

DinosaurPlay (Phase 3/Phase 4)

What is it? DinosaurPlay is a playful intervention that can be used for building confidence and reinforcing blending and segmenting skills - whilst playing with imaginary dinosaurs. It aims to encourage the person leading the sessions to become really curious about how children's blending and segmenting skills are developing and work out how best to support them.

It is intended to run in addition to daily phonics sessions and ongoing applying.

It has grown out of ideas developed over the last few years in a primary school. The original sessions used toy dinosaurs. This version uses imaginary dinosaurs to help with social distancing and also because sharing toys can be hard – everyone wants to hug a T Rex.

Who could it help? Children who know the majority of the Phase 2 and 3 GPCs but who are lacking skills and/or confidence in blending and/or segmenting Phase 3 and 4 words.

NB. If work is needed on GPCs, build GPC revision into the revisit part of daily phonics sessions.

When, where and who delivers it?

The basic plan

The basic planning follows a fairly standard format for an intervention.

Out of class Adult led session 30 mins	An adult leads a small group (6 children) session once per week to develop blending and segmenting skills and use these skills whilst having fun playing at looking after imaginary dinosaurs. There are detailed weekly planning outlines for these sessions.
In class Class teacher builds links	Children will bring back a learning poster from the adult led session. This is displayed in class and the teacher refers to it to remind children to use what they have learned that week whenever they are reading/writing. <i>NB. Building links between what happens in intervention sessions outside the class with learning going on in class has been shown repeatedly to be an important factor in determining how effective interventions are. Children often don't automatically apply their intervention learning back in class unless they are explicitly encouraged and helped to do so.</i>
In class Independent play session(s)	Children play independently with the printed resources and imaginary dinosaurs in class to rehearse learning from the adult led session - guided reading sessions often work well for this.
At home Child shares comic	A comic reinforcing the learning from each session is sent home with each child for them to share with someone at home. <i>NB. Sharing with a close family member is really important. Providing a child with an opportunity to read the comic with an adult in school may be an alternative if a child simply isn't getting the opportunity to read at home. However, reading with a much loved family member is more valuable.</i>

Adapting the basic plan

In these incredibly challenging times with bubbles, distancing, isolations, extreme staff shortages and the constant threat of school closures hanging over us, it seems highly likely that the above intervention format would be difficult to reliably achieve in many schools.

Therefore feel free to adapt things to suit your children's needs and your situation.

The planning includes lots of opportunities to 'Get curious' about what children can do and what progress they are making. You can use this as a check on whether any flexible adaptations you have made are working effectively or whether you need to adapt again.

Some possible adaptations (see the end of the document for notes):

- Class teacher uses the ideas with the whole class (See note 1)
- Class teacher uses with a group within class (See note 2)
- Use with an individual or pair of children (See note 3)
- Use weeks on a stand alone basis to identify needs or tackle a specific issue (See note 4)
- Use resources selectively to support home learning (See note 5)
- Include additional adult led sessions for extra reinforcement (See note 6)
- Emphasise the play side more than the phonics side (See note 7)
- Get creative and figure out what works for you (See note 8)

Getting started

- Look at **[bigpicture.pdf](#)** to see how the intervention, class teaching and reading at home fit together each week.
- Read through the detailed session plans for each week. Resources that need to be prepared in advance are listed in the yellow section at the top of each week's planning.
- Decide if you think this could fit the needs of your children and your school.
- Decide who, when, where and how this could work in your school - including setting aside preparation/reflection time for the person delivering the sessions.
- Check that all adults involved are happy to get really curious about the children's learning.
- Check that all adults involved are happy to be silly and play with imaginary dinosaurs.
- Have fun!

Notes

Note (1) Whole class –The intervention could simply be delivered to the whole class. All children have missed out on months of reinforcement of their blending and segmenting skills and are likely to benefit from having their confidence built up (and having any issues identified) even if they already know many more GPCs.

Note (2) Small group but led (in class) by class teacher - It is possible for a class teacher to deliver a phonics intervention session to a small group while the rest of the class does something else – a bit like a guided reading session. It needs to be very quiet for phonics learning (children need to hear the sounds clearly) and you need to be able to focus a lot of attention on the intervention group without interruptions. Realistically, a full classroom will never be as distraction free as a quiet, empty intervention room but in some circumstances it can work.

Achieving this level of focus with a small group whilst also ensuring the rest of the class are quietly, calmly, purposefully and independently learning is something that takes work to achieve. There is also no denying that it is significantly harder to make this work with some classes than it is with others.

Obviously, the key to making this work is choosing a learning activity for the rest of the class that you can train them to get on with calmly and independently. You may need to experiment a bit to find what works. Different activities work best for different classes.

Be aware that if you try to run the intervention this way, you are adding the very intense job of another person (including preparation, reflection, adapting future planning) on top of your already full workload. Plan to cut yourself some slack in some other areas on days that you do this. If you can't run the intervention in this way and also sit down to eat (and digest) lunch and go home at a realistic time, then do not run it. You being as healthy as possible is more important for the children in your class than any intervention could ever be.

Note (3) Use one to one or with a pair of children – This would be a simple adaptation. The adult leading the session may have to throw themselves even more wholeheartedly into childlike playing with the dinosaurs so that the child/children feel relaxed and able to join in. The class teacher may have to be flexible about how they link the child's learning back in to whole class lessons. Some children would be absolutely delighted to be the only child in the class with a poster on the wall and would unselfconsciously play on their own with a dinosaur who lives under their desk. Other children would find it unbearable to be singled out like this. You may wish to put the poster on the child's desk and remind them of things to focus on one to one rather than in front of the whole class. The independent session may also need to be out of class and playing with an adult. You know your children best. Adapt to them and their needs.

Note (4) Use specific weeks in a standalone way – It may be difficult to commit to staffing a 6 week intervention at the moment. If you already know that something covered in one of the weeks is what your children need then just try that one week. Hopefully, the 'Get curious' sections in the weekly intervention planning will help you identify specific issues and identify ways forward that you can then build into daily phonics sessions and class learning generally.

Note (5) Home learning – The caregiver-child relationship and the teacher-child relationship are very different. Playing to the strengths of the relationship is likely to be most effective. Detailed phonics teaching, having really high expectations and giving frequent feedback are all generally readily accepted and welcomed by children when coming from a teacher. When coming from a much loved caregiver (even one who has teaching qualifications and experience), the exact same behaviours can feel critical and hurtful to the child.

In particular, be aware that children who have been struggling with phonics in school (those most likely to be in need of intervention) may well have some feelings of frustration and even shame. They are unlikely to really let these feelings out in school. At home, with someone that they completely trust, those frustrations can come out in spectacular fashion.

On the flip side, there are aspects of learning support which parents and carers can offer more effectively than teachers. Parents are very influential in determining children's attitudes towards reading and writing. They are key to encouraging a love of reading for pleasure and learning in general. We all know that reading for pleasure and

parental involvement in children's learning have significant long term benefits for children. Home learning offers huge potential for developing these things if caregivers and teachers each take on the most appropriate roles for the relationship that they have with the child.

Find ways to ensure that any teaching, expectations and feedback (especially corrections) are seen by the child to be coming from staff back in school rather than from the caregiver.

Where parents/carers are in a position to be able to support learning (and obviously work, caring commitments and health issues mean that many will find this hard), encourage them to be supporters and cheerleaders rather than feeling the need to be teachers. Reassure them that if challenging and correcting children would cause conflict, they don't need to do this. It is impossible to learn whilst in the middle of a meltdown. Let them know it is OK to help children who get stuck by simply telling them the words and letters they need. Give caregivers permission to have fun with learning. Reassure them that their children seeing them enjoying and playing along with reading and writing games is likely to have a more important impact on learning in the long run than falling out over correcting each and every spelling or pronunciation.

With all that said, as long as parents aren't expected to be teachers, there are multiple ways that the resources and planning could be adapted to be used at home. Much of the initial, adult-led session could be delivered by video. The pdf resources posters/word cards/comics could all be used to inspire imaginative independent play at home and give relaxed opportunities for reading and writing.

Note (6) Include extra adult led sessions. Interventions can provide a useful boost but so many have missed out on so much teaching, you may wish to add extra adult led sessions each week to revisit what has been covered in the intervention sessions. This could be with the whole group or may work better with one or two children who struggled with a specific aspect of learning or find it hard to concentrate within the group or perhaps were off school for the initial session.

Note (7) Follow the children's needs. Play is a need.

Note (8) Adapt, in whatever ways work for you to help your children learn. This is what teachers do best. Trust yourself. A very handy feature of phonics learning is that changes happen so quickly that you can see in front of your eyes what is working and what isn't. Watch closely. Be curious. Have fun.