

Portfolio Chwarae Plant (EAEE4004C)

As a nation, we have fallen into the routine of overloading our children with all kinds of information and work tasks from a very young age. We do this in order to compete with academic standards and goals whilst overlooking and underestimating the importance of what all children crave, to play. In 2009, Miller and Allmon stated 'Too many schools place a double burden on young children. First, they heighten their stress by demanding that they master material beyond their developmental level. Then they deprive children of their chief means of dealing with that stress – creative play'. The want for children to learn their ABC's and 123's has come before the necessary development of their physical, mental and emotional state and the results of this have been an eye opener in realising that change was needed. Supporting this statement, Elkind (2008) stated that 'Play is not a luxury but rather a crucial dynamic of healthy physical, intellectual and social-emotional development in all ages'.

Despite starting school at an earlier age than most countries, British students seemed to fall behind all other leading countries in global education rankings, a study from the University and College Union in 2009 declared that the UK 'is one of the least educated nations in the developed world and that its position has worsened considerably'. As a result of this, it became clear that our current ways of educating were failing our youth. Therefore, the UK decided to gain first-hand experience on researching into a variety of different countries and their education systems in order to see how their international perspectives were more successful than their own. As a result of this, practitioners from all over Britain watched as children had the freedom to climb trees, whittle sticks and play on the edges of lakes in Scandanavia's popular Forest schools. Observed as children learned through a HighScope approach in North America, where they were given the opportunity to learn through active experiences as they had the option to decide what activity they would like to do, take their time doing it, then reflect on what they've spent time doing. As well as this, the Reggio Emilia approach, which was founded in Northern Italy following the destruction of World War II by Loris Malaguzzi, who stated that 'Learning is an active process, not a transmission of pre-packaged knowledge'. He believed that students and teachers should always have an equal voice and once said that 'children are powerful and capable individuals, with the ability to desire and construct their own knowledge'. Despite being three very different locations with unique aspects, they all promote the importance of play and how all children progress at their own rate. As a result to seeing how successful these methods of learning were, Wales became the first country to recognise play as a need within the early years curriculum, replacing Key Stage 1 with the Foundation Phase. As well as this, on February 1st, 2013 'the General Comment on Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child was adopted' (International Play Association, 2013) stating that 'all children to have rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts' (Children's Commissioner for Wales, Play Wales, 2016).

As practitioners of the Foundation Phase, play has become a huge part of day to day life as we now know that feeding children with information is not half as beneficial as taking a step back and letting them have fun and explore on their own means. Play can be a difficult thing to explain, as one child's play may look completely different to another, this is because every child has their own experiences and imagination to build from. Reed and Brown (2000) once said that 'Play is something 'felt' rather than 'done'' which supports the statement from Play Wales (2018) stating that when children are seen playing, they are happier, more independent, comfortable and even confident. Meaning that when children are able self-direct their play, they tend to learn more as they don't think of it as a task with an outcome, therefore there is no pressure on them. Janet Moyles believed that "Play is powerful. Play deepens children's learning and understanding because it enables them to begin learning from first hand experiences" and this is completely true. There are many other benefits to self directed play that we may not realise, firstly, the child feels a sense of freedom, meaning that he is not told what to do and how long he has to do so, he can be an individual and play in any way he likes, meaning that the activity can also end when he's had enough. It has also been proven to increase the children's self-worth, as their work is not being compared to, and they are not going at a slower pace than any of the other children, he can simply play at his own rate. Supporting this, Play Wales (2018) describes self directed play as something that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. Play is such a rich form of learning is because it can be done in such a wide variety of ways. Whether it's fantasy play or rough and tumble, social play or ludic play, children are developing in more ways than we may realise as 'Play is more than meets the eye' (National Association for Education, 2013). This wide variety of play is crucial for a child's holistic development, as a single game or activity that a child may choose to do can develop them physically, emotionally and socially, whereas a classroom work task could be not nearly as beneficial. Janet Moyles believed that "Play is, without a doubt, the most natural way children learn all over the world: this is why it is important for us, as educators, to ensure that children have every opportunity to engage in play and playful experiences". Role play is one form of play that we see very often within the early years' classrooms as children love to take on the role of people, characters and even objects they either see in everyday life or on all kinds of media forms. This could vary from pretending to be their favourite princess character or superhero, their household pets and anything else they could ever imagine, and as practitioners it is most important that we never discourage it, but play along, of course unless it becomes dangerous. Tina Bruce believed that 'Play is the highest form of learning in the early years', stating that it has the ability to take children out of themselves, to encourage creativity, develop abstract thinking and even bring spiritual awareness, things that may be impossible to teach at a desk. Role play is beneficial as it is a form of self directed play, where the children can be anyone or anything they desire, our role as an adult is to ensure they have a safe space to do so whilst also maybe having some props for the children to use. But despite what character they choose to be, their

role playing will holistically develop them either way as they interact and socialise with other children as they may run, jump, climb and crawl alongside them in their own fantasy world. As Carl Jung once said, “Without this playing with fantasy, no creative work has ever come to birth. The debt we owe to the play of the imagination is incalculable”. Another form of holistic play is physical, this can be anything from football, to skipping, to throwing a ball around, hopping and everything in between. Physical games can be one that a teacher has set up as an activity to help develop their agility and resilience, such as an obstacle course or a game of tag. With this, children get a taste of what it feels like to work together as a team, but also how to cope with competition, they will learn how to control new emotions such as winning and losing, and for some children this can be very difficult. Marjorie Ouvry (2014) believed that ‘Creating opportunities for children to explore and test their own capabilities, to manage risk and grow as capable, resourceful and resilient children into adulthood’. With their wild imagination, children have the ability to invent all kinds of games by themselves, without even realising that these will develop them physically in some way or another. Whether it’s their balance as they cross benches and logs pretending to cross a wild river, or they gross motor skills as they use chalk to draw on the playground or sticks to write in mud, children are able to self direct themselves to include physical play in most of their games. Richard Louv (2013) supports this, stating that ‘Playtime- especially unstructured, imaginative, exploratory play- is increasingly recognised as an essential component of wholesome child development’.

It’s no secret that we are living in an age where we avoid things that could be in any way a risk to young children, but as we try to protect our little ones, are we just causing them more harm in the future? Bruner believed that children are active learners who need first hand experiences, and by sheltering children from anything that may cause harm, we are failing to teach them that risk is a part of everyday life. An article from Play Wales, called ‘Let us out of the bubble-wrap’ shows how adults can support children’s need for risky play. It influences us to remember that ‘children need and want to create challenge and uncertainty as part of their play’. Sarah Knight believes that children need to be out in nature, climbing trees and embankments and stepping on stones across streams, in order to learn to be able to make the right decisions and develop physically as well as emotionally, she states that these adventures make up a rich childhood. Athey (1990) also believed that ‘confining children to flat, rubberish safety surfaces denies children essential experiences required for such rich conceptual learning’. Therefore, Play Wales is teaching parents and practitioners how to take a ‘common sense approach’, making us remember that accidents do happen and reminding us to think ‘before saying no’. They believe that we can ‘do our children harm by being overcautious or making them scared of situations or people. They need to know how to keep themselves safe, but they also need to have the confidence to make their own way in the world’. The popular Forest schools seen in countries such as Denmark and Finland are a great example of the kind of risks children all over the world should be facing within their play, yet when videos of the outdoor schools are shown to adults in Britain, they are in horror

with what they see. Yet these Forest schools succeed to convince parents to have faith in children, bold statements such as ‘children will not fall in to the lake because they know not to go too close’ (Kids Gone Wild, 2016) are completely true. As adults, we should always teach children to never be afraid to take risks, yet more importantly be there to help them along the way, and with this, children will quickly learn what how to assess different situations and solve all kinds of problems the world will throw at them.

Risk Assessment:

Details: Llandysul Nursery will be going for a walk to Coed Y Foel forestry on the 20/4/2019, hoping to take 9 children who are all 3 years old, alongside 6 members of staff.

Description	Going for a walk to the forestry
Department:	Llandysul Nursery
Location:	Coed Y Foel, a Forest Path 5 minutes' walk from the school.
Author:	Miss Sioned Bryant
Line Manager:	Mrs Heledd Dafydd
Date:	20th of April, 2019
Applicable Equipment:	Suitable clothing and footwear (children and teachers), First Aid, Water bottles, Mobile phone.
Associated Risk Assessment(s):	The risk assessment is following our locations policy
Version:	Second version
Review Date:	15 th of April, 2019
Approved by:	<u>Mrs Heledd Dafydd (Headmistress)</u>
Reason for latest update	New updates on number of children coming

Print Name: SIONED BRYANT

Signed: *Sioned Bryant*

Authorised by: *Heledd Dafydd*

Print Name: HELEDD DAFYDD

Risk Assessment:

Ref	Hazard/Task/Activity/ Area of concern	Person at Risk	Existing Controls	Describe any further controls/ Actions Needed	Actions By whom	Action by when
1	Weather conditions	Children and Adults	Check the weather every so often leading up to the day of the trip, if it's promising to be very bad, e.g storms, let the parents know that it will be moved to another day.	Even if bad weather comes on the day of the walk, ensure that parents were informed to pack suitable clothing e.g. waterproofs, wellies, hats, gloves.	Teachers and parents/ guardians	20-4-19
2	One child who has an allergy to bees	Child (Eva Jones)	Ensure that before leaving the building, the child's Epi pen is with the main practitioner and that it is in full working order. Keep an eye on the child whilst on the walk and ensure that every teacher knows of the situation.	Ensure that your staff know how to use an epi pen, keep an eye out for any signs that Eva might have been stung by a bee, then act fast. Always carry a mobile on you in case of emergency.	Teachers	21-4-19
3	Must walk along the road for 5 minutes	Children and Adults	The walk to the forestry is a short one with a pavement most of the way. Ensure that each practitioner is holding hands with a child on either side until we get to the Forest.	One teacher will walk in front of the rest to call out if there are cars coming so that the teachers can move in closer to the side, reminding the drivers to slow down.	Teachers	21-4-19
4	Other users of the forestry that day	Children	Make sure that we realise that we will most probably not be the only ones, keep an eye on the kids at all times, not letting them run to far ahead on their own, but in order to give them the freedom, have the teachers spread out so they can run further ahead while still being supervised.	Have one of the teachers drive out to the location to see how many people roughly are walking on that day, e.g. another school group, youth group or dog walking club.	Teachers	21-4-19

5	Environmental Hazards e.e. Dog waste, glass	Children and Adults	Make sure the kids are all in wellies so that if they do happen to step in dog waste, it can easily be washed off. Also, wellies have a thick sole so that anything sharp such as glass won't pierce through. If glass happens to cut their fingers or hands, ensure we always have a first aid kit on us to deal with small situations and fill in a report form when back.	When we're back in the nursery, have all the children and adults wash their hands with soap. Teachers will also wash down the children's wellies so that they're not carrying dog waste home.	Teachers	21-4-19
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With a wild, outgoing and eager group of three year olds, myself and the rest of the Llandysul Nursery staff knew it was time to plan an activity where their adventurous imagination could run free, and not only on the playground. Therefore, we decided to take a trip to the local Forest, Coed Y Foel, where they will have more freedom and lots more opportunities to holistically develop, as Margaret McMillan believed “the best classroom and the richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky’. With the forest as their classroom for a good part of the day, we realise that in result of this, the children will be able to self direct themselves without us restraining them to a certain activity with certain outcomes. Realising that some parents may struggle to understand the benefit of such things, questioning why they aren't learning how to read and write, I remind myself what Rousseau once stated, “You are worried about seeing him spend his early years doing nothing? What! Is it nothing to be happy? Nothing to skip, play and run around all day long? Never in his life will he be so busy again.” With this we take on board how a simple trip to the forest benefits them massively in the types of play I spoke about at the beginning of the portfolio. While these children are running, play fighting with branches that act as swords, inventing make believe scenarios that come to life around them, they are using role play to the highest level. Alongside this, they are also physically developing, as they may use different muscles or test their balance as they climb up the embankments or try to pick up sticks that are much too heavy, opportunities that are impossible to create with limited resources within a classroom. Therefore, to reflect on the

experience I use Gibbs' 6 step reflective cycle. Firstly, a description of what happened and secondly, how I felt it went. In my eyes, alongside the reaction and the glow on the children's faces, the experience was successful. Not only does that mean that, yes no one got hurt, or no, we didn't lose anyone. It means that the children were happy. We saw the children playing and learning all at their own accord without even realising that they were developing holistically, playing with children they may not usually or seeing all kinds of different things maybe for the first time, they were stepping out of their comfort zones. As Dr William Bird (2006) said, 'playing in a natural environment has shown to improve children's concentration, social and mental development, and physical and mental health', which makes me believe that we can only imagine how rich this form of learning really is. Gibbs' 3rd step is the evaluation, and alongside all the magic of simply being in a forest, one of the weaker parts of experience came down to us as staff. As Play Wales reminds us, 'Think before saying no', and this is one that needs to be drilled in to modern day practitioners. Admittedly, myself alongside the rest of the staff were hesitant when it came to the children jumping in deep puddles, and the question is, why were we? In doing this, we were preventing them from only having fun, but also to learn. An outdoor education specialist, Jane Williams-Siegfriedsen believes that 'it is important that young children learn what it is to be wet, maybe be cold and to survive that' (Kids gone wild, 2016). Referring to Gibbs, if I were to do this activity again, I would take more steps back, watch the children as they're in their element. By filling in the Risk Assessment, it was very useful to realise what really could go wrong and what steps should be in place if they do, and in the meantime, I am going to continue through the words of Maria Montessori, who believed we should 'let the children be free; encourage them; let them run outside when it is raining; let them remove their shoes when they find a puddle of water; and, when the grass of the meadows is damp with dew, let them run on it and trample it with their bare feet'.

Rhestr Cyfeirnod

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