

Play Portfolio

Section 1

Play is considered to be one of the most enriching experiences provided for children, it is believed to be crucial for all aspects of children's development (Bottrill, 2018). Through play it is suggested that children are able to consolidate their prior knowledge and open up their imagination and minds in order to learn and develop new knowledge and skills (Brown, 2013). The importance of play and how it impacts on children's development has been researched over several years, according to Macblain (2014), Froebels research and principles alongside his findings on the significance of the importance play has in all aspects of development is regarded as one of the highest standards of provision. Some theorists believed that play is not just a platform for learning and development, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory of play suggests that play is a form of therapy. He believed that play could bring a child's imagination and the real world together in order to alleviate stress, anxiety and past or present trauma (Freud Museum London, 2017). Anna Freud also believed that play was a form of therapy, and can give children the opportunity, through play, to process feelings and emotions that they may be facing. She also believed that through play children are able to communicate those feelings at the appropriate level and pace for them as an individual. (Anna Freud .org, no date).

Froebel viewed children as independent thinkers and learners and emphasised, in his play principles, the importance of allowing children the freedom to choose and explore at their own pace (Tovey, no date). The Welsh Government (2002) set out a Play Policy reiterating the importance of children having the freedom to choose their own play suggesting that through self-direction, play is fundamental in consolidating learning alongside their health and well-being. Although children having the opportunity to choose their own play is vital for learning and development the role of an adult is also believed to be an important factor in a child's development. Vygotsky believed that importance should be focused on the critical points of how and when an adult will engage in play activities with children rather than whether an adult will join in with play activities at all (Nilsson, and Ferholt. 2014, p 923). Vygotsky suggests that

appropriate adult participation, at the most appropriate time, during play activities at a child's developmental level is referred to as the zone of proximal development and can have an impact on the child's potential learning development (Nilsson, and Ferholt. 2014, p 924). Vygotsky's theory is supported by the play cycle theory, this theory focuses on the importance of an adult waiting for a cue or invitation from the child in order to join and return the play, however when an adult joins the play uninvited and with the intention of enhancing or educating through the play, this could cause annihilation of the current play cycle, leading children to move on to something different (Sturrock and Else, 1988).

Maria Montessori also emphasis on the role of an adult but with the idea that practitioners created stimulating environments for children and gave them the opportunities to explore and discover at their own time and pace (Macblain, 2014). According to Bottrill (2018) providing children with sufficient provision is essential for development, and environment with an area of play such as role play can support children's development holistically, for example, it can help children make sense of their world and real life situations including going to the shops or the doctor surgery, it can aid with literacy and communication skills and consolidate or build new relationships with peers (Community playthings, 2015). Froebels idea of children mastering life skills by using real tools can be facilitated into a role play area with real ice cream scoops or tea sets in order for children to learn how to think for themselves and offer endless possibilities (Tovey, no date). Having a role play such as a home corner, children can be exposed to number recognition through numbers on a phone keypad, mark making by taking messages or writing shopping lists, providing children with familiar natural and recycled materials for example packaging and equipment can link the child's play to the real world. Role play can be seen as an area of provision in the environment with props and equipment for enhanced provision but can have an equal effect on children's holistic development if children just decide to role play in any area, indoors or outdoors with their imagination to lead the way (Community play things, 2015).

Section 2

It is known that the welfare and safety of children is paramount, however it is also known that children naturally seek out, explore and experiment with risky play and behaviour. Research has shown that there is growing debate between keeping children safe from harm at all times, and allowing children to engage with risky play and the benefits that accompany it (Sandseter, 2007). The British Association for Early Years Education (no date) suggests that parents and practitioners may be limiting a child's development by preventing risky play and state that there is a balance between keeping children safe from hazards and significant harm whilst allowing them to engage in risky play, as opposed to eliminating risk altogether. Risky play is described as giving a child an exhilarated feeling, it is thrilling and exciting for them and almost always involves a potential risk of physical injury, however when children are given the opportunity to assess and undertake risk for themselves, it enables them to develop decision making skills and figure out their level of capabilities. When children are able to engage in risky play, success may not always be mastered the first time and this in itself requires the child to develop a resilient attitude and figure out new ways of attempting risky play with the ability to comprehend that during this play, and later in life, they may fail but have the confidence and skills to try again until they do succeed (Mcfarland and Laird, 2018).

An article published in 2016 studied an extreme outdoor area in a school setting in Belize, the study found that the children, who had ready access to a range of different outdoor risky play opportunities showed an increased level of fine and gross motor skills compared to those children who did not. The study suggests that the less opportunity for risky play, in line with outdoor areas being renovated and designed to promote safety and eliminate risk can lead to a decrease in physical activity as children may feel bored and less challenged (Gillis and Jupp, 2016), low levels of physical activity are a primary cause in childhood obesity in the UK which can lead to a life long effect on children and young people (HM Government, 2020). Play Wales considers risky play to be so beneficial to children's learning and development that they believe providing quality play provision for children requires them to have access and opportunities to engage in regular risky play, as among other things, risky play is central to their well-being and contributes to their emotional development alongside

their physical development (Play Wales, no date). Providing these risky play opportunities is thought to enable children to develop resilience, and to become confident enough to problem solve more independently, it is also a way in which children can make sense of the world around them developing their knowledge and understanding in a way that they are able to expand their knowledge as they become more independent and more able to manage risk for themselves (Early Years Careers, 2016).

Froebel's view of risky play was thought to be a way in which children were able to learn how to manage their own safety by providing children with the opportunity to use real tools and equipment fit for appropriate jobs in order to challenge themselves and develop skills for childhood and later in life. This type of play was implemented by Froebel in order to develop childrens autonomy and self-discipline, he also saw it as a way of providing children with opportunities to make choices and manage risk for themselves and others with adult guidance in a safe and effective way (Tovey, no date).

Section 3

Observations and assessments, in early years, is widely known to play a fundamental role in everyday practice. The foundation phase profile was implemented by the welsh government that compliments The Foundation Phase Framework as an observational and assessment tool. The foundation phase profile is an assessment framework aligned with the seven areas of learning and outcomes, it consists of a compact profile which includes four skill ladders which is used for the baseline assessment, and the full profile for a more in depth way of skills tracking and progression. Both profiles produce an outcome score which enables progress to be measured across them both (Welsh Government, 2015). The foundation phase profile, which promotes the holistic development of the child , is set out into specific category outcomes and possible observation scenarios, these outcomes are required to be observed on more than one occasion giving the practitioner the opportunity to acknowledge whether or not a child has gained mastery of specific skills. The foundation phase framework supports and emphasises this in that the holistic development of the child is at the core of this

curriculum, paying attention to enhanced provision opportunities, in the indoor and outdoor environment, in order for children to build on their prior knowledge and master these skills alongside developing new skills (Welsh Government 2015). The foundation phase profile requires practitioners to undertake baseline assessments six weeks after starting in reception with the results being forwarded to the Welsh government for the purpose of tracking pupil progression. It is also used as a progression tool through the child's early years in foundation phase, building on the previous year's outcomes. The importance of tracking and progression with baseline assessments being the starting point is supported by the Education Endowment Foundation, they believe that baseline assessments can provide a unique individual starting point and identify specific gaps in the child's learning in order to inform practice and create planning opportunities. The foundation suggests that without having baseline assessments it would not be possible to distinguish whether children have made appropriate progress during their time in foundation phase (Education Endowment Foundation, no date). However, an article published in TES in 2019, suggests that the demand and focus on tracking and progression could have a negative impact on the child. Gibbons (2019) believes that although progression and tracking has enabled some children to achieve high outcomes, it is not a true reflection on their ability to facilitate and develop new skills and consolidate their learning for future development, she suggests that with the pressures faced by practitioners to ensure specific progression steps are met at specific points in the school year or term, could lead to the use of planning being implemented to ensure the child leads to the next progression outcome rather than planning for children to develop in their own way and consolidating the foundations for learning.

As with any observational tool there would be benefits and limitations, The foundation phase profile is recognised throughout Wales and implemented in all settings within Wales, however settings are free to use their own recording methods to obtain observations and are encouraged to include the contributions of all practitioners. This could have the potential to lead to inconsistent observations due to not having a generic way of recording or no formal training and has the potential to be difficult to manage due to staffing issues. According to an article written by Education support.org (2016) the pressures on support staff are felt just as much as teaching staff and other

practitioners, interviews carried out on staff show that they are on an unrealistic time frame to get specific jobs done and are expected to fulfil multiple roles in multiple classrooms causing unnecessary stress, leading to an impact on the quality of observations in some settings. The Education Endowment Foundation (no date) suggest that the information gathered by practitioners during observations intended to inform practice need to be reliable, valid and be of a standard that is beneficial to practice and a high quality assessment or observation.

According to the foundation phase profile handbook, which is 42 pages long, outcomes should not be achieved by a singular one off observation but practitioners should observe and obtain a range of evidence to support the final outcome, (Welsh Government, 2015) however this could potentially lead to an increase in workload and pressures , which according to the National Education Union (2019) is one of the maintaining factors of teacher shortages and premature retirement from the teaching profession at present.

Section 4

In order to effectively promote children's learning and development it is known that accurate observations need to be carried out (Barber and Smith, 2010). According to a study in 2012 emphasis has been placed on, when observing children, care needs to be taken to ensure children interpret the activity being observed as playful. It was discovered that observations carried out on children completing activities that were interpreted by the child as play showed more evidence of emotional wellbeing than those activities interpreted as a more focused activity (Howard and McInnes, 2012). During these playful activities children were observed as being more engaged, happier and having the courage and self-esteem to be self-directed in order to extend their play, resulting in promoting their learning and development. It is believed that when playing, children feel more confident to move around more freely and are less distracted when they are engrossed in their world of play, which enables practitioners to observe the child holistically rather observe just one area of development (Howard and McInnes, 2012). The study found that most children were able to distinguish the difference between a playful activity and a non-playful activity by the different factors

present during these activities, for example, the location of the activity and the proximity of an adult can have an impact on their development outcomes. According to McInnes, et al (2011) studies have shown that children who perceive activities as more playful resulted in better outcomes and their performance was enhanced, compared to those children who were asked to complete specific focused tasks. In turn these studies suggest that during effective and engaging play activities children are immersed in their world and can show a range of holistic skillsets and knowledge when uninterrupted and when play is observed from the child's perspective. During observations where children are perceiving an activity as play, it is thought, from the studies undertaken, that the observational results will be of better quality, and give practitioners a much clearer picture of the children's capabilities. When the activity is perceived as play children are observed to be more engrossed and engaged in the activity therefore showing a more improved and motivated performance with significant accuracy and a more focused completion of the particular task in hand (Howard and McInnes, 2012).

When undertaking observations of children, it is suggested that children should be observed as a whole and children with effective opportunities to play can give practitioners the accurate observations needed in order to develop the child's individual skills and knowledge (Welsh Government, 2015). The Howard and McInnes study (2012) discovered that during activities where children interpreted an activity as playful children were observed to be more motivated and increased control which in turn lead to more positive outcomes compared to those children who participated in the more focused activities. This study also suggests that the role of the practitioner can impact on how children interpret these playful activities, for example, practitioners are able to provide a stimulating and playful environment, activities were seen as playful depending on their location, children were more inclined to rule an activity as playful if the location was on the floor rather than on a desk or table and if they were able to choose to participate rather than asked to participate. The annual report published by Estyn (2018-2019) supports this, they found that children are more engaged and motivated when participating in activities of their own choosing. The proximity and involvement of an adult is believed to have had an impact on how children learn, it was discovered that the children saw activities as more playful when

an adult was in the vicinity off the activity but not always directly involved. However, it is apparent that children can still interpret an activity as playful with an adult's involvement if they are familiar with the adult and both the adult and child participate in the activity as equals. It is suggested that when the adult is invited in to the play activity, is the moment the child regards the adult as an equal play partner, and the adult can participate in the play and begin to ask open ended questions but always ensuring the play is led by the child and the child is still able to initiate ideas and make choices in order to still perceive the activity as playful. The study also draws attention to the importance of a practitioner being able to interpret play from a child's perspective and the ability to reflect on the activities and provision provided in the environment being perceived as playful. It is believed that an environment that is engaging and motivating can provide endless opportunities to promote children's holistic development and give practitioners the opportunities to observe and develop children as a whole (Howard and Mcinnes, 2012).