

Play: Theory and Practice

1. Discuss two types of play and how these can be supported in practice.

According to Welsh Government (2021), all children have the right to play. Moreover, children have an innate need to play. Children discover methods to express a spectrum of emotions and learn about their shared world with others via play and playful experiences.

At the same time, for all children, play is treated seriously. Play demands attention and focus to detail and serves as a mechanism for children to develop persistence and teamwork skills. Play increases thinking and learning inclinations and sentiments of self-esteem and self-efficacy, which influences confidence and independence. Play is also essential for their physical, emotional, and creative development.

Notably, Moyles (1989) claims that there is a type of play for every part of a child's development. Given this, Dr. Whitebread (2012) analyses different forms of play. Such as, **physical play** encompasses active exercise (climbing, dancing, jumping, skipping, biking, and ball play) and rough-and-tumble play (with peers, brothers, sisters, or parents/guardians). It also encompasses fine-motor exercise (sewing, cutting, colouring, junk modelling, controlling action, and building toys). Moreover, fine-motor play incorporates various activities that develop young children's fine-motor finger and hand coordination abilities. These tasks are often solitary, benefit from adult supervision (e.g., embroidery, building), and help children improve their focus and perseverance abilities.

This form of play seems to be associated with **children's growing whole-body** and **hand-eye coordination** and the development of **endurance** and **strength**. Likewise, 'Rough-and-tumble' play has been the subject of most studies. It involves chasing, wrestling, kicking, grappling, and rolling on the ground. It seems to have developed a technique for youngsters to learn to manage aggressiveness. Jarvis (2010) claims that it is also connected with the formation of strong attachment and connections between children and their parents and the ability of school-aged children to comprehend feelings and emotions.

Another type of play, **play with objects**, involves children's increasing investigations of the physical world and their discovered items as young scientists. When a kid investigates how

things and materials feel and act, this is referred to as 'sensorimotor' play. Infants begin manipulating items as soon as they can grip and hold them. Early exploratory behaviours include biting/mouthing, turning while staring, stroking/rubbing, striking, and dropping. Children begin arranging things between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four months, which progresses to categorising and classifying tasks. By the age of four, behaviours such as constructing, creating, and building appear.

Like all other kinds of play, playing with items typically incorporates other types of play. That is a relatively well-researched style of play since it is associated with developing critical thinking, planning, and problem-solving abilities. It involves physical and manipulative characteristics and is frequently conducted with children in a pretence or socio-dramatic scenario. When little children create or construct, they often form a tale or narrative. When children play with items, they establish objectives and challenges for themselves, measure their progress toward them, and cultivate an ever-growing array of cognitive and physical abilities and techniques.

Additionally, Sylva, Bruner, and Genova (1976) claim that play with objects is strongly related to the formation of 'private communication,' with children often commenting on their activities. That seems to serve the purpose of assisting the children in maintaining their attention, focusing on the activity's objectives, monitoring their progress, making strategic decisions about how to continue, and overall regulating their behaviour during the work. As a result, creation and problem-solving play are linked to developing persistence and a positive attitude toward obstacles.

Numerous research has examined the use of constructional play as a form of therapy for children who belong to clinical groupings defined by difficulties, such as autism and ADHD.

According to Palaiologou (2016), children's developmental journeys are successfully maintained in a supportive setting or outdoor environment that promotes social behaviours and provides a secure space to express their emotions. In view of this, classroom activities should be adapted to ensure that all children present to engage. Moreover, practitioners must be willing to rearrange their setting to allow children to roam freely and make the best use of all available space. It is essential to provide a diverse selection of toys and play materials for children. The quality and quantity of play materials significantly influence young children's psychological, emotional, and social development. Smith (1997) shows that conflicts and disruptions rise

when children are confined to a relatively limited place to play, and there are insufficient toys to share.

2. Evidence a clear understanding of why it is important for children to choose their own play and the importance of the role of the adult in children's play.

Early Years Matters (2018) argues that play is the main form of learning in the early years. As a result, children understand their environment and its functioning through touch, senses, exploration, and interaction. Children develop new skills and knowledge through play and learn to solve problems. In this case, play and learning are identical in early education. Moreover, for children, playing is a natural and pleasurable method to be active, healthy, and happy. From infancy until adolescence, children need a variety of unstructured play experiences to maintain optimal physical and mental health and develop life skills. Correspondingly, freely chosen play promotes the healthy development of children (nidirect, 2021). Similarly, Herrington and Brussoni (2015) maintain that play is essential to childhood development, having been recognised as a basic right of children by the United Nations Convention. Additionally, the unstructured game has no enforced rules; it is spontaneous and started by children, without adult intervention or planning.

According to Palaiologou (2016), when children create and manage their play, this is referred to as free play. From a child's perception, play may be a pleasurable and enjoyable activity that fosters emotions of inner well-being. In the same way, Howard and McInnes (2012) report that when children view an activity as play rather than non-play, their emotional well-being increases. Additionally, children who participated in the 'like play' activity scored much higher than children who participated in the 'not like play' activity.

This suggests that adults must understand the value of play as a process and avoid becoming too focused on the final product. Adult manipulation or control of the Play Cycle to further their objective is considered "**adulteration**" by King and Sturrock (2020). Furthermore, any learning that occurs as a result of the play is likely to be accidental since the act of play is often the most enjoyable. When baking a cake, for instance, the act of blending flour and eggs

may be joyful and satisfying in and of itself—the result, the cake, may be significantly less important in other circumstances. While any learning that occurs due to free play is almost certainly accidental, practitioners are also urged to establish 'purposeful play' to foster learning (Palaologou, 2016). This, from a Vygotskian approach, refers to the difference between what a child can do on his or her own and what they can do when directed by another (either an adult or a more able child) (Vygotsky, 1978).

However, Tickell (2011) suggests that one type of scaffolding may be offered through 'sensitive intervention,' which enables the children to retain control of their play while giving possibilities and ideas for future development. By scaffolding children's play experiences, adults may help young children acquire the abilities necessary to become effective learners, such as increasing their confidence, cognitive flexibility, and viewing challenges from several perspectives.

According to Lindon (2001), practitioners need to pause, observe, and reflect before engaging in play interaction. Moreover, practitioners must evolve into 'play partners,' actively participating in children's play with enthusiasm and sincerity (Smidt, 2010). Also, adults often have the most significant opportunity to expand both child-initiated play and teacher-initiated group work since both are effective vehicles for increasing learning. Thus, the practitioner's competence may be defined as the capacity to discern when and how to intervene and participate (Sylva et al., 2004).

In view of this, Moyles (2010) frames this process as a spiral that starts with unstructured play, progresses to adult-directed play, and progresses to enriched unstructured play when necessary information and skills are consolidated. The essential aspect noted here is the utilisation of play-based learning tailored to the child's developmental stage, requirements, and interests. Nevertheless, it is essential to remember that even seemingly 'free' play needs considerable organisation, and experienced practitioners will prioritise children throughout the process. They will actively seek out and engage children's interests, needs, and ideas so that play may be enjoyable, attractive, and yet educational (Palaologou, 2016). According to the Welsh Government (2021), enabling experiences should foster learners' independence by providing challenges and the chance to perform throughout the learning path.

According to Palaologou (2016), the practitioner's role is essential in establishing a supportive and engaging setting that allows for free and organised play. The practitioners are critical in offering play topics and various tools, but they should not be reluctant to allow

children to change, expand, or modify play. Above all, although play may be a helpful learning platform, practitioners must not neglect the importance of the reality that play should be a valued and pleasurable activity.

3. Running record-an observation method for young children

According to Papatheodorou (2011), narrative observations, also referred to as running records, allow for detailed evidence of a child's behaviours and relevant information in a daily environment. Moreover, a running record, a detailed description of a child's actions, interests, developmental abilities, and other activities, is a valuable tool for analysing a child's developmental stage and establishing an educational plan (Fleming, 2020). Additionally, Bentzen (2009) claims that the fundamental purpose of using a running record is to gain a thorough, objective account of behaviour devoid of inference, interpretation, or assessment. According to Allen and Cowdery (2014), a running records should contain the following information: date, time observation began, location, and name of observer. Additional timings may be written in the margin every ten minutes or whenever there is a change in activity so that the reader can estimate how long the child is engaged in an activity. Running records may provide a comprehensive picture of each child's general behaviour and development when kept regularly. When keeping a running record, the teacher notes down everything observed. It is important not to use general phrases like 'play' or 'busy,' but rather to document specifically what the child did while 'playing' or 'busy.' It is generally preferable to write simply the initials of the child being observed at the top of the page and then add the entire name when the observation is complete. In this manner, a passing child will not see their name and will not question the practitioner what they are writing about them. Alternatively, according to Nilsen (2016), running records are impartial, providing a more objective view of a typical (or what may turn out to be an atypical) period. That, however, is unknown until the recorder starts writing. Everything that occurs within that period is described: the routine, the irritating, and the mysterious. The recording stops at the end of a specified time. A running record is analogous to turning on a video camera and allowing it to run for an extended period, capturing whatever happens. A running record is most effective when portraying a brief period in a child's life naturally.

Moreover, when a running record is focused on a learning centre or section of the classroom, the record may evaluate the area's usefulness and determine if the area requires any improvements. Particular learning centres or educational spaces are more conducive to observing specific abilities. A running record in the significant muscle region provides information about a child's climbing, jumping, or running abilities and social, emotional, and linguistic development. The dramatic play centre and the block area effectively demonstrate imaginative play, social connection, and self-concept. Small muscular skills, language comprehension, and interpersonal and verbal abilities are easily noticed in the art area or when playing at the sand or water table. Ten-minute running records in any of these sectors may be incredibly revealing. Running records need a high level of concentration and sustained attention. Additional personnel is required in the room to ensure that all children are sufficiently monitored; any recording in progress comes second to a kid in need. Interrupt any recording, draw a line, and note the ending and return timings. Recordings may be resumed after the situation has been stabilised. Furthermore, BERA (2004) claims that all times, in any circumstance, and for whatever purpose, the child's safety and well-being are essential. Moreover, one precaution to consider while utilising the running record, or any other recording tool, is the potential influence on the child's behaviour. It may cause the child to feel anxious or behave differently. When such behaviour is noticed, the writing should cease, and attempts should make future writing less evident. In a classroom where observation and recording are performed as a regular part of daily life, students often lose sight of what is happening. Better, the recorder must use caution in observing from a distance sufficient to avoid interfering with the child's activities but near enough to hear a conversation. Occasionally, placing a chair on the other side of a piece of equipment, out of the child's line of sight but within hearing distance, may be efficient. (Nilsen, 2016). Therefore, Brassard and Boehm (2011) claim that being an effective observer requires sensitivity, self-awareness, knowledge of young children and their development, knowledge of cultural diversity and environmental expectations, and the ability to integrate measurements with the results of other assessments and to translate these outcomes into meaningful instruction or preventive interventions.

Overall, the running record presents advantages because it identifies many growth areas in a single recording and evaluates the success of a learning centre or sector. Additionally, it may be utilised for several purposes: developmental evaluation, in-depth knowledge of the child, and evidence for other specialists to further analyses. Because the running record is created concurrently with the occurrence of the behaviour, it is less likely to be influenced by bias and

more likely to include extensive information (Nilsen, 2016). By contrast, Peterson and Elam (2021) claim that the running record is time-consuming. It may be tough to keep up with and follow along as children transition rapidly from one activity to the next. It is not a realistic strategy for instructors who are in ratio, and the observed behaviours may not represent those seen on other days.

4. Demonstrate an understanding of the role of play when undertaking observations and assessments of children and consider how this affects the child's engagement and the accuracy of the observation.

According to Palaiologou (2008), observations are essential to continuously assessing children's growth in a play-based learning setting. Observations may be an excellent method for gathering information in context and ensuring that children's assessments are relevant. These tests will indicate what children can do and the many skills they have mastered, and how they apply those abilities. Moreover, Moyles (1994) claims that observing children at play demonstrates why it may be an effective learning medium. Children are often completely absorbed in their activities during play. It is often repetitious and very reliant on practise. Two additional factors, emphasised by psychological research and theory, contribute to understanding its significant contribution to learning and creativity. These relate to its involvement in children's development of a sense of personal control over their learning and their development of symbolic representational abilities. Both come from the influential theoretical writings of Lev Vygotsky. According to Vygotsky, children construct what he refers to as their own 'zone of proximal development' during play. They determine their level of difficulty and so always engage in developmentally appropriate behaviour. That also implies that play is spontaneous and started by children; in other words, children control their learning during play (Vygotsky 1978). Similarly, Harries (2012) says that children are endowed with incredible learning potential, gaining confidence via play. Also, observation may indicate both a child's learning ability and previously learned. Furthermore, what children can already accomplish should serve as a basis for future planning. So, practitioners can only determine what children can do by close observation. As a result, observation must be planned and conducted with tact and consideration. For this, the organisation is required. It is advantageous to have more observers throughout the day or a week to compare results. Children often

communicate significantly more complex information via their play than they would tell in response to an adult-posed inquiry. They work better when the tension to do something right, or wrong is eliminated, as is the desire to please.

Particularly, Knight (2009), suggests that opportunities for children to interact with natural resources may pique their intrinsic drive, allowing them to learn various problem-solving, communication, and cooperation skills. Moreover, open access between indoor and outdoor play areas empowers young children to choose where, what, and how to play.

Therefore, this movement to child-play-based settings challenges evaluation, so observational assessment is vital for good early childhood education and care. Practitioners may watch children while they play, engage in everyday activities, and participate in scheduled activities. That may give vital information into children's achievements, interests, and development. Reflecting on these findings may assist practitioners in tailoring their provision to meet each individual's developing requirements. It is important to devote sufficient time to conducting and reflecting on these observations, both individually and, where feasible, as a team (Palaiologou, 2016).

Furthermore, Moyles (2010) suggests that observation of children's play needs should include parents wherever feasible. Practitioners may observe parents' knowledge of their child's needs during play sessions. Parents may also participate in a conversation about their kid's development and participate in the child's profile based on their expert knowledge of their child and the learning path of that youngster.

Correspondingly, Palaiologou (2016) sustains that observation is also essential in the collaboration between parents and practitioners. Sharing observations between home and early childhood settings allows for conversations about the child to identify the child's progress and establish strategies for further supporting and increasing learning and development. These collaborative observations may be informal comments, images capturing specific moments, or more formalised recordings of events.

Overall, observation of children engaging in play and other activities serves as the foundation for a cycle of summative assessment and curriculum planning. Also, observation is essential in the development of 'positive interactions,' in which the practitioner comprehends the child and recognises and supports his or her interests. Additionally, it contributes to the creation of 'supportive settings,' in which adults become aware of the resources and possibilities available.

Moreover, play observations may provide:

- A complete picture of each child in terms of understanding and knowledge, skills and attitudes;
- Opportunities for play improvement through the various use of techniques, resources, and modifications to the learning environment. (Palaiologou, 2016).

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