EAEE4004

2012048

Word count - 743

Section one

There have been many theorists studying the development of children, Freud, Vygotsky, Bruner, Piaget, Montessori and Froebel to name just a few. Play is something children do naturally and should be an important part of their daily routine. (Pediatrics.aappublications, 2020). Vygotsky believed that with the right balance of adult support children can develop and learn through play. (simply psychology, 2020). Like Vygotsky, Bruner also believed that the role of the adult during play is important and that children need to perfect one skill before moving on to the next stage. (Teach thought, 2020) Freud believed that children could express themselves through play and that they act out during play that they could not necessarily express orally. (Simply psychology, 2020). Piaget states that there are three stages of play, practice play, symbolic play, and social play. He believed that theses three stages of play correlate with the four stages of cognitive development which are, sensorimotor stage, birth to two years, preoperational stage, two to seven years, concrete operational stage, seven to eleven years and formal operational stage, twelve years and up. (Verywell mind, 2020). Erikson's view was that events and conflicts in childhood paved their lives. He believed that dealing with conflict successfully through childhood will be beneficial in adulthood and failing to do so children may not develop the skills they need to be strong independent adults. (Williams, 2020)

All theorists contribute to children's learning and development, the foundation phase recognises that play is a fun way for children to learn and for them to be creative and imaginative. (Welsh government, 2020) The foundation phase also states that learning through play pushes children to the best of their abilities without the risk of failure, and in turn will allow children to become more confident in risk taking through play.

One form of play is self-directed play. Self-directed play is a form of play that happens on a child's own terms without adult intervention. Self-directed play helps build the child's self confidence because the child is free to explore and make their own play. Not only does self-directed play help to build the child's self confidence it also encourages independence, for example, in the setting's home corner there may be a dressing up area with clothes for the

children to explore. Children who are engaged in self-directed play may want to dress up in the clothes to become a nurse, teacher, or fire fighter, self-directed play will allow the children to feel safe and secure in their play to explore and put the clothes on. This will encourages dressing independence without adult help and giving the child a sense of achievement once they have done it, the child may then feel confident in putting their new skill to putting on their own coat at play or home time. (Berkshire Montessori, 2020).

Although self-directed play is child led and free and that children learn and take risk at their own pace there may be occasions where a little bit of adult intervention is needed. This may be the case of an adult observing a game that may have gone a bit stagnant and asks the child or children a questions like "what do you think will happen next?" this may encourage the child to continue to play freely and they may invite the adult in to the play, however it is important that the child continues to lead the game and the adult to follow their lead. The adult may also be involved at the initial setting up of the game such as laying out the toys or taking the children to an outside area, once play is set up the adult may take a step back and allow the children to feel free to explore the game for themselves. (kozikids, 2020).

Play is an important way in which children learn holistically, play has an effect on all aspects of a child's learning and development. Unicef (2018) states that "play is one of the most effective ways in which young children gain essential knowledge and skills". Unicef (2018) continue to say that children learn new skills such as sharing and taking in turns through play, they also say that children problem solve through play as they feel free and confident such as building with smaller block if no big blocks are available. Unicef (2018) describes that through play children choose unknowingly to develop their intellectual, social, emotional, and physical skills, making their play an holistically learning experience.

Section two

As discussed in section one play is an important part of children's learning and development, and with play comes risk. The Guardian (2021) describes exposure to risk as healthy and helps children understand their body's limits. The Guardian also say that children who are involved with risky play such as rough and tough play have a feeling of excitement, adults have a role in helping children feel excited and ambitious to try new things and to take risks.

There are three main areas of risky play, physically, emotionally and mentally. Children who experience risks in these areas have opportunities to learn and practice new skills. (early years resources, 2021). Exposing children to physical risks can sometimes be challenging for them, these risks may include activities such as climbing. Children naturally enjoy climbing, however they can on times stop themselves from climbing a little higher because they feel scared or unsafe. Adult encouragement can make the child feel safe and knowing that the adult is there and close by to help at any time and can give the child the confidence they need to climb the extra height, and in time master the skill of climbing. Very well mind (2020) says that almost all risky play is physical and that discouraging children to take risks can have an impact on their physical health as it may reduce the amount of time that children spend outdoors. Very well mind continues to say that risk taking enhances emotional health, that through risky play children develop confidence to try new things without the risk of feeling failure.

Risky play also impacts on children mentally, when a child is involved in self-directed risky play they will have plenty of opportunities to manage their own skills. In a safe and controlled environment they will also take their own risks, adults need to enable these risks and try not to prevent them from happening. If adults prevented children from taking risks then they would never learn to crawl, walk or go up and down the stairs, they need to take risks in order to develop.

It is believed that children who do not experience risky play in their day to day lives may experience mental health problems in later life, such as anxiety and depression (smartkids, 2021). Children have fears and face challenges every day, risky play encourages children to learn how to manage the risks themselves. Children who learn how to problem solve themselves through risky play develop the life managing skills they need for adulthood, this helps the children to become strong, independent, problem solving adults.

There needs to be a balance between risky play and keeping children safe from harm, too many restrictions during play can prevent children from developing. However, children need to be kept safe from harm and injury. Risk assessments are done for every activity and outdoor play to assess the level of risk to play or activity, if the risk level is too high and dangerous then measures must be taken to reduce risk of harm or injury without taking the risk factor away entirely. For example, a climbing frame in the yard maybe too high for a child with limited movement, however the child still wants to climb the frame but is at risk of falling. So that the child can be included and climb the frame and experience the risk in a safer way, perhaps a crash mat can be put in place underneath in case the child fell. This way the risky play is still experienced without risk of harm and injury. Another example of a balance between risk and exposing children to harm is fruit time, children need to learn independence and do things for themselves. At fruit or snack time children are encourage to prepare their own fruit this may involve using a sharp knife, a risk assessment will indicate that the risk of harm or injury would be too high to give a child a knife to cut their own fruit therefore would be given a plastic knife and would be supervised during the activity. As the child masters the skill of cutting then the risk assessment can be redone and the risk level may be lower and the child could be given a shaper knife, this will give the child a great sense of achievement and confidence to take on more challenges.

Today children face a new risk, COVID-19. Risks are not always ones that can be seen, finding the balance between exposing children to risk and also keeping them safe during a worldwide pandemic is difficult. Children should still be encouraged to play and take risks as they would in normal times, they do not see viruses and do not understand the impact that they have on the human body. It is the adults responsibility to do a risk assessment and remove the risk of contamination by hand washing, cleaning, and keeping groups of children small and limit cross contamination, by doing this the chance of harm or infection will be limited. (gov.co.uk, 2020).

Section three

There are many ways in which observations are carried out such as, schedule of growing skills (SOGS), movement tracker, interaction tracker, and a running record to just name a few. Observations play an important part to understand the needs and development of young children. By doing observations correctly the information can then be used in activity planning to further develop the children.

The foundation phase is a curriculum for children aged three to seven in Wales. The foundation phase allows children to learn and develop whilst using their imaginations and through being creative. The foundation phase has areas of learning for both indoor and outdoor experiences. The areas of learning within the foundation phase are, personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity, language, literacy and communication skills, mathematical development, physical development, and creative development. (Early years Wales, 2021). Observing young children through the foundation phase profile allows for a more holistic view of the child's development by using the areas of learning. The foundation phase profile was developed to assess children's development until the age of seven when they move away from the foundation phase stage. The foundation phase profile consists of a handbook, record form, compact profile form, and a full profile form, all of which play a significant role in observing children for results based on evidence and not on judgment.

Like any one of the other observation tools there are strengths and limitations with using the foundation phase profile, the biggest strength would be is that it is comprehensive and allows for almost all areas of learning to be observed making the tool a good indicator of the child's holistic development and progress as child move from setting to setting or from setting to school. Using the foundation phase profile makes it clear for other professionals to understand, having a clear tool to understand can only be an advantage when observing and planning for children making it clear to see what area of learning is in need of additional support and what area needs more challenges. The foundation phase profile should start being used around six weeks of the child starting at a setting or school, this is called 'on entry' waiting six weeks allows the children to be settled and familiar with the setting, this is the period when non obvious observations are done. The on entry observation gives a good baseline indicator of at what level the child is at the beginning of their journey through the foundation phase. (Hwb, 2021).

The foundation phase profile includes a skills ladder for each of the areas of learning, once the on-entry observations are complete and logged on the compact form the baseline is then recognised. As the child moves through their time at the setting developing and learning new skills they should move up the skills ladder, it is good practice to observe the child achieve their new skill around four times before making a final assessment on the child. As the end of term approaches then the foundation phase profile will begin again, although the observations carry on throughout the whole time the child is at the setting there must be a 'leaving' assessment. The leaving assessment will indicate the value added in the child's progress from the initial on-entry assessments, this may be different for each area for example, the child may have a greater increase in development in the area of creativity than in the mathematical area of learning therefore the value added or outcome will be greater for creativity. The compact profile will follow the child on their learning journey to measure their progress, the skills ladder on leaving one setting will give the new setting or school a good picture of the child and where they are in their development. (Dera, 2021).

Foundation phase profile gives a good in depth holistic picture of the child as it covers a wide range of the areas for learning, however like the other observation tools there are also weaknesses. Even though it is good to have a large comprehensive observation tool to gain the best understand of a child's development, the foundation phase tool is quite lengthy. Practitioners using the tool would have to spend time reading through forty two pages to make their observations, this takes their attention away from the child. Another weakness is that there is not any information on the child other than their date of birth, name, and areas for assessment, to get a more accurate measurement of the child's outcome it would be beneficial to have a child's background and if they have any special requirements that includes an ALNCo being involved with the child.

Section four

As discussed in the previous sections play in an important part of children's learning and development. Through play children gain new skills without being aware that they are doing it, take making circles in the sand with a stick for an example, children really enjoy doing it and are unknowingly developing their early mark making skills. When observing children and making assessments it is good to keep the element of fun and keep it as enjoyable as possible. When observing children the way the adult interacts could determine the outcome of the observation. Howard and McInnes (2013) say that children are less likely to have an accurate outcome of the observation if the adult becomes involved with the play, children may not perceive the play as play if the adult interacts, although on occasions the adult may need to ask some open ended questions if the play becomes stagnant. Montessori refers to play as children's work and that play should be enjoyable, voluntary, purposeful and spontaneous. (child development institute, 2021).

when children are actively involved in play such as self-directed play they become engrossed in the play and see the play as fun and their development thrives. During observations if an adult wants to observe a child building a tower of eight blocks then the adult can set up the play beforehand and then step back to allow the children to pick up on the cues and begin to play. During the play the child building blocks may build them and knock them down, rebuild and knock down again enjoying the play, perhaps engaging in imaginative play by pretending that they are a giant. When the child is doing this the adult will have an accurate reflection on the child's development as the child would want to build the tallest tower they can to knock down. Howard and McInnes state that the presence of an adult can have an impact on children's play as children will no longer perceive it as play and could possibly move on to something else abandoning what was fun before the adult joined. They continue to write that adult-child interactions should be through a more teaching role with closed questions. Adults can support play during observations with asking open ended questions such as, 'I wonder how tall you can make this tower', the child may then decide to build a tall tower they may also walk away from the adult and decide to go back to the activity once the adult leave the activity and build their tall tower that the adult asked if they could. In short when observing children it can be beneficial to the observation if the child takes the lead with a little bit of adult input such as setting up the activity or open ended questions at the beginning or during the play. Children also respond better to observations when they think they are not being observed, this giving a more accurate level of their development.