

Comments on: 'Teaching and play in the early years – a balancing act?'

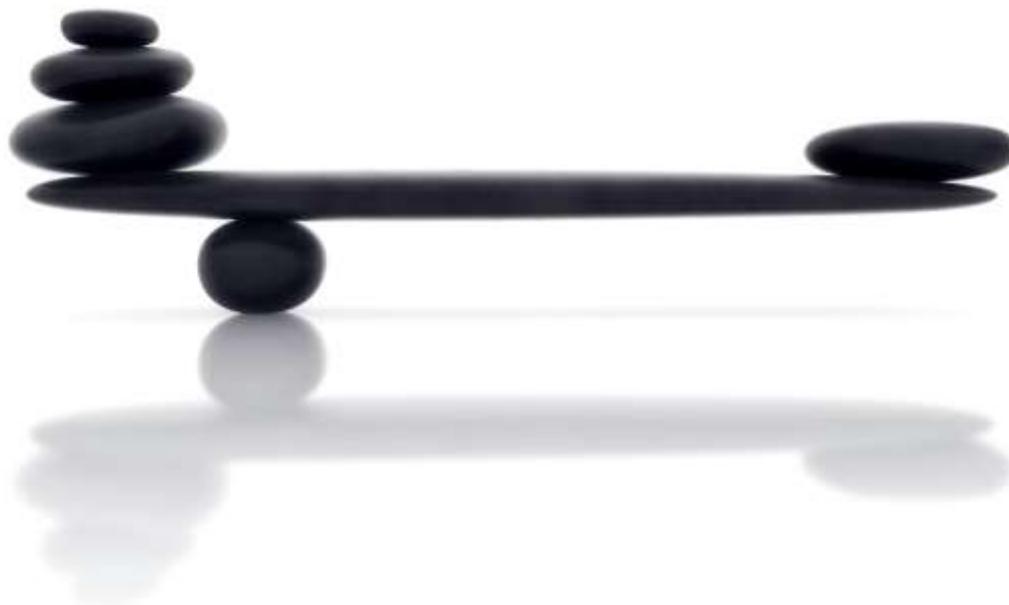
(Ofsted, 2015)

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Ofsted's (2015) influential report stresses the importance of answering the question of 'balance', particularly in relation to supporting the teaching and learning of disadvantaged children. The report acknowledges that setting up teaching and play as opposites is a false dichotomy and that good practice involves adults and children in a cyclic interplay, underpinned by accurate assessment and continual quality-enhancing decisions by the practitioner. But this still leaves the question of exactly how practitioners 'weigh up' what Ofsted refer to as:

'...the extent of their involvement, and fine-tun(e) how formal or informal, structured or unstructured, dependent or independent each learning experience should be to meet the needs of each child most effectively' (Ofsted, 2015, p5).

When most people think about the question of 'balance' between teaching and play, they think of them each exerting an equal weight on each side. But that isn't the only way things balance... you can have a 'balance' with much more emphasis on play than on teaching!



How much more? Archimedes suggested he could lift the planet Earth if only we gave him a long enough lever, although we should, of course, remember that he was only speaking metaphorically, and every metaphor has its weaknesses as well as its strengths¹. The SchemaPlay argument is that the best research evidence that we currently have suggests that the 'weighting' placed on play must be substantial, disproportionate, and overriding in comparison to teaching. But we also argue that 'synergy' rather than 'balance' provides a much better metaphor for teaching and play. This is because an appropriate combination of the two elements, even if some people consider see them as 'unbalanced', produce a total learning effect that is much greater than the sum of the two.

Citation: Siraj-Blatchford and Brock (2017) *Comments on: 'Teaching and play in the early years a - balancing act?'* [Ofsted, 2015], SchemaPlay Accessed at: <http://www.schemaplay.com/docs/synergy.pdf>

¹ It's a nice idea but: As far as we know the universe doesn't have a pivot point he could balance the lever on, the Earth is also moving at 1,000 miles an hour: and the lever would have to be 10 million light years in length!