Understanding Learning Through Play Across Cultural Contexts: The Indicators of Playful Learning

From the Pedagogy of Play Team

Project Zero
Play is both universal and culturally determined

- Who children play with
- How they play
- Where and when they play
- When/if they should stop playing

...all of these ideas are culturally constructed
What does playful learning in schools look and feel like in different cultural contexts?
International School of Billund

Denmark
6 Schools in the Boston Area
5 Schools in Colombia
Methodology: Developing the Indicators

• Site selection – purposive sampling:
  • Variety of SES, school type
  • Interested in incorporating playful learning

• Data sources:
  • Extensive classroom observations
  • In-depth semi-structured interviews with classroom teachers, administrators, and children
  • Focus groups with children
  • Playful activities to surface playful learning experiences

• Analysis:
  • Emic, open coding
  • Thematic analysis
  • Return to the conceptual literature to inform analytic approach
  • Co-construction through iterative analysis and feedback with local educators
Indicators of Playful Learning from the International School of Billund in Denmark

**WONDER**

Feels like...
- engagement, novelty
- fascination, curiosity, surprise

Looks like...
- risk-taking, focusing attention
- asking questions that further learning
- improvising, pretending
- reflecting on mistakes
- investing, imagining, exploring
- creating, trying

**CHOICE**

Feels like...
- autonomy, empowerment
- intrinsic motivation, ownership

Looks like...
- setting goals
- being spontaneous
- making and changing plans
- choosing collaborators and roles
- choosing how long to work/play
- moving around

**DELIGHT**

Feels like...
- satisfaction, enjoyment
- excitement, fun

Looks like...
- celebrating, discovering
- working through a challenge
- competing, singing, humming
- anticipating, being alert
- expressing excitement, smiling, laughing
- being mindful, speaking, singing
Subjective and Objective

What does playful learning look like? (objective)

What does it feel like? (subjective)
Choice
feels like...
autonomy
empowerment
intrinsic motivation
ownership

looks like...
setting goals
negotiating
choosing how long to work/play
choosing collaborators and roles
influencing the direction of learning
making and changing rules
being spontaneous
moving around

Wonder
feels like...
engagement
novelty
fascination
curiosity
surprise

looks like...
risk taking
trying
reflecting on mistakes
asking questions
focusing attention
improvising
pretending
inventing
imagining
exploring
creating

Delight
feels like...
satisfaction
enjoyment
belonging
pride
excitement
inspiration
flow

looks like...
celebrating
discovering
being silly
competing
singing/humming
smiling/laughing
anticipating
joking
hygge
being altruistic
expressing excitement
working through a challenge
Indicators of Playful Learning from 3 South African Schools

**Curiosity**
- feels like...
  - engagement - challenge
  - fascination - inspiration
  - eagerness - positive frustration
- looks like...
  - considering a variety of solutions
  - discussing and debating
  - asking questions - experimenting
  - learning from mistakes
  - creating - imagining
  - puddling

**Ownership**
- feels like...
  - empowerment - responsibility - courage
  - part of something bigger
  - pride - freedom
- looks like...
  - confidence - collaboration
  - valuing own and other ideas
  - seeing peers as resources
  - seeking opinions
  - learning - supporting each other in the process

**Enjoyment**
- feels like...
  - trust - belonging - excitement - safety - fun
- looks like...
  - celebrating - similing and laughing - being surprised
  - participating actively - joking - singing

**Ubuntu**
- ubuntu: social bonding created an atmosphere of warmth and excitement

Playful Learning
Ownership

feels like...
empowerment
responsibility
courage
pride
freedom
part of something bigger

looks like...
valuing own and others’ ideas
seeing peers as resources
confidence
collaboration
voicing opinions

Ubuntu
learning is a communal effort in which learners feel encouraged to lead their learning and support each other in the process

Curiosity

feels like...
engagement
challenge
fascination
inspiration
eagerness
positive frustration

looks like...
considering a variety of solutions
discussing and debating
asking questions
learning from mistakes
experimenting
creating
imagining
huddling

Ubuntu
the learning community encourages individual and collective inquiry, risk taking, and exploration of “wild ideas”

Enjoyment

feels like...
trust
anticipation
belonging
excitement
safety
fun

looks like...
celebrating
smiling and laughing
being surprised
participating actively
joking
singing

Ubuntu
social bonding creates an atmosphere of warmth and excitement
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Curiosity</th>
<th>Enjoyment</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>feels like...</td>
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<td><em>the learning community encourages</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>lead their learning and support each</em></td>
<td><em>individual and collective inquiry, risk</em></td>
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Ubuntu

Learning is a communal effort in which learners feel encouraged to lead their learning and support each other in the process.

Ubuntu

Social bonding creates an atmosphere of warmth and excitement.

Ubuntu

The learning community encourages individual and collective inquiry, risk taking, and exploration of “wild ideas.”
Indicators of Playful Learning from 6 U.S. Schools

**Meaningful**
- **Feels like:**
  - “It matters” - authenticity
  - Being interested and invested
  - Connections to interests, families, the world
  - Inspiration - focus on sense of purpose

- **Looks like:**
  - Engagement - curiosity - problem solving
  - Collaboration - creating and making
  - Imagining and pretending - drive
  - Experimenting and investigating

**Empowering**
- **Feels like:**
  - Ownership - agency - independence
  - Being heard, seen, valued - pride
  - Independence - belonging
  - Freedom - confidence

- **Looks like:**
  - Asking for help & having choices
  - Making decisions & expressing and building on ideas
  - Co-constructing rules & routines
  - Active & inclusive participation

**Joyful**
- **Feels like:**
  - Excitement - fun - challenge
  - Anticipation - curiosity - exploration
  - Trust - connection

- **Looks like:**
  - Billing and laughing - joking and banter
  - Silences - sharing - oneness
  - Smiling and laughing - ,

**Playful Learning**
Empowering

Feels like...
Ownership
Agency
Being heard and seen
Independence
Belonging
Pride
Freedom
Confidence

Looks like...
Having choices and making decisions
Leadership
Taking risks
Co-constructing rules, routines, strategies
Active and inclusive participation
Expressing and building on ideas
Discussing and debating
Asking for help
Moving around

Meaningful

Feels like...
“It matters”
Being interested and invested
Connections to interests, families, the world
Authenticity
Inspiration
Sense of purpose

Looks like...
Engagement
Curiosity
Collaboration
Drive
Creating and making
Imagining and pretending
Experimenting and investigating
Problem solving
Asking questions
Exploring different perspectives
Iteration as part of a longer process of inquiry

Joyful

Feels like...
Excitement
Challenge
Anticipation
Togetherness
Figuring it out
Trust
Safety
Comfort
Happiness
Fun

Looks like...
Smiling and laughing
Surprise
Joking and banter
Friendship
Sharing creations and discoveries
Buzz of activity
Silliness
Competition
Singing
Celebrating
Coziness
Insert a U.S.-based video here from the video library to try out using the indicators from the U.S. schools
Indicators of Playful Learning from the International School of Billund in Denmark

Indicators of Playful Learning from 3 South African Schools

Indicators of Playful Learning from 5 Colombian Schools

Indicators of Playful Learning from 6 U.S. Schools
Indicators of Playful Learning from 5 Colombian Schools

**CURIOSITY**
Feels like...
- interest, expectation
- amazement (awe)
- curiosity, surprise, resourcefulness
Looks like...
- questioning, creativity, discovery
- imagination, reflection, inquiry
- flexibility, initiative

**AUTONOMY**
Feels like...
- commitment, achievement, begetting, sense of pride, and personal achievement
Looks like...
- seeking other perspectives, connection, collaboration, leadership, resolution, negotiation, freedom

**JOY**
Feels like...
- attention, trust, fascination, transformation, curiosity
- celebration, competition, ludica
Looks like...
- smiling and laughing, enthusiasm, attention, fun, entertainment

**PLAYFUL LEARNING**

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Indicators of Playful Learning from 5 Colombian Schools

**CURIOSIDAD**
Se siente como...
- interés, expectativa
- asombro (oh, what a surprise)
- curiosidad, sorpresa, ricura

**AUTONOMIA**
Se ve como...
- conexión, colaboración, liderazgo, resolución, negociación, libertad

**ALEGRÍA**
Se siente como...
- atención, confianza, fascinación, transformación, curiosidad
- celebración, competencia, ludico
Cross-cultural Indicators of Playful Learning

Patterns from schools in Denmark, South Africa, the U.S., and Colombia

Leading Learning
- choice
- ownership
- empowerment
- autonomy

Exploring the Unknown
- wonder
- curiosity
- meaning

Finding Joy
- delight
- enjoyment
- joyful

Playful Learning
Breakout Discussions: PoP Pictures of Practice

• In the Picture of Practice you read:
  • What indicators of playful learning did you see evident in the examples shared?
  • What intrigued or puzzled you?
Our Indicators of Playful Learning

feels like...

looks like...

feels like...

looks like...

feels like...

looks like...

feels like...

looks like...

Playful Learning

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