

VOICE

Voicing children Opportunities
Interaction Collective decision
making Education

Children's participation in free play:
beliefs – practices
strategies - examples



H.F.R.I.
Hellenic Foundation for
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Main axes

- **1. Making sense of the value of play.**
- **2. Dominant beliefs and practices** of ECE teachers about play and children's participation in it – **Interpretation.**
- **3. The pedagogy of play - Role** of an ECE teacher.
- **4. Strategies** to enhance children's participation in play – **Examples.**

QUESTIONS

- *How important is play for early childhood education? Why?*
 - *What is the role of play in ECE daily schedule ?*
- *How do you interpret children's participation during children's playtime?*
 - *What is the meaning of "free play" in practice?*
- *What is the role of the ECE teacher in children's play?*

Work in pairs or in groups

Questions about...

...the **meaning** and **benefits** of play

...**my role** in children's play

...the **goals** I set for children's play

...the degree to which children's **views and ideas** are negotiated

...the kind of **opportunities** I give children to play

...the kind of **interaction** I have with children

...the degree of **utilization** of children's **interests**

...the degree and type of **observation** of children's play.

Let's explore our personal theories and practices of play

REFLECTION

The importance of play - interpretations

1. children **release tension** and **express** their feelings

2. children **are socialized** through play

3. children **learn** through play

5. play is **an activity that has meaning** for children and **provides opportunities** for expression, creation, interaction and action.

4. children **make friends, experiment** with roles and **develop** relationships with their peers

Which of the above statements do you agree with more and why?

The ECE teacher's role in play

- ▶ Would you describe the teacher's role during play as:
- ▶ To **supervise** children's play?
- ▶ To **observe** the children's play?
- ▶ To **observe and record** children's play?
- ▶ To **prepare** something for a teacher directed activity while children play?
- ▶ To **organize** play?

Another... what?

Play in ECE

- ▶ There are **different educational beliefs** about the **meaning of play** and the **teacher's role** in it.
- ▶ Different beliefs about play **imply different beliefs about**
 - ▶ *a) children,*
 - ▶ *b) the meaning of children's participation,*
 - ▶ *c) the educational process and*
 - ▶ *d) the educational goals.*
- ▶ Beliefs about play **influence**
 - ▶ *a) practices that teachers choose and*
 - ▶ *b) their role in the play process (as supervisors, as spectators, as observers, etc.).*
- ▶ **The inquiry** of personal beliefs and practices **helps teachers to reflect** on the value of play and their role choices.

(Avgitidou, 2014 · Avgitidou, 2016 · Alexiou, 2018)

Play in ECE

- ▶ **Although** play forms a favorable framework for children's participation in decision-making as children can decide with whom, where, when, what and for how long they want to play
- ▶ **Although** play pedagogy supports this framework with the process of supporting children's thinking and action during play by ECE teachers



**TEACHERS MAY NOT RECOGNIZE
PLAY AS A DOMINANT PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
AND THE ROLES THAT THEY CAN TAKE DURING IT.**

EDUCATORS DON'T RECOGNIZE PLAY AS A KEY PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Possible factors – limitations

Chaos is created during the game, there is no control, so **discipline is required.**

Play **doesn't offer to** children what organized activities by teachers offer.

In play, **conflicts** between children are constantly created.

Children often **get bored** and **repeat** the same games.

► *What do these limitations indicate about children's participation in play and the ECE teacher's role?*

Examples from ECE teachers' practices in free play that restrict children's participation

Children

ask the kindergarten teacher's **permission to play** with something, visit a corner or change toys

limit their play to the space and time set by the kindergarten teacher

ask for solutions from the teachers or seek her interventions

they don't discuss their wishes, needs or objections with the teacher

they don't have the autonomy of creating a play scenario or a play area

they play with the children or the game **that the teacher indicates them.**

ECE teacher

chooses children's **activities** herself

expects specific action from children in each play area

reminds the rules

Intervenes in the composition of the playing team

guides children's action

gives the solution herself to issues faced by children

intervenes to **keep children quiet**

stops play

limits play time

What do these practices show?

How much do they support children's participation? Why?

Examples of ECE teachers' practices in free play that allow spaces for participation

Children

make decisions – take initiatives during free play

they freely choose a play area and playmates

choose the number of their teammates

shape freely the content - scenario of their play

choose - shape play time

change or shape the play space according to their needs

they try to solve their own disagreements

The ECE teacher

asks children who are not playing if they want help?

encourages children to co-operate during play

creates problem solving situations for children to strengthen their participation in finding a solution

encourages children who are not actively participating in the game

speaks positively and reinforces children's actions and interactions

Follows children's thoughts and actions to extend play

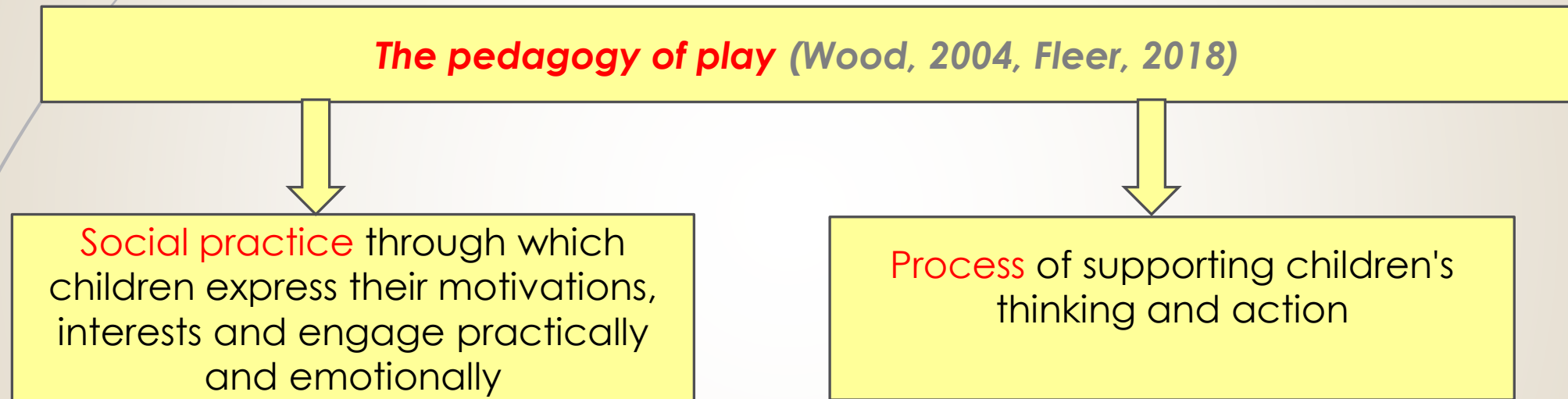
Is flexible about space organization and time for play

What do these practices show?

How much do they support children's participation? Why?

Play

- ▶ Part of the curriculum / free activities / provision of space – time.
- ▶ Tool / way of educating children / development / progress / learning about and with children.



The context of the pedagogy of play

Children's play in education involves...

...opportunities for children to process new concepts and to expand their knowledge and experiences with the support of peers and adults

...a framework for developing social relationships with peers and adults

...a practice of participation in decision-making and the shaping of the social world

**PARTICIPATION
CONSTRUCTION OF
MEANING
CRITICAL &
CREATIVE THINKING**

**RELATIONSHIPS
COMMUNICATION
COLLABORATION**

**PROCESSING THE
CONCEPTS
EXPANSION OF
KNOWLEDGE &
EXPERIENCES**

(Avgitidou, 2014)

Teaching children to play is necessary because...(1)

- ▶ not all children have developed the social skills to participate in play*(relationship between social skills and participation in play).
- ▶ there are **exclusive friendships**, cliques, **exclusions** and stereotypical relationships in the classroom *(for whom is this a 'problem' and why?).
- ▶ **play may be limited** in complexity and creativity *(for whom is this a "problem" and why?).
- ▶ play is more often **individual** than cooperative.
- ▶ children **don't make full use of materials** in the context of play or **build "poor" scenarios**.

Teaching children to play is necessary because...(2)

- ▶ there are children who **hang around from play area to play area** and can not focus on their play.
- ▶ there are children who **don't take initiatives** in play – they are **quiet**, they **don't complain**.
- ▶ the children **don't find ways to share roles** and **don't find solutions** to their disagreements.
- ▶ children **repeat the same way of playing**.
- ▶ the children, although they choose the same material or the same topic, **play in parallel**.

Pedagogy of play – why?

- ▶ By observing children we **discover their interests** and study both the content and ways of supporting learning in relation to these interests.
- ▶ **Providing authentic learning contexts** supports the child's understanding.
- ▶ **Encouraging children to explore** is necessary (Jordan, 2010: 106).
- ▶ Acceptance of responsibility by teachers that they can **support children's learning** in contexts resulting from children's action, but **following the child's thinking**.

A presupposition for a pedagogy of play

❖ ECE teacher's role

- Supporting and expanding children's **action** - continuous negotiation.
- Supporting children's **views** and **interests, initiatives and interactions**.
- **Sustaining dialogue** with children within warm relations.

ECE teacher's role

Related questions

- ✓ *How / in what way do you think that the ECE teacher can support children's action during playtime?*
- ✓ *Why is the ECE teacher's support of the children's views and interests important?*
- ✓ *How can the EcE teacher interact with the children and how can she create mutual relationships?*

Specifically, in the pedagogy of play

What is the role of the ECE teacher?

- ✓ To **identify** the meaning that play has for children.
- ✓ **Recognize opportunities** to get to know children through dialogue and interaction with them during play.
- ✓ To **extend play** by enriching or expanding the children's action framework.
- ✓ To take advantage of (**utilize**) **opportunities** to approach concepts related to children's actions within play.

How does the ECE teacher act?

OBSERVES CHILDREN'S PLAY ...

- ✓ to **get to know** children's **interests** and **play style**
- ✓ to get to know children's **pre-existing knowledge** in order to utilize and strengthen it
- ✓ to **follow** children's thinking and action

Possible ways of organizing play pedagogy (Avgitidou, 2014)

★ 1. I observe and support on the spot the **expression of thought** and the **expansion of action**.
i.e. Teacher asks a child how or why did she choose to build a bridge like that - extends the relevant concepts of balance, size and weight of materials

★ 2. I observe and support children by extending the action **with questions** that orient children **to new thoughts and actions**.
i.e. "What do you need to play princes and princesses?" – "How will you be sure to make a cake enough for all your guests?"

★ 3. I observe play and **follow children's suggestions** to extend the action.
i.e. Children have gathered leaves, twigs and other "treasures" as they call them from the yard and want to bring them into the classroom and organize them in boxes. The teacher listens to their idea and supports them in decision making and joint action.

★ 4. **From project work to play**
i.e. after visiting a castle and collecting information from experts, reading stories and so on, children decide to transform the whole classroom into a castle. Teacher supports them in decision making, planning, implementation and evaluation of their actions).

★ 5. **From play to structured activities**.
Children play VOICE (a musical contest in TV series). The teacher extends this to a structured activity in which children learn more about what a contest entails in terms of organization and participation.

★ 6. Children are **involved in making decisions** about their play.
Children play with cars in the home corner and want to transform it into a garage. Teacher allows initiatives and provides information or dialogue when necessary.

An example of the pedagogy of play (Fleer, 2010)

Play scenario and existing knowledge

- The kindergarten teacher in the area with the water has given the children colors to dissolve in the water and different objects (bottles, pumps, utensils) to enhance the experimentation of children with different materials and the way they mix.
- 4 girls have brought a doll to the area with the water and are preparing a medicine to make it well. They have mixed the paint with the water, they have found a pump to pull it out and they dose it in the spoon to give it to it. All 4 girls give the medicine to the doll but the doll does not recover.
- Children already know: The role of the drug, how to administer it, the rules for taking the drug, how to participate in the gam.
-

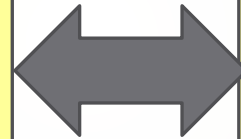
Teacher's actions

AFTER OBSERVING CHILDREN'S PLAY ...

- “This drug does not seem to work. What could we do to make a new one? What will we need to stir to make it? What color do we want it to have? “
- So the kindergarten teacher invents a goal inspired by children’s scenario to extend experimentation and guides their action in a game situation that makes sense for children.

An example for practice with helping questions to put play pedagogy in action

The children at the construction play area decide to build a castle with the wooden blocks. They choose the bigger bricks because they think they are stronger to be used as a base because the castle needs to be tall and solid. They are thinking of making it big! But as the construction progresses, they realize that the bigger bricks are not enough. Then they decide to use the plastic bricks together with the wooden ones. In practice, they observe that wooden bricks cannot balance with plastic ones. The children continue their effort by trying different ways.



- What do children *already know*?
- What's the *meaning* of their play?
- What *concepts* are involved in their play?
- How can these be *used*?
- In what way *can* the children's activity *be supported, extended or developed* by the kindergarten teacher?

What practices of ECE teachers enhance children's participation in free play?

How do these relate to the pedagogy of play?

They **encourage** children to engage in a play...

knowing their **interests and preferences** through observation.

They show **willingness to negotiate** solutions and conflicts...

to get to know them better and to **enrich - expand** their scope of action.

They **observe and interact with** children...

supporting their **views, motivations** and **emotional involvement**.

They give **priority** to children's choices...

to **observe the meaning of play** for children, to get to know their **pre-existing knowledge** and to use it to **strengthen it**.

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN PLAY THROUGH INQUIRY AND REFLECTION

Observation and recording of play (context of play – space – time - scenario - interactions - role of ECE teacher).

Interpretation (relationships - preferences - interests – children's abilities).

Reflection (What can I do to enhance, facilitate, extend....).

Thoughts for utilization(How will I utilize opportunities to enrich children's experiences around their play scenario?).

Reflections on my role (What exactly will my role be? What actions can I take to challenge children and make them more involved in decision-making?)

Thoughts on the role of children (What difficulties may they encounter?)

**COLLECTION OF DATA
FROM OBSERVING
CHILDREN'S PLAY**

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN PLAY

Interview to explore children's views on play

What do they like to do? If there is something they don't like and why. If they want to suggest something. If they face any problems in the game.....

Painting as an alternative supplementary data collection tool.

Analysis - interpretation of the data from the interview and the children's painting.

Kindergarten teacher's reflection on research data collected.

What is it that I did not know and learned from the children? What do they care about? What have I done so far regarding the support of their play? What can I do from now on based on what I learned?

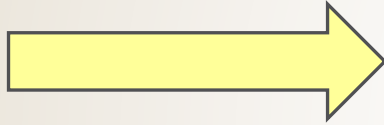
Utilization of data for review - improvement of the ECE teacher's **choices** based on the children's suggestions &

processing issues raised by the children to be resolved in the class plenary.

**COLLECTION OF DATA
FROM CHILDREN ABOUT THEIR
PLAY**



WORK IN GROUPS



DIFFERENT EXERCISES

Exercise 1

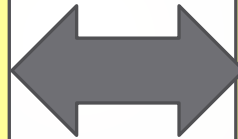
In the area with the board games a small group of children are trying to make puzzles. First, two boys choose a puzzle with large pieces and quickly build it. They continue with a puzzle with smaller and more pieces and try to fix it with the help of a girl added to the group. But two pieces are missing from the little puzzle and the children are disappointed! They complain that the available puzzles are for babies (because they are too easy) and they are old – broken (because pieces are missing). The teacher agrees and says she will look into them and replace them.



- *How do you comment on the teacher's reaction to the children's complaints?*
- *Do you think that the teacher supports children's participation in the educational process? How?*
- *What could the teacher do alternatively to enhance children's participation?*

Exercise 2

During free play the children play in the different areas. The teacher notices that the children rarely choose the “carpenter's play area”. Thus, she reminds children of the existence of this play area as well urges some boys to go and fix a chair of which one leg is not stable. The children go, get some tools, tinker and return the chair to the teacher saying they have amended it. The teacher rewards them and the children continue their game in another play area.



- *What is the meaning of children's play in the carpenter's corner for them?*
- *What is the role of teacher in this play? Who initiated play and how?*
- *In what way could the teacher actively involve the children in an action that is meaningful for them?*

What follows from the above examples?

- The importance of:
- **observation**.
- Children's **interests** and opinions.
- Highlighting a problem.
- The **role** of the ECE teacher.
- Children's **communication and interaction** with the teacher.

How can these be used for the benefit of children's participation in the context of the pedagogy of play?

- The teacher **involves** the children in a problem solving situation and **motivates** them to look for solutions
- The teacher **engages in dialogue with the children**, **explores** in depth their opinions and ideas, and **identifies** the problem together **with the children**.
- The teacher **supports and reinforces** children's views on finding a solution and their way of acting

Exercise 3

Children pretend to be astronauts and travel to the moon. They jump from the tables as if they were launching themselves, walk with long and slow steps and go behind the library, which is dark because there is the unknown planet they have to visit.

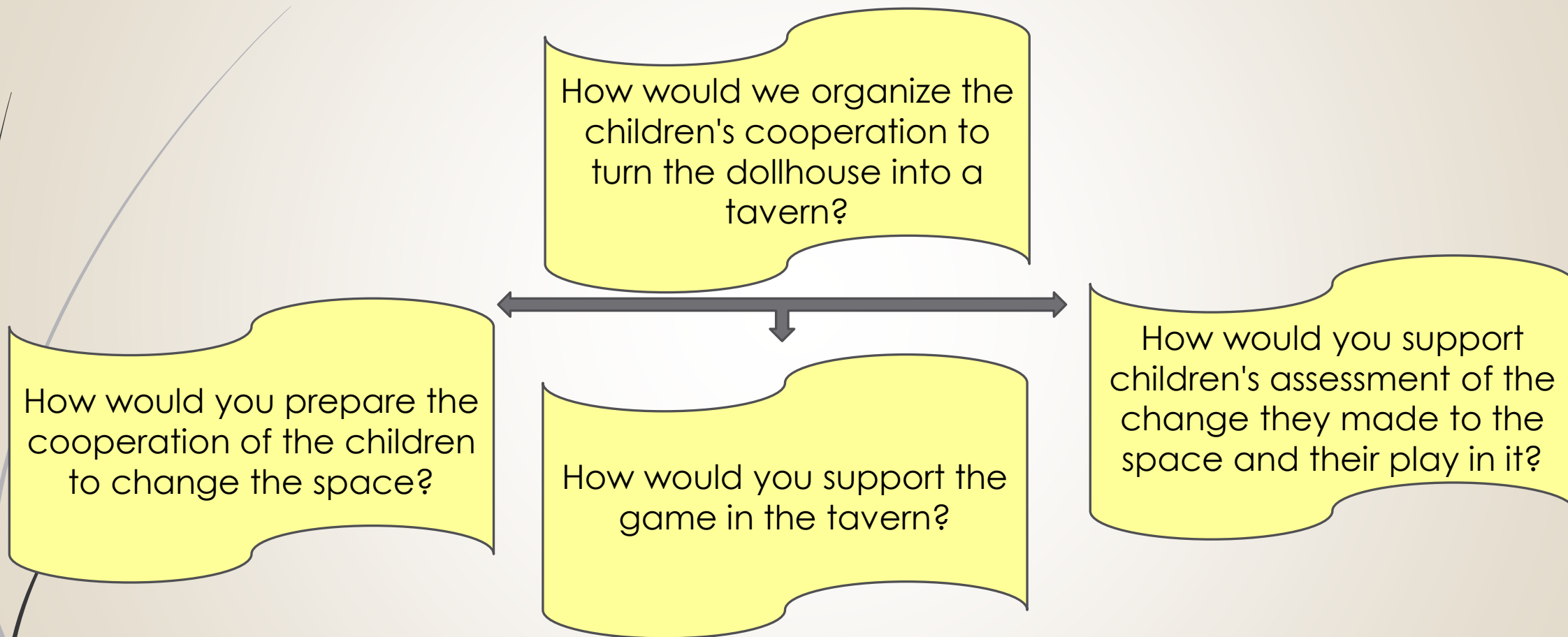
According to the above, **what actions can** the ECE teacher **take to strengthen** children's participation in this activity?

How can the teacher **extend children's interest in play** and/or connect it to concepts that can be developed in a teacher-directed activity?

What will be the purpose of each teacher's action, how does it relate to children's existing play scenario and how will they be **beneficial** for children's action and active participation?

Exercise 4

Children want to play "tavern" in the dollhouse area.



In conclusion :Play in ECE

The place of play
in each early childhood education program
highlights its importance and value
in relation to children's whole development, learning
and teaching and children's creativity
in meaningful activities for them.

The pedagogy of play has highlighted a) play as an important framework for children's participation and interaction, as a process of developing ideas and meanings, creativity and negotiating their social relationships and b) the importance of the role of the kindergarten teacher in supporting it (Avgitidou, 2001; 2016; 2022, Fleer, 2018; Wood, 2004).

The official curricula are not connected in a self-evident way to the interpretations and practices of the kindergarten teachers who implement them (Loizou & Avgitidou, 2014; Bae, 2009).

In conclusion :Play in ECE (2)

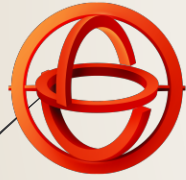
Teachers' different beliefs about play imply different beliefs about children, their type of participation in play, the educational process and the goals of education and influence their practices and their role in the play process
(Avgitidou, 2016 · Loizou & Avgitidou, 2014).

The presuppositions for the pedagogy of play reflect the supportive role and willingness of the teachers to utilize children's interests, strengthen their opinions and expand their actions
(Avgitidou, 2014).

Strategies to enhance children's participation in play are based on a) teachers exploring and reflecting on their personal beliefs and practices about play, b) observing and recording play, c) collecting data from children, and d) utilizing of the data to plan an appropriate approach to children's action
(Alexiou, 2018 · Avgitidou, 2014; 2022).

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