

Adults who interrupt play, whatever their reasons, are usually in so much of a hurry that they fail to pay attention to children's purposes. SLOW DOWN is advice to keep in mind. We shortchange young children when we hurry them. We learn most about them, and help them learn most, when we pay attention to what is happening for them as they play. (Jones and Reynolds 1992, 55–56)

The goal of play periods in preschool and kindergarten classrooms is for children to get deeply involved in high-level play. When teachers provide structure for choices, procedures for play areas, and signals to get children's attention, they will see this happen more frequently. And, they need to provide enough time for rich play to develop. Too often, children are interrupted just as soon as they get going in an exciting and interesting play scenario. The next chapter goes beyond setting up conditions, environment, and structure and looks at many actions, interventions, and techniques that teachers can use to enhance children's play.

Interacting with Children to Enhance Play

The play-based approach calls for teachers to know each child well and to differentiate the teaching methods to meet individual needs. It is the antithesis of the one-size-fits-all model of education. (Miller and Almon 2009, 5)

Ruby and Andre are a teaching team in a preschool classroom. They value children's play as an important and central part of their curriculum and allow up to one hour for it in the morning and in the afternoon in their daily schedule. During Choice Time, as they call it, the two of them circulate around the room, sometimes observing, sometimes helping to get a play scenario going, sometimes getting materials for another group, and sometimes joining in the play. They do not try to run small-group activities during Choice Time. They do that at a different time in the schedule. They believe strongly that they need to be available to facilitate and enhance children's play in any way they can. They learn so much about the children by watching and participating in their play. Each day as they reflect back on the day, they can share what they are learning and figure out the best strategies to help children have the best possible play experiences.

In this chapter, the focus is on the actions that teachers can take so that children's play reaches high levels. Teachers combine these actions in a variety of ways depending on their knowledge of the individual children involved, their goals at that particular moment, and the responses of the children to their interventions.

Good preschool and kindergarten teachers enhance and sustain children's high-level play by

- getting play started
- knowing when to enter and exit the play
- sustaining play through well-timed interventions
- coaching and mentoring players
- being intentional in all that they do

In using these actions, teachers are recognizing that children have an inherent drive toward mastery. They engage them in ways that challenge children's thinking and provide the support and scaffolding they need to be successful.

Human beings, especially children, are motivated to understand or do what is just beyond their current understanding or mastery. Effective teachers create a rich learning environment to activate that motivation, and they make use of strategies to promote children's undertaking and mastering of new and progressively more advanced challenges. (Copple and Bredekamp 2009, 15)

Rather than working against the very nature of young children, teachers using these methods are instead working with it. Children enjoy play and love a challenge. By thinking in those terms, teachers can use any of the techniques in this chapter to enrich the play experiences of the children in their programs.

Productive, high-level play does not evolve in a vacuum—teachers' actions are important to its development, sustenance, and depth. As discussed in previous chapters, teachers first set up the conditions for mature play. By providing a carefully planned environment and an inherent structure, teachers communicate to children that they can take risks and be creative as they play with interesting materials and interact with each other. However, setting up these conditions is not enough. In addition, teachers must interact with children in order to facilitate their use of the environment, to help them satisfy the lower needs identified by Maslow, and to help them build their play skills and experience the flow of high-level play.

Read the following play incident and think about ways that a teacher could interact with these boys so that their play does not deteriorate into an out-of-control experience.

Three four-year-old boys are invited by their teacher to sort colored bears into round sorting trays with multiple compartments. As long as the teacher is there with them, the boys cooperate in the sorting activity, talking about the colors of the bears as they sort them. As she moves on after five or six minutes to help in another area of the classroom, their interaction with the bears changes. "Hey, I know," says Alec. "Let's see who can throw them into the tray!" The boys move the trays to the opposite end of the table and begin to throw the bears. Their initial throws involve aiming at the small compartments. As bears fly across the table and land in the compartments, some of them bounce out again onto the table from the force of the throw. The boys laugh hysterically and continue to throw the bears harder and harder. Their laughter grows louder by the minute. Soon, bears are flying across the table and onto the floor. The boys' laughter is high-pitched. They pound on and lie across the table as each bear lands. (Gronlund and James 2008, 50)

An observant teacher who heard the louder voices and hysterical laughing and saw the boys' wilder actions would immediately move across the room to interact and intervene. How the teacher chooses to intervene is the question. Are there ways to help the boys regain control and become more interested and engaged in working with these materials? Are they showing that they have lost interest in the original sorting task and need more challenge in order to be fully engaged? Although one option is always to suggest that the materials be put away and the boys play elsewhere, the teacher may find that reaction extreme and not necessary. In fact, this is seldom the best response and should be the one of last resort.

Instead, the teacher may be able to help the boys settle down by introducing different ways to use the colored bears, challenging them to make different kinds of patterns or to measure the length of the table in colored bears. Or she may determine that throwing things is their real interest and offer them beanbags or soft balls to throw at targets outdoors or in another part of the classroom. Teachers can choose from many options when facilitating children's play. Chaotic or simplistic play can usually be changed when an adult intervenes in a way that will enhance the play experience so the children can sustain their engagement in a positive and productive manner.



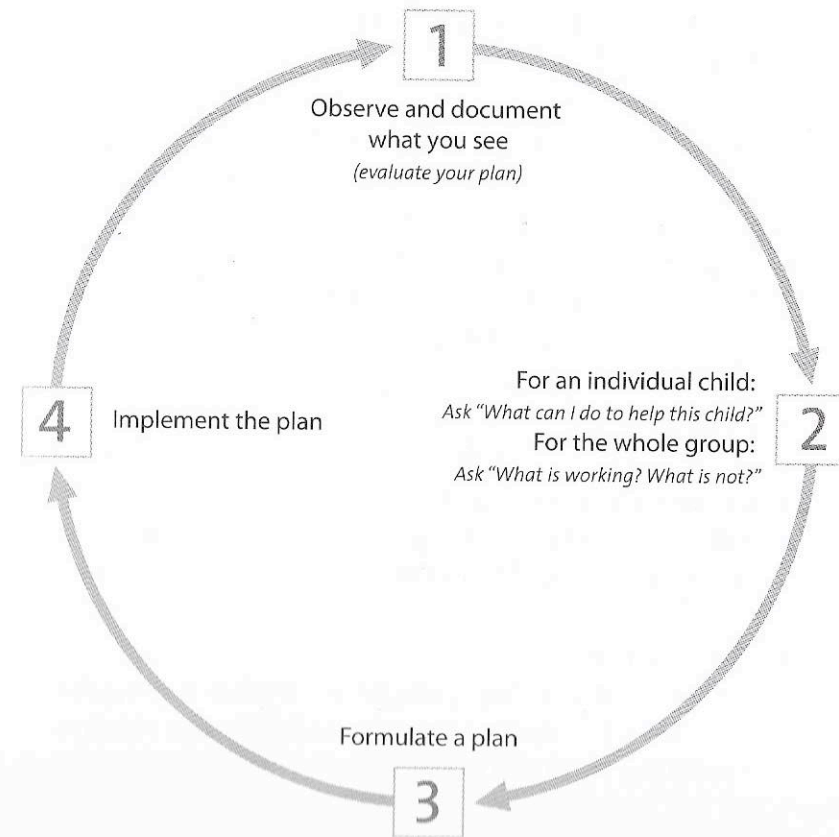
Intentional Teaching

One of the important tenets of developmentally appropriate practice is the intentionality of the teacher. In early childhood programs, especially those for preschoolers, curriculum is often an integration of many approaches and many ways to use materials. Even in kindergarten classrooms with more defined curricular approaches, the changing nature of the children's interests and levels of engagement can be challenging. That's why it's so important that teachers really think about what they are doing. Being a reflective practitioner is essential for early childhood professionals.

Good teachers continually use their knowledge and judgment to make intentional decisions about which materials, interactions, and learning experiences are likely to be most effective for the group and for each individual child in it . . .

An effective teacher makes use of the strategy that fits a particular situation and the purpose or purposes she has in mind. . . . She has a variety of strategies at the ready and remains flexible and observant so that she can determine which to use. (Copple and Bredekamp 2009, 36)

Teacher intentionality is not just important when leading small and large groups, planning for field trips and special visitors, or gathering assessment information. Intentionality and play go together too. The process of supporting and sustaining children's play engagement is a complex one. There are many ways to interact with children, depending on the needs of the moment. Teachers must observe children as they play and then make on-the-spot decisions about what actions to take with them. They are continually analyzing the play situation and trying out different approaches with the children. They also may plan for interventions in children's play and see how they work. Good teachers are making hundreds of decisions each day, continually assessing situations and thinking: What's the best way for me to help this child or this group of children right now? As the following graphic shows, this process is an ongoing cycle of actions, including observing, reflecting, making plans, and trying things out.



As teachers engage in this reflective practice, they try out a variety of teaching strategies to promote high-level play. The following list is adapted from the new edition of DAP (Copple and Bredekamp 2009, 36–37) and identifies a number of possibilities. It also includes comments a teacher could make when supporting children's play.

- Acknowledge what the children are doing or saying.
“Wow, I see that you all built a garage for your trucks. It's got very high walls. You stacked lots of long blocks up to make those walls.”
- Encourage their efforts.
“Your grocery store sure is a busy place. You have customers who are shopping and a cashier at the checkout. Oh, and you're stocking the shelves!”
- Give specific feedback.
“You have spent a long time on your Lego construction. I see you put wheels on your vehicle and you have some people riding in it. Where are they going?”
- Model attitudes, problem solving, and behavior toward others.
“Sometimes, I can't figure out what to make with my playdough. So, I just roll it and roll it, and pound it, and feel it with my fingers. I don't always have to make something, do I?”
- Demonstrate to show the correct way to do something.
“If you want the water wheel to go around when you pour the water into it, you have to pull open the latch at the bottom like this. There! Then, it works.”
- Create or add challenge.
“I wonder if you could build something with all of the blocks?”
- Ask questions that provoke children's thinking.
“What do you think would happen if we put water on the sand? How would it change? Would we need some different tools to work with it?”
- Offer assistance.
“Would you like some help getting the marble run to stop toppling over? Maybe if we made stronger foundations with some of the pieces, it would stay up. I'll help you do that.”

- Provide information.
“You made an ambulance with your Duplos. Remember when we saw the ambulance that came to our school? The EMTs had a special bed on wheels, didn't they? That was called a stretcher.”
- Give directions.
“We have lots of art materials for you to play and create with at the art table. You may use glue or paste to make whatever kind of collage you can think of.”

Teachers use these strategies alone and in combination. They use them in every activity of the day as they interact with children. They think about which strategies will work best to help the children be more productive and engaged in sustained, high-level play. Here is a look at some other actions teachers can take to support and enhance children's play.

How to Get Play Started

Sometimes teachers have to get play started. They may notice children who are wandering around the classroom or outdoor area aimlessly, not settling into any activity. A teacher may approach a wandering child and ask her what she would like to do. If the child doesn't have any ideas of her own, the teacher may make several suggestions. Or the teacher may take a wandering child by the hand, lead him over to an established play scenario, and help him join in by providing the language needed to join in social interaction with the other children and modeling what can be done with the play materials. For example, the teacher might say: “Hey, I see that you are making lots of interesting things with your playdough. May Andrew and I join you? Gee, Andrew, what should we make? Shall we make a bird's nest with some tiny eggs like Monica's or some long, squiggly snakes like Jack is making? Jack, can you show Andrew how to make those? What do you have to do?”

If teachers see instances of chaotic or simplistic play that need their attention, they may need to help more productive play get started. Dramatic play that is merely imitative of the most popular cartoon show of the day will usually remain at the simplistic level and be unsatisfying for the children. In that case, teachers may need to help get a different play theme going. They may present

different character ideas. For example, they might ask: "Do you think the bad guy likes kittens? He'd have to take care of his kitty, wouldn't he? How can we help him do that?" Or they may suggest that a different theme be played altogether: "How about if we start a restaurant to cook the food for some kings and queens?" Teachers pay close attention to the children's responses. If the questions or suggestions do not spark their interest, the teacher tries others until something does. When children respond positively to an idea, teachers help them follow through with getting the necessary materials and setting up the play scenario. Sometimes they are successful in getting new, more complex play started and sometimes not. If not, teachers will have to take some of the other steps that will be identified throughout this chapter.

Over time, teachers may reflect on how things are going in playtimes for their group of children and determine that they would like to try to start a new play theme or idea. They may decide that the children are ready for a change in their experiences, or notice that the children are showing some interest in a particular play theme or set of materials. Or it may be that the teacher has new materials or ideas to introduce to them. Consider the following play story:

Outdoor Dramatic Play—Airplanes

At the end of the day, Janet talked with her colleague, Laurene, about their prekindergarten students. Janet said, "Have you noticed that children don't really use our dramatic play area outdoors?" The area had two small playhouses and a plastic workbench. The two discussed ways to get play going in this area and decided that the next day they would provide some new dress-up clothes that included hats and jackets for a variety of jobs, including airline pilot, police officer, firefighter, and construction worker. Janet finished their conversation, saying, "Let's try it and see what happens."

The next day, before going outdoors, Janet announced to the children, "We have some new things for you to play with outdoors. We have new hats and jackets that you might be interested in wearing in our dramatic play area outside. Come over there if you're interested." Seven children followed Janet out the door and helped her open the packages. Ooh's and ah's were heard as children took turns trying on the firefighter hat, the police jacket, and the construction worker's vest and hard hat. Michael put on the pilot's

hat and announced to the group, "Let's make an airplane! I'm the pilot, I'll fly it." He dragged a chair out of the playhouse and put it next to the plastic workbench. "Here are my controls. Hurry up everybody. We're going to take off." Children wearing the other costumes looked at each other and at Michael, but did not move. "How about we get some more chairs from the classroom to be your seats on the airplane?" Janet asked. Six volunteers immediately jumped to the task. Chairs were brought out and set up behind Michael. "Wait a minute," José said. "You need a copilot to help you drive the plane." José put on the police hat, placed a chair next to Michael, and said, "There. I'll be your helper." Children sat in the other chairs and talked about where they were going. "Africa," said Renee. "No, New York," said Tanikah. Janet suggested that maybe the plane could go to lots of different places. This seemed to satisfy the girls. Some of the passengers were still wearing the hats or jackets; others were not. The play continued for approximately ten minutes with various children taking turns being the pilot and copilot. Michael and José willingly gave up their hats and seats, and joined the other passengers as the plane took off for Africa, New York, and Disney World.

Janet and Laurene started a new play endeavor and the children took it over for themselves. This is a critical consideration in getting play started—teachers can provide materials (the hats and jackets) and facilitation (chairs for airplane seats), but they still recognize that the ownership of the play and its story line are up to the children. Their goal is to get children's imaginations going and then to be ready to facilitate further, if necessary. Michael's idea of pilots and airplanes was his alone, not suggested by Janet or Laurene. And the other children went along with that play scenario, participating as copilots and passengers.

Know When to Enter and Exit the Play

Once the play is started, a teacher has to pay close attention to the children's cues to know when to enter or exit the play. Janet and Laurene wisely stayed

out of the airplane play once it got going. They remained nearby, observing to see if the rotating roles of different pilots and passengers were working for the group. When they saw that they were, they felt confident that the children could sustain this role-play experience. And the children did so for ten minutes. However, soon after that, Laurene realized that she needed to enter the play to help the children. Here's what happened:

Outdoor Dramatic Play—Airplanes (continued)

When Michael and José had been pilot and copilot, respectively, they called out to the other children to fasten seat belts, get ready for takeoff, and prepare for landing. Michael, especially, provided suggestions for actions for the passengers to follow and they did. As the players changed their roles and different children took on the pilot and copilot positions, the nature of the play changed. Some pilots merely drove the plane and did not talk to the passengers. Some pilots gave stern reprimands to the passengers to sit down and be quiet. The children sitting in the passenger chairs became restless and some left the play. Laurene observed all of this and wondered to herself if there was something she could do to enhance the situation.

She decided to get slips of paper and markers and pulled over a small table next to the "airplane" (chairs and workbench). "Do you all have your tickets for this flight?" she asked as she sat down at the table, the construction worker's hard hat on her head. "I'm the ticket counter lady. You better come get your tickets so you can go on the airplane." The passengers jumped up from their seats and gathered around her. "You can make your own tickets, if you want," Laurene suggested. Some children made markings or wrote their names on the tickets, while others wrote numbers designating a flight number. Jessica, a girl who was wearing the construction worker's vest, announced, "Hey everybody, I'm the ticket taker. You have to give me your tickets before you get on the plane." As each child handed a ticket to her, she looked at it carefully and said, "You're in number one. You're in number two," and so on. Timothy, who was wearing the pilot's hat, asked Jessica, "Do you have all the tickets?" When Jessica nodded her head, he called out, "Put on your seat belts everybody. Let's blast off." He counted from one to ten before blasting

off. The passengers responded by pretending to fasten seat belts, holding on to their chairs, and counting along with him.

The ticket making and taking scenario continued and the plane "took off and landed" several more times, again with a rotation in the children acting as pilots. Jessica remained the ticket taker throughout, but also took on the role of creating tickets for any new children who joined as passengers. Laurene provided more chairs so that the plane could accommodate everyone, but otherwise exited the play again, staying nearby in case she was needed. The play continued in this manner for another twenty-five minutes.

Once play is started and children are engaged, teachers must still be observant. Laurene noticed that Michael's ideas had helped the other children define their roles and stay interested in being passengers. But as other children played the pilot role, they did not give such directions and passengers started leaving the play. Laurene saw this and decided to step in and create a new role—providing tickets. Her involvement was needed only for a very brief time because Jessica followed up with a new role of her own—ticket taker. Thus, a whole new aspect of the play developed and children's passenger play had more complexity and purpose. Then, Timothy introduced the "blast off" process (confusing airplanes with rocket ships), which gave the passengers another way to be more involved in the scene. Again, wisely, Laurene exited the play and let the children continue on their own, providing more chairs so other children could join in, but staying out of the actual play scenario.

Effective teachers engage in a careful process of stepping in and out of children's play. This process is much like dancing with a partner, where one leads and the other follows. Teachers watch the play to determine if the children have the lead and are being successful in furthering the play scenario, or if they need them to step in and take the lead for a short time to help enhance or complicate the play. But teachers quickly step out again, turning the lead back over to the children. Teachers value the creative problem solving that self-directed play can require, and they want to empower the children to engage in cooperative negotiation of roles and determination of story lines as much as possible.

Determining when to enter or exit children's play comes with experience in reading children's cues and signals. It may be helpful for teachers to enter children's play when they see the following:

- children repeating the same actions again and again
- children getting frustrated in trying to negotiate roles and responsibilities with each other
- players leaving the area with fewer remaining to try to sustain the play

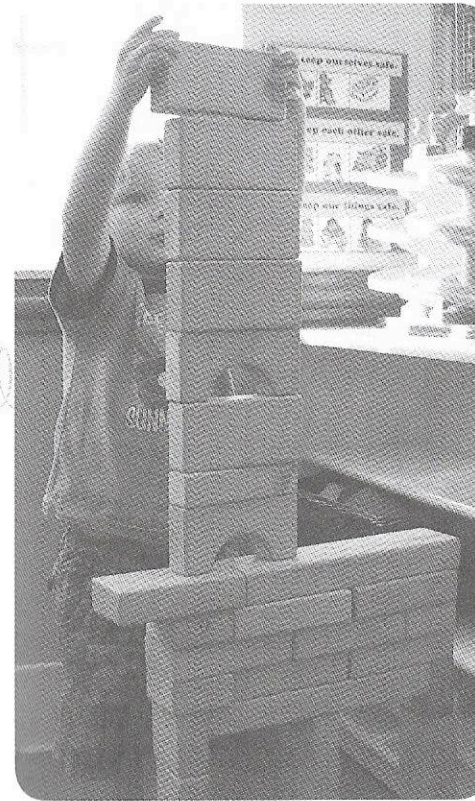
Teachers may find that they are more successful in entering play if they do so within the script the children are playing as Laurene did. By doing so, Laurene was validating the play scenario and encouraging the children to keep it going. Even when entering play in order to provide a safety element, a teacher can use the language of the children's scenario when giving a friendly reminder about use of materials.

Block Play

Three boys have been building with wooden blocks for most of Choice Time. Jesse says, "Hey, it's a castle and Voldemort is coming. He's the bad, bad guy and Harry Potter has to fight him!" Jesse has led the action as Philip and Andre have constructed the castle. The teacher, Tanya, has noticed that the play has gotten louder and louder as the castle has grown in size. "Watch out!" Jesse yells and throws himself down on the ground, knocking down part of the castle wall. "Hey!" Andre yells. "Jesse, you knocked down my wall." Tanya moves over to the block area and quietly says, "Hey, Gryffindors, be careful over here. You won't be able to fight off Lord Voldemort if you don't have a strong castle wall." Jesse jumps up and says, "Come on, Gryffindors, let's build this up again before the bad guys come to get Harry Potter." Tanya moves away as the boys return to their construction task more quietly and with focus.

Children want to sustain their play. "Children's eagerness to stay in the play situation motivates them to attend to and operate within its structure, conforming to what is required by the other players and by the play scenario" (Copple and Bredekamp 2009, 131). Teachers can work with this desire by entering the play in ways that will keep children involved, resolve the problem that has arisen, and get them back into the flow of the play action.

Exiting the play is important as well and requires teachers to be very sensitive to the children's cues to know when to exit. In the block play scenario



above, Tanya saw that her friendly reminder (phrased in the language of the Harry Potter books) led the boys to resume building in a quieter and more constructive manner. She could let them continue, independent of her direct involvement. Of course, she still watched closely to see if they were successful. However, sometimes adults overstay their welcome in a play scenario. They enter the children's play with the best of intentions, but do not time their exit well. When teachers stay involved in children's play for too long, they may inadvertently take over the play scenario. The children grow dependent on the teacher's suggestions, ideas, or external control. Teachers must be continually asking themselves: "Are the children taking ownership of this play? Are they contributing their own ideas and suggestions or are they merely following mine?" If the latter is true, the children may have slipped back from high level to simplistic play. Consider the following play scenario. Does the teacher read the children's cues that it is time to exit the play?

Outdoor Sand Play

Two four-year-old girls were playing outside on a beautiful, sunny, spring day. They had taken off their shoes and were using small, plastic shovels to dig in the sand around the climbing structure. Some of the sand covered Anna's feet. "Oh!" she cried out. "That sand is really cool on my toes." "I know," said Kendra. "Let's dig a hole and cover our feet with sand." They proceeded to do so, laughing and talking as they dug the hole, stuck in their feet, and filled the hole up to their shins. A student teacher, Matt, came by and asked, "Hey girls, what happened to your feet?" "We covered them up with the sand!" the girls replied, giggling. "But where are your toes?" Matt asked. The girls wiggled their toes and sand fell away until their feet were visible again. "Do you want me to cover them up again?" Matt asked. "Yes!" was the enthusiastic reply. By then, two other children had joined. They took off their shoes and shouted to Matt, "Cover mine! Cover mine!" Matt obliged and ended up with a group of six children sitting in a circle, demanding that he cover their feet with sand. Matt worked hard, digging sand and pouring it over the children's feet while the children sat back, calling out, "More, Matt, more!" and waiting while he tried to meet their demands.

Matt meant well in joining the children's play. He asked what they were doing, encouraging them to talk about their play, his interest validating their engagement. However, he took over the play instead of enhancing it. The children became passive recipients dependent on his actions. They were not contributing ideas or problem solving in any way. Like Matt, many teachers find themselves in situations where their involvement in the children's play does not enhance it. It's important to recognize this and turn the play back over to the children.

Here is a list of signals that indicate it is time to exit the play:

- children become passively involved rather than active participants in creating the play situation
- children become louder, more demanding, and more out of control
- children ignore the teacher's suggestions and continue doing what they were doing
- children leave the play area

What could Matt have done differently? There are ways to exit play that enhance it for children. Here's what Matt did:

Outdoor Sand Play, continued

Matt realizes that the children are getting louder and more strident as they yell out. He sees that he's doing all of the work and that the children are in a passive role. "Hey everybody," he says as he stops digging. "How about if we get more shovels so everybody can do some digging and covering up feet? I need help! This is too much for just me to do." Three of the children pull their feet out of the sand and go to get shovels. The other three wait for them to return. When they do, Matt says, "How about we take turns? Some of you can be the diggers and cover the others' feet. Then, we'll switch." The children agree to this division of labor and play it out while Matt sits off to the side giving encouragement but no longer doing the digging himself. The children stay engaged for another ten to fifteen minutes.

It's important for preschool and kindergarten teachers to keep in mind that the goal is for children to direct their own play as much as possible. "When you intentionally involve yourself in play to further children's cognitive skills, interactions with peers, or role playing, you scaffold the learning so they can reach their optimal development. As children reach that development, adults move back and let children carry the play" (Heidemann and Hewitt 2010, 116). Adult interaction and support may very well be needed. But the play has more value when adults provide just the right amount of support so that it can be sustained by the children, not dependent on the adult to lead every aspect of it and not placing children in passive roles. "Children who are capable of directing their own play often just leave or become uninterested when the adult is too involved in forming the play scenario" (Heidemann and Hewitt 2010, 117). Knowing when to enter and exit play takes careful observation of the play as it is occurring and consideration of the children's response when an adult does enter the play.

Sustain Play through Well-Timed Interventions

Like entering and exiting play, teachers also have to be careful in using questions and comments as a way to enhance children's play. Sometimes a teacher's best intentions when interacting with children in play actually interrupt what

is happening. The goal is to facilitate the play, to help it move to or sustain a higher level. Unfortunately, some teachers think that in order to incorporate early learning standards and curricular goals into play experiences, they need to interrupt what the children are doing to ask questions about concepts. For example, they may ask, "How many medium-sized bears do you have?" or "What color is that plate?" This is just not the case. There are ways to integrate standards and goals into play that do not interrupt. Chapter 8 explores effective integration strategies in more depth.

In the following example of a teacher's involvement with children in a dramatic play scenario, is the teacher helping the children sustain their engagement or is she interrupting what they are doing?

Magic Capes

Three boys and one girl (all four-year-olds) are playing in the dramatic play area, putting scarves around their backs and calling them "magic capes." Ms. Denise helps them tie the scarves and asks them, "Why are the scarves magic?" Jacob responds, "Because they make us fly!" and proceeds to laugh loudly and run around the room. Eli and Luis follow him, bumping into each other, while Alejandra watches quietly. Ms. Denise says, "If you boys don't settle down, we'll have to take the scarves away. Why don't you come over here and play with Alejandra? I know! Your magic capes could be magic chef capes to help you cook a wonderful dinner." The boys continue to run around the room and Alejandra remains where she is. (Gronlund and James 2008, 56)

The timing of questions or comments is important. Well-timed questions can encourage children to think, problem solve, try a different approach, incorporate symbolic materials, or develop new play themes. If done well, the results should be evident: the children show greater interest in their play; they complicate what they are doing; and they sustain their engagement for longer periods. However, poorly timed questioning can turn children off to the play altogether. It's an interruption. It stops the flow of the play. It makes the children lose their investment in the roles they were playing or in the construction process they were enjoying. "Even when the teacher is asking the children to tell her what to do, she is still directing the play, although subtly, and thus play is now a teacher-directed activity" (Bodrova and Leong 2007, 146). Teacher-directed activities do not give children the opportunity to develop their own

self-regulation while child-directed play does. Teachers must figure out ways to interact with children in support of their self-regulation.

How does a teacher know when to step in and ask some questions or make some comments without interrupting or directing children's play? One way is to establish a quiet presence near the play area. Instead of pushing into the play scenario, good teachers observe nearby, giving attention (and therefore value) to what's going on, but not interacting at first. Instead, they watch and listen. Then, they may begin with comments that acknowledge or encourage what the children are doing. For example, a teacher might say something like, "Boy, I see lots of cooks in that kitchen!" Or, "You children are sure working together to build that ramp. It's really long!" If the children ignore the comments, the teacher may decide to observe a bit longer. But if the children respond, the teacher has an invitation to enter into the play with a question or two.

If children call teachers over to their play area and invite them to see what they've done, they are giving the teacher an opportunity to make comments and ask questions as well. Children delight in sharing their constructions, successes, and story lines with the caring adults in their lives. Their play is important to them. So, when teachers are responsive to their invitations to see what they are doing, they can take advantage of a great opportunity to interact in ways that will enhance the play even more. Here's an example of a teacher who established a quiet presence nearby and then was invited into a child's pretend scenario.

Going to the Moon

Enrique had turned the workbench into a spaceship. After he played for a few minutes he said, "Ms. Donna, pretend you are my boss." Ms. Donna said, "Okay." He said, "Boss?" Ms. Donna said, "Yes?" He said, "How do we get to the moon?" Ms. Donna said, "Go two degrees south then forty-three degrees west." He said, "Okay, here we go. Put your seat belt on. Three, two, one. Blast off." After a minute or two he said, "We're coming in for a landing. Oh no, we're going to crash!" After the crash he asked, "Are you okay, Boss?" Ms. Donna said, "Yes!" He said, "Good. Do you know we only had five seconds of fuel left when we landed?"

When the timing is right, what kinds of questions should teachers ask? Open-ended questions are usually better. Close-ended questions have only one answer and include questions like

- How many do you have?
- What color or shape is this?
- Which piece matches?
- What letter is this?

Open-ended questions, on the other hand, have many possible answers. They encourage thinking, problem solving, and applying knowledge. They challenge children to figure things out themselves while the teacher gently guides them toward a successful solution or an interesting discovery. Vygotskians call this “educational dialogue,” and compare it to the questioning techniques used by the Greek philosopher Socrates. “The teacher has a goal in mind and uses questions to guide the students toward that goal” (Bodrova and Leong 2007, 85). Here are some examples of open-ended questions and prompts:

- What do you think will happen if you . . . ?
- Tell me about your construction or creation.
- What’s going on in your house (hospital, restaurant, spaceship)?
- What else could happen in your house (hospital, restaurant, spaceship)?
- Do you need something else to make that construction (play house)?
- What ideas do you have to solve that problem?

Teachers learn a lot about children’s thinking when they ask such questions. They may uncover misunderstandings about how something works or miscommunications among the players in the scenario. They can see where support is needed, where additional materials might be helpful, or where some mediation could take place.

And what kinds of comments sustain children’s play rather than interrupt it? Comments that acknowledge and encourage rather than praise and compliment sustain play. Instead of saying “Good job,” or “You look so pretty in your dress-up clothes,” a teacher says, “Wow, you used lots of blocks to build that bridge,” or “I see that you’re wearing a hat and high-heeled shoes.” Then the teacher can follow up with questions that will get the child thinking, such as, “What else might you need to add to your bridge? Does it need more support

anywhere? Are there other details that you might include?” and “Who are you pretending to be when you are all dressed up like that? Where are you going? Someplace special? What will you do there?” The combination of encouraging comments and open-ended questions sustain children’s engagement rather than interrupting it in most circumstances.

Consider the following scenario. Are the teacher’s questions and comments well-timed and do they help to facilitate the children’s play?

Lego Constructions Scene #1

Three four-year-olds had been working at the Lego table for ten minutes, each building vehicles with wheels, when the teacher, Anita, sat down and said, “Hey, you guys, what kind of cars are you building?” Latisha said, “It’s an ambulance.” Marco said nothing, as did Tony. “How many wheels on your ambulance?” Anita asked. Latisha replied, “I’m still building it. It’s gonna rescue people in the accidents.” Marco picked up his construction and flew it in the air, making an engine noise as he did so. Anita asked, “What kind of airplane did you make, Marco?” “It’s not an airplane—it’s the space shuttle,” he replied. “Oh, what colors of Legos did you use on your shuttle?” Marco flew his space shuttle over to the block area leaving the Lego table altogether. Throughout all of this conversation, Tony continued to work quietly, putting more Legos together for a very long vehicle. Anita said, “Tony, what are you making?” Tony whispered, “My grandma and grandpa’s got one.” “They have a big car like that?” she asked. Tony responded, “No, they go camping in it and they park it in my driveway when they come visit.” “Oh, is it an RV or a trailer?” Anita said. “I sometimes sleep in it when they come,” he said. She asked, “How many people can sleep in it?” Tony said, “Sometimes we cook in it too.”

Anita’s intentions were good ones, but her questioning was an interruption to the children’s play. She did not establish a quiet presence nearby their play and was not invited to join them. In her first approach, she assumed the children were making cars without asking about their constructions. She asked mostly close-ended questions and did not follow up on what the children told her to engage in a supportive dialogue with them. They gave her hints about their understanding of ambulances, space shuttles, and recreational vehicles.

But instead of following up on those topics, she continued to return to questions about how many and what colors were involved. Consider the scene again with Anita attempting to sustain the children's play using a different approach:

Lego Constructions Scene #2

Three four-year-olds had been working at the Lego table for ten minutes, each building vehicles with wheels, while the teacher, Anita, quietly sat nearby and watched. Latisha turned to her and said, "Look, Anita. It's an ambulance." "Oh," Anita replied. "I can see it has some people on it." Marco said nothing, as did Tony. Latisha replied, "I'm still building it. It's gonna rescue people in the accidents." Anita asked, "Was there a car accident or a different kind of accident?" Latisha responded, "Yeah, some cars got crashed." Anita said, "Oh dear, what will happen when the ambulance gets to the accident?" "It's gonna take the people to the hospital," Latisha said. Marco picked up his construction and flew it in the air, making an engine noise as he did so. Anita said, "I hear your construction making a noise, Marco." "It's the space shuttle," he replied. "Where is your space shuttle flying to?" she asked. Marco flew his space shuttle over to the block area leaving the Lego table altogether. Anita said, "To the block area?" "Yeah, it's gonna land over there and then it will come back," he said. Throughout all of this conversation, Tony continued to work quietly putting more Legos together for a very long vehicle. "Tony, I see that your vehicle is really long," Anita said. Tony whispered, "My grandma and grandpa's got one." "They do, huh?" Anita replied. He said, "Yeah, they go camping in it and they park it in my driveway when they come visit." Anita asked, "Oh, like a camper with beds?" Tony said, "I sometimes sleep in it when they come." "What else can you do in the camper?" Anita asked. And Tony said, "Sometimes we cook in it too." Anita said, "I wonder if there's a way that you could make the kitchen in your Lego camper. Do you see any Legos that might help you? What could you use for a table or for the chairs?" Marco flew his space shuttle back over to the table and landed it in front of Anita. "Is your space shuttle going on another trip? Where will your space shuttle fly to next?" she asked him. The construction play continued for another twenty minutes with lots more conversation and building.

Anita did not interrupt, but established a quiet presence nearby and then waited for an invitation before engaging with the group at the table. Rather than having an agenda of goals unrelated to the children's construction play, she asked questions that encouraged the children to talk further about their constructions and think about added details.

There are some times when an interruption and a well-timed question or comment can turn the play around. If the situation needs immediate adult intervention because of safety issues, questions or comments may be a way to very quickly turn the play back to something more productive for the children. If safety is not a concern, then it may be wiser to establish a quiet presence and wait for an invitation to join in children's play before using such strategies. Remember the Throwing Bears scenario from earlier in this chapter? In that instance the play deteriorated into hilarity and throwing of objects. It could have become dangerous, chaotic, and out of control. The following story shows one way of using interrupting and questioning to turn such play around.

Throwing Colored Bears with Teacher Questioning

Three four-year-old boys are invited by their teacher, Gina, to sort colored bears into round sorting trays with multiple compartments. As long as she is there with them, the boys cooperate in the sorting activity, talking about the colors of the bears as they sort them. As she moves on after five or six minutes to help in another area of the classroom, their interaction with the bears changes. "Hey, I know," says Alec. "Let's see who can throw them into the tray!" The boys move the trays to the opposite end of the table and begin to throw the bears. Their initial throws involve aiming at the small compartments. As bears fly across the table and land in the compartments, some of them bounce out again onto the table from the force of the throw. The boys laugh hysterically and continue to throw the bears harder and harder. Their laughter grows louder by the minute. Soon, bears are flying across the table and onto the floor. The boys' laughter is high-pitched. They pound on and lie across the table as each bear lands. (Gronlund and James 2008, 50)

Gina moves across the room and says to the boys, "It's gotten very loud over here. And I see that you're throwing the bears instead of sorting them." The boys stop throwing but still giggle. She continues, "It looks to me like you wanted to do something different with the

bears. That's okay. But throwing them into these small compartments probably isn't safe. What are some other things that you might do with the bears?" The boys look at her blankly, and Noah says, "I don't know." Gina says, "I wonder if you might like to practice throwing with something else, like beanbags and soft balls. We could set up a hoop as the target over there across the room. You could try throwing from different distances and see how many times you can get the beanbags and balls inside the hoop. What do you think?" Noah and his friends yell out, "Yeah! Let's do that." Gina suggests that they clean up the bears first, then help her get out the throwing items and hoop. She then supervises as they play the throwing game.

Gina made it clear that throwing the bears in the compartments was not to continue. Then she made comments about what she had seen and asked questions about the boys' interests. When she saw that they did not have any clear ideas on how to use the bears in a safe way, she suggested that they consider throwing suitable items. They responded positively to that and were able to continue playing productively after her interruption and suggestion for a new activity.

Coach and Mentor the Players

Sometimes children need a coach or mentor to be successful in play experiences. It's preferable to have a child in this mentoring role. "Other children are much more effective mentors for play than the teacher, because the child is a 'child,' which means that they can engage in play without making it a teacher-directed activity" (Bodrova and Leong 2007, 153). However, some children need the help of a teacher to enter play, to engage with others, or to sustain play. Once again, teachers are faced with that tricky balance that was discussed before—that dance where the lead keeps changing between teacher and child. The goal is to provide just the right amount of support so that children can move into play experiences on their own without the need of adult involvement.

In what ways can teachers coach or mentor a child in play? Most of the suggestions in this chapter are ways of coaching: getting play started, knowing when to enter and exit the play, and sustaining play through well-timed interventions. These strategies involve teachers briefly; they step out of the action

as quickly as possible. But for some children, that's not enough. They will not move beyond chaotic or simplistic play without a teacher by their side, acting as a coplayer, modeling play behaviors, and talking through the play process. "Coplayers function as equal play partners with children. . . . The teacher carefully follows the flow of the dramatic action, letting the children take the lead most of the time. In being the children's play partner, opportunities often arise for the teacher to model sociodramatic play skills such as role playing, make-believe transformations, and peer interaction strategies" (Johnson, Christie, and Wardle 2005, 272). Acting as a coplayer can be very helpful for a child who has behavioral problems or poor social skills. Consider the following play scenario:

Doggie Play

Three kindergarten girls were playing in the house corner. Mahela was on all fours, barking and growling. Christine and Lucia were attempting to get Mahela to follow them around. "Come on, doggie. You're on your leash. You have to come this way. We're taking you for walk." No matter what they said, Mahela crawled in a different direction. Lucia called out, "I have a juicy bone. I have a juicy bone." Briefly, Mahela crawled back and pretended to gobble the bone, then took off again. Finally, Christine said, "Forget it, Lucia. Let's go cook dinner. Just leave her." The two girls went back into the kitchen area of the house corner and started to play with the pots and pans. Mahela stayed off to the side, still on all fours, panting and watching the girls.

The teacher, Phil, had been observing this scenario. He knew that Mahela did not have many established social relationships in the class and often played alone. He thought this might be a good opportunity to try to support her initial attempts to engage with the other girls—and he guessed that being the dog probably was a safer, more comfortable role for her than being herself. He pulled a chair over next to Mahela and asked, "Can I be a doggie with you?" Mahela nodded her head. Phil sat in his chair, put up his hands like paws, and panted along with Mahela. "Ruff, ruff," he said. "We doggies want some dog food, ruff, ruff." Mahela growled and nodded her head. Lucia and Christine brought over two pots and put them down in front of the doggies. Christine said, "Here you go. Here's some dog food we just made for you, doggies." Mahela and Phil pretended

to eat it, then Mahela began to crawl off again. Phil said, "Ruff, ruff, now you have to take us for a walk over to the block area. Ruff, ruff, doggie Mahela, come back, we're going for our walk." Mahela watched as Phil crouched down and walked along with Lucia and Christine. "Ruff, ruff, I have my leash on so I'm walking with my masters," he said. Mahela crawled back over and joined the party. Lucia called out, "Let's find some balls to play catch with our doggies. That's what my dog does. He likes to chase tennis balls." Back in his teacher role, Phil suggested that they get the basket of soft balls down from the shelf. As he helped them get the basket, Mahela chased after a ball Lucia threw, picked it up in her mouth, and brought it back to Lucia. Phil suggested she use her paws instead to prevent germs spreading, and the girls continued to engage in a throw and fetch game for another few minutes. Then Mahela said, "Ruff, ruff, doggie go to sleep now." The girls made a dog bed of blankets, covered up Mahela, and petted her as she pretended to sleep. "I'm done playing," Mahela announced after a couple of minutes. Phil thought, "That was a pretty sustained interaction for Mahela," and smiled to himself.

When working in an inclusive setting, preschool and kindergarten teachers may find that they need to coach children with special needs as well as their typically developing peers. The play of children with special needs will be influenced by their developmental capabilities. They may need the teacher to provide entry into a playgroup and language to communicate in the play. Or they may need to imitate a teacher's actions in order to move into pretend play and may need directions for what to do. Consider this example:

Feeding the Baby

Andy, a boy with Down syndrome, attends an inclusionary preschool with typically developing peers. His teacher, Ellen, is working on engaging Andy and his peers in play together. Today she sees that several children are playing family roles in the dramatic play area—cooking, washing dishes, and caring for babies. She invites Andy to join her in that area and he agrees. "Hi, Mom and Dad," Ellen says. "The big brother and sister are here to help take care of the babies." Joseph looks up from the stove, "Are you the sister, Miss Ellen?" "I am," she replies, "and Andy's the big brother. Do you want us to

give the babies their bottles?" "Sure," Joseph replies. Marissa brings over the bottles and says, "Here you go. I'm the Mom, but I'm going shopping. So you guys got to babysit, okay?" Ellen gets a baby and holds it gently in her arms, feeding it the bottle. "See, Andy? Can you get a baby and feed it too?" Andy imitates her actions and smiles broadly.

Coplaying can also be a way to encourage typically developing children to include children with special needs in the play experience.

The way that the teacher structures the classroom can support children's interactions. For example, researchers reported increased peer interaction between children with and without disabilities when teachers introduced activities, established rules, assigned roles, and provided materials. . . .

Activities that were more structured required fewer social skills for children to interact, and better allowed for children with and without disabilities to participate together. . . .

Teachers not only manipulate the environment to provide various types of activities for children, but they also model appropriate social interactions and facilitate social interactions between children with and without disabilities. . . . Play behavior between children with and without disabilities may be initiated by teachers, and children's continued interaction may be further supported by teachers." (Hestenes and Carroll 2000, 232)

When coaching children in play and becoming a coplayer with them, teachers do not need to focus on dramatic play alone. Teachers can also join in block building, construction with manipulatives, and sensory play. Modeling how to use the materials in different ways, and providing a steady verbal stream of "think talk" can help the children complicate what they are doing as in the following scenario:

Block Play with the Teacher

Preschool teacher Alana had noticed that the block play going on in her classroom was repetitive and lackluster. Children stacked blocks and compared sizes, but they did not coordinate their actions with each other, nor did they describe what they were building

(a restaurant, fort, or bridge). So Alana decided to join the block builders today and announced this as children were choosing their play activities at large-group time. "Today, I'm going to be one of the people building in the block area," Alana announced. "I really like to build with blocks. Hmmm, I wonder what I'll build? I'll have to think about that and make a plan." The children laughed and clamored for who would join her. She helped them make their choices and assured everyone who was interested that they would get a chance throughout the day to work with her in blocks.

In the block area, Alana kept up a running conversation with herself, describing her actions, sharing her thinking, and wondering aloud what she might add next as she placed block after block on her structure. Children built alongside of her, listening and sometimes making suggestions, or adding something to her structure. As they did so, Alana asked, "Would you like to build with me? We could make this much better together, don't you think?" Soon she had all of the children working together with her on a large, extensive structure. "What do you think we're making here?" she asked. Several ideas were shared and they took a vote—a McDonald's restaurant. "If it's McDonald's, where are the golden arches?" Alana asked. One child found arches. Another child decided to make the sign and got paper, markers, and tape. Other children went off to the house area to bring back food items to sell in the McDonald's. Before long, hamburgers and fries were being sold and the scene had changed into both construction and dramatic play. Alana became more and more quiet as the children took over the play, her running commentary no longer needed.

There are many actions that teachers can take to enhance children's play so that it reaches this high level. This chapter has identified several of them. The next chapter takes the idea of teacher facilitation to another level and looks at provocations and emotions as powerful ways to lead preschoolers and kindergartners to even more rewarding and beneficial play.

Provoking Children into More Complex Play

The interventions are careful and specific—designed to facilitate children's thinking, to "provoke" them to go further in their thinking. . . . Rather than constraining children, the teachers are seeking to open up the possibilities for them, just as a maestro helps students learn to play an instrument, but does not make the music for them. (Kantor and Whaley 1998, 322)

Gail and Mark had both noticed over the past couple of weeks that their class of kindergarten children was not making good use of the dramatic play area. Much of the play involved taking all of the plastic food items, dishes, and silverware and dumping them on the table. No scripts developed for the play. The children were often silly and loud. Both teachers had tried a variety of interventions to get more productive play going without positive results. During their Friday afternoon planning session, they decided they would do something radical to provoke a response from the children to see what might develop. Here's what happened:

Kindergarten Bakery

At the end of group meeting time on Monday morning, Gail announced, "We have something different in the dramatic play area. In fact, why don't we all go over there right now so you can see what's changed." The group followed Mark and Gail over to the corner of the classroom where a half-wall defined a kitchen area with play stove, sink, refrigerator, table, and chairs. As the children