

ECEY4003

Children's Play: Theory and Practice

Section 1

There are many stages and developments of a child's play and here is two types of play in particular. One is Treasure Baskets and the other is messy play. These are compulsory play stages that have been observed and researched to be beneficial to a child's development.

Treasure Baskets

A treasure basket is a collection of numerous objects particularly not including plastic toys that are chosen to stimulate the child's different interest. These vary from natural objects like wooden spoons, logs, metal objects. All the objects used are certified to be safe for the age-appropriate children you have in your care. There are any benefits to the baskets and can be used in ranges of various ages from birth to five years. All the baskets are created for the individuals needs and expectation's depending on age and ability. By giving the children free time to play and explore the baskets you are opening their senses and helping develop their fine motor skills.

Treasure baskets are believed to be considered Goldschmied's most important contribution to understanding child's development all using the baskets.

She states that babies are able to suck, grasp, touch and feel objects from a early is age and is very beneficial to the child's needs. Stating that babies who benefit from the baskets from early on show signs of behaviours that foster their earliest learning. Through playing with treasure baskets children can develop concentration skills that will help them and assist them I future in making simple choices. In return this will benefit the child as they will build confidence and self-esteem in making choices. Also, their hand/eye co-ordination will develop as fine motor skills are promoted when playing with a basket because they are touching, grasping and holding the objects. Feeling the need to feel, touch, smell the objects they will be learning constantly. They will be gaining a rich sensory experience because they are sucking,

handling the various objects to try and make sense of what they are touching and holding. Not only sensory but they will learn about smell, weight, size, texture, sounds and smell all by playing with a treasure basket.

Practitioners facilitate this sort of play by giving children various objects that will help stimulate their development in more than one way. Not all toys need to be plastic for them to be stimulated. By giving the children the option and choice of having natural objects you are broadening their learning, playing and understanding of the world. We give children open ended play that doesn't include toys but free and natural fun objects that has lots of benefits and potential. There is no right or wrong, treasure baskets gives the children options to explore, problem solve and create things from imagination which is a unique way of learning for the child.

It is important that the practitioner can give free time and uninterrupted time to the children to be able to explore and play without being disturbed. The practitioner will set up the baskets but will watch from afar to give time for the child to explore. Sue Gascoyne and Elinor Goldschmied (2009) believe children develop literacy and numeracy by using the baskets as they will learn and encouraged to sort and explore the materials and different objects.

Messy play

Messy play is open ended exploration of materials and properties. It can include activities like clay making, sand, sorting stones, water play and painting activities. Messy plays allow the children to repeat and experiment as they like. It also engages and encourages the children to develop their senses that helps their development stages.

One development stage that is reached by playing is confidence by the control of using their bodies. They can explore their senses by using tools and materials and extend their learning skills by the equipment. They also develop fine motor skills to help control, problem solve, develop social and emotional skills to develop self-control and emotional regulation. They strengthen their sensory processing skill and nervous system because they learn how to explore and create something without the intuition of a grown up. It is believed that play is the work of childhood as Piaget (2018) states. He believes that as the child matures, their environment and play should encourage further cognitive and language development.

Steiner, Montessori, Vygotsky and Piaget all agree that sensory play stimulates and develops the brain of children. They all believe and understand the play behaviour and importance of the child having the opportunities to be able to play and explore. Holistic development fosters and grounds the curiosity, imagination and exploration of play. Messy play allows the children to understand their senses by exploring how things feel, smell and taste. This nurtures the children's awareness and understanding of the world around them.

Section 2

It is important for children to be able to choose their own play as free play as it creates opportunity for children to explore their world in their own way and not be influenced by other suggestions or ways. This gives the child to broaden their senses and be able to develop and make choices for themselves. By choosing their play are encouraged to foster creativity and encourage the children to use their own imagination. Knanow and Zaman (2019) recommend starting this at the earliest age as it will benefit them massively. It encourages the child to develop physical competence and the enjoyment of outdoors. Helps them to understand and make sense of the world, communicate and interact with others. Express and control emotion and help the children problem solve activities and practice emergent skills.

Research shows that it is essential to the children's wellbeing, mentally, physical, emotional and helps fuel your recognition of worth. If the children are lacking this it will show as the children will not know what they want in life therefore it is beneficial that they are given the opportunity early on. Adult led play is where the adults have the biggest role. This means the child's play is overseen by the adult who has chosen the activity. They will not partake in the activity themselves, but they will guide and support the children throughout. All children begin to self-regulate their own learning. By asking questions rather than giving answers to the children can be very useful because you open children's minds to new possibilities. Children need to

be allowed to develop their own enquiries, but practitioners need to make sure they are there to help and intervene when necessary.

Self-directed play is a learning that occurs when children are allowed to explore their own interests and ideas without being told what they should be doing. This happens when a child is creating or building something out of materials/ objects given like saucepans and spoons. The child will use his imagination for example and start creating music by using the objects.

This allows the children to experience independence from a young age as they are given opportunities but are given time to be able to use their imagination and decide what they want to do with the objects/ materials. It also gives time to stimulate the imagination and flex their creative muscles. Self-directed learners rely on internal motivation and not external praise to drive their interests. It is important to make observations and engage in conversations about what the children have done instead of critiquing their work. By doing this you are supporting their learning by allowing the children to learn at their own pace and grow confidence.

It gives children essential training to build skills that are required of them including lifelong skills like problem solving by self-led learning. Children can learn content and grow important life skills when given opportunities. A play approach is defined as a process for learning that is intrinsically motivated, enjoyable, freely chosen, non-literal safe and actively engaged in by children. By making choices, assuming responsibility for one's decisions and actions and by having fun are inherent components of the play approach to learning as stated by Vygotsky (2003). If children do not play they will lack attention to be able to pick an activity or stay focused on an activity long enough. This can be led or caused by the child not having the best time at home for example illness, stress or trauma and therefore effect the child's actions on deciding to play or not.

Child initiated play gives children space to learn that their own ideas of what is important and validating their own choices. This can be interoperated in role play as the children are free to explore specific ideas and emotions that are relevant to them at the time. They can gain skills like finding solutions and building friendships. These are skills that are not easily taught but should be developed by child led activities. Social skills will improve as children get to decide what activity, how they play and

who they play with. By doing this they will build and develop self-confidence, social skills, responsibility, self-sufficient, self-directed and be able to enjoy school.

A adult can help in many ways or sometimes too much. It is important that they can set up a safe environment for the children to play, give endless opportunities.

Providing a set role, acting as a partner, modelling what is expected or providing a way for the child to stop play when they are ready. It is common in recent studies that many children are being pulled away from free play where they are enjoying their activity and not ready to come away from. It is important they are given time.

There are many ways adults can support play one is by talking about play by engaging with the children whilst they play. Validating their efforts where necessary, adding to the play when needed, prevent problems occurring that can affect the quality of play and build them up. As the role of the adult is it important to be positive always. This means using positive language with manners and giving plenty of praise to the children. Learning through play will remind the children of their importance in life and still keep it fun.

Howard and Mcinnes (2013) state children believe the presence of an adult inhibits learning skills. They believe that there are many benefits to play but here are ten

- Play strengthens you
- Play makes you smarter
- Play helps you solve problems
- Play boosts creativity
- Play reduces stress
- Play allows you to make friends
- Play enhances attractiveness
- Play builds resilience
- Play promotes discovery
- Play is FUN

Section 3

Observations help you gather information and details. Details that help parents and educators to respond rather than react to situations. It helps recognise changes in a child's development during their sensitive periods. It guides us as teachers to embrace that every child is unique and helps us connect with the children. The observations allow us to understand and be able to help the children develop if they are struggling or come to terms to what level they children are at.

There are several observation methods. When recording a child's development there are seven observations used in early years settings like the Leuven scale, Narrative Observations, Snapshots and time tracker. One theorist that will be discussed will be the Leuven Scale observation. The Leuven Scale observation has been created by Ferre Laevers in Belgium. The observation has been created in the 1980's and is a very popular framework that highlights the degrees to which children demonstrate involvement in early educational settings. Laevers (2019) states that a child with high emotional well-being can be observed as being at ease, free to act spontaneously and show a degree of self-confidence. He refers children as being fish in water regarding when children's physical and emotional needs are being met.

Leuven Scale observation is a method that is used to evaluate a activity. By observing a child engaging in a activity the Leuven Scale helps pinpoint a five point scale in order to measure a child's emotional wellbeing and involvement. The emotional well-being scale measures how at ease a child is and establish whether the child's basic needs are being met. This means that they are in a prime position to engage in a deep learning. There is good and bad press for every observation and in Laever's theory people believed that the Leuven Scale does not account very well for a child with additional needs and disabilities. The behaviours described are often not present or obvious in children with additional needs therefore not practical to use In all childcare settings. But others would argue that the theory was helpful because it identifies distress and reactions to new environments. The method used is good when the practitioner is looking on how the child is settling in a new school/ nursery as the practitioner can monitor and observe the child's settling in period.

This tells me that this type of observation would be beneficial when a child is beginning in a new setting, and you want to record the child's emotional and physical development but only focuses on one area therefore if you are observing a child as a whole then this observation might be used to see how the child is developing emotionally.

When observing the practitioner can also acknowledge the child's level of involvement in the activity. If the child is showing high levels of involvement, it shows that the child are fully engaged and not easily distracted. If the child is at a lower end of the scale this can mean that the child is disinterested in the activity and therefore easily distracted. If you don't gather evidence, it is impossible to support your case you are developing or trying to understand a child's particular stage or process in development. By gathering evidence to support your opinion you have proof that supports your case. The observation informs us about objects, events and attitudes. Children who feel cared for feel safe and secure. By observing they are more likely to gain skills and do better when they enter school. Observations can tell practitioners which stage of development they are on and how to develop there on. There are many different observations and they all can progress and record different types of stages depending on what you are observing and where. Some are more detailed than others, but all observations are beneficial in the way of development because the observations show and explain what you are observing.

Section 4

Play helps children understand and express their emotions freely through play by using language, movements and facial expressions. By observing them explore and play, practitioners can ensure that a child's development is at a expected stage. It helps the educator understand why a child

- have a challenging behaviour
- identify special needs
- better understanding of the child
- documents the child's skills

- shows the child's communication styles
- see how the children interact

Play is especially important when observing because it gives us a practitioner a accurate reflection on how and where the child is in their development stage. Erikson (1963) suggest that children must intermingle with things and people in a similarly uninvolved and light fashion. He believes children should choose what they want to play with without being compelled by urgency.

Children learn most when they are actively learning with other people and manipulating objects in their environments Piaget (1952).

Adults can support children's play by

- Determine developmental goal and objectives
- Know principles of learning and children's learning styles
- Design and set up learning centres
- Evaluate the learning environment.

Howard and McInnes (2012) state that when children perceive a activity as play that they show more signs of emotional well-being than when they perceive the same activity not as play. This was recorded In the Leuven involvement scale observations when recording the level of emotional well-being. Research shows that children demonstrate play to be seen as a observable behaviour but also a mental state. Children's wellbeing is paramount in the United Nations in the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 2009) as it affects other aspects of children's developments such as physical health. Having a good emotional well-being can protect a child against various problems in the future includi9ng emotional and behavioural problems like violence and crime.

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