

## **Play Assignment**

### **Section 1 – Different types of play explored**

Play is an essential part of learning for children's development. The importance of play in early year education was developed by Froebel (1782-1852), who had a belief that education should be central to the child (Pound, 2005). According to Bruce (2011) during play, children display their capabilities and intellect at its maximum levels, providing more pathways and understanding into rationale and analytical skills. With these skills, there is a deeper understanding when considering the individuals vast range of emotions, and how to manage these effectively. Furthermore, there is an intact feeling of self-worth, and the forming of bonds and relationships with others will strengthen.

The play cycle which was created in 1998 by Gordon Sturrock and Perry Else paper 'The playground as therapeutic space: play work as healing – The Colorado Paper' (The Playwork Foundation, 2022) which provides a conceptual explanation of how children's play can be supported by adults. King et al. (2020) combines the nine areas (metaludes, cues, return, frames, flow, annihilation, adulteration, intervention and display) that are made up of play and interlinks these into the Play Cycle Theory and investigates the outcomes of free led play in children based upon practitioners' input and level of intervention.

Within this section I explore two forms of play, role play and heuristic play and will unpack its benefits for children, discuss how play can be supported in practice and how play can improve holistic development.

There are many different types of play all of which provide a key part in a child's holistic development. When considering social skills, Bruner (1972) regards play as a fundamental characteristic to develop these attributes. There are several areas of development during social play including the familiarisation of customs and building connections with peers, in addition to having a better overall insight, developing intellect and improving processing skills (Brown, 2014).

Maria Montessori (1870-1952) believed that life skills should be integrated into play to develop a child's holistic skills. Learning through play to plant flowers in a garden, look after

a classroom pet or play a game of shop would not only encourage and build developmental skills but would also provide key essential skills that would be required later in life (MacBlain 2021).

When looking at role play within a setting, this alone can provide the freedom of choice for the child to take ownership of the learning through play experience. Examples of role play could include shop, hospital, police and cooking, which gives a wide scope of choice and endless possibilities for the child to lead the play with their individual interests and imagination, this closely links to Froebel's play theory which he regards is the focal point of a child centred approach. Bruce (2011) suggests that an indirect teaching approach can be influential as it can encourage curiosity, allow the child freedom of choice, decision making and provide new areas of learning that might not have arisen should the practitioner have stepped in. Hendricks (1995) suggests that practitioners can be easily influenced to somewhat control the child's playing experience and turn it into an educational tick box exercise (Christensen, 2008). Therefore, to effectively support children during a shop style role play activity, the practitioner must find the correct balance between observing from a safe distance to intervention where necessary.

The second type of play that I will explore is heuristic play. According to Goldschmied and Jackson (1994) the initial idea of heuristic play dates to the 1980s, where babies and young children can explore for themselves household objects and discover the variations of the materials (Brown, 2013). This closely links to Simon Nicholson's Loose Parts Theory (1971), where play should be free to explore everyday items, and used in a variety of different ways in which the child might choose. This theory encourages an open-ended learning pathway for children to develop imagination, creativity and aid positive mental health (Playwales.org, 2017). Community Playthings (2024) similarly regard heuristic play as being built on the foundations of inner curiosity in young children. As the child attains each developmental milestone their natural curiosity drives them to explore further. Learning through repetition and gaining an understanding of what sounds can be made through the tapping of objects for example reinforces and aids with their cognitive development (Huleatt, 2012).

## **Section 2 – The importance of child led play, and the role of the adult.**

Self-directed play, or child led play generates confidence in young children. It can provide a feeling of freedom and self-control of their individual play options and decisions.

Intrinsically motivated play allows for the child to experience first-hand their personal limitations and will constantly need to engage with decisions during the activity (Play Wales, 2022).

According to Cumming et al. (2005) intrinsic motivation can be interpreted as an individual's drive to successfully achieve positive outcomes. Weinberg and Gould (2003) suggest that intrinsic motivation can be segmented into three areas, knowledge, stimulation and accomplishment, and Havard University, (2023) states that this can either be encouraged or restrained because of the experiences that the child is subjected to by adults.

In addition, Havard (2023) also states that adults have a key role to play and should encourage interaction during spontaneous periods of play carefully, however they should carefully gauge the correct measure of input as something that was drawing upon curiosity and problem solving could quickly turn into losing interest as there has been too much involvement from the caregiver.

Early Years Education has placed child-led play at the core of its agenda. Free play still requires practitioners to plan, and ensuring relevant resources are available which will further support learning through play (Education Endowment Foundation, 2023). Welsh Government (2023) emphasises the importance of adults supporting children's play, highlighting the responsibility to keep children safe when exposed to risks, and ensuring a suitable and safe environment. It states within the Review of Play in Wales that adults can support children in several ways including building relationships, fostering trust, listening and displaying a genuine regard for their interests. Estyn (2024) view practitioners as enablers for young children who have the ability to shape and develop confidence and individual position within their educational journey.

Highlighted in the McInnes et al. (2011) paper, it suggests that adults should apply relevant approaches towards learning with play being at the core of education. This can be seen within a Reggio Emilia style approach where she instilled that children should take leadership of their own learning provided, they have a range of resources to explore, then the

environment will provide the teaching opportunities, and the role of the adult should be just to guide them through the process (Thornton et al. 2014).

### **Section 3 - Understanding SOGS observations in young children**

Observing and assessing children is a vital component in a child's development. It can provide essential information about an individual and indicate potential areas that may need additional support or intervention with. Welsh Government (2022) highlights within their assessment guidance that there are three key areas to enable positive learning, ensuring constant support, taking note paying attention and reflecting on children's achievement timelines, and having an overall knowledge of progress to improve on future practice. When undertaking observations, there is a risk of causing the 'observer effect' which Landsberger (1958) first identified at Hawthorne Works, Chicago. It is essential for effective observations to be recorded, for the children central to the assessment, to be oblivious of the situation, therefore resulting in no variations or differences in the actual quality and level of play that they are taking part in will occur because of the child knowing that they are being watched (Brown, 2014).

There are many different assessments for young children which are undertaken in various styles and focus on different areas of development. For the purpose of this assignment we shall explore in more depth the Schedule of Growing Skills which is a screening assessment for children aged 0 – 5 years.

The SOGS assessment was produced using the foundations from Dr Mary Sheridan's book *From Birth to Five Years*, (1985) which explored key areas of development patterns and milestones in young children (Ellis-Barrett, 2007). The purpose of the schedule of growing skills (SOGS) allows for professionals to review these eight critical areas in a child's development, ranging from speech, language and hearing, to locomotor, self-care and cognitive abilities. Children are usually assessed between the ages of 0 to 5 years and are assessed in a structured manner. The child's score in each developmental area is calculated by a consistent marking system, which will provide an indication of your child's ability in months, for example 17 months would indicate that your child has attained a score inline to that of a 1 year and 5 months old child (NHS, 2022).

As set out in the Healthy child Wales quality assurance framework (2022) it stipulates the criteria that SOGS will be conducted on which includes children who are looked after, living in Flying Start areas, children where there are concerns about their development or siblings who have had delayed progress, or if there are safeguarding concerns.

The SOGS test is used universally as a quick and effective method of measuring a child's development in core areas, which is simple to use and score, however the paper by Williams et al. (2013) explored alternative scoring methods in their study. It concluded that the DQ method provided a more accurate breakdown of criteria in comparison with the standardised scoring system. Overall, the SOGS assessment provides a holistic overview for practitioners to use as guidance in best supporting the individual child.

## **Section 4**

### **Understanding play during observations and assessments of children and how it affects the child's engagement during observation.**

Bilton, (2010) states that observing children during play is important as it captures the child leading, exploring, risk taking and experimenting at their own accord. Welsh Assembly Government (n.d) states how encouraging autonomous play will provide children with their own choice, free will and control of their enjoyment. Louis, (2022) discusses that practitioners who apply a Froebelian approach during observation will be constantly reviewing the children visually in the moment, however they will not interfere or intervene with the activity. It provides practitioners with a more accurate representation of the child's integral abilities that are not being influenced by structured by a timetable of lessons. Planned lessons, for example having a child to sit through a lesson of mathematics would result in different observational reports, and although structured lessons to a certain degree remain important for children's education, the practitioner would essentially be observing a child who has been told to sit, told to listen, and told to do a particular piece of work (Louis, 2022). Waite (2017) suggests that if practitioners intervene, the relevance of play that the child is engaging in is compromised by the influence of the adult, therefore it becomes a diminished experience that has been interfered with by the adult.

Andrews (2012) states that the motions of how practitioners conduct observations appear to run in parallel to play-led learning in children and will create a pedagogical environment for

all. Practitioners can best support these observations and assessments by having a holistic understanding of the child's needs and interests. Andrews highlights many examples of what adopting a pedagogical approach would include such as, building strong relationships, having an awareness of children's educational progress, having the ability to adjust teaching skills that will align with the variations of how a child plays from one moment to the next, and constant motivation for the child to work and play independently (Andrews, 2012).

Practitioners can support children during play by implementing various methods that can be seen in the play cycle. Using cues can be an important aspect to support a child, these can range from a brief glance, verbal interaction or simply just by introducing a relevant resource into the activity (Department for Education, 2023).

The Howard and McInnes paper (2013) also state that the dominance of play within educational curriculums has been well established and highlights the belief that play is at the core of educational and developmental benefits. However, it states that to achieve these benefits it is critical to have a knowledge of the correlation between play and learning. In an earlier paper McInnes et al. (2009) identifies there is evidence that having practitioners present can sometimes cause an adverse effect upon the educational learning, however after further investigation, studies published in McInnes et al. (2010) indicate that results were more beneficial, this was the case when quality of children's play did not have a practitioner directly present but was however proximal to the play.

The four sections of this portfolio have considered heuristic, and role play and has explained the important role of adults during children's play. I have also explored the Schedule of Growing Needs Assessment (SOGS) outlining the specific areas which are checked and scored to indicate any areas of concern and forecast a child's developmental pathway. Finally, I have provided the reader with insight towards the importance of natural play during observation.

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