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Children's play: Theory and practice.

Section 1

Types of play.

According to Rees (2022, p.31), exploratory play is often one of the first types of play that children will encounter. This type of play involves the five senses: touch, smell, taste, see and hear. Exploratory play allows children to manipulate objects and encourages them to explore the environment around them. Education Wales (2022) suggests that to ignite learning and spark curiosity children should be offered purposeful and authentic learning which will enable them to make connections and learn transferrable skills. Hughes (2012) argues that adult-free play for children is essential for their growth and well-being, he also suggests that exploratory play helps to build confidence in children by allowing them to investigate the spaces around them. Play theorists such as Piaget (1936) believed that children must be able to explore and should be able to experiment with objects around them to build on their cognitive development. Piaget often referred to children as 'Lone scientists'. However, although Vygotsky's (1962) theory agreed with Piaget, he believed that this type of play also helped children's cultural and social development. The NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (2017) believe that children can be encouraged to engage in more complexed types of explorative play, by adults providing the opportunities to engage in activities such as messy play, noisy play, visual and energetic play. Play is a way for children to build meaning and construct their understanding of the world they live in, therefor adults should ensure that when creating an enriched environment, the experiences that are offered should promote purposeful and authentic learning (Macdonald, 2022, p.4). According to The Early years foundation stage (2007) exploratory play is a holistic style of play as it not only promotes brain development, but it builds confidence and allows children to explore and act out their fears within their play, helping to problem solve and build resilience whilst feeling supported and protected. Chu and Schulz (2020) believe that even when babies play and explore with toys such as rattles for the first time, this helps support their holistic development as holding the rattle can help fine motor skills, Shaking the rattle promotes their health and fitness and the sound and sight of watching this activity can amuse those around the baby, strengthening social bonds with others. Eisenmann and Hadani (N.D) suggest that when children can explore it leads to free flow play, which is when the play is self-directed, and the child is fully emersed in the play and is not easily distracted.

Recapitulative play is often linked to evolutionary types of behaviours. This type of play is usually seen outdoors when children are seen building nests and dens and linking to symbolic play when natural resources such as sticks are used as weapons or wands (Rees, 2022, p34). According to Play Scotland (2023) children can explore their history and ancestry with this type of play, often learning through rhymes and stories. When children engage in recapitulative play they begin to recap on evolutionary history and therefor subconsciously, children begin to link certain behaviours with survival. Practitioners will likely witness behaviours of humans did in ancient history (Play Wales, 2017).

(Source: Play Scotland, 2023)

Somerset council (N.D) suggest that recapitulative play is linked to the six areas of learning in the 2012 revised EYFS. They suggest that like explorative play, recapitulative play supports holistic learning as it is linked to physical development, mathematics, literacy and understanding of the world. Practitioners can support recapitulative play by allowing children to cook, build shelters, play fight and playing with the elements such as water and mud kitchens. Tinney (2022, p.111) believes that when children are taking part in recapitulative play such as den building, they are beginning to form social bonds as they negotiate, support, and cooperate with their peers. She believes that when children have engaged and supportive adults, children are encouraged to use extensive vocabulary that is mainly only associated with the outdoors. Words which are not commonly used by children that have now removed from dictionaries are finding their way back to regular vocabulary with the help from being in the outdoors and engaging in such rich recapitulative play. Lee, Carr, Soutar, and Mitchell (2012) believe in curriculums such as The Te Whāriki approach which originates from New Zealand, where children are taught through a curriculum which is enriched with recapitulative play, helping children learn and understand their culture, helping them to feel a sense of belonging to their wider community. They believe that their children are healthy in mind, body and spirit and develop into confident and competent communicators.

Section 2

Why is it important for children to choose their own play and the importance of the role of the adult in children's play?

According to Rymanowicz (2015) when children lose the right to choose their play and when the freedom of exploring openly is taken away, the experience of what they are learning loses meaning to them. When children have choice in what they would like to play, they are encouraged to be more independent and creative. Free play and choice allow children to express their own unique way of thinking which can help them to later develop crucial problem-solving skills (Zaman and Khanom, N.D). The Welsh Government Play Policy (2002) believe that play is something that should be chose freely by children, and that there should be no end goal as free play is part of a child's healthy development. The UNCRC (2017) suggest that very child has a right to play and rest. In a spotlight report for article 31 of the UNCRC's rights of the child, the children's commissioner for Wales (2018) believes that all children, regardless of race, ethnicity or background should all have equal opportunities for healthy development and should all be aware and understand their rights. Howard and McInnes (2012) believe that when children view an activity as play rather that learning, signs of emotional well-being are more apparent. They argue that when learning is 'play-like' when an adult stands back from play and allows the child to have the choice to engage, signals such as: reaction, satisfaction, language, and creativity become increasingly heightened, as opposed to a child's signals when 'not play-like' activities are planned, where an adult is present, and a child is asked to join in. Else (2014) suggests that choice of play is crucial for a child's creativity, especially in the early years. Self-chosen play can help children develop a sense of curiosity and a drive to question everything and to discover newness. This can help see learning in a new and exciting way whilst bringing them pleasure. If children spend too long in adult-led activities and sports with no choice of their own play can disconnect them from a natural form of learning. Self-led play can play a key role in fostering curiosity and imagination. By spending less time in adult-led play and more time in self-led play children's engagement and length of concentration in learning

will flourish. In line with article 3 and 12 of the UNCRC's (2017) rights of the child, all adults must hold the child's best interests at heart whilst always respecting their views, wishes and meanings and allowing them to express these. According to Early years matters (2023) adults' role is crucial to ongoing, uninterrupted learning is taking place. Adults must ensure that there is plenty of time and space for children to play freely. This also includes having plenty of age-appropriate resources that are accessible to them. Adults must value play and have the training and experience to create enriched environments that promote challenge and support development and extended learning. Mcinnes (2010, p.122) believes that pedagogy in early years settings can come in many shapes, from practiced based free play to formal types of programmes, however she suggests that studies argue that pedagogy is lacking in direct engagement due to practitioners being more focused on behaviours of the children rather than their own practice. According to Education Wales (2022) adults play an integral role in the development of children and early learning. They believe that if adults create emotionally safe environments and make strong bonds and connections with children then this can help children feel more confident and build a strong sense of belonging in their surroundings. Reggio Emilia Approach (2022) suggests that the environment in which children learn should mimic a home and be in constant dialogue with children, which offer a sense of belonging and familiarity. The Welsh Government's statutory guidance 'Wales- a play friendly country' policy (2014) believes that all children no matter their background should have the opportunity for play, which agrees with Article 15 of the UNCRC's (2017) freedom of association, therefor local authorities should offer children the choice to meet and play together if that is their wish. However, the Welsh Government do recognise that there are many barriers to this such as: disabilities and environments factors, so Local Authorities must provide inclusive and accessible opportunities to play, opportunities for bilingual play and play opportunities which are appropriate for diverse cultures and isolated communities.

(Source: UNCRC, 2017)

<u>In depth discussion and understanding of observation methods for young children.</u>
The foundation phase profile was created in 2015 by the Welsh Government as a tool to support national assessment for children in Meithrin and Derbyn. This tool was created to assess children's abilities and track their development in their mathematical and physical development, personal and social development, and their communication skills (Welsh Government, N.D). According to the department of education (2021) the main purpose of this assessment is so that children are supported and have a smoother transition when moving from EYFS into year 1. Evans (2015) suggests that for successful assessment with the Foundation phase

profile it is crucial that teachers and practitioners must be skilful and experienced in making judgment on a national level. He also believes that teachers should not use the guidance as a tick list for children to achieve a desired outcome.
The Welsh Government (2022) when carrying out research into assessing practices, discovered that practitioners seemed content overall with the ease of this observation tool, they believed that these assessments were mainly carried out through day to day observations, however practitioners did feel that assessing particular skills requires planning and preparing and not done through play, and due to this older children in the foundation phase felt they were being pressured into completing adult-led tasks. PACEY (2017) suggests that by assessing children through using The Foundation Phase Profile practitioners are able to gain a greater understanding of each child's developmental stages, allowing them to plan and carry out more enriched, encompassed activities to suite the child's needs. The foundation phase profile has been purposefully set up in order to create a holistic profile for each child's personal abilities and development in different areas of learning (National day Nurseries association, 2021). Smidt (2015) however believes that there are too many judgements being made on children as young as 2 years of age, causing pressure on the children and the teachers. She believes that by becoming obsessed with ticking boxes and assessing for goals and outcomes, the quality of children's education will suffer as teachers and practitioners become more focused on teaching for desired outcomes rather than teaching a child's needs or interests.
A running record is tool is a detailed written record that is being filled in whilst the event is taking place. This type of observation often takes place over a short period of time, no longer than 10 minutes usually. The practitioner must write down the things the child being observed says or does within a specific activity. This form of observation record must only be used to record developmental domains and not behaviour or perception of what is happening (Red Rocks community college, 2023) The Government of South Australia (2021) believes that by using running records, teachers and practitioners are able to make informed decisions to suit each individual child's needs, and they will also be able to determine what methods children use to problem solve. According to Peterson and Elam (2019), Running records are one of the oldest methods of observation. They suggest that when compared to methods such as 'specimen records' or 'narrative descriptions' Running records are seen as informal methods of data collecting. Running records are spontaneous ways of observation that require little planning beforehand. Gillett and Pierson-Ellingson (2017) suggests that reading records are one of the most informative and effective forms of methods that teachers and practitioners can adopt to help them obtain data for each child. Maria Clay the founder of the running records in 2002 initially for readers to gain one-to-one support and to allow practitioners to group children according to their similar abilities. Western Governors University (2020) believe that when children are in smaller groups, they will begin to learn by observing the other children. They believe that Bandura's social learning theory (1977) plays a large role in how children learn. When using the running records practitioners are able to give instructive feedback to children and use cooperative dialogue, which Vygotsky believed was a crucial stage of a child's learning process. Blaiklock (2003) argues running records do not always show accurate outcomes for activities such as reading, children may be able to read a book or a piece of text fluently, therefor their observation of reading would be high, however these children may not understand the context of what they have just read. According to Education Wales (2022) observation may often be spontaneous when

something significant and new arises, therefor running records are more suitable methods of observations as Peterson and Elam (2019) describe them as needing little planning and spontaneous ways to observe children.

Section 4

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

Observing and assessing children through play allows practitioners to gain a picture of the child holistically. Observation through play allows practitioners to get to know the children within their settings by seeing what activity they independently choose (West Sussex County Council, 2015). Bruce, Louis and McCall (2015) suggest that practitioners may find attuning into children (under the age of two's) development can often be challenging as they are not at the developmental stage yet to be able to express their wants and needs verbally, therefor play can assist practitioners in witnessing what children are doing through things such as schemas. Schemas illuminate the observations of children whilst they are learning through play. According to Barber and Paul-Smith (2010) observation should be seen as an opportunity to discover and explore children, not a chore. They believe that in order to understand what to look out for when nurturing a child's development, practitioners must first understand what to look for when observing them. When children have the opportunity to be assessed through play, they are able to assist practitioners in providing appropriate activities, resources and experiences. McInnes and Howard (2013) believe that practitioners are able to come to more accurate judgements regarding behaviour and development when observing through play. They also suggest that when children are observed in self-led play, practitioners are able to witness them exhibiting their highest levels of engagement and functioning to the best of their natural ability. The Welsh government (2022) believe that when assessing and observing children, practitioners should avoid using it as a tick list. They believe it is a continuous practice that is manageable and purposeful for the children. When assessing through play it becomes clear if children require extra support or more of a challenge to progress learning. When observing through play, practitioners are able to to obtain a holistic summary of the children and can help practitioners draw attention to children's well-being and connections as well as areas of skills and knowledge (Birth to 5 matters, N.D). The Victoria state government (2019) believe that teachers and practitioners are able to gain more information on how children are able to understand the world they live in and how they are able to socially interact with their peers, when play- based assessment is taking place. West Sussex County Council (2015) suggest that practitioners may find it beneficial to observe children regularly and throughout different times of the day, as decisions and judgements should not be made after observing the children just once. They also suggest that by observing and assessing over longer period of time, practitioners are able to plan and create enriched activities and environments that will help develop children holistically. McInnes, Howard, Miles and Crowley (2013) believe that practitioners having a strong understanding of learning, play, attachments and the role they have in facilitating play, can be beneficial to children's development. It is often suggested that adults should take on the opinions of the children and look at play from the child's perception. They suggest that practitioners should be encouraged to use minimal open-ended questions rather than asking closed questions and instructing them what to do. Tinney (2022) believes that

practitioners can support observation through play by encouraging longer, unbroken play time. For example, when children are playing outdoors the practitioner who is observing the play can ensure there are enough natural resources and open-ended materials to support their engagement and imagination. Practitioners can also provide challenge by adjusting play levels and balancing areas in the outdoors whilst observation is taking place. The early years matters (2023) suggest that practitioners can have a better understand what a child likes doing and how they are learning through the experiences on offer within settings and through their play.