

Name: Khush Bakht Shariq

Student ID: 2110107

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Campus: Swansea

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Objective:

- 1- What is Play and discuss two types of play***
- 2- Why play is important and the role of an adult in children's play***
- 3- Discuss the understanding of an observation method for young children***
- 4- Discuss the understanding of role when doing an assessment and observation***

What is Play

Play is important, spontaneous, independent, creative, and imaginative, and keeps a child happy and physically active. It is the set of activities that is amusing to children. It is an important part of a child's life, through play a child learns about the surroundings, learns to communicate, build relationships, develop confidence, and explore his individuality and preferences. Children from all different ages and ethnic backgrounds love to play. They imagine, create, fantasize, and express their feelings and thoughts like fear, anxiety, and happiness. It allows children to make decisions without having the fear of failing. It is different for every child based on interests exclusive to a child. For example, a male child is most interested in cars and female children are more interested in dolls and role play. (Encyclopedia of Children's Health, 2022)

Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child's soul. (Froebel Trust, 2021)

According to Friedrich Froebel a German educator who invented kindergarten states that it is extremely important for practitioners to observe children during play to understand their physical, social, emotional development. Observing a child during free play provides practitioners with a better understanding of a child's physical and emotional well-being. Froebel believed that children should be allowed autonomy to make their own decisions allowing them to analyze risks in their surroundings, providing them with a safe and stimulating environment to explore. Children should be encouraged and guided to play if required to learn and concentrate. Play allows children to be self-driven, independent, become disciplined, follow the routine, learn good manners and the art of sharing. (Early Education, 2020)

Why is Play Important

According to the UK Government play is essential for every child from birth till teenage years there is no right or wrong during play. It has a positive impact on children's health and well-being. It improves a child's ability to understand, manage stress, ability to communicate, work as a team and understand the meaning of empathy and kindness. Children from deprived communities play with natural materials from their environment through their imagination and creativity. (NI Direct Government Services, 2021)

Types of Play

There are many types of play that help with the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of a child. Some of those are role play, sensory play, construction play, object play, parallel play, imaginative play, symbolic play, and many others.

Sensory Play

Sensory play is the type of play that stimulates the five senses of a child, for example, touch, smell, taste, sight and smell. It is mostly carried out through natural materials like water, rough and smooth objects, wooden sticks, different coloured objects. This type of play is also used to calm down emotions and has a therapeutic effect. In early years settings, it is also used to calm down children with

behavioural issues and suffering from the autism spectrum. Some examples of sensory play would include treasure baskets, messy play, wooden sticks. (Early Years Resources, 2021)

In early years settings, treasure baskets are used to stimulate the senses, improve concentration and develop curiosity in babies. Treasure baskets are safe and simple, usually lightweight, shallow wicker baskets filled with different materials for toddlers to explore, such as pinecones, threads, wooden spoons, sponge, orange peel, bells, napkins, small toys etc. A child would then sit with the basket and explore different materials by taking them in the mouth, touching, smelling, tasting and recognising their shapes, colours, taste, texture and smell. It will improve concentration during activity while working on the five senses and familiarising himself without the objects in his surroundings. Also, it improves the coordination and control of muscles. (Early Impact Learning, 2021)

Role Play

Role-play has been an essential part of children's play activities for centuries. Children build their world, share their own experiences and pretend to be someone else, showing their understanding of the world around them. Role-play is an important part of child development as it enables a child to act independently, be imaginative, creative and build confidence. It improves communication skills and allows them to play with other children and make friends. In the early years, settings play equipment of doctors, builders, teachers, nurses, policemen and firefighters are used to encourage the roleplay activities. Practitioners can lead the children by giving them ideas to encourage roleplay activities. It allows the practitioner to observe and work on their social, physical, emotional and cognitive development. (Millwood Education, 2016)

What is Free play and why it is important

The idea of free play is not something without boundaries, but it allows children to think freely and independently. Thinking about their safety, following the premises rules and involving risk assessment. During free play children are allowed to play freely according to their interests expressing their feelings and knowledge about the world, caring about the environment, exploring their surroundings and learning things on their own. It can include any type of play including creative play, physical play, parallel play, role play etc. Adults provide resources, a safe and secure environment for children to play but it is essential not to impose any pressure or set goals. Ideally, play should be child-led and spontaneous, supported and encouraged by adults. Free play allows the children to settle down in a new environment, make friends, become more creative and imaginative and develop their thinking skills. Free play allows the children to explore different materials, natural resources, learning through experiments. (Pentagon Play, 2016)

According to UNCRC article 31, every child has a right to play freely and independently and to engage in recreational activities according to age. Play is essential for the development of a child and offers numerous health and wellbeing benefits. The Government of Wales has a policy based on children's right to play which mainly focuses on the quality provision and providing opportunities to play. The curriculum of Wales is also based on the principle of Learning through Play. (Play Wales, 2022)

According to Howard and McInnes perception of Play article, they assessed two groups of children, one with the activities designed 'like play' and the other group of children had the activities designed as 'not play'. Their analysis shows that the children involved in the activities designed 'as play' were more

interested, had effective concentration, showed better results and emotional well-being. However, children involved in activities classed as 'not play' were not interested, showed discomfort, and were distracted easily. According to this research, it is important to keep children's views under consideration and make sure that children consider the activity as play. Creating a playful environment for the children and allowing them to have full autonomy would have a positive impact on the learning and development of a child. (Howard and McInnes, 2012)

Role of an Adult in Children's Play

The curriculum of Wales is based on learning through play which makes play an essential part of the everyday learning process. It is the role of an adult to provide a safe stimulating environment for every child based on his interest to maximize the learning process.

According to Maria Montessori, play is children's work, and an adult should be encouraging and supporting instead of leading the play. When an adult leads the play, it destroys the basic principle of play which means freedom and child led. Adults should encourage and support the child by being present and always responding to their needs. When planning play activities, it is essential to pay attention to a child's strengths and abilities, giving them choices and opportunities to explore freely and independently. According to Michigan State University, supporting a child during play could be done by talking to them through play, taking genuine interest in children's play, actively participating, supporting and modelling positive behaviours. Observing children during play is also an important part to assess the children's abilities, strengths, weaknesses, personal interests and risks involved during play. (Michigan State University, 2015)

According to McInnes, Howard, Crowley and Miles (2013) article, they observed the adult and child interactions and two different early years settings. In the first setting, the children recognize the presence of an adult in an activity as not play. However, in the second set, the presence of an adult was characterized as play. The results show that when the presence of an adult is not characterized as play children have more choices, control, better adult-child interaction, communication and better learning opportunities. To maximize the play opportunities for children, adults should be more fun and energetic, deviate from traditional well-behaved adults and understand the play from children's point of view offering them choices and autonomy. (McInnes, Howard, Crowley and Miles, 2013, p 279-280)

Parents have an important role in children's play. They can support a child in his play by taking part genuinely having fun and showing interest. Children often learn to take risks and make their own decisions through play; it is important that an adult informs them about healthy limits and boundaries. Nowadays, the play has evolved with the increased use of technology. Parents should allow a certain amount of time for the use of technology and guide them through the safer use of technology and how to keep them safe online. Joining the screen time and playing along with children and talking about it would also have a positive impact on children's learning and development. (NI Direct Government Services, 2021)

Importance of Observation during Play

The curriculum of Wales is based on the principle of learning through play, during which the mode of assessment is entirely dependent on observation. Observing a child during free play provides a better understanding of a child's personality. Children exhibit their true potential while playing freely without

any fear of failure. Practitioners can observe children in many ways such as observing a whole class for a specific activity, spontaneous observation during play, observing during a routine activity monitoring the improvement and observing a certain child on the autism spectrum to develop his Individual Development Plan. Observation is essential for good planning specific to a child's individual needs. Observing children during play provides a better understanding of a child's development. Observation is an integral part of early years practice. It gives an accurate image of a child's strengths, weaknesses, and interests in an indoor and outdoor environment. Observation in an indoor and outdoor environment is equally important, it allows the practitioner to critically analyze their developing skills and the kind of support and resources required according to their individual needs. Observing children allows the practitioners to understand the child better and develop the teaching practices and curriculum based on children's interests. It allows the practitioners to assess the progress of a child and help him to achieve true potential. One of the main reasons for observation during play is to recognize any difficulties they are having and how they can be minimized. (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008)

The foundation phase of Wales is designed for three to seven years old. It allows the children to be more creative and imaginative, based on learning through play. The foundation phase of Wales focuses on seven areas of development that includes personal and social development, literacy and numeracy, mathematical development, Welsh language development, knowledge and understanding of the world physical and creative development which are assessed on daily basis through routine activities. The assessment method of the foundation phase is based on the principle of observing each child individually and maintaining a detailed record of the strength, weaknesses, improvements and skills of a child called Foundation Phase Profile. This profile allows the practitioner and healthcare professional to gather the information and identify delays in the development of a child. It enables the professional to support children according to their individual needs. (Education Wales, 2018)

Foundation Phase Profile

The Foundation Phase Profile has two versions of it named as compact profile and full profile. The compact profile focuses on four areas of development language, literacy and communication, personal and social development, mathematical and physical development. A teacher assesses the child and records the assessment outcome on a record form based on certain activities and marks the outcome as silver, bronze or gold. These assessments help the teacher to identify their stages of development and point out any developmental issues. (Welsh Government, 2018)

SOGS

SOGS stands for a schedule of growing skills. These are quick and reliable assessments used for the children in need of a referral to a health care professional for further assessment. SOGS focuses on the development of a child age ranges between zero to five, highlights the developmental areas which show strengths or a possible delay. It focuses on nine areas of a child's development named as active and passive posture, locomotor, speech and language, interactive and self-social care, hearing and language, visual, manipulative. These assessments are carried out four times promptly to analyses the growing skills consistently and results are achieved in an hour, these profile shows a clear developmental plan. The barriers to these assessments' methodologies are lack of experienced staff to carry out these assessments, workload on teachers, behavioural issues and low percentage of attendance during covid. (GL Assessments, 2022)

Running Record

Running records are the observation method for a particular behaviour at a certain interval of time. It is a descriptive method providing detailed data. These assessments are carried out for a short duration of time during which a child is not directed and plays freely. During these kinds of assessments, a teacher doesn't aim to achieve a certain level of results. However, the practitioner sets a time and records whatever a child is doing, saying, playing during that time. Recording every small detail of the child's activity. It provides a good understanding of child development in long term situations. For example, a teaching assistant observes a child on the autism spectrum for 10 min at a specific time and records every bit a child does like playing with bricks and building a tower, then walking in the room playing with friends said specific words. (Complex Needs, 2021)

What is Role Play

Roleplay is a type of play when a child uses his imagination and pretends to be someone else. It shows their knowledge and understanding of that subject showing their interests, creativity, ability to communicate, listening skills, cooperating and collaborating with peers. Children should be encouraged and provided with the opportunity to incorporate role-play. It also creates a better understanding of different festivals from around the globe like a child pretending to be a Santa Claus would show curiosity in Santa's character or a child playing as a veterinarian would develop a better understanding of the role of a vet and what does he do. Roleplay can be carried out indoors and outdoors as well different types of natural and manmade material can be used to encourage role-play within children. (Community Playthings, 2018)

Benefits of Role Play

Role-play provides a vast number of opportunities for children to play and follow their imagination a child could be anything they want to be in role play. Role-play offers numerous developmental opportunities. It improves the listening and speaking skills of children, allows them to act in different situations, improves their physical development coordination and control, developing self-confidence and awareness of their surroundings, managing behaviour and emotions. Role-play also plays an important role in improving children's literacy and numeracy skills, learning and sounding out new words, counting and adding while playing as a shopkeeper, learning about shapes, colours and size. (Community Playthings, 2018)

Role Play observation and Accuracy

Role-play is also known as pretend play, fantasy play or symbolic play. It allows the child to take a role and act accordingly, it allows the observer to assess the child's understanding of the topic and act accordingly showing appropriate social and communication skills. Showing manners, acceptance and empathy. An example of this would be a fishbowl experiment the student were assigned specific roles and divided into two groups one group play the role while the other group observe their behaviour. This activity made the class more interactive, and students were able to act according to their situations and observe things from a different perspective able to work on their communication skills. Another perspective on the importance of role-play while observing a child would be that a child's acts freely and

indecently during role-play showing his imagination and creativity, listening and communication skills. It enables a practitioner to assess a child while showing their true potential.

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