

# INVITATIONS TO PLAY AND PLAY PROVOCATIONS

## What's the difference?

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We all need a little motivation to try something new! In relation to inquiry-based learning in early childhood education, the terms 'invitations to play' and 'play provocations' are used as part of the pedagogical approach to emergent curriculum. They are applied interchangeably to suggest prompting curiosity and exploration through play. There is however, a subtle difference between the two approaches.

### 'Invitations to Play' and 'Play Provocations' – what's the difference?

An 'invitation to play' can be described as a mindfully planned space that encourages exploration, engagement and discovery.

A 'play provocation' is an activity framed by a broad idea that provokes action and stimulates thinking.

### What does an invitation to play look like?

An 'invitation to play' is how educators create interesting and responsive play environments for children. This can be achieved through **mindfully planned spaces indoors and outdoors**, including hidey spaces, accessible loose parts, real life artefacts, a challenging physical equipment, and creative materials - to name but a few.

Providing an environment full of invitations to play is a very simple yet effective way to 'open the door' to children to explore and investigate different open-ended materials, resources and spaces. Invitations to play act as a prompt to the child to **follow their interests, provoke thinking and nurture creativity.**

One example of this is providing interesting clothes for role play and dress up as an invitation to choose, experiment, create and play.

### REAL CLOTHES VS. COSTUMES

*Real clothes are open ended and I can be any character I choose to be..*

*Real clothes have big buttons, zips and fastenings..*

*Real clothes are recycled and free..*

*Real clothes fit any body shape or size..*

*Real clothes vary in fabric, smell and texture..*

*Real clothes are gender free..*

*Real clothes are oversized and easy to put on..*

*Real clothes are culturally diverse..*

*Real clothes are REAL*



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## Setting up invitations to play

There are **no rules** about invitations to play. The way educators set up the play environment draws on a number of areas. For example, educators may have broad learning outcomes in mind as they set up play invitations in the environment or they could be created in response to a child's interest. Other educators favour mainly natural resources and outdoor exploration when creating an environment full of invitations to play. **A balanced blend of all is usually the most effective approach.**

Invitations to play are organised by the educator as part of the **emergent early childhood curriculum** in various interesting and fun ways. As the image below demonstrates, there are many ways to refine motor skills, enhance sensory skills and nurture exploration when invitations to play are interesting, different and usually messy!



## What does a play provocation look like?

Provocations are a **pedagogical strategy** used in inquiry learning. Provocations are a collective of materials or objects set up for the child with **a broad idea behind the collective**. Materials and objects used should be open ended and non-gender specific. They should not intrude on the child's freedom to play or create.

Provocations provide a stimulus to provoke thought and ideas encouraging **creativity, decision making and independence.**

As learning has **no specific goals**, children can follow their own thought process and gain a sense of **ownership over their work.**

A lovely example of a provocation to play called **'Can you make your own flower?'** comes from TribeMOSAIC member Laugh and Learn Childcare in Quigley's Point, County Donegal.



## Setting Up Play Provocations

When educators use **provocations**, the intent of the activity is more defined. This may involve **prompting a response**. For example, the provocation could be accompanied by one or two clear questions. The questions, posed by the educator, typically encourage children to **explore or make decisions to entice learning**.

Objects can be chosen because they are unusual or interesting and the educator wants to observe how children interact with and use the items. **Provocations can be set up outdoors or indoors** and can be tailored to meet the age or capabilities of all children. They can be supported with books, pictures, magnifying glasses, writing/cutting tools, containers or art materials.

Educators can invite children to play with the materials, read the question prompt and explain a little about the resources. Educator direction is not required, just an invite to play and explore the different elements on offer. This enables the child to **self-direct their play and follow their own interests**.

Play provocations **do not have to be picture perfect** when set up and do not require expensive resources. They can be arranged in a variety of ways including observational tables, treasure trays or baskets, wonder walls or display stands.

For example, shells are intriguing loose parts that can be used for children of all ages. Regardless of whether it's a **baby** exploring the sensory properties of shells, a **toddler** sorting shells into tubs or a **preschool child** decorating a picture, **all play interactions will draw on the child's imagination**.



The most important principle that supports either 'Invitations to Play' or 'Play Provocations' is that engagement with play materials should enable each child to self-direct their own play at their own pace. The child's own curiosity, imagination and interests will determine the type of interaction which will inevitably lead to learning and development.

