

Children's Play: Theory and Practice

Section 1 - Evidence of a clear understanding of the importance of a variety of play types including self-directed play. The significance of holistic Play should be considered.

When discussing children's play it is important to consider what is meant by the word play. A definition of play provided by Starting Blocks (No date) states "Play is an activity where children show their remarkable ability for exploration, imagination and decision making. While Play is often described as 'children's work,' it is intensely enjoyable for them." Play Wales acknowledges that it is the children's right to play as part of the UNCRC and they should be given opportunities and suitable areas in accordance with this. There are several benefits listed in the Play Wales article, ranging from positive behaviour, improved social skills and overall, a higher quality of academic life.

Play Scotland suggests that there are 16 different types of play. A particular type of play listed is Creative Play. Creative play could be interpreted differently to different individuals. To certain children, Creative Play could be an activity where they go into craft area and create a small Arts and Crafts project to take home with them to other children Creative Play could be participating in Dance Classes. Inspired Schools (2023) states that Creative Play is any activity chosen by the child in which they would like to express themselves through which encourages curiosity and creativity. An effective way of supporting Creative Play in the Early Years Environment is by allowing the child to choose the activity they would like to partake in. This would also support the Child Led approach that is encouraged and supported by the Welsh Government. Another approach in supporting Creative Play referenced from Inspired Schools (2023) would be for Early Years Practitioners to provide an inclusive and enabling environments for all children attending the setting. By providing an inclusive and enabling environments for all children, the Early Years Practitioners are providing equal opportunities to the children in the Early Years Setting. This would also be working accordance with the Welsh government and the guidelines they provide to Early Years Settings.

An additional type of play is Role Play. Role play is play type children can engage in, in a variety of ways. Role Play can be used by children to help them understand the world. Children can Role Play any scenario that they experience such a driving a bus or

pretending to be a teacher teaching their pupils. Children's Learning Through Play (Krieg, J et al, 2023) suggests that a useful way that Early Years Practitioners can support this is by using appropriate language related to the Role Play. By using a variety of language, it will expand the vocabulary of the child and give the children the opportunity to deepen their play. Another suggestion given to Early Years Practitioners on how to support Role Play is by providing an inclusive and enabling environment. If Early Years Practitioners are successful in doing this then they will be giving equal opportunities to all children within the setting. An effective way of doing this is by reflecting and taking into consideration all the needs of the children and adjusting the environment and practice to meet the needs and any ALN needs of the children to meet all the children's holistic developmentally needs. An additional suggestion from Children's Learning Through Play (Krieg, J et al, 2023) is for Early Years Practitioners to model appropriate behaviour whilst allowing the children to lead the play and develop their own plot to their story. This will allow children to develop their imagination and allow them to become more engage in their play.

Throughout a child's life they typically go through 6 stages of play. According to Pathways the 6 stages of play are Unoccupied Play which usually occurs between birth to 3 months old. The next stage of play is Solitary Play which can occur between birth to 2 years old. Continuing from this the next stage of play is Onlooker Play which may occur around 2 years old. After this the next stage of Play is Parallel Play, which can also occur from 2 + years old. As the child develops the next stage of play is Associate Play which could develop between the ages of 3-4 years old. The final stage of play a child can experience is Cooperative Play which can occur from the age of 4+ years old.

Section 2 – Evidence of a clear understanding of why it is important for children to choose their own play and the importance of the role of the adult in children's play.

When working in an Early Years Setting providing a stimulating, inclusive and enabling environment for the children within that setting is vital. Vygotsky believed that by allowing children to play and learn through play it will lay a good foundation and help them develop Holistic areas of development such as social skills and emotional

development. Play Wales (No Date) suggests that an effective way for Early Years Practitioners to support self-directed play is by educating themselves on children's play and making use of resources provided by Local Governments to work in partnership with the National Curriculum of Wales. Another suggestion made by Play Wales (No Date) is for Early Years Practitioners to have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of children's play and a clear understanding of when to become involved in the child's play and when to observe the children in their play. When Early Years Practitioners have an understanding of this, they allow the child to take lead with their play and making decisions concerning it. As a result of this, children can develop confidence and a sense of feeling proud of themselves which can encourage them to continue making decisions for themselves in other aspects of their life. Another suggested way of Early Years Practitioners to help support Self-directed play is by self-reflection on own practice and the setting environment. By continually reflecting on practice during the moment and afterwards, it allows for practitioners to improve their practice and the environment. This would allow Early Years Practitioners to provide an environment which will stimulate and meet the needs of all the children within the setting allowing the children to access it to the maximum potential.

Children's play is important for a variety of reasons. Nidirect (No Date) states "Play improves the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and young people. Through play children learn about the world and themselves." Children learn a variety of skills needed throughout their lives from play. By allowing children to play children can gain confidence, resilience, problem solving, independence, curiosity, fine and gross motor skills, emotional development and emotional regulation and many others. It is important for Early Years Practitioners to remember that play is the right of the child in accordance with the UNCRC article 31.

Section 3 – In depth discussion and understanding of an observation method for young children.

Observation is an important of working in an Early Years Setting. According to Early Years Matters "Observation is the practice of looking at and listening to children to find

out how they are developing, what they like doing and what they are learning through their play and experiences on offer.” When working with children and young people it is essential that we observe the holistic development of all the children in the setting. By ensuring that Early Years Practitioners do this they can monitor the children's development and note if the child is developing according to the norm. This is an effective way of monitoring and detecting any issues or delay with the development. Early detection of any delays will allow Early Years Practitioners to strategize and intervene and provided support to the child and their families when necessary. Another key factor in observation is that it allows Early Years Practitioners to watch the child's behaviour in a variety of situations and allow them to see the child's like and dislikes. This will assist in creating a bond with a child and planning appropriate activities to enhance their experience within the setting. An additional benefit of observation for Early Years Practitioners is by observing the children and getting to know the child's behaviour, it can assist Early Years Practitioners in spotting signs of unusual behaviour within children and intervene appropriately.

A method of observation commonly used are Running Records. Complex needs describe Running Record as a type of observation in which Early Years Practitioners record and observe the actions of a child or children during their time at the setting and/or during an activity. This type of observation can be a detailed account of an activity or experience a child was in. From this, Early Years Practitioners can reflect on an activity and the child's engagement in it. It can be used to support Early Years Practitioners when they are preparing activities. This type of observation can also assist Early Years Practitioners in observing the child's development progress and interactions with other children and staff within the setting. A negative to this type of observation could be that aspects of the observation could be missed by the Early Years Practitioners while they are recording something in which has previously happened. Another limitation to this type of observation could be that the observation may not provide full context of the observation in which is being recorded or a background of events which led up to the observation being taken. Although in some cases this type of observation may be able to provide a holistic view of a child at a certain time period or situation but in other cases it may only focus on one area or activity or situation.

Section 4 – Demonstrate an understanding of 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.

When observing children, it is important to provide a relaxed environment in which they feel comfortable and confident in, with an Early Years Practitioner in which they are comfortable with. By meeting these needs, it allows Early Years Practitioners to gain a knowledgeable observation of a child. The child may feel more relaxed and engaged with the activity they are participating in. By ensuring the child is feeling confident and relaxed when being observed, it is probable that the observations taken of the child will be more of an accurate representation of the child. According to PACEY (2016) key components of a good observation is ensuring the child is engaged in an activity of their choice. Allowing the child to choose an activity to engage in will provide the child the freedom to pursue interests that they have which will also result in their full engagement within the activity. It may also be a good indicator as to where they are developmentally, and which areas need to be targeted for improvement.

PACEY (2016) also states that when Early Years Practitioners are observing children, they need to keep in mind the part that they play within this. Although observations should be made on a child led activity it is vital that Early Years Practitioners are providing an inclusive and enabling environment which is accessible for children of all abilities are able to use to support the development of the children holistically. Early Years Practitioners should allow time for themselves to take a step back and look at their setting and ensure that it meets the needs of the children and that it is also meeting the guidelines provided by The National Minimum standards. Practice reflection carried out by Early Years Practitioners is an effective way to support this. Another crucial part played by Early Years Practitioners is ensuring all staff are trained up to the appropriate standards. By ensuring that the Early Years Practitioners within the setting are of an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding of observations and child development, observations being made will be used efficiently in order to support the children within the setting. Early Years Practitioners with in-depth knowledge will know

from their training how to make effective use of observations, how to carry them out and not be involved in the observation and to only observe it. This knowledge alongside their knowledge of the child will gain effective results in observations which can be used efficiently to support the child in their developmental journey

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