

Play is more than just a 'nice to have' but has a fundamental impact on young children's language development. Play can create young storytellers. Children's play wonderfully nurtures their ability to move beyond their immediate surroundings and develop intellectual thought patterns, which is so important for retelling stories. When children share their stories, they use language that reaches beyond the immediate moment, enriching their storytelling abilities and helping them weave more detailed and imaginative narratives. Let's hear from our Head of Early Years, Tracy Jackson OBE as she explains more about the importance of play, its correlation with improved literacy development and the role different forms of play can have to create a lifelong, positive impact. Play stimulates creativity and innovation, creates a solid foundation for literacy and ignites a lifelong love for learning. Exclusion from high-quality early play experiences for disadvantaged children further deepens inequalities in learning, leading to greater disparities in life opportunities. It allows children to develop essential skills for organising their thoughts, understanding the world, recreating experiences and sharing ideas. Stories take us on adventures; from snowy mountains to dragon-guarded castles, stories are all about expanding our imagination. For children growing up in poverty, play is a valuable tool for building resilience and can temporarily alleviate anxiety and stress. Children often communicate differently when outside – with freer, louder voices – and are often enthusiastic to share and talk about their discoveries. Stories play a central role in developing a child's emotional literacy; building resilience, empathy and compassion, and learning how to form strong bonds are among the most important skills a child can learn. Before language comes play. Play and language are completely intertwined, serving as the essential building blocks for children's meaningful communication. Diverse and imaginative play enables children to build representational skills: a box becomes a hat, a boat or a box. The benefits of imaginative and outdoor play. Imaginative play is an excellent way to support and enhance language development. During role play, language use often increases as it allows children to imitate the language and behaviours of others. This, in turn, provides the basis for conversations about the spider they have discovered, the rain they can hear or the squelchy mud on their fingertips. Playday brings together families and all those who work with children across the UK to build a culture of supporting play. A year-round approach to fostering the power of play will significantly boost children's early language skills. Children thrive when they are involved in rich experiences and practical activities through play. However, poverty can limit children's opportunities for play, which in turn restricts their early learning. Language enables us to communicate by representing things, feelings, actions and ideas with words. This ability to use objects flexibly mirrors how spoken words represent objects and ideas. Play enables children to practice the language skills they have learned and build on their expanding vocabulary. Building social development is fundamental in acquiring and encouraging language development. This is when they discover, create and develop new skills in a natural and delightful way. They are happiest and most energetic when playing, and evidence shows that play is one of the most effective ways for them to learn fundamental life skills and form relationships. Through play, children can express their thoughts, ideas and feelings, building essential communication skills. Play encompasses a wide range of behaviours. Play is joyful, meaningful and unique to each child. When children are in charge of their play they can learn and consolidate knowledge through hands-on experiences. Words are symbols and signifiers of other things. It is important that

children have the opportunities for socialisation with others. Play outdoors can also provide rich opportunities for language development. The outside area provokes a great deal of exploration and investigation skills in young children. Every year on the first Wednesday in August we celebrate a national day for play. Play as a tool for learning and literacy Early childhood is a precious time for children to enjoy, learn and grow. It's so much more than preparation for school. The best way for children to explore and learn is by having the time and freedom to play. This can give them the confidence to use language they've heard in everyday situations, without the worry of making mistakes. Quieter children often gain confidence and find their voice outside. What do we mean by play? But before language comes play.