

Based on Dr Penny Lacey's
LEARNING THROUGH PLAY:



CHILD INITIATED AND ADULT-LED LEARNING at



Typically developing young children are hard wired to explore their world and as long as they have adults who can support and extend their play, they will learn easily and effectively.

Children with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD)/ Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD) and Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC) are often more passive in their attitude to exploration and require much more support in their learning from play. They may need a more carefully designed learning environment and more structured teaching opportunities.

Adults need to plan specific learning opportunities (adult-led activities) as well as have the skills to intervene to extend skills and understanding through child initiated activities.

At Greenside we provide daily opportunities and some classes even have play on the timetable.



Adults have a key role to play in building the right conditions for learning. They should provide:

1. an environment that is rich and full of opportunities for learning through play (free play)
2. support for that play when they gently encourage children to extend their ideas (child initiated activities)
3. specifically designed activities that build on children's strengths and interests (adult-led activities)

Most children with SLD/ PMLD need all three opportunities, possibly several times a day.

NB play for teenagers with SLD/ PMLD can directly mirror that of the early years but might develop into more formal games with rules, problem solving and creative thinking for the more able youngsters.

Although some sensory learners have little capacity for choosing, generally children's choices and interests are the driving force for building knowledge, skills and understanding: by working and playing with other people, they are constantly learning about themselves and their social and cultural worlds.



Adults support children to:

1. Access a range and variety of resources that interest them
2. Learn from many repetitions of activities that have the potential to give them lifelong skills
3. Make steady progress through building on their strengths in relation to skills and understanding
4. Enjoy their learning and being in school.

Adults need to manage children's time so that they have the opportunity to become deeply involved in their activities and to follow their ideas through, including returning later to continue their explorations or creative expressions.

Children's own rate of development is respected, so that children are not rushed but are supported in ways that are right for each child.

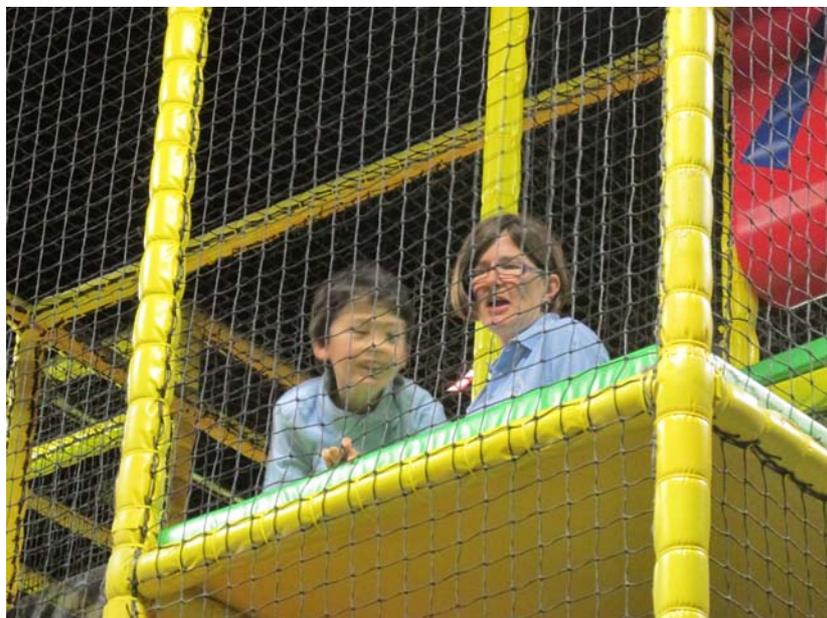
The day/ week is divided into clear sessions with beginnings and endings and, where appropriate, learning objectives are clear.

Where they are able, children learn to plan their activities, carry them out and then review what they have done (Plan, Do Review cycle).

Young typically developing children learn through:

1. Playing
2. Being with other people
3. Being active
4. Exploring new things and experiences
5. Thinking and 'talking' to themselves
6. Communicating what they are doing to someone who responds to their ideas and actions
7. Representing ideas and experiences (eg role play, art, small world play)
8. Meeting physical challenges
9. Being shown how to do things
10. Practising, repeating and applying skills
11. Having fun!

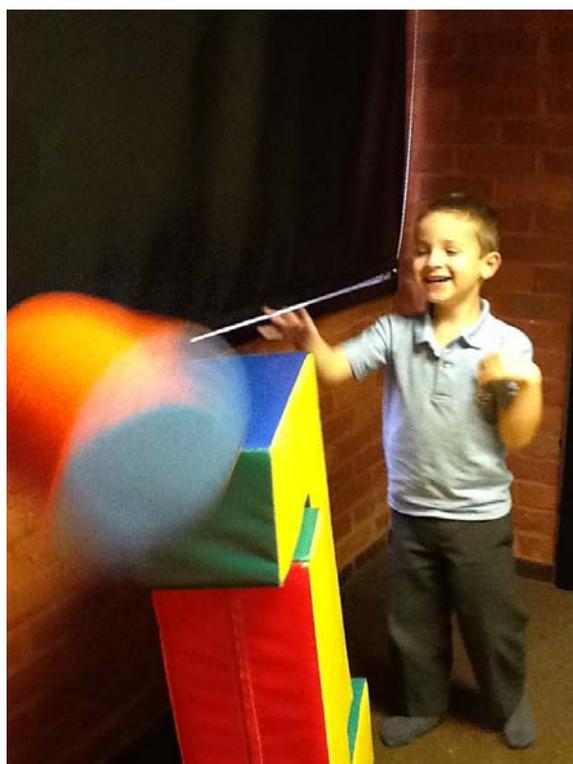
There is no reason to believe that children with SLD/ PMLD learn in any other way.



Children's learning should have 3 elements throughout their school day:

1. **Freely chosen play** which is under the control of the child. The child decides how to play, how long to sustain the play, what the play is about and who to play with.
2. **Child-initiated activity**, which although it has much in common with free play, it often has a serious purpose where the child explores something in depth. Adult intervention is guided by certain expectations regarding the development of early learning skills.
3. **Adult-led activities are those that adults initiate**. They are not play but should nevertheless be seen as playful. Adults introduce specific learning based on the learning needs of individual children. These activities should be as open-ended as possible to encourage children to think and learn.

There is no hard and fast rule about the balance of these elements over a day or week and adults should be guided by the needs of individual or groups of children. For example, most children with PMLD find free play hard and need lots of child-initiated play (e.g. Intensive Interaction) balanced with some adult directed activities (which are still largely about following the child's lead).



FREE PLAY

There are many different kinds of play e.g.:

1. Exploratory play
2. Construction play
3. Pretend play
4. Role play
5. Small world play
6. Messy play

Remember though that free play cannot be planned by adults, although it can be planned for, through creating high-quality learning environments and ensuring uninterrupted periods to children to develop their play.



Many children with SLD/ PMLD find free play very difficult as they do not have the skills or drive to play independently. They will need to be taught how to play.



CHILD-INITATED ACTIVITIES

Although children initiate the activities (which may come out of their play), the adult should:

1. Support and extend the play through introducing new ideas, words, posing problems and demonstrating
2. Offer assistance to help children be successful
3. Provide a stimulating learning environment
4. Ensure children have sustained time to develop their ideas
5. Encourage children to plan and 'talk' about their activities
6. Observe children very carefully so they can plan for future support and ways of extending learning.



ADULT-LED ACTIVITIES

Although adults initiate the activities, they will choose and plan them based on what they know about the learning needs of the individual and groups of children. They will often contain extensions of what they have observed in play or child-initiated activities.



Adult-led activities can include:

1. Story time
2. Music and singing
3. Snack time
4. Learning specific skills in numeracy and literacy
5. Themed activities e.g. shopping, gardening or cooking.



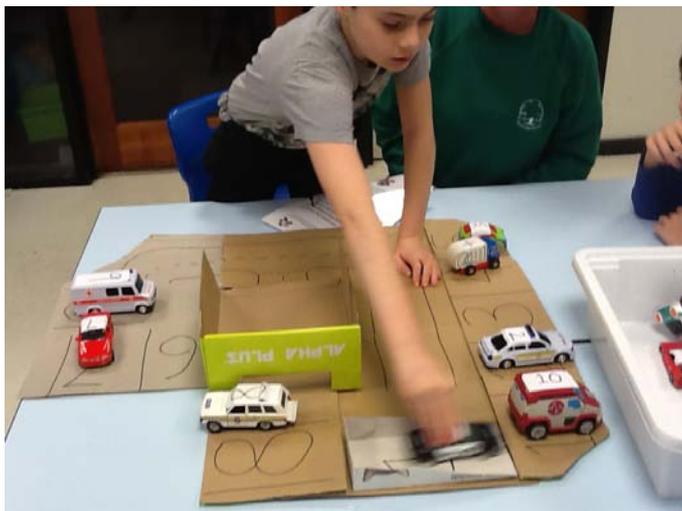
Whether the activities are child or adult led, adults need to know what the children are learning.

The activities that have been planned by adults should be clearly linked to children's current learning needs.



In child initiated activities, adults need to be skilled at opportunism, and use their close observations to link what the children are doing to their current learning needs.

Faysal is 6 and is learning to use measure and understand numbers in context. His pupil-initiated sessions are varied but cluster around his special interest in technology – iPads and using the PC to Google Earth his locality, especially tall buildings and shops. With support from an adult, he uses the computer to find images of buildings of various heights and makes a PowerPoint presentation in preparation for putting it all in a book. For free play, he chooses to use the unifix bricks to make a tower. Another young person takes photos of Faysal with his tower (with a little help from an adult). One of Faysals' teacher-led sessions supports this interest by building on his understanding of measure and number so he can work out tallest and shortest buildings. In another the teacher uses a map of his locality so Faysal can find and mark those buildings on the map.



Good play provision is built on the children's play and sometimes adults are not sure how or when to join in. Here are a few general rules for free play:

1. Take time to observe and consider when is a good time to join in
2. Try to play on the children's terms
3. Offer your own ideas when you are sure they will be consistent with the play
4. Avoid using closed questions (how many, what colour, what size?)
5. Try not to direct the play to meet a learning objective!

In child initiated play adults should:

1. Play with the children wherever they are
2. Observe what children are doing and decide how the play can be extended to meet learning objectives
3. Blend into the play with open-ended questions, suggestions and comments
4. Provide a range of stimulating materials that children can use to meet their own purposes
5. Use the children's play to help plan adult-directed sessions.

In adult-led playful activities, adults should:

1. Provide open-ended activities
2. Have specific learning objectives matched to children's strengths and needs
3. Present tasks in playful ways
4. Use materials and activities that are motivating and are associated with play
5. Provide activities that require hands-on active participation.

Whatever happens – enjoy yourself with the children!