UNIT 21 PLAY ACTIVITIES FOR
MOVEMENT AND MOBILITY

Structure

21.1 Introduction
21.2 Games — “A Waste of Time”?
  21.2.1 Role of Outdoor and Indoor Games and Play Activities in Development
21.3 The Role of the Caregiver during Play Activities for Movement and Mobility
21.4 Play Activities for Gross Motor Development
  21.4.1 Games of Running, Chasing, Crawling and Jumping
  21.4.2 Games of Hide and Seek
  21.4.3 Play Activities involving Slow Movement and Balancing
  21.4.4 Games involving Climbing, Sliding and Swinging
  21.4.5 Games of Catching, Throwing and Kicking
21.5 Play Activities for Fostering Fine Motor Development
  21.5.1 Stringing Activities
  21.5.2 Activities using Pebbles, Beads and Seeds
  21.5.3 Construction Activities
  21.5.4 Play with Water and Sand
  21.5.5 Art Activities
21.6 Inter-relatedness of Learning Experiences
21.7 Place of Activities for Movement and Mobility in the Curriculum
21.8 Summing Up
21.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

21.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we shall describe some outdoor and indoor games and play activities that provide children opportunities for movement and mobility. While they play activities described in this Unit primarily foster children’s physical and gross and fine motor development, they also stimulate children’s cognitive, language and social development. Therefore, as you read each play activity it will be helpful for you to note down the aspects of children’s development, besides physical and motor, that it fosters.

Objectives

After studying this Unit, you should be able to

- state the importance of games and play activities that allow movement and mobility;
- plan and conduct age appropriate outdoor and indoor games and play activities for preschoolers;
- use the objects and materials easily available in your setting to plan these activities;
- explain the role of the educator in outdoor and indoor games and play activities.

21.2 GAMES — “A WASTE OF TIME”?

Childhood is remembered by most of us as a period of active play, which never tired us. It was play, games and fun all the way. Yet there are many adults among us who feel that a playing is a waste of time. We admonish children who spend time in play and tell them that they would be better off if they were to spend their time “learning something”. Thus we tend to get children off play time and into the serious business of formal learning. We forget then that play is the path to later learning. Most preschool educators say that initially outdoor and indoor games and play activities form a large part of the day. When the children first join the preschool centre, they are adjusting to new surroundings and are not able to concentrate on “table work” for long. During this transition from the home to the school, the teacher finds it difficult to carry out any
Play Activities for Preschooler

structured learning activity and so lets the children play as they wish to. Gradually, as
children become familiar with the routine and are able to sit for longer periods, and as
the pressures of ‘learning something’ increase, the time allotted for outdoor and indoor
games and play activities gets reduced. In fact, as children move from one class to the
next, games move lower down on the list of priorities. But should that happen? Are
outdoor and indoor games, that provide children opportunities for movement and
mobility, really a waste of time?

We feel that you have read enough already to disagree strongly. It would help you to
note down the points of your argument here before you read further.

The following discussion brings out how outdoor and indoor games and play activities,
apart from fostering physical and motor development help in the development of a
rounded personality.

21.2.1 Role of Outdoor and Indoor Games and Play Activities in Development

Encouraging Development of Physical and Motor Abilities

It is only through active outdoor and indoor play activities and games that children
get an opportunity to exercise their growing muscles, develop coordination and
refine gross and fine motor skills.

Common playground activities provide for a variety of muscular movements. Consider
the common slide. Children run up to the slide, climb on to the ladder which involves a
change in visual perspective and, therefore, coordination of the eyes and limbs, adjust
themselves on the top and balance, change their breathing and vision at the new height,
let go of themselves and experience motion and speed and finally come to a sudden
controlled stop. The children have carried out eight different gross motor movements in
a span of 3-4 minutes. This sequence is repeated again and again. Each time children’s
movements become a little better synchronized, a little more improved and their gross
motor development is fostered.

As another example, consider the popular activity of stringing beads or leaves to make a
‘necklace’. Each time children pick up a bead and put it through the string, they
exercise the muscles of the wrist, the hand and the fingers and refine their eye-hand
co-ordination. Such play helps in fine motor development.

As children play games of chase, as they balance and climb, catch and throw, they
practise a variety of gross and fine motor abilities. Can these games and play activities
be substituted by any other experience that will provide children the opportunity to
develop physically and, at the same time, be enjoyable? No, not easily.

Enhancing Confidence and Self-Esteem

The mastery and control over one’s body that results from outdoor and indoor play
activities generates confidence and satisfaction in children and gives them a feeling
of adequacy, a feeling that they can cope with challenges. You know that the
foundations of self-esteem and self-confidence are laid during the early years of
childhood and it is important that children have positive and meaningful-experiences.
Next time you are in a playground, notice the joy and the pride on children’s faces as
they successfully negotiate a difficult turn on their tricycles or balance themselves on the
tricky seesaw.

However, this control over one’s movements is not achieved in the first attempt. You
may have observed that sometimes a child insists on playing a particular game
repeatedly day after day, to the exclusion of everything else. For days together the child
rides a tricycle or balances on the seesaw or plays with blocks. This intense concentration on a particular activity indicates the striving for mastery. Once the child feels satisfied with her accomplishments on the tricycle, for example, she moves on to try her abilities at something else, to return to the tricycle later to try more difficult variations.

Building Cooperation

We are all familiar with the competitive element in games. Of all the participants only one can win — whether it be a race, a board game or a game of endurance. But does this really have to be so? Is it possible for every player to win? Can competition not be avoided?

Many of us adults are competitive persons and this tendency percolates to our interactions with children. We tend to set up situations in play where children are in competition with each other, where each thinks only of herself or himself. We justify this by saying that competition is a way of life and children must learn early how to take care of themselves in a competitive world. But we must remember that there are many relationships where cooperation is essential.

There are many occasions when children cooperate with each other during play and it is for the adults to nurture this trait. You may have observed one child helping another on the roundabout or pushing the tricycle for another. If a child gets hurt, many will gather to comfort her. Children learn much by observation. If they see someone cooperating, they are likely to do the same. Games offer situations where children can learn from each other but if there is pressure of competition much of this will not happen. The educator must create a relaxed situation where sharing and cooperation can take place.

Games have the potential to teach children many social values. Through games children learn to take turns, to share with a slower player, to be humble about one’s skills, to abide by the decision of the majority even if it is not to one’s personal liking, to be friendly and helpful, to lose cheerfully, to comfort the one who has lost, to encourage a shy or a timid player, to share scarce equipment, to be able to argue points without personal animosity, to give the first turn to somebody else, to be fair and honest. Therefore, competition should not dominate play. Instead, cooperation should be stressed. Team games where children have to play together and pool in their efforts to win, tend to generate cooperation. In an board game, where each child is an individual player, if you help each one to increase his or her score, everyone wins, rather than emphasizing that only highest score is victory. In a race, if each child gets a reward, coming first becomes less important.

Promoting Cognitive Learning

Games stimulate development of children’s cognitive abilities. Consider the game ‘dodge ball’ which you can organize with a group of five and six year olds. In this game, there are two teams. One forms a circle and the players of the other team are
inside this circle. The team that forms the circle has to hit the players inside the circle with the ball. What are the thinking processes involved in playing this game? Make a list and compare it with the discussion that follows.

The players in outer circle need to devise a strategy that works and enables them to 'out' (hit with the ball) the players in the shortest time possible; they have to decide upon the children who will be the first targets — this may be based on their prior experience of knowing the children who are not so agile at dodging the ball; as one of the players throws the ball, the others have to anticipate its direction and remain alert and responsive; during play the team members have to communicate their strategy to each other and if their previous moves have not been successful, they have to revise them. For the players inside the circle, a lot of thinking is involved as well. Each child has to think for herself or himself. All through the game they have to be alert and think of strategies of dodging the ball. This requires the child to analyse, deduce and anticipate where the players of the other team are likely to direct the ball.

The above is just an example. Some games require children to remember a series of actions, some stress strategy and others require guessing. Through outdoor and indoor play activities and games, children sharpen their powers of observation, learn to identify similarities and differences between objects, get opportunities to classify on the basis of some attributes (as when the teacher says all wooden toys should go on the box and all metal toys on the shelf) gain insights, develop reasoning abilities (as in
the case of the child who was not able to ride the tricycle up an incline and after repeated attempts hit upon the idea of asking another child to push it from behind as he rode it, devise rules and generalize, formulate hypotheses and test them (as in the case of a group of four year olds who, when playing ‘bounce the ball’, found that their plastic ball did not bounce much and, therefore, changed it with one made of rubber). How a game can be won and what one should do in order to win are also intellectually stimulating as well as fun.

All this and more takes place when children play. They may modify the rules of a game they have played often in order to make it more interesting and challenging; they can create new games; they do imagine themselves in different roles (doctor, police, thief, mother, teacher) and enact them, stretching their minds in imaginative and creative directions.

A lot of learning occurs in games and much of it happens on its own, with relatively little direction or monitoring by the teacher. Learning is an incidental product of the game — incidental because the players do not play the game with the intention of learning; rather their intention is to have fun.

Since games are initiated by children themselves, they stimulate more interest than most other types of preschool activities. Because of this, the learning that takes place incidentally through games is more meaningful and permanent. In a game every child is involved. Each has to do something and they get an immediate feedback which stimulates reflection — “I did not strike the ball well. Next time I should do it like this.” In this manner children analyse their actions, think of an alternative and test it at the next opportunity. This is the beginning of hypothesis testing — the basis of scientific thinking.

Expressing Emotions

Children often feel disappointment, frustration and anger in real life as what they wish for cannot always be fulfilled. Games provide situations where children can enact real life encounters and express feelings and emotions which they otherwise may not be able to do. There are certain games in which there is a central player and the other children have to follow him. Such a game gives the child who is the central player a brief period of leadership in a playful context. This brief sense of power may be very rewarding for the young child who often feels powerless in the world of adults. A timid child who may be talked down to by peers in the usual activities can, in a play situation, be the one who is temporarily in command and make the others do what he or she wants.

Games when played without threat or pressure invite spontaneity, creativity and social activity. They should not become intensely competitive as that would make children feel anxious or pressured.

### 21.3 THE ROLE OF THE CAREGIVER DURING PLAY ACTIVITIES FOR MOVEMENT AND MOBILITY

Usually, the activities for movement and mobility are free play activities where children choose what they want to play. The involvement of the teacher in structuring and conducting the activity is minimal compared to structured play activities, about which you will read in the subsequent Units. This tends to give the wrong impression that in outdoor and indoor free play activities, the caregiver hardly has any role to play and can afford to relax supervision. Having spent a lot of time and effort in carrying out structured play activities with children, the educator sometimes lets go and takes a break when children are involved in outdoor and indoor games. It often happens that two educators plan an outdoor session at the same time and while one supervises the children, the other takes a break or finishes pending work. This is not a sound practice for the following reasons.
Firstly, there are chances of mishap during outdoor and indoor free play when children are involved in vigorous physical activity. **The caregiver needs to be constantly alert and prevent possible accidents.**

Secondly, the educator is needed to supervise children's play. She may be needed to help in the distribution of play materials and equipment if they are limited in number/amount or to help children to take turns to play with it. Children may also need help in spacing themselves. It often happens that a group involved in a vigorous play starts playing in close proximity to another group involved in a relatively quiet play activity. Sooner or later, a clash between the two groups is likely to occur as one gets disturbed by the other. In this situation, the caregiver being able to anticipate the events, can space the children out in different areas right from the beginning.

Thirdly, the educator is needed to guide children's experiences and to help them understand their discoveries during free play as much as she is needed during structured activities. The following incidents bring this out.

**Playing in the open, a group of children came across a snail's shell. Curious about it, they inspected it from a distance; then, as it seemed harmless, they approached it. Thinking it to be some kind of a stone, they were about to kick it away when the teacher saw them. She explained to them what it was. Their interest now aroused, the children decided to keep it in the classroom. There was much excitement as the snail emerged from the shell. They kept the snail for a few days, feeding it and talking about it. Had the caregiver not been alert in the first instance, this experience would have been missed.**

In another incident, in a nursery school, the slide had been fixed under a tree. In the month of March the ripe fruit which was bean-like, dropped to the ground with each gust of wind. On a particularly windy day, lot of fruits 'poured' on children's heads. Her interest aroused by this shower, a child collected some of the bean-like fruits and took it to the educator. Subsequently, some of the children and the teacher began collecting the beans which were taken into the class and used during many activities. **Can you think of some activities that would involve the use of the bean-like fruit?**
Fourthly, while children usually decide the outdoor and indoor games they will play, you can — rather you must — sometimes organize team games and play activities involving cooperation and sharing. This means you will have to structure some of their outdoor and indoor play activities and participate in them yourself.

Fifthly, if you are attentive and alert during these free play sessions, you can observe many things about children which are not apparent during other preschool activities. A child who is usually shy and quiet may surprise you with her initiative during outdoor play. One who seems to be hardly able to concentrate for long in indoor activities, may untiringly try negotiating a thin plank of wood resting on two stones. You may find a child especially courageous and daring on the swings. Another may need some help in overcoming fear. Children show different aspects of their personalities in different situations. Knowing them in different contexts is important before you form a total picture of a child.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Imagine that you are conversing with a group of parents about the type of activities you carry out in the preschool centre. One of the parents’ remarks that while games are fun, they do not help the children to learn much. How would you convince this parent that indoor and outdoor play activities foster development in all areas and promote learning?

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2) Think of two games that are commonly played by children in your area. Describe these games and explain how these help in the development of cognitive abilities?

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3) Make a list of popular outdoor and indoor games and play activities in your area that involve cooperation and/or sharing among children.

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4) Why is it important for the caregiver to remain alert and responsive when children are engaged in outdoor and indoor play activities?

21.4 PLAY ACTIVITIES FOR GROSS MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

In this section, you will read about the play activities and games that can be organized for fostering gross motor development. In other words, these play activities primarily help in the development of large (gross) muscles though, of course, development in other areas is fostered as well. When you plan these play activities, remember that they are intended for large muscle development and, therefore, involve a lot of movement. For this reason, most of these will have to be organized outdoors. In some cases, you may be able to make slight modifications to adapt them for indoors.

You would have played many of the games described in the following text during your childhood. The play activities described here are only examples. It would be useful to think of and create other play activities relevant to your situation. Often, you will find that children take the lead in suggesting games. They will come up with new ways of playing, different rules for winning and variations of the basic game.

To organize the play activities described here you will need balls, old tyres, wooden planks, bricks, ropes, logs of wood, pebbles, beads and string. However, you can substitute these materials with those more easily available in your setting. It is also true that play material alone is not what makes a good activity. As you read this Unit, you will notice that many play activities do not require much material, but depend on the ingenuity of the caregiver to make them interesting.
Before we go on to the play activities, it is important to recall the milestones of gross motor development during preschool years. Can you recall these from your reading of Block 4 and write them in the space provided below? Compare your list with the points mentioned in the following paragraph.

During preschool years children become better at running, jumping, climbing and balancing. They also experiment with throwing, catching, pushing and pulling. You can help children to develop these abilities, to be better able to control the movement of their limbs and refine eye-hand coordination through a variety of play activities. Preschoolers will enjoy the games described here, but if any child shows fear in trying an activity, do not use force. Also do not be anxious when children play. Many of us worry and become tense seeing children as they swing from the rope or jump from a height. However, by and large, children do not try more than they are capable of and we should trust their judgement.

Outdoor games include activities of chasing, catching, jumping, hunting, climbing, racing and acting. Let us now read about some games involving these activities.

21.4.1 Games of Running, Chasing, Crawling and Jumping

Preschoolers spontaneously engage in play activities that involve running, jumping and chasing. Their enjoyment is evident as they run hop, skip and jump from one end of the room to do other. Organizing games that provide such opportunities satisfies their need for movement.

The younger preschooler can play in a group but, by and large, finds it difficult to cooperate with many others. So while you may plan play activities where children are together, they should have the freedom to function independently. One such activity is asking children to run and touch a tree at some distance. When the younger preschoolers are across an area, they are not competing with each other but are doing something together with others for the enjoyment of the activity. Their goal is not winning, coming
second or third. The competitive element enters as children grow older and it is, generally, brought in by adults. Therefore, when you plan races, do not restrict the prizes to some children only. At this age, competition is not necessary. Give a prize to each child who participated in the race. The prize need not be elaborate—a sweet or a balloon will do.

When children are four to five years old, they begin to participate in games like tag (i.e., running and catching). Tag becomes chain tag, when the person who is caught holds the catcher’s hand and both of them then try to catch other children. The chain grows longer as more children are caught.

Children are intrigued by shadows. As one child runs, ask the other to chase her shadow and step on it. Chasing shadows becomes even more exciting when the task is to step on one’s own shadow. But how do you play this game when there is no direct sunlight? As an alternative, you can try the following game. Put a handkerchief in each child’s pocket so that a part of it is hanging out. Children have to chase each other and try to pull out the other’s handkerchief, while protecting their own.

Older preschoolers also play games such as ‘Follow-the-leader’. Here one child is the ‘leader’ and the other children do what the leader does. When the leader claps, so do the others; when the leader runs, hops or sits, the children in the group do the same. In such a game the leader becomes the central player for some time and temporarily has control over others. This brief period of command contributes to the child’s sense of well-being. Remember, each child must get a chance to be the leader.

Setting up obstacles in the path where children run provides for another play activity. Plan the obstacles according to the age of the children. For younger children you can use a row of bricks to jump over or a rope to crawl under. For older children, you can use obstacle that are more difficult to negotiate. A tub can be used to jump into and out of or a tyre fixed in the ground to crawl through. Sticks and stones placed parallel to each other form a river through which children can pretend to swim. Initially, only a few obstacles should be used. Gradually, the obstacles can be made complex or more details added. Can you think of ways of creating an imaginary jungle or a mountainous terrain using various obstacles which children will enjoy racing across? Write your thoughts in the space below. Try out your activity with children in the neighbourhood. It will help you to know how far the obstacles you had set up were appropriate to the age of the children.

With the older preschoolers, you can plan variations in movement. Ask them to hop like a rabbit or move like an elephant. Ask them to run fast or slow. As children become familiar with these movements, you can plan activities that will require children to combine these movements. Ask them to move slowly like the tortoise till a certain point and then gallop like a horse.

Children like to tumble and roll. You can provide many opportunities during play. Such activities help to heighten children’s awareness of their body and fosters large muscle control. Ask them to lie flat on their back and roll sideways to the finishing line. Do not ask them to cover too much distance initially, as it may make them dizzy.

Ask children to jump from different heights. Begin with low jumps initially. If children seem comfortable, raise the height of the jump a little. Take care to see that the surface where the children jump is sandy or else they are likely to hurt themselves. To give children practice in jumping, you can devise the following activity. Tie two ends of a rope to trees or poles some distance away from each other. This can be used to jump over or crawl under. Gradually raise the height of the rope.
It is not uncommon to see a child roll a tyre down the road using a stick. Old used tyres make good play material for giving children practice in running, jumping and crawling.

Lay tyres flat on the ground for children to hop through them. Gradually increase the distance between the tyres to make the activity more difficult. You can also use bricks for this activity.
If you bury the base of some tyres in the sand, you have a semi-permanent structure through which children can crawl, jump from, climb over or walk upon. You can vary the height of the tyres by burying more or less of them.

**21.4.2 Games of the Hide and Seek**

An all time favourite is hide and seek where one child looks for others who are hiding. The child who is found first becomes the one who looks for the others the next time. This game helps in developing children's understanding of space as they look for each other behind the door, under the bed or on the terrace. Being a group activity, it also fosters cooperation. Games of hide and seek require the children to reason and deduce and to formulate a strategy for finding the object. Thus they stimulate development of cognitive abilities as well.

When children play games like hide and seek or chase, the child who is playing the part of catching others or looking for them has to perform as a separate person, while the others are together in a group. Some children may hesitate to function alone as the 'den' in such roles and may need support and encouragement when they play. In such situations you may need to stretch the rules a bit, interrupt the game or give an opportunity to win to the child who lacks confidence. If the game goes on for too long, children may lose interest. Keep the mood of the game light — it should be enjoyable rather than competitive. Group games are enjoyed by some children, but can result in tension for others. Do not force children to participate in such games. When they do take part, encourage them to follow rules, listen to instructions and be supportive to team-mates.

Another game of seek can be played as follows. Hide an object somewhere in the room or in the open and ask the child to find it. Give them some indications as they approach in the direction of the object, as well as when they move away from it.

**21.4.3 Play Activities involving Slow Movement and Balancing**

The games that we have described till now are the ones in which children have to move fast, run and chase each other. Activities that require the child to move slowly help to get control over speed — a skill preschoolers are just learning. You can devise many activities where children walk on their heels or on toes, softly or noisily, with short steps or giant steps, quick or slow, pretending that they are walking through sand, water or thorns. One such game can be as follows. Help children form a circle. With you at the centre, ask them to walk up to you moving like a cat, an elephant, a crow, a car or an aeroplane. Such activities will help in developing motor coordination and control.

Another play activity can be devised in the following way. Give each child two pieces of thick plastic sheet, about 30 cm by 20 cm in size. You can cut out the plastic from plastic bags. To walk, children have to place one sheet in front of them, step on it, then place the next one ahead and step on it. Then pick up the first sheet, put it in front and step on it. They proceed like this till they reach the finishing line.

The following activity will only be possible with children about five to six years of age. Ask them to stand in a row and walk to the finishing line as slowly as possible, without stopping. Each must try to be the last one to reach the finishing line. This is a difficult activity as children are still learning to balance when moving slowly.

Children take great pride in balancing. Opportunities to practise balancing will be eagerly sought by preschoolers. Walking on a straight line drawn on the floor, on a
pie piece of rope laid out, on the pattern on the floor, on the edge of the carpet, on a row of bricks, on a plank resting on stones or on a seesaw are challenges that preschool children enjoy.

21.4.4 Games involving Climbing, Sliding and Swinging

The activities of climbing, swinging and sliding are interesting to all young children. Rarely will four year olds pass by a door or the railing of a stairway without trying to swing from them. They are likely to go up the stairway not using the stairs at all, but from the other side of the railing. If there is a short tree or a log of wood in the neighbourhood, there will be no stopping them from climbing it. Such activities come naturally to preschoolers who are gaining control and balance in their movements and need to put their newly acquired skills to test. Many of us feel scared seeing children in what appears to be dangerous positions — perching on a narrow seat at a height from the floor, climbing the stairs two at a time or sliding down a slippery surface. But while caution is important, one must also remember that most four to six year olds do have the strength, agility, intelligence and reasonable caution to attempt such manoeuvres. Rarely will children try something which is completely beyond their abilities. If you observe children in a playground you will see many instances where they exercise their judgement.

A preschool centre must provide opportunities for climbing, sliding and swinging. If there are trees in your playground which children can climb, then there is nothing to equal it in equipment. You can also place a few logs strategically so that they create interesting positions to climb and jump from. Besides natural materials, ladders of varying heights can also be fixed for the children to climb.
The standard jungle gym with its structure and space allows for many movements. Children delight in climbing up to the highest point, to stand without holding on, to move around the entire circumference and to swing from a bar. Once they manage climbing up and down with ease, they begin to try more intricate manoeuvres as Anup did.

A particularly agile six year old, Anup asked his father to tie a rope from the central rung of the jungle gym. His father asked him the purpose of doing so but Anup refused to say anything except: "Wait and see"! His father gave in to his repeated demands and tied a strong rope on the central rung. Anup held on to the rope and swung from it, touching one of the bars of the jungle gym with his feet. For that brief period Anup became the centre of everybody's admiration.

The jungle gym also encourages imaginative play. Provide children with materials like small buckets, ropes, wooden planks or a small ladder. You will find that they use them in their play on the jungle gym as one group of children did. This group pretended that the jungle gym was a forest. To protect themselves from the animals in the night, they pretended that they had built a small house on the tallest tree (which was symbolized by the top rung of the jungle gym) which could be reached by a hidden stairway (this was made by dragging a small ladder and placing it next to the jungle gym) that could not be seen by the animals. They were busy filling small buckets with leaves and stones to carry up to their 'house'. On being asked, they replied they were storing 'food' for the night.

A common playground equipment is the swing. They rhythmic to and fro motion is an exhilarating activity for some children. It requires considerable balance and control to be able to handle it and the educator has to be particularly careful when children are at it. While the swing gives the children an idea of speed, space and motion, it is for this very reason a dangerous activity for those whose judgement about these is poor. Children often run up to the back of the swing at the very movement it moves in the air, not realizing its forceful return.

You can create a swing using a rope and a tyre if you have a strong sturdy tree in your playground. Fling a rope across a strong limb of the tree away from the trunk. Attach an old tyre to the rope — even the inner tube from the tyre will do — and you have a swing ready on which children can explore every possibility, style and technique of movement.
Slides are another common and interesting playground equipment. Playing on the slide, children can experiment with different speeds of motion and learn to balance and control. Once the 'typical' way of sliding has been explored and mastered, children start experimenting. They try different ways of reaching the top (which will include walking up the incline of the slide), invent obstacles to obstruct the smooth downward slide or change the method of sliding down (such as sliding on the stomach or the feet). You may find them placing a ball at the foot of the slide kicking it as they slide down, to see how far it goes.

Children also experiment with rolling different objects down the slide and observe the manner in which they move. These are the beginnings of children's scientific experiments and their understanding of physical phenomena like friction, movement, speed and direction. Of course, they do not understand these concepts in adult terms yet nor do they realize that they are experimenting. They are just doing things that they enjoy and such playful, self-initiated and interesting activities form the base upon which later concepts will be built.

If you are not able to arrange for the typical slide that one usually sees in the playgrounds, you can devise one using bricks and wooden or metal planks. Raise the plank as an incline by placing bricks up to different heights on the two opposite sides as shown in the figure. At a different height and level, this provides variation from the typical slide. Children like walking on this plank on their toes or on their heels; they may try balancing a wooden block on their heads as they walk on it. As children get
used to the structure, you can raise its height. Take care to see that there are no sharp edges.

Seesaws of different heights enable children to learn another dimension of space and experience a sense of balance, weight and gravity. The seesaw lends itself to a variety of experiments. One child sitting on either side is a typical way. You can also see children balancing the seesaw by standing near its fulcrum, walking up the seesaw and walking down the other side, two children on one side balanced by one on the other, or a group of children on either side. Children also experiment with balancing objects on the seesaw.

The area where such equipment for sliding, swinging and balancing is installed should be grassy or sandy to prevent injury during a fall.

21.4.5 Games of Catching, Throwing and Kicking

Games involving catching, throwing and kicking a ball are most popular. Balls can be used for indoor and outdoor play. They can be chased, bounced off surfaces, caught, thrown, kicked or rolled.

Younger preschoolers enjoy throwing the ball and bouncing it. Roll a ball down the slope and see the children run after it.

You can plan another game in the following way. Form a tunnel using chairs or tables and ask two children to sit at either end. One child sends the ball through the tunnel to the child at the other end. The game continues in this way. As children's skill improves, the tunnel can be made longer and the game more difficult.

With older preschoolers you try the following more difficult variation of the game. Ask children to stand in a line with their legs apart. The child at the beginning of the line passes the ball through this tunnel to the child standing behind him or her, who repeats the action. When the ball reaches the last child in the line, she or he picks it up and runs to the head of the line. The child starts the process all over again and the game continues. Change the method of passing the ball, for example, over the head, and you have a new game. Such games help children to develop an idea of space and understand the meaning of the words 'through', 'over', 'behind', 'before' and 'under'.

Use a suitable ball to give children practice in throwing and catching. A big light ball is good for younger preschoolers, not a small hard one, since their eye-hand coordination is not well developed. You can also use a large balloon to play games of catch. This is particularly good for the younger preschoolers, because when thrown up, it floats down slowly and children get enough time to prepare to catch it. Keep two or three balloons
on hand, when starting this activity. As children’s abilities improve, you can make the
game more complicated. Ask them to clap once or stamp their feet before they catch the
ball. Throwing the ball overhead and catching it requires greater skill. Children must
judge the probable place where the ball will land and position themselves accordingly.
This develops in the later years of childhood.

Besides balls and balloons, you can also devise a soft bag for such games. Take a
durable cloth bag and fill it with newspaper, rags, seeds, dried beans, cotton and stitch
up the open end. Of course this “ball” will not bounce, but is still good for a catching
game.

During preschool years, children also learn to coordinate the movement of their legs.
They kick anything lying around. Games that provide opportunities for kicking should
be organized by the caregiver. Playing football is difficult for preschoolers as they
cannot run and kick at the same time. Can you think of some other games for
preschoolers with a ball or other material that provide practice for this skill?

A game which involves judgement and precision in using ones legs can be played in the
following way. Tie a medium sized balloon to each child’s ankle. Then ask the children
to stamp on another child’s balloon and blow it off, while at the same time protecting
their own. This game should be tried only if balloons are cheap and easily available for
the children.

21.5 PLAY ACTIVITIES FOR FOSTERING FINE
MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

The games and play activities that help in the development of fine motor abilities do not
need as much space as the play activities described in the earlier section for developing
gross motor abilities. Many of the activities described in this section can be organized
indoors as children do not have to move about much. Apart from the games described in
this section, some activities described in the other Units of Block 5 and 6 also foster the
development of fine motor abilities. For example, most of the art activities described in
Unit 26 help in developing fine motor coordination.

You know that fine motor abilities involve the use of small muscles i.e. the muscles of
fingers, wrist and hand. Fine motor coordination is essential for tasks like writing, tying
shoe laces, turning door knobs, buttoning and using scissors. Along with the control
over the small (fine) muscles of the hand, wrist and fingers, eye-hand coordination is
essential to complete such tasks.

What are the materials that you need for organizing play activities for developing fine
motor coordination? Bottle caps, paper, pen, bangles, spoons, marbles, beads, colours,
blocks, pebbles, blunt edged scissors are some of them. Let us now read about some
play activities that can be organized to help children refine and improve their fine motor
skills.
21.5.1 Stringing Activities

Ask children to collect leaves and provide them with a string or thread. 'Necklaces' can be made by stringing the leaves. Alternatively, you can provide beads for stringing. Another variation of the stringing activity can be the following. Cut holes in a cardboard and give children coloured ribbons, threads or lace to string through the holes. This will make interesting patterns. You can also ask the children to draw on the cardboard. Subsequently, you can punch holes along the outline of the picture that children have drawn. As children thread along these holes, they will enjoy seeing their picture outlined.

For the older preschoolers the stringing activity can be made more challenging in the following way. Take a piece of thick paper and fold it into half. Cut it as shown in the figure below from the folded end.
Open out the fold and it will look like this.

Take another paper and cut out strips of one inch width. Give these strips to children to be laced through the paper as shown below. If the strips are of different colours, they will form an interesting pattern.

21.5.2 Activities using Pebbles, Beads and Seeds

Handling pebbles, beads, seeds and similar small things fosters precision and control in using the fingers. You can plan a variety of play activities using these play materials.

Give children an assortment of pebbles, beads and seeds and ask them to separate them into different piles. This will also help children to develop some idea of classification.

Seeds and leaves can be used to make a collage. Pasting these objects on paper is good for developing fine muscle control.

Draw some shapes on the floor and ask children to place pebbles, leaves, marbles, bottle caps, seeds and similar material on the outline. This will foster eye-hand coordination and will help them to develop concept of shapes.

Later, as the older preschoolers are learning the numerals, you can assist them in the process of identification of numerals by writing out the numerals on the floor or paper and asking them to place pebbles on the outline.
21.5.3 Construction Activities

You would have often seen children piling kitchen utensils or plastic mugs or bottle caps one on top of the other, making a structure, breaking it down and then building it again. Construction activities are popular during preschool years. You can provide children with a variety of materials for this purpose — blocks made of wood or plastic, cardboard boxes of different sizes that fit into each other, empty match boxes, cigarette cartons, soap and tooth paste cartons, and similar objects that lie unused in the house. Besides fostering fine motor coordination and strengthening of fine muscles of the wrist, fingers and the hand, construction activities also involve a lot of imaginative play. A long row of blocks is a train winding through the mountains one moment and a snake wriggling...
its way through the forest in another. Children create a gigantic structure which they call a 'ship' and topple it down sometime later to build a 'castle'. Materials which allow children to construct something must form a part of the preschool centre for they give children an invaluable opportunity to express their ideas and see their thoughts taking shape.

Construction activities are usually a vigorous and a noisy affair. They also give children an opportunity to work out their emotions as they build a structure and demolish it or bang blocks and boxes against each other. Such play fosters cooperation and helps children to see each other's point of view as they work together to make something. It also helps to strengthen cognitive abilities of matching, grouping and sorting as children select a block 'just like this one' to place on the top (ability to match) or use the red ones to make the bus and the blue ones to make the ship (ability to group according to colour) or stack them side to side to make a wall (gives an understanding of size).

We have spoken about the materials that you can use for construction activities in the above paragraphs. Besides these, you can make blocks yourself, instead of buying them, using stiff paper from old greeting cards and calendars. Cut the paper as shown in the figure. Then fold the paper along the dotted lines and paste the ends together using glue or tape.

While some of the older preschoolers can work together to make something, most preschoolers would like to play independently with blocks and other such material. Therefore, there should be adequate play material for a group of children.

21.5.4 Play with Water and Sand

Children simply love to play with water and sand but many adults have strong prejudice towards 'wetness' and 'muddiness'. Children must remain clean, they feel, even if it is at the cost of exploration and discovery. This is a wrong attitude. Experiences with water, sand and mud provide innumerable opportunities for learning. It requires a little more alertness on the part of the educator to see that children do not throw mud or water over each other. You can tie an apron to ensure that children's clothes do not get dirty and their hands, feet and faces can be washed at the end of the play.

For water play, you can arrange to have a permanent small pond built in the playground. Alternatively, you can store water in large shallow basins or tubs. Provide beakers and containers of different shapes and sizes, funnels, plastic toys and objects. Children develop fine motor control as they pour water from one container to the other. Such repeated experiences will help them develop an idea of conservation of amount. It will also help them to form an idea about shape, size and volume. Water play also helps children to develop an understanding of concepts like light and heavy, floating and sinking and to know about some properties of water. You will read in Unit 22 how an educator planned activities related to water with her group of preschool children.

To provide opportunity for sand play, you can dig a pit in the open playground or improvise one indoors. Playing with sand fosters fine motor coordination as children make 'pancakes', 'laddoos' and 'houses'. But besides this, sand play is an effective medium for nurturing children's imagination. It stimulates role play and spurs children to enact roles and express emotions which they would otherwise hesitate to show. You
will have the opportunity to observe children as they play with sand, and you will find they create stories about giants, demons and kings.
Provide containers and rakes of different sizes for use in the sand pit. From such elementary experiences of digging and pouring sand in containers are the elaborate notions of measurement and shape constructed later on.

Some children, because of the rules imposed by adults, may feel uncomfortable playing with water and sand for fear that they will get dirty. This deprives children of a major sensory experience. Encourage such children to play and also talk to the parents and reassure them so that they do not get unnecessarily tense when children get dirty.

21.5.5 Art Activities

Using crayons, pencils or brushes for drawing, painting and printing, making objects with clay, paper tearing, paper folding, paper cutting, pasting — all foster fine motor development. We shall talk about them in detail in Unit 26.

21.6 INTER-RELATEDNESS OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES

In Sections 21.4 and 21.5 we have described some games and play activities that can be organized to foster physical and gross and fine motor development. You can organize many more activities using materials available in your setting. We would like to restate an important point. It has been stated earlier that we shall be categorizing a play activity on the basis of the area in which it primarily fosters development. Therefore, the activities described in this Unit are the ones that foster physical play and motor development primarily. However, many of them are a good way of fostering development in other areas as well. We have stated this for many activities. For example, water play and sand play helps children to develop an idea of size and shape, learn about conservation and stimulates imaginative play. As children handle pebbles, beads, leaves and seeds, they develop an idea about different textures — hard, soft, rough and smooth — shapes, colours and sizes, and strengthen their abilities to match, classify and seriate. Colouring, painting and running across different surfaces provides a variety of tactile experiences. The play activities involving running, jumping, climbing, sliding and swinging help children develop an idea of space as they ‘go through’ the tyre, ‘crawl under’ a rope, or ‘jump over’ an obstacle. Play with blocks and sand nurtures children’s imagination and creativity. In all team games children also learn to cooperate and think of each other. Thus besides physical and motor development, cognitive, language and social development are also fostered through the play activities described in this Unit.

The point that we are making is that learning experiences are integrated. However, the educator may decide to focus on the development of a particular concept/ability/skill and use the play material accordingly. For example, leaves can be used to impart the concept of colour or shape or to enhance fine motor coordination. What the major outcome is of a activity may be what the teacher planned; but children learn many other things which may not have been consciously planned or thought about by the teacher.

21.7 PLACE OF ACTIVITIES FOR MOVEMENT AND MOBILITY IN THE CURRICULUM

We shall be discussing how to devise a curriculum for a preschool centre in detail in Unit 30. Therein, we shall discuss the principles to bear in mind while selecting play activities and scheduling them over the week and the day. However, in this section we shall briefly talk about how you can incorporate the activities for movement and mobility in the curriculum.

By and large, it would be useful to categorize the play activities described in this Unit as outdoor and indoor free play activities. This means that children have the freedom in selecting the activity, the play materials and the duration, so long as they do not harm each other. When scheduling these activities, make available a variety of play material that children can choose from such as blocks, beads, strings, ropes, water, sand, ball and
Play Activities for Preschoolers

You can plan to have outdoor and indoor free play at different times during the day. Or else you can schedule them at the same time and divide the children between outdoor free play and indoor free play. As has been emphasized in Section 21.3, free play activities do not mean that the educator has no role to play or can relax supervision.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) Make a list of indoor and outdoor games and play activities that you played during your childhood as well as those played by children presently in your area. Along with each game, write the material needed, if any. You should be able to list at least 20 play activities. Share your list with other learners at the study centre. In this way you will have a storehouse of games and play activities that you can organise with children at the centre.

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2) The following are some indoor and outdoor games and play activities. Besides fostering physical and motor development, each of these also promotes development in other areas. Indicate the other areas where each play activity promotes development in the space next to it.

i) Hide and Seek ...........................................................................................................................
ii) Playing on the swing ...................................................................................................................
iii) Chain tag ..................................................................................................................................
iv) Crossing obstacles set up in the path of running ..................................................................
v) Hopping through tyres and bricks placed strategically on the ground ...............................
vii) Walking on different shapes drawn on the ground .............................................................
vi) Play with Blocks ......................................................................................................................
vii) Water play ..............................................................................................................................
viii) Sand play .............................................................................................................................
21.8 SUMMING UP

In this Unit you have read about outdoor and indoor games and play activities that primarily foster physical and gross and fine motor development. Games are considered a waste of time by many adults. This is a wrong notion. On deeper reflection, it becomes evident that play activities for movement and mobility foster development in all areas and help in the development of a rounded personality. Through games children build confidence and self-esteem, learn many social values, develop their cognitive abilities, strengthen their imagination and express emotions.

Some educators assume that they can afford to relax when children are involved in outdoor and indoor games and play activities. This is a wrong notion. The educator needs to be alert to prevent mishaps, supervise children's play, guide their experiences and to help them understand their discoveries and organize some play activities. Observing children during play will help her to understand them better.

You can organise games of running, catching, chasing, hide and seek, climbing, swinging, sliding, crawling, jumping, throwing, kicking and balancing to help children develop gross motor abilities. Play activities to foster fine motor development include stringing activities, block play, activities with pebbles, seeds and beads, water play and sand play.

The play activities described in this Unit are examples. It will be useful for you to make a list of games children commonly play in your area. While the play activities described in this Unit primarily foster physical and motor development, they also help children to acquire concepts and promote development in other areas.

21.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Through examples explain to the parent that indoor and outdoor games and play activities promote physical and motor development, build children's confidence and self-esteem, help them to acquire concepts and build cognitive abilities, foster social values, nurture their imagination and enable them to express emotions. Thus they help in the development of a rounded personality.

2) Read the description about the game 'dodge ball' and the activity of 'stringing beads' and note how they help in cognitive development. In the same way, analyse two games played by children in your area to see the cognitive abilities involved in playing.

3) Games where children have to play in a team or in a group and where all have to pool in their efforts in order to win promote cooperation and sharing.

4) 1) In order to prevent accidents
2) To supervise children's play
3) To guide their experiences and help them understand their discoveries
4) To organize and participate in certain activities
5) To know more about children

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) Answer this question based on your experience and observation.

2) i) Builds children's understanding of space, stimulates them to reason, analyse and deduce, thus promoting cognitive development and fosters cooperation.

ii) Helps to develop an idea of speed, space and motion and to refine one's judgement about these. Thus it promotes concept development.
iii) Requires children to devise a strategy, thus helping in the development of cognitive abilities. Also builds cooperation.

iv) Develops children’s idea of space as they hop over, crawl under obstacles.

v) Develops children’s idea of space.

vi) Promotes an understanding of shapes.

vii) Nurtures imagination; strengthens cognitive abilities of matching, sorting and classification; enables expression of emotions.

viii) Builds concepts of floating and sinking, heavy and light, shape, size and volume.

ix) Nurtures imagination and stimulates role play; builds an understanding of measurement and shape; enables expression of emotions.