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Does risky play have a positive impact on physical development?

Abstract

This research project looks closely at risky play and the positive impact that it has on a child's physical development. The reason for the researcher choosing this topic, is through a personal interest of risky play within the outdoors, and through personal experience of playing with children daily within an outdoor environment that has many risks associated with it. The researcher firstly looks into risky play by stating what it is, importance, and the advantages and disadvantages it can hold. The researcher believes that this will help to provide themselves with a deeper understanding of the topic. The researcher chooses to look more deeply into this topic, by evaluating firstly an environment that has lots of risks and secondly and environment that has not many risks. This will help the researcher to come to an accurate conclusion by evaluating to very different environments and how both impact the children differently, and whether the impact is positive or negative depending on the environment. To collect data, the researcher will be collecting research through observations, interviews, and questionnaires. Each of these methods are unique, which the researcher hopes will provide a range of different answers, to come to a final conclusion on this topic. Ethical considerations have been investigated closely which has provided the research with a guide to ensure the right ethical approaches are taken, to ensure that the research is carried out correctly, and that the children and adults' rights are upheld, and they are being protected through confidentiality and consent or assent.

Introduction

Sandseter (2009) defines the term ‘risky play’ as play that provides a sense of excitement and stimulation but may also come with a risk of obtaining bodily harm. Relating back to excitement and stimulation, Kleppe, Melhuish and Sandseter (2017) admits that enjoyment and happiness are the main reason why children want to participate in risk taking. Burns and Gottschalk (2020) agrees with this definition, expanding that children are drawn to these experiences to take control of their worries and to experience these thrills. Sandseter (2009) believes that taking risks within play is natural, and according to Brussoni et al. (2012), children have an inborn need to risk take, which can be supported through the outdoor environment. Also, Kleppe, Melhuish and Sandseter (2017) implies that when children carry out risky play, they are preparing for life like events. Burns and Gottschalk (2020) explains how the outdoor environment is suitable for supporting risky play, as it can be unrestricted, meaning that children can take control of their learning. For example, Sando, Kleppe and Sandseter (2021) lists that children can jump off high crates or walk on logs to practice their balancing skills, supporting their risky play and physical development. Sandseter (2009) agrees that risky play mostly takes place outside, as children can lead with adventure and participate in activities that support their physical development. O’Connor and Daly (2016) define physical development as control of the body and the maturing of the brain. Sando, Kleppe and Sandseter (2021) expands this as when a person carries out full body movements that requires individuals to use their energy. Kvalnes, Beate and Sandseter (2017) states that risky play and physical development are similar, as risky play is physically demanding on the body. Kvalnes, Beate and Sandseter (2017) has an understanding that outdoor environments that provides uncertainty, allows children to challenge their physical skills, than an outdoor environment that provides little challenge. Within physical development, Mnejja (2023) defines gross motor skills as when the movement of all the body is being used, including activities such as climbing, jumping, and running. Mnejja (2023) moves on to describing fine motor skills as when an individual uses the smaller muscles within the body, which includes carry out tasks such as writing and threading beads.

Children have a range of opportunities to develop throughout risk taking. For example, Orestes (2015) states that when children take risks, it will assist them in identifying risks and learn how to manage risks later in life. Orestes (2015) also suggests that children will also develop skills such as resilience, patience,

management, and self-determination. Sando, Kleppe, Sandseter (2021) believes that risky play helps encourage children to become stronger physically. Sandseter (2009) expands this further by suggesting children who carry out risky play, will improve their fine and gross motor skills and spatial awareness, which supports their physical development. Kvalnes, Beate and Sandseter (2017) considers that risky play allows children to experience defeat and to develop the courage to try again, in turn this builds a resilient individual. Orestes (2015) proposes that a supportive adult during children participating in risky play, will help them in the future to form independent choices that are positive. Smagorinksy (2018) researched Vygotsky's theory on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), looking carefully at what a child can do independently, with some help from a more capable peer or an adult, and then if they are more confident in carry out the task by themselves after receiving assistance. On the other hand, Burns and Gottschalk (2020) establishes the disadvantages of a child participating in risky play, stating that a child can become injured, which has developed to adults to become more fearful of letting their children to experience risky play, and for children to experience independence. Burns and Gottschalk (2020) suggests that because parents and carers may limit children's opportunities, then a child may be at risk of sustaining injuries as they have not been able to develop the need to recognise risks. It is recognised by Gerrand (1993) that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) that Article 31, suggests that children have the right to play and to rest, while also being offered a variety of activities to participate in. Mannello, Casey and Atkinson (2020) understand that play is at the centre of the early years, and children have the right to be involved in different types of play, such as risky play.

This study aims to investigate whether risky play provides a positive impact on a child's physical development.

Methodological

Research is defined by Bolshaw and Joesphidou (2018) as when an individual has an interest in learning, studying, and understanding something new. Nolan, Macfarlane and Cartmel (2013) provide a similar definition, by suggesting that research enables individuals to explore new understandings, discover new interests

or to research a new theory. Bolshaw and Joesphidou (2018) explains how research within the early years enables individuals to carry out research and explore new concepts, contributing to new ideas relating to children, how they learn, their surroundings and provides up to date understandings. Arnold (2022) identifies the importance of carrying out research. Arnold (2022) suggests that research can provide up to date facts and can develop an individual's knowledge on a specific topic. Liverpool (2021) links this to practitioners by stating that research can benefit the early years by providing practitioners a summary of what children need and how these needs can be met, as well as providing a reflection on an individual's practice as well. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) also describe the benefits by stating that research, can analyse current beliefs surrounding theories and curriculums within the early years, leading to an improvement on how practice is carried out and children's learning.

Within research, the investigator will have a methodology. Methodology is described by Roberts-Holmes (2014) as the structure of the research. Mbuagbaw et al. (2020) expands on this by stating that a methodology, enables individuals to assess the plan for researching and reviews the overall research topic. Roberts-Holmes (2014) provides examples, stating that the methodology includes the concept, investigation importance, the beliefs, and the reasoning behind a research project. Lanager (2018) states the importance of a methodology, suggesting that to develop a conclusion on a research project, then a well-planned out design on how to receive answer is desired. McCombes and George (2023) develops this further, by understanding that it can be a good point for the researcher to share their beliefs on why they wanted to research the topic of choice and can also help readers to understand how the research will be carried out. For example, Langer (2018) identifies that the researcher will need to consider quantitative and qualitative research, and what methods would be best for them to use.

Qualitative data is defined by Seers (2012) as when an individual carries out research that is supported through the use of verbal expression, narrative and/or the use of photography, videos, providing evidence to support the findings of the research. Bailey (2008) suggests that using one or more of these, will help to provide a detail response, and it can capture body language, expressions of participants, such as behaviour, while also viewing the environment. Nolan, Macfarlane and

Cartmel (2013) states that deciding to research through qualitative data, an individual will be able look deeper into another person's viewpoint of society and their beliefs. Tenny, Brannan, and Brannan (2022) recognises the strengths of using qualitative data by implying that this method allows the contributors to explain themselves, by using open-ended question to express their feelings towards the research. Tenny, Brannan, and Brannan (2022) suggest that this could be difficult if carrying out quantitative data. Marvasti (2014) also states that the use of qualitative data can provide a detailed description on a research topic. On the other hand, Thompson (2021) explores the restrictions, stating that it can be hard to compare data and can have a low number of participants, limiting how much data is received. To research through the use of qualitative date, Braun, Clarke and Gray (2017) and Nolan, Macfarlane and Cartmel (2013) both acknowledge that the methods of an observation and/ or an interview would be the most appropriate. Observations are described by Cowie (2009) as a full investigation of individual's actions in a realistic environment. According to Cowie (2009), an observation offers a direct encounter for a study and gives a full visual of the environment. An example by Palaiologou (2012) suggests that practitioners will observe children to learn a child's developmental stage, how they learn and their needs, helping practitioners to organise activities surrounding their findings. Spreeuwenberg (2022) identifies the strengths of an observation, stating that it can provide an overview of the communication being demonstrated and can recognise abilities that are being used. Although George (2023) and Gaille (2020) both agree that an observation, needs to be supported with another type of research method, as they can be seen as bias, as the researcher knows the intentions of the study and what is hoped to be found. Interviews are defined by Edward and Holland (2013) as when a person asks another individual a question, and the individual responses. Edward and Holland (2013) states that the questions within the interview can be unstructured leading to responses that are open-ended, which creates a range of different opinions upon a question. Nolan, Macfarlane and Cartmel (2013) suggest that a good relationship with contributors can lead to an interview that is credible and considerate. Greig, Taylor and MacKay (2013) states that interviews can benefit the researcher by having an uninterrupted conversation can allow to identify strong emotions that the contributor feels towards the subject, creating accurate responses, and comparisons. On the other hand, Adhabi and Anozie (2017) states that interviews are time consuming and take a long

time to carry out. Greig, Taylor and MacKay (2013) agree that interviews take time to examine.

Quantitative research is described by Goertzen (2017) as data that is collected, evaluated, and presented using numbers. Bhandari (2023) states that quantitative data can identify different patterns within the findings. Mcleod (2023) agrees, stating that predications based off findings can also help with quantitative research. Mcleod (2023) also believes that discovery from the findings can mirror beliefs of the researcher's analysis. Williams (2021) expands on this further by suggesting that the researcher creates a theory that they believe, afterwards, the researcher will analyse findings to see if it was correct or false towards what the researcher believed. The advantages of this type of research are explored by Rahman (2016), stating it can provide a large-scale of sampling, as many people can participate within this. Chukwuemeka (2021) disagrees stating that by receiving a large number of answers, can provide to many ranges of views, meaning that this could become time consuming for the researcher. To research through quantitative research, then a questionnaire or probability sampling would be best. A questionnaire is described by Malhotra (2006) as questions that are made to provide answers on a research topic. Mcleod (2023) describes a questionnaire as an interview that is written, enabling research to reach a larger amount of people. Hassan (2023) states that a questionnaire, can follow an unstructured or structured approach, making the data both qualitative and quantitative. The questionnaire holds many benefits which are outlined by Lindemann (2023) stating that they are confidential to the contributor and can reach a large scale of people at an inexpensive cost. On the other hand, Bhandari (2023) disagrees suggesting that questionnaire, may not support people with poor reading and writing skills due to a disability, and can be unbiased due to the lack of responses. Probability sampling is defined by McCombes (2023) as when a researcher randomly chooses a group of people to participate in the research to collect statistics. Nikolopoulou (2022) agrees that probability sampling, creates a greater statistic for the research, benefiting the findings of the research. Nikolopoulou (2022) also suggests that the sampling can reach a larger amount of people and give more options when researching the topic of choice. Although, Chukwuemeka (2021) identifies the disadvantages suggesting that it is less adaptable in unforeseen events and can be a long process the data or have enough data to have reliable statistics.

A researcher may decide on a mixed method approach or otherwise known as triangulation, which Bolshaw and Josephidou (2019) defines it as the use of both quantitative and qualitative data to carry out research that is correct. Almeida (2018) states that a mixed method approach provides a wider overview of the topic. Almeida (2018) also suggests that this also does not restrict the researcher from using only one method to gather information, creating the information more in-depth, while bringing the research together to provide an overview and whether the researcher's belief or paradigm is true. A paradigm is explained by Doyle, Brady and Byrne (2009) the researchers understanding or viewpoint of a topic, and how they go about to prove their answer. Within this research, the researcher believes that a mixed method approach, including an observation, an interview and a questionnaire would be appropriate to thoroughly research the topic of risky play and physical development in the outdoors. Through these different types of research, the researcher will be able to come to an accurate conclusion with the support of the findings.

Ethics

Ethics is defined by Alderson and Morrow (2020) as when research is carried out with consideration and respect towards the research and to participants within the research. Fouka and Mantzorou (2011) states that ethics enables researchers to consider what is correct and incorrect. Fouka and Mantzorou (2011) also points out that ethics is important as it can alter how research is carried out to ensure that a correct approach is followed, to respect participants and the company or individual of the research. Smith, Pinter and Kuchan (2013) identifies children as co-investigators within research, as they assist the researcher to support the topic that is being researched.

The British Education Research Association (BERA) is introduced by Govil (2013) as guidelines for ethics that researchers should follow to ensure an ethical approach. BERA (2018) states that these guidelines assist individuals carrying out research within education or those studying in the childcare sector. BERA (2018) guidelines directs the researcher with a responsibility for sponsors, contributors, communities, publishing and supporting the wellbeing and progress of individuals within research.

Govil (2013) briefly looks at what is included within the BERA guidelines. Consent, relationships, rights, communicating emotions, respect and engagement of participants within the research activities is all outlined with the guidelines, which are explained by Govil (2013)

Graham (2013) explains that ethics can assist the researcher to evaluate potential matters such as obstacles that could arise, while also ensuring to follow policies, procedures and laws. For example, when researching with children, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), is a law that must be upheld. According to Welsh Government (2022), the UNCRC recognises that children need rights. Welsh Government (2022) states that the UNCRC has forty-two sets of rights, relating to a child's needs, safety, development and health. Gerrand (1993) considers article 12 and 13 as the most appropriate articles while researching with children, to ensure good ethics is followed. Gerrand (1993) outlines article 12, stating that it ensures children have a voice and their voices are heard, when adults are involved in decisions that affect them. For instance, researchers within the early years, will be investigating matters that are going to have an impact on their future. Article 13 is also explained by Gerrand (1993) as when children can access information about themselves, if the information does not harm themself or harm other individuals. Within this research, the researcher has a responsibility to share findings or information when asked by contributors, also respecting and following the UNCRC. Scottish Childminding Association (2016) discusses participation as a continuing process, that a child's emotion and the active decisions that the adult make that affects them. Wetzelhutter and Bacher (2015) reviews Hart's Ladder of Participation, this theory has eight parts, which each part is influenced by how much participation the child is involved in. Percy-Smith and Thomas (2010) states that the ladder is child-led, the following children's interests, and letting the children direct the research. This lets the child determine their level of participation. Children must feel comfortable and safe when participating in research. Scottish Childminding Association (2016) suggests that the environment must enable children to demonstrate their emotions and to feel self-assured. Palaiologou (2012) implies that the children should form a relationship between researcher, contributing to them feeling comfortable within the environment the research will be carried out in. For instance, Graham et al. (2013) proposes that the researcher could act as a teaching assistant in the classroom, so they become familiar with the researcher and are

comfortable to express their feelings around them. Harcourt, Perry and Waller (2011) agree that a relationship should be established, as children should work with the researcher, rather than the researcher working on the children.

For participants to take part in a research study, consent must be given. Alderson and Morrow (2020) states that consent should be explained clearly, and participants should not feel persuaded or intimidated to take part, if they do not wish to do so. Alderson and Morrow (2013) evaluate the importance of accepting individual's choices to participate or not, suggesting that if a person feels pressured, it can result in them feeling embarrassment, mistreated, betrayed, and potentially harming mental health. There are two types of consent, which are consent and assent. Consent is explained by Robert-Holmes (2014) as when an individual willingly accepts to take part in a research project. Harcourt and Conroy (2006) states that the participant should be given time to determine whether taking part in the research is appropriate for them to do and providing the individual with information on the research. According to Arnott et al. (2020) assent is required for the researcher to read a child's body gestures, emotions that they demonstrate, and evaluating if they are interested in taking part. Assent is also described by Greig, Taylor and MacKay (2013) as when a parent or carer and a child is both informed of the nature of the research and what will happen, and the parent or carer gives assent, and the child also gives consent depending on their choice. Although Hartcourt and Conroy (2005) adds that parents or carers can give assent depending how young the child is or if the child has additional needs, as this would affect how well the child understands the study. It is important to follow the UNCRC Articles 12 and 13 as stated above, by ensuring to follow the child's voice when they are making decisions about consent and respecting their choices. Alderson and Morrow (2020) explore how consent may be given. Alderson and Morrow (2020) states that consent can be given verbally, such as recording the consent or through consent that is written, involving consent forms and emails. This data that is collected from individuals is confidential. Confidentiality is defined by Winter (2023) as when an individual's personal data is kept private. Winter (2023) also states that confidentiality keeps personal data safe and that individuals do not exploit the data or use it to their benefit. To help protect personal data, Clarke (2019) suggests following the General Data Protection Act (2018) (GDPR) will help the researcher to do so. Clarke (2019) defines the GDPR as when an individual must ensure personal information of individuals is protected.

Clarke (2019) points out that personal data includes, phone numbers, address, title, religion, and medical records. Welsh Government (2023) expresses that storing data appropriately is important to ensure it is safe. For example, using locked cabinets for paper records and digital records are protected by passwords. Welsh Government (2023) also states that individuals have a right to access their personal information and change it when needed. Within this research, the researcher will need to ensure that they follow this to protect children and their family's rights. The researcher will carry out consent through written form, asking participants for signatures and other personal details, to confirm that consent has been given for the correct child. Records will finally be kept in a locked, secure cabinet.

From the ethical considerations above, the researcher has carefully identified ethical approaches within their research. The researcher believes that a questionnaire would be beneficial towards the research, as it can reach further professionals within the early years, that come from a range of backgrounds, for example physios, practitioners and teachers. This will provide a range of opinions and answers, while asking specific answers that the researcher wants to find out more about. This will ethically support the research by individuals being asked their profession and the rest will remain anonymous, to protect individuals' identity and some individuals may not be comfortable within sharing their individual data. This will allow more people to feel more comfortable within contributing to the research. The interview was also thought to be beneficial by the researcher, as it can be unstructured and leave the individuals to expand their own answers and develop on the answers. The researchers and the participants will meet and discuss risky play and the impact it positively has on children's physical development. The researcher also suggest that they will be able to target certain professionals to participate. This will be ethically supported using consent forms from the professionals willing to take part, and confidentiality will be explained to participants and participants will be adhering to it when signing the consent form. This ensures no findings are openly shared with others outside of the research until the findings have been probably investigated by the researcher. Confidentiality will also protect other individuals taking part. Lastly, an observation of children taking part in an outdoor environment. The observation will be carried out twice, including 10 children with a range of abilities. Firstly, in an

environment will lots of opportunities for risky play, and another environment that is more basic and has less resources for children to use for risky play. For the researcher, this will hopefully provide a clear understanding on if risky play impacts positively on physical development. Ethically, a child will only participate through their consent verbally, and a consent form will be sent out to parents and carers to ensure that everyone is happy with the research. For children, this will not impact their daily routines and will be as if they are playing in the outdoors like any other day. Children will become familiar with the researcher, through the researcher visiting and playing with the children regularly. The researcher hopes this will encourage the children to feel more comfortable when researching. UNCRC and BERA guidelines will be supported, and upholding the children's rights are always upheld. For instance, if they say no on the day to participating then that will be respected. Through these different research options, hopefully the researcher will reach a reliable conclusion.

Conclusion

In conclusion, from the research of the literature review, establishes many benefits of risky play on physical development. This includes a child's mental wellbeing and being independent by developing the ability to assess risks themselves. The environment is important that it is open, to enable child-led learning, and contributing to risky play. The researcher of this project has a lot to consider when carrying out the research. For example, choosing the right way to collect the data and following an ethical approach. Choosing the right data will involve the researcher choosing between qualitative and quantitative data, which in this case, the option of both qualitative and quantitative data has been chosen, which are observation, interviews, and questionnaires to hopefully provide an accurate data response. Ethically, the researcher must follow the UNCRC and BERA guidelines to ensure children are safe, happy, healthy and that the research does not impact them in any way. It has also been established the importance of the researcher gaining consent or assent, ensuring that everyone involved with the research is happy with it, and respecting the individual if they are not happy. Also, following confidentiality to protect personal information of others.

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