

Section 1

"Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play by following their own instincts, ideas, and interests, in their own way for their own reasons"

(Play Wales, 2018)

According to Welsh Government (2008), play is an essential part of the national curriculum and is important in assisting the learning and development of a child. Play encourages children to develop emotionally, physically, and cognitively whilst they are entertained, implying they may be more likely to learn. Piaget (1962) supports this view, as he stated that play helps and encourages further cognitive and language development. This theory suggests that children are able to learn and develop their skills through play. Furthermore, agreeing with this view, Freud (1920), stated that play has an important role in the emotional development of the child, he believed that children are able to process and come to terms with some traumatic memories they may be disregarding through play. Freud's (1920) theory demonstrates the importance of play, as it shows how play supports a child's holistic development.

Play is divided into different types, all of which theoretically have different positive impacts on the child, as Voice of Play (no date) highlights when referring to the benefits play has on a child's holistic development. One type of play is symbolic play, which is where the child uses objects or actions to represent different items, for example, using a wooden spoon as a 'magic wand'. Symbolic play allows a child to be creative and use their imagination with no limits, Lewis (2020) agrees that symbolic play helps strengthen children's cognitive skills, aiding them with problem solving, for example.

Self-directed play is an alternative type of play, which is the child is completely in control and has freedom to make their own decisions about the situation, based upon their interests, instincts, and ideas. Frobel (1837) supports self-directed play, as he stated that children will

learn when they are ready, as they will understand best when they feel engaged and interested in the situation. Through self-directed play children will work to their full ability, rather than how they may work if they were working on a teacher-led activity, Care for Kids (2017) agree with Frobel's theory suggesting that children will learn best when using their own ideas and concepts. Howard and McInnes (2012) strengthen this concept stating that children work well when they feel as though they are at play. The research paper demonstrates that a child will determine whether an activity is play, depending on the presence and participation of an adult, which subsequently has an impact on the child's standard of engagement.

Self-directed play has numerous positive impacts on the child and supports a child's holistic development. Ledendecker (2020) agrees that self-directed play helps build self-confidence, as they are given the opportunity to explore and discover independently. During this the child will appreciate what they are able to achieve independently, which will result in them feeling more confident in their abilities and skills, aiding them in future activities.

Sunstone Montessori School (2019), states that self-directed play teaches problem-solving, as the children are encouraged to use their own judgement when discovering how to complete a task or activity. It allows children to choose freely and move between ideas and thoughts, encouraging them to be creative, problem solvers, motivated and independent. Self-directed play inspires children to overcome any problems they may experience, which encourages children to be independent.

NI direct (no date) discuss how self-directed play improve a child's social skills, as often children will involve their peers in the activity. Through self-directed play children will communicate with one and other, whilst sharing ideas and building upon the activity which they have created. As this play is child-led, children will also be encouraged to resolve any disagreements which may occur between peers, strengthening their social skills.

Although self-directed play is about the child leading the whole activity, a practitioner could help support self-directed play by giving the setting toys and resources which are of interest

of the children, this will help as it means the child will be engaged as they are interested. The Department of Education (2009, p.10) agree that children in the Foundation Phase should be taught in a playful manner and environment, implying that practitioners should deliver, and plan activities based around the play – based curriculum. By creating a playful environment, practitioners are supporting self-directed play. Department for Education (2009, p.12) agree that self-directed play is powerful, and practitioners should observe the child throughout, as this will enable them to understand what interests and engages the child. If a practitioner holds this knowledge, they will be able to plan playful activities which are focused on the child's next steps.

Clare Caro (2012) discusses how adults should become 'learning allies', and observe rather than interfering, as this helps promote children's independence, advancing their self-directed play. Department for Education (2009, p.12) agree that self-directed play is powerful, and practitioners should observe the child throughout, as this will enable them to understand what interests and engages the child, meaning they will be able to further their learning based on the situation. It is important that adults do not break a child's play cycle by adulteration and should wait for play cues before participating.

Section 2

“A risk is a situation where there is a possibility of something bad happening.”
(Cambridge dictionary, 2020)

A risk can often be seen as something negative, however risk taking can have a positive impact on children, Play Wales (2018) state that children require risk, as it is a natural part of childhood, and enables them to develop a knowledge and understanding of the world. Early years settings often encourage children to take risks, however these risks are carefully managed and minimised by the practitioners within the setting to ensure the children are not at risk of any serious harm. Adventurous play allows children to test their abilities and challenge themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally, whilst supporting their holistic development. Rodgers (2018) agrees that risky/adventurous play enables children to test and push boundaries which they may not have the opportunity to do in different situations. For example, when in a classroom children are taught to sit and follow rules, whereas during risky play they are given the opportunity to push themselves.

Through adventurous play children will be provided with numerous different opportunities, the main one is that it enables children to explore and discover independently, which helps them become confident individuals. Children can understand aspects such as, height, motion, and speed, as they will be able to challenge themselves whilst using their own judgment. Pilcher (no date) highlights the importance of valuing risks, stating that children need them, to venture into new experiences which prepares them for the future, as they will understand how to handle challenging situations independently.

Furthermore, adventurous play and taking risks are beneficial for children as it gives children an opportunity to develop and improve their gross motor skills, particularly when children are partaking in adventurous play outdoors. Children are able push themselves and their physical limits, which allows them to understand their own abilities and skills. KidSafe (no date) state that a benefit of risk-taking is that children are given the opportunity to engage with the natural

environment and elements. First Five Years (2020) support this statement as they agree that outdoor play benefits children as it promotes physical wellness, mental well-being, as well as giving them the opportunity to develop their social skills.

Holecko (2020) states that risk taking enhances a child's emotional health, as adventurous play provides children with the chance to overcome some of the fears and helps them build upon resilience. Also, when children are free to take risks, they may be less fearful of making mistakes, which then contributes to their self-confidence.

Bright Horizons (no date) state that by allowing children to take risks, it teaches skills and helps prepare them for future. Through risk-taking children are able to learn and develop upon their skills independently such as their gross motor skills. Moreover, adventurous play allows children to set their own limits, and make their own judgements based on what they feel is right. For example, before climbing a tree, a child may question the size of the tree or how they will get back down, this enables them to improve upon their judgement as well as problem solving.

Adults and practitioners should be able to find the appropriate balance between allowing a child to take risks whilst keeping them safe. Play Wales (2016) recognised that some children adopt the unnecessary fears of their parents and may become afraid to take part; this emphasizes the importance of finding the correct balance, as children should not fear risk-taking when in a safe controlled environment, as this would become a barrier. Practitioners may also be fearful when allowing children to take risks, as they feel responsible for those within the setting, however it is important to find the correct balance.

Ouvry (no date) recognised that parents and practitioners need to be brave when allowing the children to try new things, particularly during risky play. She recognises that fears are often passed down from parents to children and believes that in order to find the correct balance between allowing children to take risks whilst keeping them safe, adults should allow children to partake in risky play, as it will make them confident in their own decisions.

If risks are not well managed in an early year setting, it may become a problem as it could result in a child hurting themselves. However, it is important not to eliminate all risks, Play Wales (2016) implemented the ABC model, which helps practitioner determine whether they should intervene or allow the child to carry on. Pilcher (no date) supports this concept as they agree that the situation may become a hazard if there is no adult supervision, as this could result in the child being harmed, which is why HSE and CIW policies should be implemented for the safety of those involved.

Section 3

Observation is important within Early Years setting, as it ensures practitioners understand each child's abilities. An observation tool widely used across Wales is the Foundation Phase Profile, this observation tool is valuable as it is based on the Foundation Phase which is the statutory curriculum for children aged 3-7 years old in Wales, implemented by the Welsh Government (2015). It is a play-based curriculum and encourages children to be independent whilst using their imagination and supports a child's holistic development, Welsh Government (2018) state that play is one of the main way's children learn, and therefore the Foundation Phase was developed as an active learning curriculum.

The Foundation Phase covers 7 areas of learning, and highlights children's right to play as they learn best through firsthand experiences, which Bruner (1961) supports, as he agrees that children are active learners. The Welsh Government (2008) developed a play and active learning document which agrees that the curriculum and environment should be planned and organised to enable children to be active learners. They also state that play should be valued by all practitioners and opportunities should be provided for children to explore their natural play urges.

The National Day Nurseries Association (no date) states that the Foundation Phase Profile was designed in line with assessments conducted by health professionals. The profile enables practitioners to understand where each child within the setting is at in their development. Welsh Government (2015 p.15) implies that it supports early identification of possible developmental delay, special education needs or additional learning needs, as it will enable key workers to visually see where a child may require more help. This form of observation is valuable as the Foundation Phase is used all across Wales, making it consistent and easier to draw conclusions about a child's development and inform the practitioner of the next step to plan for in the learner's development.

The Welsh Government (2017) states that at the start of a child's Foundation Phase profile, there is a requirement for some basic information, such as their home language and whether or not the child has attended a flying start setting. Information like this helps broaden a practitioner's knowledge on what the child may have had experience in before attending the setting. This is beneficial as it will enable the practitioners to plan activities based on the individual's interests and abilities.

A child's Foundation Phase profile should be started within the first 6 weeks of the individual starting the reception setting, as this provides a baseline on what the child is able to complete at the start of their journey in the setting. However, this could potentially be a drawback of this observational tool, as some children may be unsettled during the first 6 weeks of the setting, meaning they will not perform to the best of their ability.

In contrast, this observation is beneficial as it sets a clear outline of the 'norms' expected of a child through their different age stages. For example, to begin bronze is what a child may be expected to achieve at the ages of 6-24 months, ranging to outcome 6. Although these are generally the 'norms' expected of a child, it is important to remember that every child is unique, as stated by Dewey (1915). This indicates that not every child will complete outcome 6 on the Foundation Phase profile by the time they leave, whereas other children may start higher than bronze, due to their past experiences.

This observation tool helps a practitioner gain an overall view on the holistic development of a child. The Foundation Phase profile helps practitioners recognise patterns of children's development, as well as notice any developmental milestones they may not be reaching, enabling practitioners to put support in place. Therefore, this is a benefit of using the Foundation Phase profile, as the quicker support and help is put in place the better it is for the individual involved.

However, a limitation of this observation tool is that there is no opportunity to state factors which may have affected the child's performance in a negative way. For example, during

handover, a parent may tell the practitioner that the child did not sleep well, which would therefore affect the child's ability to learn and develop. This may mean the child may not perform well and this will be recorded on their Foundation Phase profile with no explanation.

Section 4

Children are content and engaged during play, therefore, observing and assessing children whilst they are involved in play is valuable, as the child will be more actively engaged in an activity which interests them. Supporting this concept, the Public Health England (2014) recognised that students with better health and well-being are likely to achieve better results, this links into observations as it shows that when children are happy, they perform better.

Sellgren (2014) reports that play boosts children's development, as well as happiness. This statement implies that observing children when at play is beneficial as the child's well-being is positive. This means they will be engaged and motivated throughout the observation, as well as their concentration and enjoyment being higher. Play Wales (2020) support this argument, as they discuss how play is essential for children's mental and emotional well-being, showing that observing children through play can show them achieving their full potential.

Pacey (2016) recognizes the importance of observing children, as they agree that it is a valuable way to discover their interest, as well as understanding and monitoring any issues. However, Pacey highlights the importance of observing children sensitively, to ensure they are still engaged and focused on the activity, reducing the chance of Hawthorne effect occurring, which is where an individual changes their behaviour based on what they believe someone wants to see.

Practitioners are responsible to record children during play, by observing subtly to avoid the occurrence of the Hawthorne effect. Bruner (1961) supports the idea of observing children through play, as he agrees that children learn best through firsthand experiences since they are active learners. This implies that observing children during play is valuable as they learn through these play experiences.

Howard and McInnes (2012) research paper recognised how children feel when they are at play, as they stated that if children believe they are at play their emotional wellbeing is

increased. Whereas, if a child sees an activity as teacher-led they tend to be less engaged, and their concentration levels are lower.

In order to see the child at their full potential, it is important that children see the situation as play. To achieve this Howard and McInnes (2012) believe that adults should follow three main play cues. A child will determine whether an activity is play by noticing play cues such as a facial expression, as well as where the activity is taking place, the research paper suggests that if an activity is taking place on the floor, a child is likely to see it as play. Also, if a child is playing with the peers, and can decide who to play with, rather than be put into groups they will see this as play.

Observing and assessing children during play gives an accurate representation of where a child is in their development, as during play a child shows resilience as well as being engaged. Brown (2019) supports this idea, as they state that play helps children become resilient as well as helping them manage stress. This evidence implies that children may be more motivated and willing to take risks during play, suggesting that observing children in play will give an accurate picture of the individual, as they are working to their full potential.

Practitioners can support creating a playful environment during observations by cooperating the play cues into their planning, for example creating an activity on the floor will make it like play for the child, which results in a greater positive mental well-being for those involved. Howard and McInnes (2012) also state that practitioners should create a playful environment, for example including children's interests into the resources, implying that adults can support observations by achieving this.

Play England (2016) discusses the play cycle, which was developed by Sturrock and Else (1998). They acknowledge the importance of an adult's role in play; however, they recognise that adults should not start to control the play and it is important they do not begin to adulterate the situation. It suggests that adults should wait to be invited into self-directed play, as this ensures the child is happy for them to join and support them.

Department for Education (2009, p.14) believes that adults should support self-directed play by only entering play when it is initiated by the child, then the adult should avoid asking closed-ended question as this is restricting the activity and begins to make it more adult-led. It is important that adults work on the children's terms and ideas during self-directed play, as this is supporting them to achieve all the benefits which come alongside this type of play, enabling children to achieve their goals and next steps.

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