

Play

Paediatrician Doctor Ari Brown (2011) stressed the importance of free playtime in stimulating the developing brain as free play allows a child to develop holistically; children can think creatively, problem solve, develop reasoning, improve motor skills and are able to entertain themselves. In Browns (2011) opinion to give the child the best chance in society they must be afforded the opportunity for self-led free play to understand the way of the world. Welsh Government (2008) implore that Childs play has significantly led to the evolutionary development of our species.

Welsh Government (2014) suggests play is essential to the child and society, as a child will play for no outcome other than the joy of that moment; it is intrinsic and offers so much to the child, enriching their learning and development as they master their world.

Even in the Ancient Greek era Plato recognised the significance of play in Childrens lives, imploring that play was a vital part of preparing children for adulthood, as recognised by Brown and Patte (2012) who also researched early theorist Locke who endorsed the importance of play in education and implored a Childs development would be richer if learning were play based.

More recent theorists agree on the critical importance of play in a Childs holistic development, with Isaacs (2013) deeming that a child only reveals himself in play and although defining play has been argued for many years it is widely agreed upon that play is at the centre of a Childs holistic development. Sutton-Smith (2008) extensive research declares an outright definition of play is 'elusive'. Agreed by Reed and Brown, researched by Leeds Trinity University (2007), who state that there is no outright agreed definition of the word play as play is a feeling not an activity. However, many theorists agree with the wholesome principles and outcomes of a child who is allowed the opportunity to play, such as Froebel, discussed by Tovey (2017) who state play is central to a Childs development and gives joy, contentment, and peace within the world, whilst Goldstein (2012) talks of play reducing fear, boosting self-esteem, increasing empathy, and allowing child agency.

Many parents still think of play as a separate entity from learning, without seeing the vital connection between the two. Gray and Robinson (2015) talked at length of how play is not a distraction but an evidenced fundamental part of Childrens development.

Childrens play has been recognized as such an important right that it is enshrined in article 31 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, stating that to meet Childrens basic needs and help them reach their full potential they must have the right to play. (Save The Children, no date). In 2010, Wales became the first country to legislate Childrens play with the Childrens and Family (Wales) Measure (2010) which insisted sufficient play opportunities must be secured.

The Welsh Government (2016) ensures the child is at the centre of all its thoughts ensuring the rights of the child are met and upheld. The Foundation Phase in Wales (2015) pedagogy, through a play-based curriculum, is the holistic development of children through first-hand experiential learning in the process of play, where learnt knowledge is built upon and strengthened which helps an understanding of themselves and the world around them, aligning with Montessori, Dewey and Piaget who all agree on the importance of learning through play and first-hand experiences, researched by Aubrey and Riley (2019). Moyles (2013) considers how important those first-hand experiences for children are and states it deepens learning and understanding.

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Play Wales (2018) states play contributes to the welfare and resilience of a child and must be freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated supporting their holistic development. Bredikyte (2011) suggests that during play a child develops the knowledge and understanding of thinking for themselves. Bredikyte (2011) indicates play relaxes a Childs spiritual potential, aligning with Froebel who describes play as the highest, most spiritual level of learning. As discussed by Bruce (2015) Froebel saw play as a learning process to prepare a child for the stresses and strains of adult life, aligning with one of the Four Main Purposes of the Curriculum (2018) which promotes children will be capable critical thinkers of the world, achieved through the medium of play.

Bruce (2015) examined how children can make and break rules during play, take control of a situation manipulating it for their own wants, which coincides with Vygotsky and Freuds thoughts of children gaining control of their lives through the experience of play (Bruce, 2015). Often seen in imaginary or role play, where children understand and push society rules, a hierarchy of children are revealed; the leaders and negotiators, conforming with Vygotsky's social learning theory (Aubrey and Riley 2019). Howard and McInnes (2012) further suggests that when a child believes they are in play superior development occurs as that child can trial behaviours without risk of failure.

As discussed by Rymanowicz (2015), an adult's role is facilitating self-directed play, in a child-centred, safe, nurtured, rich, stimulating environment offering active discovery learning, ensuring individual needs are met. As Piaget suggested, researched by McLeod (2018), when playing alongside a child an adult should be enthusiastic, engaged, invested and curious, able to recognise cues, offering and facilitating opportunities. Bredikyte et al. (2017) discovered that with adult's interaction during play, narratives and characters are more developed. Blatchford (2002) agrees that adult interaction with children is crucial and invitations to play should be encouraged. However, Bruce (2015) implores that individual children will have their own unique play agenda, not be influenced by the adult, allowing for free flow of play. Montessori believes the greatest gift a practitioner can give a child is independence and responsibility as it is through freedom and environmental experience humans develop. Montessori also states free play allows for self-regulation, unlocking a Childs desire to learn, imploring that a freely chosen activity leads to self-mastery which can only be found in self-led experiences. (You tube, 2017).

The Reggio approach does not separate children during play as there is often a comradeship found amongst children, enabling them to cement and build relationships with peers during play aligning with Vygotsky's and Banduras thoughts on scaffolding. (Gray and Macblain 2015). However, Bruce (2015) talks of solitary play where a child is in their deepest learning offering added benefits of self-reflection and self-considerations. Play and Playground encyclopaedia (2018) suggests solitary play fosters independence, promotes a sense of initiative and helps develop creativity and concentration, usually found during creative activities such as a child drawing by themselves or small world play.

Bottril (2018) concurred a Childs imagination can take them anywhere, as play is creativity. It is important for a practitioner to not over plan as imagination is at its best when children are looking for inspiration. However, a practitioner must ensure enough resources are available to extend, enrich and support the play. As Isaacs (2013) surmised, Montessori classrooms demonstrate the effectiveness of ensuring the child is the centre of child-initiated learning and Froebel, Steiner and Rousseau all agreed that adults should follow a Childs lead with the fundamental principle being freedom of the child.

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Syomi and Harlow research, as discussed by Brown (2013), experiment with the effects of play deprivation in monkeys finding that play in early years could negate isolation felt at home, reinforcing why flying start programmes in deprived areas have such meaning to children. MacBlain (2014) suggests how important children learning through play is when stating that a failure to learn can result in poor qualifications, poor self-esteem and a failure to fulfil potential. Gray and Robinson (2015) considers how a setting without self-chosen play inhibits a Childs growth and to underestimate play is a great mistake.

Risk

Sandreter (2007) proclaims the debate of children being allowed to play versus ensuring child safety continues. Play is extremely important to a Childs development, agreed by UNICEF (2018) who state play to be an essential tool in a child gaining necessary skills and knowledge for life, similarly Botrill (2018) agrees 'play is critical to a Childs development.

The Welsh Government (2010) pledges to ensure all children have access to 'rich stimulating environments, free from inappropriate risk and full of challenge, placing that duty on local authorities. Donaldson (2015) insists the New Curriculum will develop confident, creative, problem solvers who grasp risk, which can only happen if we allow children to take risk, affording them the trust and responsibility to make mistakes and allowing them to reflect, building emotional and physical resilience for life.

Sandreter (2007) observed children enjoy climbing, jumping, speed and great heights, and even though they considered these actions risky they expressed a strong interest in doing them as risky play provides children with an 'exhilarating positive emotion' ultimately helping children overcome fears by being exposed to and mastering previously feared stimuli as researched by Beate et al. (2011) who also considers how parents try to limit these experiences due to anxieties.

Brown (2013) considers how western society, especially, limit Childrens outdoor play in our 'risk adverse society' declaring play deprivation being more widespread than is realised with Morrongiello and Hogg (2004) confirming risk to many being defined as danger.

Gill (2007) examine the reasons behind this negative impact adults have on Childs play concluding the reasons behind this risk adverse society include parents not realising how beneficial risk to be, media exaggerated reports of anti-social behaviour and child protection measures. Gill (2007) suggests this negative impact is shrinking a Childs world, restricting free-led outdoor play. Play Wales (2016) suggest children mimic parent's behaviour and the fears of parents resonate in children, preventing risk taking activities. Lavrysen (2015) even considers a parent's overprotection as having negative effects on Childrens abilities to cope with change and instilling a fear of the environment by preventing children from testing boundaries, declaring a lack of outdoor play a major factor.

Storli and Sanseter (2017) research found generally fathers promoted risk taking in children and thought of it as their parental role. Little (2013) alternatively found that although mothers agreed how beneficial risk taking is; increasing resilience, independence, coordination and boosting self-confidence and esteem, they expressed more concerned for their Childs welfare.

Children taking risk in outdoor natural environments has been adopted by many educational approaches and is a principal of the Scandinavian approach. which is based upon Froebel's theory, discussed by Williams-Siegfried (no date) which promotes experiential self-led

hands-on learning. Te Whariki agrees with play forming the basis of their approach with children learning from each other and risk taking (Nutbrown, 2011).

Moyle (2013) suggests educational settings have developed into risk adverse settings but insist children need outdoor experiences as risk naturally occurs in outdoor spaces which allow children to express themselves freely without space constraints, allowing them to run, jump, shout, and explore, enhancing their development. Rooijen et al (2019) considers educational settings to be the ideal place for children to realise risky play however understand the challenges that educational settings have such as parental concerns and regulatory factors suggesting further training for practitioners could aid this.

Play Wales (2018) insist this is not a question of taking risk at all cost as policies and procedures are in place to minimise this, however risk assessment must be looked upon as enabling not preventing with a vision of inclusion. Play Wales (2018) insist practitioners afford children stimulating, adventurous play opportunities whilst protecting children from serious harm ensuring resilient, creative, adaptable, flexible children are prepared for life. Health and Safety Executive (2012) support a balanced approach between controlling risks whilst optimizing benefits as they agree how vitally important challenging play can be for development and implore playworkers deal with risk responsibly. HSE (2012) state that although a fear of legislation has been exaggerated if any laws are breached this could involve prosecution.

Practitioners concerned with younger vulnerable children have particular responsibility to their safety. However, this must be balanced with needs to take risk, ensuring children learn and develop through first-hand experiences as Moyle (2009) who agrees how crucially important first-hand experiences are, through the medium of risky play and Bottril (2018) who describes play as risk, participation, and interpretation. Holland (2021) ensures that rights of the child are at the heart of her work demanding children be entitled to Participation, Provision and Protection, agreeing with the balance needed.

Storli and Sanseter (2017) find practitioners often step in to limit or even stop risky play and Little and Wyver (2008) examine the reasons for this could be poor facility with risk of litigation and high child-staff ratios but insist risky play provides such benefits as being able to try behaviours and test their limits.

Play Wales (2018) state that not offering children appropriate risk and challenge could lead to them taking that risk in less appropriate settings therefore as practitioners we need to offer risk and challenge in a safe environment to allow development.

Observations

Pacey (2017) consider observations to a pivotal part of Child's development which reveal an understanding of each individual child and their individual needs, where they are in their learning journey. It is therefore a practitioner's duty to utilise observations, evaluate them using them to assist with planning suitable play opportunities, supporting the child to progress as indicated by Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory, as stated by Gerhart-Mooney (2000) who implore the importance of the adult in extending learning. Montessori, as stated by Brodie (2013), is an observation-based approach and declare a Child's development is significantly improved when children are given appropriate toys to play with in an opportune environment with adults constantly observing and reflecting without interfering in the flow of play.

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there is a lot about the prevent of risk in play - so balance this with the benefits.

The Foundation Phase Profile (2017) or Profile, through the use of observations and assessments assesses children in the foundation phase, between ages three and seven, and provides practitioners with an understanding of where children are in their learning and holistic development ensuring relevant activities are planned, and children are provided with a developmentally appropriate inclusive curriculum. The Profile (2017) will demonstrate how far the child has progressed in the foundation phase.

The Profile (2017) is part of a wider framework known as the Early Years Development and Assessment Framework aligning with assessments carried out by health professionals, holistically supporting identification of developmental delay or additional needs for the child. This collaboration of frameworks supports The Welsh Government (2014) who implores how imperative it is for agencies to work together to support the needs of the child.

As the Profile (2017) is continued between nursery, reception, and infants, it supports transitions between settings as well as supporting communications with parents and carers when being used as a starting point for conversation.

Welsh Government (no date) state in the first six weeks of reception, a National Statutory Baseline Assessment is given to all children, to provide a baseline for measuring progression, in the form of a compact profile with a fuller profile used for tracking throughout to the end of the Foundation Phase which both produce a measureable score in outcomes. Outcomes are between one and six with gold, silver and bronze used to demonstrate smaller steps, a benefit to any child in the early stages of development or with a developmental delay.

The profile is derived of two sets of skill ladders in four areas of learning:

- Personal and Social Development
- Language, Literacy and Communication Skills
- Mathematical Development
- Physical Development.

There is no set method for recording observations with assessments carried out across a wide range of activities covering all areas of learning with PACEY (2016) stating that practitioners need to use their professional judgements to assess evidence to understand what those assessments are implying about a Childs skill, knowledge and understanding and practitioners need to be confident in their assessments given with all practitioners contributing, to ensure more than one perspective and a holistic picture of the child is gained, agreed by Drake (2006) who state the more adults in the Childs immediate world who contribute, the deeper and more insightful the observations.

Evans (2015) considers how practitioners are given in-depth guidance on each section to avoid misunderstandings and ensure a fair consistent local and national approach to reaching outcomes, across all settings, however teacher skill and experience are key to exercising judgements. Evans (2015) also consider that the assessments are more practical and feasible as they are designed with the revised areas of learning including the literacy and numeracy framework meaning the assessment and planning processes are combined in one framework.

The Profile (2017) is an in-depth document full of detail which is of benefit, as a holistic picture of the child is gained, however, this can be time consuming for practitioners when trying to ensure a true reflection is being observed. Hakkarainen (2006) stresses there cannot be a time limit set for play as Children need conditions just right, for that sufficiently deep play to be formed, which can be limiting when such profound information is needed. Donaldson (2015) suggests current assessments were over-elaborate and outcome orientated and that a simpler

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approach might ensure the play-based ethos is achieved. However, PACEY (2016) suggest assessments do not need to be time consuming with the WJEC (2018) imploring that the Profile is quick and easy to use with clear instruction.

Staff motivation is another limitation with staff to child ratios at their limit, time consuming activities can be put on hold, however having knowledgeable staff, aware of the importance of these assessments will assist this as agreed by Piaget, whom Gray and Macblain (2015) considered, who insists a child should be afforded rich stimulating experiences in a rich environment with an engaged, knowledgeable, practitioner.

Howard and McInnes (2012) state play is only achieved when the player considers themselves at play, which is self-led and self-directed, when they are afforded choice. When children had that autonomy Howard and McInnes (2012) study found, they were more focused, motivated with increased emotional well-being. However, with time constraints and the detailed information and therefore planning needed to observe the specific outcomes, the Childs autonomy is taken away to ensure outcomes are achieved, hence a true representation of the child is not truly being observed. Alternatively, Nutbrown, considered by Brodie (2013) suggest these detailed observations are imperative to really be able to see what a child can do and to create further effective learning experiences. Donaldson (2015) state practitioners should ensure enhanced provision is provided with interesting and stimulating opportunities to engage in that creative critical thinking, and not to get lost in outcome driven assessments.

Observations in Play

Play is a fundamental component of a Childs learning and development, discussed by Bruce (2018), who declares Froebel states that the difference between a Childs perception of play and an adult's perception is control. With children only considering themselves at play when it is self-chosen and self-led, and when an adult chooses and takes control, the child considers it work. Isaacs (2013) states that it is only during this Childs perception of play where a Childs true potential is revealed, when they are immersed in their intrinsic play and the real deep learning happens which is when a practitioner can obtain the optimum observation to see where they are in their holistic development, as that child is using their own imagination and creativity. The possibilities from observing children in that deep meaningful learning are endless and Storli and Sandseter (2019) consider there is a correlation between play and Childrens well-being offering bodily, social, and cultural experiences. Howard and McInnes (2012) study concur children in actual play demonstrate deep concentration, strong motivation, satisfaction, and positive energy, whereas children directed to activities they did not choose demonstrated negative behaviours and then the probability is that any observation made will not be a true reflection of what that child can do, as that child although doing the activity the Child will not be fully immersed in that play as it is not self-directed as agreed by PACEY (2016) who agree a greater observation will be attained with more learnt about a Childs interests and abilities if the Child is engaged in self-directed play rather than a set activity.

McInnes et al. (2011) have researched how a practitioner understands play and how a child understands play and declares that they can be very different thoughts, however, recognises

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that play is much more beneficial to a Childs well-being as well as their development when a child believes they are in play. Howard and McInnes. (2012) also compares the idea of the role of an adult between a Childs and adults understanding and the studies agreed that to a child whether the adult is present during play or not can be a defining factor as to whether that Child considers themselves in play or not.

Froebel also surmised, as discussed by Bruce (2018), that the role of the adult is to join and not intervene in the process of play, when wanted, and to support and extend play when appropriate. Brock et al. (2013) concur that the role of an adult is as a guide, scaffolder and facilitator of learning, which Gray and Macblain (2015) states conforms with Vygotsky and Brunner's theories on supporting and extending child development. Brodie (2013) also discusses how Isaacs suggest observations be naturalistic where children are enjoying self-led activities without interference with an adult's role being to observe, support and to scaffold learning and development.

Observations assist a practitioner with planning and providing developmentally appropriate activities and learning opportunities to all children, as stated by the Foundation Phase (2015), and practitioners must use these rich observations to reflect and to consider the set-up of a room, the resources available, the environment, ensuring a child has autonomy and self-led choice which they can take in any direction their imagination takes them, that is when the child will be truly invested in their play and adults can engage in sustained shared thinking. Dewey as suggested by Aubrey and Riley (2019) supports the idea of a reflective practitioner that can maximise a Childs environment thus enhancing a Childs development.

Howard and McInnes (2012) finds that children are less likely to join a task if an adult is present but acknowledges that how an adult conducts themselves during a Childs play, that be whether they offer them autonomy and share the control, needs to be refined to maximise the potential of a play-based curriculum, if this fails to happen the optimum for learning will not be realised. Failing to observe a child at their optimum will have implications on planning, the Childs holistic development and the Childs experience in the setting and ultimately their well-being.

Due to play being such a principal factor in a Childs development it has been enshrined into the Welsh Government (2008) and is the primary focus in the Foundation Phase Framework (2015).

The Foundation Phase pedagogy is a Play Based curriculum, however Donaldson (2015) considers that the current curriculum does not allow children to reach their full potential, and that the core aim of the Foundation Phase (2015) has been lost in the pressures of achieving outcomes and implores that the New Curriculum which empowers children in experiential hands-on learning through trial and error to allow a child, through a high quality of education, to show what they are truly capable of which will lead to the long term success of every child in Wales.

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