

Practice, Theory and Play

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No AI has been used to support my work.

Section 1

After a child progresses to school or nursery, settling into a new routine can be extremely difficult (Bottrill, G., 2018, p.3). It is important for the practitioner to be totally adaptive and flexible in methods that will help a child's transition (The Early Years Resource Team, 2018).

Sensory play is a method that can be used in practice to contribute towards a child's holistic development, and it can also help promote a child's senses and curiosity (The Early Years Resource Team, 2018). Multi-sensory activities and tools which can involve using all five senses (taste, sight, smell, touch and sound) can contribute significantly towards a child's engagement. By incorporating sensory play into a child's daily routine, it will help strengthen their brain development, life skills, language and speech development and memory (Abidin, A., et al., 2021). It can also help their memory and ability to attempt more complex tasks (Young, H., 2023). A child will have full engagement in sensory play when facilitators provide them with multiple options of equipment and space for creativity and imagination (Young, H., 2023). With children who are shy, sensory play can be very beneficial in helping them communicate. For example, talking about the shape they are holding or asking them to describe a texture (The EYR Team, 2018). It is important for practitioners to consider children with additional learning needs (ALN), as they can prove more difficult to engage when it comes to play methods. Sensory play can be highly therapeutic, therefore resulting in a good option for children who do suffer with ALN (Manja, S., et al, 2022).

Based on Young's (2023) writing, sensory play can come with many disadvantages such as creating a dependency on sensory learning. This meaning a child only wanting to learn through sensory play and becoming difficult to settle without the use of these materials. Sensory play can also be quite costly, especially if the practice does not have the funding or the environment to incorporate sensory play. Many practitioners do not understand the benefits of modern play methods, so children will be missing out on new opportunities and chances to extend their current knowledge (Manja, S., et al, 2022). Young (2023) has also noted how sensory play has a more beneficial effect when used alongside other play methods. Such as learning a new song and giving the children a chance to imitate the instruments using homemade tools or tools provided. This might not be achievable in practice as they might not have access to instruments or an outlet where music can be played.

Roleplay is another play method where children imitate what they are familiar with. Majority of the time children will choose to roleplay 'mums and dads' or

occasionally occupational roles such as firefighters, nurses or police (Waters-Davies, J., 2022, p.34). When roleplaying, a child's imaginative skills can be strengthened, and is often seen as a great method to understand where a child is with their social skills (Vlaicu, C., 2014). As a child roleplays, it helps them practice their communication skills, social interactions and emotional maturity (Vlaicu, C., 2014). This is important for both the child and the practitioner. By actively allowing opportunities for children to roleplay, practitioners can see how well a child can store new and old information and use it through play (Waters-Davies, J., 2022, p.35). The roleplay method is great for all children, especially those who enjoy independency and pretending.

As beneficial as roleplay is, McCall (no date) explores the negatives that follow along with this method. Some children may find it scary or uncomfortable to perform in front of other children, this could then lead to them not enjoying this method as much as the other children. For children with ALN, unpredictability could affect them. Roleplay could sometimes get out of hand and become noisy which can be very difficult to manage and can cause conflict and upset (McCall, J., no date).

The Montessori theory is relevant to this context due to its research on a child's natural curiosity and capability of learning independently. Although this theory focuses more on individually tailored play, it can still be effective here by the integration of play-based activities (Bhat, S., 2021). It encourages many points previously discussed and solidifying the fact that sensory and roleplay provides children with the opportunity to follow their natural instincts and curiosity, while also demonstrating how a child will become more engaged and eager when there is a variety of equipment and space (Rockingham Montessori School, 2024).

Section 2

Howard (2020) claims it is important for children to have time and space, especially when it comes to educational settings. Self-directed play signifies how an adult must step back and let the child completely take control, it includes a child creating their

own play methods and rules (Waters-Davies, J., 2022, p.37). A learning environment that allows the child to explore and express themselves is essential for self-directed play, this can later lead on to success in later education (Grava, J., et al, 2021). Self-directed play contributes to a child's cognitive, social, emotional, physical and imaginative skills (Juster, A., 2015). Highlighted in 'The Power of Play' (Howard, J., 2020), it is important for practitioners to remember that children are also active participants in their own development, and by providing plenty of opportunities for free play this can contribute towards that and their holistic development. The outcomes of supporting this method are endless and positive. A child will begin to think for themselves and learn how to take healthy appropriate risks, learn about the world at their own pace through their motivated interests and experience joy through self-discovery (Juster, A., 2015). Children who engage in self-directed play and gain these skills will be better equipped to handle stress and comebacks. As play can often be stressful for children, with peers not cooperating or communicating, this can help the child put their problem-solving skills to the test and find ways to overcome this to thrive during play (Grava, J., et al, 2021). It is also important for practitioners to encourage this. Children who are shy or may suffer with ALN might need a little extra push to begin playing. As mentioned in 'The Amazing Benefits of Self-Directed Play' (Juster, A., 2015), "It's okay. Just play!".

Although this method is completely down to the child and how they wish to play, the practitioner does have a big part to play in this method. For example; setting up the activity and ensuring the surroundings are acceptable and paying attention in order to respond to any cues from the child (Waters-Davies, J., 2022, p.37). By offering variety and creative freedom, the caregiver has provided the child with all the tools necessary to engage in self-directed play. If this is not provided, a child can feel restricted to one specific activity, with a specific outcome. The practitioner must remember to not put restrictions on play, or pressure on how the play must go. Waters-Davies (2022) claims that when an activity has no specific outcome or gain a child will see the task as rewarding, which will then contribute to the child engaging in self-directed play more often. As mentioned, this method is equally as effective for the practitioner. By observing a child's ability to entertain themselves, this gives a great base for a caregiver to work off when getting to understand the child and their abilities (Grava, J., 2021). Sometimes it is easy for practitioners to forget that free play is child led, resulting in negative outcomes when the play should be entirely positive. It is crucial to exclude any personal gain or outcomes in this method, to keep it as natural and authentic as possible (Waters-Davies, J., 2022, p.9). as previously stated, an activity where there is pressure to adhere to rules can have negative impacts on how the child views learning.

When considering theory, Pikler's theory is effective here. This theory emphasises on freedom and self-initiated play (Tomco, E., no date). By a child

getting to know their likes and dislikes and their limits, this contributes towards a child's holistic development. Children being allowed to explore freely and be respected by the caregiver is important in Pikler's theory, as this can make a child feel comfortable in practice and be engaged (Gutknecht, D., et al, 2021).

Acknowledging that each child develops at their own pace is significant, and Pikler's theory encapsulates that and creates examples that can be used in practice (Tomco, E., no date).

Another theorist that could be considered here is Vygotsky. In detail, Vygotsky's concept of children having more positive outcomes when learning is when they are engaged in a task that is just beyond their capabilities but being supported by the more knowledgeable other (Mungala, J., 2025). His theory suggests that children learn best both through guided learning and with non-guided learning. He details a zone known as a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is prominent during early year development, and argues that all interactions, both with parents and teachers, contribute to their ZPD and their cognitive development (Veer, R., 2020).

Section 3

Observation is the process where a practitioner or a caregiver carefully watches and records behaviour, actions or events that happen during the observation time. In early year settings, it involves the practitioner watching how the children interact with their surroundings and their behaviour when faced with an activity (Kumar, A., 2023). It is a great tool to use to gain insights on specific children and understand their capabilities better. Originally humans were the primary tool needed to complete a detailed observation, but as many years have passed technology has come into practice and it is now accessible to take a photo or video to record a child's

interactions (Satapathy, S., 2023). However, traditional methods could provide a more effective way of observing.

There are a variety of methods that can be used when observing, one being time sampling. Time sampling involves recording events and behaviours at regular intervals, such as every five minutes or over an hour or an hour at longer intervals (Brodie, K., no date). Although time sampling is an easy and effective method of observation, Bradbury (2017) et al argue that this method can be time consuming, and it might not be totally accurate as things can be forgotten and a practitioner can be easily distracted. Brodie (no date) mentions how these notes do not have to be time consuming and can take less than a minute to write using key words that can be detailed later. Time sampling can also improve learning outcomes in practice, by knowing what each child thrives on and is totally engaged in. While additionally strengthening positive learning outcome, maintaining a periodic observation can also strengthen the relationship between caregivers and parents by providing them with a detailed report and insight into the child's development and activity (Famly, no date). It is also beneficial to see what a child's likes and dislikes are. If a child is not interested in the task Infront of them, but when provided with a new task they are completely engaged it can be highlighted on the observation (Bruce,T., et al, 2015).

Time sampling can have its limitations just as any method, it might not be accurate and it does not prove effective for all children (Bradbury, A., et al, 2017). A child's behaviour can be influenced by an observing adult, this could lead to increased behaviour changes or self-consciousness Children often see play as an activity when they have complete control, if an adult is present it could feel more like a task to be completed or they could feel restricted from playing freely (Bradbury, A., et al, 2017).

This method requires consistency, and in some practices this might not be achievable. In a free play environment, children can become hyperactive, and some children might suffer with shorter attention spans. Knowing this, it could be extremely difficult and challenging to be able to keep a clear and detailed log of all the events that have happened in the past 5 minutes (Satapathy, S., 2023). To combat this, a timer could be set every 5 minutes, or however long the practitioner wishes to observe, so that nothing is missed, and every log is organised and completed. With this method, and many other observation methods, it is not possible to study and create notes of past events. If a practitioner misses something but then is later informed about it then it will be harder to detail and keep a track of the incident (Kumar, A., 2023). This method would be seen as an induvial observation method, but if a practitioner is with a group of children working on the same activity it is possible they could create a time sample for each child and keep a close eye holistically (Kumar, A., 2023).

When trying to link observation with a theorist, Piaget's method is more relatable to this context. The importance of Piaget's cognitive development theory is that of the child's natural interactions and curiosity, and how they learn through exploration (Lefa, B., 2014). Pakpahan (2022) describes how actively participating in observing a child could give the practitioner and insight into the child current cognitive abilities and development. A child's cognitive development and making notes during observation is crucial as it gives the practitioner a way of reflecting on the child's behaviours and interactions that contribute towards their cognitive development (Lefa, B., 2014).

Section 4

Providing opportunities for play when observing a child is crucial, this allows the practitioner to create more in-depth log of a child's interactions and development (Bruce, T., et al, 2015). While playing, children engage in activities that raise their curiosity naturally. This can showcase their cognitive and social development, while also providing practitioners with authenticity to their capabilities. While children explore and experiment in their environment and with their peers, practitioners have a good opportunity to assess their communication, coordination and imaginative skills. Undergoing regular observations will also help the practitioner to gain an understanding of each individual child's development with no pressure (Brodie, K., no date).

Although play can be central during a child's education, it is often difficult to define. This can lead to some methods and activities not being beneficial or suitable when a practitioner is tasked with assessing a child (McInnes, K., et al, 2013). The difficulty in defining play can sometimes end in challenges when trying to observe the child. All practitioners are different, and so are their methods, what one might

consider meaningful might differ from another's standard (Kurt, G., 2020). But play contributes to a big part of a child's education and development, especially in practice. As previously discussed, nurturing an environment where play is accessible will allow the children freedom to navigate their own experiences individually, and practitioners can gather a broader and more reliable observation (Lefa, b., 2014). This is also beneficial while observing as it creates more opportunities for the observer to take note of and provides an insight into the child's strengths and weaknesses (Brodie, K., no date). When a child is engaged in an activity, they are demonstrating their skills and their curiosity. This is the ideal time to start an observation as the outcomes will be authentic (Brodie, K., no date).

Once a child has fully emerged in play, a practitioner can then take a fair observation. Making notes of everything the child is interacting with, how they are interacting socially and their imaginative skills. Observation as discussed by Mcinnes (2013) might be more beneficial from a children's point of view, so by allowing the child to take control of the activity the practitioner can really see how they have developed. But practitioners must keep in mind that children are less likely to define play as an activity or fun when adults are around. So, by stepping back and allowing space and no pressure on the child, that will give the carer a more genuine view of the child's play method and be able to notice any new interactions or behaviours (Kurt, G., 2020).

Practitioners can be fully emersed in activities without having to actively take part. By keeping a close eye during observations or even helping set up the activity, practitioners will be more inclined to want to see the outcome of what has been given to the children to work with (Waters-Davies, J., 2022, p.37). A practitioner must remember not to set any rules or expectations when introducing play, as sometimes an adult's perception of play can be completely different to how the child perceives it, therefore an ingenuine response to the activity (Mcinnes, K., et al, 2013). Children who do not succeed in a structured environments will benefit more from a flexible approach to observation, as this allows them freedom with no pressure. During observation, if detailed enough, the adult will know the child's level of understanding and their likes and dislikes, making finding the activities that the child will be engaged in easier and the observation will be strengthened by the child's clear enthusiasm and response (Awortwe, I., 2022). If a child is introduced to an activity where they do not engage well or is discouraged due to other children's reactions this can have an effect on their confidence and their social engagement. By understanding the child and tailoring activities that will get them engaged it will boost their confidence and produce more positive outcomes (Mcinnes, K., et al, 2013). Not only is it important for the practitioner to be authentic, but creating a good example will contribute to a child's development. All interactions that a child experiences

during their early stages will influence the way they perceive things (McInnes, K., et al, 2013). Ensuring a good example has been provided and that all children understand basic boundaries and respect, the child's experience in practice will be more positive and beneficial during their cognitive development due to no conflicts or self-confidence issues. It is important for practitioners to boost the children's confidence and provide holistic care when necessary (Lefa, B., 2014).

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