

Organising for Play: Time and Routines

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Children develop concepts, dispositions and skills in relation to:

- Social conventions and awareness of others (Oral Language)
- Demonstrating understanding (Oral Language)
- Description, prediction and reflection (Oral Language)
- Comprehension (Reading)
- Engagement (Writing)
- Motivation and choice (Writing)

Introduction

Play and playful approaches are very important to teaching and learning in infant classes. The purpose of this Support Material is to suggest practical ways to organise the routines that support **daily opportunities for open-ended, child-led play**. It is not meant to limit play and playfulness to a daily play

session, but to help you to introduce and develop play in your classroom.

This Support Material is linked to six short podcasts which give more practical information and can help you to

- organise play opportunities for the children by **setting up a weekly sequence*** and a **daily routine**
- suggest ways to allow you to spend **time** each day **participating in play** with the children, thereby supporting learning, as well as future planning and assessment.

* In the podcasts, this is called a 'rota' but the language has evolved into the more flexible 'sequence'.



Time and Routines – Overview

For organising the **play session**, there are three interconnected routines:

- A weekly play sequence
- A daily 4-phase play session routine
- Routines to help the teacher spend time every day in playful interaction with a group of children as they play.

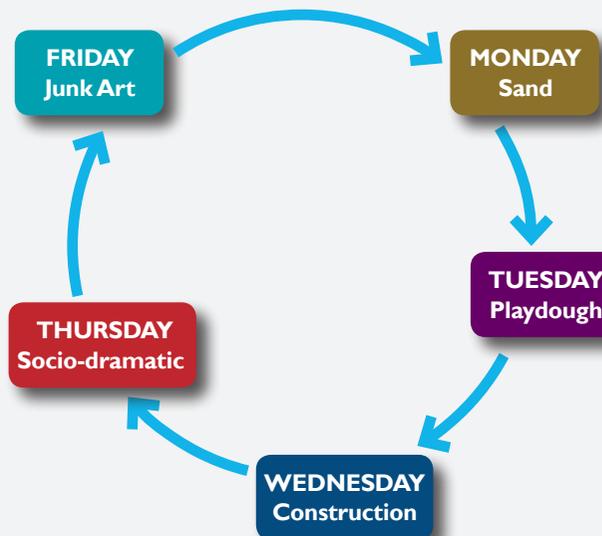
All of these routines are based on a system of **five groups** within the class playing in **five play areas** (see the Support Material, *Organising for Play: Resources*). While groups can be reassigned regularly, friendship groups in which children get to play with their special friends, should be a feature. Children whose social skills are still developing will need support to enter the play

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with the group, and careful observation can help to ensure that children who play alone are not doing so because of an uncertainty about how to join in. Gender issues might also have to be considered.

Children need plenty of time so that their play can develop and they feel it is worth their while investing in it. A minimum provision is **one hour per day**. Teachers' experience indicates that the best time is between little break and lunch-time, because this time period has a natural beginning and end.

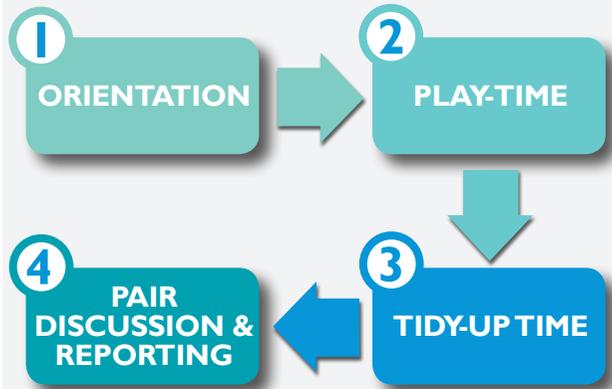
Weekly Play Sequence



The sequence is simply the order in which each group plays in each play area on the consecutive days of the week. It is designed to make sure that children in large classes have a broad range of play opportunities, and that each child gets access. The sequence is also a practical way for teachers to keep track of what each child is doing when managing large numbers. It is helpful if the children have a visual, such as a rotating chart, to help them see when their turn will come at each play area. It gives them a sense of security that they will get their turn, and helps them to plan ahead.

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Daily Routine



1. Orientation

Before play begins, the children are given time to **consider what they will do during play**. Research shows that this planning promotes higher quality play. The Orientation takes different forms depending on whether the class is junior or senior infants, or a combination of classes. The following are examples of what the children might do as part of the orientation.

Junior infants:

- Name the children in their group and in other groups.
- Describe the weekly sequence in terms of taking turns, understanding 'today, tomorrow, yesterday', and naming the days of the week.
- Begin to follow through on statements beginning with, *I'm going to ...*

Senior infants – As above and also:

- Plan with a partner, progressing to planning collaboratively with a group.
- Record the plan through mark-making, drawing and/or writing.
- Talk about the plan, identifying the resources needed.
- Identify roles required for role-play, and describe what each might do.
- Refer back to the 'written' plan when reviewing their play.

The children are supported to be **very independent when playing** and this includes the set-up. Play resources are taken out and returned by the children, and resources are stored so that this can happen. It will become obvious which play areas the children prefer. Such preferences can help with planning, e.g., many children love junk art and teachers can respond by planning the weekly sequence so that each group has two consecutive days of junk art. This allows the children to finish what they started.



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3. Tidy-up Time

Through consistent experiences of putting away resources, children develop a **sense of responsibility** for their environment and develop an awareness of the needs of others who will use those materials after them. Where the storage of materials has been carefully planned, the children practise classifying, matching, comparing and ordering when they tidy up.

They also use the associated language in a meaningful way. It is important that the children tidy up independently, so the teacher focuses on supporting the children to do this rather than doing it himself/herself. While this can take time, it can be a valuable contribution to children's developing self-reliance, independence, self-confidence and self-efficacy.

4. Pair Discussion and Reporting

After the tidy-up is finished, each child is paired with a child he/she didn't play with. The children take five minutes or so to **talk about what they did**, then two or three pairs report to the class. Over time, this encourages the children to listen to the other child. Pair discussion works well as the main form of review. This can be alternated with, for example, having a question and answer session with the role-play group, integrating with role and character in the Drama Curriculum.

Every child needs the opportunity to talk about his/her play, to be heard and, in turn, to be the listener so that another child can be heard.

Reporting

Each child reports on what his/her partner did rather than what he/she did.

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Interaction Time during Play

Sensitive participation by the teacher contributes to the quality of play in school. Spending **time playing with the children every day** will benefit you and the children. Every day, the teacher sits with **one group for at least 10 minutes**. Some call it the ‘10-minute contract’, but you and the children can come up with your own title. The teacher and the children make an agreement, in advance, that for 10 minutes (or more), the teacher will have uninterrupted playtime with a particular group. It can help the children to keep to this if they know that their group will get a turn to play with the teacher as well, and you can tell them in advance when that will be. There are a couple of other things the teacher can do to help the children to help each other, and become more independent during play.

Using Assistants

One strategy is to have ‘assistants’ such as a problem solver or helpful person in each group. Any child who has a question or needs help goes first to a helper while the teacher is playing. Such roles give positive messages to the children about social skills like helpfulness and friendliness, and acting independently.



The Waiting Room

Any child who still wants to speak to the teacher after asking an assistant, can go to the Waiting Room until the teacher is free. All that’s needed are two or three chairs, a box of reading material, pages on clipboards for writing, etc., and a sign saying *Waiting Room*. Having reading and writing materials in the Waiting Room means that, even when a child actually waits for a length of time, he/she can take part in literacy activities.



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Observing and Assessing Play

In addition to playful interaction being an opportunity, as described in the podcast, to extend the children's learning, the daily interaction time is an opportunity to gather **assessment information**. Listening to the children talking and having conversations with them will give you information about, for example, their sentence structure and grammar and their ability to listen and respond to others. You will also be able to observe and assess learning dispositions such as the ability to cope with difficulties and to persevere to complete what they want to do. The following are two suggestions for planning your interaction time during play.



- Sit at the **same play area** (e.g., blocks, playdough) **each day for the week** so that you get a chance to observe each child as part of the small group in that particular context.
- **Follow one group of children for a number of days**, even for the full five days of the weekly sequence. This allows for more intensive assessment of the children in that group, and gives the children more opportunities to interact playfully with the teacher. This is an opportunity, in the context of large classes, to give each child attention in a systematic way.

Building this playful interaction time into your daily play routine helps the teacher become more expert in developing and supporting the children's play. In terms of assessment, this approach facilitates child self-assessment, teacher-child conversations and teacher observation – three assessment methods appropriate for young children as outlined in *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009). It is also significant in providing information consistently over time about, for example, the children's developing vocabulary, the ways in which they are using their developing reading and writing skills, and their growing independence as learners.

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Conclusion

... adults cannot plan children's play, but can plan for children's play ... (Wood, 2013, p.68). The routines and strategies outlined in this Support Material and the linked podcasts, are designed to help teachers provide for children's play in the primary school classroom. Most importantly, the routines are aimed at making the children as independent as possible so that the teacher gets time every day to play with the children. Teaching and learning through play needs everyone to be a player.

References

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