

The Importance of Dramatic Play – Paloma Samu Visiting Teacher [Bright Futures](#) copyright reserved

One of the great things I have observed when it comes to children and dramatic play is seeing how children reinvent themselves and the environment they are in. It is amazing standing back and watching a child transform from a four year old boy to a homemaker going shopping at Mitre 10 while riding a bike up and down the driveway. Minutes later the same four year old moves towards the sandpit and suddenly changes into someone completely different a construction worker digging up the side road looking for treasure.

You see, with dramatic play there is no right or wrong way about it, children explore this type of play in their own way, whether they are playing by themselves or within a group of their peers. There is a sense of excitement being able to portray someone else and recreate a situation and life experience for that persona, take for instance a young girl who dresses up in a Batman costume bottle feeding her baby at the play dough table.

Dramatic play is not quite like it used to be many years ago when it was centred around the home environment, playing Mums & Dads, although you still see it today, but now children are breaking through the restrictions of reality and are going beyond using their imagination at its peak, and engaging in dramatic play that deepen what they understand of the world around them.

Children can also recreate situations or life experiences to help them cope with their fears or any anxieties they might have, such as going to the doctor or the hospital, or starting at a new school. We had an example of this at Playgroup one morning where an Educarer was sitting at the Play dough table with one of her children, and they were using the play dough to re-enact where the electrodes were going to be placed on her body for an ECG so she wouldn't feel afraid or uneasy when it came to her appointment the following day.

Dramatic Play for children has so many benefits when it comes to learning and development. Children learn how to communicate and interact with other children, they use language to explain or describe what they are doing, ask and answer



questions and develop a vocabulary that helps them to coordinate and negotiate in social settings. Dramatic play promotes listening and speaking skills, as well as encourages language development.

Children can structure their dramatic play by incorporating the use of props and materials; these can be as simple as an old telephone to using empty cardboard boxes. It's one of the great things about dramatic play when children can make something out of anything, using everyday objects to represent a prop or situation, ie/ chairs set up like a train or bus. In some cases you have children who do not necessarily need any props or materials and instead use body language to express an action, ie/ a child who swings their arms in the air pretending to be a helicopter.

Watching children in dramatic play can often be humorous especially when children start to mimic or imitate an action or verbal expression of someone they know, including animals or people they are familiar with like doctors or teachers. Quite often you see children take on the role as a parent feeding their baby whether it's a doll or another child in that baby role, or pretending to be a dog at the park and their friend being the dog handler.

Then in other cases you see children engaging in a different type of dramatic play where fantasy becomes the new reality, take for instance children pretending to be faeries, monsters, princes and princesses.

Learning opportunities and possibilities for dramatic play is endless. It is spontaneous, open-ended and child-initiated. Children have a certain sense of control when it comes to dramatic play, and in an environment that is safe and exciting children have the freedom to experiment with different roles in a variety of contexts.

As parents, teachers and adults we can enjoy being a part of their world. We can support children's dramatic play in a number of ways by providing a variety of props and materials to explore and experiment with, provide a place that is safe where children feel they will not be judged or mocked, and be given the opportunity to let their imaginations run free. We create the environment, one that is warm and stimulating, but children create the play.

American Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson once said *The playing adult steps sideward into another reality; the playing child advances forward to new stages of mastery.*

