



# Investigating the impact of learning through play at school

ACER and the LEGO Foundation launch Learning Through Play at School, a new research study in Ukraine.

Learning Through Play at School is a pioneering research study that investigates how playful approaches to teaching and learning are applied in the classroom. The four-year study provides an opportunity to expand understanding of learning through play at school in Ukraine and the impact on teachers and students.

The study investigates whether playful approaches to teaching and learning make a difference to the literacy, social and emotional skills of children. It also examines the factors that enable or challenge teachers when applying learning through play.

Learning Through Play at School is a partnership between ACER and the LEGO Foundation. The research study is implemented in-country by the Ukraine Educational Research Association (UERA).

As lead technical partner, ACER is responsible for the research design, instrument and intervention development, data analysis and reporting. UERA is responsible for in-country operations and management of the study, including school coordination and data collection.

Play is critical to the holistic development of the child as it helps to foster a breadth of skills including creative, cognitive, physical, social and emotional skills. Learning through play is play that involves children's interactions with people, objects or representations as the context for learning. It also helps in language development and self-regulation.

The research study has two unique features:

- a blended online and face-to-face professional learning program for teachers, and
- a playful and engaging student assessment.

Both elements are based on established evidence and an understanding of what works in education research.

Teachers from 10 schools in Ukraine are participating in the two-year professional learning and mentoring program covering the principles, practices and assessment of learning through play at school. The Teacher Innovative Play Program (TIPP) is an interactive learning program, facilitated by an expert pedagogy partner. Teachers will participate in four mentoring sessions each year, providing an opportunity to review footage of their teaching practice and reflect on their progress.

Students of teachers involved in the TIPP will participate in an assessment of the literacy and socio-emotional skills associated with learning through play. Another 10 schools will participate in

the assessment and receive access to training materials at the end of the study. This enables comparison of the impact of learning through play on the students of teachers who have participated in the study and those who have not.

The Learning Through Play at School Literacy and Socio-Emotional Skills assessment is unlike others. Many standardised literacy assessments for young children involve one-to-one administration of a series of disconnected items on vocabulary, letter recognition, and listening comprehension. These assessments can be tiring and stressful for young children. In these contrived settings, some children are not inspired to demonstrate their highest level of ability.

Administered one-to-one, the Literacy and Socio-Emotional Skills assessment is scored on the spot by trained administrators.

The assessment kit includes beautiful artwork and cut out characters for children to play with and hold. Feedback from the pilot revealed that children enjoyed the assessment and wanted it to continue.

Learning Through Play at School arose from a global scoping study conducted by ACER and the LEGO Foundation in 2018. The study found that learning through play is relevant and applicable to primary school when defined as holistic learning through experiences that are meaningful, iterative, joyful, socially interactive and actively engaging. Importantly, the study found that learning through play can be effective in fostering cognitive, social, emotional, physical and creative skills under certain conditions.

Ukraine was chosen for the study because of recent reforms to its education system. The New Ukrainian School (NUS) reform aims to better equip Ukrainian young people with the skills and knowledge they require for the future of work. These skills include lifelong learning, critical thinking, civic engagement, intercultural communication, and collaborating in teams.



Twenty schools from five provinces in Ukraine are participating in the Learning Through Play at School research study. It also provides professional learning and mentoring opportunities for teachers in Ukraine.

The study is important in the context of global education reforms that emphasise the importance of skills for 21st century learning and has the potential to be adapted and implemented in other countries in the future. ■

### Further reading

Read the learning through play at school global scoping study at: [legofoundation.com/media/1740/learning-through-play-school.pdf](https://legofoundation.com/media/1740/learning-through-play-school.pdf)