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Section 1:

Adventurous play offers children a wealth of developmental opportunities including self confidence, resilience, fine and gross motor development, independence, social skills and collaborative working in addition to an improvement in wellbeing (First Five Years, 2019). This is a view supported by Wiley (2018) who states that by partaking in adventurous, unstructured play which should arouse a sense of risk and be thrilling, children develop an appreciation for their own limitations, cause and effect and experience reduced stress and improved wellbeing. Furthermore Wiley (2018) states that each time a child experiences minor setbacks or injury is a learning experience for the child to adapt.

Dodd, Nesbit and FitzGibbon (2022) discusses two studies, one of which was conducted in Northern Ireland and the other was conducted across Great Britain. The results of both studies found that children who spend more time partaking in risky play demonstrate less anxiety and depression, especially those children from low income households. However it found that the study of Northern Ireland did not accurately represent the dynamics of the population and was not inclusive in its survey - with the majority of responses being from white British females. The study theorised that children build resilience, coping methods and positive experience of stressful situations, which they use to take into their wider development to support and lower anxiety and depression.

Adventurous play requires practitioners who are confident and enable risky experiences for the child. Birth to 5 matters (no date) suggests that an environment which enables children to test their intellectual and physical development through participation in risky activities supports development. First five years (2019) identifies Professor Sandseter's 6 areas of risky play, which includes play while traveling at speed, at height, rough and tumble play, playing with dangerous tools, or near dangerous elements and playing in an area where the child experiences risk of getting lost for example in a woodland. These have their challenges as it is felt that adults are adverse to risky play despite acknowledging the benefits to child development (The Wild Network, no date). Challenges to offering risky play happens where practitioners feel vulnerable to liability where risk is needed and rather risk avoidance takes over. This is an opinion supported by Tovey (2011) who discusses settings removing equipment and resources such as slides, as they are viewed as posing a risk to children.

Loose parts play enables children to manipulate a wide range of loose objects such as man made real life objects as well as natural objects (Pacey, 2019) Examples may include: dolly pegs, curtain hoops, spoons, brushes, pans, building blocks, guttering and scraps of materials, pine cones, sand, bark, stones or leaves.

Loose parts play offers children a multitude of opportunities to develop including creative skills while they imagine a new scenario for their open ended objects, fine and gross motor skills as well as collaboration skills as they work together to arrange or manipulate the objects and critical thinking skills while they adapt and imagine new scenarios for their loose objects (Daly & Beloglovsky, 2014). These views are supported by Play Wales (2017) who set out a tool kit to enable practitioners to provide loose parts play within settings, and argues that loose parts enrich environments and extend play opportunities, and goes on to state that enabling environments which allow for manipulation and movement of resources provide rich learning experiences.

Furthermore, Daly & Beloglovsky (2014) state that loose parts support Piaget's theory that children require hands-on, real life experiences for optimal development, continuing to state that loose parts offer opportunities for children to extend their imagination, work cooperatively with others and support the development of problem solving skills. In addition to this Play Wlaes (2017) and Inspiring Scotland (2019) indicate that loose parts support settings in offering approaches such as Montessori, enabling children to gain real life skills by investigation of real life objects.

Pacey (2019) suggests that loose parts provide an abundance of opportunities to imagine and be creative and develop curiosity, due to the open-ended nature of resources. This is a view supported by Daly & Belglovsky (2014) who continue by stating that shop bought toys and resources do not offer the same opportunities and often children will complete the set task and move on or become bored with the resource rather than using critical thinking to extend activities such as seeking to find out what happens when a resource is moved or manipulated in a different way.

Play Wales (2017) and Inspiring Scotland (2019) suggest that the role of the adult includes regular assessments of risk to ensure resources are appropriate to stage of development, inspection of resources to ensure they are not damaged or dangerous, providing an enabling environment by gathering new and interesting resources and disposal of broken resources and ensuring the resources are accessible to all and that practitioners model use of the resources.

Word count: 807.

Section 2:

Welsh Government (2022a) emphasises the importance of playful pedagogy, following the children's interest. Moreover, Welsh Government (2014) states the importance of play within education and childcare in order for children to make progress. This is due to research by theorists such as Froebel, who's principles suggest that children learn with freedom to choose

within a playful environment (Froebel Trust, no date). Similarly Vygotsky believed that children learn through social interactions with others and placed an importance on play (Pacey, 2016). Unicef (no date) also dictates the fundamental right for a child to access play. Likewise Siren Films (2005) suggests that through play children develop key communication skills which help them to acquire personal and social skills, becoming autonomous, improve their wellbeing, gain mathematical knowledge and creative skills.

Additionally, Welsh Government (2014) identifies the benefits to child led play opportunities within education on the progress of the child. Findings in the EPPE project indicated that the settings which provided best practice were those who advocated and offered a mix of child led, meaningful play opportunities as well as adult led activities (Sure Start, 2004). This indicates the importance of practitioners who offer autonomy and choice to children. In addition to this Erikson's Psychosocial Stages indicates the need for children to grow to become more independent between the ages of two and three years old (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, no date). Also, between the ages of three and five, children need to develop a perception of control over their abilities and making choices over their environment (Maree, 2021). Therefore practitioners and settings who offer self directed play support this developmental stage.

Furthermore, it is important to ensure that practitioners are aware of the way in which a child views an activity as play and that play, in terms of early years education, is an internal feeling rather than a verb or something that can be done (McInnes et al, 2011). It is also the view of Howard and McInnes (2013) that being playful is a state of mind and that it is within settings with practitioners who offer choice, including using open ended questions, and a variety of environments, including practitioners present, where children do not characterise activities as work or play. This suggests that practitioners need a firm understanding of child development and the role of play within child development to enable them to successfully plan and provide an enabling environment (Manning-Morton and Thorp, 2003).

Added to this, it is also the practitioner's role to understand the play cycle and have an ability to interpret children's play cues. Part of the practitioner's role is to facilitate play and as such, intervening in a child's play at the right time can enhance the learning opportunities. However, conversely, when a practitioner involves themselves in the play of a child, without invitation, at the wrong time, this can cut short the learning opportunity. A child will offer a play cue with a view to receiving a return from the play partner or practitioner. (Sturrock and Else, 1998). That being said, adult intervention or presence, with no play cue, is often viewed by the child as a signal that the activities are work and not play within settings where closed questioning is used more frequently than open ended questioning (McInnes et al, 2011. and McInnes et al, 2013). This is also the case where practitioners are not immersed in playful activities with the children as playful partners and instead are engaged in behaviour management while playing with the child. This is a barrier to learning through play as this breaks the child's play cycle (McInnes et al, 2011). This is evidenced in the EPPE project findings which suggests best practice includes the use of sustained shared thinking (Sure Start, 2004). Consequently, it is important that

practitioners provide control to the children through open ended questioning and become play partners. McInnes et al (2011) suggests that a lack of clear play definition can be a barrier to a practitioner engaging and offering playful opportunities.

Additionally, Sturrock and Else (1998) discuss the requirement for practitioners to form relationships with the child in order to be regarded as a play partner. This is evident in *Siren Films* (2012) where children have formed attachments with the practitioner and are able to involve the practitioner in their play as a result of the practitioner listening to learners and offering choice and freedom, within boundaries, to the children.

Word count: 741.

Section 3:

The Foundation Phase Profile observation tool was designed for use nationally in observations of children within the foundation phase with a Baseline assessment being completed by the end of the child's sixth week in Reception (Welsh Government, no date). However, it can not be denied that assessments within those first few weeks in a new setting will likely be conducted by practitioners who are yet to form those trusting relationships and get to know the children (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2005). The timeframe that the Profile dictates restrains the practitioner's ability to embed relationships which allow the child to view the practitioner as a play partner and for the child to be comfortable within the environment. As Maslow suggests within his hierarchy of needs (Holzknecht and Holzknecht, 2007), only when the child is comfortable within the environment will the child reach their full potential. Siraj-Blatchford et al (2005) however, states the argument that effective assessment is critical to informing progressive planning which dictates the need for assessment.

Moreover the Profile offers a consistent outcome scale from Nursery to the end of year 2. However, despite offering an assessment tool for the whole of the foundation phase, the Foundation Phase Profile is only compulsory for Reception baseline assessments, meaning that not all settings will assess in the same way (Welsh Government, no date). Additionally, whilst it sets out to form a nationwide, steady, scoring system in practice, the consistency of scoring systems such as this can be dependent on many factors. These might include practitioners' experience in observing children and knowledge of child development (Bilton and Crook, 2016). Additionally there is scope for practitioners feeling pressured to score at a deflated level so as to infer big strides in progress by the end of the key stage, for the purposes of favourable Estyn inspections (Broadhead, 2004).

The Foundation Phase Profile assesses the development of personal and social skills as well as language, literacy and communication, mathematical and physical development, with a view to providing an assessment of the child's holistic development (Welsh Government, no date). Additionally the Foundation Phase Profile sets out to support practitioners to work in partnership

with parents in order to form a well rounded view of the child's progress (Welsh Government, 2017). However, whilst practitioners encourage this collaboration with parents and should value the information available from the parents, practitioners should be mindful that parents may not be familiar with child development and may have unrealistic assumptions of the progress their child should be making.

One limitation to The Foundation Phase Profile is that practitioners must carry out assessments within the language of the setting within the first 6 weeks of arrival (Welsh Government, no date). Therefore children who have recently arrived in the country, and are learning English as an additional language, may not provide a true representation of their abilities due to the potential language barrier. This is supported by University of Cambridge (2014) who state that relocated children will initially settle, adapt and then make progress in English and, given a longer timeframe, practitioners may see a more accurate assessment of ability. Furthermore Oxfordshire County Council (2017) states that those children who are English as an additional language may use gestures to suggest they understand however this may not be the case. And that they may feel that written work may be of most importance and disregard oral skills activities. This suggests that observations for EAL children may be inaccurate or take longer than the stated 6 weeks, to enable the practitioner to gather a true reflection of the child's abilities.

It is also important to remember that whilst the observations are taken within the same timeframe for all children, the age of the children within the class will vary by 12 months. This means that the children may be at different developmental stages while being observed. Moreover, practitioners feel that continuous practitioner assessment can gain a more precise observation of the child's ability than the Profile. This may be in part due to the length of time the Profile takes to complete, as children develop rapidly during the Foundation Phase (Wales Government, 2022b).

It is also noted that the document itself is a very long document. This may pose limitations to the assessment of children as it may be easy to miss areas in which information could be recorded due to practitioners focusing on one area of the Profile. However, with practitioners who are familiar with the structure of the document, this may be avoided (Broadhead, 2004).

Welsh Government (2022b) discusses the limitations that class size, the lack of time and lack of available practitioners might place on the Foundation Phase Profile being assessed accurately through play rather than as focused adult led tasks.

Word count: 790.

Section 4:

Loizou (2017) suggests that during play activities children express their understanding of the world around them and reinforce their learning. Moreover, Bilton and Crook (2016) state that

observing children during play allows practitioners to identify the vast array of learning and development that is happening within the activity, through taking time to listen to the conversations and paying attention to their movements. Furthermore, Early Years Matters (2023) suggests that observations made of children during play activities will inform practitioners planning not only for the next steps but to gain a holistic view of the child. This is supported by Gaikwad (2015) who argues that play is a child's way of conveying their thoughts and feelings. Likewise Howard and McInnes (2012) state that play-like activities provide the optimal scenario to discover what a child knows, therefore assessments may be inaccurate. That is to say that, while observing play, practitioners will be able to identify the child's likes, dislikes and ways in which they are able to inform planning to encourage participation and therefore further learning. These views are supported by Bruce, Louis and McCall (2015) who state that children should be observed in a number of different settings, completing a variety of activities and that play offers a key assessment opportunity for practitioners to achieve a well rounded picture of the child.

Howard and McInnes (2012) also identified the importance of the child's impression of activities being playful and not work and suggest that, during their study, the children who view activities as work accomplished less. Their findings therefore support Early Years Matters (2023) meaning that it is important that practitioners observe children during play to establish their true progress.

While observing children during play activities it is important that practitioners do not adulterate the play cycle with their presence as this can terminate the cycle (Sturrock and Else, 1998). When the play cycle is allowed to freely continue the practitioner is able to assess the child's knowledge and understanding further. Additionally, Howard and McInnes (2012) discuss that practitioner intervention in child's play, use of closed questioning with the child and a child's feeling they have a lack of autonomy within the setting or activity causes the child to relate adult presence to being a work activity, rather than a play activity. This then causes the practitioner to become a cue to work and could mean that as children seem less driven during work tasks, that the practitioner can never fully gauge the child's progress (Howard and McInnes, 2012). This also supports the need for observations during play and the importance of practitioners who value the learning opportunities within play and can identify these while observing the child.

McInnes et al (2013) state that practitioners do not always value the benefits of play on children's learning and development. This is supported by Howard and McInnes (2012) who identify constraints to children learning through play. Howard and McInnes (2012) state that there is disparity between a practitioner's interpretation of playful activities and a child's own interpretation. This suggests, whilst practitioners may intend to offer learning through play, that these activities are not playful from the children's point of view and as such may not be of value.

During the study Howard and McInnes (2012) found that it is important that children view an activity as play rather than work, as this can impact the wellbeing as well as development of the child. That is to say that during the study, if a child viewed an activity as work, rather than a self chosen play activity, then the child exhibited less of the positive emotional cues, for example smiling. However this was a small study, with only three settings studied and so a larger study may have found a more accurate result. That said, the results show that it is the practitioner's role to facilitate activities which are viewed as playful by the child themselves whilst also providing progression.

As a final point, in order for observations to be accurate and consistent Lidz (2002) states that practitioners should be systematic in their approach to observations, be aware of any unconscious bias that may sway their findings, and work with colleagues to ensure a unified approach to observations.

Word count: 704.

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