

The two types of play and how these can be supported in practice.

Play underpins all aspects of children's learning and development and is central in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Intellectual and social skills, creativity and emotional skills are developed as well as the children's language skills according to Early years matters (2022) and goes on to say how environments play an essential role in play too whether it be outdoors or indoors. Children get to discover their immediate world through exploration and discovery. Welsh Government (2014) states how the Government places great value on play and is defined as encompassing children's behavior, which is freely chosen, intrinsically motivated and personally directed. The document mentions the importance in the lives of children who have the right to be able to play and is enshrined in Article 31 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Central to the curriculum framework is the holistic development of children and states that children learn through having firsthand experimental play activities, whilst meeting the diverse needs of all children. Only when the child is developmentally ready should they move onto the next stage of learning. It is a well-known fact that the curriculum is influenced by the approach of Friedrich Froebel who pioneered the kindergarten for children aged from two to seven and was the first educator to realize that play contributes to a child's emotional, physical and intellectual development (Bruce, 2011).

Baby Sparks (2021) describes symbolic play as a highlight of childhood. It involves the child using actions, objects or ideas to stand for something else during play. For example, a building block could be used as a phone or a car. Lewis (2020) points out how symbolic play starts when a child is three to 18 months old where they put their fingers in their mouths and then graduates to them banging a rattle on the floor. When they reach 18 months to three years, the precursor of real symbolic play is revealed through functional play. A child drinking water from a tea set would be an example. The child then goes on to imagine an object and use it to represent a different one, a toilet roll can be used as a phone and so on. A three- to five-year-old will start noticing what other children do so their symbolic play evolves to them wanting to dress up for instance. Having a chest of old clothes, hat, bags and shoes or having a corner of the room used for a doctor's office or veterinary clinic is an example to facilitate this, Lewis (2020) goes on to state how theorist Vygotsky thought a child playing make-believe is crucial to a child's healthy development. Aubrey and Riley (2019) say how another theorist Piaget was also a firm believer of the importance of play,

stressing that children make sense of the world through symbolic play through the development of their language skills according to Baby sparks (2021) which includes vocabulary, speech, understanding and expressing their feelings, ideas and thoughts. Also laying the foundation for reading, maths and writing skills as all of these have symbols for representation. Azuma (2017) states that emotional and social development is practiced when children express their emotion through the scenes they create in play and how symbolic play also develops meta cognition and problem-solving skills by the way they organize, plan and cognitively process any mishaps that may arise with their toys.

Creative play is a fundamental part of a child's development with the benefits of helping the child with their sensory development, hand- eye coordination, individual and social confidence, the understanding of different environments and the exploration of their imagination (Rhino play, 2018). Creativity is the process of which children turn images from their imagination into creations, through role play or pretend play, they try out ideas and can be creative by using paint, dance, music, making models with clay, playing with construction toys and blocks (Bruce, 2011). The early years foundation stage promotes the benefit of creative play by including it in the curriculum. Welsh Government (2015) states how children's creative skills should be furthered through using their imagination, senses and experience. Steiner was a pioneer whose work continues to have an influence on the education of children. Through a holistic approach his schools focus on self-directed and creative play, believing that by facilitating this, underpins later academic learning (Steiner education, 2022). Community playhouse (2009) says that a child's vocabulary is extended through pretend play. Social and communication skills are built on in a fun way in a supported environment. Creative play helps a child to express both negative and positive feelings which helps them to understand the emotions that go with them and goes on to say how a child's fine motor skills are developed when they play in sand or water for example as by expressing themselves, they use their senses and muscles (Rhino play,2018), who also states that creative activities introduce math's skills when a child must measure something for example. For children who enjoy art, by offering the child sponges, rollers and different textures to paint on helps with explorations and building the child's interest.

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

Self-directed play according to Peng (2018) is real play as it is a hands-on activity that children control. They choose what to play without adult intervention which helps to nurture their creativity and develop their imagination. Bottrill (2018) agrees and states that real play is owned by the child and should be open ended and offer endless interpretations and limitless possibilities as the experiences enables children. The benefits are that children learn to tackle problems on their own, practice decision making and leadership whilst engaging and interacting in the world around them. Teamwork and social skills are practiced as the children learn how to work together, negotiate and share, as they realize that not all share the same point of view as them (Peng, 2018).

Play Wales (2022) defines the Welsh Governments play policy as encompassing a child's behavior which is freely chosen by the child, individually directed and intrinsically motivated, being performed for no external goal or reward. Intrinsic motivation is when people are motivated to do activities because they are enjoyable to do and not because there is a reward at the end of the task (Riaz, 2022). Cowley (2022) suggests how children should learn and grasp that good behavior cannot be earned from securing a sticker as a reward for example. Learning is the ultimate motivation and as educators, helping children to understand why they need to behave in certain ways is the key goal. Though sometimes a reward can be beneficial and contribute positively to a child's willingness to learn in the early years setting (Theodotou, 2014). It is important to teach and nurture intrinsic motivation whilst children are young as a love of learning will be developed for the future as they will find enjoyment from learning as they realize they are doing it for themselves and not for rewards. To help motivate a child intrinsically includes the practitioner introducing problem solving challenges to them as this will boost their self-esteem, enabling confidence in learning. To help motivate a child use learning tools they can relate to for their natural curiosity. Practitioners give children an intrinsic drive when they let them control, lead and determine some of their own learning (Avery hill education, 2020).

Studies show that children who took part in an activity directed to be 'like play' were immersed more deeply and focused, the children moved more freely and were smiling more than the children who participated in a session with the same materials, but the activity was designed to be 'not like play'. These children expressed more negative vocalizations and

were preoccupied more easily. All practitioners need to be mindful whether a child would see an activity set out in class as playful when they are planning play activities. As from the study, children show more signs of emotional well-being when they assume an activity is 'play' rather than 'not play' (Howard and McInnes, 2012). Another study (McInnes *et al*, 2013) looked at when children do activities under a playful practice environment rather than a more formal way with the practitioner not getting involved but is close at hand. Their learning was found to be more effective.

Bruce (2011) says that open ended and continuous provision should be central in the classroom and is constantly available for children. For example, a workshop area, dolls house or garage, book corner, home corner or the use of natural materials including play, mud and play dough, not forgetting that the outdoor area is just as important. In the provision, the adult can sensitively join in with the child to help them extend into rich free flow play for instance, by joining in play they do not take it over but help children to become as independent and creative as possible as a child's imagination and creativity will shut down if adults lead the play all the time says Bruce (2011). Play props need to be open ended. For example, a child can make whatever vegetable or fruit with clay or dough rather than having a plastic apple to play with though children do not have to rely on props as pretending to pour tea into an imaginary cup for instance. Self-directed play is one of the core elements of the Montessori method of education and encourages children to learn at their own pace, building on their knowledge a day at a time in what makes sense to them and with no rush to achieve milestones (Welljourn, 2020).

An In-depth discussion and understanding of an observation method for young children.

Observations in the early years settings is the method of watching, listening, documenting and analyzing children as they play, explore and learn. The information recorded will reveal how they interact with other children and adults and show how they are developing by the monitoring of children's gestures, expressions, behaviors and physical actions (Azilo training, 2019). To improve a child's learning and development, observations provide practitioners with the relevant and accurate information they need. Observations are separated into key areas; cognitive, social, physical, emotional and language. Studies show that when practitioners observe children in a natural play-based environment an accurate reflection of the child is observed and is seen as an optimal time to witness what their interests and

capabilities are (Howard and McInnes, 2013). Froebel believed that as play was of central importance, children must be closely observed by adults for them to learn how their ideas and interests unfold. Educators can then give any guidance or support they may need (Louis, 2022). Welsh Government (2013) report states how the foundation phase promotes a play-based approach to learning with emphasis on the child, whilst the foundation phase draws inspiration from other early year programmes in Reggio Emilia and New Zealand (Te Whariki) in acknowledging the holistic approach to play.

Welsh Government (2015) states that the foundation phase profile observations determine where the children are on the learning continuum, and to identify any exceptional ability or any difficulties. Practitioners gather evidence over a period after children have been taught relevant skills, resulting in assessing if they need further opportunities and to unify their learning. It is well documented that children learn and behave differently in the outdoor environment too so the reflection of this needs to be documented in the assessment process. Welsh Government (2015) also says that the observation will benefit children as schools will be able to monitor, track and support children's development and learning as when they start the nursery, an observation is done at six weeks and carries on until the end of the foundation phase.

The main purpose of the Foundation Phase profile observation is to provide a nationally consistent baseline assessment which aligns with end of phase outcomes through assessments of children's learning and development until they are seven years old. The assessments will assist practitioners being able to provide a holistic curriculum which is developmentally relevant for each unique child (Welsh Government, 2015). By using formative assessments and observations, outcomes are produced in four areas of learning skills; personal and social development, well being and cultural diversity; language, literacy and communication skills; physical and maths development. Children are observed through a mixture of practitioner and child led activities whilst they are outdoors and indoors and across continuous, enhanced and focused provision. The document goes on to say that where appropriate children should be encouraged to appreciate and understand their development to ensure developmentally appropriate tasks and activities that suits their stage of learning, provision should be planned whilst the practitioner scaffolds children's learning and development.

Pacey (2016) explains why we need to observe children. We discover what interests a child and where they enjoy playing and exploring, we can see how they manage their feelings, we

start to understand the learning styles of each child and get to understand specific issues, for instance behavior or if they are experiencing any learning delays. The foundation phase profile as described in the Welsh Government (2015) states that though the observations support the identification of possible ALN or SEN, practitioners may need to seek advice from ALNCO or professionals, if need be, as the profile will have insufficient detail to assess ALN/SEN children. Pacey (2016) suggests that when starting an observation, practitioners need to think about and make sure the observations are positive, unbiased, objective and non-judgmental. Froebel believed that by reflecting on the observations made and through discussion with other work colleagues, interpretations can be made, looking out for patterns within each observation for information to help develop the child. Whilst observing, practitioners must be mindful to not be biased whether in relation to disability, gender or race and to ensure that observations are honest and free from bias influences of personal assumptions and stereotyping suggesting that the practitioner needs to examine their own value systems regularly (Louis, 2022). Woods (2015) explains that some achievements may be missed as though some children maybe able to achieve a task without an observation but then after being left weeks they may regress which can be difficult to record. It is also important to remember the quiet child, who be overlooked or go unnoticed.

Reflecting on the importance of observation, Bruce (2011) states how observations help us to be more informed on play, and deepens our admiration, enjoyment and respect for children, remembering that whilst it opens our thinking it should never be used to control children's learning and play.

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

Theorist Lee Vygotsky pioneered a sociocultural theory. He emphasized the notion of young children learning through social interaction in an environment between other children and adults. He felt that though young children already have skills they were added through experience through active learning. He realized the importance of play but did not agree to it being the only way that children learn (Lindon and Brodie, 2016). Twinkl (2019) explains how observations are not box ticking exercises as the information provided helps practitioners decide on the next step for planning and progressing the child's learning. The insights that observations provide are crucial for setting up a provision that reflects their

needs and by this reflection, the more the learning is tailored to the individual, it will further their journey in the Foundation Phase. West Sussex Gov (2015) explains how observations being done regularly is vital as it ensures the child is at the forefront of the practice. Though they are done informally (spontaneous) and formally (planned), it is necessary for both as the overall planning on the child would just be based on what the practitioner would think was important, interesting or fun and might not meet the needs of the child. McInnes *et al* (2013) did a study that looked at children's perceptions of play and what the impact was. The study examined adult – child interactions and concluded that when an adult is proximal, rather than when they are in formal practice conditions and are more present. The study found that whilst children practice activities under playful practice conditions, they behave and perform in ways that are more effective for learning and concludes by saying that adults need to understand play from the child's perspective, utilizing the cues children use to define play.

The play cycle is a process of play and is used by practitioners to observe and understand play (Sands, 2013), who goes on to describe the play cycle as having six component parts. Firstly, the play drive is where all play begins and is the child's intrinsic desire and need to play. Secondly is the play cue, and from this drive the child may produce an invitation by giving out a verbal or non-verbal action. Thirdly, the play return is when a child responds to the play cue. The play flow is next, where play resumes and play cues are being established whilst the children play together. Play frame is the next component and is the process of play contained by a boundary where the play is taking place. It can be a visible boundary or an imagined one where there is an understanding of the rules of the game set out by the children. Lastly is play annihilation is when the play comes to an end by the children. For instance, the game they were playing came to an end. Observation is a key aspect of the Play cycle as the play frame that is established throughout the sixteen play types, the need for adult intervention can be assessed where they observe and assess whether to take a more passive or active role according to King (2020). Though Sands (2013) stresses that an adult needs to stand back and to not intervene in the play unnecessary as the play drive will be denied in the play cycle and adulteration will occur, stating that the Play cycle helps play workers understand the process of the play better and helps to inform them of any interventions that do need to be applied, for example, when the play gets heated and arguing occurs. Studies show that the Play cycle theory also provides adults with an observational framework which helps them to reflect on how play supports children's development (King, 2020). From the study practitioners reported being more aware of the components of the play cycle which

resulted in them observing play cues better, play returns and the way children play, also reporting how the play cycle enabled them to intervene in a more subtle way with one playworker stating that they were able to stand back and let the Play cycle happen naturally. Woods (2013) states that children's play cannot be planned as the child's agency and choice is compromised. Children do not easily see adults as play partners and with the adult intervening and introducing their own agenda in the child's play will extinguish that play. The child's imagination and creativity will shut down if adults lead the play all the time (Bruce, 2011).

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