

## **Children's Play: Principles and Practice**

### **Section 1**

Play is considered a fundamental activity for children by many, as it plays a large role in their development. Play type refers to the different ways children engage in play, which can be categorized into many different types such as physical play, social play, imaginative play, and self-directed play. Each type of play supports different aspects of children's holistic development, including physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. In this assignment, one will explore how play type supports children's holistic development, with a particular focus on self-directed play (NI Direct Government Services, 2022)

Ledendecker (2020) Explains that self-directed play, also known as free play, is an unstructured type of play that allows children to follow their own interests and imagination without any external direction or guidance. This type of play allows children to explore, experiment, and discover their world at their own pace and in their own way. Self-directed play has been shown to support children's holistic development in several ways.

Self-directed play is very much a model based upon Montessori approach where there is an emphasis on mixed-age classrooms, where children of different ages and abilities learn together. This approach allows younger children to learn from older children, and older children to develop leadership skills and gain a sense of responsibility.

Overall, Montessori theory promotes a child-centred approach to education, where children are given the freedom to explore and learn at their own pace, with guidance and support from trained teachers. The approach has been widely adopted around the world, with many schools and educators incorporating Montessori principles into their own teaching practices (Rockingham Montessori school, 2022).

Firstly, self-directed play supports children's physical development. This type of play encourages children to engage in physical activities such as running, jumping, climbing, and other forms of movement. This helps children to develop their gross motor skills, which are essential for their overall physical development. In addition, self-directed play allows children to use their fine motor skills, which involve the small muscles in their hands and fingers. These skills are necessary for activities such as drawing, painting, and playing with small toys (The learning experience, 2022).

Secondly, self-directed play supports children's social development. Through self-directed play, children learn how to interact with others, negotiate, and resolve conflicts. This type of play also helps children to develop empathy and understanding of others' feelings and perspectives. When children engage in self-directed play, they can collaborate with their peers, sharing their ideas and working towards common goals. This helps to build their social skills, including communication, cooperation, and leadership (Experiential Learning Depot, 2023).

Thirdly, Howley-Rouse, A. (2021) Uses Dewey's theory of education to further support by explaining that self-directed play supports children's emotional development, play allows children to express their feelings, experiment with different emotions, and learn to control their emotions. When children engage in self-directed play, they can create imaginary scenarios and explore different roles, which allows

them to understand different emotions and perspectives. This helps children to develop their emotional intelligence, which is essential for their overall well-being. Finally, self-directed play supports children's cognitive development. This type of play encourages children to use their imagination, problem-solving skills, and creativity. When children engage in self-directed play, they can experiment with different ideas, come up with their own solutions to problems, and explore new ways of thinking. This helps to develop their critical thinking skills, which are essential for their academic success.

In addition to self-directed play, other play types also support children's holistic development. For example, physical play helps to develop children's gross motor skills, which are essential for their overall physical development. Social play, on the other hand, helps to develop children's social skills, including communication, cooperation, and empathy. Imaginative play supports children's cognitive and creative development, as it encourages them to use their imagination and problem-solving skills.

The significance of holistic play should also be considered. Holistic play refers to play that supports children's overall development, including physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Holistic play is essential for children's well-being and would be useful to consider in all settings, including homes, schools, and communities. When children engage in holistic play, they develop a range of skills and abilities that are essential for their success in life.

Holistic play also helps to promote children's mental health and well-being. Play provides an opportunity for children to relax, de-stress, and recharge. It also allows them to express their feelings and emotions in a safe and supportive environment. Through play, children can develop positive self-esteem and confidence, which are essential for their overall well-being (First Walkers, 2016).

## **Section 2**

It is important for children to choose their own play because self-directed play allows them to follow their own interests and explore their world at their own pace and in their own way. When children have the freedom to choose their own play, they can engage in activities that are meaningful and engaging to them. This helps to promote their motivation, curiosity, and creativity, which are essential for their holistic development.

Amin, R. (2022) explores that the role of the adult in children's play is also important, and Adults can support self-directed play by creating a safe and supportive environment that encourages children to explore and experiment. Adults can provide a variety of materials and resources that promote open-ended play and allow children to use their imagination and creativity. Adults can also model positive play behaviours, such as taking turns, sharing, and resolving conflicts peacefully.

Li, P. (2022) work shows there is a growing body of research that highlights the importance of play in children's development, the work goes on to say that play provides a range of benefits for children, including physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Through play, children can develop their gross and fine motor skills, social skills, emotional regulation, and problem-solving abilities.

The role of self-directed play is particularly important in promoting children's holistic development. Self-directed play allows children to follow their own interests and explore their world in a way that is meaningful and engaging to them. This helps to promote their motivation, curiosity, and creativity, which are essential for their overall development. When children engage in self-directed play, they also develop their decision-making and problem-solving skills, which are important for their future success in life.

McInnes, K. *et al.* (2011) paper provides a useful framework for understanding the role of self-directed play in children's development. The authors argue that self-directed play is an essential component of children's play and should be supported in all settings. They highlight the importance of creating a play environment that supports children's autonomy, creativity, and curiosity.

According to McInnes, K. *et al.* (2011a), adults can support self-directed play in several ways. Firstly, they can provide a variety of open-ended materials and resources that promote exploration and experimentation. Secondly, they can model positive play behaviours, such as taking turns, sharing, and resolving conflicts peacefully. Thirdly, they can create a safe and supportive environment that encourages children to take risks and try new things. Finally, they can support children's autonomy by allowing them to make their own decisions about their play and providing them with the freedom to explore and experiment in their own way.

In addition to the McInnes, K. *et al.* (2011b), paper, there is a wealth of research that highlights the importance of play in children's development. Play has been shown to support children's physical development, including their gross and fine motor skills. Play also supports children's social development, as it provides opportunities for children to interact with others, develop empathy and understanding of others' perspectives, and learn how to negotiate and resolve conflicts. Play also supports children's emotional development, as it provides opportunities for them to express their feelings and regulate their emotions. Finally, play supports children's cognitive development, as it promotes their creativity, imagination, and problem-solving abilities.

McInnes, K. *et al.* (2013), As discussed, there is an importance for children to choose their own play, as self-directed play allows them to follow their own interests and explore their world in a way that is meaningful and engaging to them. The role of the adult in children's play is also to be considered, as adults can support self-directed play by providing a variety of open-ended materials and resources, modelling positive play behaviours, creating a safe and supportive environment, and supporting children's autonomy. The importance of play in children's development cannot be overstated, and self-directed play is an essential component of play that should be supported in all settings.

### **Section 3**

Drake, J. (2006) Explains that observation is a powerful tool or skill for understanding children's development and learning. Two common types of observation used in early childhood education are movement tracker observation and schedule of

growing skills observation (SOGS). Both types of observation have benefits and limitations, and it is useful to understand their strengths and weaknesses when using them to gain insight into children's development.

Movement tracker observation involves observing and recording a child's movement patterns over time. This type of observation can provide insight into children's gross motor development and can help identify any potential issues that may need further assessment or intervention. Movement tracker observation can also help teachers and caregivers identify ways to support children's physical development through play and other activities.

(Larger Family Life, 2021) One benefit of movement tracker observation is that it is a non-invasive and non-intrusive method of assessing children's gross motor development. Unlike more formal assessments that may require a child to perform specific tasks, movement tracker observation allows children to move and play freely, which can help provide a more accurate picture of their physical abilities and limitations.

However, one limitation of movement tracker observation is that it may not provide a complete picture of a child's physical development. While movement tracker observation can help identify gross motor issues, it may not provide insight into other areas of physical development, such as fine motor skills or sensory integration.

Schedule of growing skills observation is another type of observation used in early childhood education. This type of observation involves tracking a child's development over time, with a focus on specific developmental domains such as language, social-emotional, and cognitive development.

One benefit of schedule of growing skills observation is that it can provide a comprehensive view of a child's development across multiple domains, this can help teachers, caregivers and professional practitioners identify areas where a child may need additional support or resources, as well as areas where a child is excelling and may benefit from additional challenges or opportunities.

However, one potential negative or limitation of schedule of growing skills observation is that it may not capture the differences and complexities of a child's development. Children's development could be influenced by a wide range of factors, including their environment, experiences, and relationships. A schedule of growing skills observation may not provide a complete picture of how these factors are combining to help a child's development (GL Assessment, No Date).

Brodie, K. (no date) In terms of giving a holistic view of the child, both movement tracker observation and schedule of growing skills observation have strengths and limitations. Movement tracker observation may provide a more focused view of a child's gross motor development but may not capture other areas of development. Schedule of growing skills observation may provide a more comprehensive view of a child's development but may not capture the differences of how the factors are combining to help with their development.

To gain a more holistic view of a child, it may be helpful to use a combination of different types of observation, as well as other sources of information such as parent or guardian and caregiver input, formal assessments, and developmental screening tools. By triangulating information from multiple sources, teachers, caregivers and professional practitioners can gain a more complete and different understanding of a child's development and learning.

Harcombe, K. (no date) Goes on to explain that in addition to understanding the benefits and limitations of different types of observation, it would also be useful to consider ethical considerations when using observation in early childhood education. Observation should always be conducted in a respectful and non-intrusive manner, with the child's best interests and privacy being a top priority. Ensuring that any information collected through observation is kept confidential and used only for the purposes of supporting the child's development and learning.

To conclude this section, observation is an important tool for understanding children's development and learning in early childhood education. Movement tracker observation and schedule of growing skills observation are two common types of observation used in this context, each with their own strengths and limitations. To gain a holistic view of a child's development, it may be helpful to use a combination of different types of observation, as well as other sources of information.

#### **Section 4**

Play is an aspect of children's development, and it plays a role in observations and assessments of children in early childhood education. During this part of the assignment, one will discuss the role of play in observations and assessments of children, how it affects their engagement, and the accuracy of the observations. One will also consider the importance of play when observing and assessing children, provide evidence from the Howard and McInnes papers, and explore how adults can support children's play.

Play is one of many activities for children, but play does provide an ideal context for observing and assessing in their development. During play, children engage in a range of activities and interactions that allow them to explore and make sense of the world around them. Play also provides opportunities for children to practice and develop a wide range of skills, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills. As such, play is an ideal context for observing and assessing children's development across multiple domains.

When observing and assessing children in play, it is sensible to consider the child's engagement in the activity. Children who are fully engaged in play are more likely to demonstrate their skills and abilities, which in turn could provide a more accurate reflection of their development. And opposite these children who are disengaged or distracted may not be demonstrating their true abilities, which can affect the accuracy of the observation. It is therefore important to create an environment that supports children's engagement in play, providing materials and opportunities that are interesting and stimulating to the child (Victoria State Government, No Date).

According to the McInnes, K. *et al.* (2013b), paper, play-based assessments are an effective way to observe and assess children's development. Play-based assessments use play as a context for observing and assessing children's development, which is seen as more authentic and meaningful than traditional assessments and tests. Play-based assessments provide opportunities for children to demonstrate their strengths and interests, which can help to identify areas of strength and potential for further development.

Observing children in play can give us a more accurate reflection of where they are in their development. During play, children engage in a range of activities and interactions that allow them to demonstrate their skills and abilities across multiple domains. Play also provides opportunities for children to demonstrate their understanding and knowledge in a natural and authentic context, which can provide a more accurate reflection of their abilities than more formal assessments.

(Early Years Matters, 2017) Adults can help support children's play in several ways to ensure that observations and assessments are accurate. Firstly, adults can create a play environment that is safe, stimulating, and supports the child's interests and needs. This can be achieved by providing a range of materials and activities that are age-appropriate and promote exploration and learning. Secondly, adults can observe children's play in a non-intrusive way, allowing children to lead and direct their own play. Adults can also provide positive feedback and encouragement, which can promote children's engagement and motivation in play.

Play is important when observing and assessing children because it provides a natural and authentic context for learning. Children who are engaged in play are more likely to be motivated and interested in the activity, which can enhance their learning and development. Play also provides opportunities for children to learn through trial and error, as they explore and experiment with materials and activities. This can help children to develop a deeper understanding of concepts and ideas, and to make connections between different areas of learning (UNICEF, 2018).

However, it is important to remember that observing children in play is not a fool proof method for assessing their development. Children's engagement in play can be influenced by a range of factors, including their mood, temperament, potential disabilities and external factors such as the environment or the presence of other children. It is therefore important to use a range of different observation methods and to triangulate information from multiple sources, including formal assessments, parental input, and other observations, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the child's development.

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