

## What You Should Look For in Your School as You Implement Play-Based Learning

This guide details the components of play, and the roles of teachers and students within play-based learning. These look-fors are what should be seen inside a classroom when play-based learning is flourishing.

### During guided play in kindergarten classrooms...

Teachers are:

- + Choosing play-based activities for lesson plans that embed the learning standard.
- + Clearly stating learning objectives for activities, and providing clear instructions prior to beginning an activity.
- + Supporting instruction through the inclusion of materials that allow for practical, active application of the skill being learned.
- + Encouraging students to use analysis and reasoning skills during activities.
- + Modeling curiosity and engaging students in conversation with open-ended questions and advanced vocabulary (Why...? How...? What could happen next...?) and providing ample time to pause for students to process.
- + Scaffolding and differentiating students' learning when necessary.
- + Assessing children's understanding through observations and anecdotal notes.

Students are:

- + Engaging in a hands-on activity using manipulatives, realia, or other materials that support active, contextualized learning.
- + Having conversations and engaging in back and forth exchanges that require expanded verbal responses, both with peers and teachers.
- + Explaining their thinking.

### During student-initiated play in kindergarten classrooms...

Teachers are:

- + Ensuring the classroom environment supports active learning by including clearly-defined play areas, materials that address learning standards, and opportunities to connect play with current curricular topics.
- + Using self and parallel talk, advanced language, and open-ended questions to expand the complexity of students' play and to encourage them to explain their thinking while playing.
- + Providing support to resolve peer conflicts as they arise during play.
- + Creating opportunities to engage in sensory and social-emotional activities.

- + Encouraging students to persist in the completion of their selected activity.
- + Offering support to children to enter into play scenarios with peers.
- + Observing how children interact with materials and making notes on how to modify materials to expand learning based on student interests and needs.
- + Helping children plan their play.
- + Assessing students on demonstrated skills within the context of play.

#### Students are:

- + Choosing materials and activities based on personal interest.
- + Engaging in an activity or with preferred materials for an uninterrupted, extended period of time.
- + Engaging in conversation with their peers and teacher about what they are doing (making predictions, brainstorming, experimenting, and explaining what is happening, how they figured it out, or what they could try next.)
- + Interacting, negotiating, and cooperating with peers in small groups or pairs.
- + Building upon play schemes over time (day after day, week after week), expanding their original ideas and using prior knowledge to deepen their understanding.

#### Additional Resources on Play-Based Learning:

- + Jaesook L. Gilbert, Helene Arbouet Harte, and Carol Patrick. Purposeful Play Leads to School Readiness article
- + KIDS Digital Resource. <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/KIDS-Digital-Resources.pdf>
- + NAEYC. 2020. Developmentally Appropriate Practice National Association for the Education of Young Children. [Developmentally Appropriate Practice](#)
- + National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. [Early Childhood Generalist Standards Third Edition for teachers of students ages 3–8](#)
- + Taylor, M. E., & Boyer, W. (2019). Play-Based Learning: Evidence-based research to improve children's learning experiences in the kindergarten classroom. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 48(2), 127–133. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-019-00989-7>
- + ResponsiveClassroom.org, [Classroom Setup](#), an overview of the classroom set up in a play-based classroom.
- + Teach Plus Illinois [Report Mastering Kids: Voices from the Field](#), 2019.
- + Teach Plus Illinois [Implementing Play-Based Learning Across Illinois Kindergarten Classrooms: Recommendations from Teach Plus Early Childhood Fellows](#), 2022.