

PLAY Systems

Hi PLAYmates, it is lovely to see you here taking the next step forward in your PLAY journey. I would love to hear how you are going...you can send me an email or message in the Project PLAY membership group to share your journey.

At this point you will have seen the glossary of terms we use, discovered realistic pockets of time for play, read our schedule blocking tips, created a plan for play in your play space, developed a bank of PLAY Ideas – go to set ups and learnt about different theories in PLAY. And more recently learnt about 3 different strategies in PLAY.

In this series of mini lessons (3 lessons) you will:

- Learn about PLAY Systems – the different systems used to support learners in PLAY Based Learning such as:
 - Toy Rotation
 - PLAY Based Learning Stations and
 - Daily Activity Tubs

Let's get into it!

DISCLAIMER – All ideas shared are my own opinions based on my knowledge and experience.

Hey there PLAYmates, it is super exciting to see you here again...taking the next step forward in your PLAY journey.

We are going to chat about toy rotation...what it means, what it can look like and how you can integrate it into your daily PLAY routine.

What is a Toy Rotation? It is a system that limits the number of toys available for PLAY at one time and involves rotating the toys that are available on a regular basis whilst maintaining the limited number of toys.

What do Toy Rotations look like? Toy Rotations come in many shapes, sizes, styles and forms. There is not a one size fits all. However, they do follow the basic principle of rotating toys.

Why would I consider a Toy Rotation in my PLAYspace? Toy Rotations are worth considering if you have a large volume of toys, limited storage space, a little learner/s losing interest in play and/or reducing overwhelm in the home.

How can I integrate Toy Rotation into my daily routine?

Creating a Toy Rotation in your home is a commitment that involves time, decision making, decluttering (sometimes), trial and error and ongoing reflection.

These are the steps we took to create a Toy Rotation in our home at the beginning of our PLAY journey.

CHOOSE A LOCATION

I recommend choosing one area to begin with and an area where your learners play the most. Once you have an effective system you may decide to venture into creating a toy rotation system in other spaces within the home.

👉 COLLECT ALL THE TOYS

Take a look at what toys you have and what toy you want to include in a toy rotation (toys you don't mind seeing on the floor and are safe on the floor with babies, toddlers and preschoolers).

👉 SORT THE TOYS

Categorise and declutter the toys as you sort. (I love using the traditional keep, donate and toss pile system and found [Project 14](#) to be a great program to be involved in). Deciding what toys to keep can sometimes be tricky. I prefer to use toys that are versatile, durable, fun and foster higher order thinking (problem solving, decision making and creative and critical thinking). Some toy examples are: magnetic tiles, blocks, rattles, wooden toys, craft supplies, vehicles, animal figurines, puzzles, posting boxes, soft toys, musical instruments, loose parts and books.

👉 ORGANISE THE TOYS

There are lots of ways to organise toys (colour, size, shape, favourites, alphabetically, age appropriate, themes, schemas) but our favourite way is thematic. Eg. Animals, transport, pretend, construction etc.

👉 DECIDE ON STORAGE

There are a variety of ways to store toys. Remember **“Create a system that fits your life”** – one that will fit comfortably in the physical environment (nursery, playroom or living area), provide easy and safe access for your little learners and a colour palette (that invites your child to participate and enjoy the rotation. Our favourites are Trofast frames and tubs, colourful flexitubs and cube storage with boxes/baskets (low line).

👉 PLACE TOYS IN ALLOTTED SPOTS

Once you have finalised the storage of your choice, place toys in their allotted spot. You may choose to label for an extended learning opportunity and convenient packing away system. Labels can be photos, words or a mix of both (whichever meets the needs of the users best).

👉 CHOOSING A ROTATION SYSTEM

There are a few different ways to rotate toys – cyclic, direct swap/substitute, interest based or random. And the frequency could vary from daily, weekly, fortnightly or even monthly. I suggest trying one way and sticking with it if it works and changing it if necessary. What works for

us is a cyclic mixed interest and skills based rotation on a weekly basis. Our toys are rotated at the end of the week on a Friday – this originally was on a Sunday for many years.

Things to remember if you plan on trying a toy rotation:

- they take time,
- patience,
- trial and error to work smoothly.

If at first, things aren't going to plan, take some time to reflect, seek solutions and inspiration online and be persistent whilst recognising the limitations of the users to avoid toy rotation burn out.

I hope these steps inspire you to create a toy rotation system if it something that fits your life and provide you with many opportunities to *celebrate***PLAY** with your little ones.

NEXT: PLAY BASED LEARNING STATIONS



What is Play Based Learning Stations?

A Play Based Learning Station (PBLs) is what we call our play system in the home-it is how we set up play. It focuses on the physical layout of space, furniture and resources as well as providing children with engaging, interest based and meaningful activities to play in.

How can I implement Play Based Learning Stations in my home?

A PBLs system is designed to utilise what you already have in the home and will involve trial and error. Please don't be disheartened if at first, it isn't a raving success. Here are some tips to guide you:

- 1. Make a list** (written or mental, whichever works best for you) of all the resources (toys, games) you have. This list will come in handy throughout the year when you are buying gifts for your children (eg. birthdays, Christmas) as a way of keeping track of what is needed to compliment what is already available, the direction their interests are heading in and what you are keen for them to learn.
 - 2. Once you have this list**, write down what play ideas you have in mind that can be created using those very resources and what goal you would like your child to achieve (enjoyment is a given). Eg. a tea set lends itself to tea parties, blocks lend themselves to building, designing in a variety of themes, cars lend themselves to pretend car washes, trips to venues etc.
 - 3. From this list** choose four activities to set up in your play space and set them up. Here is a peek at our list to help get you started.
 - 4. Invite** your children in for a chat about how the play is going to work. Keep the instructions to a minimum as you are trying to avoid your children tuning out before they can begin. Aim to maintain the initial anticipation.
- *FYI** -There are two ways in which this can work for you (a) free choice or (b) rotation.
- (a)Free choice**-each learner chooses the order in which they complete/play each activity.
- (b)Rotation**-each learner moves through each activity in the same direction.

You decide which way works best for you and your learners. If one doesn't work, then try the other. If at first, they don't work, be persistent and try again. It will take some time for all involved to adjust.

5. Keep these activities up for the day and refrain from packing away their creations unless it is going to be hazardous.

- If you are in and out of the house having these stations out in your absence allows learners to immediately resume their play.

6. Once you have established Play Based Learning Stations that work for you and your family and you feel confident with how it is working, you may move towards having a morning play-based routine and an afternoon play based routine where the activities are changed twice a day. Again, refrain from packing away your learner's creations unless it is hazardous. They will love waking up to see their efforts on display.

Remember to take a photo of their creations before you pack them up, so you have a keepsake.

- Moving forward, if you find PBLs are working, you may decide to increase from 4-6 stations.

- And moving from that you may look at adding new resources to maintain engagement and purpose.

If you find things aren't working the way you had hoped, go back to basics, and modify the activities and expectations.

Some benefits from Play Based Learning Stations are:

- children are learning through play which is an absolute pleasure to see
- a collection of happy snaps recording their achievements
- an inventory list to help plan gifts required for birthday, Christmas and other celebratory events based on interests and skills.
- family time for fun
- skills in a multitude of areas-problem solving, turn taking, communication to name a few.

NEXT: DAILY ACTIVITY TUBS

One of the best-known organisational strategies at celebratePLAY, is the Daily Activity Tubs (DAT's).

What are Daily Activity Tubs?

Daily Activity Tubs are a concept I created as a solution to my eldest engaging in meaningful play whilst I was feeding the newborn. It was a time of change with going from one child to two children and one that needed some improvement.

Since then, like my newborn the tubs have grown. However, their purpose has evolved and now they have been introduced to being used during evening meal prep time. That time of day that is commonly referred to as 'witching hour', where children seem to be tired, whingy, restless, difficult, clingy and a time where parents begin the evening routine in the hope for a restful night ahead.

Now that I have got your attention, let's dig deeper and talk more about the nitty gritty of these Daily Activity Tubs and then the ways you can implement them in your home, because that is what it is all about- supporting and empowering you with ideas and inspiration to create meaningful daily play experiences in the home for your little learners.

...so our Daily Activity Tubs are a series of ten (5 per child), light weight, pastel coloured flexitubs with handles purchased from Big W (many years ago). Each tub is labelled with the days of the week using custom made vinyl stickers from Pretty Paper Label. They contain approximately two to three developmentally appropriate and high interest-based activities. And the trick to keeping these activities interesting and of value is to only use them when you really need to (as suggested with above examples).

How does this work?

Each Sunday the resources are rotated ready to start the new week. Activities are chosen based on each learner's interests and skills. They are also determined by size so that they fit in the tub neatly.

Some examples of activities we include are:

- magnetic tiles

- mini small world scenes
- wooden handheld toys
- school readiness games (number wheels, peg games, first readers, tracing sets, threading sets)
- puzzles
- toys
- open ended play toys
- cut and paste activities
- colouring in
- paper and crayons/pencils
- ten frames (mathematical activity)
- maps
- books
- playdough
- number sense laminated taskcards
- flashcards
- sightword cards
- picture talk cards
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Sound like a concept that would work in your home with your early learners or one you are keen to try? Fabulous, here are some ideas to help you get started:

priml-an acronym I love to use when taking on a new teaching and learning project.

P-PREPARE There are two ways to begin – either immediately with five/seven tubs per learner (one for each day) or with one tub with a few activities in it, to test the waters before going all out for the five/seven tubs per learner.

Once you have determined which way you will start, the next steps to consider are:

logistics – Where you will store these tubs so learners can access them easily, will you need to move them out of their reach when not in use so they hold their high interest value, will your learners benefit from different coloured baskets specific to them, and what type of daily labels will work best.

R-RESOURCE We recommend batch collecting your activities in a scheduled time each week/fortnight, where you can focus on selecting

developmentally appropriate activities. These are activities, your learners can complete independently whilst still enjoying a challenge.

A place to document your DAT's ideas (available in your Daily PLAY Plan) so that you are planning based on the interests of your early learners.

I-IMPLEMENT Introduce the concept with some basic instructions eg. including the place, you wish them to complete the activity, only using one tub per day, the activity is designed to be completed at a particular time/s of day and why that is important.

Practise using the tubs, try your ideas until you find something that works best for your family. This usually involves time and trial & error. Please don't be disheartened if the first time is not a raving success.

M-MONITOR Monitor how your learners are interacting with their activity tub and each other, have the activities been engaging, will you need additional resources, will changes need to be made to meet the user's needs.

E-EVALUATE This is the opportunity to observe, take notes (optional) and reflect on how well your system is working-is there quality in the activities and system, is there room for improvement, how well are your learners participating, are your learners engaged and so forth.

Happy PLAYing!!



play systems – invitation to play rotations

One of the most recent organisational systems at celebratePLAY, is the introduction of Invitation to PLAY rotations in lieu of our previous weekly Toy Rotation.

What is Invitation to PLAY?

invitation to play is a term used in early childhood settings and is one that is inspired by the Reggio Emilio approach. An 'Invitation to PLAY' is the intentional arrangement of a play/space activity so that it "*invites*" young learners to interact, explore, manipulate, materials through independent play.

So, when I refer to Invitation to Play as a rotation, that simply means the Invitations to PLAY set up each week is changing rather than the tubs with the toys in it themselves. The reason behind this change was Toy Rotation had lost its appeal with my learners and the time I was spending on rotating toys was no longer fitting our current season of life, particularly as the rotation wasn't working as it was designed to.

remember we have the power to change what is not working in our play spaces.

Now that I have got you thinking, let's dig deeper and talk more about the nitty gritty of this style of rotation and then the ways you can implement it in your home, because that is what it is all about – supporting and empowering you with ideas and inspiration to create meaningful daily play experiences and spaces in your home for your little learners.

...so, our Invitations to Play are a series of hands-on learning experiences, set up on our PLAY bench (the main space in our play area) in an interesting and aesthetically pleasing way. Each learning experience is geared towards the interests and skills of my littlies. The trick to keeping these experiences interesting and of value is to observe my learners...take note on how they interact and play with the resources in the play space and build upon these observations.

How does this work?

Each Friday the Invitations to PLAY are rotated (packed away and replaced with new ones) ready to start the weekend where we are home

for chunkier periods of time. In the past when we followed toy rotation, we rotated toys on a Sunday as we spent more time home during the week.

Learning experiences are set up as Invitations to PLAY and resources/themes/ideas are chosen based on each learner's interests and skills.

Some examples of learning experiences we include are:

- Magnetic tiles (I only have [Connetix Tiles](#) as I am a brand ambassador.
- Mini small world scenes eg, Sylvanian Family, dinosaur etc
- Wooden Toys eg, spinning tops, rainbow, semi circles, blocks
- Chalk Talk games eg, literacy, numeracy, science, art + craft etc
- Kits – Science, Art & Craft, STEM/STEAM, fine motor
- Puzzles
- Open ended play toys
- Books
- Playdough

Sounds like a concept that would work in your home with your early learners or one you are keen to try? Fabulous, here are some ideas to help you get started:

1. Take observations/notes of what your little learners are interested in and how they play with resources. Jot them down in your daily PLAY Planner observation/notes section or on the daily play planning sheet.
2. Start small – Invitation to PLAY takes time master and for learners to engage in. It will involve trial and error - so reflect on your set ups so that you know what the next best step for you is. Please don't be disheartened if it is not a raving success in the beginning.
3. Keen to learn more about how to master the art of Invitation with a group of likeminded Mummas – join our [FREE 7 Day Invitation to Play Challenge](#). This challenge is a self-paced one available all year round, however, there is certain times of the year, I jump in and host this challenge.

Happy PLAYing!!

Erin x



play systems - notes
