The Role of the Teacher during Discovery

Deb Vietri June 2019

The role of the Teacher during a Discovery session first and foremost is that they should be fully engaged with the children, in other words **100% present 100% of the time!** There are so many rich learning opportunities that present themselves during Discovery and teachers have an important role in shaping the learning. Teachers need to be constantly listening, watching, thinking and interacting with students.

Teachers are strategic in planning for ways in which children may interact with the environment, materials, provocations and invitations, however what actually happens in Discovery is mostly spontaneous and teachers need to make on the spot decisions. Adults supporting children’s learning during Discovery may engage in any of these actions and purposes:

* Questioning, especially posing open-ended questions
* Co-playing to either model play or entice children into play scenarios
* Facilitating social interactions
* Challenging students to take an idea further
* Helping students to make connections either to their own experiences of to other curriculum areas
* Observing students at play, and listening to their conversation, (assessing)
* Recording things they notice about a child to influence further planning or teaching, or to share with others (eg family)
* Stepping in and teaching a specific skill or concept when the opportunity presents itself (just-in-time-teaching)
* Assisting with problem-solving
* Noticing and naming desired behaviours or skills
* Redirecting undesired behaviours

Most importantly teachers need to be watching for those ‘teachable moments’ when an opportunity presents itself to teach or reinforce a skill or concept either to individuals or the whole group. This could be acted on immediately, or brought to the children’s attention later through a share-time, introduction to the next session or may be integrated into another learning area.

*In this article published in ‘The Early Years Learning Framework: Professional Learning Program’ e-Newsletter No 1 2010, the author identifies and names some explicit roles Teachers could be taking during ‘play-based’ learning.*

**The role of educators in play**

Lennie identifies five functions for early childhood educators in play:

* Quality adult–child interactions, including sustained shared thinking.
* Intentionality.
* Taking different roles directly in the play.
* Teaching to support play.
* Challenging unjust and unfair play.

Lennie talked about some of the roles educators can fulfil in children’s play:

* Parallel player—working on the same tasks as the child, alongside.
* Script writer—helping to tell the story.
* Stage manager—providing space, materials, ‘props’, helping to resolve problems.
* Co-constructor—listening to what children are thinking and saying, asking clarifying questions, making suggestions.
* Participating—with children’s agreement, taking a direct role in the play.
* Modelling how to enter and exit someone else’s play—‘... Let’s go and ask Alex, can we join his play?’

*In this blog posted in ‘Inquire Within’ the author summarises different ways adults can interact with children. Her ideas were inspired by:*[*Gaye Gronlund - Developmentally Appropriate Play*](http://www.redleafpress.org/Developmentally-Appropriate-Play-P406.aspx)[*Playing With Children: Should you? If so, How?*](https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/freedom-learn/201409/playing-children-should-you-and-if-so-how)[*Play with Children*](http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=122&id=1943)

**Learning and Play: 10 ways to interact with children**

**Originally posted at** [**teachingparadox.com**](about:blank)

As I prepare to re-enter the classroom next year, I have been reading up on all things PLAY. [We](http://www.kyotointernationalschool.org/early-childhood-program/) will be diving head first into a play based curriculum that is clearly defined and structured. It is exciting/inspiring. One of my questions is; **how do we, as adults and teachers, interact with children while they play?**

Here are ten strategies for interacting with children's play to guide them to higher levels of thinking and complexity.

**TEN WAYS TO INTERACT WITH CHILDREN IN PLAY**

**Narrate**

Follow them around as they play. Point out basic observations. State the obvious. Acknowledge the choices they are making, bring those choices to the forefront of their mind. Observe. Tell the story as it happens.

"I see you are making a house"

"You're pulling the wagon over to the water tap"

You're digging a deep hole"

**Encourage**

Mention what they have done, and point out the effort it took to do it. As Dweck would say, don't praise the child, but the effort.

"You are following your plan very closely"

"You made a really long bridge, it must have been difficult to make it balance"

"You observed very closely and drew lots of details".

**Feedback**

Focus on specifics, the small details where you see growth. This will bring their attention to these details and cause them to have a quick reflection on your statements. Open a space for a conversation about specific skills.

"You're using a lot more colors than yesterday"

"Your clay model is standing because you made the legs thicker."

**Model**

Bring yourself into the play by discussing your own difficulties, or your own approach to problem solving. Share strategies that are useful to you. Ask them to try and see if they are effective.

"When I can't think of what to draw I take a walk to clear my head"

"Sometimes when I am angry, I like to sit by myself"

**Show (or Tell)**

Sometimes there is a correct way to do something, and the child simply needs to be shown the method. We often feel children need to figure out everything by themselves, but it is just as effective to show them how, in real time, and have them copy you. Or other times, they might not know the problem and even after questioning they don't see the solution. Don't be afraid to tell.

"Take clay roll it with the palm or your hand"

"Hold the brush like this"

"To unscrew the lid, hold it with one hand, and then with other turn it this way"

"I think the bottom is too thin, that's why the tower is falling down"

**Question**

Provoke their thinking. Ask them specific questions to get them reflecting on what they are doing at a higher level. Encourage them to take their wondering to new levels. Key concepts are a good lens to use to focus their questions. Listen to their observations and their forming theories, then question.

"What would happen of we mixed it with water?"

"What other tools does a carpenter use?"

"Why does the shadow keep moving across the floor?"

**Challenge**

Different from questions, this is a call to do something. It asks them to manipulate the materials they are using in a different way that pushes them further, focusing on specific skills.

"Can you use all the blocks?"

"Can you make a list of all the items in your shop?

"I wonder if you could make this map go all the way to the edge of the page?"

**Join**

Lose yourself in the play. Join the scene. Become a character. Help build something. Be a child.

**Inform**

Fill in gaps in their knowledge. If you see them acting out a role, but missing a key element of that role, fill in the blank for them. Provide vocabulary that enriches the play. Inform them of past experiences and situations they have experienced.

"That tool you are using is called is a spatula"

"After the doctor helps the patient, they go to the recovery room"

"Do you remember when we met the Aikido-sensei? He said they always bow before a match"

**Limit**

Tell them what they can or cannot do. Play is not always about student choice. An element of student choice is involved, but the teacher sets constraints. Constraints lead to creative thinking. These constraints are carefully chosen to allow space for exploration emerge.

"You can only use three colors"

"That area is closed today"

"Let's pretend we are forest animals"

Learning to play is a recursive process that is always changing. We need to be mindful of our own practice. No top ten list will supply the magic formula (though it may give us a framework to think and reflect).

There are many more verbs to add to this list (and in many ways these verbs cross over with each other). Be mindful of when you are using them, and be mindful of why.