

While play may be discarded as not a crucial factor of children's development there are many different reasons to believe that it is in fact one of the main sources to support the holistic development of a child. Play in early years is essential for a child's development. It contributes to cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth. Through play, children learn to solve problems, develop language skills, regulate emotions, and build relationships. It also enhances creativity, imagination, and helps lay the foundation for future learning, ensuring the child has a healthy relationship with learning. Providing a variety of play experiences supports holistic development in the early years of a child's life (UNICEF 2018).

This paper is going to discuss two diverse types of play and how they can be supported in practice, starting with outdoor play. (Willoughby, M. 2014) strongly suggests that outdoor play offers various benefits, promoting physical development, improving motor skills, enhancing sensory experiences, fostering social interactions, boosting creativity and developing a love for nature, contributing to overall holistic development, while furthermore adding that experiences outside are the best for developing the senses of smell, touch, and taste. Being outdoors also gives the child the ability to perceive one's own movement through space. These areas of growth and learning are equally significant as learning how to read and write. (Ouvry, M. and Furtado, A. 2020) strongly agrees that Children use their senses of taste, touch, smell, sound, and sight to perceive the world. While their senses are digesting the encounter, their emotions are being stored in their recollections, this encourages us to believe that outdoor play is very beneficial to children's holistic development and that finding ways to teach children this is going to end with a positive result. This paper also states that allowing the child to be free of movement and long periods of time encourages a child to use pretend play to connected with nature and their sense's. As practitioner's have the most rewarding job finding new ways to introduce different learning experiences, having this role comes with great difficulty to do everything in the correct way always making sure the experience is positive, but play make's that role a lot easier. Outdoor play has been recognised all around the world and has now opened new opportunities for different settings, such as forest schools (Knight, S. 2013) states that forest school is an outdoor setting that is run by qualified forest school practitioners, it focuses on experiential learning, allowing children to explore and learn in a hands-on manner while fostering a connection with nature. Activities typically include outdoor play, exploration, and learning practical skills in the natural environment. (Harris, 2023.) agrees that forest schools offer numerous benefits, including fostering a connection with nature, promoting physical activity and motor skills, encouraging risk-taking and problem-solving, enhancing social skills and teamwork, while also supporting emotional well- being, and imagination. Engaging with outdoor environments in forest

schools contributes to holistic development and a sense of environmental stewardship in children. (A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings. no date) strongly suggests that to support outdoor play in practice you must provide a variety of open-ended materials such as balls, buckets, and nature items. Create a designated outdoor play area with diverse elements such as sand, water, and climbing structures. Encourage activities that promote exploration, such as nature scavenger hunts or plant identification. Emphasize the importance of unstructured play, allowing children to use their imagination, creativity and also allowing children to take risk's to build confidence in decision making. Additionally, ensure safety by establishing clear guidelines and supervision while also allowing enough freedom for children to explore and learn from their outdoor experiences.

The second type of play this paper is going to discuss is messy play, Duffy, B (2007) states that messy play is an excellent way to contribute to a young child's cognitive and creative development, using messy play allows children to use all their sense's while also experiencing an interactive activity. Messy play is an approach which is often frowned upon because we associate the word messy with negative thoughts, although messy play is an approach to learning that involves sensory-rich activities where children can explore and engage with various materials in tactile and often untidy manner. It is designed to encourage creativity, fine motor skills, and sensory development through activities like finger painting, playing with mud, or exploring different textures. (Gascoyne, S. 2018) strongly states that as adults the way we interact with messy play can influence the child's emotions on their experience. To support messy play in practice, a practitioner should demonstrate a positive attitude towards messiness, showing that it's okay to get hands-on and enjoy the experience, by the practitioner modelling playfulness it will leave the child feeling more secure and comfortable to allow themselves to confidently play in the mess, adults can also support messy play by observing and adapting to the child's preferences and needs, if a child prefers paint over a water activities, adults can observe and offer a paint based activity in future. By providing a variety of materials it can allow the child to pick their own preferences, while the adult watches for signs of engagement or discomfort, and intervene when necessary to ensure a safe and positive experience. Observation can be beneficial and can help the adult tailor messy play activities to each child's development stage and interests.

As children grow and develop they go through different stages of play (Saracho, O.N. Ed. (2019) agrees that the stages of play start with unoccupied play, unoccupied play refers to a type of play where a child is not actively engaged in specific activity and may appear to be idle or daydreaming. This typically occurs around birth – 3 months. During unoccupied play, children might observe their surroundings, explore sensory experiences, or engage in spontaneous movements without a defined

goal or structure. It's a stage in the development of play skills as they gradually progress to more complex forms of play.

Unoccupied play is then followed by solitary play, solitary play typically occurs during the ages of 3 months- 2 years of age, solitary play is a type of play where a child engages in activities independently, playing alone without direct interaction with others. During solitary the child may use toys, explore objects or engage in imaginative activities without the involvement of peers. This form of play allows the child to focus on their interests and encourages independence in exploring and learning. Solitary play is an essential part of a child's social and cognitive development.

Solitary play is followed by onlooker play, onlooker play occurs during the age of 2 years old, onlooker play is a stage of play where a child observes and watches others plays without actively participating. During this phase the child shows interest in the activities of their peers but does not directly engage with them. Onlooker play is often a transitional phase as children develop social awareness and curiosity about the actions of those around them.

Onlooker play is followed by parallel play this stage of play typically occurs at the age of 2 and older, parallel play is a type of play in which children engage in similar activities or use similar toys side by side, but each child plays independently without direct interaction with the others. Although they are not directly engaged with each other, parallel play provides opportunities for observation, shared experiences, and the gradual development of social skills as children become more comfortable being around others.

Parallel play is then followed by associate play, associate play typically begins between the ages of 3-4 years old, associate play is a form of social play where children engage in similar or complementary activities, but they do so independently. In this type of play children are aware of each other's presence and may exchange toys or comments, but they don't actively collaborate or coordinate their actions. It represents a stage of social development between parallel play and more cooperative forms of play.

Which is lastly followed by cooperative play, cooperative play typically occurs at 4 years old and older, cooperative play is a form of social play where children engage with each other in a shared activity, working together to achieve a common goal. During cooperative play, children collaborate, communicate, coordinate their actions to play games, solve problems, or create something together. This type of play promotes social skills, teamwork, and the development of a sense of community. play is an important tool that child use to learn about their environment. Self-directed play is a great tool to allow children to learn, self-directed play is an activity that is child-led with no adult-directed outcome, leaving the child to be creative with play. (Ledendecker, M. 2020) suggests that self-

directed play is providing the child with many different materials, such as loose parts trays, treasure baskets and natural resources, and allowing the child to decide how they would like to interact with the materials. Having minimal adult intervention allows the child to explore, experiment and create based on their imagination and curiosity. Self-directed play in early years fosters autonomy, decision-making skills, and creativity, which can have lasting effects in later years. Individuals who experienced self-directed play tend to develop better problem solving abilities, adaptability, and a sense of intrinsic motivation. These qualities contribute to a personal fulfilment and success in various aspects of life as adults. (UNICEF 2018) strongly states that child centred play allows children to make their own choices, allowing them to pick who they play with, the toys they play with and when they play. It allows the child to feel independent, resilience and confident, while also developing skills they need in the future. It's a more natural way of learning, and develops their curiosity, and internal need to learn. By fostering an environment that values and encourages self-directed play adults can nurture a child's independence, imagination, and ability to learn through exploration. (Rymanowicz, K. 2015) states that an adult can support children in child-led play by talking about play, by simply engaging with the child it lets them know that you are interested and support the way they are choosing to play. Adults can also encourage creativity by providing open-ended toys, by giving them open ended time to interact with the activity, join in when invited, and let them take the lead in choosing activities. Be present, offer praise, and create a safe, supportive environment for exploration. (Howard, J. and McInnes, K. 2013) assembled a study to see how children interact when they think they are participating in a play activity compared to when they think they in an adult-led activity. when children see an activity as play they show more signs of emotional well-being than when they perceive the same activity not as play. 129 children between the ages of 3-5 years old participated in the study, the study was delivered to the children by setting one activity up that was perceived as play, and another activity up which was not perceived as play, children were allocated to the two different activities and their emotional-- wellbeing was measured by using Leuven's involvement scale. When looking at the results of the study, it had appeared that the children that participated in the activity that was perceived as play had a significantly highest result than the children that participated in the one that wasn't play, reason being that the children believed that they were just playing so it allowed them to be more emotionally involved, this tells us that children are more engaged if they believe they are playing.

While collaborating with children it is extremely important that we observe, observing children involves close watching and paying attention to their behaviours, actions, interactions, and expressions to gain insight into their development. While also observing their needs and interests.

(Forman, G. and Hall, E. 2013) believes that there are many different reasons we should observe children, by observing children we can discover their likes and dislikes, this can be useful when planning activities. Using observation you can also see how they are developing, see what approaches children use to get to their goals, observation allows you to know what children need to practice, and also allows you to learn more about their personalities and backgrounds. Observations can also be useful for picking up on underlying issues such as additional learning needs, and can help you know if a child needs extra support in a classroom. In early childhood, the phrase schemas, refer to repeated patterns of behaviour that children exhibit as they explore and make sense of the world around them. Common schemas include transporting, positioning, connecting, enclosing, rotating and transforming. Understanding and recognizing these patterns can help adults support and extend children's learning experiences by providing activities that align with their schemas, promoting more meaningful and intentional play (Atherton and Nutbrown, 2016).

The chosen observation tool this paper is going to discuss is a written observation, a written observation is when an adult is observing a child in a natural setting, allowing the child to go about their day while also interacting with them. (Daniel Rosa, 2015) suggests that when doing a written observation you should be engaged with the child, while also noting down what you see, these can be strengths or weaknesses, this allows us to identify if the child is positively developing. It is important that some observations are pre planned this allows you time to observe how the child plays, and interacts with their peers. it is important to observe the child several times, and ensure that different people observe the child also, by doing this you can see if another staff member picks up on any different types of behaviour. When observing a child, look for social interactions, emotional expressions, cognitive abilities, motor skills, language and development, problem-solving skills, and any unique interests or preferences. Observing these aspects provides comprehensive understanding of a child's holistic development. (*SAGE Companion* /, 2016) suggests that limitations on play observations may include the potential for observer bias, the influence of the observation environment, difficulty capturing spontaneous moments, and the challenge of interpreting the meaning behind certain behaviours accurately. Additionally, cultural differences and individual variations can impact the interpretation of play observations. (Barber, J, Paul smith, S. 2010) suggests that play observation often focuses on the holistic development of the child. It involves observing various aspects, including social, emotional, cognitive, and physical domains, providing a comprehensive understanding of the child's overall growth and abilities. Adults can support the child during observations by creating a natural and conducive environment, while providing diverse and age appropriate materials, actively engaging with the child during play, while documenting

observations in a systematic manner, adults can also collaborate with colleagues or other key workers to gain different perspectives. Adults can also use this observation to analyse what interests the child may have, such as toys, peers or activities, by doing this the adult is preparing to build new connections with the child by being able to offer these kind of materials during play. (Pacey 2016) supports that play is crucial in observation and assessment as it is a natural and primary way children express themselves. Through play you can observe their social interactions, problem-solving skills, creativity, emotional expression, and cognitive development. It provides valuable insights into their holistic development and allows for a more accurate assessment of their strengths and areas for growth. (Howard, J. and McInnes, K. 2013) research paper also supports this, as it states when children believe they are playing their emotional well-being is increased this allows us to believe that the child feels completely natural and comfortable. This research paper also states that during the study children demonstrated cues, such as the location of the activity, an adults presence and whether or not they have the choice to participate or not. The research paper encourages observers to allow the children to participate in the activity on the floor rather than a table, to encourage but not let the activity be adult- led, and allow the child to move to and from the activity as they please, instead of instructing them to stay until the activity is finished.

Overall the research has shown that play is an incredible foundation for children, and can help them develop in many different kinds of way, allowing children to go on an excel in adulthood.

Lois Duffy
2307781
ECEY4003
Words- 2742

Reference list

Atherton, F. and Nutbrown, C. (2016) 'Schematic pedagogy: supporting one child's learning at home and in a group', *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 24(1), pp. 63–79. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2015.1119671>.

Barber, Jenny. and Paul-Smith, Sharon. (2010) *Early years observation and planning in practice a practical guide for observation and planning in the EYFS*. London: Practical Pre-School Books.

Daniel Rosa (2015) *Effective Practice: Observation, Assessment and Planning*, p. 2. Available at: https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/media/5555/effective_poa_and_planning.pdf. (accessed on: 12 February 2024)

Duffy, B. (2007) *All About...Messy Play A Fine Mess*. Available at: <https://www.birthingto5mat-ters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Messy-Play.pdf>. (accessed on: 15 February 2024)

Forman, G. and Hall, E. (2013) 'Wondering With Children: The Importance of Observation in Early Education', *LEARNING Landscapes*, 7(1), pp. 187–202. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v7i1.637>.

Gascoyne, S. (2018). *Messy Play in the Early Years: Supporting Learning through Material Engagements* (1st ed.). Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351234702> (accessed on: 17 February 2024)

Harris, F. (2023) 'Practitioners' perspectives on children's engagement in forest school', *Education 3-13*, pp. 1–10. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2023.2183081>.

Howard, J. and McInnes, K. (2013) "The impact of children's perception of an activity as play rather than not play on emotional well-being," *Child : care, health & development*, 39(5), pp. 737–742. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2214.2012.01405.x>.

Knight, S. (2013) *Forest school and outdoor learning in the early years*. Second edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Ledendecker, M. (2020) *Why Encourage Self-Directed Play?*, www.berkshiremontessori.org. Available at: <https://www.berkshiremontessori.org/msb-blog/self-directed-play>. (accessed on 18 February 2024)

Lois Duffy
2307781
ECEY4003
Words- 2742

Ouvry, M. and Furtado, A. (2020) *Exercising muscles and minds : outdoor play and the early years curriculum*. Second edition. London, England ; Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Rymanowicz, K. (2015) *The power of play – Part 5: Adult roles in child's play, MSU Extension*. Available at: https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/the_power_of_play_part_5_adult_roles_in_childs_play. (accessed on 23 February 2024)

Saracho, O.N. (2019) *Handbook of Research on the Education of Young Children*. Edited by O.N. Saracho. Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429442827>. (accessed on 23 February 2024)

Willoughby, M. (2014) 'Outdoor Play Matters: The Benefits of Outdoor Play for Young Children', *knowledge.barnardos.ie* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://knowledge.barnardos.ie/handle/20.500.13085/238>. (accessed on 26 February 2024)

PACEY (2016) *Developing Self Reflective Practice Supporting members to provide the highest standards of care and learning for children*. Available at: [https://www.pacey.org.uk/Pacey/media/Web-site-files/PACEY%20member%20practice%20guides%20\(PDFs\)/PG04-self-reflective-practice.pdf](https://www.pacey.org.uk/Pacey/media/Web-site-files/PACEY%20member%20practice%20guides%20(PDFs)/PG04-self-reflective-practice.pdf). (accessed on 19 February 2024)

UNICEF (2018) *Learning through play: Strengthening learning through play in early childhood education programmes, unicef*. UNICEF. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/UNICEF-Lego-Foundation-Learning-through-Play.pdf>. (accessed on: 28 February 2024)

Lois Duffy
2307781
ECEY4003
Words- 2742

Lois Duffy
2307781
ECEY4003
Words- 2742