

What evidence is there to support the importance of play for young children's development?

Abstract:

This research project has been undertaken to discover the evidence which determines the importance of play in young children's development. The researcher will observe children in the early years playing as well as creating a case study in which looks further into the contrast in development in children who play in comparison to children who don't, as frequently as their research method. This project will be undertaken using the triangular, mixed method approach- this will allow accurate results while collecting data. The researcher will create a questionnaire for parents and practitioners- of children in the early years, to discover their thoughts and observances of their children's development through play. The researcher will also discuss with practitioners their observances of the children who choose to play in comparison to the children who don't as often. To ensure the university, researcher and all participants are at minimal risk, a risk assessment will be completed. As well as discussing safeguarding, consent, and confidentiality- within ethical considerations.

Literature review:

The purpose for this research is to discover what evidence there is to support the importance of play for young children's development and determine the benefits. Many studies have shown NI DIRECT (NO date) state Children and young people who play have improved cognitive, physical, social, and emotional health. The basic foundation that supports learning, exploring, problem-solving, and developing an awareness of the world and your place in it is provided through play, which is significant suggested, Mayra Mendez PhD, LMFT. In response to research within play and child development, The United Nations High Commission for Human Rights has declared that every child has the right to play since it is crucial to maximum child development states Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1989). When Froebel created 'kindergarten' he allowed children to learn through play- mainly outdoors in the garden area he stated, "The child who has cared for another living thing...is more easily led to care for his own life "The garden was not intended for teaching purposes, either in nature study or horticultural skills. Instead,

children learned from their own excitement and experience. (Froebel, in Lilley 1967: 128) quoted in Maynard T (2014). It has been suggested that teachers of young children should view play as essential states Pellegrini and Boyd, 1993 in Howard, J (2010), they also state children associate child led, self-initiated activities as play. Encyclopaedia Britannica (2020) state in a video which discovered the importance of play in child development, children as young as babies learn through play. Babies most commonly play with toys which develop child co-ordination and strength such as rattles. As babies get slightly older their play turns into the learning of emotional and social development, when engaging in play with others. The video states a massive impact on child development through play is cause and effect', as they get older after learning the type of play through adult lead, the toddlers are able to do this independently. Toddlers then often develop their language and cognitive growth through role-play, replicating familiar life tasks they have seen. The development of child roleplay then increases as children join the early years of the foundation phase in primary school, as their imagination develops, this allows children to form social relationships with peers/ practitioners while discussing and playing through role-play. As Anderson-McMamee, J and Bailey, s (2010) suggest A child needs to play in order to develop healthily. According to research, 75% of brain development happens after birth. Play supports that development by forming connections between nerve cells in the brain, which stimulates the brain. As well as this they state, three-year-olds are the age at which children start interacting with other children their age. Children develop social behaviours like partnership and sharing by playing with other children. They are starting to understand how to form moral principles through moral reasoning. In order for children to be ready for life as adults, they must be exposed to a range of social circumstances. This suggests play not only develops children's development but also life circumstances for the real world. Children develop early mathematical skills such as shape and size through play, enhancing their social, fine motor, cognitive and language skills. NI DIRECT (NO date) state that children thrive upon risky play. This allows them to test their personal limits, by challenging themselves to risks. Young children often have very little fear, by being given the opportunity to experience risky play, they are learning life skills to deal with risk. Children then through trial and error, learn from their mistakes by discovering their boundaries, trying again and experiencing self-belief. Early years matters (2023) suggests that play also serves as the foundation for education and each aspect of a child's growth. Children learn language, how to express their feelings

and be creative, as well as social and intellectual skills, through play. They state, children are at their highest level of learning when playing. Babies first developments through play are often their senses, hearing their rattle shake, seeing something which fascinates them, touching/reaching for things. Children become fascinated in what they are doing while playing, allowing them to learn through play, states family lives (2023). "Play is the work of the child," as Maria Montessori once stated. Children can discover an incredible lot about their surroundings when given the freedom to explore it via meaningful activities stated Fishtown Montessori (2021).

Methodological considerations:

During this research project, the researcher will be undertaking multiple types of research methods- this approach is called triangulation. Heale, R and Forbes, D (2013) state in research, triangulation refers to the utilisation of many methods to investigate a specific question. By verifying an observation using two or more independent measurements, the objective is to enhance confidence in the results. By using the triangulation approach, the researcher is able to gain both quantitative and qualitative data- widening the data gathered. Anything that can be measured, tallied, or assigned a numerical value is considered a quantitative piece of data, states National Library of Medicine (No date). Whereas Qualitative data are those that represent concepts and data that cannot be measured. Maps, photos, lab notes, personal diaries, focus groups, printed materials, and other observations are frequently used to compile them states National Library of medicine (No date). The sample size will be 3 primary schools in South Wales.

The method of research to gather information based on the children's perspective will be observation- this will be the most beneficial research method for children in the early years. The children will be observed in their setting while playing. Had interviewing been the chosen research method for the children, as Howard, J (2010) states while the children are capable of engaging in questioning and sharing their thoughts, to ensure their views are accurately and ethically researched, if interviewed while participating in play the child will become distracted and similarly if interviewed after play a young child's mind will be reflection on previous activities. The methodology of observance is a much more advanced way to gain knowledge, seeing how the children play. The researcher will observe the

children with consent in their setting included in the sample size. As Lambert, M (2019) suggests, through observation, one may observe and evaluate the development and progress of their pupils and make pedagogical decisions and interventions to improve their behaviour, curiosity, and learning. The type of observation the researcher will use is unstructured observations. Unstructured observations are when, data is gathered and documented descriptively, as heard, seen, and comprehended by the researcher, as opposed to structured formats. This could entail taking notes, crafting detailed narratives, keeping research diaries, or capturing audio or video, states Lambert, M (2019).

The second research method going to be used is a questionnaire. This questionnaire will be given to parents of the children in the sample settings. The questionnaire will ask both open-ended and closed questions for the parents to respond to, although a majority being closed questions- as these are easier to compare and contrast. Lambert, M (2019) suggests with the use of questionnaires, researchers can frequently get a sizable amount of data from respondents in a short period of time. Additionally, questionnaires can be especially helpful when the goal of the study is to determine the diversity of opinions and viewpoints regarding particular subject for example, in this research project "What is the importance of play in child development?" As The open university (no date) states, the questions in the question are must all be relevant and answer back to the research project question, in which is being proposed. Pointerpro (2023) states questionnaires generate a large amount of data, allowing more valid information to be gathered by delivering to a broadened range of people- in this case parents. When creating the questionnaire with questions involving multiple choice or satisfaction scales the data gathered will ensure consistency and allow the researcher to recognise patterns and trends within the answers given. The researcher will not ask parents to give any personal details, by keeping anonymous, the parents confidentiality will allow them to deliver more honest and accurate answers without fear of judgement. It is also a beneficial research method to be able to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The researcher could ask questions such as, "On an average how many hours of play does your child engage in a day?" to gain quantitative data, or questions with a multiple choice option, for example- "Which area of skills do you believe your child develops most in during play?" with options such as: Language, social, fine-motor, mathematical. By gaining both types of data, the researcher has widened the research findings. The

questionnaire then allows the researcher to analysis data straightforwardly, as all parents have answered the same questions, the ability to compare and contrast their answers to analyse them is easier. The parents can do the questionnaire comfortably from their home, with no pressure on them. This makes the input to the research project easily accessible to all parents, as it will be an online questionnaire it will have different features, for example a 'read-aloud' feature to ensure all parents are able to access this. This is ensuring diversity within the answers.

Lastly, the researcher will interview the practitioners from the setting. This will gather their personal records, thoughts, and opinions on the research project as they observe this practice on a daily basis. According to Open University (no date) the type of interview this would be a semi-structured interview. This would allow key questions and points to be covered while allowing the practitioner to feel relaxed, not having a 'correct' answer they must deliver. As well as allowing the researcher to ask appropriate additional questions where neccasary. University Libraries (no date) states by interviews consisting of open-ended questions, the practitioner is able to give an in-depth answer. In this research project the practitioner will be answering based upon their daily observations of the children in their settings. As the practitioners acknowledge a large group of children's development, they are able to talk widely about their observances. The practitioners interview answers will be kept anonymously, unless discussed otherwise.

Ethical considerations:

Ethical Considerations are a crucial consideration when undertaking a research project. Safeguarding- NSPCC (2023) state it's critical to have a well-defined strategy in place for handling children's distress or disclosures of harm caused to themselves or others. The NCSPCC (2023) have a policy in place which states the researcher has the responsibility to act on concerns that they are made aware of to the relevant organisations. As well as this when a research project is taking place within a setting a process needs to be in place in the instance of poor professional practice.

Consent- When undertaking a research project in which involves children, parents/ guardians must be asked for permission. Due to the research project being researched

around children in the early years- these children are particularly too young to understand 'consent'. However, it could be equitable to ask for the child's "assent" if they demonstrate a willingness to engage and an understanding of what is expected of them- Although in these cases parents' consent should always be confirmed. Parents/ children should fully understand- what the research project is, what will be anticipated from the participants, what the risks of the research project are/ what the benefits are, as well as that the child's involvement in the research project is voluntary- this is informed consent states NCSPP (2023). This will allow the researcher to involve the consented children in the research project. The researcher will create a consent form including all the details to form informed consent, for the parents/ guardians of the children to sign. These can then be stored safely and securely to refer to, if necessary.

The researcher is observing the children as the chosen research method. When observing the children, when appropriate the researcher will video the children during play, where they show signs of development. This is an ethical issue as, videos on mobile devices are easily accessible and vulnerable to hacking as the individual data (videos) are not password protected. As well as this the children will not be kept anonymous, and confidentiality could be broken. The researcher would again need to gain consent from parents/ assent from the children where appropriate, for the children to be videoed.

During the research project, a child or practitioner could make a disclosure to the researcher. In this case BERA (2018) states that researchers may be required by law to reveal confidential data to the appropriate authorities in some circumstances, such as when abuse has been disclosed or terrorist activities. If a disclosure is made, to safeguard the child referring to Article 3- of the rights of the child, "All decisions and actions that concern children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration." - this means the researcher might have to break confidentiality however, the safeguarding of the child is priority.

Risk to participants:	How to reduce the risks to participants:
Researcher- a child, practitioner or parent could make a disclosure to the researcher- while gathering information.	BERA (2018) states researchers may be required by law to reveal confidential data to the appropriate authorities in some circumstances, such as when abuse has been disclosed or terrorist activities. are displayed, and they must be aware of these obligations. The researcher is minimising the risk to themselves by making appropriate authorities aware of any disclosure.
Parents/ practitioners might feel under pressure to deliver the 'correct/needed' information to the researcher.	The researcher should reassure parents/ practitioners that there is no 'correct' information they can provide, and their honest observances will be most beneficial to the research project.
Researcher- difficulty getting consent to observe the children as they are so young.	NSCPP (2023) state that it could be equitable to ask for the child's "assent" if they demonstrate a willingness to engage and an understanding of what is expected of them. However, parent consent must always be confirmed.
University- reputation damage if the researcher does not follow the legislation and guidelines	The researcher should read the UWTSD Research data management policy. To follow correct guidelines.
Complaint being made about the researcher	BERA (2018) state when a stakeholder or member of the public voices a concern or files a complaint, researchers have an obligation to think about the most appropriate course of action to take- have

	a complaints procedure aligned with the universities conduct in place.
The device/ system where data, videos of observances/interviews are stored could be hacked and shared. - or themselves breach confidentiality by publishing without consent.	Researchers should follow BERA ethical guidelines for educational research- they state it is essential for researchers to guarantee the security of their data and to avoid any potential breach of confidentiality and anonymity resulting from the format of their publications, including those published online. They suggest data is easily hackable via email so should not be shared this way. Data should be password protected and data encrypted- while stored on secure premises. (BERA, 2018) By following this guidance, risk of breached data being published/ hacked.

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