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Play enhances children and young people's physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and well-being, claims Howard and McInnes (2013). Children start to learn about the environment and about themselves via play. They also acquire important skills like; social skills, self-reliance, confidence, and self-worth. All of which are essential for relationships, employment, and education. (Broadhead, Howard and Wood, 2010).

According to Stoltz et al. (2015), creative play is a crucial component of children's development as it fosters their holistic growth. Children can be more imaginative, messy, and noisy during outdoor creative play than they could be able to indoors, which helps them to develop a sense of freedom (Archer and Siraj, 2015). Children who engage in creative play can guide their own learning without the assistance of adults.

Loose Parts Play is another kind of play that fosters this creativity and opens countless options (Nicolson, 1971 cited in Kingston-Hughes, 2020). According to Kingston-Hughes (2020), Loose Parts Play fosters children's imagination, creativity, and curiosity by letting them utilise every day, natural things to construct anything they choose. Play Scotland (2019), highlights how loose parts help children develop a wider understanding of the world. According to Bruce (2011), children exhibit their intellect in play at the maximum degree to which they are capable. Creative play helps people think creatively and builds the emotional intelligence necessary to control their emotions (Bruce, 2011) because it enables to explore new schemas in a safe setting. Vygotsky (1930, cited in Nilsson, 2009) emphasised the vital role of creative play in the education of young children, claiming that it develops imagination and allows children to familiarise themselves with new real-life situations and to make meaning of them.

The idea of loose pieces by Nicholson (1971) is that the quantity and kind of variables in an environment directly affects the degree of inventiveness and creativity as well as the likelihood of discovery. Brown (2013) expands on Nicholson's (1971) work by suggesting that the idea behind holistic development is that children's learning and development should be seen as an integrated and interrelated whole, encompassing all their physical, cognitive, social, emotional, cultural, and spiritual domains. Hargraves (2019) says that practitioners should always consider how each area of learning and development relates to the others. Furthermore, educators should

work to build on and consider the abilities that children already possess in each topic area. Children's play and overall development can be enhanced by loose parts in an outdoor setting (Boulton and Thomas, 2022). They state that the idea that young infants build their knowledge through cognitive frameworks called schemas is the basis of most early childhood pedagogy. Young children who repeatedly interact with materials in their surroundings form schemas. A case study performed by Nature Network (2022) showed the use of schemas by children to build knowledge in an outdoor learning setting was investigated. The results showed that the children's decision to play with loose pieces significantly aided their cognitive, artistic, and physical development. A range of schema, including circular or rotating, enveloping, trajectory, and positional schema, were being developed by children based on their words and actions.

According to Pathways (2019), there are six phases of play that a newborn and young child will go through as they explore the many stages that they encounter. Valsiner and Connolly (2003), discuss unoccupied play, saying that this occurs between birth and three months of age. This is the first stage when a newborn starts to move and learns how their body works. Brain and Mukherji (2005), state that babies between 0 and 2 years will also engage in solitary play, which is when they play by themselves and have little interest in interacting with other children. When a baby reaches two years old, they will start to watch and observe other children play without joining in or interfering, this is spectator behaviour. It is a key moment for using creative play to support their development.

Bakeman and Brownlee (1980) stated that a young child will start playing with another child in parallel once they are two years old, but not together. While they do associate play with other children and begin interacting with them during play, 3–4-year-olds do not exhibit much collaboration. The use of creative or loose parts play develops these collaborative skills. Broadhead (2009) explained that children will start playing together and showing interest in each other's activities when they are four years old and older, which is referred to as cooperative play. Cooperative play is the most advanced play, according to Parten (1929, cited in Gregory, 2024) as children are ready to start to explore the concepts behind formal subjects such as numeracy and literacy. However, she adds that the most crucial thing is being able to acquire social skills

like teamwork and cooperation (Gregory, 2024). These are the skills that play is fundamental in developing.

Montessori (1964) is credited as saying that "play is the work of children". King (2020) says that all areas of a child's learning and development are enhanced by play, but especially the cognitive and emotive domains. The basic principle of play is that children should direct their own play. Macblain (2014) suggests that play loses its importance and experience when adults get involved. Children are then prevented from freely exploring play. Elkind, (2007) suggests that giving children lots of chances to play will therefore enable them to become involved in the game, identify their interests, develop as individuals, try new things, and broaden their experiences. When it comes to self-directed play, an adult's responsibilities include organising, assisting, and reviewing the play. It is crucial to keep in mind not to get involved and interrupt a child in play (Broadhead, Howard and Wood, 2010b).

Ledendecker (2020) implies that during self-directed play, children cannot help but be creative. By allowing children to participate in self-directed play, practitioners are enabling them to use their creative muscles by providing them with these possibilities. As they play, they will discover possibilities no one else has thought of and create original plots. It teaches how to solve problems. Solving problems naturally flows from creating one's own rules. Howard and Mcinnes, (2013) support this by saying children will have to learn how to make things function the way they desire. Children may learn at their own speed because of self-directed play and there is no time limit or academic requirement when engaging in self-directed play. Wolfgang and Sanders, (1982) say that everyday children get the opportunity to expand their own knowledge in ways that make sense to them, it fosters motivation from inside. Ledendecker (2020) explains that when children do not have adults defining what constitutes a successful activity, they will be forced to discover intrinsic delight in play. They will inherently tend to push themselves to attempt storytelling and use creative concepts. Children will take pleasure in the process, engaging in creative activities which allows practitioners to focus on each child individually. Play also helps practitioners to recognise and appreciate the diversity and individuality of each child. Sandoval-Palos, (2023) talks about how self-expression is an essential component of all creative attempts. When children are creative, they have a better

emotional expression and management system. By seeing children's artistic attempt, practitioners can get more insight into the thoughts and feelings of the child in question. In addition, creativity fosters children's mental growth by providing them with the opportunity to explore novel ideas, problem-solving techniques, and thought processes (Sandoval-Palos, 2023).

McInnes and Howard (2012) demonstrate how a play-based strategy that prioritises the child's perspective is more beneficial for the child's well-being. A child's perspective on play emphasises both the external act and the inside, emotive part of play that is necessary for enjoyment and learning. Trevlas, Matsouka and Zachopoulou (2003) explain that playfulness is believed to be a mental attitude that characterises one's approach to an activity. A study by Siraj-Blatchford et al, (2002) showed that to broaden children's activities, adults need to engage and interact with children during their play. This study about effective pedagogy in the early years then goes on to state that successful settings integrate adult-led and child-led activities.

According to Li, (2020) adults should manage the potential hazards in the environment, give playthings to the children, and keep a close eye on them as they play. There is a need to study further about how children's intellectual development is promoted by their cooperative play with educators, as there is a global trend to boost children's cognitive skills at an early age. Howard and McInnes (2010, cited in Maynard, 2013) suggest that practitioners might benefit from using a definition of play that highlights playfulness as a technique and attitude towards an activity, based on children's views. It should assist practitioners get a better knowledge of play and their engagement in children's play, in addition to encouraging them to co-construct play activities that provide children choice and control and that promote mixed framing. Furthermore, children should be less likely to hold the cue of adult presence in connection to play and, as Howard et al, (2003, citation in Maynard, Waters and Clement, 2013) imply, identify a larger range of activities as play in situations where good co-construction is accomplished during play activities.

According to Stetson et al. (2009), observation is the process of learning about a specific child by seeing and listening to them. To understand each child's unique development and determine what and how each child is learning, practitioners observe and listen to children and families. On the other hand, observation is defined by Gronlund (2016) as closely observing every aspect of a child's development and paying attention to their behaviours, interactions, activities, and

interests. Despite the differences between these two descriptions, they both emphasise how important it is to observe children with intention and learn about them.

In the early years of education, a variety of observational instruments can be employed, Palaologou, (2012) labels these as time samples, work samples, running records, and technology. Every instrument has advantages and disadvantages, but it is crucial to figure out what works best for each child and practitioner individually. Sharman, Cross and Vennis, (2004) explain that observation gives an understanding of a child's development, skills, interests, and talents. In this context play is an essential teaching strategy in early childhood education. Hobart and Frankel, (1994) implies that observation is crucial for parents, children, and early childhood educators to monitor development and inform practice. It is possible to conduct observations of single children or small groups of children as part of an ongoing cycle of planning and assessment (Smidt, 2015). This aids professionals in comprehending children's play, behaviour, and learning styles so they can adjust their approaches as necessary.

Technology is one of the new observation instruments that is gaining popularity. According to Peterson and Elam (2020), busy practitioners may gather observation evidence considerably more efficiently by incorporating technology into regular activities. Children's play, discovery, and learning experiences may be captured in real time through photos, videos, and audio recordings. Practitioners may relive significant moments in a child's day using this kind of documentation to identify interactions, play patterns, developmental milestones, challenges, and successes. Flewitt and Cowan, (2019) imply that by using this method, practitioners may record real conversations between children and their friends to monitor language development in those children. Practitioners may record both extraordinary and ordinary occurrences and watch how the children handle challenges. According to Roller (2019), technology allows both adults and children to enjoy seeing what has been accomplished over the day. Pirani and Hussain, (2019) state that it also allows children have the chance to see their work displayed and experience a sense of empowerment when their work is appreciated.

It will be more difficult to maintain objectivity and remember crucial information while recording behaviours or evaluating growth, according to Plymouth (2023). Furthermore, it is harder to obtain reliable data with the passage of time (Ice, 2004). After employing technological

tools to observe children, one of the challenges practitioners' face is writing up the observations which might take a lot of time with the risk of battery life dying and data being lost. Another challenge highlighted by McKinsey, (2020) is the cost burden associated with equipment purchases which has significantly increased since the coronavirus, which is another disadvantage of technology. Using technology to film and take pictures of young children might potentially be disadvantageous due to concerns about confidentiality (Mcfarlane, 2015). Sedgwick and Greenwood, (2015) state that when people act differently because they are aware that they are being observed, it is known as the Hawthorne effect. The use of technology and a practitioner watching children, it may make the child feel anxious and change their behaviour, thereby making the observation inaccurate (McCambridge, Witton and Elbourne, 2014).

Driscoll and Nagel, (2005) claims that by watching children at play, practitioners may learn a lot about what children are thinking and feeling. Additionally, it can provide practitioners with insight into the depth of each child's learning. There are more compelling reasons to observe play, such as the need to interpret what the child perceive. Daniel Rosa (2015) suggests that via watching children at play and seeing how they respond to different situations, such as care routines or meeting new people, practitioners may learn about each child's preferences and dislikes. It is possible to determine the routines, occasions, or activities that a child finds enjoyable or difficult, as well as those that appear to concern them. We can assess children's development and gain greater insight into their unique needs in terms of care and education via watching them play. Next, it will be possible to plan the children's learning and development periods (Daniel Rosa, 2015). Comprehending the dependability of observations in any aspect may appear challenging, as the child's performance during the observation is contingent upon their mood and state of mind on that day. Forman and Hall (2013) also address the possibility of differing perspectives among practitioners on specific observations.

In accordance with Wylie (2016), practitioners should set aside time to use a variety of observation techniques to document children's performance in real time and give appropriate, in-depth observations of them in various contexts. Having the most accurate reflection of observation on the child is key in a practitioner's role. To verify that an observation is an authentic representation of the child, Flewitt and Cowan (2019) suggest that observations made

by different staff members should be included and that the same topic be observed more than once. Children's emotions and moods on any given day will impact how well they do on their observations, according to Cohen et al. (2016). Though there are numerous things in a child's circle that might affect them, the microsystem is the one that has the closest effect, according to Bronfenbrenner's (1979 cited in Paquette and Ryan, 2021) hypothesis. A small adjustment or issue they had before entering the setting might have a significant effect on how well they learn and perform that day. To have a precise comprehension of the child's growth, it is essential that observations are conducted on separate days. According to O'Grady (2005), it is imperative that practitioners encourage children's play while also stepping back and letting them self-direct their play. By observing children at play, practitioners can gain a clear understanding of each child's developmental stage and use that knowledge and understanding to make an informed decision about what needs to be developed. Effective settings, according to McInnes (2019), combine adult-led and child-led activities. The adult's job is to engage and interact with the children, expanding on their initial activity. The main objective of education, according to Rousseau (1740, cited in Bilgiler et al., n.d.) theory, is to help children develop their inner skills and capacities, allowing this progression to occur naturally. Pacey, (2018) states that it is critical that all environments, including schools, support children and give them a secure area in which to play and learn. It is the duty of nursery professionals to continuously evaluate potential hazards in the educational setting and safeguard against any major injury to the children registered. Professionals should guide children in learning about various risks and ways to protect themselves without getting involved with of their exploration. It is important to ensure the environment is based of children's needs and allows them to risk take and play openly (Hodgman, 2012).

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