Play-based Assessment in the early years’ setting

Finding out what a child is capable of achieving with the appropriate support

An Area SENCO training topic

Essex County Council
What is play-based assessment?

**Interaction** with a child using play materials with a view to gaining information about:

- The child’s current developmental level in terms of thinking/reasoning, language and other skills
- The child’s approaches to learning
- The adult interactions which best support a child’s ability to learn – this is called mediation
So what’s different?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard assessment</th>
<th>Play-based assessment</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Adult has pre-determined goal</td>
<td>• Goals evolve during child-led activity</td>
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<td>• Child must perform task/s independently, without help</td>
<td>• Adult must interact to raise the child’s level of independent achievement</td>
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<td>• Adult wants to find out baseline skills for target child</td>
<td>• Adult wants to find out potential skills for target child</td>
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The PBA ‘equation’

What the child can do now + (How the child approaches learning × How the adult interacts (mediates)) = What the child is capable of achieving
Why assess through play?

Play is …

- A natural means of expression for most children
- An activity through which children explore and develop new concepts
- An activity through which children can explore and rehearse feelings and emotions
- An activity within which children develop the ability to relate, negotiate, share and plan with others
Which children might benefit from a play-based assessment?

Equally accessible to preschool children with a variety of special educational needs, including those with:

- Delayed receptive and expressive language development
- Concentration and attention difficulties
- Sensory or motor impairment
- General developmental delay
- Social and communication difficulties
Before you begin a play-based assessment …

… you need to gather information about the target child in the form of:

- Observations of the child’s play (likes and dislikes)
- Feedback from child’s parents/carers
- Liaison with outside agencies (if appropriate)
Establish the level of the child’s playskills by …

• Offering a familiar toy to the child on a one to one basis
• Asking “what can we do with this?”
• Recording how the child uses the toy
• Confirming findings with someone who knows the child well, eg keyworker or parent
‘Mediation’ is the way that adults …

… support children to develop their learning through play rather than teaching them how to play with specific toys (ie process not outcome).

This helps them to generalise their skills in different play situations.

As children become more skilled, mediation techniques can be faded out.
Ways to mediate

1. Focus child on task eg verbal and visual prompts (pointing)
2. Focus attention on relevant features of task (alert child to specific feature of toy eg feeling shapes and exploring)
3. Assist generalising eg show child how to place the ball in the chimney.
4. Help child to plan eg give them one piece of a puzzle at a time, make task visually clearer eg categorising into colours, shapes, size etc.
5. Help the child to break the task down through modelling, demonstration eg building a tower, teach sequence of symbolic play
6. Help the child feel successful eg verbal praise, tangible reward (something they can see)
7. Help the child feel they have made progress eg verbal/non verbal praise related to the task eg body language, smiling.