

Discuss two types of play and how these can be supported in practice.

Duffy (1998) once said ‘To mess about is to play with something and it is through play – which is part of the creative process. Creative play are activities that allow children to experiment and create with a variety of materials or instruments, where there is sufficient time and where becoming messy is not a problem (PlayWales, 2017). Resnick, (2007) believes that when creative play and the kindergarten method of teaching are blended it creates a influential experience that enables designing, experimenting, exploring and creating in a collective process which allows children to imagine, play, create, share and reflect. Creative play can take many forms, and activities can include arts and crafts, movement and dance, music and sound play. Furthermore, Quality Care for Children (2017) say creative play is also known as pretend play or dramatic play is often how children imitate life through playing ‘family’ or ‘school’. These situations allow children to work on skills such as problem solving, conflict resolution, listening to instructions and developing self-confidence. Adults can encourage this sort of play by providing props and ideas but also through participating and asking questions. They believe materials that mirror everyday life such as clothes, shoes, handbags, baby dolls, kitchen utensils and costumes aid in creative play. Practitioners can support creative play through the materials, structure, construction, trust and environment provided. The British Council (2022) have developed a series of guidelines for supporting creative play. They say materials provided promote inclusive play, that structures allow children to express and prolong involvement. Construction will allow children to work alone or in groups to see themselves as creators. Trust allows children to take risks and the environment can control social interactions. Raising children (2019) believe that following the child’s lead and giving them plenty of time, materials and space boosts their confidence and sparks their creative play. North Yorkshire County Council (2017) state that creative play is not just for the indoors, that outdoor creative play can be experienced on a larger scale. Playing with sticks, shells and other open-ended materials encourage children’s imagination and develops wonderful ideas. However, hunting for creepy crawlies and finding flowers and plants stimulates children and develops their powers of observation

Froebel saw outdoor play as a natural way to a child’s learning and development – he believed life, beauty and knowledge were connected (Pound, 2005). In addition, McMillan

saw the potential of outdoor learning – building on the work of Froebel. McMillan summarised ‘To feel one’s life in every limb, that is the life of early childhood’ (McMillan, 1919).

Outdoor play offers children a chance to develop their brains, actions and thinking patterns (schemas), also their independence which in turn helps them understand how the world works (Thomas and Boulton, 2021). Action for Children (2017) stated there are three reasons why children need to play outside. Firstly, is to improve mental health, well-being, and self-confidence. Secondly is to encourage physical activity and combat obesity. And thirdly to improve children’s sleeping patterns. National Literacy Trust (2021) believe that supporting outdoor play is essential to a child’s wellbeing and that any outdoor space will suffice, small or large, park or garden, if children are ‘spending time outside’ it creates positive and valuable experiences. In addition, Play Wales (2016) states that active play is the most straight forward and natural way that children can play, and when given the opportunity children are likely to be physically active. However, the Northern Ireland Curriculum (2005) believe that a well organised and resourced outdoor environment allows for better experiences. They furthermore state practitioners should allow children to control, change and alter their environment. On the other hand, Ouvre (2000) believed many practitioners face challenges based on fear and a reason for not planning outdoor play. Anxieties about the weather, space and risks outweigh the needs of the child. Likewise, British Broadcasting Company (BBC) news (2012) reported that research by Play England suggests fears over safety and traffic are stopping children playing outdoors. It was found that 49% of parents feared “stranger danger”, and 31% feared an accident or injury. 43.6% of parents believed their own children play outside less than they did.

Evidence of a clear understanding of why it is important for children to choose their own play and the importance of the role of the adult in children’s play.

Penn State (2016) suggests that allowing children to choose their play offers them some power and control over what they want to do, but it is also a development to growing up. Likewise, United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (NDA) say that free play gives children the opportunity to express themselves how they want, depending on the day, time, and situation they are in. They also state that every child is unique and each child expresses themselves differently.

Psychology researcher Peter Gray once said in an interview with American Journal (2013) that children usually lose enthusiasm when they lose choice – when adults control their play – which in turn children do not learn key lessons, such as, forming their own activities, solving their own problems and being in control of their own lives. However, (Weisberg et al, 2016, p.180) believe that although free play is imperative for a child's healthy development, children need to be directed towards problems happening if they are to learn.

‘Children should have the chance to better their own limits through situations like climbing a tree or using tools – and be given the opportunity to experience success and failures, learning by trial and error. Preventing children these opportunities, they will not know how to deal with uncertain environments and lack the confidence to overcome problems and think critically’ (Bento and Dias, 2017).

Erikson's 3rd stage of psychosocial development: Initiative versus guilt states that children frequently assert themselves by directing their play, giving them a sense of euphoria in their abilities.

Rose (2014) compares Goldschmied's concept of 'heuristic play' where the adult acts as a 'silent companion' while the child is able to play freely with various supplies provided by the adult, to Vygotsky and Bruner's works, where an adult's role is more interactive and they diligently 'scaffold' the child's learning. Rose also looks at Bandura's social-learning theory which highlights the significance of the adult's role in guiding children.

Professor Bertrand (2018) believes educators should be responsive to what children are thinking and assist in establishing the foremost viable environment to support play. The Welsh Government (2021) also state that practitioners should be consistent in their care, and it is essential to the developmental needs of the children that practitioners are observing, are vigilant and respond sensitively.

The importance of free play has been acknowledged as a principal part to a child's character in developing resilience, developing, and maintaining a child's social relationship. (Mannello, Casey and Atkinson, 2019).

In depth discussion and understanding of an observation method for young children.

The Leuven Scales was developed by the Research Centre for Experiential Education at Leuven University supervised by Professor Ferre Laevers (Early Learning HQ, 2011). It is made up of two critical parts that measure a child's well-being and their involvement. It is an observational scale with measurements from 1-5. Level 1 indicates minimal involvement and level 5 indicates maximum involvement.

MacRae and Jones, (2020) believe the hypothesis of the scale can be used to measure the level of provision in relation to the level of involvement. Used correctly by practitioners it can be a valuable self-assessment tool.

Laevers et al (2005) developed a manual to use the Leuven scales correctly. Step 1 begins with a self-evaluation conducted by the responsible adult for the setting and observing children individually for 2 minutes, then scoring each child using the scales. Step 2 involves reflecting on the data collected, explanations can be found from the levels marked during the observations. Influential factors such as the approach, the child and their background and any exceptional circumstances should be taken into consideration. Components should be assessed, such as the environment, group climate, freedom, organisation and guidance. Step 3 is improving where possible. Strengths and weaknesses allow practitioners to create choices and set targets.

Laevers (2017) spoke to the Early Excellence Centre for Inspirational Learning and stated that well-being is the alluring state where children can be when they are feeling good and feel at ease. They are open to anything, can cope and enjoy the moment. It shows the personal, social and emotional development of the child is going well. Laevers also believes that involvement is about concentration and being completely focused on something, wanting contact with the reality around them. Involvement can only be achieved when there is a match between a child's capabilities and the environment. If an environment is too easy or hard a child is unable to develop.

Demonstrate an understanding of the role of play when undertaking observations and assessments of children and consider how this affects the child's engagement and the accuracy of the observation.

Observations should be taken in a diversity of contrasting situations and environments in order to create a more holistic image of the child (Bruce,2015). In addition, Drake (2005)

states it is important to be regularly 'tuned in' to a child's learning and make time to observe when it arises.

Diligent observations and assessments allow practitioners to assess what understandings, skills, and abilities a child exhibits, and in accordance can plan provisions to support their learning and development.

'Assessment is the way in which our everyday practice we observe children's learning, strive to understand it, and then put our understanding to effective use' (Drummond, 1993).

Pacey (2016) believe there are elements of a good observation, one of which is conducting observations when a child is occupied in a freely chosen activity, as this allows the practitioner to learn more about the child's interests, way of learning and abilities.

The Welsh Assembly Government (2008) state that if observations are conducted frequently, then the child will become accustomed to practitioners observing play, resulting in less disruption. They go on to say that practitioners that are actively engaged in the activity are able to gather information on what the child can do and what needs to be developed.

'No two practitioners will see the same child in the same way. Asking the practitioners to observe the same child and to be open and honest in what they see and interpret will depend on what they decide to look for and their own particular perspective (Martin, 2007).

Likewise, 'Children often act in demanding and complex ways – practitioners are educated that all behaviours are a child's way of communicating, they are trained to observe, document, and analyse their behaviour to recognize what they are trying to tell us (Green, 2012).

Goldman (2014) reported on the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) news that in 1976, 360 children unknowingly participated in a psychology experiment over Halloween night. Psychologists were in 18 different homes and children were told to take one piece of candy from a bowl full after chatting for 2 minutes. They then left the children alone with the bowl, half of the time with a mirror. A second hidden researcher covertly recorded the children's behaviour. The researchers concluded that children would be less inclined to take sneaky handfuls if they could see their own reflections, even with a mask on.

The Hawthorne effect occurs when people change their behaviour because they know they are being watched (Spencer and Mahtani, 2017). Clinical psychologist Colby Pearce authored an article in 2010, in which he put the Hawthorne effect into practice. He stated that he

conducted assessments on 14 children who were of the most concern to school staff. His assessments included interviews of each child, their parent(s), classroom teachers and senior staff. Colby prepared a report on each child and made recommendations about each child's care and management requirements. He proceeded with individual feedback to parents of each child and their teachers but also gave information about engaging with children who exhibit challenging behaviour. Six months later Colby returned; one out of the fourteen children continued to be of concern. He believes adults that take an active interest in children with behaviour issues can positively improve their behaviour.

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