



Rachel McMillan Nursery School and Children's Centre

The Power of Learning through Play

"Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood." - Fred Rogers

At Rachel McMillan you will see children engaged in a wide range of activities. Some will be working with adults, some will be in groups and some will be playing alone or alongside others. Whatever form this is taking, for children it all comes under the huge umbrella of PLAY. Play is a serious business for the young child.

We believe playing is the best form of learning for young children. They are learning skills for interacting and collaborating. Through play, children learn the roles, practices and skills and ways of thinking and behaving that help them to fit in and be valued members of their communities. Play is also children's way of exploring and investigating how the world works.

In allowing children the freedom to play they are likely to focus for the necessary long uninterrupted moments that optimise brain development. Deep levels of learning take place when children are engaged for extended periods of time with things that they are interested in or passionate about. Staff in the nursery know not to cut across the children's play with adult routines or demands, but choose their timing sensitively, putting the children's thinking and learning first. We all know how difficult it is to be pulled away from something we are enjoying - whether it is someone interrupting a conversation, packing away your hobby or asking you to do something else. We are mindful of how this can affect the children too - it is no different.

Young children do not learn in subject areas - their brains absorb information in a multi-dimensional and cross-purpose way.

For example when a child uses play dough they could be:

- *Learning about texture or smell and other properties of materials*

- *Developing fine motor skills by strengthening the muscles in the fingers, arms and hands*
- *Learning about quantity by breaking or cutting it into pieces*
- *Learning about shape and measure by making balls, squares, long snakes etc*
- *Developing creative thinking by using the dough for cakes, mini beasts, superhero props etc*

As adults, we watch and learn from how the children make sense of their worlds and only then should we step in to share, support and scaffold their understanding.

All learning in early years can be achieved by a playful approach, where adults plan carefully and create a safe and stimulating environment to maximise opportunities for all children to develop.

"It is a happy talent to know how to play." - Ralph Waldo Emerson