

# Early Years Celebration 2025



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# The Power of Play

Jo Gray  
Head of Education

@JoGrayEducation  
@OneEducation

# When does playing stop?



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Do we ever stop playing?







# Why is play important?



# The benefits of play

Play is:

- An evolutionary survival trait linked to life expectancy.
- A neurological development process that builds the fundamental structure of the brain and underpins all forms of higher learning.
- A therapeutic discipline with a unique capacity to heal through positive biochemistry.
- The key to unlocking imagination, creativity, taking risks and complex problem solving.
- Essential for everyone.





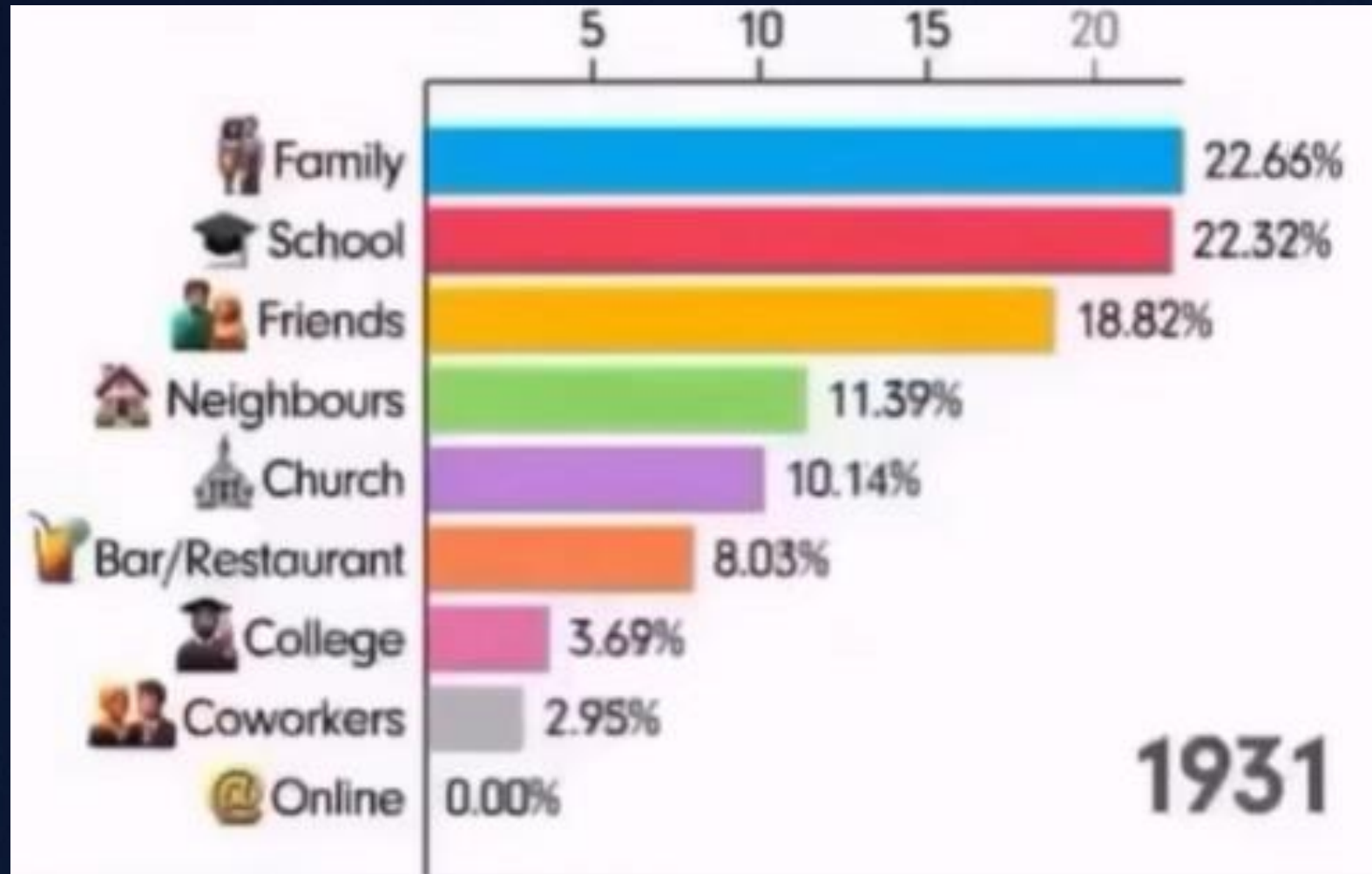
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# Our Society

We are facing unprecedented challenges – social, economic and environmental – driven by accelerating globalisation and a faster rate of technological developments.



# Where most of our time is spent 1930-2024







To navigate through such uncertainty, children will need to develop:

- curiosity,
- imagination,
- resilience,
- self-regulation,
- respect and appreciate the ideas, perspectives and values of others;
- cope with failure or rejection,
- move forward in the face of adversity.

(This list is not exhaustive)

Adapted from [https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20\(05.04.2018\).pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/E2030%20Position%20Paper%20(05.04.2018).pdf)



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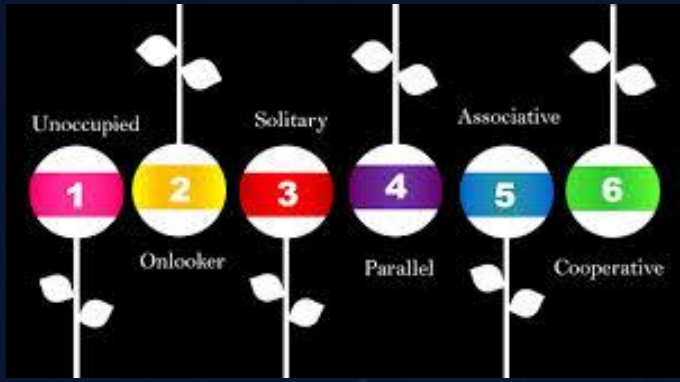
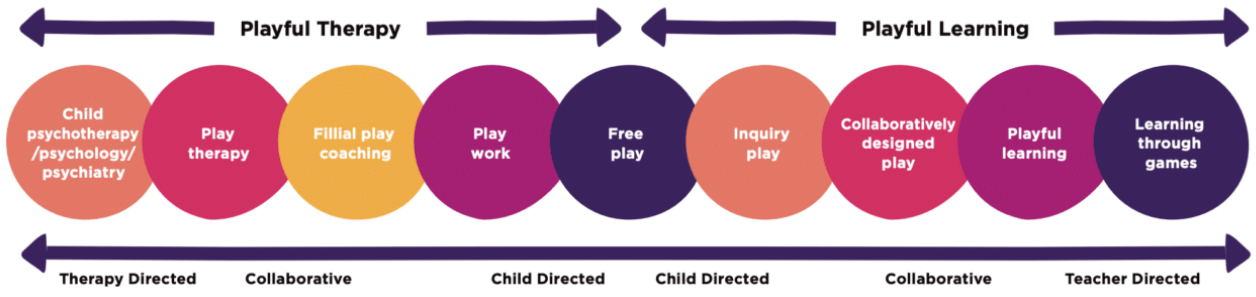




What might play look like in your school or setting?



### Continuum of Play: From Therapy to Teaching



**PLAY TYPES**

- Symbolic Play
- Locomotor Play
- Recapitulative Play
- Creative Play
- Exploratory Play
- Communication Play
- Role Play
- Fantasy Play
- Socio-dramatic Play
- Object Play
- Mastery Play
- Deep Play
- Rough and Tumble Play
- Dramatic Play
- Social Play
- Innate Play

www.playscotland.org

A Playworker's Taxonomy of Play Types by Bob Hughes



IT IS A  
HAPPY TALENT  
TO KNOW HOW TO  
play.

*-Ralph Waldo Emerson*



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# Play

unoccupied  
cooperative  
Individual/solitary  
onlooker  
parallel  
associative  
explorative



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This is play.



This is play.




This is play.



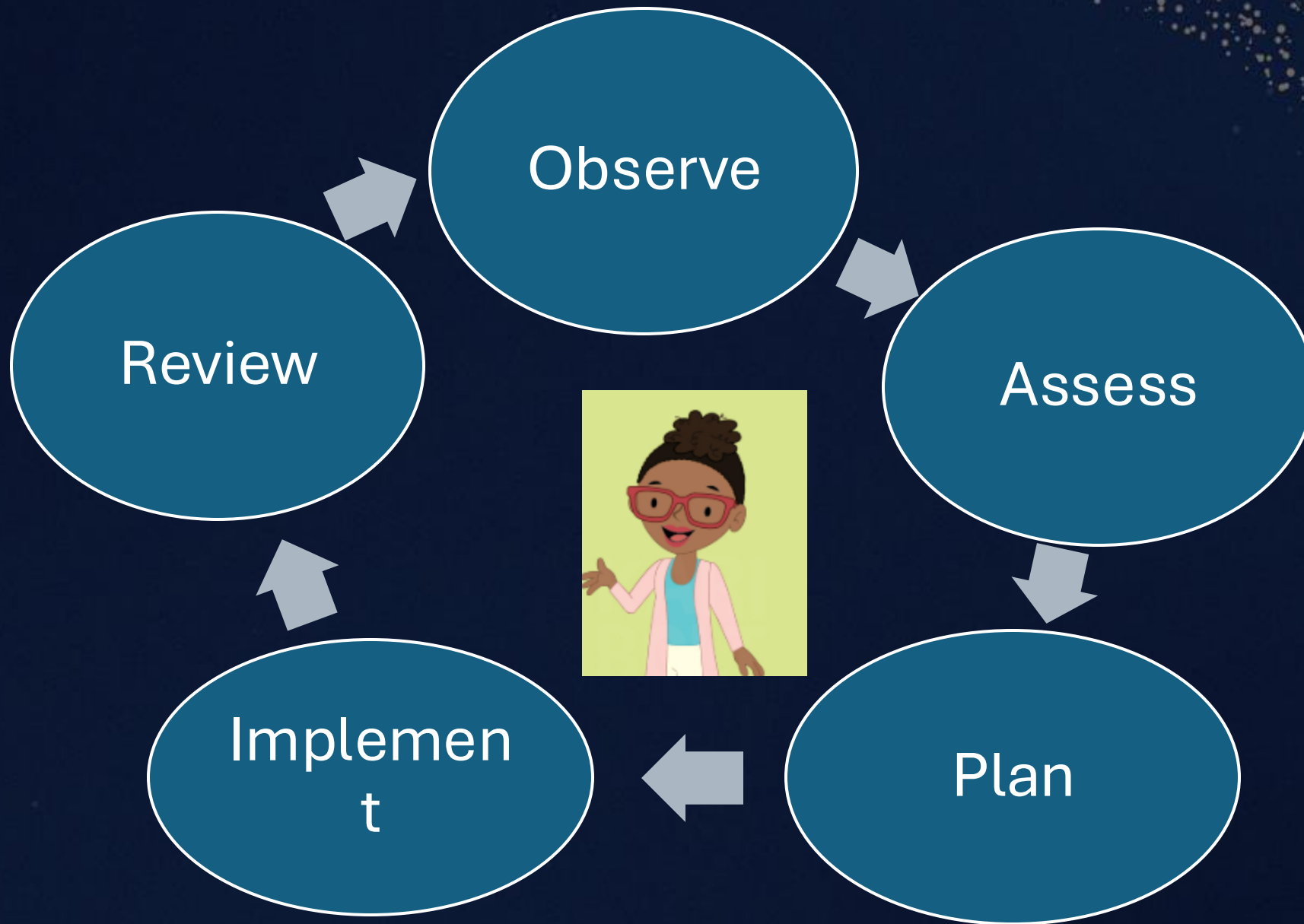
This is play.





What is the role of the adult  
in play within our schools  
and settings?







**Celebrating what Manchester  
does for our youngest children.**



**Thank you Manchester – our  
children in this city are so lucky!**

Reviewing the environment, teaching and learning in EYFS  
XXX Setting/School  
Date: XXX

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Observers: \_\_\_\_\_

Teachers and additional adults: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**The Role of the Adult: Teaching/Adult Interactions**


Intent:	Implementation:	Impact:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning builds on what children know and can do.</li> <li>Secure foundation through planning for the learning and development of each individual child, and ensuring how learners regularly" EYFS Framework 2021.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teach to the learning needs of the children.</li> <li>Present information clearly, promoting appropriate discussion about the subject matter being taught.</li> <li>Choose resources that meet children's needs and promote learning.</li> <li>Support children to integrate new knowledge into larger concepts.</li> <li>Communicate well to check children's understanding, identify misconceptions and provide clear explanations to improve learning.</li> <li>Respond and adapt teaching as necessary so children make progress</li> <li>Meet for children in a way that excites and engages them, introducing new ideas, concepts and vocabulary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children:</li> <li>developed detailed knowledge and skills (know and remember more)</li> <li>understanding of language, use and enjoyed; listened attentively and responded with comprehension to familiar stories, rhymes and songs</li> </ul>

Strengths... \_\_\_\_\_

Areas for development... \_\_\_\_\_

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**Exploring maths in the EYFS through books, rhymes and songs**



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**Interactions to support C&L - Vocabulary**

Model key vocabulary established from assessments and observations.

**Teach vocabulary explicitly:**  
Name and label (cupruls, cutlery, thermometer, temperature) and explain and show its use (I think baby has a temperature, let's use the thermometer to check)

**Teach vocabulary implicitly:**  
Imitate what a child says back, yes, ingredients (this helps support clarity and accuracy in pronunciation and allows for extension, depending on the stage in a child's language development - "we need lots of ingredients" or "ingredients tell us what we need to include in the recipe")

**Comment on what is happening:** by applying the vocabulary in context as this deepens the understanding of the communication - "You have the spatula, great that is the perfect utensil for smoothing the icing on the cake."

**in the home corner this is often an area children stay within their "comfort" zone with their use of language and communication so carefully listen then offer a range of vocabulary to extend - "yummy so delicious" "scrumptious"**

**listen out for opportunities to rephrase and recast language - "I bought some bread and eggs from the shop" for "bun yes particularly for breakfast and eggs at the shop" Listen out for opportunities to illustrate or correct use of verb tense or or "totty"**

**Interactions to support C&L - reading stories**  
Find stories and books set in the home environment which can be rotated and shared in the area.

**Practical tasks:**  
-reflex the area at transitional points.  
-restock replenishables, e.g. play dough for making outside, we need to think about this before we take baby out for a walk.  
-Connect so that children feel seen, heard and valued!

**Pause, Ponder, Play!**  
**Pause** - stand back, observe and listen.  
**Ponder** - What do you learn from their play? Reflect and consider "what learning opportunities are there to extend and deepen understanding?"  
**Play** - if invited, play alongside the children applying the learning opportunities and/or pose problems that may need solving e.g. "It's really cold outside, we need to think about this before we take baby out for a walk."  
-Connect so that children feel seen, heard and valued!

**Interactions to support C&L - singing/ telling nursery rhymes**  
-sing in the area at transitional points.  
-Polly and the kettle on  
-I'm a little teapot  
-Pat-a-cake  
-Hickory, dickory, do!  
-There was an old lady who swallowed a fly

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**Literacy in EYFS**  
Fostering Firm Foundations for Life




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**Effective adult interactions**  
What is the role of the adult in moving children's learning on?

**Top tips!**

**Part 1a: Building a culture and a curriculum of play-based learning**

**Evaluation**  
Reflect on where your school is in your journey and allocate a number against each of the statements below to evaluate the extent to which it reflects current practice in your context (1-2 = low; 3-4 = medium; 5-6 = high).

**Key ideas from research, theory and evidence**

- Staff at all levels are supported to build their expertise and understanding in relation to the role of play in child development and learning, within and beyond EYFS. Staff understand that the spectrum of play encompasses a range of play types, including what the role of adults may look like within those learning opportunities.
- The wider school community is provided with opportunities to develop a research-informed understanding of the importance of play-based learning for all stages of childhood.
- Expectations of what play-based learning is within the school have been developed collaboratively, discussed and shared with staff at all levels, in order to build a cohesive vision for play. This should include decisions around:
  - the role of the adult within play for all ages
  - the types of play (e.g. free play, guided play, directed play) and what these look like at all ages
  - the expectations of regularity of play opportunities
  - the expectations around indoor and outdoor play
  - the inclusivity of play opportunities for all
- Although they may be guided by the whole-school play principles and approaches, teachers have a degree of agency over pedagogical choices and may adopt their approach to suit a particular pupil need, subject area or event.
- Assessment includes the observation of children's play and this is used to plan follow-on activities within the classroom, as with other assessment methods.
- School systems and policies support play-based learning across the school and are regularly reviewed to ensure that barriers are negated.

**Questions for reflection and discussion**

- Do our values and vision outline play-based learning as a priority and how is this seen in the culture of our school? How do we share this with all stakeholders?
- How do we ensure that staff and the school community have a clear understanding of the value of play-based learning in our curriculum for all ages?
- What CPD or other support do we have in place to build our staff expertise and how adept is this for the whole team?
- How do our assessment systems encourage and value play-based learning?

**Common barriers**  
What might impede improvement?  
Staff are not confident in planning for or delivering play-based learning and do not understand the role of the adult within play, resulting in surface-level activities and missed opportunities for quality play interaction.  
Staff always interact with the play, inhibiting the children's interactions and limiting the observation impact for future learning.  
The vision of what play looks like across the school is not developed and shared, and play-based learning is viewed as an EYFS tool, undervalued for older children within the school community.  
School systems, such as planning expectations or assessment, do not value play and inhibit practitioners' ability to plan and deliver effectively.  
External pressures, such as external assessments or inspections, inhibit the use of play-based learning and, in turn, practitioners limit the value of play.



An hour of play is worth a lifetime of  
conversation.

— *Plato* —

Jo.gray@oneeducation.co.uk

www.oneeducation.co.uk

@JoGrayEducation

