

Children's Play: Theory and Practice assignment

Section 1

Froebel believed that play is the main way that children learn, and having first-hand experience with the world helps to form their understanding on it says (Froebel Trust, no date). There are many different types of play that support children's holistic development, such as role play, construction and rough and tumble. However, in this section messy play and risky play will be explored.

Messy Play

Messy play is one play type that children can develop holistically from. Firstly, Gascoyne, S. (2017, P.272- P.274) says that young children learn about themselves and the environment around them through sensory stimulation in particular the sense of touch. Messy play resources such as slime, mud, paint, water and play dough just as examples are important for children's cognitive development. This will also help support a child's language development as children might use words such as wet, sticky, dry, slimy, soft, or hard to describe different textures and how they feel to them suggests Gascoyne, S. (2017, P.274)

Piaget believes that children actively engage in their learning by experimenting, for example, mixing sand and water together to see what happens. This helps children build upon their prior knowledge and account for new information as they learn about the world through first-hand experience with it implies (Very Well Mind, 2022).

Messy play also has the capability to be a calming influence on children and a well-being booster suggests Gascoyne, S. (2017, P.275). Figure 1 by Gascoyne, S. (2017, p.275) shows that dry sand was the most calming and soothing for children. Although, on the other hand, Miller, S. A. (2009, P.70) indicates that a child may instead hit a block of clay with a fist to release frustration or stress during messy play. This will help a child begin to develop emotionally.

Fine motor skills, hand-eye co-ordination, and muscle control may be developed from messy play. Through movements such as digging, pouring, and mark making children can develop these skills says School house nursery (no date).

Additionally, messy play can also increase children's independence. Messy play teaches children to make their own entertainment and use their imagination. Messy play is unrestricted meaning there is no right or wrong way to do things, resulting in children playing how they want to. When children problem-solve independently they build self-confidence and self-esteem which Maslow states are one of the basic needs every human should have. (School house nursery, no date).

Risky Play

Children can also develop holistically through risky play. Risky play involves jumping, climbing, sliding, hanging upside down and rolling for example. To children these movements are exciting with the element of risk where they could hurt themselves. Lavrysen, A. *et al.* (2017, p.89) implies that naturally children want to test boundaries and it will boost their curiosity. However, to prevent the children injuring themselves an adult should be always supervising. According to Maynard (2014, p.48) it is the adult's role to judge the environment to ensure the children are not exposed to any unnecessary risk.

Risky play allows children to learn what they are capable of as an individual, as everyone's interpretations of risks are different. In Reggio Emilia settings all children are seen as capable and have the skill set to climb trees or jump of a large rock for example. The role of the adult in Reggio settings is just to provide children with the opportunities for them to practice the skills (Reggio-inspired learning centre, 2020).

Through risky play children will develop the skills to evaluate risky situations. This will boost children's self-esteem and confidence as they will start to become critical thinkers and consider the action and consequence of risks. Critical thinking skills will help children all throughout life says Twinkl (no date). Additionally, problem solving

skills will be developed as children will be required to think of new ways to overcome obstacles says Tiner, L. (2022) furthering the child's resilience.

Also, risky play can help support a child's social development. During risky play children will often play with others suggests Twinkl (no date) meaning they will learn to trust others and communicate to keep each other safe.

Risky play supports a child's physical development in specific their gross motor skills through activities like, climbing trees, swinging on monkey bars, and balancing across a beam. These types of activities will also improve strength and co-ordination (Twinkl, no date). In the same way Maynard (2014, p.47) signifies that the use of loose parts like pallets, crates and bricks in an outdoor area make it risky but it also provides children the opportunity to think, move and interact more freely.

Section 2

In accordance with Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is important to give children the opportunities and space to play in the setting where they feel comfortable and enjoy themselves. (UNICEF, 2009)

Self-directed play is when children are allowed to follow their own interests. When a child engages in self-directed play, they are undertaking a physical or mental activity to satisfy their own desires, such as curiosity suggests Schwarz Mueller, G. and Rinaldo, V. (2013, p.38). Likewise, Froebel also believed that children should be allowed to be children regarding them having the freedom to explore their natural curiosity, enjoy playing, and have the desire to learn (Bruce, 2012, p.xii). Self-directed play is child-led, natural and has no specific outcome or goal. For example, in self-directed play the initiation of a creative activity should come from the child not the adult and it is important that the child stays in control. Although, Schwarz Mueller, G. and Rinaldo, V. (2013, p.38) say that children should be guided in their play but only occasionally.

McInnes, Howard, Crowley, and Miles, (2013, p.268) suggests that play is only beneficial when it is considered play to the child. When deciding what is play and what is not, children look at environmental cues. The child's level of choice, where the activity is located, and adult presence are all cues says McInnes, Howard, Crowley, and Miles, (2013, p.270). For instance, if an adult asked a child to make a tower with blocks in the construction area, it would not be perceived as play. This is because it is the adult initiating the play.

However, a child would identify play as an activity based on the floor, the freedom to decide whether to finish the activity and lack of adult presence implies McInnes, Howard, Crowley, and Miles, (2013, p.738). They also say that a child's emotional well-being is increased when an activity is seen as play rather than not play. In addition, Howard and McInnes (2012, p.740) imply that children who took part in an activity in a play environment were more engrossed than the children who had the same activity in a not play environment. This research shows that children get most out of their learning when they learn through play.

Montessori classrooms allow for self-directed play as the learning environment is set out so that children can freely choose what they want to do, initiating their own learning. In Montessori classrooms children will learn to make their own choices, develop at their own pace, build confidence, independence, and self-esteem. The role of the adult following the Montessori approach is to observe and only step in if there is disruption or conflict between the children. No rewards or punishments are given to the children, this way there is no motive for the children to do something (Day nurseries, 2023). For example, if an adult says a child can have a sticker if they practice writing numbers that will not be perceived as play to the child as they have an incentive to do it.

In addition, the Welsh Government (2014, p.14) say that play is sufficient for healthy development. Welsh Government (2014, p.4) also imply that self-directed and freely

chosen play makes children more internally motivated, although, it is necessary that it is carried out with no external goal or reward much the same as the Montessori approach. Wales's Foundation Phase curriculum allows for the balance between self-directed play and adult structured learning.

In Wales continuous provision refers to the resources and learning opportunities available to children daily which they can choose what they want to play with. For instance, the outdoors, sand and water tray and playdough table. Early Education (2022) says that when developed well the areas will invite children to explore and learn independently and the adults should follow the lead of the child. Adding enhancements to the areas will allow the children to develop and make progress with their learning.

McInnes, Howard, Crowley, and Miles, (2013, p.271) says that traditionally the practitioner in the early years is significant in enabling a child's development. Although in recent times McInnes, Howard, Crowley, and Miles. (2013, p.271) researched that effective pedagogy in the early years are a mix between adult-led and child-led activities. It is suggested that adults should not get involved when they see children playing unless they are invited into the play, this is called adulteration. This is because it breaks the play cycle for the child and will not be viewed as play anymore due to the adult presence (McInnes, Howard, Crowley, and Miles, 2013, p.271). Cues that invite adults into play include verbal, eye-contact, and body language from the child. Adults can support play for children by being a resource, solve conflict and can also be directly in the play.

Section 3

Welsh Governments curriculum for non-maintained nursery settings (2022, p.37) implies that in settings observation is important as it helps practitioners find out what inspires, interests, and engages children. Also, through observations practitioners can discover children's emotional state, skill sets and friendships. The Welsh

Governments non-maintained curriculum (2022, p.42) implies that the aim of assessing children is to find out what they can do by detailed observations. There are many different types of observations such as a running record, time tracker and Schedule of Growing Skills kit (SOGS). However, the Foundation Phase profiles strengths and weaknesses will be explored.

By observation and assessment, the Foundation Phase profile assists in analysing children's growth and development from six months to seven years of age (WG, 2017, P.3). This is a section of the Early Years Development and Assessment Framework for the Welsh Government (EYDAF).

The Welsh Government understands that children need time to get used to their new class, so observations should be made within the first six weeks of starting reception states Welsh Government (2017, p.5). However, a weakness of this includes that some of the children will have turned five and some will have only just turned four in the August which could make their outcomes seem lower. The Compact profile is the type used during this time frame. Practitioners must select a range of skill ladders from the four areas of learning for baseline assessments, that are easy to observe and gives a snapshot of the child's development says the Welsh Government (2017, p.5). However, Bronfenbrenner shows that there are many factors that can affect a child's development including wider influences such as the child's family, friends and local area says Simply Psychology (2020). The Full Profile would be used to verify the end of phase outcomes at the end of year two. The Full profile contains all the skill ladders for each area of learning.

One strength of the Foundation Phase profile is that it covers a holistic range of development. The Welsh Government (2017, p.3) says that the observation and assessment cover the four areas of learning which are "Personal and Social Development, Well-being and cultural diversity, Language, Literacy and Communication Skills, Mathematical development and Physical Development." Due to the wide range of areas covered this will give practitioners a good indication of

where the children are in terms of their development. The profile also allows for consistency throughout Wales meaning that all children are being assessed the same and within the same time frame (WG, 2017, P.3).

However, according to Stats Wales (2021) in 2021, “603” primary school teachers left the profession. This means that children might not be having consistency. As Bowlby’s theory suggests children need a secure attachment, and this will develop overtime. According to the NSPCC (2021) children’s emotional, cognitive, and physical development can be negatively impacted by a lack of comfort and security in the early years.

In addition, another strength is that the Foundation Phase Profile has been designed to align with other health professionals’ assessments, and help identify any developmental delay, special educational needs or any additional learning needs states the WG (2017, P.3). However, the Welsh Government (2017, P.9) state that the profile does not have the intention to fully assess SEN or ALN children. This is because the lower steps support early childhood development based on developmental norms. For example, the expected age of development for a bronze outcome is 6-12 months, and some children with developmental delay might not even be at that age mentally (WG, 2017, P.12). However, during transitions for children from one setting to another, or in the same setting the baseline assessments will be easy to pass on due to the consistency says Welsh Government (2017, p.5).

The Foundation Phase profile has the opportunity to improve. Currently it does not take in to account any environmental and developmental factors or any ALN needs. For example, the observations will not state if a child has poor attendance in school.

Section 4

McInnes, Howard, Miles, and Crowley (2011, p.121) state that play is sufficient for children to learn in the early years and is the underlying curriculum guidance in

Wales's Non-Maintained Curriculum. (2022, p.15). Observing during play means that practitioners are getting the most genuine representation of what that child is capable of due to the high level of engagement that play requires of them.

In the same sense Howard and McInnes (2012, p.738) suggest that play can be considered an observational behaviour if it is perceived as play to the child. This is because children will have more concentration on the activity, a sense of achievement and be more positive towards the situation imply Howard and McInnes (2012, p.738). For instance, the Foundation Phase compact profile (2017, p.86) says children should be observed holding something they can mark-make with. Children could be observed drawing anything they want but due to the nature of it being like play they will be more involved and motivated says Howards and McInnes (2012, p. 740). They also say that the children also appeared happier during the activity, and it is often self-directed.

According to McInnes, Howard, Crowley, and Miles (2013, p.271) children are more compliant with classroom rules in terms of their behaviour, and their learning improved when an adult was not directly present in the activity. This is sufficient when observing children as it will give the adult a truer reflection of the child's ability as they will see it as play rather than work. The purpose of observing children is to gather evidence on what the child can do rather than what they cannot this is called a deficit model says the Foundation Phase profile (2017, p.10). This will then allow the adult to see where children need more support and create an enabling environment to help children reach their learning and development targets.

Howard and McInnes (2012, p.740) imply that children viewing an activity as play results in greater development, as children try out a range of different tasks with minimal risk of failure. When an activity is perceived as play children control the consequence of their actions increasing their independence, confidence, and self-esteem. Although, according to Howard and McInnes (2012, p.741) observations will only be accurate when the activities are seen as play to the child.

Observations undertaken when children are playing allow practitioners to gather insight on the child's preferences. Areas the child likes, and dislike, friendships and adult relationships will be noticeable (WG Non-maintained curriculum, 2022, p.37). In the same way, Froebel Trust (no date, p.4) believes that play is important for children, and adults can discover what children are thinking, and their interest by observing closely while they play.

In contrast, when observing children in an assessment "not play" environment Howard and McInnes (2012, p.740) say that the children are easily distracted, negative towards their work, and had a lower engagement level. This will result in the children not performing as well, as it will not be perceived as play with the adult present.

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