Student number:

Module code:

Module coordinator: Dr Nalda Wainwright

Module title: Developing & Supporting Early Childhood Physical Development

The following paper is a personal reflection on my knowledge of, and ability to support, the physical development of young children, with a focus being on how these have developed as part of my training with SKIP Cymru. The reflection is divided into two parts, the first cycle being a reflection on the first half of my training, and the second on the latter half. The setting which the following reflections were taken from, is a reception class of thirty pupils, aged four and five years, set within a large community primary school. The school itself serves a largely deprived area, with it possessing a free school meal rate that sits above the national average (Estyn, 2016). The implementation of an intervention to support young children's physical development may be significantly effective for schools based in such deprived areas, as it has been hypothesised by some that certain populations of children, to include those who are identified as disadvantaged, may be influenced by constraints that impede the development of fundamental motor skills (FMS) in early childhood (Goodway and Branta, 2003).

Cycle one

Prior to commencing this module of training, my knowledge and understanding of the issues related to young children's physical development was limited, with me possessing a common misconception that certain skills, such as those deemed to be FMS skills, would develop naturally over time. However, in reality, many children do not achieve proficiency in such skills (Stodden et al., 2008), which in turn, has a detrimental effect on their ability to achieve specific sport skills later on in life, as FMS skills are understood to form the foundation upon which advanced movement skills develop (Seefeldt, 1980 as cited in Goodway and Branta, 2003; Gagen and Getchell, 2006; Clark and Metcalfe, 2002 as cited in Stodden et al., 2008; Gallahu, Ozmun and Goodway, 2012). Alongside this misconception, I also lacked a secure knowledge of how to support such development within my teaching.

One area that I felt was immediately impacted upon from the first two training days of this module, was my ability to observe the varying levels of motor development and movement competence in my learners, that is apparent when observed closely enough (Gallahue, Ozmun and Goodway, 2012). In addition to this, I was able to more readily recognise the impact of sensorimotor integration on such development, having gained an understanding that poor

sensorimotor processing often results in both fine and gross motor skill delays (Eeles et al., 2013), with it also being argued that a child's academic, behavioural and emotional development also rests upon such integration (Ayres, 2005). Thus, I was able to observe these links within my own pupils, as those who possessed a lower level of fine motor and reading skills were also lacking in their coordination, balance and spatial awareness.

This was particularly apparent in one child, who whilst being very competent in number-based activities, has difficulty in reading, writing and staying focused for long periods of time, whilst also lacking clarity of speech, with such delays being argued to be suggestive of poor sensory processing (Ayres, 2005; Eeles et al., 2013). Furthermore, whilst I had previously considered this child to be physically able, as he was very active, when observing his coordination and balance skills, it was clear that he was of a lower level than that of his peers, thereby further suggesting that I may need to build in more opportunities for him to develop sensorimotor integration. Furthermore, it has been argued that if a child does not attain sufficient gross motor skills in their early years, they may develop a lack of confidence in engaging in structured physical activities (Davies, Healy and Smith, 2018; Kid Sense, 2019), whilst a positive correlation is also apparent between an individual's competence in fundamental motor skills, and the level of physical activity they engage in over their life-span, with an individual's perceived motor competence being believed to be a key factor in this relationship (Stodden et al., 2008; Hulteen, et al., 2018).

Within my planning, I had to consider how and when I would integrate opportunities for the children to engage in gross motor activities, as "increased physical activity provides more opportunities to promote neuromotor development, which in turn promotes FMS development" (Stodden et al., 2008, p. 294), however this proved to be challenging due to the time constraints of our current timetable. The first action I implemented was to insert a gross motor activity into their morning letters and sounds rotations, whereby they would usually engage in a fine motor activity. As gross motor skills are a prerequisite for fine motor skills (Ayres, 2005), I felt this was a suitable exchange. Additionally, I tried to incorporate more whole-body movements into the children's 'daily mile', with a greater focus of travelling using different pathways, utilising the continuous provision in the outside area to serve as a simple obstacle course.

For their structured sessions, I originally planned for the children to rotate around four different 'gardens', which upon implementing proved to be quite challenging, perhaps due to my lack of experience using this format, and it being new to the children and adults present. Furthermore, the children were spending too much time transitioning between activities and were being led too heavily by the adults. This was an area that I knew we needed to improve on, and as such, the other members of staff and I adapted our approach to limit how much time we spent explaining and modelling the task, as whilst providing correct modelling of specific skills to learners is important (Rink, 1999), the evidence to support the facilitating effect of demonstrations have been suggested to be weak if the child already possesses a prior knowledge of the given skill (Newell, 1991). Therefore, after the initial session, in which we modelled the skills more explicitly, I chose to only give a brief overview of the skills and activities they would cover at the start of each session, choosing to rely more on instant feedback within the activities and the use of task constraints to promote development (Gagen and Getchell, 2006; Getchell and Hayward, 2014). One example of this was using stickers on the feet of the children to encourage them to step forward with their opposing foot when performing an underarm throw.

Cycle Two

As I engaged in the second half of the training, I refined the structure of my practical sessions to include half of the class at a time. This worked effectively, as five or six learners were allocated to each garden, thereby enabling me to observe and assess their development more easily, whilst providing them with an adequate amount of space to move freely in each garden. Furthermore, I used three gardens, instead of four, with each child rotating around the gardens every five to ten minutes. The three gardens consisted of one obstacle course, a busy bee garden and a game of battleships, whereby the children had to use an underarm throw to throw bean bags over a line to hit cones. I chose to engage the children in this basic structure for a series of sessions, amending elements of the task, such as the obstacle course, each time to allow for a more engaging experience.

As my knowledge of the different stages of motor skill development had increased by this point, I was more confident in assessing the various levels of fundamental motor skill acquisition in my learners, thereby enabling me to more effectively plan and implement structured activities that supported them at their developmental stage (Gagen and Getchell,

2006), whilst I was also able to offer instant feedback to the children on how to amend their movements in order to move them forward in their development. This was particularly apparent in the busy bee garden, where I focused on developing the locomotor elements of the fundamental motor skills, with a specific focus on developing galloping, hopping, skipping and jumping as these form some of the most common of locomotor skills (Gallahue, Ozmun and Goodway, 2012).

An example of their varying degree of attainment was in one session where I introduced galloping, as it was apparent upon observation that a large proportion of children were performing a level one in galloping, where they were producing a broken up action that appeared to be a combination of a gallop and a run (Gallahue, Ozmun and Goodway, 2012), whilst one child was achieving a gallop that was best fitting a level three, as she was able to gallop in varying directions with a smooth rhythmical pattern, with her arms free (Gallahue, Ozmun and Goodway, 2012). However, her next step, in this case, was to rotate her hips to be forward facing as she was turning her hips sideways as she galloped. By observing the children in action and offering this immediate feedback, they were able to be moved forward in their learning whilst interruptions to their active engagement in the task was limited, as has been found with such formative approaches in other fields (Berg, et al., 2018).

However, upon discussion following on from my assessment, it was suggested that such explicit teaching of these locomotor skills were not as necessary as those of object control skills, which are more culturally specific and need more input to achieve (Gallahue, Ozmun and Goodway, 2012), with locomotor skills being deemed to be phylogenetic skills, whereby they develop more naturally (Gallahue, Ozmun and Goodway, 2012). As such, my next step is now to include more opportunities for children to engage in object control activities within my busy bee garden, such as throwing and catching a scarf every time they get to a hoop or using hockey sticks to move the objects from hoop to hoop. Furthermore, I will try to allow a greater degree of autonomy in how they move between the hoops, as “autonomy supportive teachers induce greater intrinsic motivation, curiosity and a desire for challenge, whilst students who are overly controlled lose initiative and learn less well” (Wainwright et al., 2020, p. 44).

The obstacle course, which was used independently by the children, incorporated a variety of equipment that encouraged contralateral movements through crawling and climbing, whilst

the use of wobble spots and hurdles encouraged dynamic balance, both of which are found to be prerequisites to proficiently performing fundamental motor skills (Gallahue, Ozmun and Goodway, 2012). It was communicated to me, upon completing my lesson observation, that the children showed a good level of independence in this garden. This was an aspect within the lessons that I noted needed little encouragement from me, perhaps as children search naturally for opportunities to develop their sensory integration, with them possessing a drive to persist when confronted with challenges in achieving such integration (Ayres, 2005).

Upon reflection, and discussion with my assessor, it may be important for me to now consider the level of challenge I offer to my learners, thus providing a greater level of differentiation in the tasks. One area that this had a notable effect on the outcome of the learners' skills was in the battleship garden, whereby I had used tape to mark out where the children needed to stand, and another coloured tape to mark out where they needed to throw over. By using tape in this way, it acted as a task constraint (Getchell and Haywood, 2014) that actually impeded their development as it meant that not only could they not progress to throwing from further away, thus providing them the opportunity to be further challenged, but the close proximity of the line to their targets and the lack of a barrier to throw over, meant that some children were using a chopping action to hit their targets. Therefore, within this garden I will now ensure that I use a bench for the children to throw over and will use cones rather than tape to mark out where to stand, thereby allowing the opportunity to extend the range of distance in their throws.

In conclusion, the training I have received as part of this module has benefitted my practice in a number of ways, including by increasing my awareness of the importance of movement in the development, growth and education of children (Davies, 2003), with such an awareness resulting in an increase in the amount of time I allocate to activities that promote this. However, whilst practitioners may understand the importance of engaging their learners in developmentally appropriate activities to promote motor development, they often lack the knowledge needed to accomplish this (Gagen and Getchell, 2006). This is where I feel the training has had its greatest impact on my own practice, as the knowledge I have gained regarding the developmental stages of fundamental motor skills, and the effect of constraints on such development, has helped to support me in implementing developmentally appropriate activities for my learners (Gallahue, Ozmun and Goodway, 2012). I now intend to further build on this knowledge through the use of further research and reflective practice.

Student number: Module code:

Word count: 2161

Reference List

Ayres, J. A., 2005. *Sensory Integration and the Child. Understanding Hidden Sensory challenges.* Los Angeles, CA: Western Psychological Services.
Berg, M. V. D., Bosker, R. J. & Suhre, C. J., 2018. Testing the effectiveness of classroom formative assessment in Dutch primary mathematics education. *An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice,* 29(3), pp. 339-361.
Davies, C., Healy, M. & Smith, D., 2018. *The Maze of Learning - Developing Motor Skills.* London: Fit-2-Learn CIC.
Davies, M., 2003. *Movement and Dance in Early Childhood.* London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
Eeles et al., A. L., 2013. Assessments of sensory processing in infants: a systematic review. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology,* 55(4), pp. 314-326.
Estyn, 2016. *A report on Pembroke Dock CP School.* [Online]
Available at: https://primarysite-prod-sorted.s3.amazonaws.com/pembrokedockcp/UploadedDocument/18826fe0e20541c0a488004f06371042/pembroke-dock-cp-school.pdf
[Accessed 01 September 2019].
Gagen, L. M. & Getchell, N., 2006. Using 'Constraints' to Design Developmentally Appropriate Movement Activities for Early Childhood Education. *Early Childhood Education Journal,* 34(3), pp. 227-232.
Gallahue, D.L., Ozmun, J.C. and Goodway, J.D., 2012. *Understanding Motor Development: Infants, Children, Adolescents and Adults* (7th edition), Boston: McGraw-Hill
Getchell, N., and Hayward, K., 2014. *Lifespan motor development* (6th Edition) Human Kinetics
Goodway, J.D. and Branta, C.F., 2003. Influence of a motor skill intervention on fundamental motor skill development of disadvantaged preschool children, *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport,* 74(1), pp. 36-46
Hulteen, R. M. et al., 2018. Development of Foundational Movement Skills: A Conceptual Model for Physical Activity Across the Lifespan. *Sports Medicine,* 48(11).
Kid Sense, 2019. *Gross Motor Development Chart.* [Online]
Available at: https://childdevelopment.com.au/resources/child-development-charts/gross-motor-developmental-chart/
[Accessed 01 November 2019].
Newell, K. M., 1991. MOTOR SKILL ACQUISITION. *Annual Reviews - Psychology,* Volume 42, pp. 213-237.
Rink, J. E., 1999. Instruction from a Learning Perspective. In: C. A. Hardy & M. Mawer, eds. *Learning and Teaching in Physical Education.* London: Falmer Press, pp. 149-168.
Stodden et al**.**, D., 2008. A Developmental Perspective on the Role of Motor Skill Competence in Physical Activity: An Emergent Relationship, *Quest,* 60(2), pp. 290-306.
Wainwright, N. et al., 2020. Playful pedagogy for deeper learning: exploring the implementation of the play-based foundation phase in Wales. *Early Child Development and Care ,* 190(1), pp. 43-53.