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Physical Development**

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My reflective paper will be focusing on how my skills as a practitioner, and my ability to support physical development of children and young people, have developed through part of my training with Successful Kinaesthetic Instruction for Pre- Schoolers (SKIP Cymru). This paper will be split into two sections. Cycle one will reflect on my first half of training, from the 11th of October till the 16th of November. The second cycle will be from the 16th of November till the 3rd of December. The setting where the SKIP activities took place is a large community school with over 500 pupils. The school is in a fortunate area. My personal activities were carried out with a reception class, of 31 children. The children are aged four to five years.

Children and young people need to have the support through school practitioners, to ensure that they are developing their fundamental motor skills (FMS). The SKIP Cymru programme has taught me ways in which I can successfully support children through physical development.

Cycle one

Before I started this module of training, my understanding of the impact that physical development had on children and young people's overall learning was very limited. SKIP has allowed me to see the importance of how FMS skills developed. I once believed that young children naturally develop their locomotor skills such as running, hopping and long jump. However, many children and young people do not become proficient skill carriers (Stodden et al., 2008).

Within the first two days of the training course, I was shown how children and young people who have regular physical activity have more chance at being better achievers at the academic side of schooling. Their cognitive skills function better with the recommended amount of physical exercise, and their attention span and the ability to stay on task improves alongside their ability to perform physical locomotor skills. Along with this, the children who are able practice and improve their movement skills, are also developing brain connections. With the ability to move, the children are processing information more quickly and efficiently (Gallahue, Ozmun and Goodway, 2012).

Children and young people need to develop a wide range of vocabulary, when it comes to movement. With the right equipment, tasks and environment they will be able to learn to move correctly. Although children may have the skills, they need to learn these movements - it is mainly about giving the children time and experience. In chapter 1 of Movement and Dance in Early Childhood, Hodgson (2001), states that "Everything that we

discover about life, we discover through movement. Light waves reach the eye, sound waves contact the ear. Both smell and taste involve movement. Above all, our capacity to touch and more to gain further experience, confirms our awareness.”

Therefore, when I went back to school with all this new found information, I focused mainly on allowing the children time to understand movement. Movement concepts are way to engage physical activity. Movement is unique to each individual, and is shown through 4 different concepts of movement. Firstly, body awareness - this includes shapes, such as tall or short. Following this are ways of travelling, running, hopping and skipping, then balancing, using different parts of the body. The next concept is spatial awareness i.e personal space. The use of 'bubble' is one of the main understandings of this concept, that is, having the ability to be in control of your area. Levels follow this, involving high, low and medium ways of moving plus floor movements, or tall movements. Finally, speed direction and pathways are the last parts of this concept. Pathways are the way children move, for example in the form of a zigzag. Another concept is dynamics, light or heavy - the texture of how you move. The last concept is relationships with people and objects. This is all about contact with people or objects This can be done using simple games such as mirroring. With the integration of all of the concepts, children will be able to have a wide range of vocabulary when it comes to movement.

The first SKIP sessions I carried out were all about allowing myself time to understand what the children are capable of. As my children are aged four to five, their lack of physical activity in school is due to this being their first full year of school. Therefore, even the bare excitement of having a physical education session will over rule their abilities to perform correctly. Due to this, I wanted to mainly show the children the basics of movements. I wanted to show the children all the aspects of movement, through everything that we did. I slowly introduced different aspects of learning to the children, through warm up games to keep them active and engaged. Games such as the bean game show the children different ways to get involved with the movement concepts, without actually giving them a lesson. Introducing the different games to the children allowed them chance to understand what they are doing without putting pressure on them to understand it first time.

I noticed that the children showed little understanding of their spatial awareness. They were unable to keep their bubble safe and were not capable of finding their own directions and pathways. They insisted on following their friends and creating an oval/circle shape when moving around. From this I introduced the spots and a “don't pop your bubble” game to reinforce the spatial awareness. The children enjoyed the change of

levels and direction when playing the animal game. My reflection from the first few sessions resulted in the same answers and each session was repeated a second time with the other reception class of 30 children. This allowed me a chance to perfect, and think on my feet, ways I can improve my lessons. With the ability to move, the children are processing information more quickly and efficiently (Gallahue, Ozmun and Goodway, 2012).

Once I could see the children were using the information they have gathered from our lessons, I knew it was time to introduce an obstacle course. I slowly introduced a full obstacle, but initially I broke it into parts. Allowing the children to have a chance to fully grasp what is being asked of them. For many of the children it was the first time they had seen a course carried out this way, therefore I split the main parts of the course into smaller and more of the same (Newell, 1991). From this I found that the children were beginning to get confused as to where the starting points were and seemed to race through the obstacle course in order to finish. After reflecting on the first group of 30 children, I could see that the children needed to visually see the starting points and where to go next. Therefore, I changed the task by starting each of the courses with a hula hoop. The children could use this to visually see where to start and also how to start. Once I had told the children that an obstacle course was to be carried out slowly, in order to fully get the best out of it, I could see improvements on the way they were moving throughout the course. Changing the cues also helps to keep the children on their toes. Another way I reinforced the slow movement through the course, was using the hare and the tortoise story - expressing that the tortoise won the race because he took his time, and became the best. All children aged between three and seven years can stay motivated when it comes to new challenges, as they do not have the cognitive development to understand that they are showing signs that may make them feel otherwise (Newell, 1991).

From the first couple of weeks carrying out these activities in class and during the SKIP sessions I have noticed that many of the children are yet to fully develop their vestibular system. This truly affected their ability to balance. As I was introducing balancing to my lessons, it was clear which children needed support, and without balance many of these children will find it more difficult to carry out the locomotor skills (Gallahue, et, al., 2012).

The most important reflection I have had during this first cycle is regarding the number of children, time and the hall slots. As a result of COVID, the hall times have been split to year groups, allowing the time slots for each class to be an hour long. However, I found that an hour for 30 children is not enough, as you are unable to successfully teach

the meaningful parts of the lesson. As a result of this I had to split the class further, meaning it would be 15 children for half an hour. This affected the amount of time the children had for the SKIP session, but I meant I could teach a smaller group the more crucial parts of the session.

Cycle two

During training day number three, we focused highly on how teaching and carrying out the lessons were very important. The mentors discussed the importance of how we are delivering the sessions and the impact it can have on the way the children are learning the specific skills. This made me start to feel anxious, as I'm currently a teaching assistant and this course is designed for teachers. I began to doubt my abilities.

After attending the training lesson, I came back to school and focused on object control with the children. We were unable to carry out any object control beforehand, as our supply of equipment was very limited. We had not received our SKIP equipment yet and lacked balls or beanbags to start observing the children.

Object control I knew would be the hardest part of the course, as most of the children would find this the most difficult to keep concentration for. As well as concentration, the children would find it difficult to control their excitement over the new equipment. The new equipment would allow me the chance to correctly plan games to help the children develop their catching, throwing, tracking and kicking. From my first lesson of object control, I could see that some of the boys in my class who attend different outside school activities were able to have more control over themselves and the objects. By this I mean the boys could manage their emotions better when around the new balls. Although they were excited, they had the without balance many of these children will find it more difficult to carry out the locomotor skills (Gallahue, et, al., 2012).

Within my class, there is an individual who finds it extremely difficult to contain excitement. The individual may potentially be on ASD spectrum but is yet to be stated. When introduced to the new scarves to help with tracking, it was shown that he truly struggled keeping his eye on the target. The inability to focus enough to track an object coming and going was proved when throwing the scarf up became disorientated. When teaching this individual, I ensured I was using the correct teaching cues to make him stay on task.

In conclusion, the training I have luckily received in SKIP , has allowed me to extend my knowledge and practice in an array of different ways. This includes my awareness of the importance of movement for children and young people. Whether that is in class, or in

a separate physical educational lesson, I now appreciate how movement allows children to develop cognitively. I feel the training has given me the best knowledge of how to plan and create developmentally appropriate activities for children and young people to engage their physical skills to help benefit the academic side of their learning. I believe it will be more beneficial to the children within my setting if there were more chance of these sessions being carried out. I have therefore encouraged other members of staff within the foundation phase to go on the training to emphasise the importance of children's learning through movement. I believe I now have the full understanding of children's stages of development through the fundamental motor skills, constraints which can be used or changed to suit the individual/group, or what skills can be used to help implement strong development through appropriate activities. I will continue to use the skills I've learnt, through reflective practice in my setting.

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