



“Safe, Happy, Learning”



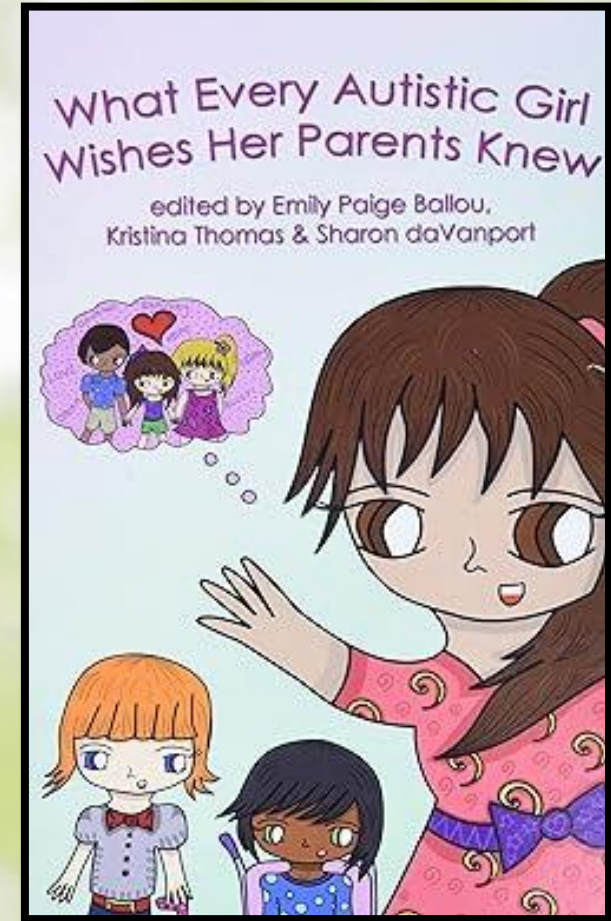
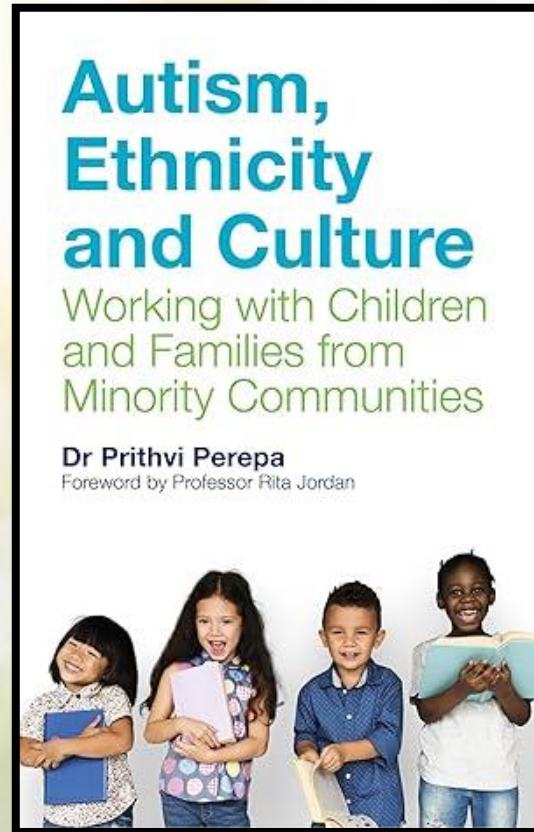
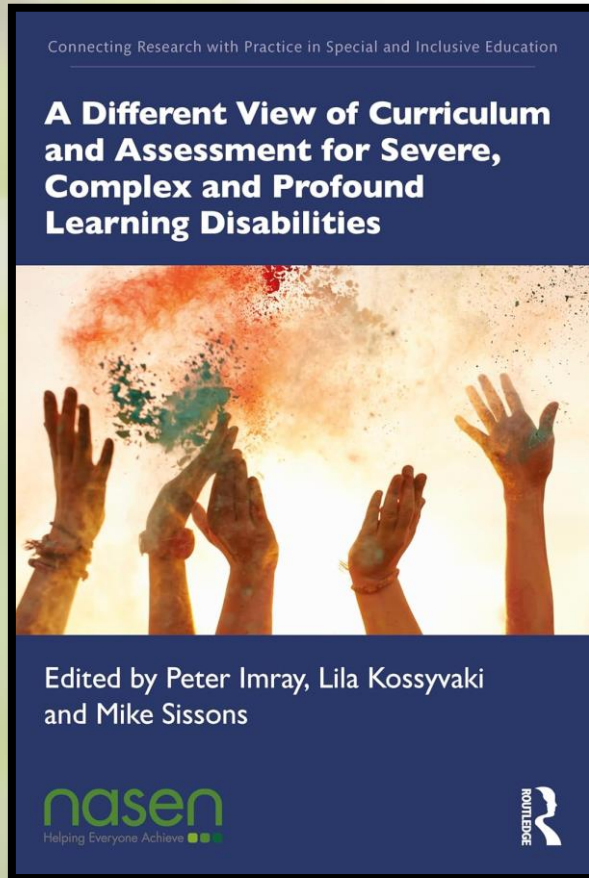
Play-based Learning at Landon School

Why Play?

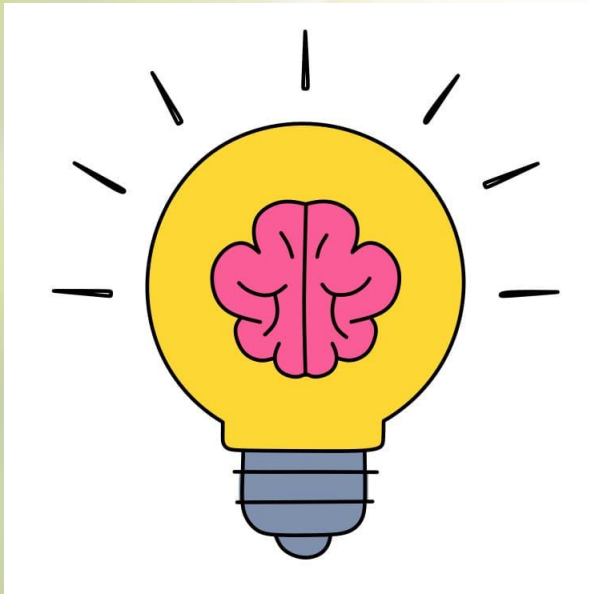
Benefits of Play (Waller, J. 2024)

- **Social development**
- **Creates a context for low right-time demands**
- **Play it is a time where the student leads.**
- **Increases pupil voice and their agency.**
- **Supports greater regulation (sensory, emotional)**
- **Preparation for life beyond the school as a play- based approach supports problem solving and cross-contextualisation.**

Some further references which can support us when explaining play to parents 😊



How would we define play?



Definition of play? There are many...

- Play is intentional
- Enabling our students to lead and direct within the activities provided.
- Enabling our students to decide for themselves whether the provision is interesting, exciting and motivating for them to engage with advantageously.
- Landon School describes our play-based approach as a holistic model that recognises play as a blend of cognitive, physical, and social elements working together to support learning and development. We use ASAP.

What is ASAP?

- ASAP stands for Advancing Social Communication And Play: An Intervention Program for Preschoolers with Autism.
- It is an intervention program which supports teachers, therapists and parents foster the development of important communication and play skills.
- It mainly focuses on Joint Attention and Symbolic play. However, it targets social interaction, requesting, and different levels of play.

Play Based Interventions for Children with Autism



Social play

- Focuses on how children interact with others.
- Involves communication, cooperation, shared goals, and understanding social rules.
- Builds social skills (sharing, turn-taking, empathy).
- Helps children learn social norms and relationships.

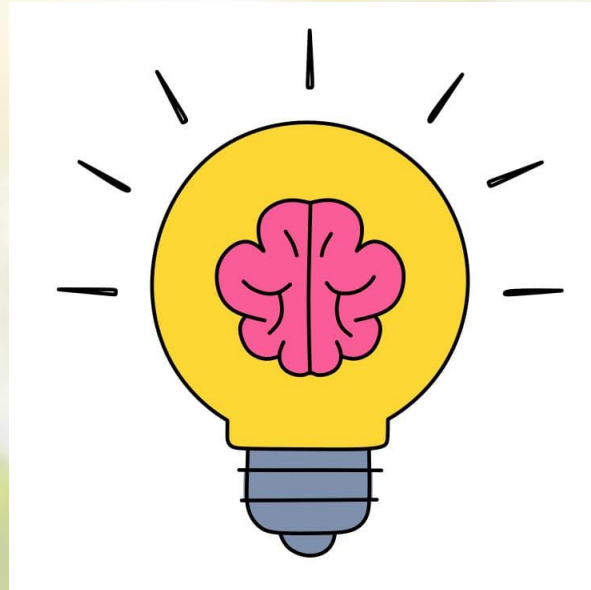
Cognitive play

- Focuses on how children think, learn, and solve problems.
- Involves imagination, reasoning, memory, and exploration of objects.
- Develops thinking skills (classification, sequencing, planning).
- Enhances creativity, problem-solving, and understanding of the world.

Example at Landon:

- Elm and Sycamore have more examples of social play (students turn-taking with peers or adults or sharing toys)
- Oak and Fern have more examples of cognitive play such as sensory exploration (shaking, banging, mouthing, filling/emptying containers, building/combining objects)

Can you think of strategies we are already using at Landon to support cognitive and social play?



- Strategies to support social play: model social interaction (commenting, turn-taking), Use visuals like “my turn / your turn”, Provide structured small-group activities, Act as a play partner to scaffold interactions, celebrate shared joy moments, clap, give high fives.
- Strategies to support cognitive play: provide varied sensory and open-ended materials, model meaningful play actions, provide time for repetition and exploration, and use simple language or AAC to comment on actions. Model emotions. Find out what songs are their favourites. Use technology wisely and moderately.

Social and cognitive dimensions of play

- When we think of play. We might associate the concept with neurotypical children, and see play as a social interaction, however this might not always be the case for our neurodivergent pupils.
- Equals believes that play (as a fundamental area of learning) is an ideal opportunity to encourage much needed practice of social interaction skills. The main goal, even though, highly ambitious is to progress from solitary play to social play. This might take years, but little steps should always be celebrated.

Co-operative Play						
Associative Play						
Parallel Play						
Onlooker Play						
Solitary Play						
Unoccupied						
Social / Cognitive	Sensorimotor Play	Relational Play	Functional Play	Symbolic Play	Socio dramatic Play	Games with rules

1. Sensory motor play

- Learning through senses and physical actions
- Exploring object properties: texture, sound, weight
- Develops fine motor skills & cause-and-effect understanding,
- **Examples:** shaking, banging, mouthing, poking objects, pressing,



2. Relational Play

- Exploring how objects relate to each other
- Combining, stacking, fitting, connecting items
- Builds problem-solving & understanding of object properties
- **Examples:** puzzles, stacking blocks, shape sorters



3. Functional Play

- ▶ Using objects for their intended purpose
- ▶ Actions directed toward objects, self, toys, or others
- ▶ Develops understanding of how things work
- ▶ **Examples:** rolling a car, feeding a doll, brushing hair, filling a bucket



4. Symbolic Play

- Pretending and using objects to represent something else
- Includes: object substitution, imaginary objects, simple role play
- Builds imagination, language, creativity, flexible thinking
- Examples:** banana as phone, sipping from invisible cup, sticks as swords, water sprays as rain..



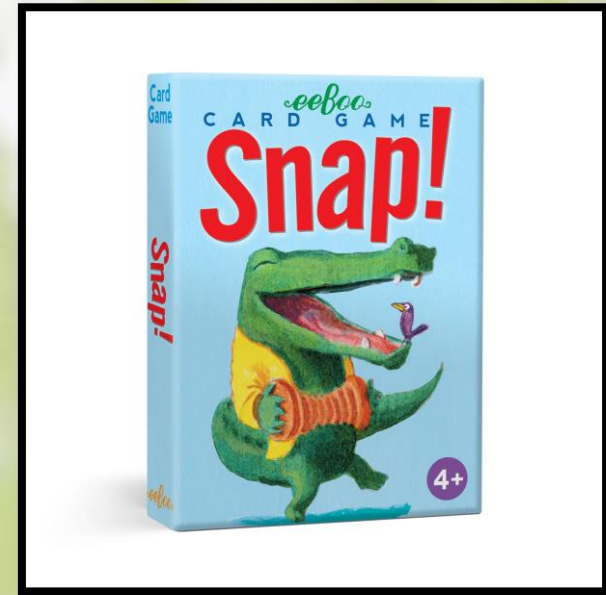
5. Socio-Dramatic Play

- Collaborative pretend play with shared roles and storylines
- Requires communication, negotiation, cooperation
- Supports social/emotional development and perspective-taking
- **Examples:** playing doctors, playing house



6. Games With Rules

- Activities governed by agreed rules or procedures
- Develops turn-taking, fairness, resilience, strategy
- Encourages sportsmanship
- Examples:** snap, snakes and ladders, pirate game, broken telephone,



Cognitive dimensions of play



Stage	Description
Onlooker	Watching others play without participating oneself
Solitary	Playing alone and independently, with no attempt to get close to other children
Parallel	Playing alongside other children and with similar materials but with no real interaction or cooperation
Associative	Playing with other children in some common activity but without division of labour or subordination to some overall group goal
Cooperative	Playing in a group that is organised for the purpose of carrying out activity or attaining some goal, with coordination of individual members' behaviour in pursuit of the common goal.

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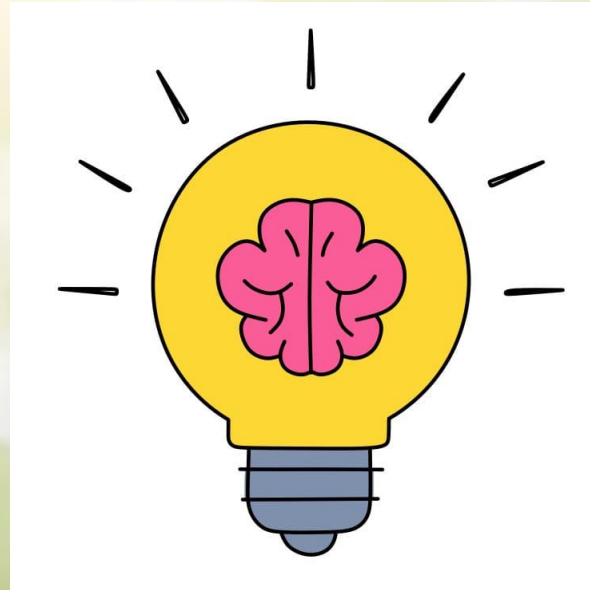
Unoccupied – exploring their body and surroundings through observation

Unoccupied play is the earliest stage of play, where students appear to move aimlessly whilst learning about their bodies, developing motor skills or understanding cause and effect.

Unoccupied play may easily be confused as ‘not playing’ but it is important to acknowledge that play looks different for all, especially those with ASC and/or complex learning difficulties.



Think of at least two activities which take place in your class and identify at least 2 social dimensions of play and 2 cognitive ones.



What does ASAP look like at Landon School:

- Observe naturally occurring play, identify the child's highest consistent level
- Plan small steps above their current level, model next-step actions within their play, use AAC or visuals to support communication and embed play opportunities throughout the day

Quick ideas for social games- no resources

- CHASE ME!
- Row, Row, your boat
- I spy with my little eye- use your hands to pretend they are binoculars.
- Pass the Smile – Sit in a circle and “pass” a smile to the next person.
- Echo Name – Say your name with a funny tone, the next person echoes it.
- High-Five Chain – Give high-fives around the circle; try increasing speed
- Counting Circle – Count out loud in a circle, one number per child.
- Story Round – Each child adds one word to a story.
- Clap Rhythm – Clap a simple rhythm, others repeat it.

Final message!

- ***Play is one of the single most powerful types of teaching and learning for all sorts of skills and abilities!***

(Waller James, Headteacher at Sunnydale School and part of Equals, National SEND Forum, DfE Early Years SEND Expert Advisory Group)

Bibliography and references list

- [Play Based Approaches for teaching pupils with SLD and Autism – YouTube](#) by James Waller
- *ASAP Manual* - [Advancing Social Play and Communication.pdf](#)
- *ASAP Intervention Activities & Resources* - [Advancing Social Communication and Play - intervention activities and resources.pdf](#)
- [The Power Of Play](#)