



The **LEGO** Foundation

PLAY Evidence Brief

February 2023

Prepared by
Lauren Pisani, Consultant for the LEGO Foundation

INTRODUCTION

The Playful Learning Across the Years (PLAY) tools are designed to measure adult-child interactions that support children's self-sustaining engagement in learning. There are multiple tools for use in different learning settings, including homes, pre-primary schools, and primary classrooms. The tools focus on the following dimensions of adult-child interactions: connection to experience, exploration, problem-solving, agency, social connectedness, and positive emotional climate. The PLAY tools were developed by RTI International and New York University Global TIES for Children between 2020 and 2022.

TESTING RELATIONSHIP WITH LEARNING OUTCOMES

In 2022, two pilot tests were conducted to study the relationships between the PLAY classroom observation tool and children's learning outcomes at the pre-primary level. Analyses aimed to determine whether higher ratings of adult support for children's engagement in classrooms were positively correlated with stronger child development outcomes. Details of the two pilot sites can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. PLAY and Learning Outcomes Pilot Sites

| | Ghana | South Africa |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Sample size | 3,035 | 189 |
| Setting | Pre-primary schools | Pre-primary schools |
| Learning Outcome Measure | International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) | Early Learning Outcomes Measure (ELOM) |

FINDINGS

Data from both pilots suggest that there is a small, positive correlation between PLAY classroom observation scores and children's learning outcomes (see Table 2). In South Africa, the relationship between PLAY items focusing on activities that support children's agency in the classroom had the most consistent significant correlations with children's learning outcomes. In Ghana, items focusing on personal and community connections in learning activities demonstrated the strongest relationships with children's learning outcomes.

Table 2. Learning Outcome Domains with Significant Positive Correlation

| | Ghana (PLAY dimension: Personal/community connection) | South Africa (PLAY dimension: Support for Agency) |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Gross Motor | | |
| Fine Motor | ✓ | |
| Numeracy | ✓ | ✓ |
| Literacy | ✓ | ✓ |
| Executive Function | ✓ | |

In Ghana, analyses also found that the PLAY tools predicted children's learning outcomes in areas that were not accounted for by another well-established measure of classroom quality (the [TIPPS](#)). **This suggests that the PLAY tools are capturing aspects of classroom**

quality that are highly relevant to children's learning and development and missing from existing tools in use in the field.

NEXT STEPS

The PLAY tools are unique because they focus on support for children's engagement in learning, whereas many other classroom quality tools focus on structural features (e.g., assets in a home, number of textbooks in a classroom) or activities directly related to academic outcomes (e.g., instances of reading books with children, engagement in number identification activities). **The PLAY tools represent a substantial step towards understanding behaviours supportive of playful learning around the world, bringing us closer to understanding how we can contribute to children's learning outcomes.**

The tools will undergo further testing and refinement with four LEGO Foundation implementing partners, alongside the tool developers from RTI International and NYU Global TIES for Children, from 2023 – 2025. These partners will:

1. Strengthen the feasibility and usability of the toolkit and address some of the limitations identified during these pilots, including the challenge of low consistency amongst items designed to measure the same dimension of adult-child interactions;
2. Continue to investigate the connections between children's playful learning environments and their learning outcomes over time;
3. Explore how the PLAY tools can be used for programme improvement, as well as to advocate for government monitoring of quality learning.

Following this testing, a final set of tools and guidance documents will be released to the public in early 2026.