



# Outdoor Play and Learning

## **Why is Play an Important Part of our Curriculum?**

Play is a vital way for children to relate to the world around them and it enables them to exercise their natural curiosity. Play, by definition, is child initiated so it allows children to independently make choices, solve problems, overcome challenges and learn through trial and error. Trusting children to play independently and responsibly develops their confidence, self-identity, resilience and sense of agency - all of which are vital learning and life skills which can be transferred back into the classroom. For this reason we invest a lot of time and energy into ensuring our pupils at Brenzett have enriching and well-resourced play experiences.

## **Benefits of Play**

Play increases pupil well-being, resilience, problem solving skills and self-confidence. It is also a vehicle for physical and social development: children learn the power of communication - how to negotiate, take-turns and how to compromise. Play also offers opportunities to develop the imagination and boosts creativity - children re-imagine the world and objects around them in a multitude of ways and they use role-play to explore and enjoy different identities as well as developing their own.

## **What does play-time look like at Brenzett?**

At Brenzett, we believe there is much to be gained by letting all of our children play together. Our older pupils are able to take on jobs and responsibilities such as helping to look-out for the younger pupils, being positive role-models and helping to organise tidy-up time. Our younger pupils benefit from having older pupils to play with - in particular older siblings, neighbours or family members which can be reassuring and comforting at times. Mixing our year groups was immediately enriching and now all year groups take their lunch hour at the same time every day. As outdoor play brings so many benefits, we now play outdoors in most weathers too.

## **Types of Play**

Providing a rich play environment is essential if all pupils, regardless of age, gender, race, disability or other special needs are to thrive. At Brenzett we strive to provide a variety of play experiences including:

- Exploratory
- Symbolic
- Imaginative
- Creative
- Socio-dramatic
- Role-Play
- Object-Play
- Recapitulative
- Fantasy
- Dramatic
- Social
- Deep

# Creative Play

**What is it?** Creative play includes making, painting, manipulating materials, using imagination and inventiveness with materials and ideas.



**What does it look like?** It is the use of any medium for its own sake often in new combinations. It is the original expression of emotions, feelings and ideas and includes playing with 'loose parts'.

**What are the benefits?** Enjoyment, self-expression, mastery of skills particular to specific contexts, development of motor skills and integration of concepts appearing in different fields. It helps to develop thinking, sensitivity to and appreciation of colour, texture, shapes, smells, etc. Problem solving, 'private speech', self-regulation, confidence, fine motor skills, and hand-eye coordination.

# Exploratory Play

**What is it?** Physically exploring an environment – going higher, further, jumping over, jumping on, feeling, tasting, swinging. It is testing 'what happens if...?'





**What does it look like?** It is manipulating objects or environment and assessing their properties. It is exploring puddles, earth, water etc.

**What are the benefits?**

Exploratory play brings emotional satisfaction, access to information and it may help to reduce uncertainty and stress around novel or complex situations. It strengthens thinking, reasoning, problem-solving, assessing risk, readiness to encounter new experiences, creativity, 'private speech' and self-regulation.

## Mastery Play

**What is it?** Mastery Play is how children begin to understand and develop a power relationship with the physical environment that surrounds them. That relationship is constructed from an evolving knowledge of what the environment will allow the child to do to it, and what it will not.

**What does it look like?** Digging holes; creating puddles; damming stream or drains to create pools; growing things; constructing things out of natural materials and then demolishing them.



**What are the benefits?** Respect for the natural environment; a deeper understanding of elemental forces and natural phenomena; motor skill development; problem solving; logical reasoning; planning and communication skills when playing with others. Children gain an understanding of their relationship with the world around them including an understanding and appreciation of limits, boundaries, control and power.



## Object Play

**What is it?** Object play allows children to discover the innumerable qualities, uses and functions of an object. This kind of play is supported by showing an appreciation for unconventional ideas and uses for an object and children should be permitted to discover uses and functions without significant adult intervention or guidance. Suggesting the 'correct' use of an object can destroy the play.

**What does it look like?** It can involve an object for example sticks and stones, household items, cardboard boxes, treasures or a puzzle. Children test and explore the possibilities of an object.

**What are the benefits?** Flexibility of thinking and ideas; fine motor skills; thinking; reasoning; problem-solving; creativity; 'private speech'; self-regulation and building the foundations for abstract mathematical concepts.



## Social Play

**What is it?** Children need the opportunity to explore and experiment with different forms of interaction with other human beings. Among adults, children are often taught and corrected, whereas whilst playing, children learn as a result of what they decide. This inevitably includes aspects of argument, debate, repression and control, as well as fun.

**What does it look like?** Any social or interactive experience. Negotiation of rules and social norms; board games; conversation/negotiation; locomotor games; running the tuck shop and other playful enterprises; creating things together.

**What are the benefits?** The development of emotional intelligence, social and groupwork, language development, communication skills. Through this type of play children can engage with social dynamics such as how children/adults/groups react to various situations; they learn to recognise and use verbal cues, looks, food, customs etc; they create experiences in which the rules and criteria for social engagement and interaction are revealed, explored and amended.

## Locomotor Play

**What is it?** This often is the dominant play type in school playgrounds.

**What does it look like?** Chase, tag, hide and seek, throwing and catching, climbing, jumping, swinging, ball games, hula-hoops, skipping and racing.

**What are the benefits?** Strength, physical literacy and stamina Whole body coordination, agility Raised heart rate, confidence Communication, teamwork and social skills. Locomotor play offers children the chance to develop a sense of themselves, familiarity with their environment, learning where is safe



and where must be avoided, the properties of objects, and a sense of ability to escape (up a tree, over a wall, out of sight).

## Communication Play



**What is it?** The emphasis here is on the process – and joy - of communication. It can be between children, children and adults, other living creatures, puppets, dolls or other inanimate objects. Maybe even with the sky or a passing cloud!

**What does it look like?** Communication play often shows high degrees of subtlety and sophistication, even when words or gestures are crude or would be unacceptable or hurtful outside a playful context. It includes imitation for comic effect; singing, rhyming, talking in slang or ‘street;’ non-verbal communication such as gesture, hands and body language.



**What are the benefits?** Oral language development, expansion of vocabulary and social skills. Preparation for more formal language concepts such as rhyme, poetry and onomatopoeia. Children develop vocabulary through communication play; learn to understand nuances in language and dual meanings; find pleasure in language including fun/rude words, mickey-taking; enjoyable sounds; body language and facial looks. They also develop empathy. This intrinsic form of play is supported by a classroom culture where there is some acceptance of playful language, silly jokes, rude sounds and funny faces but pupils learn when jokes and banter become personal or offensive rather than enjoyable.

## Dramatic Play and Socio-Dramatic

### Play



**What is it?** Making plays, song and dance routines. Miming, pretending to



be famous. Dramatisation of conversation. Dramatisation of everyday events, e.g. parent taking child to school. In front of an audience or 'for' an audience. In a looser sense, Socio-dramatic play . Use of adult phrases or language in play situations. Re-enactment of social situations to understand or gain control.

**What does it look like?** This type of play can be recognised by their 'real life' contexts and exaggeration of emotions. A sense of the 'dramatic', reaction of an audience, self-expression, adopting identities, ego boost, cathartic effect. Socio-dramatic play may involve real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature. Events enacted might have happened or be yet to happen but may be difficult for the child to understand.

**What are the benefits?** Playing in scenarios which represent real, possible or desired domestic, social or cultural situations provides children with a useful way to pre-empt, play through and rehearse situations and reactions. It gives the opportunity to engage in understanding the everyday behaviour of others. It can help with language development, performance, expression, communication, literacy, narrative, artistic and creative skills.

## Role Play

**What is it?** Role play is a way to explore identity. It enables caricature and amplification of particular traits, imitation of accents, change of gender, culture and race. Through role-play, children can access different ways of being, interpreting them from their own frame of reference. It may be of an intense expression of personal social, domestic or interpersonal nature (though not always).

**What does it look like?** The child enacts adult, or other, behaviours e.g. driving, cooking. They may play a family character, community person or celebrity. Children sometimes take on different states e.g. dead or asleep. They may mimic or imitate the mannerisms, voice, dress and actions of others.



**What are the benefits?** Children are able to access different ways of being, interpreting them from their own frame of reference. They are able to develop their narrative skills, point of view, observation, social and groupwork abilities, language and communication skills.

# Fantasy and Imaginative Play

**What is it?** In this play type, children are playfully engaged in situations created entirely from imagination and where the conventional rules which govern the physical world do not apply.

**What does it look like?** Being a fire breathing dragon; Casting spells and 'doing magic'; Unconventional use of props; Being a tree/ship; Patting invisible animals/ eating invisible food; Use of objects as other objects, e.g. using a bench as a bus

**What are the benefits?** Access to other realities, enabling children to access experiences with a potentially high impact in a manner which is controlled and gradual. Creation of alternative outcomes and emotional equilibrium. Language development, vocabulary and rhyme, communication, literacy, artistic and creative, social and groupwork skills. Also forms the basis for figurative language.

## Recapitulative Play

**What is it?** "If you look at some of what children do when they play, you will see reflected in that, some of what human beings did in the ancient past." (Hughes, 2006)

**What does it look like?** Rituals, Fires, Playing with/in the elements, Body paint, shields and face markings, dens, camps, homes and caves, growing and cooking things, playing war games and with weapons, animal husbandry.



**What are the benefits?** Accessing the behaviour of earlier human evolution, enormous satisfaction and comfort. Recapitulative play may involve benefits shown across all play types but in particular is associated with elemental forces and deep human instincts and drives. Recapitulative play may involve benefits shown across all play types but in particular is associated with elemental forces and deep human instincts and drives.

# Symbolic Play

**What is it?** To some extent, all play can be described as symbolic. Symbolic play allows children to represent an abstract idea, a feeling, something that isn't there or isn't seen. It enables children to access experiences which feel important but whose potential significance can only be guessed.

**What does it look like?** Props given specific symbolic meaning; Camps to symbolise 'home'; Spray hearts to denote love; Flags to denote a tribe; Rope to represent an area of water.



**What are the benefits** The ability to use words, gestures or images to represent actual objects, events or actions. Opens up endless possibilities for play scenarios. Also developed are abstract thought, visual representation, language development, communication, literacy, numeracy, artistic and creative skills.

# Rough and Tumble Play

**What is it?** A form of social bonding through physical contact. 'Play face' and body language make play fighting distinct from actual fighting.

**What does it look like?** Play-fighting; tests of strength; physical contact game; wrestling; playful pushing; shoving and jostling. Often pulling back, retreating or 'feinting' to rebalance power between players. Often lots of laughter.

**What are the benefits?** Experiences of close encounters; social bonding; physical activity; insights about yourself in relation to others; fun. Children also learn emotional and social skills; judgement; respect for others and build the foundations for physical, personal and interpersonal relationships; they also develop empathy, self-regulation and self-control.

# Loose Parts

Loose parts are at the heart of our approach to play and refers to anything in the play environment that is not fixed and that children can use as part of their play. The theory of

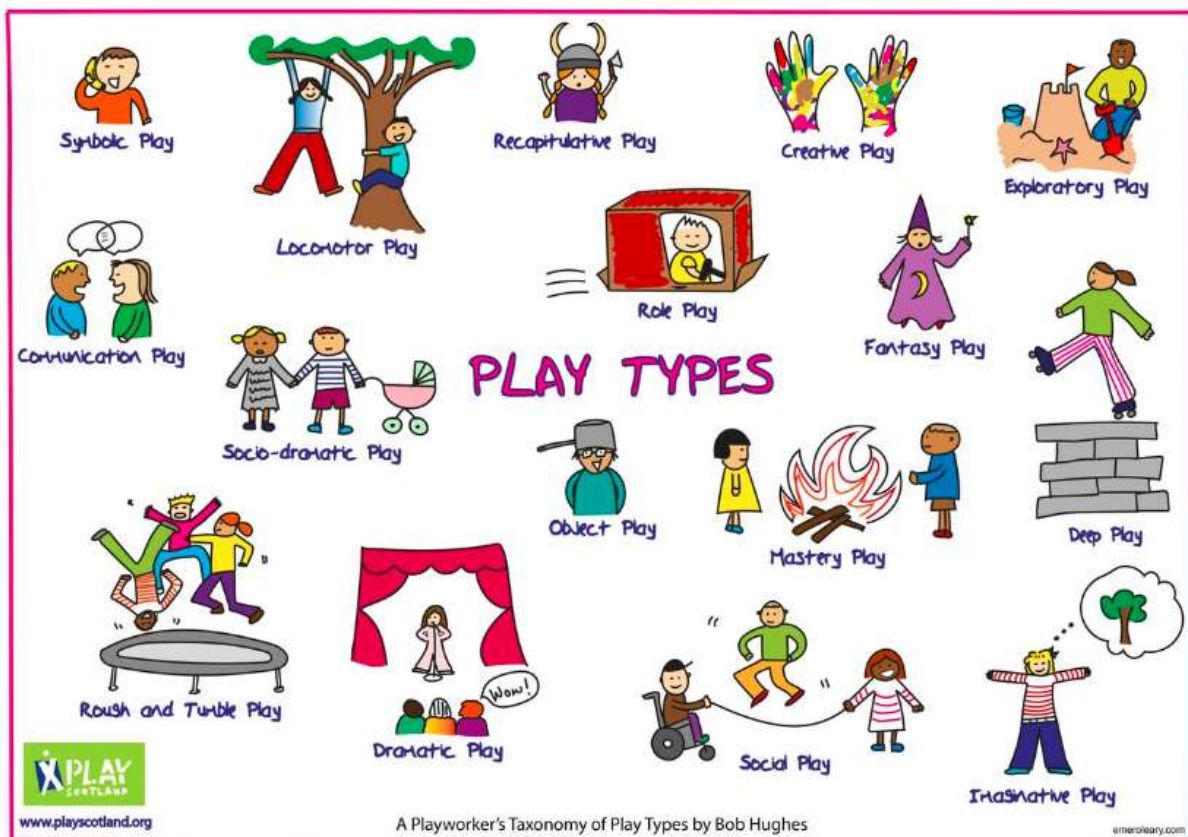
loose parts says that the more moveable things there are in a play environment, the greater the number of possibilities there will be for invention, creation and imagination.

Loose parts can be natural materials like logs and stones, or man-made stuff like tyres, crates or planks. We can think about loose parts being like ingredients for a cook. However good your kitchen is, nothing great is going to be created unless you have a varied choice of ingredients! Nearly all play requires stuff to play with, as well as places to play in. We believe our play-times are enhanced by providing the children with lots and lots of varied loose parts to play with so they can enjoy better-quality play.

Children are incredibly inventive and will find ways of using loose parts in ways that adults cannot imagine! However, our adult play-team can always add some inspiration by setting up some loose parts in a new place or in a new way, and then step back to see what happens!

**The Golden Rules for Loose Parts are:**

- Plentiful** - Lots of children require lots of stuff. Around four pieces per child is a good guide.
- Varied** - It does not really matter what it is but there should be lots of different stuff.
- Accessible** - Children should always be able to get out and put away the loose parts themselves.
- Safe Enough** - Adults should check and monitor the suitability and condition of loose parts.
- Replaced** - When things are played with every day they'll get worn out or break.



# Schema in Play

Schema are common patterns of enquiry children are drawn to explore through their play. All good play environments will support deep exploration of all schema for all ages and at Brenzett we provide opportunities for pupils to benefit from these different play types.

## Schema in Play 1



**Trajectory:** is all about movement in a clear direction, including running, riding, and throwing.



**Rotation:** is the exploration of anything circular, especially anything that rotates.



**Enclosing:** is about being enclosed in cosy and comfortable spaces or enclosing others.



**Enveloping:** is similar to enclosing but is about wrapping up, or placing objects inside other objects.



## Schema in Play 2



**Positioning:** is the placement of objects or themselves in lines patterns or sequences



**Transporting:** the movement of everything from one place to another



**Connecting:** exploring how to join objects, people and materials together.



**Transforming:** how materials or people can change their nature and appearance.

