

# PlayMatters

## Technical Topical Brief

### Integrating Learning through Play in Large Classes



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In partnership with



The LEGO Foundation



# Introduction

PlayMatters recognizes the contextual realities that educators in refugee, low-resource, and emergency contexts face that may limit the successful implementation of Learning through Play (LtP). Large and overcrowded classrooms are a frequently cited barrier to the implementation of LtP and other active learning methods. <sup>1,7,13</sup> For example, needs assessment data in Tanzania reveals some class sizes with a teacher to learner ratio of 86:1. With current funding gaps and lapses in teacher wages in Uganda, double classes or combined classes compounds the issue. Additional context assessments have identified fluctuating class sizes, creating inconsistency in class sizes that require special contextualization of the following strategies. Such structural limitations can negatively affect the classroom environment and climate or overwhelm a teacher who attempts to use new teaching methodologies or materials. This Technical Brief highlights evidence-based strategies for incorporating LtP and active teaching methods into large class sizes.



*An upper primary literacy class. Tanzania.*

# PlayMatters Learning through Play Definition

Learning through Play (LtP) is an **active teaching and learning method** that capitalizes on a child's natural desire to engage in play. Core elements include:

01



The adult facilitator (a teacher or community volunteer) **intentionally plans and delivers** contextually and age-appropriate guided playful experiences with **clear learning objectives**.

03



The facilitator deliberately creates and maintains **a positive, safe, and inclusive environment** for children, allowing children to feel comfortable and joyful.

02



LtP experiences **promote interactions with people and/or materials** that allow children to question, experiment, practice, and discover, developing critical skills that they need to thrive today and in future.



# Educator Content

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## Learning through Play Core Element 1: Lesson Planning



Thorough and thoughtful lesson plans in advance can help to mitigate the challenges of large classrooms to maximize learning time. A thorough and thoughtful lesson plan can support teachers in effective time management, a critical component of large class teaching, and being comfortable with lesson content and learning activities to manage learner behavior and provide individualised support as needed.

- ◆ Lesson activities are well thought-through to align with lesson objectives. <sup>8,15</sup>
- ◆ Lesson planning anticipates challenges that may arise in LtP activities to mitigate issues. <sup>8,15</sup>
- ◆ Teacher is comfortable and confident with lesson content and lesson activities to deliver lesson in comfortable and calm manner. <sup>2</sup>

## Learning through Play Core Element 2: Teaching and Learning Materials



Sufficient teaching and learning materials such as textbooks or manipulatives (ideally 1:1, so that every child has access to hands-on learning) can deepen learners' engagement.

- ◆ Integration of low cost or locally-available teaching and learning materials like bottle caps, fruits, and stones. <sup>1,3</sup>
- ◆ Teachers maximise using the chalkboard by making it interactive as an additional teaching aid rather than something for learners to only copy in a rote manner. <sup>10</sup>
- ◆ Six Bricks integration as manipulatives in whole-class teaching or pooled bricks in group activities.

## Learning through Play Core Element 2: Group Work



Group or pair work can provide learners an opportunity to interact with each other and the curricular content in a large class.

- ◆ Consider the strategic grouping of children given the purpose of the activity.
- ◆ Roles within the group are shared, everyone has the opportunity to participate, and every member has the opportunity to lead the group. <sup>2,3</sup>
- ◆ Smaller groups may be more effective when learners are frequently assigned into groups and understand routines and expectations of group work. <sup>2,3</sup>
- ◆ When feasible the teacher can divide the class into two groups or smaller groups of 15–20 children to teach new concepts, delivering new content to one group while the other half of the class revises or practices previous content and then switching. <sup>2,3</sup>

## Learning through Play Core Element 3: Establish Classroom Routines and Rules



Establishing classroom routines and expectations can support effective classroom management to ease burdens of large classes.

- ◆ Post and adhere to a daily routine in ECD and daily/weekly timetables in primary school to promote a sense of predictability and can lead to positive interactions.
- ◆ Get learners' attention at the beginning of class and emphasise important information at the beginning and end of class<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ Additional routines include a consistent time table of lessons, group work routines, and activity routines. <sup>2,12</sup>  
Strategic use of self-study or independent work in a routine way. <sup>14</sup>
- ◆ Establish reasonable rules for learner behavior such as taking turns and participation expectations. <sup>2,15</sup>

- ◆ Co-create roles and responsibilities of the teacher and the learners and establishing expectations to support engagement and ensure mutual understanding. <sup>5</sup>
- ◆ Establish classroom management strategies and positive discipline strategies, including the use of signals rather than shouting. <sup>8,12,15</sup>

## Learning through Play Core Element 3: Praise and Teacher-Learner Relationship



Developing teachers' ability to create a warm and inclusive environment is necessary for teaching in large classrooms. <sup>10</sup>

- ◆ Build strong interpersonal relationships with learners by learning learner's names and getting to know them to build rapport and encourage engagement. <sup>15</sup>
- ◆ Use of praise, lively energy and enthusiasm, and encouragement of children to participate to keep learners engaged. <sup>12</sup>
- ◆ In connection to classroom routines, appoint learners as classroom helpers in a rotation where all learners have the opportunity to support the teacher can also help with classroom management.

## Learning through Play Core Element 3: Use of Space



Another key consideration is the effective use of classroom space as well as the creative use of spaces outside of the classroom. <sup>2,15</sup>

- ◆ Consider special classroom arrangements beyond rows of desks facing in one direction that are aligned with learning objectives (e.g., group work with clustered desks) ensuring equity and inclusion. <sup>1,11</sup>

- ◆ Standardise seating for all learners to support classroom management. In ECD classrooms, for example, using mats instead of desks can lead to flexible arrangements as long as there are enough mats for to accommodate all learners.
- ◆ Another strategy is to re-assign classroom allocation to effectively use existing space (e.g., the largest class in the largest room).<sup>3</sup>
- ◆ The use of external environments, weather permitting, could include classroom patios or playgrounds or other safe spaces outside of the classroom.<sup>8,15</sup>

## Other: Support Staff



While classrooms might be large and overcrowded, it can be helpful to receive support from volunteers and teachers' aides from the community, parents, or former learners.<sup>2,12</sup>

- ◆ External support actors are trained or oriented on safeguarding and ethical engagement with children.
- ◆ When feasible, additional facilitators could help in group work facilitation and oversight. If this is not possible, the aforementioned use of peer leaders/helpers can provide additional support.

# Educator Training

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## Other:

### Model Sample Practices



Teacher professional development programs may not properly support teachers to anticipate or cope with the challenges that arise in large class sizes.

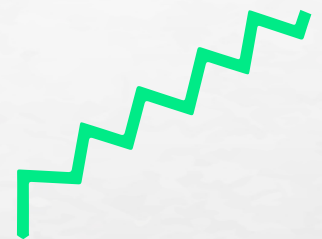
- ◆ Model large-class teaching practices in training and subsequently engage teachers in small group discussions to debrief the implementation of these strategies in their own teaching practice. <sup>6</sup>

## School Leadership Training



School leaders (Head Teachers/Principals, PTAs, SMCs/CMCs) are critical decision-makers in dispersing resources and materials and setting timetables and class allocations. <sup>9</sup> School leaders are engaged to support teachers:

- ◆ Access to teaching and learning materials.
- ◆ Utilization of existing school spaces.
- ◆ Monitoring of additional support staff, if relevant.
- ◆ Strategically designing and monitoring shift systems and class allocations considering number of teachers, available classrooms, and grade dispersions of learners. <sup>4</sup>

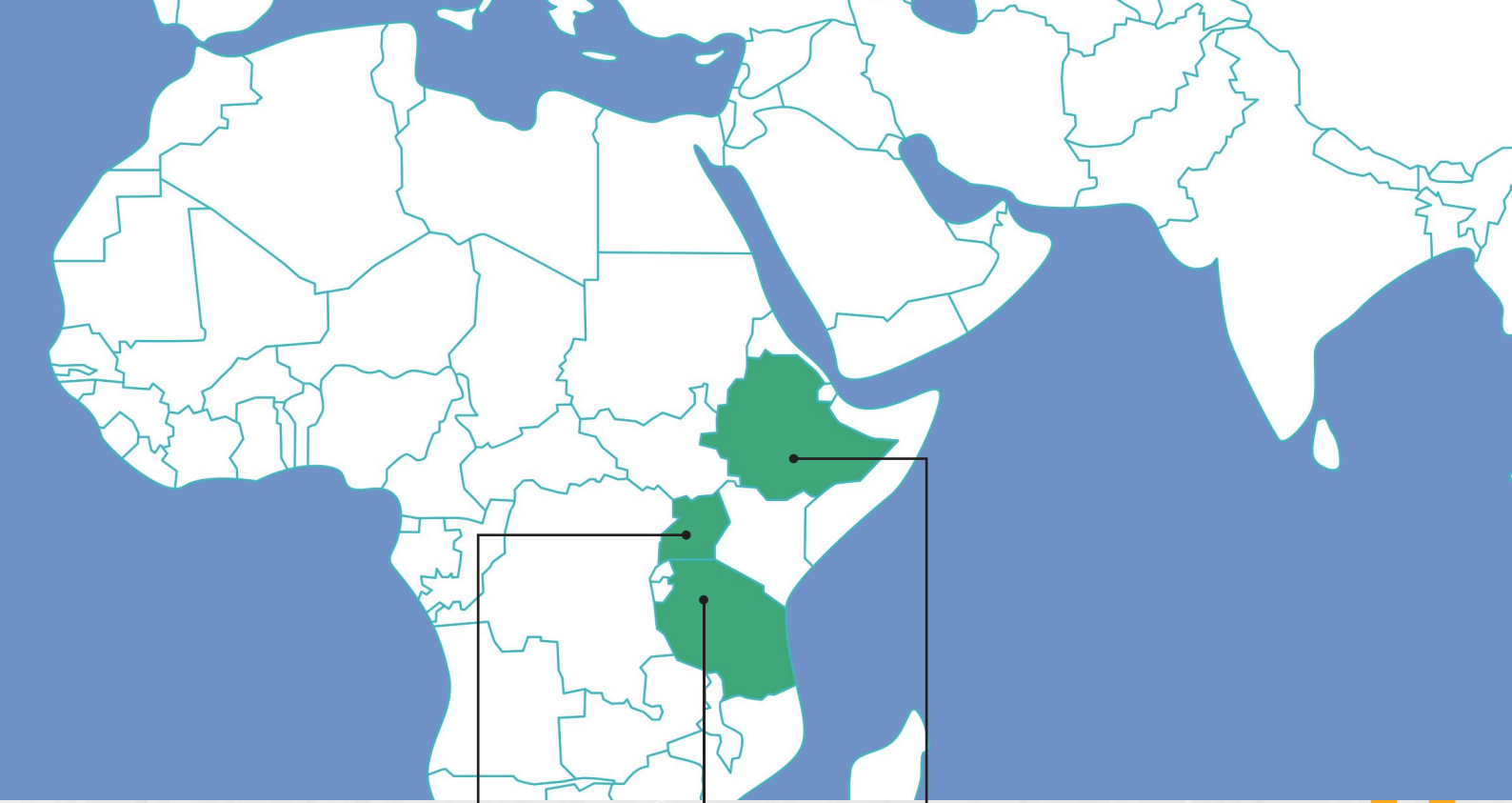




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### Uganda

*Kyegegwa, Isingiro, Kikuube, Lamwo, Arua, Madi Okollo, Terego, Obongi, Yumbe, & Adjumani Districts.*



### Tanzania

*Kasulu, Kibondo & Kakonko Districts*



### Ethiopia

*Benishangul Gumuz, Gambella, Afar, Tigray & Somali Regional States.*

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