

A Little Bit Different

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**Planning a *Conceptual PlayWorld* in STEM (Fleer, 2022)
Monash PlayLab**

Five Characteristics of a Conceptual PlayWorld to support imaginary play and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) thinking and learning (Fleer, 2022)

| Pedagogical characteristics | Pedagogical practices that are planned | Conceptual PlayWorld in action |
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| <p>Selecting a story for the <i>Conceptual PlayWorld</i></p> <p>Story: A Little Bit Different</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Selecting a story that is enjoyable to children and adults. ■ Building drama for the characters in the story. ■ Building empathy for the characters in the story. ■ A plot that lends itself to introducing a problem situation. Overview of the problem. ■ Being clear about the concept(s) and its relation to the story and play plot to be developed. ■ Adventures or journeys that spring from the plot (e.g., chapters). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ This story is about the Ploofers, who do everything the same, such as, they make clouds. But one day one of Ploofers does something different and makes a coloured cloud. ■ Develop empathy for the Ploofers who is different from the others. At first the others don't accept him/her as part of the group. How will we make the Ploofers feel welcome even though s/he makes coloured clouds? ■ Problem situation: The children have been asked to put on a light show for the new Ploofers who visit their town ■ Concept - This story brings forward the concept of light. |



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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Possible plot extension: When planning an adventure for the new Ploofers in town, the plot explores if they have a special talent. Do they create colour? |
| <p>Designing a <i>Conceptual PlayWorld</i> space</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Finding a space in the classroom/centre/outdoor area suitable for an imaginary <i>Conceptual PlayWorld</i> of the story. ■ Designing opportunities for child-initiated play in ways that develop the play plot further or explore concepts and make them more personally meaningful. ■ Planning different opportunities for children to represent their ideas and express their understandings. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The indoor area could be turned into Ploofer Land. It's dark in Ploofer Land. There is no light. ■ To create an imaginary situation, you could (e.g. cover up windows, crawl into a huge box that is painted black inside – so that it is dark. ■ You could also role play light, exploring wave lengths, direction, and colour. Or put on a shadow puppet show for parents and explore light and shadows. ■ You could design the lightshow by drawing or painting your ideas about light. For example: What is the light source? What colours will we see? |
| <p>Entering and exiting the <i>Conceptual PlayWorld</i> space</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Plan a routine for the whole group to enter and exit the <i>Conceptual PlayWorld</i> of the story where all the children are in the same imaginary situation. ■ Children choose characters as they enter into the imaginary situation. ■ Adult is always a character in the story. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To signify entering and existing the imaginary situation, Ploofer Land, you might need a torch (or other light source). You could make imaginary props to pretend to see with. ■ Children and adults chose to be characters, for example a mother Ploofer, a father Ploofer, a baby Ploofer. The Ploofers have family who join in too – Uncle Ploofer, Cousin Ploofer, etc. Or a Ploofer visitor from out of town. ■ You could pretend to be a scientist Ploofer investigating light. Someone might need to set up the lightshow, for example, collect the admission tickets to the lightshow, or make popcorn. |



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| <p>Planning the play inquiry or problem scenario</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Problem scenario is not scripted, but a general idea of the problem is planned. ■ The problem scenario is dramatic and engaging. ■ The problem invites children to investigate solutions to help the play in the <i>Conceptual PlayWorld</i>. ■ Being clear about the concepts that will be learned from solving the problem situation. Concepts are in service of the children’s play. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The children receive a phone call from the Ploofers such as “Hi Children. There are new Ploofers in town. The Ploofers heard that you are experts in light. Can you put on a lightshow to welcome them to town?” ■ Children can pretend to be scientists, or light show technicians. ■ You could explore: What is light? What is the light source? For example, the sun or a lightbulb. Can we see without light? How does light travel? Will there be shadows? Will you use mirrors to reflect light? ■ Possible experiments for the concept of light: Set up the box. Children go inside the darkened box/area, control the light, and discover light can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ travels in a straight line; ■ be blocked (shadow); ■ be reflected with mirrors ■ be absorbed (black fabric no light is reflected, or some colours are absorbed when using coloured cellophane); ■ be refracted into the colours of the rainbow. |
| <p>Planning adult interactions to build conceptual learning in role</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adults are not always the same character. Roles are not scripted. ■ Planning of who will have more knowledge and who will be present with the children to model solving the problem. There are different roles adults can take: Adults plan their role for the <i>Conceptual PlayWorld</i> to be equally present with the children, or to model practices in role, or to be needing help from the children. Their role | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There are different roles adults can take: Adults plan their role for the PlayWorld to be equally present with the children (e.g. “Let’s explore what happens to light when we use this mirror?”), or to model practises in role (e.g. “Did you know that without light we can’t see?”), or needing help from the children (e.g. “Show me how you make a shadow in the puppet show?”). Their role can |

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| | <p>can also be together with the child leading (primordial we), where they literally cradle the child or hold their hand and together act out the role or solution.</p> | <p>also be together with the child leading (primordial we) (e.g. “Let’s pretend to be Ploofers together. We could make colour ploofs/clouds. What colour shall we be?”) where they literally cradle the child or hold their hand and together act out the role or solution.</p> |

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Conceptual PlayWorlds: Monash University Working Papers:

<https://www.monash.edu/education/research/projects/conceptual-playlab/publications>