

## D2 — Playing Responsively with Children

### 1. Concept of Play

To begin this module we examine what the word "play" means. At the heart of learning and the heart of teaching is an understanding of play, yet often people use the word in different ways. "Play is the work of the child." "Stop playing and get to work." "Let's play cards." In each instance the word means different things. Because play is essential to learning, it would benefit our leadership of children if we shared a professional understanding of what play is. We all want to use the word the same way.

We have played together and answered these questions.

- a) *How does play start? What happens first?*
- b) *How does play evolve step-by-step thereafter?*
- c) *What are the positive influences others have when one plays with others rather than alone?*
- d) *What are the competitive, risky, judgmental, dark sides of play?*

### Assignment

**Observe:** Your task is to see how our definition of play fits with reality. You can see if it applies to what you see in children's play, your own behavior, and how adults relate to each other over the next few days.

Here are the questions to reflect upon this experience.

- a) *What do you notice about children's play, now that you see it this way?*
- b) *How does this idea of play relate to your adult life?*

These notes begin your D2 Portfolio.

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### 2. Play Initiations

Before we can proceed with our investigations of play and our role in it, we have to be clear about the difference between a play initiation and a play response. It is not as obvious as you might think. If everyone takes a few minutes to look for initiations and responses, we can figure it out together. This involves taking the time to sit and carefully watch play that involves at least two children.

On a form like this, you can gather examples of each of these four play behaviors.

initiated play actions	responding play actions
initiated play statements	responding play statements

### Assignment

**Collect:** We want five examples in each box. When you see an example, you place it in the appropriate box. These are exact descriptions of body movement or words spoken (*Mark says, "Give me that."*), not your opinions, inferences, or judgements (*Mark wants the pen. Mark bosses the others.*).

The collection is complete when you get your 20 examples:

*5 initiated play **actions***

*5 responding **actions** when the child reacted to the other child in play (not at other times)*

*5 initiated play **statements** to the other child (communications about the content of the play, not about other things unrelated to what they are doing)*

*5 responding play **statements** to the other child (communication related to the play in reaction to the other child's actions or statements)*

Here are the questions to reflect upon this experience.

- What is a play initiation?*
- What is a play response?*

These answers and the chart become the next addition to your portfolio.

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### 3. Play Distribution

The next task is to explore how you can be playful with different children. This is an opportunity to take time to play, indoors or out with each child in your group. It begins by carefully observing the play initiations of the child you are with. The child guides you, not your own ideas for starting something. You are trying to be responsive at the start.

Compare these examples:

**WRONG:** You decide it would be fun to play ball with Michael, so you find him on the climber and say, "Let's play ball." The idea is your initiation. You are leading.

**CORRECT:** You see Michael running to get a ball, so you run to get another ball or join him in racing to his ball, too. The idea is Michael's initiation. You are following.

### Assignment

**Chart:** You can record whom you play with on a chart with all the children's names and dates. Posted in a handy place, you can mark that day's box for each child you had a chance to play with responsively for the next 10 opportunities.

	10/3	10/4	10/5	10/6	10/7	10/10	10/11	10/12	10/13	10/14
Emiko	✓	✓	✓		✓					
Carlos	✓	✓	✓							
Mark			✓	✓						
Deshawn	✓	✓			✓					
Zemzem		absent								
Emily		✓	✓	✓	✓					
Etc...										

**Count:** A check marks the day when you and that child played for at least 1 minute, had fun, and followed the child's initiations. Both of you are to have fun, so make sure you do. If you follow the child's initiations, the child will be engaged, because the play builds from his or her idea.

If you are working with only one or two children, your chart can show the times of the day on the left side instead of the children's names. The challenge is to explore being responsively playful at each time of the day.

This assignment continues for two weeks. Next time we will look together at the first portion and then continue the check marks for a second week.

**Write:** Here are the questions to address in your portfolio:

- What does the chart say?*
- What did you discover about the children?*
- What did you find happening to yourself?*

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### 4. Play Project Exploration

This Module challenges you to discover how being a responsive play partner opens up something new for a child and enables them to live in new ways. A project, Assignment #7, will document this discovery and show that you can indeed play responsively with children.

This Module provides an opportunity for you to make a significant transformation, a transformation that only you can discover. The problem we face is finding the doorway for this breakthrough; it is not easy to see. The method we are using in this module is for you to play with each child in a way that is truly joyous for you and for them. When that happens, you can mark those children as “reached”. Your focus then turns to children whom you have not yet “reached”. When you find yourself facing something that is not working for you, then you are getting warmer. You may be approaching that doorway.

Since the project you are undertaking develops from what is NOT going on in your experience with children, it can be difficult for some people. Others may discover their project right away. Through the conversations you will have together your project can become clearer. Next time we will discuss this evolution toward finding a focus for your effort. We will be discussing the problems you are facing in using your playfulness in a pro-active way to benefit the lives of children.

#### **Assignment**

**Watch:** Often people choose to focus on the child who is most difficult to reach, either because he or she is doing too much of something or because he or she is not doing something. This project is about changing what seems to be unchangeable e.g., getting the least active child more active, getting a withdrawn child to play with another child, getting the aggressive, active child to focus constructively, etc. It is about what is tough to do.

This week is a focused exploration. You do the preliminary work on deciding upon a child or group of children to focus upon. This is a week of messing about, trying stuff, in order to return next time able to share what seems difficult for you to get happening with a child.

**Photograph:** It is not necessary to be completely sure of your final focus. If you stay open to explore different possibilities, the project will naturally emerge. For now, your task is to pick something and take notes and photos of what you are considering before you begin to make any changes.

You are making the “before” for your portfolio. At this point one may not be able to tell exactly what will eventually be used, so it helps to document whatever different things you are considering.

If you can bring photos, the others will enjoy seeing what you are thinking about addressing.

Your notes and photos become a diary of this project and add to your portfolio.

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### 5. Documentation

Now that your project is becoming clearer, you can set about finding the way to influence the situation.

Unfortunately, many participants in this D2 Module are confused at this point; they find it unclear what they are working on and what they are supposed to do about it. There is good reason for the confusion. First, no one can tell you what is the missing development in your work with children; only you can see it. Second, no one can tell you how to change it because you have to invent it; you are the only one who gets to be you.

You have no way to foresee what will happen. You can, however, keep records, which can illuminate your story of discovery.

The D2 Project of Understanding challenges you to share the story of your adventure with the others. You will be describing what it was like in the beginning and what was in your mind. You will be telling of your struggle to discover some crazy way *to use your own responsive, playful participation to benefit the life of a child.*

The events will emerge as they are. Day by day, the tale will unfold. You are writing a story about discovery — discovering something about yourself and seeing a discovery in a child.

Photographs are precious. A colleague could take pictures of you and your play with this child. You can record with your smart phone, tablet, or pad. You can take good notes of the daily events as soon as you have a chance to write something down.

### Assignment

**Play:** These are your only guides: *be spontaneous, have fun, and follow the initiations of the child.*

You can rely also, upon what we constructed about play:

- a) *You start in, get active in any way that happens, in the unique here-and-now.*
- b) *You develop an idea that comes impulsively to mind.*
- c) *You act and react to get the idea to work, change, modify, or start again.*

This project is play. You step in to try whatever you think of in response and then something emerges for you to achieve. You can change the intention, modify it in some way, or start over. If it is not fun, it is not working.

**Document:** Your task is to record whatever happens as the story unfolds, day by day. If you bring what you can to the next session, it will enable you to share your experience more completely.

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### 6. Values

As you continue your explorations on your project, using responsive play to lead children into new ways of being, you may become aware of problems.

At times it may not be appropriate for you to play, as an adult, with a child.

At times you may find yourself not enjoying the play.

You may find other concerns, too.

### **Assignment**

**Write:** Next time we are going to talk about these problems. Your task is to jot notes to yourself about times when you play that seem uncomfortable or problematic. Together we will be working on constructing guidelines for ourselves when we use playfulness to facilitate learning.

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### 7. Project of Understanding

In order to complete this module successfully each participant demonstrates the ability to transform the actions of a child or group of children by play, starting with careful following, and then joyfully being you. The aim is to show that you can transform a relationship to make it enhance the child's life.

#### Assignment

Your task is to prepare a presentation that can tell your story to the audience that truly cares what has happened. This room is full of people who have come to know you and authentically care about what you have been trying to do. We want to see the story of what you have done. The child cares. The child's family cares. The other parents care. The other educators care. The director cares.

You can tell the story to all these audiences by putting together the essentials from your photos and records. It is indeed a story. It has a **beginning** with characters and setting; it has a **middle** with a problem and struggles to overcome; it has an **end** with resolution and closure. If you publish it, all the audiences would learn of your story. It will have benefit if they can see what you have done.

**Represent:** To complete the module you communicate the story of successfully using responsive playfulness to influence the life of a young child. You show that (1) it used to be a certain way and had an objective, (2) you employed responsive playfulness, not leading, to find a way to simply play, (3) the child or children changed for the better, (4) you are able to share it with us. If the change has not yet happened, it very likely will happen this week.

**Share:** Your task is to put this story in a form that you could share with all the audiences that care. The most usual way is to put it on a poster that can be on display, or to create a book that you can read aloud. Other ways are possible: a flyer, a newsletter article, letter, video program, a slide show, etc.

This presentation is the culmination of your work on this Module and becomes another essential in your portfolio.

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### 8. Expression of Understanding

Today you showed us in your Project that you could make a difference to a child. In part two, the challenge is to convey your deep understanding of what you have done in an Expression of Understanding.

#### **Assignment**

Your task is to communicate the deep significance of the work you have done, investigating play, sharing with others and working with children. This is a work of personal expression for an audience of other participants here and, if appropriate, for the family or others to see.

**Express Yourself:** Through the work you have done, you have attained both an understanding and an ability to playfully influence a child's way of being. Who you are now is the possibility of transformation of relationships through responsive playfulness. Whenever you choose, you can enable children to view themselves as happy, confident, capable human beings. This is a major achievement.

You can create a poem, dance, story, letter, chart, song, or any other expression you find that enables you to convey your understanding of what it means to use play to open possibilities. You can use any expressive medium you choose to convey, in your unique way, your understanding of how play enables the emergence of the best in people.