

Why Play Works Facilitation Guide 5

Each session would have some time for discussing the themes from the section read that month all together and some time for small group sharing/discussion. The general format for each session is:

1. Small talk/Arrival time (5 minutes)
 - a. We will take a few minutes to talk about the weather or do an icebreaker. Participants will be invited to volunteer to plan an icebreaker for the next session.
2. Today's theme (5 minutes)
 - a. The facilitator will share announcements and introduce the theme for the day. This leads naturally to the discussion.
3. Discussion (20 minutes)
 - a. Discuss the 3-5 questions that were sent in advance for each session. Use breakout rooms depending on the size of the group:
 - i. Up to 8 people stay in one room
 - ii. 9-15 people 2 breakout rooms
 - iii. 16-23 people in 3 breakout rooms
 - iv. 24-31 in 4 breakout rooms
 - v. 32-40 in 5 breakout rooms
 - b. *Will we ask for volunteers to facilitate the breakout rooms?*
 - c. At the end of 20 minute, bring the group back together and check-in on how the discussion went. Then transition into the time for playing together.
4. Let's Play (20 minutes)
 - a. Research tells us that play is important for keeping children, and adults healthy. So we are going to take time to play as part of the book club.

Book Club meeting 5: The Theory & Science of Play

Theme: Leveling the Field

Read pages 144-184

- Throw Like a Girl
- Leveling the Playing Field
- Getting Better
- We can Do This

Small talk/Arrival time (5 minutes)

I know it is only February, but the warm weather lately has made me start looking forward to spring already. What are looking forward to when the weather is warmer?

Today's theme (5 minutes)

Today's discussion will focus on including everyone in your play and leveling the playing field. All through the book there has been a recognition and acceptance that not everyone comes to the field with the same level of passion, skill or ability to join in the game. This section helps us think about how we can change the system, change the game, so that we don't have to ask kids to change themselves to be part of what we are playing.

Our discussion in January reminded me about how important play is to all of us as human beings – and it seemed like the memories of games we played as children have an outsized impact. It is important for adults to find time to play. For my friend, Michelle, quilting is her play. She lights up when she shares the latest design for the next quilt she's working on, or when she talks about her fabric finds or the friends who share her passion. For my family, it is playing cards or board games. My husband taught me to play cribbage and pitch as soon as we started seriously dating – I could tell, if our relationship was going anywhere, I had to learn to play cards, and I'm glad I did. We've been playing games together for 32 years and taught our son to love to play too. We'll celebrate our anniversary next week.

During our discussion last month, as people told us about the games they love to play with the kids they work with, or loved playing as children, their voice changed a bit, and their excitement showed. The book reminds us that we are more present when we play. We are engaged emotionally and physically, and our memories of playing games include the emotions of that moment.

I think our challenge today is to focus on how we can create play that engages **all** the youth in our program emotionally and physically. Play that helps them create positive memories of their time with us.

Today we're going to follow the advice on page 146 – we're going to think about how the games (or our whole program) are set up for clues as to how we might redesign them to promote inclusion. This shifts the focus from the youth that are not being served well to the system that is not meeting their needs. It is not something about our kids that is not working in our system – it is something about the system that is not working for all the youth in our program that results in them being left out, in behavior challenges or attendance issues. It can be an important shift in our thinking.

Were there any ideas that struck you from this section – pages 144-184 – that you want to be sure we talk about?

Then let's jump into the discussion questions.

Discussion (20 minutes)

Set up just the number of breakout rooms needed: Up to 8 people stay in one room, 9-15 people 2 breakout rooms, etc. Send participants into breakout rooms if needed.

Discuss the questions shared in advance.

The first section, from page 144 – 162 is about inclusion, but as I read it, the picture that emerged in my mind was of an inner-city school with a hard top playground where children from diverse families played games like four square, basketball and jump rope. It didn't speak to me about the playgrounds I see in Nebraska. I wonder if that is because of how Jill described the schools, or if my on bias created that image of a playground when I was thinking of underserved youth.

I feel a need to change that image in my head a bit. I want to think about what inequity or lack of resources really looks like in our state. Let's start out thinking about inclusion in your programs.

- What are the groups that you worry about including? What families are underserved in your community?
- Is there a tension between town kids and farm kids?
- Do income differences limit opportunities for some of the kids in your program?
- What are the real issues around inclusion for your staff?

On page 150, there is a discussion about changing the language you use to intentionally be inclusive of all genders.

- What are some examples in your work where intentional shifts in language or systems can make your program feel safe and inclusive?

The discussion about supporting children's social and emotional health begins on page 163.

- What ideas does this section have that are important in your work?
- If you are not sure where to start, I thought the guidance of page 166 of 3 things the afterschool programs do was a great starting place.
 1. We give students choice and voice.
 2. We place focused attention on transitions – on the previous page it, she mentions the rituals, rules and referees of play that help kids sort out strong emotions because they can know the rules and there is someone to enforce them evenly.
 3. We provide caring adults that are there each day. She also mentions that we resist reacting negatively when a student acts out. I think that is sometimes a challenge when our staff are

also struggling with the social and emotional health – they might be tired after a long day, having financial challenges, or just pushed to balance a lot of different things in their life. I think this last one is the most important – and some days the hardest to make happen.

Bring the group back together and check-in on how the discussion went. Then transition into the time for playing together.

Let's have each group share one important idea that led to an interesting discussion.

Let's Play (20 minutes)

The last section of the book, pages 171 to 184 is about integrating your ideas about why play works into your programming. We're going to think about what we can take and use from this book as we take some time to learn from each other.

In our small groups, we'll invite everyone to share a first step you can take to apply one of the ideas you've learned from Why Play Works.

As you are thinking about the ideas you want to put into action, remember that play is important for all humans, not just for children. Some people in our book club don't work directly with children. So please feel comfortable to share ideas that are focused on any areas of your work.

My closing thought for today comes from page 177. Like many of you, my work focuses more on adults than on youth. I work for the largest youth development organization in the county, but also volunteer at my church so I can get my fix of spending time with kids because I rarely get to work directly with 4-Hers.

So when I think about play, I am thinking more about adults and workshops and trainings. I am going to focus on infusing play into any situation – specifically when I am planning a workshop – I want to follow Jill's advice and incorporate play to encourage people to be more present in the workshop, to be more authentically themselves as they are learning, and to help them connect and engage with others whether we are in-person or virtual. Thank you for doing that today – for being yourself and engaging with us in authentic ways.

Anyone else have closing thoughts?

Wrap Up

The conference committee is debating right now about choosing a book for this year's conference. We are looking at *Whole Child, Whole Life* by Stephanie Malia Krauss which is about 10 practices to help kids live, learn and thrive. The author really tries to ground the basics of positive youth development in the challenging and changing world of kids, families and schools post-covid. I think we will like it.

I don't think we'll be able to afford to purchase books for everyone at the conference unless a new funder comes forward, but I was thinking about offering books to people who commit to being part of the book club. I think it would help me know how many people are really interested and would be a nice incentive for being willing to dig a little deeper. What do you think of that idea?

Thanks to everyone for joining us today and for taking this journey through Why Play Works with me. I learned so much from everyone together, and also, I just really enjoyed the time we spent together every month. Thank you.