

LEARNING AND PLAYING TOGETHER

Let us be
'School ready'
and be ready for play every day!



Source: MomJunction

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PLAY
...
UNDERSTAND WHY YOU DO WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR CHILD
...
KNOW THE BENEFITS OF PLAYTIME
...
BUILD CONFIDENCE WITH YOUR CHILD
...
SIMPLE FUN PLAY ACTIVITIES TOWARDS BEING SCHOOL READY

Download the **POWER OF PLAY** app



**Here you will find tips, advice, ideas
further links and videos
Option to tailor to your child needs and what suits you and your child**



Source: Bigjigtoys.com

‘School ready’ – What does that really mean?

It does not mean reading and writing or knowing letters or numbers. It is about building your child's confidence, curiosity and independence whilst developing strong parent-child relationships. Playing together with your child will build your baby's brain for growing and learning.

The aim of this definition is to provide parents and carers with the information of what this means to them and their child.

This plan is a guide on how the ‘Power of play’ app can guide and support you through building foundational blocks together, that allow your baby or child thrive each day through each playful moment!

About the app

Play ideas and activities written and designed by experienced Early years professionals to help parents/carer's to play with their child and learn new ideas that will enhance their child's development. Providing easy and fun activities families can do together at home.

This is a software application tool that will support and assist parents and carer's in knowing how they can give their children the best possible start towards their journey into school life. The focus of the app will be on school readiness, but in an attempt to breakdown what parents think this means. It will ensure that they understand that during the early years, providing opportunities for learning can become part of everyday routines that help to empower families in becoming their child's first teacher and know how they can do this and the reasons why. School readiness starts from birth with the first two years for any child being particularly important. The home learning environment influences greatly on children's development, what parents and caregivers do can be supportive of their child's learning in the early years and beyond (Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons, *et al.* 2008). Not all families have eligibility to free childcare or they may miss out on childcare opportunities due to income. This app can be beneficial for these families where they can access ideas and advice at their fingertips. In addition, the app can also act as a good signpost for parents to refer back to for support and offer advice in general no matter what their circumstance. Furthermore, where referrals are in place for early intervention the app can be used as a guide until the support can start. This does not act as an instead of or in place of but could act as a support system for parents whilst they wait for input. As long waiting lists for extra intervention unfortunately are very common. Especially for these families this app can be useful in these instances.

On entering the app it will include sections with age ranges for parents to click on to begin. The app will then automatically have a range of play ideas for the age of the child, including options for parents to choose a focus – for example speech and language advice.

On the section, parents will see videos of modelling adults with demonstrations of play activities

The focus will be ideas on Play for children aged 0-5 years with items that do not have to be costly including:

Different sections that give ideas and tips on indoor and outdoor activities –

These ideas can include everyday items around the house

For example - kitchen utensils for music making, plastic cups for emptying and filling with water or dried pasta and rice - building or rolling with them etc.

Cardboard boxes that can be used to bring endless amounts of fun no matter what its size!

Reading and singing songs will be incorporated into what they do every day

Pop up reminders of how adults should allow the child to lead the play and show a caption next to each idea the reasons why engaging in these, play activities are beneficial to their child and how it is promoting their development.

Parents can be made aware of the app during pregnancy where they can download it free in preparation for their baby. During routine contacts with the family health visitor, the app can be spoken about and encouraged to be used that can support parents to create learning environments straight away. This can build on parent's confidence that I want for parents to stay connected with their child between home visits and not be left without support. Parents often feel pressured to prepare their child for their future in school, feeling high expectations when this is not necessary.

The Lego foundation, (2024) suggest that caring playful approaches is what is needed for their child to thrive into their future.

Benefits to early year's development

The idea of the Power of Play app is to support parents with how they can support their child's development through play. Evidence tells us that children learn best through play; however, this can be difficult for some parents for various reasons such as lack of knowledge and the time. I want the app to offer play ideas that take the burden off parents finding ideas themselves, including offering the advice on how the activities are enhancing their child's development. If parents have the knowledge and guidance about how play can support their child's learning, this will help prepare children for school. Notably, when children have the support from parents and carers they will acquire strong social and emotional skills, which are needed for children's school readiness. (Children's journal of child health, 2020). A key public health concern has been identified that is school readiness, and this is strongly linked to children's home environment before they enter school (Bandyopadhyay, *et al*, 2023). One of the risk factors found in this study was poor parental knowledge. The power of play app can give the advice and ideas to parents that will be easy for them to use on a daily basis. Evidence shows that parents want to access any support available to them that is easy to use, that can help them support their child's development. Investment into the early years will have a positive effect for long-term benefits. Such investments that equip parents and caregivers with the tools to support early childhood development provide higher returns that give important skills throughout a lifetime and future generations.

Possible barriers and challenges

The funding I will ask from local government as there is need to promote play in children's learning that can offer long term benefits to children's lives. However, this could act as a barrier if funding is declined. Professional association for childcare and early years, (2013) advises that promoting play for school readiness should come from the government and how working closely with early year's professionals can promote emphasis on how important play is. Investment from local government may require working in partnerships with an app builder company that would require additional high costs. Investors could argue that parents may prefer a more face to face approach for support rather than a digital version and would the money be well spent this way. Furthermore, Senedd, (2024) announced huge cuts in funding which means Wales will miss out on extra funds. Additionally, there are a huge amount of mobile apps on the market and choosing the right development is crucial for the app to stand out amongst the potential competition. Netguru, (2023) states this could be one of the biggest challenges. Ensuring the app is easy to use for the user to continue to use it, so they do not go elsewhere. The management on the upkeep of the app may also create extra costs if not developed well in its early stages and keeping on top of any technology issues that may arise. Questions may need to be answered where and who will be in charge of this at the start of planning.

Why I am in the best position to create this idea.

I have worked within the childcare field for 20 years and have a wealth of experience in child development. For the past 10 years, I have worked as a community nursery nurse within the flying start health visiting team where I visit families in their homes seeing new-born babies to children aged 5 years. One of the main issues I come across is that a large proportion of the families do not know how to engage with their child or how to play with their child or understand how play is a fundamental part of their child's learning throughout the early years, which starts before they enter school. My roles requires that I offer advice and support where there is need. Signposting parents to this app may give them the incentive and understanding of ways to play with their child. I feel I am best placed to encourage parents to use this app as a good recommendation with correct and up to date information.

Part 2

It is generally considered that early year's professionals view school readiness very differently to that often outlined by the policy makers. In fact, there is still a lot of justification on the existence of play in children's cognitive, social and physical development (Moyle, 2010, P. 3). Early years practitioners believe that starting to read and write are not the most important aspect for children to be school ready, but that confidence, curiosity and independence are what support children better when entering school. Moreover, an emphasis on play is needed, by recognising this, it is supporting children's social and emotional development (The professional association for childcare and early years, 2013). A more recent research study highlighted how many children start school without such independence and confidence due to lack of parental knowledge such as spending the time interacting with playing, singing and reading to their child. All of which are associated with school readiness and are all important factors (Bandyopadhyay et al, 2023). Indeed, the British journal of child health, (2020) maintain that with the support from parents and carers, school readiness starts from birth with the first two years for any child being particularly important. The home learning environment influences greatly on a children's development, what parents and caregivers do can be supportive of their child's learning in the early years and beyond (Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons, et al. (2008). Rather, it is needed to teach parents how to open their eyes in assisting their child on the school journey ahead of them and to help them understand their own role in providing these early years in a fun and fulfilling way that will shape and impact their children's lives (Bottrill, 2018, p.124). It was the beliefs of psychologist Bronfenbrenner that the environment children grow up in impacts their development, which is directly influenced by home and family. Adults that are closest to the

child should ensure a supportive, loving setting that promotes best interests and empowers children as they become aware of how valued and listened to they are (Bradbury and Swailes, 2022, p.124). However, when parents do not fully understand this or have trouble engaging with their children for various reasons there should be strategies in place to support and help them be the best version of themselves for their child. Research shows how fundamental parent-child relationships that are strong, create healthy attachments that have a positive effect on children's eagerness to learn (OECD, 2015). There is also evidence to show that family engagement with early childhood education and care outside of the settings is just as important to helping parents and families from the community around them (Weiss, Caspe and Lopez, 2008). In addition, parents will usually gain more confidence and motivation from family or friends and other services available to them in the community. As a result of this, all parents that gain further confidence, support and advice from services that are introduced to them, this can help them improve how they play, engage and relate with their child that continue to help children flourish throughout their lives (Asmussen, Feinstein, Martin and Chowdry, 2016). According to the Early intervention foundation, Best start at home report (2015) it identified that 98% of parents agreed that social and emotional skills were more important than literacy and numeracy skills and that support for parents to enhance these skills were seen as crucial during the period of children's development between ages of 0-5 years. The report also found that parents who sought help to access information in this area explained it was not always easy and that the first point for guidance was with their Health visitor followed closely by family and then friends. This also, included online resources being highly used for assistance. Although it is good news that there is relevant information available, and parents are aware on where they can access it. This report highlights there is still more that can be done to help (Early intervention foundation, 2015). With this understanding, it informs Early years practitioners to take on the lead and look for improvements that can be made in this area to support families, whilst focusing the attention on these aspects to find other ways that could make it easier for parents to access support. Anything that can benefit children's outcomes by supporting families is positive. Simpson, (2021) explains that there is not always enough investment going into the early year's sector to assist parental knowledge, furthermore, any funding is not enough and does not appear to match what is needed. O'Sullivan, (2015) agrees that effective parenting makes a crucial influence on children's achievements, if the early years sector can take on a task that support parents to enable them to be involved with their children's learning with supportive funding, then it can make a positive impact. However, parents have expressed how they would like to

be involved more but when they look for support and advice it is not always the relevant information and not always useful. According to Hadfield, Jopling and Needham (2015) more research found that leaders within the early years could identify when extra support is needed and are best placed to improve provision for families and children. However, individual beliefs on what early years leaders can do to make improvements and make changes can act as barriers. Additionally, closely linked to the extent in which they can make changes with the support from colleagues that build a collective commitment and understanding of the aims and goals wished to achieve. Also, Ladge, Edleston and Sugiyama, (2019) identified that women in leadership roles tend to downshift any ambitions aimed for, which can be referred to as the Imposter phenomenon that refers to individual's self-doubts and abilities (Clance, Dingham, Reviere and Stober, 1995). Which consequently can lead them to being very careful to avoid possible failures rather than thinking of the possible success. As a result, an early year's leader could pitch the idea of a software application tool that could offer this advice and support for play ideas that parents are looking for. It would be easy to access and simple to use. Consequently, such an attempt to develop an innovative idea, which provides the correct up to date information from highly skilled experienced practitioners, can be seen as a challenge worth attempting in the view of an early year's leader. Hadfield, Jopling and Needham (2015) explain that to develop a new innovative idea and overcome these challenges. Becoming an entrepreneurial leader involves mentoring and supporting colleagues who can support and help influence the idea that can establish a shared understanding. Indeed, entrepreneurship is defined by influence and being influenced to then take action, as an individual or together with a supportive team by making the idea and vision a reality (Gerlach, 2021). Thus, building confidence and beliefs for the new entrepreneur. Stuart, (2017) suggests that through reflective practice this can potentially resolve any uncertainties and act as a drive for innovation. In addition, the use of a SWOT analysis as part of this process can be helpful in breaking down barriers and finding strengths as part of the planning process as a team, which can be flexibly used (The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2024). From the evidence previously discussed in this critical analysis there are many strengths and weaknesses to consider in developing this innovative idea. It can be a useful resource for parents that will have an impact on their children's lives. However, there are still likely to be challenges in the use of the app such as financial aspects or marketing as covered in the business plan, a possible challenge that could be overcome when outweighed by the long term benefits it can provide.

To conclude this critical analysis, it is a well-known fact that parent's involvement within the home environment is important. However, when parents find this difficult for various reasons, support should be in place for them to access in many forms. More so, for parents to know where they can find the right information that can support their child's learning. Bandyopadhyay *et al*, (2023) described how parental knowledge sometimes lacked and more support would be needed as a result. Likewise, parents agreed but that relevant information could be difficult to find. It cannot be denied that early year's professionals are best placed to offer changes that support children and families. Along with a supportive team to enhance the idea and gain confidence in believing the vision could work.

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