Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of the SERUpdate for 2013.

A new feature, ‘Spotlight - Journal Current Awareness’ has been included in the SERUpdate. The spotlight will focus on three articles selected from the contents pages of journals from the Current Awareness lift-out. SERU has an extensive range of special education journals and we encourage you to either visit SERU to view the journals or order articles from the Current Awareness.

The focus this term is on the learning potential that can be created for children by providing play experiences. A quote by Susan J. Oliver author, Playing for Keeps, provides an appropriate introduction, and reflects the themes of the range of articles included in this edition.

“It’s not so much what children learn through play, but what they won’t learn if we don’t give them the chance to play. Many functional skills like literacy and arithmetic can be learned either through play or through instruction — the issue is the amount of stress on the child. However, many coping skills like compassion, self-regulation, self-confidence, the habit of active engagement, and the motivation to learn and be literate cannot be instructed. They can only be learned through self-directed experience (i.e. play).”

This edition is packed with a range of information, current research, a variety of practical strategies and approaches, educator’s stories and resources all with the common theme of how important it is for educators to provide play experiences for children with disabilities. Authors are from DECD/non-DECD schools/preschools and Regional Offices, Flinders University, Autism SA and Down Syndrome SA and we have also included extracts from the websites of two highly respected early childhood educators, Karen Stagnetti and Lisa Burman (with permission).

We hope you enjoy reading this edition and your feedback is always valued.

Dymphna James
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**supporting the inclusion of students with disabilities and learning difficulties**
What comes to mind when you hear the word play? Do you think of children:

- engaging with one another in self-directed actions and activities;
- having fun doing something of choice including singing or babbling for the joy of it;
- making use of props and environments to create a self or group determined series of connected and unconnected actions;
- using equipment and toys to explore personal and objects' potential which in turn provides joy;
- or something else?

The word “play” brings different perceptions to different people and dictionaries have a plethora of definitions for the word as well. World-wide there are numerous researchers devoted to understanding play and how “play” is now used as a tool for working with adults to improve an organisation’s culture and productivity as well.

Smith (2010) identifies a range of different play types including “social contingency play; sensorimotor play; language play; fantasy or pretend play; exercise play; rough-and-tumble play; and object play” (p.3). However, he goes on to say that play can be defined by two key characteristics: engaging in something that proves enjoyable and is done for fun and is not contingent on an external purpose or outcome. In essence, play serves a functional purpose for the individual and is viewed from a functional perspective. Play can also be viewed from a structural perspective in which we consider what behaviours are occurring and how they are being performed, i.e., organisation and sequences of actions (Smith, 2010). Smith draws on the research of others in stating that, “play does not have an end in itself or an external goal…no clear immediate benefit or obvious goal” (p.4). And yet many researchers and theorists highlight the benefits children (and often adults) get from “playing”. Smith contends while there may be, “no clear, immediate benefits”, there are “unclear, delayed benefits” (p.4).

The challenge for educators who recognise the benefits of play and explicitly embed it in their classroom programs is determining the potential delayed benefits referred to by Smith. As additional pressure is placed on educators to focus on reportable learning outcomes and standards, allocating time for “play” that is child-driven and not contingent on an external purpose can add a moral and professional dilemma to educators’ decision making (see some reflection questions for educators at the end of this piece).

Making decisions to include true play in school time is often compounded when educating children with disabilities. Levels of anxiety for parents and educators to see progress that is often delayed as a result of a disability can generate a desire for an educational program where the benefits are explicit and clear rather than unclear and delayed as is often the outcome of child-directed play. However, in choosing structured programs in preference to true play opportunities for children with a disability we may be undermining the many critical life skills that children develop through their self-directed play, specifically core emotional, behavioural and social competencies (Hirschland, 2008).

We often hear that play is the work of childhood and certainly in normally developing children play is generally valued and promoted in home and school as worthwhile and contributing to a child’s development. However, in children with disabilities true child-directed play is often precluded in favour of purposeful goal oriented play-like tasks. While such orchestrated play-based learning opportunities can certainly benefit a child’s development providing opportunities for children with disabilities to shape and direct their play can reveal much about the child’s development and contribute to the development of foundational skills for ongoing development.

Hirschland (2008), in her work as an early intervention therapist, suggests that the developmental challenges faced by children in early childhood and particularly by children with a disability can be well supported through careful observation of a child at play and evidence-informed scaffolding by knowledgeable adults. Hirschland identifies seven building blocks of development that are not only promoted through play but are fundamental to a child’s ability to, “engage with others; to pay attention; to store, retrieve and organise information; to regulate emotions; and to grasp the idea that not all minds think and feel alike” (p.16). These are skills that shape ongoing interactions in life. The seven building blocks located in Table 1 provide a model to guide our observation of children’s play. In observing play we can look for a child’s ability to tune in; to regulate energy and feelings; to communicate effectively; and to change tracks. These behaviours can be observed in a child playing in isolation and with others. Play that is self-directed is about children’s ability to tune in to what interests them and tuning in is a fundamental pre-requisite to learning. Parents and educators who can tune in to what the child is tuning into through their self-directed play stand a greater chance of connecting with the child and scaffolding their learning.

continued
In the video, DIR Floortime, one parent (Chapter 3, Ann & Alex) comments on the connection she made with her child when she finally tuned into what the child was focusing on. In her case it started with the lint on the carpet.

Observing what the child is tuning into presents another opportunity for parents and educators to consider whether the child’s self-directed activities are play or not. Smith (2010) contends that stereotypic behaviours and initial exploration and manipulation of objects are not play as they are more likely linked to meeting sensory needs. For many children with a disability repetitive behaviours may not be defined as play but they can provide a pathway for connecting with the child to ensure they feel safe and warmly connected and encouraged to explore their world. Spending time observing a child’s behaviours and engagement with objects and others is a valuable use of time. In our busy lives we often fail to notice or take time to really see what a child is doing and consider the long term benefits that may emerge from allowing them to lead their learning through play.

Questions educators might pose to themselves in considering the inclusion of “play” or making use of a “play-based” curriculum include:

- Do I understand enough about play to explain its value for the students I teach?
- Do I see potential benefits in allowing students to shape their own curriculum through their play?
- Do I feel comfortable in releasing control of learning through play to my students?
- In observing students at play what insights can I develop about individuals’ dispositions, creativity, social engagement, curriculum knowledge, and cognition and language development and how can I report on these aspects?
- When should I scaffold/intervene in students’ play and for what purposes would I do this?

Play is not just a worthy thing to promote in classrooms it may just prove to be the key to unlocking the learning potential of many children and prove joyful at the same time.

Table 1 Seven Building Blocks of Development

1. Feeling safely and warmly connected – the building block that supports them all: experiencing trust, interest and pleasure in relationships
2. Tuning in – being able to harness and sustain attention, to focus on people, ideas, requests, and expectations.
3. Communicating effectively – understanding others and making others understand, both verbally and nonverbally.
4. Regulating energy – being able to shift from one energy level to another; having capacity to slow down and stay calm for periods of time.
5. Regulating feelings – managing small difficulties without large reactions; being able to regain composure after getting upset; maintaining self-control in the face of frustration.
6. Changing tracks and being flexible – being able to adapt reasonably to change; knowing how to share space and ideas; having the ability to end one activity when it’s time to begin another.
7. Feeling capable and confident – the building block the follows the rest: having a sense of resourcefulness, competence and optimism.

(All of these building blocks are well served by children engaging in play!)

(Hirschland, 2008, p.17)

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It is paradoxical that many educators and parents still differentiate between a time for learning and a time for play without seeing the vital connection between them.

Leo F. Buscaglia
Through a recent action research project a colleague and I looked at students’ engagement in play. The single most crucial factor in promoting high engagement in play in our context was the presence of an educator. Without educator presence often the students appeared stuck, they didn’t know where to start or how to continue their play. They were also observed to revert back to behaviours that Smith (2010) described were not play. That is, exploration and stereotypic behaviour. There was also increased conflict amongst students.

It took time and reflection to understand my role in facilitating students’ play. Questions that constantly came to mind were:

1) When to intervene and when not to.
2) When to support students in problem solving and when to step back and let them work it out themselves.

I discovered many ways I could extend or add to students’ play. However, a major principle guiding me was not to take over or de-value the play by adding thoughts and opinions; this can prove more difficult than it seems.

What can educators do in order to promote high engagement in play?

- Cultivate positive relationships with staff and students
- Respect student’s voice and choice
- Listen to students
- Know when to stop
- Ensure safe environments
- Allow time and space
- Provide intelligent materials
- Ask open ended questions to facilitate conversation
- Be on the same level as the students
- Wait and respond
- Notice and observe
- Reflect
- Be available to students
- Have patience
- Repeat experiences and opportunities
- Reflect teaching and learning
- Intentional teaching
- And most importantly enjoy being together, in the moment and having fun!

The educators’ role is to organise the classroom in such a way that complements this view of learners and learning.

Van Hoorn et al. (2007) states that there are four principles that guide the orchestration of children’s play. These are taking on the child’s point of view, astute observation, organising the environment and seeing meaning as it is constructed. This translates to educators thinking about and observing students learning, the spatial organisation of the classroom, play materials, available technology, access to resources and safety and supervision.

1. Taking on the child’s point of view

Participation in children’s play is essential. However, educators must be careful to take on the child’s point of view so as not to dominate or take over the play with adult views and opinions. Knowledge of your individual students as well as child development and developmentally appropriate practice is essential here.

2. Astute observation

Observation of children’s behaviour is fundamental. Recording of observations is also good practice. These can be anecdotal notes, questions, hypotheses, next steps or possible avenues of exploration as well as student’s thoughts and opinions.

3. Organising the environment

Educators should organise environments in ways that promote choice. Students should have access to a range of resources and materials that promote exploration and discovery. The students should have the freedom to move around the room, inside and outside in their play. Resources and materials should also reflect the student’s developmental levels and should mirror their everyday lives. Sufficient time should also be given for children’s play. Where possible, children should also be able to leave their play and come back to it rather than packing everything away after each activity.

4. Seeing meaning as it is constructed (recognising learning)

Observation and noticing are essential to seeing meaning and recognising learning. Observation is ongoing and recognises what each individual brings to shared play. Observation allows educators to reflect on students’ interests, abilities, strengths and opportunities for future learning experiences.

Educators can also ask questions or add problems to enhance play and take play to the next level. Open-ended questions also allow students to show their understanding and share their learning.

Van Hoorn et al. (2007) contend that: Children’s interaction with adults and other children in classroom settings create contexts where knowledge is meaningful and elaborated. (p.49)
Challenges

Hewett (2006) suggests one of the key skills for educators of students with disabilities is:

‘To judge when to leave children to play alone or in groups. Then, critically, to know when and how, to intervene to become an adult play partner, finding the gloriously termed ‘teachable moments’.’ (p.11)

While this is not an easy task to move from teacher to “play partner” it is necessary in order to move students forward in their learning. Flexibility and understanding of playfulness proved useful for me. I could see the value of allowing students to drive their learning through play and over time have let go of my need to “teach” students in traditional ways that often resulted in limited learning anyway. Developing an understanding of the importance of play to a range of developmental areas has allowed me to let go of my anxiety of spending time playing. Once I had reframed my thinking I also became more playful with my students. I believe “playfulness” is an important disposition for educators if they are to scaffold students’ play effectively.

According to Barnett (1991 cited in Stagnetti and Cooper 2009) playfulness is a disposition towards play. Some indicators of playfulness as stated by Stagnetti and Cooper (2009) include engagement, joking around, mischief, negotiating, modifying, persisting, responding, initiating, sharing and enjoyment. Barnett also highlights that playfulness is associated with physical, social and cognitive spontaneity, manifestation of joy and having fun.

Play and playfulness is perspective based. For example, what one perceives as rough and tumble play another may perceive as bullying. Stagnetti and Cooper (2009) note, “…unfortunately, playfulness is sometimes mistaken for silliness. Like play, playfulness is often not taken seriously” (p.45). In order to effectively support students’ learning through their self-initiated play educators must have a common understanding of play and playful behavior. I have found it not only helpful to bring a playful disposition to my role as an educator of students with autism and/or intellectual disabilities but it makes every day more enjoyable and rich in learning opportunities for all.

As I reflect on this photo it captures the essence of being playful and being a true play partner to my students. The student-led play began as sensory slime making and evolved into Simeon attempting to transform me into an alien that could be controlled by a TV remote.

This learning experience relates to Outcome 5 of The Early Years Learning Framework: Children are effective communicators. Simeon’s related IEP goal is that he is being given opportunities to use language and engage in play to imagine and create roles, scripts, ideas and stories.

References:


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FURTHER READING……AVAILABLE FROM SERU

Play as Therapy - Assessment and Therapeutic Interventions. Stagnitti, K. & Cooper, R. 2009. 27.0094.01

Play as Therapy focuses on the therapeutic use of play and offers a perspective from the Australasian region. The book is divided into four sections. In section one, four different theoretical views of play are presented. In section two, the fundamentals of play assessment are overviewed and three new assessments are introduced. Section three explores play contexts whilst section four introduces some therapeutic play interventions.
Playing and Nature, Pure and Simple

Abstract

Children’s play is said to be ‘intrinsically motivated and free’ (Hewes 2007) but play is also subject to adult and institutional designs (Kozlowski 2008). This paper draws attention to sometimes unexamined educator beliefs and environmental characteristics that influence children’s play (Farver 1999) and reminds educators that play is not about products or outcomes, it is about the act of playing. In so doing the paper introduces an image of nature play that offers educators a means to both liberate children’s play and optimise schoolyard play’s potential as a pedagogical resource.

Restating the importance of free, open-ended play

In the 4th Century BC Plato advised that educators should “let your children’s lessons take the form of play” and today evidence demonstrating that play supports children’s social, emotional and cognitive development underlines Plato’s advice. Playing for example:

- provides children with opportunities to enjoy freedom, and exercise choice over their actions;
- offers children opportunities for testing boundaries and exploring risk;
- offers a very wide range of physical, social and intellectual experiences for children;
- fosters independence and self-esteem;
- develops respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction;
- supports well-being, healthy growth and development;
- increases knowledge and understanding; and,
- promotes creativity and capacity to learn (adapted from Best Play 2000, p.11).

Reflection

Although play is recognised as a significant contributor to educative processes (Fisher et al. 2008) researchers have warned that recent trends threaten children’s right to play (Jarret & Waite-Stupiansky 2009, Zigler & Bishop-Josef 2009). In response advocates have rightly emphasised play’s benefits and its essential contributions to learning and wellbeing (e.g. Pellegrini 2005). However, whilst the educative importance of children’s play is clear, there is a risk that if children only experience guided forms of play the full value of children’s free play may be diminished.

Most early childhood educators understand the importance of play and remember that it has many forms: large-motor play, small-motor play, mastery play, rule-based play, construction play, make-believe play, symbolic play, language play, playing with the arts, sensory play, rough-and-tumble play (Miller & Almon 2009). Most educators also accept that freedom is a basic tenet of play (Hewes 2007) but fewer are likely to have considered a fundamental contradiction in educator assumptions about schoolyard play. In particular educators are unlikely to have reconciled beliefs that children’s play ought to be freely chosen and self-directed with using play as a pedagogical tool. Similarly many educators will have not considered children’s recess and lunchtime play as a pedagogical issue let alone thought about the hidden curriculum of school grounds (Titman 1994).

Part of the problem with liberating schoolyard play and optimising it as a pedagogical resource has been that the vast majority of existing modern playgrounds have been designed by adults to be permanent, to look child friendly, to be tidy, and to placate feelings that children ought to be provided with special places. Unfortunately these design features have not addressed children’s need to construct, to imagine, to find places of refuge, or to just be with other children. Nor have modern playgrounds allowed for fascination that engages and extends children’s interests (Trageton 2007). Unsurprisingly then children come to feel alienated (Titman 1994, Moore & Wong 1997) by what Prue Walsh (2006) calls these ‘monuments to misunderstanding’ and growing numbers of children have begun engaging in unsafe or antisocial behaviours (Evans 2001). Unwittingly teachers and carers probably compounded the situation by managing misbehaviour without wondering if in reality the playground might have been the problem. This may be because, since ‘modern’ playgrounds introduced play structures and equipment 150 years ago (Moore 2006), many educators have come to accept as normal the ‘mismatch between formally designed playgrounds and places where children actually prefer to play’ (Holloway & Valentine 2000, p.12). As a result educators have inherited a mindset that allows “adult values and needs, rather than those of the children … [to] mould many school grounds and policies on their use” (Tranter & Malone 2004, p.153). A solution to this dilemma seems to be in educators remembering that for children play is not about products or outcomes, it is about the act of playing.

Remembering Play

Play is usually fun but often it is far from simple. In free play children naturally negotiate new meanings for objects and people: sticks, for example, are transformed into horses, wands or spoons; possessions are transformed into symbols; and, humans are transformed into super-humans. processes).
Subsequently other player’s who want to experience interesting, fulfilling and meaningful participation have to interpret what the transformed people and objects represent (i.e. they must engage in metacognitive

There is nothing new in this except perhaps to note that educators who provide the resources and time for genuinely free self-initiated play are helping to shift the focus of children’s attention from what people, objects and actions seem to be to the multiple levels of interpretation and meaning that players negotiate for people, objects and actions (Hakkarainen & Bredikyte 2007). Unfortunately and too often children’s play is subjected to other’s ends and we begin to understand what John Dewey (1976, p.277) meant when he wrote that “the source of whatever is dead, mechanical, and formal in schools is found precisely in the subordination of the life and experience of the child to the curriculum.” Paradoxically by appreciating the rich complexity of children’s free play as processes of collective inquiry where actions and meanings are continually reinterpreted in ever changing physical, social and intellectual contexts educators are allowing play to move from being about “the skills that happen to be part of it” ... [to being about] the wilful belief in one’s own capacity for a future” (Sutton Smith 1995, p.290). In other words educators are allowing free play to nurture the dispositions and capacities that are essential for 21st Century children’s learning.

Renewal, playing in nature

Liberating schoolyard play and realising itseducative potential has proven difficult because mainstream education has focussed on play as a means to deliver predetermined goals (Sutton-Smith 1995) and because modern playgrounds prioritised gross motor movement and competition (Kozlovski 2008). Change is possible however, and just a little more than a decade ago some European, North American and Australian communities began greening playgrounds precisely because children valued the “much higher quality of play experience [they offered] for children of all ages” (Staempfli 2009, p.269). The greening impetus was supported by evidence that playing in green school grounds was ‘positively associated with children’s creativity, feelings of belonging, and sense of efficacy. Other independent research also showed that free play in and with nature:

- offered excitement and fun;
- sustained longer lasting play;
- supported diversity of play;
- responded to player’s needs; and
- reduced the number and severity of accidents (Trageton 2007, p.189).

Return

In the 21st Century educators can embrace a new paradox of play. That is: by supporting and elaborating children’s interest in playing freely with and in nature educators can shape children’s ongoing meaning-making though authentic, affective and empowering inquiries. As educators we may not be able to prescribe where children’s playful inquiries will lead (and we never have) but surely after more than two millennia we can at last take Plato’s advice and provide the physical and cultural conditions which will truly let our children’s lessons take the form of play?

References


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In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior. In play it is as though he were a head taller than himself.

Lev Vygotsky

(Russian psychologist 1896–1934)
Play fosters all aspects of a child’s development: emotional, physical, social, intellectual and linguistic (Van Hoorn et al, 1999). Our practice at il nido kindergarten is based on honoring ‘the whole child.’ Our curriculum, learning and environment is based in play as well as the principles of Reggio Emilia.

Reggio Emilia is a little town in Northern Italy where educators have a very powerful image of the child. Every child is seen as capable and competent and they view the child as having a 100 languages to use to express their thoughts and ideas, verbal linguistic being just one of these languages. (Thornton & Brunton 2010). At il nido we have been talking to staff about our image of the child and have been working towards developing a pedagogy of listening.

All children are listened to and their different languages are observed. We have looked at how certain physical areas foster more social interactions, and which areas are used for quiet spaces along with discussions about the inclusion of natural play scapes. Our outdoor learning environment has been set up to provide lots of sensory play, such as the mud pit and the sandpit. Different terrains to walk on, for example, bark, real grass and mud are incorporated and a dry river creek bed is planned. Natural elements provide different types of physical challenges as well as promote sensory integration and physical skills, a response not suitable to synthetic surfacing (Elliot 2008). This often poses questions of access for children with physical disabilities and as part of our reflective practice, we hope to add ramps and keep our spaces physically inclusive. We often try to bring the outdoors in and support children who feel safer indoors with opportunities to have mud, sand, water and dirt inside.

Cooking at the il nido kitchen
Going on a plane trip.

Our practice is also influenced by the attachment model and we place great importance on educators developing and building attachment with the children and their families. Children learn best through their interactions with people who know and relate to them well (Thornton & Brunton, 2010). Supporting children with special needs and rights to be included in the play often requires the educator to use, read and model both verbal and non-verbal communicative strategies which often occurs once the educator knows a child and is able to respond to cues and body language. In our site the child is also supported to form other secondary attachments with other educators. Small groups are often taken by the educator who is the child’s primary attachment which supports the inquiry/project that we are working on with the children.

The project approach also encourages learning and wondering about a question and exploring that question using a variety of different media, methods and languages. This provides repetition as well as exploring an idea in many different ways.

**Strategies we use at il nido to keep our curriculum inclusive**

1. **A play based curriculum:**

Play is at the centre of everything we do. Materials, opportunities and experiences are on display for exploration. Spaces are set up following interests as well as extending on experiences. Spaces are aesthetically pleasing, calming and home like. We have children with global development delay, selective mutism, autism and speech and language delays. Experiences are provided so that children with special needs can access these spaces at their own developmental ability.

(In the home corner set up under a gazebo with calm dim lighting)

Peter sits with a bowl as he watches some children put a bowl into the oven.

*What are you cooking?*

Peter: *Cake*

You are making cake! Are you mixing the flour and sugar?

Peter: *Mixing cake.*

Are you going to put it in the oven?

Peter nods: *Cake mixing.*

Over the next couple of days Peter picks up a block from the home corner near the oven “Cake” he says and hands it to the educator.

Modeling, repeating and extending their ideas during play creates opportunities to put words, concepts, transfer ideas from one context to another and builds their vocabulary.

Home corner (Nonverbal child)

Jim: cradles baby and puts the baby in the cot.

“**Are you putting the baby to sleep? The baby looks tired**”.

Child nods and pats the baby “*is the baby asleep?”*

Child nods and closes his eyes and points to the baby.

Following children’s non-verbal cues during play extends on the child’s prior experiences and provides words to express their ideas.

Setting up a for a cooking experience.

A quiet bedroom space under a table.

*continued*
2. Keeping props representational.

The use of natural and open ended materials rather than plastic imitations of an object (e.g. a block for a phone, a torch as a baby) extends children's representational abilities. When children explore natural and beautiful materials, it stimulates stories and imagination and social interaction is a natural outcome. Exploring materials is also a bridge to other forms of expression i.e. drawing, collage, and construction sculpture. (Topal, Gandini 1999)

3. Providing moveable parts

Moveable parts in the preschool environment like logs to roll, wheelbarrows to fill, tyres, ropes, materials, rocks, tricycles support all children to be involved in large motor movement. This play supports children with special needs to access play in the construction site for example to fetch and carry sand or bricks to other children.

5. Keeping group time active and visual.

Children are cued into large group time with a familiar song
Come and sit down on the mat,  
take your hands and put them in your lap…..  
Try and fix that silly old hat  
Because it's group time. Bom bom

Just hearing the song helps with transitioning the children to the group time area. All the children sing the song until their peers are on the mat. Props, actions, music and games are used and story time is as visual as possible. Educators support the children during group time by remaining on the mat with them.

4. Using story tables

We use story tables with a book and props to act out the story. This is an effective literacy tool to develop concepts of print and supports ESL (English as a second language) as well as children with non verbal communication. Often children with special needs can hold and have one prop of the story and be included to retell that part of the story.

A crate can be a car, a baby bath, a tractor or a T.V to watch.
6. Small Groups

Small group times with the primary caregiver provides support for children who find larger group times stressful. Children are able to participate with smaller numbers, a trusted adult, and familiar experiences. We often pass our smile around the circle, use our name cards during small group times so children feel safe, secure and supported and a feeling of belonging to the group is fostered. Often children with special needs take their learning folder or their block with their picture on it to small and large group experiences. Drawing as a means for nonverbal children to express their thoughts and ideas.

7. Sensory play

We provide lots of sensory and messy play. Sensory play can enhance and develop children’s skills by engaging the senses. Sensory play offers many numeracy opportunities as children explore water, mud, sand, gloop, dough etc. A mud pit was created where children with special needs can maintain the pit by digging up the mud and watering it down. Clay is another medium which can hold its weight and is used as a media for children to express their thoughts and ideas. Children develop fine motor muscles as they pull apart, squeeze, munch and mould the clay. It also provides opportunities to children to participate in the group inquiry. One of the children with autism loved working with clay and would spend a lot of time creating molding and rolling the clay. Often he would bring sculptures and tell an educator what it was that he created.

Creating a play based curriculum that is rich in opportunities for children to have choices, for their voices to be heard even if their language isn’t verbal, and having lots of materials and mediums to explore, has supported us as educators to provide an inclusive preschool program. We also try to incorporate the most important element of learning and being with children.. FUN!

Shannon Belle and Charmaine Suares Howard
Il nido Children’s Centre for Early Childhood Development and Parenting
P 8365 3839

Have you thought about trialing a Wii? SERU has two for loan.

Quoted from The Advertiser, Tues Jan 15, 2013.

Using the Nintendo Wii Fit could help improve the development of children with movement difficulties, British research suggests.

Regular use of balance games on the computer console could have a positive impact on the motor skills of children with developmental coordination disorder, researchers say.

UK-based researchers studied two groups of children with DCD or other movement difficulties over one month. Once group spent 10 minutes, 3 times a week, using the Wii Fit during their lunch break while the other group took part in a program aimed at helping children develop motor skills.

The results found ‘significant gains in motor proficiency and reported emotional wellbeing.’
This article has been printed with permission from Karen Stagnitti. http://www.karens tagnitti.com/pretend-to-play/what-is-pretend-play-2/

As adults we have forgotten how to play, or maybe we never played as children and so playing with our own children is a bit of a mystery. You may remember times when you played all day long and entered into worlds that were full of adventure and fun.

Play is a broad term and within play there are many types of play. For example, gross motor play is play using the whole body (or large muscles) and you can see this type of play when children jump, run, roll, skip, climb, throw balls etc. Fine motor play is activities such as threading, drawing, cutting, and using the hands. Some other types of play are: sensory play (eg, water, sand play), visual perception play (eg, puzzles, mazes) and auditory play (eg, listening games, I spy).

Pretend play, also called imaginative play, make-believe play, representational play, and fantasy play, is when a child pretends objects are something else, they are someone else, and they create play scenarios. This type of play, particularly for children under 3 years of age, is easy to miss or dismiss as unimportant.

What is Pretend Play?

There are many ways to describe pretend play. I describe pretend play as incorporating conventional imaginative play (ie, play with toys such as dolls, trucks) and symbolic play (ie, play with unstructured objects or inanimate objects). What makes pretend play distinct from other types of play is that when children pretend there are three cognitive skills that can be observed.

These are: using objects as something else (also called object substitution or decontextualisation or transformation of objects), attributing properties to objects (eg, the doll is asleep or the tyre is flat), and references to absent objects or places (eg, a sweep of the arm indicates a door, or paying for food at the ‘shop’ with invisible money). Children can use these attributes when playing with toys as well as unstructured objects. These three attributes are noted by several researchers as making pretend play distinct within all the types of play.

Why is pretend play so important to child development?

Pretend play is strongly linked to language, narrative language, abstract thought, problem solving, logical sequential thought, creation of stories, social competence with peers, understanding a social situation, integration of emotional, social and cognitive skills, and the ability to play with others in the role of a ‘player’.

Examples of pretend play are: dressing up; playing shops; having tea parties with teddies and dolls; putting blocks in a truck and pushing it to the ‘building site’; playing in the sandpit with roads, trucks, graders etc. to create a play scene of transport vehicles; playing with dolls and feeding them, putting them to bed.

A Framework for Understanding Pretend Play

Within the literature there are lots of terms that have been used to describe these attributes of Pretend Play. Pretend play has a developmental sequence in typical development.

As a framework to understand the development of pretend play and to observe pretend play in children, I developed the Symbolic and Imaginative Play Developmental Checklist (SIP-DC). This is available in the book called: Learn to Play. A practical program to develop imaginative play skills (published in Melbourne Australia by Co-ordinates Publications). The framework breaks down the skills within pretend play into six areas. There are:

Play scripts (these are the stories children develop in their play). Play scripts begin with domestic scripts (eg, feeding, tea parties, going in the car) and by five years of age a child can make up any story in play whether fictional, real, seen, heard, or experienced.

Sequences of play actions. To play in an organised, coherent way children need to be able to sequence their play actions logically. This occurs by 2 years of age and begin with very short sequences of 2-3 actions. A logical sequence of play actions would be to stir the cup, give a drink to the teddy by lifting the cup to the teddy’s mouth. This logical sequence has 2 actions in a logical sequence. By four years of age, children can carry out numerous action sequences to the extent that a play idea can be developed over 2-3 days and by five years of age, the ideas in the play can be carried out over 2-3 weeks.

Object substitution. This is when a child uses an object as something else. This begins when a child uses a very physically looking object and pretends it is something else. A common example in Australia is using the TV remote as the mobile phone, or a block as a mobile phone. At four years, children can use any object in substitution such that it doesn’t have to look physically anything like what it represents.
Social Interaction. Pretend play is closely linked to social interaction as children who play well can play alone (solitary play) as well as with other children. Children begin by watching and imitating others, they become very social at 3 years of age when there is lots of talking and discussion and interest in what others do but they tend to have their own equipment to four and five years of age when they negotiate and co-operate in play into roles.

Role play. Role play by four and five years of age is clearly seen when children pretend they are a mother, shopkeeper, policeman, astronaut etc. It also begins earlier when children imitate actions they have previously seen. To be able to play a role in the play, children need to be able to understand that the character will say, how they will behave, what their motivation and beliefs are, and how they are likely act in the future. For example, a shopkeeper’s motivation is to sell products to the customer, and they are likely to say “hello, what would like to buy today” or “hello, can I help you. Today we have ……”

Doll or Teddy play. This is play with an object that is separate to the child. This ability is termed decentralization. The child de-centres the play to something/someone else in the play. In Australia, boys often tend not to play with dolls but they will have an object that is alive to them such as a car, truck, doll-object (eg, TV doll character), soft toy, teddy. In typical development, the doll/ special object becomes ‘alive’ around 2 years of age. To the child, this object is a breathing, living being and they treat it as such. In such play, children are learning to take another persons perspective and learning to negotiate with a ‘being’ that has different thoughts to them. For example, the child may be feeding the doll/ special object but it is not hungry and won’t eat.

See Resources Related to the Topic, page 33, for descriptions of Karen Stagnitti’s books.

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LITERACY THROUGH PLAY

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“Play is children’s work”. This statement is often used in early childhood education and nothing could be more true. However, in today’s educational climate, it has never been more important for teachers and administrators to know and understand why play is such an essential part of children’s cognitive, social, emotional and physical learning. There is a real and present danger that with increased pressure on early childhood settings to “have children up to standard”, teachers and administrators will feel forced to abandon play based curriculum and replace it with more rigidly structured and teacher directed programs. This would be a disaster for the learning of young children. Removing play and active learning from the early childhood classroom eliminates the most powerful learning tool young children have.

This article aims to look briefly at some of the reasons why we must be rigorous in our planning of and support for play based curriculum. It is hoped it will arm teachers and administrators with some theoretical knowledge to be powerful advocates for young children’s learning.

The terms Pretend Play and Dramatic Play are used in educational literature to describe the kinds of play children engage in. Dramatic Play usually refers to play when the child takes on a different role (eg: store keeper, Mom, Dentist…) and the play which occurs in the Dramatic Play or Home Center in early childhood settings. Pretend Play usually refers to play when an object takes on a different role within the play of a child (eg: the block becomes a train). Of course the two types of play often integrate: a toy spoon may become a doctor’s instrument while playing the roles of doctor and patient.

Vygotsky (1967) suggests that pretend play may allow children to function at their highest level of competence. Through their Pretend or Dramatic Play, children’s learning benefits in the following ways:

**Play Fosters Social Emotional Development**

- Play puts children in a position of personal power when they have little power in their regular lives in the “real” world. In dramatic play they are able to design a world, the roles and what happens.
- Play allows children to try on the roles important in their life (eg: Mom, Dad, big sister, TV characters, store owners…)  
- Play gives opportunity for negotiating and resolving conflict. Children begin to develop an understanding of perspective: how another feels, thinks, what they want.  
- With guidance and support from adults (and powerful modeling from the adult), children learn conflict resolution skills and empowering language
Play facilitates emerging literacy by providing rich experiences, allowing them to explore their feelings and regulate their emotions.

Play offers children a safe and empowering environment to learn, explore and take risks.

Play Presents a forum for Cognitive Development

Play allows children to explore their understandings of events, characters and objects in a manageable context.

Enacting a role or event requires children to synthesize what they know about that role or event. It engages higher order thinking. The process helps children to clarify concepts about people and the world.

Children create mental pictures or schema of events (eg: going shopping) after repeated experiences (Bretherton: 1986). This schema helps children to understand future experiences. Each individual's schema is not static however, it continues to expand and change with additional experience. Through dramatic play, children re-enact their schema, adapting and changing it according to new understandings and observations. As they form new or deeper understandings of concepts, their schema or mental pictures of how the world works deepen and change also.

Play Fosters Language Development

Language development cannot be separated from Literacy Development. Recent definitions of literacy classify literacy as a social practice involving listening, speaking, viewing, reading and writing. Oral language and first languages create the foundation stone for written literacy skills and understandings to develop. It is essential that the oral literacy curriculum is not overlooked in our classrooms.

Play encourages rich, elaborate language (Athey, 1988; Pelligrini, 1986).

“Although play is not a necessary condition for learning language and literacy skills, play is probably the best environment for these abilities to thrive.” (Rogers & Sawyers, 1988, 64.)Children use language to set the stage and direct and negotiate play. They use the specific kind of language for the context or role they are playing (eg: language of waiters, cooks and customers in a restaurant)

Play facilitates emerging literacy by providing rich language experiences and opportunities for interaction. In playing children are able to explore how it feels to be a writer and reader. They begin to define themselves as readers and writers.

Play provides a safe environment for children to use their emerging literacy skills (eg: approximated spelling, role play reading), as they “read” a bedtime story to a baby doll, as they “write” their shopping list before they go to the grocery store and so on. It encourages and allows them to take risks with their learning.

Play Fosters Physical Development

Play gives opportunity for practicing large and small muscle skills (eg: using a variety of fasteners – buttons, zippers, ties – when dressing up; developing hand control while stirring the pot of soup on the stove)

Developing fine motor control and eye-hand coordination skills lays the foundation for future cognitive abilities in literacy and numeracy. Young children need to be given regular and varied experiences in using their fine motor skills and developing their small muscle tone.

The Teacher’s Role in Play

An important role for the teacher is to provide the time to play. Teachers need to look at the week and decide when time is able to be scheduled for play as a priority not as a “left over”. Teachers also provide props and space for play. Perhaps the most important issue to consider, however, is how to best scaffold and guide children’s learning without giving too much direction.

There are two (or more) schools of thought about whether or not teachers should intervene in children’s dramatic play. It is this author’s view that there are times when it is more appropriate to intervene and times when a teacher’s intervention will not enhance or extend the play. It is important for teachers to know the different ways they can be involved in play and to observe closely before jumping in too quickly. A delicate balance is needed: too much direction will stop play from being play, while ignoring play may prevent it from reaching its richest potential.

By “scaffolding” learning, the teacher helps a child to function on a higher level than would be possible without adult intervention. The adult support will help the child to eventually develop the skills to play at this level independently.

Ways to scaffold learning include:

- Stretch the children’s knowledge of roles and materials by being involved in play and modeling roles and use of materials (eg: model the use of a stethoscope, model looking at a recipe chart when pretending to cook dinner, provide and model use of paper and pencils to make a shopping list, model reading a bedtime story to dolls)
• Stretch children's language by modeling the type of conversation that occurs between roles and in specific contexts (eg: patient/doctor, store-keeper/customer)

• Stretch children’s social interactions by making comments to help children become aware of other children’s roles in play; encouraging children to move from parallel to cooperative play by becoming involved in play and taking on a role yourself; support negotiations and conflict resolution by asking questions and giving suggestions or options for children to choose from, taking responsibility for the outcome.

• Celebrate and value play by being involved. When teachers become involved in play they convey the powerful message that pretend play is important, is fun and is valuable

• Be aware of becoming involved in play only when there is a conflict. Adult support is certainly needed at some of these times (sometimes children ARE able to resolve conflict themselves given the opportunity), but ensure that most of your involvement is positive.

• Set yourself up for success. Plan your time so that you are able to spend time in play centres, but not to the detriment of your other professional responsibilities. The use of volunteers such as parents can help the teacher to provide adult assistance at certain centres so that the teacher is then able to spend 10 minutes in the Home or Block Centre during a Choice Time.

• Observe play from the ’outside’. Plan to make time for regular ‘kidwatching’ and begin a Play Journal in which you note the type of play, play participants, props used and occasionally more detailed play scripts (the language used within play). This will enable you to analyse play for patterns and language features, which in turn will influence your future planning.

References:
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Lisa Burman

Children need the freedom and time to play.
Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity.
Kay Redfield Jamison
(professor of psychiatry)

PLAY AT GLANDORE SPEECH AND LANGUAGE PROGRAM

Glandore Speech and Language Program (SLP) is one of 8 metropolitan - based, specialist preschool programs that provide a high level of specialised support for children with severe, specific communication (speech and / or language) impairments. The children who attend these SLPs have learning and development similar to that of other children their age, and speech and language difficulties are their primary area of developmental need. They have participated in previous speech pathology sessions, have hearing within the normal range and have non-verbal skills that have been measured with a psychometric test to be within the average range. Most children are about 4 years of age when they begin their time with us in the SLP and stay for a minimum of three terms. Usually, this coincides with transition to school at approximately 5 years of age. One of the aims of the SLP is to transition children successfully to school with the support appropriate to their needs at the time of exiting preschool.

The SLP aims to strengthen children’s communication by improving their talking and listening skills, ability to learn and interact with others. The SLP operates within an integrated setting where children with speech and/or language impairments can participate in a “normal” pre-school setting with the additional support of individual intervention and small group activities from specialised staff (teacher and speech pathologist).

As with any other preschool program, a play based curriculum is used. Play is considered the developmentally appropriate process for children's learning, thinking, imagination, story making and communication, as is it stated in the Educator’s Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF, 2010). It stands to reason that the children who participate in the SLP have difficulty with the aspects of play that incorporate story making, communication and imagination that involves verbal thought. If play can be taught, as is described in the EYLF, it is the intentional use of explicit teaching to assist these children to develop the skills they need. Play will be made up of structured, unstructured and incidental

continued
A particular focus is to make resources and play scenarios rich with language – both verbal and non-verbal (such as through the use of signing, visuals or augmentative communication systems). Play is accompanied by contextual literature, through the use of props that include print (signs, appointment book, x-rays in the doctor’s office or menus and ordering pad in the restaurant). A resource we have successfully shared with examples of this type of play for use at home is The Hanen Centre’s Preschool Language and Literacy Planner (2012).

For the children who attend the SLP, play is planned in conjunction with individual therapy to develop targeted speech, language and social skills. Information about the children’s skills is collected as part of the referral process to enter the SLP, but observation once the child begins in the SLP is also a critical way information is collected about children’s development. The Respect, Reflect, Relate document contains a set of scales used by the SLP teacher to reflect on her practice when involving SLP children, as well as observing their engagement with learning. (Respect, Reflect, Relate, 2008). The SLP’s speech pathologist and teacher regularly meet to plan, monitor and evaluate this learning / therapy dyad, as part of each child’s Individual Learning Plan (ILP). Whole of centre planning happens concurrently, which includes the SLP staff, with most themes and learning opportunities provided for all children accessing the preschool. Pre-teaching some vocabulary, concepts or experiences may occur in small group or one-on-one for SLP children and is pro-actively planned. Play adjuncts and experiences may be available for longer or in a way that can be revisited time and again for SLP children.

Many children with communication difficulties don’t know how to play with the complexity or language of their age matched peers. They may have simple, immature play, stereotypical play that has been learned from a favourite television program or DVD which appears complex on first introduction but with further observation can be recognised as being rehearsed and used as a “chunk” without meaning behind it. They may have very literal play with strict rules that must be adhered to, they may perseverate and get stuck: returned to words, schemas and actions that belonged to an earlier game, or have a strong desire to incorporate sensory elements into their play, such as the use of spinning, or dressing up with a particular type of textured material, or placing themselves into tight spaces to obtain sensory feedback, or a strong desire to play with water.

Play these children feel comfortable and familiar with (and may contain one or more of the types of play described above) provides the doorway through which educators can step incrementally with the child into new territory. Gradually new skills can be built into these familiar games. New skills might include the development of: vocabulary, concepts, listening, turn taking, and listener perspective to reverse roles and play the “teacher” or “listener”. Developing play for SLP children usually begins with a child and teacher but gradually incorporates additional children, when the teacher had gauged the child is ready to make this developmental leap.

Many of our SLP children with immature play skills feel comfortable playing with trains and train tracks. This play can be performed silently or with the child making environmental noises. Often this play begins with children interacting in isolation with the toys provided and adult supervision is needed to negotiate the use of favourite items, if more children play nearby. The teacher arranges the play into a quiet space where she can work 1:1, with limited distraction and time to repeat the play process. Structured play will begin with explicit teaching of “my turn”, “your turn” with the trains, to develop turn taking – a foundation conversational skill. The teacher may do all or a considerable amount of the talking to begin this process. Gradually more words and ideas are introduced. A favourite train the child might gravitate towards might be kept in reserve, if it inhibits this structured play process, but it would be used as a reward for participation near the end of play, or indeed, to begin a new chapter in the play.

The notion of direct demonstration occurs alongside activities at preschool all the time, but at Glandore, it is able to be incorporated into small group work, where the speech pathologist participates in small group sessions with the SLP teacher and children. At the introduction of new activities, the speech pathologist might be “called upon” by the teacher to listen and follow explicit direction just as the other children might, with the group looking on and providing feedback about the speech pathologist’s attempt. Depending on the group, negative practise (the speech pathologist does not do what she has been instructed, and waits for a member of the group to notice and correct her either verbally or non-verbally) may be incorporated.

continued
Play Based Intervention in a Kindergarten Context

Play and Language Development

Research has shown that children from disadvantaged backgrounds do not possess the flexibility that is required to alter and re-sequence behaviour that might lead to different modes of functioning or problem solving. These children tend to either stick to one repetitious activity without expanding on this or will jump from one activity to another disconnected one; there is an inability to develop a theme and relate their life experiences to their play (Lovinger, 1974).

The developmental framework of play that was the focus of our intervention consists of the following four major ordinal levels: 1. Sensorimotor-exploratory, 2. Relational-nonfunctional, 3. Functional-conventional and 4. Symbolic. The area of symbolic play was chosen as a primary focus of intervention in this instance.

Symbolic play is defined as play where a child will substitute one object for another. For example, a child may cover a doll with a tea-towel, using the tea-towel to represent a blanket. This action demonstrates the child’s ability to hold a mental image of an object (a blanket) and recreate this image using an object that is available to the child in their immediate environment (a tea-towel). Symbolic play has been linked to emotional development, problem solving and creative abilities (Hack, 1990).
Speech and Language are two systems which use symbols to create meaning; therefore development of these two systems requires a grasp on symbolic representations. Research has shown that children with developmental/specific language impairment demonstrate play skills that are comparable to their linguistically competent peers, however they tend to produce fewer symbolic play acts (Roth & Clark, 1987). This research was a key component to why the area of symbolic play was chosen as a target area in this project.

The Context

Renmark Children’s Centre is situated in the Riverland and is an Integrated Service, providing both a Child Care and Preschool Service. The preschool staff comprises a Director (of the whole site), 1.9 teachers split between three (one full time, one 0.7 FTE and one 0.2 FTE). The Centre is also staffed with Early Childhood Workers and a Bi-lingual assistant.

Rationale

During term 3, 2012 the number of children receiving Preschool Support was 21, 10 for either speech or language or both and the other 11 were referred for behavioural concerns. In addition to that there were a number of children who had been referred to Speech Pathology who were on the waiting list for support. A large number of these children were from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Disability Co-ordinator had a discussion with the Director regarding caseload management and the best way to meet the needs of all the children. It was suggested that some group work might be the best way to manage the caseload.

Regional Support staff members (Disability Co-ordinator and Speech Pathologist) attended a staff meeting with the preschool staff to determine the needs from their perspective, and group the children according to their need and dynamics. A variety of needs were identified; i.e. speech and language, behaviour, limited concentration, social skills, difficulties in small and large group settings. Other children who were not eligible for support but were waiting for a speech and language assessment were discussed and strategies of how to best target their needs while they were still waiting to be assessed were suggested.

Method

A model of small group intervention that could be adapted to a whole preschool setting was developed. Based on the needs of the children that had been identified and the research behind play and language development it was decided that a play based model of intervention would be used to promote their understanding and development of symbolic play, role taking, problem solving, oral narrative and sequence development.

Children were grouped according to developmental and language needs. The groups were fluid so children could be included if staff believed they would benefit.

It was agreed that groups would run weekly, twice a day for one day over a school term. We developed a structure and routine for how the group would be run. This included the use of a visual schedule, which outlined the procedure and routine to be followed. Groups ran for up to 20 minutes. At times the group time was shortened or lengthened according to how the children were engaging in play activities. Each group was supported and eventually run by the teacher with the support of an Early Childhood Worker.

The first session involved providing the children with a selection of toys and left to play with the toys independent of any adult interaction or direction to gather information about their current play and language skills in the play domains outlined by Karen Stagnitti (Stagnitti, 1998). These domains included Themes, Sequences of Play Action, Object Substitution, Social Interaction, Role Play and Doll/Teddy Play.

It was determined that the children in the groups were at a very similar developmental level within their play skills across all the domains.

A target area from the domains was chosen from Karen Stagnitti’s book; Learn to Play, and demonstrated to the staff and the children prior to initiation of play within the group; in this case the target domain chosen was Doll/Teddy Play. The roles of the adult were to model language as well as extend the number of actions in a play sequence throughout the play session.

As children’s skills developed, new toys were introduced to extend the play and introduce a new play action into their sequence. For some it was weekly, for others no new toys were introduced. Instead, these children were modelled with a play sequence repeatedly until there was evidence of imitation.

Reflection

It was noted that some children’s skills developed quickly and the gap between the play skills of each child exhibited in the group become greater.

The intention was to be able to show staff that play actions could be replicated within the wider preschool setting. eg that the tea towel used in the small group as a blanket (object substitution) could then be used in the home corner in the same way to show the child and staff how to transfer skills from a small group setting into everyday play and kindergarten situations.
Oral language, including narrative play and labelling was modelled in small group to promote vocabulary development and increase sentence length as well as more complex sentence structure use. Gradually this became apparent within the wider preschool setting as well.

**Evaluation**

Upon evaluation there were a number of changes made to the way the groups were run.

Positive outcomes:
- More opportunities for play and play modelling were being recognised by the staff within the whole preschool setting.
- Staff were recognising opportunities to extend children’s play, incorporate problem solving, questioning and oral language modelling.
- Staff embraced the structure of the small group format i.e. timetable, use of visuals, routine and repetition into the larger group times. Regional Office staff observed a significant change in children’s behaviour, readiness to attend to whole group time, participation and concentration. Staff reflected that they had noticed a change also and kindergarten days ran more smoothly.
- Follow up assessment by the Speech Pathologist revealed improved concentration, ability to maintain attention to a task for up to 20/25 minutes, improved sentence structure and vocabulary use.
- Improved problem solving and reasoning skills were observed.
- Preschool staff adapted the program to suit their needs and continued to run this group through term 4 independently with consultation with support services where required.
- Staff prioritised the group work and ensured that it would continue by making staff time available.

The preschool staff later individualised the intervention by time-tabling the groups which allowed for the program to be self-sustaining, once intensive Regional support was withdrawn.

**Challenges**

- Maintenance of the weekly session due to unforeseen circumstances from a Regional Support perspective and a Preschool perspective.
- Child attendance on scheduled group days.

- How relevant the program developed by Regional Office staff was to the preschool setting and the cohort of children.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The development and delivery of weekly play based sessions have resulted in a sustainable program that kindergarten staff have adapted to suit their individual and group needs. As a result of the weekly sessions speech pathology assessment data revealed a noticeable improvement in vocabulary and grammar use. Kindergarten staff and Regional Support Service staff reflected that children were more engaged in small group and the whole kindergarten setting, they were beginning to develop the skills to enter and interact with other children in their play.

Overall the play based groups met the needs of the kindergarten and Support Services staff. The groups have allowed kindergarten staff a means to provide therapy and support to children that they had concerns with around their oral language and behaviour development while they were on the waiting list for an assessment. Children showed a noticeable improvement in concentration in small groups and during whole group mat time and improved vocabulary and grammar use.

**References**


**FURTHER READING……AVAILABLE FROM SERU**

Learn to Play: A Practical Program to Develop a Child’s Imaginative Play. Stagnitti, K. 1998. 27.0088.01

This program is designed to develop the imaginative play skills of children up to six years with developmental delays, autistic spectrum disorders, language disorders and other disabilities. The book aims to foster a child’s ability to play independently and spontaneously to their maximum potential by increasing their repertoire of play behaviours.
Young children's play allows them to explore, identify, negotiate, take risks and create meaning. The intellectual and cognitive benefits of playing have been well documented. Children who engage in quality play experiences are more likely to have well-developed memory skills, language development, and are able to regulate their behaviour, leading to enhanced school adjustment and academic learning (Bodrova & Leong, 2005).


This article looks at what happens when play is used to stimulate the acquisition of oral language. Renmark Primary School is a Category 2 disadvantaged school in a rural location. Accelerated Literacy has been the preferred pedagogical approach in the school for a number of years. The project focused on a mainstream Year 3/4 class which has six students with disabilities, and one 50 minute lesson with the class each week over a period of 10 weeks.

Why Oral Language Development through Play?

At the beginning of 2012, the school identified oral language development as one of the areas that many students were experiencing difficulties with. The school used the oral language assessment tool developed by Carmen Cravola to screen all students seen as experiencing difficulties accessing the curriculum because of low literacy skills. This resulted in the majority of the targeted class being assessed including all six students with disabilities. Results indicated there was a problem that needed to be addressed. The staff then attended professional learning around oral language and play provided by the Regional Speech Pathologist and Disability Coordinator. Following this, I discussed the use of play to develop oral language with Judith Taylor the Disability Coordinator, as I was interested in implementing play based learning in the classroom and unsure where to start.

The Process

1. Informal assessment of oral language skills

While the school had data on the students overall oral language skills I was keen to ascertain further information about the following:

- how students approached play
- their level of vocabulary
- social interactions.

a. First step

I started by providing students the opportunity to use play boxes. These boxes had been developed around a number of themes. E.g. Visit to the doctor's, building, food/kitchen.

Students self-selected groups of five or six with each group choosing a play box on a different theme. They had the opportunity to use two play boxes (25 mins using each box) per lesson over three weeks. This allowed them to use six different play boxes during this assessment phase.

Instructions were about the process, eg.where to work and how to work in a group, however, no guidance was provided on how to use the boxes for playing.

At this point my main aim was to observe the students to gather information about how they played and the oral language they were using.

b. What happened?

It was obvious from the start that there was not a lot of depth in the content of their play. A number were observed to be using limited or no language. Some students were not engaged and were bystanders while others dominated. Many students gravitated to their friends. The focus student was challenged by this activity because of the noise generated. To overcome this issue I set up her group with a play box outside the classroom.

c. Reflection

With the above intent in mind I realised I needed to narrow the focus to a specific theme. I contacted the Disability Coordinator to discuss where to next. I decided to focus our play on the theme At a Café, to enable all students to be active participants. It would also provide opportunities for students to learn about how a Café operates and the language used. The student could experience the Café from ‘both sides of the counter’ as customers and as employees. This would lead to the development and use of a diverse range of oral language skills.

The Intent

My intent for the ten lessons was three fold:

- To develop oral language skills in vocabulary and context relevant language
- To develop problem solving skills for all students
- To ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities.

I was especially interested in how a Year 4 student with Asperger’s syndrome would respond and learn during the lessons.
2. Scaffolding Play

My next step was to use the information gathered to assist students to play in such a way that they would be immersed in the discourse of a Café. I did this through scaffolding their play.

a. What I did?

I began with a class discussion about different types of eating places and all the aspects related to eating out. Topics covered included:
- Naming our Café.
- Different role descriptions: customer, waiter/waitress, chef/cook etc.
- Cafe menus.

We brainstormed and discussed the language associated with the different roles.

Some of the contributions from students included:
- How to welcome customers.
- The need to treat others with respect.
- How to order food.
- The language required for the different roles.

The students were given the opportunity to make props and I also purchased some (Tablecloths, plates, note pads etc). We decided that the roles would be rotated each week.

b. What happened?

Students chose what role they wanted to play for the week. E.g. Waiter, Chef, Customers, Cashier etc. The room was set out with all the props and the play began.

While students were playing I observed the following:
- The more confident students willingly took on the speaking roles.
- Students were taking on the various roles of family members.
- Students interacted with students they didn’t normally.

The rotation of the roles was especially significant for students with special needs and they were encouraged to use language in context.

Towards the end of the project, I surveyed the students about the play sessions to gauge what learning they felt had happened.

Student comments included:
- “How to count money and give change”
- “My maths has improved”
- “I had the opportunity to interact with others”
- “How to deal with difficult customers “

There were lots of comments related to it being fun and they would like to do it again.

c. Reflection

I observed that some students were reluctant to take on the role of a waiter because I had assumed they would know what to do. After a discussion with the Disability Coordinator I decided to role play different scenarios so all students had the opportunity to listen and observe language used by others. This is especially important for students with special needs as they often need to be taught how to play. I thought that this would support them.

I also found providing students with realistic and authentic props enhanced the quality of play. Setting the play in this way ensured student interacted with peers they didn’t normally. For the students with special needs having the play structured and scaffolded enabled them to use appropriate language and maximise their participation in the role plays.

For the focus student in particular this experience supported her to develop her social skills, increase her verbal output, her confidence and be part of a group.

What does this mean and where to next?

This play experience provided opportunities for all students to develop problem solving skills, negotiation, inclusivity and oral language. It is my intention this year to further explore the value of play in a lower primary class using a different theme but again focusing on oral language development, once again scaffolding the students throughout the process.

I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Judith Taylor (Disability Coordinator) and Dr Jane Pitt (Literacy Coordinator) with this project.

Sofy Pipinis
Renmark Primary School
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For a small child there is no division between playing and learning; between the things he or she does ‘just for fun’ and things that are ‘educational.’ The child learns while living and any part of living that is enjoyable is also play.

Penelope Leach (psychologist and author)
Through play children learn a wide range of skills and abilities required to make sense of their world and to be able to engage with people and objects. When using play with young children with disabilities a more considered approach is taken. Are we being inclusive? Are we being effective in the purpose we are planning for? Is the approach enjoyable? When do we encourage and scaffold and when do we remove ourselves from the play experience?

In 2007 Kapunda Kindergarten staff decided to create Developmental Language Bags with a focus on the children who required some consolidating of their language skills. A DECD speech pathologist provided a vision that inspired the staff team and the collaboration between the Preschool Support Worker and the speech pathologist first led to the creation of Developmental Language Bags. These were to focus on basic language concepts through the use of games and toys for parents and staff to play. Following this, phonological awareness bags were created children with speech difficulties. The popularity of these bags being used by both parents and staff, then led to the development of book bags promoting basic book skills and numeracy bags to promote numeracy in the home.

**Developmental Language Bags**

Toys and real objects were included in the bags which made them fun and more meaningful for the children. They were also far more effective as teaching tools. We started with some very simple ‘Following Instructions Bags’ promoting concepts colour, size, position etc.

Using cloth cut as small and large rugs and a variety of sorting teddies. Two to four information word instructions are included.

The bags were initially trialled with staff and families who reported that they liked having equipment ready and easy to use with the children. Families liked the games and the clear instructions and having something special from Kindergarten. Promoting fun family time was one of the main goals.

‘Questioning bags’ were next, designed to promote the skills of answering questions, building of vocabulary, visual memory, same and different and describing by attributes. Encouraging play and talking with children leads to learning. The bags included everyday household items, which cost very little and families also made donations of old toys or household items. *Eg. bags were made which focused on objects found in a bathroom and kitchen, including items like toothbrushes, old shampoo containers, cups and bowls.*

We then started to think about things we found difficult to teach like grammar and negatives, such as the meaning of ‘not’ and bags were created to help in these areas. By having bags and using old resources we were able to add more variety, and reduce preparation time. This meant more time spent with the children and resources that could go home.

Making sound bags was a logical thing to do as we already knew the children were enjoying playing and learning with the language bags. Items were collected to make specific consonant and blend bags. Real items are more meaningful, especially to a child having difficulty with the abstract and unfamiliar.

Game ideas were added, such as lotto boards and fishing rods, which are proving to be very popular.

The rhyme and syllable bags are certainly the most requested by the children. The syllable bags particularly encourage listening skills, clarity, the slowing of speech and breaking words into smaller parts. The rhyme bags help the children learn how words can be grouped together by similar sounds helping with listening skills and finding patterns.
Book Bags

Using Developmental Language Bags provides a good foundation for speech and language success so the next step was to include book bags. Books that were simple and could be used in the kindergarten environment easily were selected.

On the first day of the installation of three raised garden beds the children decided only two needed to be planted and one should remain as a digging patch. Although there was already a large digging patch we observed that some of the more tactile defensive children liked to dig in the raised garden bed. This became a wonderful place to read and act out books like the “Little Yellow Digger” by Betty and Alan Gilderdale and “Old MacDonald” by Siobhan Dodds. The water trough obviously works well for “Who sank the boat” by Pamela Allen. Some of our indoor plants have attracted quite a lot of enthusiasm as Hattie from “Hattie and the Fox” by Mem Fox seeks refuge from the fox. As well as being able to act out stories, we have been able to build up book skills such as the child being able to practice turning pages one at a time. Board books have purposely been included in the book bags, as they are easier for the children to handle and more durable.

Numeracy Bags

When the Numeracy bags were created differing developmental levels were covered. We started with “Sort and Match” to “Patterning”, “Number” to “Counting” and a bag for “Measurement” was included as this seems to be a popular interest at our Kindergarten. The development of the Numeracy bags is at the early stages, and they may still require some further adapting as their use is reviewed. Good advice is always cherished, and we have received lots from our friends and colleagues from Barossa Community Health. For the last several years therapy groups operated by Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Speech Pathologists have been conducted from the Kindergarten. During this time staff have been able to observe and learn effective therapy skills to transfer into the kindergarten environment. Resource ideas and play activities have been sourced and put into use at our kindergarten with both small and large groups on a daily basis. This has included a wide range of sensory experiences and pretend play scenarios. All staff have seen the benefit of sensory tools and use these with a variety of children.

Already we have ideas and plans to create and develop some of our favourite pretend play scenarios from the excellent book “Play to Learn” by Karen Stagnitti and Louise Jellie. One of our most popular play scenes is “The postman delivers the mail”. When this game is played a helmet is included and a high visible vest so the children can hop onto their pretend motor bike. This scenario is a great way to encourage children who are less interested in drawing and writing to hold a pen. Writing your name is meaningful when you want someone to know who a letter is from.

In conclusion, we do not want to give the impression our Kindergarten looks like a baggage department of an airport. It doesn’t, but over the years we have found keeping some of our resources with instructions in bags means they are easily transportable, ready to go and available for families to borrow when convenient. At our site several preschool support workers come and go on different days, and by having bags we have added to the consistency of the goals we are teaching and better knowledge and understanding of what we are teaching. This has resulted in better outcomes for our children.

Sally Wudttke
Kapunda Kindergarten
P 85662 431

We are never more fully alive, more completely ourselves, or more deeply engrossed in anything, than when we are at play.

Charles Schaefer
"You can learn more about a person in an hour of play than in year of conversation."  Plato

At Salisbury Downs Primary School (SDPS), we believe play is the universal language of children....with or without a disability. Aspects of children’s play are incorporated into our daily learning routines alongside explicit teaching and through hands-on and creative exploration and investigation.

There are two specific approaches to incorporating play at SDPS; Play Is The Way and CLIP (Create, Learn, Investigate, Play).

**Play Is The Way**

Our social and emotional approach to child development is based around a whole school program developed by Wilson McCaskill entitled *Play is the Way*.

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to understand, manage and express emotions to meet the daily requirements of living, learning and relating to others. At Salisbury Downs we believe emotional intelligence is of equal importance to academic intelligence and a key predictor of success in later life. *Play Is The Way* is a practical methodology for teaching social and emotional learning using guided play, classroom activities and an empowering language. In essence it is behaviour education using wisdom, not force. The Play is the Way games program assists teachers to guide children beyond the simple pleasures of playing games to the character building benefits and positive learning dispositions that can be achieved. These outcomes directly link to the GeneralCapabilities in the Australian Curriculum. It is structured play using games that can be adapted or adjusted to fit a variety of needs and skills.

Classes devote twenty minutes to each games session across three days of the week. Every second Monday, the whole school comes together for a twenty minute games session. Each class still works independently on their chosen game; however the whole school “plays” at the same time. This promotes a sense of belonging and community and allows healthy competition through the opportunity to play off against each other and strive for personal best.

In attempting to achieve the desired outcome of a game, students are practising the skills that improve life and learning outcomes. As games are invariably patterns of interaction, they can often be understood visually and therefore increase the chances for involvement for those who find talking or listening difficult. Games often utilise groups of people attempting to work together, the opportunity to be involved via small but meaningful contributions increases. Because the games are made effective by communal contribution they are also less prone to collapse from the mistakes or errors of an individual. The games encourage participants to be aware of each other’s strengths and weaknesses and to accommodate accordingly, no matter their ability or skill level. They also give all participants the pleasure of belonging to a collective enterprise whether or not it succeeds.

The games encourage children to use their inherent skills to advantage others in the pursuit of common objectives. They strengthen the skills of teamwork and cooperation and help children to manage and build relationships. In the playing of the games teachers take on the role of a keen observer and can learn much about their students and guide them to make strong decisions, show empathy for others and understand all members of the community no matter their circumstances. Our teachers find the games and the observations that accompany them an invaluable addition to their teaching toolkits.

Typically, students with a learning disability have other major difficulties in one or more of the following areas:

- Motor coordination
- Time management
- Attention
- Organisational skills
- Processing speed
- Social skills needed to make friends and maintaining relationships
- Emotional maturation
- Verbal expression
- Memory

*Play is the Way* games address all of these issues and supports students in developing the fundamental skills for life effectiveness.

We have students with physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities and those who are on the Autism spectrum and they all successfully participate in the *Play Is the Way* games and reap the benefits of its character building outcomes.

continued
To develop the necessary oral language skills and vocabulary of our youngest school members we run an intentional play program 4 times a week we call CLIP.

During this time we use the philosophies of the Walker Learning Approach, to create an empowering and student-focused learning environment with learning centres that provide intentional provocations for children to investigate. The children use these investigations to “play” with their learning and to explore the concepts that have been introduced during explicit lessons. Children’s interests are used as the predominant means for these learning experiences, as their learning follows the things that most interest them. The teachers then provide open ended learning centre and “play” ideas to match the students’ interests. This stimulates children’s language and thinking skills and links these experiences to literacy, numeracy and other learning across the curriculum. Children’s interests are expanded, scaffolded and supported as a means of ongoing engagement in their learning. Learning centres include things such as: Dramatic play, writer’s workshop, collage, sensory play, construction, a reading corner amongst many others. All learning centres are provided with print rich experiences to support students investigations and discovery.

The learning experiences emphasise active engagement, provide children with opportunities to explore processes not just end products and seeks to encourage children to pursue some of their learning experiences into ongoing projects for either shorter or longer periods of time. This experience allows for individual entry and exit points to the investigation. For the children that have a disability they can tenaciously explore the abilities they have, supported by the teachers and fellow students along the journey to independence. Independence is essential for assimilation, integration and acceptance.

The teacher’s role is to extend and move a child’s learning further, through the use of observation, questioning and scaffolding. Students with learning disabilities need an engaging environment to function successfully in school. A supportive environment enables them to capitalize on their strengths and minimize or cope effectively with their weaknesses. Scaffolding is one of the most important skills a teacher can ever develop and use in effective teaching and learning.

Clip helps our children to attain:
- Higher levels of engagement and motivation
- Higher oral language skills
- Increased writing capabilities
- Increased pro-social skills
- Decreased behavioural problems
- Greater level of personalised learning opportunities
- Improved problem solving and creative thinking
- Increased independence and interdependence

Play also serves as a powerful diagnostic tool and can inform a teacher of a child’s social and emotional needs thereby allowing for more effective and targeted interventions.

At Salisbury Downs Primary School we believe not only must children be encouraged to play, we must make the time for them to do so, by themselves, with each other and supported by us. Play is the universal past time of all children. A childhood with too little play ill prepares children for the requirements of adulthood.

“Children need the freedom and time to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity.”

Kay Redfield Jamison

David Bentley and Stephanie Davids
Salisbury Downs Primary School
P 8258 7560
The ABL (Activity-Based Learning) program began at Kingscote Campus in 2011. In 2012 the program ran between recess and lunch for two lessons. Students with a range of needs and across year levels came from mainstream classes and formed a group in our Learning Centre which focussed on the development of language, developing and consolidating social and emotional skills, developing and improving fine motor skills and problem solving through play. The core group contained six students aged 6 to 11 years with a range of diagnosis such as ASD, Global Developmental Delay, Intellectual Disability and Communication difficulties (one student being non-verbal). All students had been identified as having difficulties with the social norms of a mainstream classroom and require significant adjustments to their curriculum. One of the students rarely attends in the mainstream setting so it was also a way to provide a reverse transition for him.

The challenge with the range of ages and needs was how to create a program that addressed such issues and helped promote a sense of being a group that could work well together. As a team we agreed that the group needed to work on those skills now highlighted by the Social Capabilities Continuum (self-regulation; self-awareness; self-management; social awareness and social management) with a strong language focus to support the students with their literacy needs. We were also aware of the particular sensory needs of our students and endeavoured to cater for these during the program.

The program has changed, developed and continues to be refined. It is never static; as different challenges arise, the complexity of needs within the group are addressed. Last year a routine with visual prompts was successfully established to remind students of the daily routine:

1. Floorplay (jigsaw puzzles/lego/board and card games/construction toys – here we focussed on building relationships, turn-taking, listening to others and developing imaginative play).

2. Listen to a story (a strong focus on playing phonological awareness games/language games such as hangman/following on with rhyming, alliteration and other language features all based upon the story).

3. Art/Craft activity based upon the story or theme of the week. The focus was on scissor-skills/cutting and pasting/kneading for fine motor skills, and also participation. Some students were reluctant to take part in craft but taking part in all activities was a requirement in order to earn ‘free time’.

4. Free play – lego a popular choice plus visits to the playground for having participated well in the group activities.

In addition to this, there was a range of themes and the activities and stories were selected around these themes. In 2012, when we studied space, the group made their own planet piñatas and took them outside to bash them, much to their amusement. Time was spent learning about, discussing, and making things linked to The Sea; Australian animals and other cultural aspects of being Australian; other cultures, for example exploring students cultural backgrounds; Asia as part of our annual Asian market; Heroes (real-life examples as well as comic strip heroes; we created our own comics strips) to name but a few.

In 2013, two ABL programs have been developed to better support our student’s with disabilities for whom participating in mainstream classrooms all day too stressful and challenging and whose sensory, social and learning needs are especially difficult to meet in this setting. We now have a JP group between recess and lunch, and an afternoon group for older students in order to continue to address the range of ages and needs.

Both groups enjoy an array of activities such as cooking (reading and following a procedure; using utensils correctly; cooking to a recipe; self-reflection at the end); physical activities in the gym that require team work and decision-making such as creating their own obstacle course for other students to use; reading and sharing books and stories (the older group are currently reading ‘George’s Marvellous Medicine’ together this term) with ICT and art/craft activities linked to what we have read and discussed each week. They continue to enjoy playing with lego and construction toys, which allows rich opportunities for oral discussion and developing oral stories using their constructions. Again, the focus is on following instructions, doing the activities of the group, showing awareness of their own behaviour and awareness of other people, as well as working on how to self-regulate when upset.

We have been fortunate to have had a change in our facility this year. We moved into a remodelled area of the school at the beginning of the year and this has provided us with fantastic flexibility with our space, a great opportunity to develop a sensory area and a larger outdoor play area both of which are currently evolving.

Sue Morris
Assistant Principal, R-5 and Special Education
Kangaroo Island Community Education
P 85532074
According to one of the world’s most famous psychologists ‘play is the work of childhood’, when children play they learn at their highest level. For children with Down syndrome this is equally important. It is now believed that play helps create and shape brain pathways and these pathways are the foundations for all learning and development. Between birth and 3 the child grows and develops faster than at any other stage in their lives.

This article focuses on developing communication skills through play. Many children with Down syndrome struggle to be understood and this is often a source of frustration. Helping children to communicate their needs is crucial for building independence and social competence. Play provides tremendous opportunities for language development and extends and develops imaginative thinking.

For children with Down syndrome barriers to play based learning may be present in a number of ways. These include hearing and visual impairments, intellectual disability, sensory impairments and health issues. Providing opportunities for play should be guided by thoughtful and intentional teaching that is designed to meet the needs of young children with Down syndrome.

Equally as important is recognising the individual strengths and interests of each child. Many children with Down syndrome have good social skills and a strong desire to communicate. Each child brings a range of skills and experiences with them, we encourage parents/caregivers to collaborate and share information. This in turn builds an understanding of the individual child which informs planning appropriate learning opportunities to promote engagement. The amount children learn from a particular activity is largely dependent on how actively they are engaged in it.

Providing children with Down Syndrome developmentally appropriate activities is crucial in developing their play skills. These skills may also have to be explicitly taught and may not come naturally. For example educators may initiate most of the play to begin with and then fade prompts and scaffolding over time. Verbal communication (speech) may take many months or years for the child to be understood by and unfamiliar listener. It is a very complex process.

Below are some suggested play ideas in 8 key areas required for “Learning to talk”

### Attending
Improving concentration will be helpful in all areas of learning. A good attention span will help children understand language more easily.

- Make sure you have the child’s attention before giving instructions and use the child’s name.
- Teach attending using games, e.g. matching games; slowly extending the time.
- Look for cues of fatigue.
- Minimise distractions where possible.
- Break down more complex tasks into small achievable steps; it is learning the process not the outcome that is important;
- Include packing away as part of the activity.

### Listening
Listening skills are particularly challenging for children with Down syndrome many of whom are more visual learners.

- Have the child’s hearing checked regularly; every 6 months until three;
- Gain the child’s attention before you speak – be face to face.
- Singing helps children learn language through rhythm and rhyme.
- Develop an awareness of sound so that gradually children can connect sounds to different actions and object, eg. listening to everyday sounds at home, Sound Touch app.
- Develop auditory discrimination skills, eg. loud and soft, high and low sounds.
- Develop auditory memory; important for learning and following instructions. Simplify instructions, start with one step instructions and build to two step instructions, etc.

### Social communication skills
Many social rules are assumed, for children with Down syndrome these need to be explicitly taught.

- Look at the intent of the communication. What is the child trying to tell you? Do not anticipate every need - either provide choices or when appropriate, wait for the child to initiate communication.
Teach routines and turn these into games, e.g. use singing, “this is the way we put on our shoes.”
Teach turn taking; start 1:1; use games, e.g. stacking rings, building blocks and knocking it down; expect children to join in.
Teach choice making; start with two objects, one that is highly motivating and an obvious choice; reward child immediately with object.
Encourage purposeful communication, e.g. set up play situations to help the child learn to communicate he is hungry or tired.
Teach social words such as “more, stop, go, finished, please and thank you.”
Address sensory processing difficulties to minimise discomfort; be aware of visual and auditory stimulation and triggers for inappropriate behavior.

Feeding/oral motor skills
According to Libby Kumin (2003), “it is very common for infants and young children to have low muscle tone and weak muscles in the lips, tongue and palate. In fact many speech and intelligibility problems are due to this low muscle tone.”

- Play mouth games in front of the mirror. E.g. Open mouth wide, close tightly and say mmmm.
- Play lips games, e.g. stroke around the lips with a wash cloth.
- Play tongue games. E.g. singing “la la la” into a toy microphone.
- Blowing games through whistles and horns.

Receptive Language (understanding)
Expressive Language (all different ways that children express a message e.g. gesture, pointing, noises, facial expressions)

- Simplify your language using key word instructions
- Use the child’s visual skills which are often an area of strength e.g. visual timetables, using signs, pictures and all communication technologies.
- Current research point strongly toward the need to use sign language for children with Down syndrome; sign language supports speech development
- Follow the child’s lead; changing topics too quickly can be confusing;
- Respond to child’s signals and attempts at communication; this may be as simple as an eye gaze.
- Use special interests to extend vocabulary; teach core important words and sounds.

Speech
Speech is by far the hardest aspect of children’s communication. It may be many years before a child with Down syndrome is able to make himself understood by an unfamiliar listener.

- Planned activities should provide fun and success and should follow the child’s lead.
- Allow time for the child to practise listening to individual sounds, encourage any attempts at sounds.
- Model and expand language, e.g. child says/signs brush….you expand to brush hair, brush dog, brush teddy...

As young children usually spend the majority of their time with parents/caregivers, we seek to engage families in learning about the importance of responsive play in the early years. During early intervention we collaborate with parents to plan play based activities. We support parents in learning to:
- develop the child’s independence in their play;
- slowly fade supports until a child can attain their goal alone (use scaffolding);
- allow extra time for repetition and practice;
- provide extra time for children to process information and their responses;
- recognise teachable moments as they arise;
- encourage all communication attempts;
- provide opportunities to offer challenge and share enjoyment of play experiences with their children
- consider variability in progress, each child with Down Syndrome is unique.

As educators it is important to help parents see the vital link between play and learning. For example, as their child is blowing a bubble it is pointed out that breath control is very important in speech acquisition or when a child is rolling a ball to and fro, we explain this is a turn taking skill. Turn taking is a crucial conversational skill (one speaker one listener). Through play children learn. Play proves a crucial medium for parents to connect with their children and learn from each other. Play builds positive relationships between carer/parents and their children especially when both parent and child are having fun. By revealing the purpose and intent behind play based learning opportunities, parents can see that play is not only children’s work but parent’s business.

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Down Syndrome SA
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Children learn about themselves and the world around them through play. They begin by exploring the feel, taste and smell of different objects, as they begin to develop an understanding of the world around them; they gradually begin to use toys to represent real objects.

To a child that has an Autism Spectrum Disorder, a toy train may not be a 'pretend real train', but rather an object which is cold, hard, green, heavy, has a metallic taste, rattles when it's shaken, and makes funny patterns to look at when the wheels are spinning. A child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder can explore all objects; this can include toys, discarded rubbish, twigs or leaves, in order to experience the simple sensations, which give them great pleasure.

Many children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder can experience difficulty processing (absorbing and recognising) information from the world around them; they require opportunities for sensory stimulation. Sensory stimulation opportunities can include games which further develop touch, taste, smell, vision, movement and hearing. Many children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder have well developed visual skills; this can be utilised by presenting visual cues during interactions.

Play is often described as the foundation for development; hence children who lack the ability to play miss the opportunity to participate in many activities. These children may need to be directly taught how to play. Children can learn new ways of play, but we must start at the child's level. Below are some aspects that we need to take into consideration when supporting a child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder to play.

- Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder can lack motivation and would rather be left to do their own 'thing'. List activities that the child likes, including their interests to use as motivators.
- Sometimes the child can be experiencing sensory processing difficulties, which may impact on their ability to engage in play- eg tactile defensive or avoiding specific sounds.
- Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may be easily distracted- eg by a fan, leaves on a tree, other children playing with their favourite toy or the child may appear to stare into space.
- Use simple materials with limiting distracting details eg posting boxes with simple shapes.
- Children's attention span can vary depending on the task and number of distractions. Select a task that can be completed within the child's attention span- even if it's only 20 seconds. Increase the length of the task gradually.
- There is often limited varied and spontaneous play and exploration of new equipment. The child's imagination may be developmentally delayed. Use real objects where possible to begin with. As comprehension increases, use symbolic objects eg miniature toys and figures.
- The child may not want to engage in the activity initially, after some encouragement to observe and try the activity, they may enjoy it. It is important to be aware that it is often difficult for the child to try something new.

### Strategies to Support Play

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Activity/Skill</th>
<th>How and Why</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple inset puzzles, involving either familiar objects or shapes</td>
<td>These are good for hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills; they begin to understand that the parts of puzzle put together become a whole.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Posting boxes</td>
<td>This can be adapted for the child's level eg by cutting a large hole in an ice cream container and having smaller things to post through the hole. Simple language concepts eg &quot;put in&quot; are incorporated as well. It is necessary with all the activities to give lots of praise for attempts and successes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hiding small objects</td>
<td>Hiding small objects under cups and encouraging the child to find them can be fun and can develop the concept of object permanence, as well as language &quot;where is...?&quot; Incorporate noisy objects and encourage the child to find the object by locating the sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matching objects</td>
<td>Matching objects using everyday things such as cups, spoons and so on, as the child becomes confident with this, move onto matching objects to pictures, then pictures to pictures, eventually moving to lotto like games. This is a great activity to develop recognition of &quot;sameness&quot;. Some children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder are able to match pictures or words better than matching objects, try a variety of these activities.</td>
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### Building blocks
Building blocks support the development of hand/eye coordination and additionally can incorporate copying, turn taking and language. Singing songs such as "build it up, build it up, and build it high" when building a tower can make the activity fun and then knocking the tower down.

### Sorting with blocks
Sorting with blocks according to colour, shape and size. Even if the child doesn't know colours, it is worth talking about the colours and similarly of the shapes. Use plastic bowls to sort he objects, green blocks go in the green bowl.

### Cause and effect
Cause and effect toys where an action by the child brings a particular response, for example pushing a button causes an animal to pop up, or dropping a ball in the top of a toy and it goes around and around, and then comes out of the bottom, involves both fine motor and anticipation skills. Model the play first and encourage imitation. Physical prompts may be necessary.

### Fine Motor Activities
Drawing, cutting, painting and using playdough.

### Manipulation
Manipulation toys can include actions such as pushing, pulling, threading, rolling and shaking. Manipulation supports the child to understand the objects, their properties and encourage imitation.

### Tactile
Some children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder can be tactile defensive i.e. don't enjoy touch. Tactile activities such as playdough, goop, clay, sand, water, finger paint, shaving and Sorbolene support sensory tolerance. Put Sorbolene cream on the table and use it like finger paint, drawing patterns and exploring the feel of it. Following the activity, encourage the child to participate in the cleanup process, including rinsing and squeezing the sponge.

### Outdoor
When the weather is suitable, water and sand play provide great opportunities for digging, pouring, filling and emptying. These activities can often have be a calming activity for some children.

### Music
Musical activities using percussion and other instruments, singing songs and action rhymes support language and encourage the child to imitate simple actions, such as clapping and tapping sticks. Adding props to the songs can also make the activity interesting and motivating for the child. Sometimes children require physical prompting at first but slowly remove the prompts as the child's confidence and independence increases.

### Finish
When an activity has finished an activity use 'finish' as the cue to change activity, verbalize the word "finish", use the sign 'finish' and present the visual for 'finish'. Some children also enjoy having a ‘Finish Box’ where they post the visual for the completed activity.

### Communication
There are various activities which can encourage a child to use language, such as bubbles, balloons, swing and placing motivating item out of reach but in sight of the child. Encourage the child to point to the objects, say "more", 'my turn, and your turn' and "Ready, Set, Go".

It is important to ensure the child is allowed time to respond. The child may require time to process information and may need directions repeated. To support the child’s progression, the child needs success and completion of activities along with reinforcement for positive actions.

### Strategies to Support Pretend Play:

Pretend play is a vital part of any play program. Where possible, encourage other children to model and help the child with an autism spectrum disorder. In the early stages, the child may require direct adult assistance, but the aim is to reduce this as the child begins to respond by them self.
Pretend play can develop through engaging with tea sets, teddies etc. Use familiar themes like giving the teddy his breakfast, drink, giving a dolly a bath, drying her hair and talking about it eg. 'Dry dolly's hair, face, arms and legs.' Dressing dolly and cleaning her teeth with a toothbrush, then brushing her hair fit into the area of health and physical development as well as creativity. Later the child may enjoy dressing up to play a particular role eg. being mum, a fire fighter or a dog.

The Key: A successful play program will be assisted by effective communication between families and staff. The child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder often requires repetition of play activities with different people, equipment and in different sitcom, but, above all, needs to experience FUN.

Resources that staff from Autism SA Early Intervention and Clinic Services recommends include:


Jesse Doherty, Manager, Early Intervention and Clinic Services
P 8379 6976

This is the real secret of life -- to be completely engaged with what you are doing in the here and now. And instead of calling it work, realize it is play.  
Alan Wilson Watts

EMPOWERING CHILDREN THROUGH PLAY

Children with special needs are like all children. They need to be comfortable physically, feel loved and secure, and have opportunities to play that help their bodies grow and their minds develop. Play is more than just fun. It's the way young children make sense of their world. When children play they:

- Explore the world – natural and social
- Develop and practise social and language skills
- Expand and challenge their physical skills
- Experiment with new ideas including symbolic competence required for formal learning
- Enhance their self-confidence
- Think and express themselves creatively
- Respond to experiences with or without language
- Develop their sense of self and identity

Although having different views on knowledge construction, both Piaget and Vygotsky believe that children learn through active experiences in their environment and that these experiences must be adapted by children to make them fit with their current understandings. Play-based learning is an important way to develop active learning.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “Children have the right to relax and play, and to join in a wide range of cultural, artistic and other recreational activities.” (Article 31 of the UN Convention)

Research cited by Koppenhaver et.al (1991), disputes the notion that children are ever too physically, cognitively, or communicatively disabled to benefit from literacy experiences. It is their belief “that it is an ethical and moral obligation to advance the literacy skills of all persons, because we have an obligation to enhance the communication skills of all persons” (p329).

At The Briars we have a play based curriculum with a focus on literacy. It reflects our philosophy that all children are learners and can be empowered to be actively involved in their world. All of the children have complex communication needs and many experience a combination of disabilities. Because the nature of children's disabilities and abilities is unique, it is difficult to categorize their play needs. Each child has a Personal Learning Plan which takes into account their developmental stage and describes their individual learning goals and strategies to achieve these goals. This enables us to use play to teach in a developmentally appropriate way.

continued
So, what does play look like at The Briars? Like any other preschool you will see children on their own in solitary play, alongside someone else but independently in parallel play, or with other children in cooperative play. Play may be structured, where someone else makes the rules and decisions or may be unstructured where the child is self-directed and takes the initiative.

At The Briars the children are encouraged to choose where they want to play and staff are on hand to join in and when necessary to scaffold the child’s learning. Regardless of physical, cognitive or communication limitations all learning opportunities are accessible. Sensory play, which may be both indoors and outside, is where the children can explore movement, textures, sounds, taste and smell. Children may be in the home corner dressing up or playing with familiar objects from daily life. Small groups may be involved playing with cars on the car mat or building a train track while others will be involved in supervised rough and tumble play as advocated by Jan Gereb. While playing in the Literacy Room children enjoy participating in story reading, singing and dramatic role play involving costumes and props, texts, the interactive plasma screen and DVDs. The interactive whiteboard is set up in the main play area with programs to help develop the children’s cause and effect skills. Children will be jumping on trampolines, riding bikes and trikes to develop gross motor skills. The children are encouraged to be involved in activities which are fun! They may play in the rain in raincoats and boots, collect leaves in autumn, make mud with the hose to jump and roll in, or climb onto the lower branches of the tree in the paddock.

A unique influence in play at The Briars is the role of the adults as facilitators. Inspired by our study of communication technology and from research about Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC), Literacy and Play, carried out by staff, The Briars has been engineered for communication. Switches (refer to picture) are located in places to empower the children to move through their environment. Communication devices are programmed for the children to request to go outside, to go to the toilet or to have ‘more’ or to ‘finish’ an activity. The messages are not static and are relevant to the flow of the day.

During shared fruit the children use the iPad to name and request the fruit from the plate.

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Many of the children at The Briars will not use speech as their communication vehicle. They are using, or will use, AAC such as communication programs installed on iPads or picture based symbol systems. For those with no hand mobility the use of scanning devices with switches may be their voice. To ensure that the development of communication skills is deeply embedded in the curriculum we plan play-based learning opportunities with each learning experience supported with assistive technology and ICT software.

While enjoying playing in the mud Ali was able to use the iPad to request to hold the hose. This iPad has a robust cover designed to be used by the military.

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Verity was able to use a switch to drive the musical train while enjoying time out of her chair.
Switches provide the specific vocabulary for an activity or are used to control the activity. For example, children press a switch to play or stop a CD, to operate a mix-master in cooking, to make bubbles using a bubble machine, or to activate a toy or drums. Simple message switches or scanning devices assist children who have vision impairment or poor fine motor skills.

The benefits of these technologies are that the children have a voice, can make choices and are able to control their environment. They can explore sound systems and vocalisations. As typically developing children explore their voices by babbling, at The Briars some children will do the same. Some will be pressing switches, sometimes over and over again playing with and listening to sounds to make sense of their world. While other children play with sticks drawing in the sand developing prewriting skills, the children at The Briars have opportunities to do this too. But, for some, the computer or iPad may be their preferred tool. These children may be playing with computer keyboards exploring the keys and developing their prewriting skills while others may be navigating simple software programs and iPad apps. From a recorded morning greeting to a final goodbye the children are surrounded by and supported to use vocabulary boards and voice output devices to assist in their communication development; not as an adjunct but intrinsic to everything we do.

References:
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Frost J L , Play and Children with Disabilities, Pearson Allyn Bacon Prentice Hall
Owocki Gretchen, Literacy Through Play, Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH 1999
United Nations Rights of The Child (article 31)

Judith Candy
The Briars Special Early Learning Centre
P 8365 9808

Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child’s soul.

Friedrich Froebel (founder of the concept of kindergarten)
Play to Learn Building Literacy in the Early Years. Stagnitti, K. & Jellie, L. 2006. 61.0922.01
This resource contains a range of activities designed to help teachers use imaginative play with children in the classroom in order to extend their oral language, narrative competence, symbolic thinking and problem solving skills.

Barrel of Fun. 84.0369.01
This giant size blue plastic barrel (81.5 cm in height, 58 cm in diameter can be used for sensory motor integration programs and gross motor activity involving rolling, balancing, weight bearing, crawling and riding. The barrel is sturdy and could be used by kindergarten/junior primary age students. It could also be used as a hiding/safe place for small preschool children. All gross motor activities of this nature should be supervised by an adult.

Magnetic Play Book Pirate Adventure. Tiger Trib Publishing. 61.1107.02
This resource, suitable for learners three and over, can be used to assist in the development of: imagination, independent play, fine motor skills, vocabulary, expressive/receptive language and concepts.

Let’s Play 100 Popular Games for Children. McGovern, S. 2010. 43.0092.01
This book offers a selection of age appropriate games for children from five to 12 years old. The games are divided into: icebreaker, lively and physical, theatrical and trust, word games for a group and classic games.

This is the fourth book in the Tasks Galore series for children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The focus for this title is on the correlation between pretend play and cognitive development using play as the vehicle for learning.

Visual Play Package. See and Speak. 2007. 61.0969.01
This package is intended as a teacher support package to be used with learners with autism spectrum disorder and/or learning difficulties. The game cards can be used either with the choice board or the ‘now and next’ board and cover fine motor, construction, gross motor, academic, imagination play and reward activities.

Feelie Ball Sensory Tub 2. 80.0328.02
This tub contains a collection of different balls and toys intended to encourage exploration, feeling and touching, communication skills, eye hand coordination, fine motor skills and sensory development.

The Child Pretend Play Assessment (chippa). Stagnetti, K. 2006. 57.0021.01
This assessment is suitable for learners aged three to seven years and is a norm referenced standardized assessment of a child’s imaginative or pretend play skills. It is an individualized assessment that takes 30 minutes to administer and score and it measures the elaborateness of a child’s play, the child’s ability to use symbols in play and the ability to self initiate.

Pine Doll House. 62043801
This doll house with furniture for the bathroom, bedroom, kitchen and living room is suitable for soci-dramatic play, encouraging social skills, role play and language development. It is suitable for students from pre-school through to approximately Years 3/4.

Play in the Early Years, Discover Play. Riddall-Leach, S. & Raban, B. 2011. 27.0096.02
This practical guide for educators supports learning through play. The contents include a definition of the term ‘discover play’, the theory behind discovery play and suggestions for activities for children from birth to five.

Play in the Early Years, Outdoor Play. Durant, S. & Raban, B. 2011. 27.0096.01
This practical guide for educators supports learning through play, describing the value of play and how to plan for and support play in the early years setting.

Large Garage Play Pack. The Toy Factory. 62.0447.01
This pack includes a large wooden garage with four petrol pumps, ramp, five vehicles and four people. It encourages social dramatic play and language development and is suitable for students up to year four.

Fun with Messy Play. Beckerleg, T. 2009. 27.0095.01
This text contains background information and practical ideas and activities to develop sensory awareness in children with special needs that aim to stimulate sensory perception through the use of everyday messy materials, such as baked beans etc.

Index for Inclusion: Developing Play, Learning and Participation in Early Years and Childcare. Booth, T. et al. 2011. 34.0374.01
This resource comprises a book and CD intended to guide schools through a process to develop an inclusive school community. It provides strategies to review school culture, policies and practices, which identify barriers to learning and participation and determine priorities for planning and implementation.

Pine Washing machine. 62043701
This sturdy pine washing machine is suitable for socio-dramatic play in settings from pre school up to approximately Years 3/4.
Play & Imagination in Children with Autism, Wolfberg, P. 2006. 19.0196.01
This book, based on research, examines the complex problems learner’s with autism experience in reciprocal social interaction, communication and imagination. It examines the nature of the disorder in relation to play’s role in childhood culture and development, as well as current intervention practices.

Giant Light and Sound Tubes. 80.0395.01
This set of five large clear plastic tubes can be used to encourage the exploration of sight and sound. Each tube is filled with objects of different colours, weights, shapes and sizes, eg feathers, balls, bells and sparkly gems, which provide a variety of sensory experiences.

Adapted Sheep Pack. 81.1464.01
The switch adapted Wooly the Sheep in this pack cries baa when the switch is depressed. The four piece wooden puzzle depicting a sheep is set into a base with a finger hole in one piece for ease of removal. The book Sheep describes the life cycle of sheep and how farmers look after sheep. This pack is available for use with children/students with severe multiple disabilities.

This book uses a primarily visual strategy to teach social skills. Each skill is formatted sequentially, similar to a cartoon strip, with digital pictures of children combined with text and cartoon bubbles to denote what is being said. Included are right and wrong ways to act with accompanying text. There are approximately 30 social skills demonstrated, including conversation, play, emotion management and empathy. See also; 66.1343.01 The Social Skills Picture Book for High School and Beyond.

Teach Me to Play (CD). Durant, H and Larkey, S. 19.0112.01
This CD contains 44 colour schedules and over 500 pictures to create play schedules and variations designed to teach play skills. It also contains a section “using visual schedules to promote and teach play”, which contain suggestions on how to use the schedules.

Play & Learn : Motor Based Preschool Curriculum for Children of All Abilities, Sullivan, M & Kueger 2002. 43.0083.01
This book contains a twelve month curriculum, for early years learners, that integrates motor skill development with communication, socialisation and cognitive skill development. The curriculum, organised in monthly themes, has each activity presented with a simple technology option called Trying Another Way.

Smart Play, Sher, B. 2004. 27.0091.01
This collection of 101 easy to follow games are designed to assist learners to use their bodies to master essential mental skills and concepts.

Squidgy Sparkle Numbers. 80.0396.01
These colourful, tactile numbers, suitable for ages 3 and over, are filled with safe colourful liquid and glitter. The numbers can be folded and squeezed and are suitable for light boxes and for introducing literacy and mathematical concepts.

Little People Horse Stable. Fisher Price. 62.0259.01
This colourful plastic play stable comes with miniature representations of horses fences and people. This set could be used in conjunction with other play items and is a useful toy for encouraging language, sociodramatic play skills, early concepts and creativity.

Mr Potato Head. 86.0169.01
This toy can be used independently or in a small group with Preschool/Reception children to acquire knowledge of body parts and colours. It also develops hand/eye co-ordination and is an appealing creative play character.

Shake and Spin Activity Balls. 80.0381.01
These five small, hard plastic balls each feature a different activity such as a rattle, character spinner, textures, rolling character, clicking and ratcheting. The multiple textures assist in making the balls easy to grasp and shaking or spinning produces a different visual and auditory response.

Construction Play Pack. 62.0419.01
This play pack has been collated for learners in the early years, and could assist with the skills of play, classification, sorting, visual discrimination, matching, basic concepts, counting, socio-dramatic play, creativity, fine motor and expressive/receptive language development.

Join in and Play, Meiners, C. 2004. 66.1380.01
This book has full page coloured illustrations which provide visual cues to the simple text which teaches the basic skills of cooperation, making friends, and being a friend.

Playtime Parachute Fun. Stewart, G. 84.0433.01
This six foot mini parachute, accompanied by a Playtime Parachute Fun CD, is suitable for limited space and can be used to develop gross motor skills and spatial awareness. The CD contains original music that directs the parachute activities and games.

Adapted Lion Pack. 81.1421.02
The aim of the thematic pack is to encourage learning for the students beyond the stimulation of the cause effect switch operated lion. The lion time to the song “the lion sleeps tonight”, It includes a non fiction text, ‘Adventures with Lena the Lion’. This pack is available for use with children/students with severe multiple disabilities.

Achieving Learning Goals Through Play, Widerstom, A. 27.0089.01
This book provides early childhood educators with creative, ready-to-use strategies for incorporating individual learning goals into play activities throughout the school day.
Four play activity packs have recently been collated and are available for loan for classroom teachers. The aim is to collate a variety of resources into packs that provide a range of learning opportunities for learners in the early years that can be used in small groups or individually.

At this stage resources have been collated under two themes, Healthy Foods Play Sets and Vehicles Play Sets. Both activity packs, which provide socio dramatic play activities, could assist with developing the following skills: classification, following directions, sorting, discrimination, matching, basic concepts, fine motor, vocabulary, vocabulary extension and expressive/receptive language development.

The importance and benefits of providing sociodramatic play experiences for children has been well documented. ‘One of the purest forms of symbolic thought available to young children, dramatic play contributes strongly to the intellectual development of children’ (Piaget, 1962). ‘Symbolic play is a necessary part of a child’s language development’ (Edmonds, 1976).

The resources in these packs can be used to provide a variety of ways for learners to not only explore the themes but also to build social competence and cognitive skills. As they develop their imaginative world they can learn more about everyday life and communication with others.

Healthy Food Play Packs
The healthy food packs include a range of items that could be used to promote positive attitudes towards healthy eating and fruit and vegetables in a fun way.

The resources included in these packs include role play outfits; sets of fruit and vegetable replicas; wooden cookware, table ware and tea sets; and wooden breakfast, meat, steak and bagel sets. These resources provide a variety of ways for learners in the early years to explore the theme of Healthy Eating through play and support the DECD Healthy Eating initiative.

Vehicle Play Sets
Included in these play packs are a range of dress up prompts which support creative role play as police, fire officers and construction workers. Two large wooden Roadway Expansion Sets enable learners to create a variety of curved roads and paths using inserts to create shortcuts, bridges and helicopter pads. The reverse side of the pieces in this Roadway set are painted to look like dirt roads or roads under construction. A range of coloured transport vehicles provide opportunities for learners to extend their creative play.

The accompanying range of a variety of puzzles related to the theme provide the opportunity to develop the skills of manipulation, visual discrimination, problem solving, matching, eye-hand coordination, vocabulary and extension vocabulary.
The SERUUpdate now includes a spotlight on selected articles from the Journal Current Awareness, which accompanies the SERUUpdate publication. The Journal Collection is located in the reference room at SERU, you are welcome to come in and read/copy articles.

Previous and current editions of the Journal Current Awareness can be found on the SERU website, http://web.seru.sa.edu.au. As well as the content page from all the current Journals, each edition contains an article order form and a complete list of all the journals SERU holds.

SERU Journal Collection

- American Annals of the Deaf
- Australian Association of Special Education—AASE Special Education Perspectives
- Australian Journal of Early Childhood
- Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties
- Autism Asperger Digest Magazine
- Autism Spectrum Quarterly / Jenison
- British Journal of Special Education
- Child Language Teaching and Therapy
- Exceptional Parent
- Focus on Autism and Other Development Disabilities
- Interaction
- International Journal of Disability, Development and Education
- Intervention in School and Clinic
- Journal of Dyslexia and Specific Learning Difficulties (SPELD Vic)
- Journal of Early Intervention
- Journal of Special Education Technology (JSET)
- Link Newsletter
- Remedial and Special Education
- Research Development (ACER)
- Set Research Information for Teachers
- Support for Learning
- Teaching Exceptional Children
- Learning Difficulties Australia Bulletin (LDA)
- Topics in Learning and Learning Disabilities
**Topics in Early Childhood Special Education**

**The Effects of a Buddy Skills Package on Preschool Children’s Social Interactions and Play**, Kristy Hughett, Frank W. Kohler, Donna Raschke. 32:4 246-254

This study examined the effect of a buddy skills package on three preschool children with developmental delays and their peers. The results indicated that the package contributed to increased cooperative play and these outcomes continued to be evidenced during a maintenance condition.

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**Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities**

**A Preliminary Randomised Controlled Trial of Two Social Skills Interventions for Youth with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders**, Matthew D. Lerner, Amori Y. Mikami. 27/3 147-157

Two social skills interventions, Sociodramatic Affective Relational Intervention (SDARI) and Skillstreaming, are compared in this study. 13 youths with autism spectrum disorders were assessed on social behaviour during treatment sessions, peer sociometrics, staff-reported social skills and parent-reported social skill generalisations.

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**Intervention in School and Clinic**

**Social Skills Training in Natural Play Settings : Educating Through the Physical Theory to Practice**, Eilan Aljadeff-Ã-berge, Shiri Ayvazo, Eitan Eldar. 48 (2) 76 - 86.

Training in social skills is important for students with emotional and behavioural disorders who have difficulty maintaining appropriate and accepted behaviour. This article introduces 'Education Through the Physical Model’, a social skills training program delivered in natural settings of physical activity and play. It demonstrates its merit as a natural-setting social skills intervention, and provides a sample of activities that can be implemented to target 12 behavioural goals.
The New Wave of Writing Tool Apps

It is now almost three years since the release of the iPad. During this infancy stage of tablet technology, educators have had access to a number of apps which students could use for the writing process. However, very few offered assistive features to support a student with writing difficulties. Apps which did offer scaffolds were limited to text to speech and very basic word prediction. In recent months, a number of well-established inclusive software companies have finally decided to enter the iOS app arena. The companies, including Crick Software, Quillsoft Ltd and Texthelp, have an extensive understanding of how to design an assistive technology tool that supports the writing process. Their entry in to the tablet market signals a new era of apps which provide a wider range of features to support the literacy needs and abilities of students. This edition of TechBits will focus on apps recently released by Crick Software (the developers of Clicker 6).

The various versions of Clicker over the years have been internationally recognised as a universal design computer software tool that assists students of all abilities to be successful writers. Crick Software has released two apps which emulate the assistive features of Clicker 6. The activities in these apps can also be utilised in the computer software version. This unique innovative feature provides students with consistently designed supports to complete the writing activity on either a computer or an iPad.

Clicker Sentences is targeted to emergent writers and focuses on developing sentence building skills. A sequence of sentences can be created to guide writers in the construction of their text. Each sequence contains all the words required to build that particular sentence. Students only need to touch the word in the sequences to send them up into the word processor. Once constructed, students can swipe to the next sentence to continue to build their piece of text. The built-in text to speech feature can be used to re-read sentences. Students can also use this feature to listen to any of the words before they select them. Pictures from the iPad photo library can be added to each sentence and the activity can be set up to send the image into the document section.

Educators can also differentiate the supports offered in the activity to enable all students to successfully complete the writing activity. The support can display a model of the completed sentence in permanent view or as a temporary popup view. Alternatively, an audio recording can be offered during the writing stage.

The creation of activities from directly within the app is a straightforward and intuitive process.
As well as being stored on the iPad, activities can be accessed from Dropbox or LearningGrids from within the app.

Clicker Docs is a word processor which has many of the familiar assistive writing features found in Clicker 6. Students can utilise the differentiated supports including intelligent word prediction and vocabulary banks. The vocabulary banks can contain individual words or phrases. These can be grouped alphabetically or by category.

The high quality speech engine reads out words and phrases from the word banks, text from the document and words suggested by the spell checker. This provides support to struggling writers in all aspects of their writing construction.

Keyboard displaying word prediction. As well as offering the most common words used in writing, the intelligent word prediction also offers topic words from the word bank in use at the time.

This Clicker Set is a 3 page collection of words and phrases that provides a writing frame for students to complete an explanation task.

Captain Arthur Phillip was appointed Governor of new colony. He had to plan for everything a new colony might need. Transport ships had to be modified to carry convicts. On 13 May 1787, the fleet left from Portsmouth, England. The First Fleet consisted of eleven ships.

Students can access collections of phrases and individual words grouped by set criteria.

Alternatively, topic words can be grouped in an alphabetic manner.

I intend to explain
what
One reason is
Another reason is
A further explanation is
Therefore
As a consequence of
As a result of
Because of
Due to
in order to
The consequences are
The effect is
The reason for this is
The reason that is
This causes
This happens because
This is known as
This leads to
This means that
This results in
The latest computer software version of Clicker 6 can be used to create and export activities for Clicker Sentences and Clicker Docs. Existing Clicker 6 users will need to install the free update to version 6.16. This can be found at http://www.cricksoft.com/support/clicker6/downloads/updates.aspx.

The creation of a writing frame or word bank is straightforward and intuitive. A range of options are available to organise the vocabulary for the Clicker Set.

Clicker Sets can be stored and accessed from the iPad or Dropbox. They can also be downloaded from LearningGrids website.

Games can be a valuable addition to your iPad. It may be worth considering installing these on a dedicated device to avoid students seeing it as a gaming tool and not as a meaningful and highly appropriate learning tool. The key to succeeding with apps is to choose a small number of relevant apps that are tailored to specific needs.

**Drawing Pad $1.99**

Drawing Pad is a mobile art studio for iPad. This app offers additional in-app purchases. Various colouring books can be downloaded for an additional fee. Themes that can be purchased include fairy tales, sea life, winter, dinosaurs, farm, occupations, space, transportation and robots.

**Join It – Jigsaw Puzzle $4.49**

Join It allows you to create jigsaw puzzles from your camera roll. Different puzzle difficulty levels make play suitable for all ages. Up to 300 Pieces!

**Crayola**

There are many Crayola apps. Crayola has also released creative packs, pictured above. These packs are available in stores such as Big W and Office works. The Ultra Pack (49.95) gives you all these tools in one collection:

- The digital 3D tool and 3D glasses
- Digital crayon
- Digital colour changer
- Digital airbrush
- Rainbow roller

The creation of a writing frame or word bank is straightforward and intuitive. A range of options are available to organise the vocabulary for the Clicker Set.
Mindcraft $7.49

Mindcraft is a favourite at the moment of many school aged students. Mindcraft is a world building app where students place blocks to build things and go on adventures. Also available on PC. http://minecraftedu.com/ Educators are using Mindcraft to engage and educate.

Inclusive Technologies

There are 18 inclusive technologies apps. Type inclusive technologies into the app store search bar and all will come up. Prices vary between titles but range from $2.99 - $7.49.

Titles include:
- Treasure island
- Train tracker
- Inclusive Smarty Pants
- Splat the Clowns
- Finger Paint with Sounds
- Five Sharks Swimming
- Peeping Musicians
- Hidden Grid
- Big Bang Patterns
- Aunty Maggie’s Recipe
- Big Bang Pictures
- Bumper Cars
- Shhh!
- Five Little Aliens
- Jungle Adventure
- Space Shooter (pictured above)
- Hurdle Champion
- New Age Kurling

Toca Series (prices vary between titles from $0.99 - $2.99)

This is a series of apps. Type ‘toca’ into the app store search bar for a full list.

WHAT’S NEW IN OUR iPAD LIBRARY

Due to client requests we have now established several iPads which are configured for upper primary and secondary students. SERU clients need to indicate that they are wanting a secondary ipad, when requesting to loan. (77.0026.02)

There are 2 iPad mini now also available for general loan (77.0087.01). These iPads will be set up as dedicated communication iPads showcasing AAC Apps, including:

- Proloquo2go,
- TouchChat,
- Answers HD
- Predictable
- Tap Speak Choice
- Tap Speak Button
- Tap Speak Sequence
- Go Talk Now
- Scene and Heard
- Verbally
- Sono Flex
Enabling Access, Effective Teaching and Learning Pupils with Learning Difficulties. Carpenter, B. et al. 1996. 18.0230.01

The editors and contributors of this book show how access to each subject of the curriculum can be provided for pupils with moderate to profound learning difficulties. They discuss strategies for providing a high quality education for these pupils and discuss the active involvement of parents and pupils in these processes.

Room 28 A Social Language Program. Logiudice C. & Mc Connell, N. 2004. 66.1530.01

This Social Skills programme is suitable for learners aged 11-18. It includes a CD of printable material pages from the Activities Book. This curriculum is for classrooms and groups and is suited for students with learning disabilities, speech-language disorders and behaviour disorders. It is designed to support students to learn how to solve problems, resolve conflicts, and set goals for themselves.

Teaching Tough Kids. Le Messurier, M. 24.0201.01

This book provides strategies for educators to use with students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and those who have experienced challenges in their personal lives. It shows people how to set achievable goals, support emotional stability; strengthen organisation patterns, address behavioural issues; improve homework planning and deal with bullying.

Photo Conversation Cards for Children with Autism and Aspergers. 66.1514.01

This pack of ninety coloured photograph cards, with an accompanying Teaching Guide, are suitable for learners with Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome. They are designed to assist learners to develop social and communication skills and can be used to assist in developing understanding regarding the nuances of social interactions and to improve oral language skills.

Practical Ideas That Really Work for Students With Disruptive, Defiant, or Difficult Behaviours (Preschool–Grade 4) Mc Connell, K. et a.l. 2010 66.1528.01

This book is part of the Practical Ideas That Really Work series. The book, accompanied by a CD-ROM, provides teachers with practical solutions for students’ behaviour problems. It contains practical ideas, suggestions for interventions, explanations of strategies, reproducible forms, and illustrations and examples.

Prompting Guide for Oral Reading and Early Writing. Rountas, Irene & Pinnell, G. 2009 63.3368.01

This resource aims to teach, prompt and reinforce effective reading behaviours during oral reading and early writing. The teaching includes using meaning as one important source of information. By referring to this tool, educators can support learners’ effective problem solving for accurate, fluent oral reading and efficient early writing.

Puberty & Sexuality for Children and Young People with a Learning Disability. The Children’s Learning Disability Nursing Team. 2009. 66.1491.01

This teaching pack was developed for learners between the ages of 9-18 years, and uses a range of visual and tactile resources. The programme consists of twelve sessions each supported by a curriculum plan and related resources including black line masters.

Asperger Syndrome In Adolescence. J. Kingsley Publications. 2009.19.0154.01

This books looks at issues that are pertinent to all teenagers, such as sexuality, depression and friendship, as well as discussing topics like disclosure and therapeutic alternatives that are more specific to those with Asperger Syndrome.

Building Life Skill Portfolios. Henderson, L & Winram, P. 2007 66.1508.01

This book and CD, contain a structured curriculum designed for students with special needs to work towards independence by learning functional life skills and academic skills. It also provides a format for assisting learners to build their own life skill portfolios which can be passed on through each grade and then taken with them when they graduate.
Intimate Relationships and Sexual Health. Davies, C. & Dubie M. 2012. 66.1526.01
This book contains a curriculum for teaching about intimate relationships and sexual health. It is designed for adolescents with high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders and other social challenges. It includes lessons, activities, handouts, resources, and a CD containing handouts.

This guidebook provides an introduction to improving the communication of learners with moderate, severe and multiple disabilities. By emphasising the link between behaviour and communication, the authors have taken recent research and proven practices and developed instructional procedures and interventions.

The Anti-Bullying Game. Searle, Y. & Streng, I. 1996 66.1525.01
This game is suitable for players aged 6-14. It is designed for those who experience difficulties with peer relationships. It’s aim is to enable both victims and bullies to understand the dynamics underlying bullying behaviour. Available for classroom use only.

Anger Management Cards. Bailey, R. 2007 66.1521.01
These cards are designed to increase skills in anger management, self-awareness and regulation and can be used with individuals, small or large groups. Using the Rapid Anger Management (RAM) technique, the positive affirmations include: I keep cool - I think things through; I concentrate on what I am doing; My anger is under my control.

The Source for Reading Fluency. Swigert, N.B. 2003. 63.3365.01
This book provides information and strategies to help non-fluent readers increase their speed and accuracy of reading in the following areas: written letter patterns; sight words; syllable and word patterns; semantics and vocabulary; multi-syllabic words; connected text. Information on testing instruments commonly used is included.

Arithmetic Lotto Addition & Subtraction. Childs Play 64.1551.01
This arithmetic lotto game is suitable for players aged from 4 to 8 years of age. Through matching pictures, numbers and sums, this game provides practice in addition and subtraction.

Magnetic Construction and Base Plate. M.T.A. 83.1739.01
This magnetic set can be used to assist in the development of scientific, creative, fine motor and sensory skills. It consists of coloured balls, straight and curved links and a magnetic base on which to make the creations.

Vocabulary Games for the Classroom. Carleton, L. 61.1054.01
This book provides a variety of games designed to build both academic and general vocabulary for students from K – 12.

What’s the Buzz. LeMeissurer, M. 66.1527.01
This book, with reproducible pages, contains a social skills enrichment programme based on role-play, and is designed to teach learners in the Primary Years how to think and relate to others in social situations.

50 Quick Play Listening Games. Malone, K. et al. 61.1105.01
This book provides a range of activities designed to teach listening skills which are critical for communication, learning, thinking, and acquiring awareness of the world around us. The games are suitable for learners aged 5 to 10.

Phoneme Frames. 63.3326.01
These are used for building words from 2 to 6 phonemes in length with foam magnetic letters. Each frame provides a template so that learners can see that words are made up of different phonemes.

Bounce Back! Level 1. 66.1108.01
This program offers practical strategies to help young people cope with the complexity of their everyday lives and learn to ‘bounce back’ when they experience sadness, difficulties, frustrations and difficult times.

Fantacolor Junior Basic. 82.0639.01
This resource, suitable for ages two and up, consists of a large transparent Perspex board, eight pattern cards and 48 large colourful button pegs. The pattern cards are placed under the transparent board and the player matches the pattern using the pegs.
Double Bubble Bead Frame  83.1735..01
This colourful wooden wire and bead maze is visually appealing. Players move the beads on the looped and spiraled coloured wires. See also Spring-A-Ling Bead Frame 83.1736.01

This relationship training program is one in the Step Ahead series for people with intellectual disabilities and/or communication disorders and is suitable for implementation with a group from between six to ten people, aged from 16 years. It aims to equip participants with the skills required to begin a relationship and for this knowledge to develop into the more complex skills required, through additional learning and experience over time.

DIY Cooking. Southern Grampians Adult Education. 2008. 66.1509.01
DIY Cooking provides ten sections of work related to cooking. Included are sample lesson plans and reproducible worksheets for lower and upper levels, plus a range of further activities that can be developed in the topics. See also 66.1509.03 DIY Housing; 66.1509.02 DIY Gardening.

Milo’s Read and Grab Word Game with Consonant Clusters. Learning Logic. 2010. 63.3363.03
This word games supports learners who are reading words with consonant clusters, words that have two consonant letters at either the beginning or the end of a word. The aim is to collect as many sets of cards as possible. This game is part of the Little Learners Love Literacy series.

This language pack contains a lift the flap picture book, with a CD and hand puppets representing the main characters. See also; 61.1106.01 Three Billy Goats Gruff Language Pack; 61.1056.01 Monkey’s Clever Tale Language Pack; 61.1057.01 The Gingerbread Man Language Pack.

Spiral Tube. 80.0386.01
When these large visually appealing, coloured Perspex spiral tubes are turned upside down, the coloured bubbles spiral to the bottom.

Understanding Emotions. Natural Learning Concepts. 66.1507.01
These small picture cards are connected at the top by a metal ring. Each card depicts a photograph of children displaying a wide range of emotions and can be used to increase learners emotional intelligence.

Bird and Nest Magnetic Maze. 82.0640.01
This wooden maze board, suitable for ages two and up, has a wand which moves coloured balls (feed pellets) through the maze to the appropriate nest on the board. This activity can be used to assist in the development of fine motor, visual tracking and eye hand coordination skills.

On the Road: A Resource for Literacy Teaching. Southern Grampians Adult Education. 2009. 66.1510.02
This teachers resource has been designed for teaching literacy in reading and writing, numeracy and mathematics and verbal communication. The content takes a learners on a journey from learning to drive, road rules, buying a vehicle, maintenance, budgeting and what to do after an accident. See also 66.1510.03 Travel & Tourism; 66.1510.01 A Year of celebrations.

Liquid Motion Tumbler with Stand. 80.0404.01
When this timer is inverted, the coloured oil droplets drip and swirl through from the centre down to the base. This process takes a minute to complete and can be used to support students in developing the concept of time. It can also be used to support learners focusing and/or calming down.

Activity Schedules for Children with Autism. McClannahan, L. & Krantz, P. 2010. 19.0158.01
In this book, the authors demonstrate how activity schedules can be used to bring individuals greater independence, choice, and social awareness in the course of their daily lives. It explains not only how to create and use an activity schedule but how to determine whether an individual has the skills to use a schedule and how to teach them how to use one.

Numbers Factory: Multiplication and Division. Child’s Play. 64.1554.01
This box of games is suitable for players aged five to ten years and consists of six boards with numbers up to 12 on one side and higher numbers on the other and seventy-two arithmetic cards. The games include: Counting Lotto; Numbers Factory 1 & 2; Finding Factors 1 & 2; Finding Factors Solo Games; Multiplication; Free For All.
UPCOMING EVENTS

2013 SPECIAL EDUCATION EXPO

The highly successful Special Education Expo will be held again this year from 8 – 10 July 2013, with a new format. Planning is underway and applications to present are still being received (see SERU website).

The program will be held over 3 days, two at the EDC and one at SERU and Adelaide West Special Education Centre.

Workshop presentations include the following strands:
- Curriculum
- Differentiation
- Inclusive Technology
- Communication
- Wellbeing/Mental Health
- Learning Difficulties
- Disability
- Literacy & Numeracy

Monday 8 July
- SERU
  - iPad Master Classes.
  - Inclusive Learning Resources Focusing on Literacy and Social Competencies.
- Adelaide West Special Education Centre
  - Jane Farrell - Speech Pathologist and Special Educator, who specialises in literacy, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and assistive technology will present on Literacy for All: Blocks for Building Literacy Success.

Tuesday 9 and Wednesday 10 July
Education Development Centre. Approximately 60 sessions currently being planned: A preview…..
- **Puppets For Learning.** Lucia Smith, Speech Pathologist - Speech, language, literacy and social skills, inspiring ideas for using puppets in teaching. Participants can bring along a hand-puppet to the workshop or pre-order via a website and pick it up on the day for the workshop. Guaranteed FUN!!!! Workshops limited to 40 people.
- **Student Diversity and the Australian Curriculum.** Sarah Humphreys, Senior Project Officer for Students with disability at the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) will provide an overview of how the three-dimensional design of the Australian Curriculum gives teachers the flexibility to cater for student diversity and to personalise their teaching and learning programs.
- **Best Practice for Students with Moderate to Severe ASD.** Sally Jones will share her philosophy of ‘best practise’ by looking at the classroom environment and interactions that take place between all members of the educational team including teachers, students and Para-professionals.
- **An Evidence Based Model for Improving Students Attitudes Towards people with Disabilities.** Danielle Moore, will discuss her research on improving attitudes of students towards their peers and others in the community with a focus on the practical application of a disability awareness program.

The information brochure, program and registration form will be available early Term 2.
See the SERU website, http://web.seru.sa.edu.au
Would you like to contribute an article?

The SERUpdate relies on the willingness of DECD personnel to contribute articles. Feedback from readers confirms that contributions from sites are a valuable way of keeping informed with what is happening at other schools.

**Second edition 2013: Complex Needs - New Challenges and responses**

Guiding Questions contributors may like to consider:

- Describe the complexities these students present for your school community.
- Describe pedagogy/strategies/programs/innovations being trialled/implemented in your school.
- Describe the impact that these children have in your classroom and how you meet their needs.
- Describe how your school integrates services to respond to the complex needs of these students.

**Third edition 2013: Secondary Schools - Students with disabilities and learning difficulties**

This edition will provide practical ideas, strategies, programs and initiatives which focus on curriculum, differentiation, wellbeing, transition, models of support and more.

Contact: Dymphna James  Ph: 8235 2871  Dymphna.james@seru.sa.edu.au

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NEW

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**SAVE THE DATE FOR ……..**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>April 2013</th>
<th>May 2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wed 10th</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wed 8th</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apps for Speech and Language</td>
<td>Understanding the Child with Autism in your Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00 – 5:30pm</td>
<td>4:00 – 6:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mon 15th</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wed 15th</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Clicker 6</td>
<td>Promoting Effective Communication with the Child with Autism in your Class</td>
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<td>9:30 – 12:30pm</td>
<td>4:00 – 6:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Symwriter</td>
<td><strong>Fri 17th</strong></td>
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<td>1:00 – 3:30pm</td>
<td>Symwriter</td>
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<td><strong>Tues 16th</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sat 18th</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy Toolkit – Assistive Technology</td>
<td>Clicker 6</td>
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<td>9:30 – 12:30pm</td>
<td>9:30 – 12:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tame the Dragon</td>
<td><strong>Mon 20th</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00 – 3:00pm</td>
<td>All About Apps</td>
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<td><strong>Wed 17th</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wed 22nd</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>eBook Creation</td>
<td>Apps for Speech &amp; Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:30 – 3:00pm</td>
<td>1:30 – 4:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>All About Apps</td>
<td><strong>Thurs 23rd</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>9:30 – 11:00am</td>
<td>Making Learning Accessible with the iPad</td>
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<td><strong>Thurs 18th</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sat 25th</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Proloquo2Go</td>
<td>Boardmaker 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:30 – 12:30pm</td>
<td>9:30 – 12:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>TouchChat</td>
<td><strong>Sat 1st</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00 – 3:00pm</td>
<td>Proloquo2Go</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>June 2013</strong></td>
<td>9:30 – 12:00pm</td>
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**Saturdays at SERU**

In conjunction with the three Saturday workshops, the Resource Centre will be open for borrowing on the following dates, with a teacher on duty to assist with your enquiries:

- 18th May 2013 9:00am - 12:30pm
- 25th May 2013 9:00am - 12:30pm
- 1st June 2013 9:00am - 12:00pm

Descriptors and registration forms can be found at [http://web.seru.sa.edu.au/Workshops.htm](http://web.seru.sa.edu.au/Workshops.htm)