

Section one

UNICEF (2018) suggest the word play is used all over the world by individuals from every culture, economic backgrounds and communities, although each person may have a different interpretation of what play is or how children should play. According to UNICEF (2018) play is the most important way which young children can learn, develop new skills while supporting the children's holistic development by helping to make sense of the world. UNICEF (2018) also suggests play opens learning opportunities across all areas to assist in learning critical skills such as motor, cognitive, emotional and social, which can be developed in different types of play. Bottril (2018) believes play should be creative and combining interpretation with reinterpretation that allow the children to take risks and should always be open-ended, which represents infinite.

Imaginative play allows children to create a pretend world that is driven by what the children can imagine and how children see the world, and it boosts cognitive development; helps memory skills and the ability to learn new information and social development; builds relationships with friends and how to regulate emotions (Teach starter,2022).

Early years resources (2016) explains effective imaginative play such as role play can allow children to practise social interaction whilst developing own boundaries and grow children's decision making skills, by sharing ideas on how to play, suggesting what props could be used to ignite the imagination. By creating different characters and scenarios, such as a doctor taking care of a patient, children have the opportunity to explore different vocabulary and language that a child may not use every day and gain a deeper understanding of real life situations and how the world works. Maths can also be incorporated in role play, using real life situations, a shop keeper weighing out fruit or handling money and exchanging items and different shapes can boost gross and fine motor skills . Early years resources (2016) suggests the benefits from imaginative play help develop intellectual development, memory and reasoning skills that may boost children's cognitive development.

Vygotsky cognitive theory suggests that social interactions play a significant role to children's cognitive development, according to Nilsson and Ferholt (2014). Whereas

Piaget's theory differs, as Piaget's believes children's cognitive development is fuelled from within and children move through four learning stages and should take an active role exploring to build upon existing knowledge (Very Well Mind, 2023). Although both theorists acknowledge the importance of curiosity and children having an active involvement in learning (Very Well Mind,2023).

Playing with others creates a sense of belonging as the child is a part of the play, exchanging verbal engagement and cooperating with others learning how to share and building empathy towards others which helps a child's social development (Twinkl,ND).

The word Heuristic translates to a hands on approach to learning by enabling the individual to discover or learn by exploring alone, according to Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (2023).Heuristic play refers to a type of open ended play which creates opportunities to use natural items like measuring spoons, pasta, boxes, pinecones or feathers for example, for children to gather, fill, stack, knock over and explore different ways of handling the object, and has rooted from how naturally curious young children are (Huleatt, 2012).

According to Nursery Resources (2020) the aim is to let children freely play, explore different objects and experiment in a controlled environment were the adult is there to supervise and observe what interests the children and how the objects are used. Huleatt (2012) explains when children discover objects produce a sound when used together, children will repeat the discovery to test the result to see if it differs and question why it happened, or what would happen if a different object is used. The natural curiosity to play and experiment develops reasoning skills, critical thinking which encourages cognitive development as children learn why the objects made a noise . A repeated action can also strengthen a child's fine motor skills by controlling objects and manipulating how the object moves with hand eye coordination (Huleatt, 2012).

According to Nursery Resources (2020) using a mixture of materials that have different textures, weights and shapes can help children to explore and encounter different sensory experiences, which promotes basic mathematical thinking. Oppose to manufactured toys that have limited purposes or a puzzle that has the same end

result. Whereas children using natural resources engaging in heuristic play are able to use the objects differently each time which encourages creativity as there are no rules to follow (Nursery Resources,2020).

Imaginative and Heuristic play support holistic play by allowing children to be independent and taking the lead in the learning activities, encourages working with different and natural materials that can stimulate the senses and raise questions, and as a whole boosts children's natural development. Both plays have similarities to Montessori's approach, that focus on motivating children to learn through creativity and looking at meeting individual needs in all areas to ensure the children thrive (BBC,2023).

Section Two

UNCRC the right to play is enshrined in Welsh law through the rights of children and young persons (Wales Measure 2011). The Foundation Phase for Wales is a play based curriculum which states it is important children learn through play and practitioners should plan for purposeful play that supports holistic development (Welsh Gov, 2017). The curriculum has adopted similarities from international perspectives on play, such as New Zealand's curriculum 'Te Whariki' and Northern Italy curriculum 'Reggio Emilia', which focus on a child's holistic development by promoting the development progress is not the same for every child, therefore self-image and feelings of self-worth are at the core.

Similarly the Welsh Government (2015) highlights the curriculum should have a holistic approach and aim to meet the diverse needs of all children by focusing on the children's present stage, rather than what is believed the children should be able to do at that age. Children will move to the next stage of development when ready according to the Welsh Government (2015), which links to Vygotsky's objection to measuring children's ability through intelligence (Education Technology,2020).

Child-led play and adult-led have different learning objectives, according to Play Scotland (2023). Adult led play is when the adult leads the children in an activity, decides what game to play or what the children should create in the craft corner

using a step by step guide to ensure the children follow the instructions. The children have less independence and removes any chance for the children to be creative and explore, adults may use this type of play when working towards a learning goal or introducing games with rules (Twinkl, no date).

In comparison child-led play is when the child has freedom and decides how to play and engage in activities that intrinsically motivates the child. It is self-directed with no external goal at the end and is a fundamental part needed for healthy development (Play Scotland,2023).

Practitioners should not interrupt self-directed play unless the child invites the adult to join in by using a cue according to Sturrock and Else (1998), it may be a look, waving gesture, gifting the adult with a cup of tea or simply asking the adult to join. Sturrock and Else (1988) explain using cue's is a part of 'The Play Cycle' which helps the adult to decipher when to join or support play.

The adult needs to ensure the children have an enabling environment to engage and excite the children, is the space stimulating? Do the children have access to material that will spark metaludes? The child will initiate the context and decide what to include and where the play should take place, the rules or how the game will pan out. The flow of the play may last hours or a child may choose to change the context or stop, this is 'annihilation' and it is the child's choice states Sturrock and Else (1998). Although most adults feel the need to step in and improve or suggests other ways to play and take control, the adult needs to understand the importance of how the children are developing skills whilst independently playing. The child may temporarily need the adult as a resource or intervene any conflict that may arise (Sturrock and Else,1998).

Howard and McInnes (2013) explain the results of a study that tested children's cues to define play and not play, demonstrated differences with having an adult-led learning activity in oppose to an activity with an adult in close proximity presenting a playful approach to learning in an enabling environment, such as outdoor area instead of a formal setting, being directed by an adult around a table. The children who had choice in a playful practice, completed the task in less time and more accurately. To conclude Howard and McInnes (2013) suggests the results are due to

children being eager and motivated towards task based on play, which demonstrates the importance of understanding play.

Howard and McInnes (2013) explain cue development in a classroom can be identified from children who are in a play focused setting that are less structured, and will approach activities in a playful way. In contrast to children who are in a more structured adult led setting will have a clearer understanding between activities that are play and not play suggests Howard, Bellin and Rees Karrby (1989, cited in Howard and McInnes, 2013, p.123).

Howard and McInnes (2011) state practitioners need a clear understanding of play and what involvement the adult should have, and suggest children should be involved in adult-led and child-led activities where children are listened too and have choice and control. In comparison to the play cycle having a mixture of frames and using children's perception of play may help balance child-led and adult-led activities. Howard and McInnes (2011) suggest research indicates children who approach activities with a playful manner can improve concentration and motivates the children to achieve the learning outcomes.

Section three

The Welsh Government (2017) state The Foundation Phase Profile is a tool designed to support practitioners and teachers across the nation to ensure consistency when assessing children's learning and development. All settings should use the same baseline assessments from six months of age until the end of the Foundation Phase to show the child's strengths and weaknesses in the four areas of learning.

Teachers will start assessing at six weeks into the reception year, although not all children will be the same age, some may have only turned five and may not be as developed as others. Another weakness to point is the child may not feel comfortable in the new environment or with the practitioners to confidently engage. Brodie (2018) claims relationships take time and can be detrimental to development, which questions, is six weeks long enough for the child to feel comfortable? Brooker (2008) similarly suggest it may not be a true reflection if the child is anxious or distressed in new surroundings.

The Welsh Government (2022) found that practitioners reflected positively that most assessments are observation based through play. However, majority of the practitioners need to include smaller step outcomes to show a true reflection of the child's skills, due to the profile representing a tick-box process (Welsh Government, 2022). It could highlight the profile only focuses on certain areas and rather than a holistic view of viewing the child as a whole.

Practitioners stated particular outcomes could not be identified through play, therefore used a planned focused activity to assess, in a less natural environment. This can also be viewed as a negative factor, as it takes time to plan and set up activities (Welsh Gov, 2022).

Howard and McInnes (2012) suggest children's emotional well-being increases when children feel an activity is play rather than a structured activity. Howard and McInnes (2012) suggest observing behaviour while a child is playing can showcase the child's mental state, therefore using structured adult-led activities can be seen as a threat on the child's emotional well-being. Howard and McInnes (2012) state when an activity is play based, children will be deeply engaged and focused due to the child having freedom to enjoy the activity. In contrast, Howard and McInnes (2012) state children in an adult-led activity tend to become distracted, less engaged and overall very tense. The children may feel the sooner the task is finished then the children can go play, which could mean the results are rushed and not an accurate reflection.

The handbook explains information can be transferred to the next setting to support transitions (Welsh Government, 2017). As the profile should be consistently used across all the settings and school, the next practitioner will be familiar with how the profile works and can use the outcomes to know the child's abilities and continue to help the child thrive. However, it can only be considered a strength if all the practitioners who are observing and assessing receive the same level of training, a practitioner from one setting may have different views than the next practitioner on how to assess and what is considered a pass. Another weakness to point the revised framework does not include what level the practitioner needs to be to be able to use this observation tool (Welsh Government, 2017).

The Welsh Government (2017) suggest using the profile could identify children who have a delay in development, special education needs or addition learning needs, therefore benefit from early intervention. The Welsh Government (2022) point although it can be used as a tracking guide, identifying learning difficulties is not clear in the statements within the Profile.

The Welsh Government (2015) reveals the objective is for a rounded conclusion to know how the child performs across the varied areas, and highlights the child's strengths and weaknesses and then matched to the closest outcome. In addition, the Welsh Government (2017) believes by observing and assessing all areas of learning and looking at a child's development as a whole, will help practitioners to provide a holistic curriculum.

However, the Welsh Gov (2022) explain the majority of schools questioned the one off personalised assessment results, as many practitioners found the results to be inconsistent for certain children, is it a true reflection of what the learner can do? Or has the learner achieved the outcome by chance? Although, the results could be useful to identify skills that need encouragement when looking at the whole class, therefore helps the teacher to plan future activities to support the children's development.

As the new curriculum state it is vital that practitioners and the child's caregivers build a strong relationship to work together to support the child's development, which has similarities to Bronfenbrenner ecological system, according to Hayes, O'Toole and Halpenny (2017). Only a minority of schools passed the baseline outcomes to parents through an end of year report or shared the information through parents' evenings (Welsh Gov, 2022).

Section four

According to Howards and McInnes (2012) research paper, when a child engages in an activity as play, the child demonstrates an increase in behavioural factors relating to greater emotional well-being. Howards and McInnes (2012) state children appear more relaxed, engaged, natural, joyful and eager to take part in the 'like play' activity. The research demonstrated an experiment where two groups of children were given the same activity and aims, only the environment differed. The experiment found the

children who had taken part in the 'like play' set up compared to the 'not like play' appeared motivated to complete the task.

Howard and McInnes (2012) explain the results from the activity showed the children who enjoyed the task as play performed at a higher level and gained more from the experience compared to those who viewed the activity as adult-led (Thomas et al 2006; McInnes et al 2009 cited in Howard and McInnes, 2012,p.39). The findings from the study show to gain a true indication of a child's ability the practitioner should observe the child in play for a more accurate reflection.

Play is the language of a child according to Landreth (2002), as it allows a child to communicate and express emotion without speaking.

According to Gaikwad, Lalitha and Seshadri (2015) children who may be dealing with emotional disturbances or those who have encountered a traumatic experience and struggle to communicate verbally and express thoughts may need extra support from a therapist. There are different types of play therapy, such as play therapists, music therapists and sand therapy which use different resource, for example puppets and dolls to engage in imaginative play to help the child use a different form of communication, that supports Landreth (2002) view.

Gaikwad, Lalitha and Seshadri (2015) state trained play therapists recognise the power of play and will use play to observe and assess the behaviour of a child to gain an understanding of where the children is emotionally. Gaikwad, Lalitha and Seshadri (2015) suggest play therapy is a tool that is used to help children overcome traumatic experiences to prevent behavioural issues or mental health problems that can have a detrimental impact on a child's development (Ptuk, no date).

Howard and McInnes (2011) state practitioners need to have a greater understanding of play and why play is key for children's development and well-being and believe practitioners need to combine play and learning together. Howard and McInnes (2011) suggest it is not only beneficial to a child's learning development, it contributes to all other areas of development a child needs to thrive.

The environment should be enabling, exciting and offer a wide selection of resources that the children can choose freely, indoor or outdoor, with fun refreshed activities

that support interests and development is important according to Pacey (2023). Furthermore Pacey (2023) suggest children should have a safe space to explore and be involved in selecting the resources to ensure the children are interested in.

In agreement with Pacey (2023), Howard and McInnes (2011) believe to be successful in creating an enabling environment to learn and play, practitioners should create spaces and tasks using a child's perception of play and also allowing the child to have input to show what interest the child to ensure the environment is engaging and stimulating. Similarly the Foundation Phase handbook agrees that practitioners should encourage children to share thoughts and how the children felt during activities, which can prompt the children to reflect on own abilities, the feedback can be used for planning future provisions (Welsh Gov, 2015).

Similarly, Play Wales (2023) state in 'The Playwork Principles' practitioners should work alongside the children in the setting in order to create an enabling environment, the spaces should showcase what the children are interested in which will support imagination and engagement in play. Play Wales (2023) explain the 'Play Sufficiency Duty' has been introduced in Wales to provide secure sufficient play opportunities for all children, as the government recognise how fundamental it is for children to be able to play and how it supports the children's learning and well-being development. The aim is to ensure all children regardless of economic, social and cultural backgrounds experience play opportunities to support development (Play Wales, 2023).

According to the Foundation Phase handbook, the practitioner should plan engaging activities using the indoor and outdoor environment when observing and assessing, due to children behaving and learning differently in an outdoor environment (Welsh Gov, 2015).The practitioner should use the results from the observations when planning provisions to ensure the activities are appropriate to the children's abilities whilst including skills that need more time to master to support the children's learning journey. To conclude, practitioners can use the information obtained from observing and assessing through play to establish where each child is at and add extra steps to focus on the individuals skills and goals (Welsh Gov, 2015).

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