

Children's play: principles and practice

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Section 1 types of play

Play is considered to be, an important part to a child's development supporting the whole holistic development of the child as play fits into every area of development, An article from EducationHub,(2019) states that holistic development looks every area of the child's development other important aspects such as social, emotional, physical, mental, wellbeing and intellectual growth of a person. Therefore, with children using different types of play, they get all different skills to support the holistic development. Hurst, (1997) suggested that when children initiate play, free play, exploring the environment then they are learning through play. In the early 1920s, it was only then that play was linked directly to children's development (Hurst,1997; cited in Curtis, 1998) Play is linked to cognitive, physical, social and emotional development. It is considered to be, fun, messy and creative, allowing the child to use their imagination and fantasy to play, exploring the world around them with experiences, being creative and using their own initiative. Play is a need, and is vitally important, it's the basic right to every child and is essential (UNIEF,2019) There is also a theory from Maslow of which goes by the name, theory of Human Motivation. Where he states the importance of meeting the physiological needs of human survival above all else and play fits into all areas of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs as Maslow states if these needs are not met humans won't be able to function properly (Egersdorff,Mundy, 2017). Allowing them to take those risks, while problem solving and building those relationships with others learning about themselves and other around them, engaging and socialising friends and adults, supporting their development with intellectual development and communication. During play it is

usually seen as leisure, but it is also a crucial part of their development learning a lot of skills such as, fine gross motor skills, life skills, coordination skills and cognitive skill (McLean et al. (2023). Every child is unique and will play differently, play can happen anywhere but is virtual it happens as children can get all these skills out of play. As early as 1920s early educationalists such as Froebel, Montessori, Steniner and Piaget, started to make links between the importance of play and child's development. This suggests that play was just as significant back then as it is now.

There are a variety of different types of play to support a child's holistic development, wellbeing and health. When looking at the types of play; 2 examples are messy, sensory play and outdoor play. The first example is messy and sensory play. An activity that engages a child's senses. An article for BBC(nodate), cites that this activity embraces on the child's senses, this could be hearing, sight, touch, smell or taste. A play activity allowing children to work with their hands, movement or balance, engaging in the messy play. Children are ready for messy play from the moment they are born, supporting their development at an early stage as *"It's through all of our senses that we make links between what we see, what we feel and what we hear,"* (BBC,nodate). This activity often involves, water play, sand, paint, slime, playdough, mud or even using food substances, dry cereal or jelly. Using different materials in this activity is letting the children explore various textures, getting them used to different sensation. Helping children interact with the sense of the world in the environments that surrounds them (Actionforchildren,2022). This activity can be supported by the caregiver in the practice by encouraging children to get messy, set outdoor activities allowing them to explore and all the different textures from the environments. Hargraves, (2020) talks about the Reggio Emilia approach where he states that the environment is great influence on what and how the children learn, encouraging the children to explore and interact while enhancing their development for the future. This activity helps them become more aware of their dislikes and likes, coming to grips with who they are and the environment around them, supporting their future and enhancing their holistic developments.

The second example of play is outdoor, a purposeful approach with unstructured experiences, enhancing their creative and imaginative play. Children have an element of freedom, having environmental awareness while taking those risks

building that independence and self-esteem to explore through that curiosity approach. Children socialise during outdoor play to build those relationships. Therefore, this could be considered as social play. This is supported by Vygotsky (1896-1934) where he cites that children learn from the more knowledgeable other. (Hoose,2020) linking this to the other theory Bowlby,1969,p114 where he cites the importance of the bond between child and others. It's essential for children to have social skills, interacting and building those meaningful relationships as this supports their future in having healthy relationships. Play is supporting this skill because children are interacting with others while playing. Outdoor play supports the child by their physical development, as if those children are developing them physical skills it helps to kick start that health and wellbeing. In the six areas of play located in the curriculum of play, one of the areas is the importance of wellbeing and fresh air. PlayWales(2022) cites that when giving children opportunities for children to play outside, socialise with friends. This provides happiness and is crucial for their physical, mental health and wellbeing. Outdoor play also supports children that don't have many opportunities as they can make belief play and express themselves using real life objects. One of Piaget theory was that by the child having an interest in the active outdoor environment supports an awareness of their senses, allowing them to explore within the environment, understanding the world around them to support their future development. This play supports holistic development as a range of skills are being developed (Mcleod,2024).

Section 2 self-directed play:

When looking at self-directed play, this is where it is child led play, freely chosen and natural having no specific goal. The child directs all the play with no direct adult, deciding where they play and who they play with making their own choices being motivated. (The Montessori school of the Burkschires, 2024) According to Reggio Emilia self-directed play enables children learn through play so they are developing their skills (Regalia,2023). Ledendecker,(2020) discuss Montessori theory where he suggests that self-directed is a way in children learn through play by selecting what they choose to play. Self- directed play is key to a child's development as this helps support holistic development encouraging them to have holistic play, allowing them to learn on their own terms. Therefore, having an awareness links to building the

child's independence allowing the child to become more confidence. (Welsh Government, 2022). Letting them have the opportunity to build on their own knowledge which supports understanding, while letting children expresses themselves by creative and imaginary play. Supporting interactions with others to have those wider experiences and using their brain for crucial thinking and problem solving. (The Steiner Connection, 2022) In self - directed play, children need to have an enabling environment. According to the Reggio Emilia approach, it is important to let children be curious in their environment, however ensuring it is safe because if the children can have that freedom of play it needs to be safe (Regalia,2023). This is important to have awareness of self-direct play because, we get a better understanding of the unique child and to provide meaning full experiences.

The roll of the adult is to consider theory and the research behind doing. One key theorist to consider is Parten where he states that Children don't just play, there is this belief that children do it in 6 stages. Brodie, (2024) cites that Parten's theory is different stages of play these include, unoccupied play birth – 3 months of age, solitary play 3 months of age – 2 years of age, parallel play 2 years of age and older, onlooker play 2 years of age, cooperative play 4+years of age and associate play 3-4 years of age, these are effective to a child at the right age as according to Parten's. (Brain and Mukherji, 2005), The role of the practitioners is to have a good understanding about self-play, supporting and encouraging within the play environment, giving them time and trying not to direct the play (Welsh Government, 2022). According to Welsh Government (2022), The role of the adult is to consider the child center approach, using the holistic approach and making sure the play is an inclusive play. By providing playful experiences, opportunities with inclusive play are to make sure that the environment children are playing in suits everyone. Making sure everyone is being treated equally and as caregivers to not provide the same for each child, making sure the self-direct play has resources for age appropriate and at the child's level. Making sure the child can reach and access the play so they can thrive on their chosen play by themselves. The role of an adult is to support and encourage within the play environment making sure we are providing high quality care, taking into consideration the way we act around the child's self-directed play and the encouragement and praise we give the child; this is important because according McLeod(2024) theorist Skinner,(1920) insists that giving praise and

reinforcing them good behaviours is promoting their development and future. (Simply psychology 2020-24) According to The Role of the Adult — Montessori, Guide (2014) Montessori suggests that the main role of the adult in self-directed play is to be an observer of the play who also facilitates and prepares the environment, consolidate learning through repetition as some children will not develop as fast as others. Many children learn through repetition and only complete tasks if they have completed it before to stop them feeling anxious. As children get observed in self-directed play, practitioners can learn the child's, dislikes and likes. Making surer as caregivers we are planning correctly and reflecting on the self-direct play knowing what we need to change for the other activities ahead or knowing when is the right time to step in, letting them learn on their own terms. When the child is in grossed in play, they are seen to be following the play cycle. We as practitioners shouldn't interpret play but instead become a play partner learning with the child acting as a resource to provide support, picking up on play ques. Adults break the cycle by adulteration by controlling the play or coming along to the play to soon. The roll of an adult isn't to wrap them up but letting them take those risks to let them learn from them to support future development (Sands, 2013).

Adults ensures individual learning milestones in development are included, this is an important consideration when Paigets theory suggest all children are individual. However, looking at other theorists such as Lev S. Vygotsky suggest and agree that the role of the adult is knowing when to step in to keep the child safe. Vygotsky suggests that if the child can't quite do it, the adult can come along to model and give guidance. The adult is key to not doing it for them but help the child to the next stage, supporting the child's development. (Smolucha & Smolucha, 2021). This is important to consider because it's fostering the child's independence for future generations.

Section 3 observing

Allen (2022) cites that observation of children is an essential part of the role of an Early Years Practitioner as it ensures children's development is monitored, recorded and understood, supporting the child's holistic development. This is also a view that is cited by Montessori educators who suggest that the practitioner's role as an observer sits above all else, ensuring the link between the psychological needs of

the child to the development plan, the environment and the interactions between adults and children. (word press, ND). Bruce(2001)(cited by Machan, 2016). Specifies an observation to being a 'description' that makes our knowledge stronger and develops a better practice. On the other hand, an article from The Development Matters guidance (2012) points out that an observation is 'describing'. It is virtual then that an observation should be an accurate description of what is being seen and heard (Bruce 2010). The new Curriculum for Wales further recognises the importance of observation in providing the adult enabler with an in depth understanding of the learners needs so that they can be responsive to learners (Welsh government,2023). Montessori Education suggests that '*observation is expected to feed the child's academic and intellectual growth.*' suggesting that the outcome of the observations is crucial in informing pedagogy and the child's development plan (world press,ND). Welsh Government (2024), recognises three key areas in terms of the main aim of observation in enabling learner progress:

- Daily ongoing support for individual learners.
- Observing, recording and reflecting on the progress of learners over a period.
- Reflecting on group progress to understand the needs of the learners.

Welsh Government (2023) also states that observation is a fundamental part of the role of the practitioner which enables them to understand the child's development needs and interests, it helps the caregiver to ensure the child is developing at the right expected age. watching them develop new skills and abilities over time, picking up on what a child can and can't do. Providing the practitioner with crucial information, making surer the learning environment is right for the child and the right learning opportunities. This is also important as it helps us to know when to involve other agencies to give the best support to that child's holistic development. Observation informs pedagogy that aims to support and motivate the child towards the next steps in their learning and development.

There are many forms of child observation including time tracker, note taking, developmental journal, narrative observations, interaction trackers, learning stories, photograph and video observations and many more. Another style of observation is that of the SOGS, Schedule of Growing assessment. According to Belleman,

Sundara, and Aukett,(1998) all discuss the Schedule of Growing assessment forms part of the child health surveillance programme with the main purpose of an accurate method of developmental screening that is used for all children. The SoGs Assessment itself is a screening from birth to five years, suggested to be based on the work of Dr Mary Sheridan in 1985. Providing a standardised method of child development assessment against milestones, recognised as age and stage appropriate. (Belleman, Sundara, and Aukett,1998). Therefore, the review of the Healthy Child Wales Programme (2018) also recognises the role of SOGS as a standardised screening method. The programme set out three areas for contact with families one of which was watching and supporting child development which would require professionals to use the SoGs (Welsh Government 2018). Welsh Government, (2018) quoted that the ***'Schedule of Growing Skills, SoGS is a standardised developmental assessment tool used by professionals who need to get the developmental levels of children'***. The assessment provided a process in measuring children's so that all children had access to the same assessment and through the consistent approach it was possible to notice the problems in development that may need additional support at an early point in the child's life, noticing any areas of delay (Belleman, Sundara, and Aukett,1998). The report also suggested that parents welcomed the informal style of the assessment and that it made parents feel at ease. Although SoGs shows a holistic view of the child's areas of development we can argue that because the observations take place in the home or the clinic environment the results are made on one observation at that age in a child's life. (Welsh Government,2018). Bruner, Froebel, Vygotsky, and Montessori all suggested the importance of socialization and the environment in a child's observation for example, Dr Stella Louis(2022), suggests that the Froebelian approach requires practitioners to observe children in the indoors and the outdoors so that assessments and conclusions are not based on one observation. Observations are highly important, to keep providing support to address what the child may require, getting evidence of development and reflecting, to help support the child in the future.

Section 4:

Play within early childhood education is suggested to be central to a child's learning. We as practitioners can support the child using the child centre approach and identify if there are any weakness or issues as we can pick up on it through observation to give the support where it is needed (Howard, J. McInnes, 2013). According to Louise (2022), she suggested that Froebel felt that play was very important to a child's learning and that adults should closely observe children in play so that they can learn about the child. The learning would help the adult understand how the child thinks and what they like to do and anything they may dislike. Louis (2022), further suggested that Froebel felt that the outcome of observations of children in play could help the adult understand when to support the child's needs with guidance. A theory shared by Vygotsky which emphasises the importance in the role of the adult in constructing and scaffolding the learning through the observations of the adult (Mcloed 2024). According to Azilo Training, (2019) will say that observation of children in play as providing an accurate picture of their overall development as it creates an opportunity for the observer to view the child's development, strengths, interactions with others and areas of need. Play is seen as crucial to a child's learning it is also of importance in observation where practitioners use it to assess learning and construct future learning opportunities (Howard, J. McInnes, 2013). Observations enable the practitioner to record the child's development as well as a supported pathway of learning in which the needs of the child inform pedagogy, the environment and the wellbeing of children (Azilo Training, 2019). The role of the adult as the enabler is a key principle of the Curriculum for Wales. Welsh Government, (2023) research also suggests that when a child participates in self-directed play, they are developing holistically that enables learning and development across all areas (The Steiner Connection, 2022). A quote from Elkind (2008), stating the importance of play in holistic childhood development;

***'Play is not a luxury but rather crucial
dynamic of healthy physical, intellectual and
social-emotional development at all ages'***

Observing children in play also enables practitioners to observe the individual needs and development of a child supported through theories such as scaffolding when the observer uses the outcomes of the observations to build on the child's learning and

or provide support through the idea of MKO (Mcleod 2024). Observing children through play enables practitioners to observe the holistic development of a child in play across all areas of development. Including social interactions, language, connections, relationships, physically, cognitively and learning in environments such as indoor and outdoor so that they can make sense of the world around them. The SSTEW observation seeks to observe children in the learning environment, observing children interacting with others through play. SSTEW also sees the importance of shared thinking between the adult and child in the environment. Both Vygotsky and Bruner saw the importance of environment (Mcleod 2024). Observations in play see the whole child over a period rather than through observations that are a snapshot in time. A snapshot in time of a child's development is usually achieved in using baseline observation tools such as the SoGs (Belleman, Sundara, and Aukett, 1998). Play enables the practitioner to view development as well as personality and behaviours (Care Learning 2025). UNICEF(2010), also states that Play is also the voice of the child in learning and the right of the child to play. Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Development Pathway Welsh Government, (2023) states that, ***‘Welsh Government have decided to place children’s well-being and development at the heart of early childhood play, learning and care in Wales’.***

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Appendix

I haven't used AI to help support me, with this assignment.