

# Taking the Fun Cup Seriously: Exploring Play and its Purpose



## OVERVIEW

*Taking the Fun Cup Seriously* is a playful, research-informed workshop that explores why fun, joy, humour, and playfulness are essential, not optional, for children's wellbeing and learning. Grounded in the Phoenix Cups Framework and enriched by contemporary research on play, schemas, engagement, and flow, this session reframes fun as a basic human life need.

Educators will unpack what fills the Fun Cup®, why it so powerfully drives children's motivation, and how joy supports stress reduction, cognitive development, relationships, and regulation.

Educators will feel reinvigorated, inspired, and equipped with strategies to embed fun, spontaneity, laughter, and joyful learning into everyday programs. This is a workshop that honours play as the lifeblood of childhood, and reminds us that fun is not an "extra," but a fundamental ingredient for thriving.

## WE WILL...

- Explore the Fun Cup® as a basic human life need and examine how joy, stimulation, humour, and play drive children's motivation, relationships, wellbeing, and learning.
- Investigate the six types of social play and a range of schematic play patterns, using practical examples to build confidence in recognising and supporting play in action.
- Connect theory to practice through real scenarios, reflective prompts, and discussions that reimagine routines, environments, and interactions as opportunities for fun-filling, choice, engagement, and sustained flow.
- Examine evidence, research, and practical strategies, including flow theory, intrinsic motivation and agency, to intentionally design programs where fun is embedded, celebrated, and understood as essential.

### DELIVERY MODE OFFERINGS:

1. Self-paced online course
2. Full-day face-to-face session (up to 5 hours)
3. Live online webinar
4. After-hours in-service workshops with teams (up to 2.5 hours)

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## PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

By the end of this workshop, participants will possess:

1. A clear understanding of children's fundamental need for fun and why fun, joy, and playfulness are essential to children's developmental, emotional, and cognitive wellbeing.
2. Increased confidence in identifying, valuing, and supporting the different forms of play, including schematic play and the six stages of social play.
3. A deeper knowledge of theoretical perspectives underpinning fun, play, engagement, and flow, and how they relate to children's learning needs.
4. Practical, context-relevant strategies to intentionally embed fun-filling moments into everyday practice, interactions, and program decisions.
5. Renewed professional energy and inspiration to embrace spontaneity, humour, creativity, and shared joy as valid and powerful elements of quality pedagogy.

## THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

### **Phoenix Cups Framework** **Sandi Phoenix**

The Phoenix Cups Framework positions fun as a core human need that shapes children's motivation, energy, and engagement. It supports educators to interpret play, humour, and stimulation-seeking behaviours through a needs-based lens, guiding responsive and intentional fun-filling practice.

### **Schematic Play** **Jean Piaget & Chris Athey**

Piaget's cognitive development theory and Athey's schema research explain how repeated patterns of behaviour help children construct meaning, explore ideas, and deepen learning through play; central to understanding Fun Cup filling and types of engagement.

### **Six Types of Play** **Mildred Parton**

Parton's social stages of play provide a framework for observing how children engage socially, from solitary to cooperative play, informing how educators respond, scaffold, and design environments that support joy and connection.

### **Flow Theory** **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**

Flow describes the deep immersion, joy, and intrinsic motivation children experience during sustained, uninterrupted engagement. It offers a powerful lens for understanding how children enter states of absorption that naturally support Fun Cup filling and high-quality learning.

## KEY LINKS – NATIONAL

### Alignment with National Quality Standard

- **QA1** – Educational Program and Practice (Elements 1.1.1, 1.2.1, 1.2.2): Strengthens intentional, play-rich programs that foster engagement, agency, and joyful learning.
- **QA5** – Relationships with Children (Elements 5.1.1, 5.1.2): Enhances positive, playful interactions that build trust, enjoyment, connection, and shared humour.
- **QA6** – Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities: Supports conversations with families about the importance of play, fun, and joy as fundamental developmental needs.

### Alignment with Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

- **Standard 1.2** – Know learners and how they learn: Deepens understanding of how joy, motivation, play, stimulation, and flow influence wellbeing and engagement.
- **Standard 3.2** – Plan, structure and sequence learning programs: Strengthens the ability to design play-based, engaging programs that incorporate schemas, fun-filling strategies, and purposeful joy.
- **Standard 4.2** – Manage classroom activities: Encourages flexible, playful routines that support sustained engagement and minimise unnecessary interruptions.

### Alignment with EYLF v2.0

#### Principles:

- Secure, respectful & reciprocal relationships: Builds connection and shared joy through playful interactions.

#### Practices:

- Play-based learning: Centres play, schemas, and fun as foundational drivers of learning and wellbeing.
- Responsiveness to children: Supports children's interests, motivations, and spontaneous moments of joy.
- Learning environments: Promotes design of stimulating, engaging, playful spaces that enable flow and sustained engagement.

#### Learning Outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Identity: Supports confidence, agency, and a strong sense of self through joyful, meaningful play.
- Outcome 3: Wellbeing: Enhances emotional wellbeing by embedding fun, humour, stress reduction, and positive engagement.
- Outcome 5: Communication: Fosters shared language, humour, interaction, and playful expression.

### Alignment with National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

- **Principle 1:** Child safety and wellbeing are embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture: Reinforces environments where play, joy, and fun support emotional safety and belonging.
- **Principle 3:** Children are involved in decisions affecting them: Builds agency and choice through playful, child-led experiences.
- **Principle 5:** People working with children are suitable and supported: Promotes reflective practice that values children's needs, rights, and playful ways of learning.
- **Principle 8:** Physical and online environments are safe and accessible: Encourages environments that support safe, stimulating, joyful exploration.

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## KEY LINKS - QLD

### Alignment with the Kindy Uplift Key Priority Areas

#### Social & Emotional Learning

- Strengthens understanding of how fun supports stress reduction, connection, and emotional regulation.
- Builds educator capacity to foster joyful interactions, trust, and secure relationships.
- Encourages playful rituals that support emotional safety and belonging.

#### Language & Literacy

- Promotes playful communication, humour, storytelling, and social interaction.
- Enhances language development through shared joy, imaginative play, and conversational play.

#### Mathematics & Numeracy

- Utilises schema play (positioning, rotation, connecting, transforming) as rich foundations for mathematical thinking.
- Encourages playful problem-solving, patterning, spatial awareness, and reasoning.

### Alignment with QKLG

#### Wellbeing

- Supports emotional wellbeing through fun, laughter, joy, and flow as stress-reducing, confidence-building experiences.
- Builds children's capacity for regulation, resilience, and social connection.

#### Active Learning

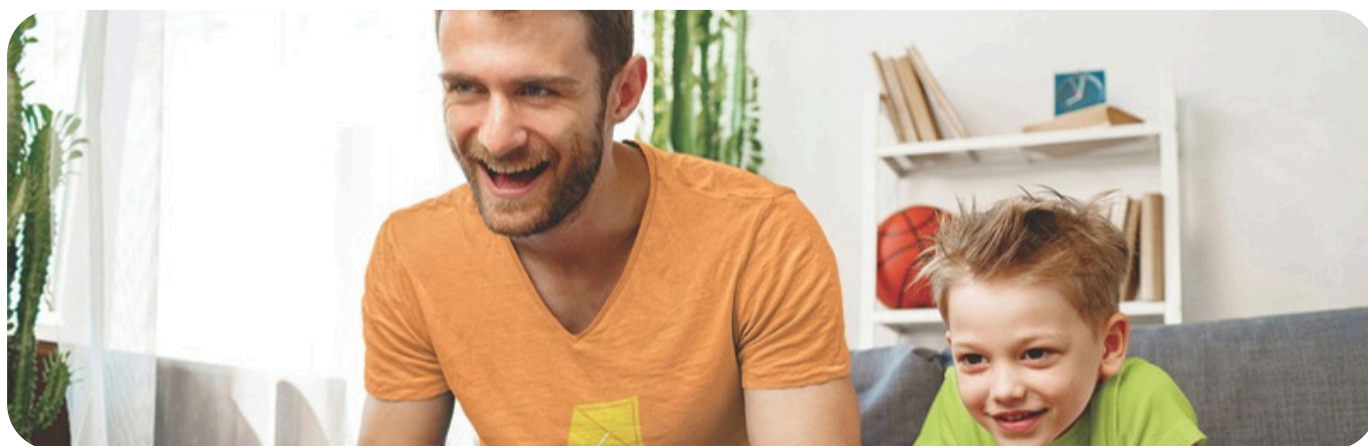
- Promotes deep engagement and concentration through schema play and sustained flow.
- Encourages curiosity, exploration, persistence, and imaginative problem-solving.

#### Communicating

- Enhances expressive and receptive communication through playful interactions, humour, storytelling, and social play.

#### Identity & Connectedness

- Strengthens children's sense of belonging through shared joy, playfulness, and positive social experiences.
- Encourages authentic participation and agency in play.



## KEY LINKS – VIC

### School Readiness Funding Menu

Please note this workshop is not on the SRF menu. It can however be utilised under flexible funding provisions. For more information on flexible funding go to the Victorian Department of Education website here:



For more information on the Phoenix Support SRF offerings, including those on the menu as well as flexible funding options, head to our website here:



### Alignment with the SRF Priority Areas for use under Flexible Funding Options

#### Access & Inclusion

- Ensures all children can participate meaningfully in a wide range of playful, joyful learning opportunities.
- Supports educators to recognise and remove barriers to participation in play and engagement.

#### Communication (Language Development)

- Enhances conversational language, humour, expressive communication, and social interaction through joyful play.

#### Wellbeing (Social & Emotional)

- Strengthens children's emotional wellbeing through fun, connection, laughter, and shared enjoyment.
- Reduces stress and supports co-regulation through play, humour, and flow experiences.

### Alignment with VELDYP

#### Outcome 1 – Identity

- Builds children's confidence, self-expression, and agency through joyful, meaningful play.

#### Outcome 2 – Community

- Encourages collaboration, shared humour, and social play that strengthen children's sense of belonging.

#### Outcome 3 – Wellbeing

- Promotes emotional regulation, resilience, and positive mental health through fun-filled, engaging learning environments.

#### Outcome 4 – Learning

- Supports deep engagement, curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving through schemas and flow states.

#### Outcome 5 – Communication

- Strengthens language, social interaction, and playful communication through storytelling, humour, and shared play narratives.