

PARTICIPANT MANUAL

Engaging School-Age Children in Our Program

Play-based learning in child care

Participant name: _____

Date: _____

Presented by Leslie Holycross and Carmina Veytia

LEARN. APPLY. GROW.

Training Objectives

In this training, we will explore four goals to transform our child care environments and make the most of our time with school-age children. Each goal is practical, applicable and full of ideas you can begin using this week.

1. Characteristics of Play-Based Learning

Explain what play-based learning is and why it is powerful for school-age children.

2. Create an Enriching, Appropriate Environment

Design spaces and routines that respond to older children's needs in mixed-age settings, with strategies for engaging children ages 6 and older outside school hours.

3. Benefits for Children and Providers

Discover how intentional play benefits child development and supports the provider's daily work.

4. Support Play-Based Learning

Identify concrete strategies for incorporating purposeful play into daily and weekly programming.

Characteristics of Purposeful Playful Learning

What Does “Playful” Mean?

The Spanish word “lúdico” comes from the Latin “ludus,” meaning play. It refers to play, fun and enjoyment: an activity undertaken with pleasure and joy that also allows exploration, imagination and learning. Playful learning means learning through play. For example, building a block tower offers opportunities to practice measurement and teamwork.

Purposeful playful learning combines the freedom of play with intentional learning. Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff and colleagues describe five key characteristics of rich playful experiences. Together, these qualities support deeper, lasting and joyful learning.

Five Connected Characteristics

- Socially interactive: children exchange ideas and learn with others.
- Joyful: enjoyment encourages exploration and participation.
- Meaningful: experiences connect to children's lives and knowledge.
- Actively engaging: children use their minds, bodies and voices.
- Iterative: children try, observe, adjust and try again.

These characteristics support one another to create rich, complete and memorable experiences for school-age children.

Challenge: The Tallest Tower!

An individual live activity: each participant is at home, connected through Zoom. Experience play-based learning firsthand, building independently with the support of the group on screen.

Step 1: Gather Materials Now

Find paper, tape, scissors and a coin. You have 60 seconds to gather your supplies.

Step 2: Build! (5 Minutes)

When the facilitator says “Go,” everyone starts. Build the tallest freestanding tower you can, using only the materials on your table. It must hold a coin at the top without leaning against a wall. Encourage other participants in the chat as you work.

Step 3: Show Your Result on Camera

- Keep your camera on throughout the challenge.
- At the end, everyone shows their tower at the same time.
- Vote in the chat for the tallest, most creative and most stable towers.
- The facilitator shares an on-screen timer so everyone follows the same pace.

Connect the Experience to Purposeful Play

Socially interactive: Although participants build separately, chat messages, encouragement and real-time reactions maintain group connection.

Joyful: The timer, simultaneous reveal and virtual applause create an energizing and memorable experience.

Meaningful: The challenge directly connects to the principles being studied: experienced individually and reflected on collectively.

Actively engaging: Everyone designs, builds and tests with their own hands. There are no spectators.

Iterative: If a tower falls, adjust the folds or structure and try again, learning from every attempt while peers encourage you.

Reflection

How could you use a similar activity, independent but connected, with children in your program? Share in the chat or the next discussion.

Children's Voices: Interests and Strengths

Complete this sheet in conversation with a child, not as a test. Invite speaking, drawing, pointing or dictation.

Name or initials: _____ Age: _____ Date: _____

What do you enjoy doing after school?

_____

What can you do that you would like to share?

_____

What would you like to learn, build or investigate?

_____

What helps you rest when you arrive feeling tired?

_____

Would you like to begin alone, with a partner or in a small group?

_____

An idea I suggest for our program:

_____

Strengths noticed by the educator:

_____

Our agreement: This week we will offer _____

We will talk again on: _____

Engaging School-Age Children in Our Program

This preview contains selected pages from the manual. The tower challenge is designed for guided participation during the training. Try the interests worksheet through conversation with the children in your program.

What is included for participants?

- The complete 74-page manual, provided for the training.
- Activities, scenarios and planning tools.
- Guidance for adapting ideas to your program.
- Discussion, practice and support from the facilitator.

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carveyteach@gmail.com

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