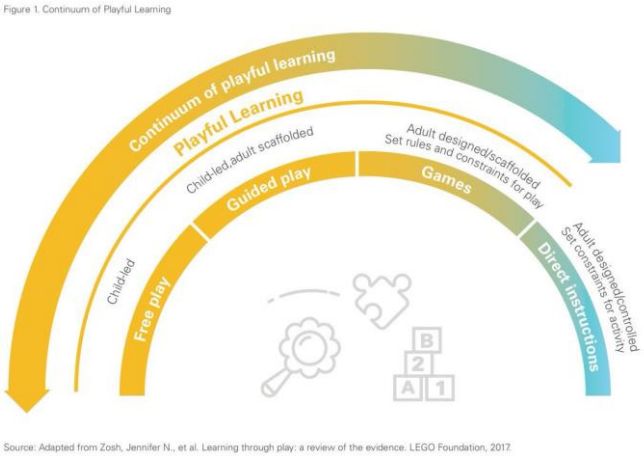
Stalyhill Infant School – Rationale for Play

At Stalyhill Infant School, we believe that frequent opportunities for play are extremely beneficial to children's development and emotional well-being. In recent years a drive towards 'performance culture' has meant that opportunities for play have been neglected in favour of academic achievement but we believe that the two concepts do not need to be mutually exclusive. Through our curriculum we strive to offer a balance of 'free play', 'guided play', games and opportunities to learn through play, leading to direct instruction (see diagram below) and, in this way, support children's socialisation, emotional and physical wellbeing **and** their academic attainment.

Play is therefore a key component in our curriculum and aligns with our wider school ethos that learning should be investigative, exploratory, based on first-hand experiences and fun.

In the wake of the 2020-21 COVID-19 pandemic, we believe that opportunities for play are more important than ever in the lives of children affected by the disruption of school closures and national lockdowns. Alongside the notion of academic catch-up, we believe that our children need to be provided with opportunities to reconnect with their peers and to develop crucial, collaborative play skills missed out on due to time away from school. It is our aim to provide experiences that have been missed and re-kindle a love of learning and play in our children on their return to school.

This statement outlines why play is important, some of the benefits of play and finally some examples of how we incorporate play at Stalyhill Infant School.



Continuum of Playful Learning (LEGO foundation 2012)

Why is play important? (Taken from Play England)

Play is an essential part of every child's life and is vital for the enjoyment of childhood as well as social, emotional, intellectual and physical development. When children are asked about what they think is important in their lives, playing and friends is usually at the top of the list.

Defining play

How do we define what 'playing' actually means?

Play England's Charter for Children's Play describes play as: 'what children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way, and for their own reasons.'

Play has also frequently been described as 'what children and young people do when they are not being told what to do by adults'.

Having time and space to play gives children the opportunity to meet and socialise with their friends, keeps them physically active, and gives the freedom to choose what they want to do.

Play can be described as being;

- based on a sense of free will and control, either individually or within the group
- motivated for its own sake rather than any external reward
- pleasurable and positively valued
- flexible and adaptive, using objects and rules in a variety of changing ways
- non-literal, 'as if' behaviour – it can rearrange or turn the world upside down
- unpredictable, spontaneous, innovative and creative.

Benefits of play

Research shows that play has many benefits for children, families and the wider community, as well as improving health and quality of life.

Recent research suggests that children's access to good play provision can:

- increase their self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-respect
- improve and maintain their physical and mental health
- give them the opportunity to mix with other children
- allow them to increase their confidence through developing new skills
- promote their imagination, independence and creativity
- offer opportunities for children of all abilities and backgrounds to play together
- provide opportunities for developing social skills and learning
- build resilience through risk taking and challenge, problem solving, and dealing with new and novel situations
- provide opportunities to learn about their environment and the wider community.

Learning through play in the EYFS

In the EYFS, play is one of the main ways in which children learn and develop. It helps to build self-worth by giving a child a sense of his or her own abilities and to feel good about themselves. Because it's fun, children often become very absorbed in what they are doing.

Play is very important to a child's development, it is an integral part of a child's Early Years Foundation Stage and supports their learning journey too. Young children can develop many skills through the power of play. They may develop their language skills, emotions, creativity and social skills. Play helps to nurture imagination and give a child a sense of adventure. Through this, they can learn essential skills such as problem solving, working with others, sharing and much more.

Learning through play in Key stage 1

Learning through play is not only for the EYFS. In KS1, play opportunities enhance children's mastery of academic concepts and build motivation to learn. In fact, two of the most important things that play can develop are interest and motivation.

Encouraging these in KS1 brings children on board in contributing to their own learning. For example, playing board games can strengthen math concepts while building social competence. The use of puppets, role play, small world and other reading games, make it much more likely for struggling readers to move ahead and not give up.

Exploration of a wide variety of stimuli and writing tools at a 'writing corner' can engage reluctant writers and help children learn from one another.

Further, play fosters creativity and imagination, critical components in enabling us to cope, to find pleasure, and to innovate. Play and opportunities to engage actively in learning strengthens children's creative powers. Letting KS1 children engage actively with materials, issues and topics, opens up the space for inquiry and problem solving.

Examples of opportunities for play at Stalyhill Infant School

Reception – Year 2

- Role & pretend play
- Small world play – use of tuff trays
- Outdoor play – natural world, weather, environment
- Multi-sensory play – sand, water, dough etc.
- Imaginative play – use of materials and free resources to create children's own choice of model / character / vehicle etc.
- Play using dolls and puppets
- Construction, building, fastening and joining
- Physical and gross motor play
- Play linked to stimuli, 'hooks' and quality texts
- Free play - making up own games
- Board games, card games, jigsaws
- Maths games
- Themed days
- Drama and drama workshops

This list is not exhaustive but merely gives an example of some of the types of play children may engage in whilst at Stalyhill infant School.

Useful links

UNICEF – Learning through Play

https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/UNICEF-Lego-Foundation-Learning-through-Play.pdf

Play England's study – Play for a Change

http://www.playengland.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/play-for-a-change-low-res.pdf