

## Children's Play

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ECEY4003/C

Word count - 2,780

### Section 1

Having play in children's lives is so important for children to grow and develop in the best way possible and creates special bonds with other children, practitioners and their parents. What is play? 'Play is an activity where children show their remarkable ability for exploration, imagination and decision making' (startingblocks.gov.au). There are a variety of play types that children can do such as holistic play and adventurous play.

Holistic play is an approach which helps children understand the world around them in a positive way. It shows children that their well-being is top priority such as psychological and emotionally. Holistic development is usually played by younger children, the reason for this is that younger children are going through different changes and developments, and this play shows new things for children to learn about! When development is thought about, individuals first thought is physical, social, emotional development and the other types of development that children go through. However, children being able to express their feelings and take care of their bodies is also so important. Some of these skills can develop naturally within a child, however, children will learn much more if holistic development is brought to a child's attention. If practitioners are using holistic play and holistic development with children, it is highlighting every single way a child can develop and it is making sure children are aware of their own wellbeing. By using holistic ways in a child's life, it will help children learn better and this will make children feel loved, safe and cared for. When using holistic development in a child's life it brings out the most important skills such as empathy, compassion, problem solving and teamwork, these skills are so important for a child's adult life.

Adventurous play is more of a physical play. This play also can involve injury however, children learn from this and adapt. This play is usually an outdoor play, it would take place outdoors such as in the woods. Adventurous play opens a child's imagination for example when being outside children tend to pretend there is a bear chasing them or their chasing fairies, this is showing practitioners that being outdoors is benefiting the children. Nathan Greene a child psychologist, has said that children benefit from being with nature. He has said that by being outside children stress less about things and have better self-esteem. It is also said that while children are playing adventurous play, it can help children with their worries and children are aware of the comfort the outdoors can give. By playing outside children are put through different challenges and opportunities and this will help with a child's development. When a child is playing outside, children will turn nature into a playground. Children will go into their own little world when playing outside, as practitioners it is important that all of us are going into this world too, for example if a child thinks that a wooden stick is a magic wand it is our chance to encourage the child to use imagination. Friedrich Froebel had a very strong opinion about outdoor play

and believed in the importance of it. Froebel created his own trust called the Froebel trust; he believed that play is one of the best ways to learn. He has said that children should have all opportunities to play and have their own space to play and feel safe and not adult led. 'Play helps children to see how they connect with nature and the world around them' - Friedrich Froebel

## Section 2

Within the early years the importance of children choosing their own play is key. If the child chooses the play, the child will be more engaged in the activity. When a child has freely chosen to play, it widens imagination and interests. This helps children with mental health, well-being and development. Play is so important in a child's life, by playing children learn new skills such as confidence, self-esteem, resilience and most importantly coping with challenging situations. By children playing too, it will encourage social development, and creating new friends, by children doing this, new friends will be created, and the child would be so excited to go to their setting.

Children should be encouraged to use self-directed play as it helps children to use creative minds with no adult help. Adults can support children by encouraging them to be more independent with their play, let the child look for things to play with, let the child use their own mind to decide what that stick is they found outside, or if an old shoe box is a rocket. By adults giving children a big enough space for the child to play, this will encourage children to go off and use their own space to create new play, if the child knows that an adult has created this space it might make the child feel safer. If adults are taking away screens as much as they can, this supports self-directed play as the child is given the chance to go off and find something to play with or even use their own imagination. As an adult do not overpower the child, if the child calls the adult over to play just remember that the child always leads the play, be interested in the ideas the child gives by showing children that the adult is interested this will give the child a confidence boost. The role of the adult is to give children the correct environment for children to be able to use self-directed play. By having loose parts in the environment children can use their minds and create new things. The curiosity approach gives children their freedom while playing, adults have the responsibility to give children these opportunities to let them grow and shine through play.

The Howard and McInnes paper discuss the role of adult in an early years classroom. This paper says that adults having many different roles when it comes to play from directing the play or letting the children lead the play. In the paper there was research done by Siraj Blatchford in 2002, this research was called 'Researching Effective Pedagogy'. This research shows that it is very effective when settings use child led and adult led play, however, it was said that adults needed to engage more in the child play activities. If adults are engaging more with children when children are playing child led play, this will encourage children to do so, in a child's brain if adults are finding their games fun and imaginative this will make the child feel good about themselves and their play, which makes the child much more confident. Howard and McInnes (2010) have explained that if adults are less present in child's play this will let the child be much more playful within their child led play.

When a child plays they will go through the play cycle. The play cycle is six different steps the child will go through before play, during play and after play. The cycle breaks down how children play for practitioners. To start off the play cycle children will think about what they want to play, how they will play it and what resources they will use to play the game, this is called **Metaludes**. The next approach the child will think about is, if the child wants to play alone or with others, if the child decides a game and wants to play by themselves they will go off and start the game, however, if the child does not want to play on their own, the child will find friends and use play cues to see if the other children would like to play to. This is called **Cues**. The next thing the child will think about is **return**, this is when the child will wait and see what their friends or adults response is of them wanting to play a game. The child will also look around at the environment there in to see what can be used for the game. After doing this, the section **frames** will come into play, this is when the leader of the game decides on the rules and what everyone's roles are, this is a chance for everyone taking part in this game have a chance to give lots of ideas on what to play. The next section in the play cycle is the **flow** of the game, this is when the children or adults start playing the game and decide how long the game goes on for, the game could last up to 10 minutes or up to an hour, this all is dependant on how the children are reacting to the game. The end to the play cycle is **Annihilation**, this is when the children decide to end the game or even to find a different game to play. This cycle is what every child will go through every time they play, even with self-directed play, as the child is the leader this gives them a sense of power.

During the early years all children will use play cues, especially children with additional learning needs. Some of the play cues are verbal, body language, eye contact, proximity and copying. As an early years practitioner, it is very important that it is understood that some children may find it difficult to communicate when they would like to play. As adults, it is so important that bombarding children is not what to do when the child is doing self-directed play, play cues will give practitioners the correct indication when they want adult involvement.

### Section 3

Within the early years, the best way to see how a child is growing and developing is through doing observations. By watching children play practitioners can see how children naturally play and what children like to do and what they do not like to do. Early years workers can also see how children are developing physically, socially, mentally and emotionally, this is important as this can highlight if a child needs extra help with a certain area within the section. The foundation phase supports children's development and learning, they do this through using observations, this will give children a more "developmentally appropriate holistic curriculum" (GOV Wales). The government has created the foundation phase for early years workers to notice possible additional needs, special educational needs and developmental delay. This gives children the opportunity to have the help they need and deserve.

There are many ways of making notes for children's observations. Running record is a written observation which can be used to keep track of how children develop and what the child's likes and dislikes are. There are different strengths for this way of making notes of children's observations. This written observation is very detailed, it gives the times the child did these things, things like eye contact, body movement can also be added into this observation. By this written observation being detailed, it gives practitioners something to go back to, seeing if the child still plays with the same things or interacts in a different way. By keeping these to, it can point things out such as additional learning needs or develop mental delay, using this observation can be good evidence to help the child get the help they need and deserve. Every child will have their own written every observation, which is good as it highlights everything about the child, such as different behaviours and how the child acts in different situations. However, there are some weaknesses that come with the written observations. By using this way of observing, it is very time consuming, writing this observation will take time and effort to do. It could be very difficult to find time to do this as it is impossible to watch the children also write a very detailed observation, practitioners will find it difficult to focus which could mean that they could write the observation wrong, this could lead to false information. As this written observation is so detailed, if practitioners are making detailed notes and watching the child the same time, the practitioner could miss things if they are not focusing on the child as much as they should.

## Section 4

When observing children, play is important as it highlights different things that children do. Play can help children with problem solving and from observing children, practitioners are able to see how children do it and how their brain works and reacts to the problem solving. Play also brings children together, which means that new friends are created, by observing practitioners are able to see how children react in a social way, also how they interact with other children. When children are playing it reduces stress levels, by observing children practitioners are able to see if there is anything that stresses the child out and if there is, observing will highlight this ([thegeniusofplay.org](http://thegeniusofplay.org))

When practitioners are observing children they will get a full understanding of how the child is developing and what the child's strengths and weaknesses are. If practitioners are observing children, they are able to see the child's cognitive development. This is important as practitioners are able to see how children think and work things out in certain situations, by making notes of things workers are able to see if the child will think differently next time. Children can choose if they would like to play on their own or play with others, while observing practitioners are able to see how children interact with other children while they are playing. It can also highlight if children are struggling with social interaction if this is kept noted, practitioners are able to help that child be more confident within themselves. Physical development is important while children play. By watching a child play, practitioners are able to see if the child can jump, run or skip, It can also highlight if the child is unable to do these things, are they able to do it the next time the child is being observed. When working with young children it is important practitioners are seeing how children's speech and language is. When observing practitioners are able to see if children know what their playing with, if children can say other children's names, also are able to

communicate about what they want. If children are not communicating or there is no sign of communication, practitioners are able to tell the parents and contact speech and language therapists to help that child develop (AziloTraining)

Adults can support this by making sure children have the correct environment to play, such as good outdoor areas, big rooms for children to be able to play with what they want but also having a safe loving environment. To help children, adults should speak to the children about what they like to play with and making sure those resources are available for these children otherwise adults are putting barriers which is not good for the new curriculum in Wales. Children need to be made aware that there is support out there if it is needed, and if children are struggling with anything they are aware of where to go and who to speak to. It is key that adults are aware of any additional needs with any child, and if they are seeing different traits of this in one of the children to communicate with the parents and with other professionals, this is so important as that this happens so children are getting that extra help they deserve to be able to glow and develop as they grow up.

Howard and McInnes paper says that children use different cues with when they do play and when they do not play. These cues could be emotional, this could depend on how much choice the child has to play, children will also consider how easy their environment is to play in. These cues are more used if children are more play orientated. This can be seen by observing children. Usually, adult involvement helps children develop in the best way. However, by children leading the play they tend to be learning and developing more, this is because children are using their imagination. Studies have shown that adults tend to not be comfortable with child led activities, adults tend to involve themselves more into work. But adults doing this, this could be a barrier of adults seeing children develop as they are not involved with the children. By adults more interactive with child led play, development will be much easier to see and adults will have a much better and clear understanding of that child.

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