

INFORMED PARTICIPANT

Perhaps the least understood role for the educator in play is that of participant. It requires the artistry of a true facilitator to find the balance between acting uninvolved in the play and taking control of the experience. This may not come easily to some initially, but with experience, participation in children's play can become one of the most enjoyable parts of the school day. Participation sends the message that the play is valued. Through participation, educators can develop their relationships with children, as well as learn more about them as thinkers and language users.

The culture of children's play remains, by and large, a mystery to adults until they actually get inside of it. The role of informed participant is to understand and extend the play without intrusion or interference. The informed participant knows when to step back and observe and when to redirect.

This is an example of how an informed participant can use observations to extend the play without disrupting it. The goal in this case is to extend the ideas of the play with the addition of new props that connect to their scenario.

If we examine each of these stories of facilitation, the multi-dimensional nature of learning through play becomes clear. Each area of the curriculum is addressed in a natural, integrated way. What the teacher does, as seen in the car chase anecdote, is redirect toward an area from the Social Studies curriculum for grade one exploring children's knowledge and understanding of community workers, in particular, what they do in the community and the tools they use. Children are involved in using their personal knowledge of the role of the ambulance and emergency room workers and how they meet the needs of people in the community. They are communicating their ideas and knowledge through role play which is an important mode of communication, especially for young children. In observing the children, the educator may identify a need for additional resources or experiences to extend their knowledge. There does not have to be competition between the mandated curriculum and self-directed play.

Essentially, in facilitating play, educators need to reflect on the following questions:

- When I look around the room, who needs my support?
- When is it an appropriate time for me to become involved in the children's play?
- How do I become involved in their play?
- What is my role when I do get involved? What do they need?
- How much do I become involved without overtaking the play?
- How will this particular child or group of children react to my involvement?

The physical and social environment of the classroom has an impact on children's motivation and attitudes about learning. In reflecting, teachers may ask:

- Is this classroom a place where children want to be?
- Do the children feel that they have a 'voice' and are part of the decision-making process?
- Is this classroom a safe place for children to ask questions, test, and try out ideas?
- Do the materials meet the children's needs as learners?
- Does the physical environment promote exploration, investigation, collaboration, and communication?



Informed Participation	Reflect on the Following
<p>Play Partner</p>	<p>The children own their play. Enter the play by invitation not intrusion. Stay in role taken during play. Don't censure or impose judgment on the actions of children during play.</p> <p>Act in role as directed by the lead child. You will not be assigned the "boss" part which is reserved for the most advanced player. Serve as a bridge for the excluded child by creating a role for him.</p> <p>Jason is a shy boy, with little experience playing with other children. Each day he stands and watches the other children playing at the Home Center. One morning as the teacher in role begins to prepare for a party, she says, "Can I invite my new friend?". The children are quite enthusiastic and so she goes over to Jason, takes him by the arm and says, "We're going to a party". At first, Jason is awkward and doesn't stay in role, but with cajoling and patience. he gets into the part. Several incidents like this and Jason is accepted and becomes part of the play. When appropriate, redirect the action plan through a question or suggestion.</p>
<p>Observer</p>	<p>Take time to focus your attention on the play. Without disrupting what is going on, you may be able to introduce a new challenge through a question:</p> <p>I wonder what would happen if we ...? Why isn't this ... happening?</p> <p>Provide something new. The introduction of new materials stimulates curiosity. In observing the children at the water table, the teacher noticed that the play was repetitive.</p> <p>The children have been playing at the water table for several days. They were familiar with the materials and had been using them for pouring water back and forth. The teacher introduced a siphon and posed the question:</p> <p>How does this work? What could it be used for?</p> <p>Initially, it may not be necessary to pose a question before children have explored what the material might do. Based on observations, it may be appropriate to pose a question to extend the learning after children have made their initial discoveries.</p>