SUPPORTING CHILDHOOD RESILIENCE THROUGH PLAY
A facilitation guide for early childhood practitioners
A CHINA-AFRICA COLLABORATION PROJECT FOR BUILDING A PEACEFUL AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE
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Acknowledgements
The project management team would like to express its sincere gratitude for the generous funding support from Dr Maggie Koong of the Victoria Charitable Trust Fund, Mr Rodney Tsang of Hammer Capital and Mr Wang Wei of SF Express.

Special thanks go to the World Organization for Early Childhood Education, especially, OMEP National Committees and the World Presidency and Secretariat (Dr Maggie Koong, Dr Eunhye Park, Dr Jessie Wong and Dr Soon Hwan Kim), for their contribution to the project conceptualisation and ongoing implementation.

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ISBN: 978-962-7512-95-0
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Introduction
This facilitation guide was prepared as part of the China-Africa Collaboration Project for Building a Peaceful and Sustainable Future: Supporting Childhood Resilience through Play project, which is the second phase of the Play and Resilience Project led by the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP), in collaboration with the Victoria Charitable Trust Fund.

The project aims to support the development and resilience of young children through play, and has the following specific objectives:

i. **To raise awareness** among parents, families, communities and policy-makers about the importance of early childhood care and education and the value of play in building children’s resilience.

ii. **To develop materials and tools** that are practical and adaptable and will improve the quality of childcare and the learning environment and processes.

iii. **To develop the capacity** of preschool and nursery administrators, teachers and caregivers to develop and implement effective curricula on resilience building through play.

iv. **To foster relationships** that are sustainable and collaborative between families, preschools and communities, in order to continue this work beyond the project.

This facilitation guide supports work towards the above objectives by providing:

- **Conceptual clarifications of ‘play’ and ‘resilience’ in early childhood.**
- **An evidence-based overview of current issues and important considerations in planning to incorporate a focus on resilience in play-based approaches.**
- **Practical exercises to support reflection on and preparation for incorporating resilience into early childhood settings using play-based approaches.**

For practitioners to support the use of play-based approaches that promote resilience, and to implement those approaches effectively, it is essential that they understand the key concepts that underpin both ‘play’ and ‘resilience’. Therefore, this facilitation guide begins with an overview of the definitions and the evidence regarding the benefits of play for young children, with specific focus on the aspects that are likely to promote resilience. This is followed by a summary of the key issues that arise when implementing play-based approaches, drawing attention to important broad considerations, based on current evidence. Subsequently, the guide provides insights into the links between resilience and play-based approaches. Throughout the guide, key points are supported with data from a recent survey of understandings and current approaches to combining play and resilience among OMEP national committees.

This facilitation guide will be useful to individuals and organisations that seek to support young children’s resilience in early childhood settings. The guide provides early childhood practitioners with information about the concepts of ‘play’ and ‘resilience’ based on current research, to assist them in planning play-based approaches to support resilience building among young children. This guide does not offer a one-size-fits-all model, however. Evidence shows that effective resilience-building requires careful consideration of each child’s individual and unique circumstances and context. Furthermore, resilience-building
also depends on teacher/practitioner resilience, agency and confidence; these are all important ‘ingredients’ in early childhood settings that effectively promote resilience. We therefore encourage users of this guide to actively interpret, contextualise and adapt the material, and prepare plans that respond to and fit with their own unique contexts, as well as with the needs of the children with whom they work.

Users are encouraged to work with peers to plan resilience-building play-based approaches that are suited to the settings and communities in which they work.
Section A
Play – what does it mean and what are the benefits?
What is ‘play’?
Experts have identified many different types of play, offering various benefits for young children. These types range from ‘structured play’, which is planned by teachers and designed to support attainment of clearly-defined learning goals, to ‘unstructured play’, in which teachers have no role other than to ensure children’s safety.

Theories about play include that of Vygotsky (1966), who felt that in play the rules should be formulated in advance, but that these can change during the course of the play experience, and the theory of Rubin, Fein and Vandenberg (1983) who argued that play must be free from externally imposed rules and regulations and should involve the active participation of all players.

The meaning of ‘play’ differs depending on the context in which it occurs (e.g. as part of a formal learning experience, as part of a community activity, and as part of a game that children are playing).

According to Ebbeck and Waniganayake (2016, pp. 20-21), ‘play’ has twelve features (see Table 1). Reflected across these twelve features is the understanding that children are actively involved in shaping the experience and there is an element of enjoyment and of choice in children’s involvement.
Table 1. The twelve features of ‘play’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Feature</th>
<th></th>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>It actively makes use of first-hand experiences, including struggles manipulations, exploration, discovery and practice.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>It can be initiated by a child or by an adult; if it is initiated by an adult, he or she must pay attention to the features in points 2, 9 and 10 of this list.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It does not exert external pressure to conform to rules, pressures, goals, tasks, for a definite direction.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>It can be solitary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>It is an active process without a pre-determined product.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>It can be conducted in partnership with other children or groups of adults and / or children who will be sensitive to each other’s personal needs and goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>It is intrinsically motivated.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>It is about participants being immersed in ideas, feelings, relationships, reflecting on and becoming aware of what we know (meta-cognition).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>It is about possible, alternative worlds that involves supposing and imagination, which lift participants to a higher level of functioning. This involves being imaginative, creative, original and innovative.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>It enables us to use skills that we have previously developed, mastering and gaining further competence in these skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>It is sustained, and when it is in ‘full flow’, it helps us to function ahead of what we can actually do in our real lives.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>It is an integrating mechanism that brings together everything we learn, know, feel and understand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2016, pp. 20-21

While these twelve features are useful in understanding the concept of play, they should not be viewed as criteria; it is not necessary for all of them to be identifiable in planned play experiences. Furthermore, it should be recognized that these features (of children’s interactions with other people and their environments) do not only take place in early childhood settings; they also take place at home, in the community and in all ‘spaces’ that children occupy. Moreover, different forms, aspects and experiences of play incorporate different parts of these features.
Reflection points

Please take time to discuss each of the twelve features outlined in Table 1:

Do they reflect your own understanding/s of ‘play’? Are there any other features / descriptions that you would add to this list? If so, please list below:

Please list below examples of play-based experiences that illustrate each of these features, based on your observations of children’s play in your own contexts:

Please discuss how you think these features of play might help in building resilience in young children (you can refer to characteristics of resilience outlined in Appendix B):
In April 2017, OMEP conducted a survey of its National Committees to gain insight into how ideas about play and resilience vary across contexts. See Box 1 for some of the responses.

**BOX 1**

**DEFINITIONS OF PLAY ACCORDING TO OMEP NATIONAL COMMITTEES**

- **Play is an activity where kids represent, imitate, simulate, explore or experiment with different natural and artificial resources, which give a pleasant and joyful feeling.**
- **Play is important for the child and work is for adults. In fact, while playing, the child is working as he is learning.**
- **Play is a compulsory human activity mostly practiced by children during which free will and pleasure enable them to process information, grow, feel good and also learn. Further, they fully benefit mentally psychologically and physically as they act from their own inquiry, for the purpose of having fun as they interact physically and verbally with other.**
- **Play is the nature of the child. Its meaning and deepest sense cannot be differentiated from the child itself. It’s freedom, expression, potential, development.**
- **Play is a self-chosen, enjoyable activity involving exploration of the natural environment and active engagement with people, objects or representations.**
- **Play is an activity which is enjoyable and meaningful at all times, for children and adults alike.**
- **To play is an act that helps us to enjoy and get engage with others and the environment.**

**Evidence of the benefits of play**

Many parents and education managers do not see the value of play for young children. This poses a major challenge to the use of play-based approaches in formal early childhood contexts. This challenge can be overcome, however, by becoming aware of the evidence that supports play-based approaches. Such knowledge can enable practitioners to (i) build on examples of where play is occurring naturally (and valued) in children’s homes and communities and (ii) explain to caregivers, policy makers and other stakeholders the various benefits of play, both for children’s learning and for their overall well-being, and to thereby gain stakeholder and community support.

As Whitebread, Basilio, Kuvalja and Verma (2012) point out, play is a universal phenomenon supported by adults across all societies and cultures across the world. Children love to play and it is their natural instinct (Ejieh, 2006). Engaging in play is a natural part of human life worldwide, as evidenced by the play artefacts from medieval and ancient times that have been uncovered all over the world.

Decades of compelling research have shown that play can support children’s physical, social, emotional and intellectual development, as well as their imagination and creativity (Ejieh, 2006; O’Dwyer, 2012). Play has been linked to evolutionary increases in the brain
size of human beings, and research indicates links between play and the development of important neural connections (Pellis and Pellis, cited in Whitebread, 2012, p. 29). Pellegrini (2009) has argued that while ‘work’ requires a specific objective or goal, engaging in more open-ended play experiences allows human beings to experiment, problem-solve, change behavioural sequences and vary actions. This supports the development of higher-order cognitive skills.

Play opportunities also promote social competence in a variety of ways, including by strengthening skills such as sharing, perspective taking and negotiating. Pretend play can enhance conflict resolution skills and enrich self-concept (Frost, Wortham and Reifel, 2001, cited in Burriss and Burriss, 2011). Furthermore, play has the potential to strengthen empathy and sensitivity towards others through perspective taking (Haney and Bissonnette, 2011).

Research has also found that a lack of play opportunities can diminish capacity for communication and therefore result in a tendency towards aggressiveness and violence (Almon, 2003). Similarly, insufficient physical activity can impact negatively on psychosocial factors such as self-esteem and can be associated with poor acquisition of fundamental movement skills during childhood (O’Dwyer, 2012).

One of the reasons why play-based approaches are so widely advocated is because play supports all the key domains of development, including cognition (problem-solving, understanding), literacy and numeracy development, social-emotional and cultural understanding, physical health and well-being.

The notion of play as a process of learning was expressed by a large number of teachers in a study conducted by UNESCO (2011) in the three sub-Saharan countries of Nigeria, Botswana and Kenya and corresponds to the widely held view that play-based approaches are effective in supporting children’s learning and development (Izumi-Taylor et al, 2004; Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010; Morrison, 2009).

Combined, the evidence suggests that there are strong links between opportunities to engage in play and children’s all-round well-being (see Table 2).
Table 2. Summary of evidence of the benefits of play

<table>
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<tr>
<th>PLAY ENABLES CHILDREN TO:</th>
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<td>Represent and understand their world.¹</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Form friendships, as research shows children are happier at preschool and school and adjust more quickly when they have friends.⁵</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be flexible in their thinking.²</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct their knowledge through meaningful, direct, first-hand experiences.⁶</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form meaningful relationships with peers, adults and significant others in their lives.⁴</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster and extend their communication skills.⁷</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience a range of emotions: Happiness, sadness, anger, jealousy, excitement, wonder and fear.⁴</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Function above their current intellectual level and extend their cognitive skills.⁸</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Source: Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2016, pp. 20-21

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child highlights the importance of ‘play’ for children’s all round development in Article 31: ‘States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.’ This right is non-negotiable for every child, everywhere (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). As the most widely ratified convention globally, the UNCRC serves as a powerful tool for advocacy in upholding children’s rights, including the right of children to engage in play.

Potential barriers to play-based approaches

Play is universal – children everywhere around the world play – and similar themes arise in play worldwide. For example, transportation features in the play of children in many different countries. However, cultural expectations affect children’s opportunities to engage in play. Beliefs about children’s development and play can have a profound impact on how play is implemented in early childhood settings (Mabagala and Mabagala, 2012).
For example, a study in Ghana observed that parents wanted their children to be the best academically and they resisted play for their children when at school as they felt this would reduce their children’s ‘time for learning’ (Dako-Gyeke, 2013). The same study in Ghana found that preschool teachers were urged to concentrate on teaching the alphabet, numbers, colours and other skills and were reprimanded for allowing children to play. Similarly, Omoera (2011) observed that many parents, preschool teachers and early childhood education providers in Nigeria tended to make children start ‘serious’ learning between the ages of 2 and 4 and that teachers were therefore reluctant to allocate time for children to play.

These findings reflect a fundamental misunderstanding about ‘play’ and indicate that in many cultures ‘play’ is viewed as being a separate activity from learning. Furthermore, play-based approaches are viewed as peripheral to learning, and play is therefore seen as being optional.

Teachers’ perceptions of play also differ between cultures. These perceptions are important because they shape teachers’ approaches to creating and managing classroom culture, environment, content and practices (Coots, 2009). Lack of training affects teachers’ perceptions of play and their willingness to use play-based approaches. Studies have shown that many preschool teachers do not use play-based approaches because they are not trained in the use of play to support children’s learning (Mbise, 1996; Kweka, 1998; Ejieh, 2006; Baharia, 2012; Hamad, 2012; Almon, 2003). Researchers have also found that other educators are even less prepared to use play as a tool for learning than preschool teachers (Musa, 2010).

Given that, when implemented correctly, play-based approaches enhance learning (including in the development of literacy, numeracy and science skills), it is important to explain to school leaders and parents the benefits of these practices, so that they will support play-based approaches. If we attempt to implement practices and approaches that conflict with existing beliefs and values without explaining the benefits of those practices and approaches, significant barriers to implementation may arise. Effective implementation requires support from all of the stakeholders, so it is important to raise awareness of the benefits of play.
Reflection points

Please discuss the benefits listed above and think of (and note below) specific examples / observations of children engaged in play-based experiences from your own contexts that illustrate these benefits:

1.

2.

3.

Can you think of any benefits that are not listed above? If so, please note below:

1.

2.

3.

Planning to implement play-based approaches needs to also address potential barriers. It would be useful to consider and discuss the following: What are parents’ and school / community leaders’ attitudes towards play in your context?
While all of the respondents that participated in the survey of the OMEP national committees felt that play has benefits for children, the respondents differed slightly in their views of what those benefits are (see Box 2).

**BOX 2**

**DATA FROM THE SURVEY OF OMEP NATIONAL COMMITTEES: BENEFITS OF PLAY**

One respondent reported that play motivates children to reach higher level learning and embodies the most natural way of interacting for children. Similarly, other respondents felt that play was the most appropriate way of learning.

Other respondents felt that engaging in play:

- Relieves stress.
- Improves brain function.
- Stimulates the mind and boost creativity.
- Improves relationships and connection to others.
- Facilitates the holistic development of young children – physical, cognitive, moral and social-emotional.

Furthermore, respondents felt that play benefits children in the sense that it enables them to have fun, feel relaxed, increase their physical fitness, gain knowledge and skills, improve their social skills, and increase emotional control.
Section B
Resilience – what is it and why is it important?
What is ‘resilience’?

While definitions vary, resilience, in general, refers to:

‘the capacity of the individual to demonstrate the personal strengths needed to cope with some kind of challenge, hardship or adversity’ (Noble and McGrath, 2012, p. 20)

This definition is reflected in the views shared by members of the surveyed OMEP national committees, as shown in Box 3.

**BOX 3**

**DEFINITIONS OF RESILIENCE ACCORDING TO OMEP NATIONAL COMMITTEES**

Responses from the OMEP national committees reflect the belief that resilience enables children to ‘bounce back’ from adversity and builds character in various ways.

**Enables children to ‘bounce back’**

- Human capacity or ability to adapt to distinct circumstances (which may include facing adverse situations).
- The ability to adapt well in the face of significant sources of stress and recover from setbacks. In other words, it is the quality of ‘bouncing back’
- The ability to handle serious challenges and find ways to bounce back and to thrive.
- Resilience is mental and physical strength to develop through life experience and adult examples while facing painful physical or mental life situations.
- Resilience in young children is an ability to learn and grow from mistakes, from a challenge, and other difficult situations
- Ability to become strong after something happens.
- Resilience is the ability to surmount or bounce back from adverse experiences.
- Resilience is potential for progress through various obstacles. Back to life as usual.

**Builds character**

- Allows children to see possibilities, to resist uniformity, to be creative.
- The resilient child has a positive self-concept and high self-esteem. He/she participates in social play, learns to share, to cooperate and to take turns.
- The child learns to be in groups, respects others and waits for her/his turn.
- The capacity to govern your own life and take active participation.
- Resilience is about acceptance of ourselves and of others.
- It’s a way of better handling and managing relations, life situations, problems, communication.

The concept of resilience in non-emergency contexts is relatively new in mainstream educational settings. Killian (2004, p. 33) refers to resilience as the ‘ordinary magic’ that enables children living across different contexts to cope effectively with and overcome severe adversity. Use of the word ‘magic’ reflects the difficulty in understanding precisely what characteristics and factors will result in resilience in children (Masten, 2001).

Ginsburg and Jablow (2015) offer a useful model for understanding how resilience is built: the ‘7 crucial Cs of resilience’: competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping and control. These ‘ingredients’ of resilience are closely interrelated and interwoven, forming a ‘web’. Box 4 provides a brief description of each of the 7 Cs.
BOX 4
THE 7 C’S OF RESILIENCE

1. COMPETENCE
Competence is the ability to handle situations effectively. It is not a vague feeling that ‘I can do this’ but is acquired through actual experience. Children become competent by developing a set of skills that allow them to trust their judgment, make responsible choices and face difficult situations.

2. CONFIDENCE
Confidence is the solid belief in one’s own abilities and is rooted in competence. Rather than by being told how special they are, children gain confidence as they demonstrate their competence in real situations. Children who grow up with a sense of security through consistent caring and supportive relationships and who have experienced their own competence, believe they can cope with challenges, have the confidence to try new things and trust their ability to make sound choices.

3. CONNECTION
Children with close connections to family, friends, school and community are more likely to have a solid sense of security that yields positive values and prevents children seeking negative alternatives. Family is the central place in children’s life and this gives them the foundation for healthy development, particularly in early childhood. Connections to civic, educational, religious and athletic groups can also increase a child’s sense of belonging and safety in a wider world.

4. CHARACTER
Children need a fundamental sense of right and wrong to ensure they are prepared to make wise choices and contribute to the world. Each family or community has its own idea of what constitutes good character, and children with character enjoy a strong sense of self-worth and confidence. When children develop strong character, they have the ability to return to their core values during times of crisis.

5. CONTRIBUTION
Children who understand the importance of personal contribution gain a sense of purpose that motivates them. Not only will they take actions and make choices to improve the world, but they will also enhance their competence, character and sense of connection.

6. COPING
Children who learn to cope with stress effectively are better prepared to overcome life’s challenges. A wide repertoire of positive, adaptive coping strategies can also help prevent or reduce negative or unsafe responses to stress.

7. CONTROL
When children realise that their decisions affect their lives and they can control the outcomes of their decisions and actions, they learn that they have control. They see that they can make choices and take actions to bounce back from challenges. If parents make all the decisions, children may believe things simply happen to them, rather than understanding that many things happen because of the choices people make. When denied opportunities to make decisions, children tend to lack a sense of control, seeing control as external, and become passive, pessimistic and even depressed. Resilient children know they have a sense of control; and knowing they can make a difference promotes their competence and confidence.

Source: Ginsburg and Jablow, 2015
While the 7 Cs and other characteristics, such as high self-esteem, have been broadly attributed to resilient individuals, resilience also depends on other factors, and a person’s level of resilience is likely to change over time in response to life events. Resilience and the factors that support it are unique to every person, and the aspects of caregiver and community inputs that would be considered to support ‘resilience’ can differ from one child to another.

One key factor that affects resilience universally, however, is personal relationships. Decades of research into young children’s resilience points to the importance of a child having at least one stable, caring, responsive and supportive relationship with an adult in his or her life, whether this relationship is in the family or with caregivers, neighbours or teachers (National Scientific Council on the Developing Children, 2015).

Ungar (2013) defines resilience as involving four key concepts: navigation, negotiation, resources (opportunity) and meaning. He argues that building resilience requires not only a focus on the characteristics, skills and capacities of individuals but, importantly, requires ensuring that these characteristics, skills and capacities enable individuals to effectively navigate and take advantage of opportunities available to them. Achieving this for young children requires consideration of the wider socio-cultural contexts that children are living in and the unique opportunities that are available to them in their early childhood setting and in the local community.

Accordingly, resilience can be understood as the outcome of interactions between a child and the various aspects of their environment. Supporting the development of resilience requires looking beyond the context of formal early childhood settings, to consider the influences outside that setting, including in children’s homes and communities, and giving attention to the factors that interact to shape an individual child’s experiences and environment, ranging from relationships with primary caregivers and teachers to policies that support childhood wellbeing (Noble and McGrath, 2012; Luthar and Brown, 2007; Rutter, 2012; Ungar, 2013). These interactions are likely to be, in turn, influenced by individual characteristics of the child, including temperament and level of self-worth and self-efficacy, as well as by the opportunities and support available in the settings that the child actively participates in.

Thus, building resilience involves understanding the interactions between various factors in a child’s environment with a view to developing his or her competencies (e.g. 7 Cs discussed above). According to experts (e.g. Pianta and Walsh, 1998; Ungar, 2013), when we focus only on developing particular skills, there is a danger that children who do not develop those skills are seen as lacking in resilience.

Figure 1 illustrates Bronfenbrenner’s socio-ecological approach to understanding children’s development. This approach draws attention to the various factors that shape children’s early experience and influence their levels of resilience (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, children who have the benefit of living in a safe community and loving home environment have greater access to factors that may enable them to show high levels of resilience in the face of adversity (Bowes, Grace and Hodge, 2012). In turn, policies to promote child well-being (such as effective use of play-based approaches in early childhood settings) that are implemented effectively are likely to support resilience-building.
Bronfenbrenner’s model is highly relevant to understanding effective approaches for promoting resilience because it neatly expresses the interaction between multiple factors and contexts. As Bronfenbrenner has argued, children occupy and are influenced by multiple settings, some of which they may not participate directly in, such as local and national policies.

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner’s socio-ecological model
Source: Adapted from Niederer et al. (2009)

Resilience is commonly discussed in relation to children’s exposure to risk and the availability of protective factors that are likely to build sufficient levels of resilience for children to avoid negative outcomes associated with such exposure (Rutter, 1985). It is important that the protective factors outweigh the impact of risk factors that might exist in their immediate environments (Masten, Gewirtz and Sapienza 2013). Risk factors exist both in the family/community and in early childhood education contexts (see Appendix A for examples of risks and protective factors). Key to the concept of resilience is that exposure to risk may not necessarily result in negative outcomes, as long as appropriate and sufficient protective factors are in place to enable children to cope and overcome.

Figure 2 below illustrates the conditions required for building a child’s resilience, indicating that ‘protective’ factors in a child’s environment outweigh the ‘risk’ factors.

Figure 2. The conditions for resilience: protective factors outweigh risks
Why is ‘resilience’ important?

Natural disasters, conflict, inequality and other factors pose risks for children and threaten their development. In its 2014 annual report, UNICEF (2015) described its responses to 300 emergencies in 98 countries, making specific reference to the large proportion of children (between 50 and 60 per cent) in those countries affected by disasters and thus exposed to risk. Indeed, most children, wherever they live in the world, will be exposed to some degree of ‘risk’ at some point in their childhood (clearly, the degree varies greatly).

The concept of resilience, particularly applied to children and youth, grew out of a concern that a narrow focus on pathology (disorders) in children that result from exposure to risk, leads to an emphasis on treating conditions after they have been diagnosed, instead of building strengths and enabling preventive strategies to support children in overcoming adversity (Masten, Best and Garmezy, 1990). There is, therefore, growing acknowledgement that it is necessary to take steps to enable children to cope effectively with risk and adversity, i.e. build ‘resilience’. Recognizing this, education practitioners are increasingly interested in incorporating into everyday practice efforts to build resilience.

The links between ‘play’ and ‘resilience’

Play offers children opportunities to build the characteristics that are closely associated with high levels of resilience. ‘Through play, children are constructing an identity – who they are, what they know and what their joys and fears are’ (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2016, p. 3).

Thus, play-based approaches support the development of resilience in young children because they provide opportunities for children to develop characteristics such as the ‘7 Cs’ as well as autonomy and agency, and because they offer children opportunities for respite from stressful circumstances.

Play-based approaches also foster elements of the protective environment (see the resilience-vulnerability matrix in Appendix B). For example, play-based approaches can support the development of good and caring relationships, interpersonal support, friendships, social networks of peers, connections with ‘competent’ adults, security and harmony, task accomplishment, positive experiences, opportunities and meaningful interactions (Zhang, DeBlois, Deniger and Kamanzi, 2008).
Section C
Identifying risks and protective factors
This section provides starting points from which practitioners can begin to plan play experiences for children that are most likely to support resilience-building.

Since levels of resilience are determined not only by the individual child’s particular characteristics but also by the opportunities and supports provided in a child’s environment that foster resilience (i.e. protective factors), approaches to supporting resilience in children should therefore consider the potential protective factors in the community and family contexts. Practitioners can draw on these protective factors to plan appropriate play-based experiences.

An effective plan for supporting the development of resilience among young children attending early childhood settings should also respond to the particular risks that those children may be exposed to (for example, children of minority migrant workers living in a crowded urban slum are likely to have different needs and access to a different set of play resources in the community than children living in a homogenous, rural village with safe community play spaces).

A good starting point for incorporating play is to consider the specific factors and influences that shape children’s experiences in your own context. Practitioners can make use of Table 3 as a guide for identifying factors that are unique to their context. The table facilitates the ‘mapping’ of your own community and context, so that you can identify the factors and build them into your plans for implementing play.

Appendices A and B may be useful as points of reference for this exercise, as they provide examples of potential risk and protective factors, based on previous research. Appendix B illustrates how these risk and protective factors may interact to impact the child’s vulnerability and resilience. You may wish to draw on these examples to complete the columns in Table 3.
### Table 3. Mapping the risk and protective factors in your community and context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential risks that exist in the wider community (e.g. exposure to conflict/natural disaster, to health risks, social and economic factors, and travel to preschool)</th>
<th>Potential vulnerabilities for children who attend your setting (e.g. belonging to an ethnic or linguistic minority; parents having to leave home to find work)</th>
<th>Protective factors available to children in your community / setting (e.g. close community bonds; strong cultural identity)</th>
<th>Resilience characteristics in children (please refer to Appendices A and B)</th>
</tr>
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Section D
Examples of play-based approaches
In designing play-based experiences to support resilience, practitioners need to be aware that there are many different forms of play and that these support different areas of learning and development, and practitioners should draw on these in developing appropriate play-based experiences.

This section describes five types of play and gives real-life examples of each, which can be used to develop play-based approaches to support resilience building in young children.¹

Each type of play offers opportunities to develop characteristics and skills that can strengthen children’s resilience. The different types of play have similarities, and the examples contain multiple types of play. For example, ‘physical’ play also includes aspects of ‘symbolic’ play. This reflects the nature of play.

While understanding the types of ‘play’ is useful in terms of planning for a range of play-based experiences, this is less important than ensuring that planned play experiences provide a range of opportunities for children to extend their learning, participate actively in the experience by using their imagination and creativity, and experience a sense of joy and well-being during the experience.²

Below, each type of play is followed by a set of ‘reflection points’ designed to provide a starting point for discussions among practitioners who are planning to implement play-based experiences to support resilience-building among children in their own settings.

### Physical play and resilience building

#### Physical play

There are two main types of physical play:

- **Gross motor**: Active movement, including running, jumping, climbing, dancing and skipping. This type of activity can also involve ‘rough and tumble’ play with siblings, parents and peers.

- **Fine motor**: Using hands and fingers to make things, thread beads, draw, write, paint, sew and so on.

Physical play typically occupies around 20 per cent of children’s behaviour by the age of 4 to 5 (Whitebread et al., 2012). This kind of play is related to development of skills such as whole body coordination and hand-eye coordination. Both kinds of physical play can build social relationships and support social-emotional skills.

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¹ These five types are provided as a starting point. There are other ‘types’ of play that are not included here, for example, please see [http://www.readingplay.co.uk/GetAsset.aspx?id=fAAYADUAMQ88AHwAARgB8hAGwAcv8AHzAFAAAA4AHwA0](http://www.readingplay.co.uk/GetAsset.aspx?id=fAAYADUAMQ88AHwAARgB8hAGwAcv8AHzAFAAAA4AHwA0).

² There are different types of play, and it is necessary to ensure that children are given opportunities to engage in different types of play, according to different learning or development goals, but it is not necessary to categorise all play experiences.
Opportunities for resilience building

- Supports the development of confidence and competence (e.g. through taking risks in a safe environment to learn self-care skills).
- Affirms cultural traditions through engagement in play that promotes important traditions reflected in music, dancing, play tools / resources.

BOX 5
EXAMPLES OF PHYSICAL PLAY

Leng Treh – Cambodia

The Cambodian game of ‘leng treh’ is similar to the game of ‘jacks’ in other countries. But instead of using plastic jacks or sheep knucklebones, children use twigs (there are ten twigs in a set) and a lime.

The children scatter the twigs on the ground then one child throws the lime in the air and picks up as many twigs as she or he can before the lime falls to the ground (the player has to catch the lime before it lands on the ground). The number of twigs to be picked up is pre-ordained and sequential: the sequence in ones, twos, threes, up to ten. The throwing of the lime, the picking up of twigs and the catching of the lime are done with the same hand.

The children take turns and try to pick up more twigs than each other.

In playing leng treh, children become proficient observers of objects’ quantity by ‘just looking’ (that is, without physically touching the objects to count them). The game also helps young children to develop partitioning skills (that is, seeing one number made up of other numbers). This skill is a major conceptual development in early childhood and enables children to easily progress to understanding more advanced concepts that are useful in science, such as percentages, ratios and proportions.

Source: Adapted from Reyes and Ebbeck, 2016, p. 187
Reflection points

Please discuss:

1. What skills do you think these children are developing in the process of playing 'leng treh' (consider the multiple domains of development – physical; social-emotional; cognitive; language; cultural understanding and so on)?

2. What other types of physical play or games do children in your community / setting engage in, and what kinds of skills are developed through engagement in these games?

3. Consider the opportunities for building resilience that are listed above. How do games such as 'leng treh' and the other types of physical play in your own community help to build resilience in young children?
With reference to the above, discuss possibilities for physical play-based experiences for developing children's resilience in your own setting. You can use the table below to organise your notes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play-based experience (please describe)</th>
<th>Domains of development &amp; resilience characteristics* that this experience may support</th>
<th>Resources and supports needed to effectively introduce the planned experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Refer to Appendix A and B, if necessary, to identify characteristics of resilience, risks and protective factors.

### Symbolic play and resilience building

#### Symbolic play

Symbolic play involves the use of ‘pretend’ objects or toys to represent real-life objects (e.g. the use of a banana-shaped object to symbolise a telephone). This type of play supports children to develop the ability to make links between their own experiences and the world around them. It also promotes reflection upon experiences, ideas and emotions. Symbolic play also allows children to express themselves, to experiment with objects and to engage in and pursue play activities and themes that are of particular interest to them. For example, a child who wants to be a pilot can make use of objects to pretend to fly a plane.

Research has established that symbolic play provides powerful support for the development of early literacy skills (Whitebread, 2012). Bornstein (2006) argues that children’s pretend play is linked to their emotional well-being. This type of play also supports the development of early numeracy skills, as children are provided with opportunities to develop confidence in skills such as counting through engagement with real-life objects that have meaning to them (Whitebread, 2000).
Engagement in music is a particular type of symbolic play. According to Whitebread (2012), singing and making music in groups can significantly contribute to children’s communication, creativity, self-regulation and cooperation skills.

**Opportunities for resilience building**

In terms of resilience, symbolic play enables children to autonomously explore their own interests, make decisions and engage with the world around them, while also gaining the opportunity to develop emergent literacy and emergent numeracy skills, thus strengthening their confidence.

Opportunities to participate in singing and dancing can significantly enhance a child’s sense of well-being through the positive feelings that result from these activities. Learning traditional music and songs can also contribute to a child’s sense of identity and belonging. Furthermore, traditional songs often carry important social messages.

**BOX 6**

**EXAMPLES OF SYMBOLIC PLAY**

**Symbolic play - Tanzania**

A. Two young girls were pretending to cook. The girls put some water in a coconut shell and put it on their pretend fire. They put some sand (rice) in the water and then the older girls asked the younger one for some salt. She immediately started sprinkling sand (salt) into the water. Their grandmother, who was watching from about 10 metres away, called out to them, ‘Don’t put in too much salt’. This comment provided a scaffold between the girls’ play and the real-life situation of them learning to take some responsibility for cooking at home. The girls looked over to their grandmother (acknowledging that they had heard her) and heeded her advice.

B. A 3-year-old boy was outside his home being minded by his teenage brother. The boy had been inspired by the community music, dance and drama (ngoma) group in his village that gives weekly performances because he had collected cooking pots, upturned them and arranged them around him as a set of drums. He had also collected a variety of implements to use as beaters, including sticks, wooden spoons and metal spoons. He played his ‘drums’ with remarkable proficiency and rhythm, and sang to accompany his music. Every now and then, he stopped to change beaters, and smiled with great pleasure at the change in sounds. His older brother watched and listened from a distance, not interfering at all. When the little boy stopped to change beaters, his older brother asked, ‘How come you know how to play ngoma?’ The young boy just smiled and played on.

---

Reflection points

Please discuss:

1. What skills / understandings (for example, social-emotional; cultural; cognitive) do you think these children are developing in the process of their play?

2. What kinds of similar types of play, using symbols to represent ‘real life’ objects, do children in your own setting / community engage in, and what skills do they develop through these games?

3. In what ways are these play experiences supporting the development of identity and well-being in these children?

4. Consider the opportunities for building resilience that are referred to above. How could the types of symbolic play that you have identified in your own community help to build resilience in young children?
With reference to the above, discuss possibilities for symbolic play for children in your own setting. You can use the table below to organise your notes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play-based experience (please describe)</th>
<th>Domains of development &amp; resilience characteristics* that this experience may support</th>
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</thead>
</table>

*Refer to Appendix A and B, if necessary, to identify characteristics of resilience, risks and protective factors.

### Object play and resilience building

#### Object play

This type of play is believed to be the most common play among primates, including humans, as it involves ‘sensori-motor’ play in which the child explores how objects and materials feel and behave. Object play provides children with opportunities to explore their physical world, using creativity, imagination and motor skills to experiment with and manipulate the objects they find.

In object play, children engage with the world around them through various sensory experiences. Play with objects begins as soon as infants can grasp and hold on to them, and includes clutching and letting go of objects, sucking and biting toys, and so on (Power, 2000). According to Whitebread (2012), by the age of 4, children begin to use objects for building and construction.

Play with objects, like other forms of play, can promote problem-solving, reasoning and other cognitive skills. When playing with objects, children set their own goals and challenges, manipulate objects to suit their purpose and imagine new ways of using objects to fit their
### Section C

**Examples of play-based approaches**

Play. Whitebread (2012) quotes evidence that suggests that children who engage actively in object play are likely to develop problem-solving skills, as they are learning to focus their attention on tasks, maintain goals and make informed choices that enable them to reach goals for use of different objects.

**Opportunities for resilience building**

In terms of supporting resilience, giving children opportunities to engage with different sensory experiences, though interaction with various objects, provides multiple benefits. For example, object play can promote relationships between children as they cooperate in manipulating, or findings ways to play with objects.

Children can be encouraged to develop a sense of belonging and responsibility through shared care for objects such as books. In addition, objects that represent important cultural, faith-based or other values may be incorporated in children’s play, strengthening relationships with members of the community and building a sense of identity and belonging.

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**BOX 7**

**EXAMPLES OF OBJECT PLAY**

**Playing with objects: Cambodia and Tanzania**

**A.** One day, Sarun (12 years old) decided to make a toy *kiew* with his younger cousins. He told them what sort of materials they should collect. Saren (six years old) collected two fallen sugar-palm leaves. Mara (4 years old) collected a couple of empty palm-nut shells. From this collection, Sarun started making a *kiew* with his small cousins watching. Saran (3 years old), the youngest of the group, wanted to the toy kiew to have a pair of nice-looking wheels. He found two empty milk tin cans in the kitchen trash and brought them to Sarun. But Sarun told him ‘Keep them for the next toy we’re making.’ Little Saran didn’t say a word but looked intensely at Mara’s two palm-nut shells. He was probably thinking ‘Maybe these will be the wheels.’

**B.** A Maasai grandfather identifies teaching moments in children’s play. When a child starts to play a game using stones to represent cows, for example, the old man uses this opportunity to start teaching him how to take care of the cows. He sees the boy take big stones and small ones, and so they talk about cows (big stones) and their calves (small stones). The old man teaches him many things, such as how to keep the cows and where to put the boma (traditional temporary houses with protective fencing for people and livestock) and the children practise these ideas as they play in the soil with stones and sticks. He teaches the child everything, including that it is very important for the calf to have the first milk from its mother.

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6 A *kiew* is a tool that is used to train inexperienced oxen and buffalo to pull loads. It is an improvised triangular structure made of wood or bamboo that is similar to the skeleton of a wheelbarrow. Toy kiew are often very well constructed and are sturdy enough to be used (by children) like a cart or wheelbarrow to carry small siblings.
Reflection points

*Please discuss:*

1. What skills / understandings (for example, creativity; problem-solving) do you think these children are developing in the process of their object play?

2. What kinds of similar types of object play do children in your own setting / community engage in, and what skills do they develop through these games? In what ways do the objects used in these examples reflect the particular cultural contexts in which these children are playing?

3. In what ways are these play experiences supporting the development of identity and well-being in these children?

4. Consider the opportunities for building resilience that are referred to above. How could the types of play (and types of objects used in play) that you have identified in your own community help you in planning play-based experiences to build resilience in young children?
With reference to the above, discuss possibilities for play-based experiences for children in your own setting. You can use the table below to organise your notes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play-based experience (please describe)</th>
<th>Domains of development &amp; resilience characteristics* that this experience may support</th>
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</table>

*Refer to Appendix A and B, if necessary, to identify characteristics of resilience, risks and protective factors.

### Pretend / socio-dramatic play and resilience-building

#### Pretend / socio-dramatic play

Pretend play involves children taking on roles that reflect their own experience and contexts, e.g. playing ‘families’ and pretending to take on work roles (farmer, driver, doctor).

Pretend play strongly supports the development of cognitive, social and academic abilities (Whitebread et al., 2012). Because pretend play involves children taking on roles and responsibilities, it also supports them in developing self-regulation, problem-solving and other social competence skills. Research has also indicated that pretend play may be especially beneficial for children with ‘special needs’ as it enables them to become more socially connected with peers and supports the development of social skills (O’Connor and Stagnitti, 2011, cited in Whitebread, 2012, p. 23).
Opportunities for resilience-building

Pretend play provides children with multiple opportunities to develop skills and characteristics that are associated with resilience. Pretend play enables children to begin learning about caring for others and developing a sense of responsibility as it often involves children taking on pretend adult roles and cooperating with peers in determining ‘rules’ of play.

As with most other forms of play, pretend play offers opportunities for children to experience stress in a risk-free environment and develop effective coping skills. For example, conflicts over roles and rules sometimes arise in pretend play situations, as children negotiate roles and identities. It is often a context in which these conflicts are quickly overcome, however, as children learn to cooperate, collaborate and support one another.

**BOX 8**

**EXAMPLE OF PRETEND / SOCIO-DRAMATIC PLAY**

**Play cooking – Tanzania**

Two young girls (3 and 6 years old) were engaged in imitative cooking play. The girls were using coconut shells for pots and sand for rice, and were ‘cooking’ on a small fire with stones to hold the shells. Two elderly women were passing and, although not directly related to the girls, they stopped to observe the girls from a distance. As they observed, they discussed the cooking skills of the older girl as demonstrated through her play and noted, ‘Oh, she can separate the rice from the water very well!’ Their comments were loud enough for the older girl, Asha, to hear, but they were not directly addressed to her. Asha kept concentrating on her ‘cooking’ but was clearly encouraged by what heard the women saying (Croker, 2007, p.248). These women later indicated that, from what they had observed, Asha would be able to take on greater cooking responsibilities.

Source: Adapted from Reyes and Ebbeck, 2016, p. 189 and Croker and Ebbeck, 2016, p. 227)

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Reflection points

Please discuss:

1. What skills / understandings (for example, learning about adult roles and work within your community) do you think these children are developing in the process of their pretend play?

2. What kinds of similar types of pretend play do children in your own setting / community engage in, and what skills do they develop through these games?

3. In what ways are these play experiences supporting the development of identity and well-being in these children (for example, in terms of caring for each other and taking on responsibilities)?

4. Consider the opportunities for building resilience described above. How could the types of pretend play that you have identified in your own community help to build resilience in young children?
With reference to the above, discuss possibilities for play-based experiences for children in your own setting. You can use the table below to organise your notes.

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<tr>
<th>Play-based experience (please describe)</th>
<th>Domains of development &amp; resilience characteristics* that this experience may support</th>
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</table>

*Refer to Appendix A and B, if necessary, to identify characteristics of resilience, risks and protective factors.

**Games with rules and resilience-building**

**Games with rules**

Some studies on play have indicated that children are strongly motivated to make sense of their world and, as part of this, they are very interested in rules. As a consequence, from a very young age, they enjoy games with rules and often invent their own (Whitebread et al., 2012). Around the world, there are many examples of rules-based games that children play, including different interpretations of ‘hide and seek’, chase, etc., as well as board games such as ‘congkak’ (Malaysia), which is known as ‘mancala’ in some African countries.

While playing rules-based games with their friends, siblings and parents, young children are learning a range of social skills related to sharing, taking turns and understanding others’ perspectives; and are also developing social relationships and engaging in problem-solving, and teamwork (DeVries, 2006).
Opportunities for resilience-building\textsuperscript{8}

All types of play promote problem-solving skills, but play with rules is particularly well-suited for this as such play engages children in focusing on a task, learning rules and applying those rules to achieve success. Play with rules can, depending on the temperament of the child, be highly motivating and encourage children to remain on-task for an extended period of time, therefore developing skills of persistence and focus.

BOX 9

EXAMPLE OF GAMES WITH RULES

Jumping Elastic – Cambodia

The ‘jumping elastic’ game played in Cambodia is similar to the internationally played game of ‘skip’ that uses a single, long piece of rope. An interesting aspect of the ‘jumping elastic’ game is the children’s extensive use of traditional measurements that use human body parts (shoulder-high, a span and so on). This practice is indispensable in agricultural communities where standard metre sticks are not easily accessible. Using elastic bands, children can explore the different properties of materials. They can also compare the stretchable quality of elastic bands with that of ordinary string.

Sophea (5 years old) is always willing to link small elastic bands together so that Angaol (3 years old) can play ‘jumping elastic’. Angaol wants a long chain. Sophea knows they only have sixty elastic bands, so has to decide whether to make a long chain with single bands (that can easily break) or make a shorter chain with double bands that is stronger.

Source: Adapted from Reyes and Ebbeck, 2016, p. 187.

\textsuperscript{8} Based on characteristics outlined in: National Scientific Council on the Developing Children, 2015; Ginsburg and Jablow, 2015; Noble and McGrath, 2012.
Reflection points

Please discuss:

1. What skills / understandings do you think these children are developing in the process of their play?

2. What kinds of similar types of play do children in your own setting / community engage in, and what skills do they develop through these games?

3. In what ways are these play experiences supporting the development of identity and well-being in these children?

4. Consider the opportunities for building resilience described above. How could the types of play that you have identified in your own community help to build resilience in young children?
With reference to the above, discuss possibilities for play-based experiences for children in your own setting. You may use the table below to organise your notes, if helpful:

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</table>

*Refer to Appendix A and B, if necessary, to identify characteristics of resilience, risks and protective factors.
Box 10 lists examples provided by members of the OMEP national committees of how play can promote resilience and of play-based approaches that have been used to promote resilience.

**BOX 10**

**ASPECTS OF PLAY AND PLAY-BASED APPROACHES FOR PROMOTING RESILIENCE ACCORDING TO OMEP NATIONAL COMMITTEES**

**Aspects of play that can promote resilience:**

- Playing together with friends is getting to know each other. A child realizes his or her capability, gains negotiation skills, practices to overcome difficulties and finds ways to achieve what he or she wants.
- During play, children mimic adult situations, even those that are violent or painful, and they also re-enact the overcoming of these situations.
- Playing helps children gain a sense of control with an accompanying sense of achievement and confidence. These are especially important in the face of adversity, when children need to navigate their reactions to stimuli in their environments that may help overcome the obstacles or provide opportunities to experience feelings of well-being.
- Play-based approaches allow children to choose how they learn and this in turn can help their confidence and resilience to grow when they make mistakes or face challenges.
- Through make-believe play, such as acting out family scenes or everyday life experiences, young children try out new roles and skills without risk of failure or criticism and gain very important insights into links between themselves and the wider community.
- Play is the natural way of children’s learning and way to engage in activity.
- Play requires children to be active in decision-making and promotes collaboration, self-awareness, awareness of others.

**Examples of play-based experiences that support resilience-building:**

- It is important for a child to play, alone, by two or in a group. Example A – a child playing in the kitchen corner - feels in his kitchen, he imitates mum cooking/ wants to do like others when setting the table. He will put the number of plates/glasses/forks/spoons as at home. He will discuss with peers, will have questions and answers and this interaction and role playing brings this same child to express himself and be in groups.
- In the doll corner, a child learns how to behave with peers, counts plates, cups, glasses and he also learns colours, size and shapes. He builds his characters when he has to take decision to talk in front of the class for recitation poems. When holding the doll and hugging the doll, the child is experiencing emotion.
- When playing with a phone: when he has a conversation, the child talks to mother using emotions and language.
- Shop corner: the child experiences weighing/pouring, tracing, filling, emptying and interacting with others.
- Courtyard: while playing, the child learns to throw, hold, catch a ball, jumping on foot/ playing football/running/walking with different rhythm (slowly-quickly)/on straight line.
- Group play and games like overcoming obstacles to reach the treasure.
- In Haiti, the post-earthquake CFS (child friendly spaces) were all play-based activity groups. Also, play based psychosocial activities have become a cathartic way to help children overcome trauma.
- Medical play helps allay children’s fears about impending medical intervention, while helping others to come to terms with painful, intrusive medical experiences that they have had.
- Problem-solving and social cooperation has been observed as children negotiate roles and work out how to move the tree trunk across the playground, or get a trolley to go up an incline or the roof to stay anchored on a building.
- A child is allowed to use his / her precious ‘thing’ (e.g. a doll)” in kindergarten to calm himself / herself when having a daily nap, or when upset.
- All play builds resilience e.g. Swing swing, group games.
- Play improves problem-solving skills and succeeds in resolving problems later in the day without frustration.
Section E
Involving community members and caregivers
Sections A to D provided basic key definitions and concepts, explained the links between ‘play’ and ‘resilience’, and provided examples of play that can be used to develop play-based experiences to support resilience-building in early childhood settings. This section offers guidance on how local communities, caregivers and other stakeholder support can be drawn upon to strengthen resilience-building in young children.

Resilience and its development are multi-faceted and are shaped by multiple levels of influence, including policy, community resources and the child’s relationships with caregivers. Early childhood settings must plan approaches to support the development of resilience from an early age, but it is unlikely that individual services or settings are able to address all of the various aspects of resilience alone (Glover, 2009). For this reason, programmes and systems to promote resilience building need to draw on the resources and opportunities that exist in the family, community and society.

Therefore, in planning play-based approaches to promoting resilience in young children, it is important to involve parents and the wider community. For example, in identifying the ‘protective factors’ that exist in the community to support children, and building on these, and in encouraging parents to play with their children and explaining to parents the benefits of play-based approaches.

Furthermore, collaborative planning, involving peers, colleagues, caregivers and members of the wider community, is more productive.

We recommend that the planning process includes the elements outlined below:

- Ideally, some training for teachers / practitioners in the use of different kinds of play-based approaches for supporting children’s holistic development (including the development of formal and non-formal learning skills).
- Opportunities to share ideas with networks regarding play-based approaches that are likely to promote characteristics of resilience.
- Discussion and identification of the specific risks in the early childhood setting and in wider environment and the particular protective factors that can be drawn upon to support resilience in the local setting.
- Discussions with stakeholders (including peers and superiors; parents and community members) to explain the approach that is being taken and its purpose, and to garner their views and contributions.
- Identification of a set of activities and experiences for children, drawing on all the factors and supports identified through the above process (including aspects of the early childhood setting and the wider community).
- Implementation of the planned activities and experiences, and ongoing monitoring and reflection.
- Further networking and sharing with peers and networks.

Involving parents and the wider community is essential in planning play-based approaches to support resilience-building.
Developing and implementing play-based approaches to support resilience requires practitioners and practitioners to have confidence to step outside a structured syllabus and tailor children's learning to the local community and context. In this way, parents and community members may come to see the benefits of play-based approaches through their involvement in children's learning. Often, parents do not see the value of play, because nobody has ever explained / demonstrated them. Some examples of involving parents, families and communities in your efforts are:

- Invite parents and community leaders to the centre so that you can explain the different types of play, and how they can be used to support different aspects of development, from problem solving and literacy / numeracy skills, to leadership and peer cooperation.
- Invite parents and community leaders into the centre to observe their children playing and to explain the learning benefits that their children are gaining.
- Invite parents and community leaders to suggest play-based activities that reflect important contextual beliefs and practices (involve stakeholders in making decisions about children's learning).
- Invite parents and community leaders to discuss what they could do to promote young children's resilience, including through play-based activities.

Persuading colleagues, school leaders, parents / families of the benefits of play-based approaches in supporting resilience requires practitioners to have confidence to locate evidence to support advocacy for these approaches. In this way, practitioners themselves are fully aware of and can explain the benefits of play-based approaches. They also need to be skilled in identifying different types of play to suit different types of learning and development outcomes. To this end, the following actions are suggested:

- Collect examples of links between play-based approaches and positive developmental outcomes (including the development of formal learning and non-formal skills) from other countries or communities in your own country:
  - Connect with colleagues in your local community, as well as national and regional networks to collect information about what has worked in their settings
  - Make use of the internet to collect evidence of links between play-based approaches and children's learning, development and wellbeing / resilience.

- Collect evidence from your own setting
  - Observe children as they play, in order to identify links between their play and formal learning outcomes (i.e. how do your children's literacy and numeracy skills / understanding of science develop when they play?). Keep records of these observations, so that you can tell parents and superiors about them.
Reflection points

Please take time to discuss the following questions regarding resources and possible obstacles in implementing play-based approaches to build children’s resilience:

1. What resources and supports are available to you within your centre / school, from families, and in the outside community?

2. If your principal / head teacher / centre director is concerned about children’s academic skills, how can you persuade / explain / demonstrate to her / him that (i) there are a range of play-based approaches, some of which directly support children in learning formal literacy and numeracy skills and (ii) supporting resilience through play-based approaches will strengthen children’s learning capacity?

3. What might be other challenges you might face and how could you overcome them?


Appendix A

Examples of ‘risk’ and ‘protective’ factors\(^9\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk factors</th>
<th>Protective factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child factors</strong></td>
<td><strong>Family factors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Low self esteem</td>
<td>- Family violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Poor social skills</td>
<td>- Poor supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Poor problem solving</td>
<td>- Harsh / inconsistent discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Difficult temperament</td>
<td>- Lack of warmth / affection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of empathy</td>
<td>- Abuse and neglect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Homelessness</td>
<td>- Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Early school leaving</td>
<td>- Feelings of failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Family factors</td>
<td>- Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Death of a family member</td>
<td>- Peer rejection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Experiences of conflict / disaster</td>
<td>- Poor attachment to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Divorce and family breakup</td>
<td>- Deviant peer group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Neighbourhood violence and crime</td>
<td>- Social competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of support services</td>
<td>- Attachment to family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Social or cultural discrimination</td>
<td>- Empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Community norms concerning violence</td>
<td>- Problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Pre-school context</strong></td>
<td>- Optimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Easy temperament</td>
<td>- School achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Strong family norms and morality</td>
<td>- Positive ethos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Supportive relationship with other adult</td>
<td>- Pro-social peer group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sense of belonging</td>
<td>- Opportunities for recognition of achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Opportunities at critical turning points or major life transitions</td>
<td>- School norms re cooperation, collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Access to support services</td>
<td>- Positive family and community events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Community networking</td>
<td>- Availability of strong supports at times of need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Attachment to the community</td>
<td>- Opportunities at community norms against violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Participation in community group</td>
<td>- Strong cultural identity / ethnic pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Community / cultural norms against violence</td>
<td>- Strong cultural identity / ethnic pride</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^9\) These examples draw on research conducted by Rutter (1985; 1998) and Werner (1989)
Appendix B
Resilience-vulnerability matrix

The figure presented here is the resilience-vulnerability matrix developed by Daniel and Wassell (2002). This matrix (or versions of it) is widely used by organisations based in the United Kingdom that seek to support the development of resilience in young children.

The matrix is designed to outline all the various factors that can be drawn upon to promote resilience, as well as factors that may pose a risk to children. It can be used by practitioners to understand how adversity can result in vulnerability, and how the availability of protective factors can help to build resilience.
