

Children's Play: Practice and Principles

Section 1

Article 31 of the UNCRC states all children have the right to engage in play.

According to Henrick (2015, p19) play is said to be ambiguous and is not the same each time. This means, play does not have one meaning or definition, there are vast interpretations of play as it is unique to each individual. Play can be anything a child wants it to be, it could be sensory, messy and creative, it can be children using their imagination. Play is powerful, it teaches children social skills and many other skills and attributes such as independence, how to be self-motivated and confident (Janet Moyels, 2013). When it comes to play there are different types such as role play and adventurous play. Adventurous play, also known as deep play or risky play has many important benefits for children. According to Lavrysen, A *et al* (2017) children have the natural instinct to seek and test their boundaries. Risky play is a necessary type of play as it allows children the opportunity to develop their risk taking skills and how to cope in risky situations (lavrysen, 2015, pp.3). According to Play Wales, Play Types (2017) play allows children experiences. These experiences support children in overcoming any mental, physical or emotional challenges. Deep play can serve a bigger purpose for children. This type of play allows children to feel alive, they can feel the thrill of conquering their fears. Taking risks enables children the opportunities to learn how to trust themselves and to know their limits. For example, climbing a tree. A child will know themselves when it's high enough. Each time they are exposed and allowed to climb a tree they may push themselves that little bit further each time. This form of play is difficult for practitioners to support in practice as they have a legal duty of care to keep children safe. However, children should not be discouraged from taking part in risky play, it needs to be available for them to access to a certain degree in a childcare setting. Meaning, children are able to access risky play, that still allows them to develop their skills but they are also safe from harm. The role of the adult in risky play is to provide children with the opportunities to have risky play

Role play is a type of play which allows children the freedom to use their imagination and creativity in their play. The benefits of roleplay on children are it allows them to act out real life events they may have come across, to help them make sense of situations. Children are able to develop their social skills, communication and language through role play and they are also able to grow in confidence by acting out their ideas, thoughts and their feelings (Play Scheme, no date). According to Hidayati and Paradjono (2018) a research study has found role play to have been successful and shown to be beneficial towards the learning process in universities. Role play has had a positive effect on students as it has allowed them to get a deeper understanding of a topic or issue, therefore has stimulated further interest in the topic or issue. The role of the adult in children's role play is to sometimes participate. By participating in role play with children adults are able to provide children with communication opportunities where they can express themselves, their feelings and they can also develop their language skills (British Council, no date).

Section 2

There are many theorists who talk about the importance of play and a child's development. Vygotsky believed that play for children created a zone of proximal development. Meaning, through play a child is able to do more than one would be able to in everyday life and activities. He also looked into the cognitive development and importance of it in a child's play. This is children being able to separate objects from real life and use them in their imagination to become other objects. For example, the object being a stick. A child could then take this item and perceive it to be a horse or a magic wand. This explains how children are able to conceptualise objects and use their imagination to turn them into something else (Smith, 2009, p.33).

Sukenik (2021) states self-directed play is when play is freely chosen and without adult interference. Through self-directed play children are able to overcome any obstacles they may face, they are able to communicate their feelings and develop their problem solving skills. Self-directed play provides children with experiences of joy, self-discovery and opportunities to find innovative and imaginative ways to think about the world around them, how it works all based on their own interests of play (Juster, 2015). When children have self-directed play they are choosing something that engages them and captures their interest.

The role of the adult varies in children's play. Their role is to provide children with opportunities to learn and explore their environment, providing them with activities that challenge and stimulate them. Some other possible roles of an adult in children's play include supporting children in their play. Practitioners can do this by using the play cycle theory. The play cycle is used for practitioners to observe and understand children's play and their behaviours. The play cycle starts with the metaludes, this is the starting point for children's play, the contemplation. This is where practitioners ensure the environment is stimulating for the child with objects or images that will intrigue and start the metalude process. The next stage in the play cycle is cues. It is important for practitioners to know and understand children's cues. The cues are the invite children give to a person. These play cues could be a look, a gesture, children can hand lead an adult to join them, it could be a verbal invitation. Following

the cues is return. The return is the response from the child, the adult or environment. It is important to remember returns do not have to be a two way process, it could be one way with the child or environment. Frames of the play cycle are initiated by the child. This is where the child provides context to their play, the child's play can be changed organically. When there is a response to frame and returns then there is a flow, the flow can last between a few seconds to a few weeks. The next stage in the play cycle is annihilation, this is where the child decides when to end an activity and to move on to the next. It is important for practitioners to realise when they have committed adulteration. Adulteration is when practitioners break the play cycle, they join in when children might not want them to and disrupt their play. Adults can change a child's play by taking control to improve it. Play should develop naturally (the play cycle,)

According to King, P (1970) the role of the adult involves observing and reflecting on children's play, acting as a resource for the children and responding to them when they have invited an adult into their play.

Section 3

The leuven scale is for practitioners and child care experts to measure children's emotional well-being. The scale is separated into five points, the first point being the lowest known as extremely low level of emotional well-being and point five being the highest, known as extremely high level of emotional well-being. The leuven scale is used to see where a child or young person may place in terms of their emotional-well being and involvement. If a child's outcome from the leuven scale is low then it is likely their development will be threatened. Children who are having the outcome of higher levels of emotional well-being and involvement show practitioners the children have a deep level of learning (Learning Journals, 2022).

Professor dr. Ferre Laevers explains in a video (Early Education, 2017) when children have a good level of well-being they can feel at ease and they are able to enjoy life and enjoy the moment. If children have secure well-being their development for personal, social and emotional development is going well. He also explains involvement is about the children's concentration, how an activity or task can take a child's total focus and motivate them. Involvement is possible when there is a certain level of mesh between the environment around the child and their capabilities. Children are not able to grow and develop if a task or activity is too easy or too difficult. This meaning involvement is successful and will have a higher outcome when the children are presented with opportunities that are at their level but still presents them with enough of a challenge to keep them stimulated, however too challenging that it will discourage them not to do something because they feel they are unable to therefor not have any interest. Similarly if something was too easy for children it will not be stimulating enough for them and not fully grasp their attention. Therefore their outcome for involvement may be lower.

The observation process starts with practitioners assessing children's levels of well-being and involvement by observing them either in groups or individually. Observations last for two minutes before practitioners give children a score between one and five for their well-being and involvement. If children receive the score of four

or under then they will be limited in their learning. Practitioners should respond to children who receive low scores in well-being or involvement sensitively. These low levels can become learning opportunities which can lead to these children receiving a higher score the next time they are observed. The first observation is important as it is the starting point which can be later used for reflection on the quality of the provision and how practitioners can support children (Northumberland County Council, 2017). It is important practitioners take into consideration children's level outcomes may vary as they will not be consistent and perform at levels four to five at all times. Their levels will fluctuate throughout the day (Milton Keynes Council, 2020). According to Laevers *et al* (2005) the level score outcomes may be lower in involvement if it is a child's first day in a new setting, a new environment. Therefore these children may receive a lower score because they are settling in and still exploring the room. Children may receive a low level for well-being if there is a new adult present. This is because children need time to get used to the new person in their environment.

The positive factors about the Leuven scale are, it is an observation based assessment where children are at the centre and in control of their own learning. Children are self-directed in their learning and play meaning, practitioners can observe the children when they feel most at ease and will show a true representation of themselves as it is something they have not been asked to do. Another positive is because the Leuven scale is child centre practitioners are able to determine what activities a child enjoys and what engages them the most to challenge them and further their learning and development. The negatives about the Leuven scale is it does not take into consideration those with additional learning needs in the forms. It would be the practitioners responsibility to take into account the child's individual needs upon review and analysis (Learning Journals, 2022). Depending on the individual child and their needs, practitioners may find they have a child who consistently scores below a four in involvement due to the fact they can't stay focused on one task for long.

Section 4

According to Early Years Matters (2022) observations are vital for children and their development. They state observations provide practitioners with reliable information about a child's interests, what they choose to do and what resources they use and enjoy playing with. The Foundation Phase (2008) also states practitioners can gather information by observing a child while they are doing an activity. They are able to see what the children know, what they understand, the skills they are developing and what they are able to do whilst also finding out the children's personal preferences. Observations provide practitioners with the information needed to see whether a child needs any additional support. The additional support does not just need to be academically but also help with a child's personal, social and emotional well-being.

Play therapy can support children with their personal, social and emotional well-being. According to PlayTherapy United Kingdom (2021) play therapy is now widely being recognised as beneficial for helping children with their development. Counselling directory (2022) talks about how play therapy allows children the opportunity to explore and express themselves freely in a safe space with the support of a play therapist who can help children to build on their resilience and confidence.

There are many benefits of play therapy for children such as reducing stress and anxiety, learning to express their emotions and learning to trust themselves and others. When they have learnt how to trust themselves and others they can build relationships (Counselling Directory, 2022). Other benefits include developing problem solving skills, they learn social skills and they can release excess energy (White Swan Foundation, 2015). Association for Play Therapy (no date) says play therapy helps children become more responsible for their behaviours and develop strategies. This means they learn self control, coping mechanisms and how to self regulate.

A form of play therapy is dance and movement psychotherapy. This therapy is an empathic creative process which allows children to use their body movement and dance to communicate (ADMP,2021). According to Essentials of Dance Movement (2017, p.4) dance therapy helps increase self-esteem and self-awareness.

Play has an important role when practitioners are performing observations and assessment on children. When children are observed during play practitioners are able to get a more realistic and true reflection of a child, what they are like and their capabilities. As opposed to observing as assessing a child through an adult-led activity. Some adult-led activities may not interest and engage a child enough to show a true reflection on their abilities.

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