



What is Inquiry based Play for Young Learners?

Skill development through play

In IB PYP, play is a powerful tool for learning. From birth, children are ‘hands-on’ natural inquirers and learn through playful interactions with people and their environment. Play is an essential aspect of a child’s healthy development. Through play-based learning, problem-solving skills, creativity, and social skills. So, instead of poring over a textbook, students are building with blocks, creating with playdough, and learning through fun, develop and nurture fundamental knowledge and skills.

Learning in the Primary Years Programme (PYP) is based on ‘approaches to learning’ skills (ATLs). These skills aim to support children of all ages to become learners who know how to ask good questions, set effective goals and pursue their aspirations with the determination to achieve them.

The infographic below, represents how ATLs can be developed through play.



Wellbeing through play

In addition to developing such skills, play is important for social, emotional, physical and mental wellbeing of children.

Inquiry through play

Children are curious and capable learners with a sense of agency, rich in potential, bringing valid skills, preferences and understandings of learning. Through play, children actively create meaning from their interactions with people and their environments. These meanings are revisited and revised in light of new experiences and further learning.

What does inquiry through play look like?

Whilst we are all familiar with the idea of play, it can be difficult to agree on exactly what it looks like.

5 key characteristics of play

1. Play is meaningful – children play to make sense of the world around them, and to find meaning in an experience by connecting it to something already known. Through play, children express and understand their understanding of their experiences.
2. Play is joyful – of course, play may have its frustrations and challenges, but the overall feeling is one of enjoyment, motivation, thrill and pleasure.
3. Play is actively engaging – watch children playing, and you will usually see that they become deeply involved, often coming physical, mental and verbal engagement.
4. Play is iterative – play is not static. Children play to practice skills, try out possibilities, revise hypotheses and discover new challenges, leading to deeper learning.
5. Play is socially interactive – play allows children to communicate ideas, to understand others through social interaction, paving the way to build deeper understanding and more powerful relationships.

There are also different types of play experiences:



How can you as a parent support your child's inquiry through play?

'Free play' is described as being led by the child. They decide when and what to play; the direction of the play, including any rules, and when - or if - to involve others. However, in both free and guided play, parents can support their child's play in several ways.

- **Materials** - these can be commercially produced, e.g. board games, paint, Lego, jigsaws, or items found around the home which the child can use in an open-ended way, such as items of clothing, scarves or material for imaginative play, old boxes and containers for construction or craft, small objects such as stones or shells for sorting and counting. 10 Prop Box Ideas for Play
- **Space** - This could be indoors or outdoors, small and cosy or large and spacious depending on your home. A small cosy nook, under a table covered with a blanket can provide just as much engagement and excitement as lots of space.
- **Time** - Giving children extended and uninterrupted time to play allows children to become deeply involved in their play.
- **Being okay with some mess** - Play is seldom tidy and contained. A small house made with blocks, quickly becomes a whole town or city, with complicated road systems, shops and other facilities.
- **Join in play** - Being careful to respect children's rules and decisions; supporting the play rather than leading it.

Joining in play allows you to:

- Talk to your child about their play, showing them that you value what they are doing. In addition, it extends your child's current knowledge and helps them make new connections.
- Model behaviours that support the child in continuing their play such as resilience, problem solving, and taking turns.
- Help your child develop the IB approaches to learning.

Approaches to learning	Examples of questions to support your child
Thinking skills	I wonder what would happen if you ...? I wonder why you chose...? Why do you think...? How do you know...? What do you think made this happen?
Research skills	I wonder what would happen if you ...? How can we find out more about...? What do you think will happen next?
Communication skills	Will you tell me about what you are doing? What happened when you...? How could you share your learning with ...? (e.g. talking, drawing, writing)
Social Skills	Can ... do anything to help? Can ... join in? How could ... help you solve this problem? What would ... do in this situation? When you have finished with the ..., can ... have a turn?
Self-management skills	What might be another way to solve this problem? Is there another way to try this? What might be your next step?

Whilst it is good to focus on open-ended questions to encourage discussion and elaboration, there is also a place for closed questions such as how many blocks did you use? Which tower is taller?

Learning at home: inquiry through play

Here are some suggestions for inquiry through play that you can try at home.

Be guided by your child - what are they curious about at home? E.g. your child is curious about the kitchen cupboards and why things in there are made of different materials. Or why soap creates bubbles. They love dressing up and role playing or building things from cardboard and tape. These are opportunities to see how play is learning as you follow your child's ideas.

Role-play dressing up

Put a box of clothes and shoes out and see what characters your child decides to become. Help them to make any 'accessories' they need from card or paper. Characters from recent stories you have read with your child might well pop up, or ones they have seen on the television. This can lead to a storytelling or drama session.

Going on a bear hunt

Popular books often spark games. One example is Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen. This is a great one for acting out the story and including sound effects. Make some cardboard binoculars together before you go...

Making caves

Old cardboard boxes can make a great cave or playhouse for children. They can be used to make tunnels too. If you don't have boxes, a blanket over the table is a good alternative. A torch can spark curiosity about night and day, or light and dark. Or maybe you get invited to a picnic under the table.