



Early Childhood
Australia

Western Australia Branch

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STATEMENT ON PLAY

Everyone
benefits when
children play



Our WA Play Strategy Campaign

Early Childhood Australia (ECA), advocates for the rights of all young children during the critical early years (from birth to the age of eight), to thrive and learn through play at home, in the community, within early learning and care settings and through the early years of school.

We specifically acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities who have for thousands of years loved, nurtured and played with young children to ensure their well-being health and development.

We believe that one of the important rights of all young children is their right to play.

ECA Western Australia Play Initiative

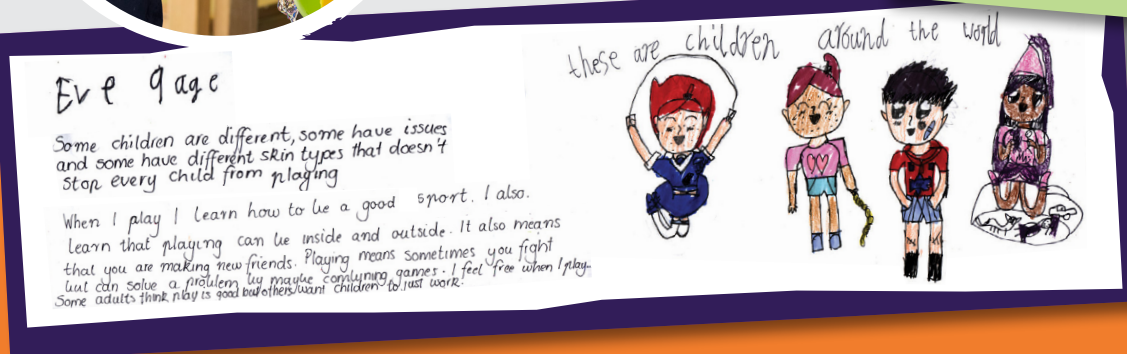
In 2014 ECA WA branch commenced a Play Strategy campaign in response to a range of concerns identified by various Early Childhood stakeholders. Specifically, that quality play experiences are diminishing in WA early years' settings. Our members called for play to be reinstated as a fundamental entitlement of childhood.

This *Statement on Play* (the Statement) is an important part of our Play Strategy campaign.

Vision

At the end of our campaign we envisage the development of a government-led WA Play Strategy, which will articulate the critical importance of play and recognise play based-learning as a leading research-based pedagogy across the broad spectrum of early childhood programs and the wider community.

We hope that this *Statement* and the Play Strategy will encourage cooperation between families, policy makers, planners and early childhood practitioners to collectively ensure that child-initiated play and play-based learning are readily available to all Western Australian children.



Guiding principles

Children's rights

This *Statement* has been developed in the context of children's right to play, in line with Article 31 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). According to Freeman (1996, p.70) "rights are entitlements... which we do not have to grovel or beg to get". Given that the Australian Government ratified the UNCRC almost thirty years ago, we believe that it has a responsibility to progressively implement the Convention by incorporating it into law, policy and practice.

At the forefront of these considerations is ensuring that children are healthy and happy and are given opportunities to flourish and maximise their potential.

The value of play

Play has no single universally accepted definition, however it is a natural occurrence in childhood and happens across varied cultural contexts and environments. It can be perceived as "the highest expression of human development in childhood" (Froebel, Fletcher & Welton, 1912). Researchers agree that unstructured play directed by children and play-based learning, facilitated by skilful early childhood practitioners, benefit children's overall well-being and development (Lester & Russell, 2010; Whitebread, 2012; Wood, 2014). Limited access to play has negative implications for children's developmental outcomes (Milteer, Ginsburg & Mulligan, 2012).

Neurological research demonstrates that frequent opportunities to be engaged in play assists the development of a healthy brain and improves executive function; including paying attention, planning, prioritising and staying focused on tasks. Therefore play facilitates children's readiness to learn, academic achievements and future life outcomes.

In addition, play-based experiences enable children to engage in real-life and an imaginary world that encourages creativity and physical development; challenges their thinking; promotes communication and nurtures social-emotional well-being, self-identity and resilience.

As resilience is important for all children, but especially those who are vulnerable, it is important we value children's play as a life-enhancing daily occurrence.

Although play enhances all children's developmental outcomes, its role in encouraging socio-emotional development and improving self-regulation cannot be overestimated. Play allows children to engage in positive interactions, learn social rules and develop meaningful relationships with important adults and with each other. These relationships are invaluable for children's social functioning and engagement in learning.

Research findings are clear. Play matters for children in reaching their full developmental potential. As such, it benefits not only children, but also their families and the society as a whole (Cuhna, Heckman, Lochner & Masterov, 2006).

The context of play – environments where children should have opportunities to play

To ensure that young children are at the forefront of our considerations, we must recognise that their well-being is the shared responsibility of the entire community.

Given the role of play in optimising children's developmental outcomes, all Australian children should be provided with daily opportunities to participate in play experiences both indoors and outdoors in a range of environments including:

- in their home;
- early childhood education settings including the early years of schooling; and
- the community.

Play – "the highest expression of human development in childhood"

(Froebel, Fletcher & Welton, 1912).

Overview

This *Play Statement* was the initiative of the WA branch of ECA to promote children's right to play at home, in education and care, at school and in the community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ECA WA thanks the generous contributions of Kyla Williams (photography), Clayton Cabral (design), Perth Individual Montessori College, and the children who contributed to the production of this Statement on Play.

ECA WA also wishes to acknowledge members of an ECAWA appointed Steering Committee (2018) who shared their individual expertise and experience in relation to the importance of play-based learning and assisted the WA Play Strategy subcommittee (2017-2019) to develop an inclusive Play Statement that will benefit all Western Australians.

Play matters and needs to become everyone's business.

To ensure children's access to play - We urge others to take action

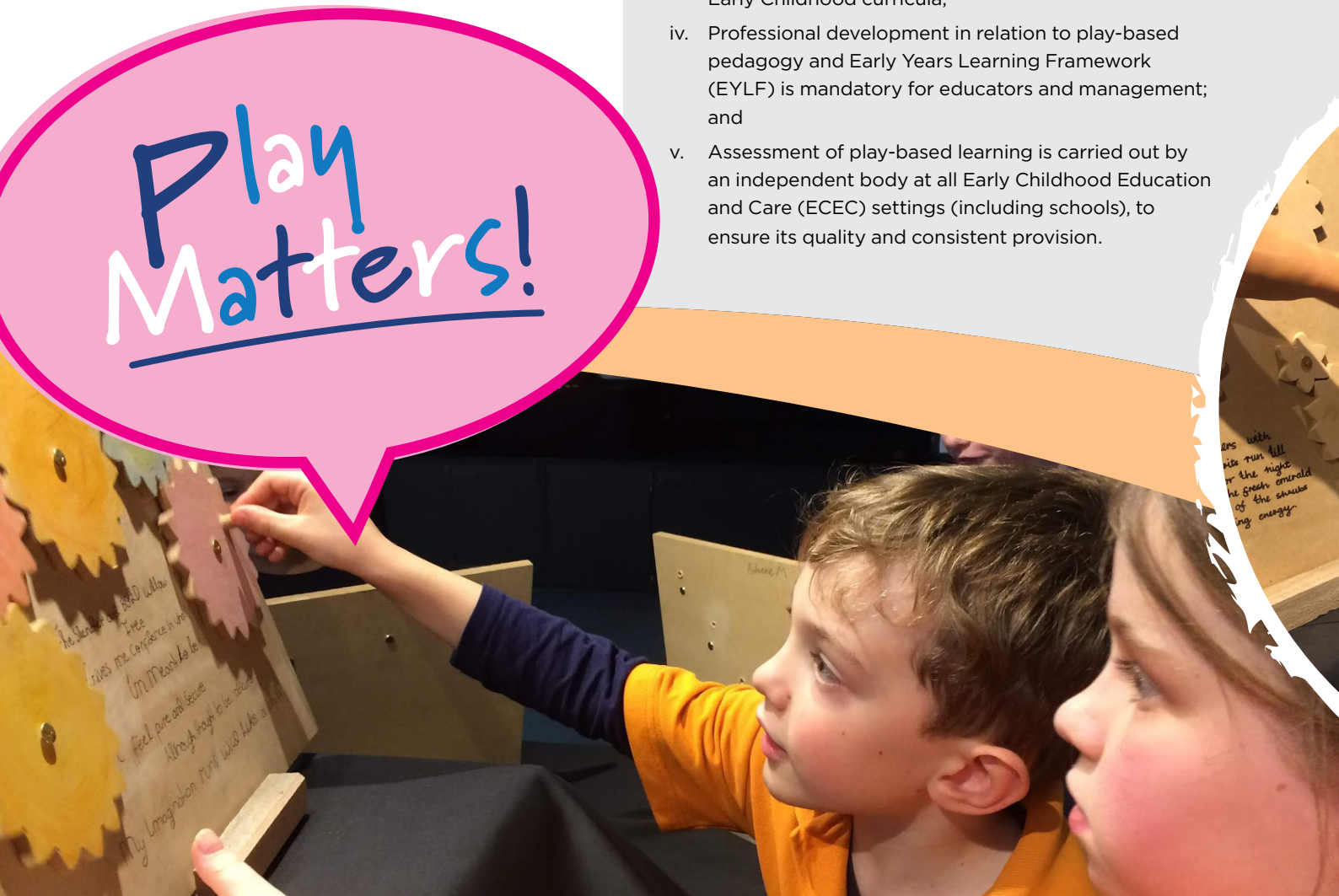
A GOVERNMENT - POLICY AND ACCESS

We envisage that the Western Australian Government will take a leading role in promoting the importance of play and play-based learning.

It is critical that:

- i. The value of play is promoted directly to families and the broader community;
- ii. A play policy is developed at the government level to guide individual services;
- iii. A play-based approach is clearly articulated in all Early Childhood curricula;
- iv. Professional development in relation to play-based pedagogy and Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is mandatory for educators and management; and
- v. Assessment of play-based learning is carried out by an independent body at all Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings (including schools), to ensure its quality and consistent provision.

Play Matters!



"You get fit and you are able to climb on the monkey bars, helps you sit with your leg crossed. Playing makes me feel good. My life would be horrible if I didn't get to play."

Lorelei, 8 years



B EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE PROVIDERS (including the early years of schooling)

The perception that formalised learning environments create better educational outcomes coupled with the increased pressure on improving achievements in national literacy and numeracy tests have resulted in some WA schools providing limited time for play-based approaches (Barblett, Knaus, & Barratt-Pugh, 2016; Hesterman, 2018). Consequently, concerns have been raised that young children are not given enough opportunities to be active, self-directed learners in some early childhood settings.

It is critical that:

- i. Each provider has a context specific policy on play;
- ii. Play-based learning is at the core of all practice;
- iii. There is an ongoing commitment to the provision of high-quality professional development in relation to play-based pedagogies aligned with Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF); and
- iv. The early childhood learning environment is designed to support children's ready access to play resources and recognised as the 'third teacher'.



"Play makes people feel good. It helps children get fit other than going to the gym. Teaches kids how to sort stuff by themselves."

Arlo, 7 years



C FAMILIES CAN ACT TOO!

Families need to be provided with encouragement, support and access to play resources; because as children grow and develop, their preferences for the types of play change.

0-2 year-old children readily engage in play that involves all their senses. They thrive in sensory rich environments which can be explored in the presence of encouraging and trusted adults. They enjoy simple everyday objects and versatile toys that can be explored through hearing, touch, smell, sight and taste; and manipulated by pushing and pulling. They enjoy safe outdoor environments where nature can be experienced firsthand. Young children under three enjoy pretend play and will play-out things they see in the home and in familiar settings.

Some play ideas include:

- Giving infants and toddlers opportunities to see themselves in a mirror – talk about what they see: eyes, nose, hands, hair etc.;
- Providing toddlers with a variety of safe objects to hold and feel – use descriptive words and share your observations when describing these varied items; and
- Visiting quality nature playgrounds will provide young children with opportunities for early exploration (one example is Lottery West Ivy Watson playground at Kings Park designed for children aged from birth to five years).

3-5-year-old children enjoy pretend and construction play. This age group especially enjoy collaborative activities with adults and other children of similar age.

Some play ideas include:

- Playing with blocks (for example big wooden or plastic blocks) and other construction materials such as, for example, empty milk or egg cartons;
- Playing with dress ups and other objects that stimulate imagination and imitate the children's real world (for example small tables, chairs, hammocks and beds combined with a range of scarfs, cardboard boxes and simple costumes can be arranged into pretend home, hospitals or shops);

- Visiting playgrounds with rocks, trees, structures to climb, lakes, bridges, cycle paths and fountains provide opportunities to stimulate children's imagination and challenge their physical skills (such as Synergy Playground at Kings Park);
- Simple cooking (for example stir fries, koftas, pikelets or cupcakes) where children will follow picture recipes and enjoy mixing dry and wet ingredients; and
- Finger-plays, nonsense songs and playing word games – “adults are big and babies are.....”

6-8-year-old children enjoy games with rules and sophisticated pretend play. It is important to give them opportunities to be involved in games, but at the same time ensure that these are NOT controlled by adults.

Some play ideas include:

- Going on a treasure hunt;
- Simple obstacle courses and ball play that encourage children to make their own rules;
- Listening to music and discussing the shapes children create with their own bodies;
- Encouraging all forms of movement and dance to various music styles;
- Providing children with opportunities to have pretend radio and TV stations or performing on stage; and
- Visiting playgrounds that provide opportunities for games of hide and seek and exploration of the natural environment (for example the Synergy and Rio Tinto Naturescape at Kings Park).



D COMMUNITY

Local councils and other community organisations can fulfill an important role in further encouraging children's access to play opportunities in the community. There are many examples of good practice in the provision of local nature and adventure playgrounds and play activities, which can be readily accessed by children and families.



Some examples in the Perth area include:

Dinosaur Park in Kingsway with an emphasis on nature and sensory play; it has a big statue of a dinosaur, balancing logs around the playground, rocks to climb, a musical play area and a small water play feature for paddling.

Kings Park includes several children's playgrounds for children to connect with nature and to appreciate our unique Western Australian environment. These varied playgrounds and large recreational spaces provide opportunities for children to explore, be challenged and have fun.

Piney Lakes Park in Winthrop is surrounded by a beautiful natural bushland creating a tranquil and peaceful place. It has a rich Whadjuk Noongar history and features a sensory play park, a boardwalk to the wetlands for nature study of turtles, frogs and birds. The park also includes a recreational lake, a small waterfall, sculptures, and a Noongar six season walk and bike path. In addition it is surrounded by open space and picnic areas.

Bibra Lake Regional Playground includes exciting and challenging play spaces and equipment such as a double flying fox, swings, a tree-top aerial rope walk, in-ground trampolines, sandpit, water play, pole maze, balance beams, and giant turtle splash pad. The Yarning Circle of 'talking' rocks present important local Noongar stories, the "Hollow Hill" play hill inspired by Aboriginal stories, along with cubbies and climbing frames have been modelled after Aboriginal fish traps.

More information about these and other facilities that support play experiences can be found online. Visit the websites of local councils and other community organisations for further information regarding local resources, community events and activities for families and children.

"Play means learning and making new friends."

Poppy, 5 years



Significance of the ECA WA Statement on Play

ECA WA believes all Western Australian children have the right to access quality play opportunities in education, care, school and community settings.

ECA WA encourages every stakeholder to take steps towards implementing the actions and principles outlined in this *Statement*. We will work with ECA members, governments, the community and others across the early childhood field to realise our vision for play for young children.

We encourage individuals and organisations to visit the WA Play Strategy campaign website to read more about the WA Play Strategy campaign and available resources.

Go to ECA WA Facebook:



ECA recognises that best practice is always evolving and we welcome feedback on this *Statement*.

Please e-mail us at: ecawa@earlychildhood.org.au

For more ideas visit:

www.natureplaywa.org.au/programs/nature-playgrounds

www.natureplaywa.org.au/nature-passport-outdoor-app

www.playaustralia.org.au/library

www.raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/play-learning/getting-play-started/toddlers-at-play

www.educatedbynature.com

ECA WA acknowledges play is essential for children's learning and development beyond 8 years of age.



"I think play is to have fun with your friends. You can invite some of your friends to play with you. You can help each other. Kindness, helpfulness, truthfulness, inspiring, sometimes frightening, sometimes alone and that is fine."

Holly, 7 years



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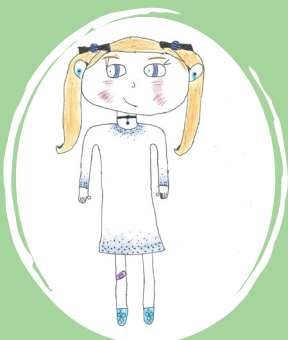
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Alice, 5 years



Arlo, 8 years



Evie, 8 years



Evie, 8 years



Kaedin, 7 years



Lachy, 5 years



Poppy, 7 years



Mia, 6 years



Zoya, 7 years



Nikolas, 7 years



Phyrne, 6 years



Nikolas, 7 years



Phyrne, 6 years



Lorelei, 9 years



Poppy, 7 years



Arlo, 8 years



Mia, 6 years



Nikolas, 7 years



Alice, 5 years



John, 6 years



Evie, 8 years



Stella, 6 years



Valentina, 5 years



Mia, 6 years



Zoya, 7 years



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