

1. Play Types

Play activities are those that children have chosen freely to participate within and without any interruption or influence of practitioners. Self-directed play includes opportunities for experimentation, understanding, developing holistically and knowing what strategies work and what do not (Danforth, 2011).

According to Kozi Kidz (2018, p.1), self-directed play is when children can “play at their own pace, led by their own interests and motivations”, which allows for children to achieve developmental milestone when they are ready. According to Hollis Montessori School (2018), self-directed play encourages young children to become self-aware, confident, independent, learn problem-solving skills, and be self-sufficient. Examples of self-directed play types are adventure play and creative play.

Shaughnessy (2017), believes that adventure play involves children engaging in activities that challenge them physically, which gives them hand-on experiences and allows for holistic development due to the range of opportunities within their environment. Piaget (1976) further supports this as he believed that children learn best through experience, and furthermore play. Piaget (1976) states that through the stages of development, children will progressively be able to understand concepts which is learnt through play, firsthand experiences and the support of practitioners.

The new curriculum that is set to become integrated in 2020 ‘Successful Futures’ will build on Piaget’s beliefs because Donaldson also believed that play is an important part of a child’s life, and that children’s emotional and social wellbeing should be considered as much as their physical, intellectual and language development (Donaldson, 2015: Welsh Government, 2015).

In Nordic countries, they have adapted adventure play into curriculums like Outdoor Play and Learning in Scandinavia, and Forest Schools in Denmark because of the benefits towards children being able to freely explore their own development through choice and opportunities (Williams-Sieghedson, 2019: SBS Dateline, 2016). McGurk (2015) discusses the Outdoor Play and Learning curriculum, the holistic benefits involve risk taking opportunities, use of natural materials, sensory experiences, and hands-on experiences rather than sitting and listening. Forest Schools in Denmark are similar and is a Kindergarten within the forest which gives children the freedom to participate in activities that only involve their environment, it focuses more on what a child can do rather than what they cannot, and it includes a lot of choice for children (SBS Dateline, 2016). Self-directed play benefits are involved additionally, because both curriculums include the ability to make own decisions, choose activities freely and they make the rules of activities rather than having them set for the children.

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (Z.P.D) demonstrates the importance of supporting children within their development, and the need for an understanding of whether a child needs support from an adult or whether the child can participate in activities on their own (Murphy, Scantlebury, and Milne, 2015: Innovative Learning, 2011). During adventure play, practitioners or pedagogues will observe the child and ensure they are not within an environment that can potentially cause extreme harm, and if they are within an environment that has some dangers then they will inform children and ensure they are aware of the limits, expectations and rules (SBS Dateline, 2016). To support children practitioners will encourage them to participate in activities that are challenging, and they will encourage children to combat their fears (Maynard and Waters, 2014).

Merriam-Webster (2019) believes that creative play is when a child can express themselves through any creative medium, this can be anything from manipulating clay to painting. Within creative play, it must be entirely self-directed because if a practitioner intervenes in any way it can influence what a child does and then becomes adult influenced rather than self-expression (Wilson, 2012). Furthermore, Wilson (2012) states

that creative play provides holistic development opportunities because it allows for children to understand their emotions and be able to express them in a healthy way, and it develops children fine motor skills whilst enhancing their imagination.

Many settings have learning areas which include certain areas of development within them, an example is a creative learning area (Salisbury Road Primary, no date). It is a practitioner's responsibility to provide resources for children to be able to express themselves, and they should allow for children to be able to access these resources throughout the day. Natural materials used within creative play, allows for children to have a sensory experience and experiment with different materials to gain an understanding of the patterns, textures, mixing colours, and knowledge and understanding of the world (Government of South Australia, no date).

As previously discussed, Vygotsky's theory Z.P.D includes the importance of understanding the difference between a child needing to be supported by an adult and being able to independently participate in activities (Innovative Learning). During creative play, opportunities for peer learning may occur and thus supports Vygotsky's theory Z.P.D. Creative play is mostly an independent and self-directed activity, however, adults may become involved if invited or if the child needs assistance such as correct scissor handling (The Little Gym, 2020).

2. Risk Taking and Challenges

Almon (2013) believes that risk is essential to play because it enables children to develop holistically by gaining experiences, learning problem-solving skills through evaluating activities they have participated in and develop the ability to become physically and emotionally resilient.

Resilience is the ability to overcome challenges using different strategies, which can be through positive self-expression or understanding how to climb a tree when there is a branch preventing a child from climbing further (Reach Out, 2019). According to Daniel and Wassell (2002) a child's ability to develop resilience can be impacted through their experiences, opportunities and the amount of support they are given by influential adults, which is further supported by Reach Out (2019).

Bruner and Vygotsky believed that children should be given support within their learning because it allows for children to be encouraged and given resources that allow for assistance in children learning and development and for an understanding of where a child is in their development (Cherry, 2019: Hammond and Gibbons, 2005). Bobbermen (2018) believes for a child to become resilient, practitioners and adults need to support them by encouraging children to try again and they can allow children to understand the different strategies involved when dealing with a problem or challenge either through communication or experience.

According to Saarni (1973) Piaget believed that problem-solving skills are an important aspect of a child's development because it enables children to understand how to overcome problems within their lives, whether it be a problem within an activity or a problem at home. To further support this, Miller (1979) discusses that Piaget believed that problem-solving skills are developed through play and experience in mostly outdoor environments, because he believed that children learn more through hands-on and real-life experiences which allow children to overcome risk in solving a problem.

Little and Eager (2010) state that risk is beneficial to children because it enables children opportunities to evaluate a risk and consider which strategy will allow them to complete their activity, and it will allow for children to try different strategies to experience why certain ones will not work. Furthermore, it also allows for children to understand their own boundaries and limitations and allows for children to develop positive and trusting

relationships with adults and other children because they are given the support and encouragement that they need (Little and Eager, 2010).

Adventure play involves risk and is based upon Forest Schools in places like Denmark (SBS Dateline, 2016). Here the play involves children engaging in climbing trees, balance on logs, using knives, the children have responsibility and it promotes independency, which all involve risk (Forest School Association, no date). Williams-Sieghfredsen (2012) states that all children should be given the opportunity to partake in risk taking and challenges outdoors which does not have to be a Forest School, but an environment that provides opportunities like terrain differences, balancing, coordination, climbing different heights and provides both a physical and emotional challenge for children. Furthermore, Williams-Sieghfredsen (2012) states the importance of emotional challenges so that children want to try something, rather than give up, which encourages self-esteem, confidence and positive resilience.

Donaldson (2015) believes that children should be enabled to become “creative, critical thinkers”, to allow for children to have the resilience to overcome challenges they may face and for children to be able to express themselves through play, develop positive self-esteem and to be able to understand how they can deal with their own emotions in a healthy way.

McKechne (1997, cited in Kozulin, et al 2003) emphasises the need for practitioners to have suitable training to allow for efficient practice because they then are more knowledgeable and understand how they can effectively support the child. Correct training allows for an understanding that the role of the practitioner is to encourage children to participate in risk and challenge activities, to allow children to understand what the boundaries and rules are; including where they are not allowed to go, and to inform children to understand what the risk are of each activity (Williams-Sieghfredson, 2012).

Bowlby's theory discusses the need for children to develop positive relationships with practitioners and adults as children can be influenced greatly by adults because children cannot sufficiently provide themselves with their needs (Holmes, 2014). Croner-i (2020) and The Lawns Nursery School (2020) state that within Forest Schools there is a large focus on developing the relationship between the child and practitioner because it allows for children to be able to express themselves in a healthy way, which allows for interventions to take place if needed and when children have positive relationships they are more likely to become involved in risk.

Observations

An observation involves a practitioner "assessing and evaluating... a young child's development and learning", which allows for the practitioner to be able to understand where a child is in their development and how they can support the child to build on weaknesses that they may have (Palaiologou, 2008, p.37). Vygotsky believed that understanding where a child is in their development, allows for practitioners to be able to focus on ensuring that every child is given the same opportunities to achieve their milestone and it allows for interventions to take place if necessary (Wertsch, 1984).

One observation type is a running record, commonly known as a written descriptive or narrative observation. A running record involves a detailed descriptive of everything a child is doing, this includes small or minor details and includes the time in which each detail took place (Brodie, 2020: Slide Share, 2020). Brodie (2020) also states that this observation will take place at least once every half term because it is an in-depth description of the exact stage that a child is in within their development.

An advantage of this method is that it is in a large amount of detail, which allows for the practitioner to elaborate on what they are saying which can be helpful as to see multiple

areas of development, rather than just focusing on one area of development (MSU Education, no date). MSU Education (no date) further discuss that being able to elaborate, also allows for practitioner to understand why the child has displayed specific behaviours, which can allow for them to either work on supporting the child to develop an area of development or to prevent the situation from repeating itself.

Another advantage of a running record is that it allows for the practitioner to summarise the information they have written as well, so not only do they have an in-depth description but a summary of the important parts which can assist in finding information that is needed immediately (Mothercraft, no date).

Neaum (2016) discusses that a running record can allow for a practitioner to understand what a child enjoys and what they dislike because the practitioner is able to show how long they are involved in the activity and what they do. This can then allow for a practitioner to plan activities that children like which encourages them to participate and allows for more development (Play England; Freedom to Play, 2019).

However, a disadvantage of a running record is that it is time consuming because you would have to dedicate a certain amount of time to it because there is a lot of information to write and evaluate (MSU Education, no date). Although, there is the option of writing notes whilst conducting the observation to reduce the possibility of missing something, there would still need to be time to write the observation up in detail and it can be difficult to remember every detail from the notes (Mothercraft, no date).

Secondly, Blaiklock (2003) states that within the practice there are multiple distraction which could interfere as complete concentration is required in order to not miss any information, however it is likely that information will be missed because a child could do something while the practitioner is writing and they do not realise it. Or, they may be

concentrating on one aspect of what the child is doing and not realise that the child is doing something else (Blaiklock, 2003).

Lastly, a disadvantage of a running record is the observation would have to be one child at a time because it would be very difficult to keep track of two to three children, and if a practitioner attempted to observe two to three children at the same time and all three of them went to different areas of the setting then observing each child in-depth would be challenging (MSU Education, no date).

Montessori and Piaget both believed that observations should be conducted during play and they should not interrupt children's play, because when a child's play is interrupted by an adult it can cause information gathered during the observation to become an incorrect description of a child's development because they may present themselves differently and not play like they usually would (Lillard, 2016).

The current curriculum the Foundation Phase believes that observations should be conducted frequently to ensure that there is a large understanding of where a child is in their development, allow for practitioners to include different activities focused on areas that children need support in, and include activities that children are interested in (Welsh Government, 2015).

Role of play

According to Family Lives (2018) play has an important role in a child's development because it allows for children to control their own play and choose what activities they want to participate in, which allows for children to become absorbed in their own play.

Donaldson (2015) discusses that observations, assessments and evaluations should be conducted without intervening in a child's play, as this can influence the observations outcomes and may not be a true representation of where a child is in their development. He also believed that practitioners must not observe a child within certain circumstances, such as, a child that displays they are distressed for any reason, when a child asks the practitioner to stop or when the child does not want to participate (Donaldson, 2015).

Howard and McInnes (2012) believe that play can become affected through the location of the play, the amount of opportunities that are within the environment, where the adult is during play and what the role of the adult is within the activity. Howard and McInnes (2012) additionally discuss the importance of the way a child views play, because if a child does not view it as play then this will impact the outcome of the observations. Donaldson (2015) is supported by Howard and McInnes (2012) because he believed that children should not feel distressed during an observation, which can take place if a child feels like an adult is watching them which may cause children to feel judged.

According to Sage (no date) intervening in a child's play during an observation can cause the observational results of a child's development area to be influenced, because a child may act differently, they may not do something as they fear getting it wrong, or they may refuse to participate in play activities. Furthermore, Sage (no date) states that observations allow for practitioners to gather information on a child's developmental stage, this can then give practitioners the opportunity to focus on areas of development that a child is struggling with.

Vygotsky focused on the importance of understanding where a child is in their development to allow for practitioners to support children efficiently and to tailor support within the child's needs (Esteban-Guitart, 2018). Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (2016) discuss that observations allow for an understanding of the

support needed for each individual child, which can allow for practitioner to assess the observation and know what exact activities they are going to implement for the child.

Froebel believed that play activities that children participate in should be open-ended activities where children can use their creativity and imagination in an outdoor environment, because it allows for children to freely choose what they want to play without adult intervention or an adult telling a child how to play something, and it allows for children to become involved in “infinite possibilities for challenge and adventure, and the chance to discover or create” (Bruce, 2012, p.47). Bruce (2012) discusses that Froebel conducted observations in which he found that they are important in ensuring play opportunities are efficient for children and to ensure that children want to participate in those activities. Froebel’s theory supports Howard and McInnes (2012) because they discuss the importance of the child, the environment and the role of the adult.

Furthermore, Bruce (2012) states McMillan supported Froebel in believing that children should be enabled to play and explore the outdoors, because it enables health advantages and improves children's creativity; enabling self-expression and developmental opportunities. With this knowledge, it is understandable of how to conduct activities that are in place to support children in the stages of development that they are struggling with.

According to Naughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford (2010), when observing a child a practitioner needs to consider the different observational types because each observational type has many advantages and negatives towards the quality of the information type, the impact the observation has on the child and how difficult the observation is to complete. Naughton, Rolfe and Siraj-Blatchford (2010) believe that each type need to be considered because if the observation impacts the child negatively, then it can be difficult to gather correct information as the child may display themselves differently, they may not want to participate in an activity if they feel like they are being

observed, and this could cause a child to become stressed and therefore supporting Howard and McInnes and their stance.

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