



REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

## Chapter 10

### Learning Through Play At ECE

NOT FOR SALE



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*This chapter provides the background and principles of learning through play in ECE.*

- *Content: background information, frameworks and tips on learning through play*
- *Outcome: providing information and tools on learning through play in Zambia*
- *Target group: ECE teachers, school administrators, MoGE and other officials.*

# 1. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCEPT OF “LEARNING THROUGH PLAY”

Through play children can develop holistically: they acquire cognitive skills, social competences, mature emotionally and morally, and gain the self-confidence required to engage in new experiences and environments and to understand the world around them. Play allows children to engage in multiple domains of learning simultaneously.

## 1.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING THROUGH PLAY IN ECE

Learning through play offers a variety of learning opportunities and experiences for young children, which a teacher centered approach does not offer. Play offers children opportunities. This can be seen in the pictures below.

to express themselves: their ideas, emotions,...  
=> develops self control, wellbeing, self-esteem

to manipulate tools and discover (multisensory) relationships  
=> including mathematical and science related relationships

to interact  
=> develops social skills and language

to practice for the next stage of development, including adulthood, free of stress, in a safe environment

to engage in a wide range of problem solving activities  
=> develops creativity and logical reasoning

to learn holistically across different domains of development as everything is interconnected

to get fully immersed and involved => develops intrinsic (inner) motivation, perseverance, deep understanding and the joy of learning.

to be independent self direct.

to develop symbolic abilities in a meaningful context to the learner



Choice in play



Adult roles



Collaboration

When children are actively involved in their play, learning becomes much easier, more efficient and joyful.

## 1.2 HOW PLAY AND LEARNING ARE INTERRELATED IN THE EARLY YEARS

Piaget (a Swiss developmental psychologist, 1896-1980) and Vygotsky (a Russian psychologist, 1896-1934) have also influenced early learning. Their theories, which are at the basis of learning through play, state that children construct knowledge and meaning from their active experiences and that learning is a collaborative process.

Piaget: Young children learn through discovery, through action and active exploration, through interaction with materials.

Vygotsky: Young children learn through social interactions (conversations with peers and adults) and they co-construct knowledge within the zone of proximal development (the content they are ready to grasp)

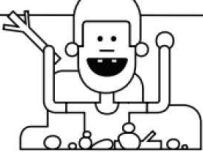
All emergent literacy activities in the activity chapters (4. Continuous emergent literacy activities, 5. Sound, phonological and phonemic awareness activities and 6. Pre-writing activities) are based on the learning through play approach.



*Interaction with the environment*


### 1.3 WHEN DOES PLAY BECOME LEARNING? THE 7CS' FRAMEWORK

The 7 characteristics or condition framework for learning through play has been adopted. Play results in learning if the play is concrete, captivating, connected, challenging, collaborative, creative and cheerful.




**CONCRETE**

Learning through Play activities provide learners with the opportunity to actively engage with, manipulate and transform materials. Through hands-on experience, learners are absorbed in the activity.



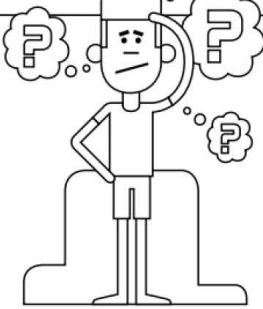
**CAPTIVATING**

Learning through Play attracts, and holds, learners' interest. It gives learners choices — big or small — about the learning center or the processes.



**CONNECTED**

Learning through Play relates to something already known by learners. It builds upon their existing knowledge, their needs and their interests. Learning through Play activities therefore connect or link with the inner world and/or social environment of learners.

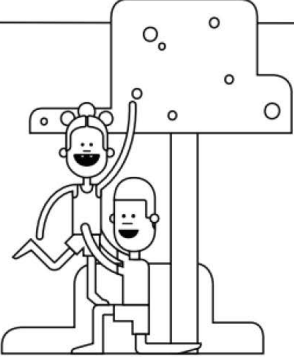


**CHALLENGING**

In the pursuit of solving problems. Learning through Play appeals to learners' creativity and imagination. Rather than provided with solutions, learners are challenged to discover for themselves, to try and fail, and try again, and make connections, whether alone or in a group, pushing their limits.

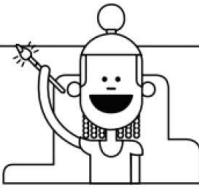
## 7 CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

7CS FRAMEWORK



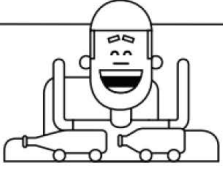
**COLLABORATIVE**

Learning through Play does not occur in isolation. Instead, learners interact, exchange and collaborate with peers and/or knowledgeable others, including the teacher. Through collaboration, they learn from each other and build relationships.



**CREATIVE**

Learning through Play provides learners with the opportunity to develop new and imaginative ideas and the freedom to express themselves in a variety of ways, voicing and/or processing their feelings and emotions.



**CHEERFUL**

Joy is at the heart of play - both enjoying a task for its own sake and the momentary thrill of surprise, insight, or success after overcoming challenges.

### 1.4 LEARNING THROUGH PLAY – A CONTINUUM

As shown on the graph below (which is introduced in [Chapter 1: ECE in Zambia, pg. 3](#)), learning through play is a continuum (range), with two influencing factors:

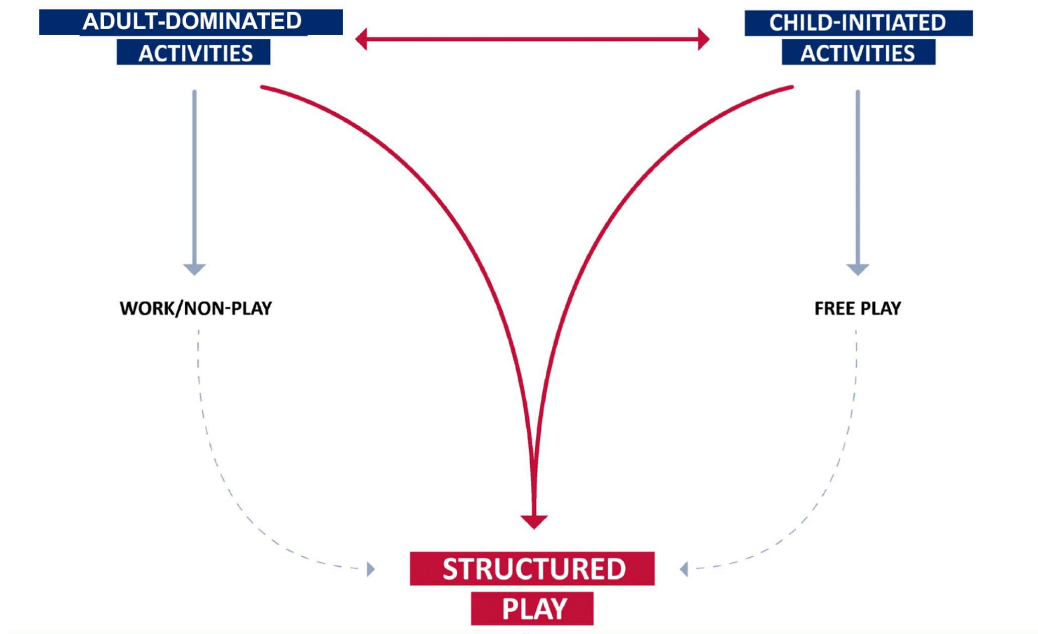
- Initiatives of the child: Participation, choice and involvement of the child
- Directions of adults / teachers: Instruction, guidance and structure by the teacher/adult

Structured play, guided play and games, which are all learning through play activities, are in the middle of the continuum: where both adults and children have a say and participate equally. These are likely to accomplish many of the LTP characteristics as children experience few constraints and joyfully lead, particularly when these activities are done individually or in groups. This is the preferred teaching approach in Early Childhood Education.



With an adult-dominated or teacher-dominated teaching approach it is difficult to organise learning opportunities for all children. Children are less involved and less stimulated to take initiative. This approach is not considered learning through play.

The right side of the continuum depicts free play. Here, children are in full lead of the activity and there is no involvement of adults at all. Free play can be meaningful and thus involve learning, if the play is meeting the seven conditions of the 7Cs' framework.



## 1.5 LINKING DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS TO PLAY AT ECE

Young children learn in a holistic and interconnected way. Play enhances development in all developmental domains and requires learning-to-learn skills (approaches to learning).

Below are examples of play, for the different developmental domains, in a non-limited list. The different types of play can either occur in free play and in guided play. In free play, children will play spontaneously without teacher intervention, making up their own rules, interacting amongst each other.



### 1.5.1 Cognitive development

The cognitive domain includes knowledge, values and skills such as: reasoning, exploration and experimentation and scientific skills.

- **Functional play or exploratory play:** e.g. investigating and discovering
- **Pretend play:** e.g. pretending, acting out different roles
- **Sociodramatic play:** dramatic play with more than one player, e.g. playing in an imaginary shop, kitchen, house
- **Constructive play:** combining materials, e.g. playing with blocks and vehicles
- **Games with rules** e.g. '(kambushi kalilalila)', dice games, memory

### 1.5.2 Physical development and wellbeing

The physical developmental domain includes knowledge, values and skills as: gross motor development, fine motor development, eye-hand coordination, safety, personal care, nutrition.

- **Gross motor play:** e.g. running, climbing, dancing, jumping and throwing
- **Fine motor play:** e.g. using tools for eating, writing, increased independence (e.g. dressing)
- **Eye-hand coordination play:** e.g. drawing, construction, weaving, aiming, ...

### 1.5.3 Language and literacy development

This domain entails knowledge, values and skills as receptive language, expressive language, reading and writing.

- **Sociodramatic play:** dramatic play with more than one player, e.g. playing in an imaginary shop, kitchen, house: social negotiation, learning language in different situations
- **Cooperative play:** this is play in groups where rules of play are negotiated towards a shared objective, e.g. treasure hunt, making up a dance, building a house, relay races

### 1.5.4 Social-emotional development

This domain entails knowledge, values and skills as: interpersonal skills, self-awareness, social competence, self-expression, self-concept.

- **Solitary play** as a pre-stage for independent seatwork
- **Associative play:** small play groups engaging with similar materials and almost sharing
- **Cooperative play:** play in groups where rules of play are negotiated towards a shared objective, e.g. treasure hunt, making up a dance, building a house, relay races
- **Physical play:** e.g. climbing (assessing risk, self-concept)
- **Sociodramatic play:** social negotiation, self-regulation, learning roles in different situations

### 1.5.5 Spiritual and moral development

This domain entails knowledge, values and skills as knowledge of God, respect for human values, respect for national values.

- **Dramatic or pretend play**
- **Sociodramatic play**
- **Cooperative play**
- **Storytelling**

### 1.5.6 Approaches to learning

Approaches to learning entail different ways children use to acquire knowledge, skills and values such as curiosity and interest, persistence, imitation and emulation, creativity and mathematical reasoning. It is crosscutting the other five developmental domains. **These skills can be developed in any type of play**



## 1.6 SOME PRACTICES OF DEEP LEARNING

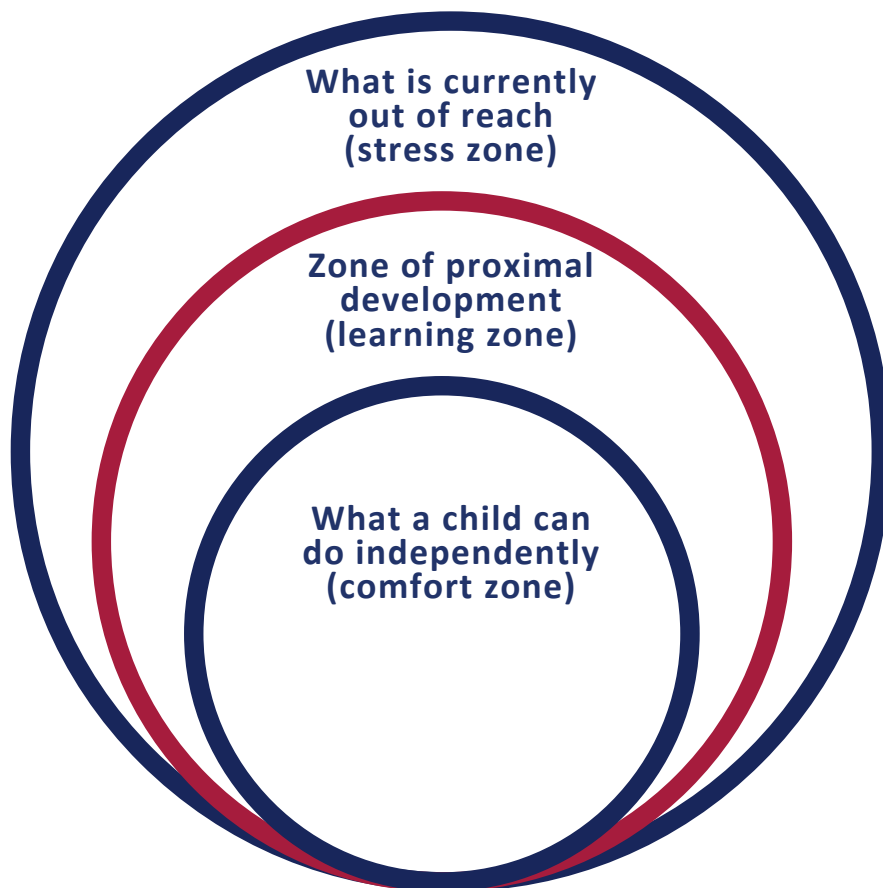
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Chapter 3 – introduction to the package briefly referred to the Bloom’s Taxonomy . **Bloom's Taxonomy** can be used to develop engaging learning activities with increased complexity (from surface / simple learning to deep / complex learning) to improve teaching and learning. It can also be used as a tool to differentiate instruction in the classroom to meet the needs of all learners.

When preparing the classroom activities and defining the learning outcomes (step 2 in the activity loop, see Chapter 3 – introduction to the package), the ECE teacher should choose the outcomes and the teaching methods, according to the obtained learning level.

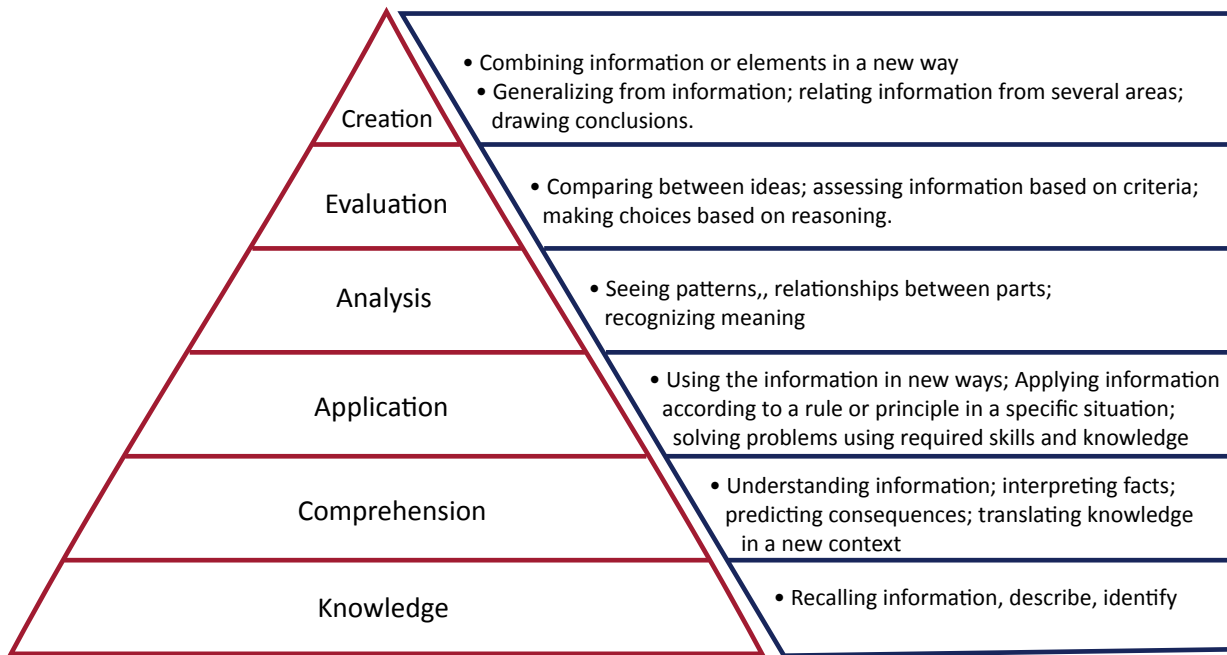
The obtained learning level is in turn related to Vygotsky’s **zone of proximal development (the learning zone)**: the range of tasks that a child can perform with the help and guidance (advice or doing-together) of others (peers or adults) but cannot yet perform independently.

This can be linked to the continuum of learning through play. Teachers observe the comfort zone, the current level of the learner and provide the learner with specific stimuli to grow into their zone of proximal development. The initiative of the child is as important as the well-chosen guidance of the teacher.



<https://afocusonlearningoutcomes.wordpress.com/resources/blooms/>, based on “Taxonomy of Education Objectives,” B.S. Bloom, Editor, 1956

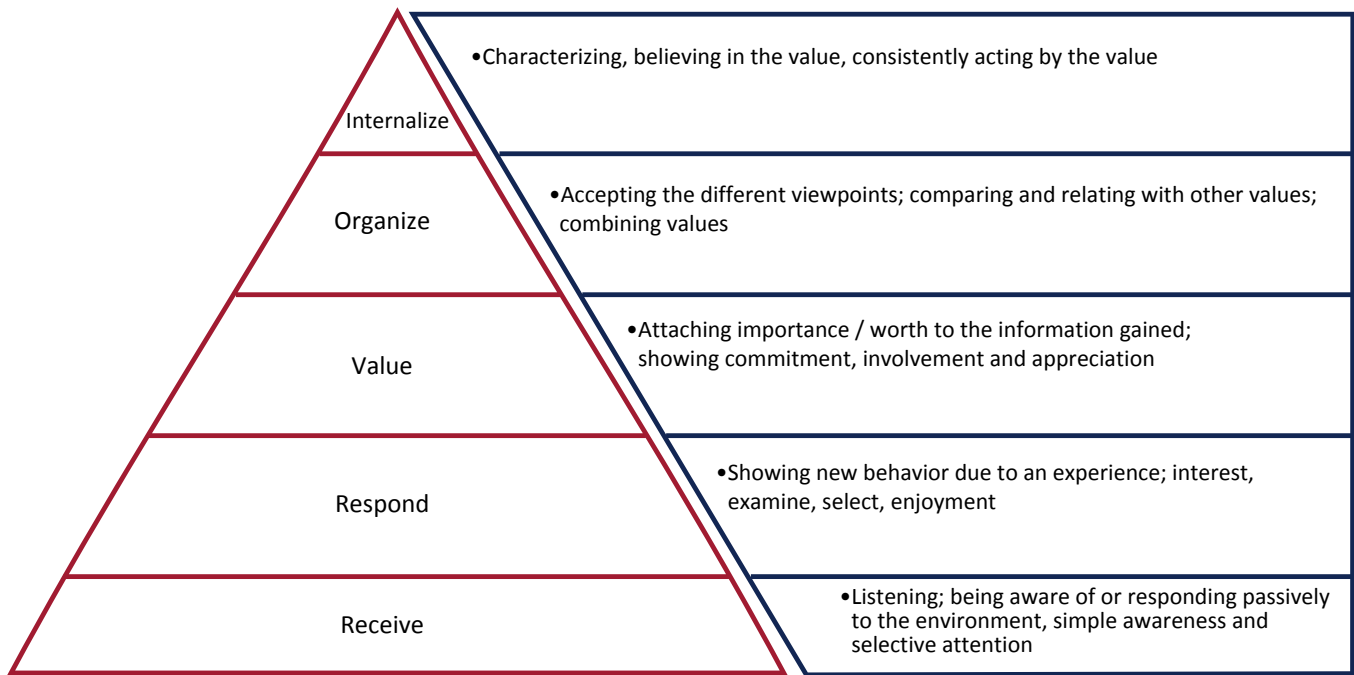
### 1.6.1 Cognitive development



The Bloom’s Taxonomy might seem difficult to apply at ECE. The table below illustrates how you can apply the taxonomy in your daily teaching practice:

LEVEL	EXAMPLES
Create	Retell the story in your own words. Can you solve this problem in another way? In dry season the river is smaller than in rain season. What do you think is the reason?
Evaluate	Which character of the story would you like to have as a friend? Why? Is it ever good to use violence? Why (not)? We have learnt about cities and villages. What looks like the best place to live? And why? People are cutting trees. Can you tell me what you think is good or bad about it?
Analyse	In the story, what happened first and what happened later? Sort these stones in two categories. Which words are rhyming? Compare what happens with the seed, when you water it regularly? What is the difference between a spider and an insect?
Apply	Use the word “cat” in a sentence. Measure your classroom: how many steps do you take from one side to the other? Think of 3 events when you dress up nicely?
Understand	What happened in the story? Describe what is happening in this picture? Can you tell what is the role of a police officer? In the story, the mother was concerned about the child. How can you tell?
Remember	What is the name of this object? What is one banana plus one banana (using objects for counting) Show three animals on the picture. Where does the story take place? Name three vehicles.

## 1.6.2 Socio-emotional and spiritual development

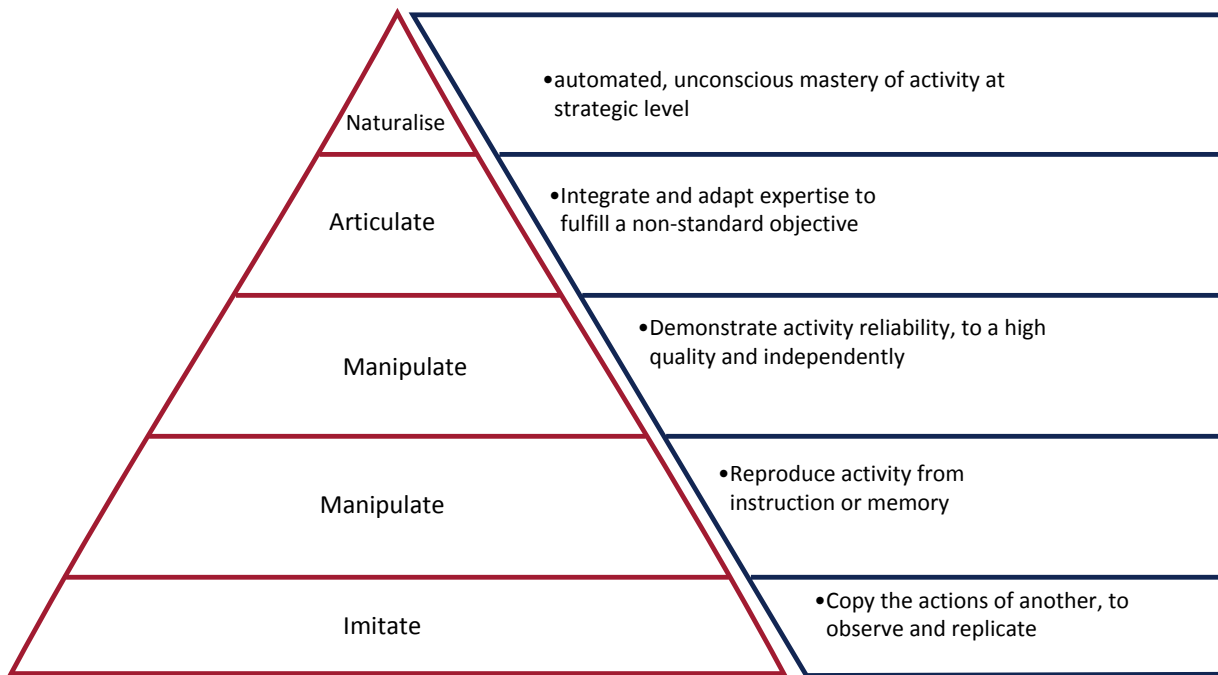


In the table below there are some example questions for every level of the socio-emotional and spiritual development (the affective domain in the Taxonomy of Bloom):

LEVEL	EXAMPLES
Internalization	Cleaning up is part of the daily routine. There is no need to talk about the organization any-more. Do you clean up the playground as well?
Organization	Let us clean up the classroom. What do you find important? How do you work together, communicate, appreciate each other? How do you organize?
Valuing	How do you feel about bullying? Let's discuss. What are, for you, important rules in the classroom? Let us make those rules together. How do you feel when the classroom is nice and tidy, after you cleaned it up?
Response	Your friend is feeling sad. What will you do? What will you tell your friend? When you feel mad, what will you do? When it is time to clean up the classroom, what do you do?
Reception	Can you remember the name of your neighbor? Listen to the story of your friend. How do you feel about this activity? Can you tell about your weekend? Can you tell the rule about cleaning up the classroom?

<https://lynnleasephd.com/2018/08/23/krathwohl-and-blooms-affective-taxonomy/>

### 1.6.3 Physical development and wellbeing



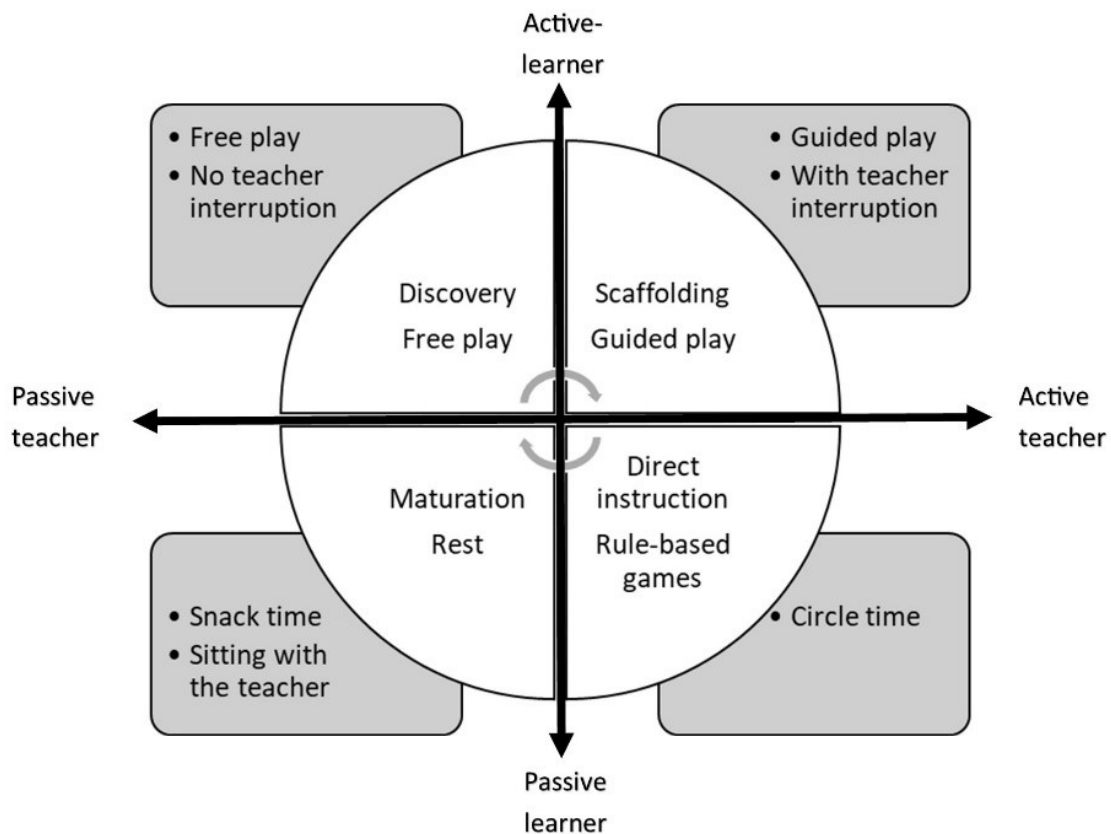
LEVEL	EXAMPLES
Naturalize	The child not only knows how to handle books, but also comics or magazines. The child makes all kinds of figures based on the shape of the letter “l”. The children making dance performances spontaneously without guidance or support from the teacher.
Articulate	The child goes to the reading corner, holds the book and swaps the pages in the correct way, spontaneously. The child uses the experience of writing the letter “l”, spontaneously to learn to write the letter “h”. Children, let us make a real performance from the dance. We can include music and drama, and dress up nicely.
Precise	The child goes to the reading corner and holds the book as it should spontaneously. Now write the letter “l” without instruction or observation. Let us perfection our moves and pay attention to every detail.
Manipulate	Do you remember how to hold a book? Can you demonstrate? I will explain how we write the letter “l”. Try do follow my guidelines. Now let us see if you still remember the dance? Can you show your moves to me?
Imitate	Watch me hold the book, and copy how I do it. I will show you how to write the letter “l”. Please repeat after me. Let us dance. Watch how I do it and copy my moves.

## 2. THE ROLE OF A TEACHER IN PLAY ACTIVITIES

### 2.1 LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT OF THE TEACHER AND LEARNERS ALONG THE CONTINUUM OF PLAY

During a school day, learning activities move along the continuum, and the role of the teacher and of the learners becomes more or less active:

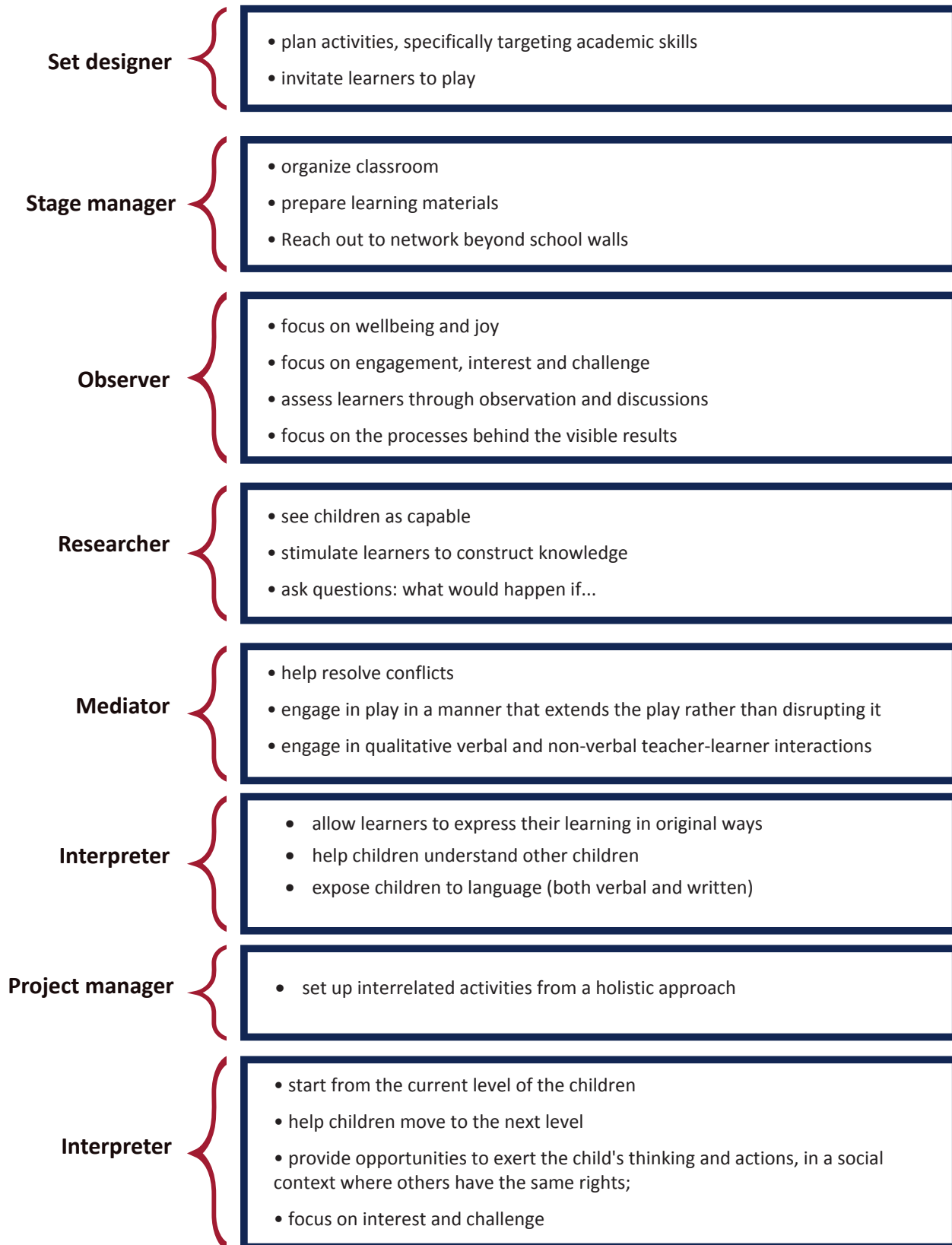
1. The day will start with some free play activities. Teachers have a passive role, they supervise without interrupting the play. During play breaks, learners will also play freely.
2. Most of the day, learners will be actively involved in learning through play activities. Individually or in small groups, the learners engage in guided play activities. Teachers observe, assess, guide and support the learners, they direct and bring the learners to the zone of proximal development. Their role is active too.
3. Sometimes, learners will group for full class activities, e.g. when it is circle time. Teachers will be leading the activity and are very active. Learners will listen, observe and follow clear instructions. They can take less initiative and are thus more passive.
4. Both the learners and the teacher need some time to relax. Resting in between learning activities, is useful for the brains: during the rest, brains process what is learned. Snack time is thus not only fruitful for the body, but also for the mind.



## 2.2 THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN GUIDED PLAY OR STRUCTURED PLAY

Teachers of Early Childhood Education are guides or facilitators. They are in a classroom not to tell learners what to do but to guide them and assist them through the learning process. Children must experience agency, that they are the ones in charge of their learning and be supported rather than directed.

The teacher facilitates learning in children from different roles:





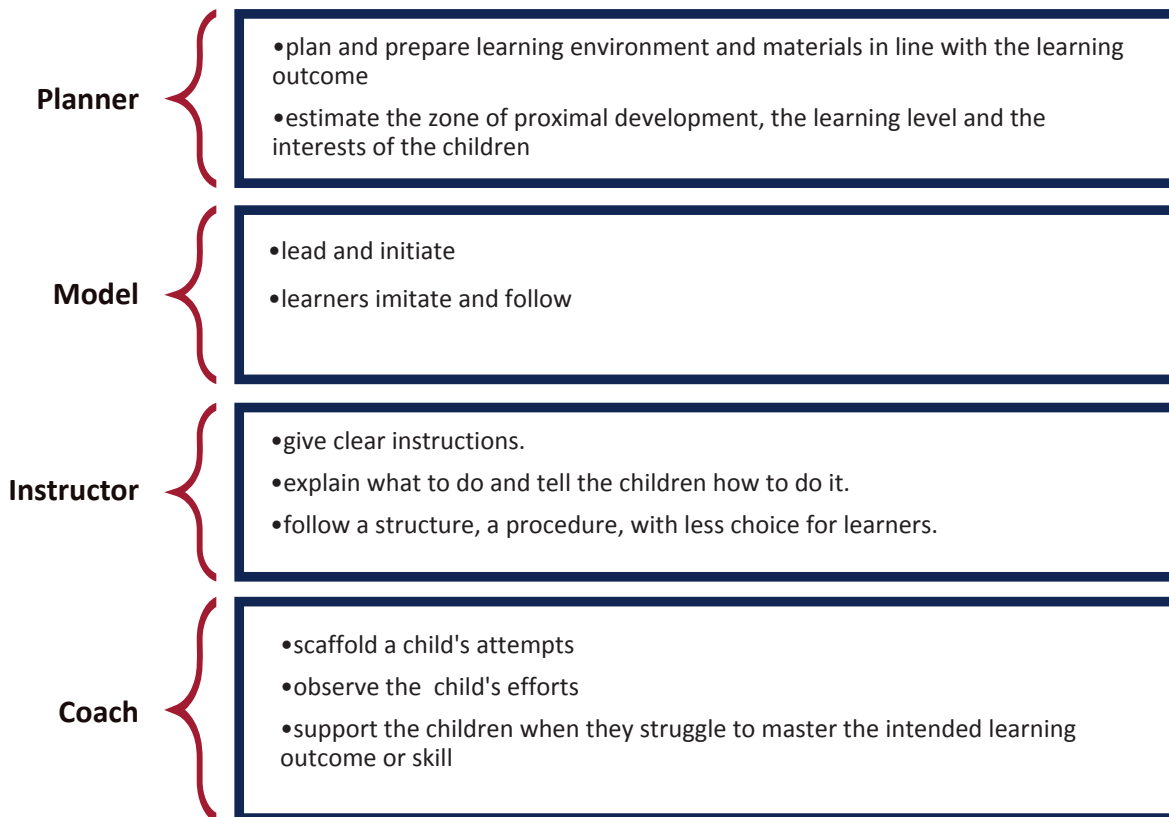
## 2.3 The teacher's role in free play

During free play, although a teacher's role is more passive towards the play, he or she is an active supervisor and takes up several roles:

<b>Security guard</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• look after a safe environment</li><li>• ensure the safety of all children</li><li>• engage the caregiver for assistance or support</li></ul>
<b>Player</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• play along with the children</li><li>• stimulate children to play; makes sure all children are involved in play</li></ul>
<b>Referee</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• remind children to the rules on the playground</li><li>• mediate between children when a conflict occurs</li></ul>
<b>Nurse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• care for the children who hurt themselves</li></ul>
<b>Comforter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• comfort the children who are having a lower wellbeing</li><li>• interconnect children who are not easily interacting with others</li><li>• help the children to cope with encountered challenges of life</li></ul>
<b>Assessor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• observe children's play and assess their learning</li><li>• assess children's play and learning</li><li>• assess children's play and learning</li></ul>
<b>Communicator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• communicate with children</li><li>• communicate with children</li></ul>

## 2.4 THE TEACHER’S ROLE IN DIRECT INSTRUCTION OR RULE-BASED GAMES

During direct instruction or rule-based games, the role of the teacher is active; teaching is teacher-centered. At ECE level, teachers should minimize direct instructions. When direct instruction is the chosen teaching method, the teacher takes up the following roles:





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