents socialize their children in the light of gender roles and identities.
b) Social class influences:
 - the time available for play
 - the type of toys and play materials available to children
 - the kind of play
 - the space available for play
 - the extent of parental participation in children's play.